

The Beauty 431

Chapter 431 The Heavenly Secrets Competition (Part 3)

Seeing Liang Qian collapsed in a pool of blood, the crowd on the stands fell deadly silent, everyone was shocked by Ling Chen's ruthlessness and decisiveness.

Confronting Liang Qian's sneak attack, he actually killed him mercilessly.

"Ling Chen, how dare you kill someone from Qingyang Sect, prepare to meet your end!"

At that moment, an enraged voice rang out, as disciples of Qingyang Sect, led by Qu Yuan, rushed onto the arena, heading straight towards Ling Chen with a menacing aura.

"Who dares to touch my Ling Cheng."

Accompanied by a furious shout, led by Qiu Yong, the eight eccentrics swiftly assembled in front of Ling Chen, staring coldly at the approaching Qu Yuan.

Qu Yuan clenched his fists, veins bulging on his forehead as he gritted his teeth, "Qiu Yong, you saw it too, he killed my disciple, do you intend to shield him? Hand him over, I want him to pay with blood for blood."

Qiu Yong said coldly, "That was your disciple's own fault. If it weren't for my Ling Cheng's quick reactions just now, he would be the one dead. Qu Yuan, you fail to instruct your disciples properly, they either harass women or launch sneak attacks behind the scenes, completely undisciplined, yet you want to shift the blame onto my Ling Cheng. Hmph! Let me tell you, don't even think about it. If you dare touch a hair on my Ling Cheng, I will make sure your Qingyang Sect members' blood splatters right here, including you, this shameless old creature."

As Qiu Yong's words fell, Yuan Yun drew his steel blade, stepping forward to Qu Yuan, his sharp gaze sweeping over Qu Jinxian and the others.

"People of Qingyang Sect, listen up, I'll count to three, either get lost or die here, it's your choice." Yuan Yun's words were domineering, just like his swordsmanship, leaving no room for mercy.

"Yuan Yun, you..."

Before he could finish, Qu Yuan suddenly felt a bone-chilling cold rising from underneath him, abruptly biting off his words as he glanced towards the stands.

Unbeknownst to him, Zhang Zhongfeng had already left the arena, standing at the back of the stands, with one hand holding a longbow, the arrow nocked and aimed directly at Qu Yuan's forehead.

Seeing this, Qu Yuan's face drastically changed, the corners of his mouth twitching uncontrollably.

In the world of Martial Arts, who doesn't know the name of Zhang Zhongfeng, the Archer God.

Once the arrow is released, it means certain death, and in front of the Archer God, no one dares harbor any hope of luck.

At this time, the onlookers all watched Qingyang Sect with schadenfreude. Clearly, it was their own disciple who disregarded the rules and initiated a deadly sneak attack, now being counter-killed by Ling Chen, they can only blame his own disregard for the rules, no one else.

Qingyang Sect was already in the wrong, yet they still wanted to trouble others, which was truly shameless. Now confronted with the tough stance of the eight eccentrics, let's see how they'll step down.

"One!"

Yuan Yun spat out a number, causing the hearts of the Qingyang Sect led by Qu Yuan to sink suddenly, becoming involuntarily tense, palms sweating.

"Two!"

The corners of Yuan Yun's mouth slightly raised, watching Qu Yuan with a sneering smile, raising his steel blade slightly. Simultaneously, behind the stands, Zhang Zhongfeng had already pulled his bow tight, only needing to loosen his fingers and there would be another corpse on the arena immediately.

Watching Yuan Yun's lips preparing to open again, Qu Yuan's forehead was covered in cold sweat, having lost his earlier anger and firmness. Not waiting for Yuan Yun's 'three' to come out, Qu Yuan quickly turned his head, looking down at the arena to Zhou Qi, and spoke, "Elder Zhou, you are the referee, you've seen everything that just happened, please uphold justice for our Qingyang Sect."

Hearing this, the crowd on the stands couldn't help but laugh, carrying a hint of mockery.

"I thought Qu Yuan was made of sterner stuff, but it turns out he's just like everyone else. All his talk of asking Zhou Qi to preside over justice was just looking for a way out.

Zhou Qi glanced at Ling Chen and said at a leisurely pace, "I believe everyone has seen that Ling Chen acted in self-defense, without fault. Liang Qian's death was his own doing; no one else is to blame. Sect Leader Qu, everyone knows the facts clearly, can't your people from Qingyang Sect see that?"

"I..." Qu Yuan was momentarily at a loss for words, not expecting Zhou Qi to put him on the spot. He wanted a way out, but Zhou Qi's words only added to his embarrassment.

"Alright, everyone please return to your seats," Zhou Qi walked up to the platform and addressed the people from both sides.

Seeing that Zhou Qi had given him an out, Qu Yuan said nothing more and immediately led his people back to their seats. Once everyone had seated themselves again, Zhou Qi looked at Qu Yuan and said indifferently, "Sect Leader Qu, I hope in the upcoming matches your people from Qingyang Sect will keep their eyes wide open. I don't want to see another incident like this."

With these words, Zhou Qi ignored the displeased look on Qu Yuan's old face, turned his head to survey everyone present, and continued: "Please abide by the rules of the competition. If anyone acts like Liang Qian, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will not seek justice for them. Also, I would like to congratulate Ling Chen for securing the last spot in the rookie competition. That concludes this morning's competition, everyone can go back and rest for a bit. At 2 PM, the rookie championship will officially start, please make sure to arrive on time at the venue and not miss out on the exciting event."

After leaving the venue, seeing that it was still early for lunch, Ling Chen and Qiu Yong went straight to the luxury cruise ship's tea cafe.

Ling Chen took a sip of the coffee brought by the waiter, delightfully savoring it. His gaze drifted through the window, looking out at the vast expanse of the azure sea, which brought him a great sense of relief.

"Ling Chen."

At that moment, Ye Liangyong, carrying tea, came over and greeted everyone with a smile.

"Mr. Ye, please sit."

"Ling Chen, you killed Liang Qian on the platform. Although everyone knows it was out of necessity, you still need to be cautious of Qingyang Sect's reprisal," Ye Liangyong kindly warned.

"Mr. Ye, don't worry, I understand," Ling Chen replied, slightly puzzled, "I had no enmity with that Liang Qian. Why would he desperately fight me for his fellow brothers?"

"Do you remember Xu Song?"

Ling Chen nodded.

"Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion sentenced him to fifty strokes. Who knew his body was so weak, he couldn't withstand it."

"Is he dead?" Ling Chen was shocked.

"He's not dead, but he's become a cripple. I heard that Liang Qian and Xu Song are cousins and very close. That's probably why Liang Qian was so ruthless with you. Now one is crippled, and the other is dead. Just now in the venue, you also made Qu Yuan lose face, with his temperament, he most certainly won't let this go."

"What is there to fear?" Qiu Yong said indifferently, "If he dares to cause trouble, we, the Eight Eccentrics, aren't pushovers either. Sixth Brother... Sixth Brother..."

"Huh?" Ling Chen snapped back to reality, shifting his gaze from the window, and asked, "Big brother, what happened?"

"What got into you, you suddenly drifted off mid-conversation."

Ling Chen smiled sheepishly, his eyes returning to the calm sea outside the window, his brows slightly furrowed.

Strange!

There seemed to be something floating on the sea surface just now, but it disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Could I have seen it wrong?

Chapter 432 Rookie Preliminary Contest

At this moment, a massive cargo ship sails over the ocean surface, with over a dozen suit-clad, armed guards patrolling the deck. On the spacious deck, there are also three helicopters, with several men busy maintaining and adjusting them.

In the cargo hold beneath the ship, more than twenty staff members sit in front of computers, rapidly typing away on their keyboards, surrounded by precision equipment blinking in red and green lights.

"Target One in position!"

"Target Two in position!"

"Target Three in position!"

"..."

Following the announcement from the staff, a young man in a suit briskly approaches a refined and scholarly-looking middle-aged man, reporting, "Mr. Yun, all preparations are complete."

Mr. Yun turns around and directly walks over to the large screen hanging on the wall, nodding at the young man, "Begin."

"Yes."

Soon after, a real-time image appears on the large screen. In the azure sea, an underwater machine equipped with a camera slowly moves forward.

Dozens of seconds later, the underside of a giant ship comes clearly into view on the screen.

As the machine approaches the bottom, two mechanical arms slowly extend out under the remote control of the staff.

"Mr. Yun, all six packages have been installed."

