

The Beauty 711

Chapter 711 The Disappearance of Zhou Jun (2)

"Ling Chen, it's so late already. Zhou Jun still hasn't come back. Should we go and inform Elder Zhou?"

Hearing Song Ge speak, Ling Chen nodded and replied, "We should tell Elder Zhou. If Zhou Jun had something come up, he would've let us know in advance and wouldn't just disappear without reason. I think he must've run into some trouble."

Immediately, the two of them left the room and hurried to where Zhou Qi was residing.

Upon entering the house, Ling Chen got straight to the point and told Zhou Qi about Zhou Jun's disappearance. After listening, Zhou Qi frowned and said, "I was just wondering where that kid had gotten off to, not showing his face the whole day and not back even this late." After speaking, Zhou Qi asked, "Mr. Ling, you just mentioned that there was a conflict between you and Tong Nan this morning?"

"It was just a verbal altercation. Zhou Jun was very angry at the time and couldn't help but start a fight, but we stopped him. After coming back, I gave him some advice, and then I had to go to Yangxin Pavilion. According to Song, Zhou Jun was missing by noon."

Zhou Qi nodded and said, "Alright, I've got it. You don't have to worry about it; I'll immediately send someone to find him. As long as he's still in Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, we'll definitely find his whereabouts."

"He's definitely in Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion." Song Ge chimed in. "I asked the guards responsible for the pavilion's entrances and exits, and they haven't seen Zhou Jun enter or leave today." Saying this, Song Ge looked worried and added, "I'm wondering, could he have gone to Yangxin Pavilion to take revenge on Tong Nan?"

"That won't happen," Zhou Qi said. "Zhou Jun is my grandson. He's not that kind of person. Despite seeming clueless and as if he doesn't take anything seriously, he knows what's important and what to do and not to do. Tong Nan is from Yangxin Pavilion, and Zhou Jun is well aware of the delicate relationship between the Pavilion Master and Yangxin Pavilion, so he would never do anything to make it difficult for the Pavilion Master."

Ling Chen muttered to himself, "Then where could he have gone?"

"Stop worrying about this matter; I'll find him." After saying that, Zhou Qi strode out of the room, beginning to summon his subordinates to search for Zhou Jun.

Although Zhou Qi told Ling Chen and his group to go back, Ling Chen and Song Ge were concerned for Zhou Jun's safety and did not wish to leave, instead following Zhou Qi out.

Soon, Zhou Qi gathered more than twenty Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciples and began a systematic search of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Ling Chen and Song closely followed the team, checking each room one by one.

Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had two high-rise buildings that were specifically for the living quarters of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciples, accommodating around two hundred people with over one hundred rooms. To search through all these rooms would take a considerable amount of time.

Fortunately, all those residing in this building were male, and with their cooperation, the search effort went smoothly. In less than an hour, they had finished with one building and found no trace of Zhou Jun.

"Elder Zhou, shall we check over there?" Song Ge pointed to the high-rise building opposite them and asked.

"Over there..." Zhou Qi looked hesitant. After all, that building was inhabited by women, and it was strictly forbidden for men to enter. If Zhou Qi brought a large group of men over there, he expected it would provoke many complaints.

He didn't care much, but the impact wouldn't be good.

While pondering, Song Ge spoke up, "Elder Zhou, don't hesitate. Zhou Jun's safety is more important. Even if the Pavilion Master finds out, she would surely understand Elder Zhou's feelings and wouldn't blame you."

"This..." Zhou Qi thought for a moment, his eyes suddenly filled with determination, and he nodded, "Okay then, Song, you go over first and give notice, to avoid any misunderstandings later."

"Yes." Song Ge saluted with his hands clenched in a fist and immediately retreated.

Ten minutes passed, and Zhou Qi arrived with a large group of people at the bottom of that building.

Seeing Zhou Qi with a stern face, the two female Disciples responsible for guarding the entrance did not dare to hinder him. They stepped aside and welcomed Zhou Qi in.

"Start the search from the first floor, and remember, don't be too reckless," Zhou Qi instructed.

"Yes!"

The crowd responded in unison, scattering in all directions.

Song Ge and Ling Chen followed behind Zhou Qi, ascended the staircase to the second floor, and then stood at the stairwell, waiting for the results of the other's searches.

It was at that moment, from one of the rooms on the second floor, that a sharp scream suddenly erupted. Then there was a loud 'bang' – the door was kicked open from the inside, and a woman with disheveled clothes and hair burst out, crying for help while running towards Zhou Qi and the others.

As the woman approached, Ling Chen finally saw her clearly. She was rather attractive, with delicate features, long black hair, and bright eyes. However, at this moment, her cheeks were marked with tear stains, and her eyes were filled with swirling tears. Furthermore, her blouse seemed to be torn, exposing a large area of her fair skin. With her movement, her ample bosom bounced enticingly.

As the woman came closer, Zhou Qi's expression turned extremely sour. He stepped forward to block the woman and commanded coldly, "Stop!"

"Elder Zhou!"

There was a 'thud' as the woman suddenly knelt down, clutched at Zhou Qi's right leg, and wept, "Elder Zhou, save me, please save me."

Zhou Qi snorted and commanded, "Let go!" With that, he shook his right foot, forcefully freeing her hands.

Ling Chen found Zhou Qi's reaction peculiar. He had spent a fair amount of time with Zhou Qi but had never seen him act so callously. Given the woman's pitiful state, anyone would be moved to compassion. Yet Zhou Qi not only displayed no concern; he even kicked her away, which seemed completely unjustifiable.

Song Ge, seemingly aware of Ling Chen's puzzled look, moved closer and spoke softly, "That woman was once a love interest of Zhou Jun."

"So it's her!" Ling Chen was startled and suddenly understood. No wonder Zhou Qi showed disdain for the woman; that explained it.

However, seeing the woman's disheveled appearance, as if she had been violated, Ling Chen's expression turned grave.

Could it be that...

While contemplating, he heard a Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciple's voice, "Elder Zhou, we've found Zhou Jun."

Ling Chen's gaze followed, noticing the Disciple standing outside a room – the same room the woman had run out of.

This isn't good!

For some reason, a very bad feeling crept into Ling Chen's heart, and he hurriedly rushed towards the room.

Once at the door, Ling Chen looked inside, his expression instantly shifting to shock, frozen as he stared at Zhou Jun in the room, momentarily at a loss for words.

"Ling Chen, what's wrong?"

As the question landed, Song Ge rushed over from behind and cast his gaze inside the room, his face, much like Ling Chen's, suddenly became blank.

Chapter 712 The Disappearance of Zhou Jun (3)

In the room, Zhou Jun lay on the bed, his body completely bare, covered by a blanket from the waist down. Clothes were scattered on the floor beside the bed, along with several empty wine bottles, filling the room with the smell of alcohol. At this moment, Zhou Jun's eyes were closed, snoring loudly like thunder, having fallen into a deep sleep, completely unaware of the noise outside.

"This..." Song Ge looked at Ling Chen, then at the others, his face bewildered: "Ling, what should we do now?"

Hearing Song Ge speak, Ling Chen finally reacted, hastily asking the others at the door to leave, only keeping himself and Song Ge, then closing the door. He hurried to Zhou Jun's side and shook him.

"Zhou Jun, wake up! Come on, wake up!"

But no matter how Ling Chen and Song Ge shouted, Zhou Jun did not respond, clearly having drunk himself to unconsciousness.

Seeing this, Ling Chen had no choice but to pull Zhou Jun up from the bed and slapped him across the face.

After several slaps, the sleeping Zhou Jun finally woke up. He rubbed his eyes, looked at Ling Chen and Song Ge all groggy, and yawned continuously, asking: "Ling Chen, what... why are you guys... here?"

Song Ge spoke gravely, "Zhou Jun, you better wake up fast, this isn't the time to sleep."

Ling Chen added, "Do you remember what happened earlier?"

"I... I seem to... have been drinking..." Saying this, Zhou Jun turned his head to look around, his expression slightly changing as he exclaimed in surprise: "How... how am I here, where is this?"

Seeing the look of surprise on Zhou Jun's face, Ling Chen and Song Ge exchanged glances, sensing a hint of trouble from each other's eyes.

