

Outside of Time

Chapter 14: Three Sets of Chopsticks and Bowls

At the scavenger campsite, Captain Lei walked in front while Xu Qing followed. The sunlight was currently streaming down, landing on them.

From afar, despite the sight of one being tall and one being short, one being old and one being young, there was actually a faint sense of harmony.

It was as though in this cruel world, such a sense of harmony was very hard to find.

Or maybe it was the python corpse in Captain Lei's hand that exuded a sense of threat, causing the passersby in the surroundings, who hadn't been to the Beastfight Arena, to not disturb them.

Xu Qing liked this feeling very much. Regardless of whether they were eating the snake later or enjoying the sunlight at this moment, both made him feel very warm.

He felt very comfortable and yearned for this.

Every time his gaze landed on the python corpse that Captain Lei held, he could feel more saliva in his mouth.

He was also fond of eating snakes.

Captain Lei's house was located in the center-ring region of the campsite.

Compared to the brick houses in the inner-ring region and the crude tents in the outer-ring region, the houses in the center-ring region were mostly constructed using stones and wood. In addition, three small houses would usually be built in a row together.

Although the space within each house wasn't that wide, Xu Qing could see that it was much better compared to the place he had lived in in the slums.

This was especially so considering the fact that Captain Lei's house still had a small courtyard. This was even rarer to come by.

At this moment, he pushed the bamboo gate leading to the courtyard open. Under Xu Qing's observation, Captain Lei walked to the secondary room in his house. He then casually pointed to the second tiny house and spoke.

“Kid, you can stay here from now on. You should first get yourself familiarized with the surroundings. I will call for you once the meal is cooked.”

After speaking, Captain Lei began his preparation and the sound of meat being chopped rang out later.

Xu Qing gulped down his saliva. He first observed the tiny courtyard carefully before entering the second house. There was a bed, a quilt, a table and a chair there. Other than these things, there were no other objects.

The ground was very clean, there was also no dust on the table and chair. Evidently, they were often cleaned by someone. Even the quilt was washed until it was very clean. There was the smell of it being dried by the sun.

Everything made Xu Qing feel very satisfied.

He didn't like a large house. What he liked was a house where he could see everything in one glance, a small house where he could project everything in his mind.

This would make him feel safer.

Hence, after a meticulous check, Xu Qing looked at the clean bed. He pondered for a moment but didn't go over, choosing to directly sit on the ground instead.

He sat cross-legged and closed his eyes, beginning today's cultivation.

During cultivation, as the spirit energy flowed into him, the sound of oil crackling could be heard from the house next door.

Very soon, waves of fragrance flowed through the tiny gaps of stone and wood on the wall and permeated his small house. This also whetted Xu Qing's appetite, causing him to feel a sense of hunger as his stomach produced grumbling noises.

It smelled very fragrant.

Xu Qing's throat involuntarily moved as he opened his eyes and glanced in the direction of the secondary room.

After living for so many years in the slums, he already couldn't remember when was the last time he smelled such fragrance.

Hence, he suppressed the hunger in his stomach and closed his eyes to calm himself down before continuing with his cultivation.

Just like this, time slowly passed. Very soon, the evening had arrived.

When the voice of Captain Lei rang out from outside, asking him to come and eat, Xu Qing who had just ended a day of cultivation immediately opened his eyes.

He stood up and swiftly exited the house. He then saw Captain Lei standing at the end room waving his hands to him.

Beside Captain Lei, Xu Qing saw that there were seven to eight different snake dishes placed on the dining table. Some were deep-fried, some were braised, some were steamed, and there was even snake soup.

Evidently, Captain Lei had extremely good cooking skills, and the dishes he prepared were excellent in their tastes, appearances, and smells.

Xu Qing's eyes couldn't turn away his gaze after he took a look. Looking at this, Captain Lei laughed and turned to pick up sets of chopsticks and bowls.

Xu Qing also moved closer and entered the end-room. The fragrance was even thicker here. However, he didn't sit down immediately. Rather, his gaze suddenly froze after he saw Captain Lei placing the sets of chopsticks and bowls.

There were three sets of chopsticks and bowls.

"There's someone else?" Although the fragrance was very tempting, the appearance of the three sets of chopsticks and bowls caused Xu Qing to cast the temptation aside.

He cautiously looked at Captain Lei and asked in a soft voice.

"You don't have to be nervous. This is a habit of mine. That...is for a person who would never come."

