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Chen Wanqing nodded: "You too."

She turned and walked towards Yunxian City.

Chen Ping watched her retreating figure and suddenly called out, "Chen Wanqing!"

Chen Wanqing stopped and turned to look at him.

Chen Ping smiled, "After I finish my business, I'll come back and we'll cultivate together."

Chen Wanqing froze.

Then, her cheeks flushed red, and she glared at him fiercely, "Get lost!"

She turned and quickly left.

But the corners of her mouth couldn't help but turn up slightly.

Chen Ping watched her departing figure, his smile deepening.

Long Hao watched from the side, his lips twitching.

This Dragon Emperor is truly...

“Your Majesty, let’s go.”

Chen Ping nodded and followed Long Hao and his group, disappearing into the wasteland.

...

Yunxian City, Chen Residence.

Chen Wanqing returned to the ancestral hall and knelt before the memorial tablet.

Chen Tiangang stood behind her, his face ashen. “You dare come back?”

Chen Wanqing didn’t turn around, only saying calmly, “This is my home. Why can’t I come back?”

Chen Tiangang took a deep breath, suppressing his anger:

“Do you know what you’ve done? You let Chen Ping go, offending those three dragon envoys. If they blame you, how will the Chen family bear it?”

Chen Wanqing smiled.

That smile was full of mockery.

“Father, do you know who those three dragon envoys are?”

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Chen Tiangang was taken aback.

Chen Wanqing continued, “They are traitors to the dragon clan, having defected to the demon clan. They possess demonic energy. Cooperating with them is like seeking a tiger’s skin.”

Chen Tiangang's expression changed: "What did you say?"

Chen Wanqing stood up, looking at her father:

"Father, you'll do anything for the so-called interests of the Chen family. Using me, deceiving Chen Ping, cooperating with the demon dragons... Have you ever thought about the consequences of these things?"

Chen Tiangang remained silent. Chen Wanqing continued, "Chen Ping is of Dragon Emperor blood; the true dragons have already come for him. Offending him is offending the entire dragon race."

She paused, then said, slowly and deliberately, "Father, do you regret it?"

Chen Tiangang's face turned ashen; he remained silent.

Chen Wanqing sighed and turned to walk out of the ancestral hall.

"Where are you going?" Chen Tiangang asked.

Chen Wanqing didn't turn back: "To reflect on my mistakes. This is your punishment for me."

She walked out of the ancestral hall and disappeared into the night.

Chen Tiangang stood there, speechless for a long time.

Does he regret it?

He didn't know.

But he knew that the Chen family might have truly made a mistake.

Chen Wanqing's words still pierced deep into Chen Tiangang's eardrums like cold needles, refusing to fade.

"Chen Ping possesses the bloodline of the Dragon Emperor; the true Dragon Clan has come for him. Offending him is tantamount to offending the entire Dragon Clan."

The Dragon Clan...

These two words, seemingly light, weighed heavily on Chen Tiangang's heart.

Standing in the dimly lit, solemn space of the Chen family ancestral hall, gazing at the ancestral tablets that had been enshrined for nearly ten thousand years, a bitter smile involuntarily tugged at the corner of his lips.

He had lived for thousands of years, rising from an ignorant young cultivator to break through countless realms step by step.

He had experienced countless life-and-death battles, witnessed the devastation of sects, the tragedy of dynasties collapsing, the mountains of corpses and seas of blood in the war between gods and demons, and seen countless powerful figures perish before his eyes, countless forces vanish into thin air over time.

What storms and waves, what earth-shattering conspiracies, what desperate situations and deadly predicaments hadn't he, Chen Tiangang, experienced?

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This time, however, he clearly felt a bone-chilling cold surge from his feet to the top of his head, causing even his body, which had long since cultivated to the True Immortal realm and was virtually invulnerable, to tremble uncontrollably.

He was truly wrong.

Wrong beyond belief, utterly wrong, so wrong that even the possibility of redemption seemed to have been severed by his own hands.

When he made those decisions, hadn't he constantly told himself that it was all for the Chen family?

For the Chen family's millennia-long prosperity, for preserving the Chen family's foundation that had stood tall in Yunxian City for a thousand years, for ensuring that the Chen family continued to hold its position as a top-tier family in this immortal realm, free from bullying and annexation.