Ling Chen turned back, his expression solemn, "Zhou Jun, this is no joke; think carefully, what exactly happened earlier? Could it be... did you... with a woman..."

"Woman?" Zhou Jun asked puzzled: "What woman? Ling Chen, what exactly are you talking about?"

"Ah!" Song Ge sighed and said, "Zhou Jun, don't you remember whose room this is? This is Zhu Ying's place, haven't you been here before? How come you don't have any recollection?"

Zhu Ying?

Zhou Jun's expression changed, he quickly looked around, and exclaimed in surprise, "How... how did I end up in her room? I clearly remember drinking alone outside, and then... then..." As he spoke, a look of confusion appeared on Zhou Jun's face, as if he was struggling to recall what had happened during the day.

"Right! I remember when I was drinking, I bumped into Zhu Ying, we had a small chat, and then... we drank a few drinks together..."

Song Ge pressed, "And then what?"

Zhou Jun shook his head, "I forgot what happened after that. When I woke up, I saw you guys, if you hadn't told me, I wouldn't have known this was Zhu Ying's room."

"You..." Just as Ling Chen was about to speak, a 'bang' sounded, and the room's door was kicked open from the outside. Right after, Zhou Qi appeared at the door with a livid face and strode in.

Seeing his grandfather appear, Zhou Jun was suddenly shocked, hurriedly got up from the bed. However, just as he moved, he realized he was wearing nothing, his face instantly blushing red, quickly covered his vital parts with a blanket, looking awkwardly at Ling Chen and Song Ge, stammering, "You... I... how did I..."

Ling Chen opened his mouth, but the words at his lips were swallowed back. At this point, saying anything was useless. Many people had seen Zhou Jun's state, and with Zhu Ying's recent disheveled appearance, there was no need to ask further; everyone already understood what had happened.

Once this matter spreads, it will not only cause Zhou Jun to lose face but also leave Elder Zhou with no place to show his face. When the time comes, not just Zhou Jun, but Elder Zhou won't be able to stay at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion anymore.

Harsh, too harsh!

Ling Chen frowned secretly, no need to say, the incident clearly involved someone plotting behind the scenes. As for who it was, he couldn't determine yet, however, even if he didn't know, Zhu Ying surely did.

At this moment, Elder Zhou walked to the bedside, looked at Zhou Jun lying on the bed, his face not looking natural, and snorted lightly, saying nothing more than, "Dress up, come back with me."

After saying that, Elder Zhou turned around and left the room. Ling Chen and Song Ge exchanged glances, then followed Elder Zhou's steps, leaving the room together.

Outside the room, Zhu Ying was draped in a coat, leaning against the wall with her hands covering her face, sobbing non-stop, surrounded by several women, probably friends living next to her, comforting her.

However, no matter what they said, Zhu Ying kept crying non-stop, screaming about seeking justice from the Pavilion Master.

"Enough, stop crying!"

Elder Zhou said impatiently, "I will investigate this matter clearly and will eventually give you justice."

"No, Elder Zhou, it's not that I don't trust you, but Zhou Jun is your grandson, after dishonoring me like this, aren't you going to cover up for him?"

"You..." Elder Zhou's face turned cold, his fists clenched, feeling an urge to throw a punch. He took a deep breath, his anger subsiding slightly, and said coldly, "Since you are seeking justice from the Pavilion Master, go ahead then." With that, Elder Zhou waved his sleeve and strode towards the outside of the building.

Not long after Elder Zhou had left, Zhou Jun came out of the room.

As soon as Zhou Jun appeared, Zhu Ying immediately burst into tears, rushed over and yelled fiercely, "You bastard, you ruined my innocence, I must kill you today!"

Seeing Zhu Ying's impulsive action, Ling Chen frowned, immediately stepped in front of her, caught her wrist gently, and just a slight pull made Zhu Ying lose her balance, suddenly swaying to the side and leaning against the wall.

"Song, you take Zhou Jun away first."

"Alright." Song Ge responded, immediately pulling Zhou Jun away.

"Wait! I..." Zhou Jun wanted to explain, but before he could speak, Song Ge had already dragged him away.

Only after Song Ge and Zhou Jun had left did Ling Chen let go of Zhu Ying, his expression stern, "I'm telling you, don't think I'm unaware of the tricks you're playing. It would be wise for you not to stick to this matter any longer, and also, tell the people behind you, if they dare touch a single hair on Zhou Jun again, don't blame me for being unkind."

Zhu Ying was stunned for a moment, then scoffed, "Are you threatening me? Ling Chen, I know you, what right does an outsider have to interfere in my matters? Moreover, I advise you not to meddle in affairs that aren't yours, otherwise, you might not know who will end up unlucky."

"Fine, we'll see about that."

Chapter 713 Resignation

Catching up with Zhou Jun and Song Ge, Ling Chen and his two companions went straight back to their room. Upon entering, they saw Zhou Qi sitting in a chair, his face gloomy, fists clenched, and bulging veins visible on his forehead. Clearly, the events from before had left him very angry. At this moment, he was forcefully suppressing his rage, preventing himself from exploding.

Seeing his grandfather so angry, Zhou Jun hesitated for a moment, then approached Zhou Qi and said with his head bowed: "Grandfather, I... I am sorry for letting you down."

Zhou Qi looked up at his grandson, took a deep breath, and a hint of disappointment flashed in his eyes. After a while, he sighed softly and shook his head: "Forget it, I know you were framed this time. Besides, what has happened has already occurred, and it's useless to blame you now. Let's think more about how to overcome this difficult situation."

"Elder Zhou, who do you think is behind the framing of Zhou Jun?" Song Ge asked.

"How should I know? I've been serving the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion for so many years, always diligent without complaint, never making enemies with anyone. I can't think of anyone who would target me," Zhou Qi replied, glancing at Zhou Jun. "This incident must be related to you. Think about who you have offended to have provoked someone's revenge."

"It must be Tong Nan!" Ling Chen said in a grave tone. "We had a conflict with Tong Nan this morning; it must be his way of retaliating. And that Zhu Ying used to have dealings with Tong Nan. Given their relation, it is likely that Tong Nan directed her from behind the scenes, plotting for Zhu Ying to frame Zhou Jun."

Pausing, Ling Chen continued: "Tong Nan is a very cautious man. If we confront him directly, he will definitely wash his hands of this affair. Plus, we have no evidence, so we can do nothing to him."

However, we can start with Zhu Ying. No matter what, she is a woman after all, and if we apply certain methods, I doubt she would remain silent."

Zhou Qi waved his hand dismissively: "You all are oversimplifying the matter. Even as we speak now, Zhu Ying must have gone to plead with the Pavilion Master. Even if the Pavilion Master believes us, too many people saw Zhou Jun in Zhu Ying's room, and... the most important point is that Zhou Jun did have relations with that woman. With that connection, no matter how Zhou Jun defends himself, it's useless."

"This..."

Ling Chen and Song Ge glanced at Zhou Jun and were suddenly at a loss for words, unsure of what to say.

When they encountered Zhu Ying before, not only was she dressed in disarray, with various signs of tearing on her clothing. Additionally, the observant Ling Chen noticed that Zhu Ying had many bruises on her body. All these pieces of evidence were sufficient to prove that Zhu Ying's body had been forcefully violated, not of her own volition. Thus, with just this point alone, as long as Zhu Ying insisted that she was forced by Zhou Jun, Zhou Jun would have no defense.

Thinking to this point, Ling Chen couldn't help but sigh. Zhou Qi was right; this matter was indeed difficult to handle.

As he was thinking, a 'knock knock knock' came from outside the door.

Song Ge got up and opened the door, only to see a Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion Disciple standing outside. He cupped his fists towards Zhou Qi and said: "Elder Zhou, the Pavilion Master requests your and Zhou Jun's presence."

"I understand. You may leave now," Zhou Qi dismissed him, then stood up and said: "Let's go. What is inevitable will eventually come, we can't escape it."

Ling Chen asked: "Elder Zhou, do you want us to accompany you?"

"No need. This is our own family affair; you need not interfere. Besides, at this point, having more people is useless," Zhou Qi replied as he straightened his clothes, then strode out.

Watching Zhou Qi leave, Ling Chen patted Zhou Jun on the shoulder and said: "Go on, no matter the outcome, we will support you from behind."

