

The Beauty 701

Chapter 701: Reunion with Su He (3)

"Elder Su, are you saying that everyone from the Yangxin Pavilion will attend that grand event?"

Su He nodded and said: "That's correct. You know about the Yangxin Pavilion, and I believe you have some understanding of it. Let me put it this way, people from the Yangxin Pavilion mostly wander outside and seldom return to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. However, when this grand event begins, everyone will rush back. The level of this event is much higher than the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony. Once you are there, no matter who you deal with, you have to be cautious, keep several steps ahead, and be careful not to be deceived."

"I understand that. I will pay extra attention."

"Alright!" At this moment, Su He put down the fish bones in his hand, stood up from the wooden stump chair, and then walked to the edge of the wide beach, pointing at Ling Chen and said: "You, come here."

Ling Chen dared not delay and quickly stepped over to Su He's side, asking, "Elder Su, what instructions do you have?"

"In the Martial Arts world, your skills among your peers are not bad. But that's in the absence of the Yangxin Pavilion. Once you're in the Yangxin Pavilion, you will meet many people of your age, or even younger, whose strengths are not a bit weaker than yours. If you want to win, relying solely on your current strength and techniques I've taught you is completely insufficient, you must improve yourself in a short time."

"Elder Su, what should I do?"

"I have never taken a disciple in my life, and I intended to take all that I've learned into the grave. However, considering you will be participating in that grand event, I will make an exception once, and impart to you a few moves. After all, once you're there, you will represent me, not just yourself. Even if you don't bring honor to yourself, you can't embarrass me."

Hearing these words, Ling Chen felt a secret thrill - to have a Heavenly List master pass on his skills was not something everyone got to enjoy.

"Elder Su, rest assured, I will certainly not disgrace you."

"Youngster, first thing I want to remind you is, in the Yangxin Pavilion, you might face many challengers, and then, your opponents will mostly be Earthly List masters. You cannot treat them the way you treat Dragon List masters. There's a very clear difference between Dragon List masters and Earthly List masters, and that is Hua Realm."

"Hua Realm?" Ling Chen asked curiously: "Elder Su, what is that?"

"The so-called Hua Realm is actually a kind of power. The Inner Strength cultivated by Tiger List masters and Dragon List masters, but Earthly List masters call it Hua Realm. After entering the Earthly List, the power gradually changes. It's not just a quantitative change, but also a qualitative leap. In short, Hua Realm is stronger than Inner Strength, it extends further, and has more lethality. Dragon List masters, at most, can release their Inner Strength to a distance of about two fingers. A bit stronger and it's three fingers at most. But Earthly List masters are different; they can release their Hua Realm over half a meter. Facing such an opponent, you won't even have the chance to get close before being repelled by their Hua Realm."

Half a meter? Hearing Su He's clarification, Ling Chen was somewhat surprised; the gap seemed too big.

However, when he had fought with Lin Tong some time ago, why didn't he encounter such a situation? At that time Lin Tong was also an Earthly List master, but his Hua Realm was far from being as formidable as what Su He described.

Thinking of this, Ling Chen couldn't help but express his doubts.

"The problem you mentioned is actually quite simple." Su He patiently explained: "That person named Lin Tong must have just broken through the bottleneck and hasn't mastered the use of Hua Realm yet. Once he masters the differences between Hua Realm and Inner Strength, he will be able to perfectly utilize his power." After saying this, Su He changed the subject: "Alright, let's not talk about that for now, as time is limited, I don't have so much time to go into details with you. Watch carefully now, I will only do it three times. Learn what you can."

Hearing this, Ling Chen immediately sat down cross-legged on the ground, intently watching Su He, not daring to miss any detail.

...

Time trickled by, and in the blink of an eye, the morning sun slowly rose from the sea level, gradually dispersing the pitch-black night.

At this time, on the beach, Su He stood with his hands on his back, facing the sea. As the morning sun gradually rose, Su He slowly turned his head, looked at the meditating Ling Chen and said, "You can reflect on it by yourself, I'm going to rest now, and you don't need to say goodbye to me later." After speaking, Su He went back inside the house.

After an unknown amount of time, Ling Chen finally opened his eyes, stood up facing the sea breeze that carried a hint of seaweed-smell, and looked up at the blazing sun overhead, secretly astonished at how long he had been in meditation.

Recalling Su He's instructions from the morning, Ling Chen didn't disturb Su He again and Instead returned to where he parked, and drove towards the airport.

He had agreed to meet with Qiu Yong and others at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion today, and if he didn't set off soon, he would probably be late.

Luckily, with the Hongyu Group's private jet, when evening fell, Ling Chen successfully arrived at the mountains and forests outside the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

Just as he stepped into the forest, Ling Chen hadn't walked far when he heard rustling sounds all around. Ever since undergoing special training with Yang Chen, Ling Chen's ears had become much sharper.

Quickly judging the situation, Ling Chen identified the footsteps of four or five people. There would only be so many people here if they were members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. To avoid misunderstandings, Ling Chen called out loudly: "Everyone, I am Ling Chen, a friend of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

As soon as his voice fell, Ling Chen saw a young man walking out from under the dense foliage nearby.

The young man came over to Ling Chen, looked him up and down, then greeted him with a fist and palm salute and a smile: "It turns out to be Mr. Ling. Elder Qiu and the others already mentioned that you would come back later. Mr. Ling, please this way, I'll take you there."

Ling Chen politely returned the salute and slightly smiled: "Thank you for the trouble."

Once at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, Zhou Jun and Song Ge, who had already received the news, stood at the entrance. Seeing Ling Chen approaching, both of them had smiles on their faces and quickly greeted him.

"Ling," Song Ge waved his hand and took the initiative to call out.

Friends meeting was a happy moment. After exchanging a few pleasantries, Zhou Jun pulled Ling Chen aside and asked: "Hey! Tell me the truth, what are you doing at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion this time?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"If you were coming alone, I wouldn't think much of it, but you guys are showing up at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion as the 'Eight Eccentrics,' it's definitely not just a friendly visit. Spill it, what's the big deal? Let your brothers know first."

Ling Chen waved his hand and said: "Don't ask me, I can't help you, I'm just here to tag along, the specifics should be asked of my elder brother. Stop being so curious, let's go, first take me to see my elder brother."

Seeing that Ling Chen was reluctant to speak, Zhou Jun shrugged helplessly, not good to keep questioning, and had to lead Ling Chen to the room where Qiu Yong and others were.

Chapter 702 Seeing Du Kang Again (1)

After meeting with Qiu Yong and the others, Ling Chen made small talk and did not mention the purpose of his trip to Jinhai City at all. It wasn't that he didn't trust Qiu Yong, but Song Ge and Zhou Jun were also present, and it was better not to let them hear.

Although Ling Chen still didn't know exactly what relationship Su He had with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, being as clever as he was, even if Su He didn't say anything, Ling Chen could guess a thing or two. Su He's position in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion wasn't just high, it was extremely high.

At this moment, someone walked towards the door and stepped into the room.

Seeing the newcomer, Ling Chen hurriedly clasped his fists and slightly bowed, saying, "Elder Zhou."

Zhou Qi nodded and took the initiative to greet Qiu Yong and the others. Even though Zhou Qi held a high position in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the other party was after all among the Eight Eccentrics, and even if the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master Su Mei were here, she wouldn't dare be negligent.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the Pavilion Master invites you!"

Hearing this, Yang Chen smiled and said, "Brother Six, your charm is really great. We didn't even see the Pavilion Master when we came yesterday, but the moment you arrive, you immediately receive a summons. It seems that our faces are not as big as yours."

"That's right, of all of us here, only Brother Six is the youngest and most capable, and handsome and dashing, naturally earning others' favor," Xia Yue added.

Ling Chen touched his nose helplessly and said with a bitter smile, "Enough! You two stop teasing me."

"Everyone, recently the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion has an important matter to deal with, so the Pavilion Master has been very busy and couldn't receive everyone immediately. Please forgive us and don't take it to heart," Zhou Qi explained.