Captain Lei calmly spoke as recollection flashed in the depths of his eyes. However, that look of recollection soon disappeared, and he sat down on a chair.

Xu Qing nodded and sat down as well. He couldn't control his urges anymore and directly took a piece of deep-fried snake meat. He then put it into his mouth and began to chew.

It was very hot, but he was also extremely satisfied as he ate it. His mouth was full of grease.

After he finished eating one piece, he licked the grease above his mouth and his hand stretched out to grab the braised snake meat. But at this moment, Captain Lei coughed lightly.

"Use the chopsticks."

"Oh." Xu Qing clumsily took the chopsticks and after a period of getting used to it, he carried a piece of braised snake meat into his mouth and wolfed it down ravenously.

During the entire process of the meal, both didn't speak. It was just that their eating appearances were completely not a match.

Captain Lei chewed the meat slowly before he swallowed them, not looking like a scavenger. He only tried two to three pieces for every dish. As for Xu Qing, he was ravenously wolfing down the meat. His appetite far surpassed Captain Lei's.

Seeing how Xu Qing ate, Captain Lei couldn't help but speak.

"Why was it so different back then when I gave you the bun? You ate the bun small mouthful by mouthful."

Xu Qing forcefully swallowed the piece of snake meat in his mouth. He then lifted his head and looked at Captain Lei as he seriously answered.

"The buns belonged to you, but this snake meat belongs to me."

One was food others treated him to. The other was food he was treating others to.

The thinking process of this youth was very simple. Since this belonged to him, he naturally would eat it in a way that perfectly justified the fact.

Captain Lei didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He then looked at Xu Qing who kept picking up pieces of snake meat to eat while also drinking the snake soup. However, he also noticed that the youth didn't eat from every snake dish. He only took meat from the dishes near him, and he also drank the snake soup with restraint.

He only ate the portion that belonged to him in such a way.

"Your python is extremely huge, so it is enough for us to eat for half a month. In addition, its skin and bones have some value as well. So..." Captain Lei casually spoke.

"I will pay you rent. You don't have to deduct the rent from these," Xu Qing suddenly said.

The snake meat was to repay Captain Lei for the buns and sleeping bag. The value of the snake skin and snake bones was to pay back Captain Lei for helping him conceal the matter about Broken Ox.

As for Captain Lei bringing him away from the ruins and to the campsite, that was a debt of gratitude.

Xu Qing felt that it was somewhat inappropriate if he tried to repay the debt by giving material objects. So, he remembered the favor in his heart instead.

Captain Lei cast a deep glance at Xu Qing and could see the seriousness in the youth's eyes as well as his personality of clearly separating grudges and kindness. Hence, he nodded. After he pondered, he spoke again.

"Kid, you probably had many guesses about my identity when we were on our way here."

Xu Qing didn't speak, but his eating action slowed slightly.

"The others call me Captain Lei. As for my name, it is not important. In the scavenger campsite, no one will use their real name."

Captain Lei picked up a piece of steamed snake meat and placed it into his mouth as he slowly chewed.

"As to why I have this title, it was because, in the scavenger camp, I met a few friends who were willing to share life-and-death with me.

"We form a small team, but the name of our small team is a little crude. It's known as Thunder.

"Usually, everyone will accept individual missions. If we encounter a mission with greater difficulty, our team will gather and complete it together. Including me, there are a total of four people. But the three of them are still out and have yet to return.

"After they return, I will introduce you to them. In the future, you can follow us and become a new member of Team Thunder. You will then be able to do missions to earn a living as well as cultivation resources."

Captain Lei seemed to be somewhat full. He put his chopsticks down and looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing wasn't surprised by the words 'cultivation resources'.

Even Xu Qing could somehow sense that Captain Lei was a rogue cultivator. After having interacted with each other for such a long time, even if Xu Qing was in the Body Refinement Realm*, Captain Lei would naturally be able to sense it through his observation.

"Sure." Xu Qing didn't hesitate as he nodded his head.

This caused him to breathe a sigh of relief in his heart. He who grew up in the slums deeply knew that it was impossible for someone to show kindness and offer help while wanting nothing in return. There was a reason for everything.

“You can continue eating. I’m already old and won’t be able to digest the food if I eat too much.”

Captain Lei coughed a few times and his face turned a little red. However, he soon recovered. He stood up and walked toward the outside as he spoke.

