

## **Middle Age 251**

### Chapter 251: Why Are You So Strong?

Early the next morning, Qi Yun, who was still asleep, was suddenly nudged.

He opened his eyes drowsily and saw Chen Wei making a gesture for silence towards him and pointing outside.

Qi Yun immediately woke up, perked his ears to listen carefully, and besides the faint sound of the wind, he seemed to hear the crunching sound of snow being trampled, getting closer to the cabin.

He subconsciously sat up and turned to look outside, only to remember that there were no windows in the cabin.

Chen Wei pointed at Cao Yufei and Huzi, who were sleeping inside, and gestured for Qi Yun to wake them up. He himself quietly moved to the wooden door, tightly holding a dagger in his hand, his expression alert.

There are large animals in Changbai Mountain, not to mention bears and leopards, and even Siberian tigers.

It's not clear what exactly was outside now, but the sound of its heavy breathing was audible.

Qi Yun hurriedly woke up the two beside him, also making a gesture for silence.

The two woke up, looking at him confusedly, then at Chen Wei's solemn face behind the door, and immediately realized something.

At that moment, the heavy footsteps had already approached beside the cabin, followed by the sound of sniffing; it seemed the thing outside was smelling something.

Chen Wei's arm muscles tensed behind the door, the dagger gleaming coldly, ready to strike.

The other three stared intensely at the doorway, their hearts in their throats, hardly daring to breathe.

Just when Qi Yun thought the big thing outside was about to break in, the noise outside suddenly stopped, followed by the sound of footsteps gradually moving away.

"Gone... has it left?" Cao Yufei swallowed, speaking softly.

Qi Yun perked his ears and nodded.

Chen Wei waited for a while behind the door, then gently opened it a crack, peering outside. After confirming the creature had left, he opened the door and went outside.

Qi Yun and the other two followed him out.

Looking at the snowy ground outside, there was a series of large footprints, deeply imprinted in the snow, indicating the creature was quite large.

Huzi squatted down, carefully examining the prints, and said, "These footprints look like a bear's, but if they're this large, it must be a fully-grown big bear."

Qi Yun looked at the footprints on the ground, letting out a long sigh of relief inside.

"Let's leave this place for now. There's not much to eat in the mountains during winter; maybe the creature smelled food from the cabin, and it might come back later," Huzi continued.

The others nodded, went back inside to pack their things, and started walking eastward.

The group moved cautiously on the snowy ground, their steps making crunching sounds.

Chen Wei was constantly attentive to the surroundings, clutching the dagger tightly in his hand.

"Huzi, how much further until we reach those households?" Cao Yufei asked.

Huzi took out the map from his pocket, looked around, and said, "Once we get over that small hill ahead, we should be able to see them."

The group continued on silently, trudging along for more than an hour, until finally, a household appeared within their sight.

They slowly approached the cluster of wooden huts, and as they reached the doorway, a dark-skinned middle-aged man came out of the house, eyeing them cautiously, holding a hunting rifle.

"What are you guys up to?" The middle-aged man frowned and asked.

Seeing this, Huzi hurriedly waved his hand and replied, "Big brother, don't misunderstand, I'm a friend of Liu Dana from Hundred Herbs Gully, here specifically to collect medicinal herbs from you."

On hearing the name Liu Dana, the middle-aged man's wary expression slightly eased, but he still didn't completely let down his guard.

He scrutinized the group up and down, saying, "So you're Dana's friends. I heard his old man was hospitalized a while ago, how's he now?"

Upon hearing this, Huzi showed a wry smile: "Big brother, no need to test me. Liu Dana's old man passed away many years ago, the grass on his grave is already two meters high."

"We're really not bad people; we came specifically to collect medicinal herbs."

Only then did the middle-aged man fully believe in their identity, laughed heartily, and lowered his hunting rifle.

"Can't help it, once this season arrives, mountain poachers become plenty, hope you don't mind."

"Come on, come inside and warm up."

With that, the middle-aged man ushered them into the house.

Inside, a wooden stove was burning, making it much warmer than outside.

The group rubbed their hands together and sat down on the wooden stools.

The middle-aged man filled the teacups with boiling water, saying, "The mountains aren't like outside, facilities are simple. Hope you don't find it too rough."

Qi Yun replied with a smile, "You're too kind, brother. Having a place to warm up is already quite nice."

Huzi took the hot water, took a sip, and asked, "Elder brother, I heard from Liu Dana that you have wild ginseng over 50 years old?"

The middle-aged man was slightly taken aback hearing this: "You're looking for that stuff?"

Huzi smiled and nodded: "That's right, we're here just for that. If you have it, we're willing to pay a high price."

The middle-aged man frowned slightly, pondered for a moment, and said, "Wild ginseng over fifty years is a treasure and not easy to find. I do have some that are of good age, but not yet fifty years."

"If you really want something over fifty years, you'd have to try your luck with Old Zhao—he's an experienced medicine gatherer and might have some."

Qi Yun nodded and politely asked, "Does Old Zhao also live around here?"

The middle-aged man walked to the wall, picked up a stick, and began drawing on the ground.

While drawing, he said, "Follow this path, go straight, when you get to the fork, take the left, you'll see a coniferous forest, pass through it, and there's a small hill, Old Zhao's house is at the foot of the hill."

Chapter 252: Why Are You So Strong? \_2

Hu Zi carefully noted the route on the ground: "Thanks, brother. We won't disturb you anymore. We'll head over to ask Old Zhao now."

The middle-aged man nodded, advising, "Be careful on the way. There are many wild animals in these mountains, and that Old Zhao has a bit of a temper. You should be polite when you talk to him."

After thanking him once more, they bid farewell and left.

Following the route indicated by the middle-aged man, they walked for about ten minutes before they arrived at the foot of the mountain, where there were indeed two wooden houses.

As soon as they approached, a wolf dog suddenly sprang out from the doorway, baring its teeth and barking fiercely at them.

Soon after, a wooden door nearby creaked open, and an old man wrapped in a military coat came out of the house.

"Hu Zi! Come back!"

The dog listened to the old man's command and immediately stopped barking. It whimpered twice before lying back down in its kennel.

Hu Zi looked at the dog with a peculiar expression and asked the old man, "Sir, is its name also Hu Zi?"

Old Zhao glanced at the group suspiciously and asked, "What are you guys here for?"

"We're here to collect herbs, Sir. Do you have any fifty-year-old wild ginseng?" Hu Zi asked.

Old Zhao sized them up and down, seemingly realizing they weren't troublemakers, and turned around to head back inside: "Come in and talk."

The group followed Old Zhao into the house, which was filled with a faint herbal scent. Some herb-collecting tools hung on the wall, and a few baskets were piled in the corner.

Old Zhao pointed to a somewhat worn-out wooden table and said, "Have a seat."

Everyone sat down, and Hu Zi said with a smile, "Old man Zhao, the herbal smell is quite strong here."

Old Zhao snorted, saying, "I've been dealing with these things my whole life. Can my house not have the smell? You mentioned fifty-year-old wild ginseng earlier. What's your offer?"

