

Starlit Path 56

Chapter 56: A Spark of Life in the Face of Death

A hundred miles from Beiluo, Wolong Ridge stretched across the plains like a slumbering dragon, exuding an oppressive aura. A carriage sped across the uneven terrain, halting at the ridge's base where the official road ended. The path grew rough, jostling the carriage violently.

The driver, sweating profusely, stopped. Lü Mudui stepped out, gripping his jade-green bamboo staff, and instructed the driver to wait. His gaze fixed on the ridge, fingers rubbing the three copper coins around his neck. The dragon-like ridge seemed to loom over him, as if watched by a pair of intimidating eyes, making his fingers tremble. "Immortal fate in Wolong Ridge?" he murmured, taking a deep breath. Clad in white, staff in hand, he ventured into the rugged mountain path.

The deeper he went, the heavier the oppressive air grew. From the distance, a dark-skinned mountain villager, carrying a bamboo basket, burst from the trees, panic etched on his face. Lü Mudui's eyes lit up, and he stopped the man.

"Run! There's a monster in the mountains, about to awaken!" the villager stammered. "It'll eat people!" He described the eerie phenomena deep in the ridge, his voice trembling. Lü Mudui's brow furrowed, his expression growing grave. The villager, seeing Lü Mudui still intent on advancing, gave up and fled, fear driving his steps.

As the villager vanished, Lü Mudui inhaled deeply, tapped his staff, and pressed on. Strange roars echoed through the dense ridge, startling birds into flight. At last, he reached the source of the terror—a massive pit where trees once stood. In its center shimmered a translucent, pale-blue dome, like an eggshell, radiating a mesmerizing glow. The oppressive aura emanated from it.

Lü Mudui trembled. Immortal fate! Young Master Lu's words were true. His usual calm shattered as he approached the dome, drawn irresistibly closer. Peering through its faint transparency, he glimpsed a majestic subterranean palace gate within. The secret realm of immortal fate! Lu hadn't lied.

His face flushed with excitement, he pressed closer, eager to discern the palace's details. Suddenly, a black shadow appeared on the dome's far side. A pale, ghostly eye pressed against the inner surface, staring directly into Lü Mudui's. A chill shot up his spine.

A terrifying pressure erupted from the dome, rippling through the air. Lü Mudui spat blood, his white robes stained, and stumbled back, clutching his staff, fear flooding his face. The dome must be the immortal fate's safeguard—without the Heavenly or Earthly Qi Tokens, entry is impossible. The realization struck him, followed by wild joy. The immortal fate is real! Laughing like a madman, he turned and sprinted away, staff in hand. The world would quake at this discovery.

By Beiluo Lake, the tense atmosphere dissipated. Mo Liuqi lay unconscious, sprawled on the ground, bloodied and broken. The Preceptor's wide robes fluttered, his back damp with cold sweat. That assassin had some skill—I nearly fell for it.

"Master, how should we handle him?" Lu asked with a faint smile, seated in their wheelchair. The Preceptor was the target and the one startled, so his opinion mattered.

Regaining his composure, the Preceptor smiled. "You subdued him, Ping'an. It's your call." He saw through Lu's interest in the assassin.

Lu nodded. "Uncle Luo, lock him in the dungeon. I'll interrogate him later."

Still shaken, Luo Yue clasped his hands. "Yes." He ordered Mo Liuqi bound tightly. As the ropes were tied, a cheap hairpin fell from the assassin's waist. Lu beckoned, and it flew into their hand. Crudely crafted, it bore two crooked characters: A-Zhu

. Lu's brow arched, glancing at Mo Liuqi.

The group collected themselves and headed to the Lu Manor, the assassination attempt dampening their mood. Inside the manor, Jing Yue sat bored on a stone chair, balancing a sword on one finger to keep it upright.

In the courtyard's center, Mo Tianyu's head poked from the ground, hair disheveled, lips cracked, blood dried on his face, eyelids drooping. "Don't sleep," Jing Yue warned, glancing at him. "If you pass out and don't wake, the Young Master will have my head. You sleep, you die, and I'm in trouble."

He smirked. "The top disciple of the Confucian School, reduced to this? Pathetic. Why act so high and mighty? Stay low-key like me—live longer. Can't win? Run. Can't run? Beg. Survive, and you'll see life's possibilities. You're lucky the City Lord pleaded for you. The last guy who strutted before the Young Master? His corpse is cold."

Jing Yue rambled, twirling his sword. Mo Tianyu's face flushed with anger, managing a weak protest: "Shut... shut..."

"You want me to shut up? Just say so! How was I supposed to know?" Jing Yue grinned, toying with his sword.

Mo Tianyu nearly choked, too weak to retort. Is Young Master Lu a devil, leaving me with this chatterbox to drive me mad?

Jing Yue was about to lecture further when he sheathed his sword and stood straight. Outside the courtyard, footsteps approached. Lu appeared in their wheelchair, flanked by the white-haired Preceptor in wide robes and Lu Changkong. The group entered, their eyes falling on Mo Tianyu's pitiful, buried state.

"Young Master!" Jing Yue flashed a sycophantic smile. "He's alive! Nearly died a few times, but my inspiring words reminded him of life's beauty. He clung on—a miracle of life!"

Lu glanced at Jing Yue, unimpressed by the shameless swordmaster. The Preceptor, stroking his beard, shook his head at Mo Tianyu's sorry state. "This troublesome disciple has caused you grief, Ping'an."

Lu smiled. "No trouble. A trifling matter." Pale blue energy swirled around them as their control over spiritual pressure sharpened. With a surge, the ground rumbled, and Mo Tianyu's body shot upward from the earth.

"Jing Yue, catch him," Lu said calmly, withdrawing the pressure.

Jing Yue sprang into action, his lightness kung fu stirring the courtyard's fallen leaves. He leaped, catching Mo Tianyu midair, and spun gracefully back to the ground, leaves swirling around them.