

The Beauty 401

Chapter 401 Strive to Become Stronger

Ling Chen opened his mouth, wanting to say something more. But just then, a soft and smooth little hand gently slid across his cheek. For some unexplainable reason, Ling Chen immediately felt dizzy and fell into a deep sleep with his head lolling to one side.

After an unknown period of time, Ling Chen finally regained consciousness, waking up from his stupor.

Opening his eyes, Ling Chen looked at his surroundings and realized he was lying in a hospital room. Beside the hospital bed, Nanrong Hao and Jiang Hao were sitting on chairs, having fallen asleep at the bedside.

"Haozi... Jiang Hao..."

Hearing Ling Chen's call, Jiang Hao and Nanrong Hao immediately lifted their heads, their faces filled with joy as they exclaimed, "Chen, you're finally awake."

"How did I end up here?"

Nanrong Hao said blankly, "Chen, have you forgotten what happened earlier? After we dealt with those people in the parking lot, we were planning to head back but found you lying by the roadside, covered in injuries, so we brought you to the hospital."

Jiang Hao added, "Chen, the doctor has already examined you. There's nothing serious; it's just superficial injuries." After speaking, Jiang Hao asked with confusion, "Chen, how did you get these injuries?"

Yi Shuiyan!

Ling Chen stared at the pristine white ceiling, his eyebrows tightly knotted and a hint of resentment in his eyes. All this while, he had outwardly dismissed the Tiger List as trivial, but deep down, he still felt a bit smug. Being young and already on the Tiger List, an object of envy for all martial artists, was indeed something to be proud of.

However, after tonight's events, all his pride was ruthlessly shattered by Yi Shuiyan.

Both belonging to the younger generation, the gap between them made him feel utterly left behind. Compared to Yi Shuiyan, his pride now seemed utterly ridiculous.

"Chen, Chen?" Seeing Ling Chen's distant expression and his prolonged silence, Nanrong Hao couldn't help but call out.

Ling Chen gave him a glance, threw off his blanket, and got up, saying, "Haozi, go and sort out my discharge paperwork."

Jiang Hao quickly said, "Chen, your injuries aren't completely healed yet, why not stay a few more days for observation?"

"My body isn't that precious; hurry up, I have things to handle later." Ling Chen urged.

About ten minutes later, the three of them exited the hospital and got straight into a car.

Checking the time, it was already past five in the morning; he didn't realize he had slept for so long.

"Haozi, did you tell your sister I'm not coming back?"

"Don't worry, I called her earlier. To keep her from worrying, I told her about your injuries."

Ling Chen nodded and then shifted the conversation, asking, "How did things go on your end?"

"Everything is sorted out. Fortunately, we had experienced people with us this time, and with Haozi's help, those guys were dealt with, and their drugs were found. Xiong is handling it. If all goes as expected, we'll have news soon."

Just as he finished speaking, Jiang Hao's phone rang.

After listening to the call, Jiang Hao smiled and said, "Chen, it's done. The people were caught, and the money is in hand."

"That's good."

According to the plan, after Zhao Zhengxiong and his team intercepted the drugs, they would contact the people from North City District and extort a sum from them. Once the money from North City District was delivered, Zhao Zhengxiong would return the intercepted drugs unopened.

However, once the North City District people came to pick up the goods, Xia Mutong, having been informed beforehand, would lead his men to secretly ambush and capture all the handlers from North City District.

In doing so, not only did money come into the account, but North City District also lost some manpower. More importantly, drug trafficking is a serious crime. In the coming months, all entertainment venues within the North City District will undoubtedly become the prime targets of police searches.

With the police causing disruptions, the business of those guys in North City District will definitely plummet. Not only will there be no income coming in, but they'll also have to be constantly vigilant and live in fear.

During this period, it's enough time for Zhao Zhengxiong and the others to accomplish a lot.

"Jiang Hao, Haozi, you guys need to put in more effort in these two months. Handle whatever comes up on your own; I'm afraid I won't have the energy to help you," Ling Chen instructed.

"Chen, don't worry. As long as the three of us work together, we guarantee there will be no mistakes."

"That's for the best," Ling Chen said, looking out the car window. "Stop the car, I'll get off here."

Nanrong Hao turned to look at Ling Chen in the back seat and asked, "Chen, aren't you coming back with me?"

"No, I have other matters to attend to. You guys go ahead."

After Nanrong Hao and Jiang Hao drove away, Ling Chen walked alone on the roadside and turned into an alley. Following the narrow alley to its end, Ling Chen stood in front of a bright red gate and gently knocked.

Shortly after, the gate opened, and a beautiful and delicate face instantly appeared in front of Ling Chen.

"Ling Cheng, you..." As soon as she began to speak, Xia Yue immediately noticed the injury on Ling Chen's face and frowned slightly, "What happened, who hurt you?"

Ling Chen gave a wry smile, "Fifth Sister, let's talk inside."

Xia Yue hurriedly stepped aside and welcomed Ling Chen into the house.

Ever since he came back last time, Ling Chen had rented a quiet Siheyuan in East Sea City specifically for Yuan Yun and Wei Jiahao to recover from their injuries. At this moment, it wasn't yet dawn, but Qiu Yong and the others had already gotten up and were exercising in the spacious courtyard.

As martial artists, they must persist in their efforts, as only with perseverance can they continuously improve.

Once inside, it wasn't more than two minutes before Qiu Yong and the others arrived one by one, each with a fierce look and a stern expression.

"Ling Cheng, everyone is here. Tell us, who hurt you? Your Big Brother will help you get justice."

Ling Chen looked at the people in front of him, feeling a touch of emotion. He took a breath, sorted out his feelings, and said, "Big Brother, I appreciate your kindness. But as a man, where I fall is where I should get back up. I want to regain my lost face on my own."

Hearing this, the usually silent Xu Ming slightly lifted his head, a hint of admiration flickering in his cloudy eyes.

Zhang Zhongfeng, who was not prone to smiles, slightly curled the corner of his mouth and said with a smile, "It's good that you think this way. That shows you are indeed a real man. Ling Cheng, remember, a temporary defeat is not shameful. Who among us hasn't experienced failures? As long as you are determined and willing to work hard, you will surely regain what you have lost."

"Fourth Brother is right," Qiu Yong echoed. "Since you want to handle it yourself, we respect your choice. But there must be more than just this matter that brought you to us so early, right?"

Ling Chen got straight to the point, "I heard that the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony is in less than two months, and I plan to participate."

Qiu Yong and the others looked at each other and nodded, "Alright, since you want to participate, we'll all go with you."

"There's one more thing." At this point, Ling Chen suddenly stood up, knelt down with a 'thump', and kowtowed three times to the people present.

"Ling Cheng, what are you doing?" Xia Yue's expression changed, and she hurriedly helped Ling Chen up.

Ling Chen spoke seriously, "I know my abilities are limited. In these less than two months, I hope my brothers and sisters can impart their knowledge to me. I understand the rules of the Martial Arts world, that skills are not passed on lightly. Those three kowtows are my way of offering a master-apprentice homage."

Chapter 402 Seeking Knowledge

Xu Ming looked up and asked Ling Chen, "Who is your opponent?"

"Yi Shuiyan, have you heard of this person before?"

"Mad Blade Shuiyan, the most prominent young man of the Dangyang Sect and also the youngest expert," Qiu Yong said with a solemn expression: "So it was him who sought you out. It looks like the Dangyang Sect is not giving up on the Tianling Blade, they even deployed Shuiyan. However, it's normal for you to lose to him. Let alone you, even if our fifth sister were to face him, there would be no guarantee of victory. As one of the outstanding young generation, Yi Shuiyan's skills are indeed formidable."

"Big brother." Ling Chen couldn't suppress the doubts in his heart and asked, "If Shuiyan is so strong, on par with the experts on the Dragon List, why isn't he on the list?"

"Because of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion," Xia Yue explained from the side. "The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion likes to recruit talent. Anyone eyed by the Pavilion, as long as they pass the challenges of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, can join and become a member of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. That is the only way to enter. Other than that, there is no other method. Every year, hundreds, if not thousands, yearn to join the Pavilion, but only two or three actually succeed."

