

Starlit Path 35

Chapter 35: I Cannot Abide the Slightest Grievance

At the lake's edge, the gap-toothed old boatman leaned against the boat, clutching his pole, grinning as he watched the courtesans, laden with their belongings, being ushered off Lakeheart Island. In the distance, Nie Changqing pushed the young master in his wheelchair toward the dock. Lu Ping'an's eyes were half-closed, sensing the slow recovery of his spiritual energy. Ni Yu, still shaken by the eerie power of the *Skyward Spirit Chrysanthemums*, trailed closely behind, her steps tentative.

They boarded the boat. The old boatman, full of vigor, drove the pole into the water, sending the vessel gliding smoothly, ripples fanning out. Ni Yu, predictably, slumped against the rail, resuming her seasick ordeal. Ning Zhao remained on the island to oversee the dispersal of its occupants and the cleansing of the newly named White Jade Capital.

On shore, the boatman rubbed his hands expectantly. The young master opened his eyes, giving him a meaningful look. "Reward him," he said lightly.

Ni Yu, pale and trembling, fumbled with a coin pouch, producing a piece of broken silver and handing it to the boatman. His face lit up with a toothy grin. The young master's custom carriage waited at the dock. Nie Changqing opened the side door, easing the wheelchair into the compartment. He took the driver's seat, coiling the whip, while Ni Yu, too queasy for the carriage's interior, crouched on the outer frame to recover.

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Crack! Nie Changqing snapped the whip, and the horse whinnied, pulling the carriage into motion.

Inside, the young master lifted the curtain, peering through the window at the boatman, who clutched his silver and pole, still grinning. Their eyes met briefly before the carriage sped off down the official road, severing their gaze. The boatman's smile widened, his missing tooth on full display. Humming a folk tune, he hopped onto his boat with a carefree air, his straw sandals slapping the deck as the vessel drifted across the lake.

In the carriage, the young master summoned the system panel:

****Host:**** Lu Ping'an

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

****Qi Refining Level:**** 2 (Progress to Level 3: 100/1000 strands)

****Soul Strength:**** 13 (Convertible: 2)

****Physical Strength:**** 1 (Convertible: 1)

****Spiritual Energy:**** 72 strands (Self-recovering)

****Transformation Reward:**** *Mystic Creation Qi Refining Manual*

****World Rating:**** Wuhuang Continent [Low-Martial]

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

****Sub-Permission:**** [Ten Thousand Methods Furnace (Lv1)]

His spiritual energy had climbed to 72 strands—decent but slow. Staring at the panel, he sank into thought. Since his soul strength surpassed 10, his senses had sharpened, and he could manipulate

objects, like directing his wheelchair. Stronger soul strength amplified such abilities. Physical strength, clearly tied to his constitution, was less urgent. Soul strength and spiritual energy were his priorities.

“I need to gather attribute points faster,” he mused. He’d deduced two ways to earn them: completing missions or achieving transformation milestones. Deploying spiritual energy to Ning Zhao, creating the first cultivator, had earned a reward. Perhaps any “first” in transforming this world could yield more.

The carriage raced to the grand gates of the Lu Manor. Nie Changqing helped the young master disembark, while Ni Yu, still lugging the chessboard, pushed the wheelchair. Yi Yue awaited at the entrance, her eyes brightening as she saw him. She bowed slightly. “Young Master, per your orders, all involved parties are in the dungeon, awaiting judgment.”

“Well done,” he nodded. “Take me there.”

Yi Yue bowed again, guiding the wheelchair toward the manor’s dungeon. As the city lord’s residence, the Lu Manor housed a prison for criminals. No city was free of sin, and dungeons were essential. The wheelchair’s wooden wheels clacked against the stone floor as they approached.

A young general in dark, gleaming armor stood guard, awaiting the young master. Though unfamiliar to Lu Ping’an, the general recognized him, stepping forward to salute. “I am Luo Cheng, at your service, Young Master.”

Lu Ping’an, one hand propping his chin, the other tapping the blanket over his legs, studied him. “Luo Yue’s eldest son?”

Luo Cheng nodded, surprised.

“Good,” the young master said, his lips curving. “What I’m about to do may get... intense. Can you handle it?”

Luo Cheng, helmeted, met the young master’s gaze, his demeanor resolute. “I’ve followed the city lord through mountains of corpses and seas of blood. What can’t I handle? Before he left, he ordered me to obey your commands and ensure your safety. Whatever you ask, I’ll do.”

His words were firm. The young master nodded. “Good. Let’s meet Little Chen and the others.”

Luo Cheng stepped aside, leading them into the dungeon. The air was damp, reeking of mold and blood. Dim torchlight flickered, illuminating torture devices stained with crimson. Prisoners in their cells didn’t clamor like in dramas from the young master’s past life; they sat silently, their gazes numb and cold.

Deeper in, the atmosphere grew noisier. “Lu Ping’an! How dare you do this?” a scholar shouted. “We hold imperial titles! Locking us up defies the Emperor and our Confucian Preceptor!”

“Release us! Scholars act with principle—on what grounds do you seize us?”

The confined scholars gripped the bars, roaring at the young master without decorum. He frowned. Nie Changqing’s hand tightened on his butcher’s knife, his icy glare sweeping over them. Yi Yue’s hand rested on her whip, her face cold. The young master raised a hand, stopping her.

He surveyed the scholars, a half-smile on his lips. "On what grounds? I suspect you've colluded with the three noble families and rebel forces to undermine Great Zhou. You know what the families have done. With my father in the capital, I rule Beiluo. What he won't do, I will."

Luo Cheng stepped forward, hand on his sword, his eyes sharp. The young master's words struck a chord, stirring his blood. He looked at the wheelchair-bound youth with growing anticipation.

The scholars, undeterred, hurled insults, their titled status emboldening them. They cursed freely, even the Emperor not spared. The young master's lips twitched. *I'm good-natured, but I can't abide the slightest grievance.*

"Luo Cheng."

"At your command," the general saluted.

"Kill them all," the young master said, his voice calm.

Luo Cheng's heart jolted, but a glint flashed in his eyes. "Understood."

At his order, the ironclad soldiers stormed the cells. The scholars froze, their curses dying. The soldiers wasted no words; cold steel flashed, and blood sprayed across the walls. Screams were brief, drowned by the thick stench of blood.

Deep in the dungeon, Chen Beixun's face twitched. Liu Ye and Zhu Yishan trembled in terror. Was this Lu Ping'an's intent—mass slaughter at a whim? Would they share the scholars' fate?

In their fearful gazes, the young master emerged from the shadows, his white robes pristine, his jade-like face bearing a springlike smile.