

The Beauty 421

Chapter 421 Tea Girl

Ling Chen halted his steps, inwardly groaning that this woman was relentless and seemed intent on holding him accountable. Fearing his eyes might offend her once more, Ling Chen responded without turning back, "That... it was really a misunderstanding. It wasn't intentional."

"Just stand here for now," said the woman in an indifferent tone. Immediately after, Ling Chen heard the sound of the bedroom door closing.

In less than a minute, the woman's voice rang out again, "Sit down."

Hearing this, Ling Chen turned around and found the woman already seated behind the curtain. Since she had spoken, Ling Chen dared not disobey; he was at fault, after all. He thought to himself that he should apologize sincerely later; maybe she would forgive him.

With that thought, Ling Chen honestly took a seat outside the curtain.

"What's your name?"

"Ling Chen."

"Ling Chen?" The woman behind the curtain chuckled lightly, as if talking to herself, "So you're Ling Chen."

Ling Chen asked in surprise, "You know me?"

"I've heard of you. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion initially planned to place you on the Newcomer List, but after thorough consideration, they decided not to include you."

As I thought!

Ling Chen nodded inwardly, confirming his guess that this woman was also a member of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, although he didn't know her status within it.

"When you came in just now, didn't you see the warning sign outside?"

"I did."

"Yet you still entered?"

"Well..." Ling Chen touched his nose awkwardly, explaining, "I didn't mean to barge in. I just wanted to find someone."

"There's only me living here, so were you looking for me?" the woman asked.

"I..."

Before Ling Chen could finish speaking, the woman behind the curtain cut him off, continuing, "Never mind, I won't pursue it since it's your first offense. Since we've met, it must be fate. Take a seat and we can chat."

Ling Chen was secretly relieved and breathed a sigh of relief. He was indeed afraid that this woman would hold him accountable and that it would affect Qiu Yong and the others, especially since this was someone else's territory.

As he heard the sounds of washing tea utensils coming from behind the curtain, Ling Chen completely relaxed and asked with a smile, "I still don't know what to call you."

"I have no name. People have referred to me by various titles, but no one has ever called me by my name. Over time, I've forgotten it. A name is just a label; you can call me whatever you like."

Ling Chen cracked a smile, finding the woman's personality quite similar to that of porridge girl.

Thinking of porridge girl, an idea flashed through Ling Chen's mind, and he grinned, "Since you don't care for titles, I'll call you Tea Girl."

"As you wish."

As they spoke, a pair of smooth and fair hands emerged from behind the curtain, offering a cup of steaming tea.

Ling Chen hurriedly took it, thanking her.

"Did you come to the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony this time to broaden your horizons, or is there another purpose?" asked Tea Girl.

"Settling some issues of enmity and gratitude."

Tea Girl seemed to sigh as she said, "People in the Martial Arts can never escape these words of enmity and gratitude. Despite the evolution of the ages, this has never changed."

Ling Chen laughed, "Where there are people, there will be grievances. Times change, but human nature does not."

"You seem to have a deep understanding," Tea Girl said with a hint of admiration in her voice.

"One learns from experience."

"Who is your opponent?"

"Yi Shuiyan."

"Is it him?" Tea Girl seemed surprised and peered at Ling Chen through the curtain, asking, "Are you confident you can defeat him?"

"To be honest, no."

"Then why still go through with it?"

Ling Chen sipped the tea. The bitterness spread through his mouth but quickly transformed into a sense of clarity and invigoration.

"Good tea." Ling Chen's lips curved upward as he smiled, "Many things aren't done based on certainty, but on necessity. If I believe it's the right thing to do, no matter how strong the opponent, I will not back down. To put it simply, you could say it's a man's pride."

"You're quite frank. But I know Yi Shuiyan well; his martial arts are exceptional. On the Newcomer List, aside from Song Ge who ranks first, Han Yu in the second place, Qu Jinxian in third, and Yi Shuiyan in fourth, their abilities are quite close. The reason why Han Yu is ranked second is that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion sees potential in him." Pausing with a playful tone, Tea Girl asked, "Do you want to know how the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion evaluates you?"

Ling Chen's eyes lit up with curiosity, "What's their evaluation?"

"Mediocre talent, mediocre martial arts, mediocre background, but the one thing that's quite good is your charm with women."

Er...

Hearing this, Ling Chen's face turned red, and he awkwardly scratched his head. He had to admit, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's intelligence capabilities were quite impressive to have such a clear grasp of his popularity with women.

He coughed lightly, masking his embarrassment, and laughed, "At least there's one good thing."

"If you don't mind, would you tell me what Internal Cultivation Methods you practice?"

Ling Chen puzzled, "Why ask that?"

"Nothing much, just to assess the gap between you and Yi Shuiyan. When masters contend, besides external skills, the most important is Inner Strength. The types of Internal Cultivation Methods are many, some strong, some weak, each with different effects. As far as I know, Yi Shuiyan doesn't practice the inherited mental method of the Dangyang Sect; instead, he practices a type of robust Inner Strength. This method paired with his unique sword technique is highly complementary, rendering it extremely powerful."

"My Internal Cultivation Method is quite special; it's called the Prajnaparamita Sutra. Have you heard of it?" Ling Chen didn't hide it, as it was just the name of the method and not the content; there was no harm in telling her.

"The Prajnaparamita Sutra?" Tea Girl sounded surprised from behind the curtain.

Noticing the change in Tea Girl's tone, Ling Chen asked, "Do you know of this method?"

"Hundreds of years ago, there was an exceptional individual in Buddhism who, before his conversion, was a wanderer in the Martial Arts with high skill, having exchanged moves with the past several Pavilion Masters of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, neither of them superior. This wanderer was free and unbound, known for many good deeds. However, he had one bad habit."

"What habit?"

"He..." Tea Girl seemed reluctant to speak, hesitated for a moment, and then said, "That person liked to seduce daughters from noble families and virtuous women. Moreover, his actions were worse than a rapist: not only did he take their bodies, but he also took their hearts, a true heartbreaker. Later, no one knows why he suddenly changed his ways and converted to Buddhism. In less than ten years, he transformed into a high monk and even served as a Buddhist abbot."

Chapter 422 The Secret of the Prajnaparamita Sutra

Ling Chen exclaimed in surprise, "Is he that formidable?"

"Although his actions are despicable, one must admit that his aptitude is truly outstanding. Whatever he does, he can reach the pinnacle in a short time. At that time, almost no one in the Martial Arts world could compare."

"What eventually happened to him?"

The Tea Girl said, "He stayed in the Buddhist temple for twenty years, only to be expelled from it."

"Why?"

"Because of the Prajnaparamita Sutra. The Prajnaparamita Sutra was an Internal Cultivation Method he developed within the Buddhist temple. Even though it is named after a Buddhist scripture, this method involves the forbidden elements of sensuality and killing, both prohibited by the monks. The abbot at the time ordered him to cease his research on this mental method, but he refused to repent, leading to his expulsion. Since then, no one has seen him."

Having finished speaking, the Tea Girl couldn't help but ask, "Where did you obtain the Prajnaparamita Sutra from?"

As soon as the words left her mouth, she seemed to realize something and quickly corrected herself, saying, "Sorry, I forgot the rules. Please disregard my last question."

Behind a curtain, Ling Chen, greatly interested, looked at the Tea Girl and said, "You seem to be very informed about these centuries-old events."

"There's nothing surprising about that. Ever since the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was founded, it has continuously collected intelligence from within the Martial Arts world. Even after hundreds of years, that information has been organized and archived, well-preserved without omissions. Such outdated intelligence can be freely read by members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Ling Chen nodded and humbly asked for guidance, "You just mentioned that the Prajnaparamita Sutra involves sensuality and conflict. Could you explain that to me?"

When he first acquired the Prajnaparamita Sutra, its content was recorded in Sanskrit, and it was only with He Ziyun's help that he was able to decipher the Internal Cultivation Methods written there. However, despite having practiced the Prajnaparamita Sutra, Ling Chen was still partially ignorant of many aspects.

He understood what the Tea Girl referred to in terms of sensuality—enhancing one's Inner Strength by gathering Yin energy from women through sexual intercourse. He had experienced this himself, and the effects were indeed remarkable. However, he didn't understand the killing aspect she mentioned. Could it be that the Prajnaparamita Sutra had other effects?

"These are matters related to the intelligence of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. There are rules in the Pavilion: vital information such as this cannot be disclosed casually. If you really want it, you can buy it."

