

Stranger 531

Chapter 531: The Buddhist Hall of Joy

After Xue Hanshan was gone, Yi Pin caught up to Ye Qing and asked, “Why didn’t you kill Xue Hanshan and end the threat for sure, brother?”

The old Taoist hadn’t said a word until just now because Ye Qing had told him to stay quiet and leave it all to him, and as expected, the young man had dealt with the problem beautifully. However, Yi Pin didn’t understand why Ye Qing ultimately let Xue Hanshan go even though all the cards were in his hands. In fact, he would even go as far as to say that Ye Qing’s finish was poor and didn’t fit with his *modus operandi*.

Ye Qing looked up at the sky and said, “It’s complicated, and I don’t want to stay here all night. Let’s walk as we talk.”

“Sure,” Yi Pin responded, and the duo made their way down the mountain.

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“If what you said is true, then the Life Leech must be responsible for the rumors of longevity behind Longevity Village as well.”

Ye Qing and Yi Pin were currently basking in the warm sun and enjoying a cup of tea at a tea stall just outside Bei You City.

It was midnight when they left the Longevity Mountain, and late morning by the time they finally got back to Bei You. At this time, the sunlight was warm and sleep-inducing.

Ye Qing was fine, but Yi Pin was tired after spending the whole night traveling. So, they decided to catch a small break.

“Yeah.” Ye Qing nodded in agreement. After they returned to Bei You, he immediately used the Annon Sutra to find out what was the invisible danger that kept him from killing Xue Hanshan and his goons. Although the vellum didn’t tell him what happened at the Longevity Village, he knew that the Life Leech must be the reason he hadn’t killed them back in the village.

Ye Qing was thankful that he hadn’t done something unnecessary like making Xue Hanshan swear his loyalty to him or something. Such an act would’ve formed a strong karmic bond between him and Xue Hanshan, and his lifespan would have been drained for no good reason.

“I can’t believe that the Life Leech actually exists.” Yi Pin sipped his tea to suppress his shock. He didn’t know how Ye Qing had found out about this, but he didn’t ask. Everyone had a secret they didn’t wish to divulge to anyone, and probing too deeply into it would turn friends into strangers, and strangers into foes.

As a veteran of the *jianghu*, he knew better than to break a cardinal rule like this.

“In that case, the way you handle the matter was excellent. Xue Hanshan nearly shat his pants after the scare you gave him, so I doubt he would dare to trouble us ever again.”

A sardonic, schadenfreude-filled smile flitted across his face. “A shame about his friends and family though. It is a curse to have a senior like Xue Hanshan.”

Ye Qing leaned lazily against a pillar and admired the clear, blue sky above their heads. “If you’re such a bleeding heart, you can try spreading the truth about the Life Leech and the fact that Xue Hanshan is sacrificing his relatives to increase his own lifespan in secret. With luck, his relatives or a righteous warrior might do us a favor and kill him.”

“Heh... It’s not a bad idea, but nah. We literally just put this behind us. I have no intentions of landing us in new trouble.”

Yi Pin shook his head. “Besides, I doubt that Xue Hanshan’s relatives are worth saving. Xue Hanshan was the infamous Mountain Bearing Raider before he went into hiding and gave himself a new identity, and I know for a fact that his descendants are scumbags just like him. I ain’t risking my hide to save people like that.”

“Karma is a bitch, but at least she’s a bitch to everyone. Her judgment may be delayed, but never escaped.”

Ye Qing snorted but said nothing. He knew that Yi Pin was going to say this because he was both weak and cowardly. The day he risked his hide to save someone’s life was the day hell froze over.

Besides, he was right that the Xue Clan wasn’t worth saving.

“The Bodhisattva guides all to the ultimate bliss...”

It was at this moment an obscene tune that one normally heard in the brothel resounded from a distance. Everyone who was resting their legs at the tea stall immediately felt a surge of lust and passion.

Strangely, the decadent tune also gave off a grand and noble feeling. It was an odd blend of feeling to say the least.

Several breaths later, a group of people emerged from the end of a marked road. The men were handsome and playing their instruments, while the women were sexy and tossing flower petals into the air.

Both men and women were wearing monk robes. Why were monks putting on such an obscene performance in public?

At the center of the group were eighteen men carrying a huge litter on their shoulders. Their upper bodies were bare, and their heads were clean shaven. Their bronze skin was marked with tattoos of sky dragons and divine tigers, and their breathing was as steady as their vigor was strong. They looked like Buddhist protectors.

The litter they were carrying was massive, exquisitely designed, and covered by white curtains. The top of the litter was adorned by intricate statues of Bodhisattvas and celestial women. All in all, the group gave off an atmosphere of auspiciousness, solemnity and serenity—if one pretended that

sexual moans weren't coming out of the litter, and there weren't silhouettes of naked, conjoined bodies behind the curtains, that was.

It was a given, but nearly everyone at the stall was staring at the litter with varying degrees of lust and desire. Some of them looked like they were barely holding themselves back from pouncing toward the group.

"Who are those people, brother?" Ye Qing asked with a frown. For someone of his strength, the white curtains blocking the view might as well not exist. He could clearly sense that a gorgeous woman was having her way with five handsome men.

Public sex in broad daylight? The nerve! If you're a woman, you would let go of those men and come at me!

Yi Pin tsked as he stared intently at the group. "You really are one lucky sonuvabitch, aren't you brother? It hasn't even been a week since you arrived at Bei You City, and you somehow managed to stumble upon the Dana[2] Day. The Buddhist Hall of Joy only holds this once a year, you know."

"The Buddhist Hall of Joy?" Ye Qing inquired.

Yi Pin asked a question instead of answering, "Have you heard of this saying, brother? 'Yellow dragon, cornucopia and endless sand; joy, mistress, and the strange warrior'."

"No at all. What on earth does it mean?" Ye Qing shook his head.

"It's a famous quote everyone in Bei You knows about, and it's a direct reference to the greatest factions and champions of Bei You."

Yi Pin explained slowly, "The yellow dragon refers to the Yellow Dragon Brigand, one of the Thirteen Brigands of Chu. The cornucopia refers to the Tower of Cornucopia, a faction that claims that they own all the treasures in the northern lands. Endless sand refers to Endless Sand, the number one gang where all the warriors of the northern lands are supposedly gathered."

"By the way, did you know that Zhang Jun—you know, the guy you killed back in the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin—is a member of the Endless Sand?"

"Really now? What a coincidence," Ye Qing replied in a tone that made it clear he didn't give a shit one bit. "Anyway, what does joy, mistress and the strange warrior refer to?"

"Joy refers to the Joy Bodhisattva, the head of the Buddhist Hall of Joy. Mistress refers to Mistress Bai, the head of the Shade of Scents. And finally, the strange warrior refers to Ouyang De, a wandering warrior who loves doing good and slaying heretics but has a very, very peculiar way of doing things."

Yi Pin sipped his tea to soothe his dry throat. "Endless Sand and the strange warrior Ouyang De are the so-called 'lawful good' forces—relatively speaking, of course. The Tower of Cornucopia and Shade of Scents are neutral forces who appear to be mere merchants on the outside, but do all sorts of things on the insides."

“Finally, the Yellow Dragon Brigand and the Buddhist Hall of Joy are heretics through and through. They care nothing for laws and customs, and they would do anything to see their goals through. They are the factions you want to stay as far away as possible.”

“But of course, there is no such thing as absolute good or evil in the *jianghu*. Some factions obey the rules more so than the others, but in the end, self-interest drives all of them. Always be on your toes if you are in their line of sight, brother.”

Yi Pin paused for a second before shaking his head. “Wait, what nonsense am I talking about? Apologies, brother. They’re the ones who should be on their toes, not you.”

Ye Qing: “...” *A subtle and completely unnecessary jab, you did.*

Ye Qing decided to be the bigger man and asked, “What is this Dana Day?”

“The Buddhist Hall of Joy practices the Buddhist Way of Joy,” Yi Pin started. “The Buddhist Way of Joy is a Vajrayana lineage of Buddhism, and its worshipers worship Nandikeshvara, the Buddha of Pleasure. The symbol of Nandikeshvara is a man—which represents law—and a woman—which represents wisdom—hugging each other tightly. The union of man and woman, law and wisdom symbolizes infinite wisdom and power.”

“The Buddhist Way of Joy teaches the way of controlling desire with desire, and attaining the wisdom of the Buddha through desire. However, it is easy to create desire, but difficult to suppress it. That was why the Buddhist Way of Joy splintered into two different factions some time after its conception.”

“The first faction stayed true to their teachings and used desire to suppress and void their desires. They are the orthodox faction and Vajrayana lineage of the Buddhist Way of Joy. The second faction seeks to attain ultimate bliss by diving into the deep end of the pleasures of the flesh. To put it in simpler terms, they strive to attain Buddhahood via indulgence. This faction also gave birth to many smaller factions that focus on dual cultivation, which is why they are denounced as pagan by the orthodox faction.”

“The Buddhist Hall of Joy is a sect that practices the unorthodox branch of Buddhist Way of Joy. They strive to attain Buddhahood by indulging in the ultimate pleasure of man.”

Chapter 532: Reading All The Colors of Humanity

“And now to your question. Dana Day is something the Buddhist Hall of Joy created themselves. When a normal Buddhist gives away to others, they usually offer items and Buddhist teachings to the common people. As for the Buddhist Hall of Joy, they

offer sex so that the masses may experience the essence of their Joyful Way of the Buddha themselves.”

Yi Pin took another pause before continuing, “That is why Dana Day is also known as the Day of Joy or Day of Bliss. Anyone be it men, women, old, young, rich, poor, good, evil, beautiful or ugly may copulate with the members of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and partake in humanity’s greatest bliss.”

“They offer their... services this to the women as well?” Ye Qing exclaimed in shock.

“Er, duh? The Buddhist Hall of Joy doesn’t only have female members, you know. There are men as well!”

Yi Pin shot Ye Qing a disdainful look. “Plus, the Buddhist Hall of Joy preaches a world of equality where both men and women may partake in the ultimate bliss without bias. Forget normal sex, they can accept sex between people of the same gender as well!”

“They allow that?!” Ye Qing was well and truly shocked. He had no idea such an open-minded institution existed in this world!

Yi Pin snickered and winked at Ye Qing. “Why not? Some people prefer it that way!”

“Well, consider me schooled.” Ye Qing licked his lips. He should’ve known that the world was big, and nothing was impossible in this world!

“This Dana Day sounds pretty interesting.” Ye Qing looked at Yi Pin and joked, “So, have you received their ah, ‘giving’ before?”

