

Xiào Ào Jiāng Hú
Smiling Proud Wanderer Vol 03

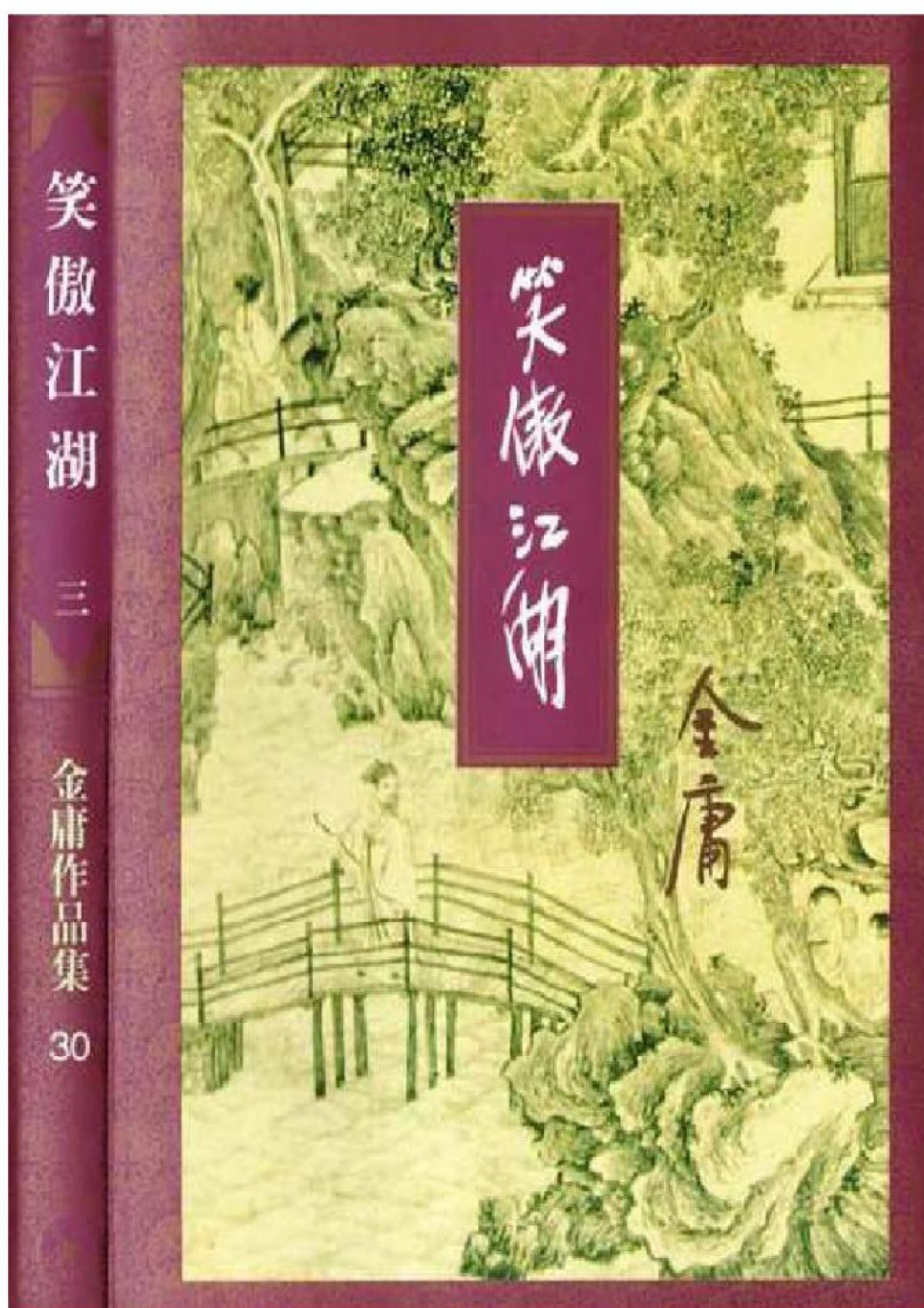
by
Jin Yong

Translators:

Lanny Lin
Pokit
Bliss

Editor:

HHaung



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Ebook Compiler's note

This was originally translated by and posted online by

- Lanny Lin (<http://www.lannyland.com>, <http://blog.lannyland.com>) (Chapters 1 to 21)
- Pokit (<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/showthread.php/17771-Smiling-Proud-Wanderer-Unabridged>) (Chapters 22 to 40)
- Bliss (Chapters 30,31)
- Editor: HHaung

I compiled it as part of an ongoing effort to create a repository of the online fan translations of wuxia fiction in a more convenient format for offline reading.

Unfortunately there does not appear to a large commercial market for English wuxia translations, so we are beholden to by Lanny, Pokit and others for their efforts to bring the work of Jin Yong, Gu Long et al to an English speaking audience.

Additionally, I would note that the work involved goes far beyond just translation.

Chinese cannot simply be directly translated to English, so am grateful for the notes explaining idioms in addition to notes on geography, culture and historical context.

I have left the translations as I found them with the following caveats.

- I added the pictures and chapter descriptions from Lanny's website
- I received chapters 1 to 21 in a MS Word document from Lanny which included footnotes, whereas I assembled Chapters 22 onwards from the online version. The online version used inline notation, but I changed the inline explanations to footnotes for consistency's sake.

Other Translations

We have a repository of some of the existing online translations, including links and many downloads in eBook format.

<http://wuxiatranslations.wikispaces.com>

There is also a sister site, also with downloads but more emphasis on original translations and forum discussions.

<http://wuxiasociety.com>

Other good sources for translations are

<http://www.lannyland.com>

<http://www.spcnet.tv/forums/forumdisplay.php/29-Wuxia-Translations>

<http://xiaoshuo.genreverse.com>

http://haddjo.freehostia.com/joomla_1.5.3/index.php

<http://tu-shu-guan.blogspot.tw/>

<http://mywuxia.com>

Helping out with Wuxia Translations At [Wuxia Translations](#), we are always looking volunteers, both for translation and eBook compilation/formatting For Translators we need.

- Native level Mandarin
 - Excellent written English
 - Understanding of, and enthusiasm for, wuxia, martial arts, Chinese literature and history.
 - Ability to take the initiative to do further research regarding the terms and idioms used in Chinese to avoid making literal translations.
 - Ability to collaborate/ share work.

For help with compilation and formatting we just need

- Web access.
- Moderate proficiency with MS Word
- Ability to follow standardized formats
- Ability to collaborate/ share work.

Our ultimate goal is to get all the major wuxia works translated and available to English readers in one location If you or a friend would like to help, please get in touch at N1ghtT1iger71@gmail.com

Contents

[Chapter 21 Life in Prison](#)

[Chapter 22 Out of Trouble](#)

[Chapter 23 Ambush](#)

[Chapter 24 Injustice](#)

[Chapter 25 Information](#)

[Chapter 26 Besieging the Temple](#)

[Chapter 27 Three Fights](#)

[Chapter 28 Accumulation of Snow](#)

[Chapter 29 Headmaster](#)

[Chapter 30 Secret Meeting](#)

Chapter 21 Life in Prison

Translated by Lanny Lin



Before Black-White Piece could figure out his mistake, his wrist was already seized. In a hurry, he rotated his wrist to grab back while pulling his arm back, and then swiftly kicked out with his left foot.

When Linghu Chong finally came around, he found himself surrounded by complete darkness, knowing neither where he was nor how long he had been out cold. The headache was so bad that he almost felt as though somebody had cracked his head open and loud thunder-like rumbles still rumbled continuously in his ears. He tried in vain to get back onto his feet but found no strength left in him at all.

“I must be dead already and have been buried into a grave,” he thought as the strong sense of grief and fuss quickly overwhelmed him and he fainted once again.

By the time he woke up the second time, although his headache didn't get any better, the ringing in his ears did lighten up a great deal. He felt something cold and hard underneath him as though he was lying upon something made of iron or steel. A quick feel with his hand soon confirmed that it was indeed a steel plate underneath the straw mat. As soon as he moved his right hand, a light clank broke out, and at the same time he felt something icy-cold tied around his wrist. When he tried to feel it with his left hand, the clanking sound rose again. Turned out that his left wrist also had something tied around it. A mixed feeling of shock, joy, and fear soared in his heart. Now he was sure that he had not died but had been shackled. He felt it again with his left hand and then came to realization that it was a thin steel chain tied around his wrist. A slight move of his two feet also revealed steel chains shackled around his ankles. He opened his eyes as wide as he could and stared forward, but did not see even a glimmer of light.

“I was having a sword match with the Revered Mr. Ren right before I fainted. How did I fall for the machination of the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan?” he asked himself. “It looks as though I am also locked up in the dungeon underneath the lake. Have I been locked up in the same place together with the Revered Mr. Ren?” At that thought, he called out immediately, “Revered Mr. Ren? Revered Mr. Ren?”

He called out twice, but did not hear anything in return. Feeling of great shock grew stronger and stronger in his heart and he called out even louder, “Mr. Ren! Mr. Ren!” But once again, all he could hear in the pitch black were his own hoarse and vexed cries.

As desperation began to sink in, he shouted out at the top of his lungs, “First Master! Fourth Master! Why have you locked me in here? Let me out! Let me out!” But other than his own shouting, there was not another sound all the while.

Soon panic turned into rage, and he began pouring out streams of abuses, “You despicable, brazen, evil scum! You couldn’t beat me in the sword matches, so you figured that you could lock me up here to get even? How shameless you are!” But the thought that he would be locked up in the dark dungeon underneath the lake for the rest of his life just like the Revered Mr. Ren instantly made his hair stand on end and his heart filled with despair. The more he thought about it, the more afraid he became, he couldn’t help but bawl on top of his lungs, and before he knew it, the bawling had turned into loud wails, and tears had streamed down his cheeks uncontrollably.

“You four...four despicable scoundrels...of the Plum Manor,” he cried in a hoarse voice, “If I can make it out of here one day, I’ll...I’ll blind...blind your eyes with my sword, and sever...sever both your arms and legs.... Once I escape the dark dungeon....” But suddenly he fell silent when a loud voice echoed in his head, “Will I ever escape the dark dungeon? Will I ever escape the dark dungeon? Even Revered Mr. Ren, such a capable man, can’t get out. How...how can I make a difference?” Anxiety immediately surged in his heart. Feeling really sick in his stomach, he vomited, and after a few gags of blood, he fainted again.

In the wooziness, he thought he heard a cracking sound, and immediately after, bright light dazzled his eyes. Waking up abruptly, he leapt to his feet, but he forgot that both of his wrists and ankles were still shackled by steel chains. Furthermore, he did not have much strength left in him, so only instants later, he fell back down heavily and all the bones in his body seemed to have been falling apart. Having been in complete darkness for a long while, his eyes were not adept to sudden lights, but for fear that the gleam of light might just vanish as abruptly as it appeared, voiding him of any opportunity to escape, he kept his eyes wide open and stared hard toward the origin of the light despite the stinging pain.

The gleam of light had come from a one-foot wide, square-shaped opening. And he remembered at once: the dungeon cell Revered Mr. Ren lived in also had a squared-shaped opening on the iron door. In fact, it had one exactly

identical to this one. He took a quick glance around and then confirmed that he was, indeed, also locked in the same kind of dungeon cell.

“Let me out of here! Huang-Zhong, Black-White, you despicable scoundrels, let me out if you’ve got any guts!” he shouted out.

A large wooden tray came forth slowly through the square-shaped opening, on top of which was a large bowl of rice with some cooked food piled on top. There was also an earthen jar, which apparently held some soup or water.

This sight made Linghu Chong even angrier, thinking, “Bringing food and water to me only means that you want to lock me in here for an extended period.” So he cursed loudly, “You four dirty swine, listen up! If you want me dead, just come forward and give me your best shot. Stop playing games!”

But the wooden tray remained still. The person outside the door obviously wanted him to take the tray in. Infuriated, Linghu Chong reached out and struck it hard. Loud clangs echoed as the rice bowl and the earthen jar fell to the ground and smashed into pieces. Food and soup splashed everywhere. Slowly, the wooden tray retracted out of the opening.

In a storm of rage, Linghu Chong threw himself at the squared-shaped opening, and then he saw a completely gray-headed old man, a light in his left hand and the wooden tray in his right hand, turning away unhurriedly. Deep wrinkles covered the man’s entire face, a face Linghu Chong had never seen before.

“Go get Huang-Zhong or Black-White here! Tell those four shameless scoundrels to come here and fight me like a man if they’ve gotten any guts!” Linghu Chong shouted out.

But the old man didn’t pay him the slightest attention and kept walking further and further away unhurriedly, stooping low with his back.

Linghu Chong watched on as the man slowly disappeared around the corner of the tunnel. The light also gradually dimmed until it finally faded into gloom. After a short while, he vaguely heard the sounds of gates opening followed by sounds of the wooden gate and the iron gate closing down one after another.

And then once again, the tunnel was enveloped by complete darkness, without a glimmer of light or the slightest of sound.

Linghu Chong felt another strong dizziness in his head. After staring blankly into the blackness for a moment, he decided to lie down on the bed for better concentration with his thoughts.

“The old man delivering food to me must have had strict orders to not exchange any word with me. It would be useless to shout at him,” he thought to himself. “This dungeon cell looks identical to the one Revered Mr. Ren lives in. I guess there are quite a few prison cells built under the Plum Manor. I wonder how many people they have locked up down here. If somehow I can connect with the Revered Mr. Ren, or with any other fellow prisoners here, by working together and uniting our efforts, who knows, we might be able to find a way out of here.”

At that thought, he extended his arm and knocked on the wall. But the clanking sounds clearly indicated that it was made of sheer steel. The sounds were both heavy and dull. Obviously there was no space on the other side of the wall except solid ground.

He walked to another wall and also knocked on it, but again, the responding sounds were both heavy and dull. Not willing to give up, Linghu Chong sat back on the bed and knocked on the wall behind him. Once again, the sounds were still the same.

Feeling his way along the walls, he carefully knocked on every inch of all the three walls, but other than the side of the wall with the iron door, this dungeon cell seemed to have been buried deep underground all alone. There, of course, had to be other dungeon cells underground, at least one another, which had the Ren named old man locked in. But he had no clue where that dungeon cell might be or even how far it was from his own cell.

Leaning against the wall, he very carefully reviewed, in his head, the series of events that had happened before he fainted. He could remember how the old man's sword moves became faster and faster as his shouting also became louder

and louder. Then, all of a sudden, there was that earthshaking roar, right after which he lost his consciousness. But how on earth was he captured by the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, and then sent to this prison cell, he couldn't remember a thing about it.

“The four Manor Masters all appeared to be talented persons of poetic temperament on the surface, even their day-to-day amusements are related to Music, Gamesmanship, Calligraphy, and Painting these Four Arts. Who would have imagined that underneath their pretending skin, they were all filthy, contemptible characters who stop at no evil,” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “There were many vile characters like these in the Martial World and it shouldn't have come to one's surprise. But the strange thing was that these four Manor Masters did hold genuine interests in the art of music, gamesmanship, calligraphy, and painting, which would have been impossible for them to pretend. When Mr. Bald-Brush wrote the ‘General Pei Poem’ on the wall, his writing was completely free from inhibition, something not a normal martial arts master could have accomplished.”

Then he thought, “Master once said, ‘Only people with extreme aptitude are capable of extreme evil.’ That is so true. The scam the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan pulled is indeed hard to guard against.”

Suddenly a thought struck him. He cried out and jumped back onto his feet, his heart pounding madly. “What happened to Big Brother Xiang? Has he fallen for their murderous scheme as well?” But then he thought, “Big Brother Xiang is a man of shrewdness and improvisation. He seems to have known about the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan's conducts beforehand. As the Right Luminous Advisor of the Demon's Cult, he has roamed the Martial World for many years. He won't fall for their trap easily. And as long as he is not stranded by the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan, he will try to rescue me for sure. Even if I were to be locked up one thousand feet below ground, Big Brother Xiang would still be able to get me out of here. He has the ability to do that.” At that thought, he found himself much relaxed. Carrying a big grin on his face, he muttered to himself, “Linghu Chong! Linghu Chong! Did you know that you are a real

coward? Scared into crying like a baby, where are you going to hide your face if people find out about this?”

Feeling relieved, he stood up slowly, then immediately realized how thirsty and hungry he had been. “Too bad I threw a fit and knocked over the perfectly fine rice meal and the water. If I don’t stuff myself, after Big Brother Xiang rescue me out of here, where am I gonna find strength to battle the Four Skunks of Jiangnan? Ha-ha, that’s right, the Four Skunks of Jiangnan! How can such vile skunks be worthy of the title the ‘Four Playfellows of Jiangnan?’ Out of the four skunks, Mr. Black-White had to be the most sinister one, always wearing that blank, collected countenance on his face. He is probably the one who came up with the entire scheme. Once I break out of here, killing him will be the first thing on my to-do list. Mr. Paint, on the other hand, seems to be relatively frank; I might as well spare his despicable life. But in regard to his collection of great wines, ha-ha, I’ll drink them all up, leaving not even one drop behind.” At the thought of Mr. Paint’s great wine collection, he found his mouth burning with thirst.

“How long have I been unconscious? Why hasn’t Big Brother Xiang come to my rescue?” he wondered. Then another thought popped out, “Oh, no! If it were a fight one-on-one, Big Brother Xiang’s Kung Fu skills are more than sufficient to defeat any one of the Four Skunks of Jiangnan. But if those four skunks attack Big Brother Xiang all at once, then Big Brother Xiang would have a hard time winning the battle. Even if Big Brother Xiang gave full play to his ability and kill all four of them, it would be impossible for him to find the entrance of this underground dungeon. Who would have expected to find the dungeon entrance hidden underneath Mr. Huang-Zhong’s bed?”

Feeling completely worn out, he lay down on the bed when another thought suddenly came upon him. “The Revered Mr. Ren’s Kung Fu skills are undoubtedly greater than those of Big Brother Xiang’s, and his wit, experience and foresight also outclass that of Big Brother Xiang. Even he became a prisoner in the dungeon, what makes Big Brother Xiang so special that he could ensure victory? Straightforward gentlemen often fall prey of machination from the vile.

It is well said that covert attack is far more difficult to defend against than overt attack. Since Big Brother Xiang hasn't come to my rescue after such a long while, could he have fallen for their trap?" He instantly forgot all about his own trouble, but began worrying about Xiang Wentian's safety, instead.

He let his thoughts go off into wild flights of fancy, and before long, he fell asleep. When he woke up again, he had no idea what time it was, and all he could see was still complete darkness.

"It is simply impossible for me to escape by myself," he thought to himself. "If, unfortunately, Big Brother Xiang also falls for their scheme, then who else might come to free me? Master has announced to the entire world that I am expelled from the Huashan Sword School; of course people from the orthodox schools won't be coming to my rescue. Ying-Ying, Ying-Ying...."

As soon as he thought of Ying-Ying, his spirit soared, and he sat up, thinking, "She asked Old Man to spread the word to the entire Martial World that she wants me killed; those people from the unorthodox schools of course won't be coming to my rescue, but what about her, herself? If she learned that I am trapped here, she would surely come to save me. Many people from the unorthodox schools follow her commands. All she needs to do is to let the word out. Ha-ha...." He suddenly chortled, thinking, "This girl is so bashful. What she fears the most is people saying that she likes me. Even if she does come to my rescue, she would surely come alone and would never ask for help from anyone. And if someone learns that she is coming to save me, he most probably would lose his life because of that. Alas, what goes on in a girl's thinking is truly incomprehensible. Like, for example, Little Apprentice Sister...."

As soon as Little Apprentice Sister came to his mind, his heart ached, and the feeling of grief and despair deepened. "Why am I hoping that someone might come and rescue me? By now, Little Apprentice Sister and junior apprentice brother Lin probably have already wedded. Even if I can get out of here somehow, what's there to look for outside? It's probably much better if I get locked up in this dark dungeon for the rest of my life and I never find out what happens outside."

Once he figured out the benefit of being locked up in the dungeon, his worries seemed to have slipped away and he even felt somewhat pleased with the situation. But the elated feeling did not last long when he was soon overwhelmed with hunger and thirst. Haunted by the memories of the great enjoyments he had when he drank bowls after bowls of wine served with large steaks in the various wine houses, he decided it would still be better if he could get out of the dungeon, after all.

“Well, if Little Apprentice Sister wedded junior apprentice brother Lin, so what? I’ve already been pushed around by others many times, anyhow. I am already an invalid with none of my inner strength left in me. Doctor Ping said that I don’t have many days left. Even if Little Apprentice Sister is willing to marry me, I can’t marry her. How can I let her stay a widow the rest of her life?”

But deep in his heart, he still felt that even though he wouldn’t let Yue Lingshan marry him even if she wanted to, Yue Lingshan’s falling in love with Lin Pingzhi was just too agonizing for him to withstand. But what could he wish for? “I wish Little Apprentice Sister were still the same as before. I wish none of this had ever happened, and I would still be practicing sword arts with her in the waterfall atop Mount Huashan, and junior apprentice brother Lin never came to Mount Huashan, and Little Apprentice Sister and I would be happily spending the rest of our lives together. Alas, Tian Boguang, Peach Valley’s Six Fairies, apprentice sister Yilin....”

At the thought of Heng-Shan Sword School’s little Sister Yilin, he could no longer hold a straight face and a gentle smile crept onto his lips. “I wonder how this apprentice sister Yilin is doing right now,” he thought. “If she learns that I am locked up here, she must be very worried. Her Master undoubtedly wouldn’t allow her to come and save me after reading the letter from my Master, but she might ask her father, Monk No-Commandment, to do it for her. Who knows, Monk No-Commandment might even invite the Peach Valley’s Six Fairies to tag along. Ha, those seven are a total mess and would only mess things up even more. But having people coming for my rescue is still better than having no one paying any attention.”

When he thought of the Peach Valley's Six Fairies' constant nagging and arguing, he couldn't help but grin. When they were around him in the past, he did belittle the six brothers somewhat, but at this point in time, how he wished they could be accompanying him inside the prison cell. Their unintelligible remarks would have sounded like heavenly music to his ears at the moment. He let his thoughts run wild and soon dozed off once again.

In the pitch black dungeon cell he had no way of knowing the time. In his wooziness, he noticed a glimmer of faint light coming through the squared-shaped opening. Linghu Chong was ecstatic. He sat up immediately, his heart thumping wildly, thinking, "Who has come to rescue me?" But his joy did not last long. Soon came the sound of heavy and slow footsteps, apparently from the old man who brought food to him. Much dispirited, he let his body collapse back down.

"Ask those four skunks to come here; see if they've still got any guts to show their faces here!" Linghu Chong shouted.

He could hear the sound of the footsteps getting closer and closer. The light also became brighter and brighter. Then a wooden tray was pushed in from the squared-shaped opening on the door. On the wooden tray were a large bowl of rice and an earthen jar just like the last time. Linghu Chong had been fighting his hunger for a good while and his thirst had also become unbearable. After a slight hesitation, he reached out and took the wooden tray. As soon as the old man let go of the wooden tray, he turned around to walk away.

"Hey! Hey! Wait a second! I have something to ask you!" Linghu Chong called out.

But the old man completely ignored him. Sound of footsteps faded gradually as the old man dragged his feet along the way and the light also faded gradually. Linghu Chong murmured a few curses and then picked up the earthen jar. Raising the jar next to his mouth, he poured the content into his mouth. Sure enough, the jar was filled with clear water. He drank up almost half jar of water in one breath before touching the bowl of rice. Piled on top of the rice were some vegetables. He tasted them in the dark and was able to tell there were some

radish, tofu, and the like.

The same routine went on for seven or eight days. The old man would bring food to him once everyday and then collect the previous day's utensils and water jar together with the jug for human waste. Regardless of what Linghu Chong said to him, his face remained expressionless. Then one day, as soon as Linghu Chong saw the light, he threw himself at the square-shaped opening and grabbed the wooden tray, shouting, "Why don't you speak to me? Haven't you heard me?"

The old man pointed at his own ear and shook his head, indicating that he was deaf. Then he opened his mouth. What Linghu Chong saw shocked him and he couldn't help but gasp. The old man only had half of his tongue left in his mouth; the scene was horrific.

"Someone cut your tongue off? Did the four god-damned Manor Masters do this to you?" Linghu Chong uttered.

The old man did not answer and simply pushed the wooden tray through the square-shaped opening. He obviously could not hear Linghu Chong's words. Even if he could, he had no way of answering.

Linghu Chong was terrified. Even after the old man had long left, he couldn't bring himself to eat. The terrifying image of the old man's remaining portion of his tongue flashed again and again in front of his eyes.

"Those Four Skunks of Jiangnan are too evil," he murmured to himself as hatred quickly filled his heart. "Unless I am locked up here for life, if one day Linghu Chong can escape from this dungeon, I swear that I'll find the four skunks, and one by one, I'll cut off their tongues, drill their ears, and prick their eyes...."

Suddenly he thought of something from deep within his memories. "Could it have been them...them...?" He remembered that night how he blinded the fifteen masked men's eyes outside of the monastery, but as to the origin of those people, he never found out. "Could it be that they locked me up in this dungeon cell to take vengeance for their suffering?" At that thought, he heaved a long

sigh, and much of the grudge and hatred built up in the past many days evaporated instantly. "I blinded those fifteen men's eyes. It's only natural that they want their revenge," he thought aloud.

Once his anger eased off, each day seemed to be a bit easier to get by. There was no difference between days and nights in the underground prison; Linghu Chong completely lost track of days and could only tell that each day was hotter than the previous day. He figured that it must have been mid-summer already. There was not even a whiff of wind in the small dungeon cell. The humid heat just got worse and worse everyday. Then the day came when the heat became simply unbearable. With steel chains shackled around his wrists and ankles, he could not take off his clothes completely. Having no other alternatives, he could only pull his shirt upward and pushed his pants downward as much as he could. After rolling the ragged mat on the bed and placing it to a corner of the bed, he lay down on the steel plate half naked. Immediately, he felt cool and refreshing and his perspiration also improved dramatically. It didn't take long for him to fall asleep. A few hours went by quickly. In the daze, when he felt the part of steel plate under his body had been heated up by him, he moved his body inward to find a cooler spot. Pressing his left palm on the steel plate, he vaguely felt some kind of lines of patterns carved onto the steel plate, but in the heavy drowsiness, he paid no attention to it and soon was sound asleep.

This nap was so comfortable; when Linghu Chong woke up, he felt completely refreshed. Not long after, the old man came as usual, delivering food to him. Linghu Chong had great sympathy for the old man, and every time when the old man pushed the wooden tray in through the square-shaped opening, he would always squeeze the old man's finger gently or pat a few times on the old man's hand to show his compassion. This time was no exception. After he took the wooden tray and was just about to retract his arms, all of a sudden, under the dim light, he spotted three words imprinted on the back of his left hand. It clearly said, "Woxing gets stranded."

