

The Beauty 721

Chapter 721 Battle with Tong Nan (3)

Seeing Ling Chen's actions, everyone watching couldn't help but be stunned, not understanding what Ling Chen was up to. Such a move would not only be ineffective but would also expose all of his vital points, and any opponent with experience and strength could easily break it.

Ling Chen's actions were tantamount to seeking death.

At this moment, Tong Nan looked up at Ling Chen, his mouth curving up slightly with a cold smile.

What an ignorant fool, using such a tactic against himself, does he really think he, an Earthly List expert, is just for show?

As thoughts raced through his mind, Ling Chen was already upon him. Although the fists had not yet fallen, Tong Nan could already feel the power contained in those steel fists.

Without giving it much thought, the moment those steel fists were about to fall, Tong Nan flicked his wrists, and both sabers struck upwards, aimed at Ling Chen's arms. If Ling Chen didn't retract his move, then both of his arms would be severed by the sabers.

In this situation, Ling Chen had no chance to choose, he could only dodge unless he wanted to become disabled.

However, just when everyone thought that Ling Chen was sure to lose, he suddenly opened his fists in mid-air, transforming them into palms, and reached out towards the two sabers.

Catching a saber with the bare hands?

Seeing Ling Chen's movement, everyone was shocked, not expecting that Ling Chen would possess such skill.

That was too audacious. To catch a saber with bare hands, unless one had utter confidence in their strength, or their strength overwhelmed the opponent otherwise, no one would dare to use this tactic lightly. Ling Chen was just a Dragon List expert, facing an Earthly List expert and using this move, how could it not shock them?

This was being too overconfident, did he actually think Earthly List experts were made of paper, so easy to deal with?

Whether it was the crowd watching from below, or Du Kang watching from the stands, none could contain their astonishment and stood up, their faces growing extremely grave. If Ling Chen made the slightest mistake, his hands would be ruined.

At this moment, facing Ling Chen's approaching hands, Tong Nan's eyes flickered with a sinister shade.

Actually wanting to catch his blade with bare hands, it was either overconfidence or utter stupidity. In his heart, Ling Chen was undoubtedly the latter. This was just perfect! Tong Nan quietly snickered—since the rules of the duel stated that the opponent must not be harmed, he was worrying about how he couldn't properly teach Ling Chen a lesson. Now that Ling Chen was presenting himself, how could he miss such a good opportunity?

Immediately, Tong Nan increased the force in his wrists, the two sabers like two sharp gusts of wind, chopping toward Ling Chen's hands.

However, just as the sabers' blades were about to touch Ling Chen's hands, Ling Chen's wrists quivered ever so slightly, surprisingly sliding down along the blades of the sabers. Sparks flew simultaneously. Before the crowd could react, Ling Chen's hands had already reached the hilts of the sabers.

This sudden change shocked Tong Nan on the spot. But at this moment, whatever he did was too late.

Ling Chen's hands gripped firmly onto his wrists, followed by a forceful twist. Instantaneously, intense pain shot through, causing Tong Nan's hands to lose strength instantly, and with two 'clang' sounds, both sabers fell to the ground.

Seeing this, everyone was dumbfounded, each one looking at Ling Chen in disbelief. What had just happened was too fast; they hadn't seen it too clearly, but the outcome right before their eyes made it all seem incredibly unbelievable.

While everyone was still in shock and had not yet reacted, they heard a loud 'ah', a scream emanated from Tong Nan's mouth.

Staring intently, they saw Tong Nan 'bang' onto the floor with a thud.

The turn of events was so sudden that everyone hadn't quite come to their senses yet. Just moments ago, they saw Ling Chen disarm Tong Nan's twin sabers, but didn't see clearly how Ling Chen brought Tong Nan down.

At this moment, Tong Nan quickly got up from the ground, looking at Ling Chen with a face full of shock and anger, and shouted: "You cheated!"

"Who cheated?" Ling Chen responded indifferently: "Tong Nan, don't slander me, show some evidence if you dare."

Tong Nan pointed at Ling Chen's hands and roared angrily: "You better fess up, what's with your hands? How could I have lost the advantage if you weren't playing dirty?"

"Hmph!" Ling Chen sneered and said: "Tong Nan, what you're saying is, if you lose to me, it must be because I cheated? What kind of logic is that?"

"Cut the crap, if you dare, show your hands to everyone."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen said nothing more, directly raising his hands over his head, then facing the palms towards the audience below.

"Everyone, look carefully."

The crowd looked and noticed that Ling Chen's hands were covered with a layer of material as thin as cicada's wings, resembling gloves, which were so transparent that it was difficult to notice something on his hands if one didn't look closely.

"You're still trying to play innocent, everyone sees it, Ling Chen cheated," Tong Nan said with a triumphant smile.

Ling Chen took off the gloves from his hands and said: "I believe there were no rules against using weapons in this duel, nor against using special weapons." As he spoke, Ling Chen looked up towards the elderly in the stands: "Elders, you all know the Yangxin Pavilion well, and are most familiar with Elder Su, so you should recognize what these are."

Hearing this, Du Kang seemed to recall something, and said: "I remember now, Elder Su indeed had a pair of silk gloves, made from special silk that is impervious to water and fire, very tough, and can withstand the sharpness of swords. In his youth, Elder Su often used those silk gloves, which could be considered a special weapon. Ling Chen is Elder Su's disciple, and it's not against the rules for Elder Su to pass on his weapon to his disciple. Tong Nan, if your own skills are insufficient, don't blame others for cheating."

"I..." Tong Nan was momentarily taken aback, his face turning beet red with embarrassment and anger: "You're covering up for him."

Du Kang's expression darkened, his tone growing colder: "I am judging the situation as it is, you dare say I'm covering up for him? Fine, you ask the others here, see if they also think I'm covering up for Ling Chen."

Tong Nan glanced at the others, then looked at his own master. However, his master shook his head, showing no intention of speaking up to help.

It was perfectly natural for a master to pass knowledge to his disciple. Besides, this grand event was essentially about the disciples representing their masters to test their skills against one another. If anyone was to be blamed, it could only be his own master for not having anything to pass on.

"Tong Nan, if you don't wish to continue, then give up on your own, don't waste everyone else's time."

At this moment, the referee spoke up.

Tong Nan clenched his teeth, his face ashen as he looked at Ling Chen and coldly said: "Fine, I want to see just how many tricks you have left." With those words, Tong Nan turned around, went to the weapon rack, took a long sword, then turned back to the center of the arena, staring at Ling Chen, and said through gritted teeth: "Let's go again!"

Chapter 722 The Last Spot

The long sword thrust forward, carrying a fierce gale, the blade not yet close, but the Qi Force already pressing towards Ling Chen's face.

Feeling the Qi Force hurtling towards him, Ling Chen reached towards his waist and, in a flash, drew the Tianling Blade, which transformed into a three-foot green gleam. With a 'clang', he deflected the blade. Immediately thereafter, Ling Chen lightly tapped his toes on the floor twice in succession, and his body soared forward.

Seeing Ling Chen charging towards him, Tong Nan was just about to thrust his sword forward. However, as his gaze landed on Ling Chen's hands, his movements involuntarily delayed, and he immediately abandoned the idea of attacking and swiftly retreated to avoid Ling Chen's offensive.

With Tong Nan retreating, Ling Chen immediately pressed forward, relentlessly closing in, giving Tong Nan no chance to catch his breath. To Ling Chen, now was the best opportunity. His recent attack had been forceful, enough to affect Tong Nan's wrist. It was evident from Tong Nan's earlier swordplay that the flexibility of his wrist had greatly diminished, and his strength was not as previously.

Therefore, with this advantage, it would be a missed opportunity not to press the attack.

Facing Ling Chen's fierce onslaught, Tong Nan tried to muster a counterattack several times, but regrettably, due to the injuries to his hands, his performance was affected. His successive attempts to counter were defused by Ling Chen, and he still couldn't alter the situation in the arena.

At this moment, Ling Chen, in mid-attack, suddenly accelerated his footsteps, surged forward, and with the three-foot green peak in his hand thrusting straight ahead, the Inner Strength condensed. If this strike succeeded, it would end the duel.

