

GREAT SAGE 1

Chapter 1 - The Black Ox Speaks

Under the pitch-black sky, an uninterrupted chain of mountains lay there like a huge beast, quietly awaiting the break of dawn.

A hamlet sat below a small hill shaped like a crouching ox.

“Li Er, get up and get to work!” A loud shout broke the silence. A middle-aged farmwife with a somewhat wide waist yelled at a cowshed.

Within a pile of straw in the cowshed, a skinny young man immediately jerked awake from his dream. He wondered in a daze, Where am I?

He had that dream again. In the dream, he lived in a city filled with towering skyscrapers; he would play with a mystical object called a computer, and the place had monsters of steel running amuck in the streets.

Finally, a monster called a BMW would run over him one day.

Afterwards, he jerked awake. That was right, he had transmigrated.

Over a dozen years later, the matters of his past life had seemingly become a dream.

Looking around the dirty cowshed and sensing the itch from mosquito bites, this clearly was not a good place. Probably no transmigrator was worse off than him.

Speaking of which, fifteen years should have passed already!

His parents of this life were the most ordinary of farmers in Crouching Ox village. Both of them had passed away when he was young, and his older brother had raised him. His elder brother was Li Da, so he was Li Er¹.

The village was not very sophisticated, so many villagers would spend their entire lives without a proper name. He only managed to give himself a proper name thanks to his knowledge from his previous life. He was called Li Qingshan².

“Must you be buried in your place of home? Sufficient are the green mountains overgrown.” Since he had transmigrated, he needed to live a good life, no, a better life than his last. Only then would he not waste his second life³.

At this moment, he thought back to his childhood. He had recovered from the fear and confusion from his recent transmigration, and the grand ambitions of a transmigrator filled him. However, he soon discovered that he was hungry and had not eaten.

His brother and sister-in-law only treated him as a deadweight. They left all the tiresome and dirty work to him. He always ate the worst as well. They did not treat him like family at all.

At such a young age, he had nowhere to go. He could only attempt to behave like a child prodigy, but the local witch deemed ghosts to have possessed him, so she filled him with purging water against his will. Consequently, he never dared to act like that again.

As a result, the villagers continued to refer to him as Li Er. Li Qingshan was just a joke.

Li Qingshan's sister-in-law shouted for a while. Upon noticing the lack of reaction, she rushed in and began swinging her bamboo stick, striking him mercilessly. "Lazy bones, why don't you keep playing dead? Why don't you keep playing dead!"

Li Qingshan was thinking about his past life, so his thoughts were momentarily a mess. He suddenly stood up and snatched the bamboo stick, glaring at the farmwife.

Seeing how the child from before was already a head taller than her, sister-in-law Li became slightly afraid. However, she remained as imposing as before. "Alright, Li Er. We've raised you after so much difficulty, yet you still want to be unreasonable! I'll wait for your brother to get up. He'll deal with you. If you don't work, you can't eat!" With that, she turned around and left.

After she left, Li Qingshan tossed aside the bamboo stick and sighed heavily. He arrived by the trough and said to a black ox, "Brother ox; oh, brother ox. I've already grown up. I don't want to stay here any longer. However, I just can't part with you."

Before his parents passed away, they had split up the family property. His elder brother and sister-in-law had forcibly taken away the cottage and field. Now, he only had this black ox left.

Thanks to the ox, he could often help out the landowner, which was just enough for him to receive a full meal. If he only ate the pitiful remains from home, who knows how thin he would be. As a result, not only was he reluctant to treat it as simply an animal, he even referred to it with respect as 'brother ox'.

The villagers all knew that Li Er could go without his big brother Li, but he could not go without his big brother ox.

The black ox had a glossy hide and was sturdily built. The care that Li Qingshan had given it was evident. However, it also seemed a little old and sickly. It was missing a horn as well, and the surface of the breakage was extremely smooth. It was like a sharp knife had cut it off.

The black ox looked at Li Qingshan with its moist eyes before standing up with vigour as if it could understand him. Li Qingshan mounted the ox in a proficient manner, and the black ox slowly made its way towards Crouching Ox hill.

Atop the ox, Li Qingshan raised his head. The many stars shone brilliantly with resplendence that the world lacked. Like an ordinary cowherd, he began playing a loud, clear reed flute.

The sounds of the flute echoed through the morning mist. Behind him, the village gradually woke up from its slumber.

Below Crouching Ox hill, the vegetation was lush and vibrant, and the green grass covered the ground like a mattress.

Using the first glimmers of daylight in the east, Li Qingshan looked west. The mountains rose and fell in an unending fashion, and the myriad mountains stood in the distance. It was said that not only were there wolves, tigers, and leopards, but there were even spirits and monsters. Even hunters dared not enter too deeply.

Li Qingshan had never seen a proper map in the village, so he was clueless of the geography of this world. He only knew that the mountains and valleys were towering, and the rivers and waterways were vast. Danger would fill these places, but there was also a great new world out there waiting for him to explore.

Li Qingshan had already made up his mind. He wanted to leave. In the end, he patted the ox's back.

"Brother ox; oh, brother ox. You've grown old. If I sell you, they'll definitely butcher you for your meat. The world is huge, so you should go. There are many wolves and tigers in the mountains, so do be careful."

At a time like this, the smartest decision would be to sell the black ox and gather some money for travelling. He would have something to rely on once he arrived at Qingyang city. At the very least, he would not just starve to death on the streets. However, he refused to do that.

Any farmer would laugh if they heard such an immature decision, but he insisted on doing so.

"You call me big brother, so how can I bear to part ways with you?"