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded, having no clue where these words had come from. After a short contemplation, he hurriedly placed the wooden tray on

the floor and reached out to feel the steel plate on the bed. Turned out the steel plate was covered with carved words, so thickly dotted, he couldn't even tell how many there were. Linghu Chong understood at once. The words were carved onto the steel plate before he even came, but because the steel plate had always been covered by the mat, he was never aware of it, until yesterday when he slept half-naked directly on top of the steel plate. That was how the words got imprinted on the back of his hand. Extending his hand to his backside he felt his back and his behind, and he was unable to stifle a laugh. There were words marked on his skin everywhere he felt. Each character was about the size of a copper coin. The strokes were very deep, but the handwriting was hasty and careless.

By then the old man who delivered the food had been long gone and the dungeon cell was once again engulfed in complete darkness. Linghu Chong's curiosity overpowered his hunger. After taking a few quick drinks from the earthen jar, he began feeling the words carved on the steel plate slowly from the very beginning, one character at a time, and read them out in a soft voice:

“I have been straightforward and willful all my life, killing people like flies. Imprisonment underneath the lake probably is the retribution I deserve. Only that when the old fellow Ren Woxing gets stranded...” At this character, Linghu Chong thought, “So the words ‘Woxing gets stranded’ came from this sentence.” He went on feeling the characters and the words continued, “...here, his extraordinary divine art that exceeds lofty will inevitably perish together with the old fellow's skeleton, and people in the aftertime would not have known his exceptional and magical power. What a great pity that would be!”

Linghu Chong paused and raised his head. “Old fellow Ren Woxing!¹ Old fellow Ren Woxing!” he pondered. “Then the man who carved these words of course is named Ren Woxing. So this man's last name is Ren as well. I wonder if he is related to the Revered Mr. Ren in anyway.” But then he thought better of it, “This underground prison probably was built a long time ago, and the man who carved these words probably passed away decades or even centuries ago.”

He went on feeling the characters and the carvings read, “That's why I am

writing down the succinct principles and secrets of my divine art, so people from the aftertime can practice the divine art and gain the ability to freely roam the world, then although the old man's flesh will parish, his name will become immortal. Number one, Sitting Meditation....” Then what followed were various breathing exercises and meditation techniques.

Ever since Linghu Chong learned the “Dugu Nine Swords,” he was only fond of sword art in the many types of Martial Arts, and since he had lost all his inner strength, when he recognized the words “Sitting Meditation,” his heart was filled with disappointment. He hoped that somewhere within the remaining words from which he would be able to find a form of exceptional sword art and he might as well learn this sword art as self-entertainment inside the dark dungeon cell. The hope of escape had become more and more distant and indistinct. If he didn't find something to occupy himself, life in prison could be very difficult. But the words afterwards were always terms for inner strength cultivation such as “breathing,” “concentrate the spirit in the lower abdomen,” “redirecting the strength to Jin-Jing²,” “Ren Passage” and the like. He followed the characters all the way to the end of the steel plate and still couldn't find even one character resembling the character “sword.”

Linghu Chong found himself utterly frustrated. “What extraordinary divine art that exceeds the lofty? This man has played a good joke on me! It could have been any other type of Martial Arts; why did it have to be an art of inner strength cultivation, the only one I cannot practice? As soon as I try to gather my inner strength, the energy streams inside my chest and abdomen would roll over and over, clashing with each other. I'd be asking for trouble myself if practice inner strength cultivation.” He heaved a heavy sigh and picked up the rice bowl to eat, thinking to himself, “What kind of person is this Ren Woxing? He was certainly very arrogant, talking about exceeding lofty and roaming the world, as though he had no match in the entire world. This dungeon turned out to be used specifically to imprison superior Kung Fu Masters.”

When he first discovered the words carved on the steel plate, his excitement soared high, but by now he had the least interest left in him, thinking, “Heaven

can really play tricks on mortals. I probably wouldn't feel so down if I never found these words." Then he thought, "If that Ren Woxing was as capable as how he boasted himself, why he was still stranded here and couldn't get away? Evidently this underground prison is simply too durable and secure to break out. Regardless of how capable the captive is, once locked in, all he could do is to slowly and painfully wait for his end to come." Having come to a conclusion, he paid no more attention to the words on the steel plate.

The city of Hangzhou almost turned into a steam box in the hot summer time. The dungeon was located deep underneath the lake. Without getting the heat from the direct sunshine, it should have been much cooler, but firstly, the dungeon had no ventilation, and secondly, it had always been overly humid, it turned out a different type of misery for its occupant. Everyday Linghu Chong would strip off as much clothing as he could and sleep on the steel plate half-naked. Whenever he moved his hand, he would feel the carved characters on the steel plate. As days went by, he had memorized many of the words and sentences subconsciously. One day when he was wondering where his Master, Master-Wife and Little Apprentice Sister might be and whether they had returned to Mount Huashan, he suddenly heard the sound of footsteps coming toward him. This time, the sound was quick and light, completely different from the sound made by the food-delivering old man. After spending many days locked inside, he had not been as anxiously looking forward to a rescuer, so when he suddenly heard the sound of a different set of footsteps, the feeling of surprise and joy instantly welled up his heart. He wanted to leap to his feet, but the ecstasy was so strong and overwhelming, he suddenly lost all his strength and could only lie still on the bed, not able to move a single muscle. The sound of footsteps quickly approached the iron-door.

A voice came from outside the iron-door, "Mr. Ren, it has been very hot in the last couple of days. May I ask if the revered mister still enjoys his good health?"

As soon as Linghu Chong heard the voice, he recognized it instantly. It was the voice of Mr. Black-White. If he had come to his cell one month before, Linghu Chong would have shouted all kinds of invective at him with no scruples.

However, after many days of imprisonment, his anger had mollified a great deal and he was able to think calmly.

“Why did he call me Mr. Ren? Has he come to the wrong cell?” he thought to himself and decided to remain silent and listen on.

“Every two months, I come and ask the revered mister the same question. Today is the first day of July, so please allow me to ask once again: Will the revered mister grant my request?” Mr. Black-White continued, his tone respectful and cautious.

Linghu Chong laughed inwardly. “He got the prison cells all mixed up and must have thought I am the Revered Mr. Ren. How careless of him!” But immediately after, he felt a chill in his heart. “Mr. Black-White obviously is the most meticulous one among the four Masters of the Plum Manor. It might be possible for Mr. Bald-Brush or Mr. Paint to mix up the prison cells, but how could Mr. Black-White actually make such a mistake? There must be a reason behind this.” With that in mind, he kept his silence.

Mr. Black-White continued, “Revered Mr. Ren, valiant and capable all your life, why let yourself languish with the decaying dust in the underground dungeon? My words are as firm as the mountain. If the revered mister grants me my request, I promise I will help the revered mister get out of this prison.”

Linghu Chong’s heart thumped wildly. Many thoughts raced through his mind, but he failed to put them in order. What was Mr. Black-White really after and why did he speak this way? He simply couldn’t figure it out. Then he heard Mr. Black-White asking a second time.

“Will the revered mister grant my request?”

Linghu Chong knew that this could be the very opportunity for him to escape. Despite any possible ill intentions, it would still have been a much better alternative than getting stranded forever in the underground prison for some unknown reasons. But having no way of identifying Mr. Black-White’s true intention, he bit his lip and remained silent, afraid that he might say something wrong to ruin this precious opportunity.

“Revered Mr. Ren, why aren’t you speaking up?” Mr. Black-White heaved a sigh. “Last time, when that boy Feng challenged you in the art of sword, you didn’t mention a single word about my request in front of my three sworn-brothers. I am truly grateful for the kindness. I thought to myself, the sword fight must have brought back the many fond memories and the lofty sentiments in Revered Mr. Ren’s heart, and reminded him of the vast world outside. If your Excellency could break out of the dark dungeon, the entire world would be yours for the taking, and you can snuff out any mundane life at will, whether male or female, old or young; and no one would ever dare defy your wish. Wouldn’t that be exhilarating? Granting the request would not have brought any nuisance to your own. Why wouldn’t you ever consent in the past twelve years?”

Linghu Chong could sense the sincerity in his voice. Apparently he really thought he was addressing senior master Ren, which puzzled Linghu Chong even more. He listened on as Mr. Black-White begged again and again for him to agree to the request. Linghu Chong really wanted to know more details about the request, but he reckoned that the situation would take an immediate bad turn if he opened his mouth. Holding his tongue forcibly with great effort, he dared not make the slightest sound.

“If the revered mister is still so stubborn, I guess I’ll visit him again in two months,” Mr. Black-White concluded. He suddenly let out a few chuckles. “The revered mister didn’t scold me this time. Maybe there’s a favorable turn in the situation. I hope the revered mister will give my request some good consideration in the next two months.” After those words, he turned around to exit.

Linghu Chong became quite worried. It would be another two months before Mr. Black-White would return, and how could he stand another two months of the miserable life in the pitch-black prison? He waited until Mr. Black-White had taken several steps and then spoke up in an intentionally lowered and coarse voice.

“What request shall I grant?”

Mr. Black-White turned around at once, and with a swift leap, he had returned back to the square-shaped opening.

“You will...you will grant me my request?” His voice trembled.

Linghu Chong turned to face the wall and covered his mouth with his hand.

“What request?” he said in a muffled voice.

“In the past twelve years, I would take on great risks to come here six times each year, just so that I could implore for the revered mister to consent. Why is the revered mister asking when the answer is so obvious?”

“I forgot!” Linghu Chong snorted.

“I would like the revered mister to teach me the secret of the magical art. Once I master the skills, I promise to let the revered mister out of this place.”

“Has he really mistaken me for that senior master Ren, or is this some kind of intrigue?” Linghu Chong pondered. Still having no clue about Mr. Black-White’s true intentions, he mumbled something indistinct, not even knowing what he said himself.

Naturally, Mr. Black-White didn’t understand a word of his, and had to ask again and again, “Will the revered mister grant it? Will the revered mister grant it?”

“You don’t live up to your promise. You won’t fool me,” Linghu Chong replied.

“What kind of guarantee would I have to provide so the revered mister will believe my words?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I understand the revered mister’s worries. What if I break my promise after the revered mister teaches me the secret of the magical art and still not let him out? There is no need to worry! I have it all arranged, and the revered mister can put his trust in my arrangement,” Mr. Black-White answered.

“What arrangement?”

“Does this mean the revered mister will grant me my request?” Mr. Black-White asked quickly, his voice filled with excitement.

Linghu Chong thought very quickly, “He wants me to teach him the secret of the magical art. Where the heck would I find this secret of the magical art? But I might as well check out his arrangement. If he really will let me out of this place, I could just give him those meditation techniques carved on the steel plate. Who cares if it works or not, it doesn’t hurt to give him some false hope.”

When Mr. Black-White didn’t hear an answer, he added, “After the revered mister teaches me the magical art, I would have automatically become an apprentice of the revered mister. In our cult, an apprentice who deceives his master is to be skinned and dismembered alive. In the past several hundred years, not a single one had managed to get away from the harsh punishment. How would I ever dare to not let the revered mister out?”

“I see,” Linghu Chong let out another snort. “Come back in three days to get your answer.”

“Why won’t the revered mister grant my request today? Why wait another three days in this dark dungeon?” Mr. Black-White pleaded.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “He is even more impatient than I am. It might be a good idea to wait three days and see if he’s going to pull some clever tricks.” At that thought, he produced a loud, disgruntled humph as if he was very annoyed.

“Sure! Sure! I shall return in three days so I could ask advice from the revered mister again!” Mr. Black-White hurriedly agreed.

Linghu Chong listened as Mr. Black-White walked out of the underground tunnel and closed the iron gate while many unsettling thoughts swirled inside his head.

“Could he really have mistaken me as the Ren-named senior master? He is a very meticulous man. How could he make such a silly mistake?”

Suddenly, an idea struck him. “Could it be possible that Mr. Huang-Zhong

found out about Mr. Black-White's visits and secretly moved senior master Ren to another cell, then put me in this cell instead? That's got to be it! In the past twelve years, Mr. Black-White had been paying a visit every other month. It's very likely that someone found out about it. It must have been Mr. Huang-Zhong who set up this scheme clandestinely."

Then, he remembered what Mr. Black-White had said earlier. "In our cult, an apprentice who deceives his master is to be skinned and dismembered alive. In the past several hundred years, not a single one had managed to get away from the harsh punishment."

"Our cult? Which cult?" he thought it over. "Could it be the Demon's Cult? Is it possible that the senior master Ren and the Four Skunks of Jiangnan are all members of the Demon's Cult? What kind of game are they playing? Why are they dragging me into this mess?"

As soon as the name "Demon's Cult" came to his mind, he found the entire matter surreptitious and beyond his comprehension, and decided to not ponder upon it. Instead, he concentrated only on two things: "Was Mr. Black-White sincere or was he just acting it up? How shall I answer him when he comes back in three days?"

All kinds of strange idea went through his mind, but no matter how hard he tried, he still couldn't figure out Mr. Black-White's true intentions. After some time, he became extremely weary and fell asleep. By the time he woke up, his first thought was, "If brother Xiang were here, with his experience and knowledge, he would have guessed Mr. Black-White's intention in no time. That Ren-named senior master was also very bright, likely even smarter than brother Xiang...oops!"

He suddenly cried out and jumped to his feet. After the nap, his brain functioned much better and he realized something.

"For the last twelve years, senior master Ren never granted him the request. Why? Because he knew very well what would happen if he did. As sharp and experienced as he is, he clearly knew the pros and cons of the matter." Then he

thought to himself, “Although senior master Ren should not grant the request, I am not senior master Ren. Why can’t I?”

He knew he shouldn’t do it. He could even smell the great danger involved, yet the hope of escape weighed heavily on his mind, and he would risk the greatest calamity just for an opportunity to break out from the dark underground dungeon. He soon made up his mind.

“When Mr. Black-White comes back in three days, I will consent to his request and teach him the inner strength cultivation and meditation techniques carved on the steel plate. Then I’ll just act according to his reactions.”

Having decided, he began tracing the handwritings on the steel plate and tried to memorize every word of it.

“I must completely memorize this thing, so that the formulas will simply bolt out when I teach him and he will never have any doubt about it. Only that my voice is too different from that of the senior master Ren. I’ll really have to lower my voice. I’ve got an idea! I can shout at the top of my lungs for the next two days and dampen my voice. Then I’ll also mumble when I speak, so it’ll be hard for him to detect anything unusual.”

In the next while, Linghu Chong would spend some time reading the formulas on the steel plate, and then spend the next moment shouting out loud. He knew that the dungeon was located deep underground, and with the many gates, even if he were to burn firecrackers in the cell, people outside would still not be able to hear anything. Crying at the top of his lungs, he cursed the Four Skunks of Jiangnan for a good while and then began singing songs and theater opera. Eventually, even he, himself, couldn’t withstand his own ugly singing. He burst out into loud laughter. Then he would go back to memorizing the formulas on the steel plate.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong came upon a few sentences: “Make DanTian³ an empty box and a deep valley. Empty box can store objects; deep valley is a reservoir for water. When inner energy flows through, distribute into the acupoints in the Ren Passage.”

He had actually traced these sentences with his fingers a few times before, but since he detested all energy cultivation techniques in his mind, he never really thought about the meaning inside. Now when they caught his attention, he was very dumbfounded.

“When Master taught me inner strength cultivation, the main essentials were all about storing inner energy inside DanTian. The more vigorous and dense the inner entry streams inside DanTian, the stronger the inner strength. Why would this formula say that there should be no inner energy stored inside DanTian? If inner energy cannot reside inside DanTian, then where inner strength would be coming from? No inner strength cultivation methods out there will ever suggest something like this. Is this technique a joke? Ha-ha! Black-White is a wicked and despicable man. Why don't I pass this method on to him and make a fool out of him?”

He traced the handwritings on the steel plate and slowly pondered over the meaning. The first several hundred characters taught techniques on how to disperse one's own inner strength and energy. The more he read it, the more shocked he felt.

“Who in the world would be so stupid and willing to dissolve the inner energy he had once diligently cultivated over his entire life? Unless he was determined to end his life. But if he wanted a suicide, he could just easily slash his throat with his own sword. Why make it so complicated? To dissolve inner energy this way is much more difficult than cultivating inner energy. Besides, what good does it do?”

He mulled over the matter some more and found himself in great depression.

“Once Black-White hears these formulas and techniques, he would know immediately that I am just messing with him. For sure he won't fall for it. I guess my plan is not going to work at all.”

Linghu Chong became more and more annoyed as he recited the words again and again, “when there's inner energy steams inside DanTian, distribute them into the Ren Passage, like a bamboo is empty inside, like a valley is always

void....” Anger built up as he went on and eventually he gave a good smack at his bed and cursed loudly, “Damn it! This guy was angry for being stuck in the dungeon, so he decided to play tricks and make fun of other people.”

He scolded for a while and then fell asleep again. In his sleep, his mind seemed to have started following the formulas on the steel plate and began the exercise. When he thought of the sentence “when there’s inner energy steams inside DanTian, distribute them into the Ren Passage,” a stream of inner energy actually dispersed into his Ren Passage, and he felt ineffable comforts all over his body. This went on for a good while in his wooziness. Half-sleep and half-awake, Linghu Chong could feel the energy streams inside his DanTian still flowing toward the Ren Passage. But all of a sudden, he realized what was going on.

“Oh, no! If my inner energy keeps flowing out like this, I’d turn into an invalid!”

Startled, he sat up hurriedly. The inner energy streams immediately flowed backward from the Ren Passage, and he found himself consumed by strong nausea and dizziness. After a long while, he was finally able to breathe normally. Then, a thought suddenly struck him and brought him a pleasant surprise.

“My inner injuries are so difficult to cure all because I have running wild inside me seven or eight heterogeneous inner energy streams from the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment. Even Dr. Ping One-Finger couldn’t cure me. Great Master Fang-Zheng, the abbot of the Shaolin Temple, said before that only the Tendon Altering Sutra of Shaolin would allow me to gradually tame and dissolve these heterogeneous inner energy streams. But aren’t these inner energy cultivation techniques carved on the steel plate teaching me exactly the same thing – how to dissolve the inner energy streams inside me? Ha-ha! Linghu Chong, you are such a fool! While others fear the loss of their inner energy, you actually fear that the inner energy wouldn’t go away. Now there’s this amazing method just perfect for my case. How wonderful!”

He knew that what happened was only because he dreamed what he thought. Because he recited the formulas again and again when he was awake, those

meditation techniques and breathing exercises carved on the steel plate had occupied his entire mind. Once he fell asleep, his subconsciousness took over and simply started following suit involuntarily. However, since his mind was not focused in his dreams, he didn't really follow the formulas letter to letter. Now, having figured out the great benefit, he found great inspiration. He carefully traced the carvings on the steel plate two more times and made sure he understood the true meanings before sitting down cross-legged in a meditation pose and beginning the energy cultivation step by step.

Only about two hours into the meditation, he could already sense a fraction of the heterogeneous energy streams, which had been stuck and getting wild in his DanTian region for a long time, dispersing into his Ren Passage. Although he still couldn't rid them out of his body, the pain and tension caused by those energy steams rolling over inside him had certainly been greatly reduced.

Great joy welled up in his heart and he couldn't help but jump to his feet and sing at the top of his lungs. He soon realized how ugly and hoarse the singing was. Turned out his previous day's screaming and shouting were very effective and had really done it for his voice.

"Ren Woxing! Ren Woxing! You had left these formulas behind with the intention to cause harm. You probably had no idea that one day I'd run into them and actually benefit instead of suffer from them! If you knew this, you'd probably turn over in your grave and cry! Ha-ha! Ha-ha!" he thought to himself.

He continued working on dispersing energy steams without any break. The more he exercised, the more comfortable he felt. Then he thought.

"After I completely disperse the energy streams from the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment, I could very well start all over with our Huashan School's inner strength cultivation, following the instructions taught by Master. Although I'll have to start from scratch again, and it might take a lot of time and effort, chances are, my life probably would be safe now. If Brother Xiang eventually comes and rescues me out of here, there's a new life waiting for me out there in the martial world!"

Then he had a different thought, “Since Master had already banished me from the Huashan School, why bother practicing Huashan School’s inner strength? There are plenty of inner strength cultivation methods from the many schools in the martial world. Why can’t I study from Brother Xiang or even Ying-Ying?” Desolation and excitement entangled in his mind.

After eating the day’s meal, he practiced the techniques again and felt a great sense of soothing in his entire body. Not able to contain his joy, he burst into hearty laughter. Then, Mr. Black-White’s voice all of a sudden rose from outside of the prison door.

“How are you, revered mister? I have been humbly waiting outside for a good while!”

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded. He had been concentrating so much on the energy cultivation and dispersion that he didn’t even realize that three days had passed and that it was the day he told Mr. Black-White to come back. He didn’t even notice Mr. Black-White’s arrival. Luckily his voice was so coarse now that Mr. Black-White didn’t find anything unusual. He quickly let out several hollow laughs as an acknowledgement.

“The revered mister seems to be in a pleasant mood today. Why not make it the day the revered mister receives a new apprentice?” Mr. Black-White suggested.

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “If I agree to take him in as an apprentice and teach him these energy cultivation techniques, as soon as he opens the door and comes in, he’ll notice that there’s only Feng Er-Zhong, but no revered mister Ren. For sure he’ll have a fall out immediately. Besides, even if it were the real revered mister Ren, once Mr. Black-White learns those techniques, he’ll most likely manage to murder revered mister Ren, like poisoning the food or something. Right! It would be so easy for Black-White to murder me with poison. Why would he want to let me escape after he learns the secret formulas? No wonder revered mister Ren wouldn’t ever agree to teach him the secret art in the last twelve years.”

“Once revered mister teaches me the magical art, the humble apprentice will show his respect by serving the revered mister great wine and tasty roast chicken,” not hearing a reply, Mr. Black-White immediately proposed.

Linghu Chong had been imprisoned for many days and was only given plain vegetables and tofu each day. As soon as he heard the words “great wine and tasty roast chicken,” his mouth drooled with greed. This was too tempting!

“Fine. Go get me some great wine and tasty chicken first. If they get me into a good mood, I might teach you something.”

“Sure! Sure! I’ll bring back some great wine and tasty chicken. But I am afraid it won’t be today. If opportunity allows, I’ll bring them in tomorrow,” Mr. Black-White replied hurriedly.

“Why not today?” Linghu Chong asked.

“To get in here, I have to pass through my eldest sworn-brother’s bedroom. Only when he is away, I could...could....” Mr. Black-White explained, to which Linghu Chong let out a snort without saying another word.

Afraid that Mr. Huang-Zhong might return to his bedroom, Mr. Black-White dared not to stay any longer. He quickly said his goodbye and then went away.

“How can I trick Black-White into the prison cell and whack him?” Linghu Chong thought to himself. “This man is so crafty; it would be impossible to swindle him. Moreover, without a way to break these iron shackles and chains around my wrists and ankles, even if I succeed in killing Black-White, I would still be stuck here.”

With that thought, his right hand naturally reached for his left wrist and then pulled. This was only a spontaneous move, and he certainly didn’t expect the iron shackle to break open, but to his great surprise, the iron shackle did actually open. He gave it a few more hard pulls and even managed to free his left wrist from the shackle.

This was definitely not something Linghu Chong could foresee, and his heart thumped quickly from the mixed feeling of shock and delight. He examined the

iron shackle with his finger and then found a slit in the middle of the ring. If he had not dispersed the inner energy streams inside him, any hard movement would have made him faint. Even with the slit in the middle of the shackle ring, he would not have been able to pull it open. Since he had been working on dispersing inner energy streams for over two days, the energy streams the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment had forcefully injected into his body have been diffused into his Ren Passage, which in turn spontaneously originated strong inner force.

He felt the iron shackle on this right wrist. Sure enough, there was also a thin slit. He probably had felt the thin slit many times before, but never in his mind associated it with a crack in the shackle ring. He pulled hard with his left hand and freed his right hand from the shackle ring. Next he felt the two shackle rings around his ankles and also found thin slits in both. After some more hard pulling, he found himself breathless, covered in sweat, but completely free from all the shackles.

Once rid of the shackles, the iron chain no longer restrained him in anyway. He was truly puzzled: “Why is there a slit on each of the shackle ring? How could this kind of shackles have fettered anyone?”

The next day, when the deaf and mute old man delivered his food, Linghu Chong was able to actually look at the shackles closely. Next to each of the slits was a fine-grained saw pattern. Obviously someone had cut through the four shackles rings with a very thin steel wire saw. The slits shined under the dim light and there were no rust on the fractures. This meant that the cuts must have been made only recently.

“But why were these shackle rings closed again around my limbs?” Linghu Chong asked himself. “Someone must have tried to free me secretly. This underground dungeon is so well hidden; no one from the outside would be able to break in. Therefore, the secret rescuer must be someone inside the Plum Manor. Maybe he disliked the plot against me. That’s why he secretly cut open my shackles with a steel wire saw while I lay unconsciously in the prison cell. He probably didn’t want to openly declare himself an enemy of the Plum Manor,

and he is still looking for an opportunity to help me escape.” At the thought, his spirit was greatly lifted.

“The entrance to the underground tunnel is concealed underneath Mr. Huang-Zhong’s bed in his bedroom. If it were Mr. Huang-Zhong who had wanted to rescue me, he could have done it anytime. He didn’t have to delay. Mr. Black-White obviously can’t be the one. Out of Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint, Mr. Paint is a confidant in the art of wine and had good fellowship with me. I bet it must be Mr. Paint.”

Then he remembered that Mr. Black-White would return the next day and thought about how he should cope with him. “I’ll just gloss things over with him. Why can’t I fool him with fake Kung Fu in exchange for some wine and meat?”

Then he thought, “Mr. Paint could come and rescue me any day now. I’ve gotta hurry and memorize all these formulas and techniques on the steel plate.”

He traced the carved characters and then recited each word carefully. When he studied these characters before, he didn’t pay very close attention, so memorizing everything with one hundred percent accuracy was no easy task. The handwritings on the steel plate were hasty and careless. With his limited education, he couldn’t recognize some of the poorly written characters. So he forced himself to memorize the strokes of the character and then randomly picked characters with similar strokes as substitutes. He knew that formulas for first-class martial arts are serious matters. Even one incorrect character could mean difference between life and death, success and failure. Any slight misunderstanding could very well lead to fire-deviation. Once he got out of the prison, who knows when he’ll be able to come back and reference the steel plate again? He must make sure he memorized everything with absolutely no errors.

So he read them again and again, losing count of how many times he had recited them, until he felt that he could even recite backward from the end to the beginning. Only by then, he felt at ease and allowed himself to fall asleep.

That night, in his dream, Linghu Chong actually saw Mr. Paint coming forth to

open the prison cell door and let him out. The excitement woke him and then he realized it was only a fond dream. He didn't let that depress him.

“He hasn't come to rescue me today only because he doesn't have the right opportunity. He'll certainly come to my rescue before long,” he thought to himself.

