

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 2: The Dawn of Spiritual Energy

The vastness of the Five Phoenixes Continent was beyond Lu's comprehension. The Great Zhou Dynasty, however, was expansive, originally spanning sixteen prefectures. The founding emperor appointed sixteen governors to oversee these territories, but over successive reigns, their number dwindled to thirteen. Now, the imperial family's influence had waned. The previous emperor died abruptly at thirty, leaving six children—five daughters and one son eligible to inherit the throne. Thus, an eleven-year-old crown prince ascended, with the Grand Preceptor governing as regent. Yet, the young emperor's age sparked unrest across the land.

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Lu sat in his wheelchair. The innate spiritual energy that once clogged his meridians had been cleared, granting him the ability to walk. After years of paralysis, this sudden recovery was a miracle he kept quiet, choosing to remain in his chair for now.

Ni Yu, pushing the wheelchair, was still reeling from the shock. Her wide eyes sparkled with curiosity and excitement, her face flushed red. The image of Lu wiggling his toes—an unexpectedly playful moment—kept replaying in her mind, shattering the aloof image she held of him. More astonishing, though, was the fact that his crippled legs could move.

At the garden's edge, two maids appeared, drenched in sweat from their frantic search. Seeing Ni Yu pushing Lu, unharmed, they sighed in relief.

“Ni Yu, let Sister Ning take over,” Lu said to the flushed girl behind him.

The eldest maid, Ning Zhao, stepped forward, taking Ni Yu’s place. Ni Yu stuck out her tongue and retreated to stand with the other maid. Ning Zhao glanced at Ni Yu’s red face and Lu’s relaxed demeanor, her brow arching slightly. *Something’s up*, she thought.

“Sister Ning, did you go to my father?” Lu asked, noticing her expression but offering no explanation.

“I’m innocent,” Lu thought to himself, his conscience clear.

“Master is in the study, preparing to summon Physician Hua for you,” Ning Zhao replied softly, her tone laced with concern.

“No need for the trouble. Just take me to the study,” Lu said.

Ning Zhao nodded, guiding the wheelchair out of the garden toward the study. With his spiritual energy fully awakened, the system had granted Lu access to new “permissions.” He refrained from exploring them, wary of slipping into an obsessive state that might alarm his father or the maids.

At the study, the carved vermilion doors stood open. Ni Yu and the other maid waited outside as Ning Zhao carefully wheeled Lu inside. The study had no threshold, designed for Lu’s ease of access.

From afar, Lu spotted a towering figure in armor, helmetless, exuding a commanding presence. The sound of the wheelchair’s wheels against the floor drew the figure’s attention. His sharp gaze, steeped in the aura of battle, seemed to chill the air.

“Father,” Lu called out, still adjusting to the unfamiliar term despite his merged memories.

Lu Changkong, seeing his frail son in the wheelchair, softened instantly, his fierce demeanor melting away. “Fan’er, Ning Zhao said you seemed dazed. Are you unwell?” he asked, concern evident. Upon hearing Ning Zhao’s report, he had rushed back from the city walls, still clad in armor.

Inspecting Lu and finding him unharmed, Lu Changkong relaxed slightly.

“I’m fine, Father. Sorry to worry you,” Lu said with a smile.

Lu Changkong frowned slightly, sensing something different about his son. Despite his paralysis, Lu was never deemed a failure—not in Beiluo City or even the Great Zhou capital. Beyond Lu Changkong’s status, Lu’s own merits shone. Unable to practice martial arts, he excelled in Confucian scholarship, earning praise from the Grand Preceptor himself. Yet, Lu Changkong knew his son’s disability weighed heavily, fostering insecurity and a temper that set him apart from others. Smiles were rare for Lu, a fact his father understood well.

“Leave us,” Lu Changkong said to Ning Zhao, waving her out.

Ning Zhao hesitated but bowed and exited, closing the door behind her.

“Fan’er, the world is in chaos. The twelve feudal lords have risen in rebellion, and Beiluo City, the northern frontline shielding the capital, bears the brunt. I must lead our forces myself, which leaves me little time for you. Don’t hold it against me,” Lu Changkong said, his eyes tinged with guilt.