"Good, have them retrieve the machine, don't let the other side detect it."

"Understood." As soon as he says this, the young man asks, "Mr. Yun, when do we start the operation?"

"There's no rush; my people have not yet arrived. Let's wait a bit longer."

...

After lunch, Ling Chen takes a short rest and then follows Qiu Yong and others to the conference venue to participate in the afternoon's newcomer competition.

Sitting in the seating area, Ling Chen immediately feels a soft gaze upon him. Looking up, he sees Zhu Xiaozhu on the opposite stand watching him. He smiles and gives a light nod.

At this moment, Shi Su, who is beside Zhu Xiaozhu, seems to notice their interaction, her eyes coldly fix on Ling Chen, as if a layer of frost has formed on her face.

Ling Chen touches his nose and turns his head away, no longer looking at the woman.

Although Shi Su is Zhu Xiaozhu's master, Ling Chen has no fondness for her.

At two o'clock in the afternoon, the attendees for the venue are all present, and the host Zhou Qi, as usual, mounts the stage, giving a fist salute to all the seated guests.

"Everyone, this morning's competition for spots was just an appetizer; the main event is this afternoon. You are all already aware of the prize for this newcomer competition, so I won't repeat it and will just announce the rules. This year's newcomer competition is divided into two rounds. The first round is for the bottom five of the Newcomer List, plus Ling Chen who won his spot this morning, making a total of six people. The winner among these six will compete with the top five of the Newcomer List for the top three spots."

Hearing this rather unfair rule, the crowd looks at one another, their faces a mix of astonishment.

"Elder Zhou, isn't this rule somewhat unfair? Why don't the top five newcomers participate in the competition together?" Someone in the stands questions, "Even if one of those six emerges victorious, they will surely be drained in energy and physical condition after successive battles, and it will be even more troublesome if they're injured. How can they then compete with the top five newcomers in such a state?"

"That's right." Another person immediately agrees, "I also feel it's unfair; those six are at too much of a disadvantage."

Faced with the opposition and doubts of the crowd, Zhou Qi presses his hand down, signaling everyone to quiet down.

"I understand that you find the rules set by Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion unfair. However, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has always been fair and impartial in its actions and will not favor anyone. The Pavilion has made this decision after careful deliberation and has entirely considered the six contestants."

"Elder Zhou, what do you mean by that?"

"Since everyone wants to know, let me just tell the truth. There's a large gap between the strength of the top five and bottom five of the Newcomer List. The newcomers ranked in the top five possess strength not inferior to Dragon List experts, as I believe everyone saw in the match between Song Ge and Liu Yunsong that day. As a Dragon List expert, Liu Yunsong was utterly defenseless against Song Ge. By contrast, the few ranked in the bottom five of the Newcomer List only possess Tiger List strength. With such a huge disparity, do you think it's interesting to put them together?"

Seeing that everyone is stunned by his words, Zhou Qi smiles and says, "We have arranged this also with the safety of the newcomers in mind, of course, I do not rule out the possibility of a dark horse. However, if there really is a dark horse, I believe they will stand out in the competition. Apart from that, I'd like to remind you all. Each of you is a member of the Martial Arts community, survival of the fittest, it all comes down to who has the stronger fists. It's cruel, but that's reality. To become a strong person, how can one reach the pinnacle without going through hardships and obstacles?"

After Zhou Qi's stirring speech, everyone falls into silence, and no one objects to the rules set by Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion anymore.

Survival of the fittest, this is the unchanging law for millennia.

If, as Zhou Qi said, the strength disparity is so great, then the six of them indeed have no qualifications to challenge the top five of the Newcomer List.

"Alright, I've said all that needs to be said. Since no one objects, let's proceed with drawing lots to determine the opponents." After saying that, Zhou Qi gestures grandly, and Zhong Yang immediately runs up the stage, handing a bamboo tube with six bamboo sticks to Zhou Qi.

"Please, all newcomers come up to the stage."

Without a word, Ling Chen steps onto the stage. At the same time, the other five newcomers rise from their seats and step onto the stage one after another, gathering around Zhou Qi, sizing up those who could very well become their opponents.

To Ling Chen's surprise, among the five newcomers, there is a young woman with a delicate face, tender and elegant, looking about twenty-one or twenty-two years old.

Seeing that all six are present, Zhou Qi speaks, "There are three sets of matching numbers on the six bamboo sticks, and those with the same numbers will be in one group. Begin."

Once the other five have drawn, Ling Chen doesn't need to draw to know who his opponent is.

Shi Tao, a youth of similar age to himself, ordinary-looking with a hooked nose, thick eyebrows, large eyes, and very thick lips, seems like a straightforward person.

After looking at the bamboo sticks in the hands of the six, Zhou Qi points to the exquisite young woman and another youth next to her.

"Xiao Wan, Luo Yu, let's start with you two."

The two nod their heads and immediately step down to prepare.

Ling Chen returns to his seat and finds Ye Liangyong has unknowingly taken a seat behind him.

"Mr. Ye, why have you come over?"

"I switched seats with someone else."

"Is there something you need from me?"

"I've just been asking around about those few people's details, so I wanted to come over and tell you, to help you be prepared."

"Ye has been considerate." Qiu Yong smiles, "Ling Cheng, know yourself and your enemy, and you will never be in peril. No matter who your next opponent is, you must not underestimate them, learning more is always good."

"I know, Big Brother."

Chapter 433 A Fierce Battle with Shi Yong (1)

Before long, Xiao Wan and Luo Yu both returned to the arena and bowed with clasped fists to each other in greeting.

Ling Chen's curiosity was piqued as he observed the weapons in their hands. For those dedicated to Martial Arts, common weapons are swords and sabers, but both Xiao Wan and Luo Yu wielded rather unusual ones.

Luo Yu was using a folding fan, which appeared to be made of alloy from a single glance. His weapon, relatively speaking, was still normal. On the contrary, it was Xiao Wan; she held two cone-shaped short blades in her hands, each about half a foot long, resembling two intricately crafted daggers.

Short blades were common weapons, but cone-shaped ones were extremely rare. With only the tip possessing the lethality, this design undoubtedly lessened their power.

As he contemplated, Luo Yu let out a sharp cry and took the initiative to attack.

With his body rushing forward, Xiao Wan, without a word, instantly raised the cone-shaped short blade in her right hand above her head. Just as the audience was puzzled by her action, the cone-shaped short blade startlingly split in two. The sharp tip was violently shot out, connected to the end by a fine steel wire, and it pierced into the top of the venue.

Immediately after, the steel wire started to rapidly retract, lifting Xiao Wan into the air and avoiding Luo Yu's line of attack.

Clicking his tongue!

Witnessing this scene, Ling Chen couldn't help but be impressed, not having expected the two short cone-shaped blades to have such an effect. Clearly, these were specially modified weapons.

At this point, Xiao Wan was suspended in mid-air, over two meters above Luo Yu's head, which was out of his reach even if he were to jump. While Luo Yu pondered his next move, Xiao Wan flicked her wrist, and the short blade gripped in her left hand was also shot out, heading straight towards Luo Yu's head.

Seeing this, Luo Yu did not hesitate and immediately stepped back. However, surprisingly, after her initial miss, Xiao Wan did not retract the shot blade. Instead, she used the steel wire connected to the blade to gently shake it, controlling the blade fluidly as if by an extension of her arm. She maneuvered it around Luo Yu, constantly changing positions, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

In no time, Luo Yu was put entirely on the defensive, forced to drop all other thoughts and focus on fending off the attacks from the short blade.

"This young lady has some good ideas." Xia Yue said with a smile, her tone filled with a hint of appreciation.

Yuan Yun nodded and added, "Looking at her technique, she must have dedicated over a decade to reach this level today. It's quite remarkable."

As they conversed, a sudden change occurred on the platform. Luo Yu, probably fed up with being entangled, took a quick step back. Simultaneously, he snapped open his folding fan with a swish, twisted at the waist, and made a throwing gesture.

Instantly, the folding fan whirled through the air like a boomerang, rapidly spinning towards the steel wire in Xiao Wan's hand.

Sparks flew, and Luo Yu's face lit up with joy, but his pleasure quickly froze. Although the folding fan had hit the steel wire squarely, it had failed to cut it.

Not only that, Xiao Wan seized the opportunity. With a gentle tug of her left hand, she entwined the folding fan with the steel wire and, with a flick, threw the fan out of the arena.

