

Starlit Path 79

Chapter 79: Quietly Watching You Drink Chicken Soup

Outside Beiluo City.

In a corner of the vast plains, a carriage stood silently. The horse snorted, puffing warm breath as it grazed on the lush grass. Moonlight spilled from the sky, cloaking the plains in a silvery, ethereal glow, both cold and captivating.

The carriage curtain parted, and a hunched, elderly figure stepped out, hands clasped behind his back, gazing at the faintly visible outline of Beiluo City in the night. The coachman, a one-armed man, followed, his face pale.

“What hour is it, Shougui?” the old man asked.

“Just shy of the hour of chou,” the one-armed man replied hoarsely, his eyes glinting with cold resentment as he stared at Beiluo. His severed arm, a wound inflicted by Ning Zhao—a maid of Young Master Lu—fueled his hatred.

“The hour of chou...” The old man, the true Mohist Leader, took a deep breath, his eye bags trembling. By agreement, if the Yin-Yang sage Wei Luan had secured Beiluo, a signal would have been sent. Yet, from the hour of zi to now, nearing chou, the city remained eerily silent, like a venomous snake coiled in the dark, radiating menace.

“They failed,” he said with a wistful sigh, his breath visible in the cold night air, his beard fluttering. “Shougui, ride swiftly to North County.”

“Yes,” the one-armed man replied, cracking the whip with his remaining arm. The carriage turned and sped off, wheels rumbling. As they departed, he glanced back at Beiluo, a venomous hatred flickering in his eyes.

Wolong Ridge, outskirts.

A bonfire crackled, its light piercing the deep shadows of the surrounding forest. On a bed of dry grass, a graceful figure lay sleeping. The warlord sat by the fire, cycling his spiritual energy, dark demonic aura swirling around him.

“Reversing immortal techniques births demonic arts...” he murmured. “One thought for immortality, one for demonhood?”

In his near-death ordeal, he had sold a piece of his soul to the demon, transforming to carve a path of survival. Turning, he gazed at the sleeping woman, his fierce demeanor softening into tenderness. Her serene face embodied a quiet beauty, and for her, he had no regrets.

He harbored no grand ambitions for conquest. His rebellion was solely to make her the most revered woman in the world, to give her everything. At his core, he sought the pinnacle of martial prowess, the ultimate strength. They said iron-hearted warriors had soft spots, and his was her—his childhood sweetheart.

But as he turned back to the fire, his gaze hardened, brimming with murderous intent. "Mohist Leader..." he growled. "You failed to kill me. As long as I live, this world will never fall to your Mohists."

His low voice tore through the night.

Unseen, the woman's long lashes trembled. Her starry eyes, gazing at his scarred back by the fire, shimmered with tenderness, then flickered with struggle, pain, and sorrow. She closed her eyes, whispering inwardly, "Shaoyun, I'm not worth this. I'm not."

Drunken Dragon City.

A thick fog enveloped the city, mirroring Beiluo's eerie silence, as its inhabitants slumbered. Outside a humble farmhouse, General Jiang Li, clad in silver armor with a cloth masking his face, gazed into the courtyard. Through the window, he saw a young woman sleeping soundly, her face dimpled with a sweet smile, cheeks flushed as if lost in a pleasant dream.

His expression remained stoic. Removing his helmet, he turned and walked away. After a few steps, he pressed his thumb and forefinger to his lips, whistling sharply. A white horse galloped through the night, its mane flowing. Jiang Li mounted, a long spear tucked into the saddle and a rusted, sheathed sword at his waist. With a flick of his foot, he grasped the spear and charged down the city's main street, a streak of white light.

Several figures, faces masked, followed him, plunging into the dark. Yin-Yang sorcerers materialized like phantoms, mechanical beasts roared, and swarms of poisonous insects buzzed. A bloody storm swept through Drunken Dragon City.

Jiang Li's eyes blazed, his horse's hooves thundering like rain. Wielding his spear in silver armor, he led his men like a sharpened blade, piercing the darkness conjured by the Yin-Yang sorcerers. Unlike Beiluo's one-sided slaughter, this was a brutal, ordinary war, showcasing the terrifying prowess of the Yin-Yang School, bolstered by Mechanism School beasts and Mohist rangers—a formidable hand tearing at the dynasty's defenses.

As dawn's first light leapt from the horizon, bathing the earth, the clank of armor echoed. Jiang Li emerged from a field of corpses, discarding his spear and resting his hand on the rusted sword's hilt, exhaling. Behind him lay shattered mechanical beasts and heaps of Yin-Yang sorcerers' bodies, mingled with those of his own men.

His face was numb; death was no stranger to him. Dawn's glow warmed his features, making him squint. A blood-soaked woman trailed him. "Dispose of the bodies," he ordered. "When the city wakes, hold it firm."

"Yes," she replied wearily, her eyes flashing with fervor as they fell on his sheathed sword. It hadn't been drawn—the crisis hadn't warranted it. As he walked away, blood marking his steps, her fervor faded into complexity. She knew where he was going and didn't follow.

In the farmhouse, Jiang Li removed his helmet and bloodied face cloth, his hair disheveled. He entered, extinguishing a nearly spent candle, and gazed at the sleeping girl. His hand trembled, reaching out, but he withdrew, fearing his blood would stain her. Sitting on the threshold, sword at his side, he watched the dawn break through scattered clouds, his posture rigid.

Inside, the girl stirred, spotting the bloodied figure at the door. She gasped, sitting up, accidentally flinging Little Phoenix One from her collar. The chick landed near Jiang Li.

He glanced at it, then at her, raising an eyebrow. "Is this... today's soup chicken?"

Blushing, she stammered, "Uncle Jiang, when did you arrive?" Scooping up the chick and tucking it back into her collar, she rushed to the kitchen. "Soup's coming right up—just wait!"

Soon, Jiang Li set his bloodied helmet aside, savoring a bowl of golden chicken soup and fragrant meat. The girl, propping her chin, watched him, her eyes crescent moons of joy. The first sight of his bloodied form had scared her, but familiarity dulled her fear. She simply loved watching him drink her soup. What he did, who he killed—it didn't matter.

The pot emptied. Jiang Li wiped the grease from his mouth and stood. "I'm leaving," he said. He never lingered after soup.

At the door, he paused. "Fatten that chicken up," he added, glancing at Little Phoenix One peeking from her collar, his lips twitching. He wasn't jealous of the chick—just thought it might make good soup.

The Capital, Great Zhou.

At dawn, sunlight bathed the earth. Six riders thundered into the capital from the six guardian cities, hooves pounding like rain, bearing urgent messages.

In the palace's main hall, Emperor Yuwen Xiu read the reports, then hurled them down in fury, slamming the dragon throne, the sound reverberating. The court officials exchanged glances; those privy to intelligence lowered their heads, silent.

The old eunuch gathered the reports. "Read!" the emperor commanded coldly.

The eunuch's shrill voice recited the news, shocking the court. The six guardian cities had been attacked. Beiluo, Drunken Dragon, Wangtian, and Pingnan held firm, but the lords of Yuanchi and Tong'an were slain, their cities thrown into chaos by rebellious noble families, with the populace in panic.

Yuwen Xiu glared at the stunned officials, disappointment etched on his face. He dismissed the court and headed to the library pavilion.

Beiluo City, Lu Manor.

Morning light spilled over, bringing a misty, comforting warmth. Lu sat in his wheelchair, sipping plain porridge. Before him, Ni Yu, her hair in a bun, wailed dramatically, tears streaming as she beat her chest, staring longingly at him.