

War God 171

Chapter 171: Let's Get a Divorce!

The next day, when the people of River City awoke from their deep slumber, they were shocked by two major events.

First, a landslide on the outskirts of River City had reduced an abandoned chemical plant to ruins. The second event was even more astonishing: the estate of the wealthy Fang Family, famous throughout River City, had been flattened to the ground by heavenly thunder.

These two incidents caused an uproar in River City. Some seemed to have their suspicions but remained unusually silent. Curious citizens who wanted to see the scene for themselves discovered that both sites had been sealed off from public view. Suddenly, wild rumors began to fly everywhere, and all of River City was consumed by fear.

At that moment, a piece of news sent shockwaves through the Martial Arts World. Yun Xu of the Dragon Tiger Mountain Celestial Master Mansion had decided to challenge Master Lin, the Master of the Three Rivers.

The Master of the Three Rivers was a major figure who had recently become famous in the Martial Arts World. He was a Martial Arts Grandmaster with an unrivaled Thunder Law, supreme in all of Jiuzhou. Yun Xu, on the other hand, was a long-renowned powerhouse from the Celestial Master Mansion, his strength also at the Grandmaster Realm. A battle between Grandmasters would surely be a clash of the titans.

Everyone was curious why Yun Xu would challenge Master Lin, as there seemed to be no connection between the two. The truth only came out when some Martial Artists who had attended the martial arts competition in River City revealed that Master Lin had killed Yun Xu's disciple, Zhang Yan, during the event.

So that was it. The crowd was stunned, but this was quickly followed by a sense of thrill. After all, a battle between two Grandmasters was bound to attract widespread attention. Immediately, countless Martial Artists headed toward River City, ready to witness the fight.

At the same time, the Ancient Martial Faction's Crane Immortal Sect also set out for River City, ready to hold Master Lin accountable. The reason was the same: Master Lin had killed their Elder, Liu Xianhe.

The public knew very little about the Crane Immortal Sect, but as time went on, more information about them began to surface. People were shocked, yet they felt an icy chill.

The Celestial Master Mansion and the Crane Immortal Sect. Two powerful sects were moving to hold the Master of the Three Rivers accountable. Regardless of Master Lin's true strength, to receive this kind of attention was unprecedented.

Throughout River City, hearts trembled, sensing an impending storm. What they didn't know, however, was that members of the Martial Alliance had already arrived in River City ahead of everyone else. A challenge letter had been delivered to the Bamboo Grove Courtyard.

...

Lin Mu paid no heed to the outside world. At the moment, he was sitting in the bedroom, holding Qin Luoli's wrist.

"Lin Mu, am I really disfigured?" Qin Luoli was still very weak, and her voice trembled as she spoke.

If you were to ask what women in this world care about most, the vast majority would say "beauty." The more beautiful a woman is, the more she cares. Qin Luoli herself was a generational beauty, the number one belle in River City. In both looks and intelligence, she was one in ten thousand. If she was truly disfigured, everything she had built would be for naught.

Lin Mu held her hand and said gently, "What nonsense are you talking about? Your wounds just haven't healed yet. Trust me, I won't let anything happen to you."

With a forlorn look in her eyes, Qin Luoli said, "Don't lie to me. Even though I can't see what I look like, I'm sure I'm hideous... I must be a monster."

As Qin Luoli spoke, she began to sob, overwhelmed by fear, dread, grievance, and even a rare hint of vulnerability.

Suddenly seizing Lin Mu's hand, she stated resolutely, "Lin Mu, let's get a divorce."

Lin Mu was jolted. He looked at Qin Luoli in disbelief.

Qin Luoli gave a tragic smile, which looked somewhat horrifying on her scar-covered face. Her once-fair skin was now dark and slightly swollen, giving her a strange appearance.

"You've always said you wanted to divorce me, right? I agree now. Let's get divorced!"

Not daring to look at Lin Mu, she lowered her head and continued, "Now that I've become this ghastly figure, how could I possibly be worthy of you?"

Tears fell one by one, shattering on the ground like her heart. It hurt!

Lin Mu was shocked to his core. He unconsciously reached out to cradle Qin Luoli's face, his expression tender and affectionate, his tone even softer than before. "Silly woman, what are you saying? Who says you're not good enough for me? In my eyes, you will always be the most beautiful woman in the world."

Qin Luoli shook her head, her voice tinged with tears. "Lin Mu, don't lie to me. I know you're just trying to comfort me."

"I've made up my mind, so don't try to persuade me." Qin Luoli said with an air of indifference, "As for Mom, I'll explain it to her."

"Bullshit!"

Lin Mu's tone turned cold, hard, and domineering. "Divorce? I won't allow it!"

"Lin Mu..."

Lin Mu lowered his head and kissed her forcefully on the lips.

Qin Luoli's entire body trembled. She tried to push Lin Mu away, but to no avail. In the end, she found herself returning his embrace. It was a deep, affectionate hug.

Lin Mu looked at the woman before him, his eyes filled with fondness. "Trust me," he said. "Not only will I heal you, but I will also make you even more beautiful. Forever beautiful!"

"After all, your man is no ordinary person!"

Mere external wounds were nothing to him. But Qin Luoli was a woman, and her thoughts were sensitive. That was why she said such things. He was sure she didn't truly believe his words, so he would have to prove it through his actions.

"Mm, I believe you," Qin Luoli smiled faintly, but in her heart, she had already made her decision.

Lin Mu didn't explain further. Some things had to be proven with actions.

"Rest well. I'm going to check downstairs." Lin Mu tucked the blanket around Qin Luoli and infused some Spiritual Energy into her body to help her rest.

Once Qin Luoli was asleep, Lin Mu slowly stood up, his expression turning frosty and sharp.

Although Qin Luoli was not in grave danger, the wounds on her face could not be healed even with his Mana. The deep scars were like maggots feasting on bone, impossible to dispel. Lin Mu knew Fang Yonglong and his men must have applied some kind of poison to the wounds—one that wasn't fatal but would ensure the scars were permanent. They had wanted to ruin her completely.

For that, Lin Mu felt no regret about slaughtering Fang Yonglong's entire bloodline. They had clearly underestimated his capabilities.

There was one simple and reliable way to restore Qin Luoli's face: the Ever Youth Pill.

The effects of the Ever Youth Pill were simple: it helped one retain eternal youth and everlasting beauty. In the Immortal Realm, it was considered a low-grade elixir with simple ingredients. It had always been a favorite among female Cultivators.

But this was Earth, where Spiritual Energy was scarce. The ingredients for the Ever Youth Pill would be difficult to find.

However difficult it might be, Lin Mu had to refine the Ever Youth Pill.

For his woman!

After all this time together, Qin Luoli already held a place in his heart. He would not give up on her.

Stepping out of the bedroom, he heard a commotion outside. A cold gleam instantly flashed in his eyes.

"That Lin Mu certainly has some nerve, taking this long to come out and pay his respects. Is he not afraid of retribution from the Martial Alliance?"

Chapter 172: Martial Alliance? What is that!

Several people were standing outside the villa.

Guan Jiaojiao had a furious expression. She was shouting something, her face flushed red with anger. Guan Chengye's expression was just as grim, his eyes holding a heavy look.

In the courtyard stood a young man with an arrogant demeanor. With his hands clasped behind his back and his chin tilted high, he exuded an air of haughtiness, looking down on everyone. Behind him were two companions—middle-aged men who looked like bodyguards, but not quite.

The young man said coldly, "If that Lin Mu doesn't show his face, I'll tear this place down!"

He scoffed. "With my status in the Martial Alliance, I refuse to believe he'd dare to do a thing!"

Just as Guan Jiaojiao was about to say something, a cold voice suddenly interjected.

"The Martial Alliance? Is it that impressive?"

Everyone turned to see Lin Mu standing on the steps, looking at them with an indifferent expression.

"Lin Mu!"

Seeing Lin Mu brought a flash of joy to Guan Jiaojiao's face, which was quickly replaced by worry. Guan Chengye, for his part, looked as though he wanted to speak but held his tongue.

The young man glanced sideways at Lin Mu. "So, you're that Vermilion Bird of the Three Rivers Area, Lin Mu?"

Vermilion Bird?

This was a profound insult to Lin Mu. The youth thought very highly of himself and had insulted Lin Mu right from the start, intending to put him in his place.

"Young man, watch your tone!" Guan Chengye's face darkened, his gaze turning hostile.

However, the youth looked completely indifferent. One of the men behind him stepped forward, his powerful aura flaring to intimidate Guan Chengye. The man's presence was powerful; he was a Martial Artist who had achieved Internal Energy Mastery.

"What? You want to make a move against me?" the youth asked, looking at Guan Chengye with disdain. "You should recognize your own station. You may be the guardian of River City, but don't forget that the Martial Alliance also falls under the jurisdiction of the Military Department."

Guan Chengye's expression shifted, but he ultimately just let out a cold snort.

The youth then turned back to Lin Mu, sizing him up before commanding, "Lin Mu, the Martial Alliance summons you for questioning. Come with us."

After speaking, he produced a purple token and flashed it before them.

The Martial Alliance Command!

The Martial Alliance Command could command all Martial Artists under heaven. Those who saw it were required to kneel!