However, an Earthly List expert was ultimately an Earthly List expert.

As the sword tip advanced, Tong Nan flicked his wrist, placing his long sword horizontally in front of his chest.

Clang!

With a crisp sound, Ling Chen's sword tip struck right on Tong Nan's blade. Under the force applied, Tong Nan's blade slightly bent inward, the back of the blade almost touching his chest clothing.

"Scram!" Tong Nan roared explosively.

Suddenly, the bent blade snapped forward, not only deflecting the steel sword but also sending Ling Chen's body flying, landing at the edge of the platform, nearly colliding with the weapons rack behind him.

At this moment, Tong Nan, who had been at a disadvantage, was already seething with rage. Having struck a blow, he did not hesitate and immediately launched an offensive, rapidly rushing towards Ling Chen.

Watching Tong Nan charge, Ling Chen's expression remained unchanged, his sharp eyes still retaining calmness. Suddenly, he reached back with his left hand and actually picked up a longbow from the weapons rack. Next, he slightly tilted his body, placed the steel sword atop the bowstring, gathered the strength in his right arm, pulled the bow to its full arc, with the sharp sword tip aiming straight at Tong Nan.

Seeing Ling Chen's move, Su Mei, Qiu Yong, and the others involuntarily clenched their fists, their eyes filled with anticipation.

They had all participated in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. In the final battle of the ceremony, it was with this move that Ling Chen shot and killed Han Yu. Now, he was using the same trick again, and it was uncertain whether it would have a startling effect.

By comparison, Tong Nan did not take Ling Chen's move to heart. He had not participated in the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony and naturally did not know about the past event. Moreover, in his view, given Ling Chen's young age, it was impossible for him to be proficient in so many weapons. Besides, everyone can shoot arrows, but truly skilled archers are few and far between, as archery's technical demands far exceed those of other weapons.

Ten meters... Nine meters...

Tong Nan was getting closer and closer, the murderous intent in his eyes growing stronger and stronger.

Six meters!

When Tong Nan closed in to a distance of six meters, Ling Chen's two fingers finally released the bowstring. In a flash, a 'thwack' sound was heard from the bowstring, and the three-foot green peak instantly shot out, at a speed so fast it was nearly invisible to the naked eye.

Feeling the extremely sharp gust of wind, the color of Tong Nan's face involuntarily changed.

Fast! Accurate! Ruthless!

Tong Nan never expected Ling Chen's archery skills to reach such a level. Without time to think more, his long sword swiftly changed moves, stabbing forward as his whole body erupted with Hua Realm power.

Clang!

A crisp sound rang out, and both long swords were knocked flying, dropping onto the floor.

Impossible!

Tong Nan was shocked. The sword launched by the arrow not only knocked his own sword from his hand but also left his arm feeling slightly numb.

Such strong power.

Before Tong Nan could think further, a surge of intense pain suddenly came from his chest. At the same time, a powerful force rushed at him, pushing his body several steps back.

By the time Tong Nan realized what had happened, he discovered an additional arrow lying on the ground. However, this arrow had no head; its tip had been removed. If it hadn't been so, the arrow just now would likely have pierced through his body.

Looking up, Tong Nan stared at Ling Chen standing in front of the weapons rack, his face instantly turning ashen and ugly. The missing part of the arrow was in Ling Chen's hand.

At this moment, the audience below, after a brief moment of stupor, finally came back to their senses, clapping and cheering, their noisy voices rising and falling, boiling in the ears of Ling Chen and Tong Nan.

He actually won!

Such an outcome was likely beyond anyone's expectations. Before this, everyone thought Ling Chen was bound to lose. After all, a Dragon List expert competing with an Earthly List expert, without a miracle, victory was impossible.

But Ling Chen had done it, which was indeed shocking.

At this time, the referee glanced at Tong Nan, who was standing there dumbstruck, and loudly proclaimed: "Ling Chen wins, advancing to the next round."

"No!"

Hearing the referee's verdict, Tong Nan finally snapped back to reality, shouting urgently: "I haven't lost, I can still continue!"

The referee snorted lightly and, pointing at the arrow on the floor, said sternly: "If Ling Chen hadn't removed the arrowhead, you'd be a corpse by now. Instead of being grateful for his mercy, you refuse to admit defeat. Even if you don't care about your own face, think about your master's dignity."

"I..."

"Enough!" Before Tong Nan could say anything else, an old man in the stands spoke up: "A loss is a loss; why make so many excuses? Go down now; stop making a fool of yourself up there."

Being reprimanded by his Master in front of everyone, Tong Nan's face turned both green and red. He no longer dared to stay any longer, hurrying down from the stage.

Once off the stage, Liang Zheng and Song Yi immediately came up to him. However, seeing Tong Nan grinding his teeth in anger, they instantly swallowed their words, not daring to say another word, afraid of further upsetting Tong Nan.

Turning his head, Tong Nan cast a resentful glance at Ling Chen, then quickly walked towards the outer edge of the crowd. Losing to a Dragon List expert and being publicly reprimanded by his master, he had lost all face and had no desire to stay. He didn't want to become a laughing stock.

Watching Tong Nan's retreating figure, Ling Chen let out a long breath.

It's finally over.

Thank goodness, it was all thanks to Su He's guidance; otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to win so easily.

Chapter 723 The Mysterious Xu Ming

Su He summoned Ling Chen to attend the grand event at the Yangxin Pavilion, naturally he wouldn't do so without saying anything and simply have him come over for nothing; that would merely be a waste of time.

Su He was very clear, he knew that Ling Chen's opponents were all masters from the Earthly List, so he informed him in advance of the matters to pay attention to. For instance, how to maintain a certain

distance from the Earthly List experts, preventing them from using their Hua Realm techniques to harm him, and how to cope with potential crises. All these details were thoroughly explained. If it were not for Su He tutoring him with all he might, even if Ling Chen could defeat Tong Nan by employing all means, he would still have to pay a hefty price.

After descending from the arena, before Ling Chen could walk to his seat, Su Mei had already rushed over, clutching Ling Chen's hands urgently and asking, "Where is my grandfather?"

"This..." Ling Chen hesitated, his face showing uncertainty as he looked at Su Mei, unsure of how to broach the subject.

Seeing that Ling Chen was not speaking, Su Mei couldn't help urging him, "Just say it, where exactly is he?"

Ling Chen sighed softly and said helplessly, "Miss Su, it's not that I'm unwilling to tell you, but... Elder Su instructed me not to disclose his whereabouts to anyone. So, I'm very sorry."

"You..." Su Mei furrowed her brows, her dissatisfaction evident as she said, "We are friends, aren't you able to tell me? He's my grandfather, I have the right to know where he is. Ling Chen, please, for the sake of our friendship, I beg you to tell me."

Ling Chen responded with a bitter smile, "Miss Su, it's really not that I don't want to tell you, but to tell you the truth, Elder Su repeatedly warned me before I came here. Moreover, he also said that even if I told you of his whereabouts, you wouldn't be able to see him. The moment he finds out someone from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is nearby, he would immediately leave. By then, it wouldn't just be you who can't see him, even I wouldn't have the chance to meet him again. Miss Su, please do me a favor and don't make it difficult for me."

Hearing this, Su Mei still wanted to speak. But before she could, an elder nearby said, "Pavilion Master, since Elder Su does not wish to be found, you shouldn't press the matter. Besides, if Elder Su had wanted to return, he would have come back to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion long ago, how could there be no word from him for over a decade?"

"But..." Su Mei was still rather unreconciled.

"Alright then." After thinking it over, Su Mei changed her tune, "If my grandfather doesn't want to see us, then I won't force him. However, Ling Chen, can you do me a favor and relay a few words to my grandfather for me?"

Ling Chen nodded, "That's no problem."

"Let's leave it at this then," the old man next to Su Mei said, "Pavilion Master, Mr. Ling has just finished his martial arts match and must be tired, it's best to let him rest earlier."

"That's fine," Although Su Mei had innumerable questions for Ling Chen, out of consideration for the many people present, she had to suppress the excitement in her heart and said, "You rest well for now, I will come find you tonight."

Watching Su Mei leave, Ling Chen then returned to Qiu Yong and the others.