"Buy?" Ling Chen was momentarily stunned, then quickly understood and said generously, "Alright, name your price."

"You might not be aware of the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Our intelligence is not measured by money. If you want intel, you must perform tasks for us."

"What kind of tasks?"

"That depends on the value of the information. The higher the value, the more tasks you'll need to perform—perhaps three, maybe five."

Ling Chen thought for a moment and then asked, "What's the price for the information I want?"

"Sorry, you don't have the standing to discuss terms with me yet. With your current strength, even if we at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion assigned tasks to you, you wouldn't be able to complete them."

Hearing this, Ling Chen was immediately displeased. All that talking turned out to be a waste of breath.

Fine! If she won't talk, I won't ask. Ling Chen thought haughtily.

Immediately, he stood up and said, "Thank you for the tea, but I must be going." After speaking, he waved his hand and walked out of the room.

After Ling Chen had left, the Tea Girl sitting behind the curtain grasped a thin wire hanging from above her head and gave it a gentle pull. Accompanied by the sound of a crisp wind chime, the door quickly

opened, and a delicate-looking woman walked in. She knelt down respectfully outside the curtain and asked, "Pavilion Master, do you have any instructions?"

The Tea Girl spoke in a cold tone, "Where were you just now? Didn't you know someone had come in?"

The woman quickly bowed her head, her face filled with panic as she said, "I'm sorry, Pavilion Master. You hadn't returned, so I left for a bit, I..."

"Enough!" The Tea Girl cut her off and said firmly, "I've taken care of it. Don't let it happen again, or you know the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Hearing this, the woman's body trembled slightly, and her delicate face turned extremely pale.

"Go tell Zhou Qi that when the Newcomer Challenge begins, I will be there to observe."

"Yes, Pavilion Master."

At this moment, Ling Chen was walking alone back to his room, still thinking about the Tea Girl he had met by chance. Suddenly, he seemed to remember something, stopped in his tracks, and his face showed a mix of confusion and shock.

How could this be?

Ling Chen muttered to himself. He clearly remembered that although the Tea Girl had stayed behind the curtain, he had met her face to face before. He had seen her appearance, her snow-white skin, and her full bosom. But now, looking back, the Tea Girl's features had become blurry in his memory, and he could barely recall what she looked like. If he saw her again, he might not be able to identify her.

Ling Chen had always prided himself on his memory and should not be experiencing this kind of lapse. But the reality before him forced him to wonder whether the problem was with himself or with the Tea Girl.

That's right!

A sudden thought struck him—he had drunk a cup of tea in the Tea Girl's room.

Could there be something wrong with that cup of tea?

After pondering for a while, Ling Chen affirmed to himself that it must have been because of that cup of tea; otherwise, he could not have forgotten the Tea Girl's face.

Very cautious indeed.

It seemed that the woman's position within the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was not low; otherwise, why would she resort to such measures?

Forget it, it doesn't matter if I can't remember her face; remembering her voice will suffice.

Upon returning to his room, Ling Chen lay on the bed, pretending to rest for a while. When it was close to noon, Qiu Yong and the others finally returned, bringing with them a sumptuous lunch for Ling Chen.

"Big brother."

Ling Chen greeted them with a smile but noticed that everyone looked rather upset.

"What's wrong, big brother?"

"It's because of those bastards from the Dangyang Sect," Xia Yue cursed indignantly. "They've publicized your agreement with Yi Shuiyan, claiming that you will have a showdown on the Newcomer Challenge arena. Now, everyone knows about it, and they're all talking. Some say you're overreaching, while others think you're trying to make a name for yourself using Yi Shuiyan's reputation. Not a single word in your favor."

Yuan Yun frowned and said, "The most important thing is, now that the news is out, if you back out or don't respond to the challenge, your reputation will be completely destroyed. You won't be able to continue in this circle."

"When Yi Shuiyan saw you were injured after leaving the training ground today, he probably feared you'd withdraw from the fight, so he used this despicable tactic to force you into a no-choice situation, unless you're willing to lose face."

Hearing Qiu Yong's words, Ling Chen smiled faintly, "Let them say what they will. I never intended to back down anyway."

Chapter 423 Song Ge

In the afternoon, Qiu Yong originally wanted Ling Chen to stay in his room and continue resting, but upon hearing that there would be a competition for a grand prize in the afternoon, Ling Chen could no longer sit still. He knew that this afternoon was the real highlight. For the grand prize prepared by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, many experts would make their move, and Ling Chen didn't want to miss such an event.

At Ling Chen's repeated requests, Qiu Yong reluctantly agreed to take him to the venue.

Upon arriving at the venue and as everyone settled into their seats, Ling Chen immediately noticed that many people's gazes were focused on him, pointing and discussing.

"See that? That's Ling Chen, the guy who claims he wants to have a showdown with Shuiyan on the stage."

"He's really overestimating himself. Shuiyan is ranked in the top five of the Newcomer List; he hasn't even made it into the top ten. What qualifications does he have to challenge Shuiyan? He's just asking for trouble."

There were others with a different opinion, saying, "You can't say that. Ling Chen is after all one of the Eight Eccentrics. Each of the Eight Eccentrics possesses unique skills. You saw yesterday's competition too, where Yuan Yun defeated a Dragon List expert. Perhaps Ling Chen truly has some real abilities."

Ling Chen ignored the surrounding discussions and sat quietly, waiting for the martial arts competition to begin.

After a while, the host Zhou Qi stepped onto the stage, looked around at the audience with a smile, and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, as the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle progresses, we are approaching the most exciting match. Whoever wins this afternoon's match will receive a premium Heavenly Mechanism Pill provided by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. You all know the value of the premium Heavenly Mechanism Pill, so I won't say much more. Remember, there's only one chance; please cherish it."

After speaking, Zhou Qi turned and stepped down from the stage, waiting for the first contestant to come up.

By this time, everyone's gaze in the venue was on the Dragon List experts. It was clear to everyone that the Dragon List experts were the main attraction of the afternoon; others were just there to add to the excitement.

Seeing that no one was coming up to the stage for a while, Liu Yunsong from the Danyang Sect suddenly stood up and walked confidently to the stage. He greeted the audience with a bow and said, "Since no one wishes to go first, let me be the trailblazer. Who is willing to come up and give me some pointers?"

"Big brother, let me do it," Xia Yue said eagerly.

Qiu Yong shook his head and said, "Don't rush, let's watch for a bit first."

As his words fell, a young man slowly walked out from the crowd, with a handsome face wearing a gentle and humble smile, and leaped onto the stage.

Ling Chen was somewhat surprised; he hadn't expected that the contestant would be a young man of similar age to himself.

The young man, about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, stood tall and clean, with a friendly smile that gave a refreshing feeling. Combined with his handsome face, it added a bit of charm to him.

"Oh my!"

As the young man took to the stage, a wave of exclamations immediately erupted from the venue.

"It's actually Song Ge."

"Why did he come to the stage?"

Hearing the voices from the stands, Ling Chen was taken aback. This young man was actually Song Ge, the top-ranked fighter on the Newcomer List.

"Big brother, can he also participate in the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle?"

"Why not," Qiu Yong replied. "Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has not restricted anyone from participating. As long as you have the ability, even someone from the Newcomer List can challenge these Dragon List masters." At this, Qiu Yong looked at Song Ge with a great interest and murmured to himself: "I've heard that Song Ge, the first of the Newcomer List, is powerfully skilled and unfathomably mysterious. Nobody knows how strong he actually is. Today is a good opportunity to see whether he really lives up to his reputation."

At this moment, Liu Yunsong on the stage saw Song Ge appearing, his face immediately shifted, his eyes narrowed hiding a cold glint, and he managed to squeeze out a slight smile, saying: "So it's Song."

Song Ge politely clasped his fists and with utmost courtesy, he said: "Mr. Liu, please be gentle, I look forward to learning from you."

"Of course."

During the conversation, Liu Yunsong glanced at the seats of the Dangyang Sect, only to see Sect Leader Zhu Jin nodding subtly to him. Liu Yunsong immediately understood, turned his head to look at Song Ge on the stage, and made an inviting gesture saying: "You are junior, you make the first move."

"Then I shall not hold back."

As the words fell, Song Ge's face still wore a gentle smile, his legs moving swiftly like the wind, stepping in strange patterns, quickly moving around Liu Yunsong, maintaining a distance of about a meter.

