

Starlit Path 102

Chapter 102: Blood in the Capital and a Challenger on the Lake

A storm of blood and death swept through the capital. Over a dozen noble families, each with members in the imperial court, had penned memorials to the emperor's desk. Now, they faced an unrelenting purge. Five hundred Beiluo cavalry, escorting a single carriage, rampaged like a primordial beast, crushing all in their path. Heads rolled as noble houses were cleansed—not eradicated entirely, but left crippled, their vitality drained. Smaller families trembled, fearing the hooves of Beiluo's riders would shatter their gates next.

This was a day of bloodshed, a day when the capital's nobles were cloaked in dread. Mention the Young Lord of Beiluo, and even crying children were hushed by their parents' hands.

In the Prime Minister's Mansion, Zhao Kuo sat serenely in the main hall, sipping tea. At his age, he valued calm and health above all. A subordinate burst in, collapsing to his knees. "Prime Minister, disaster! Beiluo's Young Lord sent five hundred cavalry to the capital. They've captured Lord He and are slaughtering the noble families. Ministers are dead, and blood flows like rivers!"

Zhao Kuo's teacup clattered to the table, his sharp eyes glinting. "This Young Lord of Beiluo dares wreak havoc in the capital? Utterly brazen! Cultivators are indeed a new variable in this world."

He rubbed the jade ring on his finger and raised a hand. From the rafters, a shadow drifted down silently. "Fetch Master Du from the east wing," Zhao Kuo ordered. "Cultivators must be countered by cultivators."

Master Du, who had gained an immortal fate in Wolong Ridge's immortal palace, was Zhao Kuo's hidden ace, recruited as a strategist. Had He Shou and the other ministers been present, they would have been stunned. Zhao Kuo was far from the frail, foolish old man he appeared to be in their meetings. Leaning back in his chair, he sipped his tea and shook his head. "These ministers have disappointed me. If blood must flow, let it pour."

He turned to his kneeling subordinate. "Prepare the carriage." As the man scurried off, Zhao Kuo rose leisurely. "I've always lacked the right wind to stir the storm. Today, that wind blows perfectly."

He boarded his carriage, the wheels rolling toward the Scholar's Pavilion. There, Mo Tianyu was divining, pausing to glance at Zhao Kuo as he stepped down. "Is the Grand Preceptor here?" Zhao Kuo asked.

Mo Tianyu took a swig from his gourd. "He's here, but he won't see you."

Zhao Kuo's eyes narrowed, but he ignored Mo Tianyu, gazing at the weathered pavilion. "Kong Xiu, we've vied for half a lifetime. It's time for a reckoning. The young emperor lacks judgment, and you're mired in rumors, barely holding on. Why not set aside our rivalry and aid the emperor together?"

His words carried hidden barbs. A stir came from the pavilion. After a long pause, Kong Nanfei appeared on the second floor. "Leave. The master says he's never competed with you, nor is there need for a reckoning."

Zhao Kuo's face flushed with anger. Never competed? That was tantamount to dismissing him as unworthy. Clenching his fists, he said no more, storming off. He would show Kong Xiu the folly of his refusal through action.

On Lakeheart Island, Lü Dongxuan trembled violently, overwhelmed by the aura of the pavilion's plaques. The Young Lord, seemingly oblivious, had Ni Yu wheel him to the second-floor terrace, where he leaned against the railing, listening to the wind. Lü Mu stood at a distance, his expression complex, while Mingyue, the pipa girl, looked worried. "Is Master Lü alright? Is he in danger?" she asked.

Lü Mu glanced at her, waving dismissively. "He's fine—more than fine. This is a great opportunity." The plaques held profound potential, capable of clearing the mind and unlocking deeper insights.

Time passed. Lü Dongxuan sat as if in meditation for half a day. On the terrace, the Young Lord sipped wine, set up his chessboard, and played a game of mountains and rivers, his mind drifting to the capital's events and the establishment of a Dragon-Rearing Ground. He wasn't overly concerned about the capital—Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, and Nie Changqing could handle any threat short of a ten-thousand-strong army.

His thoughts shifted to the capital's depths, to the imperial gardens where Yuwen Xiu stood by a shimmering pool, the black serpent coiled around his arm. As it slithered into the water, thousands of fish scattered in panic. The Young Lord's mind stirred, and he raised a hand, channeling a wisp of spiritual energy to mark the spot. Imperial Palace Dragon-Rearing Ground, confirmed.

Suddenly, he withdrew his focus, his brow arching. Holding a bronze wine cup, he leaned on the railing, the breeze ruffling his hair, and gazed at the lake under the sunset's glow. Someone approached by boat—and another... came treading the waves.

At Beiluo's city walls, Lu Changkong stood atop the gate, Luo Yue in armor beside him. A black steed galloped from the plains' edge, halting below. Its rider, cloaked in a wide black robe and a conical hat, exuded an imposing presence despite his obscured face. "I've come to visit Beiluo's Young Lord. Please, Lord Lu, grant me entry," the figure called, reining in the horse.

Lu Changkong's gaze deepened. "He's formidable," Luo Yue whispered, feeling a mountainous pressure from the stranger. As a cultivator, Lu Changkong sensed it more acutely—this was no ordinary man, a cultivator of great power.

"Who are you, and from where?" Lu Changkong asked, his hand resting on his sword, spiritual energy surging from his fifth-stage Qi Core, his aura like a roused lion.

The figure smiled, withholding his spiritual energy. "I come from Western Liang," he said, laughing heartily.

The gate erupted in murmurs. Western Liang! The black steed! Lu Changkong's eyes narrowed. Could this be the Overlord? After a moment's thought, he waved open the gates. The rider laughed, his horse whinnying as it thundered into Beiluo. Lu Changkong and his troops waited below. The rider removed his hat, revealing a fierce, domineering face.

Lu Changkong froze, and Luo Yue, tensing, drew his sword. The Overlord! His feat at Wolong Ridge—slaying five thousand single-handedly, rivers of blood flowing—was legendary. His name alone struck fear. He had come for the Young Lord, no doubt to challenge him.

The Overlord, Xiang Shaoyun, grinned, bowing slightly to Lu Changkong before riding toward Beiluo Lake. Lu Changkong and his soldiers followed at a distance. At the lakeside, Xiang Shaoyun looked out,

the sunset glinting on the water. He glimpsed a misty, spiritual-energy-wreathed island. His blood surged, a thrill of facing a worthy foe.

With a laugh, his black robe tore apart, revealing a towering frame with a double-headed axe strapped to his back. He stepped onto the lake, the water churning as if struck by a tempest. Striding forward, waves crashed, white foam bursting. His piercing gaze cut through the fog, locked on Lakeheart Island. The Overlord treaded the waves, charging toward his goal.