

The Beauty 1621

Chapter 1621 Dengzhou City

Ling Chen spoke no more, stood up, and walked towards the outside. At the door, he suddenly stopped and looked back at Jiang Yue'e, saying: "Mrs. Jiang, I hope you won't regret your decision."

Jiang Yue'e replied coolly, "You don't need to worry about that. Even without you, the Nanrong Family will be just fine."

"I hope so." Ling Chen smiled and walked out.

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Returning to the Dragon Tiger Hall, Ling Chen went straight to the office, pushed open the door, and saw someone sitting inside—the person was Zhu Qing.

"When did you come back? Why didn't you notify me in advance?"

"Just arrived," Zhu Qing replied casually, then took out a thick stack of photos from his pocket and placed them on the desk. "These past few days, I've been secretly following the traitor. I've photographed everywhere he went and everyone he met."

Ling Chen picked up the photos and examined them one by one. After looking at all the photos, he asked, "Any discoveries?"

"Netherworld Snake probably has a base in Jinhai City," Zhu Qing said. "These days, that person visited eight places in total. For safety reasons, to avoid being discovered, I didn't investigate deeply. But I believe one of these places is a secret base of the Netherworld Snake."

"Alright." Ling Chen nodded, saying: "Thank you for your hard work. I'll have Hu Fei investigate it later."

"What do you plan to do?"

"What else can I do? Since Netherworld Snake wants a life-and-death struggle with me, I can't just sit and wait for death. I have no choice but to retaliate." Ling Chen said with curiosity: "Zhu Qing, how much do you know about the Netherworld Snake?"

Previously, he heard Ling Gengqiu mention that there were two mysterious forces in the martial arts world in those years—one was the assassin force of Netherworld Snake, and the other was the assassin family, Zhu Family. These two forces had crossed paths hundreds of years ago, so the Zhu Family should know more about the Netherworld Snake.

"I've heard of the force of Netherworld Snake, but it's all history from hundreds of years ago. If you want to know more about Netherworld Snake, it's best to go to the Zhu Family and ask our Family Head clearly. He knows Zhu Family's history the best."

Ling Chen smiled and said: "I've dealt with your Zhu Family for so long, but I've never visited your Zhu Family. It's just right; since I'm free these few days, why not make a trip to your Zhu Family."

"When do you want to go?"

"There's no better time than the present. Let's go today. Later, help me book four tickets."

"Four tickets? Who else do you plan to take with you?"

"Sir Chen and Ji Gang. They are my personal bodyguards now. The people of Netherworld Snake are watching closely, ready to make a move at any moment. If they're not by my side, I really can't feel at ease."

Zhu Qing nodded and said: "Alright then."

At 4:30 in the afternoon, Ling Chen and his group arrived at the airport, boarding the flight to Dengzhou City. The ancestral home of the Zhu Family is located in Dengzhou City, a major southern city over a thousand kilometers from East Sea City. The plane flew for more than two hours, until evening, when Ling Chen's flight finally reached its destination.

Upon exiting the airport passage, Zhu Qing led the three to the roadside. Shortly, a convoy of Mercedes cars slowly approached, stopping before the four of them. Zhu Qing and Ling Chen boarded the central sedan, while Chen Junfeng and Ji Gang sat in the front and rear Mercedes respectively. As the convoy hit the road, Zhu Qing said: "The Zhu Family has some rules that everyone visiting must follow. So, please understand later."

Ling Chen smiled slightly and said: "This is your territory. The guest obeys the host; I'll cooperate with you."

As the convoy was halfway, Ling Chen handed over his phone as required. Simultaneously, a barrier rose between the sides of the car windows and seats, blocking Ling Chen's view and leaving him unable to see anything.

Seeing this, Ling Chen couldn't help but laugh: "Zhu Qing, isn't this too cautious?"

"For the Zhu Family to be passed down until today, it relies on this caution. Apart from Zhu family members, outsiders don't know the real location of the Zhu Family. Only with this can we better protect ourselves."

"What if there is a traitor in the Zhu Family?"

Zhu Qing shook his head, saying: "Impossible. The Zhu Family has been passed down for hundreds of years and has never had a traitor. This is thanks to the strict family rules and education—every Zhu Family member values honor and loyalty more than their life."

As they spoke, the convoy's speed gradually decreased. "We're here!" As Zhu Qing spoke, the barrier on the car window immediately rose. Ling Chen turned to look outside, discovering the convoy had arrived in a brightly-lit manor. As the sedan came to a stop, a middle-aged man in a suit quickly came over, opening the car door.

"Mr. Ling, welcome to the Zhu Family as a guest," the man said enthusiastically.

Looking at the middle-aged man before him, Ling Chen smiled and extended his hand, saying: "Mr. Zhu, long time no see." This middle-aged man was none other than Zhu Houchang, who had represented the Zhu Family in negotiating cooperation with him before.

"Come on, I'll take you to see the Family Head. The Family Head has already prepared good food and wine."

Following Zhu Houchang, the group soon arrived at the Siheyuan in the center of the manor. The Siheyuan had a front hall and a back hall, with the front hall primarily for hosting esteemed guests. Upon entering the front hall, Ling Chen's gaze was immediately drawn to an elderly man. The man was seventy or eighty years old, with a fair and ruddy complexion, appearing vigorous and spirited.

"Mr. Ling, let me introduce you. This is the Family Head of our Zhu Family, Zhu Qian, who is also my father."

"Family Head Zhu," Ling Chen respectfully cupped his hands and greeted.

Zhu Qian smiled, stood from his seat, walked over to Ling Chen, examined him closely, and nodded: "I've often heard Houchang talk about you, saying you're an outstanding young talent. Seeing you today, you are indeed impressive."

"The Family Head praises me too much. I'm just an ordinary person in the martial arts world."

"There's no need for humility." Zhu Houchang interjected: "You are our Zhu Family's major client. As the popular saying goes, 'the customer is like an emperor,' so it's only right for the Family Head to extol you a bit."

Hearing Zhu Houchang's joke, everyone couldn't help but laugh. After introducing Chen Junfeng and Ji Gang, Zhu Qian led everyone to the adjacent dining room, saying: "Knowing you were coming, I specially had the chef prepare a feast to welcome you. Come, let's have a couple of drinks first."

With a few drinks down, Ling Chen began to talk, naturally turning to the topic of Netherworld Snake.

"Netherworld Snake..." Zhu Qian set down his wine glass and spoke slowly: "I've read the records left by the Zhu Family in the past, and they do mention Netherworld Snake. It's an assassin organization, extremely powerful, causing bloody storms in the martial arts world, resulting in countless deaths and injuries."

Chapter 1622 Journey to the Zhu Family (1)

"Afterwards, with the establishment of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, its first Pavilion Master, Su Cheng'en, allied with several major Martial Arts forces to launch a siege against the Netherworld Snake that lasted several months. At that time, our Zhu Family also sent people to participate. According to the records of the Zhu Family, although that siege was victorious, all other Martial Arts forces except for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion suffered heavy losses. It is precisely because of this that the newly established Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion could become the overlord of the Martial Arts world within just over a decade."

Hearing this, Ling Chen felt a stir in his heart and asked in surprise, "Family Head, are you trying to say..."

Zhu Qian waved his hand to stop Ling Chen's words and said, "I didn't say anything. The fact that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion remained intact could be a coincidence, or it could be because of its own formidable strength, which spared it from losses. In any case, after that, the Netherworld Snake disappeared from the Martial Arts scene. So, from any perspective, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion can be regarded as a benefactor. Besides, even if there are suspicions, what does it matter, it was all a few hundred years ago, who can investigate the truth now."

Ling Chen nodded and did not continue to inquire further. However, after hearing Zhu Qian talk about the events of that year, Ling Chen's first thought was that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion used improper means. Perhaps at that time, Su Cheng'en wanted to use the siege on the Netherworld Snake to weaken the strength of other forces in the Martial Arts world, so that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion could stand out among the heroes and become the overlord of the Martial Arts world.

