

Starlit Path 135

Chapter 135: Perhaps It Was the One in Zijin Palace

Imperial Capital

Silver blades tore through the rain, martial energy exploding, turning droplets into dense mist. The cloaked, conical-hat-wearing assassins were formidable, each at grandmaster level. Their oppressive force warped the falling rain, filling the capital's main street with dread. Jiang Li, gripping his silver spear, felt stifled. A cloaked figure blocked him, their blade slashing without lethal intent yet raising his hackles. His spear clashed, splashing water meters high, but the assassin stood firm, unyielding.

Jiang Li was pinned down. The assassins, like specters in the rain, surged toward Tang Xiansheng with deadly intent. Who could it be? Jiang Li's eyes narrowed, his spear weaving silver blooms. Many wished Tang Xiansheng dead—county governors, the Overlord, Tantai Xuan, the Mo School—all fearing South County's amassed power, a tiger poised to strike. His death would shatter that momentum unless a new leader emerged, leaving South County irrelevant in the world's struggles.

Yet Tang Xiansheng, famously cautious, rarely left South County, unlike the bold Overlord. Protected by layers of guards, he was untouchable. His rare venture to the capital was a golden opportunity. But Jiang Li, repelling an assassin, sensed familiarity. "It shouldn't be... Killing Tang here would push South County to align with Great Zhou, a move neither North nor West County wants." Rain streamed down his helmet, pooling at his chin.

These assassins, disciplined like elite soldiers, weren't Mo School—lacking their chaotic style. Mo Beike wouldn't risk this, knowing failure would hasten South County's alliance with Great Zhou. Jiang Li's spear swept, eyes locked on the cloaked figure.

Tang Xiansheng, drenched, clutched Tang Yimo's arm, unfazed. "I'm used to this," he said calmly. "Yimo, my life's in your hands." Tang Yimo, hair plastered to his forehead, stepped forward, splashing water

three feet high. Activating his first meridian, a faint red aura swirled, repelling rain. “A cultivator!” Jiang Li gasped, surprised at the strength beside Tang Xiansheng.

Tang Yimo’s piercing gaze swept the assassins. With a roar, he launched like a cannonball, elbow smashing an assassin’s blade to pieces. The cloaked figure spat blood, flying back meters. The others froze, then drew blades infused with faint spiritual energy—trained cultivators, albeit weak ones. Tang Yimo retreated to Tang Xiansheng, hands weaving. Rain gathered into a massive water shield before them.

The assassins’ spiritual-infused blades, semi-transparent, sliced through the rain, arcing toward them. Tang Yimo roared, veins bulging, and slammed the shield down. The blades struck, rippling the shield before dissipating. The lead assassin, facing Jiang Li, faltered. Jiang Li, switching to his sword briefly but reverting to his spear, tore the assassin’s cloak, glimpsing their face. His heart skipped.

“Withdraw!” a low voice commanded. The assassins leaped to rooftops, vanishing into the rainy haze. Tang Yimo didn’t pursue, wary of a diversion. Jiang Li, watching them flee, lost his expression, glancing toward Zijin Palace. Tang Xiansheng wiped rain from his face, his smile enigmatic. Jiang Li ordered cleanup and led them to the palace.

Book Pavilion

Rain blurred the windows. Master Kong Xiu stood watching, banana leaves bending under the downpour, water dripping. Mo Tianyu entered, draping a crane cloak over him. “Teacher, it’s cold,” he said.

Kong Xiu coughed. "The capital reeks of blood. This rain cleanses it but masks new deaths." Mo Tianyu, half-understanding, poured hot tea, leaves swirling in the green liquid, and handed it to his teacher. "Teacher, Tang Xiansheng was attacked on the capital's street. The assassins had spiritual energy."

"With the eight Dragon Gates open, the world's changed. Cultivators, though rare, are less so now," Kong Xiu said, blowing on his tea. "Tianyu, who do you think ordered this?"

Mo Tianyu hesitated. "Shall I cast a hexagram?"

Kong Xiu's face darkened. "No hexagrams. Just your thoughts."

"It's hard to say. Anyone could want him dead, yet no one fits perfectly," Mo Tianyu said. "If I must guess... perhaps the one in Zijin Palace."

Kong Xiu paused mid-sip, eyes fixing on Mo Tianyu as rain thundered outside.

North Luo Lakeheart Island

Lu, leaning in his wheelchair, sensed the capital's events but cared little. Tang Xiansheng's fate didn't concern him. Morning wind brought heavy clouds, brewing rain. As the first cold drop fell, the lake rippled, and a downpour began. Ning Zhao held an umbrella, shielding Lu as she pushed him into White Jade Capital's pavilion. Lighting sandalwood incense, she warmed wine, adding a plum for fragrance, and handed it to him. "Young Master, the rain's damp. Warm yourself," she smiled.

Lu accepted, sipping the warm wine, its heat dispelling the rain's gloom. Before him sat the spiritual pressure board. He played a game of Mountain and River Strategy, then stored it. Closing his eyes, he seemed to rest, but his mind probed his expanded spiritual energy range, crossing mountains and rivers, reaching beyond Great Zhou's Tianhan Pass—his former limit. Beyond, he sensed barren lands of bones and sand. Bored, he withdrew.

His system panel flared. The [Authority] tab's [Preaching Platform] flickered. Intrigued, Lu tapped the Phoenix Plume armrest, diving into the platform. A familiar sensation surged, and rows of prompt text scrolled before his eyes.