

Starlit Path 174

Chapter 174: A Chick Falls from the Sky

The air fell deathly still. Ni Yu, head tilted back, stared at the familiar figure in the wheelchair, her face freezing as her chubby cheeks stiffened. Even the sugar-coated pill dropping into the snow didn't sting as much as it should—after all, a quick dust-off would make it edible again.

“Young... Young Master?!” Ni Yu stammered.

Lu, seated calmly, gazed at her without a hint of reproach. His temper, after all, was famously mild. With a glance, he summoned a lakeside pebble to float before him. His finger traced across it, carving words as stone dust fell. With a flick, the pebble smashed down, crushing the fallen pill with a squelch.

“Three months in seclusion, and you've been slacking,” Lu said evenly, leaning back. “That pebble holds the recipe for the Body Tempering Pill. Study it. I expect a finished product in three days.”

Ni Yu's hands trembled as she picked up the pebble, heart aching for her crushed pill. Young Master, are you a demon? Even my candy isn't safe? The dense script on the stone confirmed it was a pill formula—only Lu would etch something so crucial so casually. She pouted but didn't dare protest.

“Young Master, are you done with seclusion?” Ning Zhao asked, eyes bright, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Lu nodded.

“Jing Yue and the others have left to aid the counties against the barbarians,” Ning Zhao added. “The world faces a great crisis.”

“I know,” Lu replied, unruffled. Ning Zhao paused, then nodded. Of course he knew—though he rarely left the island, he sat in his pavilion, omniscient of the world’s affairs.

Snowflakes drifted down, flecking their hair, though none touched Lu, repelled by an invisible aura. Clad in a white crane cloak, he propped his chin with one hand. His Thousand Blades Chair rolled down from the pavilion, gliding toward Beiluo Lake’s surface, parting the water like a lone boat.

Ni Yu clutched the pebble, and Ning Zhao watched, puzzled. Yi Yue, training nearby, hurried over. Sensing Lu’s presence, Little Yinglong burst through the ice, only to dive back at Lu’s soothing gesture. At the lake’s center, Lu raised a hand, splitting the water to reveal a massive golden orb, its five elemental energies swirling within. Its majestic aura awed Ning Zhao, who couldn’t even meet its gaze.

“What... is that?” she whispered, shaken.

Ni Yu, gripping the pebble, swallowed hard. “Could it be... a giant sesame ball Young Master made?”

Ning Zhao shot her a look, speechless.

On the lake, Lu’s hair fluttered as he touched the orb—now the size of a wok—pulsing with planar origin energy. A hum rippled through the air. Above White Jade Capital, clouds parted, forming a vortex like an inverted funnel. The world began to shift subtly.

In South County, under Nanjin City's relentless rain, the battlefield reeked of blood, but the tide had turned. Jing Yue, his white robes pristine, thrust his Jingtian Sword, unleashing sword energy that tore through barbarians, collapsing their bodies. Each strike honed his sword intent.

Hua Dongliu, watching from the ramparts, nodded approvingly. Jing Yue's simple thrusts embodied the essence of swordsmanship—returning to purity through simplicity, a difficult feat. Hua Dongliu had spent thirty years forging his Eastward Flow Sword Intent, a force like a rushing river. Jing Yue sought the same, aiming for an intent uniquely his own.

Leaping down, Hua Dongliu drew Morning Chrysanthemum, unleashing a torrent of sword shadows that surged like water. Landing beside Jing Yue, he said, "Sword intent requires a breath of conviction. Know what your heart seeks, what your sword seeks. Understand its intent, and it will manifest." He smiled. "In this era, spiritual energy makes it easier to forge intent. Feel it."

Jing Yue nodded, closing his eyes, his Qi Core surging. Hua Dongliu charged into battle. Though江湖 outcasts, they were part of this world, duty-bound to fight the barbarians. With aid from Jing Yue, the Dao Pavilion, and the Sword Pavilion, South County gained the upper hand, the barbarians retreating.

