

## Stranger 541

Chapter 541: So?

“I can’t believe you never told me about this... which means that you must have already known that I am a traitor. Why didn’t you just kill me then? Why this farce?”

The Wisdom King of Joy asked bitterly even as the fight left his body.

Joy Bodhisattva shook her head. “I didn’t know that you’re the traitor. I only know that someone within the sect is colluding with outsiders to kill me. So, I decided to put myself out as bait, lure out the traitors and the outsiders, and kill two birds with one stone. That is all.”

Ouyang De coughed. “Ahem... considering that you already have a plan, and you have entered the Grandmaster stage, I’m sure you could have dealt with these people yourself. Why did you even bother hiring me to be your bodyguard then?”

It was clear that Ouyang De didn’t know about this either, and he was feeling stupid and annoyed as a result.

“I hired you to lure out all of my enemies. Otherwise, those who truly mattered might not show themselves. Besides, I prefer to wrap up my business in one go instead of dragging it forever.”

Joy Bodhisattva bowed respectfully in Ouyang De’s direction and said, “If it wasn’t for you, the Wisdom King of Joy would never have revealed himself. It is thanks to you pressuring them so much that they have no choice but to reveal their full hand. Therefore, not only is your presence necessary, you are the biggest reason that my plan is a success.”

“Hehe... I suppose you’re right.”

Ouyang De was a simple man. A good explanation and a bit of heartfelt flattery was all he needed to hear to forget the fact that he had been kept in the dark.

“I see. You truly are wise beyond your years, Bodhisattva.”

The Wisdom King of Joy nodded and, to everyone’s surprise, dropped to his knees and pressed his head to the floor. “Merciful Bodhisattva, I was blinded by evildoers and tempted into betrayal. Can you forgive me? If you do, I swear to carry out your every command serve you faithfully for eternity. May I fall into the infinite hells and never reincarnate if I break my promise.”

“Wisdom King of Joy! You spineless coward!” Master of Swords raged when he saw the Wisdom King of Joy submitting to Joy Bodhisattva just like that.

Instead of answering, the Wisdom King of Joy remained exactly where he was with his arms stretched forward, and his forehead pressed against the ground. He was prostrating himself before Joy Bodhisattva like he was praying to Siddhartha Gautama himself.

“Do you know that there is nothing I loathe more than betrayal?” Joy Bodhisattva said slowly.

“I am aware that my sins deserve a thousand deaths. Still, I beg for your forgiveness, Bodhisattva,” The Wisdom King of Joy replied while shivering a little. He did not dare to retort or quibble considering the situation. He could only beg harder.

Joy Bodhisattva did not say anything for a time, and the Wisdom King of Joy remained as silent as death as well. He didn’t dare to say anything for fear of triggering her.

Just when the Wisdom King of Joy’s anxiety reached a new height, Joy Bodhisattva looked at Ye Qing and asked, “What do you think I should do? Should I kill him, or should I forgive him?”

“You... You’re asking me?” Caught off guard, Ye Qing pointed at himself while feeling incredulous and confused at the same time.

“Yes.” Joy Bodhisattva nodded.

“Ahem... this is your personal business, so you should decide for yourself.” Ye Qing rubbed his nose and answered cautiously, “Plus, I’m sure you already have a plan, so...”

“I see. I shall do as you say.” Joy Bodhisattva nodded.

Joy Bodhisattva suddenly lowered her hand and grabbed the Wisdom King of Joy’s skull. A shudder coursed through his body, but he didn’t dare to resist.

“You have betrayed me, and I don’t forgive you!” Joy Bodhisattva began. “But the Buddha is merciful, so I will give you a chance to make amends.”

“As you command, Bodhisattva!”

His fate had gone up, and down, then up again. The Wisdom King hid a deep sigh of relief. For now, it looked like he would live a little longer.

Joy Bodhisattva then looked at Master of Swords and said indifferently, “Kill them.”

“... Them?” The Wisdom King of Joy looked in Master of Swords’ direction in confusion. The Half-Step Grandmaster was just one person, so who was she referring to, exactly?

It was at this moment a second Joy Bodhisattva appeared from afar and reached them in just the blink of an eye. When she came to a stop, they finally noticed that she was holding a man by his neck.

The man looked old and gloomy, and his exposed skin was covered in all sorts of patterns. One look at those patterns sent a chill up everyone's spine. Right now, he looked sickly pale and listless.

"Master of Curses!" Ouyang De blurted while looking back and forth between the second Joy Bodhisattva and her captive.

The second Joy Bodhisattva dumped Master of Curses beside Master of Swords. Then, she walked up to the first Joy Bodhisattva and, to everyone's astonishment, merged into her.

Ye Qing couldn't help but click his tongue in amazement. Despite his spiritual power, he was unable to tell who was the real and who was the fake, and he definitely had no idea when the second Joy Bodhisattva appeared, left, and captured Master of Curses without alerting anyone.

"Kill them, and I will let you live," Joy Bodhisattva commanded.

"You dare?!" Master of Swords exclaimed in shock and horror. "We're from Endless Sand!"

"So?" Joy Bodhisattva replied calmly.

"We are the vice leaders of Endless Sand! If you kill us, our leader will hunt you to the ends of the earth!" Master of Swords threatened.

"So?" Joy Bodhisattva repeated.

"Killing us is simple, but the price for that is endless strife and even destruction! Our two sects will fight to the death, and the fisherman will hunt us both! In the end, you're the one who will bear all the consequences! So think twice before you threaten us again, Bodhisattva!"

Master of Curses sneered. Despite his sorry state, he appeared to be calm, collected, and utterly fearless. It was because he did not believe for a second that Joy Bodhisattva would actually kill them.

"So?" But Joy Bodhisattva was unmoved. "Wisdom King, kill them."

Suddenly, Master of Swords had a very bad feeling about this. He tried to threaten Joy Bodhisattva again, "Are you really going to make a sworn enemy out of Endless Sand, Joy Bodhisattva?"

"Bodhisattva?" The Wisdom King of Joy himself was hesitating. He wasn't worried for Joy Bodhisattva or the Buddhist Hall of Joy, of course. No, he was worried for himself. Master of Swords and Master of Curses were no ordinary people. They were the vice leaders of Endless Sand. If he slew them, there would be no reconciliation between him and Endless Sand. Even if he had acted under coercion, they would still chase him to the ends of the earth. It would be a difficult period to say the least.

“It looks like you don’t want to repent after all. In that case, I will fulfill your wish.” Joy Bodhisattva raised her hand emotionlessly.

“Mercy, Bodhisattva! This monk will do whatever you say!” The Wisdom King of Joy said hurriedly. A future of endless harassment was still better than death in the present.

*Damn, she knows what she’s doing.*

Ye Qing sighed mentally. From now on, the Wisdom King of Joy was well and truly Joy Bodhisattva’s slave. Unless a freak accident happened, he would never break free until he died.

Not only that, Ye Qing was almost certain Endless Sand and the Buddhist Hall of Joy would not go to war with each other even after Master of Swords and Master of Curses were killed. To begin with, Endless Sand was the one at fault for trying to assassinate Joy Bodhisattva in the first place. No one in their right mind would say that it was wrong to kill the person or faction who tried to kill you.

Second, Joy Bodhisattva was now a Grandmaster, and the threat she posed was great indeed. Master of Swords and Master of Curses were powerful, but in the end, they were just pawns who were slightly more useful than most. The fate of a pawn was to be tossed away, and while he knew little about Xiong Kuohai, he was sure that the leader would not want to battle Joy Bodhisattva to the death over the loss of two pawns.

As Master of Curses said himself, such a battle would only make it easy for a third party to kill both of them.

Finally, Master of Swords and Master of Curses only held value when they were still alive. Once they were dead, well, they could not generate any more value for Endless Sand, could they? What kind of leader would risk the collapse of their own empire for the sake of two worthless pawns?

Sure, some might argue that not retaliating after such a humiliating defeat was shameful and dishonorable, but if it meant that his interests were protected as a result, then... who cares?

If the voices of opposition within Endless Sand, and Xiong Kuohai was forced to take action despite his own wishes, then Joy Bodhisattva could still toss the Wisdom King of Joy out as a scapegoat and resolve the situation peacefully. He was the one who slew Master of Swords and Master of Curses after all. Xiong Kuohai would also have the perfect excuse to brush off this incident and pretend it had never happened.

A sliver of pity appeared on Ye Qing's face as the Wisdom King of Joy slowly approached Master of Swords and Master of Curses.

Chapter 542: When In The Jianghu, Do As The Jianghu Does

“Wisdom King of Joy! You wouldn’t dare!”

Master of Swords and Master of Curses finally panicked when they saw the Wisdom King of Joy walking toward them. “You can’t kill us, Bodhisattva! Our leader will hunt you down if it’s the last thing he does!”

“Apologies, you two.”

The Wisdom King of Joy was unmoved by their plea. He grabbed their skulls with both hands and prepared to crush their heads into bits.

“Who dares to lay their hands on the good people of Endless Sand?”

It was at this moment a loud, forceful shout resounded throughout the area. As soon as it appeared, dark clouds covered the sky, and a terrific sandstorm washed over the area. It was as if the world had plunged into darkness in an instant.

A gigantic hand reached out of the sandstorm toward the people on the ground. It felt almost as big as the sky itself, and it exuded such pressure that a lesser person would void their bowels in an instant.

Ye Qing distinctly felt his energy stuttering like its channels were blocked, and his mind trembling violently like a leaf. He felt like an ant facing a natural disaster, and he was utterly helpless in both power and spirit to stop it.

It wasn't just him. The Wisdom King of Joy, Master of Swords and Master of Curses were the same. Joy Bodhisattva and Ouyang De were the only ones who seemed completely unaffected by it.

“Xiong Kuohai...”

Joy Bodhisattva took one step forward and manifested what looked like a silhouette of herself. It shot upward until it looked as tall as the sky itself before flipping its left hand over and producing a mutton-fat jade kalasa[1] on its left palm. The kalasa was also carrying a vibrant green willow branch. At the same time, her right hand was making an anjali mudra[2].

When the giant hand got close, the silhouette grabbed the willow branch and gently waved it in the hand's direction.

For a moment, there was only silence. Then, the giant hand split into two halves.

Not done yet, the kalasa slowly floated into the air and grew bigger and bigger. Then, the sandstorm blotting out the sky condensed into a hurricane and flew into its opening.

Sunlight and calm returned to the world, and dancing amidst the light were countless celestials and white lotuses. It looked so auspicious and peaceful it was like they were standing in the middle of a Kingdom of Buddha.

Standing at the center of it all and carrying her kalasa, Joy Bodhisattva stood barefooted on the ground but looked holier and more dignified than ever before.

