

Starlit Path 85

Chapter 85: The Cultivator's Sword

Rain poured relentlessly, dark clouds cloaking the cliff's peak, oppressive and stifling. The donkey snorted hot breath into the storm. Mo Liuqi stared at the shattered half of the smiling mask, his mind conjuring the image of a cold, expressionless face. That stoic man, who loved wearing a grinning mask, was mocked by Mo Liuqi for his hypocrisy. Yet, he never took offense, saying he couldn't smile, so the mask did it for him.

Rain soaked Mo Liuqi's clothes as he picked up the blood-tinged mask, its mud washed clean by the downpour. "Three more missions, and I'm free. Then you'll be the world's top assassin," the man had said. "When I retire, I'll brew plenty of wine. Come drink if you're thirsty. Assassins never know when a failed mission will leave their bones rotting in the wild. If you love someone, say it soon—whether they accept is another matter."

Memories flashed: the thin youth by the cliff under moonlight, his cloth-wrapped sword at his side, eyes gleaming with longing. "Mo the Stoic, you're free now," Mo Liuqi whispered. "Bless you."

Rain streamed down his chin, pooling like a thread. Tucking the mask away, he glanced toward the cliff's summit, where roars echoed. The red-robed figure with the half-silver mask, like a blood-red mandala, flickered in his mind, as if dissolving like ink in water. Panic and fear gripped him. The stoic was right—love must be spoken swiftly.

Mounting his donkey, he whipped the bamboo pole. With a bray, it galloped toward the summit, hooves splashing mud.

Beiluo, Lakeheart Island.

While the world churned with blood and storm, the island remained a tranquil haven. Lake breezes, laced with spiritual energy, rippled the water. Fishermen cast nets, hauling in plump bass. Ni Yu, still farting from the failed pill, excitedly joined Jing Yue by the spirit-endowed pot, adding herbs for another attempt. She was determined to refine a pill.

Nie Changqing, hands behind his back, hovered above the lake, guiding young Nie Shuang's fist practice. Yi Yue sat cross-legged, diligently absorbing spiritual energy. The island hummed with harmony.

On the second-floor terrace of White Jade Pavilion, Lu leaned against the railing, listening to the breeze. His chessboard, set with the Mountains and Rivers

game, was half-played. Ning Zhao offered a bronze cup of warmed plum wine. "Young Master, the wine is ready."

Lu took the cup, his eyes deep as a starry galaxy. Even Ning Zhao, at the peak of the Qi Core realm, couldn't meet his gaze—it seemed to hold the entire world. "Interesting," he mused, sipping the wine, his lips curling. "The Mohists and North County's army seize Yuanchi, aiming to march on the capital. Meanwhile, the Warlord leads eighty thousand Xi Liang cavalry to raze the Mechanism City."

The world's tides and imperial shifts mattered little to him. His focus was elevating the world's level by fostering cultivators. Only their rise could transform the realm. He was more intrigued by the clash at the Mechanism City than the standoff at Yuanchi. A fascinating prospect loomed: Mo Liuqi might face the Warlord, a first true clash of cultivators he'd nurtured.

The Warlord's odds seemed higher, but the outcome intrigued Lu. The battle at Wolong Ridge with ancient cultivator Jiang Chao was scripted, its start and end predetermined, lacking suspense. Watching his own cultivators collide, however, was thrilling. He sipped again, then raised an eyebrow. His vision shifted, leaping from the Mechanism City to Drunken Dragon City, where an unexpected scene unfolded.

"Ning, more wine. Your Young Master's quite busy," he said, raising his cup.

"Yes, sir." Ning Zhao's gentle face smiled, her white dress fluttering as she poured more wine, its rich aroma wafting.

Drunken Dragon City.

The once-idyllic farmhouse courtyard lay in ruins. Bai Qingniao, clutching Little Phoenix One, hid in the chicken pen, her eyes wide with fear. The elusive Yin-Yang sorcerers in bamboo hats terrified her. A simple chicken farmer who loved sharing soup, she'd have fainted without her recent "immortal encounter."

The familiar granny had transformed into Chilian, a stunning beauty whose figure shamed Bai Qingniao's. More shocking, she was a killer. Chilian's hair danced as she hurled a dagger, piercing a sorcerer's chest. Another tried to form a curse seal, but Chilian leapt, pinning him with a knee and stabbing his neck with a blade from her thigh-high slit dress—thirteen times until he lay dead.

She strode to the first sorcerer, drew her dagger, and slit his throat. Bai Qingniao, stunned, watched the blood-soaked Chilian with... admiration. So cool!

Chilian, noticing Bai Qingniao's sparkling eyes, paused. "Worthy of General Bai's heir, who buried thirty thousand enemy soldiers alive. Your courage surpasses ordinary folk," she said, smiling. She had fulfilled Jiang Li's order to protect her.

Suddenly, Chilian stiffened, spinning toward the courtyard's edge. A clear footstep echoed, unmasked, with a faint airflow. "Who's there?" she demanded.

Bai Qingniao, clutching Little Phoenix One, stared wide-eyed. "The Leader was right—Jiang Li wouldn't leave his weakness unguarded," a lazy voice drawled. A slender, elegant figure appeared, one sleeve flapping empty in the breeze.

"Mohist... Mo Shougui!" Chilian's eyes narrowed.

Mo Shougui's mild gaze flicked over Chilian, then settled on Bai Qingniao. "Tch, the heir of the Bai family, who once slaughtered thirty thousand, now a mere chicken farmer. Jiang Li's protected her well."

Bai Qingniao froze. Chilian raised her bloodied dagger. "Poisoned by gu, you're no match for me. Even without it, I'd defeat you in one move," Mo Shougui sneered.

His single arm rose, channeling a strand of spiritual energy from Wolong Ridge, amplified by blood qi. The force struck Chilian, making her cough blood and collapse beside Bai Qingniao. A blackened, rotting wound on her thigh revealed the gu's effect.

Chilian struggled to rise but faltered, weak. Bai Qingniao, pale but defiant, stood before her. Mo Shougui's gaze turned strange. "The Leader said not to kill you, just take you. But delivering your head to Yuanchi would drive Jiang Li mad, collapsing Great Zhou like a landslide."

His empty sleeve fluttered, a sword appearing in his hand. His eyes gleamed with obsession. No hesitation—he'd lost his arm to it once. His sword arced toward Bai Qingniao's neck, poised to send her head skyward.

Beiluo Lake.

The white-robed youth in the wheelchair sipped wine, smiling, and placed a chess piece. "A cultivator's sword, aimed at an ordinary chicken farmer. Shameless."

The piece landed. A surge of spiritual energy projected across the distance. The phoenix hadn't yet emerged—how could the chicken farmer die?

Drunken Dragon City, above the farmhouse.

Clouds roiled. A pillar of spiritual energy shot down, enveloping Little Phoenix One in Bai Qingniao's arms. The chick shuddered, wings stiffening, and let out a deafening, resonant crow.