"I can accompany you for a thousand kilometres, but there will always be a time... when we must part..." Li Qingshan answered instinctively, but his voice gradually trailed off. He looked at the black ox with widened eyes as he felt all the hairs on his body stand up. He took a step back. "Monster!"

The black ox said, "Don't be afraid; I won't harm you."

They had spent all these years together after all. Li Qingshan was not particularly afraid; he was just temporarily unable to take in this surreal situation. However, when he thought about everything he had been through, he calmed down. He probed with a frown. "Are you really brother ox?"

The black ox nodded in approval when he saw how Li Qingshan had calmed down so quickly. "Truly someone with innate knowledge."

"What's innate knowledge?" Li Qingshan immediately raised his guard. He did not want anyone to know that he had transmigrated. He could put up an act before other people, but he was not as cautious around the black ox. His behaviour that contradicted his identity and age at certain times must have caught its eye.

"Amongst the six realms of sa?sāra, beings that retain the memories of their past lives appear from time to time. That's what innate knowledge is. You and I both have the memories of another identity. We're not a regular farmer and ox. For us to be able to meet can be regarded as a form of destiny."

"I see." Li Qingshan eased up slightly inside. He had heard of something like this before, but at least the ox never exposed his identity as a transmigrator. "I never thought that this world would actually have monsters, and to think that I've raised one for over a decade. Why didn't you talk in the past?"

"There wasn't anything to talk about. I've never asked about where you come from, so don't ask me where I come from either. All you need to know is what I can give you."

"Give me... what?"

"Have you heard of superhuman abilities before?"

Before Li Qingshan could ask anything, the black ox continued, “These so-called superhuman abilities are the mighty abilities of demons and gods, ranging from moving mountains to filling seas to picking the stars and moon from the sky. Those who seek longevity can attain longevity, while those who seek eternal life will attain eternal life. Moreover, things like glory, wealth, money, and women can be brought to you with a simple flick. Does that interest you?”

The two words, superhuman abilities, basically encapsulated the desires of all living beings. Li Qingshan was only one of these living beings, so how could he not be interested?

His deeper feelings included disbelief; he was like someone who had spent over a decade blind before suddenly opening his eyes. Everything before him was so dazzling; all of it just seemed so surreal.

Li Qingshan restrained his excitement. “Brother ox, what kind of superhuman abilities do you want to teach me?”

The black ox shook his head. “You still don’t have the right to learn as of now.” He changed the topic. “If you want to practise superhuman abilities, you need to eat meat first!”

“What?” Li Qingshan doubted his ears. He felt that it was absurd. Why would the great abilities that could move mountains, fill seas, and pick the stars and moon from the sky be related to something so ordinary?

“The first step to cultivation is ‘refining vitality into qi’. You have to refine the vitality in your body into true qi. With how sallow you are right now, is there any vitality to be refined?”

Li Qingshan smiled bitterly. It was impossible for anyone with a childhood like his to grow up to be strong and sturdy. Was it not a joke for someone who even struggled when lifting a bucket of water to talk about moving mountains and filling seas?

“May I ask where the meat will come from?” It was not like Li Qingshan did not want to eat meat. Compared to those imaginary immortal pills and spiritual medicines, the taste of meat had been firmly embedded in his head. It was enough for him to think of it in his dreams, and he still cherished the memories even now.

However, for a poor kid who could not even stuff himself with coarse grains, where would the meat even come from? He could not help but stare at brother ox’s sturdy body, subconsciously carving it up into tenderloins, t-bone steaks, ribs, and all the different bits and pieces. His eyes shone green with gluttony.

The black ox smacked him over the head. “Don’t look at me like that.” He extended a hoof boldly at the Myriad Mountains in the west. “The meat is right there.”

Li Qingshan became alarmed instead of joyful. Being a hunter in this world was no easy job. None of the wolves, tigers, and leopards in the mountains could be trifled with. Additionally, with the black ox being a living example, the legends of supernatural creatures did not seem to be all tall tales. If he accidentally came across one, his life would basically be over.

However, the black ox only told him to not worry, telling him to go home and wait before running off and vanishing.

Li Qingshan made his way down the hill by himself. He was still unable to calm himself down from all the excitement. This was actually such a bizarre, colourful, and dazzling world. If he really could practise cultivation and attain enlightenment, traversing the entire world with all of its mountains green, the name he gave himself would not be wasted.

Li Qingshan returned home. His big brother had already gone to the fields, leaving his sister-in-law leaning against the entrance and eating melon seeds. She rolled her eyes a few times upon seeing him. The wives of other people would all begin the household chores or do some weaving to cover the costs of basic necessities when their husbands went out to work. However, she was renowned within the village for being a lazy wife. She tossed all the chores to Li Qingshan, and she had never touched a loom before either.

Li Qingshan just ignored her and directly entered the house. He lifted the lid of the pot to have a look. Let alone a hot meal, there were not even cold leftovers.

The sister-in-law said dripping with ambiguity, "Our house has no rice to spare for idlers. Why don't you take the ox with you to caretaker Li for work?" Suddenly, she noticed that the ox was not present and asked, "Where's the ox?"

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1. Li Da basically translates to Li the First or Li the Older and Li Er to Li the Second or Li the Younger. A slightly more formal way of referring to them would be Li Dalang and Li Erlang, but it means the same.

2. Qingshan means green mountains.

3. This is part of a poem written by either the famed samurai Saigō Takamori or Qing dynasty official Zhang Tingyu; this was popularised by chairman Mao Zedong, whose father had written for him when he set out to study. In any case, the 'green mountains (overgrown)' refer to any old place in the world. It implies that men should venture out in the world bravely and attempt to attain greatness instead of being held back by their attachment to home.