

### **Chapter 23 - Distant are the Roads of Jianghu**

As the heat spread through his body, the sliver of qi became lively as well, flowing near his wounds and producing a numbing itchiness.

Huang Binghu sent out a few nimble hunters as scouts as the group traveled into the depths of the mountains around the ox cart.

They walked all the way until dusk without stopping, entering deep into a mountain. There was no trace of human activity at all in the surroundings.

At the foot of the mountain, Li Qingshan saw the legendary Drawn Reins village.

A tall, wooden wall was erected around the village. Watch towers stood at each corner. It did not seem like a village and was more like a military base. They had to approach it, signal the people in there, and only then would the gate open up. It was nowhere near as informal as the Crouching Ox village.

Li Qingshan was the only outsider, so he attracted everyone's attention. He seemed unaffected on the surface, but he became nervous on the inside. This was the legendary lair of danger that had managed to make a whole army draw their reins.

Huang Binghu did not seem to be harbouring any ill intentions, but he needed to handle this carefully. Otherwise, he could lose his life without even knowing. His steel blade had already been taken away. However, even if he still possessed it, the damage it had received during that battle was already beyond repair.

Huang Binghu arranged a small, empty courtyard for him. Although he did not send anyone to watch over him, he did tell him to not wander around before leaving in a hurry.

In the most central building of the village, the most influential hunters gathered around a circular discussion table under the light of a few lanterns.

"For the sake of harvesting ginseng, the Ginseng King village has been building up grievances with us. Oftentimes, people of the village randomly die in the mountains, which they're probably responsible for. This time, they're even trying to get the spiritual ginseng from us. It's a perfect opportunity for us to deal a blow to them."

The two villages were only a few mountains apart with no clear boundary. The ginseng foragers made a living by harvesting ginseng, while the hunters would frequently move through the mountains. Ginseng was one of the few herbs they could recognise, so they obviously would not let it pass if they came across any.

As a result, there were many disputes, and the villagers tended to resolve them using their blades. As they were far away enough from one another, a large-scale battle had not occurred so far.

However, they recently met again, this time on the Bailao peak closer to the Drawn Reins village on a mountain path. They discovered a legendary spiritual ginseng that had already assumed a humanoid form and could even leave this place.

A rare treasure like this led to another battle. After the battle ended, the spiritual ginseng had already managed to flee, but it should still be on Bailao peak. Neither of the two villages dared to act rashly or blindly and search the entire mountain, but they had all been making preparations.

“Hunting chief, we can’t afford this matter being divulged. Let’s deal with the kid!”

“That kid has got some skill, and his temperament suits my tastes as well. Killing him would be a pity. I want him to remain in the village and lend us his strength.”

“But he’s still an outsider.”

“There’s no need to say anything more. I will test him properly. If he’s unworthy, I definitely won’t be soft-hearted,” Huang Binghu said firmly before breaking into a coughing fit.

In the pitch-black house, Xiao An emerged from the wooden tablet and looked at Li Qingshan in concern. He extended his hand to touch Li Qingshan’s wounds that had already scabbed over.

Li Qingshan said, “Don’t worry. I’m fine. I’m fine for now!” Although he could tell that Huang Binghu admired him, the feeling where his life laid in the hands of others was still horrible. He could only take charge of his own fate if he became stronger.

He immediately followed the black ox’s advice and placed the ginseng into the alcohol to make medicinal wine. He stopped to rest just now, looked at his handiwork, and felt delighted.

The next morning, Li Qingshan rose nice and early and practised the Ox Demon’s Fist of Great Strength. Suddenly, he felt a gale of wind from behind as if a vicious tiger were lunging at him.

Li Qingshan turned around and threw a punch, but it missed. Huang Binghu brushed past his arm and shaped his right hand into a claw, grabbing towards his throat.

He wants to silence me?! A thought flooded Li Qingshan’s mind. He actually did not try to block at all, instead facing the attack directly, as if he wanted to deliver his vital point to his opponent. He closed both hands like a bear hugging a tree, unleashing his great strength.