Losing a weapon meant half a defeat. Watching Xiao Wan who remained aloft, Luo Yu could not help but let out a bitter smile. In this situation, despite his capabilities, he was helpless; Xiao Wan countered him at every turn.

Having no other choice, Luo Yu bowed his fists to Elder Zhou beneath the platform and said, "Elder Zhou, I admit defeat."

Hearing his voluntary concession, the audience couldn't help but feel a bit sorry. Although many believed Xiao Wan's victory was somewhat dishonorable, a win was a win, a loss was a loss, and there was no cause for complaint.

Unlike others, Ling Chen and a few other new talents showed a contemplative look. If they were to face Xiao Wan later, how would they break through her Sky Flying Technique?

"The first battle, Xiao Wan wins!" Zhou Qi announced loudly: "Now for the second battle, Ling Chen against Shi Yong. Please both get ready, the match will start in three minutes."

"Ling Cheng, come on!" Qiu Yong patted Ling Chen on the shoulder, encouraging him.

Ling Chen smiled and with the Tianling Blade in hand, stepped onto the platform.

At this moment, Shi Yong also walked up to the other side of the platform. Seeing Shi Yong's equipment, despite being mentally prepared, Ling Chen was still taken aback.

Shi Yong held a broad and thick Horse-slaying Saber in one hand, and in the other, he carried a solid round shield, while his upper body was clad in armor. His attire was reminiscent of an ancient battlefield soldier, missing only a splendid steed.

Earlier in the spectators' stand, Ye Liangyong had mentioned Shi Yong's background to Ling Chen. Shi Yong came from a Martial Arts family, his ancestors once held the title of Golden Saber Marshal, commanding thousands of troops and horses. In the history of the Shi Family, there had been a total of two Marshals and seven Generals. As a result, the Shi Family's Martial Arts were evolved from the ancient battlefield, characterized by their fierce and aggressive nature, encompassing both offense and defense.

"Shi Yong, please enlighten me."

"Please!"

Ling Chen clasped his hands in salutation, then moved back to the edge of the platform, holding the Tianling Blade, waiting for Shi Yong's move.

"The match... begins!"

As Zhou Qi's voice fell, Shi Yong's eyes instantly burst with an intimidating brilliance, and he roared like a wild beast, exuding an overwhelming presence.

"Kill!"

Shi Yong held the shield high with his left hand, protecting his vital parts, and strode forward with the Horse-slaying Saber raised above his head, charging at Ling Chen with an unstoppable momentum, the saber's sharp edge aiming to viciously strike down towards his head.

Seeing the saber's wind coming at him, Ling Chen quickly raised the Tianling Blade, forcefully blocking the attack from the Horse-slaying Saber.

Clang!

Amid a sharp sound, Ling Chen felt a tingling numbness in his hand, accompanied by a sore swelling sensation in his arm. A simple slash felt like it carried the weight of thousands. Having suffered a

setback, Ling Chen quickly moved, dodging beneath Shi Yong's Horse-slaying Saber, and swiftly circulated to his back.

However, before Ling Chen could launch a counter-attack, a gust of wind suddenly hit him from the side. At this moment, even though Shi Yong was still with his back turned to Ling Chen, his body hadn't moved, but the shield in his left hand, in coordination with the twist of his waist, struck fiercely at him.

Left with no choice, Ling Chen had to abandon the idea of attacking and continued to withdraw backwards.

Two consecutive moves, and Ling Chen had not gained the slightest advantage, instead falling into a significant disadvantage in terms of strength.

"Come again!"

Shi Yong adjusted his stance, holding the shield level and the Horse-slaying Saber in hand, readying himself again for the charge.

Ling Chen frowned, shifting his feet lightly, his gaze sizing up Shi Yong, in hopes of finding an opening. However, with the defense of the shield, Shi Yong's defense was ironclad, leaving no opportunity for a strike.

"Ling Cheng is in trouble," said Qiu Yong from the seats.

Zhang Zhongfeng nodded and said, "Shi Yong's defense is very solid, leaving virtually no gaps, and with his advantage in strength, it seems rather precarious for Ling Cheng to win."

Chapter 434 A Fierce Battle with Shi Yong (2)

Watching Shi Yong gradually closing in, Ling Chen gripped the Tianling Blade in his hand even tighter.

Indeed, none of the top ten on the Newcomer List are ordinary characters. In the twinkling of a thought, Ling Chen made a swift decision. With a light tap of his toes, he shifted from defense to offense. The cold light of the Tianling Blade flashed as the blade swiftly extended, slicing towards Shi Yong's shield.

Clang!

With a crisp sound, the blade steadily chopped onto the solid shield, leaving not a single mark. From the sound emitted by the shield, it could be inferred that the shield was made of pure steel, not only hefty but also extremely hard, making it difficult for ordinary attacks to break through its defense.

After several probing attempts, Ling Chen suddenly noticed something. Shi Yong, when facing an opponent, displayed great steadiness, not rushing for quick success but focusing on solid defense. After each defensive move, he wouldn't seize the chance to attack but would stabilize his defense on the spot.

This might be related to his family's history, where soldiers in ancient armies were primarily focused on maintaining stability. As the battlefield is ever-changing, one could lose their life at any moment. Therefore, the most important thing on the battlefield wasn't victory, but survival, and Shi Yong had indeed inherited this excellent family tradition.

However, for Ling Chen, this was an opportunity.

Clang!

The attack was blocked by the shield once again. Without hesitation, Ling Chen immediately moved his feet, shifting to Shi Yong's left side, continuing to press the attack. Having understood Shi Yong's habits, he knew that Shi Yong would not counterattack. Thus, he could attack boldly, continuously seeking vulnerabilities in the relentless onslaught to try and break Shi Yong's defense.

However, after a round of aggressive attack akin to a storm, Ling Chen felt that he had exhausted half of his energy, yet Shi Yong's defense was still impenetrable, without the slightest opportunity to exploit.

Yuan Yun, who was watching the battle, shook his head and said, "This isn't going to work; Ling Cheng can't outlast the opponent in stamina. If he can't find a breakthrough, he's bound to lose to Shi Yong eventually."

"This Shi Yong has a good foundation; his basics are very solid. Among the last five on the Newcomer List, his strength is probably the strongest."

Hearing Xia Yue's assessment, the usually reticent Xu Ming spoke up: "At most three minutes. If no turning point emerges, Ling Cheng will undoubtedly lose."

As they spoke, Ling Chen and Shi Yong stood on opposite sides of the arena, facing each other.

At this moment, Ling Chen had switched from holding the sword with one hand to both hands. After the continuous hard clashes, his arms felt incredibly sore and swollen, forcing him to use both hands to maintain the strength of the Tianling Blade.

Under the gaze of the crowd, the previously passive Shi Yong finally took a step forward, holding up his shield and advancing towards Ling Chen.

Seeing this, Ling Chen continuously changed positions, maintaining the distance between them.

Seeing his evasion and reluctance to fight, a wave of booing immediately arose from the stands.

"If you're too scared to fight him, just concede and stop wasting everyone's time," someone shouted loudly.

"Exactly, just concede graciously, why resort to such underhanded tactics?"

"Having the audacity to challenge Yi Shuiyan with such mediocre skills, he must have water in his brain."

Amid the mocking voices rising and falling, Ling Chen acted as if he had heard nothing, turning a deaf ear and continuing to move around the arena, using this opportunity to recover his depleted energy.

However, this situation did not last long. As Ling Chen moved to the corner of the ring, Shi Yong, who had been maintaining a steady pace, suddenly quickened his steps, rushed forward, and cornered Ling Chen, leaving him no room to move to either side.

Feeling the mountain-like stable aura emanating from Shi Yong, Ling Chen raised his eyebrows, his eyes sparkling with sharp light.

At this moment, there were no other choices but to strike.

In an instant, without hesitation, Ling Chen forcefully propelled himself from the ground, leaped high, and with both hands holding the Tianling Blade, he brought it down with a slash.

Unexpectedly, Shi Yong did not defend with his shield as usual but swung it forcefully, striking the blade, and instantly deflecting the edge of the Tianling Blade.

Before Ling Chen could react, Shi Yong, holding his shield, quickly closed the distance and slammed his shield against Ling Chen, knocking him flying.

At the moment Ling Chen struck, he was already at the edge of the ring, and under the impact of the shield, his body immediately flew out of the ring.