Under the guise of removing harm from the Martial Arts world, weakening competitors' strength, this method fits very well with the style of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. It not only weakened competitors but also brought a good reputation for itself, a dual benefit. However, as Zhu Qian said, all these events happened a few hundred years ago, and there is no way to verify. Even if evidence is found, few people care now.

"Family Head, how much do you know about the Netherworld Snake?"

"The Netherworld Snake operates just like their name, fixating on their target like a venomous snake. As long as the target is not dead, they will not easily give up. Additionally, the Netherworld Snake picks out talented individuals from orphans for training. Each person is a killing machine without emotion, without their own thoughts, completely mechanical, obeying orders only. Therefore, assassins from the Netherworld Snake almost never betray; they will carry out orders even if it means their own death without hesitation."

Zhu Qian's words reminded Ling Chen of Qiang; they matched Zhu Qian's description closely.

"Family Head, has the Zhu Family heard any news about the Netherworld Snake in these hundred years?"

Zhu Qian shook his head and said, "No, I always thought the Netherworld Snake was extinguished. However, judging by your experience, they still exist, just lurking in some dark corner unnoticed. I imagine the people of the Netherworld Snake are also waiting for an opportunity."

"Opportunity?" Ling Chen asked, puzzled, "What opportunity?"

"Of course, the opportunity to rise again. As everyone knows, the current Martial Arts world is at a critical development stage, with various forces emerging and returning to the fold of the Martial Arts world. It won't be long before the entire Martial Arts world will once again flourish like a hundred flowers blooming. However, as more and more forces rise, the order in the Martial Arts world will fall into chaos, and strife for fame and gain is inevitable. To the Netherworld Snake, this chaotic situation is their favorite."

Chaos!

Ling Chen frowned slightly; Zhu Qian's words echoed those of Golden Dragon and Wang Teng. They all mentioned the word 'chaos.' These people are veterans of the Martial Arts world, having seen both its glory and decline, so their words are highly credible.

As he contemplated, Zhu Qian picked up a wine bottle and poured a glass for Ling Chen. Seeing the gesture, Ling Chen quickly picked up the wine glass with both hands.

"Ling Chen, I heard from Qing that you were assassinated by the Netherworld Snake last night?"

"That's right! The people of the Netherworld Snake have set their sights on me. Family Head, to be honest, I've never felt afraid like this in my life, always needing to have Sir Chen with me wherever I go, fearing that members of the Netherworld Snake might suddenly appear." Speaking of last night's events, Ling Chen still had lingering fears; the man in black sent by the Netherworld Snake was too formidable.

"You must be careful. You survived an assassination by the Netherworld Snake, so they will certainly spare no effort to deal with you; this is the rule of the Netherworld Snake."

"Family Head, a few hundred years ago, the Zhu Family and the Netherworld Snake were rivals. Where do you think they might be hiding?"

"It's hard to say. You saw it when you came in, the Zhu Family is extremely cautious, never revealing its position to outsiders. The Netherworld Snake has been silent for so many years; they are likely even more cautious than our Zhu Family. However, I think you could check their former headquarters; perhaps it has been reactivated."

Ling Chen's eyes lit up, nodding, "I am completely in the dark now, with no clues to go on. I will try anything if there's a glimmer of hope."

"I'll tell you the former address of the Netherworld Snake when the time comes; you can take a look." Saying this, Zhu Qian raised his glass, "Come, let's drink first."

Zhu Qian held his liquor well, finishing two bottles of white wine with his face unchanged. Satisfied with food and drink, Ling Chen suddenly remembered something and asked, "Family Head, I'd like to ask you something, do you know of the Dark Pavilion?"

"The Dark Pavilion?"

Zhu Qian and Zhu Houchang exchanged a glance, a hint of surprise flashing in their eyes.

Zhu Houchang looked at Ling Chen and asked, "Where did you hear about the Dark Pavilion?"

"Recently, during the Martial Arts Tournament hosted by the Martial Arts Association, the Dark Pavilion sent people to create chaos, thankfully we stopped it in time before major disasters struck." Ling Chen recounted what happened during the Martial Arts Tournament briefly. Finally, he looked at Zhu Qian and Zhu Houchang, and asked, "From your tone, it seems you know about the Dark Pavilion."

Zhu Houchang nodded, "To be honest, we do know about the Dark Pavilion. In fact, it has quite a connection with our Zhu Family."

Hearing this, Ling Chen was taken aback. The fact that the Dark Pavilion is connected to the Zhu Family was something he didn't expect.

"This matter goes back many years ago," Zhu Qian began, "Our Zhu Family ancestors once served the royal family and later became a family of assassins, passed down to this day. The Zhu Family is divided into an outer and inner sect; the outer sect consists of disciples without the Zhu Family surname, while only those with Zhu Family blood can become Inner Sect Disciples and receive the best training. At that time, the Zhu Family's outer sect recruited a disciple with a different surname, named He Honggang, who was a very talented person. What took others four or five years to complete, he only took less than a year. He Honggang was extremely diligent; although he had extraordinary talent, he was never arrogant and worked even harder than others. All of this was seen by the Zhu Family Master. The Family Master cherished talent and wanted to invite He Honggang into the Inner Sect for systematic training, to make him an excellent assassin. However, He Honggang was an outsider, and even the Family Master could not break the rules."

Chapter 1623 Zhu Family Visit (2)

"What happened afterward?" Ling Chen asked.

"Later, the Family Head came up with an idea. He found a young woman from the Zhu Family and arranged for He Honggang to marry into the Zhu Family. In this way, although He Honggang still had a different surname, he could be considered family. Since then, the Zhu Family Master has focused all his energy on He Honggang, aiming to cultivate him into the most formidable assassin. In just a decade or more, He Honggang did not disappoint, becoming the youngest assassin on the Heavenly List from the Zhu Family. However, unexpectedly for the Zhu Family Master, the day after He Honggang was promoted to the Heavenly List assassin, he disappeared. At that time, the Zhu Family Master ordered the entire Zhu Family to search for He Honggang's whereabouts. But, He Honggang was an assassin trained by the Zhu Family and a master on the Heavenly List; if he wanted to hide his tracks, even the Zhu Family couldn't find him."

"In the following two years, He Honggang remained completely silent. At the same time, an extremely powerful assassin emerged in the martial arts world. This assassin was unique in that he only targeted members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. In just two years, over thirty members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion were killed in secret. Because of this, the entire Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was outraged and even issued a Heavenly Mechanism Order, calling for the entire martial arts world to hunt down the assassin. The person assassinating the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion members was none other than the assassin painstakingly cultivated by the Zhu Family, He Honggang. Even though He Honggang was personally very strong and skilled at hiding his tracks, when faced with the entire martial arts world's siege, he was inevitably discovered. Late one night, just before dawn, an unexpected guest suddenly arrived at the Zhu Family. When the Zhu Family Master received the notification, he immediately rushed over and found that the unexpected guest was He Honggang."

"At that time, He Honggang was covered in wounds, and his clothes were stained with blood. Later, the Zhu Family learned that He Honggang had broken through the siege of dozens of martial arts masters to come to the Zhu Family seeking help. However, the Zhu Family never intervenes in any martial arts disputes; moreover, He Honggang's actions had already angered the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. If the Zhu Family shelters He Honggang, it will inevitably invite misunderstanding and revenge from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. After careful consideration, the Zhu Family Master abandoned rescuing He Honggang and instead expelled the battered man from the Zhu Family, leaving him to fend for himself. From then on, the Zhu Family severed ties with He Honggang completely. The decision was not due to the Zhu Family's ruthlessness but for self-preservation. After all, the Zhu Family has over a hundred members and cannot make enemies with the entire martial arts world over one outsider."

"Later, the Zhu Family Master learned from some martial artists that He Honggang's father had killed several people in the martial arts world, leading to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's wanted list and pursuit. After his father was killed, the young He Honggang was obsessed with revenge but lacked the ability. Thus, he chose to enter the Zhu Family's Outer Sect, hoping to learn some killing techniques. As a result, his hard work and talent caught the attention of the Family Head. Our Zhu Family are assassins, not killers; all of He Honggang's actions violated the ancestral teachings of the Zhu Family. Therefore, someone like him must be expelled. Because of this, the Zhu Family strengthened the control over outsiders, no matter how talented they were, they would not be introduced to the Inner Sect."