Hu Zi didn't speak and turned his head to look at Qi Yun.

Qi Yun gave him a signal, indicating that he would handle the negotiation.

Hu Zi then felt at ease and spoke up, "Sir, could you take it out and let me have a look first?"

Old Zhao slowly got up, walked to an old cabinet, and held onto it as he moved it aside, revealing a wooden plank underneath.

He lifted the plank to reveal a small dirt pit, inside which was a wooden box.

He took out the wooden box, placed it on the table, and gently opened it. Inside lay a piece of ginseng tied with a red string, with slender roots and a plump body, emitting a faint medicinal fragrance.

Qi Yun glanced at it briefly, thinking it looked about the same as the one Cao Yufei had brought him before.

Hu Zi cautiously picked up the box, examined it carefully for a while, and then put the box down, saying, "The quality is very good; it could be sixty years old."

Old Zhao heard Hu Zi's words and showed a hint of pride on his face: "You young man know your stuff."

Hu Zi smiled at him, "Sir, I'm in this business too. If I couldn't recognize good stuff, I'd be in trouble."

Old Zhao didn't say much more and directly asked, "Then make your offer."

Hu Zi rubbed his chin, thought for a moment, and said, "Sir, twelve thousand; what do you think?"

Old Zhao nodded, pleased: "You kid knows your prices."

This meant he agreed.

Hu Zi heard this and smiled, "Haha, it's not easy for you to collect herbs, and we're buying them for ourselves, so we definitely won't undercut you unfairly."

Old Zhao sighed, "Alright, I'll sell it to you for twelve thousand."

"Okay, thank you, sir." Hu Zi closed the wooden box and continued to ask, "Sir, do you only have this one piece?"

Old Zhao glanced at him after hearing this: "Do you want more?"

Hu Zi nodded, "Yes, if you have more, take them all out and we'll buy them from you at a fair price."

Old Zhao frowned, puffed on his pipe for a while before saying, "What price would you offer for a hundred-year-old one?"

As soon as he said this, Qi Yun and the others were momentarily stunned.

Hu Zi looked surprised, "You have one that's a hundred years old?"

Old Zhao squinted his eyes and slowly said, "I know where there's one growing. If your offer is good, I'll go and harvest it."

"It's not easy for this thing to reach a hundred years old. If it wasn't for my grandson needing a bride price for his wedding, I really wouldn't want to touch it."

After hearing this, the group exchanged looks. Hu Zi saw Qi Yun nodding, thought for a moment, and made an offer: "Sir, if there's really one that's a hundred years old, thirty thousand; what do you think?"

Old Zhao puffed on his pipe again, finally nodding in agreement: "Alright, thirty thousand."

"But today it's too late, I won't be able to bring it back. I'll go up the mountain early tomorrow to collect it."

"No problem." Hu Zi nodded with a smile, but when his gaze returned to the wooden box on the table, he looked a bit troubled.

This place has no signal, so they couldn't pay Old Zhao; it's impossible to bring cash into the mountains.

The nearest location with a signal is where they stayed last night, by the cabin.

Old Zhao seemed to notice Tiger's difficulty and said after thinking, "I'll take you to Big Zhuzi. You can stay at his place tonight, and once that ginseng is harvested tomorrow, I will go with you to settle the payment."

Tiger nodded in agreement and handed the wooden box back to the other party.

Old Zhao tucked the box into his coat and then led them back to the middle-aged man's house they visited earlier.

Outside, Old Zhao called Big Zhuzi aside to explain the situation. He handed the ginseng to him for safekeeping.

From this, you could see Old Zhao was cautious; after all, his hiding spot was seen by Qi Yun and the others earlier, so he felt uneasy leaving it at home.

If he took it into the mountains, climbing up and down, he feared losing it—it's worth tens of thousands.

Big Zhuzi carefully stored the wooden box and nodded in acknowledgment.

Old Zhao didn't say much more, puffing on his pipe and leisurely headed home.

In the evening, Big Zhuzi prepared a large pot of meat to treat everyone.

The group sat around the stove, their mouths watering at the sight of the delicious-looking, fragrant meat pieces.

Once the meat was cooked, Qi Yun picked a piece and chewed it, feeling it tender and succulent, tastier than anything he had ever eaten.

After finishing the meal, he felt a warmth inside as if a small fire was burning, making his blood boil.

No one asked what kind of meat it was—they knew it was simply delicious.

...

The next day, after breakfast, Big Zhuzi took his hoe to tend to his vegetable garden.

In the mountains, supplies are scarce; aside from grains, oils, and staples purchased elsewhere, other foods are self-sustained.

Qi Yun, feeling idle, saw Chen Wei practicing boxing in an open space and went over to observe.

As Chen Wei finished a set of Military Boxing, Qi Yun spoke, "Brother Wei, can you teach me a few moves?"

Chen Wei paused, puzzled, "You want to learn?"

Qi Yun nodded, "I want to learn a few self-defense moves, just in case I encounter danger when you're not around."

Chen Wei looked at Qi Yun's earnest expression and, after a moment of thought, nodded: "Alright, if you want to learn, I'll teach you, but it's not easy. You'll have to bear some hardships."

Qi Yun smiled at him, "Toughening up is fine, as long as it can save my life."

Chen Wei nodded and started with the basic stance: "Stand properly, feet apart, shoulder-width, knees slightly bent, lower your center of gravity—this is stable."

Qi Yun adjusted his posture according to the instruction, while Chen Wei carefully corrected him.

Once the stance was right, Chen Wei taught the moves: "When punching, extend your arm straight, generate force from the waist, keep the fist surface flat."

"Try punching my chest."

Qi Yun didn't hesitate to worry about injuring Chen Wei, and threw a punch directly.

But before his arm fully extended, Chen Wei's large hand swiftly grabbed it.

"Incorrect, your force point is wrong; it's not just using your arm's strength, you need to turn your waist to transmit the force."

Thus, Chen Wei patiently taught while Qi Yun diligently learned, practicing repeatedly for a long time. Chen Wei finally said, "Now punch my chest again."

Recalling the force execution, Qi Yun threw a punch again.

The next second, a dull "thud" sound was heard.

Qi Yun felt as though he had punched a wall, and his hand ached fiercely.

Chen Wei, usually expressionless, now had a changed expression, staring at Qi Yun, "Why are you so strong?"

"Huh?" Qi Yun was a bit surprised, "Am I really that strong?"

Chen Wei nodded: "Generally, those without special training don't have such strength."

Qi Yun secretly guessed that it was likely the effect of a potion he recently started drinking. He could clearly feel his physique strengthening a lot...

After being trained by Chen Wei for over two hours, Qi Yun collapsed in a chair, panting heavily.

The training was truly exhausting and required persistent practice.

...

Time in the mountains passed quickly; while daydreaming, the sky gradually darkened.

But Old Zhao, who went into the mountains to gather herbs, still hadn't returned...

### Chapter 253: The Poachers

At night, Big Pillar and Qi Yun appeared at the door of Old Zhao's wooden cabin.