Tang Yimo, with his second meridian open, fought like a demon, slaughtering the black-robed priests. From the forest, the ground rumbled, and a towering figure emerged, propelled by shifting earth. Tang Yimo tensed, feeling immense pressure.

“A White Jade Capital cultivator?” the burly man in a black robe said, his movements graceful despite his bulk. Glancing at Jing Yue, his gaze settled on Tang Yimo. “You practice demonic arts, fallen to sin.”

Tang Yimo, skin red and veins bulging, didn't bother with words. He shot forward, cratering the ground. This man was likely the mastermind behind the barbarian assault—killing him would end it. But the man's earth-manipulating grace outpaced Tang Yimo's attacks.

“Such temper,” the man said. “I'm peak Foundation Establishment. Your technique grants Foundation-level combat power, but it's merely physical. True strength lies in sorcery. What use is a strong body if you can't touch me?”

Tang Yimo's eyes burned red, his speed pushing his body to bleed as the second meridian strained him. The man waved, summoning a massive stone pillar. Tang Yimo shattered it, but the man glided away, conjuring more spikes. Tang Yimo crushed them relentlessly.

“Impressive, but a body has limits,” the man said, clapping. Two earthen hemispheres surged, encasing Tang Yimo in a sphere that thudded to the ground, dust falling.

The man glanced at Nanjin's walls. “Lord of the Plane...” he murmured, fingers crossed elegantly. More black-robed priests emerged, their soulless eyes casting spells like puppets.

Tang Yimo's entrapment shocked the defenders. Jing Yue's eyes snapped open, a sharp aura surging. Hua Dongliu's words had sparked an epiphany. “My sword intent... is to press forward!” he whispered. Gripping Jingtian Sword, he recalled thrusting through Beiluo Lake's waters, each stroke lengthening his reach. His aura sharpened, and he thrust, a simple strike tearing a gash in the earth, its sword energy piercing 500 meters.

The man raised stone slabs to block it. The sword energy shattered fifty-two before fading, merely cutting a strand of his hair. "Swordmaster," he said, squinting. These natives—Tang Yimo's raw power and Jing Yue's swordsmanship—were exceptional.

Jing Yue, frowning, took a Qi Gathering Pill from a cloth, swallowing it to restore his energy. If one strike failed, he'd try again. The man waved, and his priests summoned spikes at Jing Yue. The Dao Pavilion, led by Xie Yunling, formed an array, a spiritual disc blocking the spikes.

On Nanjin's ramparts, Sima Qingshan appeared, weary from three months in the dragon gate. Wielding his brush, he unrolled a scroll, using rain as ink. Spiritual energy surged, and he painted. The battlefield vanished for the burly man, replaced by a rainy lake, an endless cage. On the ramparts, Sima Qingshan, pale but smiling, had trapped him in a rain-drawn painting.

In North County, the battle was brutal, lacking powerhouses like Nie Changqing. Jiang Li led the charge, briefly gaining ground, but the Xirong overwhelmed them. The Xirong King, watching Jiang Li's silver armor, sighed. "A splendid world with many heroes... a pity."

Respecting their valor, he stepped from his chariot, accelerating into afterimages toward Jiang Li. A chilling dread gripped Jiang Li, who drew his short sword. A shadowy figure perched on his horse's head, pointing a finger. The sword shattered, and Jiang Li flew back, spitting blood.

North County cultivators and Chi Lian rushed to protect him, but the Xirong King's wave sent them flying. Standing before Jiang Li, he said, "You're a hero. Tell me your name."

“You’re not the Xirong King,” Jiang Li said, blood dripping.

“My actions are sinful, so I hide my face to ease my conscience,” the king admitted, conflicted.

“Hypocritical nonsense,” Jiang Li sneered. “You don’t deserve my name.”

The king’s pity faded, his finger poised to strike Jiang Li’s brow. Chi Lian charged desperately. Time slowed for Jiang Li, colors and sounds fading. Then, a fluffy yellow chick fell from the sky, bouncing into his arms with a bewildered look.

The king’s finger paused, startled. What... is that?