

The Beauty 1641

Chapter 1641 Trouble Comes Knocking (2)

Ling Chen quickly stepped forward and asked, "Did you find anything?"

Zhu Qing pointed to a pile of ashes on the ground and said, "This was just found in the car; it should be metal, because the explosion's impact shattered it. Porridge girl and I are collecting fragments to see if we can piece them back together."

"Notify everyone to strengthen the defense of Dragon Tiger Hall and closely monitor any suspicious individuals nearby," Ling Chen said solemnly. The occurrence of such an incident at this time is definitely not a coincidence. Originally, Dragon Tiger Hall hoped to peacefully weather this storm, but it seems someone doesn't want them to have an easy time.

As soon as he finished speaking, Kaelina hurried over from not far away, her face looking troubled as she said, "Just received news that the Beijing Branch, Jinhai Branch, Liancheng Branch, and Zuo Zhou Branch have all been attacked by unknown assailants. No casualties have been reported yet."

After hearing Kaelina's report, Ling Chen's heart sank. Longhu Martial Arts Hall headquarters and four branches have all been attacked; someone must have planned this. What do those people want? Are they planning to start a war? Even at its peak, Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion might not have the ability to do this, let alone other forces. Who could it be?

Ling Chen furrowed his brow, deep in thought. Beside him, Chen Junfeng spoke up, "I think this might be a harassment attack intended to catch our attention."

Harassment attack? Hearing this, Ling Chen said puzzledly, "Sir Chen, who would be so free as to cause trouble? Dragon Tiger Hall has never provoked anyone; those people coming to us, do they really think we're easy to bully?" After speaking, he walked to the side, took out his phone from his pocket, and dialed Hu Fei's number.

Last time, because of the Netherworld Snake incident, the surroundings of Dragon Tiger Hall were filled with surveillance facilities, and each intersection and corner was closely monitored. Since they couldn't find those responsible for the attacks, perhaps the surveillance caught some valuable clues.

After the call, within ten minutes, the surveillance video was sent to Ling Chen's phone. Opening the video, the screen soon showed a few people driving an off-road vehicle slowly approaching Dragon Tiger Hall. Among these people was a woman, whom Ling Chen instantly recognized as Mo Shuiyan, who had come to discuss cooperation last time.

Heavenly Dragon Sect! Ling Chen narrowed his eyes as a sharp glint flashed through his ink-like pupils.

He had already expressed his attitude to the people of Heavenly Dragon Sect, having no interest in cooperation, yet they secretly did this. It seems his feeling at the time was correct: Heavenly Dragon Sect wasn't sincere about wanting to talk cooperation with Dragon Tiger Hall but had other intentions.

After closing the video, Ling Chen went directly to the office, followed by Chen Junfeng and his team, ready for instructions.

"Ling Chen, should we continue to investigate that vehicle..."

Zhu Qing hadn't finished speaking when Ling Chen waved his hand, saying, "It's a waste of time." Since they already knew who's behind the trickery, there's no need to check the clues left in the off-road vehicle.

"Notify all branches later, let them strengthen their defenses. Heavenly Dragon Sect's sudden action must not be just simple harassment; they must have other moves."

"Heavenly Dragon Sect?" Chen Junfeng said sternly, "Are you saying that all of this is orchestrated by Heavenly Dragon Sect behind the scenes?"

Ling Chen nodded and said, "Today Zhu Qing gathered intelligence about Heavenly Dragon Sect, one of which mentioned their closeness with Dangyang Sect's Qi Yong. I suspect they've long reached an agreement. Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has suffered repeated setbacks with diminished strength. Besides Dragon Tiger Hall, the other influential force in Martial Arts is Qi Yong-led Dangyang Sect. As everyone knows, Qi Yong is very cunning, he has consolidated some minor factions to boost his own strength. Right now, if Qi Yong can suppress Dragon Tiger Hall, then Dangyang Sect will certainly become the most powerful force in Martial Arts."

"Hmph! That idea is too naive," Zhu Qing said. "Any strong force has a rich heritage; even if he gains the upper hand temporarily, what good will it do?"

"Everyone has their own ideas, which doesn't concern us," Ling Chen rubbed his eyebrows. What he wanted to know most now was what Heavenly Dragon Sect's next move would be. Just as he pondered, the phone on the desk suddenly rang.

Ling Chen picked up the receiver and barely had time to speak before his face turned dark. Noticing the change in Ling Chen's expression, porridge girl asked with concern, "What's wrong?"

"Jinhai Branch has been besieged."

"What?" Everyone was shocked and hadn't managed to say anything before the phone rang again.

"Zuo Zhou Branch, Liancheng Branch, Changtian Branch, Xinlin Branch have all been besieged simultaneously." After hearing these messages, the atmosphere of the office instantly became overwhelmingly tense, with everyone falling into silence.

"This can't be possible!" After a while, Chen Junfeng spoke, "Even if Heavenly Dragon Sect and Dangyang Sect collaborated, they couldn't mobilize so many people; the disciples of these five branches combined number nearly a thousand, where did they get so many people?"

Ling Chen nodded slightly, "Sir Chen is right; it's impossible for Heavenly Dragon Sect and Dangyang Sect to send out so many people. As far as I know, Dangyang Sect's total strength doesn't exceed two hundred, and Heavenly Dragon Sect has only about one hundred people. Zhu Qing, I'll trouble you with this matter, quickly find out the situation."

Zhu Qing responded and, without another word, turned to leave the office.

"Ling Chen, what now?" porridge girl asked, "Should we send reinforcements?"

Ling Chen shook his head, "It's too late; each branch's location is far apart. Even if we hurry now, it will take several hours, by then the battle will be over. Clearly, the opposition came prepared; we'll have to

swallow a silent defeat this time." Pausing, he looked at porridge girl and Kaelina, "You two go prepare for the aftermath arrangements; there will definitely be significant personnel losses this time."

After assigning all tasks, Ling Chen leaned against the chair, lightly tapping his forehead. The sudden occurrence of so many things indeed made him feel overwhelmed. All along, Dragon Tiger Hall was managed by Tong Zhentian and He Ziyun. But since he's been in charge recently, he felt pressure from various fronts.

Heavenly Dragon Sect... Qi Yong... Ling Chen squinted slightly, with a hint of chilling murderous intent in his deep-set eyes.

In this Martial Arts upheaval, he originally intended to preserve neutrality, not getting involved in the disputes of major forces. But now it seems some things can't be avoided even if one tries. Even if he doesn't seek trouble with others, someone will come to him willingly.

So be it! Since they want to fight, he'll accompany them to the end and see who laughs last.

Chapter 1642 Jinyao Martial Arts Hall

Two hours later, Ling Chen received the latest information from various branches. As expected, the opponents came prepared this time. Although the five branches had sufficient manpower, they still suffered significant losses, with heavy personnel casualties.

Looking at the report in hand, Ling Chen's face was devoid of expression, and Zhu Qing, who was responsible for gathering intelligence, didn't dare to breathe heavily. Knowing Ling Chen for so long, she had never seen him like this before, so calm, it was almost terrifying.

After a while, Ling Chen finally spoke: "Let the porridge girl and Kaelina handle the aftermath, and send the injured to the hospital as soon as possible. Also, tally up the remaining combat-capable personnel and have them all gather in East Sea City."

Zhu Qing nodded and said, "I've investigated those who attacked us. Apart from the Heavenly Dragon Sect and the Dangyang Sect, there are several other forces. It's initially estimated that at least eight martial arts factions participated in this operation."

"Investigate the backgrounds of all the forces involved in the action. Dragon Tiger Hall won't let this go easily. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. The loss they inflicted on Dragon Tiger Hall, I will repay tenfold."

"I understand."

As soon as Zhu Qing left, Ling Chen's mobile phone rang as expected. It was Tong Zhentian calling. Once the call connected, Tong Zhentian's deep voice came over: "I know everything that's happened, and no matter what you plan to do, I will support you. Additionally, I will finish handling the Martial Arts Association's matters as soon as possible and return to help you."