However, Lin Mu didn't kneel.

The youth's face turned cold as he bellowed, "How presumptuous! Who gave you the courage to see the Martial Alliance Command and not kneel?"

Lin Mu finally spoke. "What is this Martial Alliance? You expect *me* to kneel?" His voice was cold and devoid of emotion.

"Daring to disregard the Martial Alliance is courting death!" the youth roared in fury. He turned to the two men behind him. "Elder Chen, Elder Zhou, if you please."

The two Martial Alliance Elders stepped forward in unison, their eyes locked on Lin Mu.

"Boy, seeing the Martial Alliance Command and not kneeling will bring you a world of pain."

As soon as the words were spoken, Elder Chen unleashed his aura, sending it sweeping toward Lin Mu in a suppressive wave. He actually intended to use his imposing presence to force Lin Mu to his knees.

However, Lin Mu remained completely unfazed.

Elder Chen's expression flickered as he pushed his aura even further. And yet, Lin Mu simply stood on the steps above, looking down on him with a mocking gaze.

"Insolent fool!" Elder Zhou shouted coldly, his clothes billowing as a formidable aura erupted from him.

Guan Jiaojiao and Guan Chengye's faces paled, and they both retreated. The aura was incredibly powerful. With both men acting together, even the aftershocks that washed over them made their blood churn and their hearts pound with fear.

What kind of pressure, then, was Lin Mu, who faced it head-on, enduring?

But Lin Mu's expression didn't change in the slightest. On the contrary, he slowly took a step forward.

BOOM!

As his foot landed, a dull thud echoed out of thin air.

The two Martial Alliance Elders grunted in unison and staggered back several steps, staring at Lin Mu in utter shock.

"You..."

Lin Mu took another step. The two men's faces turned deathly pale, and their knees buckled. With a THUD, they collapsed to the ground. An invisible pressure radiated from Lin Mu, pressing down on their shoulders with a weight they simply could not bear.

"You are not the first to act so arrogantly before me."

With each step Lin Mu took, the Elders' faces grew paler. Their gazes were now filled with profound shock.

"But every single one has paid the price for their ignorance and audacity!"

Taking one more step, Lin Mu stood just three paces away from them.

BOOM!

A vast, ethereal aura erupted from Lin Mu like a volcano, crashing down on the two men as if the very sky were falling.

PFT!

The two could no longer hold out. They each coughed up a mouthful of blood, their auras instantly weakening.

"A Martial Arts Grandmaster!"

They exchanged a glance, and each saw sheer, abject terror in the other's eyes.

"Master, spare our lives!"

All traces of disdain and mockery had vanished, replaced by looks of bitter despair as they kowtowed to Lin Mu.

A Martial Arts Grandmaster could see the Martial Alliance Command and not kneel. But disrespecting a Grandmaster was an offense punishable by death!

At that moment, the two elders were filled with both dread and resentment. They dreaded that Lin Mu would punish them, and they resented the youth for his blinding arrogance.

"Spare you?" Lin Mu's eyes narrowed, his voice dangerously low. "If I were not a Grandmaster, would you be acting this way?"

The two men's expressions fell, knowing that Lin Mu had no intention of letting them off so easily.

"Master Lin, this was our mistake. I, Chen Yong, apologize to you. I hope..."

BANG!

Before he could finish, an invisible force sent him flying.

"Lin Mu, you mustn't—"

The other, Elder Zhou, cried out in alarm, but he too was sent flying before he could finish.

Their bodies slammed against the villa's wall. Crying out, they spit up more blood, their faces ashen and their appearances wretched.

"If apologies were useful, then this Grandmaster title would be worthless."

With that, Lin Mu turned his gaze to the youth, whose legs had long been trembling and whose face was a mask of terror.

"What was that you said? Say it again."

His words were calm, but to the youth, they boomed like thunder.

"I... I..." The young man's voice trembled as he forced a smile that was uglier than a grimace. "Master... Master Lin, it was all a misunderstanding."

"A misunderstanding?" A corner of Lin Mu's mouth curled up. "I don't think it was a misunderstanding at all."

THUD!

The youth could no longer stay on his feet. His legs gave out and he collapsed to his knees, crying, "Master Lin, I was wrong! I'm just a messenger! Please don't make things difficult for me!"

SLAP!

Lin Mu's hand flashed out, striking the youth across the face.

"Ah!"

The young man screamed as he flew through the air. A spray of blood and teeth flew from his mouth before he slammed onto the ground with a heavy THUD. He lay there like a dead pig, unable to even crawl.

"If you're just a messenger, then you should have known your place," Lin Mu said, clasping his hands behind his back and looking down coldly at the three. "At the very least, you are not qualified to speak to me."

The young man struggled to his feet, glaring at Lin Mu with a mixture of resentment and fear.

"Make the call. Tell your steward to come see me," Lin Mu said, his tone flat. "Of course, I could pay him a visit myself... but then, he'll have to face the consequences."

Chapter 173: Leveled to the Ground!

Zhuang Yu was the leader of the Martial Alliance team this time. Although his strength was not the highest, his status was extremely elevated because he was the junior brother of Lu Tong, the Martial Alliance Hall Master. The two shared the same master, and their relationship had always been good. Moreover, although Zhuang Yu was young, he possessed the strength of Internal Energy Mastery and could solve many problems for Lu Tong at the branch.

Lu Tong had sent Zhuang Yu to River City for two reasons. Firstly, he believed there was no need to mobilize a large force for a mere Lin Mu. Secondly, he wanted to build momentum. Once Lin Mu was

defeated and the so-called Master of the Three Rivers was trampled underfoot, Lu Tong would apply to establish another branch in River City. The position of Helmsman would be assumed by his junior brother, Zhuang Yu.

By then, with the two martial brothers supporting each other, their position and power within the Martial Alliance would be even more secure.

"Our master is at a critical period right now. If he advances further, he will inevitably take action. Since our master cannot personally intervene, we disciples must act on his behalf."

Thinking back to what his senior brother had told him on the way here, Zhuang Yu's expression grew solemn, his heart stirring with faint excitement. If his master really did advance further, he wouldn't just be a top figure in the Martial Alliance, but in the entire Martial Arts World. He would be a peerless expert, someone who could be ranked on the Grandmaster List! Therefore, this mission to River City is a must-win!

"Elder Zhuang, so much time has passed, and there's still no news from Elders Zhou and Chen. Could it be..." In the hotel where Zhuang Yu and his party were resting, Tian Boguang voiced his concerns.

Unlike the others, he had seen Lin Mu with his own eyes. He had a profound impression of the young martial arts powerhouse, who was definitely not an easy opponent. Otherwise, he wouldn't have fled Wufeng Town so disgracefully just because of a remark from him. Elders Zhou and Chen were several levels stronger than him, so logically, there was no need for him to worry.

However, for some reason, whenever he recalled the young man's calm and powerful demeanor, Tian Boguang felt uneasy. He couldn't shake the feeling that this trip to River City would be anything but easy.

A faint smile appeared on Zhuang Yu's lips as he looked at Tian Boguang with disdain.

An ant who hasn't even mastered Inner Strength, who only managed to secure a nominal position as a Martial Alliance Elder by selling his daughter... You think you're worthy of speaking to me?

Though he felt extreme disdain for Tian Boguang, Zhuang Yu said with a smile, "Elder Tian, you needn't worry. Elders Zhou and Chen are experienced and prudent. With their strength far surpassing that of ordinary people, I believe capturing that Lin Mu fellow will be effortless."

Zhuang Yu deliberately emphasized the words "ordinary people."

Upon hearing this, Tian Boguang's face flushed a deep crimson, and he was seething with anger.

But he knew his own strength was lacking, which only deepened his hatred for Lin Mu. If that brat hadn't crippled Wang Wu, I wouldn't have been punished by Lu Tong. Not only did I lose my reputation, but I also sacrificed my daughter's lifelong happiness. At this thought, Tian Boguang secretly vowed that if he ever got the chance, he would definitely kill Lin Mu!

At that moment, the door was pushed open. Wang Wu entered with a smile on his face and a self-satisfied look in his eyes.

"Greetings, Master."

"Greetings, Elder Zhuang."

Wang Wu approached, his steps a bit unsteady, but he still bowed to both men.

Zhuang Yu glanced at Wang Wu and said meaningfully, "We're all family now. Why are you still calling him 'Master'? From now on, you should call him 'Father-in-law'."

"Yes, thank you for the reminder, Elder Zhuang." Wang Wu's eyes brightened. He clasped his fist and bowed to Tian Boguang, whose face was extremely gloomy, and said, "Mas— Father-in-law, I assure you, from now on, I will treat her well."

Tian Boguang recalled how Wang Wu had just gone into his daughter's room and had only now emerged. Though he had tacitly consented, his feelings were extremely complicated. He felt anger, reluctance, regret, and yet also a sense of blessing.

Waving his hand, Tian Boguang said, "Your words are enough." He then looked at Zhuang Yu. "The priority now is our mission in River City."

"I have my own plans for that, so there's no need for Elder Tian to worry," Zhuang Yu replied, waving his hand dismissively.

