

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 16: I, Ni Yu, Want to Cultivate Immortality!

Lu couldn't help but chuckle at his father's swift change of heart. Only those who experienced spiritual energy firsthand could grasp its allure. For seasoned martial artists like Lu Changkong, who'd reached the limits of their path, spiritual energy was a beacon of hope, a transcendence of their cultivation.

"Father, spiritual energy is potent, but true mastery comes from fully integrating it. Too much at once hinders progress, like forcing a seedling to grow," Lu said. "Take Sister Ning. If she'd fully mastered one strand, she could've crushed four Grandmasters yesterday. But her control was crude, requiring two strands to barely manage it." He added, "For a long time, I won't aid her further until she masters those two strands."

Ning Zhao, standing behind him, flushed with shame, dissatisfied with her performance. Lu Changkong, feeling the spiritual energy in his dantian, nodded thoughtfully. "Makes sense. Like vital energy, spiritual energy must be tamed. Man conquers heaven." As a veteran Grandmaster, his martial insight surpassed Ning Zhao's.

“So, Father, about my faction?” Lu pressed, eyes gleaming.

Lu Changkong paused, then laughed softly, studying his son. *Just for self-protection?* “What do you need?” he asked.

Lu leaned back, one hand propping his chin, the other tapping the wool blanket on his legs. “Not much. A plot of land and a building.”

Lu Changkong squinted, waving dismissively. “No land here. I’m a clean-handed city lord—pure as jade. But the Chen family has a plot in the east. Ask them. Call it rent.”

Lu’s eyes lit up, a grin spreading. The three major clans had colluded with Tantai Xuan, betraying the Lu family and Great Zhou. They’d mocked him mercilessly, wounding his spirit. Now, it was time to collect compensation for his emotional distress.

“Need a city guard unit?” Lu Changkong offered, knowing a faction required manpower.

“No need. My faction will be elite, not numerous,” Lu replied, chuckling as he signaled Ning Zhao to wheel him away. Yi Yue and Ni Yu followed. “Oh, Father, copy your blood-circulation technique for me. It’ll be useful,” Lu called back.

Lu Changkong, hands clasped, watched Lu’s wheelchair vanish around a corner, his eyes flickering. “Immortal fate, spiritual energy... the world’s truly about to change.”

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Ning Zhao pushed Lu out of the manor, Ni Yu scurrying to shade him with her umbrella. She hesitated, then spoke. “Young Master...”

Lu, dozing in his chair, cracked an eye, humming, “Hm?”

Ni Yu’s flat chest heaved as she steeled herself. “I, Ni Yu, want to follow you and cultivate immortality!” She feared losing her place as his maid if she didn’t strive harder.

“Oh?” Lu raised a brow, surprised by her ambition. Ning Zhao and Yi Yue looked equally stunned.

“You want to cultivate immortality? Your martial skills are poor, your talent’s lacking, and you’re lazy. What are you good at?” Lu teased, smiling.

Ni Yu, clutching the umbrella, flushed red. His words stung, but she fumbled, unable to name a strength. Finally, she mumbled, “Young Master... I’m good at eating!”

Lu paused, then burst into laughter. Ning Zhao and Yi Yue stifled giggles. Ni Yu deflated, defeated. Lu reached out, ruffling her hair. “Eating’s a blessing. Don’t worry—I’ll guide you to cultivate while you eat.”

Ni Yu’s eyes sparkled. As they left the manor, Ning Zhao asked gently, “Young Master, where to?”

“The three clans’ estates?” Yi Yue suggested.

Lu shook his head, lazy. “A butcher shop.”

Ning Zhao froze, doubting her ears. *A butcher shop? Not the clans?* Ni Yu's eyes lit up. "Young Master, craving pork?"

"No, I'm looking for someone," Lu said, smirking, toying with his slender fingers.

"Which butcher shop? East, west, or south? The market has a few," Ni Yu chirped, excited.

Lu shot her a deadpan look. "So talkative. Lead the way. Pick the wrong shop, and you're skipping meals."

Ni Yu's face fell. *Young Master's a devil! What happened to eating being a blessing?* Ning Zhao and Yi Yue burst out laughing at her crestfallen expression.

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"Boss, half a jin of meat, minced. Making dumplings for the wife tonight," a farmer in coarse cloth called, grinning.

Rows of red-and-white pork hung on hooks, a forest of meat in the butcher shop. Behind the counter, two figures sat on low stools, awaiting customers: a middle-aged man in a blood-stained apron and a big-headed child, about four or five years old.

“Shuang’er, stay back,” the man said, standing as business arrived. The child nodded, big eyes blinking, out of place amid the bloody meat.

The man flicked a heavy cleaver from the cutting board, spinning it with a gust of raw wind. He sliced a chunk of pork without weighing it, as if its weight was second nature, scraping off skin and blood. His blade flashed, dazzling, followed by rapid chopping sounds. The meat was minced, wrapped in a lotus leaf, tied, and tossed to the customer, who left satisfied.

The man slammed the cleaver into the board, wiping his hands on his apron, and turned to the child. “Father, more customers,” the boy said, pointing, his voice childish.

The man stiffened, whirling around. A wheelchair’s wheels grated against the sticky floor, like chewing sticky rice cakes. Instinctively, he shielded the boy, his weathered eyes sharp with caution.

“Six butcher shops in Beiluo, and I’ve finally found you,” a faint voice called.

A frail youth in a wheelchair, legs draped with a wool blanket, approached, pushed by a stunning maid. He smoothed the blanket, smiling at the man. “Daoist outcast, Nie Changqing... is that you?”

Nie’s pupils contracted, a murderous aura rising. “Oh? Looks like I got the right one,” the youth said, tilting his head with a gentle laugh.

Behind the counter, Nie’s killing intent thickened as he gripped the cleaver’s handle, veins bulging. “Sent by the Daoist School?” he rasped, voice bitter. “After all these years, they still won’t leave us be.”

Lu smirked, propping his chin. “The Daoist School sent me? Hah, are they even worthy?”