"Correct." Zhang Zhongfeng nodded slightly, "The Pavilion's criteria for selection are very strict. They don't want those who are too old, those with insufficient talent, or those with an unclean background. To even qualify, one's strength must not be lower than that on the Tiger List, otherwise, it's out of the question. It's precisely because of this reason that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has always maintained its transcendent status and formidable power. If we were back in ancient times, the Pavilion's status would be akin to that of the leader of the Martial Arts, having the ability and deterrence to command the heroes."

"Big brother, among the promising young generation, besides Yi Shuiyan, are there any others?" Ling Chen asked.

"To my knowledge, there are six individuals. Yi Shuiyan is just one of them, and moreover..." At this point, Qiu Yong glanced at Ling Chen, hesitating, as if there were more he wished to say but refrained. Seeing this, Ling Chen could not help but ask, "Big brother, is there something you can't say?"

"It's not that Big Brother doesn't want to say it, but rather he's worried it might demoralize you," Xu Ming chimed in. "Among those six people, Shuiyan is at most ranked fifth. There are four others even more formidable than him." After speaking, Xu Ming sighed, "Your generation indeed has quite a few

natural-born talents. It has been many years since we've seen such a situation. But with too many talents, conflicts within the Martial Arts will also increase, as everyone wants to be the dragon that soars to the heavens."

"Little sixth brother, don't be too disheartened. After all, you have just begun to truly step into the Martial Arts World. You are different from Shuiyan and the others. They have been cultivated from a young age, apart from talent, enormous resources have been expended to build their strength to what it is today. Therefore, you don't have to undervalue yourself. If you were on the same starting line as them, they would have no bragging rights at all."

Upon hearing Qiu Yong's words, Ling Chen nodded slightly, "Big Brother, I'm not concerned with these matters at all. I'm just wondering if within less than two months, I can catch up to Shuiyan's pace."

Qiu Yong spoke with full confidence, "If you were to follow the usual hard training process, it definitely wouldn't be possible, but we are the Eight Eccentrics. The Eight Eccentrics have never done things by the book. Hence, ordinary methods are useless for you, we must adopt unorthodox methods." After that, Qiu Yong beckoned Xia Yue over, gave her an instruction, and then rose up and walked out of the living room.

Seeing his actions, everyone immediately followed him to the spacious courtyard.

By now, the sky was slightly bright, the dawn brought the white belly of the fish in the east, a sliver of the faint sunlight shone on everyone, accompanied by the cold breeze of early winter gently blowing.

"Little sixth brother, come out."

Hearing Qiu Yong's words, Ling Chen obediently walked and stood in the center of the courtyard.

At the same time, Xia Yue, Yuan Yun, and Wei Jiahao came out of the adjacent room.

Ling Chen was startled and asked with concern, "Third Brother, Eighth Brother, your injuries haven't healed yet, why aren't you resting inside?"

Yuan Yun waved his hand with a smile, "After lying down for so many days, the injuries have mostly healed, it's no big deal, don't worry about me." After finishing, Yuan Yun changed the subject, "I heard you're going to face Shuiyan at the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, so I came to give you a hand."

With those words, Yuan Yun flicked his wrist, and a steel saber over three feet long immediately appeared in his hand, stepping right in front of Ling Chen.

"Before we help you, we first need to understand your gap with Shuiyan to devise a corresponding plan. Don't hold back during the bout, go all out."

Ling Chen hesitated, "This... Is this really okay?"

"What, are you afraid of hurting me?" Yuan Yun raised his head and laughed, "Honestly, I'm not afraid of you hurting me, I'm afraid you don't have the skills."

Ling Chen touched his nose, knowing that his third brother was trying to provoke him. If Yuan Yun could ignore his own injuries to help him, and Ling Chen acted squeamishly, it would really be unfair to everyone's good intentions.

With this in mind, Ling Chen took a deep breath, composed himself, his gaze focused slightly, staring at Yuan Yun who was ten steps away, adjusting his breathing, as the Inner Strength in his Dantian flowed gently through his meridians, like a trickling stream.

"Third Brother, excuse my offense!"

With a light shout, Ling Chen lightly tapped with the tip of his foot, his body shot forward like a cannonball, rapidly advancing towards Yuan Yun. His iron fist smashed forward mercilessly, the punch ferocious, the sound of wind whistling.

"Nice one!"

Yuan Yun smiled, shifting his feet backwards by a step, leaving space, raising his saber to chop towards Ling Chen's incoming fist.

Seeing danger, Ling Chen quickly retracted his fist, twisted his waist, and instantaneously sidestepped to Yuan Yun's left, using both shoulder and elbow to get close, aiming to limit Yuan Yun's saber with close combat.

Last night, when he had battled with Shuiyan, he had used the same method, but the difference in strength between them was too great, so it didn't have a significant effect.

At this moment, Yuan Yun's steps moved agilely, dodging Ling Chen's attacks. His steel saber was continuously gathering strength, waiting for the right moment.

Ling Chen did not pause, his punches forceful, one after another, pressuring Yuan Yun, wishing to force a weakness through a storm-like offensive. However, Yuan Yun's defense was watertight, not leaving any opportunity.

Just as the two were locked in a standoff, Yuan Yun casually swung his saber in an attempt to force Ling Chen back but Ling Chen easily dodged it. Simultaneously, Ling Chen saw Yuan Yun expose his side, a huge opening; he was delighted and immediately seized the opportunity and shot forward with a blasting punch.

Just as the punch was about to hit the target, Ling Chen's eyes lit up, his mouth corners just beginning to smile. Yet before his smile could broaden, he suddenly felt a blur in front of his eyes, and Yuan Yun disappeared from his sight.

Where did he go?

Seeing what happened, Ling Chen was greatly shocked and turned his head around hurriedly, looking in all directions.

Chapter 403 Special Training

As his gaze shifted, a fierce sword wind suddenly attacked from above his head.

Ling Chen looked up and saw Yuan Yun holding a sword in both hands, raised high over his head, chopping straight towards him. Without time to think, Ling Chen immediately retreated hastily, trying to avoid the range of the steel sword's attack.

However, for every step he took back, Yuan Yun pressed forward a step, continuously swinging the steel sword in his hand, fast and ruthless, as if it came with an unstoppable force.

After Ling Chen had retreated more than ten steps, his back seemed to hit something hard, and his retreat was completely blocked. At this moment, Yuan Yun's steel sword rapidly enlarged in his eyes. For a moment, Ling Chen's pupils slightly shrank under that fierce Sword Force, and he actually felt a suffocating pressure.

"Alright, that's far enough."

Qiu Yong's voice came, and Yuan Yun's steel sword immediately stopped in mid-air, less than an inch away from Ling Chen's forehead. Looking at Ling Chen's dazed expression, Yuan Yun slightly smiled, sheathed his sword and stood up, patting Ling Chen's shoulder, and asked, "Ling Cheng, are you alright?"

Regaining his senses, Ling Chen gave a bitter smile and touched his nose, saying, "I lost."

"Losing to your third brother is no big deal; he just wanted to test your skill and figure out the gap between you and Yi Shuiyan," said Qiu Yong as he walked. "Besides, your third brother might not excel in other skills, but his swordsmanship is almost as good as Yi Shuiyan's. Choosing him to spar with you couldn't be more appropriate." With that, Qiu Yong turned to look at Yuan Yun and said, "Third brother, you just tested Ling Cheng's skill, you should speak your thoughts."

Yuan Yun nodded and said, "Ling Cheng's martial foundation isn't bad, but perhaps because of his previous occupation, his moves mainly aim for a one-hit kill, discarding those useless fancy maneuvers. Overall, Ling Cheng is a little too eager for quick success, too desperate to defeat his opponent. His martial arts may work against ordinary martial arts practitioners, but if he faces a true master, the effectiveness will be greatly reduced."

"Ling Cheng, to defeat Yi Shuiyan, you must change your habits, abandon everything you've learned before. The martial arts of Huaxia are profound and encompassing; every move is the essence evolved

from our predecessors. Comparing combat skills in the military with martial arts is like comparing heaven and earth. Only by seeking change can you make progress."

"Change?" mused Ling Chen.

However, as easy as it sounds, it's difficult to do. Changing one's old habits is not so easy.

"Yi Shuiyan excels in swordsmanship, why don't you learn swordsmanship from me?" Yuan Yun suggested.

Xia Yue chimed in, "Yi Shuiyan has over twenty years of hard training in swordsmanship; how can Ling Cheng compare with him? It's more reliable for him to learn swordsmanship from me. I can teach him how to counter swordsmanship."