As the head of the family, he bore the weight of the entire clan's life, death, honor, and disgrace on his shoulders. Every step he took was like walking on thin ice; every choice concerned the fate of millions of clan members.

He believed that everything he had done was out of a sense of responsibility to the family.

Why was the ancestral hall eerily quiet at this moment? Only his own breathing echoed in the empty room, yet his heart felt as if a piece had been ripped out, leaving it hollow, cold, and utterly devoid of any strength.

That boundless emptiness and regret was more unbearable than when he was severely injured and on the verge of death years ago.

He involuntarily closed his eyes, and the look in Chen Ping's eyes when he left the Chen residence flashed before him.

That look was cold, as cold as eternal ice, as cold as the silent night deep in the wilderness, devoid of any warmth, devoid of any emotion.

Yet, there was no hatred, no resentment, no anger in that look, not even a trace of superfluous emotion.

It was this extreme calm and indifference that tore at his heart more than any overwhelming hatred.

Because that gaze clearly told him that in Chen Ping's eyes, the entire Chen family, including himself, the thousand-year-old patriarch, and those self-important elders, were nothing more than a group of insignificant, unworthy clowns.

They weren't even worthy of hatred.

Chen Tiangang's heart felt as if it were being clenched tightly by an invisible hand, the pain almost suffocating him.

He recalled the three messengers who had recently descended upon the Chen residence.

At first, he had addressed them with awe as messengers of the Dragon Clan, believing them to be the descent of ancient dragons, a golden opportunity for the Chen family to curry favor with the Dragon Clan.

But now, looking back, where was the slightest trace of sacred and peaceful dragon aura emanating from those three?

It was a chilling aura that penetrated to the bone, a demonic energy that made one's heart tremble and one's soul quiver—a demonic dragon, an evil creature, not a true member of the Dragon Clan at all!

He had clearly sensed something amiss with that aura, a flicker of vigilance had crossed his mind, yet why had he chosen to ignore it?

Was it greed?

Was it the countless dragon treasures promised by the three demonic dragon envoys?

Were they the rare and precious materials, ancient cultivation techniques, and divine weapons that would allow the Chen family to drastically increase its power and dominate Yunxian City?

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Or was it because he desperately wanted the treasures buried in the ancient dragon pool?

Was he desperately wanting to use those treasures to completely break through the shackles of the Chen family and enter the ranks of the true top immortal sects?

Greed clouded his mind, and profit blinded his judgment.

These eight words, at this moment, were like the sharpest blade, repeatedly cutting into his conscience.

Chen Tiangang slowly closed his eyes, his aged and dignified face filled with weariness and dejection.

He exhaled a long, stale breath, a breath that carried nearly a thousand years of vicissitudes, and the endless regret and self-reproach of this moment.

Wanqing was right.

He was wrong.

He, the patriarch, was incompetent and foolish, unable to judge character. For the sake of a fleeting, illusory gain, he schemed against Chen Ping, who possessed the blood of the Dragon Emperor, pushing the Chen family into an abyss of no return.

But now, the mistake was made, the damage was done, and it was all too late.

What could he do?

What could the Chen family do?

Chen Tiangang dragged his heavy steps slowly out of the Chen family ancestral hall.

The night was deep, the inky sky devoid of stars, only a pale, waning moon hung forlornly on the horizon, exuding an indescribable desolation.

He looked up at the deathly silent night sky, his lips trembling slightly, murmuring in a voice only he could hear, "Hope...it's not too late..."

He didn't know that the cruelest thing in the world is that just when you feel a sliver of regret, a sliver of hope, fate will mercilessly tell you that it's all too late.

Meanwhile, outside Cloud Immortal City, dust billowed everywhere.

A menacing hundred-strong force was galloping towards the city gate.

The sound of hooves thundered, the clanging of armor crisp and cold, carrying an undeniable air of authority and oppression that sent birds and beasts scattering in terror, too afraid to even breathe.

At the head of the procession were more than ten elderly men clad in silver robes.

These men possessed a profound and unfathomable aura, their faces cold, and they exuded a chilling pressure.

