

War God 531

Chapter 531: Turning Decay into Magic!

"Just you wait!" Alice clenched her fists tightly. "I swear I'll make you willingly take me as your disciple!"

"Good. Then take the first step of your 500-mile journey now."

After Lin Mu finished speaking, he picked Alice up and threw her off the Chu Family's Back Mountain.

"AAAAH!"

A scream pierced the night sky as a figure soared through the air.

Alice landed on the road and quickly checked herself over. Thankfully, she wasn't injured, but her face was ashen with lingering fear.

"Dammit, that was barbaric!" Alice glared back at the mountain and raised her fist. "Once I'm strong enough, I will get my revenge!"

"Haha, let's see you walk to Suzhou first," Lin Mu's voice clearly reached her ears. "I'll hold on to your ID and wallet for you. I'll give them back when this is over."

"Remember, from this moment on, you don't have a single cent. If you starve or die of exhaustion on the road, I'll collect your corpse."

"Of course, if someone kills you, I will avenge you."

Lin Mu's voice carried a hint of indifference. "But remember, if you really die halfway, don't blame anyone else. This was your choice!"

Hearing Lin Mu's words, Alice's expression flickered. She quickly took a deep breath, a determined light filling her eyes. "I can definitely do it! You can do this, Alice!"

However, when Alice prepared to take her first step, she froze.

Because... she didn't know which way to go.

What a jerk. He didn't even give me a map. I'm definitely going to get lost...

...

Lin Mu simply ignored all of Alice's complaints.

He had left a trace of Divine Sense on her, so if she tried to use any form of transportation, he would sense the increase in her speed. That would prove she had failed the trial. Furthermore, he would also be able to sense it if Alice encountered any danger.

Of course, he didn't actually care if she lived or died. It was merely to make it more convenient to collect her corpse.

Forcing Alice to walk hundreds of kilometers wasn't Lin Mu's attempt to deliberately torment her.

This was a Path of Heart Refinement! It was a journey that tested one's determination, Dao heart, willpower, and even their ability to endure loneliness.

Anyone who wished to pursue Cultivation had to possess these latent qualities.

It was the same kind of crucible faced by the monk Tripitaka and his disciples on their Journey to the West—a path meant to temper their hearts, starve their bodies, toil their minds, and fortify their wills. For a foreigner like Alice, such a trial would be immensely beneficial.

After dealing with Alice, Spirit Seer awoke.

Spirit Seer's eyes flew open, flashing with a brilliant light as a terrifying aura emanated from his body. It seemed he had completely mastered his new physical form.

"Spirit Seer thanks you for this great kindness, Master!"

The moment he awoke, Spirit Seer knelt and kowtowed three times to Lin Mu. The bows were utterly sincere, marking his complete acknowledgment of Lin Mu as his master. Beyond Lin Mu's various astonishing abilities, the simple act of restoring his body and teaching him secret techniques was enough to earn Spirit Seer's undying gratitude.

"Hmph." Lin Mu said, brandishing the Soul Communion Realm in his hand. "Where did you get this?"

Although it was only a replica, even in the Cultivation World, this Soul Communion Realm would require a cultivator at the Golden Core realm or higher to forge. And since it was a replica, a genuine one must exist. The genuine Soul Communion Realm would certainly be a treasure above the rank of a Spiritual Artifact.

Thus, Lin Mu didn't believe for a second that Spirit Seer had crafted it himself.

"Master, I truly do not know," Spirit Seer replied with a bitter smile. "I've had this mirror with me for as long as I can remember. All of my current strength is thanks to it."

"Oh?" Lin Mu was slightly surprised. "You don't know either?"

"I would never dare to hide anything from you, Master," Spirit Seer hurriedly explained. "I was adopted as a child. My foster father told me that when he found me, this mirror was the only thing I had. He assumed it was a keepsake and told me to guard it well, thinking it might one day help me find my family."

"Unfortunately, so many years have passed that I gave up on that notion long ago," Spirit Seer said, his tone frank. "Besides, for us cultivators, severing worldly ties aids our Dao Cultivation! It's also because of this Soul Communion Realm that I later took Spirit Seer as my Daoist name."

Lin Mu nodded. "Did he say where he found you?"

"Mount Lingyan in Suzhou."

Lin Mu's eyes flashed. "Since this might have been a gift from your family, you should keep it."

He suddenly tightened his grip, and a surge of Mana flooded into the Soul Communion Realm.

Instantly, wind and clouds roiled above the entire back mountain as a tyrannical power swept through the area. This was because Lin Mu's own power had triggered a change in the Heavenly Dao.

"DECREE!" he uttered a single word.

The clouds scattered, the wind died down, and the world returned to tranquility. The Soul Communion Realm in Lin Mu's hand, however, now pulsed with a powerful energy, too intense to look at directly.

"This object's Dao Charm was about to dissipate, so I helped you refine it a little. This only stopped the Dao Charm from fading further. Improving its quality will require specific materials, but we can discuss that later."

With that, Lin Mu tossed the Soul Communion Realm back to Spirit Seer.

"Ah?"

Spirit Seer scrambled to catch the mirror. He could feel that it was somehow different than before, as if... it was now suffused with a heart-stopping energy.

The Master enhanced the Soul Communion Realm's power with just a casual touch? Such an ability is nothing short of miraculous!

Spirit Seer was once again astounded by Lin Mu's methods. He hesitated, then said, "Master, this Soul Communion Realm is a treasure I obtained only after surviving countless perils. All of my current achievements are thanks to this mirror. But your grace saved my life, and I have no way to repay you. Please, accept this Soul Communion Realm as a token of my devotion!"

Though it pained him to part with it, Spirit Seer knew that Lin Mu had given him his life back. Compared to his life, a mirror—even a priceless treasure—was nothing. He knew what choice to make.

"Haha! If you hadn't said that, I might have actually considered taking it. But now, it's yours to keep," Lin Mu laughed heartily. "Besides, a mere Magic Artifact is beneath my notice."

Hearing this, Spirit Seer was stunned for a moment before letting out a huge sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Master!" Spirit Seer said with deep admiration. "With your abilities, a treasure that we Mortals consider priceless is indeed unworthy of your status."

At the same time, he understood. Those few words were a test. Thank goodness I made the right choice. His admiration and respect for Lin Mu deepened. The Master's perspective is far beyond what a mere Mortal like me can comprehend.

"Master, what about this person?" Spirit Seer asked, glancing at Chu Zhengbo and hesitating over whether he should kill him. After all, leaving someone alive who knew so many of their secrets was a liability.

Lin Mu pondered for a moment. "I have my own plans for him. Let's head down the mountain first."

Chapter 532 Kneel Down, Apologize to Master!

"What was that? Did you see it?"

At the Chu Family's villa, everyone stared at the mountain behind them, their faces filled with panic and shock.

"I can't see clearly, but something terrible must have happened up there!"

"No kidding! It's not even winter, but the whole mountain is frozen solid. Something horrible must have happened."

"What could possibly have such terrifying power that it can affect the climate?"

"I don't know."

The event was so world-shakingly bizarre that no one dared go up the mountain to investigate. Besides, with the mountain encased in ice, you couldn't even get close without suffering from the cold.

"Look! The ice is melting!"

At that moment, someone cried out in surprise as the thick frost on the mountain began to melt. Before anyone could react, their eyes widened in unison. A look of pure shock appeared on their faces because, from within the now-melting mountain, two figures were slowly walking down.

The man in the lead was dressed in casual attire with his hands clasped behind his back. He looked as if he were returning from a leisurely stroll to view the scenery, his expression serene and composed.

With every step he took, the frost on the ground receded. It was as if the very ice was afraid of him.

"This... this..." Even Elder Fan, who was worldly and experienced, stared wide-eyed and drew in a sharp, cold breath at the sight.

The ice and frost melted away from his every footstep! What kind of power was this? Magic? A supernatural ability? It was simply terrifying!

THUD.

With his next step, Lin Mu was standing in the Chu Family's courtyard. Behind him, the mountain had already returned to its original state.

Seeing Lin Mu, Elder Fan's face twitched, and his voice trembled. "Young... Young Master Mu!"

Lin Mu? Could he be the famous Young Master Mu of Handong Province? Upon hearing Elder Fan, everyone stared at Lin Mu in utter shock.

When Lin Mu had gone up the mountain earlier, no one had gotten a clear look at him. But seeing him now, so young, left everyone astounded.

He can't be thirty yet, can he? And he's already famous throughout Handong Province?

They had just been asking about the rumors surrounding Lin Mu, but seeing him in person was still a shock. He was just so young.

In the whole of Handong Province, every major figurehead was a balding, gray-haired man well into middle age. Never in history had there been a powerhouse as young as Lin Mu.

"Fan Buwei of the Fan family pays his respects to Young Master Mu!"

Elder Fan stepped forward and gave Lin Mu a fist-and-palm salute, his posture extremely deferential. He couldn't help it; Lin Mu's status was simply too overwhelming.

"Hmph! What 'Young Master Mu'? I don't buy it!" a portly middle-aged man sneered as he stepped forward. Eyeing Lin Mu sideways, he asked, "Kid, are you really this 'Young Master Mu' character?"

Lin Mu gave a slight nod.

