

## THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

### Chapter 41: The Eight Methods of Eye Techniques

"This is extremely similar to the killer move Bear Shakes the Tree."

Su Jie had learned the traditional martial arts Eighteen Freehand Techniques from Gu Yang, one of which was called Bear Shakes the Tree. It mimicked a bear standing upright and walking, swaying yet extremely stable, capable of hugging a tree and shaking it violently, even uprooting it—a display of immense strength.

Now, in the split second of Tang Jin's advance, although he was using boxing, both his power and intent resembled that of a bear. It was evident that martial arts were interconnected.

Tang Jin shook and moved rapidly, seemingly finding the best point of force and the ideal striking position. Suddenly, he feinted with a straight punch before launching a swift and unpredictable uppercut to Su Jie's ribs.

However, Su Jie had already anticipated Tang Jin's true intentions through his gaze. He dodged continuously, clamping his ribs tight.

Sure enough, Tang Jin's uppercut struck his ribs.

But unexpectedly, though the punch seemed ferocious, it only lightly grazed him before sharply changing direction—like a race car drifting—toward Su Jie's abdomen.

Bang!

Su Jie's abdomen took a direct hit, his entire body bending like a shrimp from the impact.

If it were anyone else, getting punched in the abdomen by a professional fighter would have caused instant spasms, rendering them unable to stand and completely losing their combat capability. However, Su Jie's Iron Body Training was formidable. The moment his abdomen was struck, his muscles automatically collapsed inward, subtly relaxing at just the right moment so that the punch's force didn't fully land on him. This maneuver reduced at least seventy to eighty percent of the impact.

This was something he had previously struggled to achieve, but after undergoing electric stimulation training, his neurons had gained increasingly precise control over his muscles.

Still, this didn't seem to help much in a boxing match.

As Su Jie's abdomen took the hit, Tang Jin exploded with a rapid flurry of jabs and hooks, violently pounding his head. At this point, no defense was effective—the speed was simply too fast. Techniques and forms became meaningless; only instincts remained.

If not for the boxing rules, Su Jie could have used his legs or knees to block the assault. But now, he had no choice but to endure it.

Covering his head, he took at least ten head punches in less than two seconds before he collapsed to the ground. Rolling twice, he struggled to get back up.

He had lost.

"Your endurance is that strong?" Tang Jin had assumed Su Jie wouldn't be able to rise, yet the latter did, still seemingly capable of fighting.

"Let's stop here," Tang Jin said, waving his hand.

"Master Tang, you fooled me with your eyes. This isn't something from boxing, is it?" Su Jie stood up, his whole body aching, especially his head, which felt slightly off. Tang Jin's punches were too fierce, and the speed of his combos was beyond what Su Jie had expected. He hadn't even lasted five seconds.

In an instant, Su Jie realized where he had erred—he had focused on observing Tang Jin's eyes and assumed his ribs would be the target. He hadn't expected to be deceived by that very gaze, which led to his abdomen getting hit, exposing a weakness and causing his complete downfall.

However, he did not grow frustrated over his loss. His words remained polite, and his attitude humble and respectful, demonstrating his cultivated demeanor.

Seeing this, Tang Jin was slightly impressed. He nodded subtly, acknowledging the young man. "You're right. This isn't just boxing; it's the Eight Methods of Eye Techniques from Shaolin martial arts."

"Shaolin martial arts? Eight Methods of Eye Techniques?" This was Su Jie's first time hearing of it. In fact, Odell should have known about it, but Su Jie had spent too little time training under him and had not learned such advanced concepts.

"The Eight Methods of Eye Techniques consist of: Bright, Dark, Solid, Fierce, Sweeping, Wavy, Luring, and Begging," Tang Jin explained. "The Bright Eye technique means focusing your eyes and concentrating on the opponent's every move, reacting instantly. The Dark Eye technique involves pretending not to look at the opponent—your gaze appears scattered, making them think you are distracted, but in reality, you're secretly observing their weaknesses and launching a sudden attack. The Solid Eye technique is about maintaining a dignified and unshaken gaze, exuding confidence so that the opponent feels your strength and hesitates to attack."

"What about Fierce, Sweeping, Wavy, Luring, and Begging?" Su Jie was intrigued—he hadn't realized eye techniques could be so versatile.

"Fierce is the Glare of the Wrathful Vajra—like a beast hunting prey, it intimidates the opponent. Sweeping involves scanning up, down, left, and right, making the opponent think you're about to strike various areas, forcing them into a defensive dilemma. Wavy means using peripheral vision to monitor the surroundings, swiftly seizing advantageous positions for a sudden strike. Luring is a deceptive trick—I just used this technique against you. I intentionally glanced at your ribs to make you believe that was my target, but in truth, I aimed for your abdomen. As for Begging, it's about feigning weakness—pretending to be timid or vulnerable to lure the opponent into underestimating you, only to strike unexpectedly."

"That makes a lot of sense!" Su Jie nodded repeatedly, feeling like he had learned a great deal.

"Coach, you two barely fought for five seconds, and all we saw was a chaotic exchange of punches. Who knew there was so much behind it?"

Three young women approached. They hadn't been able to grasp the deeper meaning behind the fight—only that Su Jie, who looked impressive when hitting the sandbag, was still completely outmatched in an actual bout against the professional coach, Tang Jin.

One of them, a tall girl standing at about 1.78 meters, curiously asked, "Coach, did you also learn Shaolin martial arts? Just now, you mentioned something about eye techniques being part of Shaolin martial arts?"

"First, focus on learning boxing properly." Tang Jin kept a stern face. "Your movie in three months has a lot of boxing scenes. If you don't train well, the filming of those scenes will suffer, and I won't take the blame. Your agency is paying me to be your coach, so I must do my job responsibly."

"Understood, Coach." The three girls earnestly practiced their punches, each strike carrying considerable force.

"Let's talk." Tang Jin patted Su Jie on the shoulder.

The two sat down to the side, and Tang Jin asked, "Your boxing skills are impressive. You've actually reached a certain level, but what you're lacking is real combat experience—not the kind from the ring, nor even street fights, but something closer to battlefield conditions. Of course, underground fights could also serve the same purpose. That is the best way to temper your mind and will."

This wasn't the first time someone had told Su Jie this.

But as a high school student, where would he find such an opportunity? He could only listen in silence.

"What do you think is the most important quality for a martial artist?" Tang Jin asked again.

"It should be character," Su Jie had pondered this question before. "That's what allows someone to go further in life. Take, for example, the former boxing champion Tyson. For a time, he ruled the boxing world, and no opponent could stand against him. But after his coach passed away, he spiraled downward, neglected training, and led a reckless lifestyle, getting himself into all sorts of trouble. He ruined his career, and his skills and physical condition deteriorated significantly. He could have gone much further. That's why traditional martial arts emphasize virtue before skill. With good character, one can face any challenge with composure."

"You're absolutely right." Tang Jin slapped his thigh. "Would you be interested in becoming a professional boxer? I can train you into a world champion. Forget about learning other sports—boxing is the most profitable sport in the world. The money you make from kickboxing or MMA doesn't even come close to one percent of what you can earn in boxing."

"I'll think about it." Su Jie had already mapped out his life plan, so he politely declined.

"No worries, you're still young, but time waits for no one. If you change your mind in the next two years, you can contact me anytime." Tang Jin handed Su Jie a business card before getting up to continue training the three girls.

Su Jie observed Tang Jin's training and striking techniques for a while and ended up learning a few more things from it.

Just then, Zhang Manman approached. "Su Jie, how was it?"

"Great. Live ammunition shooting was pretty fun," Su Jie replied. "This whole day of training must have cost quite a bit. Let me settle the bill."

He now had nearly 200,000 yuan in his account, giving him some financial confidence. Otherwise, he wouldn't have dared to spend so freely.

"No need." Zhang Manman smiled. "The owner of Heart-Cleansing Manor is my uncle. He's covering the cost this time. Come on, let's head back to school."

Su Jie nodded and left the manor with Zhang Manman. As usual, a car was waiting to take them straight back to school.

By the time they returned, it was already late.

After grabbing dinner at the cafeteria, Su Jie headed to the small arena training grounds to see if he could find a match.

Luck was on his side this time—he actually got a slot.



Because of the ongoing regional martial arts school league, many participants were too exhausted to join the small arena matches after competing all day. Since there were still several more days of competition ahead, most people chose to rest.

Even so, the small arena still had a sizable audience. It was a staple of Minglun Martial Arts Academy, having signed deals with multiple live-streaming platforms and video sites. Matches were broadcasted every evening from 7:30 to 10:00.

It was said that the annual broadcasting contract brought in a significant amount of money.

Su Jie stepped into the ring like a ferocious tiger. His first opponent was a boxer, but with just two feints and a sudden lunge, Su Jie knocked him to the ground.

His second opponent was a towering MMA fighter, well over 1.9 meters tall, with an incredibly long reach. Fighters like him were the most troublesome, as they could keep their opponents at a distance while landing strikes freely.

However, Su Jie simply circled him for a moment. Then, in a split second, he lunged forward, pinning the man to the ground.

In the following matches, Su Jie didn't make a move until the perfect moment—whenever he did, his opponents were instantly taken down. At this point, he truly seemed to have transformed into a thousand-pound tiger.

That morning, he had been defeated by Feng Hengyi with just two punches. After practicing live-fire shooting at Heart-Cleansing Manor in the afternoon, he had finally grasped the concept of "a mind like gunpowder, fists like bullets." His explosive power had increased significantly. He still used his "Hoe Strike" technique, but compared to before, both his speed and strength had improved dramatically.

He won match after match, as if he had entered a state of flow—or perhaps, he was just aggressively raking in money.

After all, each victory earned him between 1,000 and 2,000 yuan. If he could win ten matches in a single night, he could pocket 20,000 yuan. With summer break coming to an end, he would soon have to return home and transfer back to his old school. Before that, he wanted to gain as much combat experience as possible and earn as much money as he could.

While Su Jie was dominating the small arena, in a building within Minglun Martial Arts Academy, international superstar Liu Zihao was hosting a private dinner.

His guest was none other than Feng Hengyi, the man who had defeated Su Jie with two punches.

Strangely, the two dined at separate tables, each having their own set of meals.

Liu Zihao's meal consisted of chicken breast, beef, seven or eight types of fresh vegetables, dairy products, and a medicinal soup that carried a noticeable herbal aroma. Additionally, several bottles containing trace element supplements were lined up beside him.

Feng Hengyi's table also had beef, along with several rare seafood dishes. However, they were all prepared very plainly, without much seasoning. His vegetable selection was even more diverse than Liu Zihao's. He also had several bottles filled with what appeared to be specialized drinks.

"Hengyi, want to try Minglun Martial Arts Academy's premium health meal? The Nie family's private nourishing dishes are quite good," Liu Zihao said while eating.

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## Chapter 42: Three Parts Training, Seven Parts Eating

“I’m not eating.” Feng Hengyi directly refused, without politeness. “I bring my own food and ingredients, prepared by my team in the most scientific way. The ingredients are cultivated in labs, free from any impurities or hormones. If my diet is disrupted, it will easily reduce my physical strength.”

“My dishes are all organic.” Liu Zihao smiled, seemingly unconcerned. With his status, even if a billionaire CEO spoke to him like this, he would immediately order them to leave without hesitation.

“Organic isn’t necessarily better. The land is heavily polluted now. Only lab-cultivated ingredients are truly free of impurities.” Feng Hengyi said dismissively.

“How many people are taking care of your diet and daily needs now?” Liu Zihao asked.

“Three chefs, carrying various ingredients and kitchenware, a mobile home, on standby 24 hours a day. The water is brought by us.” Feng Hengyi said, his tone not boasting, just stating facts. “There are also three masseuses, available around the clock, and three doctors in another car, equipped with various health and medical devices. In addition, there are three assistants for my clothes and daily needs, plus five bodyguards.”

“Huh? No coach?” Liu Zihao asked.

“A coach? None of them are better than me. Their training methods are outdated.” Feng Hengyi waved his hand. “In this world, there is only one coach I respect, and that’s the God Maker, Odell. Though his physical training in movement and breathing has been surpassed by our Typhon Training Camp’s AI, his spiritual training still has its unique insights.”