“Cough! Cough!” Yi Pin was in the middle of sipping his tea, and the question caught him so off guard that he couldn’t stop coughing for a time. When he finally recovered, he yelled, “What the hell are you talking about? I’m a monk! I would never do such a thing!”

“Besides, I have no intentions of dying young!”

Ye Qing looked at the old Taoist’s gray hair skeptically, but he decided that satisfying his curiosity was the higher priority right now. “What do you mean by that?”

Yi Pin glanced at the overly excited customers around them. “You didn’t actually think that the Buddhist Hall of Joy is doing this out of the kindness of their heart, did you?”

“They claim that their Joyful Way of the Buddha is the truth of ultimate bliss and the way to become a Buddha through desire, but pragmatically speaking, it is really a dual cultivation method where they harvest their victims’ energies to improve their own. Anyone who copulates with a member of the Buddhist Hall of Joy would have their origin yang, vigor, lifespan and talent stolen from them.”

“Worse still, a weak-willed person may lose sight of themselves and join the Buddhist Hall of Joy as a worshiper. Two fates lay before these people. If their talent is above a

certain level, then they may become a proper disciple of the Joyful Way of the Buddha. If not, then they would become slaves and incubators that the Buddhist Hall of Joy may use as they please.”

“And no one tried to stop them?” Ye Qing asked.

“How, pray tell? This is Bei You, the home to countless independent factions and forces. The one power that could actually do something about this, the imperial court, sits too far away to exert their influence, and the sect itself is hardly a weak sect. Who could possibly unseat the Buddhist Hall of Joy?”

A disdainful snort escaped Yi Pin’s nose. “Besides, the consequences are not at all a secret, and the Buddhist Hall of Joy does not forcefully convert someone into their ranks. They offer, and the people take. It is all consensual. If someone loses themselves to the pleasure, then they only have their own weak will to blame, no?”

“I don’t get it. Why would anyone willingly subject themselves to such a fate?” Ye Qing asked.

“Your words betray your youth, brother. ‘Sex is an irresistible killer. The more it hurts you, the more you want it.’ ‘Better the fertilizer of a bed of flowers than the owner of a barren land[1].’ Such is the wisdom of the old sages. If even they are not immune to the allure of sex, then how can you expect the common people to do better? ‘Appetite and lust are only natural’, and some people *want* to be ‘eaten’, you know?”

Yi Pin chuckled before continuing, “Also, everyone in the Buddhist Hall of Joy is handsome or beautiful. All the colors of humanity are gathered in their halls, and it is true that the Joyful Way of the Buddha gives a person bliss unlike anything they have ever experienced. What is a few years of lifespan compared to that?”

Ye Qing wiggled his eyebrows. “You know far too much for someone who supposedly never used their services before.”

“W-What? Nonsense! I’m just er, telling you what one of my acquaintances told me! Don’t you know who I am? I’m as straight as they get!”

Yi Pin protested impotently before breaking into a lascivious grin. “You shouldn’t miss out on this opportunity, brother. Your body is strong, your vigor is unending, and more importantly, you’re still a virgin, aren’t you? Why not shed your status with one of the most blissful experiences you may have in your life?”

“Heh. Thanks, but no thanks. Let’s just say that it’s not my cup of tea.” Ye Qing shrugged.

While they were chatting, the entourage had finally made it to the tea stall, and the tangle of bodies behind the curtains and the moans grew clearer than ever. Everyone at the tea stall was staring at the curtains like they could burn a hole in it, gulping down saliva non-stop like they were in the middle of a desert, and wishing that they were the ones fucking inside the litter right now.

A female disciple of the Buddhist Hall of Joy looked at the customers and said, “The Bodhisattva guides all to the ultimate bliss. All are welcome to share in our joy. Today is our annually held Dana Day. If you are willing, our Bodhisattva welcomes you to partake in the ultimate bliss with her when she is ready.”

“The Bodhisattva guides all to the ultimate bliss...”

“The Bodhisattva guides all to the ultimate bliss...”

The disciples chanted their mantras, and the instruments tickled the people’s hearts. As the litter shook harder and harder, the pants and moans coming from the litter grew heavier as well.

Nine breaths later, the chants, the music, and the creakings of the litter came to a sudden stop. The sexual noises too reached their climax before lapsing into silence.

“Let’s go, brother.”

From the beginning until the end, Ye Qing’s eyes had remained as clear as a lake. It was almost as if he hadn’t just witnessed a sexual performance in public.

Yi Pin was having the time of his life though. He was sipping a cup of delicious tea and rinsing his eyes and ears with beauty. What’s not to like?

The old Taoist turned in Ye Qing’s direction in surprise. “The show’s not over yet.”

“So? There’s nothing to watch.” Ye Qing shook his head.

Yi Pin complained, “You have no appreciation for aesthetics. This only happens once a year, you know? It’s your loss if you miss it.”

Ye Qing joked, “You’re gonna catch a stye[2] at this rate.”

Yi Pin protested, “The hell are you talking about? Only a voyeur would catch a stye. Am I peeping? No, I’m watching this openly!”

“You’re... right, I guess.” Ye Qing rolled his eyes in exasperation. “If there was any doubt that you are a fake Taoist, it’s gone now.”

“You don’t get it. I’m observing the event in front of me with a critical, unbiased eye.”

Yi Pin began bull-shitting matter-of-factly, “This is cultivation. Observing this event helps me temper my dao heart, understand?”

“Cultivation, my butt. Do you think you can trick me just because I’m less worldly than you?” Ye Qing rolled his eyes harder.

It was at this moment an old man sitting at a table a short distance away from them commented, “Your words betray your youth and ignorance, boy. A warrior must always cultivate the heart before the body. Otherwise, they can never be accomplished.”

“The temptation of sex is one of the hardest trials of the heart, but also the most beneficial. Only when you have read all the colors of humanity without being swayed by temptation can you truly say that you have obtained an unwavering dao heart.”

The old man looked like he was in his sixties, but his complexion looked pretty healthy. He was wearing a tattered sheepskin coat and a straw hat. He was currently smoking a pipe and staring at the litter with unblinking eyes.

Ye Qing let out a deep, exasperated sigh. "You know, I might have believed you if your eyes weren't glued to the litter this whole time."

Meanwhile, Yi Pin was beyond happy to find a soul mate. "Well said, brother! You understood what I was trying to say perfectly! I am honored to make your acquaintance!"

"You flatter me, Reverend. Your eyes may be tinged with color, but I can tell that your heart is devoid of lust. Anyone can tell at first glance that you are an enlightened one. I'm the one who should say that I am honored to be in your presence," the old man returned with a beaming smile.

"Now that is flattery if I ever heard one! Undeserved flattery!" Yi Pin said that, but he could not contain the wide grin on his face at all. Without hesitation, he shuffled to the side and offered the old man a seat, "Sharing is caring, and it is better to cultivate with others than it is to cultivate alone. Please take a seat so we may trade insights and hone our cultivation further, brother!"

"Why not? It so happens I have a jar of wine with me. It will balance out the work we must do to improve our cultivation!"

The old man chuckled and appeared beside Yi Pin in a blur. He was also holding a wine jar in his hand even though he wasn't a moment ago.

Chapter 533: Joy Bodhisattva

Ye Qing narrowed his eyes a little. Even before the old man had spoken, he already suspected that he was no ordinary person.

Most of the people at the stall were staring at the litter with lustful eyes, but the old man was one of the few whose eyes and expression were as calm and tranquil as a lake.

Now, he was even more certain of his assumption. There was a table between them and the old man's table, and yet he had appeared next to Yi Pin in the blink of an eye. Anyone who possessed such a potent movement art was someone to be respected.

They said that Bei You was a region of crouching tigers and hidden dragons, and that the random, ordinary-looking guy drinking next to you could be a champion of epic proportions. Ye Qing always thought the claim was a bit of an exaggeration until he literally went through that exact experience.

While Ye Qing's thoughts were a million kilometers away, Yi Pin and the old man were drinking with each other. If you looked at their straight posture and stern expression only, you might think that they were two esteemed seniors who were deep in discussion about the profound arts. In reality...

"Look at the third woman on the left side of the litter! Now that's what I call an hourglass figure!"

“The one right in front of her isn’t too bad herself. She might not have the figure, but she’s the epitome of a cute and delicate flower.”

“Look! Look! That’s some of the biggest chests I’ve ever seen!”

Shit. I should’ve moved to a different table.

While Ye Qing was busy regretting his life choices, a sudden movement caught his attention. A feminine arm was reaching out of the curtains, and it was smooth, slender, and almost glowing. Somehow, it was even paler than even the white curtains covering the litter.

It was as if the arm was imbued with some sort of magic. As soon as it appeared, the entire place fell silent, and everyone’s gaze was pulled toward it before they knew it. Even Yi Pin and the old man suddenly dropped their discussion and stared at the arm as if they were hypnotized.

As the arm slowly pushed away the fabric, and a lovely, awe-inspiring figure slowly rose to a sitting position. Everyone began breathing a little faster before they knew it.

When the curtains were fully lifted, and a woman stepped out into the open, it was as if the world itself was fading into the background. For a moment, the woman was the only color that existed in this gray-white world, and not even the sun itself could match her brightness. Countless eyes widened to the absolute limit as they stared blankly at the woman. They were in such a stupor that they had forgotten to breathe.

Even Ye Qing temporarily lost control of his breathing and found himself utterly speechless for a moment.

The woman had silky smooth black hair that cascaded down her back like a waterfall. Her countenance was noble and holy, and she wore a thin white dress that barely concealed her milky skin. The sex marks, sweat and reddish complexion on her neck and other parts of her body made it crystal clear that she was the main actor of the sexual performance earlier, and yet she did not appear depraved or obscene at all. If anything, it was the opposite.

“Bodhisattva...”

As soon as the woman appeared, every disciple bowed their heads with reverence.

“Rise,” The woman whispered. As it turned out, the woman didn’t just possess a holy appearance. Her voice was pure, calm, and untainted by the mortal coil as well.

The woman was barefooted. When she walked, a white lotus would sprout where her foot just left the ground. It truly looked like she was a living goddess who had descended to the world to save the people from suffering.

The disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy looked increasingly fervent in their worship, and the common men who were blinded by their lust just a moment ago calmed down. In fact, most of them were bowing their heads in shame and looking away from the woman because they felt that the act was sacrilege.

There were three people who weren’t affected, however. They were the old man, Yi Pin and Ye Qing.

After she stepped off the litter, the woman calmly walked toward the tea stall. In fact, it looked like she was walking straight toward them.