"Elder Tong, how much do you know about the Heavenly Dragon Sect?" Ling Chen asked.

"The sect leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect is named Guo Halong, but I've never met him. I've only heard people from the Martial Arts Association mention him as a very insidious guy who likes to use underhanded tactics. Furthermore, the current headquarters of the Heavenly Dragon Sect is in Yangcheng, which was previously a Martial Arts Academy."

"Yangcheng?" Ling Chen's heart stirred; wasn't that the former territory of the Jiang Family.

"Here's a suggestion for you; for the time being, don't touch the Heavenly Dragon Sect. From what I've gathered, they are colluding with the Dangyang Sect, and their influence is quite large. Although Dragon Tiger Hall is not weak, it cannot withstand too much depletion. If you want revenge, it's best to start with other targets first."

"Understood."

...

The next day.

The tirelessly working Zhu Qing finally collected enough intelligence. A list was handed over to Ling Chen. Looking at the list in front of him, Ling Chen wore a playful smile.

"Jinyao Martial Arts Hall." Seeing this name, Ling Chen recalled some impressions. When the Martial Arts Tournament was held, participants from Jinyao Martial Arts Hall had sparred against those from Dragon Tiger Hall, using very ruthless moves, resulting in the elimination of Dragon Tiger Hall. It was unexpected that they also participated in last night's action.

"Let's start with Jinyao Martial Arts Hall."

As soon as Ling Chen finished speaking, Zhu Qing immediately said: "The hall master of Jinyao Martial Arts Hall is named Song Qingde, currently fifty-six years old, a master on the Earthly List. Jinyao Martial Arts Hall was founded by the Song Family and has been passed down for over a hundred years, with over a hundred disciples. Additionally, Jinyao Martial Arts Hall has two branches, bringing the total number to about two hundred people."

It's clear that Zhu Qing did her homework thoroughly, conducting detailed investigations into the background of each force.

Ling Chen nodded with satisfaction; Zhu Qing's intelligence gathering ability is commendable. "Sir Chen, what do you think?"

Chen Junfeng echoed: "I have no objections. Jinyao Martial Arts Hall is relatively moderate among these forces, neither too strong nor too weak. It's perfect for killing a chicken as a warning to monkeys, letting others know our Dragon Tiger Hall's stance."

"I'll lead this operation myself. Sir Chen, Ji Gang, porridge girl, along with Zhu Qing's assassin team, are enough to handle Jinyao Martial Arts Hall."

"Why use a bull knife to kill a chicken? Isn't it too much to bring so many experts?" Zhu Qing asked.

"No," Ling Chen replied: "This is the time for Dragon Tiger Hall to display its strength. I want to obliterate Jinyao Martial Arts Hall in a forceful manner and then announce to everyone that our Dragon Tiger Hall is not easily bullied."

"When do you plan to act?"

"A gentleman's revenge lasts for ten years; a villain's revenge runs day and night. We are not gentlemen, so there's no need for formalities. Zhu Qing, send the notice, move to Yangcheng immediately, and try to resolve the matter before nightfall."

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It's not Ling Chen's first time coming to Yangcheng. Because of the Jiang Family's presence, he's been here several times and is quite familiar with it. Before arriving, Zhu Qing had already scouted the location of Jinyao Martial Arts Hall.

After coming out of the airport, the group took a car to a hotel near Jinyao Martial Arts Hall. Led by Zhu Qing, they directly checked into the presidential suite on the top floor of the hotel. Upon entering the room, a huge floor-to-ceiling window immediately appeared in Ling Chen's view.

"The view here is excellent; you can clearly see the opposite Jinyao Martial Arts Hall."

Upon hearing Zhu Qing's words, Ling Chen quickly walked to the floor-to-ceiling window and glanced down. As Zhu Qing said, Jinyao Martial Arts Hall is just over thirty meters from the hotel, and it can be seen clearly from above.

The area of Jinyao Martial Arts Hall is not small, roughly four to five hundred square meters, with a large martial arts arena in front. At this moment, dozens of disciples are training on the martial arts arena, with an instructor pacing back and forth next to them, responsible for guiding and correcting.

Taking the high-definition binoculars handed over by Zhu Qing, Ling Chen observed carefully but didn't see Song Qingde, the hall master of Jinyao Martial Arts Hall. According to the information collected by Zhu Qing, Song Qingde had returned to the hall with his disciples after last night's action.

"Everyone, rest for a while. We'll act when we confirm the target."

Having said that, Ling Chen was about to head to the bathroom when Zhu Qing spoke up: "Someone's here."

"Who?"

Zhu Qing picked up the binoculars and observed the situation at Jinyao Martial Arts Hall, saying: "It's Sect Leader Yu Zhen of the Lianhai Sect."

Lianhai Sect... Ling Chen sneered. This Lianhai Sect was also one of the forces participating in last night's action, considered a relatively weak sect. Unexpectedly, they would appear at Jinyao Martial Arts Hall. Perfect, it's a good opportunity to solve this together.

"Song Qingde came out from the hall to greet him, and both entered the room."

Ling Chen nodded and said: "We're quite lucky." With that, he turned to everyone and said: "Everyone, it looks like it's time to handle the main business."

At this time, in the hall of Jinyao Martial Arts Hall, a stout, dignified middle-aged man smiled warmly: "Sect Leader Yu, please sit."

"Master Song, there's no need to be so polite." The reply came from Yu Zhen, a lean man in his forties, whose complexion was slightly pale, possibly due to health issues or other reasons.

"It's only right, Sect Leader Yu personally visiting Jinyao Martial Arts Hall is my honor."

"Master Song, I came to Jinyao Martial Arts Hall today to ask you something."

Chapter 1643 Song Qingde

"Sect Leader Yu, speak your mind. It's just the two of us here, so feel free to express yourself."

Yu Zhen nodded and said, "Alright, we were all involved in last night's operation. In a sense, we're in the same boat, so I won't hide anything from you. You know, this operation was led by the Heavenly Dragon Sect, along with Jinyao Martial Arts Hall and the Lianhai Sect, for a total of nine factions. Our goal was the same, to carve up the benefits of the Dragon Tiger Hall. However, the mission is now complete, and the Heavenly Dragon Sect hasn't made any gestures, so I'm a bit worried about this matter..."

Before he finished speaking, Song Qingde smiled and interjected, "Sect Leader Yu, I understand your concern, but there's no need to worry. I've been in contact with Tan Gang, the Vice Sect Leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect. The operation just ended, and there's still a lot to handle. Once this busy period is over, you won't be shortchanged on your benefits."

"Master Song, what about the Dragon Tiger Hall? If they find out we were behind it, they might come looking for trouble. The Heavenly Dragon Sect promised that if the Dragon Tiger Hall came knocking, they would handle it for us."

Song Qingde waved his hand and said, "Sect Leader Yu, just relax. Since the Heavenly Dragon Sect made a promise, they won't go back on it. Besides, it's just the Dragon Tiger Hall. What are you so afraid of? Remember at the Martial Arts Tournament, the Dragon Tiger Hall people lost to our Jinyao Martial Arts Hall, so there's nothing to be afraid of. Other than having many people, the Dragon Tiger Hall isn't much."

"Master Song is right, our Dragon Tiger Hall indeed doesn't have other skills besides having many people." A voice came, and both Song Qingde and Yu Zhen turned their eyes to the entrance of the hall. When they saw the person leading, their expressions changed slightly.

Seeing their dazed expressions, Ling Chen smiled faintly and said, "Gentlemen, don't you recognize me?"

As his words fell, Song Qingde was the first to react. He quickly got up from his seat with a smile, hurriedly approached Ling Chen, and greeted enthusiastically, "Isn't this Mr. Ling? What brings you here? Please, everyone, have a seat."

Ling Chen nodded and found a seat for himself. As everyone sat down, Yu Zhen felt like he was sitting on pins and needles, his forehead already covered in sweat. "Well..." After hesitating, Yu Zhen slowly stood up and said, "Master Song, since you have guests, I won't bother you. Let's gather again when there's time." With that, he turned to walk out.

