

Scavengers 371

Chapter 371: Turning the Tables

The three lucky individuals who were drawn immediately began processing the Snow Juice.

The surroundings were very quiet.

Ji You also quietly watched from the side, not speaking to disturb the three.

Snow Juice—actually a mucus extracted from a certain Star Beast—liquefies completely within a few seconds of being harvested. Due to its adhesive characteristics, humans have researched and transformed it into an adhesive, typically used in large machinery such as the production of spaceships, airships, starships, and mechas. This powerful glue is essential for bonding various materials with different properties.

It can be said that Snow Juice has a wide range of applications and is one of the most fundamental adhesives currently.

minute.

minutes.

minutes.

...

As time ticked away, the initially quiet audience began to grow restless—

Suddenly—

One of them stopped their work, revealing a frustrated expression, and said, "I made an error just now. In the process of decomposing the molecules, I acted slightly prematurely, causing the molecules to fail to recombine properly."

This error meant that the material in their hand was instantly ruined.

Missing by a fraction can lead to a gross misstep—that's exactly what had happened.

"Shush—" Cheng Jing raised a hand, signaling the student to be quiet.

The student immediately fell silent and nervously watched the operations of the other two.

Then.

After about 5 minutes, one of them put down their tools, sighed in relief, and said, "Finally succeeded!"

As they spoke, they reached out to gently lift up a transparent glass tube, inside of which was a shining liquid, almost transparent, but upon comparison, it was a few notches inferior to what Ji You had produced, yet still significantly better than the regular standard of Snow Juice.

Very soon.

The third student also finished their work. They stopped their hands, couldn't help but take a careful look at the Snow Juice they had processed, and revealed a satisfied smile, "Feels pretty good."

Audience: "Quick, run the tests!"

"Right, right... Don't waste time, get on with the tests!"

"We've waited so long the flowers are wilting, hurry up and test it, will you!"

...

Without needing further urging from the audience, Jiang Tong, Xia Dong, and Shi Yin, who were responsible for testing, took up the two tubes of material and began to meticulously conduct the tests.

Then—

Under the tense and impatient wait of everyone present, the results were finally out.

The first person's product had an effective usage rate of: 96.5%.

The second person's product had an effective usage rate of: 97.54%.

Both were significantly inferior to the Snow Juice processed by Ji You but far surpassed the international standard of 95%. At this point, everyone's mouths fell open in shock, and for a moment, they didn't know what to say.

After a short while.

The audience boiled over again:

"Ah ah ah!!! So it's true! It really can be done!"

"Ah ah ah!!! This means I could at least improve it by 1% as well!"

"The operations of the two individuals just now were a bit hurried, resulting in a lack of smoothness, but there is actually a lot of room for improvement. Given more time, they could certainly achieve the same effects as Student Ji You!"

"It's over! I can't hold back now. I want to go back now and start making it myself."

"Same here, I don't have the patience to sit still anymore; I want to go back and try it out."

...

Listening to the discussions around the stage, Ji You smiled and said, "Everyone, please calm down. You have all seen the processing methods and results of the three students just now. Of course, you must also be very curious about what has caused such great astonishment. Allow me to share a few simple insights. Please be patient and let me explain what I understand."

The petite and slender silhouette of the young girl stood at the lectern. Her light voice fell gently on everyone's hearts; each word, each sentence, although quietly spoken by her, inexplicably imbued a sense of formidable strength.

In an instant, the restless audience became quiet once more, everyone raising their heads and listening attentively.

Ji You spoke softly, "The first student was somewhat impulsive. They were unsteady while processing the material and accidentally altered the structure of two molecules, leading to failure. However, this situation can be remedied."

Remedy?

The single word stirred surprise among the audience!

"Indeed."

"Remedy." Ji You smiled faintly and continued, "That's by removing those two damaged molecules and their complementary molecules from the batch. By doing so, the material's properties won't change, thus preventing the material from being wasted."

Though Snow Juice is a basic material, it is nonetheless extracted from Star Beasts, involving a certain degree of danger. Therefore, it's imperative not to waste materials.

Ji nodded soberly and continued, "I've taken back the material wasted by the first student earlier. While it hadn't completely degraded, there was a chance for reprocessing."

At this point, Ji You paused slightly and looked towards the audience, softly asking, "Would everyone allow me 15 minutes to process this material?"

"Of course!"

"Start it up quickly."

"Don't even mention 15 minutes, we would wait even 150 minutes."

The idea proposed by Ji You had thoroughly piqued everyone's interest. By this time, nobody was in a rush to leave. In fact, several students even quickly brought out their Light Computers and contacted their classmates, urging them to come and watch.

If Ji You had merely improved the Snow Juice to 98%, it would have already been astonishing.

But—

Now, she was about to utilize in front of everyone what seemed to be a wasted material, involving another area of knowledge.

This was incredibly rare.

Even some seasoned researchers would be greatly interested in this.

So—

As Ji You sat down at the workbench again, immersing herself fully in processing the material, the originally empty hall gradually filled with more students, starting with just two or three, and then arriving in groups.

Later on—

As news spread far and wide, many students from the Material Department housed in training rooms and labs were alerted and rushed over, dropping whatever they were doing.

Among them, some were senior students.

Then—

When Ji You put down her tools and raised her head, she was startled, "What's going on?"

Due to the shock, the freshly processed Snow Juice in her hand shook, and it almost fell to the ground with a plunk. The audience couldn't help but leap to their feet, "Calm down! Don't move!"

Ji You tightly grasped the glass tube, stabilizing her shaking body.

The audience watched this scene and collectively sighed in relief, "Ji You, don't be agitated. First, slowly put down the material in your hand and then we can have a proper conversation, good girl~"

Ji You: "..."

Ji You looked at the hundreds of additional people in the audience, forcing calmness on her face but feeling a complex mix of emotions inside:

Was this—

What success looked like?

Chapter 372: Old Fox Wang

Ji You blinked, the corners of her mouth slowly rising in an arc.

Then—

In the blink of an eye, Xia Dong, Shi Yin, and Jiang Tong, who were responsible for the inspection, dashed over—one supported Ji You, another snatched the processed Snow Juice, and the third swiftly opened the detector...

The trio cooperated smoothly, ensuring the safety of the Material in Ji You's hands.

Seeing this, the audience breathed a collective sigh of relief:

"I was really scared to death just now!"

"My heart nearly stopped from fear."

"It was genuinely terrifying, a fraction of a millisecond later and the test tube would have hit the ground."

"Shh—"

"Everyone quiet down, the testing has begun, let's patiently wait for the results."

As soon as these words were spoken, the bleachers fell silent instantly; this well-organized and friendly order didn't need any maintaining at all—watching this scene, the corner of Ji You's mouth twitched, and she suddenly began to feel sorry for her 100,000 points.

She always felt she had been duped!

Definitely tricked by Director Wang!

The personnel maintaining order at the scene didn't need 500 people at all...

50!

No no no!

people would definitely be more than enough!

Which meant she possibly wasted points, overpaying 495 people's wages.

Ah ah ah...

Ji You instantly became unsettled!

Damn it!

The damn Director Wang!

This was even more ruthless than blackhearted cotton!

Pocketing students' points like that, did he even have a conscience?

On the other side.

The Office of Academic Affairs.

Director Wang, legs crossed and sipping on health tea, sneezed out of the blue. He raised a hand to rub his nose, muttering, "Which little brat is cursing me now?"

After a smack of his lips, Director Wang gently sipped the tea, a fragrant and pleasant taste spreading in his mouth. He set down the teacup and looked toward Professor Ye Hong, who was sitting across with a stern face and serious expression.

The pleasure on Director Wang's face vanished in an instant, replaced by a wry smile as he said, "Old Ye... are you really not considering it? The student holding the competition really is very strong, if you go and judge for a bit, and if she catches your eye, you can take her as your last disciple..."