The old man and the dog named Tiger have yet to return.

Qi Yun frowned and asked, "Brother Pillar, how far is the place where Zhao went from here?"

Big Pillar scratched his head and, after thinking for a moment, said, "Old Zhao told me last night that he was going to Wild Wolf Gully, which is about twenty kilometers from here. With his pace, it would take him five or six hours to get there."

"But he's been gone quite a while today; he should have been back by now."

Qi Yun looked at the sky anxiously and asked, "Is there anything dangerous over there? Could something have happened to him?"

Big Pillar frowned slightly and sighed, "Wild Wolf Gully is a tough place to visit. It's called Wild Wolf Gully because there are many wild animals, especially wolves which roam in packs, so we rarely venture there."

Cao Yufei chimed in, "Could Old Zhao have run into a pack of wolves?"

"It's hard to say." Big Pillar shook his head, worry written all over his face, "I advised him not to go there last night, but for his grandson, Old Zhao took the risk."

"With nightfall, we can't head into the mountains to look for him. We can only hope he was delayed on the way and returns safely tomorrow."

Everyone returned to Big Pillar's house, feeling anxious.

Just like they said, there was nothing to be done now, just wait and see.

After dinner, they went to bed early.

The next day, when Qi Yun and the others woke up, Big Pillar just returned from checking near the mountain foot.

Qi Yun hurriedly asked, "Brother Pillar, any news of Old Zhao?"

Big Pillar shook his head, disappointment on his face, "No."

"Let's wait and see. If he was delayed on the way back from Wildman Gully, he should return by noon at the latest."

"If there's no news by noon, I'll head up the mountain to find him."

Qi Yun nodded, "We'll go with you."

In the morning, none of them had much appetite, so they simply drank some porridge.

After breakfast, Qi Yun went outside, lit up a cigarette, and decided to check today's intelligence report in hopes of some news about Old Zhao.

[Current Intelligence Points: 7]

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): An adult brown bear struggling to find food is wandering near the wooden cabin you once lived in]

"So it really is a brown bear... lucky I didn't run into it that day."

This creature isn't easy to handle; if provoked, it's bold enough to confront a tiger.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Blue): There is a 50-meter tall red pine on Erlong Ridge, and two kilometers north along this pine grows a large patch of ginseng, including multiple plants over a hundred years old]

"Hiss~"

Upon seeing this intelligence, Qi Yun inhaled sharply.

Multiple plants over a hundred years old!

From this trip to obtain ginseng, he understands how precious this is.

The wild ginseng happens to be the indispensable main ingredient in the prescription, so for a steady supply of medicine, he must go all out to collect qualified ginseng.

He has decided that once Old Zhao's situation is resolved, he'll go search for that ginseng.

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Red): Yesterday, three poachers were spotted near Wild Wolf Gully. In fear of being reported, they took control of the person and temporarily detained them in a cave on the ridge]

Wild Wolf Gully!

Yesterday?

What a coincidence, could it be Old Zhao who encountered the poaching gang?

At this thought, Qi Yun's heart shivered, thinking it's highly likely his guess is correct.

This could explain why Old Zhao hasn't returned yet.

But whether it is or not, they must go rescue the person to find out...

Given the situation, reporting to the police might result in nighttime arrival, and it would be tomorrow before heading into the mountains. Whether Old Zhao can endure till then is uncertain.

The current plan is to go into the mountain later and look for opportunities for Chen Wei to take action against those poachers.

If those men are daring enough to poach in the dangerous Wild Wolf Gully, they're likely armed, and only Chen Wei among them is capable of dealing with them.

Qi Yun extinguished the cigarette butt, pondering how to convey this information to Chen Wei...

Noon came, and Old Zhao still hadn't returned.

The group packed some provisions and began heading into the mountains to find him.

In preparation for encountering wild beasts, Big Pillar made a point of taking his hunting rifle.

The first part of the path was relatively easy, with a trail carved out.

After crossing a few peaks, there was no trail ahead.

Big Pillar pointed to the right, toward a dense forest, and said, "Heading that way is the direction to Wild Wolf Gully."

They nodded and followed him onward.

All these trees looked the same, making navigation difficult; unless one were a long-time inhabitant of the mountains, they might easily lose their way.

The group trudged through the forest, staying alert and mindful of the surroundings.

The sun gradually set in the west. After nearly three or four hours of walking, Big Pillar stopped and, pointing to an endless ravine on the slope below, said, "Ahead is Wild Wolf Gully."

Qi Yun followed Big Pillar's direction and saw a deep ravine appearing ahead, as if cleaved by a giant axe, with trees densely populating its sides and the grass below nearly half a meter high, faintly accompanied by odd noises.

Big Pillar took the rifle off his back and held it in hand, his expression serious, "We need to be cautious moving forward; there are many wild animals here."

#### Chapter 254: The Poachers (2)

Qi Yun nodded and casually asked in a low voice, "Brother Zhuzi, since there are many wild animals in this Wild Wolf Gully, would anyone come here to poach?"

Da Zhuzi frowned, nodded slightly, and said, "It's hard to say. There are quite a few valuable things in Wild Wolf Gully, especially those rare species. Inevitably, there will be poachers taking risks."

"But usually, we don't often run into poachers in the mountains. They generally don't dare to be too blatant."

After hearing this, Qi Yun secretly smiled bitterly in his heart, meaning Old Zhao just had bad luck?

Da Zhuzi glanced down for a moment, confirmed a direction, and continued to move forward.

The group carefully walked along the edge of the gully, with the snow underfoot a bit soft, and occasionally small stones rolled to the bottom of the ravine.

After more than half an hour of walking, there was no path ahead, so everyone had to descend into the gully using a few tree vines.

Upon entering the gully, Qi Yun realized what it meant to be impassable.

The tall weeds, almost as tall as their waists, were like riverbed silt, making every step a struggle.

"Bang!"

At this moment, a gunshot suddenly echoed through the silent mountain forest!

The group immediately tensed up, and Chen Wei reflexively dashed to Qi Yun, grabbing him by the shoulder and pulling him to the ground.

The others quickly followed suit, hiding their bodies deep within the weeds.

Da Zhuzi gripped his hunting rifle tightly, lowering his voice, "Poachers!"

In this season, only poachers would fire a gun in the mountains.

Huzi and Cao Yufei both looked grave. Having never experienced such a situation, alarm bells rang in their hearts.

Chen Wei remained calm and unflustered. He pointed to a patch of forest in the east and said, "The gunshot came from over there."

"You all stay here, don't move. I'll sneak over to check things out."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun nodded, saving himself from having to make an excuse.

He patted Chen Wei on the shoulder and warned, "Be careful, Brother Wei. If there's a chance, capture them. If not, retreat and wait until we can call the police to handle it."

Chen Wei nodded silently, taking a folding knife from his back, ready to move forward.

"Brother, I'll go with you!" Da Zhuzi whispered beside him.

Chen Wei shook his head slightly at him, "No need, you guys stay here."

