

## Starlit Path 59

### Chapter 59: Orchestrating the Board, Beyond the Game

“Too small an immortal fate to bother with?” Lu Changkong was dumbfounded by Lu’s response. Who dismisses an immortal fate as too trivial? Any opportunity was a treasure!

“Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao will suffice?” Lu Changkong pressed, brow furrowed.

“They’re enough,” Lu replied with a smile.

Lu Changkong said no more. He wasn’t one to force matters, and he knew Lu harbored secrets far beyond the ordinary. Matching a sage-level figure gave Lu the right to scoff at this immortal fate. According to scouts, no Hundred Schools sages were heading to Wolong Ridge anyway.

“Alright, as long as you’re certain. But since this immortal fate is erupting within Beiluo’s jurisdiction, I must guard the city to prevent chaos from spilling over,” Lu Changkong said gravely.

Lu nodded. “Father, spend more time on Lake Island when you can. It’s no less potent than most immortal secret realms.”

Lu Changkong’s breakthrough to the second stage of the Qi Core Realm had revealed surprising talent, and Lu believed dedicating time to cultivation would serve him well. “Noted. Once this is settled, I’ll stay on the island. Those chrysanthemums... I find them quite pleasing,” Lu Changkong said, his stern face softening into a smile. As a descendant of the Hundred Schools’ Agricultural School, he had a fondness for unique plants.

Clad in armor, sword at his waist, Lu Changkong left the courtyard for the city walls. Wolong Ridge, a hundred miles away, could spark conflict that might threaten Beiluo. Some warlords might even use the immortal fate as a pretext to attack. He had to stand firm to deter them.

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In the damp, filthy Lu Manor dungeon, the air reeked of blood. It was Lu's second visit. The first time, a single word from them had sealed the fates of many Confucian scholars, their blood staining the walls for a day and night. This time, Lu carried no killing intent.

Mo Liuqi stirred, bound tightly to a cross, his body aching from the muscle damage caused by Lu's crushing spiritual pressure. "I'm... alive?" he muttered, wincing.

The dungeon door creaked open, sunlight flooding in, stinging his eyes. He squinted, then slowly opened them to see a red-lipped, white-toothed youth in a pristine white robe, hair falling gracefully, face like polished jade—elegant and otherworldly. Beside him stood a fox-faced maid with a swaying figure and a fierce girl clutching a chessboard, glaring at him. Armored soldiers flanked them, their cold presence filling the room.

Lu Manor dungeon. Mo Liuqi recognized the stench. "The Mohists sent you to assassinate?" the youth asked, toying with slender fingers, voice calm, stopping three steps away.

"Kill me or torture me—do as you will," Mo Liuqi said, eyes dim, head drooping. A-Zhu, I'm going to die. Regret didn't grip him, only a pang of sorrow at the thought of never seeing her again—the woman who gave him the mission.

“You’re not a proper assassin,” Lu said, propping their chin, holding up the hairpin. “Assassins shouldn’t have such strong emotions.”

Mo Liuqi’s head snapped up, eyes fixed on the hairpin. “So, abandon assassination. Join me,” Lu continued.

Mo Liuqi froze, stunned. Instead of death, Lu was... recruiting him? “By rights, for attempting assassination in White Jade Capital’s territory, you shouldn’t live. But I, Lu Ping’an, am a reasonable person. I’m giving you a chance to live, a chance to see your beloved again.”

Lu raised a hand, and the hairpin floated before Mo Liuqi’s eyes, mere millimeters from his pupils. “Your ability to ‘guide the blade with intent’ shows remarkable talent. So, I offer you this chance. One day. Reach the third stage of the Qi Core Realm, and you live. I’ll even grant you a moment to part with A-Zhu.”

Lu’s voice was calm. “And if I fail?” Mo Liuqi asked, sweat beading on his forehead. The youth’s methods were uncanny—spiritual pressure more terrifying than the Preceptor’s righteous aura, and now this effortless object control. As someone who could guide scissors with intent, Mo Liuqi knew the difficulty.

