

Battlefield 471

Chapter 471: Dan Tower, First Encounter

The piercing sound of sirens drew closer as two white ambulance flying devices broke through the morning fog and came to a stable halt at the accident scene.

The medical personnel jumped down quickly with emergency kits and swiftly lifted the unconscious man onto a stretcher.

The heart monitor screen lit up, with a straight line glaringly bright.

The leading doctor reached for the man's carotid artery, checked his pupils, and finally shook his head helplessly, speaking in a low voice to those around him, "He's gone."

"Sigh..." A collective sigh arose from the crowd of onlookers.

No one expected that a rare flying device crash would take four lives all at once, including two young children.

For the two families involved, it was undoubtedly a devastating blow.

The medical personnel gently covered the woman and children's bodies with a white sheet, which was particularly glaring against the snowy backdrop.

Xiao Yu stood there, her body trembling uncontrollably, her face as pale as paper, and tears silently streaming down her cheeks as she bit her lip until it turned white.

At that moment, a pair of warm hands gently wrapped around her shoulders.

Xiao Yu looked up and met Dongfang Mingyue's weary eyes, her voice trembling uncontrollably, "Miss, if... if I hadn't stopped them earlier, would those two children still be alive?"

Dongfang Mingyue sighed, turning her gaze to a young boy wearing a baseball cap not far away — the boy was holding up a smart wristwatch, taking pictures, completely oblivious that he was the survivor of this "fate correction."

"Xiao Yu, you saved one person, but three others died as a result. This is the consequence of trying to change fate — it never disappears; it only manifests in a more brutal way, falling upon others."

Hearing this, Xiao Yu's tears flowed even more profusely.

She raised her hand to wipe her face, looking at the deep-seated fatigue in Dongfang Mingyue's eyes, a sudden thought crossing her mind: Miss possesses the ability to foresee the future. Over the years, has she also struggled countless times in the pain of "foresight" and the despair of "powerlessness to change"?

She used to think that being able to see the future in advance was a great fortune, but only today did she understand — foreseeing the future is nowhere near a blessing; it's clearly the heaviest curse of life.

It makes you watch helplessly as the seeds of tragedy sprout, without even the courage to reach out and pull them out, because you don't know if a gentle touch will trigger an even more horrific disaster.

The wind rose again, swirling snowflakes on the ground, depositing them on the tips of their hair.

Dongfang Mingyue gently patted Xiao Yu's back, her gaze falling on the bodies covered with white sheets, her eyes swirling with complex emotions — a mix of sadness, helplessness, and a hint of long-accustomed numbness.

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"Miss Dongfang, take care. If there's anything else you need, feel free to contact me anytime," at the police station entrance, Director Li personally escorted them to the steps, his attitude exceptionally respectful.

"Thank you, Director Li." Dongfang Mingyue nodded slightly, reaching out to pull along the still-dazed Xiao Yu, bringing her onto the private flying device parked by the roadside. The cabin door slowly closed, isolating the outside world's clamor, allowing Xiao Yu to finally regain her senses, her eyes still tinged with red.

"Xiao Yu, this wasn't your fault." Dongfang Mingyue looked at her pale profile, speaking softly, "I've already had someone look into the information of those two families. Later, we will anonymously transfer 5 million Star Elements to each family. With this money, their families can at least have less living pressure."

Xiao Yu looked up abruptly, her voice choked with sobs, "Miss, thank you..." She knew in her heart that Dongfang Mingyue was doing this mostly to help ease her guilt — she had meant well but made things worse, yet now Miss was covering for her.

"Alright, don't think too much about it." Dongfang Mingyue gently patted her shoulder, a barely noticeable fatigue flashing in her eyes.

This guilt and helplessness brought about by "foresight," she was long accustomed to, but she didn't want Xiao Yu to fall into the same predicament.

"Miss, where are we going next? Still to the Dan Tower?" Xiao Yu wiped away her tears, trying to gather her spirits.

"Yes." Dongfang Mingyue nodded, her fingertips brushing over the schedule on the light-brain, "Tomorrow is the quarterfinals, we need to practice today to maintain the feel for alchemy."

Half an hour later, the flying device slowly landed before a majestic tower.

The tower, made of obsidian, soared into the clouds, its surface engraved with intricate alchemy patterns, reflecting a cold, piercing luster in the sunlight — this was the exclusive Dan Tower established by the Alchemy Association on the Shuang Hua star, only registered Alchemists could enter.

"Miss Dongfang, you're here!" The guard, Wang Yang, at the entrance, broke into a warm smile, greeting her familiarly.

"Hello, Brother Wang Yang." Dongfang Mingyue took out her Fifth Grade Alchemist badge and handed it over, adding with a smile, "Today, I'll be bringing my assistant inside as well."

"No problem!" Wang Yang took the badge, swiped it lightly over the verifier, and the screen instantly lit up with a green "Pass."

He stepped aside, gesturing "please," "Your exclusive alchemy room is ready, just head directly to the sixth floor."

Dongfang Mingyue took back the badge, leading Xiao Yu into the Dan Tower.

The hall was filled with a faint medicinal aroma, with many Alchemists exchanging insights in the rest area, nodding respectfully and amiably when they saw Dongfang Mingyue — after all, having made it into the top eight of the "Star Cup" at just over twenty, Dongfang Mingyue had become a renowned figure in the Azure Wood Star Realm's alchemy community.

The two arrived at the herb dispensing area, where the staff had already placed the prepared herbs behind the counter: "Miss Dongfang, these are the Star Marrow Crystals, Moon Soul Grass, and other herbs you requested, please verify."

Dongfang Mingyue opened the jade box, and a gentle sweep of her fingers, surrounded by a pale green Spiritual Energy, confirmed the herb quality before nodding, "No problem, thank you."

They took the exclusive elevator and soon arrived on the sixth floor.

The alchemy rooms here were all private compartments; Dongfang Mingyue brought her badge close to the door lock, and the heavy alloy door slowly slid open — the room was spacious and expansive, with a ceiling reaching ten meters high, a blue-black tripod cauldron standing in the center, its body covered in entwined plant patterns, it was her usual "Yunling Cauldron."

"Miss, what elixir are you preparing to make today?" Xiao Yu curiously approached the cauldron, running her hand over the cold pattern on its surface.

Dongfang Mingyue crouched down, laying a layer of flame spirit stones underneath the cauldron, her voice clear, "The Star Marrow Barrier-Breaking Pill — an elixir that can help Tier Six Spiritualists break through bottlenecks."

"Wow! So amazing!" Xiao Yu's eyes lit up instantly, clapping eagerly, her tone full of admiration, "Tier Six Spiritualists are already so strong, and yet you can make an elixir to help them break through; in tomorrow's competition, you will surely defeat that wretched woman Dongfang Xi."

Hearing this, Dongfang Mingyue's lips curved into a faint smile, without responding, simply arranging the jade boxes containing the herbs in a row.

As she opened the lids, a rich medicinal fragrance surged forth — the Star Marrow Crystals glowing with a faint purple halo, the leaves of the Moon Soul Grass still sparkling with morning dew, each herb was top-grade.

She took a deep breath, the tips of her fingers glowing with azure Spiritual Energy, guiding it into the cauldron to activate the flame spirit stones.

Just as the Moon Soul Grass was about to soar from the herb box into the cauldron...

"Hold on."

A cool male voice suddenly echoed within the room.

Dongfang Mingyue's movements froze instantly, her eyes narrowing sharply — the Moon Soul Grass paused mid-air, then automatically flew back into the jade box.

She stood abruptly, pale green Spiritual Energy blossoming around her, forming a faint shield, as she turned warily towards the source of the voice.

"Who!" Xiao Yu immediately ran behind Dongfang Mingyue, clenching her fist, though a bit scared inside, she straightened her back defiantly — she couldn't be a burden to the Miss.

The air rippled slightly, as a figure slowly emerged from the shadows of the corner.

The man wore all black, his posture tall and upright like a pine, his features stern and well-defined, with deep, penetrating eyes, exuding a steady aura, despite his sudden appearance, there wasn't the slightest abruptness about it.

"Who are you! Why are you here!" Xiao Yu gritted her teeth, loudly questioning, her hand quietly reaching into her pocket for the defensive charm — something Dongfang Mingyue had specifically prepared for her.

Yet, looking at the man before her, Dongfang Mingyue seemed to be under some immobilization spell, her entire being freezing, pupils constricting slightly, her heartbeat uncontrollably accelerating, as her mind instantly flashed back to that snowy night dream —

The man in the dream was exactly the same as the one before her!

Chapter 472: Repairing the Alchemy Cauldron

"You... Who are you!"

Xiao Yu looked at the man's stern eyebrows and eyes across from her, her originally tense vigilance and hostility quietly loosened—his aura, steady as a mountain, really didn't seem like someone with malicious intent, but the way he suddenly appeared from the shadows carried an eerie feel, making her still hesitant to lower her guard.

"Qin Tian." The man spoke, his voice cold, his gaze sweeping over the center of the room at the dark green pill cauldron, "Ordered by the Military Department, secretly protecting Miss Dongfang Mingyue."

He was supposed to remain hidden according to the plan, and if not for discovering the deadly flaw in the cauldron, he wouldn't easily expose himself—tomorrow was the "Star Cup" quarterfinals, and if Dongfang Mingyue couldn't compete due to the cauldron's issue, his mission would be equal to failure, making it impossible to report back to Marshal Lin.

"Military Department?"

Xiao Yu and Dongfang Mingyue were both stunned, exchanging a puzzled glance. They had never had any dealings with the Military Department; why would someone from there specifically come to protect them?

"You say you're from the Military Department. Do you have proof?" Xiao Yu was still not reassured, clutching a protective charm in her pocket, her tone tinged with doubt, "Which bodyguard appears like this, suddenly out of the corner, like a ghost? Who knows if you're a bad guy pretending!"