He practised an ability of great strength, not normal martial arts. Even though he had yet to achieve the strength of an ox, the power of the hug was still not something a body of flesh and blood could endure.

Huang Binghu suddenly pulled back his claw strike and made his way behind Li Qingshan.

Li Qingshan said, “Oh no.” Just when he wanted to maneuver himself, he felt that Huang Binghu had stopped attacking him, only looking at him in approval.

The claw earlier would have been completely unleashed if he had retreated. It would have ripped out his throat easily. However, he had advanced instead, limiting the strength of the attack while using a desperate move. Not only was he able to react to the changing circumstances, he was even rather courageous as well.

“I’ve lost.” Li Qingshan rubbed his neck, and there were five bloody traces there. Huang Binghu’s skill was impressive. Even if he were not injured, he would still struggle against him.

“Where did you learn your martial arts from?” Huang Binghu asked. Apart from being brave and quick-witted, Li Qingshan’s martial arts were extraordinary as well. Even if normal people could react fast enough, their strength would not recover in time. Moreover, when his five fingers came in contact with Li Qingshan’s neck earlier, it felt like he had struck the tough hide of an ox, not a soft, vulnerable part of the body.

Li Qingshan could not say that he had learnt it from an ox, or people would probably treat him as an idiot. He just said that he met a great master several years ago. The master saw how he was an honest boy, so he taught him some moves. However, the master had also ordered him to keep his appearance and identity a secret.

“A few years ago?!” Huang Binghu was speechless. He was not particularly surprised by the fact that Li Qingshan was reluctant to state his master, but he had originally thought Li Qingshan had practised martial arts since a young age. The most crucial part about him remaining in Drawn Reins village would be finding out about his master.

“What’s wrong?” Li Qingshan was perplexed.

“Didn’t you begin learning martial arts from a young age?”

“He used just a few years to guide you to such a level. That’s truly unbelievable. It seems like this great master really is a great master.”

Li Qingshan sweated profusely inside. Fortunately, he had just casually said a few years ago and not a month ago. Otherwise, he would have probably frightened Huang Binghu to death.

At the same time, he gained a better understanding that supernatural abilities and the martial arts of mortals were things of two completely different levels. He was not Huang Binghu’s opponent right now, but only because he had practised for less than two months. Huang Binghu, on the other hand, had probably spent twenty or thirty years of effort to get to his current level.

“May I ask for the reason for your visit, hunting chief?”

“Kid, would you be interested in settling down in the Drawn Reins village?” Although it was a question, it felt like he left no room for refusal.

“Sure!” Li Qingshan agreed straightforwardly, which surprised Huang Binghu instead. “Don’t you have any attachments to your home?”

“If I don’t agree, will the hunting head let me leave here safely?” Li Qingshan said with composure, “And, I’ve heard of a saying before.”

“What saying?”

“Home is wherever I am. Whether it be the Crouching Ox village or the Drawn Reins village, there’s no difference to me. I might even be able to learn some archery for hunting here. Do you understand me, hunting chief? My ambitions don’t lie in these mountains and forests.”

“With your mediocre martial arts, wandering on the roads of jianghu will only lead you to your death. At most, you’ll just be a shrimp that follows those disciples of large clans and sects around. How can it be compared to the freedom of the mountains and forests?”

“Hmm? Hunting chief, aren’t your skills enough then?” Li Qingshan was rather surprised. Huang Binghu could be regarded as famous in this region.

“You can laugh if you want, but my skills with the bow and arrow are passable, and I've made a name for myself in the jianghu before. However, the jianghu is filled with powerful people. Even if you practise martial arts for several decades, a kid in his teens can still slaughter you like killing a dog. I suffered tremendously. It’s fortunate that I could return alive.”

Li Qingshan pursed his lips. Not only did he feel no fear, but he was even charmed by it instead.