After listening to Zhu Qian's retelling, Ling Chen curiously asked, "What about He Honggang? What happened to him in the end?"

Zhu Qian shook his head and said, "No one knows how He Honggang ended up, but three years after He Honggang was expelled from the Zhu Family, the Zhu Family received a generous gift every year, signed by the Dark Pavilion. That's why when you mentioned the Dark Pavilion just now, we were so surprised. Combining what you said before, if I'm not mistaken, He Honggang should have secretly founded the Dark Pavilion after he left the Zhu Family. He is a Heavenly List assassin cultivated with innumerable

resources by the Zhu Family and mastered all the family's skills. Using these skills, he could train countless assassins." At this point, Zhu Qian couldn't help but sigh, "Ultimately, this was all caused by the Zhu Family. If the Zhu Family hadn't valued him, none of this would have happened."

"Family Head, is there any chance that He Honggang is still alive?"

"Impossible!" Zhu Houchang replied, "That happened more than a hundred years ago; no matter how long He Honggang's lifespan was, he couldn't live for that long."

Impossible? Ling Chen shook his head silently. In the past, he might have believed Zhu Houchang. But since he personally saw Ling Gengqiu, Su Cheng'en, and He Zhishen, many things changed his mind. Even without mentioning Ling Gengqiu and Su Cheng'en, figures like Golden Dragon, Wang Teng, Dan Xuzi, and Master Hui Yun—none of them weren't over a hundred years old. Once cultivation reaches a certain realm, longevity is indeed possible, just not possessing immortality like Ling Gengqiu.

This visit to the Zhu Family was initially to clarify the Netherworld Snake matter, but unexpectedly revealed the origins of the Dark Pavilion.

"Ling Chen, I know you traveled far to reach the Zhu Family this time, but unfortunately, we are powerless regarding the Netherworld Snake, and our information on it is limited to several hundred years ago."

"Family Head, you are too kind; knowing this much already leaves me satisfied."

Checking the time, Ling Chen realized this conversation had lasted several hours, nearing midnight.

"Mr. Ling, it's getting late, let me arrange a room for you to rest," Zhu Houchang stood up to say.

"Okay, thank you."

Shortly thereafter, Ling Chen was shown to a comfortable guest room. The Zhu Family estate is very large, housing over a hundred people. On the east side of the estate, several rows of bungalows were built for people to live in. As a guest, Ling Chen could only be placed in the outermost room because this

is the Zhu Familia's rule: maintaining caution with outsiders, regardless of how prestigious the guest's status was, no exceptions.

Thankfully, Ling Chen isn't particularly picky about accommodations as long as he has a place to sleep.

And so, the night passed quietly.

The next morning, Ling Chen got up on time at 7:30, washed up, and went out. Zhu Qing greeted him.

"Morning!" Ling Chen cheerfully greeted.

"Let's go, I'll take you for breakfast first, then show you around. Since you're here at the Zhu Family, why not stay a few more days?"

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Sure, it'd be nice to see the elite assassins of the Zhu Family."

"That might not be possible as you wish. The Zhu Family never allows outsiders to observe Inner Sect disciple training."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen shrugged and said, "Then forget it. This is your territory, I'll just follow your arrangements."

During breakfast, Ling Chen found the large restaurant only occupied by him and Zhu Qing, feeling a bit strange, "Where are the others? Why is it just the two of us?"

Chapter 1624 Zhu Family Visit (Part 3)

Rolling her eyes, Zhu Qing said, "Everyone else has already eaten. Do you think everyone wakes up late like you?"

Ling Chen scratched his nose and smiled awkwardly, "Did you all get up very early?"

"Of course, the Zhu Family gets up at four o'clock for training. The Zhu Family is a place that trains excellent assassins. Assassins must be adept at moving in the dark, so we wake up early for dark training first, followed by regular physical and skill training."

After listening to Zhu Qing's explanation, Ling Chen finally understood a bit more.

After enjoying breakfast, Zhu Qing took Ling Chen to the front gate of the manor, where a car was already parked.

"Get in, I'll take you out for a spin."

"What about Sir Chen and the others?"

"No need to bother Sir Chen. This is Dengzhou City, the Zhu Family's territory. From the moment you step into Dengzhou City, your safety is the Zhu Family's responsibility. Rest assured, as long as you are in this area, even if the Netherworld Snake's people come, they won't hurt a single hair on you."

Since Zhu Qing said that, Ling Chen naturally didn't say anything more. He obediently got into the car. Similar to when entering the Zhu Family yesterday, when going out, the car windows and rear seats were shielded, blocking the outside view. It wasn't until twenty minutes later that the shields slowly descended. Turning his head, he saw the car was already inside Dengzhou City.

Dengzhou City is considered a top-tier city in the country, located in the south with a suitable climate. Shortly after, the car stopped in the bustling city center. Getting out of the car, although it was just past eight o'clock, the city center was already crowded, bustling with people.

"Zhu Qing, where are you taking me?"

"Shopping." Zhu Qing replied lightly.

Uh... Ling Chen scratched his nose, unsure of what to say. Shopping? He didn't come all the way to Dengzhou City just for shopping. But since Zhu Qing had brought him here, he didn't want to dampen her spirits.

Following Zhu Qing, the two wandered around the mall and bought some local specialties from Dengzhou City. Of course, as a guest, Ling Chen didn't need to pay; Zhu Qing covered all the costs. After more than half an hour, Ling Chen's hands were filled with seven or eight big bags.

According to Zhu Qing, with so many women around him, he should bring them gifts. Walking and browsing, unknowingly, more than two hours passed. After placing the purchased specialties into the car, Zhu Qing took Ling Chen to a high-end restaurant in the city center.

"After lunch, I'll take you somewhere."

"Where to?"

"You'll know when the time comes." Zhu Qing wouldn't say more, but Ling Chen became curious. Her secrecy suggested that the place might be quite special.

Soon, the waiter brought several flavorful dishes to the table, all Dengzhou City specialties. Ling Chen tasted a few and found them all quite good. After finishing the meal, Zhu Qing called the waiter to settle the bill, only to hear the waiter say, "It's already been paid for by someone else."

"Who paid for it?"

The waiter pointed his finger, and Zhu Qing and Ling Chen looked in the direction indicated, seeing a young man at a nearby table smiling and waving at Zhu Qing. As he got up and approached, Zhu Qing's eyebrows furrowed slightly.

"Qing, long time no see." The young man greeted with a smile as he came closer.

Ling Chen assessed the young man before him, handsome in appearance, in his twenties, dressed in style with good temperament, suggesting a well-off family background. It made sense – dining in such a high-end restaurant wouldn't be something ordinary people would indulge in, spending thousands or even tens of thousands on a single meal.

"Who asked you to pay for me?" Zhu Qing glanced at the young man, saying indifferently, "Do you think I don't have any money?"

The young man chuckled, "Just joking, how could a member of the Zhu Family lack money? Qing, it's been years since we last met, it's just a meal, no need to be so upset. We were once a couple, even almost got married."

"Married?" Ling Chen was slightly taken aback; though he knew Zhu Qing for some time, he had never heard her mention this.

Hearing the young man's words, Zhu Qing's emotions seemed quite agitated. She abruptly stood up from her chair and glared coldly at him, "Lin Ziyang, stop talking nonsense. Who wants to marry you? Get lost!" With that, she stormed out angrily.

Seeing this, Ling Chen quickly followed Zhu Qing. "Hey! Brother, slow down." The young man suddenly reached out, placing his hand on Ling Chen's shoulder, asking, "Are you her new boyfriend?"

"What's it to you?" Ling Chen replied, "Is there a problem?"

The young man named Lin Ziyang sneered, "Of course there's a problem, and a big one at that. Friend, I advise you, if you want to leave Dengzhou City safely, you'd better disappear from her side soon. Otherwise, accidents happen easily these days, you know what I mean?"

