

Starlit Path 29

Chapter 29: Mocking the Scholars, Nie Wields the Blade

The young master knew Chen Beixun would stir trouble, but he hadn't expected such a... pedestrian tactic. It almost felt beneath him, dulling his interest. Using Drunken Dust Pavilion as bait, exploiting the scholars' penchant for romantic flair to incite their righteous fury—this was meant to break his spirit, a classic attack on the mind. The old Lu Ping'an, crippled and mentally fragile, might have crumbled under such pressure, his spirit knotted with despair. But the young master was no longer that man.

Seated in his wheelchair, he straightened, the gentle breeze lifting a stray lock of hair. Flower boats bobbed across the lake, their Confucian scholars standing tall, one hand behind their backs, their gazes cold and proud as they stared down the fishing boat. Their eloquence flowed like rivers, their righteous qi unyielding. In the Great Zhou Dynasty, the Imperial Preceptor's influence had elevated Confucian ideals, making scholars a revered force.

A low hum filled the air. As the scholars' accusations rang out, the lake's mist began to swirl, forming a vortex. Nie Changqing's hand rested on his butcher's knife, his expression hardening. The young master raised a brow at the spiraling mist. "Confucianism values 'qi'—not spiritual energy, but righteous qi born of conviction," Nie Changqing explained, his voice hoarse. "Great Confucians can repel armies with a single word. Exaggerated, perhaps, but that's the power of righteous qi. It's intangible but takes form."

He eyed the vortex, formed by the scholars' fervent rhetoric. "This qi can kill invisibly."

Raising his knife, he continued, "The Hundred Schools are known for three great arts: the Mohists' mechanical cities, Confucianism's righteous qi, and the Yin-Yang School's dream-killing technique. Righteous qi is why Confucianism ranks among the top schools. These scholars, though, are far from true Confucian masters."

The young master nodded, feeling the faint pressure of the mist vortex on his skin. Compared to a cultivator's spiritual pressure, it was laughably weak. "It's got a touch of mystique," he said, smirking. He'd underestimated this low-martial world.

"What now?" Nie Changqing asked, gripping his knife.

"Young Master, let me cut them down and shatter their righteous qi," Ning Zhao said, her face icy. "Reasoning with them is futile."

"You can't kill them," Nie Changqing countered. "They hold imperial titles, students of the Preceptor. Even with spiritual energy, you're only a first-rank grandmaster. You can't break the righteous qi of a hundred scholars."

"Outtalked and untouchable—what are they, rogues?" Ning Zhao fumed. "A grandmaster has to endure this?"

The young master chuckled, patting her slender waist. "I'm patient, but that doesn't mean they can dance on my head." He glanced at the twenty-some flower boats, his smile playful. "Old Nie, kill."

Reason was for equals. Against those beneath him, he'd crush them first.

The moment "kill" left his lips, Nie Changqing's eyes blazed, as if flames ignited in his pupils. A strand of spiritual energy surged from his qi core, his blood energy roaring with six resounding bursts that echoed like thunder. He'd warned the young master, but the decision was made. His role was to act.

Deep down, he burned with frustration. Scholars, armed only with words, dared to suppress hard-forged grandmasters like him. Why? A hundred scholars? Righteous qi? Today, Nie Changqing would cleave through them for satisfaction.

The old boatman ducked into the cabin, leaving the pole at the stern. Nie Changqing leapt, seizing it and hurling it like a javelin. With a stomp, the boat dipped, then surged upward, propelling him into the air. The pole skimmed the water's surface, and Nie Changqing landed lightly, his toes balancing on its narrow tip, gliding forward.

His cloth robes snapped in the wind, his butcher's knife gripped tightly as he skimmed the lake. "A mere martial brute dares raise a blade against us?" three scholars on a flower boat roared, standing at the prow. "Young Master Lu, you dare incite your servant to attack us, bearers of imperial titles and the Preceptor's righteous qi?"

A gust seemed to rise, their robes billowing, their forms sharp against the pressure of their righteous qi, now a swirling vortex of mist. Nie Changqing's glide slowed, the scholars' relentless rhetoric weaving an intangible force that dulled his boiling blood energy.

On the fishing boat, the young master watched with keen interest. This was the most fantastical sight he'd witnessed in this world. Righteous qi lacked lethality but excelled at psychological and atmospheric suppression. His eyes flickered as he pondered: what if righteous qi merged with spiritual energy? Spiritual energy was destructive, righteous qi oppressive. Could their fusion truly repel armies with a single breath, banishing evil in an instant?

The thought intrigued him. If such power existed, it would feel truly fantastical. The current righteous qi, barely slowing Nie Changqing, was a parlor trick by comparison.

Nie Changqing's face grew solemn as the wind howled, rippling the lake. Standing on the pole, facing dozens of boats and a hundred scholars, the pressure was immense, his knife trembling faintly. The pole stalled, blocking his path to the flower boats.

Then, the young master's calm voice cut through the wind, reaching Nie Changqing's ears. "If your lightness skill falls short, strike from afar. Use spiritual energy to wield the blade remotely. Can you do it? Don't worry about running dry."

Nie Changqing's body jolted. The young master knew of the Blade Control Technique he'd mentioned—a method imparted by an immortal, unmastered due to his lack of spiritual energy. Now, with spiritual energy at his command, he could try.

He raised his head, his gaze piercing the scholars. A bold laugh erupted. Closing his eyes, his mind stilled, the cacophony of the scholars' voices, the wind, the water, and the gulls fading away. Only his butcher's knife remained, simple yet one with him. A strand of spiritual energy flowed, following the Blade Control Technique, an evolved form of the Taoist Blade Derivation Technique.

His heart calmed. The scholars' voices vanished. Spiritual energy coursed through his limbs, guided by the technique. Man and blade became one.

Nie Changqing's eyes snapped open, his hair rising. He raised the knife, a strand of spiritual energy wrapping its blade. Slowly, he released his grip. The wind stirred his hair, and the plain, black butcher's knife... hovered before him, defying gravity.

On the fishing boat, the young master's lips curved. He took the Spiritual Pressure Chessboard from a wobbly, seasick Ni Yu, placing it elegantly on his lap. Unhurried, he lifted the lid of the chess box, his sleeve pulled back, and plucked a glistening white piece.

Nie Changqing's face lit with awe and disbelief. "Blade control..." He laughed heartily, stomping the pole, which shot upright like a pillar in the lake. Leaping to its tip, he stood high above, arms crossed, then thrust them forward. The hovering knife spun rapidly around its axis.

His laughter boomed across the lake. With a downward slash of his arms, the spinning knife halted, its blade aimed at a flower boat. A faint, illusory blade shadow shimmered around it.

With spiritual energy as its guide, the blade struck from afar.