

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 91: A Casual Slap Teaches Respect

The younger generation—men and women alike—grinned as they watched Xu Jiahao mess with Su Jie.

To them, Su Jie and Xu Ying had come to disgust them, snatch their wealth, and potentially cut off their financial lifelines.

And cutting off someone's livelihood is like killing their parents.

"Ah Hua! Get over here! Take him into the next room to search him and change his clothes!" Xu Jiahao clapped his hands and ordered the burly man in camouflage.

The camo-clad man looked at Xu Jieren, clearly waiting for his cue.

Obviously, he was one of Xu Jieren's trusted men—Xu Jiahao couldn't command him directly.

Xu Jieren gave Ah Hua a subtle signal, granting permission.

"Ah Hua, hurry up! I can't stand the stink on this guy anymore... don't you all smell it?" Xu Jiahao pinched his nose and laughed again with the others.

SMACK!

Out of nowhere, a loud slap echoed like a firecracker going off.

Everyone froze.

They saw something unbelievable: Su Jie had raised his hand and slapped Xu Jiahao across the face.

"Aaargh..."

Xu Jiahao howled in pain as Su Jie's strike hit a nerve. A clear vertical handprint quickly appeared on his face—not the typical sideways slap. That's because Su Jie's habitual strike came from above—a technique known as the "Hoe Strike Technique."

"You dare hit me..." Xu Jiahao's face turned red and swollen. The slap had nearly disfigured him. He was in so much shock he couldn't even yell properly.

"Did your parents never teach you how to speak to people?" Su Jie asked coldly. "Is this how you were raised?"

"You're insane!" Xu Jieren finally came to his senses, seething with rage. He hadn't imagined Su Jie would actually dare to strike someone here. In their eyes, this crowd was the cream of the crop—pampered elites. Outsiders didn't even *dare* to offend them, let alone lay a hand on them.

"Ah Hua! Ah Hua! Grab him! Tie him up! Hang him up!" Xu Jieren barked three commands in a row, unable to hide his fury.

Ah Hua lunged forward.

SMACK!

Su Jie moved faster. Before Ah Hua could reach him, Su Jie was already in front of him, delivering another slap—this time right to the face.

Ah Hua, the burly man in camouflage, didn't even have time to cry out before crumpling to the ground, lying motionless face down—almost as if dead. Only his legs were still twitching uncontrollably.

"Yes, yes, let it blow up... the bigger the better..." Xu Jiahong, who had been silent until now, was inwardly thrilled. He wanted Su Jie to cause a scene beyond control. He knew how skilled Su Jie was—even Ding wasn't his match—so he hadn't dared to intervene first.

"Somebody! Quick! Somebody help!" one of the girls screamed, her garishly painted lips trembling. Her expensive handbag fell to the ground.

Just then, seven or eight more men in camouflage rushed in from the courtyard.

"Stop!" came a commanding voice—Huang Dingyi had just entered and saw the chaos unfolding. He immediately shouted for calm.

The camo-clad men froze when they saw him.

Huang Dingyi was their martial arts instructor, their Shifu.

"Who told you to stop?" Xu Jieren was even angrier now. Then he saw who it was. "Master Huang? Why are you here? We were just talking about visiting you."

"I told them to stop," Huang Dingyi said bluntly, ignoring Xu Jieren. Turning to Su Jie, he said, "Su Jie, these kids are out of line. For my sake, let it go."

"Master Huang, what are you talking about? He just started beating people out of nowhere!" Xu Jieren was stunned. He had no idea why Huang Dingyi was taking Su Jie's side—or why he immediately blamed them.

"I'm going to kill you!" Xu Jiahao finally recovered a bit and, eyes bloodshot with rage, charged at Su Jie like a madman.

Without hesitation, Huang Dingyi stepped forward and used a "Black Tiger Steals the Heart" strike—right to Xu Jiahao's abdomen.

Xu Jiahao immediately passed out.

"Take him to the side to rest. He'll be fine—just needs to cool off," Huang Dingyi ordered calmly.

"Master Huang, what are you doing?" Xu Jieren's brow furrowed deeply. "We respect you as a teacher, but this is our family's internal matter."

"Jieren, I'm doing this for your own good," Huang Dingyi replied. "Just stay calm for now. The old man will be back shortly. I'll explain it to him myself."

Su Jie couldn't tell exactly why Huang Dingyi was suddenly defending him. Maybe he didn't want anyone seriously hurt, or maybe mentioning the Typhon Training Camp earlier had made Huang think Su Jie was one of *them*.

"Surround the area. Don't let this kid get away," Xu Jieren said coldly, shooting Su Jie a hard look. "I'm going to tell the old master. Master Huang, today is a big day. He assaulted people here—no one can cover for him."

With that, Xu Jieren strode out briskly.

"Su Jie, have a seat," Huang Dingyi said, pulling over two stools. "These younger ones—I watched them grow up. Yeah, they're spoiled, but they're still family."

"All I did was slap him twice," Su Jie replied, sitting down. "Didn't even really go at him."

"True. If you had really used your 'Hoe Strike' move, his skull would've been cracked open," Huang Dingyi muttered under his breath. "You mentioned the Typhon Training Camp earlier—are you one of their trainees?"

Seeing Su Jie sitting and chatting so casually with Huang Dingyi infuriated the younger crowd. But there was nothing they could do.

All they could do now was pray that Xu Jieren could bring back someone from the older generation to crush Su Jie's arrogance.

Even though Huang Dingyi could keep the younger generation in check, if one of the elders stepped in, he couldn't interfere.

At that moment, on the mountainside behind the house...

A group of people surrounded two elderly men.

One wore a traditional Tang suit, eyes bright as he gazed out from the mountaintop, lost in thought.

Next to him sat a frail old man wrapped in thick blankets, slumped in a wheelchair. His face was sallow and weary.

Behind the wheelchair stood a large man in a Zhongshan suit, expression like stone. He looked like a machine—dead silent, with a face like a poker card. His hands gripped the wheelchair handles with unnerving steadiness, not a single tremor.

A short distance away stood a group of men—no women in sight—stationed far enough to avoid hearing the old men's conversation.

The man in the wheelchair was none other than Xu Qiaomu, head of the Xu family.

"Master Luo, tell me the truth—how long do I have left?" Xu Qiaomu asked. "After your treatment, I felt better. But the clearer my mind gets, the more I feel something's wrong."

"Life and death are fate. Wealth is heaven's will. Who can see clearly? I'm no god—I can't presume to decide a man's lifespan," replied Master Luo.

Despite looking around forty, clean-shaven and sporting a military buzz cut, he exuded vitality. If not for the Tang suit, no one would think he was the legendary "Northern Luo."

Xu Qiaomu knew the man was actually over seventy. A master of foresight, geomancy, and feng shui, his reputation was unmatched.

In the South, especially among the elderly, such beliefs ran deep. Xu Qiaomu had paid a heavy price to get him here.

"Master Luo, I followed your instructions—offered a house, and inside placed thirty-six catties of gold. No matter what, help me settle my affairs—only then can I leave in peace," Xu Qiaomu said.

Master Luo had a rule: if he agreed to read your fate, you had to offer a house—and fill it with thirty-six catties (18kg) of gold.

At about 300 yuan per gram, that's over five million yuan. But for the truly wealthy, that's pocket change—a token of sincerity, really. More importantly, Master Luo rarely accepted clients.

Xu Qiaomu had only gotten him through an old friend's favor. And he understood the symbolism—an homage to the Buddhist tale of Elder Gudu and Prince Jita paving the grove with gold to invite the Buddha to preach.

It wasn't about the gold. It was about sincerity and the idea that true teachings are never casually shared.

"You're not terminally ill," Master Luo said. "Your vitality is fading because of heart troubles and worry—no medicine can cure that. At this rate, you have two, maybe three years left. But when it comes to lifespan readings, I'm not as skilled as Old Ma. His cloth-divination techniques are unmatched."

"You're too modest. Yes, there's a saying: Southern Mao, Northern Luo, Central Ma. But your ancestor read the fate of Emperor Kangxi's heir, didn't he?" Xu Qiaomu, though aged, still had eyes like steel. In that moment, his former sharpness as a business mogul flared: "When I read Kangxi's letters to Nian Gengyao, I saw him write the words 'extremely accurate in divination' about your ancestor."

"You're just flattering me. What Kangxi actually wrote in the margin of Nian Gengyao's report was: 'This man is not entirely unreliable. His readings are acceptable.' Yes, my ancestor—Blind Luo—read fortunes for Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong. But the scholars of the time scorned him. I personally don't like telling fortunes. That's why I demand houses and gold—to scare most people off. Destiny isn't fixed—it's shaped by action. The Book of Changes begins with the words: 'Strive ceaselessly. Hold virtue to bear the weight of the world.' A person who is diligent, disciplined, and virtuous will naturally live long and prosper. Misfortune won't touch him. Ghosts and gods won't sway him. I may divine fates, but I don't actually believe in fate. I want to make that clear to you."

"A true gentleman does not believe in fate," Xu Qiaomu sighed. "Hearing that, I know you truly are a master. But I know myself—I've lived a petty, grasping life. I'm no gentleman. That's why fate can control me—and why I must believe in it. A gentleman isn't someone who rejects fate—but someone whose virtue is so great that fate cannot touch him. Back when Nian Gengyao entered the capital, Kangxi told him to consult Blind Luo. But Nian, being a Confucian general, feared the scorn of the literati and refused. Kangxi even hinted at it in his letters, but Nian remained stubborn. In the end, he died under Yongzheng. If you're not a gentleman, then you'd better respect fate. Trying to conquer demons with virtue—when you have none—is like smashing rocks with eggs."

Chapter 92: Gathering of Northern Luo and Central Ma

"That's exactly right. When virtue can't subdue evil, disaster follows. Nian Gengyao wasn't a true gentleman. Trying to act like one brought his downfall," said Master Luo. "I'll do three things for you. First, I've treated your illness — you were on your last legs, wouldn't have made it three more months. Now, you've got two or three years left, though I can't promise more. Second, I helped you choose a feng shui burial site. As I said, three zhang deep under this mountain, encircled like a jade belt — it'll keep your family from decline for three generations."

"Only three generations without decline? Can't we rise to greatness?" Xu Qiaomu was unwilling to settle: "Like Feng Shoucheng — he suddenly rose to power, unstoppable. But our Xu family is already on the decline, and the younger generation is the third. Can't we soar like him?"

"You want to shoot to the heavens with just a grave? That's pure fantasy. In every dynasty, sages picked imperial tombs — how many empires actually lasted ten thousand years?" Master Luo said. "It all comes down to people. If someone in your family has real talent, maybe you can turn things around. Actually, you've got a good eye — the most important task is for me to read faces and see if any of your descendants can shoulder great responsibility."

"Exactly." Xu Qiaomu nodded. "Master Luo, your ancestors read fortunes for emperors. The Forbidden City archives still hold Qianlong's birth chart and Kangxi's comments on it — if I'm not mistaken, those comments were written by your ancestor, Blind Luo. I trust you. If your family could divine an emperor's fate, then finding a successor for my little clan should be a walk in the park."

Indeed, compared to ruling a vast empire, picking a family successor was child's play.

"True. Kangxi chose Yongzheng because of his grandson Qianlong. And it's true — my ancestor Blind Luo played a role in that. But of course, Yongzheng's iron-fisted rule was key. History has proven certain truths," Master Luo said.

"Then Master Luo, these are all my sons. What do you think?" Xu Qiaomu pointed to a group of men standing not far off.

Those middle-aged men, though they couldn't hear what he said, knew exactly what was being asked — who was fit to inherit the family legacy?