“The spirit energy in this world is like poison. If you keep cultivating so assiduously as you did on the way here, your body might not be able to last very long before the mutation overcomes it. Cultivation requires one to build a solid foundation. You must not be hasty.”

Xu Qing fell silent and didn’t speak.

The old man who walked to the door turned and looked at Xu Qing as he shook his head.

“However, by cultivating like this, you are also correct.”

“The scavenger campsite lies beside a forbidden zone, and it is different from the one you were in previously. The items and objects within the forbidden zone cause many low-level rogue cultivators and fugitives to gather here.

“Since you are staying here, you will surely need to make a trip to the forbidden zone sooner or later. So, cultivating more is also good.”

Captain Lei then left.

Xu Qing sat here alone until he finished all the snake meat. However, he didn’t leave immediately. He first cleaned and put the tableware down before he returned to his small house.

Upon returning, he sat down cross-legged and continued to cultivate.

Xu Qing was very clear that if he didn’t want to struggle whilst on death’s door and bend his back to survive, leaving the right of his life and death in the hands of others, his own strength would be the root of everything.

This was especially so in the scavenger camp. There were plenty of rogue cultivators here, far more than the number he had seen in his six years in the slums. Not a single one of these people was a pushover.

If the slums were a nest for dogs, this place was a den for wolves.

If he didn't work hard, even before he mutated, he might have already died without a burial place because of a conflict or dispute.

As for the anomalous substances in his body, Xu Qing learned from the bamboo slip that contained the Mountains and Seas Art that alchemy pills might be able to neutralize them.

Although they could only treat the symptoms and not the root, the pills could still be used to cope with mutation. On the way here, he also learned the name of one of such pills from the conversations of the scavengers. The pill was named 'white pills'.

In the nearby forbidden zone, an important herb necessary for the concoction of white pills was produced there. So, there would surely be people selling white pills inside the campsite.

After thinking of this, Xu Qing touched the location of the purple crystal in his chest.

During this period, he clearly sensed that other than granting him a boost in recovery, it also provided a huge increase in his strength and speed.

This had something to do with him achieving the first level of the Mountains and Seas Art. However, Xu Qing felt that his first level seemed to be somewhat different from the introduction of the first level described on the bamboo slip, where he would gain a tiger's worth of strength upon reaching the first level.

"I think I can beat many tigers to death."

Xu Qing mused silently as he sensed the spirit energy in his body. On the way here, he had been assiduously cultivating and he was soon about to break through to the second level.

"Today, I will attempt to break through to the second level." Xu Qing's gaze revealed determination. He then closed his eyes and started his breathing exercise.

Very soon, spirit energy fluctuations flooded over from all directions. The spirit energy outside forbidden zones had much fewer anomalous substances in comparison to the spirit energy within forbidden zones, and so it could increase the cultivators' cultivation speed by quite a bit.

For this point, Xu Qing had discovered it yesterday when he was in the wooden shed of the Beastfight Arena.

At this moment, he relaxed his body and exerted force to absorb the spirit energy in conjunction with his breathing. There was also a weak flash of purple light from his chest that was covered by the leather coat.

Time flowed by. Gradually, light popping sounds echoed from Xu Qing's body, and his pores began to secrete black-colored impurities once again.

The flesh and blood of his entire body seemed to be nourished and became more tenacious. It was like there was a greater strength within them that was gradually bursting out.

And at the same time, in the darkness outside, the little girl whose bamboo stick got swapped by Xu Qing walked toward the courtyard Xu Qing was in.

She stood there and hesitated. It was like she wanted to knock on the gate but also felt some trepidation.

After a long time, she seemed to have gathered the courage and knocked lightly on the bamboo gate of the courtyard. It was just that the sound of such knocking was too weak. There was basically no way for it to be transmitted within.

The moment the little girl knocked on the gate, the popping sounds from Xu Qing's body also reached their most intense moment.

As a rumbling sound roared in his mind, Xu Qing opened his eyes. At this moment, purple light flashed in his eyes once again as joy appeared on his face. He then lowered his head and glanced at his arm. The second mutation point had appeared there.

The second level of Qi Condensation.

[1] The end-room seemed to be connected to the second house where Xu Qing is staying.

[2] Xu Qing is in the Qi Condensation Realm, but the raws used here was 炼体 'Body Refinement'. Might refer to the cultivation art Xu Qing practiced. The Mountains and Seas Art is said to be one that tempers and refine one's body. You can view the reference from Chapter 6 if you are interested.