Seeing this, Da Zhuzi wanted to say more, but Qi Yun patted him on the shoulder, advising, "Brother Zhuzi, let Brother Wei go alone. We might just hold him back if we go."

Upon hearing this, Da Zhuzi opened his mouth but eventually said nothing more.

Chen Wei crouched low, stepping lightly to the side like a stealthy leopard, not making a sound.

On the other side, three middle-aged poachers gathered together, staring at a colorful wild chicken on the ground.

One of them, a big bearded man, rubbed his hands and grinned, "This wild chicken looks fat, let's roast it for a good meal tonight."

The man next to him, wearing an army cap, kicked the bearded guy and said harshly, "I've told you eight hundred times, don't randomly shoot. Why the hell did you shoot for one wild chicken?"

"It was your reckless shooting yesterday that brought that old man over, still haven't learned?"

The bearded man laughed awkwardly and reluctantly said, "We've been wandering in the mountains for two days now and haven't seen a trace of a bear. I just thought I'd shoot a chicken to satisfy my craving..."

The man in the army cap frowned, a look of impatience in his eyes. He cursed under his breath, "With a mind like yours, if it weren't for the fact that you are somewhat useful, I'd have fed you to the wolves by now."

"We'll look for one more day tomorrow. Regardless of whether we find the bear paws or not, we need to retreat. That old man's absence for so long might cause a stir, and I don't want to be caught by the Chinese police."

At this time, another tall, thin man spoke up, "Boss, if we don't get the bear paws, how do we explain it to Old Eight Jin when we get back?"

The man in the army cap spat on the ground, "Do I, who survives on this trade, need to explain to anyone?"

"And besides, didn't we find a piece of ginseng on that old man yesterday? He can use that to cross, right?"

"..."

The tall, thin man said nothing more after hearing this.

Before they knew it, the sky gradually darkened.

The three poachers wandered around the forest a bit more and finally arrived at a wooden shed on the mountainside.

The bearded man put down his hunting rifle, eagerly grabbed the wild chicken, and prepared to pluck it.

The man in the army cap saw this and kicked him on the butt again, cursing, "Go away and do it somewhere else. It reeks."

The bearded man turned, with a sheepish smile, carrying the wild chicken to the side of the wooden shed, muttering, "Alright, alright, I'll do it further away." Saying this, he walked to the back of the shed.

The man in the army cap lay down on the ground covered with branches, took a sip from the flask at his waist, and muttered to himself, "Those damn guys really know how to enjoy. To eat bear paws, they make me come to China to poach."

The tall, thin man sorted the tools next to him and dared not respond to these complaints since those people's statuses were too high for someone at his level to dare comment on.

"Boss, that old man was left starving in the cave for a day. Should we feed him something so he doesn't starve to death?"

The man in the army cap frowned, took another sip of alcohol, and said, "It's not you starving to death, so why bother?"

"And who knows if the old man might recognize our accents. Just to be safe, take care of him when we leave tomorrow."

The tall, thin man paused upon hearing this but eventually nodded in agreement, "Yes."

The man in the army cap continued instructing, "Once you're done, toss him down into Wild Wolf Gully. In a couple of days, he'll be nothing but bones."

"Understood," replied the tall, thin man.

Only then did the man in the army cap nod in satisfaction, taking another sip from the flask. Then he cursed, "Cui Lao Er, are you going to take all day to kill a chicken?"

This time, though, no one answered no matter how long he waited.

The man in the army cap grew angry and shouted again, "Cui Lao Er, are you deaf?"

Yet it remained silent behind the shed.

The man in the army cap's face sank, and a hint of wariness appeared in his eyes. He whispered to the tall, thin man, "Something's not right, go check it out."

The tall, thin man's brow twitched. He wanted to refuse but was intimidated by the other man's dominance. So he reluctantly grabbed the hunting rifle and cautiously headed to the back of the shed.

Two minutes passed, and now even the tall, thin man was gone without a trace, making no noise at all.

By this point, the man in the army cap couldn't sit still any longer. He jumped up from the ground and quickly grabbed the hunting rifle beside him.

He widened his eyes, warily scanning the surroundings, but in the pitch-black night, only the calls of a few doves could be heard.

The man in the army cap crouched low, slowly inching toward the back of the shed, taking each step with extreme caution, eyes fixed ahead, ears perked up.

This dark, oppressive environment gave rise to slivers of fear in his heart.

"Who's there? Come out!" He shouted, disguising his fear with bravado, his voice trembling slightly.

At that moment, the spruce tree behind him suddenly rustled, followed by the sound of a heavy object hitting the ground.

Before the man in the army cap could turn around, a chilly sensation abruptly touched his neck.

Just as the man in the army cap was about to turn, a cold voice spoke in his ear, "You'd better stay still."

It turned out Chen Wei had somehow appeared behind him, with a knife pressing closely against his neck.

"Who... who are you?" The man in the army cap tried to speak calmly, but his voice trembled uncontrollably.

Chen Wei ignored his question, raising his right hand and striking the man in the army cap's neck hard.

The next second, the man's body went limp, and he fell straight into the snow.

...

More than half an hour later, Qi Yun and his group also arrived at the mountainside. Except for him, everyone else seemed startled by the scene before them.

"These... these three guys are poachers?" Huzi stammered a bit, pointing to the three people tied up on the ground.

Chen Wei nodded, then used his foot to push aside the hunting rifles nearby.

Da Zhuzi stared blankly at Chen Wei, surprised by his skills, managing to effortlessly handle three armed men?

ps: I'm back in Xinjiang, updates will resume tomorrow.

## Chapter 255: A Century-Old Ginseng

"Wh-What do you want!?"

The bearded man, now awake, looked at the people in front of him in terror, swallowing hard.

He turned his head to check the tall, thin guy and the man in the military cap who were also tied up nearby, still lying with their eyes closed. He used his elbow to jab the man in the cap, trying to wake him up.

But after several prods, the man in the military cap remained absolutely still, unsure if he was pretending to be unconscious or truly not awake.

Seeing this, the bearded man felt even more panic inside.

He hoped that these people in front of him were fellow poachers, then perhaps he could negotiate, offer some benefits, and maybe they would release them.

But if they weren't fellow poachers, then things would be quite dire.

He had heard before that poaching was a serious crime in China, let alone the fact that they had snuck over here illegally. If they got caught, they might end up working themselves to death in prison.

Just then, a strong man nearby walked up, grabbed the bearded man's collar, and asked in a deep voice, "Where's the old man? Take me to him!"

"What, what old man, I have no idea what you're talking about." The bearded man was startled, his eyes darted around, denying repeatedly.

Though uncertain how they knew about that matter, he dared not admit it in this situation, lest he add another charge to his name for kidnapping.

The strong man, seeing the denial, turned to look at Chen Wei by his side.

Chen Wei stepped forward, gesturing for the strong man to step aside, indicating he'd handle it.

"I know what you're up to. Now I'll give you a chance, whoever speaks first will be let go." Chen Wei's voice was not loud, but it was steady and firm.

After speaking, he glanced at the two lying beside.

