

Doctor 941

Chapter 941: Fearless Heart

Hou Ziping, although somewhat timid, was not foolish. He understood that his beating this time was due to his close association with Fang Bai, making him the "sacrificial lamb" used by Gao Shuxian, Yang Lin, and others to intimidate Fang Bai.

Yang Wei's attack was vicious, inflicting serious injuries on him immediately. If not for the rules of the Martial Academy, Hou Ziping believed he probably wouldn't even have been able to save his own life.

After suffering severe injuries at the hands of Yang Wei, Hou Ziping was carried back to his dwelling by several fellow disciples, where he swallowed a few Healing Pills and lay there to recuperate in silence.

Hou Ziping was acutely aware that Yang Wei's ruthless attack must have been instigated by Yang Lin and Gao Shuxian. He felt a profound sadness and anger in his heart.

Yet Hou Ziping also realized that Yang Wei's reason for injuring him under the pretext of a challenge did not violate the Martial Academy's rules. Even if he complained to the Discipline Hall, he was unlikely to win. After all, wasn't he a "Failure Disciple" with poor aptitude and no future in the Martial Dao?

Failure Disciples have no rights, a truth in the True Martial Realm that has remained unshaken for all time.

If he had been an individual with an Innate Spiritual Root, with a bright future ahead, the higher-ups of the Martial Academy would certainly have intervened over such serious injuries inflicted by Yang Wei.

But now, his beating might only cause a minor stir within the Inner Court, which would quickly settle down, and soon no one would remember this pitiful and poor Failure Disciple.

Hou Ziping had few friends in the Inner Sect, and most Inner Court disciples could guess why he was gravely hurt by Yang Wei. Fearing to offend Yang Lin, Gao Shuxian, and Yang Wei, no one dared to visit.

Hou Ziping hadn't expected anyone to visit him, but deep down, he hoped Fang Bai would show up. After all, he had been injured because of Fang Bai's involvement, an innocent victim of the ordeal.

In reality, Hou Ziping didn't have much hope that Fang Bai would visit. After all, Fang Bai was like a Clay Bodhisattva who could barely protect himself.

In a couple of days, it would be the day of Fang Bai's arranged battle with Yang Lin. Before that, Fang Bai would likely enter seclusion for cultivation, conserving his energy to prepare fully for the fight. How could he have time to visit him?

Let me, a Failure Disciple, hide in my own room, quietly licking my wounds!

Hou Ziping lay on the stone bed, thinking to himself in utter desolation.

But just then, Fang Bai unexpectedly appeared in his room and even declared he would seek justice for him.

This moved Hou Ziping, making him feel that Fang Bai truly saw him as a real friend.

"Junior Brother Fang, Yang Wei's attack on me was surely on the orders of Yang Lin and Gao Shuxian. Their goal is to intimidate you, or to disturb your state of mind, so that you cannot fully concentrate on the upcoming fight. You must not be affected by this."

Hou Ziping said weakly, unable to suppress a few moans of pain.

"Senior Brother Hou, do you want revenge?"

Fang Bai suddenly asked.

Hou Ziping paused, looking at Fang Bai with confusion.

"Do you want to return the pain Yang Wei inflicted on you back to him?"

Fang Bai continued.

"Of course I do! But..."

Hou Ziping replied with a bitter smile, "I can only wish! Yang Wei is much stronger than me; defeating him is impossible. And even if I could defeat Yang Wei, what about Gao Shuxian? What about Yang Lin? They would never let me off! Therefore, other than continuing to swallow my pride, there's nothing I can do. I am just a waste!"

Hou Ziping sighed with a look of sorrow on his face.

Fang Bai spoke sternly and seriously, "Martial Artists must possess a fearless heart! They must have an indomitable spirit that never admits defeat or succumbs to difficulties but rather faces challenges head-on and grows stronger with each setback! Without such a spirit, a martial artist, no matter how talented or how many cultivation resources he has, will not have any great prospects on the path of Martial Dao!"

As Fang Bai said this, his voice suddenly rose as he addressed Hou Ziping, "Senior Brother Hou, perhaps what you're lacking to breakthrough to the next level is precisely this fighting spirit!"

These words struck Hou Ziping like an Ambrosia Baptism. His body involuntarily shuddered as he reflected on his own past, which was indeed full of retreating in the face of difficulties and cowering in danger, without the resolve and courage for a fight to the death.

"At dusk the day after tomorrow, I have a duel scheduled with Yang Lin. Senior Brother Hou, I hope you can also be there at the Inner Sect disciples' Practice Battle Arena, to challenge Yang Wei and trample him underfoot."

Hou Ziping's expression darkened as he sighed, "Junior Brother Fang, I am truly sorry. With this injury, I won't fully recover for two or three months; I'm afraid I won't be able to cheer for you the day after tomorrow. As for challenging Yang Wei... that might have to wait until later!"

When he spoke these words, his tone was filled with unwillingness.

In fact, he wanted to challenge Yang Wei and defeat him more than anyone else, but even at his peak, there was no hope for victory, let alone now with his severe injuries, lying on a stone bed?

"There's no need to wait until later! I can heal your injuries completely by the day after tomorrow, allowing you to show up at the Inner Sect disciples' Practice Battle Arena as scheduled!"

Fang Bai said with a slight smile, his expression brimming with confidence.

"Junior Brother Fang, are you serious?"

Hou Ziping suddenly widened his eyes, his previously languid spirit lifting slightly. Although he didn't quite believe Fang Bai's words, he still harbored some hope.

"You just take a good sleep, and when you wake up, your injuries will be no concern."

Saying this, Fang Bai waved his right hand and gently patted Hou Ziping's body. Hou Ziping felt a numbness pass through him like an electric shock, and soon his thoughts began to blur until, in the blink of an eye, he lost consciousness.

Hou Ziping felt as if he had been dreaming, a peculiar dream in which his body seemed to bathe in the dense Essence Energy of water and wood. The injuries on his body were healing at a visible speed, and his fractured bones quickly fused back together...

When his body was fully recovered, Hou Ziping woke from the dream to find himself still in his stone hut, with Fang Bai sitting beside him, wearing a comforting and warm smile.

"That dream just now seemed as real as if it actually happened!"

Hou Ziping thought to himself, still believing he lay on the stone bed, immobile from his serious injuries.

"Senior Brother Hou, you've been asleep for two whole days!"

Fang Bai said with a smile.

"What?"

Hou Ziping exclaimed in shock, sitting up reflexively as he mumbled, "I thought I had just taken a short nap, how could it be... two days already? Ah, Junior Brother Fang, does that mean you're dueling with Yang Lin today? What time is it now?"

Fang Bai said, "There's still time before the agreed-upon dusk, no need to rush. Senior Brother Hou's body has also almost fully recovered. How about we go outside and stand for a bit?"

With that, he had already stood up and walked outside.

Only then did Hou Ziping realize that he was actually sitting up on the stone bed, his injuries healed as if by magic. Thinking back to the dream he had just had, he sat there momentarily stunned.

Chapter 942: Guiding Senior Brother Hou

Fang Bai stood outside the stone house for a moment before he saw Hou Ziping finally shuffling out.

Disbelief still lingered on Hou Ziping's face.

"Junior Brother Fang, my injury..."

Looking at Fang Bai, Hou Ziping felt his throat go dry, wanting to say something but couldn't find the words.

Although Hou Ziping didn't understand how his injury had healed so quickly, he knew it must have something to do with the Junior Brother Fang before him.

"I healed your wound."

Under Hou Ziping's astonished gaze, Fang Bai casually said, "I know a secret technique that can rapidly heal others' injuries. Hmm, it's enough for you, Senior Brother Hou, to know this in your heart, please keep it a secret for me."

Hou Ziping, who was well aware of 'He who carries a jade untouched bears no guilt, but he who carries a jade invites trouble,' nodded subconsciously, and said, "I know! I know! I definitely won't tell anyone."

With a smile, Fang Bai asked, "How are you feeling now, Senior Brother Hou?"

Excitedly, Hou Ziping exclaimed, "Very good! My injury has completely healed, and... and I feel like my strength has improved from before."

Hou Ziping had thought that even if his injuries healed after his severe setback, it would be difficult for his strength to return to its peak, but he had never expected to gain a blessing in disguise, with his strength not regressing but instead advancing, making him overjoyed.

Then, Hou Ziping thought of Fang Bai's miraculous secret technique that could swiftly heal injuries, and his heart heated up, thinking that if he formed a good relationship with Fang Bai, wouldn't he no longer have to worry about being injured?

"Senior Brother Hou, now I'm going to ask you again: do you want to return the pain Yang Wei has brought you back to him?"

Fang Bai turned his head to look at Hou Ziping and asked seriously.

Hou Ziping replied, "I do! But..."

He had wanted to say "but now my strength might not necessarily be a match for Yang Wei," but Fang Bai waved his hand and interrupted him.