Professor Ye Hong snorted coldly: "Wang Lianfa, did you call me over to talk about such trivial matters? If there's nothing else, I'm going back to the lab."

Director Wang's smile stiffened; even his health tea became hard to swallow as he hurriedly said, "Hey! Old Ye... please wait a moment."

Ye Hong continued to snort disdainfully.

Director Wang hurriedly stepped forward, poured a cup of tea for him, and said with a smile plastered on his face, "You see, it's just your traditional mindset that's the problem. Serving as a judge for students is really not that disgraceful. On the contrary, if the student truly has the ability, shouldn't we be happy to have another promising youngster?"

Ye Hong's face remained cold as he said, "Students who are unsteady in their work, who resort to all sorts of trickery and chaotic stunts – even if they do have real abilities, their character is flawed. Any success they achieve is only temporary and will never last."

"This kind of person, expecting me to take them in as my last disciple? In your dreams!"

The talent Ye Hong wanted to nurture had to be both morally and intellectually competent. If someone only had intellect without morality, he would rather have none than accept mediocrity.

Therefore, in Professor Ye Hong's view, the student Director Wang was talking about – whether talented or not was unknown, but the fact that they were so conceited as to publicly challenge all students in the Material Department from First Year and Second Year, even openly expressing disdain for everyone.

What virtues or abilities do such impatient and vain people possess?

Professor Ye Hong internally rejected the notion.

He didn't want to waste time and started to walk away.

Seeing this, Director Wang quickly stepped forward, grabbed Professor Ye Hong's hand, and said, "Old Ye... wait, this student's situation is a bit special. Old Hong and I are very optimistic about her future prospects. Her major is actually not in the Material Department but the Combat Department – look, she's also particularly talented in the Material Department. If possible, Old Hong and I hope she can dual-major. Don't be so hasty to refuse; she's coming forward to demonstrate her abilities. Why not just go and see, and vet talents for the school? If you really don't wish to mentor her, I'll arrange another advisor for her..."

Combat Department?

Hearing these three words, Ye Hong's eyelid twitched; lately, he had developed a distaste for this term –

Subconsciously, Professor Ye Hong's steps halted.

Director Wang saw this as an easing of the tension and hurriedly said, "This child is a rather special case. She hasn't actually studied material processing formally, so Old Hong and I are concerned she might go astray without guidance. If you step in and have a look, we can truly be at ease."

Hasn't studied?

Dares to publicly challenge the entire school in a competition?

Professor Ye Hong's face, which had just relaxed, tightened once again.

Director Wang said, "Old Ye, shall we just leave now?"

Director Wang was urging him, his own heart anxious, fearing that if this old professor suddenly changed his mind and reneged, it would all be for naught.

"Hmph!" Ye Hong shook off his hand and said, "I'll just have a look, but I definitely won't take this student in."

Here, taking in a single student, imparting all one's knowledge and mentorship, is quite different from lecturing in a large classroom. The former requires devoting more time and energy to the student. As for the latter, it involves only delivering public lectures; how much students learn depends on their own comprehension.

Director Wang said, "Alright, alright... Of course, we can't force you to take any students."

In reality, Professor Ye Hong was well advanced in years, already 260 years of age. As an old-timer in the field of materials, he was a notable figure within the Alliance. However, his personality was traditional and strict; he was strict with himself and others in his dealings. He held many stubborn principles, which made him difficult to get along with.

The school was well aware of his personality and accorded him great respect and freedom.

Moreover, as Professor Ye Hong's health was not what it used to be, he didn't have the energy to manage upperclassmen. Therefore, this year, Principal Hong had specifically sought Professor Ye Hong's opinion and assigned him to teach only freshmen.

The coursework for freshmen was relatively simple, just laying the foundation, so Professor Ye Hong's teaching load had been greatly reduced, and he had more time to look after his health.

At this point, seeing that he had persuaded Professor Ye Hong, Director Wang immediately arranged for a Floating Car. The two of them set out for the grand auditorium of the Material Department.

Meanwhile, Director Wang on the car contacted another confirmed Material Department professor, and upon learning that the latter would arrive at the grand auditorium in about 10 minutes, Director Wang's brow instantly relaxed.

However—

When Director Wang and Professor Ye Hong were on their way to the grand auditorium, they suddenly noticed that there were more students on the road, and clearly, they also seemed to be heading toward the grand auditorium. Huh?

What's happening here?

Chapter 373: The Older, the Wiser

Auditorium.

The atmosphere on site had become very tense. Every person in the audience was slightly lifting their head, craning their necks, staring at every move of the three students responsible for the inspection.

How would the results turn out?

At this moment, that was all anyone from the Material Department was thinking about.

But Ji You wasn't.

Having made the device herself, Ji You had a rough premonition about the results, so she wasn't worried that they would be bad. Right now, she was only concerned about the 100,000 points she had been swindled out of.

100,000 points!

100,000 points!

How greedy could Director Wang be, how wicked and grasping at heart, to have the nerve to swindle such an enormous amount of points from her.

The more Ji You thought about it, the more she felt like spitting blood.

She couldn't help but raise her hand to signal toward Cheng Jing: "Cheng Jing, could you come over for a moment, I have something I want to ask you."

When Cheng Jing saw her, she immediately came over and asked, "Ji You, is there something you wanted to ask?"

Ji You glanced around and noticed many students under the stage were focused on her, which made her face slightly uneasy. She deliberately lowered her voice to say, "Let's step aside to talk."

Cheng Jing was startled: "Hmm?"

Ji You didn't answer, but took a few quick steps and slipped behind a curtain, with Cheng Jing following.

Seeing that they were now alone, Ji You asked in a low voice, "Cheng Jing, I want to ask, how much does the school pay you for maintaining order here?"

Cheng Jing paused in thought after hearing this, then replied with a smile, "Oh, it's about that. Since we from the Student Management Office have to help with various matters at school, we receive a fixed number of points every month. Besides that, for temporary events organized by students like Ji You, if we recruit people to help out, the school also provides us with additional points as a subsidy."

That is —

When Cheng Jing received this task, she had advised Director Wang that a maximum of 50 students would suffice because all of us are Military Academy students with very strong discipline. There would not be any disturbances to worry about, not to mention that there were many security robots available at the school... But for some reason, Director Wang insisted on having her recruit 500 students.

people!

That would be more than enough to maintain order even at an event with more than a hundred thousand people.

Although Cheng Jing didn't understand the reason behind it, she thought that since Director Wang had given the order, he must have had his reasons.

But —

No matter how much Cheng Jing pondered, she could not have expected that the audience attending the event would end up being fewer than the people they had arranged to maintain order.

Embarrassing...

It was truly embarrassing.

Therefore, when she first met Ji You, Cheng Jing felt extremely awkward.

Ji You quickly asked, "May I ask, about how many points can each student get?"

Of course, if this is confidential and Cheng Jing doesn't wish to answer, Ji You wouldn't press the issue.

Upon hearing the question, Cheng Jing laughed, slightly embarrassed, "Each person gets 10 points, which is quite a lot, so the students from the Management Office all rushed over to register."

Ji You: "!!!"

points!

For 500 people, that's only 5,000 points!

Yet Director Wang actually scammed her out of 100,000 points!

Although the expenses for these students accounted for only a tiny fraction, there were also the fees for the two evaluating judges, and then insurance costs among others...

But Ji You racked her brains and still couldn't figure out where the remaining 95,000 points were supposed to go.

Ji You's face showed the first signs of turning black—

Cheng Jing caught this and feeling slightly uneasy, she quietly explained, "These expenses, Ji You must have paid them herself, right? Just hiring students to maintain order for the event cost 5,000 points. When the students in the administration found out, they were all quite surprised. Behind your back, they all secretly call you Ji Tuhao." Whether Ji You used credit points or directly spent points, everyone thought her action was really excessive.

