

The Beauty 1201

Chapter 1201 The Veteran General Takes Command

Seeing Ling Chen coming out of the nightclub, the gazes of dozens of men in suits all focused on him.

"Mr. Ling, the nightclub doesn't open until seven in the evening. Aren't you a bit early?" A voice came from the crowd. Ling Chen fixed his eyes on the speaker, realizing it was the young man who had driven him and Nanrong Wanqing to the banquet the other day.

Ling Chen looked around at the crowd, smiled faintly, and said, "I am a bit early. But you don't need such a large setup to welcome me, do you?"

"Mr. Hong instructed us; since Mr. Ling is a distinguished guest, we must entertain him well." After speaking, the young man glanced behind Ling Chen and asked, "Mr. Ling, why are you alone? How about having your companions come out?"

"Sorry, they're not convenient right now. Whatever the matter is, just address it to me."

As soon as he finished speaking, the sound of sirens suddenly came from the roadside. Soon, several police cars parked in front of the nightclub. As the car doors opened, more than a dozen police officers stepped out. Seeing them, the young man immediately approached.

"Officer Luo, this man forcibly entered the nightclub and intentionally hurt people. Please take him back for investigation."

"Rest assured, we will certainly enforce the law impartially." The officer nodded, then turned his gaze to Ling Chen, commanding softly, "Arrest him, take him back, and interrogate him thoroughly."

"Yes, sir!" Several officers responded and strode toward Ling Chen.

Seeing the police closing in with handcuffs, Ling Chen inwardly cursed at the unfavorable situation. In such circumstances, he couldn't resist the police; otherwise, the charges would be severe. In a place like Beijing, there were too many restrictions; even a small matter could become serious. If any evidence fell into the hands of the enemy, they could find a reason to destroy you even over something trivial. Talk

about reason? Hmph! These people were hired by Hong Wei, naturally biased towards him, and they wouldn't listen to his plea.

Thinking of this, Ling Chen was momentarily at a loss. He had counted on Tang Yuan to help, but with Tang Yuan not there, he couldn't do much, or at least couldn't act officially.

As thoughts raced through his mind, Ling Chen's gaze fell on the young man. At that moment, the latter was also looking at him, a mocking smile on his face. Damn it! Ling Chen was secretly displeased; he couldn't retaliate—really frustrating.

Just as the officers were about to take Ling Chen away with the handcuffs, a military jeep suddenly rushed over from the roadside.

Fearing being hit by the jeep, everyone quickly stepped aside. As the jeep came to a halt in front of Ling Chen, the passenger seat door swung open, and an elderly man with white hair, dressed in military uniform, jumped out of the vehicle. At the same time, two more military jeeps arrived and parked by the roadside, with over a dozen armed soldiers surrounding the men in suits.

Seeing the newcomers, joy welled up in Ling Chen's heart, sweeping away the gloomy feelings.

"What are you doing?" The old man shouted at the officers, "Get back! Anyone who touches him will eat a bullet from me."

This sudden change stunned everyone present, especially the police, who were all intimidated by the old man's aura, standing still without daring to move.

Officer Luo, who was leading the team, finally reacted, jogging over to the old man. After glancing at the general stars on the old man's shoulder, his legs grew weak, and sweat covered his forehead.

"G-Ge-General, what... what are you up to?" Officer Luo asked with a forced smile.

"Nothing much," the old man said coldly. "Upholding justice is supposed to be your job as the police. Since you're incompetent, let me, an old man, take over. Call your director. If I don't see him within ten minutes, he'll be out of his position."

Hearing the old man's bold words, Officer Luo dared not ask further, quickly responding with 'Yes' and scrambled to the side, pulling out his phone.

Witnessing this, the young man's expression changed slightly; he discreetly took out his phone, intending to call Hong Wei. However, before he could dial, a large hand suddenly reached out from behind, ruthlessly snatching and smashing his phone to the ground.

The one who acted was none other than the subordinates brought by the old man.

"Listen up, all of you! Stand still. Anyone who dares to move, I'll shoot them. Got it?" The old man shouted coldly. Seeing everyone nodding submissively, he nodded in satisfaction and turned to Ling Chen.

"You, brat, every time you come to Beijing, you stir up trouble," the old man scolded jokingly. "Isn't it comfortable unless you cause some trouble?"

Ling Chen embarrassedly scratched his head and said, "General, you can't blame me. The trouble came to me, I couldn't just ignore it." Pausing, Ling Chen asked softly, "General, how did you know I was here?"

"Wasn't it that kid Tang Yuan who called me? He said you were in trouble and hoped I could help you. I didn't hesitate, immediately brought my guard company over. Brat, tell me, what's going on?"

Ling Chen nodded and recounted the recent events.

After listening, Qiao Zhen's expression became displeased, "You did well. Hmph! Whatever happens this time, I'll back you up. I want to see if Beijing is ruled by Hong Wei or the government."

Not long after, the police chief responsible for this area arrived at the Wanziqianhong Nightclub.

Seeing Qiao Zhen in the crowd, he was taken aback and quickly ran over, respectfully greeting, "General Qiao, what brings you here?"

"I don't want to waste words with you. Personally lead a team with Ling Chen inside and explain to me how you plan to handle this."

Upon Qiao Zhen's command, the chief dared not disobey and immediately gathered over a dozen subordinates to follow Ling Chen into the nightclub.

A few minutes later, the police chief emerged from the nightclub, his expression grave.

"General Qiao, such an incident in my jurisdiction warrants my accountability. Rest assured, I will handle it impartially, not letting any wrongdoers escape."

"Good." Qiao Zhen nodded, "You arrange for the media; in an hour, hold a press conference here. You'll host, and I'll watch."

Hearing this, the chief hesitated, somewhat reluctantly saying, "General Qiao, isn't this too much? Maybe... maybe we should handle it discreetly."

"Discreetly?" Qiao Zhen sneered, "Don't think I don't know what you're up to. I warn you, though I've retired, removing a small police chief like you is easy. Either do as I say or... take off that uniform and get out immediately."

Chapter 1202 - 1209: The Elder General in Critical Condition (1)

Under the pressure of Qiao Zhen's influence, the police chief ultimately chose the former option. As Qiao Zhen said, although he had retired, his influence remained, and dealing with a police chief was a trivial matter for him.

"Very good." Qiao Zhen was pleased with the decision and nodded, "This time solving a major case will greatly benefit your career. You should seize this opportunity. If you handle this matter well, you might rise even further."

Hearing this, a glimmer of hope flashed in the police chief's eyes. Having been in the system for so long, he naturally understood the implication behind Qiao Zhen's words. Initially thinking he was finished, Qiao Zhen had closed one door for him but opened a window. If he did well and got Qiao Zhen to maneuver for him, his chances of promotion would increase greatly. As for Hong Wei... he was just a small figure, forced into it this time; presumably, Hong Wei wouldn't hold it against him.

Thinking of this, he immediately arranged for someone to notify the media and prepare for a news conference.

Clang!

With a sharp sound, a glass goblet shattered into pieces.

In a luxurious villa, Hong Wei sat on the sofa, watching the news conference broadcast on TV, his face stern and eyes filled with barely concealed anger.

"Mr. Hong," the butler standing behind the sofa asked, "Is there anything I need to do?"

Hong Wei took a deep breath, gradually calming his furious emotions. He glanced at the maid beside him and pointed to the wine glass on the table. The latter understood, refilled a glass of wine and handed it to Hong Wei. Taking the wine glass, Hong Wei swirled it gently, watching the red wine ripple, his tone indifferent as he said, "This time, it's my fault. I underestimated Ling Chen."

"What does sir plan to do?"

