

The Beauty 451

Chapter 451 Confrontation (Part 1)

After listening to Ling Chen's words, Shi Su's eyebrows furrowed slightly, her face cold as frost, she coldly said, "Fine, then I would like to see what ability you have to stop them from being together."

"Ling Cheng..."

Ling Chen waved his hand, cutting off Yuan Yun's words, and said indifferently, "Elder brother, there's no need to persuade me. I'll resolve this matter myself. You don't need to help me."

Having said that, Ling Chen ignored Yuan Yun's obstruction and strode towards Zhu Xiaozhu, reaching out his hand to her.

"Come with me."

Zhu Xiaozhu looked up and met Ling Chen's gaze. Feeling the resolve and determination in his eyes, her heart seemed to be struck by a stone, causing violent ripples.

Perhaps this was what she had been hoping would happen.

Seeing the hesitation in Zhu Xiaozhu's eyes, Ling Chen spoke again, "Come with me, no matter what it is, I will bear it for you."

Upon hearing these words, Zhu Xiaozhu was somewhat tempted. However, the promise she had made to Shi Su echoed continuously in her ears.

"Xiaozhu, if you dare to go with him, from now on I won't have you as my disciple. Also, don't forget what you promised me."

As Zhu Xiaozhu was caught in a dilemma, Shi Su's voice suddenly came over, causing her nearly outstretched hand to shrink back.

Seeing that she couldn't make a decision, Ling Chen simply got tired of talking nonsense, grabbed her hand, and forcefully pulled her to walk outside.

Seeing Ling Chen's actions, Han Yu's expression turned cold, and he yelled angrily, "Let go of her!"

As soon as his voice sounded, he had already lunged forward, his fist aiming straight for Ling Chen's neck. However, before Ling Chen could react, a gust of wind flashed through the crowd.

As the figure flashed by, a strong hand quickly reached out, firmly locking onto Han Yu's wrist, stopping his attack.

With his punch blocked, Han Yu was slightly startled, he fixed his gaze on the newcomer, his expression changed immediately, his eyes harshly said, "Are you taking his side?"

"You aren't including me among the people you've saved, so I'm not obligated to owe this favor." With that, Song Ge turned his head to look at Ling Chen, smiling, "Ling, you go ahead, I'll hold them off here."

"I'd like to see who dares to leave!" Shi Su said coldly, her gaze sweeping across everyone, "Everyone here saw it, Ling Chen tried to forcefully take my disciple, an utterly heinous act, I hope everyone can help me capture this man."

"Ms. Shi, rest assured, I won't let him walk out of this door."

A familiar voice sounded, and Jiang Hanlin appeared with the Qiu brothers from the crowd, blocking in front of Ling Chen.

"When Ms. Shi asks for help, our Dangyang Sect will surely assist."

"And my Qingyang Sect as well."

Immediately, dozens of people appeared around Ling Chen, almost leaving him no way to escape.

"Enough, stop!"

Zhou Qi, who had been coldly observing, saw that the situation was getting serious and immediately shouted out to stop them.

Once a person from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion spoke, naturally, nobody dared to act rashly, and the crowd that had gathered immediately dispersed.

"Elder Zhou, since you have spoken, how should we deal with this matter?"

Zhou Qi glanced at Shi Su who had spoken and countered, "Ms. Shi, how do you think this should be handled?"

Shi Su coldly said, "Punish him with fifty strokes, expel him from the ship, disqualify him from participating in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, and forbid him from involving in any affairs within the Martial Arts community."

"This... Ling Chen made a mistake, but there is no need for such a severe punishment."

"Is Elder Zhou trying to make excuses for him?"

"That's not it, I just..."

"Since Elder Zhou can't make up his mind, I might as well directly consult the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master. I believe he will agree with my decision."

Zhou Qi's expression changed; he hadn't expected Shi Su to directly invoke the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master, clearly putting pressure on him.

"Fine then." Zhou Qi helplessly nodded.

"Bring someone!"

"Hold on!"

As the voice was heard, Zhou Jun appeared with his hands behind his back, swaggering to Ling Chen's side, and looking at Shi Su on stage, he commented with a click of his tongue, "Tsk ts! You really are something, everyone has to listen to you. I'm a bit confused now, who actually runs this ship? The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, or someone from the Shi Family? Ms. Shi, you better clarify, the Pavilion treats you as a friend, which is giving you face, don't overestimate yourself. Truly, you don't deserve it."

Hearing Zhou Jun's words, everyone was shocked, looking at him. That guy really was bold, uttering words without any regard.

Seeing Shi Su's livid face, Zhou Qi next to her was instantly anxious, wishing he could severely beat that brat. Anyone in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion knew of the relationship between Shi Su and the Pavilion Master, Zhou Jun's words were like smashing their rice bowls.

"I'm just handling this according to the rules; I didn't mean to command on behalf of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Are you making a mountain out of a molehill?"

"What rules are you following? Are those the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's rules? Ling Chen only snatched your disciple, which is a personal matter and doesn't seem to violate any Pavilion rules. What right do you have to expel Ling Chen from the ship? Basically, you're just leveraging the fact that no one dares to contradict you because you saved everyone."

"Zhou Jun, shut up!" Zhou Qi hurriedly shouted, fearing that the foul-mouthed kid had offended Shi Su to death.

"Old man, why so anxious, I haven't finished speaking." Meanwhile, Zhou Jun secretly gave Ling Chen a wink, then continued, "Ms. Shi, unless I'm mistaken, you said at the start that the Shi Family has been medics for generations, treating and saving people is your duty. You also mentioned Han Yu's superb medical skills as your capable assistant, thanks to a few of you, everyone's lives were saved."

Shi Su, holding back her anger, coldly said, "Is there a problem?"

"Of course there's no problem, it only makes people feel disgusted, not just ordinarily disgusting, but extremely disgusting." Zhou Jun turned to the audience and loudly said, "Everyone, you have been deceived by her, she's nothing but a petty person who steals the credit of others."

"Is that true?"

People were shocked, discussing amongst themselves.

Shi Su gritted her teeth, her face becoming even uglier, glaring at Zhou Jun, "How dare you slander me?"

Zhou Jun sneered, "Whether I'm slandering you, you know best in your heart. Dare you say that the serum you injected everyone with was developed by you?"

"If not me, then who do you think it should be?"

"Humph! Still unwilling to admit it. Shi Su, do you really want to ruin your own reputation before you regret it? I'll give you one more chance, if you still won't admit it, no worries, I have the evidence to prove it. But, by that time, you'll have lost all face."

Hearing this, a flicker of panic crossed Shi Su's eyes as her angrily flushed cheeks turned a shade paler.

Seeing his grandson so full of confidence, Zhou Qi suspiciously looked at Shi Su and asked, "Ms. Shi, what exactly is going on?"

Chapter 452 Confrontation (Part 2)

Zhou Qi knew his grandson well; though usually flippant and lackadaisical, he was serious when it mattered. Thus, his words definitely held ground.

Facing Zhou Qi's inquiry, Shi Su did not respond but instead turned to look at Han Yu in the crowd. Sensing her gaze, the latter subtly nodded. With Han Yu's affirmation, Shi Su quickly composed herself, her expression turning cold: "Elder Zhou, your grandson is quite the storyteller. I hope he continues, as I am curious to see what 'evidence' he plans to concoct to slander me."

"Fine. Since you are so deluded and still struggling at death's door, don't blame me for not giving you face," Zhou Qi sternly said. "Honestly, this wasn't a big deal. If you had just told the truth, everyone could have shared the credit. But you, being narrow-minded, not only hid the truth but also monopolized all the credit for yourself. Shi Su, ask yourself, aren't you ashamed?"

Pausing briefly, Zhou Jun looked around at the buzzing crowd and began, "Perhaps everyone isn't quite clear about the situation. Here's what happened..." He then recounted what Ling Chen had done.

After hearing this, everyone immediately understood why Zhou Jun was so furious. Ling Chen and his team, risking their lives to find data on the virus, rightfully deserved the credit, but instead, it was claimed by Shi Su and Han Yu.

This behavior was indeed despicable.

Feeling the scornful looks from everyone, Shi Su, losing her composure, snapped, "Nonsense! These are all lies you've concocted."

"I can prove he's not lying," Zhou Qi interjected. "That day, Ling Chen sent me the data to show you, to ensure there was nothing wrong with the serum you produced."

Zhou Jun added, "You took a helicopter that day to the nearest city, where the experiments were conducted in a temporary laboratory set up by the Heavenly Mechanage Pavilion. All the information you obtained in the experiment was recorded on a computer, including the final serum formula."

