

Chapter 35 - The Startling News from the Black Wind Stronghold

As it turned out, the people on the mountain path earlier today were from the Dragon's Gate sect, and the haughty person was the young sect master. No wonder he was so arrogant.

Li Long was surprised. "You know the 'Sickly Tiger'?" Afterwards, he obviously saw the bow on Li Qingshan's back. As Huang Binghu rarely ventured out to Qingyang city, he was unable to confirm if this was the Stone Splitter bow.

Li Qingshan nodded and said nothing else.

Li Long said, "Then your martial arts are probably from..."

"No, and you don't need to worry about it. If you want revenge, just come at me." Li Qingshan did not want to use Huang Binghu's tiger hide as a flag to scare away enemies. He did not want to assume the might of someone else as his own.

Li Long's expression changed as he thought to himself, Li Qingshan's martial arts already makes him a third-rate master, so what kind of person is his master supposed to be like? He has connections with Huang Binghu as well. I only had a small dispute with him, so even if I end up killing him, it'll bring me no benefit. It is better to resolve this grievance peacefully instead of deepening it.

Li Long made up his mind, and his expression suddenly changed. He smiled slightly, even though the smile was slightly forced. "Erlang, we're all from the same hometown, so are there any great grievances between us that have to be settled violently?"

Li Qingshan was surprised at this response. Originally, he thought the development of this matter would be angering the senior after beating up the junior, so the whole hornet's nest would chase him to the end of his road. Subsequently, he would achieve something with his ability and slaughter them all.

He had never thought that although Li Long seemed rash, he was actually highly flexible and rather thick-skinned; he was actually able to change his attitude. Li Qingshan had basically witnessed the practical shrewdness of people of the jianghu.

Li Long smiled. "And I threw three punches in exchange for two from you. I've basically gotten the better end of the deal."

"You're welcome to improve your end of the deal even further." Li Qingshan saw how he wanted revenge but only changed his mind after hearing Huang Binghu's name. When he thought about how this was the second time he had relied on this to avoid trouble, his feelings became very mixed.

He hoped that one day, he could be just like that, just like Huang Binghu. No, we wanted to be better than Huang Binghu, where even from a thousand kilometres away, people would show deep respect when his name was mentioned, afraid of slandering him.

Li Long forced a smile. "There's no need for that. Don't just stand there, let's go in and talk. Our Crouching Ox village has produced a young hero like this, so I need to get to know you properly." Then he clasped his fist at the surroundings. "Fellow countrymen, please go. If I have the time, I will pay a visit to you one by one."

The villagers looked at one another. The outcome had truly exceeded their expectations, but since Li Long had dismissed them, they did not dare to stay. However, in their minds, Li Qingshan had quietly replaced Li Long as the greatest talent of Crouching Ox village.

Since Li Long had humbled himself, Li Qingshan could not reject him. It was just like what he had said. There were no particularly great grievances between them, and he wanted to learn about Qingyang city. In particular, he wanted to know more about the Dragon's Gate sect.

Under everyone's fearful and admiring gazes, Li Qingshan was invited into village head Li's home. Unlike the nervousness he experienced when he attended the banquet at caretaker Liu's home, he was relaxed and completely at ease now. In the eyes of others, he seemed supercilious. This was a change in his mental state and aura as a result of his strength.

"Qingshan, you have such impressive martial arts, so have you ever thought about holding a position in Qingyang city? Our Iron Fist school welcomes all exceptional people from across the world. With your martial arts, my master would definitely take a liking to you." Li Long tried to rope him in right from the beginning.

"But I already have martial arts. Can I just join the Iron Fist school like this?" Li Qingshan admired Li Long's tolerance, but he was clueless of Li Long's internal conflict before he made this proposal. Although Li Qingshan had hit him with two punches, they did not have any particularly severe grievances. If Li Long could rope him onto his side, helping each other as fellow countrymen, it would benefit his status in the school.

