

Starlit Path 57

Chapter 57: White Jade Capital Shall Rise Among the World's Heroes

The courtyard was silent, save for the gentle rustle of leaves in the breeze. "Last year, in this courtyard, peach blossoms reflected the glow of faces..." Lu, seated in their wheelchair, tapped the armrest lightly, a faint smile playing on their lips as they recited the verse, watching the poetic scene unfold.

The others exchanged odd glances at Lu's words. Mo Tianyu coughed weakly, his voice laced with irritation. "Put... put me down!"

Jing Yue, with his pearwood sword case slung over his back, landed in the courtyard with a carefree grin. "You want down? Why didn't you say so earlier? How was I supposed to know? You're all about saving face, but it's just making you suffer. Can you even stand? The Young Master told me to catch you—think I wanted to hold you? If you want down, stop clinging so tight!"

Jing Yue prattled on, relentless. Mo Tianyu's face flushed red with anger, his cracked lips trembling as he tried to retort. Abruptly, Jing Yue let go. Thud! Mo Tianyu hit the ground hard, his landing anything but graceful.

"Alright, Tianyu, apologize to Ping'an. It's time we return to the capital," the Preceptor said, hands tucked into his wide sleeves.

Mo Tianyu, half-dead, staggered to his feet, every inch of his body screaming in pain. He'd thought death was certain—Lu's spiritual pressure had crushed him, leaving him helpless, teetering on the edge of oblivion. That powerlessness and fear had shattered his arrogance.

Lowering his eyes, he shakily raised his bloodied, mangled hands, clasping them and bowing to Lu. "My crimes are unforgivable. For the Master's sake, I beg... Young Master Lu's forgiveness." His voice was bitter, the taste of blood filling his throat.

Lu, one hand propping their chin, the other resting on the wool blanket over their legs, gazed at him as the breeze lifted their dark hair. "Go back and learn well from the Master. And... stop divining for others. You're really not suited for it."

Mo Tianyu flinched, his lips twitching as if stabbed in the heart. “Thank you for the advice, Young Master Lu,” he said, bowing again.

The Preceptor, surprised by Mo Tianyu’s humbled demeanor, regarded his disciple anew. The once-proud youth had changed—perhaps this ordeal wasn’t entirely a loss. With a complex expression, the Preceptor led the battered Mo Tianyu to a five-horse carriage, which thundered out of Beiluo.

The Preceptor was pleased with the trip. Lu’s strength revealed the true potential of a heaven-blessed, or as Lu called them, a cultivator. The Preceptor sensed a shift—perhaps the future belonged to cultivators. This could be Great Zhou’s chance to turn the tide. He trusted Lu, seeing no ambition for worldly power. Or rather, Great Zhou was too small for Lu’s true aspirations. The Preceptor had feared Lu would covet the throne, rallying armies like the thirteen warlords to fracture the empire. That, he knew, would spell Great Zhou’s doom.

Outside Beiluo, on the endless plains, hooves thundered, kicking up clouds of dust. Inside the swaying carriage, the Preceptor sat cross-legged, while Mo Tianyu lay flat, staring blankly at the ceiling.

“Do you harbor hatred, Tianyu?” the Preceptor asked softly.

Mo Tianyu’s face was wooden. “At first, I hated him to the bone. But... buried in the earth, time dragging like years, the hate faded. I even felt some gratitude.”

The Preceptor’s wrinkled face showed surprise. “Oh? You’ve changed.”

Mo Tianyu’s lips twitched faintly. “Hovering between life and death, one starts to see clearly. I used to think myself above all but you, Master. Now I see how laughable that was. Not just Young Master Lu or the Hundred Schools’ sages—even Xiang Shaoyun of West County, Jiang Li of Drunken Dragon City, or Junior Brother Kong Nanfei outshine me. My arrogance was a joke.”

The Preceptor’s smile deepened, stroking his beard with a warm expression. “It’s not too late to realize this. You mentioned a ranking of the world’s heroes, excluding the Hundred Schools. Care to share it with your teacher?”

Pleased by his disciple's clarity, he listened as Mo Tianyu, eyes regaining some spark, struggled to sit up. "My old ranking, excluding the Hundred Schools, placed Xiang Shaoyun of West County first—born with divine strength, an invincible grandmaster, unmatched in the world. Second, Mo Shougui of the Mohist School, heir to Mo Beike, who discards the dross and absorbs the essence of the Hundred Schools, a peerless talent. Third, Li Sansi of the Daoist Sect, riding a single ox with a wooden sword, defeating two thousand Western Rong cavalry and reclaiming three border cities."

The Preceptor nodded, smiling. Mo Tianyu gazed out the carriage window at the distant plains, where a lone plume of smoke rose. "Now... Lu Ping'an of Beiluo must claim a spot among the top three."

The Preceptor followed his gaze, not disputing the claim. He recalled Lu on the island, placing a chess piece with the weight of mountains and rivers. Stroking his beard, his smile grew enigmatic. Just one spot among the three? The carriage rumbled on, the setting sun casting a rosy glow, stretching its shadow long across the plains.

Night fell, the moon hanging high, bathing Beiluo in cold light. At the Lu Manor, Lu sat in their wheelchair, toying with the hairpin, their face luminous under the moonlight, lips red, teeth white, like an exiled immortal. Ning Zhao and Yi Yue stood gracefully behind them. Ni Yu, sulking, balanced the chessboard on her back, practicing an unsteady horse stance under Nie Changqing's stern guidance. Jing Yue watched her with a gleeful smirk.

In the small pond, fish flicked their tails, rippling the water. "Ning, Old Nie," Lu called softly.

Nie Changqing approached, and he and Ning Zhao answered in unison, "Young Master, your orders?"

"You've heard of the Wolong Ridge secret realm, haven't you?" Lu asked.

Their hearts trembled. "It's a great opportunity for you," Lu continued, rolling a white chess piece between their fingers. "If the world's heroes gather at Wolong Ridge, what are your chances of seizing the immortal fate?"

Nie Changqing pondered, then admitted with a bitter smile, "None."

Ning Zhao sighed, agreeing. "If you went yourself, Young Master, success would be certain. But we... we're far too weak compared to the world's heroes. Xiang Shaoyun of West County, a grandmaster who could crush masters at six, is now a supreme grandmaster—his strength is unfathomable. Even with my Blade Control Technique, I'm no match for him."

Ning Zhao fell silent. If Nie Changqing couldn't compete, her own spiritual pressure, despite her mastery, was useless against such a gap in strength. "Beyond Xiang Shaoyun, there's Mo Shougui of the Mohist School, Li Sansi of the Daoist Sect, Ximen Xianzhi of the Sword School... If they all go, we stand no chance," Nie Changqing said honestly.

Under the moonlight, Lu's expression was unreadable. The silence made Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao uneasy. Then Lu laughed softly. "Interesting."

Raising a hand, gleaming like glass in the moonlight, Lu pointed toward Lake Island. With a surge of will, they activated their [Spiritual Energy Deployment] authority, releasing 100 wisps of spiritual energy into the island. Amplified a hundredfold, the island's energy concentration soared to 10,000 wisps. Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao, sensing the shift, stared in awe as streaks of light, like falling stars, encircled the island in the dark. Their own spiritual energy stirred restlessly.

Lu clapped lightly, smiling. "Go to Lake Island. Before the Wolong Ridge secret realm opens, reach at least the ninth stage of the Qi Core Realm. 'The great roc rises with the wind, soaring ninety thousand miles.' Among the world's heroes, how could my White Jade Capital disciples be absent?"