Shi Su scoffed, "And then?"

"I guess you must have felt quite pleased with yourself," Zhou Jun continued. "Afraid of being discovered, you instructed someone to delete all the data stored on the computer. Unfortunately, you made a mistake because the person you enlisted was not proficient with computers. Although the data was deleted, it was not completely erased. For a top hacker, restoring the data is a simple task. The serum formula you developed is fundamentally different from the final one injected into everyone."

Top hacker?

Ling Chen's mind stirred; Zhou Jun was referring to Fatty. No wonder Hu Fei was so mysteriously secretive today, not allowing him to see his computer. He was messing with those files.

"How interesting," Shi Su said emotionlessly. "Am I not allowed to adjust the formula last minute?"

"Of course you can. However, if you want to engage in nefarious deeds in the future, better choose a secluded place, and not do it publicly. Didn't you realize, this luxury cruise ship is equipped with surveillance cameras everywhere to ensure everyone's safety? That day, after reviewing the data sent by Ling Chen, you sent Zhu Xiaozhu away and then secretly whispered to Han Yu. What you discussed, you know best. After Han Yu left, he met with eight people, each of whom shares a common trait—they are skilled in medicine but have no significant backing. You probably didn't anticipate that all this was recorded by the surveillance."

At this point, Zhou Jun looked at Shi Su and Han Yu, his tone mocking, "Do I need to keep going, or do you need me to present evidence and have Han Yu confront those people face-to-face before you admit your mistake? If you two have any shame left, just confess yourselves and don't waste everyone's time."

Hearing this, Shi Su and Han Yu's faces drastically changed, their eyes reflecting a hint of hesitation and struggle.

Seeing their continued silence, Zhou Jun continued on his own, "Those who conspired with Han Yu, listen well. I know you are all here. Considering that you were unknowingly exploited, I'll withhold your names for now. If you don't want to end up disgraced like these two, here's your chance to redeem yourselves. Just come forward and explain yourselves to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, and I assure you, the Pavilion will not pursue your faults nor will it expose you. This is a rare opportunity; cherish it."

"Ms. Shi." Zhou Qi looked at Shi Su beside him, his voice deep. "Do you have anything to say now?"

Biting her lip, Shi Su defensively argued, "I didn't do these things; this is slander. Zhou Qi, as a member of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, you even let your grandson tarnish my reputation. I will definitely take this up with the Pavilion Master."

"Master."

Suddenly, a voice from the crowd—Zhu Xiaozhu's—rang out.

"Is what he said... all true?" Zhu Xiaozhu, looking up, her beautiful eyes twinkling, incredulously stared at Shi Su.

"No, it's not!" Shi Su nearly hysterically yelled. "I never did such a thing." After speaking, she took a deep breath, calming her emotions, and gently said, "Xiaozhu, you've been with me for so many years, don't you even believe in your master?"

"Master, I want to believe you. You taught me to always be fair. Since you insist it's slander, let me clear your name." Saying that, Zhu Xiaozhu turned to Zhou Jun and said, "I was involved in the entire process of making the serum, and I know the original formula. Please give me the data, and I will compare both versions of the serum formulas."

Zhou Jun glanced at Ling Chen, who nodded, and he immediately had the data delivered to Zhu Xiaozhu.

Watching Zhu Xiaozhu earnestly comparing the data and formulas, Shi Su became visibly flustered, quickly interjecting, "Xiaozhu, you don't need to get involved in this."

She knew her disciple's character too well; that was why, initially, she had entrusted this task to Han Yu without telling Zhu Xiaozhu.

"Master, this concerns your reputation, and as your disciple, I cannot stand idly by." Zhu Xiaozhu locked eyes with Shi Su, each word deliberate, "Master, you don't want me involved, unless it's because..."

At this point, Zhu Xiaozhu stopped. She didn't want to continue, nor could she believe it. In her eyes, Shi Su was not that kind of person.

However, as Zhu Xiaozhu finished reviewing the data and comparing the two serum formulas, her pretty face gradually turned pale, her lips devoid of any color.

"Master..."

Zhu Xiaozhu's lips parted slightly, her voice trembling, her eyes filled with disappointment, pain, and a myriad of complex expressions intertwined in her gaze, converging into a single glistening tear.

Chapter 453 Losing Face

It's over!

At the moment Zhu Xiaozhu began to speak, Shi Su knew everything was ruined. Perhaps she could deceive others, but she couldn't deceive her own disciple, because Zhu Xiaozhu's skills were all taught by her; she understood too well.

Facing Zhu Xiaozhu's regretful gaze, Shi Su's eyes carried a hint of pleading. Now she could only hope that Zhu Xiaozhu would help her keep this hidden. Once the matter came to light, she was well aware of what consequences she would face.

Not to mention the loss of her reputation, she would also have to endure others' accusations, spitting, and the gaze of contempt, and would never be able to turn things around. More importantly, this issue would inevitably implicate the Shi Family, affecting their reputation.

"Please help me for the Pavilion Master's sake," Shi Su implored softly, afraid of being overheard. By saying such words, she was no different from admitting her own actions. However, Shi Su could no longer care about that much; after all, this was the territory of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. With her relationship with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, as long as the Pavilion was willing to stand up for her, she could at least keep her reputation intact.

Regarding Shi Su's request, Zhou Qi frowned and said, "Ms. Shi, I have always respected you, but you should be aware that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion always seeks justice in its actions. I'm sorry, I can't help you with this matter, and I believe the Pavilion Master would agree with me."

With that, Zhou Qi stepped to the edge of the stage, his gaze sweeping across the hall, and he spoke in a loud voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, the situation is now clear. We were able to get through this crisis thanks entirely to Ling Chen and his team, who risked their lives to infiltrate the enemy camp and find a way to treat the virus, saving everyone on this ship. On behalf of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Ling Chen and the others, and also hope they can forgive the Pavilion's mistake for trusting the wrong people."

At this point, Zhou Qi paused in his speech, glanced over the ashen-faced Shi Su, and continued, "Regarding the actions of Shi Su and Han Yu, these were purely out of personal greed. As friends of Ms. Shi, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion feels deep shame. From now on, character will be our utmost priority in friendships. The Pavilion refuses to associate with those of poor character."

This sentence undeniably declared the end of the relationship between the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and Shi Su.

"I really didn't expect her to be this kind of person."

"Now she's done for—not only did she not gain any merit, but she also ruined her own future."

"She has only herself to blame."

Upon learning the truth, the attitudes of those present changed in an instant, their discussions filled with undisguised contempt.

Shi Su stood stiffly on the stage, her limbs cold. At this moment, she felt so disgraced she wished she could just crawl into a corner.

"Hey! Han Yu, where do you think you're going? Weren't you so pleased with yourself just now?"

At this moment, Zhou Jun spotted Han Yu trying to silently slip away from the banquet hall, and sneered sarcastically.

His words immediately drew everyone's gaze to Han Yu. Han Yu glared at Zhou Jun with resentment; she had wanted to sneak away unnoticed, but the sharp-eyed Zhou Jun had spotted her, making her the center of attention.

Faced with the mocking looks from everyone, Han Yu's face turned beet red. Especially since the people around her stepped back as if to avoid being associated with him, which made him even more ashamed.

"And here I wonder, who was it that shamelessly told Ling Chen to buzz off just now? Hmm! Han Yu, I'd like to ask, who is making a fool of themselves now? Is it Ling Chen, or is it you?" Zhou Jun had no intention of sparing Han Yu, pressuring him aggressively.

Hearing this, Han Yu clenched his teeth, his humiliation and anger barely squeezing through his gritted teeth: "Remember this." After speaking, under everyone's gaze, he quickened his pace, fleeing from the banquet hall.

Watching Han Yu's retreating figure, everyone couldn't help but shake their heads. Clearly, it was his own fault to begin with; not apologizing was one thing, but to add threats was another. It was clear to see, his character really wasn't that great.

After Han Yu left, Shi Su felt too ashamed to stay, unable to bear the cold stares from everyone, so she silently disappeared from the stage, out of sight.

Seeing Shi Su leave, Zhu Xiaozhu quickly followed after her.

"Xiaozhu."

Noticing Zhu Xiaozhu's actions, Ling Chen immediately caught up to her, grabbed her arm, and asked, "What are you doing?"