Just as he finished speaking, his phone rang. It was from Zhuang Qing, his son, who had accompanied Elders Zhou and Chen to find Lin Mu.

"Zhuang Qing, is the task complete?" Zhuang Yu asked.

"Dad, Master Lin... Master Lin wants to see you," Zhuang Qing's hesitant voice came through the phone, thick with fear.

"Which Master Lin?"

"It's Lin Mu... Master Lin."

Zhuang Yu's expression suddenly turned ugly. "What exactly happened?"

From Zhuang Qing's tone, Zhuang Yu knew something had gone wrong. Otherwise, Zhuang Qing would never have called Lin Mu 'Master Lin'.

Just then, Zhuang Qing's agonized scream echoed from the phone. Zhuang Yu's expression instantly became extremely grim.

Then, a different voice—cold and detached—came through the line. "You have two choices. Either you come here yourself, or I will pay you a visit. However, you will be responsible for all the consequences."

Lin Mu!

Wang Wu and Tian Boguang exchanged a look. The image of a tall, domineering figure immediately came to mind. They would never forget that tone and voice.

Wang Wu clenched his fists tightly, his eyes filled with venomous hatred.

Zhuang Yu took a deep breath and said, "Fine. You just wait. If anything happens to my son, I swear I'll kill you!"

There was no reply. The call was abruptly disconnected.

"Bastard!" Zhuang Yu cursed, then snorted coldly and strode outside. "I want to see for myself what this so-called Vermilion Bird is capable of!"

Excitement painted Wang Wu's face as he hurriedly followed, while Tian Boguang sighed and trailed behind them.

「Qinzhu Xiaoyuan.」

The scent of tea wafted through the air.

Guan Jiaojiao was silently brewing tea. Her technique was worthy of a master and her posture was elegant, betraying none of her inherently lively and eccentric nature. Meanwhile, Guan Chengye was all smiles, nodding continuously, clearly quite satisfied with his granddaughter's tea ceremony skills.

Lin Mu casually picked up a teacup and downed it in one gulp.

His crude action drew a roll of the eyes from Guan Jiaojiao. This guy! Is that how you're supposed to appreciate tea? It's like a cow chewing on a peony!

However, the thought of the three figures lying downstairs made her worry. Her hand trembled, and a bit of tea spilled from the pot.

"Tea is like Zen. One's mind must be free of distractions," Lin Mu said gently as he set down his teacup. "Otherwise, if you are too hasty, the tea will lack its essential tranquility."

"Putting on airs," Guan Jiaojiao snorted, pouring another cup for Lin Mu. "Take it or leave it."

Lin Mu laughed heartily, not taking offense. He picked up the cup but didn't drink, looking outside instead.

"Surround the area! If anything happens to my son, level this place to the ground!"

Chapter 174: Furious to the Point of Coughing Up Blood!

Before the words had even settled, a group of people rushed into the villa with a clamor. At the head of the group was a middle-aged man with a steady, commanding presence.

It was none other than Zhuang Yu of the Martial Alliance.

"Dad!"

Seeing Zhuang Yu appear, the young man kneeling in the courtyard brightened up and started to rise. This was Zhuang Qing, Zhuang Yu's son.

"Hmm?"

However, just as Zhuang Qing moved to stand, a single drawn-out syllable reached his ears.

THUD!

Zhuang Qing's expression changed, and he fell to his knees again. His face flushed red, and the venom in his eyes grew even thicker.

Damn you, boy. How dare you humiliate me like this? I'll tear you to pieces later!

When Wang Wu entered the villa, he saw Zhuang Qing and the two Elders kneeling on the ground. They looked extremely disheveled and appeared to be seriously injured. Wang Wu's eyes narrowed slightly.

That guy really has a death wish. To humiliate members of the Martial Alliance right in front of Zhuang Yu... let's see how he gets out of this!

Everyone's eyes were on Lin Mu. But Lin Mu remained calm, quietly sipping his tea.

Zhuang Yu's gaze immediately fell upon Lin Mu, who was seated in the host's chair. A cold light flickered in his otherwise placid eyes.

"You are Lin Mu?" His tone betrayed no emotion.

But Tian Boguang, standing nearby, felt a bone-chilling cold. He knew that this Elder Zhuang, a potential head of the River City Martial Alliance Branch, was radiating murderous intent.

Lin Mu watched Zhuang Yu calmly and replied, "I am."

"You have some nerve, insulting the Martial Alliance like this. Aren't you afraid of being reduced to dust?" Zhuang Yu's tone was icy, a trace of his aura already leaking out. He was at the peak of Internal Energy Mastery, his power even more consolidated than that of Elders Zhou and Chen.

"And you, Guan Chengye," Zhuang Yu continued, turning to him. "You were ordered to guard River City, yet you collude with this man to plot against the Martial Alliance. Do you not fear the Alliance's retribution?"

Zhuang Yu shot Guan Chengye a look, leveling a heavy accusation. The Martial Alliance was also under the jurisdiction of the Military Department, but it was not part of the same system as Guan Chengye. In some respects, the local Martial Alliance Branches had to obey orders from the regional military departments. However, Guan Chengye held a unique but not particularly high-ranking position in the Military Department, so Zhuang Yu spoke to him with little courtesy.

"How I conduct my business is none of your concern. As for you, Zhuang Yu, you should be in Jiangling. What are you doing here in River City? I have reason to suspect you've deserted your post. Perhaps I should ask the Military Department if the Jiangling Branch has become too idle."

Guan Chengye was no greenhorn. He had been forged in the crucible of battle and tempered by years in the Military Department. His temperament, methods, and resolve were far beyond those of an ordinary person. He wasn't about to be intimidated by a few words from Zhuang Yu and let the man seize the initiative.

On the contrary, his retort made Zhuang Yu's pupils constrict slightly.

Guan Chengye seized on this subtle change. "If I recall correctly, any member of the Martial Alliance at the rank of Elder or above requires a written order from the Martial Alliance Headquarters to conduct business across prefectures. Elder Zhuang, do you have such an order?"

Zhuang Yu snorted. "I naturally have an order to be in River City. General Guan need not concern himself with it."

Guan Chengye nodded, not bothering to press the issue.

Then, Zhuang Yu turned back to Lin Mu. Just as he was about to speak, Lin Mu interjected coolly, "Is there anything else? If not, you can go."

Zhuang Yu was speechless. So was the crowd. What did he mean by that? He was the one who had them come here. Now that they had arrived, he was telling them to leave? Was this some kind of joke?

Zhuang Yu's mouth twitched, his hands balling into tight fists at his sides.

At that moment, someone leaped out, pointing at Lin Mu's nose and bellowing, "Lin Mu, don't be so presumptuous!"

"If you continue this insolence, do you not fear being held accountable by the Martial Alliance?"

The speaker was none other than Wang Wu. Seeing Lin Mu again, the hatred in his heart could no longer be contained.

His future had once been bright. Once he cultivated his Internal Energy and became a Martial Artist, he could have soared through the ranks of the Martial Alliance, his journey along the Martial Way unimpeded. But all of it was destroyed because of Lin Mu, who shattered his Dantian, ruined his Martial Way, and turned him into a cripple.

He had thought this revenge impossible, but then his uncle had unexpectedly promised to let him claim it with his own hands. Now, seeing Lin Mu acting as arrogant and brazen as ever, Wang Wu finally lost control.

He jumped forward, shouting accusations at Lin Mu. His words were filled with a hatred so deep that not even all the water in the Three Rivers Area could wash it away.

"You hate me?" The smile vanished from Lin Mu's face as he looked at Wang Wu.

Wang Wu was stunned. Isn't that obvious? Of course, I hate you! I want you dead right now, but I also can't bear for you to die so easily. I want to torture you, make you suffer every torment imaginable, and watch you die in regret and despair.

"Yes, I hate you!" Wang Wu snarled through gritted teeth. "I want nothing more than to kill you with my own two hands!"

Lin Mu nodded. "But you're not capable."

Wang Wu's mouth twitched. He felt as if a hand had closed around his heart, squeezing it with unbearable pain.

Guan Jiaojiao looked at Wang Wu with pity, shaking her head with a sigh. Of all the people to provoke, he chose this one. What terrible karma did he accrue in a past life?

"You..." Wang Wu pointed at Lin Mu, too enraged to speak.

"Because you're trash." Lin Mu's tone was as calm as ever, devoid of mockery or disdain, as if he were merely stating a fact. "Tell me, how can a piece of trash get revenge?"

Wang Wu's expression contorted, his face darkening to the point it looked like blood might drip from it.

"Lin Mu, you... you've gone too far!"

Wang Wu gasped for breath, his heart hammering in his chest as his eyes gradually turned bloodshot.

"You think too highly of yourself," Lin Mu said casually. "Before, you were an ant in my eyes. Now, you don't even qualify as an ant."

"So, get lost."

The tone was utterly contemptuous, but Wang Wu was unable to retort. He pointed at Lin Mu, his entire body trembling. The crimson in his eyes deepened as he opened his mouth, gasping desperately for air.

Then...

PFFT!

A flash of pain crossed Wang Wu's face before he suddenly spewed a mouthful of blood and collapsed to the ground. His eyes were wide, his mouth opening and closing like a dying fish gasping for air on dry land. He stared up at the white clouds, feeling the world spin as if he were in a dream.