Before he reached the door, Zhu Qing suddenly took a few steps forward, blocking Yu Zhen's path. Seeing Zhu Qing's cold expression, Yu Zhen forced a smile and said, "You... What are you doing?"

"Sect Leader Yu, since you're here, why rush to leave? We're all people of the martial arts world; why not sit and talk?"

Hearing Ling Chen's voice behind him, Yu Zhen turned back and said, "Mr. Ling, I have urgent matters; maybe next time. I assure you of a visit."

"Sect Leader Yu, without meaning any offense, if we wait for your visit, who knows how long that will take? I've come to Yangcheng to see Master Song, and you must know why. Do you think you can avoid it?" Ling Chen spoke calmly.

Yu Zhen glanced at Song Qingde in the hall, noticing that he stayed silent, which made him uneasy.

"Mr. Ling, I don't quite understand what you mean. I just came for a visit, and since you have business with Master Song, I shouldn't stay and interfere."

"Sect Leader Yu, last night the Dragon Tiger Hall was attacked; I've heard you were involved. Now that we're all here, why not give me an explanation?"

"Last night?" Yu Zhen's expression changed, and he quickly said, "Mr. Ling, there must be a misunderstanding. I was at the sect all night and never left, so how could I be involved in the attack on the Dragon Tiger Hall? You must be mistaken."

"Seems like you're determined not to admit it." Ling Chen said with a sarcastic smile. "The Dragon Tiger Hall never looks for trouble without reason, but anyone who thinks they can bully the Dragon Tiger Hall is sorely mistaken. Sect Leader Yu, will you keep denying, or admit it graciously?"

"I... I..." Yu Zhen opened his mouth, unsure how to respond. After hesitating briefly, he looked pleadingly at Song Qingde for help.

Feeling Yu Zhen's gaze, Song Qingde's mouth twitched slightly into a smile, "Sect Leader Yu, not to be blunt, but just tell Mr. Ling the truth. Why beat around the bush; do you think he'd eat you alive?" After a pause, he turned to Ling Chen and said, "Mr. Ling, let's take our time talking. I'll make some tea for our honorable guests first."

Saying this, Song Qingde walked to a corner of the hall and reached for a teacup on the table. However, instead of picking it up, he gently rotated it. Instantly, a trapdoor opened beneath his feet, and he fell through, vanishing.

This sudden turn of events startled everyone present, and Ling Chen's group rushed over. However, it was too late; the trapdoor had already closed.

Teacup!

Ling Chen quickly realized and found the teacup Song Qingde had used, giving it a light spin. Yet, although the teacup moved, the floor remained unresponsive.

Zhu Qing frowned slightly and said, "He must have sealed the mechanism from below."

Hearing this, Ling Chen couldn't help but snort coldly. Song Qingde was cunning indeed, knowing they were here for trouble, he used such a method to escape. Ling Chen also blamed himself for being too careless, thinking he had control of the entire hall, not realizing Song Qingde had already prepared, secretly installing a secret passage in the hall.

"Yu Zhen!" Ling Chen turned his gaze coldly to Yu Zhen, who stood there looking bewildered, seemingly not fully grasping the situation. Upon hearing Ling Chen's cold call, Yu Zhen's body trembled slightly, hastily saying, "This... this has nothing to do with me. I don't know anything."

Seeing Ling Chen approach him step by step, Yu Zhen inwardly lamented. He hadn't expected Song Qingde to utilize a secret passage for escape. Earlier, he had acted unbothered by the Dragon Tiger Hall, yet as soon as Ling Chen's group arrived, he fled immediately.

By now, Zhu Qing had smashed through the floor and, along with the porridge girl, leaped into the secret passage. With the two of them together, even encountering danger would be manageable.

Chapter 1644 The Heavenly Dragon Sect's Plot (1)

"Sect Leader Yu, now that there are no outsiders, can we have a proper chat?" Ling Chen returned to his seat, looking at Yu Zhen beside him, and then gestured to the chair next to him. The latter hesitated for a moment, but eventually sat down obediently.

At this moment, Song Qingde had already fled, leaving him alone. If he could, he really wanted to run away. However, he knew in his heart that he couldn't escape from Ling Chen's grasp alone. Now, all he could do was cooperate.

"Sect Leader Yu, I actually admire you. The mere Lianhai Sect, with only a little over fifty people, has quite an appetite. But are you sure this piece of meat won't be hard to digest after you swallow it?"

Faced with Ling Chen's inquiry, Yu Zhen kept his head down, his eyes flickering, unsure of what he was thinking. After a while, he slowly raised his head, forcing a smile uglier than a cry, and looked at Ling Chen, saying, "Mr. Ling, I... I really know I was wrong. I beg you to spare me. I promise, I will never dare to offend the Dragon Tiger Hall again in the future."

Ling Chen said calmly, "If you had realized this earlier, today's events wouldn't have happened. Since you dared to act against us, you must have a strong backing. I'm curious, how did the Heavenly Dragon Sect convince you?"

Yu Zhen hesitated for a moment before slowly saying, "Tan Gang from the Heavenly Dragon Sect contacted me, asking me to attend a gathering. When I got there, I found that there were many leaders of various forces, including Song Qingde. Later, Tan Gang told us that their goal was to share in the profits of the Dragon Tiger Hall. At that time, I didn't want to participate because I knew the strength of the Dragon Tiger Hall, which is not something we could contend with. It wasn't just me; many others shared this sentiment. The proposal of the Heavenly Dragon Sect was good, but it also required the capability to follow through. Tan Gang seemed aware of our concerns and told us not to fear the Dragon Tiger Hall, assuring us that even if they retaliated, they had enough strength to handle it."

"So, did you believe them?"

Yu Zhen shook his head and said, "Of course not. How could mere words convince everyone? But then someone showed up at the gathering, and that person..." At this point, a trace of fear appeared on Yu Zhen's face. "That person's strength was terrifying. It was the first time I had seen someone so powerful, even more daunting than the experts on the Heavenly List. It was the presence of that person that gave everyone enough confidence to join the Heavenly Dragon Sect's plan."

"That person?" Ling Chen asked with interest, "Who was that person you mentioned? Tell me the name."

"I don't know. Tan Gang didn't say. I also couldn't understand how the Heavenly Dragon Sect, having just been established, could invite such a formidable ally."

After listening to Yu Zhen's words, Ling Chen nodded secretly. He believed Yu Zhen wasn't lying. At this point, the other party didn't dare to deceive him. However, he was very curious about 'that person' Yu Zhen mentioned. He wondered who could make Yu Zhen and the others so afraid.

As he pondered, Zhu Qing and the porridge girl emerged from the hidden passage, both returning to Ling Chen and giving a helpless expression, indicating they hadn't managed to catch Song Qingde.

"Alright, I've asked everything I needed to." Ling Chen stood up from his chair and said, "Sect Leader Yu, there's a saying: 'Blood for blood.' Your Lianhai Sect attacked my Dragon Tiger Hall, causing many disciple casualties; how do you think this should be settled?"

"I..." Yu Zhen's face changed, and he hurriedly said, "Mr. Ling, I was also deceived by others. I beg you to show mercy; I assure you I won't oppose the Dragon Tiger Hall ever again, I..."

"It's too late to say that now," Ling Chen cut in. "Since the deed is done, there are consequences to bear. Rest assured, I won't take your life, but a small punishment is necessary." With that, he walked straight out of the hall.

As Ling Chen passed by the martial arts field, a miserable cry suddenly echoed from the hall. Meanwhile, Chen Junfeng and his entourage gradually followed Ling Chen's footsteps.

Just as Ling Chen said, he didn't take Yu Zhen's life, but had Chen Junfeng cripple his martial arts. For Yu Zhen, an Earthly List expert, suddenly reduced to an ordinary person, this blow was punishment enough.