"It's okay," Qiu Yong said indifferently, "We were just joking, nothing serious. Elder Zhou doesn't need to apologize. Since the Pavilion Master has summoned us, let's hurry on, so we don't keep her waiting."

Walking to the top floor of the Pavilion Master's tower where the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master resides, Qiu Yong, as the leader of the Eight Eccentrics, was the first to step in.

Upon entering the room, a graceful figure could vaguely be seen behind the curtain.

With both hands clasped in salute, Qiu Yong greeted, "Qiu Yong and the Eight Eccentrics pay their respects to the Pavilion Master."

"Please, Elder Qiu, have a seat!"

"Thank you!"

After everyone sat down, Su Mei, sitting behind the curtain, asked, "Elder Qiu, may I know what brings the Eight Eccentrics to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion this time?"

"Well..." Qiu Yong glanced at Ling Chen with the corner of his eye and said with a smile, "It's nothing much, just wanted to ask the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion for a favor. My younger brother was seriously injured recently, was at death's doorstep, and although he has improved somewhat, his health isn't fully recovered. I worry about residual health issues, thus I came to ask the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion for a Heavenly Mechanism Pill. I wonder if the Pavilion Master could make an exception and help?"

"Elder Qiu, it's not that I don't want to help you, but Ling Chen received many rewards during the Heavenly Mechanism Great Ceremony, including several Heavenly Mechanism Pills. Surely they haven't all been used up?"

"If we still had some, we wouldn't have had to ask the Pavilion Master for help."

"If it were anyone else, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion wouldn't easily give out the Heavenly Mechanism Pill, but since Elder Qiu has spoken, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion must show some respect. Zhou Qi, go fetch a Heavenly Mechanism Pill."

"Yes," Zhou Qi responded and then turned and walked out of the room.

"Elder Qiu, the Eight Eccentrics rarely visit the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, so since you're here, why not stay a few more days and let us extend our hospitality," Su Mei warmly invited.

With a mild smile, Qiu Yong replied, "Since the Pavilion Master has invited, how could I refuse? It would be my pleasure to stay."

In a short while, Zhou Qi brought a high-quality Heavenly Mechanism Pill and handed it to Qiu Yong. Once the item was received, Qiu Yong led everyone to thank Su Mei and then turned to leave the room.

Before Ling Chen could leave the room, suddenly, Su Mei's voice came from behind the curtain, "Mr. Ling, please wait a moment."

Qiu Yong turned back and looked at Ling Chen with a meaningful expression, saying, "Then we'll head back to our room first. You can have a good talk with the Pavilion Master."

Ling Chen nodded and watched as Qiu Yong and the others left before he returned to the room and asked the figure behind the curtain, "Miss Su, did you need something?"

"Elder Zhou, you may leave as well, let us talk alone."

"Yes!" Zhou Qi nodded slightly and followed in the footsteps of Qiu Yong and others, leaving the room.

Once there were no others in the room, Su Mei lifted the curtain and walked out from behind it, graceful and elegant.

It's been a while since Ling Chen last saw her, and Su Mei seemed somewhat tired, probably due to lack of rest, not as spirited as before.

"Miss Su, have you been busy lately? You don't seem to look very well," Ling Chen asked with concern.

"There are many things to handle at the Yangxin Pavilion, and although I as the Pavilion Master have many people to command, this matter must be handled personally by me, thus I've been more tired than usual, but it's nothing. It'll be fine after a few days."

Hearing this, Ling Chen immediately understood. There was no need to guess; Su Mei was surely preparing for the grand event at the Yangxin Pavilion.

"Ling Chen, did you really come to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion only for a Heavenly Mechanism Pill?"

Facing Su Mei's inquiry, Ling Chen smiled slightly, "Of course. Why, do you not believe me?"

"It's not that I don't believe you, but... if it was just for this, I feel you wouldn't make such a fuss, even bringing the Eight Eccentrics personally to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Actually, given your relationship with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, if you had just spoken up, I would have definitely not refused, so I am curious to know if you might have other motives."

"I won't hide it from you, I indeed have another purpose. Miss Su, I was wondering if Elder Du is at the Yangxin Pavilion?"

"Du Kang?" Su Mei nodded and replied, "Since he helped you last time, he has been staying at Yangxin Pavilion. What, you want to see him?"

"Correct. I want to thank him and also discuss some matters with him. Miss Su, I wonder if you could help me with this?"

"This..." Su Mei hesitated and said, "It's not that I'm unwilling to help you, but the rules of the Yangxin Pavilion are many, and also, Elder Du doesn't really want to be disturbed, I'm not sure if he would be willing to meet you. How about this, let me ask and see what he thinks."

"That would be much appreciated."

After some more casual talk, Ling Chen took his leave from the room.

His earlier mention of visiting Du Kang was just a pretext and did not reveal his true purpose, simply following Su He's instructions. Before his arrival, Su He had advised him not to reveal the dagger hastily, but to first find Du Kang and have him accompany him to the grand event to assess the situation.

Because this grand event involved a showdown between masters, Su He hoped that after seeing the capabilities of the opponents, he could carefully consider everything before deciding whether to participate or not.

Once back in his room, Ling Chen stood by the window, stretched leisurely, and quietly awaited Su Mei's news.

Chapter 703 Seeing Du Kang Again (2)

Arriving at Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, a round of drinks was inevitable. With Song Ge and Zhou Jun accompanying, they drank until midnight, all three of them drunk and staggering, unable to walk steadily, so they had to spend the night in Ling Chen's room.

The next day.

When Ling Chen woke up, he heard a knocking sound outside the door. Probably disturbed by the knocking, Zhou Jun and Song Ge woke up and got up to open the door.

As soon as the door opened, before Zhou Jun could react, he felt a pain in his head. He covered the sore spot, looked up, and saw Zhou Qi standing at the door, looking displeased, and gently scolded, "You rascal, how much wine have you stolen this time?"

Zhou Jun retorted dissatisfiedly, "It's just a few bottles of wine, old man, do you really need to be so stingy?"

During this, Ling Chen quickly approached, clasped his fists, and said, "Elder Zhou, are you here to find me or..."

Upon seeing Ling Chen, Zhou Qi immediately turned his attention away from Zhou Jun, saying, "Mr. Ling, the Pavilion Master just sent a message for me to take you to Yangxin Pavilion. Get ready, I'll wait for you outside in ten minutes."

Curious, Zhou Jun asked, "What are you doing going to Yangxin Pavilion? Hey! Old man, we're bored anyway, why don't you take us along?"

Zhou Qi replied irritably, "Both of you just stay put; I'll settle accounts with you when I return."

After Zhou Qi left, Zhou Jun and Song Ge looked at Ling Chen curiously, wondering what he was going to do at Yangxin Pavilion. Ling Chen naturally wouldn't reveal his purpose. It was not that he didn't trust Zhou Jun and Song Ge, but some matters are better kept known to as few people as possible.

After washing up, Ling Chen came outside alone. At that moment, Zhou Qi was quietly waiting for his arrival. After meeting up, Zhou Qi, without another word, immediately led Ling Chen towards Yangxin Pavilion.

Along the way, Ling Chen noticed that the number of guards outside Yangxin Pavilion had increased considerably; previously, there were only two at the entrance, but now there were six. Moreover, upon entering Yangxin Pavilion, Zhou Qi had to show the Pavilion Master's token, or they wouldn't be allowed entry.

Upon reaching the spacious Siheyuan, as soon as he entered through the gates, Ling Chen heard noisy chatter. In the large courtyard, there were several children, about six or seven years old, playing. Besides the children, Ling Chen also saw Song Yi.

Perhaps sensing Ling Chen's gaze, Song Yi turned back and saw Ling Chen, his face immediately darkened, he snorted, then turned his gaze away.

"Elder Zhou, I remember there weren't so many people last time I came, why..."

"There is a grand event being held at Yangxin Pavilion this time, all the roaming people have returned, these kids are the disciples collected by various masters."

Upon hearing Zhou Qi's explanation, Ling Chen finally understood.