Trash! Ant! Get lost!

Each word was sharper than a blade, slicing his spirit and dignity to shreds.

"Xiao Wu!" Seeing Wang Wu vomit blood out of sheer rage, Tian Boguang's expression changed, and he rushed to check Wang Wu's pulse.

His face paled instantly.

Wang Wu's life force was fading rapidly. It was clear he wasn't going to make it.

"Trash," Zhuang Yu muttered, looking at Wang Wu with cold disdain. Just a worthless cripple whose Dantian was destroyed. Keeping him around was a waste of resources. His death simplifies things.

Tian Boguang glared at Lin Mu with bloodshot eyes and roared, "Boy, you have a venomous heart!"

Lin Mu merely gave him a cool glance and said icily, "It seems you've forgotten my warning."

Chapter 175: Ice Heart Sword Liu Su!

Tian Boguang was utterly shocked.

Many days ago, at the River City martial tournament, Lin Mu had warned that if Tian Boguang dared to set foot in River City, he would bring his sword north and raze Jiangling to the ground. That resounding warning still rang in his ears, and Tian Boguang's face instantly turned ashen.

He hadn't forgotten about it. He had only dismissed the threat because he had been suddenly recruited into the Martial Alliance and believed he had Lu Tong's backing. Besides, the strength Lin Mu had displayed back then wasn't particularly impressive, so Tian Boguang had treated it as a joke.

However, the news of Lin Mu's deeds in Wufeng Town had already spread throughout the Three Rivers Area. They had been on the road to River City and heard the news late. Still, with three Inner Strength experts in their party, they theoretically shouldn't have been afraid of a mere Lin Mu.

But when he saw Elders Zhou and Chen kneeling on the ground, their faces pale and their bodies trembling, Tian Boguang seemed to understand.

"I..." Tian Boguang opened his mouth, wanting to offer an explanation.

However, a grim aura instantly enveloped him.

"Since you're here, don't even think about leaving!"

As his words fell, Lin Mu flicked his wrist. The teacup in his hand shot toward Tian Boguang like a laser beam.

WHOOSH!

The teacup moved with incredible speed, its immense force generating a whistling sound. Not only did Tian Boguang's expression change, but Zhuang Yu's face also paled in shock. In that brief delay, the teacup whistled toward its target.

"How dare you!" Zhuang Yu roared, his aura flaring. He stepped forward, crossed his hands before his chest, and pushed.

BANG!

The moment he made his move, Zhuang Yu regretted it. An unbelievably powerful force erupted from the teacup, sending him flying backward.

COUGH, COUGH!

Zhuang Yu stumbled back several steps as the qi and blood roiled within him. His True Qi surged chaotically, causing immense discomfort. What was even more shocking was that the seemingly fragile teacup, having lost none of its momentum, spun and shot toward Tian Boguang once more.

Murderous intent surged!

"Boy, if you kill a member of the Martial Alliance, I will annihilate your entire family!" Zhuang Yu shouted, his face contorted and his eyes filled with rage.

Yet Lin Mu seemed unfazed. He just snorted lightly, and the teacup sped toward Tian Boguang even faster.

PFFT!

Tian Boguang felt a sharp pain in his chest. He looked down and saw a teacup-sized, bloody hole. Fresh blood poured from the wound, carrying his life force with it.

A chill ran through Tian Boguang as an overwhelming sense of pain and despair flooded his mind.

With a thud, he fell to the ground, dead.

Wang Wu was dead. Now, Tian Boguang was dead too.

More than a dozen members of the Martial Alliance had come, but at this moment, no one dared to step forward or utter a single word.

Zhuang Yu was also silent. He was drenched in sweat, his legs shaking uncontrollably. He stiffly turned his neck and saw a teacup embedded deep in the wall, less than three inches from his head. The tea inside was still steaming, without the slightest ripple on its surface.

Zhuang Yu swallowed hard. This technique of killing with a teacup was similar to a Martial Arts Grandmaster injuring someone with a plucked flower, but it was several orders of magnitude more difficult. For one, the force behind the teacup hadn't diminished in the slightest after he blocked it. More impressively, after killing a man, it still had enough power to embed itself in the wall without spilling a single drop of tea.

This level of control was something not even a typical Martial Arts Grandmaster could achieve!

Martial Arts Grandmasters are also divided into realms: Early Stage, Middle Stage, and the Perfection Stage. Grasping the true meaning of the Martial Way and achieving Qi Release marks one as an Early-Stage Grandmaster. Those whose Internal Energy is as dense as a wall and can be manipulated at will

are considered Middle-Stage. The Perfection Stage is reached when one's Internal Energy becomes imperceptible, controlled as if it were one's own limbs, returning to a state of simplicity and flawlessness. People who reach this realm are indistinguishable from ordinary folk unless they choose to display their Grandmaster techniques.

This Lin Mu, if not a Perfection-Stage Martial Arts Grandmaster, had to be at least Middle-Stage. He was several tiers above Senior Brother Lu Tong! How could River City produce such a powerful figure!

The shock in Zhuang Yu's heart was plain on his face. He looked at Lin Mu, swallowed again, and asked cautiously, "Lin... Lin Mu, what are you going to do? We're from the Martial Alliance."

Lin Mu rose to his feet and looked down at Zhuang Yu and the others from the steps. "I've said it before. In my eyes, the Martial Alliance is nothing."

He glanced at Tian Boguang's corpse. "I warned him that if he dared to set foot in River City, he would receive no mercy. He simply reaped what he sowed."

Zhuang Yu suppressed his anger and said in a low voice, "But he was still a member of our Martial Alliance. Now that you've killed him, surely you owe the Martial Alliance an explanation?"

Lin Mu laughed. "An explanation?"

His eyes glinted with a sharp light. "Do you think I'm good-tempered or easy to bully? You invade my home, yet you demand an explanation from me? What, has the Martial Alliance gotten so used to its lofty position that it thinks everyone should kneel and grovel before you?"

Lin Mu's tone was indifferent as he said, "If you truly believe that, then perhaps I should pick a day to pay a visit to your Jiangling Martial Alliance Branch!"

"You... How dare you!" Zhuang Yu burned with anger, pointing at Lin Mu. "So what if you're a Martial Arts Grandmaster? All land under heaven belongs to the sovereign! The Martial Alliance has been tasked with leading the entire Martial Arts World. Do you intend to defy that mandate?"

"TSK, TSK. Since when did the Martial Alliance have such authority?"

Just then, a mocking voice drifted in. "If I recall correctly, since its founding, the Martial Alliance has only ever had managerial rights, not any sort of commanding authority. Or has your Jiangling Martial Alliance Branch been granted such power?"

As the voice faded, a group of men and women in matching uniforms entered the villa. Most of them were young, each with an extraordinary temperament and an arrogant expression. They looked around with eyes full of disdain and contempt.

The leader was a woman in a cyan robe with a longsword strapped to her back. The moment she appeared, the entire villa was filled with a bone-chilling cold, as if she herself were its source.

"The Crane Immortal Sect's Ice Heart Sword, Liu Su!" Zhuang Yu sucked in a sharp breath. "What are you doing here?"

Liu Su cast a dismissive glance at Zhuang Yu, her eyes filled with disdain, before turning her gaze to Lin Mu. "I'm here for him," she said. "It has nothing to do with you."

Zhuang Yu's expression shifted, a gleam flashing in his eyes.

Ice Heart Sword Liu Su... she might look young, but she's nearly forty. She only looks like she's in her twenties because of youth-preserving techniques and meticulous care. But what's truly stunning isn't her age, it's her identity. She's the only daughter of Liu Qingshan, the Sect Leader of the Crane Immortal Sect. She began the Martial Way at five, reached External Strength at ten, Inner Strength at sixteen, and achieved Internal Energy Mastery by twenty. Decades have passed, and her current Cultivation Level is unknown. But what she's most famous for in the Martial Arts World is her swordsmanship, which is said to be unparalleled across three continents! When she draws her Ice Heart Sword, no one below the Grandmaster realm is her match! Her fame was sealed in a battle in Jiangling, where she single-handedly swept through the entire province. When she left, she uttered a line that is still remembered to this day: "There are no men in Jiangling!" That remark is considered a great humiliation by the entire Jiangling Martial Arts World!

Chapter 176: Take My Sword, and Let the Matter Rest!

In all of Jiangling, there is not a single worthy man!

Every time Zhuang Yu thought about this, he was overcome with a stifling frustration he could not vent. Because, over a decade ago, he too had stood on the arena, only to be kicked off the stage by Ice Heart Sword Liu Su. He hadn't even drawn his sword! More than a decade ago, he was also hailed as a prodigy of the Martial Arts World, yet he was no match for Liu Su, not even for a single exchange. He considered it a lifelong shame!

In the end, his senior brother, Lu Tong, took the stage and fought several rounds with Liu Su. Finally, finding it a bit boring, she abruptly drew her sword. Lu Tong immediately admitted defeat.

It was because both brothers had been defeated that Liu Su uttered that humiliating phrase.