It was as the Wisdom King of Joy said earlier. Joy Bodhisattva had abandoned the way of the Buddha of Pleasure and picked the Joyful Way of the Buddha instead, suppressing desire with desire to attain a desireless state. Now, she had become a true Bodhisattva of the Buddhas.

That was also why the Kingdom of Buddha she manifested was perfectly holy. Not a shred of evil or anomaly could be sensed anywhere.

Everyone felt relieved when the giant hand and the sandstorm that was choking this section of the city disappeared, but Master of Swords and Master of Curses looked especially happy. Since their sect leader had arrived, there was no way Joy Bodhisattva could kill them anymore. They had survived this ordeal.

Or did they?

Suddenly, the Wisdom King of Joy tightened his grip. Their heads exploded, and their headless bodies collapsed on the ground just like that.

Neither Master of Swords nor Master of Curses saw this coming at all, so they were dead before they knew what was happening. Even their Yin Gods were annihilated before they could detach themselves from their mortal shells and escape.

“What... what was I...?” The Wisdom King of Joy murmured as if he had just awoken. When he looked down and saw the headless corpses, he flinched and jumped backward with panic, confusion, and disbelief clearly etched on his face.

“You will go this far, Bodhisattva?”

It was at this moment a human face took form in the sky. It looked angry, and the entire sky seemed to be shaking because of it.

The human face belonged to Xiong Kuohai, of course, though he wasn't here in person. It was a wisp of his spirit. The real person was probably tens of kilometers away. Even so, Ye Qing couldn't help but shudder at the man's power.

“A Trueman may lose their life, but not their dignity. They're the ones who attacked me. Naturally, they must die to compensate for their crimes,” Joy Bodhisattva said expressionlessly. “Besides, you and I are enemies. I don't believe there is such a thing as ‘too far’ between us.”

“Do you think you can fight me just because you have become a Trueman, Bodhisattva?” Xiong Kuohai asked with a rumbling voice.

Joy Bodhisattva did not give an inch. “I invite you to try, Leader Xiong!”

Xiong Kuohai did not say anything, though the increasingly violent disturbance in space, howling wind and dark clouds suggested that he was gathering his strength.

In the end though, Xiong Kuohai didn't do anything. The reason was simple. At the beginning, he had attacked Joy Bodhisattva as soon as he arrived because he wanted to test her strength. Had Joy Bodhisattva fought like a newly ascended Grandmaster who was still unused to her new powers, then he would do everything in his power to kill her. He would use her death to remind everyone the consequences of upsetting Endless Sand, and he would eliminate a competitor before she could grow strong enough to challenge him.

Bei You was only so big after all. Every new competitor, no matter how weak, meant that his share of the pie would become smaller.

However, Joy Bodhisattva turned out to be stronger than expected despite having become a Grandmaster just a while ago. In fact, she was stronger than some Grandmasters who had years to hone their strength. He was certain he would be able to defeat her, but it would come at a huge cost.

Not only that, Joy Bodhisattva was supported by Ouyang De. The old man was notoriously neutral and acted mostly based on his own whims, so it was impossible to say if he would assist her or not. If he did, then attacking Joy Bodhisattva could turn out to be the biggest mistake of his life.

“I admit that my men are in the wrong. I had no idea they were plotting to assassinate you until just now. Their crimes are severe, and their deaths deserved.”

Xiong Kuohai fell silent for a moment before adding, “However, Endless Sand’s honor must remain intact!”

Xiong Kuohai compromised. Although Master of Swords and Master of Curses’ death wounded him—they were his left and right hand and extremely powerful warriors in their own right after all—they were already dead. It just did not make sense to go to war against Joy Bodhisattva and risk everything over two dead men.

He was sure Joy Bodhisattva would understand his meaning.

“What do you want, Leader Xiong?” Joy Bodhisattva asked.

“A life for a life,” Xiong Kuohai replied.

“And who might this person be, Leader Xiong?”

“I want him.” Xiong Kuohai abruptly looked at the Wisdom King of Joy. “He’s the one who killed my vice leaders. Naturally, he should pay for his crimes.”

The Wisdom King of Joy turned as white as a sheet. He hurriedly turned to Joy Bodhisattva and cried, “Save me, Bodhisattva! Please!”

Unfortunately, Joy Bodhisattva’s response was, “It’s only right to pay for what you’ve done.”

“Bodhisattva!” The Wisdom King of Joy exclaimed in shock and horror. He could not believe that Joy Bodhisattva would betray him without a second thought. “It was you who—!”

Before he could finish, a shudder suddenly coursed through his body, and his pupils began dilating bit by bit. Then, he collapsed on the ground with shock, horror, reluctance, and fear forever frozen on his face.

Ye Qing’s demonic thought told him that the Wisdom King of Joy’s soul had crumbled, and his mind extinguished in an instant. He was so dead not even a god could save him, and the one who did it was clearly Joy Bodhisattva.

Ye Qing had anticipated that the Wisdom King of Joy would be turned into a scapegoat, but it still surprised him when it actually happened.

What a lamentable yet deserved fate it was.

Perhaps his fate was sealed from the moment he chose to betray Joy Bodhisattva.

“Are you satisfied now, Leader Xiong?” Joy Bodhisattva asked. She never even looked at the Wisdom King of Joy.

“I am. You truly are wise beyond your years,” Xiong Kuohai said. “I have other businesses to attend to, so this is where I take my leave. Please do not hesitate to pay

me a visit at Endless Sand when you are free, Bodhisattva. And you as well, senior Ouyang.”

Both Joy Bodhisattva and Ouyang De nodded. The next moment, a gust of wind and sand appeared out of nowhere and enveloped Master of Swords and Master of Curses’ bodies. Then, they vanished into thin air just like that.

From the start to finish, Xiong Kuohai never even glanced at Ye Qing or Yi Pin.

“Good riddance. It’s a stage performance from the start until the end.”

After Xiong Kuohai was gone, Ouyang De sucked on his smoking pipe and blew out a smoke ring, sighing.

Both sides had killed, threatened, and made up with each other all in one sitting. To a naive outsider, what happened just now must look like an incomprehensible, unrealistic mess.

There was logic behind each at every action, however. Joy Bodhisattva killed Master of Swords and Master of Curses despite the many resistance she faced not because she desired revenge, but because she wanted to send a message to the sect leader. She was telling him that she was no small fry that he could take out as he pleased, so he should stop provoking her unless he was ready to face the consequences.

Xiong Kuohai knew that it was too late to salvage the situation, and further conflict would only put his own life and his assets at risk. So, he chose to compromise. It wasn’t as simple as raising the white flag and calling it a day though. No, it actually took quite a lot of effort and skill to beat a retreat without losing face. That was why he demanded the Wisdom King of Joy’s death.

They all knew that the Wisdom King of Joy wasn’t really the one who killed Master of Swords and Master of Curses, but so what? The point was to keep up appearances.

Joy Bodhisattva was showing off her power to display that she was not someone to be trifled with, but that did not mean she must remain forceful and uncompromising the whole time. All stick and no carrot made for an unhappy, disobedient donkey after all. That was why she killed the Wisdom King of Joy and gave Xiong Kuohai the flight of stairs he sought.

As for the Wisdom King of Joy, the guy was just a lamentable pawn from the start until the end.

All in all, both sides had suffered a not insignificant amount of losses in this conflict. Not only did Xiong Kuohai fail to assassinate Joy Bodhisattva and take over the Buddhist Hall of Joy as planned, he even lost his two vice leaders, Master of Swords and Master of Curses.

It looked like the Buddhist Hall of Joy had won, but in reality they had lost the Wisdom King of Joy, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector. It was hardly a loss they could ignore either.

He was the guy who lived most of his life answering to no one but himself, but even he wasn’t completely free, was he? Take this conflict for instance. He was dragged into it because he owed Joy Bodhisattva a favor, didn’t he?

Chapter 543: Tool

Now that the crisis was finally over, Joy Bodhisattva turned to Ouyang De, Ye Qing and Yi Pin and saluted them deeply. “My warmest thanks to senior Ouyang and the two of you. If you don’t mind, I



would like to invite you all to the Buddhist Hall of Joy, play the host, and repay the favor as best I can.”

“Forget it. I’m just paying back a favor I owe. From now on, you and I are in the clear, understand?” Ouyang De waved her off impatiently. He never liked jianghu matters, and he would likely never get involved in another if he could help it especially after the very person he was supposed to protect had tricked him.

His old heart just couldn’t take such excitement anymore.

“We just happened to be at the right place at the right time, Bodhisattva. We do not deserve such courtesy from you.”

Although he had helped Joy Bodhisattva, Ye Qing didn’t dare to impose on a Grandmaster and hurriedly returned the salute. He had made a gamble based on the variables he was handed, and he was glad he made the right choice.

That said, he had no intentions of getting involved with Joy Bodhisattva any more than was necessary, at least not now. He was well aware that he didn’t have the strength to get involved in a conflict at this level just yet.

“Wait a second. I thought you’re one of Joy Bodhisattva’s hired help?” exclaimed Ouyang De in surprise even as realization struck him.

Ye Qing tilted his head at the old man. “Not at all. I’ve only arrived at Bei You a couple of days ago. How could I possibly know the great Joy Bodhisattva?”

“Really?” Ouyang De looked back and forth between Ye Qing and Joy Bodhisattva with clear doubt.

“But of course. If you don’t believe me, you can ask the Bodhisattva herself.” Ye Qing smiled. “It was *pure coincidence* that we were caught up in this.”

Ye Qing purposely emphasized the words “pure coincidence” as he spoke. He had more or less figured out why Ouyang De had dragged them into this mess after listening to his words.

*What an unfortunate coincidence it is!*

“Ahem...” Ouyang De coughed awkwardly. He didn’t miss Ye Qing’s subtle change in intonation, of course. Heavens, this is embarrassing.

Ouyang De was sure that Ye Qing was Joy Bodhisattva’s hired help. That was why he threw the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector over to the young man when it looked like the guy was trying to shirk his job. But now, it turned out that Ye Qing was just an innocent bystander, and he had become the asshole who dragged an innocent into a violent, deadly conflict.

What a blunder!

Sure, he cared little for trifles when he made up his mind to do something, and sure, some of his actions appeared outlandish in the eyes of those who did not understand his greatness, but this? This was well and truly beneath him.

I can't believe my flawless record is ruined, and it's not even my fault. What else was I supposed to think when Joy Bodhisattva herself asked this guy for his hand in marriage??? Anyone in their right mind would think that they're in cahoots with each other, right?!

*Damn it all!*

"Er, I still have some business to attend to, so, buh-bye!" The old man said rapidly before pushing off the ground. An instant later, he was over a hundred meters away from his original spot. By the time the sound of his movement faded with the wind, Ouyang De was already gone.

"He runs fast."