Hong Wei took a sip of red wine, watching the images on the TV, and said, "Do nothing. Since this encounter is lost, there's no need to continue clashing hard; it's not worth it. Butler, tell Yang Xun to take the fall for this. I'll take care of his family. If he dares to reveal anything about me, he knows the consequences."

"Yes, I know what to do."

"Also..." Hong Wei pointed at an elderly man in military uniform on the TV and asked, "You're most familiar with the major figures in Beijing, do you know who he is? I've never seen him before."

"His name is Qiao Zhen, a recently retired General from the military who now holds a nominal post, living out his retirement in the military district compound."

"Retirement? Hmph! At such an age yet still stirring trouble. He's tired of living, I see." Pausing, Hong Wei pondered for a while and then spoke, "Do you know his background?"

"I'm not very sure, there's not much information about him. I suspect he was in charge of a secret department, only such people wouldn't have too many records in the files. And although he's retired, his high military rank indicates his important status. Mr. Hong, I believe we shouldn't provoke him; after all, he's a veteran of the military, and our relations with the military aren't very strong. Once the limits are crossed, the military people definitely won't stand idly by."

Hong Wei nodded, agreeing, "You analyze well. Indeed, we cannot offend the military. But, if this old man using his influence in the military insists on bothering me, what should I do? Must I let him bully me?"

"I think we don't need to worry too much. Though Qiao Zhen is military personnel, this matter should be handled by the police. Qiao Zhen has already overstepped, and I believe the military will step in to stop him to avoid tension between the military and the police."

"You mean... let him off and not bother with him?" Hong Wei sneered, "Butler, you've been with me for so many years. Do you still not understand my character?" Then, with his eyes narrowed, seeming to have made up his mind, Hong Wei said, "Get me in touch with Mr. Zhu."

Hearing Hong Wei mention 'Mr. Zhu,' the butler's expression slightly changed, asking, "Mr. Hong, are you sure you want to do this?"

"They've bullied me beyond tolerance. If I do nothing, people in Beijing will think I'm scared. Just as well, I'll take this opportunity to show everyone that I'm not easy to mess with. Remember, make it clean and tidy, preferably as an accident. I don't want it to trace back to me. Understand?"

"Yes, I know what to do." The butler nodded and turned to leave the living room.

In a rented room, Ling Chen, Tang Guolun, and others sat in front of the TV, watching the police's news conference, a faint smile in their eyes.

"Well done," Tang Guolun said with a laugh, "Hong Wei has stumbled so badly; I bet he's fuming right now."

"It was fortunate the old General arrived in time, or we would have been in serious trouble," Ling Chen responded. Beijing, as a political center, is troublesome to operate in with many restrictions unless you have strong enough backing; otherwise, it's hard to move an inch.

Moreover, this incident made Ling Chen aware of his weaknesses. Before, the old General had power, and the backing was large enough that even if something went wrong, there was little worry. But things are different now; the old General is retired and has moved from a position of power to a nominal position. Although Pang Jiulin, who succeeded Lonely Wolf, had a good relationship with him, Pang Jiulin's standing in the military was too weak. Being only a colonel, he didn't have much say and had to consult superiors for everything. So, his presence was far from Qiao Zhen's while he was in power.

Therefore, in Beijing, his actions must be low-key, as low-key as possible, avoiding making a big scene which would be difficult to control.

Qiao Zhen knew this better than anyone. That's why he forced the counterpart to hold a press conference immediately, making the crimes discovered at the nightclub public. In doing so, even if someone wanted to cover it up, they couldn't. Had it not been for Qiao Zhen's strong stance, this matter might have been suppressed, disappearing silently.

Even Qiao Zhen had to leverage the media for exposure, indicating that he was also at times rendered powerless.

"Ling Chen, what's our next step?" Tang Guolun asked, "The nightclub incident has been taken on by someone else. Hong Wei is smart; he never directly involves himself in illegal acts but lets others handle them. This way, even if something goes wrong, someone else takes the fall, and he's not implicated. If we want to bring down Hong Wei, we must find evidence directly linking him."

Chapter 1203 - 1210: The Old General in Critical Condition (Part 2)

"Why make it so complicated?" At this moment, Zhu Qing suddenly interjected from the back, "Just kill that kind of person. As long as you give the order, I can take care of it for you tonight."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen and Tang Guolun, among others, were taken aback. They didn't expect Zhu Qing to be so direct.

"Lady Zhu, things aren't as simple as you imagine," Jiang Yunkai spoke up. "If Hong Wei were that easy to deal with, he couldn't have built such a massive force in Beijing."

"Perhaps... Lady Zhu's suggestion isn't bad either," Ling Chen thought for a moment, then said with a smile, "Lady Zhu is a professional assassin, capable enough to take down Hong Wei. Once Hong Wei is dead, things will be much easier to handle."

Tang Guolun expressed some concern, "But right now, we have limited manpower. After Hong Wei's death, we won't have enough people to take over his territory. By then, Beijing's underworld factions are sure to plunge into chaos."

"That's exactly what we want," Ling Chen replied. "Beijing's powers aren't only held by Hong Wei. There are also some smaller factions that have been oppressed by Hong Wei for years, making them unable to grow. Once Hong Wei is dead, it will undoubtedly be an opportunity for them. So, as long as Hong Wei dies, all the small and big forces in Beijing will become active, scrambling to snatch more benefits from this big crocodile. The more factions vying for power, the more chaotic Beijing will become. Under the current circumstances, it's impossible for us to take over all of Hong Wei's power in one go. We can only proceed step by step, slowly. At that point, we just need to get hold of Hong Wei's key assets to establish our foundation. The rest of the forces are just a matter of time."

After listening to Ling Chen's analysis, Tang Guolun nodded, saying, "I understand what you mean. You're thinking of fishing in troubled waters."

"More or less. After all, we won't lose anything, so we might as well give it a try." Saying this, Ling Chen turned to look at Zhu Qing and asked, "Lady Zhu, how confident are you?"

"Give me three days. Once I've gathered enough intel, I'll let you know."

"Alright, then I'll leave it to you."

In the late afternoon.

Ling Chen received a call from Tang Shiyun, inviting him to the Zhu Family for dinner. It might be because Nanrong Wanqing was staying with the Zhu Family, so they arranged a lavish dinner today. Naturally, Zhu Xiaozhu thought of Ling Chen, so she asked Tang Shiyun to call and ask.

"Girl, I'm busy tonight. There's still a lot to do, maybe another time." Ling Chen politely declined.

To be honest, Ling Chen didn't really want to associate too much with the Zhu Family. After all, he and Zhu Hong were sworn enemies, and sitting at the same table with Zhu Hong's parents felt strange. Zhu Xiaozhu probably had this concern too, which is why she had Tang Shiyun call to sound him out.

After hanging up, Ling Chen ate some fast food while studying Hong Wei's enterprises in Beijing.

After a busy evening, Ling Chen looked at the time, realizing it was late, so he took a short nap on the sofa. This nap lasted until six the next morning. Originally, Ling Chen wanted to sleep a bit more, but was jolted awake by a call from Tang Yuan.

Rubbing his eyes drowsily, Ling Chen asked, "Old Tang, why are you looking for me so early? Want to treat me to breakfast?"

"The General's in trouble." Tang Yuan's grave voice came from the other end of the line, "Army General Hospital, come quickly."

Tang Yuan didn't say much more, but Ling Chen's heart sank. The General's in trouble! How could this be? Without time to think, Ling Chen rushed out the door, taking a taxi to the Army General Hospital.

When Ling Chen arrived, Tang Yuan was already waiting at the hospital entrance.

Upon meeting, Ling Chen hurriedly asked, "How's the General? Is he in danger?"

"The rescue just ended. There's no immediate danger, but the critical period isn't over. He needs to remain in the hospital for observation," Tang Yuan replied.