An arrogant expression on his face, clearly not taking Lin Mu seriously, the middle-aged man continued, "I hear you have some sway in Handong and started that Coiling Dragon Bay project. I'm quite interested in it. Shall we talk?"

Though he framed it as a talk, his demeanor was haughty and even aggressive.

"And who might you be? Why should I talk with you?" Lin Mu asked, a smile playing on his lips that didn't quite reach his eyes.

"On the strength of these three words: Shen Qianhao!" he declared, full of himself.

Hearing this name, the crowd was taken aback.

"Shen Qianhao? *The* Shen Qianhao?"

"You don't know Shen Qianhao? He's from Suzhou and a man with a formidable background. The Shen Family is big in local real estate and non-ferrous metal development. They have deep roots and widespread influence; they're not people you can afford to provoke."

"Hiss... I had no idea Chu Zhengbo managed to invite him. I didn't see him here earlier."

"Well, what you might not know is that Chu Zhengbo and this Shen Qianhao are close business partners. It's only natural he'd come to congratulate him on such a joyous occasion."

Anyone who can secure the development rights for non-ferrous metals must have a powerful background. No wonder he dared to speak to Lin Mu that way.

A mix of tension and excitement crossed everyone's faces. They were tense because both men were major figures you couldn't afford to offend. They were excited to see who would come out on top if these two were to clash.

"If you're smart, you'll take the initiative and give up a slice of Coiling Dragon Bay. There's money for everyone to make, right?" Shen Qianhao said with a smug smile. "After all, stick with me, Shen Qianhao, and you won't lose out."

Lin Mu glanced at him indifferently. "Stick with you? Are you even worthy?"

Lin Mu's words startled everyone. This Young Master Mu was just as domineering and aggressive as the rumors claimed. He didn't even regard Shen Qianhao as significant.

Logically, they were all in the world of business. No matter who Shen Qianhao was, Lin Mu was his junior and shouldn't have been so confrontational. Besides, Shen Qianhao was known for his explosive temper.

Sure enough, the moment the words left Lin Mu's mouth, Shen Qianhao snorted coldly. "You've got some nerve. I only call you 'Young Master Mu' out of courtesy. Without it, what the hell are you?"

A cold, disdainful smile crept onto his face. "If your little project at Coiling Dragon Bay weren't somewhat interesting, do you really think I'd pay any attention to you? piss me off, and I'll make sure you lose every penny!"

First, state your identity. Second, promise benefits. If that fails, resort to threats. This was Shen Qianhao's signature style.

Lin Mu smiled faintly. "Spirit Seer, teach him the meaning of respect."

"Yes, Master!"

The Spirit Seer stepped forward, carelessly tossing Chu Zhengbo to the ground before reaching for Shen Qianhao.

"Hmph?"

Shen Qianhao's expression shifted, but he only sneered. "Rip his arms off for me!"

"Yes, sir!"

Two men stepped out from behind Shen Qianhao. They were his personal bodyguards, both powerful experts of the Martial Way. They exchanged glances and advanced on the Spirit Seer, cold smirks on their faces.

An old fossil with one foot in the grave dares to pick a fight like some young punk? He must be looking for death!

"A mere firefly dares to challenge the radiance of the moon!" the Spirit Seer snorted. With a single slap, the two experts at the Internal Energy Early Stage spat out mouthfuls of blood and were sent flying.

"How is that possible?"

The two men clutched their chests, staring at the Spirit Seer in pure shock.

"Who are you? How can you be so powerful?"

The Spirit Seer smiled coldly. "I am the Spirit Seer. Perhaps you've heard the name?"

"What?"

One of the Martial Artists exclaimed. After a closer look, his eyes went wide with recognition. He scrambled to his knees and began kowtowing frantically. "Master, spare my life! This junior was blind and failed to recognize your greatness! I have offended you, Master, please spare me!"

"Get lost. If I see you again, I will kill you on the spot!"

The Spirit Seer commanded coldly. The two Martial Artists scrambled to their feet and fled, looking as pathetic and panicked as stray, beaten dogs.

Shen Qianhao stared blankly as his two bodyguards disappeared into the distance. When he finally snapped out of it, he roared, "You worthless cowards! What are you running for?"

"If we didn't run, we'd be waiting to die! That's the Spirit Seer, renowned throughout the Southeast Five Provinces! Boss Shen, if you don't want to bring disaster upon the Shen Family, you'd better get on your knees and apologize, fast!" A voice drifted back as they vanished from sight.

Shen Qianhao's face was a mask of horror as he stared at the Spirit Seer. An icy chill ran down his spine, his limbs feeling weak and boneless.

The Spirit Seer? How could it be him? The terrifying figure venerated as a living god across the Southeast Five Provinces?

"Kneel and apologize to the Master!" the Spirit Seer commanded coldly. Shen Qianhao's legs turned to jelly, and he collapsed to his knees with a thud.

"Master... spare my life!"

The once-arrogant Shen Qianhao was now kneeling on the ground, begging for his life without a shred of his former pride.

Chapter 533 - Handong, My Word Is Law!

"Master... Master?"

Shen Qianhao looked at Lin Mu in disbelief, his heart roiling like a tempest, filled with shock.

The famed Spirit Seer of the Southeast Five Provinces is actually addressing this young man as his master? Just who on earth is he?

For a moment, Shen Qianhao felt as if he had been struck by lightning, his mind utterly reeling.

"What? Is there a problem?" Seeing Shen Qianhao standing there dumbstruck, a trace of murderous intent appeared in the Spirit Seer's eyes.

"N-No... No problem."

Shen Qianhao trembled, his voice sounding strained. He knelt on the ground and kowtowed to Lin Mu. "Young Master Mu... it was my fault for failing to recognize your greatness. Please, be the bigger man and forgive me this once."

Everyone was stunned to see Shen Qianhao kneeling on the ground like a dog and ceaselessly begging for mercy. Is this really Shen Qianhao? From the esteemed Shen Family of Suzhou? The same Shen Qianhao from one of the great families of the Southeast Five Provinces is kowtowing to a young man? This is unbelievable!

The scene devolved into chaos as everyone exclaimed in astonishment. The few who had supported Shen Qianhao earlier looked as pale as death, their heads bowed in fear of retribution.

"Hmph." Seeing the chaos, the Spirit Seer snorted. "Are you looking to die?"

Instantly, the entire courtyard fell deathly silent. No one dared to speak.

Having intimidated the crowd, the Spirit Seer looked at Shen Qianhao with a frosty expression. "My master is not some insignificant mortal and you can humiliate at will. If you don't give me a proper explanation today, I'll slaughter you!"

Lin Mu was now the person the Spirit Seer respected most, and he would not tolerate the slightest disrespect toward him. Worldly men like Shen Qianhao thought their money and power made them untouchable. Little did they know, with but a single word, the Spirit Seer could make countless prestigious families of the Southeast Five Provinces kneel before him and acclaim him as their Master.

"I..." Shen Qianhao's face turned white, his body drenched in a cold sweat as he begged, "Master, Young Master Mu, I implore you, show me mercy just this once."

"I won't dare to do it again, never again," he sobbed, weeping bitterly. He was filled with such regret that his insides ached. If only I had known, I never would have attended Chu Zhengbo's damn wedding. All that talk about making big money together... Now, not only have I failed to earn a single penny, I've nearly lost my life.

At this thought, Shen Qianhao suddenly blurted out, "Young Master Mu, Master, it's all Chu Zhengbo's fault! It was him!"

He pointed at Chu Zhengbo on the ground. "He's the one who told me about Coiling Dragon Bay in Jiangling! He said it was comparable to an Immortal Realm and that its owner was powerless and without influence. He claimed he had many ways to take it over, and that's the only reason I came to Jiangling!"

Crying with regret, Shen Qianhao continued, "It was Chu Zhengbo who convinced me to come! He said that you, Young Master Mu, were a fat lamb ready for slaughter. I may be at fault, but my crime doesn't warrant death!"

Hearing Shen Qianhao's words, Lin Mu's eyes narrowed.

The Spirit Seer instantly understood. He strode forward and kicked Chu Zhengbo. "Still playing dead? Believe me, I can make you **really** dead right now."

"Spare me, Master, spare me!" Chu Zhengbo scrambled to his knees, begging frantically. "Young Master Mu, Master, it's all my fault! I was blinded by greed and coveted your property. I deserve to die!"

As he spoke, Chu Zhengbo slapped his own face repeatedly until his cheeks were swollen.

To the onlookers, this whole spectacle seemed to turn the world on its head; it was beyond belief. Shen Qianhao was one thing; he was from distant Suzhou and not well-known to the crowd. But this was Chu Zhengbo, a man touted as a formidable figure in Handong Province.

And now... he was groveling on the ground like a beaten dog.

"Since you deserve death, then go and die," Lin Mu said flatly. "Kill him."

If Chu Zhengbo dared to target him, he could not be allowed to live. He was about to report to the Southeast Military Academy. There could be no loose ends left in Handong Province. Otherwise, if trouble flared up in his backyard, he wouldn't have time to come back and deal with it.

"No, don't kill me! I don't want to die!" Hearing Lin Mu's verdict, Chu Zhengbo retreated in terror. "I can give you everything the Chu Family has! Just don't kill me! I'm scared!"

"If you didn't want to die, you shouldn't have offended the Master," the Spirit Seer said, stepping forward. "In your next life, remember not to offend those you can't afford to."

