

The Beauty 1221

Chapter 1221 The Troubles of Those in Power

Just when everyone wanted to fight to the end, Hu Zhichun picked up the pen beside him and signed his name at the bottom of the agreement. Seeing Hu Zhichun press his handprint, everyone's expression changed involuntarily. They wanted to unite and refuse the agreement, but they didn't expect Hu Zhichun to do this. In a daze, Hu Zhichun stood up alone and looked at Nanrong Wanqing expressionlessly and said, "Can I leave now?"

Nanrong Wanqing nodded and gave a glance to the two middle-aged men guarding the door. The two immediately opened the door to let Hu Zhichun and his female secretary out.

As they walked to the door, Hu Zhichun suddenly stopped and turned around to look at everyone in the box, saying, "Folks, don't blame me for not advancing and retreating with you. This is Beijing; you should know what will happen." Having said this, Hu Zhichun left without turning back.

After hearing Hu Zhichun's words, everyone seemed to understand something, and fell silent one by one, all sinking into contemplation. After a while, two more people signed the agreement. Once someone led the way, others successively abandoned resistance. Soon, fourteen agreements were laid out in front of Nanrong Wanqing.

"Very good!" Nanrong Wanqing said with a faint smile, "I hope you all remember this agreement. If anyone dares to violate it, don't blame the Nanrong Family for showing no mercy." After her words fell, Nanrong Wanqing and Nanrong Hao stood up and walked side by side to the box door.

"Today's meal is on me, consider it our partnership meal." With these words, Nanrong Wanqing and her brother vanished beyond the door.

Listening to their gradually distant footsteps, everyone in the box showed different expressions, with no one speaking. The words Hu Zhichun said before leaving awakened many people. This is Beijing, and there is no shortage of people ready to hit a man when he's down. Once incarcerated and cut off from the outside world, let alone a year, within just two or three months, one's assets would be divided among others.

Thus, signing that agreement is the safest way to at least keep one's industry. As for whether there will be profits in the future, it's still unknown.

These days, not only Nanrong Wanqing was busy, but Ling Chen was also extremely busy, exhausted. Beijing is no smaller than East Sea City, and there are too many things to handle. Moreover, the mess left by Hong Wei is very large, even though Hu Fei transferred three to four hundred people from East Sea City, it still wasn't enough.

Besides receiving the industries left by Hong Wei, there's the need to guard against other forces in Beijing. Just as Ling Chen predicted, once Hong Wei collapsed, the forces long suppressed in Beijing by Hong Wei all emerged, wanting to profiter from Hong Wei's pie. Moreover, many emerging forces sprang up like mushrooms wanting to gain some benefits.

This is also what Ling Chen finds most troublesome, not only having to fight with the old forces left by Hong Wei but also having to guard against those new forces' sneak attacks, wishing he could be like ten people himself. Staying in the manor every day, his phone kept ringing without pause. Once this issue barely solved, another arose, never a moment of peace. After persevering for a few days, Ling Chen and Tang Guolun, among others, all showed a weary appearance, wishing they could shut the phone off and sleep soundly.

"Ling Chen, a nightclub in the West District was just attacked, and our people were all driven away."

Tang Guolun's words were barely finished when Jiang Yunkai hurried over, saying, "Chen, two bars in the North City District were wrecked; three of our men were injured and are now receiving treatment in the hospital."

Before Ling Chen could spare attention to handle this, a young man ran in from outside, hurriedly saying, "Chen, the police arrested our people, saying they engaged in public brawling. It's those bastards who provoked us first, wanting to snatch our territory; we were merely defending ourselves."

"Chen! Chen!"

Seeing two more people rushing in from outside, Ling Chen grabbed his hair and shouted, "Hold it, everyone hold, one at a time."

After busying for half an hour, Ling Chen finally managed to deal with these chaotic issues. Leaning against the sofa, he looked up to the sky and sighed longingly, not knowing when these troublesome matters would end.

"What, tired?" Tang Guolun came over with two bottles of coffee drinks and tossed one to Ling Chen, saying with a smile, "If you want to be a qualified leader, these are things you must go through. You used to play the hands-off boss; others did the hard work for you. Now you're experiencing it, right?"

Ling Chen replied with a wry smile, "Boss Tang, if I knew there were so many troubles, I wouldn't have gotten myself into such a mess. Eh! Seriously, can we still deploy some personnel from the fat guy's side?"

"No more can be deployed; all deployable personnel have already come over; East Sea City needs people to manage it too. Fortunately, the foundation in East Sea City is relatively solid, not requiring too many people. Ling Chen, I've wanted to discuss this with you for a while now. Given our current situation, we must expand personnel. I estimated, at least five hundred people need to be integrated to maintain normal operations."

"Five hundred people?" Ling Chen was surprised; he knew they lacked manpower but didn't expect so many were needed.

"Five hundred people can barely solve our current predicament, and we still need to continue expanding personnel." Tang Guolun said, "Think about it, Hong Wei had so many entertainment industries, each site requires people to handle affairs, not saying much, but each site needs at least twenty security personnel to maintain order, and that's the minimum requirement. If it's a large-scale nightclub, at least fifty people need to be arranged. With this calculation, five hundred people are simply not enough. Additionally, we need to establish a specially reserved emergency team. The number doesn't need to be many, but they must be elite to guard against trouble from other forces."

Ling Chen rubbed his nose and said, "Or...should I ask Mr. Ye for help? He operates a martial arts academy in Beijing; surely we can borrow a good number of people."

"That would be best." Pausing, Tang Guolun changed the subject and asked, "Is your Mr. Ye's martial arts academy large in scale?"

"Medium-sized, not very large. Boss Tang, do you have any ideas?"

"Beijing will inevitably come under our control; aren't you planning to open a Dragon Tiger Hall here?"

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen's eyes lit up, slapping his leg and praising, "That's right! How could I have not thought of this?" Tang Guolun's proposal was excellent, using Qingyun Martial Arts Hall as a base to open a branch of Dragon Tiger Hall in Beijing. Currently, the reputation of Dragon Tiger Hall has spread, many in the Martial Arts community are vying to join Dragon Tiger Hall.

If a branch were opened in Beijing, it would surely attract many from the martial arts community. As such, not only could the influence of Dragon Tiger Hall be expanded, but Utilized martial arts individuals to resolve current power struggles could also.

Thinking of this, Ling Chen couldn't sit still anymore and stood up, saying, "Boss Tang, I'm heading over now to discuss with Mr. Ye."

Chapter 1222 Little Hua Arrives

Zhong Wei was very agreeable to Ling Chen's proposal. Moreover, upon learning of this matter, He Ziyun also endorsed Ling Chen's decision.

With the plan set, everything was proceeding at a rapid pace. Although it was tiring, Ling Chen was enjoying it. In a blink, half a month had passed. During this period, Qiao Zhen had already woken up, and his condition had improved. Ling Chen and Tang Yuan specifically went to visit him.

On this day, Ling Chen had just finished selecting a location for the Dragon Tiger Hall's branch when he received a call from Nanrong Hao.

"Hey! Chen, what are you busy with?"

"Don't ask, I've been so busy I'm about to lose my mind," Ling Chen casually replied, "Haven't seen you around lately, what have you been up to?"

"I've been busy too. Chen, my sister and I are flying back to East Sea City this afternoon, we've prepared a private jet. Do you want to come with us?"

"Sorry, I can't yet. I still have a lot of things to handle here. I estimate I'll return next month."

"Alright, when you get back to East Sea City, remember to contact me, we'll have a proper drink together."

"Okay... Wait!" Suddenly, Ling Chen remembered something and asked, "What time is your flight?"

"Two o'clock. Why, is there something up?"

"I need to go to the airport around that time for something, maybe I can see you guys off. Alright, I'll call you when I get to the airport."