Back at the hotel, Ling Chen sat on the sofa with a piece of information in hand. The Jinyao Martial Arts Hall had been his initial target, but Song Qingde escaped, luckily stumbling upon Yu Zhen; otherwise, he'd return empty-handed.

"Ling Chen, who's the next target?"

Hearing the porridge girl's inquiry, Ling Chen looked at the list in his hand. After pondering for a while, he said, "Directly to the Heavenly Dragon Sect."

"To the Heavenly Dragon Sect?" Everyone was taken aback, not expecting Ling Chen to confront them directly.

"The Heavenly Dragon Sect is the true culprit. Rather than wasting time dealing with other forces, it's better to go straight for the head. Besides, I'm very interested in that 'person' Yu Zhen mentioned. Since that person is so powerful, they must have significant backing," Ling Chen said. Although Tong Zhentian had warned him to avoid direct conflicts with the Heavenly Dragon Sect for the time being to prevent draining the Dragon Tiger Hall's strength, he didn't want to confront them one by one. As long as he dealt with the Heavenly Dragon Sect, the forces that attacked the Dragon Tiger Hall would come begging for mercy.

Zhu Qing spoke up, "Both the Jinyao Martial Arts Hall and the Heavenly Dragon Sect are in Yangcheng. Song Qingde has definitely fled to the Heavenly Dragon Sect, and since the Heavenly Dragon Sect knows we're coming, they'll surely be prepared. If we go now, we might not fare well."

"Don't worry, with Sir Chen and Ji Gang, along with me, can we possibly not handle the Heavenly Dragon Sect?" After a pause, Ling Chen continued, "Here's the plan, you first send someone to the Heavenly Dragon Sect headquarters to scout the situation."

"Alright," Zhu Qing replied and turned to leave the presidential suite.

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At seven in the evening, as night fell, Ling Chen and the porridge girl stood in front of the living room's floor-to-ceiling window, looking at the night view outside, chatting occasionally. At this moment, the suite's door was pushed open, and Zhu Qing walked in quickly, her face a bit grim.

"What's wrong?" Ling Chen asked.

"Something happened." Zhu Qing frowned and said, "Yu Zhen is dead!"

Dead? Ling Chen's expression changed slightly. When they left the Jinyao Martial Arts Hall, Chen Junfeng merely crippled Yu Zhen's martial arts and didn't kill him, yet now he was dead so soon after.

"How did he die?" he asked.

"That's the problem. They're saying it was our Dragon Tiger Hall that killed him."

Chapter 1645 The Heavenly Dragon Sect's Plot (2)

"How is this possible," Chen Junfeng chimed in, "I was very careful, there's no way I would have injured him fatally."

Zhu Qing said, "Sir Chen, this is not your fault, but someone is deliberately framing our Dragon Tiger Hall."

"What use is such framing?" said the porridge girl from the side, "The people from the Lianhai Sect voluntarily attacked Dragon Tiger Hall, even if we killed him, it's his own doing. Even if this matter reaches the Martial Arts community, we have the upper hand."

Ling Chen pondered for a while, then shook his head, "Things aren't that simple. If I'm not mistaken, the ones framing us should be the Heavenly Dragon Sect. Their purpose in doing this is not to tarnish Dragon Tiger Hall's reputation, but for their own benefit."

Upon hearing this, everyone looked at Ling Chen puzzled, and asked, "What do you mean by this?"

"It's quite simple!" Ling Chen explained, "The reason those forces are willing to act together with the Heavenly Dragon Sect is that they have displayed strong enough power, making them think they have a powerful backing and need not fear Dragon Tiger Hall's retaliation. However, now we've come knocking,

and with Yu Zhen dead, those forces' leaders are certainly afraid, fearing they might become the next Yu Zhen. So now, they will definitely seek help from the Heavenly Dragon Sect. Think about it, if you were the Sect Leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect, with others pleading for your protection, what would you do?"

Zhu Qing thought for a moment and said, "If it were me, I would force them to join me, only then would I agree to offer them protection."

"Exactly!" Ling Chen nodded, "That's it. The Heavenly Dragon Sect needs to do nothing, for those forces to save their lives, would have to reluctantly agree to their terms. In this way, the Heavenly Dragon Sect's power grows considerably."

"Humph! Those Heavenly Dragon Sect people are truly crafty, using our Dragon Tiger Hall as a pawn," Zhu Qing said indignantly.

"The last time I spoke with Elder Tong on the phone, he told me that the Sect Leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect is called Guo Halong, a very insidious and cunning person. Now it seems, not only is he cunning, but he's also quite wise, otherwise he wouldn't think of such a brilliant plan," Ling Chen spoke with a hint of admiration.

Indeed, heroes arise in troubled times, and now the Martial Arts world is no different from such times, to reach the pinnacle not only requires strong prowess but also strategy. Obviously, the Heavenly Dragon Sect's attack in union with other forces wasn't just to target Dragon Tiger Hall, but mainly to incorporate those small forces to strengthen their own power.

With Yu Zhen's death spreading, the leaders of those small forces are certainly in a panic, rushing towards the Heavenly Dragon Sect at this very moment.

"Ling Chen, what should we do now?" Chen Junfeng asked, "Are we to let the Heavenly Dragon Sect succeed?"

"It's too late to do anything now, the Heavenly Dragon Sect has already planned everything well in advance, every step they take is ahead of us, in this round of competition, we have lost."

"Should we still go to the Heavenly Dragon Sect?" the porridge girl asked.

"Yes, why not go, since we've come to Yangcheng, we certainly have to pay a visit, I really want to meet this Guo Halong and see what kind of person he is. Zhu Qing, get the car ready, we depart immediately."

The headquarters of the Heavenly Dragon Sect is located in the outskirts of Yangcheng. When Ling Chen and his party arrived by car, it was already past eight in the evening.

After getting out of the car and looking at the vast manor before him, Ling Chen walked over. At the gates of the manor stood two stone lions, majestically fierce, with four Heavenly Dragon Sect disciples guarding on both sides. This manor seems to have just been built recently, with many areas unfinished, scaffolding around the buildings outside, over ten workers working overnight.

As Ling Chen and his group entered, the disciples guarding the gate immediately approached to intercept them.

"Whom do you seek?"

"I am Ling Chen, here to visit the Sect Leader of the Heavenly Dragon Sect."

"One moment!" A Heavenly Dragon Sect disciple immediately ran inside to report.

After a few minutes, all the lights in the manor lit up, and simultaneously, the manor's gates slowly opened, a broad-shouldered, burly middle-aged man strode out, followed by more than ten men. Ling Chen observed the middle-aged man leading at the forefront, around forty years old, about 1.85 meters tall, his muscles protruding all over his body, seemingly containing immense strength.

This... was quite at odds with his imagined image. Ling Chen thought to himself, before coming here, he had been wondering what kind of person Guo Halong would be. In his mind, given Guo Halong's cunning and insidious nature, he should be slender, have cold eyes, and give off a venomous snake vibe from inside out. But the Guo Halong before him is completely opposite to that impression, one might say it's two extremes.

No matter from which angle, the Guo Halong before him doesn't resemble someone skilled in craftiness.

"Mr. Ling, why didn't you notify me in advance, so I could come outside to greet you," Guo Halong said with a hearty laugh.

"Master Guo is a busy man, I wouldn't dare disturb."

"Mr. Ling is joking, please come in!"

Entering the manor, under Guo Halong's guidance, the group headed straight to the villa at the center of the manor. This three-story villa was opulently luxurious, with very new materials, likely just newly renovated, there was even a faint scent inside the house.

From the entrance to the living room, it was only about ten meters, with ten maids lined on both sides, all very young women.

Once seated, tea, a fruit plate, and warm towels were presented, making Ling Chen feel rather impressed. Though he considered himself wealthy, he had never experienced such a lifestyle.

"Mr. Ling, I wonder what brings you to visit today?" Guo Halong asked with a smile while holding a cup of hot tea.

Ling Chen smiled slightly, "The Heavenly Dragon Sect has recently gained fame in the Martial Arts community, so I wanted to come over and take a look, meet Master Guo, and perhaps forge a friendship, would Master Guo mind?"

