

Chapter 51- Calm before storm

Zi Mo woke slowly, her lashes fluttering as she stretched beneath the blanket. A cute yawn slipped past her lips before her gaze settled on him... and stilled. For a brief moment, she simply watched him watching her. Then she raised an amused brow.

“Did you watch me the entire night?” She asked.

Li Yuan leaned back in the chair and didn't look away, still appreciating his fiancée's beauty. “Not the entire night. Only an hour or so,” he said, a faint smile tugging at his lips. “I hopes it doesn't come off as weird creepy.”



Her lips curved slightly as she shifted closer, reaching out to take his arm and tug him back toward the bed. “No. It's endearing.” Then, without giving him room to argue, she added, “Cuddle with me.”

He let out a quiet huff of amusement as he allowed himself to be pulled down beside her. “Yes, ma'am.”

She fit against him easily, like she had done it a hundred times before, her head resting against his chest as his arm draped lazily around her form. For a while, neither of them spoke. The room was quiet, warm, and unhurried in a way that felt almost foreign after everything he had been busy doing recently.

Then, halfway through the cuddle, Zi Mo stilled, her nose twitching slightly. She pulled back just enough to look at him properly, and her gaze narrowed.

“You seem... different.” She said. Li Yuan raised an eyebrow, not having expected her to notice anything. She leaned in and sniffed again, more deliberately now, her expression turning faintly puzzled. “You smell different as well.”



“How so?” he asked, watching her reaction carefully.

Zi Mo didn't answer immediately. She leaned closer, almost pressing against him as she took another breath, her brows knitting together in concentration. “...I don't know,” she admitted after a moment, clearly unsatisfied with her own answer.

Li Yuan's lips quirked faintly. "Is it a good different or a bad different?"

That gave her pause. She pulled back slightly, thinking it through before finally nodding. "Good," she said. "You smell better." Her eyes flicked back to his. "What did you do?"

Li Yuan didn't hide it and told her about him about the Heaven-Breaking Titan Body Scripture. About finally grasping its core principles.

Zi Mo listened without interrupting. She was good at that, he noticed. At listening. He appreciated her greatly for that alone. The few girls he dated in his past life were usually not good listeners. But then again, they hadn't lived for a century and half either.

By the time he finished, her expression had softened entirely. She leaned back into him, her head settling against his chest once more.

"I see..." she said, letting out a soft chuckle. "Why am I not even surprised that you mastered an entire Body Cultivation technique in just a single night," she murmured, almost to herself. And there was a quiet satisfaction in her voice.

Her fingers idly traced against his arm as she continued, “Maybe, just maybe, with that ridiculous comprehension of yours... you might actually walk the path of tri-cultivation.”

“Who knows,” she added dryly, “you might even reach Golden Core in your lifetime.”

Li Yuan didn't respond immediately. Instead, he lowered his head slightly and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead.

“Have some more faith in me.” He said.

Zi Mo sighed softly at that, the sound more tired than dismissive. “There's little else I can do when you've already made your decision,” she said, though there was no real resistance in her voice.

He didn't let the matter drop. His arm tightened slightly around her, just enough to draw her attention back. “I'm being serious. I want you to actually have faith in my path,” he continued, his voice calm but firm. “Not just tolerate it. And especially not make snide remarks about whether I'll succeed or not.”

Zi Mo held his gaze for a moment. Then she exhaled slowly and leaned back into him, as if using the hug to apologise for her earlier remark.

“...Alright,” she said quietly. “I’ll try.” There was a brief pause before she added, softer this time, “I’m sorry.”

He nodded and pressed another kiss on her forehead. “There’s nothing to be sorry for.” He said. And he was being truthful. If Zi Mo had known how bullshit his cheats were, she would never have doubted him. But for his own safety, she had refused to learn about them. And he appreciated her greatly for that, and everything else she’s done for him.

They stayed like that for a while, the silence between them finally become comfortable once again.

Eventually, as the sun started to rise in the horizon, Li Yuan spoke again. “Don’t you have to go help with making preparations for Ning Renxue’s breakthrough?”

Zi Mo shifted slightly at that, though she didn’t move away. “I do,” she said. “In Snow Peak, every Golden Core cultivator is expected to contribute to their junior’s ascension. Whether it be in resources, wealth, connections... whatever they can offer.”

Her tone grew more practical as she continued. “I refined a batch of Aurora Spirit Stone and gave it to her. It would increase her chances of breaking through by around 20%. That alone more than covers my share.”