Now, over a decade later, the two brothers had become leading figures in the Martial Arts World, controlling a Martial Alliance Branch and commanding great authority. However, that martial arts competition remained like a thorn lodged deep in their throats.

Now, Liu Su had come out of seclusion. Her words, laced with disdain and mockery, were like that same thorn piercing their throats again, drawing fresh blood.

And the reason for Liu Su's visit gave Zhuang Yu a pleasant surprise on top of his astonishment.

Liu Su is here for Lin Mu? That wouldn't be for a friendly visit.

Suddenly, Zhuang Yu thought of something, and a smile crept onto his face.

Liu Xianhe was nominally Liu Su's fiancé. Their marriage had been arranged many years ago, but with Liu Su focused on the Martial Way, she had declared they would only marry after both had achieved the rank of Martial Arts Grandmaster, thus delaying it repeatedly. Years had passed. While Liu Xianhe had become a Martial Arts Grandmaster, there had been little news from Liu Su. However, now that Liu Xianhe was dead at the hands of Lin Mu, was Liu Su here to demand retribution?

Zhuang Yu looked toward Lin Mu with a sense of schadenfreude.

As long as Lin Mu dies, my mission will be accomplished. Given the Crane Immortal Sect's status in the Martial Arts World, they likely wouldn't care about a mere River City. Then, I can logically establish a branch in River City and oversee its Martial Arts community.

"So, you're Lin Mu? The one who killed Martial Uncle Liu?"

A young man stepped forward, a sword on his back and dressed in a long robe, resembling a Sword Immortal from a painting. Moreover, his attitude was exceedingly arrogant; his gaze toward Lin Mu was filled with disdain and contempt. These disciples, taken in by the Ancient Martial Faction at a young age, regarded people of the secular world with a natural sense of superiority.

Seeing Lin Mu remain silent, the young man's face darkened. "I'm talking to you. Are you deaf?"

Lin Mu stood at the top of the steps, looking down at the youth. "Are you talking to me?" he asked indifferently.

His tone was emotionless, even listless, which to the young man's ears sounded like pure disregard.

The youth narrowed his eyes and spoke menacingly, "You ignorant fool. It seems you don't know what kind of existence you're speaking to."

As his voice fell, the youth slapped the longsword on his back.

CLANG!

The longsword unsheathed. Grasping it, he flicked his wrist and thrust it instantly toward Lin Mu's face.

I'll tear his mouth apart, shatter his teeth, and cut out his tongue. Let's see if he still dares to be so arrogant!

The longsword became a streak of cold light, its movement incredibly graceful.

"Brother Zheng's swordsmanship has improved again!"

"Of course! Brother Zheng is hailed as a once-in-a-century swordsmanship genius in our Crane Immortal Sect. His skills are naturally superb."

"Alas, I thought the gap between myself and Brother Zheng wasn't that large. But seeing him draw his sword, I now realize how conceited I've been."

The disciples of the Crane Immortal Sect showered him with praise. In the eyes of some of the young women, expressions of admiration and affection bloomed. The young men, however, looked dejected, yet also faintly excited.

"A swordsman must get stronger when facing the strong and would rather break than bend! If you lose that will to win, even ten or twenty years of training will be useless!" Liu Su suddenly said. Her gaze, however, was fixed on her disciple, and she nodded slightly, appearing satisfied. To have such a level of cultivation in the Sword Dao at his age is quite impressive.

Upon hearing Liu Su's words, the other disciples flinched and quickly murmured their agreement.

A cold smile played on the youth's face. His longsword, carrying a gust of wind, thrust forward without any regard for how insidious the move was, or that it could be fatal. Liu Su didn't speak to stop him. To her, he was a mere ant. If this was the extent of his strength, his death was of no consequence.

Guan Jiaojiao's eyes widened, her hands clenched tightly as worry filled her face.

Lin Mu's eyes narrowed slightly, a cold light flickering within them.

He simply raised his hand, extended two fingers, and swiftly reached out.

Seeing this, Brother Zheng was first startled, then he sneered coldly. Idiot! My sword may not compare to Master's Ice Heart Sword, but it is a rare and fine weapon. And this guy intends to catch it with his bare fingers? If that's not idiocy, what is?

Thinking this, Brother Zheng's thrust became even faster.

BANG!

But in the next second, Brother Zheng's expression changed. His sword had been caught between two fingers.

The members of the Crane Immortal Sect were stunned, all amazed that Lin Mu had caught Brother Zheng's sword. Zhuang Yu's expression, however, remained unchanged.

This youth's talent isn't bad, but he's only just reached the External Strength level at most. Did he really think he could injure Lin Mu with a single strike? Nothing but a pipe dream.

"To be so vicious at such a young age. It seems your elders are no good either," Lin Mu said, his tone detached and merciless as his fingers held the blade fast.

The young man's expression changed drastically, as did those of the other Crane Immortal Sect disciples. A sharp glint appeared in Liu Su's eyes as well.

"You're seeking death!" Brother Zheng roared, trying to yank his sword back with all his might.

But the longsword didn't move. His opponent's fingers were like the sturdiest of vises, completely immovable.

"Let go!" the young man shouted, his face flushing red as he strained with all his strength.

Lin Mu slowly shook his head and flicked the blade. "If you want to kill people, practice your martial arts first. Otherwise, you might get killed yourself with no one to turn to for justice."

CLANG!

The sword vibrated violently. The youth cried out in alarm and stumbled backward.

CRACK!

The longsword in his hand shattered into several pieces.

Staring at the broken sword on the ground, the young man seemed dazed. His eyes were red, and he was struggling to control his emotions.

"Considering your youth, I won't kill you today," Lin Mu said faintly, his hands behind his back. "But if there is a next time, you will not be spared!"

The young man shuddered and retreated behind Liu Su, tears immediately streaming from his eyes.

"If you're not good enough to win, don't stand there blubbering about it!" Liu Su snorted coldly. The young man instantly wiped his tears, not daring to cry any longer.

Liu Su stepped forward and gave Lin Mu a fist-and-palm salute. "Thank you for sparing my disciple's life."

Immediately after, a cold aura emanated from her, her presence becoming misty. "However, Liu Xianhe was, after all, an Elder of my Crane Immortal Sect. He is dead, and you must answer for it."

Lin Mu said indifferently, "What kind of answer do you want?"

"Withstand one strike from my sword, and this matter is settled!"

Chapter 177: True Qi Condensation, Protective Gang Qi!

"Take one strike from my sword, and this matter is settled?"

How skilled was Liu Su's swordsmanship? Others might not know, but Zhuang Yu knew best. Otherwise, the saying, "In Jiangling, there is not one man," wouldn't have circulated to this day. Nor would Liu Su have been able to suppress all of Jiangling with just her sword, remaining undefeated.

Back then, although the older generation of experts were too proud to intervene, Liu Su was unmatched in strength among her peers. Now, more than a decade later, her strength and swordsmanship must have risen by countless levels.

So, could Lin Mu be her opponent? Zhuang Yu waited eagerly to see.

As for Guan Chengye, he wanted to say something, but when he opened his mouth, he didn't know how to begin. Although he was a Martial Artist, he wasn't part of the Martial Arts World. The Martial Arts World had its own rules.

Today, Liu Su had challenged Lin Mu with her sword. If Lin Mu accepted, the matter with Liu Xianhe would be settled, with no debts owed on either side. But if Lin Mu can't take it, the consequences...

No matter how confident Guan Chengye was in Lin Mu's strength, he couldn't help but feel his resolve waver. Female martial artists were already a rarity in the Martial Way, and one with Liu Su's temperament and way of speaking was even rarer. Judging by Zhuang Yu's earlier reaction, this woman must be extraordinary.

Guan Chengye glanced at Lin Mu, his heart a tangle of complex emotions. This whole affair, after all, started because of my Guan Family. By all rights, I should be the one to bear the responsibility.

Thinking this, Guan Chengye stood up and moved to Lin Mu's side, about to speak. However, before a word could escape his lips, a hand stopped him.

"Take one strike from you?" Lin Mu looked at Liu Su and shook his head. "You're too weak. Go train for another ten years. Perhaps then you'll be qualified to challenge me."

Guan Chengye: "..."

Zhuang Yu: "..."

Everyone: "..."

"Arrogant fool!"

"Utterly shameless!"

Before Liu Su could even speak, her disciples began to rail against him, with Brother Zheng being the loudest. "Who do you think you are? You think beating me makes you better than my Master? What a joke!"

"If my Master were to act, even a wisp of her Sword Qi would be enough to kill you!"

"..."

Facing the torrent of accusations, Lin Mu's expression remained unchanged. He simply shook his head slowly while looking at Liu Su. "It's not impossible for you to challenge me, but you'll have to defeat her first."

Beside Lin Mu, someone shivered and pointed a finger at herself.

"Me?" Guan Jiaojiao's beautiful eyes widened in utter disbelief.

It wasn't just her; everyone felt the same.

"That's right." Lin Mu nodded, confirming what she'd said.

Guan Jiaojiao immediately jumped to her feet, waving her hands frantically. "No, how can this be? I can't do it." She was not only shocked but terrified. She didn't know any martial arts; if her opponent struck her with a sword, she would probably die.