After hanging up, Ling Chen remembered He Ziyun's instructions. Little Hua was arriving in Beijing this afternoon, and he was supposed to pick her up at the airport. Recently, He Ziyun had been busy managing Dragon Tiger Hall, with no time to look after Little Hua. Little Hua was bored alone at home, so He Ziyun decided to have Little Hua stay with Mr. Ye for a while, as a chance to unwind.

Honestly, Ling Chen hadn't seen Little Hua in quite a while.

At 1:30 PM, Ling Chen arrived at the airport early by car. After calling Nanrong Hao, Ling Chen headed straight to Hangar No. 3 at the airport. At this time, both Nanrong Hao and Nanrong Wanqing were there. Besides them, Zhong Wei and Liang Zhao Hui were sitting in wheelchairs, being pushed onto the plane.

"Wanqing, Haozi," Ling Chen waved and smiled, greeting the two of them.

Nanrong Wanqing looked at Ling Chen curiously and asked, "What are you doing here?" Even though both were in Beijing for the past half month, they hadn't seen each other, as each was busy with their own affairs. Nanrong Wanqing was working on her new business plan, and as for what Ling Chen was occupied with, she wasn't quite sure.

Before Ling Chen could reply, Nanrong Hao hurriedly interjected, "Sis, Chen heard you were leaving today, so he specially came to see you off."

Hearing this, Ling Chen grinned and winked at Nanrong Hao. The kid sure knew how to talk.

Indeed, after Nanrong Hao said that, a faint smile appeared on Nanrong Wanqing's delicate face.

"You've been busy lately, haven't seen you around, even Xiaozhu and Shiyun don't know what you're up to."

"Busy, my hair is practically turning white," Ling Chen laughed and said, "But it's almost over, I might get a proper rest soon." Speaking of which, Ling Chen shifted the conversation and asked, "Have those guys from Hu Zhichun been dealt with?"

After getting that list, Ling Chen handed it directly to Nanrong Wanqing. After all, it was a commercial matter, better left to Nanrong Wanqing. As for how Nanrong Wanqing handled it, he wasn't very clear.

Nanrong Wanqing nodded, "Thanks to your help this time, Hongyu Group managed to get through it smoothly. You not only helped Hongyu Group but also saved our Nanrong Family, thank you!"

"No need to be polite."

"Exactly, no need for formalities among family," Nanrong Hao chuckled, joining the conversation.

Nanrong Wanqing blushed, rolled her eyes at Nanrong Hao, signaling him to be quiet. At this point, the plane's pilot poked his head out of the cabin and waved, "Chairman, we should take off now."

"Chen, we're heading off then."

"Safe travels, call me if you need anything." With that, Ling Chen looked at Nanrong Wanqing and reminded, "Take good care of yourself when you return, don't overwork. Try leaving more responsibilities to Haozi; it's time for him to develop independence."

"I know, you take care of yourself too."

Watching the plane disappear into the sky, Ling Chen went straight to the airport exit. At around 2:10 PM, a petite figure appeared in the exit path.

Ling Chen waved his arms and shouted, "Little Hua!"

Upon hearing Ling Chen's call, Little Hua dragging a large suitcase ran over.

"Big Brother!"

Ling Chen coughed lightly and awkwardly smiled, "Little Hua, maybe you shouldn't call me 'Big Brother' anymore; it sounds awkward now." Previously, Ling Chen wouldn't have minded. But since learning Little Hua's true identity, he felt that 'Big Brother' was no longer appropriate.

Despite Little Hua's body looking like a child of three or four, her actual age was over twenty, she was indeed an adult. Back then, Ling Chen had been kept in the dark, treating Little Hua as a child. Now thinking back, Ling Chen could only feel chills all over.

Little Hua pouted her lips in dissatisfaction, "Why can't I call you Big Brother, do you want me to call you Uncle?"

Ling Chen gave a wry smile, "Please spare me, my lord."

"Hmph! Not fun, you're not as cute as you used to be."

Cute?

Could this word be used to describe him? 'Tall and mighty' sounded more fitting. Ling Chen sighed helplessly, deciding not to argue with her. He knew that arguing with this girl would only lead to his loss.

Back in the car, Little Hua sat in the passenger seat, about to buckle the seatbelt when Ling Chen said, "Sit in the back, kids can't sit in the front, I don't want trouble with traffic police."

Little Hua looked up at Ling Chen, seriously saying, "Didn't you say I'm an adult? Since I'm an adult, why can't I sit in the front?"

Oh, dear!

Ling Chen slapped his forehead, this girl was too hard to please.

"Alright, alright! Not teasing you anymore." Saying that, Little Hua obediently crawled to the back seat, took out a lollipop from her pocket, and began to eat.

Starting the car, Ling Chen said, "Mr. Ye is in a meeting, I'll take you to his house first. When he gets off work in the evening, we'll have dinner together."

"No way." Little Hua bit into the lollipop and complained, "In East Sea City, Master ignores me; now, Senior Brother ignores me here too. Sending me to Senior Brother's house is like putting me in prison; I don't want to go."

Ling Chen felt a bit of a headache, "Then where do you want to go?"

"I don't know, wherever it's fun."

"I still have things to do later, no time to take you to an amusement park. How about another day?"

"How about this, you do your thing, and I'll tag along. Don't worry, I won't bother you. How's that?"

Chapter 1223 Kill One to Warn a Hundred (1)

Ling Chen sighed helplessly. He knew this little girl had decided to stick to him. Checking the time, it was almost three o'clock. Before heading to the airport, he had made an appointment with Tang Guolun to take care of something very important today.

Thinking of this, Ling Chen looked at Little Hua in the rearview mirror and said, "I can let you come with me, but you must be obedient and not cause any trouble."

Little Hua replied with a grin, "Don't worry, big brother, I won't cause you any trouble."

At that moment, Ling Chen drove the car straight to the agreed location. After about an hour on the road, Ling Chen arrived with Little Hua in a partially developed area in the north of Beijing. Looking around, new office buildings and shops were everywhere. However, among these buildings, there were many old residential houses and buildings.

This area was originally a government redevelopment project, but many residents felt the government's compensation was insufficient and refused to give up their homes, gradually becoming so-called "nail households." The large number of these households greatly limited the area's development.

Following the car's navigation route, Ling Chen soon drove up to a restaurant. This restaurant wasn't very big, with only about a hundred square feet—just a very ordinary place. At that time, dozens of young men with a gangster-like demeanor were gathered outside the restaurant, smoking, gathered in groups, exchanging lewd jokes.

Little Hua leaned against the car window, looking at the scene outside, and asked, "Big brother, what are we doing here?"

"Having tea and chatting." After speaking, Ling Chen opened the car door and headed over with Little Hua. Before the two got close to the restaurant entrance, a young man with tattoos on his hand walked up and blocked their path, impatiently saying, "We're closed today. If you want a meal, go somewhere else. Get lost!"

"I'm here to find someone," Ling Chen replied flatly.

"Find someone?" The tattooed young man sized up Ling Chen, sneering and saying, "Do you know anyone here?" Then, glancing at Little Hua beside Ling Chen, he smiled maliciously, "Your girl looks pretty good, but she's a bit young. My buddies aren't too interested in little girls anyway, or else..."

"Or else what do you intend to do?" A voice interrupted, drawing everyone's attention to the restaurant entrance. At that moment, Jiang Yunkai quickly approached, pointing at the tattooed young man's nose, "This is Chen, watch your mouth."

"Chen?" The tattooed young man flicked his cigarette ash, blowing out smoke, and with a smirk that didn't reach his eyes, he said, "What Chen, what dog, I've never heard of them. Nowadays, it seems anyone can call themselves 'brother.' Ridiculous. People need to take a good hard look at themselves first to see if they have the right to claim that title."

Jiang Yunkai's eyes narrowed, his tone growing colder, "You'd better apologize immediately."

The tattooed young man scoffed, "So what if I don't? What are you going to do about it? Are you planning on hitting me?" With that, he whistled. The surrounding young thugs quickly gathered around, encircling Ling Chen and Jiang Yunkai, fixing them with hostile glares.

