

Starlit Path 82

Chapter 82: Young Master... The Pot's Ready!

Drunken Dragon City.

The city gates swung wide open as Jiang Li, clad in silver armor, led a hundred riders toward Yuanchi and Tong'an. In a humble farmhouse courtyard, a flock of fluffy yellow chicks waddled behind their mother hen, pecking at the ground.

Bai Qingniao stood outside the pen, clucking softly, scattering a handful of rice mixed with bran. From the gap in her collar, Little Phoenix One poked out its head, eyes darting to the food, wings flapping as it tried to escape. Bai Qingniao, noticing, pressed it back with a quick hand, leaving the chick slumping in defeat.

After tending to the chickens, she joined the old woman nearby, who carried a basket and watched her with a gentle smile. "Granny, aren't you heading to work in the city today?" Bai Qingniao asked, sitting beside her.

The old woman's wrinkled face creased further. "I'm tired. Just resting and watching you. I might not get the chance to see you like this again."

Bai Qingniao froze, her smile fading, then forced a brighter one, hugging the woman's arm as they chatted. Meanwhile, Little Phoenix One, seizing its chance, escaped her collar and scampered across the ground, its yellow fluff bouncing.

“Uncle Jiang—when’s he coming for chicken soup? I’ve got a new recipe,” Bai Qingniao said casually, steering the conversation.

The old woman’s smile deepened. “Your Uncle Jiang’s busy, but once he’s free, he’ll come. He loves your soup.”

Her voice, hoarse with a trace of bitterness, struck Bai Qingniao as odd, though she couldn’t pinpoint why. Suddenly, the old woman’s gaze sharpened, fixing on the dense shrubbery beyond the courtyard.

“Qingniao,” she said, her voice low, “if one day you couldn’t see your Uncle Jiang anymore, would you be sad?”

Bai Qingniao paused, imagining it. Her face darkened. “I wouldn’t be sad. It’d hurt too much to feel anything else.”

The old woman nodded. “Maybe that’s how your Uncle Jiang feels too.” Her hoarse voice softened to a whisper, almost inaudible. “If he couldn’t see me... would he be sad?”

Rustling came from the shrubs. Bai Qingniao’s heart skipped, but she was more shocked by the old woman, who transformed in an instant, her aura sharp as an unsheathed sword.

“Show yourself,” the woman demanded.

A black-robed figure in a veiled bamboo hat emerged from the shrubs. Another appeared silently atop the farmhouse roof. “Yin-Yang School... sorcerers!” the old woman hissed.

“Chilian, the last of General Jiang Li’s four commanders,” the shrub figure said slowly. “Hand over the Soldier School’s heir. The Mohist Leader has ordered she not be harmed—just taken.”

“The Mohist Leader’s legacy pales compared to the first Leader’s glory. The Mohists have lost their way,” Chilian retorted coldly. “I’m tasked with protecting the Soldier School’s heir. You’ll have to step over my corpse.”

Bai Qingniao’s mind reeled. Jiang Li’s weakness? Soldier School’s heir? Were they talking about her? On the ground, Little Phoenix One leapt back into her collar, peeking out warily.

“Then... forgive our offense,” the sorcerer said. Thick smoke billowed, and both figures vanished.

East Lake, Mohist Mechanism City.

On the corridor suspended between cascading waterfalls, the world’s top assassin, Mo Yihen, showed a rare flicker of shock. “Defend to the death?” The mission’s audacity stunned even his emotionless facade.

“Who in the world could breach the Mohist Mechanism City?” he said. “Mohist techniques are unmatched, and with the Mechanism School’s aid, this city is the world’s most impregnable fortress—harder to crack than the Great Zhou capital.”

It was the most he’d ever spoken. The red-robed woman, Azhu, her face half-masked, shook her head. “The Leader’s orders are certain. He’s allied with the North County Governor to breach the six guardian cities and march on the capital. The Warlord of Xi County aims to raze this city, cutting off the Mohists’ retreat and forcing the Leader to recall his forces.”

Her voice was nearly drowned by the waterfalls, but Mo Yihen heard clearly. Even his stoic heart clenched. The Leader was staking everything on this gamble.