"There obviously needs to be a guarantor, but don't worry, I can be your guarantor! Our Iron Fist school is expansive, such that our influence and power is not limited to Qingyang city. The main branch is established in the Clear River prefecture. As long as your fists are hard enough and you have sufficient merit, your future development won't be a problem. Women and money will be in easy reach..."

Expressions of extreme jealousy were plastered across Li Hu and Li Bao's faces. They could only blame their elder brother for not serving as a guarantor for them. As a result, they could not enjoy the women and money in the city.

"Yeah, yeah. My son, Liu Neng, serves as the caretaker of old hero Liu's estate. He'll be taken care of like that in the future as well." Caretaker Liu followed them in as well. Fortunately, he had not offended Li Qingshan too much in the past. Who would have thought that the mere cowherd from before would become so powerful in a mere few months.

As Li Long continued, Li Qingshan gradually understood that although the Iron Fist school accepted disciples into its school, they were more like a gang or sect that resided in the city. That old hero Liu with the nickname of Iron Tiger should be the leader of a side branch or a side school.

Li Qingshan said, "Please pardon my question, but may I ask what rate old hero Liu's martial arts would be within the jianghu?"

"If you had asked someone else, they might not be able to answer you. My master has trained his Iron Fist to great mastery. He's a second-rate master."

"Then how does he compare with me?"

“That...” Li Long had never thought that Li Qingshan would compare himself to a figure who stood at the very peak of Qingyang, his master, as soon as he spoke. He felt rather displeased. “I’m not exaggerating, but while your martial arts are impressive, Qingshan, you’re only at the top of the third-rate. You’re nowhere close to being my master’s opponent.”

“Then may I ask how these rates are determined?”

“My master has said that a practitioner of martial arts who has gained a basic grasp can take on three to five adult men, while a skilled adept of the jianghu can take on three to five practitioners of martial arts. It’s determined like that. It’s not a measurement of absolute accuracy, but it gives a general idea. Once you go past that number, you’ll just end up being outnumbered.”

“However, that’s only for open confrontations. If it’s about maneuvering and sneak attacks, a first-rate master skilled in movement techniques can strike utter fear into the hearts of several dozen second-rate masters, but a few dozen trained archers or crossbowmen can also kill a first-rate master.”

Li Qingshan gained a rough understanding of his strength. The ginseng foragers were practitioners trained in martial arts. As such, he was a skilled martial artist back then, which was why he had only managed to eke out a miserable victory.

After some training, he barely managed to make it to the level of third-rate masters. Only after drinking the spiritual alcohol did he truly become a third-rate master. Li Long could be considered to be adept at martial arts, but he was not a master. As a result, he was not Li Qingshan’s opponent.

“Apologies. I’ve already promised hunting chief Huang of the Drawn Reins village to join the Drawn Reins village, so I might not be able to accept your invitation.” He could not help but think of the past. Back then, he could not even find peace when sleeping in the cowshed, treated as a thorn in the side by his elder brother’s family. They had wanted to find a way to chase him away. Now, there were people trying to invite him to places.

Li Long was not surprised, as he had been expecting this. He said in pity, “The Drawn Reins village cannot offer a lot of benefits. Out of the four places of Qingyang, our Iron Fist school still enjoys the most freedom. They’re cooped up in the mountains, so how can they be compared to the bustling world we’re right next to? Whatever. If you ever change your mind, come to Qingyang city, and you’re more than welcome to come to the Iron Fist school to look for me. You just need to state my name.”

Li Qingshan could not help but smile. As expected, there were not a lot of people who roamed the jianghu to uphold justice and help the weak. He asked a lot more questions, and Li Long answered them with everything he knew. Li Qingshan saw how generous Li Long was and knew that he was a sensible person, so he showed some additional respect. “Brother Li, today is not a festival, so why have you returned?”

Li Long suddenly whispered, “Even if you didn’t ask me, I would have told you anyway. I’ve returned this time for a major matter that endangers the Crouching Ox village. The Crouching Ox village might have become a target to ransack for the Black Wind stronghold.”

Aside from Li Qingshan, everyone in the house immediately became disturbed.