Guan Chengye's expression also changed. "Young friend Lin, this..."

"Elder Guan, rest assured. I have my own plan," Lin Mu said with a faint smile, his gaze returning to Liu Su. "Think carefully before you answer me."

Liu Su stared fixedly at Lin Mu, a ripple of emotion disturbing her bright eyes.

"Are you insulting me?!" Liu Su uttered each word through clenched teeth, looking as if she wanted nothing more than to cut him down on the spot.

Lin Mu shook his head. "I have no intention of insulting you, but in my eyes, you are indeed too weak. I'm afraid I might accidentally injure you."

As soon as he said this, the disciples of the Crane Immortal Sect gasped. This man—does he know what he's saying? To think our Master is too weak? He's afraid of injuring our Master?

"How outrageous!" a female disciple cried out, flushed with shame and anger. With a sharp sound, she unsheathed her longsword and pointed it at Lin Mu. "I'll cut you down!"

She pushed off the ground with her toes, her body leaping gracefully as she thrust her blade at Lin Mu.

"Stop!" Liu Su's expression shifted slightly as she tried to call her back.

But it was too late. The young woman was quite fast, and the distance to Lin Mu was short. She arrived before him in an instant, bringing her sword down.

Lin Mu didn't even look at her. He merely lifted a hand and flicked a finger.

CLANG!

With a light ring, the young woman cried out in shock as her longsword was sent flying, landing askew in the ground. After landing, she stumbled back several steps, about to fall.

Liu Su let out a soft huff and moved with light steps, appearing behind the disciple in two strides. She placed a hand on her shoulder, helping her steady herself.

"Hmph."

Although the young woman was now steady, the shock had roiled her qi and blood, and her face was a little pale. At least she wasn't injured. She looked up, staring at Lin Mu in horror. Her small face was a mask of pure shock. He's so strong!

"This is getting tedious." Lin Mu waved a hand with some irritation. Looking at Liu Su, he said, "Stop sending your disciples one by one to make fools of themselves. If you want a fight, I'll fight you."

"You said this matter would be over if I took one strike from you, didn't you? Let's begin."

Sensing the impatience in his tone, Liu Su's expression changed, and she let out a cold snort. "You want to fight now? I refuse."

Her gaze swept across the courtyard, and the corner of her mouth curled up. "I'll be back tomorrow."

With that, Liu Su waved her hand. "Let's go."

Zhuang Yu and the others were stunned. The disciples of the Crane Immortal Sect were leaving? This Lin Mu is really lucky. I thought for sure today would be the day he'd suffer a downfall, but that Liu Su... she's as capricious as they come.

"What, do you think this place is somewhere you can come and go as you please?"

However, just as Liu Su and her group were about to depart, Lin Mu made it clear he wasn't going to let them leave so easily. Qin Luoli needed time to recover from her injuries, and Lin Mu needed to find the medicinal herbs for the Ever Youth Pill. If these people were to show up and provoke him time and time again, he simply wouldn't have the time.

Therefore, Lin Mu decided to make a decisive show of force to intimidate the Martial Alliance and this Crane Immortal Sect.

At Lin Mu's words, Liu Su's steps halted as promised. She turned, her brows furrowed. Her eyebrows, as sharp as swords, trembled slightly.

"Are you courting death?"

As her words fell, the temperature within a radius of dozens of meters plummeted. The sky turned a hazy white, and a bone-chilling cold descended from above.

CHING!

A crisp sword cry rang out. In an instant, a majestic Sword Intent erupted from a single point.

SIZZLE!

The flowers and trees in the courtyard were sheared apart by the invisible Sword Qi, and numerous sword marks scarred the ground.

CLANG!

With a flash of cold light, a streak of white light shot out from the dense mist, slashing directly at Lin Mu. It was a manifestation of Sword Intent, filled with a glacial, grim aura.

Guan Chengye was standing very close and felt its power most deeply. His face changed. He knew he could not withstand that Sword Intent.

Zhuang Yu's expression was no better. Though he could likely take it, he would be left in a sorry state. Has Liu Su already become this strong? Now, all that was left was to see if Lin Mu could withstand it. A cold smirk once again touched Zhuang Yu's lips.

The Sword Intent descended swiftly, aimed directly at Lin Mu.

Just as everyone assumed Lin Mu would either shatter the Sword Intent with a powerful technique or evade it with nimble footwork, he did the unexpected. He stood perfectly still, allowing the Sword Intent to fall upon him.

CLANG!

However, with a clear ringing sound, the Sword Intent was repelled by an invisible force before it could even touch him.

"That's..."

"Condensed True Qi! It's Protective Gang Qi!"

Chapter 178: The Romantic Lady!

"Protective Gang Qi! Only a Grandmaster can manifest that!" Liu Su's expression turned serious, and with a soft hiss, she thrust her sword forward once more.

"This..." Guan Chengye was stunned. Just as he was about to speak, Liu Su's cold voice cut through the air.

"Since you claim to be a Grandmaster, then face another one of my strikes!"

CLANG!

The Sword Intent rang out, sharp and chilling, making the air feel even colder. A Hundred-Color Longsword materialized before everyone. Its three-foot Qing Feng blade, coated in frost, emanated a cold and powerful Sword Intent.

What terrifying Sword Intent! Zhuang Yu's face was stricken with horror. Forget about blocking that strike; surviving it at all would be a miracle.

The disciples of the Crane Immortal Sect, however, were thrilled. The young men and women clenched their fists, silently cheering for their master. Guan Jiaojiao's face was pale, worried that Lin Mu couldn't possibly handle such an attack.

"Be careful!" Liu Su warned, her wrist flicking as she brought the sword down.

CRACK! CRACK!

Tiny, perfectly neat fissures spiderwebbed across the ground.

"The sword is good, but the wielder's strength is a bit lacking," Lin Mu suddenly said. Without any perceptible motion, he simply raised a hand and brought two fingers together. "Freeze."

Just like that, the frost-covered longsword hovered three inches from Lin Mu's face, unable to advance any further.

Liu Su's expression changed, her eyes filled with disbelief. She bit her lip, and an immense aura erupted from within her, sweeping out in all directions.

"A Half-step Grandmaster!" Zhuang Yu cried out, his face a mask of shock.

He had suspected as much, but to feel the true depth of Liu Su's power still made his heart pound. He hadn't seen her in over a decade, and she had already reached this level. A Half-step Grandmaster was on par with his own senior brother, Lu Tong.

And she was a woman! A female Grandmaster, in any dynasty or era, was an unparalleled genius worthy of being recorded in the annals of history.

Wait... something about her Half-step Grandmaster aura seems... incomplete.

As Liu Su's Internal Energy surged, she let out another soft hiss, and her Sword Intent intensified. The longsword, frozen in midair, began to tremble violently as a frigid wave rushed toward Lin Mu.

Lin Mu's brow furrowed.

This Liu Su is quite relentless. If that's how she wants to play it...

BOOM!

An intimidating presence instantly burst forth from Lin Mu. Being the closest, Guan Chengye and Guan Jiaojiao felt it most profoundly. An incredibly terrifying Sword Intent was pouring out of Lin Mu. It was vastly different from Liu Su's—it was filled with a sharp, boundless power, making them feel as if they were facing a true Sword Immortal.

With no time for further thought, Guan Chengye grabbed Guan Jiaojiao and retreated frantically. They only felt a sliver of relief when their backs hit the wall, but the piercing, razor-sharp Sword Intent from Lin Mu continued to wash over them like a tide of fire.

"What a terrifying Sword Intent," Guan Chengye muttered, his eyes wide with shock. He was, once again, completely stunned by Lin Mu's capabilities.

Guan Jiaojiao, on the other hand, was utterly captivated. In her eyes, Lin Mu was like an omnipotent god.

But of everyone in the courtyard, the most shaken was Liu Su. As a sword cultivator herself, she was extremely sensitive to Sword Intent. The moment Lin Mu's Sword Intent had erupted, a primal fear gripped her, and she had the overwhelming urge to flee. Yet, at the same time, a stubborn pride surged from deep within her, and her gaze grew resolute.

Why is it that men can reach the pinnacle of the Martial Way, but women cannot? Why can men tread this path, while women are expected to stay home, serve their husbands, and raise children? I refuse to accept it! In this life, I, Liu Su, will walk the Martial Way, become a Grandmaster, and trample all of you men under my feet!

And so, Liu Su had stepped onto the Martial Way at the age of five, achieved External Strength at ten, entered the realm of Inner Strength at sixteen, and attained Internal Energy Mastery by twenty. Now,

not yet forty, she was only a hair's breadth away from the Half-step Grandmaster realm. Throughout history, how many men could boast such an achievement?

Years ago, she had battled her way through an entire region with a single sword, earning the name Ice Heart Sword Liu Su. Today, she had emerged from her seclusion not to avenge Liu Xianhe, but to let the Martial Arts World know that a female Grandmaster like her existed!

As indignation and ambition warred in her heart, Liu Su felt her Internal Energy circulate with even greater smoothness. Under the pressure of that sharp and fierce Sword Intent, her own Sword Intent slowly weakened, yet it grew more solid, more pure. With her True Yuan flowing freely and her Sword Intent consolidating, Liu Su felt a vast power surge from her chest, rushing up her throat before bursting forth.