Ye Qing shrugged. He wasn't actually planning to demand compensation from Ouyang De, of course. He was just teasing him a little. However, the old man had run away before he could say anything else. He had never encountered such a thin-skinned senior in his life. Yi Pin might as well be a god compared to him!

Even Joy Bodhisattva was smiling a little. The woman was expressionless most of the time, so it was a rare expression to say the least.

Her smile was so beautiful that Ye Qing blanked out a little. By the time he returned to the earth, he realized that the woman was looking at him. He hurriedly let out a quick cough to cover up his embarrassment before saying, "Senior Ouyang is truly... unpredictable."

"There's a reason he got his reputation." Joy Bodhisattva chuckled. "Now that he's gone, let us discuss our business, shall we?"

"... Do we have business with each other?" Ye Qing was completely confused.

Joy Bodhisattva said, "Of course. It's about my marriage proposal. Speaking of which, I haven't even gotten your name yet. May I have the honor of knowing your name?"

"Please, Bodhisattva! You're killing me here! My name is Joyless. Joyless Ye." Ye Qing saluted her.

"Joyless Ye? You are definitely destined with my Buddhist Hall of Joy." Joy Bodhisattva nodded.

"You jest, Bodhisattva." Ye Qing rubbed his nose while barely resisting the urge to roll his eyes. Destined? Joyless and joy sits on the opposite side of the spectrum, okay?

"I'm serious. I really would like to ask for your hand in marriage. Are you willing to fulfill my wish?" Joy Bodhisattva said seriously.

Realizing that Joy Bodhisattva was actually serious about this, Ye Qing fell silent for a moment. "If I may ask, why on earth would you want to marry this junior?"

Joy Bodhisattva answered honestly, "To tell you the truth, my cultivation art transforms desires and emotions into nothing. I have now reached a desireless and emotionless state, but my Buddha is merciful, and he sympathizes with the plight of the people. This state is not the end."

"If I wish to improve my cultivation, then I must experience all the desires and emotions that exist in the world. It is the only way to reach the state where I can empathize with all living things, and all things living are equal before my eyes."

"Love is the root of all emotions and desires. That is why I wish to marry you and experience love. I will then transform this love into love for all living things."

In other words, she just wants me as a cultivation tool, thought Ye Qing while rubbing his nose. He was so sure that it was his extraordinary and unparalleled good looks and aura that made the Bodhisattva fell in love with him at first sight, but as it turned out, it was just his imagination.

*I can't possibly surrender myself to a woman who doesn't even want my body, can I?*

"Please don't make a decision before you hear my terms, scion," Joy Bodhisattva said when she saw that Ye Qing was silent. "I won't make you help me for free."

"First, my cultivation art is a dual cultivation art. If we marry, your cultivation is sure to improve by leaps and bounds."

"Second, you will become the most powerful member in the Buddhist Hall of Joy besides me. The only one you will answer to is me, and you are free to mobilize and utilize the resources of my sect as you please."

"Finally, you may come to me for help if you have any problem or need regarding your cultivation. I swear that I will not hide anything from you."

Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath. To be entirely honest, her terms were extremely good. No, that would be an understatement. It was like those web novels where the protagonist married a sexy, competent CEO and never had to worry about life ever again, relatively speaking.

Even if Joy Bodhisattva hadn't offered him these very lucrative terms, the fact that he could count on her and the Buddhist Hall of Joy to act as his shield alone was a tempting offer. It would certainly ease his burden and make it easier for him to take revenge against Fang Muyun and everyone else who wronged him.

Beside him, Yi Pin was blinking at him rapidly with clear envy in his eyes. It didn't take a genius to figure out that he wanted Ye Qing to say yes.

Sure, he would be living off a woman, but so what? Only an idiot would reject a competent, powerful woman, not to mention one as beautiful as Joy Bodhisattva!

"Ahem... if I may dare ask, why me?" Ye Qing took a moment to calm himself before asking.

If a tool was all she needed, then she could have picked anyone. Surely a willing candidate like say, a disciple of the Buddhist Hall of Joy would cost her far less than a reluctant guy like him?

Joy Bodhisattva answered honestly, "Because you are incredibly accomplished for one so young, and because your looks are good enough to match mine."

"Ehehe... you have a good pair of eyes on you." The flattery made Ye Qing feel so much better.

*I knew it! Just like fireflies, excellent people would always shine no matter how dark their surroundings are!*

On the inside, Ye Qing was feeling as gleeful as a child. But on the outside, he maintained a humble appearance, "You flatter me, Bodhisattva. I cannot possibly deserve such praise."

Before Ye Qing could finish, Joy Bodhisattva continued, "Of course, the most important factor is that my Buddha has bound our destinies together. After all, it cannot be a coincidence that you have met me at this place and time."

Ye Qing didn't say anything to that. Buddhist beliefs were steeped in karma and destiny, so it was perfectly normal for Joy Bodhisattva to say and act based on such statements.

"Please take your time to think. I will deal with them in the meantime," Joy Bodhisattva said while looking at the Wisdom King of Joy, the Joy Arhat and the Lampholding Protector.

"Of course." Ye Qing nodded.

Joy Bodhisattva first walked up to the Joy Arhat and pointed a finger at his body. The man immediately burst into flames and dissolved into ash in no time. She then walked up to the Wisdom King of Joy and the Lampholding Protector and did the same thing.

The Lampholding Protector was still alive, but Joy Bodhisattva didn't care to save her. She had delivered the woman straight to the ultimate bliss that was her next life.

Chapter 544: Man In The Shadows

"Have you come to a decision, scion?" Joy Bodhisattva asked after dealing with the three traitors and returning to Ye Qing's side.

Ye Qing saluted her and said, "I appreciate the offer, Bodhisattva, but my answer is still no."

It wasn't like Joy Bodhisattva's offer was unattractive. He didn't mind living off a woman either, especially one as competent as her. Unfortunately, he had reasons that prevented him from accepting no matter what.

Even if he assumed that Joy Bodhisattva was completely honest and sincere with their deal, he still couldn't accept her offer. First, he came to Bei You to avoid capture, and to do that, he needed to keep a low profile. Sure, he had shown himself today, but things were still under control. After all, no one would believe that the late-stage Spirit Purifier Ye Qing would gain the power of a late-stage Spirit Master just a little over a month after he was grievously injured by Zhou Hengshan. His pursuers might notice that a new contender had appeared in Bei You, but chances were they wouldn't think it was him.

It was a completely different story if he married Joy Bodhisattva, however. The woman was the head of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and a famous warrior in this region. Not only that, her recent ascension to the Grandmaster stage guaranteed that all attention would fall on her.

If he and Joy Bodhisattva were to marry, everyone in the *jianghu* would learn about it at first notice, and he would become famous whether he liked it or not. Privacy did not exist for celebrities, and it was doubly true in this world. No matter how careful he was, it was only a matter of time before his identity was exposed.

Sure, some idiot might say that since the most dangerous place is the safest place, it stands to reason that going high profile is actually the safest way to stay low profile blah blah blah. To those people, he could only say, "Fuck off."

If he was exposed, Joy Bodhisattva might be the very first person to stab him in the back. Even if she proved to be more loyal than expected, she could never keep him safe.

After all, Fang Muyun wasn't his only enemy. There was Chu Wangsun, Zhou Hengshan and the Intelligence Department as well. Forget one Joy Bodhisattva, not even five Joy Bodhisattvas would be enough to save his life.

Second, he wasn't just trying to hide himself from his enemies. He had more important things to do as well. If he agreed to marry Joy Bodhisattva, he would have to interact with her every day, and she would have full purview of his activities. It would be inconvenient to say the least.

His heart ached at the thought of saying no, but in the end, it was his only option.

"If that is your decision, then so it shall be," Joy Bodhisattva replied calmly. It was impossible to say if she anticipated his rejection from the start, or if she really had reached a state of zero emotion and desire and so could not feel frustration or annoyance at his rejection. One thing for certain, the woman's face was impeccable, and she did not ask him why he rejected her offer either.

"Thank you for understanding, Bodhisattva," Ye Qing replied with a hint of relief. He would be lying if he said he wasn't afraid that Joy Bodhisattva would throw caution to the wind and kidnap him by force.

"Since you don't wish to be wed with me, I assume you wouldn't want to join my Buddhist Hall of Joy either," Joy Bodhisattva said indifferently. "In that case, I owe you one."

Ye Qing replied honestly, "Er, I don't think so, Bodhisattva. Honestly, you had everything under control with or without my help."

It was at this moment Joy Bodhisattva said something that caused Ye Qing's heart to skip a beat. "I do not like owing favors, but I do not like being rejected either. And you, scion Ye, have already rejected me many times today."

"My deepest apologies, Bodhisattva!" Ye Qing replied in a hurry while chiding himself for his carelessness. Since Joy Bodhisattva had been extremely friendly thus far, he nearly forgot that she was a Grandmaster and a warrior of the Dark Ways. Standing

before him was a pitiless woman who could kill without batting an eyelid even before she attained her desireless and emotionless state. "In this case, I see no reason to turn you down. Very well."

"Good." Joy Bodhisattva seemed very pleased with Ye Qing's answer. "Seek me out if you ever change your mind. I won't wait for you for too long though."

"Thank you again, Bodhisattva. I promise I will consider it seriously," Ye Qing said cautiously.

"Good. If there is nothing else, then I will take my leave."

Joy Bodhisattva glanced at Ye Qing once before slowly dissolving into nothing like a dream.

"Until next time, Bodhisattva," Ye Qing replied with a salute. It wasn't until the woman was completely gone that he finally let out a sigh of relief.

Grandmasters were still too strong for him right now. He might be as strong as a body-tempering late-stage Spirit Master, but in the eyes of a Grandmaster, he was still little different from an ant. Just look at Master of Swords, Master of Curses and the Wisdom King of Joy. Master of Swords was the only one who managed to put up a fight against Ouyang De, and in the end, he still ended up dead.

He needed to grow stronger as soon as possible. At the very least, he needed to push his "Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra" to the adept level and ascend his body to the Grandmaster stage. Only then could he face off against these Grandmasters and not rely on their mercy to live to see another day.

Meanwhile, Yi Pin finally stopped pretending that he was dead and walked up to Ye Qing with a look of disbelief. "I can't believe you rejected her, brother! She gave you a flight of stairs that will take you all the way to the heavens, and you actually said no?!"

Ye Qing smiled. "Heh. I won't deny that, but you know I'm nowhere strong enough to survive the consequences right now. I can easily fall and turn into a smear on the ground if I'm not careful."

"Sure, but... a shame. A shame."

Yi Pin shook his head regretfully. He understood Ye Qing's worries completely, but that didn't mean he couldn't regret the missed opportunities. "Why did she choose you instead of me? I would've said yes without hesitation!"