Their nerves were stretched thin.

"Rotten wood — can't be carved," said Master Luo bluntly, not sparing anyone's dignity. "If any of them take over, the whole family business will be gone in ten years. Clean sweep."

"Really that useless?" Xu Qiaomu still clung to hope. Now that hope was crushed. "Then I'll trouble you to take a look at the younger generation. See if any of them have potential. If not, well... we'll even consider the girls."

"Someone from the Zhang family is coming today too, right?" Master Luo said. "That's actually why I agreed to help you. Otherwise, your house and gold

wouldn't have caught my interest. You've calculated this well — decades ago, the marriage alliance with the Zhangs fell through. This time, you're offering a lot, trying to marry Zhang Hongqing's daughter. I won't meddle in that. But Zhang Hongqing and Ma Fengnian are sworn brothers. Ma Fengnian's bringing her over to see if there's any promising talent in your family. I'm actually looking forward to chatting with Ma Fengnian. You didn't tell me he was coming — what, afraid two tigers can't share one mountain?"

"Of course not!" Xu Qiaomu was startled and quickly explained, not wanting to offend Master Luo. "If Master Ma comes, it's a double blessing. It'll bring great honor to our Xu family. The two of you are the modern-day equivalents of Yuan Tiangang and Li Chunfeng. If you both meet at my home today, perhaps we'll even create a new 'Tui Bei Tu' legend." (G: Tui bei tu is a Chinese prophecy book from the 7th-century Tang dynasty.)

"Hah! Old fox — you sure know how to flatter," Master Luo chuckled. "We're no Yuan Tiangang and Li Chunfeng, and we're not writing any 'Tui Bei Tu'. Just academic exchange, that's all. If I'm right, they should be arriving soon. Let's go down."

A large man in a Zhongshan suit pushed the wheelchair gently, smoothly, and without the slightest jolt — a level of control and strength that marked him as a true martial arts expert.

"Good kid. What's his style?" Master Luo asked.

"He's deaf and mute — an orphan I took in. Loyal, reliable, understands my every intention," Xu Qiaomu said. "His name is Xu Ba. Always had great strength. Learned a bit of everything."

"Impressive." Master Luo nodded. He could sense the terrifying internal power hidden within this man.

The group made their way down the mountain.

At the foot, Xu Jieren had already slipped over to quietly tell some of the men what had just happened with Su Jie.

One of them — a middle-aged man — instantly flew into a rage.

"Outrageous! That brat's gone too far — he hit someone? How's Jiahao?" he roared. Clearly, he was Xu Jiahao's father, furious that his son had been beaten.

"What happened?" Xu Qiaomu coughed. "Jieren, what did you just say?"

"Father!" Xu Jiahao's dad said, "Your grandson Jiahao was knocked unconscious by that boy Xu Ying brought back. Right in our ancestral home!"

"Where were security? Why wasn't he detained? What do we even pay you people for?" Another man — Xu Jieren's father, Xu Ziqiang — chimed in.

"Master Huang intervened to protect that little thug and stopped us," Xu Jieren quickly explained. "We couldn't lay hands on him, so we came to report to you."

"You mean Xu Ying came back?" Xu Qiaomu narrowed his eyes in his wheelchair. "With his son? And the kid beat up Jiahao? The guards tried to stop him, and Master Huang got in the way?"

"Yes, Grandpa." Xu Jieren bowed deeply.

"Master Huang really should mind his business. Let him train the branch kids — why meddle in the main family's affairs?" Xu Ziqiang muttered. "I'll go speak with him."

"Master Huang doesn't act without reason," Xu Qiaomu said. "We've got bigger things to handle today. You go deal with that. Since Xu Ying is back, bring her to the hall — and the younger ones too. The Zhangs are coming soon, and I'll be greeting them myself."

"The Zhangs are just sending a girl this time. Do you really need to greet her personally?" Xu Ziqiang asked, puzzled.

"Master Ma is coming with her," Xu Qiaomu narrowed his eyes. "To be frank, the Zhangs are bringing Master Ma to use his Ma-style face-reading to assess whether there's any talent in our Xu family — if we're even worthy of marriage. Whoever catches the eye of Master Luo and Master Ma will inherit the entire family estate. I'm laying this down right now. If it's a younger one, their father will first be the successor, and then it'll pass to them — I'm following the Kangxi-Yongzheng-Qianlong model."

Everyone felt the weight of that declaration.

"Xu Ying's kid dares to hit people — what should we do? Toss him in jail for a few days?" Xu Ziqiang asked.

"Bring him to the hall. I want to see what kind of kid he is," said Xu Qiaomu.

"Dad, Xu Ying ran off from an arranged marriage — made us enemies with the Zhangs. If we want to rebuild that alliance, showing his face might not help," said Xu Ziqiang.

"You think you're in charge now?" Xu Qiaomu shot him a glance, and Xu Ziqiang instantly fell silent.

"I'll take care of it, Dad." Xu Ziqiang bowed and left.

At the village entrance.

A car rolled up to the Xu family estate. Out stepped two people — Master Ma and Zhang Manman.

"Uncle Ma, the feng shui of the Xu ancestral home seems decent," Zhang Manman said, surveying the area.

"It's alright. But feng shui's secondary — people are the key. Ever read The Humble Room Inscription? 'A mountain doesn't have to be high — if there's an immortal, it's famous. Water doesn't have to be deep — if there's a dragon, it has spirit.' A place's feng shui depends on who lives there. If it's someone like King Wen of Zhou, even a prison becomes a birthplace of the Book of Changes. But the Xu family hasn't produced a single notable figure in years — all mediocrities. Even the best feng shui can't save that," Master Ma smiled. "Since ancient times, land gains prestige from people — never the other way around. That's why places become 'former residences' only after someone made a name."

"And they're offering my dad so much just to marry me off?" Zhang Manman frowned. "I don't get what he's thinking, asking me to come check things out."

"Doesn't hurt to look." Master Ma said, "Your dad's leaving the final decision to you. The Xu family's current head, Xu Qiaomu, isn't dead yet — he still holds massive influence. Even if he dies soon, they can coast on his legacy for a while. Unless the new head botches things and the clan splits."

"That's already happening," Zhang Manman nodded, just as the ancestral gates opened and a welcoming party emerged — led by an old man in a wheelchair.

"Xu Qiaomu is actually coming to greet us? Not for me — that's your reputation, Uncle Ma," Zhang Manman thought to herself.

"Let's go," said Master Ma.

The two walked up.

"Hahaha..." Xu Qiaomu laughed. "Master Ma! I've tried to invite you so many times without success — seems Hongqing's face holds more sway."

"I'm just here accompanying my niece," Master Ma replied, catching sight of Master Luo. He laughed. "Old Luo — so you're working this gig too?"

"Old Ma, I knew you'd come — I've been waiting for you here," Master Luo's eyes gleamed like lightning.

"You two are usually impossible to book — even billionaires can't get you. Today you grace our Xu family — my ancestors must've done something right," Xu Qiaomu said hurriedly. "Please, come in — let me host you properly."

Xu Qiaomu truly dared not offend either of them. First, there's the old maxim: never offend feng shui masters. Second, these two weren't ordinary mystics — they were highly educated, had legions of disciples, and networks far deeper than Xu's own. Befriending them could bring tremendous benefits.

The group entered the hall.

Chapter 93: Unthinkable and Unstoppable K!lling Techniques

"You little b*stard! If you manage to walk out of the Xu household in one piece today, I'll take your last name!"

Xu Jiahao clutched his face, still roaring with rage, trying to rush at Su Jie, but was tightly held back by Xu Jiazhi.

This group of younger Xu family members watched Su Jie lounging casually in front of them, all fuming to the point of bursting a lung. Yet none of them made a move.

First, they had clearly seen that Su Jie's combat ability was terrifyingly strong. That security guard, Ah Hua, was a brawny fighter skilled in hand-to-hand combat, capable of taking down three to five ordinary men easily—yet Su Jie had floored him in one move. Second, it was obvious that Huang Dingyi was protecting Su Jie, so the other guards dared not intervene.

After all, these younger members didn't actually hold real authority within the Xu family.

“Mr. Huang, these guys still think you're siding with me,” Su Jie chuckled. He couldn't care less what this junior crew thought. In fact, he saw the entire Xu family as a hollow tree—big in size but rotten at the core. One good storm and the whole thing could collapse. No one here was capable of holding things together.

Especially among this so-called younger generation—not a single one of them was worthy of carrying on the legacy, let alone making something new of it.

Huang Dingyi appeared to be shielding Su Jie, but Su Jie knew better—he was actually protecting these younger family members, worried Su Jie might lash out violently.

“I can’t help it,” Huang Dingyi said, still shaken. “People from the Typhon Training Camp left a lasting impression on me. Every one of them is a stone-cold killer. They could kill with a sheet of paper, even a drop of spit. Their techniques are impossible to guard against. That’s not martial arts—it’s pure assassination. Ancient Chinese kung fu used to be called killing arts, but even that was open and righteous. Typhon’s techniques are the pinnacle of spy-level assassination: poison, hidden weapons, explosives, and all sorts of unthinkable methods. Sometimes two people could be walking past each other, not even close, and suddenly the other one drops dead. Even the cops on the scene can’t find a trace, and the coroner can’t determine a cause of death. I’m afraid you know these kinds of techniques.”

“You mean they can kill from a distance, and even a forensic exam can’t tell how the person died? Typhon Training Camp is that dangerous?” Su Jie found it unbelievable, but then again, this world is full of unsolved mysteries.

Besides, the human body is fragile. Many substances, even a speck invisible to the eye, can kill a person a hundred times over—like certain cyanides.

Even with Su Jie’s reinforced internal arts and superhuman recovery, poison would still end him just the same. He was still flesh and blood.

‘Looks like I’ll need to study up on these assassination techniques,’ Su Jie thought to himself. ‘Otherwise, if my sister really does switch companies, the Feng family might go all-out and play dirty. Typhon’s inner workings are off-limits, but I do know Coach Odell. He likely knows all the training camp’s assassination methods. I might not learn them, but I need to understand them well enough to defend against them.’

“What are you thinking about?” Huang Dingyi asked, seeing Su Jie quiet and assuming he was silently admitting it.

He truly feared Su Jie might know some terrifying methods—silent, invisible death.

“It’s fine,” Su Jie replied. “I won’t touch them. Don’t worry.”

Just then, hurried footsteps echoed—it was Xu Ziqiang, with several bodyguards in tow.

The moment he entered, his eyes locked onto Su Jie.

“The old master has something to say. You’re all to wait in the main hall,” Xu Ziqiang commanded with authority. Even Xu Jiahao quieted down.

“Jiazhi, take Jiahao to treat his face, then go to the main hall,” he added. Then he nodded slightly to Huang Dingyi. “Master Huang, please help maintain order. If these youngsters start fighting, it’ll reflect poorly on the Xu family. I’ll handle the matter from here. You go ahead and rest.”

His tone was polite, but the message was clear—Huang Dingyi was meddling in family affairs.

Huang Dingyi understood but didn't let it show. He stood up. "Ziqiang, you'd better keep your eyes open. That young man has a serious background. I won't get involved in this anymore."

He patted Su Jie on the shoulder. "Little Brother, make sure you visit my academy sometime. We'll have a good exchange. I've got fine liquor."

"No problem. I'll follow up on the app project too," Su Jie thought to himself. *'This Huang Dingyi is an interesting guy—and a client, after all.'*

And with that, Huang Dingyi left—without even glancing at Xu Ziqiang.