"Mr. Ling, what are you saying, how could I mind, it's my honor you look favorably upon our Heavenly Dragon Sect."

"Master Guo, your sect's Vice Sect Leader Tan Gang visited Dragon Tiger Hall to meet me last time, how come I don't see him today?" Ling Chen shifted the topic and asked.

"There are many matters that need managing within the Heavenly Dragon Sect, I'm responsible for holding the fort at headquarters, all minor affairs are personally handled by him, so he seldom returns. If Mr. Ling wishes to see him, I'm afraid you might be disappointed."

"That's alright." Ling Chen said indifferently, "There are plenty of days ahead, we'll meet eventually." Pausing, he glanced at the living room's decor, seeming to notice something, a faint smile appeared at the corner of his mouth.

Chapter 1646 Guo Halong's Collection Room

"Mr. Ling, what are you looking at?" Guo Halong asked.

Ling Chen reached out and pointed to an axe hanging on the wall, saying, "That axe looks pretty good."

Upon hearing this, Guo Halong grinned and said, "Mr. Ling's eyes are indeed discerning. You're right, that isn't just a decorative axe, but a divine weapon, crafted by Mr. Guo Ming himself. Mr. Ling, I'm sure there's no need for me to introduce Mr. Guo to you, as he's the dedicated master blacksmith for your Dragon Tiger Hall. Mr. Guo Ming's craftsmanship is unmatched throughout all of Huaxia, and this axe is an early work of his; it took a lot of effort for me to acquire it. Mr. Ling, if possible, could you ask Mr. Guo Ming to specially craft me a suitable weapon?"

"Since Master Guo has made the request, I will surely ask when I return to see if Mr. Guo has the time."

"Mr. Ling, Mr. Guo is affiliated with your Dragon Tiger Hall. Just say the word, and I believe he won't refuse." After a pause, Guo Halong continued, "Of course, as long as Mr. Guo is willing to create a weapon for me, I'm willing to pay generously."

Ling Chen said lightly, "Given Mr. Guo's status, doesn't Master Guo find talking about money a bit vulgar?"

Guo Halong let out a hearty laugh and nodded, "Mr. Ling is right, that's too provincial of me. The weapons crafted by Mr. Guo are priceless; how can they be measured by money? How about this: no matter what conditions Mr. Guo sets, as long as I can fulfill them, I will certainly not go back on my word. How about that?"

"It seems Master Guo is quite fond of Mr. Guo's weapons."

"As martial artists, who among us doesn't like weapons? Not only do I like them, but I also enjoy collecting them. Mr. Ling, if you're interested, shall I take you to see my collection room?"

Ling Chen responded, "Sure, since we're sitting here anyway, might as well learn from Master Guo."

"Please follow me, everyone."

"Excuse me, where is your restroom?" Zhu Qing asked at this moment.

Guo Halong made a gesture, and a disciple immediately led Zhu Qing away. Watching Zhu Qing's departing figure, Ling Chen's mouth curved slightly before following Guo Halong toward the villa's underground chamber. At the entrance to the chamber, Ling Chen couldn't help but be surprised at the sight before him.

The chamber was equipped with a reinforced explosion-proof door, which regular amounts of explosives were unlikely to open. Not only that, this explosion-proof door required dual passwords to unlock—one being Guo Halong's fingerprint, and the other being his voice recognition. The electronic encryption system would randomly select a pre-recorded phrase for Guo Halong to recite accurately for the door to open. If there was a mistake, not only would the door remain closed, but the security system would be triggered.

As the explosion-proof door slowly opened, Guo Halong made a gesture of 'please' toward Ling Chen and then walked in briskly.

The lights turned on, revealing the entire collection to Ling Chen. On all four walls hung Guo Halong's weapon collection; all eighteen types of weapons were present, dazzling to behold, at least forty to fifty items in sight.

Ling Chen smiled and said, "Master Guo's collection truly opens my eyes."

Upon hearing the compliment, Guo Halong looked unusually pleased. He pointed to a cold, gleaming steel blade and said, "This steel blade is over a hundred years old, left behind by a master skilled in blade use over a century ago." With that, he pointed to a nearby rust-covered iron sword.

"Mr. Ling might find it odd that I collect divine weapons, yet here there's a rusty sword."

"Master Guo must have a reason for this."

"To be honest, this sword is actually quite ordinary, with no special features. In today's market, you could easily buy a sword of better quality than this one. However, I collect this sword not for its qualities, but for its owner. Over two hundred years ago, the Martial Arts world had a sword genius who, in just thirty years, reached the pinnacle of the Martial Arts world, becoming the number one of the time with this very sword. So, this sword holds significant historical importance."

Ling Chen nodded, "It seems Master Guo not only likes divine weapons but is also fond of the histories behind them." After a pause, he glanced around the collection room and noticed a vacant spot in the middle of one wall, with nothing placed there.

"Master Guo, haven't you found enough pieces to fill that gap?" he asked casually.

"No," Guo Halong shook his head, "I have plenty of items, but I left that space for a specific weapon. Mr. Ling, haven't you noticed that there's one type of weapon missing from my collection?"

"Missing one type?" Ling Chen looked carefully and quickly understood what Guo Halong referred to.

"There's a lack of a bow here."

"Exactly!" Guo Halong said with a smile, "Throughout the hundreds of years of Martial Arts history, there's only one master archer in the world, and that's the arrow god Zhang Zhongfeng. I'm sure Mr. Ling is quite familiar with him; the bow he held was Mr. Guo Ming's late masterpiece, considered the pinnacle of Master Guo's work. Both the man and the bow were unparalleled, which is why only Zhang Zhongfeng's bow fits this spot in my collection." As he spoke, Guo Halong gave Ling Chen a somewhat apologetic look, "Mr. Ling, please don't misunderstand, I'm expressing pure admiration without any other intent."

"I understand," Ling Chen said dismissively, "Now that we've toured the collection room, shall we discuss our real business?"

"Business? Mr. Ling, I'm not sure what you mean."

"Here's the situation: two nights ago, several branch halls of the Dragon Tiger Hall were simultaneously attacked by unknown individuals, suffering heavy losses. I'm not sure if Master Guo has heard about this incident?"

"I've heard whispers of it, but I don't know the details. Mr. Ling, your sudden visit tonight isn't because you suspect our Heavenly Dragon Sect, is it?"

"Not exactly. We found some clues pointing to one of the groups involved in the attack being Jinyao Martial Arts Hall, so we made our way to Yangcheng, hoping to ask its hall master Song Qingde about it. But Song Qingde was too cunning and managed to escape. Since we're in Yangcheng, we couldn't leave empty-handed, so I took the opportunity to visit Master Guo, with no other intentions."

"I see," Guo Halong said, maintaining his composure, "I've hardly interacted with Song Qingde, so I don't know him well. Otherwise, I'd certainly assist Mr. Ling."

Chapter 1647 An Awkward Situation

"I appreciate Master Guo's kind intention." After speaking, Ling Chen checked the time and said, "It's getting late; we should be heading back to avoid disturbing Master Guo's rest."

"Mr. Ling, I sincerely apologize. As the host, I should have had you stay overnight, but as you can see, my estate is still undergoing renovations, and many facilities are not yet complete. When Mr. Ling visits next time, I will certainly fulfill my duties as a host."

"There's no need to be so formal." Ling Chen smiled and stepped out of the collection room. After coming up from the basement, Zhu Qing was already waiting outside. After some pleasantries, Ling Chen and his group left the estate accompanied by Guo Halong.

Once in the car, watching the estate gradually fade from view, Ling Chen withdrew his gaze and said softly, "There are significant issues with this Heavenly Dragon Sect."

"What have you discovered?" asked Chen Junfeng.

Ling Chen didn't directly answer him but instead turned to Zhu Qing and asked, "Did you find anything?"