He figured that although the formulas and techniques carved on the steel plate were very beneficial to him, they could be extremely harmful to others. If someone else gets locked up in this dark prison cell again in the future, that someone must have been a good person, and he wouldn't let that person fall for Ren Woxing's scheme. With that in mind, he traced the handwritings and recited the entire thing for another ten times or so, and then scraped off over a dozen characters in the passage from the steel plate using the iron shackles he freed himself from.

Mr. Black-White didn't show up that day, but Linghu Chong didn't care much about it. Instead, he continued cultivating his internal energy streams according to the formulas and methods on the steel plate. For the next several days, Mr. Black-White never came. Linghu Chong could tell that he had made great improvement in his training. Over sixty percent of the heterogeneous energy steams left inside him by the Peach Valley Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment had been successfully dispersed out from his DanTian and into his various Ren and Du Passages. He was sure that all of them could be dispersed out if he persevered.

Each day, he would recite the formulas scores of times and then scrape off a dozen or so characters from the steel plate. He noticed a gradual increase in his strength, and it became easier and easier to scrape the steel plate with the iron shackles. Another month went by in this manner. Although he lived deep underground, he could still sense a gradual decrease of the sweltering summer temperature.

“This must have been the work of divine providence. If I had been imprisoned here during winter, I would never have found the handwritings on the steel plate. Who knows? Perhaps before summer hits, Mr. Paint would have

already had me rescued.”

At that moment, he suddenly heard the sound of Mr. Black-White’s footsteps from the outside tunnel.

Linghu Chong was lying in bed. He quickly turned around with his face toward the inside of the cell. Then he heard Mr. Black-White stopping outside of the prison door and spoke apologetically.

“Revered...revered mister Ren! I am truly very sorry for not having come sooner! In the past month, my eldest sworn-brother never set foot outside. Every day I anxiously awaited the opportunity to come and pay the revered mister my respect, but that opportunity only presented itself today. I hope the revered mister...the revered mister do not take any offense!”

Together with Mr. Black-White’s voice, a wonderful aroma of wine and roast chicken also came in through the square-shaped opening on the prison door. It had been many days since Linghu Chong last tasted any drop of wine. As soon as the smell of the wine hit his nose, he could no longer hold his patience and quickly turned around.

“Give me the wine and chicken!” he demanded.

“Sure! Sure! So the revered mister has agreed to teach me the secret formulas of the divine art?” Mr. Black-White asked.

“Bring me three catties⁴ of wine and a whole chicken each time, and I’ll teach you four segments of the secret formulas. Once I’ve had three thousand catties of wine and one thousand whole chickens, you can probably get all the formulas by then.”

“I am afraid this arrangement might be too slow and cause unnecessary problems. How about I bring six catties of wine and two whole chickens each time so the revered mister can teach me eight segments of the secret formulas?” Mr. Black-White bargained.

“You are certainly greedy!” Linghu Chong said with a grin. “Fine! Come on! Give those to me!”

Mr. Black-White handed over a wooden tray through the square-shaped opening, upon which were a large kettle of wine and a fat roast chicken.

Linghu Chong thought, “I am sure you won’t kill me with poison before I teach you the secret formulas.” So he picked up the wine kettle and quickly gulped down mouthful of wine. The wine was not in any way spectacular, but in his mind it tasted so good that even Mr. Paint’s Turfan Grape-Wine of four cycles of distillation and ferments was no match for it. Without any stop for breath, he quickly poured half kettle of wine down his throat, and then tore a chicken leg off and shoved it into his mouth. Not very long after, he had already emptied the wine kettle and picked the chicken clean. Giving a satisfied pat to his belly, he declared approvingly.

“Excellent wine! Excellent wine!”

Mr. Black-White let out a big smile. “Now that the revered mister has enjoyed the tasty chicken and great wine, will the revered mister start the teaching please?”

Linghu Chong noticed that Mr. Black-White no longer mentioned anything with regard to the proposed Master-Apprentice relationship and ceremony. “He probably thought I was too busy drinking wine and eating chicken, and I’d completely forgotten about it,” Linghu Chong thought. So he didn’t mention it either.

“Okay. Here are the four segments. You’d better remember them well. ‘Inside the unique channels and eight passages, there exist inner energy streams. Gather them in your DanTian. Join them in your Dan-Zhong⁵.’ Do you understand?”

The original text on the steel plate actually read, “Inner energy streams inside DanTian, disperse them into four limbs. Inner strengths inside Dan-Zhong, dissolve them into the eight passages.” Linghu Chong actually deliberately reversed the meaning in his teaching. When Mr. Black-White heard these, he found them to be just as plain as any ordinary inner energy cultivation methods out there, so he quickly replied.

“I got these four segments. Will the revered mister please teach me the next

four segments?”

Linghu Chong thought to himself, “After I made the changes, those four segments sounded quite ordinary. Naturally he wanted something more unique. I must find four peculiar segments to give him a good scare!” So he said, “Since today is the first day, I might as well teach you four more. Remember these: ‘Split Yang-Wei Passage with shock. Shut down Yin-Qiao Passage with clog. Once all Eight Passages are broken, the Divine Art will succeed.

Mr. Black-White was stupefied.

“If...if...one’s unique channel and eight passages are broken, how could he stay alive? These...these four segments are really beyond my understanding!”

“Do you expect just any ordinary person to understand such powerful divine art easily? If so, what would be so unique about it? Of course there are many profound and subtle theories in the divine art so no ordinary person could have understood them,” Linghu Chong said with a snort.

As Mr. Black-White listened on, he became more and more suspicious. The manner of speaking and the phrases the “revered mister” used seemed to be quite different from the Ren-named person he had known. In the first two meetings, Linghu Chong had only spoken very few words and also muffled his voice. This time, since Linghu Chong was quite high in spirit after he drank a good deal of wine, he spoke a lot more. Mr. Black-White was a very scrupulous man and these unusual signs quickly brought suspicion to his mind – the “revered mister” must be making up formulas to make fun of him.

“You said, ‘Once all Eight Passages are broken, the Divine Art will succeed.’ Are the unique channel and eight passages of the revered mister all really broken?” he demanded.

“That’s of course,” Linghu Chong acknowledged.

From the tone of Mr. Black-White’s voice, he could sense suspicion developing and building, and he dared not to speak too much. So he quickly concluded.

“That’s all. Comprehend well and you’ll understand.”

After these words, he set the wine kettle back down on the wooden tray and then handed the tray back through the square-shaped opening. Mr. Black-White reached forward to receive the tray, but all of a sudden, Linghu Chong let out a cry and then fell forward. A loud clank echoed as his forehead banged against the iron door.

“Why!” Mr. Black-White uttered. People in his caliber with extraordinary Kung Fu skills always had very quick reflexes. In no time he had reached his hands forward through the square-shaped opening and grabbed hold of the wooden tray, making sure the wine kettle would not fall and smash on the ground. At that split second, Linghu Chong turned his left hand swiftly and grabbed onto Mr. Black-White’s right wrist.

“Black-White! Do you know who I am?” He grinned.

Mr. Black-White was astounded! “You... You...,” his voice trembled.

At the time when Linghu Chong was handing the wooden tray out, the idea of grabbing Mr. Black-White’s wrist hadn’t crossed his mind. However, when he saw Mr. Black-White’s palms moved under the dim light of the oil lamp, ready to receive the wooden tray from him, an insuppressible urge all of a sudden overwhelmed his heart. It was all because of this person’s sly and calculated tricks that resulted in his many days of imprisonment. If he could break Mr. Black-White’s wrist, it would be a great way to vent some of his anger and hatred. Besides, this out of the blue seize of his wrist would definitely give him a good fright. For such a treacherous man, such a fright was the least punishment he could think of. He wasn’t even sure if it was the feeling of revenge or his childlike mischievous nature that led to the fake fall, which tricked Mr. Black-White into reaching his hands in, which in turn made the grabbing successful.

Mr. Black-White had always been vigilant, but this attack came so sudden and abrupt without any prior signs of warning. By the time he sensed something was not right, his wrist had already fallen into Linghu Chong’s grip. The grip was so strong that, to him, Linghu Chong’s fingers almost felt like an iron claw and

clasped firmly onto the Inner-Pass and Outer-Pass acupoints in his wrist.

Without thinking, Mr. Black-White reflectively rotated his right wrist and executed an anti-grappling stance. A loud clank echoed when three toes of his right foot suddenly broke, and he cried out loud in painful groans.

How did Mr. Black-White end up breaking his toes on his left foot when his right wrist was been held? How strange? Turned out that Mr. Black-White always had great fear of the “revered mister.” As soon as his wrist fell into the grip, he desperately feared for his life, and in a rush, used a move named “Flood Dragon Rising above the Deep Pool.” This move worked particularly well when one’s wrist fell into the enemy’s grip by quickly pulling the arm inward while swiftly and unexpectedly kicking outward with one’s left foot. Such a powerful and fierce kick would land squarely on the enemy’s chest. The enemy would usually end up spitting blood from severe internal injuries. If the enemy were also a skilled Kung Fu master, he would have easily chosen to let go of his wrist in avoidance. Otherwise, he would have no way of dodging the kick right to the chest. Unfortunately, in the moment of extreme distress, eager to break free, Mr. Black-White completely forgot about the thick iron door right between him and his opponent. He had executed the move “Flood Dragon Rising above the Deep Pool” perfectly, and the kick had also been very accurate, powerful and fierce. Sadly, he kicked right into the iron door and the only positive effect was a loud echoing bang.

Only when Linghu Chong heard the loud bang did he realize how lucky he had been. If it weren’t because of the protection provided by the iron door, there was no way he could have escaped Mr. Black-White’s extremely formidable kick. He couldn’t help but burst into loud laughter.

“Kick again! If you kick as hard as the first time, I might just let you go,” he said sarcastically.

Mr. Black-White suddenly felt his inner energy gushing out continuously through the Inner-Pass and the Outer-Pass acupoints on his right wrist, and could not but remember the one thing he feared the most his entire life. Instantly, he was scared out of his wits! He tried his best to slow down the inner

energy loss and at the same time begged in sorrow.

“Revered...revered mister, I beg...you....”

As soon as he spoke, his inner energy gushed out in even larger waves. He had no choice but to stop speaking. But the inner energy just kept flowing out of him rapidly.

Ever since Linghu Chong started practicing the Kung Fu techniques carved on the steel plate, his DanTian region felt like a bamboo that was empty inside and a valley that was always void. At the moment when he felt some inner energy appearing in his DanTian, he didn't pay much attention to it. Instead, he noticed that Mr. Black-White's wrist quivered continuously as though he had seen something terrifying. Since he had great grudges against Mr. Black-White, he decided to give him a good scare. So he yelled loudly.

“After I teach you the secret art, you have become an apprentice of mine. You have been caught deceiving your master. Shouldn't I punish you for your crime?”

Mr. Black-White could feel that the inner energy inside him was rushing out even faster now. If he tried hard to hold his breath, the gushing could be temporarily stopped. But he simply had to breathe once a while, and in between the exhaling and inhaling, great amount of his inner energy would continue to flow out. At the moment he had completely forgotten about the pain from his injured toes. He only wished to be able to free his right hand out of the square-shaped opening. Even if he had to lose an arm or an leg, he would have no complaints. At that thought, he immediately reached for his sword by the waist. As soon as made the move, two large gaps seemed to have opened up at the Inner-Pass and Outer-Pass acupoints by his wrist, and all the inner energy from his entire body spurted out like river water bursting through dikes, and impossible to stop the flow ever again.

Mr. Black-White knew if this continued for another while, all his internal energy would be eventually sucked dry. Gritting his teeth, he finally managed to draw his sword out of its sheath. Raising the sword high, he wanted to swing

the sword down to chop off his own arm, but this movement only caused even larger streams of inner energy surging out of him. A loud ring resonated in his ears and he fainted.

Linghu Chong had only planned to scare Mr. Black-White when he grabbed onto the man's wrist. At most he was only going to twist and break Mr. Black-White's wrist to vent his anger. He certainly did not expect Mr. Black-White to panic so much and faint as if having been scared out of his wits. Laughing out loud, Linghu Chong let go of the wrist, and as soon as he did that, Mr. Black-White's torso collapsed and his right hand retracted backward from the square-shaped opening.

Suddenly, an idea shot up Linghu Chong's mind and he quickly reached for the sliding hand. Luckily he was quick with his move and caught the palm in time.

“Why don't I shackle him with the steel chains as a hostage, so I can coerce Mr. Huang-Zhong to let me go?” he thought.

He pulled Mr. Black-White's wrist hard to get it closer. Unexpectedly, as he gave the strong pull, Mr. Black-White's head actually came in also through the square-shaped opening, and then his entire body followed.

Linghu Chong did not see this coming. After a brief shock, he couldn't help but scold himself for how stupid he was. The square opening was roughly a foot wide, big enough to put a head through. And if one's head can go through it, so can the body. If Mr. Black-White can be pulled in, why couldn't he get out the same way? It would have been impossible for him to escape previously when his hands and feet were shackled in steel chains. But the shackle rings had been sawed through by someone secretly some time ago. Why didn't he escape?

“After Mr. Paint secretly sawed through the shackles around my hands and feet, day after day, he must have hoped that I'd escape the prison following that old man who delivered my food. He must have been extremely anxious by now!” he thought to himself.

At the time when Linghu Chong had found out about the sawed-through

shackle rings, he had been right in the middle of learning those inner energy cultivation techniques and had focused all his attention to the training. Also he had not memorized all the formulas on the steel plate, so subconsciously he didn't really want to leave the prison cell. Therefore, the thought of running away by himself never even occurred to him.

Linghu Chong pondered for a second and then came to a decision. He hurriedly removed Mr. Black-White's robe and his own and then swapped them. He even put Mr. Black-White's black cloth mask over his own head, thinking, "Even if I bump into someone on my way out, they'll think I am Mr. Black-White."

Next, he hung Mr. Black-White's sword by his own waist. With the sword right next to his hand, his spirit soured immensely. Then he cuffed Mr. Black-White's hands and feet with the steel shackles and then pinched forcefully. The shackle rings were so tight that they even cut into flesh.

The severe pain woke Mr. Black-White, and he groaned, "Revered...revered mister Ren...your...your Magical Art of Essence Absorbing...."

Linghu Chong had heard of the term "Magical Art of Essence Absorbing" before when he fought alongside Xiang Wentian in the remote wilderness. Someone in the crowd had shouted out this term. Now hearing the term again from Mr. Black-White, he couldn't resist but ask, "What Magical Art of Essence Absorbing?"

"I...I...am...damn...damned...," Mr. Black-White moaned.

Linghu Chong was in a rush to finally get out of the dungeon. He didn't pay any more attention to Mr. Black-White. Sticking his head out from the square-shaped opening and also extending his arms out, he pushed gently on the iron door. His body shot out swiftly and he landed on the ground without a stagger. He felt a great amount of inner energy depositing inside his DanTian region once again, which made him quite uncomfortable. He had no idea that the inner energy streams were actually absorbed from Mr. Black-White, and only concluded that the energy streams from Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Monk

No-Commandment had returned to Dan Tian because he hadn't practiced his energy cultivation techniques for a while. He decided to not worry too much about that and focus on how to get out of the dark dungeon as soon as possible, so he picked up the oil lamp Mr. Black-White had left outside and began following the tunnel out.

All the gates in the tunnel were left unlocked. He figured that Mr. Black-White must have decided to lock them on his way out. This made his escape so much easier. As he stepped through the many solid gates one after another, the many days of life in the dark underground prison suddenly felt as though they had occurred in a different lifetime. Strangely, his resentment toward Mr. Huang-Zhong and the bunch also seemed to have significantly lessened. All he could think of was the sweet smell of freedom, and everything else in the world no longer mattered to him.

At the end of the tunnel, he followed the steps upward until he was directly under an iron plate. He listened carefully but didn't hear anything from the outside. This underground imprisonment experience had taught him to be more careful and cautious, so he didn't rush out immediately, and instead, waited a good while underneath the iron plate and made sure there was no sound from the outside. By then he felt certain that Mr. Hung-Zhong was indeed not in his bedroom. Lifting up the iron plate gently, he climbed up and then leapt out from the hole in the bed. After carefully returning the iron plate to its original position and pulling the bamboo bedding sheet to cover it up, he treaded softly on tiptoe toward the door way. Then all of a sudden, someone spoke behind him in a gloomy voice.

“Second brother, what are you doing?”

Startled, Linghu Chong turned around and then saw Mr. Huang-Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint completely surrounding him, each wielding his weapon in hand. He didn't know that the entrance was equipped with secret trapping devices, and his breaking out had triggered the alarm and attracted Mr. Huang-Zhong and the others. Because he had a black mask on and was also wearing Mr. Black-White's robe, no one had recognized his true identity.

Greatly frightened, Linghu Chong could only stutter, "I...I...."

"I what?" Mr. Huang-Zhong demanded in an icy-cold voice. "I had a feeling that you were up to something. You went down the dungeon and asked Ren Woxing to teach you the Evil Art of Essence Absorbing, didn't you? Humph! Do you still remember what vow you pledged all those years ago?"

Linghu Chong found himself quite muddle-headed, not able to decide on whether to reveal his true identity or to keep pretending as Mr. Black-White. After a short hesitation, he drew the long sword by his waist and thrust it toward Mr. Bald-Brush.

"Good second brother! You really want to fight us?" Mr. Bald-Brush bellowed as he raised his brush to ward off the sword.

Linghu Chong's sword thrust was only a fake. Seeing Mr. Bald-Brush's attempt to block his attack, he quickly turned around and dashed out of the room. Mr. Huang-Zhong and the rest immediately chased after him. Running with all his might, Linghu Chong reached the front hall in no time.

"Second brother! Second brother! Where are you going?" Mr. Huang-Zhong shouted from behind.

Linghu Chong didn't answer and kept on running full speed. He suddenly spotted a man standing in the middle of the front gate right in his path.

"Second Master, please stop!" the man uttered.

Since Linghu Chong was in such a hurry, he failed to slow down and ran right into the man. The collision sent the man flying in the air and landed almost thirty feet outside of the gate.

Linghu Chong threw a quick side glance and then recognized the man. It was "Straight Line Lightning Sword" Ding Jian, who, at this very moment, lay straight and stiff on the ground. His body position indeed resembled part of his nickname "Straight Line;" however, it had no relation whatsoever with the other part "Lightning Sword."

Linghu Chong dashed along a small road nonstop. Mr. Huang-Zhong and the

others stopped at the gate of the manor and gave up the chase. Only Mr. Paint continued shouting out loud.

“Second brother! Second brother! Come back! We brothers can always talk things through....”

Linghu Chong intentionally picked desolated small roads to follow and eventually arrived at an uninhabited wilderness, a place obviously quite a distance away from the city of Hangzhou. Although he had been running continuously at his top speed, when he stopped, he wasn't tired at all and wasn't even out of breath. It seemed as though his stamina was even better than the time before he got injured.

He took off the cloth mask and then heard the sound of gurgling water. Feeling very thirsty, he traced the sound and soon found a small creek. He squatted down and then leaned forward so he could scoop some water to his mouth when he suddenly saw a man's face in the reflection of the creek water. The face was covered in filth, and with the disheveled hair it looked very odd and ugly. Linghu Chong was briefly startled, and then he couldn't help but grin. Anyone who got locked up for several months and never bathed would look this filthy. He all of a sudden felt his body itching all over. He quickly removed his robe and jumped into the creek for a good deep cleansing, thinking, “the filth on my body must have weighed more than thirty catties.”

After he had thoroughly cleaned himself and also had a stomach full of clear water, he tied his long hair on top of his head. Checking in the water reflection, he found the familiar face again, a face that had no resemblance to that swollen face of the Feng Er-Zhong. As he was putting the robe back on, he felt some discomfort and blockage between his chest and stomach, so he sat down and meditated for a while using the newly learned inner energy cultivation techniques. Soon he could feel that the inner energy streams inside his DanTian had been successfully dispersed into his unique channel and eight passages. The DanTian region was once again like a bamboo that was empty inside or a valley that was always void. His entire body seemed to be vigorous and he also felt a soothing feeling of carefree beyond words. He didn't realize that he had

mastered one of the best martial arts in the entire world. The seven streams of inner energy from the Peach Valley's Six Fairies and Monk No-Commandment, together with the inner energy streams infused into him by Great Master Fang-Sheng when he was treated at the Shaolin Temple, had all been transformed into his own. And when he gripped onto Mr. Black-White's wrist, he had also absorbed into his DanTian the entire load of inner energy Mr. Black-White had cultivated for his entire life. Once he dispersed those into his unique channel and eight passages, he had gained the inner strength of another superior master. Naturally he would feel utterly vigorous.

He leapt up, drew the long sword by his waist, and leisurely thrust it toward the hanging branch of a green willow by the side of the creek, whisking his wrist gently as he thrust out. The blade whistled as it cut through the thin air and then swiftly returned to the sheath before he landed smoothly on his left foot. Lifting his head, he watched as five leaves slowly drifted down in the air. The long sword cleared its sheath for a second time and made an arcing slash, catching all five leaves on the side of the blade. He picked up one of the willow leaves from the side of the blade with his left hand as a mixed feeling quickly submerged his heart. It was a mixture of joy and disbelief. He stood silently by the creek, and all of a sudden, found deep grief in his heart.

“The superior Kung Fu I have right now would not have been possible from Master and Master-Wife's teaching. But I would rather everything was the way it was as before, when my inner strength and my sword art were equally futile, when I could live a carefree life inside the Huashan School, spending time with little apprentice sister from morning till dusk, instead of wandering the martial world alone like a loitering ghost.”

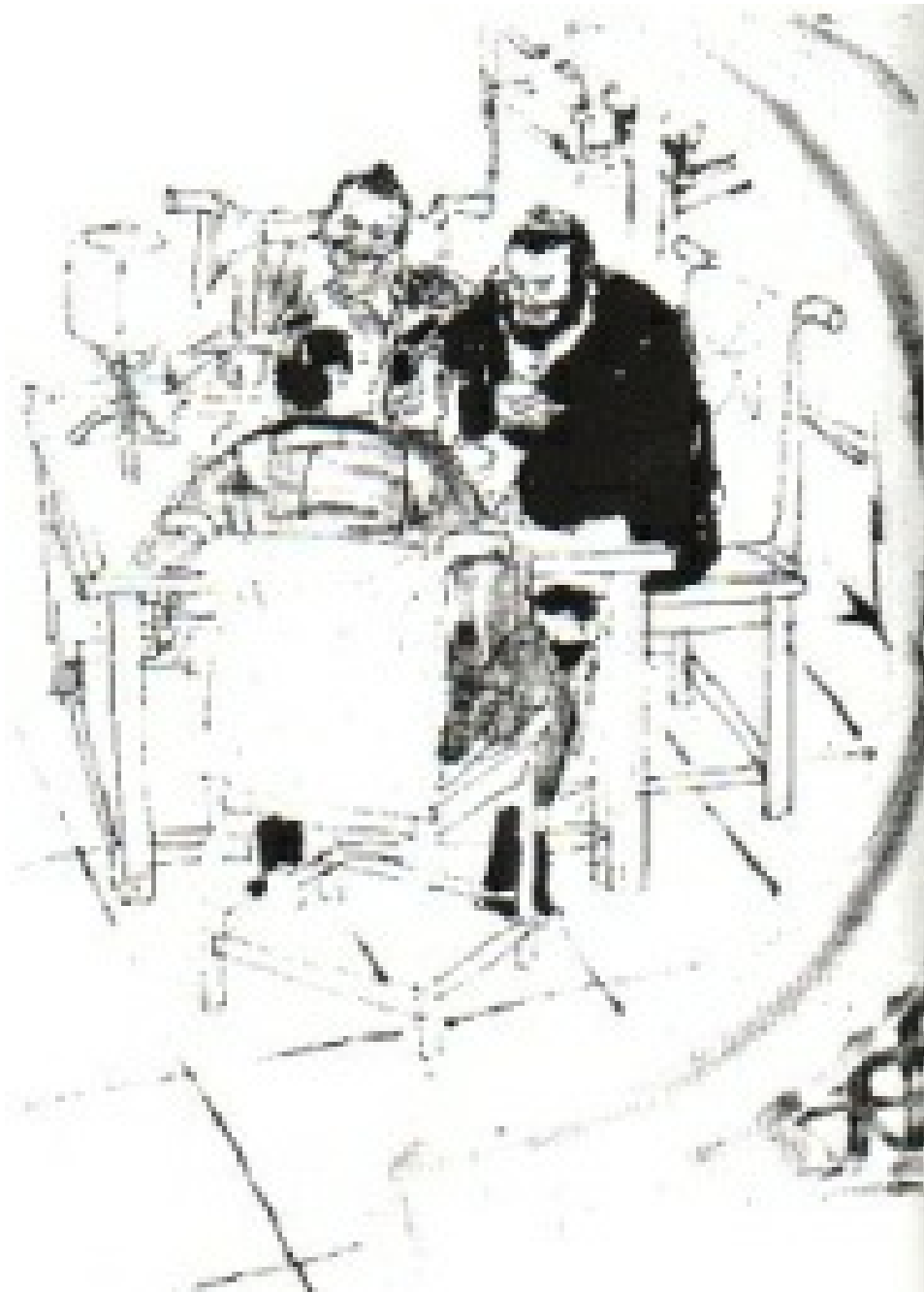
His martial arts skills had reached the most superior level, but at the meantime, he had never felt so lonely and desolate in his entire life. All his life he'd enjoyed lively crowds, bosom friends, and tasty wines. In the past several months since he was locked away in the underground dungeon, he had no choice but to be alone. Now that his body had finally break free, but his mind was just as lonely. Standing next to the gurgling creek all by himself, the feeling

of joy gradually waned away. The cold moon casted his lonely shadow on the ground as the gentle breeze brushed his body, filling his heart with boundless despair.

Chapter 22 Out of Trouble

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



Ren Woxing picked up the wine kettle and filled a cup with wine. "It's fate that have brought us here together." Said he, "If you agree with my suggestion, then please drink up this cup of wine.

Linghu Chong sadly stood still for a long time until the moon was directly above his head. The night was still and he pondered over the events that occurred at the Plum Manor. He decided to go back to the manor to understand what had happened and also to rescue senior Ren if he was not a bad person.

Having finally decided on this course of action, he started his journey back to the Plum Manor. He went up Mount Gu and approached the Plum Manor through the forest surrounding it. He listened for sounds inside the manor and after awhile, having heard no sound, he lightly jumped over the fence onto the manor's ground. All the ten or more rooms inside the manor were shrouded in darkness. However, there was one window on his right with lights from inside the room. He silently walked across the ground and crouched underneath that window. From inside the room, he heard the voice of a person.

The voice sounded very strict. "Mr. Huang Zhong, do you know your crime?"

