

Starlit Path 48

Chapter 48: The Throne Forged for Her

The night was deep.

In the land of Xiliang, within the grand encampment, Xiang Shaoyun snapped his eyes open. A terrifying surge of vital energy roiled within the tent. His eyes blazed crimson, veins bulging on his neck like twisted cords. His hair fanned out like steel needles, and his hulking frame reverberated with a menacing hum, causing the air to tremble faintly.

“Immortal!” he roared, his voice thick with fury and humiliation. Who did this immortal think they were to demand his submission? Xiang Shaoyun, the Overlord of Western County, knelt to no one—not the heavens, not the earth, not any being in existence.

His low growl, like a beast’s roar, echoed relentlessly, so fierce it seemed it could make the blood of anyone nearby boil. Two wisps of spiritual energy coiled restlessly around his massive arms.

“Shaoyun...” A gentle voice cut through the storm.

Bathed in moonlight, a young woman stood, her beauty ethereal, her eyes filled with concern as she gazed softly at Xiang Shaoyun. His rage softened at the sound of Luo Mingsang’s voice. He covered his face, shaking his head, her worried tone anchoring his turbulent emotions. Yet the sting of humiliation lingered—he, the master of Xiliang, forced to kneel before an immortal? Unacceptable.

Luo Mingsang, delicate and tender, stepped closer, wrapping her arms around his broad chest. “You need to temper that fiery spirit of yours,” she said softly. “You’re a commander now. You can’t act on impulse. Think before you act—brute force can’t solve everything.”

Her gentle words melted the fury on Xiang Shaoyun’s face. He ran his fingers through her hair, inhaling the faint fragrance, and chuckled. “Mingsang, you’re wrong. There’s nothing force can’t solve. If there is, it just means the force wasn’t strong enough.”

His voice carried an unshakable confidence. “I once thought I’d reached the pinnacle of Great Zhou’s martial path. But I was wrong. This immortal fate has shown me a broader world beyond.”

He raised his hand, the two wisps of spiritual energy flowing tamely in his palm. Luo Mingsang traced gentle circles on his chest, her voice soft but firm. “You lead the thirteen feudal lords now. Don’t let this distract you. Once you’ve reached the pinnacle and built your dynasty, I won’t stop you from chasing martial immortality. But for now, stay focused. Aligning with the Hundred Schools is like scheming with a tiger.”

Xiang Shaoyun’s lips curled into a smirk as he stroked her hair, his gaze piercing the tent’s walls, burning with ambition. “I promised to make you the queen of a king. This empire will be forged for you, this dynasty built in your name. As for the Hundred Schools? Hah—when I stand at the pinnacle, I’ll cast them all aside.”

“Rest easy, Mingsang.”

In the capital of Great Zhou, within the Imperial Study, Yuwen Xiu stirred from a reclining chair, his eyes flashing with shame and anger before settling into calm. “Your Majesty, did you obtain immortal fate?” a mild voice asked in the quiet room.

A flickering candle cast soft light. An elderly man in plain robes and straw sandals, his face ruddy and kind, looked at Yuwen Xiu. In his hand was a letter delivered by his coachman, its contents read without a trace of surprise on his face.

“Master, I suppose you could say I did,” Yuwen Xiu replied, rubbing his temples, uncertain.

“Suppose?” The Imperial Preceptor raised an eyebrow.

Yuwen Xiu hesitated before recounting his experience in the Preaching Platform. “A land of immortal fate... Wolong Ridge?” The Preceptor stroked his white beard, his aged face creasing in thought. He rose slowly, retrieving a worn, yellowed map from a stack of scrolls, its rough sketches depicting the kingdom’s terrain.

“Coiled like a dragon, nestled near Beiluo...” His finger tapped the mark for Beiluo City. “Wolong Ridge, about a hundred miles out?”

He tucked the map away, coughing lightly. “Your Majesty, the world is shifting. Heaven-blessed individuals with immortal fate are emerging, making the situation more unpredictable than ever.”

“As a heaven-blessed yourself, you mentioned two others whose identities remain unknown. And Lu Ping’an of Beiluo City—my instincts tell me he’s one as well. His retainer, capable of wielding a blade

from afar, may also be heaven-blessed. We cannot know how many such individuals exist, but this chaos... it's Great Zhou's chance to break the deadlock."

