

The first part of the opening: The Count's Order and the First Door of the Dusty Village

In the winter of 1347, when the Black Death had just spread from the East into the Mediterranean, the whole of Europe was still in a state of ignorance about this "unknown disease".

Lucas, the private physician of an earl. Having studied at Salerno Medical School and been well-versed in the Arabic medical book "Medical Compenches", in the yellowed pages, he saw sporadic accounts of the "Great Death" of the East - high fever, black bruises, groin lumps, and speculation that "the disease came with the cargo of the merchant ship". But these were just words from books, Lucas had never seen real cases, and even privately felt that they were just exaggerated tales of the Eastern barbarians and could not have spread to the civilized Christian world.

Lucas touched the seal of fire on his chest, and it seemed as if he heard the count's cold command: "There are many dead people in the village of dust. Go and find out the cause of death and write a report to me. Don't let this disease float to the castle."

Lucas was unmoved by it. In his eyes, the village was just a speck of mud on the edge of the map, and the villagers were illiterate farmers whose lives and deaths had nothing to do with him. He just wanted to go through the process as quickly as possible, make up a conclusion of "food poisoning" or "mischief" at random, and then return to his peaceful noble life.

At dusk, Lucas finally reached the entrance of the dusty village.

There were no soldiers, no fence, only a crooked **wooden notice board** nailed to the trunk of an old oak tree at the entrance. He reined in his horse and glanced over the parish notice written in bold black ink, scrawled but with an unquestionable majesty:

Edict from the parish:

Anyone who burns corpses privately is blaspheming God!
While the soul is still in the body, fire is an offense
to the kingdom of heaven.

The dead should be buried in the ground and handed over
to the church.

Those who violate the rule will be regarded as accomplices in the spread of the plague and will be severely punished.

He sneered and threw the absurd notice out of his mind – in the medical books he had read, **burning corpses was the most direct way to stop the spread of the disease**, but in the eyes of the church it was a sin of "blasphemy against God". He felt even more that the ignorance of the lower classes and the hypocrisy of the church were the best breeding ground for this "great death".

- The door of the hut was mostly open, and the silence inside was terrifying. The crows' cries were particularly shrill in the silence;
- Beside the well at the entrance of the village, there was an empty bucket with its handle dropped, and the bottom of the bucket was smeared with dry mud marks, as if someone had thrown it in a hurry;
- At the edge of the woodland in the distance, a few hastily buried mounds of earth could be faintly seen - the place where the villagers secretly buried their loved ones, not daring to make a name for themselves, not daring to burn them, fearing that they would be discovered by the parishes and even dragged to be condemned.

The Chronicles of Luochen Village: The Miller's Account Book

Lucas walked west along the quiet village road, where the air was filled with the smell of earth and decay, but in the direction of the mill, there was still a faint smell of wheat flour.

The wooden door of the mill was half open, like a mouth that could not be closed.

He pushed open the door, and a cold, dull smell hit him.

The stone mill had stopped, and the grinding plate was covered with a layer of dry and hard flour. The wooden handle, where it had been held for years, was worn shiny, and the edges were wrapped with a few tattered pieces of coarse cloth, which bore dark brown marks.

In the middle of the mill, the miller lay motionless on the ground. He was stiff, with one hand still resting on the open account book, the quill pen rolled aside, and the ink stain spread a small patch of dark color on the pages. Under the skin of his back and neck, there were patches of dark purple bruises, the roots of his thighs were swollen high, and his

clothes were stretched and distorted – a symptom Lucas had read about in medical books but never seen with his own eyes. Strangely, he had a calm smile on his face.

Beside the corpse stood a whole bag of ground flour, the opening of which was tied tightly.

On a small wooden table not far away lay a small wooden box carved with simple patterns, inside which lay a polished silver hairpin. Beside the hairpin lay a thread-bound account book. The pages were rough and the handwriting was neat but somewhat clumsy. It was obvious that the owner could read and write, but was not highly learned; he was just used to taking notes casually.

Lucas gently picked up the account book and flipped through the last few pages.