Jiang Yunkai took a step forward, coldly stating, "I'll count to three. You better all get out of my way. One!"

"Two!" The tattooed young man interjected, "Let me save you some time and just shout 'three' right away."

Hearing this, Jiang Yunkai glanced back at Ling Chen, and upon seeing him nod slightly, he stopped talking and swiftly dashed forward, grabbing the tattooed young man's throat and lifting him high off the ground.

Seeing Jiang Yunkai make a move, the group of young men immediately started shouting, swinging their fists and feet, all aiming at Jiang Yunkai. Standing by, Ling Chen watched leisurely, showing no intention of helping. No kidding, these punks were no match for Jiang Yunkai.

With Jiang Yunkai's current strength, he could easily make it to the top ten on the Tiger List. Ordinary experts wouldn't necessarily be his match, let alone a bunch of rabble.

Sure enough, in no time, more than ten young men were already lying on the ground, either with fractures or dislocations, cries of pain echoing everywhere.

Witnessing Jiang Yunkai's prowess, those thugs finally realized they had hit a brick wall and backed away, having no courage to continue fighting. Throughout, Jiang Yunkai only used one hand; the other hand remained gripping the tattooed young man's throat, holding him aloft.

"Wasn't it you who wanted to make a move just now?" Jiang Yunkai asked coldly, looking at the tattooed young man. "Besides relying on numbers, what else can you do?"

The latter struggled desperately, trying to break free from Jiang Yunkai's grip, but all his efforts were in vain. Jiang Yunkai's right hand was like a steel clench, impossible to pry open.

"Let... let me go!" The tattooed young man choked out a few words.

Ling Chen walked forward with a smile, signaling Jiang Yunkai to loosen his grip slightly. "Speak up, who told you to act like this?"

Upon hearing Ling Chen's question, the tattooed young man swallowed hard, stammering, "I... I don't know what you're talking about."

"Do you really think I'm dumb? I've already said I'm here to find someone. Anyone with any brains would know what business I'm here on. Yet you keep making things difficult for me, trying to create trouble. If no one is instigating you from behind, would you dare act like this?"

The young man's face changed slightly. He opened his mouth but couldn't say a word for a long time.

"Kai, since he doesn't want to talk, there's no point in him keeping his mouth. Might as well render it useless." Ling Chen said coolly.

Jiang Yunkai nodded, pulling out a dagger from his pocket, ready to shove it into the young man's mouth. Seeing Jiang Yunkai's action, the tattooed young man instantly panicked, crying out desperately.

"I'll... I'll talk, I'll talk..."

Ling Chen gave a look, and Jiang Yunkai understood immediately, taking the tattooed young man away. Moments later, Jiang Yunkai returned, entering the restaurant with Ling Chen and Little Hua. After the earlier lesson, no one dared stop them this time.

Inside the restaurant, there were quite a few people, all in their twenties, looking like henchmen sitting indifferently, smoking and making the restaurant filled with smoke and the air very polluted.

At the central round table sat a dozen or so slightly older men. Ling Chen took a glance and finally fixed his gaze on Tang Guolun.

Locking eyes, Ling Chen walked straight to Tang Guolun's side and sat down. Ling Chen's arrival drew a lot of attention, and everyone observed the young man in his twenties.

"Mr. Ling has such a grand demeanor, making all of us wait for you alone."

Chapter 1224 - 1231: Kill One to Warn a Hundred (2)

A voice neither cold nor warm came through, Ling Chen fixed his gaze, only to see the speaker was a man in his thirties, looking fierce and menacing, wearing a white vest that revealed strong chest muscles and solid build.

"His name is Cao Bin," Tang Guolun whispered in Ling Chen's ear, "He recently rose to prominence, has quite a few men under him, and has taken over many entertainment venues in the South District. Half of those venues were ours, but he's seized them."

Ling Chen nodded, saying nothing. At this moment, an elderly man walked in, surrounded by several men in suits. Seeing the old man appear, everyone stood up and stepped forward to greet him. Ling Chen sized up the elderly man, who was over seventy, with white hair, energetic, and a seemingly kindly face, smiling benignly at everyone.

"Boss Tang, who is he?"

"He's the elder who facilitated this meeting, Wang Gui. I hear Wang Gui is an old hand on the streets, somewhat respected, and anyone involved in street dealings must give him some face. He's gathered everyone here probably to mediate and resolve disputes among various forces."

So he's the middleman! Ling Chen realized. He only knew Tang Guolun called him over to meet the bosses of various forces to discuss the territory allocation issue properly.

"Everyone, the reason for gathering you here today, I'm sure you all know," Wang Gui began, "Lately, everyone has been fighting for the biggest profit. It's normal in street dealings, since we all have many people under us to support. However, things are different now; if things get too messy, the police will surely trouble us all. So, I hope everyone can sit down and talk things over, aim to resolve this issue over a meal."

"Elder Wang, you're a senior figure, since you've spoken, I must give you face. But how do you plan to resolve this allocation issue?"

Wang Gui chuckled, "If everyone takes a step back, this problem isn't hard to solve. Beijing is a big pie, no one can swallow it whole, not even Hong Wei back in the day. So no one needs to worry about going hungry. To be clear, what everyone truly cares about is who gets more and who gets less."

After a pause, Wang Gui continued, "Beijing is divided into five districts, plus a suburban area. We have eleven people here, each district can have two forces, just perfect for even distribution. What do you all think?"

Burly Cao Bin nodded, "This proposal is good, the Central District has the smallest territory, why not let me have it?"

"Boss Cao, your appetite is too big, isn't it, everyone knows the Central District's profits are the greatest," someone sneered.

"I want the land in the North District, that's where I started out; I trust no one will fight me for it?"

Listening to the crowd's territorial arguments, Ling Chen and Tang Guolun kept silent, not saying a word.

"Everyone, please quiet down," Wang Gui gestured to signal for the crowd to listen to him temporarily, "I know territorial allocation will lead to many disputes, so I've prepared in advance." Saying so, Wang

Gui gestured to the suited men behind him. They immediately handed over a briefcase and took out documents from inside it.

As the documents were distributed among the crowd, Wang Gui smiled slightly and said, "I've already distributed the territories based on the size of your forces. I can't guarantee everyone will be satisfied, but I can at least guarantee everyone's interests will not be affected. What does everyone think?"

At this moment, Little Hua peeked from behind Ling Chen, looked at the contents of the document curiously, and asked, "Big brother, why isn't there any land for you?"

Ling Chen raised the corner of his mouth with a smile and said, "There is, you just didn't see it." After speaking, Ling Chen lightly tapped the bottom right corner of the document with his finger.

Beijing's suburban area... this was the territory Wang Gui allocated to Ling Chen.

"Elder Wang, I think it's acceptable," Cao Bin spoke first.

"I also think it's very reasonable."

Everyone expressed their opinions one after another, except Ling Chen and Tang Guolun. Soon, everyone's gaze was fixed on Ling Chen.

Wang Gui smiled kindly, "Mr. Ling, are you satisfied with this allocation?"

Ling Chen casually tossed the document on the table, crossed his legs, and looked at everyone with a playful smile, "This act was played quite well. You all want to push me out and take my territory, I can understand, but... using such clumsy means is quite laughable. I'll say this clearly today, listen carefully, I'll only say it once. If it's my territory, don't think any of you can touch it. Also, I own a lot of entertainment businesses, many of which have been occupied by you. I give you three days. If you don't return what's mine, I'll have to take some less rational measures."

Upon hearing this, everyone's complexion involuntarily darkened.

"Ling Chen, giving you some face, you really think you're somebody," Cao Bin said coldly, "Don't forget, we outnumber you, if it comes to a fight, who knows who'll win."