Qiu Yong waved his hands, "Ling Cheng's hand-to-hand combat skills are pretty good, and besides, his external skills have already reached the pinnacle. I think he's more suited to learn the Cross Training of Iron Cloth Shirt from me."

For a time, everyone was talking at once, each expressing their desire to impart their Absolute Skill to Ling Chen.

"Enough, stop arguing," said Xu Ming, who was now speaking, and everyone immediately quieted down. Xu Ming looked at Ling Chen and said, "There are only less than two months left, no matter what you study, you can't make much progress. Any skill needs persistent effort; there are no shortcuts."

Hearing this, Xia Yue asked, "Second brother, then do you have any good ideas?"

"There is one method; instead of learning a single skill, why not combine the strengths of various styles, simplify the complex, and impart the essence, allowing him to master a variety of different techniques. This way, when facing the enemy unexpectedly, it might have a surprising effect."

After hearing Xu Ming's suggestion, Qiu Yong's eyes lit up, nodding in agreement, "Second brother's method is good, I think it's feasible. Ling Cheng, what do you think?"

"I'll follow everyone's arrangements."

"Good, you were just injured last night, so go back and rest for today, and come back here early tomorrow morning."

Scratching his head and feeling somewhat embarrassed, Ling Chen said, "Big Brother, I might as well stay here. Wanqing doesn't even know I've been injured yet."

"Suit yourself, there are plenty of rooms available here anyway."

...

The next day.

As dawn broke, Ling Chen was already up and out of his room.

At this moment, Qiu Yong and the others were in the yard, preparing for the upcoming training. When Ling Chen arrived in the courtyard, he saw four supports placed in the center, connected at the top by sticks. From each stick, more than a dozen fist-sized sandbags hung by thin strings, constantly swinging in mid-air.

Ling Chen walked over with a puzzled look and asked, "Big Brother, what's this for?"

Qiu Yong said with a smile, "This is a listening training specially prepared for you by your junior brother. He was born blind but has sharp hearing. With those ears of his, he is no less capable than a normal person with sight. His abilities also come from training since childhood."

After hearing Qiu Yong's explanation, Ling Chen immediately understood; he also possessed the ability to discern location by sound. However, he had previously relied on the sound of gunfire to determine the position of enemies. If a sound were too soft, his ears would not be able to pick it up.

Blindfolded, Ling Chen, guided by Yang Chen, walked towards the still sandbags, listening carefully to the faint sound of sand rustling against the bags to gauge their distance and position for dodging.

However, this level of training was more than ten times harder than the training Ling Chen underwent at Ghost Base. In less than half an hour, he was nearly dizzy from the swinging sandbags and completely lost his bearings.

After being 'tortured' by Yang Chen for two hours without much break, Ling Chen was then dragged away by Xia Yue to learn swordsmanship.

Among the eight eccentrics, all but Wei Jiahao, whose Mechanical Techniques were not suitable to teach Ling Chen, extracted the essence of their Absolute Skills and imparted them to Ling Chen. Each person trained him for two hours in uninterrupted intensive sessions.

Even with Ling Chen's iron-clad physique, after being tormented for twelve straight hours, he was left aching and weak, barely able to walk steadily.

After a busy day, when Ling Chen returned to his room, he didn't even take a bath. Smelling of sweat, he collapsed into bed and fell asleep.

A week passed, and Ling Chen lived and ate with Qiu Yong and the others, never returning home nor having time to do so. Each day he could only find a moment for a phone call with Nanrong Wanqing, to keep her reassured.

Besides learning the unique skills of the eight eccentrics, Ling Chen didn't forget to cultivate the Prajnaparamita Sutra. No matter how formidable the martial skills he learned, Inner Strength was the most crucial foundation. Only by advancing in both aspects would he have a chance to surpass Yi Shuiyan.

That day, after breakfast, Ling Chen was preparing to continue getting thrashed by Yang Chen when he saw Qiu Yong approaching and saying, "You have the day off today. Go out and relax. Training must maintain a balance between tension and relaxation; you can't wind yourself too tight."

"Really?" Ling Chen's spirits lifted, finally, he could relax for a bit.

Chapter 404 Belief

Leaving the yard, Ling Chen directly drove to Wealthy Manor. Today was a day off, and Nanrong Wanqing was at home, not going to the company.

The car stopped outside the door, and Ling Chen directly went to the villa. Upon entering, he saw Nanrong Wanqing wearing a set of home clothes, lying sideways on the living room sofa, her legs slightly bent, a pair of delicate bare feet exposed, holding a magazine in her hands, engrossed in reading, completely unaware of Ling Chen's arrival.

Seeing Nanrong Wanqing so engrossed, Ling Chen sneaked a smile, tiptoed around to the back of the sofa.

Without waiting for Nanrong Wanqing to react, Ling Chen suddenly leaped forward, his hands supporting the couch's cushion, gently pressing down on Nanrong Wanqing's soft body.

Ah!

Startled, Nanrong Wanqing's mouth opened slightly, her beautiful eyes like shimmering water looking at Ling Chen who had appeared on top of her, and she froze for a moment.

Ling Chen grinned, his eyes filled with affection, and said, "Beautiful lady, did you miss your husband?"

"What husband, don't talk nonsense." Feeling Ling Chen's breath, Nanrong Wanqing's face blushed, her eyes shyly said, "I... uh..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Ling Chen couldn't wait to capture Nanrong Wanqing's cherry lips, savoring her fragrance and sweetness.

"Don't... uh... stop..."

Nanrong Wanqing, with a face flushed with shyness, pushed at Ling Chen, trying to stop his actions, but Ling Chen's advances were too forceful. In no time, she gave up resisting and fell completely into his tender embrace, responding to his ardor.

At this moment, the sound of footsteps came from the staircase, and Ling Chen looked up, his expression changing to surprise. He was expecting it to be that young girl Su Lin, but to his surprise, it was the nanny, Nanny Wang.

Seeing them being intimate, Ling Chen felt a bit embarrassed, reluctantly got up from Nanrong Wanqing's body, and waved a greeting at Nanny Wang.

"Uh... Miss, I have cleaned up the upstairs, you guys go ahead, I'll be leaving now." After speaking, Nanny Wang left the villa in a hurry without even putting down her rag.

"It's all your fault!" Nanrong Wanqing sat up, her face red and her eyes brimming with embarrassment.

Ling Chen spread his hand, protesting, "How was I supposed to know Nanny Wang was here, you didn't tell me beforehand either."

Nanrong Wanqing hit Ling Chen's shoulder crossly, and complained, "I was just about to tell you, but you didn't give me a chance."

"Alright, alright, my fault, my fault, happy now?" Saying this, Ling Chen's hand involuntarily reached for Nanrong Wanqing's slender waist, pulled her into his arms and whispered with a low chuckle, "Now that Nanny Wang is gone, shall we continue?"

"Stop it! Who is going to continue with you. Come clean, what have you been up to lately? You haven't been home."

"Isn't it because I have important matters to attend to." Ling Chen explained, "At most two more months, once I'm done with things, I'll be with you every day. Is that good enough?"

With that, Ling Chen lifted Nanrong Wanqing onto his lap, letting her lean against him, one hand gently stroking her legs, his eyes showing a hint of puzzlement.

"Wanqing, have your legs completely recovered?"

Nanrong Wanqing nodded lightly, unable to hide the excitement in her eyes, and spoke with a soft smile, "I don't know why, but suddenly they healed. I even went to the hospital for a check-up, and the doctor said both my legs are healthy, no problems."

Nanrong Wanqing didn't know, but Ling Chen was very clear that it was due to the enhanced drug that Nanrong Wanqing's legs recovered normally. What he couldn't understand was how Mr. Yun managed to permanently fix the effect of the enhanced drug in Nanrong Wanqing's body.

Could it be that the God Organization had developed a new drug?

While he was thinking, the ringtone from Ling Chen's cellphone in his pocket started to ring.

Ling Chen took out his phone, saw that it was a call from Tang Yuan, and immediately put down Nanrong Wanqing, walked to the window, and pressed the answer button.

"Hello! Old Tang, what do you need?"

"Is it convenient for you to talk right now?" Tang Yuan's voice carried a hint of gravity.

"You go ahead."

"I want to ask if Miss Nanrong still has that suit of exoskeleton armor on her?"

Damn it!

