

The Beauty 1631

Chapter 1631 Deception (Part 1)

"Zhu Qian, I've said so much, let me be clear: you should know how much debt the Zhu Family owes the Lin Family. With the current income of the Zhu Family, it won't be paid off even in twenty years. However, as long as Zhu Qing marries Ziyang, I can decide to waive one-third of the Zhu Family's debt. I'm already showing a lot of sincerity, now it's up to you."

"I..." Zhu Qian glanced at Zhu Qing, who was lightly biting her thin lip, hesitated for a moment, and nodded, "Alright then..."

"Wait! Family Head, for such a big matter, you should think it over before making a decision."

As the voice came, everyone turned their heads to look, only to see Ling Chen walking in from the entrance of the main hall. Zhu Houchang frowned slightly and said, "Mr. Ling, this is Zhu Family's matter, please don't interfere."

Ling Chen smiled slightly, "Mr. Zhu, I'm not speaking to you as a business client of the Zhu Family now, but as a friend of Zhu Qing. This concerns her lifelong happiness, and as her friend, I naturally care about it." Saying this, he found a seat for himself and sat down, looking at Lin Rong and Lin Ziyang opposite him, "You two, Zhu Qing is unwilling to marry into your Lin Family, why are you stubbornly forcing her? Your Lin Family is big and wealthy, surely you have no shortage of women to choose from, if you ask me, you shouldn't force it, a forced melon is not sweet."

"You are Ling Chen?" Lin Rong scrutinized Ling Chen coldly and said, "This is our family's private matter. We don't need an outsider like you interfering. I advise you not to meddle, lest you invite trouble for yourself."

Ling Chen laughed indifferently, "I value friendship above all, and would do anything for a friend. Since Zhu Qing is my friend, this matter is not idle to me at all. Instead, I advise you not to overdo it in life and affairs, it's best to leave room for yourself."

Hearing this, Lin Rong squinted and said, "What do you mean by that?"

"Lin Family Master, I think you know well in your heart, why make it so explicit? In short, Zhu Qing will not marry Lin Ziyang, even if the Zhu Family agrees, I won't agree." Saying this, Ling Chen turned to Zhu Qian, "Family Head, I apologize in advance if there's any disrespect, please forgive me."

"Ling Chen!" Lin Ziyang, who had been standing behind Lin Rong, shouted angrily, "It looks like you're tired of living. Get out of here immediately, or I'll make sure you won't leave alive."

"Mr. Lin, what you say really scares me. However, since your attempt to assassinate me at the night market failed, do you think you have another chance now?"

At these words, Lin Ziyang's expression changed instantly, hurriedly saying, "Don't falsely accuse me, I haven't done anything."

Ling Chen replied with a sly smile, "Whether you did or not, the Zhu Family should know best. Family Head, am I not right?" My safety in Dengzhou City is managed by the Zhu Family; besides Zhu Qing who is always by my side, there are quite a few Zhu Family elites following secretly. Therefore, the Zhu Family must know about my assassination encounter at the night market. However, due to the relationship between the Zhu Family and the Lin Family, as long as no one initiates this matter, the Zhu Family will certainly turn a blind eye, pretending nothing happened."

Faced with Ling Chen's inquiry, Zhu Qian did not give a direct response but diverted the topic elsewhere.

"Ling Chen, can you do me a favor and not intervene in this matter anymore? I know you care about Zhu Qing, but this involves the Zhu Family regulations. If exceptions are made because of you, how can the Zhu Family demand anything from other disciples in the future?"

"Family Head, I heard about the marriage alliance between the Zhu Family and the Lin Family from Zhu Qing. Honestly, in this day and age, you're still arranging marriages, which is illegal. You should keep up with the times, advocate for free love, and not sacrifice the lifelong happiness of Zhu Family disciples for family bloodline and development." Ling Chen advised sincerely, "Family Head, over the centuries, too many have sacrificed their happiness for the growth and continuity of the Zhu Family. If this continues, the Zhu Family will inevitably be ruined by its own members."

Zhu Qian sighed lightly and said, "Ling Chen, I understand everything you said, but we have our own difficulties."

"Difficulties?" Ling Chen shook his head and said, "Family Head, I understand the difficulties you mentioned, but what I want to say is that the Zhu Family ended up in its current predicament because you trusted others too easily. If it weren't for the Lin Family, you wouldn't be in this suffering."

"Ling Chen, what are you saying?" Lin Ziyang shouted, "You'd better watch your words and not falsely accuse people."

"Have I falsely accused you?" Ling Chen replied with a meaningful smile.

"Enough!" Lin Rong said coldly, "Zhu Qian, I've had enough of this person, please get him out immediately, don't let him spout nonsense here."

"Lin Family Master, is it because I struck your sore spot that you're afraid to let me continue talking?"

Lin Rong snorted lightly, "My Lin Family has never regretted any conduct, so why should I fear anything? I just don't want you, an outsider, damaging our relationship between the two families." Saying this, he looked at Zhu Qian, "The Zhu Family and Lin Family are old friends, you know us best. Over the years, whenever the Zhu Family faced financial difficulties, our Lin Family would unhesitatingly lend a helping hand, helping you through tough times. Now, an outsider defames my Lin Family in your presence, attempting to sow discord between our families. Are you going to just sit back and ignore it? Well! Since you're keen on supporting him, I won't say much more. Let's settle accounts today, pay off the debt the Zhu Family owes to the Lin Family completely, and from now on, our two families will regard each other as strangers."

"Lin Family Master, please calm down," Zhu Houchang interjected, "We do not intend to support Ling Chen, but..." He hesitated for a moment before walking over to Ling Chen, saying, "Mr. Ling, you should return to your room first. We'll handle Zhu Family matters ourselves."

Ling Chen glanced at Zhu Qian, who remained silent, and couldn't help but laugh, saying, "Family Head, I get it; the Zhu Family's biggest problem is being too rigid, remembering the Lin Family's kindness to you, thereby allowing them to have their way. Alas! It's a pity, the Zhu Family once thrived in the martial arts world, but now must endure such bullying from them. If it were me, I would have wiped them out long ago."

"Ling Chen, don't be excessive," Zhu Qian said sternly, "The Lin Family is a friend to the Zhu Family, you're not allowed to speak of them that way."

"Family Head, you consider the Lin Family a friend, but they don't consider you a friend. Instead, the Zhu Family is unwittingly manipulated by them like fools." Saying this, Ling Chen turned his focus to Lin Rong and Lin Ziyang nearby.

"Ling Chen, don't be too arrogant," the Zhu Family was very angry.

Chapter 1632 Deception (2)

"Don't rush to get angry, listen to me first. Years ago, your Lin Family joined forces with the Zhu Family for investments, which ended in a complete loss. As a result, the Zhu Family borrowed a large sum of money from your Lin Family to proceed. Later, you continued to lend considerable amounts to the Zhu Family. The principal along with interest has now amassed to an astronomical number, one difficult for the Zhu Family to repay quickly with their income. Using this as leverage, your Lin Family tied the Zhu Family closely to you, then secretly used the Zhu Family's strength to tackle competitors, thus enabling the Lin Family to develop and expand rapidly. Lin Family Master, am I wrong?"

Lin Rong said in a deep voice, "What exactly are you trying to say?"

"I had someone investigate those companies the Zhu Family invested in. They are actually secretly controlled by your Lin Family. The so-called investment failures were orchestrated by your Lin Family as nothing more than an act. You used this to deceive the Zhu Family's savings over many years, then lent the swindled money back to the Zhu Family. Honestly, I admire your tactics; it's quite the profitable venture without risk."