“Fail?” Lu glanced at him. “Then you die. But don’t worry—even in death, I’ll ensure A-Zhu sees you one last time... though it’ll be your bloodied head.”

Lu grinned brightly. Mo Liuqi shivered, chilled. Ni Yu, nearby, rolled her eyes. Young Master’s intimidation tactics are so lame.

Mo Liuqi closed his eyes, picturing A-Zhu's reaction to his severed head. A bitter smile crossed his face—perhaps she wouldn't care. "I accept," he said.

Lu smiled faintly. "Good." The hairpin floated back, tucking into Mo Liuqi's hair. His ropes snapped, and he slumped to the floor. "Jing Yue, take him to the island," Lu said, their wheelchair turning.

Jing Yue, grinning with his pearwood sword case, hoisted Mo Liuqi up.

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On Lake Island, the boat docked. Yi Yue pushed Lu's wheelchair ashore, while Ni Yu, dizzy from vomiting, staggered with the chessboard, legs trembling. Mo Liuqi kept his head low, Jing Yue trailing him.

A whooshing sound cut through the air as Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao appeared. "Young Master," they said, bowing.

Lu waved a hand. "I'm disappointed. One night, and you've only condensed one wisp of spiritual energy?"

Nie Changqing had reached the second stage of the Qi Core Realm, Ning Zhao the third. Yet Lu was unsatisfied. With the island's spiritual energy concentration at 10,000 wisps, amplified by the ten Spirit Chrysanthemums' gentle energy, it was the Five Phoenixes Continent's premier cultivation ground. Their slow progress was unacceptable.

Ning Zhao bit her lip, head bowed in shame. Nie Changqing mirrored her guilt. "The Wolong Ridge secret realm has appeared," Lu said, voice neutral. "You have one day. Tomorrow, head to Wolong Ridge."

"Yes," they replied, hurrying off to cultivate.

"Jing Yue, watch him," Lu said, wheelchair gliding. "He's free to move on the island. If he tries to leave, kill him."

Jing Yue straightened, grinning. "Leave it to me, Young Master." He shot Mo Liuqi a glare.

"Yi Yue," Lu called. She paused, looking at him. "You once asked for an immortal fate, and I didn't grant it. Now, your vital energy surges, nearing first-rate martial status. I'll give you a chance."

Yi Yue's fox-like face lit up, and she knelt, trembling with excitement. "Cultivate on the island with Mo Liuqi. If you can sense qi and enter the Qi Core Realm, I'll teach you true immortal techniques," Lu said.

Yi Yue, overjoyed, kowtowed in gratitude. Lu said nothing more. Unlike Ning Zhao and Ni Yu, Yi Yue bore a deep grudge. When Lu Changkong found her, Ning Zhao, and Ni Yu among refugee corpses, Yi Yue stood out, clutching a bloodied dagger, eyes burning with vengeance. Lu later learned her story: from a scholarly family in West County, she opposed Mohist interference, only to see her entire clan slaughtered by their assassins. She escaped, joining refugees to Beiluo, where Lu Changkong saved her.

"Don't thank me yet. Succeed in sensing qi first," Lu said, turning away. "Ni Yu, push me upstairs."

Ni Yu complied, pushing the wheelchair to the second-floor balcony of the White Jade Capital pavilion. Lu took the spiritual pressure chessboard, setting it before them with boxes of black and white pieces. Ni Yu busied herself brewing plum wine.

Boom... The clear sky darkened as clouds gathered, wind stirring the lake. A heavy aura filled the air. Lu held a chess piece, and the pavilion seemed to shift with the storm. Their eyes deepened, distant and profound.

On the spiritual pressure chessboard, lines formed, sketching Wolong Ridge's terrain. The heroes and armies converging there appeared as red dots. Lu was the chessmaster, yet stood outside the game.

The era of spiritual energy resurgence had begun.