“He was here last month, but I don’t know where he is now,” Liu Zihao said. “By the way, have you found the three to five sparring partners you were looking for? You don’t have to participate in the competition yourself; I can pick a few with good physical fitness for you.”

“No need, I’ll choose them myself. It’s always best when I choose them personally.” Feng Hengyi’s tone remained blunt, subtly implying that Liu Zihao’s judgment wasn’t good enough.

“That’s true. To train, you need human targets. Using live people as targets is the best. Only those without money use wooden dummies or fixed sandbags.” Liu Zihao said. “In ancient times, many rich masters hired strong men to serve as targets for martial arts training, progressing very quickly. But it seems that abroad, there are already robotic sparring partners. These robots can even do backflips. I know Typhon Training Camp already has these simulation robots as training partners, with various martial arts AI programs. Why don’t you get one?”

“Too expensive, and that kind of technology isn’t available for public use. But our Haoyu Group’s AI has made breakthrough progress. Of course, people are still more affordable. I’ll observe for a few days and pick out a few human targets to join my team and sign lifetime contracts. My training involves many secrets, and they cannot be allowed to switch jobs or leak anything. Once I’ve selected the people, you’ll need to provide me with their information,” Feng Hengyi spoke in a commanding tone to Liu Zihao, who frowned but held back from reacting.

He couldn’t afford to offend the “young master” of the Feng family, especially since he had a major collaboration with Haoyu Group.

In the Feng family, the leader was Feng Shoucheng. His eldest son, Feng Yuxuan, was in charge of the group’s investment business. The second son, Feng Qian Cang, was anything but modest and loved the spotlight. He invested in the film industry, entertainment sectors, live streaming, girl groups, and artist management, creating a huge buzz. In just a year, his initial capital of three billion grew to several billion, making him a business genius.

The third son, the most mysterious of them all, had never been seen. Many didn't even know he existed. But Liu Zihao knew the secret—Feng Shoucheng had sent this youngest son, Feng Hengyi, to Typhon Training Camp at a very young age, where he had trained for over ten years until he had just returned in the past two years.

Liu Zihao had also trained at Typhon Training Camp, but only for six months. And even the limited training he received had dramatically boosted his physical strength and martial arts skills. He had experienced explosive growth in ability.

Now, he no longer had the qualifications to enter.

Not just anyone could enter. Liu Zihao had gained his spot by helping a major figure film a movie, which got him an introduction to the camp.

“Hengyi, have you found any talent yet?” Liu Zihao asked.

“My first opponent was okay. Although I finished him off with two punches, his physical condition makes him a good target for training. His name is Su Jie.” Feng Hengyi nodded, and someone beside him handed Liu Zihao a photo.

“This person? He's just a temporary student, not from our academy,” Liu Zihao remarked. “I tried to get him to sign with my film company, but he refused. Apparently, he's planning to take the university entrance exam.”

“Really? Does he have any background?” Feng Hengyi asked.

“I don’t think so,” Liu Zihao replied.

“Then there’s no problem,” Feng Hengyi said. “He should consider himself lucky to work for me for life—at least he’ll never go hungry.”

“Well, let’s see if you can deal with this student. He’s quite difficult,” Liu Zihao said.

“I’ve had three years of special agent training, mastering psychological, physical, and both tangible and intangible torture methods. Whatever I set my mind to, I can definitely accomplish,” Feng Hengyi’s tone was arrogant, but the confidence in his voice made people believe he was capable of anything.

"You must have had some human-shaped dummies in your training, right? Where did they go?" Suddenly, Liu Zihao asked. "When you have human-shaped dummies, you can learn many secret things. During the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, some became human-shaped dummies for martial arts families. The disciples of those martial arts families couldn't learn the techniques, but the human-shaped dummies instead became more skilled."



"My few human-shaped dummies, after learning my methods, wanted to switch sides, so I got rid of them." Feng Hengyi seemed to be speaking about something trivial.

Liu Zihao fell silent.

He understood that "getting rid of them" meant killing them.

Feng Hengyi was not old, not even eighteen, but he was already ruthless, unscrupulous, extremely powerful, and had strong financial and political backing.

Liu Zihao didn't speak, and neither did Feng Hengyi. They silently ate their food.

The two of them found themselves in an awkward situation.

Meanwhile, at this moment, Su Jie had won thirteen matches in a row. His stamina was almost depleted, so he finally gave up guarding the arena. After settling the accounts, he had earned a total of 26,000 yuan and felt quite satisfied. Although it was just a bank card, it felt heavy in his pocket.

Then he went to find Uncle Mang for a massage.

Uncle Mang seemed to be even more punctual than him every day, eagerly waiting for him.

As soon as Su Jie arrived, Uncle Mang began checking his body, adjusting his bones, and massaging him. Suddenly, he frowned. "Your cervical spine has been hit hard and is slightly dislocated. Your head was punched. If it had been anyone else, their neck would have likely been broken. Luckily, your horizontal training is very impressive, and it protected you from serious injury. But that person was really ruthless."

"I'm not injured, right?" Su Jie asked.

"You'll recover," Uncle Mang said, using acupuncture to help treat Su Jie for a while before starting electrical stimulation.

Today's electrical stimulation gave Su Jie a strange sensation — it was both painful and soothing, unlike the pure pain he usually felt.

"Congratulations, your nerve resilience has increased another level," Uncle Mang observed various data for comparison. "According to AI predictions, you should only be able to achieve this level of nerve response in a month."

"I got beaten up today and suddenly comprehended the state of 'heart like gunpowder, fist like a child' and then went to experience live shooting. I learned to exert force," Su Jie explained his experience.

"That's enlightenment, remarkable, truly remarkable," Uncle Mang praised. "But I'm curious, with your current skills, even if you encounter strong professional fighters, you could handle it passively in a match. Even if you just run around, it would be hard for your opponent to knock you down."

"I met someone really powerful, about my age, who completely overwhelmed me in speed, experience, strength, stamina, and momentum. His name is Feng Hengyi," Su Jie said, trying to gather more information. "Coach Gu Yang said he has killed people, and not just one. He came from the Typhon Training Camp."

"So it's him," Uncle Mang's expression changed slightly. "Be careful from now on. He's not like Zhou Chun. Zhou Chun only uses underhanded methods, but he can't get anywhere. Feng Hengyi is different. As for the Typhon Training Camp, it's the most mysterious, high-tech laboratory in the world. Training humans is just one of their projects. I heard this camp was originally established by wealthy people seeking immortality through investments in life science, but it gradually changed and became something no one could control."

"I thought these things were far from me, but I didn't expect to get involved in it," Su Jie shook his head.

Now, under the electrical stimulation, he was chatting freely, feeling somewhat like Guan Yu undergoing bone treatment to detoxify his body.

After the treatment, he felt extremely comfortable, as if the medicinal ointment he had applied was completely absorbed.

These past few days, he had been using the Nie family's secret ointment combined with the electrical stimulation, so the ointment had almost no waste and had been fully absorbed into his skin, enhancing its toughness, vitality, and improving the strength between his tendons and joints, even penetrating into his bones.

Since using the secret ointment and the internal-strengthening liquor, Su Jie could clearly feel his physical condition improving drastically, almost rapidly advancing, especially his physical training, which seemed like it had been practiced for three to five years.

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## Chapter 43: The Lonely Despair

"The physical condition is really quite good." Uncle Mang nodded. "I'll be honest with you. This special ointment and internal-strengthening wine are the best medicines at our Minglun Martial Arts Academy. They're so expensive that money can't buy them, and I've used quite a lot of them on you. But the Typhon Training Camp has even better medicine, and they also have surgeries to enhance potential, like replacing weak joints with special material joints that are practically indestructible."

"There's such a thing?" Su Jie couldn't accept the idea of replacing his joints with artificial ones. It made him feel like he wasn't entirely "human." Of course, if it

were for a medical reason, it would be understandable, but doing it just for strength felt off psychologically.

"Of course," Uncle Mang continued. "In these past few days, I've explained a lot about the structure of the human body to you. In fact, the most fragile, easily injured, and irreparable parts of the body are the joints, with the knee joint being the most critical. Many martial artists have knee problems, even those professional fighters who follow the most scientifically advanced training systems. Injury is still inevitable." Uncle Mang seemed to be reminiscing. "The human body is simply too fragile, you have to be careful everywhere. Practicing martial arts is essentially like crossing a river by feeling the stones along the way. You must cross the river, but you can't be too aggressive. You need to find the most delicate balance, and it can't be achieved by hard practice alone. This is the way of moderation."

"I understand." Su Jie nodded.

"If there were more time, I could teach you a lot of knowledge about human anatomy and medicine, but time is too tight." Uncle Mang truly wished Su Jie would become his student.

"Yes, school is about to start. I really need to go back and handle some things," Su Jie said, already making plans for his future. "I'll go back and see if I can apply for a leave of absence, then come back here to train. Honestly, the college entrance exam isn't that hard for me. Even if I took it now, I could still get into a top university. The problem is my parents, older sister, and the school teachers and leaders probably won't agree."

"People are always tied down by worldly matters, unwilling to let go of things, and end up running around in circles, like a monkey picking corn. In the end, it gets nothing," Uncle Mang said with sudden seriousness. "Su Jie, if you don't have the courage to give up everything and focus solely on the path, don't even think about reaching the highest realm."

"I don't think so," Su Jie shook his head. "In fact, the world is incredibly complex. A person must exist within it. If you abandon everything in pursuit of something, that's actually a sign of incompetence. The true highest realm is to navigate through the complexities of the world with ease, handling all kinds of relationships with grace. Both Buddhism and Taoism have such figures—Taoism has Zhuangzi, Buddhism has Vimalakirti. The eight trigrams of the Book of Changes, when combined, form all the manifestations of heaven and earth. As long as you are part of it, you can't escape. I believe that trying to escape or sever it isn't really severing. On the contrary, not severing is the true way to break free."

"Kid, did you come to this realization on your own? You even know the Book of Changes?" Uncle Mang was shocked.

"It's something I've realized myself," Su Jie nodded. "I believe everything in life must be handled with one's own wisdom, resolved harmoniously, so that your heart remains in a state of ease and freedom. You're not influenced by the external environment. Even if all the misfortune in the world falls upon me, aimed at me, I can still turn danger into safety, remain unhurried. This is the true way of a sage."

"Su Jie, your mindset surpasses mine. I can hardly imagine that this came from your own insight. But you must know, when entangled in a mess, the best method is to sever it quickly with a sharp knife. What you're choosing to do—untangling it one by one—will be exhausting." Uncle Mang said.

"I don't think this is a mess, but water. Drawing a knife to cut the water only makes it flow more. The only solution is to understand the nature of water." Su Jie truly thought this way deep inside.

After being urged by Odell to study the Book of Changes, which contained China's ancient and highest wisdom, Su Jie had gained some insight. He then applied that to other ancient books, such as Zhuangzi, Laozi, and even some Buddhist stories. Through this, he developed his own philosophy on life and how to interact with others.

This also helped him form his own worldview and outlook on life.

For many of life's troubles, he needed to face them actively, solve them one by one, and maintain a state of ease and freedom, rather than abandoning or avoiding them.

Thinking this way, his heart felt at ease, and he always experienced a sense of "freedom" in every moment.

"Not to mention your future achievements, just your attitude toward life already surpasses mine. With this mindset toward life and martial arts, you'll gain many unexpected things," Uncle Mang said. "There are only a few days left. Your electrical stimulation has reached a peak, and now I'll prepare a psychological training course for you."

"Psychological training?" Su Jie asked, somewhat puzzled.



"Your body has already reached its peak after this period of massage, acupuncture, and electrical stimulation. What's left now is slow recuperation. However, your psychological endurance still needs further strengthening. Though you can endure pain, there's still one thing you need to endure to improve your mental resilience," Uncle Mang explained.

"What is it that I need to endure?" Su Jie asked.

"Loneliness." Uncle Mang said, "Alright, will you join this training?"

"I'll join." Su Jie thought for a moment and nodded. "I want to see what is more unbearable than pain."