"Maybe I do, maybe I don't, but I'll advise you too: before threatening others, weigh up whether you have the skills for it."

"You..." Lin Ziyang's face darkened instantly, ready to retort. But Ling Chen didn't give him the chance, simply brushing his hand off his shoulder and catching up with Zhu Qing's pace.

Watching the backs of Ling Chen and Zhu Qing leaving together, Lin Ziyang's expression was as sour as could be. This guy... dared to ignore him; in all Dengzhou City, apart from the Zhu Family, no one dared treat him like this.

Hmph! Since you're asking for it, don't blame me for being rude.

Back in the car, seeing Zhu Qing's face still full of anger, Ling Chen couldn't help but laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Zhu Qing blushed and glared at Ling Chen, looking like she wanted to eat him alive.

Ling Chen stifled his laughter, "Nothing, it's just, knowing you for so long, it's the first time I've seen you angry. It's quite entertaining! Hey, was that man named Lin Ziyang really your ex-fiancé?"

"Nonsense, he certainly wasn't." Zhu Qing said irritably, "And from now on, don't mention him in front of me, otherwise I'll..."

"What will you do?" Ling Chen teased, "Are you going to teach me a lesson? Don't forget, I'm your employer; your job is to protect me, and not let me get hurt even a little."

"Hmph!" Zhu Qing shot Ling Chen a resentful look, simply turned to gaze outside the window, ignoring him.

"Weren't you saying at lunch that you'd take me somewhere? Why aren't we going?"

"Not anymore, I'm not in the mood now."

"How can you be like that, running into your ex-boyfriend was pure coincidence. You can't take it out on me." Ling Chen looked innocently.

Chapter 1625 The Zhu Family's Predicament (1)

"Why not? You're the only man around me, who else am I supposed to vent on if not you?"

"Alright, alright, guess I'm just unlucky. How about this, I'll take you out for a drink, okay? Booze solves sorrows and helps let off steam."

Zhu Qing turned her head away, pouting, "Not going, that's something you men do, I'm not interested."

Ling Chen asked helplessly, "Then what do you want to do?"

"You help me teach him a lesson." Zhu Qing pointed out of the car window, and saw Lin Ziyang coming out of a fancy restaurant, about to get in his car. Ling Chen rubbed his nose, smiling wryly, "Aren't you asking me to offend someone?"

"With the Zhu Family backing you up, what are you afraid of? We've known each other for so long, I've never seen you this cowardly before. Is it because I'm not your woman, so you won't stick up for me?"

"That's not it, you're my friend, if I can, I would definitely help you vent." Ling Chen said, "But I'm just a guest right now, using your Zhu Family's name to do bad things doesn't seem right."

"Forget it, I knew you wouldn't have the guts."

Hearing this, Ling Chen had no choice but to open the car door and stride towards Lin Ziyang's sports car. Just kidding, was he that cowardly? Seeing Ling Chen walking quickly, Zhu Qing's expression changed slightly, originally she just wanted to act up a bit, who knew Ling Chen would actually go cause trouble for Lin Ziyang.

Oh no!

Lin Ziyang's identity is not simple, if Ling Chen really beat him up, it would still be her who gets blamed in the end. Thinking of this, she hurriedly drove the car in front of Ling Chen and called him back.

"You're really my dear aunt, wasn't it you who told me to teach him a lesson just now? Why are you stopping me now?"

"I was just saying it casually, who knew you would actually take action. Lin Ziyang's identity is not ordinary, if he gets hurt, I can't explain it over here at the Zhu Family."

Ling Chen asked with interest, "What's his background?"

"Their Lin Family is a marriage partner of the Zhu Family."

"Marriage partner?" Ling Chen was startled, he had only heard of business partners before, this was the first time he heard of a marriage partner, shouldn't it be described as a 'marriage relationship'? Seeing Ling Chen's face full of confusion, Zhu Qing seemed to know what he was thinking, said, "You didn't hear wrong, it's a marriage partner."

"What does this marriage partner mean?"

Zhu Qing explained, "The Zhu Family needs to pass on the next generation, internal marriage is not possible, they must combine with outsiders. However, if Zhu Family members are allowed to freely fall in love and marry, it will only lead to the dispersal of the Zhu Family bloodline, so the Zhu Family must ensure the bloodline doesn't get lost and stays concentrated, only this way can the Zhu Family thrive and the bloodline continue. The Lin Family is also a prominent family in Dengzhou City, hundreds of years ago, when the Zhu Family settled in this place, the Lin Family was already a well-known big family, primarily in business. The two families have dealt with each other for hundreds of years, and have a good relationship. Later, the Zhu Family saw that the Lin Family had many members, and thus conceived the idea of marrying into them, the Zhu Family men only marry Lin Family women, the Zhu Family women only marry Lin Family men. As long as it's a Zhu Family man's offspring, whether male or female, they must become an assassin."

"What if they don't like it?" Ling Chen asked, "Do you have to accept the other party?"

Zhu Qing nodded and said, "In a big family, you must obey the rules. Men are fine, mostly it's the women. Of course, if you don't like Lin Family people, you can choose to divorce after marriage and having children, and then return to the Zhu Family, this kind of thing is very common in the Zhu Family, Lin Family men are also willing, as long as there are offspring, their task is complete, they can find another woman they like and spend the rest of their lives, what the Zhu Family cares about is just their own bloodline."

Ling Chen rubbed his nose and said, "If that's the case, aren't you guys marrying close relatives by your generation?"

"You're overthinking it." Zhu Qing said calmly, "I just said, the Lin Family is a big family, with many collateral bloodlines. Moreover, before marriage, a background check will be done on both sides, so there's no need to worry about such things."

"So, the person Lin Ziyang was interested in back then was you?"

"Yes, but I don't like him. When my father went out to perform a mission back then, he had an accident, and my mother died of childbirth difficulties when I was born. It was my uncle who raised me single-handedly, I'm very close to him, he even treats me as his own. So, when the Family Head wanted to betroth me to Lin Ziyang, it was only because my uncle pleaded that the matter was not discussed. However, the Family Head decided to change his mind partly because I was still young. After a few more years, I will definitely have to choose a Lin Family man to marry, that's an inviolable family rule."

"Why must you marry a Lin Family man?" Ling Chen furrowed his brow and said, "Isn't this rule too unfeeling, doesn't your Family Head ever consider the feelings of your own people?"

"Because the Zhu Family must rely on the Lin Family's assistance in some matters." Zhu Qing sighed, "The Zhu Family also has its difficulties, although the Zhu Family is an assassin family with countless masters, in the current society, to survive and develop, simply having a large number of people is useless, there must be ample financial resources to back it up. Unfortunately, the Zhu Family is obsessed with cultivating excellent assassins and hasn't considered the way to survive in the future. Until the Zhu Family's accumulated wealth over many years slowly ran out, they realized this serious problem."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen was surprised, somewhat incredulous, "Could it be that the Zhu Family is short of money? That's impossible, your Zhu Family charges hefty fees for missions, how could you lack money?"

To be honest, Ling Chen really found it hard to believe. Back then, his transactions with the Zhu Family alone amounted to billions of US Dollars, and if you add other income, the Zhu Family at least had a hundred billion US Dollars in assets. Even with so many people to support, it wouldn't cost that much money.

"You should know, the Zhu Family's services are basically lifelong, even if there are short-term ones, they last ten or twenty years. Also, the Zhu Family's services are a one-time fee, like you, you have so many assassins trained by the Zhu Family protecting you, serving you, the families behind these people all need the Zhu Family to take care of for life. Of course, spending on these people alone isn't too much, but think about how many Inner Sect Disciples and Outer Sect Disciples the Zhu Family has, there are thousands of families the Zhu Family needs to support. Besides those families' expenses, the Zhu Family also has to develop, expand personnel, every one requires money."

Ling Chen thought carefully, Zhu Qing's words were indeed correct, even if the Zhu Family had hundreds of billions of US Dollars in assets, it couldn't withstand such expenditures.

