

Starlit Path 142

Chapter 142: The Weight of Age

If the battle within the city was a one-sided slaughter, the clash outside was a fierce struggle between lions and tigers.

Nie Changqing, having broken his inner shackles at the Daoist Sect, had stepped into the Body Zang realm. Li Sansi, aided by the Candle Dragon and enduring inhuman torment, had also crossed that threshold. Both stood at the Body Zang realm, a level far beyond the cultivators of their time. Though they were new to this realm, their organs yet to be tempered, their combat prowess dwarfed that of the Qi Core realm. The spiritual energy in their Qi Cores was double that of its peak, coursing through their bodies, amplifying strength and physique.

Li Sansi swept his wooden sword, slicing the rain curtain. A sword aura, like a dragon, surged toward Nie Changqing. Nie's butcher knife spun rapidly, his white robes billowing in the storm as if stirred by a breeze. The knife shot forward like black lightning.

Li Sansi tapped his sword, unleashing six or seven strikes in an instant. The blade met the butcher knife's edge but was forced back by its sheer power, each step splashing water three feet high. His eyes narrowed. He dragged his sword along the ground, sending raindrops flying as sharp arrows. Spiritual energy surged, and as he danced with his sword, the rainwater at his feet coiled into a circular pattern.

Nie Changqing's knife hovered before him. With a tremor, his spiritual energy poured out, solidifying the knife's faint shadow into something tangible.

"One Sword Fish-Dragon Dance," Li Sansi called, his Taoist robes flaring as he thrust his sword.

“Knife Control,” Nie Changqing replied coolly.

He flung his arm forward, and the butcher knife, now a massive blade, carved an arc like a crescent moon, splitting the rain in two. Li Sansi’s form blurred, his sword strikes mimicking a fish-dragon’s dance, clashing against the knife. But Nie’s controlled blade didn’t waver.

Boom!

The knife struck where Li Sansi had stood, cracking the earth and sending rainwater gushing into the fissures. Nie pressed his advantage, relentless as a tiger. His palm waved, guiding the knife through the air, shattering raindrops. The water hitting his face and body fragmented, vaporized by the heat of his spiritual energy.

Li Sansi struggled to parry with his wooden sword, overwhelmed by Nie’s onslaught. The knife came from all directions, a black dragon relentless in its assault. Each clash drained Li Sansi’s spiritual energy, his face paling as he retreated, his robes muddied.

Nie frowned. Both were in the Body Zang realm, yet Li Sansi seemed weaker than expected.

Suddenly, both men—one dominating, the other battered—looked toward the city. A faint voice echoed through Beiluo: “With the sun breaking through after the rain and peach blossoms blooming on the island, I honor your era’s close.”

The words shook them. Nie sheathed his knife, stepping back, stunned—it was the young master’s voice. Li Sansi, panting and slumped on the ground, gazed skyward. The horses before the carriages whirled uneasily. An oppressive force gripped everyone, their faces contorted in awe.

Boom!

A faint explosion rang from the heavens. A translucent hand seemed to pierce the sky, shattering the storm-laden clouds. Golden sunlight pierced the leaden veil, bathing the earth.

“It’s over,” Nie Changqing said, his butcher knife at his side, his emotions tangled as he stared at the broken clouds. The young master’s strength remained as unfathomable and terrifying as ever. This single palm filled Nie with dread and defeat. He’d thought entering the Body Zang realm brought him closer to the young master’s power, but the gap was still endless.

Li Sansi, battered and bathed in sunlight, trembled. He felt an era’s end. Their fight no longer mattered—he’d been thoroughly outmatched.

From a distant carriage, Mo Beike lifted the curtain, gazing at the golden light piercing the clouds—a curtain call, radiant in its farewell. His wrinkled face froze. Beside him, Grandmaster Kong Xiu did the same, staring at the golden sky. They could imagine Xie Yunling and the others in the city, defeated but unregretful. Even in death, they’d shone brightly, fought fiercely.

Almost in unison, Mo Beike and Kong Xiu lowered their curtains. “Let’s go,” their voices, aged and weary, said from within.

They were old, after all.

“Yes,” Mo Ju and Mo Tianyu replied in sync, regret on their faces for missing the clash of eras. But today marked the end of the Hundred Schools’ time. A new era—White Jade Capital’s era of cultivators—would rise, shaking the world.

The carriages’ wheels turned, splashing mud. One headed east, the other west—one to North County, the other to the Imperial Capital.

Nie Changqing sheathed his knife, leaning against his carriage. He glanced at the mud-covered Li Sansi, nodding slightly, then drove toward Beiluo’s gates. It was time for his family to reunite.