"Ling Cheng, how could you just rush up there without saying a word? You had us worried to death," Xia Yue scolded, looking at Ling Chen.

Ling Chen, feeling a bit embarrassed, touched his nose and said, "Sister Five, I was wrong this time. I didn't tell you all because I was afraid you would stop me and not allow me to participate."

Qiu Yong asked, "Ling Cheng, what is going on? When did you become a disciple of the Yangxin Pavilion, and who is this Elder Su? How did he become your master? I've never heard you mention him before."

"Elder Su's full name is Su He. He was once the Old Pavilion Master of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the current Pavilion Master's grandfather. After Elder Su retired, he stayed at the Yangxin Pavilion to nurture talents for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Later, for some unknown reason, Elder Su suddenly left the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and vanished into seclusion. For many years, there has been no news of Elder Su, and everyone in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is speculating whether Elder Su knew his end was near and thus left the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion," explained Xu Ming.

Hearing Xu Ming's words, Ling Chen curiously asked, "Why would everyone think that way?"

"Elder Su held very high prestige within the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. To tell you the truth, because the current Pavilion Master is a woman and lacks knowledge in martial arts, it would be difficult for her to control the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion without support. Furthermore, the Yangxin Pavilion is filled with powerful elders. To make them obediently follow orders, do you think Su Mei can accomplish that alone? The reason Su Mei is able to sit securely in the position of Pavilion Master with so many people's support is largely due to Elder Su's presence. No one knows when Elder Su might return, so with Elder Su looming above everyone, no one dares to make reckless moves."

"So that's how it is." Ling Chen suddenly understood and was surprised to realize how high Elder Su's status was within the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Even after leaving for over a decade, the people here still held him in awe.

Tsk tsk!

His own luck was indeed not bad; by a fluke, he had garnered Su He's favor. Now with this—status, his standing in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would only rise; no one would dare to look down on him.

In deep thought, he heard the referee above the arena say, "Alright! Today's martial arts competition ends here, and the next round of matches will take place in two days. Please prepare accordingly. Absence from the competition will be considered an automatic forfeiture."

"Ling Cheng, let's go!"

"Wait!" Speaking, Ling Chen looked up at Du Kang in the stands, and seeing him approaching with Yang Tao, he quickly greeted them, cupping his fists and saying, "Elder Du, thank you for your help earlier."

Du Kang waved his hand, "You needn't thank me, I merely spoke the truth. You did well, I thought you might not even make it past the first round. However, while you may have won today's match, the day after tomorrow's competition will be even more perilous, so be careful."

"Yes, I understand."

...

Leaving the Yangxin Pavilion, Ling Chen and Qiu Yong among others returned to their rooms and discussed the recent competition. Seizing the opportunity, Ling Chen also revealed his goals. Only then did everyone realize that Ling Chen intended to win the Nine Elements Pill through this method.

"You do have a chance to win the Nine Elements Pill this way, but..." Xu Ming shook his head and said, "I've known about this major event at the Yangxin Pavilion for decades, and the reason I didn't tell you before is that I didn't want you to participate—it's too dangerous."

Hearing this, Ling Chen looked curiously at Xu Ming, "Second Brother, you seem to know quite a lot about the Yangxin Pavilion and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Once these words were spoken, everyone's gaze fell on Xu Ming. Not just Ling Chen, they all were eager to know the reason. However, upon mentioning this matter, Xu Ming immediately shut his mouth and said nothing as if he didn't want to answer Ling Chen's question.

Seeing this, the others felt it inappropriate to press further, so they shifted the topic and talked about the upcoming martial arts competition instead.

Chapter 724 Methods

"Ling Cheng, you don't need to worry too much about the upcoming martial arts competition. As long as luck is on your side, you should be able to pass smoothly."

"Exactly, our fifth sister is right." Yuan Yun echoed, "Among the eight people advancing this time, other than you, only Wang Hao and Yang Zhe are masters from the Earthly List; the others are all from the Dragon List. As long as you have a bit of luck and don't encounter them, advancing to the top four should be no issue."

"Things are not as simple as you imagine." At this point, Xu Ming spoke up again, "There's something you all must understand. Whether it's Yang Zhe or any other Yangxin Pavilion disciple participating in the competition, they are representing their own masters. Simply put, it's their masters who wish to obtain the Nine Elements Pill. However, some are well aware of their disciples' strength and know victory is unlikely. Therefore, they might resort to certain measures."

"Measures? What kind of measures?"

Xu Ming said indifferently, "Other than not taking your life, any and all means will be used, so you need to be careful. Try not to go out these next couple of days. We'll leave one or two people with you to prevent any unforeseen incidents."

"That... Elder Brother, it can't be as serious as you say, right? If they really resort to such measures, wouldn't the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion intervene?" Ling Chen asked.

"Why should they intervene?" Xu Ming pointed at his own head and said, "Remember, a clever mind is sometimes more important than strength. Yangxin Pavilion doesn't just cultivate martial artists; they want talent—those with both martial arts prowess and an exceptional mind."

"I understand." Ling Chen nodded, "Elder Brother, rest assured, I will protect myself."

During their conversation, a series of 'thump thump thump' knocking sounds came from outside the room.

Wei Jiahao stood up to open the door. Seeing the visitor, he quickly stepped aside and shouted into the room, "Ling Cheng, the Pavilion Master is here."

Seeing Su Mei walk in alone with graceful steps, Qiu Yong and the others instantly understood that she was there to see Ling Chen. They stood up and said, "Pavilion Master, you can talk comfortably, we won't disturb you."

Su Mei expressed her thanks and, after everyone left, she took a seat in front of Ling Chen and got straight to the point, "I want to know my grandfather's current situation, can you tell me?"

"Your grandfather is doing very well, living comfortably. You don't need to worry about him." After Ling Chen spoke briefly, he turned the conversation, "Miss Su, why did Elder Su suddenly leave Yangxin Pavilion years ago, his whereabouts unknown? As his granddaughter, you must understand more about this matter."

Su Mei shook her head and sighed softly, "Honestly, I'm not very clear about why he suddenly left. He didn't say a word to me when he left and just disappeared. If it weren't for Elder Du realizing he wasn't in Yangxin Pavilion, I wouldn't have known he was gone. At that time, Elder Du and I guessed that it

could be because my grandfather's time was near, so he left the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion silently. He knew that if he died, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would become hard to manage. Thus, by dying outside, he could ensure that the pavilion would continue as before. For many years, I had thought that my grandfather was deceased. If it weren't for you bringing news of him today, I..." Her voice trailed off as her eyes filled with tears, overwhelmed with emotions, and unable to speak further.

Ling Chen quickly pulled out a tissue from the table and handed it to Su Mei, comforting her, "Don't think too much, I believe Elder Su had his reasons for leaving. And he doesn't seem like a heartless person; he must have had his own difficulties. You are his granddaughter; he will surely meet you sooner or later."

"I... I'm not thinking too much..." Su Mei said softly as she wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes, "I just want my grandfather to know that I have always tried hard not to disappoint him over the years."

"Don't worry, the next time I see Elder Su, I will definitely tell him."

Under Ling Chen's persuasion, Su Mei gradually stopped crying. She put down the tissue and looked at Ling Chen, "I'm not sure why my grandfather asked you to participate in the competition. I don't want to know too much; I just want to remind you that this competition is not just about strength but also about tactics. As long as it doesn't result in death, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion won't impose many restrictions. So you have to be very careful."

"I know." Ling Chen responded with a smile. Xu Ming had already warned him, and now Su Mei reminded him again; it seemed he really needed to be cautious.

After sending off Su Mei, Ling Chen returned to the living room alone, taking out a pair of silken gloves from his pocket. Paired with the Tianling Blade, they made for an excellent combination. If he encountered an opponent stronger than himself, he would have to rely on the techniques taught by Su He.

The day was still young.

Although he had been through several bouts, it was still a while before lunch. However, remembering the cautions from Xu Ming and Su Mei, Ling Chen, who had originally wanted to stroll outside, decided to abandon the idea and stay quietly in his room.

At lunchtime, a Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciple brought him his meal as usual.