Linghu Chong was surprised. He wondered what Mr. Huang Zhong's position was in this manor when there was someone who could actually use this kind of tone when speaking to him. He peered inside the room from a crack in the window and was able to see four people sitting in a row. Three of these are men around fifty to sixty years old while the other one is a middle aged woman. They were all wearing black robes with a yellow belt tied around their waists. Mr. Huang Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint were standing in front of them with their backs to the window. From this, Linghu Chong could tell that those people sitting have higher rank than them.

"Yes, your subordinate knows his crime. On the elders' arrival, we didn't go far to welcome you. Very guilty, very guilty," Linghu Chong heard Mr. Huang Zhong's reply.

"Hmm, not going far to welcome us, is this a crime? Where's Black-White? Why doesn't he come out to see me?" the gentleman sitting in the middle coldly asked.

Linghu Chong laughed inside, "Mr. Black-White has been imprisoned by me inside the underground prison, but Mr. Huang Zhong and the rest of them thought that he has run away from the manor." He also thought, "What elder? What subordinate? They all must be people from the devil cult."

"Four elders, your subordinate has not been strict enough. Mr. Black-White's temperament is strange and recently he has been acting like his former self. In

the last few days, he has unexpectedly disappeared from the manor," Mr. Huang Zhong replied.

This elder's eye flashed and stared at Mr. Huang Zhong.

"Mr. Huang Zhong, Chief ordered you four to guard the Plum Manor. However, from what we heard, you've been playing zither, drinking wine, drawing and playing go. Is this true?" the elder coldly asked.

"We four subordinates have accepted Chief's order to stay here and guard the traitor," Mr. Huang Zhong replied while bowing.

"That is correct. How's that traitor doing?" the elder asked.

"We can report to the elder that the traitor is still being held inside the underground prison. Over the last twelve years, subordinate has never stepped foot outside the Plum Manor. We do not dare to relax our guard," Mr. Huang Zhong reported.

"Very good, very good. You never stepped foot outside the Plum Manor and do not dare to relax your guard. So for sure that traitor is still being held inside the underground prison?" the elder questioned.

"That's true," Mr. Huang Zhong replied.

Suddenly, that elder lifted his head and laughed loudly facing the roof. The dust from the ceiling was seen falling around the room.

"Very good! Bring that traitor here for us to look at," shouted the elder.

"Four elders, please forgive us. Chief's strict order was not to let anyone visit the traitor except for Chief himself. We don't dare," replied Mr. Huang Zhong.

The elder took out something from inside his robe and lifted the object he took out high above his head. The other three elders stood up immediately as well, looking at the object reverently. Linghu Chong squinted his eye trying to look at the object. It was a half-foot high dried up black wood. On top of the object was some kind of flowery patterns carved on it which looked completely strange to Linghu Chong.

Seeing this object, Mr. Huang Zhong and the rest of the people in the room bowed towards the object.

"Chief's Black Command Wood is here, it's as if Chief himself is here, subordinate is ready to receive order," Mr. Huang Zhong said.

"Good, bring that traitor here!" commanded the elder.

"That traitor's hands and feet are bound in metal chains. We can't... we can't bring him up here," said Mr. Huang Zhong hesitantly.

"Even until this moment, you still refuse to bring him here. I ask you, has that traitor escaped?" the elder asked coldly.

"That traitor... that traitor has escaped? Im.. impossible. That person is still locked away in the underground prison. I have just seen him recently with my own eyes. How... how can he have escaped?" Mr. Huang Zhong answered in fright.

"Oh, so he's still in the underground prison. I've wronged you. Please forgive me," the elder spoke warmly with a softened expression.

Then, the elder stood up and slowly approached Mr. Huang Zhong. It looked like that he was going to apologise to the three masters of the Plum Manor. But he suddenly extended one hand to pat Mr. Huang Zhong's shoulder. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint simultaneously retreated two steps in a hurry. Although their movements were really fast, that elder's hand moved even faster. Two sounds "bang, bang" can be heard as both of Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint's right shoulders were hit. As he carried out this sneak attack, the elder was still showing a smile on his face. Actually, even with Mr. Huang Zhong's skill in Jiang Hu, he had no chance of avoiding this sneak attack. Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint's skills were inferior, so even if they were aware of the attack, they had no chance of escaping the strikes.

"Elder Bao, what sin have we committed? Why do you use such a vicious method to deal with us?" said Mr. Paint loudly. He sounded both injured and angry.

"Chief ordered you to guard the traitor here. But you've let that traitor escaped. Don't you think you deserve to die?" the smirking Elder Bao said slowly.

"If that traitor has really escaped, then subordinate deserves to die. But he's still being held in the underground prison. Elder Bao, you're too vicious, we brothers cannot accept this," replied Mr. Huang Zhong indignantly, as he was leaning slightly to one side.

Linghu Chong outside the window could see Mr. Huang Zhong sweating profusely. He thought that Elder Bao's palm strike was very good as he managed to subdue Mr. Huang Zhong, whose kung fu was already powerful, using only one palm. However, he also thought that Mr. Huang Zhong's kung fu could not be inferior to Elder Bao's. If not for Elder Bao's sneak attack, Mr. Huang Zhong may not have lost.

"Go to the underground prison and have a look. If that traitor is still in there, I... humph... I, Bao Dachu, will give you three kowtows to apologise. Naturally, I will also immediately forgive you from this sin," said Elder Bao.

"Ok, four elders please wait here," said Mr. Huang Zhong.

Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint immediately went out of the room to follow Mr. Huang Zhong. Linghu Chong trembled as he saw these three people walking away from the room. He thought that he shivered because of the injuries still affecting him. But it was merely because he was excited from watching all the things happening right in front of his eyes.

Fearing the four people inside the room detecting him, he didn't dare to look inside again and slowly sat down on the ground.

"The Chief they're talking about must be the current world's number one Dongfang Bubai. He assigned the Four Playfellows of Jiangnan to guard this traitor and they've been at it for 12 years now. Of course the traitor they're talking about isn't me then. It must be that senior Ren. And he has managed to escape without Mr. Huang Zhong and other's knowledge. Wow, this senior Ren is really resourceful. That's right! They all really didn't know that senior Ren has escaped. Otherwise, Mr. Black-White wouldn't have mistaken me for senior

Ren," thought Linghu Chong.

Thinking that once Mr. Huang Zhong and his brothers entered the underground prison and recognised Mr. Black-White, things will get very complicated for them; Linghu Chong felt wonderful and very happy.

"Why did they also imprison me in the underground prison? All I did was to compare sword art against senior Ren. They must've been afraid that I would leak their secret out, so they locked me up in there too. Humph, this is called eliminating a potential informant without murder. But eliminating a potential informant in this way is just the same as murder. This time, they would be the ones to suffer difficulties. See how they like it. This will repay for the wrong that they did to me," thought Linghu Chong indignantly.

Linghu Chong heard the four people inside the room sat back down without saying a single word. He didn't dare to breathe loudly. Even though there's a wall that separate him with the four people in the room, the distance between them is only around 10 feet. He only had to breathe slightly heavily and they'd be able to detect him immediately.

Suddenly, a cry of "ah" could be heard in the still and quiet night. It sounded full of pain and dread. Whoever heard it could not help but feel absolutely terrified. When Linghu Chong recognised that it was Mr. Black-White's voice, he felt sorry for him. However, this Mr. Black-White had plotted his own demise, it could be said that the consequences matched his own action. But now that he has fallen on Elder Bao's hand, this is even more unfortunate for Mr. Black-White.

He could hear their steps coming closer. Then, he heard Mr. Huang Zhong and his brothers entering the room. Linghu Chong edged closer to the window's crack to take a look inside the room. Inside, he could see Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint carrying Mr. Black-White. Mr. Black-White's face was pale and his eyes lacked any spirit. The atmosphere inside the room was completely different than before.

"Report... Reporting to the Four Elders. That traitor has... has escaped.

Subordinate is ready to receive death," said Mr. Huang Zhong while bowing down.

He looked like he already knew what his fate would be. His speech was calm and collected, unlike before.

"You said that Black-White is not in the manor, how come he's here now? How can it be?" calmly replied Bao Dachu.

"All sorts of reasons. Actually subordinate is really confused. Ai, all because we four subordinates are too engrossed in the arts and has let other people looked at our weaknesses. And they have managed to take away that traitor from right under our noses," replied Mr. Huang Zhong.

"We four people have received Chief's order to come here and verify that the traitor has escaped. It seems that you have reported truthfully now and is not trying to deceive us anymore. Then... then, maybe we can plead mercy to Chief on your behalf," said Bao Dachu.

Mr. Huang Zhong sighed and said, "Even considering Chief's mercy and the four elders' compassions, how can we, subordinates, still live in this world with all this shame? The whole event is very complicated, subordinate doesn't understand the true story. Even after we've died, we won't be content. Elder Bao, is Chief... is Chief in Hangzhou city at the moment?"

"Who said Chief is in Hangzhou city?"

"That traitor has just escaped yesterday, how did Chief know about this so fast and sent four elders to Plum Manor immediately?"

"Humph... you're becoming more and more stupid. Who said that traitor escaped yesterday?"

"That person really escaped yesterday at noon. At that time, we three people thought that person was Mr. Black-White. We didn't know that he had switched places with Mr. Black-White. He was wearing Mr. Black-White's robe when he escaped. In this matter, we three brothers... four brothers are certain. Also, there's still Ding Jian, who that traitor knocked down, and got several of his ribs

broken..." Mr. Huang Zhong said assuredly.

Bao Dachu turned his head to look at the other three elders.

"This person is talking nonsense. I don't know what he's talking about," scowled Elder Bao.

"We received the message last month on the 14th..." A fat and short elder said while calculating with his fingers. "This is the 17th day."

Mr. Huang Zhong fiercely withdrew two steps and hit the wall with a "bang".

"No... This can't be! We're really certain. We saw him escaped yesterday with our own eyes."

Mr. Huang Zhong walked to the door and shouted "Shi Lingwei, bring Ding Jian here!"

"Yes!" Shi Lingwei replied from somewhere distant.

Bao Dachu walked up to Mr. Black-White, grabbed his chest, and lifted him up. Mr. Black-White's hands and feet were dangling down. It seemed that all the bones in his body had been broken. His body looked like a sack of leather.

Bao Dachu lost all colour from his face as if he was scared to death. He quickly let go of Mr. Black-White's body, which crumpled to the ground.

"Correct, this is that bastard's ... that bastard's Art of Essence Absorbing. It can absorb the whole body's energy clean," said a tall and strong looking elder, his voice quivering and looking completely scared.

"When did you get in his way?" Bao Dachu asked Mr. Black-White.

"It... It... was yesterday. That bastard... that bastard grabbed my right wrist. I... I couldn't move at all. He controlled me completely," answered Mr. Black-White.

Bao Dachu looked completely baffled. His face muscle twitched slightly and his eyes looked bewildered.

"And after that?"

"He then pulled me through the hole in the iron gate, removed my robe and

wore it. Then he shackled my hands and feet with the steel chains. He then escaped... escaped through that hole."

Bao Dachu scowled and asked, "Yesterday? How can it be yesterday?"

"The shackles for the hands and feet were made out of steel. How did he break them?" asked the fat and short looking elder.

"I don't know," answered Mr. Black-White.

"Subordinate examined the shackles and found that they were sawed through by a fine steel saw. I don't know where this bastard got the saw from," said Mr. Bald-Brush.

After Mr. Bald-Brush finished speaking, Shi Lengwei and two servants entered the room bringing Ding Jian and laid him down on the carpet. Ding Jian's body was covered by a thin quilt. Bao Dachu lifted the quilt and lightly poked his chest. Ding Jian screamed, showing that he was in extreme pain. Bao Dachu nodded and waved his hand telling them to take Ding Jian away. Shi Lingwei and the two servants carried Ding Jian out of the room.

"This hit is definitely caused by that bastard," said Bao Dachu.

The middle-aged woman who until this moment had not said a single word yet, suddenly said "Elder Bao, if that bastard escaped yesterday, then the message we got last month must be a fake. That bastard's follower is still outside spreading confusion, trying to make us sway in our loyalty."

Elder Bao shook his head and said, "It cannot be a fake."

"Cannot be a fake?" asked the middle-aged woman.

"Lord Xue Xiang's whole body was covered by a metal gown. He used this metal gown to practise kung fu and even a sabre cannot chop through it. But someone managed to grab and dig out his heart using just his five fingers. Besides this bastard, in this world, there's no second person who can do this..." reasoned Bao Dachu.

Linghu Chong was lost in thought while listening to the conversations inside the room. Suddenly, he felt his shoulder patted by someone. He was truly

startled and quickly jumped three steps away. He pulled his sword out, turned his head and saw two people standing there.

As the moon was at the back of those two people, he couldn't see their faces. One of them turned his head and said, "Brother, let's go in."

It was Xiang Wentian's voice.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed and he whispered "Brother Xiang!"

However, the people inside the room had heard the sound of the sword being drawn and Linghu Chong's answer.

"Who's out there?" Bao Dachu shouted.

"Ha Ha Ha," the person beside Xiang Wentian laughed loudly.

This laugh shook the tiles inside the room while Linghu Chong started to feel an unbearable pain. He started to hear a "weng, weng" sound inside his ear and felt blood rushing up his stomach. That person took a step forward and used both hands to push towards the wall. A thunderous sound was heard. In the middle of the wall was now a big hole, which that person then used to enter the room.

Xiang Wentian stretched his hand and grabbed Linghu Chong's right hand. They entered the room side by side. Inside the room, the four elders were standing up and had their hands ready in front of them. Their faces looked very intense. Linghu Chong was anxious to know who this person was but the person's back was facing him. He looked very tall with black hair and was wearing a suit of blue-green gown.

Bao Dachu's voice was trembling when he said, "It's... It's Ren... Senior Ren has arrived."

"Humph," that person answered and took a long stride forward.

Bao Dachu and Mr. Huang Zhong involuntarily took two steps backwards. That person turned and sat at the chair which Bao Dachu sat in earlier. Linghu Chong now managed to see his face clearly. That person's face was long and white as snow, not a trace of blood could be seen on the face. His feature was

handsome. But his white complexion was just like a corpse which had just come out from the grave.

He beckoned to Xiang Wentian and Linghu Chong, "Brother Xiang, Brother Linghu Chong, please come and sit here."

When Linghu Chong heard his voice, he was pleasantly surprised.

"You... You are Senior Ren?" asked Linghu Chong.

That person smiled slightly and said "I am. Your sword art maybe much better."

"You're really out of trouble already. Today... Today, I came here to rescue you..." said Linghu Chong excitedly.

That person laughed and said, "Today you came here to rescue me out of prison, didn't you? HaHa, HaHa. Brother Xiang, your brother Ren has so many friends."

Xiang Wentian pulled Linghu Chong's hand and seated him on the right side of Senior Ren. Then he sat himself down on the left side.

"Brother Linghu is really sincere in dealing with people. You're really the world's most upright and courageous person," said Xiang Wentian.

"Brother Linghu, you've given up more than two months of your life to live in the dark underground prison. I feel very sorry for you. HaHa, HaHa!" said that person.

By now, Linghu Chong had an inkling but was not able to completely understand what was going on.

With a smile on his face, that person Ren looked at Linghu Chong and said, "You were imprisoned for more than two months because of me, but in that time you've finished learning the Art of Essence Absorbing that I had written on the iron panel. Hey Hey, that means I've paid you back for your time in there."

"That secret on the iron panel was written by senior?" asked Linghu Chong in surprise.

"If it wasn't me, then who else in the world knows Art of Essence Absorbing?" answered that person with a smile.

"Brother, Chief Ren's Art of Essence Absorbing has been passed on to you only. Congratulations!" said Xiang Wentian.

"Chief Ren?" asked Linghu Chong confused.

"Originally, when you arrived here, you didn't know Chief Ren's position. Chief Ren is the chief of Sun Moon Sect. His name is "Woxing". Have you heard of this name before?" asked Xiang Wentian.

Linghu Chong knew that "Sun Moon Sect" was the Devil sect, but he didn't know the origin of this sect. And the Jiang Hu people mostly knew of this religion by the name Devil Sect, and Devil Sect's chief had always been Dongfang Bubai. Where did Ren Woxing come out from?

"Chief... Chief Ren's name, I found it carved on the iron panel, but I didn't know that he was Chief," muttered Linghu Chong.

The tall and strong looking elder suddenly shouted, "What Chief is he? Everyone under the heaven knows that our Sun Moon Sect's chief is Chief Dongfang. This person Ren was expelled a long time ago for rebelling against our sect. Xiang Wentian, what you said was heresy, this is a big sin."

Ren Woxing slowly turned his head and stared at this elder. He then asked, "You are Qin Weibang, aren't you?"

"Correct," said that tall and strong looking elder.

"When I was the Chief, you were the master of our Jiangxi headquarter, correct?" asked Ren Woxing.

"That's right!" answered Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "You're now one of the Sect's 10 elders. You were promoted rather quickly, don't you think? How come Dongfang Bubai rates you so highly? Is it because of your martial art or is it because of you can take care of sect's business?"

"I'm loyal to the sect and takes care of sect's business. Also, my accomplishments in the past 10 years earned my promotion," replied Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "That's not too bad."

Suddenly, Ren Woxing's body shook. Before anyone can react, he was already in front of Bao Dachu. His left hand quickly shot out and grabbed Bao Dachu's throat. Bao Dachu was startled and he tried using his right hand, shaped in a knife-form, to deflect the grab but it was too late. So he used his left elbow to protect his throat. At the same time, he used his left foot to retreat a step, while using his knife-form right hand to hack down. This was done in an instant, one hand defending tightly and one hand attacking fiercely. A wise technique to use.

But Ren Woxing wasn't finished yet. His right hand was now coming in fast to grab Bao Dachu's right hand. Before Bao Dachu was able to use his knife-form right hand to chop down, his chest was grabbed and his gown torn open. In Ren Woxing's left hand was now an object that he's grabbed from inside Bao Dachu's gown. It was the Black Command Wood. With his right hand turned over, he twisted Bao Dachu's right wrist.

At the same time, three "dang, dang, dang" sounds were heard. This was Xiang Wentian using his long sword to separate Qin Weibang and the other two elders from Bao Dachu. Each of the three elders had drawn their weapons. Xiang Wentian had attacked three times, but these attacks were only meant to prevent the three elders from helping Bao Dachu. When these three attacks were finished, Bao Dachu was completely under Ren Woxing's control.

Ren Woxing smiled and said, "I haven't used my Art of Essence Absorbing yet, you wanna taste it?"

Bao Dachu knew that if he didn't surrender then he would be killed in an instant. He has no other option but to surrender. So he made the decision quickly and said, "Chief Ren, Bao Dachu from now on vows loyalty and devotion to you."

"Once in the past, you swore loyalty to me and then you betrayed me,"

answered Ren Woxing.

"Chief Ren, please allow subordinate to atone for my sin by pledging my service to you," quivered Bao Dachu.

"Alright! Eat this pill first," said Ren Woxing and released his wrist.

He took out a small medicine bottle from his chest. He turned it over to get a fiery red pill out and threw the pill over to Bao Dachu. Bao Dachu grabbed the pill. Without looking at it, he put it in his mouth and swallowed it.

"This... This pill is "Three Corpse Brain" pill?" muttered Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said "Correct. This is definitely the "Three Corpse Brain"!"

He took out six more "Three Corpse Brain" pills and threw it on the table. The pills rolled on the table.

"Do you know how terrible these "Three Corpse Brain" pills are?" asked Ren Woxing.

"After taking the brain pill, our lives will be in Chief's hand, so we must forever follow Chief's order. Otherwise, the corpse bugs in the pill will be released and they will enter the brain and start eating it. The pain would be unbearable. Also, you will become insane just like a crazy dog," explained Bao Dachu.

"What you said is very true. You already knew the efficiency of my brain pill, how come you still took it?" asked Ren Woxing.

"From now on, subordinate will be loyal to Chief forever. Even though this brain pill is very efficient, it's irrelevant to me."

"HaHa! HaHa! Very good! Very good! Who else wants to take these pills?" said Ren Woxing laughing.

Mr. Huang Zhong, Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint looked at each other in dismay. Along with Qin Weibang and the other two elders, these six people had been in Sun Moon Sect for a very long time. So they already knew that the

corpse bugs inside the "Three Corpse Brain" pill didn't just break out suddenly. Usually, at noon every year at the dragon boat festival, they had to take the medicine to restrain the corpse bugs. If they didn't, then the corpse bugs would be released. Once the bugs entered the brain, this person would become like a ghost and would no longer have the capacity to reason. He would also lose all rationality. He would even eat his own parents or wife. No other poison in the world is as potent as this. Furthermore, the "Three Corpse Brain" pills were made by many different people and have different natures. So Chief Dongfang's medicine wouldn't have any effect on Ren Woxing's "Three Corpse Brain" poison.

They were all scared to death hesitating what to do. Suddenly, Mr. Black-White said loudly, "Chief, have mercy, please. Subordinate will take one first." He was struggling to the table to take the pill. Ren Woxing lightly brushed away with his sleeve. Mr. Black-White was hit and fell hard on the ground, his brain matter scattered all over the wall.

"You're a crippled and have lost all your martial art already. Don't waste my wonder pill," coldly smiled Ren Woxing.

"Qin Weibang, Wang Cheng, Sang San Niang, you guys don't want to take my wonder pill?" asked Ren Woxing as he turned his head to them.

The middle-aged woman, Sang San Niang, bowed and said "Subordinate vows her loyalty to Chief from now on."

The fat and short looking elder, Wang Cheng, honestly said, "Subordinate sacrifice myself willingly to Chief."

Both took a pill each from the table and swallowed them. Those two people dreaded Ren Woxing completely. They had already seen with their own eyes Ren Woxing's ruthlessness. They would never dare to revolt again.

When Ren Woxing was Chief, Qin Weibang was in charge of the headquarter responsible for several districts. He had seen the various fierce methods that Ren Woxing used.

"I won't accompany you!" shouted Qin Weibang as he jumped through the

hole in the wall.

"HaHa, HaHa!" laughed Ren Woxing without trying to stop him escaping.

Qin Weibang's body was outside the wall when a long and slender black whip shot out from Xiang Wentian's left sleeve. Everyone in the room heard a cry of "Ah" from outside the wall as the whip was now being pulled back through the hole in the wall. Qin Weibang was being dragged back through the wall with the whip coiled around his left foot. He struggled with all his might, rolling around on the ground trying to break free.

"Sang San Niang, take a brain pill and peel its outside skin," said Ren Woxing.

"Yes!" responded Sang San Niang.

She took one pill from the table and used her finger to peel its shell. Inside the pill was a small gray coloured round ball.

"Feed it to him," ordered Ren Woxing.

"Yes!" answered Sang San Niang. She went in front of Qin Weibang and ordered, "Open your mouth!"

He turned around and shot out a palm. Even though his kung fu was slightly above Sang San Niang, but his ankle was under the whip's control. So his palm power was greatly reduced. Sang San Niang's left foot kicked his wrist, followed by her right foot kicking his chest, and in Yuan yang mandarin style, her left foot kicked again at his shoulder. These three kicks had sealed his accupoints. She then used her left hand to pinch his jaw forcing it to open and her right hand put the peeled brain pill in his mouth. Her right hand followed by pinching his throat, making him swallowed the pill.

Linghu Chong had been observing everything intently. He thought that these people had acted as if these things happened all the time in their normal ordinary days.

"This granny's hand and foot movements are clever," Linghu Chong thought. He didn't know that Sang Sa Niang used her "hand capturing" martial art to show off her vitality and unique skill to Ren Woxing. Also, she wanted to show

the Chief that she was loyal to him. Ren Woxing nodded his approval and smiled. Sang San Niang got up and stood guard respectfully besides Qin Weibang.

Ren Woxing turned around and looked at Mr. Huang Zhong and his two brothers. They understood that he was asking them whether they were going to take the pill or not.

Without speaking a single word, Mr. Bald-Brush went to take a pill and swallowed it.

Mr. Paint was mumbling to himself before he finally went and took a pill.

Mr. Huang Zhong looked grieved. He took a book out of his bosom. This was the "Guang Ling San" music score. He walked to Linghu Chong and said, "Your honorable's martial art is very high. You are also very wise to setup this strategy to help Ren Woxing got out. I admire you. This music score has harmed us four brothers. I return this to you." He then tossed the music score to Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong was startled. He then saw Mr. Huang Zhong turned around and walked towards the wall. Feeling regret and sorrow watching Mr. Huang Zhong walking towards the wall, he couldn't help thinking, "This was all Brother Xiang's plan to save Chief Ren. I didn't even know anything about it. But Mr. Huang Zhong and the two brothers will hate me always. I can never separate myself from this matter."

Mr. Huang Zhong leaned against the wall and said, "Originally, we four brothers entered the Sun Moon Sect with the intention of upholding justice in Jiang Hu. But Chief Ren's temper was very irritable and he used the power for his own gain. So we four brothers didn't get involved much in sect's affairs. When Chief Dongfang became Chief, he was crafty and villainous, and he expelled a lot of brothers from the sect. We four brothers became downhearted. So we asked to be sent here, to be far away from Dark Wood Cliff and not to be involved in other people's affairs. So we stayed in the West Lake cherishing the arts. In the past twelve years, we've enjoyed a lot of happiness and good fortune. A man's life is full of worry and short of happiness. This is fate... "

Speaking until here, a "heng" sound was heard. His body slowly dropped down.

"Big Brother!" shouted Mr. Bald-Brush and Mr. Paint. They ran to Mr. Huang Zhong's side to support him. Only to see a dagger sticking out of his heart, his two eyes opened wide, and his breath had stopped.

"Big Brother! Big brother!" cried both of them, their tears pouring down.

Wang Cheng applauded and said, "This old fellow didn't follow Chief's order. Now, he's killed himself fearing his crime. He's also added one more crime to his name. What are you two chaps being noisy about?"

Mr. Paint, his face full of anger, turned around. He wanted to charge at Wang Cheng disregarding his own life.

"What? You wanna rebel?" smirked Wang Cheng.

Mr. Paint remembered that he had taken the "Three Brain Corpse" pill already. From here on, he mustn't defy Ren Woxing's order at all. With this in mind, his anger subsided. He merely lowered his head and wiped his tears.

"Bring his corpse and this crippled corpse outside. Bring in the wine and dishes! Today, I'm gonna get drunk with Brother Xiang and Brother Linghu!" said Ren Woxing.

"Right away!" said Mr. Bald-Brush after he'd brought Mr. Huang Zhong's corpse outside.

A servant came in and arranged six sets of bowls and chopsticks.

"Take away three sets. How can we share a table with Chief?" said Bao Dachu while helping to setup the bowls and chopsticks.

"You have worked hard also. Have a drink outside," said Ren Woxing.

Bao Dachu, Wang Cheng, and Sang San Niang bowed together and replied "Thank you for Chief's grace." They then withdrew out of the room slowly.