They passed through the Siheyuan, and Ling Chen entered the back mountain of Yangxin Pavilion, which truly held importance; many masters resided here.

On the way, Ling Chen saw many unfamiliar faces. Due to years of martial training, even though these people had ages around seventy or eighty, they appeared only in their sixties, looking quite youthful.

Regarding Ling Chen's arrival, not many truly noticed him; most just glanced at him and then went about their own business.

After walking for about ten minutes, Ling Chen finally reached Du Kang's residence. There was a simple thatched cottage, spanning over a hundred square meters, with dozens of liquor jars placed outside. Even from afar, a rich alcohol aroma was detectable.

Arriving outside the cottage, Zhou Qi slightly bowed with clasped hands, respectfully saying, "Elder Du, Ling Chen is here."

As soon as he finished speaking, a young man about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old with an ordinary appearance and a stern demeanor stepped out of the cottage. He glanced at Zhou Qi and said indifferently, "Hand him over to me, you can go back."

"Yes!"

Zhou Qi, without a word more, turned around and left the way he came.

After Zhou Qi left, the young man shifted his gaze to Ling Chen. After looking him over, he said, "Come with me."

Ling Chen nodded, following the young man's pace into the cottage.

Inside the spacious and bright house, Du Kang was sitting by the window, leaning on a rattan chair, gently rocking, holding a gourd of wine, drinking occasionally, very leisurely, humming an indistinguishable tune, looking quite content.

Seeing Du Kang, Ling Chen quickly approached, respectfully performed a salute, and greeted, "Elder Du, sorry to disturb you."

Du Kang, with half-closed eyes and a smirk, watched Ling Chen and said, "Have a seat; no need for formalities here." After speaking, Du Kang glanced at the young man beside him, saying, "Come, let me introduce you, this is my disciple, his name is Yang Tao, he has been with me since he was four, it's been over twenty years now."

Ling Chen immediately clasped his fists and called out 'Brother Yang.'

Yang Tao maintained his indifferent demeanor, not saying a word, just nodded slightly, then went into his room to mind his own business.

"Don't mind him; that kid is just like that, not much for talking." Du Kang paused, then changing his tone, asked, "So, what brings you here this time?"

Without hesitation, Ling Chen took out the dagger given to him by Su He and held it up to Elder Du.

"Elder Du, please have a look."

Du Kang took the dagger, drew it from its sheath, and seeing the 'He' character engraved on the blade, his expression slightly stunned, he suddenly stood up from the rattan chair, his murky old eyes gleaming sharply.

"This item... where did you get this?"

"Elder Du, since you recognize this dagger, you must know who it originally belonged to."

"Old Su... it really is you... after all these years, you finally show yourself," Du Kang murmured, slowly sitting back down in the rattan chair.

After pondering for a while, Du Kang looked at Ling Chen and asked, "Do you know who gave him this dagger?"

"I don't know; Elder Su never mentioned it to me."

"It was I who gave it to him. No wonder that old fellow would have you bring it to me; he knows I recognize this dagger." Saying this, Du Kang sheathed the dagger, handed it back to Ling Chen, and asked, "How is that old man doing?"

"Elder Su is doing well, however... Elder Su repeatedly instructed me not to disclose his whereabouts, so..."

"All right, I understand, don't worry, since he does not want others to know his whereabouts, I won't bother to ask. If he had you bring this dagger to me, he must need my help for something. Tell me, what is it? Considering that old man's sake, I'll help if I can."

Chapter 704 Yang Tao

"I know that the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will hold a grand event in the next few days, and I wish to participate."

"You?" Upon hearing this, even the always composed Du Kang was startled, and with a face full of surprise, looked at Ling Chen and said, "Was it that old man who asked you to participate?"

"No. I pleaded with Elder Su to give me this opportunity." Ling Chen paused for a moment before continuing, "I want the Nine Elements Pill."

Du Kang leaned forward from his rattan chair and said earnestly, "Honestly, I don't know why he agreed to your request to attend such an event, but what I want to tell you is that wanting the Nine Elements Pill is pure folly; it's simply impossible."

"Why?" Ling Chen asked with a face full of confusion.

"Because you're too weak; going there would be suicide. Do you know that almost everyone participating in this event is a master from the Earthly List? What do you have to compete against those people with? I won't deny your talent and potential, but some things cannot be changed by courage and audacity alone. The event at Yangxin Pavilion is a contest of one hundred percent strength, not luck."

Du Kang opened his mouth and said, "Elder Du, I know you have my best interests at heart, but I have no choice. As long as I can obtain the Nine Elements Pill, no matter the risk, I'm willing to take it. I only hope that you can help me this once."

"You!" Du Kang sighed helplessly, "Why won't you listen to my advice? That old man too; he actually agreed to let you participate in this event—it's not helping you, it's harming you."

With that, Du Kang stood up from the rattan chair, turned his head towards the inner room, and called out, "Apprentice, come out for a bit."

Once Yang Tao came out from the room, Du Kang looked at Ling Chen and said, "The two of you, come with me."

Leaving the thatched cottage, Du Kang led Ling Chen and Yang Tao to a spacious open area and said, "You two, spar here."

Spar?

Ling Chen was shocked; he hadn't expected Du Kang to make such a request.

Du Kang glanced at Ling Chen and said, "You want to participate in that event, right? Fine, I'll give you a chance. If you can last one minute against my disciple without being defeated, I'll help you out. If you can't, then you better go back early and not lose your life here." Having said this, Du Kang turned to his own disciple and instructed, "Use only your left hand."

"Understood." Yang Tao nodded, then fetched a rope from outside the house, tied it around his right wrist, wrapped it around his waist, and firmly restricted his right hand.

"Come on!"

Looking at Yang Tao's expressionless face, Ling Chen slightly furrowed his brow. He wasn't sure how strong Yang Tao's abilities were, but as a disciple trained by a master from the Heavenly List, he couldn't be that weak. Although Yang Tao was limited to using only his left hand, Ling Chen was aware that Du Kang's instructions meant he had full confidence in his disciple.

"One minute," Du Kang said, holding his wine gourd and stepping aside, "Begin. Ling Chen, you may use any method at your disposal."

Hearing this, Ling Chen didn't dare to be careless. He drew out the Tianling Blade. With a flick of the mechanism, a sharp blade immediately sprang out, turning into a steel sword.

Steel sword in hand, Ling Chen stood up straight, his body slightly tilted, his sharp gaze fixed on Yang Tao, looking for the right moment to strike.

In the blink of an eye, more than ten seconds passed, and seeing Ling Chen had not yet made a move, the still Yang Tao suddenly stepped forward and dashed straight toward Ling Chen.

Yang Tao's pace wasn't fast, and Ling Chen could pinpoint his location accurately. As Yang Tao closed in, Ling Chen hesitated no longer. With a flick of his wrist, he thrust his steel sword straight at Yang Tao's forehead. The sword seemed light and effortless, seemingly without force, but the sword tip was condensed with a magnificent Inner Strength. The sword's edge was sharp, piercing through the air in an instant.

Just as the sword tip was about to hit the target, the straight-advancing Yang Tao suddenly leaned backward, then pivoted on his feet, quickly changing position and dodging the sharp sword tip.

Having missed his strike, Ling Chen swiftly withdrew, avoiding giving Yang Tao the chance to close in. However, at that moment, Ling Chen suddenly felt a surge of powerful energy, like a wall of air, sharply hitting his right shoulder. His retreating steps not quite stable, he was pushed aside by that force.

Seeing this, Ling Chen quivered his long sword and lightly tapped it against the ground, leveraging that force to prop up his body.

Simultaneously, Ling Chen's peripheral vision caught a glimpse of Yang Tao less than a meter away.

Hua Realm!

Ling Chen inwardly frowned; he had been hit by the Hua Realm energy unique to the masters of the Earthly List. The Hua Realm was more formidable than Inner Strength, able to harm a person from about a meter away. Just now, his only thought had been not to let Yang Tao get close, but he had forgotten this detail.