Zhu Xiaozhu's face showed a woeful smile as she bitterly said, "No matter what, she is still my Master. You all can scorn her actions, but she has been kind to me for over a decade, I cannot ignore her. With such an incident, she definitely needs someone by her side." Having said that, Zhu Xiaozhu apologetically looked at Ling Chen, full of remorse, "I'm sorry, I know my Master did wrong, and I hope you don't hold it against her."

"I won't."

Although Shi Su's actions had angered him, he wasn't concerned about the credit. In his eyes, as long as the people he cared about were safe, it didn't matter who received the credit. If Zhou Jun hadn't brought this to light, perhaps he would have never investigated.

"Xiaozhu, if you need anything, just come find me," Ling Chen instructed.

"Okay, I know," Zhu Xiaozhu nodded lightly.

Watching Zhu Xiaozhu leave, Ling Chen let out a silent sigh. Having known Zhu Xiaozhu for so long, he understood her dilemma and pain. Zhu Xiaozhu was a kind-hearted and upright girl, but facing her Master's wrongdoing was certainly causing her intense inner turmoil.

If she chose to cover up for Shi Su, she would undoubtedly be violating her principles. But not doing so might be seen as betrayal in the eyes of others. Although Zhu Xiaozhu had made her choice, it must have been hard on her heart.

A carefully prepared banquet had ended prematurely, even before it began, with Shi Su and Han Yu's embarrassing departure.

At that moment, Zhou Jun approached Ling Chen with a gleeful smile, as if expecting praise, and laughingly said, "How was that? I handled it quite well, didn't I?"

Ling Chen curiously asked, "When did you start suspecting her?"

"I never believed her from the start," Zhou Jun stated bluntly. "Even though she's a friend of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, I never really liked her. I can't stand people who act so high and mighty like her."

"Forget it, it's already come to this; I believe she has learned her lesson. There's no need to dwell on it," Ling Chen said, then turned his head to Song Ge, expressing his gratitude, "Song, thank you for earlier."

"No need to be polite," Song Ge replied with a faint smile. "There's a martial contest tomorrow, you should go back and rest early." After a pause, Song Ge added, "Friends aside, if we meet in the arena, I won't show any mercy."

"Nor will I," Ling Chen said, and after waving goodbye, accompanied by Qiu Yong and the others, he returned to the guest rooms.

Chapter 454 Han Haifeng

The next day.

Ling Chen got up early and went to the deck alone, breathing in the fresh air and stretching his muscles to prepare for the morning's martial arts contest.

As everyone on board practiced martial arts, they all had the habit of getting up early. Just past six o'clock, the deck was already filled with people exercising. Seeing Ling Chen there, everyone cast friendly glances and smiles his way.

After about half an hour of exercise, Ling Chen learned from the idle chat of those around him that Shi Su and Zhu Xiaozhu had left by helicopter shortly after the banquet the night before. Given the situation, Shi Su probably had no face to stay.

However, to Ling Chen's surprise, Han Yu had not left and was evidently prepared to continue participating in the tournament. In the Newcomer List, he was ranked second, with great hopes of contending for the top three. Also, the rewards for this edition of the Newcomer Championship were generous, and with only one opportunity, no one wanted to miss it.

Returning to his room, Ling Chen rested for a while until Qiu Yong and the others arrived, and then they all went to the dining hall, chatting and laughing.

After enjoying a hearty breakfast, it was eight o'clock in the morning. Ling Chen followed Qiu Yong and the rest directly into the venue and took their seats in the area reserved for the eight eccentrics.

Before long, members ranked in the top five of the Newcomer List began to arrive at the venue one after another.

When people in the crowd saw Han Yu, many pointed and commented with disdainful expressions. After such an incident, the fact that Han Yu still had the face to stay was tantamount to having skin as thick as city walls. However, despite their contempt, few dared to voice it outright. After all, the power standing behind Han Yu was nothing to scoff at. His position as second on the Newcomer List was not just due to his own strength but also his significant backing.

Facing the crowd's gossip, Han Yu's face turned ashen. Accompanied by several middle-aged men, he walked to his seating area with his head down, without saying a word. However, his gaze occasionally swept towards the area where the eight eccentrics sat, his cold eyes revealing a hint of resentment.

Ling Chen could naturally feel Han Yu's gaze, but he didn't take it to heart. Anything said now was superfluous; it was the arena where the real test would take place.

Just then, under everyone's gaze, Zhou Qi ascended the arena with his hands behind his back. Without mentioning the previous night's events, he dove right into the main subject and announced the start of the final round of the contest.

It made sense, too, given that Shi Su, as a friend of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, had committed such a deed, leaving the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion equally disgraced.

"Ladies and gentlemen, after many rounds of competition, the final six contestants are now confirmed. The top five on the Newcomer List—Song Ge, Han Yu, Qu Jinxian, Yi Shuiyan, Han Haifeng—and the newly risen Ling Chen, making six in total. Over the course of two days, they will determine the top three. Now, please come to the stage for the drawing of lots to decide your opponents."

"Wait!" Just as the voice fell, Yi Shuiyan from the Dangyang Sect stood up from his seat and looked at Zhou Qi, "Elder Zhou, I have a pending challenge with Ling Chen. I hope you can allow us to settle it on the arena and directly pair us in the same group."

The request from Yi Shuiyan took the audience by surprise. In the many editions of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, there had never been an instance of someone voluntarily specifying their opponent.

"This..." Zhou Qi hesitated for a moment, glanced at Ling Chen not far away, and said, "Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has always adhered to fairness as its principle, and drawing lots is the fairest method. Moreover, this is only a unilateral request from you. Unless Ling Chen agrees, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion cannot grant your request. Ling Chen, what do you say?"

Ling Chen smiled faintly, unafraid, and nodded. Sooner or later, what's meant to happen will happen, and his main goal in participating in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony was precisely for this fight.

"Good. Since both parties have no objections, I will make an exception this time. Now, will the other four please come to draw lots."

Soon, the six competitors had all determined their opponents. Ling Chen was up against Yi Shuiyan, Qu Jinxian against Song Ge, and Han Yu against Han Haifeng.

The first round featured Han Yu and Han Haifeng taking the stage.

After several minutes of preparation, Han Haifeng was the first to ascend the arena. Among those ranked in the top ten on the Newcomer List, Han Haifeng was probably the youngest, only nineteen years old, just starting college, with a frail appearance, wearing a pair of nearsighted glasses, and at first glance looked like a bookworm, quite far from the image of a Martial Artist.

Before this, Ling Chen had not had much interaction with Han Haifeng, only seen him from a distance a few times. Ling Chen was filled with curiosity towards this young contestant. Without a doubt, those who are listed on the Newcomer List were all exceptional. Ling Chen wanted to take this opportunity to understand and see what special abilities Han Haifeng possessed.

At this moment, Han Yu walked up to the stage with a cold face and large strides, standing opposite Han Haifeng with his hands behind his back and eyes slanting, showing no regard for his opponent in front of him.

Putting aside everything else, as the second rank on the Newcomer List, Han Yu indeed had the right to look down on Han Haifeng.

"Remember, stop at a touch, do not seriously injure your opponent. Whoever dares to break the rules, don't blame me for being impolite," Zhou Qi reminded them.

With that, Zhou Qi stepped down from the arena and nodded at the two men, signaling that they could begin.

"You are no match for me, concede defeat."

Before even crossing hands, Han Yu had already opened his mouth to persuade his opponent to surrender, with arrogance clear in his words.

Han Haifeng pushed up his glasses on the bridge of his nose, completely unaffected by Han Yu's words, and said calmly, "If I can't injure you within ten moves, I'll concede defeat."

Han Haifeng's tone was very calm, but with a hint of confidence within that calmness.

Ling Chen nodded inwardly, finding Han Haifeng's temperament to his liking; he was most annoyed with people like Han Yu, who acted high and mighty, as if they were something special.

"Hmph! Since you want to show off, then I will oblige you." After speaking, Han Yu hooked his fingers, his face full of contempt, "Come at me."

Han Haifeng rolled up his sleeves and walked towards Han Yu without a word, each step deliberately slow, as if taking a leisurely stroll in a garden, without any sense of pressure.

Any expert's every step would contain momentum. Before the clash, they would establish pressure through their aura, then seek the opportunity to strike. In contrast, Han Haifeng behaved like an ordinary person.

Ling Chen was curious to see how Han Haifeng would make his move.

While he was thinking, the advancing Han Haifeng finally launched an offensive. He stretched out both hands, and unexpectedly, two writing brushes appeared in his hands.

The brush handles were about a foot long, with a jade-green surface, seemingly made of bronze. The brush bristles were tightly packed and extremely sharp.