Li Yuan nodded slightly.

“She’s still preparing, though,” Zi Mo added. “Partly because of me... but mostly because she wants everything to be perfect.” A faint smile tugged at her lips. “At this point, almost everything is ready. We’re just waiting for the right moment for her to make the breakthrough.”

Li Yuan’s eyes narrowed slightly in thought. Then, quietly, he said, “Take me with you to see Ning Renxue.”

Zi Mo paused. “She doesn’t want to show herself to you.”

“I’m aware. She could wear a robe and a mask to cover herself.” He replied. “But take me with you when she’s about to star her breakthrough.”

Zi Mo turned to look at him properly. “Why?”

Li Yuan paused and then activated the privacy formation surrounding their house. “Because I might be able to tell whether her breakthrough will succeed or not,” he said simply.

The change in her was immediate.

Zi Mo sat up straight, the warmth from earlier vanishing in an instant as sharp alertness took its place.

“...Are you serious?” She asked.

Li Yuan met her gaze and nodded once.

Zi Mo didn't speak for several long moments. Her expression shifted subtly, thoughts clearly racing behind her eyes as she weighed what he had just said. Finally, she let out a slow breath.

“Very well, we'll go together. On the day she's decides to make break through, You'll come with me then.” She said, before her gaze sharpened. “But you have to promise me something. You will never ever tell anyone about this ability of yours,” she said, her voice low but firm. “Not a single person. Do you understand?”

Li Yuan held her gaze for a moment, then nodded. “I promise.”

Zi Mo studied him for another second, as if confirming whether he truly meant it. Then, slowly, the tension in her shoulders eased. “... Good. Because if word of this ability gets out, then the entire Snow Peak would be in danger.”

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He and Zi Mo lazily flew through the Crystal Yin Mountain. Once again, she flew under her own power while he relied on a flying sword. He didn't quite mind it though, as flying on a sword could also be a lot of fun. It felt a bit like surfing. Except, instead of water, you're surfing on air.

"There." He said and pointed at where a spirit herb was glowing on a steep cliff. The both of them flew close to the cliff, and he carefully dug out the herbs and placed it within his Ancient Spatial Ring to be replanted later. And they continued flying.

After a while, Zi Mo noticed something in the distance, and they flew over to collect another treasure. A Yin crystal that forms in Yin heavy place. He'd already found dozens of such crystals in the mountain before but wouldn't say no to more as each one could sell for thousands of spirit stones.

As they continued flying, he suddenly spoke up. "You know... I've been thinking about Chu Tianming recently."

"Oh?" Zi Mo said, flying closer to show that she was paying attention.



“I was wondering how he keeps finding it whenever I bring you along to ambush him.” He said. “And I thought that maybe he still has connections with the Sect Leader. With that connection, he could make partial use of the Formation that covers the entire Nine Peak Sect, and use it to survey us.”

Zi Mo looked thoughtful at his words but then shook her head. “Or, he could have a Divination Artefact, or a Divination-type Gu to help him. Do you have any proof behind your conjecture, or is it just a wild guess?”

“I don’t have any proof. But maybe we could put it to the test.”

“How?” She asked.

“You’ll leave the sect with the excuse to do something and stay out for a week or so. Once outside the Sect’s boundary, the Formation covering the sect will no longer be able to track you. Then, a week later, I’ll leave the sect, and lure him to a designated place where you would be hiding.” He said. “Then, we could attack him together, and kill him.”

Zi Mo looked thoughtful. “It seems like a risky plan. What if he catches you before you reach my location”

“Don’t worry. I’ll know if our plan won’t succeed in advance and act accordingly.” He told her and Zi Mo frowned for a moment and then nodded.

“We’ll have to discuss this in more details. And we might also have to leave behind our sect identity tokens. Who knows if those things have trackers within them.”

He blinked at those words and nodded. Somehow, that thought hadn’t even occurred to him, but it now made sense. Even if Chu Tianming didn’t have any connection with the Sect Leader but has a way to sense sect tokens. Then of course he would be able to tell when Zi Mo is nearby.

Maybe the answer was just that simple, and not something as complicated as a divination tool.

“There’s also something else I wanted to ask you.” He said again.

“What is it?”

“Before coming to the Snow Peak, didn’t you ask me to take your master as my master as well. What happened to that?”