Ye Qing furrowed his brows a little. He suddenly had a bad feeling about this.

After the woman arrived at their table, she glanced at Yi Pin and the old man briefly before turning her attention onto Ye Qing. “Will you become my disciple and study the way of ultimate bliss with me?”

Envy colored everyone’s expression including the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy instantly. They only wished they could be Ye Qing at that moment.

As for Ye Qing, he was having trouble trying to process what was happening. *This is our first meeting, and you’re already inviting me to...? I’m not ready yet!*

Seeing that Ye Qing wasn’t responding, the woman repeated her request, “Will you become my disciple and study the way of ultimate bliss with me?”

“Ahem...” Ye Qing finally came back to reality and coughed. “Thank you very much for your kind offer, householder[1], but I am used to being unfettered.”

Almost everyone turned around and glared at Ye Qing in shock and anger. The woman herself didn’t seem to anticipate that Ye Qing would reject her. She thought for a moment before asking, “In that case, would you like to study the way of ultimate bliss with me.”

When Ye Qing said he wished to be unfettered, he was implying that he didn’t wish to become her disciple. However, that didn’t apply to the latter half of her offer.

Ye Qing rubbed his nose. “Er, thank you, but no thanks. I’m a scholar, and I have not undergone consummation[2]. It wouldn’t be right for me to break tradition.”

The woman wasn’t giving up, however. She thought for a moment before saying, “In that case, why don’t we marry? You won’t be breaking tradition then.”

“Are you serious?!” Ye Qing blurted. He just couldn’t hold himself. Yi Pin and the old man’s mouth fell open, and even the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy could scarcely believe their ears.

This woman was no ordinary person. She was none other than the head of the Buddhist Hall of Joy, Joy Bodhisattva. She was so famous that her title became a part of a famous saying not just in Bei You, but the entire northern lands, and now she was asking a random guy’s hand in marriage?

What the fuck was going on here?

The woman—Joy Bodhisattva—replied, “Of course. I never lie.”

“Ahem, that’s not what I meant. What I’m trying to say is, aren’t you a monk? I thought marriage is forbidden for those who practice monasticism?”

Joy Bodhisattva replied, “That may be true for other religions, but not the Buddhist Hall of Joy. If my current status bothers you, I can leave my monastic order and serve as your faithful wife.”

As soon as Joy Bodhisattva said this, the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy dropped to their knees and cried in shock and horror, “Bodhisattva, you can’t!”

In response, she glanced at them and said, “Just because I am no longer a monk does not mean I am renouncing the Buddha. Must one convert to embrace the Buddha? Can they not practice his teachings without being a monk?”

“You still have a long way to go before you may free yourselves from the mirages of the mortal coil.”

The disciples bowed their heads in shame. “You are right, Bodhisattva.”

“So, will you be my husband?” Joy Bodhisattva turned back to Ye Qing.

Ye Qing’s mouth opened and closed as he tried to search for the right words. For a long time, they refused to come to him.

I’m not speaking English, right? I’ve rejected her twice—twice! So why is she not getting my meaning? Fuck my life!

Ye Qing coughed again and said as seriously as he could, “Ahem... I am truly sorry, but I am still very young. I don’t plan on getting married any time soon.”

Outrage filled the disciples’ eyes once more. From their perspective, a million Ye Qings weren’t worth a single toe on their Bodhisattva, and yet for whatever reason, Joy Bodhisattva had chosen him to be her husband. He should be thanking his entire bloodline for the impossible luck that just landed in his lap, and yet the sonuvabitch dared to reject their Bodhisattva not once, not twice, but three times! His stupidity and arrogance truly knew no bounds!

Next to Ye Qing, Yi Pin and the old man exchanged an incredulous look with each other while thinking “holy shit” inside their heads. They couldn’t believe that Joy Bodhisattva was offering to marry Ye Qing, and they couldn’t believe that Ye Qing dared to reject her. “Holy shit” was literally the only words they could describe their feelings right now.

Ye Qing could feel the furious gazes threatening to burn his body into a crisp, of course, but he could only feign ignorance. What else could he do, really? He hardly wanted this to happen. He was literally a random passerby watching a show when suddenly, the main actor stepped down from the stage and offered him her hand in marriage. Like what the fuck? Why was this happening?

It was one thing if he knew nothing about her. He could have just turned her down, patted his bum and left the scene without a care for the world. But having heard about the Buddhist Hall of Joy from Yi Pin, having the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy addressing the woman as Bodhisattva, and having felt her vast and unfathomable aura, he would have to a complete idiot not to realize who was standing in front of him.

It was precisely because he didn’t want to insult one of the most influential figures of Bei You that he came up with various excuses and tried to let her down gently again and again. This way, both of them would be able to walk away with their dignity intact. However, his attempts failed miserably because the woman just would not get the hint. He couldn’t even tell if she was playing him or actually serious because religion could do things to a person’s head, and that was doubly true for those who held a high position.

Just how was he going to get out of this situation?

Someone help me!

Translator's Note: I know this scene is meant to be hilarious, but imagine that your president, prime minister or whatever suddenly walked up to you and asked you to become his husband on TV. And you know that you might wake up with a bullet the next day if you say no.

The MC curse truly has no mercy for MCs.

Chapter 534: God Sealing Curse

"I can wait," Joy Bodhisattva replied simply.

Ye Qing: "... *Why are you so obsessed with me, girl? Exactly what do you like about me? I can change!*"[1]

"You don't want to study the way of ultimate bliss with me, don't you?" Joy Bodhisattva asked after waiting for a couple of seconds and receiving no response from Ye Qing.

"You misunderstand, householder. I just..."

Ye Qing struggled for a moment before giving up with a sigh. "It seems that you want me to speak plainly. Very well. Yes, I don't wish to be together with you—"

Before the crowd's gaze could burn Ye Qing into a crisp, he continued, "—because I'm gay."

The world fell deathly silent, and for a moment, the crowd's fury was replaced by utter shock and speechlessness. Yi Pin and the old man spat out their wine at each other's faces, but neither man seemed to notice at all.

Ye Qing felt much better seeing the stupid expressions on everyone's faces. *How does my ultimate feel? You're the ones who forced me to do this! Don't blame me if it's not to your liking!*

Joy Bodhisattva didn't say anything. She simply watched him quietly with pure, untainted eyes.

Normally, it was any man's pleasure to be watched so intently by a beautiful woman. However, every hair on Ye Qing's body was standing on end. It was because he felt like Joy Bodhisattva's eyes contained some sort of power that laid bare all of his excuses and pretenses.

"Pfft."

Just when Ye Qing felt like squirming under her gaze, Joy Bodhisattva abruptly broke into a smile. At that moment, it felt like a million flowers were blooming, and no color existed in the world except her.

Her smile was so beautiful that even Ye Qing was temporarily dazed by it. However, he quickly suppressed the unwanted twinge of emotion and regained his cool.

"You truly are an amazing person, benefactor. If one day you changed your mind, or if you suddenly grew fond of women one day, do know that my doors will always be open to you," Joy Bodhisattva said smilingly.

With that said, she gave the old man and Yi Pin a nod before walking away.

Ye Qing rubbed his nose. It was clear that Joy Bodhisattva had seen through him. Or rather, she had been feigning ignorance and playing him from the start.

Then again, he should've known better. Joy Bodhisattva was the head of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and a titan that occupied one corner of Bei You. If she was a foolish, innocent woman who couldn't understand something as simple as an excuse, then she would be a footnote in history a long time ago.

The fact that he was played left him feeling a little disgruntled, but his relief far outweighed that emotion. It felt good not to be at the center of everyone's ire.

As Joy Bodhisattva was turning around and leaving, a muscle in Ye Qing's forehead suddenly twitched once. Blanching, he cried out, "Watch out!"

It was too late. By the time he said the word "Watch", several people had already dashed out of the crowd and charged toward Joy Bodhisattva.

The ambush was so sudden that even Ye Qing hadn't noticed it until the last moment, but Joy Bodhisattva seemed to have anticipated it. She waved her arm, and white lotuses accompanied by celestial music began falling from the sky.

A mini Bodhisattva who was sitting or lying down on each lotus. Each Bodhisattva was wearing a different outfit, making a different pose, and wearing a different expression, but they were undoubtedly all Joy Bodhisattva herself.

There was a Buddhist quote that went something like this: A Bodhisattva possesses many forms equal to the number of sand in an eternal river; innumerable and uncountable.

Innumerable white lotuses and Bodhisattvas descended from the sky to enlighten the world. As soon as the nine ambushers made contact with them, they soundlessly exploded into showers of blood and gore.

The blend of white lotuses and red gore; pure white and bright scarlet were beautiful beyond words.

The ambushers were dead, but Joy Bodhisattva frowned for the first time since she revealed herself. Ye Qing was frowning as well.

The reason was simple. The crisis wasn't over yet. Or rather, it was just beginning.

It was at this moment the flesh and blood still floating in the air abruptly joined together to form nine bloody chains covered in unknown, evil-looking runes. Blood was dripping off the chains like a mini rain, but it disappeared almost as soon as it left the chains. A thick blood stench permeated the area in no time at all.

The next moment, the nine bloody chains surged toward Joy Bodhisattva from every direction. Sensing danger, she furrowed her brow in concentration, pressed her palms together, and caused the Bodhisattvas sitting or lying on the white lotuses to fly into the air. They joined together and formed a Kingdom of Buddha in just the blink of an eye.

The nine bloody chains were completely unaffected by the power, however. They passed right through the Kingdom of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas almost as if they didn't exist and wrapped around Joy Bodhisattva's body before she could do anything else.

One end of the chains kept Joy Bodhisattva firmly trapped, while the other end spread out in nine different directions and slipped into the underground. It looked like an array of sorts.

At the center of the array, Joy Bodhisattva couldn't move a muscle. Her eyes were also glazed over as if she had lost consciousness.

The Kingdom of Buddha, the Bodhisattvas and the white lotuses disappeared at the same time.

“The God Sealing Curse? Watch out!”

Yi Pin turned a little pale when he recognized the bloody chains wrapped around Joy Bodhisattva's body. He quickly grabbed his new pal's arm and looked like he might dash away at first notice.

Ye Qing was trying to figure out why Yi Pin was warning him when suddenly, he sensed something and sidestepped to the right. Not a moment too soon, a chain burst out of the ground next to him and attempted to bind him like a snake.

Ye Qing's eyebrows knitted as he flicked a finger in the chain's directions. It immediately shattered into pieces and evaporated into a cloud of blood vapor.

A pair of chains had burst out of the ground next to Yi Pin and the old man as well. However, the old man calmly smacked his smoking pipe on the chains and shattered them into vapor.