Lu felt a warmth in his heart. Lu Changkong was a devoted father, whose care had kept Lu’s spirit intact despite his disability.

Gritting his teeth, Lu decided to reveal the truth. Hiding it would only lead to questions later. He met his father’s gaze, eyes gleaming with resolve.

“Father, I have something to tell you.”

Lu Changkong’s expression grew serious. “Speak.”

Instead of words, Lu pulled back the blanket covering his legs. Gripping the armrests, he shakily stood.

The room fell silent.

Then, a surge of vital energy erupted, shaking the scrolls on the walls. Lu Changkong rushed forward, supporting Lu, his eyes wide with disbelief. The world's greatest physician had declared Lu's legs permanently useless, yet here he stood—a miracle.

Overwhelmed, Lu Changkong's lips trembled. "Fan'er, take a few steps?"

Lu's face reddened under the intensity of his father's aura, a hallmark of this low-martial world's warriors. Taking a deep breath, he steadied himself and, with Lu Changkong's support, took halting steps. Though unsteady at first, nearly falling, he moved.

Lu Changkong burst into laughter, the sound echoing through the study.

After a while, he gently helped Lu back into the wheelchair. Though curious about the recovery, he chose not to press. The fact that Lu could walk was blessing enough.

His expression turned grave. "Fan'er, tell no one of this except your three maids. Your recovery is a miracle, but if word spreads, the Grand Preceptor will likely summon you to the capital under the emperor's orders."

"Keep it secret as long as possible. Ning Zhao and the others were handpicked and trained for your protection. They're loyal. Trust no one else," he warned.

Lu understood the stakes. The Great Zhou Dynasty was crumbling, its control reduced to six cities—roughly one prefecture. To prevent rebellion, the Grand Preceptor held the heirs of the other five city lords in the capital, ostensibly to study Confucianism but truly as hostages. Lu's disability had spared him this fate, as he posed no threat. If his recovery became known, the other lords would demand his presence in the capital, and the Grand Preceptor would comply.

Lu nodded in agreement.

"Good. Rest well. With your legs healed, I can face your Uncle Tantai with confidence," Lu Changkong said, a cold edge in his voice.

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Back in his room, Lu's maids busied themselves tidying up, giving him a moment of peace. His mind stirred, and the system panel appeared before him:

****Host**:** Lu

****Title**:** Qi Refiner (Permanent)

****Qi Refinement Level**:** 1

****Soul Strength**:** 1

****Physical Strength**:** 0.5

****Spiritual Energy**:** 10 Strands

****Transformation Rewards**:** None

****World Rating**:** Five Phoenixes Continent [Low-Martial]

Permissions: [Missions], [Preaching Platform], [Spiritual Energy Deployment]

With his spiritual energy awakened, the system had unlocked new permissions. His gaze settled on the permissions tab, now displaying three options: Missions, Preaching Platform, and Spiritual Energy Deployment. Only the last was active, glowing faintly, while the others remained dim, unresponsive.

Focusing on Spiritual Energy Deployment, Lu closed his eyes, and a prompt appeared:

Spiritual Energy Deployment Permission: Based on the host's current Qi Refinement level, spiritual energy from the host's qi core can be deployed to a designated area at a minimum of 100 times amplification, enhancing the cultivation environment and sparking a cultivation surge. Note: Deployment into a human body does not amplify.

Lu's eyes lit up. Transforming a low-martial world into a mystical one required abundant spiritual energy. This permission solved that problem. He wasn't just generating spiritual energy—he was its courier, poised to ignite a spiritual renaissance.

The ability to infuse spiritual energy into others was even more intriguing. He could create cultivators.

His eyes snapped open, a spark of inspiration flashing through them. Perhaps it was time to test this ability on a martial artist.

In the room, Ning Zhao, delicately rolling up a scroll, froze, sensing an intense gaze. Looking up, she saw Lu, elbow propped on the armrest, chin in hand, watching her with a mischievous, almost roguish smile.