

Chapter 51

Peculiar Scene

The fog disappeared.

Jin WuMing still stood there motionless. His dead, gray eyes focused on a dew falling off the side of his hat.

He didn't seem to notice ShangGuan JinHong walking out the forest alone.

ShangGuan JinHong didn't look at him either. He just walked casually past Jin WuMing, and said leisurely, "There's fog today. It must be a good day."

Jin WuMing hesitated for a moment, then said, "There's fog today. It must be a good day."

He finally turned around, and walked in sync behind ShangGuan JinHong. One in the front, one in the back, both disappeared into the fog.

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The street is very crowded, almost as much as the Sky Bridge^{*} in the capital city. There are all sorts of things to buy here. It's still not noon yet, but vendors have already setup booths all over the street. There are all sorts of snacks, all sorts of circus acts, and all sorts of customers.

LingLing was almost blinded by the sight. She has never been this happy before.

After all, she is still a kid.

She never expected Li XunHuan to take her to this place.

So there is an inner child in his heart.

* Sky Bridge is a location in old Beijing famous for its circus atmosphere.

Seeing Li XunHuan holding a candy gourd^{**}, LingLing wanted to laugh.

They just bought these candy gourds, quite a few sticks of them. Shiny red gourds stuck on a stick, like big, red jewels.

All girls love jewels. LingLing bought every single one the seller had. Too bad she only has two hands, and couldn't carry all of them.

A girl would never feel that she has bought too much of something.

Li XunHuan had to carry some for her.

Actually, he has also bought candy gourds himself. But that was a long time ago. At that time, he still didn't know about grief, about worry.

What about now?

He is certainly worried about something. He has been staring at a person, staring for a long time.

This person walked in front of him. He wore a dirty robe, a pair of straw sandals. On his head is a straw hat. This person never looked up, as if he didn't want to see anyone.

He walked like a hunchback, but has wide shoulders. Should he straighten up, this man would look quite imposing.

Even so, this person doesn't look all that extraordinary. At best he's a destitute martial arts practitioner. Possibly he's just a beggar.

Yet Li XunHuan noticed him with the first gaze.

No matter where he went, Li XunHuan followed. That's why they are now on this street.

Oddly enough, Li XunHuan isn't the only person following this man.

Li XunHuan originally planned to catch up, to see this man's face. When suddenly, he saw another person following behind the beggar.

This person's very skinny, very tall, and has light steps. Despite his ordinary clothing, the man's eyes shined brightly, full of energy.

Li XunHuan knew this man's no ordinary person.

^{**} This is a popular Chinese snack. I don't know the exact process for making it, but I think gourd is first hardened, then dipped into molasses, and lastly stacked onto a stick.

He didn't seem to notice Li XunHuan, though. He concentrated fully on the beggar. When the beggar walked faster, he would walk faster. When the beggar slowed down, he would slow down. When the beggar stopped, he would stop. And pretend to straighten his clothes, or adjust his shoes. But his eyes would never leave the beggar.

He certainly is an expert at spying.

So why would he spy on a beggar?

What's the point? What's his relationship with the beggar?

The beggar didn't seem to notice that he's being followed. He continued to walk slowly, without ever turning around.

If someone gives him some money, he'd take it. Otherwise, he never bothered to beg for any.

LingLing's eyeballs moved continuously. She suddenly grabbed Li XunHuan's sleeves and asked, "Are we following that beggar?"

This little girl really is clever.

Li XunHuan nodded, and whispered, "That's why we must speak quietly."

LingLing said, "Who is he? Why are we following him?"

Li XunHuan said, "This doesn't concern you."

LingLing said, "That's why I have to ask you. If you won't tell me, I'll ask loudly again."

Li XunHuan sighed, and said, "He looks like an old friend of mine."

LingLing was surprised. She said, "Your old friend? Is he a member of the Beggar's Clan?"

Li XunHuan said, "No."

LingLing said, "Then who is he?"

Li XunHuan said with a sullen face, "You wouldn't know his name even if I told you."

LingLing remained silent for a while, when she suddenly said, "There's someone else following the beggar too. Do you see him?"

Li XunHuan chuckled, and said, "You are quite observant."

LingLing also chuckled, and said, "So who is he? Is he also one of your friends?"

Li XunHuan said, "No."

LingLing said, "Really? So is he your friend's enemy?"

Li XunHuan said, "Perhaps..."

LingLing said, "Then why don't you warn your friend?"

Li XunHuan sighed, and said, "My friend's quite strange. He never likes for anyone to help him."

LingLing said, "But..."

She didn't finish this sentence.

Because she was busy looking at something, looking very intently.

This street is quite long. They've only walked about half its length.

The beggar walked in front of a wonton seller.

Near them, a person was selling wine carried on his shoulder-pole. Several people were drinking by the wine seller. One is a blind fortune-teller, his face quite pale.

On the opposite end of the street stood a burly green-robed man.