“For the Mohist vision to guide the world rightly, we must hold,” Azhu said, gazing at the scenic falls. It was the Mohists’ creed.

“Fine,” Mo Yihen replied. “After this, the world’s top assassin, Mo Yihen, will be no more.”

Azhu nodded, her red robes flaring like fire as she left. Alone, Mo Yihen’s calloused hand rested on his cloth-wrapped sword hilt, stroking it gently.

Below the city, the earth trembled, startling birds and beasts into hiding. Xi Liang warriors, clad in cold armor, marched in disciplined ranks, spears and blades in hand—a fearsome, elite force.

Atop a war chariot, Xiang Shaoyun stood in battle armor, a crimson cape billowing, his axe and shield strapped to his back, exuding a demonic aura. He stared at the mist-shrouded Mechanism City atop the mountain lake, his eyes icy.

“Report!” a soldier called, rushing forward.

Xiang Shaoyun halted the army with a wave. “Speak.”

“Governor, five li ahead, a scholar on a green ox blocks the path.”

Xiang Shaoyun’s eyes narrowed, already knowing who it was. “Bring him.”

The warriors parted, and a green ox ambled forward, carrying Li Sansi, a white-robed Daoist with a wooden sword, smiling calmly despite the army’s menace.

“Pleading for the Mohists?” Xiang Shaoyun asked coldly.

Li Sansi’s smile widened. “I’m a Daoist disciple. The Mohists’ fate means nothing to me.”

“Then why are you here? Seeking death?”

“For our bond forged in Wolong Ridge’s life-and-death trials, I offer a warning: the Mechanism City is the world’s most fortified stronghold. Attacking it will cost you dearly. Think thrice, Warlord. The Mohist Leader, allied with North County, aims to topple Great Zhou—a cause backed by the Sword Sect, Daoist Sect, Yin-Yang School, Mechanism School, Heavenly Mechanism School, and Strategist School. This is the world’s tide. By forcing the Leader to defend, you defy it and make enemies of the Hundred Schools.”

Xiang Shaoyun gazed at the gathering storm clouds. “Defy the world’s tide? Make enemies of the Hundred Schools? So what? Do I need their approval? If they oppose me, I’ll crush them all!”

His final words unleashed a torrent of black energy, startling Li Sansi’s ox. The Daoist’s heart raced—the Warlord was even more terrifying now. Without further words, Li Sansi rode away.

The army marched on, reaching a cliff overlooking the Mechanism City. Waterfalls roared, mist rising from the abyss. Eighty-one iron chains linked the cliff to the city, swaying in the fog. Dark clouds loomed, heavy with impending rain.

Beiluo, Lakeheart Island.

A wooden boat glided across the lake, rippling the water. The old eunuch, clutching the imperial decree, stood beside the city lord, with Luo Cheng, sword at his side, behind them. The island’s serene beauty, veiled in mist, felt like an immortal realm.

The eunuch gazed ahead, sweat beading on his palms. The mist seemed to twist into a pair of massive eyes watching him. Suddenly, the boat stopped. The lake's ripples and birds' cries vanished, leaving an eerie silence.

"Father, why bring someone to the island?" Lu's voice echoed across Beiluo Lake.

The eunuch, despite his martial prowess, felt a chill. This was the cultivator even the National Advisor treated with reverence. "I bear His Majesty's decree for Young Master Lu," he said, holding up the scroll respectfully.

A formless force snatched the decree, whisking it into the misty depths. "Return and tell His Majesty I'm busy and have no plans to visit the capital," Lu's voice declared.

A sonic boom followed. The mist parted, and the decree shot back, halting an inch from the eunuch's face, suspended like lightning frozen in time. His heart clenched.

On the island, Lu was busy. Seated in his wheelchair, one hand propped his chin, the other rested on a wool blanket covering his legs. His eyes sparkled with anticipation as he watched Ni Yu fiddle with a black pot, its wooden lid steaming. Black smoke billowed, smudging Ni Yu's face like a raccoon's as she prepared to lift the lid.

Unfazed, she licked her lips, eyes gleaming with excitement. "Young Master... the pot's ready!" she announced.

Lu nodded with a smile.

With a “Hiyah!” Ni Yu yanked off the scalding lid.