"Then why don't you guys invest? Nowadays, there are many fields where money can beget more money."

Chapter 1626 Zhu Family's Predicament (2)

Zhu Qing gave a bitter smile and said, "That's the crux of the matter. The Zhu Family considered this issue a long time ago and invested in many industries. In the first few years, the returns were indeed good, especially if the Zhu Family had increased their investment. But, whether it was due to sheer bad luck or an inherent unsuitability for this line of work, all of the Zhu Family's investments went down the drain, losing more than half of their assets. Back then, if it weren't for the Lin Family's assistance, lending a huge sum of money to the Zhu Family, they wouldn't have been able to keep turning. Later on, the Lin Family invited the Zhu Family to join them in investments. The Family Head thought, since the Lin Family was the richest in Dengzhou City and their specialty was business, following them surely wouldn't lead to losses. So, we trusted them, borrowed a significant amount of capital from the Lin Family, but ended up losing everything. Since then, the Zhu Family gave up on financial investments. The money was gone, but the huge debt to the Lin Family remained, and the interest over all these years has been terrifying. More than half of every penny the Zhu Family earns goes to the Lin Family, and it's still not paid off. If the Zhu Family encounters any trouble requiring financial help, they still need to turn to the Lin Family. After all I've said, now you should understand the reason."

So that's how it is!

Ling Chen nodded, finally understanding the Zhu Family's predicament. As the saying goes, even a hero can be brought low by the lack of a penny; this is even more true in today's realistic society. Without money, you can't take a single step, let alone for a prominent family like the Zhu Family.

"What if you marry someone from the Lin Family? Who will protect my safety? Our agreement was for a lifetime, don't forget."

Zhu Qing gave Ling Chen a sidelong glance and said, "Don't worry. I won't forget. I'll be away for at most a year or two, and once I've had the child, I'll come back to you."

Ling Chen smiled and asked, "Once you have a child, will you still feel inclined to stay by my side?"

Hearing this, Zhu Qing fell silent, not responding. Seeing her complex expression, Ling Chen asked, "Since there are so many men in the Lin Family, have you taken a liking to any of them?"

Zhu Qing shook her head and said, "I don't want to continue this topic."

Zhu Qing didn't want to talk, but Ling Chen did. Seeing Zhu Qing ready to drive away, Ling Chen snatched the car keys and said, "We've already talked so much; we might as well discuss more. Tell me your true thoughts. Maybe I can help you."

"Help me? How can you help me? You're not part of the Zhu Family. You can't meddle in our affairs."

Ling Chen laughed and said, "The main issue with the Zhu Family is nothing more than a lack of money. If there is money, I suppose they wouldn't force you to marry into the Lin Family. Hey! I should be better than those Lin Family men. How about I ask the Family Head to betroth you to me?"

"Oh, stop it with these jokes," Zhu Qing said irritably.

"Okay, okay, no more jokes. Seriously, I really want to help you. You're my friend, and I don't want you to be unhappy," Ling Chen said earnestly. "You know I am a rich guy without money issues, so don't be shy with me."

"We'll see when the time comes." Zhu Qing stretched out her hand and said, "First, give me the car keys. I'll take you somewhere."

Half an hour later, Zhu Qing drove to a residential area in the southern part of Dengzhou City. After parking, they went straight up to the third floor of a residential building. Ling Chen looked around; the building was rather old, and not many people lived there. Was Zhu Qing bringing him to meet someone?

As he pondered, Zhu Qing stopped outside a room and knocked on the door. A moment later, an old man appeared at the door before them. Looking at the old man, Ling Chen glanced twice and noticed his left eye was blind and several scars marked his face, giving him an aged appearance.

"Oh! Isn't this Qing," the old man's face filled with wrinkles squeezed together, full of smiles seeing Zhu Qing.

"Fourth Grandpa, long time no see," Zhu Qing said.

"It has been a long time. I heard you were on a mission?"

Zhu Qing nodded and said, "Let me introduce you. This is Ling Chen, my employer. The Family Head asked me to bring him here to find something." As she spoke, she took a token from her pocket and handed it to the old man.

"Hello, Sir," Ling Chen greeted politely.

"Come in, don't stand outside," the old man stepped aside, welcoming Ling Chen and Zhu Qing inside.

Entering the room, Ling Chen looked at the furnishings and was surprised. He thought it was just an ordinary home but found the space inside was vast, as if several adjoining homes were connected to form a large house.

In the room, many wooden shelves were stacked with thick papers, most of which had turned yellow with age, indicating they were many years old.

"Qing, what are you looking for?"

"The archives concerning the Netherworld Snake."

"Alright, sit here for a bit. I'll go look for it." With that, the old man left, and Ling Chen quietly asked, "What is this place?"

"This is where the Zhu Family stores hundreds of years of archives and documents, essentially a secret base for the family." After a pause, Zhu Qing continued, "Fourth Grandpa is the Family Head's brother.

He was severely injured on a mission before, lost an eye, and has some disabilities, so he took the initiative to stay here and guard this place."

"If it's a secret base, why bring me here?"

"Because I trust you. Besides, even if you had any ulterior motives, you wouldn't succeed. Fourth Grandpa, despite his health, is more than capable of handling you."

Hearing this, Ling Chen felt a chill. Could this seemingly unimpressive old man be so formidable? Just as he was thinking, the old man returned with a dusty file.

"Here's what you wanted. Keep it safe."

"Thank you, Fourth Grandpa."

"No need to thank me. Just remember to bring me a few bottles of wine next time you visit."

"I'll remember."

Outside the residential building, Zhu Qing handed the file over to Ling Chen and said, "You can take these documents back to review. Return them to me once you're done."

Back at the Zhu Family, as Ling Chen got out of the car, Zhu Houchang approached from across the way. "Mr. Zhu," Ling Chen greeted him with a nod. Zhu Houchang smiled and replied, "Mr. Ling, you must be tired from being out so long; go rest in your room. I'll call you when dinner is ready." With that said, Zhu Houchang turned his attention to Zhu Qing and said, "Qing, come with me. I have something to discuss with you."

Zhu Qing acknowledged with a nod and followed Zhu Houchang towards the front hall of the Siheyuan.

In the room, Ling Chen took out his phone and called Hu Fei to inquire about the situation over the past few days. Although he wasn't in East Sea City, there were still matters he needed to keep an eye on.

Chapter 1627 Lin Zi Yang (1)

Being in the Zhu Family meant there were countless rules, including how you used your phone. When he first entered the Zhu Family, Zhu Qing had taken his phone away, and only after the Zhu Family's tech people had checked it and installed an encryption device did they give it back to him. That way, even if he used his phone inside the Zhu Family, no one could lock onto his location through the signal.

Besides catching up on what had happened over the past few days, Ling Chen had specifically told Hu Fei to look into something for him.

After hanging up, Ling Chen took out the file Zhu Qing had given him and carefully read it through. It was a record about the Netherworld Snake from several hundred years ago, every incident clearly documented in great detail. Unfortunately, Ling Chen read from beginning to end without finding any particularly valuable intel or clues; what he did learn were the locations of the Netherworld Snake's former headquarters and several strongholds.

Right then, Ling Chen used his phone to send all those locations to Hu Fei, telling him to send people to investigate.

After a short rest, when it was time for dinner, Zhu Houchang appeared outside Ling Chen's room, which struck Ling Chen as a bit strange. Usually, it was Zhu Qing who handled him; why was it Zhu Houchang tonight?

"Mr. Zhu, where's Zhu Qing?" Walking along the corridor, Ling Chen asked curiously.

"Qing has other matters to attend to." Zhu Houchang didn't explain much, and Ling Chen tactfully dropped the subject, figuring the Zhu Family had given her some task.

"Mr. Ling, after we finish dinner, I'll have someone take you to the Dengzhou City night market for a stroll. How about it?"

"Sure." Ling Chen smiled and nodded. "I'm a guest anyway, so I'll just follow Mr. Zhu's arrangements."