"Actually, there are many things more unbearable than pain—loneliness, despair—they are harder to endure. The pain caused by electrical stimulation is just the first lesson in agent training. What I'm giving you now is the second lesson in agent training. Since you've agreed, don't back out. Put on your clothes and follow me."

Uncle Mang stood up.

Su Jie wiped his body and followed Uncle Mang outside the school. They arrived at an abandoned warehouse. Inside, it seemed like some things were stored, and the space was very large, with a basement.

The basement was built very solidly, divided into many rooms. It was empty and chilling, like a terrifying location from a movie scene. The dim light only added to the eerie atmosphere.

Bang!

Uncle Mang unlocked a solid iron door with a key. Inside was a room about ten square meters. The room was empty, except for a toilet in the corner. The floor felt soft, as if there was a layer of some membrane, and the walls and ceiling were also covered in it.

The only purpose of this membrane was soundproofing.

Once inside the room and with the door closed, not a single sound could be heard. The only sounds were Su Jie's own heartbeat and breathing, magnified as if he were the only person in the sealed space.

“This is a true soundproof room. The materials used in the construction can block out any external sounds and absorb internal noise. In here, everything is absolutely silent. Of course, it will also bring about utter loneliness. The training I’ll give you is to lock you in here and make you experience despair and loneliness.” Uncle Mang’s voice became eerie, like that of an evil scientist.

“You can’t be serious, just locking me in here?” Su Jie asked.

“Don’t underestimate it. This is both a psychological and physical torment. You might look fine now, but after a while, you’ll understand how difficult it is.” Uncle Mang’s voice had a sinister tone. “Have you made up your mind? If so, I’ll leave now.”

“Alright!” Su Jie nodded.

Uncle Mang walked out of the room, and as he closed the door, he said, “Su Jie, you need to know, this place is desolate. No one will be able to find the basement. If I leave and don’t tell anyone, you’ll be stuck here and die. No one will ever know...”

Then, the door slammed shut.

The iron door was practically indestructible by human strength.

Su Jie heard Uncle Mang’s words and felt a chill in his heart.

He knew Uncle Mang was just trying to scare him, adding psychological pressure, but he couldn’t stop thinking about the worst-case scenario.

This was an abandoned warehouse, with very few people coming by. Even if someone did enter the warehouse, it would be hard to find the basement. Even if they found the basement, there were so many rooms that it would be difficult to locate his specific room.

His voice couldn't be heard outside.

If Uncle Mang didn't come back to open the door, he would truly be trapped here to die.

Once this thought took hold, it grew and spread uncontrollably.

Bang!

The lights in the room suddenly went out. The entire room was plunged into complete darkness. Su Jie couldn't see anything. Although he had good vision, in a room with no light, he felt completely blind and had to rely on his memory to navigate.

"Calm down," Su Jie immediately felt a strong sense of darkness and despair rushing toward him.

He wasn't wearing a watch and didn't have his phone with him—he had nothing to track the time, which made him even more anxious.

*'Breathe, breathe...'*

He simply lay down, using the Great Corpse State to sleep.

Since he had done some stretching earlier, it was already time to rest.

When he woke up, he opened his eyes, and it was still pitch black. He had no idea how long had passed or what had happened outside.

"It should be around 3 AM now, because after practicing the Great Corpse State, my routine is pretty regular, and I wake up on time every day." Su Jie tried his best to stay calm, realizing that many restless emotions were rising from within him.

There was no light, no sound, no one to disturb him, and Uncle Mang's words kept fueling his fear and despair, making them spread uncontrollably.

In an instant, he felt like he was going mad.

“No, this is loneliness and despair. It’s truly unbearable, even harder than pain.” Su Jie forced himself to calm down and decided to focus on practicing martial arts.

He started to assume a stance, preparing to practice, but then stopped suddenly. “If I practice martial arts and sweat, there’s no way to wash up here, and there’s no food. If I burn through my energy, that won’t do. If there were enough water and food here, I could spend my life here practicing martial arts without getting bored. But now there’s nothing, so I can’t practice.”

Thankfully, there was a toilet. After he relieved himself, he lay back down and continued the Great Corpse State.

But the anxiety remained, and even the Great Corpse State couldn’t calm him down. His usual calm mindset had vanished.

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**Author's Words:** I’ve seen many readers ask whether this book will include fantasy cultivation or futuristic technology. I want to tell everyone that this book is realistic. All the cultivation methods will be explained scientifically, using physiology, psychology, and more. All the martial arts moves are based on real concepts, and the cultivation techniques are grounded in reality. As for AI and technology, everything mentioned, like the backflip robot I referenced (you can search “Boston Dynamics robot backflip” online), exists in our world. The smart dog that opens doors is real, and I believe we’re witnessing the beginning of a new era. In the AI field, AlphaGo defeating all professional Go players is already well

known, and intelligent systems analyzing martial arts movements, sports like basketball, soccer, etc., are already out there. The effectiveness of certain moves is clear and measurable. As for d\*ugs, the news of performance enhancers used by athletes is rampant in the world. What will the world look like ten or twenty years from now? I can't even imagine. Just twenty years ago, my rural home used a rotary dial phone, and the brick-sized mobile phones cost tens of thousands. Who could have imagined today? In short, this book won't contain anything too far ahead of its time.

Goblin: Unfortunately, Covid happened and it seemed to have affected the author's thoughts.

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## Chapter 44: A Still Mind

Su Jie paced back and forth, appearing restless and uneasy.

Inside his body, an uncontrollable surge of emotions threatened to break free.

In some foreign countries, there were competitions where people were locked in sealed rooms to test their endurance. However, those participants had light, food, and the reassurance of knowing it was just a show. Psychologically, they felt safe—completely different from Su Jie's current situation.

Yet, even under such conditions, Su Jie had not collapsed. His mental resilience was already remarkably strong.



A pitch-dark, enclosed space—this was already a form of cruel punishment. Over time, it was even more tormenting than electric shocks.

Time passed. Sometimes Su Jie lay down, sometimes he stood up. He was on the verge of breaking down.

But just when he reached his limit, he would force himself to stop and suppress his agitation.

He had no idea how much time had passed, but eventually, hunger and thirst set in.

Yet, Uncle Mang still hadn't come.

"Did Uncle Mang really forget about me?" Doubt crept into Su Jie's mind. "He's blind... If something happened to him, I might starve and die of thirst in here..."

In theory, if he was truly desperate, he could drink the water from the toilet. But when he checked, there was none left. He pressed the flush button, only to find that the tank was empty. The first time he had relieved himself, the water had already been used up, and the pipes had not refilled.

Now he was in a situation with neither food nor water, deepening his despair.

To make matters worse, the longer he stayed in this agitated state, the more energy his body consumed, making his hunger intensify.

"I can't go on like this. I have to calm down—no joy, no sorrow, no fear of life or death, no dread of terror..." Every time he felt himself breaking, Su Jie reminded himself to hold onto the last thread of clarity in his mind.

Who knew how many times he had neared collapse? How many times he had been tormented by despair? Yet gradually, through sheer willpower, Su Jie forced himself into a state of complete calm.

He lay down, thinking of nothing, doing nothing, breathing in the most even rhythm possible.

It was the Great Corpse State.

He entered a deeper level of this technique, treating himself as a corpse. Wasn't this pitch-black space just like a tomb and coffin?

If he was already dead, what was there to fear? What was there to despair over?

All that remained was absolute relaxation and tranquility.

In that instant, Su Jie found this place rather nice—so peaceful that he felt he could stay here forever. He no longer felt hunger or thirst; it was as if his body's life force had stopped depleting.

Suddenly, he seemed to grasp the essence of a certain state of "feigned death" in his training. It was something he had never reached before in the Great Corpse State. After enduring excruciating suffering and despair, he had finally broken through.

Lying there motionless, he neither thought nor slept. His mind was crystal clear, void of all distractions—he had forgotten martial arts, forgotten his studies, forgotten everything. It was as if he were drifting at the edge of the universe, embracing endless solitude.

But solitude was not suffering. It was bliss.

This was an evolution of his mental resilience.

Click!

The door opened.

Uncle Mang entered.

But at that moment, Su Jie didn't react, as if he didn't care about his arrival at all.

"Su Jie, do you know how long you've been in here?" Uncle Mang asked.

"Not really interested," Su Jie finally sat up, his expression serene and his mind exceptionally composed. This was the state he had reached after enduring suffering and despair—his Great Corpse State had advanced further.

"It's been three days," Uncle Mang clicked his tongue in amazement. "Even elite American agents struggle to endure such conditions without breaking down. But judging by your state, you could probably last another two days without issue. Your mental state has minimized your energy consumption. The Great Corpse State is one of the simplest yet most profound yogic disciplines—a gateway, so to speak. There are many levels within it. Previously, you had only reached the first level—'Calm Mind, Tranquil Spirit.' Now, you've attained the second level—'Neither Dead Nor Alive.' If you can reach the third level—'Living Dead'—you will be at the peak. This kind of psychological training enhances your brain function, influences your body's hormonal balance, and further boosts your physical capabilities. The intricate relationship between mental and physical states is one of my research topics."

"Living Dead? Sounds like a character from some martial arts novel—something about Mount Zhongnan and a Tomb of the Living Dead," Su Jie mused.

"That is Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Quanzhen Sect. Historically, he practiced Daoist Qi cultivation, which was quite similar to the Great Corpse Laying Technique. He built a tomb for himself and secluded himself inside. After three years of cultivation, he finally trained his mind to the state of a living dead, thus establishing the Quanzhen lineage," Uncle Mang said.

"Is that how it was in history? Then was his martial arts very powerful?" Su Jie asked.

"That, I don't know. Mental cultivation can certainly enhance physical fitness, but it's not the same as martial arts. However, if you reach the state of a living dead, any martial arts you practice will progress rapidly. In Chinese history, many cultivators didn't actually train in martial arts but instead focused on mental resilience. For example, Zhang Sanfeng—I believe his martial arts is another matter, but his mental cultivation was truly at the level of a grandmaster. If you have time, you should read his Rootless Words."

Uncle Mang had Su Jie step outside. "You've been in there for three days and nights. Although your mental state is fine, your body has deteriorated significantly. You need to recuperate. Come with me—I've prepared plenty of nutritional supplements."

Sure enough, when Su Jie got up, he felt weak in the legs. Anyone would feel the same after going three days and nights without food.

Moreover, during that time, he had gone through intense anxiety and despair, depleting a significant amount of physical energy.

"I understand this well," Su Jie said, still able to walk. "My coach also told me that mental resilience is essentially a person's moral character. When someone has a strong will, can endure hardships, and calmly analyze gains and losses, they can excel in anything they do. That's why establishing good character from the start is crucial. A person who is lazy and deceitful will achieve nothing, no matter how favorable their conditions are."

"If I'm not mistaken, your coach is the godmaker, Odell," Uncle Mang suddenly said.

"How do you know?" Su Jie was startled. Odell had told him not to reveal it to anyone, and he had kept it a secret. But now that someone had guessed, there was nothing he could do.

"Actually, some time ago, he came here and spoke with me. I know what he's trying to do—he's searching for supernatural power. But what he's truly after is the highest level of mental training. Right now, human body training has reached a level of extreme precision, completely analyzed by artificial intelligence. Humans will never surpass AI. AI can absorb thousands of years of human knowledge in a single second and extrapolate even more. Just look at Go, and you'll see what I mean," Uncle Mang said. "But when it comes to training the mind, AI is powerless—because the human psyche is uncontrollable."

Su Jie had heard plenty about this subject. However, he was particularly interested in what Uncle Mang had mentioned about Wang Chongyang and Zhang Sanfeng.

He wanted to research them and read their works. These figures had been mythologized in various novels, but in reality, they were just practitioners of mental cultivation. If he could learn from their insights, his own training in this area could reach a higher level.

"Globally, the training of mental resilience is still in its infancy. But in ancient times, civilizations such as those in India and China, along with various religious sects, conducted extensive research on it. Unfortunately, back then, civilization wasn't advanced enough to preserve much of it. Only written records and illustrations remain. If there were videos or detailed data, that would be ideal," Uncle Mang sighed.

Su Jie remained silent. His experience over the past three days in the "dark room" had significantly strengthened his mental resilience—far more than days of electric stimulation ever could.