Perhaps because of the competition, today's meal was much better than the previous few days. Looking at the lavish lunch, Ling Chen felt an increase in appetite. Since he was alone in the room, he saw no need for courtesy. He filled his bowl with rice and was about to eat a large shrimp when Song Ge's voice suddenly came from outside.

"Song." Upon opening the door and seeing Song Ge standing at the threshold, Ling Chen welcomed him in with a smile, "Song, have you eaten?"

"Not yet. I came to see you this morning but you weren't here, so I thought I'd come by again at noon."

"I had something to attend to this morning so I was away. Come on in, the meals are ready, let's eat together."

Song Ge helped himself, and the two sat down and began to eat, alternating bites with sips of wine. Before long, two bottles of wine were empty. Looking at the bottle in his hand, Song Ge's expression turned melancholy.

Seeing his demeanor, Ling Chen didn't need to ask to know what was on his mind. These two bottles of wine were leftovers brought by Zhou Qi last time. They were kept in his room, intending to drink them the next time they had the chance. Now, the wine remained, but the person was gone, with no indication of where Zhou Qi had taken Zhou Jun.

Thinking this, Ling Chen sighed softly to himself.

After a satisfying meal, Song Ge, burping contentedly, stood up and said, "Ling, I've got other matters to attend to, so I won't keep you company. I'll come over again in the evening."

"Sure, take your time, I won't see you out."

Song Ge waved his hand and then strode towards the door. But before he reached it, his legs suddenly gave way, and his body lurched forward; with a 'thump', he collapsed onto the floor.

"Song?"

Ling Chen was startled and rushed to Song Ge's side, helping him up from the floor and calling his name. However, Song Ge seemed to have fallen into a coma; his eyes were tightly shut, showing no reaction at all.

Chapter 725 Xiangrun Pill

Seeing Song Ge in such a state, Ling Chen was startled and quickly reached out to check Song Ge's nose. Feeling Song Ge's faint breathing, Ling Chen relaxed slightly. Good, there was breathing! Immediately after, Ling Chen checked Song Ge's pulse. The pulse was steady but weak, a clear sign of poisoning.

Poisoned?

Ling Chen frowned slightly and turned to look at the uneaten food. Song Ge was fine when he arrived, but had passed out after the meal, which clearly pointed to an issue with the food. Hmph! This is the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, and someone dared to poison his food here, that was truly ruthless. Fortunately, the poison used was not life-threatening.

The last time Ling Chen came to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, he had attempted to poison the food himself. However, based on what he knew, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion took logistics very seriously, prohibiting anyone other than designated logistics personnel from entering the logistics area. Therefore, someone who could poison his food must not have a simple identity.

Could this be the warning that Xu Ming and Su Mei urged him to be careful about?

Ling Chen's thoughts stirred, and he immediately connected this incident with the current martial arts competition. Apart from this reason, he couldn't think of anyone else who would target him like this.

Thereupon, Ling Chen carried the unconscious Song Ge to the bed, then went out to call Qiu Yong and the others over.

Seeing Song Ge on the bed, the expressions on Qiu Yong and the rest appeared somewhat ugly. Yuan Yun snorted coldly: "Those bastards are really bold, daring to poison the food. This won't do, I have to confront someone from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion about this. Ling Cheng, wait for me, I'll be right back." As soon as he finished speaking, Yuan Yun left the room ignoring Ling Chen's attempts to persuade him otherwise.

Seeing Yuan Yun leave, Ling Chen shook his head helplessly, shifting his attention to Qiu Yong, Xu Ming, and the others.

Xu Ming patted Ling Chen on the shoulder and said indifferently, "Now you see, they will stop at nothing to win, and will go to any lengths. This incident is just a probe; more dangerous things are yet to come."

"Elder brother, won't the people of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion intervene?"

"Don't be too naive. As long as it doesn't result in loss of life, no one will step in. Besides, your identity is different now. Because of Elder Su, you have become an official member of the Yangxin Pavilion, and hence, part of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. As such, you need to play by the rules of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Hearing this, Ling Chen felt annoyed but powerless. Indeed, as Xu Ming said, he was now a part of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

While pondering, Ling Chen suddenly thought of something strange and asked, "By the way! Elder brother, if the food was poisoned, and both Song and I ate it, why did only he pass out while nothing happened to me?"

Once Ling Chen raised this point, Qiu Yong and the others realized they had almost overlooked this matter.

Indeed! If Song Ge passed out, why was Ling Chen completely unaffected? This seemed a bit abnormal.

While everyone was confused, Yuan Yun walked in with Su Mei.

"Pavilion Master!" Qiu Yong promptly greeted her respectfully with a bow of his fists.

Su Mei nodded lightly and said, "Everyone, I am already aware of the situation and am very sorry. However, the rules of the Yangxin Pavilion martial competition are as they are: as long as it's not fatal, any means can be freely employed—it depends on your own capability. So, until the final winner emerges, we can do nothing." Having said this, Su Mei looked at Ling Chen with surprise and asked, "Song Ge was poisoned, why are you unharmed?"

Ling Chen touched his nose and replied, "I don't know."

Su Mei pondered briefly, a glint of clarity in her beautiful eyes, and she murmured, "Could it be because of..."

"Miss Su, do you know the reason?" Ling Chen's eyes lit up as he quickly asked.

"It might be related to the Xiangrun Pill from the Shi Family."

Xiangrun Pill?

Ling Chen was puzzled. Of course, he knew what the Xiangrun Pill was. Qiu Yong had mentioned to him that the Heavenly Mechanism Pill from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was a pill that all martial artists covet. Besides the Heavenly Mechanism Pill, there was also the Xiangrun Pill. The Xiangrun Pill, a secret medicine of the traditional Chinese medicine family, the Shi Family, was scarce in quantity. In the Martial Arts world, only the Xiangrun Pill could stand shoulder to shoulder with the ordinary Heavenly Mechanism Pill. Of course, this was only in comparison to the more common Heavenly Mechanism Pill.

Compared to the supreme Heavenly Mechanism Pill or the Nine Elements Pill, the Xiangrun Pill was far inferior.

With this in mind, Ling Chen curiously asked, "Miss Su, I indeed know about the Xiangrun Pill. However, I have never taken the Xiangrun Pill, so why would I..."

Before Ling Chen could finish speaking, Su Mei interrupted him: "You have taken it, just without your knowledge. During the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, you were injured before the competition, and Zhu Xiaozhu was worried about your health, so she asked Shi Su for a Xiangrun Pill. I'm not sure how she managed to trick you into taking it without your notice, but what I can confirm is that you definitely have taken it. The Shi Family's Xiangrun Pill is different from the Heavenly Mechanism Pill of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion; the Heavenly Mechanism Pill improves physique, expands meridians, and makes cultivating easier, whereas the Xiangrun Pill strengthens the physique and enhances the body's resistance. Anyone who has taken the Xiangrun Pill is impervious to common poisons."

After a pause, Su Mei continued, "Regardless, someone poisoning the food also reflects negligence in our Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's management. Our Pavilion has always attached great importance to logistics, and this incident is largely due to Elder Zhou's departure. Previously, Elder Zhou was responsible for all affairs of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, including logistics. Now that he has left, I haven't yet found someone to replace him, which allowed for this lapse to occur. Rest assured, when we return, I will urge those below to pay more attention to prevent similar incidents."

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Good, as long as Miss Su has given her word, I don't want to worry about not being able to eat in peace."

"Ling Chen, although I am the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master, I want to remind you as a friend once again, never be complacent."

Ling Chen nodded and replied, "I understand."

He had initially thought that Su Mei and Xu Ming's warnings were just a reminder to be more vigilant, but now he realized the true danger. If he hadn't taken the Xiangrun Pill, he might have ended up like Song Ge, unconscious for days. If that had happened, missing the competition in two days' time would have been a major loss.

After taking Song Ge back to his room, Ling Chen, accompanied by Qiu Yong and others, head to the martial arts training field. With so many accompanying him, he didn't have to worry about anyone trying to harm him stealthily.

Standing on the hillside, Ling Chen looked into the distance, with Su Mei's words still echoing in his mind.

Zhu Xiaozhu!

