

### Chapter 3 - An Insulting Separation

Li Qingshan lay in the straw in complete satisfaction. He spread out his arms and legs, and before he knew it, he had fallen asleep.

He did not dream of his past life that night.

In the house near the cowshed, the couple tossed and turned under the torment of the smell of meat. They only fell asleep in the dead of the night.

The next morning, as soon as the roosters had crowed thrice, a short fatty in emerald-green silk garments arrived at the edge of the fields. He was none other than the greatest landowner in the tiny Crouching Ox village, master Liu. He was also the caretaker Liu that the elder brother and sister-in-law had mentioned. He had worked as a caretaker for a wealthy clan in the past. Eventually, he was excused due to his age, returning home with wealth.

However, he still wanted others to refer to him as caretaker Liu to stress his vastly different status and identity compared to these bumpkins; he also used this title to differentiate himself from the regular landowners. At the same time, since he had used various methods to swallow up most of the land in the village, he gained another elegant name, Half-village Liu.

If Half-village Liu had any ambitions, it would obviously be becoming Whole-village Liu. However, the matter could not be hurried. As his old master in the city would have described it, this ambition required gradual scheming to fulfil. He believed that he could complete this dream in the remaining years of his life. By then, everyone in the village would be his workers, and he would be the local despot. He would be able to do whatever he wanted.

However, caretaker Liu currently felt rather displeased. There were not a lot of workers on his land right now. He waved his plump hand. "Why're there only these people? Where are the others?"

A worker wore a smile. "Caretaker Liu, they've gone to help Li Er build a house."

"Li Er? Which Li Er?"

"That cowherd!"

"Of course I know who it is. Where'd he get the money from?"

"The kid's got dumb luck. He just came across a huge wild boar. He's giving a huge chunk of boar meat to everyone in the village who's willing to help him build a house. They're at the bottom of Crouching Ox hill right now. It's quite the news currently."

"Then why aren't you going?"

"I've fallen out with him in the past," the worker said in an embarrassed manner. He regretted this deeply. That was meat, for god's sake! When did he normally get to eat meat?

Caretaker Liu twiddled his mustache. "Let's go. Let's take a look as well."

After waking up, Li Qingshan began to busy himself with the matter of separating from the family. The priority right now was to build a proper house for himself. He could not depend on others anymore.

In the past, he lacked the ability to do so, but many issues could be readily solved with the boar. With just a call, many people would be willing to help him. He had essentially witnessed the wonders of pork in this world.

Below the Crouching Ox hill, the willow trees offered shade, and the flowers bloomed brightly. It offered wonderful scenery. In his previous life, such a place would either be a tourist attraction or part of a wealthy person's estate. He would never be able to claim it for himself. Moreover, this place was far away from the village, so it was suitable for him to keep secrets here. He could converse with the black ox at ease.

Li Qingshan stood within the crowd of people and directed them around. He felt an indescribable sense of joy. He slightly understood why the black ox had told him to eat meat. It was not just to strengthen his body.

If an impoverished person had to busy themselves all day long just to fill their bellies, how could they still be interested in doing anything else, much less seek enlightenment?

Caretaker Liu stood in the distance and glanced at it all. He muttered to himself, "That means the brothers are separating." He happened to see the Li couple watching from afar. As they watched their own family build a new house, not only did they show no joy, but even they ground their teeth in resentment instead. As a result, caretaker Liu came up with a plan and walked over with a smile.

In just a dozen or so days, a new house was built, and everyone dispersed with their boar meat.

Li Qingshan looked at his new house in satisfaction as he stood within the small courtyard surrounded by a fence. It was just a regular mudbrick house with a thatched roof, but this was both his new home and his first step to settling down and pursuing his interests in this new world.

In the past few days, he ate meat everyday, recovering a healthy glow. He felt more confident just by standing there. It had only been around half a month, but he seemed to have grown by a few centimeters.

Just as Li Qingshan felt delighted, a grey-haired and wrinkled old woman strolled into the courtyard. She said as if she were leaping in fright, "Li Erlang, your house is badly built. It's highly ominous!"

Li Qingshan frowned. This person was the local witch. When he was young, she had filled him up with purging water. She would act in a mystifying, deluding manner all day long to deceive the ignorant and unsophisticated villagers. He had never felt any goodwill towards her, but she held great prestige in the village. People would ask for her fortunes for events that happened in the village such as funerals and weddings. Obviously, there would always be many offerings to the gods when she did divine for them.

Li Qingshan did not want to give her the cold shoulder either. He bowed towards her. "What brings you here?"

The witch did not even look at him. She glanced around the house's interior and said, "There's yin qi. There's evil in there. Fortunately, I've come prepared." She held a clay jar of water in one hand and a

willow branch in the other. She dipped the willow branch in the water and sprinkled it through the house and courtyard randomly as she called out a mess of things, "Begone, begone..."

Li Qingshan was unable to stop her, having no other choice than to let her do her thing. He was already convinced about the existence of ghosts and gods, but he highly doubted the existence of some yin qi or evil here. After all, there was an actual daemon with him. If something were wrong, the black ox would obviously tell him. There would be no need for her.