"No!"

Chu Zhengbo suddenly shot to his feet and ran.

He didn't want to die! He hadn't lived long enough!

Fueled by fear, Chu Zhengbo moved with incredible speed. In the blink of an eye, he reached the Chu Family's main gate, about to sprint out of the villa. The crowd watched, slightly surprised. It seemed that in a desperate situation, anyone could unleash unbelievable power.

However, just as everyone—including Chu Zhengbo himself—thought he might actually escape, Lin Mu raised his hand, opened his palm, and then clenched his fist.

Before the eyes of all, Chu Zhengbo's entire body exploded into a mist of blood, leaving not a single bone behind.

Chu Zhengbo was dead. And he had died a most pathetic death.

This had all, indeed, been part of Chu Zhengbo's plan. He had recognized Lin Mu earlier but had said nothing, because he wanted to kill him. With Lin Mu dead, Coiling Dragon Bay would be his. That real estate project was currently the most profitable in all of Handong Province. His status as head of the chamber of commerce, his immense background—in Chu Zhengbo's eyes, these were all trivial. His true trump card was not a worldly force; it was the Spirit Seer. Or, to be precise, another one of the Spirit Seer's divine avatars.

But Chu Zhengbo could never have imagined that in the end, he would die because of the very Spirit Seer he was counting on.

It was the ultimate irony. If the Spirit Seer hadn't accepted Lin Mu as his master, Lin Mu wouldn't have come to help retrieve his true form. If Chu Zhengbo hadn't coveted Coiling Dragon Bay, he wouldn't have crossed paths with Lin Mu. And if he hadn't crossed paths with Lin Mu, he wouldn't have died.

But in this world, there are no "what-ifs."

Witnessing this feat, everyone was utterly horrified. To crush a man into a bloody mist with a single gesture from afar...

Is he even human?

In that moment, everyone looked at Lin Mu with absolute terror in their eyes, truly afraid he would turn on them next.

The most terrified of all was Shen Qianhao.

"I..." He was so frightened he couldn't speak, only kneeling on the ground as if awaiting judgment.

"Begone," Lin Mu said indifferently. "And from now on, do not appear before me again. Otherwise, I won't hesitate to kill you."

Shen Qianhao started, then kowtowed repeatedly. "Yes, yes! I understand! I would never dare! Never!"

With that, Shen Qianhao scrambled to his feet and fled. He stumbled several times along the way, but always clambered back up, practically crawling on all fours to get away.

Once Shen Qianhao had left, Lin Mu turned to the remaining guests in the Chu Family's courtyard, his expression impassive.

The crowd gasped, so frightened that they hastily bowed with clasped fists.

When no one else spoke, Fan Buwei stepped forward with a nervous smile. "Fan Buwei greets Young Master Mu once again. I am utterly convinced by your methods, Young Master Mu. You are a hero the likes of which Handong hasn't seen in a hundred years. I believe that from this day forward, Handong should be led by you."

"Indeed, indeed!"

"It should be so."

"We hope Young Master Mu will accept."

Facing their fearful reverence, Lin Mu clasped his hands behind his back and declared, "Very well. From now on, I have the final say in Handong!"

Chapter 534: I'm Quite Good at Kicking People!

After dealing with the Chu Family and Shen Qianhao, Lin Mu told the Spirit Seer to return directly to Suzhou. He would follow a few days later.

For the next few days, Lin Mu needed to spend time with his family. He would soon be reporting to the Southeast Military Academy, and the journey was long. Besides, he had a mission to carry out there, which meant he wouldn't be able to return for quite some time. He took this opportunity to arrange some matters.

The first was Boheng Pharma. The company had been developing rapidly. Under the meticulous management of Su Ke'er and Liu Zijian, its performance was soaring, and several of its newly developed products received unanimous market praise. Moreover, the Jiangbei area managed by Liu Zijian had gained significant fame. Numerous powerful companies had already sent representatives to discuss collaborations. Lin Mu left this entirely in Liu Zijian's hands, trusting his brother completely. Furthermore, with the support of the "Five Dragons and Six Phoenixes" and the presence of the Crane Immortal Sect, no one in Jiangbei dared to offend Liu Zijian.

Of course, as a quid pro quo, Lin Mu gave Liu Xiaolin a choice: whether to forgive the Crane Immortal Sect or to ignore them was his decision to make. That very night, Liu Xiaolin and Liu Su from the Crane Immortal Sect returned to Jiangbei together. As for the series of assurances from the Crane Immortal Sect, Lin Mu acted as if he hadn't heard them. He would neither distance himself from the sect nor

actively try to win them over. He believed that after the last incident, the Crane Immortal Sect was capable of making the right decision.

The second matter concerned the Qin Corporation. Qin Luoli had already begun gradually moving the Qin Corporation's industries to Jiangling, establishing it as the company's new foundation. However, for some of the Qin Family's elders, River City was their home, and they were reluctant to leave. This included the Old Madam, who also voiced some objections. Left without a choice, Qin Luoli could only return to River City personally to try to persuade the Old Madam to move to Jiangling. After all, the abundance of Spiritual Energy in Coiling Dragon Bay made it the best option for the Old Madam's health. Lin Mu had no objections to this. Within the Qin Family, the Old Madam doted on Qin Luoli the most, so if she was the one doing the persuading, the chances of success would be much higher.

「The next morning」

Lin Mu saw Qin Luoli off, and the two parted reluctantly. Qin Luoli knew that once they separated this time, it would be a long while before they could see each other again. But she understood that Lin Mu was no ordinary person; everything he did was to provide them with a better life.

Looking at the man standing in the doorway, Qin Luoli's gaze grew even more determined.

I will work even harder to catch up to you!

In the past few days, Lin Mu had shared some things with her. Qin Luoli was touched by his honesty but also shocked by his true identity. Since they had gotten together, she had never discussed business with him. Proud people have strong self-esteem, and this was especially true for Lin Mu. That was why she had entrusted Coiling Dragon Bay to him, hoping he could build his own accomplishments and stand beside her as an equal.

However, she had never imagined that Lin Mu's true strength would so far exceed her imagination. He was the Master of the Three Rivers and Chairman of the Jiangling Chamber of Commerce. Half of the most powerful figures in Handong Province had to address him respectfully as Young Master Mu. His ability to turn the tides with a flip of his hand was especially gratifying for Qin Luoli, but also somewhat disheartening.

She, too, was a proud and confident person. But as time went on, it felt as though her own presence was diminishing. The gap between them grew wider, and she sometimes felt she wasn't worthy of him. These were words the world had once used to describe Lin Mu, but now their roles had reversed. This left Qin Luoli feeling somewhat defeated, yet also defiant.

I have to catch up to Lin Mu! I refuse to be just the woman behind him! I will let the whole world know that I, Qin Luoli, am worthy of Lin Mu! So, after I return to River City this time and bring the Old Madam to Jiangling, I will begin the next step of my plan. Wherever Lin Mu goes, I will go!

...

After seeing Qin Luoli off, Lin Mu received a call from Li Dajiao, who said that for the past two days, members of the Chamber of Commerce had been calling nonstop, anxious to meet their new chairman. There was an uneasy tone to their words. Hearing the unusual note in Li Dajiao's voice, Lin Mu knew there must be more to the story.

He agreed to meet without hesitation. Since he was going to be away from Handong Province for a while, he couldn't leave any loose ends.

Once I've dealt with the matters here, it'll be time to set off.

「Jiangling Sports Stadium」

This was Lin Mu's destination for the day.

When Lin Mu arrived, Li Dajiao was waiting at the entrance. The sight of him made Li Dajiao let out a long sigh of relief.

"Chairman, everyone has arrived."

Lin Mu was surprised. "What's wrong? And why are we holding the meeting in a stadium? Today is supposed to be my formal inauguration as chairman."

"Chairman, you'll understand once you go inside," Li Dajiao sighed, seeming unwilling to say more.

Lin Mu nodded and entered the stadium with him. The Jiangling Sports Stadium was massive and fully equipped with all necessary facilities. Inside, there was a huge soccer field where a game was currently underway. Quite a number of people were already seated in the stands.

Upon seeing Lin Mu enter, some stood up and greeted him respectfully.

"Good to see you, Young Master Mu!"

"Hello, Mr. Lin!"

"Hello, Chairman!"

Lin Mu nodded, signaling for everyone to sit down, but his gaze fell upon a young man in a floral shirt who remained seated. The man was in his early twenties and exuded an air of arrogance. From his attire, he clearly came from a prominent family. While everyone else was standing to greet Lin Mu, the young man didn't rise or even glance his way, keeping his eyes glued to the field.

"Great!"

Just then, another goal was scored, deciding the match. The young man laughed loudly and pointed at a player on the field. "Number Seven isn't bad. Have him play a game with me later."

Only after saying this did the young man turn to look at Lin Mu, his eyes filled with disdain. "So, you're Lin Mu?"

"Insolent! Who are you to address Young Master Mu by his name?!"

"Kid, aren't you getting ahead of yourself?!"

As soon as the young man spoke, several people in the crowd began to berate him.

Li Dajiao's expression changed, and he quickly intervened, "Zhu Qi, this is the Chairman of the Jiangling Chamber of Commerce. I suggest you show some respect."