Qin Tian frowned slightly—he certainly had items to prove his identity, but his status as a Major General in the Seventh Bureau was classified, not usually disclosed.

"No need, I believe you."

At that moment, Dongfang Mingyue suddenly spoke, her gaze falling on the face that overlapped with the snowy night in her dream, her heartbeat still somewhat uncontrollable. Her future self had once shown close contact with him without any defense, and this mysterious connection was enough to make her choose to trust him.

"Miss?" Xiao Yu turned her head in surprise, unable to understand why Dongfang Mingyue would trust a stranger so easily.

Dongfang Mingyue waved her hand gently, focusing her gaze back on Qin Tian, her tone solemn: "Mr. Qin, thank you for coming forward to alert us. But what exactly did you want to tell me just now?"

"Someone tampered with your cauldron." Qin Tian didn't mince words, pointing his finger to the bottom of the green cauldron, "There's a tiny crack there, almost invisible to the naked eye, but it reaches the inner layer of the cauldron wall. If you use this cauldron for alchemy, when the flames heat it, the crack will enlarge, causing the elixir to fail at best, or exploding the cauldron at worst."

What!

Dongfang Mingyue's expression changed drastically, light green Spiritual Energy immediately surged out from her fingertips, winding like dense vines around the cauldron.

She closed her eyes, concentrating her Spiritual Power to the utmost, meticulously probing inch by inch along the cauldron wall—from the cauldron's ears to its belly, down to its feet, finally touching the hair-thin crack at the junction near the three legs.

The pill cauldron is the alchemist's life weapon. If there's a small external flaw, it could still possibly be used, but a crack penetrating the inner layer means it's a worthless item, absolutely incapable of successful alchemy.

"Miss, is he telling the truth?" Xiao Yu clutched Dongfang Mingyue's hand nervously, her voice trembling, "What should we do now? The competition is tomorrow!"

Dongfang Mingyue bit her lower lip, a chill passing through her heart. Such a level of crack could only potentially be repaired by a high-level artifact refiner. Whether Shuang Hua star even had such a level of artifact refiner was uncertain. Even if someone was found, repairing this specially crafted pill cauldron would take at least three days, making it impossible to compete in tomorrow's quarterfinal.

What's even more troublesome is that the cauldron requires time to blend—each cauldron's fire conduction and Spiritual Energy compatibility have subtle differences. She spent three entire years understanding the characteristics of this 'Lingering Spirit Cauldron'.

If replaced temporarily, not to mention finding a compatible pill cauldron, even if found, the blend couldn't possibly succeed in just one day, let alone crafting the extremely challenging sixth-grade elixir.

When Dongfang Mingyue was nearly desperate and even considered the possibility of giving up the competition, Qin Tian's voice sounded again, breaking the room's silence: "I can help you repair it."

Whoosh—

Two pairs of eyes instantly focused on him, full of shock and disbelief.

"Brother Qin... Are you serious? Can you really repair Miss's pill cauldron?" Xiao Yu rushed forward, her tone eager.

"Yes." Qin Tian nodded, his tone calm but confident, "Just need a little time."

Just now, when entering the alchemy room with Dongfang Mingyue, the perception of [Divine Weapon Emperor] had captured the anomaly of the pill cauldron.

He didn't understand alchemy, but he knew the importance of a pill cauldron to an alchemist. Moreover, if Dongfang Mingyue failed the quarterfinal due to the cauldron, not only would her efforts be in vain, but his mission would also fail completely.

This was why he had no choice but to reveal himself.

"Alright, in that case, please..." Dongfang Mingyue began to thank him but was interrupted by Xiao Yu.

"Wait!" Suddenly Xiao Yu looked at Qin Tian with suspicion, her brows tightly furrowed, "Could this be your conspiracy? Did you damage Miss's pill cauldron in advance, then pretend to be a good person by showing up, and once we agree, secretly do more harm to the cauldron?"

Hearing this, Dongfang Mingyue couldn't help but hold her forehead, while Qin Tian's mouth twitched imperceptibly, and he retorted, "If I wanted to destroy it, why not act before you arrived? Wouldn't that be easier and undetectable by you?"

"Uh... seems like it." Only then did Xiao Yu realize it, her face immediately turning bright red, wishing she could find a place to hide— trying to be cautious, never expecting to make such a joke.

"Mr. Qin, sorry for the embarrassment." Dongfang Mingyue quickly apologized, then said seriously, "I entrust it to you."

Anyway, the pill cauldron was unusable, the worst outcome would be maintaining the status quo, and if repaired, it would be a desperate survival.

"Alright." Qin Tian stepped forward, gently holding the bottom of the pill cauldron with one hand.

"Do you need me to prepare repair tools?" Xiao Yu quickly asked, not forgetting to make up for the embarrassment earlier, "I'll get them now, it'll be quick!"

"No need." As soon as Qin Tian's words fell, a brilliant golden light slowly blossomed from his palm, like flowing molten gold, spreading along the cauldron wall.

That's the power of [Divine Weapon Emperor]—capable of enchanting weapons, awakening spirituality, repairing this damage was naturally within its realm.

As the golden light simmered, the tiny crack healed at a speed visible to the naked eye. In just a few seconds, the cauldron wall returned to its original smooth and glossy state, without a trace of repair visible.

Qin Tian originally intended to boost the cauldron's performance casually, but he soon abandoned the idea—exposing [Divine Weapon Emperor]'s secrets was too risky, and suddenly enhancing the cauldron's performance might disrupt Dongfang Mingyue's alchemy rhythm, outweighing the benefits.

"Repair complete." He withdrew his hand, the golden light in his palm instantly dissipating.

"It's fixed just like that?" Xiao Yu stared wide-eyed, examining the cauldron repeatedly, her tone full of disbelief, "It seems like you just touched it, and the crack vanished. Could it be an illusion?"

Dongfang Mingyue also stepped forward quickly, using her Spiritual Power to examine meticulously—the cauldron wall smooth as jade, the crack completely gone. She was filled with wonder, unable to resist asking, "Mr. Qin, is this... a superpower or a Bloodline Ability?"

"Consider it a special ability." Qin Tian didn't elaborate, turning to look at the two, "The pill cauldron is back to normal, won't affect tomorrow's competition."

"Thank you, Mr. Qin." Dongfang Mingyue bowed respectfully, her tone filled with sincere gratitude.

For the opportunity to train at the Alchemy Association headquarters, she had put in efforts beyond the imagination of ordinary people. If her efforts were wasted due to the pill cauldron being destroyed, she truly couldn't imagine if she could bear the heavy blow.

"You're welcome, it's my duty." Qin Tian slightly dodged her bow, his tone still calm, "Miss Dongfang, the issue is resolved, I'll step back for now. I'll keep a safe distance from you, won't invade your personal space."

Dongfang Mingyue felt warmth in her heart, when Qin Tian showed up suddenly, she indeed worried about privacy issues, alchemy requires full concentration, and any disturbance is intolerable, in life even less wishes others to pry.

Now Qin Tian proactively mentioned it, solving her worries, also making her feel more fondness for the bodyguard sent by the Military Department.

"Alright, thank you for your understanding, Mr. Qin." she said softly.

Buzz—

As soon as the words fell, the space suddenly rippled subtly, like ripples on the water surface.

Qin Tian's figure lightly blurred in place, then completely vanished, as if never appearing in this room.

"Wow! Where did he go? Like a magic trick!" Xiao Yu exclaimed, covering her mouth in surprise, looking around, but couldn't find even Qin Tian's shadow.

"It's a Spatial Ability." Dongfang Mingyue's eyes were full of astonishment, suddenly understanding why the Military Department would send Qin Tian to protect her— besides repairing the pill cauldron, possessing extremely rare Spatial Ability, such a person could never be an ordinary soldier.

His identity might be more complex than she imagined.

Chapter 473: Dongfang Haoyue

"Foreseeing the future?"

Qin Tian stealthily hid in the shadows of the Dan Tower corridor, enveloped by a barely perceptible spatial barrier. Only his deep eyes gleamed sharply in the dim light.

Previously, he thought that Marshal Lin assigned him to protect Dongfang Mingyue because of her status as a genius alchemist. But now, upon reflection, perhaps the matter is not so simple.

The real concern for Marshal Lin is likely Dongfang Mingyue's ability to foresee the future.

The Empire appears peaceful on the surface, but undercurrents surge: Evil God's revival, Blood Demon Cult's havoc, rebel armies lying dormant, alien races stirring... The annual losses from sudden calamities are incalculable.

If Dongfang Mingyue's dreams can truly capture key segments of these disasters in advance—even just a location, a time, or a name—they would be sufficient for the Empire to strategize preventive measures ahead, minimizing losses.

This value is far more precious than that of a genius alchemist capable of crafting high-grade elixirs.

As for Dongfang Mingyue's claim that "destiny cannot be changed"—a cold glint flashed in Qin Tian's eyes.

He has never been one to believe in destiny. To him, what is called destiny is never a predetermined trajectory etched in star trails, but the result of one's own steps.

People can, due to cowardice and negligence, let a situation that originally had a turnaround slip into the abyss; they can also, relying on courage and wisdom, turn a doomed tragic ending into a perfect resolution.

Dongfang Mingyue can foresee the future through her dreams, the Zhuge Family can glimpse the stars through celestial techniques—essentially, there is no great difference.

It's just that Dongfang Mingyue's foresight is more random, maybe just an ordinary daily segment, but with extremely detailed specifics; while the Zhuge Family's celestial technique covers a broader scope, often revealing only vague trends and omens.

Since the Zhuge Family can firmly hold celestial mechanics in their hands, avoiding risks for the family and the Empire, why can't Dongfang Mingyue?

Of course, Qin Tian also understands that he hasn't experienced the things Dongfang Mingyue went through, so he cannot casually negate her reverence and helplessness towards destiny.

Yet even so, he can confirm that Dongfang Mingyue's personal value is far higher than he initially imagined.