A twitch flickered at the corner of Ji You's mouth.

Ji Tuhao...

It stung.

Ji You quickly pushed away the unpleasant thoughts in her head. Despite having to swallow her own teeth in resignation, she still maintained a calm and harmonious expression and asked, "Cheng Jing, senior, I have another question. Now that the designated judges have not shown up, can I request the school to waive this part of the fees?"

The fees for the two judges were estimated to at least reduce by 20,000-30,000 points, right?

At this moment, having been utterly deceived, Ji You could only try her best to minimize her losses.

"This..." Cheng Jing was in a bit of a predicament and said, "We in student management are only responsible for maintaining order, other matters are directly under the control of the Academic Affairs Office. In your case... I suggest you discuss it with the Academic Affairs Office."

At this point, Cheng Jing suddenly paused, looked around to make sure no one was eavesdropping, then leaned in a bit closer, speaking in a hushed voice, "Ji You, I advise you not to talk to Director Wang. You can talk to the other two vice directors instead. Of course, when you go to talk to them, make sure to pick a time when Director Wang is not around."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You instantly understood.

She had been completely screwed over by Director Wang. Perhaps if she hadn't met Director Wang when she went to discuss renting the auditorium at the Academic Affairs Office, she wouldn't have been fleeced.

After saying that, Cheng Jing straightened up and said, "That's it, you get it."

Ji You's face was the picture of misery as she said dejectedly, "It's already too late, I've been severely exploited by Director Wang."

Out of curiosity, Cheng Jing asked quietly, "How much did you get taken for?"

Ji You stretched out one finger.

Cheng Jing guessed, "10,000?"

At these words, Ji You felt even less like laughing.

Just then—

A sudden amazement came from the whole auditorium:

"Wow!"

"The results are out!"

"God!"

Cheng Jing dashed out in one leap.

Calmly, Ji You withdrew her finger and emotionlessly answered her own question: "I spent 100,000! Not credit points, but points!"

"It was points!"

Suddenly—

A voice came from behind her, asking, "What are you muttering to yourself?"

Ji You: "..."

The voice, benign yet filled with slyness, was one that Ji You would recognize even in ashes. A surge of old and new grievances flooded her heart. Ji You turned sharply, revealing a sycophantic smile: "Director Wang, you're here—"

Director Wang looked satisfied with the smile on Ji You's face and said, "Since I promised to come, naturally I should come. Otherwise, some little rascals behind my back would curse me viciously, quite fiercely at that."

Ji You's face was plastered with a forced smile as she said, "Oh! Who's the naughty one? How could they curse Director Wang behind his back? That won't do! If they're caught, they must be taught a harsh lesson."

Director Wang smiled, his face full of satisfaction as he looked at Ji You, adding, "Hmm! That's a very good idea. Of course, I know that Ji You would never do such a thing. Right?"

Ji You: "..."

Chapter 374: All Old Men Are Bad

Old fox, just an old fox.

Ji You decided not to mince words and directly said, "Director Wang, I was just about to discuss something with you. You mentioned that the two judges you appointed weren't able to make it today, and I was wondering if..."

Cheng Jing told Ji You that if she wanted a refund, she should negotiate with two other people behind Director Wang's back, but Ji You knew very well that a sly fox like Director Wang would never allow her any loopholes.

He must be prepared.

So, if she had to bring it up, it must be directed to him personally.

Now, since the originally scheduled professors hadn't arrived, wasn't this a perfect excuse? No point in wasting it, Ji You decided to seize the moment and immediately requested Director Wang to refund part of her fee.

As soon as Ji You finished speaking, Director Wang stared at her with a strange expression.

Ji You: "???"

A few seconds later, Director Wang shook his head, sighed, and said with his hands behind his back, "So young, yet already having poor eyesight, you really need some treatment."

Ji You: "???"

Director Wang pointed at the judge's table in the auditorium, saying, "The judges you wanted, I personally invited them here."

Ji You: "!!!"

Ji You, with wide eyes, "No... no way?"

Director Wang straightened his face and scolded, "Nonsense! Would I even resort to faking it?"

Ji You: "..."

Director Wang, with his hands behind, paced back and forth, looked around, and said, "Alright, judges, security personnel, materials, equipment... everything agreed upon in the contract, I have arranged it all; my task is also completed."

At this, Director Wang suddenly turned back, glanced at Ji You, and said, "As for the audience being so few, it's definitely because you are not competitive enough, lack influence, and didn't attract the audience. That can't be blamed on the school, right?"

Ji You opened her mouth but was at a loss for words.

Director Wang glanced at her and said, "The problem with young people these days is that they are impulsive and exaggerated! When problems arise, they always search for faults in others, not knowing that most problems are their own doing."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You took a deep breath and said, "Director Wang, that remark of yours was not very kind. From my perspective, the reason young people face various issues is mainly because they are too young, have too little experience, and thus they fall into traps everywhere! In the future, the youth should strive to be independent and strong, and they must not be deceived by those experienced in the ways of Jianghu again."

Director Wang's mouth twitched.

Good grief!

This one has some guts, daring to insinuate things about me right to my face.

Hm~

Admirable courage.

Director Wang, with a smile on his face, said, "That's right, the youth should be self-reliant and strong, but it's not just about that, they also need to cultivate their moral character, starting with respecting their elders."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You chuckled, saying, "Yes, yes, the Director has taught me well, I will definitely heed your teachings."

Director Wang glanced at her, knowing her words were all fluff, but didn't mind, and said directly, "This competition has been going on for a while, its popularity isn't great, but the necessary procedures must still be followed. I, as one of the judge-teachers, cannot neglect my duties, alright, let's not talk much more, let's head to the front desk."

Ji You, with a stiff smile, followed him out.

As the two appeared, the originally noisy audience suddenly paused for a moment.

Hmm?

What's going on?

Ji You looked up and noticed that in just a few minutes, a crowd had settled down in the audience area, most likely a few hundred more people, making a total of about 1500 pure spectators now, and it looked quite decent.

Ji You felt heartily relieved.

At that moment—

On stage, an elderly figure caught Ji You's attention, and she paused momentarily—wasn't that Professor Ye Hong? The same persnickety old man who would find fault over the tiniest details and make Ji You revise her work whenever it wasn't to his satisfaction.

Ji You's face darkened in an instant.

She hadn't expected Director Wang to actually bring this old man here; she thought it was just a joke.

Indeed—

Inside, Ji You was opposed to having Professor Ye Hong as a judge.

The reason for her refusal was that this old man was difficult to please; if things didn't go his way, he might embarrass her publicly and she might be unable to leave the stage with dignity.

The whole venue was silent.

Professor Ye Hong, hearing footsteps, stared at the perfectly processed Snow Juice, slightly reluctant to look away but finally did, raising his head to glance towards Ji You.

Their gazes collided briefly in mid-air.

Silence.

Complete silence.

Ye Hong's already slightly yellowish eyes were still as sharp as a knife.

Ji You, far from being daunted, also lifted her head, bravely meeting Professor Ye Hong's gaze. In her view, she had done nothing wrong, thus there was no need for her to feel guilty.

Ye Hong's eyes moved slightly.

This was his second encounter with the girl named Ji You. The last time after Ji You abruptly left his class, Ye Hong had been incredibly angry, filled not just with anger but also with rage.

But—

He thought this girl was arrogant, talented yet lacking moral integrity, not worthy of being nurtured.

Therefore, aside from being angry, Ye Hong didn't feel it was any great loss.

Of course, afterwards, recalling what the girl had said that day, Ye Hong repeatedly doubted his initial judgment. How could a girl so proud at heart commit plagiarism?

But—

The evidence for the plagiarism was concrete; it was only after Ye Hong personally went with several colleagues to the authenticity verification institution and confirmed the findings that he decided to cancel Ji You's admission notification.