Right now, only twenty-something seconds had passed since Du Kang's one-minute mark, but after that brief exchange, Ling Chen had already realized Yang Tao's strength. Indeed, a master of the Earthly List who was proficient in the Hua Realm was not easy to deal with.

Half a minute left!

Ling Chen closely watched the advancing Yang Tao, rapidly contemplating his strategy.

Suddenly, a gust of wind rushed at his face. In the blink of an eye, Yang Tao, who had been three meters away, charged forward, now less than a meter from Ling Chen.

Seeing this, Ling Chen was shocked and quickly retreated, trying to increase the distance between them. But Yang Tao was very fast, like a swift breeze, relentlessly pursuing him.

Feeling the fierce Hua Realm energy, Ling Chen's pupils contracted, and with a shake of his hand, he threw the steel sword he was holding, its sharp tip aimed straight at Yang Tao's face.

Forced by the steel sword, Yang Tao had no choice but to withdraw and cease his assault. Then he twisted at the waist, raised his right leg, and kicked the flying steel sword away, landing it more than ten meters away.

Seeing the Tianling Blade lost, Ling Chen didn't even think before he lightly tapped with the tip of his foot, quickly moving in the opposite direction of Yang Tao.

"Trying to escape?" Yang Tao snorted softly, instantly accelerating and chasing right behind Ling Chen. In less than ten seconds, the distance between them had already narrowed.

Ling Chen knew well that once Yang Tao got within a meter, he would inevitably be attacked by his Hua Realm energy.

As he was considering his options, Ling Chen's gaze was suddenly drawn to the dozen or so wine jars placed outside the straw hut. An idea flashed through his mind, and the corner of his mouth lifted slightly.

Immediately, he increased his speed toward the wine jars outside the straw hut. Upon reaching them, he lifted a wine jar and swung it toward the pursuing Yang Tao.

As the wine jar fell from above his head, Yang Tao's expression changed. Instead of dodging, he reached out with both hands, steadily catching the wine jar, and then set it aside. His demeanor suggested he was particularly careful not to damage the jar.

Chapter 705 The Cunning Ling Chen

Noticing Yang Tao's actions, Ling Chen was instantly overjoyed; he had finally pinpointed Yang Tao's weakness. With this thought, Ling Chen paid no heed to the iron blue face of Du Kang next to him and kept lifting up the wine jars, smashing them towards Yang Tao.

In order to ensure the wine jars remained intact, Yang Tao had no choice but to concentrate all his energy on them, to prevent them from being damaged and the wine spilling onto the ground.

This repetition continued until Ling Chen suddenly turned his head and looked at Du Kang not far away: "Elder Du, has a minute passed?"

Du Kang looked at Ling Chen displeasedly, then said to Yang Tao, "Alright, stop it both of you."

Hearing this, Ling Chen breathed a sigh of relief as if he'd been exonerated. Thankfully, he found a method Yang Tao dreaded; otherwise, if he really had to last a minute under Yang Tao's hands, he likely couldn't have managed.

Seeing Ling Chen's smug face, Du Kang said unhappily, "You still have the face to smile, using such treacherous tactics. If it weren't for Yang Tao being concerned about the wine I brewed, you would have failed already."

Ling Chen touched his nose and replied sheepishly, "That... Elder Du, didn't you say earlier that any means could be used, so I..."

"Enough! Even if you passed, if you're seeking death, I won't stop you. That's it then, go back first and come find me here in two days. The grand event won't start for another three days. Rest well these next two days, adjust your condition, and don't disgrace Old Su when the time comes."

"Yes, I'll take my leave then." With that said, Ling Chen turned to face the approaching Yang Tao, cupped his fists, and said, "Big Brother Yang, my apologies for earlier. Please don't take it to heart—I'll invite you for a drink next time to make amends."

Yang Tao's expression was indifferent, and it was unclear whether he had taken Ling Chen's words to heart.

Leaving the Yangxin Pavilion, Ling Chen headed straight for his room. Seeing his beaming face, Qiu Yong knew things must have gone really smoothly, so he did not inquire further.

Returning to his room, Ling Chen kept Elder Du's instructions in mind, to rest well for the next two days and be in good spirits before the grand event began. Just as Elder Du said, at that time, he would not just be representing himself, but also Su He. Su He had also mentioned this to him.

To maintain his condition, Ling Chen rejected invitations for drinks from Zhou Jun and Song Ge, spending all his time in his room, meditating in silence.

...

A day passed by.

While in meditation in his room, Ling Chen suddenly heard a 'dong dong dong' knocking at the door.

"Who is it?" Ling Chen asked aloud.

However, there was no response from outside the door. Ling Chen found it odd and asked again, but still, no one responded.

"Who could it be so early in the morning?" Ling Chen muttered to himself, climbing off the bed and walking towards the door.

Opening the door, Ling Chen looked outside only to discover that no one was there. Although he didn't see anyone, he found a small paper note on the ground.

Heh! Ling Chen secretly smirked, finding it interesting. He didn't know who it was, but they were playing such tricks.

Despite his thoughts, Ling Chen still picked up the note.

"Meet at the north gate in half an hour."

Looking at the content on the paper, Ling Chen grew curious. He wondered who had left the note, doing so secretly—could they not have directly come to his room to talk? As Ling Chen pondered, he took another few looks at the note and noticed that the handwriting was very elegant, likely that of a woman.

A woman?

Within the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, Ling Chen only knew one woman, Su Mei. Other than Su Mei, who else would secretly arrange a meeting with him?

Never mind! Ling Chen shook his head, not bothering to think about it anymore. He would just go to the appointment when the time came. After all, this was the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion; surely no one would dare harm him here.

After sitting in his room for a while, estimating that it was almost time, Ling Chen tidied up a bit and then headed alone towards the north gate of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

Having toured around the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion with Zhou Jun before, Ling Chen was quite familiar with its surroundings. The north gate was another exit of the pavilion, but it had been sealed off with stones many years ago, and many trees had been planted around it. Now, the north gate had essentially become a garden.

When he arrived in the garden, Ling Chen searched for any traces of other people. However, even after waiting a few minutes, no one appeared.

The agreed time had long passed, yet the person had not shown up. Could it be that he had been fooled? This thought made Ling Chen feel indignant, so instead of waiting any longer, he turned around to leave.

But just after taking a few steps, a faint voice suddenly reached Ling Chen's ears. He quickly turned around and looked behind him, only to see an elegant figure stepping on the fallen leaves, walking towards him gracefully.

Seeing who it was, Ling Chen was shocked and exclaimed, "Porridge girl?"

He never expected that the person who had arranged to meet him would be the Porridge girl.

"How... How could it be you?" Ling Chen asked in surprise.

"I just arrived at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and happened to see that Qiu Yong and Xu Ming from the Eight Odd Men were also here. I thought you might be here too, so I checked, and sure enough, you were, so I called you out."

"Aren't you friends with the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Master? Since you have a friendly relationship with the pavilion, why all the secrecy? Why not just say what you have to say directly in my room?"

The Porridge girl shook her head and said, "I can't do that. The people of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion still don't know I'm here; I sneaked in."

Hearing this, Ling Chen was taken aback and asked puzzledly, "Why?"

"I don't want people to know I've come to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. I have an important task this time that may cause a falling out with the pavilion, so it's better to avoid contact with them as much as possible."

A falling out?

Ling Chen was shocked; the Porridge girl was actually saying such a thing. Could it be she was preparing to do something detrimental to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?

Seeing Ling Chen open his mouth, the Porridge girl beat him to the punch and said, "Don't ask. It's my business, and it has nothing to do with you. You'd better not get involved to avoid getting dragged into it."

"If you didn't want to involve me, then you shouldn't have called me here and told me so much."

"I know. But I thought it through carefully—this matter is too dangerous, and there might not be another chance to see you. So, there are some things I must tell you. I believe you must also have many questions you want to ask me. If I don't tell you now, I'm afraid there won't be another opportunity."

Hearing how grave the Porridge girl's tone was, Ling Chen said solemnly, "What exactly do you want to do?"