After that, he followed Uncle Mang to another location. He first drank dairy products and honey to regulate his digestion. After half a day, he ate porridge and soup noodles, then received massages to aid his recovery.

After twenty-four hours, he had fully regained his strength, and all his physiological indicators had returned to peak condition.

In truth, his physical fitness was excellent, and his recovery ability was extraordinary. This level of exertion was nothing to him.

Once his body had fully recovered, he resumed training and found that his boxing techniques had improved once again. He could control his punches effortlessly, and his mind was sharper than ever. His mastery over his own body had also become more precise.

"Originally, your dark room training was supposed to last much longer, with repeated cycles of hardship. But you managed to complete the mental resilience training in just three days. In fact, you've already broken many records for special agent training," Uncle Mang said. "The training of mental resilience is fascinating—it's easy to break through. Buddhism has a saying about sudden enlightenment. But physical training requires consistent effort over a long period. Your physique is already very strong, but you lack muscle memory. To truly master combat techniques to the point where they become instinctual, you'll need three to five years of constant practice. Of course, at your current rate, you could reach that level in just a year."

"I understand," Su Jie said. He was well aware that his physical ability, techniques, and reflexes had yet to reach their peak. There was still plenty of room for growth.

The reason for this was simple. First, he was only sixteen years old. Second, he had only been training for two months—far too short a time. But within those two months, he had already reached a level where he could compete with provincial-level professionals.

That was thanks to the efforts of Odell, Uncle Mang, and Gu Yang. Of course, his own dedication and intelligence played a significant role. Additionally, Josh's contributions could not be overlooked.

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## Chapter 45: Ruthless to the Point of No Return

"This is a jar of internal-strength wine. Take it with you and drink a sip every day to help regulate your body. Also, here is a jar of specially-made oil ointment. Don't use it carelessly, only apply it to your joints if you experience pain after intense training," Uncle Mang handed Su Jue two items. "Don't refuse. This is a gift from Nie Shuang and me. Talented individuals are rare, and we hope you can go further."

"Thank you, both teachers." Su Jue understood their intentions. As teachers, they must have seen great potential in him and wanted to invest everything they could to help him grow.

"To be honest, we've gained quite a bit from you as well, so you don't need to feel overly grateful. I used to think you should study at Minglun Martial Arts Academy and become a professional fighter, but now I see that this life plan is too limiting for you. You have your own ideas, and even the small Minglun Martial Arts Academy can't accommodate you. Even if you stay here to train, it won't be of much help to your growth. If you get the chance, I truly recommend you train at the Typhon Training Camp," Uncle Mang waved his hand. "Alright, take care. Contact us more when you have time."

Holding the two large jars, Su Jue bowed deeply to Uncle Mang and then left.

He had already bought a ticket for that day, and would return home early the next morning, then report to school the day after. The day after was September 1st, the start of the school year.

Back at the dorm, he decided to say goodbye to Zhang Manman, Josh, Gu Yang, and the others. However, when he entered the dormitory, Josh was nowhere to be seen. Instead, another person was sitting there. This person was dressed in a suit, his gaze sharp, exuding an aura of blood and fire. Somehow, when Su Jue saw him, he felt as though this man could pounce at him at any moment, slitting his throat or killing him with swift and precise movements.

"A dagger."

His gaze shifted slightly, and he saw something hidden in the man's suit sleeve. It was subtle, so much so that an ordinary person wouldn't notice it unless they were trained in hidden weapons. If it weren't for his lessons with Odell on dagger fighting, Su Jue wouldn't have recognized it at all.

At the time, Odell had taught him dagger combat to quickly build his courage, followed by long-range weapon training. One was for close combat, the other for long-range, both of which were the most practical battlefield skills.

Daggers were most commonly used by modern special forces for assassination, capture, reconnaissance, and so on. They were easy to hide, throw, and use quickly.

While long-range weapons like guns were no longer used in modern society, they were once divine weapons on ancient battlefields, used to shape empires.

These two forms of training had greatly benefited Su Jue. In fact, the reason he was so fearless and strong in the ring was due to this training.

However, it also made him extremely sensitive to daggers and highly cautious around anyone carrying one.

"Who are you?" Su Jue asked as he entered the room, subtly moving towards the door, hand on the handle, ready to defend against any sudden attack or dagger throw.

This was the best approach.

"Not bad," the man said, his face showing a look of satisfaction as he observed Su Jue's reaction. "Looks like you're indeed worthy of becoming my boss's pawn. Come, sign here."

The man tossed a contract towards Su Jue. "You can call me by my codename, Grey Wolf."

The "Grey Wolf" was exuding the unmistakable aura of a special forces soldier, but he wasn't from the domestic military—he was from overseas.

"Who is your boss?" Su Jue asked. Over the past few days, he had been forced to sign contracts twice—once with Zhou Chun, another time with Liu Zihao. Now it seemed there was yet another one to deal with.

"The one who knocked you out with two punches—that's my boss," Grey Wolf replied. "By the way, your friend Josh also signed this contract, becoming my boss's sparring partner—just a pawn. This could really benefit you and help improve your skills quickly."

"Is that so?" Su Jue looked over the contract. There were many pages, but he skimmed through it rapidly, quickly finding the key points. "Room and board for five years? But I have to be on call 24/7? No salary? This contract is really interesting."

"Even an ordinary person, just by being my boss's sparring partner, could quickly become a master. Do you know how many people want to become my boss's sparring partner?" Grey Wolf sneered. "Your friend Josh made a wise choice. I hope you don't miss this opportunity."

"Sorry, I'm not interested. Please find someone else," Su Jue waved his hand.

"You're young, and some opportunities shouldn't be missed." Grey Wolf stood up. "I'll give you three more minutes to think about it."

"No need. Please leave," Su Jue said firmly. He could already tell that this man was used to being overbearing and forceful, thinking he could do whatever he pleased because he was from abroad, unaware of how things worked domestically.

"Very well. You've directly rejected an opportunity that could change your life," Grey Wolf said, pulling out a lighter and burning the contract in front of him. The flames reflected on his face, making him look menacing.

As the contract burned, he walked toward the door.

Su Jue stepped aside, letting him pass.

But as they crossed paths, Su Jue suddenly felt a chill, his hair standing on end—danger was closing in.

Grey Wolf had somehow produced a jet-black dagger, which was completely matte and extremely sharp. He aimed it straight at Su Jue's throat, seemingly trying to end his life.

Almost instinctively, Su Jue contracted his body, pulling his head in like a turtle, narrowly avoiding the slash. However, his clothes were torn wide open by the dagger's edge.

Grey Wolf's expression shifted. He hadn't expected Su Jue to dodge his strike.

His arm moved again, and the dagger twisted, angling toward Su Jue's wrist tendons.

He was aiming to sever Su Jue's tendons and disable him completely.

Su Jie's body swayed again, seemingly fleeing outside the door, but instead, he directly dove into the room. Almost ninety-nine percent of people in this situation would run toward the exit and never walk straight into a trap, diving into a room where they could be easily captured.

However, Su Jie did the opposite. He dove into the room, reached the corner, and grabbed a weapon without hesitation.

It was a hoe.

Yes, it was the same hoe Su Jie used to practice his martial arts.

Every morning at three a.m., he would grab the hoe and head out to the wild fields outside the school to practice. His signature move, the “Hoe Strike,” had been perfected to the point where he could do it effortlessly.

The moment the hoe was in his hand, it seemed to have gained a life of its own, full of vitality. Without even needing to aim, he raised and swung it slightly, aiming at the “Gray Wolf's” head, delivering a deadly strike.

The Gray Wolf furrowed his brows, swiftly dodging the swing. His body twisted like a snake, attempting to close in on Su Jie.

The hoe was long, and in the cramped room, it couldn't be fully extended, making it clumsy and unwieldy. If the enemy got too close, it would be over.

But at this moment, Su Jie crouched, rotating from the corner. It was as if he had grasped the trajectory of the “Gray Wolf's” dagger, knowing exactly what the next move would be.

Seizing the opportunity, he swept the hoe across the ground, disrupting the Gray Wolf's movement, and before long, he was at the door, holding the hoe and standing firm.

Now, the “Gray Wolf” found himself trapped, a sitting duck.



Swish!

Suddenly, a flash of cold light.

The Gray Wolf had thrown his dagger.

Su Jie raised the hoe, and the dagger stabbed directly into it.

If it hadn't been for his special training with Odell on dagger combat, he would've been in serious trouble today.

Moreover, the Gray Wolf's dagger techniques were exactly like those Odell had taught him—simple, practical, and lethal, striking in a way that ensured death with a single move. This was the mark of a true soldier, one who carried out special missions, ruthless and deadly, with every dagger technique honed to perfection.

However, even though the Gray Wolf had thrown the dagger, his body lunged forward. Somehow, another dagger had appeared in his hand, and he attacked Su Jie once again.

In close combat, the series of dagger strikes were seamless, as if each one was linked to the next, killing without a sound.

Trrrrrrt!

Su Jie's clothes were torn once more.

Luckily, he wasn't injured, but at this point, the Gray Wolf had retrieved his dagger and had backed out of the room, forcing Su Jie back inside.

Su Jie stood in full alert, but the Gray Wolf made no further moves.

"You're lucky," the Gray Wolf said dismissively. "I gave you a light punishment, just slashing your clothes. If it had been more serious, I might've severed your tendons so you'd never be able to lift anything again." He sneered. "You've got a little talent, but you don't know your limits. One day, you won't even know how you died."

With that, the Gray Wolf turned and left.

"D\*mn..." Su Jie looked at the slashes in his clothes, relieved that his skin wasn't harmed. He immediately considered calling the police but then thought better of it. Given that the Gray Wolf had clearly come prepared, calling the police would likely yield no evidence and could lead to an unfavorable situation.

The man was probably a mercenary-type special forces soldier from abroad, with various counter-surveillance skills. In terms of experience handling such matters, Su Jie knew he was no match.

“Not good.”

He suddenly remembered something.

*‘My sister is still working on artificial intelligence at the Feng family’s lab, and she’s been harassed by Feng Yuxuan multiple times. If it weren’t for Feng Yuxuan being a second-generation heir, I wouldn’t have come here to learn martial arts.’ Su Jie thought quickly. ‘But while Feng Yuxuan is insidious, he still follows some rules. On the other hand, Feng Hengyi is unscrupulous. I can’t let my sister stay at Haoyu Group any longer; she needs to leave.’*

Initially, he had planned to say goodbye to Zhang Manman and the others, but with this new realization, he couldn’t sit still.

“Josh actually signed a contract with Feng Hengyi to become his sparring partner. I need to find a chance to talk some sense into him.” After checking over his belongings, Su Jie quickly packed and made his way home.

He took a cab straight to D City's airport, where he bought a ticket on the spot. He had originally planned to take the train, but now there was no need for it. He didn't even bother to cancel the train ticket; instead, he focused on getting home as quickly as possible.

With a couple hundred thousand in his pocket, he didn't need to worry about saving money.

With almost two hundred thousand in his wallet, he felt incredibly secure.

"I wonder what it will feel like when I have two million or even twenty million," Su Jie thought as he boarded the plane, opting for first class.

This wasn't to show off, but the last flight had sold out in economy class, and only first class tickets were available. In order to save time, he had no choice but to spend the extra money.

Soon, he arrived at his city.

His city was truly an international metropolis, S City—extremely bustling, with flights coming and going, connecting to all corners of the country and the world.

When Su Jie got off the plane, he checked his watch and realized only two hours had passed.

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## Chapter 46: Artificial Intelligence, Mastering Every Detail

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"Having money is great. It'll be so much more convenient when I visit D City in the future. No need to worry about so many things. It's like that news story about a celebrity who, while walking around Hong Kong, suddenly flew to London to feed pigeons and then returned in the afternoon."

After getting off the plane, Su Jie didn't take the subway or line up for a taxi—his pre-booked private car was already waiting for him.

Before long, he arrived outside his residential complex.

His family lived in an old neighborhood. Their apartment was just over 100 square meters, bought by his parents when they got married twenty years ago. Back then, it was cheap, but now it was worth a fortune. Of course, new homes in the area were even more expensive, and his family couldn't afford a second one to improve their living conditions.