The bearded man heard this, gulped, and a trace of hesitation crossed his face.

He instinctively turned to look at his two companions, quickly weighing the truth of Chen Wei's words in his mind.

But he realized he seemed to have no other choice after thinking it through for a moment.

In this situation, running was not an option, so it'd be better him than his friends...

"I'll take..."

The bearded man was about to speak when the tall, thin guy suddenly sat up and answered first, "I know where the old man is! I'll take you to him, let me go!"

Seeing this, the bearded man was instantly dumbfounded, his mouth hanging open for a good while before he managed to close it.

However, the tall, thin guy ignored him entirely, struggling to get closer to Chen Wei, saying eagerly, "Really, I tied up the old man yesterday, I'll take you to him now!"

Realizing this, the bearded man was furious, glaring at the tall, thin guy as if he wanted to kill him.

"Damn you!"

The tall, thin guy turned a deaf ear, focusing only on showing his loyalty to Chen Wei.

Beside them, a smirk appeared on Qi Yun's lips, observing human nature...

...

More than half an hour later, in a cave on the ridge, Old Zhao, who was previously on the brink of death, finally regained some color in his face after eating a few bites of smoked meat.

"Sir, are you feeling better?" Qi Yun crouched down, handing the canteen to Old Zhao.

Old Zhao gobbled down the jerky, took the canteen, drank some water, and slowly said, "Much better, thanks to you all finding me, or this old life would have been gone."

Seeing this, Qi Yun couldn't help but admire the physical endurance of those who have spent years in the mountains.

If it were an ordinary person, at such an age, not eating or drinking for a day might have already met the end.

Halfway through drinking, Old Zhao suddenly remembered something, stood up quickly, and grabbed the military cap man's collar, yelling, "Where's the ginseng? My ginseng!"

As he spoke, he reached into the military cap man's pockets, searching.

Finally finding the ginseng in the inner lining of the man's coat, Old Zhao breathed a long sigh of relief.

He then raised his hand and slapped the military cap man hard, cursing, "You dog, it's just that I didn't bring my weapon this time, or I'd have shot you three bastards dead!"

After hitting him, he still wasn't satisfied, grabbing the bearded man and slapping him repeatedly, "You damn thing, return my dog, you animal..."

The strong man, worried that the old man's emotions were too intense and afraid something else might arise, quickly pulled him back and sat him down again. "Old Zhao, it's not worth getting angry at them. When dawn breaks, we'll take them back to Captain Fu."

Meanwhile, the tall, thin guy who had been squatting, rose slightly and spoke to Chen Wei, "Brother, I helped you find the guy, can you let me go now?"

Upon hearing that, the military cap man glared at him fiercely.

Actually, he had been awake the whole time. Hearing Chen Wei say that whoever helped find the old man would be freed first, he was about to jump up and seize the opportunity.

But the tall, thin guy had stealthily elbowed his nose, causing such pain that tears came out, preventing him from speaking.

Even now his nose was still red.

"Third brother, don't think betraying us will pay off. Just wait until I'm free, and see what I'll do to you."

The bearded man, Second Old Cui, also said with a grim face, "You filthy dog, you'd better pray I die in here."

The kneeling tall, thin guy shivered uncontrollably, genuinely frightened by their words.

Chen Wei lowered his head, glanced at the tall, thin guy, and said, "Alright."

With that, he bent down, preparing to untie the vine that bound the man's hands behind his back.

The strong man, seeing this, quickly rushed over to stop him, "Brother, you can't let him go! These poachers are wicked; if you let him go, they'll come back and harm the forest again."

The nearby Tiger chimed in in agreement, "That's right, brother. We should take them all back and hand them over to the police."

#### Chapter 256: A Century-Old Ginseng

Old Zhao and Cao Yufei both seemed hesitant to speak, clearly wanting to persuade Chen Wei not to release the person so easily.

Only Qi Yun remained calm, lighting a cigarette with a playful expression.

Chen Wei's hands kept moving, and in a few moves, he untied the restraints on the tall and skinny man, tossed the vine to the ground, and then looked at his watch to check the time. He said, "You can go now."

It was only then that the tall and skinny man finally breathed a sigh of relief. He turned his head to glance at the man with the military cap and the man with the beard, then immediately turned and ran towards the cave exit.

Seeing that the tall and skinny man had really been let go, Dazhuzi and the others were so anxious they stamped their feet, but since Chen Wei was the one who caught him, they had nothing more to say.

The cave fell silent, with Chen Wei standing there, staring at the cave entrance.

By the time the cigarette in Qi Yun's hand had burned halfway down, Chen Wei again looked at his watch and walked out of the cave silently.

Five minutes later, when he returned, he was carrying someone—it was the tall and skinny man who had run away earlier.

Although the man was much taller than Chen Wei, he was powerless in Chen Wei's grip, like a chick.

He could only shout angrily: "You tricked me! You said you'd let me go, but your word is worthless!"

Chen Wei threw him to the ground indifferently and said, "I already let you go, but it's your fault that you couldn't escape."

The others looked at each other upon seeing this scene.

Only the man with the military cap and the man with the beard grinned maliciously, "Haha, old third, we meet again so soon, huh."

The tall and skinny man turned and saw the twisted expressions on their faces, and he was suddenly so frightened he almost wet himself.

At night, the wind started blowing in the mountains.

The outside was covered in snow, nothing could be seen clearly, and faint wolf howls could be heard.

However, with Chen Wei guarding the cave entrance, the others felt inexplicably at ease.

...

The next day, at just after four, it was already light.

Old Zhao, after a night's rest, had recovered significantly.

Chen Wei used vines to tie the three of them together, preparing to leave Wild Wolf Gully.

The return journey was no easier than before, and with three extra burdens, their pace was very slow.

During this time, the man with the military cap was restless and repeatedly asked to squat, but Dazhuizi, who was watching over them, refused each time, telling him to just soil himself.

By the time everyone returned to the cabin, dusk had already fallen.

Dazhuizi picked a warehouse and locked the man with the military cap and his two companions inside, finally relaxing completely.

The evening meal was quite sumptuous, featuring some unknown meat, and Old Zhao even brought out his treasured liquor.

The two wanted to toast Chen Wei a few times in gratitude, but Chen Wei's habit was to always remain sober, so he declined their kindness.

Qi Yun and Huzi, on the other hand, were eating heartily, swallowing the fragrant meat and sipping the strong liquor, feeling like a fiery blaze was burning inside them.

Unfortunately, Old Zhao's liquor was limited, and each person only drank about two ounces before it was all gone.

After the meal, Old Zhao took out the ginseng, his face glowing as he said, "Look at this, it's rare to see something like this. I've lived most of my life and have only seen it a few times in the mountains."

Huzi rubbed his hands, picked up the ginseng from the table, and examined it under the kerosene lamp before nodding at Qi Yun, "It is indeed over a hundred years old."

Qi Yun nodded slightly at him, signaling to keep it safe, and then turned to Old Zhao with a smile, "Thank you, Grandpa."