Seeing Song Ge's actions, Ling Chen nodded silently; the man was indeed smart, not launching a direct attack, but first probing Liu Yunsong's depth. The one-meter distance he maintained was just perfect, ready to advance or retreat, capable of responding promptly to any action from the opponent.

At that moment, Liu Yunsong stood still on the spot, following Song Ge's footsteps closely with his gaze, shifting positions as he moved.

Half a minute went by, and Liu Yunsong, who had been observing Song Ge's movements, finally decided to make a move. His fingers like sharp claws, quickly reached forward, grasping toward Song Ge's shoulder.

Liu Yunsong's timing and positioning were very precise; by the time the audience realized, Liu Yunsong's hand had already locked onto Song Ge's shoulder. Successfully landing the first strike, Liu Yunsong's face lit up with joy, immediately pressing forward, hoping to take this chance to defeat Song Ge.

As Liu Yunsong rapidly approached him, Song Ge still wore a smiling face, undisturbed.

A figure flashed, and when Liu Yunsong came up close, Song Ge's shoulder shook slightly, and for some reason, Liu Yunsong's fingers were shaken off, slipping down from Song Ge's shoulder.

This sudden change immediately shocked Liu Yunsong, who quickly retreated backward. But by then, Song Ge, with his agile steps, rapidly closing in on Liu Yunsong. Then, he raised a single palm and delivered what seemed like a light slap.

Without a word, Liu Yunsong folded his arms across his chest, palm against the back of his hand, forming a cross shape to meet Song Ge's fleshly palm.

Bang!

Accompanied by a muffled sound, Liu Yunsong's body slightly leaned back as if he had lost his balance, his steps retreating continuously until he stabilized himself two meters away.

Seeing this scene, the crowd at the venue were taken aback, their eyes showing disbelief.

Nobody expected that a prestigious Dragon List master would be repeatedly embarrassed by Song Ge's hands. And seeing how effortlessly Song Ge handled himself, it seemed like he hadn't even used his full strength.

He truly lived up to his reputation as the first-ranked in the Newcomer List. Ling Chen marveled silently.

"Mr. Liu, no need to hold back too much, I can still withstand. Let's go again!" Song Ge said with a smile.

Hearing the teasing tone in his voice, Liu Yunsong's face quickly darkened. Losing to a junior would completely disgrace him.

Chapter 424 Shameless Ambush

"Song is truly worthy of being the top on the Newcomer List, indeed formidable." Liu Yunsong said with a forced smile, reaching out to smooth his cuff. Seeing his gesture, a sharp cold light flashed in Xu Ming's eyes as he said solemnly, "Liu Yunsong is preparing to make a sneaky move."

Ling Chen asked in surprise, "Second brother, how do you know he's going to play dirty?"

"You'll see soon."

As they were speaking, Liu Yunsong lightly tapped with his toes, one fist and one palm, throwing himself toward Song Ge.

"Take this!"

With a light shout, Liu Yunsong shook his wrists, palms raised high like the crushing weight of Mount Tai, coming down toward the top of Song Ge's head. At the same time, his left fist thrust forward, fierce and unstoppable.

Faced with Liu Yunsong's dual attacks, Song Ge remained composed. With a smile on his handsome face unchanged, his long arms moved swiftly like two nimble snakes, wrapping around Liu Yunsong's fist and palm, completely neutralizing his Power.

Once his Power and force were dissipated, Liu Yunsong, seeing the tide turning against him, hastily withdrew. However, Song Ge showed no sign of stopping. Before Liu Yunsong could move, Song Ge instantly moved forward, hands raised and coiled around Liu Yunsong's wrists, closing in.

Not good!

Seeing the approaching figure, Liu Yunsong's pupils shrank and his face paled.

"Go!"

As Song Ge lightly exclaimed, his waist and shoulders coordinated in a powerful effort, hitting Liu Yunsong like a solid iron rod, sending him crashing heavily onto the arena platform.

Feeling the pain in his chest and back, Liu Yunsong gritted his teeth and sprang back up.

"Again!"

With a furious shout, Liu Yunsong charged forward, his palms glowing red with concentrated Inner Strength, eyes losing all reason for the roaring fury within.

On the spectator stand, Ling Chen shook his head silently. Getting consumed by rage was the biggest taboo in martial arts competition. Without clarity, one couldn't make correct decisions and adapt, and the inevitable outcome was clear.

But what shocked Ling Chen the most was Song Ge. Liu Yunsong, after all a top eight contender on the Dragon List, posed no threat at all in front of Song Ge, showing a significant gap between their skills.

Meanwhile, Liu Yunsong had already closed in on Song Ge, his palms fiercely aiming for Song Ge's chest.

Song Ge smiled lightly, his eyes vividly bright and fearless as he raised his palms to meet the attack head-on.

However, just as their palms were about to meet, Song Ge seemed to notice something, his expression suddenly changed, and a cold light exploded in his eyes as he swiftly leant back, bending into a bow shape.

This sudden change left the onlooking crowd puzzled and bewildered, unaware of what had transpired.

However, this movement left Song Ge completely exposed, full of vulnerabilities.

Seizing this chance, Liu Yunsong, with a chilling smile, transformed his palms into fists, hammering down hard, knocking the bent-over Song Ge to the ground.

Feeling a sharp pain in his chest, Song Ge's smile instantly vanished. Without a moment to think, he slapped his hands on the ground, sliding his body out from in front of Liu Yunsong and quickly got back to his feet.

"Song's skills are good, but he still lacks experience," Liu Yunsong sneered.

Hearing this, Song, who had been expressionless, suddenly smiled slightly, meaningfully saying, "Mr. Liu, it's no doubt you are a Dragon List expert, but was this really worth it?"

"You..."

Liu Yunsong was about to respond, but Song Ge across from him didn't give him the chance to speak.

With a swift movement, Song Ge quickly approached Liu Yunsong, throwing punches with both fists like an overwhelming force of thousands of troops, unstoppable by anyone.

Seeing the cold gleam in Song Ge's eyes, for some reason, Liu Yunsong felt a strong sense of unease rising in his heart. He involuntarily stepped back and hastily yelled, "Stop! I acknowl..."

Before he could finish shouting 'admit defeat', Song Ge's feet forcefully propelled him forward, and his fist slammed harshly into Liu Yunsong's body.

Crack!

A crisp sound of bones breaking immediately spread from the stage.

"Stop!"

Sitting in the seats of the Dangyang Sect, Zhu Jin's expression turned cold, and he shouted loudly, soaring up from his seat like a great roc flying, rushing directly towards the stage to grab Song Ge.

However, before his hand could reach Song Ge, it was blocked by an old man, the host and referee of this match, Zhou Qi.

"Zhou Qi, what are you doing?" Zhu Jin shouted coldly.

Zhou Qi calmly said, "Master Zhu, the match isn't over yet. By intervening now, aren't you breaking the rules?"

"Nonsense, my Junior Brother clearly admitted defeat."

"I didn't hear him say the words 'admit defeat'."

"You..."

Before Zhu Jin could finish his sentence, a pitiful scream suddenly came from behind Zhou Qi. Following that, with a 'bang', Liu Yunsong's body collapsed on the stage, both his arms bent unnaturally, clearly broken by Song Ge.

Seeing this scene, the people present gasped in shock, not expecting Song Ge to be so ruthless and directly cripple Liu Yunsong's two arms. An esteemed fighter from the Dragon List had instantly turned into a disabled person.

Was he not afraid of making an enemy of the Dangyang Sect?

"Junior Brother!"

Seeing the terrible state of Liu Yunsong, Zhu Jin's eyes filled with bloodshot rage, and glaring coldly at Song Ge, he gritted his teeth and said, "Song Ge, you are being too presumptuous!"

Song Ge paid no heed to Zhu Jin's rage, and indifferently said, "He brought this upon himself. Master Zhu, you should know very well what your Junior Brother did just now."

"I only know that you've disabled my Junior Brother's two arms, turning him into a disabled person. I know nothing else about the matter." After speaking, Zhu Jin turned to Zhou Qi and said sternly, "You are more aware of the rules of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion than I am. This is a martial arts competition, not a personal feud. Song Ge clearly intended harm. According to the rules of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, such a ruthless and unprincipled person does not deserve to participate in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. He must be expelled immediately. As the host of this ceremony, I want to see how your Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will uphold justice."