Zhou Jun nodded, said nothing, and followed Zhou Qi's steps, leaving the room together.

"Sigh." After seeing off Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun, Song Ge sighed helplessly and said: "I really didn't expect such a thing to happen. Tong Nan is too ruthless; as a disciple of the Yangxin Pavilion, to plot and frame one of his own."

Ling Chen frowned and said: "Don't think too much for now. Elder Zhou has served the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion for many years; he has been through hardships even if not meritorious. I believe Miss Su won't forget past favors. Whatever we say now is useless; let's just calmly await the outcome."

It was now two o'clock in the morning, and there was a grand event at the Yangxin Pavilion to attend tomorrow. They should have been resting properly, conserving their energy, but the events that had transpired left Ling Chen in no mood to think of anything else.

After about half an hour, footsteps sounded from outside, and Ling Chen quickly opened the door. As expected, it was Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun who returned.

"Elder Zhou, what was the outcome?" Ling Chen and Song Ge asked eagerly.

Zhou Jun, head lowered, silently walked into the room, then sat down alone on a chair, his face full of loss and regret.

Zhou Qi sighed softly and said: "Considering the many years I've served the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, the Pavilion Master has decided not to pursue Zhou Jun's mistake. As for Zhu Ying... the Pavilion Master will find a way to appease her, providing some compensation."

Hearing this, Ling Chen and Song Ge simultaneously breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that nothing worse had happened.

"All right, don't just sit there, hurry back and pack your things," Zhou Qi said to Zhou Jun.

"Pack?" Song Ge asked, puzzled: "Elder Zhou, why packing?"

Zhou Qi replied indifferently: "I have already tendered my resignation to the Pavilion Master. We will leave Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion tomorrow morning and henceforth will have no further association with it."

"What?"

Ling Chen was shocked and asked: "Elder Zhou, didn't you say the Pavilion Master is not going to pursue the matter? Why..."

"The Pavilion Master may not be pursuing the matter, but having this scandal spread, where would we still have the face to stay at the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion? This is the best course of action. Before the matter blows up, it's better to handle it as soon as possible, so as not to make it difficult for the Pavilion Master." Zhou Qi paused then looked at Ling Chen and Song Ge: "Don't feel upset on our behalf; this is already the best outcome. Having friends like you is fortunate for Zhou Jun. Besides, leaving the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, we can live freely outside without so many restrictions, which can actually be more relaxing."

Although Zhou Qi spoke casually, Ling Chen could feel the helplessness and reluctance in his words. He knew that Zhou Qi had spent decades in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, almost dedicating his entire life to it. For Zhou Qi, the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was his home. Now faced with such a situation, his heart must be uncomfortable.

"Zhou Jun, let's go."

Zhou Jun nodded, stood up, and looked at Ling Chen and Song Ge. His handsome face forced a smile and he said: "Don't worry about me, I'm fine. Ling Chen, if I ever go to East Sea City, I'll definitely look you up. You'll have to treat me well then."

Chapter 714 The Grand Gathering of Heavenly Secrets (1)

After Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun left, the one who found it hardest to let go was Song Ge. Ever since he joined the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, he spent every day with Zhou Jun, and the two of them had a great relationship. Moreover, unlike Ling Chen, he was a man of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and had to abide by its rules. With Zhou Jun gone, he feared there would be few chances to see him again. So, witnessing his friend being treated unfairly was undoubtedly the most distressing for him.

Ling Chen patted Song Ge's shoulder and comforted him, "Big Brother Song, don't overthink it. What's done is done; we can only look on the bright side."

"I know, it's just that... sigh, forget it. The more I talk about it, the angrier I get. Ling, it's getting late, and you should rest. I won't disturb you any further." With that, Song Ge stepped out and left the room.

...

The next day.

Ling Chen woke up early in the morning, ready to see Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun off. But upon reaching Zhou Jun's room, he only saw several members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion cleaning out the room. He hastened to the door and peeked inside, only to find that the room's contents had been cleared out.

Seeing this, Ling Chen stopped a young man who was coming out and asked, "Where is Zhou Jun?"

The other man took a look at Ling Chen and said, "Don't you know? They left the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion last night."

Last night?

Ling Chen was startled, not expecting Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun to leave without saying goodbye. After a moment of thought, he understood. Zhou Jun had caused quite a scandal, losing all face; it made sense that Zhou Qi would not wait until daylight to leave.

At that thought, Ling Chen sighed. He had wanted to see them off, but now it appeared he would have to seek Zhou Jun out in the future. Fortunately, he still had Zhou Jun's contact information, so he wasn't worried about not being able to find him.

As Ling Chen was leaving, he ran into Song Ge, who, like him, had come to send off Zhou Qi and Zhou Jun. Hearing that the two had already left the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion early, Song Ge's mood seemed somewhat downcast.

"Big Brother Song, don't be too sad. There will always be a chance to meet in the future. I still have things to do, so let's not chat now. I'll come find you when I return tonight."

After separating from Song Ge, Ling Chen went straight to Qiu Yong and others' room and called everyone together. Yesterday, Elder Du had instructed him to bring the eight eccentrics with him.

Walking towards the Yangxin Pavilion, Wei Jiahao excitedly said, "I've long heard Big Brother mention the Yangxin Pavilion of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, saying it's the most mysterious place. Who would have thought we'd get the chance to see it today?"

Qiu Yong smiled and nodded, "I never expected it either. I heard entry to the Yangxin Pavilion is forbidden to outsiders, and even members of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion have no right to enter unless they have the Pavilion Master's permission. We're fortunate to have a chance to broaden our horizons thanks to Ling Cheng."

Listening to everyone's conversation, the smile on Ling Chen's face seemed somewhat strained. Their visit to the Yangxin Pavilion wasn't for sightseeing, but to witness his contest. If anything were to happen to him during the contest, with Qiu Yong and the others as witnesses, the blame would not fall on the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. It must be said, Elder Du really knows how to consider the Pavilion's interests.

Upon arriving at the Yangxin Pavilion, Ling Chen led Qiu Yong and the others directly to Elder Du's residence.

Coincidentally, just as they arrived, Elder Du and Yang Tao came out of the house, Elder Du holding a wine gourd, seemingly ready to set off for the grand event.

"Elder Du!" Ling Chen quickened his pace, greeted Elder Du with a fist and palm salute, and then greeted 'Big Brother Yang'.

Qiu Yong and the others hurried to catch up, with respectful salutes. Before coming, Ling Chen had briefed them about Elder Du's status, so everyone was careful not to make a faux pas.

Elder Du nodded and said, "There's no need to be so formal with me; this old man doesn't care for such worldly courtesy. Ling Chen, it's about time, let's hurry up and get going. We don't want to be late and miss the drawing for the lots."

Thereupon, the group followed behind Elder Du and Yang Tao, making their way to the valley of the Yangxin Pavilion.

Upon entering the valley, Ling Chen immediately noticed that today's setup was very different from yesterday. When he came yesterday, the valley was empty with only a few decrepit houses, but today, there were many disciples of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, all fully armed, stationed in various parts of the valley.

On the slopes on both sides of the valley, there were dozens of flags planted, each bearing the unique broken sword emblem of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion.

The deeper they went, the livelier it became; almost everyone with status in the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion had come.

Moreover, there was a fighting ring set up at the very depths of the valley. The ring was square, with a diameter of twenty meters, very spacious, and on both sides, there were racks of weapons, all kinds—swords, spears, halberds, and more—each emitting a chilling gleam, razor-sharp.

Following behind Elder Du, Ling Chen and Qiu Yong smoothly made their way into the valley.

At this moment, the area surrounding the ring was crowded, mostly with people from the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and Yangxin Pavilion. Ling Chen noticed that on a hillside not far from the ring, a platform had been erected, with over a dozen people sitting on it, including Huang Zheng and Liang Tian.

The others were all around seventy or eighty years old, presumably the elders and reclusive experts of the Yangxin Pavilion.

As a master of the Heavenly List, Elder Du's arrival immediately drew everyone's attention, with people respectfully saluting and then moving to the sides to make way.

