

Tome of Troubled Times

Chapter 3: The Jianghu

It soon turned out that was not the case.

Village Lord Luo brought the two to the reception hall and dismissed his underlings. There was also a brightly dressed youth in the hall. He was rather delicate and handsome. The Luo Village Lord smiled as he introduced him. "This is my humble son, Zhenwu."

Luo Zhenwu cupped his hands to Yue Hongling with utmost elegance. "It is good to see you again, Maiden Yue. Long have I heard of your gracious name. What fortune has allowed us to meet this day?"

Yue Hongling knit her brows. She did not enjoy these hollow platitudes at all, especially when they concerned her beauty, and the village lord's words were so excessive that they'd even made Zhao Changhe vomit earlier. However, people everywhere were like this. She was disinclined to speak more than was necessary.

"I hear that the Blood God Cult will raid your village. As for why, I am not sure."

Village Lord Luo was at a loss for a moment. "Not sure?"

"Yes... I was at Beimang Mountain some time ago and happened to overhear a few disciples of this demonic cult talking about it. At the time, I was outnumbered and their cult leader was present, so I wasn't able to capture anyone for detailed questioning. In short, I've come to specially report this to you. I hope that you will take heed of this."

"Beimang? That's only about a thousand li away..." Village Lord Luo looked at Yue Hongling startled. His expression was rather strange.

Zhao Changhe sat by the side. The color had drained from his face, and he listened with raised brows. Yue Hongling had rushed over a thousand li to warn the Luo Village Lord of some raid which might or might not occur... Furthermore, from listening to the two speak, Zhao Changhe could tell that they were not at all familiar with each other. It was likely they had only met once before.

Zhao Changhe felt that if Yue Hongling was a brave and chivalrous man, she would fit the part even better. A girl acting like this was fascinating. To dream about someone like her, perhaps meant that Zhao Changhe liked this type of woman, or maybe it meant that he was gay...

Village Lord Luo muttered, "Why would they do that? We have nothing to do with the Blood God Cult. Fair maiden, you must've gotten it wrong... However, for you to cross a thousand li to pass on this information, my village is greatly indebted to you. It wouldn't hurt to spend a few days here. Allow us to show you some hospitality."

Yue Hongling pointed at Zhao Changhe and said, "Just now, I passed by the Zhao House. The villagers have all been slaughtered. This younger brother here is the only lucky survivor. I personally saved him; he can corroborate my account."

The father and son of the Luo family had a slight change in expression. "Fair maiden, did you battle with them? Could you ascertain their background?"

Yue Hongling shook her head. "They were all ruffians. None of them had any notable background. It's very likely that they were simply bandits belonging to the Blood God Cult. Demonic cults typically gather such vile people to loot villages. Some are similar to... As for why they would slaughter an entire village and so rashly alert their enemies, I haven't a clue. It's a shame that I was too eager to save people and left no one alive for questioning."

So it has something to do with me... Zhao Changhe recalled Yue Hongling saying "Why act so rashly and alert their enemies?" to herself. The Blood God Cult raid on the Zhao House must be what she was referring to.

Zhao Changhe's hatred toward that throat-slitting witch could not compare to what he felt toward those murderers. That indignation, that desire surging within him to kill every one of those bastards—it was hard to understand for people who did not personally witness what he had seen.

The Blood God Cult... Zhao Changhe clenched his fists tightly.

Village Lord Luo's expression turned grave as he muttered, "This being the case, the village will immediately go on high alert and prepare for battle. Fair maiden, your traveling a thousand li to pass on this information is an act of utmost benevolence and virtue. My village cannot keep you here, lest you be drawn into the fighting for no reason..."

Luo Zhenwu wanted to speak out but hesitated. Village Lord Luo glared at him.

Since Yue Hongling had come all this way from faraway lands to pass on this information, she certainly had the intention of battling the demonic cult with them. But the attitude of this Village Lord Luo was a bit strange... His words sounded pleasant, but in essence, they were equivalent to driving away a guest before even serving them dinner. How could she shamelessly ask to stay? She was a free and chivalrous person, and she would never do something so humiliating.

Thinking this, Yue Hongling was a little angry and said coldly, "I have shown you the greatest kindness of the *jianghu*. Since you are confident in handling this by yourself, I shall not meddle in your affairs any longer. This is where I will take my leave. There is still one more thing I must call the village lord's attention to."

Village Lord Luo cupped his hands. "Please speak, fair maiden."

Yue Hongling said, "The Zhao House is no further than a few tens of li away. At this very moment, corpses are strewn all over the village—a tragic sight. I hope that you can send some people to bury the dead. I believe that a man of great virtue like yourself will take the noble course of action."

Yue Hongling pulled Zhao Changhe over as she spoke, "This lucky survivor is Zhao Changhe. Right now, he is without anyone to rely on. I hope that you can take him in, for my sake."

Village Lord Luo smiled. "As I should. In the future this shall be your home, little brother."

Yue Hongling smiled, patting Zhao Changhe on the shoulder. "This is where we say goodbye. I hope that, in the future, you shall be just as pure-hearted as you are today. And when we next meet in the *jianghu*, I hope to hear you call me big sister again."

Yue Hongling turned around and left. Zhao Changhe sent her off to the gates, looking fixedly upon that red-garbed woman striding toward the sunset on her stalwart steed.

The view was beautiful.

When Zhao Changhe first got here, everything was a mystery to him; he did not understand a thing, and naturally, was taciturn and at a loss. This was how he ended up giving others the impression of an innocent youth. However, in reality, Zhao Changhe knew this was not his actual temperament. If anything, he resembled Yue Hongling quite well.

This was the *jianghu* of his dreams; that was the heroine of his dreams.