Fang Bai leaped onto a Stone Platform in front of the stone house and then sat down cross-legged, gesturing for Hou Ziping to join him.

The quarters of the Inner Court disciples almost always had such a Stone Platform, specifically for daily cultivation practice.

Hou Ziping immediately jumped onto the Stone Platform and sat cross-legged opposite Fang Bai, looking at him with some confusion.

Fang Bai said, "Senior Brother Hou, you practice Earth Element Martial Arts Techniques, and during my journey in the past, I also had the chance to come across some Earth Element Martial Arts Techniques. Now, I will explain them to you, and I hope you can gain some insights from them."

Knowing that Fang Bai intended to guide him, Hou Ziping eagerly straightened up and prepared to listen carefully to Fang Bai's explanation.

The information Fang Bai discussed was among the most basic in the Martial Dao, but to Hou Ziping, every word sparkled with wisdom and was indescribably marvelous.

Hou Ziping listened intently, cross-referencing what he learned with his previous knowledge, and suddenly experienced an epiphany, as if the clouds had parted to reveal the sun.

Since entering the Inner Court, Hou Ziping had diligently buried himself in grueling practice, never allowing himself to slacken, but he kept hitting walls on the Martial Dao, struggling to make any headway. This was in part due to his mediocre aptitude and lack of keen insight, but it was also because the high-level instructors from the Martial Academy did not explain things in simple and detailed terms.

There were around three hundred disciples in the Inner Court, and whenever a high-level instructor came to impart Martial Arts Techniques, they would all gather together to listen.

Those disciples with superior talent and sharp insight often understood the lessons quickly upon explanation, while others like Hou Ziping might only grasp a vague understanding.

As a result, disciples like Hou Ziping would fall behind step by step, widening the gap in strength between them and other Inner Court disciples.

Twelve years of arduous cultivation in the Inner Court had yielded no return he deserved, and Hou Ziping had even grown to despair of himself, ready to live a life of mediocrity.

But now, Fang Bai had opened a new window to the Martial Dao World for him, showing him a whole new world, which greatly boosted his confidence and left him almost dancing with excitement.

Before usurping a body to be reborn, Fang Bai was a battle-hardened Immortal Emperor with an extremely profound understanding of the Martial Dao. He was like a master teacher, knowing exactly how to impart skills and teach techniques to allow his disciple to comprehend as quickly as possible.

Fang Bai's explanations were simple and detailed, and Hou Ziping listened so intently that he was completely entranced, losing track of time until dusk arrived.

"Senior Brother Hou, it's time for us to set off!"

Fang Bai looked up at the sky and leaped down from the Stone Platform.

Dusk was the time for his duel with Yang Lin, and he had to arrive at the Practice Battle Arena for Inner Court disciples on time.

As for Hou Ziping, he was also going to the Practice Battle Arena with Fang Bai to seek justice from Yang Wei, Yang Lin's cousin.

Hou Ziping landed beside Fang Bai and clasped his hands in a fists salute, bowing deeply to Fang Bai, "Junior Brother Fang, thank you!"

He was thanking Fang Bai for explaining the Martial Dao to him, which had led to a vast improvement in his understanding and strength within just the past few hours—a leap in capability equivalent to his twelve years of hard cultivation since entering the Inner Court.

Now, if he were to face Yang Wei again, Hou Ziping was confident of victory.

Therefore, Hou Ziping was immensely grateful to Fang Bai and bowed to express his thanks.

"Let's go, to the Practice Battle Arena!"

Fang Bai accepted Hou Ziping's gratitude, then they walked shoulder to shoulder towards the Practice Battle Arena for Inner Court disciples.

Just as they set off, at the Practice Battle Arena by a small lake within Bitao Martial Academy, a sizable number of Inner Court disciples had already gathered.

These Inner Court disciples knew that today, Yang Lin, ranked third on the power list of Inner Court disciples, would face off against the newly promoted Inner Court disciple Fang Bai. Most of them came with the intent to watch the excitement unfold.

"Look, Senior Brother Yang has arrived!"

At dusk, surrounded by a group of Inner Court disciples including Yang Wei, Yang Lin appeared at the Practice Battle Arena with a smile and a laugh.

Yang Lin was naturally handsome, and today he had deliberately donned a new outfit and groomed his hair, looking even more elegant and debonair, captivating many of the female Inner Court disciples with his charm.

The duel was imminent, yet not a trace of pre-battle seriousness or tension could be seen on Yang Lin's face, only a strong sense of confidence.

"The agreed time for the duel is almost here. Senior Brother Yang has already arrived, but where is Junior Brother Fang Bai?"

"Could he be scared and backing out at the last moment?"

"Haha, I think it's quite possible! How could a newbie Inner Court disciple like him stand a chance against an old hand like Senior Brother Yang?"

"Indeed, Senior Brother Yang is the third-ranked on the Inner Court disciples' power list! His position hasn't been shaken by anyone for many years!"

"If Junior Brother Fang Bai doesn't show up, I'm doomed. I bet a thousand Essence Stones with Senior Brother Zhao that Fang Bai would win!"

"Hahaha, Junior Brother Qian, did you get your head stuck in a door? Betting on Fang Bai to win is like giving away cultivation resources to Senior Brother Zhao!"

At the Practice Battle Arena, the gathered Inner Court disciples freely discussed the upcoming event. When they heard about Junior Brother Qian betting a thousand Essence Stones on Fang Bai's victory, the other Inner Court disciples all burst into laughter.

Chapter 943: Keeping the Appointment

In the Bitao Martial Academy, almost every day there were disciples challenging each other to fights, and the venue was almost always the Practice Battle Arena.

And with each challenge, a large number of disciples from Bitao Martial Academy would gather to spectate. Eventually, those watching felt that merely observing the duels was not that interesting, so some disciples started to use their cultivation resources to wager against one another. As a result, this trend of betting grew more and more popular, attracting nearly all the academy's disciples to participate.

Some disciples thus "lost their fortunes," squandering all their cultivation resources, while others "struck it rich overnight," winning a great deal of cultivation resources.

The challenge between Yang Lin and Fang Bai had spread throughout the entire Inner Court. Aside from a few disciples who were out gaining experience, nearly all the other Inner Court disciples had gathered at the Practice Battle Arena with their cultivation resources, ready to make their bets.

However, this duel didn't seem to hold much suspense, as the majority of Inner Court disciples believed that Fang Bai was doomed to lose, and thus they placed their bets on Yang Lin.

But there were a few Inner Court disciples who felt that since Fang Bai dared to accept Yang Lin's challenge, he might have some sort of "trump card," so they gritted their teeth and bet on Fang Bai winning.

That Inner Court disciple with the surname Qian held this very thought, and wagered a thousand Essence Stones with a Senior Brother surnamed Zhao.

Hearing his fellow disciples laughing at him, the red-faced Inner Court disciple with the surname Qian shouted, "The duel hasn't started yet, how can you be so sure that Junior Brother Fang is bound to lose? Hmph, I believe in Junior Brother Fang!"

Though he spoke like this, he was already feeling a bit regretful inside. But as martial artists are true to their word, he had already placed his bet on Fang Bai winning and couldn't change it now.

If Fang Bai were to lose to Yang Lin in the duel, the Inner Court disciple named Qian would have to obediently hand over a thousand Essence Stones to the Senior Brother surnamed Zhao.

For an ordinary Inner Court disciple, a thousand Essence Stones was not a small sum, and if lost, it would certainly cause some heartache.

"Senior Brother Qian, since you're so sure about Junior Brother Fang, why not make a wager with me? How about it, do you dare?"

A female disciple of the Inner Court said with a giggly smile.

"Senior Brother Qian, you're not going to be scared to bet with Junior Sister Chen, are you?"

"A man afraid of a woman? Bet with her!"

"If you're a man, take a gamble. What if you win?"

"Hehe, I bet Senior Brother Qian doesn't dare to bet! Senior Brother Qian has lost quite a bit of cultivation resources lately, probably doesn't have the confidence to bet, right?"

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Some other Inner Court disciples also began egging him on.

Seeing Junior Sister Chen's teasing and disdainful look, and egged on by the surrounding Inner Court disciples, the hot-blooded disciple surnamed Qian puffed out his chest and declared loudly, "What's there to be afraid of? Junior Sister Chen, should we bet Essence Stones or elixirs?"

Junior Sister Chen laughed and said, "Let's bet elixirs! How about ten bottles of Gathering Yuan Pills as the wager? What do you say, Senior Brother Qian?"

The disciple surnamed Qian hesitated for a moment, then gritted his teeth and said, "Alright, you got it!"

Afterward, a few more Inner Court disciples asked to place bets with the disciple surnamed Qian. Steeling himself and stomping his foot, he simply agreed to them all, thinking to himself that if Fang Bai lost, he would just lose all his accumulated cultivation resources. But if Fang Bai won, he would make a hefty profit.

"Junior Brother Fang, oh Junior Brother Fang, my entire fortune is staked on you—you mustn't lose!"