No wonder she is surrounded by such tight security.

Just now, while observing in the shadows, Qin Tian had thoroughly assessed the security around Dongfang Mingyue: a total of thirteen guards, five of whom are Tier Six Spiritualists.

These individuals are well-trained, always maintaining a distance that is neither too close to disturb her personal space nor too far to delay in forming a protection circle in case of emergencies.

However, with their perception abilities, they still cannot detect his presence.

Buzz—

Just as Qin Tian was deep in thought, the smart watch on his wrist suddenly vibrated, a secure message popping up on the screen.

He tapped to unlock the content, a barely noticeable unusual look flashing in his eyes: "Dongfang Haoyue... so it's him."

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Spring on the Royal Star always comes with just the right warmth, the willow branches at the Royal Military Academy hang like silk, the tender green leaves gently swaying in the breeze, casting dappled shadows.

On the path, two figures walked side by side. One wore a moon-white brocaded robe, sword brows and starry eyes, charming face, exuding the dignity and composure of a noble family descendant, he was Dongfang Mingyue's brother, Dongfang Haoyue; the other had fluffy soft hair, bangs covered most of his forehead, eyes always squinted, surrounded by a lazy and relaxed aura, he was Zhuge Yu of the Zhuge Family.

"A Yu, someone has made a move on Mingyue." Dongfang Haoyue raised his hand to close the chat window on the optic brain, his fingertips turning slightly pale from force, a cold gleam flashing in his eyes, breaking the surrounding tranquility.

Zhuce Yu's eyes, slightly squinted, moved, eyebrows raised lightly: "Oh? What happened?"

"Mingyue was in the Alchemy Room of the Dan Tower on Shuang Hua Star when the medicine cauldron was tampered with." Dongfang Haoyue's voice grew colder, "Luckily, a person claiming to be sent by the Military Department suddenly appeared, repaired the cauldron for her, otherwise she wouldn't have qualified for the top-eight competition tomorrow."

Hearing this, the laziness on Zhuce Yu's face dissipated considerably, eyebrows furrowing completely.

The cauldron being sabotaged might be a trick by other competing alchemists, but the Military Department sending someone to protect Mingyue without any word to their side and the Dongfang Family is the real issue.

"What's that person's name? Let me check his background." Zhuce Yu looked at Dongfang Haoyue, tone certain, with the intelligence network of the Zhuce Family, as long as there's a name, they can dig out some clues.

"He's called Qin Tian," Dongfang Haoyue was just about to describe the appearance mentioned by Dongfang Mingyue—black-clad, stern, possessing spatial abilities, when Zhuge Yu suddenly interrupted him.

"Qin Tian? Are you certain his name is Qin Tian?" Zhuge Yu's voice suddenly rose a bit, his originally squinted eyes opened slightly, a trace of surprise flickering through, repeatedly confirming.

"Yes, that's the name." Dongfang Haoyue nodded, suddenly remembered something, a shift in his gaze, "Could it be the Qin Tian you mentioned before, who saved you during the Azure Wood Star Realm Genius Battle?"

"Indeed, if no surprises, it's him." Zhuge Yu's lips curled into a knowing smile, his tone gaining more certainty.

"So it's him..." Dongfang Haoyue whispered, his eyes growing deep.

He recalled Zhuge Yu telling him about the Azure Wood Star Realm Genius Battle—at that time, the Blood Demon Cult had set an ambush, sealing dozens of finalists in a Purple Crystal Formation. It was Qin Tian who turned the tides, not only crushing the Blood Demon Cult's main force but also releasing them from the formation, eventually leading to rescue.

Moreover, he had actually met Qin Tian once.

That was two years ago, at a specialty shop on Alpha 1 Star, at the time he and Zhuge Yu coincidentally encountered Qin Tian, temporarily sharing a table.

During the meal, he discerned Qin Tian's potential, a rare talent, intending to build rapport and eventually recruit him under his wing, but Qin Tian's character was too aloof, he left after exchanging only a few words.

At that time, he was about to report to the Royal Military Academy, had no time for further entanglement, so entrusted Zhuge Yu to investigate Qin Tian's background and find ways to approach.

But later Zhuge Yu reported that Qin Tian's identity was mysterious, even the Zhuge Family's intelligence network couldn't uncover a shred of information, and the matter was left unresolved.

Unexpectedly, a year later, Qin Tian would reunite with Zhuge Yu during the Azure Wood Star Realm Genius Battle.

"If it's him, a lot of things make sense." Zhuge Yu's lips curled into a meaningful smile, looking at Dongfang Haoyue, "Don't forget, Qin Tian is from the Seventh Bureau. With the Seventh Bureau personally sending people to protect Mingyue, is there even a need to ask who's behind it?"

"Marshal Lin." Dongfang Haoyue immediately realized.

Marshal Lin Xuanqing, overseeing the Royal Judgement Court and the Seventh Bureau, with an intelligence network sprawling across the Nine Great Star Realms, unrivaled. He dispatched someone to protect Mingyue, surely having caught some hints, knowing someone intends harm to Mingyue.

Yet puzzlement also arises—he and Mingyue have no prior dealings with Marshal Lin, and the Dongfang Family has never leaked Mingyue's "future prediction" ability externally. Why would Marshal Lin go out of his way to protect her?

Could it be that Marshal Lin already knows about Mingyue's special ability?

Dongfang Haoyue's gaze turned complex. For someone like Marshal Lin to focus on Mingyue, in the long run, whether it's a fortune or misfortune is uncertain. But for now, having Marshal Lin's person by her side adds a layer of security to Mingyue's safety, and that is at least a good thing.

"Marshal Lin sending Qin Tian to protect Mingyue shows the person targeting her must be of considerable influence." Zhuge Yu's tone grew somber, fully aware of Qin Tian's abilities—calm and cautious demeanor, meticulous mind, during the Azure Wood Star Realm Genius Battle, single-handedly kept all the geniuses on their toes; and immensely powerful, with strength far beyond his tier.

Had Qin Tian not turned the tides, he and those geniuses would have long become sacrifices to the Blood Demon Cult.

That Marshal Lin considers it seriously enough to deploy Qin Tian, a competent subordinate, highlights Mingyue's situation as even more precarious than they imagined.

Upon hearing this, the chill in Dongfang Haoyue's eyes intensified, and the aura around him fell several degrees: "A Yu, do you think it's them?"

Both knew whom "them" referred to without saying.

Without a doubt, Zhuge Yu nodded: "Nine times out of ten, it's them."

Dongfang Haoyue slowly turned, his gaze seemingly pierced through the layers of academy buildings, staring towards a direction in the Royal Star's core, eyes cold as frost:

"It seems, some people ultimately could not hold back."

Zhuge Yu gently shook his feather fan, eyes squinted showing a trace of seriousness—if those people are planning to target Dongfang Mingyue, then they won't spare Dongfang Haoyue by her side.

Next, their situation will be even more challenging; the time left for them is truly scarce.

Chapter 474: Gifted Pill, Flames of Jealousy

The time taken to refine a sixth-grade elixir was far longer than Qin Tian had anticipated.

From eleven in the morning until nine at night, a full ten hours, Dongfang Mingyue maintained an unwavering focus, her fingertips radiating a faint green spiritual energy that enveloped the alchemy cauldron like a living entity. She precisely controlled the refining and integration of each medicinal ingredient, meticulously honing the elixir until it took shape, never allowing even a moment's distraction.

Exhale—

As the final step was completed, the cauldron lid slowly opened, and a wave of scorching heat mixed with a rich medicinal fragrance burst forth, instantly raising the temperature in the alchemy room. Even the air was filled with floating spiritual energy particles.

A perfectly round elixir shot out from the cauldron, its entire body shimmering with a faint starlight, with a glossy sheen flowing across its surface.

Dongfang Mingyue's eyes were quick, and she swiftly took out a white jade bottle to catch it, then immediately sealed it with a stopper, perfectly locking in the medicinal potency, allowing not the slightest bit to escape.

"Miss!" Xiao Yu hurried over, her eyes gleaming as she stared at the white jade bottle in Dongfang Mingyue's hand, her tone filled with joy, "I knew you could succeed!"

Even for the most seasoned sixth-grade alchemist, there was never a one hundred percent success rate when refining a sixth-grade elixir. An outstanding individual refining a familiar recipe typically had a success rate between 40% and 60%. Even with hundreds of practices, breaking through 80% was extremely rare.

There were too many variables: even the same type of herb could have slight differences in medicinal properties depending on the plant, and these tiny differences could trigger a chain reaction when multiple ingredients were integrated, requiring the alchemist to adjust on the spot using years of experience and refined technique.

Besides this, the strength of the flame, the rhythm of spiritual energy infusion, and even the temperature and humidity of the alchemy room all significantly impacted the analysis and integration of the medicinal properties.

For this reason, in the alchemy profession, there were two spiritual ability attributes most suited to the art of alchemy: one was wood, which could precisely decompose the essence of ingredients, promoting a gentle integration of medicinal properties; the other was fire, which allowed for meticulous temperature control, tightly governing the entire process of elixir formation.

The top representatives of these two schools were the Empire's two great Holy Blood Clans: the Dongfang family and the Xiao clan.

Dongfang Mingyue smiled at these words, her fair cheeks flushed with a faint rosy hue from the prolonged exposure to high temperatures, like a begonia covered in morning dew. She possessed the pure and vibrant charm of a young girl, yet exuded an invigorating vitality.

"Yes, this time was indeed very smooth." She gently caressed the white jade bottle's surface and mused, "Moreover, I always felt like the Spirit Cauldron seemed to have changed somehow, with improved efficiency in spiritual energy conduction."

Having worked with this cauldron for three years and refined elixirs over a hundred times with it, she had long become intimately familiar with the Spirit Cauldron's characteristics, so even the slightest changes would not escape her perception.

The Spirit Cauldron couldn't change for no reason; the only possibility was the influence left by Qin Tian's repair work.