Ling Chen laughed and said, "Unfortunately, the Zhu Family remains oblivious, believing in your talk of investment failure. The Zhu Family has focused solely on nurturing internal talent for years, none are proficient in finance, so there's no way for them to discern truth from fiction. To them, your Lin Family has been in commerce for generations, and is a renowned business family in Dengzhou City, unlikely to deceive them in this aspect. That's why I said earlier, the Zhu Family is quite naïve. If not for this, their situation wouldn't be so strained."

"Nonsense," Lin Ziyang shouted angrily, "Ling Chen, stop trying to sow discord here, nobody will pay attention to your words." With that, he turned to Zhu Qian and said, "Sir Zhu, this man's too presumptuous, are you still going to tolerate him?"

Zhu Qian quietly observed Ling Chen, remained silent for a moment before slowly speaking, "I want to hear him out. Ling Chen, everything requires evidence; how can I believe you based just on your words alone?"

Ling Chen pulled a phone from his pocket, stood up, and walked over to Zhu Qian, "Here, my friend just sent me this information. There's records of all six companies your Zhu Family invested in. Additionally, my friend found an internal share allocation document. From the allocation, you can see the Lin Family is the major shareholder of these companies. However, they've remained behind the scenes, keeping you none the wiser. Look, it's all here, you can take a close look. If there's anything you don't understand, I can arrange for a financial expert to explain the Lin Family's methods to you."

Zhu Qian accepted the phone from Ling Chen and, as he read the information on the screen, his expression grew increasingly displeased. After a while, with a loud bang, Zhu Qian stood abruptly from his seat, glaring angrily at Lin Rong beside him, and gritted through his teeth, "Lin, how could I have trusted you, yet you dare to conspire to deceive my Zhu Family and cheat us out of our money?"

Feeling Zhu Qian's rage, Lin Rong's expression finally changed, stammering, "Zhu... Zhu Qian, don't believe his words, it's not like that, you... let me explain."

"Hmph! The evidence is clear, what more could you explain? What, are you trying to deceive me again? Guards!"

As Zhu Qian's words fell, over a dozen Zhu Family disciples swiftly charged into the front hall.

"Lin, I'll give you a chance to confess. If you don't want to die, you'd better honestly clear this up. Otherwise, neither you nor your grandson will walk out of here alive."

"I... I..." Lin Rong opened his mouth but didn't know what to say. In all the years he's known Zhu Qian, he has never seen him so angry. Seeing his cold eyes, he senses that Zhu Qian isn't joking. If he can't provide a clear answer, he might not get out alive.

"Sir Zhu, this is all a misunderstanding, please don't listen to him." After a moment of shock, Lin Ziyang reacted first, hastily speaking.

"Don't listen to him? What, should I keep listening to you and be deceived?" Zhu Qian said coldly, "Does your Ling Family think our Zhu Family is easy to bully?"

"No, no, not at all," Lin Rong quickly said, "Zhu Qian, things aren't as you think. Investment failures are quite normal, it's not our Lin Family scheming to cheat the Zhu Family's assets."

"Lin Rong, at this point, will you still not tell the truth?" Zhu Houchang raised his brow and said, "Fine, if so, don't blame us for turning our back." With that, he drew a flying knife from his body and headed directly toward Lin Ziyang.

Seeing Zhu Houchang's action, Lin Ziyang's expression changed dramatically. He hurriedly stepped back with a pale face and asked, "What... what do you plan to do?"

"The Zhu Family has many ways to deal with enemies, one method is gouging their eyes out. I'll take out one of your eyes first to see if your grandfather will speak the truth. If he continues to find excuses for the Lin Family, then I'll gouge out both your eyes. Ziyang, this won't be pleasant, brace yourself."

Upon hearing this, Lin Ziyang jumped in shock, disregarding everything and dashed outward. However, someone had long been watching his movements, and as he tried to flee, two Zhu Family disciples swiftly approached, pinning his arms on either side, forcibly restraining him, leaving him unable to move.

Zhu Houchang walked up, holding the flying knife, and said indifferently, "Ziyang, don't blame me; blame your grandfather, who refuses to save you."

Watching the gleaming knife flick before him, Lin Ziyang's face turned as white as a sheet, trembling uncontrollably.

"Grandpa, Grandpa, please, save me," Lin Ziyang shouted loudly.

Lin Rong gritted his teeth, turned to look at Zhu Qian, "If you want to use this method to coerce our Lin Family, fine, then as you wish. From now on, the debts between the Zhu Family and Lin Family are entirely written off, are you satisfied? Release him!"

"Is that all?" Ling Chen interjected with a smile, "Lin Family Master, you're too naïve. Your Lin Family did so much wrong to the Zhu Family and dare to say you want it all written off? Moreover, the Lin Family clearly owes the Zhu Family, how can you talk about writing it off? It seems you're still hoping to turn a big matter into a little one. Unfortunately, do you really think the Zhu Family is so easy to deceive?"

Zhu Qian stared emotionlessly into Lin Rong's eyes, silent but gestured to Zhu Houchang. The latter immediately understood, gripping the knife and slowly brought its sharp tip closer to Lin Ziyang's eye.

Chapter 1633 Deception (Part 3)

Seeing the situation, Lin Ziyang hurriedly turned his gaze to his grandfather. However, upon seeing the latter's hesitant and conflicted expression, he felt utterly disappointed. At this point, Lin Rong was still considering; would he really have to sacrifice a pair of eyes?

Thinking of this, Lin Ziyang couldn't help but shout out, "I'll speak, I'll tell everything. This was all orchestrated by the Lin Family; the Lin Family designed a scheme to deceive the Zhu Family out of their fortune."

"Ziyang, shut up!" Lin Rong's expression turned anxious as he hurriedly rebuked. Unfortunately, Lin Ziyang had already spoken, and even if he wanted to stop him, it was too late.

"Finally, someone speaks the truth." Zhu Qian said calmly, but everyone could discern the underlying anger in his tone.

"Ling Chen, you may leave now. This is a private matter of the Zhu Family; let us handle it ourselves."

Upon hearing Zhu Qian's words, Ling Chen nodded, said nothing more, and turned to leave the front hall. His task had been completed, and there was no need for him to intervene further.

...

The next day.

At eight o'clock in the morning, Ling Chen had just gotten up and finished washing up when he heard a series of 'knock knock knock' sounds coming from outside the door. When he opened the door, he saw Zhu Qing standing outside, her delicate face adorned with a faint smile.

"You seem to be in a good mood." Ling Chen said with a smile.

"Thanks to you. Come on, the Family Head and Uncle are waiting for you in the front hall."

In no time, the two of them arrived at the front hall of the Siheyuan. Upon entering, they saw Zhu Qian chatting with Zhu Houchang, both with smiles on their faces.

Seeing Ling Chen enter from outside, Zhu Houchang and Zhu Qian both rose to welcome him, a treatment that hadn't been received prior. "Mr. Ling, we are truly grateful to you for this; without you, the Zhu Family might have remained in the dark."

"You're too kind. If it were just me, I wouldn't have been able to expose the Lin Family's conspiracy; it was thanks to everyone's cooperation." Ling Chen said.

When Zhu Qing mentioned the Zhu Family's failed investments the other day, Ling Chen found it peculiar. He considered himself a somewhat successful businessman, with many enterprises and investment projects, each yielding considerable profits. However, the Zhu Family had consecutively failed in several projects, which was abnormal. Either their luck was exceedingly poor, or someone was deliberately sabotaging them. With this in mind, he asked Hu Fei to investigate.

However, the Lin Family was very cautious; all traces of the investment company's initial involvement had been meticulously wiped clean. Fortunately, Hu Fei was skilled enough to find some faint clues. But despite having some leads, there wasn't enough concrete evidence, so Ling Chen had a quick idea to take a risk and try something.

Last night, the phone he handed to Zhu Qian didn't have any so-called evidence, only some leads and his message to Zhu Qian, hoping the latter would cooperate with him to stage a drama to expose the Lin Family's conspiracy.