At dusk, right after dinner, Ling Chen had just taken a seat, planning to have some tea and chat with Zhu Houchang for a bit, when his phone suddenly received a text. It was from Zhu Qing, with only two short words: Help me! Looking at the content on the screen, Ling Chen's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Mr. Ling, what's wrong?"

"Nothing." Ling Chen took a sip of hot tea and said, "Didn't Mr. Zhu say you'd arrange for me to stroll around the night market? Why don't we head out now? I'm idle anyway."

"Since Mr. Ling is interested, I'll have them get the car ready at once."

A short while later, Ling Chen was sitting alone in a Mercedes sedan, slowly driving out of the Zhu Family compound. Once they were on the road, he glanced at the message on his phone and said, "Driver, please take me to Desheng Western Restaurant in the north of the city."

The driver turned his head, looking at Ling Chen as he asked, "Mr. Ling, we're not going to the night market?"

"Go to the north side first. I'm meeting a friend, and then we'll hit the night market. What? Do I need to report to the Zhu Family in advance wherever I want to go?"

"Of course not." The driver didn't dare ask further and immediately drove the Mercedes toward the north side of the city.

More than twenty minutes later, the car stopped at the entrance of Desheng Western Restaurant. Ling Chen got out, thinking to himself: This should be the place! Previously, he'd texted with Zhu Qing, and she had given him this restaurant name.

With one sweep of his eyes, Ling Chen immediately saw a red Ferrari parked by the curb outside the restaurant. When he'd had lunch with Zhu Qing earlier that day, he'd seen this car as well and knew it was Lin Ziyang's ride. Looks like my guess was right! Ling Chen thought to himself. After Lin Ziyang ran into Zhu Qing today, once they got back to the Zhu Family, Zhu Houchang had called Zhu Qing in for a talk, most likely to persuade her to come to this meeting.

Walking into Desheng Western Restaurant, Ling Chen declined the waiter's assistance. His eyes swept the place and he saw a man and a woman sitting in a corner of the first-floor hall—it was Zhu Qing and Lin Ziyang. Next to their table, several security personnel in suits were standing in a row like a human screen, blocking outsiders' line of sight.

At the moment, Lin Ziyang was chatting with Zhu Qing with a smile, but Zhu Qing's face stayed cold the entire time, showing no reaction at all to what he was saying.

Seeing that they hadn't noticed him, Ling Chen walked straight to a booth by the window and sat with his back to Zhu Qing and Lin Ziyang. It was a good spot: he could hear their conversation without being seen.

Meanwhile, in a bedroom back at the Zhu Family estate, Zhu Houchang had just sat down when he saw a Zhu Family disciple run in from outside.

"What is it?"

"We just got word from the driver—Ling Chen didn't go to the night market, he went to Desheng Western Restaurant instead." Although Ling Chen was an honored guest, his every move was under the Zhu Family's watch. On the one hand, it was to protect his safety; on the other, it was just in case.

"Desheng Western Restaurant?" Zhu Houchang's expression shifted slightly; of course he knew what that place was. For Ling Chen to suddenly go there, could it be because of...? At that thought, his brows involuntarily furrowed.

The Zhu Family disciple beside him read his expression and said, "Should I go bring him back?"

After thinking for a moment, Zhu Houchang shook his head. "No need, let him be. If he can really help, that would be a good thing."

After sitting in the restaurant for a few minutes, a waiter brought a cup of coffee over and set it in front of Ling Chen. Ling Chen responded with a smile, placed the tip he'd prepared in advance on the waiter's tray, and then shifted the corner of his gaze toward Zhu Qing's table.

"Qing, I really like you. Why won't you believe me? Give me a chance, I promise I'll treat you well from now on and never do anything to wrong you again." As Lin Ziyang spoke, he reached out with both hands, trying to grab Zhu Qing's hand, but she pulled back with a look of disgust.

"Lin Ziyang, people like you don't change your nature. If it happens once, it'll happen again. How do you expect me to trust you? Do you want to hurt me one more time?" Zhu Qing replied coldly.

Lin Ziyang hurried to explain, "I admit I was wrong before, but I'll definitely change. Besides, it's not like you don't know—this kind of thing is pretty normal in the Lin Family. I... I was just influenced by others."

"To me, loyalty is the most important thing. If you had only betrayed me once, I could forgive you and give you another chance. But you betrayed me twice in a row. Do you really think I'd still forgive you?" Zhu Qing shook her head. "Lin Ziyang, let it go. There's no way for us. Besides, I'm currently on assignment, a lifelong service assignment, so there's no way I can spend my life with you."

"The Zhu Family has so many people, why do they have to send you? Don't worry, I'll go talk to your Family Head about this, have him assign someone else to that bullshit mission."

Hearing that, Zhu Qing frowned, her face darkening. "You'd better show some respect. Carrying out missions is the Zhu Family's duty. For us, every mission is a responsibility and a matter of family honor."

"Sorry, that was my mistake. Qing, I'm serious—marry me. I promise I won't mess around with other women anymore and will devote myself entirely to you and you alone." Lin Ziyang said with deep feeling, doing his best to show his sincerity.

Chapter 1628 Lin Ziyang (2)

"Forget it! I told you, it's impossible between us. You don't need to waste any more energy on this." After speaking, Zhu Qing glanced at the watch on her wrist, stood up and said, "Thank you for dinner tonight, I still have things to do, so I'll be leaving first."

Seeing that Zhu Qing was about to leave, Lin Ziyang hurriedly stood up and grabbed her arm.

"What are you doing?"

"Qing, I just want to tell you that no matter what you're thinking, you can't change the fact that you're going to marry me. Our Lin Family Head has already talked to your Family Head. Within this year they'll hold a wedding for us. Sooner or later you'll be my woman."

"In your dreams!" Zhu Qing flung off Lin Ziyang's hand and strode quickly toward the exit.

Lin Ziyang flicked his hand, and the few security guards who had been waiting nearby immediately quickened their pace, chasing after her and blocking Zhu Qing's way.

"Qing, stay. Don't leave. Are you really going to disobey the Zhu Family's orders?"

"Orders?" Zhu Qing whipped her head around, stared into Lin Ziyang's eyes and said, "What orders? The Zhu Family never ordered me to spend the night with you."

"How do you know they didn't?" Lin Ziyang said with absolute confidence, "If you don't believe me, why don't you call someone from the Zhu Family and ask?"

Hearing this, Zhu Qing hesitated for a moment, then took her phone out of her pocket and dialed a number. The call went through, but no one answered. The result made Zhu Qing's face turn extremely ugly. The call timed out and hung up automatically. Unwilling to accept it, she dialed again. But the result was still the same.

For a moment, Zhu Qing felt like her heart had turned to ashes. She had just called Zhu Houchang. He had never once refused to pick up her calls. This was the first time. Even though he hadn't answered, she already understood his attitude. Thinking back to what Zhu Houchang had said to her when she went home today, Zhu Qing felt as if she had fallen into an ice cellar, incomparably cold.

Though disappointed, she didn't hate him, because she understood clearly in her heart that if there were any other way, Zhu Houchang would never do this. The rules of the family and her own fate were things she simply couldn't escape.

Putting down her phone, Zhu Qing turned to look at Lin Ziyang and asked coldly, "What did you say to the Family Head and the others?"

Lin Ziyang smiled and said, "Nothing much. I just kindly reminded the Zhu Family about their debt problem. If you come with me, I can find a way to help the Zhu Family reduce some of that debt. Otherwise... you'll have to pay back everything you owe within a year. But you know the Zhu Family's situation better than I do. There's no way you can scrape together that much money in such a short time. Qing, you're part of the Zhu Family. As long as you choose to be with me, you'll not only help lessen their burden, you'll also be fulfilling your responsibility and duty to the Zhu Family. Why won't you?"

Zhu Qing stayed silent, as if she had fallen into deep thought. Seeing her so pensive, Lin Ziyang didn't disturb her, just stood quietly to the side, waiting for her answer.

After quite a while, Zhu Qing slowly opened her mouth and said, "All you want is my body. Fine, I can give it to you, but you have to fulfill the promise you made before."