“Oh... I talked with master about it as well. She said that she doesn't want to accept you as a disciple.” Zi Mo replied and he blinked in surprise.

“Why?” He asked. Had he done something to upset her?

Zi Mo paused for a moment before she shrugged. “I don't know.”

His eyes narrowed at that. Something in the way Zi Mo replied made him feel like she just lied to him. But he decided to give her the benefit of doubt and didn't call her out for it.

Just as they were about fly into the lower areas of the Crystal Yin Mountain, his Sect Identity Token suddenly buzzed.

He curiously picked it up, wondering who could be calling him. Did his Family send someone to meet him?

But then he heard the voice from the other side, and its contents, and his face went dark.

“Zi Mo. We need to go down to the city.” He said.

Zi Mo, who had listened in on the talk nodded grimly as well. “Okay.”

And so, they left the sect in a hurry.

Chapter 52- Consequences of good deeds

The wind howled past them as they cut through the sky, the vast expanse of Nine Peak City spreading out beneath them as they flew at a rapid pace. Well, rapid pace for Li Yuan who was flying atop a sword. She had to keep her own pace steady and slow down enough to let him lead.

Every so often, she would look at him, and notice the tension in his frame. He tried his best to be calm, controlling his breathing and keeping his posture upright. But small things like his tightened jaw as well as his clenching and unclenching fingers gave him away.

Li Yuan was worried, enraged, and dare she say it... afraid. Afraid of what he was going to find once they reached their destination.

Zi Mo said nothing and kept following him in silence. She got the feeling that whatever they found in the city today would change Li Yuan greatly. And she wasn't sure if it would be for the good or bad.

With their flying speed, it only took a few minutes before they arrived at the outer districts. And the change was immediate. The polished streets, the opulent buildings, and the crowded markets all gave way to a city that was older, neglected and poorer. To a mortal populace that didn't seem to carry themselves with the same energy and self-respect as their inner-city counterparts.

She sensed it when Li Yuan used some sort of technique to start looking for the Qi of the boy who called him. And before long, they arrived atop a dilapidated mansion.



The mansion must've been grand once, but for some reason, it seemed to have long been abandoned. Now, its wooden parts were half rotted, its gates hung crooked from their hinges, and its courtyard was overrun with weeds and wild grass taller than humans.

She and Li Yuan descended upon one area in the courtyard that had been cleared up, and found Ao Tian waiting for him. The younger cultivator whom Li Yuan had saved looked well, if a bit exhausted.

He moved forward, his eyes widened in awe and then shock as he saw her flying under her own power, his knees trembling a bit. But then he controlled himself and went on a knee before cupping his hands, “Senior—” He spoke up but Li Yuan raised a hand, stopping him from speaking any further.

“Where are they?” Li Yuan asked, not even looking at the boy. Zi Mo raised an eyebrow at his discourtesy but said nothing.

Ao Tian paused, caught off guard as well. But then he studied Li Yuan’s expression and gulped. “...this way Senior brother.” He said and turned around without another word.

They followed him through the crumbling walls down to a set of staircase and narrow corridors, until they arrived at the dungeon hidden beneath the mansion. The place was dark, and only illuminated by the occasional torches that Ao Tian must’ve lit up.

“Here.” Ao Tian said, gesturing at a metal door. Li Yuan pushed through without pausing, the metal hinges of the door protesting loudly as they flung open.

The smell of blood and sweat hit them almost instantly. But Li Yuan seemed to not care as he gazed at the six mortals within the prison cell. Tied and blindfolded as they huddled and shivered in one corner of the room.

They were bloodied and bruised. Some more so than others. Ao Tian had clearly not been gentle with them. Maybe the boy even tried to interrogate them. But she doubted he would've met with any success. Cases like these were not solved so easily. Especially by a low-level cultivator like Ao Tian who was still only at the 2nd Stage of Qi Condensation.



Zi Mo's gaze shifted toward Li Yuan as she quietly studied his expression. For a long moment, he simply stood there, staring at the mortals with a quiet, terrifying stillness that begin to fill the room.

The mortals squirmed. Unable to see him thanks to the blindfold, but able to feel his gaze regardless.

Ao Tian entered the room with a torch and cleared his throat. “As you had ordered, I looked into the matter of the adopted orphans.” He began, his tone subdued. “Despite looking for them all over the city, I couldn’t find them anywhere. The ones who adopted them... these people, they had clearly faked their records.”

