

Starlit Path 105

Chapter 105: The Capital's Bloodbath and a Lesson in Power

In the capital, the ten-mile-long street glowed crimson under the setting sun, steeped in an aura of slaughter and chill. Today was a day of bloodshed, and the city's residents had long since barricaded themselves indoors. The lofty noble families, once untouchable as tigers, now wailed in despair, their blood staining the streets. The common folk felt a mix of grim satisfaction and overwhelming fear. The streets lay deserted.

Luo Cheng, his armor still wet with blood, dragged He Shou, whose face was a mask of despair. At the street's far end, a disciplined army in armor and shields advanced—a true military force. Luo Cheng couldn't fathom how such an army existed in the capital. Nie Changqing sat calmly on the carriage, eyeing the troops with indifference. The curtain parted, and Ning Zhao and Yi Yue stepped out.

Heavy shields slammed into the ground, soldiers slotting blades through the gaps, forming a wall of steel that inched forward. A cold voice rang out from behind. "You've slaughtered seventeen noble families and twenty-one ministers, undermining Great Zhou's foundation. You are the source of this chaos, guilty of heinous crimes. The capital is the emperor's domain—how dare you villains act so brazenly? By the Prime Minister's order, we seize you rebels. Those who sow chaos will be killed without mercy!"

A scholar in green robes, astride a red steed, reined in his horse and shouted. "Kill!" The army roared in unison, their cry like thunder. This was an elite force, trained by Zhao Kuo, over eight thousand strong, enveloping the street. Five hundred against eight thousand—a disparity rivaling the Overlord's famed battle at Wolong Ridge.

Beside the scholar stood a young man in a wide robe and crane cloak, seated in a sedan chair borne by six servants. "Master Du," the scholar bowed. Du Tao, once a first-rate martial artist, had been unremarkable in Great Zhou until he gained a strand of spiritual energy in Wolong Ridge's immortal palace. His strength soared, surpassing ordinary grandmasters, and his spiritual energy made him invincible in the capital's martial circles. Recruited by Zhao Kuo as a guest advisor, Du Tao's ego swelled. Revered by thousands, even the Prime Minister treated him with respect. Mimicking the Young Lord of Beiluo, he insisted on being carried in a sedan, never walking.

Initially, Du Tao refused Zhao Kuo's request to confront Beiluo's forces with eight thousand elite soldiers. He knew his limits—against ordinary martial artists, he was unmatched, but facing the Young Lord's cultivators would likely mean death. Yet Zhao Kuo's persistence swayed him. With eight thousand well-equipped soldiers, several grandmasters, and his own cultivation, he might defeat the Young Lord's maid and coachman. Success could yield their cultivation methods, propelling him further. The prospect of wealth through risk enticed him, and so he stood on the street.

In the carriage, Ning Zhao's sleeve fluttered, her Cicada Wing Sword sliding out. "There's spiritual energy—a cultivator," she said, her red lips parting. "But... so weak, I almost didn't sense it."

Nie Changqing, gripping his butcher's knife, stood. "Likely a lucky fool who gained an immortal fate at Wolong Ridge."

Ning Zhao laughed. "What's he trying to do?"

"Using eight thousand soldiers for a human wave tactic to kill us, hoping to seize our cultivation methods," Nie Changqing said, cracking his neck. "First time a cultivator's dared challenge White Jade Pavilion's disciples. Interesting. What would the Young Master do with such an upstart?"

Yi Yue, coiling her whip, sneered, "He'd whip him to death."

While Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing bantered, Luo Cheng gripped his sword, his knuckles white. Not a cultivator, he saw five hundred against eight thousand as a death sentence. Even a seventh- or eighth-resonance grandmaster couldn't survive this, let alone him, a mere first-rate martial general.

Nie Changqing leaped down beside Luo Cheng, who released He Shou. The black butcher's knife pressed against He Shou's neck. "You're good at writing proclamations, aren't you?" Nie Changqing said. "Curse Zhao Kuo. Scream it at that army."

He Shou trembled, pushed forward by Nie Changqing, the cold blade at his throat. Facing eight thousand soldiers, he shouted curses. Instantly, an arrow pierced his chest. He gasped, staring in disbelief. The green-robed scholar, bow in hand, smirked as the string still quivered. Another arrow struck He Shou's shoulder.

Nie Changqing lowered his knife. He Shou, crazed, stumbled forward, roaring hoarsely. In his mind flashed memories of the Prime Minister's mansion, where he'd penned his proclamation under moonlight, earning applause and Zhao Kuo's approving smile. Now, he saw the cold intent behind that smile. Arrows turned him into a pincushion, a sacrificial pawn discarded.

Arrows flew past his corpse toward Nie Changqing and the others. Ning Zhao raised a hand, her peak Qi Core spiritual pressure halting them midair, clattering to the ground. Du Tao, in his sedan, squinted, heart trembling. So strong.

"No more arrows—use human wave tactics!" he shouted. He knew cultivators' weaknesses: limited spiritual energy. Once depleted, they were barely stronger than ordinary martial artists. The scholar signaled, and the army abandoned bows, pushing shields and charging with blades—a steel torrent flooding the street.

On Lakeheart Island, a gentle breeze stirred the Young Lord's hair. The White Jade Pavilion was silent, save for the startled cries of birds. Xiang Shaoyun, having spoken, watched the Young Lord with fervent eyes. Lü Dongxuan felt he'd heard something he shouldn't have.

The Young Lord leaned in his wheelchair, glancing at Xiang Shaoyun and gesturing to Ni Yu. "Little Ni, more wine."

"Yes, Young Master," Ni Yu replied, ladling wine into his cup.

The Young Lord sipped, his expression unreadable. "You disappoint me," he said finally.

Xiang Shaoyun's face stiffened, his brow furrowing. "Why, Young Lord?"

The Young Lord, cup in hand, leaned against the carved railing, gazing at the misty lake. "You still don't grasp the true meaning of being a cultivator. I thought you came to White Jade Pavilion to seek the Dao, but I'm disappointed. Northern County has Mo Beike, Southern County the Sword Sect, Great Zhou Kong Xiu—but none are cultivators. They rely on schemes and calculations. You, without their aid, are different. You are a cultivator, blessed by an immortal, enlightened by the Demon Lord."

Xiang Shaoyun trembled. How did the Young Lord know of his demonic transformation? The words sank in, stirring reflection.

The Young Lord sipped again. "As a cultivator, that's your greatest advantage, enough to crush any plot. In this world, strength is everything."

His words jolted Xiang Shaoyun. The Young Lord picked a chess piece, raising it high. Click. It landed on the spiritual pressure board, glowing faintly. He intended to teach the Overlord a lesson. Nearly five hundred strands of spiritual energy surged.

Boom! The invisible pressure erupted, the lake around the island sinking meters. In the pavilion, winds howled, Lü Dongxuan paled, his gold chain rattling. Xiang Shaoyun stood, nine strands of demonic energy swirling to shield him, but they shattered under the Young Lord's pressure. His spine seemed to crack, forcing him to one knee.

The Young Lord, hair and robes billowing, sat like an immortal, gazing down. "Moreover, have you considered who is worthy of my aid? Are you?"