Ling Chen smiled calmly, "I don't even regard Hong Wei, do you think I'd care about you all? When Hong Wei was around, you all acted like cowards, didn't dare provoke him. Now that Hong Wei is gone, do you think your time has come? I'll tell you, listen and obey, perhaps I'll give you a bowl of rice to eat. If anyone wants to play tricks, I have a hundred ways to make them die, Hong Wei was the best example. Three days! Remember, you have only three days."

Finished speaking, Ling Chen stood up, heading towards the restaurant door with Tang Guolun and others.

"Stop him!" Cao Bin shouted loudly, "Ling Chen, since you don't want us to have it easy, then don't think about leaving here alive... uh... uh..."

Cao Bin's words hadn't finished when his throat suddenly turned into a gurgling sound. Everyone turned to look, their faces instantly horrified, seeing a dagger plunged into Cao Bin's throat, scalding blood gushing profusely and splattering on the table.

Seeing Cao Bin lying on the floor, everyone was stunned. From beginning to end, none of them saw who had made the move.

"Does anyone else want to stop me?"

Ling Chen's calm voice brought the stunned crowd back to reality. At this moment, everyone looked at Ling Chen with deep fear in their eyes.

"Ling... Ling Chen, you... you dare to kill," Wang Gui raised his trembling arm, pointing at Ling Chen.

"Elder Wang, which eye did you see me kill him? A word of advice, don't speak carelessly, or you won't know how you died. Also, you're already at an old age, go home and enjoy your retirement, stop meddling."

Chapter 1225 - 1233: Hongyu United Investment Company

Leaving the restaurant, Jiang Yunkai glanced at Little Hua trailing behind Ling Chen, and whispered, "Chen, there was no need to kill Cao Bin just now, it's not good for the child to see too much bloodshed."

Ling Chen chuckled and said, "No need to worry about that little girl, she's seen more bloodshed than you have."

"You did well just now," Tang Guolun chimed in, "That's the only way to show them our ruthlessness. Kill one as a warning to others; I believe no one will dare risk their lives against us. By the way, the matter we discussed last time, have you thought it over?"

"No problem." Ling Chen nodded and said, "Let Kai handle this matter; he knows best."

After discussing the lack of manpower with Tang Guolun last time, Ling Chen thought of a solution – establishing a large security company. This way, not only can we legitimately expand personnel, but also recruit some retired soldiers. Retired soldiers are not only personally strong and physically fit, but also maintain high discipline, able to start working without training, saving a lot of time invisibly.

Three days.

Since Ling Chen disposed of Cao Bin in front of everyone that day, those with malicious intent immediately became obedient. Over three days, all the occupied venues were smoothly taken over by Ling Chen. For easier management and to reduce personnel usage, Ling Chen and Tang Guolun sold off some bars and bathhouses that were remote and difficult to manage.

After clearing a quarter of the entertainment industry, Ling Chen invested all the earned money with Jiang Yunkai, tasking him with the security company's establishment.

After being so busy, everything is proceeding smoothly. However, the only thing that irks Ling Chen is Zhu Hong; that guy disappeared again.

After repelling assassins from Skyhawk Pavilion at Hong Wei's place last time, Zhu Hong vanished without a trace. Not only that, but the clues about Skyhawk Pavilion were also severed. Hong Wei once

told Ling Chen that unless people from Skyhawk Pavilion come looking for us, it's very difficult to track their movements.

Half a month has passed in the blink of an eye.

Ling Chen originally planned to return to East Sea City earlier, but the Beijing situation hasn't completely stabilized yet, leaving him uneasy. He could only remain in the manor to assist Tang Guolun and Jiang Yunkai with some affairs. During this time, both Tang Shiyun and Zhu Xiaozhu have returned to East Sea City, leaving only Little Hua accompanying Ling Chen, unwilling to leave.

In this half-month, two major events occurred in Beijing. One was the listing of Hongyu United Investment Company, the other being the establishment of Falcon Private Security Company.

The former is a new company established by Nanrong Wanqing. When this company held its ribbon-cutting ceremony, many major enterprises attended, with over a dozen media covering the event, momentarily becoming a spectacular affair in the business circle.

Ling Chen didn't attend the event in person; he only watched the news coverage on TV. Seeing Nanrong Wanqing leading the new company's other shareholders onto the stage, Ling Chen was somewhat surprised. This United Investment Company had up to fifteen shareholders, with the Nanrong Family holding fifty-one percent majority stake.

Apart from Nanrong Wanqing as the major shareholder, the other fourteen shareholders were no strangers to Ling Chen – they were the ones who had previously united against Hongyu Group.

Initially, when Ling Chen handed that list to Nanrong Wanqing, he thought she would retaliate legally against her opponents. Now it appears, Nanrong Wanqing did not do so; instead, she consolidated everyone's resources to form a new company.

It proves Nanrong Wanqing is a smart and ambitious woman.

There are no permanent enemies, nor lasting friends; as long as interests align, enemies can become friends.

In contrast to the former, Jiang Yunkai's establishment of Falcon Private Security Company was much more low-key. However, despite its low profile, Falcon Company's development has been smooth. Within just a week of establishment, Falcon Company recruited nearly a hundred security personnel, mostly retired soldiers.

Falcon Company offered very attractive conditions for retired soldiers, with high salaries and good benefits, surpassing the treatment offered by other security companies. Anyway, Ling Chen does not expect this security company to make profits; as long as its revenue can maintain normal operations, it's sufficient.

"Boss Tang, things in Beijing are almost sorted out. If there's nothing else, I'll head back to East Sea City."

"Okay, I'll contact you if anything comes up."

For better management, someone needs to hold down the fort in Beijing, and Tang Guolun is undoubtedly the most suitable person for the job, along with Jiang Yunkai's assistance, there should be no major problems.

However, just as Ling Chen was about to book a flight back to East Sea City, he unexpectedly received a call.

Su Mei, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master!

"Are you free tonight? I'd like to invite you out for a meeting," Su Mei extended the invitation over the phone.

Ling Chen was somewhat hesitant. To be frank, considering his current relationship with Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, it's best to keep a distance. Nonetheless, aside from other matters, Su Mei is considered his friend. After some thought, Ling Chen ultimately decided to meet Su Mei.

Some issues need to be addressed sooner or later, it's also good to clarify things with Su Mei.

Nightfall.

After much persuasion, Ling Chen managed to leave Little Hua at home, driving alone to the agreed location.

It was a high-end domed restaurant, located at the top floor of a tower. Dining at this restaurant allowed one to overlook Beijing's nightscape. Upon entering the restaurant, Ling Chen glanced around and discovered the luxurious restaurant was devoid of any guests.

At this moment, a genteel-looking waitress approached and politely asked, "Are you Mr. Ling?"

"Yes, I am." Ling Chen nodded.

"Mr. Ling, hello, please follow me."

Before long, under the waitress's guidance, Ling Chen arrived at a window seat.

"Mr. Ling, please have a seat. Miss Su will be here shortly."

Watching the back of the departing waitress, Ling Chen chuckled quietly to himself. True to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's style, not only did they book the entire restaurant, but even changed the staff to their own people. Although the waitress hid it well, Ling Chen still sensed something unusual from her nimble steps.

At a glance, the staff and bartenders were all disguised experts from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

Sigh!

Ling Chen sighed helplessly. For Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to be so guarded against him could only mean one thing – he had already been placed on Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's blacklist.

After more than ten minutes, and a glass of red wine, Ling Chen finally heard some movement at the restaurant entrance.

Turning his head to look, he saw Su Mei in a beige dress, her long hair down, gracefully walking over. Su Mei is the kind of delicate woman; if Zhu Xiaozhu is sweet and clear spring water, Nanrong Wanqing is a snow lotus atop an iceberg, then Su Mei is a low-key, fragrant water lily.

Noble, serene, with a unique charm.

Chapter 1226 - 1234: Su Mei's Invitation

Watching Su Mei approach, Ling Chen stood up and went forward to help pull out the chair in a gentlemanly manner.

"Thank you!" Su Mei responded with a smile, saying apologetically, "I got caught in a bit of traffic on the way, sorry for keeping you waiting."

