

# Tome of Troubled Times

## *Chapter 4: This Is Not a Dream*

In that instant, Zhao Changhe thought, "It's a dream. Just beat him up."

However, he was able to restrain himself.

Zhao Changhe's experience told him that there was no use in trying to be a hero. Even if he started a fight, he could not win. Was this not equivalent to sending himself to death? And even though when he "died," he'd wake up back in the real world, his objective in the dream would still not be completed, so what was the point?

What's more, he was beginning to have doubts that this was even a dream... Given that Zhao Changhe was incapable of even imagining such a disgusting person, how was it possible to dream about him?

The slaughtered villagers, the innocent children... All massacred because someone got angry over being stopped from having his way with a village girl.

Yue Hongling had traveled a thousand li to warn the Luo Family Village of impending danger; her honor was as high as the clouds. Yet, they were only concerned with how to obtain her.

Zhao Changhe was disgusted to the point of wanting to vomit. This was the taste of hatred. It was something he had never experienced before, a ruthless emotion that would have never arisen in the peaceful life of a student in the real world. It consumed his heart.

Whether this place was reality or a dream, Zhao Changhe did not wish to wake up so soon. What he truly wanted at this moment was to kill the father and son of the Luo family.

He continued playing the part of a naive young man and was inaugurated into the outer sect of the Luo family. That same night, he was given a set of clothes, utensils for daily use, and temporary lodging.

These living quarters were not for him but for the head disciple in charge of the outer sect. Zhao Changhe was told to stay here so that this head disciple could bring him around and show him how things worked around here. Tomorrow or the day after, Zhao Changhe would probably be sent to a shared dormitory.

From the outside, things looked to be rather proper. If Yue Hongling were to visit in the future, telling her that living quarters and clothes were provided the same night she left,

and the head disciple gave him special treatment would definitely give the impression that Zhao Changhe was well taken care of... How he trained and whether he was fated to remain in the outer sect for the rest of his life depended on his own aptitude. Yue Hongling could not say anything about it.

Zhao Changhe could see through all of it with little effort. However, it did not matter. *Am I really going to accept the Luo Village Lord as my master? How disgusting.*

The head disciple in the outer sect was named Luo Qi. Allegedly, he was born into the Luo family as a servant and took up the Luo surname. In the future, it was possible for him to assume an administrative role in the village. From this, one could infer the structure of this prominent martial arts family.

Even though Luo Qi had the title of head disciple, he was actually younger than Zhao Changhe, about sixteen or seventeen years of age in appearance. His features were delicate; he had rosy lips and white teeth that made him look rather feminine.

“You’re Zhao Changhe? You’re pretty well-built. You seem strong.” Luo Qi’s expression was cold and unpleasant. An outsider was now, for whatever reason, living in his small courtyard; anyone in this situation would have had a similarly upset expression.

The way Luo Qi spoke was also a little feminine, and his voice was thin... However, Zhao Changhe would not suspect someone of disguising herself as a man for no good reason. He put on a dumb smile in response to Luo Qi’s question. “Indeed. I just arrived here. The Village Lord told me to learn the family rules from you.”

“There aren’t any rules.” Even though Luo Qi spoke coldly, there was a deep curiosity in his voice. “I heard it was Yue Hongling who brought you here. Why didn’t you cling to her and have her take you as a student?”

Zhao Changhe pretended to be an idiot. “Maybe I’m dumb.”

Luo Qi approved. “Sounds about right.”

Zhao Changhe: “?”

Luo Qi said, “By dumb, I don’t mean you’re dumb in the head or whatever. I’m talking about your age. You’re already eighteen or nineteen. What can you learn starting this old... Maybe you can pick up some martial arts techniques and look over the village for a living. That’s about it. How could Yue Hongling possibly accept you as a disciple? You two are around the same age, but she’s already made a name for herself.” Luo Qi sighed.

Zhao Changhe was stupefied.

He was too old... This was a common saying. If one wanted to get good at a sport, it was crucial that they started training from a young age. Zhao Changhe was a nineteen-year-old university student. He had never heard of anyone beginning their training at his age and reaching the level of a national athlete.

There can only be so many Kou Zhong's and Xu Ziling's [1]

However, setting the Luo family aside for now, it seemed like Zhao Changhe's objective of slaying that witch did not require him to reach such a high level. The battlefield he was always sent to only consisted of riff-raff. He could even cut down a few with what little skill he possessed. The fact that that witch always appeared in such a battlefield probably meant that she was weaker than Zhao Changhe thought. At the very least, he could see that she was not as skilled as Yue Hongling, who could wipe out an entire group of people in an instant.

*To enter the Luo family to learn martial arts, then seek out the witch and slay her—was this perhaps the intended course of this dream?*

He thought for a bit then asked, "Martial brother, what are the layers of the Profound Gate?"

