

That is the life of the one ... by Olivia Foulger

The Silk Trade Road 100 BC

The Northern Route

Chang'an, the 'million man city'. Even standing on the outskirts of the huge city the name is spot on. Men in fine traditional clothing and women draped in dyed silks and fabrics, adorned with gold, gems and other high priced goods. Safely protected in their little slice of paradise, the people of Chang'an seem oblivious to any of the adventures and sufferings endured upon the roads that bring them their riches. How lucky it is for the closer parts of the trade road to be protected by Emperor Wu. Some call him a 'modernist' but he, he is a protector, a leader. He is the high point of this area's prosperity. However, his troops that protect the Northern Route are a force too powerful for me to describe. They provide a large protection barrier across the land, stopping robberies and runaways, attacks and attempts.

Moving on from the city I'm commanded to find my way onto the road. Heavy with carts of goods that burden the backs of others and beaten and pounded by the large footfall of its success, this is where I know. Merchants and sellers, hagglers and colour. Though these silks and spices are for sale, and will soon be gone within a few days, they still create a rich aroma of fun that seems permanent. Saffron from Persia, Sandalwood from India, Myrrh and Frankincense from Somalia, these are the smells that overwhelm my senses, tickle my nose and make me want to jump from stall to stall with the excitement of a calve.

I admire the silks and textiles from afar, scared my earth-worn hooves may mark or rip the ethereal fabrics, but the other items I press my face as close as I can to breathe them in. I cant have them but I can remember them, the smell, the taste I steal from time to time, the sounds and the looks. The looks of these fabrics litter my dreams with small sparks of teasing colour and taunting tastes. I wish I could have and reach out and-

The mountain ranges of the north Taklamakan Desert scare me. The sand glides over each other, like each grain is trying to escape the vast sun, but to no avail. Grains that look solid from a far but easily and quickly give way beneath you, threatening to steal you and your load when you try to cross. When I first heard the tales I thought of large grey mountains of rock and ore, covered in snow. But these harsh lands of small grains are what ended up being served to me on a golden sun covered platter. The colours here are the same, nothing to show where is where, which is back and which is forward. Sometimes that comforts me. Hanging, seemingly unmoving in time. But comfort from the desert is rare. Comfort anywhere on this road is rare.

Sleep, though always engulfing but never consuming, will take me places off my route before snapping me back to harsh life, that is the life of the one who carries the riches, the rags and the relish. That is the life of the camel.