The Preceptor's old eyes gleamed like stars. Yuwen Xiu's own eyes lit up. As emperor, he saw the dire state of the kingdom clearly: feudal lords amassing armies, seizing cities with unstoppable momentum, while bandits roamed unchecked. Great Zhou's control had shrunk to the capital alone.

"Master, can the heaven-blessed truly save Great Zhou?" Yuwen Xiu asked, his voice tinged with urgency.

"You are the Son of Heaven. With the heaven-blessed at your side, you could pacify the realm and even cast down the Hundred Schools—not as mere rhetoric, but reality," the Preceptor said, gazing at the starry night beyond the window. "Rest now, Your Majesty. I'll visit Beiluo tomorrow."

Yuwen Xiu bowed respectfully and left, escorted by eunuchs waiting outside. The Preceptor watched him go, his kind expression softening further. Reclining in his rocking chair, he coughed lightly. "The older I get, the less useful I become. How many more burdens can I lift for His Majesty?"

The candle's flame flickered, deepening the room's shadows as a weary sigh lingered.

"A chess manual?" In the darkness, Lu was caught off guard. A chess manual as a reward? Was the system mocking their lackluster skills?

With a wry smile, Lu claimed the reward. “Chess Manual: Heavenly Strategy

—Low Mysterious Grade Soul-Forging Technique (Upgradable). By placing pieces according to the manual and visualizing the board’s momentum, soul strength can be restored and refined. Note: When paired with Mysterious Qi Refining Chapter, it enhances autonomous Qi refining speed.”

A mental image unfolded: black and white pieces arranged in intricate patterns. Lu’s vision blurred, conjuring a scene beneath an ancient pine. Two figures sat across a chessboard, sipping tea as leaves fell. Each move stirred seas and shifted stars, as if the board held the cosmos itself.

Snapping back, Lu grabbed a chessboard, placing it on their lap. Following Heavenly Strategy’s patterns, they began placing pieces. The manual detailed nine games, each more complex than the last. The first, Mountains and Rivers Game, required 32 black pieces and 29 white.

In the stillness of the night, the rhythmic clack of pieces filled the room. The deeper Lu delved into the game, the more alert they felt. Their depleted soul strength gradually replenished, reaching full restoration.

The night passed in play.

The next morning, Lu cleared the board and stretched, feeling invigorated despite the sleepless night. Their soul strength was fully restored. A knock came at the carved rosewood door. “Come in,” Lu called.

Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Ni Yu entered. Ni Yu carried hot water, her face flushed from the steam, while Yi Yue bore breakfast. "Morning," Lu greeted with a smile. A decadent morning marked the start of a fine day.

After being attended by the three maids and finishing breakfast, the rosewood door swung open. Ning Zhao pushed Lu's wheelchair at a leisurely pace, Yi Yue held an umbrella for shade, and Ni Yu followed, carrying the chessboard. In the courtyard, Jing Yue was already awake, rubbing his hands with a beaming smile. "Good morning, Young Master!"

Lu glanced at him, nodding, then shifted their gaze to Mo Tianyu, buried in the ground with only his head exposed, looking utterly wretched. "Keep an eye on him. If he dies or escapes, you're accountable," Lu said.

Jing Yue's smile froze.

"Ning, to White Jade Capital on Lake Island," Lu instructed, one hand on their chin, the other resting on a wool blanket draped over their knees.

"Yes," Ning Zhao replied with a light laugh, pushing the wheelchair out. Ni Yu and Yi Yue hurried after. Jing Yue was left alone in the courtyard, guarding Mo Tianyu's head.

Outside the manor, Nie Changqing waited with his sweat-drenched son, Nie Shuang, fresh from morning training. Lu nodded, and they followed. The group boarded a carriage bound for Lake Island.

Meanwhile, outside Beiluo City, five horses galloped, pulling a swaying carriage that slowed as it neared the city gate. There, Lu Changkong, clad in brocade robes, stood with Luo Yue and his son, Luo Cheng, both in plain attire.

As the carriage stopped, Lu Changkong stepped forward, clasping his hands and bowing. "Greetings, Imperial Preceptor."