They weren't the only ones who were attacked by the chains. The same thing was happening everywhere. The red chains sprouted out of the earth like vines and ripped through the mass of bodies like nothing. Some people were skewered like satay, some were wrapped as tightly as a zongzi, some were strangled to death and more.

At least dozens of people were sucked dry and turned into a dry husk as soon as they made contact with the chains. Just a moment later, only a handful of people were still alive.

These people were still alive and struggling because they were stronger than most, but it wouldn't be long before they followed in their brethren's footsteps. Having consumed so much flesh and blood, the chains' colors were deepening, and its runes growing increasingly mysterious by the second. At the same time, strange arrange lines were beginning to manifest around Joy Bodhisattva.

“What is going on, brother?” Ye Qing asked while shattering a few bloody chains that were slithering toward him. As the number of survivors decreased, the bloody chains attacking him, Yi Pin and the old man steadily grew in numbers.

“It's the God Sealing Curse. Someone's trying to assassinate Joy Bodhisattva,” Yi Pin answered from behind the old man. “We need to leave. These chains wouldn't stop attacking us otherwise.”

“It's too late. The ones behind these chains are here.” The old man inhaled a deep puff of smoke before exhaling it all. The smoke quickly transformed into various birds and slammed into the chains in the sky, snapping them all into bits and turning them into bloody vapor. However, the chains simply reformed a second later.

As soon as the old man said this, three people stepped out of a shadowy alley. The chains avoided them as if they had a mind of their own.

They were two men and one woman. One of the men was in his forties and carried five swords on his back. His sword qi felt cold and biting, and his aura felt very powerful.

The other guy was a monk with an ugly face and a muscular body. His upper body was bare, and there were naked women tattoos on his body.

The woman was in her thirties and wearing the exact same attire as Joy Bodhisattva. However, her appearance was far closer to that of a succubus than a holy woman, and she oozed sexiness instead of nobility. She could probably steal a man's heart with a single look.

"It's the arhat and the protector!"

"Please save us!"

The few Buddhist Hall of Joy disciples who were still hanging on looked burst out in joy and relief when they saw the monk and the woman. They hurriedly made a beeline toward them.

As soon as they came within a certain range, the monk let out a savage laugh and thrust his palm in the disciples' direction. They froze for an instant before their heads exploded into pieces.

Chapter 535: If I Must Interfere?

"Arhat... you..."

A lucky disciple who happened to be standing farther away from the group stared at the monk and the woman in wide-eyed disbelief. They were the Joy Arhat and Lampholding Protector of the Buddhist Hall of Joy, but they were slaughtering their own instead of saving them.

Aren't they here to save the Bodhisattva?

If not, then...

The disciple felt chilled to the very core of his soul.

"I am freeing them from the sea of bitterness and delivering them to bliss."

The Joy Arhat smiled, but it was a smile that resembled a demon's. "To become one with bliss is to attain eternal life, no?"

The woman—the Lampholding Protector—didn't wait for the monk to finish his sentence. She abruptly appeared behind the disciple and thrust her arm through his chest.

Pssh! Shhrek!

The disciple subconsciously looked down. There was now a gaping hole in his chest, and his heart was nowhere to be found.

He couldn't even form his final thoughts before he collapsed on the ground and perished.

"Haha... no need to be envious, benefactors. We view all life as equal, and we promise to deliver you to the Land of Bliss[1] as well."

The Lampholding Protector swept her gaze across the remaining crowd before lifting the still beating heart to her lips. Then, she licked it with an intoxicated expression.

"Aren't you the Buddhist Hall of Joy's arhat and the protector? What the hell do you think you're doing? Are you betraying your own Bodhisattva?" someone asked between gasps of exertion.

“Betray? Joy Bodhisattva is the one who betrayed the Buddha’s way. We are just cleaning house,” the Lampholding Protector replied with a giggle.

“If you’re cleaning house, then why are you getting us involved? Why are you attacking us even though we have nothing to do with the Buddhist Hall of Joy?” Someone demanded impotently.

“It’s true that our business has nothing to do with you people,” the Lampholding Protector nodded in agreement, “but what can we do if you appear at the wrong place at the wrong time?”

It was at this moment Master of Swords interrupted in a cold voice, “Cut the bullshit and kill them already. It’s on your head if someone throws a rat into our plans and screws things up.”

“Hahaha! You’re right, Master of Swords. Senior brother, let’s take out the traitor first, shall we?” the Lampholding Protector giggled.

“Hehe, sure. Today is the day we eradicate the shame of our Buddha.” The Joy Arhat let out a sinister laugh as he stared at Joy Bodhisattva, who was still bound at the center of the array.

“Can you deal with the small fries while my senior brother and I are killing the traitor, Master of Swords?” The Lampholding Protector asked while glancing at Master of Swords.

“Leave it to me,” Master of Swords replied simply.

“Scatter!” Someone shouted, and every man and woman began running in every direction. It was the right call, but...

“Hmph.”

Master of Swords snorted disdainfully before weaving lines in front of him like he was splitting heaven and earth into evenly-shaped blocks. The next moment, the escaping men and women froze in their tracks, and their heads flew away from their shoulders.

“Hmm? Who are you, senior?”

Master of Swords commented while looking in Ye Qing, Yi Pin and the old man’s direction. More accurately, he was looking at the old man. It was because the old man had casually shattered his sword qi with the wave of her hand. While he hadn’t employed his full strength, his attack wasn’t something that could be dispelled so easily. Clearly, the old man was no weakling.

He wasn’t sure if it was just his paranoia talking, but the old man also felt familiar for some reason. The old man smoked his pipe and chuckled. “Senior? You flatter me, Master of Swords.”

“You know me?” Master of Swords frowned.

“You’re Master of Swords, vice leader of Endless Sand and one of the Two Masters, aren’t you? Why wouldn’t I recognize you?”

The old man smiled. “Not only that, I know that the one who cast the God Sealing Curse is none other than Master of Curses, your compatriot. I was lucky enough to have met your leader a couple of times, you see.”

“Who on earth are you?” Master of Swords’ face grew increasingly stern, and even the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector had temporarily stopped in their tracks to look at the old man.

“It doesn’t matter who I am. What matters is that the Two Masters of the so-called ‘righteous’ sect of Bei You are working together with the infamous Joy Arhat and Lampholding Protector, tsk tsk... This is something many thought they would never witness in a lifetime!”

The old man tapped his smoking pipe against the sole of his shoe to clear some of the ash. “Wouldn’t you agree?”

“You’re... Ouyang De?!” Master of Swords finally recalled a certain memory and exclaimed in shock.

“Ouyang De?” The Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector exchanged a glance with each other. “You’re the ‘Strange Warrior’ Ouyang De?!”

“I have no idea that people still remember me! I feel very honored!” Ouyang De chuckled.

“It is an honor to meet you as well, senior Ouyang. I hope you’ll forgive me for my earlier transgression!” replied Master of Swords with a salute.

That was what he said, but Master of Swords didn’t look apologetic in the slightest. There were three Grandmasters in Bei You, and they were the head of the Yellow Dragon Brigand, Huang Tianba; the head of the Endless Sand, Xiong Kuohai, and finally, the ‘Strange Warrior’ Ouyang De. In fact, Ouyang De was the strongest of the trio.

Despite this, Master of Swords wasn’t too afraid of Ouyang De. He might be the strongest Grandmaster of Bei You, but he was a lone man with no powerbase under his name. There was only so much a single person could do.

Of course, that didn’t mean that Master of Swords was willing to antagonize Ouyang De. Not even Endless Sand was willing to make an enemy out of a Grandmaster, much less him.

“One who errs unknowingly need not be held responsible. I forgive you.” Ouyang De waved uncaringly.

“This junior appreciates your generosity, senior.” Master of Swords saluted him again. “If there is nothing else, I humbly request you to take your leave, senior. This junior will make up for his mistake with a proper apology later.”

“Oh no, that I cannot do.” Ouyang De shook his head.

“What do you mean by that?” The Joy Arhat interrupted with an unfriendly frown on his face.

“My meaning is very simple. Can you give me face and abandon your mission, just for today?” Ouyang De asked.

Master of Swords was frowning as well. “Joy Bodhisattva is a monster who has committed many crimes and tempt countless off the straight and narrow. As a fellow believer of the right and good, shouldn’t you work with us to eliminate her vile influence on society? Why are you helping her?”

“Hahaha! Come now. You may be able to fool some children who just entered the *jianghu* with your passionate speech, but I’ve eaten more salt than you have rice, and walked more bridges than you have roads, so please, save it.”

“If Endless Sand really wishes to right what is wrong, you wouldn’t be working with the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector, both notorious villains of the Buddhist Hall of Joy, and you definitely wouldn’t slaughter innocents whose only error is to appear at the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Ouyang De beamed at the trio. “Also, please never call me a believer of the right and good again unless your goal is to curse me. Everyone knows that no good deed goes unpunished, and good people even more so, and I do not believe I am anywhere strong enough to carry such a title.”

“The Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector have chosen to return to the light, and the redeemed deserve a second chance. On the other hand, these people are clearly bewitched by that demoness. It only makes sense to slay them all before they could spread her foul influence.”

Master of Swords made one more attempt to change Ouyang De’s mind. “I will not force you to cooperate with us and slay that demoness, but please don’t interfere with our business either.”

The Lampholding Protector chanted, “My Buddha is merciful. This is an internal matter, senior. A lofty, independent warrior like you shouldn’t get involved with the likes of us. You wouldn’t want to be caught in a quagmire of trouble, would you?”

“And if I must interfere?” Ouyang De smiled.

Master of Swords uttered coldly, “If you must take the side of that demoness, then you will become an enemy of Endless Sand. Is that what you wish, senior?”

“Are you threatening me?” Ouyang Den slowly filled his pipe with fresh powder and ignited it. Two deep and satisfying puffs later, he said, “Don’t you know? The one thing I don’t fear in life is threats.”

“Is that your decision, senior?” Master of Swords slowly gripped one of the swords hanging on his back and gathered his energy. It felt like a cyclone was taking form right before their eyes.

“It’s not like I want to. Swim long in the *jianghu* long enough, and it’s only a matter of time before you get pulled into muddy waters!” Ouyang De replied without a care for Master of Swords’ threat whatsoever.

“We gave you a choice, old man! You’re the one who spurned it!”

The Joy Arhat roared and grew a full meter tall in an instant. His muscles rippled like waves, and his vigor ballooned as he launched a palm strike at Ouyang De.