Luo Qi said, "Opening all of the nine layers of the Profound Gate allows one to pry into the three Profound Mysteries. Once that happens, they will have reached the realm of celestials. At that point, there is nothing they cannot accomplish. Normal people need not think about this. The nine layers of the Profound Gate are precisely the nine layers of heaven; each step in-between is taken with extreme difficulty. Wherever people like Yue Hongling and our village lord go, who would dare disrespect them? Any higher and we're talking about great masters that you could never even meet once in a lifetime."

"The village lord has reached the ninth layer of the Profound Gate?"

"It's said that he's reached the eighth layer." Luo Qi revealed a reverent expression. "I have no idea how long it takes to reach such a level."

Zhao Changhe's mouth twitched imperceptibly.

Village Lord Luo was getting old, yet he was at the same level as Yue Hongling. It was hard to blame him for being jealous of her. It was possible that he would not be able to defeat her. However, this was also enough to show that reaching the eighth layer of the Profound Gate was indeed very impressive. Village Lord Luo could proclaim himself hegemon of this region; Yue Hongling could march across the lands under heaven.

"Then..." Zhao Changhe tried asking, "What about you, martial brother?"

Luo Qi said proudly, "With some luck, I've already broken through to the first heavenly layer!"

Zhao Changhe: "..."

*Yue Hongling is only two to three years older than you and she's already at the eighth layer. What are you so proud of?*

Seeing that he received no flattery from Zhao Changhe, Luo Qi knew what his interlocutor was thinking. He simply grinned without explaining anything.

It was natural for a layman to think that reaching the first layer of the Profound Gate was only an introduction to martial arts. However, one also had to take into account the fact that the Luo Family Village was not a large sect. Under normal conditions, what level of skill could a measly outer disciple from the village achieve by practicing low-level martial arts? To be able to break through to the first layer of the Profound Gate was to formally attain a higher level in the training of martial arts. This was no easy feat.

Becoming a hero like Yue Hongling was beyond the reach of most. Someone of her abilities should have left that insignificant sect long ago.

*I hope that after ten bitter years of training, when Zhao Changhe realizes that overcoming this hurdle is harder than shaking mountains, he will think of today.*

"It's getting late. You should go to sleep. If you need anything, you can tell me tomorrow." Luo Qi stretched his body, casually pointing at a small hut outside the courtyard. "I've picked out a room for you. You'll stay there for now... Or, what? Am I supposed to begin training you right now? Am I supposed to let you sleep in my room?"

"Not at all, not at all... Thank you, martial brother." Zhao Changhe smiled apologetically before leaving.

Once Zhao Changhe returned to the storeroom picked out for him, he lay on the hard bed. The smile on his face had disappeared without a trace.

If someone is unfamiliar with you, they may not answer your questions if you ask about too many important details in too short a time. It would be better to do so the following day. Moreover, sleeping, in and of itself, was one such important detail.

How was Zhao Changhe supposed to return to the real world?

Sleep... If this was a dream, could Zhao Changhe fall asleep within it? If he could, then would he continue having those nightmares? Or would he directly wake up in the real world? Or perhaps he would "dream" about the real world?

*What was real? What was a dream?*

Zhao Changhe heaved a heavy sigh and slowly closed his eyes.

Even though a troubled mind, in addition to a hard and *fucking* cold bed, made it difficult to fall asleep, Zhao Changhe's repeated nightmares had made him both mentally and physically exhausted to the point where he could lay down anywhere and fall asleep. He curled himself up and tossed around for the greater half of an hour before finally slipping into unconsciousness.

He fell asleep.

He did not dream.

This was the only time in the past month that Zhao Changhe did not have a nightmare. He entered into a deep sleep. However, if he had a choice, he would have preferred otherwise.

As the night sky grew darker, Zhao Changhe was woken by the cacophony of battle. He got up. From all around came sounds of killing and furious roars; the village was alight with blazing fires that reddened the night sky.

He could faintly hear a voice. "Leave none of these dogs alive!"

Zhao Changhe's expression was extremely unpleasant. He was able to deduce two things.

First, that he was able to fall asleep in this world; when he slept, he did not dream; and when he awoke, he was still here. All this was basically enough to confirm that this was no "dream entering." *This is fucking transmigration!*

The difference between transmigration and entering a dream was that, for the former, not only could one not return, but dying in this world actually meant *dying*.

His second deduction was that the Blood God Cult had indeed come. The danger Yue Hongling traveled a thousand li to warn the village about had arrived this very night.

He had no idea if Village Lord Luo had actually sent out a messenger to the capital to request for assistance... As for Yue Hongling, she had left in the evening, and at this time of night, was probably sleeping soundly at an inn in a neighboring city.

There was no one that could help now.

1. Main characters of the famous *wuxia* novel *The Legend of the Twin Dragons of the Great Tang* written by Huang Yi. They started out as gangsters before making a name for themselves wandering the *jianghu* after picking up martial arts. 📖