

Starlit Path 185

Chapter 185: No Such Thing as Tranquil Years

The old man stuffed a carefully crafted secret missive into the beak of a sky pigeon, a creature that seemed to have gained a spark of sentience. White feathers fluttered as the pigeon beat its wings against the falling snow, piercing through the snowy veil and vanishing into the thick fog, leaving behind a trail like flowing water.

He watched the pigeon disappear, stroking his large gold chain with a grin that made his beard quiver.

Elsewhere, a young man leaned on a bamboo staff beside a peach tree, glaring at the old man with a hint of resentment. That old fool... why didn't he use his own blood? The young man thought, deciding it was time to speed up his plan to prepare a bucket of pig's blood.

Meanwhile, a young woman continued her alchemy, hunched over a blackened cauldron. She studied a stone tablet inscribed with the formula for a body-tempering pill, lost in thought. Alchemy was her focus—she took it seriously. Cultivation? That was out of the question. She could only refine pills to prove to the young master she wasn't idling. The body-tempering pill was far more complex than the qi-gathering pill, with strict requirements for the age of the herbs. Fortunately, the young master never restricted her spending, so after memorizing the formula, she dragged a companion along and left the island at the lake's heart.

After a nauseating, vomit-filled boat ride, they arrived in Beiluo City and hurriedly gathered the needed herbs.

Back on the island, another young woman was deep in cultivation. She had heard the young master's words: these three days marked the early phase of the world's transformation, the perfect time to reap the greatest benefits. She was determined to seize this chance. Her talent wasn't exceptional, but her diligence and drive to grow stronger were unmatched. As the young master had predicted, these days

were ideal for cultivation, especially on the island, where spiritual energy was abundant and the world's origin was unleashed. Her qi pill realm was nearing perfection, teetering on the edge of breaking through to the body treasury realm.

The birth of the world's origin had made things easier. Advancing to the body treasury realm was far less daunting than before. The origin's importance was undeniable—it simplified cultivation for those with talent and shattered the old barriers to progress, making it easier to grasp the deeper truths of practice. The young master had even infused attributes into the plane's origin, promising that the body treasury realm would soon manifest unique properties, adding vibrant diversity to the world of cultivators.

Another figure, one of the renowned sages, was also cultivating. As a sage, his progress was swift—his exceptional talent was undeniable. But after a while, he lost interest in cultivation and returned to the forging pavilion in the White Jade Capital, diving back into crafting artifacts. Cultivation? he thought. Nowhere near as fun as forging.

A young woman, no longer cultivating, climbed the pavilion with a basket of freshly washed green plums. She prepared to brew wine for the young master, who sat in his wheelchair by the railing, a gentle breeze brushing past as he toyed with a golden Buddhist relic bead.

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A man crossed the dragon gate of Beiluo Lake, stepping into the dragon gate of Bei County. His heart was heavy with worry for his son's safety. This war was no ordinary conflict—it was a clash of cultivators, a battle unlike any other. Whether facing the Buddhist monk or the golden-haired man, even someone as skilled as he had to exert every ounce of strength. If such a figure appeared in Bei County, it would be a disaster.

Still, he suspected a certain swordsman might also be in Bei County, so he didn't panic. Crossing through the central palace and along the ropes, he entered the Candle Dragon Gate. Suddenly, a terrifying aura rippled through the air. He spotted a young girl holding a flute, her eyes closed, her hair cascading loosely. The sight of her stirred an inexplicable tension in his heart, as if he were facing some immense, terrifying entity.

He was no ordinary man—he had fully tempered his five organs and could manifest spiritual armor around his body, marking him as a top-tier cultivator. Yet, before this girl, he felt like a lone boat adrift in a vast ocean. Suppressing his unease, he bowed respectfully. “I am a disciple of White Jade Capital, seeking passage to Bei County. Please, allow me through.”

The girl's flute melody ceased. Lowering her instrument, she waved dismissively. “For the sake of my father's aura, go.”

Puzzled but unwavering, he nodded, sheathed his butcher's knife at his waist, and dashed across the iron cables, crossing the floating island and exiting the dragon gate. Before leaving, he bowed to the girl again. “Thank you.”

She ignored him entirely. Shaken, he realized the world still held many powerful beings beyond his knowledge—a sobering reminder to stay vigilant.

Emerging from the Candle Dragon Gate, he descended Buzhou Mountain and headed for Tianhan Pass. Upon arriving, he found the local lord strategizing with advisors. A scout's report startled the lord: a white-robed figure with a butcher's knife at his waist approached, unstoppable by the county's soldiers. His spiritual pressure overwhelmed all resistance.

The lord stepped out and saw the man in white. “Clad in robes whiter than snow—is this a cultivator of White Jade Capital?” he asked.

An advisor, wrapped in a thick blanket, stepped forward. "This is the coachman of the young master of White Jade Capital."