Hearing this, Zhou Qi looked somewhat troubled as he glanced at Song Ge. He also hadn't expected Song Ge to be so heavy-handed as to cripple Liu Yunsong.

According to the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, martial arts competitions should stop at the point of contact and deliberate harm is not permitted, but Song Ge's actions had already broken these rules.

"Song Ge, do you have anything to say?" Zhou Qi thought for a moment, then handed the right to speak to Song Ge to hear his defense.

"Elder Zhou, I did not break the rules. It is he who first breached the rules by using a hidden weapon to attack me. My response was merely appropriate retaliation. That shouldn't be a problem, right?"

"Nonsense!" Zhu Jin scolded angrily: "Which eye of yours saw my Junior Brother attacking you? Song, don't slander my Junior Brother with your wild accusations."

Chapter 425 The Disappearing Steel Needle

Zhou Qi spoke solemnly, "Song Ge, you can't joke about this sort of thing. You say Liu Yunsong used a hidden weapon to ambush you; do you have any evidence?"

Song Ge pointed at Liu Yunsong's cuff and said, "There's a mechanism hidden inside his sleeve. If you don't believe me, you can search it."

Upon hearing this, Zhou Qi immediately went in front of Liu Yunsong, bent over, and rolled up his cuff. Suddenly, a leather pouch bound to Liu Yunsong's sleeve appeared, equipped with an exquisitely hidden compartment on its surface, with three needle-sized holes on the front.

Seeing the hidden weapon mechanism that Liu Yunsong wore, Zhou Qi's face changed, and with dexterous hands, he removed the pouch, raising it in front of Zhu Jin to challenge him, "Master Zhu, how do you explain this?"

With his hands clasped behind his back, Zhu Jin calmly said, "What's so strange about this? My Junior Brother is a member of Martial Arts; he has many enemies, so he frequently carries this set of hidden weapons for self-defense. It has become a habit for him. Zhou Qi, are you suggesting that having personal habits is wrong?"

At this point, Zhu Jin paused, then continued, "I am well aware of my Junior Brother's habits. To avoid any accidents, I specifically instructed him before ascending the stage to remove the steel needles from the hidden weapon for me to keep safe."

After finishing his statement, Zhu Jin took out three steel needles from his pocket and handed them to Zhou Qi, saying, "If you don't believe it, you can try and see if these three needles match."

"There's no need to try," Song Ge interjected from the side. "I have a better way to prove it—the three steel needles your Junior Brother used to attack me are still left on the platform. Just find those three needles, and the truth will be clear whether it was a fact or a slander."

"Alright!" Zhu Jin readily agreed. "As long as you can find them, then it's my Junior Brother's own fault, and I will no longer pursue it."

"Someone," Zhou Qi gestured grandly and commanded, "Set a perimeter around the platform, and no one is allowed to approach."

Very swiftly, Zhong Yang led a dozen people to surround the platform, meticulously searching for the whereabouts of the steel needles.

Ten minutes passed.

Zhong Yang walked over to Zhou Qi and whispered a few words in his ear.

Whatever Zhong Yang said, Zhou Qi nodded and turned to Song Ge and Zhu Jin, saying, "We've searched the platform thoroughly and haven't found the steel needles."

Song Ge's expression changed, and with a frown, he said, "Elder Zhou, I am one hundred percent certain he used the hidden weapon to ambush me. Could it be that you've missed it, or..." Song Ge looked at Zhu Jin, saying, "Or it was discreetly dealt with by someone."

"I get your point," Zhou Qi replied. "However, the only ones who went up to the platform just now were me and Master Zhu. As a judge, I naturally wouldn't help Dangyang Sect conceal criminal evidence. While Master Zhu was on the platform, I was watching him the entire time. If he had done anything sneaky, it couldn't have escaped my eyes."

"Elder Zhou..."

Zhou Qi waved his hand, cutting off Song Ge's words, with a serious face he said, "Song Ge, there's no need for further explanation; the matter is clear. Ignoring the rules of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, you deliberately used excessive force and seriously injured Liu Yunsong. Even though you are the top of the Newcomer List, I must uphold justice and integrity."

Upon hearing this, Song Ge's complexion turned unsightly, with a commotion of comments erupting among the audience.

"What a pity!"

"Yes, indeed. The top of the Newcomer List, the most promising candidate, has made such a basic mistake, which is really unbecoming."

"Who's to blame? He destroyed his own promising future; he's just too young and impulsive."

Listening to the sighs around him, Ling Chen looked towards Song Ge on the platform and also felt sorry for him. Deep down, he believed in Song Ge's words. To become the top of the Newcomer List was no easy feat. Moreover, Song Ge's demeanor did not seem arrogant or unyielding.

However, facts speak louder than words. Without the hidden weapon, all words were in vain.

While musing, Ling Chen glanced at Zhu Jin on the platform and Yi Shuiyan among the seated guests, noting the faint smiles on their lips. Neither was perturbed by Liu Yunsong's injury—it all seemed too suspicious.

"What a pity."

Ling Chen, looking at the shaking head of Xu Ming, asked, "Second Brother, do you also believe that Song Ge is innocent?"

"He was wronged; Liu Yunsong indeed used a hidden weapon. However, without the three steel needles, everything said is futile."

Ling Chen was somewhat surprised. Among so many present, including numerous experts, no one saw Liu Yunsong deploy a hidden weapon, except Xu Ming did, which couldn't be a simple coincidence.

As far as he knew, among the eight eccentrics, Xu Ming and Zhang Zhongfeng had the most mysterious backgrounds. Especially Xu Ming, who was typically quiet and rarely spoke, never mentioned his past. Even Qiu Yong didn't know much about him.

After letting his thoughts wander for a while, Ling Chen shifted his focus back to the platform, pondering why the three steel needles had inexplicably vanished.

"Ladies and gentlemen..."

At this moment, Zhou Qi cupped his fists towards the audience and announced, "In light of Song Ge's violation, I hereby declare the cancellation of Song Ge's eligibility to partake in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. Due to the sudden incident, I need to report quickly to the Pavilion Master. Please, everyone, take a break with a cup of tea. After the matter is resolved, the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle shall continue."

"Let's go."

The audience looked reluctantly at Song Ge on the platform and began to rise up to leave.

But at that moment, after hearing Zhou Qi's words, Ling Chen seemed to think of something, his eyes suddenly sparkled with realization, and he quickly raised his arm high, shouting, "Wait!"

Those who were about to leave turned their heads at his shout.

Zhou Qi, recognizing Ling Chen, asked, "Mr. Ling, do you have something else to say?"

Ling Chen smiled as he emerged from his seat, climbed swiftly onto the platform, and spoke slowly and deliberately, "I believe I know the whereabouts of those three steel needles."

As soon as these words came out, the whole place erupted like a boiling pot.

"Oh?" Zhou Qi asked with interest, "Mr. Ling, this is not a matter to joke about. Are you sure you have a handle on this?"

Song Ge, standing to one side, gave Ling Chen a slightly puzzled look, but remained silent and did not speak.

"Ling Chen, don't get ahead of yourself here. The people of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have searched thoroughly and didn't find the three steel needles. Are you implying you're questioning the integrity of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?" Zhu Jin said coldly.

"Master Zhu, you don't need to target me. I know what you're thinking—you're just afraid I'll mess up your plans."

"Insolent! You dare slander me?"

"Zhu, stop your nonsense. If you disturb my Junior Brother's work, get out of the way. Other people might fear your Danyang Sect, but we eight eccentrics certainly don't."

Hearing Qiu Yong's rebuke, Zhou Qi, fearful of a dispute breaking out right there, promptly intervened, "Both of you, say less. Since Mr. Ling has a way to find those three needles, why not let him try? It won't take much of everyone's time."

Chapter 426 The Truth About Ling Chen's Way

Zhu Jin coldly said, "Fine, I want to see how he can find those three steel needles."

"Elder Zhou, please show me that hidden weapon."

Without a word, Zhou Qi handed over the hidden weapon fixed in the sheath to Ling Chen.

Ling Chen squatted down, dexterously disassembled the hidden weapon, took out the components one by one, revealing the core part - the chamber that launches the three steel needles.

Looking at the water stains remaining inside the chamber, Ling Chen's mouth curled slightly, and he lightly touched it with his finger. As expected, the chamber still felt slightly cold.

"Elder Zhou, Master Zhu is right, we indeed have no way to find those three steel needles."

Hearing this, Song Ge's face suddenly showed a hint of disappointment.