Any one of them, even a casual glance, would be a powerful figure in Yunxian City, capable of shaking the entire region with a mere stomp of their foot. Their minimum cultivation level was at least the eighth rank of the Upper Immortal Realm!

Such strength would be considered formidable by any aristocratic family.

The three at the head of the group possessed an even more terrifying aura, clearly peak ninth-rank Upper Immortal Realm experts, only a step away from the True Immortal Realm!

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Their silver robes were of extraordinary quality, shimmering with iridescent light. Embroidered on their chests was a majestic, towering sacred mountain that pierced the clouds.

That was the symbol of the Divine Temple.

In this Immortal Realm, the words “Divine Temple” represented supreme authority, absolute dominance, and a terrifying force that no one dared to easily provoke.

Any sect or aristocratic family, upon hearing the name of the Divine Temple, would show utmost respect, daring not to utter the slightest negligence.

At this moment, this Divine Temple contingent was heading straight for Yunxian City.

At the city gate, Wu Lingyun had been waiting for some time.

He was dressed in fine robes, his face handsome, yet carrying an undisguised air of ruthlessness and urgency.

He stood to one side of the gate, his gaze fixed on the dust-filled distance, his hands clasped behind his back, his fingertips trembling slightly, clearly indicating his inner turmoil.

When he saw the distinctive silver robes and sacred mountain emblem of the temple’s procession, Wu Lingyun’s eyes lit up, and his face immediately broke into an extremely respectful smile as he hurried forward to greet them.

“Wu Lingyun of the Wu family greets the elders of the temple!”

He bowed deeply, his posture extremely humble, daring not to show the slightest disrespect.

Leading the procession was an elderly man with white hair and beard, his face dignified, yet his spirit vigorous, his eyes sharp as lightning, seemingly able to pierce through to the heart.

He glanced at Wu Lingyun indifferently, his voice calm and even, yet carrying an air of superior authority: "Young Master Wu, you say the Chen family is harboring Chen Ping, a criminal from the Divine Temple. Is this true?"

Wu Lingyun immediately bowed again, his tone utterly certain: "Reporting to Elder, it is absolutely true, not a single word is false!"

Chen Ping recently participated in the Chen family's martial arts contest for a husband, overcoming all obstacles and surpassing all others. He has now been formally married to the Chen family, his status already tacitly accepted!

The Chen family has even personally taken him to the Ancient Dragon Pool in the mountains north of the city, with ill intentions!"

"The Ancient Dragon Pool?"

Upon hearing this, the white-haired elder frowned slightly, clearly familiar with the place.

Wu Lingyun nodded hastily, adding, "Exactly! Elder, you may not know, but buried within that ancient Dragon Pool is a legendary dragon treasure, possessing boundless power!"

Chen Ping, with his golden dragon bloodline, is the destined inheritor of the Dragon Pool. Having entered, he must have already obtained the treasure! Now, he must be hiding in the Chen residence, awaiting his opportunity!"

The white-haired elder remained silent for a moment, his deep gaze fixed on the depths of Yunxian City, in the direction of the Chen residence.

He asked no further questions, simply waving his hand dismissively: "Enter the city."

At his command,

the hundred-strong temple contingent immediately sprang into action, a mighty force surging into Yunxian City. Their steps were perfectly synchronized, their momentum overwhelming, their destination clear: the Chen residence!

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The people lining the streets, witnessing this spectacle, scattered in fear, hiding behind walls, doors, and shops, peeking out with half their heads, whispering amongst themselves, their faces filled with terror and unease.

“Those are... people from the Temple? Why are they in our Cloud Immortal City?”

“Judging by their demeanor, they’re up to no good! I heard the Chen family is harboring a wanted criminal from the Temple, and the Temple has come specifically to arrest them!”

“A wanted criminal? Is it Chen Ping, the one who’s been making headlines lately for destroying the Heavenly Road?”

“Shh! Keep your voice down! We can’t just talk about names like that! Don’t you want to die? Don’t bring trouble upon yourself!”

The whispers were hushed and filled with fear. Everyone knew that the Temple’s wrath could kill millions. Today, the Chen family was likely doomed.

Outside the Chen residence, two ordinary guards were on duty as usual.

They saw a group of menacing figures in silver robes charging towards them. The terrifying pressure emanating from them made their legs go weak, and their faces instantly turned deathly pale.