Xu Ziqiang noticed this and was stirred. Huang Dingyi had been close to the Xu family since his father's generation, serving as their martial arts coach—akin to a private tutor in the old days. The Xu family had always emphasized respect for teachers. From early on, they had strict rules about being polite to mentors, so even Xu Ziqiang didn't dare speak harshly to him.

Plus, Huang Dingyi now had many disciples and considerable influence.

"What exactly does he see in this kid?" Xu Ziqiang couldn't help but feel deeply annoyed by Su Jie—borderline disgusted. In fact, the entire Xu family held no goodwill toward Su Jie or Xu Ying.

Especially now, watching Su Jie remain seated without the slightest attempt to show respect, Xu Ziqiang grew even more irritated. He wanted nothing more than to slap the arrogance out of him.

The younger generation had all exited—even Xu Jiahao didn’t dare act up. He knew this was a crucial moment. Stirring more trouble would leave a bad impression on the old man, potentially losing him his share of the inheritance. On the other hand, if he behaved, he might just get a bigger cut.

As he left, his gaze was filled with hatred—mortal enemy levels. But his mind was already calculating how to snatch and maximize his gain.

He looked like a playboy on the outside, but underneath he was cold, cunning, and ruthless.

Xu Jiahong had also left. He hadn’t said a word the whole time, but Su Jie could feel his venomous gaze—this guy wasn’t going to let things slide either.

Now, only Su Jie and Xu Ziqiang remained in the hall. Security guards stood outside.

“Stand up,” Xu Ziqiang commanded.

“Say what you want.” Su Jie had originally tried to be polite, but after this farce, he was completely disillusioned. Even if his grandfather gave his mom control of the company, it would never reverse the family’s decline. She’d be constantly blocked, plotted against, and sabotaged.

This visit was just closure for his mom. From now on, they’d live quietly. The Xu family looked prosperous on the surface, but beneath it all was a tangled mess—not worth the effort or risk.

Since the Xu family treated him with no respect, there was no reason to keep smiling.

“You...” Xu Ziqiang’s face turned white with anger. “Is this what Xu Ying taught you? Do you have any respect for your elders?”

“Then you sit.” Su Jie stood up and pointed at his own chair.

Xu Ziqiang got even more furious but soon narrowed his eyes and calmed down. “You’re Xu Ying’s son, aren’t you? She left the family over twenty years ago. Her actions cost us a huge business deal and weakened our foundation. Now she wants to come back just because the old man is dying? Trying to grab a piece of the inheritance? Isn’t that a bit delusional?”

“I don’t know anything about inheritance,” Su Jie replied. “As for why I hit Xu Jiahao—you know exactly what he did. But arrogance and prejudice have blinded you.”

“You little punk, so full of yourself,” Xu Ziqiang sneered. “Here’s my offer: five million. I’ll give you and Xu Ying five million right now. Take the money and leave—don’t ever come back. Deal? If you want more—tens or even hundreds of millions—then you won’t get a single cent, and I’ll make sure you regret ever stepping foot here.”

He sat in the main chair, coldly waiting for Su Jie’s answer.

“Five million might go a long way in this kind of backwater town,” Su Jie glanced around. “But in S City, it might buy you a toilet.”

“You—!” Xu Ziqiang nearly coughed up blood.

Su Jie hadn’t even raised his voice, but that casual remark cut deep—mocking him as a country bumpkin.

Xu Ziqiang took a deep breath, at a loss for words.

“If you’re going to be difficult, don’t blame me for being rude,” he finally said, standing up and heading out. Then he barked to the guards, “Don’t let this kid take a single step outside. Bring Xu Ying to the conference room.”

“Hm?” Su Jie moved in a flash and strode to the door.

Wham!

Three guards rushed to subdue him.

Before, they hesitated because Huang Dingyi was there. But now that he was gone and Xu Ziqiang had spoken, they didn’t dare defy orders.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Three thuds later, all three guards were on the ground.

Su Jie had trained extensively in dealing with multiple attackers. His body dropped low, movements tight and compact. His feet hooked and kicked in swift, sweeping arcs—low and fast like a swirling ground wind. Wherever he passed, men flew.

“Enough, Su Jie—don’t fight them!” came a voice from the door.

“Mom? What are you doing here?” Su Jie turned and quickly moved to her side, eyes scanning around protectively.

It was indeed Xu Ying. Her presence here was risky—alone, surrounded by hostility, any dirty trick could humiliate her.

“Xu Ziqiang, whatever happens between us adults is one thing,” Xu Ying said coldly. “But using your son to falsely accuse mine of theft? Since when did the Xu family stoop to such disgraceful, low-life tactics?”

“Xu Ying, you know why you’re really here,” Xu Ziqiang sneered. “You didn’t visit the old man once all these years. Now you come running the moment you hear he made a will? After all the damage you caused this family back then, you’ve got the nerve to show your face and fight over the inheritance?”

Chapter 94: Above Heroic Talent Lies Great Talent

"Xu Ziqiang, I'm not here this time to fight over the inheritance. I just want to see how Father is doing. Unlike you people, always scheming and groveling, obsessed with stuffing family wealth into your own pockets," Xu Ying said, clearly

unimpressed by her older brother. "The things you did back then—I've just never said them out loud. If I had, Father would've died on the spot from rage."

"What nonsense are you spouting?" Xu Ziqiang's expression turned visibly unnatural—clearly, Xu Ying had something on him. But then he sneered, "That was twenty years ago. It's all water under the bridge. You don't have any proof, so now it's just slander. And don't forget, in the Xu family, women are ultimately outsiders. A married daughter is like spilled water. Let's not forget, you ran away with some man all those years ago—you disgraced the entire Xu family."

"I'm not here to argue with you today." Xu Ying was unmoved. "And I have no interest in exchanging pointless words. I'll leave right after seeing Father. Keep a close eye on those useless younger ones of yours, and don't use your underhanded tricks again. I won't be responsible for what happens if you do."

"Your son's no good to begin with." Another voice joined in—it was Xu Zide, Xu Jiahao's father.

He hated Su Jie for beating up his son and wished he could have Su Jie arrested.

Xu Zide's eyes were locked on Su Jie. "This little bastard has no upbringing. Comes to the Xu household and still acts up. Xu Ying, is this the son you raised? Looks like you've had a rough time since you ran off with that stray man. Your son turned out useless too. Regretting it now, aren't you?"

"Ignore them," Xu Ying tugged at Su Jie. "Let's go. We'll see your grandfather first."

"Xu Ying, you can go—but this brat stays," said Xu Ziqiang. "Today's a Xu family gathering. He's not a Xu, so by our rules, he's not allowed to attend."

"Stay here. I'll be back soon." Xu Ying frowned.

"No way. Dad said I'm supposed to protect you," Su Jie shook his head. "This lot's as shady as they come. I'm better off staying close."

Xu Ziqiang signaled, and several security guards stepped forward, trying to pull Su Jie away.

But in that moment, Su Jie made his move—swiftly striking forward.

His finger jabbed directly into a guard's chest.

The guard dropped like a log, foaming at the mouth and convulsing violently, like he'd had an epileptic seizure.

The human body has many nerve-sensitive points. When struck with precision, they can trigger seizure-like symptoms. Su Jie had learned this from Uncle Mang during massage therapy training rooted in traditional Chinese medicine. Later, he spent a month studying under Master Ma, absorbing deeper knowledge of human

nerves and integrating it into his martial arts. His current fighting style was vicious, piercing, and unrelenting.

And that wasn't even the most terrifying part.

What was more fearsome was Su Jie's ability to withstand blows.

He trained in iron-body techniques from the start and, through using the crystal sphere to circulate energy throughout his body, had reached mastery. Even national-level professional fighters would struggle to injure him—let alone some rent-a-cop security guards.

These guards did know some martial arts—but they were no match for professional fighters.

Their attacks on Su Jie were like scratching an itch.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three consecutive strikes—each guard was hit square in the chest.

All three collapsed, twitching on the ground, foaming at the mouth. Some even lost control of their bladder and bowels—their nervous systems so rattled that their cerebral cortexes could no longer manage the pain response, sending them into spasms.

The other guards froze, not daring to advance.

“Unless you want to end up like them, don’t move,” Su Jie said coldly. “Just now, Teacher Huang stopped you not to protect me, but to protect you—from me. Step aside.”

“Get the riot gear, get weapons—kill this brat! He dares to commit violence here!” Xu Zide retreated behind the remaining guards. “Go call for more backup. This kid’s never been taught a lesson. Thinks he can take on a dozen people alone?”

“What the hell’s going on here? The old man’s waiting!” Another person entered the room, frowning at the scene. He glanced at Xu Ying and Su Jie with obvious disgust.

“Mom, who’s that?” Su Jie asked.

“Xu Ziming,” Xu Ying replied. “My half-brother.”

“Ziming, Xu Ying’s trying to bring an outsider into our Xu family gathering,” Xu Zide complained.

“The old man wants to see Xu Ying’s son,” Xu Ziming replied.

“You’re just going to break tradition like that?” Xu Zide still wouldn’t let it go—but he was out of moves. He glared at Xu Ying, eyes filled with malice. “Xu Ying, you better keep a close watch on that brat. If he disturbs the old man, we won’t let him off easy.”

“Don’t worry—my son has far better manners than any of yours.” Xu Ying stayed alert, knowing that Xu Zide was bound to have more schemes in store.

She knew her brothers were utterly useless at revitalizing the family—but masters at scheming, ruthless to the core.

"Your son is just a thug. I give it less than a year before he either lands in prison or ends up dead in the streets. You might as well buy him a coffin now," Xu Zide spat venomously.

Xu Ying fired back: “My son will surpass anything the Xu family has ever produced. Your boy just eats, drinks, and chases women all day. I give him a few years before he dies on top of one.”

"Hahaha..." Xu Ziqiang and Xu Ziming looked at her like she was delusional. They couldn't help but laugh. Xu Ziqiang said, "Xu Ying, don't kid yourself. The old man just wants to see you for nostalgia's sake. Once that's done, you and your son better get out. Don't even think about taking a blade of grass from the Xu family."

"Mom, don't waste words on them," Su Jie shook his head.

"You're right. Nothing worth saying to them anyway." Xu Ying took Su Jie's hand and left.

As they watched the mother and son walk away, Xu Zide muttered, "That brat is way too cocky. What do you think we should do?"

"I've got it handled," Xu Ziqiang said. "Once they've seen the old man, he definitely won't like them. As long as he turns a blind eye, I can take care of it. Zide, this is your job. After all, your son's the one who got beat."

"No problem. If Xu Ying really wants to fight for her share of the inheritance, we'll use that brat as leverage to make her back off. But we'll need to discuss how to divide her portion," Xu Zide said darkly. His end goal was clearly the family fortune.

In the Xu family's antique-style side hall used for council meetings, only a handful of people were allowed to sit: the old patriarch Xu Qiaomu, Master Luo, Master Ma, and Zhang Manman.

Everyone else from the second and third generations had to stand.

Those in the middle generation—Xu Ying's peers—each had their own agendas. They all understood this was likely the day the old man would make a major decision. The presence of two renowned masters all but guaranteed it. Their opinions carried the weight of final judgment.

Even families more powerful than the Xus would consider themselves blessed to secure the counsel of either of these masters. Whether it be for major asset sales, new ventures, or make-or-break deals—these two could literally decide a family's fate.

Put simply, a word from either of them could shift billions—or even hundreds of billions—in assets.

“Masters, the second and third generations of our Xu family are mostly here. The fourth generation is still just kids—they're not ready for responsibility.” Xu Qiaomu seemed invigorated, eyes sharp and piercing like a crouching tiger. Clearly, he'd been a fierce man in his younger years.