The inner court disciple surnamed Qian clasped his hands together and silently prayed.

The voices of the inner court disciples on the Practice Battle Arena were heard loud and clear by Yang Lin and Yang Wei. Seeing that the disciple surnamed Qian actually supported Fang Bai, their expressions turned somewhat ugly.

Realizing that his behavior might have offended the cousins when he noticed the unfriendly gaze from Yang Lin and Yang Wei, the disciple surnamed Qian felt somewhat apprehensive.

Both Yang Lin and Yang Wei were ranked among the top combatants of the inner court disciples, with Yang Lin ranked third and Yang Wei ranked Eighteen. If the cousins were to join forces, even the individuals ranked first and second on the list would be somewhat wary, let alone a disciple surnamed Qian who was ranked in the dozens.

"Cousin, it's already this late, and Fang Bai still hasn't shown up. Could he really be planning to play the tortoise with its head withdrawn?"

Yang Wei was getting impatient and spoke to Yang Lin in a low voice.

Yang Lin's eyes gleamed with sharpness as he coldly snorted, "If he doesn't come, you go to his residence and drag him here! I want all the inner court disciples to know that Junior Brother Fang is a petty man who doesn't keep his word!"

No sooner had he finished speaking than they heard an inner court disciple exclaim loudly, "Here he comes! Junior Brother Fang has arrived!"

Then, all the inner court disciples on the Practice Battle Arena turned their gazes in the same direction.

Fang Bai arrived with a smile at the corner of his mouth, hands clasped behind his back, walking leisurely over. He looked as relaxed as if he were not there to keep an appointment but to enjoy a leisurely spring outing.

The crowd's eyes scanned Fang Bai before being drawn to Hou Ziping, who followed close behind. Some couldn't help but cry out in amazement.

Wasn't it said that Hou Ziping was severely injured by Yang Wei? Wasn't it said that his injuries would take months to heal? But Hou Ziping standing before them looked completely unharmed!

Many inner court disciples had witnessed Hou Ziping being injured by Yang Wei, and now seeing him appear unscathed, they thought their eyes were playing tricks on them. But looking closer, there was no doubt that the person was indeed Hou Ziping.

What exactly had happened that allowed Hou Ziping, who was on death's door due to his serious injuries, to miraculously recover and show up here?

A big question mark appeared in the mind of every inner court disciple present.

"Yang Wei, what's going on?"

Upon seeing Hou Ziping, a trace of surprise flickered across Yang Lin's eyes; he too hadn't expected such a turn of events, and immediately turned to glare at Yang Wei behind him.

It was Yang Lin who had ordered Hou Ziping to be injured by Yang Wei, but the current situation caught Yang Lin off-guard.

"I don't know... I did indeed leave him seriously injured..."

Yang Wei, somewhat fearful of his cousin, shrank his neck under his scrutiny and blurted out, "No matter how miraculous the spirit pills are, they couldn't possibly heal Hou Ziping's injuries so quickly! This...this... what on earth happened?"

The cousins stared at each other, eyes wide, and it took a moment before they came back to their senses and their gazes returned to Fang Bai and Hou Ziping.

Fang Bai moved with fluid grace, coming to a stop two Zhang away from Yang Lin and Yang Wei.

Hou Ziping followed in step behind Fang Bai, coming up beside him and glaring angrily at Yang Wei, who had injured him.

At this moment, Yang Wei experienced a strange sensation: even though his strength was clearly superior to Hou Ziping's, under Hou Ziping's gaze, he felt an inexplicable sense of fear.

Chapter 944: Dare to Fight with Me?

Yang Wei was paying attention to Hou Ziping, while Yang Lin's gaze had fallen on Fang Bai.

Ever since he had challenged Fang Bai to a fight three days ago, Yang Lin had put the matter out of his mind; in his view, defeating Fang Bai would be a piece of cake, and there was no need to dwell on it.

What Yang Lin had thought about most during these three days was, on the contrary, the matter of dual cultivation with Gao Shuxian after defeating Fang Bai.

Gao Shuxian, with her Innate Spiritual Root, was like a treasure trove in and of herself; dual cultivating with her would greatly benefit a Martial Artist's cultivation level, something all male disciples of the Martial Academy dreamed of.

Now, Yang Lin had this opportunity, which made him ecstatic. For the past three days, he had been conserving his energy, preparing to make an impressive showing during the dual cultivation with Gao Shuxian.

Yang Lin also had his own plans: he hoped to conquer Gao Shuxian both spiritually and physically, which would not only benefit his own cultivation but also be advantageous to him if Gao Shuxian truly became a high-ranking figure in the Martial Academy in the future.

Yang Lin knew that Gao Shuxian was a deeply scheming woman and that she was likely using him to deal with Fang Bai.

However, Yang Lin felt it didn't matter. If Gao Shuxian was using him, wasn't he using her as well?

As long as he could gain benefits from the situation, what did it matter if he was being used?

Thinking of Gao Shuxian's beautiful face and her graceful figure, Yang Lin's heartbeat quickened, and he couldn't help but yearn to pin her down and thoroughly possess her.

However, to enjoy Gao Shuxian's body, he first had to defeat this new Inner Court disciple named Fang Bai. Otherwise, how could the proud Gao Shuxian possibly allow him to touch her body?

In order to obtain both Gao Shuxian's body and heart, then he must first defeat Fang Bai, as agreed upon with Gao Shuxian!

Yang Lin's gaze towards Fang Bai gradually grew cold, and a killing intent began to spread in his chest. The aura of a Heaven Level middle-stage expert was released, transforming into a pressure that enveloped Fang Bai.

As soon as the two met, even before a word was spoken, the atmosphere became tense and chilling. The surrounding Inner Court disciples began to retreat one after another, clearing a large area, each disciple with an excited look on their face, waiting for the forthcoming duel.

Yang Lin did not want to waste too much time on Fang Bai and stepped forward, raising his hand and pointing at Fang Bai with a slight display of contempt in his eyes, he said, "Junior Brother Fang, make your move! As the junior brother, I will let you have three moves first!"

These words, coming from Yang Lin's mouth, did not cause anyone to think he was arrogant because he was a long-time third-ranked fighter on the Inner Court disciples' combat list; he had the right to be arrogant.

All eyes turned to Fang Bai, eager to see how he would respond.

Fang Bai stood with his hands behind his back, adopting a carefree demeanor, seemingly unaffected by the pressure Yang Lin was exerting on him.

There wasn't a hint of pre-battle nervousness or seriousness on Fang Bai; his eyes met Yang Lin's murderous gaze, showing no sign of evasion or shrinking away.

This was not the expression of someone weak in the face of a stronger opponent!

Yang Lin felt somewhat angered, sensing his authority challenged. His fist clenched tight, joints popping with a series of "crack" sounds, as his fighting spirit surged, seemingly ready to launch an attack on Fang Bai at any moment.

"Junior Brother Yang Wei, do you dare to come out and fight me?"

Just as the confrontation between Fang Bai and Yang Lin was about to erupt, Hou Ziping, who stood beside Fang Bai, stepped forward with fury in his eyes, pointing at Yang Wei as he shouted fiercely.

Hou Ziping suddenly stepped forward to challenge Yang Wei, catching everyone by surprise.

Previously, Hou Ziping had been severely injured by Yang Wei, a fact that had spread throughout the entire Inner Court. All the disciples of the Inner Court believed that Hou Ziping had suffered a great loss at Yang Wei's hands, and even if his injuries healed in two or three months, he would still be left with a psychological shadow, probably going out of his way to avoid Yang Wei in the future.

But to everyone's astonishment, just two or three days later, Hou Ziping was up and bouncing around, appearing before everyone. Not only did his injuries seem to have fully healed, but his spirit and overall demeanor were indescribably good.

Ever since seeing Hou Ziping appear in the Practice Battle Arena, Yang Wei had been staring blankly, his face a picture of disbelief. Even when Hou Ziping called him out loud by name to challenge him, he failed to respond.

Yang Wei knew all too well how ruthlessly he had injured Hou Ziping three days ago, and had thought it would take Hou several months to recover from his injuries, perhaps even facing a decline in his fighting capacity afterward. Yet, the scene before him completely overturned his expectations.

Not only had Hou Ziping's injuries healed, but the Martial Artist Aura emanating from him also exerted a certain pressure on Yang Wei, instilling a sense of fear in him.

"Yang Wei, what's wrong with you?"

Seeing Yang Wei staring blankly at Hou Ziping as if he were frozen in fear, Yang Lin frowned and suddenly let out a sharp rebuke.

Although Yang Lin was also surprised to find that Hou Ziping's Martial Artist Aura seemed to surpass his cousin Yang Wei's, he did not want Yang Wei to decline Hou Ziping's challenge.

In the Inner Court, Hou Ziping's strength ranked quite low, deemed unworthy by everyone. If Yang Wei were to refuse his challenge, he would become the laughingstock of the Inner Court disciples. Even for him, as the cousin, it would be a disgrace.