A person, carrying two cases of smelly-tofu on his shoulder-pole, walked over there.

There's also a very tall married-woman. She had been examining makeup and sewing items. But at this moment, she looked up. One of her eyes has been blinded.

When the beggar walked close...

The wine seller suddenly lowered his shoulder-pole.

The blind fortune-teller lowered his wine cup.

The burly green-robed man walked out from where he stood.

The one-eyed woman turned around abruptly, almost knocking down the makeup items besides her.

In addition to that tall, skinny follower, these people surrounded the beggar.

The smelly-tofu seller suddenly walked in front of the beggar, blocking his path!

There are many other people on the street. But these few people are quite noticeable. Even LingLing realized that something's wrong. Li XunHuan's face sank. He had long thought that the beggar was Tie ChuanJia. Now there's no doubt.

He must be very careful.

He knew that these people harbored deep hatred for Tie ChuanJia. They must've planned this ambush in detail. Leaving no chance for Tie ChuanJia to escape. If they knew someone could help Tie ChuanJia, they might decide to kill him immediately.

Even if it costs him his life, Li XunHuan would not let any harm come towards Tie ChuanJia. He doesn't owe favors to many people in this world. Tie ChuanJia is one of the few.

Li XunHuan cannot lose a friend like him.

At this moment, those people had surrounded the beggar.

In a flash, three sharp daggers leaned on the beggar's body. The people besides them realized what's going on, and dispersed.

No one wants to get involved in these sorts of things.

Only to hear the blind fortune-teller say coldly, "Come with us. Don't say a single word. Understand?"

The burly green-robed man said, "Follow orders, and you might live a bit longer. Do something rash, and you just might die immediately.

The beggar responded quite slowly. Only now did he nod.

The one-eyed married-woman gave him a push from behind. She said, "Start walking. What are you waiting for?"

With this push, the straw hat on the beggar came off, showing his face.

The face looked quite yellow, as if he just recovered from a serious illness. His nose was red and crooked. His mouth widened, smiling foolishly at these people.

This person is Tie ChuanJia? Of course not. He looked more like a retard.

Li XunHuan wanted to laugh.

The one-eyed married-woman was absolutely fuming. She yelled, "Fifth brother. How did this happen?"

The tall, skinny man's face turned pale. He said, "But... I was sure he's Tie ChuanJia. I never let him out of my sight. How could... this have happened?"

The burly green-robed man slapped the beggar across the face, and yelled, "Who are you?"

The beggar still smiled foolishly. He said, "I'm me. You're you. Why did you hit me?"

The wine seller said, "Perhaps he's Tie ChuanJia in disguise. Let's try to peel off his mask."

The blind fortune-teller suddenly said, "No need. This person is not Tie ChuanJia."

Only this blind man's face remained calm and cold.

The burly green-robed man said, "Second brother, did you recognize his voice?"

The blind man said, "Tie ChuanJia would rather die than let you slap him."

The tall, thin man said, "This person must've been in cahoots with Tie ChuanJia. They switched places somehow, so Tie ChuanJia could escape."

The one-eyed married-woman yelled angrily, "How could you let him get away like that?"

The tall, thin man lowered his head, and said, "Perhaps... when he was at the restroom. After all, I can't exactly..."

The burly green-robed man yelled, "So you're a buddy of Tie ChuanJia. I'm going to kill you."

He raised a shoulder-pole, about to strike down upon the beggar.

At this moment, Li XunHuan absolutely has to interfere.

This beggar may or may not be a real retard. He may or may not be Tie ChuanJia's friend. But even so, he at least helped out Tie ChuanJia. So Li XunHuan can't let him die.

Besides, Li XunHuan also wanted Tie ChuanJia's information from this man.

Li XunHuan's body dashed forward.

But immediately afterward, he stopped. This start-and-stop motion was quick as a flash. No one could actually tell that he had moved.

He no longer needed to interfere.

With a loud crack, the green-robed man's shoulder-pole broke in two. He almost lost his balance, and stuttered.

No one saw what exactly broke the shoulder-pole. Everyone's expression changed. They all yelled, "Who dares to interfere?"

A person standing by the edge of a store said calmly, "Me."

Everyone turned their heads toward him, only to see a man wearing a robe white as jade. His hands together behind his back. As he examined a birdcage at the front of the store.

The birds in the cage chirped.

This white-robed man seemed to find birds more amusing than people. He didn't even look towards these vengeful people.

There's a bit of wrinkle by his eyes. But with his dashing eyebrows, his jade-white face, this man is very much a handsome gentleman. No one can tell his age.

The burly green-robed man yelled, "So you broke my shoulder-pole?"

This time, the white-robed man didn't even bother to respond.

The burly green-robed man and the one-eyed married-woman were both furious. They wanted to attack this gentleman.

Suddenly, that blind fortune-teller said, "Stop."

He then picked up an ingot of silver from the ground, and said coldly, "Although this gentleman broke your shoulder-pole, his ingot can buy you hundreds of these shoulder-poles. You should thank him for his generosity, rather than get angry."

