

## The Quest 54

Chapter 54: Lotus Festival

Aunt Xue looked into two pairs of watery eyes, her heart wavering.

The lady of the house was always strict in her discipline, demanding high standards from the young miss and young master from a young age, allowing them to focus only on cultivation and studying arrays and alchemy. Except on special festivals, they were rarely allowed outside, and even then, they were accompanied and expected to return before dark, with no delays allowed.

Though this ensured the young miss and master excelled in cultivation, it stifled their natural childlike spirit.

Sometimes, Aunt Xue wished to let them play and laugh like normal children. However, the lady had high hopes for them, and any diversion caused by play could delay their cultivation, for which Aunt Xue would bear the blame.

Bai Zisheng said, "Aunt Xue, I just want to look around a bit, to see what Tongxian City is like."

Aunt Xue hesitated, but Bai Zixi tugged at her sleeve and also called out, "Aunt Xue..."

Aunt Xue's heart melted completely. "Alright, but we can only stay out until the hour of Hai."

"Thank you, Aunt Xue!" Bai Zisheng immediately brightened up.

Aunt Xue then smiled at Mo Hua, "We are new here and not familiar with Tongxian City, so please lead the way."

Aunt Xue's kind demeanor, and Mo Hua, looking at the eager eyes of the Bai siblings, couldn't refuse.

He had planned to return early to draw a few more array patterns, but having drawn too many recently, and his meditation techniques not recovering, a night's rest seemed good.

The group then strolled down the streets, exploring the night market of the Lotus Festival in Tongxian City.

Though Tongxian City was a minor celestial city, not particularly bustling, the crossflow of people and myriad lights created a lively, festive atmosphere.

Mo Hua and the Meng brothers led the way, with the Bai siblings following a few steps behind, looking around with fresh, curious eyes. Aunt Xue, ever cautious, followed quietly behind them.

Along the way, the twins whispered to Mo Hua, "Do you know them?"

Mo Hua nodded, "We are fellow nominal disciples under Mr. Zhuang."

"They aren't from Tongxian City, are they?"

"No, they seem to be from a distant, prominent family..."

"Distant? Outside of Tongxian City?"

"Probably even further, beyond the Li province."

"Beyond Li province... How long would that take?"

The group, feeling both excited and nervous about the unknown regions of the cultivation world, continued their chat.

Xiao Hu suddenly asked, "Mo Hua, are you close to them?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment, "Not really, just sort of fellow sect members; we don't talk much otherwise."

Xiao Hu nodded, "These noble family descendants really don't have much in common with us."

Mo Hua felt something was off with that statement, but couldn't pinpoint what.

In the cultivation world, the gulf between noble families and independent cultivators was vast. The older and more profound the noble family, the more unapproachable they were for ordinary cultivators. Although both were cultivators, they weren't really considered the same.

As they walked, the group felt somewhat constrained and didn't enjoy themselves as much.

Seeing their discomfort, Mo Hua chuckled, "Go and have fun on your own; I'll just wander around with them for a bit and then head back. I still have some array patterns to draw tonight."

Xiao Hu exclaimed, "You're still going to draw arrays tonight? Being an array master is tough..."

The twins said, "We'll buy something fun for you too if we find anything good."

"How about a candy figurine from Pan Datou's stall? We plan to buy tiger-shaped ones; we'll get one for you too."

Da Hu scratched his head and added earnestly, "If anyone dares to bully you, just call us, and we'll come help you!"

"Got it," Mo Hua smiled, and the three ran off like birds freed from a cage.

Aunt Xue, seeing this, called Mo Hua over, asking, "I don't know what festival it is today, why it's so lively."

"Aunt Xue, today is the Lotus Festival."

Aunt Xue looked puzzled, "I've never heard of such a festival in the cultivation world."

Mo Hua explained, "It's a minor festival, only celebrated near Tongxian City, not elsewhere."

"Why is it called the Lotus Festival?"

Bai Zisheng asked curiously, while Bai Zixi turned her head to listen to Mo Hua.

Mo Hua thought back, "When I was a child, I asked my parents, and they said the Lotus Festival commemorates the Wandering Lotus Hermit."

"The Wandering Lotus Sage? Was this hermit a great cultivator?" Aunt Xue inquired.

"To us, perhaps a great cultivator, but not so much in the grand scheme of the cultivation world," Mo Hua replied. "I'm not sure about the exact level of cultivation, but I've heard from some older folks that the Wandering Lotus Hermit was at the late Foundation Building stage, though some say it was the Golden Core stage."

"It is said that back then, Li province was scorching hot, the vegetation withered, and starving demonic beasts descended from the mountains to prey on humans, causing a beast tide. The cultivators of Tongxian City fought bravely but were overwhelmed by the sheer number of beasts. Just as the city gates were about to be breached and many cultivators faced death, the passing Wandering Lotus Hermit alone held back the tide. The city's cultivators were saved, but the hermit perished from exhaustion of spiritual power..."

"It's said that today marks the day of the hermit's passing, and since then, every year at this time, the people of Tongxian City light various lotus lanterns, sending them into the sky to remember the hermit's deed with a bright spectacle."

Listening intently, Bai Zixi was captivated, while Bai Zisheng felt his blood boil.

Imagining the scene, as if in the midst of the beast tide, fighting ferocious and brutal demonic beasts. After a fierce battle, although victorious, he too would fall exhausted and die.

Years later, many cultivators still remembered the merit of that day, and his name was etched in the minds of the city's cultivators.

Bai Zisheng, filled with fervor, exclaimed, "To live without fear of death, to march towards it, such a tragic yet stirring life is the destiny of a true cultivator."

Aunt Xue sighed helplessly, "Young master, the lady has only you for a son, please take care of yourself."

Bai Zisheng's enthusiasm waned, and he hung his head low.

Mo Hua chuckled, and Bai Zisheng retorted slightly annoyed, "Are you laughing at me?"

Mo Hua replied casually, "No."

Bai Zisheng grew even angrier, while Bai Zixi's lips curled up, her face shining brighter than the lantern-lit sky.

Aunt Xue thought for a moment, still puzzled, "The physical bodies and demonic energies of demonic beasts are far stronger than those of cultivators. Even a Golden Core stage cultivator alone could not possibly withstand a beast tide, let alone a late Foundation Building cultivator. It doesn't seem worth such an elaborate commemoration by the city's cultivators..."

As they spoke, they arrived at a small stall displaying various lotus lanterns, intricately designed and sold for a mere five fragments of spirit stones.

Mo Hua took out five fragments, laid them on the stall, and picked a lotus lantern that couldn't quite be made out to be any auspicious beast. Lighting it, the flame illuminated the creature, making it appear lifelike.

Releasing the lantern, it slowly ascended, blending into the myriad lights above.

Mo Hua watched the sky filled with lanterns and murmured, "In this world, despite cultivators reaching the skies with their abilities, how many would sacrifice their cultivation and dao foundation for strangers? The cultivators of Tongxian City commemorate not the cultivation level of the Wandering Lotus Hermit, but the benevolence that benefitted all lives."

Bai Zisheng nodded, lighting a majestic red tiger-shaped lantern earnestly and sending it skyward.

Bai Zixi released a golden phoenix-patterned lantern, dazzling and beautiful.

Hesitating for a moment, Aunt Xue, after a glance at Mo Hua, also chose a green phoenix-shaped lantern, sending it into the night sky.

Across Tongxian City, the specks of light gathered, illuminating the dark night sky.

