

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 6: A Grandmaster as a Maid

Beneath Beiluo City's walls, hooves thundered like a storm. Dust billowed as Lu Changkong, clad in armor, gripped a long halberd, his eyes flashing with electric intensity. His horse's mane streamed as he charged toward Feng Shi.

Boom, boom, boom!

Atop the city walls, a bare-chested soldier swung a mallet, striking the war drum with a rhythm that shook the heart. Feng Shi's gaze sharpened, sensing a piercing aura sweep toward him, scattering the sand beneath. "Lu Changkong... a Grandmaster!" he muttered, then roared with laughter, his voice like thunder.

Spurring his armored black steed, he charged fearlessly, hooves pounding like a tempest. The landscape blurred as both warriors galloped, one from the south, one from the north. Feng Shi's eyes gleamed with bloodlust, his broadsword gripped tightly.

Lu Changkong, though imposing, was slimmer than the hulking Feng Shi, a master of external techniques. Lu Changkong, trained in internal blood circulation, leaned low over his horse, sweeping his halberd with veins bulging like coiled dragons.

Feng Shi bellowed, meeting the strike in the pulsing rhythm of the war drum. Sparks flew as halberd clashed with broadsword, the clang of metal resounding. Feng Shi's divine strength overpowered Lu Changkong's initial strike, proving himself near Grandmaster level despite his rank.

Lu Changkong's eyes were ice, regarding Feng Shi as a dead man. With a twist of his halberd, he redirected the force, his helmet blasted off by a surge of vital energy. The halberd slid along the broadsword, forcing Feng Shi to abandon his weapon. Lu Changkong snorted, hurling the halberd to pin the blade to the ground.

He followed with a powerful fist. Feng Shi roared, meeting it with his own massive punch. But Lu Changkong's internal training granted relentless stamina. Three rapid strikes overwhelmed Feng Shi, who coughed blood and was thrown from his horse, rolling in the dirt.

“Magnificent!”

“City Lord’s might prevails!”

“A mere brute dares challenge our Grandmaster?”

Cheers erupted from Beiluo’s defenders, their morale soaring. The Northern Prefecture’s army fell silent.

Lu Changkong remained stoic, his gaze cold. He spurred his horse, retrieving his halberd and swinging it toward Feng Shi, aiming to cleave him in two. Feng Shi scrambled to his feet, fleeing toward his army, his legs pounding the ground like a beast.

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Deep within the Northern Prefecture’s camp, a grand tent stood. A soldier galloped in, kneeling. “Governor, City Lord Lu Changkong has engaged. General Feng is defeated and retreating!”

At the tent’s head, a refined man in armor, a red cape draped behind him, tapped his chin thoughtfully. Governor Tantai Xuan’s face lit with a faint smile, not alarm. “Lu Changkong’s taken the bait.”

His generals exchanged knowing looks. “The Governor’s foresight is unmatched. Beiluo is ours for the taking,” they praised.

Tantai Xuan’s scholarly face softened with a smile. “Lu Changkong’s cautious, rarely leaving the city. Only a foul-mouthed brute like Feng Shi could provoke him.” His eyes sharpened. “Send the martial sect Grandmasters. Today, Lu Changkong must not return to Beiluo. We have one chance—if he escapes and fortifies, it’ll take months to breach the city. Signal our insiders to act. With internal and external pressure, Beiluo will fall.”

The generals saluted, departing to execute his orders.

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Hooves thundered as Feng Shi fled, heart pounding. Suddenly, the Northern Prefecture’s ranks parted, and several figures on horseback charged toward Lu Changkong, their vital energy booming with resonant bursts—Grandmasters.

Lu Changkong reined in his horse, its hooves rearing. Feng Shi, relieved, laughed maniacally. Four figures attacked: one with a spear, one with a sword, one with a broadsword, and one with a horsetail whisk.

“Lu Sword Sect, Black Tiger Gang, and... Qingcheng Temple?” Lu Changkong’s eyes narrowed. “Martial sects, summoned by the Grand Preceptor to aid Great Zhou, yet you betray us?”