After Linghu Chong saw Mr. Huang Zhong's suicide, he came to regard him as a righteous and upright person. He remembered the day when Mr. Huang Zhong offered to write a letter to Shaolin Abbot Fang Zheng to treat Linghu Chong's

illness. Linghu Chong couldn't help but feel sad at Mr. Huang Zhong's death.

"Brother, you've had a really good fortune being able to learn Chief's Art of Essence Absorbing. Let's hear your story," said Xiang Wentian smiling. So Linghu Chong told them how he found the skill on the iron panel and everything that went on afterwards.

"Congratulations, this type of opportunity is really precious. It makes brother's life good and happy," said Xiang Wentian happily. As he finished speaking, he lifted his wine cup and chugged it down in a mouthful. Ren Woxing and Linghu Chong also lifted their wine cups and chugged them down.

Looking happy, Ren Woxing said, "When you look at this matter, it is actually very dangerous. Initially, when I engraved this martial art's secrets on the iron panel, I was just feeling melancholy and wanting to kill some time. I didn't actually have any intention to preserve this martial art. This divine martial art is of course real, but I didn't leave any direction to help in learning or to avoid having "fire deviation". This is to prevent people from getting this skill. There are two major difficulties in learning this divine skill. The first difficulty involves scattering all of the body's internal energy and emptying everything from the Dantian region. If the internal energy is not emptied out or if it was scattered into the wrong acupoints, you will get "fire deviation". At best, your whole body will be paralysed and you will be crippled. At worst, your meridians will flow backwards and you will bleed to death from 7 holes in your body. This martial art was created by Cheng Yida several hundred years ago and it is rare to get instructions for it. Also, very few people finished learning it completely because this scattering step is very difficult. Brother Linghu actually had a few big advantages. First, you have lost all of your internal energy. So you didn't care about scattering your energy and it didn't take too much effort for you to complete the first step. For other people, this is the most difficult and dangerous step. You, on the other hand, passed this step unexpectedly and unwittingly. After scattering your internal energy, it is essential to absorb other people's qi immediately. This energy from another person must be stored in your Dantian and then scattered into your 8 meridians. Ordinarily, this step is also very

difficult. Your whole internal energy has just been dispersed into the meridians. You then must absorb someone's qi. How can this be an easy thing to do? Who wants to give up his life for you to practice this skill? Brother Linghu again had an advantage with this second difficulty. I've heard Brother Xiang said that, there are 8 types of internal energy in your body from various masters. Although they are only a portion of each person's qi, each one is already extremely good. Brother Linghu, you've passed these two major obstacles very easily and finished learning the skill. It must be heaven's will."

Linghu Chong's palm was wet with cold sweat. He said, "Luckily all my internal energy was lost already. Otherwise, I don't dare to think what would have happened. Brother Xiang, how did Chief Ren escape from the underground prison? Little brother still doesn't know how this happened."

Xiang Wentian chuckled and took out an object from his bosom and put it on Linghu Chong's palm.

"What's this?" asked Linghu Chong as he felt a hard ball on his palm. It was the object that he gave to Ren Woxing on that day. He opened his palm and saw a metal ball. There was an inlay with a metal bead on the ball. He pushed the metal bead and it turned around in the inlay. When he pulled on the bead, an extremely fine metal thread came out of it. The end of this metal thread was connected to the ball on his hand. With a row of saw tooth, this metal thread was just like a metal wire saw. Linghu Chong was suddenly enlightened.

"So that was how the shackles on Chief's hands and feet were broken!" exclaimed Linghu Chong.

"I completely knocked out all five of you by laughing a few times using my internal energy. Then I used that metal saw to cut the shackles. How did you deal with Mr. Black-White when you were escaping? What do you think I did?" asked Ren Woxing with a smile.

"First, you switched your clothes with mine and then you shackled my hands and feet. No wonder Mr. Huang Zhong didn't notice what happened." beamed Linghu Chong.

"Of course, it wasn't easy to conceal this from Mr. Huang Zhong and Mr. Black-White. But when they woke up, Chief and I had already left the Plum Manor. We left them the chess book, the music score, the calligraphy and the painting. Seeing these probably made them very happy. How can they suspect that the person inside the prison has escaped?" explained Xiang Wentian.

"Brother's strategy was certainly divine. No other person could have done it this well." said Linghu Chong. But in his heart, he was thinking, "You planned all of this from the very beginning. You deceived these four people to lead us inside the prison. But it has been a long time since Chief escaped. How come it took you so long to rescue me?"

Xiang Wentian noticed the change of color on Linghu Chong's face and guessed correctly what Linghu Chong was thinking.

With a smile, he said, "Brother, Chief had many major matters to deal with after the escape from prison. We cannot let the enemy know of the escape at the time. So, it was better to wrong you and let you stay under the West Lake for several days first. Didn't we come to rescue you today? However, we found you've turned bad luck into good fortune and have finished learning this marvelous martial art. That should compensate for your time in there. HaHaHa. Wasn't it a fair trade?" Saying this, Xiang Wentian filled their wine cups to the brim.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, "Cheers!" Each of them gulped their wine down.

"What fair trade? I have to thank the two of you. Originally, I had serious internal injuries that have no cure in this world. After learning Chief's divine martial art, this internal injuries were healed, giving me back one life," smiled Linghu Chong.

The three of them laughed loudly, feeling very happy.

"Twelve years ago, Chief went missing and Dongfang Bubai seized power. When I found out about this matter, I could only bear patiently. So I worked together with Dongfang Bubai with little interest. Until recently, when I found

out that Chief was being imprisoned here. I came here straight away to help Chief escape from this prison. How was I supposed to know that when I descended from Dark Wood Cliff, that bastard Dongfang Bubai would send many groups to kill me. Then I accidentally met with those orthodox sect scoundrel bastards when they were having a meeting. Brother, that day at the bottom of the valley, you told me the reason for losing your internal energy. At that time, I thought of scattering your various strange internal energies. At the present age, only Chief can do this," reasoned Xiang Wentian.

After drinking more than ten cups of wine, Linghu Chong thought that this person Ren Woxing's style of speaking was heroic, his knowledge and experience were not ordinary. He really was a rare grand hero. He couldn't help but to admire him. At first, when he saw how he dealt with Qin Weibang, Mr. Huang Zhong and Mr. Black-White, he thought that his method was excessively vicious. But after hearing him talk, he quite resembled that of a hero. Also, he thought that his temperament couldn't often be this vicious. Hence, his heart, which at first, held a resentful thought towards Ren Woxing gradually subsided.

"Brother Linghu, when we treat with the enemy, we treat them viciously. Managing subordinates must also be strict. You're probably not accustomed to it. But you think, how long have I been locked up under the West Lake's underground prison? You've been imprisoned in there, you know how it feels likes. How do others treat me? Regarding the enemy's rebel, can you treat them compassionately?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong nodded agreeing with him. Suddenly, he wanted to deal with a matter and stood up.

"I have a matter to request from Chief, hopefully Chief will agree to it," said Linghu Chong.

"What matter?" asked Ren Woxing.

"The day when I first met Chief, I heard Mr. Huang Zhong said, that when Chief escaped and re-entered Jiang Hu. That you will give Huashan School great trouble. I also heard Chief said that if you meet my master then you will give

him some embarrassments. Chief's martial art is godly, if you give trouble to Huashan School, then no one there would be able to withstand it," said Linghu Chong.

"I heard Brother Xiang said that your master announced to everyone that you've been expelled from Huashan School. I'll go and disgrace them. After we've found them, we'll wipe Huashan School out from the Wulin world. This is to substitute for the bitter feeling in your heart," told Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong shook his head and replied, "My parents died when I was young. It was Master and Master-wife's kindness that they took me in. They took care of me when I was growing up and then took me in as a disciple. They're like parents to me. It was my fault that Master expelled me from the school. Also, there might be some misunderstanding between us. I wouldn't dare blame my kind Master."

"It was Yue Buqun who treated you heartlessly. But you're not willing to seek justice?" smiled Ren Woxing.

"I beg for Chief's kindness and to be broadminded. Please don't go after my Master, Master-wife, and Huashan School's disciples," said Linghu Chong.

"Emm, I've escaped from that dark prison and you've also had your strive at the same time. But I've passed on to you the divine skill Art of Essence Absorbing and saved your life. Both things should be equal. I've re-entered Jiang Hu and have a lot of grudges. I can't agree to your request. Later, when I handle my affairs, I can't have both my hands and feet tied," answered Ren Woxing.

Hearing him said this, Linghu Chong felt that his master would meet great difficulty. He couldn't help but felt anxious.

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "Little brother, sit down. Today, in this world, I only trust you and Brother Xiang. You requested one matter from me. We can always discuss this. How about this? I also have a request to make to you. Why don't you agree to this matter for me first? After today, when I meet Huashan's disciples, as long as they're not disrespectful towards me, then I won't bother

them. Even if I must teach them a lesson, if I see you at that time, I will hold my hand and only use thirty percent of my power. What do you say to this?"

Linghu Chong was very happy. He replied, "I'm deeply grateful for this. Who dares not to follow Chief's order?"

"We three are now sworn brothers, from today, we'll share all happiness and woes together. Brother Xiang is Sun Moon Sect's Guang Ming Zuo Shi (left protector). You will become my sect's Guang Ming You Shi (right protector). What do you think of this?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong was startled when he heard this. He didn't anticipate that Ren Woxing wanted him to join the Devil Sect. When he was young, he heard from Master and Master-wife that Devil Sect has many kinds of evil and vicious people. After he'd been expelled from Huashan School, he was thinking of just leisurely wandering the Jiang Hu and not belonging to any school or sect. Even if his body wanted to join the Devil Sect, his mind thought that he should not. His heart was disconcerted. He didn't know how to answer.

Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian were staring at him. The room was now completely quiet and not a single sound could be heard.

After some time, Linghu Chong said, "Chief is very kind to let me, Linghu Chong, enter the sect so late. But how would I dare to stand side-by-side with Chief? Also, I'm still hoping that, even though I don't have a chance to rejoin Huashan School, Master will have a change of attitude and take back his command...."

Ren Woxing smiled tastelessly and said, "You call me Chief. Actually, although I've escaped from prison, my life is still in a precarious state and this word "Chief" means nothing. It's only good to hear. Today, everyone knows that Sun Moon Sect's Chief is Dongfang Bubai. This person's kung fu is high and is not below me at all. His strategy and wisdom are also above me. With a signal from him, many people will rush to help him against only Brother Xiang and me. So, taking the position of Chief from him is a hopeless battle. It's a foolish and deluded action. You're not willing to be my sworn brother. Of course, this is a

wise idea to protect your own life. Come, come, come! Let's drink wine and be happy. Let this matter rest."

"How did Dongfang Bubai take away Chief's power and position? Also how did you get imprisoned in the underground prison? There are many matters that I still don't understand. Can these two matters be explained?" asked Linghu Chong.

Ren Woxing shook his head. His smile was mournful. He said, "I've been living under the lake for 12 years. What fame and authority do I have left? Hey, hey. I've grown older and my temper has also become worse."

He filled a wine cup to the brim, drank it in a mouthful, and laughed loudly. His laughter sounded sad and forlorn.

"Brother, that day Dongfang Bubai sent a lot of people to chase after me, you've seen his vicious method with your own eyes. If you didn't give me a hand, I would've become minced-meat in that pavilion. Right now, your heart is divided between the orthodox school and the Devil Sect. But on that day, those several hundred people from both sides allied together and tried to kill the two of us. Where is the division? What orthodox school? What devil sect? Actually this division is only artificial. Inside the orthodox schools, there are good people. But don't they also have some despicable and evil disciples? Although the Devil Sect has no shortages of bad people, but we three people would be able to hold the power in the sect. So we'll be able to reorganise the sect well and get rid of those evil degenerates. Won't we then be seen as a proud and heroic sect in Jiang Hu?" Xiang Wentian said.

Linghu Chong nodded and said, "What big brother said is true."

"Back in those days, Chief treated Dongfang Bubai fairly. He was promoted to the position of left protector and was given all the power in the sect. Meanwhile, Chief was concentrating on correcting some small flaws in the Art of Essence Absorbing. That wolf Dongfang Bubai, with his unexpectedly wild ambition, took care of everyday affairs. On the surface, he treated Chief respectfully and didn't dare to violate anything. But secretly, he gathered power to himself and

did things on false pretexts. He removed all the ministers loyal to Chief, all were possibly killed. A few years later, all of Chief's trusted people were all gone. Chief is an upright and most sincere person. He saw that Dongfang Bubai was respectful and prudent so he didn't suspect anything. But Dongfang Bubai had positioned himself well in the sect with his hands in everything. He had everything arranged to his liking. We didn't have any suspicion from the beginning to the end," explained Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "Brother Xiang, I'm actually very ashamed of this matter. You honestly told me many times to guard against treachery. But I trusted Dongfang Bubai too highly and I didn't like to hear those honest talk. Instead I thought you were jealous of him. After I blamed you, you sowed dissension and a lot of lives were lost. Then you left in anger and from then on we haven't met again till now."

"I wouldn't dare to blame Chief. I merely saw that something wasn't right. That Dongfang Bubai encircled us secretly then launched his attack. If subordinate was besides Chief at that time, then I would also suffer his violent treachery. Although I was willing to face difficulty and death for the sect, I had to consider about the future in this case. So I felt that I must have a way to escape for every situation. If Chief was able to see through his deceitful heart and ordered him to not pursue his own goals, then I would have been really happy. Otherwise, I should be outside the sect. At the very least, I should avoid him unless he discovered about my suspicion," said Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing nodded and said, "That's true. But how did I know about your pain at that time? I only saw you left without saying goodbye and felt really angry. At the same time, my martial art practice had just reached its critical point and I nearly had a calamity. That Dongfang Bubai actually did everything to please me and advised me not to worry. Then I fell even deeper in his plot, I went as far as giving him the sect's secret Sunflower Scripture."

When Linghu Chong heard of this "Sunflower Scripture", he let out an "ah".

"Brother, you also know about the "Sunflower Scripture"?" asked Xiang Wentian.

"I only heard master mentioned this name before. I knew that it's a deep and profound martial art secret. But I didn't know that it was in Chief's possession," answered Linghu Chong.

"For many years, "Sunflower Scripture" has been Sun Moon Sect's well guarded treasure. It is handed down from the previous Chief to the next. When I was practising the Art of Essence Absorbing, I neglected to eat and sleep. I didn't care about any matters at all and I wanted to give up the position of Chief to Dongfang Bubai. So I gave Dongfang Bubai the "Sunflower Scripture". This is to make him understand clearly about my intention. That not long after, I was going to give the position of Chief to him. Ai, originally Dongfang Bubai is a very intelligent person. But once he understood that he was going to get the position of Chief, why did he have to rush in getting it and not willing to wait until I formally give him the position myself? Why did he instead rebel to seize this position?" said Ren Woxing.

He scowled and it appears that even until now he didn't understand clearly about this matter.

"Apparently, he couldn't wait a moment longer. He didn't know when Chief was going to formally give him the position. So he worried and afraid that something might suddenly change," explained Xiang Wentian.

"Actually, he already secured everything for himself. What sudden change should he be afraid of? It's difficult to predict the minds of other people. When I was in the underground prison, I went over his treasonous plan from many different angles, trying to understand. Why did he suddenly launch the attack? Even until now, I still don't understand his logic. Originally, he was a little bit jealous of you, afraid that I might give the position of chief to you. But he'd seen you left with his own eyes. So it was better for him to just wait for a little while," reasoned Ren Woxing.

"At the night of the dragon boat festival's feast in the same year that Dongfang Bubai launched his attack, Miss said something at the banquet. Does Chief still remember what she said?" asked Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing scratched his head pondering, "Dragon boat festival? What did that little Miss say? Hmm. What's the connection? I don't remember."

"Chief, don't treat Miss as a little child. She's very clever and thoughtful, and no lesser than any adult. That year, miss is seven years old, right? She was at the banquet looking at people when she suddenly asked you, "Dad, dad, how come when we drink wine at the dragon boat festival every year, there's always one person less?" You were startled and asked her, "What do you mean there is one person less every year?" Miss answered, "I remembered there were 11 people last year. The year before, there were 12 people. This year, one, two, three, four, five... we only have ten,"" recounted Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing sighed and said, "That's true. Ahh. At that time, when I heard what little miss said, I felt very unhappy. The year before, Dongfang Bubai had executed younger brother Hao Xian. The year before that, Elder Qiu died at Gansu with no clear reason. When I think about it now, this must have been Dongfang Bubai's evil doing. And one year before that, Elder Wen was removed from the sect and was killed by the masters from SongShan School, TaiShan School and HengShan School. That disaster must also be Dongfang Bubai's doing. Ai, little miss accidentally said the right word and revealed his plan. At that time, my mind was like in a dream, I couldn't comprehend it."

He stopped for a while and gulped his wine down.

He continued, "This Art of Essence Absorbing was created by Xiao Yao Sect in times of Northern Song. It was a combination of the two skills, BeiMing Shen Gong and Hua Gong DaFa (Author's note: Please read "Tian Long Ba Bu"), which were left behind by Dali's Duan family and XingXiu Sect respectively. They were combined into one, and became the Art of Essence Absorbing. The Art of Essence Absorbing's main principle is inherited from Hua Gong DaFa. But the scholars who wrote the formula down didn't know the proper way, so there were some flaws on the skill. In the meantime, for more than ten years, I've been repairing this Art of Essence Absorbing. In Jiang Hu, this divine martial art still has a big reputation. When people from orthodox school hear this name, they still tremble with fear. But I know that this divine martial art has

a few big flaws in it. In the beginning, I didn't feel anything wrong. But later, a disastrous problem was slowly revealed. In those several years, I came to understand the problem deeply. I knew that if I don't find the remedy soon, I would one day die by "fire deviation". Those energy that I've absorbed from other people could suddenly reverse. Because I've absorbed a lot of energy, the reverse energy would also be just as big."

When Linghu Chong heard all this, he secretly felt that there was one big thing that wasn't right. Ren Woxing continued, "At that time, I've already absorbed the internal energies of ten evil masters. But because each of the ten internal energies was very strong and different, they prohibited each other from being sent to different gates. I believed that there must be a way to make all these internal energy harmonious and whole so that I could use them. Otherwise, I will always be in danger. In those few years, I thought day and night on how to solve this problem to the point that I neglected everything except thinking on this matter. That day at the Dragon Boat Festival feast, although I was drinking wine and cracking jokes, but in my heart, I sought a way that would allow the energy in my body to flow freely amidst the twenty-two acupoints of the Yangjiao Channel and the thirty-two acupoints of the Yangwei Channel. These made up a total of fifty-four acupoints, through which the energy could flow in its passage from the Yangjiao into the Yangwei and vice-versa."

"At that time, I also thought that it was strange as Chief is usually alert. Chief only needs to hear half a word to know what a person wants to say. You observed everything and missed nothing. But in those several years, not only were you not aware of Dongfang Bubai's treasonous plan, but also every day... every day..." sighed Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing smiled a little and said, "Everyday I was dazed and witless. My mind seemed to be elsewhere all the time."

"That's true. Ahhh. After miss said those words, Dongfang Bubai laughed and said, "Miss, you love things to be lively, don't you? Next year, we'll invite more people to drink wine" When he said those words, his face was full of happiness. But when I observed his eyes, it was full of hesitation. He must've suspected that

Chief knew of what he was up to. And that right then, Chief was just pretending to be ignorant to test him. He knew that Chief is astute so he expected that Chief knew about his plan already," said Xiang Wentian.

Ren Woxing scowled and said, "I couldn't remember at all what little miss said at the dragon boat festival's feast twelve years ago. I now remember only after you mentioned about it. That's right, when Dongfang Bubai heard those words, how can it not raise his suspicions?"

"Also, Dongfang Bubai was afraid that Miss would see through his treasonous plan in a year or two when she had grown up and gotten even smarter. Furthermore, he was afraid that if he waited until she became an adult, Chief might give the position of Chief to her. So, when Dongfang Bubai heard this, he didn't dare to wait any longer. He took a risk and launched the attack. This is the logic behind all this," Xiang Wentian explained.

Ren Woxing nodded his head agreeing with what Xiang Wentian said.

"Ai, if my daughter is by my side right now, then we'll have one more person and our position wouldn't be as weak as right now," said Ren Woxing.

Xiang Wentian turned to Linghu Chong and said, "Brother, Chief has already said that there's a big flaw with the Art of Essence Absorbing. As far as I know, Chief was working on a solution to fix this divine martial art while he endured being imprisoned for the last 12 years. Of course, by the time he escaped from that prison, he already had a breakthrough and found the solution for this divine martial art. Chief, is this right?"

Ren Woxing rubbed his thick black fine beard, laughed, and was feeling proud of himself. He said, "Of course. From now on, when I absorb other people's energy, I don't have to worry about these energies suddenly reversing. HaHa! Brother Linghu, take a deep breath, don't you feel there's qi drumming fiercely at your Yuzhen and Shanzhong acupoints?"

Linghu Chong took a deep breath and felt a faint qi flowing at his Yuzhen and Shanzhong acupoints. He couldn't help that his complexion changed as he did this.

"You've only begun your practice, so you can probably only feel it a little bit. But during those years, before I found the remedy, the qi in these two pressure points was drumming really fiercely. It felt like the sky was falling down and the earth shaking. It was torture. Even though I looked calm and quiet outside, inside my ears, it sounded like there were a thousand horses charging through. Sometimes, it sounded like thunder continuously striking down. Ai, if I wasn't having such a big disaster with my qi, how can Dongfang Bubai's treasonous plan have succeeded?" said Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong knew that Ren Woxing was saying the truth. He also knew that Xiang Wentian mentioned this problem to get him to ask for advice from Ren Woxing. But he was determined not to join the Sun Moon Sect and ask for Ren Woxing's help. He couldn't say anything, but in his heart, he was thinking, "I've already learned his Art of Essence Absorbing. This skill absorbs other people's energy for myself to use. It's a very selfish and vicious skill. I had decided not to practise and use it. If I can't stop these absorbed energies from reversing, then that's the way it's gonna be. This is gonna be my fate. How can Linghu Chong be greedy and be afraid of death? How can I commit a big violation over this when I'm originally sincere?"

After he mulled over this matter in his mind, he said, "Chief, I would like to consult you on a matter I still don't understand. My master said that the "Sunflower Scripture" is the most supreme martial arts secret. No one will be able to match you in the whole world after learning this martial art. He said your life would also be prolonged to over 100 years. How come you didn't learn this martial art and instead learned that dangerously fierce Art of Essence Absorbing?"

Ren Woxing weakly smiled and said, "I don't think outsiders are worthy enough to know the reason."

Linghu Chong's face turned red when he heard this. He said, "Yes, I was too bold."

"Brother, Chief is already old, your big brother is also only a few years younger than him. If you enter the sect, then Chief's successor will of course be

you. I know that you dislike the Sun Moon Sect's bad reputation. But when you're chief, wouldn't you have the power in hand to reorganise the sect so that people in this world would benefit from it?" Xiang Wentian logically told Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong felt that Xiang Wentian's speech was logical and reasonable. He was moved. He saw Ren Woxing picked up his wine cup and with his right hand, picked up the wine pot and filled the cup to the brim. Ren Woxing then said, "Several hundred years ago, there was enmity between my Sun Moon sect and the orthodox sects and schools. After that, we couldn't coexist anymore. If you adhere stubbornly to this opinion and don't enter our sect then your internal injuries will be difficult to heal and your life isn't guaranteed. This doesn't need to be said. Also, I'm afraid that your Master and Master-wife of Huashan school... Hey, hey, I want to make all of Huashan School disciples perish and stamp Huashan School out of existence from the Wulin world. This isn't a hard thing to do at all. It was fate that brought us here together. If you agree with my suggestion, then please drink this cup of wine."

These words were said threateningly. Linghu Chong's felt his anger rising up and in a clear voice said, "Chief, big brother, originally my injuries were enough to shorten my life and I was only living from day to day. Then I accidentally learned Chief's divine martial art. But now, because I'm unable to meld all the energies together, I might not live long. So it's just like my old injuries. This is no big deal. For a long time, I've already thought my life was unimportant. Dead or alive, I still have my life now. Huashan School has been around for several hundred years and has managed to survive till now. It's not necessarily true that other people can just raise their hands and destroy Huashan School. Today, we've finished our talk. Let us part here."

As soon as he finished speaking, he cupped his hands in salute towards the two people, turned around and left.

Xiang Wentian still had words to say but Linghu Chong was already far away. As Linghu Chong ran out of the Plum Manor, he felt the cold air brushing his body and he felt unrestrained in his heart. As he sighed and raised his head, he

saw the crescent moon hanging from the tip of a willow branch. In the middle of the lake, he could see reflections of the bright moon and the clouds on the water. When he reached the bank of the lake, he stood there quietly for some time and thought, "Chief Ren must now be going to Dongfang Bubai to settle the matter concerning the position of Chief. He wouldn't search for Huashan School straight away to bring them trouble. But, Master, Master-wife, and martial brothers and sisters didn't know about this matter. If they meet him, they may suffer under his violent hands. I must tell them as soon as possible so that they can be prepared. But I don't know whether they've returned from Fuzhou or not. From here, it's not that far to Fuzhou. I don't have anything else to do. I'll just go to Fuzhou for a trip. If they're on their way back, then maybe I'll meet them on the way."

His thought immediately turned to the letter his master wrote to the Wulin world. In that letter, his Master announced that he'd been expelled from Huashan school. A sour feeling rose up in his heart as he remembered this. He thought to himself, "I'm going to report to Master and Master-wife about Chief Ren compelling me to join his sect. They will understand that I didn't intentionally make friends with people from Devil sect. Maybe Master will take back his command and will only punish me to spend three years on top of that cliff thinking about my fault. If that's the case, then it's going to be good." Thinking that there may be a chance to re-enter the school, his spirit rose.

He immediately started off to look for an inn to stay overnight. He felt that he would be able to sleep long until noon this time. Then he thought that as he hadn't seen Master and Master-wife, it would be better to hide his original appearance. Furthermore, Yingying gave orders to those people to take his life. So, he felt it'd be best to disguise himself and not look for trouble. But what appearance should he take on for his disguise?

As he was deep in thought, he arrived at an inn. He walked slowly into the inn. Just as he entered the courtyard, he suddenly heard the sound of a door being opened and a basin full of water splashed towards him. He evaded quickly as the basin emptied out. In front of him was an angry looking military officer

glaring at him, holding a wooden wash basin. The officer rudely shouted, "Did you not bring your eyes? Didn't you see grandfather throwing water out?"

Linghu Chong was feeling angry. He couldn't believe that such an unruly and unreasonable man existed. With a fine thick beard, this military officer looked like he was around forty years old. He was wearing a full body military gown and there was a Yaodao saber on his waist. Linghu Chong thought that he was probably an officer from a military school. With his chest flat and his belly bulging out, he looked accustomed to the good living.

That military officer loudly shouted, "What are you looking at? You don't recognise your granddad?"