Seeing this, Qiu Yong and others changed their expressions drastically, stood up from their seats, and watched Ling Chen anxiously. On the other side of the spectator stand, Zhu Xiaozhu was biting her thin lips with worry, holding her clothes tightly, her concern even affecting Shi Su, earning a displeased look from him.

At this critical moment, as Ling Chen was about to hit the ground, he suddenly twisted his body mid-air, facing downward, and at the same time, flicked his wrist, lightly tapping the ground with the tip of the Tianling Blade. Instantly, the blade flexed like a fully drawn longbow.

Using the rebound force formed by the bent blade, Ling Chen bounced up again, his feet neatly landing on the edge of the ring.

That was close!

Ling Chen silently remarked, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead. Once he fell out of the ring, this fight would be deemed a loss to his opponent, and his journey would also come to an end.

Luckily, his quick reactions helped him regain control. However, the crisis was only temporarily averted. The match was not over yet, and facing a powerful opponent like Shi Yong, Ling Chen was unsure how to secure a victory.

Indeed, he still had some formidable techniques at his disposal. However, those techniques were intended for facing Yi Shuiyan, and if revealed now, even if he defeated Shi Yong, he would lose the means to confront Yi Shuiyan later.

Because of this, Ling Chen was somewhat hesitant.

As he pondered, Shi Yong was already approaching with a shield in hand, his presence fierce. As Shi Yong drew closer, Ling Chen stared at the solid shield, his brow furrowing, his mind constantly searching for a strategy.

That shield was key; without dealing with it, his attacks were unlikely to threaten Shi Yong.

With a resolved expression, Ling Chen suddenly retracted the tip of the Tianling Blade he was holding. Following that, both ends of the Tianling Blade extended outwards, instantly transforming into a five-foot-long steel rod.

Not waiting for Shi Yong to approach, Ling Chen gripped the steel rod, took a few quick steps, then used it to vault from the ground, leaping over Shi Yong's head.

Shi Yong seemed unprepared for Ling Chen's move, pausing slightly before looking up, lifting his shield above his head to guard against Ling Chen's attack.

However, Ling Chen did not attack directly but lightly tapped the surface of the shield with the steel rod, using it to bounce even higher into the air.

Watching Ling Chen's actions left the spectators puzzled, unsure of what he was planning.

Just when everyone was baffled, Ling Chen, who had jumped three meters into the air, suddenly spun around tightly gripping the steel rod, and from above, he smashed it down fiercely onto the shield.

Chapter 435 Fierce Battle with Shi Yong (Three)

Clang!

When the steel rod struck the shield, a loud sound like a prolonged bell echoed throughout the entire venue.

Under Ling Chen's forceful attack, Shi Yong's arms and knees showed a distinct sinking movement, indicating that Ling Chen's attack exceeded the range he could withstand.

Although Shi Yong's movement was subtle, the sharp-eyed Ling Chen still noticed it and could not help but feel pleased.

Success!

This method was indeed effective.

Ling Chen knew clearly that he couldn't match Shi Yong in sheer strength, so he had to find another way to enhance his power.

Launching an attack from mid-air was different from attacking on the ground; leveraging the body's inertia and the impact of the fall, combined with his own strength and Inner Strength, was enough to bring his power to its utmost limit.

It's like throwing a shot put; if you stand in one spot, motionless, and throw the shot put, it certainly won't go very far. However, if you take a run-up, the distance the shot put travels will be much farther than the former.

The situations are different, but the principle is the same.

Having found the method to defeat the enemy, Ling Chen's tense face relaxed considerably, continuously using the same method to put pressure on Shi Yong.

Although Shi Yong was stable enough, each of his movements was precise, but his footwork could not be called agile, just average. Moreover, facing Ling Chen's attack, he had to lift the shield above his head. Consequently, the area of shield blocked his line of sight, preventing him from pinpointing Ling Chen's exact position and forcing him to rely on the range of the shield to defend against Ling Chen's steel rod.

In less than half a minute under Ling Chen's powerful assault, the shield in Shi Yong's hand was increasingly lowered, as if the arm holding it was growing tired.

Excellent opportunity!

Noticing the change in Shi Yong, Ling Chen's eyes brightened, recognizing that his attacks were effective. At that moment, he leaped high, accompanied by a whistling wind, and again fiercely struck the shield with his steel rod.

Clang!

The powerful force spread across the surface of the shield. Shi Yong's arm shrank back as if unable to bear it, and he quickly retreated, only stabilizing his footsteps five meters away, slowly lowering the shield he held up high.

Ling Chen slightly curved the corners of his mouth, ready to overpower Shi Yong in one go. But just then, a movement from Shi Yong made Ling Chen halt and look at him curiously.

Shi Yong threw down the shield he was holding and took off the armor from his body, leaving only the Horse-slaying Saber in his hand.

Ling Chen was puzzled, was Shi Yong planning to give up his defense and attack with all his might?

While he was thinking, Shi Yong silently raised the Horse-slaying Saber, blade facing outward, standing as straight as a rigid javelin, with a formidable aura.

Suddenly, Shi Yong shouted loudly from where he stood with the saber, his morale soaring. With an unstoppable momentum, he quickly ran towards Ling Chen, slightly tilting the Horse-slaying Saber back, poised in a chopping stance.

Watching Shi Yong charging towards him, Ling Chen was momentarily stunned, a hint of surprise in Mo Che's eyes.

At this moment, Shi Yong, who had discarded his armor and shield, moved swiftly and with sharp movements, looking entirely different from before. Without a moment to spare as Shi Yong closed in, the broad Horse-slaying Saber chopped straight towards the top of his head, full of force.

Without a word, Ling Chen immediately raised his steel rod, holding it above himself. In an instant, only a crisp 'clang' sound was heard as Ling Chen's knees bent, his shoulders and elbows moving in concert with his torso to sink down, dissolving that fierce power.

Not landing a successful hit, Shi Yong quickly retracted the Horse-slaying Saber, his footsteps as swift as the wind, and in an instant he moved to Ling Chen's right side, the Horse-slaying Saber slashing down again with a mighty aura.

So fast!

Seeing the flickering figure before him, Ling Chen couldn't help but be greatly alarmed; Shi Yong's speed was at least twice as fast as before.

Could it be that this fellow has been hiding his strength all along?

In a flash of thought, Ling Chen seemed to realize something, his eyes swiftly glancing at the discarded shield and armor on the ground, his eyes filled with undisguised shock.

At this moment, with the whistle of the saber wind by his ear, and the oppressive power closing in, Ling Chen hurriedly discarded all distractions, focusing on countering Shi Yong's attacks.

Clang! Clang!

In just a moment, Shi Yong had already unleashed four or five slashes in succession, the power contained in the blade not only showing no sign of weakening but instead growing stronger as if Shi Yong possessed an inexhaustible strength, his offensive relentless, leaving Ling Chen struggling to defend.

At that moment, as Ling Chen once again swung the steel rod, hard-connecting with Shi Yong's fierce attack, a sudden change occurred on the platform. Facing Shi Yong's aggressive assault, Ling Chen suddenly found his feet giving way, his legs seemingly unable to support his body, staggering backward, nearly falling to the ground. Fortunately, he reacted promptly, using the steel rod to prop himself up on the ground.

Feeling the pain in his waist, Ling Chen's expression changed, inwardly cursing, not expecting his waist injury to flare up at this time. Probably the high-intensity battle had triggered the injury once more.

What now?

Ling Chen frowned deeply, reaching to touch his lower back, feeling a piercing pain.

Seeing Ling Chen holding his spine, his eyebrows tightly furrowed, and a fleeting expression of pain across his face, Zhu Xiaozhu on the stands couldn't help but worry. That day because of her, Ling Chen had accidentally hurt his spine. Since Ling Chen had repeatedly insisted he was fine, she hadn't taken it too seriously.

But now, it seemed that Ling Chen was not only not fine, but his injury was also very serious. He had deliberately hidden his injury in front of her, probably not wanting to make her feel guilty. Thinking of this, Zhu Xiaozhu's eyes started to moisten, shimmering faintly.

On the platform, Shi Yong, seeing Ling Chen's actions, put away the Horse-slaying Saber and asked, "Are you injured?"

"It's nothing." Ling Chen shook his head, mustering his spirits, gripping the steel rod in his hand, signaling to Shi Yong, "Continue!"

"You're a decent opponent, but in your current state, it isn't suitable to continue. Admit defeat, to avoid aggravating your injury."