He roared, temples pulsing, swinging his halberd in a white arc to meet their weapons. Facing three Grandmasters, he held his ground. In the distance, Tantai Xuan watched from a raised platform, his gaze tightening. “Lu Changkong’s grown stronger. Without these sect Grandmasters, stopping him would be near impossible.” He sighed. “But even Grandmasters are mortal.”

Lu Changkong repelled his foes and, without hesitation, wheeled his horse toward Beiluo. His recent breakthrough had fueled his confidence, but the betrayal of martial sects changed everything. If captured, Beiluo would be leaderless and doomed.

Then, his eyes blazed with fury. “You dare?!” His roar sent shockwaves through the air. The open city gates had slammed shut.

Atop Beiluo's walls, chaos reigned. Confucian-robed warriors from the three major clans clashed with the city's defenders. Lu Changkong was cut off, isolated.

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When Ning Zhao wheeled Lu to the base of the city walls, the scene was a bloodbath. Corpses littered the ground behind the gates. Lu Changkong's trusted general lay dead, a spear through his chest, eyes wide with unyielding defiance. The air reeked of blood as the clans' warriors, having slain the gate guards, seized control and sealed the entrance.

Lu's face paled, the wool blanket pressed to his nose to block the stench. Ning Zhao and Yi Yue, seasoned martial artists, were unfazed. Even Ni Yu had seen blood before. But Lu, witnessing this slaughter for the first time, was shaken.

"Master..." Ning Zhao said, concern in her voice.

Lu waved her off, clarity dawning in his eyes. This was the chaos of a warring world—lives as cheap as grass. Even with his system, survival was no guarantee. This was the era's brutal rule.

“I’m fine,” he said calmly. “Just not fond of the smell.”

Three Confucian scholars, bloodied swords in hand, blocked their path. They glanced at Lu in his wheelchair, recognizing Beiluo’s young lord. His presence at the walls was odd, and they smirked.

“Young Lord Lu, this is no place for poetry and willows. A cripple like you should retreat,” one sneered.

“Beiluo’s about to change hands. Better pack and flee, cripple,” another mocked.

“Flee? Without his father, how long will he last? But his maids... we’ll take them off his hands.”

In the past, they’d maintained decorum around Lu. Now, with loyalties broken, they dropped all pretense. A crippled young lord with three maids was a laughable sight.

They stayed wary, however. Ning Zhao, with her restrained aura and no visible weapon, seemed unthreatening. Yi Yue, with her whip and pulsing vitality, appeared the real danger—a likely high-level martial artist. Ni Yu, clutching her umbrella, was dismissed as a harmless mascot.

Ning Zhao's face remained impassive. Yi Yue drew her whip, eyes cold. Ni Yu huddled close to Lu, trembling.

Lu, hands clasped over the blanket, gazed at the chaotic walls, his brow furrowed. The system's mission was no mistake—Beiluo was unraveling.

"How dare you insult Master!" Yi Yue's fox-like face darkened with killing intent. Her whip cracked against the ground, explosive as firecrackers.

But Ning Zhao placed a hand on Yi Yue's shoulder. "Little Yue, protect Master."

With a flick of her wrist, a metallic *clang* sounded. A thin, cicada-wing blade sprang from the wheelchair's handle. Ning Zhao seized it, her figure blurring like a breeze, her body resonating with Grandmaster-level bursts.

The three scholars froze, terror gripping them. “Resonant body... a Grandmaster?!”

“A Grandmaster as a maid? What kind of extravagance is this?!”

“Damn it, run!”

They hadn’t imagined the gentle, stunning maid was a Grandmaster. Their courage shattered, they turned to flee. But against a Grandmaster, three Second-Rate fighters had no chance.

A flash of white light sliced through their necks. Blood stained their robes, and they collapsed, dead.

A breeze stirred, untouched by dust. Ning Zhao returned, flicking blood from her blade. She sheathed it back into the wheelchair’s handle.

Lu, still covering his nose, didn’t spare the corpses a glance. “Sister Ning, to the walls,” he said, his voice trembling slightly at first, then steadyng.

Ning Zhao smiled brightly, pushing the wheelchair past the bodies with graceful steps, heading for the city walls.