Linghu Chong suddenly got an inspiration, "Why don't I disguise myself as this military officer? He's quite interesting. I'll be walking around Jiang Hu in an impressive disguise. People in Wulin won't even give me a second look."

That military officer shouted loudly again, "What are you laughing at? Your granny⁶, what's so funny?"

Linghu Chong unconsciously smiled, feeling proud of himself. When he went to the counter to pay for a room and meal, he whispered to the innkeeper, "What's the background of that military officer?"

The shopkeeper frowned at his question, but he still answered, "Who knows where he comes from? He came from Beijing and has stayed here for one night. The servants served him three meals already. He's also ordered a good quantity of good wine and good meat. Don't know if he's going to pay or not."

Linghu Chong nodded and walked into the teahouse. He brewed a pot of tea and slowly drank it. After waiting for an hour, he heard the sound of a horse trotting. That military officer was going out of the inn on a red jujube-coloured horse. While lashing his horsewhip making a "Pai, pai" sound, he was loudly bellowing, "Make way! Make way! Your granny, hurry up and get away!" A few people were too slow getting out of his way and got lashed by the whip.

Linghu Chong already paid for his tea, so he got up and followed the horse. He saw the officer exiting from the west gate and galloping away on the

southwesterly road. After a few li, there were less and less people on the road, so Linghu Chong quickened his steps. He rushed to the front of the horse and raised his right hand. The horse was frightened and reared at him causing that officer to almost fall from the horse.

Linghu Chong shouted loudly, "Your granny, didn't you bring your eyes? Your horse almost kicked this old man to death!"

That officer didn't open his mouth but he looked indignant and snorted three times. He waited till his horse's front foot dropped back down before he selected a whip and lashed out towards Linghu Chong's head. He saw that it's inconvenient to settle this matter on the main road so he shouted, "Ai yo!" and staggered into the forest. That officer wasn't willing to just let Linghu Chong go like that. So he dismounted his horse and quickly tied the horse's rein on a tree. He was madly impatient to start chasing.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Ai yo! I want my mommy!" as he fled into the forest.

That military officer started pursuing and raised a clamor as he was running through the forest. Suddenly he felt a tingling sensation on the side of his body and fell down on the ground. Linghu Chong's left foot stepped on his chest and laughingly said, "Your granny, your skill isn't good. How can you march to war?" He searched the officer's bosom and took out a big envelope. On the envelope was the "Seal of the Ministry of War Office" on red vermillion and a written word "Announcement" in big letters. He opened the letter and took out a thick paper. It was the ministry of war office's appointment order. Written on it was the promotion of Hebei's Cangzhou prefecture's officer Wu Tiande to become Fujian's Quanzhou prefecture's general.

Linghu Chong laughed and said, "Oh, it's big general, so you're Wu Tiande?"

That officer was pinned underneath Linghu Chong's foot and his face starting to turn purple.

"Let me get up! Quickly! You... you... very daring. Insulting a government official, not... not afraid of the law?" shouted that officer. Although he was shouting, his anger had long been exhausted.

Smiling, Linghu Chong said, "Your old man doesn't have anything to tie you up with but I want to borrow your clothes to try on," After saying so, he knocked out the officer by hitting him on the head with his palm.

He then quickly took the officer's clothes off. Thinking that this guy was hateful, he decided to teach him a lesson and took off all his underwear, leaving the officer buck-naked on the ground. He then picked up the officer's bundle and opened it. Inside, there were several hundreds silver taels and three gold coins. He thought, "This must have been taken away from good and honest people. It's going to be hard to return these to the owners. I'll just have to use it to buy wine for my General Wu Tiande." He chuckled as he thought of this. Immediately, he took off his clothes and put on the officer's clothes, leather boots, and Yaodao saber. He also took the bundle with him. Afterwards, using a strip of his own clothes, he tied the officer's hands to a tree and stuffed his mouth full with mud. He thought for a while and took his knife out to shave the officer's beard and put those shaved beard in his bosom. He smiled and remarked, "You've changed into a pretty face now. You've become much more beautiful."

When he got back to the main road, he untied the horse's rein and mounted it. He lashed out with the whip and shouted, "Make way! Make way! Your granny, didn't you bring your eyes? HaHa, HaHa!" Laughing loudly, he galloped away to the south.

That same night, he arrived at an inn at the border area of Hangzhou. The shopkeeper and servant at that inn greeted him with "Army officer, army officer". At daybreak, Linghu Chong asked the shopkeeper the road to Fujian. After receiving 5 taels of silver, the shopkeeper and his servant accompanied him while bowing all the way to the door. Linghu Chong thought, "You guys are fortunate that you met my general; if you had actually met the real General Wu Tiande, you would certainly have suffered." After leaving the inn, he went to a store and bought a face mirror and a bottle of glue water. Once he got outside the city, he looked for a desolated place. Once he got there, he took out the mirror and carefully glued the shaved beard on his face. This took him around

an hour. When he checked himself in the mirror, his cheek was full of fine thick beard and couldn't help but laughed at himself.

On the way south, he reached Jinhua prefecture and arrived at the prefecture office. In this area, he found it hard to understand the southern accent. But it was good that he was dressed in military attire because people started talking to him in a more formal manner, which made him able to understand them much better. In his whole life, he's never had this much money before, so he kept ordering wine and drank to his heart's content.

The many different internal energies that he had were circulating throughout the meridians in his body, not a trace of it was leaving his body. When suddenly, an energy stream rushed towards his Dantian region making him dizzy, seeing stars, and wanting to vomit. This was Mr. Black-White's qi. He felt the pain was even more unbearable than before. Whenever this happened, he only had to follow the method written by Ren WoXing on the iron panel and expel the qi out from the Dantian region. After the qi in the Dantian was emptied, then his qi would become smooth and he would feel vigorous immediately. If he followed this practice every time this happened, he knew that his energy would also increase by a level but he would also be deeper in trouble by one level. He was always upbeat in his thinking. "I already got my life back. Living for one more day, even for one more minute is already good." He calmed down straight away.

That afternoon, he entered the Xianxia mountain range. The area was rugged and as he went on, he got higher and higher and could see less and less smokes from the mountain people's habitation. He rode on for another 20 li and no house was around anymore. He knew straight away that he had made a mistake by going past the last inn so now he had to stay the night on the road with robbers around the area. The night was getting darker as he picked a fruit up and ate it. Then he spotted a small cave underneath the cliff. It looked dry and seemed as if there were not many bugs inside to bother him. So he tied his horse's rein on a tree and let it eat some grass, while he went to collect some dry grass to spread inside the cave.

He felt that the qi in his Dantian wasn't relaxed so he sat down to meditate.

With more practice, Ren Woxing's divine martial art was going to get even harder to restrain and he was going to feel uncomfortable more often. When he finished meditating, his whole body felt relaxed and light. It was as if he was on a cloud. He then expelled the breath in his mouth, stood up, and smiled bitterly. "That day when I asked Chief Ren, how come he still wanted to learn the Art of Essence Absorbing when he already had "Sunflower Manual" in his possession, he didn't answer willingly. But now, I understand why. This Art of Essence Absorbing, after you practiced it, you won't be able to give it up." After reaching this conclusion, he couldn't help but feel frightened. "I heard Master-wife said before about Miao people raising poisonous evil things. Even when they knew it was evil, it was hard to give up. If they don't use those poisonous bugs to harm people then the bugs would harm the host's body. In the future, will I become just like those Miao people?"

When he walked out of the cave, he saw a lot of stars in the sky and heard the chirping of insects. Suddenly, he heard people coming towards the mountain. It seemed that they're still quite far away but his internal energy allowed him to hear further. Immediately, he went to his horse, loosened its rein, hit its back to make the horse move into the cave. He then hid himself behind a tree. After some time, he heard the steps coming closer. The light from the stars allowed him to see many people with black gowns and yellow waistbands, walking along. From the outfits, he reckoned they were people from the Devil Sect. There were more than thirty people in the group and none of them spoke a word. Linghu Chong thought, "They seemed to be going south towards Fujian. I wonder if they have anything to do with my Huashan School. Have they received orders from Chief Ren to cause trouble for Master and Master-wife?" He waited until those people were gone far enough before he quietly followed.

After he had walked for several li, the mountain road became really steep. Then he saw the two mountain peaks besides each other with a very narrow mountain road going through the middle. It would be impossible for two people to go up side by side on this road. Those thirty people were climbing through the pass in a single file. Linghu Chong thought, "If I were to follow them up now, it's possible that once they reached the top, one of them might accidentally

turn his head around and see me." So he quickly hid himself in the bushes to wait for them to finish climbing the slope and to start going down on the south slope before he started chasing again. But when these people reached the peak of the slope, they suddenly scattered and hid themselves behind the mountain rocks. Not a single shadow was seen.

Linghu Chong was frightened. The first thing that entered his mind was, "They saw me." But he knew immediately that he was wrong. He considered further, "They're going to ambush people who will go up the slope. That must be it! This is the perfect place to plan an ambush. Whoever climbed up here would have trouble escaping. Who are they trying to ambush? If Master and Master-wife had gone back to the North, what urgent matter do they have to go back to Fujian that they would be walking through here at night? Will I see my little martial sister tonight?" As his thought turned to Yue Lingshan, his whole body became hot. He quietly stepped away from the bushes. After he had gained a bit of distance away from the mountaintop, he quickly dashed down from the mountain. After several bends, he turned around and couldn't see the mountain slope anymore. Then he headed back north away from the mountain pass. He scampered along the road while trying to listen if anyone was coming towards him. After 10 more li, he suddenly heard voices from a hillside on the left. "Linghu Chong is a dirty rascal. You're still defending him!"

Chapter 23 Ambush

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



Yilin turned around hurriedly and stuck out her hand. Linghu Chong reached over and held on to her hand. Yilin pulled hard upwards, and after several embarrassing stumbles, Linghu Chong finally regained his balance. Several female apprentices behind him simply could not help giggling.

Linghu Chong was alarmed to suddenly hear someone calling his own name on a desolated mountaintop in the middle of the night. His first thought was, "It's master!" But it was the voice of a female and it wasn't master-wife or Yue Lingshan. This outburst was followed by a softer and quieter female's voice,

which he could not hear clearly. Linghu Chong went towards the hillside and saw the shadows of thirty-four people standing up. His heart turned sour. "Who scolded me? Is it really HuaShan School's party? If martial sister heard someone scolded me like that, I wonder how she would react?"

He lowered his body to hide beside a shrub on the side. He crouched and circled around the hillside to get closer to the group and hid himself behind a big tree. He heard a female's voice said, "Martial uncle, Martial brother Linghu is an upright and heroic..." Hearing this half sentence, the picture of a delicately pretty face came into his mind. His chest became slightly constricted as he realised that the person saying this was Yilin, the little nun from Hengshan school. He was disappointed to learn that these people were not from Huashan School. As his mind was somewhere else, he missed the next two sentences said by Yilin. He only heard the sharp voice of the previous speaker saying angrily, "You still dare to argue with your elder? Then that letter from Mr. Yue of Huashan School is fake? Mr. Yue sent this letter to the entire realm, telling everyone that Linghu Chong had been expelled from HuaShan because he's involved with Devil Sect's people. What wrong can we do to him? When Linghu Chong saved you before, he probably wants to depend on this small favour to plot against us..."

"Martial uncle, it wasn't a small favor, Martial brother Linghu disregarded his own life..." answered Yilin.

"You're still calling him martial brother? This person is most probably a shrewd and wicked scheming thief. Putting on airs and deceiving young children like you. In Jiang Hu, there are all sorts of sly and crafty people, swindling young people like you because you have never experienced meeting them," the elder shouted in reply.

Yilin answered, "How can disciple not listen to martial uncle's order? But.. but.. martial... Linghu ..." and the word "brother" wasn't said. She stiffly stood there enduring the lecture.

That elder asked, "But what?" Yilin appeared to be frightened and didn't dare to speak anymore.

"This is a message from SongShan's Alliance Chief Zuo. Devil Sect is conducting a large-scale operation in Fujian to rob the Lin family of Fuzhou of their Evil Resisting sword art. Alliance Chief Zuo wants the Five Mountains Sword Alliance to help in preventing the demon people from having the sword art manual. When great masters from the Five Mountains Sword Alliance stepped in, it is unavoidable that people will die without being buried. That child from FuZhou's Lin family has already entered Mr. Yue's school so it seemed that HuaShan School has obtained the sword art manual but actually they have not. We fear that the Devil Sect will have many traps. Also, when you add that ex-disciple of Huashan School, Linghu Chong, into the equation, our plight becomes even more unfavourable because the Devil sect may have inside information. Alliance Chief has put the responsibility of handling this matter on my shoulder and ordered me to lead us into Fujian. This matter concerns the fortune of both the orthodox and Devil Sect. We can't allow any careless or indiscreet acts. Thirty li from here is the border between Zhejiang and Fujian. Today, everyone has worked hard and had been hurrying along at night. We'll rest when we get to Nianbapu town. We'll then hurry along so we can be in front and wait for the Devil Sect people to launch their operation. By then, we would have waited at ease and have the advantage of waiting for an exhausted enemy. But you must still be on your guard," that elder announced. All the female disciples (numbering in scores of ten) complied with one voice.

Linghu Chong thought, "This master is in charge of this Heng-Shan School group and Yilin also called her martial uncle. I've heard of "Three Ding of Heng-Shan", she must be Dingjing Shi Tai⁷. She received my master's letter and thought that I'm a bad person. I can't blame her for thinking this way. She wanted to get ahead but didn't know that Devil Sect people are already setting up an ambush in front. Luckily, I already knew, but how do I tell them about this?"

He then heard Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Once we enter Fujian's boundary, you must be on your guard. Everyone around you will be your enemy. Even the servants from the restaurants or the teahouses might be spies from the Devil

Sect. The walls have ears, just like the bushes might have enemy hiding within. From now on, do not mention anything about the Evil Resisting sword art manual, Mr. Yue, Linghu Chong, and DongFang BiBai⁸."

The female disciples answered together, "Yes!"

Linghu Chong knew that Devil Sect's Chief DongFang BuBai's kungfu had no match in the world, which was why he was called undefeated. But when the orthodox schools talked about him, they frequently referred to him as "Bibai". They did this to nullify the meaning behind the enemy's name and to mock him. After hearing her mentioned his own name, his master's name and DongFang BuBai's on the same level, he couldn't help but laughed bitterly. "I'm just a nameless person while you're a senior from Heng-Shan School. You flatter me too much to mention my name in the same breath as my master's and Dongfang Bubai's."

Dingjing Shi Tai continued, "Everyone, let's go!" All the disciples answered in one voice and complied with the order. He then saw seven female disciples sped away from the hillside followed by another seven soon after. Heng-Shan School's qinggong was famous in the wulin world; the seven people in front and the seven people at the back kept the distance between them constant as they run, resembling a troop formation. The sleeves of the fourteen people were floating in the air and they were all synchronous in their running. It was extremely beautiful to look at. Not too long after that, another seven people started to go down the hill. In a short time, all of Heng-Shan School's groups have moved out. Altogether, there were six groups. The last group consisted of eight people, with the extra person being Dingjing Shi Tai. Some of these females were not nuns, but secular disciples of Heng-Shan.

In the darkness of the night, Linghu Chong wasn't able to recognise which group Yilin was in. He thought, "These disciples from Heng-Shan must each have their own unique skill. But when they're climbing that steep slope between the two peaks, the Devil Sect people will ambush them. They will definitely suffer heavy injuries and deaths."

He took a handful of green grass, squeezed them and smeared the juices on his

face. Then he dug out some mud and smeared it on his face, hands and thick beard. Even if it were daytime, Yilin would not be able to recognise him under all the mud. Linghu Chong then circled the hillside to go back to the road and started chasing after them. Originally, his qinggong wasn't that good. But whether your qinggong was high or low was dependent on the strength of your internal energy level. Right now, his internal energy was high, so he could take a step as he willed and each step was also very far away. At this speed, he caught up with Heng-Shan School's people in no time at all. He was afraid that Dingjing Shi Tai might hear his footsteps as he came closer to them so he overtook them by running in a big circle. Once he was ahead of them and was back on the main road, he ran even faster. When he arrived at the bottom of the slope, the moon was already above his head. He stood there listening to his surrounding and did not hear a single sound. "If I didn't see the Devil Sect people setting up an ambush here, then a disaster would have happened at this place. A great disaster."

He slowly walked up the steep slope and arrived at the beginning of the road between the two peaks. He was around a li away from the ambush place; he sat down and started thinking, "The Devil Sect people have probably seen me here. But they're afraid to alert the enemy so they are just letting me sit here." After waiting for some time, he lied down on the ground. Finally, he heard faint steps coming up from the hillside. He thought, "It's best if I lead the Devil Sect's people to start fighting with me first. After fighting for a little bit, then Heng-Shan School will be aware." He then said angrily at the people on the top of the slope, "What old man hates the most is being stabbed in the back. Then I won't know whether they are real swords or spears. Stabbing in the back is a very rotten method. You hiding there, get up! Evil ghosts, harming people by ambush! How contemptible and disgraceful." Although his voice wasn't loud, he had put an abundant of qi to deliver it, so it was able to travel far. He was guessing that the Devil Sect people had heard what he said. But who would have thought these people could really hold in their anger and unexpectedly did not pay attention to him at all. Not long after, Heng-Shan School's first group of seven disciples arrived in front of him.

Under the moonlight, the seven disciples could see an officer sleeping on the ground with his four limbs extended out. Only one person at a time can go up the mountain pass as it was flanked by high cliffs on both sides. Therefore, if they wanted to go up the slope, they have to step across his body first. These disciples only had to lightly jump to go across his body, but between man and woman, there must be a separation. In order to jump across, they also have to go over his head. This was just too rude.

A middle-aged nun said with a clear voice, "Excuse me, officer. Please lend us a path."

Linghu Chong made two "woo, woo" sounds snoring loudly. That nun's buddhist name was Yihe but her temper was not peaceful at all⁹. She saw that this officer was sleeping soundly in the middle of the road snoring so loudly that he must be deliberately pretending to be asleep. This made her all the more agitated. She held back her anger and said, "If you don't make way, we will jump over you." Linghu Chong kept up his loud snoring and muttered, "Lots of demons and ghosts on this road. Mustn't go through it. Woo... woo... the sea of bitterness is endless... turn... turn... turn around then you will see the beach." Yihe was startled when she heard this as his words seemed to carry two meanings. Another nun pulled Yihe back by tugging her sleeve and the seven nuns retreated several steps.

One person whispered, "Martial sister, this person is weird."

Another one said, "I'm afraid he might be Devil Sect's spy challenging us."

Another person said, "I don't think Devil Sect's people would go and get a government job as a military officer. I think he's disguising himself. He didn't dirty his attire when he was disguising himself."

Yihe said, "Don't worry about him! He's not letting us get through so we'll jump over him."

Before she jumped, she asked again, "If you're really not making way then we just have to offend you."

Linghu Chong stretched out lazily and slowly got up. He was still afraid that

Yilin might recognise him so he faced the hillside. The back of his body was facing the Heng-Shan School disciples. With his right hand leaning on the cliff face, his body swayed from side to side looking like a drunk. He said, "Good wine! good wine!" At this moment, the second group of Heng-Shan School disciples arrived.

"Martial sister Yihe, what's this person doing here?" asked a secular disciple.

"Who knows what he's doing here!" answered Yihe.

Linghu Chong said in a loud voice, "Just then I butchered a dog. My tummy's so full after eating it. I've also drunk a lot of wine. I'm afraid I might vomit. Aiyo, not good, really gonna vomit!" A vomiting sound was heard briefly.

The female disciples scowled and one by one retreated back. Linghu Chong made the vomiting sound a few more times although nothing was coming out. The disciples were discussing among themselves when the third group also arrived.

He heard a soft voice said, "This person is drunk, he's very pitiful. Let him rest, we can't be delayed."

When Linghu Chong heard this voice, his heart fluttered. He thought, "Martial sister Yilin has a very good heart."

But Yihe said, "This person is deliberately making a fuss here, he must have some bad intention!" She then took a step forward and shouted, "Make way!" While she pushed Linghu Chong's left shoulder. Linghu Chong swayed forward and shouted, "Aiyo, this is disastrous!" He took a few stumbling steps up the slope, staggering from side to side. After walking a few steps, the situation had become even more awkward. His body was now filling in the narrow pass completely. If it were not for the inappropriateness, the people behind him would have jumped over his head to get pass. Yihe went forward and shouted, "Make way already!"

"Yes, yes," answered Linghu Chong. He took a few more steps up. He got even higher as he moved forward making the narrow pass even more difficult to pass. Suddenly he shouted very loudly, "Hello, friends above waiting to ambush,

pay attention please! The people you're waiting for have arrived. You guys should come out now, no one here would be able to escape."

When Yihe and the other disciples heard of this, they immediately retreated back. One disciple said, "This place is really dangerous, if the enemy ambush us now, we'll have great difficulty in fighting back." Yihe said, "If there's someone waiting to ambush us, why is he calling them out? It's just empty threat, empty threat. There's nobody up there. If we retreat in fear, the enemy will laugh at us." Another two middle-aged nun said together, "Yeah! We three people will make way in front, martial sisters follow behind us." The three nuns pulled their long swords out and went forward towards Linghu Chong's back.

Linghu Chong continuously panted loudly and said, "This hillside road is very steep. Ai, old man is very old now. I can't go further."

One of the nuns said, "Hey, you go to one side and let us walk ahead first, is this ok?"

"Don't get angry. Walking fast will get us there, walking slow will also get us there. Hai.. Hai.. Ai, when going towards the gates of Hell, it is better to go slowly."

That nun said, "Why are you beating around the bush trying to scold people?"

With a shout, Yihe thrust her sword towards Linghu Chong's heart from behind. This thrust was only meant to scare him into making way for them. So when the sword was about to pierce his body, it stopped short. At this exact moment, Linghu Chong also turned his body around. He saw that the tip of the sword was pointed at his chest and shouted, "Hey! You... you... what are you doing? I'm a government official. Didn't expect that you dare to be this rude. Come people, seize these nuns!"

Some of the younger nuns couldn't help to hold in their laughter anymore. This person was on a desolated mountainside but was still exhibiting a bureaucratic air. It was really comical.

A nun laughingly said, "Officer, we have an urgent matter and are hurrying along. Please move to a side and let us through."

"What officer, I'm a general. You should call me general. Then I'll let you through," said Linghu Chong.

Seven to eight female disciples laughingly said, "General, please make way."

Linghu Chong laughed and straightened up. He puffed up his chest and tucked in his stomach, looking arrogant. Suddenly, he slipped and fell on the ground. The female disciples squealed and called out in alarm, "Be careful." And two of them quickly held onto his arms. Linghu Chong slipped one more time before he stood firm. He then scolded, "His granny... this ground is so slippery. The local government is a bucket of rice, unlike those common people¹⁰. They should keep the mountain road in good condition." He had already slipped twice and now he leaned his body against a small depression on the cliff wall. Heng-Shan School's disciples quickly used their qinggong to go through. One by one, they went past him swiftly.

One of them laughed, "The local government will send eight people with a sedan chair to carry general over this mountain range. That's the way to do it."

Another one said, "General rides a horse not a sedan chair."

The next one said, "This general is different than the others. When riding a horse, he's afraid that he might fall down on the ground."

Linghu Chong indignantly said, "Nonsense! How many times have I fallen down from riding a horse? Last month, that horse was scared to death by a tiger. Only then did I slid from the horse's back and injured my upper arm. So that one cannot be counted." The disciples laughed aloud while climbing the slope like wind.

Linghu Chong saw a slender body shook. It was Yilin. He immediately followed behind her, again blocking the disciples behind her. His steps were heavy and he was also panting heavily. For every three steps, he slipped two steps. He was climbing and falling at the same time. Fortunately, he was actually walking quite quickly. The disciples behind were laughing and complaining at the same time. "You, general, is really... cough. Don't know how many times must you fall down in a day!"

Yilin turned her head and said, "Martial sister Yiqing, don't rush general. He's already trying to hurry, don't make him slip for real. This slope is really steep, falling down would be serious."

Linghu Chong saw her two big eyes. They were clear and bright like two clear fountains. Her elegant face shone under the moonlight looking very beautiful. He remembered the day when they were evading the pursuit of Qingcheng School. She carried him out from inside the city of Hengshan and he was staring at her right now just like he did at that time. Suddenly, he felt a soft and gentle feeling rising up in his heart. He thought, "At the top of this slope, there are many concealed enemies wanting to harm her. I don't care about my life but I must protect her and make sure she is safe."

Yilin saw his two eyes looking dull and his appearance ugly. She nodded slightly at him, revealing a warm and smiling countenance. She said, "Martial sister Yiqing, if General slipped and fell, you must quickly give him a hand."

Yiqing laughed, "He's very heavy, how do I help him?"

Originally, Heng-Shan School's rules were very strict. These female disciples did not easily chat and laugh with strangers. But Linghu Chong had been acting like a clown making them laugh repeatedly. Also, there were no elders around. As the dark night hurried along and after exchanging some harmless jokes, everyone was feeling livelier.

Linghu Chong indignantly said, "You girls are speaking without knowing what you're talking about. I'm a great general. Back in those days, in the battlefield, I routed and killed numerous thieves. The type of killing that makes you shiver with fear that the air around it would even be filled with a shimmering murderous aura. If you girls saw it, hey hey, you will admire me completely. This trivial mountain slope is nothing to look at for me. How can I fall down? You're talking rubbish... Aiyo, not good!"

His foot seemed to have stepped on a small stone and he fell down. He put both of his hands out waving them about trying to grab onto something. The disciples behind him yelped in surprise. Yilin quickly turned back and stuck her hand out

to help him. Linghu Chong grabbed her hand and Yilin used all her strength to pull him upwards. Linghu Chong was now crouching down with his left hand on the ground supporting himself. He appeared to be very distressed. The disciples behind him were clutching their stomachs laughing loudly.

Linghu Chong said, "My leather boots are too heavy to use for climbing up mountain roads. If I were wearing your hemp shoes, then I guarantee I wouldn't fall down at all. Also, I'm only slipping and falling, what's so funny about that?"

Yilin slowly loosened her hand and said, "Yeah. General is wearing riding boots so it's not comfortable to climb up the mountain."

"Of course it's not comfortable. But with my very high prestige, I have to wear these boots. If I were just an ordinary common person like you people then I can wear those hemp shoes without any shame," said Linghu Chong. After hearing him trying to save face at all cost, the disciples all laughed again.

By now, a few more groups have arrived at the bottom of the slope while the first person who had gone up have reached the top of the slope

Linghu Chong shouted, "This region has the most thieves, stealing chicken and dogs. They don't care at all if the weather is cold, they'll still come out to steal our money. Although you buddhists don't have too much wealth, be careful. Don't let them steal your hard earned alms money."

Yiqing giggled and said, "General is here, those thieves wouldn't dare to show their faces here."

