

Tome of Troubled Times

#Chapter 13: Shared Bed - Read Tome of Troubled Times Chapter 13: Shared Bed

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The bed was pretty big and had reeds as bedding. There was even a blanket fit for a two-person bed. After all, this was a two-person room. Zhao Changhe and Luo Qi did not occupy low positions in the cult and could be considered as leaders in their own right, so the treatment they received was not too bad.

At night, Zhao Changhe continued to train outside in the snow while Luo Qi was first to dig into bed. He lay on the inside, next to the wall, and wrapped himself in the blanket, looking at Zhao Changhe slashing the wooden pole with his saber as he held the horse stance. There was a rhythm to his attacks.

Luo Qi watched intently and did not let himself fall asleep. His mouth twitched as he suddenly said, "Aren't your muscles sore from training at this intensity without stopping from dusk to dawn?"

Zhao Changhe did not look at Luo Qi as he responded, "The Vicious Blood Art is a little interesting. It looks like it's able to solve that problem. My muscles don't hurt at all."

"Don't tell me you also don't feel tired?"

"Of course I do. Actually, it's even easier to tire myself out practicing the Vicious Blood Art. I still need time to rest from time to time. It's probably because I'm overexerting my qi and blood. I may be able to become unstoppable in battle, but if the enemies don't take me down, the fatigue sure will. I fought some people today, and I was *far* more exhausted after that than I am now."

Luo Qi thought for a moment. "Demonic arts sure are strange... You've only been training for two days, but you can already feel such clear changes in your body. If it were a martial art from the Luo family, you'd have to be a genius to feel the qi in your body after a month."

"Of course there'd be some shortcuts. Otherwise who would want to level up an alt account using demonic arts?"

"What's an alt account... Wait, did you just say you had a fight? Who did you fight?" Luo Qi suddenly realized what Zhao Changhe had just said and his expression turned grim.

Zhao Changhe finally threw him a glance. As he looked at Luo Qi's dark face, he grinned. "Senior brother, do you want to help me get out of my predicament? I keep forgetting that you're way stronger than me."

"Of course I'm way stronger than you!"

"So why are you so afraid of sleeping? You think I'll wreck your asshole? I should be the one who's afraid of you."

"What's with you? You've been full of nonsense since we've become more familiar with each other. You weren't like this before..." Luo Qi covered his forehead. "I'm asking who you fought with. Do you need my help?"

"Isn't it normal for friends to talk like this after they become more familiar with each other? Anyway, I won that fight, so it's alright."

Luo Qi could not be bothered with Zhao Changhe anymore and turned to face the wall on the other side. "Since you know we're friends, next time you find yourself in a similar situation, remember to tell me. If I'm not around, just hide somewhere. It's never too late to take revenge. You're too reckless for someone who's only been training for two days. Your body may be well-built, but in reality, it doesn't count for anything."

"Alright, alright, alright." Zhao Changhe was in a rather cheerful mood. Luo Qi really viewed him as a friend now. However, seeing him go to bed after eating bewildered Zhao Changhe. "Come to think of it, I've never seen you cultivate or train. Don't you need to practice as well?"

"I practice internal arts. I can cultivate even when I'm lying down."

"...No shit, you can do that? Then why do people need to sit in the lotus position to cultivate?"

"That's for daoists. There are many different kinds of internal arts in this world. In fact, there are some people who can cultivate while they work or run. Everyone cultivates in a different manner. Being able to cultivate while lying down isn't very rare." Luo Qi suddenly smiled. "What's up? Do you regret not picking up the internal arts of our Luo Family's outer branch?"

Zhao Changhe had a bitter expression and he raised his head for a while before sighing. "I don't have any regrets. What I'm looking for is speed, not an easy time cultivating."

"That's why you're training day and night?"

"Yes..."