In this regard, Ye Hong felt that he was maintaining the fairness of the examination, and he had done nothing wrong.

However, if it weren't for the girl suddenly appearing in the class and making a statement, Ye Hong would never have doubted his initial judgment.

However?

Every so often, when he unintentionally recalled the girl's departure from the class, her thin yet straight back, and those strong, emphatic words, Ye Hong couldn't help but doubt himself...

Not only doubting the initial plagiarism verdict but also his judgment of a student's character.

...

Of course, every time Ji You turned in her homework was another reason Ye Hong doubted himself.

In these days, Ye Hong felt conflicted. Seeing how talented Ji You was, he wanted to nurture her fully, yet he had many reservations, hence his attitude towards Ji You became increasingly conflicted.

Ji You switching to the Combat Department, Ye Hong was very angry.

Ji You turning in homework late, Ye Hong was very angry.

Ji You refusing to enter the classroom, Ye Hong was very angry.

...

In summary, towards this student, Ye Hong felt both anger and conflict, genuinely uncertain how to approach her. He felt he needed some time to think things over, but he never anticipated that under such conflicting circumstances, he would meet Ji You for the second time.

Chapter 375: Sharing the Spotlight with the Big Shots

Silence.

Ji You didn't speak.

Neither did Ye Hong; he furrowed his brows, his eyes twinkling with light.

A few seconds later.

Ji You took a step forward and initiated, "Hello Professor Ye, I'm delighted that you've come to be a judge."

Ye Hong: "Hmph."

Ji You: "..."

This—

Is it what they call offering a warm face only to get a cold shoulder?

However, after several confrontations with this old man when handing in her assignments, Ji You had roughly figured out his personality: exceptionally stubborn and meticulous.

When facing such an old man, there really is no need to be petty.

After greeting him, Ji You was about to return to her workstation when Ye Hong suddenly spoke, "Did you just handle this Snow Juice?"

Ji You paused midstep, turned around, and nodded: "Yes, Professor Ye, I handled it in front of all the senior students and my classmates within 20 minutes."

Ye Hong remained silent, his gaze returning to the newly processed material.

Ji You waited and waited but didn't hear a second sentence. After thinking it over, she lifted her foot to leave.

Suddenly—

Ye Hong then said, "Come here, tell me about your thought process while handling it."

Ji You: "..."

Couldn't this old man say everything all at once? Must he break it up into one or two sentences at a time?

Isn't it tiring?

Of course, she, with her internal complaints, couldn't comprehend the complexity and haughty demeanor in Professor Ye Hong's heart.

Staring at the material, Ye Hong's dim eyes almost couldn't bear to shift away. Students with a shallow understanding of the Material Department might not understand why he did this.

But only Ye Hong knew how remarkable Ji You's method for handling the already damaged Snow Juice was.

If this method could be widely applied to other materials, then undoubtedly, it would bring a new revolution to the material science world! And it would greatly enrich the existing technological system.

Ye Hong stared intently at the Snow Juice on the workstation, eyes keen.

Despite her inner sarcasm, Ji You organized her thoughts and said dutifully, "My approach was simple; since there were damaged molecular structures, then just remove them before reprocessing the material."

Subsequently, Ji You elaborated on the problems she encountered during the process and the solutions she had adopted.

Ye Hong listened quietly, his expression indifferent but from his earnest demeanor, Ji You knew the old man was seriously listening, seriously contemplating.

After speaking, Ji You stopped.

Ye Hong said, "Your idea is good, and quite creative, but your success this time was accidental, without universality. To apply it widely, we need to find out the true reason behind it."

Ji You opened her mouth, feeling somewhat admiringly, "Indeed, just as Old Man Ye said, when I proposed to 'turn waste into treasure' in front of everyone, I didn't have complete certainty, did I? It was just a sudden brainstorm, then I felt eager to try it, thinking it might be successful."

Holding this thought, Ji You immediately put it into action.

What followed was a lengthy 20-minute process.

To outsiders, she looked at ease, her hands constantly moving, deftly using various instruments, and afterwards, seemingly effortlessly, she successfully processed the material.

But in reality—

During the process, Ji You encountered several difficulties; if she hadn't been thick-skinned, knowing not to show any signs of urgency, and if she hadn't maintained continuous communication with Xiao You, following Xiao You's instructed methods, she would have faced peril numerous times.

Now, given the same material, she didn't have complete confidence she could produce it again, because there was a significant element of chance involved.

To her surprise, Professor Ye Hong only took a few looks to find clues.

This—

You just have to respect it.

For a moment, Ji You dared not make any inappropriate moves in front of the old professor.

This is a big shot!

Big shots must be treated with respect.

While Professor Ye Hong was speaking with Ji You, another panel judge who was invited, Professor Jiang Yulan, also stood up from her seat and proactively walked onto the stage—

Professor Jiang Yulan was a female professor, appearing to be around 40 years old. Still, thanks to the advanced skin care technology of the interstellar era, her actual age was unknown.

Professor Jiang Yulan was dressed very fashionably, giving off a city beauty vibe.

At this moment, she looked at Ji You with a very gentle and friendly smile, saying, "Student Ji You, I am also very interested in what you just mentioned. How about this, since Old Ye and I both have time now, let's the three of us separately replicate the material you just handled and see what the results are."

Hmm?

While Ji You was still in a daze, Jiang Yulan looked at Professor Ye Hong and asked with a smile, "Ye Hong, what do you think?"

Ye Hong, with a stern face, said, "It's doable."

Ji You: "!!!"

Ji You couldn't believe it: "Make another one?"

Jiang Yulan smiled and said, "That's right, each of us will replicate your process once more and see what the success rate is. If all are successful, it means it is replicable, and it's necessary to popularize it."

This Professor Jiang Yulan, Ji You had never attended her class, but she knew of her reputation. She was one of the senior professors in the Material Department and was also a well-known material master within the Alliance, having already received several interstellar-level awards for her research.

In short—

A big shot!

Not to be messed with.

And having the chance to work with two big shots on material production and research, Ji You naturally agreed, so she nodded without a second word.

In the secluded space.

Xiao You's face was flushed with excitement, her soft voice rising with an unbelievable joy, saying, "Sister! Is it true? Are we really going to handle materials with the two professors?"

Ji You: "Yeah!"

Xiao You jumped up, of course. In this secluded space, her body didn't have substance, so even her jumps felt light and without extra sensation, but Xiao You was still thrilled!

"Sister!"

"I'm so happy."

"Sister!"

"Really so happy."

...

She didn't tire of saying how happy she was several times in a row.

Ji You couldn't help but tease her: "Silly child, don't just focus on being happy now, come and get to work quickly, the thing we handled just now, even though I've done it once, I can't guarantee it'll definitely be successful this time."

Xiao You immediately returned to normal, smiling somewhat shyly, "Sister, don't worry, I'll try my best with you. If there's any issue, tell me right away. The one we processed earlier, I've simulated it again and had some new insights. I'll tell you now, sister, so we can probably avoid some small errors later."

Ji You sincerely admired her, saying, "Xiao You, you are really amazing."

Xiao You blushed, "No, I'm not, sister, you are the most amazing person."

Ji You waved her hand grandly, "I say you are, so you are, no rebuttal accepted."

Chapter 376: Sharing the Stage

The grand auditorium.

Professor Ye Hong has entered the stage.

Professor Jiang Yulan has also entered the stage.

These two are currently the top talents in the Alliance's Material Department, senior bigwigs! Now, everyone knows that these two have proposed to remake the project with Ji You.

In an instant, the students in the audience got excited:

"This—this is a masterclass performance by the bigwigs."

"No, it's not! This is a fight between divine bigwigs, happening right online!"

"Professor Jiang Yulan hasn't personally handled materials for a long time; I heard her techniques are especially proficient, just watching her is a treat, we are so lucky today."