Hearing this, Ling Chen let out a slight sigh of relief, "Old Tang, what exactly happened? When I saw the General yesterday, he was fine. How could this happen overnight..."

"According to the doctors, the General had a sudden acute myocardial infarction and collapsed. Fortunately, the guards noticed in time and rushed him to the hospital. If they had been half an hour later, the General might... Sigh!" At this, Tang Yuan shook his head, clearly still shaken.

"Can I go see the General in his ward?"

"No, the General is still in a coma. Although there's no immediate threat to his life, for unknown reasons, he remains unconscious. The doctors say, given his age and how overworked he's been over the years, the illness hit hard and is very severe. In short, the doctors aren't optimistic about the General's condition. If there's no improvement within a week, even if his life is saved, he could remain in a prolonged coma and become a vegetable."

As they spoke, several military jeeps drove up to the hospital. The doors opened, revealing Pang Jiulin as the driver. To have Pang Jiulin as the chauffeur meant the people inside were all high-ranking and influential military figures.

Seeing Ling Chen and Tang Yuan standing by the entrance, Pang Jiulin didn't say much, just nodded before leading the important figures into the hospital.

"Old Tang, let's go in and have a look too."

Inside the hospital, Ling Chen and Tang Yuan followed closely behind the group of prominent figures to Qiao Zhen's ward. At this moment, several doctors in white coats were conducting a thorough examination on Qiao Zhen, who lay on the hospital bed.

Under Pang Jiulin's guidance, the doctors took the prominent figures to an office and analyzed Qiao Zhen's medical condition.

Ling Chen and Tang Yuan leaned against the doorframe, listening intently to the doctors, both looking rather grim. As they listened intently, Ling Chen felt someone bump into his back. Then, a young voice said, "Sorr... sorry!"

Ling Chen turned to see a somewhat naïve-looking young man in a white coat bending down to pick up scattered documents from the floor.

"Let me help you." Ling Chen picked up two sheets of paper and glanced over the contents, realizing they were Qiao Zhen's past medical records and hospital examination files.

"Young man, what are you doing with these things?" Ling Chen asked.

"General Qiao's condition is quite serious. I'm comparing his previous medical records to see what medication he had taken before."

Tang Yuan, standing nearby, asked, "Have you discovered anything?"

The young man nodded, "I find General Qiao's condition quite strange. I reviewed his past records, and he was quite healthy and vigorous. Given General Qiao's status, the military conducts regular health checks for him. If there were any abnormal conditions, the doctors would have documented them. However, over the past ten years, General Qiao only had bouts of the common cold, no serious illnesses, and didn't take any medications."

Chapter 1204 - 1211: Chengde Martial Arts Hall

"The old general didn't have coronary heart disease before, so logically, he shouldn't have a sudden issue like this."

"Have you mentioned it to the other doctors?" Ling Chen asked.

"I have, but they all think that the old general's age and deteriorating physical functions could lead to anything." The young man said with some resignation.

Hearing this, Ling Chen and Tang Yuan exchanged a glance, both showing a hint of confusion. From the beginning, Ling Chen found Qiao Zhen's condition quite odd. Though Qiao Zhen was old, he exercised regularly, with methods taught by He Ziyun, and was supposed to be very healthy. Furthermore, when they saw Qiao Zhen yesterday, he was full of energy, completely healthy in appearance.

Yet, in just one night, Qiao Zhen had fallen sick in bed, unable to wake up.

"Sanlang, what do you think?" Tang Yuan asked.

Ling Chen glanced at the doctors in the office analyzing the condition, then signaled to Tang Yuan. Both quickly walked towards Qiao Zhen's hospital room. Once there, Ling Chen left Tang Yuan outside to keep watch, in case any doctors suddenly came in.

Looking at Qiao Zhen lying on the bed, Ling Chen gently lifted his head, carefully examining his body parts. After a few minutes, Ling Chen's gaze was caught by a small needle mark. The needle mark was behind the neck, near the hair, hard to detect unless carefully inspected.

A doctor couldn't have placed an infusion needle here, so this needle mark definitely suggested a problem.

Knock knock knock!

At this time, a knock on the door sounded, signaling from Tang Yuan from outside. After re-settling Qiao Zhen's body, Ling Chen left the hospital room.

In the hallway, Ling Chen shared his findings with Tang Yuan, "Old Tang, the old general might have been secretly harmed, and that needle mark is evidence."

"This needs to be reported to Colonel Pang, so he can inform the military people." Tang Yuan immediately decided, quickly heading to the office to tell Pang Jiulin. Pang Jiulin, having been mentored by Qiao Zhen, had deep feelings for the old general.

"If someone truly harmed the old general secretly, I won't spare them, even if I have to dig three feet underground." Pang Jiulin said angrily.

"Instructor Pang, I suspect Hong Wei did this." Ling Chen said solemnly, "The old general was fine yesterday, yet an incident occurred today. It's very likely Hong Wei's retaliation."

"Investigate!" Pang Jiulin replied coldly, "You two are responsible for clearing up this matter, I'll take care of any issues that arise. Go!"

Leaving the Army General Hospital, Tang Yuan watched Ling Chen, lost in thought, and asked, "What are you thinking about?"

"The old general's military compound is heavily guarded, not just anyone can enter or even get near. For someone to bypass so many guards and harm the old general, they must have extraordinary abilities. And I know Hong Wei is acquainted with such experts, capable of doing this."

"Do you think it was them?"

"Very likely!" Ling Chen contemplated and said, "Old Tang, give me half a day, and I'll surely investigate this matter thoroughly."

"Don't need my help?"

"No, you stay at the hospital with the old general, in case something else happens."

"Alright then, take care."

Returning to the rental, Ling Chen called Hu Fei. Then, he contacted Tong Zhentian, suspecting Ren Han and Zhou Qian. These two had close ties with Hong Wei, who might have instructed them to target Qiao Zhen. However, as these two were previously supported by Tong Zhentian, any action against them required a heads-up to Tong Zhentian.

Around two in the afternoon, Ling Chen got ready and headed alone to Chengde Martial Arts Hall, the academy Ren Han had established in Beijing.

On the way, Ling Chen received a call from Pang Jiulin, who said only one thing: "Go ahead and do it, the entire military will back you up."

With these words, Ling Chen's confidence soared. The needle mark must have been confirmed as the cause of Qiao Zhen's illness, hence the military's decision. Just, there were matters the military couldn't handle openly, needing consideration of impact. Hence, Ling Chen, who had left the army, was the perfect choice.

Forty minutes later, Ling Chen arrived outside Chengde Martial Arts Hall.

Chengde Martial Arts Hall was one of the two most renowned academies in Beijing, covering thousands of square meters, with ancient architectural styles, exuding cultural vibes.

Passing through the crimson red gate, Ling Chen just stepped over the threshold when two youths blocked his path.

"Sir, who are you looking for?"

"I'm looking for your Martial Arts Hall Master."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"Tell your Martial Arts Hall Master that Ling Chen is looking for him on urgent business, and that he better get out quickly, don't waste my time. Otherwise, I'll take down his academy today."

Upon hearing this, the two youths' faces changed, and they sternly shouted, "You're audacious, to cause trouble at our Chengde Martial Arts Hall! You must be tired of living! Get him, show him some color."

Seeing the two youths rushing at him, Ling Chen showed no mercy, one punch per person, knocking them directly to the ground.

From the main gate to inside the academy, along a twenty-meter stretch, over ten people lay, who had attempted to stop Ling Chen.

"Ren Han, your honor guest is here, aren't you going to come out to greet them?" Entering the academy, Ling Chen shouted loudly amidst a group of youths.

Soon, accompanied by several middle-aged men, Ren Han emerged from the inner hall. Seeing Ling Chen at the door, Ren Han's eyes turned icy cold, and he shouted coldly, "Ling Chen, what are you doing?"