"Show some respect?" Zhu Qi scoffed coldly. "Since when does a kid like this get to be the chairman of the Jiangling Martial Arts Association and the Jiangling Chamber of Commerce?"

"Do you all think that just because my dad is dead, any Tom, Dick, or Harry can take his place?"

Zhu Qi's words made everyone's expression shift. Clearly, this Zhu Qi was someone of significant status.

"Chairman, Zhu Qi's father was Master Zhu," Li Dajiao explained quietly at his side. "In name, his father was the vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, but in reality, he was responsible for all of its affairs. It was only after Chang Wei's senior disciple killed Master Zhu that we jointly nominated you for the chairmanship.

"Zhu Qi is here to claim the chairman's position for himself."

Lin Mu raised an eyebrow. So, he's here to usurp my position?

Zhu Qi looked at Lin Mu coldly. "Kid, you heard him. Scram. There's nothing for you here."

"Of course, if you still want to fight for the chairman's seat, don't say I didn't give you a chance," Zhu Qi said with a sudden laugh. "Let's play a game of soccer. If you win, I'll give you a chance. How about it?"

Lin Mu shook his head. "Sorry, I'm not good at soccer."

"Then what are you good at?" Zhu Qi said arrogantly. "Name anything. I'll take you on."

He was brimming with confidence, as if certain he would win no matter what Lin Mu chose.

"I'm quite good at kicking people."

Chapter 535: Do You Want to Give It a Try?

"Am I particularly good at kicking people?"

The moment he said this, not only Li Dajiao and the others but even Zhu Qi was stunned.

Zhu Qi was no ordinary person, after all. His father, Master Zhu, though not a Martial Artist, had been a prominent figure in Jiangling. Furthermore, while the Zhu family wasn't native to Jiangling, with their background, what was this backwater town to them? For this kid to dare mock him like this... he must be tired of living!

"Kid, are you looking for death?" Zhu Qi pointed at Lin Mu, his voice sharp. "My father was this chamber's president, and he died for it! Therefore, this position belongs to the Zhu family. No one else is qualified to take it!"

"Anyone else who wants it will have to get through my Zhu family first!"

Everyone's expression soured at his words. His threat was clearly aimed at Lin Mu. There was a cold glint in his eyes, a silent promise that he would kill Lin Mu if he dared to take the president's seat.

"Zhu Qi, that's enough!" an elder from the Chamber of Commerce retorted. "Master Zhu made great contributions, but the presidency isn't a throne to be passed from father to son!"

"Exactly! And Master Zhu was never the president when he was alive. He only handled some of the Chamber's affairs."

Hearing the opposition, Zhu Qi just laughed, a sinister edge to his smile. He sneered at the crowd. "I'm here today to change the old rules. Once I become president of the Jiangling Chamber of Commerce, this seat will belong to the Zhu family from now on!"

"Ridiculous!"

"What an absurd joke!"

"On what grounds does your Zhu family think they can monopolize the presidency?"

The Chamber members were furious, universally rejecting Zhu Qi's claim. It was preposterous. They had finally found a president in Lin Mu; they couldn't just let the Zhu family snatch the position away.

"Zhu Qi," Li Dajiao's face had also turned grim, "out of respect for your father, we've already decided to grant your family some extra points. But if you push your luck, don't blame this uncle for forgetting old ties!"

He hadn't expected Zhu Qi to be so brazen. Vying for the presidency was nothing short of courting death. Was Lin Mu someone who could be so easily offended? And not only was Zhu Qi being reckless, but the men he brought with him were just as foolish!

"And what if I don't agree?" Zhu Qi sneered, his gaze fixed on Lin Mu. "I, Zhu Qi, have what it takes to be president. Others do not!"

"Absolutely ridiculous!" Just then, Zheng Mingye and Xie Dingtian arrived together.

Xie Dingtian shot Zhu Qi a cold look. "A snot-nosed brat who's barely weaned wants to be president of the Jiangling Chamber of Commerce? Why don't you go take a piss and look at your own reflection?"

"You dare to humiliate me?" Zhu Qi's face darkened as he pointed at Xie Dingtian. "What the hell are you? Who gave you the right to interrupt me?"

"Oh?" Xie Dingtian chuckled, amused. It had been years since anyone had dared to speak to him like that. This kid was certainly aiming high.

It wasn't surprising that Zhu Qi looked down on him. Xie Dingtian's current attire was misleading. With his tank top, shorts, flip-flops, and balding pate, he looked exactly like some sleazy, middle-aged slob.

What kind of background could a man like that possibly have? As a result, Zhu Qi didn't bother with any courtesy.

"Go ahead," Xie Dingtian waved a hand. "Teach this kid a good lesson. Let him know what kind of 'thing' I am."

"Yes, sir." Xie Dingtian rarely went out without bodyguards, and today was no exception. He had brought four with him.

"So he's just some nouveau riche. No wonder he's so arrogant." Zhu Qi chuckled. He leaned back in his seat, coolly crossing his legs before lighting a cigar. "This trash is all yours," he said to his man. "While you're at it, show everyone that I, too, am good at kicking people. I just can't be bothered to do it myself."

"Yes, Young Master!" The man in sunglasses sitting behind Zhu Qi stood up and slowly advanced on Xie Dingtian's four bodyguards.

"Get him!" Xie Dingtian sneered. He'd paid a hefty price for these four bodyguards; each one could handle four or five ordinary men with ease, let alone a single opponent.

However, what happened next was beyond Xie Dingtian's wildest expectations. Before his four bodyguards could even touch the man, they were sent flying, landing in a motionless heap on the floor.

"This..." Xie Dingtian was dumbfounded. The others were equally shocked. They hadn't seen the man move at all, yet all four bodyguards were down. This man in sunglasses was clearly on another level.

"You're a Martial Artist?!" Only Zheng Mingye and Lin Mu had actually seen it. The four bodyguards had all been taken out by a single kick from the sunglasses-wearing man.

A Martial Artist? The others were shocked, but then it clicked. No wonder the man was so strong. If he was a Martial Artist, it all made sense.

Although the Jiangling Martial Arts Association had martial arts practitioners, their training was mostly for health and fitness. It wasn't like the stories where masters could kill a tiger with one punch or slay a lion with a single palm strike. However, given their status, they knew that such people truly existed in the world—people like Zheng Mingye, Li Dajiao, and the man in sunglasses standing before them.

"Hm? I didn't expect you to be a Martial Artist too." The man in sunglasses looked at Zheng Mingye with a flicker of surprise. "From your aura, I can tell you've attained Inner Strength. I presume you must be the strongest practitioner of the Martial Way in Jiangling?"

"It's a pity. Your vital energy is depleted, and your Internal Energy is as fragile as a withered branch. You're no match for me."

The man in sunglasses shook his head, his tone dripping with disdain. "It seems the Martial Way of Jiangling has truly fallen. I alone am enough to sweep through the entire Jiangling Martial Arts World."

"What a load of horseshit!" Xie Dingtian exploded in anger. "Sweep the Jiangling Martial Arts World? Aren't you afraid you'll sprain your jaw with all that big talk?"

"Hmph?" A sharp, menacing aura flared from the man in sunglasses. "You're courting death!"

With that, the man shot forward, striking a palm at Xie Dingtian.

"Watch out!" Zheng Mingye's expression changed as he leaped forward to intercept the blow.

BANG!

As their fists met, Zheng Mingye grunted, a trickle of blood seeping from the corner of his mouth as he staggered backward.

But the man in sunglasses pressed his advantage, refusing to let up. He surged forward again, raising his leg to kick Zheng Mingye squarely in the chest. If that kick landed, Zheng Mingye wouldn't survive.

Just as the kick was about to connect, a figure suddenly appeared behind Zheng Mingye, pulling him to safety. It was Lin Mu.

Seeing Lin Mu, the man in sunglasses paused for a split second, but the sneer on his lips only widened.

"Kid, since you're so eager to die, I'll be happy to oblige!" His kick accelerated, a piercing aura erupting from his foot as he aimed straight for Lin Mu's head.

He was trying to kick his head clean off.

However, just as the man's foot was about to connect, Lin Mu moved faster. He lifted his own leg and kicked viciously at the man's crotch.

AIEEEEE!

An ungodly scream ripped through the air. The man in sunglasses was launched backward, sent flying upside down before landing squarely in the open doorway as if it were a goal.

HISS!

Every man in the room instinctively crossed his legs, a collective wave of nausea washing over them as their faces turned pale. They all stared at Lin Mu in horror.

Lin Mu lowered his leg, standing firm. He turned to face Zhu Qi. "What was that you were saying just now? That you're also good at kicking people?"

He paused, a slight smile on his face. "So... want to give it a try?"

Chapter 536: Kung Fu Soccer!

GULP!

Zhu Qi forcefully swallowed as cold sweat streamed down his forehead. The big man in sunglasses was the strongest expert his family's elder had hired. According to the man, as long as no Grandmaster intervened, he was invincible.

Invincible my ass! He was just sent flying with a single kick, and we don't even know if he's dead or alive. Invincible? Are you kidding me?

Lin Mu's words made his heart tighten even more.

Try it? How could I try? I don't know any martial arts. Forget about Lin Mu, who sent that expert flying with one kick—I couldn't even beat an ordinary person. I've spent all my energy on women these past few years, leaving my body completely drained.