Unexpectedly, Zhu Qian's acting was so convincing that Lin Rong and Lin Ziyang were both shocked.

"Family Head, may I ask how you will ultimately handle the Lin Family issue?"

"The Lin Family will repay double the amount they swindled from the Zhu Family." Saying this, Zhu Qian's face was full of smiles. The Zhu Family had previously been burdened with huge debts, and all hard-earned money was being siphoned by the Lin Family. Now, without the debt issue, the Zhu Family accounts even have additional funds, enough for better development. As the Family Head, he was naturally pleased.

"Ling Chen, we really owe you thanks; had it not been for your help, who knows how long the Lin Family would have continued deceiving us." Zhu Qian sighed, "I reflected on what you said last night and found it quite sensible; as times are evolving, our Zhu Family should also keep up, instead of clinging to old rules. If the Zhu Family had more talents proficient in other areas, we wouldn't have been fooled by the Lin Family. You were right, in this matter, the Zhu Family was like a fool, being deceived while still feeling thankful."

"The Lin Family was indeed bold enough to try swindling the Zhu Family, without realizing what kind of status the Zhu Family holds. If things had gone really wrong, no matter how wealthy, the Lin Family would have met a dead end."

Zhu Houchang nodded and said, "From now on, our Zhu Family will have no relations with the Lin Family. Given this incident, it's estimated that the Lin Family will have a hard time recovering in the short term."

"Family Head, the Zhu Family's business model indeed has issues; although this time, a significant amount of money was recovered from the Lin Family, you should think about how to operate efficiently. If you are interested, I can introduce some projects, while not bringing exorbitant profits, they will have reliable annual yields. Of course, if you don't trust me, you can cultivate financial talents to aid the Zhu Family's financial management."

"Ling Chen, it's not a matter of not trusting you; after all you've done for the Zhu Family, we already consider you not as a client but a friend. But because of the Lin Family issue, we're somewhat apprehensive, so please understand; we must thoroughly discuss to plan the future directions for the Zhu Family."

Listening to Zhu Qian's words, Ling Chen laughed and replied, "It's alright, I'm merely offering a suggestion; how you proceed is up to the Zhu Family, I won't interfere." Pausing slightly, he then transitioned, "Family Head, I've been with the Zhu Family for several days, but there are many matters awaiting me at the Dragon Tiger Hall, and I feel it's time I take my leave."

"Alright, then I won't keep you." Zhu Qian said, "I know you came to the Zhu Family hoping to inquire about the Netherworld Snake. Unfortunately, I couldn't offer much help, but last time you mentioned the Dark Pavilion; perhaps I can provide some leads."

Ling Chen's eyes brightened, and he hurriedly asked, "What kind of leads?"

"Previously, I told you the Dark Pavilion sends a gift to the Zhu Family once a year. The Zhu Family's security is fairly decent, yet the Dark Pavilion always delivers the gift right to the doorstep, while not a single presence is detected. For this reason, we specially investigated to figure out who exactly delivers the gift. Since there's only one opportunity per year, I tasked the Zhu Family's top experts to personally handle it and lurk nearby. One night, more than twenty years ago, during the late hours, someone quietly crept into the Zhu Family and dropped off the items, then swiftly departed. The expert responsible for surveillance noticed the person was adept at concealing themselves, with techniques resembling us. Therefore, the individual could effortlessly infiltrate the Zhu Family."

"However, I sent out a Heavenly List assassin from the Zhu Family that time, though the opponent was very strong, they couldn't evade his sight. Because I had ordered not to alert the enemy, the Heavenly List assassin stayed hidden, and secretly tailed the person to determine their whereabouts. In the end, through that person, we discovered a location, which should be the Dark Pavilion's secret base."

Chapter 1634 - Overseas Expansion (1)

"A secret base?" Ling Chen's heart leapt with joy. It seems this trip to the Zhu Family wasn't in vain, there's finally some gain. "Family Head, have you investigated that secret base?"

Zhu Qian shook his head and said, "No. You already know about He Honggang's situation, and whether he established the Dark Pavilion or not, the Zhu Family wants to avoid unnecessary trouble. Moreover, the Dark Pavilion bears no ill will towards the Zhu Family. If you wish to investigate, I can provide the location of the secret base to you, but I must remind you, since the Dark Pavilion inherited the skills of our Zhu Family, they're definitely not to be trifled with. You'd better be careful."

Ling Chen replied, "Family Head, rest assured, I'm well-aware."

After bidding farewell to the Zhu Family, Ling Chen, accompanied by Zhu Qing, took a car with Chen Junfeng and Ji Gang to Dengzhou City Airport and directly returned to East Sea City.

Sitting in the plane's first class cabin, Zhu Qing asked, "When do you plan to send people to investigate the location of the Dark Pavilion's secret base?"

With a smile, Ling Chen replied, "I'm not going to investigate."

"You're not?" Zhu Qing asked in confusion, "Why, you've hardly gotten a clue, are you going to give up?"

"Why should I proactively investigate the Dark Pavilion?" Ling Chen retorted, "You have to know, the enemy of the Dark Pavilion is the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Recently, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was attacked, suffering heavy losses, and now everyone suspects it's the work of the Dark Pavilion. You've encountered people from the Dark Pavilion, you should know their strength; even the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion dares to make a move against them, they're definitely formidable opponents. So, why should we set up a powerful enemy for ourselves?"

Upon hearing this, Zhu Qing immediately understood, "You're thinking of giving this clue to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and letting them investigate?"

"Of course." Ling Chen nodded, "I imagine the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would want nothing more than to immediately seek revenge on the Dark Pavilion. We just watch on the sidelines without intervening, what we need to guard against now is the Netherworld Snake." Mentioning the Netherworld Snake made him rub his temples in frustration. Despite finding some documents from the Zhu Family, they were centuries old, uncertain if they can be of use now.

After several hours of flight, the plane finally landed at East Sea International Airport.

Upon returning to the base, Ling Chen skipped resting and went straight to the control room to find Hu Fei who was busy. "Fatty, any progress with the information I sent you a couple of days ago?"

"I sent people to verify a few places, and they've all been abandoned or changed beyond recognition; after all, it's been centuries, those places couldn't possibly remain unchanged. However, there are two places that seem suspicious, currently under deeper investigation without further news."

"Which two places?" Ling Chen asked.

"Last time, Zhu Qing went to Jin Hai City and found a lot of suspicious places. I compared your data, and indeed, the Netherworld Snake had a secret base in Jin Hai City centuries ago. However, back then, Jin Hai City wasn't called that name, but the place is the same. Moreover, the location of that secret base coincides with the intel provided by Zhu Qing. I've made a preliminary judgment that the Netherworld Snake's secret bureau in Jin Hai City still exists."

"You mentioned earlier, there are two places under deeper investigation, besides Jin Hai City's place, which is the other one?"

"The other is the former headquarters of the Netherworld Snake." Hu Fei said with interest, "This place is rather intriguing."

"Intriguing?" Ling Chen asked doubtfully, "What does that mean?"

"I've investigated the location of the Netherworld Snake's headquarters; it's a very remote place. But over the centuries, with development, it gradually became a national tourist area. In it, there's a very famous spot called the Stalactite Cave, it's a naturally-formed landscape with numerous entrances, interconnected like a spider web, sprawling through every corner of the mountain. The Netherworld Snake's headquarters was built deep within the Stalactite Cave."

"Are there still people at that headquarters now?"

"The team sent to investigate hasn't reported back yet, but if I were the mind behind the Netherworld Snake, I'd definitely choose that place to re-establish the headquarters of the Netherworld Snake. The reason is simple, the tourist spot has a high visitor flow, receiving thousands every day. If anything happens, they can quickly blend in with the tourists to evacuate. Even if they can't leave, they can take some tourists hostage. Nobody would dare to do anything against them. What do you think?"