When he got home, he found the place empty.

It was noon, and with the new academy year approaching, his mother—a university professor—was busy, as was his father, the head of a security team. As for his older sister, she spent most of her time in the lab conducting research.

Su Jie took out his phone and called his sister, Su Muchen, but her phone was turned off.

"Still buried in research..." Su Jie knew that her lab had no signal; it was a top-secret facility.

"Forget it, I'll just buy some supplements."

He opened the academy's website and ordered a large batch of nutritional products, spending a total of 30,000 yuan—enough for about a month. Through personal experience, he had come to realize that the academy's health supplements were incredibly effective, significantly aiding his training and further improving his physical abilities.

Of course, supplements were just one part of it. To unlock even greater potential, his diet had to keep up as well.

The academy's VIP cafeteria offered all sorts of specialized meal plans, but he couldn't access them now.

However, in S City—a major international metropolis—if you had money, you could buy anything.

While browsing online for health-focused meals, he suddenly came across "Nie's Private Kitchen."

"Is this Nie Shuang's family's restaurant chain?"

As he scrolled through the menu, he saw many dishes he had once shared with Coach Odell. When he glanced at the prices, he was stunned.

"Whoa."

Every custom dish cost several thousand to tens of thousands of yuan.

The 200,000 yuan he had on hand might not even last a few days at this rate.

"Top professional fighters seem to have nutritionists who design their meal plans, dedicated chefs on standby 24/7, massage therapists, sparring partners, and entire teams to support their training. That kind of money is no joke. Let's see... Boxer



Paschi spends millions of dollars a year just on body maintenance. These rich guys are on another level. My 200,000 yuan wouldn't even make a splash in that ocean."

At this moment, Su Jie realized how little money he actually had.

Back at Minglun Martial Arts academy, he could make ten or twenty thousand a day from small ring matches, so he never really thought much about money. But now that he was home without that income, he suddenly felt strapped for cash.

Though he still had some savings, they wouldn't last long when he considered all his expenses. But he knew that every penny spent on his body was worth it.

"Forget it, I'll figure something out. Once the academy year starts, I'll see if I can take a leave of absence. If I can, I'll go back to Minglun Martial Arts Academy and train for another year. That should be enough to solidify my martial arts foundation. Two months is too short—even though I've learned a lot, I need long-term training, full immersion in that environment.

I told Uncle Mang that I could stay calm and handle everything with ease, but I'm no saint. There's no way I can master everything perfectly. No matter what, my training can't stop. Otherwise, I'd be letting Coach Odell down."

Su Jie quickly calculated his next steps in his mind.

Click!

Just then, the door opened.

A tall girl walked in, wearing a white lab coat and flat shoes. Her hair was a mess, as if she hadn't brushed it, but her face was delicate and pretty. Carrying a bag, she stepped inside and, upon seeing Su Jie, suddenly let out a sharp scream.

"Who are you?! Why are you in my house?"

"Big Sis? You're back?" Su Jie was stunned. "What, you don't recognize your own little brother?" He touched his face.

"You..."

The girl in the white coat, Su Muchen, recognized his voice. She took off her glasses, rubbed her eyes, and put them back on.

"You kinda look like him... Wait, are you really my little brother? Oh my god, did you get plastic surgery? You've grown so much taller!"

"Really?"

Su Jie touched his face. His transformation over the past two months had been drastic.

With the sculpting training from Odell, the massages, acupuncture, and electrical stimulation from Uncle Mang, his own rigorous training, and an abundance of high-quality supplements—not to mention that he was still in his prime growth period—his appearance had changed almost daily.

His facial structure had become sharper, his physique more defined—leaner and more proportional than even professional bodybuilding champions. But more than that, his entire aura had shifted.

He radiated confidence and vigor, his every movement upright and disciplined, exuding the crisp sharpness of a well-trained soldier.

"Did you join the army or something?"

Su Muchen stepped closer, inspecting him carefully.

"You look completely different—like you've been through military training."

Su Jie knew a child from a neighbor's family who was quite mischievous and carefree, almost like a good-for-nothing. Later, the child was sent to join the army, and in just two or three months, he completely transformed. He became polite, composed, and radiant, as though he had been completely re-made.

"No, I just enrolled in a short-term martial arts training course at Minglun Martial Arts Academy during the summer," Su Jie said. "Mom and Dad don't know about this yet, so don't tell them."

"After you've changed like this, it would be strange if they didn't ask when they come back. You said you went to an English-speaking summer camp, but instead you went to a martial arts academy to learn kung fu?" Su Muchen scrutinized her younger brother up and down. "It wouldn't be because of Feng Yuxuan, would it?"

"Big sister, last time, I really did catch him at a club saying that he was going to take you under his control. He even said you were completely under his thumb now and that he could make you do whatever he wanted. But the evidence I took was snatched away by his subordinates, and they even threw me out. All the records I saved online disappeared too. I have no evidence at all," Su Jie said, as if he had repeated this explanation several times.

"Alright, alright, I know." Su Muchen waved her hand. "Feng Yuxuan is indeed pursuing me, but he hasn't done anything inappropriate. Honestly, I'm not interested in him, but he works at Haoyu Group, and the project I'm leading right now is very critical. I absolutely can't leave. If this project succeeds, my team and I will have a stake in the company, and by the smallest valuation, I'd make several

hundred million. Once we have the money, I'll leave Haoyu Group and start my own business. By then, our parents won't have to work anymore and can just enjoy their retirement. Look at how old this house is. We can buy a few new houses and hire a caregiver for them. Plus, when you start dating and getting married, you'll need a new house too. The way things are now, no girl would want to marry you."

"Alright, alright." Su Jie immediately yielded. "I haven't even graduated from high academy yet. Marriage and relationships are too far off for me. Also, big sister, I don't want people to call you a 'supportive sister'. But you're into research, and you definitely won't be able to deal with those businessmen. Be careful with all the contracts and don't get tricked. Also, any verbal promises don't count; they need to be written down first."

"You don't need to remind me of that." Su Muchen knew her younger brother was very mature for his age, even more so than many adults. "The team I'm leading is working in a high-level research environment, and only Haoyu Group is funding us. If I leave now, it would be morally wrong. Moreover, I can't afford the breach of contract penalty stipulated in the contract."

Su Jie fell silent. He knew the situation wasn't simple. He needed to stay vigilant and protect his sister in the background. Now that he had learned martial arts, he believed he could do many things in secret to safeguard her. But thinking of Feng Hengyi, he still felt uncertain.

"By the way, recently, many companies have been reaching out to our team, trying to poach us. Some even offered to pay the penalty for breaking the contract. In order to keep morale high, the company gave us a large bonus. I'll transfer some to you, so you can buy some good food," Su Muchen said as she picked up her phone to make a transfer.

"Don't, don't, don't..." Su Jie quickly protested. "I'm making money now too. Keep your money for yourself."

Despite Su Jie's insistence, his sister Su Muchen still transferred the money. It was an astonishing 100,000 yuan.

"Big sister, why so much?" Su Jie was shocked. "How much bonus did Haoyu Group give you?"

"Just a few hundred thousand." Su Muchen said, "By the way, don't tell mom and dad about the money I sent you, or I'll get scolded. Anyway, I'm going to take a shower and sleep. I haven't had a proper bath in days, and I stink."

"By the way, big sister, Haoyu Group is famous for being stingy. Their employees have low salaries and long hours. How come they gave you such a large bonus this time? Is the project you're working on really that important? All I know is that it's about artificial intelligence," Su Jie quickly asked.

"If we succeed in the research, this artificial intelligence could change human life." Su Muchen paused.

"By the way, I heard that artificial intelligence can even help people train in martial arts. Have you researched this project?" Su Jie asked again.

"You're right." Su Muchen quickly responded, "Recently, we've been helping Minglun Martial Arts Academy create a training system, and it's part of our project. It's in the testing phase right now. When it's ready, I'll get you a special Haoyu Group phone with the system installed. But I'm off to shower and sleep first. I'm so tired!"

"Haoyu Group is involved in so many industries. They've even started making phones?" Su Jie hurriedly opened Haoyu Group's official website, but found no information about phones.

Haoyu Group was a typical internet company. They initially ran a portal website, then expanded into gaming, film and entertainment, technology software, security systems, social media, and more, gradually forming their own brand and accumulating many technical teams. They had ventured into many high-tech industries.

"This company has a lot of cash flow, and it seems like they're brewing some big move to dominate the market and become a global commercial giant." Su Jie browsed through the official website and various news articles. For some reason, his mind was unusually sharp lately, and he had a vague sense that something wasn't quite right.

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## Chapter 47: A Gentleman's Kitchen: Simplicity is the Key



After browsing through these commercial ads, Su Jie started watching some instructional videos on the Minglun Martial Arts Academy website. The academy's website featured some videos with profound content, including training videos from national champions who graduated from Minglun Martial Arts Academy, along with little secrets and tips.

These materials were quite valuable.

However, they required a fee.

“Even during training, there's attention paid to how you drink water—what temperature it should be, what minerals to add, how much you sweat on the body's surface, and the internal body temperature at which you should drink, as well as what temperature the water should be to ensure the best balance.” Su Jie paid to watch some videos, and ended up gaining many insights.

Some of the national champions' training regimens were so detailed that every movement was refined.

“My current strength is roughly at the level of a provincial-level professional team member? But my training methods and mental toughness are a bit better than theirs, and my physical fitness even exceeds theirs. However, technically, because I've had fewer real fights, there's a significant gap.” Su Jie was well aware of his own strength: “After all, even a national-level combat sports athlete wouldn't be able to endure that kind of electrical stimulation training used for special agents. They probably wouldn't afford the internal-strength wine or the secret oil paste, let alone receive direct instruction from Coach Odell.”

“I need to develop my own training method that ensures I’m always practicing my skills without neglecting other important things. Some old boxing manuals mention that every action—walking, sitting, lying down—is a form of training. There’s no moment when you aren’t practicing; everything is integrated into it. With a harmonious spirit and form, a person’s state of mind transcends the ordinary. I haven’t reached that level yet. However, Uncle Mang said that my state of being is already at the near-death, yet not dead level, but still far from the state of the living dead. How exactly should I cultivate my mental state to reach that level? Wang Chongyang is known as the living dead; I can take a closer look at his writings—maybe I can find some inspiration.”

Uncle Mang suggested that Su Jie take some time to study the writings of Wang Chongyang and Zhang Sanfeng.

In most people’s minds, both Wang Chongyang and Zhang Sanfeng are figures born from various novels and films, with appearances that are completely different from the historical figures.

Historically, these two were famous Taoist figures whose mental training had reached very high levels.

Actually, Su Jie believed that practices like meditation and internal alchemy, when explained by scientific theories, are just forms of mental training. A person’s mental strength greatly influences their physical condition.

When Su Jie was being massaged by Uncle Mang every day, one remark from Uncle Mang left a deep impression: if someone’s mental state reached the realm of “no self, no person, no living being, no mortal,” then their physical condition would undergo tremendous changes.

What exactly those changes would be, Uncle Mang said he didn't know, because he hadn't seen anyone reach that state yet.

Odell searched everywhere, also looking for such a person.

"Training physical fitness requires a lot of equipment, nutritional supplements, and various considerations. With my current resources, I can't even match the training conditions of national-level athletes, let alone world-class athletes. But I can engage in all sorts of mental training. In terms of physical training conditions, I definitely can't compete with Feng Hengyi, but mental training can narrow the gap..." Su Jie gradually found the direction for his next training phase.

At that moment, the door opened again.

It was a middle-aged man with a burly build, dressed in a security guard's uniform—it was Su Jie's dad, Su Shilin.

After he came in and saw Su Jie sitting on the sofa watching his phone, he paused for a moment before recognizing his son. "Where did you go during the two-month summer break? Not a single phone call. You've changed so much I almost didn't recognize you. I have to cook for your mom now, so I don't have time to talk much—explain everything to me properly tonight. Mr. Li from your school called me several times about you attending extra classes. With the college entrance exam coming up next year, if you continue wasting time out here and fail to get into a good school, wait and see how I handle you."