Chapter 536: Five Virtue Sword of Star Deities

Boom!

The air within several meters of the combatants compressed and exploded with a boom, but Ouyang De didn’t panic. While the Joy Arhat’s palm was making its way toward him, he thrust his smoking pipe forward, pierced through the layers of palm force, and tapped it on the Joy Arhat’s wrist.

There was an old saying called, “Four taels can move five hundred kilograms.” Weak strength could surpass greater strength if it was applied properly. With a simple flick and push, Ouyang De was able to stagger the Joy Arhat and caused his palm strike to sail harmlessly past his side. As they were brushing past each other, he then reversed his grip and smacked the monk on the back of his head.

Bang!

The Joy Arhat hit the ground at the speed of lightning. It was such an impact that he left a deep pit on the ground.

While Ouyang De was repelling the Joy Arhat, a smooth, slender finger pointed at the center of his forehead. The finger looked a good distance away from its target, but was it? Was it not right in front of its target? Not only that, it looked like it existed in both reality and unreality at the same time. So long as its owner willed it, it could be anything and everything.

“Finger of Whims and Wishes”

At the same time, Master of Swords’ aura had reached its peak. When he swung his sword, a fiery blaze hot enough to burn heaven and earth burst into existence, and a fearsome-looking god manifested in the sky. It had three heads and six arms, and it wielded a bow, arrows, two swords and a fire calabash. It was also wearing a golden helm and a golden armor.

Standing in the middle of the inferno, the god looked as imposing as hell and as ubiquitous as the sea. The next moment, the god executed a cross slash and launched a dragon of pure fire at Ouyang De.

“Sword of the Fire Virtue of the South”

Ouyang De looked like an ant before the god and its fire dragon, but he wasn’t afraid in the slightest. He brought his smoking pipe to his mouth and took a puff, and both entities suddenly lost their cohesion and began shrinking rapidly. Before Master of Swords could do anything, both the god and the fire dragon were sucked into the smoking pipe.

Whoever said that a smoking pipe could not hold a world, much less a god?

The next moment, Ouyang De exhaled and spat fire from his smoking pipe. The flames scattered into countless birds and slammed into the slender finger still sailing toward him.

The Lampholding Protector was exposed as the finger surrounding her dissolved inch by inch. Her face was white with terror as she backpedaled as quickly as her feet would allow.

A short distance away from her, Master of Swords was forced to back away by the swarm of flaming birds as well. He was wearing a severe expression on his face.

He was a Half-Step Grandmaster, which meant that he was only half a step away from attaining the Grandmaster stage. Besides that, he cultivated the “Five Virtue Sword of Star Deities”, a powerful and famous martial art in ancient times.

In Taoism, there were five star gods known as the Five Virtues or the Five True Lords. They were the Wood Virtue of the East “Hua Xing”, the Fire Virtue of the South “Ying Huo”, the Metal Virtue of the West “Tai Bai”, the Water Virtue of the North “Ci Chen”, and the Earth Virtue of the Center “Di Hou”.

Each Virtue wielded a supreme sword, and each sword possessed incredible power. They could even manifest a shadow of the Five Virtues to assist its wielder, each with their own unique qualities.

The Sword of the Wood Virtue of the East possessed the power of life and could revive and revitalize all living things,

The Sword of the Fire Virtue of the South possessed the power of destruction and could burn all into ash,

The Sword of the Metal Virtue of the West possessed the power of killing and could slay any foe,

The Sword of the Water Virtue of the East possessed the power of winter and could turn everything into ice,

And finally, the Sword of the Earth Virtue of the Center possessed the power of thick virtue and could protect anything and everything.

Once, Master of Swords had used the “Five Virtue Sword of Star Deities” to defeat a recently ascended Grandmaster. Although he didn’t slay his opponent, the fact that he defeated him fair and square earned him the title “Master of Swords” and the eleventh place on the Human Champions Ranking.

Although Ouyang De was the strongest Grandmaster in Bei You, he was only ranked ninety-eighth on the Earth Champions Ranking. That was why he naively thought that the power gap between them wasn’t too big. Even if he couldn’t defeat the man, he was sure that the three of them together could go toe to toe against the Grandmaster.

Then, reality slapped him in the face. In just one exchange, Ouyang De had dealt all three of them a serious blow. Not only that, it was clear that the old man hadn’t employed his full strength.

Just how strong was Ouyang De?

They couldn’t back down, however. If they missed this opportunity, and Joy Bodhisattva survived to fight another day, then it would be that much harder for them to eliminate her in the future.

Endless Sand's plans to eliminate the Buddhist Hall of Joy and claim its rightful place as the king of Bei You would also fall into tatters.

Worse still, Joy Bodhisattva would surely transform into their bitterest enemy. Although their factions had never been on the best of terms, the worst they ever did was to back bite and duke it out behind the scenes. They had never clashed against each other in public, much less assassinated the other's leader in broad daylight. If Joy Bodhisattva died, then all was well. If not, then this would turn into a full-blown war.

Endless Sand would probably win by virtue of being the bigger and stronger faction, but Joy Bodhisattva would make them pay every step of the way. In the end, no one would come out on top.

That was why Joy Bodhisattva must die today.

Master of Swords came to a decision after some quick thinking. He ordered, "Delay Ouyang De as best you can. I'll kill Joy Bodhisattva in the meantime."

If Joy Bodhisattva dies, then their grand plan would succeed. Ouyang De could be a living god, and he still wouldn't be able to change anything. The power of one only extended so far.

The Lampholding Protector and the Joy Arhat understood the seriousness of the situation, of course. They had colluded with Endless Sand to murder their own leader, and Joy Bodhisattva had killed for far less. If she lived, they would die. It was as simple as that.

The two traitors charged toward Ouyang De without hesitation. At the same time, Master of Swords charged toward Joy Bodhisattva at the speed of lightning.

Seeing this, Ouyang De inhaled until his stomach was bulging before exhaling it all at once. Countless sparks flew out of his smoking pipe like stars.

The Joy Arhat let out an angry roar, raised his massive fist, and scattered the sea of sparks with a single punch. However, the sparks also burned his flesh and left many black patches on his body.

The Lampholding Protector also pointed another finger at Ouyang De and summoned countless semi-transparent fingers into existence. Each finger would halt a spark in its tracks before flicking it away.

They had just finished dealing with the sea of sparks when they realized that Ouyang De was standing between the two of them. Stunned, the two betrayers subconsciously attacked the old man.

Ouyang De let out a strange cackle and blocked their attacks with both hands. Then, another pair of hands reached out of his sleeves and slapped them in the chest.

"Can you guess how many hands I have?"

Ouyang De grinned savagely as another two pairs of hands reached out of his collar and his chest and slapped the absolute shit out of the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector. Their cheeks swelled like balloons, and their vision was filled with stars. Not done yet, Ouyang lunged forward from an angle that defied common sense, grabbed their shoulders, and tossed them over and behind him.

As the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector were still paralyzed, they were unable to arrest their momentum. Then, a series of firecracker-like pops erupted inside their body.

“Pwack!”

The two betrayers threw up blood and turned deathly pale at the same time.

This was Ouyang De’s signature martial art, “Grinning Fist and Impossible Move”. The reason the martial art was named this way was because its practitioner used grins to control his force, and its techniques were as unusual as they were unpredictable. Take the way Ouyang De had suppressed the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector just now. Who could anticipate that he would suddenly grow multiple pairs of hands? Surprising enemies with literally impossible techniques and hitting them where their guard was weakest was the epitome of “Grinning Fist and Impossible Move”.

Ouyang De mainly got his moniker due to his unorthodox, unpredictable, and ridiculous behavior, but his signature martial art was also a major part in it.

Ye Qing and Yi Pin were trying to sneak away from the battlefield when the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector landed right in front of them. Then, they heard Ouyang De’s voice from afar, “Please handle them while I take care of Master of Swords, young one.”

You sonuvabitch!

Ye Qing and Yi Pin were speechless to say the least. If Ouyang De wasn’t a Grandmaster who could kick their butts, they would be swearing at full volume already.

When Master of Swords, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector appeared, Ye Qing and Yi Pin figured out instantly that this was a clash between two of the biggest forces of Bei You. Neither man had any intention of getting involved in this, which was why they had pretended to be blind and deaf and kept a low profile this whole time. While the trio were fighting against Ouyang De, they immediately saw their opportunity and tried to sneak away as quietly as they were able.

At first, things went exactly as they had planned. Neither combatant seemed to have noticed their actions, and they were seconds away from rounding a corner and hopping away like a rabbit.

Then, the son of a *bitch* threw the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector over and cut off their path of escape. As a result, any chance they had at escaping this battlefield unscathed had evaporated into thin air.

“Ahem. Would you believe me if I told you that we were just passing through?” Ye Qing tried while watching at the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector warily.

“Deal with them, senior brother. I’m going to help Master of Swords.”

The Lampholding Protector leaped into the air and dashed toward Master of Swords and Ouyang De’s battlefield.

The Joy Arhat grunted in agreement and struck the ground with his palm. As it collapsed, he leaped into the air and swung his right arm at Ye Qing and Yi Pin like a hammer.

Chapter 537: Blissful Red Dust

Boom!

A deafening boom and a terrible shockwave washed over the area. The explosion was such that an entire chunk of the earth was flung into the air.

“What the...? Did he really need to go that far to kill two small fries?”

The Lampholding Protector was still making her way toward Ouyang De and Master of Swords when the ungodly explosion caused her to flinch a little. She subconsciously looked in the direction of the explosion and saw a single man flying out of the smoke and carving a deep gorge on the ground.

When her brain clicked, the Lampholding Protector exclaimed in shock and disbelief, “Senior brother?!”

The person lying on the ground wasn’t either one of the small fries. It was the one person she did not expect to see, the Joy Arhat. There was also a clear fist imprint on his chest.

Another silhouette slowly stepped out of the smoke. His face was etched with frustration and resignation. He was, of course, Ye Qing.

When the Joy Arhat saw Ye Qing, he climbed to his feet, let out a furious roar, and charged Ye Qing once more. At this, the young man could only sigh deeply.

“Why must you force my hand?”

He was just a small fry, so why must he endure the attention of these big shots time and again?

When the Joy Arhat got close, Ye Qing sidestepped away from a punch that was aimed at his head and took one step forward. His shoulder slammed hard into the monk’s chest and sent him tumbling across the ground like a tumbleweed.

The Lampholding Protector changed her mind and appeared behind the Joyful Arhat instead. She used both hands to neutralize the force affecting her senior brother and arrested his momentum with some effort. Then, she blocked the enraged Joy Arhat with a raised hand and watched Ye Qing warily, asking, “Who are you?”