Although Ling Chen was aware that the weapons in the Martial Arts world were diverse and unusual, including the Judge's Pen, this was his first time seeing someone employ such brushes.

The two brushes in Han Haifeng's hands moved like two dragons surging from the sea, lively and nimble, constantly changing positions, and deliberately targeting tricky angles.

Caught off guard, Han Yu was actually forced back several steps by Han Haifeng's rapid offensive.

Chapter 455 The Long-Awaited Battle (Part 1)

Han Haifeng's attack was very characteristic, especially his ten fingers which were not only flexible but also powerful. The two bronze brushes at his fingertips moved at will; wherever he intended to attack, the brush tips would effortlessly arrive.

At this moment, Han Haifeng, seizing an opportunity in his offensive, directed the brush tip straight at Han Yu's face. Seeing this, Han Yu sneered and, without waiting for the brush tip to come close, raised his hands high and clamped down on the brush shaft with both palms, preventing the tip from advancing an inch.

However, just as Han Yu thought he had blocked Han Haifeng's attack, the bristles of the brush tip suddenly splayed out. Then, with a light twist of the hand holding the brush shaft, the dense bristles spread out like a broom, completely covering Han Yu's eyes and blinding him to what lay ahead.

This sudden change of events caused Han Yu's expression to shift instantaneously, and he hastily retreated backward.

Witnessing Han Yu's action, the audience on the stands nodded to themselves. Han Yu's reaction and adaptability were swift; if he hadn't made a split-second decision to retreat, Han Haifeng's other brush might have very well hit him.

However, what was even more astonishing than Han Yu was Han Haifeng.

The brush bristles that had splayed out were now regrouping, becoming incredibly sharp. When Han Haifeng first pulled out the two bronze brushes, everyone thought the bristles were one with the shaft, both fashioned from bronze, merely coated with a layer of black. But after witnessing that scene, everyone realized that the bristles were actually made from a soft material.

To make soft bristles lethal required not just anyone; it demanded the support of powerful Inner Strength. Han Haifeng was so young, yet he had managed to do this, indicating that his Inner Strength practice had reached an impressively strong level.

Ling Chen was inwardly shocked, questioning himself whether he could achieve the same, and concluded that he definitely could not.

While he mused, the situation on the stage gradually began to change.

Han Yu, who had been passive, seemed to have been provoked by Han Haifeng and after regaining his composure, he abandoned defense and took the initiative to attack, alternating between punch and palm, searching for Han Haifeng's vulnerabilities.

"It's already the seventh move," muttered Qiu Yong, sitting next to Ling Chen.

At that moment, Han Haifeng was wielding the two bronze brushes, defending himself tightly, making him impervious to attack. Han Yu's offense was fierce, but he still couldn't break through Han Haifeng's defense.

For a time, the two were locked in a stalemate.

The ninth move!

Han Haifeng still hadn't found an opportunity to counterattack, and with only one move left, if he couldn't injure Han Yu, he would only be left with the option to admit defeat as he had promised.

Suddenly, Han Haifeng stumbled backward, his waist bending sharply rearward, barely maintaining his balance.

Seeing this circumstance, Han Yu's eyes brightened. He swiftly closed the gap with Han Haifeng, thrusting a single palm forward, striking towards Han Haifeng's chest.

Defeated!

At this sight, everyone felt pity. What could have been a longer stand was cut short by such an error.

However, just then, the stage was set for another twist.

Just as Han Haifeng seemed about to be hit by Han Yu, he twirled on the tips of his toes, and with an unstable center of gravity, supported his entire body with one foot, forcibly moving to Han Yu's side. Not only did he avoid Han Yu's attack, but Han Yu hadn't anticipated Han Haifeng's tricky maneuver, leaving his side wide open.

Ling Chen's lips curled into a smile, that Han Haifeng truly had guts. The previous flaw was clearly a deliberate ploy to lure Han Yu in; in fact, he had reserved a move in advance.

As he felt the rush of wind behind his head, Han Yu quickly turned around and, without thinking, reached out with his right hand to grab the brush shaft. However, at that instant, the other bronze brush emerged from nowhere, with its sharp bristles aiming directly at the armpit of his right arm.

At this moment, with Han Yu's right hand constrained by the brush shaft and his left hand unable to cover the angle of Han Haifeng's cunning attack, he could only watch helplessly as the brush tip jabbed toward him.

Damn!

Han Yu's face was iron-blue; he had underestimated his opponent too much.

The guy in front of him seemed to have calculated everything in advance. Each move was paving the way for the next. To consider all aspects in such a short time and then make a plan, this guy's mind must be incredibly fast.

"I lost!"

At that moment, Han Haifeng suddenly retracted his moves, holding two bronze brushes and retreated to the edge of the arena, conceding defeat voluntarily.

Hearing his words, everyone present was momentarily stunned. With such a good opportunity at hand, why concede?

While everyone was still in shock, it seemed that someone understood the reason behind Han Haifeng's concession.

Facing this outcome, Ling Chen was also confused and turned his head to ask Qiu Yong, "Big brother, what's going on?"

Qiu Yong explained, "He promised to injure Han Yu within ten moves, but that last move was already the eleventh."

So that was it!

Ling Chen nodded, watching Han Haifeng on the stage with interest. He didn't expect this man to be quite so amusing. Though defeated, the victorious Han Yu was probably even more frustrated.

He started off with a posture of arrogance and disdain, but ended up winning when he was at a disadvantage. Not only losing face, but also being slapped in the face.

As expected, Han Yu's face was dark with gloom, his eyes frighteningly cold. Without waiting for Zhou Qi to make the announcement, he had already turned and left the arena.

Although Han Haifeng took the initiative to admit defeat, there wasn't much dispute over the result. After all, Han Haifeng had used a weapon, while Han Yu fought with his bare hands. Those who knew Han Yu understood that he was not skilled in unarmed combat. If Han Yu had used a weapon, the duel might not have dragged on for so long.

With the end of the duel between Han Haifeng and Han Yu, the second round was next.

Ling Chen versus Yi Shuiyan.

There was a great deal of anticipation for this fight.

Ling Chen's feud with the Dangyang Sect was already known to those with a keen interest, passing from one to ten and ten to a hundred; most people were well aware. Also, because of Ling Chen, Liu Yunsong from the Dangyang Sect was expelled and suffered great loss of face.

Thus, although this duel had not yet started, in everyone's eyes, it would undoubtedly be a splendid fight.

During the few minutes of preparation time, Yuan Yun patted Ling Chen's shoulder and said, "Don't feel pressured. Just go ahead and fight freely, don't worry too much about winning or losing. The key is to protect yourself. Just remember, you have your brothers standing behind you."

Ling Chen smiled slightly and nodded, "Third brother, I know."

"Please both sides enter the arena."

As Zhou Qi's voice rang out, Ling Chen took a deep breath and stepped onto the stage.

The two contestants took their positions, Yi Shuiyan holding a steel knife, his posture upright, looking coldly at Ling Chen who held the Tianling Blade in hand, and said coldly, "Don't forget our previous agreement, if you lose, that weapon must be returned to the Dangyang Sect."

"Let's talk about it after you've won."

Chapter 456 Long-Awaited Battle (Part 2)

"Let's begin." Zhou Qi's voice rang out.

"Wait!" Yi Shuiyan stared directly at Ling Chen, enunciating each word carefully, "Before we start, I have a proposal. In a martial arts competition, one should give it their all, but it's inevitable that one may not control themselves and cause accidental injury. I am aware of the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism

Pavilion, but they are too restrictive, making it difficult to really let loose. I think we should agree on our own rule between us."

Ling Chen's expression remained indifferent, but his mind fully grasped the intent behind Yi Shuiyan's words.

"Tell me, what rule?"

"Combat can be unpredictable, and if someone gets hurt, or even dies on the stage, it can't be blamed on anyone else. What do you say?"

Upon hearing this, before Ling Chen could respond, Zhou Qi frowned from below the stage and chastised, "Yi Shuiyan, don't overstep your bounds."

Yi Shuiyan let out a cold laugh, ignoring Zhou Qi's warning, his chilling eyes fixated on Ling Chen as if awaiting his response.

Seeing that Ling Chen had yet to reply, Yi Shuiyan snorted with a sneer, his eyes brimming with disdain, "What's the matter, don't you have the courage? Are you only capable of hiding behind a woman, letting her fight for you? Hmph! How can someone like you be worthy of being called a man?"

Faced with Yi Shuiyan's provocation, the corners of Ling Chen's mouth lifted slightly, his pupils as dark as Mo Che's, radiating a fierce chill.