Thinking of this, Dongfang Mingyue raised her head and softly called out toward the open room, "Mr. Qin Tian, are you here?"

"I'm here."

As soon as the words fell, a faint spatial ripple appeared, and Qin Tian's figure suddenly materialized before the two, still clad in black, with a posture as upright as a pine tree.

Xiao Yu instinctively shivered slightly-- although she knew Qin Tian was spatially capable, his sudden, ghostly appearances still startled her every time.

"Miss Dongfang, do you need anything?" Qin Tian asked.

Dongfang Mingyue gazed at him, her tone softening, "Mr. Qin Tian, you can just call me Mingyue in the future; no need to be so formal."

Qin Tian pondered for a moment, then nodded, "Alright, Miss Ming Yue."

Seeing that he still maintained his courtesy, Dongfang Mingyue didn't dwell on the address, instead handing over the white jade bottle in her hand, her gaze sincere: "Mr. Qin Tian, this Star Marrow Barrier-Breaking Pill is for you. If it weren't for you timely discovering the issue with the cauldron and helping me repair it, this elixir wouldn't have been refined at all, and I wouldn't be able to participate in tomorrow's competition. It's a token of my gratitude, please accept it."

Looking at her earnest eyes, Qin Tian thought for a moment, then accepted the white jade bottle without further refusal, "Then I thank you, Miss Ming Yue."

"The one who should be thanking is me." Dongfang Mingyue smiled warmly.

Holding the white jade bottle in his hand, Qin Tian also felt a deep appreciation. A sixth-grade elixir was inherently extremely precious, scarcely available on the market, let alone a Star Marrow Barrier-Breaking Pill, which could help a Tier Six Spiritualist break through bottlenecks.

If placed in the military department's treasury, it would be valued at least in the hundreds of thousands of military merit points, something that ordinary people would find hard to purchase even if they had the money.

With his talent, there was no bottleneck below Tier Six, but his subordinates would undoubtedly encounter one, and by then, this elixir would come in handy.

This gift carried considerable weight.

His gaze swept over the ring on Dongfang Mingyue's right index finger, as he suddenly reminded, "Miss Ming Yue, I suggest not leaving the cauldron in the alchemy room tonight."

Dongfang Mingyue immediately nodded — if someone could sneak into her private alchemy room and sabotage the cauldron without her knowing, it indicated the place was no longer safe.

"I'll put the cauldron in my space ring," she said, moving her fingers slightly to take out some less valuable items — her space ring had limited capacity, and to fit the cauldron in, some space had to be freed, this being why she had previously left the cauldron in the alchemy room.

The Dan Tower had strict controls over personnel entry and exit, with full surveillance on the floors housing private alchemy rooms and dedicated guards on duty around the clock.

Nevertheless, the cauldron had been tampered with, suggesting that the saboteur likely came from within the Dan Tower.

The people here could no longer be completely trusted.

She had originally intended to report the situation to the authorities of Dan Tower to investigate the saboteur's identity, but now, this idea was entirely suppressed. Moreover, she already had a sneaking suspicion about the culprit.

"Alright, if there's nothing else, I'll take my leave." Qin Tian said, "If Miss Ming Yue needs help, just call my name like you did just now."

Before the words fell, his figure disappeared once again amidst the spatial fluctuations.

Dongfang Mingyue organized the items in the Space Ring, then activated her Spiritual Energy, slowly storing the Spirit-Concealing Cauldron into the ring.

"Xiao Yu, let's go too."

"Okay!"

The two of them walked side by side out of the Dan Tower, boarding a personal Flying Device waiting outside.

The Flying Device slowly ascended, flying towards the hotel, while not far behind, two inconspicuous Flying Devices quietly followed, always maintaining a safe distance, silently guarding them.

In the shadows at the entrance of the Dan Tower, a pair of eyes watched the departing Flying Device, pupils slightly contracting, a hint of uncertainty flashing in the eyes, not knowing what was being calculated.

...

"Worthless! All worthless!"

In a luxurious room, a woman in purple clothes smashed an expensive blue porcelain bottle onto the ground, shattering it into pieces.

She pointed at the man in front of her, head lowered, her voice sharp to the point of breaking: "I've put in so much effort to get you into the Dan Tower, and yet you failed at such a small task!"

The man kept his head down, fingertips clenched white, full of grievance and confusion in his heart.

He clearly followed the instructions, sneaking into Dongfang Mingyue's private Alchemy Room late at night, creating a crack at the base of the green cauldron—with such damage, it was impossible to refine a sixth-grade Elixir.

But the surveillance footage didn't lie: from morning till night, Dongfang Mingyue stayed in the Alchemy Room for a full ten hours, not stepping out once; when she came out, she had a faint smile on her face, clearly having succeeded in alchemy.

He couldn't figure out where the problem lay, so he could only let the furious woman vent, not daring to utter a word of defense.

"Worthless!" Dongfang Xi, raging, picked up a jade cup on the table and hurled it at the man's head.

The jade cup shattered, sharp pieces embedding into the man's hair, yet he merely reached up and removed the fragments, not daring to wince.

"Get out! Get out of here!" Dongfang Xi clutched her chest, breathing heavily, eyes almost blazing with fury.

"Yes," the man replied softly, stepping lightly like a cat, cautiously exiting the room, afraid to provoke the young lady further.

Bang—

Just as the door closed, Dongfang Xi picked up a glass ornament from the table and smashed it to the ground, her originally delicate features now twisted with madness, her exquisite makeup tainted with a touch of ferocity from her anger.

She was jealous of Dongfang Mingyue, so much so it drove her nearly insane.

That wild child, not even knowing who her father was, was merely a member of the Dongfang Clan's side branch, yet consistently outshone her in alchemy, which she prided herself on most.

Whenever outsiders mentioned the "Dongfang Clan's alchemy genius," everyone first thought of Dongfang Mingyue, rather than her, the young lady of the direct lineage.

She couldn't understand why.

In terms of effort, she spent no less time than Dongfang Mingyue in the Alchemy Room every day; in resources, the clan provided her with the finest Spirit Plants, alchemy cauldrons, and elixir recipes.

Yet despite all this, she still couldn't keep up with Dongfang Mingyue's pace—the latter seemed born for alchemy, able to produce higher-quality elixirs even with the simplest ingredients.

Even in terms of appearance, Dongfang Mingyue's pure, radiant look with Spiritual Qi was more charming than her carefully adorned beauty.

The clan's alchemy elders constantly preached "Mingyue is Dongfang's hope"; the upper echelons of the Alchemy Association openly and subtly suggested that Dongfang Mingyue, likely to win the "Starry Cup," could become the youngest Seventh Grade Alchemist after training at the Imperial Star headquarters for a few years.

And what about her?

Everyone thought her "talent was good, but slightly inferior to Dongfang Mingyue," rarely even mentioning her.

This comparison felt like a poisonous thorn, day and night pricking at Dongfang Xi's heart.

Since everyone believed Dongfang Mingyue would win, she was determined to destroy this "inevitability"!

To sabotage Dongfang Mingyue's cauldron, she paid a hefty price to bribe a director of the Dan Tower, allowing her subordinate to infiltrate the Alchemy Room.

Last night, her subordinate reported, "Mission accomplished, Dongfang Mingyue definitely won't be able to compete tomorrow," but the result?

Dongfang Mingyue not only stayed in the Alchemy Room for ten hours but also reported no abnormalities to the Dan Tower—this was not how a damaged alchemy cauldron should behave!

"A bunch of useless trash!" Dongfang Xi gritted her silver teeth, nails deeply embedded in her palm, glaring at the pitch-black night sky outside the window, a hint of ruthlessness flashing in her eyes:

"Dongfang Mingyue, let's see who has the last laugh. This competition isn't over yet, and it's still uncertain who will stand in the end!"

Chapter 475: Hidden Guard, Nightmare

"Ming Yue, the family has dispatched two experts to Shuang Hua Star. They will arrive in three days. But during these three days, you must pay close attention to your surroundings and protect yourself well."

On the video projection, Dongfang Haoyue's voice carried a hint of worry, and his handsome face was full of concern.

"Yes, I know, brother." Dongfang Mingyue nodded, her fingertips gently tracing the edge of the screen.

"Also, Qin Tian belongs to the Seventh Bureau of the Military Department, and he saved A Yu in the Azure Wood Star Realm before. He is considered a friend and can be trusted," Dongfang Haoyue added, his tone more assured.

"Okay." Dongfang Mingyue replied, feeling slightly relieved.

"Ming Yue, remember, it doesn't matter if you win the competition or not, your safety is the most important," Dongfang Haoyue reminded once more, afraid she would focus too much on the competition and overlook the danger.

"Alright, I get it. You're almost like a nagging old man." Dongfang Mingyue teased with a smile, trying to lighten the mood.

"You little girl." Dongfang Haoyue smiled reluctantly, "I won't disturb you anymore. Get some good rest so you have the energy for the competition tomorrow."

"Hmm... brother." Just as the video was about to end, Dongfang Mingyue suddenly spoke up.

"What's wrong?"

"You also need to protect yourself over there." She said softly, her eyes hiding an imperceptible concern.

"Haha, don't worry!" Dongfang Haoyue patted his chest, his tone hearty, "Those clowns can't hurt your brother."

The video ended, and the holographic screen dimmed, reflecting Dongfang Mingyue's worried face.

She walked to the window, gazing at the falling white snow outside—the nights on Shuang Hua Star were especially cold. Snowflakes landed on the transparent glass, quickly forming a thin layer of ice, enveloping the entire city in a serene white.

She knew she was in danger, but she was more concerned about her brother, Dongfang Haoyue—the Royal Star was the center of power struggles. Since those people were targeting her, who was far away in the Azure Wood Star Realm, they would undoubtedly exert ten or even a hundred times the effort to eliminate her brother.

Her brother's situation was far more dangerous than hers.