“I looked into other orphanages across the city, and found that they also had many children recently adopted from them. I cross-checked everything and...” Ao Tian paused, as if fearing Li Yuan’s reaction. “O-over two hundred children are missing across the entire city.”

Zi Mo’s expression sharpened at that. To have taken that many mortal children... she could only think of one type of cultivator who would do this. And that did not bode well for those children.

“And these were the ones who adopted those children?” Li Yuan asked softly.

“Yes, senior brother. It took me some time but I eventually managed to locate them all.”

“Have them talked?” she asked.

Ao Tian snorted softly. “I tried.” His gaze flicked briefly to the worst of the injured. “But none of them seemed willing to speak. They fear their backer more than they fear death.”

Li Yuan released a breath then inhaled slowly, as if grounding himself. Then, he reached into his spatial ring. A heavy pouch appeared in his hand along with a spirit herb. And he tossed them both to Ao Tian without looking. “For your trouble.”

Ao Tian caught them instinctively. Opening the pouch, his eyes widened as he saw the number of spirit stones within. Over a thousand easily. The herb was no less valuable and clearly potent enough to push him to the 3rd stage of Qi Condensation.

“Senior, this—” Ao Tian began to speak but then he noticed the look on Li Yuan’s face and wisely shut up.

Li Yuan walked over and stopped a few steps before the mortals. And waited. The silence stretched as the mortals whimpered, clearly able to sense his presence. Until suddenly... Li Yuan’s presence changed and killing intent filled the room.

The mortals felt it immediately. Their breathing turned ragged, their bodies trembling violently against their restraints. One of them started gasping for breath while another pissed himself.

Even Ao Tian flinched back as if struck, his face going pale before he wisely backed off a few steps and gazed at Li Yuan in terror.



She herself felt a smile come upon her face, so proud she was of Li Yuan's killing intent. Killing that 3rd Grade Combat Gu on his own had clearly refined his killing intent to a whole new level. One she doubted that any other Qi Condensation disciple, or even a Foundation Realm cultivator would not be able to match.

Finally, Li Yuan spoke up in a terrifying calm voice. "I'll give you one chance to speak and atone for your sins. Tell me. Where are the children."

Only stubborn silence answered him, as despite their fear, not a single mortal spoke up. Ao Tian clearly hadn't been lying when he said that these mortals feared their backer more than they feared death.

Zi Mo watched as Li Yuan's face went dark. The way his anger turning into a black shimmering rage. She'd only ever seen it once before. When Li Yuan had somehow divined the Fat prince's arrival.

Li Yuan turned slightly, and his gaze settling on her. "Search their souls."

Zi Mo raised a brow. "They're mortals." She said. "If I do that, the process will likely shatter their souls."

Li Yuan paused for the briefest of moments before he continued. "Does not matter. As long as find the children's location. Do it."

Zi Mo nodded, doing her best to hide her pleased expression behind a calm facade as she stepped forward. But before she could act, one of the mortals broke.

"I—I'll speak!" the man choked out, voice cracking as his body shook violently. "Please— I... we.... We didn't want to—! That cultivator... he took out families... he said if we didn't—"

The man choked mid sentence. Literally. His body seized and his hands clawed at his throat as he wheezed. His eyes bulged and his veins rose along his neck as a faint line or ruins started to strangle the life out of him.



‘A seal. So it was indeed as I guessed.’ Zi Mo thought, her eyes narrowing. Now all but sure that this was the work of a demonic cultivator. But if that were really the case... then those children...

Li Yuan moved, and with a flick of his finger, he launched a sword intent at the dying mortal. The sword intent was so fine that it was almost invisible to herself as well. It sliced through the air... and cut the seal in half. Without so much as leaving a single cut on the man’s skin.

The man collapsed to the ground, coughing violently as air rushed back into his lungs. And Zi Mo let out a shuddering breath.

That level of control... she doubted even the elders of Sword Peak could replicate that feat. Maybe only the Peak Master of Sword Peak could do it.

The mortal lay there for a moment, trembling, before scrambling to speak again. “They took our families! That bastard! Son of a whore!” he cried, his teeth gritted in anger as tears streamed down his face. “I... what did I ever did wrong. I just wanted to live my life. But he took my family. Said that if I don’t bring him children, he’ll slaughter my family. I had no choice!”

His voice broke completely by the end. “We’re just mortals... we couldn’t... we couldn’t fight him...” He lowered his head, shoulders shaking. “Punish me if you must great immortal—but please... please save them... save my family.”