Zhu Jin sneered sarcastically, "I thought you were highly capable, but it turns out you're just mediocre. Ling Chen, you should better stay out less embarrassing yourself and tarnishing the reputation of your notorious group."

Ling Chen glanced at Zhu Jin and said indifferently, "Master Zhu, I haven't finished speaking yet, why the rush? I believe what Song said; Liu Yunsong indeed used a hidden weapon against him. The reason why the people of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion couldn't find the three steel needles is because the needles have disappeared. Honestly, I admire Liu Yunsong for coming up with the idea of using ice needles."

Ice needles?

Ling Chen's words immediately aroused exclamations from the audience, and Zhu Jin and Yi Shuiyan's expressions changed drastically.

"Exactly, ice needles." Ling Chen handed the disassembled hidden weapon to Zhou Qi, saying, "Elder Zhou, take a closer look; there's still moisture in the muzzle of the weapon. Although it's been a few minutes, you can still feel the cold. If it were ordinary steel needles, this would definitely not be the case."

"When ice needles land, they also need time to melt. However, Master Zhu's appearance delayed the melting of the ice needles. Elder Zhou, why not ask someone to search again and see if there are three spots of water on the platform?"

Zhou Qi looked around, and without his saying a word, Zhong Yang had already led people to search the platform like combing through a carpet.

In no time, someone shouted, "Elder Zhou, we found them."

Without another word, Zhou Qi quickly walked over to the person, inspecting the water stains left on the ground.

"Elder Zhou, isn't it just as I said?"

"Zhu Jin!" Zhou Qi stood up, turned his head to look at the Sect Leader of the Dangyang Sect, and said sternly, "Don't you think you owe me a reasonable explanation?"

Zhu Jin remained indifferent, "That's just his side of the story. Besides, what can a few water stains prove? It could have been accidentally left by others. Without the steel needles, no claims hold."

"You're still making excuses."

Ling Chen chimed in, "Elder Zhou, since Master Zhu wants evidence, let's give him the evidence. Creating such fine ice needles requires special equipment. Why not send someone to search Liu Yunsong's room? You might find something."

Hearing this, Zhu Jin's expression changed, and he coldly said, "No! Without our Dangyang Sect's permission, no one is allowed to enter my junior brother's room; you guys from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have no right to violate the privacy of a guest."

"Stop right there!"

At that moment, Ling Chen shouted lightly and pointed at the disciples of the Dangyang Sect, saying, "Gentlemen, for your own sake, it's better to sit quietly and not entertain any crooked ideas."

Ling Chen had anticipated that the people from Dangyang Sect would take action after he made his suggestion, so he kept an eye on the Dangyang Sect's seating area to prevent anyone from sneaking out to destroy evidence.

As expected, he noticed Qin Wu and Yi Shuiyan secretly exchanging glances before she stood up to leave.

In an instant, upon Ling Chen's reminder, everyone's gaze focused on Qin Wu. Faced with the meaningful looks from the crowd, Qin Wu's pretty face immediately turned pale, and she quietly defended herself, "I... I just wanted to go to the restroom."

"Without my permission, no one from the Dangyang Sect is allowed to leave," Zhou Qi said coldly as he eyed Zhu Jin, commanding, "Zhong Yang, take your men and search Liu Yunsong's room. If you find nothing there, search all of the Dangyang Sect's rooms thoroughly, leave no stone unturned. Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

Watching Zhong Yang lead his men away, Qin Wu nervously sat back down, biting her thin lips, her eyes filled with resentment as she glared at Ling Chen. Beside her, Yi Shuiyan clutched Qin Wu's hand tightly, his gaze chillingly fixated on Ling Chen.

Feeling the intense hostility from their eyes, Ling Chen remained unconcerned and turned to Song Ge, smiling and winking at him. The latter smiled back and nodded appreciatively.

Within ten minutes, Zhong Yang hurried back to the venue and handed several items to Zhou Qi, saying, "Elder Zhou, Mr. Ling was right; these are tools used to make ice needles."

"Were they found in Liu Yunsong's room?"

"No. According to the guest room records, that room belonged to Qin Wu."

"Qin Wu?" Ling Chen was surprised, not expecting her to be the one making ice needles.

Zhong Yang continued, "Moreover, besides the tools for making ice needles, we also found a medical anesthesia, which they used to create the ice needles by mixing it with ice."

"Good, very good!"

Zhou Qi glared at Zhu Jin, slamming the tools down at his feet and rebuked, "Zhu Jin, now that there's conclusive evidence, what else do you have to say?"

Zhu Jin's face changed as he quickly retorted, "I truly didn't know about this; my Junior Brother never mentioned it to me."

"Zhu Jin, even now, you still make excuses?"

"No... don't blame my Senior Brother."

At this point, the disabled Liu Yunsong, enduring his pain, struggled to speak, "Elder Zhou, let the person responsible bear the consequences alone, this matter has nothing to do with my Senior Brother. I acted on my own. I asked Qin Wu to help me make the ice needles, but she didn't know I would use them in the martial arts competition."

After speaking, Liu Yunsong looked at Zhu Jin with a guilty expression, "Senior Brother, I was too eager for quick success; I'm sorry for dishonoring your and our Master's teachings."

Zhu Jin sighed with disappointment, "Junior Brother, how could you be so foolish."

"Elder Zhou, I broke the rules of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion; this has nothing to do with Dangyang Sect. Whatever punishment you decide for me, I will accept," Liu Yunsong said defiantly.

"Alright, since you've confessed, I have nothing more to say. Zhong Yang, take him away."

"Wait!" Zhu Jin interjected, "Considering my Junior Brother's actions, I, as his Senior Brother, bear an inescapable responsibility." He then bowed to Song, "Song, I apologize for the offense earlier on behalf of Dangyang Sect; I hope you can forgive us."

After speaking, Zhu Jin turned to the attendees, "My Junior Brother's actions have not only broken the rules of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, but they have also tarnished the reputation of Dangyang Sect. Here, I wish for all present to witness. From this moment, as Sect Leader of Dangyang Sect, I expel Liu Yunsong from the sect; from now on, Liu Yunsong has no association with Dangyang Sect."

Pausing, he continued, "As for my disciple Qin Wu, considering she was unaware beforehand, her actions are forgivable. After the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony concludes, I will personally deal with her. Besides that, I owe a great deal of gratitude to Mr. Ling."

Chapter 427 A Thank-You Gift from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion

Thank me?

Ling Chen was slightly startled, not expecting Zhu Jin to mention him. That bastard probably hated him to death by now, how could he have the goodwill to thank him.

"Thanks to Mr. Ling, our Dangyang Sect did not wrong a good person, maintaining the reputation of our sect. Mr. Ling, as our token of gratitude, please let me know if you ever need help in the future, I will certainly assist with all my might."

Seeing Zhu Jin's insincere smile on his face, Ling Chen also responded with feigned courtesy: "Certainly, certainly."

"Let's go." Zhu Jin waved his hand, and his disciples immediately followed him, leaving the meeting place together.

Upon exiting the venue, Zhu Jin's expression immediately darkened, rage simmering in his eyes, hating so much that his teeth were gnashing.

"Shuiyan."

"Master, what are your orders?"

Zhu Jin's face was ashen, as he squeezed a few words through gritted teeth: "Don't let Ling Chen leave this boat alive."

Yi Shuiyan replied promptly, "Master, rest assured, for the sake of Dangyang Sect and Uncle, I will make sure he pays the price."

After the people from Dangyang Sect left, the crowd at the event gradually dispersed too. Considering this unforeseen incident, Zhou Qi decided to take a break for a moment and continue later.

"Mr. Ling, thank you for stepping in to help just now." Song Ge approached Ling Chen and gratefully said, "If not for you, I probably wouldn't have been able to participate in this Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony."

"Don't mention it." Ling Chen said with a smile, "Song, you are a few years older than me. If you don't mind me being presumptuous, feel free to call me Ling, please don't use the formal Mr. Ling."

"That's not the way to say it. The renown of the Eight Eccentrics is well-known; to be friends with Ling is truly my honor."

Song Ge appeared very humble, but his words won the favor of others including Qiu Yong. After all, a person who could speak well was also liked.

"Mr. Ling, I really owe you one for this time. Otherwise, I really wouldn't have known what to do." Zhou Qi spoke up. Song Ge was someone the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had long set its sights on, a future key protégé. If Song Ge lost his eligibility to participate in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, then their plans for the competition amongst newcomers would be meaningless.