The latter shook her head and said, "No, the time was too short to conduct a detailed investigation. But personally, I feel that the secrets of this estate should be hidden underground." Previously, when she said she needed to use the restroom, she was actually finding an opportunity to investigate the estate. With her skills, she could easily sneak out even if there was someone guarding outside the restroom.

"Why do you say that?"

"I checked all the buildings in the estate. Besides those few under renovation, there were not many people inside the other houses, only a large storage of food. I roughly calculated: the villa plus the other few buildings have only about twenty rooms, with each room having a single bed. However, there are about fifty to sixty people between the Heavenly Dragon Sect disciples inside and outside the estate and those around Guo Halong. These rooms are simply not enough for them to live in. So, there must be hidden areas in that estate."

"Now you should talk about your findings." Chen Junfeng chimed in.

"That Guo Halong has major issues," Ling Chen said. "From the way he talks, he doesn't seem like the cunning, scheming type. Generally speaking, the more scheming a person is, the more hypocritical they are, but Guo Halong seems quite straightforward, and he doesn't like to beat around the bush. Honestly, after interacting with Guo Halong, I now seriously doubt whether he's the one really planning everything. To me, that Tan Gang seems more scheming than Guo Halong."

"What's so strange about that?" piped up the porridge girl. "In the past, generals would have several advisors by their side to offer strategies. Perhaps the attack on the Dragon Tiger Hall was a strategy thought up by Tan Gang and then suggested to Guo Halong. Also, don't forget, the Heavenly Dragon Sect has deep ties with the Dangyang Sect; maybe Qi Yong is the one advising him."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen nodded and said, "Your guess makes sense. Qi Yong is indeed the type with a calculating mind." After speaking, he turned to look out the car window and said, "Our current position is somewhat awkward. The Heavenly Dragon Sect has become very powerful and can't be moved

temporarily. Although Dragon Tiger Hall is stronger than the Heavenly Dragon Sect overall, we have to be wary of the Dangyang Sect. If Qi Yong secretly intervenes while we're dealing with the Heavenly Dragon Sect, we could be attacked from both sides, suffering significant losses. Besides, 'that person' mentioned by Yu Zhen has yet to appear, so we can't act rashly right now."

Chen Junfeng frowned and said, "Isn't this too disgraceful? Knowing that others are bullying us but not being able to strike back, if word gets out, others might think Dragon Tiger Hall is cowardly."

"Others' opinions don't matter; it's key to preserve our strength. Sir Chen, this chaos has just begun. More conflicts await, and for Dragon Tiger Hall to continue, keeping a low profile is necessary. Regardless of how long this chaos lasts, only those who laugh last are the true victors. Do you understand what I mean?"

After hearing Ling Chen's words, Chen Junfeng remained silent. He understood Ling Chen's concerns; besides the Heavenly Dragon Sect and Dangyang Sect, Ling Chen also had to be on guard against assassins from the Netherworld Snake. If a war begins, not only would it cause huge losses to Dragon Tiger Hall, but it might also give Netherworld Snake an opportunity. As Ling Chen said, Dragon Tiger Hall's position is very awkward. For the larger picture's sake, he must endure in silence for now and secretly wait for the right moment.

...

At this moment, back in the Heavenly Dragon Sect headquarters, shortly after Ling Chen and his group left, Guo Halong returned alone to the basement collection room.

He walked over to a rusty iron sword, grasped the hilt, and gently pressed down. With a light 'ka' sound, the adjacent wall slowly moved aside, revealing a wide passageway.

Through the passage, Guo Halong entered a room. Though built underground, the room was spacious, over a hundred square meters, with two bedrooms and a living room, complete with a kitchen and bathroom, like an ordinary residence.

At this moment, a young man was sitting on the sofa in the living room. Though the young man wasn't very old, his hair, whether due to dyeing or some other reason, was prematurely graying, incongruous

with his age. Opposite the sofa was an LCD TV, and the young man, holding a remote, leaned on a pillow, one hand supporting his head, idly watching the news playing on TV.

Hearing footsteps beside him, the young man didn't even twitch his corner of his eye, seeming to speak to himself, "Gone?"

As soon as the youth spoke, Guo Halong immediately stopped and stood respectfully, replying, "They have left."

"What do you think of Ling Chen?"

"A worthy opponent. He knows it was our Heavenly Dragon Sect's doing but said nothing, acting as if nothing happened."

"He's not just an opponent; he's a troublesome one. I've clashed with him before but never gained the upper hand, not just due to personal shortcomings but also a lack of luck. However, I no longer need luck now." The youth put down the remote, sat upright, and said, "You've done well this time, catching Ling Chen off guard. Even if he reacts, it will be too late."

Guo Halong hurriedly said, "All thanks to Mr. Zhu's strategy."

The Mr. Zhu he referred to is none other than the long-lost Zhu Hong.

"Ling Chen suffered a significant setback this time, but he's a smart man. He knows his situation isn't favorable, which is why he's holding back. Otherwise, do you think he'd come for no reason to chat with you? He just wants to gauge your depth by engaging with you."

"What should we do next?"

Zhu Hong said slowly, "No rush. First, consolidate your power. Though those small factions joined us out of fear of the Dragon Tiger Hall, they're likely unwilling, and might make some small moves. You need to pay attention to that. As soon as you discover anything, don't hold back, just kill them. If I can't get their loyalty, then let them fear me. Only if they fear will they obey."

Guo Halong nodded and said, "I understand."

Chapter 1648 In Name Only

While speaking, the bedroom door next to the living room was suddenly pushed open by someone. Immediately afterward, a long-haired woman in sexy pajamas walked out. Leaning against the door frame with a lazy expression, she glanced at Guo Halong before shifting her gaze to Zhu Hong on the sofa.

"Darling, it's so late, and you're still not sleeping?" The woman's voice was soft, carrying an irresistible allure.

"Coming." Zhu Hong smiled and stood up from the sofa.

Seeing this scene, Guo Halong wisely kept silent and quickly retreated. At this moment, if Ling Chen were here, he would surely be surprised to find that the woman's appearance was identical to Nanrong Wanqing.

...

Back at the hotel, everyone spent the night, and the next morning, Ling Chen and his group flew back to East Sea City.

Although the trip to Yangcheng wasn't exactly smooth, it wasn't completely fruitless either. At least they had dealt with Guo Halong from the Heavenly Dragon Sect. Back at Dragon Tiger Hall, Ling Chen barely had time to rest before a series of matters piled up on his desk.

Looking at the thick pile of documents in front of him, Ling Chen touched his nose with a slightly bitter smile. He had only been gone for a day, yet so many issues had accumulated. After brewing a cup of tea, Ling Chen called Kaelina over. With Zhu Qing absent, Kaelina was responsible for collecting all this intelligence and materials, so she was most familiar with the situation.

"Two major events happened in the Martial Arts world over the past couple of days."

Ling Chen smiled and said, "I was gone for just one day, yet two significant events occurred. It seems the current situation is truly unpredictable."

"One event concerns the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Yesterday afternoon, they announced complete seclusion, cutting off all external contacts and not participating in any disputes. As for when they might come out of isolation, that's still uncertain."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen's expression changed. What does this mean? Could it be that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is planning to run away? Founded for hundreds of years, nothing like this has ever happened before. What exactly is Su Mei trying to do? Although the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion suffered consecutive blows with heavy losses, there's no need to act like deserters; this would greatly impact their reputation.

"Did the people monitoring the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion report any news?"

Kaelina nodded and said, "The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is now under strict lockdown, refusing to see anyone, and all their disciples stationed outside have returned. Personally, I think this decision is the best move for the moment. Though their reputation might be affected, it buys them some breathing space. Moreover, with the Martial Arts world becoming increasingly chaotic, they can watch and wait for the right moment to intervene, protecting their strength while gaining the greatest benefits."

"That makes sense, but this isn't quite typical of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion's style." Ling Chen paused and then asked, "What about the second major event you mentioned?"

"The Martial Arts Association is practically defunct now; all its members have been disbanded."

"So quickly?" Ling Chen was a bit surprised. Although he had anticipated the Martial Arts Association's demise, he thought with Tong Zhentian at the helm, it would last a bit longer.