"I want to ask where you were last night."

"Hmph! Ling Chen, don't you think you're meddling too much? Why should I tell you?"

"Not willing to speak?" Ling Chen smirked slightly, and said half-smiling, half-not, "Chairman Ren, don't blame me for not reminding you, you'd better answer my questions honestly. Otherwise, the consequences are on you!"

"Haha! Quite the arrogance." A voice echoed, and a youth in his twenties appeared in Ling Chen's sight. The youth was well-built, with handsome features, with fine long hair, almost resembling a Korean star if he wore a suit.

Looking at the youth coming from the inner hall, Ling Chen spoke indifferently, "Chairman Ren, I thought you only had one son, Ren Chong."

"I'm Zhou Fangfang, my father Zhou Qian, you're likely not unfamiliar." The youth responded.

"Oh!" Ling Chen feigned understanding, nodding, "So it's President Zhou's son." Pausing, he looked at Zhou Fangfang, "I'm talking to Chairman Ren, why are you, an outsider, interrupting? No manners—didn't your dad teach you what politeness means?"

Chapter 1205 - 1212: Challenging the Dojo (Part 1)

Zhou Fangfang's face turned angry, and he opened his mouth to angrily curse: "You..."

"You what?" Ling Chen mercilessly interrupted, retorting, "Shut up, this has nothing to do with you. Either watch quietly from the side or get lost, don't try to show your presence in front of me."

"Ling Chen, you..." Before Zhou Fangfang could finish speaking, Ren Han interjected, "Fangfang, there's no need to argue with someone like him. Just watch from the side, let me handle this." Having said that, Ren Han locked his gaze on Ling Chen, coldly saying, "Ling Chen, don't think you can act recklessly just because Elder Tong supports you. Let me remind you, this is Beijing, not a place for you to do as you please."

"So what if it's Beijing?" Ling Chen smiled indifferently, unconcerned as he spoke, "Chairman Ren, out of respect I consider you a Martial Arts Elder, but you? Shameless, despicable techniques, truly disgraceful to the title of President of the Martial Arts Association. However, that's not the point. My main purpose for coming today is to clarify something. Where were you last night?"

"That's my private affair, I have no obligation to tell you. If you have no other questions, you can leave now; Chengde Martial Arts Hall does not welcome you."

Ling Chen nodded and said, "One of my elders was ambushed last night, now lying in the ICU, life or death uncertain. The assailant was highly skilled, and after much thought, you and Zhou Qian are the main suspects."

Ren Han furrowed his brow slightly, retorting coldly, "Ling Chen, you'd better think carefully before you speak. I have no enmity or acquaintance with your elder, why would I trouble myself looking for him."

"Yes, you're right. If it were in the past, I wouldn't suspect you. But given your ties with Hong Wei, I have no choice but to suspect you."

Hearing this, Ren Han was momentarily stunned and then burst into laughter, gloating as he said, "So you've offended Mr. Hong. Haha! Ling Chen, if that's the case, you can only blame your elder for seeking trouble. Who in Beijing doesn't know, it's better to provoke King Yan than Hong Wei. Opposing Mr. Hong is a death wish."

Ling Chen stared directly at Ren Han, punctuating each word, "Do you dare say this matter has nothing to do with you?"

"Believe it or not, it has nothing to do with me. If you want revenge, you might as well go directly to Hong Wei. But I'm afraid you lack the courage." Ren Han mocked, "Ling Chen, face reality, this isn't your turf, be careful not to lose your life in Beijing."

"That's not your concern. I will deal with Hong Wei eventually, but first, I need to handle some problems."

Feeling the cold intent in Ling Chen's gaze, Ren Han's heart sank slightly, frowning as he asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"I once respected you as the Vice President of the Martial Arts Association, but now I know, what a joke of a president, you and Zhou Qian are just someone's lackeys. To reach your level is a disgrace to us martial artists. Before dealing with Hong Wei, I must first deal with you two, to prevent any dogs from blocking my path when the time comes."

Being berated as dogs by Ling Chen, especially in front of a crowd, was more than Ren Han could bear despite his cultivation. With so many disciples watching, if he remained indifferent, how could he lead them in the future?

"Fine, very well! Ling Chen, I have tolerated you again and again, yet you do not know restraint. Since that is the case, don't blame me for being discourteous." With that, Ren Han strode forward and extended his hand. The disciples behind him immediately understood, quickly retrieving a steel knife from a wooden box and handing it to him. With the knife in hand, Ren Han's aura shifted instantly.

"Ling Chen, you escaped last time, no victory decided. This time I'll show you the true power of the Lianyang Saber Technique."

"Enough nonsense, bring it on if you dare." Ling Chen remained unfazed, not regarding Ren Han.

"Take this!" With a shout, Ren Han kicked off, his body transforming into a lightning bolt, knife held aloft as he charged at Ling Chen. In an instant, before the blade reached him, a fierce wind swept in, feeling like the biting wind of December, chilling to the bone.

Watching the approaching blade, Ling Chen remained motionless, maintaining a calm composure like Mo Che in his eyes.

When the steel knife was two centimeters from his forehead, a strong force suddenly burst forth. Feeling the terrifying power, Ren Han's pupils contracted, and his movements briefly paused. In that moment he stopped, a fist shot out from above Ling Chen's right shoulder, slamming into the steel knife.

In a flash, a cry rang out as Ren Han was forced back seven or eight meters, the steel knife falling from his hand, clattering loudly on the ground.

This sudden change left everyone present stunned. Especially the disciples of the Martial Arts Academy, who never imagined their master couldn't withstand a single move. Moreover, they noticed that Ren Han's arms trembled slightly, his face pale, struggling even to stand.

"You..." After resting for a while, Ren Han finally mustered the strength to speak, "You cheated!"

Ling Chen shrugged, "I learned it from you." As he finished speaking, a person appeared behind Ling Chen, more accurately, an old man. As a Vice President of the Martial Arts Association, Ren Han's discernment was keen. Seeing the newcomer, he shuddered, his lips devoid of color.

"Ji... Ji Gang... why... why are you...?" Ren Han stammered, eyes filled with fear.

A master from the Heavenly List! Ling Chen had actually invited a master from the Heavenly List to help! In an instant, Ren Han's heart filled with despair.

Ling Chen walked over to Ren Han on his own, asking, "If it wasn't you last night, then who was it? Tell me!"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" Ling Chen snorted, "Chairman Ren, my patience is limited. Speak, who was it?"

Ren Han glanced at Ji Gang nearby, trembling inwardly as he quickly said, "Anyway, Hong Wei didn't contact me, perhaps... perhaps..." He trailed off, casting his gaze towards Zhou Fangfang in the crowd.

Seeing Ren Han's gesture, Ling Chen immediately understood his meaning, walking straight over to Zhou Fangfang, questioning, "Where's your dad?"

"What do you want?" Zhou Fangfang's eyes widened, coldly staring at Ling Chen as he shouted angrily, "I'll tell you, my dad is the President of the Martial Arts Association, if you touch a hair on my head, I'll make sure you..."

Slap!

Before Zhou Fangfang could finish, Ling Chen slapped him, shutting him up completely.

Chapter 1206 - 1213: Challengers at the Door (Part 2)

"If you don't want to die, call your dad immediately and tell him to come to Chengde Martial Arts Hall right away," Ling Chen said coldly.

Looking at Ling Chen's icy gaze, Zhou Fangfang was not afraid, only felt an intense anger. As the son of the Martial Arts Association President, everyone treated him with respect; he had never suffered such humiliation. Especially the pain from that slap, it fueled his rage even more.

"Ling Chen, you're looking for death!" Zhou Fangfang roared furiously, swinging his fist directly towards Ling Chen's face.