"Because you're ugly as sin, duh," Ye Qing shot him a look and scoffed with disdain. *Your wrinkles are so deep they might as well be mini mountain ranges. Not even a blind woman would choose you to be their partner!*

"Fuck you! When I was younger, I too was a handsome, competent, and extraordinarily talented youngster who was loved by thousands and thousands of women. You had no idea how many celestials and demonesses wanted me back then!"

Yi Pin scoffed right back. "The only reason I turned them all down is because I couldn't give them the loyalty they seek, and because I see no reason to turn down a forest for a tree! Otherwise, I would have great great great *great* grandchildren who are older than you already!"

"Know this, boy. If I was even a decade younger, then our roles would be reversed, understand?"

Ye Qing raised an incredulous eyebrow. "A decade? Are you kidding me right now? With your face, maaaaaaaaaybe you can say that if you're seventy or eighty years younger. Otherwise? Heh!"

"Who the fuck are you calling eighty? I'm only in my fifties! It's literally impossible for me to be eighty years younger, and even if I can that would be completely unethical!"

Yi Pin rolled his eyes at Ye Qing. "You know what? I don't need to stand here and take your nonsense. I'm heading home."

Yi Pin huffed and began walking away.

"Alright, alright! I was just kidding. You're still a handsome begonia who can seduce a woman with a mere curl of your finger, okay?"

Ye Qing laughed and followed the old man.

.....

Inside a big hall, Xiong Kuohai opened his eyes. Tiny bolts of lightning could be seen flickering here and there.

It was at this moment his shadow suddenly writhed like it was alive. Then, a voice came from the shadows asking,

"How did it go?"

Xiong Kuohai hurriedly rose to his feet and faced toward his shadow. He said carefully, "My apologies, Sakyamuni, but there was a small issue."

The shadow continued to writhe like a glob of insoluble darkness. "A small issue? Are you saying that Joy Bodhisattva is still alive?"

Xiong Kuohai hurriedly explained himself, "Forgive me, Sakyamuni, but Joy Bodhisattva was prepared for us. Not only did she recruit Ouyang De to help her, she ascended to the Grandmaster stage over a month ago. We ultimately failed to kill her because of this."

"Grandmaster? That is unexpected," the shadow said. Xiong Kuohai let out a sigh of relief, but then the shadow added, "However, the ascension to Grandmaster stage warps the heaven and earth itself. You should have noticed some signs at the very least, and yet you were completely oblivious. It is your own fault that you aren't prepared for this. And now, our plans have run aground because of this. Do you admit your guilt?"

"I do," Xiong Kuohai replied fearfully.

“Since you’re guilty, you must be punished.”

A silver needle flew out of the shadow, and Xiong Kuohai turned as pale as a sheet when he saw it. He didn’t dare to dodge out of the way, however. He remained where he was and allowed it to hit him.

As soon as the needle made contact with his forehead, it started wiggling as if it was alive. Then, it slowly crawled into his flesh.

Crack!

Xiong Kuohai’s molars were crushed at that moment. His face was deathly pale, his whole body was trembling, and cold sweat was pouring off his forehead like crazy. It looked like he was enduring some sort of unimaginable pain.

Every time the silver needle crept an inch deeper into Xiong Kuohai’s forehead, the Grandmaster would shudder violently. His complexion kept growing paler and paler, and his teeth kept breaking from the sheer amount of force he was exerting on them.

The silver needle was only three inches long, but it took about half a teatime to fully sink into Xiong Kuohai’s forehead. By now, the Grandmaster was shaking non-stop like a leaf trying weather a windstorm, his clothes were completely drenched in sweat, his eyes were bloodshot, and veins were bulging all over his face.

This was just the beginning, however. After the silver needle had entered his forehead, it began moving about his face and scalp like an earthworm.

Chapter 545: Meeting Chen Wuxin Again

“AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!”

At some point, Xiong Kuohai could no longer stand it. He clutched his head and slammed his head into the floor.

Crack!

A massive crack appeared on the limestone floor, and blood dripped down Xiong Kuohai’s face. That was how much strength he used. The Grandmaster couldn’t seem to feel the pain, He simply clutched his head tighter and slammed his forehead against the floor again and again.

A full incense stick later, the silver needle finally crawled out of Xiong Kuohai’s forehead and disappeared into the shadows. The Grandmaster was lying limp on the ground with a bloodless face and a pair of lifeless eyes. If it wasn’t for the fact that his chest was still heaving up and down, anyone would think that he was dead.

“Your punishment is over, and your sin forgiven,” the shadow declared.

Despite his condition, Xiong Kuohai climbed to his feet and knelt in front of the shadow. “Thank you for showing mercy, Sakyamuni.”

“However, Bei You represents a critical part of our plans. Nothing else must go wrong, understand?” The shadow said.



"I understand. Don't worry, Sakyamuni. I promise that everything will go exactly as planned," Xiong Kuohai promised.

"Good. I do hope you're a man of your word. Otherwise, not even I can save you from my lord's wrath." The shadow paused for a moment before handing out the carrot. "But if you do a good job, then rest assured that you will be rewarded handsomely."

"As you command, Sakyamuni," declared Xiong Kuohai with a salute.

That was the end of the conversation. The shadow writhed and grew fainter over time. A couple more seconds later, it looked no different from a normal shadow.

"Phew..." Xiong Kuohai exhaled deeply before his eyes turned violent and hateful.

"Dad?! Are you alright?!"

It was at this moment a young man burst into the room. When he saw how sorry Xiong Kuohai looked, he could not help but blurt out in shock and concern.

"Who allowed you to come inside? I said I don't want anyone to disturb me while I'm cultivating! Get out!" Xiong Kuohai roared like an enraged lion. Such was his wrath that the entire hall shook like it was beset by an earthquake.

"I-I'm sorry! I was just worried about you, dad!" The young man replied in a hurry. He was Xiong Kuohai's son, Xiong Tianlie.

"Get out! GET OUT!"

Xiong Kuohai roared, and a terrible power surged toward Xiong Tianlie like a flood. Blood spewed out of the young man's lips as he was blown out of the hall.

"JOY BODHISATTVA, YOU BITCH! I SWEAR I'LL KILL YOU IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO!"

Xiong Kuohai let out another roar, and his expression looked savager than even the vilest ghoul.

.....

"Strength comes from the ground, force comes from the body, and will comes from the mind..."

Inside the Temple of Divination, Ye Qing was sitting on a chair and giving Li Longxiang various instructions. The disciple was currently practicing his fists in the courtyard.

"Your strength must be concentrated, your force must be condensed, and your will must be strong. You already possess a good powerbase, Longxiang, but your strength is too scattered, and your force is too chaotic. A small fry might be intimidated by your thunder, but they would never fall to your lightning, and that's just depressing. You want it to be the other way around, understand?"

"I understand, senior uncle." Li Longxiang wiped away some sweat and gave him an honest smile.

Ye Qing nodded in satisfaction. “Good. Now keep training. I want you to repeat Break Through a thousand times.”

“Yes, senior uncle,” Li Longxiang responded and resumed his training.

He was the one who taught Li Longxiang Break Through, of course. The young man might be dumb and simple-minded, but he was pure and innocent like a newborn and extraordinarily talented in martial arts. He was able to reach the journeyman stage of Break Through just two or three days after he learned it.

Objectively speaking, a good teacher was all Li Longxiang needed to have a bright future. Unfortunately, Yi Pin was the “live and let live” type of teacher, so Li Longxiang wasn’t able to live up to his full potential. It irked Ye Qing so much that he eventually got involved in his learning.

In fact, Li Longxiang wasn’t the only one he taught. Wen Shu, the brat living at the funeral shop, was quite gifted in the martial way as well. Objectively speaking, he was even more gifted than Li Longxiang. If one hint was all Li Longxiang needed to grasp a concept, then Wen Shu could grasp three concepts from the same hint. He was intelligent in a way Li Longxiang could never hope to become.

Unfortunately, the very intelligence and adaptability that made him so gifted was also his greatest crutch. He lacked perseverance and could not work tirelessly toward a goal like Li Longxiang. He was also impatient and possessed little taste for hardships. He could train hard for a week at most before he ran out of motivation and spent the next two weeks doing nothing in particular. That was why his cultivation was lousy to put it mildly.

To be honest, Ye Qing was rather fond of Wen Shu. Since he was teaching Li Longxiang anyway, he wanted to elevate Wen Shu to the point where he could stand his ground in Bei You at the very least. Unfortunately, the boy had spurned him in disgust—disgust!—as soon as he learned that he didn’t know any sword-based martial arts. He refused to learn even the basics and pissed Ye Qing off so much that he kicked the boy in the butt.

Li Longxiang was much, much better in this regard.

“I’m going out for a bit, Longxiang. Keep training, and tell your master that I won’t be coming back for dinner.”

“Got it, senior uncle,” Li Longxiang replied before turning his attention back to his fists.

After Ye Qing left the Temple of Divination, he spent some time just strolling about and relaxing before heading toward the biggest restaurant in the city, Number One. Then, he ordered a jar of wine and slowly drank at his leisure.

The biggest and most famous restaurant in Bei You was called Number One. It was because they claimed that their wine, food, and women were the best in all of Bei You.

Obviously, this was a slight exaggeration. For starters, everyone acknowledged that the women of Shade of Scents were far more alluring than Number One’s.

That wasn’t to say that their boast was empty, of course. Their wine, food and women were undoubtedly top class, which was why the restaurant was already jam-packed with people even

though it wasn't mealtime yet. The alcoholics were drinking, and the gossipers were gossiping. It was a bustling day for Number One as usual.

Right now, the hottest gossip as of late was Joy Bodhisattva. No, they weren't talking about the conflict and enmity between Joy Bodhisattva and Xiong Kuohai. They were discussing the Trueman banquet Joy Bodhisattva would be holding on November 1st—which was a little over a month from now—to celebrate the fact that she had become the fourth Grandmaster of Bei You after Ouyang De, Xiong Kuohai and Huang Tianba.

Everyone was welcomed to her banquet at the Buddhist Hall of Joy, and as compensation, she would be publicly sharing her knowledge and experience.

Although some people were still talking about the collusion between Endless Sand the Buddhist Hall of Joy, the conflict between Joy Bodhisattva and Xiong Kuohai, and the deaths of Master of Swords, Master of Curses, the Wisdom King of Joy and more, most of them were just speculating. Since both Xiong Kuohai and Joy Bodhisattva had chosen silence regarding the truth of the matter, time was slowly washing away the memories.

It had been three days since that harrowing day, and for three days straight, everything was peaceful and calm. It was almost as if nothing had happened.

This was exactly what Ye Qing wanted, of course. Peace, quiet, and some time for himself and only himself.

When he had downed roughly three cups of wine, a man suddenly sat down opposite Ye Qing and asked tentatively, "Brother Ye?"

Ye Qing looked up and smiled at the newcomer. "Brother Chen."