She had given him the Xiangrun Pill from the Shi Family to take.

Chapter 726 Forest

If it weren't for Su Mei telling him about this, he would still be kept in the dark.

Naturally, Ling Chen knew the preciousness of the Xiangrun Pill, and he was surprised by Zhu Xiaozhu's actions.

It seems that unconsciously, he owed Zhu Xiaozhu a huge favor.

"Sixth brother."

At this moment, Yuan Yun's voice came from behind. Ling Chen turned his head and asked, "Third brother, what's up?"

Yuan Yun stretched out his hand and pointed to a distance, saying, "Look over there."

Ling Chen raised his head and looked afar, only to see a person outside the forest about dozens of meters away. To be precise, it was a woman.

Zhu Ying!

Ling Chen vaguely recognized the facial contours of the woman, and a sharp look immediately flashed through the pupils akin to Mo Che's.

It was her!

At this moment, Zhu Ying was sneaking around the outside of the forest, continuously looking around, seemingly worried about being discovered. Probably because Ling Chen and the others were standing on

a slope, which was relatively higher in terrain and blocked Zhu Ying's line of sight, she hadn't noticed their presence.

After a while, seeing no one nearby, Zhu Ying dived into the woods.

Watching Zhu Ying's cautious demeanor, Ling Chen greeted everyone and then quickly followed her. He wanted to see what Zhu Ying was up to.

Upon reaching the edge of the forest, Ling Chen lightened his footsteps and walked into the woods. Navigating through the dense forest for about thirty meters, Ling Chen heard rustling sounds entering his ears.

"What's that sound?"

Ling Chen murmured to himself and carefully approached the direction from where the sound came. Soon, the giggling and tempting moaning became clearer.

Damn it! Ling Chen's eyes widened in shock as he stared ahead in the forest.

These two are too daring to engage in such an indecent act here. Needless to say, that woman must be Zhu Ying. Probably afraid that her voice would be heard, Zhu Ying was desperately controlling her breaths, but occasionally, bursts of indecent moans could still be heard.

It seems Tong Nan's words the other day were not wrong; Zhu Ying indeed was no good, though she had some beauty and grace, her private life was too indiscordant – Ling Chen wondered how Zhou Jun could fall for such a woman.

However, compared to this, Ling Chen was more interested in the man.

Could it be Tong Nan? Ling Chen thought. Zhu Ying had spent some time with Tong Nan, devoted to him completely, and it was Tong Nan who instructed the plot to frame Zhou Jun last time. Honestly, Ling Chen quite admired Zhu Ying as a woman; she was infatuated with Tong Nan, yet willingly let her body be possessed by others, something not everyone was capable of.

To avoid being noticed by the two people in the forest, Ling Chen carefully lightened his steps as he moved forward.

Fortunately, Ling Chen was lucky and found a perfect spot. Through a few crossed branches, Ling Chen clearly saw that ten meters ahead, Zhu Ying was sticking her buttocks out with both hands propped against the tree, her face flushed, and her shirt buttons undone, revealing a white expanse of her chest.

Behind Zhu Ying stood a young man. Seeing this young man's appearance, Ling Chen was taken aback.

He thought it would be Tong Nan, but it turned out to be Song Yi.

At this moment, the two were indulging their primal urges in the secluded forest, completely unaware of the outsider spectating.

After watching for a bit, Ling Chen immediately withdrew his gaze. As a virile young man, he feared he couldn't handle too much of such sight. Moreover, besides looking, he dared not listen either. No way around it, for Zhu Ying's moaning and gasping were too tempting, just like the female protagonists in adult movies, always able to stir up a man's deepest desires.

After a few minutes, the couple in the forest finally stopped.

Ling Chen turned his head, only to see Zhu Ying and Song Yi had already dressed. The two embraced and sat on the ground in an affectionate mien. If Zhou Jun saw this scene, he would probably be enraged to death.

"My dear."

Hearing Song Yi's nickname for Zhu Ying, Ling Chen felt utterly nauseated. Unexpectedly, this usually haughty young man completely changed his demeanor in front of a woman.

"You say, our affair won't be known to Big Brother Tong, right?"

Zhu Ying spoke softly: "What if he knows? It doesn't matter since he never took me seriously. I was too foolish before, thinking he would love me forever, but I later realized he just wanted to play with me. Only you are truly sincere to me."

"Of course." Song Yi embraced Zhu Ying tightly, eliciting a coquettish complaint from her.

"Hey! What's Tong Nan doing today? Usually, you are always together, why aren't you with him today?"

"Don't mention it." Song Yi sneered: "Tong Nan has always been arrogant, but this time he has experienced a big loss, losing in a martial contest to Ling Chen. A renowned Earthly List master actually lost to a Dragon List master, and once this news spreads, Tong Nan's face will be utterly disgraced; how could he face anyone afterwards?"

"Really?" Zhu Ying asked curiously: "Is that Ling Chen really so formidable?"

"I'm not sure about his prowess, but he indeed has some tricks up his sleeve. Most importantly, he's Elder Su's disciple, which is no ordinary status. Just with this identity, he can walk sideways at Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion without any issues, even the Pavilion Master has to give him some respect." Song Yi sighed and continued: "I didn't know Ling Chen had such a background before, and had offended him several times, I don't know if he would take it to heart. With his current status, if he plots revenge against me, I would be helpless."

"Forget it!" After thinking, Song Yi shook his head and said: "Let Tong Nan deal with him."

"Tong Nan? Didn't you say he lost the contest?"

"Yes, he lost the contest, but there are many rules in Yangxin Pavilion. During the contest period, you can use any means as long as it doesn't result in a fatality. Tong Nan lost to Ling Chen and was completely humiliated, turning into a laughingstock. Given his temper, do you think he can bear it? Just now, I went to see Tong Nan with Liang Zheng, as far as I know, he seems to be plotting something, preparing to make a move against Ling Chen. Good, let those two fight it out. Anyway, I'll just watch from the sidelines, not getting involved."

Listening to Song Yi's words, Zhu Ying's eyes flickered and she asked: "Is Ling Chen's identity really that impressive?"

"Absolutely, why would I lie to you. Alright, enough about him, while I've regained some energy, let's have another round."

As he spoke, Song Yi pounced like a tiger, pinning Zhu Ying's delicate body to the ground again, tugging at her clothes.

Chapter 727 Tong Nan's Revenge

Seeing the return of spring in the woods, Ling Chen no longer had any interest in watching.

Stepping out of Lin Zi, Ling Chen went straight back to join Qiu Yong and the others, then they all headed back to their room.

After dinner, Qiu Yong took the others back to their own guest rooms, only leaving Yuan Yun and Wei Jiahao behind to accompany Ling Chen, to prevent any covert harm coming to him.

Standing by the window, Ling Chen looked out into the night, his thoughts unconsciously drifting towards East Sea City, flying to Nanrong Wanqing.

Indeed, he had been quite busy this period, with hardly any time to spend with Nanrong Wanqing. Plus, with Su Lin away on an internship, only Nanrong Wanqing was at home with no one by her side, leaving him unsure if she was faring well.

"Brother Six, it's getting late, you should get some rest."

Hearing the voice of Wei Jiahao from behind, Ling Chen gave a soft reply, then closed the window and turned back into the room.

Deep into the night.

Silence enveloped everything, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion seemed shrouded in a mysterious veil; all lights were extinguished, leaving not a single gleam.

However, at this time, a dark shadow swept across the night sky, rushing toward a nearby building. In the blink of an eye, the shadow had reached the base of the building. Following that, without any apparent movement, the shadow ascended the wall, moving swiftly upward like a gecko.

Within a few seconds, the shadow stopped outside a window.

At the window, it seemed like the shadow's hand suddenly held a dagger, gently probing through the crevice of the window. Instantly, the tightly shut window opened. The shadow pulled open a window and flashed inside, blending into the darkness once more.

In the pitch-black room, where one couldn't see their own hand, the shadow completely merged with the surrounding darkness, its precise location indistinct. Only a faint sound of breathing could be vaguely heard.

Bang!

Suddenly, a loud noise erupted in the room. Following that, 'thud thud' sounds as if something heavy had struck the walls and then fell from mid-air, heavily hitting the floor.

