

Starlit Path 120

Chapter 120: Seeking Only a Family Reunited

A calm voice, laced with suppressed excitement and complexity, echoed through the ruins of the shattered sect gate. Dust swirled as Nie Changqing stepped forward, his butcher's knife hovering silently at his side. The mountain breeze whipped his white robe and dark hair.

A young Daoist fled in panic toward the sect's temple. Nie Changqing spared him, his gaze lifting to the sunlight piercing the clouds, casting golden rays on the ancient steps of the Daoist Sect. Unpausing, he advanced to the stone archway inscribed with "Heart-Stopping Temple." Beyond it lay the sect's training plaza, a vast expanse that had birthed countless legendary warriors—including a younger Nie Changqing, once sweating under its open sky.

Now, hundreds of Daoists sat in the plaza—on bluestones, beneath pines, or in shadowed corners—watching him. Some sneered with disdain; others bore complex expressions. None were strangers to Nie Changqing. His scandal years ago had been a sensation, rivaled only by tales of Li Sansui within the sect.

"He dares return?" one scoffed.

"Didn't he kill Senior Brother Han Lianxiao? Such a ruthless traitor should've been slain back then."

"Committing such disgraceful acts and now storming the sect so brazenly—shameless!"

The Daoists' words dripped with mockery, jealousy, or indifference. Beneath an ancient pine, an elder sat, eyes closed, flanked by aged Daoists—some impassive, some cold, some glaring at Nie Changqing. The plaza fell silent, save for the steady tread of his steps.

“Friends, it’s been a while,” Nie Changqing said softly, his robe fluttering.

No one answered. The elder opened his eyes, fixing them on Nie Changqing. With a sudden smile, he drew a tattered letter from his sleeve and flung it with a burst of energy. The soft paper shot toward Nie Changqing like a blade.

Nie caught it effortlessly, his gaze falling on the shredded remnants of the letter to his wife. His lips twitched, then parted in a sigh. As Young Master Lu had said, reason came only after force. Beat them into submission, and words would follow.

North Luo, Lakeheart Island

Lu sneezed, as if someone whispered his name. Rubbing his nose, he sipped from a bronze cup, the tart wine lingering on his tongue. “Little Ni, fetch Ning Zhao,” he called.

“Mmph,” Ni Yu mumbled, mouth full of a pill, before darting downstairs like a gust of wind. Lu’s eyes drifted to the spiritual pressure board, checking the Dragon Gate realms. On North Luo Lake, the sun broke through heavy clouds, casting a golden curtain.

His mind shifted, vision leaping to a towering, rugged mountain topped with a temple and Daoists. “Old Nie’s reached the Daoist Sect,” Lu murmured, smiling as he sipped again.

Ning Zhao soon arrived, white skirt flowing, bowing slightly. “Young Master.”

Watching the sect, Lu spoke, “Enter the Dragon Gate realm. Aim for the Hidden Body Realm. Fail this time, and you’ll fall behind.”

Ning Zhao’s eyes sharpened, lips set with resolve. “I won’t disappoint you, Young Master.”

“Go,” Lu waved.

She descended from White Jade Capital, stepping onto the lake where a vortex swirled, revealing a Dragon Gate. Lü Mudui, brewing tea with Lü Dongxuan, watched curiously but stayed put, lacking Lu’s permission. Jing Yue, seeing Ning Zhao vanish into the gate, took a deep breath.

Lu’s faint voice reached him. “You, too—try the Dragon Gate.”

Jing Yue’s face lit up. An immortal realm promised opportunity. A great gain could boost his strength—and his ability to flee. “Thank you, Young Master!” Beaming, he dashed off, pausing to wheedle two Qi-Gathering Pills from Ni Yu, who generously obliged.

On the pavilion, Lu shifted focus, sipping wine while observing the Daoist Sect. Nie Changqing carried a five-year knot in his heart. To Lu, its nature mattered little—what mattered was that it blocked Nie’s path to higher realms. This trip to the sect was to untie it.

“Daoist Sect...” Lu’s lips curved, leaning against the red-carved railing with a soft chuckle.

“Who tore this letter?” Nie Changqing’s calm voice rang across the plaza.

“What if I did?” the elder under the pine replied.

Nie gripped his butcher’s knife, pointing it at the elder, eyes turning cold. “You tear my letter, I’ll cut the hand that did it.”

“Insolent!” the elder roared, slamming the pine, needles drifting down. Surrounding Daoists echoed, “Arrogant!”

Nie Changqing smiled, saying no more. He stepped forward, knife lowered, robe billowing. Six figures landed before him, blocking his path.

“Old Ten, leave,” one said, voice heavy with emotion. “Go, and we’ll pretend this never happened.”

“For the sake of our shared training days, retreat,” another urged.

“You’ve gained an immortal opportunity, but the sect now has one too. You can’t win.”

“I say who leaves?” the elder snapped. “With the Master in seclusion, I command the disciples! Seize him! Form the array!”

“Yes!” the Daoists shouted, moving to designated positions across the plaza. Each clapped their hands, unleashing surges of blood and qi that wove into a strange, oppressive force, blanketing the plaza.

On Lakeheart Island, Lu raised an eyebrow. “An array?” The Daoist Sect’s millennial legacy impressed him, sparking inspiration. Arrays... a new idea.

Nie Changqing’s hair fluttered as he faced the six—once his peers, ranked third through eighth in the sect. The ninth, Han Lianxiao, had died peacefully in North Luo. “All I seek is my family’s reunion,” he said. “Five years... it’s time to bring my wife home.”

The six sighed, unmoved. “Enough talk! Take this traitor!” the elder bellowed. The array’s pressure crashed onto Nie Changqing.

Stones quivered. The six raised weapons—swords, spears, a bow. Nie Changqing smiled under the weight. The sect hadn’t changed, but he was no longer the man from five years ago.

Gripping his knife, he stepped forward. “Immortal opportunity? Being a disciple of White Jade Capital is my greatest fortune.”

His voice thundered across the plaza. The scholarly air vanished, replaced by a killer forged in blood and fire. Pale blue spiritual energy coiled around him, his pressure bursting forth.

The array's force met his, but Nie Changqing stood unshaken. A gale whipped through the plaza as he advanced toward the six. His pressure made them tremble. The eighth, weakest in cultivation, buckled first, knees slamming into the tiles like a tolling bell.

The third, Miao Renyu, a name poetic and serene, struggled to draw his bow, arrow quivering as he aimed. With a twang, it shot, spinning with piercing force. Nie Changqing didn't flinch, striding forward. The arrow halted inches from him, blocked by an invisible barrier. He flicked it, redirecting it toward the elder.

The arrow streaked, grazing Miao Renyu's cheek, drawing blood, and tore toward the elder's face like lightning splitting the night.