"Ling Cheng, come down." Qiu Yong spoke from the seats.

They were all aware of Ling Chen's injury, which was their biggest concern. With the injury flaring up now, it undoubtedly would greatly impact Ling Chen. For the sake of his health, Qiu Yong could only urge him to admit defeat.

"Big brother, I'm fine, no need to worry." Ling Chen forced a smile, his gaze fixed on Shi Yong across from him, nodding, "Let's go."

Shi Yong said seriously, "Since you insist, I respect your decision, but I must remind you, I won't go easy."

"That's best, I don't want an unearned victory."

As he spoke, Shi Yong once again raised the Horse-slaying Saber, his waist sinking down, steady as a rock, his eyes blazing with a sharp light.

"Take this!"

With a loud shout, Shi Yong tapped the ground with one foot, taking large strides, advancing like a flying arrow, charging at Ling Chen with soaring momentum.

Seeing the opponent approach, Ling Chen took a deep breath, his teeth tightly clenched, enduring the pain in his spine, he swung the steel rod horizontally, an unstoppable force.

Chapter 436 A Fierce Battle with Shi Yong (4)

As the battle entered its final stage, everyone was focused intently on the arena, watching Shi Yong and Ling Chen, waiting for the victor to emerge.

"That Shi Yong is quite outstanding."

In a corner of the venue stood two women, one of whom was wearing a veil, seemingly afraid of being recognized. However, the attention of everyone in the venue was so concentrated on the stage that nobody noticed their presence.

Hearing the veiled woman's assessment, the delicate woman beside her agreed: "Shi Yong is a newbie heavily nurtured by the Shi Family, with excellent aptitude and physical qualities. We took all aspects into consideration during our evaluation, which is why we placed him in the last five spots of the Newcomer List. However, his strength has indeed exceeded our expectations. Judging by the power he has just displayed, he should be on par with the masters on the Dragon List. Personally, I think he is qualified to challenge the top five on the Newcomer List."

The veiled woman nodded lightly, her eyes like autumn waters fixed on Ling Chen, who was struggling on the stage, and she softly spoke, "What do you think of that Ling Chen?"

"Not bad, but just that, far from outstanding. Even if he wasn't injured, he would not be Shi Yong's match. Based on my understanding of him, his endurance is probably thanks to the Heavenly Mechanism Pill, which has enhanced his strength. However, even with that, the gap between him and Shi Yong cannot be narrowed."

While they were talking, a faint elegant fragrance suddenly arrived. Unbeknownst to them, a woman in white clothing and wearing a veil too, not revealing her face, had appeared beside them.

"How did you get here?" The previously speaking veiled woman didn't even look at the newcomer; she recognized her identity simply from the fragrance. And the only person who would dare to appear beside her without notice was this woman.

"You can leave first."

"Yes." The delicate woman replied and withdrew to the back, leaving the two veiled women alone.

"I've come to see him."

"Who?"

"Ling Chen."

The veiled woman asked with a hint of surprise in her tone, "You know him? How come I wasn't aware?"

"There's a lot you don't know, and I don't need to tell you everything."

"That's true. However, in the current situation, do you think he can win?"

"Until the final moment arrives, no one can predict the outcome. I believe he won't disappoint me."

Clang!

At that moment, in the arena, Ling Chen, having sustained a direct attack from Shi Yong, staggered backward, his body shaking, nearly unable to stand firm.

Minutes passed, and Shi Yong had completely taken the initiative, not giving Ling Chen any chance to counterattack, pressing him step by step. Apart from defending, Ling Chen had no strength to fight back, like a fish on a chopping board, at the mercy of others.

"Aren't you conceding yet?" Shi Yong frowned at the gasping Ling Chen, "Don't force me to be ruthless."

"Bring it on!"

Ling Chen gritted his teeth and swung his steel staff with force. Shi Yong stepped forward, and his Horse-slaying Saber swooped down through the air.

At the moment of weapon contact, Ling Chen felt a numbness in his palm, the strong force making his arms tremble slightly, almost causing him to drop the steel staff.

Taking advantage of this, Shi Yong closed in and repeatedly chopped down with his Horse-slaying Saber, striking hard on the steel staff.

"Let go!"

With Shi Yong's shout, the power bursting from the Horse-slaying Saber was like raging river waters, continuous and relentless, fiercely assaulting the steel staff.

Ling Chen, gritting his teeth to endure, suddenly felt an ache in his arm, as if he had lost all strength, and the steel rod slipped from his grasp, falling to the ground.

At last, a victor had emerged!

The audience in the stands exhaled collectively, their gazes filled with unreserved admiration for Shi Yong, who was undoubtedly a dark horse. Although there was one battle yet to end, everyone had already recognized him as the final victor in their hearts.

Gazing at the rolling steel rod on the ground, Ling Chen slowly lifted his head, looking directly at Shi Yong, showing not the slightest hint of backing down.

Shi Yong, feeling the determination in Ling Chen's eyes, was taken aback and looked at him in disbelief. Had it come to this point, and yet this guy still refused to admit defeat?

Lost in thought, Shi Yong suddenly saw Ling Chen reach inside his clothing with empty hands and pull out ten daggers, wedged between his fingers.

Everyone was shocked at Ling Chen's actions.

This guy still wouldn't give up!

Some couldn't help but utter words of admiration; even though Ling Chen's abilities seemed average, his indomitable spirit was commendable. However, their admiration was mingled with confusion, as they wondered what Ling Chen intended to do.

Could he possibly hope to turn the tables with just a few daggers?

Watching the ten daggers in Ling Chen's hands, Shi Yong raised his Horse-slaying Saber, instantly on guard, daring not to be careless.

The martial arts competition wasn't over yet; anything could happen. He understood this all too well.

At that moment, the attentive Shi Yong suddenly noticed something odd about the daggers in Ling Chen's hands. They appeared to be just ten daggers, but they were unusually thick, not the normal thickness of regular daggers. It seemed as if each one was composed of more than ten thin daggers.

What was he planning to do?

With this thought, a hint of confusion flickered in Shi Yong's eyes.

With the ten daggers in hand, Ling Chen took a deep breath, trying to bring himself to peak condition. After a moment, he looked up at Shi Yong, his lips suddenly curling into a faint smile.

Seeing the smile emerge on his face, for some reason, Shi Yong felt an uneasy sensation.

Right then, he put aside distracting thoughts, lifted the Horse-slaying Saber high, and quickly charged at Ling Chen. Regardless of what Ling Chen had up his sleeve, it was essential to gain the initiative.

As Shi Yong approached, Ling Chen lightly tapped the ground with the tip of his foot, flinging his arms upward, and the ten daggers wedged between his fingers were instantly thrown into the air.

The odd action immediately startled the onlookers.

Shi Yong was directly in front of Ling Chen, and instead of attacking him, Ling Chen threw the daggers into the sky. What did that mean?

Just as everyone was perplexed, the ten daggers in midair suddenly transformed, each one splitting into more than ten blades thin as cicada wings.

In just an instant, hundreds of daggers appeared above their heads, nearly covering the entire arena.

Shi Yong looked up at the falling daggers, his expression changing instantly. He immediately halted his attack, swinging the Horse-slaying Saber with both hands, deflecting the daggers raining from the sky to avoid being cut.

"What is he doing?"

At that moment, an alarmed shout came from the stands, and all eyes focused on Ling Chen, utterly astonished.

Among the dense rain of daggers, Ling Chen moved swiftly like a gust of wind, darting through them. What was even more surprising was that whenever it seemed like Ling Chen would be struck by the falling daggers, he always anticipated in advance, shifting his position to deftly avoid them.

In a blink of an eye, Ling Chen had swiftly made it up close to Shi Yong.

Chapter 437 A Fierce Battle with Shi Yong (5)

At this moment, Shi Yong was still dealing with the dagger falling above his head. It was only when he heard the fierce wind by his ear that he became aware of Ling Chen's approach. Unfortunately, even though he detected Ling Chen beside him, he was still a step too late; Ling Chen's iron fist had already fiercely slammed towards him.

Bang!

With a muffled sound, Shi Yong, who had taken a punch, staggered back several steps and let out a roar, brandishing his saber in preparation for a counterattack. However, the falling dagger above forced him to contain his rage.

While Shi Yong's attention was captured by those daggers, Ling Chen seized the opportunity, circling around Shi Yong's body, continuously swinging his iron fists.