“That line again? Are you people going to say that every time you run into an unexpected obstacle?”

Ye Qing sighed, but he wasn’t referring to the duo specifically. Since he came to Bei You, nearly every foe who tried to push him only to be pushed back hard had asked that exact same question, and for the life of him, he couldn’t understand why. Did they think it would save them from a beating or something?

Sure, it was partially because he was pretending to be Small Fry A, but come the fuck on!

“I told you I was just passing through.” Ye Qing shrugged helplessly. “But you guys just couldn’t catch a hint.”

The Lampholding Protector couldn’t say anything against that because it was true. A few seconds later, she clasped her hands in salute and apologized, “We see that now, and we apologize for our mistake. If you don’t mind, please evacuate the scene and leave us to our business. We promise to give you a proper apology when all is said and done.”

Although the young man felt like a late-stage Spirit Purifier, the fact he could sent the Joy Arhat flying with his shoulder proved that his physical strength was at least equal to a body-tempering late-stage Spirit Master, if not more.

She and the Joy Arhat were only late-stage Spirit Masters, and while they could probably kill the young man if they worked together, there was no way they could finish the battle in time for them to reinforce Master of Swords. That was how most battles against a body-tempering Spirit Master with a strong and vigorous body went, not to mention that they were injured right now.

Ouyang De's "Grinning Fist and Impossible Move" looked weak and harmless on the surface, but it had injured them both to a certain extent. That was why she was attempting to reach an amicable resolution with Ye Qing right now. Once Joy Bodhisattva was dead, they had all the time in the world to settle other matters.

"I wanted to leave earlier, but you refused to let me go..." Ye Qing said slowly, "Now? I don't feel like leaving anymore."

The Lampholding Protector's face turned grim and dark. In the end, her worst fears had come to fruition. "Are you sure about this?"

You fuckers really thought you could send me off like a dog like you didn't just try to kill me?

"I don't want to do this either. You're the ones who forced me into this," Ye Qing replied with a cold chill in his eyes. If he had a choice—a real choice—he wouldn't get involved in this shitshow as a matter of course. No one knew better than him that he couldn't afford a high profile right now. Unfortunately, Ouyang De had already dragged him into this mess, and he seriously disliked the way the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector acted.

No, he wasn't referring to the fact that the duo had tried to kill him. To be fair, Endless Sand was clearly planning to kill all witnesses, so of course they weren't going to allow them to go scot free. However, one look at the Lampholding Protector's expression, and he knew that they were going to come after him after they were done with their business. She was so bloody obvious he didn't even need to read her emotions to know that. That was how arrogant she was.

Naturally, this displeased him greatly. He might not like to get into trouble, but he sure as hell wasn't scared of trouble. Rather than waiting for his enemies to gang up on him at a later date, he would much rather ruin their plan and end their threat right now.

You fuckers want to kill Joy Bodhisattva, right? Well, that ain't happening anymore. I wonder if you'll still have the time to attack li'l old me when Joy Bodhisattva hunts down the two of you like the rats you are?

Technically, this wasn't the only option he had. Since Ouyang De had screwed him over as well, he could choose to assist Master of Swords, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector and ensure that their assassination plot was a success. However, that would turn Ouyang De into his enemy. The trio didn't fear Ouyang De because they were backed by Endless Sand, but he was but one man.

On top of that, Ouyang De clearly had the upper hand right now. Just how stupid would he have to be to help a bunch of losers he didn't even like?

Of course, the biggest motivation behind his decision was the fact that his impression of Ouyang De was okay despite the fact that the old man just screwed him over. He didn't think that Ouyang De

would pull an “alright it’s time to silence the witnesses” shenanigan when all was said and done. Even if he was wrong, the old man at least injured the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector before tossing them into his lap. That gesture alone was enough to sway him into joining Ouyang De’s side.

“Junior sister, go help Master of Swords. I’ll keep this brat busy.”

“Forget it. None of you are going anywhere.”

The punch was completely traceless, but as soon as it made contact with the woman’s back, it triggered a series of ripples. Each ripple contained an image of the Lampholding Protector, and they prevented Ye Qing’s fist force from reaching her true body. In fact, the distance between them was growing by the second.

It looked like they were standing right next to each other, when in reality the gulf between them could fill up ten thousand bodies of water and mountains.

“You can’t stop me,” The Lampholding Protector declared with an arrogant smile on her face. Her main movement art was called the “Dance of Whims and Wishes”. Created based on the Buddhist understanding that all things that existed and would ever exist were transient, it could turn what was real into an illusion, and what was an illusion into reality. Excellent at neutralizing forces and minimizing damage, it was how she was able to neutralize Ye Qing’s punch despite the terrible weight behind it.

“Is that so?”

Ye Qing smirked. If he couldn’t hit her, then he wouldn’t. His goal wasn’t to kill his opponent anyway. It was to delay them long enough for Ouyang De to finish off Master of Swords.

A thick fog rushed out of Ye Qing’s body and enveloped everything within a hundred meters of him in the blink of an eye. The Lampholding Protector flinched immediately. It was because she had lost all perception of her surroundings including sound. If she didn’t know better, she would have thought that Ye Qing had somehow teleported her to a completely different location.

The Lampholding Protector tried to dash in what she thought was where Joy Bodhisattva was located, but she was unable to find her no matter what she tried. It was almost as if the Joy Bodhisattva had disappeared into thin air.

Frowning, the Lampholding Protector waved her arm and tried to dispel the fog with a powerful gust of wind. She successfully pushed back the fog for about a meter or so before it swam right back into place.

“No, I can’t delay any longer,” the Lampholding Protector muttered under her breath. At this rate, Ouyang De was going to defeat Master of Swords and rescue Joy Bodhisattva, or Joy Bodhisattva herself was going to break out of her confinement. If either worst case scenario happened, they would all die.

Having made up her mind, an oil lamp slowly emerged from the Lampholding Protector’s head and rose higher. It was exquisitely crafted and adorned with a painting of nine naked women. The

Lampholind Protector then slowly raised her arms and maintained the pose like she was pretending to be a lighthouse.

A tiny light burned within the oil lamp, but within that light was a world of its own. Inside the light, countless male and female bodies were entangled with each other like a scene from the blissful Kingdom of Buddha.

When the oil lamp had risen about halfway into the sky, a seductive woman abruptly appeared in the air, held the oil lamp in her hands, and blew.

A wisp of lampfire shot out of the oil lamp, and the surrounding fog abruptly transformed into a raging inferno.

The inferno wasn't just all flames. Naked celestials and Bodhisattvas were dancing amidst the flames while the sounds of sex filled the ears. It was an unusual, fiery sexual fantasy few could dream of.

The Lampholding Protector's main cultivation art was called the "Blissful Rebirth Sutra", and her Yin God was none other than the oil lamp she released earlier. The lamp was called the Blissful Lamp and why she was granted the title "Lampholding Protector".

The technique she just executed was a Magia in the "Blissful Rebirth Sutra" named the "Blissful Red Dust". When the Blissful Lamp appeared, it would manifest a facade of the red dust and the blissful Kingdom of Buddha. It would convert all of humanity into Buddhism.

Chapter 538: The Purple Sun Overwhelms Bliss

In just the blink of an eye, the blaze consumed the surrounding fog and transformed it into the blissful Kingdom of Buddha. Even with Ye Qing's strength of spirit, his desires were inflamed, and his mind swayed by the unnatural power.

For a moment, his soul felt like it would be sucked into the female celestials dancing in the sky. Then, the demonic lotus entrenched inside his headspace absorbed all of his lust and cleared his mind.

"I have my own fire. Let's see if your lampfire is greater than my Purple Sun Trueflame!"

Ye Qing opened his mouth and exhaled a jet of purple flame. If the Lampholding Protector's lampfire was beautiful, dreamlike, and seductive, then the Purple Sun Trueflame was powerful, ferocious, and indomitable.

As soon as the Purple Sun Trueflame appeared, it was like the morning sun was rising from the east.

The bliss Kingdom of Buddha, the celestials and the Bodhisattvas—they all burned into ash in an instant.

The nine women etched on the surface of the oil lamp immediately began screaming at the top of their lungs. The people inside the lampfire perished, and the world itself was falling apart.

The destruction was too much. Cracks appeared all over the oil lamp's surface, and a muffled groan escaped the Lampholding Protector's lips. Her face looked terribly pale, and bright red blood poured out of her orifices freely. The next moment, the oil lamp dissolved into a beam of light and entered the Lampholding Protector's head.

At first, her eyes widened as if she couldn't believe that this was happening. Then, she began clutching her head with both hands and screaming at the top of her lungs. Purple flames could be seen leaking out of her eyes, ears, nose and mouth.

The Lampholding Protector fell still a few breaths later. She was still alive, but she might as well be dead considering her current state.

"The Purple Sun Trueflame?"

"The Purple Sun Trueflame!"

On the other side of the battlefield, both Master of Swords and Ouyang De could clearly see flickers of purple in the sky and feel the Purple Sun Trueflame's terrifying heat.

"What an unlucky child," Ouyang De muttered under his breath. Although they were enemies, he couldn't help but empathize with the Lampholding Protector.

The Lampholding Protector's "Blissful Rebirth Sutra" was a mental illusion art rooted in her Yin God, the Blissful Lamp. Combined with her Dance of Whims and Wishes, it could be used to bewitch the minds of her foes or a distraction tool if the opposition proved too much for her. It was such a powerful cultivation art that it made her nigh invincible against most enemies under the Grandmaster stage.

Unfortunately for her, the Purple Sun Trueflame was one of the fiercest and most yang fires in the world. Impervious to evil and the bane of all things yin and dark, it was the perfect counter to the Lampholding Protector's "Blissful Rebirth Sutra" as the martial art was steeped in the Dark Ways despite its Buddhist origins. Add to the fact that the Lampholding Protector was overly careless and thought that Ye Qing couldn't harm her through her "Dance of Whims and Wishes", she was incapacitated before she could even use a single strange Artifact.

The Purple Sun Trueflame had severely damaged her Yin God and her "Blissful Rebirth Sutra". She was still alive, but she would never return to her full strength unless she had a fortuitous encounter. But considering the circumstances, it would be a miracle if she lived to see the sunset.

"I didn't expect you to have a helper this strong, Ouyang De," Master of Swords uttered coldly as an earth yellow sword revolved around him, its sword qi vaguely taking the form of a qilin and protecting him from harm. Not only that, the area within a hundred meters of him had transformed into an ice land. This was caused by the Sword of the Water Virtue of the North.

