

Starlit Path 150

Chapter 150: The Sword Named Jingtian

The crimson sunset, tinged with the hue of an unripe yolk, cast its glow on the blood-stained white-robed figure standing on a lone boat. Leaning on his blunted sword, Jing Yue turned and said, "The Young Master won't see you. Please leave."

Tang Xiansheng's smiling face froze. This man has no tact at all. He knew of Jing Yue's reputation in the Sword Sect—a swordsman who, despite the creed of fearless advance, fled faster than anyone when danger loomed. Tang admired him once, seeing a kindred spirit who valued survival above all, just as he did. That's why he remembered Jing Yue. But now, he found himself despising the man.

Has Lu Ping'an even spoken? Tang thought. What gives this fool the right to say Lu won't see me? Straightening, he fixed Jing Yue with a stern gaze. "I've come specifically to meet Young Master Lu. Please pass on my request."

His tone was sharp, the courtesy of a smile unreturned. In Tang's world, respect was mutual—give face, get face. Jing Yue shook his head, aware of Tang's displeasure. Lu's voice had rung directly in his mind, unheard by Tang. "The Young Master truly said he doesn't wish to see you. You should go."

Grabbing the boat's pole, Jing Yue struck the water, sending ripples outward as the boat glided swiftly toward Lake Island, vanishing into the misty lake under the sunset's warm breeze. Tang's ornate robe fluttered as he turned to Luo Yue, forcing a smile that didn't reach his eyes. "That fellow's no good," he said, pointing toward Jing Yue's fading figure.

Luo Yue remained silent, suspecting Jing Yue had indeed received Lu's orders. "Governor Tang, that man is a Baiyujing disciple. If he says the Young Master won't see you, then that's final. Please leave."

Tang's face twitched. This was his first taste of rejection. Even the emperor had granted him an audience. Who was this Lu Ping'an to refuse him? "No wonder he's a cultivator," Tang said with a strained smile. "Such arrogance befits one." Undeterred, he added, "Very well, I'll wait by the lakeside until the Young Master is ready to meet me."

Luo Yue glanced at him, unimpressed. An old trick. But his expression turned odd as Tang sat on a clean stone step, wiping it with a cloth, and gazed at the picturesque lake under the sunset. Surely, such sincerity would sway Lu Ping'an.

Suddenly, Tang felt himself lifted from the step. "What?!" he exclaimed, struggling. The Dragon Blood Army soldiers, empowered by Dragon Blood Pills, held him fast. Luo Yue adjusted his armor, his voice flat. "Governor Tang, the Young Master just ordered you to leave the dock. You're in the way."

Tang's face flushed with shock and anger. Why? He'd heard Lu met with the Imperial Preceptor, the emperor, even the Overlord at midnight. Why not him? "You're joking, Commander," he said, his smile fading. "How dare you act without the Young Master's word?"

As the soldiers carried him to his carriage, a gentle voice echoed in his mind. "Oh? Joking? What's that you say?" Lu's voice, smooth as jade yet aloof, sent a chill through Tang. Who's speaking? How is this voice in my head? His son was a cultivator, but this was beyond his understanding.

"Some things I don't repeat thrice," Lu's voice continued, then faded. Tang sensed the displeasure and dared not press further. Lu Ping'an's temper was infamous, and Tang, ever cautious of death, feared pushing too far might trap him in Beiluo forever. With reluctant awe, he bowed toward the island and climbed into his carriage. "Back to the capital."

On Lake Island, Lu reclined in his Thousand-Blade Chair, sipping warm plum wine from a bronze cup. His white robe and hair fluttered in the breeze. He had no need to meet Tang Xiansheng; the man's intent to recruit him as a South Command advisor was transparent, and Lu had no patience for such schemes. A game of chess or watching Nie Changqing's team challenge the secret realm master was far more interesting.

Jing Yue returned, his boat gliding through the lake. Ni Yu and Nie Shuang exhaled in relief. Ni Yu, with a grimace, tossed back the wrapped Gathering Qi Pill. Jing Yue grinned and ascended to the pavilion's second floor. "Young Master," he said, kneeling.

Lu sipped his wine. "Well done. From today, you are a true disciple of Baiyujing."