Ling Chen smiled faintly, "This is Beijing, traffic jams are quite normal, there's no need to apologize to me." Saying this, Ling Chen curiously asked, "When did you arrive in Beijing?"

"I arrived last night, some things needed handling."

Ling Chen nodded, without asking further. He knew that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had a headquarters in Beijing, and during the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, he had been there as an invited guest.

"How did you know I was in Beijing?" As soon as the words left his mouth, Ling Chen realized his question was redundant. With the capabilities of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, finding out where he was would be a simple matter. Moreover, he was already under close surveillance by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, there must be someone from their side monitoring him in secret.

Sure enough, Su Mei lowered her head, looking at the napkin on the table, and kept silent in response to Ling Chen's question.

Feeling the atmosphere grow a bit cold, Ling Chen cleared his throat and initiated the conversation, "How is your grandfather's health? Elder Du, haven't heard about him for a while."

"Grandpa is well, Elder Du has been busy handling matters at Yangxin Pavilion, I guess he won't be leaving Yangxin Pavilion for quite some time."

"Really?" Ling Chen found it odd. Yangxin Pavilion was filled with retired folks, what could be keeping them busy? There might be something more to it.

Seeing Ling Chen lost in thought, Su Mei sighed inwardly. In the past, she could talk about anything with Ling Chen, but now she had to be cautious of him. From the bottom of her heart, she didn't wish for it to be this way. To her, she always viewed Ling Chen as a friend.

Back then, if it hadn't been for Ling Chen's tremendous support, helping the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion through several crises, the pavilion might be in a dire situation now.

However, recalling her parents' tragic deaths, Su Mei couldn't help biting her lip, her heart in turmoil.

"Miss Su, meeting me tonight, is there anything in particular you wanted to discuss?" Ling Chen shifted the topic to the main point. He too sensed that he and Su Mei couldn't converse as openly as they used to; neither knew what to talk about, even small talk seemed awkward.

"Congratulations to you first." Su Mei smiled, "I heard Dragon Tiger Hall is developing well."

"It's just okay, nowhere near your Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

"Given the growth trajectory of Dragon Tiger Hall, it won't be long before it reaches the level of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, maybe even surpass it."

Ling Chen smiled, "If such a day comes, it would be thanks to you."

"Ling Chen..." Su Mei hesitated, wanting to speak but stopping midway. After a while, she finally made up her mind and asked, "I want to confirm something with you, is it really... really... the case with my parents' death?" Su Mei lightly bit her thin lip, "You know what I'm asking, could you tell me?"

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen finally understood the main reason Su Mei came to see him. Although Su He and others suspected that Su Zhengyang and his wife were murdered by Ling Kun, there was no concrete evidence. However, compared to Su He and them, Su Mei found it harder to accept this possibility, so she wanted to inquire clearly.

"Miss Su, I understand your concern." Ling Chen gathered his thoughts and slowly said, "However, I'm not entirely sure about this matter either. I haven't been in touch with my father for ages, I have no idea where he is or what he's doing." Pausing, Ling Chen continued, "Miss Su, I know this situation is a heavy blow to you, it troubles me as well. If it weren't for this matter, I could always be friends with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, but now..."

Ling Chen smiled bitterly, "I suppose you can see it too, your Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion folks don't welcome me, treating me like a criminal, especially your grandfather, who accepted Wang Hao as a direct disciple. How do you think I feel?"

"I know." Su Mei nodded, "Grandpa accepting Wang Hao as a disciple was a lapse in judgment. Alas, it's his personal decision; I can't intervene. Ling Chen, I hope you understand, I always consider you a friend."

"Thank you! However, I think it's better for us to keep a distance now, to avoid angering your grandfather." After saying this, without waiting for Su Mei to speak, Ling Chen stood up from his seat, "Sorry, I have some engagements tonight, I must go."

Ignoring Su Mei's attempts to stop him, Ling Chen strode towards the restaurant exit.

Regarding the matter of Su Zhengyang and his wife, he was indeed aware that it was Ling Kun's doing. Yet, he could not reveal this to Su Mei. Firstly, he didn't want to hurt Su Mei, and secondly... it was for his own safety. If Su Mei became aware, leaving the restaurant might be a problem for him.

Taking the elevator down to the parking lot, Ling Chen prepared to drive away. As it was evening, most employees of the building had already gone home, leaving the parking lot sparsely populated. Hearing

his footsteps echo in the parking lot, Ling Chen suddenly paused, looking at his car parked nearby, his brows furrowed. Abruptly, Ling Chen accelerated, rushing towards his car.

However, just as Ling Chen was about to start the car, a jolt of intense danger surged from within. With no time to think, Ling Chen leapt to his left.

In an instant, a sharp gust of wind brushed past Ling Chen's shoulder. With a loud 'clang', it pierced through the car window. As he focused his sight, he saw a sharp Longquan Sword embedded in the driver's seat.

Laying on the ground, Ling Chen quickly got up, looking at his shoulder. Although the Longquan Sword hadn't pierced his body, the Sword Qi emitted by it had left a thin scratch on his shoulder, from which blood trickled out.

Damn! Ling Chen turned around, scanning the rear side of the parking lot, his gaze wary. But in the empty parking lot, besides him, there was no one else.

Observing the situation, Ling Chen approached his car step by step. Whoever had ambushed him held substantial prowess. If faced directly, he wasn't very confident. Hence, the safest way was to leave quickly.

Opening the car door, gazing at the sword embedded in the seat, Ling Chen took hold of the hilt and pulled it out forcefully.

Just as Ling Chen was about to discard the Longquan Sword onto the ground, his eyes were suddenly drawn to the ancient writing carved on the sword hilt.

This... this is... It's over!

Chapter 1227 - 1235: Heavenly List Assassin (1)

Ling Chen thought to himself, "This is bad," not expecting the one to make a move would be him.

On the hilt of the Longquan Sword, there was engraved a 'Qin' character. Seeing this surname, Ling Chen immediately thought of the person's identity. With such strength, and coincidentally knowing his location, there was no one else but Qin Chuan.

Qin Chuan, a top expert from the Heavenly List specifically responsible for secretly protecting Su Mei. Ling Chen had met him once; the last time they met, they were still comrades.

Since it was Qin Chuan, Ling Chen immediately abandoned the idea of fleeing. In such a place, trying to escape the pursuit of a Heavenly List expert was basically impossible.

Holding the Longquan Sword, Ling Chen circled around the car, vigilantly looking around, searching for Qin Chuan's whereabouts. At this moment, Ling Chen felt some regret; if he had known things would turn out this way, he should have brought Ji Gang to the meeting. Unfortunately, it's too late for regrets now.

As time passed by the second, Qin Chuan, hidden in the dark, still hadn't appeared. Seeing this, Ling Chen became somewhat unsettled and voluntarily spoke out, "Elder Qin, since you're here, show yourself. I know you're nearby. Could it be that a dignified expert of the Heavenly List fears a small fry like me?"

As his voice fell, an old man slowly walked out from the corner not far away. The old man stuck close to the corner's edge, hidden in the shadows, his appearance indiscernible.

"Elder Qin, why?" Ling Chen asked, "I believe Miss Su wouldn't have you come to kill me."

"You're too much of a hindrance." A deep voice came from the shadows, "If you die, it benefits many."

Hearing this, Ling Chen's heart sank, and he said solemnly, "So... it seems I'm doomed to die tonight?"

"I'm just following orders." After saying this, Qin Chuan's figure vanished once again into the shadows. In the next instant, Ling Chen sensed an inexplicable sense of crisis surging in from all directions.

Whoosh!

The sound of wind brushed past, and Ling Chen swiftly turned around, looking behind him while gripping the Longquan Sword. However, aside from a fleeting afterimage, Ling Chen saw nothing.

Suddenly, an intense aura closed in rapidly. Before Ling Chen could react, he only felt his arms go heavy, and the Longquan Sword in his hand disappeared instantly.

