

Starlit Path 89

Chapter 89: If Lu Ping'an Comes, See or Not See?

"Qi-gathering pills, successful?" Lu's eyes lit up. "Ning, let's go downstairs."

"Yes, sir." Ning Zhao was curious. Ni Yu's half-finished pill had boosted her by two strands of spiritual energy—what would the finished product do? For Great Zhou's martial artists, elixirs that enhanced cultivation were unheard of, their emergence a seismic shift.

Lu wheeled down from White Jade Pavilion. "Young Master, the pills are done!" Ni Yu's flushed face beamed with excitement. Jing Yue, stunned, couldn't believe a pot had produced legendary elixirs.

"Well done," Lu said, praising Ni Yu before inspecting the pot. A misty aura wafted, carrying a condensed, exotic fragrance. Each pill gleamed like glass, coated in a sugary sheen. With a gesture, twelve pills floated out, forming a circle like prayer beads. "Twelve pills from one batch—not bad," he said, impressed.

He plucked one pill, recalling the Qi-Gathering Pill Refining Manual. "Pills are graded from one to nine, marked by dan patterns. Top-tier pills bear nine patterns, but qi-gathering pills, being first-grade, can have up to three. Yours, Ni Yu, have none—subpar. You need more practice."

Ni Yu nodded earnestly. Lu called for Yi Yue, who approached, her fox-like face tired yet excited. "Young Master," she bowed respectfully.

"I promised that if you sensed qi, I'd teach you true immortal techniques," Lu said, lounging in his wheelchair. "I keep my word." Yi Yue trembled with anticipation. Lu flicked two pills, wrapped in

spiritual energy, toward her. As they reached her, clarity washed over her, and the Ksitigarbha Sutra, like Ning Zhao's, filled her mind. She knelt, eyes misty, clutching the pills. "Thank you, Young Master."

Lu nodded. "Ni Yu, you refined them. Keep two for my father and distribute the rest. Ning, stay and cultivate—break through to the Body Treasury realm soon." He wheeled back to the pavilion's second floor.

Ni Yu, holding nine pills, blushed. "Qi-gathering pills speed up spiritual energy condensation, ideal for Qi Core realm cultivators." She gave two to Ning Zhao. "Ning, here." Then, waving to Nie Changqing on the lake, she gave him two, knowing his need to grow stronger to rescue Nie Shuang's mother from the Daoist Sect.

"Ni, what about me?" Jing Yue asked, eyeing the dwindling pills, his sword case on his back.

"Four left, we split them," Ni Yu said. "Originally two each, but you laughed loudest at my farts, so you lose one. Here's your one pill—cherish it." She handed him a single pill solemnly.

Jing Yue: "???"

Lu Changkong, in armor, arrived at Lakeheart Island. Ni Yu gleefully gave him two pills. Stunned, he learned they aided qi refinement, marveling at her unexpected alchemy. He pocketed them and ascended to the pavilion's terrace, where Lu gazed at the lake, deep in thought.

“Father,” Lu said, turning as he heard footsteps.

Lu Changkong smiled warmly at his peerless son, feeling a surreal pride. Sensing his question, Lu waved, setting up the spiritual pressure chessboard. “Father, a game?”

Lu Changkong agreed. As the sun set, casting a long glow over the lake, they played. Eventually, Lu Changkong conceded. “I can’t beat you,” he said, then grew serious. “Fan’er, if Great Zhou’s capital falls and a new dynasty rises, what will become of White Jade Pavilion?”

Lu, collecting chess pieces, replied calmly, “Father, don’t dwell on it. Great Zhou, new dynasty—it matters not. If they leave White Jade Pavilion alone, fine. If they provoke us, they’ll be... eradicated.”

Lu Changkong froze. Was this the confidence of a cultivator’s faction? With a bitter smile, he left. On the terrace, Lu toyed with a chess piece, watching his father’s boat depart, sipping wine as his hair danced in the breeze.

Yuanchi City.

On the city walls, the Mohist Leader stood with hands behind his back, flanked by Tantai Xuan and Mo Ju. They’d stood there all day, waiting for news. Jiang Li’s army, led by Great Zhou’s military soul and Soldier School heir, stood firm like a divine anchor, radiating strength despite inferior numbers. Tantai Xuan, wary of the Mohists’ power akin to a great clan, hesitated to attack.

“Leader,” Tantai Xuan said, frowning.

“It seems we’ve failed,” the Mohist Leader rasped. A rider from Jiang Li’s army approached, delivering a blood-scented box to a sentinel, who presented it to the Leader. “Enemy envoy sent this, for the Mohist Leader to open.”

The Leader’s wrinkled face remained impassive as he lifted the lid, then quickly closed it. Tantai Xuan and Mo Ju, curious, watched as Mo Ju took the box and opened it. Blood’s stench hit him, his face paling, hands trembling. The lid fell, and Mo Shougui’s snarling, unwilling head rolled out.

Night, Great Zhou Capital, Zijin Palace.

Candles blazed. Emperor Yuwen Xiu, on the dragon throne, read frontline reports with excitement. “General Jiang Li lives up to his name as Great Zhou’s military soul.” Tantai Xuan’s army had halted, even showing signs of retreat, a rare relief amid constant bad news. The National Advisor’s strategy had worked.

Annoyed by the chattering ministers, Yuwen Xiu’s mood soured.

Capital, Book Pavilion.

Candlelight flickered. An old man in a loose robe rocked in a chair, creaking softly. Moonlight bathed his gaunt face. "Good news from the front—North County's army has stopped," Mo Tianyu reported, bowing.

Kong Nanfei, cultivating, opened his eyes. The old man, the National Advisor, stirred, his sleepy eyes cracking open. "Halted?" he rasped. "Jiang Li knows his weakness; he wouldn't let the Mohist Leader exploit it. The kidnapping failed, so the Leader may take a desperate path—more dangerous than swords. I hope His Majesty stays unshaken."

Mo Tianyu pondered the Leader's next move. "Tianyu, guard the pavilion. I see no one, especially His Majesty," the National Advisor said.

"No one? If Lu Ping'an comes, Master... see or not see?" Mo Tianyu asked.

The air grew awkward. The National Advisor's gaze, like one eyeing a fool, made Mo Tianyu's scalp tingle. He slunk away.

Kong Nanfei, curious, asked, "Master, what's the Mohist Leader's next move, to make you avoid His Majesty?"

Under moonlight, the National Advisor stared at the silver disk, smiling, wrinkles alive. "Three men make a tiger—rumors are the most fearsome."

Deep in the night, a white pigeon flew from Yuanchi, entering the capital. A rumor spread through the silent city: "Great Zhou's late Emperor Yuwen Tuo fell to Kong Xiu's scheme, killed by Jiang Li's hand." The pigeon's wings stirred an invisible storm.