

## Starlit Path 38

### Chapter 38: The Grandmaster Swordsman... Flees Again

“Before the campaign could begin, he met his end...”

The phrase perfectly described the three-sword swordsman. His chance to shine was shattered by a single stroke. Stepping out of the hall, he was beheaded by a butcher’s knife falling from the sky, with no chance to protest. The bloodied knife hovered silently, dripping crimson.

The Chen estate fell deathly quiet, everyone frozen in fear. The remaining Sword Sect disciples gaped, bewildered, terrified, or stunned. How... how is he dead?

At the nanmu table, Jingyue’s eyelids twitched. The wine in his cup rippled, betraying his steady hand. It’s here. He knew tonight would decide whether the Sword Sect could seize Beiluo. The young master, done with pretense, had bared his fangs, intent on crushing the Sword Sect’s influence with thunderous force.

The hovering knife shot back, vanishing under awestruck gazes. Such a technique—controlling a blade through the air—was akin to an immortal’s art. The swordsmen’s hearts quaked, their faces darkening with hesitation as they glanced at their fallen comrade and the retreating knife. Yet, they steeled themselves and stepped out, each step heavy, reaching the estate’s garden after a hundred paces.

The garden, with its rockery, pavilion, and pond, was picturesque, but the air reeked of blood and death. Dozens of Beiluo’s ironclad soldiers, their armor and blades stained red, stood ready. By the pond, a wheelchair-bound youth sprinkled steamed bun crumbs, drawing fish to feed. Beside him, a fox-faced girl in a goose-yellow skirt smiled brightly, while a child with a chessboard on her back stared curiously at the crumbs. A black-robed man stood solemnly, catching the bloodied butcher’s knife as it returned.

The Sword Sect disciples and merchants emerging from the hall tensed. The wheelchair creaked, turning on its own. Lu Ping'an, in pristine white robes, clapped the crumbs from his hands and regarded them coolly. The setting sun cast a blood-red glow, as if the light itself boiled.

"Beiluo's thirty-seven merchant houses," he said, propping his chin. "You, alongside the three noble families, hired those thugs?"

His tone wasn't harsh, but it gripped every merchant's heart. They opened their mouths, yet no words came. The Liu and Zhu patriarchs' faces twitched, their gazes falling on their bound heirs—Liu Ye, Zhu Yishan, and Chen Beixun—along with other key family members. Fear clutched them; their families were finished.

"Young Master Lu, what crime has my Liu family committed?" the Liu patriarch shouted, trembling. "If you destroy us, our industries and trade networks with other cities will collapse, plunging Beiluo into ruin!"

"You fiend!" the Zhu patriarch added. "Your father, Lu Changkong, is reasonable, yet he sired such a lawless wretch!"

Merchants echoed their protests, while Sword Sect disciples drew their blades. The Chen family's private guards raised longbows, facing Lu's group. Tension crackled.

Lu's gaze bypassed the patriarchs, landing on the Sword Sect elites in teal robes, their yellow pearwood sword cases gleaming. "The Sword Sect... one of the Hundred Schools," he mused, eyes narrowing. He'd first encountered the Taoist Sect, but they hadn't targeted Beiluo. The Sword Sect, however, sought to control it. According to Chen Beixun, the Hundred Schools had infiltrated Great Zhou's six fortified cities,

treating the empire as a feast to carve up. The three families' rebellion, luring Tantai Xuan's army, was likely their doing.

Nie Changqing opened his eyes, wiping blood from his knife. Slaying a fifth-rank grandmaster from afar had his hand trembling. Unlike the frail scholars on the flower boats, this was a true grandmaster. His success owed much to the Blade Control Technique

's surprise. Luo Cheng, gripping his sword, buzzed with excitement but stayed vigilant, knowing this was the final stand.

"Young Master, what's the plan?" he asked.

The Liu and Zhu patriarchs kept shouting, hoping to intimidate Lu with talk of economic collapse. Merchants joined in, warning of chaos without them.

"Kill them," Lu said calmly, propping his chin. "The world won't stop without you, nor will Beiluo. Others will take your place."

His voice was cold, silencing the crowd. Their hearts sank. "Beiluo will fall into chaos!" a merchant roared, eyes red.

Lu glanced at him. "Chaos? So be it. If anyone feels they can't survive in Beiluo, they're free to leave. Let's see if the world outside is more chaotic than here."

He stroked the wool blanket on his lap, then uttered a single, icy word: "Kill."

Luo Cheng kateri, their swords drawn, stood ready atop the estate's walls, summoned by Luo Cheng from the city defenses, aiming military crossbows at the Chen guards, merchants, and Sword Sect elites. Soldiers with iron shields protected Lu.

"No! Young Master Lu, we were wrong! Spare us!" the merchants begged, collapsing in tears, fear overtaking them. But their pleas were futile. At Luo Cheng's command, the crossbows fired, piercing merchants and leaving blood pooling on the ground. The Liu and Zhu patriarchs fell without a scream. The Sword Sect elites, overwhelmed, were hacked to death. The weakened Chen guards stood no chance against the elite soldiers, quickly falling.

The garden reeked of blood. Lu looked up. From the hall, a figure emerged, wine cup in hand—Jingyue, the four-sword grandmaster. A bloodied Sword Sect martial artist crawled to him, dying with a resentful gasp. Jingyue sighed, tossing his cup into the air, the wine sparkling in the sunset. With a flick of his fingers, he drew a sword, its ring echoing. Six bursts of blood energy erupted.

Nie Changqing gripped his knife, stepping in front of Lu, bracing for a sixth-rank grandmaster. But Jingyue struck the ground with his sword, bending it, and vaulted onto the roof, fleeing across the tiles into the sunset.

Lu blinked, the scene oddly familiar. Didn't I see this before?