Dongfang Mingyue pursed her lips, her gaze gradually becoming resolute. Initially, she only wanted to enter the headquarters of the Alchemy Association through the competition to enhance her alchemical skills, but now, she had a more urgent reason—she had to quickly become strong and fight alongside her brother on the Royal Star, using her abilities to share even a slight burden with him.

"Miss, it's late. You should rest." Xiao Yu, dressed in pink pajamas, came out rubbing her sleepy eyes. "You have the competition tomorrow; it won't be good if you're tired."

"Yes, I know." Dongfang Mingyue nodded, turning to close the window and following Xiao Yu into the bedroom.

Soon, the room's lights went out, merging into the quietness of the snowy night.

...

Downstairs from the hotel, a meat soup shop with warm yellow lights was still open. By the window, two men sat at a table, occasionally glancing towards the window in the upper floors of the hotel where the lights had just gone out.

"Miss Ming Yue has gone to bed." He Wu, who was thin, withdrew his gaze and used spiritual energy to transform his voice into a fine wire, transmitting only to Nie Yunxing opposite him, "The boss just sent a message saying that someone has been watching Miss Ming Yue recently. Let's work hard tonight and check the potential threats on the three streets around the hotel again."

Nie Yunxing nodded, his fingertips quietly reaching for the short blade at his waist under the table—they were Hidden Guards sent by the Dongfang Clan. Thirteen guards were divided into three groups; two groups of Guard Ming stood next to Dongfang Mingyue, protecting her closely, while the two of them were the hidden group, responsible for scouting the perimeter, paying attention to every suspicious person approaching the hotel with a broader perspective.

"Soup's coming!"

At this moment, the shop owner came over with two steaming bowls of soup. In the blue and white porcelain bowls floated tender white lamb, and the rich aroma instantly spread.

He gently placed the soup bowls on the table, smiling, "Enjoy, gentlemen. There's nothing better than a bowl of hot soup in this snowy weather."

"Thank you, boss." Nie Yunxing picked up a spoon and sipped a mouthful of soup, feeling a warmth slide into his stomach, so comfortable that he sighed, "Your soup is truly fresh. I've been drinking it every day recently and still haven't gotten tired of it."

"Haha, that's the secret!" The owner laughed with wrinkles bunching up at the corners of his eyes, speaking with pride, "This soup uses thigh bones from snow sheep, simmered for seven hours. The meat is freshly slaughtered snow lamb. We don't add any extra seasonings, relying solely on the authentic flavor of the ingredients."

He paused, then added, "You can get a free refill once you finish, just call me if you need more."

"Alright." Nie Yunxing smiled, "Boss, give us another jin of lamb to add to the soup."

"Sure thing!" The owner responded, turning to walk into the kitchen.

The kitchen's lights were dim. The owner picked up the cleaver on the countertop, the sharp blade slicing through the lamb, making a "thump thump" sound. He looked down at the meat on the cutting board, the corners of his mouth curling into an imperceptible smile.

...

The cold wind of the snowy night was piercing, as if it could penetrate clothing and freeze one's soul.

On the pristine fabric, specks of blood spread like red plum blossoms, striking to the eye. A woman curled up in the snow; her once vibrant face now wrinkled and aged, like a flower withered by the harsh frost, her breath so faint it was almost gone.

"Xiao Yu! Xiao Yu!"

"Miss... I can't... don't be sad for me... I'm happy to protect you..."

"No! You're not going to die! I forbid you to die!!!"

"Miss... take care... of yourself... In the next life, I still want to be your maid..."

"No! No!!!"

"Miss! Miss, what's wrong with you!"

Swoosh—

Dongfang Mingyue suddenly opened her eyes, gasping for air. Cold sweat slid down her temple, streaking her face. What met her eyes was Xiao Yu's face full of concern, looking at her worriedly.

"Miss, did you have a nightmare?" Xiao Yu's voice was urgent, reaching out to wipe away the cold sweat for her.

Dongfang Mingyue looked at the living Xiao Yu in front of her, her eyes turning red instantly. Suddenly remembering something, she threw off the quilt and rushed to the adjoining suite—Xiao Yu's bedroom.

She pushed open the door, walked straight to the wardrobe, and forcefully pulled it open, frantically rummaging through the clothes inside.

"Not this one!"

"Not this one!"

"No! No!"

"Miss, what are you looking for? Let me help you find it!" Xiao Yu followed in, looking at the mess on the floor and Dongfang Mingyue's frantic state, and was so anxious that she stomped her feet.

Click—

A soft click sounded as Dongfang Mingyue opened the drawer of the bedside table. Her gaze fixed on the deepest part of the drawer—where a white coat was folded, exactly the one she had seen in her nightmare.

At the sight of the coat, Dongfang Mingyue could no longer hold back her tears, which fell like broken pearls, splattering on the white fabric, spreading a small dark stain.

She covered her mouth, her shoulders shaking violently, yet restrained sobs escaped through her fingers.

"Miss, what's wrong with you?" Xiao Yu quickly approached, holding her trembling body, her heart feeling like it was being squeezed painfully, "Are you feeling unwell? Don't scare me!"

Dongfang Mingyue turned around, grabbing Xiao Yu's shoulders tightly, her knuckles turning whitish from the force. Her eyes were bright red, tears obscuring her vision, her voice trembling uncontrollably: "I... I dreamt of you..."

Before she could finish her sentence, she couldn't hold back anymore and burst into tears. The crying was full of fear and helplessness, disjointed, unable to form a complete sentence, allowing the emotions to completely collapse at this moment.

Xiao Yu's body trembled violently. She looked at the white coat clutched in Dongfang Mingyue's hands, then at her losing control appearance, and found her answer in an instant.

Chapter 476: Jade Heaven Essence Pill, The Unfolding Conspiracy

"Miss, are you saying... I'll die in your arms wearing this dress?"

Beside the bed, Little Jade looked down at the white coat folded on the bed—this was the most expensive piece in her wardrobe. She had originally thought of wearing it to celebrate Miss's victory in the competition, but at this moment, the coat seemed stained with the blood from the nightmare, tightening her heart.

"Miss, maybe it was just an ordinary nightmare." Little Jade gently patted Dongfang Mingyue's trembling back, her voice as tender as comforting a child, "You have dreams that can foresee the future, so naturally, you also have typical dreams. Don't take it too seriously, alright?"

Dongfang Mingyue pressed her lips together, her eyes still red, tears swirling at the rim.

How could she not take it to heart?

The dream was as vivid as if she were there, with no trace of haziness, identical to the previous dreams that foresaw the future—that was clearly a fragment she was about to experience.

"Little Jade, leave, depart Shuang Hua Star." Dongfang Mingyue suddenly grabbed Little Jade's hand, her voice trembling, with a hint of pleading, "I'll ask the Patriarch and elders to send someone to protect you back to Azure Wood Star, far away from the danger here."

Upon hearing this, Little Jade gently patted the back of her hand and shook her head slowly, "Miss, I can't leave. You have said before that fate cannot be changed, and the more we try to escape it, the worse things get."

She paused, her voice lowered a bit, "I don't want to cause trouble for more people because of me, just like that mother and her child yesterday."

Hearing this, Dongfang Mingyue's heart felt as if it was being cut by a knife, the despair and helplessness toward fate swept over her again, making her almost unable to breathe.

"Miss, don't worry about me anymore." Little Jade suddenly smiled, trying to lighten her tone, "I remember you said that your prophetic dreams usually happen months later. Doesn't that mean I still have several months to live? At least, I can watch you win the championship with my own eyes, see you go to Royal Star, fulfilling your wish."

She paused, a hint of hope in her eyes, "Maybe in these few months, things will turn around? At that time, I won't have to die and can continue following you."

Dongfang Mingyue tightly gripped Little Jade's hand, her knuckles whitening from the exertion, Little Jade could even feel the pain in her bones, yet she continued to smile, without a trace of complaint.

"Miss, it's getting late, we should head to the competition." Little Jade said, picking up the white coat, and without hesitation threw it to the ground, stomping on it twice, wrinkling her nose in disdain, "This coat, I'll never wear it again in my lifetime! I'll throw it straight in the trash later, to avoid the irritation of seeing it!"

"Little Jade..." Dongfang Mingyue looked up, her eyes red, tears still hung at her corner, seeing Little Jade's feigned nonchalance, she felt even more distressed.

"Miss, don't waste time!" Little Jade forcefully pulled Dongfang Mingyue up, her tone carrying a hint of insistence, "I still have several months to live, this isn't the moment to be concerned about me, the competition is what's important now!"

She half-pulled and half-helped Dongfang Mingyue into the bathroom, efficiently squeezed toothpaste on her brush, handed her a towel, like caring for a child, she assisted her with her morning routine; then she contacted hotel services to bring breakfast to their room, watching Dongfang Mingyue eat bite by bite, only then did she nod satisfied, "That's right! Performing Alchemy takes so much energy, how can you manage without a proper meal?"

"Little Jade..." Dongfang Mingyue opened her mouth but was gently interrupted by Little Jade.

"Miss, no matter what my future holds, right now my greatest wish is to see you win the championship." Little Jade looked at her, her gaze incredibly serious, "So I want to ask you, please give it your all in this competition. If you lose because of distraction on my account, it will be my lifelong regret."

Dongfang Mingyue gazed at Little Jade's steadfast eyes, the pain in her heart continued to spread, tears almost welled up again, but she forcefully sniffed, slowly nodded.

.....

The Star Cup Semifinal is set in an open-air stadium, the audience seats are strictly invitation-only, only those with an exclusive invitation card can enter this venue.

At the moment, hundreds of seats were filled, the air thick with anticipation and tension.

In the center of the stadium, eight contestants stood in each corner, separated by dozens of meters, forming a symmetrical pattern.

In front of each stood a neat row of Jade Boxes, containing the raw materials needed for the upcoming Elixir refining, with types and quantities completely uniform to ensure the fairness of the competition.