Old Zhao waved his hand, "No need to thank me. If anyone should be grateful, it's me thanking you all for rescuing me from Wild Wolf Gully. If not for needing money for my grandson's wedding, I'd give this ginseng to you for free."

Qi Yun couldn't tell if this was true or false, but he was willing to believe it was genuine.

"Haha, Grandpa, business is business, and friendship is friendship. If you find good stuff again, give me a call, and the price will surely satisfy you."

Old Zhao took a deep drag from his pipe and nodded earnestly, considering it a promise.

Qi Yun also took out cigarettes and gave each person one, lighting them up and taking a few puffs before casually asking, "Grandpa, do you know where Erlong Ridge is?"

Upon hearing this, Old Zhao froze for a moment and showed a trace of recall on his face.

After a long pause, he exhaled smoke and sighed, "I know. The last time I went there was over sixty years ago when I was only a teenager, my father took me there to collect herbs."

"Later, that area fell to the east side, and I never returned."

Fell to the east side?

Qi Yun was startled; what the hell is going on here?

Old Zhao glanced at him, puzzled, "What's up? You want to go there?"

Qi Yun came back to his senses and nodded, "Yes, I knew someone from Changbai Mountain before, and he told me there was ginseng over there."

Old Zhao frowned, his pipe clicking as he seemed to be pondering something.

After a long silence, he finally spoke slowly, "The place is not far from the checkpoint, generally unreachable, but I know a path that can go around the other side of Celestial Lake."

"If you decide to go, I can take you there, as a way to repay you for saving my life."

Qi Yun was silent after hearing this, thinking that this little old man was quite loyal.

After a few puffs, he pondered, "How far is it from here to Erlong Ridge? Can your health handle it?"

"What, you look down on me, old man?" Old Zhao said with dissatisfaction, "Let me tell you, in these mountains, there's no place I can't go."

#### Chapter 257: A Century-Old Ginseng

Qi Yun quickly smiled and said, "No, no, I'm fully aware of your skills, I'm just worried about the cold mountain weather, we might not handle it well."

Old Zhao heard this and finally agreed, grumbling, "It takes three days to get through from here, but along our route there are wooden cabins, as long as you don't encounter a snowstorm, you don't need to worry too much."

Qi Yun nodded and asked the most crucial question, "If we go over there, does that count as smuggling? We won't get caught by those people on the east side, right?"

"What's this smuggling thing? Here, this mountain always belongs to us." Old Zhao scoffed, tapped his tobacco pipe on the ground, and continued, "Just avoid our side's checkpoints and don't make it difficult for them."

"Although I haven't been to that side in years, I've heard from the late Old Zhang that, while it's under the east side, that area is very remote, and there's no clear border line or special guards."

"In the past, whenever anyone wanted to gather herbs or something over there, they just went, as long as they didn't provoke people from the east, generally no one would mind."

Hearing this, Qi Yun felt a little relieved and curiously asked, "How many years has that Old Zhang been dead?"

Old Zhao counted on his fingers, earnestly replied, "About thirty years."

Qi Yun's recently eased mind tightened again, thinking to himself, could the situation thirty years ago reasonably be the same as now?

Old Zhao noticed his worry and waved his hand nonchalantly, "Actually, even if you meet people from that side, it's not a big deal. We're just gathering herbs, not doing anything bad."

"I see you guys brought some Chinese cigarettes, that stuff is really prized by them over there. When the time comes, give them a couple packs, and they'll likely pretend they didn't see anything."

Qi Yun was a bit stunned hearing this, can it really be done that way? Like they're on a construction site, solving everything with a couple packs of cigarettes.

But when they set off later, he specifically asked Chen Wei to carry extra cigarettes just in case...

...

The next day, before even sunrise, they set out, escorting the man with the military cap.

By noon, they finally reached the small wooden cabin where Qi Yun stayed earlier.

Once there, Da Zhuzi quickly took out his phone to contact Captain Fu, whom he knew, and informed him about catching three poachers.

Upon hearing that the poachers were from the east, the other party immediately agreed to come over.

Meanwhile, Qi Yun clarified Old Zhao's grandson's account and transferred the money for the two ginseng plants, adding an extra hundred thousand.

Old Zhao received a call from his grandson and looked at Qi Yun in surprise, asking, "Didn't we agree on 420,000? Why did you send 520,000?"

Qi Yun smiled at him, "The extra hundred thousand is an escort fee for you, can't let you run around with us for free."

Old Zhao heard this, was silent for a moment, then gave him a thumbs up and said, "You're really something!"

About an hour later, a police car stopped behind their vehicle, and two middle-aged men in police uniforms stepped out.

The leader was Captain Fu, whom Da Zhuzi had mentioned, he trotted up to the group, scrutinized the man with the military cap and others, then asked Da Zhuzi, "Is it these three?"

Da Zhuzi nodded and then detailed the incident to him.

Captain Fu then looked at Qi Yun's group and sincerely expressed his gratitude, "You must come to Bailong Village when you're leaving, I'll treat you to a meal."

Qi Yun smiled, "Captain Fu, you're too kind, we just did what needed to be done. This mountain forest belongs to all of us, we have a responsibility to protect it."

Captain Fu nodded, saying, "Exactly, protecting the forest requires everyone's effort, but if you encounter similar situations in the future, contact us promptly, try not to take risks on your own."

"Certainly, we will next time," Qi Yun said with laughter.

"..."

Once things were settled, Captain Fu escorted the man with the military cap away, and Da Zhuzi went to the police station to assist with the record. Qi Yun and his group, taking advantage of the early time, hurried back.

By nightfall, the dusty group returned to Da Zhuzi's wooden cabin.

Having traveled for a day, everyone's stomach was already grumbling, but now with Da Zhuzi absent, they had to cook for themselves.

Qi Yun rolled up his sleeves and went to the nearby kitchen. When he saw half of an animal carcass in the cabinet, he finally knew what kind of meat they'd been eating these past few days.

After about half an hour of toil, a pot of aromatic meat was placed on the stove.

Qi Yun, while waiting for the stew to boil, took out a cigarette and handed one to Old Zhao, "Do you always eat this meat in the mountain?"

Old Zhao took the cigarette, smirked, "Mountain folks aren't so picky, whatever God provides, we eat."

"Don't worry, this isn't hunted with guns. We Medicine Gatherers don't do such things. Only those that freeze to death or are chased and killed by predators, we'll take if we come across them."

Qi Yun nodded understandingly.

Old Zhao lit up the cigarette, took a couple of drags, and continued bragging, "I remember one year, Old Zhang and I went to gather herbs, and a huge snow fell, couldn't see anything."

"We were trapped in a cabin for days, eaten all our rations, thought we'd die in that forest back then."

"Then in a daze, heard a 'bang' sound, something hit the door, opened it, turns out it was a wild rabbit, hahaha..."

...

The next day, Qi Yun and Chen Wei, each carrying a large backpack, followed behind Old Zhao, ready to head into the mountains.

### Chapter 258: A Century-Old Ginseng

Cao Yufei, feeling uneasy, caught up and advised, "Old Qi, how about I go with you guys? Let Huzi stay outside to support us, having one more person is just more help."

