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Chapter 41: An Accidental Meeting by the Pond

The Ling Family gathered around a blazing bonfire, merrily drinking some fine alcohol while devouring chunks of roasted meat.

—They had long since parted ways with Liu Yan and Gao Yu.

Back in the forest, due to the appearance of the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, Shattered Ice Manor was soundly defeated and lost god knows how many men, whereas they easily exited the forest and entered Frost Mist Mountain without any further incidents.

The moment they reached Frost Mist Mountain, Qin Lie and his group parted ways with Liu Yan and Gao Yu. Gao Yu returned to the Gao family, whereas Liu Yan had to go to Nebula Pavilion to report on everything that had happened in Celestial Wolf Mountain. Ling Yushi and the others, however, were going home.

All three sides were headed along a different path.

“Brother Liu really is a pretty cool guy, eh? What a boon it is for us that he would ignore all that loot from Shattered Ice Manor! Haha, I got about ten Rank Three spirit stones and a few Spirit Recovering Pills. It’s such a shame though that I couldn’t get a spirit artifact.” Ling Xiao grinned as he ate his meat.

“Hmph! Those Shattered Ice Manor bastards were all killed by the Silver Winged Demon Wolves, and Liu Yan had no part in it at all, so why would these spoils have anything to do with him? Of course he should not have the audacity to intervene!” Ling Xing scolded with a cold face. “If it wasn’t for Qin Lie, the rest of them would have found it hard pressed to escape death. You have nothing to thank them for at all!”

“You’re right. If it wasn’t for Qin Lie, we would’ve long been dead,” Ling Xiao also agreed with a sigh.

When the Ling Family first departed, Ling Xing and Ling Xiao were the two people who were the most opposed to Ling Yushi bringing Qin Lie along.

They just couldn’t find it in themselves to accept Qin Lie, whom they believed might become a burden to the team, so they would constantly take shots at him along the way.

Ling Yushi had scolded them multiple times because of this matter, but without success, considering how their attitudes didn't change at all.

However, when they set off for the journey back home, the duo had become Qin Lie's greatest fans. One might say that their attitudes had done a complete one-eighty.

Qin Lie had won their respect and their heartfelt admiration with his own transformation.

None of this had escaped Ling Yushi's eyes as a smile touched her lips and her heart filled with joy.

"I'm full." Qin Lie nodded and stood up to his feet, wiping the oily corner of his mouth with his sleeves and smiled. "I'll go ahead and find a place to cultivate. Do ignore me, and please take your time with the drinks."

"You can't go until you finish this wineskin!" Ling Feng yelled while smiling and tossed over a wineskin.

"Ling Feng! Seriously, Qin Lie is only fifteen years old. Can you refrain from pouring him drinks all the time? Do you think he is an alcoholic like you guys are?" Ling Yushi rolled her eyes at Ling Feng, warmly looked at Qin Lie, and said softly, "Ignore them..."

"You sure are a protective one First Miss! Qin Lie aside, even you and Ling Ying have drunk quite a bit of alcohol, haven't you? Aren't you underestimating him too much?" Ling Feng laughed loudly and shot Qin Lie a slanted look while goading, "Am I right, Qin Lie?"

"Since Big Brother Ling has given the word, naturally I'll have to drink this," Qin Lie said helplessly. He could only pick up the wineskin and, with a "gulp," drink deeply while arching his head. His actions were both bold and unrestrained.

"Enough! They've already forced you to drink so much, so you aren't allowed to drink any further!" Ling Yushi's brows were slightly knitted together as she snatched the wineskin with her jade-like hands, then glared at the rest of the crowd while exclaiming, "And you guys will stop forcing him to drink!"

"Of course we'll stop after this one First Miss, but the leftover liquor... has to be finished," Ling Xiao laughed strangely. "Of course, if there is someone who's willing to finish it for him, we're also fine with that, right guys?"

The crowd realized Ling Xiao's intentions and laughed along while many nodded in agreement.

"I..." Beside Ling Feng, Ling Ying also got excited when she saw the commotion and was about to stand up with a smile.

“Fine! I’ll drink for him!”

Ling Yushi cut off Ling Ying’s words right away. With a small blush underneath Qin Lie’s surprised gaze, she cocked her head, put her lips to the mouth of the wineskin, and began taking small sips repeatedly; her posture was both elegant and attractive.

Everyone exploded into applause as their smiles turned more and more merry when they looked at Qin Lie and Yushi teasingly.

Ling Ying secretly regretted it on the inside when she saw that she was one step too slow, and she hmphed lightly with a dissatisfied pout.

As Qin Lie watched Ling Yushi drink the liquor that he had just drunk without the slightest reservation at all, he felt the slightest ripple in his heart... At this moment, he thought that she looked more and more beautiful and exuberated an aura of unspeakable attractiveness.

“Are you satisfied?” Finishing the rest of the liquor, with her cheeks completely red, Ling Yushi rolled her eyes at her clansmen and turned to speak to Qin Lie gently, “Just ignore these bastards and go. Do whatever you need to.”

Qin Lie nodded with a smile and left as advised towards a faraway pond.

Before long, he arrived at a large tree with crisscrossing roots and took out the tens of Fire Crystals Liu Yan had gifted him, the Green Wing Axe, and Qin Shan’s sculpture, pondering while rubbing the bottom of his chin.

“Fwoosh!”

Before long, he had lit up a Fire Crystal and the flames burned blazingly. The axe head of the low level Green Wing Axe was propped on top of the crimson flames.

After a long while, the axe head began to turn red, and Qin Lie reached out his right hand and pointed at its cheeks from afar.

His spirit energy seeped out, and his mind energy flowed within. He immediately made a connection with the Green Wing Axe, and while he felt out the simplistic Spirit Gathering diagram inside the axe, he also paid close attention to the flow of mind energy, capturing even the tiniest changes of the spirit lines within...

Previously, after he used his all his power to help Liu Yan fix his Hexagonal Shield, both his mind and spirit energy were almost completely exhausted. When he recovered using the the Spirit Recovering Pill, he realized that both his mind and spirit energy had increased by a certain amount.

It was a memorable moment which was why he wanted to try it again and see if he could increase his power through repairing the Green Wing Axe.

“Only by improving my cultivating and breaking through can my mind energy increase steadily as well. Mind energy is the key to unlocking my sealed memories, and if I want to remember what happened before I was ten years old, I must continue to better myself and breakthrough to the next realm! What was I like before I was ten years old, who are my parents, and are they dead or still alive? I must have an answer to all of that!”

While Qin Lie was in quiet thought, he began conducting his spirit energy towards the twisted knot inside the axe’s spirit diagram, ready to fix it.

“Poof!”

While his thoughts were still in a jumble, he accidentally broke a tiny spirit thread. Then he saw the Spirit Gathering diagram actually collapse immediately. The spirit network was completely tangled together, causing the spirit energy to become unbalanced which suddenly destroyed the Spirit Gathering diagram.

It all happened in an instant, and there was nothing he could do to save it. When he realized the problem, it was already too late.

Originally the Green Wing Axe’s components were already damaged by his thunder, so even if he did fix the spirit diagram, it would not be able to unleash its full power. He didn’t do it to fix the Green Wing Axe but rather to cultivate. The Green Wing Axe was completely useless now, but it was nothing to feel sorry about either. He simply treated it as a failed case of reparation.

“It appears that I cannot lose concentration for even an instant while I’m repairing a spirit artifact or drawing a spirit diagram. No matter how miniscule the mistake, it could cause the entire construction to collapse and destroy the spirit artifact as well,” Qin Lie’s thought deeply. At this point, he began congratulating himself for actually succeeding the first time when he assisted Liu Yan by fixing his spirit artifact.

Since the Green Wing Axe was broken, he then picked up Qin Shan’s wooden sculpture. As he began probing about with his mind energy, he felt a surge of quiet surprise.

Previously, when the Silver Winged Demon Wolves had attacked them, he had injected an insane amount of thunder and lightning energy into the wooden sculpture. He had thought that its components might be damaged by the violent thunder and lightning energy...

The truth was different.

His probes revealed that, not only were the wooden sculpture's components not affected whatsoever, even the "artifact's" interior structures were perfectly intact!

He didn't know whether it was because the wooden sculpture was adaptive to the injection of lightning powers or that this "artifact" was of enough high rank and could thus endure the destructive powers of lightning. At any rate, the wooden sculpture had no problems whatsoever.

"If this wooden sculpture truly was made by Grandpa, then his artifact forging skills... must be unbelievably superb!"

After a moment's thought, Qin Lie realized that the current him still could not understand the complex spirit diagrams inside the sculpture and therefore did not dare to change anything on his own. He had no choice but to safely put away the sculpture once more.

He sat down, held his breath, focused his mind, and began channeling Heavenly Thunder Eradication, all while using Spirit Recovering Pills to gather spirit energy.

After an unknown amount of time, he gradually woke up from cultivation and looked up towards the pure white moon, frowning. "There is thunder and lightning energy inside my acupoints and my spirit energy couldn't get through it. In this case, wouldn't it be impossible to cultivate the penetration of my acupoints and achieve the eighth level of Refinement?"

Earlier, he gathered spirit energy and tried to break through his acupoints only to find that every single one had thunder and lightning energy inside. All the thunder and lightning energy quickly formed a barrier that prevented the rush of spirit energy.

He had tried many acupoints and all of them returned the same result; spirit energy was completely blocked off.

This could be counted as the first barrier he had ever faced on his path of cultivation. He needed to break through this barrier if he wanted to ascend to a higher realm and push his power to new heights.

"Splash splash splash!"

It was at this moment that he suddenly heard the sound of water splashing in the pond beside him.

The huge tree Qin Lie was by was right beside the pond. In the first place, he was cultivating from behind the tree roots facing away from the pond, so he didn't notice anything happening inside the pond at all. Now that he had heard something peculiar, he then poked his head out around the tree and gazed at the pond.

A single glance alone caused a great shudder, and Qin Lie felt all the blood in his body rush to his head.

Under the bright moonlight and inside the clear pond water was a white as cream naked body, whose beautiful back had just suddenly appeared right before his eyes!

That thin waist, that cloud-like hair hanging across her shoulders, those long, graceful legs, and those peach-like butt cheeks... Qin Lie saw everything. He lost his cool in an instant, and his eyes became hot. Even his breathing was gradually turning heavier and heavier.

"Ling Yushi!"

Qin Lie shouted in his heart. He only needed to look once at that slightly thin figure to know who the beautiful woman was.

Previously, Ling Yushi was bathing inside the pond. Once she finished washing her body and swam over from deeper part of the pond just now, she stood up with her back towards Qin Lie, and facing towards the center of the pond, she said, "I'm done washing, so I'll be going back first. Take your time."

"I'm almost done," came Ling Ying's voice from further inside the pond.

Startled, Qin Lie looked behind Ling Yushi towards the deeper part of the pond, and only then did he noticed Ling Ying's little head on the surface of the water, glittering under the moonlight.

He immediately realized that the two girls must have come to the pond to bathe together after the bonfire had concluded. It's just that he didn't realize that they had come there because he was in the state of Thoughtless Tranquility, and since he was behind the tree, Ling Yushi and Ling Ying also didn't notice him.

"Okay. Then I'll go up and change into my clothes," Ling Yushi casually replied. She then turned around and began walking over from the pond.

Qin Lie shuddered again as he dazedly watched Ling Yushi, who was facing directly towards him, with his mind completely blank.

Ling Yushi was completely oblivious to the fact that there was someone in the vicinity. She was busy wiping the water droplets off her body and her soaked long hair with a towel. Her full and round breasts, her perfectly flat stomach, that little bush right between her beautiful legs... Qin Lie could see everything!

She walked straight to the where their clothes were placed not too far away, and just as she picked up some silken undergarments and put it on, she heard the sound of a person gulping.

“Who is it?” Ling Yushi’s expression turned as she exclaimed softly, and without a second thought, she dashed towards the origin of the sound like lightning.

It was only then that Qin Lie came to his senses behind the tree as he quickly bowed his head, but unfortunately, it was already too late...

“Whoosh!”

Ling Yushi’s beautiful eyes were filled with evil. She raised her hands, brimming with a silver light and a murderous charge, and was about to strike down the offender with all her might.

When she saw that the person behind the tree was actually Qin Lie, she suddenly froze and a cry escaped her lips. In an instant, her cheeks turned completely red with embarrassment, and although her shining left hand was still held high in the air she just couldn’t bring it down on Qin Lie.

“First Miss, are you talking to someone?” At this moment, Ling Ying’s voice also came over. “I’m also finished. I’m coming up right now.”

Hearing her words, Ling Yushi became dumbfounded for a moment, but she instantly realized that the moment Ling Ying climbed up, she would see her completely wet next to Qin Lie, and Qin Lie too... would see an equally naked Ling Ying.

To prevent Ling Ying from noticing them, in a rush, she grit her teeth and shrunk right behind the tree and pressed herself tightly against Qin Lie’s body. That beautiful face of hers looked almost red enough to drip blood.

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Chapter 42: Intimacy

“First Miss, where are you? I told you to wait a bit for me. Just where did you run off to?”

As Ling Ying whispered to herself, her clothes rustled as she put them on. She glanced back and forth and then muttered, “That’s weird. She was clearly just around here. How did she suddenly vanish?”

As she spoke, a light blue veil covered the top of her petite body. Her little head constantly shook as she scanned around for any trace of Ling Yushi.

In order to avoid being seen by Ling Ying, Qin Lie and Ling Yushi were standing behind a large tree, but it was only big enough to hide them if they huddled together. Unwittingly, the two plastered their bodies against each other...

Ling Yushi squirmed. At the moment, she was covered only by some thin silk undergarments, and her long hair was still dripping wet. Her undergarment was completely soaked through, causing the thin fabric to closely stick to her graceful body. Compared to being completely naked, this kind of vagueness was far more enticing and stimulating.

Qin Lie didn't dare move, his body becoming very stiff as his breathing gradually heaved.

Ling Yushi's extremely alluring naked body was seamlessly plastered to him, allowing him to smell the delicate fragrance of orchids and feel the creaminess of her skin. He could sense her supple breasts and the acceleration of her heartbeat...

"Bathump! Bathump!"

As Ling Ying muttered to herself, the heartbeats of the two quickly sped up. They could both feel each other's temperatures rise and hear each other's breaths slowly begin to grow heavier.

Stuck within their alluring and thrilling moment, the two became unable to think, their minds completely blank as they pressed closer and closer together. They almost even forgot about the existence of Ling Ying.

After who knows how long had passed and after Ling Ying's mutterings had stopped, the two were still stuck in the same position, their breaths still becoming ever so heavier.

Qin Lie felt as if a ball of raging fire had been ignited within him, one which burned through him and clouded his judgement. He only wanted to tightly embrace that graceful body; perhaps this way he could slow down the raging fire within him.

Subconsciously, he tightly embraced the graceful body as he pleased...

His sturdy arms suddenly exerted force, abruptly hugging Ling Yushi tight and only continued to exert more and more force!