After that string of words, Su Shilin grabbed the bags of groceries he'd just bought and headed to the kitchen. Within half an hour, an enticing aroma wafted from the kitchen.

There were four people in Su Jie's family: his dad, his mom, himself, and his sister Su Muchen.

In most families, the mom does the cooking, but ever since Su Jie could remember, his dad has done the cooking, mopping, and cleaning—he handled all the household chores. His mom never did anything. After meals, she would just toss her chopsticks aside, either watch TV, scroll on her phone, read a book, or exercise—completely treating his dad as a servant.

Yet, Su Jie's dad, Su Shilin, did it all with enthusiasm and without complaint.

Moreover, his dad's cooking was delicious, and he was very skilled, while his mom's cooking was terrible—she even burned the rice and porridge. It seemed she had been spoiled from a young age like a pampered princess.

Oddly enough, Su Jie had never heard about his grandparents on his mother's side, nor about his paternal grandparents.

Ever since he could remember, it had just been the four of them.

He didn't even have a single relative.

After spending over an hour in the kitchen, Dad—Su Shilin—finally emerged. He was holding an insulated container filled with various dishes, rice, and soup. “Go, take this to Mom. There’s an event at her university today, so she can’t eat at home. She isn’t used to the university cafeteria food, so hurry up and deliver it before the food gets cold. There are some leftovers in the kitchen for you to eat later. The company has a security training session tonight, so I’ll be back a bit later.”

As he spoke, he hurriedly left.

“Hmm?” Just as Dad was leaving, Su Jie noticed a small detail. At the threshold, before the door opened, as soon as Su Shilin paused his step, his ears twitched a few times—seemingly listening to the sounds outside. Only after confirming there was no danger did he step out and quickly shut the door behind him.

This action had been honed to perfection; ordinary people wouldn’t even notice a detail that lasts less than a second. In the past, Su Jie never would have thought so much about it. But after Odell’s training, he found himself unconsciously paying attention to the smallest details in everyday life.

When leaving the house, he had been fully focused—listening carefully to the sounds outside before opening the door. Odell had once given Su Jie a bit of training, teaching him minor techniques for being ready for combat and for

preventing surprise attacks in complex environments. Don't be fooled by the unassuming nature of these techniques; they can often be lifesaving.

*'Dad isn't just an ordinary security guard. He seems to have that special agent vibe. Ordinary security guards wouldn't pay attention to such details,'* Su Jie thought, closing his eyes and recalling how his dad had moved when he slipped out the door. His movements were subtle yet meaningful—so natural, like water flowing over stone, light and effortless. *'Could it be that Dad is a master?'*

Su Shilin was the captain of the company's security team, managing many guards, and Su Jie knew he was skilled in joint locks and combat. Originally, before Su Jie went to the martial arts school, he had casually mentioned wanting to learn combat. But Dad had harshly scolded him—almost slapping him—and told him not to learn such brawling skills, insisting he focus on his studies instead.

So Su Jie had no choice but to secretly attend Minglun Martial Arts Academy on his own. Now, his perspective was completely different from what it had been two months ago; he could almost tell who was a master and who wasn't.

With questions swirling in his mind, he grabbed the insulated container and headed out to catch the subway to the university where Mom was.

The container was large and packed with many dishes, each prepared exquisitely. In truth, Mom couldn't possibly eat all that, but Dad always found creative ways to make something delicious.

“I feel like a delivery guy,” Su Jie mused as he carried the container on the subway. Even though the train shook violently, he remained as steady as a post, his stance remarkably solid.

Then he suddenly realized—this was also a form of training. In combat, the worst thing is when an opponent’s impact causes you to lose your balance, rendering your strikes ineffective. That’s why you first practice stances—to build balance and stability, keeping calm so you can seize the opportunity to take down your enemy.

Su Jie excelled at this. When Odell trained him, they practiced various strikes and impacts every day; no matter the situation, his stance never wavered.

“A man can die, his life can be lost, but his stance must never falter.” Even on the swaying subway, Su Jie’s mind was occupied with thoughts of martial arts. He recalled Odell’s words: “It’s like your Chinese spirit of valor. Standing firm in your stance is about exuding an unyielding spirit. Here, no matter what posture you take, it’s like a mountain, a towering fortress—indestructible. Even if natural disasters shatter you to pieces, your soul remains. If you can grasp that feeling, your martial arts will surely improve.”

Just as he was pondering this, the subway arrived at his stop. Su Jie stepped out, carrying the container, and walked straight toward the university.

Suddenly, he noticed a military unit stationed at the entrance of a military district building. Several soldiers were standing guard beneath the national flag, their posture upright like bayonets pointed at the sky—motionless as if they were sculptures, indifferent to the sweat streaming down their bodies. Su Jie had no

doubt: even if faced with an avalanche, tsunami, or the end of the world, these soldiers would not budge—they were steadfast in guarding the flag.

“That’s the spirit!” In that moment, Su Jie felt a stirring in his heart. These soldiers might not be as physically strong as him or as skilled in combat, but the spirit they embodied far surpassed his own.

He absorbed that spirit deeply; his body straightened as if his very bones were lengthened. This wasn’t just a superficial adjustment—it was a sudden infusion of a noble quality that transformed his soul.

“In everyday life, you can always sense the presence of martial arts.” Su Jie was filled with excitement and joy, almost wanting to let out a long shout. But he suppressed the thrill, converting it into a calm emotion—a subtle joy that made him feel serene.

He briskly walked to the school gate, watching university students coming and going, radiating youthful energy. It was the start of the semester, with freshmen enrolling early and beginning their military training, their shouts echoing like thunder.

“Is this the life I’ll have a year from now? Do I really like this kind of life?” Su Jie paused to reflect.

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## Chapter 48: Unintentionally Exploding the Basketball

Su Jie had been thinking about his future all along. In the past, he wanted to study and go to university, but after getting into martial arts, he felt that it could be a

lifelong career. However, he didn't want to become a professional fighter, as that would essentially limit the development of martial arts.

In his view, the purpose of martial arts was to explore the limits of life and the human body.

So he still wanted to go to university and pursue research in life sciences.

Up to now, his idea had not wavered.

But he felt that attending university was somewhat of a waste of time, because he could finish the courses in just a few months. In fact, he had already studied three years' worth of high school curriculum by buying textbooks and workbooks during his first year. In the first semester of high school, he tackled mock college entrance exams and scored very high—meeting the top-tier cutoff was never an issue.

Later, in his sophomore year, he followed a steady study routine and put a lot of effort into English; his spoken language was fluent enough to converse quickly with foreigners and even translate. He originally thought that was the pace of learning, but after practicing martial arts and coming into contact with many profound subjects, he began to feel that time was precious and couldn't be wasted.

To ordinary people, high school studies were extremely intense—almost suffocating. However, Su Jie felt that the workload was too relaxed; it would need to be at least ten times more intense for him to barely cope.

Learning is a kind of training too, and having gone through super agent training, Su Jie naturally thought that this level of study was child's play—a complete waste of time.

“I'll find a time to talk about this with my teachers, the principal, and my parents. Even if they don't agree, I have other ways,” Su Jie finally decided in his heart.

Before long, he easily found his mom's office.

This university was a national key institution with a great reputation. His mom was a university professor and a minor administrator with her own office.

“Mom, I brought you some food,” he said as he pushed the door open. Sure enough, his mom was inside, though she was in the middle of a conversation.

Su Jie's mom was named Xu Ying. Although she was in her forties, she looked like she was under thirty. Her skin was well maintained, and she always wore a neat uniform that made her look less like a university professor and more like a corporate professional.

Every gesture and word from Xu Ying exuded a refined elegance, making it clear that her family background was extraordinary.

Suddenly, someone pushed the door open, and the man who had been talking with Xu Ying frowned slightly.

He was a middle-aged man dressed in casual clothes. At first glance he seemed unremarkable, but upon closer inspection one would notice that every piece of his outfit was extremely valuable—the subtle details of his collar and cuffs fit his physique perfectly, crafted with exquisite workmanship that clearly came from a master designer.

What appeared to be ordinary clothing, when worn by him, became the finishing touch that brought his look to life, exuding vigor and spirit.

“Xiao Ying, please give my suggestion some thought and let me know your reply.” The middle-aged man stood up, looked at Su Jie and appraised him with a couple of glances. A peculiar glimmer flashed in his eyes as he added, “This is your son; he’s grown so tall. Not bad, not bad.”

After saying that, he walked out.

“Mom, why do you look so pale? Who was that man?” Su Jie asked as he took the food out of the insulated box.

“Someone I used to know—none of your business,” Xu Ying replied absentmindedly. Then, suddenly fixing her gaze on Su Jie, she said, “You definitely haven’t been at an English summer camp these past two months. So, what on earth have you been doing?”

“I went to Minglun Martial Arts Academy and signed up for a short-term martial arts training course. Training in martial arts helped me grow taller.” Su Jie said with a playful grin. He felt very relaxed talking to his mom—unlike his dad, who used to beat him whenever he misbehaved as a child.

Fortunately, as Su Jie’s studies improved, the beatings became much less frequent. In fact, every time he was about to get hit, his mom would step in. His dad, Su Shilin, always listened to Xu Ying; whatever she said, he followed.

Over the years, Su Jie had noticed that his dad always obeyed his mom, not quite like a couple but more like an assistant—or even a servant.

“Your dad told you not to learn all this fighting and brawling, yet you’re still at it,” Xu Ying said, slightly irritated.

“Mom, please don’t get worked up. Just listen to me,” Su Jie quickly explained. “I’m actually learning this for my older sister. The boss at her company is chasing after her, but he’s a real scumbag. Even though my sister wouldn’t believe me, I collected evidence—and ended up getting beaten and humiliated by his bodyguard. Otherwise, what would I do? Besides, that guy Qian Zheng at school always scores first in exams. His family runs a chain of large-scale combat fitness centers; his physical education scores are much higher than mine, and his smarts are superior too. Of course, I need to train in martial arts to see if I can surpass him.”

“Why have you never told me about this?” Xu Ying said while eating. “Exercising is good, but you could just as well go to the gym or run. Your dad is just worried that if you practice martial arts, you’ll get overly aggressive and cause trouble. He practiced this himself before—anyone who learns combat tends to get overly inflated, oblivious to their limits, and always looking for a fight.”

Su Jie thought about it, and he realized he had indeed gone through that phase. Fortunately, at Minglun Martial Arts Academy he was never short of opponents. At first he sparred with Qiaosi, and later participated in small ring matches, venting all his belligerence on the arena. As his character matured and his martial arts deepened, he became remarkably calm and composed—there was no trace of aggression left, only a dedication to studying and contemplating martial arts.

That was also one of the reasons he didn’t want to become a professional fighter.

“Mom, if I want to take a leave of absence from school, will you agree?” Su Jie asked tentatively.

"What?"

Smack!

Xu Ying slammed her chopsticks onto the table, splattering soup everywhere. "Say that again," she ordered.

"Mom, mom, calm down, calm down," Su Jie quickly said as he wiped the table clean, peppering her with compliments. He knew that when his mom got angry, it was all bark and no bite—very different from his dad, Su Shilin, who believed in "beat first, talk later."

"You go back and tell your dad that once he agrees, I will agree too." Xu Ying sipped her tea, her temper easing a bit. She ate quickly and silently, not bothering to respond to Su Jie.

"Mom, take it slow—don't choke, chew carefully." Su Jie kept smiling. His mom was gentle and reasonable, and he was confident he could win her over. Once she agreed, even if his dad objected, there'd be no other option.

But Xu Ying continued to ignore him.

"Mom, it's not that I don't want to study anymore; I just think the traditional way of learning is such a waste of time. I could take the college entrance exam right now and guarantee a spot at a top university. Why waste my time in high school then?" Su Jie earnestly explained. "Some geniuses go to college at fourteen, and their test scores are off the charts."

"So, are you saying you consider yourself a genius?" Xu Ying almost laughed through her anger.

"Something like that," Su Jie replied unashamedly. "Mom, let me prove it. Give me a few sets of really challenging mock exams, and I promise I'll score high."

Su Jie was already among the top students, so his claim wasn't just hot air.