Yang Lin's shout contained a strand of True Yuan, exploding like thunder by Yang Wei's ear, startling him so much that he finally snapped back to reality.

"Cousin... no, Senior Brother Yang, I..."

In a duel between Martial Artists of similar strength, it is the braver who emerges victorious in a narrow path. If one side harbors fear, the odds of winning become slim and the battle perilous.

Now, Yang Wei was feeling a trace of fear towards Hou Ziping and wanted to refuse his challenge.

"Senior Brother Hou has issued you a challenge. Set a time for the duel, and then fight!"

Yang Lin said sternly, noticing that his cousin had become somewhat cowardly. If he did not accept the challenge on his behalf, Yang Wei might very well refuse it.

Now that almost all the Inner Court disciples had gathered in the Practice Battle Arena, if Yang Wei refused Hou Ziping's challenge, the reputation he had worked hard to build in the Martial Academy would be completely ruined.

"There's no need to set a time; the time is now!"

Hou Ziping's fighting spirit soared, and he looked straight at Yang Wei with high morale, shouting, "Junior Brother Yang, do you dare to fight me now?"

There was a time when Hou Ziping was seen as the epitome of weakness in the Inner Court. Whenever a disciple challenged him, he would almost invariably refuse without a second thought, becoming the subject of ridicule as a result.

But who could have expected that in just a few days, Hou Ziping had seemingly become a different person, actively challenging Yang Wei, ranked eighteenth among the Inner Court disciples, causing an uproar of disbelief.

And from his manner, he seemed impatient for the battle with Yang Wei.

Chapter 945: I Bet With You!

Many onlooking Inner Court disciples thought it over carefully and understood Hou Ziping's mindset.

Hou Ziping had been severely injured by Yang Wei before and undoubtedly harbored deep hatred towards Yang Wei. Now that his injuries had healed and his strength seemed to have improved, he wanted to defeat Yang Wei to redeem his previous disgrace.

But could he really defeat Yang Wei?

Hou Ziping indeed overwhelmed Yang Wei in terms of momentum, but the duel between martial artists depended not only on the cultivation level but also on real combat experience.

Since becoming an Inner Court disciple, Yang Wei had continually challenged stronger disciples who ranked above him on the Inner Court disciple power ranking, and he also had to accept challenges from some disciples who ranked lower. Having gone through hundreds of duels, he had now reached the eighteenth position on the power ranking, amassing rich combat experience.

In contrast, Hou Ziping had entered the Inner Court twelve years ago, dedicating himself solely to intense cultivation, with only a handful of duels which left him lacking in real combat experience, thus making him the less favored in a rematch against Yang Wei.

"Senior Brother Hou, you challenge me? Haha, have you forgotten who inflicted severe injuries on you three days ago? Although I don't know why your injuries healed so quickly, if I could severely injure you once, I can do it a second time, a third time... Come on, if you want to fight, then let's fight!"

Although Yang Wei felt fear, he knew today's battle was inevitable, so he gritted his teeth and accepted Hou Ziping's challenge.

Yang Wei didn't believe that Hou Ziping's combat power could surpass his own within just two or three days, even if he had experienced some incredible stroke of luck, it would still take time to cultivate.

This time was originally meant for the duel between Yang Lin and Fang Bai, but Hou Ziping and Yang Wei "jumped the queue", a development that many at the venue didn't anticipate.

"Place your bets! Place your bets! I'm betting two thousand Essence Stones on Junior Brother Yang winning! Who will take the bet against me?"

Just before Hou Ziping and Yang Wei's duel began, an Inner Court disciple already started shouting loudly.

No sooner had he spoken than another Inner Court disciple chimed in, "Senior Brother Wang, I'll take your bet! I actually favor Senior Brother Hou!"

"I'm betting ten Gathering Yuan Pills on Junior Brother Yang winning!"

"Haha, Senior Sister Li, I'll take your bet! But ten Gathering Yuan Pills are too few, how about twenty?"

"Fine, you're on! Junior Brother Yang, I've bet all the Gathering Yuan Pills I have on you winning, so don't let me down!"

...

Two to three hundred Inner Court disciples began betting noisily using Essence Stones or Elixirs.

Of course, most of the disciples favored Yang Wei, placing their bets on him.

However, a small portion of the Inner Court disciples felt that Hou Ziping was different from before, exuding an unprecedented confidence and decided to take a chance on him.

"Five thousand Essence Stones, fifty Elixirs, betting on Senior Brother Hou winning, does anyone want to bet against me?"

Fang Bai's clear voice suddenly rang out, also ready to join the fun.

Five thousand Essence Stones and fifty Elixirs were all the cultivation resources Fang Bai could gather, but he decided to stake them all on Hou Ziping.

How powerful Hou Ziping was now, Fang Bai knew better than anyone, perhaps even better than Hou Ziping himself, so without any hesitation, he bet all his assets on Hou Ziping winning.

Five thousand Essence Stones plus fifty Elixirs was not a small amount for the Inner Court disciples on the scene, so upon hearing Fang Bai's voice, there was a moment of silence, and for a while, no one dared to bet against Fang Bai.

"Junior Brother Fang, I'll bet with you!"

Just then, a crisp voice like that of a warbling oriole echoed from afar.

Disciples from the Inner Court at the Practice Battle Arena turned their heads one after another to look in the direction of the voice, their eyes lighting up when they saw who it was.

Fang Bai narrowed his eyes slightly and looked toward a young Inner Court female disciple who was gracefully approaching from a distance.

The one who wanted to bet with Fang Bai was precisely that young Inner Court female disciple.

The Inner Court female disciple wore a light blue dress and appeared to be around twenty-two years old. With an oval face, phoenix eyes, a delicate nose, and cheeks like peach blossoms, she was extremely beautiful, slightly surpassing Gao Shuxian from the External Courtyard.

From the reaction of the male disciples on the Practice Battle Arena, it was evident that the beautiful Inner Court female disciple walking in their direction was quite popular.

"Greetings, Senior Sister Huang!"

As the beautiful Inner Court female disciple approached, disciples of the Inner Court regardless of age or gender, all clasped their fists and bowed to her in greeting.

After Fang Bai entered the Inner Court, he had learned about some of the disciples from Hou Ziping, especially those ranked high on the list of combat power among the disciples; he knew them even better.

The beautiful Inner Court female disciple's surname was Huang, and her cultivation realm was even higher than Yang Lin's. With a thought, Fang Bai immediately knew who she was.

He saw the female disciple surnamed Huang walk up to him, smiling as she sized him up. He clasped his hands together and bowed slightly, respectfully saying, "Greetings, Senior Sister Huang!"

"Oh, you know me? Junior Brother Fang, we haven't met before, have we?"

The female disciple surnamed Huang asked curiously.

Fang Bai smiled faintly and said, "Although I haven't met Senior Sister Huang, I have long heard of your great reputation. Moreover..."

He raised his hand and pointed toward a huge stele standing on the north side of the Practice Battle Arena, saying, "As an Inner Court disciple, I naturally know a bit about the Inner Court. Senior Sister Huang's great name is hanging on that stele in the second position, quite conspicuously, making it hard not to notice!"

The huge stele that Fang Bai pointed to was densely packed with name tags; upon closer scrutiny, there were exactly a hundred tags.

That was the Inner Court Disciples Combat Power List.

All Inner Court disciples took pride in having their names hung on the stele, and the higher the placement, the better their ranking on the combat power list.

In the second position on the stele, the tag read "Huang Miao," which was indeed the full name of the female disciple surnamed Huang.

This position also indicated that Huang Miao's strength was second among the Inner Court disciples, surpassing Yang Lin.

Fang Bai's gaze swept over Huang Miao's face, then continued, "I've heard people say, 'Senior Sister Huang is naturally beautiful, a beauty unmatched, among the female disciples in the Inner Court, whether in looks or strength, Senior Sister is second to none.' So as soon as Senior Sister appeared, I immediately guessed it was you."

Huang Miao giggled delightfully, her laughter causing her to shimmer, her eyes playfully glancing at Fang Bai as she said, "Junior Brother Fang really has a way with words, praising me so much that I'm almost blooming with joy, I almost don't want to bet against you to win your cultivation resources!"

Fang Bai also laughed, saying to Huang Miao, "Is Senior Sister so confident in her victory?"

Huang Miao paused, glanced at Hou Ziping who had already taken a combat stance, and then laughed again, "In terms of cultivation realm, Senior Brother Hou and Senior Brother Yang are quite similar, but in practical combat experience, Senior Brother Yang definitely beats Senior Brother Hou, so I bet on Senior Brother Yang to win!"

Chapter 946: Senior Sister Huang Miao

Huang Miao was younger than Yang Lin; she was not born with an Innate Spiritual Root, yet her strength far surpassed his. She ranked second on the Inner Court Disciple Strength Ranking, which was due in part to her diligent cultivation and also because she had once encountered a fortuitous opportunity.