So far, Master of Swords had employed three swords—the Sword of the Fire Virtue of the South, the Sword of the Earth Virtue of the Center, and the Sword of the Water Virtue of the North—against Ouyang De. The Sword of the Earth Virtue of the Center was his defense, and the other two swords his offense.

Unfortunately, his assault hadn't yielded any fruit so far. His attacks tickled Ouyang De at best, while he was rapidly running out of strength.

"I wasn't expecting this myself," Ouyang De replied honestly.

The reason he dragged Ye Qing into this mess was because he thought that Ye Qing was one of the helpers Joy Bodhisattva hired to protect herself. And how did he arrive at this conclusion? It was due to their earlier interaction, of course. It was such a nonsensical, comedic exchange that it had to be a coded conversation of some sort. There was just no way such a conversation could actually happen in real life, much less between two people who had zero connection with each other until then, right?

He himself wasn't here by coincidence. Why would anyone in their right mind willingly stick their nose into Endless Sand and the Buddhist Hall of Joy's business? He might be weird, but he wasn't crazy. It was because he owed Joy Bodhisattva a favor, and the woman knew a long time ago that there was a brewing plot against her. It was why she secretly employed him to protect her.

This was why he had passed the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector to Ye Qing. They were on the "same" side after all, so why should he do all the hard work while Ye Qing sat on the sidelines?

Besides, he could tell that Ye Qing was hiding an unknown amount of strength beneath his weak cultivation. Even if he was no match for the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector, he was sure he could stall them long enough for him to kill Master of Swords. It was the perfect plan.

He never imagined that Ye Qing would take out one of his opponents first before he could wrap up his own battle, however. This was why he adored pleasant surprises.

"Hmph. You think you've won?" Master of Swords said coldly.

"Haven't we?"

Ouyang De could have ended the battle already, but he did not try to rush things because the upper hand was firmly in his grasp right now. His enemy was the one who needed to kill Joy Bodhisattva as soon as possible, while he only needed to stall long enough for Joy Bodhisattva to break out of her predicament. If Master of Swords himself wasn't in a hurry, why would he?

"The Lampholding Protector has lost, and the Joy Arhat is no match for my young friend. Master of Curses can't join the battle because he needs to maintain the God Sealing Curse. As for you, you only have two swords left. This battle is over once you've used them."

Ouyang De took a puff from his smoking pipe and declared arrogantly, "If you're in my position, won't you think that you've already won as well?"

"I would." Master of Swords nodded in agreement. Although the "Five Virtue Sword of Star Deities" was very powerful, it also consumed a lot of strength to use. At his current strength, five swords was his absolute limit. Once he had unleashed five swords, he would barely have enough energy to make a run for it, much less continue his fight against Ouyang De, so the old man's deduction was spot on.

However...

Master of Swords wasn't a smiling guy, but his lips slowly curled upward as he said, "Your judgment is impeccable, but you're wrong about one thing."

The taste of smoke in Ouyang De's mouth suddenly became less delicious. "And what might that be?"

"You will know very soon." Master of Swords chuckled.

The Half-Step Grandmaster made a sword seal with his hands, and another sword shot out of his back and into the sky. This one had an emerald green blade and leaves growing out of its hilt. A deity wearing a star crown, a pair of vermillion sandals, and a long robe with green clouds and longevity cranes manifested in the sky. He was holding a jade strip in his hand and carrying a Seven Treasure Sword and a white jade pendant on his waist.

He was the Wood Virtue of the East, "Hua Xing".

An unbelievable amount of vitality spread throughout the world. Grass suddenly sprouted out of the barren ground beneath the deity, and the dead trees nearby suddenly gained new life. It was like the coming of spring.

The Wood Virtue of the East, "Hua Xing" was the star god that governed the world's flora. Naturally, he was overflowing with life force.

The manifestation of Hua Xing gripped his Seven Treasure Sword and swung not at Ouyang De, but at Master of Swords himself. The Half-Step Grandmaster was flagging after unleashing three swords, but as soon as the emerald green sword energy entered his body, his energies immediately soared back to the peak once more.

Not done yet, Master of Swords gripped his final sword slowly moved his hand backward and gripped his final sword. It was none other than the Sword of the Metal Virtue of the West, the sword that was said to possess the power of killing.

As the sword slowly left its sheath, the world fell cold and silent like autumn. The fresh plants the Sword of the Wood Virtue of the East grew a moment ago instantly withered and died. It was like the reaper himself had come to claim Ouyang De.

Sensing danger from the sword, Ouyang De dropped his playful demeanor and gathered his own energies. His power gradually became thick, vast, unshakeable, and indiscernible from the world itself.

For a moment, the duo simply stared at each other. Both men were waiting for the other person to make a move first. Then, the terse stand-off was interrupted by a sudden arrival.

He was a young monk wearing a moon white robe. An actual moon was suspended behind his head, and his aura was warm and soothing like that of an enlightened monk. Every time he took a step, a ray of moonlight would descend from the sky and illuminate the endless facades of the red dust and the infinite variations of the blissful world.

The monk looked like he was moving at a snail's pace, but in reality, he crossed over sixty meters of distance in just the blink of an eye. He was headed straight for Joy Bodhisattva!

"The Wisdom King of Joy?!"

Ouyang De finally realized what Master of Swords meant. He thought that Master of Swords, Master of Curses, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector were his only enemies, but he was wrong. They had a fifth he wasn't aware of, and he was the true culprit who masterminded the

collusion between Endless Sand and the Buddhist Hall of Joy. The Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector were just lackeys.

Chapter 539: The Demonic Ape Crushes The Arhat

The monk was called the Wisdom King of Joy, and he was the second-in-command of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and a Half-Step Grandmaster. He was the second most powerful person in the sect both in terms of status and power.

Knowing that the situation had just taken a downward spiral, Ouyang De tried to stop the Wisdom King of Joy from approaching Joy Bodhisattva. However, Master of Swords swung his sword as soon as he twitched a muscle, and a barrage of pure white sword qi descended from the sky and formed an array around him.

The sword qi was called the Tai Bai Hepta Metal Sword Qi. Known as the sharpest sword qi in the world bar none, killing was its bread and butter. Its mere presence alone filled the world with an air of desolation and murder, chilling Ouyang De down to the very bones.

No wonder Master of Swords was able to defeat a Grandmaster. Even Ouyang De, the strongest Grandmaster in Bei You sensed true danger from the sword qi. He had no choice but to stop in his tracks and defend himself.

Ye Qing hadn't missed the Wisdom King of Joy's arrival, of course. He immediately rushed toward the newcomer in an attempt to stop him.

It was almost never a good idea to quit halfway after making a decision, and Ye Qing intended to see his through until the end. Joy Bodhisattva must survive no matter what.

“You killed my junior sister... YOU KILLED MY JUNIOR SISTER! I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!”

Unfortunately, he hadn't even taken a single step when the Joy Arhat suddenly let out a crazed howl and rushed toward him.

At first, Ye Qing paid the Joy Arhat no attention whatsoever. Generally speaking, body-tempering warriors were clumsy and slow, and the Joy Arhat was a body-tempering warrior who relied on brute strength to overwhelm his enemies. He highly doubted that the monk would be able to catch up to his “Illusionist's Grace”.

However, the brute grew bigger and bigger with each step he took. The tattoos of naked women on his body were also swaying their voluptuous bodies and moaning like they were alive. Then, the tattoos flew away from his body and danced around him, releasing layers of golden light and transforming into runes that covered every inch of the Joy Arhat's body.

A few breaths later, the Joy Arhat transformed into a ten-meter-tall Golden Arhat with three heads and six arms. Golden light circulated throughout his body, and semi-transparent images of celestial women danced around him. The two heads that had sprouted beside his head, and his three right arms were female as well. It was an expression of the belief that men should appear on the left side, and women the right especially during funerals.

In this form, the Joy Arhat's aura was no weaker than the Half-Step Grandmaster, Master of Swords.

Yi Pin—the old man had been hiding this whole time—called out, “That’s the Trailokya[1] Joy Arhat Golden Body! Be careful!”

After his transformation was complete, the Joy Arhat bent his knees a little and leaped into the sky at unbelievable speed. Such was his force that the ground within sixty meters of his feet crumbled. Once he had reached the highest point, his six arms formed a circle, and his fingers crisscrossed to form the shape of a lotus flower.

Boom!

The palm strike didn’t even reach Ye Qing yet, and the ground within sixty meters of him abruptly exploded into a massive pit that was shaped like a lotus flower.

Ye Qing didn’t falter, however. Standing as tall as a mountain, he looked up at the Joy Arhat and let out a mighty roar of his own.

“RAAAHHHHH!!!”

His body began swelling rapidly in size, and black fur as tough as steel needles grew out of his skin. He had transformed into a demonic ape in just the blink of an eye.

As soon as his transformation was complete, a dark, heavy and demonic aura enveloped the world. The maverick energy shot up into the air and warped the sky itself.

This was the first time he fully unleashed his Chaos Demon Ape Body after nearly entering the adept level of the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra”. Compared to his previous transformations, his Chaos Demon Ape Body was a lot bigger, stronger, and intimidating than before. Size and strength weren’t the only things he had improved either. Every muscle was exquisitely sculpted, and even his hair possessed enough strength to stab right through a wall.

As the “Divine Palm of Trailokya” descended toward him, Ye Qing made a fist and punched up at the sky. He was now a Chaos Demon Ape, and a Chaos Demon Ape was a foolish, fearless being that would dare to give even the sun and the moon a new make-up!

When his punch took form, the sky darkened, and it felt as if the world itself had been turned upside down. The very fabric of space was punched clean through before his fist slammed into the Joy Arhat’s palm.

BOOM!

The resulting impact reminded Ye Qing of the time he traveled in the Yin Yang Gap. It sounded like two mountains crashing into one another at full speed, and the shockwaves it generated were such that even the God Sealing Curse’s chains were shattered into pieces. The thunderous rumbles would spread far, far away and astound ordinary people and warriors alike

The ground beneath Ye Qing’s feet stretched inward like it was a piece of cloth before exploding into fine powder. Considering the sheer force of the impact, the reaction was all too natural.

The Joy Arhat shot through the clouds like an arrow and vanished in the blink of an eye. Ye Qing shrank back to his human form and threw up a mouthful of blood.

“Pwack!”

Ye Qing was swaying on his feet and looking a little pale. After transforming into a Trailokya Arhat, the Joy Arhat's strength was almost equal to that of the old Chen Ah Sheng. It was inevitable he sustained some injuries after clashing against him head on.