- Three days before Saint Martin's Day: Grind three bags of flour for four pence and store them in a wooden box. Lena has been here.
- Two days before Saint Martin's Day: Grind two bags of flour for three pence. Cows do not eat grass.
- Day before Saint Martin's Day: Grind a bag of flour. Black spots appear on the cow.
- St. Martin's Day: Unground. The cow died and was buried at the edge of the forest.
- Day after Saint Martin's Day: Half a bag of flour, heavy body.
- Two days after Saint Martin's Day: Unground flour. Black spots on the body.

On the last page, there is no record of harvest, only a string of chattering, as light as everyday conversation, as if it were just a random plan for tomorrow written down, no despair, no farewell, only a peaceful hope:

When I feel better, I'll fix the grinding plate again. When the harvest is good next year, I'll be able to prepare your dowry. The wooden door at home is a bit loose. I'll fix it when it clears up. Everything will be fine.

Lucas paused at the tip of his finger and looked at the line in silence. For the first time, the cold description of the illness in the book became real and heavy in front of an ordinary corpse and a thin account book. For some reason, Lucas thought of the bread on the count's table. (Parallel Montage)

A pair of empty cow hollows was thrown in the corner, and a few faint drag marks on the ground led to the door. The stone mill was quiet, the flour was covered with dust, the silver hairpin shone, and the account book was spread out.

Chronicles of the Dusty Village • Toby in the Cellar

Leaving the mill, Lucas continued along the dead village road. The thatched cottage by the roadside was mostly open and empty, with only the wind weaving through the beams and pillars.

He stopped in front of a farmhouse with its doors and Windows closed. The door was unlocked, just slightly closed, as if someone had deliberately left a last shred of dignity.

Lucas pushed the door open. The room was unusually tidy, the stove cold, the earthenware jars upside down, the bed flat, as if the master would return from the field in a second. Only the heavy silence in the air indicated that the place had long been abandoned.

He noticed that the edge of the gap in the corner floor had shallow marks from repeated pushing and pulling.

The moment the planks were lifted, a pair of frightened but clean eyes emerged from the darkness.

It was a boy. He was curled up, hugging his knees, his body taut, but biting his lip and making no sound.

Lucas's breath almost imperceptibly paused. It was the first living person he had seen since entering the village.

He moved lightly and did not approach immediately, but crouched at the entrance of the cellar, his voice as cold and steady as ever.

"What's your name?"

The boy shrank back into the shadow again and whispered, "Toby."

"How long have you been here?"

"I don't know... It has been dark many times." His voice was as thin as a thread, with a childlike bewilderance, "Mom put me down. She said, 'Don't make a sound. Wait for her to call me.'"

Lucas was silent for a moment: "You haven't gone up to have a look?" "

Toby shook his head gently, with fear in his eyes, but with a bit of stubborn belief. "Mom said, no. They'll come back to pick me up."

He looked up at the light at the cellar opening, then quickly lowered his head and whispered, "I'm good. I did not cry."

Lucas looked into his dirty but clean eyes, eyes that had no idea what was going on in the village, what the "black spot" meant, or that his parents would never come back.

Diseases in books, corpses, handwriting in account books, distant orders from the count... At this moment, all of a sudden, they were touched lightly by the eyes.

Lucas was silent for a long time, then slowly reached out his hand.

"Come up. It's already... It's quiet."

Toby hesitated for a long time before cautiously reaching out his hand to him little by little. The little hand was cold, small and trembling.

At the very moment his fingers touched, Lucas realized clearly that he had come to Luochen Village only for a report. But from now on, things are different.

Dust Village Chronicles • Doctor

After having Toby temporarily settled down, Lucas continued to explore the village. Deep in the village road, a thatched house with dried herbs hanging in front of it had its door slightly open, and the air was filled with the bitter scent of the herbs, which stood out conspicuously in the dead silence of the village.

He pushed the door open and entered.

The room was not large, with a table, a bed, a row of simple earthenware jars, and herbs piled up in the corner, neatly bound.

Behind the wooden table, the barefoot doctor lay motionless on the table. With one hand still tightly grasping the pen and the other hand spread out on a sheet of paper full of words, as if he had been carefully recording just a second ago. The arms and neck were already covered with clear, dark purple bruises.

