

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 7: Don't Fear, Your Master Has Your Back

The deaths of the three clan scholars barely registered amid the chaos atop Beiluo's walls. Blades clashed, swords sparked, and the air rang with unceasing metallic clamor. Ning Zhao's strike was swift and subtle, dispatching her foes in a flash, like a dragonfly skimming water. Empowered by spiritual energy, her Grandmaster prowess, though not fully refined, made killing Second-Rate fighters effortless.

Yi Yue's eyes gleamed with awe. Ning Zhao was impossibly strong—stronger than any ordinary Grandmaster. Against her, Yi Yue doubted she could withstand even a single strike. Ni Yu, face flushed, gripped her umbrella tightly, eyes wide. "So... so powerful!" she gasped.

Lu sat expressionless in his wheelchair. The sight of killing unnerved him, but he knew he'd have to adapt. To survive in this chaotic era, he had to embrace its brutal rules.

"Master, if the bloodshed bothers you, cover your eyes," Ning Zhao whispered softly, her dark hair falling as she leaned close to his ear.

Lu chuckled. “Your master isn’t that fragile. Sister Ning, take me to the walls. Yi Yue, open the gate.”

Ning Zhao smiled gently, complying. Yi Yue’s eyes flashed with resolve. Her whip cracked, and she leaped over piled corpses toward the gate. Lu glanced at Ni Yu, who stared back, and he clapped with a grin. “Little Ni, keep that umbrella steady. My charm can’t handle the sun.”

Ning Zhao paused, startled. Ni Yu rolled her eyes. *Master, so shameless.*

The path to the walls lacked a ramp, only a narrow staircase littered with bodies. “Master, hold tight,” Ning Zhao warned.

Lu raised an eyebrow. With a tap on the wheelchair’s back, Ning Zhao’s white skirt billowed as she lifted the chair, ascending the steps with airy grace, as if floating. In moments, they reached the top. Ni Yu, panting, folded her umbrella and scrambled up the stairs, vowing to train in martial arts after this ordeal.

The wheelchair’s wooden wheels clacked against the ancient bricks. The fighting atop the walls had mostly subsided, both sides locked in a tense

standoff. Lu Changkong's loyal general, Luo Yue, led the city's defenders against the three clans' forces, each side forming distinct camps.

Ning Zhao wheeled Lu out from the stairwell, inadvertently placing them at the forefront, closer to the clans' side. Their sudden appearance drew every eye, creating an awkward, charged silence thick with blood and tension.

"Master, Sister Ning, wait for me!" Ni Yu called, stumbling up the stairs, one hand clutching her umbrella, the other on her hip as she caught her breath. Climbing dozens of steps had nearly done her in.

"Young Lord!" a bloodied general among Lu Changkong's men roared, his voice raw with fear and despair. They recognized Lu, their crippled young lord, whose presence on this blood-soaked battlefield was unthinkable. With the three clans' betrayal exposed, Lu's position at their forefront was like a lamb among wolves.

The clans' warriors, recovering from their shock, erupted in glee. "Lu Changkong's only son, the Lu family cripple!"

"Seize him, and Beiluo's ours!"

“Careful—his maids include a First-Rate fighter!”

Their eyes gleamed as they surged forward, vital energy surging like beasts scenting blood. Luo Yue and his men rushed to protect Lu. Caught in the crossfire, Lu became the focal point.

Yet Lu remained calm, his face slightly flushed from the pulsing energy but unshaken. Poise was everything. “Little Ni, umbrella,” he said, one hand propping his chin, the other smoothing the blanket.

Ni Yu fumbled to raise the umbrella, trembling as she shielded him from the sun. “The three clans collude with the enemy. Their crime warrants death,” Lu declared coldly, eyeing the charging warriors. “Behead them and display their heads on the walls.”

Ning Zhao’s gaze blazed. Her cicada-wing blade sprang from the wheelchair’s handle. “Just a half-crippled fool, putting on airs!” sneered Chen He, head of the Chen clan, a former disciple of the Grand Preceptor. His usual scholarly demeanor twisted into a snarl as he charged.

Ning Zhao, cold as ancient ice, moved with fluid steps. Chen He, a First-Rate fighter, assumed his male physique gave him the edge, brimming with confidence. Luo Yue rushed to Lu's side, watching the clash intently.

In an instant, it ended. A sword's light streaked like a meteor. Chen He's confidence shattered as Ning Zhao's aura surged, her blade striking with the force of a thousand-pound hammer. His sword flew from his bloodied grip, and before he could scream, his head soared, slapped by Ning Zhao's blade to roll like a ball to Luo Yue's feet. A kick sent Chen He's body tumbling aside.

One move to slay a First-Rate fighter. Ning Zhao acted as if it were trivial, her steps light as she advanced on the other two clan heads. "Grandmaster?!"

"Madness! Lu Changkong's insane!"

"A Grandmaster as a maid? That cunning old fox!"

Chen He's instant death snapped the clans' forces awake. The remaining heads, seeing Ning Zhao's extraordinary power, turned to flee. Her blade gleamed with chilling intent. "Master decrees your death today. Obey."

Spiritual energy coursed through her, accelerating her speed. She soared over the clans' soldiers, catching the fleeing heads. Blood sprayed as her blade flicked, sending two more heads rolling neatly to Luo Yue's feet, their bodies collapsing.

Atop the walls, Ning Zhao stood, blade dripping blood, her white skirt and flowing hair radiant. The soldiers and warriors gaped in awe. A Grandmaster could carve through armies and claim generals' heads—and now they'd seen it.

Ning Zhao walked through the stunned clansmen, returning to Lu's side. None dared obstruct her. Silence blanketed the walls. Luo Yue stared at the three neatly aligned heads, dumbfounded. *What's gotten into Ning Zhao?*

Below, a deafening creak sounded as Yi Yue opened the heavy gates. A Second-Rate fighter, she channeled her vitality to pry a gap. Outside, Lu Changkong, hunched over his horse, spotted the opening, his eyes flashing. His steed became a crimson blur.

"Open!" he roared, leaping from the saddle and slamming a palm against the gate, widening the gap. Like an agile monkey, he slipped through. As his blood-red steed followed, Lu Changkong, now grounded, braced against the gate, his armor and shirt tearing under a surge of vital energy. With a resounding *boom*, he forced the gate shut.

“Lock it!” he bellowed. Yi Yue, face flushed from his Grandmaster aura, released her whip, and the heavy bolt slammed down. She collapsed, exhausted.

At that moment, the four enemy Grandmasters’ attacks struck the gate, shaking it but failing to break through. Lu Changkong, bare-chested and imposing, stood behind the gate, glaring at his fallen general’s speared body, his face dark as a storm.

Outside, Feng Shi galloped up, furious at Lu Changkong’s escape. “Damn it! He slipped away!”

“That turtle Lu Changkong!”

“Hand over your pretty little cripple son—my men are eager for him!”

He hurled insults, hoping to provoke Lu Changkong again. But the gate remained silent.

Atop the walls, Lu clutched his chest, muttering in mock distress. “So angry... I need comforting.”

Ning Zhao’s eyes narrowed. Her hand struck the wheelchair’s handle, her blade springing free. “Master, don’t be upset. I’ll handle this,” she said. “How should he die?”

Lu squinted, one hand on his chest, the other smoothing the blanket. “Cut off his legs and drag him up here. I’ll deal with him myself.”

Ning Zhao paused, then smiled like a blooming peach blossom. “As you command.”

“Go,” Lu said with a chuckle, lightly patting her slender waist. “Don’t fear—your Master has your back.”