The corners of Lin Ziyang's mouth curled up. He didn't bother to hide his delight. "Don't worry, anything I've promised you, I'll definitely do."

"I don't agree." However, at this moment, a discordant voice suddenly rang out.

Lin Ziyang's smile vanished. He followed the sound and saw Ling Chen slowly stand up from a booth by the window and walk toward them.

"You?" When he saw who it was, Lin Ziyang's face instantly turned cold. He snapped, "What are you doing here?"

Ling Chen smiled faintly and said, "Obviously, I'm here for her." He pointed at Zhu Qing beside him. She looked at him in surprise and delight. So long had passed without Ling Chen appearing that she had already lost hope. She hadn't expected that Ling Chen had arrived early and was just sitting off to the side without showing himself.

Lin Ziyang sneered, "You just said you don't agree? Buddy, at least piss in a puddle and take a look at yourself first. You think you're qualified to butt into this?"

"I'm her employer. The one she serves for the rest of her life is me. So I have every right to interfere in her affairs. As long as I don't agree to her leaving, no one gets to take her away from my side."

"Hmph!" Lin Ziyang looked utterly contemptuous. "So what if you're her employer? This is the Zhu Family's private matter. You have no right to ask about it. And..." As if suddenly thinking of something, Lin Ziyang added, "From now on, you're no longer Qing's client. I'll have the Zhu Family assign someone else to you. If you know what's good for you, you'd better disappear from my sight immediately and stop disturbing my date with Qing."

Ling Chen said with a half-smile, "And what if I don't?"

"Don't?" Hands clasped behind his back, Lin Ziyang said coldly, "I advise you not to ask for trouble. This is Dengzhou City, a territory shared by the Lin Family and the Zhu Family. If you piss me off, even if I kill you, the Zhu Family won't say a word. So if you care about that little life of yours, you'd better get lost right now and never show up in front of me again."

"Sorry, I'm not the type who likes to get lost. Unless I want to leave, no one can force me." With that, Ling Chen walked straight toward Zhu Qing. But before he got close, a man in a suit stepped in to block his way.

"Mr. Lin has spoken. You'd better leave immediately. Don't force me to get physical. In a public place like this, do you really want to get your ass kicked?"

The corners of Ling Chen's mouth lifted. He smiled and said, "That depends on whether you have what it takes."

"Quit wasting words with him. He's clearly the type who doesn't know what's good for him." Lin Ziyang barked coldly. Hearing this, the suited man said no more, reached out to grab Ling Chen by the collar, planning to teach him a lesson.

However, before his hand could touch Ling Chen's body, a formless force suddenly crashed into him head-on, slamming into his torso. His upper body jerked backward and he fell straight to the floor.

"Sorry, I really don't like people touching me." Ling Chen flicked his collar, then strode over to stand in front of Zhu Qing and said, as if no one else were there, "Mr. Zhu arranged for me to stroll around the night market, but no one came with me. It's too boring going alone."

Zhu Qing smiled and said, "I'll go with you."

Being so blatantly ignored, Lin Ziyang felt his anger shoot through the roof. He waved his hand and said, "Teach him a lesson for me."

The suited men all answered in unison and charged toward Ling Chen in big strides. Ling Chen glanced at them and said calmly, "I'm still your employer, you know. You can't really expect me to dirty my own hands, can you?"

"Relax, I'll handle them." As soon as the words left her mouth, Zhu Qing rushed forward. As the Zhu Family's most outstanding assassin, these security guards were no match for her at all. It didn't take much effort before every suited man was laid out on the floor, and they wouldn't be getting back up anytime soon.

Chapter 1629 Lin Zi Yang (3)

Lin Ziyang's face changed, he exclaimed, "Qing, you..."

Before he could finish, Ling Chen appeared beside him, patting his shoulder and said, "Here's a piece of advice for you, don't snatch things that aren't yours, or else you'll only end up harming others and yourself."

Watching Ling Chen and Zhu Qing leave side by side, Lin Ziyang gritted his teeth, his eyes full of anger and venom.

Back in the car, Zhu Qing looked at Ling Chen with gratitude and said, "Thank you for helping me."

"We're all friends, no need to be so polite." Ling Chen said indifferently: "However, it seems I've completely angered that Lin Ziyang, how do you think he's going to deal with me?"

"Are you afraid?" Zhu Qing retorted.

"Of course not. If I were afraid, I wouldn't have come to help you. I'm just worried that the good relationship between the Lin Family and your Zhu Family might make things difficult for you."

"You're a guest of our Zhu Family, even if the Family Head finds out, he won't do anything to you, at most scold me a bit. Being scolded is better than being ruined by someone like Lin Ziyang."

Ling Chen smiled and asked, "I heard you talking to Lin Ziyang earlier, it seemed like you used to date him?"

Zhu Qing nodded, "We did date for a while. I was just twenty then, met Lin Ziyang at a family gathering. At that time, he was an outstanding disciple of the Lin Family, a focus of cultivation, and our elders were keen on us getting to know each other. Back then, I only knew training and had little contact with the outside world. Suddenly meeting someone handsome and eloquent like Lin Ziyang naturally sparked my feelings. However, during the six months we dated, I caught him cheating twice. He thought he was discreet, but forgot about my background. As an excellent assassin, if I wish, he couldn't escape my grasp. The first time, he begged for forgiveness and the elders pleaded, so I let it go. But he didn't change, and I lost all hope in him. Just then, the family had a mission, and I volunteered to go to East Sea City, where I met you."

"There's an old saying, 'A horse loses strength because it's thin, a man loses grace simply because he's poor.'" Ling Chen remarked, "For someone like Lin Ziyang, rich, powerful, and good-looking, being flirtatious is quite normal."

On hearing this, Zhu Qing couldn't help rolling her eyes and said, "So you're all the same?"

"Me? Am I?"

"Aren't you?" Zhu Qing counted on her fingers and said, "Nanrong Wanqing counts as one, Zhu Xiaozhu as one, then there's Tang Shiyun, and..."

"Alright, alright." Seeing Zhu Qing wouldn't stop until she finished counting, Ling Chen hurriedly said, "We're talking about you and Lin Ziyang, why drag me into this? Besides, how can Lin Ziyang compare to me? He's just an animal driven by lower desires. I'm different; I take responsibility for every woman."

"Enough, stop making excuses for your flirtations." As they talked, the car arrived at the night market.

The night market was huge with a wide variety of stalls, bustling with people everywhere. Ling Chen and Zhu Qing walked down the street, looking at stalls filled with local specialties. Ling Chen showed little interest, but Zhu Qing was quite keen, frequently stopping to look at things as they went along.

In the crowded street, Ling Chen followed Zhu Qing's steps, generously buying her any trinkets she liked. The items weren't expensive, it was the thought that counted. However, not long after, Ling Chen's eyes narrowed slightly. Spending years on the edge of life and death, he had a keen sense for danger. In that fleeting moment, he seemed to feel a hint of murderous intent aimed at him. Interesting... Ling Chen secretly smiled, pretending to notice nothing, and continued following behind Zhu Qing.

After a while, Ling Chen suddenly walked closer to Zhu Qing and said, "I'm going to find a restroom."

Leaving the crowd, he glanced around, finding no restroom, but spotted a dark alley not far away. He quickened his pace and walked straight towards it.

In the alley, Ling Chen found a concealed corner, faced the wall, and exposed his back. Suddenly, a rush of wind approached, closing in on Ling Chen. In the darkness, a glint of light seemed to flash. Just as the light was about to touch Ling Chen, he swiftly turned and punched backward.

Bam!

With a dull thud, something seemed to be knocked away, hitting the alley wall. Ling Chen retracted his fist, focusing ahead; he saw a man clutching his chest, a trickle of blood at the corner of his mouth, struggling to get up. However, that punch used half of Ling Chen's strength, breaking several of the man's ribs at least.

After several tries, the man still couldn't stand, finally sitting against the wall.

"Call out your companions." Ling Chen said blandly. He had already sensed back in the crowd, there weren't just one, at least four or five.