Facing Zhou Fangfang's attack, Ling Chen was unfazed. A fierce whip kick followed through, fiercely sweeping Zhou Fangfang's lower body. Instantly, Zhou Fangfang's body tilted, lost his balance, and fell to the ground. Before Zhou Fangfang could get back up, Ling Chen swiftly kicked out. In a moment, a miserable scream echoed throughout the Martial Arts Academy.

"Ling Chen, you..." Seeing Ling Chen's action, Ren Han was taken aback. He couldn't have imagined that Ling Chen would strike so ruthlessly, directly breaking Zhou Fangfang's shin bone. It was known that the most famous Martial Arts of the Zhou family were the Thirty-Two Paths of Tan Leg, all their skills relying on the legs. Zhou Fangfang's severe leg injury would definitely affect his strength, at best he could be a martial master in the academy, but becoming a master would be impossible.

"Pain... It hurts so much!" Zhou Fangfang hugged his injured shin, his face pale, and moans of misery kept coming from his mouth.

"If you don't want your other leg ruined too, you'd better call your dad immediately."

Hearing Ling Chen's voice, Zhou Fangfang gritted his teeth, itching to tear a piece off Ling Chen's body. But the harsh reality quickly brought him back to his senses. The person in front of him was not someone he could afford to offend. Although unwilling, for the sake of his other leg, Zhou Fangfang obediently took out his phone and dialed Zhou Qian's number.

After hanging up the phone, Zhou Fangfang looked at Ling Chen with cold, venomous eyes and said, "Just you wait, when my dad comes, see how I deal with you."

Ling Chen didn't bother to pay attention to such an idiot and directly found a chair to sit down in the martial arts academy hall. Ji Gang stood quietly beside him, motionless, his eyes vacant like a plant. After returning from the Army General Hospital today, Ling Chen immediately called Hu Fei to have Ji Gang sent over. Ling Chen didn't plan to stir up trouble on this trip to Beijing; he wanted to slow down and keep things low-key.

However, everyone has a bottom line that must not be crossed, and General Qiao Zhen was one of them.

When Ling Chen saw Qiao Zhen lying in the hospital bed, uncertain between life and death, he was truly angry. Only, he hid his emotions well and did not easily reveal them.

When it comes to harshness, he's never lost to anyone!

After waiting for more than half an hour, Zhou Qian still hadn't appeared. Ling Chen wasn't in a hurry, sitting quietly with his arms crossed. Just now, when Zhou Fangfang called Zhou Qian, he told him what had happened here. Zhou Qian hadn't come yet probably because he was gathering people.

It took over an hour before Zhou Qian rushed to Chengde Martial Arts Hall with a large group of people.

Seeing Zhou Fangfang lying on the ground, Zhou Qian's expression changed, he hurriedly ran over and asked with concern, "Fangfang, are you alright?"

"Dad! That bastard broke my leg." Seeing Zhou Qian arrive, Zhou Fangfang immediately felt he had support, pointed at Ling Chen and cursed, "You must get revenge for your son."

Zhou Qian furrowed his brows, looking coldly at Ling Chen, and said in a deep voice, "Ling Chen, what are you doing? Our Zhou family has no grudges against you, past or present, why did you harm my son so viciously?"

Ling Chen replied blandly, "President Zhou, blame your son for talking too much, lacking skills yet trying to stand up for others." As he spoke, Ling Chen stood up and walked directly to Zhou Qian, saying, "I called you here to ask you a question. Did you do what happened last night?"

"What incident?" Zhou Qian was somewhat confused.

"Last night someone attacked one of his elders, and he thinks it was us who did it," Ren Han interjected.

Upon hearing this, Zhou Qian finally understood, "Ling Chen, regardless of whether we did it or not, you're here causing trouble without evidence, do you really think we're easy to bully?"

As he finished speaking, Zhou Qian waved his hand, and the twenty or so people he brought immediately surrounded Ling Chen.

"Careful, that old man is Ji Gang," Ren Han reminded.

Zhou Qian was slightly startled and then shifted his gaze towards Ji Gang not far away. When he entered earlier, he had noticed the old man, but because of Zhou Fangfang's injury, he hadn't paid much attention, focusing all his thoughts on his son. Now, hearing Ren Han's reminder, Zhou Qian carefully scrutinized Ji Gang.

Confirming Ji Gang's identity, Zhou Qian's heart sank, and he hurriedly went to Ji Gang, clasping his fists respectfully, and greeted him, "Elder Ji, I've admired your name for a long time. I'm Zhou Qian, President of Huaxia Martial Arts Association. I've had the honor of meeting you once, do you remember?"

Looking at Zhou Qian, Ji Gang's expression was stiff, as if he hadn't heard anything, with no reaction at all. Seeing this, Zhou Qian mistakenly thought Ji Gang didn't want to respond to him and continued saying, "Elder Ji, I..."

Before Zhou Qian could finish speaking, Ling Chen's voice suddenly came from the side, "Elder Ji, President Zhou is greeting you, at least give some response."

As the words fell, a glint of light suddenly burst forth from Ji Gang's ancient, unwavering eyes. At the same moment, his body slightly leaned forward, his aura exploding instantly. Zhou Qian, unprepared, was directly struck and flew away, landing heavily on the ground, blood gushing uncontrollably from his mouth.

"Elder Ji, you...ah!" Zhou Qian opened his mouth, only to spew another mouthful of blood.

Seeing this scene, the people Zhou Qian brought were all stunned, standing in place, looking at each other, none dared to act rashly. Ling Chen ignored them, walked straight through the encirclement, approached Zhou Qian and Ren Han, and said, "Don't blame me for being ruthless; blame yourselves for following the wrong person. If you want to continue in this field, you'd better give me some useful information."

Zhou Qian endured the pain, roaring furiously, "Ling Chen, we're from the Martial Arts Association. If you dare to touch us, you'll be against the entire Martial Arts Association, and I'll make sure you can never stand in the martial arts world."

Ling Chen replied indifferently, "Whatever, anyway, this identity means nothing to me. How you act is your business, but the precondition is you are able to live that long. Now, you have two choices: tell me who the attacker was last night, or provide valuable information to me."

Chapter 1207 - 1214: Zhu Family Secrets

Zhou Qian looked at Ren Han, the two of them exchanged glances, hesitation flashing in their eyes. If it was just Ling Chen alone, they wouldn't be afraid, but now with a Heavenly List expert backing Ling Chen, they couldn't handle it.

"We're just Hong Wei's henchmen. As far as we know, there's a very formidable group of people behind Hong Wei, but we've never seen them. They're the ones who specifically help Hong Wei eliminate rivals. The ones who attacked your elders last night were probably them." After much hesitation, Zhou Qian finally made a decision.

"You've worked with Hong Wei for so long, and you don't know anything about them?"

"We really don't know," Ren Han said. "Hong Wei is a very cautious person, he wouldn't easily reveal his true strength. In his eyes, we just take care of his security on the surface. In truth, he wouldn't really entrust his safety to us. There's another group in the shadows protecting him, they're his true reliance."

Ling Chen nodded. Ren Han and Zhou Qian didn't seem to be lying, so there was some credibility to their words. "Alright, I'll believe you for now. But don't blame me if I didn't warn you, I will eventually remove this thorn, Hong Wei. If you continue to serve him, don't blame me for being ruthless." With that, Ling Chen took Ji Gang and turned to leave Chengde Martial Arts Hall.

"Old Zhou, are you alright?" After Ling Chen left, Ren Han looked at Zhou Qian, who was pale, and asked.

"I'm fine." Zhou Qian slowly exhaled. "Ren, what do you think we should do now? Should we tell Hong Wei about this, or..."

"Do you think Hong Wei has the ability to deal with a Heavenly List expert?" Ren Han retorted.