In the blink of an eye, Shi Yong's midsection and back took successive heavy blows from Ling Chen. Under the painful stimulus, his reaction speed got slower and slower.

At this time, having dealt with the threat of the daggers, Shi Yong flipped his hands, sweeping the Horse-slaying Saber horizontally in an attempt to force Ling Chen back from his side.

However, Ling Chen had been paying close attention to his actions. Seeing the blade coming, Ling Chen immediately leaned backward. As soon as the saber passed in front of him, he quickly got up, reached out to the side, and seized one of the falling daggers, placing it backhanded against Shi Yong's neck.

Feeling the cold touch on his neck, Shi Yong's body stiffened, and he immediately halted his actions, standing there with a stunned expression.

"The duel is over, Ling Chen wins!"

As Zhou Qi's voice sounded, the audience, recovering from their shock, stared in disbelief at Ling Chen on the stage.

No one had expected Ling Chen, who was assumed to be undoubtedly defeated, to turn defeat into victory in the last moment in such a fashion; it was entirely unexpected.

"How could that work?" Someone complained about Shi Yong's loss: "That Ling Chen clearly took advantage of the situation. In terms of strength, he is no match for Shi Yong."

No sooner had he spoken than someone retorted: "What do you mean by taking advantage? Could you make accurate predictions like he did with so many daggers? It's not luck; it's true skill."

On the stage.

Ling Chen put away the dagger and took two steps back, giving Shi Yong a fist salute.

"I appreciate your forbearance."

Shi Yong turned his head, looking directly at Ling Chen, and asked in a deep voice, "How did you do it?"

Ling Chen understood what Shi Yong meant, with so many daggers above, one couldn't simply rely on eyesight to evade, and anyone would be amazed how easy he did it. He pointed to his own ear and replied with a smile, "By listening."

"So it is." Shi Yong nodded, "I understand now. To win in such a situation, even though I lost, I am convinced by the loss and hope you can achieve better results."

After speaking, Shi Yong clasped his fists, picked up his discarded shield and armor, and turned to leave the stage.

Watching Shi Yong's departure, Ling Chen exhaled a breath of relief; he had finally made it through. But for this victory, he had exposed his trump card, which he had intended to reserve for the duel against Yi Shuiyan. He had not expected Shi Yong's strength to be so formidable; without employing this tactic, it would have been difficult for him to emerge victorious.

"The next battle is..."

Hearing Zhou Qi's voice, Ling Chen hurriedly made way and walked towards the stands. However, after only a few steps, he suddenly felt his legs go numb as if they had lost all sensation, and he collapsed to the ground.

Seeing this, the spectators on the stands burst into discussions, speculating with various theories.

"Ling Cheng!" Qiu Yong's expression changed, and he quickly rushed onto the stage to help the fallen Ling Chen, asking with concern, "How are you?"

Ling Chen shook his head and said with a frown, "Big brother, please take me back to my room first."

"Alright. Third brother, come and lend a hand."

With the help of Qiu Yong and Yuan Yun, Ling Chen was quickly carried out of the venue, but the discussions among the onlookers in the stands didn't cease; everyone was speculating whether Ling Chen, in his physical condition, would still be able to participate in the upcoming duels.

"You have a good eye."

In a corner of the venue, two masked women whispered to each other.

"However, it looks like he has sustained quite serious injuries. Even if he gets the chance to compete with the top five on the Newcomer List, how far do you think he can go?"

"That's not for you to worry about." The masked woman said and turned to leave.

"By the way! Last time Ling Chen accidentally entered my room, we had a short conversation, would you like to know who his master is?"

"Tell me."

"The Internal Cultivation Methods he practices is the Prajnaparamita Sutra."

"The Prajnaparamita Sutra?" The masked woman paused, taken aback.

"Yes. I've been wondering whether this is fate or not."

"There are some things it's better to know without saying. Also, mind your own business from now on when it comes to him."

Watching the masked woman walk away, the Tea Girl gently shook her head and sighed inwardly.

...

In the guest room, Qiu Yong and Yuan Yun together lifted Ling Chen's body and gently placed it on the bed, Xia Yue immediately handed a cup of water to Ling Chen.

Sensing everyone's concern and care, Ling Chen grinned and said, "It's nothing, I just need some rest."

Xia Yue gave him a sharp look, saying irritably, "All you know is to act tough. Do you have any idea how worried we were? What's the point of winning if you ruin your health?"

"Okay now! Give it a rest and let him recover properly," said Qiu Yong.

At that moment, Wei Jiahao leaned over Ling Chen's bed, beaming, and asked, "Sixth Brother, how about those daggers I made for you? They worked quite well, didn't they?"

Ling Chen gave a thumbs up and praised with a smile, "I owe this victory over Shi Yong to you and Seventh Brother; the biggest credit goes to you guys."

He wasn't just being polite, those daggers were specially made by Wei Jiahao, they were not only lightweight but also sturdy and sharp. Wei Jiahao had put a lot of effort into making those daggers. Besides, Yang Chen's training on his auditory skills was essential.

Although the special training lasted less than two months, the effect was significant and was key to his victory.

After a short rest, a series of 'knock, knock, knock' sounds came from outside the door.

Xia Yue got up to open the door and found Zhou Qi, the host of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony.

"Elder Zhou, what brings you here?" Ling Chen sat up from the bed and asked.

"I came to check on your injury and to tell you about the next arrangements. The three rounds of combat have ended, and you, Xiao Wan, and Lin Dong have advanced. After a lucky draw, your fortune is good, you have a bye in the next round. Tomorrow morning's fight will be between Xiao Wan and Lin Dong, and the winner of that match will face you in the final battle. You have a day to recuperate before the fight begins."

"I understand. Thank you, Elder Zhou."

"No need to be polite." Zhou Qi changed the topic and said, "Ms. Shi is also on the ship; her medical expertise is profound. Would you like me to ask her to see to your wounds?"

"Elder Zhou, that's not necessary." Considering his relationship with Shi Su, Ling Chen chose to decline.

"Very well then, you rest up. I won't disturb you any longer."

Chapter 438 Zhu Xiaozhu's Decision

In the spacious and luxurious room, Zhu Xiaozhu stood in front of the window, quietly gazing at the azure sea outside, her clear eyes shimmering with light.

At this moment, Shi Su walked into the room and saw her disciple standing motionless by the window, silent, as if she hadn't noticed her arrival, and thus called out, "Xiaozhu."

However, either Zhu Xiaozhu didn't hear her or she just didn't react, remaining still and silent.

"Xiaozhu!"

Shi Su approached her disciple from behind, gently patted her on the shoulder, and finally brought the dazed Zhu Xiaozhu back to reality.

"Master."

Seeing Zhu Xiaozhu's delicate face that was endearing, Shi Su smiled and asked, "What's on your mind, to be so engrossed?"

Zhu Xiaozhu fiddled with her fingers, looking down, and replied softly, "It's nothing."

"The weather is nice today. Why are you staying in your room? Why not go out for a walk with Han Yu? He told me he's invited you several times, but you've turned him down. It's not good to be like this; he's trying to get to know you better, and you're being impolite by rejecting every time. Plus, you only know if someone is right for you if you understand each other better. I'm not forcing you to favor Han Yu. I just think he's very promising and an excellent young man. You could try to get in touch with him and not miss out on a good opportunity."

After listening to Shi Su's words, Zhu Xiaozhu hesitated before gathering her courage and said, "Master, I know you mean well, but..."

"But what?" Shi Su's expression turned displeased, "You aren't still thinking about that Ling Chen, are you?"

"Master..."

Shi Su shook her head, interrupting Zhu Xiaozhu's response, "It's not that I am biased against Ling Chen; it's just that he's not suitable for you. As my disciple, only a man that's truly outstanding can match you. And by outstanding, I don't mean just personally, but also his background. In my view, both in personal capability and background, Ling Chen doesn't come close to Han Yu. Xiaozhu, listen to me, one must be cautious with emotions; you can't be too emotional, and you must approach it rationally, thinking of your future. Besides, didn't you tell me last time that Ling Chen already has another woman? Do you wish to meddle in others' relationships?"

"I..." Zhu Xiaozhu opened her mouth but found herself at a loss for words. The thought of the relationship between Ling Chen and Nanrong Wanqing immediately dimmed the sparkle in her eyes, leaving a faint sadness.

"Sigh!"

