

## Starlit Path 80

### Chapter 80: Ni Yu's Path to Immortality

The white jade spoon delicately scooped the plain porridge, translucent grains sliding down its sides, trailing a viscous thread of rice broth. Yet, Lu hesitated to take a sip. A pair of wide, pleading eyes fixed on him—and the porridge—making the simple meal feel anything but comfortable.

“Girl, what’s the matter?” Lu asked, glancing at Ni Yu, who crouched before his wheelchair.

Ni Yu tore her gaze from the porridge, swallowing hard, her eyes brimming with longing as she pounded her small fists against her flat chest. “Young Master, I, Ni Yu... want to cultivate immortality!”

Lu’s mouth twitched. “You’ve said that before.”

Ni Yu’s fists hammered her chest harder, tears welling up. After last night’s ordeal, watching her cold steamed bun dissolve under blood insects, she realized she needed to grow stronger—not just to protect her food, but to protect her young master.

“Young Master, is there a cultivation method where I can eat and drink and still get stronger?” she asked hopefully. “You said you’d help me cultivate while eating... You can’t go back on your word!”

Lu’s face darkened. Had he said that? Perhaps he had, in passing. But a cultivation method that strengthened through eating? Maybe he could invent something like Gluttonous Beast Art, transforming her into a beast-human hybrid. Beast-humans never bow to slavery—unless food and lodging are provided?

His hand propped his chin, fingers tapping thoughtfully. Then, his eyes lit up as an idea struck. His mind sank into the system panel, quickly pulling up the Qi Gathering Pill Refining Manual.

Cultivating through eating... It wasn't impossible. If Ni Yu became a "pill-testing apprentice" or an alchemist, couldn't she eat pills like candy and cultivate rapidly? His eyes gleamed with a cool light, a faint smile curling his lips as he looked at her.

Ni Yu shivered, the young master's gaze giving her an ominous feeling. "Y-Young Master... I don't want to cultivate anymore!" she blurted, nearly crying. Was he holding a grudge? Couldn't she just give up?

"Don't be afraid," Lu said gently. "Go prepare some things. You want to cultivate while eating? I'll make it happen."

His gentle tone only chilled her further. He raised a hand, his slender finger tapping her forehead. A ripple of spiritual energy spread outward, and she froze, feeling a flood of knowledge pour into her mind as a stream of energy, like a small snake, surged through her body.

"Oh!" Her eyes widened, joy overtaking her. "Young Master, I can feel spiritual energy!"

She bounced in place, thrilled. "One hour," Lu said, still smiling gently. "Prepare everything I've transmitted to you. Fail, and you'll go two days without food. Spend as much silver as you need."

Her bouncing stopped abruptly. Then, she bolted out the door, feet flying.

The Qi Gathering Pill Refining Manual detailed the method for crafting qi-gathering pills, requiring specific raw materials and specialized processing. Lu had given Ni Yu a list of necessary materials and tools. Naturally, any materials she gathered would need spiritual energy infusion for actual alchemy. He even considered carving out a medicinal herb garden on Lakeheart Island for cultivating alchemical ingredients.

Lost in thought, he picked up the porridge again, blowing on the steam and sipping slowly. Without Ni Yu's pleading eyes, the porridge tasted much better.

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\*The Capital.\*

On the second floor of the library pavilion, Emperor Yuwen Xiu's anxious mood calmed as he stepped inside. Sandalwood incense wafted gently. The National Advisor, white-haired and aged, reclined in a rocking chair. Mo Tianyu studied a bamboo scroll, while Kong Nanfei sat with eyes closed, spiritual energy swirling around him.

Yuwen Xiu knew Kong Nanfei had gained an immortal fate at Wolong Ridge's Immortal Palace, so he wasn't surprised. "Teacher," he said, "urgent reports from the six guardian cities state that Mohist rangers, allied with the Yin-Yang and Mechanism Schools, attacked last night. The lords of Yuanchi and Tong'an were killed, and their cities have fallen."

Mo Tianyu set down his scroll, and Kong Nanfei opened his eyes. The pavilion grew quiet.

“Your Majesty, shall I divine the fate of those two cities?” Mo Tianyu offered.