“The way of cultivation requires one to achieve balance. To insist on training so excessively is not necessarily a good thing. You should rest.” Luo Qi paused and realized that what he had just said was equivalent to inviting Zhao Changhe to go to bed with him. Luo Qi continued, “Once you’re in bed, don’t touch me with your paws. Disgusting.”

Zhao Changhe responded unhappily, “You really think I’m gay? Don’t you think I’d find that disgusting as well?”

He did not feel tired, so he kept swinging his sword. “Go to sleep first. I need to do a hundred slashes tonight before anything else.”

Luo Qi’s eyes widened. “Madman.”

“Mad?” Zhao Changhe said softly. “If I’m not mad, how am I supposed to protect the things I don’t want to lose?”

Luo Qi had a complicated look on his face as he watched Zhao Changhe’s spill his sweat everywhere in the darkness. There was a mysterious hatred in Luo Qi’s eyes, but also hard-to-suppress admiration. In the end, everything became faint as he shut his eyes.

One person outside; one person inside. One still and quiet; one full of movement. Amidst this snowing winter night where not a sound could be heard, the two of them formed a unique scenery.

After some time, Zhao Changhe had lost count of how many times he had swung his saber. He was finally exhausted, but he was also satisfied.

He had managed to get a feel for how to control his saber. He was getting faster and faster, becoming steadier as he went, and also more precise with his attacks. The slashes he had made on the wooden pole before were scattered and rarely hit the same spot twice. However, the blade marks were getting closer and closer together, converging towards a single line.

The sayings “an extension of one’s arm” and “wherever one’s thoughts go, the blade reaches” seemed like metaphors, but they could actually be realized with enough practice. There was nothing special about being highly skilled—it was just practice and then more practice. This principle was ironclad.

“Fuck. I smell rancid. There’s nowhere to take a shower. This is too hard to deal with.” Zhao Changhe wiped away his sweat as he entered the wooden hut. He wanted to complain, but seeing Luo Qi fast asleep, he stopped himself.

Another reason Zhao Changhe wanted to keep training was so that he could ward off the cold. If he wore such thin clothes in the middle of winter without constantly

exercising, he would freeze to death. Whenever he paused and the wind picked up, he would feel incredibly cold.

Zhao Changhe could do nothing but hang up his sweaty shirt to dry. He wiped the sweat off himself and snuggled into his own part of the blanket.

Luo Qi pulled away, shifting himself further to the inner side of the bed.

“Still haven’t slept?”

“You were making such a ruckus with your saber? Who’d be able to sleep?”

Zhao Changhe felt a bit sorry. “In that case, I won’t practice with the saber at night next time. I’ll just cultivate.”

“There’s no need for that,” Luo Qi forced himself to say. “Since you want to rapidly raise your strength, how can you be hindered by such a trivial matter? In any case, I don’t care. Whatever other people think doesn’t matter either. They can go and die for all I care.”

“If you didn’t care you’d be asleep. Anyway, I’m dead tired. I’m going to bed now.”

“...”

The wooden hut suddenly became quiet.

Zhao Changhe was truly exhausted. He fell asleep the moment he shut his eyes. With the both of them curled up in their own separate blankets, there was no possibility of bumping into each other. *He sure is overthinking things. The heck is he imagining about touching?*

However, the reality was that there was a stench emanating from both of them, and *that* was unbearable.

Zhao Changhe was in no mood to find out whether Luo Qi was a guy or a girl. Right now, he was fully preoccupied with his own goals. There was no time to think about pointless things. As Zhao Changhe said, it would be best if Luo Qi was not a girl. Otherwise, there would be much more trouble to deal with. Things would be much simpler if he was a man.

Without extraneous thoughts, Zhao Changhe quickly fell asleep. Luo Qi anxiously grabbed his blanket. He faced the wall, but his eyes were wide open. His whole body was tense and he felt like his heart was about to jump out of his throat.

“He wouldn’t dare get nearer, would he? He said he wouldn’t get close and also found it disgusting, right?”

“But what if he gets closer in his sleep?”