“Halt! This is the Chen family’s territory, no trespassing allowed!”

One of the guards mustered his courage and shouted sharply, but his voice trembled uncontrollably.

The white-haired old man didn't even glance at them, as if he were merely shooing away two insignificant ants.

He casually raised his hand, and an invisible force erupted instantly, slamming into the two guards like a mountain.

"Thump!"

With two muffled thuds, the two guards didn't even have time to scream before they were sent flying, crashing heavily to the ground, spitting blood, and unconscious.

"Surround the Chen family residence! No one is allowed to enter or leave! Those who disobey will be killed without mercy!"

The white-haired old man's voice was icy cold, devoid of any emotion.

"Yes!"

The hundred temple soldiers responded in unison, their voices clear and resonant, causing the entire Chen residence to tremble slightly.

They quickly dispersed, swiftly surrounding the Chen residence, layer upon layer, preventing even a fly from escaping.

Inside the Chen residence, chaos reigned.

In the council hall, Chen Tiangang sat with the six elders of the Chen family, their faces grave as they discussed countermeasures.

Anxiety and unease etched themselves on everyone's faces; the atmosphere was incredibly tense.

Just then, a sudden, violent commotion erupted outside, accompanied by footsteps, shouts, and the sound of things crashing to the ground—utter chaos.

Chen Tiangang's brow furrowed sharply, a strong sense of unease rising within him.

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He was about to send someone out to investigate when a guard stumbled in, his clothes disheveled, his face deathly pale, his eyes filled with utter terror. "Patriarch...Patriarch! Something terrible has happened!"

"The people from the Temple are here! So many! They've completely surrounded the Chen residence!"

Boom!

These words struck like a bolt from the blue, hitting everyone in the council hall hard.

Chen Tiangang's expression changed drastically; his already pale face became completely bloodless.

He abruptly stood up, his aura fluctuating uncontrollably.

The six elders exchanged glances, a barely concealed fear flashing in their eyes.

A red-faced elder's lips trembled, his voice choked with sobs: "The Temple...how could they have arrived so quickly? We were...we were prepared!"

The white-haired elder slowly closed his eyes, letting out a long sigh, his voice filled with helplessness and sorrow: "What was destined to come has finally come. There's no escaping it, no avoiding it."

Another slightly plump elder slammed his fist on the table, gritting his teeth, his voice laced with resentment: "It's all Chen Ping's fault! It's all his fault! If we hadn't taken him in, let him participate in the martial arts contest, and certainly shouldn't have taken him to Dragon Pool!

Our Chen family wouldn't be in such a state! If we had known this would happen, we should have handed him over to the Temple directly!"

The red-faced elder shook his head, his face full of regret: "No, we can't blame Chen Ping. It was our own greed, our own folly!

If we hadn't been greedy..." "His bloodline and treasures wouldn't have allowed him to refuse the three demonic dragons' demands, nor would he have intended to betray him to the temple. How could our Chen family have ended up like this? We ourselves have led ourselves to our doom!"

The white-haired elder gave a bitter laugh, his smile filled with resentment. "What's the use of saying all this now? The mistake has been made; it's too late for regrets."

Another elder murmured to himself, his voice low and filled with guilt: "I said from the beginning that putting that dragon-locking collar on Chen Ping was dishonest.

Chen Ping genuinely helped our Chen family, averting a crisis and passing the test, yet we plotted against him behind his back. This violates the Chen family's ancestral precepts... it violates the laws of heaven..."

"It's too late to say all this now, it's all too late..."

"Patriarch, what should we do now?"

All eyes were fixed on Chen Tiangang.

At this moment, Chen Tiangang took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing the turmoil and endless regret in his heart.

He knew he was the head of the Chen family, and at this crucial moment, he absolutely could not afford to panic.

He said in a deep voice, "What's meant to happen will happen. Since the Temple has come knocking, we'll face them head-on.

Remember, no matter what happens, no matter how aggressive they are, do not make the first move. Endure if you can, retreat if you can. Do not give them an excuse to attack, understand?"

"Understood!"

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The six elders nodded in unison. Though their faces still showed fear, they forced themselves to stand and followed Chen Tiangang out of the council hall.