"I..." Zhu Qi's face twitched as he forced a dry laugh. "I... I was just joking. Yeah, just joking..."

"Joking?" Xie Dingtian stepped forward and grabbed Zhu Qi by the collar, sneering, "Who the hell do you think you are, joking with Young Master Mu? Are you tired of living?"

"Get lost! Let go of me!" Xie Dingtian was incredibly strong, and Zhu Qi was unable to break free. He could only roar, "My brother is a lieutenant at the Southeast Military Academy! If you dare to touch me, I'll make sure you regret it!"

"What?" Li Dajiao's expression changed drastically. He quickly held Xie Dingtian back, saying, "Elder Xie, stop!"

Pulled away by Li Dajiao, Xie Dingtian said impatiently, "Li Dajiao, what the hell are you doing? Don't stop me, or I'll get pissed at you!"

Li Dajiao pleaded, "Please, Elder Xie, don't be reckless. Zhu Qi's brother is not someone to be trifled with."

"Hmph, what's so great about him? You think someone from the Southeast Military Academy is that amazing?" Xie Dingtian scoffed with disdain. Young Master Mu is the Chief Instructor of the Southeast Military Academy, and even he isn't showing off.

However, Li Dajiao was unaware of this and only spoke in a grave tone, "Elder Xie, we're just here for money. We can't afford to provoke someone of that stature. Moreover, I heard from Master Zhu that his eldest son holds a very high position in the Southeast Military Academy!"

Xie Dingtian hesitated. When he saw Lin Mu remain silent, his expression shifted slightly. Could it be that even Lin Mu, as the Chief Instructor of the Southeast Military Academy, doesn't dare offend the Zhu family?

With that thought, Xie Dingtian reluctantly let go of Zhu Qi.

"Hahaha, Zhu Qi, I was just joking with you earlier. Don't take it to heart, okay?" Xie Dingtian laughed heartily. Since Young Master Mu was silent, he decided it was best not to cause trouble for him.

However, while Xie Dingtian didn't intend to stir up trouble, Zhu Qi had no intention of letting them off.

"Joking, were you?" Zhu Qi straightened his collar, slowly patting Xie Dingtian's face with his palm as he sneered, "Was that joke funny?"

The so-called big shots of Handong Province were nothing before his Zhu family! And why? Because his older brother was already a lieutenant at the Southeast Military Academy. His brother was only thirty years old, yet he'd already reached such a rank. Who knew how far he could go? That was the source of Zhu Qi's confidence.

As he thought this, Zhu Qi's hand pressed down even harder.

"Now, kneel and apologize to me!" Zhu Qi said coldly. "If I'm satisfied with your attitude, perhaps I'll let this go!"

"Zhu Qi, that's enough!" Li Dajiao said. "If you want to be the president, I'll agree to it. But first, let go of Elder Xie. He's your elder, after all."

Zhu Qi slapping Xie Dingtian's face was a slap in the face to the entire Jiangling Chamber of Commerce. Many people were already very unhappy, but because of Zhu Qi's terrifying status, they were all angry but dared not speak out.

"An elder?" Zhu Qi stopped his hand. "I can let him off. Have him kneel and apologize to me, and hand over the position of president. Then we can consider this matter settled."

"You want me to kneel and apologize to you? Dream on!" Xie Dingtian sneered. "I am responsible for my own actions. If you've got guts, come at me. But let me tell you, kid, I, Xie Dingtian, am not a pushover. Don't let me catch you, or I'll kill you!"

"Who wants to kill my brother? Are you tired of living?"

At that moment, a figure appeared on the soccer field. The man, who looked to be in his early thirties, wore a military-style tank top. He stood ramrod straight, his entire body exuding a potent, iron-willed aura. This unique temperament could only belong to one type of person: a soldier.

The crowd exchanged glances, shock apparent in everyone's eyes. Zhu Qi's brother was actually here.

The young man walked slowly toward the goal, where the big man in sunglasses was still sprawled. When he saw the man, the youth's expression changed slightly. He's dead?

"Who killed him?" The young man looked toward the stands, his gaze landing on Zheng Mingye and Li Dajiao. "Step forward and accept your death. Otherwise, don't blame me for being ruthless!"

In the entire stadium, only those two were Martial Artists. Only they could have possibly killed someone from his Zhu family. The young man's voice was powerful, projecting an overwhelming dominance. It seemed that if no one confessed, he would truly take action.

"Brother!" Zhu Qi was ecstatic, pointing at Lin Mu. "It was him! He killed him! He kicked Abing to death! I saw it with my own eyes!"

Hearing this, the young man gave Lin Mu a strange look, a hint of shock in his eyes. He killed him? But this man has no aura fluctuations at all, and from his breathing, he's just an ordinary person. How could he have killed Abing? Abing was the Zhu family's strongest bodyguard!

"Kid, did you kill him?" the young man asked, his eyes filled with scrutiny.

"That's right, I killed him," Lin Mu said nonchalantly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"What nerve!" the young man sneered. "Although I didn't see you do it, you must have used some despicable trick. But in front of me, all your schemes are useless!"

Just then, a soccer ball rolled to a stop in front of him. The young man's eyes lit up, and he suddenly kicked it.

WHOOSH!

In an instant, the soccer ball shot toward Lin Mu with terrifying speed and ferocious power. The ball moved so fast that visible ripples formed in the air around it, and the sheer force of the wind flattened the grass on the field. The crowd's mouths hung open in astonishment. This was a scene they had only ever witnessed in the movie **Shaolin Soccer**. To think that such people actually existed in the world—it was terrifying.

"President, dodge!" Li Dajiao's face paled. He knew he could never catch a ball like that.

Zheng Mingye and Xie Dingtian, on the other hand, wore expressions of disdain. Trying to show off in front of Young Master Mu? That's just child's play!

The soccer ball was unbelievably fast, reaching Lin Mu in the blink of an eye. It was too late for him to dodge, even if he wanted to. Lin Mu simply stood his ground, took one hand out of his pocket, and gently tapped the ball.

WHOOSH!

The next moment, the crowd witnessed an even more terrifying scene. When Lin Mu's hand made contact with the soccer ball, it shot back with even more astonishing speed. The air crackled, and a smell of something scorching filled the air as the ball's incredible velocity created sparks from the friction.

"Not good!" The young man's expression changed drastically. He bent his knees, let out a great shout, and raised his hands to block the incoming ball.

THUD!

But when the ball struck him, the young man let out a pained scream and was sent flying backward. He crashed clean through the fence, not stopping until he slammed into the concrete wall surrounding the field.

BOOM!

A long section of the wall, several meters in length, collapsed into rubble. On the field, a deep trench, several feet deep, was carved into the ground, stretching from the stands to the wall. Dirt flew everywhere, and the grass was utterly destroyed.

Chapter 537: If you can't explain yourself, your whole family dies!

GULP!

Everyone's face turned pale as they gazed at the long trench. They all swallowed nervously, a bitter taste in their parched mouths.

Zhu Qi's eyes widened in disbelief as he stared at Lin Mu.

"You... you're dead! Kid, I'm telling you, you're done for!" Zhu Qi shrieked. "You actually dared to hurt my brother. I guarantee you will pay a heavy price!"

"A price?" Lin Mu said indifferently. "I'm curious to see how you'll make me pay."

COUGH, COUGH.

Just then, a painful cough came from the other side of the wall, and a figure climbed out from the ruined earth.

It was the same young man as before. But now, any trace of his iron-blooded temperament was gone. His body was covered in blood, and his vest was torn to shreds, with only ragged strips of fabric hanging on his frame. He looked as wretched as one could possibly be.

"Good, good, good!" Zhu Tao wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, his expression ferocious as he glared at Lin Mu with a chilling smile. "Kid, you've really surprised me. If it weren't for the unique Cultivation Technique I practice, I would have died by your hand."

Lin Mu curled his lip in disdain. "I didn't kill you because your dog life is still useful. Otherwise, did you really think you could have survived?"

"Hahaha!" Zhu Tao suddenly burst into laughter. "Kid, you're far too arrogant!"

"I, Zhu Tao, began my Martial Way at ten and entered the military for training at fifteen! In the twelve years since, think of all I have seen and learned! How could a frog at the bottom of a well like you possibly understand!"

With an arrogant look, Zhu Tao declared, "I became a lieutenant in the military before I was even thirty, and I'm about to be selected for the Divine Machine Camp. How dare you be so insolent before me!"

The Divine Machine Camp... Even in the entire Jinan Military Region with its hundreds of thousands of soldiers, less than a hundred are chosen, let alone at the Southeast Military Academy. And he was about to become one of them! People like Lin Mu, who looked down on him just because they had a bit of strength, were simply courting death! The prospective candidates for the Divine Machine Camp have the authority to carry out summary executions. Therefore, even if he killed someone, no one would dare do a thing! He was one of the seeds for the Divine Machine Camp, hand-picked from hundreds of thousands!

"Quite the grandiose claim," Lin Mu sneered. "Take a look at this before you talk to me again."

With a flick of his hand, Lin Mu threw a small booklet.

Even though they were hundreds of meters apart, the booklet shot straight toward Zhu Tao. He dared not be careless, and it took all his effort to catch it.

Military Officer's ID!

For the first time, Zhu Tao's expression wavered.

Opening the ID, the first page showed a photo and two lines of text.

Name: Lin Mu!