Linghu Chong answered back, "Hey, hey, be careful. I see some people at the top lurking around."

One of the female disciples said, "General, you are talking nonsense. With us around you're still afraid of a few small time thieves?"

Just as she said this, two female disciple suddenly shouted, "Ai yo!" and rolled down the slope.

Two female disciples hastily went up and held them. From the front, a few of the female disciples shouted, "The thieves used some projectiles. Be careful!" As

soon as they said this, another disciple rolled down the slope.

Yihe ordered in a loud voice, "Everyone get down! Be careful of projectiles!"

Everyone quickly crouched down while Linghu Chong scolded out loudly, "Bold thieves, you don't know that General is here?" Yilin was pulling his arm and worriedly implored, "Quickly get down!"

The disciples in front were shooting their metal bead projectiles from inside their sleeves. But the enemies on the hilltop had concealed themselves behind the rocks again. Not one could be seen. So their projectiles did not find their targets. Dingjing Shi Tai rushed forward when she heard that there was enemy at the top. She was jumping over the disciples' head to get ahead. When she arrived behind Linghu Chong, she also jumped over his head and kept going forward¹¹.

Linghu Chong called out, "This is bad luck! Bad luck!" and spat out some saliva. He saw Dingjing Shi Tai waving her big sleeve around as she charged towards the hilltop. She was met by a rain of the enemy's projectiles. Some of the projectiles were trapped while some were knocked away flying by her sleeves.

Dingjing Shi Tai jumped a few more times and reached the top of the slope. Before she steadied herself, she felt a strong wind; a copper staff was coming towards her head. Hearing the sound of the staff cutting through the air, she knew that the strike was very heavy so she didn't dare to parry it. She dodged to the side of the staff, but at the same time saw two spears coming forward. One was aiming high and the other one low making the situation very dangerous. The enemy was holding an advantageous position by blocking the mountain pass with three good fighters. Dingjing Shi Tai shouted, "Shameless!" while pulling out her long sword. Her sword slashed at the two spears and broke them, while the copper staff was swept at her waist. She countered by hitting the top of the staff with her sword to change its direction. Just then, another spear was thrust towards her right shoulder. The female disciples on the slope started to scream in surprise and large crashing sounds were heard. Apparently the enemies on the hilltop were pushing big rocks down the slope. Heng-Shan

School's disciples were crowded in the middle of the pass. They were jumping and crouching to avoid the rocks from hitting them, but soon after some of them was hit and got injured.

Dingjing Shi Tai retreated back two steps and ordered, "Everyone turn back! Go back down the hill and regroup!"

She wielded her sword to prevent the enemy from going down but the enemy still managed to continuously toss more rocks down the slope. Then she heard the sounds of fighting coming from below. Apparently, enemies were also waiting for them at the bottom of the slope to prevent them from retreating.

Someone shouted from below, "Martial uncle, the martial art of the enemies cutting off our escape are strong. We can't go down."

Another one shouted, "Two martial sisters are injured."

Dingjing Shi Tai angrily flew down. She saw two men wielding sabres preventing two disciples at the back from retreating down the hill. Dingjing Shi Tai cried out and attacked using her sword. Suddenly she heard two "hu, hu" sounds; two small hammers connected by a long chain were flying down vertically attacking the front of her body. Dingjing Shi Tai lifted her sword to block one of the meteor hammers while the other one went through and almost hit her head. Dingjing Shi Tai was startled, "Great power." If they were on flat ground, she wouldn't have used her sword to block the hammer. She would have instead launched an attack from the side. But the mountain pass was too narrow and there was only two ways to go; which was either up or down. The enemy twirled his meteor hammers quickly and the hammers, looking like two black clouds, came hurtling towards Dingjing Shi Tai. Dingjing Shi Tai was unable to use her clever sword art against him so she retreated step-by-step back towards the hilltop.

From above, she heard the cries of the disciples and saw some of them falling down on the ground after being hit by projectiles. Dingjing Shi Tai calmed herself down and thought to herself that the enemies' martial art were weaker at the hilltop and should be easier to deal with. So she quickly rushed back up and

jumped over some of the disciples and also passed over Linghu Chong's head.

Linghu Chong called out to her, "Aiyo, what are you doing? Do you think you're jumping over a chicken here? You're already so old but still joking around, jumping over my head to go here and there. Do you think I can still gamble after this?"

Dingjing Shi Tai was hurrying trying to break through the enemy's trap so she didn't hear those words. But Yilin apologised, "Sorry, my martial uncle didn't do it on purpose." Linghu Chong grumbled and complained, "I already said earlier that there were thieves here. But none of you believed me." But in his heart, he was thinking, "I saw earlier that the Devil Sect people were setting up an ambush on the hilltop, but apparently they also have people at the bottom. Even though Heng-Shan School has many people here, they're all crowded in the middle of this narrow pass. So they can't display their skills. The situation is not encouraging at all."

When Dingjing Shi Tai arrived at the hilltop, she suddenly saw the shadow of a stick moving. A Buddhist steel staff was coming towards her head. The enemies have adjusted so that their better skilled people were now fighting her. Dingjing Shi Tai thought, "Today, if I don't manage to break through this pass, I'm afraid these disciples will be annihilated." She leaned to one side and thrust her sword out in an angle. The Buddhist staff missed her body by only a few inches. She then shot forward and plunged her sword towards the monk. In making this move, she disregarded her own life, as it was potentially disastrous to both people. That monk tried hard to protect himself but it was too late. He scoffed lightly as the sword pierced the side of his body. But that monk was extremely brave. Uttering a cry, he broke the long sword in two with his fist. His fist was bloodied as it hit the sword.

Dingjing Shi Tai shouted, "Quickly get up here! Give me a sword!"

Yihe flew up and held her sword horizontally. She shouted, "Martial uncle, sword!" Dingjing Shi Tai turned her body around to take the sword. But a spear was thrust slantingly towards Yihe, while another spear was thrust towards Dingjing Shi Tai. Yihe had to use her sword to ward off the attack which

allowed the spear wielding person to close in on her bit by bit. This also forced Yihe to retreat back down the slope. With this happening, Yihe wasn't able to pass the sword to Dingjing Shi Tai. In the mean time, three people charged onto the hilltop, two with sabres and the other one with a judge's pen, surrounding Dingjing Shi Tai. Dingjing Shi Tai's two palms were flitting about using Heng-Shan School's "Tian Zhang Zhang Fa" (Heaven's Palm) to ward off the attack from the four people. She was already around sixty years old but her hands were still agile. Unexpectedly, she was holding her own using only her bare hands even though the four masters from the Devil Sect were fighting cooperatively against her.

Yilin was frightened and whispered, "Ai yo! What do I do? What do I do?"

Linghu Chong said with a loud voice, "These small time thieves are too unruly. Make way! Make way! General is going up there to capture these thieves!"

Yilin worriedly said, "You mustn't go! They're not small time thieves. All of them have good martial art. If you go up there then they'll kill you."

Linghu Chong puffed up his chest and shouted boldly, "Under a sunny day... " He then raised his head up to the sky; it was almost daybreak, but it wasn't a "sunny day". But he didn't care and continued, "These small time thieves are cutting off the road and plundering people. Bullying women. Hng, hng, aren't they afraid of the law?"

"We're not ordinary women. Enemies are also not small time thieves cutting off the road and plundering people," said Yilin.

Linghu Chong took a big step going up the slope. He squeezed through the female disciples to go up. The female disciples were staying close to the side of the cliff face and allowed him to go up.

When Linghu Chong reached the hilltop, he extended his hand to pull out his Yaodao sabre. As a fraction of the sabre was pulled out, he suddenly stopped and pretended that he couldn't pull the sabre out anymore. He scolded, "Your granny, this sabre is looking for trouble. When an important matter comes up, it

suddenly becomes rusted. How can General capture thieves with a rusted sabre?"

Yihe was fighting for her life against one of the Devil Sect's people on the hilltop when she heard Linghu Chong behind her talking nonsense about his sword rusting and why he couldn't pull out his sword. She was angry but also found it funny. She shouted, "Quick! Go away! It's dangerous up here." As she called out, she lost her concentration slightly and her defense wasn't as tight. With a fierce sound, a spear was thrust forward and nearly hit her shoulder. Yihe retreated half a step while that person thrust his spear again.

Linghu Chong shouted, "That's wrong, that's wrong! Bold thieves, don't you see General standing right here?" In a flash, he slanted his body and was in front of Yihe. The spear wielding man was startled. As the sky was gradually becoming brighter, he was able to see his clothes were like those that government officials wear. Just at that moment, even though his spear was pointing at the officer's chest, he didn't thrust it forward. He shouted, "Who are you? Before this, someone was calling out from the bottom of the hill. Was it you, government dog?"

Linghu Chong rebuked, "Your granny, are you calling me a government dog? You're a thief dog! You're here cutting off the road and plundering. And even though General is here, you still haven't run away. You're the real outlaw! After General has captured you, I'm going to send you to the local authority. With fifty planks each, you all are going to be beaten until your bottom is swollen and you are calling out for your mommy!" The spear-wielding man didn't want to kill a government official. But he was greatly annoyed and shouted, "Scram you rotten egg! If you talk nonsense again, I'll poke three holes through your government dog's body!"

Linghu Chong saw Dingjing Shi Tai had not been defeated yet and the Devil Sect people had stopped shooting projectiles and throwing rocks down the slope. He shouted, "Bold thieves, quickly kneel down and kowtow. If General sees your eighty years old mother in your home, then maybe I'll go easy on you. If not, hng, hng, I'll chop everyone's head off... .."

When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard this, they all scowled and shook their heads. They all had the same thought, "This person is crazy." Yihe walked up a step with her sword up. If the enemy thrust his spear towards the General, then it's going to be easier for her to block it. Linghu Chong used his strength to pull out his sabre again and then scolded, "Your granny, just before battle, my precious sabre from my ancestor has suddenly become rusted. Hng, if only my precious sabre were not rusted, all of your small time thieves' heads would've been chopped off."

That man wielding the spear laughed loudly and shouted, "Go back to your mum!" He then swept his spear towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong was hit and pushed down but at the same time he pulled out his sheath. He shouted, "Ai yo!" and pushed his body forward. Yihe shouted, "Be careful!" As Linghu Chong was falling down, he held his sheathed sabre out and used the point of his sheath to hit the spear wielding man's side of the small of the back.

That man dropped to the ground wordlessly. With a slapping sound, Linghu Chong also fell to the ground. Then as he struggled to get up, he shouted, "Ah ha! You also fell down. We've both fallen down. I'm not going to concede defeat. Come on, we fight again!" Yihe grabbed that man and threw him behind. She was thinking that now she had captured an enemy, things would become easier. Another three Devil Sect people came over to save that person. Linghu Chong called out, "Ah Ha, this is disastrous, these small time thieves are really going to refuse being captured."

Linghu Chong raised his sheathed sabre to the west and his finger on the other hand was pointed to the east. It was completely unmethodical. Dugu Nine Swords didn't have any set moves so when it was used, it can be either graceful or clumsy and awkward, but strangely still maintaining the same power. This was because Dugu Nine Swords concentrated on the sword intention not set moves.

He was now thrusting his sword towards an enemy's various accupoints without any great force. During a fight, it would be difficult to accurately hit people's accupoints. But a refined sword art with vigorous internal energy

attached to the strike, even if it wasn't that accurate, might still perhaps hit the side of the accupoints. So considering this, the enemy in front of him continuously protected himself following Linghu Chong's sheathed sabre wherever it went.

At the same time, Linghu Chong was staggering, looking like he was about to fall down, and waving his sheathed sabre about. When suddenly, the point of the scabbard hit that enemy's stomach. That person gasped and went limp. Linghu Chong yelled, "Ah Ha!" and jumped back a step. At the same time, his sword handle hit the back of another enemy's shoulder. That person immediately fell down and swayed back and forth on the ground. Linghu Chong continued to step back and tripped on that person's body. He scolded him, "Your granny!" and kicked his body away.

Then his sword handle inadvertently hit a Devil Sect person wielding a sabre. This person was one of the three masters besieging Dingjing Shi Tai. The back of his body was hit and he dropped his sword. Dingjing Shi Tai took this opportunity to hit his chest making that person sprout blood from his mouth and life fled from his body.

Linghu Chong called out, "Careful, careful!" While he retreated a few steps and was about to bump into the back of the person holding the judge's pen. That person quickly sent his pen back to protect himself. Linghu Chong staggered and dashed forward while waving his scabbard around. Soon, more Devil Sect people were hit and fell down.

That person wielding the judge's pen was greatly annoyed and rushed at Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong yelled, "Mommy!" as he pulled up and ran away with that person pursuing him. Linghu Chong suddenly stopped and bent his waist forward; while at the same time poked his sword handle through his armpit. That person never expected him to be able to run so fast and suddenly stopped motionless in an instant. Although his martial art was already high, he was still inferior. He quickly applied a downward force to stop, but his chest was still hit by Linghu Chong's extended sword handle. That person's face showed an extremely odd expression. He couldn't believe what just happened.

But his body had slowly started to fall down.

Linghu Chong turned around and saw the fighting on the hilltop had ceased. A few of the Heng-Shan School's disciples had already gone up the slope. Both the orthodox and Devil Sect people were now facing each other while the remaining disciples were quickly rushing up the slope. He shouted, "Hey, small time thieves, you've seen General here. Quickly kneel down and surrender. Really strange!" He then started to dance his sheathed sabre around, cried out and charged towards the cluster of Devil Sect people. The Devil Sect people quickly sent out their swords and spears.

Heng-Shan School disciples were about to go forward and help when they heard Linghu Chong shouted, "Skillful! Skillful! Very fierce thieves!" and he came out from the cluster of Devil Sect people. His steps were heavy and he was dragging his feet through the mud as he ran. He missed a step and fell down. His scabbard shot up and hit his own forehead making him dizzy. But he had already managed to hit five people as he entered and exited the cluster of Devil Sect people. Both groups were dumbfounded looking at him.

Both Yihe and Yiqing rushed forward and asked, "General, are you alright?"

Both of Linghu Chong's eyes were closed. He didn't answer them pretending to have passed out. The leader of the Devil Sect group saw that one person had died and this lunatic general had hit eleven of his people. Just now, when the General charged at his party, he made his moves one after another to grab the General. But all of his moves ended up with him in danger of being hit by the scabbard. Although the scabbard was not attacking any accupoints, it was coming in swift and fierce with its weird positioning. He didn't know this person's background but sensed that his martial art was high and its true depth couldn't be measured.

He then saw the people who had been hit; the Heng-Shan School had now captured five of them. Today, everything had gone pear-shaped. He shouted with a clear voice, "Dingjing Shi Tai, do you want the antidotes for your disciples who got hit by the projectiles?"

Dingjing Shi Tai already saw that those disciples who got hit by the projectiles fell into a coma and couldn't be woken up. The injuries made by the projectiles were also leaking black blood. She knew that the projectiles were poisoned. When she heard his words, she already had a clear idea of what to do. She shouted, "Give us the antidotes in exchange for your people!" That person nodded his head and muttered something under his breath. One of the Devil Sect people took out a porcelain bottle and stood in front of Dingjing Shi Tai and bowed slightly. Dingjing Shi Tai took the bottle and fiercely said, "If the antidote is effective then I'll release them myself."

That old person said, "Alright. Heng-Shan's DingJing Shi Tai, I'm not the kind of person who eats his own words." He waved his hand and the Devil Sect people went down the west slope taking their injured and dead people with them. A short time later, all of them had left the hilltop leaving their five captured comrades.

After a long time, LingHu Chong woke up and called out, "Ouch, hurts so much!" as he rubbed his swollen forehead. Then with a surprised tone, he asked, "Where did all those thieves go?" YiHe giggled and said, "General, you're really strange. Just then, it was lucky that you somehow hit a number of them when you charged at their group. The leader of those small-time thieves was truly frightened by you."

LingHu Chong laughed loudly and said, "Wonderful, wonderful! Big general has such a big reputation. When I ride out to confront these small-time thieves of course it's a different matter altogether. They would certainly run away with their tails between their legs. Ai yo..." Then he rubbed his swollen forehead again with his face showing a painful expression.

"General, have you been injured? We have some medicine," said Yiqing.

LingHu Chong answered proudly, "No, no, I'm not injured! When a gentleman dies in the battlefield ("Ma Ge Li Shi"*), it's a common thing..."

YiHe pursed her lips smiling and said, "I'm afraid it's "Ma Ge Guo Shi"*, how can it be "Ma Ge Li Shi"*?"

YiQing gave her a stern look and said, "You always love to find other people's fault, what's the point of pointing out his fault?"

LingHu Chong said, "We people from the north learns "Ma Ge Li Shi", you southern people must have learnt it differently."

YiHe turned her head and said, "But we're also from the north." ¹²

Master DingJing went to the injured disciples and gave them the antidote for the poison. When she reached LingHu Chong, she bowed to him and said, "I am Heng-Shan's old nun DingJing. May I ask for young hero's name?"

Linghu Chong's heart shivered in fear, "This Heng-Shan School senior really has good eyesight. She knows that I'm still young and also that I'm actually a brave general."

He immediately bowed and clasped his fist respectfully returning the bow. He said, "As Shi Tai requested, my surname is Wu. My name is Tiande. Tian from "Tian En Hao Dang" (enormous graciousness). De from "Dao De Wen Zhang" (Morality)¹³. I'm going to Quanzhou government office to take up office."

Dingjing Shi Tai already expected that he wouldn't reveal his real identity and he might not necessarily be a real general. She said, "Today, my Heng-Shan School has met difficulty and General has helped us. I don't know how to repay your virtue and kindness. General's martial art is very deep. Although poor nun has taken a look at it, I still don't know which school General comes from. Really admirable."

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "Old Shi Tai flatters me. But to be honest, my martial art has a few foundations. On the top "Snow falling from the sky", at the bottom "Ancient tree root", in the middle "Black tiger stealing heart"..... Ai yo, ai yo." As he was talking, his hands and feet were moving about showing off the martial art moves. It looked like that he had used too much force in his demonstration and had strained himself. He rubbed his aching joints while his eyes stole a look towards Yilin.

She was startled and for a moment it looked as if she had something to say. He

thought, "My martial sister has a really good conscience. I wonder how she will react if she knew I am the general."

Naturally, Dingjing Shi Tai was aware that he was pretending. She smiled and said, "General doesn't want to reveal himself since he's an honorable man. Poor nun can only burn the incense stick from morning till dusk to pray for General's good fortune and health. Best wishes to General."

Linghu Chong said, "Thank you very much, thank you very much. Please pray to Buddha for my promotion and wealth. Little general will also pray for the safety of old Shi Tai and all the little Shi Tai on your journey, for bad luck to turn into good, and for all matters to go smoothly. HaHa! HaHa!" As he was laughing loudly, he bowed deeply to Dingjing Shi Tai and swaggered away.

He had been in the Five Mountains Sword Alliance for a long time, so even though he was pretending to be crazy, he still didn't dare to be inappropriate towards this senior from Heng-Shan School. The school disciples were now looking at him stumbling towards the south slope. As he disappeared, they quickly surrounded Dingjing Shi Tai and started to barrage her with questions: "Martial uncle, what's his background?" "Is he really insane or is he just pretending?" "Is his martial art very high, or was he merely lucky and mistakenly hit the enemies here and there?" "He doesn't resemble a general. He still looks young, am I right?"

Dingjing Shi Tai sighed and turned her head to look at the disciples injured by the projectiles. After the medicine was applied to their wounds, the black blood had turned red and their pulses strengthened. They were no longer in danger. She then gave Heng-Shan School's unique medicine to each of the disciples to administer it to their own injuries. After that she released the acupoints of the five captured Devil Sect people and told them to leave.

She then ordered the disciples, "Everyone go under that tree to rest", while she went alone and sat on a big stone. She closed her eyes and pondered, "When this person charged at the Devil Sect group, the leader of the group fought with him. But he still managed to hit five of their people. He wasn't using a martial art that aimed at the acupoints. He was using some martial art style but I didn't

expect that there was not even a slight demonstration of his school's martial art. In Wulin, there must be such a young person who's that skilful. But whose disciple is he? This person was a friend and not an enemy. This is really Heng-Shan School's big fortune."

At mid-morning, she ordered the disciples to fetch a brush, an ink stone, and a thin silk to write a letter. She ordered, "Yizhi, bring the pigeon here." Yizhi answered and took a pigeon out of the bamboo cage she was carrying. In the mean time, Dingjing Shi Tai rolled up the thin silk letter into a thin strip and put it in a slender bamboo tube. She put the cover on and sealed it with melted wax. Then using an iron wire, she put the bamboo tube on the pigeon's left feet. After a silent prayer, she released the pigeon. The pigeon flew north, gradually going higher and further. Not long after, it was only a black dot in the sky.

After Dingjing Shi Tai released the pigeon, everyone became quiet, completely different from before when they were vigorously fighting the enemies. Dingjing Shi Tai raised her head to look up. She saw the black dot entering a white cloud and disappeared, but she continued to look into the distance. All the disciples didn't dare to make any sound. At the recent battle, although that clown general was jesting around and acting comical, the situation in actuality was really dangerous. It can be said that everyone had now escaped death. After standing there for a long time, Dingjing Shi Tai turned around and beckoned forward a fifteen or sixteen years old girl. The girl immediately went and stood in front of her.

She quietly called out, "Master!"

Dingjing Shi Tai lightly brushed the girl's hair to comfort her and said, "Juan'er, were you scared before?"

The young girl nodded and said, "I was scared! Lucky that General was brave and fought those bad people off."

Dingjing Shi Tai smiled and said, "This General wasn't really brave but his martial was really good."

"Master, is his martial art really that high? I saw his moves were erratic and he

was really careless. He even hit his head with his own scabbard. Also he was saying something like his saber was rusting and couldn't pull it out of the scabbard?" said that girl unbelieving.

This young lady Qin Juan was Dingjing Shi Tai's disciple. She was clever and bright, and she was really loved by her master. Between the Heng-Shan School disciples, sixty percent of the disciples were nuns, while the rest were secular disciples. Some of these disciples were middle aged and there were also fifty to sixty year old grannies. Qin Juan was the youngest disciple in the Heng-Shan School.

The other disciples heard Dingjing Shi Tai conversing with martial sister Qin Juan so they slowly gathered around. Yihe interposed herself and said, "What do you mean that his moves were erratic? He was just pretending and was actually concealing his excellent martial art. That is called smart! Martial uncle, what do you think of this General's background? Which house or school is he from?"

Dingjing Shi Tai slowly shook her head and said, "This person's martial art might be "immeasurably deep". I don't know how else to describe him except with these two words."

Qin Juan asked, "Master, was that letter for martial uncle? Do you think it will get there soon?"

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "When the pigeon gets to Suzhou's Baiyi Temple, they will exchange it with another pigeon. At Ji'nan Miaoxiang Temple, they will change to another pigeon. Again at the mouth of the old river at Qingjing Temple, they will use another pigeon. The letter will arrive in Hengshan after the use of these four pigeons."

Yihe said, "Fortunately we didn't lose anyone. I believe those several martial sisters who got hit by the projectiles won't be a big hindrance after two days. While those who got hit by the rocks, we also don't have to worry about them losing their lives."

Dingjing Shi Tai was lost in her own thoughts so she didn't hear what Yihe just said. She was thinking, "Currently, Heng-Shan School's position and

movement in the south is a secret. We've been sleeping during the day and travelling at night. How did the Devil Sect people find out and managed to setup an ambush here?" She then turned her head towards the disciples and said, "The enemies have disappeared and wouldn't dare to come back right now. Everyone is now very tired so we'll eat some provisions here and then sleep for a while under that tree's shade." Everyone complied with her order. Some people erected an iron trivet to boil some water for brewing tea. After eating their meal, they slept for a few hours till around noon.

Dingjing Shi Tai looked at the weary expressions of the injured disciples. She said, "The enemies have discovered our movements so there's no need for us to travel at night anymore. Those injured must also recuperate. Tonight, we'll rest at an Inn in Nianbapu."

They went down the hill and, after several hours, reached Nianbapu. It was an important location for transportation between Zhejiang and Fujian province for people travelling through the Xianxia mountain range. As they neared the small town, the sky had not darkened yet. Unexpectedly, there was not a single person inside the small town.

Yihe said, "Fujian's custom is really weird. It's still so early but everyone went to sleep already."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Let's go further to get lodgings for the night."

Even though Heng-Shan School has contact with every temple in Wulin, there was no temple to stay in at Nianbapu so they had to find an inn to spend the night. It was inconvenient that normal people had a taboo against nuns and frequently caused trouble because they believe that seeing nuns brought them bad luck. It was good that the nuns were accustomed to receiving this kind of treatment and never held a grudge. But now they saw all the stores on the street were closed and boarded up. Nianbapu was neither big nor small, but it had around two hundred stores and inns. But as they looked around, the town resembled a ghost town. The setting sun was still providing some light but Nianbapu's streets were deserted as if it were in the middle of the night.

The disciples were on the street looking around when they noticed a white cloth hanging on a pole in front of an inn. The words "Xian An Inn" were written in big letters on the cloth. The inn's big door was shut and there was no sound at all on the street. One of the disciples named Zheng E knocked on the door. Zheng E was a secular disciple. She had a round face and was always carrying a smile. She was good at talking and very likeable. Whenever the nuns had to deal with people on the road, Zheng E was always the one to do it. This was to prevent other people from seeing nuns and becoming agitated. Zheng E knocked on the door a few times, stopped a while and then knocked a few more times. After waiting for a long time, no one answered the door. Zheng E called out, "Uncle, please open the door." Her voice was clear and carried far, just like people who have practised martial art. Even people several courtyards away would be able to hear it. But there was no answer from inside the inn. The situation was clearly very strange. Yihe went forward and put her ear on the door. No sound could be heard from the inside. She turned her head and said, "Martial uncle, there's no one inside."

Dingjing Shi Tai secretly felt something wasn't right. She saw the sign for the inn was still new. The door's board had also been washed clean recently. It didn't look like a place that had gone out of business at all. She said, "We'll keep going and take a look around. This town must have more than one inn."

They kept walking forward and passed several more shops before they saw another inn named "Nan An Inn". Zheng E went to knock on the door again but the result was still the same. No one answered.

Zheng E said, "Sister Yihe, let's go in and take a look."

"Ok," answered Yihe and they both jumped the wall to go in.

"Anyone here?" asked Zheng E.

When no one answered, they pulled their swords out and walked into the main hall of the inn. They took a look around the kitchen, the barn and every room in the inn. But they still didn't see anyone. But they observed that there was no dust on the table or the chairs. Also, the teapot on top of a table was still

warm. Zheng E opened the main door to let Dingjing Shi Tai enter and to report the situation. Everyone thought that the situation was really strange.

Dingjing Shi Tai commanded, "Get seven people into a group. Go around the town and ask what's going on. Don't go too far, if you see signs of enemies then whistle out."