In the midst of speaking, Zhou Qi suddenly became curious and asked, "Mr. Ling, how did you know that Liu Yunsong used an ice needle?"

"It was actually thanks to your hint, Elder. You asked us to take a break for tea in the middle, once I thought about tea, I naturally associated it with water, hence the speculation. But that Liu Yunsong is tough, taking all the blame on himself." Ling Chen spoke with a hint of disappointment.

"There was no other way, he could only do that. By taking all the blame on himself, it is equivalent to Dangyang Sect owing him a huge favor. If he didn't do that, with Zhu Jin's character, he definitely wouldn't let him off once they returned."

Ling Chen looked at Zhou Qi in surprise, not expecting the elder to see through things so clearly.

"Elder Zhou, so you knew all along."

"At my old age, if I couldn't even see this, it would have been a life wasted. Some things, we all know well inside, no need to voice them. However, you, you've messed up Dangyang Sect's plans, they probably won't let you off easily. On this boat I can protect you, but once you disembark, you're on your own."

"Dangyang Sect alone, I, one of the Eight Eccentrics, do not even consider them a threat." Qiu Yong spoke dismissively.

Zhou Qi slapped his forehead, laughing, "Look at my memory, I almost forgot Mr. Ling is one of the Eight Eccentrics. With Elder Qiu here, Dangyang Sect naturally can't pose a threat. Well, I must report this incident to the Pavilion Master as soon as possible, I'll excuse myself first, you guys chat."

After watching Zhou Qi leave, Song Ge shook his head and said, "I didn't expect the people of Dangyang Sect to use such despicable tactics against me."

"It wasn't a deliberate targeting, it just happened to be a coincidence, I guess even Liu Yunsong didn't expect you to suddenly step up to the challenge. What Liu Yunsong and Zhu Jin did just now was simply grasping at an opportunity to either seriously injure you or to have the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion strip you of your eligibility to compete."

Hearing Ling Chen's words, Song Ge asked in confusion, "Why would they do that?"

""It's all for clearing the way for Yi Shuiyan. I've heard that among the top five people in the Newcomer List, besides you, the ones ranked second, third, and fourth have roughly equal strength. If you don't participate, Yi Shuiyan's chances of winning will greatly increase.""

Song Ge sighed, "So that's the case. Those from the Dangyang Sect really are quite scheming."

"It's not that complicated, you'd realize it if you think about it. Big Brother Song, it seems you don't have much exposure to these kinds of things."

"I usually focus on martial arts training and don't spend much thought on other things."

"No wonder," Ling Chen smiled and said.

Who would have thought that the one ranked first on the Newcomer List is such a newbie, seriously lacking social experience. In the eyes of swindlers, this kind of person is like a delicious steamed bun.

After chatting for a while and considering that Song Ge was injured, Ling Chen didn't keep him for too long and let him go back to his room to rest.

"Ling Cheng, you did great today," Yuan Yun gave Ling Chen a thumbs up, generously praising him: "You've managed to make a fool out of Zhu Jin and his gang, and also started a connection with Song Ge."

Zhang Zhongfeng nodded and said, "That Song Ge is really not bad, so young yet even Liu Yunsong is not his match. Given time, that young man might even have a chance to challenge the Heavenly List."

The Heavenly List!

Ling Chen smacked his lips; that was something one could only aspire to reach. In his view, being able to get into the Earthly List within his lifetime would be quite an achievement.

At this moment,

In the room Ling Chen had once visited, Zhou Qi was kneeling on the ground with a respectful demeanor, head bowed, reporting to the person behind the curtain about what had just happened at the event.

"Pavilion Master, should I give a warning to people from the Dangyang Sect?"

"No need, it's normal for there to be cunning plots and fights in the Martial Arts world. It's Ling Chen who did us a big favor, preventing Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion from making the wrong decision."

"Pavilion Master, the competition for the newcomers is about to begin, should we provide some convenience for Ling Chen when the time comes?"

"That's not necessary. Different matters should be dealt with accordingly, and Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has always prioritized fairness. Zhou Qi, prepare a gift on my behalf, as a token of gratitude towards Ling Chen."

"Yes, Pavilion Master."

...

Thunk, thunk, thunk!

Hearing the knocking at the door, Ling Chen got up and opened it, seeing Zhou Qi at the doorstep, he quickly stepped aside with a grin, "Elder Zhou, what brings you here? Please come in."

"No need, I've come specifically to convey the Pavilion Master's gratitude to you and to present you with a gift on behalf of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion." Saying this, Zhou Qi handed a delicate wooden box to Ling Chen.

"Elder Zhou, you're being too polite." Though he said this, Ling Chen still honestly accepted the gift.

Joking, of course. Anything given by Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, if it's free, why not take it?

"It's no trouble, you go on with what you were doing, I won't disturb your rest."

After Zhou Qi left, Qiu Yong and others immediately crowded around, curiously asking, "Ling Cheng, what's the gift?"

Without a word, Ling Chen promptly opened the lid of the box.

Seeing the item placed inside the wooden box, everyone was suddenly startled, looking at each other in disbelief.

Chapter 428 The Eve of the Competition

"I can't believe the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is so generous to have gifted a premium-quality Heavenly Mechanism Pill," Xia Yue couldn't help but smile happily. It was delightful to receive such a nice gift for free.

Ling Chen closed the wooden box and handed it to Qiu Yong, saying, "Big brother, you'll know what to do with this."

Qiu Yong declined, "This is a gift from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to you, why are you giving it to me?"

"Big brother, it's strange to hear you say that. We're all brothers, so it doesn't matter who has it. Besides, I've already taken a Heavenly Mechanism Pill, and considering my current realm in martial arts, another premium-quality one wouldn't be of much use to me. Better give it to someone who needs it."

"Big brother, since it's Ling Cheng's sincere gesture, you should just accept it. Second brother said that your internal strength has been stagnant for a while. Maybe taking this premium-quality Heavenly Mechanism Pill could help break through that bottleneck and take you to the next level. You're our leader among the eight eccentrics – we're counting on you to hold the fort in the future. So, it's most appropriate for you to use this Heavenly Mechanism Pill," Yuan Yun suggested.

"Third brother is right," Xia Yue chimed in, "Big brother, don't be too modest."

After much persuasion, Qiu Yong finally accepted the premium-quality Heavenly Mechanism Pill.

Originally, everyone had wanted to participate in the afternoon's Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle to win the grand prize. However, since they had already received a generous gift from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, there was no need to join the fray and conserve their energy. After all, aiming for that grand prize meant clashing with numerous top fighters, and victory was not guaranteed.

After a short rest, everyone headed to the arena again to watch the upcoming battles. As expected, the Dangyang Sect members did not reappear. Having lost face just a short while ago, they probably didn't have the nerve to continue participating in the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle.

The afternoon's competitive battles eventually came to an end with a Dragon List master triumphing and claiming the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's grand prize. With that, the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle was over.

The main event of this Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, the competition for the newcomers, would take place tomorrow.

Night fell.

After dinner, Qiu Yong urged Ling Chen to get some rest quickly to prepare for tomorrow's newcomer competition. Their only worry now was Ling Chen's back injury.

Ling Chen was also aware of his condition—it was fine for normal walking, but intense physical activity would aggravate his injury.

Saying goodbye to Qiu Yong and the others, Ling Chen didn't head straight back to his room but went to the communications room on the luxurious vessel. This room was specially set up by the event organizers for guests attending the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. Once on board, for safety reasons, all mobile phone signals were blocked, including wireless internet and satellite signals. The only way to contact the outside world was through this communications room.

Having been away from East Sea City for a few days, Ling Chen didn't forget to call Nanrong Wanqing to check in, making time each day to touch base and inquire about each other's well-being.

After a chat of over ten minutes, Ling Chen hung up the phone and was about to head back to his room when he happened to see Zhu Xiaozhu approaching from outside, and they bumped into each other.

Seeing Zhu Xiaozhu's delicate features, Ling Chen smiled and greeted her with a wave.

"How's your injury?" Zhu Xiaozhu asked with concern.

"Much better, don't worry."

"The newcomer competition is tomorrow. Take care of yourself. I'll wish you success in advance."

"Thank you!"

After the brief exchange, Ling Chen and Zhu Xiaozhu went their separate ways. Just as Ling Chen was about to leave, he saw someone suddenly block his path.

Han Yu?