“Talent comes in many levels,” Master Luo began. “For a family to soar to new heights overnight, what it needs is heroic talent—extremely rare. Next is virtuous talent, which quietly nurtures the family’s steady rise like climbing stairs—less dramatic, but equally solid. Then there’s elite talent—adept at crisis management, stabilizing the ship. Below that is basic talent—capable of maintaining the family’s holdings while grooming the next generation of virtuous or heroic talent. Then you have mediocre talent, under whose watch the family declines. Below that is foolish talent, which drags the family into chaos. And even worse...”

“What’s worse than that?” Xu Qiaomu asked.

“Debt-collectors,” said Master Luo. “These are people born to bankrupt their families. I’ve seen a few in your second and third generations. Put your estate in their hands, and you’ll end up with nothing. Forget luxury—think prison. You might not even keep your ancestral tomb intact. What do you think, Master Ma?”

“Agreed,” said Master Ma, nodding. “But actually, above heroic talent, there’s a higher level—great talent. Heroic talent means extraordinary skill, daring, and a powerful destiny. Virtuous talent brings wisdom and refinement. Elite talent is decisive and calm under pressure. But great talent...”

“And what makes someone a great talent?” Master Luo asked, straightening up.

“Great talent governs nations and maps the cosmos, holds the world in their mind, commands awe like a towering mountain, sees through the illusions of the world,” Master Ma said. “They are like the dragons in the I Ching—able to command all types of talent beneath them. Qin Shi Huang and Emperor Wu of Han were merely

heroic talents. But Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Guiguzi, and the Buddha—they were great talents.”

“Dare I ask, Master Ma, are there any elite or basic talents in my family?” Xu Qiaomu still held a sliver of hope. He didn’t even bother dreaming about great, heroic, or virtuous talents—he knew the Xu family didn’t have any.

“No great, heroic, virtuous, or elite talents,” said Master Ma. “But you do have some basic talents—and a few debt-collectors.”

“Then please point them out to me,” Xu Qiaomu’s eyes gleamed with dangerous intent.

A debt-collector in the family is the death knell for one’s ancestors. Xu Qiaomu believed this with every fiber of his being and had no intention of showing mercy.

Everyone from the second and third generations stood tense, terrified of being named. If Master Ma called you a debt-collector, your future was over—not to mention the hell your parents would catch.

“If I name them, those kids are finished,” said Master Ma. “But fate can be changed. One’s appearance stems from the heart. Even someone irredeemable can change if they sincerely reform. Their face will change accordingly. The question is whether they’ll awaken.”

“Old Ma, enough theory. Xu Qiaomu wants to pick a successor today. In a field of dwarfs, you still have to choose the tallest,” said Master Luo.

“Who’d have thought, after all my years of wisdom, my descendants would turn out so worthless?” Xu Qiaomu sighed. “Masters, if fate can be changed, I’ll spare no effort. The Xu family must not decline after I’m gone. Otherwise, I’ll have no face before my ancestors.”

Hearing all this, many in the younger generation were visibly displeased—but no one dared speak out. To offend either master meant being branded a debt-collector, losing your future, and bringing shame to your family.

At that moment, Xu Ying and Su Jie entered the room.

Chapter 95: Even the Four Seas Struggle to Contain Him

“Dad.”

When Xu Ying entered, she saw Xu Qiaomu sitting in a wheelchair, his life clearly nearing its end. Her eyes reddened, and tears welled up.

“Hm?” Su Jie was surprised to see Master Ma and Zhang Manman there as well.

“Young man, you came too? Are you part of the Xu family?” Master Ma waved him over enthusiastically. “Come, come here! Haha, Old Luo, we were just discussing outstanding talents. What kind of talent do you think this young man has?”

“Hello, Master Ma.”

Su Jie walked over, and Master Ma stood up personally, took his hand, and led him to Master Luo.

Xu Qiaomu was stunned. This old fox didn’t know who Su Jie was, but seeing him walk in with Xu Ying, he began to suspect that Su Jie was his grandson.

What he didn’t understand was why this grandson seemed so familiar with Master Ma.

The arriving Xu Ziqiang, Xu Zide, and Xu Ziming were all dumbfounded. Even the younger generation—Xu Jiahong, Xu Jiaren, and the beaten Xu Jiahao—couldn’t believe what they were seeing. But they had no say in this room.

Even Xu Ying was taken aback.

“This young man...” Master Luo had been observing Su Jie from the moment he entered.

When Master Ma brought Su Jie over, Master Luo suddenly stood up, grabbed his hand, and began feeling it, pressing on his shoulder, examining his back—like a blind fortune-teller reading bones.

“Well?” Master Ma smiled. “What kind of talent is my young brother here?”

“This child...” After a long examination, Master Luo finally spoke. “Without saying more, his pulse is barely detectable, and his thoughts flit in and out—clear signs of a highly cultivated spiritual state. His bones and skin are like jade and glass, and his vitality is more than ten times stronger than the average person. Even more impressive is the purity of his aura—righteous, unmixed, with no hint of evil. His character is clearly excellent. He has virtue, intelligence, and physical excellence. This child is a hidden dragon—at the very least, a man of great talent. With the right opportunities, he will soar through the heavens, a giant among men.”

That was Master Luo’s evaluation.

“Old Luo, you’ve still got an eye for talent. Reading a person’s character, cultivation, and constitution just from feeling bones—you might really steal my job one day,” Master Ma laughed.

“Old Ma, I know your physiognomy skills have reached another level—you can read people not with your eyes or ears, but with your heart. You’re far beyond me. But where did you find this young man? He’s incredible.”

Master Luo turned to Su Jie: “Young man, would you be willing to study with me? I can get you into the world’s top architecture programs—Harvard, MIT, Princeton—I can recommend you for any of them, and even secure you the highest level of scholarship.”

Master Luo was already trying to recruit him.

From his words, Su Jie could tell that this man was likely a world-class architect. After all, feng shui is a form of architecture and a branch of psychology. Su Jie had long thought that feng shui and architecture had many overlapping principles.

Master Ma was a world-class psychology expert, skilled in Ma-style physiognomy and psychological therapy. He fused traditional physiognomy with modern psychology to achieve groundbreaking results.

Master Luo must be of a similar caliber.

Su Jie understood that anyone who achieves greatness must extract the essence of ancient traditions and study them with modern scientific methods. Clinging to outdated ways would never lead to high achievement.

Gu Yang, Uncle Mang, Odell, Master Ma, and Master Luo—all followed this path.

“Old Luo, you want Su Jie as your disciple? I think you’re barking up the wrong tree. The young man is just a step away from transcending the boundary between spiritual death and divine rebirth. He’s beyond both of us. Why not study together instead?” Master Ma chuckled.

“No wonder you call him ‘young brother.’” Master Luo nodded. “There’s no real hierarchy in the pursuit of knowledge—those who understand, lead. If he truly crosses that threshold, he’ll be ahead of us.”

Hearing their exchange—even without understanding the more obscure terminology—Xu Qiaomu realized that the young man named Su Jie had gained tremendous respect from both masters, even being called a man of great and exceptional talent.

“Xu Ying, come here.” Xu Qiaomu beckoned his daughter, whom he hadn’t seen in over twenty years, to his side.

“Dad.” Looking at her father in the wheelchair, Xu Ying was overcome with emotion, unable to speak.

“This is your son?” Xu Qiaomu asked.

“Yes.” Xu Ying nodded.

Xu Qiaomu asked no further. He closed his eyes, lost in thought.

“Old Luo, we each have our strengths—you excel at feng shui, I at physiognomy. We’ve long competed, but we’re walking different paths toward the same goal. Why not join forces? We both have businesses and compete, but that’s not sustainable. Like the Xu family—once old Xu dies, they’ll be left without strong heirs. With Su Jie here, why not pass on our research to him? He’ll refine and elevate our work.”

Master Ma suggested.

“Agreed.”

Master Luo didn’t even hesitate. “Nothing is more gratifying than discovering a genius and nurturing them. You must’ve already predicted I’d be here and used this opportunity to propose a partnership, right? I bet some force got to you, and you realized you couldn’t face it alone—so you came to me.”

“Exactly.” Master Ma smiled.

Su Jie picked up on something—both masters were under some kind of pressure and had to unite.

“Wait.” Xu Qiaomu suddenly spoke: “Masters, this child is my grandson. That makes him family. Would you be willing to...”

“Old Xu, let me be blunt.” Master Ma cut in. “This child is a dragon. Even the four seas can hardly contain him—how could the tiny Xu family? A man of exceptional talent educates the world. A man of great talent governs the nation. A virtuous man revitalizes a region. A gifted man manages a household. Your Xu family needs only a gifted man. This boy would be wasted here. I actually came today to see if your family had any promising young men for my niece. Now that I’ve seen, I’m leaving.”

With that, he stood up. “Come, Manman, let’s go.”

“Master Ma, stay a few more days,” Xu Qiaomu said, clearly disappointed. He’d hoped to arrange a marriage alliance with the Zhang family—get one of his third-generation boys to connect with Zhang Manman, expand the Xu family’s business. But clearly, none of them impressed Master Ma. Instead, Su Jie—his external grandson—had been completely embraced and even praised as extraordinary.

“No, I’ve other matters.” Master Ma declined, then pulled Su Jie along. “Young brother, come with me—I have something to say. Old Luo, you coming?”

“Old Ma, are you trying to act all mysterious again?” Master Luo laughed and stood up. “Let’s talk outside.”

The four of them left the Xu household and walked to the village road.

“The Xu family’s luck is bad. I sense bloodshed. Don’t tell me you didn’t see it, Old Luo—why get involved?”

Master Ma pointed toward the Xu ancestral home. “It used to be a good place, but their own actions turned it into a cursed one.”

“They’re like a big tree rotting from the inside. Looks lush on the outside but can’t weather a storm. Once Xu Qiaomu dies, everything will fall apart. They do have some talents, but the timing isn’t right.”

Master Luo nodded. “But since they’re paying me, I’m here to fix things. If I hadn’t come, I wouldn’t have met this young man. It’s a blessing in disguise. But listen, kid—don’t get dragged into their mess. I can see your mother just barely escaped all this. Dragging her back in would be a huge mistake.”

“I agree.” Su Jie had already seen that the Xu family was trouble.

“Old Luo, once you finish your work with them, let’s regroup. You saw it—Su Jie is on the verge of a major breakthrough. If he crosses over, it’ll benefit us too.” Master Ma said. “If we can both break into the realm of the ‘living dead,’ our insight will deepen, our sixth sense will sharpen—and we won’t be so easily fooled or ambushed.”

“You’re right.”

Master Luo nodded and looked at Su Jie again like he was a priceless treasure. “I’ll go wrap up the Xu business.”

“Su Jie, come visit me sometime.” Zhang Manman invited him warmly.

“Definitely.” Su Jie said his goodbyes and returned to the Xu household with Master Luo.

Now, the second and third-generation Xu members looked at him completely differently.

Even Xu Qiaomu had mixed feelings. He’d once strongly resented Su Jie, because of Xu Ying’s long-ago rebellion and elopement.

“Why would this b*stard child win over both Ma and Luo? Could Xu Ying have staged this whole thing with them?” Xu Zide whispered to Xu Ziqiang.

“You think you could get those two to play along like that?” Xu Ziqiang was equally annoyed—but helpless.

“Master Luo, what do you think of my daughter?” Xu Qiaomu asked as Luo and Su Jie returned.

Master Luo smiled. “She’s talented, but not suited for the Xu family. You know full well—if your daughter were to take charge, how many would accept it? Your family has always been male-dominated. Go against that tradition, and disaster will strike. You know this. Anyway, I’ll now do the third task you asked of me—choose a capable talent from your family.”