Hearing this, Zhou Qian fell into deep thought. After a long while, Zhou Qian nodded and said, "I understand what you mean. Let's pretend nothing happened today, and no one is allowed to say a word."

After leaving Chengde Martial Arts Hall, Ling Chen and Ji Gang took a car directly to the rented apartment.

"Lady Zhu, you must be careful during your operation, there are many hidden experts protecting Hong Wei," Ling Chen instructed.

Zhu Qing's team was ready to take action tonight, and Ling Chen shared the information he got from Zhou Qian to let her be prepared to avoid any accidents.

However, Zhu Qing didn't take Ling Chen's warning seriously. "We're professional assassins, not like those common killers." Zhu Qing was very confident in her abilities.

Nightfall.

Around midnight, Zhu Qing left the apartment alone. Ling Chen and Tang Guolun stayed behind, waiting for the outcome.

Since Zhu Qing was confident, Ling Chen chose not to get involved, to avoid complicating their actions.

Waiting is undoubtedly an ordeal. As the clock on the wall ticked away, Ling Chen couldn't help but feel a bit worried.

It wasn't until around three in the morning that there was finally a knock on the door. Ling Chen quickly got up, walked to the door, and opened it. As soon as the door was opened, a strong smell of blood rushed in. Under the bright light, Zhu Qing was covered in dark red stains, but because she was wearing black, the bloodstains weren't obvious.

Seeing Zhu Qing panting, Ling Chen was slightly taken aback and urgently asked, "Lady Zhu, are you injured?"

"I'm not. That's someone else's blood." With that, Zhu Qing went straight to the couch, picked up a cup of water, and drank it in large gulps.

Although Ling Chen was eager to know the result, he patiently let Zhu Qing catch her breath and rest for a bit.

After a while, as her breathing became steady, Zhu Qing looked up at everyone in the room and said, "I'm sorry, the mission wasn't successful."

Ling Chen wasn't surprised by this outcome, as Zhu Qing's appearance on return had already said a lot.

"What about your casualties?" Ling Chen asked.

Hearing this, Zhu Qing's gaze toward Ling Chen softened. As assassins, their creed was to serve the employer. Many employers cared only about the results and never about their casualties. So Ling Chen's words brought some warmth to Zhu Qing.

"Three injured, but we killed six of theirs."

"Were those the hidden experts?"

Zhu Qing nodded, "I need to report this to my family, to have them send reinforcements quickly."

"What? The people you brought aren't enough?"

"No." At this point, Zhu Qing hesitated, looking as if she wanted to say something but didn't.

Noticing Zhu Qing's expression, Ling Chen said, "Lady Zhu, I'm not just your employer; I'm also your friend. Besides, you're working for me, is there anything you can't say?"

Zhu Qing pondered for a while and then said, "I know the identity and background of those people."

"You know?" Ling Chen was shocked.

"They're the mortal enemies of our Zhu Family. Initially, they were part of the Zhu Family, but due to differing ideologies, they split. The Zhu Family ancestors were Imperial Secret Agents, serving the royal family and secretly eliminating traitors. Later, even after the court was overthrown, the Zhu Family began serving powerful figures. However, because the Zhu Family was very selective about its employers, many of us had no work. If this continued, the Zhu Family would eventually fall."

"At that time, there were many voices of dissent within the Zhu Family, suggesting that anything can be done as long as there's profit. Thus, the Zhu Family was divided into two factions. After over a decade of open and secret clashes, it ended when one faction left. Those Zhu Family members set up their own establishment, shedding the assassin label and becoming killers for hire. As long as the price was right, they'd take up any task."

"Because of this, their development was rapid, quickly overshadowing the Zhu Family. Later, due to their elusive whereabouts and discreet conduct, we haven't encountered them since, nor do we know where they are. But internally, it's heard that they formed an organization called the Skyhawk Pavilion, specializing in training elite killers."

"The Skyhawk Pavilion?" Ling Chen's eyes brightened at those words. He interrupted Zhu Qing and asked, "Did you just say Skyhawk Pavilion?"

Zhu Qing nodded, "That's right, the Skyhawk Pavilion. Why, have you heard of them?"

"An elder mentioned them to me," Ling Chen casually replied. A while back, Tong Zhentian mentioned the Skyhawk Pavilion. It's a secret organization that serves the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, dealing with matters that the pavilion can't conveniently handle.

These days, Ling Chen had been wary of the Skyhawk Pavilion's emergence, unaware of its connection to the Zhu Family.

Chapter 1208 - 1215: The Origins of Skyhawk Pavilion

"Lady Zhu, how much do you know about the Skyhawk Pavilion?" Ling Chen asked. It was hard to come by someone who knew about the Skyhawk Pavilion, and he wanted to ask clearly so he could be prepared.

"I don't know much about the Skyhawk Pavilion. If you want to know, you can ask my Mr. Chang. He is mainly responsible for the Zhu Family's intelligence work; he knows those things best."

Not long after, Zhu Qing contacted Zhu Houchang and informed him of what had transpired here. After they finished chatting, Zhu Qing handed the phone to Ling Chen.

"Hello! Mr. Zhu, it's me, Ling Chen. I have a few questions I would like to ask."

"Qing has just told me, Mr. Ling wants to know about the Skyhawk Pavilion?"

"Yes! I wonder if Mr. Zhu could reveal a bit to me," Ling Chen pleaded.

Zhu Houchang sighed on the other end of the phone, "Speaking of which, this should be a disgrace to our Zhu Family. Although family scandals should not be broadcasted, this was after all many years ago, and today's Skyhawk Pavilion has nothing to do with the Zhu Family. On the contrary, they have always been the target we want to eliminate."

Pausing, Zhu Houchang continued: "Qing isn't very clear about these matters, most of which are heard from the elderly of the Zhu Family. In fact, the matter wasn't as she said. Back then, it wasn't that another faction proactively requested splitting off, but they were expelled by the Zhu Family. The ancestor of the Zhu Family believed their ideas undermined the principles the Zhu Family persisted in. To prevent the Zhu Family from collapsing due to internal strife, the Zhu Family Head at the time ordered the total expulsion of those people."

"After being expelled from the Zhu Family, they lived quite miserably, with some even becoming henchmen for others. Later, a great force took a fancy to their abilities, not only providing much help but also funding them to establish their own power, which is when the Skyhawk Pavilion was founded."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen immediately understood, "So, it was the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion that helped them back then."

"You know?" Zhu Houchang appeared a bit surprised, "Mr. Ling, I didn't mention the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. How did you learn about this?"

Ling Chen smiled slightly, "To be honest with you, Mr. Zhu, I'm facing threats from the Skyhawk Pavilion at any moment, so naturally, I need to do my homework."

"Since you know about the Skyhawk Pavilion's backers, I might as well be frank. Yes! It was indeed the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion that helped establish the Skyhawk Pavilion. Since then, the Skyhawk Pavilion has become an affiliate of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. However, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was hidden very deeply, with hardly anyone aware of the existence of the Skyhawk Pavilion. For years, the Skyhawk Pavilion has been doing dirty work for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

"According to years of investigation by our Zhu Family, the Skyhawk Pavilion is internally divided into two parts. One consists of outer disciples, who specifically handle businesses outside, like the people around Hong Wei—all elite assassins trained by the Skyhawk Pavilion. Besides them, another part belongs to the management of Ying Hall. Ying Hall is the real core of the Skyhawk Pavilion. Like us, most people in Ying Hall are descendants of the Zhu Family. Mr. Ling, you should understand now."

"One more thing. Mr. Zhu, do you know where the headquarters of the Skyhawk Pavilion is?"

"Sorry, I don't know this either. Over the years, our Zhu Family has conducted numerous investigations, but from various indications, we suspect the headquarters of the Skyhawk Pavilion is not in HuaXia."

Ling Chen asked puzzled, "Why do you think so?"