Beneath the name was the rank: Colonel!

HISS!

Colonel!

The bright red characters stabbed into his eyes like piercing sunlight.

Zhu Tao dared not look any further. That alone was enough to stagger him.

"You... you're actually a colonel?" Zhu Tao felt his heart pounding in his chest.

How old was Lin Mu? He looked even younger than him, didn't he? Yet he was already a colonel!

And a colonel with a position, at that! Although he couldn't see Lin Mu's specific duties, the line for his position was not blank. In the current military system, having a position versus not having one were two entirely different matters.

Therefore, not only was Lin Mu's rank higher than his, but his position was as well! Strictly speaking, Lin Mu was his superior!

"Why do you not salute a superior officer?" Lin Mu said coldly. "Do people from the Southeast Military Academy all lack such basic manners?"

Upon hearing Lin Mu's words, Zhu Tao's face changed drastically. If this matter were pursued seriously, Lin Mu could charge him with disrespecting a superior. According to the strict military code, the punishment would be severe. He could very well lose his chance with the Divine Machine Camp because of it!

Realizing this, no matter how unwilling Zhu Tao felt, he could only jog over. He stood before Lin Mu, clicked his heels together, and respectfully presented the military ID with both hands.

Zhu Tao shouted, "Lieutenant Zhu Tao, 4th Battalion, 13th Army Group, Jinan Military Region, reporting, Sir!"

Everyone who heard Zhu Tao was stunned. A lieutenant was saluting Lin Mu? And addressing him as "Sir"?

This... What the hell was going on?

Zhu Qi was utterly dumbfounded. He had been relying on Zhu Tao to put Lin Mu in his place, but who would have thought that his pillar of support was actually the other man's subordinate? Who could he even complain to about this?

Lin Mu didn't even glance at Zhu Tao, leaving him to hold out the military ID. The blatant disregard made Zhu Tao's face flush deep red. But he dared not react. The excruciating pain wracking his body was nearly unbearable, yet he couldn't move a muscle.

This was what it meant to be a soldier. One must endure what ordinary people cannot.

Lin Mu turned his indifferent gaze toward Zhu Qi.

"I..."

THUD.

Zhu Qi collapsed to his knees, his face deathly pale.

"How do you want him to die?" Lin Mu asked, turning to Elder Xie.

Elder Xie was startled. "Young Master Mu, I..."

Lin Mu spoke indifferently, "You are my man. How I discipline you is my business. But if anyone else so much as lays a finger on you, I will annihilate them!"

"So, whether he lives or dies is your call."

Hearing Lin Mu's words, even Elder Xie, who commanded half the forces in Handong Province, was deeply shaken, his eyes suddenly welling up.

"Young Master Mu..."

Just as Elder Xie's legs buckled and he was about to kneel, an unseen force held him upright. "With a spine that soft, how are you supposed to not embarrass me in the future?"

"I won't!" Elder Xie suddenly straightened his legs and spine. Lowering his head slightly to show his reverence, he said, "I, Xie Dingtian, swear that from this day forward, I belong to Young Master Mu in life and will be his shade in death! I will never bring him the slightest shame!"

Lin Mu nodded slightly.

If it hadn't been for Elder Xie speaking up for him earlier, Lin Mu wouldn't have considered him a true confidant. To protect Lin Mu's honor, he had been willing to kneel and let Zhu Qi slap him without fighting back. This Xie Dingtian had spirit and was loyal—a useful man indeed.

In this respect, he was the exact opposite of Li Dajiao.

"Tell me, how do you want to deal with him," Lin Mu said with a grin. "Even if you want to kill his entire family, I will grant it. I guarantee no one will dare say a word against it!"

Everyone shivered upon hearing Lin Mu's murderous words.

"No..." Zhu Qi shook his head in terror. "You can't kill me! You can't! I'm from the Zhu family! My brother is a lieutenant, and my grandfather is Zhu Hongming! How dare you kill me?!"

"Young Master Mu, let's just forget it," Elder Xie said with his head low, his voice somber. "It's just a scratch. Besides, a worthless life like mine isn't worth all this trouble."

"He just needs to apologize to me. There's no need to make things so difficult for him."

Zhu Qi nodded frantically, pleading, "Yes, I'll apologize! A sincere apology! I was wrong, Elder Xie... Uncle Xie! I know I was wrong! Please, just let me go this one time!"

Lin Mu laughed. Elder Xie made it sound so simple, but how could Lin Mu not hear the trace of loneliness in his tone?

"You, Xie Dingtian, are supposed to be a man of hot-blooded passion. How can you choose to let this go just to keep the peace?" Lin Mu's voice was firm and powerful. "Since you are my man and you call me Young Master Mu, I will settle this score for you!"

As soon as he finished speaking, Lin Mu planted his foot on Zhu Qi's chest and grinned. "Call your grandfather. Tell him to give me a satisfactory explanation."

"If his explanation isn't satisfactory, I'll kill your entire family!"

Chapter 538 What does this have to do with you?

「Half an hour later.」

Zhu Hongming hurried over. When he saw Zhu Qi kneeling on the ground in a pathetic state, he flew into a rage, a cold light flashing in his eyes.

A short while ago, Zhu Qi had called him, admitting he'd caused trouble and that the other party demanded he come personally to give an explanation. This ignited a fire of fury in Zhu Hongming's heart. It had been years since anyone had dared to speak to him that way. Demanding he come personally to offer an apology? The sheer audacity!

But because it was his own grandson, Zhu Hongming had come. He wanted to see who this person was.

With a grim expression, Zhu Hongming's gaze suddenly paused. He spotted Zhu Tao and was instantly overjoyed.

"Tao, you're back?"

This was the pride of the Zhu family. He had joined the military in his teens and, before the age of thirty, had already been promoted to First Lieutenant. Who else could boast such an achievement?

Zhu Tao kept his head down and said nothing. He didn't dare to speak.

Zhu Hongming said with a smile, "Tao, wait for me to handle a few minor things, then we'll go home and catch up."

Zhu Tao's status is sensitive, so there are some things he shouldn't get involved in. I'll handle this myself. he thought.

"Li Dajiao, Zheng Mingye, what is the meaning of this? How dare you lay a hand on my grandson!"

Zhu Hongming pointed at Zhu Qi. "Zhu Qi is my grandson, don't you know that? You need to give me an explanation for this!"

"Grandfather..."

Just as Zhu Tao started to speak, Zhu Hongming waved him off. "Tao, don't you worry. I can resolve a small matter like this."

After all, the Zhu family was a prestigious clan!

"Family Head Zhu, there's more to this situation..." Li Dajiao's expression changed. Just as he was about to explain, Zhu Hongming snorted coldly.

"More to it? I don't care what there is. You dared to touch my grandson. If you don't give me a proper explanation for this, don't blame me for being ruthless!"

Zhu Hongming walked toward Zhu Qi. "Little Qi, speak. Who did this to you? Say it boldly. Grandfather will stand up for you!"

Zhu Hongming held a very high reputation in Jiangling. In recent years, however, he had retreated from the limelight, content to raise fish and tend to his flowers at home, paying little attention to the outside world. But anyone who knew him knew he was an autocratic and ruthless man. Combined with the Zhu family's considerable local power, everyone had to give him some face. When he said he would stand up for Zhu Qi, it meant he would not let the matter rest.

"Grandfather, I..." Zhu Qi glanced at Lin Mu.

Just as he was about to speak, Zhu Hongming's gaze shot toward Lin Mu. "Little Qi, was it him?"

Believing he understood everything, Zhu Hongming said coldly, "Boy, was it you who told me to come and give you an explanation? You certainly have a lot of nerve!"

"I've always had a lot of nerve. You have a problem with that?" Lin Mu replied with a faint smile. He was starting to get a good read on this Zhu Hongming.

Domineering, aggressive, and condescending.

Very good. Lin Mu loved to crush people like this!

"I don't know who gave you this confidence, but let me make myself clear today," Zhu Hongming said arrogantly, his hands clasped behind his back. "Right now. Immediately. Kneel and apologize to my grandson. Then, break your own legs, go to the gates of Jiangling City, and kneel to beg for forgiveness."

"Only then might you be allowed to live," Zhu Hongming added with a sinister smile. "Of course, you can refuse, but I doubt you can bear the consequences."

"Hahaha, I'd love to see if these consequences you speak of are as unbearable as you claim," Lin Mu laughed loudly before his tone turned indifferent. "Old man, you're far too arrogant. In this entire world, no one has ever dared to speak to me like that."

"My Zhu family is comparable to any great clan. How can a mere boy like you hope to contend with me?"

Zhu Hongming's eyes then fell on Xie Dingtian, who was standing behind Lin Mu. He shook his head and chuckled. "I was wondering where you, this little beast, got your gall from. So, it turns out you have Xie Tuzi backing you. No wonder, no wonder."

Stroking his beard, Zhu Hongming shook his head again. "But unfortunately for you, that is not nearly enough capital for you to act so brazenly in front of me!"

Hearing Zhu Hongming's words, everyone present wore a peculiar expression. This man was so used to being arrogant and overbearing, did he really think he was all-powerful? Unfortunately for him, he had truly met his match today.

"Whether I have the capital or not isn't for you to decide," Lin Mu said, glancing at Zhu Tao. "Tell him if I have it."