Feeling the supple breasts press against him, not only did the fire within him not slow down, it began to rage even more violently, burning him to the point that he wished to press Ling Yushi into his own body!

He, who was only fifteen years old, only knew how to cultivate. He had only cared about the accumulation of spirit energy and rising in power; never before had he fought such a battle. He was unfamiliar with everything else and thus had no idea how to put out the fire within him.

His actions were but the instinctive reactions of his body...

“Uu... you’re hurting me.”

Ling Yushi’s breaths sounded more and more haggard as Qin Lie hugged her tighter and tighter. She felt as if she would suffocate at any moment and quickly cried out as she forcefully pushed Qin Lie away.

The two were finally separated.

“I... I have constantly been cultivating here. I don’t know when you guys came here, but it wasn’t on purpose... I swear! I swear it wasn’t on purpose...”

As soon as they separated, Qin Lie immediately sobered up. Within the depths of his heart, he felt anxious and confused as he stutteringly spoke, his demeanor showing hints of nervousness.

Ling Yushi’s face had flushed red, and an enchanting yearning shined and rippled through her eyes. She lightly bit her lower lip, snorted softly, and then said, “You didn’t peep on purpose, eh? You suddenly hugged someone so tightly... what else do you have to say for yourself?”

Qin Lie was silent. He just stood there, speechless.

Ling Yushi suddenly raised her head and charmingly rolled her eyes, quietly laughing, “You’re acting like a fool...”

Her words stopped; not waiting for Qin Lie to clearly explain himself, she moved her long, beautiful legs and began walking towards their rest area. From her graceful and nimble steps, she seemed... to not truly be that angry.

Qin Lie watched her walk gradually but gracefully into the distance, his mind still recalling the wonderful events that he had just experienced. After a moment, he suddenly felt that the prospect of continuing to cultivate had become awfully dreary.

He just sat down, raising his head to look at the timelessly bright and clear moon with his heart still a mess. No matter what he did, he couldn’t calm down.

The following two days, every time Qin Lie and Ling Yushi saw each other, they didn’t dare look each other in the eye. It was as if they had done something unspeakable and were afraid of being exposed.

In the eyes of the Ling Family members, Ling Yushi was still the compassionate First Miss. Whenever they rested on the way home, she would chat with them about what spoils they had gained from the trip and exchange cultivation tips.

Qin Lie was also the same as before, generally not active in engaging conversation with the Ling Family members. Even when they rested, he would often sit expressionlessly with his eyes vacant as if his soul had left through his acupoints...

Through Ling Yushi's explanations, everyone now knew that Qin Lie's blankness was caused by his cultivation method and gradually became accustomed to it. In fact, every time they saw Qin Lie's eyes go blank, they would reveal looks of deep respect.

Everyone completely approved of Qin Lie's painstaking cultivation. Furthermore, as soon as they saw Qin Lie's eyes become blank, they began to gradually talk less and less. Immediately stopping their conversations and finding suitable places for them to gather spirit energy as well in order to temper their own bodies.

—Qin Lie bitterly cultivating had caused them to feel the pressure and had indirectly encouraged and inspired them.

"We will arrive home in just two more days!" That evening, as everyone sat together while eating dried meat and drinking good liquor, Ling Xiao became exuberant as he laughingly said, "This time, Shattered Ice Manor has suffered great losses. We can be considered to have made great contributions and also gained a lot of spoils from the battle. It is truly a perfect scenario!"

"I wonder if Feng Yi died. If that brat didn't die, sooner or later he will become a disaster. If he is still among the living, I will personally kill him myself!" coldly exclaimed Ling Xin.

Out of the Ling Family members who had left on the trip, only Ling Yang wasn't returning. He had died at the hands of the Feng Family. Ling Yang was Ling Xin's younger cousin, and this caused his hatred for the Feng Family to embed itself deep within his bones.

"The Feng Family is located rather close to Nebula Pavilion while the Ling and Gao Families are both rather far. Furthermore, since we are going through Frost Mist Mountain, our trip was extended even further... If Feng Yi didn't die and went straight towards home from Celestial Wolf Mountain, he will have been much faster than us. If he wanted to play tricks, he could have already gone to Nebula Pavilion and discredited us," reasoned Ling Feng with a solemn expression.

"Discredit us?" blankly asked Ling Xiao. "We have Liu Yan with us, how could he discredit us? Moreover, the Gao Family can also testify, how could the Feng Family change the entire story?"

"If he wants to discredit us, it is probable that he will include Liu Yan and the Gao Family as well. Although this can't be covered up for too long, I believe it is likely..." said Ling Feng.

"What will he say?" curiously asked Ling Xin.

“The Feng Family wants time. Previously the Feng Family had already dispatched someone, so that person should have already notified the Feng Family Patriarch which means that they will have thoroughly prepared. After they’ve thrown suspicion onto the Ling and Gao Families, distracting Nebula Pavilion, they will immediately shift their allegiance to Shattered Ice Manor and leave Nebula Pavilion,” inserted Ling Yushi as she crinkled her eyebrows.

“What First Miss said is correct,” said Ling Feng, nodding his head. “After the Feng Family have passed the message on to Shattered Ice Manor, they will have already started their preparations. They will definitely all move to Shattered Ice Manor’s territory. There is no possibility that they will wait for Nebula Pavilion to slaughter them all. Before Liu Yan is able to return to give his own report on the events that concluded, the Feng Family would have already made thorough preparations...”

“What are you afraid of? When water subsides, rocks will always emerge. Future matters will just be headaches for Nebula Pavilion,” responded Ling Xin.

“Within Nebula Pavilion, there is an anxious person who has constantly been trying to take control of the Ling Family. After this matter, they might take this opportunity to make trouble before the truth comes to light,” said Ling Feng, sighing as he looked at Ling Yushi with a worried expression.

As he said that, Ling Yushi’s pretty face also sank. Upon thinking about Du Haitian, Du Jiaolan, and her children, she began to gush with hatred as she knew that Ling Feng’s fears could quite possibly happen. Du Haitian had long since wanted to deal with the Ling Family. If he was given such an opportunity, how could he not take it?

“From tomorrow onward, let us all increase our speed. We must quickly return to Ling Town!” suddenly shouted Ling Yushi after thinking for a moment.

Once everyone remembered the existence of Du Haitian, their hearts all sank. All of them silently nodding in understanding.

“Qin Lie is cultivating again, what a weirdo!” quietly shouted Ling Xiao.

Everyone looked towards Qin Lie and discovered that he once again seemed to be soulless. Feeling the pressure, they hurriedly ended their conversations and found their own places to cultivate.

Only Ling Yushi was still where she originally was. She seemingly sat in a trance as if she hadn’t realized that everyone else had dispersed. It was like she had thought of some depressing matter as a touch of sadness emerged upon her elegant face...

“What’s wrong?”

Qin Lie awakened from his state of Thoughtless Tranquility. Seeing that there was no one nearby except for Ling Yushi, he watched as her eyes reddened and became moist. Suddenly feeling a little pain in his heart, he couldn't help but softly ask.

"It's nothing," sadly whispered Ling Yushi, wiping the tears from her eyes as she smiled at him. "I only thought of my mother..."

A sentimental light appeared within Qin Lie's eyes.

"My mother was driven to death by Du Haitian," depressingly whispered Ling Yushi as she hung her head. "That year, I was ten years old. At the time, Nebula Pavilion and Shattered Ice Manor had gotten into major conflicts that were much worse than it is right now. At that time, Nebula Pavilion passed down an order to the Ling Family, commanding us to destroy one of Shattered Ice Manor's spirit herb garden. They had said that there weren't any Shattered Ice Manor experts guarding it..."

Once her speech reached this point, she once again seemed on the verge of crying. "So my mother and father, along with some of the family members, went out. Upon reaching the spirit herb garden, they discovered that there was a middle stage Natal Opening martial practitioner stationed within. At that time, my father was still only at the early stage Natal Opening Realm. Thus, more than half of the family members that went died, and as for my mother... she also wasn't able to come back."

She raised her head, her bright eyes filled with a deep-seated hatred. Grinding her teeth, she said, "Only afterwards did we learn that the order was sent down by Du Haitian and that he had purposely sent us there even though he knew about the true situation within the herb garden!"

Qin Lie stayed silent for a moment, then whispered, "You must live well then, so that in the future, you can take revenge for your mother. You can definitely do it!"

After saying these words to console Ling Yushi, for a reason he didn't understand, a dull pain suddenly arose in his heart. His face became extremely pale as he clutched at it as a painful expression appeared within his eyes.

"Qin Lie, what's wrong? Are you not feeling well?" nervously asked Ling Yushi, with traces of tears still left on her face. Upon seeing Qin Lie's condition, she became shocked and hurried to his side.

"I'm fine, I'm fine." Qin Lie's face became extremely red. Panting, he shook his head as he slowly took a few deep breaths. Only after a while did he stabilize himself. Finally, after breathing in another breath, he said, "I don't understand why, but when I hear you talk about what happened to your mother, I felt extremely upset. I felt as if my heart was about to be torn from the pain."

“Qin Lie, thank you, truly thank you!” Upon hearing Qin Lie’s words, she felt moved to tears, unexpectedly flying into his arms and tightly hugging him. She excitedly said, “Thank you so much for comforting me, I feel much better.”

Qin Lie's body was slightly stiff, letting her hug him tightly without any resistance. Yet this time, his thoughts did not become adventurous and his expression was unnaturally calm.

His response just now wasn’t said to comfort Ling Yushi, but was the truest, deepest, most intimate feeling within his heart. Even at this moment, his heart was still aching.

“Mother, father, I have already forgotten you both. I don’t know what happened in the past, but because I thought of you two... my heart aches,” quietly whispered Qin Lie as he hugged Ling Yushi. Before he knew it, his eyes had also become slightly moist.

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Chapter 43: Returning to the Mountain

Eight days later, Qin Lie, Ling Yushi, and the rest, finally arrived at Herb Mountain. Seeing the familiar caves dotted across Herb Mountain, everyone was filled with joy.

“We have finally returned home,” laughingly said Ling Xiao. Touching the bulging cloth bag on his body, his eyes flashed with light as he said, “Although it hasn’t even been a month since I left Ling Town, this trip was just too dangerous and thrilling. It feels as if a long time has passed. Fortunately... we were able to avoid great disaster and instead gained great rewards, haha!”

“For us to survive through the sinister plot of the Feng Family and Shattered Ice Manor and their wild goose chase is indeed a miracle,” said Ling Feng, looking deeply at Qin Lie. Smiling, he continued, “We were even able to gain a decent number of both spirit stones and spirit materials and were able to make contributions towards Nebula Pavilion as well. Mn, this recent chain of events was indeed quite the thrill ride.”

Everyone similarly looked at Qin Lie as well.

Everyone’s hearts brightened. If not for Qin Lie’s numerous and shocking performances, the Ling Family members which had gone on this trip would have been beyond redemption — the men would have died and Ling Yushi and Ling Ying would have had to suffer tragic fates that would have probably been worse than death.

Even Liu Yan and the Gao Family members would not have escaped death. They would have all died together.

“Qin Lie, in the future when you are within Ling Town, are you still going to act the fool?” smilingly asked Ling Yushi, pursing her lips.

They were almost about to reach Ling Town; because of that, last night, Ling Yushi had changed from her practitioner attire into a light green robe. A floral pattern was sewn into the robe with blue crystals hanging from its corners. The robe gave her a noble beauty, and along with the ambient light within her beautiful eyes, she seemed bright and beautiful.

During this trip, not only had the Ling Family gained many spirit stones and spirit materials, they also made contributions towards Nebula Pavilion and gained the goodwill of Liu Yan. Even the issue that had constantly plagued her for a long time had been gotten rid of.

—Not only was her fiance not a fool, he was both outstanding and extraordinary and had constantly protected her.

Her worries were no more, and in turn she had gained things she could be happy about. This caused her to feel exuberant, so a faint smile constantly stayed on her face which gave her a radiant look.

Lately, everyone had noticed that the relationship between Qin Lie and Ling Yushi had become increasingly close. Upon hearing Ling Yushi teasing Qin Lie, they all began to laugh and look at Qin Lie.

“I wasn’t acting as a fool, I was only in a cultivating state. In the future, I might also be like that, so don’t be too shocked,” said Qin Lie, bitterly laughing. He reluctantly explained, “So in the future, when you see me in Ling Town and I’m like that, there is no need to act like it’s weird. Mn, I cultivate in that state, that is just the way it is.”

“It’s not weird, it’s not weird. Hehe, anything you do in the future will not be considered weird.” Ling Xiao boisterously laughed. “You were even able to repair Liu Yan’s Common Grade Five spirit artifact. You are even better than your grandpa in the past. What else can we find weird in the future? If there are too many weird things, nothing is weird anymore...”

As he said these words, everyone began to laugh uncontrollably. Indeed, Qin Lie had done so many weird things that they had gradually begun to get used to them.

“Forget it, I’m not going to keep talking with you all. I’m going to make a trip to Herb Mountain first to drop off the fire crystals. In a bit, I will go into town and eat a normal warm meal. You guys go first, there’s no need to wait for me. I will be there in a while,” said Qin Lie, chuckling.

“I will return with you,” said Ling Yushi with a serene smile. Naturally, she continued, “It has almost been a month since we left, so there is no rush at the moment. Go, I will simply wait here for a while.”

“We’re also not in a rush so we’ll just wait here for you,” said Ling Xiao with a great sense of obligation.

Ling Xin glared at him saying, “Idiot, First Miss wanted to walk home alone with Qin Lie. This guy really is stupid!”

After these words, everyone sobered up. All of them began to quietly laugh as they teasingly stared at the two of them.

Ling Yushi felt a little embarrassed and annoyed as her face slightly turned red. She snappily said, “As always, you sure have a lot to say!”

Ling Xin wasn’t angry at all. Scratching his head, he awkwardly and foolishly laughed twice, “First Miss, please forgive my mistake. I was wrong, I said it too loudly...”

Qin Lie was speechless. Within his heart, a slight warmth could be felt.

He couldn’t remember ten years ago, and he had spent the last five years cultivating in solitude. Thus, he had essentially no contact with people around his age, and this made him sometimes seem eccentric.

These days, however, he was getting along quite well with these members of the Ling Family. It made him very comfortable and made his heart feel a great deal of warmth. Especially Ling Yushi...

“Then I’ll go to Herb Mountain first.” Slightly smiling, he quickly nodded his head at everyone and then left to Herb Mountain.

After he left, everyone else all acted sensibly, immediately taking the initiative to head back to Ling Town first. Only Ling Ying pouted reluctantly, as if she had wanted to also stay and wait for Qin Lie.

“This girl, they are already engaged. What are you cutting in for?” quietly reminded Ling Xiao, grabbing her.

“They are only engaged and have yet to truly marry. Seriously. Whatever, I’ll just leave with you guys...” whispered Ling Ying in response.

Ling Yushi just watched everything happen, not saying anything to Ling Ying. After deeply pondering for a while, she said to everyone, “These past five years Qin Lie has been painstakingly cultivating. It is I... who disturbed his peaceful life and involved him in the matters of the Ling Family.”