Ling Chen nodded in agreement; Hu Fei's analysis made a lot of sense. But everything was merely conjecture; the exact situation would have to wait for the front-line intelligence personnel to finish their investigation.

"I'll go rest first, inform me immediately if there's any news."

"Okay." Hu Fei responded.

Leaving the control room, Ling Chen returned to his room and lay on the bed, holding his phone and browsing through the contact list. When he saw Nanrong Wanqing's name, he felt a bit uncomfortable inside. Originally, he got along very well with Nanrong Wanqing, and marriage was just a matter of time. But now, due to Jiang Yue'e's return, they ended up in their current predicament.

Back at the Nanrong Family at the time, he was momentarily upset and agreed with Jiang Yue'e not to associate with Nanrong Wanqing moving forward. Thinking back now, he actually feels regret; he shouldn't have said those angry words back then.

Mulling over this, Ling Chen decided to call Nanrong Hao instead. Although he wanted to reach out to Nanrong Wanqing, he worried that Jiang Yue'e might be nearby. The phone connected, and immediately a noisy sound came from the other end as if there were many people.

"Hey! Chen." Hearing Nanrong Hao's drunken voice, Ling Chen asked, "Where are you drinking, you brat?"

"Company dinner, celebrating my sister's career reaching new heights."

"Is that so?" Ling Chen asked with a smile, "What's the good news, tell me?"

"Chen, you don't know yet, our Hongyu Group has opened its doors to the world, preparing to enter the international stage." Nanrong Hao's voice carried a hint of excitement.

"You're planning to develop overseas?" Ling Chen was somewhat surprised. He previously discussed this topic with Nanrong Wanqing, and she mentioned she didn't have great ambitions; she would be satisfied if she could make Hongyu Group a leading domestic enterprise. Now, Hongyu Group's intention to expand abroad seemed to deviate from Nanrong Wanqing's initial plan.

"My sis wasn't originally inclined, but mom persuaded her. Mom has quite a few acquaintances and connections abroad, providing chances for Hongyu Group to expand. Hongyu Group is already a top-tier domestic enterprise; by stepping out internationally, it could further level up to become a truly global corporation."

"Then let me congratulate you guys first." Ling Chen said, though feeling slightly uneasy inside.

Chapter 1635 - Overseas Expansion (2)

"Chen, when do you have some free time? Come over to my place when you do. My sister is going abroad today to prepare for the branch office, and it might take a long time before she returns."

"Is she going alone?"

"No, Mom is going with her. Since all her connections over there are Mom's, she definitely needs to go. I'll stay here to continue managing Hongyu Group."

Ling Chen nodded to himself, a bitter smile slowly forming on his lips.

Jiang Yue'e has put so much effort into separating Nanrong Wanqing and me; she even convinced Nanrong Wanqing to develop her career abroad. Once Nanrong Wanqing goes overseas, the chances for us to meet will certainly decrease. Many long-distance relationships end without resolution because of the distance.

Forget it! No point in dwelling on these thoughts. Jiang Yue'e is Nanrong Wanqing's mother; I can't possibly go and cause trouble for Jiang Yue'e. If I can't handle our relationship properly, even if I eventually end up with Nanrong Wanqing, how would I face Jiang Yue'e?

"Hey! Chen, why are you silent over there? Is there something wrong with my phone?"

Hearing Nanrong Hao's voice from the other end of the call, Ling Chen smiled slightly and said, "No, I was just thinking. Okay! Since it's your company dinner, I won't interrupt you anymore. Let's get in touch when we're both free." With that, he prepared to hang up the phone.

"Chen, my sister is leaving the day after tomorrow. Would you like to join me in seeing her off?"

"I..." Ling Chen hesitated for a moment, then said, "No, please tell your sister for me that I'm busy with a lot of things at the moment and can't spare time to go to the airport. I hope she'll understand."

"My sister is right here. Why don't you tell her yourself?"

"No need for that, I have things to do, I'm hanging up now." Not waiting for Nanrong Hao to say more, Ling Chen already hung up the phone.

Putting down his phone, Ling Chen spread his arms wide, lying in a 'big' shape on the bed, quietly staring at the ceiling above, his mind in a turmoil. Before he realized it, a drowsy feeling overcame him, his eyes slowly closed, and he drifted into a deep sleep.

In the blink of an eye, it's been three days since returning to East Sea City.

These past days, Ling Chen immersed himself in a hectic state, dealing with all the matters pressing on Dragon Tiger Hall, not giving himself a moment of free rest.

Watching over him all the time was Zhu Qing, who couldn't help but advise, "What's been up with you lately? Since you came back, you seem like a different person."

"Do I?" Ling Chen gave a light smile and said, "Nothing much, just feeling that I've been too lax before, so now I'm set on working hard and striving for development. Although Dragon Tiger Hall is one of the major forces in Martial Arts, its current situation is rather awkward." Saying this, he took out a document and placed it in front of Zhu Qing, saying, "This just came today. In just a few days, several branches of Dragon Tiger Hall were suppressed by other forces because we seized their resources and interests."

"If I remember correctly, Dragon Tiger Hall currently has a total of 13 branches."

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Exactly! Apart from the headquarters in East Sea City, there are 13 branches. The Beijing branch was opened earlier, with a solid foundation and Mr. He overseeing things, so no one dares to cause trouble there. However, the other twelve branches were established later; one reason is their short establishment time, and another is that the responsible personnel lack experience

and ability to handle such incidents. These branches are all located in major cities, where resources are plentiful, but some of these major cities have Martial Arts families present. Previously, no one was interested in competing, so they let us open as many branches as we wanted. But the current situation is different. Today, Martial Arts is gradually rising, showcasing a trend of blossoming diversity, and all Martial Arts families and forces are eager to take a bite out of this meat bun. Whoever can grab the meat will be determined by each family's abilities."

"How are you planning to respond?" Zhu Qing asked.

"Not long ago, Elder Tong and those two veterans warned me that Martial Arts is nearing a chaotic phase, so I've mentally prepared for this inevitable suppression from other forces. If you gobble up the most meat, people will definitely be jealous. If you wish to protect this piece of meat, you will have to make a move. But the current issue is, with so many envious eyes, who do you teach a lesson to? Moreover, we don't have enough resources to wage war with everyone."

"Isn't this simple?" Zhu Qing said, "If you can't do certain things, let us handle them. Anyone daring to hassle Dragon Tiger Hall, kill a few of them first, and see if others take heed."

Ling Chen shook his head and said, "You're oversimplifying it. Dragon Tiger Hall now is like a piece of juicy meat, which countless eyes are watching. If not handled well, or if there is the slightest mistake, it could serve as an excuse for others, putting Dragon Tiger Hall in a situation of being besieged by other forces. Previously, we had Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to help divert attention, but now, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion suffered a major attack, inflicted heavy losses, and barely manages itself. In Martial Arts World's strongest force undoubtedly, us Dragon Tiger Hall. Only by suppressing us can others have the opportunity to rise; do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I'm not stupid." Zhu Qing rolled her eyes at Ling Chen and asked, "So, how are you planning to proceed?"

"These past two days I pondered seriously, Dragon Tiger Hall's many branches are beyond our management, so we'll have to sacrifice some branches and concentrate our power to solidly defend several locations. This way, other forces will compete for the interests we abandon and won't fix their eyes on us for a time."

"What's the point of doing that? The problem still exists; it's only a matter of time."

Ling Chen smiled, "With enough time, we can make arrangements accordingly. In short, our Dragon Tiger Hall won't initiate conflict or fight with others; we only need to secure our own turf. You're also part of the Martial Arts World, so you understand what Martial Arts means. If there's no conflict, then how does Martial Arts progress and evolve? Martial Arts now is at a unique period, forces from all sides are making a comeback, and undercurrents are surging. But any tactics are merely processes; the true victor is the one who can laugh till the end."

