

## The Quest 42

Chapter 42: The Path of the Heart

Among the mountains, there is a mist, and within the mist, a courtyard, enclosed by a bamboo gate at the end of a narrow path that snakes down to the feet of Mo Hua.

It appears entirely unremarkable.

Mo Hua steps onto the path and immediately senses a fluctuation, as if something has been activated.

Yet looking around, the peaks are still just peaks, the trees remain trees, and the flowers and grass are unchanged.

Mo Hua pauses and surveys his surroundings, but discerns nothing unusual.

Mo Hua has heard that some venerable seniors enjoy setting up arrays or scenarios to test others; perhaps the master on the mountain has similar inclinations.

Or could it be that this very path is itself a test?

Mo Hua feels inexplicably nervous.

Since he is an array master and there are waves of spiritual sense, there likely is an array set up on this path.

But what kind of array could it be?

With Mo Hua's limited experience with arrays, he is clueless. No matter how he looks, the scenery around him seems no different.

As Mo Hua walks, he ponders, but comes to no conclusion.

He simply remembers the instructions of his teacher: to keep a clear mind, let things come naturally, neither forcing nor discouraging himself.

Walking on, he soon reaches the gate of the courtyard.

The bamboo gate of the courtyard is simple but charming.

Beyond the gate, the view opens up to a beautifully scenic yard, with elegant bamboo dwellings, verdant grass underfoot, mist over the pond, and cranes sipping dew—a sight that lifts the spirits.

In the yard stands a gaunt old man. Mo Hua quickly greets him: "Greetings, sir."

The old man's voice is as raspy and dry as his appearance, sounding like wind through decaying wood:

"I am not the master; the master is inside. Follow me."

He leads Mo Hua into one of the bamboo dwellings, which is refreshingly cool and open to breezes on all sides.

In the middle of the room sits a middle-aged cultivator in white robes, his demeanor effortlessly graceful and unconstrained, giving off an aura of detachment, as if all of creation could not linger in his heart.

This was the most transcendental person Mo Hua had ever encountered.

The middle-aged cultivator greets Mo Hua with a casual smile: "You must be Mo Hua. Mr. Yan has told me about you. I'll ask, and you answer freely, without restraint. Speak your mind."

Mo Hua bows, "Yes, sir."

The cultivator introduces himself, "My surname is Zhuang. You may call me Mr. Zhuang."

Mo Hua bows again, "Mr. Zhuang."

Mr. Zhuang nods slightly, "When you passed that path on the mountain, what did you see?"

Mo Hua thinks and replies, "There were mountains, trees, flowers, grass, and a path."

"Anything else?" Mr. Zhuang asks with interest, "Did you see anything else? Perhaps people or events?"

Mo Hua shakes his head.

Mr. Zhuang reveals, "That path contains an array called the Water Mirror Array, gifted to me long ago by a fellow daoist. The first time someone walks it, it can reveal some of their circumstances or even predict some aspects of their future."

Mo Hua is shocked—such an array exists that can reveal one's circumstances and future?

Then what does it mean that he saw nothing? Surely it doesn't mean he has no future...

Mo Hua is momentarily anxious, but recalling Mr. Yan's earlier advice, he honestly says, "I saw nothing else..."

Mr. Zhuang looks surprised, then nods, "I understand." He then produces an array diagram and continues:

"Here are some brushes and ink; draw as much of this array as you can from this diagram."

Mo Hua looks at the diagram—it's the Stabilizing Water Array, the same one Mr. Yan had used to test him previously.

"Yes."

Mo Hua takes the paper and brush, and following the diagram, begins to draw the array.

An hour later, his spiritual sense exhausted, he has only managed to draw five and a half lines of the array pattern.

Since he last attempted the Stabilizing Water Array only a few days ago, his spiritual sense hadn't grown fast enough to complete six lines in such a short period.

His attempt this time is more skilled, and his strokes more precise.

Mr. Zhuang examines Mo Hua's drawing of the array, raises an eyebrow slightly, then says:

"Not bad. Would you like to become a recorded disciple here? I won't teach you the specific sect arrays, but if you wish to learn the common arrays of the cultivation world, I am willing to teach you."

Though unsure why, Mo Hua feels he has somehow passed Mr. Zhuang's test

Mo Hua is overjoyed and respectfully bows to Mr. Zhuang, saying, "Thank you, sir, I am willing!"

In the cultivation world, there are two types of master-disciple relationships: recorded disciples and direct disciples.

Direct disciples address their masters as "master" and receive personal instruction, forming a deep bond akin to parent and child.

Recorded disciples are more casual; they can learn whatever they wish, though they cannot address their master as "master," only as "sir." There is still affection between them, but not as profound as between direct disciples.

However, Mo Hua is grateful that Mr. Zhuang is willing to accept him as a recorded disciple.

Mr. Zhuang nods and says, "Return today and come back tomorrow at dawn. I will begin teaching you some array techniques."

"Understood, sir!"

Mo Hua bows once more, this time as a disciple bidding farewell to his master, then respectfully takes his leave from Mr. Zhuang's courtyard.

As he descends the mountain, he finds Mr. Yan still waiting at the foot. Learning that Mr. Zhuang has agreed to take him as a disciple, Mr. Yan breathes a sigh of relief and advises Mo Hua:

"You are fortunate to have caught Mr. Zhuang's attention. Treasure this opportunity; he is a great master. Show him respect."

"Yes, Teacher," Mo Hua responds.

They walk along the mountain path for a while until Mo Hua suddenly becomes curious and asks, "Teacher, have you been to Mr. Zhuang's courtyard? What did you see when you passed that path?"

Mr. Yan turns to look at Mo Hua silently for a moment before saying:

"When I passed that path, I faintly saw some scenes. Those fleeting images told me that Mr. Zhuang was willing to accept you as his disciple and that you would become an outstanding array master in the future."

After saying this, they arrive at a crossroad, and ahead lies Tongxian City.

Mr. Yan looks at Mo Hua, then solemnly says, "Mo Hua."

Mo Hua turns back, and after a moment of hesitation, Mr. Yan continues:

"Array masters seek the Tao, which is boundless, while human life is fleeting. Only by passing down arrays from generation to generation can cultivators possibly comprehend the Tao and benefit all beings with their arrays."

"In the future, if you become a high-ranking array master, or even higher, and encounter cultivators with good character and talent in arrays, I hope you will not hesitate to guide them. The path of arrays is like water; only by passing it on can it flow far and wide. Otherwise, it will remain stagnant."

Mo Hua suddenly feels the weight on his shoulders. He bows to Mr. Yan earnestly, saying, "I will remember, Teacher!"

Mr. Yan looks relieved.

Mo Hua can't help but ask, "Teacher, are you leaving Tongxian City?"

Mr. Yan nods, "I cannot stay in Tongxian Sect any longer, and I have some personal matters to attend to. I will be leaving soon."

"Will I see you again?"

Mr. Yan looks into Mo Hua's dark and clear eyes, smiling, "We'll see how fate decides."

He reaches out to ruffle Mo Hua's hair, "Go back to your parents and tell them the news."

Mo Hua heads towards the city gate, but after a few steps, he turns back and bows to Mr. Yan once more.

Mr. Yan waves his hand gently and says, "Go on." He watches Mo Hua until his figure becomes small in the misty mountains, then turns and walks away.

At that moment, Mo Hua turns back again to look at Mr. Yan and bows deeply once more.

As Mr. Yan's figure gradually fades away, disappearing into the misty mountains, Mo Hua also turns and walks away, heading towards the city gate.