Unlike Gao Shuxian, who was pampered and spoiled, arrogant and domineering, ruthless, and scheming, Huang Miao, although she was the second-ranked individual on the Inner Court Disciple Strength

Ranking, was modest and sincere in her dealings with others, treating every Inner Court disciple with due respect, which resulted in her having quite a good reputation among them.

As for Fang Bai, a newly promoted Inner Court disciple who was highly valued by the higher-ups of the Martial Academy, Huang Miao harbored no jealousy but rather a sense of curiosity.

Fang Bai possessed a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root of wood and fire, and at about twenty years old, he was already a Heaven Level mid-rank Martial Artist—unprecedented in the history of Bitao Martial Academy. No wonder the higher-ups were ecstatic, treating him as a treasured find.

Huang Miao was certain that in the future, the Martial Academy leadership would go to great lengths to cultivate Fang Bai. With his kind of talent, as long as he did not encounter any major disasters along the way, he was bound to achieve great things on the Martial Dao and could possibly lead Bitao Martial Academy to become a third-grade sect or even a higher level one.

The so-called major disasters referred to Fang Bai becoming a cripple or perishing.

In the current True Martial Realm, competition between the various sects and factions was fierce. If news of a Martial Dao genius emerged from Bitao Martial Academy, it would definitely catch the attention of other sects and factions.

Those sects and factions that were on bad terms or even hostile towards Bitao Martial Academy would definitely not want to see such a gifted and promising genius disciple arise, posing a threat to them. So, they would try by all means to cripple Fang Bai or even kill him directly.

The Martial Academy's higher-ups were naturally aware of this and therefore, protecting Fang Bai's personal safety had become one of their top priorities; they wouldn't allow an incident to befall a disciple who might lead the rise of the academy.

Huang Miao was an orphan who had lived in Bitao Martial Academy since childhood, considering it her home. She shared the academy's fortunes and misfortunes, and no one wanted to see it prosper more than she did.

So, regarding Fang Bai becoming a disciple of the academy, Huang Miao felt no envy but was instead inspired and heartened.

Even though Huang Miao supported Fang Bai internally, when it came to his duel with Yang Lin, she wasn't very optimistic about his chances, so she made a special trip to the Practice Battle Arena. In case Yang Lin attempted to harm Fang Bai during the duel, she could intervene in time.

Huang Miao had initially observed from a distance, somewhat eager to witness the duel between Yang Lin and Fang Bai and thereby gauge Fang Bai's true strength, but to her surprise, Hou Ziping suddenly stepped forward, wanting to fight Yang Wei first.

What surprised Huang Miao even more was that Fang Bai also got involved in the bet, wagering five thousand Essence Stones and fifty Elixirs on Hou Ziping's victory.

Huang Miao thought to herself that Fang Bai had just entered the Inner Court, and the five thousand Essence Stones and fifty Elixirs he was betting were probably what he had just received. If he lost them, he would face the awkward situation of having no cultivation resources for the next month.

Out of a protective instinct, Huang Miao stepped forward immediately to bet against Fang Bai. That way, after Fang Bai lost to her, the Essence Stones and Elixirs would be hers, and she could find a time to secretly return the won resources to Fang Bai. This was better than losing them to other Inner Court disciples.

She believed that Fang Bai would understand her well-meaning intentions before long.

"Senior Sister Huang, are you really sure you want to bet against me? Don't you want to think it over? If you lose, it'll cost you a tidy sum of cultivation resources!"

Fang Bai said with a beaming smile.

Huang Miao, seeing Fang Bai's confident demeanor, couldn't help feeling a mix of annoyance and amusement as she replied, "No need to think it over, I'll take the bet! Five thousand Essence Stones, fifty Elixirs—I can afford to lose them!"

"Alright, then it's agreed!"

Fang Bai said, stepped away, and left space for Hou Ziping and Yang Wei to duel.

The other Inner Court disciples also retreated, their eyes fixed on Hou Ziping and Yang Wei.

"Senior Brother Hou, I didn't expect you to recover so quickly. It seems I didn't hit you hard enough last time. This time, you won't be so lucky!"

Yang Wei spoke in a deep voice, slowly approaching Hou Ziping step by step.

"Go, Senior Brother Yang!"

"Junior Brother Yang, I've bet a thousand Essence Stones and ten elixirs on you winning. Don't let me down!"

"I'm betting on you this time, Senior Brother Hou!"

"I hope you can create a miracle, Senior Brother Hou, and turn the tables on Junior Brother Yang!"

...

The duel between Hou Ziping and Yang Wei was imminent, and the surrounding Inner Court disciples began shouting, some supporting Yang Wei, others favoring Hou Ziping, but nine out of ten were cheering for Yang Wei.

Huang Miao glanced at Fang Bai, and seeing the smile at the corner of his mouth and his relaxed demeanor, she thought to herself, "This kid seems to have a lot of confidence in Hou Ziping! Isn't he afraid that Hou Ziping will lose? After betting five thousand Essence Stones and fifty elixirs, I can't believe he wouldn't be distressed!"

Just then, as Yang Wei, who had been steadily approaching Hou Ziping, suddenly sped up, his figure flashed like a ghost in front of Hou Ziping. His right palm turned into a blade, raised high, and fiercely chopped down towards Hou Ziping's left shoulder.

Wanting to win with a single strike and show off his strength, Yang Wei poured all his energy into this Palm Blade, which carried the True Yuan of a Heaven Level middle-tier Martial Artist. His hand was sharper than a hundred-refined steel blade, and if it hit Hou Ziping, it could immediately inflict a heavy injury and render him powerless.

Yang Lin, who was watching from the side, nodded slightly, thinking that his cousin's strength wasn't bad at all. No wonder he ranked eighteenth on the Inner Court disciples' power ranking.

"This Yang Wei really doesn't care for the fellowship among Sect members, striking so viciously! If that Palm Blade hits Hou Ziping, even if his left arm isn't completely ruined, it will be practically unusable in the future, which would greatly affect his combat capabilities."

Huang Miao disliked the idea of Sect members fighting each other, and seeing Yang Wei's ruthless attack, her brows lightly furrowed, a trace of coldness flitting across her eyes.

At the same time, she was also secretly worried for Hou Ziping, wondering if he could withstand Yang Wei's all-out blow.

No trace of panic could be seen on Hou Ziping's face; in fact, he was eerily calm. He made no hasty moves to dodge or defend, and it wasn't until Yang Wei's Palm Blade was mere inches from his shoulder that Hou Ziping finally reacted.

He moved back, narrowly avoiding Yang Wei's Palm Blade, then his figure shifted, appearing on Yang Wei's left side. Simultaneously, he lifted his right hand, reaching out like lightning to grab Yang Wei's descending palm.

This sequence of movements was smooth as flowing water, completed in the blink of an eye, so quick that Yang Wei was dizzy and could not react in time.

By the time Yang Wei came to his senses, he only felt his palm tightening, already firmly grasped by Hou Ziping.

Chapter 947: Hou Ziping's Counterattack

Yang Wei's palm was seized by Hou Ziping, and he was shocked, subconsciously trying to break free.

What he did not expect was that Hou Ziping's fingers were like iron tongs, firmly clamping his palm. An immense force came through, making him feel as if his hand bones were about to split, causing unbearable pain.

"You... let go!"

Yang Wei was incredibly terrified and yelled out in frustration, while also throwing a punch towards Hou Ziping with his left hand.

Hou Ziping's lips curled into a hint of a scornful cold smile as he too launched a punch.

"Bang!"

As their fists collided, contrary to what most spectators at the scene anticipated, Hou Ziping's body only slightly swayed, but Yang Wei's body was sent flying backwards.

As he was falling to the ground, still about a zhang high, Hou Ziping suddenly rushed forward and kicked him in mid-air.

"Ah!"

Hou Ziping's kick, infused with True Essence Force, directly broke several of Yang Wei's ribs, eliciting a pig-like scream from Yang Wei as his body flew up again.

This cycle repeated several times. Yang Wei had no strength to retaliate at all, being kicked until his muscles severed and bones broke, screaming repeatedly, until finally, when he landed, he had already passed out.

The disciples of the Inner Court surrounding the arena looked at Yang Wei who had fainted on the Practice Battle Arena, and then at Hou Ziping, who finally showed some excitement, finding it unbelievable.

Just three days ago, Hou Ziping had been nearly beaten to death by Yang Wei, who was arrogant and regarded as invincible among the disciples, ranked eighteenth in the combat strength list of the Inner Court. Now, however, the plot had dramatically reversed and that formidable Yang Wei was knocked unconscious by Hou Ziping in just a few moves.

Such a rapid change made the watching Inner Court disciples feel as though they were dreaming, yet the screams from Yang Wei reminded them that they were not dreaming, but this was reality.

It was just that this reality was hard to accept for the moment.

Yang Lin's face was an ashen iron blue, his eyes flickered with alarming anger, and his fists were clenched so tightly that his knuckles had turned white.

