

Starlit Path 183

Chapter 183: Can Myriad Cultivation Paths Grant Immortality?

Li Sansi, sustaining his breath, reached Tianhan Pass at night, panting steam in the snowy darkness. The moonlight hid behind thick clouds. Guided by North County soldiers, he ascended the ramparts. Known for resisting Xirong invaders, despite once blocking North County's army at Buzhou Peak, Li Sansi was respected.

"Is it over?" he murmured, robes fluttering. A North County general nodded. "It was tough. The Xirong King led a massive assault. Without White Jade Capital's cultivators, Tianhan Pass would've fallen." Li Sansi's emotions churned. The snow-covered battlefield hid blood and bodies, but its killing aura lingered. Had he arrived late and the pass fallen, he'd be consumed by guilt.

"My delay cost lives. I can't escape this fault," he said, snow melting on his face. Raising his wooden sword, he struck the rampart's stone thrice, a vow. "I'll pursue the Xirong army to atone," he declared, leaping off the wall into the snowy night. Soldiers watched in awe—a lone swordsman chasing ten thousand foes, a rare heroism.

In South County, under a bright moon, Tang Xiansheng lounged on a rocking chair, hearing reports of Nanjin City's hard-won victory. Relieved, he'd feared defeat against the ferocious Five Barbarians. "Sword Pavilion, Dao Pavilion, and White Jade Capital's Jing Yue stopped the Nanman," the aide said.

"Even White Jade Capital intervened?" Tang Xiansheng mused, gazing at the moon. "They foresaw this. Immortal fate spreads—my son Yimo, Beiluo's Young Master Lu, and even the barbarians gain it. To immortals, all are equal, balancing the world. But barbarians, greedy with power, aim to ravage Zhou, repeating history's chaos. Fortunately, White Jade Capital reigns supreme."

He asked about the capital. The aide hesitated. "We sent word, but the emperor ignored South and West Counties' plights, only sending a decree to North County. Its contents are unknown. The Imperial Preceptor left for East Yang County." Tang Xiansheng smiled. "The emperor disappoints the Preceptor. Power blinds him. I hope his decree isn't too harsh, or Dantai's temper might spark upheaval."

Coughing blood, he sighed, "Birth, aging, sickness, death—human nature. If only I could ask Lu Ping'an: Can myriad cultivation paths grant immortality?" His moonlit figure seemed desolate.

In the capital, snow blanketed silent streets. At the city gate, Kong Nanfei entrusted two letters to black-robed messengers. "One to North County, one to West County—don't mix them up," he ordered. The messengers, vowing to deliver, rode into the night, splitting at a fork.

Ten miles out, crossbow bolts struck. One horse fell, its rider tumbling. Black Dragon Guards, the emperor's elite, descended from trees, blades gleaming. The messenger, a cultivator, fled but was overwhelmed. Blood stained the snow as the Guards retrieved the letter and vanished. The second messenger met a similar fate, both dead, unaware to Kong Nanfei.

In the Zijin Palace, candlelight flickered. Yuwen Xiu, alone on the dragon throne, studied a black dragon carving. The old eunuch entered, chilled by the eerie scene. "Majesty, the Black Dragon Eighteen Armor intercepted the messengers as ordered," he reported. Yuwen Xiu's eyes lit up. "Show me the letters."

Reading the bloodstained letters, he laughed wildly. The eunuch, ignorant of their contents, sensed their importance. "My great teacher, my Preceptor," Yuwen Xiu sneered. "Why defy me? Why abandon me? You planned to ruin West and North Counties, but I've uncovered your scheme!" His voice dripped with betrayal, fist clenched.

At Lakeheart Island, Jing Yue, Nie Changqing, and Lü Mudui returned via Yinglong's dragon gate. Ni Yu, under her wok, waved excitedly. Ning Zhao, stabilizing her aura, opened her eyes, nearing her fifth Zang. "Not bad," Nie Changqing said, having completed his own. "Where's Nie Shuang?"

"With Bai Qingniao in North County," Ning Zhao replied. Nie Changqing's face darkened. "This Five Barbarians' chaos is unusual." Worried for his son, he suppressed panic. "Where's Young Master?" Ni Yu, munching a pill, said, "On the lake, in the fog." Unable to consult Lu, Nie Changqing rushed back to North County, fearing Nie Shuang faced foes like the Buddha or golden-haired youth.

Jing Yue, regretting not warning Nie Shuang to flee strong enemies, joined the concern. Lü Dongxuan and Lu Changkong arrived by boat, unable to pierce the fog. Jing Yue recounted South County's battle, mentioning the earth-spike foe. "Barbarians with immortal fate?" Lu Changkong mused. "Fan'er's three-month ceasefire anticipated this."

Suddenly, the fog stirred, a bell-like chant echoing. Mingyue trembled, recognizing the Buddha's chant from South County. A massive Buddha shadow loomed, oppressive. A silver blade tore it apart, revealing Lu in his wheelchair, emerging from the collapsing fog.