Outside the council hall, the gate of the Chen residence, which had stood for a thousand years and symbolized the Chen family's prestige, had already been smashed open, its fragments scattered everywhere.

The Temple cultivators poured in like a tide, filling the entire front courtyard, their silver robes particularly dazzling in the night.

The white-haired elder stood at the forefront, like a star surrounded by the moon, his gaze slowly landing on Chen Tiangang. A faint smile curved his lips: "Patriarch Chen, I've long admired your name."

Chen Tiangang forced himself to remain calm, clasping his hands in a fist salute: "I was unaware of the presence of the elders of the Divine Temple. Please forgive my lack of hospitality."

The white-haired elder smiled faintly, his tone devoid of any politeness: "Patriarch Chen, there's no need for such formalities. We've come today for no other reason than one person."

Chen Tiangang's heart sank; he knew what was coming was inevitable. He remained outwardly calm, feigning curiosity: "Oh? Who is it that the elder speaks of?"

The white-haired elder's gaze sharpened, staring intently at him. He spoke slowly and deliberately, his voice cold and clear: "Chen Ping."

The name Chen Ping struck Chen Tiangang's heart like two massive stones.

He remained silent for a moment, knowing that concealment was futile, but he still forced himself to speak slowly: "Elder, to be honest, Chen Ping did indeed visit my Chen family and stayed at the Chen residence for a period of time.

However, after returning from the Dragon Pool, he voluntarily left the Chen residence. As for where he went, this old man truly does not know."

"Left?"

The white-haired elder raised an eyebrow slightly, clearly not believing him.

Chen Tiangang nodded solemnly: "Absolutely true. After emerging from the ancient Dragon Pool that day, he severed all ties with my Chen family and left alone. His whereabouts are secretive, coming and going without a trace; this old man truly does not know where he went."

"Doesn't know?"

A cold laugh suddenly rang out from the crowd.

Wu Lingyun slowly walked out from behind the crowd in the temple, his face filled with mockery and smugness, looking at Chen Tiangang with disdain.

"Patriarch Chen, who are you trying to fool? Chen Ping passed your Chen family's martial arts contest for marriage; he's your Chen family's lawfully wedded son-in-law, and he and your daughter Chen Wanqing are deeply in love. You think you don't know where he is? Do you think we'd believe that?" Wu Lingyun sneered.

Chen Tiangang looked at Wu Lingyun, a flash of undisguised disgust and coldness crossing his eyes.

The Wu family!

It really was the Wu family!

It was that despicable Wu Lingyun who secretly informed the Temple!

It was he who stabbed the Chen family in the back!

If it weren't for the Wu family's interference and constant instigation, things wouldn't have come to this.

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"Young Master Wu,"

Chen Tiangang's voice was calm, yet tinged with coldness, "Chen Ping did indeed leave in anger. As for why he left, the reasons are not for me to elaborate on."

Wu Lingyun sneered, pressing closer: "Not for me to elaborate? I think it was your Chen family that deliberately hid him, deliberately let him go!"

He stopped looking at Chen Tiangang, turned to the white-haired elder, bowed respectfully, and said, "Elder, the Chen family is lying! Chen Ping must still be hiding in the Chen residence, perhaps in a secret room, the backyard, or the cellar! As long as we search carefully, we will definitely find him!"

The white-haired elder slowly turned his head, his gaze sharp as lightning, landing on Chen Tiangang again, carrying an irresistible pressure: "Patriarch Chen, do you dare to order us to search the Chen residence?"

Chen Tiangang's expression changed drastically.

Search?

Let the people of the Divine Temple freely search the Chen family's thousand-year-old mansion?

The Chen family has stood tall in Yunxian City for a thousand years, representing the dignity and prestige of this prominent clan.

If the people of the Divine Temple were to freely search the mansion today, ransacking it and causing chaos, the Chen family's reputation would be utterly destroyed!

From then on, the Chen family would never be able to hold their heads high in Yunxian City again, becoming a laughingstock for everyone!

Moreover, Chen Wanqing is still in the mansion!

If Wanqing, a mere woman, were to be disturbed by these cultivators of the Divine Temple, the consequences would be unimaginable!