Just as Zhu Tao was about to speak, Zhu Hongming sneered, "My Tao is a dragon among men, a vital general of the nation. How could he possibly know a mere mortal like you? Asking him is just asking for humiliation."

Zhu Tao's mouth fell open. He stared blankly at his grandfather, a roar filling his mind as his entire body went weak.

"Grandfather, he... he's my superior officer," Zhu Tao managed to force the words out. "My rank is lower than his."

He felt that if he didn't speak now, his grandfather would offend Lin Mu beyond any hope of redemption.

"No wonder, no wonder. Since he is your..." Zhu Hongming's words caught in his throat, as if a hand had suddenly seized his neck. He choked out, "Tao, you said... he's your superior?"

Zhu Tao nodded.

The color drained from Zhu Hongming's face. He cried out in disbelief, "How is that possible? That's absolutely impossible!"

"Grandfather, it's true." Zhu Tao sighed, handing his grandfather a military ID. "This is his identification. He's a Colonel!"

"This..." Zhu Hongming staggered back several steps, his face a deathly white. "This isn't real! It's a fake!"

An idea lit up Zhu Hongming's eyes. "Tao, fake IDs like this are a dime a dozen on the street. You can get one made for a little bit of money."

Zhu Tao was also taken aback.

Could it really be fake?

To be honest, he didn't want to believe it either. After all, Lin Mu was too young. Besides, even if it were real, he had never heard the name Lin Mu. The number of personnel in the seven major military regions wasn't small, but it wasn't unmanageably large either. Furthermore, each military region's ID had unique markings, and Lin Mu's was from the Jinan Military Region.

Colonel Lin Mu of the Jinan Military Region? There's no such person in my memory! So, Grandpa's right! This has to be a fake!

"I knew something felt off. So it was a fake!" Zhu Tao's expression darkened as he clenched the ID, glaring at Lin Mu. "Do you realize that forging a military officer's ID is a serious crime? If you don't give me a reasonable explanation today, I have the authority to execute you on the spot!"

The humiliation from that kick, compounded by the disgrace his brother had suffered, sent Zhu Tao into a burning rage. It seemed if Lin Mu didn't provide an explanation, he really would act.

"Tao, you may be a first lieutenant now and have spent years in the service, but you still have very little experience with the ways of the world," Zhu Hongming said with a gentle smile. "In society today, this kind of thing is common. Many people forge credentials to swindle and deceive. It's understandable."

"However, this young man's luck ran out today. This is a classic case of an impostor running into the real deal. He'll have no one to blame but himself for what's coming."

Hearing this, Zhu Tao subconsciously nodded. Just as he was about to speak, a group of people suddenly approached.

Zhu Hongming recognized two of them. One was Fei Xiang, the Mayor of Jiangling. Behind him stood an older man: Jiang Weiguo, the top official of Handong Province! Following them was a large contingent of men in military uniforms, all armed with live ammunition.

He didn't recognize the middle-aged man at the front who looked like a commander, but anyone standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Fei Xiang and Jiang Weiguo couldn't possibly have a low status.

"Mayor Fei, Governor Jiang, you're here as well?" Assuming they had come for him, Zhu Hongming was pleasantly surprised. "I can't believe this matter has troubled you both. I am deeply grateful. Once this is over, I will host a banquet at my home to properly toast you all."

Fei Xiang paused, looking baffled. "What does this have to do with you? I'm here to see Instructor Lin."

Chapter 539: I Am the Pride of the Wealthy Family!

"Instructor Lin? Which Instructor Lin?" Zhu Hongming asked subconsciously.

Just as Fei Xiang was about to speak, Jiang Weiguo had already walked up to Lin Mu. He smiled and said, "Instructor Lin, I am Jiang Weiguo. I came here specifically to see you."

"After all, Handong Province has produced a young talent like you. As the top leader, it's an honor for me as well." Jiang Weiguo chuckled, chatting warmly with Lin Mu.

This scene struck the onlookers like a bolt from the blue. This was the top leader of Handong Province, here to personally meet Lin Mu. What an incredible honor!

Meanwhile, Xie Dingtian and the others watched Zhu Hongming with smug smiles, eager to see how the old scoundrel would get himself out of this mess.

"Governor Jiang, could you be mistaken?" Zhu Hongming's expression shifted. "What instructor? This boy is nothing but a fraud!"

Taking the identification from Zhu Tao's hand, Zhu Hongming said, "Look! This ID is forged! He's not an instructor at all!"

"Hmm?" Jiang Weiguo looked at Zhu Hongming in bewilderment. "Are you the one who's mistaken? This identification is real. Doesn't it state right here that Colonel Lin Mu is the General Instructor of the Southeast Military Academy?"

Zhu Hongming opened the ID booklet and on the next page, he saw Lin Mu's position clearly listed.

General Instructor of the Southeast Military Academy!

The seven bright red characters seared his eyes like the blinding sun.

"I personally handed that identification to Instructor Lin," Guan Xinhe spoke up, his gaze sweeping coldly over Zhu Hongming. "Are you suggesting that I forged it?"

"GACK!" Zhu Hongming felt as if his throat were clogged, his face flushing beet red. The identification in his hand suddenly felt as heavy as a mountain.

"I..." Zhu Hongming's legs went weak, and his mind roared as if he were trapped in a nightmare.

He had just questioned a General Instructor of a military academy? And insulted him? It's over. It's completely over!

"What's the matter? Scared now?" Lin Mu said with a smirk. "What happened to all that arrogance from before?"

Drenched in sweat, Zhu Hongming stammered, his voice trembling, "In... Instructor Lin, I was wrong about this."

Fear gripped Zhu Hongming. If Lin Mu pursues this, the Zhu family is finished. Even Zhu Tao will be dragged down because of me.

Just then, Fei Xiang and the others also sensed something was wrong. "Instructor Lin, did the Zhu family offend you?"

As if on cue, Jiang Weiguo spoke up, his expression instantly turning grim. "Zhu Hongming, you dare to offend Instructor Lin? Do you have a death wish?"

Normally, even as the top leader, Jiang Weiguo wouldn't dare to speak so recklessly. After all, being caught making such threats would not end well. But now, someone had dared to question the identity of an instructor that Handong Province had finally produced. If word of this got out, his own time as the top leader would be over. What a disgrace!

"Governor Jiang, this is all a misunderstanding!" Zhu Hongming's legs gave out, and he collapsed to his knees, his eyes wide with terror. He stammered, "I didn't know! I truly had no idea that Instructor Lin would... would..."

He wanted to say that Instructor Lin had targeted his grandson and shown him no respect, but he swallowed the words before they could escape. Saying that now would only bring a catastrophic disaster upon the Zhu family.

He had already grievously offended Lin Mu. He thought he could use his grandson Zhu Tao's status to crush Lin Mu completely, but he never expected the top leader of Handong Province himself to show up. And judging by Guan Xinhe's uniform, his military rank was clearly not low.

Xie Dingtian, Zheng Mingye, and the others were silently ecstatic. They had bet on the right horse!

Even now, Zheng Mingye, Li Dajiao, and the others were still in shock, finding it hard to believe. But the truth was laid bare right before them. Their president was the General Instructor of the Southeast Military Academy! That status is just too incredible!

"Telling me is useless!" Jiang Weiguo said coldly. "I'll have people investigate your case. As for whether Instructor Lin decides to let you off the hook, that's your problem!"

At this, Zhu Hongming's face grew even paler. He bowed repeatedly to Lin Mu. "Instructor Lin, I know I was wrong! Please... please be magnanimous and spare the Zhu family just this once."

"Spare you? How?" Lin Mu sneered. "A moment ago, you were threatening to kill me. You said I'd have to bear the consequences, that I'd have to cut off my own arms and legs and kneel in apology. Did you not consider this outcome back then?"

"Hmph. You dare threaten a military academy instructor?" Guan Xinhe suddenly drew his pistol and pressed the muzzle to Zhu Hongming's head. "Believe it or not," he said viciously, "I could execute you on the spot!"

"No! Don't!" Zhu Hongming dropped to the ground, begging loudly for his life. "Instructor Lin, I know I was wrong! I'm begging you, please, just treat me like a fart in the wind and let me go!"

"What do you say?" Lin Mu asked, turning to Zhu Tao with a faint smile.

Zhu Tao couldn't help but shudder.

Lin Mu's identity was terrifying. He wasn't just a colonel; he was the General Instructor of a military academy. A figure with that kind of real power carried far more weight than an ordinary colonel. What's more, he was so young.

Regret washed over Zhu Tao as well. He had only taken leave to come home and pay respects to his late father. He never imagined something like this would happen.

Thinking this, Zhu Tao lowered his head and said, "The nation has its laws. If they have done wrong, they must accept the punishment they deserve."

"Very good," Lin Mu nodded, looking at Zhu Hongming. "Did you hear that?"

Zhu Hongming trembled. He glanced at Zhu Qi beside him, a ruthless glint in his eyes. Then, he picked up a steel pipe from the ground and violently smashed it down on his own hand.

CRACK! The bone in his arm snapped, and the sheer agony almost made Zhu Hongming pass out.

A chill ran down the spines of everyone watching. That Zhu Hongming... he's truly ruthless.