Ling Chen's face changed slightly. He had almost forgotten about this and hadn't reported it to the Phantom. After Nanrong Wanqing was taken away by Zhu Hong, the suit of exoskeleton armor had disappeared, never to be found. Presumably, it had been taken by people from the God Organization for research.

"Some time ago, there was an accident, and the armor has been lost. Why, did something happen?"

"No wonder." Tang Yuan sighed over the phone and replied, "A couple of days ago, we raided a secret base of the God Organization and faced fierce resistance. Their strength was formidable; our attack was repelled, and we had to retreat early. During the withdrawal, we killed an enemy and found a suit of exoskeleton armor on him. After examination, the technology used in the exoskeleton armor was indeed the technology provided by Miss Nanrong, which is why I'm calling to ask."

Ling Chen frowned slightly and said, "How are the casualties on your side?"

"Fortunately, no one was lost, just some gunshot wounds. We were planning to use the exoskeleton armor as a secret weapon, but now it's great, the God Organization not only has the same technology but is also producing it on a large scale. Once the exoskeleton armor is widely equipped, combined with the enhancement drugs, the God Organization will only become harder to deal with in the future."

"Sorry, I was too careless and didn't protect the exoskeleton armor well."

"Forget it! Talking about it now is useless, just take care of yourself, don't let anything else happen."

"You too, take care."

After hanging up the phone, Ling Chen let out a sigh, feeling somewhat downcast. If the God Organization equipped the exoskeleton armor on a large scale, the situation would be grim.

"What's wrong?" Nanrong Wanqing walked barefoot to Ling Chen's side and asked with concern.

Ling Chen turned his head and managed a slight smile, "It's nothing. It was Old Tang's call, he's just bored and wanted to chat."

Nanrong Wanqing, ever so astute, could tell Ling Chen was troubled. Seeing that he was reluctant to elaborate, she didn't ask further. Although she acted very strong at Hongyu Group, she knew that there are some things men do that women are better off not meddling with. In her eyes, as long as Ling Chen was safe, that was what mattered most.

"Oh, right!" Ling Chen changed the subject, "Where's Su Lin? Is she not home today?"

"You don't know?" As soon as she spoke, Nanrong Wanqing immediately remembered that Ling Chen hadn't been home for a week, so he had no idea about Su Lin's situation.

"Lin has left."

"Left?" Ling Chen was slightly startled, puzzled: "What do you mean? Where did she go?"

"She's gone for an internship and might not be back for a while."

So, she went for an internship. Ling Chen thought Su Lin had gone abroad to find her parents.

"Hey, what major is Su Lin studying?" Ling Chen asked casually.

"Archaeology."

"Archaeology?" Ling Chen was taken aback. Why had that girl chosen a major that dealt with the dead? It didn't seem to fit her personality.

As he was thinking, Liu Kun walked in from outside.

"Uncle Liu." Ling Chen greeted with a smile.

"Ling Chen, someone outside sent a letter, specifically asking for it to be given to you." After saying that, Liu Kun handed an envelope to Ling Chen.

Ling Chen tore open a slit and pulled out the letter inside. He only glanced at it, and his gaze immediately froze.

Chapter 405 Deep into the Trap

"Ling Chen, who sent this letter?"

Nanrong Wanqing leaned in close to Ling Chen, eyeing the letter in his hand. However, before she could make out the contents of the letter, Ling Chen had already folded it up and slipped it into his pocket, saying, "I have something to take care of, I'll step out for a bit." Without waiting for Nanrong Wanqing to ask any more questions, Ling Chen quickly exited the villa.

But after a few steps, Ling Chen seemed to remember something and turned back to his bedroom. When he came out again, he had something wrapped in clothes in his hand.

Leaving the Nanrong Family home, Ling Chen got into his car and took out the letter from his pocket again. Looking at the contents, Ling Chen's face remained expressionless, but his eyes revealed a cold and sinister glint, like a blood-thirsty beast ready to tear the throat of its prey at any moment.

Then, he took out his cell phone and repeatedly dialed a number. However, the phone kept indicating that the recipient was unreachable.

A few minutes later, Ling Chen put away his phone, started the car, and drove out of Wealthy Manor.

After a drive of more than fifty minutes, Ling Chen arrived at the outskirts of the South District of East Sea City, near the rural areas. This place was an industrial park, dotted with over ten factories, among which were some old and abandoned buildings and warehouses.

Ling Chen drove up to a dilapidated factory building, looked at the rusty iron gate, and honked the car horn.

Soon after, two men in suits came out from a nearby guard room. After glancing at Ling Chen in the driver's seat, the two men quickly approached, circled the car to make sure there was no one else inside, and then opened the iron gate to let Ling Chen in.

Reaching the entrance of the factory building, Ling Chen opened the car door and stepped out, only to be immediately surrounded by several men in suits. They gestured for him to spread his arms and took everything out of his pockets—his cell phone and wallet—then scanned him a few times with a device to make sure he wasn't carrying any weapons.

"Go inside," one of the men in suits threw the phone and wallet back to Ling Chen and pointed toward the factory's main entrance.

Without a word, Ling Chen gathered his belongings and stepped inside.

Once in the factory, the large door behind him was immediately locked by the people outside. Ling Chen frowned and looked around. The spacious, dilapidated factory was filled with various debris and discarded machinery. The floor was covered in thick dust, and most of the window glass above had shattered, allowing unobstructed sunlight to stream in from above.

In the center of the factory, there was a table with a camera on it, pointed in the direction of the entrance.

Ling Chen walked over to the camera and said coldly, "I don't care what tricks you want to play, hand over the person now."

"Ling Chen, you really are gullible. I gave you a random excuse and you actually believed it." A hoarse voice mixed with electronic tones came from the camera's speaker, carrying a hint of a sneer.

Hearing that unfamiliar yet somewhat familiar voice, Ling Chen's mind raced, searching through his memories for the owner of the voice. However, none of the enemies he knew matched this voice. Still, he was certain that this person definitely came from the God Organization.

"If she's not in your hands, why can't I contact her?" Ling Chen asked.

"Ling Chen, it seems you don't really care about the people around you. Didn't you know Miss Su went on an internship to the mountains? She's in a remote area deep in the forest with no signal; of course, you can't reach her."

Relieved to hear that Su Lin was safe, Ling Chen breathed a sigh of relief. The letter he had received earlier claimed that Su Lin had fallen into their hands, and if he didn't arrive within an hour, he would have to collect her corpse.

When he left the Nanrong Family home, he had called Su Lin several times, but no one had answered. Plus, since the other party gave him only one hour, he didn't have time to investigate thoroughly, so he had to rush over to the meeting. True or false, he had to confirm Su Lin's safety.

"What elaborate scheme did you concoct to lure me here? Is this about seeking revenge for the island incident?"

"Hmph! Do you have any idea how much effort we put into that base? Because of you, more than ten years of our hard work went down the drain."

"Evil deeds will bring retribution; you've brought this upon yourselves."

"Cut the crap, today you're not leaving here alive."

As those words fell, Ling Chen heard footsteps from outside the factory gradually receding, as if the suited men guarding the door were running away.

Not coming in to deal with him, but running away instead... Could it be...

Ling Chen's pupils shrank as he quickly realized what was happening. He hurriedly dashed towards the tightly locked main door and delivered a powerful flying kick.

Bang!

The robust iron door was immediately dented by the kick.

At that moment, flames suddenly burst out from a pile of debris in the factory, rapidly spreading around. As the fire drew closer to him, Ling Chen channeled his Inner Strength and furiously kicked at the iron door.

But despite his strength, Ling Chen couldn't break through. At this rate, before the iron door gave way, he might already be consumed by the flames.

Realizing this, Ling Chen immediately discarded the idea of escaping through the main door and began looking for other ways out.

The factory was surrounded by walls, and the only exits were through the high windows above—far too high to climb—and the iron gate he had come through.

His gaze shifting, Ling Chen's attention was suddenly captured by an old machine inside the factory. He couldn't tell what the machine was used for; it was spherical in the middle as if it processed something.

Without delay, Ling Chen rushed to the machine and, with all his strength, forced open the rusted seal. As expected, there was a sealed space inside—cramped but just enough to accommodate an adult.

Immediately, Ling Chen crawled into the opening, sealed the entire space, and kept the flames at bay.

At the same time, he took out his cellphone and dialed the fire department number urgently.