"Two days ago, members of the Martial Arts Association were invited to handle a dispute, but one of the factions involved simply ignored the Association's authority and directly eliminated those sent there. Because of this incident, the Association's members no longer dare to get involved in these disputes and chose to leave."

"So, it seems Elder Tong should return now." Ling Chen breathed a sigh of relief. At this critical juncture, Tong Zhentian's return is undoubtedly a good thing, alleviating some of the burden on Ling Chen. To be honest, the events of recent times have weighed heavily on him, making him unsure of his direction. Although he wants to rest and recuperate, preserving strength, they just won't let him catch a break. Not only that, he can't retaliate when wronged and can only swallow his frustration, making him uncomfortable.

"Kaelina, keep a close watch on the movements of the Heavenly Dragon Sect and Dangyang Sect lately; these two forces are the main enemies of Dragon Tiger Hall at the moment."

"I know." Seeing Ling Chen looking a bit weary, Kaelina said with concern, "You should take a break and rest, don't overexert yourself."

Ling Chen said with a bitter smile, "I wish I could, but I can't find the time to rest now. Anyway, you go ahead and get busy; I'll take a break after handling everything."

After watching Kaelina leave the office, Ling Chen finished the pile of work, then leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and contemplated the next steps for Dragon Tiger Hall. Just then, his phone suddenly rang from his pocket.

Ling Chen took out his phone, glanced at the caller ID, and a flicker of surprise appeared in his eyes. Why is she calling me?

With the call connected, before Ling Chen could utter a "hello," he heard the other party demanding, "Ling Chen, what's going on between you and my sister?"

"Miss Su, what are you talking about?"

"Ling Chen, don't play dumb with me. Don't you know? Be honest, did you and my sister have a falling out?"

"Nothing of the sort, who told you that?"

"I have my own sources. Where are you right now? I'm at Chunhui Restaurant on Jinlan Road; come over and explain things to me in person." With that, before Ling Chen could respond, Su Lin had already hung up.

This girl... Ling Chen shook his head helplessly. Looking at the time, it was already twelve o'clock, just in time for lunch.

Without delay, Ling Chen drove alone to Chunhui Restaurant, as mentioned by Su Lin. As soon as he entered, he saw Su Lin sitting in the northeastern corner of the restaurant's lobby, holding a cell phone with a cup of tea beside her. Ling Chen walked straight over and greeted her with a smile.

Seeing Ling Chen appear, Su Lin gave him an annoyed glance and pointed to the seat opposite, saying, "Order whatever you want; today I'm buying."

"Oh! How generous."

"When have I ever been stingy?" Su Lin put away her phone and asked, "Straight to the point, what's going on between you and my sister? I heard from Nanrong Hao that something's off with your relationship."

Ling Chen smiled slightly and said, "I knew it must be Nanrong Hao who told you that. Okay! Both of you stop worrying unnecessarily; there's nothing going on between me and your sister. Besides, even if there were, it's between the two of us."

"You think I'm concerned about you? I'm worried about my sister; I don't want her to be hurt because of this situation."

"Your sister is a businesswoman, not as fragile as you imagine." At this point, Ling Chen changed the topic and said, "I heard from your sister that not long ago, you found a job, so how come you have time to come back to East Sea City today?"

"The work is wrapped up now, and my unit arranged for us to take some time off. Originally, I wanted to go out and relax, explore a bit, but ran into an annoying person and lost interest, so I decided to come back instead."

Chapter 1649 The Old Taoist

"Annoying person?" Ling Chen asked with interest, "What kind of annoying person? Could it be someone who is pursuing you?"

Su Lin snorted, "There are a lot of people chasing the great me, but I'm not interested in those kinds of people."

"So if it's not someone pursuing you, who is it then?" Ling Chen was a bit puzzled. In his view, someone termed 'annoying person' must be a man.

"When I was in the archaeological team, I met an old Taoist priest who was mysterious, like one of those fortune-telling scammers on the street, acting as if there's nothing he doesn't know. He told me not to travel far, saying the journey would be troublesome and possibly dangerous."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen couldn't help but laugh, and asked, "Did you believe what he said?"

"Of course I didn't believe him," Su Lin pouted, "So I booked a flight and planned my trip to go on a trip out of town. But it was like seeing a ghost on this journey, either traffic jams or the taxi broke down, then the plane was delayed. While waiting at the airport, I even encountered a smuggler, and they almost took me as a hostage during an arrest. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to dodge it, otherwise, you might not even be seeing me now."

"Tsk ts!" Ling Chen chuckled and said, "It seems that old Taoist's fortune-telling skills are pretty good, so you didn't dare to go out and play then?"

"With so much happening, I didn't feel like going at all, so I simply returned."

Ling Chen's interest was piqued, and he asked, "Do you know where that old Taoist is?"

Su Lin shook her head, "How would I know? We were doing an archaeological dig at the time, and I don't know where that old Taoist came from when he came asking us for some food. He was very talkative, and everyone was captivated by his words when we sat together to eat. Nonetheless, the old Taoist seemed to have some genuine skill, well-versed in astronomy and geography, able to speak about any topic expertly. Our archaeological team's leader chatted with him for a while and found that he was very

knowledgeable about ancient cultures, even able to explain many unsolved ancient mysteries clearly. Anyway, I'm not interested in that old Taoist, I figured all his words were made up and I didn't believe them."

"He came to your camp just to ask for food? No other purpose?" Ling Chen continued to ask, "Did you not say he did a fortune-telling for you, warning you not to travel? You must've had a private interaction with him."

"He approached me and spoke a lot by himself; I didn't engage him." At that point, Su Lin seemed to remember something and said, "Oh! After eating, that old Taoist stood alone in front of the tombstone we dug up, not sure what he was doing there, standing for a long time. Later, he also looked at the coffin which was being heavily guarded not far away."

"Coffin?" Ling Chen pondered and asked, "What era's tomb were you excavating?"

"A noble's tomb over four hundred years old, discovered when construction for a large facility was underway, and the excavator found the tomb beneath ground. Because the tomb had been damaged by the excavator, our archaeological team was dispatched to conduct protective excavation."

After Su Lin's narration, Ling Chen subtly nodded. That old Taoist priest probably wasn't a simple person. Looking back, his grandfather had also mentioned an old Taoist priest to him before. If not for the old Taoist teaching him a set of Breathing Skills, his grandfather might not have lived so long.

But he didn't know if the old Taoist his grandfather encountered was the same person Su Lin talked about.

"Hey!" Su Lin said discontentedly, "I came to ask you about my cousin's affair, how did it turn into you interrogating me? Are you interested in that old Taoist?"

Ling Chen chuckled, "My luck has been pretty bad recently, so I want to find that old Taoist to do some fortune-telling and see if there's a way to change my luck."

"This is just superstition, you should know better as an educated person, yet you believe in things like that."

As they spoke, the waiter brought their meal to the table. Ling Chen picked up the chopsticks and, seeing Su Lin still playing with her phone, asked, "Aren't you going to eat?"

"No, I've already eaten. Take good care of my cousin's matter, and I have other things to handle later. I'll be heading out." After finishing the words, Su Lin grabbed her purse, left some hundred-dollar bills, and walked out of the restaurant.

Seeing Su Lin's back as she left, Ling Chen shook his head. This girl called him over and left him there alone. Never mind. He would just consider it as getting out to relax. After eating, Ling Chen patted his full belly and got up to leave. As he reached the restaurant's entrance, Ling Chen was about to get in the car and return to the Dragon Tiger Hall.

At this point, a stranger's voice suddenly called out, "Hello, Mr. Ling."

Ling Chen turned his head, only to see a young man leaning against the wall outside the restaurant, holding a cigarette with a faint smile on his face. Studying the man a few times, Ling Chen was sure he didn't know him and turned to leave, having no interest in engaging people like that right now.

As Ling Chen was about to depart, the youth flicked his cigarette and quickly caught up with Ling Chen's pace, reaching out to try to tap his shoulder. However, before his hand could touch Ling Chen's body, he was repelled by a dark force.