As he spoke, he pointed to Xu Jiazhi.

Xu Jiazhi flinched and tried to shrink back.

“Jiazhi, come forward,” Xu Qiaomu ordered.

Xu Jiazhi had no choice but to step up.

“This young man is steady and composed. With proper guidance and some experience, he could handle important responsibilities,” said Master Luo.

“Oh?” Xu Qiaomu seemed thoughtful. Then he asked, “Then, Master Luo, could you point out the debt-collectors in the family? I will reward you handsomely.”

Whoosh!

Everyone’s face turned pale.

Su Jie suddenly felt a bit sorry for them—like ministers under a tyrant king. They had no freedom of their own.

Chapter 96: Doomed Beyond Redemption, Blinded by Greed

Whether it was the earlier posturing of Xu Zide, Xu Ziqiang, and Xu Ziming, or the overbearing arrogance of Xu Jiahao and Xu Jiaren, all of them now looked ashen, as though awaiting a final verdict.

Sure enough, the first person Master Luo pointed to was Xu Jiahao.

“This boy has the eyes of a snake and an untrustworthy mouth—lecherous and greedy. His ears stick out, a sign of constant trouble. I can clearly see his fate: in the future, because of women and powerful enemies, he’ll bring disaster upon your Xu family.”

At these words, Xu Jiahao went pale and nearly collapsed on the spot.

Master Luo didn’t pause for a moment. He pointed at Xu Jiahong next.

“This one is narrow-minded, ignorant, a hypocrite through and through. His face resembles a hawk or vulture—currently lying low and accumulating power. Once he rises, those closest to him will suffer. Worse, he bears the mark of betrayal—he will one day let the wolf into your house for his own gain. Be warned.”

Xu Jiahong’s expression changed drastically. Indeed, he had been maneuvering behind the scenes recently, and Master Luo had laid it bare with a single glance.

“And this one,” Master Luo turned to Xu Jiaren. “He’s cunning, a face like a deceitful ape or ghostly fox. He likes to read, but only scheming texts. A natural plotter. People like him in history were treacherous ministers—self-serving,

nation-damaging men like Cai Jing or Qin Hui. Yet his talent doesn't even come close to theirs. He'll bring nothing but ruin to your house.”

“I...” Xu Jiaren was about to speak when Xu Qiaomu suddenly roared, “Enough! Master Luo, continue!”

Master Luo paid him no mind and turned to Xu Mingde. Xu Zide felt a chill rising in his gut just as Master Luo’s merciless words followed: “This one has a hot temper and tunnel vision. Beady-eyed, selfish. A single selfish act from him is enough to poison the entire pot. He is a ruinous presence.”

Without pause, Master Luo pointed at Xu Ziqiang and Xu Ziming: “One has the face of a shameless weasel; the other looks like a crow feeding on corpses. I can foresee this—when you're on your deathbed, Xu Qiaomu, these two will wage war over your legacy, ensuring you die without peace. That’s all I’ll say. The rest of the family is passable—none can revive the house, but at least they won’t destroy it. I’ve pointed out your talent and your debt-collecting devils. My task is done.”

“Grandfather! You mustn’t believe this street charlatan!” Xu Jiaren suddenly burst out in tears.

“If Emperor Wu of Han hadn’t believed such people, there would’ve been no witchcraft disaster; if the First Emperor hadn’t trusted mystics, there would’ve been no Second Emperor's downfall! This fraud must’ve been sent by enemies of the Xu family. We’ve done so much for the family. We're managing key parts of the business. If you expel us all, the company will grind to a halt!”

Xu Qiaomu’s eyes flickered with hesitation.

Truthfully, the six Master Luo had singled out were indeed core pillars of the family business. Removing them all at once would leave a massive void—and if they rebelled, things could spiral out of control fast. If he were ten years younger, still in his prime, he could suppress the chaos. But now? He knew he was past that.

“Success or failure hinges on a single thought,” Master Luo said, standing. “Under Heaven’s will, all five skandhas are deluded. Few dare to overturn the cauldron. Xu Qiaomu, I’ve said all I came to say. Young man, shall we go?”

He was talking to Su Jie.

“Sure,” Su Jie replied, not keen to stick around the Xu family anyway. He glanced toward Xu Ying.

“Dad, I still have things to handle back home. I’ll visit again later,” Xu Ying said with a calm sharpness. She had instantly grasped what was going on. Originally, she and Su Jie had planned to spend the New Year here. Now she knew even one more day could be dangerous.

Without waiting for Xu Qiaomu’s approval, she and Su Jie hastily left the ancestral estate—Master Luo following close behind.

Their departure was like a pressure valve released. Many present let out a breath.

“Father, that damn Luo deliberately drove a wedge between us! After all the money we gave him!” Xu Ziqiang tried to comfort Xu Qiaomu—and to probe his thinking.

“Enough. You all leave.” Xu Qiaomu’s tone was cold. “Jiazhi, you stay.”

Everyone exchanged uneasy glances.

“What? You’re not listening? Planning a mutiny?” Xu Qiaomu’s voice turned icy.

Xu Ziming knew the old man was truly furious now and dared not cross him. He promptly left.

Meanwhile, in the village, Master Luo, Xu Ying, and Su Jie climbed into Luo’s private vehicle. Spacious inside, it came with a driver and was tailed by a convoy of identical vehicles filled with bodyguards and aides. Master Luo’s entourage far outclassed that of Master Ma.

“You’re a woman, yet you act decisively. Had you been tied down by family ties, staying in the Xu family would’ve dragged your son down with you,” Master Luo said to Xu Ying, nodding in approval.

“My father is completely past his prime,” Xu Ying replied. “His hesitation just now said everything. I once thought he brought me into the company to help cleanse the rot with his backing. But he doesn't even dare make a move himself—how could I? I'm done with the Xu family. We're through.”

In that moment, Su Jie truly saw his mother's potential as a powerful woman.

Xu Ying had sharp instincts. In this brief clash, she had already diagnosed Xu Qiaomu's loss of decisive leadership. The Xu family's pillar had collapsed. What remained were scoundrels gnawing at its foundations. Without her father's support, she knew she couldn't reverse the tide.

“I merely pointed out the cancers,” Master Luo said. “But that also hastened the Xu family's internal collapse. If Xu Qiaomu had the guts to cut off the rotten limbs immediately, there'd still be hope. But if he keeps hesitating, those six will grow desperate. The whole house could fall—and Xu Qiaomu might die early.”

Xu Ying frowned, deeply disturbed.

She understood—today, when Master Luo named Xu Zide, Xu Ziqiang, Xu Ziming, and their sons Xu Jiahao, Xu Jiaren, and Xu Jiahong as debt-collecting devils, he had shattered something unspoken within the Xu family. There was no going back.

“Master Luo, do you think Jiazhi, whom my father favors, can help turn things around?” Xu Ying asked.

“He has potential,” Luo replied. “Calm and steady by nature. But his foundations are still shallow. He can’t hold the family up—though a miracle is always possible.”

“Let’s go. Your son Su Jie is a dragon among men. There’s no reason for him to be trapped in the Xu family’s swamp. The world is wide—let him soar.”

Su Jie was slightly embarrassed by the praise.

In truth, he didn’t think much of himself. Sure, he was always top of the class and decent at martial arts, but he hadn’t solved much at home, and his sister was still stuck in a pit of wolves.

“Su Jie, follow Master Luo and Master Ma’s guidance. I’m heading back,” Xu Ying said. She knew Luo and Ma were extraordinary figures. If they were willing to teach Su Jie, it was an immense stroke of fortune.

Several hours later, they arrived in G City. Xu Ying boarded a flight to S City, while Master Luo flew with Su Jie to B City.

B City—northern powerhouse, true national hub—stood shoulder to shoulder with S City in global influence.

All the country's top universities were concentrated in B City.

After landing, they were picked up and driven to an old courtyard residence. Su Jie stepped inside and felt an immediate calm. The design was simple, the atmosphere serene. He didn't understand feng shui, but could sense the deep harmony—the place resonated with heaven, earth, and humanity.

This was architectural art.

“The ‘I Ching’ teaches us to observe all under heaven—to use mountains and rivers to cultivate our temperament, and reach unity with the cosmos,” Master Luo explained. “Look at mountains: learn nobility. Look at the vast earth: gain a heart that bears all. When your spirit merges with the world, there's no distinction. That mental state even surpasses what some call the ‘living dead.’”

“But Master Ma says that surpassing the living dead's mindset means attaining the Diamond Sutra's teaching—no self, no others, no sentient beings, no lifespan,” Su Jie mused in the courtyard. “It's the insight into impermanence and the undying essence. But Confucianism teaches unity with heaven and man. I don't know which is higher.”

“That’s for the wise to debate,” Master Luo said. “Unity with heaven and man is the root of our civilization—it sees man and universe as one. Zen Buddhism teaches that all is empty—even heaven and earth. It’s an eternal philosophical puzzle. You’ll have to explore it yourself. Ma Fengnian and I often discuss this question.”

Su Jie fell into thought.

Philosophy, truly, was deep—far deeper than any science. It was the key to how we think.

“Su Jie, you’re not even eighteen, yet already this accomplished. That’s one reason I chose you—but not the main one,” Master Luo said. “What matters most is your integrity: your actions match your beliefs, your spirit is righteous. You’re still green, yes, but as long as you stay true, you’ll achieve greatness. In today’s terms—your worldview, values, and outlook are all on point. I’ve seen many talented youths, but they were arrogant, extreme, or emotionally cold. You, though—you’re just right.”

Chapter 97: Unity of Heaven and Man, Refining the True Spirit

“Master Luo, are you going to teach me feng shui architecture this time?” Su Jie asked earnestly.

“Not just that. I also hold a PhD in brain anatomy from MIT,” Master Luo replied. “You can call me Master Luo. I’ve been researching psychology and the structure of the human brain for years, hoping to uncover the secrets of spiritual cultivation through scientific means. When humans observe the heavens and the earth, they naturally feel emotions. Emotions cause fluctuations in thought, which in turn reflect in the cerebral cortex, ultimately affecting the entire body—even one’s lifespan. External factors influence emotion, and emotion influences longevity. This is a holistic science bridging the spiritual and biological aspects of the human body. Right now, you’re not just an excellent student—you’re also an ideal research subject. The paper I recently published anonymously in a scientific journal was on this topic. Actually, in this field, Old Ma is slightly stronger than I am, but I have my own unique insights.”

“I heard that you and Master Ma were both threatened and had to team up. Is that true? Who would dare threaten you?” Su Jie asked.

“It’s an evil international force. They’ve been hunting down top professionals and elite scholars in every field to coerce them into working on their research—even going as far as restricting their freedom. Old Ma and I nearly got kidnapped while abroad. And now, their influence seems to be slowly creeping into the country,” Master Luo said. “My expertise lies mainly in architecture, though I also do brain research. Old Ma is a true master in psychology. We’ve both trained in martial arts too, but when it comes to real operatives skilled in kidnapping and assassination, we’re nowhere near that level.”

“There’s actually such an evil force out there? Could it be related to the dark web?” Su Jie suddenly thought of Feng Hengyi.

“You know about the dark web?” Master Luo looked slightly surprised. “Well, I suppose that’s not unexpected. Actually, the Xu family has already been infiltrated by people from the dark web. I went to their estate to do a feng shui reading, but

the real goal was to sniff out clues about this evil force. They're incredibly powerful—leveraging the dark web as a platform, issuing cryptocurrency, and gaining serious momentum. They've even been acknowledged by global financial markets. With money in hand, they immediately launched into action, driven by massive ambition. Who knows what their true goals are.”