After the machine's space was sealed, the air was limited, and he could last only a few minutes at most. Furthermore, with the engulfing fire, the machine's outer shell was getting hotter and hotter; if he didn't escape quickly, he would inevitably be cooked alive.

Three minutes passed, and the temperature inside the machine soared rapidly. Ling Chen was drenched in sweat as if he had been caught in heavy rain. Moreover, the machine's inner walls were hot like burning iron; Ling Chen didn't dare touch them and curled up as much as possible to avoid getting burned.

Just then, a wailing 'woo woo woo woo' sound faintly came from outside the machine.

Gasping for air and nearly suffocating, Ling Chen was overjoyed. Rescue had finally arrived.

Chapter 406 Invitation

Before long, Ling Chen felt the temperature inside the machine gradually decrease. Unable to breathe, he hurriedly pushed open the sealed hatch, and a smell of scorching mixed with the air immediately rushed in from outside.

Ling Chen didn't care too much, greedily breathing in the air as he crawled out of the machine. By this time, the fire inside the factory had been brought under control and a team of firefighters had already burst through the doors, rushing in with hoses.

"Sir, are you alright?" One of the firefighters saw Ling Chen escaping from the machine and hurried over to help him walk outside.

"I'm fine, you go ahead with your work," Ling Chen declined the offer of help and walked out of the burnt-out factory on his own.

At this moment, among the crowd that had gathered around the fire trucks, a man wearing sunglasses turned around and pulled out his phone to dial a number.

"Hello!"

"How did things go?"

"Mr. Yun, everything went according to your plan, Ling Chen is safe and has escaped successfully."

"He won't suspect anything, will he?"

"We set it up thoroughly, he should not realize our true intentions and will simply think we are seeking revenge for the last incident."

"Good, I trust your work."

Sitting in the ambulance, the doctor responsible for checking Ling Chen's body said, "Mr. Ling, you're really lucky. It's fortunate that there was a fire brigade stationed just two kilometers away. If it weren't so close, you would have had a hard time escaping from the fire."

Ling Chen grinned and said, "That's right, my luck is always good."

Returning to the Nanrong Family, Ling Chen didn't dare mention what had happened to Nanrong Wanqing for fear of worrying her. Regardless, at least Su Lin was fine; it was a false alarm.

Having come back for a rare visit, Ling Chen spent the entire night by Nanrong Wanqing's side, enjoying the tenderness of a beautiful woman.

...

The next day.

Early in the morning, before the sky had brightened, Ling Chen set out for where Qiu Yong and the others lived. With less than one and a half months left until the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, he needed to race against time to improve himself.

From six in the morning until six in the evening, Ling Chen underwent continuous intensive training for twelve hours. After each exhausting session, he couldn't even think about sleeping, immediately starting to cultivate the Prajnaparamita Sutra.

After days of training, Ling Chen had deeply appreciated the benefits of the Prajnaparamita Sutra. After each session of cultivation, he felt strength coursing through his body, all fatigue swept away, needing only two to three hours of sleep to maintain his energy for the entire day.

In the blink of an eye, a month passed by, and Ling Chen improved faster with each passing day.

Among the eight eccentrics, apart from Ling Chen himself and Wei Jiahao, the other six possessed unique abilities. After a month of intensive training, Ling Chen began real combat training. Having six experts with different abilities to spar with him, it would be difficult not to progress.

One day, after having lunch with Qiu Yong and others, Ling Chen planned to rest for a moment before continuing training. But at that moment, there was a knock on the door.

"I'll get the door." The youngest, Wei Jiahao, stood up and quickly walked to the door, opening it.

A few minutes later, Wei Jiahao returned to the group with two invitations.

"Big brother, the people from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have sent two invitations. One is for us, the eight eccentrics, and the other is solely for Ling Cheng."

Ling Chen's eyes brightened, he reached out to take the invitations and looked at them with interest.

The invitations issued by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion were very ordinary, no different from those on the market, but the sharp-eyed Ling Chen noticed a gold-embossed pattern on the lower right corner of the invite, resembling a broken sword.

Seeing Ling Chen examining the pattern, Xia Yue said, "That is the Heavenly Mechanism Sword, the treasured sword of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Ling Chen curiously asked, "Why is it broken?"

"The Heavenly Mechanism Sword passed down by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is, in fact, a broken sword," explained Qiu Yong. "There are many legends about the Heavenly Mechanism Sword in the Martial Arts community. Some say that the Heavenly Mechanism Sword was the personal sword of the first Pavilion Master of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Hundreds of years ago, that Pavilion Master fought alone against numerous heroes with the Heavenly Mechanism Sword and overpowered all the experts, establishing Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's esteemed status. Therefore, subsequent Pavilion Masters have taken the Heavenly Mechanism Sword as a symbol of the Pavilion, passing it down through generations."

"I see," Ling Chen nodded, looking at the date marked on the invitation, the sixth of the next month, ten days away.

"Big brother, why does it only have the time, but no specific location?"

Qiu Yong replied, "Each Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony is held in a different location. As a grand event in the Martial Arts, it naturally attracts many martial artists. However, generally, only those who are invited have the entitlement to participate in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. If there were too many people, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would struggle to control the situation, and chaos could ensue. Decades ago, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion held a public Great Ceremony, resulting in two to three thousand martial artists attending from across the country. Due to the overwhelming number of participants, coordination became difficult, and the event had trouble proceeding smoothly. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had no choice but to end the Great Ceremony prematurely. Hence, the subsequent Great Ceremonies have been held in very secretive locations, and until the last moment, no one knows the exact location. This way, it prevents any leaks of information."

After listening to Qiu Yong, Ling Chen curled his lip. A Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony treated like a national leader's election, made so solemn and mysterious, was it really necessary?

Grumbling aside, Ling Chen did not forget his goal. He wasn't particularly interested in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, his purpose in attending was to seek revenge.

On the night he crossed swords with Yi Shuiyan, he heard the voice of the porridge girl. If it weren't for the porridge girl's intervention at a critical moment, he would not know what his current state would be.

As a man, always being protected by a woman felt annoying. While he may seem carefree and mingle easily with women, as if he didn't take anything too seriously, in this aspect, his sense of male ego was strong.

A man should protect a woman; it's embarrassing to have it the other way around.

Thinking this, Ling Chen picked up his Tianling Blade and strode into the courtyard.

"Third brother, let's go a few more rounds."

...

Five days had passed, and Ling Chen's training finally came to an end.

Ling Chen wanted to continue the special training until the start of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, but Qiu Yong refused his request. With five days left, Qiu Yong advised him to rest well, adjust his condition, and ideally integrate what he had learned during this period.

When the big brother spoke, Ling Chen dared not disobey. Moreover, he had neglected Nanrong Wanqing during this period of intensive training. Now that Su Lin had gone out of town for an internship, Nanrong Wanqing was at home all alone, without anyone to talk to.

What's more, in a few days, he would leave to attend the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, unsure when he would be able to return. So during these few available days, it might be better to spend more time with Nanrong Wanqing at home.

Chapter 407 Departure

Staying in the tender land of love, five days passed in the blink of an eye.

Upon opening his eyes, Ling Chen looked at the hazy sky outside the window, then retracted his gaze and turned to look at Nanrong Wanqing, who was sound asleep in his arms.

Nanrong Wanqing was hugging his body with both hands, her legs slightly curled, just like a little cat, enjoying the warmth of his embrace.

Looking at her enchanting face, Ling Chen couldn't help but raise his hand and gently stroke her smooth cheek, pushing away a few strands of hair that had fallen on her forehead, and planted a light kiss there.

Perhaps feeling the moisture of Ling Chen's lips, the sleeping Nanrong Wanqing fluttered her eyelashes, opened her eyes slightly, and sleepily looked at Ling Chen beside her, lazily said: "It's still not bright outside, why are you awake already." With that said, Nanrong Wanqing squeezed into Ling Chen's embrace, finding a comfortable position, and continued to lie down.

Ling Chen looked down and just caught a glimpse of the snow-white cleavage that had been squeezed out from Nanrong Wanqing's neckline.

Men always have an involuntary physical reaction in the morning, and Ling Chen was no exception. At the moment, smelling the faint scent of Nanrong Wanqing's body undoubtedly made Ling Chen's reaction even more intense.

Thinking that he would have to leave soon, if not taking the chance to be intimate now, when would he? Immediately, Ling Chen rolled over and pressed Nanrong Wanqing's delicate body beneath him.