Zhu Qing nodded absent-mindedly, looked at Ling Chen with a peculiar expression, and said, "I still feel you're acting strangely, you never bothered with such matters before."

Ling Chen touched his nose and said, "Elder Tong is bogged down with Martial Arts Association matters now, and Mr. He is stationed in Beijing. The entire future of Dragon Tiger Hall rests solely on me; of course, I need to be more earnest. Although I'm not power-hungry, Dragon Tiger Hall is something I established with painstaking efforts; I can't just watch it get divided up by others."

At this point, Ling Chen switched the subject and asked, "By the way, how's the matter I asked you to handle last time?"

Chapter 1636 - Mother and Daughter's Night Talk

"I've already released the information about the Dark Pavilion through special channels. With Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's intelligence capabilities, I'm sure they're already aware."

"Very good, keep an eye on them and monitor Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's every move. If possible, probe into the Dark Pavilion's details," Ling Chen instructed.

Initially, he planned to directly inform Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion about the intelligence on Dark Pavilion, but after reconsidering, he felt it was inappropriate. Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had just endured an attack; if he delivered the Dark Pavilion intelligence now, though his intentions were good, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would certainly suspect he had ulterior motives, perhaps trying to incite a conflict between Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and Dark Pavilion, leading both sides to self-destruct, and allowing him to reap the benefits.

Therefore, it was more prudent to release the information through special channels, allowing him to observe in secret and uncover the Dark Pavilion's details.

Knock, knock, knock!

As this thought passed through, there was a knock at the door outside the office. Ling Chen said "Come in", and soon the door was pushed open from the outside as Hu Fei walked in, carrying a folder.

"Fatty, why are you here?"

"Been cooped up too long at the base, came out to stretch my legs." Saying so, Hu Fei tossed the folder onto the desk, found a chair, and sat down. "The people I sent for investigation have reported back, all the materials are in there, have a look."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen opened the folder, took out a document, and carefully perused through it. After a while, he frowned slightly, "Isn't Netherworld Snake's headquarters there?"

Hu Fei nodded, "That's the investigation's result. They searched the entire Stalactite Cave several times but found nothing. According to the data I've checked, decades ago, the government funded construction at the Stalactite Cave, discovering during the process a large hidden space inside, filled with tables, beds, and weapons. I think that must've been Netherworld Snake's headquarters back then. But the government-appointed archaeologists believed the place was a secret military storage site from ancient times, so it became a protected tourist site now."

"So all this was just a false alarm then."

"Sort of. But don't be too disappointed; although nothing was found there, there's been progress in the Jin Hai City area."

Ling Chen eagerly asked, "Did you find Netherworld Snake's secret base in Jin Hai City?"

"Correct! We've pinpointed the location, there's surveillance 24/7, you can take action whenever you want."

"Not so fast, keep monitoring their movements in secret, and try to confirm how many people are in that secret base. Also, inform the front line staff to watch out for any suspicious old men," Ling Chen referred to the old man who was the black-clad assassin from that night, that man is terrifyingly skilled.

To this day, Ling Chen is still unsettled by him. If that man is in the secret base, then their actions need a long-term strategy. Otherwise, reckless attack would result in immense losses."

"Don't worry, I'll instruct them." After a pause, Hu Fei shifted the topic, "Now that business is finished, how about we talk about something else?"

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Nanrong Wanqing," Hu Fei winked at Ling Chen.

Ling Chen rubbed his nose, turned his gaze elsewhere, and asked with a faint expression, "Why did you suddenly bring her up?"

"Did you think I wanted to? You're not a kid, I generally avoid meddling in personal affairs, but yesterday Nanrong Hao called me, asking about you. He mentioned that recently your attitude towards Nanrong Wanqing has been cold, possibly intentionally avoiding her. I feel if you don't want to be with her, you should just say it, as adults, breaking up is not something unacceptable nowadays. Marriage and divorce are common these days," Hu Fei said earnestly.

Ling Chen chuckled bitterly, "Things are more complicated than you think, I...I promised her mother to avoid her in the future and not meet with her."

"You mean Jiang Yue'e?" Hu Fei slightly startled, puzzled, "Why? You and Nanrong Wanqing are mutually affectionate, why doesn't she support you two?"

"She probably thinks I'm living in danger, hence doesn't want Wanqing to fall into the same situation. Truth be told, I can understand her point of view; as parents, no one wants their children living in danger."

"So you gave up?"

"Not giving up, just..." Ling Chen said as he felt a headache coming on, "Right now, I'm unsure how to handle it. Besides, there's so much to deal with now, I have no time to think about romance. Let's get through this period first."

Zhu Qing, sitting next to them, chimed in, "No wonder you've been working so hard lately, to force yourself not to think about this."

"Alright, both of you stop teasing me."

"Okay, okay, since you don't want to hear it, I won't say anymore. You'll figure it out yourself." With that, Hu Fei stood up and walked straight out of the office.

...

Night fell.

Jiang Yue'e came to a bedroom door and knocked gently. "Come in!" Hearing Nanrong Wanqing's voice from inside, Jiang Yue'e pushed the door open and walked in. As soon as she entered, she saw Nanrong Wanqing standing beside the balcony, gazing into the distance, seemingly admiring the bustling night scene of this unfamiliar city.

Hearing footsteps from behind, Nanrong Wanqing slowly turned her head toward Jiang Yue'e and said, "Mom, why haven't you rested yet?"

"I came to check on you. What's the matter? Not used to this city?"

Nanrong Wanqing shook her head, "It's not about being unused, just...I feel uncomfortable. Although I used to travel abroad often and would return in a few days, this time it's different; I'm here for a long stay and don't know when I'll return home."

"Silly child," Jiang Yue'e gently stroked Nanrong Wanqing's hair and said, "I'm here with you, aren't I? Besides, we're starting a business, aiming to put Hongyu Group on a bigger stage— isn't that exciting?"

"Mom, perhaps one or two years ago, I would've been very interested, but now... Nanrong Hao is the future heir of the Nanrong Family, he's begun to grow, I feel these matters should be handled by him, not me. I've done enough for the Nanrong Family, it's time I enjoy my own life."

"How can you think like that," Jiang Yue'e said with some displeasure, "You're still young, there's a long way ahead in your future. Whether it's you or Hongyu Group, this is just the beginning, your glory has yet to arrive."

Chapter 1637 - Wiped Out

"Mom, I understand what you mean," Nanrong Wanqing said. "But everyone has their own aspirations, and my aspiration is not to be a strong woman. In the past, I took over the Hongyu Group not because I loved the work, but because Nanrong Hao was not proactive and someone had to step up to take on the responsibility. If I had to choose, I would rather be an ordinary person, someone without responsibility, without obligations, just purely enjoying my own life."

She paused slightly, then continued, "Ling Chen visited my home that day. Both my brother and I were at work, only you and Grandpa were home. The security personnel told me that he didn't go to see Grandpa that day, but met with you instead. I don't know what you talked about, but I can sense his change. It's been a week since you met, and he hasn't called me, not even to see me off for my trip abroad. He had Nanrong Hao tell me that he's very busy lately and can't find the time. However, having known him for so long, I understand him well; no matter how busy he is, he would definitely make time to see me."

"Wanqing, Mom was just having a casual chat with him that day, we didn't discuss anything significant. Even if I did say something, it was for your own good."

"Mom, you don't have to hide things from me. I know you don't like Ling Chen; otherwise, you wouldn't have introduced me to all those outstanding young men. But what I want to say is, everyone has their own fate and the right to choose. No matter what my future looks like, as long as it's my own choice, I'll never regret it. Besides, I'm already an adult, a woman capable of independent thinking, so Mom, please don't make decisions for me anymore."