“If that happens, he’s unconscious, so he wouldn’t know right?”

“But if he wakes up before me, won’t he know?”

Luo Qi’s thoughts were a mess. He could not sleep at all. As if to mock him, Zhao Changhe soon entered a deep sleep and began snoring. It was like thunder.

Luo Qi turned around unhappily and menacingly raised his leg. He wanted to kick Zhao Changhe but hesitated for a moment and eventually slowly put it down.

He looked at Zhao Changhe’s face. The scar on it was just as distinctive in the darkness.

When he said that Zhao Changhe’s scar was ugly, Luo Qi was not speaking the truth. It was not ugly at all. On the contrary, it had a wild beauty; it was very manly.

This was because Zhao Changhe was manly and handsome to begin with. No matter how good-looking people messed up their appearance, they would look cool (author’s note: ugly people should not follow this advice).

Zhao Changhe slept very well. He did not move an inch in his sleep. After watching for a while, Luo Qi slowly relaxed. He eventually gave in to his fatigue and finally dozed off.

In Luo Qi’s dream, there was a person who gently served her food.

Luo Qi faintly heard herself asking, “Mom, why aren’t you eating?”

The person in her dream patted her head. “I’ve already eaten this afternoon. I’m not hungry.”

The person’s face was blurry. It was only an early memory from Luo Qi’s childhood. She had long forgotten what that face looked like.

Chapter 14: The Power of a Saber

Luo Qi and Zhao Changhe were both filled with worry and could not sleep well. On the second day, the two of them immediately sprang out of bed at the same time when a laborer knocked on the door to deliver their cornbread. After they both composed themselves, they looked at each other. Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Good morning.”

Luo Qi ignored him and looked down. Seeing himself wrapped tightly in his blanket, he heaved a sigh of relief.

Zhao Changhe could not be bothered concerning himself with Luo Qi and went to open the door, returning with the cornbread. He saw Luo Qi sitting on the bed, fixing up his hair.

That posture... If I wasn't careful, I would've been smitten.

Zhao Changhe felt his heart skip a beat. He tilted his head and changed the topic of conversation. "Fucking hell. Another day without being able to brush my teeth. I'm really not used to any of this."

Luo Qi replied lazily, "You were born in the countryside, yet you talk as if you're from a wealthy family. You even know about brushing your teeth with willow branches!?"

Zhao Changhe chewed on his cornbread and cast Luo Qi a sidelong glance. "You know about it too? And about the willow branches? Weren't you just a servant or whatever... Oh, sorry."

"What's there to apologize for? You think you can offend me with your words? I call you a country bumpkin, you call me a servant. That makes us even." Luo Qi looked at Zhao Changhe disapprovingly. "Let's go. You have your training to do, I have to struggle to make sure we have meat to eat."

"Eh, about what you said yesterday..."

Luo Qi glanced back with a smile as he walked to the door. "You are too naive. I'm afraid it won't be so easy to achieve what you want. However... I think you should focus on other things. Go with the flow and see where that takes you."

That smile was spiteful, but Zhao Changhe was unaffected and nodded. "There will be a way."

Thick-headed guys were like this. It made Luo Qi even more careful not to reveal anything feminine about himself. He took his cornbread and went to complete his tasks.

Regardless of what Luo Qi did with his femininity, Zhao Changhe did not intend to concern himself with it.

Who cares if he's a guy or a girl. Thinking too much will only affect how fast I can cultivate.

Once Luo Qi left, Zhao Changhe made his way to the training grounds without telling anyone. He was supposed to cultivate the Vicious Blood Art in the morning and train with the saber in the afternoon. However, he was channeling the Vicious Blood Art as he practiced with the saber. This allowed him to make quick progress in the Vicious Blood Art. He did not know if any problems would arise because of this, so he decided it would be best to consult Instructor Sun.

“You think you’re improving too fast? Where are you in your cultivation right now? Channel the Vicious Blood Art and try to punch me,” said Instructor Sun, not the least bit concerned.

