

Chapter 7 - Swearing a Great Oath

With the silver recovered, the couple was pleasantly surprised. The sister-in-law even ignored the pain from her face and stuffed the bag of silver into her clothes in a hurry.

The three scoundrels looked at one another speechlessly with faces of admiration. That was quite a lot of silver, enough for them to squander for quite some time, yet it had actually been tossed aside so easily. Originally, they had only felt fear, but there was now much more respect in their gazes towards Li Qingshan's back.

Previously, they had thought a real man who kept his debts of gratitude and revenge so clearly distinguished was only something storytellers had cooked up. They had never thought they would actually be able to witness someone like that. He was able to do this despite being at such a young age, so he would definitely become a great man in the future. Their feelings of despicability towards Li Qingshan due to his young age had completely vanished now.

Li Qingshan strode at the front. As the sun set in the west, the green mountains stood alone. He felt extremely relaxed and at ease, as if an invisible burden had been lifted from his shoulders. Energy filled his body out of nowhere such that even his exhaustion disappeared. He could vaguely feel that if he practised the Ox Demon's Strength of Fist right now, it would definitely flow much smoother than usual.

In reality, this was not a mere feeling. Whether it be abilities of daoism or regular martial arts, it had to conform with the practitioner's mood. The Ox Demon's Fist of Strength was a cultivation method of being unencumbered. It required a clear mind, requiring him to advance courageously and diligently.

Li Qingshan had settled this debt in a satisfying manner, so it no longer cast a shade over his heart. Evidently, it had coincided with key aspects of the cultivation method.

Returning to his house, Li Qingshan looked at the three scoundrels with shining eyes. "Thank you for earlier." If it were not for the pressure from the three scoundrels, his elder brother and sister-in-law would have never yielded so easily. If they began to use violence with the stick and the knife, there really would not have been anything he could have done. He might have ended up suffering instead.

He came to a realisation. He had never thought that his trip would be so successful, and he also understood the benefit that came with a numerical advantage. Even the Ox Demon King¹ needed six sworn siblings, let alone him! Of course, the three scoundrels were not worthy of becoming his sworn brothers.

The three scoundrels replied hastily, "How can you say that, big brother? You are the bigger man, not bickering with us. We cannot thank you enough. Patch-haired Liu, that ungrateful wretch, deserved far more than just death. When we followed him in the past, we were so offensive..."

Li Qingshan waved his hand and interrupted them. "The past is the past."

With Li Qingshan's word of honour, the three scoundrels all felt at ease. Ideas began to spring forth in their heads, and they all began to fawn over him. They became emotional to the point that they went on to say they basically wanted to burn a few blades of grass with him and become sworn brothers.

Across both of his lives, Li Qingshan had never been sucked up to and spoken so highly of like this. Although it all came from the mouths of three scoundrels he looked down on, he could not help but feel flattered and proud of himself. However, becoming sworn brothers was impossible. After averting their requests in a perfunctory manner, he sent them off.

The black ox that crouched to one side asked, "Why didn't you agree? They're willing to follow you as their leader. You can form your own group, and the village will only become safer and safer to you. If anything happens, there'll be people who'll report to you as well."

Within small villages, strength in numbers was key. Most of the time, people would tend to avoid harassing families with more siblings. As a matter of fact, these siblings could go and harass others.

Li Qingshan said proudly and boldly, "Even if the friends that I, Li Qingshan, make are not the outstanding heroes and figures of the world, they will be men with backbone who value their bonds and ties of friendship. How can I be associated with people like them?" His voice was resonant, such that it disturbed a few roosting crows, making them fly around among the trees.

The black ox remained silent. It looked at how high-spirited and enthusiastic Li Qingshan was and sank into its thoughts.

Li Qingshan felt embarrassed. He rubbed the back of his head. "Brother ox, you must be laughing at my bold and boastful words, but that's how I feel inside. I've only told you as well."

The black ox pulled out a gourd of alcohol from somewhere once again and tossed it to Li Qingshan. "If you're even afraid of saying some bold words, you might as well go back to farming. What other bold things do you want to say? Let's hear it."

Li Qingshan removed the stopper deftly, tilted his back, and gulped down a few mouthfuls. He casually wiped his mouth and grinned. "I want to travel through all corners of the world, across the entire universe! I want to taste all of the delicacies and drink all of the finest alcohol the world has to offer! I want to practise the fiercest abilities, fight the strongest foes, and sleep with the most beautiful women! Only then will this life not be a waste! Brother ox, do you think my dream can come true?"