Having heard Nanrong Wanqing's words, Jiang Yue'e's expression slightly changed, struck silent, seemingly unsure of what to say.

After a while, she slowly spoke, "My dear daughter, I'm more experienced than you in many matters. As time goes on, you'll understand my well-intentioned efforts."

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't. But what I want to say is, the reason I agreed to go abroad with you this time isn't because you persuaded me, but because I wanted to. I've heard Ling Chen's situation hasn't been great lately, and many people might trouble him. Although I'm not very familiar with the world he's in, I know I can't provide much help to him. Moreover, my presence might pose a risk to him. So leaving temporarily is the best choice for both of us."

"Wanqing, you..." Jiang Yue'e sighed and said, "You're still too young. I know Ling Chen is an excellent young man; I've done some investigations myself. Ling Chen is indeed much stronger than others his age, but he's not very loyal to one person. As far as I know, you're not the only woman around him. How can I trust putting you in his hands? What if he falls for someone else in the future?"

Nanrong Wanqing replied calmly, "I've said it before, as long as it's my decision, I'll never regret it. As for Ling Chen's character, I know him better than you." After finishing, she turned and walked to the bathroom door, saying, "Mom, it's getting late, get some rest."

Watching the bathroom door close, Jiang Yue'e shook her head helplessly and walked straight out of the bedroom.

In the blink of an eye, over a week passed. Just as Ling Chen anticipated, the entire Martial Arts world was in turmoil, with conflicts occurring daily. Forces that just rose up were immediately suppressed by alliances of other forces, leaving bloody chaos everywhere.

Fortunately, Ling Chen was prepared early on, giving up several branches of the Dragon Tiger Hall, leaving only the five branches closest to East Sea City and Beijing. This way, all personnel could be concentrated together, so even if trouble came knocking, they could handle it independently.

During this period, Ling Chen stayed at the Dragon Tiger Hall headquarters, daily staying informed of the latest dynamics in the Martial Arts world, and making arrangements for Dragon Tiger Hall. There were so many events happening in the Martial Arts world lately that the situation changed daily, requiring him to make adjustments at any time to ensure the safety of Longhu Martial Arts Hall.

"Ling Chen." At this time, Zhu Qing quickly ran in from outside, her face full of anxiety.

"What happened?" Ling Chen asked. Having known Zhu Qing for so long, he never saw her so anxious.

"We just received news that Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion sent people to the Dark Pavilion's secret base, resulting in a battle where Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's people were completely wiped out, not a single survivor left."

Hearing this, Ling Chen's expression changed sharply, standing up, "What did you say? They were all killed?"

Zhu Qing nodded, "That's right! As far as I know, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion sent disciples from Yangxin Pavilion this time, including Elder Du's disciple Yang Tao, and they all died in battle."

Yang... has died! Ling Chen muttered to himself, his face becoming extremely unpleasant. He had encountered Du Kang's disciple Yang Tao several times and considered him a friend; he never thought he would die.

Lingering in thought for a moment, Ling Chen quickly asked, "What's the reaction from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?"

"I'm not sure about that; it's a recent event, and Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion must have just received the news. Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was attacked not long ago, suffering significant losses, and now this has happened. It's a heavy blow to Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Considering their centuries-old foundation, this time, it's going to be difficult for them to endure."

Ling Chen pondered for a while, then spoke, "Remember, never let Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion know that we were the ones who leaked the information to them. Otherwise, they'll definitely resent us." His concern wasn't baseless, as it was their leaked information that led Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion to lose so many outstanding disciples. Yang Tao and the others were Yangxin Pavilion disciples, the future pillars of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Their deaths meant that Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion might not be able to cultivate Heavenly List experts in the coming decades. For a force like Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, losing talent was a fatal blow.

So if Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion learned the truth, there's no guarantee they wouldn't resent them.

"I know." Zhu Qing responded, "It seems we all underestimated the strength of Dark Pavilion. That a secret base could have so many powerful experts."

"Were Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion people killed after entering that base?"

"Yes."

"Last time you mentioned, the Dark Pavilion was established by He Honggang, and its members are all proficient in assassination techniques. Yang and the others were too careless, recklessly barging into a base that has been operated for so many years; it's no surprise they encountered an ambush."

"What do we do now?" Zhu Qing asked, "Should we continue monitoring that base?"

"Have everyone stay concealed and not expose themselves. Also, keep an eye on Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's movements; I want to know how they react."

"Okay."

Chapter 1638 - Heavenly Dragon Sect

Watching Zhu Qing leave, Ling Chen slowly sat back down in his seat. Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had suffered consecutive blows; it was uncertain if they could recover. In the midst of his thoughts, a disciple from the Dragon Tiger Hall rushed in from outside.

"Vice Hall Master, someone is looking for you outside."

"Who?"

"I don't recognize them; they claim to be from the Heavenly Dragon Sect."

"Heavenly Dragon Sect?" Upon hearing this unfamiliar name, Ling Chen recalled having heard it before; it seemed like he had seen the sect's name in a report a few days ago. The Heavenly Dragon Sect was an emerging force in the Martial Arts community, only established less than a month ago, composed of various martial arts individuals. Currently, the Martial Arts world is in a state where heroes are competing for dominance; individual strength alone is insufficient to secure a position, forcing people to either depend on an existing power or establish a new one to contend with the powerful.

Despite being newly formed, the Heavenly Dragon Sect was made up of seasoned folks in the Martial Arts community and was quite strong and united. In less than half a month, the Heavenly Dragon Sect had already defeated two forces, gained fame quickly, and enhanced its strength further.

The Heavenly Dragon Sect coming to find him at such a time was doubtful. Ling Chen considered this and said, "Please bring them to the guest room; I will be there shortly."

After tidying himself up, Ling Chen headed straight to the guest room. Upon entering, he saw two people sitting in the spacious room, a man and a woman, both in their forties. The man had an ordinary appearance with a horse-like face and sallow complexion, giving an unhealthy impression. The woman looked attractive, but age left traces on her face, necessitating heavy makeup, making her appear striking.

Seeing Ling Chen come in, the two immediately rose from their seats, cupped their fists, and said, "Mr. Ling, sorry to bother you."

Ling Chen smiled gently and responded, "Not at all; it's a joy to have guests from far away. Please sit!"

After everyone sat down, Ling Chen glanced at the two and asked, "The Heavenly Dragon Sect certainly has a lot to handle recently. What brings you both to me?"

The middle-aged man smiled and replied, "We came specifically to visit Mr. Ling. Mr. Ling, let me introduce myself; I am Tan Gang, the Vice Sect Leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect, and this is the Hall Master, Mo Shuiyan. Mr. Ling, let's speak frankly; we mainly came here to seek cooperation."

"Cooperation?"

"Yes," Mo Shuiyan nodded and said, "Mr. Ling, you understand the current situation best. The Martial Arts community is not only crowded with forces but they are mixed; various types of people are trying to seize opportunities. Although the Heavenly Dragon Sect can't compare to a major force like Dragon Tiger Hall, it has gained some reputation and secured a position in the Martial Arts community. However, to truly remain undefeated, our power alone is far from sufficient. Only through sincere cooperation can both parties achieve a win-win situation."

Ling Chen smiled and said, "I understand your intentions, but Dragon Tiger Hall has no interest in joining this conflict. Moreover, anyone reasonable wouldn't deliberately seek trouble with us unless they have a death wish. Since Dragon Tiger Hall can peacefully weather this storm, why start trouble proactively? Doesn't it just cause unnecessary problems? Am I right?"