The newcomer was none other than Chen Wuxin, the Heartless Brain who had taken over Chen Ah Sheng's body.

"Hah! It really is you. It looks like you're doing pretty well!" Chen Wuxin guffawed at Ye Qing's reply and poured a cup of wine for himself. He then drained it all in one gulp.

"Not as well as you, brother. It's only been a little over a month, and you almost made it all the way to Qi," Ye Qing replied with a smile that did not quite reach the eye.

That day, after they left Carefree Mountain behind, Ye Qing had found an opportunity to use the Annon Sutra to locate Chen Wuxin and call him to his side, so imagine his surprise when the Annon sutra told him that Chen Wuxin was at a border commandery between Chu and Qi at the time.

While he was traveling north, the Stranger had been traveling east this whole time. If he hadn't checked up on him, the bastard might have run all the way to fucking Qi.

"Ahem... I was trying to hide from the Intelligence Department, so..." Chen Wuxin pretended that he didn't catch Ye Qing's meaning and asked, "Speaking of which, there's something I'm really curious about. How did you find me?"

Chapter 546: Ye Qing's Ambitions

Chen Wuxin was seriously puzzled. His true form was the Heartless Brain, and he possessed the ability to mask his karma and sever all karma that was tied to him. Any and all kinds of divination wouldn't work on him.

The first thing he did after leaving Tian Yong was to activate his ability and sever all karma that was tied to him. It was both to avoid the Intelligence Department and to hide from Ye Qing.

He was almost at Qi when Ye Qing's message found him, and he couldn't for the life of him figure out how the young man did it. They were tens of thousands of kilometers away from each other, and he had never lingered at a certain spot for more than two or three days. Despite this, Ye Qing still managed to home in on his location with uncanny precision.

He remembered the day he received Ye Qing's message as if it was yesterday. It was a bright sunny day. He was enjoying a delicious cup of wine and listening to the wonderful tune of a songstress named Little Red when suddenly, a greenbird normally suddenly landed on his shoulder and said, "Do you still remember the promise of Chaos Heaven, Brother Wuxin? I'll be waiting for you at the Temple of Divination of Bei You."

It was such a shock that he nearly lost his hard-on[1].

The fact that the greenbird was speaking didn't surprise him in the slightest. The greenbird was a mechanical construct named the Messenger Bird, and it was a messenger tool created by an organization called the Exploitation of the Works of Nature[2]. It was because of the voice and the content of the message. A Strange Artifact of sorts, it came equipped with a Sound Storing Crystal that could be used to record sounds. All the user needed to do was to record their voice using the Sound Storing Crystal, deposit it within the Messenger Bird, and give the receiver's address to the Exploitation of the Works of Nature, and the Messenger Bird would fly to that exact location.

As soon as Chen Wuxin heard the voice, he knew it was Ye Qing who sent the message. The fact that he mentioned "the promise of Chaos Heaven" confirmed it.

Ye Qing was the one who gave him the name Chen Wuxin, and the promise of Chaos Heaven referred to the promise they made at Chaos Heaven Mountain.

Naturally, Chen Wuxin was shocked beyond words. He almost thought that Ye Qing had been trailing behind him this whole time, but that was obviously impossible. Ye Qing had mentioned the Temple of Divination, and he later found out that that was all the way at Bei You. It was clear that Ye Qing had escaped to the north.

To say that Chen Wuxin was disgruntled would be an understatement. They had escaped in different cardinal directions, and they were at least tens of thousands of kilometers away from each other, so how the hell did Ye Qing manage to locate him despite this? How was this fair?

He had considered overlooking the message and sticking to his original escape plan, but it was clear that Ye Qing had done something to him. Even if he managed to escape for now, whatever Ye Qing did to him would never disappear. It was only a matter of time before the young man caught up.

More importantly, there was a huge chance his life would be in danger if he overlooked this message.

Left with no choice, Chen Wuxin changed course and traveled to Bei You.

Three days ago, just as he set foot at the border of Northern Xinjiang, he received another Messenger Bird from Ye Qing. The young man wanted them to meet up at Number One.

This time, Chen Wuxin was more scared than he was astonished. He almost felt like Ye Qing was watching his every move even though it should be impossible. Knowing he could not escape the young man's grasp, his final defiance fizzled out like a dying candle.

"It's a secret." Ye Qing sipped his wine with a mysterious smile on his face.

He knew what Chen Wuxin was thinking of course. He just didn't care to expose him. So how was Ye Qing able to locate Chen Wuxin like a radar? It was thanks to whatever the Annon Sutra did to it when he moved his brain to Chen Ah Sheng's body, of course. From that point onward, the Heartless Brain was his and his forever.

He wasn't going to give Chen Wuxin even a hint regarding his methods though. There were few better checks than the fear of the unknown itself.

"Fine, you heartless bastard. I journeyed to Bei You without stopping as soon as I received your message, and you couldn't even share a teeny-weeny bit of information with me. Does trust no longer exist between people anymore?"

Ye Qing deadpanned. "You're not a person though. You're just a brain, remember?"

"I'm just joking. Here, have some wine."

Ye Qing poured Chen Wuxin a cup of wine and handed it to Chen Wuxin. Chen Wuxin reached out to grab it. As soon as their hands met, the veins on the back of their hands abruptly bulged, and the wine cup soundlessly crumbled into dust. The wine itself had evaporated before it could hit the floor.

"That's a superior quality Snowfire, brother. You shouldn't waste it if you don't want it." Ye Qing withdrew his hand and sighed with regret.

Chen Wuxin's hand was still extended though. His eyes wide with shock as he sputtered, "You... you..."

For a time, he wasn't able to complete a full sentence.

A while later, Chen Wuxin finally recovered and blurted in disbelief, "When did your body become so strong, brother?"

Back at Tian Yong, Ye Qing was only seven dragon elephants strong or the equivalent of a body-tempering early-stage Spirit Master. It had been a little over a month since then, and he somehow increased his strength to nine dragon elephants! Sure, he was still weaker than him, but he wasn't far behind at all. Just how was that possible?

*Did I black out somewhere in between my great escape? Maybe it's really been a year instead of a month?*

Except Ye Qing's progress didn't sound realistic even if it really had been a year. For starters, Ye Qing took grave injuries when he escaped Tian Yong. Even if he wasn't injured, it would have taken a normal body-tempering warrior between eight to ten years to become a late-stage Spirit Master.

After all, the path of cultivation of a body-tempering warrior only got steeper as they advanced. It was the same as the amount of resources they consumed to strengthen their body.

And yet, Ye Qing was able to do what most people couldn't do in a decade in just a month's time. It wasn't like he spent the whole month cultivating either. He had to have spent some of his time running away from his pursuers.

*Did your injuries somehow unlock your Ren and Du meridians, or did you run into a grandpa while on the run?*

"I had a fortuitous encounter on my way to Bei You," Ye Qing replied indifferently.

*I can see that,*

Chen Wuxin thought and rolled his eyes so hard his eyeballs temporarily flipped to the back of his skull.

Ye Qing proceeded to tell Chen Wuxin a summary of his encounter with the Earthly Sovereign's Coffin and how the Profound Yellow Qi was highly beneficial to his wounds. Of course, he did not mention his cooperation with Huo Linglong since it was a secret.

After Ye Qing reached the end of his story, Chen Wuxin kept quiet for a moment before saying slowly, "You're... seriously one blessed sonuvabitch, brother."

Not only did Ye Qing escape Tian Yong, he even benefited from it and shaved an entire decade off his cultivation schedule. If he wasn't beloved by the heavens, then who was?

"I was just lucky." Ye Qing waved him off casually.

Chen Wuxin did not say anything. He didn't know what to say, frankly. Shock and speechlessness were the only emotions left inside him right now.

Ye Qing was very satisfied with Chen Wuxin's reaction. Just now, he had purposely shown off his strength not because he wanted to satisfy his ego, but because he wanted to show Chen Wuxin that he was no one to be trifled with. He wanted to ensure that the Stranger would never try to pull something like his attempted escape to Qi again.

Now that the foreplay was over, it was time to get into business. "So, the reason I called you over is because I need your help with something, brother."

"Just tell me what I need to do, and it shall be done," Chen Wuxin replied listlessly.

Ye Qing began, "I want you to round up the scattered forces of the Chaos Heaven Brigand, take control of it, and put them under my control."

"What do you mean?" Chen Wuxin looked up in surprise.

"It's exactly what it sounds like." Ye Qing said slowly, "You occupied Chen Ah Sheng's body, so you should know that the roots of Chaos Heaven Brigand are really located at Mount Qi of Northern Xinjiang. The reason Chen Ah Sheng traveled south to the Chaos Heaven Mountain was to avoid his nemesis."

“Although the Ghost Tower cost the Chaos Heaven Brigand dearly, their roots are still present. You should have no problem consolidating the forces at Mount Qi and retaking control.”

“Because power is everything in this world,” Ye Qing replied softly while brushing a finger against his wine cup.

In the past, he thought he was safe with the Pacification Bureau and the imperial court as his patron. However, the incident in Tian Yong made him realize that some of his so-called patrons were really just profiteers who thought him as a tool, and they wouldn’t hesitate to discard him if they stood to gain from it.

In the end, the only one he could rely on was himself. Now that he had walked to the opposite side of the imperial court of Chu, his enemies weren’t just the Intelligence Department or Zhou Hengshan anymore. He had to fight against the Fang Clan, one of the Three Dukes of Chu; and Chu Wangsun, the famous Mister Nine of the Jixia Academy as well.

If he went up against them himself, well. A kind person would say that he was ambitious. A blunt one would say that he was suicidal and idiotic.

There were only so many things a single person could do.

That was why his individual strength wasn’t the only thing he needed to improve. It was time he started building a force of his own. If he did not have a patron, then he would build one.

The Chaos Heaven Brigand was his first step toward that goal.

#### Chapter 547: Two Steps To Build A Powerbase

“Hehehe. Interesting! I like it.”

Chen Wuxin understood Ye Qing’s plan immediately and allowed a hint of excitement to appear on his face.

As a troublemaker, it was ingrained in his blood to start trouble.

“Taking control of Chaos Heaven Brigand is just the first step. Once you’ve assumed control, I need you to grow its power and influence as quickly and humanly as possible,” Ye Qing continued his explanation while rapping his knuckles against the table.

Over half of Chen Wuxing’s excitement fizzled out just like that. “I don’t foresee any trouble taking over the Chaos Heaven Brigand, but... rapid development is going to be difficult.”

Mount Qi was a massive mountain range spanning hundreds of kilometers to the southwest of Bei You. It encompassed three commanderies—Xuan Hua, An Ding and Qing Wu—and bordered Yan. Geographically and strategically important, the three commanderies were heavily garrisoned and constantly embroiled in armed conflicts.

