

Starlit Path 90

Chapter 90: The Emperor's Decree Leaves the Imperial City

The Next Morning, Dawn.

Sunlight spilled over the capital's bustling teahouse. A glamorous woman sat, her beautiful face dark with fury. Before her, several teahouse servants knelt, trembling, while a maid with a bun stood silently behind her.

"Who was it?!" the woman demanded, slamming the table, making the servants quake. "The Mohists infiltrated our Heavenly Secret School? Who leaked the news?"

Lü Mudui, lounging in a corner, sipped porridge, stroking his beard leisurely. Last night, a Heavenly Secret pigeon had flown from the teahouse, spreading a shocking rumor: "Great Zhou's late Emperor Yuwen Tuo fell to Kong Xiu's scheme, killed by Jiang Li's hand." Coming from the Heavenly Secret School, it carried an air of credibility, enraging the woman.

Lü Mudui finished his porridge, wiped his beard, and chuckled. "Qianqian, don't be so angry. Just manage the pigeons better next time. Besides, our school is neutral, but with the Hundred Schools opposing Great Zhou, choosing a side is inevitable. This rumor isn't baseless—flies don't swarm a flawless egg."

"Shut up, you old fool!" Qianqian snapped, already fuming. Lü Mudui smiled, rose with his bamboo staff, and headed out.

"Where to?" she asked, frowning.

“Beiluo,” Lü Mudui replied. “Young Master Lu owes me a promise—it’s time he fulfilled it.”

The capital erupted. The Heavenly Secret School’s rumor, amplified by noble clans, spread like wildfire. “National Advisor Kong Xiu plotted to murder Emperor Yuwen Tuo!” “Great Zhou’s military soul Jiang Li is the culprit!” “The late Emperor’s death hides a shocking secret!” Teahouses, taverns, and street storytellers buzzed with the tale.

Many questioned why Jiang Li and Kong Xiu, Yuwen Tuo’s trusted allies, would kill him. Soon, more details emerged, centering on a key figure: Bai Fengtian, Soldier School heir. During Yuwen Tuo’s reign, Bai Fengtian crushed western barbarians and southern tribes, his victories legendary. His boldest act was burying three hundred thousand barbarian soldiers alive at the border, holding supreme military power—too great for the Emperor’s comfort.

Yuwen Tuo issued nine imperial decrees, recalling Bai Fengtian from the western frontier, stripping his command and ordering him to retire. But Bai Fengtian never reached retirement—he died mysteriously. As Kong Xiu’s close friend and Jiang Li’s mentor, his death shocked the realm. Many suspected Yuwen Tuo’s hand but dared not speak it. When Yuwen Tuo died soon after, the rumor now ignited the world.

Great Zhou’s officials were outraged, flooding Zijin Palace with impeachment memorials. The “three men make a tiger” effect solidified Jiang Li’s guilt.

Zijin Palace.

Emperor Yuwen Xiu, trembling with rage, hurled memorials to the floor. The old eunuch, whisk in hand, dared not breathe. After a long silence, Yuwen Xiu exhaled, eyes opening. "To the Book Pavilion."

At the pavilion, Mo Tianyu, hair disheveled, blocked the Emperor. The National Advisor refused to see him. Yuwen Xiu, an eleven-year-old emperor, returned to the palace, crestfallen. "Why won't the National Advisor see me?" he muttered, his obsession chilling the eunuch.

"Is it true, as the rumors say, that the National Advisor and Jiang Li killed my father?" he asked, voice hollow. The eunuch, prostrate, froze. The question revealed Yuwen Xiu's growing doubt, swayed by the rumor's power. He remained silent.

"Prepare my robes for court," Yuwen Xiu said after a pause. The eunuch rose, summoning maids. In Taihe Hall, officials entered as dawn light streamed through carved doors. The session was brief—Yuwen Xiu stormed out, furious. Several bold officials, beaten bloody, were carried out, their injuries earning them fame.

Half a day later, an imperial decree left the palace, carried by galloping riders toward Yuanchi City.

Book Pavilion.

The rocking chair creaked. Mo Tianyu entered, bowing. "Master, His Majesty issued the decree."

Kong Xiu, aged by the news, sighed ambiguously.

The decree's news spread before reaching Jiang Li. In Yuanchi, Tantai Xuan looked at the Mohist Leader oddly. "Leader, what now?" he asked, bowing.

"Leave a thousand troops in Yuanchi. The rest, withdraw thirty li," the Leader said calmly. Tantai Xuan was puzzled, but Mo Ju, fanning himself, understood, eyes gleaming.

Beiluo, Lakeheart Island.

The island remained serene. Lü Mudui, in a bamboo hat, rowed a lone boat across the rippling lake, his pole startling fat fish. Gazing at the misty, ethereal island, he marveled. "Young Master Lu gained much from Wolong Ridge," he mused, anticipation rising.

On the pavilion's terrace, Lu leaned against the railing, pondering the Dragon Breeding Ground and the second secret realm. The first was a prelude, awakening spiritual energy and revealing cultivators. The second would push Wuhuang Continent halfway into mid-martial status, cementing White Jade Pavilion's transcendence. A medium to broadcast its influence globally was needed first.

Sipping wine, he noticed a boat approaching, scattering gulls. The old man in the bamboo hat sparked a glint in his calm eyes.