The burly green-robed man looked at the shoulder-pole in his hand, then at the ingot in the blind man's hand. He didn't seem to believe that the tiny ingot could break his shoulder-pole.

The white-robed man suddenly began to laugh. He said, "Good. Looks like you're wiser than those who can actually see. You can keep the silver."

The blind fortune-teller said coldly, "My eyes may be blind, but not my heart. I don't take anything that's not rightfully mine."

He rubbed the ingot in his hands, and said, "A penny worth of silver is enough to buy a new shoulder-pole. This ingot weighs at least ten taels. Surely you don't need to give us this much money."

As he spoke, he rubbed the ingot into a tiny little stick. With a twist from his left hand, a small piece came off. The blind fortune-teller said coldly, "Thanks for this penny's worth of silver. You can keep the rest."

His hand waved, a silver light streaked through the air. The tiny silver stick shot towards the white-robed man. Amazingly, this throw incorporated Wu Dang's 'Double-Virtue Sword Art'.

As the light streaked, it aimed at five different pressure points in front of the white-robed man's chest.

Just as the silver stick reached the white-robed man's chest, he suddenly nipped the stick with his right hand. The two fingers that caught it then calmly came together, and cut off a piece of the stick.

The white-robed man said calmly, "Your sword art is quite good. But just a bit too slow."

With each word, he took another cut at the stick. After he finished this sentence, fourteen pieces of silver dropped to the ground.

LingLing had been watching from far away. She couldn't help but gasp, and said, "Is this man's hand really made of meat?"

Looking at the small piece of silver in the blind man's hand, everyone's face turned gray. No one could speak up.

The white-robed man said coldly, "Once I threw out the ingot, it was yours. How come you won't pick it up?"

The blind fortune-teller suddenly bent down, and picked up the pieces of silver. Then without a single word, he turned around and left.

His companions left with him.

LingLing said with a smile, "At least they know when to leave."

Li XunHuan remained sullen. He suddenly said, "Do you see that dumpling restaurant?"

LingLing said, "Of course. I've wanted to taste their dumplings for a while now."

Li XunHuan said, "Good. Wait for me over there."

LingLing hesitated for a moment, then said, "You're chasing after that beggar?"

That beggar began to walk forward again. He did not thank the white-robed man, nor looked at anyone else.

It's as if nothing had happened.

Li XunHuan nodded, and said, "I need to ask him something."

LingLing lowered her head, and said, "I can't come with you?"

Li XunHuan said, "No."

LingLing was on the verge of tears. She said, "I know what you're doing. You're going to leave me here alone."

Li XunHuan sighed, and said tenderly, "I want to taste their dumplings too. Why would I not come back?"

LingLing said, "Alright. I trust you. If you lie, I'll wait for you here forever."

The beggar didn't walk very fast.

But Li XunHuan isn't in a hurry to catch him, either. There are way too many people on this street.

It's never convenient to talk with so many people around. Besides, he realized that the white-robed man had been examining him. As if he's more interesting than those birds.

Li XunHuan also wanted to meet this white-robed man. The whole cutting of silver with his fingers really caught Li XunHuan's attention.

Not many people have this type of ability.

Actually, Li XunHuan had never seen such power with any person's hands. LingLing's description is very apt.

This person's hand does not look like it's made of meat.

Any martial arts expert, upon meeting someone like him, would want to do two things. Either challenge him, or have a drink with him.

On an ordinary day, Li XunHuan would be no exception.

But not today. He has been looking for Tie ChuanJia for a while now. He cannot pass up this lead.

The white-robed man walked toward Li XunHuan. As if wishing to block his path.

Thankfully, the dispersed crowd came to gather around the white-robed man. They wanted to meet this amazing person. Li XunHuan took this opportunity to sneak away.

When he looked up again, that beggar had reached the end of the street. He turned left.

This new road has a lot less people. And is a lot shorter.

Li XunHuan hurried forward, but couldn't see the beggar as he turned. Li XunHuan searched the street following this one. Again, he saw no one.

How could the beggar disappear?

Li XunHuan slowed down, and began to search carefully.

On this street are only back doors of households. A man seemed to be sitting in front of a door. He's rubbing something on his chest.

Before Li XunHuan could see the face, he saw the straw hat.

So that's where the beggar went.

What's he doing?

Li XunHuan didn't want to scare the beggar. So he walked over slowly.

But that beggar was still scared. He quickly tried to hide the item in his hand.

Too bad Li XunHuan's eyes are faster than his hands. He saw that the beggar held a piece of silver. One of the pieces the white-robed man cut off.

Li XunHuan smiled, and said, "May I ask for the name of this friend?"

The beggar stared at him for a moment, then said, "I'm not your friend. You're not my friend. I don't know you. You don't know me."

Li XunHuan still smiled. He said, "I want to ask you about someone. I'm sure you would know him."