“Where did you take the children?” Li Yuan asked, and the mortal, now bereft of the cursed seal, quickly gave up all the answers. Unfortunately, it wasn’t a lot.

The mortals only took the children and left them within a house. Afterward, those children would vanish, and that would be it. They knew nothing else. Not even whether their families were safe or not. And knowing demonic cultivators...

Silence returned to the prison cell following the confession. Zi Mo glance at Li Yuan, and noticed that his expression hadn’t softened. Not even slightly. If anything... it had grown colder.

She stepped forward slightly, voice casual. “If you want them punished, I can do it for you.” After all, Li Yuan was still too young and had a kind heart. If he wanted them dead, then she might as well take this burden from him, lest it harm his dao heart and cause trouble for his cultivation advancement.

Li Yuan didn’t answer immediately, his gaze lingering on the mortals in silence. But she was sure he would accept her offer. Until... he shook his head.

His hand lifted. And sword intent flickered again. And it passed through the mortals without harming their bodies. But the mortals all still instantly, their trembling stopped at once and their expressions emptied.

Zi Mo tilted her head slightly, curiosity flickering through her gaze. “What did you do?” She asked.

Li Yuan didn’t answer and turned away, already leaving the prison cell. “Come. We need to look for that cultivator and rescue those children.”

She closed her eyes, unwilling to tell Li Yuan that it was likely already too late.

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In the end, they found the demonic cultivator far too easily.

She couldn't tell if it was due to overconfidence in his Cursed Seal, but the cultivator hadn't even bothered to hide his tracks. So once they found the house where those children were sent, finding the demonic cultivator merely became a matter of time.

She carried Ao Tian with one hand as they flew. Beneath them, the city gradually thinned until they finally left its boundary and flew out into the wilderness.

They went deeper and deeper into the forest until finally, Li Yuan flew down and landed in front of a dilapidated shack that stood alone within a clearing, half rotted and half crooked with age.

The smell of blood reached them as soon as they landed. It was thick enough that if she opened her mouth, she would be able to taste it. That, along with the heavy twisted Yin Qi in the air told her enough.

Zi Mo closed her eyes briefly and exhaled through her nose. She did not need to step inside to know what they would find.

Her gaze shifted toward Li Yuan. His face had gone chalk white. So he sensed it too.

For a moment, just a moment, she considered stopping him. Saying something. Anything. Because whatever lay inside that shack... it was not something someone like him should see.

But then the thought passed and she did nothing.

The world of cultivation would not be kind enough to spare him such sights. If he continued walking this path, he would see worse. Far worse. Better here and now, while she was still beside him.

Plus, with his talent, Li Yuan's cultivation journey has been too easy. And facing some difficulties, while harmful for him in the short run, would definitely benefit him in the long run. Provided he's able to overcome this hurdle.

With slow, trembling steps, Li Yuan pushed himself forward. When he reached the shack, he hesitated for the briefest of moments before pushing it open. And then—

Silence.

Li Yuan's expression crumbled into a profound look of sadness and despair as he saw the corpses inside. Small, tiny corpses, piled carelessly atop one another, as though they were nothing but discarded waste. Their faces were frozen—fear, pain, confusion—