A lot of forces built their bases on Mount Qi due to how vast, defensible, and strategic it was. Unfortunately, most of these forces were composed of bandits and brigands.

These brigands relied heavily on the natural stronghold that was Mount Qi to assault civilians and rob merchants. If an opportunity were to present itself, they would even attack the Chu army and rob them of their provisions and siege weapons. Daring and audacious beyond belief, there was no crime they wouldn't commit.

The worst part was that there was nothing the imperial court could do against them. Qing Wu, Xuan Hua and An Ding might be protected by not one, but three huge armies, but their main responsibility was to defend the borders. The commanderies possessed immense strategic importance, and Yan was constantly probing their defense line for holes. As a result, they were unable to deploy the number of troops to uproot the brigands once and for all.

Of course, every once in a while, there would be a bold commander who had had enough of these bastards and threw caution to the wind. Unfortunately, the brigands would simply scatter like rabbits and retreat into Mount Qi, which was generally enough to foil most extermination attempts.

On the rare occasion a commander actually succeeded in eradicating the brigands, it usually took a couple of years at most before new brigands infested the area. It was literally impossible to end their ilk in a permanent fashion.

The brigands of Mount Qi were, without a doubt, a thorn in the border armies' sides. Although they weren't a major threat, they were about as annoying as the shitstain on your shoes. No matter how hard you tried to wipe them on the grass or wash them with water, there would always be a faint stench somewhere. They were disgusting to say the least.

The Chaos Heaven Brigand's main headquarters was located inside Mount Qi. In fact, the ninth rank Mountain Mover Brigand, the eleventh rank Black Haw Brigand, and the thirteenth rank Green Wolf Brigand were based in Mount Qi as well.

Besides that, dozens other minor and major factions were entrenched within Mount Qi. Some people claimed that Mount Qi boasted one hundred thousand bandits, and it was anything but an exaggeration.

Most of these factions had solidified territories and circles as well. If you challenged one of them, you challenged all of them.

In short, the border army was constantly on the lookout for brigands, and the brigands themselves were on the lookout for each other. Therefore, Ye Qing's dream of expanding the Chaos Heaven Brigand rapidly could very well be just that—a dream.

"It is difficult, but where there's a will, there's a way."

Ye Qing said calmly and handed the Boundless Mara Buddha to Chen Wuxin. "You can have this. I'm sure your endeavor would be easier with its aid."

"You're giving me the Boundless Mara Buddha? Are you sure?" Chen Wuxin accepted the Strange Artifact with astonishment.

As a Half-Step Grandmaster, a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact was beneath him. However, a sapient Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact was a different story.

Moreover, he had witnessed the Boundless Mara Buddha's power back at Chaos Heaven Mountain. Not only did it possess incredible offensive and defensive capabilities, its artifact spirit was beyond



exceptional. The Fog Demon possessed the ability to bewitch and control minds, extract memories and more. This alone made it impossible to evaluate by its rating.

“Stingy bastard.” Chen Wuxin pouted, though he couldn’t deny that the Boundless Mara Buddha and especially the Fog Demon would make it much easier for him to carry out his mission.

Suddenly, Chen Wuxin realized something. “Wait a second. Aren’t you coming with me?”

“No. For now, this is the safest place for me to be.” Ye Qing shook his head. “Besides, I’m sure you can do this without my help, though you may notify me if you run into some trouble that’s truly beyond your capabilities to resolve, of course.”

“How are you so confident that I can do this when I’m not?” Chen Wuxin rolled his eyes before asking, “Do you have a specific plan in mind?”

Ye Qing chuckled. “Do you really need me to teach you how to do this? Just divide and conquer, everyone has a price, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, power is everything, yada yada blah blah. And if all else fails, there’s always fleeing is best of the Thirty-Six Stratagems!”

The Heartless Brain wasn’t just an intelligent Stranger, it was exceptionally intelligent even among intelligent Strangers. Ye Qing was sure the guy could pull off much more professional schemes than he could, at least in terms of toying with human hearts.

“Don’t worry. I’ve prepared a helper for you.” Ye Qing looked at the disgruntled Chen Wuxin.

“A helper? Who is it?” Chen Wuxin asked while putting away the Boundless Mara Buddha.

“His name is Xue Beikun. He’ll join the Qing Wu garrison as a commandant-in-chief in about a month’s time.” Ye Qing said slowly, “If he is the blade in the light, then you are the knife in the dark. Together, you should be able to surmount most obstacles.”

This was his second step to build his powerbase. A month ago, he sent Xue Beikun a message and ordered him to find a way to transfer himself to Qing Wu, Xuan Hua or An Ding. It was so that he could coordinate with Chen Wuxin.

He thought that it would take Xue Beikun at least months to pull this off, but in reality, it only took him less than three weeks to wrap up everything. Of course, it wasn’t without a cost. He had to drop almost an entire rank just to obtain the position of a commandant-in-chief in the Qing Wu garrison.

Originally, Xue Beikun was the commander of the Black Feather Guards of Luo Shui. In terms of rank, he was the equivalent of a battalion commander of a border army. In ascending order, the military rank of a border army was squad leader, platoon leader, garrison commandant, commandant, commandant-in-chief, battalion commander, general, commander-in-chief and more.

On a related note, five soldiers made a squad, five squads made a platoon, five platoons made a guard, five guards made a company, five companies made a brigade, five brigades made a battalion, and five battalions made an army.

In the border army, a commandant-in-chief wasn't a lousy post by all means, but it definitely wasn't high either. It was smack dab at the center of the totem pole. Not only that, Xue Beikun enjoyed a leisurely life while he was a commander defending the heart of Luo Shui, but a border army must brave the elements, face all kinds of danger, and risk their lives almost every day. It wasn't the most attractive prospect to put it mildly.

But of course, serving in a border army promised many benefits. For starters, one could earn merits and promotions faster than almost anywhere else. As long as you were capable and competent, you could be promoted all the way to the top. Everything was possible.

In fact, the man nicknamed the King of Northern Xinjiang and the commander-in-chief of an army of two hundred thousand was a grassroot.

This was why Ye Qing didn't think that he was screwing Xue Beikun over even though he was demoted a full rank. In fact, it was a blessing in disguise. With Chen Wuxin working with him, Xue Beikun could earn the military merits he needed to climb up the ranks at a rapid pace, and Chen Wuxin could expand his forces as well.

It was killing two birds with one stone, and he fully expected Xue Beikun to surpass his previous position in just a short time. When the time was right, they would become a major help in his grand plan.

His enemies thought they could fuck with him? Okay. He would play.

"Xue Beikun? Commandant-in-chief? You have connections in the border army?" Chen Wuxin was speechless. Every time he thought he had had a grasp of Ye Qing's abilities, the young man would strive to surpass it. "Is he reliable?"

"He will never betray me," Ye Qing replied simply.

"That's good. With his aid, things should be even easier." Chen Wuxin didn't prod deeper as he doubted that Ye Qing would give him a straight answer. "When and how can I contact him?"

Ye Qing replied, "He will contact you in due time. Just bring the Fog Demon, and he will know that you are one of mine and trust you."

"Got it." Chen Wuxin nodded.

"Remember. Always be careful, and keep a low profile as best you can," Ye Qing advised.

"Like I need you to tell me that!" Chen Wuxin shrugged.

Ye Qing nodded and drank his wine. When he looked up and saw that Chen Wuxin was still there, he asked, "Do you have any more questions?"

"No...?" Chen Wuxin replied, puzzled.

"Then what are you waiting for? Get your ass over to Mount Qi already!" Ye Qing ordered.

“It’s going to take time for you to muster the Chaos Heaven Brigand and get everything prepared. That is why I need you to depart as soon as possible. This way, you can start as soon as Xue Beikun arrives at Qing Wu.”

As if he could hear Chen Wuxin’s thoughts, Ye Qing poured him a cup of wine and said, “Sorry for the trouble, but I expect great things from you.”

Chen Wuxin accepted the cup of wine and drained it all in one gulp. Then he rose to his feet and declared, “Got it. I’ll be going now.”

“Yeah.”

Ye Qing got up to see him off. When Chen Wuxin was at the exit, Ye Qing suddenly called out to him. “Hey.”

“What is it?” Chen Wuxin turned around with a puzzled look on his face.

“It’s nothing.” Ye Qing raised his cup and saluted him. “Take care. I’ll treat you to a drink when you return.”

“Hahahaha!” Chen Wuxin suddenly burst into a hearty guffaw. “I’ll be waiting.”

Chapter 548: Joy Bodhisattva’s Invitation

Chen Wuxin left as quickly as he came. After that, Ye Qing spent the next few days cultivating, cultivating, and even more cultivating.

Ye Qing’s cultivation plan for himself was very simple. During the morning, he would refine the Profound Yellow Qi and cultivate the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra” to temper his body. The sooner he completed the final step of the martial art and ascended his body to the Grandmaster stage, the better.

At night, he would use Nanke to hone his control over his new strength and body. At the same time, he also cultivated the “Paranirmitavaśavartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” to manifest his Yin God and enter the Spirit Master stage as soon as possible.

Besides cultivation, Ye Qing would occasionally take a stroll around or outside the city, but not to relax or catch some rest. In fact, he wasn’t going to rest until he mastered the “Chaos Demon Ape Body Tempering Sutra”.

The reason he went out was to seek out the items Nanke desired in exchange for its services. Thanks to the Annon Sutra, it was generally simple to satisfy Black Lord and White Lord’s demands. In fact, a good number of items could be bought directly from the Tower of Cornucopia’s shops. Sure, most of them were extremely expensive, but as the man who robbed the Chaos Heaven Brigand’s treasury, money was the one thing he didn’t lack. Anything that money could solve was not a problem.

However, not all of the items they requested could be purchased. In fact, some requests did not involve items at all. That was why Ye Qing occasionally left the city to hunt certain Strangers or unusual items.

Speaking of requests that did not involve items, sometimes, the two snakes would make some extremely unusual requests. For example, they would ask him to stay a night at a haunted house, stand under a tree during a thunderstorm for the entire day, run naked around the entire city one time, peep on Widow Wang, his neighbor while she bathed, tell Old Chen that his son's surname was really Wang[1], dip honey in piss and taste it, so on and so on.

He did not know what the fuck was wrong with Black Lord and White Lord, but as a bashful man there were certain requests he would never accept. For example, he never accepted the request to streak around the city, dip honey in piss and the like. However, there were some requests that his heart said no, but his cultivation said yes such as peeping on Widow Wang while she bathed. What was shame before the allure of power? Nay!

It definitely wasn't because he wanted to peep on her himself. Nuh uh.

Honestly, if it wasn't for Nanke's demands, he would have stayed inside the Temple of Divination twenty-four seven. Thankfully, Black Lord and White Lord never gave him a task he couldn't complete, so overall everything was going as planned.