Yi Shuiyan had this request because his true purpose was likely to see him slain right there, to avenge the humiliation suffered by the Dangyang Sect.

With this in mind, Ling Chen glanced at the seats of the Eight Eccentrics. He saw Qiu Yong and the others looking worried, gently shaking their heads at him, signaling him to refuse Yi Shuiyan's proposal.

Ling Chen was silent for a moment before suddenly breaking into a smile and nodding, "Fine, if you wish for a battle to the death, then I'm all in."

As soon as he said this, the entire place erupted in shock. No one expected Ling Chen to agree to Yi Shuiyan's demand; wasn't it akin to seeking death? Immediately, the spectators were abuzz with surprise, some admiring Ling Chen's bravery, but many believed that his action was recklessly endangering his own life.

Although Ling Chen had demonstrated considerable strength in the previous days' matches, it was still just that: considerable. The top five on the Newcomer List were not like his previous opponents, almost all possessing strength not inferior to those on the Dragon List.

"Good! Very good!" Hearing Ling Chen's agreement to his proposal, Yi Shuiyan's face showed a subtle and successful conspiratorial smirk.

"Everyone present has heard, if someone should be unlucky enough to be killed in this battle, they can only blame their insufficient skills and cannot hold others accountable. Please be our witnesses."

No sooner had he finished speaking than someone in the stands shouted indignantly, "Yi Shuiyan, can the people from the Dangyang Sect be any more shameless? Ling Chen saved your lives, and yet you play these tricks against him, it's despicable beyond measure."

"That's right, the behavior of the Dangyang Sect is too outrageous."

Faced with the chorus of condemnation, the Dangyang Sect's complexion turned unsightly. Especially Sect Leader Zhu Jin, with a grim face and a darkly oppressive gaze. Likely, they didn't expect Yi Shuiyan's proposal to attract so much disdain, casting a further blow on the reputation of the Dangyang Sect.

Moreover, if Yi Shuiyan were to kill Ling Chen in front of everyone present, the Dangyang Sect might bear the stigma of being ungrateful, becoming an object of scorn to all.

Zhu Jin wished nothing more than for Ling Chen to die immediately, to wash away their previous disgrace, yet this outcome was something he had not anticipated.

To kill, or not to kill, became the biggest problem they were facing now.

At this time, Yi Shuiyan also realized that the situation was somewhat out of control and involuntarily cast his gaze towards Zhu Jin, waiting for his instruction.

Zhu Jin kept a cold expression, and after deep consideration, he subtly shook his head at Yi Shuiyan. There would be plenty of opportunities to deal with Ling Chen after the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony ended; for now, it was better to restrain themselves to avoid tarnishing the reputation of the Dangyang Sect.

Having received Zhu Jin's signal, Yi Shuiyan, although frustrated, had no other choice but to contain his urge to kill.

"Shall we begin, everyone is getting impatient," Ling Chen looked at Yi Shuiyan and asked.

Without a word, Yi Shuiyan lightly lifted the steel blade in his hand, slanting it towards the ground, his waist shifted slightly to the side, assuming an offensive stance.

Feeling the intense sharpness emanating from Yi Shuiyan's eyes, Ling Chen lightly triggered the mechanism, and the Tianling Blade immediately sprang out, turning into a sharp edge, held across his chest.

"Kill!"

With a low shout, Yi Shuiyan leaned forward, his speed surging as he quickly closed in on Ling Chen with the steel blade in hand. In the blink of an eye, the ten-meter distance shrank to two.

As the two were about to clash, Yi Shuiyan abruptly raised his steel blade, unleashing a fierce momentum that carried a formidable force. With one strike, he aimed to slash straight down onto Ling Chen's head. The blade's speed was so fast, it was like a residual image flashing through midair, nearly impossible for the naked eye to catch.

However, although his eyes couldn't catch it, Ling Chen still had his keen hearing. Relying on his ears, at the instant the steel blade was about to descend, Ling Chen's feet suddenly moved back, and with just one step, the blade's edge fell through empty space, slicing down in front of Ling Chen's forehead.

Failing to hit his mark, Yi Shuiyan pressed on once more, relentlessly moving in step by step, intent on capturing Ling Chen in one fell swoop.

Back when he first fought Ling Chen in East Sea City, Yi Shuiyan had almost effortlessly defeated him. In his eyes, Ling Chen simply wasn't qualified to be his opponent. Even though Ling Chen had impressive performances in the martial arts duels a few days ago, for Yi Shuiyan, it was impossible for Ling Chen to surpass himself in the short span of less than two months.

However, after a round of fierce attacks, Yi Shuiyan's face became increasingly grim.

Amidst his tempestuous onslaught, Ling Chen maintained an orderly defense. Ling Chen dodged several killing moves in a row, and this was certainly not just a matter of luck.

Thinking this, Yi Shuiyan changed his sword force, and his straightforward, wide-sweeping blade technique instantaneously became cunning, targeting those areas that were difficult to defend. For a moment, Ling Chen was thrown into disarray, nearly falling victim to the attacks several times.

Before the duel, Ling Chen had studied Yi Shuiyan's blade techniques more than once, and had even specifically sought advice from Yuan Yun, who specialized in blade techniques. In Yuan Yun's words, Yi Shuiyan's blade technique was aggressive and straightforward, embodying the essence of speed, accuracy, and ruthlessness. However, from the current situation, it was clear that Yi Shuiyan was proficient in more than just one type of blade technique.

Indeed, he deserved his reputation as a master of the blade.

At this time, a trace of impatience gradually appeared on Yi Shuiyan's face; after several minutes, he still couldn't breach Ling Chen's defense, which was causing him to lose face.

He was, after all, ranked fourth on the Newcomer List, facing a former opponent who had been defeated by his hand, and yet he was entangled for so long. According to his previous plan, he intended to take down Ling Chen in one go, seriously injuring him in the shortest amount of time.

However, Ling Chen's strength was somewhat beyond his expectations.

Could it be that in such a short period of less than two months, one could make such significant progress?

Chapter 457 The Long-Awaited Battle (Three)

Yi Shuiyan couldn't believe it.

If Ling Chen possessed such good aptitude, his name would definitely be among the top five on the Newcomer List.

Thinking this, Yi Shuiyan's expression turned serious as he looked at Ling Chen, his eyes suddenly filled with coldness. With a change in his knife technique, his attacks became sharper, infusing a more dangerous killing intent into his moves.

Clang!

Suddenly, a crisp sound rang out, and the steel knife Yi Shuiyan swung was parried. Focusing his eyes, Ling Chen now wielded not a sword but a steel rod—unknown when he switched—that not only blocked Yi Shuiyan's attack but also increased the distance between them slightly.

"Quite a variety of tricks, let's see how long you can hold on."

Yi Shuiyan sneered and swung his steel knife to close in again. However, Ling Chen, now armed with the steel rod, no longer stayed passive and instead took the initiative to attack. Leveraging the length of the steel rod, Ling Chen controlled the distance between them, making it difficult for Yi Shuiyan to get close.

As long as Yi Shuiyan couldn't get close, his knife skills were halved in strength, greatly reducing their threat.

Yi Shuiyan frowned, trying repeatedly to break through the restraint of the steel rod. However, Ling Chen skillfully took advantage of timing, retreating as Yi Shuiyan advanced, always maintaining a two-meter distance, rendering Yi Shuiyan's skills ineffective.

Seeing this, Yi Shuiyan stopped his attack, staring coldly at Ling Chen and said, "You think you can delay like this?"

Ling Chen shrugged his shoulders, remaining silent.

"No matter how much you've improved, I'll show you the gap between us."

As he spoke, Yi Shuiyan lifted his steel knife high, his eyes fierce. In his hand, the blade of the knife trembled slightly, highly unusual.

Seeing this, Qiu Yong and others' pupils contracted, a worried expression spontaneously appearing on their faces. They knew what this meant: Yi Shuiyan was getting serious now, and it was uncertain whether Ling Chen could withstand it.

Suddenly, Yi Shuiyan roared, leaped high off the ground, no longer seeking a chance to close in but instead striking directly at the steel rod.

Clang!

Accompanied by another crisp sound, Ling Chen's expression suddenly changed. Under the steel knife's attack, the steel rod trembled violently, making the base of his palm go numb and both arms bear the brunt of the power.

Such strong Inner Strength!

Ling Chen exclaimed inwardly. Previously, Yi Shuiyan relied solely on his knife techniques, but now he had truly shown his formidable power.

Clearly, Yi Shuiyan intended to use his profound Inner Strength foundation to crush his opponent and quickly determine the outcome.