Looking at Ling Chen above her, Nanrong Wanqing's eyes held a shy charm, and she pouted with a flushed face: "Stop it, it's still early in the morning. If I had known you were this naughty, I wouldn't have fallen for your tricks and slept with you last night."

"We've already slept together, are you thinking of going back on that now? Come on, give me a kiss."

"You... mmh..."

Before Nanrong Wanqing could finish speaking, her cherry-like mouth was blocked by Ling Chen's.

...

After a session of tenderness, it was already past six in the morning, and the sky was gradually getting brighter outside the window.

Looking at Nanrong Wanqing panting softly in his arms, her cheeks blushing, Ling Chen smiled proudly.

Nanrong Wanqing complained: "You're still smiling, it's all your fault, not letting anyone get a good sleep. I still have to work today."

"Then keep sleeping, it's about time for me to leave."

Hearing this, Nanrong Wanqing immediately sat up from the bed, and asked reluctantly: "Then when will you be back?"

"For now, I'm not sure, but I promise you, once things are handled, I will rush back as soon as possible." After a pause, Ling Chen continued: "I have asked two friends to secretly protect you while I'm not here, so there won't be any safety issues."

Nanrong Wanqing urged: "Take good care of yourself when you're out there alone, remember to look after yourself."

"Alright, wifey, I'm not a child, there's no need to worry about me."

Hearing him calling her wifey, Nanrong Wanqing's face flushed with shyness, and she muttered: "I haven't agreed to marry you yet, don't call me that." Her words said one thing, but the slight curl of her lips betrayed her true feelings.

With a smile in his eyes, Ling Chen said: "You've slept in my bed, and you still think you can run away. Alright, I have to go now, everyone is waiting for me."

After getting dressed and freshening up, Ling Chen changed into his clothes, picked up the backpack already prepared, and left the Nanrong Family alone.

On his way, Ling Chen received a phone call from Qiu Yong, telling him to go directly to the harbor in East Sea City.

The harbor? Are we taking a ship to attend the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony?

Thinking to himself, Ling Chen then turned the car around and headed towards the harbor.

Twenty minutes later, Ling Chen parked the car in the parking lot outside the harbor. Arriving at the roadside, he saw Qiu Yong and others standing outside the harbors' gates, waiting for his arrival.

"Big brother, second brother..." Ling Chen hurried over and greeted everyone with a smile.

Qiu Yong nodded and said: "Everyone is here, let's set off."

As expected, their mode of transportation this time was a passenger ship, and moreover, a luxurious one. Ling Chen noticed that the surface of the ship was also marked with the pattern of the Heavenly Mechanism Sword, indicating that it belonged to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

"Wow, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is really rich," Ling Chen muttered under his breath.

Xia Yue, who was walking beside him, gave Ling Chen a look and said: "You think all the people from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion are hermits living in seclusion, untouched by the worldly smoke? We are in modern times now, even organizations like the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion with hundreds of years of legacy have to keep up with the times. Besides, without solid financial support, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would probably have dissolved long ago."

While talking, the group boarded the passenger ship.

A middle-aged man in a suit greeted them with a smile at the boarding gate. Seeing Qiu Yong and the others coming aboard, he immediately approached with a beaming smile: "Elder Qiu, it has been a long time since I've seen you. It is an honor for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to have you attending this edition of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony."

Qiu Yong glanced at him and said indifferently: "Zhong Yang, spare me the pleasantries. We are here to broaden the horizons of my sixth brother."

Hearing this, the middle-aged man named Zhong Yang immediately turned his gaze toward Ling Chen and smiled: "I suppose this gentleman must be Mr. Ling, truly a person of outstanding appearance. Gentlemen, I am the host for your trip, feel free to ask for anything you need, and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will do its best to accommodate everyone's requests."

After speaking, Zhong Yang led everyone to a luxurious suite. The suite had three bedrooms and two living rooms, very spacious and fully equipped, almost having everything available, comparable to a presidential suite in a high-end hotel.

"Elder Qiu, please rest for a while. I have other guests to attend to. Contact me by phone if you need anything."

After Zhong Yang left, Ling Chen threw his backpack on the bed, walked straight to the window, and looking out at the azure ocean and the clear sky, he felt incredibly relaxed and at ease.

"Sixth brother, there's no need to be too nervous, just remember the training you've done recently, and dealing with Yi Shuiyan won't be a problem," Yuan Yun patted Ling Chen's shoulder, encouraging him.

"Third brother, you're worrying too much," Ling Chen grinned, after all, he was someone who had seen the world, and nervousness was almost non-existent to him.

"Third brother, do you know where they will host the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony this time?"

"How would I know? The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's actions are always mysterious, and the places they choose for the ceremony are even more bizarre each time. If my memory serves me right, a few years ago, the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony was held on a snow mountain in the north. There wasn't a soul in sight for hundreds of miles around; everyone who went to the ceremony complained bitterly, freezing half to death. Luckily, big brother was wise not to accept the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's invitation. Otherwise, we would have had to suffer along," said Yuan Yun.

"Really?" After hearing what Yuan Yun had said, Ling Chen became even more curious about where this edition of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony would take place.

After waiting in the room for about two hours, the passenger ship finally started, slowly departing from the harbor, heading towards the destination.

Chapter 408 On the Eve of the Grand Ceremony

Ten hours had passed, and the sky was growing dim. The suite arranged by Zhong Yang for the eight eccentrics only had three bedrooms. Aside from Xia Yue, who enjoyed one by herself, the rest were all grown men; they weren't too particular and could make do with whatever sleeping arrangements for the night.

Once everyone had sorted out their sleeping arrangements, Ling Chen lay on the couch in the living room, his legs crossed, playing with his cell phone, prepared to sleep there for the night.

"Huh?" As he was playing, Ling Chen discovered that his cell phone had lost its signal, and he couldn't even search for the cruise ship's Wi-Fi network anymore. Annoyed, Ling Chen sat up; it was truly disappointing not being able to finish the movie he was watching halfway through.

At this moment, Qiu Yong and Yuan Yun walked out of the bedroom. The living room was equipped with an independent bar, and these two men were fond of a good drink, liking to have a few sips before going to bed.

"Ling Cheng, come on, join us for a few drinks if you've got nothing else to do." Yuan Yun called out to Ling Chen, taking out three glasses from a cabinet under the bar and placing them side by side on the table. He then took out a bottle of Moutai from the liquor cabinet and filled each glass.

Ling Chen put away his phone and walked to the bar, lifting his glass, he said, "Elder Brother, Third Brother, after sitting on the boat for more than ten hours, where are they taking us? I estimate we've already left Huaxia territorial waters."

Yuan Yun was also puzzled, "Every Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony has been held domestically, there's never been a precedent for holding it abroad. Is the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion breaking tradition this time?"

"I'm not sure about that either." After speaking, Qiu Yong glanced at the wall clock and suggested, "It's still early, why not go find Zhong Yang and ask him? Now that we've come this far, he surely won't keep hiding it from us."

Ling Chen and Yuan Yun followed Zhong Ping to the top deck of the cruise ship. After asking a crew member, they learned that Zhong Yang was in the cockpit, and they immediately hurried over.

"Elder Qiu?" Seeing Qiu Yong's trio standing outside the cockpit, Zhong Yang was slightly taken aback, then greeted them with a smile, saying, "Elder Qiu, you could have called me if you had any issues, why bother coming here in person?"

"Zhong Yang, spare the pleasantries, we've been on this boat for so long and haven't arrived at our destination yet. Where are you taking us?"

Faced with Qiu Yong's questioning, Zhong Yang sheepishly replied, "Elder Qiu, you also know the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion—I cannot disclose anything before we arrive."

While the two were speaking, Ling Chen surveyed the cockpit, observing the advanced equipment and instruments. His eyebrows knitted slightly, a hint of suspicion in his eyes.

Impatiently, Qiu Yong said, "We've already come this far, are you still worried we would leak our location?"

"No, no, no, Elder Qiu, you misunderstand, that's not what I meant," Zhong Yang hurriedly explained, "This time..."

"Stop there." Not letting Zhong Yang finish his words, Ling Chen interrupted, "Elder Brother, Third Brother, I think I've figured out why we haven't reached our destination even after more than ten hours."

Hearing this, both Qiu Yong and Yuan Yun looked at Ling Chen in surprise, asking, "You know the reason?"