Zhao Changhe replied carefully, “With all my strength?”

“Of course with all your strength.” Instructor Sun rolled his eyes. “You think you can rattle me with your punches?”

Zhao Changhe agreed and entered into his horse stance with his fists by his waist.

Qi and blood from the Vicious Blood Art surged throughout his body. Zhao Changhe could feel his muscles fill with abundant energy both fiendish and ferocious.

With a shout, Zhao Changhe punched with all his might.

He did not know if he was seeing things, but the moment he threw his punch, he could only see red.

Instructor Sun raised a hand indifferently to block the attack. Zhao Changhe felt like an enormous, immeasurable force had rushed toward him and was sent flying backwards a few steps before he was able to stabilize himself. That powerful force disappeared and seemed to have beaten out the blood-red image in Zhao Changhe’s vision.

Zhao Changhe held some respect for Instructor Sun in his heart. He laughed apologetically and said, “That’s why you’re the instructor.”

Instructor Sun clasped his hands behind his back and said indifferently, “Your progress...is indeed very fast. There’s no special reason for this, though. In the first place, you have a pretty good understanding of martial arts. More crucially, however, is your physique. It’s simply too good, incomparably abundant with qi and blood. You’re overly suited to cultivating the Vicious Blood Art. It’s strange. Being from a peasant family, how were you able to get such nutrition? How did you develop your body?”

He did not let Zhao Changhe see his hand slightly shaking behind his back.

Instructor Sun had been too careless to casually block the attack with a single hand. He did not expect Zhao Changhe to strike with such ferocity... *What the hell, this is ridiculous!*

Zhao Changhe thought to himself, *If we talk nutrition, then I don’t think even the cult leader can eat as well as a regular worker in the modern world. Not to mention, I’m a real gym rat, so how could a random dude my age compare to me? Come to think of it, I’ve yet to even be forced to use the Back Eye. Maybe this body of mine is the biggest cheat I have?*

“Of course, there is another reason. You haven’t lost your virginity; you still retain your original yang and have abundant male essence, overflowing even... This is what people call being young and vigorous.” Not even Instructor Sun knew if he was praising or mocking Zhao Changhe. He sized him up for a while and could not hold back from adding, “You’re already nineteen, right? How sad.”

“Fuck.” Zhao Changhe straightened his neck and asked, “Wouldn’t I have lost some of that original yang from rubbing one out?”

“You’re *technically* correct according to the principles of cultivation, but it’s negligible unless you do it too often...fuck, why am I telling you this?!”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Instructor Sun was expressionless. “From what I can see today, you’re about to reach the first level of the Vicious Blood Art. Train well this month and attempt to break through. Once you’ve passed the first level, you will have also broken through to the first layer of the Profound Gate.”

“Reaching the first layer of the Profound Gate in a month?” Zhao Changhe found it unbelievable. He thought of Luo Qi, who had started cultivating as a child and felt proud for reaching the first layer of the Profound Gate at sixteen or seventeen. *I wonder if he’ll vomit blood after hearing about this.*

“This is what a demonic art can accomplish. You’ll know the price to pay in the future. Anyway, those who use demonic arts advance at a far greater rate than others. You are exceptional, but not unique,” Instructor Sun said indifferently. “Right, your cultivation is progressing much faster than your saber art. You need to catch up. The three moves I taught you yesterday, the Vertical Chop, Horizontal Slash, and Returning Slash—how many times have you practiced them?”

Zhao Changhe answered truthfully, “I intended to practice each move a thousand times, but I lost count in the end. The number of repetitions shouldn’t be that far off, though.”

He actually practiced them a thousand times each? Instructor Sun’s eyes nearly popped out of the sockets, and he did his best to calmly point at a wooden pole. “You see that blade mark in the middle? Hit that. Let me see.”

Zhao Changhe took out his saber.

Swoosh!