Among the contestants were white-haired, wrinkled elderly, and middle-aged individuals with steady expressions and refined auras, but most striking were two young figures—both girls, yet in stark contrast.

One donned a purple outfit, with glamorous and eye-catching makeup, at first glance resembling a notable female celebrity, rather than a dedicated Alchemist; the other wore a simple white dress, without makeup, the slight redness around her eyes added a fragile sense of lovability.

"Those two are Dongfang Clan's Alchemists, right? They seem barely over twenty, to have made it into the semifinals at such a young age, it is impressive!" In the stands, someone couldn't help but whisper, eyes firmly on the two girls in the arena.

"Dongfang Clan truly lives up to its reputation, deserving to be the Empire's top Alchemy family, producing talent generation after generation." The person next to them nodded in agreement, full of admiration.

Chapter 477: Jade Heaven Essence Pill, The First Signs of Conspiracy (Part 2)

"I've heard that the girl in white is even stronger than the one in purple," someone whispered, providing more specific information, "One is from the side branch, the other from the direct lineage, yet the side branch's talent and strength surpass the direct lineage's. This is rare in a big family."

"In terms of looks, the one in white is also superior, with such a clean aura."

The discussions in the audience drifted intermittently into the ears of the eight contestants. Some ignored it, closing their eyes to adjust their state; some moved their fingertips subtly, silently familiarizing themselves with the herbs in front of them; and some, like Dongfang Xi, hung their heads low, long hair covering the cold surging in her eyes—those discussions pierced her heart like needles, with anger and jealousy growing wildly in her chest.

At this moment, Dongfang Xi's gaze unintentionally swept towards Dongfang Mingyue opposite her, only to suddenly pause—Dongfang Mingyue's expression was somewhat off, her eyes vacant, as if distracted, lacking the focus and tension of someone about to compete.

What's going on? Is her cauldron really broken, and she hasn't resolved it yet?

A wave of glee surged in Dongfang Xi's heart. No matter the reason, if Dongfang Mingyue competes in this state, only failure awaits her!

"What's wrong with Miss? Why does she look so lost?" On the edge of the spectators' area, bodyguards from the Dongfang family also noticed Dongfang Mingyue's unusual state and couldn't help exchanging worried glances.

"Not sure, she was like this on the way here." A burly guard replied with a frown, "I quietly asked Xiaoyu, and she said it was nothing, so I didn't ask further."

Guard captain Min Wenbing followed his gaze to the stage, where Xiaoyu was staring directly at Dongfang Mingyue, with a hint of tension and unease in her eyes.

Min Wenbing frowned tighter but said nothing more, only heightened his vigilance in secret.

Soon, the finals of the quarterfinals officially commenced.

Without lengthy preambles, an elder in a cyan robe, with a heavy aura, took the stage. He was Gu Chaoxian, the Eighth Tier Alchemist sent by the Alchemist Association's headquarters.

Simultaneously, staff members handed eight jade slips to each of the eight contestants.

"Everyone, the quarterfinals of the Starry Sky Cup start now," Gu Chaoxian's deep voice resonated throughout the venue via an amplification array, without a single extra word, straight to the point, "The elixir you need to refine today is called 'Jade Heaven Essence Pill'. Recently developed by Seventh Grade Alchemist Lou Kecheng, this elixir can temporarily triple the spiritual energy of a Tier Six Spiritualist upon consumption, and speeds up injury recovery with no side effects."

As the words fell, the scene instantly erupted, with discussions surging like a tide.

Triple spiritual energy enhancement

This means that in a battle of evenly matched opponents, the one consuming this elixir can instantly reverse the situation, leading to a crushing victory; even if severely injured, they can make a quick recovery with the elixir, making it a 'trump card-grade' elixir for Tier Six Spiritualists!

Seeing the audience's enthusiastic discussion, a faint smile appeared on Gu Chaoxian's face. An alchemist competition was always a great opportunity for the association to promote new elixirs—by leveraging the attention drawn by the competition to make new elixir formulations known to more people, thereby gaining external recognition and orders, this has been the association's norm for years.

Using a new elixir formula as the competition topic is undoubtedly a huge challenge for the contestants, but this is precisely the point of the competition.

Just like ordinary academic competitions don't use previous questions, but instead test students with new questions to assess their real abilities.

Using a new formula in an alchemist competition not only maximizes fairness but also truly tests the contestants' fundamental skills and on-the-spot adaptability.

Of course, for contestants, this is not an unprofitable trade—the new elixir formula, for an alchemist, is comparable to a secret manual for a spiritualist, learning a rare sixth-tier formula for free is naturally a good thing.

Compared to other sixth-tier elixirs, although the Jade Heaven Essence Pill's formula is new, the overall difficulty is not particularly high, making it a well-chosen formula suitable for competition by the association.

"Alright, no more unnecessary words," Gu Chaoxian raised his hand to quiet the crowd, "The competition time is ten hours, after which the judging panel will score the elixirs you refined, and the four highest scorers will advance to the finals."

As soon as the words fell, the stone slabs under the eight contestants simultaneously lit up with a soft white light, and eight semi-transparent spiritual energy arrays slowly rose, enveloping each person in a separate space—isolating them from external noise to avoid interference and ensuring the alchemists' safety in case of emergencies.

The contestants picked up the jade slips in their hands, injecting their spiritual power into them.

The next second, the information about the Jade Heaven Essence Pill, including the recipe, herb proportions, refining steps, and details, clearly flowed into their minds.

Nobody moved immediately; all of them held their breath and focused intently on studying the formula, attempting to thoroughly understand every detail, and even simulating the entire alchemy process in their minds—the more prepared they were with a new formula initially, the lower the probability of errors later.

About a quarter of an hour later, someone finally took the first action—a gray-haired elder, whose fingertip emanated a faint red spiritual energy. With a gentle point towards the charcoal stove in front of him, a blue flame burst into life, its height consistently stable at around three inches without the slightest flicker.

This was a typical fire spiritual energy application, using precise fire control to directly refine the herbs.

Soon after, the other contestants also began to take action one after another.

Some, like the elder, activated their fire spiritual energy; the flames varied in strength but were firmly controlled, adding herbs into the cauldron in batches to decompose the essence through high heat. Others, like Dongfang Mingyue, had their fingertips wrapped in a pale green spiritual energy, akin to fine vines entwining the herbs, using the "vital force" of wood spiritual energy to accurately strip away impurities, extracting the herbs' effective components with extraordinary purity—both approaches had their merits, drawing approving nods from the audience who were also alchemists, their eyes locked on each detail in the arena for fear of missing techniques they could learn.

Only Dongfang Mingyue displayed some sluggishness in her actions from the very start.

The wood spiritual energy at her fingertips remained pure, but occasionally showed subtle fluctuations. Her rhythm in decomposing the herbs was also half a beat slower than usual—the remnants of a nightmare still lingered in her mind, with Xiaoyu's image constantly flashing in her thoughts, making it hard to fully concentrate.

Min Wenbing and others in the audience felt a tightening in their chests as they watched. Xiaoyu gripped her clothes tightly, her nails almost embedding in her palm—she knew that Miss was distracted because of her.

Time ticked by, and two hours passed in the blink of an eye.

Some contestants had already completed the initial refinement of the herbs and were preparing for the critical step of merging the medicinal properties.

At this moment, a light "buzz" suddenly emitted from Dongfang Mingyue's cauldron, followed by a wisp of black smoke slowly rising from the cauldron's mouth, causing the spiritual energy fluctuation to become chaotic instantly.

"Oh no! The elixir is ruined!" someone beneath the stage exclaimed in a low voice.

Everyone's eyes focused on Dongfang Mingyue—the appearance of black smoke during herb refinement meant the medicinal properties had been destroyed, and this batch was completely wasted.

The audience was filled with surprise, even Gu Chaoxian on the judges' bench frowned, "That's odd, with Dongfang Mingyue's skill, she shouldn't make a mistake in such a fundamental step."

The judge beside him nodded in agreement, evidently also finding it unusual.

Out of the corner of her eye, Dongfang Xi saw this scene and couldn't help but curl her lips into a secretive smile, although she didn't know the reason, something had obviously affected Dongfang Mingyue!

Beside the cauldron, Dongfang Mingyue looked at the wisp of black smoke, her body stiffened for a moment, then she slowly closed her eyes. Images of Xiaoyu's smiles from last night flashed through her mind, interspersed with the coldness of the snow in her nightmare and Xiaoyu's worried gaze just now.

She was silent for a full half minute, and when she opened her eyes again, the confusion was gone, leaving only determination.

She turned her head to look at Xiaoyu beneath the stage, their eyes meeting across the crowd—Xiaoyu nodded towards her with force, eyes full of trust.

Dongfang Mingyue took a deep breath, raised her hand to clean the residue of herbs from the ruined cauldron, then opened the spare jade box to retrieve new raw materials.

This time, the wood spiritual energy at her fingertips was incredibly stable, her movements in decomposing the herbs were seamless and precise as if practiced hundreds of times, without wasting a single bit of spiritual energy.

"That's more like it!" Min Wenbing secretly breathed a sigh of relief, his tense shoulders finally relaxing somewhat. Xiaoyu also smiled, although her eyes were slightly red—she knew that Miss was forcing herself to focus, to let go of her worries.

Yet alongside the relief came concern—others were already two hours ahead, with only eight hours left until the competition ended. Could Dongfang Mingyue catch up by starting over again?

Everyone's focus returned to her, some with anticipation, others with doubt.

"Old He, I'm going to the restroom,"

In a corner of the audience, Nie Yunxing patted He Wu on the shoulder and stood to head to the restroom.

Upon reaching the restroom, as Nie Yunxing unzipped his pants to relieve himself, he suddenly smelled a peculiar aroma. His vision blurred, and his mind felt as if it was pricked by needles. Gradually, his eyes became hollow.