But of course, the injury wasn't particularly serious. A single breath was all he needed to heal away most of it.

One of the biggest advantages of a body-tempering warrior was their insane recovery speed. So long as the injury wasn't mental or fatal, they could recover from just about anything in a short time.

Ye Qing didn't relax, however. If anything, his expression looked uglier than ever. It had taken him a few breaths to send the Joy Arhat flying, and that was all the time the Wisdom King of Joy needed to reach Joy Bodhisattva and thrust a finger at her forehead.

"Fuck!"

Ouyang De blanched. Ye Qing blanched.

Ouyang De was angry at himself for being too lax and careless, whereas Ye Qing was thinking how he was going to make his escape with Yi Pin.

Master of Swords was leaning on his sword for support and panting heavily, but he was laughing triumphantly. And why wouldn't he? Despite his enemies' best efforts, they had ultimately succeeded.

Or did they?

Right before the Wisdom King of Joy's finger would pierce through Joy Bodhisattva's forehead, the seemingly unconscious woman abruptly opened her eyes. As if time and space themselves were frozen, his finger immediately stopped dead and refused to move an inch further.

Joy Bodhisattva watched the Wisdom King of Joy with pure, clear eyes. She said indifferently, "So you're the one who betrayed me."

Joy Bodhisattva's face was as calm as her voice. It was almost as if she was a third party observer and not the person at the center of this assassination plot.

"It is I."

Although Joy Bodhisattva's awakening surprised the Wisdom King of Joy, he didn't look too worried. It was because she was currently bound by the God Sealing Curse, and the one who cast it was none other than the Master of Curses.

Just like Master of Swords, Master of Curses was also a vice leader of Endless Sand and a Half-Step Grandmaster. But unlike Master of Swords, Master of Curses earned his fame not through martial power, but his slippery, indefensible curses.

A curse caster was someone who cursed others through verbal incantations. They could cast horrifying, anomalous curses from the shadows and slay their enemies without a trace.

One of a curse caster's greatest advantage was their ability to cast a deadly curse without having to make contact with their target in any way. They could simply cast their curses from a safe place, and rarely anyone could detect it until the curse had fully taken shape.

Worse still, curses came in all shapes and sizes. It could range from something as minor as flu or ill luck, to a plague or natural disaster that could wipe out an entire region. It was why curses were as enigmatic as they were feared.

Master of Curses was originally a member of the Curse Sect before he joined Endless Sand. He operated within Yan as a killer-for-hire who would do anything for money. He had cursed countless warriors to death, and even created a plague that annihilated a town of tens of thousands just because he felt like it.

After joining Endless Sand, Master of Curses kept a much lower profile and never committed something as atrocious as killing an entire town again. However, some of Endless Sand's enemies would occasionally drop dead for seemingly no reason whatsoever since his joining. It was entirely possible that Master of Curses had a hand in it.

Master of Curses knew many bizarre and anomalous curses, and the one he was most familiar with was the God Sealing Curse.

Chapter 540: Joy Bodhisattva's Plan

The God Sealing Curse was a type of blood curse. By using blood as the medium, it could shackle a target's Three Heavenly Souls and trap their Seven Earthly Souls. It should not need to be said why it was incredibly powerful.

The nine assassins who attacked Joy Bodhisattva at the beginning were the sacrifices. No one expected them to succeed, they were there just so that Joy Bodhisattva would kill them, and their blood would trigger the curses Master of Curses had planted inside them.

After the God Sealing Curse was activated, it would spawn curse chains that attacked all living beings within a certain range and consumed their blood. The more blood it consumed, the stronger it became.

In fact, they had purposely leaked Joy Bodhisattva's exact locations to persons of interest and lured many people over to ensure that the God Sealing Curse would not be wanting in power. That was why there were so many customers in the tea stall just now. Their only purpose was to serve as fodder for the God Sealing Curse.

The nine assassins were expected to provide the God Sealing Curse with enough power to shackle Joy Bodhisattva for some time, but since she was a Half-Step Grandmaster—one who was even stronger than the Wisdom King of Joy—they decided to have some insurance in place.

The Wisdom King of Joy did not believe that his leader could break free from the God Sealing Curse fast enough to save her own life. It was also why he was fearless despite the fact that Joy Bodhisattva was awake.

As for why he didn't show up sooner, it was because one, it looked like Master of Swords, Master of Curses, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector would be able to handle everything on their own; and two, he would become the next head of the Buddhist Hall of Joy if Joy Bodhisattva was dead. Naturally, he did not want outsiders to know that he had succeeded the position only because he colluded with Endless Sand to assassinate his own leader.

Unfortunately, Joy Bodhisattva had anticipated an attack like this and recruited Ouyang De to serve as her bodyguard. That was why he had no choice but to set foot on the battlefield himself. This would have happened even if Ye Qing wasn't present.

"Why?" Joy Bodhisattva asked.

"You betrayed our creed," the Wisdom King of Joy replied. He was in no hurry to take her life because he could end her with a single thought at this distance. Ouyang De could literally teleport, and he still wouldn't be able to stop him.

He was a vain man. He did not mind boasting to an enemy who would soon perish by his hands.

"You are our leader, and you worship the Buddha of Joyful Pleasure. But instead of serving our Buddha with ultimate bliss, you suppress desire with desire with the aim of ridding yourself of desire completely. That is completely antithetical to our belief and paints you a betrayer of our creed. Naturally, you must die for your sins."

"No two paths are the exact same, and the same goes with Buddhas. But in the end, all things begin and end the same way. Be it fueling desire with desire or suppressing desire with desire, both ways are Buddha nature that will eventually merge with the one great way, so what betrayal are you talking about?" Joy Bodhisattva replied calmly.

Ye Qing was surprised. Earlier, Yi Pin had explained to him the difference between the Buddha of Joy and the Buddha of Joyful Pleasure. The Buddhist Hall of Joy was an unorthodox sect that practiced the unorthodox Joyful Way of the Buddha and worshiped the Buddha of Joyful Pleasure, but it turned out that their leader, Joy Bodhisattva, was practicing the orthodox way of suppressing her desire through desire to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha.

"Buddha nature is everywhere, but how can two separate Buddha natures become one, and how can human desire ever be suppressed and extinguished? No, there is only one righteous way, and that is to indulge in our nature and become a Buddha through desire."

The Wisdom King of Joy sighed with pity. "I did not foresee the extent at which you have fallen... However, the Buddha does not enjoy killing. If you promise to return to our fold, I can consider keeping you alive."

For a brief moment, lust and greed burned in the Wisdom King of Joy's eyes. He suddenly had a better idea. Keeping Joy Bodhisattva alive might be a better option than killing her. He knew very well that Endless Sand was only helping him so that they could turn him into a puppet leader and assume control over the Buddhist Hall of Joy, and this was not the outcome he wanted. After all, what was the difference between serving under Joy Bodhisattva and Endless Sand? He would still be a servant in both scenarios.

It was a different story if he could make Joy Bodhisattva his subordinate, however. He would be that much confident in his ability to break free from Endless Sand's control, and he could dual

cultivate with her to rapidly improve his strength. And if he became a Grandmaster as a result? Hah! Endless Sand and Xiong Kuohai would trouble him no longer.

Joy Bodhisattva saw through him in a single glance, however. “You just want to use me to keep Endless Sand in check and assist you in becoming a Grandmaster.”

The Wisdom King of Joy’s face immediately darkened. “Stubborn fool. If you desire the Buddha that much, then you shall see him right now.”

The Wisdom King of Joy didn’t care that Joy Bodhisattva saw through him. What he cared about was the fact that Master of Swords was within hearing range. If Xiong Kuohai hears of this, then it would be that much harder for him to enact his plans in the future. The only way he could clear his name now was to kill Joy Bodhisattva as quickly as possible.

But would it matter? The wedge had already been driven. Xiong Kuohai would always be suspicious of him.

Regret and frustration gripped the Wisdom King of Joy. Why hadn’t he killed Joy Bodhisattva immediately? His desire to gloat at her had backfired on him, hard.

Eyes burning with killing intent, the Wisdom King of Joy finally stopped holding back and attacked Joy Bodhisattva with the intent to kill. However, he met resistance yet again when his finger was about an inch away from her forehead.

He thought that the reason he failed at the beginning was because Joy Bodhisattva had one final shred of resistance left in her, but what about this time? What could possibly be stopping him from killing her?

The Wisdom King of Joy suddenly had a bad feeling about this, and his fears came true just a second later. His eyes widened in shock and horror as the curse chains wrapped around Joy Bodhisattva’s body suddenly broke off on their own, and the woman slowly rose to full height.

Unable to maintain his lofty appearance any longer, the moon behind his head abruptly shone so bright that both heaven and earth were dyed in white. At the same time, the image of a Wisdom King manifested into existence.

However, the moonlight stuttered for a moment, and Joy Bodhisattva abruptly appeared in front of the Wisdom King of Joy. Then, she brushed her slender fingers against his forehead.

A ripple of invisible energy broke out, and the Wisdom King of Joy was flung back like he had suffered a huge blow. The moon behind his head abruptly shattered into pieces, his Yin God winked out of existence, and blood jetted out of his orifices and drenched his white robes in red.

“You... you’re a...!”

The Wisdom King of Joy couldn’t care less about his injuries, however. His attention was fully absorbed by the infinite power pressing against him from all sides.

“Grandmaster?!”

“Grandmaster?!”

Some distance away, Master of Swords and Ouyang De blurted out at the same time. However, Master of Swords' outburst was filled with fear, whereas Ouyang De's was simply filled with surprise.

On the other hand, Ye Qing was completely confused by the sudden turn of events, so much so that he didn't even look when the Joy Arhat finally fell down from the sky.

"Correct. My breakthrough happened a little over a month ago."

Joy Bodhisattva suddenly looked in Ye Qing's direction and raised a finger. It was such an innocent and harmless gesture, and yet the power it exuded was so terrible and all-encompassing that the surrounding air froze, and the world shuddered in response. It was as if she could shatter anything and everything with one finger.

Ye Qing didn't resist, however. It was because the attack wasn't aimed at him.

As expected, the finger suddenly appeared at the center of the Joy Arhat's forehead. The monk was trying to attack Ye Qing while he was distracted, but as soon as the finger struck flesh, his crazed expression stiffened, and his pupils contracted bit by bit. In the end, he collapsed on the ground and stopped breathing forever.

Ye Qing figured out what happened immediately. Joy Bodhisattva had wiped out his mind in a single touch.

The woman gave Ye Qing a nod before looking back at the Wisdom King of Joy.