Yang Lin was furious, both angry at Hou Ziping for knocking his cousin unconscious and angry that his cousin had shown no resistance, losing to Hou Ziping, who wasn't even on the list of power rankings of the Inner Court disciples, an utterly humiliating defeat.

Moreover, Yang Lin was also shocked and wary of Hou Ziping's sudden increase in strength.

Yang Wei, being eighteenth in power among the Inner Court disciples, was not to be underestimated. Although Yang Lin was proud, he was not completely certain that he could defeat Yang Wei within just a few moves. However, now Hou Ziping had done it.

Doesn't that mean that Hou Ziping now possesses the strength to challenge him?

At this thought, Yang Lin's expression darkened even more, and he felt uneasy, his gaze towards Hou Ziping full of wariness.

Huang Miao was also shocked. She had considered all possibilities, even that Yang Wei might be defeated by Hou Ziping, but she never imagined that Yang Wei would lose so cleanly. Had she not seen it with her own eyes, she would never have believed it to be true.

Now, it seemed that Hou Ziping's combat strength had completely crushed Yang Wei, even to the extent of challenging those ranked ahead of him on the Inner Court disciples' strength list.

What baffled Huang Miao was that just three days ago, Hou Ziping had been severely injured by Yang Wei, barely clinging to life when carried back to his residence for recuperation. Yet now, not only had Hou Ziping fully recovered from his injuries, but he also seemed completely transformed, easily defeating Yang Wei. How could this be?

Huang Miao knew that something miraculous must have happened during these three days of Hou Ziping's injury to cause such a drastic change.

"There seems to be a mysterious aura about Fang Bai, could Hou Ziping's change be related to him?"

Huang Miao cast a thoughtful glance at Fang Bai, silently pondering.

After Yang Wei was defeated, the scene fell silent for a moment, followed by an uproar.

The two to three hundred Inner Court Disciples gathered at the Practice Battle Arena, at least nine out of ten had favored Yang Wei, hence placing their bets on his victory.

However, the few Inner Court Disciples who had bet on Hou Ziping primarily did so out of a speculative mentality, thinking, what if Hou Ziping actually won?

When Yang Wei was knocked out in the Practice Battle Arena by Hou Ziping, those who had bet on him were initially stunned, then some became frustrated and distraught, unable to refrain from ridiculing.

Meanwhile, those who had bet on Hou Ziping winning were all smiles, overjoyed. Some even stomped their feet in elation, regretting they hadn't bet more on him.

That Hou Ziping would win was something Fang Bai had anticipated, so he still maintained a calm and nonchalant demeanor. His gaze shifted to Huang Miao, and he smiled lightly, "Senior Sister Huang, I apologize, I lucked out on the gamble!"

"Was it really just luck?"

Huang Miao squinted at Fang Bai, strongly feeling that the significant transformation in Hou Ziping had something to do with Fang Bai.

Fang Bai nonchalantly said, "Junior Brother Hou's strength has indeed improved since the other day, but the main reason he could win so easily against Senior Brother Yang was that Senior Brother Yang had underestimated him. Otherwise, there would have been a fierce battle, and it's hard to say who would have fallen. So I think Junior Brother Hou's victory did include an element of luck. What do you think, Senior Sister Huang?"

After thinking for a moment, Huang Miao nodded and said, "That's true, Junior Brother Yang was indeed complacent, but Junior Brother Hou's progress is significant too. I'm very curious, how could Junior Brother Hou's injuries heal so quickly in just a few days, and his strength also improved so much...Junior Brother Fang, do you know the reason?"

Before coming to the Practice Battle Arena, Fang Bai had already aligned his story with Hou Ziping. He smiled and said, "Junior Brother Hou told me that during his past training experiences, he fortuitously obtained a Healing Pill. Three days ago, when he was severely injured by Senior Brother Yang, he took that Healing Pill, and unexpectedly, his injuries healed in just a couple of days, and his strength also greatly improved, much to his surprise."

"So that's how it was."

Huang Miao looked at Hou Ziping approaching them and cheerfully said, "Junior Brother Hou has been troubled for years by his stagnant Cultivation Level. Now, having such a fortunate opportunity is indeed a cause for celebration."

Some Inner Court Disciples nearby, upon hearing the conversation between Fang Bai and Huang Miao, now understood that Hou Ziping's sudden increase in strength was due to such a fortunate event. Some envied him while others felt jealous.

Now that Hou Ziping had easily defeated Yang Wei, it proved that his strength was far superior to Yang Wei's, creating the possibility for him to contend for a spot among the top ten in the Inner Court Disciples' power rankings.

It could be anticipated that next, Hou Ziping would challenge the top ten elite fighters of the Inner Court Disciples. Perhaps soon, the rankings on the Bitao Martial Academy's Inner Court Disciples' power list might witness significant changes.

By this time, Hou Ziping had already approached Fang Bai, his face full of excitement and agitation.

Chapter 948: Step Forward to Battle!

Hou Ziping understood in his heart that his victory over Yang Wei, which allowed him to hold his head high in front of numerous Inner Court disciples and wipe away the humiliation of his past, would have been utterly impossible without the help of Fang Bai. Therefore, he was filled with gratitude toward Fang Bai.

If it weren't for the many Inner Court disciples watching around him, Hou Ziping would have already respectfully fist-and-palmed and bowed deeply to Fang Bai as a sign of his thanks.

"Senior Brother Hou, congratulations to you!"

Seeing Hou Ziping's slightly red eyes, Fang Bai knew he was moved, and he smiled as he fist-and-palmed him in return.

Huang Miao also fist-and-palmed, smiling sweetly as she said, "I also congratulate Junior Brother Hou."

In the past, Hou Ziping's strength ranked towards the end among the Inner Court disciples; he had to wear a smile when facing anyone, being a head shorter than them. However, from the moment he defeated Yang Wei, he knew his status among the Inner Court disciples would rise rapidly, and no one would dare to look down on or bully him ever again.

Even when facing Huang Miao, who ranked second in the Inner Court disciples' strength ranking, he could now stand tall, fearless in his heart.

From the watching Inner Court disciples' eyes around him, Hou Ziping also saw a hint of awe.

This feeling was truly sublime!

Hou Ziping took a deep breath, suppressing the excitement in his heart, and made an effort to remain calm as he fist-and-palmed back to Fang Bai and Huang Miao with modesty, saying, "It was just luck that I could beat Junior Brother Yang."

"Come on, Junior Brother Hou, a win is a win, don't be so humble. I wonder who you plan to challenge next?"

Huang Miao giggled, her eyes shimmering as she carefully observed Hou Ziping in front of her.

The Martial Artist Aura that Hou Ziping emitted was strong, but still a bit weaker than Huang Miao's, which gave her some reassurance that Hou Ziping isn't likely to challenge her anytime soon.

Even if he did challenge her, Huang Miao was confident in keeping her second position on the Inner Court disciples' strength ranking.

The Inner Court disciples' strength ranking was very important for each Inner Court disciple; those who made it on the list received respect from their peers and attention from the higher-ups of the Martial Academy, which in turn meant more benefits than other disciples.

Especially those ranked high among the Inner Court disciples were prime targets for the Martial Academy's leaders to cultivate. They not only received more support in Cultivation Resources but also had the opportunity to listen to the Martial Academy's leaders expound on the Martial Dao, an enviable treatment among many Inner Court disciples.

Therefore, even Huang Miao, who was well-regarded for her character and reputation among the Inner Court disciples, paid great attention to the ranking of the strength ranking.

When Huang Miao inquired who Hou Ziping's next challenge would be, it was a bit of a teasing probe.

The surrounding Inner Court disciples also pricked up their ears, wanting to hear how Hou Ziping would respond.

Hou Ziping was momentarily taken aback, then smiled ruefully as he shook his head, "I haven't yet considered continuing to challenge others. My strength has only just improved a bit, and I need to calm down and consolidate it. Blindly issuing challenges might actually be detrimental."

Huang Miao said with a smile, "Junior Brother Hou saying that does relieve us upper-ranked Inner Court disciples."

Hou Ziping replied, "Senior Sister Huang is joking."

Thinking about how he now qualified to speak on equal terms with Huang Miao, who ranked second on the Inner Court disciples' strength ranking—an impossible scenario in the past—Hou Ziping couldn't help feeling a rush of excitement again.

"Senior Sister Huang, a bet is a bet, right? When can you give me the Essence Stones and Elixirs I won?"

Fang Bai laughed and said.

Huang Miao gave Fang Bai a reproachful look, pretending to be angry, "Well, you, Junior Brother Fang, do you think your senior sister would renege on a debt?"

Fang Bai laughed heartily, "I dare not! I dare not! If Senior Sister Huang cannot pay now, I can wait. Your reputation in the Inner Court is illustrious; I still trust you!"

Huang Miao retorted, "You are clearly making fun of me!"