Chapter 478: Sudden Upheaval, Celestial Barrier

Time quietly slipped away amidst the faint glow of the alchemy furnace and the flow of Spiritual Energy. The sky outside the venue gradually darkened, while the atmosphere inside grew increasingly tense.

Another three hours passed, and a low sigh suddenly echoed through the hall—a middle-aged alchemist gazed at the failed remnants in his cauldron, shaking his head helplessly; his second batch had also failed.

Soon after, another contestant stopped, his face full of regret and frustration—less than four hours remained until the competition ended, not enough time to start another batch, sealing his fate outside the finals.

The remaining six contestants quickened their pace, progressively entering the final stage of pill formation.

The white-haired elder was the first to harness Spiritual Energy, weaving seals with both hands, causing a faint red glow to emanate around his cauldron. He enveloped the cauldron with fire-type Spiritual Energy, precisely controlling the final temperature with practiced, steady motions.

Dongfang Xi refused to be outdone, her fingertips shimmering with Spiritual Energy, using a family-secret fire control technique to accelerate the pill formation, a confident smile on her lips.

The audience held their breath, their eyes switching between the contestants, even holding their breath softer.

As time went on, the first contestant to complete the pill formation emerged—it was the white-haired elder.

When a lustrous Jade Heaven Essence Pill flew out from the cauldron, the hall was filled with low murmurs of admiration. The elder exhaled a long breath, a look of relief gracing his face.

Closely following was Dongfang Xi. Her pill's color was slightly inferior to the elder's, but it was formed completely and highly accomplished.

As she placed the pill into a Jade Bottle, she gave a deliberate glance towards Dongfang Mingyue, her eyes full of pride.

Third, fourth... More and more contestants completed their refining, as the numbers on the electronic timer kept jumping, with only five minutes left until the end of the competition.

At this moment, only two contestants who had previously failed and Dongfang Mingyue were left unfinished.

"Looks like Dongfang Mingyue won't make it?" someone muttered softly, tone filled with regret, "What a pity, she was doing so well just now."

Xiao Yu clasped her sleeves tightly, her palms cold with sweat, too nervous to blink.

At that moment, a clear hum resonated from Dongfang Mingyue's cauldron, clearer than any previous time.

Soon, a completely green, jade-sculpture-like pill rose slowly from the mouth of the cauldron, its surface swirling with delicate Spiritual Energy halos—Jade Heaven Essence Pill!

Dongfang Mingyue's quick reflexes allowed her to catch it stably into a white jade bottle, her actions swift and decisive.

Just seconds after she secured the bottle cap, the electronic timer emitted a prolonged beep, officially marking the end of the competition.

The contestant who failed to complete their task looked at their cauldron with resigned disappointment but continued refining at Gu Chao Xian's suggestion—"It's a rare chance to practice a new recipe, don't waste the materials."

Gu Chao Xian's gentle voice eased their disappointment.

After the competition ended, staff members collected the pills from the six contestants, delivering them to the judges' table.

Gu Chao Xian and several other judges gathered, carefully evaluating the pills from multiple aspects, such as color, gloss, and Spiritual Energy fluctuation, exchanging soft whispers, jotting notes with their scoring pens.

Soon, the electronic scoreboard at the center of the venue lit up, displaying the contestants' scores one after another. The white-haired elder took first place with 78 points, followed closely by contestants scoring between 62 and 75 points.

When Dongfang Xi's score flashed, a cry of surprise rose from the crowd—85 points! The highest score yet! Dongfang Xi's smile grew broader; she had already secured her spot in the finals.

All eyes focused on the last empty space on the scoreboard—Dongfang Mingyue's score.

Xiao Yu's heart leaped into her throat, and Min Wenbing and others stared intently at the screen, forgetting even to breathe.

The next second, the numbers slowly appeared: 83 points!

Though two points lower than Dongfang Xi, it was still firmly in second place!

The audience erupted instantly, voices of discussion intertwining.

"To get 83 points after being two hours late, Dongfang Mingyue's strength is incredible!"

"Seeing her earlier state, I thought it was over, but she turned it around!"

Some were curious about her initial performance issues, but were ultimately impressed by her later stability.

Dongfang Mingyue gazed at her score on the board, her tense shoulders finally relaxing. She turned to look at Xiao Yu below the stage, exchanging a smile that melted away all her worries and tension.

Despite a rocky start, she had successfully advanced to the finals.

Seeing the numbers on the scoreboard, Dongfang Xi's face darkened instantly—she could never have expected that even after falling behind by two hours, Dongfang Mingyue not only completed the pill formation but also scored just two points less than her.

If Dongfang Mingyue hadn't made early mistakes, perhaps she would have dominated as before, leaving Dongfang Xi behind. This unwillingness and jealousy pierced her heart like a needle, dousing her celebratory mood.

"All contestants' scores have been tallied." Gu Chao Xian stepped onto the stage, his voice amplified by the array spreading throughout the venue, "Now, I announce the four alchemists advancing to the Star Cup finals—Dongfang Xi, Dongfang Mingyue, Ren Changhe, and Fu Ze!"

The moment he finished speaking, the venue erupted in prolonged applause.

According to competition rules, completed pills would be returned to the contestants—both as a reward for their ten hours of hard alchemy work and a display of the Alchemy Association's wealth.

Dongfang Mingyue received the Jade Bottle handed over by a staff member; the cool touch on her fingertips caused her to gently caress the bottle, her taut nerves finally relaxing,

As soon as she exited the arena, Xiao Yu darted over, her eyes sparkling, her tone filled with excitement: "Miss! That was amazing! Getting second despite being two hours late is incredible!"

Dongfang Mingyue grinned, reaching out to ruffle Xiao Yu's hair, yet as she recalled last night's dream, her initial happiness suddenly turned heavy, letting out a deep sigh, her smile somewhat forced.

The group quickly left the venue, boarding a private flying device waiting outside.

The flying device rose steadily, heading toward the hotel, with two escort flying devices closely tailing it at a safe distance; not far to the side, a discreet small flying device accompanied, housing He Wu and Nie Yunxing from the dark unit, responsible for outer perimeter vigilance.

Outside the window, snowflakes fell gently, sticking to the windshield only to be swiftly swept away by the automatic cleaning device, leaving streaks of water marks.

The streets below gradually emptied, passersby few, and even shops usually lit up closed their doors, the silence somewhat unnerving.

"Strange, even if Shuang Hua star is cold at night, it shouldn't be this quiet." Xiao Yu murmured, frowning as she leaned against the window, "This time of night, there should at least be some night stalls open."

Dongfang Mingyue leaned closer to check out the window, a vague sense of unease arising in her heart.

Just then, the communicator on the flying device sounded, Min Wenbing's voice carrying a weighty tone: "Miss Ming Yue, wait a moment! Something's off, slow the flying device down!"

As soon as he finished, the two escort flying devices quickly accelerated, closing in on the main one; the small flying device to the side immediately altered its course, He Wu and Nie Yunxing deftly maneuvering to converge with the other escorts, forming a tight protective circle around the main flying device.

Dongfang Mingyue's heartbeat quickened gradually, she looked down again— there wasn't a whisper of movement on the streets below, not even a breeze, unnaturally quiet like a still painting, vastly different from the occasional car and human sounds of the past, reeking of something eerie.

"Buzz—!"

Suddenly, the flying device shuddered violently as if slamming into an invisible barrier.

Instinctively grasping the handrail, Dongfang Mingyue shot a glance out the window—below, the streets and buildings appeared as if shattered glass, cracks forming and then dissolving completely, replaced by a gray void.

Immediately following, the surrounding space rippled like water, a semi-transparent sky curtain rose slowly, enclosing all the flying devices within, forming an enormous cage.

"This is... a Sky Array!" Min Wenbing's voice, tinged with shock, reached everyone through the communicator.

Inside the flying device, Dongfang Mingyue's face changed dramatically, Xiao Yu clutching her arm tightly, eyes filled with tension and fear.

He Wu and Nie Yunxing immediately piloted the flying device in an attempt to break out, but no matter how they crashed against it, they couldn't shatter the watery sky curtain, only going in circles.

Everyone understood they'd fallen into a carefully orchestrated trap set by someone else.

The target was Dongfang Mingyue herself.

Chapter 479: Seventh-Tier Assassin, Qin Tian Appears

The snowflakes and cold wind were blocked outside by the water-patterned canopy, yet everyone inside the flying device felt a bone-chilling cold, spreading from the depths of their hearts to their limbs—this was clearly an ambush set up by the enemy, waiting for them to walk right into it.

"Protect Miss Ming Yue, prepare for ground battle!" Min Wenbing's voice came through the communicator, carrying an undeniable decisiveness.

In the air, the view is wide open, making them easy targets. They can only rely on the terrain to counterattack once grounded.

"Yes!"

The bodyguards replied in unison, the flying device's cabin door swiftly opened, and the biting wind instantly rushed in.

Min Wenbing was the first to leap out of the cabin, Spiritual Energy condensed into a golden airflow beneath his feet, steadily cushioning the impact of his fall; the other bodyguards followed closely, moving swiftly like leopards.

Dongfang Mingyue also grasped Xiaoyu's hand tightly, a faint green Spiritual Energy shimmering at her fingertips, and the two jumped down side by side—for a Tier Five Holy Blood Spiritualist, a height of several hundred meters wasn't considered dangerous; the Spiritual Energy was enough to support them in landing safely.

"Splat!"

Everyone landed on the ground one after another, making a dull sound as their feet touched the earth.

The bodyguards quickly formed a circle, shielding Dongfang Mingyue and Xiaoyu in the center, their eyes vigilantly scanning the surroundings.

Min Wenbing looked up at the water-patterned canopy, his brows furrowed tightly—he immediately recognized the barrier, "Sky Canopy Barrier"

This was originally a secret technique developed by the Tribunal for capturing high-tier criminals, capable of isolating space and limiting the aftermath of battles to avoid involving the innocent. However, the technology leaked later, becoming a weapon for many factions to secretly assassinate and eradicate.