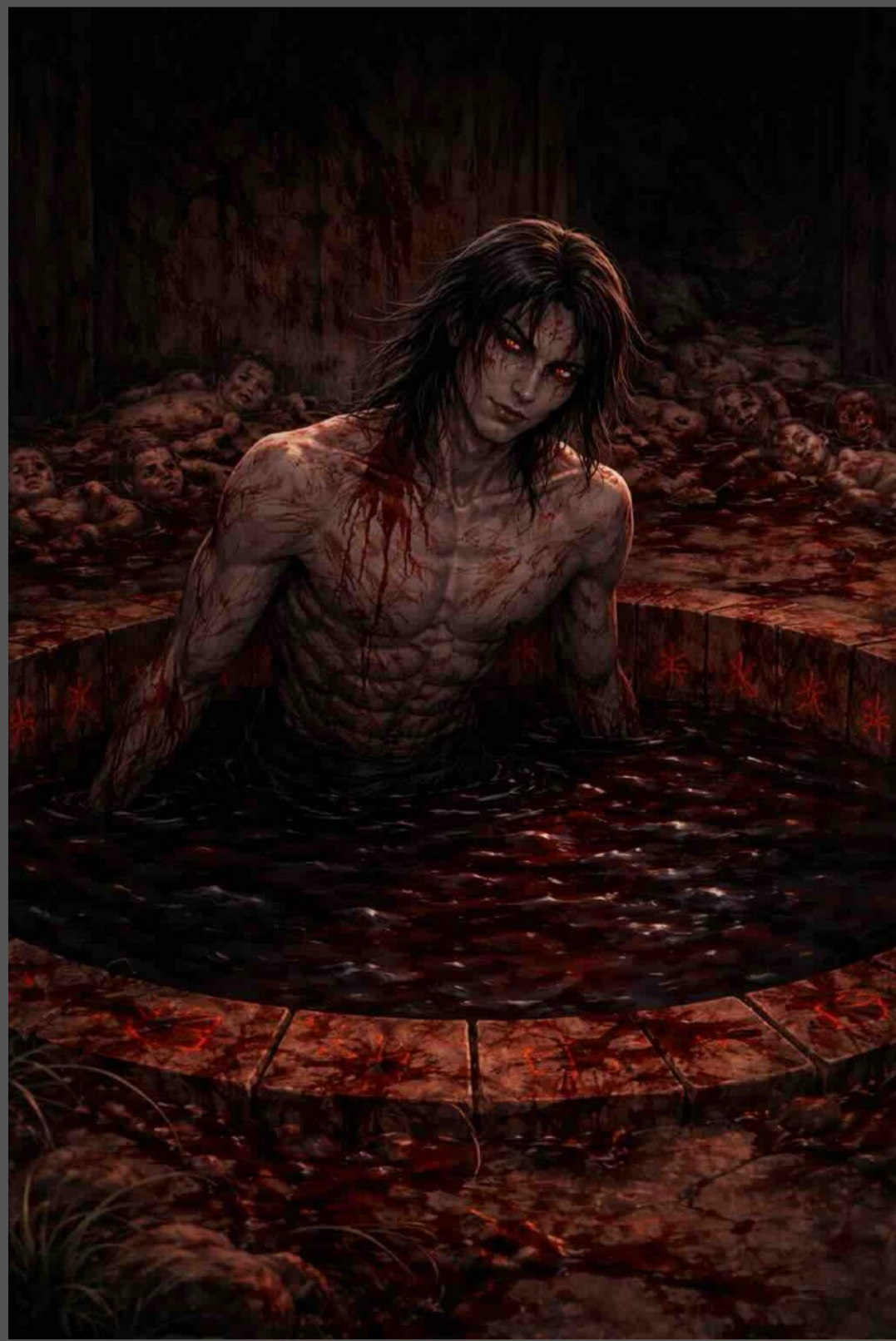
expressions that had never been given time to resolve into anything else.

At the centre of the room was a pit carved into the ground, its edges etched with crude, glowing runes. Inside it churned a dark, viscous liquid. Blood that had lost all its vitality, and turned into a black tar like substance.

And within that pit sat a man. Half submerged, and watching them in silence. The demonic cultivator's gaze fell upon Li Yuan and he paused as something flickered in his gaze. Recognition and disbelief.

The demonic cultivator let out a soft, defeated chuckle. "I always knew someone would find me eventually but I had hoped... never mind. I suppose its all worthless now, eh Brother Yuan?"

Li Yuan didn't respond. He hadn't moved. He stood at the threshold, staring... not at the man, but at the tiny bodies. Zi Mo watched his shoulders tremble. His hands hung at his sides, fingers twitching faintly as though unsure what to do with themselves.



Finally, he numbly turned to face the demonic cultivator. “You... know me?” Li Yuan asked hoarsely.

Her heart went out to him for the pain and grief he must be suffering. She wanted to hold him. To cradle him to her bosom and let him sleep for an eternity. But she knew that this was something he must do alone, and so she stayed back and simply watched.

The demonic cultivator chuckled. “Ah... have I changed so much that I’m unrecognisable now? Or have you forgotten brother Yuan?”

Recognition, followed by despair flickered across Li Yuan’s face. “No... I remember now. I saved you. In the forbidden forest. During the Sword Peak Tournament.”

“Yeah. Among many others, from I heard. You were quite generous back then.” The cultivator said bitterly before he let out a soft chuckle and lifted his hands to lazily gesture around the room. “Tell me, brother Yuan... do you like what that generosity became?”