"HA!"

A cry that seemed to shake the heavens echoed out. Zhuang Yu and his men stumbled backward. Weaker cultivators like Zhuang Qing were sent flying, spitting out mouthfuls of blood.

In the entire courtyard, only two people remained standing.

Liu Su stood with her arms at her sides, her eyes lightly closed, her body trembling faintly. Her disciples, worried, started to move forward to check on her but were held back by their companions. Zhuang Yu's expression flickered, and he too almost stepped forward, but a cold glare locked him in place. He froze, a cold sweat breaking out all over his body.

BOOM!

A moment later, a muffled sound came from within Liu Su. Her eyes snapped open. A volcanic aura briefly flared to life before vanishing completely.

Lifting her head, Liu Su looked at the calm figure of Lin Mu, who stood on the steps with his hands behind his back. Her expression was complicated as she cupped her fist and bowed.

"Liu Su of the Crane Immortal Sect thanks Master Lin for granting this opportunity."

Just moments ago, when Lin Mu had unleashed his Sword Intent, Liu Su was sure she was going to die. But at the critical moment, he had retracted his power just enough to allow her to break through and take that final, crucial step. Her True Yuan now flowed as she willed it, and her Sword Intent was contained within her, giving her an air of profound simplicity.

Finally, on the brink of death, Liu Su had broken through to the Half-step Grandmaster realm. And it was all because of the man standing before her.

Therefore, her bow was one of sincere, heartfelt submission, filled with both relief and gratitude.

Lin Mu accepted it calmly.

Liu Su hesitated for a moment before asking, "Master Lin, could you tell me... what was that Sword Intent?"

"That was the Infinite Sword Intent," Lin Mu replied slowly. "Now that you have used my Sword Intent to achieve your breakthrough, you should contemplate its true meaning and strive to enter the Grandmaster realm soon."

He had initially planned to teach the woman a lesson, but at the critical moment, he had seen her unyielding martial spirit and ambition that could rival any man's. So, Lin Mu simply went with the flow, using his Sword Intent to force her breakthrough while also allowing her to comprehend a sliver of the essence of the Infinite Sword Intent. As long as Liu Su wasn't a fool, it was only a matter of time before she became a true Grandmaster.

Liu Su understood this as well. That Sword Intent was the opportunity of a lifetime. Realizing this, she bowed deeply to Lin Mu once more. "Thank you, Master Lin, for the gift of your Sword Intent."

Everyone present was dumbfounded. Liu Su's disciples, in particular, found the scene completely surreal. Their master had come to teach the man a lesson, so how had it ended with her thanking and bowing to him? Brother Zheng opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but he sensed a change in his master and didn't dare to speak.

As for Zhuang Yu and the others, they were so terrified they didn't even dare to breathe too loudly. To help someone achieve a breakthrough to the Half-step Grandmaster realm with nothing but a display of Sword Intent... just who in the world was this Lin Mu?

Liu Su glanced at Zhuang Yu, raised an eyebrow, and said, "Master Lin, would you like me to get rid of these people for you?"

Zhuang Yu was instantly on high alert.

"No need." Lin Mu shook his head. Liu Su was merely trying to repay the favor, but Zhuang Yu and his followers weren't even worth his notice.

"In that case, I will take my leave," Liu Su said. She offered one more martial salute, then turned and left with a graceful air.

When she reached the gate, she paused and turned her head slightly. "In as little as a year or two, or as long as three to five years, I, Liu Su, will certainly seek Master Lin's guidance again!"

With that, she strode away without a second glance.

Who says only men can be gallant heroes? There are women who can rival any man.

Chapter 179 Green Spirit Fruit!

Not until Liu Su had left did Zhuang Yu cast his gaze upward, just in time to meet a pair of indifferent and unfeeling eyes.

Zhuang Yu shuddered and was about to bow with trembling hands, but Lin Mu couldn't be bothered with idle talk.

With a wave of his hand, an immense force suddenly swept through and struck Zhuang Yu.

BANG!

With a muffled thud, Zhuang Yu felt as if he had been hit by a speeding truck, his body flying straight out of the villa. He landed hard on the ground, spitting out a mouthful of blood. His body ached, feeling weak as all his True Qi vanished.

"Since you came here to cause trouble, you must be punished," Lin Mu's voice came from the villa, carrying an unmistakable air of authority. "I am sealing your True Yuan. When I have some free time, I will personally pay a visit to Jiangling!"

As soon as he finished speaking, several loud thuds followed. Zhuang Qing and the others were thrown out of the villa, screaming in pain.

Zhuang Yu knew this was Lin Mu's warning, but he dared not show any defiance. He quickly scrambled up and bowed toward the villa.

"Today, Zhuang Yu was rash. I will go to the Martial Alliance to accept my punishment. I hope Master Lin..."

An impatient voice cut him off, "Scram!"

The low shout was deafening. Zhuang Yu dared not linger any longer and had to leave in disgrace with his men from the Martial Alliance.

"Father, are we just leaving like this?" Zhuang Qing rubbed his painfully throbbing chest and glanced at the tranquil bamboo courtyard, his eyes flashing with venomous resentment.

SLAP!

He had thought his father would stand up for him, but instead, Zhuang Yu slapped him hard across the face.

"You fool, what are you thinking?" Zhuang Yu's tone was filled with a mix of terror and the lingering fear of someone who had just survived a catastrophe. He raged, "If you want to die, I can't save you!"

The sharp slap finally knocked some sense into Zhuang Qing.

The young man in the villa is no kind soul; he kills at the slightest provocation. Haven't we already seen Tian Boguang and Wang Wu turned into corpses?

So, Zhuang Qing dared not say another word. He just lowered his head in silence, his heart filled with terror.

Zhuang Yu muttered to himself, "Not only did we fail our mission, but we also offended a Martial Arts Grandmaster. I must find a way to make amends!"

"Zhuang Yang."

"Present!" A burly man stepped forward, awaiting Zhuang Yu's orders.

Zhuang Yu pondered for a moment before saying, "Take some men to Jiangling immediately. Tell the Hall Master everything exactly as it happened. I'll stay here to see if there's any chance to salvage this."

"Second Uncle..." Zhuang Yang hesitated, instinctively wanting to refuse.

Go back? With the Hall Master's temperament, they would surely suffer.

Zhuang Yu sighed. "Don't worry, the Hall Master won't make things difficult for you. This isn't your fault." He seemed to remember something and added, "I'll call ahead. Just go and tell them the truth."

Zhuang Yang finally relented. "Alright then. But Second Uncle, isn't it too dangerous for you to stay here?"

That Master Lin's power is so terrifying that even the Hall Master might be no match for him. It's too dangerous for Second Uncle to stay here.

Zhuang Yu gave a wry smile. "If I just leave like this, there will be no room to ease the tension."

"Luckily, I brought a few things with me. I can only hope they are enough to catch Master Lin's eye."

「In the courtyard.」

Lin Mu turned and sat down. Guan Jiaojiao went to find someone to clean up, while Guan Chengye hesitated, wanting to speak but holding back.

"Elder Guan, if you have something to say, just say it," Lin Mu said with a smile.

"Mr. Lin," Guan Chengye said with a wry smile, "you really don't need to have such a tense relationship with the Martial Alliance."

Lin Mu raised an eyebrow. "And why is that? Can the Jiangling branch really do anything to me?"

Guan Chengye sighed heavily. "Since ancient times, those in power have never liked vigilantes who use martial arts to defy the law."

"This dislike stems from fear. Martial Arts Grandmasters possess immense destructive power. If they rely on their own strength and act willfully, the consequences for ordinary people would be severe, not only hindering governance but also causing unnecessary trouble."

"The Martial Alliance was originally established precisely to prevent martial artists from acting recklessly and affecting the affairs of the nation."

"At the same time, it serves as a gathering place for martial artists to share resources."

At this point, Guan Chengye gave a self-deprecating laugh. "Although nowadays there are parasites within the Martial Alliance who are unfit for their positions, and it has developed a somewhat capitalistic atmosphere, it's still a good institution overall."

Lin Mu listened quietly without speaking.

Guan Chengye got straight to the point. "I know that you are extraordinarily powerful, Mr. Lin, and that you have your own principles. However, making an enemy of the Martial Alliance is not a wise choice."

He continued in a solemn tone, "After all, the Martial Alliance has existed for a long time and has gathered geniuses from all over the world. Over the years, who knows how many powerful experts have joined its ranks."

"Even some Ancient Martial Factions answer to the Martial Alliance. If they were to strike at you in anger, the consequences would be unimaginable."

This was Guan Chengye's greatest concern. As a prominent national figure, he naturally prioritized matters of the state above all else. Lin Mu's talent in the Martial Way was a rarity in the world, and his strength was unfathomable. A conflict between him and the Martial Alliance was the last thing Guan Chengye wanted to see.

Perhaps Lin Mu was immensely powerful, but the Martial Alliance was teeming with talent. In the end, even he would be unable to fight them all off alone.