After a pause, she said, "Don't worry, I'll give you the Essence Stones and Elixirs I owe you, but let's talk after your duel with Junior Brother Yang Lin. I will try my luck again later; who knows, I might win?"

Upon hearing Huang Miao's words, some of the Inner Court disciples suddenly remembered that today's agreed fight was between Fang Bai and Yang Lin; the recent clash between Hou Ziping and Yang Wei was just an unexpected interlude.

With this in mind, some Inner Court disciples began to rub their hands together in anticipation, preparing for the next round of betting.

Yang Lin checked on his cousin Yang Wei's injuries, knowing that without two or three months of recovery, his strength would hardly return to its peak, his anger flared up intensely.

"Hou Ziping, as fellow disciples, shouldn't we spare each other in our sparring? Aren't you afraid of being punished by the Martial Academy's higher-ups?"

Yang Lin stood up, walked over to Hou Ziping with a face full of rage, and stared at him with a gaze as sharp as a sword.

If looks could kill, Hou Ziping would have been run through with a sword by now, dead beyond any doubt.

Yang Lin called out Hou Ziping by name, his deep hatred evident, making it clear that they were archenemies from now on.

A few days ago, Hou Ziping might have still been intimidated when facing Yang Lin, but his easy victory over Yang Wei had given him immense confidence, and he no longer feared Yang Lin.

"Yang Lin, are you joking?"

In response to Yang Lin's questioning, Hou Ziping sneered, "Three days ago, your cousin Yang Wei gravely injured me with a heavy hand. Why didn't I see you speak of punishment from the higher-ups then? Do you think I, Hou Ziping, am still as easy to bully as I used to be?"

Yang Lin, far from angry, replied with a smile, "Don't think that a little progress means you can look down on everyone! In my eyes, you, Hou Ziping, are still scum! Defeating you would be as easy as flipping my hand!"

Having been mocked and ridiculed for years, Hou Ziping had grown accustomed to it, so when Yang Lin called him scum, he didn't get angry. Instead, he replied with a smile, "Yang Lin, don't forget, your opponent today is not me, but Junior Brother Bai Fang. Defeating me is nothing surprising, let's see if you can defeat Junior Brother Fang first! However, I don't think you stand a chance!"

Yang Lin glanced at Fang Bai with contempt and chuckled, "Heh, from the sound of it, Bai Fang is stronger than you? I don't believe it; a newcomer to the Inner Court, no matter how extraordinary his talent is, can't be that powerful."

With that, he turned and strode into the open space of the Practice Battle Arena, beckoned to Fang Bai, and called out loudly, "Junior Brother Fang, come forward and battle!"

Fang Bai stepped forward two paces, then suddenly halted and solemnly said to Hou Ziping, "Senior Brother Hou, may I trouble you with something: if someone wants to bet with you, place a wager for me—ten thousand Essence Stones and one hundred bottles of Elixirs on my victory! After I win this duel, I will repay you."

Hou Ziping hadn't expected Fang Bai to be so fond of gambling and was somewhat amused, yet he was still very confident in Fang Bai's victory, "Junior Brother Fang, I only have a couple thousand Essence Stones and a few dozen Elixirs on hand. You see..."

"Then borrow from others! This is a great opportunity to earn Cultivation Resources; don't miss out! You couldn't borrow before, but now, surely someone will lend to you!"

After finishing these two sentences, Fang Bai turned and walked toward Yang Lin.

Chapter 949: There Are Some People You Can't Afford to Offend!

Fang Bai and Yang Lin's battle was imminent, and the inner court disciples surrounding the Practice Battle Arena were rubbing their hands in eagerness, their spirits lifted. After estimating their current cultivation resources, they began to bet among themselves again.

The recent bout between Hou Ziping and Yang Wei had left some inner court disciples with losses and others with wins. Those who had lost were hoping to turn the tables and win back the cultivation resources they had squandered, while the winners were looking to press their advantage and gain even more.

However, with the precedent set by Hou Ziping and Yang Wei's duel, the outcome of Fang Bai and Yang Lin's upcoming clash had become unpredictable.

Initially, the vast majority of the inner court disciples were sceptical about Fang Bai's chances and were prepared to bet on Yang Lin's victory. Now, however, they had become more cautious and did not dare to make a decision lightly.

Especially since Fang Bai had maintained an aloof and unconcerned demeanor from the start, which made those inner court disciples feel that this newly initiated fellow disciple was profound and inscrutable.

Following Fang Bai's instructions, Hou Ziping approached several fellow disciples with whom he had relatively good relations and borrowed cultivation resources from them.

If it had been a few days earlier, those fellow disciples might have refused Hou Ziping's request, but after his fight with Yang Wei, Hou Ziping had displayed his martial prowess and left an impression. The fellow disciples showed exceptional enthusiasm towards him and generously pooled together 10,000 Essence Stones and hundreds of Elixirs for him.

With these cultivation resources, Hou Ziping placed bets against several disciples who had wagered on Yang Lin. He had absolute confidence in Fang Bai and was not worried about the possibility of Fang Bai losing at all.

Influenced by Hou Ziping, many other inner court disciples also started placing their bets on Fang Bai.

Even Huang Miao, after some momentary consideration, decided to wager 10,000 Essence Stones and hundreds of Elixirs on Fang Bai's victory.

Though Huang Miao had amassed quite a number of cultivation resources over the years, the recent loss to Fang Bai of 10,000 Essence Stones and hundreds of Elixirs still stung, and she saw this as an opportunity to win it all back.

Although the Martial Artist Aura exuded by Fang Bai was on par with Yang Lin's, and the duel's outcome was uncertain, Fang Bai's composed demeanor, as opposed to Yang Lin's furious intensity, gave Huang Miao the impression of having the situation well in hand.

The inner court disciples around the Practice Battle Arena were busy betting, while Fang Bai and Yang Lin standing in the center had already faced each other off.

Yang Lin's expression was ice-cold, his fists tightly clenched, his fighting spirit rising ceaselessly. True Yuan swirled around his body, and he resembled an unsheathed sword brimming with sharp Killing Qi. His wolf-like eyes fixed on Fang Bai, as if ready to strike at any moment.

Yang Lin at that moment seemed like a volcano on the verge of erupting, storing up immense power, ready to unleash catastrophic destruction once released.

Fang Bai, however, stood with his hands clasped behind his back, his expression indifferent, giving no sense of rising fighting spirit, surging True Yuan, or any pre-battle tension.

To the average inner court disciple, Fang Bai appeared completely overwhelmed by Yang Lin in terms of aura; however, to a standout inner court disciple like Huang Miao, Fang Bai seemed like a vast ocean—calm on the surface with undercurrents stirring below, harboring unpredictable dangers.

Whether it was a volcano ready to erupt or an ocean with surging undercurrents, the power within them, once unleashed, was sure to shake the heavens and earth with terrifying might.

"Junior Brother Fang, in Bitao Martial Academy, there are some people you can't afford to provoke. Once you do, you must pay the price! Today, I'll just give you a lesson," Yang Lin said.

Yang Lin's body was slightly bent, and then he suddenly sprang forward like a fierce cheetah, pouncing towards Fang Bai.

"It seems that Junior Brother Yang's prowess has improved since before. No wonder he was recently talking about challenging me," Huang Miao watched the unfolding battle, her phoenix eyes narrowing slightly as her expression turned solemn.

Swish!

Yang Lin moved with extreme speed, leaving a blur behind him. Even though he was initially three yards away from Fang Bai, in the blink of an eye, he had closed the distance between them.

Whoosh!

A fist wind rose abruptly, and in the next instant, Yang Lin threw a punch aimed directly at Fang Bai's face.

His punch, containing the True Essence of a mid-stage Heaven Level Martial Artist, could shatter a thousand-pound giant rock with a single strike. Fang Bai was merely flesh and blood—if he were to be hit by such a punch, the consequences were easy to imagine.

"As expected of someone ranked third on the Inner Court Disciples' strength leaderboard, I still have some gaps compared to him,"

Hou Ziping thought to himself as he watched Yang Lin's simple yet devastatingly powerful punch.

Even though Hou Ziping had great confidence in Fang Bai, he had never witnessed Fang Bai reveal his true strength, and thus, his heart couldn't help but be suspended in worry. His gaze was tightly fixed on Fang Bai, eager to see how he would respond.

"Yang Lin's punch is fierce and forceful. If it were me, I would choose to dodge its sharpness and wait for an opportunity to counterattack."

This was the thought shared by most of the Inner Court disciples at the scene, including Huang Miao.

However, contrary to expectations, Fang Bai didn't evade. He just stood there quietly until Yang Lin's fist was about to smash into his nose—only then did he finally move.

He dug his heels in and leveraged his body to swiftly retreat backward. His retreating speed appeared slow, but no matter how Yang Lin accelerated his charge, his fist always fell short of touching Fang Bai's face.

The two moved back and forth, swiftly traversing the wide space of the Practice Battle Arena, reaching the edge of the large lake at the southern end of the arena.