"Training an elite assassin is not easy; assassins who haven't stained their hands with dozens of lives are unqualified. To train elite assassins, they must get accustomed to blood and enjoy killing. However, HuaXia has too many restrictions, and killing too many people would easily invite trouble. Hence, the Skyhawk Pavilion moved the headquarters overseas where there are no regulations, allowing them to act recklessly."

"Skyhawk Pavilion has trained many elite assassins. Where did these assassins come from initially?" Ling Chen asked.

"Skyhawk Pavilion was established by Zhu family members, and many of the training methods followed those of the Zhu Family. To give a simple example, our Zhu Family would select some children with better qualifications from orphanages or elsewhere through official channels for training from a young age. Skyhawk Pavilion does the same, but they aren't as regulated as we are. They will use any means to acquire enough children."

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Zhu, for sharing so much with me."

"You're welcome. Since the Skyhawk Pavilion wants to attack you, I should help you more," Zhu Houchang smiled, "Mr. Ling, Qing told me their action last night failed. I apologize for that. Please believe me, our Zhu Family won't let you down again."

At this point, it seemed Zhu Houchang thought of something, and he switched topics, "By the way! Mr. Ling, there's one very important thing I almost forgot. Last time we met, you asked me to check the Zhu Family archives to see if there are records about Guo Qiang and the tomb of Ling Gengqiu. Believe it or not, I really found that information. Let's talk more about this the next time we meet."

"Great, I'm looking forward to our next meeting. Take care!"

After hanging up the phone, Zhu Qing took back her mobile and asked Ling Chen, "What did you chat with Mr. Chang?"

Ling Chen teased with a smile, "A lot, but unfortunately, it's stuff girls can't listen to." After saying this, before Zhu Qing cast a white eye, Ling Chen waved his hand, "Alright! It's not early anymore. You have had a busy night, get some rest early; there's still much to be done in the coming days."

The next day.

Ling Chen had just had breakfast when he received a call from He Ziyun. Before causing trouble at Chengde Martial Arts Hall yesterday, Ling Chen called Tong Zhentian regarding the matter. Presumably, Tong Zhentian mentioned it to He Ziyun, prompting the latter to call and inquire about the situation.

"Mr. He, you don't have to worry. I have a grasp on things; nothing will go wrong... Alright, I understand, let's leave it at that."

Just as the call ended, Jiang Yunkai hurriedly ran in from outside the rental unit and said, "Chen, a few cars are outside, saying they're looking for you."

Ling Chen got up with a smile, "Don't be afraid, they're all our people." Saying this, Ling Chen called Tang Guolun and others, and quickly went out to meet them.

"Ling Chen, you're in Beijing yet didn't contact me. Had Master not told me, I wouldn't have known," Ye Liangyong scolded.

Ling Chen smiled apologetically, "Mr. Ye, I didn't want to bother you."

Ye Liangyong said dissatisfied, "What are you saying? Do we need such politeness between us? Alright, let's not talk about it. Have your friends pack their stuff; I've prepared a place for you, and it guarantees satisfaction."

Ling Chen nodded, "Thank you, Mr. Ye."

Chapter 1209 - 1216: Ying Hall (1)

Just now, He Ziyun told Ling Chen over the phone that Ye Liangyong had arranged a place for him to stay. Although this rented house was spacious, the conditions were too poor. If it were just a group of men, it wouldn't matter, but with Zhu Qing around, they needed to be a bit more particular.

What's that saying? You can neglect anyone, but you can't neglect a beauty.

The place Ye Liangyong arranged was quite large; it's an estate located in the Beijing suburb, with two villas in a pastoral style, surrounded by lush greenery, with many trees planted around.

When Ling Chen and his party arrived, they found a lot of young men in the estate, each walking back and forth, seemingly patrolling the surroundings.

"Mr. Ye, are these all the security of the estate?"

"No, they're all our own people, brought over from the Qingyun Martial Arts Hall. They're quite capable; although they can't compare to a freak like you, they can handle being security without major issues."

Ling Chen was very impressed with 'Qingyun Martial Arts Hall.' Qingyun Martial Arts Hall was an academy founded by He Ziyun, initially in East Sea City. Later, due to He Ziyun's identity issues, fearing it might implicate the Qingyun Martial Arts Hall, the hall was moved to Beijing, where Ye Liangyong took full responsibility for managing it.

"Mr. Ye, is it really necessary to go to such lengths?"

"Master told me that you're short on manpower right now, so I will help as much as I can." After a pause, Ye Liangyong changed the topic and asked, "I heard you had a big conflict with Hong Wei?"

Ling Chen nodded, considering Ye Liangyong one of their own, there was no need to hide the truth from him.

"Mr. Ye, you've been in Beijing for so many years, you must be familiar with Hong Wei, right?"

"Met him a few times, but we're not in deep contact. Hong Wei and I are not on the same path, so I try to keep my distance from him. My most extensive knowledge of him is about his love life, something everyone in the upper echelons of Beijing society must know well. Hong Wei loves young, beautiful women, especially those with a certain social status. Whether it's news anchors or celebrities, he's been through them all. It's said he has dozens of women he's maintained, and more than half of them have given him children. However, Hong Wei has done it very discreetly, sending the children abroad to live right after birth, so no one knows where his children are."

Hearing this, Ling Chen couldn't help but smile, "This is typically someone who's done too much bad stuff and is afraid of revenge, so he leaves so many descendants to avoid severing the Hong family's line."

"Ling Chen." Ye Liangyong sternly said, "As long as you're confident, just go for it, don't worry about causing an impact. On the surface, people in Beijing are polite to Hong Wei, but privately, there are

many criticisms because some of his actions undermine the basic fairness of competition. However, due to Hong Wei's massive power, no one dares to openly conflict with him. If something were to really happen to Hong Wei, I'm sure many people would clap their hands in joy."

"I understand."

"Alright! I have a meeting to host later, so I won't go inside with you. Whatever you need, just call me; I'll do my best to help if I can."

"Thanks, Mr. Ye!"

...

"Kill!"

With a loud shout, there was a clanging sound as a pair of sharp daggers slipped from the man's hands. Then, he tilted his body and fell straight to the ground, lifeless.

Clap clap clap!

Clear clapping sounds came, and an old man walked over slowly, nodding at the blood-covered Zhu Hong, "Not bad! You've improved quickly, you didn't disappoint me."

Looking at the old man, Zhu Hong took a few deep breaths. When his slightly trembling arms gradually relaxed, he threw down the dagger in his hand, and his blood-red eyes slowly returned to normal.

"Master, thanks to your outstanding teaching, I've made such great progress."

"No need to be modest. No matter how well I teach, it all depends on your diligence and hard work." Saying this, the old man waved his hand, and several expressionless youths immediately came over to carry away the bodies lying on the ground.

"Master, when can I enter the second stage?" Zhu Hong eagerly asked. Since undergoing the old man's special training, he had clearly felt his power increase. Once he'd stepped into the threshold, he naturally wanted to pursue even greater strength.

"No rush," the old man lightly chuckled, "This kind of thing must be done step by step, don't rush it. You've done very well recently, you need to rest for a period, let your body completely relax, and consolidate your foundation. When the time comes, I will naturally let you enter the second stage of training. Go attend to your wounds, then come see me at my place."

Zhu Hong glanced at the wounds on his body and said nonchalantly, "Master, these little wounds are nothing."

"Don't overdo it. After drug immersion, your sense of pain has greatly diminished, you can hardly feel any pain. But, the absence of pain doesn't mean your injuries won't affect your body. As an assassin, your body is your capital."

"Yes, I understand!" Zhu Hong nodded, saying nothing more, and walked straight out of the training ground.