"While there's still seating available, I need to quickly call over a few more of my buddies."

"How did I not think of this? The sight of bigwigs practicing in person is rare; I must call my sisters over too."

"Hahaha... I already called them; my classmates are rushing over at full speed."

Meanwhile—

Lanyue Star School forum.

There is an exceptionally hot post, the title of which is very unabashed, even carrying a thick sense of schadenfreude, but it is precisely because of this unabashed human malice revealed by the title that it is very eye-catching.

The post is as follows:

[Today's public challenger, I wonder if she'll feel lonely with no one showing up?]

1L: Everyone should boycott, let's see if she can even start the competition.

2L: Buddies, let's unite and stand firm together, let's not give that disgusting plagiarist a chance to boost her fame, let's call out: Don't go to the grand auditorium! Don't go! Don't go!

3L: Don't worry, upper floor poster, anyone with a sense of justice definitely won't go.

4L: Have you all forgotten the title of the post? Let me be the first to answer: I guess that plagiarist dog is so worried right now, her hair's turning white, grabbing her scalp and howling: 'Ah~ this accursed, unshakable loneliness!'

5L: I just imagined that scene and I'm about to burst from laughter.

6L: She must be very lonely, because there's confirmed news from the frontlines, fewer than a hundred people went, and dozens left already, it's seriously killing me from laughter, the joke of the year is completely monopolized by that plagiarist dog.

...

1099L: Here's another call-out: Please let's all work hard in the fight for justice, don't go to flatter the plagiarist dog, absolutely do not go! The fewer people that go, the more she'll be embarrassed. Now, she's embarrassed herself enough, we just need to be patient a little longer, wait for the end of today, and then see if she still has the face to hang around the school.

...

2999L: Plagiarist dog, get out!

...

399L: I hope the plagiarist dog dies off completely.

...

4999L: Buddies, good news! Good news! It's been 2 hours already, and there are still fewer than 600 people in the grand auditorium, keep it up everyone, maintain the course.

5000L: What kind of idiots are those 600 people that went? Did they grow brains? Why would they flatter the plagiarist dog?

5001L: Don't get too worked up, floor above. There will always be some who love to join in the bustle and don't have a sense of right and wrong, stay cool! Stay cool! We just need to keep doing what we do.

...

8999L: I'm happy, Xu Siyu senior clearly also doesn't plan to accept that plagiarist dog's challenge! That's right! That's the reason I began to admire senior Si Yu, her values are super upright! No going means no going, why should we provide a stage presence for the plagiarist dog?

9000L: Si Yu is right not to go. Where does that copycat dog get off being so shameless? She says go and we're supposed to go?

...

The entire forum, led by Xu Siyu's fans and supplemented by the voluntary actions of students who despised plagiarism, resulted in a lack of attendance at the grand auditorium for Ji You's public challenge starting from 8 o'clock.

That's also the reason why there were only so few people at first.

Then—

What happened next?

The students on the entire forum were unanimous in their spontaneous refusal to watch the contest or challenge Ji You, and for a while, they practically controlled the entire online forum.

A few of Xu Siyu's die-hard fans were gathered together, discussing how to celebrate their victory.

Suddenly—

One of them received a message and exclaimed in surprise, "What? Professor Ye Hong is there? Professor Jiang Yulan is there too? Director Wang as well?"

Another said, "It's just the teachers who went, there should be no problem. It's fine as long as we students don't go."

"But—what if someone goes there to fill the venue out of respect for the professors?"

"Control the comments! Let's send someone to the forum right now to control the comments and try to cover up the news about the teachers' attendance."

"It's too late! The forum has already spread the news."

"Not only the three professors, but the live video from the scene has also been shared. That plagiarist dog, in front of everyone, seems to have produced something amazing, even professors were startled and took the initiative to discuss it together."

"What!!!"

"When did this happen? Why didn't you say earlier?"

"It just happened; I just heard about it too. Before we could control the comments, the news had already spread on the forum."

A few die-hard fans clustered together, their joy instantly vanishing as they furrowed their brows, showing discontent. One of them said, "How are we going to break the news to Siyu?"

"Siyu asked us to make an effort to control comments and to urge everyone not to go because she is busy and can't leave, so she's unable to accept the challenge. But she doesn't want to say it herself because if she does, the plagiarist dog will catch on and claim that Siyu is scared and doesn't dare to accept the challenge."

"Whether Siyu accepts or refuses, there's no benefit for her. It's right for Siyu not to go. Since we are her fans, we should share her anxieties, think from her perspective, and clear the way for her, overcoming all difficulties!"

"Right! This is our undeniable duty!"

"Now we have no other options. Let's just keep steady and foremost, don't make things difficult for Siyu."

"Right!"

Ji You was unaware of everything that happened on the forum and the discussions among Xu Siyu's private group of fans. Of course, even if she knew, she wouldn't care.

Because—

Right now, she simply couldn't afford to care about anything else.

After Professor Jiang Yulan proposed working together, she immediately started, and within moments, had discarded three batches of Snow Juice's raw liquid, then handed it to Professor Ye Hong and Ji You.

Ye Hong got straight to work once he received it.

Ji You did not dare to waste any time either. Reclaiming this discarded Material required perfect timing; if she missed the opportunity, once the material was completely wasted, it would no longer be salvageable.

So—

The three chose separate workspaces and began their work.

The surroundings were quiet, no one spoke to disturb the three of them.

Then, everyone saw Jiang Yulan and Professor Ye Hong almost without blinking, start processing immediately. Their methods were slightly different. Jiang Yulan's technique was very graceful, her fingers fluttering as if performing an elegant dance, a sight to behold.

And Professor Ye Hong?

His approach was very methodical, step by step, orderly, appearing to be monotonous movements, yet there was an inexplicable rhythm to them.

Chapter 377: Every Bit as Outstanding

The entire venue was silent, nobody wanted to disturb the scene unfolding before their eyes. Moreover, it was quite miraculous that some students who had just entered had been specifically instructed beforehand not to make any noise when entering and to remain as quiet as possible once seated, to avoid disturbing the professors...

The students were indeed very disciplined and all quietly took their seats.

minute.

minutes.

minutes.

...

Every move of the three people on stage was watched by everyone, but—because they could watch three people handling materials at the same time, it caused great distress for those who have difficulty making choices.

Who to choose?

A pair of eyes simply can't watch three places at the same time.

It was uncomfortable.

It was truly uncomfortable.

Professor Ye Hong, with his practiced and experienced techniques, watching him work was like watching an epic textbook performance, and you would surely benefit a lot from watching carefully.

Professor Jiang Yulan? Her techniques were also very neat and skillful, her movements graceful, and she didn't strictly follow conventions when handling materials, occasionally using some clever tricks... Each time she revealed a trick, people felt not only pleased visually but also gained a lot of insights.

And Ji You? Despite being a freshman, under the joint pressure of the two big shots, she was hardly inferior, her movements were standard yet skilled and ethereal... She had the rigor of Professor Ye Hong and the unconventionality of Professor Jiang Yulan... If everyone didn't know she was just a freshman and only 18 years old, many in the audience would doubt if she was some hidden master.

It could be said, autumn shades in three parts, each with their highlights and their own thoughts and skills.

This scene—

It was truly a battle of immortals, so impressive it could make one slam the table in admiration.

At this time, the way people looked at Ji You was no longer filled with condescension and mockery. Such a character, such talent, it's quite normal for her to be a bit flamboyant.

Strength!

No matter how loudly and exaggeratedly one brags, in the end, only strength can truly convince others.

Below the stage.

The audience was silent, but their small actions continued unabated, recording videos, calling friends, taking notes...

In short, they were extremely busy.