"All right!" Elder Du turned his head back and said to Yang Tao and Ling Chen, "You guys stay here; I'll go up and greet those old fellows. Ling Chen, be careful later, and if you have any questions, ask Yang Tao; he'll tell you what to do."

"Yes."

Watching Elder Du leave, Yuan Yun asked curiously, "Ling Cheng, what did Elder Du mean by being careful?"

"It's nothing." Ling Chen replied evasively, "Third Brother, it's not often we come here; let's go around and look first."

No sooner had his voice faded than a sarcastic voice reached them, "Yo! Isn't this Ling Chen, the number one on the Newcomer List? When did you join our Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?"

Ling Chen turned his head, following the voice, and saw Tong Nan walking towards him with Song Yi and Liang Zheng.

Seeing the sneering look on Tong Nan's face, Ling Chen's eyebrows twitched, and a cold harshness flashed through his pupils, reminiscent of Mo Che.

Approaching, Song Yi looked at Ling Chen's left and right and asked with a half-smile, "Ling Chen, aren't you usually seen running around with that kid Zhou Jun? How come we only see you today and not him?"

Sure enough!

Ling Chen narrowed his eyes; he had always suspected that Zhou Jun's incident might have been engineered by Tong Nan and his cohorts. Now, it seemed highly likely that they were the masterminds behind it.

Chapter 715 The Grand Gathering of Heavenly Secrets (2)

However, although Ling Chen knew it was their doing, he was frustrated by the lack of evidence.

After thinking for a moment, Ling Chen spoke up: "Song Yi, don't think I don't know what you've done. Remember this: Zhou Jun is my friend, and you schemed against him. I will settle this account with you sooner or later."

"With just you?" Song Yi sneered and said, "You..."

"Enough!" Before Song Yi could finish his words, Tong Nan suddenly cut him off and looked at Ling Chen, "Ling Chen, I don't know what you're talking about, nor do I know what happened to Zhou Jun. In any case, don't pin everything on us, or else don't blame me for accusing you of defamation. Let's go!" With that, Tong Nan waved his hand and left with Song Yi and Liang Zheng, disappearing into the crowd.

"Do you have a grudge against them?" Yang Tao asked from the side.

Ling Chen shook his head: "I have no grudge with them, but they framed my friend and forced him out of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion."

"No matter if you have a grudge with them or not, just don't involve us. We're not your talisman, nor your backing. Also, you must know the rules of Yangxin Pavilion; people from Yangxin Pavilion absolutely must not fight amongst themselves, or they will face severe punishment. Whether it's us disciples or the masters, everyone must follow this rule."

After hearing this, Ling Chen nodded slightly: "I understand."

Yang Tao's meaning was clear, he did not want Ling Chen to use Du Kang's name to pressure others. But even if Yang Tao didn't mention it, he wouldn't do such a thing anyway. Bullying others by flaunting power was not his style; if he was going to bully someone, it would be based on his own capabilities.

"Ling Cheng, were those people from Yangxin Pavilion just now? They seemed pretty arrogant."

Ling Chen glanced at Xia Yue who had spoken and nodded with a smile: "Can the people of Yangxin Pavilion not be arrogant? They do have the capital to be."

Xu Ming said indifferently: "Others may have the capital to be arrogant, but so do you. There's no need to take their attitude to heart too much."

Hearing this, Ling Chen felt somewhat puzzled. For a long time, Xu Ming had always been low-key, but the words he said today were anything but low-key, in fact, quite the opposite. Ling Chen was very curious about what kind of capital he supposedly had.

While deep in thought, the bustling crowd gradually quieted down, and everyone's gaze turned to the stage.

Ling Chen looked intently and saw Su Mei, escorted by an old man, gracefully ascend the platform. She then stood at the center, her beautiful eyes like water, scanning the people below. When her gaze brushed across Ling Chen, it paused ever so slightly, revealing a hint of surprise as if she found it strange that Ling Chen was here.

Shifting her gaze away, Su Mei's lips parted slightly as she spoke, her voice as clear and melodious as that of an oriole.

"Everyone, today is the once-in-a-decade grand event of Yangxin Pavilion. There are hardly any outsiders here, and I believe you all understand the significance of this gathering, so I won't waste more time. Next, I will announce the rules: disciples of Yangxin Pavilion who wish to participate in the martial arts tournament must be at least eighteen years old and have strength equal to or above that of the Dragon List. Participants must not exceed thirty-five years of age. Only those Yangxin Pavilion disciples who meet these requirements may participate in the upcoming matches. Moreover, the tournament will primarily consist of one-on-one duels, with the winners advancing to the next round. Considering that we are all disciples of Yangxin Pavilion, it is inevitable that injuries will occur during the competition, so I hope everyone will be careful, stop at the right moment, and absolutely not intentionally harm the lives of others. If anyone is found to have violated the rules, no matter their identity or background, they will be expelled from Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion. Alright! I have said all that needs to be said, the tournament now officially begins."

As soon as Su Mei left the stage, the quiet crowd once again erupted into a buzz of conversation. Everyone was discussing spiritedly, with lots of commotion and noise.

"Ling Chen!"

At that moment, Ling Chen heard a voice coming from behind. He turned his head and saw Porridge Girl walking towards him.

"Eh!" Ling Chen asked in surprise: "How did you get here?"

Porridge girl gave Ling Chen an annoyed glance and said softly, "If you can come, why can't I?" After a pause, porridge girl still explained, "It was Su Mei who brought me here. She was afraid I'd be bored, so she brought me over to have a look. What about you? Did Su Mei specially allow you to come? Why didn't I hear her mention it?"

"She doesn't know I'm here."

As they spoke, Ling Chen felt a sharp and unrelenting gaze sweeping over him again and again, prompting him to glance over with the corner of his eye.

Immediately, he saw Tong Nan at the edge of the crowd, tilting his head and shooting occasional glances this way, looking very displeased.

It's him again!

Ling Chen frowned, guessing that Tong Nan was upset to see him staying with porridge girl. No, he had to keep a closer watch on porridge girl. He wasn't worried about Tong Nan swooping in to charm her away but was concerned that Tong Nan would resort to dirty tricks.

Having learned from what happened with Zhou Jun, he had to be cautious.

Just then, the crowd around them suddenly parted. Following that, Su Mei approached, accompanied by an elderly man.

"Ling Chen, how did you end up here?"

"It was Elder Du who brought me here."

"Elder Du?" Su Mei glanced towards Elder Du Kang on the hilltop stands, a hint of curiosity in her beautiful eyes. Curiosity aside, she didn't ask further but said, "Since you're here, why not come and sit with me? After all, you are guests, and Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion will surely not neglect honored guests."

Ling Chen nodded, not refusing Su Mei's invitation, and followed her to a side of the arena. By this time, chairs had already been arranged in a row, waiting for Su Mei to take a seat.

Once everyone was seated, tea was promptly served, with very attentive service.

At this moment, a young man emerged from the crowd and strode towards the arena. Upon reaching the arena, the young man folded his hands into fists, bowed to the crowd below as a courtesy, then straightened up, standing tall in the center of the arena, looking straight ahead, silently waiting.

Yang Zhe?

Recognizing the young man, Ling Chen was immediately aware of his identity, not expecting him to be the first one taking the stage.

It was him!

At this point, the crowd below the arena was abuzz with discussion, seemingly very surprised by Yang Zhe's appearance. Everyone had thought that the first to enter the arena would be high-ranking Dragon List fighters like Song Yi or Liang Zheng who had yet to step onto the Earthly List, not expecting a heavy hitter to be the first to challenge.

Ling Chen was also surprised, although he had only met Yang Zhe once. However, from what he had heard from Yang Tao, Ling Chen knew quite a bit about Yang Zhe. Yang Zhe and Yang Tao were brothers, with Yang Tao being the older and Yang Zhe the younger. Both of them were actually quite talented, which is why Du Kang brought them to Yangxin Pavilion and took them on as disciples.

However, since Elder Du's time was limited and he only wanted a single direct disciple, Yang Zhe was placed under the tutelage of another master in Yangxin Pavilion.

As far as Ling Chen knew, Yang Zhe's abilities were close to that of Yang Tao's, both being Earthly List masters and remarkably formidable among their peers.