The saber flashed as it struck toward the blade mark Instructor Sun had pointed out. The attack did not strictly line up with the mark; there was still a small discrepancy. Instructor Sun heaved a huge sigh and muttered, “Reasonable.”

Zhao Changhe said, "It's not all that great, but it should get better with more training today."

You want to be humble? Do you think that by 'reasonable' I meant your technique was alright? What I meant was that your talent for the saber is reasonably average, not ridiculous like the Vicious Blood Art. If not, your aptitude would be a bit too ridiculous.

Instructor Sun's expression relaxed considerably. "To be honest, if we were to speak of talent, you're not that special. You're only slightly better than average. After all, this move is the simplest of them all. Any random idiot could learn it after chopping firewood for a few days. How could a true genius still make inaccurate attacks after practicing a move a thousand times? However, what's different about you is that you know your attacks aren't accurate. You can practice a single move a thousand times. Most people can't do that."

Zhao Changhe: "Eh..."

"If you can keep practicing every single move a thousand times when you actually start learning the Vicious Blood Saber Art, what you can achieve will exceed your expectations," Instructor Sun said unhurriedly. "Of course, when regular people pick up advanced saber arts and break through to the first layer of the Profound Gate, they're usually placed in a leadership role. After that, they're able to enjoy lots of wine and meat and plenty of women. Those that are able to continue working hard are few and far between. I don't know how you'll fare."

Zhao Changhe also could not be certain of how he would fare in the future. In any case, he was extremely committed right now. All his attention was practically placed on training. It wasn't just that he wanted to become strong and return to the real world; he also found real pleasure in cultivation and training in martial arts.

It was just like the video games he played in the past. When dying repeatedly to a boss, how could Zhao Changhe just give up like that? Even the server admins told him off for not being willing to walk away. Zhao Changhe's current situation was similar. *Fucking hell. I can't accurately strike that blade mark? I won't accept this. I'll continue striking this "boss" until I figure out how to defeat it.*

It was the same for the Vicious Blood Art. Zhao Changhe found real enjoyment in the process of gaining more and more strength, and he secretly enjoyed the reverence he received from the people around him.

At the training grounds, Zhao Changhe's voice grew louder and grander. Soon, it melded together with the voices of the others present.

That scholarly air he had before had faded away without him knowing it; it was replaced with the temperament of a bandit.

After a mere few days...

Zhao Changhe showed off more and more of the reasons he had been labeled a natural-born bandit.

Plap!

Dusk had arrived. Zhao Changhe, who had been training for the entire day, put away his saber and gave one of the bandits behind him a heavy pat on the shoulder. "Someday, when we can leave the stronghold, I'll treat all of you to a drink!"

The bandit laughed apologetically. "Nah, boss, I think we are the ones who gotta give you a drink. Even just the fact that you killed that pig Luo Zhenwu is enough to deserve a toast."

"Huh? You were there that day?"

"Of course we weren't there, but we heard about it from the other disciples who participated in the raid. Boss Zhao, you're already pretty famous in the *jianghu*."

"What? How can that be? It was just some dog from the Luo family. Who in the *jianghu* would possibly care?"

The bandit had a strange look on his face as he said, "They say that, ten years ago, the emperor went on an inspection tour throughout the country. One of his destinations was the Luo family. The Luo Village Lord, being the bootlicker that he was, wanted to kiss the emperor's ass, and he sent his wife to tend to the emperor..."

Zhao Changhe was dumbstruck. He ruminated on the bandit's words for a moment. "You don't mean to say..."

The bandit clapped his hands together. "Yes. It's possible that Luo Zhenwu is the emperor's offspring! That's why the Imperial Clan took special care of them! The Luo family had a lot of hidden masters affiliated with the imperial court. If it wasn't for Venerable Vermillion Bird, how could we have succeeded... Just think about it, boss, can any old family hide masters affiliated with the imperial court?"

Zhao Changhe tried to restrain himself, and only said one word, "Fuck!"