"What do you plan to do if you take a leave from school? Do you have any plans?" Xu Ying asked calmly.

"I want to return to Minglun Martial Arts Academy to do research—not to practice martial arts, but to study. I'm really interested in life sciences, psychology, anatomy, and medicine. I plan to study these subjects in college. During my time at Minglun, I was introduced to this field by a Cambridge medical doctor who taught me some things." Su Jie then brought up Uncle Mang.

At Minglun Martial Arts Academy, Uncle Mang worked as a masseur, but before losing his sight he had been a doctoral graduate of Cambridge University's Medical School—a title sure to impress Mom.

Sure enough, Xu Ying was momentarily stunned. "Getting into Cambridge Medical School is extremely tough. Only top-tier talent in the global medical community can qualify to do research. Why would someone like that end up at a small martial arts school?"



"I don't know. Besides, Minglun isn't small at all—international superstar Liu Zihao is from there. They even selected me to join his Liu Family team, but I turned it down." Su Jie mentioned this casually.

"Liu Zihao?" Xu Ying studied her son again. "What on earth have you been taking these past two months? You've grown so tall, and your body seems much more solid—no professional body-sculpting trainer could have gotten you to this level."

*'Well, what's a body-sculpting trainer compared to my coach—he's none other than Odell, the world's most mysterious god-maker from the Typhon Training Camp.'* Su Jie thought inwardly with a hint of sarcasm but kept his thoughts to himself.

"School starts with your senior year, the most important year. If you want to take a leave of absence, you'll need the approval of your homeroom teacher, the dean, and the principal, right?" Xu Ying mused. "I'm still pretty open-minded. If you can really score high on a set of challenging mock exams, I'll let you take a year off to pursue what you want. Then you can sit for the college entrance exam in June next year. How does that sound?"

"Alright, it's settled then," Su Jie agreed sycophantically. "I knew you were the best mom—so educated and open-minded, unlike Dad, that rough old brute. Later tonight when we get home, if Dad beats me up, Mom, you've got to protect me."

"That remains to be seen," Xu Ying rolled her eyes at him and continued eating. After the meal, watching Su Jie swiftly tidy up, she felt quite pleased. "He's gotten

a lot more handsome, and his bearing now suits high society—Minglun Martial Arts Academy is truly miraculous," she thought.

Anyone who had known Su Jie just two months ago would be astonished by his current appearance and vigor—either thinking he had undergone plastic surgery or some extreme muscle-enhancing transformation. It was nothing short of a complete metamorphosis.

With his mom softening her stance, Su Jie felt elated and walked with a light step. Leaving the office, he carried a thermos as he passed by the playground, his mind preoccupied with perfecting his martial arts stances.

He even marveled at the military bearing of the flag-guarding soldiers, their posture exuding an unwavering resolve—as if they would stand firm even in the face of landslides or tsunamis.

Whew!

Just then, a basketball suddenly flew toward him, barreling at the back of his head.

It turned out that a group of college students and instructors, engaged in military training, were playing a basketball game on the playground, and the ball had gone completely out of control.

As the ball was about to hit him, it was as if Su Jie had an extra set of eyes on the back of his head. Without a second thought—and still holding the thermos in one hand—he spun around sharply, instinctively unleashing the "Hoe Strike" technique. With a fierce single-handed strike, he smashed the basketball.

The ball, hit with such force, collapsed inward and then exploded with a bang.

The basketball was utterly shattered.

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## Chapter 49: Practicing with Wholehearted Devotion

At the moment the basketball exploded, even Su Jie was taken aback. Luckily, his recovery was fast—if his hand had stayed on the ball any longer, it would surely have been injured by the blast.

*‘Exactly like that—the instant you retract your hand, it should be as if you’re scooping something out of boiling oil, withdrawing immediately upon contact. In all martial arts, especially boxing, a quick retraction is key.’*

Having effortlessly shattered another basketball, he felt he’d gained a whole new level of understanding of his “Hoe Strike” technique.

In recent days, he’d watched videos and browsed websites to learn about various martial arts and techniques, but in the end, he always returned to that fundamental move—the “Hoe Strike.” Its variations seemed endless.

Every little improvement made Su Jie marvel at the ancient masters' wisdom. No wonder they enshrined the "Hoe Strike" as the core fist technique—a move one could devote a lifetime to.

*'The force needed to shatter a basketball was once tested by foreigners—I can't recall the numbers, only that it was extremely difficult. And mind you, my strike was a chopping strike, not a straight punch; if it had been a straight punch, it would have required even more power.'*

Su Jie paused to savor the sensation of the move he'd just executed. The "Hoe Strike" had come out almost unintentionally, perfectly embodying the martial arts idea that "true intent lies in what appears unintentional."

If someone were to throw another basketball at him now, he was certain he wouldn't be able to shatter it.

*'If I could make this state of 'true intent in unintentionality' my norm, my martial arts would surely reach a new level. I might still never match Feng Hengyi, but at least I wouldn't be defeated so quickly.'*

Su Jie put away his insulated box but didn't leave the area. He noticed a few people running over from afar—the military training instructors and several college students coming to retrieve the basketball. Shattering their ball meant he'd have to make amends somehow.

"Hey, young man, this basketball..." A military training instructor was the first to arrive, looking at the splintered ball with a puzzled expression.

“I’m really sorry—I’ll make it right. I don’t know how it just exploded,” Su Jie quickly apologized. “I’ll go buy a new one right away.”

“No,” the instructor waved him off. “You all go grab another basketball and continue your game. I’d like to have a word with you.”

The college students who’d hurried over soon dispersed.

“Young man, that punch was really impressive. If I’m not mistaken, it’s a chopping strike from Form Intent Boxing, isn’t it? To be able to shatter a basketball with it—the force in that chop is nothing short of transcendent. Could you show it to me again?”

The instructor clearly knew something about martial arts. He’d seen the whole thing—how the basketball flew toward Su Jie’s head, and how Su Jie suddenly turned and delivered a chop that exploded the ball. There was no way this was mere coincidence.

“I’ve practiced martial arts, but that move isn’t a chopping punch—it’s called the ‘Hoe Strike’,” Su Jie explained openly. Since the instructor was also a martial artist, it was a great chance to exchange ideas.

Martial arts are all about sharing techniques. Practicing alone in the wilderness for ten years isn’t as effective as several people getting together to study kicks, strikes, throws, and grappling for a few months.

“‘Hoe Strike?’” the instructor blinked in surprise before saying, “You learned the Shaolin Boxing, right? I mean, those movements are ancient and unadorned—their great subtlety lies in appearing clumsy. This move may seem simple, but mastering it isn’t easy. How old are you?”

“Sixteen—I’m in my second year of high school. Actually, with school starting tomorrow, I’ll be a senior,” Su Jie replied with a smile. He had great respect for military men; just a moment ago, he’d even picked up on the spirit of the stances from a soldier guarding the national flag.

“How long have you been practicing martial arts?” the instructor asked again, still in disbelief.

“At Minglun Martial Arts Academy—two months. My coach is Gu Yang,” Su Jie answered, carefully omitting any mention of Odell.

“Impossible,” the instructor said irritably, suspecting Su Jie was lying. He extended a hand. “Let’s test your strength.”

The stance he assumed wasn’t a fighting stance at all—it was similar to the push-hands movement of Tai Chi. Su Jie had never quite understood it before; on TV it always seemed impractical—after all, who in a real fight would simply push each other around? Later, after delving into various martial arts histories and old manuals, he learned that this was a form of “wen-bi”—a refined spar where two people test their skills without injuring each other. It was very popular during the

Republican era, when martial arts needed to be embraced by high society. Brute force and deadly fighting were unacceptable; dignitaries of any era considered such behavior crude and common.

On the contrary, this kind of back-and-forth pushing—graceful yet skillful, interwoven with Zen-like wisdom—was favored by the upper echelons and helped promote martial arts.

Su Jie extended his hand to join the instructor's. At the moment their hands touched, as their skin made contact, the instructor suddenly pushed forward, trying to off-balance him. The force was so swift it almost lifted Su Jie off his feet.

But Su Jie rooted himself firmly, as if a thousand pounds were pressing him down, making it impossible to be lifted. He employed his "Shoulder Load" technique.

At that moment, the instructor's arm smoothly shifted its pull sideways, aiming to redirect Su Jie—a maneuver executed with such subtlety and ease, it was like effortlessly herding a sheep.

Without a second thought, regardless of how his opponent's force might change, Su Jie hoisted his arm and body upward and then delivered a forceful downward chop. It was, once again, the "Hoe Strike."

Smack!



The instructor looked as if he were a rabbit caught by an eagle or an antelope pounced upon by a tiger—instantly pinned to the ground and utterly immobile.

Immediately, Su Jie let go and helped him up. “Sorry, sorry—I didn’t execute it properly. I didn’t know when to stop.”

“If that’s what you call poor practice, then no one in the world could ever perfect it,” the instructor replied as he dusted himself off. “An eagle’s catch in a few moves stains the yellow sand; with your catch, you nearly had me bloodstained on the sand. Do you know any other techniques?”

“I’ve picked up a few moves from other schools, but I mainly focus on this one move—the ‘Hoe Strike.’ I believe it’s worth dedicating a lifetime to.”

Su Jie spoke earnestly, exuding a sense of reliability.

“Practicing one move with all your heart—truly remarkable,” the instructor marveled. “You really managed to develop such skill in just two months? I can tell you, even after ten years, one might not perfect this technique. I know Minglun Martial Arts Academy is the top martial arts school in the country, teeming with experts. Many of our military grappling coaches have been recruited from there, yet even they wouldn’t possess such extraordinary prowess.”

“Practicing one move with all one’s heart...” Su Jie mumbled, as if the phrase had sparked another thought.

The sentence, Practicing one move with all your heart (一心一意) resonated deeply with him.

“Alright, my name is Yu Jiang. I’ve been studying martial arts since I was a kid—my family’s tradition is the Tai Chi Praying Mantis style. Let’s keep in touch and exchange ideas when we have time.”

“Sure—can I have your contact info?” the instructor asked.

“Absolutely,” Su Jie replied quickly, exchanging names and contact details before pointing at the basketball. “I’ll go get you a new one.”

“Actually, forget it. Really—the fact that the basketball hit you is partly our fault. I’ve got to go lead my students now, but let’s chat again sometime,” said Instructor Yu Jiang as he patted Su Jie on the shoulder and briskly headed toward the basketball court.

Su Jie also quickly left the college campus. Watching his departing figure, Yu Jiang stopped and gazed into the distance, murmuring, “Incredible, simply incredible—two months, at sixteen years old, how could one possess such skill? Today it was merely a push-hands match, not real combat; I wonder what would happen in an actual fight?”

“Push-hands is quite interesting. Such matches are very safe, and they truly reveal who has the deeper skill. Even though it was just those few moves, I learned a great deal,” Su Jie thought as he walked home by subway.

By the time he got home, his older sister, Su Mucheng, had already woken up and left for work, and his dad, Su Shilin, hadn’t returned—leaving Su Jie alone. He reheated the meal his father had left behind and ate every bite; the food was really quite good. While his dad’s cooking might not match the secret recipes of the Nie family, it was at least on par with what you’d expect from a five-star hotel chef.

Su Jie’s mom, Xu Ying, was notoriously picky—she only ate dishes that were meticulously prepared. The ordinary fare at most restaurants would never tempt her. Because of this, Su Jie remembered from a young age how his dad had diligently practiced his cooking. Over the years, while not transcendent, his dishes were always pleasing in color, aroma, and taste.

“It’s still early. Since today’s training didn’t leave me feeling off, I might as well get some extra exercise. How about the nearby park?”

Su Jie now felt an itch for training if he went a day without it. Not far behind his residential complex was a large park that in the mornings buzzed with activity—elderly folks practicing Tai Chi and young men and women jogging or working out. But now it was afternoon, and with the scorching heat and heavy humidity, hardly anyone was out.

In such weather, aside from those military-training college students, most people were indoors enjoying the air conditioning. But Su Jie didn't care about the heat at all; his time working in the fields—hoeing, digging, and carrying loads—had already built his endurance.