Chapter 716 The Grand Gathering of the Heavenly Secrets (3)

Several minutes had passed, and it was dead silent below the arena, with no one stepping up to the challenge. It seemed that everyone was aware of Yang Zhe's prowess and no one of his age wished to cross hands with him.

In the blink of an eye, ten minutes had gone by. Su Mei, seated on her chair, saw that still no one had come forward and thus stood up and said, "If no one is willing to step up and challenge, then this round will automatically advance Yang Zhe to the next one."

Upon hearing this, the crowd below started buzzing with discussions, looking at Yang Zhe with great envy. Advancing to the next round without lifting a finger was not an opportunity that came by for everyone.

After Yang Zhe stepped down, someone immediately leaped onto the arena, cupped his hands towards the crowd, and bowed in greeting. This person had barely been on the stage for a few seconds before several others eagerly jumped onto the arena.

Ling Chen glanced around; these young people were all around twenty years old, quite young.

He guessed that these individuals were very close in strength, which is why they were eager to take the stage. Besides that, Ling Chen also noticed that among the crowd, Song Yi and Liang Zheng near Tong Nan appeared to be itching to go but seemed hesitant. After a moment of deliberation, they ultimately gave up the thought of going on stage.

"Yang," Ling Chen turned to Yang Tao beside him and asked, "There's a big gap in strength among the disciples of Yangxin Pavilion. If a Dragon List master stepped up, wouldn't they be afraid of an Earthly List master taking advantage?"

"Even though there's no rule prohibiting it, nobody would do such a thing. Whoever it is, they'd have to consider their own and their master's face. An Earthly List master bullying a Dragon List master is something no one can afford to lose face over. Remember, this competition is not just about the disciples; it's a struggle between masters. It's just that the masters are old and their skills are formidable, and using them could easily lead to disputes, so they have their disciples compete on their behalf instead," Yang Tao explained in a low voice, adding, "Now you should understand why the Master is so worried about you. In fact, his concern isn't really for your safety but for Elder Su's reputation. Elder Su holds high prestige in Yangxin Pavilion, and nobody dares to disobey him, not even other masters."

Ling Chen nodded. He had suspected that Su He's standing in Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion was high, but he hadn't realized it was that high.

As he pondered, the arena had cleared out the extras, leaving only two competitors.

After a few glances, Ling Chen lost interest in the match. Both contestants were Dragon List masters, and it was indeed rare for someone around twenty to make it to the Dragon List. However, this was Yangxin Pavilion after all, where everyone was a talented individual. What's more, Ling Chen's strength was not inferior, capable of matching the top three of the Dragon List, so he was not very keen on watching a duel between Dragon List masters.

The match lasted for about four or five minutes until, by a narrow margin, a winner was determined.

Including Yang Zhe just now, a total of two people had smoothly advanced to the next round. Before Ling Chen could react, he saw several individuals rushing towards the arena, including Song Yi and Liang Zheng.

Seeing others a step quicker than himself, Song Yi huffed softly. With a tap of his toe on the ground for leverage, his body swiftly flew towards the arena. At the same time, he twisted his waist, launching a sideways kick at a young man beside him.

Caught off guard by Song Yi's sudden attack, the youth had no time to dodge and was immediately kicked, sent falling towards the ground below the arena.

Seeing this, the others didn't hesitate and launched attacks on their nearby competitors.

Instantly, a melee broke out among the crowd, even before they had stepped onto the arena.

Ling Chen was startled and looked at Yang Tao with a puzzled face, asking, "Yang, what are they doing?"

"There's no need to make a big fuss; this is quite normal," Yang Tao replied indifferently, "Only eight people can advance to the next round, and the spots are limited. If one misses the chance, there's no hope left. It doesn't matter who it is or how powerful your background is; if you miss your chance, there's no remedy. This is just the beginning. The later it gets, the more intense the competition. To fight for the right to compete on stage, you have to prove you've got what it takes."

After hearing this, Ling Chen understood the reason behind it.

"Yang, when do you plan to make your move?" he asked.

"There's no hurry; let the others have a go first," Yang Tao paused, then changing the subject, he said, "Ling Chen, if you want to take action, you'd better seize the opportunity soon and not delay any further. As the competition intensifies later on, especially against Earthly List masters, it will be much harder for you to win by then."

"I understand."

With Yang Tao's reminder, Ling Chen turned his full attention to the arena, quietly waiting for the right moment.

Both Song Yi and Liang Zheng had the strength to rank within the top three of the Dragon List and were only a step away from the Earthly List. Naturally, no one else stood a chance when they made a move. Before long, Song Yi had firmly taken his place on the arena, alongside another young man.

Looking at Song Yi's opponent, Ling Chen couldn't help but frown. These two guys were too cunning!

Such a tactic.

When the crowd had clamored for a chance to get on stage, Song Yi and Liang Zheng must have conspired together. Song Yi went for the opportunity to get on stage, while Liang Zheng took care of the rest. However, while he was helping out, he purposefully let one youth go, allowing him to get onto the arena easily.

At that moment, the audience below the arena shook their heads, knowing that Song Yi's opponent was weak and stood no chance of winning.

Ling Chen shook his head inwardly; this was blatant cheating. But since Su Mei didn't object, even if he had an opinion, it was useless.

The duel ended in less than two minutes, and unsurprisingly, Song Yi won with ease, advancing to the next round.

There were now three people who had advanced, leaving five spots remaining.

After much thought, Ling Chen set his sights on Liang Zheng. His strength was comparable to Liang Zheng's, and if Liang Zheng took the stage, Ling Chen could give it a try. Although he couldn't claim a hundred percent certainty of victory, at least he held a seventy percent chance.

As he pondered, a loud 'clang' suddenly rang from the crowd, instantly drawing everyone's attention.

However, it was at this moment that Liang Zheng and another youth from the crowd leaped onto the arena together. By the time the others reacted, both were already securely standing on the stage.

Damn!

Ling Chen couldn't help but curse, "That's too despicable, using such methods." Turning to Yang Tao with indignation, he asked, "Yang, aren't they going to do anything about this?"

"How to intervene? They're using fair and open measures, not underhanded tricks. Besides, martial arts contests are not just about strength, but also wit. Sometimes, a clever mind is far more important than pure power."

Chapter 717: The Grand Gathering of Heavenly Secrets (4)

Ling Chen was speechless; he hadn't expected such a trick could be employed. However, he did admire Liang Zheng for deceiving everyone with such a method, easily seizing the opportunity to compete on stage.

"Yang, what's the deal with that young man?" Ling Chen asked, pointing to Liang Zheng's opponent.

"They had conspired beforehand," Yang Tao explained. "There are many elders in Yangxin Pavilion, and some of their disciples, due to their young age or lesser talents, don't make much progress in strength. Therefore, certain individuals with ulterior motives seek them out for cooperation. This way they not only curry favors but also reap some benefits. Why not do it? Just wait and see. In no more than thirty moves, they will determine the winner."

After hearing this, Ling Chen turned his gaze towards the stage, watching Liang Zheng and his opponent exchange blows. As Yang Tao had said, although their moves seemed sharp, they were actually feigned, with no intention of causing harm. As the thirtieth move approached, the young man made a slight mistake, allowing Liang Zheng to seize the opportunity and knock him to the ground.

"Liang Zheng wins!" announced the emotionless referee overseeing the match.

Liang Zheng, unconcerned by the whispers from the crowd below, left the stage with a broad smile on his face and gave Song Yi a high five in celebration.

With Liang Zheng and Song Yi both advancing, only five spots remained, and the competition grew increasingly fierce.

At that moment, a figure walked out from the crowd and headed straight to the stage. Upon seeing the man standing at the center of the stage, the crowd suddenly fell silent. Not only that, but even those preparing to compete halted in their tracks, not daring to step forward.

Ling Chen looked up and sized up the newcomer. The young man was about the same age as Yang Tao, around twenty-eight or twenty-nine, with a tall figure of about one meter eighty and a well-proportioned body, with harmonious muscles on his arms and legs. Moreover, his facial features were not bad. Although he wasn't particularly handsome, he exuded a martial bearing, like an unsheathed sword, brilliance revealed.

Several minutes passed, and no one approached the stage, seemingly overwhelmed by the man's presence, they remained obediently in the crowd, looking at each other.

