

Starlit Path 134

Chapter 134: The Chick's Strength is Your Strength

North Luo Lakeheart Island

A dragon?! Chi Lian froze, staring at the basin-sized yellow dragon head, its fine scales and gill-like frills radiating menace. Hearing Lu's voice from the misty island, the dragon's eyes swiveled. With a boom, it dove into the lake, its massive wings churning waves that rocked the boat. Chi Lian steadied Bai Qingniao, heart pounding from the dragon's overwhelming presence, which had paralyzed her dagger hand. This place was eerie. Why had the lord sent Qingniao here to cultivate?

The mist thickened, oppressive and chilling. Suddenly, a ding-dong echoed, as if someone walked on the lake. A figure emerged unhurriedly—Li Yue, whip at her waist, fox-like face smiling. “The Young Master invites you to the island.” Without Chi Lian's effort, the boat glided deeper into the lake. The mist parted like curtains, revealing an island steeped in ethereal aura. Ten towering chrysanthemums and jade-like peach trees with budding blossoms adorned it.

The boat docked. At one corner, two elders sipped tea. Beneath a giant chrysanthemum, a boy punched with dragon-like roars. Yi Yue, who guided them, sat cross-legged to cultivate. Chi Lian, holding Bai Qingniao's hand, found everything—people, scenery—strange. They hadn't even glimpsed North Luo's Young Master.

On White Jade Capital's pavilion, Lu leaned against the railing, holding the rigid Little Phoenix One, lying like a cooked chicken. “Playing dead?” he chuckled. Spiritual energy formed a feather in his palm. Lifting the chick by its wingtip, he tickled it. The lifeless chick squawked, unable to endure. “A phoenix fledgling, yet to master its power,” Lu mused. “This look suits you—perfect for playing the pig to eat the tiger.”

He liked the chick, tossing it lightly. It looked miserable but, sensing Lu's terrifying aura, stayed meek. Endure now, soar later

, it seemed to think. Lu flicked its rear, spiritual energy propelling it like a spinning ball. Flames erupted as it opened its beak, emitting a piercing cry that startled Bai Qingniao and Chi Lian below. Crimson flames danced on its feathers, transforming it into a radiant sun soaring above.

The lake exploded with a dragon's roar, Little Yinglong's heavenly aura shaking Little Phoenix One's flames. The dragon burst from the water, chasing the chick. Screaming, Little Phoenix One glided like a fireball, pursued by the dragon in a playful dance.

Chi Lian's heart skipped, glancing at the pavilion where a blurred white-robed figure sat. "North Luo's Young Master!" She pulled Bai Qingniao to kneel in reverence. Lu remained unmoved. "For the chick's sake, you may stay and cultivate. Your path is simple: the chick's strength is your strength. Raise it well." His voice echoed in their ears.

Bai Qingniao and Chi Lian, unable to see his face, felt growing unease. Chi Lian, relieved to secure a place in the world's safest haven, relaxed. Lu's temperament seemed mild, not as fearsome as rumored. "You may leave," Lu's voice added faintly. "Don't linger, or face the consequences."

Chi Lian's face stiffened. Glancing up, Lu was gone. Hesitating, she wanted to stay with Bai Qingniao but feared his wrath. "Qingniao, stay and behave. Don't provoke the Young Master. Wait for the lord," she urged. Bai Qingniao nodded reluctantly. Chi Lian boarded the boat, poling swiftly away.

Alone, Bai Qingniao felt uneasy but soon grew bored, ignored by all. She released her chicks from the basket, and they scampered wildly. Little Yinglong and Little Phoenix One chased above. Spotting Ni Yu, Bai Qingniao bonded with her over shared age and chatter. When Bai Qingniao mentioned her knack for chicken soup, their friendship soared—girls connect in wondrous ways.

Buzhou Peak

The crimson sunset set clouds ablaze, like burning paper, fleetingly radiant. On a bluestone, a ragged-robed Daoist sat silently, gazing at the fiery sky. He'd lingered a day and night, but the cave behind remained still. Attempting entry, he was repelled by murderous intent. Li Sansi sighed, knowing Zhu Long's change stemmed from that "immortal."

Clenching his fists, hair shadowing half his face, he radiated loneliness. Tapping his flute on the stone, he played a melancholic tune. Memories of Zhu Long surfaced, stirring reluctance. "Dragonland... just a cage binding you," he murmured. "I'm too weak to approach or free you. But one day, I'll grow strong, tear down your chains, and set you free."

Setting the flute down, he left a jar of bamboo leaf wine on the stone. With his wooden sword, he cleared the peak's corpses, glanced back, and descended. Half a day later, he returned with another wine jar, smiled, and left decisively, vowing to return to free Zhu Long. At the mountain's base, he mounted his tethered green ox, swigging fiery liquor, vanishing into the twilight.

Long after, under moonlight, the flute and wine sat quietly. A snake-bodied, human-headed figure emerged from the cave, transforming into the blind Zhu Long. She took the wine, paused, then retrieved the flute, slipping back into the cave's darkness.

Imperial Capital

Tang Xiansheng's caravan, switching horses at relay stations, reached the capital after a day and night. As dawn's light pierced gloomy clouds, illuminating the ancient, weathered city walls, his convoy entered. The capital, scarred by rebellion, reeked of blood. "Smell that?" Tang Xiansheng said from the carriage. "The scent of death."

Tang Yimo, on horseback, blinked. He could smell that? Hooves clattered as elite troops approached, exuding iron-blooded aura. Tang Yimo tensed. "Yimo, dismount. Meet Great Zhou's war god," Tang Xiansheng chuckled, stepping shakily from the carriage with a maid's aid.

Jiang Li, in silver armor, stood impassive with his cold troops. Tang Xiansheng squinted, impressed—Jiang Li's command rivaled Bai Fengtian's legendary prowess. Had Bai survived, none could've risen, not even the Overlord. "General Jiang's fame precedes him. As formidable as General Bai!" Tang Xiansheng smiled.

His voice echoed alone on the street. Jiang Li and his men remained stone-faced. Tang Xiansheng's smile faded, replaced by calm. "I've brought gifts for His Majesty and a small token for you, General." Clapping, a maid presented a wooden box. From it, he drew a bamboo scroll. "General Bai Fengtian's personal battle notes, detailing his insights on brutal campaigns. I study them nightly, admiring him. Today, I part with it for you."

Jiang Li's eyes locked on the scroll, fists tightening. Tang Xiansheng had come prepared, knowing his weakness. The scroll was irresistible. Relaxing, Jiang Li took it, bowing slightly. "Governor Tang, please. Don't keep His Majesty waiting."

"Of course, His Majesty, the true dragon, shouldn't wait for an old man like me. My apologies," Tang Xiansheng said, smiling broadly. They proceeded to Zijin Palace. Under a gloomy sky, an oppressive wind swept the empty streets. Jiang Li led the way.

Tang Xiansheng, hunched, grabbed Tang Yimo's arm. As thunder rumbled and rain poured, cloaked figures in conical hats emerged on rooftops. Lightning flashed—the signal. They leaped down, rain splattering their cloaks, swords drawn, sheaths piercing walls. Blades sliced through the downpour, venomous and lethal, aiming for Tang Xiansheng.

Jiang Li's eyes narrowed, stunned. His soldiers drew weapons, clanging metal echoing. Silver spears shattered rain, piercing the curtain. Who dared assassinate Tang Xiansheng in the tightly guarded capital?