"Let's see where you can retreat to now!"

A sinister smile flashed across Yang Lin's lips as he saw the large lake emerge behind Fang Bai.

A mid-stage Heaven Level Martial Artist could stand on the surface of the lake for a moment, but as time passed, they would inevitably fall into the water.

If Fang Bai continued to retreat, he would end up in the lake; then, Yang Lin would simply need to stand at the edge of the lake to ensure Fang Bai's defeat.

And if Fang Bai didn't retreat, he would have no choice but to fight Yang Lin.

Facing Fang Bai head-on, Yang Lin was confident that his rich combat experience would help him defeat Fang Bai.

In a flash, Fang Bai had already reached the edge of the lake, with unfathomably deep waters directly behind his heels. There was no more room to retreat.

Hou Ziping's brow furrowed tightly, his clenched fists now soaked with sweat.

For Hou Ziping, whether Fang Bai won or lost this duel would greatly determine his own future.

If Fang Bai won, Hou Ziping would have a strong backer in the Inner Court and a secure foothold.

If Fang Bai lost, Hou Ziping would face retaliation from the brothers Yang Lin and Yang Wei, and whether he could even stay alive was an unknown.

Huang Miao, too, widened her phoenix eyes with a hint of worry between her brows.

What concerned Huang Miao was not that her ten thousand Essence Stones and one hundred Elixirs had been wasted on Fang Bai losing the duel.

In fact, like the higher-ups of Bitao Martial Academy, Huang Miao greatly valued Fang Bai's talent and potential, placing high hopes on him in the expectation that one day he would lead Bitao Martial Academy to rise in the True Martial Realm.

Thus, Huang Miao didn't wish for Fang Bai to lose to Yang Lin because she knew that if he did, the result would be that Yang Lin would inflict severe injuries on him, consequently affecting Fang Bai's future cultivation.

Unfortunately, in such a duel between disciples, other disciples of Bitao Martial Academy were not allowed to intervene. So even if Yang Lin were to severely injure Fang Bai, Huang Miao could only watch helplessly. That was what worried her the most.

Chapter 950: Reversal

Hou Ziping, Huang Miao, and those Inner Court disciples who had bet on Fang Bai to win had their hearts lodged firmly in their throats, their gazes intensely focused on Fang Bai.

Hou Ziping and Huang Miao were worried that Fang Bai would get injured, while those betting on Fang Bai's victory were afraid they would lose their cultivation resources.

Thus, they were all eagerly hoping for Fang Bai to win the duel.

However, ever since the duel began, Fang Bai had been forced to continuously retreat. Now, with no way out unless he could "burn his boats" and withstand Yang Lin's attacks before counterattacking.

Yet, it seemed highly unlikely!

Fang Bai continued to retreat; his heels had already stepped into the lake water, splashing droplets everywhere.

"Junior Brother Fang, you've lost!"

Yang Lin shouted loudly, his martial artist aura rising again as True Yuan wildly circulated around him, remarkably unleashing twelvefold potential. He soared into the air, his right leg, carrying a torrential force like a steel whip, lashed out in his strongest strike towards Fang Bai.

This strike was Yang Lin's commitment to victory, intending to severely injure Fang Bai.

"Sweeping Mountain Kick! Who would've thought Junior Brother Yang managed to master this martial arts technique!"

Huang Miao's pretty face turned pale as she murmured to herself.

The leg technique displayed by Yang Lin was a very powerful martial art from the Bitao Martial Academy, known for its fierce and mighty force, embodying the power to sweep across mountains—hence the name "Sweeping Mountain Kick."

This formidable technique, recently mastered by Yang Lin, was something he had planned to polish further before challenging Huang Miao, ranked second, and Tu Hu, ranked first, among the Inner Court disciples.

But now, Yang Lin, to inflict heavy damage on Fang Bai and to avenge his cousin Yang Wei's humiliation, prematurely unleashed this martial art.

Yang Lin unleashed a kick with lightning speed, accompanied by a sharp and piercing howl of wind which formed a high-speed rotating vortex, sweeping towards Fang Bai.

Even before the leg arrived, the vortex had engulfed Fang Bai, its violent winds, like spinning blades, tearing and slicing at Fang Bai's clothes.

If it had been any other Inner Court disciple, their clothes might have been reduced to shreds under the onslaught of the vortex, but an invisible, sturdy Defense Qi Shield seemingly surrounded Fang Bai, isolating the vortex and protecting him from harm.

"Boom!"

A deafening thud echoed as Yang Lin's sweeping right leg collided midair with Fang Bai's suddenly extended left arm, sending shockwaves of True Yuan that stirred up waves in the lake behind Fang Bai.

"To actually block my kick with your arm, it's like a mantis trying to stop a chariot, sheer folly!"

In the instant of contact between leg and arm, Yang Lin sneered to himself with contempt.

In the very next moment, however, Yang Lin heard the crisp sound of a bone snapping. His first reaction was that Fang Bai's arm bone had broken.

But... why was there a sharp pain surging through his right leg?

Before Yang Lin could understand the situation, he realized his nearly numb right leg had been firmly grasped by Fang Bai, who then swung him around.

"How is this possible?"

Yang Lin was horrified, instinctively trying to struggle. But even the slightest twist of his right leg resulted in bone-piercing agony, forcing him to scream out in pain.

Yang Lin finally came to realize that the crisp sound when his right leg collided with Fang Bai's left arm was not the breaking of Fang Bai's arm, but of his own leg bone.

"Go for a swim!"

Suddenly, a light shout from Fang Bai echoed in Yang Lin's ears, causing his scalp to tingle and the wind to whoosh by. He saw his body being hurled away like a cannonball, soaring high and quickly gaining distance from Fang Bai.

Under the astonished gaze of the many onlooking Inner Court disciples, Yang Lin's body flew upwards in a parabolic arc towards the lake before plummeting down swiftly.

"Splash!"

Yang Lin's body smashed harshly into the lake water, instantly stirring up a great spray.

Even though a Martial Artist's body is highly resistant to strikes, Yang Lin had first sustained a heavy injury, greatly reducing his strength, followed by a fall from a great height. The reaction force produced when his body "intimately contacted" the lake surface actually knocked the Inner Court disciple, ranked third on the combat power list, unconscious.

Fortunately, it didn't take long for some Inner Court disciples to jump into the lake and fish out the unconscious Yang Lin, placing him beside the equally unconscious Yang Wei.

As some Inner Court disciples watched the domineering Yang Lin and Yang Wei, who had once proudly roamed wild inside the Inner Court, now both lying on the Practice Battle Arena, they couldn't help but sigh. Most of the other disciples, however, cast admiring glances at Fang Bai.

This newly advanced Junior Brother Fang within the Inner Court had nearly defeated Yang Lin upon their first encounter, highlighting his strength as incredibly formidable.

Some Inner Court disciples couldn't help but glance at Huang Miao, thinking that not even Senior Sister Huang, ranked second on the combat power list, let alone Tu Hu, who had long occupied the top spot, might not be a match for Junior Brother Fang.

Junior Brother Fang, with his Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root, had always kept a low profile, but today he had shown his might and made his mark, causing all present Inner Court disciples to regard him with new respect.

It was foreseeable that, starting from today, the positions of both Hou Ziping and Fang Bai within the Inner Court would rise significantly, and they would receive even more attention from the higher ranks of the Martial Academy.

Fang Bai's victory caused mixed reactions among the Inner Court disciples; some were joyful, and others were distressed. Those who were distressed had naturally lost their Cultivation Resources, while those smiling had undoubtedly won.

However, at that moment, very few Inner Court disciples were truly concerned with winning or losing. What mattered more to them was how the rankings on the Inner Court disciples' combat power list would change in the future.

Hou Ziping and Huang Miao both heaved sighs of relief. The heavy burden lifted from their hearts, and their faces showed signs of letting go of a heavy load.

"I just knew that Junior Brother Fang would surely win!" Hou Ziping excitedly waved his fist.

"Why were you so certain that Junior Brother Fang could win?" Huang Miao asked with a smile.

She had previously lost ten thousand Essence Stones and hundreds of Elixirs to Fang Bai, but now, having won so much, she could make up for the deficit. She felt indescribably happy.

"Because I ... Because Junior Brother Fang is a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root, his talent is exceptional, and his Cultivation Level is not inferior to Junior Brother Yang, so it was only natural for him to win," Hou Ziping almost blurted out that he himself had advanced in strength thanks to Fang Bai's guidance but managed to revise his words in time.

Huang Miao always felt that Hou Ziping was hiding something, and after giving Fang Bai a meaningful look, she nodded in agreement, "You make a good point. With such an extraordinary talent as Junior Brother Fang has, it's only natural that he defeated Junior Brother Yang."

After a pause and a sigh, she added, "Junior Brother Yang Lin's strength is only slightly less than mine. If Fang Bai can defeat him with ease, then he is capable of defeating me. I have no choice but to give up the second position on the Inner Court disciples' combat power list."