Pausing for a moment, she furrowed her brows and then continued, “The chaotic, messy matters of the Ling Family should not be imposed upon him as he is completely unrelated. Thus, once we’ve all returned to normal, concerning over the matters

pertaining to him... everyone please don't say anything. He wants to just peacefully cultivate, we shouldn't break that peace."

"Mn, we all understand. Although the Ling Family has a ton of terrible matters, they are all our own matters. We definitely shouldn't impose these upon him," said Ling Feng, nodding his head. He sternly continued towards everyone, "In a while, when we return to Ling Town, don't speak anymore about matters regarding Qin Lie. Otherwise, if other people learn of Qin Lie's strength, they will definitely pester him. That will definitely affect his cultivation."

Everyone expressed their understanding and promised not to gossip or discuss things concerning Qin Lie.

Not long after, under Ling Feng's urging, they all returned to Ling Town together.

Ling Yushi gracefully stood by herself at the foot of Herb Mountain, waiting. Suddenly, she recalled one of her most recent encounters with Qin Lie where she had carried Qin Lie by his legs back to Ling Town.

During that time, he had been lying on her back while closely pressed against her...

Thinking about it, her cheeks couldn't help but grow hot as she suddenly thought of a question: During that time, was that guy awake?

As the thought raced through her mind, waves began to ripple across her eyes and her face revealed an alluring, elegant expression.

Within the mines of Herb Mountain, Qin Lie had just entered, and his expression suddenly sank.

The mountain's interior was a complex system of mines. While he had been cultivating, his grandfather had personally worked on constructing it day by day. Tunnel after tunnel crisscrossed each other, forming strange formations which prevented outsiders from entering, so he could always have a quiet place to cultivate. A private little space where he could let himself loose.

Previously, due to Du Jiaolan's increasingly aggressive actions, Ling Chengye had no choice but to open the cave to the public, resulting in many Ling Family members entering the mountain to explore like a flock of birds.

Unfortunately, not a single martial practitioner of Ling Town was able to find the secret to the formations and break into their mysteries; they all gradually gave up on their own.

Today, however, at the entrance to the mine, there were clear traces of the formations having been broken through since several of the stone tunnels were blocked by giant boulders, thus changing the flow of air current within the tunnels. Furthermore, there

were several newly opened tunnels which seemed to have been the initial method the trespasser utilized to break the formations.

——The Ling Family definitely didn't have people who could understand this.

So who could have done it?

Qin Lie deeply furrowed his brows, his heart constricting as he hurriedly followed the original path into the depths of the mountain. He hoped that no one had been able to enter the deepest part of the mountain.

That was his own private space. It was the crucial area where he had previously tempered himself with Heavenly Thunder Eradication and was also his own little paradise.

He couldn't allow any outsiders to enter!

Very quickly, he reached the interior of the caves. After discovering that everything was still normal, as well as the traces he had seen on his way, he surmised that formation breaker had yet to come in.

"It's okay. That person should not be able to break through the formations for the time being. I assume they must still be trying to figure out a method." After entering the cave, Qin Lie properly put away the fire crystals, and rubbed his chin for a while. His eyes gradually became cold. "If it wasn't a person from Ling Town, who could it be? What does this person want? Do they truly believe there is some treasure within the cave?"

Knowing that Ling Yushi was waiting for him outside, he didn't stay for long within the mines and quickly left.

Naturally, as soon as he exited cavern, he saw Ling Yushi prettily standing where she had originally been.

He didn't know what she had been thinking about, but her cheeks had become flushed and there was an ambient light within her eyes. She didn't have her usual alluring charm, and her elegance was different than usual. All of this gave Qin Lie a different impression.

"What are you thinking about so deeply?" Qin Lie suddenly called out softly, after quietly walking behind her.

Ling Yushi suddenly jumped. She had clearly been surprised. Upon realizing that it was just Qin Lie, a smile emerged again as she mischievously looked at him, pointed at him, and laughingly asked, "I was thinking of that time when I was carrying you home on my back. Were you awake?"

Unprepared, the skin on Qin Lie's face suddenly trembled. Just when he wanted to strongly deny it, Ling Yushi had already seen it, shouting, "I knew it! I just knew it, you! You are truly rotten to the core!"

Embarrassed, Qin Lie dryly laughed, noncommittal no matter what she said.

However, Ling Yushi didn't pursue it any further. Laughing, she rolled her eyes and said, "Since you tightly gripped my hand and helped me divide the pressure during the engagement ceremony, I will forgive you."

At that time, she had to endure the ridicule and mocking from her family members as well the harsh words of the Du Family. In that moment of extreme sadness and helplessness, it was Qin Lie who had tightly held her hand.

At that time, under the great pressure, she had unconsciously gripped with force and her nails pierced into Qin Lie's palm, yet Qin Lie didn't even utter a cry.

After the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, with her pure and noble heart, she had naturally been able to guess that Qin Lie had been awake then. Thus, she had often recalled that time, and whenever she did, her heart would be extremely moved.

Just that one matter was enough for her to forgive all of Qin Lie's sins. Not to mention, in the first place, the depths of her heart didn't contain even the slightest negative thought towards Qin Lie...

"The stone tunnels' formations within Herb Mountain are currently being destroyed by someone. The person shouldn't be someone of the Ling Family, do you have any idea who it might be?" in order to avoid awkwardness, Qin Lie changed the topic by quickly bringing up what he had just discovered. Simply explaining the circumstances, he continued, "That person understands formations and should be an artificer. However, their level shouldn't be too high considering that even after spending a long time, they weren't able to break through."

"There isn't even a need to guess, the culprit has to be Du Jiaolan. She probably told Du Haitian the circumstances surrounding Herb Mountain and had him arrange for people to come over and try to break through it," decisively concluded Ling Yushi. "She has wanted to acquire Herb Mountain for a long time now, constantly scheming to replace my father as the Ling Family Patriarch. The mysteries within Herb Mountain are a point of entry for her, so she would naturally pay attention to it."

Qin Lie silently listened, his brows gradually furrowing as his face sunk.

The wondrous formations within Herb Mountain were personally made for him by his grandfather. Even if they truly needed to be destroyed, they would only be destroyed by his hands. No one else could interfere!

That cave was a sacred ground within his mind, his only private space. Even Ling Yushi hadn't been brought in, so how could an outsider enter!

Chapter 44: Heavy Pressure

Qin Lie and Ling Yushi were walking shoulder to shoulder along the small mountain path. They chatted along the way, unhurriedly heading towards Ling Town.

At Ling Town's entrance, the two of them could hear Du Jiaolan's piercing voice as she was scolding someone, echoing out from within the courtyard of Ling Family's main quarters.

Ling Yushi's pretty face changed and she said to Qin Lie, "Go ahead and get some rest, I'm going to check it out." After speaking, she rushed towards the main quarters.

Ling Chengye's family lived in the middle of Ling Town, right beside the martial arts arena. That was also where the ancestral hall was, and that area of residency had always belonged to the patriarchs of the Ling Family.

At that moment, intense arguing could be heard from that direction. Many of the Ling Family members could be seen gathering around to take a look at the commotion.

Qin Lie froze for a moment. After pondering for a while, his state of mind slightly shook, causing his eyes to returned back into a vacant state as he also emotionlessly made his way over.

Shortly after, he arrived at the site of the argument — the Ling Family courtyard at the back of the martial arts arena.

He was greeted by the sight of Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and the rest who had arrived earlier and were standing beside Ling Chengye. Ling Yushi had also joined her father's side after rushing over with a face full of worry. She was quietly asking her younger sister, Ling Xuanxuan the details of what had transpired.

Du Jiaolan had brought Du Qishan, Du Heng, and a group of martial practitioners dispatched by Du Haitian to confront Ling Chengye as she chastised and shouted at Ling Xuanxuan viciously.

At the sides of the Du Family, her youngest son, Du Fei was lying on a stretcher. His face was as pale as a ghost due to the severe injuries he sustained.

There were a few scratches on Ling Chengye's face as well which were probably inflicted by Du Jiaolan in her rage.

The Ling Family's three elders, Ling Kangan, Ling Xiang, and Ling Bo, were also present. Their expressions were heavy as they tried their best to get the two sides to talk things through.

Quite a large number of the Ling Family members were gathered at the sides of the courtyard, pointing and criticizing the Du Family's mother and sons furiously.

Qin Lie listened in from an inconspicuous corner, gradually coming to an understanding of what had exactly transpired.

Two nights ago, Du Fei attempted to take advantage of Ling Xuanxuan by drugging her with smoke when she slept, but was discovered by her. With his cultivation only at the sixth level of the Refinement Realm, he was brutally beaten up by Ling Xuanxuan and ended up with many broken ribs. Even his manhood was given a vicious stomp, likely to be unusable anymore...

After that happened, Du Jiaolan erupted with rage. She accused Ling Xuanxuan of slandering her son, purposefully scheming to grievously harm him.

That very night, she almost took to arms against Ling Chengye. Similarly, after Ling Chengye found out that Du Fei was harboring malicious intent towards his daughter, he exploded with anger. He had a intense quarrel with Du Jiaolan which was only broken up after the persuasion of the three clan elders into a temporary ceasefire.

Du Jiaolan returned home to check on Du Fei's injuries; discovering that the injuries were gradually worsening, she returned to clash against Ling Chengye once more.

Including today, that would be the fourth round already...

"Ling Chengye! You actually dare to bully us? A widow and some fatherless kids? You dare to treat us as nobodies? Fine! Just you wait, my Du Family will be here soon!" Du Jiaolan gestured wildly as she howled like a lioness. "My cousin will arrive in the afternoon. I'm curious to see whether you, Ling Chengye, would still dare to disregard me then? Your b*tch of a daughter venomously injured my son, resulting in his current state. I will never rest until I have settled the score!"

"You're the b*tch! Your whole Du Family are dogs and b*tches!" Ling Xuanxuan's eyes were bloodshot as she cursed back, refusing to show even the slightest bit of weakness. The way she gnashed and grit her teeth was just like a tigress.

"Your son deserved it!" Ling Yushi's pretty face was also frosty after she found out the details of what happened. Her beautiful eyes glared at Du Jiaolan as she shouted, "It is already very forgiving of us not to kill Du Fei when he tried to carry out such a heinous act. Xuanxuan could be considered to be like a younger sister to him. For him to attempt such a thing, he is lowlier than a beast!"

“Mn, simply just a beast!”

“He deserves it, that’s just his karma. It’s already very lenient that we haven’t beaten him to death!”

“Agreed, agreed!”

The Ling Family clansmen at the sides were all set ablaze with righteous indignation as they echoed in agreement.

“Good! Very good! You guys actually dare to bully us outsiders?!” Du Jiaolan’s lungs were threatening to explode from rage, and her eyes were spewing a dark look of pure venom. “All of you had better wait here for my cousin to come over from Nebula Pavilion. I will see how tough a nut you all are to crack when he arrives! If I do not obtain justice for my son, I, Du Jiaolan, shall leave Ling Town and never return!”

Upon hearing her mention Du Haitian, the previously outspoken members of the Ling Family immediately became silent.

Du Haitian was one of Nebula Pavilion’s five great elders, possessing a cultivation level at the middle stage Natal Opening Realm and was rumored that he would be breaking through to the late stage soon. His combat abilities were definitely stronger than Ling Chengye’s. Moreover, he still had three early stage Natal Opening martial practitioners under his command. On top of that, Du Haitian was the confidante of Liu Yuntao, a Vice Pavilion Master, and was highly regarded by him.

Du Haitian’s individual capabilities were already an entire level above the Ling Family’s, not to mention that he also represented Nebula Pavilion. If he really were to come here, the Ling Family... would have a tremendously difficult time in resolving this.

“What? Speechless? Lost your tongues?” Upon mentioning Du Haitian’s name, the majority of the Ling Family members turned silent. At this, Du Jiaolan became even more haughty as she continued amidst sarcastic laughter, “All of you’d better listen up. Regarding this matter with my son, I am determined to obtain justice! That little b*tch must pay!” Her eyes were cold and dark like a cobra’s as she glared murderously at Ling Xuanxuan.

Affected by her stare that was full of killing intent, Ling Xuanxuan felt a chill from the depths of her heart as her attractive body gave an involuntary shudder. She timidly asked, “Big sister, was I wrong? Did I bring trouble to daddy and the clan?”

Pausing for a moment, she continued with sobs, “That brute, Du Fei had gone mad! I... I really couldn’t tolerate it anymore!”

“It’s fine, don’t be scared. You did nothing wrong; he deserved it!” Ling Yushi held her hands tightly and soothingly comforted her, “On the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, we

achieved huge merits for Nebula Pavilion. We do not necessarily have to fear that Du Haitian, so don't you worry too much. If it was me, I would have heavily injured him as well, so don't blame yourself anymore.

After being comforted, Ling Xuanxuan visibly became less burdened as one less worry loomed on her delicate face.

Qin Lie was observing silently from a corner when he noticed the two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, had slight changes in their expressions upon hearing that Du Haitian was arriving in the afternoon.

From the looks of it, the two brothers were adopting a tough stance. But in actuality, they were dreading the arrival of Du Haitian.

With even the two of them like this, what more could be expected of the members of the Ling Family?

Every member of the Ling Family had their eyebrows tightly knitted in worry, including the three clan elders. Many of the previously rowdy people were now all completely silent as though the existence of Du Haitian was like a mountain that was firmly pressing down on their chests. Their moods were extremely heavy as though they couldn't breathe from the pressure.

On the other hand, Du Jiaolan and company were all filled with arrogance with the assurance of their backer, tipping the balance into her favor with just a single swipe.

Even though Nebula Pavilion was only a force at the Limestone rank, they were still considered an existence far beyond the reach of subordinate clans like the Ling Family. Even though Du Haitian was a mere elder from Nebula Pavilion, it was enough to heavily pressure the entire Ling Family...

This amazed Qin Lie as he became further enlightened regarding the harsh, cruel rankings and distinctions between the different forces in Spirit Realm.

"We shall wait here for your uncle to arrive. Looking at the time, they should be arriving just about now. We will settle this with the Ling Family then!" Du Jiaolan and her few Du Family members found a spot to sit, evidently resting before the impending showdown.

Many members of the Ling Family were feeling downcast as they glanced towards the Du Family's mother and sons with eyes full of worry.

Ling Chengye frowned deeply as he signaled with his eyes towards Ling Chengzhi and called Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, and the others back into the hall within the courtyard. He asked, "How was the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain?"

Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and Ling Xiao were all attracted to the ruckus upon returning, and gathered together at the courtyard; they did not have a chance to report yet.

After they were summoned into the hall, upon hearing the patriarch's question, they immediately became full of excitement.

"It was extremely dangerous and thrilling!" Ling Xiao took the lead to answer. "Patriarch, you have absolutely no idea! Our trip could be considered a close shave with death itself. It was seriously fraught with danger, and it was all due to Qin Lie..."

"Qin Lie?"

"Qin Lie?"

"Qin Lie?"

Ling Chengye, Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan's faces were pointedly full of question marks as they stared strangely at Ling Xiao.