The Porridge girl sighed softly, shook her head, and said, "Don't ask; even if you do, I won't tell." She paused for a moment and then changed the subject, "Aren't you curious about what happened to Ling Kun?"

Chapter 706 The True Identity of the Secret Leader

"Not bad, I really want to know, how do you know my father, and what is your relationship with him?"

"Actually... I not only know your father, but I am also very close to him."

Close?

Hearing this word, Ling Chen was slightly startled and did not react for a moment. Noticing Ling Chen's strange gaze, porridge girl realized her choice of words was inappropriate and quickly corrected herself: "No, don't misunderstand, I mean, your father is my Master, that's why our relationship is quite close."

"He is your Master?" Ling Chen was suddenly taken aback. He had never imagined that there was such a relationship between his father and porridge girl.

"Yes. I don't want to keep it from you, you have actually met your father a long time ago, do you remember? Many times a man claiming to be from the Secret Society has come to see you, he is your father."

"What?" Ling Chen widened his eyes, somewhat unable to believe it all. That mysterious man from the Secret Society who claimed to be his father's friend was actually his father.

Why... knowing that he had waited for him for so many years, and now being so close, why couldn't he acknowledge him? Thinking of this, Ling Chen felt a mix of emotions, and it was an unpleasant feeling.

Seeing the change in Ling Chen's eyes, porridge girl spoke, "Don't think too much, Master doesn't disregard you, on the contrary, he values you so much that he hid his identity and refused to acknowledge you. Unfortunately, he originally wanted you to lead an ordinary life, but you still got involved. Master once said, when everything is resolved, he will come to meet you. But plans can't keep up with changes, the actions of the Secret Society provoked the fierce retaliation of the God Organization, and even the experts of the Heavenly List were dispatched, which led to Master being captured."

"You can't be telling me that my father is the mysterious leader of the Secret Society?"

Porridge girl nodded and said: "Yes. Although to the inner circle he claimed to be a close follower of the leader, in reality, he is the true controller of the Secret Society, and he did so merely to conceal his identity."

So that's how it is!

At this moment, Ling Chen finally understood the things he had been puzzled by before. He had wondered why the Secret Society suddenly agreed to help him unconditionally, it turned out to be because of his father. Including the last time Ling Kun found him and talked about the matters related to the southern Ling Family. Ling Kun didn't want him to get involved, as he wanted him to stay away from the family struggles.

Thinking it over, Ling Chen looked at porridge girl and asked: "Do you know where my father is?"

Porridge girl hesitated for a moment, then slowly shook her head and said: "Not sure yet."

"Really?" Ling Chen stared into porridge girl's eyes.

Facing Ling Chen's gaze, porridge girl appeared somewhat uncomfortable, slightly turned her head away, and said, "I have no reason to lie to you."

"Well then, you..."

"I've said everything I needed to, don't ask any further, I still have very important things to do. If I succeed this time, it won't be long before I can reunite you with your father." After saying this, without waiting for Ling Chen to say anything else, porridge girl already ran towards the garden outside, and in a blink, she was out of sight.

Watching the disappearing back of porridge girl, Ling Chen sighed silently.

He could see that porridge girl was deceiving him just now. Porridge girl certainly knew Ling Kun's whereabouts but chose not to tell him. Unfortunately, what porridge girl didn't know was that he had long known his father was in the hands of Ji Gang.

Back in his room, Ling Chen's mind was still pondering the conversation with porridge girl. That mysterious man was actually his father, he originally thought that his father had forgotten about him, but it turns out he had always been watching his every move from the shadows.

Father...rest assured, no matter the cost, I will definitely rescue you.

...

Into the night.

In Yangxin Pavilion, a dark shadow swiftly passed over the ground, heading straight for the deep parts of the valley.

Upon reaching the valley, the shadow looked all around, seemingly in search of something. However, just at that moment, an elderly voice suddenly came from a tree branch: "Young girl, stop looking, you won't find it."

"Who's there?" The shadow was startled and quickly looked up at the branches above. Instantly, an old man could be seen lying on a thick branch, holding a wine gourd with one hand, his face flushed, and a hint of drunkenness in his eyes.

"You don't need to know who I am. You just need to know that you won't find anything in Yangxin Pavilion. Hurry up and leave, while the others haven't discovered you yet. This place is Yangxin Pavilion, not the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. If others catch you here, the consequences won't be pleasant. We never show mercy to those who trespass into Yangxin Pavilion."

"You..."

"Stop stalling, go on, don't make it hard for this old man or for Ling Chen."

"Ling Chen?"

"Yes, he already guessed your purpose for coming here, so he sent me a message, hoping I could help, to stop you. If you insist on taking action in Yangxin Pavilion, you'd be disregarding his kindness." After speaking, Du Kang jumped down from the branch, took a couple of sips of wine, then strode towards the thatched hut, saying as he walked: "Go on, don't linger here. Since you've managed to get in, presumably you can also get out. I won't see you off."

Watching Du Kang's figure gradually moving away, porridge girl's expression suddenly became immensely complicated.

Could it be... Ling Chen knew about her purpose for coming to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?

...

The next morning, Ling Chen got up early, went to the windowsill, and stretched while looking out at the training field.

Two days had passed, and today was the day to meet Du Kang at Yangxin Pavilion.

Taking advantage of the early hour, Ling Chen went alone to the training field to loosen up his muscles.

A day's plan starts with the morning; at this time, the training field was filled with martial artists practicing. Ling Chen chose a relatively high spot, swung a few punches to loosen up his body, then drew the Tianling Blade, practicing from swordplay to swordsmanship, and only stopped when he was drenched in sweat.

"Yo! Isn't this Ling Chen, the first on the Newcomer List?"

At that moment, a mocking voice came from not too far away.

Ling Chen looked up and saw that the speaker was none other than Tong Nan. Ling Chen had met Tong Nan once during his last visit to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and knew him to be a playboy, so the impression was deep.

After glancing at Tong Nan, Ling Chen shifted his gaze beyond him to Song Yi and Liang Zheng standing behind.

Liang Zheng remained his usual indifferent self. In contrast, Song Yi's eyes held a trace of darkness toward Ling Chen, probably because he had lost to Ling Chen in a spar and was subsequently scolded by his master, Huang Zheng, which made Song Yi quite hostile towards Ling Chen.

Seeing the three approaching, Ling Chen slightly furrowed his brow, then sheathed the Tianling Blade and turned to leave.

Chapter 707 Insulted (1)

Seeing Ling Chen about to leave, Liang Zheng called out: "Ling Chen, where are you going? It's rare for old friends to meet, why not stay longer? Are you afraid of us?"

Ling Chen turned his head back, and said indifferently: "Please mind your words. We're not even close to being old friends, not even friends at all."

Hearing this, Song Yi sneered sarcastically: "Liang, he doesn't want to be friends with us, why bother offering warmth only to receive coldness in return?"

"Is that so?" Tong Nan chimed in from the side: "I really don't know what makes him think he can look down on us, just because he is first on the Newcomer List?"

Listening to their mocking words, Ling Chen was too lazy to argue and started walking down the hillside.

However, just as Ling Chen was about to leave, he saw someone approaching from the opposite direction.

Porridge girl?

Ling Chen paused slightly, a faint smile appearing at the corner of his mouth. Porridge girl's appearance here meant that her action last night was unsuccessful. When porridge girl left, he had guessed her purpose for coming to the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion might be the same as his, for the Nine Elements Pill. Otherwise, she wouldn't have left without telling him.

Therefore, he had made a point to greet Du Kang, hoping he could help so porridge girl wouldn't get into trouble. Although porridge girl was strong, being an Earthly List expert, Yangxin Pavilion was full of masters and it was easy for her to get into trouble.

At this moment, seeing porridge girl appear openly in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, Ling Chen knew that she had abandoned her previous plan.

"You're here!" Ling Chen smiled and quickly went up to meet her.

Porridge girl looked at Ling Chen irritably and asked: "Was it you who had someone block me last night?"