After sprinkling the water, the witch acted like she had just helped Li Qingshan tremendously, babbling a great deal once again. She went on about how Li Qingshan was fortunate enough and all of this had been granted by the god, and how now was the time to send the god off. As for the best item to offer to the god, it was obviously the huge head that had remained from the wild boar.

Only then did Li Qingshan understand the reason for her appearance. "It's probably not to feed the god but to feed you, right?"

The witch flew into a great rage over Li Qingshan's snide comment. She straightened herself up and said in a different voice, "Li Qingshan, ignoring the advice of this god will bring calamity unto you."

Li Qingshan knew this was her act of inviting a god to possess her body. When regular villagers were met with this move, even the brave ones would pale in fright and kneel down and smack their heads against the ground. Even the Li Qingshan of the past dared not take her lightly, but it was all different now. He crossed his arms like he was looking at a joke. "Everything, whether good or bad, is brought on by man himself. What's it got to do with gods? Please leave!"

Seeing how this move of hers was actually ineffective, the witch awkwardly turned back to normal. She said sinisterly, "Just you wait!"

Soon after the witch's departure, calamity arrived as expected.

A villager came to tell Li Qingshan to pay a visit to the ancestral hall. The village was small, but it had many rules. In order to separate from his brother's family, he needed to go to the ancestral hall to split the property before the village elders. However, that would only happen when one side proposed separation. Did his elder brother beat him to it?

Li Qingshan felt slightly uneasy, but the black ox had vanished off somewhere. He could only go with reluctance.

The so-called ancestral hall was just a small room at the end of a very long entrance, but it was one of the few masonry structures in the village. It enshrined the memorial tablets of the ancestors of the Li and Liu families.

A few elderly folk sat to the two sides of the pitch-black house. The one in charge was the village head of Crouching Ox village. He was in his sixties and was completely hunched over. He was also a member of the Li family. In terms of seniority, Li Qingshan even had to refer to him as grandfather.

The couple had already been waiting there. As soon as they saw Li Qingshan, they glared at him viciously, as if he would be afraid of them, with a slight pleasure of payback.

Li Qingshan ignored them, only greeting the various elders. Afterwards, they began to divide the family property with the village head presiding over the process.

Originally, Li Qingshan thought that all he had was a black ox and some land. However, the matter was far more complicated than he had imagined.

The village head was solemn and impartial, issuing Li Qingshan with many miscellaneous items. It was so elaborate that it came down to a single spoon, a pair of chopsticks, and so on.

Whenever an item was mentioned, the sister-in-law would twitch painfully, and her gaze towards Li Qingshan would grow more and more vicious.

Li Qingshan remained unfazed and composed. These day-to-day objects could all be used. It would save him repurchasing them all.

After a whole hour, the village head finally stopped and looked at both sides with his cloudy eyes. "Do you have any issues with this?"

The elder brother and sister-in-law both agreed to it, but Li Qingshan felt that something was off. "Grandfather, what about the bit of farmland?"

"What farmland?"

Li Qingshan was stunned. When his parents were about to pass away, they had been crystal clear about this right in front of the village head, as they were afraid that his elder brother would harass him. They wanted this elder of high prestige in the village to ensure fairness.

The sister-in-law had already started explaining it all, "You were young, so you didn't know. The two old fogies borrowed money without returning it. It has been given away as compensation a long time ago."

Li Qingshan was enraged. "What did you just call my parents? Why don't you say it again?" His feelings for his parents were not particularly deep, but they were still the parents who had given birth to him in this life. How could he allow someone to insult them casually in public?

However, the elder brother had already shielded the sister-in-law, and a few men had walked in from outside too. Clearly, they had made preparations beforehand.

Li Qingshan noticed that these men were all scoundrels and ruffians of the village. Normally, they would just mess around, harassing men and seizing women. They were not people who would value their ties as fellow villagers. They would show no mercy if they took action.

The village head secretly cursed the stupid woman and sighed. "I've already checked the promissory note."

"Where's the note?"

The elder brother said, "We've already burnt it after taking it back."

"May I ask who the money was owed to?"

The sister-in-law said complacently, "The village's caretaker Liu. If you're brave enough, go ask for it. I would like to see whether caretaker Liu will skin you alive or not. That's right, I just want to harass you,

you little ungrateful bastard.” The bit of land was good farmland. It sold very well, basically making up for them not getting any boar meat. She had made up her mind. She would buy a chicken to eat as soon as she got home.

Li Qingshan shook all over from anger. His nails dug into his palm.

With his experiences across his two lives, how could he not know the inside story? Farmers treated their land as their lifeblood. Why would they give it away as compensation so easily? Their parents had lived off the land for their entire lives, so why would they have to borrow money?

They were clearly working together against him. Having lost the land, he could only go work on caretaker Liu’s farmland if he wanted to be fed. No matter how furious he became, he had to endure it. It was truly well-schemed.

At home, Li Qingshan was treated coldly by his elder brother and sister-in-law, but at most, he was just slightly worse off for food and clothing. It was still acceptable, but it was nowhere near as twisted as right now. In his past life, he frequently browsed the internet and thought he had seen all the darkness society had to offer. He even fumed and cursed over it. However, now that it all happened to him, he truly found it incredibly indignant.

If he yielded, even if it were just to follow the village’s arrangements, he would lose the opportunity to appeal the matter forever.