Qi Yun patted him on the shoulder and said with a smile, "We're going in to look for herbs, not to fight, so why take so many people? Just wait outside."

"And don't forget what I told you, in three or four days, take my phone and go out. If you see a call from Beijing looking for me, just call back and tell them I'll be heading to Beijing in a few days."

Cao Yufei sighed after hearing this and finally nodded helplessly.

"Alright, I got it."

At this moment, Huzi also came over, somewhat worried, and said, "Brother Qi Yun, be careful, okay? If it's impossible, just come back quickly. I know you want to gather more ginseng, but I'll help you find some in other villages later."

Qi Yun nodded slightly, "Don't worry, I won't joke around with my life."

Just then, Old Zhao urged from the side, "Alright, alright, stop dawdling, if we don't leave now, we won't reach the place to spend the night before dark."

Qi Yun smiled helplessly, waved to Cao Yufei and the others, and followed Old Zhao into the woods.

After about an hour of walking, the forest in front of them became denser, and everything looked almost the same. If not for the sun overhead, Qi Yun couldn't even tell north from south.

Old Zhao, walking ahead while pushing aside branches, turned back to remind Qi Yun and the others, "Make sure you don't get lost, shout if anything happens. Getting lost in the mountains is no joke."

Qi Yun quickly nodded in agreement, "Grandpa, rest assured, we'll stick close to you."

Old Zhao said nothing further and focused on leading the way at the front.

More than three hours passed, and in the blink of an eye, it was noon.

The three of them stopped to take a break, each pulling out their dry food to replenish their energy.

Just then, there was a sudden noise from the dense forest ahead, like some animal running in the snow, and the noise wasn't small.

Old Zhao quickly stuffed the jerky into his mouth, stood up swiftly, and took the hunting rifle from his back, holding it in his hands.

Chen Wei also drew a machete from his waist and stood in front of Qi Yun.

At home, Dazhu's family originally had a hunting rifle, but he wasn't used to it, feeling the machete was more handy, so he brought it along for self-defense.

"Be careful, sounds like a wild boar," Old Zhao said in a low voice.

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's heart sank; wild boars were not easy to deal with.

It's often said, 'First the boar, second the bear, third the tiger', although it's not referring to combat power, it still shows how dangerous wild boars can be.

These creatures have tough skin and thick muscles, and most of the time, they come in groups. If they're really starving, they might even dare to confront a tiger, especially with those sharp tusks, each capable of piercing with a single thrust.

Just after Old Zhao finished speaking, the noise from the distance grew louder, and it seemed to be approaching.

"Damn it," Old Zhao cursed, slinging the hunting rifle back and turned to Qi Yun and the others, "It's a group of wild boars, climb up the trees!"

Qi Yun was momentarily stunned. A group of wild boars just after entering the woods? How unlucky!

He originally wanted to help Old Zhao, thinking he might have trouble climbing due to his age.

Unexpectedly, in the blink of an eye, Old Zhao was already at the base of a big tree, he hugged it with both hands, and in a few quick moves, he climbed several meters up, stabilizing himself on a branch. He then turned to shout at Qi Yun below, "What are you standing there for? Waiting to be fed to the pigs?"

Qi Yun snapped back to reality, exchanged a glance with Chen Wei, and also found a couple of trees nearby to start climbing.

Fortunately, with his recent strength gains, Qi Yun easily climbed onto a branch, and there was no need to even mention Chen Wei's side.

Shortly after the three of them climbed the trees, they saw the treetops in the distance shedding snow as a large group of wild boars rushed towards them aggressively.

The leading wild boar was massive, its fur forming a thick armor-like layer, weighing probably three to four hundred pounds, and its long tusks glinted coldly.

Ahead of them, several wild rabbits were frantically fleeing.

#### Chapter 259: Raiding the Old Ginseng Den

Two minutes later, after those aggressive wild boars had all passed by underfoot, the group finally climbed down from the trees.

Old Zhao looked in the direction the wild boars had left, still feeling lingering fear: "In the mountains, the most frightening encounter is with these beasts. Once they go berserk, no one can stop them."

Qi Yun dusted off the snow that had smudged on his clothes, looking at the piece of jerky on the ground that had been trampled by the boars. He gave a helpless, bitter smile.

"It's getting late, let's continue on." Old Zhao called out, leading the way ahead.

The three continued forward. The forest was eerily quiet, with only the crunching sound of footsteps on the snow.

This time, they didn't stop, walking until dusk when they finally reached the first cabin on their journey.

This cabin was much more dilapidated than the one Qi Yun and the others had stayed in before. It looked like no one had been here for a long time, with snow piled high around.

Old Zhao went forward and pushed the door open. Inside the cabin was filled with the smell of mildew, with scattered rotten leaves on the floor.

"I've been to this place before, it's fairly safe." Old Zhao said, as he took his pipe from his waist and tapped it twice on the stove nearby, "We'll rest here tonight and continue on tomorrow morning."

Qi Yun looked around the cabin. Though rundown, it could at least keep out the wind and cold, so he put down his backpack and prepared to start a fire.

Chen Wei circled the perimeter to ensure safety, then entered the cabin, took out a pot from his backpack, and began preparing food.

At night in the mountains, the temperature drops quickly, but fortunately, the cabin wasn't large and there was always wood burning in the stove, so it could withstand the cold.

After a simple dinner, the three of them squeezed onto a wooden bed and slept with their clothes on.

...

On the third day, after walking for over an hour, Qi Yun was deeply shocked by the sight of a gigantic lake before him.

The lake lay like a huge blue gemstone, quietly embedded among the mountains.

The lake surface shimmered, dazzling in the sunlight. The snow along the lake's edge had yet to melt completely, contrasting beautifully with the lake water, creating an exceptionally exquisite scene.

This must be paradise on earth.

Old Zhao pointed at the lake and said, "This is the Celestial Lake. Further ahead, we will encounter a checkpoint. We need to take another small path around it and try to reach Erlong Ridge before dark."

No time to admire the beautiful scenery, the three set off once again.

As they reached the mountainside, Old Zhao didn't continue forward but turned right into a dense forest.

"Try to keep quiet, don't make any noise."

"Understood," Qi Yun replied with a nod.

The three carefully traversed the forest, with twigs and leaves underfoot making slight noises.

This path was indeed difficult, essentially making a large circle around the mountainside, climbing uphill and downhill intermittently, and if not cautious, one might slip and roll down the mountain.

So they didn't walk quickly, grabbing onto tree trunks with every step to ensure safety.

After walking for an indeterminate time, Old Zhao stopped, surveyed the area, and said in a low voice, "We should have bypassed the checkpoint."

"Let's rest here for a while. If we walk south for about ten more miles, we should reach Erlong Ridge."

With that, he sat down on a snow-bent tree trunk, took out his pipe, and started puffing.

Qi Yun and Chen Wei found a place to sit, taking out dry rations from their backpacks to replenish their energy.

After trekking in the mountains for two or three days, Qi Yun felt both physically and mentally exhausted.