Zhao Changhe followed Yue Hongling with his eyes as she left on horseback. For a while, he felt reluctant to part with her and did not know what to say to the father and son of the Luo Family. Moreover, he had no idea what they planned to do with him...

Zhao Changhe stared blankly into space, pondering.

Behind him, Zhao Changhe could clearly see the Luo Family's father and son standing outside the reception hall. Their expressions were grim as they looked at the direction Yue Hongling had left in.

Yue Hongling traveled a thousand li to tell you danger was coming, and you didn't even give her a meal or anything. So what's with that look on your faces?!

Zhao Changhe surreptitiously moved a few steps backward, perking up his ears in an attempt to eavesdrop.

That blind woman said that this Back Eye was able to slightly improve Zhao Changhe's regular eyesight, but he noticed that it also appeared to strengthen his hearing; it was much clearer than before. The father and son of the Luo family, furthermore, did not take this "na?ve country boy" seriously, conversing as they wished. They spoke softly, but he could still vaguely listen in to what was being said.

"Father, why did you let her go? Would it not have been better to have her stay and show her our hospitality? Perhaps it would be possible..." Luo Zhenwu spoke softly, clenching his fist. His expression was a bit wretched.

"You good-for-nothing!" Village Lord Luo quietly gnashed his teeth. "Yue Hongling has reached the eighth layer of the Profound Gate. She is the fifth-ranked Hidden Dragon. What heights! I don't even know if *I* can handle her, so what makes you think you can scheme against her? What if we fail and she runs away? Do you know what sort of trouble that'll bring us?!"

"We can trick her into a dark room, and use that opportunity..."

"What do you know! Did you notice that from the moment she walked through those gates, her hand never left her blade? Her eyes and ears were constantly taking notice of every change and sound in her surroundings. That's an instinct beaten into people by the *jianghu*! You think such a person will follow you into an unknown place?"

Luo Zhenwu: "..."

Village Lord Luo was disappointed with his son. "Let me tell you something about women that make a name for themselves in the *jianghu*. The more beautiful they are, the harder they are to deceive. There are more men coveting them than you've even *met* in your entire life, and even so, they still wander through the *jianghu* as they please. The very fact that they haven't been turned into someone's plaything speaks volumes about what they've experienced!"

Luo Zhenwu: "..."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Well, that makes a fuckload of sense. Perhaps Yue Hongling letting Zhao Changhe sit behind her was actually a deliberate act of observation. Seeing him leaving a few inches between them, and possibly blushing, was probably what made her feel he was an innocent kid...

What can I say, I am a thick-headed man. That's just who I am...

Village Lord Luo continued coldly, "In any case, we were rude to her and she's gone. This is good. If she stayed any longer and somehow discovered that you are the one who sent those men at the Zhao House, you would've found out very quickly what real trouble means!"

Zhao Changhe's expression warped instantly

"Who asked those villagers to spit on my kindness!" Luo Zhenwu said hatefully. "What matters if I play with one of their girls? The whole village took up pitchforks in retaliation. If we don't teach them a lesson, won't they think we're too soft?"

Village Lord Luo did not respond, only saying, "As it turns out, Yue Hongling was too eager to save people. She had no way to check their background thoroughly, so she thought they were bandits, part of some demonic cult. There wasn't anything to connect them to us. The Blood God Cult has smoothly taken the fall for us."

Luo Zhenwu said, "In other words, she has no evidence for her so-called demonic cult raid. Is this not proof that she is acting on hearsay and fearmongering? We really don't have anything to do with the Blood God Cult."

However, Village Lord Luo very strangely hesitated, speaking only after a while, "I'd rather believe her about that part. Taking further precautions is never a bad thing. I will write to the Demon Suppression Bureau in the capital and request for First Seat Tang to send a correspondent."

Luo Zhenwu did not quite understand, but he also did not talk back to his father. Finally, he threw a meaningful glance at Zhao Changhe outside, "The little feller is still leaning against the door staring at his benefactor. He's an idiot. Can't we just..."

Luo Zhenwu made a slicing motion with his hands as he said, "In order to prevent him from finding out anything in the future and seeking us out to take revenge—"

Village Lord Luo shook his head. "No. If it so happens that one day Yue Hongling comes by on a whim to visit the person she saved, it will not be easy to explain his disappearance. Just think of this as giving her face. Take him in as an outer disciple and give him the cold shoulder. In any case, all the men you sent to the Zhao House have been killed by her and the other people in the village are unaware of your actions, so how is he going to discover the truth?"

Luo Zhenwu was unwilling to concede and muttered, "Father, you are too afraid of Yue Hongling. I haven't even said anything about taking revenge on her for slaying my men, heh... Her Luoxia Mountain Village is also only a ninth-rate sect..."

Village Lord Luo sighed. “People know you because you are from the Luo family. She is the exact opposite. The only reason people know there’s such a thing as the Luoxia Mountain Village is thanks to Yue Hongling. If you really want to obtain her, maybe you can keep in mind this insignificant background of hers... But in front of Yue Hongling herself, you would do better to be more well-behaved.”

Village Lord Luo paid no more heed to his son and his sparkling eyes. He put on a smile and walked to Zhao Changhe’s side, cordially patting him on the shoulder, “Leaning against the gate and gazing like that—are you reluctant to part with your honored older sister?”

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath. By the time he turned his head around, he had a dumb smile plastered on his face. “Indeed. Big Sister Yue is really pretty.”

Village Lord Luo laughed. “Train well. Your honored sister is waiting for you in the *jianghu*.”

Wow, now that’s the bearing of a true elder. His words are as refreshing as the spring breeze...

However, the village lord failed to notice that veins were popping out on Zhao Changhe’s clenched fists.