Shi Su sighed, gently stroking Zhu Xiaozhu's hair and said, "Xiaozhu, such is life; we miss out on many things. Once something is missed, it might be lost forever. As such, one must learn to look forward and not dwell on the past."

"Master," Zhu Xiaozhu lifted her head, her lips slightly parted, and said, "Can you help me with a favor? If you agree, I'll always listen to you and never go against your wishes."

"What do you want to do?"

Zhu Xiaozhu's lips moved as she slowly uttered three words.

"No way!"

Shi Su's face changed immediately, and without a second thought, she refused, "Absolutely not. Xiaozhu, your Master advises you to give up this idea; I will not agree."

"Master..."

"Enough, let's not talk about this. There's no room for negotiation." With that, Shi Su turned and walked towards the door. However, shortly after stepping out, Shi Su heard a 'thump' from behind.

She turned around to see Zhu Xiaozhu kneeling on the ground and was taken aback, softly chastising, "What are you doing?"

Zhu Xiaozhu pleaded pitifully, "Master, I've never asked you for anything, but this time I hope you can assist me. I promise, just this once. From now on, I will obediently follow your words, never refusing anything you ask of me, even if..."

Pausing, Zhu Xiaozhu hesitated. But thinking of her request, her clear eyes hardened with determination, and she looked at Shi Su and continued, "Even if it means being with Han Yu, I will not object."

"You..."

Hearing her disciple's words left Shi Su stunned, speechless.

"Master, please."

"You... sigh..." Shi Su sighed helplessly, unable to articulate her thoughts, and expressed with deep sympathy while looking at her disciple, "Get up."

"Master..."

"Alright, no more words. I'll agree to your request."

Upon hearing this, joy immediately spread across Zhu Xiaozhu's face, and she repeatedly expressed, "Thank you, Master!"

"You silly girl, I don't know what good deeds Ling Chen did in his past lives to earn your affection like this. But I must say it upfront: I'll help you, but don't forget the words you just said. Once this matter is over, you are not to have any dealings with Ling Chen again. In the future, just treat him as a stranger who once appeared in your life."

"Yes, Master."

...

Nighttime arrived.

After dinner, Ling Chen lay in bed resting, regaining some sensation in his legs through the treatment of Acupuncture Technique. Based on this progress, tomorrow's martial contest should pose no problem.

As long as the pain did not affect him, Ling Chen was confident in victory. After all, not everyone in the bottom five of the Newcomer List was as strong as Shi Yong. Looking within himself, he acknowledged that Shi Yong was indeed stronger; in this regard, he was self-aware.

That he won at the last moment today was indeed fortuitous. Otherwise, relying solely on brute force, he would have been undoubtedly defeated.

While pondering, the door to his room was knocked.

"I'll get the door." Xia Yue, who was looking after Ling Chen, stood up and went to the door.

Soon after, Xia Yue returned to the bedroom with Zhu Xiaozhu.

"Xiaozhu?" Ling Chen was momentarily stunned, then quickly mustered a smile and asked, "What brings you here?"

"I came to see how you were doing, is your injury okay?"

"It's fine."

"Ling Cheng, you two chat. I have something to discuss with our eldest brother; I'll come back later." With that, Xia Yue tactfully left the room.

Only after Xia Yue had gone did Zhu Xiaozhu, seeing Ling Chen lying in bed, somewhat unable to move, chide him lightly, "You suffered such a severe injury, yet you kept it from me."

"It's not like that." Ling Chen quickly explained, "I..."

"No need to explain, I know what you're thinking."

Hearing this, Ling Chen smiled awkwardly.

"I've brought you some medicine, it should help with your injury. Wait here, I'll get some water." Saying this, Zhu Xiaozhu walked to the table, filled a glass with boiled water, and then reached into her pocket for something.

"Here, drink the water."

Chapter 439 Jealousy Arises

Ling Chen took the glass and looked at the pills Zhu Xiaozhu had handed him, jokingly said, "You're a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, why have you switched to Western medicine?"

"Although traditional Chinese medicine can treat the root cause, it takes a longer time. You have a martial arts competition tomorrow, of course, you need fast-acting Western medicine. You know medicine too, don't you understand this?"

"I'm just an amateur compared to you." Ling Chen replied with a smile, then popped the pills into his mouth and washed them down with the boiled water in his glass. After swallowing the pills, Ling Chen smacked his lips, feeling the boiled water surprisingly sweet, as if it were well water, and couldn't help but drink a few more sips, quickly finishing the cup.

Seeing Ling Chen drink the entire cup of water, a faint smile appeared on Zhu Xiaozhu's delicate face.

"What are you smiling about?" Ling Chen noticed the smile on her face and asked.

"Nothing." Zhu Xiaozhu took the glass from him and advised, "Get some rest, I won't disturb you anymore."

"You're leaving so soon?"

Zhu Xiaozhu nodded gently, her beautiful eyes showing a hint of reluctance. She really wanted to stay, but remembering her promise to Shi Su, she had to leave.

"I'll be going then."

Watching Zhu Xiaozhu leave, Ling Chen couldn't help but feel she looked rather troubled, as if she was deliberately avoiding him.

...

The next day.

Early in the morning, Ling Chen woke up from his sleep. Looking at the time, it was only 6:30. He originally wanted to sleep in more, but the noise outside woke him up.

"Why is it so noisy this early in the morning?" Ling Chen rubbed his sleepy eyes, got out of bed to wash up, and then jogged around in his bedroom to check on the recovery of his waist injury.

He was pleased to find that the pain in his waist had greatly reduced. Although it was still slightly painful, it didn't affect him much. After a night's rest, he didn't expect to recover so quickly; it seemed his physical condition was quite good.

Just then, Xia Yue walked in. Seeing Ling Chen exercising, her expression changed immediately, and she ran over to stop him, "Your injury hasn't healed yet, what are you jumping around for? Get back to bed."

Ling Chen smiled and said, "Sister Five, don't worry, my waist feels a lot better." After that, without waiting for Xia Yue to speak, Ling Chen changed the subject and asked, "By the way, Sister Five, what's happening outside? It's so noisy."

"They discovered a fishing boat and are preparing to carry out a rescue."

"Really?" Ling Chen immediately became interested and suggested, "Sister Five, let's go outside and breathe some fresh air."

"Hey! Your injury..." Before she could finish, Ling Chen had already quickly left the room.

Once on deck, he saw many people gathered at the edge of the ship, with Qiu Yong and others too. Ling Chen was about to go over and greet them, but at that moment, a man and a woman suddenly appeared in his line of sight, causing his face to instantly stiffen.

Not far away, Han Yu and Zhu Xiaozhu were walking side by side, the man's face beaming with joy, looking very happy. In contrast, Zhu Xiaozhu wore a strange expression on her face, looking like she wanted to smile but couldn't.

Of course, if it had just been this, Ling Chen wouldn't have cared too much. What mattered was that Han Yu was also holding Zhu Xiaozhu's hand. Thinking about how long he had known Zhu Xiaozhu and that he had never held her hand, jealousy churned inside him.

At this moment, the approaching Han Yu and Zhu Xiaozhu seemed to feel Ling Chen's gaze and both looked over.

As their six eyes met, Han Yu smirked and lifted his head, his handsome face showing a smug smile, swaying the hand he held with Zhu Xiaozhu back and forth, as if to flaunt to Ling Chen.

But Ling Chen didn't even glance at him directly, his eyes were always fixated on Zhu Xiaozhu, as complex emotions flashed through his eyes.

Zhu Xiaozhu was biting her thin lips, her head lowered, looking at her toes, somewhat afraid to meet Ling Chen's gaze.

As they walked past in front of him, Ling Chen opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word, he didn't even know what to say.

No matter how Zhu Xiaozhu chose, it was her freedom, after all, he was just a friend, an outsider, with no right to interfere in her private affairs.

"Ling Cheng."

Hearing Yuan Yun's voice, Ling Chen gathered his emotions and stepped toward everyone.

Standing by the ship's rail, Ling Chen looked into the distance and saw a fishing boat on the sapphire sea. The fishing boat had sustained serious damage, the deck was in disarray, and several crew members lay on it, weak and waiting for rescue.

Soon, the luxurious cruise ship dispatched two motorboats, rescuing all the crew members from the fishing boat.

Watching the rescue team escort the crew into the infirmary, Ling Chen asked, "Big Brother, what happened to that fishing boat?"