At the instant the noise rang out, the previously dark room was instantly flooded with light. Ling Chen stood casually by the bed, looking down at the man at the bottom of the wall, his expression impassive.

Although the man was dressed in night clothes with his face covered, Ling Chen could identify him just by the resentful gaze in his eyes.

Tong Nan!

It could be no one else but him.

After overhearing the conversation between Song Yi and Zhu Ying today, Ling Chen had exercised extra caution. Since Tong Nan intended to harm him, of course, he had to be careful not to let him succeed easily.

So, under Ling Chen's vigilance, as soon as Tong Nan entered the room, he was discovered, but Ling Chen didn't make a sound. Instead, he quietly waited for Tong Nan to approach, ready to take the opportunity to kick him.

At this moment, Tong Nan quickly scrambled up from the ground, his eyes filled with resentment as he stared at Ling Chen. Suddenly, with a flick of his wrist, a dagger appeared out of nowhere, and he charged directly at Ling Chen.

In a flash, Tong Nan had closed the distance to within five meters of Ling Chen, his sharp dagger aiming straight for Ling Chen's vital spots. His movements suggested he intended to put Ling Chen to death.

As Tong Nan closed in, Ling Chen showed no sign of making a move, instead standing quietly in place, appearing as if he didn't take Tong Nan seriously at all.

Just as the dagger was about to pierce Ling Chen, a powerful gust of wind surged, descending from the heavens, aimed directly at the top of Tong Nan's head.

Feeling that piercing knife wind, Tong Nan's pupils shrank violently as he quickly looked up. In an instant, he saw Yuan Yun holding a steel knife with an aggressive momentum.

After recognizing the person who came, Tong Nan's expression finally changed. He was not afraid of a mere Ling Chen, but the person in front of him was the master of knife-wielding among the eight eccentrics—this was not someone he could afford to underestimate.

His mind racing, Tong Nan hastily withdrew his move, then rolled on the spot to dodge Yuan Yun's attack.

Forget it!

Seeing that Ling Chen had backup, Tong Nan immediately abandoned his plan of action, pushed off with his legs, and rushed toward the window.

Bang!

However, when Tong Nan's head collided with the window, not only did it fail to break open, but he was also bounced back and landed on the ground with a thud.

This sudden turn of events made Tong Nan freeze.

How could this be?

He couldn't understand how it was that everything was fine when he came in, but now he couldn't get out.

While pondering, he heard Ling Chen's voice coming from nearby: "Tong Nan, don't think about escaping. Surrender now. I anticipated that you wouldn't give up easily and would come to trouble me, so I had my Ling Cheng make a small modification to the room—doors and windows you can only enter, not leave."

Hearing this, Tong Nan's face immediately turned exceedingly ugly.

Without waiting for Tong Nan to get up, there was a 'bang' as the room's door was knocked open from the outside.

Watching Qiu Yong and others enter one after another, Tong Nan immediately gave up resisting. No matter how powerful he was, he didn't have the ability to contend with the eight eccentrics.

"Hmph!" Xia Yue glared at Tong Nan with fury and said softly, "You've really got some nerve, daring to secretly attack my Ling Cheng."

"No, I didn't," Tong Nan hurriedly defended. This was no joking matter. If they misunderstood that he intended to harm Ling Chen, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would not turn a blind eye; they would definitely punish him severely.

"Enough, stop the nonsense. Come on, let's go and reason with the Pavilion Master. I am curious to see how you'll argue your case."

Xia Yue grabbed Tong Nan from the floor and began to drag him away. However, at that moment, a fierce look suddenly flashed in Tong Nan's eyes, he grabbed Xia Yue's wrist, slightly turned his body, and his right arm immediately locked around Xia Yue's neck.

This turn of events happened so quickly that everyone failed to react in time.

Seeing Xia Yue controlled by Tong Nan, Ling Chen's brow furrowed, and he coldly ordered, "Tong Nan, release her immediately."

"I can let her go, but you must let me go. How about it, Ling Chen, that's a fair trade, right?"

Yuan Yun snorted coldly, holding the steel knife in one hand and striding in front of Tong Nan. He spoke deliberately, "I advise you'd better release her. If you dare harm a single hair on her, I can assure you, no matter who your master is or how powerful your background is, I will surely dismember you a thousand times over."

"I..."

"You don't need to doubt my words. If you don't believe me, feel free to try."

Feeling the deadly look in Yuan Yun's eyes, Tong Nan's face suddenly became uncomfortable, and he quickly retreated with Xia Yue. However, Xu Ming had already seen through Tong Nan's intentions, and he blocked the doorway first, preventing any chance of escape.

"Just release her; there's no way you can run."

Chapter 728 The Decision of the Top Four (1)

Facing the advancing Ling Chen and others, Tong Nan, holding Xia Yue hostage, retreated to the corner of the room. His arm tightly choked Xia Yue's neck as he shouted loudly, "Everyone back off!"

Ling Chen's face was stern as he coldly said, "Tong Nan, admit defeat. You can't escape our grasp. If you must blame someone, blame your own arrogance, daring to sneak into my room alone at night to harm me. Did you really think I was that easy to bully? Let me tell you, I knew you would come, so I was prepared in advance."

Tong Nan frowned and asked, "You knew I would come for you?"

"Of course. All thanks to your friends who secretly sent messages to me, otherwise, you might have succeeded by now."

"My friends?" Tong Nan was momentarily stunned and shook his head, "I don't have friends."

Ling Chen retorted, "Aren't those two who frequently follow you around your friends?"

Hearing this, Tong Nan's expression suddenly changed as he coldly said, "You mean those two... Who exactly is it?"

"Sorry, I can't tell you exactly who, and moreover, I don't think you have a chance to seek revenge. Tong Nan, don't forget, you lost to me in yesterday's martial arts match, hence, you've lost your qualifications. I know contestants can use any means to defeat their opponents, but that only applies to those who are qualified, and you're not. Hence, your actions have seriously violated the rules. What do you think the Pavilion Master will do if she finds out?"

"I..." Tong Nan opened his mouth but didn't know how to speak. Ling Chen was right. Once the Pavilion Master learns he did not follow the rules, she surely wouldn't let him off easily. Even if he was a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, things might get difficult for him.

With this in mind, Tong Nan glanced at the window nearby, still holding Xia Yue, and slowly shifted towards it.

As he neared the window, Tong Nan used his peripheral vision to inspect it and saw that both sides of the frame were fitted with springs – mechanisms that sealed the window from the inside, allowing entry but not exit.

Then, suddenly, Tong Nan pushed Xia Yue forward and lunged toward the window. Waving his dagger swiftly, he knocked down all the springs. Immediately following, before the people could react, Tong Nan leaped out the window and disappeared into the darkness.

Ling Chen walked to the windowsill and looked at the now absent Tong Nan, his lips curled slightly with a faint smile.

"Third Brother, thank you!"

"No need to be polite." Yuan Yun said with a smile, "When you gave me that look, I knew what to do. However, I just don't understand why, after finally catching that kid, you let him go again?"

"Let them fight among themselves," Ling Chen stated.

Just now, Ling Chen had told Tong Nan that the betrayal was reported by two of his close friends. Since only Song Yi and Liang Zheng had been constantly following Tong Nan, undoubtedly, Tong Nan would suspect them. Then, Tong Nan would inevitably go looking for trouble with Song Yi and Liang Zheng. Using Tong Nan to teach those two a lesson was undeniably the right choice.

"Alright, everyone head back. It's getting late, and we shouldn't delay our rest."

...

The next day.

Early in the morning, Ling Chen, along with Qiu Yong and others, returned to Yangxin Pavilion.

Stepping into the valley of Yangxin Pavilion, there were already numerous people waiting around the arena. Ling Chen's arrival immediately drew lots of attention. Being a disciple of Su He, this identity alone was enough to pique everyone's interest.

As Ling Chen approached, many people from the crowd came forward, wearing friendly smiles, and actively greeted Ling Chen.

As the saying goes, one does not slap a smiling face. Ling Chen had no choice but to squeeze out a smile and greeted them back.