Then—

Some people in the audience seats glanced up inadvertently and suddenly noticed that the originally empty seats had started filling up without them realizing, not just around them—nearby, far away, in the corners...

As if in a blink of an eye, the originally empty auditorium now had many, many people, too many to count at a glance, just seeing heads everywhere.

Hiss—

Was this a full house?

No!

Not exactly, some secluded corners were still empty.

But this was enough to shock everyone, considering this auditorium could hold up to 50,000 people at one time, and now the occupancy rate was at least 95%!

Terrifying.

It was truly terrifying.

This scene went unnoticed by Ji You, who was seriously handling the materials on stage, by Professor Ye Hong, and by Professor Jiang Yulan, who, of course, even if they had noticed, would definitely not care.

Suddenly—

Everyone noticed that Professor Ye Hong stopped his actions, but his brow was furrowed, seemingly unsatisfied with the result.

Immediately following.

Professor Jiang Yulan also stopped her actions, but her face remained unreadable as she simply placed the processed Snow Juice to one side.

Then—

About a minute later, Ji You also stopped, her brow also slightly furrowed, seemingly very dissatisfied with the material she handled.

Huh?

What had happened?

Everyone was curious.

Soon, without making everyone wait long, Professor Ye Hong told the three students in charge of testing: "Each of you test one, get the results checked quickly." Of course, as a seasoned veteran in materials, having dealt with these materials all his life, Professor Ye Hong didn't need special tests to know roughly what data his work had produced.

He said this because he knew the audience was waiting for the results.

Jiang Tong, Xia Dong, and Shi Yin, all students of the Material Department, were even more careful not to take things lightly and started the testing earnestly. Having the opportunity to stand on stage and observe the masters demonstrate up close was a precious chance they all cherished deeply, and they remained as quiet as possible during the entire presentation. Now, with the results ready, they excitedly took one each and went to test them.

Tick-tock~

Tick-tock~

Tick-tock~

Time silently trickled away.

This time, perhaps because of the nervousness, the three took about half more time than usual to complete the testing, and it took around three minutes before the results emerged.

Professor Ye Hong: Effective usage rate 85%.

Professor Jiang Yulan: Effective usage rate 55%.

Ji You: Effective usage rate: 70%.

Everyone: "!!!"

When the results came out, almost everyone was a bit disbelieving that Ji You's handled materials were even better than those of Professor Jiang Yulan. How could this be possible? What exactly happened here?

While the audience was puzzled, Professor Jiang Yulan smiled slightly and voluntarily explained: "It was just some slight deviations that occurred while I was processing earlier that led to this result."

"What? Even Professor Jiang can make mistakes?"

"Am I hallucinating, did she really make an error?"

"Actually, I noticed it earlier, just wasn't sure, but turns out it was true."

...

The audience buzzed with whispers, but Professor Jiang Yulan smiled and looked towards the audience and said: "It's perfectly normal for a professor to make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes, the key is to find the cause of the mistakes and correct them timely. In research, we are least afraid of failing. It is only through countless failures that we can discover the true principles."

"That's right." Professor Ye Hong chimed in: "In research, the first thing to do is to be prepared for how to face yourself after failure. That's the first step. Only after overcoming this step can you truly understand yourself."

Both dignitaries spoke, and Ji You of course did not speak, as there was really no opportunity for a minor like her to talk. Of course, Ji You didn't actually want to overshadow the professors.

The audience below the stage listened to the professors' speeches and nodded repeatedly.

Throughout the auditorium, whether in the audience or on stage, the atmosphere was very harmonious, and the mood was pleasant and joyful spreading all around...

Suddenly—

A group of about a dozen people entered the auditorium. Seeing Ji You standing on stage, the faces of these new entrants looked a bit unpleasant.

Then, these dozen newly entered people showed no intention of being low-key either, swaggering directly towards the stage. Among them, a tall boy suddenly shouted loudly: "Ji You, I challenge you now, do you dare to accept?"

Chapter 378: The Competition Begins

As he spoke, there was a sudden silence around.

Quiet.

An eerie kind of quiet.

The boy initially felt proud of the impact his words had made, but — just seconds into his pride, he began to feel something was odd, not just him, but also the people around him felt the atmosphere was inexplicably strange at this moment.

On the stage.

Ji You gently put down her tools and stood up, looking at the boy who spoke and asked, "Are you challenging me?"

The boy shouted loudly, "Yes! Aren't you openly setting up this challenge? I am the first one who will defeat you. If you know what's good for you, step down from the platform now and publicly apologize to Siyu Xu in front of everyone. I can let bygones be bygones."

Hmm?

Such an arrogant tone.

However—

She liked it.

Ji You pursed her lips and smiled, "Dear senior, we're short on time, let's not delay any further, please come up."

The boy lifted his chin arrogantly, "You better think this through."

Audience:

"Isn't this Gao Jie from the 130th Material Department?"

"It is Gao Jie; I heard he is very strong."

"They say Gao Jie comes from a family with a history in materials research, his father, his mother, his grandfather, his grandmother... all are well-known material researchers in the Alliance."

"!!! So formidable? Doesn't that mean Ji You is going to lose?"

"Not to mention anything else, Gao Jie has undergone systematic material knowledge training since he was young, with a solid foundation and profound knowledge. Compared to Ji You, who has blazed her own trail, his advantage seems too great."

"Could Ji You truly lose?"

"It's very possible."

"Now that you say it, I'm even more excited to see the outcome of their competition."

...

While the audience was murmuring, Ji You naturally heard some of it, but she didn't care at all. If this guy named Gao Jie hadn't shown up, she would have nearly forgotten why she was standing on the stage today.

Challenging on stage.

It's been half the day, and finally, the first challenger appeared, which could almost bring her to tears of joy.

So—

Ji You wanted to pull him onto the stage immediately, how could she afford to let him go?

Ji You spoke loudly, "Dear senior, I have thought it through, don't worry, I will ensure you step down with dignity."

Gao Jie: "..."

Everyone: "..."

Gao Jie shouted, "Don't be too confident. If you lose, you must publicly apologize to Siyu Xu!"

Ji You frowned upon hearing this, "Why should I apologize to Siyu Xu if I lose? This platform is open to everyone, not just her alone. If she wishes to challenge me, I welcome her, but to apologize? Sorry — that's never going to happen. I, Ji You, have never done anything wrong to her which warrants an apology."

Upon hearing this, Gao Jie's face instantly turned sour: "You plagiarize and copy her work, dare say you haven't done anything wrong to her?"

Ji You's smile faded, her voice neither loud nor soft, but enough for everyone present to hear: "Did Senior Gao Jie come here today pretending to challenge me, just to forcibly press my head down and make me admit to things I've never done?"

Gao Jie shouted, "Whether you did it or not, you know it in your heart."

Ji You's face darkened slightly, she spoke lightly, "Fine, I apologize—because I shouldn't have wasted so much time talking nonsense with you. Now, Senior Gao Jie, please come up to the stage. If I lose, I will apologize."

Wow~

This statement caused a stir around.

Ji You apologizing?

Is she going to apologize?

This means she admits to plagiarizing Siyu Xu's work.

But Ji You quickly shifted the tone, her voice resounding clearly, "But if I win, my only request is that whenever Senior Gao Jie sees me in any situation in the future, he must keep his mouth shut!"

Huh?

Following this statement, the audience was somewhat speechless.

Not asking Gao Jie to apologize, just to keep his mouth shut?

She—

Is this an implicit criticism of Gao Jie's babbling, unable to stand his talking?

Pfft—

The audiences in their seats, after a slight brainstorm, found Ji You's idea a bit funny.

Upon hearing this, Gao Jie's brow twitched. He knew the comment was uncomfortable and odd, but he absolutely believed in his own capabilities, thus Gao Jie did not hesitate to respond: "Can do."

Ji You pursed her lips, smiling, "Senior is really straightforward! So, please come up to the stage."