Jing Yue's face lit up. "Thank you, Young Master!"

Lu nodded, twirling his cup. With a gesture, Jing Yue's broken sword flew into his hand. "This sword is ruined. As my disciple, you deserve a new one." His fingers grazed the guard of his Phoenix Feather Sword, flicking it free. The red blade burned Jing Yue's old sword into molten iron, which Lu's spiritual will shaped into a sleek, three-foot blade etched with intricate patterns. Tapping the blade thrice—tip, body, hilt—Lu infused it with spiritual energy. The Phoenix Feather Sword returned to its guard. With a wave, the new blade floated to Jing Yue.

"This is your sword. Name it yourself," Lu said. "A sword is the pinnacle of attack. Its intent can amplify its power. Don't let this blade down. Forge your sword intent and become a true swordsman."

Jing Yue's lips trembled with excitement. The sword, beautiful enough to stir his heart, was the first gift he'd ever received, and the one he cherished most. Holding it like a lover's hand, he vowed, Sword in hand, I live. Lu waved him away, and Jing Yue descended, caressing the blade.

A shadow appeared behind him, startling him. "May I see that sword?" a raspy voice asked. Jing Yue turned to find Gongshu Yu, the white-haired master of the Mechanism Pavilion, now under Baiyujing. His aged eyes were fixed on the sword. Sensing Jing Yue's hesitation, Gongshu said, "It needs a scabbard. Let me study it, and I'll craft one."

Jing Yue smiled and handed over the sword. Gongshu's excitement rivaled his own, his hands tracing the blade's patterns. "Worthy of the Young Master," he said. "This is a yellow-grade high-tier spiritual weapon, crafted with the essence of the Artisan's Manual." Reluctantly returning it, he added, "A fine sword, but it needs nurturing. A weapon is lifeless; a person gives it soul. Take Nie Changqing's butcher knife—lesser in quality, but infused with his spirit, it surpasses yours in combat. What's its name?"

Jing Yue stroked the blade, smiling. "My name is Jing, and this is my sky. I'll call it the Jingtian Sword."

"Jingtian?" Gongshu nodded. "Three days, and I'll craft a scabbard for it." He pulled out the Artisan's Manual, studying it eagerly. Had he not sensed Lu forging the sword, he wouldn't have noticed Jing Yue.

"Thank you, Elder!" Jing Yue said, touched. The sword, a gift from Lu, proved he was the Young Master's favored disciple.

In South Command's Tiandang Mountain, moonlight bathed the ancient stone steps of the Daoist Sect, now the Daoist Pavilion. A black-robed figure ascended slowly, crunching dried leaves. The sound woke a dozing gatekeeping boy clutching a broom. Seeing the figure, he started. "You..."

The figure chuckled, lifting the hood to reveal a savage, yet oddly alluring face. The boy's heart raced. That eerie charm... "A barbarian?!" he gasped.

The figure's orchid-like fingers tapped his forehead, and he slumped, dazed, hugging his broom. "The Daoist Sect... or rather, the Daoist Pavilion under Baiyujing?" the figure mused with a laugh. "Body Treasury is this world's peak power? Qi Core is like our qi condensation, Body Treasury akin to foundation building. But these new Body Treasury cultivators are mere novices. A peak Body Treasury might pose trouble." The figure's fingers grazed a coarse, bearded face, frowning in disgust. "This vile body."

"Lu Ping'an, the world's top cultivator, likely a mid-tier foundation builder at best. My spiritual clone should suffice, but caution is wise. I'll probe his depths first." With a husky, alluring chuckle, the figure tapped the boy's forehead again, sending a ripple through the air. The boy collapsed, senseless.

In the pavilion's hall, candlelight flickered. Xie Yunling, in a Taoist robe, his temples gray, wrote at an old table, studying Taoist arrays since his defeat at Lake Island. Arrays held great potential; with more spiritual energy, he could have troubled Lu Ping'an more. But his energy was too scarce.

Suddenly, his brush paused. The candle flickered wildly without wind. "Who's there?!" he shouted.

A husky, seductive laugh answered. A hooded figure stood at the door. In a blink, it vanished, reappearing behind Xie, a thick hand forming an orchid gesture on his shoulder.