Ling Chen raised his eyebrows and spoke indifferently, "Do you need something from me?"

"Ling, have you forgotten what I said the other day?" Han Yu glared at him coldly, "I warned you, if you dare to take another look at Xiaozhu, I'll gouge out your eyes."

Hearing this, Ling Chen looked Han Yu up and down and sarcastically retorted without holding back: "Who do you think you are? What I do is my business, and none of your concern. You can't capture a woman's heart, yet you come to show off your power to me? With your character and pettiness, no wonder Xiaozhu isn't interested in you."

Finished speaking, Ling Chen shook his head, not bothering with Han Yu, and simply walked past him.

"Stop!" Han Yu's face turned livid as he struggled to contain his fury, grabbing Ling Chen's collar and growling, "Don't think just because you have the eight eccentrics backing you up that I wouldn't dare to touch you. To me, someone who can't even make it to the Newcomer List's top ten is nothing more than an incompetent loser."

"Pity that Xiaozhu happens to be interested in this 'loser' but not in you – doesn't that mean you're even worse than a loser?"

Han Yu's face twisted in anger as he spat, "You..."

"Shut up!"

Ling Chen interrupted him before he could finish, impatiently brushing his hand off his collar and speaking emphatically, "You keep coming to warn me time and again—let me give you a warning now. Stop threatening me from now on, it's childish, and I'm not buying it. And don't think you're something special just because you're second on the Newcomer List. Maybe you should ask around to find out what I used to do. In martial skills, I might not be your match, but when it comes to the art of killing... you and nine more like you still wouldn't equal me. If you really piss me off, I'll make sure you die without understanding how. So, be smarter in the future and don't bother me."

Watching Ling Chen walk away, Han Yu shouted furiously, "Fine, Ling, just wait! Tomorrow on the combat platform, I will see exactly how capable you are."

Ling Chen ignored Han Yu's bellowing and went back to his own room.

...

The next day.

Early in the morning, Ling Chen applied his Acupuncture Technique to treat his injured back, hoping it would prevent any issues during the competition.

After the acupuncture treatment, Ling Chen took a bath and heard someone knocking at his door—it was Qiu Yong and the gang.

"Ling Cheng, how are you feeling? Are you ready?"

Ling Chen nodded with a smile, "No problem."

"Let's go. We have half an hour until the start. Let's have breakfast first."

After breakfast, it was 8 o'clock in the morning. Ling Chen followed Qiu Yong and the others into the arena.

The venue was already full of people. Compared to the past two days, everyone seemed very relaxed today, each wearing a smile on their faces. After the end of the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle, the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony didn't involve them much, and now it was time to enjoy the competition amongst the newcomers.

Sitting in his seat, Ling Chen looked around and immediately felt three fierce gazes directed at him.

Turning his head slightly, Ling Chen glanced through the corner of his eye and noticed the three gazes belonging to Yi Shuiyan, Han Yu, and Qu Jinxian from the Qingyang Sect.

Huh!

He smirked. The competition hadn't even begun, and he had already become the target of many.

Then, Ling Chen saw Song Ge escorted into the venue by a middle-aged man in a suit. Sensing his gaze, Song Ge turned around and nodded at him in a friendly manner.

Chapter 429 The Heavenly Secrets Competition (Part 1)

As everyone took their seats, Zhou Qi, who was the host, ascended the platform and, as per usual, first greeted the guests with a fist-and-palm salute.

"Ladies and gentlemen, after two days of competition, the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle has concluded successfully, with all seven prizes finding their respective owners. Today, we are going to witness the highlight of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony—the battle of the newcomers. Unlike previous years, this year's contestants are all remarkably gifted, and it would be a pity for any of them to be eliminated. With a keen interest in talent, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has specially revised the rules for this year's competition."

"Any contestant who finishes in the top three will not only have the opportunity to join the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and become a key focus of its cultivation. Furthermore, the top three contestants will each receive a generous prize. In addition, the first-place winner will have the honor of being summoned by the Pavilion Master."

Upon hearing these words, the entire audience was abuzz with excitement, their speech brimming with envy.

Having a meeting with the Pavilion Master was an unprecedented opportunity. Normally, only martial artists who ascended to the Earthly List would have a chance to meet with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master. However, there are countless masters in the world, and very few can reach the Earthly List.

Thus, for any martial artist, an audience with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master is the highest honor.

Ling Chen touched his nose, remembering what He Ziyun had told him. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master's powers are vast and all-encompassing, almost all questions can be answered. Guidance from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master could greatly enhance his martial arts progress.

If even He Ziyun said so, it must be true. If possible, he too wanted to meet this mysterious Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master and see just how capable he is.

As he contemplated, he saw Zhou Qi gesturing with his hand for quiet, then continued, "I believe everyone is very interested in the prizes for the top three."

"Elder Zhou, stop keeping us in suspense, let's hear it."

Hearing the urging from the audience, Zhou Qi smiled and said, "The first place, besides having the opportunity to meet with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master, will also receive three premium Heavenly Mechanism Pills, a choice of any Martial Arts Heart Method from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's collection accumulated over hundreds of years, and a weapon personally forged by Master Guo Liang. The second place will receive two premium Heavenly Mechanism Pills and one Martial Arts Heart Method. Third place will receive one premium Heavenly Mechanism Pill and one ordinary Heavenly Mechanism Pill. Ladies and gentlemen, remember, these prizes will be completely at the disposal of the winners, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will not interfere."

Tsk tsk!

Even Qiu Yong and others couldn't help but feel impressed after hearing about the rich prizes prepared by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

Compared to the prizes of the newcomer battle, the rewards of the Heavenly Mechanism Chaos Battle suddenly seemed insignificant, the gap was too big.

Ling Chen wondered, "Since the top three winners will join the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion anyway, what's the significance of these prizes?"

Yuan Yun laughed from the side and said, "Didn't you hear the last sentence from Elder Zhou? That's the key point. In plain terms, these prizes are not for the winners themselves, but for the powers behind them."

"I see." Ling Chen nodded. Then he changed the topic and asked, "Third Brother, since the candidates on the Newcomer List all belong to their own sects and forces, wouldn't they have to draw a line with their previous identities after joining the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?"

"That's not necessary. Their backgrounds won't change after joining the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Take Yi Shuiyan as an example; if he enters the Pavilion, he is still a disciple of the Dangyang Sect. However, for the next few decades, he would receive cultivation from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and work for them. Of course, if the Dangyang Sect needs him, he can also lend a hand, as the Pavilion will not impose restrictions. This is akin to having two great powers simultaneously nurturing a genius who can serve them both—a win-win situation for both the Dangyang Sect and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Moreover, they can maintain a harmonious relationship through this approach."

Qiu Yong added, "The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has been able to stand tall for hundreds of years and maintain its detached status among the major forces not only because of its mystery and strength, but more importantly, its tactics and control over the human heart. The Pavilion knows what these people need, so it always provides what they desire. Throughout history, there have been many who joined the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, each with different backgrounds, yet there has never been a single person who betrayed the Pavilion. On the contrary, when they grow old, instead of returning to their original forces and sects, they are willing to stay in the Pavilion for retirement, silently guarding it. These individuals are one of the core reasons for the Pavilion's longstanding stability."

After listening to Qiu Yong, Ling Chen couldn't help but be amazed, realizing how alluring the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was.

"Ladies and gentlemen, according to the old rules, only those on the Newcomer List are eligible to compete in the newcomer battle. However, considering the extraordinary talents of this edition's newcomers, the rules have changed slightly from previous years. The Newcomer List has only ten spots, but I believe that there are more than just these ten rising stars in the Martial Arts world. Therefore, in addition to the Newcomer List, we have provided one additional spot. Whoever secures this spot will be eligible to compete for the top three of the newcomers."

Ling Chen silently nodded, as the changes to the rules of the newcomer battle had already been made public. Otherwise, he wouldn't have stayed.

To contend with Yi Shuiyan at the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, he must secure this spot.

"Alright, without further ado, the battle for the spot begins now. Whoever can maintain an undefeated streak through three matches on the platform, the last spot will belong to them. The opportunity is limited, so do not hesitate, lest you miss out on a golden chance." After finishing, Zhou Qi turned and stepped down from the platform.

Ling Chen looked at the empty platform, hesitated for a moment, but decided to wait and see. At this moment, rashly stepping up onto the stage, who knew what opponents he might encounter.