Strange. The way the Luo Village Lord spoke to his son was not anything like how someone would treat a prince. Wasn't it exactly like how a father would speak to his child? Did the bandit get it wrong... Or did those two just get used to that dynamic?

The bandit said, "In the past, when people spread rumors about the relationship between the Luo family and the Imperial Clan, no one spoke in detail about what this relationship exactly was... It's not that they didn't know. They didn't dare to! Now, we're

all a part of the same holy faith. What we oppose is this rotten imperial court. Why should we cover up the identity of this dog of a prince you killed?”

Zhao Changhe sighed. He thought that the whole thing was confidential and he could only ask about it after joining the cult as a formal disciple. He did not expect to hear about all this right now.

In a way, it made sense. Before Luo Zhenwu died, the whole thing had been kept under wraps. But now that he was dead, it was only right that the Blood God Cult wanted to spread what they did.

So what I did...it appears to be quite impressive...

“All I did was kill the emperor’s bastard. How long can my reputation really spread for? No one will be speaking about it in a few days.” Zhao Changhe shrugged and turned away, thinking of ending the conversation right there.

However, the bandit’s eyes widened. “Only a bastard? No, boss, you really don’t get it. The *actual* crown prince is dead and the emperor has no other sons.”

Zhao Changhe froze in his tracks.

Chapter 15: Wine for You

“Rumors say that the emperor had an illegitimate son but couldn’t afford to mess with the empress’ clan, so he couldn’t bring the kid to the palace. The emperor could only take care of him in secret. But with the death of the crown prince, the value of Luo Zhenwu’s secret identity suddenly changed... Before then, who would’ve cared about which bastard he was?”

Zhao Changhe felt numb.

Was this the real reason why the Four Idols Cult and Blood God Cult wanted to exterminate the Luo Family? If they extinguish the imperial bloodline, then the world will be thrown into chaos.

The problem is, with the death of the crown prince, wouldn’t the emperor have sent people to the Luo family to bring Luo Zhenwu to the palace? How could he possibly allow Luo Zhenwu to stay with the Luo family... What’s more, from the attitude of the Luo family, they didn’t look like they understood the gravity of the crown prince’s death. If not, how could Luo Zhenwu still be in the mood to have his way with village girls?

The other possibility was, of course, that the people were just making wild guesses and the Luo family had suffered this calamity for no reason.

Zhao Changhe carefully asked, “When did the crown prince die? Did he die before or after Luo Zhenwu?”

The bandit clapped his hands together. “Actually, that’s a weird coincidence. He died in the afternoon right before you killed Luo Zhenwu. Just a few hours before! At that time, Luo Zhenwu was the emperor’s only child. So, Boss Zhao...it can be said that your saber cleaved open the gate to troubled times. How could you *not* be famous?”

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath.

Judging from the time that the Blood God Cult chose to strike, they were definitely planning to kill Luo Zhenwu even before the crown prince died... Was this really a coincidence? Or was the crown prince’s death also part of their plan? Did they decide to carry out both of them at the same time?

First Seat Tang’s words resurfaced in Zhao Changhe’s mind. “You have no idea of the gravity of what just happened. You... You will regret this.”

She didn’t come to the Luo Family Village because of Village Lord Luo’s request for assistance, nor did she arrive ahead of a large army. In fact, there wasn’t any large army. Village Lord Luo’s letter probably hadn’t even reached the capital either...The reason she rushed to the Luo Family was that she had to take care of Luo Zhenwu! She just happened to arrive after the raid had already started.

So it looks like the Luo family didn’t meet with a calamity for no reason. There were other things behind the raid.

Luo Zhenwu’s death was indeed serious. It was serious to the point that Zhao Changhe was put in a daze for a while. He suddenly looked to the sky and laughed hysterically. “The imperial palace and dragon throne on the location card—so this is how they were related to the Luo Family Village. Hahaha! This card is fucking useless. Damn blind woman, I’ll fuck you up!”