Amidst these thoughts, the fierce knife wind struck again, and without any hesitation, Ling Chen swung his steel rod to meet it.

Clang!

As their weapons collided, a surging force as relentless as tidal waves came wave after wave. Struck by that power, Ling Chen instantly lost his footing, continually retreating several steps, his arms sore and swollen.

"Again!"

Noticing Ling Chen's slightly trembling arms, Yi Shuiyan sneered, lifting his steel knife high and persistently advancing, intending to completely break Ling Chen's defense.

Watching Yi Shuiyan advancing relentlessly, Ling Chen's eyes flickered, his sharp-featured face losing its earlier calm as a trace of anxiety gradually spread in his eyes.

Yi Shuiyan's personal strength, combined with the display of his Inner Strength, was unstoppable like a force majeure. If this continued, he couldn't hold on for much longer.

Capturing the worry in Ling Chen's eyes, a hint of smugness appeared on Yi Shuiyan's face.

In the face of absolute strength, all tactics were futile; this was the gap between him and Ling Chen, and also the confidence behind his challenge to a duel to the death.

Clang!

As the steel knife came slashing down, Ling Chen, who had been continuously clashing hard, felt numbness in his tiger's mouth, and his arms swelled up as if drained of strength. The steel staff slipped from his hands and fell to the ground, rolling to the edge of the platform.

Ah!

The audience in the stands gently sighed, feeling pity for Ling Chen. The disparity between the two was too great; Ling Chen had no chance of winning, and it was impressive that he had managed to hold on for so long.

At that moment on the platform, seeing Ling Chen's weapon fall, Yi Shuiyan didn't hesitate and with his steel knife aimed straight for Ling Chen's chopping down. Clearly, he intended to disable Ling Chen's arms.

"Stop!"

Seeing Yi Shuiyan striking mercilessly, aiming to severely injure Ling Chen, Qiu Yong immediately stood up from his seat and rushed towards the platform. However, before he could ascend the platform, Zhu Jin of the Dangyang Sect had already made a move, blocking Qiu Yong's path.

"Get out of the way!" Qiu Yong shouted coldly.

"Qiu Yong, a deal was made beforehand, regardless of life or death, everyone present can testify. The 'Eight Eccentrics' always keep their word; are you trying to break this rule?"

"Zhu Jin, you..."

Qiu Yong hadn't finished speaking when suddenly a burst of exclamations erupted from the crowd. He quickly turned his head, peering past Zhu Jin's shoulders towards the platform, just to see Ling Chen awkwardly dodging Yi Shuiyan's steel knife.

Seeing this, Qiu Yong breathed a sigh of relief. However, seeing the aggressive Yi Shuiyan, Qiu Yong couldn't help but worry about Ling Chen's safety. He couldn't be sure if Ling Chen would be lucky enough to dodge the next strike.

Thinking this, he clenched his teeth, determined to bring Ling Chen down from the platform unharmed, even at the cost of breaking his promise, to prevent him from being severely injured by Yi Shuiyan.

"Zhu Jin, we concede this fight, let me pass."

Hearing this, Zhu Jin sneered, "Qiu Yong, you are not Ling Chen. He hasn't conceded, what right do you have to make decisions for him?"

"Fine! Then I want to see how you'll stop me."

"Big brother!"

Just as Qiu Yong was about to make his move, he suddenly heard Ling Chen's breathless voice coming from the platform.

"Big brother, step back, I'll handle this myself."

Qiu Yong anxiously said, "Ling Cheng."

"Big brother..." Ling Chen turned to look at Qiu Yong, and with a slight smile and a firm look in his eyes, he said, "Trust me, nothing will happen." After saying that, Ling Chen turned his gaze back to Yi Shuiyan on the platform, his face unexpectedly showing a faint smile.

"You made a very serious mistake," Ling Chen muttered to himself, "You shouldn't have proposed a fight to the death."

Yi Shuiyan scoffed, "I don't think so, do you really think you still have a chance to resist?"

"Until the last moment, who knows what might happen?" As he spoke, Ling Chen reached into his clothes.

Seeing his action, the audience in the stands immediately widened their eyes, curiously watching Ling Chen.

Planning to use that move again?

The technique Ling Chen used against Shi Yong was still fresh in everyone's memory. If he used that technique, maybe Ling Chen really would have a chance to turn defeat into victory.

"Do you think the same trick will work on me?" Yi Shuiyan scoffed, dismissive. He admitted Ling Chen's technique was impressive, but he had already studied how to counter it and was not afraid at all.

Should Ling Chen dare to use that move, he would ensure Ling Chen suffered an even worse defeat.

As Ling Chen's hand came out from his clothes, to everyone's surprise, he held not a dagger.

Chapter 458 The Long-Awaited Battle (Four)

At that moment, what Ling Chen pulled out from within his clothes was a string of springs, their shape quite peculiar, resembling a "large" character and over one meter in length.

What is that?

The crowd looked at the object in Ling Chen's hands, their faces full of confusion. Could this be a weapon? But they had never seen a weapon of such shape before.

At this time, on the seating of the eight eccentrics, Qiu Yong and the others watched with a hint of anticipation. Especially Wei Jiahao, who was the most excited. The device that Ling Chen was wearing, which Wei Jiahao had personally crafted, was neither a weapon nor a hidden projectile, but rather a sophisticated contraption for training one's speed.

The springs were fixed to Ling Chen's hands and feet, and he had to endure the tension of the springs nearly all the time. He had been wearing this device since before he began his special training, whether sleeping, eating, or even during combat, he never took it off.

At the moment Ling Chen took off that device, Qiu Yong and the others were very eager to see how he would perform.

Seeing Ling Chen throw the string of springs outside the arena, Yi Shuiyan's eyes slightly condensed, and for some reason, he felt a troubling sensation in his heart. He thought he had already figured out all of

Ling Chen's cards, but now it seemed that there were still many things about Ling Chen that he didn't know.

After removing the device, Ling Chen twisted his neck, rubbed his hands together, and moved his limbs. Free from the device, Ling Chen immediately felt a tremendous relief, as light as a swallow, and indescribably exhilarated.

"You've been on the offensive until now, now it's my turn." Ling Chen's mouth curled into a smile as he said to Yi Shuiyan: "I'm curious to see how long you can last against me."

"You think you can?" Yi Shuiyan looked disdainful, scoffing: "Skill isn't something you can just talk about."

"Let's give it a try."

With those words, Ling Chen's toes lightly tapped, and his body, like a swift breeze, quickly rushed towards Yi Shuiyan.

"He intends to fight Yi Shuiyan's steel sword barehanded?" Looking at Ling Chen unarmed going against Yi Shuiyan, the audience on the platform was somewhat surprised.

"Yi Shuiyan's swordsmanship is exquisite; it won't be easy for Ling Chen to gain any advantage."

"Don't be too quick to draw conclusions; Ling Chen probably won't do anything he's not sure of."

As they spoke, Ling Chen had already closed in on Yi Shuiyan.

"Seeking death!"

Yi Shuiyan bellowed furiously, raising his steel sword high, the sword force biting cold, slashing straight towards Ling Chen's head.

But at this moment, Ling Chen sidestepped nimbly, shifting his body. Before the steel sword even came down, Ling Chen had already appeared at Yi Shuiyan's side.

Seeing this, Yi Shuiyan's pupils constricted, quickly stopping his Sword Force and switching from a chop to a sweep, slashing sideways, trying to push Ling Chen back. The blade of the steel sword neared, but Ling Chen's expression remained calm, without any hint of retreating.

When the sword reached his shoulder, Ling Chen suddenly thrust upward with his shoulder and elbow, striking hard against the back of the blade. Instantly, affected by that force, the horizontally approaching steel sword bounced upwards, deviating from its course and just grazing past Ling Chen's hair.

Seizing the opportunity, Ling Chen's hands moved like lightning, aiming a heavy blow at Yi Shuiyan's right shoulder.

"Bang!" Having been hit by the solid punch, Yi Shuiyan's body involuntarily tilted, and before he could react, Ling Chen had already closed in, powering his shoulder and elbow simultaneously, crashing into his body.

In a moment, Yi Shuiyan, having lost his balance, retreated several steps before finally steadying himself.

Impossible!

Watching the smiling Ling Chen, Yi Shuiyan was utterly shocked, almost unable to believe his own eyes. The move Ling Chen had used just moments before to neutralize his attack contained an Inner Strength that was extremely powerful, not a bit weaker than his own.