Upon hearing this, Tan Gang and Mo Shuiyan exchanged a glance, then said, "Mr. Ling, indeed, no one dares to provoke Dragon Tiger Hall. But don't you want Dragon Tiger Hall to rise further and become the true overlord of the Martial Arts community? Mr. Ling, if you are willing, assign us enough personnel, and we'll handle the dirty work of expanding territories. Later, all profits will be split seventy-thirty. You need to do nothing to gain maximum benefits and bring Dragon Tiger Hall to the pinnacle. Mr. Ling, any smart person wouldn't turn down such an opportunity."

"I won't deny, your proposal is quite tempting, but unfortunately, I'm not ambitious, so I'm not interested. You might as well try appealing to others; perhaps someone will be swayed by your proposal."

Upon seeing Ling Chen rise to leave, Tan Gang quickly said, "Mr. Ling, are you truly going to give up such a good opportunity?"

"I'm very sorry, I'm not interested, and I don't want to repeat myself a third time. If you don't have anything else, I'll go about my business." Finishing his speech, Ling Chen said no more and directly left the guest room.

Watching Ling Chen's departing figure, Tan Gang turned to Mo Shuiyan next to him and said, "Looks like Qi Yong was right; Ling Chen is hard to persuade."

"What shall we do now, should we continue to contact him?"

Tan Gang shook his head, saying, "No need, he clearly rejected us earlier; staying longer only wastes time and creates a bad impression. Rather be straightforward and leave some good impression."

Mo Shuiyan frowned and said, "This means the plan we set with Qi Yong can't be achieved."

"No rush, let's think of other ways; we'll eventually get a piece of Dragon Tiger Hall."

Upon leaving the guest room, Ling Chen didn't return directly to the office but wandered leisurely around the Longhu Martial Arts Hall's training ground. Although conflict ravages the Martial Arts world, daily life at the Dragon Tiger Hall continues unaffected. At this moment, nearly a hundred disciples were training in the large training ground, with more than ten instructors carefully guiding and explaining.

These disciples are the future elites of Dragon Tiger Hall, to train them, the hall indeed invested a lot of energy and resources.

"Sir Chen." At this moment, Ling Chen noticed Chen Junfeng standing on one side of the training ground, attentively watching the disciples train, so he went to greet him.

"I heard that the people from Heavenly Dragon Sect just came looking?"

Ling Chen smiled and nodded, saying, "Sir Chen, your information is quite updated."

"What did they want from you?"

"They talked about cooperation."

Chen Junfeng said calmly, "Looks like they left disappointed."

"Indeed, Sir Chen knows me well. I don't know much about the Heavenly Dragon Sect, but I've seen reports of their interactions with other forces. Their methods are neither honorable nor concerned about any means to achieve their goals. Based on this point alone, the Heavenly Dragon Sect doesn't appear trustworthy for cooperation; who knows when they might betray us. Moreover, their proposal seems tempting but is essentially exploiting our power to gain benefits for themselves. Although we'd gain benefits too, I feel things aren't that simple."

"Being cautious at times like this doesn't hurt." Pausing, Chen Junfeng asked, "When will Elder Tong return? He's still the Martial Arts Hall Master of Dragon Tiger Hall. In Beijing for so long, is he not prepared to handle affairs?"

Chapter 1639 - Porridge Girl Leaves Seclusion

"Elder Tong is currently extremely busy, where would he have the time to manage the Dragon Tiger Hall."

"What is he busy with?"

"As you know well, recently disputes have erupted throughout the Martial Arts world. Some oppressed forces are seeking refuge from the Martial Arts Association, while others want the association to mediate. In any case, it's a mess. In my opinion, with the current situation, the Martial Arts Association is bound to become like a shell with only a name. Elder Tong doesn't need to waste all his energy on this."

"And what about your brothers, have you got any news from them?" Chen Junfeng asked.

Ling Chen knew he was referring to the eight notable individuals. Recently, he had also been in contact with Qiu Yong, who was currently enjoying a leisurely life traveling. However, Qiu Yong had told him that if needed, with just a word, the eight notable individuals would immediately return to his side.

Just as he was thinking about it, Ling Chen's phone suddenly rang.

He answered, saying, "Hello, who's this?" As soon as he heard the familiar voice on the other end, his expression instantly brightened and he eagerly said, "Where are you? I'll come pick you up right away."

After hanging up the phone, Ling Chen rushed out of the Longhu Martial Arts Hall without so much as a word to anyone. Over half an hour later, he arrived alone at the airport by car. As soon as he got out, his gaze locked onto a young woman.

"I'm over here." Ling Chen waved his arms and quickly ran over, embracing her with a look of delight.

Feeling Ling Chen's warmth and happiness, the woman's face was full of smiles. But, noticing the glances from around, her cheeks flushed a little, and she gently pushed Ling Chen away, teasingly chiding, "This is a public place, at least mind your image."

Ling Chen chuckled and said, "What does it matter, nobody knows us anyway."

"They may not know me, but they certainly know you, you're a national icon."

Recalling past events, Ling Chen shyly laughed and said, "You know about that too? Don't worry, people nowadays forget easily; no one remembers what I look like. Let's go, I'll take you back to the hall first." With that, he took the luggage from the porridge girl's hands and walked with her towards the parked car.

If he counted, it had been a long time since he last saw the porridge girl. Not that he didn't want to, but his father wouldn't allow it. Ling Kun had told him that the porridge girl was at a critical point in her training and needed to seclude herself to break through. This retreat lasted over half a year, and when he received the call from the porridge girl earlier, he thought he had heard wrong.

"Dad allowed you to come to East Sea City, looks like you successfully broke through the bottleneck?" Ling Chen asked while driving.

The porridge girl nodded slightly and said, "Fortunately, Master helped; otherwise, I wouldn't have exited seclusion so quickly. Master said that your situation isn't great right now and that you need help urgently, so I was sent to assist you as soon as possible."

"It's alright, it's not as exaggerated as Dad said. The situation is chaotic, but it hasn't affected the Dragon Tiger Hall yet. By the way, what level have you reached now?" Ling Chen asked curiously, knowing about the porridge girl's talent. Back when they first met, she was already challenging Earthly List experts and had even sparred with He Ziyun once.

After all this time and breaking through a bottleneck, her abilities must have improved greatly.

"I've touched the threshold of the Heavenly List, but there's still quite a distance to break through. Originally, Master wanted me to continue in seclusion to try and break through the Heavenly List in one go, but due to your situation, he allowed me to exit early."

"That's not bad. With your talent, reaching the Heavenly List is only a matter of time."

"When I flew to East Sea City today, a major event happened in Beijing; I wonder if you've heard about it?"

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen asked with keen interest, "What major event? Tell me."

"A new family has appeared in Beijing."

"A family? Is that considered a major event?"

"Of course," the porridge girl said. "Because this family is the Su family."

Su... Su Family... Ling Chen's heart jolted. Could it be... His expression changed slightly as he asked, "The Su family you mentioned, could it be..."

"It's them."

Though the porridge girl didn't say any names, Ling Chen had already guessed who it was. Other than Su Cheng'en and Su He, which other Su Family could attract such attention? Thinking of this, he couldn't help but smile and said, "They really are bold; after doing so many bad things and causing public outrage in the Martial Arts community, they still dare to brazenly establish the Su family. Aren't they afraid others will cause trouble for them?"

"Who would cause trouble for them now? Everyone is too busy with their interests, caught in endless disputes. Master told me the Su family is very shrewd; they understand the current situation well, hence their decision. With the Su family's establishment, they'll inevitably join this power struggle sooner or later. But what interests me more is the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion; I wonder how they'll react."

"The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is currently in a difficult period. Su He and the others rebuilding the Su family might have been motivated by this as well. If the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion falters, they can ensure the Su bloodline continues. As long as the Su Family exists, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion stands a chance to rise again." At this point, Ling Chen suddenly laughed and said, "No matter what, Su He has been a mentor to me; since the Su family is being rebuilt, I should send a gift to express my sentiments."