“Were you able to identify any problematic individuals within the Xu family?” Su Jie asked, intrigued.

“Everyone I pointed out had issues,” Master Luo said. “Alright, enough of that for now. Old Ma will be here soon, and we’ll talk it over together. Since they’ve come knocking, we’ve got to fight back. Otherwise, if their influence keeps expanding and they set their sights on us, things will get ugly fast. You're good at martial arts and have a solid character. If you level up a bit more, you’ll be a powerful ally for us.”

He wasn’t wrong. Su Jie’s martial prowess now made him virtually untouchable by three to five grown men at once. His physical conditioning alone was enough to make even national-level professional fighter Zhou Chun struggle to break through. Master Luo had a keen eye—Su Jie did have the potential to become a "super soldier."

Even more impressively, Su Jie’s spiritual cultivation had reached the state of "seeming death but not death"—so rare that not one in tens of millions could attain it. With just one more step into the “living dead” state, his brain and physical capabilities would be pushed to unimaginable extremes.

As a brain specialist, Master Luo understood just how powerful the brain could become in this state—thought processes lightning fast, reflexes razor-sharp, almost as if endowed with a sixth sense to perceive danger or fortune. That level of cognitive function made TV “superbrain” contestants look like amateurs.

That was the real "super brain."

And that's not even mentioning the physical improvements.

On top of that, Su Jie was still young, with years of room to grow. His potential was enormous—even a decade from now, he'd still be improving.

"Hahaha..."

Just then, a familiar voice echoed in the courtyard.

Master Ma had arrived—bringing Zhang Manman along with him.

"Old Ma, you're quick on your feet," Master Luo said.

"Old Luo, I have to admit, your feng shui skills are above mine. Just looking at the layout of this courtyard makes that clear," Master Ma nodded while surveying the area. "This trouble we're in—it's serious. I foresee bloodshed. The only way to break the calamity is through the calamity itself, and Su Jie is the key."

“Old Ma, you’re at it again with your mystical talk. We do have problems, and yes, bloodshed might be inevitable. Su Jie can help us—but only if he grows stronger,” Master Luo said. “But all of this is founded on strength and intelligence. I’m a staunch materialist.”

“Old Luo, this world contains both idealism and materialism—neither can be discarded. Take a human being for example: the body is material, the soul is ideal. Without a soul, the body is just a walking corpse. Like a computer—the hardware is the body, the operating system is the soul. No OS, and the computer’s useless. No hardware, and the OS doesn’t even exist,” Master Ma retorted.

“Alright, uncles, this isn’t the time for debate,” Zhang Manman interrupted. “My father said the d@rk web organization is expanding rapidly and beginning to infiltrate the outside world. Their first targets are elite professionals, especially those in science. You two are scientists, yet you hide behind the façade of martial arts masters. But ironically, that just makes you more enticing to them.”

“We are martial arts masters,” Master Luo countered. “We’re the inheritors of ancient traditional culture. Scientific research is just our means of deepening that understanding—not a contradiction.”

“Enough,” Master Ma waved it off. “Let’s get to work. Old Luo, we’ve known each other for ages, but never really collaborated. Oddly enough, it’s this evil force that finally made us put aside our differences.”

“That’s true,” Master Luo nodded. “I know your concern—you’ve accumulated years of research and wisdom, and you haven’t found the right heir. If something were to happen to you, it would all be lost. And even if you wanted to pass it on, not many people could even understand it. That’s why you want to hand it down to this young man.”

“And you’re any different?” Master Ma shot back. “Didn’t you have a disciple named Zhang Jinchuan? Weren’t you going to pass your teachings on to him? What happened to that?”

“Zhang Jinchuan?” Su Jie remembered him—a fellow high school senior from B City. He was also the national champion of the Xixin Cup poetry competition.

That event had been televised. Zhang Jinchuan handled every poem and literary reference effortlessly, discussing thousands of years of culture as if it were casual conversation. His brain seemed like a live search engine—Su Jie had been stunned. Even Qian Zheng had entered that contest, but ran into Zhang Jinchuan and was totally outclassed.

Su Jie hadn’t realized Zhang Jinchuan was Master Luo’s student.

“Yes, Zhang Jinchuan is my disciple. His talent might even surpass Su Jie’s,” Luo said. “But he’s too scheming. I don’t want to pass on my true teachings to someone like that. Speaking of which, don’t you have a disciple named Xiao Mo?”

“Xiao Mo is indeed my last disciple, and he’s meant to inherit my legacy—but he’s still too young, a minor. If Su Jie can master my teachings, he could pass them down to Xiao Mo in the future,” Master Ma shook his head. “Ugh, what am I saying? Talking like I’m already dying...”

Master Luo frowned. “Words spoken unintentionally often become prophecy. We both need to be careful.”

In a Xu family residence.

Xu Qiaomu sat in a wheelchair. Standing behind him like a statue was Xu Ba, his iron-willed bodyguard, gripping the chair handles without moving a muscle.

Xu Jiazhi stood silently in front of his grandfather, waiting for him to speak.

“Jiazhi,” Xu Qiaomu finally said, “Master Luo says you’re talented. What do you think?”

“Grandfather, I just try to do my job. I’ve never had any ulterior motives. Actually, my older brothers aren’t the incompetent freeloaders that Luo makes them out to be. He’s exaggerating,” Xu Jiazhi said quickly.

“Master Luo has advised dozens of family heads without a single miscalculation. He’s even helped them through serious crises. You think he earned the title of ‘Master’ for nothing? If he says they’re debt-collecting leeches, then they are,” Xu Qiaomu’s eyes gleamed slyly. “Jiazhi, I want you to manage the company now. Are you ready?”

“No,” Xu Jiazhi answered without hesitation. “Honestly, you could have Aunt Xu Ying run it. Both Luo and Ma speak highly of her son—he probably has what it takes to elevate the Xu family.”

“Xu Ying is my daughter, yes. But once a woman marries out, she’s no longer one of us. Her son may be capable, but he doesn’t carry the Xu name,” Xu Qiaomu said. “I called her back just to give her some shares and cash, maybe have her help clean house. But if she doesn’t want it, fine. We still have to rely on our own. Jiazhi, I know you’ve been hiding your abilities. Master Luo said you were talented—he underestimated you. You’re at least a prodigy.”

“You flatter me, Grandpa,” Xu Jiazhi said, waving his hands humbly.

“Flattered or not, the responsibility’s yours now. I’ve decided—within the year, you’ll take over management of the company. And those six debt-collecting leeches will be kicked out,” Xu Qiaomu said. “Master Luo probably called you a talent just to protect you. The Xu family isn’t in decline yet, but in three to five years, our industries will stagnate. We need to transform immediately.”

“For the family, I won’t refuse,” Xu Jiazhi said. “But those men... they’re still my uncles and cousins. How can I be so ruthless?”

“To achieve great things, you must be utterly ruthless,” Xu Qiaomu said coldly. “I won’t live much longer. Until then, I’ll help you establish your authority. One year—that’s all you get. You must be ruthless. If Emperor Taizong hadn’t killed his brothers and forced his father to abdicate, there would’ve been no Golden Age of Zhenguan. If Yongzheng hadn’t eliminated his siblings, the Qing Dynasty wouldn’t have lasted three centuries. Also—get in touch with Su Jie. Offer him something. I’ve heard he’s had run-ins with those leeches. Use that. Let him help you take them down.”

“Grandfather, considering how much Master Luo and Master Ma value Su Jie—even teaching him personally—I think we should recruit him into the company,” Xu Jiazhi said cautiously.

“He’s too young to command respect. And more importantly, he doesn’t carry the Xu name—he’s not guaranteed to be loyal to us,” Xu Qiaomu said. “Still, given how Luo and Ma treat him, he’ll probably soar in three to five years. Keep a good relationship with him. Don’t make an enemy out of him.”

“I understand. Even just leveraging his connections through Luo and Ma could be immensely valuable,” Xu Jiazhi said.

“Exactly,” Xu Qiaomu narrowed his eyes. “I’m curious to see if this Su Jie is truly a once-in-a-generation talent... Anyway, enough of that. As for Xu Ying, let her be. I’ll revise my will and make it official. Remember—those six debt collectors must be crushed. Don’t give them a second chance.”

Chapter 98: Decisive Action – Infant State in the Womb

When he heard those words, Xu Zhijie felt a chill rise in his heart. Still, he welcomed it—it was, in fact, a good sign for him. And honestly, he wasn't worried that Xu Qiaomu was trying to test him.

Xu Qiaomu was extremely superstitious, especially when it came to anything said by Master Luo. He practically treated it as divine revelation.

And since Master Luo's ancestors had once helped Emperor Kangxi choose a successor, that only added to his credibility in Xu Qiaomu's eyes.

Since Xu Qiaomu had made up his mind, Xu Zhijie decided to go all in.

He also understood clearly that whether it was Xu Zhide, Xu Zhiqiang, or Xu Zhiming—they all held massive sway in the family company. Each of them managed significant affairs, with deeply rooted power and influence. As a younger member of the family with no real prestige, even with Xu Qiaomu's support, he'd still be walking a tightrope.

But if he could stabilize the situation and turn things around quickly, it would prove his real capabilities.

“I’ll convene an immediate shareholders’ conference call and remove them from their company positions. Then I’ll promote you,” Xu Qiaomu said with his signature decisiveness. “Also, you’ll need people around you.”

As he spoke, he pointed at the wheelchair beside him.

The deaf-mute man, Xu Ba, seemed to understand the gesture. He pressed a button on the intercom on his chest, seemingly triggering an alert.

Soon after, the sound of footsteps approached.

They were remarkably uniform—military-like. A few dozen people gathered in the courtyard.

Xu Zhijie looked over and saw that these individuals exuded the aura of people who had seen combat. Some had deep scars on their faces, even visible bullet wounds. Every one of them looked deadly, as if there was nothing they wouldn’t do.

“These are the true elite security forces of our Xu family. They can help you get a lot of things done. Even in modern society, sometimes you need force. Especially during an internal power shift—people play dirty.” Xu Qiaomu said, “You’ll be in charge of them now. Show me your plan.”

“Yes, Grandfather.” Xu Zhijie was thrilled but quickly composed himself. He began issuing orders immediately: “Twenty of you, go watch Xu Jieren, Xu Jiahao, Xu Jiahong, Xu Zhiqiang, Xu Zhide, and Xu Zhiming. Confiscate all their communication devices. Confine them to their rooms and tell them it's a financial audit. The rest of you, come with me to company HQ. We're convening a department heads meeting and sending out an all-staff email announcing the suspension of those six. Then we begin a full internal audit. Move fast. It's only been a few dozen minutes—they won't have had time to react. They're probably huddled up nearby right now. We can catch them all in one net.”

“Yes, sir!”

The team responded instantly and sprang into action.

“Very good,” Xu Qiaomu laughed. “Master Luo said you were talented—I'd say you're a genius. He told me to pick you, and it looks like I made the right call. You must have trusted subordinates of your own, right? Bring them out. I know you've been quietly building your own network.”

“Grandfather, you saw through me long ago,” Xu Zhijie felt a chill in his heart.

“I'm in a position to see everything clearly from above. Nobody's sneaky moves escape me,” Xu Qiaomu said. “Now go—no time to waste.”

Swish, swish, swish!

Xu Zhijie led the team out the door.

Xu Qiaomu watched his back, a strange expression crossing his face.

A moment later, someone entered—it was Huang Dingyi.