"Instructor Lin, this old fool was blind to have offended you. I have now broken one of my own hands. Is this apology satisfactory?" Zhu Hongming was drenched in cold sweat, his face deathly pale. The excruciating pain of a broken bone was more than most people could bear, especially a man of his advanced age. But to appease Lin Mu, he had gone through with it.

Lin Mu remained silent. No one else dared to even breathe too loudly.

Zhu Hongming glanced at Zhu Qi again, his eyes suddenly turning bloodshot. In the next instant, he lunged forward and seized Zhu Qi by the throat.

"Grandfather... what are you doing?" Zhu Tao cried out, shocked to see his grandfather attacking Zhu Qi. The others were equally stunned.

Fei Xiang moved to intervene.

"Stay back!" Zhu Hongming roared, his expression contorted into a ferocious snarl.

"Grand... Grandfather... you..." Zhu Qi gasped, struggling to breathe as he was held by the throat, his eyes filled with terror.

CRACK! With his face twitching, Zhu Hongming gave a sharp twist of his hand, snapping Zhu Qi's neck.

"Instructor Lin, this all started because of this little bastard. He was the one who offended you because he didn't know his place. Is this explanation satisfactory?"

"They say even the most venomous tiger won't eat its own cubs. To think you would strike down your own grandson... I have to say, I'm surprised." Lin Mu shook his head slightly. He stomped his foot lightly on the ground, and an ice spike shot up from below, instantly impaling Zhu Hongming.

An expression of utter disbelief spread across Zhu Hongming's face as he stared at Lin Mu. The onlookers, who had just seen an ice spike materialize from thin air, were so terrified their legs began to tremble uncontrollably.

"I never told you to kill your grandson," Lin Mu said with a mocking sneer. "Your Zhu family thinks it's as powerful as a preeminent clan? I, Lin Mu, am a preeminent clan unto myself!"

Chapter 540: What You Say Doesn't Count!

"Today, I truly witnessed something extraordinary."

In a teahouse filled with ancient charm, Jiang Weiguo heaved a long sigh. Lin Mu held a teacup, gently spinning it. The only ones accompanying him were Fei Xiang, Jiang Weiguo, and Guan Xinhe. Yet these three figures, renowned for their extensive connections, were all extremely cautious and apprehensive in Lin Mu's presence.

The scene from half an hour ago had made a deep impression on them. Although Guan Xinhe knew Lin Mu possessed a multitude of miraculous abilities and was even called a Martial Arts Grandmaster, the feat of conjuring ice from thin air was so astonishing it seemed like the work of a Heavenly Being.

Fei Xiang had once seen Lin Mu in action in Wufeng County. With a single burst of his Internal Energy, dozens of ruffians had dissipated like dust in the wind. That scene had been scary enough, but what happened today was truly an eye-opener for him.

Lin Mu held his teacup, spinning it lightly. "Let's get down to business. You wouldn't have sought me out today just to have tea, right?"

Guan Xinhe had previously mentioned that the Jinan Military Region wanted him to take charge, but Lin Mu sensed it wasn't that simple; some kind of emergency must have occurred.

"Haha, Instructor Lin, you're a direct man, so I'll be blunt," Jiang Weiguo said, his smile suddenly vanishing. He heaved another long sigh, as if struggling with something difficult to express.

"Let me," Guan Xinhe said, setting down his teacup. "Actually, we came to find you, Instructor Lin, for two reasons. Firstly, the Southeast Military Academy does indeed need you to take command, and you will understand why once you get there. The second matter... requires you to save someone."

Lin Mu was slightly taken aback. "Save someone?"

"That's right," Jiang Weiguo spoke up. "To be frank, Instructor Lin, the person in question is the granddaughter of an old friend of mine, a junior I care about. She was kidnapped just a few days ago. So, I must be so bold as to ask for your help."

"Kidnapped?" Lin Mu frowned. "You don't need to come to me for something like that."

Guan Xinhe interjected, "Instructor Lin, you may not know this, but we've already made several rescue attempts. The kidnappers are powerful, and members of our rescue teams have been sacrificed.

"They even threatened that if we dared to send anyone else, they would kill the hostage."

Lin Mu said, "As far as I know, the army is full of experts. Surely it wouldn't be a problem to find someone powerful enough to handle this?"

"Instructor Lin, you have no idea," Jiang Weiguo sighed. "It's not that I haven't asked other experts to intervene, but they all failed."

Guan Xinhe added, "Even Master Qing Ni from the Emei Sect was injured. We suspect the enemy has a Grandmaster-level expert, so we were left with no choice but to come to you."

"A Grandmaster-level expert?" Lin Mu nodded. If that was the case, then regular military forces would indeed be outmatched.

"Instructor Lin, it was actually Elder Guan, Guan Chengye, who recommended you to me," Jiang Weiguo said. "I might have hesitated before, but after seeing you in action today, I believe you are the only one who can save that poor child."

Lin Mu didn't say anything, seeming to hesitate.

Just then, his phone rang. It was Qin Luoli.

"Lin Mu, my friend has been kidnapped! Can you save her?"

Hearing Qin Luoli's frantic and anxious voice, Lin Mu's eyebrows shot up. "Your friend? How do you know she's been kidnapped?"

"Yes, she's my best friend!" Qin Luoli pleaded. "Lin Mu, I'm begging you. I know you know many powerful people. Please help me save her. Lin Mu, she's my only good friend, I don't want to lose her."

Hearing the sob in Qin Luoli's voice, Lin Mu's heart ached for her. "First, tell me your friend's name and how you know she was kidnapped."

"Her grandmother called me," Qin Luoli's voice trembled with worry. "Lin Mu, I've never met my parents. My great-grandmother raised me all by herself. She's old, and in the Qin Family, I have no one to talk to. But my friend is different. From the first day we met, we became inseparable friends who could talk about anything. So, please, I'm begging you, will you save her?"

Lin Mu comforted her, "Luo Li, don't panic."

Lowering the phone for a moment, he asked Jiang Weiguo, "What's the name of the person you want me to save?"

"Li Qiran," Jiang Weiguo answered honestly, though he looked puzzled.

Lin Mu nodded, then spoke into the phone again. "Luo Li, is your friend's name Li Ziran?"

"Yes!" Qin Luoli replied, confused. "Lin Mu, how did you know?"

"Don't you worry about that," Lin Mu said with a smile. "Rest assured, I'll rescue her for you."

"Good, good, good," Qin Luoli was overjoyed. "Lin Mu, you must save her! Qiran's parents passed away when she was very young, and her grandfather disappeared when she was three. Her grandmother raised her all alone. Her life has been a lot like mine, and I can't bear to see her in danger."

"Okay, I promise you," Lin Mu said. He offered a few more words of comfort, got Li Qiran's grandmother's contact information, and then hung up.

"Instructor Lin, does this mean... you agree?" Jiang Weiguo looked at Lin Mu with anticipation, hoping for a definitive answer.

"Yes, I agree." Lin Mu had been hesitant before, but now, for Qin Luoli's sake, he would make the trip.

"Thank you, Instructor Lin!" Jiang Weiguo stood up and raised his teacup. "I offer this tea in place of wine to thank you on behalf of my old friend."

That very afternoon, Lin Mu set off for Sichuan-Shu.

Along the way, Qin Luoli called again. She explained that she had wanted to come with him, but the Old Madam wasn't feeling well and needed someone to look after her, so she couldn't get away.

"Lin Mu, even though Qiran is my good friend, you must protect yourself," Qin Luoli said hesitantly. "I can't live without you."

"Okay."

After hanging up, Lin Mu's heart filled with warmth. It was a nice feeling to be cared for.

Before dark, Lin Mu arrived in Sichuan-Shu, where someone was naturally waiting to pick him up.

"Mr. Lin, this way." The person who had come to meet him was, to his surprise, Guan Feifei, Guan Xinhe's son.

"Why is it you?" Lin Mu was taken aback. Even Guan Feifei had come personally. This Li Qiran's identity must be anything but ordinary.

Guan Feifei gave a wry smile. "It seems Mr. Lin isn't happy to see me."

"Not at all. I'm just a bit curious," Lin Mu said, shaking his head. "A simple kidnapping has alarmed Handong Province's top leader and Elder Guan. This person's identity must be quite significant."

Guan Feifei hesitated.

"If you don't want to say, then don't," Lin Mu said. "I'm not interested in knowing anyway."

"Thank you for your understanding, Mr. Lin." Truth be told, Guan Feifei was still somewhat afraid of Lin Mu. Although there wasn't much of an age difference between them, the gap in their abilities was substantial.

Just then, a man wearing gold-rimmed glasses approached, scrutinizing Lin Mu. His face wore a look of strong disdain, radiating an air of extreme arrogance and rudeness. Following him was another man, towering like an iron fortress, who looked down on Lin Mu condescendingly.

"So you're the expert Jiang Weiguo hired?" the man with glasses said, sizing up Lin Mu and curling his lip. "You don't look like much. Can you really save her? You've got to be joking."

With a small frame like that, he dares call himself an expert? Isn't he afraid of becoming a laughingstock?

When he heard Jiangling was sending an expert, the man hadn't taken it seriously. What kind of expert could they possibly send? In his presence, they would be nothing. Seeing Lin Mu now only solidified his opinion.

It was questionable if a guy like this could even take one of his punches.

"Whether I'm up to it or not is not for you to decide," Lin Mu smiled slightly. "We'll only know after we try."