"Be careful they don't chase away whoever you send. If not for you, they wouldn't be in this mess."

Ling Chen shrugged and said, "Is that my fault? If blame must be assigned, it's on them." While speaking, the car reached the entrance of the Dragon Tiger Hall.

Upon entering, as the disciples saw Ling Chen carrying luggage with a beautiful woman alongside him, their faces lit up with knowing smiles. Ling Chen lightly coughed, pretending not to notice their stares, and quickly led the porridge girl towards the dormitory building. Ling Chen had a thick skin, but the porridge girl was more bashful. Facing everyone's gaze, her face turned bright red, like a tempting red apple, inviting a bite.

With her head down, ignoring the laughter around them, the porridge girl closely followed Ling Chen's steps, directly reaching the dormitory.

Inside the room, Ling Chen breathed a sigh of relief and turned to look at the porridge girl behind him. Seeing her flushed face, he couldn't help but laugh.

Hearing his laughter, the porridge girl glared at him, playfully reprimanding, "You're still laughing. How can I face anyone after this?"

"What's there to be embarrassed about? You're my woman, isn't it normal for me to hold your hand?"

The porridge girl was slightly startled, never expecting Ling Chen to say something like this. Having known him for a long time, he had never been so forthright. However, Ling Chen's words made her heart feel sweet, as if filled with honey. What woman doesn't want to be publicly acknowledged by her man?

Chapter 1640 - Trouble Comes Knocking (Part 1)

Looking at the tears shimmering in the porridge girl's eyes, Ling Chen couldn't help but get anxious and hurriedly asked, "What's wrong, why are you suddenly crying?"

The porridge girl shook her head, wiped the tears from the corner of her eye with her hand, but there was a hint of a happy smile on her lips. Her tears were not for any other reason, but out of emotion. She knew in her heart that Ling Chen had many women around him, but she was the most special one. When she was very young, she was taken in by her master and personally taught. From a few years old,

Ling Kun instilled a thought in her, that she would become Ling Chen's fiancée in the future. Even if she couldn't be Ling Chen's wife, she would become his woman, protecting him all her life and at all costs, even sacrificing her life if Ling Chen were in danger.

All along, she knew in her heart that the position next to Ling Chen wasn't reserved for her. So, she couldn't be his wife, only his woman, silently contributing from behind, without seeking return.

Today, in front of everyone, Ling Chen held her hand and brought her into his room. This was a silent declaration to everyone that she was his woman. Although Ling Chen had many women around him, not many could enjoy this kind of treatment.

"Grandma, don't cry. I didn't upset you." Ling Chen scratched his head, not knowing how to console her. She was fine just a moment ago. How did she suddenly start crying? A woman's thoughts are really hard to understand.

Seeing Ling Chen's helpless expression, the porridge girl couldn't help but chuckle and said with pouted lips, "Look how scared you are. I just find my tears excessive, so I let them flow a bit. You don't need to worry."

"How can I not worry? I'm most afraid of seeing women cry. There's a saying: A woman's tears are a deadly weapon that no one can resist."

Upon hearing Ling Chen's description, the porridge girl rolled her eyes at him and said with mock anger, "Am I that terrifying?"

"Of course not." Ling Chen smiled as he pulled her wrist, gently bringing her in front of himself. The porridge girl's delicate body once again nestled into his embrace. Feeling the strength of his arms, the porridge girl didn't struggle anymore, instead, she peacefully hugged him, savoring the warmth of his chest.

The two lingered in the room for the afternoon. Ling Chen originally wanted the porridge girl to sleep directly in his room, but under her strong protest, he had to arrange for her to stay next door. No choice; girls have thin skin and feel embarrassed.

At dinner time, Ling Chen openly brought the porridge girl to the dining hall. Given the previous experience, although the porridge girl was still a bit shy, she was much better and could at least greet Zhu Qing and Chen Junfeng openly.

"This is great, we have one more helper now."

As soon as Zhu Qing spoke, Chen Junfeng immediately chimed in, "You said it wrong, it should be Ling Chen has gained a wise assistant."

Hearing Chen Junfeng's jest, the porridge girl's face blushed with shyness, making Ling Chen somewhat dazed. Thinking back to when he first met the porridge girl, she was indifferent, seeming not to care about anything, with the same expression on her face forever. Nowadays, the porridge girl seemed like a transformed person, precisely, she had gained more femininity.

After a few teasing remarks, Zhu Qing shifted the topic to serious matters.

"News from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion just came in."

At the mention of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the smile on Ling Chen's face immediately faded as he asked, "What's the situation?"

"Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is very silent, no response as if nothing has happened. But the guards around Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have been reinforced a lot. We have no way of knowing the internal situation. You have friends at Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, right? Why don't you call them?"

Ling Chen shook his head and said, "The control at Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is very strict; all signals are being monitored. If I call, wouldn't I be exposing myself? Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion would certainly know that this has something to do with me. Forget it! Since Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion doesn't want exposure, we'll act as if we don't know anything for now and don't intervene."

"There's one more thing," Zhu Qing said. "As per your instructions, I have collected some intelligence regarding Heavenly Dragon Sect. As far as I know, they've been closely associating with Dangyang Sect recently."

"Dangyang Sect?" Ling Chen raised his eyebrows and said, "Are you talking about Qi Yong? Hmph! Qi Yong is really stubborn. Last time, at the Martial Arts Tournament, he got ambushed and almost lost his life, then secretly retreated to Dangyang Sect, never showing up again, not even dealing with the Martial Arts Association matters. I thought he had learned his lesson and was ready to be the sect leader quietly. Now it seems his ambition is still intact."

Speaking of this, Ling Chen shifted his tone and asked, "Since Heavenly Dragon Sect is close to Dangyang Sect, why did people from Heavenly Dragon Sect come to us for cooperation?"

"How would I know? It's been just an afternoon, even if I were more capable, I couldn't collect all intelligence at once. But your guess might be correct; Heavenly Dragon Sect is up to something, possibly with other intentions. Anyway, we shouldn't be interacting with such people."

Boom!

As they spoke, a loud noise suddenly came from outside the dining hall. Ling Chen quickly raised his head to look outside the window, noticing flames seem to be erupting from the Martial Arts field of Dragon Tiger Hall.

Seeing this situation, his expression changed slightly, promptly put down his chopsticks, and quickly ran out. Upon reaching the outside, Ling Chen took a close look and found that the source of the fire was an SUV. Although the vehicle had already exploded, its speed remained unchanged, continuing forward until it crashed into a wall and stopped.

"Ling Chen, look over there."

Following Zhu Qing's pointing direction, Ling Chen saw the main gate of Dragon Tiger Hall had been crashed open, presumably by the SUV just now.

"Zhu Qing, check if there's anyone in the vehicle, Sir Chen, come outside with me to have a look." As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Ling Chen tapped his foot lightly, and the Nine Yang Qiankun Step instantly unfolded, his whole person like a gust of wind, quickly rushing out of the hall.

The SUV wouldn't charge into Dragon Tiger Hall for no reason, nor explode mysteriously. Someone must be behind this. It's an unusual time; if someone is looking for trouble with Dragon Tiger Hall, it's not surprising.

However, after searching around Dragon Tiger Hall, he found no suspicious traces, presumably escaped far away.

"A group of cowards, dare to act but not show their face."

"Sir Chen, let's go back and take a look."

Returning to Dragon Tiger Hall, the SUV that caught fire had already been extinguished, the whole vehicle emitting blue smoke. Although it hadn't been burning for long, the fire was intense, leaving only the frame as all other parts were burnt.

At this moment, Zhu Qing and the porridge girl stood beside the SUV, seemingly sorting through something.