Huang Dingyi sat down without ceremony. “Zhijie’s got real ability. I underestimated him before. Looks like he’s ambitious deep down.”

“You were the first one to make contact with my grandson Su Jie, and you’ve protected him ever since,” Xu Qiaomu said. “How do you think Zhijie compares to him? Why are Master Ma and Master Luo so high on Su Jie? I don’t see what’s so great about the kid. If it’s just that he can fight, then I don’t buy it. Sure, being good at martial arts is nice, but it’s not that useful in today’s world. What really matters is brains.”

“Zhijie is far inferior to him,” Huang Dingyi shook his head. “Of course, I only chatted with Su Jie briefly, so I don’t know him that well. I was worried he might be from the Typhon Training Camp—the kind that can kill without anyone knowing. On the surface, I was protecting him, but I was really protecting your younger family members. Still, his demeanor and temperament came across as

sincere and steady—very easy to get along with. Zhijie, by contrast, appears mild but is full of ambition and constantly scheming. If I had to choose a partner, I'd pick Su Jie over Zhijie any day. That instinct—I trust it."

"Your instincts have saved us from many attacks abroad," Xu Qiaomu said. He and Huang Dingyi were longtime friends and spoke without pretense. "Dingyi, now that I've taken care of those people, what do you think about the future of the family company?"

"It's not going to be that simple," Huang said flatly.

Sure enough, Xu Zhijie returned shortly afterward. "Grandfather, Xu Jiahong is missing—left the family estate and his whereabouts are unknown. The others were indeed holed up in a room talking. They've been placed under house arrest."

"Only Jiahong got away? That's no big deal—he won't make any waves," Xu Qiaomu said indifferently. "Go back to HQ. Audit everything. If we find holes, press charges and send them to prison. If we don't, fire them. We'll deal with the rest later."

"Yes." Xu Zhijie left again.

"Whew.." Xu Jiahong was gasping for breath.

He was in a car speeding down the road. Beside him sat Ah Ding, an instructor from the Honey Badger Training Camp.

"That was close," Xu Jiahong looked pale. Then he gritted his teeth. "Can't believe the old man went that far—put us under house arrest and started auditing the books just because of some fortune-teller's words. He's ready to destroy his own sons and grandsons. He must've gone off the deep end thinking he's Emperor Kangxi or something."

"The Xu family's total assets are huge—practically a business empire. Sure, it's not one of those trillion-dollar behemoths, but it's still a mini-kingdom," Ah Ding replied. "You still have a shot at turning things around—it depends on how you use what you've got."

"Turn things around? How?" Xu Jiahong had no confidence.

"Relax. I'll help you. After all, you've been running things for a while and have access to sensitive info. That alone will make Xu Qiaomu hesitate. We're in a society governed by law now—not the clan-based rule of the past. Even if they want to take you down, it starts with removing you from your post, then auditing you, then accusing you of embezzlement or breach of trust. After that, they call the cops and you're looking at jail. That process is full of loopholes we can exploit. So don't panic."

Meanwhile, as the Xu family erupted into chaos, Su Jie had no idea—and he didn't care.

Though the Xu family was his mother's side, he felt like a stranger to them, with no sense of belonging or affection. His mother had originally wanted to help the family a little, hoping to get some money to help his sister, Su Muchen, out of her troubles. But after seeing the internal strife, she felt disillusioned and finally made up her mind to stay out of the muck.

That put Su Jie at ease.

He went back to studying with Masters Luo and Ma in peace.

This was a rare learning opportunity.

After a brief chat, he followed Master Luo into the basement.

Unexpectedly, the basement of this courtyard was a research lab. It had medical equipment and computers—looked very expensive. Su Jie even saw robotic surgical arms, the kind used in high-end hospitals for precision operations.

He had no idea why Master Luo had all this gear.

“This machine wasn’t cheap. It’s used for nerve repair surgery,” Master Ma nodded after inspecting it. “Are you researching neuroscience?”

“This machine isn’t even the precise one. The truly advanced ones can do head transplants,” Master Luo replied. “Head transplants—that’s the true boundary between soul and flesh. I haven’t done it myself, but I’ve studied it. This robotic arm was actually repurposed for massage and acupuncture. Right now, the best massage therapist in the country is probably that blind guy from Minglun Martial Arts Academy. But even he isn’t as precise as this machine.”

“Massage?” Su Jie was confused.

His body conditioning had started with Odell’s impact training, which evenly distributed force across every muscle and inch of skin—something only top-tier coaches could do. Later, Uncle Mang had massaged him.

But he never expected Master Luo to use robotic surgical arms for massage.

Truthfully, in certain surgeries, even the best lead surgeons can’t compete with robotic arms. They don’t get tired, they’re ultra-precise, and they avoid even the tiniest nerves and blood vessels.

“Head transplants were hyped up years ago. They say they’ve already succeeded. I still find it hard to believe,” said Zhang Manman. “Sounds like something only underworld judges in old Chinese ghost stories could pull off. Who knows what kind of crazy tech we’ll see in a few decades.”

“The hardest part of a head transplant is connecting spinal nerves and preventing rejection. That takes extreme precision,” said Master Ma. “It really is mind-blowing. In ancient times, this would be considered divine magic. Anyway, let’s focus—Lao Luo, turning a surgical robot into an acupuncture masseur is basically like carrying a master therapist around. Let me take a look at your research.”

“Actually, I wanted to exchange some findings with you today,” said Master Luo. “I’ve been researching how to return the human psyche to a state like that of an unborn infant in the womb.”

“That’s a topic worth pursuing,” Master Ma’s eyes lit up. “In Daoist practice, returning to the prenatal state is a major concept. The Classic of the Way and its Power says, ‘Can you become as soft and yielding as an infant?’ That’s the essence of cultivation. I’ve been exploring that too. Looks like we’re on the same path.”

“How do you even research that?” Su Jie had always dreamed of studying life sciences. He thought topics like these were something he’d only encounter in grad school or during a PhD under a mentor—never did he imagine he’d get to explore them now.

Chapter 99: Switching Between Two Modes of Cultivation

“There are many fascinating insights from ancient times. Take traditional Chinese medicine, for example—many formulas are remarkably effective. When examined using modern scientific methods, we can uncover some truly intriguing things. The pity is, back then, people didn’t understand what components were in a given remedy, what its molecular structure was, how it combined, or what chemical reactions it triggered once absorbed by the body. There was no chemistry, no molecular theory, no microbiology—only experience to rely on,” said Master Luo. “But in essence, it was all science, a step-by-step search for truth. Even something like ancient feng shui, when analyzed through modern architecture, can reveal many useful findings.”

“Exactly. Su Jie, remember this well,” said Master Ma. “Though people call us masters and say we’re mystical, deep down, we’re simply trying to draw insights from traditional culture and use a scientific lens to uncover truth. The ancients were practical. Through repeated experimentation, they found things that worked, but due to their limited worldview, they didn’t know the underlying principles. Now that we understand those principles, we can refine and innovate. Science is nothing more than a process of using strict logic to explore truth—and prove that it is truth.”

Su Jie listened, deep in thought.

“Alright, let’s move on to our research,” said Master Luo. “When a fetus is in the womb, it possesses a form of consciousness and can perceive external stimuli. The problem is, the brain at that stage doesn’t store memories, which is why we can’t recall anything from early childhood, let alone from when we were still in the

womb. Ancient cultivators believed that returning to that fetal mental state—called the ‘prenatal state’—would greatly enhance one’s vitality. But how to return to that state? No one really knew. Many ancient cultivation methods aimed to achieve it—through meditation, holding one’s breath, even inducing brief oxygen deprivation to trigger fainting—but none offered a clear, repeatable path. Some people stumbled into it by chance, but no systematic method ever emerged. In other words, it couldn’t be replicated. That’s the real shame. And whether returning to that state can actually enhance the body is still an open question. There are ancient cases, yes—but modern ones are practically nonexistent.”

“Science tells us that people can’t form memories during the fetal stage,” said Master Ma. “But at the Royal Hypnosis Association, we’ve done a lot of clinical trials. Under deep hypnosis, people can recall events from the womb—and sometimes even past lives.”

“There’s really such a thing as past lives?” Zhang Manman raised an eyebrow. “This is starting to sound pretty far-fetched.”

“Well, that’s more of a psychological phenomenon. My own research doesn’t support literal past lives. It’s likely a kind of mental simulation, similar to dreaming. For example, when I was treating a patient abroad, he often dreamed of a specific place, describing its people and scenery in vivid detail. He’d never been there. But when I went myself—it was exactly as he described,” said Master Ma. “That’s a real case. The mind is astonishing. There’s still so much science hasn’t touched. That’s why we’re explorers.”

“I need your clinical data to support my project,” said Master Luo. “How can we get someone to return to a fetal state—whether through specific exercises, hypnosis, or intense mental suggestion—and what changes occur in the body as a result? This falls into psychology, and that’s your domain. Now, I need Su Jie to be our test subject. But before we begin, let’s go over fetal development.”

As he spoke, Master Luo opened a door to another room. The space inside was oddly shaped and pitch black—unsettling at first glance.

“This room is designed to mimic a womb. Once you’ve studied the material, you’ll go in and use powerful mental suggestion to imagine yourself as an unborn fetus. That’s the true cultivation,” said Master Luo. “Both you and Zhang Manman will try it.”

“Another dark room?” Su Jie gave a wry smile. He’d once been locked in a dark room by Uncle Mang and gone from pain and despair to peace. It had helped him break through to the second stage of the Great Corpse State: ‘Neither Dead Nor Alive.’

Now, it was time for another round in the dark room.

But this was a scientific experiment, not mysticism.

Martial arts cultivation was the same way.

The ancients knew the benefits of the fetal state but didn’t understand the principles. Modern science does.

For example, we now know how the fetal cerebral cortex functions, how nutrients are absorbed, how the body grows—all backed by data.

It's like ancient medicine: everyone knew ginseng was the king of herbs and extremely nourishing. But what exactly in ginseng provides the benefit? How does the body absorb it? The ancients had no idea. Modern science can break it down, analyze it, and even extract the active components to deliver them via injection rather than oral intake—making it even more effective.

That's where we've outpaced the ancients.

The best example is artemisinin. The ancients discovered that *Artemisia annua* could treat dysentery—it's even recorded in the *Emergency Prescriptions Kept Up One's Sleeve*. But they didn't know which substance in it was responsible. They simply boiled it, often with limited results.

Modern Chinese scientists, guided by that ancient clue, extracted artemisinin using modern methods.

The ancients pointed the way. Modern science confirmed the truth.

Since taking up martial arts, Su Jie had studied ancient manuals while integrating modern combat theory and scientific research. He often reflected deeply—drawing parallels between kung fu and every other field.

Traditional medicine and modern medicine. Feng shui and architecture.
Cultivation and meditation vs. psychology.

It's all a search for truth.

There's nothing mystical about it.

Master Luo and Master Ma began teaching Zhang Manman and Su Jie about the fetal state—how the mind might enter it via suggestion, and what that meant physiologically.

Zhang Manman absorbed the concepts slowly.

Su Jie, on the other hand, progressed rapidly.

In just a few days, he had learned a tremendous amount.

Then, it was time for the “dark room.”

Inside, instead of sprawling out as in the Great Corpse State, he curled up like a fetus—like a comma, or a tadpole.

He began mentally suggesting to himself that he was still unborn, still in the womb.

Most people don't have the psychological resilience for this kind of self-suggestion. Even if they try, they can't truly enter the state. But Su Jie's capacity for psychological self-suggestion far exceeded the average. That was one of his greatest assets in martial arts.