"Qin Lie went as well? How did he go?" Ling Chengye looked deeply at Ling Yushi and said, "No wonder I haven't seen him recently, it turns out he went along with you to Celestial Wolf Mountain. What exactly happened there?"

"Did that fool become a burden? What did he follow for? Did he delay your mission?" When Ling Xuanxuan heard the words, "it was all due to Qin Lie," she had thought that it was because of Qin Lie that the group had faced a great number of troubles. Knitting her eyebrows together, she chided, "Seriously, why did all of you bring along a fool when you're carrying out a mission for Nebula Pavilion? Have you all gone mad?"

After these words, she discovered that Ling Yushi, Ling Feng, Ling Xin, and Ling Xiao's expressions were gradually changing as though something wasn't quite right...

It was especially true for Ling Xin and Ling Xiao as the expressions they had when they looked at her was exceptionally cold, evidently displeased at her words...

This caused Ling Xuanxuan to abruptly freeze.

"What happened? These people... what is up with them?" She was absolutely baffled at heart.

"If it wasn't for the one that Second Miss keeps calling a fool, all of us would have suffered miserable deaths. First Miss and Ling Ying could also have very well met a fate far worse than death! Hmph!" Ling Xin suddenly snorted coldly.

Ling Xiao joined in the criticism, "If it wasn't for Qin Lie, all of us would be corpses now..."

“Little sister, you should stop with your prejudice in the future. Qin Lie... is the benefactor to all of us.” Ling Yushi sighed lightly and then added, “Before you’re clear on the truth, you shouldn’t make up assumptions on your own.”

Ling Xuanxuan didn’t expect that her passing words would attract everyone’s angry looks and criticism. This made her small face freeze in place as it turned green in one moment and white the next, looking extremely awkward.

“What exactly transpired? Ling Feng, you tell us!” Ling Chengye ordered as his eyes slightly brightened, evidently curious.

“Yeah, what happened to make your attitudes towards him make a complete turn around?” Ling Chengzhi urgently interrogated.

“Patriarch! Patriarch! The people from Nebula Pavilion have arrived!” At this moment, surprised exclamations echoed from the Ling Family members outside, their tone carrying their obvious panic. “Other than Elder Du Haitian, there is also Elder Ye Yangqiu who is in charge of the Discipline Hall! They even brought the Hall Masters under their command! It’s not looking good!”

The expressions of the two brothers of the Ling Family, who were originally inquiring what had happened with Qin Lie, changed drastically upon hearing the sudden news. They took a glance at each other, the terror apparent on each other’s face.

Just Du Haitian alone was enough to give the Ling Family migraines, and now there was an additional Discipline Hall’s Ye Yangqiu as well... The two brothers felt their heads going a bit numb.

“Why would Ye Yangqiu come? I have never heard of any ties between him and Du Haitian. Whenever the Discipline Hall’s Ye Yangqiu appeared within any of the vassal forces, he would always be accompanied by the most brutal of punishments! What exactly did the Ling Family do wrong to actually warrant a visit by Ye Yangqiu himself?!” Ling Chengye said as his body shook and his face contorted in rage and terror.

“If it is just the matter of Xuanxuan heavily injuring Du Fei, it definitely isn’t enough to move Ye Yangqiu. Moreover, he has always done things strictly by the book/rules. Other than the Pavilion Master himself, he would never do favors for anyone. He does not even deign to give face to the two Vice Pavilion Masters, Kang Hui and Liu Yuntao! Surely he would not make his way here for such a minor matter!” Ling Chengzhi was also starting to feel terror grow within his heart.

Ye Yangqiu was the Elder of Nebula Pavilion’s Discipline Hall. Wherever he appeared, it would usually be accompanied by the most brutal of punishments. His arrival sank the hearts of every member of the Ling Family into the depths of hell!

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Chapter 45: Discipline Hall Elder

A group of martial practitioners appeared at Ling Town's entrance, their expressions cold and aloof.

The group of martial practitioners were evidently split into two sides, one side headed by Elder Du Haitian, the other headed by Discipline Hall Elder Ye Yangqiu. The two arrived together, yet they were distinctly separated.

Du Haitian's stature was tall and lean with short white hair and refined clothes. The look in his eyes was distant, making it hard for anyone to guess what he was thinking.

On the other hand, Ye Yangqiu was short and pudgy. It was unknown whether there was another reason or that the arts he cultivated in was special, but his skin was dark and greenish, making him look extremely strange and creepy. His eyes were frosty, and his entire body exuded a suffocating aura that warned strangers to stay away.

He walked shoulder to shoulder with Du Haitian into Ling Town, followed by their individual men. They were both elders of Nebula Pavilion; Ye Yangqiu was in charge of the Discipline Hall while Du Haitian was in charge of external combat, frequently leading his men to fight enemies from opposing martial forces or to hunt spirit beasts.

Usually, the two sides would not have any interaction. However, if any of Du Haitian's subordinates were to commit an offense, Ye Yangqiu would have the authority to carry the punishments out.

Being Nebula Pavilion's most crucial Discipline Hall Elder, Ye Yangqiu was famous for being impartial. As long as anyone committed an offense and landed into his hands, he would punish the person accordingly, even if the offender was the direct subordinate of any of the elders. He would definitely not deign to give anyone face, even the two Vice Pavilion Masters—would find it wishful thinking to ask for any favors from him.

As such, Ye Yangqiu's notoriety spread far and wide within Nebula Pavilion. Every single martial practitioner within the pavilion was afraid of him, fearful of landing into his hands.

"Elder Ye, regarding the Ling Family's betrayal, what are your thoughts?" Du Haitian asked suddenly.

A couple of days ago, the Feng Family's Patriarch, Feng Bin, personally reported to Nebula Pavilion that the Ling Family had conspired with Shattered Ice Manor on Celestial Wolf Mountain's mine, resulting in the near annihilation of the Feng Family and Gao Family's members and Liu Yan's unknown fate. Feng Bin even handed over a letter that was exchanged between Ling Chengye and Shattered Ice Manor, said to be found from the body of a dead Ling Family member, in order to get Nebula Pavilion to severely deal with them.

On the presented letter was Shattered Ice Manor's Elder Yan Dewu's personal signature, accompanied by the seal unique to Shattered Ice Manor.

After Ye Yangqiu had investigated and confirmed that the seal truly belonged to Shattered Ice Manor, he was severely shocked and brought his subordinates to Ling Town.

Du Haitian was pondering on what excuse he should use to deal with the the Ling Family when he heard of this matter. On the premise that his cousin was also at Ling Town, he accompanied Ye Yangqiu over to deal with the Ling Family.

"It is yet to be determined whether there was a betrayal from the Ling Family, further investigation is still required." Ye Yangqiu's face was black as he spoke darkly, "If it is true, all parties involved in this matter will be executed!"

Pausing a bit, he continued, "If your cousin and nephews had a part in this, hmph, they too will be dealt with!"

Upon hearing this, Du Haitian felt a chill from the depths of his heart. Chuckling dryly, he hurriedly said, "Elder Ye thinks too much. My cousin and nephews do not get along with Ling Chengye, therefore they are definitely not aware of such a thing. Elder Ye should definitely thoroughly investigate about this and avoid wronging them."

"I will investigate thoroughly," Ye Yangqiu said indifferently.

Du Haitian knitted his eyebrows and looked towards the Ling Family's ancestral halls with a chilly look in his eyes.

It was halfway towards Ling Town that he received news of Du Fei's grievous injuries. It was also then that he made a resolution to make the Ling Family pay dearly with this trip, to cause the names of Ling Chengye and his family to completely disappear from Ling Town!

Ling Family's courtyard.

Ling Chengye and his brother lead the three clan elders out of the hall to welcome the Elders from Nebula Pavilion.

The Ling Family members that were gathered all wore heavy expressions that were full of worry, obviously displaying their nerve-wrecked faces. They were also distraught by the sudden arrival of Ye Yangqiu as they were clueless on what kind of calamity the Discipline Hall Elder, notorious for his brutal punishments, would bring to Ling Town.

On the other hand, Du Jiaolan and the others were all visibly delighted as excitement brewed within them while they thought to themselves, "Ye Yangqiu actually came? Let's see how you'll meet your demise, Ling Family!"

Qin Lie was positioned among the Ling Family members, towards the back where he was inconspicuous. He coolly observed on as the events unfolded, completely shocked by all of them.

“Even the Discipline Hall Elder is present. If it was merely about Ling Xuanxuan hurting another person, then was his physical presence really required? It shouldn’t be so, there should be another reason...”

He unconsciously thought back to the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, recalling Ling Feng and Ling Yushi’s analyses before they had returned, and he gradually began to start in the correct direction.

Amidst his serious pondering, he suddenly became aware of a pair of bright eyes shining over from the group of Ling Family members.

Paying closer attention, he discovered that the pair of eyes actually belonged to Ling Xuanxuan...

Ling Xuanxuan stood behind Ling Chengye, to the left of Ling Yushi, and was perfectly in place to look at him.

Mixed within that bright pair of eyes were complicated feelings such as alarm, astonishment, and confusion, obviously different from the usual contempt and condescension she had. Qin Lie was stunned for a moment as he was baffled.

“Was that fool... actually pondering? There was an instant when his eyes were bright and clear. Was it my eyes failing me?” Ling Xuanxuan looked at Qin Lie from afar, her maiden heart in complete disorder. “Why was big sister, Ling Xin and the others so protective of him? What exactly happened on that trip?”

Perplexed, she gradually realized that she couldn’t get a read on Qin Lie at all. She couldn’t tell whether Qin Lie was the fool she had always known or the one with the clear, bright eyes was the real Qin Lie...

“We welcome Elder Ye and Elder Du’s arrival to Ling Town!”

Right as she was confused, her father, Ling Chengye’s, loud voice pulled her back to reality.

Catching sight of the gradually nearing Du Haitian, accompanied by the solemn Ye Yangqiu, her small face revealed a look of shock. She felt burdened with worry again as she regretted not having held back against Du Fei, bringing troubles to the clan.

“Cousin!”

“Uncle!”

Du Jiaolan, Du Heng, and Du Fei all possessed expressions of glee upon the arrival of Du Haitian as they immediately greeted him. The eyes of Du Fei that was lying on the stretcher turned even redder as he looked extremely miserable.

Du Haitian's face twitched when he saw Du Fei's pitiful state. He lightly nodded his head towards Du Jiaolan and the rest, using his eyes to convey his resolution on this matter which gave them some relief.

One of the martial practitioners at his side walked over to Du Jiaolan and softly spoke a few words to her. The words brought immense happiness to her as she stared gratifyingly at Ling Chengye.

"I humbly invite the two Elders to talk within the main hall," Ling Chengye said with a slight bow.

Du Haitian waved his hands and indifferently said, "There is no need to do so, we can talk here. Hehe, you guys sure are brave. You actually did something like this and still dare to continue staying at Ling town? Why have you not escaped to Shattered Ice Manor yet? Don't tell me that Shattered Ice Manor was only using you guys and was not sincere in taking Ling Town under their wing?"

Upon these words, the expressions of all the members of the Ling Family fell as their hearts pulsed with fear.

Having any sort of interaction with Shattered Ice Manor was a big matter that warranted total clan extermination, how could they not be terrified?

"May, may I know what exactly is Elder Du implying?!" Ling Chengye's face was as pale as a ghost. He tightly grit his teeth, then loudly spoke in a slightly shaky voice to Ye Yangqiu, placing emphasis on every single word and pause, "The Ling Family has never had any interaction with Shattered Ice Manor! May the two elders please investigate thoroughly!"

"You still dare to deny it?!" Du Haitian exclaimed loudly. "Feng Bin has already submitted the letter you exchanged with Shattered Ice Manor's Elder Yan Dewu. What more do you have to say for yourself?"

"Let him have a look." Ye Yangqiu's face was impassive as he gestured with his hands.

One of his subordinates immediately walked before Ling Chengye and handed the letter over.

Ling Chengye took the letter with his severely trembling hands and saw handwriting that was extremely similar to his, Shattered Ice Manor's seal, and Yan Dewu's reply on it.

Ling Chengye felt like he was plunged into the depths of a frozen lake. He simply could not bring himself to believe what his very own eyes were seeing. After a long while, he protested vehemently, "I do not even know anyone from Shattered Ice Manor! I have been wrongfully accused! I am totally unaware of anything!"

"The ones who betrayed Nebula Pavilion were the Feng Family, not our Ling Family!" Ling Yushi walked over to her father's side as she spoke those words. Taking a deep breath, she continued agitatedly, "Feng Yi admitted it himself that the Feng Family had long pledged themselves to Shattered Ice Manor. They were in cahoots with Shattered Ice Manor, and tried to take over the Fiery Solar Jade Mine on Celestial Wolf Mountain. We were almost annihilated by them, Liu Yan can attest to that. May Elder Ye please investigate thoroughly!"

"Liu Yan is my subordinate, and he has yet to return to Nebula Pavilion. According to Feng Bin's words, it is likely that Liu Yan has met his demise." Ye Yangqiu paused for a moment and continued, "Why don't you explain what exactly happened?"

Ling Yushi's words were entirely different from Feng Bin's. However, Feng Bin had presented a letter with Yan Dewu's signature while the Ling Family had nothing in their defense. Even so, he was shaken by Ling Yushi's mentioning of Liu Yan as he now had something more to think about.

"That was what happened..."

In the presence of the Ling Family members and Ye Yangqiu, Ling Yushi finely recounted the events that happened, paying extra care to recount even the smallest detail.

"Qin Lie found out about the Feng Family's scheme and notified us in advance..."

"Under the assault of the Feng Family, Qin Lie first killed Feng Lun, then Feng Jie, eventually forcing Feng Yi to retreat..."

"Qin Lie repaired Liu Yan's Hexagonal Shield..."

"Qin Lie pointed us in the right direction..."

"In the end, it was Qin Lie who retrieved the sculpture that led the Demon Wolf King to release us, turning it against Shattered Ice Manor and causing them severe losses which resulted in Yan Dewu escaping for his life..."

During her narration, the name that came up the most was Qin Lie. After she mentioned Qin Lie time and time again, every member of the Ling Family and all the Nebula Pavilion martial practitioners were utterly shocked. They all revealed expressions of complete disbelief while simultaneously inwardly exclaiming the absurdity of the events.

The two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, had long guessed that Qin Lie was special. Hearing the excited chatters of disbelief, the two brothers shared a glance with each other and felt a surge of electricity flow out from within their bodies as their excitement secretly rose.

However, Ling Xuanxuan was dumbfounded. Her mind was blank as she listened to the fairy-tale like narration from her sister.

“Is it really him? The person who caught hold of the Feng Family’s scheme in advance, led the Ling Family to break through the assault, helped Nebula Pavilion’s Liu Yan to repair his spirit artifact, and borrowed the help of the Demon Wolf King to deal a heavy blow to Shattered Ice Manor... That person is actually the fool that I had always discriminated against?”

Upon thinking of this, her eyes glistened in shock as she hurriedly turned her head towards a certain direction only to find that Qin Lie was already gone.