Seeing this, the referee at the edge of the stage took a couple of steps forward, opened his mouth ready to declare the result. However, just at that moment, Yang Tao, who had been sitting beside Ling Chen, suddenly stood up and strode towards the stage.

Seeing Yang Tao's appearance, the words of the judge were immediately swallowed back, and he stepped aside.

Meanwhile, the young man on the stage watched Yang Tao with a subtly smiling face. As Yang Tao climbed onto the stage, the young man said, "I thought you wouldn't come up."

"I just didn't want to disappoint you," Yang Tao replied indifferently. "Wang Hao, a battle between us was inevitable sooner or later. Rather than wait, let's settle it now. I'm curious to see your progress after two years of seclusion."

Wang Hao?

A thought struck Ling Chen. So this was Wang Hao. Yang Tao had previously mentioned the disciples of Yangxin Pavilion to Ling Chen, especially highlighting those with strong abilities, including Wang Hao. According to Yang Tao, Wang Hao was very powerful. Among the many disciples, he was one of the best. Even Yang Tao admitted he was no match for him.

Yang Tao had once told him that he had sparred with Wang Hao two years ago and lost after 240 moves. Since then, Wang Hao had been in seclusion, and only emerged today. After two years of solitude, it was unknown how much Wang Hao's abilities had improved.

"Mr. Du, do you think your disciple has a good chance of winning?" asked an elder in a nearby spectator stand.

Du Kang tilted his head back and took a couple of drinks, saying to himself, "How would I know? That kid Wang Hao has been in seclusion for two years, but given his talent and aptitude, his progress shouldn't be small after two years of dedicated seclusion. Honestly, Wang Hao is indeed an exceptional talent. At just over twenty years old, he's been able to endure the loneliness and boredom of seclusion for two years, something not all of us old folks could endure with such focus." At this point, Du Kang shook his head and sighed lightly, "It's just a pity, if Old Man Wei were still alive, perhaps he could have nurtured a top expert."

Hearing Du Kang mention 'Old Man Wei', several other elders present sighed collectively, their expressions nostalgic.

"That's true. Old Man Wei died too early, but fortunately, before his death, he passed on all of his knowledge to Wang Hao. If someone could offer guidance, Wang Hao would avoid many detours. Eh! Mr. Du, are you interested in taking Wang Hao under your wing to nurture him? You are a master of the Heavenly List; among us all, probably only you are qualified to instruct Wang Hao."

Du Kang waved his hand and said, "Forget it, dealing with Yang Tao is enough trouble for me. If I took on Wang Hao as well, my legs would be tied to Yangxin Pavilion. You all know I like to roam around when I'm free. If any of you are interested, you might as well take Wang Hao and nurture him."

The crowd said in unison, "Let's forget it. Handing over a talent like Wang Hao to us would be a waste." At this, an elder suddenly spoke up, "If Elder Su were still around, he could have taken Wang Hao under his wing."

Upon mentioning Elder Su, the crowd immediately agreed, "That's correct, it's a shame Elder Su left Yangxin Pavilion many years ago, and now we don't even know where he is. If we could find him, it would be great to let him take on Wang Hao as a disciple."

Hearing this, a meaningful smile appeared on Du Kang's face, and his cloudy eyes swept towards Ling Chen's direction.

At this moment, everyone's eyes were focused on Yang Tao and Wang Hao.

The mountain breeze blew, lifting the corners of their clothes, making a rustling sound.

"Please!"

"Please!"

As the words fell, Yang Tao's gaze instantly sharpened, his toes tapped the ground, and his body surged forward with a fist aimed at Wang Hao's face.

However, midway through the punch, Yang Tao suddenly changed his move, twisting his waist from front to side, his fists turning into palms, striking high and middle simultaneously, while his right leg rose, sweeping towards Wang Hao's lower body.

All three attacks were launched at once, forceful and fierce, with a howling wind.

Facing Yang Tao's assault, Wang Hao's expression remained unchanged, still as calm as a mild breeze. Suddenly, without any discernible movement, his body drifted backwards, like a falling leaf, dodging all of Yang's attacks.

Seeing the move Wang Hao executed, everyone, whether below the stage or in the spectator stands, was taken aback.

This movement technique... could it be that he had already mastered the Shattered Leaf Step?

Chapter 718 The Grand Gathering of the Heavenly Secrets (5)

Shattered Leaf Step?

Upon hearing the exclamations from Qiu Yong and the others, Ling Chen curiously asked, "Big brother, do you know what Shattered Leaf Step is?"

Qiu Yong nodded and said, "Shattered Leaf Step is a movement technique that primarily relies on the coordination of Inner Strength and stepping techniques. Anyone who masters this movement technique will move like a drifting leaf, very light and incredibly fast, making it hard for others to anticipate. This movement technique is also considered an Absolute Skill in the Martial Arts world. I didn't expect it to appear on this young man. Tsk tsk! Worthy of the Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, none of its people are simple."

After hearing Qiu Yong's explanation, Ling Chen's eyes narrowed slightly, flashing a faint gleam, his thoughts unreadable.

"Shattered Leaf Step, who would've thought Wang Hao has already learned Old Man Wei's Absolute Skill. Mr. Du, it seems your disciple is in trouble," an old man chuckled maliciously.

Du Kang glanced at him, his expression indifferent, unbothered.

"So what? Consider it an opportunity to learn. I brought him here to gain experience, not for the Nine Elements Pill. If he loses to Wang Hao, it might actually be a good thing. It would serve as motivation for him to push harder and progress. As for you, your disciple Tong Nan, I've heard quite a bit about him. Young and frivolous, flirting around, without any true learning. Continuing this way, he'll eventually be surpassed by the other disciples of Yangxin Pavilion."

"Hmph! Du Kang, I will handle my disciple myself, no need for your nonsense."

"Alright! Both of you, enough with the talk," interjected several old men nearby, quickly trying to keep the peace fearing they might start arguing.

At this moment, after witnessing Wang Hao's performance of the movement technique, Yang Tao's expression turned serious. His eyes locked on Wang Hao's legs, he advanced step by step, his punches and palm strikes aiming high, middle, and low simultaneously.

However, no matter how fierce Yang Tao's attacks were, Wang Hao remained calm, seemingly unaffected by any threat.

With the agility of Shattered Leaf Step, Wang Hao controlled his body like a floating leaf, moving around the platform, always maintaining a distance from Yang. Under these circumstances, Yang, despite his strength, couldn't utilize it effectively.

After a few minutes of stalemate, Yang Tao finally stopped, quietly standing in a corner of the platform, he looked at Wang Hao and said, "How long will this continue? Since it's a spar, can't you fight me openly?"

Wang Hao slightly smiled, shook his head and replied, "No, I don't think there's a need to continue."

Yang Tao, frowning, asked, "Why?"

"Shattered Leaf Step is just one of the techniques I've mastered, and it's the least of them. If you can't even counter Shattered Leaf Step, I see no point in continuing. You can't defeat me."

Hearing this, Yang Tao's face shifted, a trace of reluctance in his eyes.

"Disciple, come down," Elder Du's voice came from the stands: "He's right, you're far from being his match."

Upon the Master's call, Yang Tao hesitated no more, silently gave Wang Hao a fist salute, and then turned to leave, walking back to Ling Chen's side.

Watching Yang Tao's expressionless face, Ling Chen opened his mouth, unsure of what to say.

He had expected a fierce battle between Yang Tao and Wang Hao, yet it ended so swiftly without Yang Tao showcasing his strength. Even Du Kang had spoken up; was Wang Hao's strength really that formidable?

"Wang Hao, advances to the next round."

As the referee's words fell, Wang Hao stepped off the platform, didn't even pause, and directly left the valley, disappearing in a blink.

"Big brother Yang..." Ling Chen hesitated, still couldn't help calling out.

"There's no need to console me," Yang Tao replied: "I'm fine, as a martial artist, one must learn to accept defeat. If one can't even accept this, then they won't get far. You should think about yourself. With Wang Hao advanced, there are only four spots left. If you don't act fast, you'll miss your chance."

During the conversation, numerous people rushed to the arena stage. There were exactly six people.

Originally, the plan was to dismiss four people, but at this moment, Su Mei suddenly signaled the referee with her eyes. The latter immediately understood and announced, "Alright! Since there aren't many people joining anymore, you six can compete together to save some time."

