

Time 37

Outside Of Time

Chapter 37: Fireworks in the human world

Within the scavenger's campsite, apart from the necessities for survival, meat was the next thing they had in abundance.

This was due to the proximity to the forbidden zone. Some scavengers headed there every day, which was why there were several stalls selling edible meat.

Captain Lei's wrinkled face broke into a restrained laugh upon hearing that Xu Qing wanted to eat snake meat.

He understood that the reason why Xu Qing said snake meat was because of what he said back then. It was obvious that the kid in front of him had committed it to memory.

As such, he stopped Xu Qing when he was about to head out to buy the meat.

"Those bunch of people in the campsite are all deceitful. You are not that knowledgeable about the mutated beasts from the forbidden zone. It'll be easy for you to get scammed and find yourself in a situation where you are being coerced to buy. It's still better for me to go instead." Captain Lei said as he stood up.

Upon hearing the words, 'coerced to buy', Xu Qing subconsciously touched the iron stick and answered seriously after some thought.

"They won't."

Captain Lei glanced at the iron stick and couldn't help laughing. Without speaking, he walked out of the courtyard.

Watching Captain Lei's figure, Xu Qing deliberated, then walked into the side room. He washed the pans and bowls meticulously, then arranged and cleaned the table. Finally, he prepared three sets of bowls and chopsticks and placed them on top. Looking at the additional set, Xu Qing suddenly understood something.

"That is for a person who would never come." The words Captain Lei had once said surfaced in his mind. In his silence, he placed the third set of a bowl and chopsticks beside Captain Lei's set.

He did the same for the chair.

After doing these, Xu Qing turned his head and looked at the courtyard outside the house. At this moment, the sky had turned into dusk. There was a little chilliness in the breeze and within that, there were some indistinct snowflakes.

During the end-of-March season for the eastern part of the Nanhuang Continent, while the weather was beginning to warm up again and everything was coming back to life, the winter days didn't seem to be resigned. From time to time, there would still be snowflakes falling, as though to tell all things that it hadn't left yet.

At that moment, the snowflakes swayed in the overcast sky, blown down by the wind.

They seemed to fall from Heaven to the human world. They then got scattered across the world, then swiftly melted from the warmth as well.

Ultimately, you could see that it was just a land full of mud.

No matter how prestigious a place it came from, no matter how clean it was, when it was in the human world, it would still be mixed with sludge. Blending together, indistinguishable from each other.

There was no telling if it was the wind that held the snow, causing it to be icier. Or, was it the snow that infected the wind, causing it to be even more chilly?

At the moment, as it was gusting through the earth, through the campsite, through the bamboo courtyard and residence, Xu Qing felt a little cold.

Even though he was a cultivator, in the depths of his memory, there was still the fear of cold which had accumulated for years, and this made him feel somewhat uncomfortable in this freezing cold.

It was until he saw an unsteady silhouette in this cold gust, shielding against the blizzard as they walked from afar and opened the door in the courtyard. The moment the figure was revealed, their voice which was laced with laughter penetrated the blizzard.

"Kid, you're in for a treat today. Look what I managed to buy. This is a redflower snake. The quality of meat on this snake can be regarded as premium. I'll show off my abilities for you in a while."

Captain Lei carried the body of the snake and walked into the side room in large strides.

Noticing the tidiness within the side room, the arrangement of tables and chairs, the bowls and chopsticks, and especially the two sets which were placed side by side, Captain Lei's wrinkled-filled face broke into a smile and stared deeply at Xu Qing.

"Do you want to learn how to cook a snake?" Captain Lei asked.

"I do." Xu Qing's eyes lit up. He was thirsty for everything that he didn't possess the knowledge of, especially the snake that Captain Lei cooked. It was delicious.

Captain Lei laughed and called Xu Qing to his side. He introduced as he made it.

"Logically, you'd have to behead and remove the tail of this snake but those people don't know that the reason you must remove its tail was because of excretion. However, as long as you have removed the venom in the snake head, it could lift the flavor of the snake meat on a whole, enhancing its freshness."

Captain Lei was delighted when he spoke about cooking.

Xu Qing listened attentively from the side as well. Watched as Captain Lei cleaned the snake, skinned it then remove the internal organs and other junk from the body. He then chopped it into pieces before placing it to the side.

"Kid, you have to remember, whether there will be an aftertaste or not is still dependent on the soup."