Li Yuan, clutched his chest, as if he was having difficulty breathing. Tears gathered in his eyes as his lips parted and then closed. Then, finally—

“...why?”

The question was barely more than a whisper.

“Why? Why indeed. Why would I do something so monstrous?” The cultivator chuckled sadly. “Maybe I’m just a monster? Have you thought of that? Or are you too noble, too kind hearted to ever think so low of others, brother Yuan?”

Li Yuan did not seem to recognise the mockery in the man’s voice.

“Why?” Li Yuan asked again, some rage finally entering his voice, and this time the demonic cultivator’s fake facade of cockiness finally crumbled, replaced by a bitter expression.

“For revenge.” The cultivator said with a bitter smile. He looked like he was about to speak further to justify his actions. But in the end, he simply looked down at the pool of blood and sighed.” For revenge. I wanted them to suffer how I had suffered. Is that so much to ask for? Couldn’t you have come a bit later, brother Yuan. I was almost done here. A few more children and... haah... I suppose it doesn’t matter anymore.“

Li Yuan and the demonic cultivator simply stared at each other. And to her surprise, despite how exposed and vulnerable Li Yuan was, the demonic cultivator didn’t take the chance to attack him. Maybe the demonic cultivator simply feared that she would interfere. But the look in his eyes told her that it wasn’t due to her.

The demonic cultivator held Li Yuan in great respect and couldn't bring himself to attack him.

Finally, after a long silence, Li Yuan stepped forward, passing the man without even looking at him, his steps carrying him toward the pile of bodies as he left his back open to the man. The demonic cultivator simply watched in defeat as he knelt before the corpses.

Carefully. Gently. As if afraid the world itself might shatter beneath his touch, Li Yuan's hand reached out, trembling, and brushed against the face of a small girl.

"Her name was Xiao Yu," Li Yuan said as tears finally begun to stream down his face. He sniffed and steadied his voice. "She wanted to become a cultivator," he continued, a faint, broken smile forming. "Because she thought cultivators were rich. And she wanted to buy dolls."

The words hung in the air as Li Yuan closed the girl's eyes and let out a shuddering breath, his face scrunching up as if he would break down at any moment. But then, he slowly got control over his emotions.

With a sigh, he got up, his shoulders now slumped in defeat as he slowly turned to face the Demonic cultivator.

“Was it worth it?”

The demonic cultivator leaned back into the blood and exhaled a breath. “Worth it...?” He spoke up, as if asking the question himself. “No... it wasn’t. But by the time I realised that, there was no turning back.” A faint chuckle escaped him and he closed his eyes. “I had to keep going. Otherwise... all of this would be meaningless.”

His gaze returned to Li Yuan and there was a slight sheen in his eyes. “...Pathetic, isn’t it?”

Li Yuan didn’t answer. He simply looked around the room again. At all the tiny bodies. At the blood. “This...” His voice dropped, hollow and heavy. “...is my fault.” Li Yuan stepped closer to the pit. “If I hadn’t saved you...” he continued, “...none of this would have happened.”

The man sighed. “I’d like to say you’re wrong,” he said. “But... maybe you’re not.”

A pause.

“...You should’ve let me die, brother Yuan.”

Li Yuan closed his eyes, and something within him shifted.

Zi Mo felt it before she saw it. An overwhelming presence rose from him before sword intent flooded the place, multiplying, fracturing, and filling every inch of the world around them.

Thousands. Then tens of thousands. Then millions as they continued to multiply far beyond her ability to count.

Cold sweat broke out in the palm of her hands as she heart hammered against her ribs, as she suddenly felt something she hadn't felt for a long while.

Fear.

Her instincts screamed at her and she didn't hesitate. She took Ao Tian in her grasp and instant retreated, her figure blurred out of the shack and didn't stop as she continued to run.

Behind her... a pure, blinding white filled the world. She looked back and saw it expanded outward in a perfect sphere, swallowing everything in its path.

Trees, earth, and even weak Spirit Beasts. Anything it touched simply ceased to exist.

“...Sword Domain,” she murmured, in disbelief.

The sphere grew and grew, devouring the land itself, until suddenly... it collapsed. As if it had never been there in the first place. And silence returned.

Where the shack had once stood, and half a forest around it, there was nothing left. Only a vast, smooth depression carved into the earth, perfect and empty, as though a piece of the world had been erased.



And at its centre... lay the unconscious form of Li Yuan.