This feeling was similar to when he had ventured into the desert before.

Just then, a few distant dog barks suddenly broke the quiet.

The originally relaxed trio immediately stood up, their gaze vigilant towards the front.

Old Zhao took the hunting rifle from his back and held it in his hands.

Chen Wei also gripped his machete tightly, ready to react to any sudden situation.

The barking grew nearer, seemingly heading in their direction.

Old Zhao quickly said in a lowered voice, "Hide!"

Upon hearing the command, Qi Yun swiftly hid behind a large tree, Chen Wei concealed himself within a bush, and Old Zhao hid behind the thick trunk of a tree, tightly clutching his hunting rifle, eyes fixed in the direction of the barking.

After a while, a dog ran over, sniffing around.

Soon after, several men dressed in camouflage appeared in sight, holding rifles, faces tense with alertness.

The dog came closer and closer, now less than ten meters away, discovery seemed inevitable.

Qi Yun's heart was in his throat, not daring to make a sound.

At that moment, Old Zhao suddenly emerged from his hiding spot behind the tree.

The camouflaged men immediately tensed, raised their guns, and aimed at him with grave expressions.

Old Zhao showed no panic, voluntarily lowered his hunting rifle, then raised his hands high, indicating he meant no harm.

He then shouted to the group, "Herb collectors, not bad people!"

The group remained wary despite his words, with their gun barrels still raised.

One who looked like the leader slightly furrowed his brow, suspicion reflected in his eyes, and asked, "Herb collectors?"

Old Zhao nodded and pointed to his backpack behind, explaining, "It has tools inside, you can see for yourselves if you don't believe."

The leader signaled someone to inspect the backpack. That person cautiously approached Old Zhao, opened the backpack and rummaged through it, indeed finding herb collecting tools inside, then nodded towards the leader.

#### Chapter 260: Raiding the Ginseng Nest \_2

The leader slightly relaxed his vigilance, gestured for everyone to lower their guns, and stared at Old Zhao as he said, "I won't make things difficult for you. This area is ours now. You'd better turn around and go back quickly."

The border here by Changbai Mountain isn't as tense as the one on the other side, coupled with the shared language, so as long as you're not poaching, they mostly turn a blind eye.

After all, conditions over there are not good, and they themselves secretly trade a bit of supplies with folks on this side.

Just as the atmosphere was gradually easing, the dog not far away barked a few times and its eyes fixed tightly on the tree where Qi Yun was hiding.

The group alertly raised their guns again, aiming ahead.

Seeing this, Old Zhao hastily explained, "Don't worry, we're together."

Then he turned his head and shouted at Qi Yun, signaling him to come out.

Qi Yun came out from behind the tree, with a slightly embarrassed look on his face.

The leader furrowed his brow, still wary in his eyes. Although the gun in his hand was no longer aimed at them, he wasn't completely relaxed either.

"Is he also here to gather herbs?"

Old Zhao nodded repeatedly, "Yes, we're all here to gather herbs."

"Come over here!" The leader pointed at Qi Yun and said.

Qi Yun nodded and walked towards the man.

He never glanced at the underbrush where Chen Wei was hiding nearby. Although he didn't know how Chen Wei avoided the dog's sense of smell, the fact that he hadn't come out meant he clearly had his own plan.

As Qi Yun came closer, he forced a smile and said, "We're really just here to gather herbs."

The leader waved his hand, and someone came out to check Qi Yun's backpack.

When seeing those two packs of Chinese cigarettes in the bag, the person's hand paused obviously, a look of surprise appeared on his face, and after a full four or five seconds, he continued checking the other items.

After searching for a while, he nodded to the leader.

The leader's expression finally relaxed a bit and he told Qi Yun and the others, "Hurry up and leave, don't come back next time."

Upon hearing this, Old Zhao smiled and winked at Qi Yun.

Qi Yun understood, knowing that Old Zhao wanted him to take out the cigarettes.

Although he felt it was unreliable, since he had already brought the cigarettes and took three days to get here, he couldn't just leave empty-handed.

So, he took off his backpack, took out the cigarettes, and offered them to the leader, saying the most genuine words, "Haha, sorry for the trouble. Just a small token, hope you don't mind."

However, he still didn't realize what those Chinese cigarettes meant on the other side.

Except for the person who checked Qi Yun's backpack, everyone else showed a look of surprise when they saw Qi Yun handing over those Chinese cigarettes.

One must know that such cigarettes are considered a high-end luxury over there. It's said that aside from Cuban cigars, the person most liked to smoke these Chinese cigarettes, so its prestige is unrivaled.

And the average wage of ordinary people on their side, when converted, is not even three hundred RMB a month. Not to mention these are unavailable in the market; even if they were, they wouldn't be affordable for them.

Qi Yun noticed a hint of realization on the other side's face and did not expect Old Zhao to be right.

This thing showed its greater usefulness outside the worksite.

He chuckled as he pushed the cigarettes forward again, "Go ahead, accept it, no other meaning, just seeing you guys have it hard too. We'll leave soon, won't cause any trouble."

The leader eyed the cigarettes Qi Yun handed over, a fleeting look of delight in his eyes, but quickly regained his serious demeanor.

He nodded slightly, then someone beside him slung his rifle over his shoulder, received the cigarettes with both hands from Qi Yun, and politely said "Thank you!"

The leader cleared his throat, then looked at Qi Yun and said, "Do not go any further, turn back quickly."

Qi Yun could hear the more relaxed tone of the voice and quickly responded with a smile, "Alright, we'll leave right away."

Old Zhao also smiled agreeably and said, "Sorry for the trouble, we know the rules."

The leader nodded and, without further words, turned and left with his men.

It was only after they had gone a distance away that Old Zhao, now somewhat smug, said to Qi Yun, "What did I tell you, kid? You didn't believe it."

He spoke as he took a tobacco pipe from his waist, implying that he deserved some credit.

Qi Yun quickly nodded in agreement, "Yes, you really are knowledgeable, Uncle."

Meanwhile, Chen Wei, who had been hiding all this time, quietly came up from behind, glanced in the direction where the group had disappeared, and his tense muscles relaxed.

Qi Yun fastened his backpack again, looked up at Old Zhao, and asked, "Uncle, can we reach Erlong Ridge before dark?"

Old Zhao took a couple of puffs from his pipe, looked up at the sun overhead, and replied, "The path ahead is a little easier now. Another two hours' walk and we'll be there."

Qi Yun nodded, eager to find those ginseng and return.

Though those people didn't seem malicious before, this was, after all, their territory. He still felt a bit uneasy.

The three of them dared not delay further; they gathered their things and continued on their way.

After walking for another two hours or so, they finally reached their destination before dark.

Old Zhao stood at the foot of a mountain and pointed to a slope ahead, "That's Erlong Ridge ahead."

Following Old Zhao's finger, Qi Yun saw that the trees on the slope were sparse, with a single tall red pine standing out.

As night fell, they definitely wouldn't have time to find the ginseng today, so the three of them settled in a hollow at the mountain's base.