It was taken? Ling Chen was greatly shocked.

This... this is terrifying! Ling Chen was astonished internally; he knew that Heavenly List experts were formidable, but Qin Chuan's abilities instilled a bit of fear in him.

Speed! Speed to the utmost limit!

Besides being adept at speed, Qin Chuan seemed to possess another ability—concealment—just like the assassins of the Zhu Family and the Skyhawk Pavilion. However, Qin Chuan's skill in this area was even more formidable. Whether it's the Zhu Family or the Skyhawk Pavilion, their trained assassins and killers need to rely on dark environments.

Yet, whether or not he was in darkness, Qin Chuan's abilities remained unaffected. Suddenly, a bold speculation emerged in Ling Chen's mind. Connecting the relationship between the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and the Skyhawk Pavilion, Qin Chuan likely originated from the Skyhawk Pavilion.

A Heavenly List-level assassin—just the thought of it was chilling.

Escape! Ling Chen gritted his teeth; this was his only hope. Glancing at the car nearby, Ling Chen decided against it. The space inside the car was too cramped, and once inside, Qin Chuan would surely launch an offensive. That way, he wouldn't even have time to start the car before being directly taken down.

Immediately, Ling Chen made a swift movement, deploying the Nine Yang Qiankun Step, swiftly heading toward the parking lot's entrance. As the Nine Yang Qiankun Step was executed, Ling Chen's body seemed like an afterimage, constantly flickering.

At this moment, Ling Chen exerted all his strength, using even the energy he was born with. In the blink of an eye, he was less than twenty meters away from the entrance of the parking lot.

But just then, a sharp Sword Qi rapidly closed in from behind.

Not good!

Ling Chen's pupils contracted slightly, his heart sinking to the bottom. It was over... Suddenly, two beams of headlights shone over. Looking closely, Ling Chen saw a sedan driving in through the entrance. Without thinking, he leaped forcefully, vaulting over the top of the car.

Sensing the Sword Qi behind him dissipate, Ling Chen secretly breathed a sigh of relief. Thankfully, fate wasn't against him. If not for the sudden appearance of that sedan, he guessed that Longquan Sword would have already pierced through him.

Taking advantage of this moment, Ling Chen, without hesitation, dashed forward, instantly leaving the parking lot. By now, it was already past eight in the evening, and the wide streets were bustling with constant traffic and numerous pedestrians. Ling Chen didn't have time to catch his breath and quickly melded into the crowd, trying to shake off Qin Chuan's pursuit.

Having moved over a hundred meters, Ling Chen looked around, seeing no trace of Qin Chuan, he let out a sigh of relief. Surely, under such public eyes, Qin Chuan wouldn't dare act rashly.

Seeing a bus stopped under the bus stop sign ahead, Ling Chen hurried over, boarded the bus after tossing in a coin. As long as he left this area and returned to the estate located in the Beijing Suburb, Qin Chuan wouldn't be a threat anymore. As the bus slowly started, Ling Chen confirmed again, finding no trace of Qin Chuan.

Phew!

Exhaling slowly, Ling Chen let his whole body relax, slumping onto the seat. His nerves had been so tense earlier; now, having relaxed, a deep sense of fatigue immediately washed over him.

After seven bus stops, Ling Chen switched to a taxi heading towards the estate in the Beijing Suburb.

At nine-thirty, the taxi left the city area, driving on a broad road. At this speed, in about ten more minutes, Ling Chen would be able to safely return to the estate.

However, just then, the streetlights on both sides of the road suddenly went out, plunging the road and surroundings into darkness.

The taxi driver mumbled a quiet complaint and quickly turned on the car's headlights, illuminating the road. Ling Chen sat up straight, vigilant, with his gaze carefully observing the sides of the road and the rear of the car.

Bang!

Suddenly, the taxi Ling Chen was in emitted a loud noise, with the car body tipping sharply to the left. With years of experience, Ling Chen immediately realized the car tire had blown!

First, the streetlights on both sides went out, then the tire blew. This was absolutely no coincidence. Could it be... Qin Chuan had caught up? Ling Chen frowned. Even at this distance, Qin Chuan was too persistent.

As he was contemplating, the taxi driver got out to check the blown tire, and said helplessly to Ling Chen, "Bro, I'm really sorry, the tire blew, and changing it might take dozens of minutes. The place you're heading to isn't very far from here, and taking the shortcut over there would take at most twenty minutes, how about..."

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Alright, I'll walk there myself."

After walking for a few minutes, the taxi had already disappeared from view. At this moment, Ling Chen was walking along the road towards the estate. Apart from a crescent moon emitting a faint light, it was dark all around, with the visibility being under five meters.

Chapter 1228 - 1236: Heavenly List Assassin (2)

Following the taxi driver's suggestion, Ling Chen chose the closer path. Though called a path, it was actually a dirt road less than half a meter wide. Fortunately, it hadn't rained for days, and the ground was dry. After walking for a short distance, he noticed a lot of trees appearing on both sides of the road, lush and dense.

As he walked, Ling Chen took out his phone and dialed Tang Guolun's number. Given the current situation, calling for support seemed the safest option. The call connected quickly, and Ling Chen shared his approximate location with Tang Guolun, asking him to send someone over as soon as possible. Of course, it was most important to bring Ji Gang.

Just as the call ended, Ling Chen noticed a shadow flash through the trees not far away, disappearing in an instant.

With the shadow's appearance, Ling Chen immediately stopped in his tracks. It was obvious that the shadow had to be Qin Chuan. Looking at the surrounding darkness, Ling Chen felt a headache coming on, having no idea where Qin Chuan might be hiding. Damn! Such a despicable move. A top-tier Heavenly List expert refusing to confront directly, instead choosing to play dirty. Truly shameless.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew in. Ling Chen turned his gaze to the approaching direction of the wind, only to see nothing there. At the same time, a hand suddenly landed on his shoulder from behind. Before Ling Chen could react, a powerful force struck his back with a resounding impact.

Thud!

A mouthful of fresh blood was spat out, and Ling Chen's body flew several meters away, landing heavily on the ground.

After lying on the ground for over ten seconds, Ling Chen's body gradually regained feeling. However, the intense pain caused his arms to tremble slightly. He tried several times but failed to get up. Upon hearing footsteps approaching from behind, Ling Chen turned over and saw Qin Chuan slowly approaching in the darkness.

"Why?" Ling Chen asked in a deep voice, "Did Su He order you?"

"This isn't the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's order," Qin Chuan replied coldly.

Puzzled, Ling Chen asked, "Then... why do you want to kill me?" He had thought Qin Chuan was following Su He's orders, but it seemed that wasn't the case.

"Since its establishment, the Skyhawk Pavilion has never suffered a defeat, except when they encountered you, causing significant losses to the pavilion."

Hearing this, Ling Chen's expression changed, realizing his guess was correct. Qin Chuan was indeed with the Skyhawk Pavilion.

"So, you're trying to save face for the Skyhawk Pavilion?"

"You could say that," Qin Chuan said coldly. "Your death would not only compensate for the Skyhawk Pavilion's failure, but also benefit the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. I know Su He wants to deal with you, but he's been hesitant, unable to make up his mind. With your death, I believe your father wouldn't stand by idly."

Struggling to stand, Ling Chen panted, "Looks like I'm doomed to die today. But before I go, I have one last request."

"Speak."

"I hope..." Ling Chen parted his lips, and as he started speaking, his gaze suddenly fixed on a point behind Qin Chuan. At the same time, his lips curled up into a slightly relaxed smile.

Noticing the change in Ling Chen's expression, Qin Chuan asked coldly, "Why are you smiling?"

"I think I might not die tonight. Don't you agree, Mr. Ji?"

As his voice fell, Qin Chuan's heart sank. He quickly turned to look behind him. But there was nothing there except dense trees.

Tricked?