Chapter 46: All Sorts of Unfavorable Circumstances

“Absurd! Nonsense! Are people actually believing this rubbish?”

Words exploded out of Du Haitian’s mouth, both interrupting the pondering of the crowd and causing them to be roused with incredible shock.

Afterwards, Du Haitian coldly laughed as he looked at Ling Yushi, making no effort to disguise the ridicule on his face. “Whether or not Qin Lie is a fool is still unknown. Even if he isn’t a fool, do you believe that a martial practitioner of the Refinement Realm could actually take the reins and turn the tables in a certain death situation? And to say that he used the Demon Wolf King to kill off Shattered Ice Manor, that is even more laughable! You are telling me that a trivial wooden sculpture could make the Demon Wolf King yield — are you joking with us?”

His remark deluged the crowd in shock and caused of their expressions to become puzzled.

Ling Yushi’s statements were truly hard to believe and caused doubt to emerge within the hearts of the crowd. They began to believe that with just Qin Lie’s strength, it was unlikely for him to have been able to take the initiative and turn the tide, thus saving the Ling Family members from their despair while also killing Shattered Ice Manor’s martial practitioners.

“Elder Ye, do you believe a single word that she said?” calmly asked Du Haitian as he tilted his head.

Ye Yangqiu had also been silently pondering during this time.

In his eyes, Ling Yushi's words were definitely a bit too absurd and unrealistic. Thus, he also couldn't believe them.

"What actually happened is that the Ling Family must have conspired with Shattered Ice Manor, thus resulting in the near extermination of the Feng and Gao Families and also the sacrifice of the pavilion's Liu Yan. I say Feng Bin's words sounded much more reasonable and more trustworthy. Furthermore, the Feng Bin had the letters of communication between the Ling Family and Shattered Ice Manor. You checked them yourself, and they were indeed from Shattered Ice Manor," said Du Haitian.

"I also have a piece of evidence!"

At this moment, Du Jiaolan suddenly walked out, chuckling to herself as she looked at Ling Chengye with insidious eyes. Afterwards, she positioned herself below Ye Yangqiu and said, "When that fool was engaged to Ling Yushi, her engagement present surprisingly had a 'Hundred Vein Pill' and 'Sea Opening Pill.' There were also several high grade spirit stones. It's impossible that the Ling Family has such precious treasures!"

Coldly laughing, she said, "To think that they were illicitly acquired from Shattered Ice Manor!"

"Stop venomously slandering people! Those were Qin Lie's, how could it have any relation with my Ling Family?" raged Ling Chengye, his expression anxious. Du Jiaolan's remark had caused a cold sweat to cover his entire body.

"That fool has no morals or ability, how could he possibly have such precious spirit pills and stones? It was obviously secretly hidden away by you!" snapped Du Jiaolan as she coldly laughed. She continued, "At the time, I was perplexed. I was confused as to how so many spirit pills and stones suddenly appeared. No matter how much I pondered, I couldn't figure out where they came from, but now I understand. You received them in exchange for conspiring with Shattered Ice Manor. Did you hope to use the engagement to cover up where those spirit pills and stones came from so that your daughter could use them openly? You truly calculated so deeply!"

After she put it that way, a chill arose within the depths of the hearts of the Ling Family members. They felt as if a catastrophe was about to arise.

In regard to the surprising matter during the engagement ceremony, everyone remembered it very deeply. They had also been confused as to where the spirit pills and stones within the engagement present had come from, unable to place the matters together.

—They truly didn't believe that those things were Qin Lie's.

Today, following Du Haitian and Du Jiaolan's speeches, a portion of the Ling Family members also began to secretly doubt over whether or not Ling Chengye had been conspiring with Shattered Ice Manor behind their backs to betray Nebula Pavilion in return for precious cultivation materials.

Once these thoughts had arisen, the look in their eyes towards Ling Chengye and his family also changed... becoming full of questions and anger.

Traitors... weren't accepted by anyone. Even if it was their own clansmen, no one would tolerate any kind of betrayal. It was an absolutely inexcusable crime!

Seeing the suspicious looks within the eyes of their family members, Ling Chengye and his daughters felt chills run up their backs. Ling Xuanxuan trembled as she nervously grit her teeth and felt her body becoming colder and colder.

Ling Yushi's face became extremely pale, giving birth to a sense of hopelessness. She never would have thought that Du Jiaolan's words would be so sharp, insidious, and spiteful. She realized that the Ling Family had all misjudged just how insidious and sinister she was.

The crime of betraying Nebula Pavilion was enough for the entire family to be beheaded. They were pretty much all damned to perdition!

"I truly don't know about those spirit pills and materials, they all came from Qin Lie. They have no relation with my Ling Family!" said Ling Chengye decisively, his expression sinking. He glared at Du Jiaolan like a beast and continued, "It is all but your own speculating. Do you have any evidence that proves that those spirit pills and herbs were from Shattered Ice Manor?"

Du Jiaolan's expression lagged for a moment. Then, she immediately and firmly rebuked, "Anyone with a discerning eye can see that it is true."

As Du Jiaolan was unable to show any evidence that proved that the materials truly came from Shattered Ice Manor, Ling Chengye's decisive statement caused people to only harbor suspicions as they were unable to truly confirm it.

"Do you still have the pill? A Sea Opening Pill... is most suited for use when one is breaking through into the Natal Opening Realm. You shouldn't have refined it yet, right?" indifferently asked Ye Yangqiu, directing his question at Ling Yushi.

Stunned, Ling Yushi gently nodded, "It is still in my possession."

"Bring out the Sea Opening Pill and let me look at it," ordered Ye Yangqiu, sticking out his hand.

Ling Yushi didn't say anything, carefully retrieved a jade bottle, and politely offered it up.

Under everyone's gazes, Ye Yangqiu received the jade bottle. Opening it, a fragrant pill dropped out. He carefully observed the pill with squinted eyes.

After a few seconds, Ye Yangqiu's expression suddenly became cold as he sharply said, "It is actually from Shattered Ice Manor!"

As his words faded, Ling Yushi's graceful body violently trembled, and an extremely shocked expression emerged within her eyes. The Ling brothers and Ling Xuanxuan felt as if a bomb had exploded within their heads, giving birth to a feeling that the heavens wanted the Ling Family dead.

The eyes of Du Jiaolan, Du Haitian, and their followers all brightened up, all of their expressions extremely ecstatic.

It was also a giant surprise to all of the Ling Family members as each of them began pointing fingers at Ling Chengye, Ling Xuanxuan, and Ling Yushi, swearing at them and saying that they would die a thousand times over for their sins. For them to have actually dared to conspire with Shattered Ice Manor, it wasn't enough if they just died.

Only Ling Xin, Ling Feng, and the others who had experienced the attacks of Shattered Ice Manor themselves at Celestial Wolf Mountain knew that the Ling Family most definitely hadn't conspired with Shattered Ice Manor. Thus, they still made excuses for Ling Chengye, saying that the situation wasn't like what everyone thought.

However, in the eyes of others, their excuses... seemed truly lacking. Many placed them together with the others as traitors.

"I have a deep understanding of Shattered Ice Manor's things. Upon this Sea Opening Pill, there is an extremely subtle imprint of shattered ice, the unique print of Shattered Ice Manor's Artificers. Thus, I am able to definitely say that this Sea Opening Pill is from Shattered Ice Manor!" Raising the pill within his hand, Ye Yangqiu pointed towards a spot on the bottom half of the pill, bringing it in front of Ling Chengye so that he could see it clearly.

When Ling Chengye saw the imprint, his entire body froze.

Ye Yangqiu hadn't baselessly slandered him. On the bottom of the Sea Opening Pill was indeed an extremely small imprint of shattered ice which could only be seen by observing closely.

After they had received the pill, because they were preparing to use it in the near-future, they had never opened the bottle and thus never knew about it.

"Is there anything else left to say?" asked Ye Yangqiu, his expression dark and frosty.

"The pill came from Qin Lie, we had completely no clue. I plead for Elder Ye to clear his mind and give the Ling Family a fair ruling!" beastially shouted Ling Chengye, his eyes turning red.

"You still dare to speak in the face of death!" sharply shouted Du Haitian. He immediately continued, "But in all honesty, only the Ling Family Patriarch's family should have conspired with Shattered Ice Manor. It should have nothing to do with the others, I beseech Elder Ye give a fair ruling."

"First, seal off the courtyard," commanded Ye Yangqiu.

The people below him immediately dispersed, surrounding the entire area and not allowing anyone to leave.

Upon seeing Ye Yangqiu's commands, Du Haitian immediately smiled whereas Ling Chengye and his family immediately became ashen.

"Capture those who returned from Celestial Wolf Mountain and search them," coldly continued Ye Yangqiu.

The experts under him immediately walked towards Ling Feng and the others, their expressions dark and cold as dense killing intent emanated out from every one of them.

One of the experts said, "Just previously, Liu Yan had been drinking liquor with me. I never would have thought that he would be done in by traitors. Once you fall into our hands, even if you want to die... it won't be that easy!"

"What are you doing?" furiously asked Ling Xin, unsheathing his weapon as his expression became crazed. He shouted, "Holy sheet, the Feng Family clearly insinuated us. We tirelessly killed enemies and escaped from countless life and death situations just to be dealt with by you all?"

"If not for Qin Lie, this daddy would have died long ago at the hands of the Feng Family. Today, whoever dares to touch me will have to fight me!" irascibly said Ling Xiao.

"Whoever dares to resist will be killed on the spot!" indifferently said Ye Yangqiu.

"Ling Xiao, Ling Xin! Both of you shut up! None of you may move!" sharply cried Ling Yushi, about to cry, "Put down all of your weapons, I trust that Nebula Pavilion will definitely find out the truth! You all know that Brother Liu is on his way back to Nebula Pavilion right now. Although his route was longer than ours, he will definitely return to Nebula Pavilion!"

Hearing her words, Ling Xiao and Ling Xin both hesitated for a moment. Only after being yelled at again by Ling Chengye did they behave and put down their weapons without a fight.

Very quickly, Ye Yangqiu's underlings began to inspect Ling Xiao and the others' bodies, searching from the top all the way to the bottom for spirit stones and materials, as well as for some low grade spirit pills.

Ye Yangqiu picked out a few of the spirit pills and analyzed them. Upon discovering that they were all from Shattered Ice Manor, his expression became increasingly dark and cold.

Earlier, when Ling Yushi had explained the events that had happened, she hadn't said that they had gained spirit stones and pills of the bodies of the dead Shattered Ice Manor practitioners, hoping to keep those things secret. However, it had come back to bite them...

"It seems as if you have truly gained many things from Shattered Ice Manor," coldly laughed Du Haitian.

Ling Chengye and his family all began to feel as if this was the end of the road for them as all of the evidence pointed against them. If Ye Yangqiu was any bit more brash, this evidence would have been enough for them to have been killed on the spot.

"Elder Ye, I believe that there is no need to return to the pavilion and review this. Let us just execute them now," said Du Haitian with a slight smile as he looked at Ling Chengye and his family with ice cold eyes. He continued, "My people can also help, and I can personally kill the Ling Family Patriarch as well..."

Ling Chengye suddenly erupted, "Du Haitian! Aren't you are deliberately going against my Ling Family just because you want the position of Ling Family Patriarch? Is it for your mistress and two bastards?! In the past you drove my wife to death, and today, you want to be the killer of my daughters and I. If I am to die today, I will drag you with me!"

At this point, Ling Chengye had pretty much collapsed. From within the depths of his heart, his many years of repressed anger finally erupted out, "Cousin? Indeed, Du Jiaolan is your cousin! Do you think people truly don't know about all the dirty things you two do? Du Jiaolan had Du Heng seven months after arriving within my Ling Family, you are very clear whose seed he is within your heart!"

"Two years later, she made a trip to Nebula Pavilion and gave birth to Du Fei! You two both know very clearly just whose cheap seeds they are! As for how my second brother died, I am also very clear about that as well!"

"Stop spitting out slander!" shrieked Du Jiaolan. "Your second brother died from bodily explosion in his cultivation, it had nothing to do with me!"

"Even in the face of death you dare to accuse others?" asked Du Haitian, his expression extremely like a bird of prey. "To unwarrantedly spout nonsense, it is a shame that you are a patriarch. Indeed, dying isn't enough to atone for your sins."

Looking at Ye Yangqiu, his expression became embarrassed as he awkwardly smiled and said, “The matters that Ling Chengye brought up are but the actions of a mad dog. I plead Elder Ye to pay no heed to his nonsense.”

After a moment, he then said, “How about we join hands and kill him first together? The rest can be taken back to the pavilion for interrogation. How about that?”

Ye Yangqiu furrowed his brows, a dark cold light flashing through his eyes. After pondering for a moment, he said, “Whether it be the appearance of pills at the engagement ceremony or the trip to Celestial Wolf Mountain, there is one person connecting the two... where is this person? I would like to meet him and listen to what he has to say. He is called Qin Lie, right? Bring Qin Lie over for me!”

“There is no need to worry about him, Qin Lie is but a fool. Ling Chengye and Ling Yushi, this father and daughter pair, are only using this fool to spew nonsense and to lessen their implications. What fool can offer spirit pills, what fool can turn the tide and help the Ling Family escape and cause the Demon Wolf King to attack Shattered Ice Manor and everything else that they said? They are all just excuses,” said Du Jiaolan, smiling sweetly at Ye Yangqiu. She continued, “Whether we look for Qin Lie or not, it is the same. The fool cannot speak as there is a problem with his head. Even if we bring him over, he will be of no use.”

“Lowly slut who f*cked her cousin, who are you calling a fool?” At this time, from behind the crowd of Ling Family members, a voice people were unfamiliar with suddenly emanated over.

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Chapter 47: Coming Out

Gathered within the Ling Family’s large courtyard were many of the Ling Family clansmen as well as some of Nebula Pavilion’s powerful practitioners.

At the moment, everyone was astonished by the words coming from behind them. They couldn’t help but look for the origin of the sound. The person who had spoken — a thin figure suddenly appeared in front of them.

“Qin Lie!”

“It’s actually Qin Lie!”

“He, he’s finally opened his mouth and talked!”

Many of the Ling Family members had shocked expressions. They couldn’t help but cry out loudly, each one acting as if it were the first time that they had met Qin Lie.

In these last five years, this person had always been ignored, and even held in disgust and in contempt as a fool. However, when disaster had struck the Ling Family, he had actually stood up and spoke for the first time, verbally attacking Du Jiaolan with the most vicious words!

Ling Yushi's eyes quickly began to shine with a shocking radiance as she unwaveringly looked at Qin Lie this very moment, her maiden heart endlessly agitated.

"In my darkest hour, it's you again. It's you who has stood up once again..." silently thought Ling Yushi as she secretly clenched her fists. That thin figure had already been deeply etched into her mind.

"It's him. He's actually not a fool, the fool... was actually me." Atop Ling Xuanxuan's lovely and innocent face, an indescribable expression emerged, one which was seemingly remorseful, yet guilty and self-deprecating — all kinds of feelings were mixing together.