There were no expensive medicines on the table, only a few cans of crude herbal ointment, a few clean cloths, and a bowl of water that had already

cooled down. He died in front of his desk, in a posture that still wanted to save someone.

Lucas gently picked up the tattered notebook at the corner of the table. The handwriting was clumsy and crooked, but filled to the brim, every stroke with earnestness:

- Today I bandaged Old Herman's hand. It was a minor injury but nothing serious.
- A child in the village got a bump on his head while playing around. He was very brave.
- Recently, many people have been suffering from persistent high fever and severe body aches, and are bedridden.
- Then hard lumps swelled up in the armpits and the roots of the legs, gradually turning black.
- After that, black spots appeared all over the body and wouldn't last for more than a few days.
- The disease seems to be contagious. If one family gets sick, the whole family can't escape.
- Herbs are useless; they can only relieve the pain a little. I'll just visit a few more households.
- I'm also starting to have a high fever and my body is getting stiff. It's okay, I'll just hold on.
- The medicine is running out. I'll hold on as long as I can.
- Everyone will be fine.
- It will be fine.

Notes stop here.

Lucas' fingertips fell on the last line, silent for a long time. High fever, severe pain, groin lumps, black spots all over the body, human-to-human transmission... Abstract words from medical books are corresponded, verified and locked in this plain notebook. He was almost certain that what was wreaking havoc in the village was the dreaded **Black Death**.

The miller's account book, Toby waiting in the cellar, this pen that he never put down before his eyes... One held up a future for his daughter with his life, one kept a promise that would never be fulfilled in the darkness, one held on to the disaster with his meager strength to the end.

He closed his notes and slowly walked out of the hut. The wind blew through the empty village, carrying dust and memories.

Lucas looked into the distance and then lowered his head to look at Toby, who was waiting quietly behind him. He came here only to complete the task assigned by the count, to record the illness and submit the report. But

at this moment, the hard and cold part of his heart had been cracked open by three ordinary people.

False ending

Lucas disregarded whatever had happened and wrote in his notebook in a businesslike manner: "It was just a common plague, God's punishment for the undevout."

After completing the count's assignment, Lucas returned to the castle.

Shortly after, the Black Death spread in the region with the village of Dust as its origin. The count ordered the blockade of movement of people, but it was too late. He had to flee with his family to the country of his relatives. Lucas, who was accused of doing things poorly, was left behind, and with nowhere to go, he eventually contracted the Black Death.

This time, it seemed that God did not continue to favor him as he had hoped.

True Ending

Lucas, guided by Toby, found the place where the villagers had buried their bodies. It was a makeshift, sloppy burial pit where almost everyone in the village had been temporarily buried. The bodies had rotted and their identities were indistinct.

Based on the symptoms described in his medical book, Lucas determined that the Black Death was happening in the village and that the most efficient way to stop it from spreading was to burn the bodies to prevent them from rotting and spreading in the land.

Although it was contrary to Lucas' beliefs and Christian teachings. But Lucas was shaken by the clues he had found in the village, the stories he had pieced together for the villagers, and their expectations for the future.

Thinking of the anticipation in Toby's shining eyes, Lucas was dazed. He suddenly felt that the blurry faces on the idol he prayed to every day were now clearer and more and more overlapping with Toby's.

"Always for the living," Lucas murmured to himself. Then Lucas dug a circle of isolation around the large pit with a shovel and set fire to the pit where the body was buried.

Back at Toby's house, Lucas said to the waiting Toby, "I'm sorry, but there are no living people left in the village."

Toby: "Where are my family?"

Lucas remained silent for a long time and said, "It's not safe to stay in the village. There's still an uneradicated plague here. Not to mention that you, a child, can't live on your own, will you come with me?"

Toby thought for a moment and said, "Well, but where are we going? "Back to where you came from?"

"Not going back there," Lucas said. "I'm going to find a place to settle down and then go to other villages to continue investigating whether there's a plague. In the process, do you want to study medicine with me? If you become a doctor in the future, you can also live independently."

Toby asked, "What is a doctor?"

Lucas: "Being a doctor is a profession that gives more people a future."

So Lucas took Toby's hand and walked out in the burning fire of the village behind the dust. The sky was still dim, but for some reason Lucas felt that the fire had brightened the world a little.