

## Starlit Path 101

### Chapter 101: Blood Flows in the Capital as the Young Lord's Wrath Descends

The capital's gates creaked open, admitting ten galloping steeds. A thick stench of blood assaulted their senses. Jiang Li, astride his horse, its mane streaming, surveyed the scene—a landscape of corpses and scattered arrows, a veritable mountain of death. On the city walls, the bodies of guards lay in grotesque poses, blood trickling through the crevices. These were the capital's defenders.

“What happened here?” one envoy stammered, his body trembling from the shock.

“Could the Northern County or Western County armies have stormed the capital?” another whispered, swallowing hard.

Jiang Li tightened his grip on the reins, his horse restless amid the gore. His eyes gleamed with a strange light. “Beiluo's Young Lord...” he murmured. Had Beiluo sent its forces?

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In the Scholar's Pavilion, tranquility reigned as always. Mo Tianyu sat at the entrance, studying divination while swigging from a large gourd. Since being dragged back from Beiluo by the Grand Preceptor, he had matured. No longer the reckless, flamboyant “Madman Mo” of the capital, he understood that true audacity required strength—like the Young Lord's. Without it, who could stop him? Yet he clung to divination, his passion since youth, undeterred by frequent failures. No regrets in this life for diving into the art of divination.

Footsteps echoed from the pavilion. Mo Tianyu looked up to see the Grand Preceptor, long secluded, standing hunched with hands clasped behind him, gazing into the distance. Kong Nanfei, in Confucian robes, joined him, also looking out.

“A storm gathers, and the winds fill the tower,” Kong Xiu said softly. “Feel it? The capital’s air is shifting.”

Kong Nanfei nodded. “Lu Ping’an’s maid and coachman, with five hundred Beiluo cavalry, have entered the capital. His aim is clear—to purge the capital’s corrupt noble families, just as he did in Beiluo. But the capital’s noble bloc, though weaker than those in the Northern or Southern Counties, is deeply entwined with the court’s ministers. Uprooting them will be no small feat.”

Kong Xiu smiled, his white hair trembling in the breeze. “Some say a troubled world demands harsh measures. I once disagreed—such actions disrupt order, harming both state and people. But Great Zhou has little left to lose. How much worse can it get?”

Kong Nanfei paused, then heard Kong Xiu sigh. “Lu Ping’an sees it clearly.”

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In the Purple Gold Palace, Yuwen Xiu read a secret report, his eyes blazing with fervor. “Doing what I dare not...” he muttered. “Worthy of Lu Ping’an.” He crushed the report into a ball. “Kill them all! These traitors dare to secretly amass troops and meddle with the capital’s military power—are they plotting rebellion? If chaos erupts here, Great Zhou’s hope is lost. Damn them!”

His face was icy as he slammed his palm on the desk. He felt utterly stifled as emperor, surrounded by scheming ministers, not one trustworthy. The old eunuch stood by, his expression equally cold. The unassuming Prime Minister Zhao Kuo, half in his grave, had hidden such ambition.

“Pity Lu Ping’an won’t leave Beiluo to aid my court,” Yuwen Xiu sighed. “With him, Great Zhou could be unified.”

The old eunuch shook his head. Without He Shou’s inflammatory proclamation, the Young Lord might not have even sent his people. Such a figure would never serve as a mere minister—and even if he would, could the emperor dare accept him?

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At Wangxiang Tower, He Shou’s face was ashen, staring at the panting servant. “My lord, the tower is surrounded by armored cavalry on horseback. We’re trapped!” the servant cried, sweat beading with fear.

“Run!” He Shou’s expression shifted, and the ministers, terrified, rushed downstairs. Hearing hooves thundering outside, they avoided the main entrance, fleeing toward the side door. “Beiluo’s thieves are ruthless. We must reach the Prime Minister’s mansion!” He Shou urged, swapping clothes with a servant for safety.

But as they slipped out, Beiluo’s cavalry blocked the way, their gazes cold. He Shou paled, and the ministers trembled, turning to flee, only to face a bloodied blade barring their path. “Who is He Shou?” Luo Cheng demanded, his sword drawn, eyes like ice.

Nie Changqing approached, driving the carriage. “You scholars love your theatrics,” he said coolly. “Ambushing us, then watching from on high—perhaps you’d compose a poem for the occasion?” His gaze swept the group, instantly spotting the disguised ministers. He Shou’s lack of a servant’s demeanor betrayed him.

He Shou’s heart sank with regret. Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing’s prowess—stopping a rain of arrows and wielding a butcher’s knife to kill effortlessly—defied his understanding of martial masters. Even grandmasters couldn’t withstand an army or such an arrow storm. He had mobilized three thousand elite soldiers from Zhao Kuo to crush the Young Lord’s servants, aiming to break his spirit. Yet they faced this unimaginable power.

Nie Changqing, knife in hand, his white robes billowing, stepped forward. “Which one is He Shou? Point him out, and you may live.”

The disguised ministers, already resentful of He Shou for dragging them to this spectacle, eagerly betrayed him. He Shou’s face drained of color, his anger boiling. Luo Cheng’s eyes blazed, his sword flashing toward He Shou’s neck. “You wrote that wretched proclamation? Who are you to insult the Young Lord?”

The blade cut through the air, its edge deadly. He Shou, face gray as ash, regretted coming to Wangxiang Tower. Why had he courted death?

“Wait,” Nie Changqing interrupted, halting Luo Cheng. “Killing him now is too kind. Let him witness the consequences of his proclamation.” He pointed to the minister who first betrayed He Shou. “You may go.”

The man, weeping with relief, scrambled away. Nie Changqing sighed, watching his pathetic retreat. Great Zhou's ministers lacked any spine, no wonder the capital was in chaos. "Kill the rest," he said calmly.

Luo Cheng's soldiers drew their blades, and the ministers who came to gawk fell in pools of blood. He Shou collapsed, a foul stench rising as he soiled himself, blood from a nearby minister splattering his face.

From behind the carriage's curtain, Ning Zhao's voice drifted. "The ministers we seized in Beiluo detailed the capital's noble factions clearly. We'll take our time."

Nie Changqing climbed aboard, driving the carriage forward. Luo Cheng, sneering at He Shou, hoisted him up and mounted his horse. The five hundred cavalry thundered away from Wangxiang Tower, dominating the capital's streets as onlookers cowered in silence.

The Qian family, a prominent noble house and staunch ally of Zhao Kuo, was their next target. The cavalry stormed the mansion, breaking the gates. Qian guards rushed forward, but Nie Changqing dispatched them with two swings of his knife. Luo Cheng led the cavalry in, rounding up the family, sparing only women and children. The Qian patriarch knelt, tears streaming, shouting, "Beiluo thieves! By what right do you destroy my family?"

From the carriage, a calm voice replied, "The Qian family submitted thirteen memorials, each slandering our Young Lord, and spread your proclamation's lies. Your secret recruitment of soldiers and corruption we'll overlook—your crimes are grave enough. Kill them."

Luo Cheng gave the order, and blades fell, blood spraying. He Shou, dragged along, watched, his face growing paler. He thought this was the end, but the Qian family's fall was merely the beginning.

The five hundred cavalry, escorting the carriage, moved unhurriedly through the capital, breaching mansion after mansion. Noble houses crumbled under their iron hooves, their cries and pleas silenced as Ning Zhao listed their crimes. Their greatest sin? Submitting countless memorials defaming Beiluo's Young Lord.

A rain of blood drenched the capital. The noble families, long emboldened, now faced the terror of the Young Lord's dominion, their arrogance shattered by Beiluo's relentless blades.