With that, Captain Lei began to slow boil the soup in a clay pot and added many medicinal ingredients to it. At last, the snake head which had been treated previously was thrown into the mix as well.

After doing these, following the aroma which permeated the whole place, Xu Qing gulped. Witnessing this, Captain Lei laughed out loud and retrieved a clean wok. He then began to stir-fry the snake meat at high heat.

In that instant, the pitter-patter sounds of the oil reverberated. Wafts of heavy fragrance assaulted the senses in waves, spreading out in the side room as it drifted out.

It was as though it had dispersed all of the cold, making Xu Qing's stomach rumble uncontrollably. Looking at the boiling snake meat, even his eyes became straight.

Very soon, following Captain Lei's fire, the stir-fried snake meat was also added to the pot. As he covered the lid, he looked toward Xu Qing.

"Have you learned it?"

Xu Qing stared at the clay pot and nodded his head vigorously. He watched the entire process and didn't think it too difficult.

Captain Lei smiled a little and left the side room. When he returned, he carried two alcohol flasks. He threw one of it to Xu Qing and held onto the other, exclaiming with praises when he took a gulp.

"There is no lack of meat in the campsite but this alcohol is a rare commodity."

Xu Qing lifted the flask and looked into the turbid liquid. He had never drunk alcohol before.

Just as Captain Lei said, this was considered a rare commodity. There was none of it in the slums, only some of the important figures in the cities would be able to taste it.

But looking at the enjoyment on Captain Lei's face after drinking it, Xu Qing hesitantly placed it to the corner of his lips. After drinking a sip, his brows furrowed. He felt as though his entire mouth was filled with spiciness, but he still swallowed it.

A stream of heat emerged from his throat as it flowed down his esophagus and into his stomach. Then, it exploded violently and heat spread throughout his entire body. It turned into a breath that gushed to his mouth, causing him to open it and let out an alcohol-laced breath.

"It's not pleasant." Xu Qing looked at Captain Lei.

Captain Lei burst out into laughter when he heard that and pointed to Xu Qing.

"You're still too young and can't taste the flavor of alcohol. When you've grown older, you'll surely like it."

With that, Captain Lei was about to take the alcohol flask from Xu Qing's hands but the latter dodged it.

"I will try some more." Xu Qing replied seriously and then took another sip. He was still frowning but at the same time, he got used to the strange taste.

Not long after, under Captain Lei's good-natured teasing towards Xu Qing, the snake meat was done cooking.

When he served the clay pot, the aroma diffused the moment he opened the lid. Xu Qing's adam apple involuntarily twitched and he put down the flask. He waited for Captain Lei to pick up a piece before he stabbed into one and wolfed it down.

He still couldn't change the habit of wolfing down his food ravenously when eating.

Just like that, while the wind and snow mingled outside, inside the residence, the old and young drank as they ate the meat, the feeling of warmth gradually suffused the atmosphere.

Watching Xu Qing's awkward posture as he exerted his strength when using the chopsticks, Captain Lei's eyes revealed some gentleness behind them. He muttered in his heart.

"After all, he's still a child. It's a pity... that he lived in such a cruel world."

When the blizzard gusted from outside, as there were gaps in the residence's structure, it managed to slip in through the cracks. Despite being covered in perspiration from eating the hot food, Xu Qing had some resistance to the cold wind as it landed on him causing him to merely curled his body slightly.

That small gesture was caught by Captain Lei. He looked pensive but he didn't speak.

After a long while, Xu Qing mimicked Captain Lei in taking another big gulp of alcohol and exhaling an alcohol-laced breath. The former watched the old man who brought him out of the ruined city and settled here, then spoke up abruptly.

"Your injuries..."

"No matter. I've already lived with it for so many years, why would I die this easily? It's fine."

Xu Qing went silent. He wanted to question Captain Lei about the crippling of his foundation but when he recalled the scene in the forbidden zone, he didn't ask in the end.

They ate the meal for a long time. Only after the alcohol flask in Captain Lei's hands was empty did he stand up. His eyes looked a little hazy as he returned to his room.

Looking at his figure, Xu Qing could clearly feel that the vigor Captain Lei used to exude seemed to have dissipated a little after their return from the forbidden zone.

Xu Qing was quiet and only got up after a while. He tidied up the dining table and cleaned the pots and bowls, before placing them neatly. Only then did he return to his room.