The bandit: “?”

Zhao Changhe smiled as he patted the bandit’s shoulder. “I’ve understood everything. Thank you, brother.”

Cleaving open the gate to troubled times.

How could chaos start just because of something like that? The way that pig was, if he’d taken the throne, that’s when the people would have met with actual misfortune.

What’s done is done. Did I not kill a big scoundrel?

Thinking this, the nervousness in Zhao Changhe's heart vanished. In fact, he felt better than before. The mystery of the location card, which had been nagging him all this while, was finally solved, and Zhao Changhe felt a wave of satisfaction wash over him.

However, there's still something weird about the whole thing. The way the village lord and his son talked to each other didn't make any sense. Also, if the Four Idols Cult and Blood God Cult conducted the raid just to kill Luo Zhenwu, wouldn't it have been enough to send an assassin? Why stir up something so big by exterminating the entire Luo family...

Anyway, who cares? Will knowing what actually happened get me out of this situation? Nope. Not at all. In any case, I'm a wanted criminal. I can't leave the stronghold even if I want to. Might as well continue bringing food back for Luo Qi. I still need something to fill up my days.

Zhao Changhe had spent a long time talking, and he returned to the wooden hut much later than the night before. The sun had fully set and he could not even make out the roads anymore. However, when he returned, Luo Qi was nowhere to be found. Zhao Changhe knit his brow. He was in no mood to put in extra practice and repeatedly paced around the building while looking at the entrance of the stronghold.

Yesterday, he was worried that Luo Qi met with some danger. That did not turn out to be the case, but it did not mean that danger did not exist. It could strike at any time.

It wouldn't strike today, would it?

Zhao Changhe finally could not wait any longer, picked up his saber, and left the building. After walking a few steps, he saw Luo Qi sauntering back with his hands clasped behind his back.

Seeing Zhao Changhe anxiously head outside, Luo Qi was a little stunned, but he soon understood what was going on. His eyes squinted slightly as he smiled. "I'm back."

Zhao Changhe heaved a sigh of relief and frowned. "Why have you returned so late... Eh, wait, something's wrong..."

He sniffed the air.

"Hey, wait a moment. You used to have a stench that I could smell whenever the wind blew in my direction. Where's that gone?"

Luo Qi furrowed his brow. "I went to take a bath in the stream behind the mountain. I couldn't take the stench anymore. It felt like lice were about to begin crawling all over me."

“Swimming in winter. Impressive” Zhao Changhe felt restless, and also a bit terrified. *I’ve never swam in winter before. Forget about taking a bath, I’ll freeze to death if I even try to take my clothes off. Looks like people at the first layer of the Profound Gate can really do whatever they want...*

“You take a bath as well. Who’d want to sleep with you if you smell like shit?” Luo Qi found a good excuse. “I wasn’t being unreasonable before. You were just too smelly.”

Zhao Changhe’s expression was bitter. “It’s so cold. You’ve reached the first layer of the Profound Gate and you can handle it. I’m just a noob.”

“True men are all unafraid of going into water in winter, even those who have never cultivated. You’ve already been cultivating for a few days. Don’t chicken out.” Luo Qi smiled as he took out a gourd of wine that he was hiding behind his back. “I’ll pour you some warm wine to drink. It’ll help you beat the cold.”

Zhao Changhe was pleasantly surprised. “Where did you get this?”

“I went to the city and bought some today.” Luo Qi seemed to magically pull out a greasy bag. “I even got some barbecued meat. It’s your reward for training so hard.”

Zhao Changhe asked curiously, “There’s no way you bought all this and used it to complete your mission, right? Regardless of how much money you brought after leaving the Luo Family Village, it wouldn’t be enough.”

“Today, I arranged for my men to go hunting... It’s winter, so wild animals are scarce, but there are still some to be found. We managed to catch a few chickens and rabbits to hand in and just barely met the mission requirements. Because of this, we were able to finish things early. I took the time to make a trip to the city.” Luo Qi made a stern face. “Just tell me if you want it or not. Cut the bullshit.”