Ling Chen nodded, "They've been circling around; we've actually been in the waters belonging to East Sea City all along, we haven't gone far." After speaking, Ling Chen looked at Zhong Yang, "Mr. Zhong, am I wrong? Now, isn't it time you gave us a proper explanation?"

Zhong Yang glanced through the window at the pitch-dark sea and curiously counter-asked, "Mr. Ling, how are you so sure we're still near East Sea City?"

Ling Chen pointed to the electronic equipment in the cockpit, and the large display screens assembled, his expression indifferent, "I used to serve in the military after all. You can fool my elder brother, who can't comprehend high-tech and is a traditional martial arts practitioner, but you can't fool my eyes. I understand clearly what the data displayed on these devices means."

Yuan Yun coldly said, "Zhong Yang, you're wasting our time. You better clarify things clearly; what is going on?"

"Gentlemen, please calm down." Zhong Yang, feeling helpless, explained, "It's not that I intended to deceive everyone, it's just... we've been doing this also considering everyone's safety. To be honest, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion received intelligence that someone intends to cause trouble during the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. However, the information we have collected is limited, and we do not know who the party is. To be cautious, the Pavilion Master ordered that we must be extremely careful this time to ensure that the location of the ceremony does not get leaked. We are circling around this area just to avoid being followed."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen and his companions were taken aback—they had not expected someone to dare oppose the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

With a forced smile, Zhong Yang said, "Elder Qiu, you all go back to rest. I assure you, by tomorrow morning, we will definitely arrive at the venue."

"Fair enough."

Qiu Yong was a reasonable person. After learning the reason, he no longer insisted and turned to leave the cockpit. Ling Chen walked to the door, then turned back to ask, "Mr. Zhong, has the wireless network on the ship been turned off?"

"Yes, to prevent any accidents, we've blocked all signals on the ship. If it has inconvenienced Mr. Ling, please accept my apologies."

"It's fine. Mr. Zhong, please continue with your work, we won't disturb you anymore."

Back in the suite, Yuan Yun called for a waiter to bring some snacks to accompany the drinks. The three of them drank until midnight before staggering back to their bedroom to rest.

Under the influence of alcohol, it didn't take long before Ling Chen's snoring could be heard from the couch in the living room.

...

At this time.

East Sea City.

In a spacious basement, over a dozen staff members were seated in front of computer screens, with various precise devices arranged around, and blinking indicator lights everywhere.

Standing in front of a large screen hanging on the wall, was a middle-aged man dressed in a suit and leather shoes, cultured and elegant.

"Mr. Yun, the drone has been deployed."

Upon hearing the sound, Mr. Yun pointed to the large screen in front of him, "Switch the view to the screen."

"Yes."

As the words fell, the large screen immediately displayed an image filtered through night vision. In the image was an endless ocean with surging waves.

Mr. Yun frowned slightly, "Where's the target?"

"Still searching. Ten minutes ago, signal from the trackers in Ling Chen's cell phone and wallet disappeared—the other party must have activated a signal jamming device. However, judging from the signal's last known location, they couldn't have gone too far."

The voice suddenly paused, then with excitement said, "We've found the cruise ship."

Mr. Yun focused on the screen where a cruise ship appeared from a distance in the drone's surveillance camera.

"Keep your distance, don't let them notice us. Dispatch the frogman team immediately, make sure they lock onto the cruise ship—we can't let that ship escape our sight."

"Yes, Mr. Yun."

"The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony!"

Mr. Yun murmured to himself, his lips curving into a sinister smile, and a sharp glint swept across his eyes, deep as a pond.

Chapter 409 Arriving at the Venue

The next day.

Under the 'gentle' touch of Xia Yue's fingers, Ling Chen, who was suffering from last night's hangover, finally came to his senses.

Looking out the window at the calm sea, Ling Chen felt puzzled. It had been one night; why hadn't the passenger ship docked yet?

After freshening up, a waiter delivered a sumptuous breakfast directly to his room. It must be admitted that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion indeed had substantial financial resources, as everyone on the ship was enjoying five-star treatment.

After breakfast, there was a gentle knock on the door of the suite. Wei Jiahao got up to open it and saw Zhong Yang outside, asking, "Does Mr. Zhong need something?"

Zhong Yang said with a smile, "We have arrived at our destination."

Ling Chen asked with a puzzled face, "Aren't we still at sea?"

"Mr. Ling, you'll know in a moment."

Then, everyone packed up their luggage and followed Zhong Yang to the deck of the passenger ship. As far as the eye could see, there were only the azure-blue waters and the rolling waves, not even a single island or boat in sight.

Ling Chen stood among the Eight Eccentric Fighters, looking around, and saw people continuously arriving on the deck. There were about twenty people in total, all invited guests for the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, mostly men, with women accounting for less than a third. Their ages were around thirty to forty years old, and each person carried with them a weapon, either a knife or a sword, all wrapped in cloth.

Waited for about five minutes, someone in the crowd suddenly exclaimed, "There's a ship coming."

Ling Chen looked up and saw a pure white luxury liner approaching from the southeast. Seeing that luxury liner, Ling Chen was slightly amazed and immediately understood, asking Zhong Yang in astonishment, "Is that the venue for the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony?"

Zhong Yang merely smiled and said nothing, apparently agreeing with his guess.

Tsk tsk!

Such extravagance! To actually hold the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony on that luxury liner—how much money would that cost?

As the luxury liner drew near, Zhong Yang immediately arranged for staff to lower the motorboat to transfer the guests from the passenger ship to the luxury liner.

Once aboard, Ling Chen followed Qiu Yong and others, led by the attendants, straight to their rooms. Along the way, Ling Chen, driven by curiosity, constantly scanned the surroundings, observing the environment on the luxury liner.

Before them, many guests had already boarded, gathering in groups of three to five on the deck, engaged in animated discussions, and pointing at the passing guests, sizing them up.

Especially when the Eight Eccentric Fighters appeared, almost everyone's eyes were drawn to Qiu Yong and the others.

The Eight Eccentric Fighters had a resonant reputation in the Martial Arts community because everyone knew that even if the Eight Eccentric Fighters were not on the Heaven and Earth Dragon and Tiger List, they each had their own remarkable abilities, no less skilled than those ranked masters. Moreover, the Eight Eccentric Fighters shared common hostility against enemies and moved forward and back as one. Provoking any one of them would incur the collective retaliation of all eight.

Therefore, in the Martial Arts community, there were very few who dared to provoke the Eight Eccentric Fighters, unless they possessed great strength or a powerful background.

Entering the third tier of the luxury liner, Ling Chen was immediately captivated by the interior decoration. The vessel was designed with an antique style in mind, resembling an old-timey inn. Although doors and windows were made of steel structures, they were coated with wood-colored wall paint, supplemented with other ancient decors, making one feel as though they've stepped into an ancient city, marvelously beautiful and brimming with an antique charm.

To protect the privacy of the guests, each room was a separate unit. Everyone was provided with their own private room. Considering the identities of the eight oddities, their rooms were arranged together, adjacent to one another.

Upon entering the room, although mentally prepared, Ling Chen was still fiercely astonished by the opulence of his quarters.

A living room, bedroom, plus a separate bathroom and washroom were included. Aside from the antique decor, all facilities were fully equipped. Ling Chen noticed that even an ordinary-looking chair in the living room was no simple object; it was crafted from expensive rosewood, as were the other tables and chairs.

Indeed, this was the luxury of the wealthy.

Ling Chen couldn't help but sigh internally; the cost of the luxury liner, coupled with its interior decor, was probably unimaginable.

Just as he was thinking, a 'knock, knock, knock' came from the door outside his room.

Ling Chen got up to open the door and was immediately taken aback by the middle-aged man standing at the entrance. He exclaimed with surprise, "Mr. Ye?"

Ye Liangyong smiled slightly: "Ling Chen, long time no see."

"Mr. Ye, please come in." Ling Chen joyfully welcomed Ye Liangyong into the room, asking, "Mr. Ye, how did you know I was here?"

"You are a Tiger List expert, so you must have been invited. I just checked the guest registration list and found your room number, so I came to see you." With that, Ye Liangyong patted Ling Chen's shoulder, laughing, "My boy, you're doing quite well for yourself, becoming one of the eight oddities. It is truly unexpected."