Sitting on the bed plank, he raised his head towards the blizzard outside. He curled his body and retrieved the leather bag he picked up from the Bloodshadow Captain when he was in the forbidden zone.

Even though there were no alchemy pills in it, there were a lot of spirit coins. There were also several miscellaneous items that Xu Qing checked through.

Finally, he took out a black glove. The texture of it didn't feel like leather, more like metallic.

When he tried it on, Xu Qing realized the item was very tough. It provided an impressive amount of protection. So, he struck a few punches with it on and thought it was not bad. Only then did he take it off and meditated with his eyes closed, starting his breathing technique.

It was a night of silence.

At dawn, the flurry of snow continued falling but it was warmer by much. After a night of freezing cold, the snowflakes which fell to the ground could finally exist for some time.

Hence, when Xu Qing stepped out of the room, he saw traces on the snow.

Xu Qing held his clothes tighter around him and glanced toward Captain Lei's residence. After exiting the courtyard, he thought he ought to do something. For example, buying some white pills for Captain Lei.

As such, after heading out, the snow that Xu Qing stepped on let out a crunching sound as he walked toward the general store.

When Xu Qing passed Grandmaster Bai's carriage fleet's tent, he could hear the faint sound of the young man and lady studying. That sound made him stop in his tracks and there was a look of envy in his eyes as he glanced over.

After a while, he turned his head without speaking and continued towards the general store.

As he neared, he could see the general store from afar as well as the little girl who was diligently clearing the snow tracks outside of it. Her garments were something thin, her tiny hands were red from the cold and there were clouds of vapor coming from her mouth.

After days of not seeing her, the little girl seemed to have adapted a little to the life at the campsite. Though it was tiring, she was still earnest in cleaning up.

Even though the snow was still falling, she still continued to sweep. It was just that the scar that ruined her face was a little obvious under the morning sun.

When Xu Qing neared, the little girl seemed to sense it. Raising her head, her eyes lit up when she saw Xu Qing, revealing a joyful smile.

"Morning."

"Morning..." Xu Qing was not used to such greetings. He nodded and then looked inside the general store.

Perhaps it was because the sun had just come up, or maybe it was due to the weather, but there was no one inside. Not even the shop owner.

"What do you want to buy? I'll get it for you." The little girl smiled.

"White pills." Xu Qing looked at her.

At the sound of that, the little girl leaned the broom in her hands against the wall to her side. After she brought Xu Qing into the store, she ran to the back of the counter and rummaged through some things. Very soon, she took out a few leather bags as she opened them, and put them back.

It was quite a while later before she a bag out and handed it to Xu Qing.

"The boss dictated we can only sell five a day, so I can't sell you more." The little girl was apologetic as she looked at Xu Qing.

Xu Qing could understand it. He took the leather bag and opened it to check. After that, his gaze froze slightly.

He noticed that the white pill in this leather bag had a quality that was a lot better than what he bought previously. Among them, there were three which didn't have a smear of green and there was even a faint medicinal fragrance wafting from them.

He thought back to the little girl's actions and then raised his head towards her.

"It's nothing. It's within my scope of authority." The little girl blinked and smiled.

Xu Qing stared deeply at the little girl.

"Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me for such a trivial matter. I'm the one who owes you my thanks. If it's not for you, I might not have survived until now."

The little girl's smile was radiant and there was a glimmer in her eyes. After saying that, she seemed to have remembered something and whispered to Xu Qing as she escorted him out.

"I heard the boss talking about it yesterday. Recently, there were a lot of young people disappearing from the campsite and according to his expression, it seems like he didn't think it was caused by the dangers of the forbidden zone. More like it was caused by humans... Keep an eye out for yourself."

There was concern in the little girl's eyes and Xu Qing was not used to such a gaze. He retreated a few steps and nodded, leaving after saying his thanks.

He didn't walk too far before he turned his head. He stared at the figure of the little girl who continued to sweep the snow, and at the scar on her face under the sunlight.

He suddenly remembered what Captain Lei said before, that there was a stone that could remove scars in the temper cluster at the forbidden zone.

"If there's a chance, I'll go find one for her." Xu Qing muttered in his heart then turned and left.

The young man walked away, leaving a trail of tracks in the snow. The wind and snow behind him... grew even heavier