Yuwen Xiu stared, incredulous. Mo Tianyu’s divinations were notorious—his “poisonous” predictions had once landed him buried in the ground for a day and night. Had the National Advisor not intervened, he might have died for his craft. Did Yuwen Xiu dare accept such an offer?

The National Advisor spoke. “This fits the Mohist Leader’s style. Unlike his predecessor, he’s far more ruthless. With two of the six guardian cities breached, North County’s army could exploit the gap, march straight to the capital, and threaten Great Zhou.”

Yuwen Xiu’s anxiety deepened. “Please guide me, Teacher.”

The National Advisor rose from his chair, hunched and slow, pacing to the carved wooden window. Sunlight bathed the earth outside, his eyes misty. “Two options, Your Majesty,” he said. “First, issue a decree summoning Young Master Lu of Beiluo to the capital. With him guarding it, the capital will be secure.”

Yuwen Xiu blinked, taken aback by the high praise for Lu. Rumors held that Young Master Lu was a profound cultivator. A cultivator’s presence could indeed be a boon, but... “Cultivators are unpredictable. This could be risky,” he cautioned.

The National Advisor smiled, saying nothing, and continued, “Second, send reinforcements to Drunken Dragon City and order its lord, Jiang Li, to hold Yuanchi and Tong’an.”

Yuwen Xiu frowned. “Jiang Li...” The loyal general of the late emperor, renowned alongside the National Advisor, but Yuwen Xiu harbored doubts. Was the late emperor’s sudden death tied to him?

The National Advisor, as if reading his thoughts, smiled. "If Great Zhou truly collapses, only Jiang Li would fight to the last drop of blood. But we're not there yet. The Mohist Leader plans meticulously, yet he miscalculated one thing."

He turned, his face pale, coughing as a glint flickered in his eyes. "He underestimated cultivators' strength. He also thought he had the upper hand, leaking the warlord's whereabouts to the Pingyang County Governor, who led five thousand men to kill him in the mountains. He assumed the warlord would die, but..."

"The warlord survived," the National Advisor continued. "Not only that, he slaughtered all five thousand and killed the governor, returning to Xi County."

Yuwen Xiu's eyes narrowed. He'd seen this in yesterday's reports but dismissed it as exaggerated, overshadowed by the guardian cities' breaches. "One against five thousand, leaving rivers of blood..." the National Advisor said. "In this era, only Young Master Lu could defeat the warlord—save for the warlord himself."

Yuwen Xiu, Mo Tianyu, and Kong Nanfei all drew sharp breaths. "With the warlord alive, the Mohist Leader will have his hands full," the National Advisor said softly. "Great Zhou is not yet at its end."

As the sandalwood smoke dissipated, Yuwen Xiu left, returning to Zijin Palace to draft decrees. Soon, the palace gates opened, and two riders galloped out, kicking up dust and sunlight. At the capital's outskirts, they parted ways—one to Beiluo, one to Drunken Dragon.

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\*Xi County.\*

A carriage rolled slowly through the camp. Xi Liang warriors, eyes blazing, parted to let it pass. At the front, the warlord sat, bloodstained, whip in hand, his oppressive aura dominating the camp.

The carriage stopped before his tent. He dismounted, gently helping a woman out and arranging for her care. Turning, his sharp gaze swept over the warriors. "I, Xiang Shaoyun, have returned, treading over corpses," he declared, his voice raw. "They tried to kill me, destroy me. A hundred brothers shielded me with their lives, defending Xi Liang's honor with their blood."

His eyes reddened, his bloodied fist pounding his chest as he scanned the silent crowd. "The dead are gone, but their blood still burns! Those who kill will be killed. Today, I, the Warlord, seek not the throne but vengeance for my hundred brothers!"

"The world betrays me, and I'll slay the world!" he roared. "Assemble the army! Our target: the Mohist Mechanism City at East Lake! For Xi Liang's glory... kill!"

His roar, like a beast's, shook the camp. The warriors' eyes burned red, their cries shattering the clouds with the ferocity of tigers and wolves. The warlord's vengeance was swift and unrelenting.