"I'm not very sure either, but I heard from others that the fishing boat encountered a storm, which damaged the hull and made it unable to sail. It has been drifting on the sea for many days."

"Well, their luck isn't bad, running into us."

The appearance of the fishing boat was just a minor incident; the cruise ship had specialized rescue personnel, and the crew members would be properly accommodated.

Meanwhile, in the control room of the luxurious cruise ship, Zhou Qi was communicating with several staff members.

"Have you figured it out?"

"We've confirmed it. The fishing boat is registered in Haiyang City. It went out to sea half a month ago with fourteen crew members on board, no issues." As he spoke, the staff member handed a document

to Zhou Qi, saying, "These are the identities of those crew members, I've confirmed with the rescue team."

"That's good. Once their condition stabilizes, arrange a helicopter to take them away."

"Understood."

By eight o'clock in the morning, everyone had gradually arrived at the venue.

When everyone had assembled, Zhou Qi stepped up to the ring and announced that the martial arts competition would continue.

This morning's contest would be between Xiao Wan and Lin Dong, with the winner competing against Ling Chen in the afternoon for a spot to advance.

A martial arts contest doesn't take much time, but considering Ling Chen's injuries had not fully recovered and to give the morning's winner more time to rest and prepare, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion adjusted the contest to one session per half day. In this respect, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was quite humane.

Sitting in the seats, Ling Chen's gaze was fixed on Lin Dong in the ring. He had already witnessed Xiao Wan's capabilities, only this Lin Dong he did not understand. As someone who might become his opponent, he needed to figure him out.

However, when he saw the weapon Lin Dong was using, he instantly lost interest in the contest.

Lin Dong's weapon was a whip, which perfectly countered Xiao Wan's tactics. Unless something unexpected happened, there wouldn't be much suspense in this contest.

Meanwhile, people in the venue began to leave one after another. For a contest lacking suspense, everyone was less interested. Rather than wasting time here, they preferred to go outside and enjoy the sun.

Chapter 440 Viral Infection (1)

As Zhou Qi announced the start of the martial arts competition, as everyone expected, Xiao Wan repeated her usual tactic and conceded defeat after barely holding on for two minutes. Lin Dong won the match almost effortlessly.

Ling Chen originally wanted to see Lin Dong's capabilities, but was greatly disappointed by the unexpected quick ending.

Returning to his room, under the supervision of Xia Yue, the entire morning was spent in bed.

When mealtime came, Qiu Yong and others gathered in Ling Chen's room, waiting for the waiter to bring their meals.

"Be extra careful in this afternoon's competition, Ling Cheng, to prevent your injuries from recurring," Qiu Yong cautioned while covering his mouth with his hand, constantly coughing, his face turning bright red.

"Big brother, are you okay?"

Qiu Yong waved his hand and said, "What could possibly be wrong with me? Don't worry unnecessarily, better take care of yourself."

During the conversation, the waiter had already brought a lavish lunch to the room on a cart.

After lunch, Qiu Yong and others went back to their rooms for a nap. Having laid down all morning, Ling Chen, with nothing else to do, turned on the TV and casually selected a movie to watch.

Around 1:40 in the afternoon, Ling Chen checked the time, felt it was about right to head to the venue to prepare, and thus got up and went to knock on Qiu Yong's door.

"Big brother, it's me!"

Before the door opened, a series of intense coughs had already reached Ling Chen's ears through the door. When the door opened, Qiu Yong was seen covering his mouth, coughing incessantly, his complexion looking rather unhealthy and his spirits down.

Ling Chen asked with concern, "Big brother, are you sick? Let me have a look."

"It's just a minor illness, no need for a fuss." Perhaps due to severe coughing, Qiu Yong's voice was hoarse.

"How can that be okay? What if a minor illness turns into a serious one?" Saying this, Ling Chen, ignoring Qiu Yong's protest, took him back into the room. Once seated, Ling Chen checked Qiu Yong's pulse carefully.

The pulse was normal, no major issues, likely just a severe cold caught unintentionally.

"Big brother, since you're not feeling well, you should skip the competition this afternoon and rest well in the room. I'll ask the medical staff to bring some cold medicine over."

Qiu Yong nodded, "Then you call your second brother to accompany you."

"Understood."

Leaving the room, Ling Chen went straight to the room where Xu Ming was staying. As the door opened, seeing Xu Ming, Ling Chen was momentarily stunned, staring at him with a look of surprise.

Feeling his astonished gaze, Xu Ming asked, "Ling Cheng, what's wrong?"

"Second brother, your eyes... why are they red?"

Hearing this, Xu Ming immediately turned around and walked into the bathroom, standing in front of the mirror examining his eyes. Indeed, his eyes were full of blood vessels, appearing congested, somewhat alarming.

"Second brother, do you feel unwell?"

Xu Ming shook his head and said, "No, I feel normal."

While talking, a bout of coughing suddenly came from the doorway, Ling Chen turned to look, only to see Xia Yue walking in, her cheeks reddish, breathing accompanied by continuous coughs, very similar to Qiu Yong's symptoms.

"Sister Xia."

Ling Chen quickly walked over, asking with a face full of concern, "Are you also sick?"

"Maybe it's just a cold." As she finished speaking, Xia Yue noticed Xu Ming's bloodshot eyes and exclaimed, "Second brother, what's wrong with your eyes?"

"I don't know either. If Ling Cheng hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't have even noticed."

Ling Chen thought for a moment and said, "Second brother, fifth sister, you two stay in the room for a bit, I'll go to the medical room and get some medicine for you."

The symptoms of Xia Yue and Xu Ming were not as severe as those of Qiu Yong. He surmised the source of the illness was with Qiu Yong, and because everyone had been together for a long time, it had spread to others.

However, when Ling Chen arrived at the medical room, he realized the situation was not as simple as he had imagined. The medical room was filled to capacity, overcrowded, with most people stuck outside unable to enter.

Moreover, these people had symptoms similar to Qiu Yong's, including coughs and red eyes. Some even had large patches of red rashes on their skin, which looked particularly disturbing.

Strange!

Ling Chen frowned secretly. Why were so many people sick? And all at the same time, could it really just be a coincidence? He shook his head on his own, unable to believe it was a coincidence. This morning during the competition, there was no sign of this problem, but in just three to four hours, a massive outbreak had triggered. There must be an issue.

In his contemplation, a rush of hurried footsteps approached from afar, heading this way. Ling Chen looked up to see Zhou Qi and Zhong Yang leading over thirty Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciples, all with serious expressions, clearly realizing the seriousness of this sudden incident.

"Elder Zhou, Elder Zhou is here."

Upon seeing Zhou Qi appear, the crowd outside the medical room immediately surged forward, all talking at once.

"Please, everyone, calm down."

Zhou Qi gestured with his hand and said, "We are aware of the situation, please rest assured, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will handle this fully. However, before that, please cooperate with our efforts."

"Elder Zhou, as you can see, there are so many people sick, and the medical room has limited staff. In my opinion, it's best to dock the ship as soon as possible to not delay everyone's treatment."

"Everyone, please stay calm, we have already started heading back. However, it will take at least two days to reach the nearest port. Until then, I hope everyone stays organized, and we will ensure everyone's safety." After finishing, Zhou Qi gave Zhong Yang a look, who understood immediately and began organizing people to head to the deck.

Seeing this, Ling Chen quickly returned to Xu Ming's room and gathered all members of their group in Qiu Yong's room. As expected, everyone else also had varying degrees of symptoms.

"It was all fine this morning, how could this suddenly happen?" Yuan Yun said with a furrowed brow.

"It's still unclear what's going on. People from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion are investigating."

While talking, Ling Chen checked everyone's pulse, trying to find the cause of the illness. However, what puzzled him was that everyone's body seemed perfectly normal, and their pulses were steady, not at all like those of sick people.

Knock, knock, knock!

At this moment, a knock came from the door.

Ling Chen got up and opened the door, only to see several men in protective gear standing at the doorway with medical kits.

"What is this..."

"Sorry, we've been ordered to check on every guest."

Hearing this, Ling Chen immediately stepped aside and welcomed the medical staff into the room.

After drawing blood, a medical staff member spoke, "Before the lab results are available, please stay in your rooms and do not go out unnecessarily. If you need anything, contact our staff."

Seeing the people preparing to leave, Ling Chen quickly followed and asked, "How much do you know about this sudden illness?"

"Sorry, there are orders from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, no comment can be made."