Gao Jie leapt onto the stage.

His companions also wanted to follow him onto the stage but were stopped by Cheng Jing, who was in charge of maintaining order, who said, "Only challengers may come onto the stage."

After hearing this, they looked at Gao Jie, then at Professors Ye Hong and Jiang Yulan, both with stern faces on the stage, and did not dare to act rashly, so they retreated according to the instructions and took their seats.

After Gao Jie came onto the stage, he first greeted Professor Ye Hong and Professor Jiang Yulan, "Professor Ye, Professor Jiang, good day."

Ye Hong glanced at him and snorted coldly.

Jiang Yulan didn't outright snub him, but simply said indifferently, "Since it's a competition, focus all your effort into it."

Gao Jie nodded, "Yes."

Ye Hong paused for a moment at three groups of materials, snorted coldly and returned to the judges' seat.

Jiang Yulan also reluctantly put down her tools and returned to her original seat.

Since it was a competition, it was, of course, about processing materials. Gao Jie then said, "I heard you've never attended a complete material class, which shows you haven't deeply studied this subject. So, I won't take advantage of you; let's directly compete in basic materials. Both of us will prepare 3 sets of basic materials, and the quality of the final product will determine the winner."

Wow~

As soon as he said this, there was a brief pause in the audience, many people lifted their heads, looking at Gao Jie with slightly complex expressions:

This Gao Jie, who has been playing with materials since he was young, has a solid foundation that is renowned throughout Lanyue Star, even the new talent Siyu Xu cannot compete with him in producing basic materials, let alone others?

So, everyone understood that despite Gao Jie's righteous words, in truth — Ji You was at a great disadvantage.

For a moment, many eyes were on Ji You. Would she accept or refuse?

In the audience's view, Ji You's only chance of winning against Gao Jie was through her unique creativity and innovation, not by competing in basic knowledge—

But who knew—

Ji You hooked the corner of her lips and readily said, "Can do."

Gao Jie's pupils shimmered with triumph, which disappeared in an instant, he waved his hand, playing the magnanimous part, "You can choose the materials first."

Ji You smiled, "The materials are the same, no difference; whoever picks first doesn't matter. Time is precious, wasting it isn't good. I'll start now, Senior Gao Jie, please feel free."

After hearing this, Gao Jie's expression grew slightly unpleasant. He only wanted to show a bit of gentlemanly demeanor, but Ji You didn't give him any face at all.

Gao Jie was a bit angry.

Chapter 379: Results

On stage, Ji You had already begun to process the materials.

Gao Jie was an extremely proud person. Apart from his parents, elders, and a few professors at school, he admired no one. Even the rising star Xu Siyu did not impress him as being stronger than himself. However, as he spent more time with Xu Siyu, feelings beyond mere friendship towards her blossomed in his heart, which is why he couldn't stand to see Xu Siyu mistreated.

Gao Jie's action today was essentially to stand up for Xu Siyu.

Otherwise, he truly disdained the idea of competing with a junior.

If he lost, it would be embarrassing.

Even if he won, it would still be embarrassing since others would think he's bullying the younger and weaker.

Of course, this was just an example. Gao Jie never believed that he could lose.

Thus, seeing Ji You starting her work, Gao Jie furrowed his brow, displeasure written across his face, but then he thought since the competition had begun, he decided to let the results speak for themselves. After winning against Ji You, he would have her apologize to him in person.

So, Gao Jie also approached the workbench and started his own crafting.

minute.

minutes.

minutes.

...

As time ticked away, Ji You, who had been completely focused on her task without a single distraction, finally stopped her hands and smiled after safely packing the three portions of processed materials.

In fact, processing materials and creating handicrafts share similarities. Handicrafts mostly rely on inspiration and handwork, with only a little help from tools for assistance.

But processing materials is more than just using hands; it requires numerous advanced tools for assistance. This not only tests one's understanding of the materials but also their proficiency with various tools.

On this note, Ji You was at a disadvantage. She began earlier than Gao Jie, but ended several minutes later than him.

Upon seeing Ji You stop her work, Gao Jie lifted his chin and said, "Finally stopped. I watched your processing earlier; your techniques were quite clever. During critical moments, you relied on skill to prevent the materials from collapsing. But constantly using tricks only shows that your fundamentals are a complete mess. Miss junior, after the competition is over, I suggest talking less and spending more time improving your basics."

Ji You: "..."

Ji You slowly curved her lips and said, "Thank you for your concern, senior. I admit that indeed, fundamentals are my only shortcoming and inadequacy. Compared to a senior with such profound foundational skills, I certainly stand no chance. But—I still request that senior talk less, or even stay quiet. Let's have the three professional teachers and three fair classmates judge the final result."

Snappy retort!

If it wasn't for maintaining her own image, Ji You really wished she could tell Gao Jie to shut up.

Gao Jie lifted his chin, full of pride: "Fine."

Next—

Jiang Tong, Xia Dong, and Shi Yin, the three classmates, immediately took the materials processed by Ji You and Gao Jie for testing.

Gao Jie stood up straight, maintaining a proper posture. Tall and handsome, at that moment, he was like a perfectly genteel young nobleman, moving gracefully.

And Ji You?

Ji You lacked any sense of image, loosening her arms and legs right in front of everyone. To maintain her focus, she barely moved except for her hands. So she was really feeling the stiffness all over.

Ji You kept swinging her arms and legs, and after finishing that, she even did some radio calisthenics. So... while waiting for the results, everyone watched Ji You stretching out her limbs:

On stage, the five bodyguards whispered stealthily:

Sheng Qingyan raised his hand to his forehead: "Spicy Eye indeed—"

Yue Qiyuan silently shook his head: "A sight most distressing—"

Yue Qiguang glared and cursed: "This idiot, can't she just stand still properly?"

Shen Changqing opened his mouth then, half a second later, closed it again: Discussing others' rights and wrongs in their presence was not the upbringing he had been given.

Chu Jiaojiao was different from everyone else. Her eyes sparkling, she clutched at her chest: "Classmate Ji You is truly beautiful, with strong abilities, generous actions, yet not bothered by minor details. Her movements are as fluid as clouds and flowing water, elegant and natural, indeed the world's most beautiful person."

The four others: "..."

The four discreetly shifted away, putting some distance between themselves and Chu Jiaojiao.

Below the stage:

"Ji You, what is this performance about? Is she trying to energize everyone with an impromptu show because the wait is too dull?"

"So hard on the eyes."

"Can she please stop?"

"When will the results be out? I don't want to watch her monkey around anymore. What did my eyes ever do wrong?"

...

All of a sudden—

The notification sound indicated the results were in.

Everyone stopped and fixed their gaze on the three students holding the reports.

—Who lost in the end?

At the judges' table, Director Wang, who had kept a very low profile since entering, suddenly said, "Bring the results here."

No one objected to Director Wang's command.

Then, the three students brought the results over; Director Wang glanced at them first, showing no expression, and then he handed the results over to Professor Ye Hong sitting next to him.

Professor Ye Hong read them without a word.

Then, he passed them on to Professor Jiang Yulan.

Professor Jiang Yulan took them, read them, and a smile briefly appeared at the corner of her mouth as she said, "Hmm, not bad."

Not bad?

Who's she referring to?

Ji You? Or Gao Jie?

The ambiguity of Professor Jiang Yulan's words led to wild speculation, causing considerable discomfort. Students in the audience were nearly craning their necks, eager to get a closer look at the results.

Fortunately, the judges didn't plan to keep anyone guessing, and Director Wang directly said, "Cheng Jing, announce the scores."

Cheng Jing, as a student manager and the one maintaining order, was promptly conscripted by Director Wang to play the role of a host.

Cheng Jing promptly stepped up, took the two data reports, and peeking at the results, her round, apple-like cheeks remained expressionless.