Returning to his residence, as soon as he stepped inside, a woman with delicate features quickly put down her tasks and hurried over to him, kneeling respectfully in front of Zhu Hong with her head lowered, "Master."

Zhu Hong didn't even glance at her and walked straight to the bedside to sit down. Without needing to say anything further, the woman immediately brought over a medical kit and carefully tended to Zhu Hong's wounds. From her skilled movements, it seemed she often handled such matters.

After bandaging the wounds, the woman brought a cup of tea and handed it to Zhu Hong with both hands, "Master, please have some water."

Taking the teacup, Zhu Hong said indifferently, "Go and get busy."

"Yes."

Watching the woman's retreating figure, Zhu Hong couldn't help but curl the corner of his mouth into a smile with an inexplicable meaning. As a direct disciple, the treatment Zhu Hong received was much better than others, which included having a woman exclusively for him. The woman in front of him was named Xiu, very young, only twenty-two, in her prime. When she was delivered, she was clean and untouched by any man.

Xiu's job was very simple—to serve Zhu Hong well, fulfilling his every demand, even if those demands were perverse, she had to comply unconditionally.

Having stayed in the desert for so long, mingling with a group of men all day, suddenly receiving a fair-skinned woman was like relief in a time of drought for Zhu Hong. On the day Xiu was delivered, Zhu Hong couldn't wait to enjoy her. It had to be said that Xiu was trained very well, not just in figure, but more importantly in skill, and there was no trace of her being new to the experience.

However, over time, Zhu Hong grew weary. It wasn't that Xiu wasn't good enough, it's just that his mind was now entirely focused on improving his power, leaving him no mood to consider anything else. After resting for about ten minutes, Zhu Hong, with Xiu's assistance, changed into clean clothes and went straight to the master's residence.

Chapter 1210 - 1217: Ying Hall (Part 2)

"Master!"

Upon entering the old man's dwelling, the first thing that catches the eye is a gigantic wooden sculpture, a mighty eagle soaring majestically, exuding an air of authority. It's unclear why, but this kind of eagle decoration can be found everywhere in this assassin base.

Zhu Hong stood earnestly in front of the eagle, waiting for the old man to speak. "Come in," the old man's voice resonated, prompting Zhu Hong to lift the curtain and step inside. The old man's room was very simple; apart from this direct disciple, it rarely saw outsiders.

At the moment, the old man was leaning against the window, gazing at the endless sea of yellow sand outside. Hearing Zhu Hong's approaching footsteps, the old man shut the window and gestured to a nearby seat, "Sit down."

"Master, why have you called me here?" Zhu Hong asked, looking directly at him.

"You've been here for quite a while now, I imagine you might have many questions about the base," the old man began. "You are my direct disciple; I don't care about your past, as long as you remain loyal to me, I promise your future will be smooth sailing."

Zhu Hong replied earnestly, "Master, you gave me this life, no matter what you ask of me, I will not refuse."

"Really?" The old man smiled faintly, a flick of his wrist and a sharp dagger suddenly landed at Zhu Hong's feet, "Words alone are useless, I need you to prove it with actions."

Zhu Hong picked up the dagger without flinching and asked, "What do you want me to do, Master?"

The old man pointed at Zhu Hong's crotch, a playful smile on his face, "You want to prove your loyalty? Fine, then ruin it. Assassins are solitary, you won't need it anymore."

Upon hearing this, Zhu Hong's pupils slightly contracted, his entire body froze. He never expected such a demand from the old man.

Seeing Zhu Hong immobile, the old man's smile gradually turned cold, "What? Was everything you said earlier a lie? If you can't bring yourself to do it, I can help you."

Zhu Hong gritted his teeth, a fierce mental struggle raging in his mind. Women or power... any ambitious person desires both. But now, the old man has posed a dilemma before him. Seeing the old man's cold gaze, Zhu Hong trembled inside, uncertain how to choose.

More than ten seconds passed, beads of sweat formed on Zhu Hong's forehead. He clenched his teeth, turned the dagger around in his hand, finally making his decision.

He could guess that if he didn't comply, the old man might kill him on the spot. In that case, it was better to choose a path to survival. As long as he was alive, there was hope for everything. With that thought, Zhu Hong swung his arm, aiming the sharp dagger directly at his crotch.

Just as Zhu Hong was about to make the cut, the old man sitting in the chair suddenly lunged forward, grabbing Zhu Hong's wrist to stop him. Bewildered by the old man's actions, Zhu Hong asked, "Master, you..."

"Enough, that's quite sufficient." The old man smiled and said, "I just wanted to test you, to see how ruthless you were with yourself. Only those who can be ruthless with themselves can be ruthless with others. This is your final test, passing it makes you my true direct disciple."

The old man's words made Zhu Hong involuntarily breathe a sigh of relief.

"Sit down, I have many things to tell you." Once they were seated again, the old man slowly began, "You've been here for so long but still don't know my name. I'm Zhu Chuan, the chief responsible for this base. Our assassin organization is called Skyhawk Pavilion, you probably haven't heard of it."

"Skyhawk Pavilion?" Zhu Hong's interest was piqued, he asked, "Master, is Skyhawk Pavilion connected to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?"

"You don't need to know about that for now. This is the main base of Skyhawk Pavilion, where all assassins must complete their training before officially becoming members. Within Skyhawk Pavilion, core disciples belong to Ying Hall, I'm the Eagle Head, overseeing all Ying Hall affairs. With your current abilities, you are still insufficient to become a Ying Hall member. However, since you are my direct disciple, you have the privilege of directly entering Ying Hall. But don't be too pleased. Skyhawk Pavilion always upholds the principle of preferring scarcity over mediocrity. If your skills never reach Ying Hall's standards, I'll have no choice but to demote you. So you need to work even harder than before. If you do well, perhaps decades from now you'll have a chance to inherit my position, becoming the Eagle Head of Ying Hall."

"I understand." Zhu Hong nodded, "Rest assured, Master, I will not disappoint you."

"Good, I trust I haven't misjudged you." Zhu Chuan said, shifting the conversation, "Zhu Hong, I know you are an ambitious person, and that's what I admire about you. But a person's ambition must be supported by matching strength; otherwise, it becomes overreach and self-destruction. So, without the requisite strength, hold your ambition in check, move forward diligently one step at a time."

"Master, I understand your intention, I will be careful."

"That's best. All right, take your rest for now."

Zhu Hong acknowledged, rising to leave. Just before he walked out the door, someone suddenly entered, bowing with fists clasped, "Eagle Head, there's an urgent message from Beijing."

"Bring it here!"

"Yes." The man hastily approached Zhu Chuan, handing over a set of documents.

After reading the document's content, a trace of cold killing intent appeared on Zhu Chuan's old face, "Hmph! It's those Zhu Family people again. Go, notify the Ying Hall's Eagle Talon to come see me."

"Master." Zhu Hong asked, "Is there trouble in Beijing?"

Zhu Chuan nodded, "A client has hit a snag, encountering a tough opponent."

"Can I know who this client is?"

Zhu Chuan glanced at Zhu Hong, "According to the rules, Skyhawk Pavilion's client information is confidential, not easily disclosed. However, this is a low-level client, so there aren't as many restrictions. He's called Hong Wei, you've lived in Beijing before, haven't you heard of him."

"Hong Wei?" Zhu Hong nodded slightly, "I know him; he's a well-known figure in Beijing, runs the underground forces there, incredibly wealthy."

"The data shows he's conflicted with someone named Ling Chen, that Ling Chen hired Zhu Family people. The Zhu Family is our sworn enemy, difficult to deal with. This trouble with the Zhu Family is quite a hassle."

Ling Chen!

Upon hearing this name, Zhu Hong's emotions involuntarily fluctuated. Sensing this change, the observant Zhu Chuan seemed to notice, looking up to ask, "Do you know this Ling Chen?"