Once trapped inside a Sky Canopy Barrier, the outside world cannot perceive any movement inside, and calling for help is nearly impossible.

"Brothers, the situation is worse than expected." Min Wenbing lowered his voice, his eyes sweeping over the bodyguards around him, "You protect Miss Ming Yue well, I'll try to break the barrier and call for help."

He wasn't sure of the barrier's level—if it was a Tier Six barrier, he had a chance to break through it with his Peak Tier Six strength, but if it was Tier Seven...

He took a deep breath, suppressing the heaviness in his heart, "No matter what, even if it means breaking bones and spilling blood, we must protect Miss Ming Yue!"

"Protect Miss Ming Yue to the death!" The bodyguards shouted in unison, their voices firm and powerful.

Min Wenbing no longer said anything more, and a majestic aura suddenly erupted around him, light gold metallic Spiritual Energy surged out from his body, covering him like flowing armor, the sharp aura making the surrounding air seem sharp, tightening everyone's skin.

The Golden Bloodline power within him awakened as well, an invisible pressure expanding all around.

As soon as this pressure spread, footsteps were heard all around.

"Step, step, step..."

Uniform footsteps came from the gray fog, getting closer and closer.

Immediately afterward, dozens of shadows dressed in black and masked faces slowly walked out, spreading like ghosts all around, icy auras locking onto Min Wenbing and the others, making the air turn stagnant.

Min Wenbing and the bodyguards' faces changed dramatically—just judging from the auras, there were at least ten Tier Six Spiritualists on the other side, and the rest were all Tier Five masters!

While there were only thirteen people on their side.

"Attack!"

Someone uttered in a low tone, and the black clad men instantly launched their assault, sending several dark Spiritual Blades flying towards the bodyguard circle, quick as lightning.

"Block it!" Min Wenbing roared angrily, his hands forming seals, and light gold Spiritual Energy instantly condensed into a massive shield, with a "bang" it blocked the Spiritual Blades, fine cracks appearing on the shield's surface.

Meanwhile, the other bodyguards also started unleashing Spiritual Energy, some forming shields, others launching attacks, engaging in a fierce battle with the black-clothed men.

Light gold metallic Spiritual Energy, black Dark Spiritual Energy, and green Wood Spiritual Energy clashed within the Sky Canopy Barrier, erupting with piercing noises.

Min Wenbing wielded his long knife, first charging towards a Tier Six black clothed man, the Golden Bloodline pressure making the opponent's movements pause, taking advantage of this, he swung his knife down, the blade wind sharp, aiming straight for the opponent's vital parts.

Xiaoyu tightly grasped Dongfang Mingyue's arm, hiding in the center of the bodyguard circle, watching the fierce battle outside, her face pale but not screaming—she knew she must not trouble her lady at this moment.

Dongfang Mingyue also clenched her fists, the Spiritual Energy at her fingertips subtly flickering, her gaze watchful, ready to respond to sudden situations at any time.

The battle had barely started and already reached a fever pitch.

Though some of Min Wenbing's side had the advantage of bloodlines, the enemy had many people, and each of them was unyielding, quickly putting the bodyguards at a disadvantage, someone's arm being slashed by a Spiritual Blade, blood instantly staining the sleeves.

The fight stalling, the bodyguards were valiant, but couldn't bear the sheer number of the black-clothed killers, each of them making lethal moves.

The shoulder of one was burned by Dark Spiritual Energy, the flesh turning black; another had their arm sliced open with a deep, bone-revealing wound, blood dripping from their fingertips, staining the ground red.

Seeing the bodyguard circle slowly loosen, the black-clad killers' attacks became increasingly fierce, Xiaoyu's face growing paler, her teeth tightly gnashing against her lips.

At this moment, Dongfang Mingyue suddenly stepped forward, closed her eyes, her body's faint green Spiritual Energy abruptly skyrocketed, like vines breaking ground on a spring day, rapidly sprawling out.

In the next moment, her fingertips lightly touched, rays of Spiritual Energy fused with pure vitality precisely flew toward each injured bodyguard—landing on burnt shoulders, the blackened flesh fading visibly, new pink skin emerging; wrapping around bleeding arms, immediately stopping the blood flow at the wound which healed muscle and bone swiftly, leaving no scar behind.

Chapter 480: Seventh-Rank Assassin, Qin Tian Appears (Part 2)

Not only that, the Spiritual Energy within the light band contained a gentle force that flowed along the bodyguards' meridians. It dispelled the fatigue from battle and suddenly boosted their momentum.

The Holy Blood of the Dongfang Clan, the Azure Wood Bloodline, not only precisely decomposes medicinal ingredients during alchemy but also has unparalleled advantages in healing and support—this ability to instantly heal injuries and enhance combat power was the key to reversing the battle!

The treated bodyguards felt their morale surge, instantly switching from defensive stances to aggressive ones, their gazes becoming fiercer than the black-clad assassins'.

A Tier Five bodyguard, whose arm had just healed, struck with Spiritual Energy-coalesced fists directly at the opponent assassin's chest. A cracking sound was heard as the assassin's ribs broke; another bodyguard, exploiting the boost in speed, maneuvered behind the assassin and sliced the opponent's neck with a Spiritual Blade.

The situation reversed instantly; the black-clad assassins fell one by one, blood and Spiritual Energy intertwining in a chilling scene.

Seeing the assassins suffer heavy casualties, a plain yet slightly impatient voice finally echoed within the heavenly barrier, complaining as if about a troublesome task: "I still have to step in, how troublesome."

Swish—

Before the words had settled, a figure suddenly appeared in front of the protective ring, moving at an extreme speed, leaving not even an afterimage.

Everyone felt a flash before their eyes, and the next moment, a loud "bang" resounded as though a heavy object had struck a wall.

Everyone looked toward the sound, their expressions changing drastically—Min Wenbing was hit as if by a speeding truck, sent flying, crashing hard against the boundary of the heavenly barrier, producing a dull impact sound.

He slid slowly to the ground, his chest visibly caved in, blood continuously seeping from the corners of his mouth, staining the ground in front of him red; he didn't even have the strength to struggle, clearly gravely injured.

The suddenly appearing figure turned slowly, clad in plain white robes, with an unremarkable appearance and features, as if he'd blend into a crowd, never to be found again.

But the aura surrounding him was extraordinarily strange—despite standing there, he gave an impression of unfathomable depth, as though the ground beneath and the air around subtly pulsed with his breath.

Upon witnessing this, everyone's heart sank to the depths.

They knew Min Wenbing's strength well, as a Peak Tier Six with the Golden Bloodline, ordinary Tier Six Spiritualists were simply not his match; against average Tier Seven opponents, he could at least exchange a few moves.

Yet this person before them managed to gravely injure him instantly, offering no chance to resist—this person must be a Tier Seven Spiritualist, and among them, of absolutely top-notch caliber!

Dongfang Mingyue tightly grasped Xiao Yu's hand, the Spiritual Energy in her fingertips trembling slightly.

She could treat Tier Six injuries but was powerless against the crushing force of a Tier Seven powerhouse—this was a chasm in levels, one that no supportive power could bridge.

The white-robed man's indifferent gaze swept across everyone and finally rested on Dongfang Mingyue, his eyes flat, as if looking at a dead person.

The white-robed man's gaze locked onto Dongfang Mingyue without unnecessary words; his right hand formed fingers like a sword, and at his fingertips, a pale azure Sword Qi instantly coalesced—though thin, it radiated a terrifying sharpness, as if slicing the surrounding air into fragments, emitting a faint sizzling sound.

"Miss, watch out!"

The closest bodyguard to Dongfang Mingyue roared and rushed forward, his body surged with Spiritual Energy, forming a thick Earth Element Shield; other bodyguards also activated their Spiritual Energy, either forming shields or unleashing Waves of Spiritual Energy, trying to jointly block the Sword Qi.

Yet the next second, a desperate scene unfolded—the pale azure Sword Qi passed through the Earth Element Shield like a blade through tofu, then tore through the subsequent Waves of Spiritual Energy without encountering any obstruction, flying directly towards Dongfang Mingyue.

The sound of shattering shields and disintegrating Spiritual Energy interwove, faces of the bodyguards etched with helplessness, some even closing their eyes, unwilling to witness the coming scene.

Xiao Yu clung tightly to Dongfang Mingyue, her body trembling uncontrollably, yet still shielding Dongfang Mingyue behind her, her eyes filled with determination.

At this critical moment, a figure suddenly appeared before Dongfang Mingyue like a phantom—a figure in black, standing as upright as a pine, with a stern countenance, surrounded by faint spatial ripples; no one saw how he materialized.

"Ding—!"

The crisp sound of metal clashing rang out suddenly, like jade meeting stone, echoing throughout the heavenly barrier.

The crowd only saw the black-clad man raise his hand; a frost-tinged Battle Sword had somehow appeared in it, blocking the pale azure Sword Qi precisely.

Upon impact, the pale azure glow disintegrated instantly, scattering into countless tiny Spiritual Energy light points, dissipating into the air.

The shockwave generated from the clash, however, spread outward like a fierce wind—the bodyguards stumbled backward, some even falling directly onto the ground; Xiao Yu and Dongfang Mingyue were pushed back two steps by the wave, nearly losing their balance.

The bodyguards looked at the black-clad figure in shock; they didn't know him, yet he managed to deflect the lethal Sword Qi of a Tier Seven powerhouse, showing his immense strength.

Who is he?

The previously indifferent look on the white-robed man's face finally changed, his eyebrows raised slightly, his tone carried a hint of curiosity: "Where did you come from to slip past my eyes?"

The black-clad man paid him no mind, instead, he turned slowly, his gaze settling on Dongfang Mingyue, his voice calm yet imbued with a reassuring strength: "Miss Ming Yue, are you alright?"