Hearing the referee's words, Ling Chen was stunned for a moment; he had thought it would be one-by-one, and was not expecting six people to compete together. With this arrangement, three slots were taken directly, and after accounting for the earlier slots, only one remained.

Ling Chen touched his nose in frustration and chuckled bitterly to himself. He had planned for numerous scenarios, but he hadn't anticipated this one. Now, what should he do?

Watching the six contestants on the stage, Ling Chen was speechless; those people were all Dragon List experts, yet their skills were still not as strong as his.

The not-so-strong disciples from Yangxin Pavilion were all participating; who could he challenge later?

During his contemplation, the six contestants on the stage eventually had their outcome decided.

Only one slot was left!

As the six people left the stage, someone suddenly leaped from the crowd, sprinting towards the arena. At this moment, Ling Chen couldn't care less who it was, as he instantly sprang from his seat and dashed to the edge of the arena at full speed.

Seeing Ling Chen's actions, Su Mei and others were simultaneously stunned.

What was he trying to do?

Before anyone could recover, Ling Chen had already leapt onto the stage.

"Is it you?" Seeing Ling Chen opposite him, Tong Nan frowned slightly and said coldly, "Ling Chen, did you drink too much last night? Only Yangxin Pavilion disciples are eligible to participate in this competition; why are you meddling here? Get down quickly and stop embarrassing yourself."

"Ling Cheng, what are you doing, come back!"

Yuan Yun's shouting reached him from behind, but as if he hadn't heard, Ling Chen kept his gaze fixed on Tong Nan, moving step by step and staring directly at him.

Seeing that Ling Chen showed no signs of leaving, the referee on the stage quickly approached and coldly demanded, "Aren't you leaving yet? Must I force you down?"

"Why would you have the right to force me down?"

"Simply because you are not a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion."

Ling Chen looked at the referee and responded, "Who says I'm not?"

Upon hearing that, not only Tong Nan on the stage, but everyone else who hadn't known (excluding Du Kang and Yang Tao), were stunned, looking at Ling Chen in surprise.

He's a Yangxin Pavilion disciple?

When did this happen?

Instantly, everyone's attention turned towards the stands. Could it be that some elder had taken Ling Chen as a disciple?

Under everyone's watchful eyes, Du Kang stood up from his chair and walked directly to the edge of the stands.

Seeing Du Kang rise, everyone was shocked— it was Du Kang!

Tong Nan looked at Ling Chen with displeasure, thinking that this guy really had unbelievable luck to have been taken as a disciple by Du Kang.

Chapter 719 Battle with Tong Nan (1)

Cough cough... Du Kang lightly coughed twice, cleared his throat, and said: "Well... I can testify for Ling Chen. He is indeed not wrong; he is a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion."

"Elder Du, you're being rather unscrupulous now. You just said that you only accepted Yang Tao as a disciple, and now, how come..."

Before the elder beside him could finish his sentence, Du Kang cut him off and said: "Listen to me first. Although Ling Chen is a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, he is not my disciple."

"Elder Du, if he's not your disciple, then whose disciple could he be? No one here has taken him as a disciple."

Just as an elder finished speaking, Huang Zheng coldly said: "Mr. Du, don't try to fool us. Initially, I thought highly of that kid and wanted to accept him as a disciple, but he was utterly unwilling. Now you suddenly say that he is a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion but not yours, how do you expect us to believe that?"

Swirling his wine gourd in hand, Du Kang smiled and said: "What, you don't even believe my words now?" Saying this, Du Kang looked towards the people below and continued: "I'll not deceive you all; not only is Ling Chen's master an elder of Yangxin Pavilion, but he is also the most senior among them."

"Elder Du, who exactly are you talking about?" the crowd below asked curiously.

Smiling, Du Kang uttered two words: "Su He!"

Su He?

Upon hearing this name, the people present were momentarily stunned.

Su He, a name that surely no one was unaware of. Present were either disciples and elders of Yangxin Pavilion or important figures of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, and each one had a profound memory of the name Su He.

Amongst the crowd, Su Mei was the most shocked. When Du Kang mentioned the name 'Su He,' Su Mei even doubted her own ears, wondering if she had heard wrongly.

Su He, a name that had not graced her ears for a long time. If not for Du Kang's mention today, she would have nearly forgotten this man who was once most important to her.

Su He... He turned out to be Grandpa's disciple!

Since Grandpa left Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, there had been no news of him for many years, and now, at last, she knew his whereabouts. Remembering the past, Su Mei felt her eyes brimming with tears; the next thing she knew, a tear rolled down her cheek.

After a while, someone finally regained their composure, looked at Du Kang, and asked: "Elder Du, Elder Su has been gone for so many years now, you can't just be joking about this."

Glancing at the speaker, Liang Tian, Du Kang replied: "Elder Liang, what's the matter, you don't believe my words?"

"Elder Du, it's not that I don't believe you, but your words are frankly hard to believe. I wanted to take Ling Chen as a disciple not long ago, and he said in person that he had not yet taken a master. It's only been so short a time, and now you suddenly say he is Elder Su's disciple, do you think we can believe that?"

"It doesn't matter if you don't believe it, as long as the Pavilion Master believes it." With that said, Du Kang pulled out a dagger from his body, flicked his wrist, and threw it towards Su Mei down the slope. Seeing the dagger falling, the elder next to Su Mei immediately caught it, then handed it to Su Mei.

"This dagger is Elder Su's token, and I have confirmed it. Everyone present, surely no one is clearer than the Pavilion Master whether Elder Su's token is genuine or not, so it's fair to let her verify. Pavilion Master, please take a good look, whether this dagger really belongs to Elder Su."

Su Mei nodded lightly, carefully examining the dagger in her hand. Then, she took a deep breath to calm her excitement and said: "Elder Du is right, this dagger is indeed my grandfather's token, which he always carried with him, rarely parting from it. Since this dagger has appeared in Ling Chen's hands, I believe he has not lied."

Grandpa?

Hearing this, Ling Chen was taken aback. Su He was Su Mei's grandfather? That meant he was... the former Pavilion Master of Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion?

Ling Chen was stunned, not expecting Su He to have such an identity, and he never mentioned it before.

At this moment, after Su Mei's confirmation, everyone's gaze towards Ling Chen instantly changed.

The disciple of Su He... This identity was not simple. Given Su He's status, whether in terms of identity or position, his disciple could walk unhindered in both Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and Yangxin Pavilion.

Tong Nan, with a displeased expression, stared at Ling Chen, a hint of wariness flashing in his eyes. He had thought that Ling Chen was an outsider who could be bullied at will, but who knew, this fellow had such a formidable background and backing.

Su He!

Thinking of the elder who once ruled over Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion and Yangxin Pavilion, Tong Nan could not help but shiver uncontrollably.

Over the years, after Su Mei took the position of Pavilion Master, while Yangxin Pavilion outwardly respected her, in reality, some of the elders did not take her seriously. The reason they were so respectful and attentive to Su Mei was because of Su He's presence. They might disrespect Su Mei, but they couldn't disrespect Su He; at least eighty percent of the elders in Yangxin Pavilion had received his favor.

For this reason, when Su Mei affirmed Ling Chen's identity, the way they looked at him changed.

Facing everyone's stares, Ling Chen cast aside the stray thoughts in his mind and looked straight at Tong Nan across from him, speaking indifferently: "Since I am a disciple of Yangxin Pavilion, I wonder if I am eligible to participate in the upcoming competition?"

"Of course." Before Tong Nan could reply, the judge next to him had already nodded in recognition.

"Hmph!" Tong Nan sneered with disdain, saying: "So what if you are Elder Su's disciple? If you're on the stage, you have to rely on your own skills, not your background. Your strength is merely on the Dragon List, what qualifications do you have to fight me? Fine, since you seek humiliation, I'll accompany you all the way."

"Tong Nan, you plotted against Zhou Jun and forced him to leave Heavenly Mechanism Pavilion, I will settle this account with you."

Hearing this, Tong Nan sneered and said nothing further, immediately striding with both legs towards Ling Chen.

As Tong Nan closed in swiftly, Ling Chen did not think twice; he immediately turned and retreated, sprinting towards the edge of the platform. After a short while, Ling Chen reached a rack of weapons.