After a round of greetings, Ling Chen felt his face almost stiffening.

When it was nearly eight o'clock, Du Kang and others leisurely arrived and seated themselves in the stands, awaiting the start of the martial arts competition.

Shortly after the arrival of Du Kang and the others, Su Mei, accompanied by an elderly man and several Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciples, arrived in the valley.

"Ladies and gentlemen!"

It was still the same referee as the day before. He stepped onto the stage, greeted everyone with a bowed fist, and then began, "Today is the quarterfinals. Winning one match today means advancing a significant step toward the final victory. However, I must emphasize here, no matter who the opponent is or whatever grievances you have had before, once you step onto the stage, you must abide by the rules and not randomly injure your opponent. Otherwise, don't blame me for being unkind. Now, no more idle talk, everyone please hurry up. I invite the top eight contestants to come on stage to draw lots to decide their opponents."

Hearing this, Ling Chen stepped onto the stage. Other than him, Wang Hao, Yang Zhe, and others successively went up.

Once everyone was on the stage, Ling Chen swept his gaze around and found that Song Yi and Liang Zheng were not present. Odd, where had these two guys gone? Didn't they know today was the semifinals?

While pondering, he suddenly saw someone quickly approaching from a distance. Ling Chen looked up, and his expression instantly stiffened – wasn't that... Liang Zheng?

However, Liang Zheng's appearance was quite a laughable sight. At that moment, Liang Zheng, with a bruised face and messy hair, looked like a beggar, even sporting several cut wounds on his mouth.

Seeing this, the crowd took a few more glances, full of curiosity.

Liang Zheng seemed like he had just been beaten up.

When the breathless Liang Zheng got on stage, the referee frowned and asked, "Liang Zheng, what happened to you?"

"It's... it's nothing," Liang Zheng said with his head bowed down, "I accidentally tripped last night."

However, such a low-skilled lie wasn't believed by anyone. One could tell from Liang Zheng's wounds that he had definitely been beaten up; he was just too embarrassed to admit it.

Holding back a laugh, Ling Chen turned his head away. It was obvious that Liang Zheng had been troubled by Tong Nan.

The referee snorted lightly, obviously not convinced by Liang Zheng's words. However, he did not pursue further, only asking, "What about Song Yi? Why hasn't he arrived yet? Aren't you usually always together?"

Hearing this, Liang Zheng's eyes flickered, not daring to meet the referee's gaze, and he said in a low voice, "I...I don't know, I haven't seen him."

"Then never mind. Since the time has already passed and he has not shown up, let's consider him to have forfeited. Now, there are still seven people left on the stage. I won't waste words – among you seven, one person will get a bye, directly advancing to the semifinals."

Upon hearing this, the eyes of Ling Chen and others lit up. This was unexpected but welcoming news - it remained to be seen who would be so fortunate.

While speaking, the referee handed over a bamboo tube to everyone, containing eight bamboo sticks marked with corresponding numbers. Whoever drew the same number would be opponents.

Chapter 729 Battle of the Top Four (2)

Ling Chen was the first to draw lots, and without much glance, he directly pulled out a bamboo stick. At the bottom of the stick, there was a number, three.

He hoped to draw a bye. Ling Chen thought to himself, to advance to the semi-finals without doing anything was a stroke of effortless good luck he certainly wanted.

Soon, all seven people had finished drawing. As everyone revealed their numbers, Ling Chen's expression immediately changed.

He had hoped for some good luck, but his opponent turned out to be Yang Zhe!

Not only that, the strongest contender, Wang Hao, had drawn a bye.

Damn! Ling Chen couldn't help but curse silently, feeling completely out of luck. It would have been one thing to draw a Dragon List master as an opponent, but he ended up drawing a master from the Earthly List, which was horribly unlucky.

"Ling Chen versus Yang Zhe."

When the referee announced the pairings, the audience around the stage was immediately shocked, showing various expressions.

"This Ling Chen is really unlucky, drawing Yang Zhe. It looks like he's stopping at the semi-finals today."

"Yes, although he defeated Tong Nan the other day, Tong Nan and Yang Zhe are completely different levels."

In the ranking of Earthly List masters, each level has a big difference. Tong Nan's strength at best ranked ninth in the Earthly List, but Yang Zhe's strength was between eighth and seventh, much stronger than Tong Nan. Besides, during the day of the contest between Tong Nan and Ling Chen, many people noticed that Tong Nan lost partly because he underestimated his opponent and made mistakes. Additionally, it was Ling Chen's first battle; no one knew his tactics back then, but today was different, people had a general understanding of his methods and would naturally guard against him.

Therefore, if Ling Chen still wanted to win with those techniques, it would be very difficult.

At this moment, after the judge's arrangement, the match between Ling Chen and Yang Zhe was scheduled to be the last one.

After stepping down, Ling Chen returned to Qiu Yong and the others with a wry smile on his face.

Yuan Yun sighed, patted Ling Chen's shoulder, and comforted, "Ling Cheng, don't think too much, just do your best."

"If it really doesn't work out, you might as well forfeit." At this moment, porridge girl came over and said, "I just asked Su Mei, that Yang Zhe's strength is very strong, ranked in the top three within Yangxin Pavilion, except for Wang Hao and Yang Tao, he is the most formidable. Everyone would understand if you forfeit against such an opponent, no one would laugh at you."

Hearing porridge girl's suggestion, Ling Chen shook his head lightly. Although he knew she meant well, he couldn't give up easily. This opportunity was hard-won; he couldn't let it pass so easily. Otherwise, not only would he despise himself, but Su He would also be disappointed.

During this visit to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, even though Su He did not indicate anything, Ling Chen could see that Su He had great expectations for him and hoped he would achieve a good result.

Furthermore, to step back ten thousand steps, even if he really wasn't a match, it would be good to compete against an Earthly List master to enhance his real combat experience against powerful fighters.

Amid these thoughts, he saw Yang Tao not far away, gesturing for him to come over.

Ling Chen quickly ran to him and asked, "Yang, what's wrong?"

"Nothing much, Master asked me to remind you of a few things, and I also have some words to tell you. When you confront Yang Zhe, if you want to beat him, you must pay attention to one key point."

"Key point?" Ling Chen asked curiously, "What key point?"

"Yang Zhe has a habit when he spars with others, listen carefully..." Saying this, Yang Tao leaned in close to Ling Chen and whispered a few words. Finally, Yang Tao raised his head and said, "Yang Zhe is my biological brother, I know him best, so don't doubt what I've told you."

Ling Chen was momentarily stunned and asked, "Yang, since you are brothers, why would you still..."

"It's nothing." Yang Tao said indifferently, "Although we are brothers, this time we are not fighting for brothers, but for our respective masters. Master told me that the Nine Elements Pill is very important to you, it could save your father's life. So, I will help if I can, but whether you can obtain the Nine Elements Pill depends on your own skills and fortune."

"Thank you!"

Ling Chen thanked him, and then turned back to join Qiu Yong and the others, quietly waiting for his turn to enter the arena.

There were two fights ahead of Ling Chen, both featuring Dragon List masters, with not much to watch, nobody was really interested.

The first fight featured Liang Zheng on the stage. As expected, perhaps due to injury, he, being the strongest among the Dragon List masters, surprisingly lost to a slightly lesser opponent, missing out on the semi-finals.

As the second fight was about to end, Ling Chen stood up from his seat, starting to warm up for his upcoming battle.

In less than five minutes, the two Dragon List masters on the stage decided the winner and, including the bye drawn by Wang Hao, three out of four semi-finalists were determined. Now, it all depended on the showdown between Ling Chen and Yang Zhe to see who would secure the last semi-final spot.

"Ling Cheng, go ahead, no matter the result, just do your best," Qiu Yong said.

Ling Chen nodded, took a deep breath, and then stepped onto the stage.

Looking at Yang Zhe standing opposite, Ling Chen clasped his hands together, smiled slightly, and said, "Yang, I didn't expect us to meet here."

"Last time, thanks to your help, a disaster was averted. However, favors aside, I won't go easy this time in our match; let's fight fairly. If you want to win, show your true skills."

"Of course!"

"The third fight, Ling Chen versus Yang Zhe, begins!"