Under one extremely shocked gaze after another, Qin Lie walked forward through the sea of Ling Family members who had split for him to the center of the courtyard, arriving in front of Du Jiaolan.

As the dumb, lifeless look disappeared from his eyes, it was replaced by a clear and bright radiance, setting off his originally extraordinarily delicate, handsome face. At the moment, Qin Lie... was incomparably elegant and handsome. Everyone felt as if a blinding light had suddenly appeared right before their very eyes.

"Slut, who are you calling a fool? Where are your two cheap seeds?" He indifferently smiled, glancing at Du Heng and Du Fei. Ignoring the livid expressions of the mother and two sons, he continued on as he planned, saying, "It seems true, that rumor that incestual relations give birth to mostly retarded sons..."

His remark caused the crowd to go into an uproar. Looking towards the mother and her two sons, their expressions seemed extremely monstrous.

"S-such a venomous mouth... is this truly Qin Lie? Heavens, is he crazy?"

"He sure knows how to speak, huh!"

"This guy, he knows Du Haitian is still here, right...? He must truly be crazed."

Many people's eyes flashed as they all began to quietly whisper to each other. They felt shocked because of how unfamiliar they were with a talking Qin Lie.

"I will f*cking kill you, you little bastard!"

The eyes of Du Heng, who had cultivated to the eighth level of Refinement, suddenly reddened as he rushed over like an enraged mad dog.

A faint gold light circulated amongst his right hand as his five fingers curved strangely, resembling the unfurled wing of a flying bird. Right as he was about to reach Qin Lie, he suddenly shouted, and his surging spirit energy suddenly gushed out and condensed into a golden spirit bird about the size of a sparrow which shot towards Qin Lie's chest.

Ling Yushi panicked as if she had lost her mind, unconsciously shouting out a tender reminder, "Qin Lie, watch out! That Golden Spirit Bird is a Common Grade Five spirit artifact, which is the same level as Liu Yan's Hexagonal Shield!"

The Golden Spirit Bird was a spirit artifact which had been procured for Du Heng by Du Haitian. Normally, it was shaped as an armband which Du Heng hid within his right sleeve. It was hard to notice during a fight and allowed him to instantly exert the power of a spirit artifact to take advantage of an unsuspecting enemy.

For Du Heng to directly start off with the Golden Spirit Bird caused Ling Yushi to feel anxious. She knew very well just how terrifying that Golden Spirit Bird was and feared that Qin Lie was going to suffer.

Du Haitian's impassive face had also been enraged by Qin Lie's remarks, but he couldn't make a move himself due to his status. Upon seeing Du Heng charge over, he was secretly delighted and hoped for Du Heng to immediately kill Qin Lie once and for all.

Surprisingly, Ye Yangqiu also didn't bother saying anything to stop Du Heng as he coldly observed from the side, seemingly wanting to continue watching.

From his point of view, if Qin Lie was truly like what Ling Yushi had said, being able to turn the tide at Celestial Wolf Mountain, then it shouldn't be difficult for him to block Du Heng's attack.

If Ling Yushi was lying and what happened at Celestial Wolf Mountain was fake, then all of the Ling Family members were traitors. If it was like that, even if Qin Lie was killed, it was deserved!

"Zzzt zzzt zzzt!"

Under everyone's stares, an electric current suddenly began to concentrate and interweave around the sculpture held within Qin Lie's raised left hand, forming a giant web of discharging lightning.

Upon flying into the web of lightning, the golden bird which had been condensed out of Du Heng's spirit energy was hit by the discharging electric current and instantly dissipated into nothingness.

Not even waiting for Du Heng to react, Qin Lie, who had long since known it would be like this, suddenly appeared beside Du Heng, his right lightning-covered fist violently rumbled and shot towards Du Heng's chest.

Du Heng's face was full of shock as he hurriedly regathered spirit energy. He was only barely able to condense a small cluster of golden clouds atop his hand before having to turn and welcome Qin Lie's fist.

"Boom!"

The sound of exploding thunder suddenly emanated over from the two colliding fists, causing everyone's ears to ring.

The golden cloud atop Du Heng's hand was immediately blown up by the lightning and dispersed into small, twinkling golden stars. The serene blue lightning became increasingly fierce and violent as it followed along Du Heng's fist and twined around his arm. It was as if a blue electric snake had begun to spread around Du Heng's entire body!

Furthermore, his body flew back, as if it had been hit by a charging armored chariot, with his feet in the air, unable to touch the ground.

"Thump!"

He was unable to control himself as he was forced all the way back, to the side of Du Fei's stretcher. He fell bottom first onto the stretcher, knocking into the bruised Du Fei, and also caused him to shriek miserably.

"Th-this truly Qin Lie? Have my eyes gone blind?"

"I-I remember I used to curse at him for being a fool. I hope... I hope he didn't hear me."

"Heavens, is this the true Qin Lie?!"

As if it were their first time meeting him, all of the Ling Family members looked at Qin Lie as if they were looking at a monster.

Especially Ling Xuanxuan. As she gazed at Qin Lie, she nervously grinded her teeth with an extremely complex look in her eyes...

Ye Yangqiu also stared blankly for a moment. Clearly, he had also been shocked by Qin Lie as he finally began to truly consider Ling Yushi's statements and felt that they might actually be true.

Under the rows of amazed gazes, Qin Lie didn't stay his hand. Like a cruel and fierce beast which had gone mad, he continued chasing after Du Heng, seemingly wanting to take advantage of when Du Heng couldn't gather spirit energy to kill him on the spot.

This violent, wild, overbearing, and crazed aura immediately astonished everyone and caused their expressions to all suddenly change.

Before Qin Lie had made his move, he had seemed delicate and pretty, his thin figure making him look as weak as a girl.

But as soon as he had launched an attack, he seemed to have turned into a fierce primitive beast. That kind of violent, crazed, fierce aura, along with the booming sounds of exploding thunder and lightning had so greatly contrasted with his weak first impression that everyone was thoroughly dumbfounded!

They couldn't help but begin to doubt, doubt if the calm Qin Lie from before and the current violent Qin Lie were two different people.

"Little brute! You're courting death!"

Seeing Qin Lie rush over, Du Jiaolan's hair began to fly wildly. She wretchedly cried out as a purple colored halo began to flash around her body and was about to make a move to kill.

Upon seeing her stance, Ling Chengye cried out and rushed towards Du Jiaolan.

Du Haitian's expression was insidious, his face cold, as he himself was also about to get involved.

Ling Yushi, Ling Xuanxuan, Ling Chengzhi, and the rest of the Ling Family members also began to cry out. The scene within the courtyard was almost out of control.

"All of you, stop!"

At this time, Ye Yangqiu's ruthless ice-cold voice emanated. Like a ghost, he suddenly appeared beside Qin Lie and placed his hands on Qin Lie's shoulders. Afterwards, he darkly gazed upon Du Haitian.

As soon as those hands were placed on him, Qin Lie felt as though a huge mountain was pressing down on him, that his feet were encased in lead. Unable to move, he could only give up on chasing Du Heng.

He looked at the skinny, middle-aged, and hunched figure next to Du Heng who wore the black robes of an artificer, his eyes frigid.

Qin Lie had been secretly hiding in the crowd earlier, quietly observing. He discovered that Du Jiaolan now had one more artificer and immediately determined that this artificer was definitely the one who had broken the formation Herb Mountain. Thus, he had felt extreme distaste towards the Du Family.

Later on, when he saw how the Du Family's slander caused Ling Yushi's eyes to become red, he had almost wanted to cry out in grief, becoming even further unable to repress the increasing rage within his heart. Finally, he could no longer hold it in. An eye for an eye, he used the same vicious words to slander the Du Family.

He never expected that Du Heng would suddenly rush at him and try to kill him. This caused his inner rage to be completely ignited, causing it to come exploding out.

"Whoever dares move, don't blame the Discipline Hall for punishing them!" coldly shouted Ye Yangqiu.

Upon hearing the two words "Discipline Hall," the situation that was going out of control miraculously calmed down immediately.

Not only did Ling Chengye and his people back down, even Du Haitian restrained himself, his gloomy face trembling. They all calmed down, and no one dared to move impulsively.

"I have no interest, nor do I care about the disputes between the Ling and Du Families!" exclaimed Ye Yingqiu after everything calmed down. Furrowing his brows, he coldly looked at both sides and then continued, "The point of my trip here was just to investigate whether or not the Ling Family conspired with Shattered Ice Manor and betrayed Nebula Pavilion!"

As he spoke, the Discipline Hall martial practitioners dispersed, their dark eyes warning the previously reckless practitioners to calm down.

The crowd scattered as everyone returned to their original positions. The Ling and Du Families were also separated, unable to start another fight.

Only Qin Lie and Ye Yangqiu were still standing in the center amongst everyone.

Ye Yangqiu was still holding Qin Lie by the shoulders, so Qin Lie was unable to move. At this time, he unconsciously furrowed his brows and said, "That's enough, I won't make attack anymore. Let go."

At that moment, Du Heng stood up again. His face was extremely ugly as he venomously looked at Qin Lie with resentment and hatred hidden within his eyes.

Ye Yingqiu's dark and cold eyes deeply looked at Qin Lie for a moment. Finally, he let go of Qin Lie, coldly asking, "Are these Hundred Veins Pills and Sea Opening Pills

which bear the imprint of Shattered Ice Manor actually yours, or are they the Ling Family Patriarch's?"

"Mine," simply replied Qin Lie.

"Where did you get them from?" asked Ye Yangqiu.

"Within a mountain valley within the Arctic Mountain Range. I gained them as spoils of a battle after killing several of Shattered Ice Manor's people," replied Qin Lie.

"Do you have proof?" asked Ye Yangqiu, narrowing his eyes.

Qin Lie furrowed his brows and pondered for a while. Suddenly, he thought of something. From his chest, he took out the jade tablet with a round nebula design and casually passed it over to Ye Yangqiu. Unsure if it would work, he asked, "Can this prove it?"

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Chapter 48: Nebula Token

Qin Lie had gotten the nebula jade tablet from Tu Ze earlier, and Tu Ze had clearly told him that this jade token would allow him to directly enter Nebula Pavilion and immediately become a core member.

With it, he wouldn't need to reach the Natal Opening Realm before turning twenty to be qualified to enter Nebula Pavilion like Ling Xuanxuan or Ling Yushi needed to.

At that time, Tu Ze had also added that after he arrived at Nebula Pavilion and showed his jade tablet in the future, they might even need to take it back.

—One could see that this jade tablet probably had a little history of its own.

It was true that he had only his words to prove his adventure of killing the Shattered Ice Manor martial practitioners with Tu Ze and the others really happened. The only evidence he could think of would be this jade tablet.

Of course, he himself wasn't sure if this jade tablet would actually persuade anyone, so after he passed it to Ye Yangqiu, he too felt some doubt within.

Hence him looking at Ye Yangqiu's reactions closely...

Ye Yangqiu was consistently a stern and indifferent person. He carelessly accepted the jade tablet and frowned while leaning forward to take a look, and suddenly, he froze.

With the jade tablet in his hand, it seemed his entire body had turned stiff as he just stood there motionlessly without making any sound whatsoever for a very long time.

The Ling Family clansmen were all tense and looked anxiously at Ye Yangqiu. Every single one of them were holding their breaths, hoping that Qin Lie could prove that the Ling Family was innocent and that he had no ties whatsoever with Shattered Ice Manor.

Ling Chengye, Ling Yushi, Ling Xuanxuan and everyone else had their eyes all set upon Ye Yangqiu while experiencing the same anxiety.

“My lord...”

Seeing no reaction from him after a long while, a hall master under Ye Yangqiu could not help but exclaim softly.

Amidst the alarmed and doubtful looks, Ye Yangqiu finally came to his senses. After a moments consideration, he then lifted the jade tablet in Du Haitian’s direction, without a word, so that they could see the nebula diagram on it.

Du Haitian took a single glance and abruptly his entire expression turned to horror as he screamed out, “A Nebula Token? Impossible! How can it possibly be a Nebula Token?!”

The moment the words “Nebula Token” fell out into the open, every martial practitioner from Nebula Pavilion became stunned with surprise. Countless looks of extreme shock quickly gathered on Qin Lie.

Every martial practitioner from Nebula Pavilion knew the exact origins of the Nebula Token and what it represented.

The Nebula Tokens were made specifically under the request of the old Pavilion Master Tu Shixiong, and there were only two of them that existed in the world. He had left them specifically for his two sons.

Tu Shixiong had built Nebula Pavilion from scratch with his own hands, and he had broken through into the Manifestation Realm twenty years ago, thus successfully entering Dark Asura Hall.

Back in the day, when he first left Nebula Pavilion and joined Dark Asura Hall, he only had his eldest son Tu Mo. His wife’s cultivation realm was low, so she could not enter Dark Asura Hall with him. Therefore, he could only leave his wife and Tu Mo back at Nebula Pavilion.

He would go through fire and water for Dark Asura Hall many years after. There would even be numerous rumors of him, from Dark Asura Hall, having fought to his death on the “Nether Battlefield.”

At the time, Tu Mo was still somewhat young and could not help Nebula Pavilion which was why the position of pavilion master was left empty.

There were also the constant rumors from Dark Asura Hall that Tu Shixiong had fought to his death, and it gave birth to the many trials and dangers within Nebula Pavilion to obtain the position of pavilion master; it nearly took away Tu Mo's life.

Later, not only had Tu Shixiong managed to survive the Nether Battlefield, he was even conferred the position of "Commander." He then immediately returned to Nebula Pavilion and killed all who conspired against him. After that, he stayed in Nebula Pavilion for a period of time, during which he and his wife contributed to the birth of his second son Tu Ze.

Tu Ze's birth made Tu Shixiong incredibly happy, and he specifically requested for an artificer in Dark Asura Hall to make two Nebula Tokens to give to his sons.

These two unique Nebula Tokens were filled with the great love he had for his sons. Not only would the command token enhance any practitioner who cultivated using Nebula Pavilion's special art formula, it also represented his authority and was a mark of his unmatched status in Nebula Pavilion. It was a deterrent towards all martial practitioners under the pavilion who held disloyalty in their hearts.

Back to the present. His eldest son Tu Mo had reached the late stage of the Natal Opening Realm long ago, and he was very close to breaking through to the Manifestation Realm. Not only that, he was also firmly seated as the pavilion master of Nebula Pavilion for quite some time now and simply did not need the Nebula Token any longer. Over time, this caused the Nebula Token to gradually become just a symbol of a sovereign's identity.

Only Tu Mo and Tu Ze possessed the Nebula Tokens, and they were also the unique representation of the two brothers. If they wanted to send someone on an errand, they only needed to show the tokens to get it done.

Since Tu Mo was now the pavilion master of Nebula Pavilion, the Nebula Token was gradually known otherwise as the Pavilion Master Command Tablet...

"I have examined it closely and confirmed that this is definitely a Nebula Token!" Ye Yangqiu ignored Du Haitian's cries and nodded towards Qin Lie amidst the faces of the Ling Family bursting with mad joy. His cold eyes finally softened, "This Nebula Token belongs to Tu Ze, correct? If he's willing to lend you his Nebula Token, then it is enough to prove that you cannot possibly share any relations with Shattered Ice Manor. It will seem that you have spoken the truth and that those spirit pills were indeed looted off of the corpses of Shattered Ice Manor's martial practitioners."