Li Sansi stood outside the city, wooden sword in hand, stunned by the beating he’d taken.

At Beiluo Lake’s shore, the water churned with faint traces of terrifying spiritual pressure. Martial artists and scholars who’d gathered paled as the lake roared like a beast, waves crashing against the shore.

Lu Changkong’s expression was complex. Behind him, Luo Yue and Luo Cheng sighed. The Hundred Schools had fallen in Beiluo. Since Yin-Yang master Wei Luan, the city had become their graveyard.

Tang Yimo stood at the shore, staring through the mist to the island’s terror. For the first time since receiving his immortal legacy and opening his first vein, he tasted despair. He’d faced no rivals—soldier puppets in the Dragon Gate Secret Realm posed no threat. But the pressure from the island crushed his courage. Across the lake, he felt its overwhelming power.

“Beiluo... Young Master Lu!” Tang Yimo swallowed hard. He was still so far behind.

A carriage approached. Tang turned to see a white-robed man with a butcher knife at his waist, gently helping a Taoist nun from the carriage. "Ru'er, careful," Nie Changqing said.

The nun gazed at him, clutching his hair. Nie carried her to the shore, boarding a small boat. Tang Yimo stared at the man, who glanced back.

Boom!

The look struck Tang like a hammer, forcing him back several steps, blood welling in his chest. "So strong!" Fear gripped him; that glance carried the threat of the butcher knife severing his head.

"Who... is he?" Tang gasped.

A martial artist nearby answered, "With a butcher knife at his waist, that's undoubtedly Young Master Lu's coachman."

Tang's body shook. Coachman? Just a coachman? And so powerful? His pride shattered.

On the island, sunlight blazed. Peach blossoms bloomed across the peninsula, their pink petals like a maiden's flush, shy yet captivating. Spiritual energy swirled, thickening the island's air. Skyward Chrysanthemums and Biluo Peach Trees vied, exuding energy.

The young master sat in his Thousand Blades Chair, white robes fluttering, hair dancing. Ning Zhao folded her umbrella, standing quietly beside him.

He tapped the armrest, a crisp sound echoing across the island. Xie Yunling gazed at the cleared sky and golden light, its warmth banishing the rain's chill. Hua Dongliu, entranced, stared at the young master, the unforgettable sword still vivid in his mind.

"When the peninsula's peach blossoms bloom, they form a spiritual energy storm. Don't waste this rare chance," the young master said, his voice carrying across the island.

The words jolted everyone. Jing Yue sat cross-legged, absorbing energy. Yi Yue entered cultivation mode with focus. Nie Shuang ran to the chrysanthemums, practicing a fist technique, his small frame steaming as energy coiled around him. Little Phoenix crawled from Bai Qingniao's collar, bouncing like a fluff ball, then darted across the island, absorbing energy. Bai Qingniao, surprised, practiced her Nine Phoenix Transformation, energy swirling around her.

On the boat, Lü Dongxuan sprang up, no longer playing dead, and absorbed energy. Xie Yunling followed suit. Hua Dongliu and Gongshu Yu, untrained in cultivation, could only bask in the energy, their bodies subtly changed by its nourishment.

The young master turned to Ning Zhao. "Go. You're in the Body Zang realm, but don't miss this opportunity. The peach blossom storm is rare—its next occurrence is uncertain."

Ning Zhao's eyes flickered, her lips curving. She bowed. "Yes, sir." Her white dress billowed as she descended to cultivate.

Alone on the pavilion's second floor, the young master leaned on his chair, fingers brushing the Phoenix Feather sword's handle.

On the stone steps, Ming Yue played her pipa, notes like a storm of pearls, urgent and free. Inspired by the battle, she wove spiritual energy into her music, stirring the blood of those who heard it.

Lü Mu, unlike the others, didn't cultivate. He took out paper and pen, coughed blood, and wrote with it: "Rainy Beiluo, Lakeheart Island. Masters of Daoist Sect, Sword Sect, Mechanism School, and Tianji School challenged White Jade Capital's Lu Ping'an and lost. Lu Ping'an summoned peach blossoms across the peninsula with a thought, shattering clouds to bring sunlight, honoring the Hundred Schools' fall and an era's end."

Wiping blood from his mouth, Lü Mu's withered hands trembled as he tucked the message into a Tianji pigeon. With a coo, it took flight, shedding white feathers and vanishing into the mist with a burst of energy.

As the pigeon soared, the young master, leaning on his chair, squinted. Before his eyes, long-awaited system prompt text appeared: "Congratulations, Host, on completing the side quest..."