“I want it!” Zhao Changhe snatched all of the meat and wine from Luo Qi and ran toward the exit. “I’ll eat before I go into the pool, to warm myself up.”

Luo Qi entered the wooden hut in an unhurried manner. He looked at the food on the table and grinned.

After the incident at the Luo Family Village, Luo Qi was short on money. Today, he had spent it all on the meat and wine. He did not buy anything for himself. But this was because he knew there would be something for him to eat when he got back.

You leave food for me and I’ll buy you wine. It’s only right to do so.

Luo Qi could faintly hear someone shouting from the exit of the stronghold, “No one is allowed to leave the stronghold at night!”

Then came Zhao Changhe's voice. "Why haven't I heard of any curfew? What the hell, you think you're some kind of bigshot now? For fuck's sake, I just want to go out and take a bath. What's with all the bullshit?"

"Eh... B-boss Zhao..."

"Oh, it's you guys. You guys have guard duty? It's alright, we're all in the same boat here. Let me pass."

"If we knew it was you, we wouldn't have stopped you. Sorry, boss."

The sounds got further and further.

He's already a boss... It looks like he's becoming more and more like a bandit. Luo Qi ate slowly. Suddenly, he could not help but laugh.

An innocent young man?

Whether Zhao Changhe was a bandit or not, the fact that he was able to adapt to this devilish nest faster than Luo Qi made it clear that he was naturally suited to the *jianghu*. In just a few days, Zhao Changhe had begun thriving here. Only heaven knew how he had managed to give others the impression of a naive youth at the start. It was truly a mystery.

Luo Qi suddenly began to think. *There isn't any actual friendship between me and Zhao Changhe. Before the raid, we only spoke...what, a couple of words to each other?* Zhao Changhe treated Luo Qi well mainly because he found himself stuck in a place both foreign and sinister. Amidst the solitude and diffidence of being here, the only other familiar person was Luo Qi, so it was natural that they would become close to each other.

As Zhao Changhe continued to flourish here, he would get to know more and more people. By then, the relationship between him and Luo Qi would not be anything special anymore. Perhaps his friendship with other people would become deeper than his friendship with Luo Qi.

That's fine with me. Everyone has their own path to follow.

Luo Qi leisurely tidied up his bowl and chopsticks then sat on the bed, closed his eyes, and began to cultivate.

He was also very hard working... However, Zhao Changhe was abnormal. Luo Qi had never seen someone so committed to training.

After circulating his qi ten times around his body, Luo Qi heard footsteps. Zhao Changhe had returned.

Luo Qi felt it strange and opened his eyes, “How are you back so soon?”

“After I got there I thought, how can wine be drunk alone? Of course I’d have to come back and drink with you.” Zhao Changhe was refreshed after his bath and took some bowls to pour wine into. He smiled. “It wasn’t as cold as I imagined. I’m still pretty awesome. Let’s bathe together next time.”

Who’s going to bathe with you!?

Luo Qi’s mouth twitched, but as he looked at the vapor slowly rising from the warm wine, his mood lightened considerably for some odd reason and he brought up something to talk about. “I saw your wanted poster in the city. The imperial court isn’t taking you lightly. Looks like you’ll have a lot of trouble traveling outside in the future.”

“Of course! Let me tell you, today I learned the reason the Luo family was exterminated. That fucker Luo Zhenwu was actually a prince!” Zhao Changhe handed Luo Qi a bowl of wine and smiled. “Wait a second, you stayed at the village for a long time. Did Luo Zhenwu ever have the bearing of a prince?”

Luo Qi’s hands shook slightly as he took the bowl. The wine inside swayed and rippled.

However, Luo Qi acted like nothing was wrong and just laughed. “How shocking. I’m shaking in my boots, *hehe*. When you go out next time, you have to be very careful.”