"I don't particularly like chatting with strangers. From my experience, people like you coming to me usually mean no good."

Upon hearing this, the youth chuckled, "Mr. Ling, don't worry, I mean no harm; I just want to talk to you."

"Talk? Then perhaps you should tell me which faction you represent."

"If I told you I come from the Dark Pavilion, I wonder if you would have any interest in talking further."

Dark Pavilion!

Ling Chen raised an eyebrow, his gaze landing once again on the youth's face. If it was any other faction, he might not be interested, but since the other party was from Dark Pavilion, he couldn't ignore it. He was well aware of Dark Pavilion's strength, having seen the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion suffer repeated setbacks at their hands, showcasing their power. However, Ling Chen was curious why people from Dark Pavilion would actively come seeking him.

Seeing Ling Chen's delayed reaction, the youth wasn't in a hurry. He casually took out a pack of cigarettes and began smoking leisurely.

After a while, Ling Chen watched the youth puffing out clouds and asked, "What do you want to discuss with me?"

"This isn't the place for discussion. Let's find a spot to sit down first." With that, the youth walked straight to the tea house across the street.

Arriving at the tea house, the two of them requested a private room, and soon after, the waiter brought a pot of tea and some snacks. Ling Chen picked up the tea cup, blew softly at the tea leaves floating on top, and asked, "Can you tell me now?"

"Mr. Ling, how much do you know about Dark Pavilion?"

"Not much, I've never heard of the existence of Dark Pavilion before."

Chapter 1650 Tian Xiong (1)

"Mr. Ling, I trust you've privately investigated the Dark Pavilion, and considering you've been to the Zhu Family a few days ago and your relations with them, you should already know who founded the Dark Pavilion."

"You seem well-informed." Ling Chen replied calmly.

The young man smiled and said, "Since I came to meet you, I naturally had to be well-prepared." After a moment's pause, he continued, "We've been talking for so long, but I haven't introduced myself. My name is Tian Xiong."

Ling Chen asked indifferently, "Do I need to remember this name?"

Tian Xiong nodded and said, "It'd be best to remember it, as this name is quite important."

Hearing this, Ling Chen became a bit more interested in the young man who called himself Tian Xiong. The reason he asked earlier was simply to ascertain Tian Xiong's position within the Dark Pavilion. If Tian Xiong was just a minor character sent to interact with him, there would be no need to waste too much talk. However, given Tian Xiong's assertion, it seems he holds some standing within the Dark Pavilion.

"What do you want to discuss with me?"

"The future!" Tian Xiong uttered two words, "Mr. Ling, I want to ask, what is your perspective on the current situation of the Martial Arts world?"

"I have no perspective, from ancient times till now, Martial Arts has always adhered to a principle, the strong prey on the weak; the strong are the only ones who can survive. The current situation is no different; whoever has the strongest fist has the right to speak."

"Previously, the one with the greatest authority was surely the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, but unfortunately, Mr. Ling must be aware of the recent circumstances of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion." Tian Xiong said meaningfully.

Ling Chen nodded slightly and said, "Your Dark Pavilion is indeed formidable. Despite being the leading power in Martial Arts, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has suffered defeats twice in your hands."

"Leading power?" Tian Xiong sneered, showing undisguised disdain and sarcasm, "That's all old history. The Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, a force that sticks to old ways and fails to adapt, should have been replaced long ago. Without Su He to preside over it, and only Du Kang remaining, how can the current Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion still be deemed as the leading power?"

"Even though Su He was expelled from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the Su Family still exists. If you're well-informed, you must have heard about the affairs of the Su Family in Beijing. As long as the Su Family remains, they'll undoubtedly support the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion from behind. Moreover, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has garnered considerable support from many senior figures in Martial Arts. This power shouldn't be underestimated. With such backing, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion still has the strength to contend for the leading power position."

Tian Xiong nodded and said, "I don't deny any of this, but times are changing, and the landscape of Martial Arts is evolving. Even though the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is deeply rooted, it can't possibly continue forever. Mr. Ling, let me be frank—the Dark Pavilion's mission since its inception was to destroy the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. However, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has long occupied the position of hegemony in Martial Arts, so we haven't had a great opportunity to act until now. Everything has changed; the entire Martial Arts world is awakening, and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is no longer the sole leader. Our Dark Pavilion has formulated a foolproof plan. Even if the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion isn't destroyed, it will eventually decline into an insignificant force."

After hearing Tian Xiong's words, Ling Chen frowned slightly and said, "Why are you telling me this? Aren't you afraid I'll report it to Su Mei? Although Dragon Tiger Hall and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion are rivals, Su Mei is still a friend of mine."

"Mr. Ling, I'm sharing this with no other intention. Our Dark Pavilion simply wishes to befriend you. Since we're making friends, we ought to be frank; don't you agree?" Tian Xiong said, "As for whether you'll tell Su Mei, that's up to you. We won't interfere, nor will we blame you, because we're confident that even if the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion learns we're targeting them, they'll be powerless. The Dark Pavilion has prepared for so many years; the outcome won't change because of one person."

"I'm still unclear on one point." Ling Chen pondered for a moment and then said, "Did the Dark Pavilion send you to me just to say all this?"

Tian Xiong smiled and said, "To be honest, Mr. Ling, the Dark Pavilion wishes to find a collaborator to create a future together."

Upon hearing this, Ling Chen asked perplexedly, "The Dark Pavilion isn't weak; you can fully engage in this struggle for interests. Why collaborate with Dragon Tiger Hall?"

"Because the current Martial Arts world is filled with numerous factions, making the situation very chaotic. Besides the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, there are the Dangyang Sect, the Heavenly Dragon

Sect, the Netherworld Snake, and other various forces. Although the Dark Pavilion is confident in dealing with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, emerging from the competition requires a powerful ally. If we join forces, who else in the world could be our rival?"

Netherworld Snake... When Tian Xiong mentioned 'Netherworld Snake,' Ling Chen couldn't help but feel a stir in his heart.

"You know Netherworld Snake?"

"Why wouldn't I?" Tian Xiong retorted, "The Netherworld Snake isn't some secret. Our Dark Pavilion has operated for so many years, it'd be an utter failure not to know about Netherworld Snake. In fact, the Dark Pavilion and Netherworld Snake have similarities and have collaborated a few times in the past, so we have a mutual understanding."

"Can you tell me about Netherworld Snake?"

"So, Mr. Ling is quite interested in Netherworld Snake?"

Ling Chen nodded and said, "I won't hide it from you, Netherworld Snake sent someone to assassinate me recently. Although I evaded it, they won't give up easily."

"I didn't expect Mr. Ling to have such an experience." Tian Xiong laughed and said, "As far as I know, the rules of Netherworld Snake are very strict. If you've escaped their assassination, they'll definitely use all their efforts against you. It seems our choice of collaborating with you is correct; you are indeed a suitable partner."

"Why do you say that?"

"The Netherworld Snake has existed for hundreds of years, and very few have escaped their assassinations—only two people including you. This demonstrates the formidable strength of Netherworld Snake and your own capabilities. Without some skills, you couldn't have survived unscathed. Our Dark Pavilion appreciates capable individuals like you. You are the youngest expert on the Heavenly List in Martial Arts and the creator of the Dragon Tiger Hall. Your future is limitless. So, if

we can reach a collaboration, we will surely dominate our rivals and stand on top of the world." At the end, Tian Xiong's eyes ignited with passionate fervor.

Ling Chen pondered for a while, then said, "I need to seriously consider the cooperation matter, as it concerns the future of Dragon Tiger Hall. I can't make a hasty decision. Furthermore, if you don't mind, could you share more about Netherworld Snake?"

"Mr. Ling wishes to resolve the threat of Netherworld Snake?"

"There's an old saying, 'Know your enemy and know yourself, and in one hundred battles you will never be defeated.' If I don't understand my adversary, how can I possibly fight against them?"