

### Chapter 8 - Attending a Feast of Treachery

Caretaker Liu said, "But he has to eat."

Liu Hu said, "Who doesn't have to eat?"

Just like how sophistication came with age, village head Li had yet to grow senile. His eyes lit up. "You mean?"

"If he wants to eat, he has to work. Is there still anyone in the village who can afford to employ him? If he works for me, then wouldn't I be able to make whatever arrangements I need to make?"

Caretaker Li saw the admiration on the father and son's face and felt complacent. Food was the most basic necessity of people. It was impossible for food to rain from the sky. It all had to be grown from the ground. Controlling the land was equivalent to grasping the lifeblood of people. Even a brave man would be reduced to a wimp if he went three days without food.

Caretaker Liu had already come up with a countermeasure. There was actually no need to kill Li Erlang. He only needed to deal a blow to him and see what would happen. If he became usable after that, it would not be a bad outcome.

Li Qingshan woke up from a dream. He had no idea about these schemes. All he saw was a water deer lying in the courtyard. He chuckled. Without even thanking the black ox, he skinned and boned the water deer. This time, he had prepared salt to preserve the meat, just in case he could not finish it all before it went off.

After doing all that, he arrived by the side of the stream, washing his face and rinsing his mouth before beginning a day of cultivation.

For the next few days, he woke up when it was still dark and only went to sleep when it was pitch-black. He basically did not take a single step out of his home, completely cutting himself off from the outside world. He would be utterly dead beat from the training everyday such that he did not find it boring.

He was working hard for his dream. With every step forward he took, with every bit of progress he made, a whole new world seemed to be unfolding before him.

Over a dozen days passed, and Li Qingshan just happened to have finished the water deer when the village head had run out of patience. He had not managed to get even a single night of proper sleep in the past few days. Every night, he would have his two sons keep watch over him by his bedside, and only then would he barely be able to catch some sleep. At such an advanced age, there was no way for him to endure all of this. He was close to developing a serious illness, so he quickly went to discuss matters with caretaker Liu.

Caretaker Liu had become terribly worried from the waiting as well. He would send his guards to Li Qingshan's house to check on him. The first guard reported back that Li Qingshan had been drinking and eating meat everyday, and he had even started practising martial arts. He originally was not convinced but several other guards reported the same news. Afterwards, no one dared to check on him anymore.

The witch saying that demons had possessed him crossed their minds once more, which added a stern layer of mystery and terror to Li Qingshan's courtyard. However, some people believed that Li Qingshan was diligently practising martial arts in order to prepare for revenge.

Seeing how village head Li was close to breaking down in tears, caretaker Liu frowned and made up his mind. "Invite him to a feast. If he comes, then he's a brave man. If he doesn't, then he's just a coward putting on an act."

An invitation card was delivered to Li Qingshan. He fiddled around with the large, red invitation. In a small village like this, marriages and funerals were normally notified of by sending a person. Rarely would they ever send a formal invitation like this, so he could not help but find this to be rather novel.

He sank into his thoughts. Nothing good could come out of this feast. If he went, he would be essentially walking head-first into a trap. He had only practised for around a dozen days. He had benefited greatly, but it was still difficult to take on multiple people with just two hands.

However, if he did not go, the reputation he had established after so much difficulty would all go to waste. If other people mentioned him, they would definitely talk about how he was afraid of going to a mere feast. It would ruin his name.

Once he showed weakness, the blows to him would be endless. Caretaker Liu's move was truly well-schemed, forcing him between a rock and a hard place.

The black ox asked, "Are you going?"

"I just happened to have run out of food to eat. There's someone treating me to a meal, so why wouldn't I go? Armed with a single blade, Guan Yunchang attended a feast alone<sup>1</sup>. Am I supposed to be afraid of attending this village feast?" Li Qingshan laughed aloud as a heroic spirit developed within him.

"Who's Guan Yunchang?"

"Just a hero I've heard of." Li Qingshan stood up and poured his strength into his two arms, performing the Ox Demon Bucks its Horns. At the same time, he began to exhale deeply, gently emitting a sound similar to the moo of a cow from his lungs. He was like a huge water buffalo swinging its horns, ready to confront an opponent in battle.

The black ox nodded in satisfaction. Li Qingshan's Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength had already touched on the correct path, and he had been progressing with amazing speed the entire time. If he carefully evaded this bit of danger now, it would definitely be detrimental to his cultivation.

"I just happen to have some existing debts to settle with someone, and the matter still encumbers me. Now's an opportunity." Ever since the day Li Qingshan settled his debts with his elder brother and sister-in-law, he had indeed made rapid progress with the Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, which proved his guess was not just a feeling.

Summer was about to end, but the sunlight was still dazzling. Under a few elm trees in caretaker Liu's courtyard, tables had already been set up for the feast.

A group of men in their prime occupied a few of the tables, gulping as they stared at the tables of alcohol and dishes. Only caretaker Liu could afford to hold a feast like this! However, even with how

simple-minded they were as farmers, they knew this feast would not be held for free. Caretaker Liu had already explained many things beforehand.

Something... something to do with smashing a cup as a signal? They did not understand too well anyway. They only knew that once caretaker Liu suddenly turned hostile, they would have to begin using their fists.

Although they were somewhat reluctant to fight Li Qingshan, they were all caretaker Liu's farmworkers. They could not afford to offend this person they relied on to make a living. Li Erlang was only fifteen anyway, so how could he take on so many people? As a result, all the workers who could come came, occupying several large tables.

Even for some of them who could not bear to lay their hands on Li Qingshan, they could only just do it with slightly less force to play along. After that, they would get Erlang to kneel before caretaker Liu and apologise so that they themselves could suffer a little less.

The cicadas buzzed weakly in the trees as everyone became rather impatient from the wait. With such great alcohol and food placed before them that they could not touch, it was quite a test for them. The discussion drowned out the cicada cries,

"It's about time. He's afraid. He won't come. Let's just eat!"

"But when it comes to you, you wouldn't be afraid. Not coming is the right decision. He'd be an idiot if he did."

Caretaker Liu seemed to turn a deaf ear to it all. He only smiled as he thought to himself, As long as he knows he's afraid. He's still just a half-grown kid at the end of the day.

"He's here! He's here!" A young walker jogged into the courtyard, covered in sweat. "Li Erlang is here!"

As if everyone in the courtyard had been grabbed by the neck at the same time, all of them fell silent. The cries of the cicadas seemed to grow resonant at that moment.

Li Qingshan stood in front of caretaker Liu's gate. His nerves were also on the edge. Everything was always easier said than done. The courtyard of white walls and black tiles seriously seemed like a tiny lair of danger. If he were careless, he could end up losing his life inside there.

He began to consider retreating. He thought about how it was never too late for a real man to take revenge, whether it be a day or ten years. With his current rate of progress, as long as he had some time—one year, no, half a year, or maybe even three months—and managed to achieve something with his Ox Demon's Fist of Great Strength, he would have no need to fear anyone in the courtyard.

He suddenly jolted his mind and dismissed those thoughts. He questioned himself, "Li Qingshan, oh Li Qingshan, were you just talking nonsense with what you said before? Only bold enough to turn against those weaker than you? Then even if you attain abilities of paramount might, you're really just a coward inside."

All of these thoughts occurred to him in only but an instant. Li Qingshan inhaled deeply and clenched his fists. His gaze became determined as he entered the courtyard with resolve.