Chen Tiangang took a deep breath, his eyes hardening, and said in a deep voice, "Elder, I'll say it again, Chen Ping is indeed not in the Chen residence. If you don't believe me, there's nothing I can do. Please don't force me."

A cold glint flashed in the white-haired elder's eyes, and his tone instantly turned icy: "Patriarch Chen, are you determined to protect a wanted criminal of the Divine Temple and become an enemy of our Divine Temple?"

Chen Tiangang quickly shook his head, his tone sincere: "I wouldn't dare! I've never had any intention of protecting anyone, much less dare to become an enemy of the Divine Temple!"

But Chen Ping is indeed not in the residence. Even if you search the entire Chen residence, it will be in vain, a complete waste of effort!"

The white-haired elder remained silent for a moment.

The next moment, he suddenly smiled.

That smile was devoid of any warmth, chillingly cold.

“Patriarch Chen, do you think I came here today to discuss things with you?”

He abruptly raised his hand, and a hundred temple soldiers behind him instantly stepped forward, their auras exploding, radiating murderous intent!

“Search the Chen residence! From the attic to the cellar, every room, every corner, search thoroughly! Anyone who dares to resist, kill them without mercy!”

“Yes, sir!”

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At the command!

The hundred temple soldiers surged into every corner of the Chen residence like a silver tide.

The study, bedrooms, attic, courtyard, secret rooms, cellar... every place where someone could hide was frantically searched.

Tables and chairs overturned, vases shattered, doors and windows broken; the once exquisite and elegant Chen residence was instantly reduced to a scene of utter chaos.

Chen Tiangang’s face was ashen, his hands clenched tightly, knuckles white, veins bulging. He was furious beyond measure, yet dared not make a move.

He knew perfectly well that to act would be to declare war on the temple. With the Chen family’s current strength, they are no match for the Temple. The entire Chen family will be utterly annihilated, leaving no one alive.

The six elders were also pale-faced and trembling, but could only watch helplessly as this unfolded.

The search lasted a full half hour.

The entire Chen residence was practically turned upside down, a scene of chaos.

A Temple soldier rushed in from outside, knelt on one knee, and respectfully reported to the white-haired elder: "Reporting to the elder! The entire Chen residence, every corner, has been searched! No trace of Chen Ping has been found!"

The white-haired elder frowned slightly, clearly somewhat surprised.

Wu Lingyun's expression changed drastically, and he cried out, "Impossible! Absolutely impossible! He must be hiding in the manor! You must not have searched thoroughly enough! Search again! Search three more times! Search carefully!"

The temple soldier glanced coldly at Wu Lingyun, his tone tinged with displeasure: "Young Master Wu, we have searched three times already, leaving no corner unchecked. There is indeed no one named Chen Ping. Why would we lie?"

Wu Lingyun gritted his teeth, his heart filled with both anxiety and anger. Suddenly, his eyes darted around, and he remembered something. He immediately shouted, "There's one more person! Chen Wanqing! She is Chen Ping's cultivation partner, the person he cares about most! She must know Chen Ping's whereabouts!"

"Chen Wanqing?"

The white-haired old man's eyes flashed; he had clearly heard of this name.

Chen Tiangang's expression changed instantly!

This is bad!

They're going to attack Wanqing!

His worst fears have come true!

Wu Lingyun revealed a ferocious smile as he looked at Chen Tiangang: "Patriarch Chen, let your daughter come out. If she obediently tells us Chen Ping's whereabouts, I can plead with the elders to spare your Chen family. Otherwise, today... your entire Chen family will be wiped out!"

Chen Tiangang took a deep breath, forcibly suppressing his panic and anger, and said in a deep voice, "Wanqing... she's unwell and is resting in the backyard, not in the manor."

"Not in the manor?" Wu Lingyun sneered as if he had heard the biggest joke in the world. "Patriarch Chen, do you think I'm a three-year-old?" "I already questioned the guards in your manor, and they clearly stated that Chen Wanqing is here and has never left! Are you still trying to deny it?"

He turned to the white-haired elder again, bowing, and said, "Elder, Chen Wanqing has a close relationship with Chen Ping; she must know his whereabouts! As long as we capture her, Chen Ping will surely show himself! We can definitely find Chen Ping through her!"