

Starlit Path 133

Chapter 133: Tang Xiansheng Enters the Capital

West County, East Yan River

In the grand tent, Luo Mingsang, draped in a gauzy skirt, gently applied ointment to Xiang Shaoyun's wounds. The Overlord sat bare-chested, his body a map of fresh, oozing gashes from battles with the purple-smoke figures, alongside old scars. Luo Mingsang's slender fingers traced them with heartache. No success was accidental; even a prodigy like the Overlord bore the marks of relentless effort.

Unfazed, Xiang Shaoyun read a secret missive. After tending his wounds, Luo Mingsang sat in a corner, placing a long zither on her lap. Her delicate fingers plucked, filling the tent with melodious notes. Xiang Shaoyun's stern face softened; her music washed away his cares. Folding the missive, he closed his eyes, savoring the sound.

"Tang Xiansheng, that old tortoise, enters the capital... with ill intent," he mused. "Joining the emperor to crush North and West Counties? Where does he get the nerve?" He smirked, unperturbed. "Let him come. My West Liang warriors fear no fight."

North County

Tantai Xuan's face was grim, the bitter defeat at Buzhou Peak fueling his rage and sorrow. Leading thirty thousand troops to seize the Dragonland, he was thwarted by a lone Daoist and the dragon's glare,

which decimated his forces. His heart bled. Worse, he felt cursed, perpetually denied immortal fate. Why? Had he offended the heavens?

Mo Beike entered the tent with Mo Ju, fan in hand. “Lord, immortal fate is just that—fate. Don’t dwell on losses,” Mo Beike advised.

Tantai Xuan shook his head. “You don’t understand, Giant. The dread of death’s gaze, the frustration of grasping at immortal chances and failing—you can’t know.” The world was transforming, yet he stagnated, unable to claim a Dragon Gate while others—South County, West County, the capital—thrived. “It’s truly pitiful,” Mo Beike admitted, stroking his beard.

Tantai Xuan’s lips trembled. Mo Ju spoke, “Lord, South County’s Tang Xiansheng rode to the capital at dawn, likely to ally with Great Zhou against North and West Counties.”

“Alliance? Nonsense! That coward Tang Xiansheng, richest in the realm, has no ambition? Who’d believe that?” Tantai Xuan slammed the table. Mo Beike nodded. “Tang’s cunning, not ordinary. The Daoist Sect’s Xie Yunling won’t bow to him, but the Sword Sect might. Their ambition could make South County a winged tiger.”

Tantai Xuan clenched his fists. “If he dares come, he won’t leave.” Mo Beike cautioned restraint. “South County’s strong, with a Dragon Gate. And...” His face grew grave. “Tang Xiansheng met secretly with the Southern Barbarians’ high priest.”

The tent fell silent. Tantai Xuan’s eyes narrowed, Mo Ju gripped his fan tightly. “That dog! Colluding with foreigners? Treason!” Tantai Xuan roared, pacing. “Even in chaos, I’d never weaken Tianhan Pass. Without it, West Rong’s locusts would devour us. Internal strife is one thing, but involving foreigners? Unforgivable!”

His family had fought West Rong for generations, losing countless heroes, including his sons. His hatred for such betrayal burned. Mo Beike calmed him. "The news isn't confirmed, just rumors." Silence returned.

*Imperial Capital

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A carrier pigeon delivered a secret missive to the palace. A young eunuch hurried across the nine-fold stone bridge to Yuwen Xiu, who was feeding raw meat to the black dragon from a bloody bucket, sleeves rolled up. Sensing the eunuch's fear, he spoke without turning. "Speak."

"Your Majesty, South County's Tang Xiansheng rides to the capital with great gifts, seeking to pledge loyalty to Great Zhou," the eunuch reported.

Yuwen Xiu paused, handing the bucket to an attendant and wiping blood from his hands. Taking the missive, he squinted. "That old fox, Tang Xiansheng, up to no good. I hear he's forming a South Manor Army—ambitious. Is he here to negotiate?" No fool, Yuwen Xiu had grown since Zhao Kuo's rebellion. Once, he'd have rushed to the National Teacher; now, he pondered alone, learning to rely on himself.

"Cooperation? To crush North County and pacify West Liang?" He smiled. "Have General Jiang prepare to welcome Governor Tang."

The eunuch hesitated, feeling Yuwen Xiu's subtle pressure. Shivering, he bowed. "Yes."

Under the blazing sun, Chi Lian, in a black slit dress revealing glimpses of her thighs, drew eyes along North Luo's streets. Bai Qingniao, clutching Little Phoenix One and carrying a basket of chicks, followed, uneasy under the stares. At the lake's dock, Chi Lian gazed at the mist-shrouded Lakeheart Island, inhaling deeply. "Qingniao, be respectful on the island," she warned.

"Sister Chi Lian, you've said that ten times. I'm tired of hearing it," Bai Qingniao replied, petting her chick.

Chi Lian approached a fisherman's boat, requesting passage to the island. The old man refused outright—Lakeheart Island was the Young Master's forbidden domain. Even a hefty silver ingot didn't sway him; fishing in the lake was already a mercy. Undeterred, Chi Lian bought the boat for two ingots. The fisherman, delighted, left with his rod.

"Get on," Chi Lian said. Bai Qingniao, basket on her back, hopped aboard. Chi Lian, a martial artist, propelled the boat with a pole, shooting it forward. Little Phoenix One peeked from Bai Qingniao's collar, wings flapping, chirping at the lake's spiritual energy. Bai Qingniao, curious, peered into the misty surroundings as the boat glided.

Suddenly, something massive surged beneath, scattering fish. Chi Lian froze, gripping the pole. Bai Qingniao swallowed hard, clutching her chick. A fat fish splashed, then vanished in ripples. A dark shape loomed below, erupting in a spray of water. A yellow, scaly creature with gills and whiskers emerged, snorting steam.

Bai Qingniao and her chick froze in terror. Chi Lian, bristling, drew a dagger from her thigh, pulling Bai Qingniao back. She stared at the fearsome creature. A gentle, refined voice cut through the mist from the island. "Little Yinglong, don't scare them."

A powerful suction yanked Little Phoenix One from Bai Qingniao's grasp. "Cheep?!" It flapped frantically, but the faster it flew, the closer it got to the island. With a final, heart-wrenching cry, it vanished into the mist, as if parted forever from Bai Qingniao.