Soon, a young man walked down from the spectator seats and confidently climbed onto the platform, smiling and gesturing with a fist-and-palm salute: "Zhou Jun here, who wishes to enlighten me?"

"I will!"

As the words fell, a crew-cut young man leaped onto the platform and bowed with clasped hands: "He Yang, please enlighten me."

After speaking, He Yang did not waste any words, immediately making his move. His steel sword, like a Spirit Snake darting out its tongue, aimed straight at Zhou Jun's throat.

Zhou Jun laughed heartily and welcomed the attack with empty hands, full of confidence.

As Zhou Jun's hands touched the sword blade, before the onlookers could react, they saw He Yang's steel sword fly out of his hands, shocking everyone.

Catching a blade barehanded?

How impressive!

So confident!

Seeing the steel sword falling from his grip, He Yang's expression changed, and he promptly withdrew, admitting defeat with a flushed face: "I have lost."

"It was just luck." Zhou Jun said with a smile, looking around at the surrounding stands, and asked, "Who else?"

"I'll have a try."

As the voice sounded, another young man stepped onto the platform.

However, the duel did not even last three moves before Zhou Jun easily defeated his opponent, securing two consecutive victories.

Watching the triumphant Zhou Jun, Ling Chen's expression became a bit odd, and so did the faces of the onlookers.

Chapter 430 The Heavenly Secrets Competition (Part 2)

Just now, when the first round ended, everyone was still amazed at Zhou Jun's prowess. However, having played out two rounds consecutively, anyone with a bit of discernment could tell that this wasn't a martial arts competition; it was clearly a staged performance, with both challengers who went on stage acting as stooges.

To think he had the audacity to cheat openly during the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, Zhou Jun sure has some nerve.

For a moment, everyone's gaze turned unanimously to Zhou Qi. With things being this way, shouldn't the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion intervene?

Contrary to everyone's expectation, Zhou Qi not only did not intervene but instead said with a smile, "Ladies and gentlemen, he has now won two consecutive rounds. If he wins one more, you will have no chance left."

"I'll go!"

"Let me take you on."

"..."

As soon as Zhou Qi's words left his mouth, immediately, seven or eight young men, unwilling to be outdone, rushed onto the stage, and Ling Chen joined in without exception.

Seeing these young men staring at him with menacing expressions, Zhou Jun suddenly felt intimidated and managed a forced smile. Turning to Zhou Qi, he said, "Umm... Grandpa, I forfeit. Let them do it." After speaking, he scurried down the stage in disgrace and vanished in the blink of an eye.

Grandpa?

The crowd burst into laughter, realizing that the young man was indeed Zhou Qi's grandson, no wonder Zhou Qi turned a blind eye.

"That brat just played a little joke with everyone, please don't mind. However..." Zhou Qi looked at the people on the stage and continued with a laugh, "However, my good-for-nothing grandson did do one good thing; he pushed you all to step forward, saving us some time. Now, I will ask again, is there anyone else? If not, I'll change the rules a bit. You eight will pair up and fight, three rounds to decide the victor. Any objections?"

"No objections." Everyone responded in unison.

To save time, the eight individuals each took their spots at the four corners of the ring, and all began at once.

Ling Chen was matched with a young man in his early twenties, possibly a year or two younger than himself, but he was burly and sported a shaved head, looking strong and formidable.

After exchanging a few courteous words, the bald man did not hesitate and immediately took off with his stout legs towards Ling Chen, charging like a humanoid bulldozer, his momentum fierce.

As the opponent came closing in, Ling Chen moved his feet, swiftly circling to the bald man's side. He lightly raised his right leg to block the bald man's rushing legs, and with his left hand, he pushed on the opponent's back.

Instantly, the bald man stumbled underfoot, his burly body losing its balance and tumbling to the ground.

"Ling Chen, victor of the first round."

Hearing Zhou Qi's voice, Ling Chen silently smirked to himself, but the audience erupted in boos. Even a move fit for a child's brawl was enough to secure victory; Ling Chen's opponent was too weak to strike a blow.

In a few minutes, Ling Chen and three others advanced to the next stage, while the rest were eliminated.

When Ling Chen had exchanged words with the Tea Girl previously, she had told him that with his capabilities, he could rank in the top ten of the Newcomer List, but considering other factors, they had left him off the list.

Thus, compared with these competitors, Ling Chen felt no pressure or threat at all.

The second round's outcome was as expected, with Ling Chen easily defeating his opponent and advancing to the final round.

"Ling Chen, your luck ends here. Will you go down on your own, or shall I send you down?"

Ling Chen looked at his opponent and felt a bit perplexed. The other's words carried a hint of coldness, with anger flickering in his eyes, almost as if he saw Ling Chen as an enemy. However, Ling Chen had no recollection of knowing this person at all.

"The next match is the decisive battle, Ling Chen versus Liang Qian of the Qingyang Sect. The ultimate victor will secure a spot in the Newcomer competition."

As Zhou Qi's voice rang out, Ling Chen immediately realized that this guy was a disciple of the Qingyang Sect; no wonder he harbored such enmity towards him.

"If you want to avenge Xu Song and the others, then come at me. Why so much nonsense?"

"Seeking death!"

Liang Qian coldly snorted and with a light tap of his toes, he swooped toward Ling Chen at high speed, his spear thrusting straight toward Ling Chen's face.

Ling Chen retreated step by step, trying to dodge the spearhead. But Liang Qian's spearmanship was extremely exquisite, and no matter how Ling Chen moved, the sharp spearhead always locked onto his body, pressing closer with each step.

Seeing that he was about to be driven to the edge of the arena, Ling Chen hesitated no more, reaching swiftly to his waist.

Clang!

Accompanied by a crisp sound, the spear tightly gripped by Liang Qian was struck, diverting its course, sweeping past Ling Chen.

At the same time, Ling Chen's hand now held a rod-shaped iron instrument, roughly a foot and a half long.

Upon seeing Ling Chen wielding the Tianling Blade, Zhu Jin and Yi Shuiyan from the Dangyang Sect squinted their eyes, fixating on the blade with intense desire, wishing they could snatch it away immediately.

At this moment, Ling Chen lightly triggered a mechanism, and a sharp blade suddenly extended from the end, transforming into a sword over three feet long.

With the sword in hand, Ling Chen took a couple of running steps and vigorously launched off his toes, his body leaping high into the air. Following that, he twisted his waist, spread out his arms, and swiftly rotated in mid-air, like a spinning windmill, bringing the sword blade in his hand slashing down in quick succession upon Liang Qian's head, not pausing for a moment.

Under the relentless sword onslaught, Liang Qian found no chance to fight back and was forced to hold his spear horizontally above his head to parry the sword strikes.

However, apart from the spear tip, the shaft of Liang Qian's spear was made of wood. Although sturdy, it could not withstand the sharpness of the Tianling Blade. Moreover, Ling Chen's precision was impeccable; every strike hit the same spot.

When the fifth strike came down, Liang Qian's spear could no longer withstand Ling Chen's assault and snapped into two pieces at the center.

Without the spear for defense, Ling Chen's Tianling Blade directly thrust forward, firmly resting against Liang Qian's neck.

"You've lost!"

Liang Qian's face turned ugly as he looked at the Tianling Blade, his gaze flickering. Suddenly, he gritted his teeth and bellowed, "I haven't lost yet." As he spoke, he leaned forward, grabbing the broken spearhead with his hand, lunging straight for Ling Chen's chest.

Seeing Liang Qian's action, Qiu Yong and others in the audience seats changed their expressions dramatically, rising from their seats to exclaim, "Stop!"

However, Liang Qian ignored their shouts as if unheard, his malicious face bearing a grim smile.

At that moment, seeing the rapidly approaching spearhead, Ling Chen's eyebrows furrowed; he had not expected Liang Qian to resort to such extreme measures. He had thought the battle was over and had let down his guard, only to find Liang Qian launching a surprise attack.

Moreover, from the direction of the spearhead, it was clear he aimed to take Ling Chen's life.

As the spearhead was less than five centimeters away from a vital spot, Ling Chen didn't hesitate for a moment, his wrist flicking slightly. Instantly, Liang Qian's face stiffened, his movements abruptly slowing.

Seizing the opportunity, Ling Chen quickly withdrew, evading the spear attack.

"You... you..." Liang Qian opened his mouth but couldn't believe what he saw from Ling Chen.

Before he could finish, a stream of hot blood spurted from his neck, along with his body collapsing to the ground.