

## Starlit Path 43

### Chapter 43: Divining Young Master Lu's Fate

The night draped Beiluo in a frost-like veil, bathing the city in a silvery glow. Lu Changkong, astride his sweat-blooded steed, inhaled deeply, the thick stench of blood filling his lungs. His heart trembled. Could Mo Tianyu's divination be true? Had Lu Ping'an truly fallen to the combined forces of the three noble families and the Sword Sect? Clad in cold armor, his back hunched slightly, weighed by dread.

Luo Yue, silent behind him, gripped his reins tightly, his face grim as he too caught the blood-soaked air. The clatter of wheels on cobblestones sounded as the five-horse carriage slowed, its hoofbeats fading. Mo Tianyu emerged, wine gourd at his waist, and took a deep breath of the blood-tainted air. "A city steeped in slaughter," he remarked, his voice heavy with emotion. "My dire divination was correct. What a pity—Heaven's will is unyielding. Lord Lu, my condolences."

He unhooked his gourd, swigged wine, and let the liquid spray, its aroma cutting through the blood. Perched on the carriage frame, his Confucian robe open at the chest, straw sandals dangling, he exuded a carefree defiance. Lu Changkong shot him a glare, his eyes blazing with killing intent, as if ready to draw his blade and spill blood in five steps.

Mo Tianyu, unfazed, took another swig, belched, and laughed. "That's the spirit! The Farmer School may be faded, but as one of the Hundred Schools, you should carry their domineering air."

Lu Changkong's eyes narrowed. "Mind your words, sir. You're accountable for what you say."

"Old Luo, we ride to the Lu Manor," he ordered. "If anything's happened to Fan'er, I'll raze the Zhongnan Sword Sect to the ground, even if it costs me Beiluo!"

His words rang with resolve. He cracked his whip, and his horse surged toward the manor. Luo Yue's eyes flickered, his hand on his sword. "I'll follow to the death!" he roared. The three hundred cavalry thundered after him, leaving Mo Tianyu alone on the street, clutching his gourd. He grinned, then signaled the driver to follow.

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Lu Changkong's face was dark with worry, but as he galloped through the city, his expression grew puzzled. Spotting soldiers handling corpses, he reined in his horse, hooves tapping rhythmically on the bricks. Dismounting, he strode toward them. The soldiers, recognizing him, knelt in excitement. "Lord City Lord!"

"How's the young master?" Lu Changkong demanded, his face stern. "What happened? Where are the wall guards? What's the battle's status? Casualties?"

The soldiers, overwhelmed by his barrage, stammered. Luo Yue, impatient, stepped forward, roaring like a lion, "Answer him! Are you all struck dumb? Speak!"

The soldiers flinched. "Reporting to the City Lord," one began, "the battle... it's over."

Lu Changkong blinked, caught off guard. Before he could press further, the soldier recounted everything: "The Liu, Zhu, and Chen families were eradicated by the young master's order on charges of treason. The Sword Sect's elites were wiped out. Hundreds of scholars insulted the young master at Beiluo Lake and were jailed and executed..."

The words struck Lu Changkong and Luo Yue like thunder. What? This contradicted the earlier reports. Everything was reversed. Lu Changkong's face twitched. "Is this true?"

The soldier, nearly in tears, insisted he wouldn't dare lie. "The wall guards—only a few remain. Eighteen wounded, three dead. The rest were called by Commander Luo to move bodies."

From the trailing carriage, Mo Tianyu's voice rang out, incredulous. "Impossible! Five of the Sword Sect's Seven Heroes came. How could you win?"

Lu Changkong's face darkened further. "Mo Tianyu, I warned you to mind your words. Does your divination mean my son doesn't deserve to live?"

Luo Yue glared at Mo Tianyu, who, realizing his misstep, offered no apology but arched his hand. He pulled out three copper coins, studying them. Another wrong divination? Lu Changkong, calming, turned back to the soldier. "Good. Fan'er's safe."

Though unsure of the details, Lu knew his son had handled it. No longer rushing to the manor, he set out to clean up the aftermath.

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In the carriage, Mo Tianyu scratched his disheveled hair, muttering, "Five of the Seven Heroes—without Lu Changkong and his three hundred elite cavalry, Lu Ping'an should be dead!" He flicked his coins, sprayed wine, and watched them spin in the mist, landing in his palm. Squinting at the moonlight through the window, he frowned. "Still a dire omen. Lu Changkong's son should be doomed."

Irritated, he tucked the coins away. "I'll divine Lu Ping'an's fate to his face!" he declared. "To the Lu Manor!"

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\*Lu Manor, Lu Ping'an's Courtyard\*

Jingyue, his yellow pearwood sword case on his back, sat gazing at the starry sky, a touch of melancholy in his eyes. He'd survived, but Lu's indifferent stare still haunted him. His surrender hadn't guaranteed life—Lu's demand for a reason to spare him had chilled him. Unable to offer one, death loomed. The Sword Sect's Beiluo forces were crushed, four of the Seven Heroes slain. To live, Jingyue had surrendered the sect's blood-moving technique and several sword arts, selling himself into servitude.

Now, he was no longer a Sword Sect hero but Lu's nameless servant. Yet he felt no shame. Isn't living enough?

On the roof, Ning Zhao sat in her white dress, bathed in moonlight, ethereal and radiant. Sensing something, her lashes fluttered, and she glanced coldly at Jingyue. He forced a stiff smile. Suddenly, her brow furrowed, and she looked toward the manor's gates. Jingyue's eyes narrowed.

Outside, the five-horse carriage stopped, horses whinnying. Mo Tianyu, disheveled and clutching his gourd, stepped out. Seeing the closed gates, he smirked, climbed the carriage frame, and leaped onto the manor's roof, using lightfoot techniques to slip toward the manor's depths.