When he arrived at the park, completely empty, he began his routine workout, still following Odell's training regimen without any changes. After all, Odell's training method represented the most scientific system of the Typhon Training Camp. With his current level of wisdom and insight, he couldn't stray from that system—any rash modifications might backfire.

Today, his training state felt different. He had infused the upright, flag-guarding spirit of military men into his "Hoe Strike" technique and found that every move became remarkably erect and imposing, almost exuding an aura of conquering mountains and rivers—immovable as a mountain, vast as the sea.

Gradually, he became completely absorbed, practicing repeatedly until that very spirit became second nature.

"Martial arts are, first and foremost, about form—the posture must be correct and follow the principles of mechanics. Only then can the spirit shine through."

Su Jie had long known that when he once watched a flock of chickens fighting over food in the wild, he'd absorbed a certain spirit from them. Although the posture remained the same, incorporating that spirit into his technique made his strikes far sharper.

“Chickens have a unique independence, the courage to fight, the skill to peck at insects, the majesty in shaking their feathers, and a buoyant momentum—each quality exuding impressive spirit and intent. When blended into martial arts, they give your moves a certain sharpness. And perhaps one could also incorporate the spirit of soldiers guarding the national flag into the art. By the way, isn’t our motherland’s territory just like an Eastern rooster?”

As Su Jie practiced, that thought suddenly came to him. The map of China is like a rooster in the East.

At that very moment, a line of poetry surged into his mind:

“When the rooster crows, the world turns bright!”

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Flower Stealing Master

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## Chapter 50: When the Rooster Crowed, the World Turned White

"The long night seemed endless, enveloped in pitch darkness; demons and malevolent spirits roamed, wreaking havoc across Ch!na, as all living beings lamented and the people suffered greatly.

Then, in an instant, with the crowing of a rooster, the sun rose in the east, sweeping aside the drifting clouds, and the whole world was bathed in brilliant light, filling hearts with joy and inspiration."

While practicing the move “Hoe Strike,” Su Jie initially sensed a mysterious aura in his mind—the surrounding darkness felt so oppressive it nearly suffocated him. Yet, he transformed himself into a rooster, ruffling his feathers in the gloom, raising his unyielding head, and with a long, piercing cry that seemed to cleave the very heavens and earth, tore through the darkness to welcome the light, bringing daylight to the world.

With that single crow, the entire world was illuminated.

Bang!

As he stomped down, even the concrete beneath his foot appeared to crack.

This version of “Hoe Strike” was entirely different; while the form remained unchanged, its spirit had been completely transformed. If the earlier version of the move had carried a ruthless ferocity and an explosive quality, now it exuded only grand, indomitable valor.

Because darkness will eventually vanish, and light will surely come.

“That's it, that's it,” Su Jie exclaimed, his whole body trembling with excitement after finishing the move. It wasn't a loss of control, but rather the joy akin to the sentiment of “hearing the Way in the morning, one could die content by evening.”

At long last, the elusive “spirit” he had pursued so desperately was found. In that moment, it felt as though he had truly claimed something for himself. Had he not

witnessed the posture of soldiers guarding the national flag, he would never have grasped this level of understanding.

“This must be the internal energy method,” Su Jie mused as he repeated the practice. Although his stance was the same, the move “Hoe Strike” no longer carried that aura of hopeless lament—or the satisfaction of harvest and cultivation familiar to Gu Yang—but instead resonated with the invigorating energy of a rooster’s crow heralding the arrival of light.

To him, the map of his motherland was like a rooster, its rivers and mountains forever enshrined in his heart. Every time he practiced, an indescribable surge of energy bubbled up within him.

*‘This is real Chinese martial arts,’* Su Jie thought. He lost all sense of time as he trained relentlessly from noon until nightfall—even as twilight began to glow, he continued. This session’s intensity was several times his usual practice, yet he felt no fatigue, no weariness, not even hunger or thirst.

“Time to head home,” Su Jie decided, feeling a soothing comfort throughout his body.

“Hey, young man, wait up!” an elderly man called out. “I see you’ve been practicing that move for three hours straight, over and over. What kind of martial art is that?”



The old man, dressed in a white training outfit and carrying a teapot, even sported a badge emblazoned with “Hunyuan Tai Chi,” indicating he was a member of the Tai Chi Association.

“Hello, Uncle,” Su Jie greeted politely. “This move was taught to me by a martial arts school instructor—I’ve only been practicing it for two months. It’s called Hoe Strike.”

“Hoe Strike?” the old man exclaimed, evidently unacquainted with the move. “I see you’re very diligent, but learning martial arts requires instruction from a true master. If you’re interested, you can come to our Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall—our teacher is a bona fide heir to authentic Tai Chi. Without proper guidance, practicing incorrectly can injure your muscles and bones. The hall is just to the left of the park. See that tall building over there with the plaque?”

Sure enough, Su Jie looked in that direction and noticed a large plaque in a corner not far from the park—a detail he’d never paid attention to before.

“Alright, thank you, Uncle,” Su Jie replied, knowing the old man meant well. He smiled, nodded, and walked away.

Noticing Su Jie’s somewhat perfunctory response, the old man shook his head. He then went to his usual training area, where he practiced Tai Chi with deliberate, graceful movements, accompanied by classical music, quickly immersing himself in the flow of his practice.

His Tai Chi was unhurried yet perfectly controlled, exuding a poised and extraordinary demeanor that made Su Jie regard him with newfound respect.

*'This must surely come from masterful instruction. Looks like I should check out the Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall sometime,'* Su Jie thought. He had even studied Odell's joint exercise—a routine that, at the Typhon Training Camp, blended Tai Chi with various disciplines of kinesiology and sports medicine, and which also contained elements of pure Tai Chi martial arts. Thanks to that experience, he could instantly discern whether a set of Tai Chi techniques was genuine.

Of course, excelling in Tai Chi forms is far different from being able to actually fight. Combat requires relentless real-world sparring, hundreds or even thousands of failures and bloodied lessons before mastering the techniques, whereas perfecting a martial arts routine only demands endless repetition.

Mastering a martial arts form is merely the foundation for combat, much like learning and memorizing formulas is just the beginning before an exam.

When he got home, neither his father nor his mother had returned, and his elder sister was also away—it was just Su Jie. He simply took a shower, washed his clothes, and then went to his room to review his textbooks.

Chinese, mathematics, English, physics, chemistry, biology... He flipped through each textbook, with one knowledge point after another flashing through his mind. Although he hadn't studied at all during the two-month summer break, Su Jie felt that his knowledge hadn't faded at all—in fact, it had grown even deeper.

He also reviewed many exam papers; even those once obscure topics now yielded effortlessly to his understanding, and his mind felt more agile than ever.

Snap!

He closed the exam paper, and an unprecedented surge of confidence welled up inside him.

"Let's grab some food—I really miss those days at the martial arts school. At times like this, I should be dueling with Qiaosi, or taking part in a small sparring tournament, and then Uncle Mang giving me a massage.

After getting used to that kind of life, coming home now felt strangely out of place for Su Jie.

“Su Jie, come out now!”

At that moment, both Su Shilin and Mom, Xu Ying, had returned. As soon as he stepped inside, Su Jie could feel his dad’s murderous aura!

He quickly ran out and saw Su Shilin standing by the sofa, while Xu Ying was sitting on it.

“You little brat, taking a leave from school—how presumptuous! You don’t know your place, and now you even have the nerve to lie.” Su Shilin fumed. “You sneaked off to the martial arts school to learn how to fight and brawl, to be some kind of hoodlum, and then you tricked us about going to an English summer camp. If I don’t beat you to death today, I won’t even carry the Su name anymore!”

“Dad, don’t get worked up,” Su Jie said with a smile, showing no fear. “I went to learn martial arts—why would that be considered fighting and brawling or being a hoodlum? Besides, those gangster movies are from your generation—I’ve never even seen them.”

“Come out now!” Su Shilin shouted, and in no time he was almost upon Su Jie, ready to grab him and give him a proper beating—the very way he used to discipline him when he was a child.

“Mom, didn’t we agree on this?” Su Jie protested, darting off to hide beside Xu Ying.

“This time, your mom won’t save you either.” Though Su Shilin said that, he paused for a moment, afraid that any tussling might accidentally bump into Xu Ying. “Xiao Ying, this kid’s still so young and already refuses to study. You mustn’t protect him this time.”

“Alright,” Xu Ying waved her hand dismissively. “Now that he’s older, it’s normal for him to have his own ideas. You two go downstairs and sort this out. And Su Shilin, what did I tell you on the way? Why didn’t you listen?”

“Little brat, come with me downstairs.” Xu Ying’s words worked; Su Shilin turned and left immediately.

Su Jie followed, and just as they reached the door, Su Shilin’s voice rang out, “Make sure your mom closes the door properly!”

The father and son arrived, one after the other, by the small flowerbed downstairs. Finally, Su Shilin couldn’t hold back his anger any longer: “You’re usually pretty good at your studies, so why on earth did you suddenly start learning how to fight like a hoodlum? I swear, if I don’t beat you to death today—”

“Wait a minute!” Su Jie interrupted. “Dad, let me say it again—it wasn’t for fighting and brawling; it was to learn Chinese martial arts! Martial arts!”

“Little brat, you’re still so young—what do you know about martial arts?” Su Shilin growled even louder. “Alright then, today we’re going to have a proper training session, just the two of us! If you beat me, you can do whatever you want from now on. If you can’t, then you’ll obediently study and get into university, and there will be no more talk about martial arts.”

“Dad, you’re not joking, are you?” Su Jie waved his hand frantically.

“What are you afraid of? Haven’t you learned martial arts?” Su Shilin shouted.  
“With that cowardly look, you’re no match for martial arts!”

“Dad, martial arts isn’t meant for fighting with you.” Su Jie, now completely calm and unruffled—showing none of the typical youthful anger—replied. If it were any other young person, they might have immediately started a fight with their dad.  
“Alright, Dad, let me demonstrate a set of punches. If my focus, energy, qi, bone, and spirit all come together in perfect unity, I hope you’ll change your opinion of me.”

“Hmm?” Su Shilin, noticing Su Jie’s demeanor, was momentarily stunned. His anger suddenly subsided. “You actually know about qi, bone, and spirit? Complete unity? Then show me what you’ve got! I wonder what you’ve been secretly learning these past two months?”

*‘Sure enough, Dad must know something about martial arts,’* Su Jie thought, recalling that little detail he’d picked up at noon when he went out to listen.

Suddenly, Su Jie focused his mind, calmed his spirit, and fixed his sharp gaze straight ahead.

That aura forced Su Shilin to take two involuntary steps back—he could actually feel an enormous threat emanating from his son.

*'What on earth is going on? How does he have such an aura?'* Su Shilin couldn't believe his eyes. He knew all too well what kind of kid his son was—how could he have changed so drastically in just two months?

"Hhaaa!"

Su Jie raised his hand and leapt forward, executing a flurry of swift, digging moves—then he halted! A finishing technique! The sound roared like thunder, mixed with the howling of blades and the surging might of martial prowess.

Cracks appeared in the concrete.

Su Shilin took another three steps back. He sensed that his son's punch was unstoppable—so powerful it felt as if it could move mountains and fill seas, sweep away all demonic forces, and restore order to the heavens and earth.

*'Hoe Strike! Shaolin Heart-Intent Palm! Resent the Sky Without a Handle, Resent the Earth Without a Loop? No? That's not the intended aura. But the posture is perfect—Chicken Leg, Dragon Body, Bear Arm, Tiger Covers Head, Eagle Snatch, Monkey Sky-Gazing, Thunder Sound—all seven methods are fully present. How on earth could you have mastered this kind of martial arts in just two months? Not even twenty years of grueling practice would compare.'*

*‘The Hoe Strike may look like a simple up-and-down chopping strike, but in every motion it carries the proud stance of a golden rooster standing alone, the graceful strength of a winding dragon, the immense might of a bear’s composed power, the fierce and roaring force of a tiger, the sharp, snatching demeanor of an eagle, the keen perceptiveness of a sky-watching monkey, and the unstoppable momentum of thunder striking down.*

*It’s only when all seven methods are perfected that it truly becomes martial art; missing even one makes it mere show.’*

“Dad, how was that punch?” Su Jie asked after finishing his move.

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