Moreover, deep down, he hoped Lin Mu would join the Martial Alliance, or even the Military Department. For Lin Mu and for the entire nation, that would be the perfect outcome. But given Lin Mu's current opinion of the Martial Alliance, that path was likely to be fraught with setbacks.

Thinking of this, the old man sighed heavily once again.

Lin Mu chuckled. "Elder Guan, your words truly come from the heart."

After a pause, he added, "If the Martial Alliance knows what's good for them, I can let this go. But if they push their luck, they shouldn't blame me for being heartless!"

The sharp edge in his voice made even Guan Chengye shiver.

In the end, the Martial Alliance is the one in the wrong, Guan Chengye thought. I'll have to swallow my pride and contact my old superior when I get back to recommend Lin Mu.

That night, after Qin Luoli had gone to sleep, Lin Mu left the villa alone and headed for Hundred Herbs Hall.

Ning Xian had already been notified of Lin Mu's visit and was waiting for him.

"Mr. Lin," Ning Xian said with a bow. "Congratulations on becoming the Master of the Three Rivers."

Lin Mu waved his hand and produced a piece of paper. "See how many of these medicinal ingredients you can gather."

Ning Xian's expression turned serious as he took the list. Upon seeing the contents, his hands trembled.

"Hundred Fragrance Fruit, Qilin Grass, Beauty Flower..."

"Mr. Lin," Ning Xian said, "these are all extremely rare. We don't have much of a stock."

He paused for a moment before adding, "However, we did just receive a fruit today that looks similar to the Hundred Fragrance Fruit on your list, but I can't be sure..."

Lin Mu's eyes lit up. "Bring it to me."

Ning Xian immediately sent someone to fetch the fruit. It was brought out in a small wooden box. The fruit itself was the size of a walnut and entirely green, with no other remarkable features.

However, the moment Lin Mu saw it, his eyes lit up.

"A Green Spirit Fruit!"

Chapter 180: Tiger's Lair Mountain!

"Green Spirit Fruit?"

Ning Xian's face showed some confusion. "Mr. Lin, isn't this the Hundred Fragrance Fruit?"

Lin Mu smiled. "It's just a different name."

The Green Spirit Fruit was a common spirit fruit in the Cultivation World. It was also an indispensable ingredient for refining the Ever Youth Pill.

Originally, Lin Mu thought that due to the scarcity of Spiritual Energy on Earth, the Green Spirit Fruit would be hard to find, so he had planned to use the Hundred Fragrance Fruit as a substitute. To his surprise, he had stumbled upon a genuine Green Spirit Fruit right here at the Hundred Herbs Hall.

This will save me a lot of time. As long as I collect one more herb, I'm very confident that I can concoct the Ever Youth Pill. And this final key ingredient grows alongside the Green Spirit Fruit; it has to be within a hundred meters of it.

At this thought, Lin Mu asked, "Do you know who sold this Green Spirit Fruit? Can you still contact them?"

Ning Xian replied, "I'll have to ask."

A moment later, an apprentice from the Hundred Herbs Hall came over and explained anxiously, "This Hundred Fragrance Fruit was picked by an uncle from my hometown. I bought it because of its unique fragrance and calming effects."

The Hundred Fragrance Fruit wasn't an overly precious herb, and the apprentice had only wanted to help his uncle, so he had purchased it for a few hundred yuan.

Now that Mr. Ning is asking about it, will he make me reimburse the cost? the apprentice wondered nervously.

Lin Mu chuckled. "Don't be nervous. I just want to know if he has any more of this Hundred Fragrance Fruit."

The apprentice was startled and glanced at Ning Xian.

"I told you to speak, so speak," Ning Xian glared.

The apprentice hurriedly said, "Yes, my uncle mentioned he picked them from the mountains behind our home. He said there are quite a lot of them, but the mountains are steep and densely forested, and wild beasts often roam there, so he doesn't dare venture too deep."

Lin Mu's interest was piqued. "Could you help me contact your uncle and ask if he'd take me there?"

"This..."

The apprentice glanced at Mr. Lin, and then a stroke of inspiration hit him. "Yes, yes! I'll contact my uncle right away."

He immediately made a phone call.

A few minutes later, the apprentice said excitedly, "Mr. Lin, my uncle is in River City right now, but he's heading home this afternoon. I've explained the situation, and he said that if it's not too much trouble, he can take you into the mountains. It's just..."

Lin Mu immediately cut in, "Don't worry. Whether we find anything or not, I will give him a generous fee for his trouble."

"Yes, yes! I'll tell my uncle right away."

The apprentice nodded excitedly and contacted his uncle again.

And so, they decided to head to the apprentice's hometown immediately.

「Qinxian Town, Hengtai Township, Tiger Residence Village.」

This was a small village under the jurisdiction of River City with extremely inconvenient transportation. The winding journey took almost five hours. Huang Laoshi was a native of Tiger Residence Village. Having been born and raised here, he knew the area like the back of his hand.

"This... Sir, don't look down on us for being poor. In the past, this was one of the biggest and most renowned villages in River City, and it produced a lot of famous people," Huang Laoshi began, his teeth stained yellow and trouser legs caked in mud. He took a long drag from his rustic tobacco pipe as he spoke. "The most famous was General Huang Weihu, from over two hundred years ago. He was an invincible military leader. After he died in battle, he was buried in the mountains behind Tiger Residence Village."

Pointing to a large mountain ahead, Huang Laoshi continued, "In recent years, quite a few people like you have come to the mountains to hunt for treasure. They say General Huang Weihu acquired a valuable artifact that was buried with him."

"How could that be?" Huang Laoshi chuckled, a mix of rustic simplicity and shrewdness in his expression. "If that were true, he would have offered it to the Emperor long ago. Why would it be buried with him? Those treasure hunters never found anything. Instead, many of them were eaten by the monsters in the mountains."

Lin Mu surveyed the formidable Tiger's Lair Mountain before him. It was steep and menacing, like a mighty tiger crouching in wait, faintly emanating an invisible, commanding presence.

Lin Mu narrowed his eyes. "You said there are monsters in these mountains?"

A flicker of fear appeared in Huang Laoshi's eyes. He smacked his lips and said, "That's right. This Tiger's Lair Mountain is tall, densely forested, and has treacherous cliffs. There are quite a few monsters, you know."

Adopting an air of mystery, Huang Laoshi leaned in. "I've heard the old folks in the village say that these monsters are the Tomb-guarding Divine Beasts of General Huang Weihu. They say if anyone dares to disrespect the General in the mountains, the Divine Beasts will come out and eat them."

Lin Mu laughed. "Rumors aren't always true."

Huang Laoshi's expression changed drastically. He frantically waved his hands. "You can't say things like that!"

He glanced around nervously, terrified that the so-called divine beasts might be listening.

Lin Mu just smiled, unconcerned.

"Let's go. Into the mountain."

He took the lead, heading towards Tiger's Lair Mountain. "Don't worry," Lin Mu added, wanting to put Huang Laoshi's mind at ease. "You'll get the full reward I promised. If we run into danger, you can turn back."

"That's great! That's really great!" Huang Laoshi chuckled, his spirits lifted, and he scurried to the front to lead the way.

As they walked, Huang Laoshi kept up a running commentary. "That Hundred Fragrance Fruit may not be a precious herb, but the ones you find elsewhere are all artificially cultivated. They're nothing compared to the wild ones from our Tiger's Lair Mountain," he said with a smile. "It's just that the place where they grow is a bit dangerous and often prowled by large beasts, so very few people can get there."

At this, Huang Laoshi sighed. "If my wife wasn't seriously ill and in constant need of medicine, I wouldn't venture into the mountains to gather herbs and find the Hundred Fragrance Fruit either."

Lin Mu mostly just nodded, occasionally asking a question about the Hundred Fragrance Fruit. For the most part, Huang Laoshi was left talking to himself. After rambling for a while, he figured that the man

beside him was either not very talkative or was too tired from the difficult mountain path to have the energy to speak. He didn't dwell on it. In his mind, Lin Mu was just a typical city person out for a leisurely mountain hike, unaccustomed to hardship or mountain trails. Understanding this, Huang Laoshi consciously slowed his pace.

After walking for over an hour, he grew worried that Lin Mu couldn't hold out much longer and was about to suggest a rest. He wasn't tired himself, but he was concerned that if he went too fast for Lin Mu to keep up, the man might not say anything but would hold it against him and dock his pay. To his surprise, however, Lin Mu showed no signs of fatigue; his expression hadn't changed in the slightest. His breathing was steady, his steps were even, and there wasn't a single bead of sweat on his brow.

How strange! Huang Laoshi thought to himself, a competitive spark igniting within him. He, Huang Laoshi, went into these mountains at least twice a month and was well-used to the paths. He wasn't about to be outdone by some city slicker.

They walked for another hour. By now, even Huang Laoshi, whose physical fitness was decent from years of farm work, was starting to feel the strain. But Lin Mu still looked as calm and composed as ever.

It's infuriating! Could it be that this gentleman hikes so often he's already developed a robust constitution?

Wiping the sweat from his forehead, Huang Laoshi pointed to a hollow in the distance. "We'll be there after we cross two more mountains."

He glanced at the sky. It was past noon, and the sun was getting hot. "We should pick up the pace, so we can get back down before dark."