Ling Chen laughed it off and casually mentioned, "Ah! Mr. Ye, did Mr. He not accept the invitation this time?"

"Master will not be attending this kind of gathering. Only experts from the Tiger List and Dragon List are invited to the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. The experts on the Earthly List wouldn't limit their vision to a measly Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony—that would be beneath them. Besides, Earthly List experts have gatherings exclusive to them." Ye Liangyong paused momentarily, then continued, "Ling Chen, as a representative of the younger generation, what are your thoughts?"

"My thoughts?" Ling Chen asked in confusion, "What thoughts?"

Ye Liangyong looked surprised: "Don't you know the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony?"

Ling Chen shrugged; he truly was unaware. Qiu Yong hadn't mentioned anything, and his purpose for attending the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony was straightforward—to keep the appointment with Yi Shuiyan and settle their scores.

"You really are rash, coming here without knowledge of anything." Ye Liangyong shook his head helplessly and explained: "Well, let me tell you, the nature of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony is similar to a martial arts competition—victors are kings, and winners receive numerous substantial rewards. However, the competitors are divided by age groups. Like you, you belong to the finest of the young generation. If you compete, your opponents will be people of your age group, but..."

"But what?"

"From what I know, there are several experts among the young competitors this time. Ling Chen, have you ever heard of the Newcomer List?"

"No."

"Before each Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will compile a Newcomer List. Only those young experts with excellent talent and tremendous potential can make the list, and this time is no exception. Furthermore, considering the abundance of rising stars on this Newcomer List, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has specially increased the rewards. If you can stand out and claim one of the top three spots, not only will you have a chance to receive dan medicines and Martial Arts Heart Methods gifted by the Pavilion, but you will also meet the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master and join the Pavilion. Usually, only experts on the Earthly List have the privilege of meeting the Pavilion Master; this time, the Pavilion is setting a precedent. It's very rare, so you might want to seize the opportunity."

Chapter 410 Newcomer List

After listening to Ye Liangyong's narrative, Ling Chen couldn't help but be tempted. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master was the most mysterious figure in the Martial Arts world. Even the Secret Society, which claimed to be the biggest intelligence agency globally and spent years trying, failed to uncover the identity of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master.

Moreover, He Ziyun once told him that if he had a chance to have a long talk with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master, it would be greatly beneficial to his future.

"Mr. Ye, how much do you know about the Newcomer List?" Ling Chen curiously asked.

"There are ten people on the Newcomer List. The ones ranked in the top five are Song Ge, Han Yu, Qu Jinxian, Yi Shuiyan, and He Haifeng. These five are the outstanding youths of their generation, very strong. It is said that some of them are no less skilled than the experts on the Dragon List. Moreover, these individuals come from major sects and have very powerful backers. The gap between the five behind them and these five is quite significant."

Ling Chen sheepishly asked: "What about me... Mr. Ye, where do I rank on the Newcomer List?"

"You?" Ye Liangyong lifted his lips with a smile, "Take a guess."

"The eighth?" Ling Chen said cautiously. But seeing the smile on Ye Liangyong's face, he quickly changed his words, "Could it be the ninth?"

Seeing that Ye Liangyong didn't reply, Ling Chen said with a wry smile: "Don't tell me it's the tenth?"

"Alright, stop guessing. I'll tell you the truth, your name isn't on the Newcomer List. But you don't need to feel downhearted; with your strength, ranking seventh or eighth wouldn't be a problem. The reason your name isn't listed is because Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has to consider a comprehensive evaluation. They consider not just an individual's strength, but also their background. There are many young talents like you in the Martial Arts world, but there are only ten spots. It's difficult for Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to cover everyone. In any case, the list is more questionable for the latter five names; those can be ignored. What you really need to pay attention to are the top five; they are the truly outstanding masters."

Ling Chen touched his nose and said: "Mr. Ye, knowing how strong those people are, why do you still encourage me to participate?"

Ye Liangyong said with a smile, "As a martial artist, you must constantly challenge your limits to make greater progress. For you, winning or losing isn't the key; the most important thing is to temper yourself. Opportunities come only once; you must cherish it."

"Let's talk about it when the time comes. By the way, Mr. Ye, when does the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony start?"

"It's estimated to start in two days. People are still arriving."

After chatting idly for a while, Ye Liangyong then took his leave. They had agreed to have dinner together later, at which time Ye would introduce Ling Chen to the other members of the Eight Eccentrics.

In the evening.

Night fell, and the boundless ocean seemed draped in a layer of mysterious veil.

After dinner, Ling Chen came to the deck alone, leaning on the railing with his hands, listening to the surging waves below, looking out at the distant horizon. Far away, a storm cloud was approaching this way, with lightning flashing, strong gusts of wind, followed by rumbling thunder.

A storm was coming!

Feeling the coolness rushing towards his face and drops of rain mixed with the wind, Ling Chen turned and headed towards his cabin.

However, as Ling Chen approached the cabin door, something in the corner of his eye caught his attention—a flawless white figure. He turned his head and looked at the figure standing beside the railing, his gaze slightly hardening.

The woman was dressed in white, her long hair fluttering and dancing with the wind, seemingly unaffected by the fierce gusts, standing silently, unmoving, listening to the roaring of the ocean.

Although it was just a simple silhouette, Ling Chen couldn't shake the feeling of familiarity in his heart.

While he pondered, several drunken youths emerged from the cabin, holding bottles of wine, their faces flushed, already showing signs of intoxication, laughing boisterously.

At this moment, one of the young men noticed the woman in white next to the ship's railing and immediately signaled his companions with a glance, surrounding her together.

"Beauty, are you alone? Why not join us for a few drinks?"

The woman in white turned her head, her beautiful eyes calmly looking at the young men, said nothing, and continued walking toward the ship's cabin. Seeing the woman in white about to leave, a young man immediately reached out and touched her shoulder, gently pulling her back.

Suddenly, the woman in white lost her balance, her delicate body immediately fell backward, right into the arms of that young man.

"Yo! Senior Brother, you really have the charm; this beauty has thrown herself into your embrace. Haha!"

Hearing his companion's teasing, the young man grinned and laughed, reaching out to wrap his arm around the woman in white's slender waist. However, the woman in white reacted quickly, struggling to free herself from his embrace and looked at the young man with anger and shame, about to slap him.

But before the slap could land, the silky wrist of the woman in white was grasped by the young man.

"Tsks tsk! Beauty, your skin is really smooth. I wonder if other parts are the same; why not let me have a feel?" the young man said with a sleazy grin.

"Let go of me!" the woman in white shouted angrily, struggling vigorously, but the young man held on tight.

The sea breeze came, blowing the woman's stray bangs on her forehead, revealing her exquisitely flawless face. Seeing the woman in white's face, the young men's eyes widened, their gazes became dazed, their throats rolled continuously, swallowing saliva.

So beautiful!

One of the young men snapped out of it, carefully examined the woman in white, and exclaimed, "I can't believe there's such a beautiful woman on this ship; it seems our Senior Brothers are in for some good fortune."

The woman in white glared angrily at the young men and said softly, "Let go of me, I don't want any trouble."

Despite being astonished by the beauty of the woman in white, one of the young men felt the sea breeze sobering him up significantly and whispered, "Senior Brother, everyone on this ship is invited to attend the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. It's better to be cautious, let's not cause trouble for our sect."

The young man holding the woman in white waved his hand, dismissive, "We are from the Qingyang Sect, who dares disrespect us. Besides, we've got the Elder Senior Brother backing us up, what's there to fear?"

After finishing his words, the young man looked at the woman in white with ill intentions and sneered, "Beauty, what era are we living in, why so shy? Aren't you women very open nowadays? Just play with us Senior Brothers, it'll be pleasurable for you too. Isn't it great? Brothers, don't you agree?"

Hearing this, the eyes of the young men revealed primal desires.

"Junior Brother, stop talking, let's take her to the room, I can hardly wait."

The young man laughed and scolded, "You're just too impatient, kiddo. Beauty, come with me." As he spoke, the young man forcefully dragged the woman in white by her wrist towards the ship's cabin.

The woman in white bit her thin lips, pulling hard on her wrist and said urgently, "Let me go, or I'll call for help."

"By saying that, you've actually reminded me, Fourth Junior Brother, gag her mouth, don't disturb the others."

"Yes."

"Let her go!"

Right at that moment, a detached voice came with the wind, entering everyone's ears.