Calendars do not exist in a mountain.

Time flows like an unending stream.

Before late autumn was over, Bei You greeted its first big snow.

The snow looked like goose feathers as they rode the icy wind and leisurely floated down the dark sky. It gave the brownish yellow soil of Northern Xinjiang a silvery make-up and lessened its usual ruggedness and roguishness.

The pedestrians' attire had changed overnight as well. Almost everyone was wearing a thick sheepskin coat and hugging themselves tightly to keep warm. The white outfit made them look like a natural part of the wind and snow.

It was like the spring wind had changed the landscape overnight and filled it with flowers.

In Northern Xinjiang, snow was as common as the rain of Tian Yong. It was perfectly normal and nothing to be surprised about. In fact, Yi Pin claimed that this year's snow was actually a lot later than normal. Previously, a days-long snow would appear as soon as September or October, but this year it didn't snow until November.

This was Bei You's first snow of the year and Ye Qing's first snow since he arrived at Bei You. Yi Pin believed that it was worth commemorating and decided to set up a stove in the courtyard. They just sat there admiring the snow while drinking white and cooking lamb meat. It was a relaxing, peaceful moment especially for Ye Qing since he had been cultivating almost non-stop until that point.

Their wine bottles were half-full when a series of knocks came from the entrance.

"Hmm?" Ye Qing set down his cup with a slight frown on his face. "It looks like we have honored guests today. Please greet them, Longxiang."

"Okay." Li Longxiang got to his feet, patted away the snow on his outfit, and left to open the front door.

A beautiful nun was standing outside the entrance. Her head was shaved, but her bald head actually added to her charm instead of diminishing it. Not only that, the somewhat heavy snow didn't affect her in the slightest. Whenever a snowflake was around one meter away from the woman, its speed of descent would suddenly suffer, and it would always fall one meter away from the woman.

It was as if nature itself was submitting to her.

"Are Reverend Yi Pin and Warrior Ye around, young man?" the woman asked smilingly while clasping her hands together in a prayer.

Li Longxiang blanked out for a moment. He had never seen such a beautiful woman in his life.

The woman did not lose her cool even though Longxiang was so stunned by her appearance that he forgot to speak. "Are Reverend Yi Pin and Warrior Ye around, little reverend?"

"Y-yes! Yes, they are!" Li Longxiang finally returned to the earth and looked down at his feet while blushing furiously.

"Please invite her inside, Longxiang," Ye Qing called out while looking at the woman's general direction. He had a feeling that he knew who she was.

"Senior uncle has given you permission, so please come inside." Li Longxiang stepped out of the way and motioned for the woman to enter.

"Thank you, little reverend." The woman nodded and stepped into the courtyard. She then saluted Yi Pin and Ye Qing and said, "Greetings, Reverend Yi Pin, Warrior Ye. I am Worriless of the Buddhist Hall of Joy."

"The Worriless Protector?! To think you would grace our lowly temple with your presence!" Yi Pin jumped to his feet and exclaimed with pleasant surprise before Ye Qing could even say anything. "Please, take a seat."

Ye Qing clasped his own hands and said, "Well met, protector."

"Please, there is no need to be so courteous," Worriless replied politely and smilingly. "First, I would like to apologize for taking up your time. The reason I came here is to invite the two of you to attend the Bodhisattva's Trueman feast five days later. It is her sincerest wish that you would grace her halls with your presence!"

Worriless then produced two golden invitation letters from her sleeves and sent them floating into Ye Qing and Yi Pin's hands. "These are your invitation letters."

After the duo accepted the invitation letters, Ye Qing said courteously, "The Bodhisattva is too courteous. She did not need to send someone as important as you to be her messenger."

Worriless smiled at him. "Thank you, but I don't find this task to be beneath me. You are the Bodhisattva's honored guests, and it is my honor to be able to invite you to her Trueman feast."

“You flatter us, protector,” Yi Pin said with a wide grin on his face. “Would you like to take a seat? It’s pretty cold today, I’m sure you can use a cup of tea or two to warm up your body.”

“Thank you, but I have to return to the Bodhisattva and report the completion of my mission,” Worriless turned him down gently. “Please attend the Bodhisattva’s Trueman feast five days later.”

“We will,” both Ye Qing and Yi Pin replied in unison.

“Goodbye.” Worriless clasped her hands together in prayer, nodded, and took her leave just like that.

After Worriless was gone, Yi Pin looked at the invitation letter and clicked his tongue in amazement. “I can’t believe Joy Bodhisattva sent a protector just to invite you to her Trueman feast. She seems to value you a lot for some reason!”

“She invited you as well, didn’t she?” Ye Qing countered.

“Don’t be stupid. It’s obvious that you’re the one she really wants to invite. I’m just the extra,” Yi Pin said with a tinge of jealousy.

Ye Qing glanced at him with astonishment. “Sometimes, your self-awareness really surprises me, brother.”

“Anyway, are we going or not?”

“Joy Bodhisattva went so far as to send a protector to give me my invitation letter. Do you think I really have the option to say no?” Ye Qing sighed.

Unfortunately, Joy Bodhisattva had sent a protector to invite him almost as if she had anticipated his response. If he did not show up, there was a good chance he would earn her ire and land himself in even more trouble. All in all, he did not have a choice.

“What about you, brother?”

“I’m not going.” Yi Pin shook his head without hesitation.

“One, every big shot in Bei You would be attending Joy Bodhisattva’s Trueman feast. I have no intention of showing my face to these people and embarrassing myself.”

Yi Pin then fixed at Ye Qing with a wordless stare and said slowly, “And finally, I have this feeling that being near you in a setting like that is like setting a powder keg next to an inferno. Sorry, but I have no intentions of getting caught up in your troubles. Good luck.”

Ye Qing: “...”

*You wound me, brother!*

Chapter 549: Sixth Mouse

There was a famous town named Joy Town about fifteen kilometers to the south of Bei You City, and next to the town was a mountain named Blissful Mountain. The Buddhist Hall of Joy was located at its peak.

A mountain was just a mountain until someone noteworthy and decided to give it a name. That was the case for Blissful Mountain. Blissful Mountain used to be an ordinary, nameless mountain, and Joy Town used to be called something else until Joy Bodhisattva founded the Buddhist Hall of Joy.

When Ye Qing arrived at Joy Town, the place was already overflowing with people. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the shirts blotted out the ground, and sweat fell like a rain.

Most of them weren't here to attend Joy Bodhisattva's Trueman feast though. They were just here to partake in the festivities.

Did they not want to attend Joy Bodhisattva's Trueman feast? Of course they did. They just weren't qualified. Those who did had either received an invitation letter from Joy Bodhisattva, or were big shots in their own right. No one else had the right to ascend Blissful Mountain at this time.

Even so, countless jianghu warriors came to Joy Town to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event. It wasn't every day a Trueman feast was held, and a Grandmaster offered to share their insight after all. Even if they couldn't attend the feast itself, there was no harm in witnessing a Trueman's power and broadening one's horizon.

Most importantly, the world itself changed when a Grandmaster decided to share their knowledge in public. It was also highly probable that Joy Town would be caught up in whatever phenomenon the sermon created. If they could gain something from this, then it would be worth it.

But of course, most of them were really hoping to sneak up Blissful Mountain and slip into the Buddhist Hall of Joy in secret. If they succeeded, and they were spotted by a senior or a powerful faction, then their lives would be changed forever.

There were even some people who were looking to duel with a famous warrior in hopes of becoming famous overnight.

Ye Qing himself saw many unfortunate bastards trying to sneak up Blissful Mountain only to have their asses kicked by the disciples of the Buddhist Hall of Joy and thrown out.

It was a shameful experience as a matter of course, but since this was a celebration day for the Buddhist Hall of Joy, the disciples did not take anyone's life. As a result, a lot of people were emboldened to try again and again.

Ye Qing did not linger overly long because he had departed from the Temple of Divination a little later than expected. There was only a day left before the Trueman feast was held, so he made his way to the mountain pass as quickly as he was able.

He had just arrived at the mountain pass when two Buddhist Hall of Joy disciples stopped him in his tracks. He was just about to hand his invitation letter to the disciples when suddenly, it curled up like a snake, slipped out of his hand, hit the ground with a plop, and vanished into the crowd just like that.

"Huh?"

Ye Qing blinked and glanced at the two disciples.

The female disciple noted his confusion and reminded, “Benefactor, we cannot allow you to enter the mountain if you do not have an invitation letter.”

Ye Qing blinked again and finally snapped back to reality. “Someone stole my invitation letter right in front of your eyes. Aren’t you going to do anything about this?”

The male disciple explained, “Our job is to collect the invitation letters only. We do not take responsibility for anything else.”

“Besides, if you can’t even protect your own invitation letter, then you prove that you have no right to attend our Trueman feast in the first place.”

Ye Qing: “...” That’s very jianghu.

There were many others who had witnessed the theft, and they were all wearing looks of schadenfreude on their faces. No one was surprised, however. This clearly wasn’t the first time such a thing had happened.

“My name is Joyless Ye. Can I go in?” Ye Qing asked. He did not have an invitation letter at the moment, but perhaps Joy Bodhisattva had informed her disciples about him?

“My apologies, but we have never heard your name before. What sect do you belong to? Do you have proof?”

“Hahahaha!” The crowd burst into laughter upon hearing this. Who did he think he was? Did he think he could get inside with his looks or something?

Ye Qing sighed. “Fine. Give me a moment. I’ll be back with my invitation letter very soon.”

Plan B was a dud as well. Clearly, Joy Bodhisattva had not informed her disciples about him. In that case, he had no choice but to get his invitation letter back.

Of course, he could say that he knew Joy Bodhisattva and the Woriless Protector, but even if the disciples believed him, everyone would think that he was a useless person who got in purely because of his connections, and that was more than his pride could accept.

“I just want to keep a low profile. Why is it so difficult?” Ye Qing massaged his forehead and turned around.

The crowd burst into laughter again when they heard Ye Qing’s words. No one believed that he could actually get back his invitation letter. If this was somewhere else and some other time, then sure. However, Joy Town was currently drowning in a sea of limbs right now. The thief only needed to bend their waist and duck into the nearest group to vanish like a mud statue that fell into the sea. It was near impossible to track down anyone like this.

Even if he could track down the thief, how was he going to catch up to them? Again, the place was absolutely jam-packed with people. Even walking had become a task that demanded one’s full attention, much less pursuing someone. And if he was too rough when he was shoving someone out of his way, then he would be making enemies for himself.



Right now, nearly everyone walking the streets of Joy Town was a jianghu warrior, and mild-natured was no one's middle name. If he enraged someone, then the game of pursuit would suddenly turn into a game of survival—for Ye Qing.