Qin Chuan hesitated briefly, then immediately shifted his gaze back to where Ling Chen had been. As expected, Ling Chen had already vanished without a trace.

Trying to escape... Qin Chuan chuckled lightly, holding the Longquan Sword, his body turned into a mere shadow and disappeared into the darkness.

At that moment, Ling Chen exerted the Nine Yang Qiankun Step to its fullest, racing over the flatland like a storm. After running an unknown distance, he suddenly heard the sound of flowing water nearby. Following the sound, Ling Chen quickened his pace, sprinting several dozen meters ahead until he saw a river more than thirty meters wide.

Opportunity!

Ling Chen's eyes lit up; it seemed fortune was favoring him. Without hesitation, he leapt into the river. Fortunately, the water wasn't too turbulent, and the surface was calm. The deeper he got, the deeper the river became, reaching about three meters. Ling Chen submerged himself at the river's bottom, staying as still as possible, only rising to the surface for fresh air when he'd run out.

Ling Chen hid underwater for more than half an hour. During this time, Qin Chuan never appeared.

Meanwhile, hundreds of meters away from the shore, beams of light scoured the surroundings. Guided by Tang Guolun and Jiang Yunkai, dozens of men with flashlights searched for Ling Chen.

"Kai, tell them to shout louder. Maybe Ling Chen can hear us," Tang Guolun instructed.

"Alright."

However, at that moment, Ling Chen was hiding underwater and couldn't hear the shouts from Tang Guolun and the others. As time passed, Ling Chen exchanged air and slowly moved underwater. When he surfaced again, he found himself dozens of meters away from the grove he originally escaped from.

I should have shaken off Qin Chuan by now! Ling Chen thought to himself. Carefully observing, he ensured no one was nearby before starting to move toward the shore. But just then, sensing something, Ling Chen abruptly turned around. In an instant, a cold gleam flashed before his eyes. Following that, an intense pain shot through his chest.

Staring at the Longquan Sword piercing through his chest, Ling Chen's pupils shrunk, filled with disbelief.

"Did you really think you could escape my grasp?"

The voice reached him, and he saw Qin Chuan's figure appear on the riverbank. With a light step, he seemed to walk effortlessly on the rippling water, approaching Ling Chen.

When he reached Ling Chen, Qin Chuan bent down, grabbed the Longquan Sword's hilt, and pulled it out forcefully, sending a spurt of fresh blood into the river.

Ling Chen clutched his wound, panting heavily. Yet, he could feel his life force rapidly draining away.

"Ling Chen!"

"Chen!"

"..."

Vaguely, Ling Chen seemed to hear someone calling his name. Moreover, in his gradually blurring vision, it seemed as if lights were shining from afar.

As the calls grew clearer, Ling Chen tried to respond but found his throat blocked, unable to produce any sound.

Under Qin Chuan's cold gaze, Ling Chen's eyes slowly closed, his entire body losing balance and collapsing into the water. Watching Ling Chen's body fully submerge, Qin Chuan lingered for several

minutes. Only when the lights and voices grew nearer did he walk away on the water's surface, vanishing into the thick darkness of the night.

Chapter 1229 - 1237: No News

Beijing, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion branch.

Under the bright lights, Su Mei held a book in her hands, leaning against the sofa, reading intently. However, for some reason, she felt uneasy today, unable to calm down for a long time. Hours have passed, and she hadn't turned a page of the book, keeping it in its original state.

Perhaps... it's because she met Ling Chen. Looking at the words on the page, her mind uncontrollably drifted to Ling Chen.

Enough! Su Mei sighed softly, putting down the book in her hand. At this moment, the bedroom door opened, and a graceful woman entered with a tray, placing a glass of water and a fruit platter beside Su Mei. Su Mei picked up the teacup and asked, "Where is Old Qin?"

Since returning from the restaurant until now, she hadn't seen Qin Chuan come to meet her. Whenever she went out, Qin Chuan would secretly follow to ensure her safety. After returning home, the people of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion were responsible for her safety, Qin Chuan would greet her and then rest. But now, after all this time, Qin Chuan still hadn't appeared.

"Pavilion Master, I haven't seen Old Qin; he seems not to have returned yet."

Su Mei asked suspiciously, "Then where did he go?"

"I'm not sure; he has always been like a dragon—seen at one moment, gone at the next; no one knows his whereabouts."

Just as she finished speaking, a low voice came from outside the door: "Pavilion Master, are you looking for me?" Su Mei looked up to see Qin Chuan standing by the door frame, head bowed.

"Old Qin, where did you go just now?"

"I had some personal business to handle; I apologize for neglecting my duties today. I ask for the Pavilion Master's forgiveness."

Su Mei felt a bit strange; Qin Chuan had been in charge of her safety ever since she was old enough to understand, never leaving her side, and today was the exception. She really wanted to know what personal business Qin Chuan handled. However, since it was personal business, it was not appropriate for her to inquire further. Moreover, although she was the Pavilion Master, Qin Chuan was a Heavenly List expert and an elder of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, so she couldn't offend him too much.

"Old Qin, I won't go out tonight; you should rest early."

"Yes." Qin Chuan responded, bowed, and departed.

"You may leave as well." Su Mei waved her hand, and the woman serving her immediately left, closing the door behind her.

Looking at the night scene outside the window, Su Mei frowned slightly, her mind still pondering Qin Chuan's words. She didn't know why, but as she thought, a handsome face, Ling Chen's, emerged in her mind. After hesitating, Su Mei picked up her phone and found Ling Chen's phone number.

After a moment of silence, Su Mei took a deep breath as if summoning great courage, and dialed that number. However, the phone quickly returned a system message indicating that the subscriber's phone was turned off.

Su Mei gently bit her thin lip, recalling Ling Chen's words to her in the restaurant tonight... maintain distance... could it be that... he wouldn't even answer the phone?

Sighing softly, Su Mei shook her head, trying to cast away these miscellaneous thoughts.

...

Midnight.

A luxurious Mercedes car drove along the road and stopped outside a solitary estate. The car door opened, and Ye Liangyong quickly jumped out, rushing toward the villa.

Passing through the gate, Ye Liangyong asked urgently, "Where is Ling Chen?"

"Mr. Ye." Tang Guolun came forward, saying, "We've been searching for several hours, but there's no sign of Ling Chen."

"How could this happen?"

"Around nine o'clock, Ling Chen called me saying someone was secretly following him, trying to harm him, and asked me to bring people for support as soon as possible. However, when we arrived at the location, there wasn't anyone there, and we didn't see Ling Chen. Later, we expanded our search area, but still couldn't find him."

Ye Liangyong said in a deep voice, "No clues at all?"

Tang Guolun shook his head, saying, "No clues, but we found a pool of blood in that forest. I've collected the blood and sent it for testing; we'll soon have results."

"If that blood was left by Ling Chen, it means he was in danger..." Ye Liangyong pondered for a moment and asked, "When Ling Chen told you he was being followed, did he reveal the identity of the pursuers?"

"No. However, Ling Chen emphasized several times that I should bring Ji Gang; I suspect... the people tracking him might be Heavenly List experts. Otherwise, Ling Chen wouldn't have been so urgent."

Heavenly List experts! Ye Liangyong felt a heavy heart and grew a bit uneasy. After contemplating for a moment, Ye Liangyong spoke: "Continue searching for Ling Chen's whereabouts; leave no clue unchecked. I'll inform Master and Elder Tong about this; see how they wish to proceed."

In the blink of an eye, three days had passed, and still, there was no news of Ling Chen.

At the Dragon Tiger Hall in East Sea City, the gathered crowd was filled with tension.

"Elder Tong, I think it's unnecessary to investigate; surely it's the mischief of those bastards from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion," Xia Yue said indignantly, "According to Tang Guolun, Ling Cheng went to meet the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master that night and then was followed. Certainly, it's the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion who deliberately lured Ling Cheng out for an ambush."