As his words fell, faint sounds came from around him. Ling Chen looked around, seeing nothing but the dark night. But he wasn't surprised; if he guessed right, these people should be from the Zhu Family, all trained assassins. As for why these assassins were troubling him, no need to guess, surely because of that Lin Ziyang.

He had heard Zhu Qing mention before, the Zhu Family and the Lin Family, being in a marriage alliance, Zhu Family provided free protection for the Lin Family. So the Lin Family similarly had access to a group of assassins at their command.

Though all were assassins, Ling Chen had no fear. Having spent so much time with Zhu Qing, he understood a bit about an assassin's skills, knew how they would hide and close in on the enemy.

After a while, noticing the assassins hesitated to act, Ling Chen smiled and said, "Alright, since you all won't act, I'll take the initiative." With that, he picked up several stones from the ground, flicked his wrist, and sent the stones flying in various directions. Shortly after, moans came from the surrounding darkness. Clearly, those hidden assassins were hit by the stones.

Too weak!

Ling Chen shook his head. These assassins assigned to the Lin Family must be outer sect disciples with very mediocre skills, having him, a Heavenly List expert, handle them was truly overkill.

"Friend." Ling Chen looked at the man sitting against the wall and said, "Go back and tell your master not to provoke me anymore. Some people can't be trifled with, or you'll end up losing both the lady and the troops."

Chapter 1630 Lin Zi Yang (4)

Leaving the alley, Ling Chen quickly returned to Zhu Qing's side. She complained, "What took you so long?"

"You can't blame me for that. There wasn't a restroom nearby, so I had to walk a bit further. So, how about it, keep walking around?" Originally Zhu Qing had come to keep him company, but it ended up with him accompanying her around the night market.

"No more. It's all the same stuff from here on, nothing interesting. Besides, it's getting late, we should head back. If we're any later, Uncle will probably call and rush us home."

Ling Chen smiled and said, "Don't be afraid. If someone scolds you when we get back, I'll be your backup."

A little after nine in the evening, Ling Chen and Zhu Qing took a car back to the Zhu Family. As soon as they stepped into the Siheyuan, they saw Zhu Houchang standing in the courtyard, as if he had been waiting for them to return. "Mr. Zhu." Ling Chen walked up to greet him and asked, "It's so late, why aren't you asleep yet?"

Expressionless, Zhu Houchang said, "I'd like to rest, but you two are making too much trouble and no one can get any peace." With that, he turned his gaze to Zhu Qing beside him and said, "The Family Head is in the front hall, and the Lin Family people are here too. You come with me."

"What about me?" Ling Chen pointed at his own nose and asked.

"Mr. Ling, you are an honored guest of the Zhu Family. Please go back to your room and rest for now. We Zhu Family people will handle our own affairs."

Hearing this, Ling Chen was about to speak, but Zhu Qing at his side shot him a look, signaling him not to say anything more. Seeing this, Ling Chen shrugged and nodded. "Alright then. Since you're dealing with family matters, I won't intrude."

Leaving the Siheyuan, Ling Chen took out his phone and called Hu Fei, asking, "Fatty, any results on what I asked you to look into last time?... Okay, then send the file to my phone in a bit."

After hanging up, Ling Chen didn't actually go back to his room. Instead, he circled around to the back of the Siheyuan and quietly climbed in over the courtyard wall.

At this moment, in the front hall of the Siheyuan, Zhu Qing followed behind Zhu Houchang and slowly walked in. As soon as she entered, Zhu Qing very consciously moved to the side, lowered her head, and said nothing, like a child who had done something wrong.

"Qing." Sir Zhu, sitting in the main seat, spoke up. "Tell me what you were doing outside just now. Let me hear it."

"Family Head, I just walked around the night market with Ling Chen. I didn't do anything else."

"You've got some nerve, daring to lie in front of your Family Head." At this moment, an old man sitting beside Sir Zhu slammed the table and glared at Zhu Qing.

"Grandpa, don't get mad yet. This really has nothing to do with Qing."

Hearing that familiar and annoying voice, Zhu Qing frowned slightly. She hadn't expected Lin Ziyang to even call over the Lin Family Head. After listening to Lin Ziyang, the gray-haired old man sat back down and said, "Ziyang, you say this has nothing to do with her, then who does it have to do with?"

"Grandpa, it's all because of some guy named Ling Chen. If he hadn't been stirring things up and causing trouble between us, Qing and I wouldn't have had so many misunderstandings."

"Nonsense." Zhu Qing said angrily, "This has nothing to do with Ling Chen. Stop wrongfully blaming people."

"Shut up!" Sir Zhu said in a low, sharp voice. "I didn't give you permission to speak. Stand there and behave yourself." Then he turned his head to the old man beside him and said, "Lin Rong, it's normal for the younger generation to squabble a bit. I'll give them a good scolding later. You don't need to take it too seriously."

The old man named Lin Rong nodded slightly. "Alright, since you've put it that way, if I keep pressing the issue, it'd be like I'm not giving the Zhu Family any face." He paused, then continued, "The main reason I personally came to the Zhu Family tonight is for my grandson's matter. Zhu Qian, our two families aren't strangers, so I'll just speak frankly. Back then you promised me you'd marry Zhu Qing to my grandson. I've always kept that in mind. They're not young anymore; it's about time they settled down. I say we might as well pick a good day and get their wedding done, and our two families can use the chance to have a lively celebration."

Zhu Qian nodded and was about to respond when Zhu Qing suddenly cut in, "Family Head, I don't want to marry him."

"Presumptuous!" Zhu Houchang snapped. "No manners at all. The two Family Heads are talking and you think it's your place to interrupt? Besides, have you forgotten the Zhu Family rules? You don't get to decide your own marriage. Everything follows the Family Head's arrangements. Lin Ziyang is the most outstanding Disciple of the younger generation in the Lin Family. Marrying him is your blessing."

"But I don't like him."

"You..." Zhu Houchang's expression darkened and he said coldly, "Have you forgotten how the Zhu Family has raised and taught you? You even dare talk back to me now. You're getting more and more unruly. Someone come and lock her in the confinement room so she can reflect properly."

"Hold on." Lin Rong spoke up. "It's normal for young people to have a bit of temper. There's no need to punish her. Besides, she's my future granddaughter-in-law. What if she gets hurt?"

Hearing this, a trace of embarrassment flashed in Zhu Houchang's eyes. Zhu Qing had been raised by him alone; in his heart, she was like his own daughter. Naturally, he didn't want Zhu Qing to do something she didn't want to do. When Lin Rong suddenly showed up at the Zhu Family with Lin Ziyang, he knew this matter would be hard to handle. That was why he had publicly scolded Zhu Qing, planning to use it as an excuse to punish her, in other words, to stall for time as much as he could. But since Lin Rong had voiced his "plea" for mercy, he couldn't continue. Otherwise, if he made it too obvious, the Lin Family would definitely realize he was siding with Zhu Qing, and that would inevitably affect the relationship between the two families.

"Zhu Qian, I've said what I needed to say. What do you think?"

Zhu Qian pondered for a moment, then said, "The Zhu Family has always kept its promises. Since we agreed, we won't go back on our word. Rest assured, Qing will become your Lin Family's granddaughter-in-law sooner or later. It's just that... she currently has a mission, and I'm afraid she won't have time to prepare for the wedding. How about this—after all, the two of them are still young—we wait a few more years. How does that sound to you?"

"Ziyang already mentioned this to me, and I was just about to bring it up. Since Zhu Qing is the Lin Family's future daughter-in-law, I won't allow her to have contact with other men. I heard that this Ling Chen is a young man, so I hope you can terminate Zhu Qing's mission or find someone else to replace her."

"That might not be very appropriate." Zhu Qian hesitated.

"There's nothing inappropriate about it." Lin Ziyang said, "Sir Zhu, I really don't like that Ling Chen. He's too arrogant, doesn't put me in his eyes at all, and even taught a lesson to our Lin Family people right in front of me. If it weren't out of respect for the Zhu Family, I would never let him off so easily."