In fact, a lot of people had lost their invitation letters for all kinds of reasons, and a good number of them were pretty strong. They had caused quite the commotion in their attempt to reclaim their invitation letter, but not a single one of them had succeeded. In fact, some had even died for their rash decision.

If even those powerful warriors could not succeed, what could a weakling like Ye Qing possibly do? His aura was weaker than most of them!

That wasn't all. There were a good number of malicious or petty-minded people who purposely moved into Ye Qing's way and blocked his path. It was to delay the young man and make it even more impossible for him to reclaim his invitation letter, of course.

Jianghu warriors were only all too happy to start trouble. We're so much better than you, and yet we never even got an invitation letter. Why does a weak nobody like you get to have an invitation letter?

If we can't have it, then no one can!

People with such a mentality would never be in the minority. Even as Ye Qing took another step, the throng of people blocking his way grew a little thicker. Their malice was more than palpable.

Ye Qing paid them no heed, however. He continued to walk forward like they didn't exist.

It was at this moment the crowd's malicious grins suddenly stiffened on their faces. When Ye Qing reached them, they abruptly parted as if a massive, invisible hand was parting them into two. What was strange was that not a single person seemed to notice anything out of the ordinary at all. Their expressions were slackened, and their eyes unfocused as they dumbly moved out of Ye Qing's way.

Naturally, Ye Qing's departure didn't cause any commotion whatsoever.

Ye Qing continued to stride forward with confidence and leisure. Wherever he went, people automatically stepped out of the way as if he was Joy Bodhisattva herself. Just a few breaths later, Ye Qing saw the back of the thief who stole his invitation letter.

The thief was an old man with a goatee. He had a slim figure, beady eyes, and splayed incisors that gave him the appearance of a mouse.

Right now, the old man was weaving between the crowd and escaping from the crime scene as quickly as possible. There should be barely any space between the people to move at all, and yet the old man's movement art was quite impressive. No matter how little space there was, he could always spot a hole and slip through with millimeters to spare. He seriously resembled a mouse.

The old man's name was Shu Jianyun (Growing Clouds). Despite having a poetic, elegant name, he neither looked nor acted like such a person. In fact, he was a kleptomaniac and a pervert who stuck to the shadows far more than he ever did in the light. Because he was the sixth child of his family, the jianghu eventually gave him a fitting moniker, Sixth Mouse.

Despite his terrible moniker and reputation, Shu Jianyun hadn't lived until old age because he was dogshit lucky. His thieving skills and movement art were so outstanding that he managed to garner

some small amount of reputation in Northern Xinjiang. A lot of people even called him, “Senior Mouse” when they saw him.

But of course, Shu Jianyun was nothing before a giant like the Buddhist Hall of Joy. The fact that he didn’t receive an invitation letter was all the proof one needed to see to know what they thought of him.

Sixth Mouse came to Joy Town today to attend the Trueman feast, of course. Specifically, he was here for the knowledge sharing. He was only one small step away from manifesting his Yin God and entering the Spirit Master stage, and Joy Bodhisattva’s knowledge might just be what he needed to achieve a breakthrough.

Of course, he had to enter the Buddhist Hall of Joy first, but he did not have an invitation letter, and he wasn’t famous enough to get in with just his face either. What should he do?

Chapter 550: Stomach of the Finger Eating Grandma

The answer was simple. He just needed to steal one. Luckily for him, stealing was his bread and butter, and the Buddhist Hall of Joy did not care who entered their halls so long as they had an invitation letter.

Things had gone exactly as expected. It took him little trouble to obtain his first invitation letter. Then, Sixth Mouse had a genius idea.

Why don’t I steal more invitation letters and sell them?

A lot of people came today to attend Joy Bodhisattva’s Trueman feast and listen to her sermon. This was doubly true for those warriors who were stuck in a bottleneck and were looking to achieve a breakthrough.

However, it wasn’t easy to sneak past the Buddhist Hall of Joy’s defenses. The fact that no one had succeeded at slipping in was the proof of that. Despair was slowly but surely encroaching on these people.

Now then—what would happen if someone were to sell them an invitation letter?

They would pay anything to have it, of course.

He would become a much richer man, and he would still be able to enter the Buddhist Hall of Joy. It was killing two birds with one stone.

Even better, this environment was perfect for slipping away. An ordinary thief could have slipped away with little to no trouble, much less a professional like him. No one would ever be able to catch him.

And so Sixth Mouse kicked off his lucrative venture, and at first, everything went exactly as planned. It took him little to no trouble to steal a handful of invitation letters and sell them to desperate buyers, and it wasn’t long before his Nature’s Shell was filled with goods and money.

However, Sixth Mouse soon realized that the stealing part of his plan wasn’t efficient. Even before he could try anything, he must decide if his target owned an invitation letter at all, and if they were weak enough that he could steal from them without repercussions. It took too much brain power so to speak.

Another genius idea came to him then. He could just hang out at the one place where all letter holders would appear: the entrance to the Buddhist Hall of Joy! Every time someone presented their letter, he would steal it from right under their noses!

Of course, he wasn't stupid enough to steal indiscriminately. He only picked on the weaklings. Most of these people were either juniors of a major faction who had received the invitation letters from their seniors, or people who got dogshit lucky.

He wasn't afraid of offending these people or the factions behind them because of one simple reason: they had to find out who was the one who stole their invitation letter first, and he, Sixth Mouse, was oh-so-sneaky. Even if they found out that it was him, it still wasn't a problem. Besides stealing, he was an expert in hiding and escaping as well. If worse came to worst, he could simply duck into a forgotten corner and sit out the manhunt.

And who in the world could find a mouse determined to stay put in its hole?

Finally, Sixth Mouse was a greedy man, but he was a greedy man who knew that overdoing something was folly. The Trueman feast would begin tomorrow, so he needed to finish processing the invitation letters he currently possessed now.

Stealing from the young man was his final heist. He would have stopped sooner, but the young man looked so innocent he probably would have lost his invitation letter to other thieves and robbers, so Sixth Mouse decided that he might as well cut his misery short.

This has been a most profitable heist. When this Trueman feast is over, I'm going to pamper myself like an emperor!

Sixth Mouse was imagining all kinds of ways to spend his newfound wealth when suddenly, he realized that something was amiss. Specifically, he noticed that many people were looking behind his back. When he succumbed to his curiosity and looked back, his mind abruptly stuttered to a dead stop.

There was no one behind him. To be more accurate, it looked like an invisible hand had pushed the crowd to both sides of the street. At the center of the street was a young man looking like he was taking a stroll in the park and walking straight toward him.

Their eyes met, and the young man blinked at him. The corners of his mouth were slowly turning up as well.

Every hair on Sixth Mouse's body stood on end immediately. He recognized the young man, and he recognized the fact that he needed to escape *now* before it was too late.

Unfortunately, he had just twitched a muscle when he caught the young man rapping the space beside his knuckles out of the corner of his eyes. His consciousness immediately grew blurry, and he came to a stop instead of running away as he originally planned.

Ye Qing casually walked up to Sixth Mouse and grabbed him by the shoulder. When the thief stole his invitation letter, he immediately retaliated by attaching a wisp of demonic thought to his person. From that point onward, there was no way for the thief to escape him no matter how fast or sneaky he was.

Suddenly, Ye Qing felt something disappearing from his grip. Sixth Mouse had somehow disappeared and left only his shirt behind.

“Huh. Interesting,” commented Ye Qing with a raised eyebrow. The fact that this thief managed to break out of his “Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul” proved that his spirit was pretty strong.

The escape was only temporary, however. It didn’t even take half a second for Ye Qing to lock his gaze onto the guy once more.

To his surprise, the thief had somehow gotten a new set of clothes. His appearance looked drastically different from before as well. If his demonic thought hadn’t been attached to the guy this whole time, there was a real chance he could have lost him completely.

Turning a little more serious, Ye Qing gently planted a foot on the ground and caused the entire street to shake soundlessly. Caught off guard, most people lost their footing and stumbled uncontrollably toward the two sides of the street.

During this time, Ye Qing blurred out of existence and reappeared behind the thief. Then, he reached out to grab his shoulder.

Meanwhile, Sixth Mouse suddenly discovered that the air around him had grown as thick as sludge. Face turning ugly, he gritted his teeth and let out a growl.

The next moment, all five fingers on his left hand abruptly exploded into bits. Not a moment sooner, the blood transformed into a giant maw and swallowed Sixth Mouse whole.

The maw disappeared immediately after that. Just like that, Sixth Mouse escaped once more.

“He’s quite the slippery one, isn’t he? No wonder he dared to do such a thing!”

Ye Qing clenched his fist, causing a loud pop that sounded like a thunderclap of the biggest lightning. Everyone in the vicinity clutched their ears in pain and staggered on their feet.

A moment later, the invisible space in front of Ye Qing began to ripple. It grew more and more rapid until a strange flesh bag abruptly popped into existence.

The bag was made of blood and meat. He could see blood vessels crawling all over the thing and scarlet blood dripping from the bottom. It was also expanding and contracting rhythmically almost like it was a human heart or something.

The next moment, the flesh bag spat something on the ground. It was a man covered in slimy, sticky fluid. Some people failed to get out of the way in time and were covered in the slime as well.

“BLAAAAAARGHHHHH!!!”

As soon as the smell hit, everyone began throwing up the contents of their stomach like crazy. Even Ye Qing was frowning a little as well. The slime smelled like vomit, but a dozen times worse than normal. It was disgusting to say the least.

The man the flesh bag had spat out was Sixth Mouse, of course. Right now, he was covered in slime and still bleeding from the stump that was his left hand. It was both a sorry and nauseating sight.

The man couldn’t care less about his current state, however. He immediately climbed to his feet and ran toward the crowd again.

Regret, shock and fear like never before was clutching him in a death grip. He had never encountered such a terrifying young man in his life. None of his escape tactics were working, and even his trump card, the flesh bag, had been dismantled with ease.

The flesh bag was called the Stomach of the Finger Eating Grandma, a Soulstealer-class Strange Artifact. As its name implied, it was a Strange Artifact forged from the stomach of the Stranger known as the Finger Eating Grandma.

The Finger Eating Grandma was a Phenomenon-class Stranger with a head as tiny as a fist, and a stomach as big as a pregnant woman. She enjoyed feeding on human fingers, and every time it was the middle of the month, she would sneak into a human's house and feast on their fingers. However, the human would not notice the loss of their fingers until they bled to death.

The reason the Finger Eating Grandma was classified as Phenomenon-class was due to her potent spatial traversal ability. She could hide herself in a different space and avoid detection from most people.

The Stomach of the Finger Eating Grandma was a pocket space that could accommodate far more things than a normal human's stomach. Just like the Stranger it was created from, it too possessed the ability to traverse through space and conceal itself. Its wielder could use it to hide themselves in its pocket space and temporarily disappear from the real world.