With the strong wind from behind approaching, Ling Chen extended his hand, grabbed a Yanyue Blade, and swung around rapidly. Holding the blade high with both hands, he chopped powerfully toward Tong Nan's head.

Faced with the incoming Yanyue Blade, Tong Nan's pupils shrank, and he quickly stopped, then dodged to the side.

Instantly, the Yanyue Blade passed closely by Tong Nan's side and crashed heavily onto the ground, carving out a long crack.

After the failed strike, Ling Chen did not hesitate; his hands shook, and he gripped the Yanyue Blade firmly, lifting it slightly upwards. The blade spun, sweeping horizontally, and aiming straight for Tong Nan's neck.

As the saying goes, an inch longer is an inch stronger. The Yanyue Blade in Ling Chen's hands was nearly two meters long, leaving Tong Nan no chance to close in, forcing him to retreat again and again.

Chapter 720 Battle with Tong Nan (2)

Using the Yanyue Blade, a weapon with a long handle, was an intentional choice by Ling Chen. Tong Nan was a master of the Earthly List, and every master on the Earthly List was proficient in the Hua Realm, capable of injuring someone from a distance of one meter without physical contact. Therefore, Ling Chen had to use a long weapon to increase the distance between them, preventing Tong Nan from getting the chance to close in.

Wielding the Yanyue Blade, Ling Chen whipped it around with a windstorm-like ferocity, the harsh blade edge forcing Tong Nan closer and closer. In just a short while, Tong Nan was pushed to the edge of the arena. One more step, and he would tumble off. Seeing this, Tong Nan snorted coldly, his toes thrusting forcefully off the ground; he leaped over the incoming Yanyue Blade and landed in front of a rack of weapons.

By the time Ling Chen reacted, Tong Nan had already picked up two scimitars.

"I'd like to see just how long you can hold on," Tong Nan sneered menacingly, his legs coordinating with his waist to leap high off the ground. Mid-air, Tong Nan twisted his waist, initiating a spin that brought his body around, the scimitars in his hands extended straight out like a whirligig, chopping down one stroke after another.

Facing the fierce whirlwind of blade edges, Ling Chen retreated swiftly, raising the Yanyue Blade overhead, using its long handle to fend off the scimitar attacks.

Clang clang!

For a moment, the two scimitars continuously chopped down on the shaft of the Yanyue Blade, emitting sharp, clear sounds, each strike faster and more ruthless than the last. In the blink of an eye, Tong Nan wielded the scimitars, delivering over twenty successive chops, each packed with immense power, forcing Ling Chen to retreat step by step, unable to even stand steadily.

Most fortunate was that the shaft of the Yanyue Blade was made of pure steel, incredibly sturdy. If it were just an ordinary wooden one, it would have likely snapped long ago.

Seeing that Tong Nan had no intention of stopping, Ling Chen suddenly sensed trouble. At this moment, he was less than two meters from the edge of the arena, and if this continued, Tong Nan would eventually force him off. However, Tong Nan's strength was far superior to his own, so if Ling Chen couldn't find a way to neutralize the attacks, defeat was only a matter of time.

"Alas, what a pity!"

At this time, the crowd watching below shook their heads and sighed quietly upon seeing Ling Chen at a disadvantage. They were not worried about Ling Chen's precarious situation, but rather felt it was a shame for Su He. Even though Ling Chen was Su He's disciple, his strength was too weak, not even reaching the realm of the Earthly List. Regardless of how adept his techniques were, the gap in strength was there and not something that techniques could compensate for.

Moreover, Tong Nan was not a novice on the Earthly List. With his current strength, he could be ranked at least ninth on the Earthly List, having long mastered the use of the Hua Realm. Therefore, after witnessing Ling Chen's capabilities, the crowd did not have high hopes for him.

"Tch! Elder Su may be formidable, but his eye for choosing disciples is truly poor. I don't understand what he's thinking, taking in Ling Chen as a disciple and allowing him to come to the Yangxin Pavilion. Could it be that Elder Su isn't worried about Ling Chen completely ruining his reputation?"

Up in the stands, Huang Zheng jeered sarcastically.

Du Kang covered the wine gourd in his hand and spoke indifferently, "Elder Su's realm is not something you can compare to. Besides, do you think he cares about those superficial honors? Since he dared to bring Ling Chen here, it shows that he doesn't care about others' opinions." Pausing for a moment, Du Kang continued, "In fact, Elder Su's purpose in bringing Ling Chen here was not to compete for the Nine Elements Pill, but to train his own disciple, to give him the opportunity to spar with masters of the Earthly List. As martial artists, it is only through occasional defeats that one can make greater progress."

Hearing these words, Liang Tian replied with a smirk that was neither friendly nor sincere, "Elder Du, are you referring to your disciple Yang Tao? To be honest, I rather admire you. A loss is a loss; why bother looking for so many excuses? We've all known each other for so long, and no one will laugh at you. Don't you think?"

"Making a joke about me?" Du Kang shook his head and smiled: "Do you think I care? Elder Liang, you should talk less. If you ask me, you should hurry up and find yourself a disciple, so as not to have no one to succeed your skills."

Having said that, Du Kang looked at Ling Chen and Tong Nan fighting on the stage, and said no more. In fact, his reason for saying so much just now wasn't to save face for himself, but to preserve Elder Su's dignity.

Ling Chen is a master from the Dragon List, while Tong Nan is from the Earthly List. The gap in their abilities is evident to anyone. Even Du Kang himself didn't have much confidence in Ling Chen. Hence, by saying all those words beforehand, if Ling Chen were to lose, it would also save some face for Elder Su.

At this moment, Ling Chen was in a precarious position on the stage, less than half a meter from the edge, at any moment in danger of falling off.

Seeing this situation, Ling Chen suddenly pushed off with his legs and leaped backwards. Upon seeing his move, everyone was stunned. The spot where Ling Chen was positioned was already at the very edge of

the stage, and this leap seemed to take him out of the bounds of the stage. Could it be... that Ling Chen knew he was no match for Tong Nan and chose to give up?

Just when everyone was puzzled, Ling Chen, who had jumped out of the stage, suddenly swung the Yanyue Blade in his hand and stabbed fiercely forward, the sharp tip directly piercing into the floor of the stage. Immediately after, he gripped the pole with both hands, vigorously rotated his body, and leaped onto the other side of the stage. Then he landed steadily, successfully avoiding Tong Nan's line of attack.

Tsk, tsk!

Everyone silently nodded, praising Ling Chen's adaptability. They had thought he was about to give up, but didn't expect him to use such a method to dodge Tong Nan's offensive and seize a sliver of opportunity for himself.

"Hmph!" Tong Nan gave a cold laugh, his eyes cynically fixed on Ling Chen as he said contemptuously, "You can avoid the first day, but not the fifteenth. Ling Chen, you might as well give up gracefully, don't waste your energy, you are no match for me."

Ling Chen flicked his wrist, raising the Yanyue Blade slightly, its blade pointing straight at Tong Nan, his expression indifferent, as if he hadn't heard Tong Nan's words.

Seeing Ling Chen unmoved, Tong Nan's expression cooled, and he shouted, "Get down from here!"

The instant the words fell, Tong Nan's toes touched the ground repeatedly, moving at a breakneck speed, like a rushing gust of wind, and in a moment, he was right in front of Ling Chen, his curved blade chopping straight down at Ling Chen's head.

The blade wind neared, and Ling Chen still stood his ground, not moving an inch, like a solid rock, unswayed by the blustering wind and rain.

Two meters... one meter... half a meter...

Watching the curved blade rapidly enlarge before his eyes, Ling Chen, who stood still, suddenly jumped up from his spot. At the same time, he loosened his grip on the Yanyue Blade, letting it drop to the ground with a 'clang' sound.

Without the weight of the Yanyue Blade, Ling Chen's body instantly jumped over a meter high. Before Tong Nan could change his move, Ling Chen's toes tapped on the blade of the curved sword, using it to push himself up again, his body rising to a height of two meters.

Upon reaching the highest point, Ling Chen twisted his waist, his head and feet immediately swapped positions, and his fists came thundering down from the sky, aiming straight for Tong Nan's head.