The "intent" in martial arts is a form of strong self-suggestion—it activates emotional and hormonal responses in an instant, unleashing strength and speed far beyond the norm.

"He's in the state. His physiological readings are almost identical to those of a fetus—though not a perfect match," said Master Ma, observing the data with Master Luo.

Zhang Manman was impressed. "Su Jie is amazing. His self-suggestion is so intense—I'm nowhere near his level." She had been doing her own experiments, but no matter how much she tried, her physiological markers were far off from fetal parameters.

In martial arts terms, that meant her “intent” training was shallow—hardly enough for mastery.

“Self-suggestion is intent in martial arts,” said Master Ma. “The deeper the suggestion, the deeper the skill. But the key is being able to exit the state at will. Otherwise, you end up mentally unstable. I treated someone who went off the rails during training. He thought he was a snake and would hiss all day. He couldn’t snap out of the self-suggestion. It took everything I had to bring him back.”

“Yeah, my dad told me that’s what the ancients called ‘qi deviation,’” said Zhang Manman. “Going too deep into a state and losing touch with reality.”

“That’s why ancient martial artists always trained under a master’s watchful eye. Technique errors were one thing—psychological issues were much worse. Even modern fighters need therapists,” said Master Ma. “Su Jie, though, can enter and exit the state in a heartbeat. That’s incredibly rare. Your father was the same way—but not at Su Jie’s age.”

“He’s extraordinary,” said Master Luo. “Really impressive. Old Ma, neither of us had that level of mental control, did we?”

“This is just like the line from Journey to the West: ‘Able to be kind, able to be wicked; whether saint or devil is up to him. In goodness, he’s a Buddha or an immortal—in evil, he grows horns and fur.’” said Master Ma. “Give it a month. As we record his physiological data, we’ll likely gain a lot of insight. And during this process, we can pass on some of our knowledge to him. Multiple wins in one go.”

“Su Jie’s physical condition is clearly improving,” said Master Luo. “The fetal state involves curling up, while the Great Corpse State is all about stretching out. Switching between the two mental states and postures is making his body even stronger. This has to be documented. Looks like our hypothesis was right.”

Su Jie used to sleep in the Great Corpse State—fully spread out.

Now, he alternated unconsciously—sprawling for a while, then curling into a fetal position, then sprawling again.

And with every switch, his body became more comfortable, more powerful.

Chapter 100: The Innate State: Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qi Gong

"According to various data, this fetal-like psychological suggestion is extremely effective. It allows a person's mental state to enter its deepest fluctuations and return to the innate state."

As the days passed, Su Jie continued working with Ma and Luo—the two “professors”—conducting experiments and studying. He changed his sleep habits

and gradually found a unique world between stretching and curling up. Compared to simply using the "corpse-sprawled" method, it had an added layer of mystery.

The Great Corpse State involved treating oneself like a dead body—but still being alive.

However, the state of a fetus in the womb was even more fascinating—seemingly hovering between life and death.

Now, through various cultivation practices and intense psychological suggestion, Su Jie had made his state closely resemble that of a fetus in the womb. This gradually began to awaken some extraordinary abilities.

“Marvelous. Absolutely marvelous.”

In the room, Su Jie, Master Ma, and Zhang Manman were watching a playback video of Su Jie sleeping.

His previous sleep posture resembled an empty sack—swelling with inhalation, collapsing with exhalation.

But now, it had subtly changed. At first, he lay flat like a corpse. Then, with the rhythm of his breathing, he gradually curled into a fetal position, then slowly

stretched out, growing day by day, until he reached the peak of growth—then reverted to the corpse-like state of the sprawl method.

This entire process completed in six hours, resembling the experience of life from death, and death from life—a full cycle.

“Our theory was right after all,” Master Ma said as he looked at the data. “In just these few days, your physical performance has increased by ten percent. It’s nothing short of a miracle.”

“I used to think I had hit a plateau, but in fact, all my physical and performance metrics have improved significantly,” Su Jie said, looking at the test results, unable to deny that he had advanced again.

However, he still hadn't broken through to the realm of the “Living Dead.”

But he could feel that he was getting closer and closer.

“The Great Corpse State is about treating yourself like a corpse and sensing death. The fetal simulation, on the other hand, is about going from death back to life. In Chinese culture, we value the concept of reincarnation and rebirth. You’re moving from corpse to fetus—completing a cycle. Then, as the fetus grows and again becomes a corpse, it’s equivalent to living an entire life,” said Master Luo.

“In many research institutions abroad, they’ve found that fetuses are natural geniuses. They learn and comprehend incredibly fast—only to forget everything at birth. But with certain prenatal education methods, it's possible to deeply engrave

knowledge into the fetus's subconscious, allowing them to retain instincts that benefit them for life," he continued.

"Indeed, the most ideal time for education is during the prenatal phase. Unfortunately, research on fetal education worldwide is still in its infancy. We don't yet know how to implant correct knowledge and concepts into a fetus's subconscious to make sure they retain it post-birth," Master Ma added. "When it comes to physical training, international experts currently divide it into three stages: flexibility and mobility training before losing baby teeth at age 6 or 7, explosive physical development before 17 or 18, and combined physical-mental training in adulthood. But they're missing the most important stage—prenatal."

"My research materials show that the fetal mental state is extremely pure—its receptiveness far surpasses that of the average adult. That's because there's no external interference in the womb; the mind is completely undistracted," Luo said, jotting down more insights. "That's why many experts are exploring how adults might return to that fetal mental state, and they've conducted many experiments."

"Ancient cultivation practices emphasized exactly this—returning to the innate, becoming like a baby," Su Jie said.

"Exactly. The ancients noticed this as well and conducted systematic studies, recording their conclusions," Master Ma nodded. "This time, Old Luo and I exchanged our findings and uncovered a lot of new knowledge. Your training in this area validates our research."

“The alternation between the Great Corpse State and fetal simulation does feel far superior to just corpse meditation alone,” Su Jie nodded. “Each session is like a complete cycle.”

“Your biggest obstacle now is a lack of innate advantage,” Master Luo looked at him. “The ideal training path begins with fetal education, then development before the age of six or seven. But you didn’t start training until age sixteen. Those earlier two phases are missing. Compared to some of the most formidable individuals out there, you’ve got a big gap. Fortunately, you’re making up for it through relentless effort.”

This made Su Jie think of Feng Hengyi. Had he started training "from the womb"?

“Well, this round of experiments has laid a more solid foundation for your comprehension of the ‘Living Dead’ realm. Next, you’ll need to intensify your external training too,” said Master Ma. “Old Luo, time to bring out the good stuff.”

“It’s not all that great,” Master Luo said modestly as he opened a secret folder on his computer. A video started playing—with a foreigner explaining how to train in “Golden Bell Cover,” “Iron Shirt,” “Thirteen Protectors External Training,” and “Hard Qi Gong,” among others.

“This foreigner?”

Su Jie instantly recognized the man in the video—it was Odell.

In the instructional video, Odell gave detailed explanations of the physiological and psychological secrets behind external training methods.

He concluded in fluent Chinese: “I’ve named this set of training techniques the ‘Thirteen Protectors External Training Golden Bell Cover Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qi Gong.’”

“Why such a long name?” Su Jie was stunned, then burst out laughing—it reminded him of absurd movie names like ‘Nine Heavens Ten Earths Bodhisattva Head-Shake Lightning-Fist Thunder-Palm’.

“In combat, durability is key. That’s widely accepted now. Traditional Chinese martial arts also placed heavy emphasis on this. Over centuries of experimentation, a wide variety of methods were developed—most famously the Golden Bell Cover, Iron Shirt, Thirteen Protectors External Training, and various forms of Hard Qi Gong,” said Master Luo. “Ma and I have also studied this area, but not as deeply as this foreigner. His name is Odell, nicknamed ‘The Godmaker.’ The champions he’s trained have top-tier resistance to damage.”

“Why’s it called Thirteen Protectors External Training?” Zhang Manman asked.

“The Thirteen Protectors refers to a historical figure—Li Cunxiao, a famed general from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. There’s a saying: ‘No king surpasses Xiang Yu, no general surpasses Li.’ Xiang Yu was the Hegemon-King of Western Chu. Li refers to Li Cunxiao, who was the thirteenth-ranked son and held

the title of Taibao—thus the nickname ‘Thirteen Protectors.’ Legend has it he was superhumanly strong, with muscles like steel. He charged into battle, unbeatable and invincible. Eventually, he was tricked and executed by being torn apart by five horses. It’s said the horses had to pull dozens of times before they succeeded—only after his tendons were cut. He supposedly acquired a special training method from a mysterious master. That method was passed down and became known as the Thirteen Protectors External Training,” Luo explained.

“Ancient warriors couldn’t be tougher than today’s fighters, right?” Zhang Manman asked.

“Not necessarily,” Su Jie replied. “Some people in history had not just incredible strength, but a higher spiritual state than modern people. Plus, the brutality of cold weapon combat forced the human body to evolve under pressure. Honestly, if you threw a modern fighter into a battlefield of cold weapons, they’d likely die horribly. The ring doesn’t compare to chaotic blade-and-spear warfare. Those who survived multiple battles weren’t lucky—they had real skills. Especially those undefeated on the frontlines.”

Su Jie, being immersed in martial arts, had developed the habit of putting himself in others’ shoes.

Modern people tend to assume fighters today are superior—but that’s not necessarily true. There was a world champion boxer who was beaten to death by his nephew and an 18-year-old with steel pipes. Ordinary folks practicing kung fu routines who’ve never fought real fights are no match for those who train in actual combat.

But even fighters today train in simulated combat—it's not life and death. Ancient warriors hacked and stabbed people regularly. Through countless life-or-death situations, they learned to protect themselves and strike with deadly precision. That was real combat.

Chinese martial arts today have lost those conditions and become mere performance. And there's no going back—cold weapon warfare is long gone.

“Exactly. Without experiencing the brutality of cold weapon combat, you can't imagine its cruelty,” Master Ma agreed. “But let's not dwell on history. Let's get back to Odell's external training video.”

Su Jie watched intently.

Golden Bell Cover and Iron Shirt techniques can be found in many bookstores, but the books are often vague or incomprehensible.

And frankly, just reading a book and training on your own won't work.

Even with a good teacher, it's hard to master this stuff—let alone through self-study.

Only someone with an already high level of understanding could dig useful insights from those books, test them through practice, and gain benefits over time.

Su Jie used to believe those stories where a protagonist finds a secret manual, goes into seclusion for a few years, and comes out a grandmaster. Now he finds them laughable.

No matter the field, progress comes from scientific methods, collective intelligence, collaboration, experimentation, detailed record-keeping, and rigorous logic. Only then can real breakthroughs be made.

Take something as simple as a jab in boxing—it's the result of thousands of matches and endless training. It requires muscle conditioning and full-body coordination to deliver the fastest, most accurate, and most destructive strike.

A lone guy in the woods reading books and training is like a blind man feeling an elephant.

That's why Su Jie always worked with others.

He started at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, later joined Starshine Combat Fitness Club, and eventually organized his own training ground—constantly refining through practice and collaboration.

Ma and Luo did the same. They're both part of top global institutions, collaborating with experts and research teams.

It's that spirit of collective research and innovation that lets humanity fly, terraform, travel through space, and transplant organs. That must never be lost.

This, too, is a small research team.

"Odell has a massive force backing him. I suspect it's the same group trying to recruit—or threaten—us," Master Luo said. "This video was a secret. It took a lot to get my hands on it. I also obtained some external training ointment from the Typhon Training Camp. It's designed to be used alongside this Hard Qi Gong method. I'm too old to practice it—but Su Jie, let's see if you can master it."