Ling Chen nodded and said: "It was for your own good. Whatever you planned to do, with the masters from the Yangxin Pavilion around, it wouldn't have been easy to succeed. Do you know who stopped you last night? His name is Du Kang, a Heavenly List expert from Yangxin Pavilion. Luckily, I have a good relationship with him, otherwise if someone else found you, you wouldn't have been so fortunate."

"Heavenly List expert?" Porridge girl looked startled, her eyes on Ling Chen filled with a curious glint.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"After being out of touch for a while, your circle of friends has grown wider, even knowing a Heavenly List expert."

Ling Chen laughed and said: "That's because of my good character, everyone wants to be friends with me."

"Look at how pleased you are." Porridge girl, her nose tilted up, huffed lightly and said: "It's a good thing for you to make connections with a Heavenly List expert; he might be able to help you a lot in the future."

During their conversation, Tong Nan and the other two had noticed porridge girl's appearance.

Suddenly seeing a refined and beautiful woman appear, Tong Nan and the others were instantly captivated. Although they had seen beauties at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the only top-notch beauty was Miss Su. As Miss Su was the Pavilion Master of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, they could only admire her from a distance, not daring to entertain any disrespectful thoughts.

However, the beauty before them was equally elegant and beautiful as Miss Su.

Watching porridge girl talk with Ling Chen, both Song Yi and Liang Zheng had a look of admiration in their eyes. They usually stayed in the Yangxin Pavilion and rarely went out, so they had little chance to meet beauties. In comparison, the playboy Tong Nan was more thrilled.

He had almost had his fill with the women of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, and it was rare for any to spark his interest. But now a top-notch beauty suddenly appeared, how could he not be moved?

"Do you two know who that woman is?"

Song Yi and Liang Zheng shook their heads and said: "We've never seen her before. Tong, you know we mostly stay in Yangxin Pavilion and seldom visit Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. She's likely a guest there, maybe... maybe I should go ask around and find out her identity for you."

Tong Nan waved his hand and said: "No need for that, just go up and ask directly."

Hearing this, Liang Zheng quickly said: "Tong, everyone is aware of your charm, but... what if she is an important guest of the Pavilion Master? This casual approach might displease the Pavilion Master."

"What's there to be afraid of?" Tong Nan casually said: "So what if it's impolite? Don't forget, we are from Yangxin Pavilion. Although the Pavilion Master has the authority to manage the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, if she wants to punish someone from Yangxin Pavilion, she needs the consent of several elders from Yangxin Pavilion. Besides, you know the Pavilion Master is often lenient towards us; even if we make a small mistake, I believe the Pavilion Master won't fuss over it. Alright, if you two don't have the guts to go, then stay here. I'll go by myself."

With that, Tong Nan walked towards Ling Chen and porridge girl.

Seeing Tong Nan's actions, Song Yi and Liang Zheng exchanged a glance, nodded slightly, and followed Tong Nan's footsteps.

"Have you met Miss Su?"

"I have," porridge girl said. "I just went to greet her and plan to stay in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion for a few days. I heard someone say you were training here, so I came to find you."

"Let's go, it's getting late, let's go have breakfast."

Porridge girl agreed, and was about to follow Ling Chen down the hillside when suddenly she heard Tong Nan's voice from behind: "Beauty, please wait a moment!"

Porridge girl turned around, sizing up the quickly approaching Tong Nan, her eyebrows slightly raised, her eyes showing a hint of displeasure, and asked: "Do you need something?"

As he approached, Tong Nan unabashedly admired porridge girl's beauty, then flamboyantly flipped his bangs, a charming smile appearing on his lips, and said: "Beauty, let me introduce myself first. My name is Tong Nan, a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion. May I know how to address the beauty?"

Seeing Tong Nan's frivolous demeanor, porridge girl coldly said: "Sorry, I have no interest in telling my name to a stranger. Ling Chen, let's go!"

As porridge girl moved to leave, Tong Nan quickly stepped in front of the two, blocking their way.

Ling Chen furrowed his brow and asked, "Tong Nan, what are you trying to do?"

"Ling Chen, shut up, this has nothing to do with you, get lost and don't interfere with my business," Tong Nan said irritably.

"Tong Nan, she is my friend, you better not have any intentions towards her. Otherwise, don't blame me for being rude," Ling Chen warned.

"Ha!" Tong Nan sneered contemptuously, "Is that a reminder or a threat? If it's a threat, I'm afraid you are not qualified."

Behind them, Song Yi chimed in: "Ling Chen, don't think just because you defeated me once you can strut around here. Tong Nan is a genuine Earthly List expert, he could squash you with one hand. I advise you to leave as far as you can and stop making a fool of yourself here."

Chapter 708 Humiliation (2)

"Shut up, all of you!" The Porridge Girl, seeing Tong Nan and Song Yi mocking Ling Chen, could no longer stand it and shouted, "If any of you dares to insult him again, don't blame me for being merciless."

Tsk, tsk!

Tong Nan shook his head with a smile, looking at Ling Chen with a face full of mockery: "I thought you were so formidable, but it turns out you're just a coward who needs a woman to stand up for you, what a disgrace to men."

"Exactly." Song Yi and Liang Zheng echoed in agreement.

"Enough!"

Hearing them continuously mocking Ling Chen, the Porridge Girl appeared very angry, her delicate face covered in frost.

Feeling the Porridge Girl's anger, Tong Nan immediately became more restrained, and with a smile said, "Beauty, you've misunderstood. We were just joking with Ling Chen, we're actually all friends."

"Tong Nan, you might as well stop trying to self-aggrandize, who is your friend?"

Just then, a voice came their way. Ling Chen and the others looked up to see Zhou Jun and Song Ge walking towards them; the speaker was none other than Zhou Jun.

As he got closer, Zhou Jun swept a cold glance at Tong Nan and Song Yi, and snorted, "The people from Yangxin Pavilion are becoming more and more presumptuous, even daring to flirt with the Pavilion Master's honored guests. Just wait, I will report this incident to the Pavilion Master exactly as it happened."

Tong Nan snorted indifferently, said arrogantly, "Zhou Jun, if you want to snitch, go ahead and do it. If I'm scared, I'm not Tong Nan. But, don't say I didn't warn you. I am a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, even if the Pavilion Master wants to punish me, she'd have to see if my Master agrees."

"What of Yangxin Pavilion? It's still under the command of the Pavilion Master. Do you dare to disobey her orders? Tong Nan, don't think that just because you are a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, you can act recklessly in Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. I'm telling you, if you keep this up, you will eventually face severe punishment."

"So what if I rely on Yangxin Pavilion? At least I count on my aptitude and abilities, unlike some people who neither have the aptitude nor the skill, and only get by with their old man's position in Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Although Tong Nan did not name names, everyone knew he was talking about Zhou Jun.

Upon hearing this, Zhou Jun became infuriated, his face blotchy red with rage as he shouted, "Tong Nan, what do you want exactly? Let me tell you, stop being so arrogant here."

Tong Nan laughed disdainfully, "I am arrogant, and what can you do about it? You can't beat me in a fight, nor can you compete with my background. What do you have to even compare with me? Zhou Jun, I know you're irritated by me. Is it because I've been with the woman you like? To tell you the truth, you do have some taste. Despite her usual demure appearance like a lady, she's quite wild in bed, which I quite enjoyed. Oh, right! I dumped her not long ago, so if you go to her now, I'm sure she'll welcome you. I have already trained her well, her skills in bed are outstanding, you'll be able to enjoy her right away, how wonderful!"

With those words, Tong Nan laughed loudly.

"Tong Nan!" Zhou Jun gritted his teeth, both fists clenched, crackling sounds emitting from them, wishing he could punch Tong Nan to the ground.

"What, not happy?" Tong Nan sneered, shaking his head, "What can you do about it, dare to take action against me?"

Upon hearing this, Zhou Jun could no longer restrain his rage and shouted, "Bastard, I'll kill you!" With that, Zhou Jun grabbed the steel sword from Song Ge's hand and thrust it towards Tong Nan's vital spots.

Seeing this, Song Yi and Liang Zheng shouted in unison, "Zhou Jun, you dare!"