The lord's expression grew complex. The young master's coachman wields such presence? Truly remarkable.

Sensing the lord, the man in white nodded slightly. The lord ordered his men to lead him to his son, who was recovering. A young soldier greeted him warmly, while a young woman, guilt-ridden, admitted her role in the boy's injuries. A small phoenix peeked from her collar, but one glance from the man sent it scurrying back.

The man's stern face softened as he examined his son's condition. Hearing the young woman's account of the battle, he touched his son's cheek with a mix of emotions. "Take care of him," he instructed her. "When I return, we'll head back to White Jade Capital."

"Where are you going?" she asked, startled.

"To settle a score for my son," he replied. His white robes billowed as he stepped onto the city wall, then leaped down, striding through the swirling snow. His blade intent tore through the storm, scattering flakes in his wake. As a father, how could he stand idly by when his son had been wronged? He would make things right.

The lord watched him vanish into the snow, a lone figure with a single blade heading deep into the enemy's territory. "The cultivators of White Jade Capital... true heroes," he remarked, a hint of envy in his voice. Free and unbound, they lived with unmatched valor.

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A secret missive from White Jade Capital soon spread, reaching a teahouse in the imperial capital. A beautiful woman read it, her eyes widening. “By Beiluo Lake, the young master will preach...”

The simple words carried profound weight. The last missive had halted wars for three months. Now, with that truce ended, another missive emerged. Was there a connection? Feeling the faint spiritual energy in her core and the strange currents in the air, her eyes gleamed. The recent upheaval in the world—could the young master’s sermon be tied to it? For the first time, she felt an urge to visit Beiluo City.

She ordered the missive disseminated, and when it spread, the world stirred. The foremost cultivator would preach by Beiluo Lake. For practitioners, whose path was long and arduous, guidance from such a figure could illuminate the way, revealing the essence of cultivation.

News of the missive sparked a pilgrimage. Countless cultivators set out for Beiluo, making the city the world’s focal point once more—not for a challenge, as when the four sages confronted the young master, but simply because he would speak.

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On the road from the imperial capital to Dongyang County, a carriage rattled through heavy snow. The driver, clad in a straw hat and thick coat, shivered as he urged the horses forward. Inside, an old scholar read bamboo slips by the light streaming through the window, deep in thought.

A young man sat uneasily beside him. He had cast a divination for the scholar and their academy—a most auspicious sign. Yet doubt gnawed at him. His divinations had failed repeatedly since visiting Beiluo City, each attempt to prove himself met with reality's harsh rebuke. Clutching three copper coins, he muttered, "It's auspicious. It must be."

The scholar glanced at him, his wrinkled face breaking into a faint smile. "The world is a curious place, young one. The more you fear, the more likely things will go the way you dread. Keep a steady heart—good fortune follows a calm mind."

The carriage pressed on, wheels carving ruts in the snow. As they entered Dongyang County, the scholar's expression grew grave. The county faced invasion from the eastern barbarians, and the air was thick with tension. Unlike other regions teeming with cultivators, Dongyang had almost none. Its dragon gate, rather than a resource, was a perilous dead end, useless for nurturing practitioners. Thus, in this war, Dongyang relied on sheer numbers and primitive tactics.

Yet the enemy wielded cultivators, making the battle brutally lopsided. The county could not fall—too many civilians depended on it. The local governor had ordered a desperate defense. At dawn, with snow still falling, the governor, clad in fine armor, hurried from the border defenses. A refined man with a long beard and phoenix-like eyes, he spotted the scholar's carriage and exclaimed, "Master!"

The scholar stopped the carriage and, with the young man's help, stepped down, wrapped in a thick cloak. He greeted the governor warmly. "Did His Majesty send you in response to my plea for aid?" the governor asked eagerly.

The scholar hesitated, then smiled. "Indeed, His Majesty sent me to assist Dongyang."

The young man glanced at him, surprised. The governor, overjoyed, led them to the city walls. Beneath the icy ramparts, wounded soldiers huddled—some bloodied, others missing limbs, bandaged tightly. “These are the lucky ones who survived,” the governor said. “This war is brutal. The enemy is stronger than ever, with strange powers and fearless warriors. We hold the line, but I don’t know how long we can last.”

The governor, a scion of the Yang family, led the scholar along the snow-covered walls. “These must be the cultivators you spoke of,” he said. “They’re terrifying—capable of turning the tide of war. If not for our soldiers’ and generals’ fearless sacrifices, Dongyang would have fallen, and the enemy would be ravaging our lands.”

The scholar nodded solemnly, his heart heavy as he saw the maimed soldiers and martial artists, some missing arms or legs. He sighed. No tranquil years exist—only those who bear the weight for others.

The young man, trailing behind, grew pale. “Master...” he began, but the scholar silenced him with a wave. The young man’s heart sank. The ill omens... they’re coming true again.