Really—

Not a hint was revealed.

The audience waited with bated breath, just looking forward to Cheng Jing announcing the results.

Ji You stopped her stretching exercises and had taken a seat.

Gao Jie straightened his spine, pride and arrogance evident on his handsome face.

Cheng Jing looked around, cleared her throat, and said, "Now, I will announce the scores. First—"

Gao Jie raised his hand, interrupting Cheng Jing, and said, "Since I'm a guy, I'll let Ji You go first, announce Ji You's scores."

Cheng Jing's mouth twitched slightly at being abruptly interrupted, and she looked at Ji You with a silent query.

Without any concern, Ji You gestured dismissively and said, "Actually, it doesn't matter who goes first, it's only a matter of seconds. Since Senior Gao Jie wants to know my scores, go ahead and announce mine first."

Her words were heavy with irony.

Cheng Jing's face carried a smile as she said, "Alright, let's take a look at Ji You's scores first. Starting with the first piece of Material, here are the various data: The effective usage rate is 96.4%..."

Huh?

Only 96.4%? That doesn't sound very good.

Ji You herself didn't seem too disappointed upon hearing this.

Chapter 380: Beating You by Just a Little

Cheng Jing finished reporting the first material and then started on the second one: "For the second material, here are its data: effective usage rate: 99.6%..."

Wow~

As soon as this data was revealed, everyone began clicking their tongues in surprise.

Then, the full data for the second material was displayed on the big screen. Not only were people clicking their tongues in surprise, but they were also staring in shock.

How—

How is this possible?

Not only was the effective usage rate outstanding, but its other data were also incredibly high-performing. If everyone hadn't seen Ji You create it with their own eyes, they might not believe this was the work of a beginner.

For a moment, many people's gazes turned towards Ji You, their eyes shining with surprise.

In the face of various looks, Ji You sat calmly, with a smile that revealed eight teeth showing on his mouth.

After the second material, it was time for the third.

Cheng Jing said with a smile: "I believe everyone was shocked by the second set of data. Honestly, I was shocked too. Who would have thought Ji You's basic materials would be so strong? Who said she had poor fundamentals?"

Cheng Jing lightly threw out a rhetorical question, then continued with a smile, "Now, let's take a look at the third material."

The big screen changed, and a set of data was displayed directly.

Audience: "!!!"

Huh~

What's happening?

Did Ji You use some kind of cheat today?

99.9%!

The third material's most important indicator: an effective usage rate of 99.9%! What else could anyone say?

Even the usually unflappable Gao Jie couldn't help but have his pupils shrink, but he quickly recovered to his normal state.

Ji You maintained his standard eight-tooth grin, calmly waving his hands to the crowd: "Comrades, don't be surprised. It's possible that senior Gao Jie did even better than I did."

Audience: "..."

The audience members couldn't help but sneak peeks at Gao Jie, who had a tight expression and remained silent.

Following that—

Cheng Jing said: "After seeing Ji You's grades, I believe everyone is even more curious about Gao Jie's grades. Now, let us appreciate them together."

The big screen switched again, and Gao Jie's first set of data was displayed directly.

Audience: "!!!"

Gao Jie: "!!!"

Cheng Jing said with a smile: "The first set of data: the effective usage rate is 96.3%, just slightly regrettable, 0.01% lower than Ji You." And cleverly enough, it was not only in the effective usage rate but also in other areas such as loss rate etc., where it happened to be 0.01% lower than Ji You's.

Clever.

Really clever.

Gao Jie had a stern face, silent.

Cheng Jing said with a smile: "Now let's look at the second set of data: the effective usage rate for the second material is 99.5%..."

Boom——

Audience: "..."

Gao Jie: "..."

As if doused by a bucket of cold water from midair, Gao Jie suddenly stood up and shouted, "How is that possible! There must be a problem with your detection!"

How could it be just 0.01% lower than Ji You's?

Foul play!

It must be foul play!

Gao Jie's face turned red, staring at Cheng Jing with anger, convinced that Cheng Jing deliberately reported the wrong numbers.

Questioned about fairness, Cheng Jing appeared somewhat helpless but still said with a smile, "If Gao Jie wishes to challenge the results, please wait until I have finished announcing all the grades before discussing it with the inspection team."

Indeed, there was nothing wrong with that statement.

Gao Jie had no choice but to sit back down.

The complete data for the second material were then fully displayed in front of everyone in the auditorium.

Well, it must be said that the material Gao Jie processed was indeed very good, but—each and every data point was just a tiny bit worse than Ji You's, which one could call very clever indeed.

Watching the complete data, Gao Jie's face darkened even more.

Ji You, on the other hand, didn't say anything, still maintaining a smile showing eight teeth.

Cheng Jing said, "Next, I'll announce the data for Gao Jie's third material sample—its effective usage rate is: 99.8%..."

Huh?

Audience: "???"

Gao Jie: "???"

Gao Jie took a deep breath and asked loudly, "Are you sure there's no mistake?"

Cheng Jing showed the data in her hand, spread it out, and said, "Gao Jie, please refrain from shouting loudly at will; after all, this is a public place. If you have objections to the results, you can apply for a re-verification later. I trust that our colleagues who verify the data, as well as the judging panel, will handle it absolutely fairly, justly, and transparently."

Gao Jie's face was livid as he clenched his fists tightly.

The complete data for the third material sample was also fully unveiled.

After the audience saw it, they were left in silence and suffocation.

What a coincidence!

Such a coincidence!

For every item, Ji You's data was just 0.01% higher than Gao Jie's.

What does this imply?

If it were one coincidence, of course, it would be an unintentional one.

But—

This has been three consecutive coincidences, all exactly the same. Is that possible? Only one conclusion remains—it's deliberate!

Absolutely deliberate!

Suddenly, Gao Jie stood up and in front of everyone, said, "I request a re-verification of the data between me and Ji You."

Director Wang nodded: "Granted."

With that, he gestured and said to the three students, "All of you, go and re-test it thoroughly."

Jiang Tong, Xia Dong, and Shi Yin pursed their lips but proceeded to do so. In fact, when they were verifying the data, they too suspected that there could be errors, but in the spirit of fairness and justice, they verified the data over and over again before printing out the results.

Director Wang said, "Use six machines to verify separately, display all the processes of verification to the audience. We at Lanyue Star Military Academy absolutely do not tolerate any form of cheating. Should any be discovered, it must be dealt with severely! No covering up!"

When he said this, the atmosphere around tightened instantly. Director Wang

The audience, too, fell silent.

Gao Jie stared intently at the verification equipment as if afraid that someone would tamper with it if he blinked.

minute.

minutes.

minutes.

...

Six machines, in front of everyone's eyes, tested the materials made by Ji You and Gao Jie simultaneously. After completion, to rule out any issues with the machines, they were swapped and the materials were tested again.

Then—

The final data was presented before everyone. This time, Ji You's data wasn't just 0.01% higher than Gao Jie's; in fact, accurate to four decimal places, it was 0.0111%.

The audience was enveloped in wave after wave of silence.

Gao Jie's face turned shades darker, his face was ashen as he stared in disbelief at the results.

Silence.

Still silence.

...

After a long moment, Gao Jie suddenly stood up, walked over to Ji You, his face showing a complicated mix of embarrassment, pride, anger, and loss—difficult to encapsulate in a few words.

Gao Jie stared at Ji You, gritted his teeth, and said, "I admit defeat this time, but it wasn't due to lack of strength. I simply underestimated you. You are indeed quite good, but I won't lose to you again when I take it seriously..."

Ji You maintained a smile revealing eight teeth and lightly raised her hand, throwing out a question, "Senior, you don't think you lost to me by just a little bit, do you? Just by 0.01%?"

Gao Jie: "You..."

Ji You smiled: "It's just because I wanted to beat you by 0.01%."

Surrounding: "!!!"