As Zhou Jun made his move, Ling Chen glanced at the indifferent Tong Nan, who stood still and watched Zhou Jun with a smirk, a cold smile on his lips, and a fleeting glimpse of murderous intent in his eyes.

Not good!

Ling Chen's heart startled, mentally cursing the situation. It looked like Tong Nan was waiting to take a harsh action against Zhou Jun.

Not to mention that Tong Nan had the backing of Yangxin Pavilion and wasn't afraid of being blamed, what's more, Zhou Jun was the first to strike, and if something happened to Zhou Jun, Tong Nan could use the excuse of self-defense to absolve himself of responsibility.

Thinking of this, Ling Chen's toes tapped the ground, and he rushed forward, grabbing Zhou Jun from behind by the shoulders, pulling him back.

With his strike interrupted, Zhou Jun immediately turned his gaze to Ling Chen, frowning, "Ling Chen, what are you doing?"

"Don't be impulsive, even if you won't consider Tong Nan, you should consider yourself. Listen to me, now is not the time to cause trouble, let's go back first." Saying this, Ling Chen signaled Song Ge with his eyes.

The latter immediately understood, hurriedly walking to Zhou Jun's side and tugging at his arm, "Listen to Ling Chen, let's go."

Under the combined efforts of Ling Chen and Song Ge, Zhou Jun was forcibly dragged away.

Watching the departing trio of Ling Chen, Tong Nan called out with a laugh, "Zhou Jun, if you want to let off some steam, go find the woman you like, she's the best at relieving a man's needs."

Hearing this, Zhou Jun's face turned pale, and if not for Ling Chen's firm grip, he probably would have run back.

Back in the room, Zhou Jun angrily opened a bottle of wine, taking several large gulps. Seeing this, Ling Chen hurried to stop him, lest he get drunk in one go.

"Alright, alright, stop being so angry," Ling Chen advised, "It's all in the past, no need to hold grudges against her."

Song Ge spoke up indignantly, "That Tong Nan is really out of line, relying on his status as a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, he doesn't take us seriously at all. No way, I must tell the Pavilion Master, she needs to avenge this humiliation on your behalf."

Zhou Jun sighed and shook his head, "Forget it! Don't you know the delicate relationship between the Pavilion Master and Yangxin Pavilion? Even though the Pavilion Master is in control of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, she always shows great respect to the elders of Yangxin Pavilion, and rarely conflicts with the people of Yangxin Pavilion. So, even if I report this incident to the Pavilion Master, she won't say much, at most she'll downplay this issue."

Song Ge thought about it and sighed softly.

"It's nobody's fault but my own for not being strong enough, if I were stronger, I wouldn't have to endure this humiliation."

Seeing Zhou Jun looking dejected, Ling Chen patted his shoulder and said, "Enough, stop thinking about it. People like Tong Nan will eventually get their comeuppance."

As they talked, they suddenly heard a knock at the door.

"You guys sit tight, I'll get the door." With that, Ling Chen went to the door and opened it, to see a young man around twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old standing outside.

"Big Brother Yang?"

Seeing the visitor, Ling Chen was momentarily stunned, then promptly stepped aside to welcome him in.

"Big Brother Yang, please come in!"

Chapter 709 Valley

"I'm not going in." Yang Tao spoke up: "I'm here to let you know, Master asked me to find you and told you to come over, he has something to say to you."

"Elder Du?" Ling Chen quickly nodded: "Okay, I'll come with you right now." As he finished speaking, Ling Chen turned back to give Porridge Girl a gesture and then followed Yang Tao to Yangxin Pavilion.

Arriving at Yangxin Pavilion, Ling Chen walked into the thatched hut and saw Du Kang leaning against the wall, holding a liquor gourd, drinking mouthfuls of alcohol. When Du Kang saw Ling Chen come in, he wiped the liquor from the corner of his mouth and said, "Kid, you finally arrived. Didn't I tell you to come over in a couple of days? What took you so long?"

With a smile, Ling Chen replied, "Elder Du, isn't it just morning? I haven't even had the chance to eat breakfast."

"Enough! Don't bother eating now, let's go, we're short on time."

Hearing this, Ling Chen curiously asked, "Elder Du, where are we going?"

"You'll know when we get there." With that, Du Kang said no more and headed straight out of the hut.

Following Du Kang's lead, Ling Chen and Yang Tao kept pace behind him, walking deeper into Yangxin Pavilion. This was Ling Chen's first time coming to this place, and to his surprise, he discovered that the depths of Yangxin Pavilion were actually a valley.

Furthermore, the valley was very deep, extending hundreds of meters inward. As Ling Chen walked, he observed the environment on both sides of the valley—there were many houses built on the surrounding hill slopes. Some houses were spaced tens of meters apart, while others were constructed on the peaks or precarious edges.

However, those houses were quite old, weathered by years of wind and rain, now dilapidated and in disarray.

Noticing Ling Chen sizing up the houses, Du Kang began to explain, "These houses were once inhabited by the forebears of Yangxin Pavilion, all with histories of several hundreds of years. Only this place where we are now can be truly called Yangxin Pavilion. Later, because the pavilion was filled with the elderly, the Pavilion Master decided to expand Yangxin Pavilion, encompassing the outside area into the territory of Yangxin Pavilion."

"Afterward, this area became a place to commemorate the predecessors of Yangxin Pavilion, and since then, no one has lived here anymore."

After listening to Du Kang's explanation, Ling Chen asked, "Elder Du, then why have we come here?"

"Of course, there's something to be done."

As they spoke, Ling Chen suddenly heard a cacophony of noises coming from deep within the valley.

Not far ahead, Ling Chen looked and saw that not too far away, a large group of people had gathered—Song Yi, Liang Zheng, and also Tong Nan, all of them were there, including the elders of Yangxin Pavilion and the experts of the Earthly List like Huang Zheng and Liang Tian.

Roughly counting, there were at least thirty or forty people, more than half were elderly, while the other half consisted of young people and little children.

Seeing this, Ling Chen's interest grew even more. It was not his first time at Yangxin Pavilion, but this was the first time he had seen so many people gathered.

No wonder Su He had told him that whenever this grand event was held, the wandering elders of Yangxin Pavilion would return.

"Come this way."

Ling Chen was eager to move forward, to join the crowd and soak up the excitement, but suddenly Du Kang spoke up, leading Ling Chen and Yang Tao up a different path onto the hillside. At the top of the hillside there was a dilapidated pavilion; although the structure was old, the spot offered a great view, allowing one to see everything below clearly.

Du Kang settled himself in the pavilion, opened the liquor gourd, and started drinking on his own. Yang Tao, as usual, stayed put respectfully behind Du Kang.

Ling Chen, however, was restless, all the more so now that everything around him piqued his interest.

Standing on the hillside, Ling Chen watched the crowd below. He saw them gathering in groups, talking animatedly, but it was unclear what they were discussing. At the same time, even more people were arriving from outside the valley. In less than half an hour, the number of people in the valley had grown to fifty or sixty. Still, the young people and children made up the majority, with only a dozen or so older people present.

However, even having just over a dozen was already quite remarkable.

After all, apart from Yangxin Pavilion, there is nowhere else that can support so many high-level experts.

It seems that everyone has almost arrived, as the crowd suddenly became quiet and all turned to look in one direction of the valley.

Ling Chen noticed that there was a wooden hut in that direction, with its door tightly closed, and it was unknown whether there was anyone living inside.

Just as he was thinking about it, the door of the wooden hut was abruptly pushed open. And then, a young man walked out from inside. As the young man drew closer, Ling Chen finally saw the other party's face clearly, and his heart couldn't help but be surprised.

It's him!

During his last visit to the Yangxin Pavilion, Huang Zheng and Liang Tian had a big fight over competing to take him as their apprentice. It was this young man who suddenly appeared, stopped their conflict, and even scolded them.

Ling Chen remembered clearly, facing the young man's rebuke, Huang Zheng and Liang Tian didn't dare to utter any superfluous word, as if they were extremely fearful of the young man.