Since he possessed such strength, why did he choose to conceal it during their earlier exchange? Could it be to feign weakness, to lower his guard?

Despite his myriad uncertainties, Yi Shuiyan had no time to ponder. Facing the oncoming Ling Chen, he hurriedly lifted his steel blade to meet the attack.

As the steel blade chopped down, Ling Chen sidestepped with extreme speed, without the slightest hesitation. Then, his fist clenched tightly, concentrated Inner Strength erupted like fireworks, and he swung a punch directly at the back of the blade, intending to meet steel with flesh.

However, even more astonishing was that as Ling Chen's fist connected, the steel blade began to tremble violently. The force was transmitted along the blade to Yi Shuiyan's hands, which made his complexion grow increasingly unsightly.

When the blade was deflected, Ling Chen's punch drove straight in towards Yi Shuiyan's vital points. Not only that, but Ling Chen's strikes grew bolder and bolder, unlike traditional Martial Arts patterns. Each move was a lethal technique, cunning, ferocious, decisive, and utterly ruthless.

Faced with Ling Chen's brutality, Yi Shuiyan momentarily lost his composure. He had crossed hands with many experts, with moves and countermoves, but had never seen this kind of fighting style like Ling Chen's, which abandoned traditional moves and went straight for killing blows at vital spots. Moreover, Ling Chen knew the weaknesses of the body extremely well. Each attack forced Yi Shuiyan to respond with all his might, not daring to be careless for even a second.

Simple, yet significantly effective.

"Let go!"

Suddenly, with a cold shout from Ling Chen, before Yi Shuiyan could even react, the steel blade in his hand had dropped to the ground. Then he was sent flying with a kick from Ling Chen. Although he managed to remain standing, he staggered several steps backwards, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, his face pale, evidently seriously injured.

In an instant, the Dangyang Sect members sitting in the seats all stood up together, their faces tense, their eyes filled with anxiety.

Casting a glance at the steel blade on the ground, a slight smile played on Ling Chen's lips. He lifted his gaze to face Yi Shuiyan, and once more advanced step by step.

Seeing Ling Chen approach, Yi Shuiyan couldn't help but step back, his eyes flickering, unsure of what he was thinking.

"Yi Shuiyan, do you remember what I said just now?" Ling Chen spoke indifferently, "You made a fatal mistake; you shouldn't have proposed a duel to the death. In a fight to the death, the advantage lies with me, not you."

Ling Chen has always been restraining himself, forgetting what he learned before and reacquainting himself with the knowledge of orthodox Martial Arts. His previous skills were all about killing; when it comes to the techniques and experience of killing, probably no one present could compare to him.

So, when Yi Shuiyan proposed a duel to the death, Ling Chen gladly accepted.

A fight to the death means no need to hold back, no need to stop at contact; as long as the opponent can be killed, there are no other restrictions.

Ling Chen might not excel in other areas, but killing... he truly excelled in that.

Now, Yi Shuiyan without his steel blade was like a wolf without its fangs, standing there flustered, unable to hide the panic in his eyes.

With his steel blade, he could not defend against Ling Chen, let alone now.

"We from the Dangyang Sect admit defeat."

At this moment, Zhu Jin's unwilling voice came from the spectator seats.

Hearing this, Ling Chen glanced at Zhu Jin and said indifferently, "This is between him and me, what right do you have to speak for him?"

Zhu Jin was taken aback, as he had used these words to stop Qiu Yong earlier, and hadn't expected Ling Chen to retort with the same phrase.

"As this is a fight to the death, it can't end without witnessing life or death. Yi Shuiyan, am I right?"

Chapter 459 Disdain to Kill You

Ling Chen's words, like a heavy hammer, fiercely struck Yi Shuiyan's heart, nearly leaving him breathless.

Faced with Ling Chen's gaze, Yi Shuiyan opened his mouth but was at a loss for words. He had thought the battle was a sure win, but he did not expect to end up in such a situation. Whether he believed it or not, this was the reality before his eyes.

"I... I admit defeat!" After hesitating, Yi Shuiyan struggled to utter these three words. After speaking, he walked off the stage listlessly, like a deflated ball.

"Stop right there!"

Hearing Ling Chen's voice from behind, Yi Shuiyan turned his head back, frowning and said, "I've already admitted defeat, what more do you want?"

Ling Chen replied with a smile that was not quite a smile: "Do you have a problem with your ears, or is it your memory? I just said, in a fight to the death, without seeing life or death, don't think it is over. Unless I accept, you have to stay on the stage."

"Ling Chen, don't push people too far," Zhu Jin, from the seating area, called out coldly.

"I am a reasonable person. It was you who proposed a fight to the death, not me. Why am I the one pushing people too far? Do you think I'm easy to bully?" Saying this, Ling Chen turned his head to Zhou Qi and asked, "Elder Zhou, could you give us your judgment? Am I right?"

Zhou Qi nodded and said, "Ling Chen is correct. Since it is a fight to the death, it must witness life or death. Yi Shuiyan, you may admit defeat, but only if Ling Chen agrees. As you just mentioned, everyone here is a witness. Do you intend to break the rules?" At this point, Zhou Qi looked at Zhu Jin in the audience and said, "Master Zhu, the battle is a matter between the two of them; you best not interfere."

At this moment, everyone present adopted an attitude of watching a good show, looking at Dangyang Sect's members and Yi Shuiyan.

It was like lifting a rock only to drop it on one's own feet—a phrase that was perhaps the best description for Dangyang Sect.

On the stage, Yi Shuiyan's face was ashen, and his forehead was, unbeknownst to him, covered in sweat. Just thinking about the possible outcome made his face turn even whiter.

He was still young with a promising future. To die here would be far too unworthy.

At this time, Ling Chen, leisurely and carefree, looked at Yi Shuiyan with an inscrutable smile, showing no intention of acting. Suddenly, Ling Chen took a step forward, walking straight up to Yi Shuiyan, silent, just staring into his eyes.

Under such a bizarre situation, the whole place fell silent, and all eyes focused on Ling Chen and Yi Shuiyan, waiting for the outcome of the battle.

Confronted with Ling Chen's stare, Yi Shuiyan appeared to freeze, motionless, sweat sliding down his cheeks onto the ground, not daring to breathe heavily, the unease in his eyes growing more intense.

After a brief silence, Ling Chen's gaze turned cold, his face became stern, and he suddenly raised his arm. Yi Shuiyan's face changed dramatically at the sight, instinctively stepping back, raising both hands to protect his front.

However, after several seconds, Ling Chen's attack never came.

Looking closely, Ling Chen was seen scratching the back of his head with a mocking smile, not planning on striking at all.

Yi Shuiyan instantly realized that he had been tricked by Ling Chen.

People in the audience shook their heads at Yi Shuiyan's reaction, thinking his mental fortitude was far too weak. Even with good martial skills and excellent talents, without psychological strength, one could hardly become a master.

Meanwhile, Zhou Qi, watching the battle below, also showed a look of disappointment. As the host of the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, he was responsible not only for maintaining order but also for assessing every member on the Newcomer List in every aspect.

Any talent, even if not ranked within the top three, would be nurtured through other means by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

Unfortunately, Yi Shuiyan's performance was truly disappointing.

"Back in East Sea City, you said I was not worthy to be your opponent. Now, I'm going to return that sentence to you; you're even less qualified to be mine."

Ling Chen looked at Yi Shuiyan with a serene expression, pronouncing each word slowly: "A person not qualified to be my opponent, I'm not interested in killing you."

"I accept your surrender."

After saying that, Ling Chen turned and walked down from the stage.

Watching Ling Chen's departing figure, Yi Shuiyan clenched his teeth, his eyes filled with a cold and venomous look. The murmurs around him were excessively irritating; he wanted nothing more than to leave immediately, and he jumped off the stage, rushing toward the exit.

Seeing his disciple so devastated, Zhu Jin heaved a silent sigh and turned his head to say, "Qin Wu, go check on your senior brother and comfort him."

"Yes, Master."

Qin Wu replied and followed Yi Shuiyan out of the assembly.

At this moment, among the seating area of the eight eccentrics, Wei Jiahao, with a big thumbs-up, excitedly laughed and said, "Ling Cheng, that was brilliant! Your last few words were really too cool."

"Really?" Ling Chen grinned: "I think so too."

Yuan Yun patted Ling Chen's shoulder and praised without stinginess: "Not bad, well done, you're progressing amazingly fast."

Everyone was pleased, and Xu Ming, somewhat puzzled, looked at Ling Chen and asked, "When did your Inner Strength cultivation become so strong? You didn't show such great improvement in the previous matches."