The moment those words escaped Ye Yangqiu's lips, everyone in the Ling Family let loose an expression of pure relief. Finally, they could put down their hanging hearts.

Surprise bloomed within Qin Lie's heart. He had not expected the jade tablet Tu Ze had given him would work this well, completely wiping away Ye Yangqiu's suspicions of him in an instant.

—Up till now, he still did not know what the Nebula Token truly represented.

“My lord, I suddenly remembered something.” The eyes of a hall master, a subordinate of Ye Yangqiu, lit up at this moment as he said suddenly, “Not long ago when I went to visit Elder Han, I heard from him that there was a junior in the Ling Family who had saved his son Han Feng's life from the hands of Shattered Ice Manor's Yan Ziqian in the Arctic Mountain Range. He was even rewarded with one thousand and two hundred contribution points. As you know, Han Feng and Tu Ze often mingled, and they often went outside to hunt together...”

“My lord, I have some impression too about the matter; I believe I've heard this before from Kang Zhi,” Another person expressed his opinion.

Ye Yangqiu appeared stunned for a brief moment before he stared intently at Qin Lie, a trace of surprise leaking out of his eyes. “You are that Ling Lie, aren't you?”

Qin Lie coolly smiled back in affirmation.

From behind him, Ling Chengzhi and Ling Xuanxuan were excited beyond words when they heard the news. Their eyes suddenly lit up as they stared firmly at Qin Lie's back.

They could still remember the day Nebula Pavilion's guards intentionally made life difficult for them to the point where they couldn't even step through the front door. Ling Xuanxuan was even harassed for quite a while by them...

At a critical moment, it was the name “Ling Lie” that had rescued them from their peril. Kang Zhi had beaten up and humiliated their own guards for “Ling Lie.”

Elder Han Qingrui had accepted them enthusiastically because of “Ling Lie,” and even exempted the Ling Family from two years of tribute.

Once they returned from Nebula Pavilion, the entire family had been looking for this elusive “Ling Lie.” Unfortunately, they had only found a bedridden Ling Lie.

They had suspected Qin Lie before, but they quickly found their own assumptions to be absurd. They simply assumed that Nebula Pavilion had made a mistake and was even quite worried about the outcome for a while.

Now that they heard Ye Yangqiu and the other Nebula Pavilion martial practitioner's explanations and saw both the Nebula Token and Qin Lie's cool smile, they finally realized that — the one who had saved the Ling Family from their predicament was none other than Qin Lie!

Light bloomed inside the two sisters' eyes. Both sisters were feeling excitement in their hearts, and Ling Xuanxuan's eyes had even turned slightly red...

On the other hand, Du Family's Du Haitian and Du Jiaolan wore a gloomy expression on their faces, and they looked at Qin Lie with a kind of shock and fear that was akin to seeing a ghost in broad daylight.

No matter how much they plotted, they could never have expected that the fool that they had scorned would suddenly appear without warning at this most critical juncture, and not only had he wiped away their accusations, he was also somehow related to the most powerful people in Nebula Pavilion, the Tu Family, turning the entire situation away from Ling Family's near certain destruction.

"As for the part at Celestial Wolf Mountain..." Qin Lie's tone remained cool and collected as he stared into Ye Yangqiu's eyes and said, "If you cannot believe our words, then please wait for another five to six days for Liu Yan's report. Hm, it should take him six days at most to reach Nebula Pavilion, and by now, Gao Yu should have returned to Gao Family already. You can also ask him to stand witness for us."

"Elder Ye, please give us the time to prove our innocence!" Ling Yushi begged sincerely.

Ye Yangqiu narrowed his eyes and thought for a moment. He suddenly said, "Release the Ling Family clansmen."

Every Ling Family member relaxed because of his words. They knew that he no longer saw them as traitors, and this change in attitude was of paramount importance to the Ling Family!

"Do forgive my many offenses earlier, little brother."

"Yes, we had acted too rashly. We're really sorry."

When Ye Yangqiu's subordinates helped Ling Xing, Ling Xiao and the others with their bonds, they were all smiling embarrassedly and repeatedly offered their apologies.

They had already believed Qin Lie's words from the bottom of their hearts, and that was why their attitudes had undergone a massive change.

"If what you said is true, then... the Feng Family cannot be forgiven!" A hall master under Ye Yangqiu uttered with a cold expression, "Feng Bing must be tired of living. How dare he collude with Shattered Ice Manor, and even slander the Ling Family with extreme maliciousness. Nebula Pavilion will never forgive him!"

"Send a hawk messenger to contact the pavilion, and tell them that the moment Liu Yan returns, he is to report to me about this incident immediately!" Ye Yangqiu yelled coldly.

“Yes sir.” The martial practitioner accepted the order and immediately ordered his own subordinate, and before long, a gray shadow hawk broke towards the skies.

“Keep this Nebula Token to yourself.” Ye Yangqiu returned the command token to Qin Lie and frowned. “If what you’re saying is true, then the Feng Family must hate the Ling Family to the core to use such an evil ploy to frame the Ling Family. On one hand, they wished that we would make an error in judgement and inflict the Ling Family with great misfortune. On the other, they were using this opportunity to move away so they could settle within Shattered Ice Manor’s grounds and restart their cultivation.”

“Mn, it must be like that.” Qin Lie nodded quietly.

“Elder Du, what other opinions do you have to offer on this matter?” Ye Yangqiu suddenly looked towards Du Haitian with a dark expression, and his tone suggested that it was accusatory.

Du Haitian’s gaze was dark with uncertainty, and with a frown, he said indifferently, “This is the Discipline Hall’s matter, so I have no authority to interfere. Elder Ye will surely bring this mystery to light. The reason I’m here is to bring my cousin and nephews back to the Du Family. That’s all.”

He looked towards Du Jiaolan, Du Heng, Du Fei and the rest and said, “It looks like the Ling Family does not welcome us, so you lot may as well come home with me and stay there for a while. I have left the Du Family for Nebula Pavilion for such a long time, and I haven’t found much opportunity to return home, so I shall accompany you all and take a look around.”

Du Jiaolan and the others kept quiet and did not answer. Beneath the Ling Family’s scornful gaze, they disgracefully left Ling Town together with Du Haitian.

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Chapter 49: Eighth Level

Ye Yangqiu and the Discipline Hall’s martial practitioners had stayed at Ling Town temporarily while they waited for the pavilion’s response.

Now, after the huge incident at the Ling Family’s great courtyard, every Ling Family member’s eyes were filled with a combination of curiosity, fear, and regret whenever they looked at Qin Lie.

Many Ling Family martial practitioners held gratitude and respect towards Qin Lie, and both Ling Xing and Ling Xiao would often look for Qin Lie to go drink and have some fun.

There were even many bold Ling Family maidens, who dressed both brightly and beautifully, often loitering around Qin Lie's stone house...

Every day, when Qin Lie traversed back and forth from Herb Mountain, the eyes of the Ling family would fall upon him, and sometimes, even martial practitioners from Nebula Pavilion would smile and greet him.

All of the sudden, Qin Lie had become the most sought after person in Ling Town, and even Ling Yushi had trouble trying to talk to him alone.

—He was simply too striking at the moment.

On an afternoon five days later, a messenger hawk appeared in the sky above Ling Town and landed on a Discipline Hall practitioner's shoulder.

The messenger hawk had brought over news from Nebula Pavilion.

Ye Yangqiu read the entire letter in front of Ling Chengye and the family, and once he finished, he nodded towards Ling Yushi and said, "Liu Yan has explained the entire matter. Not only has the Ling Family done nothing wrong at all, you have also done a great service for Nebula Pavilion. Especially Qin Lie... his contribution points in Nebula Pavilion have reached a total of three thousand. All of it has been recorded by Elder Han Qingrui."

All the tension left Ling Chengye's body, and he thanked the Elder many times over; a smile of relief had finally appeared on his face.

Ling Yushi's eyes sparkled as she answered with quiet elegance, "I thank Elder Ye for clearing our Ling Family's name."

"No, I should be the one to thank the Ling Family, to thank... Qin Lie." Ye Yangqiu remained as cool as ever. "The reason that subordinate of mine, Liu Yan, survived was completely due to Qin Lie turning the Devil Wolf King against Yan Dewu. Otherwise, Liu Yan could not have survived, and furthermore, Gao Yu and the others would have all been killed as well."

The moment he said that, the Ling Family clansmen became filled with untold emotions.

No matter how vivid their imaginations were, there was no way they could've predicted that the person who saved the Ling Family from disaster time and time again would be the one whom they had looked down upon for the last five years, Qin Lie the fool.

—Ling Xuanxuan had felt especially guilty during the past few days, and was too ashamed to look for Qin Lie and express her apologies.

“While we have proven the Ling Family’s innocence, the Feng Family’s devious plot has also succeeded. We have gotten news that the entire Feng Family has moved inside Shattered Ice Manor’s domain. It will be slightly troublesome if we are to act against them now,” Ye Yangqiu said with a frigid face, and after a moment of thought, he said suddenly to Ling Chengye, “Ten years ago, about Du Haitian framing the Ling Family and causing the sacrifice of your wife and your clansmen... I shall investigate this matter. Even if Du Haitian is an Elder, I will find out the truth and bring justice to the Ling Family.”

Hearing his words, Ling Xuanxuan and Ling Yushi’s eyes reddened, and they were excited beyond control.

The two brothers, Ling Chengye and Ling Chengzhi, could only thank him yet again, unsure of what else to say.

“I cannot fully guarantee that Du Haitian will face the punishment he deserves. He is after all... an Elder with rank equal to mine. But the pawns who had carried out his orders on his behalf should fail to escape the Discipline Hall’s punishment. Please be prepared for whatever comes next,” Ye Yangqiu continued.

“We understand! We understand Elder Ye’s difficulties,” Ling Chengye quickly answered.

“This is it. We have stayed in Ling Town for too long, and it’s about time we go back and reassume our responsibilities.” Ye Yangqiu turned down Ling Chengye’s urgings to stay, and after he took care of the matters on hand, he then led his subordinates and left Ling Town.

On the same evening.

Qin Lie walked out of the Herb Mountain cave, and when he glanced at the foot of the hill, he saw an elegant shadow standing there — it was Ling Yushi.

She was robed in a close-fitting, navy blue dress, and it brought out her aura of quiet elegance completely. Her long, jet black hair was let loose like plunging waterfalls, and it only added to her beauty and nobility.

Under the sunset, she was like a fairy who had walked right out of a painting, fascinating the masses and swaying their hearts.

“Why are you here today?” Qin Lie walked over and asked naturally.

“My father has arranged for a feast and allowed me to invite you personally. In hopes that you would bless us with your presence.” Ling Yushi smiled gently with eyes full of meaning. “For the past few days, there were quite the number of gorgeous little birds in

Ling Family surrounding your stone house. I couldn't even find the chance to meet you..."

Qin Lie couldn't suppress a laugh and shook his head as he said in a helpless tone, "This is exactly what I was afraid of."

After he had truly awakened, he still chose to disguise himself as a silent fool exactly because he was afraid of attracting the Ling Family's attention and unnecessary troubles which would affect his own training.

Now, the moment he appeared in Ling Town, all the clansmen would lock eyes with him and pester him with lots of questions along the way. Even after he had gone back to his home, he couldn't find peace and escape from the endless chatter surrounding him. Sometimes Ling Xiao and Ling Xing would even straight up barge into his home for a talk and a drink.

And now, even Ling Chengzhi had begun preparing a feast. Suddenly, he was afraid that he would lose his quiet days forever.

"You don't have to worry too much; their enthusiasm will settle down eventually. Just wait and it'll soon be over," Ling Yushi consoled him and then continued apologetically, "It's all because of me that your life was disrupted. I've dragged you into that big mess in the Ling Family..."

Qin Lie smiled coolly, "It's not all because of you. When the Du Family tried to sneak in their artificer to crack Herb Mountain's formation, they also offended me. I did not feel like allowing them to have a good time either."

"Oh you. What is your true realm; at which level of Refinement are you at now? That Du Heng is at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm and he didn't even stand a chance. Your realm level must be pretty high, am I right?" Ling Yushi bowed slightly and stuck herself towards him. She held his gaze, unwavering, with a pair of starry eyes.

Right now, Ling Yushi was slightly taller than him, so after she lowered her waist like that, her plump lips were but a fist's distance away...

A subtle fragrance that refreshed the heart slipped silently out of her breathing lips, causing Qin Lie's heart to sway a little as an unknown flame burned inside him...

"Seventh level of Refinement, I am only at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm. Mn, seventh level of the Refinement Realm." Even his speech was getting a little clumsy.

Ling Yushi stared deeply at his face before breaking into giggle, her eyes filled with laughter. "Like I'd believe you."

“Either you believe it or forget about it.” Qin Lie chuckled himself. “My acupoints are filled with a different energy, so spirit energy cannot seep inside them. Since I can’t penetrate my acupoints, I’m at the seventh level of the Refinement Realm, isn’t that right?”

“A different energy?” Ling Yushi showed a pondering look as she walked alongside him towards Ling Town, thinking seriously with a frown. After a while, she finally said, “Logically speaking, as long the acupoints are penetrated and can store energy, then it should count as eighth level of Refinement, shouldn’t it? Even if it isn’t spirit energy that is inside your acupoints, as long as it’s a form of energy, then it should count as having your acupoints penetrated, and thus be the eighth level of the Refinement...”

After a pause she said, “How about this; we’ll use the Realm Assessing Stone to test this later. We’ll evaluate by the richness of your spirit energy.”

Qin Lie’s thoughts stirred. “If a different kind of energy had penetrated the acupoints, it would still count as the eighth level of Refinement? It doesn’t necessarily have to be spirit energy?”

“That’s right. I heard from father in the past that those who cultivated spirit arts that use a different kind of energy can use that to penetrate their acupoints to make them store special energy. It’s just that this kind of situation is pretty rare and almost unheard of,” Ling Yushi said seriously.

Qin Lie’s eyes brightened as he internally nodded before saying, “Not a bad idea. Then let’s go and test it using the Realm Assessing Stone.”

“First Miss is back.”

“Hi there Qin Lie!”

“Haha, First Miss personally went there to wait for Qin Lie. What an enviable person.”

“They’re engaged, of course they’re going to get together. Look at you, fussing over nothing.”

When Qin Lie and Ling Yushi appeared at the entrance of Ling Town, there were many Ling clansmen who immediately greeted them loudly while smiling, teasing the duo in good will.

Qin Lie paid her some attention and noticed that Ling Yushi was blushing slightly; there was embarrassment hidden in her eyes. However, she wasn’t angry, and she didn’t seem to mind the teasing; this made him feel a little surprised.

Enveloped in the crowd’s smiles and greetings along the way, the duo arrived at the Ling Family Hall. A table of excellent food had just been arranged, and it was still

steaming. The The Ling brothers, Ling Xuanxuan, and even Clan Elder Ling Kangan were also present; the moment they saw him walking over, they were immediately full of smiles and rose to greet them.