As the judge's words fell, Ling Chen, without a second thought, turned around and dashed to the weapon rack behind him, taking down a longbow and a quiver of arrows, which he slung across his waist.

However, just as Ling Chen picked up his weapons, a gust of wind hurriedly approached from behind with tremendous speed.

Faced with the imminent threat, Ling Chen, without thinking, spun around, left hand gripping the bow, right hand pulling an arrow, slightly drawing the bowstring, and shooting out a sharp arrow directly at Yang Zhe's body.

Due to the hasty action, Ling Chen's arrow didn't have much force, and its speed wasn't at its peak either. However, Ling Chen's intent with this arrow was not to wound Yang Zhe, but to force him back.

Sure enough, seeing the arrow coming, Yang Zhe's forward charge abruptly stopped, he leaned his torso slightly back, and the arrow whizzed by, barely missing his upper body.

Seizing the moment, Ling Chen moved his legs quickly, rushing to the other side of the stage, creating distance between them.

Whoosh!

As Yang Zhe adjusted his position, Ling Chen did not hesitate and shot another arrow.

Chapter 730 Battle of the Top Four (3)

The arrows pierced the sky, flying so swiftly that the naked eye could almost not catch them.

However, for a master of the Earthly List, they did not pose much of a threat.

Three consecutive arrows were shot, and Yang Zhe easily dodged each, unscathed. They only forced him to keep his distance, hovering on the edge of the arena, unable to get near Ling Chen.

Yet, the arrows in Ling Chen's quiver were ultimately limited. After shooting several arrows in succession, his quiver was already half empty.

Now the fight had only just begun for less than a minute. At this rate, Ling Chen's arrows would soon be exhausted.

"This isn't looking good." The spectators shook their heads one after another, not very optimistic about Ling Chen. The same move again? Did Ling Chen really think Yang Zhe was the same kind of opponent as Tong Nan? Besides, in this kind of one-on-one fight, the role of the bow and arrow was minuscule unless it was at a very close range or if there was a good opportunity.

However, Yang Zhe was well aware of this and always maintained a safe distance, minimizing the threat of the arrows.

At this moment, Ling Chen nocked an arrow to his bow. The arrow followed Yang Zhe's movements, always aimed at his body.

Seeing Ling Chen hesitant to release the arrow, Yang Zhe took the opportunity to swiftly close the distance, preparing to launch an attack. But just as he was about to get close, a 'whoosh' sound was heard as the sharp arrow finally flew out, forcing Yang Zhe to retreat several steps.

Thus, the cycle repeated. Under Yang Zhe's continuous probing, Ling Chen's arrows were rapidly depleting.

Two minutes later, Ling Chen was left holding his last arrow.

"You have one arrow left. Do you think it can change anything?" Yang Zhe said indifferently.

Hearing this, the corner of Ling Chen's mouth lifted in a smile as he replied, "How do you know it won't have any effect?" As he spoke, Ling Chen's fingers loosened, and the arrow immediately shot forth.

As the arrow approached, Yang Zhe's body shifted slightly, allowing the arrow to whiz past his right shoulder. However, at that moment, Yang Zhe suddenly sensed a flash of a figure before his eyes, and Ling Chen's body instantly appeared in front of him.

"Take this!"

Ling Chen exclaimed softly, his fist laden with formidable power, thundering out.

Facing the heavy punch, Yang Zhe's face still maintained its calm. As the fist neared, Yang Zhe touched it lightly with his finger, pointing upward from below, right on Ling Chen's wrist.

Instantly, Ling Chen felt the strength in his fist halved.

Such precise technique!

Ling Chen's pupils contracted. Without time to think further, he immediately pulled back to retreat. Yang Zhe's simple touch had accurately landed on a soft spot on the wrist, capable of dissipating the force.

As Ling Chen retreated, Yang Zhe immediately pressed forward, closely following Ling Chen's footsteps, pressing step by step, his sharp palm strike heading straight for Ling Chen's chest.

Seeing this, Ling Chen frowned. Yang Zhe was pressing too close; if he kept retreating, he would inevitably fall off the arena.

No good, he had to find a way to avoid Yang Zhe's offensive.

In the split second of his rapidly turning thoughts, Ling Chen suddenly stopped his retreat, his body falling stiffly backward.

Seeing this, the onlooking crowd couldn't help but be startled. What was going on? Had he been hit?

But as the crowd watched in bewilderment, the fallen Ling Chen quickly rolled to the side, dodging Yang Zhe's attack. Although the evasive move seemed somewhat extravagant, it had, in any case, allowed him to avoid disaster.

Failing to connect with his strike, Yang Zhe immediately withdrew and turned, darting towards Ling Chen's location.

Ling Chen didn't dare to linger; if Yang Zhe stuck to him, he would surely lose. He immediately took long strides, rushing towards the weapons rack again.

What on earth is this guy trying to do?

Everyone thought to themselves. From the beginning of the fight until now, everyone felt that Ling Chen was just delaying, showing no intention of engaging.

Just as he was thinking, everyone was stunned once again by the weapon Ling Chen had chosen.

A shield?

Ling Chen actually chose a shield.

After a brief moment of surprise, everyone immediately realized why Ling Chen had chosen the shield.

Yang Zhe was an Earthly List expert, proficient in the Hua Realm, and in this aspect alone, Ling Chen could not compare with Yang Zhe. Thus, choosing a shield was a very correct decision. In this way, he could use the shield's sturdiness to fend off attacks from the Hua Realm.

At this moment, seeing Ling Chen holding the shield in front of him, Yang Zhe immediately changed his direction and rushed to the weapon rack beside the arena, then pulled out a broad-backed sword over a meter in length.

Without even trying it out, one could tell from the shape and material of the sword that it was very heavy, at least weighing around a hundred pounds or so.

Choosing such a heavy weapon to counter a shield was undoubtedly a good choice. Because Ling Chen was not very strong, and his power was lesser than Yang Zhe's. Therefore, if used well, this broad-backed sword could easily break through the shield's defense.

Clang!

Accompanied by a crisp sound, Yang Zhe held the broad-backed sword in one hand and chopped it onto the surface of the shield.

Immediately, Ling Chen's body slightly shook, and he staggered backward for two or three meters before steadying his stance.

Feeling the numbness in both arms, Ling Chen secretly felt alarmed, not expecting the sword to contain such formidable power. If Yang Zhe were to strike twice more like that, he wouldn't have the strength to hold onto the shield.

"Come again!"

Seeing Yang Zhe charging forward with the sword raised once more, Ling Chen quickly retreated, then raised the shield in his hand high, blocking the onslaught of the broad-backed sword.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

This time, Yang Zhe held nothing back, his strength, speed, and frequency of sword strikes had all tripled.

After three slashes, Ling Chen felt as if he was hit by a strong force, and in an instant, he was sent flying from the ground, crashing onto the floor along with the shield.

"How formidable!"

Seeing Yang Zhe's moves, the crowd exclaimed one after another.

"It's no wonder he's among the top three disciples in Yangxin Pavilion, his strength truly is extraordinary. Ling Chen, being a Dragon List expert, simply has no chance of defeating Yang Zhe."

"That's right, this battle already has no suspense; it's just a matter of how long Ling Chen can last against Yang Zhe."

"Going by this trend, the fight will end in at most two minutes."

"I don't see it that way; no matter what, Ling Chen is a disciple trained by Elder Su. Even if he is somewhat lacking, he can't be too bad. Let's not jump to conclusions, and just watch how it unfolds. Maybe Ling Chen has other techniques to turn the tide."

Amidst the discussion of the crowd, Ling Chen struggled to get up from the ground.

Taking a deep breath, he eased the pain inside his body and once again lifted the shield, looking at Yang Zhe on the other side, and slowly walked over.

"Stop hiding."

At this time, a sudden sentence came out of Yang Zhe's mouth.

"What?" Ling Chen didn't catch on for a moment and casually replied.

"You are a disciple of Elder Su, I don't believe this is all you've got. Use whatever techniques you have; otherwise, I'm afraid you won't have the chance later."

Hearing this, Ling Chen shrugged his shoulders and said with a resigned smile, "You seem to know me quite well."