Hearing this, Qiu Yong chimed in: "I also noticed that. Ling Cheng, based on what happened just now, your Inner Strength has more than doubled. How did you manage that in just a few days? Are you hiding something from us?"

Ling Chen quickly waved his hands and said, "Big brother, I haven't hidden anything from you all." He scratched his head, puzzled: "To be honest, I don't even know why. Recently, I suddenly felt my Inner Strength growing rapidly, and I was wondering if it could be due to the Heavenly Mechanism Pill."

"Impossible!" Qiu Yong shook his head and said, "You only took an ordinary Heavenly Mechanism Pill. I took a higher-quality one and didn't experience such a change, so it's even less likely for you. It must be something else."

"Could it be because of the Internal Cultivation Methods I practice?"

Qiu Yong and the others exchanged glances, unable to come up with an answer.

"Let's not think about it anymore. As long as Ling Cheng wins safely, that's all that matters," Zhang Zhongfeng said. "Besides, progression is always a good thing."

Yang Chen, smiling, said, "With Ling Cheng winning this match, a spot in the top three is assured. Now it's just a matter of who will take the last place in this afternoon's matches."

"As long as there are no surprises, the winner will surely be Song Ge," Ling Chen said.

The Tea Girl had mentioned to him that Song Ge's top spot on the Newcomer List was indisputable. Even other members within the top five did not dispute his selection as number one. This indicated that if Song Ge faced Qu Jinxian, he should have an overwhelming advantage.

What Ling Chen was concerned with now was not the afternoon's battle, but rather who his next opponent would be. He wondered if it might be Han Yu.

Chapter 460 Qin Wu's Encounter

Thud, thud, thud!

At this moment, Qin Wu arrived at the guest room where Yi Shuiyan was staying, and hearing the noise from inside, she quickly knocked on the door.

"Senior Brother, it's me."

Not long after, the door opened, and Yi Shuiyan, his face twisted with ferocity, appeared in front of Qin Wu. Looking at Yi Shuiyan, whose eyes were bloodshot, Qin Wu couldn't help feeling frightened. The Yi Shuiyan before her seemed like a wild beast that had lost control, eager to vent his fury.

Following Yi Shuiyan's shoulder line, she saw that almost every fixture in the room had become an outlet for his rage, all smashed to pieces on the floor.

"Senior Brother, I know you're hurting, but it's okay, we'll have more chances if we lose this time. As long as we're alive, there is hope," Qin Wu comforted.

Yi Shuiyan coldly said, "Did Master send you here?"

Qin Wu gently nodded, "Master is worried about you, so he asked me to come and check on you."

"What's there to see?" Yi Shuiyan snorted coldly and turned back into the room. Seeing this, Qin Wu immediately followed in and closed the door behind her, then picked up a nearby trash can to clean up the mess on the floor.

Yi Shuiyan sat on a chair, breathing heavily, staring unblinkingly at the busy Qin Wu bending over, his eyes progressively more bloodshot.

Feeling Yi Shuiyan's gaze on her, Qin Wu raised her head and smiled, "Senior Brother, what's wrong?"

"Sister..." Yi Shuiyan, with a suppressed voice, beckoned, "Come here."

Qin Wu, unsuspecting, stood up and walked over to Yi Shuiyan.

"Sister, has your Senior Brother been good to you?"

"Yes." Qin Wu did not understand why Yi Shuiyan would suddenly ask such a question, but replied honestly anyway.

Hearing her answer, Yi Shuiyan's mouth curled, his bloodshot eyes gleaming with a peculiar light, his smile sly, "Since you think Senior Brother has been good to you, it means you must help me relieve my anger now, don't you think?"

Qin Wu was slightly stunned, perplexed, "Senior Brother, do you want some tea? Wait, I'll go and pour you some." Saying so, Qin Wu turned and quickly walked towards the door.

However, after just a few steps, her wrist was grabbed by Yi Shuiyan from behind.

"Senior... Senior Brother." Qin Wu turned her head, biting her thin lip, her expression anxious.

Yi Shuiyan, looking directly at his junior sister, with a smirk that was not quite a smile, said, "I have tea in my room, what are you going outside for? Could it be... you are trying to avoid me."

Qin Wu lowered her head, muttering softly, "I... I'm not."

Yi Shuiyan, his eyes flashing coldly, scoffed, "Sister, you're a smart person, you must have understood what I mean by now, otherwise, you wouldn't think of leaving. So, don't you want to help your Senior Brother?"

Qin Wu dodged Yi Shuiyan's gaze, a flicker of fear in her eyes.

"Senior Brother... please, don't be like this, okay?" Qin Wu's voice was tearful.

"Quit the nonsense, come here!" With a fierce expression, Yi Shuiyan pulled Qin Wu into his embrace and then carried her toward the bedroom.

"Senior Brother, no... please, I beg of you." Qin Wu struggled desperately, her pleas filled with panic.

However, Yi Shuiyan paid no attention to her resistance, pinning her delicate body onto the bed, his large hands forcefully tearing at her clothes.

The more Qin Wu struggled, the more excited Yi Shuiyan became. At this moment, he had completely lost his sanity, his eyes extremely bloodshot.

Looking at that pale skin, the high, round breasts, Yi Shuiyan could no longer restrain himself and pounced directly.

...

I don't know how long it has been, Qin Wu slowly opened her eyes, a crystal-clear tear rolling down her cheek. At this moment, her body, wantonly ravaged by Yi Shuiyan, was unbearably painful, as if she had lost all her strength, not wanting to move at all.

She bit her thin lips hard, struggled to sit up, and looked at the blood stains on the sheets, finally unable to hold back her cries. The treasure she had kept for over twenty years was now gone.

At this time, Yi Shuiyan, neatly dressed, walked in from the living room, glanced at Qin Wu on the bed, and said indifferently, "I took some clothes from your room, put them on quickly. The Master will come later, you should go back and rest first, I will come find you when I have time."

Qin Wu didn't say a word, silently picked up her clothes, and as she saw the bruises on her arms and thighs, tears couldn't stop flowing out.

She had never imagined herself having such a day.

Towards Yi Shuiyan, she had merely respected him as a fellow apprentice; never had there been feelings of a man and a woman between them. However, she could never have imagined that her normally refined Senior Brother would commit such a beastly act on her.

By the time Qin Wu was dressed, Yi Shuiyan leaned against the wall, watching her walk to the door.

"Wait!"

Qin Wu turned her head, her face expressionless as she looked at Yi Shuiyan, her bright eyes like stagnated ponds, devoid of any luster.

"Keep your mouth shut, it's best not to let the other apprentices know about today's affair. Also, don't think about complaining to the Master, you should know my status in his eyes; even if you approach him, it would be futile. If you're smart, just obediently be my woman from now on, I won't mistreat you."

After hearing this, Qin Wu silently opened the door and staggered out.

Leaving the room, Qin Wu didn't return to her own cabin but went directly to the deck, standing quietly at the ship's rail, staring at the distant azure sea, her demeanor complex.

At this time, a young man approached from behind Qin Wu, leaning on the railing next to the ship's edge, smiling and enjoying the breeze from the sea.

"Miss Qin?"

Seeing Qin Wu beside him, Ling Chen slightly staggered, especially at the disheveled appearance of Qin Wu, which surprised him and involuntarily called out.

Qin Wu turned her head to look at Ling Chen, her eyes empty, then withdrew her gaze and continued staring at the undulating sea.

Ling Chen inwardly felt alarmed, Qin Wu's expression was all too familiar to him; only those utterly disheartened would look like this. Moreover, his keen eyes noticed the two tear tracks on Qin Wu's cheeks, clearly indicating she had just cried.

"Miss Qin, are you okay?"

Ling Chen was worried; seeing Qin Wu on the deck in this state, could it be she was thinking of jumping into the sea? Although he had grievances with the Dangyang Sect and didn't like Qin Wu, she was still a human life, and he could not stand idly by.

"Men..."

Qin Wu opened her mouth, mumbling two words.

Hmph!

Suddenly, Qin Wu sneered.

For some reason, that laughter sounded eerie to Ling Chen.

What exactly had happened to this woman?

Just as he was pondering, Qin Wu turned around and started walking towards the cabin step by step.

Seeing her not-so-nimble legs, a shock went through Ling Chen, as he recognized this walking posture from somewhere before.

That's right!

Xia Mutong.

Back when he had spent a night with Xia Mutong, she walked just like that.

Considering Qin Wu's earlier actions and expression, Ling Chen slightly frowned, could it be that she...