Therefore, Ling Chen was very curious about the identity of this young man. What kind of person could make Huang Zheng and Liang Tian feel so wary?

While he was contemplating, the young man had already reached the crowd.

As Ling Chen was observing the young man, he saw a surprising scene. Huang Zheng and the others bowed their bodies, actually paying respects to the young man. And it seemed as if the young man took such gestures as commonplace.

After everyone had finished paying their respects, the young man walked through the crowd to a stone platform not far away, then took out a wooden box from his person and placed it on top of the platform.

A wooden box?

Ling Chen looked at the exquisite wooden box, and couldn't help but wonder what was inside.

"Elder Du." Ling Chen turned his head to look at Du Kang in the pavilion and asked, "What is in that wooden box?"

"Inside there is the Nine Elements Pill."

Nine Elements Pill!

Ling Chen's eyes lit up and refocused his attention on the wooden box. At this moment, not just him, everyone in the valley had their eager gazes locked on the wooden box.

The Nine Elements Pill is inside there...

Ling Chen thought to himself, really wanting to rush over immediately and snatch the wooden box into his hands.

After placing the wooden box down, the young man didn't say a word, and directly returned to the hut. After watching the young man depart, the other people in the valley gathered around the stone platform, examining the wooden box and chattering amongst themselves. Yet, from beginning to end, no one dared to touch the wooden box.

Before long, everyone departed one after another, and the valley was instantly devoid of people.

They left?

Ling Chen watched the wooden box with a look of confusion on his face.

Since the wooden box contained the Nine Elements Pill, why did everyone act so strangely?

"Alright, stop looking, let's go."

Hearing Du Kang's words coming from behind, Ling Chen turned his head to ask, "Elder Du, are we leaving just like this?"

Chapter 710 The Disappearance of Zhou Jun (1)

"Not going back and still staying here for what?" Du Kang replied indifferently, then started walking down the hillside.

Seeing the two of them gradually walking away, Ling Chen dared not dally and quickly followed their pace, asking, "Elder Du, what's the matter after all? Since the Nine Elements Pill is there, why does everyone need to leave? Also, who was that young man just now?"

Du Kang swayed the wine gourd in his hand and shook his head, saying, "You kid, always with so many questions. If the Nine Elements Pill is not brought out, how can this major event continue? The Nine Elements Pill from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion is managed by them. In the past, when such major events were held, the ceremonies were very grand. However, over the years, if things can be simplified, they are. Besides, everyone has lost interest in those so-called ceremonies, so they just show up to express the importance of the event. Only after the Nine Elements Pill is taken out can the event continue."

"What about that young man?" Ling Chen pressed on. He always felt that the young man's identity was very mysterious; otherwise, why would masters like Huang Zheng and Liang Zheng show such respect for him? Could it be that the young man's strength was even greater than theirs?

Ling Chen found this hard to believe from the bottom of his heart. Regardless of how excellent that young man's talents were, Huang Zheng and the others were, after all, masters who had studied for seventy or eighty years, not to be compared with ordinary people. Therefore, Ling Chen thought there might be another possibility.

That young man must have a master behind him.

Du Kang had mentioned before that this valley was the original site of Yangxin Pavilion. After extending Yangxin Pavilion, the valley was gradually abandoned, becoming a piece of history for the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, no longer inhabited. However, the young man lived in the deepest part of the valley, which probably had extraordinary significance.

"You mean that young man?" Du Kang seemed to be talking to himself, murmuring, "That person... it's better for you to know less." After a pause, without waiting for Ling Chen to speak again, Du Kang suddenly changed the subject, asking, "Did you see all those people who came just now?"

Ling Chen nodded.

"Your opponents are among those people, but there are four that you should pay special attention to. Later, I'll have Yang Tao tell you, and also give you some advice, so you know what to watch out for, to avoid being unable to last even a minute in the ring, which would be too embarrassing."

"Yes, I'll trouble Brother Yang later."

On the way back, Ling Chen looked at the green woods on both sides of the road, and suddenly a thought came to mind.

"Elder Du..."

Hearing Ling Chen speak, Du Kang glared with impatience and said, "Why do you have so many questions, kid? Spit it out, what is it now?"

"Well... it's like this..."

Some time ago, Ling Chen, along with Zhou Jun and Song Ge, had come to Yangxin Pavilion to search for Zhu Hong's whereabouts and had by chance met a young man of similar age to himself, Yang Zhe. At that time, they followed Yang Zhe into a forest and discovered a prisoner chained up within. The prisoner had broken free of one arm, and the situation was urgent. Fortunately, they helped Yang Zhe control the prisoner. However, when they asked about it later, Yang Zhe remained silent about the prisoner's matter.

Since Elder Du was a Heavenly List master, he must be well-informed about the affairs of Yangxin Pavilion.

After listening to Ling Chen's story, Du Kang suddenly stopped walking, staring straight into Ling Chen's eyes and asked, "You've seen that person?"

"Yes. Elder Du, that person is..."

"Okay!" Before Ling Chen could finish speaking, Du Kang interrupted him with a wave, saying sternly, "Don't ask anymore about this matter, and, what you saw that day, pretend you didn't see it, it's better forgotten, and don't mention it in front of others. Otherwise, you might bring trouble upon yourself."

Seeing how serious Du Kang was, Ling Chen immediately shut his mouth. But the more mysterious Du Kang acted, the more curious Ling Chen's heart grew. Unfortunately, he was an outsider, and the secrets of Yangxin Pavilion would probably not be shared with him.

Returning to Du Kang's residence, Yang Tao, following Du Kang's instructions, gave Ling Chen a rough idea of the situation.

When leaving, Du Kang suddenly asked, "I heard that all eight of your odd fellows have come?"

"They have."

"Then do this, when you come over tomorrow, remember to bring all the eight odd fellows along, if anyone stops you, tell them it's my order."

Ling Chen was slightly startled, puzzled, and asked, "Elder Du, why do you want them to come?"

Since the event was organized by Yangxin Pavilion, it was not likely to be open to outsiders, yet Du Kang specifically allowed Qiu Yong and the others to attend, which Ling Chen found strange.

"I'm having them come just to act as witnesses, not forcing you to go to your death. If something happens to you, they can be the proof, so it doesn't bring trouble for me and the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

Uh...

Hearing this, Ling Chen secretly smiled bitterly to himself. He thought there was some other reason, but it turned out to be this. It was clear that Du Kang did not have much faith in him. But he understood; after all, a Dragon List master competing against Earthly List masters, no one would hold much hope.

Leaving Yangxin Pavilion, Ling Chen went straight to his room.

The martial arts competition would start tomorrow, and today was the last day. He must rest well, conserve his energy, and prepare fully for tomorrow.

After dinner, Ling Chen made a phone call to Nanrong Wanqing, chatting on the phone for over half an hour until the sound of Song Ge's voice came from outside the door, prompting Ling Chen to hang up.

Opening the door, and seeing Song with an anxious face, Ling Chen asked, "Big Brother Song, what's the rush?"

"Have you seen Zhou Jun? I've looked everywhere for him and can't find him. I don't know where he's gone."

"Zhou Jun? Aren't you usually together?"

"This morning after you left, Zhou Jun went back by himself. I wanted to call him for lunch, but he was nowhere to be found. Elder Zhou said he hasn't seen Zhou Jun all day. I'm worried... maybe he was upset this morning, and so..."

Ling Chen shook his head and said, "No, Zhou Jun is not that kind of person. People trained by Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion don't have such weak mental strength. Don't worry, maybe he has something to do. Let's wait a bit longer; if he really doesn't come back, we'll tell Elder Zhou to have someone search for him."

Song Ge sighed lightly and nodded, "That's all we can do."

...

In the blink of an eye, it was already midnight. Under the shroud of darkness, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion fell into silence, quiet as a whisper, with only the sound of the mountain wind brushing over the rooftops and whistling through the mountain gaps.

Inside his room, Ling Chen glanced at the time, frowning slightly. This late and Zhou Jun had yet to return, Ling Chen couldn't help but worry.