Yuan Yun agreed, "Given Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's tactics, this possibility isn't impossible. Elder Tong, Mr. He, big brother, it's been three days with no news of Ling Cheng; he's likely in great danger. I suggest we shouldn't waste time waiting for news here, but take action."

Tong Zhentian furrowed his brows tightly, remaining silent, seemingly contemplating the serious consequences of the matter. Sitting beside him, He Ziyun spoke up: "You are all Ling Chen's brothers, I understand your feelings. However, what can we do now? Even if Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion did this, we have no evidence to prove it. We can't simply go and cause trouble with Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Dragon Tiger Hall was just established, and in all aspects, it's not comparable to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion; if we engage them, we stand to lose the most."

Qiu Yong nodded, saying, "Mr. He speaks wisely. Third brother, now is not the time for impulsive actions; we need a foolproof plan."

Seeing his elder brother speak, Yuan Yun, though unwilling, calmed down.

After a brief silence, everyone's eyes turned to Tong Zhentian. Since the beginning, Tong Zhentian hadn't spoken. Here, Tong Zhentian was the only Heavenly List expert, and the sole pillar everyone relied on. Now, everyone hoped he would step forward.

Feeling the attention on him, Tong Zhentian slowly raised his head, scanning the crowd, speaking calmly, "I agree with Mr. He's proposal. Now is not the time to start a conflict with Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Their aim in killing Ling Chen, besides personal grudges, is primarily because Dragon Tiger Hall infringed upon their interests."

Chapter 1230 - 1238: No News (2)

"Elder Tong, are you suggesting we just let it go like this?" Yuan Yun asked unwillingly.

"A gentleman's revenge is never too late, even after ten years," Tong Zhentian replied calmly. "Unless we have enough resources, declaring war on the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion now would be tantamount to seeking death. If Ling Chen were here, do you think he would do that?"

"He would." Zhang Zhongfeng, who had been silent, suddenly spoke. "I know the personality of our sixth brother. He never saw himself as a gentleman. If someone infringes on his interests or friends, he would go to any lengths to seek justice. Even knowing the difficulties, he wouldn't give up. I believe if sixth brother were here, he would certainly retaliate against the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion with all possible means. Even if he failed, he would expose their ugly face to everyone."

At this point, Zhang Zhongfeng paused slightly and continued, "Elder Tong, if we endure quietly and focus on developing the Dragon Tiger Hall as you suggested, do you think it's truly feasible? Why did the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion kill Ling Chen? As you said earlier, beyond personal grievances, it's mainly because the existence of the Dragon Tiger Hall threatens the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Since they dared to assassinate Ling Chen, dealing with the Dragon Tiger Hall is only a matter of time. By then, before the Dragon Tiger Hall could grow, it might already be wiped out by the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Zhang Zhongfeng's words immediately plunged everyone present into deep thought.

It must be admitted that Zhang Zhongfeng's argument made a lot of sense. Moreover, given the style of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, it's quite likely they would do such a thing.

After pondering for a moment, Tong Zhentian nodded, sighing deeply, "Mr. Zhang is right; my consideration was flawed. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion killed Ling Chen, and their next step will surely be to deal with the Dragon Tiger Hall. Rather than passive defense, we should take the initiative."

After a brief pause, Tong Zhentian looked at everyone and said, "The chance of success in this struggle with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is slim, I believe everyone knows this in their hearts. So, if anyone wants to withdraw, I absolutely will not stop you, nor will I blame you."

Feeling Tong Zhentian's gaze, everyone lifted their heads, and no one chose to retreat.

"Very well!" Tong Zhentian smiled slightly and said, "Since you all have made your decision, let's work together and give it our all. The martial arts world has been tranquil for so many years, it's time for a change."

As his words fell, two people walked in from outside the door. The middle-aged man in the lead was unfamiliar to everyone, but the young woman following behind was well-known to everyone as Zhu Qing.

"Lady Zhu." Yuan Yun stood up, scrutinizing the middle-aged man, and asked, "Who is this?"

"Hello, my name is Zhu Houchang." Zhu Houchang politely greeted everyone and said, "I know about Mr. Ling's situation. I came here this time to apologize to you all because of our negligence, which caused Mr. Ling to encounter misfortune." As he spoke, Zhu Houchang turned his head and sharply ordered Zhu Qing behind him, "Kneel!"

Zhu Qing kept her head down, silent, and with a thud, knelt on the ground, drawing a dagger from her waist and pressing it against her fair neck.

Seeing their actions, Qiu Yong frowned and asked, "Mr. Zhu, what are you doing?"

"Elder Qiu, Mr. Ling was Zhu Qing's employer, and regardless of what happened, Zhu Qing should have stayed by his side. However, on the night of Mr. Ling's incident, Zhu Qing was not able to follow closely, which led to his demise. Our Zhu family has always been clear about rewards and punishments, and if a mistake is made, it should be paid for. So, she is here to atone for her sins with death."

As Zhu Houchang finished speaking, Zhu Qing gently bit her lips, closing her eyes slowly, her trembling eyelashes revealing her inner turmoil.

Suddenly, she gritted her teeth, wielding the dagger to stab her throat.

"Stop!"

Witnessing this scene, everyone's expressions changed dramatically. At the critical moment, Tong Zhentian waved his sleeve, and a teacup placed on the coffee table flew out, accurately hitting Zhu Qing's right hand.

Clang! With a crisp sound, the sharp dagger fell to the ground.

Yuan Yun strode forward, picked up the dagger from the floor, helped Zhu Qing up, and said, "Mr. Zhu, we understand the situation. That night, it was Ling Chen who didn't let Lady Zhu follow; she was just following orders and had nothing to do with it. Moreover, thanks to Lady Zhu not being with Ling Chen, otherwise, more than just Ling Chen would be missing now."

Hearing this, Zhu Houchang raised an eyebrow, his expression heavy, and asked, "Could it be that the assailant was a Heavenly List expert?"

"Indeed." Qiu Yong nodded, "We just can't confirm the person's identity, only knowing they are from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

"What do you intend to do next?"

"If we let others bully us, and if we do nothing, how can we continue in the martial arts world?" Yuan Yun said solemnly, "If people don't offend me, I won't offend them. Since the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion killed Ling Chen, we must repay blood with blood."

"Count me in." Zhu Houchang spoke up.

Everyone was slightly taken aback and curiously looked at Zhu Houchang, asking, "Mr. Zhu, this matter has nothing to do with your Zhu family. There's no need for you to get involved in this troubled situation."

"No, you're wrong," Zhu Houchang said. "This matter does have something to do with the Zhu family, and the Zhu family is obligated and responsible to seek justice for Mr. Ling. When Mr. Ling hired our Zhu family, an agreement was already made. Now that he's encountered misfortune, according to reason, our employment relationship should end here. However, our Zhu family would benefit too much from

this, which is not our style. Therefore, our Zhu family has decided, even though Mr. Ling is no longer here, we must be worthy of the compensation he paid."

Upon hearing Zhu Houchang's statement, everyone brightened up; with the Zhu family's assistance, their hope increased.

"Good!" Tong Zhentian nodded slightly, "We will remember the Zhu family's justice and righteousness in our hearts. Mr. Zhu, may I ask, how much help can the Zhu family provide?"

"One hundred elite assassins plus one Heavenly List assassin, I wonder if Elder Tong is satisfied?"

Heavenly List assassin?

Everyone gasped; although they admired the Zhu family's approach, they hadn't expected the family to be so generous as to send out a Heavenly List-level assassin.

With the addition of these people, everyone seemed to see a glimmer of hope.

Tong Zhentian gently stroked his beard, smiling and nodding, "The kindness of the Zhu family we will remember. However, dealing with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is not easy and requires careful planning. Mr. Zhu, once we've drawn up a plan and everything is ready, we'll notify you."

"Alright. Everyone, we will take our leave now!" Zhu Houchang cupped his fists in farewell to everyone, then turned and walked out of the room with Zhu Qing.