

Starlit Path 110

Chapter 110: A Message of Dragons and a Defiant Charge

The night deepened over the capital. A carriage entered the palace, where the chaos had just subsided. Corpses, wrapped in shrouds, still bled on the ground. Lü Mu, leaning on his bamboo cane, lifted the curtain and gazed at the hellish scene, his wrinkled face trembling. The coachman's legs shook in fear. Beyond the bloody streets, the sights lessened. Jiang Li had seized control of the capital's forces, rallying Zhao Kuo's rebels under his banner. Years of Zhao Kuo's schemes had become Jiang Li's gain. Ministers who once impeached Jiang Li and Kong Xiu now lay silent, their bodies cold.

The carriage stopped at a teahouse in the bustling market, its candles still burning. A nervous maid opened the door for Lü Mu. A graceful woman, hair pinned in a bun, descended the stairs, raising an eyebrow. "You again?"

Lü Mu toyed with his tortoiseshell, grinning with gapped teeth. "Qianqian, my junior sister, may I borrow the Tianji pigeons again?"

Her brows furrowed. "What now? The emperor just crushed a rebellion, and Jiang Li holds the army. If we spread reckless rumors now, the emperor might raze this teahouse! Can you, old man, afford that?"

Lü Mu grinned shamelessly. "Why fear? Our master has joined Beiluo's White Jade Pavilion, and we're now its Tianji Pavilion. The emperor won't touch us." With such backing, he stood tall.

Qianqian froze. The Tianji School, with centuries of legacy, joined White Jade Pavilion? Lü Mu, sensing her shock, had the maid brew tea. Sipping, he explained slowly. Finally, she led him to a secret room atop the teahouse. Lü Mu took xuanhuang paper, hesitated, then coughed blood after patting his chest. "I should use pig's blood next time—this is killing me," he muttered, wiping his mouth. Dipping his brush in blood-ink, he recalled Lü Dongxuan's words and wrote:

“Dragons roam the Dragon-Rearing Grounds, eight sites to seek the noble flow. Spiritual energy stirs, the world transforms; without immortality, men lament. —White Jade Pavilion’s Tianji Pavilion, Lü Mu, blood-written.”

Exhaling, he finished. Qianqian, reading it, gasped. “Eight Dragon-Rearing Grounds? Is the emperor’s dragon tied to this?” Lü Mu nodded. “Remember Wolong Ridge? The Young Master says this secret realm will be grander, brimming with immortal fates.” He copied several scrolls, tucked them into pigeon tubes, and released the birds, their wings scattering white feathers.

On Beiluo Lake, in White Jade Pavilion’s second-floor terrace, the Young Lord sat, chessboard before him, playing a game of mountains and rivers. Lü Dongxuan, gold chain dangling, brewed tea. The Young Lord, sleeves rolled, placed a piece, spiritual energy stirring. Lü Dongxuan offered a cup of crystal-clear tea. “Young Master, try my craft,” he said, grinning. “First steeps water, second steeps tea, third and fourth are the essence.”

The Young Lord raised a brow, sipped, and savored the aroma. Lü Dongxuan hesitated, then spoke. “Young Master, you seem invested in the Overlord. That day by the lake, he asked me for a divination. After gaining insight from the plaques, I read his fate.”

The Young Lord paused mid-sip, intrigued. “What was the hexagram?”

“Great calamity,” Lü Dongxuan said, touching his chain.

The Young Lord nodded, understanding why Xiang Shaoyun acted so recklessly. Unlike Mo Tianyu, Lü Dongxuan's divinations, enlightened by the plaques, were likely accurate. Yet, the Overlord's demonic transformation might have shifted his fate. "No wonder," the Young Lord said, smiling, his eyes flickering with patterns. He glimpsed the chaos near Yuanchi City—a towering, defiant figure under moonlight.

Hooves thundered. The Overlord, spear in hand, axe on his back, charged like lightning into Northern County's army. War drums pounded, soldiers formed ranks, and horns pierced the night. Tantai Xuan, in armor with a red cape, rode a chariot to the camp's edge, spotting the Overlord's silhouette. "Arrogant!" he roared, slamming the chariot. "You may have fought five thousand at Wolong Ridge, and I respect that, but my fifty thousand? You think you're an immortal, Xiang Shaoyun?"

Feeling mocked, Tantai Xuan drew a flag and bellowed, "Kill! Five thousand gold for his head!" Mo Ju and Mo Beike sat in a carriage, wind whipping their robes. "I can't fathom his intent," Mo Ju said, fanning himself. "Why attack alone? At Wolong Ridge, five thousand nearly killed him." Mo Beike, silent, his weathered face unreadable, suspected the Overlord was taunting him. The Mohist Mechanism City had fallen, yet Xiang Shaoyun rode alone, as if to prove a point. His fists clenched.

Tantai Xuan, enraged, mobilized his fifty thousand. Swords and spears surged toward the Overlord. No matter how strong, he was mortal—blood would spill, exhaustion would come. Fifty thousand could bury him. Only an immortal could prevail, and even Lu Ping'an couldn't manage this.

From above, the scene was staggering: one rider against a roaring tide of fifty thousand, a drop in a stormy sea, swallowed instantly. Yet, a roar erupted. Soldiers flew, carved aside by immense force. The Overlord's spear pierced through, blood spraying, his face cold but fearless, growing fiercer.

Tantai Xuan, no ordinary lord, waved his flag, forming a serpent array to envelop and grind down the Overlord. Abandoning his broken spear, Xiang Shaoyun drew his axe, its swing toppling dozens. His black steed galloped, tearing the array apart, demonic energy swirling, blood raining. His blood boiled—he understood the Young Lord’s words. Strength trumped all schemes. What did Tantai Xuan’s Mo Beike matter? Or Yuwen Xiu’s Kong Xiu and Jiang Li? Western Liang had him, the Overlord, and that was enough.

Demonic energy wove through blood, forming an axe’s shadow, cleaving soldiers. The army swarmed, restricting his movement, but he carved a bloody path toward the camp. Hooves splashed blood, martial generals charged, their blood and energy roaring. The Overlord, unfazed, swung his axe, smashing a grandmaster meters away.

The army faltered, his demonic energy hinting at a breakthrough. Blood thickened, drawn to him by an unstoppable force. He vented his frustrations from Beiluo—not just the Young Lord’s disappointment but Lü Dongxuan’s dire divination. He refused to accept a fate of death by schemes. He charged to defy Mo Beike, fearless of any plot.

Blood soaked the earth, armor shattered. Fifty thousand couldn’t stop him. Panting, his steed whinnying, both were weary, but he pressed on, cultivating furiously. Under the blood-red moonlight, the soldiers, gripped by fear, parted, forming a path. Tantai Xuan, on his chariot, clenched his fists, face grim. The blood-drenched Overlord, axe in hand, rode before him, glancing briefly before fixing a beastly, oppressive gaze on Mo Beike.

Raising his axe, pointing at Mo Beike, blood dripping down his face, Xiang Shaoyun’s defiant, untamed spirit shone, rejecting fate and crushing all schemes with unyielding confidence.