“I thought it was about time you guys arrived, so I let the servants prepare this in advance. Ah, Qin Lie, when your grandfather was still around, we would often sit down and eat together. After your grandfather left... I neglected you. It's Uncle Ling's fault. Today I will drink three cups of self-punishment!”

Before waiting for Qin Lie to speak, the Ling Family Patriarch grabbed the drinking cup and downed three cups.

“Qin Lie, in the past I... in the past... anyway, I'm at fault so I'll punish myself with a drink too. Please forgive me.”

Ling Xuanxuan bowed her head and didn't dare to look at him. A look of shame and regret floated on her face as she too drank her wine and just sat with her head bowed without saying a word.

“Come on, Qin Lie, come over and sit,” Ling Chengzhi invited passionately. “Little Shi, bring Qin Lie in quickly, what are you standing there for?”

Seeing her family member's enthusiastic flattering, Ling Yushi was a bit embarrassed and said helplessly, “Father, Qin Lie needs to use the Realm Assessing Stone for a while to check his level. Maybe we can drink later.”

“I'll get it!”

Ling Chengzhi stood up abruptly, blazed out and into the hall, and then placed a diamond-shaped Realm Assessing Stone in front of Qin Lie.

“Thank you.”

Qin Lie was extremely concerned about his level, so he did not care that the whole Ling Family was around and pressed his palm to the stone. Slowly, he injected his spirit energy into the Realm Assessing Stone.

Rays of blue light floated from the Realm Assessing Stone. The first six rays were really quick, and when it reached the seventh ray, it noticeably slowed down.

The Ling Family members watched the Realm Assessing Stone's blue light attentively. Each ray represented a level of Refinement, and now they had reached the seventh, blue light...

Qin Lie continued to increase the transfer of spirit energy, his eyes completely glued to the Realm Assessing Stone's surface. As the spirit energy grew stronger, another blue

light emerged, albeit very thin and blurry at the beginning. But as time went by, it gradually turned brighter and brighter!

“The eighth level of the Refinement Realm!” Ling Yushi exclaimed in pleasant surprise. “I told you, didn’t I? You must have reached the eighth level of Refinement, but you didn’t believe it yourself. I really don’t know what else to say to you.”

On the other hand, Ling Chengye and the others were completely nonplussed about the fact. In their opinion, since Qin Lie was able to take down Du Heng perfectly without any chance of retaliation, it was only natural that he should be at the eighth level of the Refinement Realm. It wasn’t a surprise to them at all, but what did surprise them, was Ling Yushi’s exclamation. “Isn’t that very normal?” Ling Chengye asked for the reason.

Ling Yushi proceeded to explain Qin Lie’s worries.

Ling Chengye was surprised at first. Then he turned towards Qin Lie and said, “No matter what kind of energy, as long as it could penetrate the acupoints and be discharged from it, then it will be considered as the eighth level of the Refinement Realm. In fact, from what I know, those spirit arts that could open acupoints through a different kind of energy are usually incredibly rare and amazing...”

Qin Lie finally relaxed after seeing the eighth blue light on the Realm Assessing Stone and listening to Ling Chengye’s explanation.

After he pulled back his hand, the blue light on top of the Realm Assessing Stone quickly disappeared. Looking at the Realm Assessing Stone, that was as smooth as a mirror, he thought to himself with eyes that shone with a thoughtful look.

“I’ve only used the spirit energy inside my dantian’s spirit sea. This alone is enough to be called the eighth level of the Refinement Realm, and I haven’t used even a shred of the thunder and lightning energy stored inside my acupoints. If... if I used all the thunder and lightning energy in my seven hundred and twenty acupoints and injected them into the stone, I wonder what would happen...”

When he had battled Du Heng, he had thought that the reason Du Heng could not withstand even a single blow was because he had underestimated himself and did not use his full power. He thought that it was because his electric net had taken down the spirit bird released by the Golden Spirit Bird which then caused Du Heng to be caught off guard and suffer a complete collapse to the point that even his mind was intimidated. He had believed that all these factors combined was the reason that he had been struck away in a single blow.

But it was only now that he finally understood that it wasn’t that Du Heng didn’t give it his all, it’s just that he was really strong to begin with!

—He had underestimated his own true power!

So he had reached the eighth level of the Refinement Realm before he even realized it. With an equivalent realm to Du Heng and the extra power from his thunder and lightning energy, plus the strength of his own physical body, it was practically a given that he would utterly defeat Du Heng!

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Chapter 50: Back Figure

At the banquet table.

The Ling Family was enthusiastically treating Qing Lie, continuously urging him to drink to thank him for the things he had done for all of them.

After Ling Xuanxuan drank a few cups, she gradually eased up and she gazed curiously at Qin Lie with bright eyes. She suddenly seemed to be brimming with interest in him.

“Don’t drink anymore!” Ling Yushi shouted to curb everyone’s enthusiasm so they would stop drinking.

Ling Chengye’s face was flushed as he chuckled and said with a nod, “Alright, no more drinking, no more drinking.”

“Uncle Ling, I’d like to ask about my grandpa.” At this time, Qin Lie put down his drinking cup and suddenly asked, “You had once said that you and my grandfather frequently conversed... what did he talk about with you, where did he go?”

Ling Chengye’s expression was strange. A beat later, he sighed and said, “Qin Lie, Uncle Ling will not lie to you, I do not understand your grandfather at all. What I said at the engagement ceremony was to deal with the Du Family, all of it was false. I’m not familiar with your grandfather at all. Even though you are asking me, I have no idea know how to answer.”

The reason that Qin Lie had come over with Ling Yushi, other than to use the Realm Assessing Stone, was that he hoped he could learn where his grandfather had gone from Ling Chengye. He hadn’t expected to receive this kind of result after eating and drinking. This caused his mood to instantly plummet.

“My grandpa left a letter for me telling me that he was going to be gone for a few years and would return when I turned seventeen. If he has not come back by then, then he most likely had an accident... I do not know much about my grandpa’s situation, but I hope nothing bad happened to him,” Qin Lie said with his head bowed.

The Ling brothers and Ling Kangan looked at each other and saw the shock on each other’s faces.

Qin Shan's passing away two years ago had been very suspicious. When Ling Chengye found the strange formation inside Herb Mountain, he had guessed that Qin Shan could have possibly faked his death. Now, he had finally confirmed it due to Qin Lie's words. This shocked them, causing them to feel that Qin Lie and his grandfather Qin Shan were not simple in the least.

"Qin Lie, you... why were you and your grandfather at Ling Town? Where were you before?" Ling Chengye asked.

"Don't know, I don't know." Qin Lie shook his head, and a forlorn and disappointed expression surfaced on his face. "I do not have any memories from before I was ten years old. Starting from where I do have memories, I had come to Ling Town with Grandpa and then spent the next few years in a dazed cultivation state. I also want to find my grandpa and understand the situation."

Seeing Qin Lie's current expression, Ling Yushi's heart suddenly hurt. She stood and said, "Let's end it here tonight. Qin Lie, you must be tired, I'll accompany you back."

Qin Lie was very disappointed since he had not been able to learn anything from Ling Chengye. He did not linger and left expressionlessly, with his heart heavy as he walked together with Ling Yushi.

Ling Yushi feared he had drunk too much. She threw an arm over his shoulders as she walked with him in the darkness towards his stone house.

Under the clear moonlight, the shadows of the two lengthened and then seemed to merge together...

At the door, Ling Chengye watched as the two walked away with an odd glint in his eyes.

Ling Chengzhi had a slight smile as he said thoughtfully, "Little Shi seems to have gradually forgotten that the engagement between her and Qin Lie... is just a scheme to stall for time. When Qin Lie turns seventeen, Big Brother, you and Qin Lie can end this engagement unilaterally. After three more months, Qin Lie will be sixteen..."

Ling Chengye was astounded, and then he furrowed his brows. He remained silent and did not say anything.

Ling Xuanxuan stood at the side. Looking at the two shadows that had melded together, a thought suddenly rose in her mind: If I hadn't opposed it, then the person that would be walking with Qin Lie right now wouldn't be Big Sister, but me...

Thinking like this, helplessness and pain rose within, causing her to suffocate as if there had been a blockage in her heart.

“Chengye, Qin Lie is actually a good child, and he has helped the Ling Family multiple times. He also seems to be interested in Little Shi. I feel his marriage with Little Shi... there is no harm if it turns into a real one, what do you think?” Ling Family’ Clan Elder Ling Kangan smiled slightly and said, “There are only a few of us who know the details. If we do not oppose this, I think this matter will be completed.”

“Sigh, everything about Qin Lie is good, but his origins are unknown... I’m afraid that it will cause great trouble in the future.” Ling Chengye was very worried.

He didn’t know why Qin Shan and Qin Lie had hidden themselves in Ling Town, but this grandfather and grandson pair were definitely not simple; they may even have great origins.

But the Ling Family was just a little force and could not afford to deal with trouble. If Qin Lie and Ling Yushi’s marriage caused the Ling Family to land in a calamitous situation, how could he face the members of the Ling Family?

As the leader of the family, he had to consider all factors and try as much as he could to help the clan avoid future dangers. He needed to be extremely careful.

“Your concern is reasonable. We’ll talk about this more based on the situation, so let it progress naturally.” Ling Kangan thought about it again and his heart also cooled slightly. He understood that Ling Chengye’s caution was necessary.

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“Really, my dad had to urge you to drink. He thinks you are the same as them, hmph.”

In the stone house, Ling Yushi helped Qin Lie back and complained that her father should not have allowed Qin Lie to drink so much wine as she entered the house.

“Rest first, I’ll help you get water for a bath. You as well, don’t drink if you don’t want to. They can’t force you, can they?” Ling Yushi reminded him. When Qin Lie sat down, she went to the washroom to open the tap. “Don’t worry too much about your grandfather. Nothing will happen to him, and he’ll definitely come back to Ling Town when you turn seventeen, so rest your heart.”

Qin Lie sighed lightly. He shook his head and didn’t know what to say.

“Qin Lie, I think... something must have happened when you were young. You might have temporarily lost your memories, but you might suddenly remember them at some time. Then you can find your parents and discover where your relatives are.” In the washroom, Ling Yushi’s tone was gentle as she comforted him.

For an unknown reason, as he listened to her gentle and soft voice, his worries gradually disappeared. The depressed mood caused by the alcohol started to ease.

"I've let out the water."

Ling Yushi, walking out of the washroom, had a slight smile, but her eyes seemed slightly dejected.

"I'm going to leave first. Have a slow bath, and remember not to get cold." Her head was lowered, and when she arrived at the doorway, she said with her back facing Qin Lie, "You have so many contribution points in Nebula Pavilion and the Nebula Token. You can instantly become a core member of Nebula Pavilion at any time. If you cultivate at Nebula Pavilion, it will definitely be much faster than here at the Ling Family... if you want to go to Nebula Pavilion, then go. That place is more suitable for your growth."

When she finished, Ling Yushi's back figure was lonely as she left through the door.

Qin Lie was astounded, and it took a moment for him to react. A long while after she had disappeared, he shook his head and laughed, "Stupid, if I wanted to go, I would have left long ago, why would I wait until now..."

The second day in the caves of Herb Mountain.

Qin Lie woke up from his cultivation. He used his mind consciousness to enter the Soul Suppression Orb to gaze at the complex and mysterious spirit diagrams on the walls and to look at the lines upon lines of bright flashing spirit lines.

The thickness of every spirit line was not the same and represented different degrees of spirit energy. They caused him to suddenly remember his grandpa's words.

The inscription of spirit diagrams required very precise control over spirit energy. When each spirit line takes form, the spirit energy used needed to be extremely precise. A spirit diagram could have thousands of spirit lines, and the length and width of each line were not exactly proportional to the amount of spirit energy used. If one spirit line was incorrect, the entire spirit diagram's inscription would be a waste of effort.

A spirit artifact would sometimes require several spirit diagrams to be layered and merged together. This demanded even more control of spirit lines, and it demanded precision to be maintained at an extremely terrifying degree. One bit of carelessness was a calamity, and it was very likely for the spirit artifact to be turned to scrap at but a moment's notice.

"The spirit diagram is imprinted in the mind, but in order to be inscribed, it requires extreme precision! Those spirit lines of varied thickness and brightness represent a special inscribing method, like techniques and art formulas. If one only knows techniques and does not understand the matching art formula, they cannot express its true power..."

Visualizing the four spirit diagrams in his mind, Qin Lie thought in silence and gradually found the trick.

Today, he had completely memorized the four Spirit Gathering, Amplification, Spirit Storage, and Strengthening spirit diagrams. He knew that what he memorized was just the “technique.”

In order to truly inscribe them, he still needed to master the precise width and length of the spirit lines and know how much spirit energy was in each line. This would require repeated practice and not just visualizing as in the past.

“Practice, practice, practicing inscribing spirit diagrams requires special ‘spirit tablets.’ I do not have ‘spirit tablets’ to practice with, so it seems I need to think of a way...” Qin Lie rubbed his chin as he thought, “Grandpa is an artificer, so I should also become an artificer like Grandpa and one day make a wondrous spirit artifact like the wooden carving. If Grandpa comes back and finds that I can already inscribe spirit diagrams, he would be... delighted, right?”

In the evening, he came out of Herb Mountain and was in deep thought all the way until he reached Ling Town.

In the dining hall, he ate dinner with the Ling Family; he found that Ling Yushi’s mood was slightly depressed compared to usual, and her smile was slightly forced.

“I need ‘spirit tablets’ to practice spirit diagrams inscription, where can I get them?” Qin Lie suddenly asked.

“Spirit tablets to inscribe spirit diagrams...” Ling Chengye was shocked. “They have to be made from special materials. The Ling Family doesn’t have the wealth to foster artificers, so we naturally do not have these kind of objects. Some of the material shops in Icestone City should have spirit tablets, and Nebula Pavilion naturally does too. Oh, right, you have Nebula Pavilion contribution points, so you can trade for them at Nebula Pavilion.”

Qin Lie’s eyes lit up.

“Nebula Pavilion...” Ling Yushi’s eyes dimmed as she thought: As expected, he has decided to go.

Thinking like this, she suddenly felt that the usually delicious food tasted the same as wax.

“Uncle Ling, I am not planning to go to Nebula Pavilion in the short term, I need to wait here in Ling Town for my grandpa to come back. Can you get someone to go to Nebula Pavilion and exchange some of my contribution points for spirit tablets for me?” Qin Lie thought and then asked with a smile.

“Of course,” Ling Chengye instantly agreed. “This is very simple. I’ll let someone use my name to go to Nebula Pavilion. As long as they recognize your contribution points, it will be easy to acquire spirit tablets, it isn’t troublesome at all.”

“Thanks, Uncle Ling,” Qin Lie said.

He then looked at Ling Yushi and found that Ling Yushi’s beautiful eyes were flashing brightly as though they had suddenly become alert. She also smiled sweetly at him, and that beautiful action — struck him and plucked at his heartstrings.