"Definitely!"

"Alright, I'll be counting on that!"

The youth's great dream resounded through the tiny courtyard. Perhaps right now, he did not take it seriously at all, but a spark had already been embedded in his heart, ready to become a roaring fire some day.

Using his high spirits from drinking, he practised the three forms of the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength once more. In a drunken stupor, he had no idea whether his movements were correct, swinging his arms and legs however he liked it. The black ox drank to the side, saying nothing.

In the end, Li Qingshan collapsed on the ground due to intoxication.

The next day, through the three scoundrels, the news of Li Qingshan returning the money to his elder brother and sister-in-law spread through the entire village very quickly. In regard to his choice, some people felt admiration, praising him for his extraordinary spirit. There were also others who mocked

him. How was he supposed to eat without the land? He would still be forced to work for caretaker Liu. Would he still have any spirit then?

However, they were afraid of saying it so openly either. Unbeknownst to most people, Li Erlang had already begun to establish a reputation in the village.

Caretaker Liu experienced a mix of joy and worry because of this. He was obviously joyful that Li Erlang would no longer bicker with him over the piece of land, but he was worried over how closely he kept watch over his debts of gratitude and revenge. Perhaps he was only biding his time, waiting for a time for revenge. After all, patch-haired Liu had been acting under his orders prior to this.

If Li Erlang came looking for trouble right now, he would be better off instead. He personally had a myriad of ways to deal with him if that did happen, but he could not afford to remain on guard every day and night. It was just like the saying, "Better to harass the old than the poor but young."

As caretaker Liu considered this in a hall, a hunched old man arrived in front of the gate under the support of a young man. The guards there stopped them.

Caretaker Liu immediately went to receive them. His chubby face formed a smile. "Village head Li, what brings you here today?"

Village head Li said sternly, "Since when did you have guards here? May I ask what you are guarding against?"

Caretaker Liu smiled awkwardly. He was a landowner, but this was only a small mountain village after all. It was obviously impossible for his family to hold as much status as the large clans in the cities. Normally, he only had an old attendant. He never had anyone guarding the entrance.

Although he had done everything he could to possess the land in the village, it was still mostly done through legitimate transactions. Even if it involved coercion, he was coercing people who could not fight back, so he did not have that many enemies. He was obviously guarding against Li Qingshan right now. In his eyes, the kid was originally someone who could not fight back, but his response in the end had taken him by surprise.

The two of them went inside to talk. Village head Li cut right to the chase and said, "Caretaker Liu, you are someone who has seen the world. Tell me, how do you plan on dealing with Li Erlang?"

His eyes were completely bloodshot. The villagers were afraid of Li Qingshan and so was he. As people grew older, their fear towards death would increase. Last night, he had laid in bed, tossing and turning, unable to fall asleep. Any disturbance would make him sit up in a hurry, afraid that Li Qingshan had snuck in to take his old life. He basically did not catch a wink of sleep.

He rose from bed early in the morning and made up his mind. If he did not eliminate this potential problem that haunted him, he could not live properly anymore. As a result, he came to caretaker Liu.

Caretaker Liu spread his hands. "How do I deal with him? Everyone in the village respects him as a brave man. Besides, there's no evidence that he killed patch-haired Liu."

“Why wouldn’t he be the murderer? It’s basically written on his face,” said the young man beside the village head. He was the village head’s son, Li Hu. He had also been a dominating fellow of the village, but he now paled in comparison to Li Qingshan. He was unwilling to accept it.

“It’s not like you would be able to read it even if it were written across his face.” caretaker Liu shot a glance at him. Just a brat like you wants to try to act tough in front of me? He glanced at village head Li and slowed down. “Do you know what he did last night?”

“Of course I know. Everyone thinks he’s a brave man, which makes it even more impossible for me to order people around. That’s why I’ve come to you.” As the person with the greatest authority in the village, village head Li had already grown accustomed to utter obedience. Now, a kid had suddenly appeared out of nowhere and challenged his dignity. He felt infuriated and very hurt. He had made up his mind about redeeming his pride, paying no regard to who had twisted reality and distorted what was right and wrong in the first place.

1. The Ox Demon King is a reference to Journey to the West. One of the main characters, Sun Wukong, is the seventh brother out of the sworn siblings. The Ox Demon King is the first brother.