

To **Grand Astronomer Li Shensu**
Bureau of Celestial Observance
BEIJING

6th of the 6th Moon
In the 5th year of Zhengtong's Emperorship

Esteemed Shensu,

I write from the south tower of the Celestial Bureau. The bells do not ring. The night has not ended.

For seven nights, the green-tailed star has hovered above the Forbidden City. Not streaking. Not shifting. It burns without motion, as if nailed into the sky by a hand stronger than any sage.

The emperor has asked for explanations. The courtiers mutter of ancestors displeased. But I—who have charted the paths of the spheres since boyhood—I say this:

This star follows no law. It is not a guest. It is a rupture.

I recalculated the ephemeris tables. I consulted the star archives from the Yuan dynasty. I even read the preserved oracles of the Tang. Nothing matches. The star appears where there should be silence. It speaks in presence, not path.

We were taught that Heaven is order. That the Emperor rules beneath the Mandate, written not in blood, but in the constancy of stars. But now, I wonder—if Heaven forgets its rhythm, does the Son of Heaven remain so?

Floods break the dikes in the south. The wheat wilts too early. The rituals feel hollow. Even the incense struggles to rise in the tower braziers.

You once told me: *The sky is a scroll, and we are its readers*. But what if the ink has changed? What if the sky writes now in a language meant not for men, but for *no one at all*?

Let it be known:

In the fifth year of the Zhengtong Emperor, when the heavens unfurled a green-tailed comet above the Forbidden City, Zhao Qichen, Junior Astronomer of the Imperial Observatory, sealed the lost Mandate of Heaven into silent archives.

You are receiving this because you taught me to question even the perfect arc of the moon. Hide this scroll behind the dragon-skin folios in the imperial archive.

Let it say: *in the fifth year of Zhengtong, a star without name hovered over the throne, and the men who read Heaven grew silent—not from fear, but from unknowing.*

In restraint and reverence,

Zhao Qichen

Junior Astronomer of the Southern Tower

NANJING