They acknowledged her order and quickly went out the door. Only Dingjing Shi Tai remained inside the main hall. Before long, the sounds of the disciples' footsteps have disappeared and no more sound was heard. The stillness of this Nianbapu town made the hair at the back of Dingjing Shi Tai's neck to stand up. The town was so big but not a sound was heard. There was not even a small sound of birds chirping or dogs barking. This was really strange.

Dingjing Shi Tai suddenly felt uneasy. "Could it be that this is the Devil Sect's trap? The female disciples don't have much experience travelling the Jianghu. They might be deceived and can easily fall into a trap." She walked to the door and saw shadows moving in the northeast. From the west, she also saw some people moving into other people's houses. They were all Heng-Shan School's disciples. She felt slightly relieved after seeing them. After some time, the disciples started to return. They all reported the same thing: there was no one in the town.

"Not just people, we also couldn't see any animals around," added Yihe.

Yiqing said, "I think they haven't been gone for too long. There were opened chests and baskets inside the houses. They seemed to have taken all the money."

Dingjing Shi Tai nodded and asked, "What do you think is going on?"

Yihe answered, "I'm guessing that the Devil Sect people have chased out all the townspeople just recently to launch an attack."

"Correct! This time the Devil Sect wants to fight us again. That's very good, are you all scared?" said Dingjing Shi Tai.

"Eradicating evil is our inherent responsibilities as Buddhists," the disciples answered together.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "We'll rest at this inn. We'll take our meals first. Be careful and see if the water, rice, or vegetables have been poisoned."

Heng-Shan School people did not speak while taking their meals. They were on alert and tried to listen for any sound from the outside. The first disciple to finish eating went out to relieve the disciple guarding outside. Yiqing suddenly thought of something and said, "Martial uncle, why don't we go out to some of the houses and light up the lamps in there. The Devil Sect people won't know our whereabouts."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "This idea is very good. You seven people go and light up the lamps."

Not long after, Dingjing Shi Tai also went out the main door. She looked towards the west and lights were showing through the windows of many houses. After some time, lights came on from the houses in the east. The street lit up with lights from the windows. But there was still no sound to be heard. Dingjing Shi Tai raised her head and looked at the moon. She prayed, "Buddha, bless and protect us. Let my Heng-Shan School disciples escape from harm this time. If disciple Dingjing can go back to Heng-Shan, then I will light up an incense and won't use my sword ever again."

In her former years, she had roamed Jianghu and had many imposing achievements under her belt. But after last night's battle on Xianxia mountain range, she had lingering fear on her mind for the disciples under her command. If she were by herself, even if the situation had been ten times more dangerous, she would not even worry about it. She prayed again, "Goddess of Mercy, Guan Yin, if Heng-Shan School people must receive injuries, let disciple Dingjing alone received that disaster for retribution for killing people. Let disciple alone bear this."

Suddenly, she heard a female's voice shouting from the northeast. "Help, help!" The shrill voice sounded sorrowful. Dingjing Shi Tai was alarmed. The voice did not sound like any of her school's disciples. She squinted her eyes looking towards the northeast and did not see any movement. She then saw Yiqing and six disciples went towards the northeast. She waited where she was

watching what was going on. After a long time, Yiqing and her group still had not come back.

Yihe said, "Martial uncle, disciple and six disciple sisters will go to take a look."

Dingjing Shi Tai nodded her head. Yihe quickly led six disciples and went away to investigate. Suddenly, the flashing of a sword appeared briefly and the same female's voice was heard shrieking. "Someone's murdered! Help, help!" Heng-Shan School disciples crowded together to have a look. They did not know what was going on there. The voice originated from where Yiqing and Yihe's two groups had gone before. Seemed like they had met the enemies but there was no sound of fighting. They then heard that female's voice shrilly shouting again, "Help!" Everyone looked at Dingjing Shi Tai waiting for her to command them to go and help.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Yu Sao, take six disciple sisters to check that area. No matter what you see, you must immediately come back."

Yu Sao was a forty years old middle-aged woman. She was originally Dingxian Shi Tai's servant from Hengshan's Baiyun Temple. Later, Dingxian Shi Tai saw that she was capable and accepted her as a disciple. This trip with Dingjing Shi Tai was her first experience in Jianghu. Yu Sao bowed to comply with Dingjing Shi Tai's order. Then she took six disciple sisters to go towards the northeast.

But none of these seven people came back either. Dingjing Shi Tai became more frightened suspecting that the disciples had fallen into the enemy's trap; enticed by the enemy and captured one by one. They waited for a while longer but there was not the slightest bit of movement and there were no more calls for help either.

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Yizhi, Yizhen, wait here and tend to the injured sisters. No matter what happens, you mustn't leave the inn so as to prevent the enemy from luring you out."

Yizhi and Yizhen bowed acknowledging the order. Dingjing Shi Tai said to the

three young disciples Zheng E, Yilin and Qin Juan, "You three come with me," while pulling out her long sword and starting out to the northeast. When they got nearer, they saw a big house where the lamps have been extinguished. The area was dark and no sound was heard.

Dingjing Shi Tai fiercely shouted, "Devil Sect witch, come out and fight. What kind of heroic deeds is it ambushing people like this?"

After waiting for a while, they still did not hear anyone answering from inside the house. So Dingjing Shi Tai flew and kicked the main door of the big house. The door latch broke and the door banged opened. It was dark inside the house and Dingjing Shi Tai could not tell if there was anyone in there so she didn't dare to rashly charge in.

She inquired, "Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao, do you hear my voice?" Her voice was loud and it travelled far. She then heard her echo from somewhere far. Once the echo died out, the place was completely quiet again. Dingjing Shi Tai turned her head around and said, "The three of you follow behind me closely." She brandished her sword as she went around the outside of the house but didn't find anything unusual. So she jumped on top of the house and squinted her eyes to look around the four directions.

There was no wind at all and the tree branches were still. The cold moon's light shone on the tiles. The scenery was just like that in Hengshan when she was strolling beneath the moon. But in Hengshan, there was a feeling of tranquillity while in this place, there was a feeling of surreptitiousness and murderous air. Dingjing Shi Tai was using her whole body to sense her surrounding but she hadn't been able to sense the enemy so far. She was really at a loss. She was feeling anxious and regretted, "I already knew that the Devil Sect demons would have many deceptions. I shouldn't have sent them in turns..." Suddenly, she shivered in fear and clapped her hands while going down the house. She quickly used her qinggong to run back towards the Nan An Inn. She called out, "Yizhi, Yizhen, have you seen anything?" No one answered from inside the inn.

She rushed in with cold sweat drenching her body but there was no one inside

the inn. The couch that the injured disciples were sleeping on had also disappeared. At this point, Dingjing Shi Tai thought carefully but she had run out of idea. The shadow casted by her sword point was quivering as reflected lights from her sword flickered around the room. Her hand holding the sword was shaking. Her female disciples had suddenly disappeared without making any noise. How did this all happen? What's there to do? After a moment, she felt her lips dried, her tongue parched, and her whole body drained of energy. She felt paralyzed.

But this weakness was only momentary, as she took a deep breath and gathered her qi in the Dantian region. With her vigor immediately restored, she quickly went from room to room. She found nothing unusual in those rooms. She called out, "E'er, Juan'er, come in here." But in the midst of the night, she could only hear her own voice. There was no sound from Zheng E, Qin Juan and Yilin. Dingjing Shi Tai muttered, "Not good!" and quickly rushed out. Once she was outside, she shouted, "Zheng E, Qin Juan, Yilin, where are you?"

Outside, the pale moon was shining down and there was no trace of the three disciples. Dingjing Shi Tai wasn't frightened by this turn of event but turned angry instead. She jumped up the roof and shouted, "Devil Sect demons, what type of cheap tactic is this? What kind of win is this, ambushing people?" She cried out repeatedly. But all the area around her was very quiet and not a single sound was heard. As she was continuously calling out, it seemed that she was the only remaining person inside the Nianbapu town. There was nothing she could do. Suddenly, she shouted with a clear voice, "Devil Sect demons, listen to me. You still don't want to appear? So, Dongfang Bubai's disciples are shameless and gutless. You don't dare to face me and my school's people. What Dongfang Bubai? It's merely Dongfang Bibai. Dongfang Bibai, do you dare to come out and meet this old nun? Dongfang Bibai, Dongfang Bibai, I think you're afraid!"

She knew that when any Devil Sect people heard someone insulting their Chief's reputation then they would have to come out and risk their lives in defending it. This was a big matter for them. Sure enough, after she called out a

few "Dongfang Bibai", seven people rushed out from inside a house. They quietly jumped on the roof and surrounded her. Dingjing Shi Tai felt happy now that the enemies had appeared. She thought, "Finally, you demons have come out after being scolded by me. Wanting to cut me up and cut my corpse in two. This is better than not seeing their shadows at all." But these seven people just stood there without saying anything.

Dingjing Shi Tai angrily asked, "Where's my disciples? Where have you taken them?" Her enemies stayed quiet and didn't answer her. Dingjing Shi Tai saw the two people guarding at the west were around fifty years old. Their faces were stiff like that of corpses and there was no sign of anger on their faces.

She sighed heavily and shouted, "Ok, watch out for my sword!"

She thrust her sword towards a person standing at the northwest. She knew that she was surrounded and that this thrust may not find its mark so she used this thrust as a false move. That person just stood still waiting for the sword as he knew it was only a false move. Dingjing Shi Tai was planning to take her sword back but when she saw him not paying attention to her, instead of taking her sword back in mid stroke, she put power into her right hand and pushed the sword forward. But the two people besides her target moved quickly and separately aimed their palms towards her left and right shoulders. Dingjing Shi Tai leaned to one side, jumped into the air, turned around and thrust her sword towards the tall person at the east side. The tall man slid back half a step and with a ringing sound, the sword hit a heavy iron tablet. He then lifted the iron tablet and struck at the top of her sword. Dingjing Shi Tai sneered, circled her sword and thrust it towards an old man on the left. The old man extended his left hand along the sword's path to try and grab it. In the moonlight, it looked like that he was wearing a black glove. Dingjing Shi Tai guessed that the glove's material might be impervious to the sword thrust. That seemed like the only reason why he was brave enough to use just his hands to grab a long sword.

She fought one enemy after another. Dingjing Shi Tai had now fought with five of the seven enemies. She felt that these five enemies were not that good. If she were only fighting with one or even two of them, she would not be afraid at

all and would most probably win. But against these seven people, when she attacked any little crack in one person's defense, it was immediately covered by the next person. Then they would immediately counter-attack and turned the situation dangerously against her. After some more fighting, she thought in alarm, "Who are these capable people from the Devil Sect? I know most of their well-known people. Their martial arts and the weapons they used are also known by the Five Mountains Sword Alliance. So what's the background of these seven people, I really can't tell where they come from. I didn't anticipate that Devil Sect's power would grow so large in these past few years. They unexpectedly have many masters working for them."

She had fought around sixty to seventy moves but she was unable to keep up any further. She was now breathing heavily when from the corner of her eyes she saw more than ten shadows on the roof. Clearly, these people had been hiding there for a long time and only now appeared suddenly. She gloomily muttered, "It's finished, it's finished! I can't even handle these seven people. Now there are more enemies watching from the sides. Dingjing, it would be hard to escape from your death today. You would suffer a big insult if you fall into the enemies' hand. It would be better if you had killed yourself earlier. This stinky sack of leather is only my temporary residence. But when it's destroyed, I would still have some regrets. This time I had taken along many disciples and delivered them to their deaths. Old nun Dingjing is ashamed to face Heng-Shan School's ancestors."

She thrust three times "Shua, shua, shua" forcing the enemies to take two steps back. She suddenly reversed the long sword and pierced it towards her own heart.

As her sword was about to reach her chest, a "dang" sound was heard, her hand shook and the tip of her long sword was knocked away from her chest. A man was besides her with a sword in his hand. He exclaimed, "Dingjing Shi Tai, don't be short-sighted. Friends from Songshan School are here!" He was the one who knocked her long sword away. She then heard the sounds of swords clashing. More than ten men had one by one jumped out from their hiding spots

to fight with those seven Devil Sect people.

Having escaped from death, Dingjing Shi Tai felt revitalised. She immediately went to join the battle again. But she saw that the Songshan School people were now fighting two against one and the seven Devil Sect people were at a disadvantage. Those seven people saw that sheer number was overwhelming them. They whistled and started to retreat towards the south. Dingjing Shi Tai chased them holding her sword. She suddenly heard the sound of wind coming towards her and recognized that many small projectiles had been released. Dingjing Shi Tai lifted her sword and concentrated on deflecting each of the projectiles aimed at her. In the middle of the night, there was only a glimmer of light from the moon and stars. Her long sword danced around and a "ding, ding" sound was heard continuously as her sword deflected all the projectiles. As she was hindered by the projectiles, those seven Devil Sect people had managed to escape far. She heard the person behind her said, "Heng-Shan School's "Ten-thousand Blossoms Sword Art" is exquisite and peerless. Today our eyes have been widened."

Dingjing Shi Tai sheathed her long sword and slowly turned around. In a short moment, everything had become still and quiet. When she was fighting just then, she was a vigorous wulin martial artist. But now that the fight is over, she had turned into an amiable and benevolent old nun. She joined her two hands greeting the Songshan School people and said, "Older martial brother Zhong, thank you very much for breaking the encirclement."

She now recognised the middle-aged man as Songshan School leader Zuo's younger martial brother. His name was Zhong Zhen and his nickname was "Nine Bent Sword". This nickname was not because he really used a bent sword but it was because his sword art fluctuates irregularly and was unpredictable. Dingjing Shi Tai had met him before at a meeting of the Five Mountains Sword Alliance at Taishan Mountain monastery. From the remaining Songshan School people, she knew three or four of them.

Zhong Zhen cupped his hand returning the courtesy. He smiled and said, "Dingjing Shi Tai, you fought with seven people by yourself. These seven

people are Devil Sect's "Seven Star Emissaries". Your sword art is really high. I admire you." Dingjing Shi Tai pondered, "So, these seven chaps are called 'Seven Star Emissaries'." She didn't want to appear unknowledgeable so she didn't ask anymore. She thought she could inquire about those people some other day. It was already good enough now for her to know their names.

One by one, the rest of the Songshan School people went up to greet her. Two of them were Zhong Zhen's younger martial brothers, while the rest were disciples a generation lower than them. Dingjing Shi Tai was still returning the greetings when she said, "I'm really ashamed. My Heng-Shan School has arrived in Fujian with several tens of disciples. But they've suddenly gone missing in this town. Martial brother Zhong, how long have you arrived at Nianbapu town? Do you have any clues for old nun to investigate?"

She believed that Songshan School people had been hiding here for a long time but they wanted to wait for her to get exhausted first before they come out and help. It was obvious that they wanted to shame her and at the same time show their power. She wasn't pleased at all. But many of her disciples had gone missing and it was a matter of grave importance. So she had no choice but to ask them about it. She felt this was her own problem to handle so she didn't want to ask these people for help. She already felt it was wrong to ask Zhong Zhen for information.

Zhong Zhen said, "Devil Sect witches are very crafty. They knew that Shi Tai's martial art is very outstanding and that it would be very hard for them to win. So they secretly captured all the disciples first. Shi Tai doesn't have to worry. Although Devil Sect is daring, they wouldn't harm martial sisters. Let's go down and discuss carefully on how we're going to save them."

After he finished saying this, he extended his left hand inviting her to go down. She nodded her head and jumped down. Zhong Zhen followed her and also jumped down. He then went to the west while saying, "I'll lead the way." After walking for a hundred feet, he turned north. They arrived in front of Xian An Inn and he pushed the main door open.

"Shi Tai, we'll discuss the matter in here," said Zhong Zhen.

The other two martial brothers were "Divine Whip" Deng Bagong and "Bright Hair Lion" Gao Kexin. The three of them led Dingjing Shi Tai to a big room upstairs. After the lamps were lighted, they took their seats while the other disciples offered them tea and then retreated out of the room. Gao Kexin went to the door and closed it.

Zhong Zhen said, "We've long admired Shi Tai's sword art, Heng-Shan School's number one.... "

Dingjing Shi Tai shook her head and said, "Wrong, my sword art isn't as good as my martial sister. It's also inferior to martial sister Dingyi."

Zhong Zhen smiled and said, "Shi Tai, don't be too modest. We martial brothers have long admired heroine and been wanting to see Shi Tai's clever sword art. That's why we were late in helping. We don't have any bad intention. I sincerely apologise. Shi Tai please don't blame us."

Dingjing Shi Tai felt a bit calmer and saw the three of them stood up and cupped their fists. She also stood up to return the gesture and said, "Well said."

Zhong Zhen waited for her to sit down before saying, "When our schools formed the Five Mountain Sword alliance, we considered ourselves to be of the same branch and share all weal and woes together. It's just that in the last few years, we've had little time to meet together and we also haven't collaborated on any matters. This has caused the Devil Sect to grow stronger and become more arrogant."

Dingjing Shi Tai uttered a "Hmph" thinking, "What is he doing saying all these idle talk?"

Zhong Zhen said again, "Everyday, older brother Zuo says: Together, we are strong. Divided, we are weak. If the Five Mountain Sword Alliance can join together and become one, then the Devil Sect wouldn't antagonise us. Even the big school of Shaolin and Wudang who have been enjoying their big reputation for a long time wouldn't be able to compare to us. Brother Zuo wishes that we no longer had this disunity of the five mountain sword schools. He wants us to combine together and become the "Five Mountain School". That way, we would

have many people cooperating together and we would really become the leader of Wulin. What does Shi Tai think of this?"

Dingjing Shi Tai scowled and said, "Poor nun at Heng-Shan School is only an idle person and don't pay much attention to matters. However, Martial brother Zhong has raised an important matter. You should come with me to meet my martial sisters to speak about this. Right now, the most important thing is to rescue my school's female disciples who have fallen into the Devil Sect's trap. We can discuss other matters in details after this."

Zhong Zhen smiled and said, "Shi Tai, don't worry. I've already asked Songshan School people to handle this. Heng-Shan School's problem is also Songshan School's. We wouldn't let your school's disciples to suffer."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "In that case, many thanks. But I don't know how brother Zhong came to have this optimistic outlook about my problem? What assurances do you have to say these words?"

Zhong Zhen smilingly said, "Shi Tai yourself is here. You're Heng-Shan School's well-known master. How could we still be afraid of a few demons from the Devil Sect? Also, there are still we martial brothers and several other martial nephews. We'll definitely use all our power to fight them. If we still can't handle these second rate fighters from Devil Sect then, hey hey, that's too ridiculous for us to say."

Dingjing Shi Tai heard him talking about irrelevant things that she became anxious and angry. She stood up and said, "Brother Zhong is talking as if the situation looks good. Let's go now!"

"Where are you going Shi Tai?" asked Zhong Zhen.

"Going to save people," answered Dingjing Shi Tai.

"Where are you going to save people?" asked Zhong Zhen again.

Dingjing Shi Tai was dumbfounded and unable to answer the question. After a moment, she said, "My disciples haven't gone missing for a long time. So of course they're still somewhere nearby. We've procrastinated for a long time now,

so it's going to be more difficult to find them."

Zhong Zhen said, "According to our intelligence, the Devil Sect people have a lair not far from Nianbapu town. It's very likely that your school's martial sisters are being held captive there. According to..."

Dingjing Shi Tai interrupted, "Where's this lair? We'll go save them."

Zhong Zhen slowly said, "Devil Sect would be well prepared to receive us. If we rashly go and make a mistake, then I can't say for sure that we'll be able to save them. We already know where they are. In my opinion, we should discuss this first before going to save them. This is a comparatively better plan."

Dingjing Shi Tai couldn't stand it anymore but she still sat back down.

She said, "I'll listen to martial brother Zhong's high opinion."

"I've come to Fujian under martial brother's order to discuss an important matter with Shi Tai. This matter concerns the destiny of the Wulin world. It also implicates the rise and fall of our Five Mountains Sword Alliance. So this is not a small matter at all. We need to discuss this big matter first and the remaining matters like saving people will have to wait. This is how we should go about it," said Zhong Zhen.

"But I don't know what big matter brother Zhong is talking about?" asked Dingjing Shi Tai.

Zhong Zhen said, "The big matter is the one that I've just raised before. The matter of combining the Five Mountains Sword Alliance into one."

Dingjing Shi Tai suddenly stood up and her complexion turned green. She stuttered, "You.... you.... you...."

Zhong Zhen just smiled slightly and said, "Shi Tai, please don't misunderstand. I'm not taking advantage of someone in a precarious position. I'm just compelling Shi Tai to agree to this matter."

Dingjing Shi Tai indignantly said, "You said it yourself. If this is not taking advantage of someone in a precarious position, then what is this?"

Zhong Zhen answered, "You're from Heng-Shan School. I'm from Songshan School. When your school is facing a problem, of course my school is also concerned. After all, this is a matter of life and death. Of course, I'm willing to help Shi Tai with all my power. But I don't know if my martial brothers and martial nephews would be willing to do so. But if the two schools have merged into one, then this problem would become our school's problem. Then they would have no more excuses."

Dingjing Shi Tai said, "According to what you said, if my Heng-Shan School doesn't merge with your school, then you would just sit on your hand and be a spectator regarding the matter of Heng-Shan School's missing disciples?"

Zhong Zhen said, "It can't be said like that. I've been ordered by martial brother to catch up with Shi Tai to discuss this matter. So other matters must wait before martial brother's order is completed. That's why I don't dare to handle this matter carelessly. Shi Tai, please don't blame us."

Dingjing Shi Tai's face had gone completely pale. She coldly said, "Poor nun can't take the responsibility for making the decision regarding the merging of our two schools. Even if I agree to this but my school's martial sisters don't agree, then everything would've been in vain."

Zhong Zhen leaned forward and whispered, "If Shi Tai agree then Dingxian Shi Tai can't disagree. Originally, the leader of each school and each faction has always been held by the first disciple. Looking at Shi Tai's attitude, martial art, and also your position in the school, Shi Tai deserves to be the leader of Heng-Shan School...."

Suddenly, Dingjing Shi Tai slapped the table and broke it. She fiercely retorted, "You want to sow dissension? I was the one who requested my deceased master that martial sister be the leader of our school. It was also me who persuaded martial sister Dingxian to take up the position. If Dingjing wanted to be the leader of the school then I would've done it during that time instead of using other people to incite it now."

Zhong Zhen sighed and said, "What brother Zuo said wasn't wrong."

"What did he say?" said Dingjing Shi Tai.

Zhong Zhen said, "Before we went south, brother Zuo said: 'The conduct of Heng-Shan School's Dingjing Shi Tai's is too good. Her martial art is also extremely high and she's admired by everyone. But it's a pity that she always fails to see the larger issue.' I asked him why he said these words and he answered: 'I have known Dingjing Shi Tai's manner for some time; she's naturally aloof from worldly affairs and doesn't cherish unwarranted reputation. On common matters, she's happy not to pay attention to them. If you ask her about this matter of combining the five schools, then you'll certainly meet with this problem.' This matter actually concerns a lot of things. We know that we wouldn't be able to handle it by ourselves but we're still going to try. If Dingjing Shi Tai is only concerned about yourself and ignores the thousands of lives from the orthodox schools who are in danger, then the Wulin realm will fall under a disaster and there's nothing we can do."

Dingjing Shi Tai stood up and coldly said, "You cleverly took this opportunity to say many honeyed words. But they're all completely useless to me. Songshan School has taken this path. You're not only taking advantage of someone in a precarious situation but also hitting a person when he is down."

Zhong Zhen said, "Shi Tai, you're wrong. If Shi Tai agrees to this matter and let the people in Wulin to know about this, it will facilitate our Songshan, Heng-Shan, Taishan, Huashan, and Hengshan five mountains to merge together. Then Songshan School will definitely support Shi Tai to become our "Five Mountains School" leader. So you can see clearly that our brother Zuo is sincere and doesn't have any personal ambition..."

Dingjing Shi Tai shook her hand continuously and shouted, "Say no more! My ear is already drowning in filth."

She put her hand together and pushed them out. A noisy "peng" sound was heard as two boards were blown away by her qi. She moved quickly and in no time was already outside Xian An Inn.

When she was out of the door, the calm wind caressed and cooled her red-hot

face. She considered, "That surname Zhong said that Devil Sect has a lair near Nianbapu town. The missing school disciples must be there. I don't know how much of what he said is true and how much is false." Then she walked away undecidedly without a plan. Walking alone, she looked at her own long shadow reflected on the slab stone as the moon lowered in the sky.

After walking for some distance, she stopped and thought, "I only have my own power to rely on. Just by myself, I won't be able to save my disciples. The old grand heroes had always been able to adjust themselves to any situation. Why didn't I just temporarily agree to that guy Zhong? After we've saved my disciples, I could immediately cut my own throat to thank them and teach him that with my death he will have no proof of the agreement. He would only be able to announce that I've eaten my own words and dirty my name. This I'm willing to bear by myself."

She sighed thinking about this. Then she turned around and slowly walked back to Xian Xia Inn. Suddenly she heard someone shouting from the end of the long street. "Your granny, General wants to drink wine and get some sleep. Your granny, shop servants, why don't you quickly open the door?" It was just yesterday at Xianxia mountain range that she met with General Wu Tiande. When Dingjing Shi Tai heard his voice, it was like a drowning person catching a big lumber.

Yesterday, Linghu Chong had helped Heng-Shan School escaped from danger at the top of Xianxia mountain range. Feeling proud of himself, he hurried along the road and arrived at Nianbapu town. He then quickly found a restaurant and went in. He shouted, "Bring out the wine!" When the servants saw that it was a General who had entered the shop, they didn't dare to be slow and lazy. They quickly poured the wine, cooked the rice, killed the chicken and sliced the beef. They were being very respectful towards him and were standing at attention and serving him attentively. Linghu Chong became slightly drunk after many bowls of wine. In his heart, he was thinking, "Devil Sect has suffered a great setback this time. But they probably wouldn't be resigned to it. Nineteen people are still enough to cause trouble for Heng-Shan School. Dingjing Shi Tai is foolhardy

and isn't Devil Sect's match. So I must look after them in secret."

After he had paid for his meal and wine, he went to Xian An Inn to sleep. He woke up at noon to wash his face when he suddenly heard people shouting on the street. "Huang Fengzai's people from Chaos Stone Mound are coming to Nianbapu to plunder the town. They will kill every person they meet. They will take all the money they see. Everyone quickly run away to save your life!" The shouting could be heard from everywhere.

The servant at the inn screamed, "General, General, there's a bad thing coming!"

Linghu Chong inquired, "Your granny, what bad thing is coming?"

"General, Huang Fengzai's men from Chaos Stone Mound are coming. They're coming to plunder the town tonight. Everyone is escaping already," replied the servant.

Linghu Chong opened his room's door and scolded, "Your granny, today is a sunny day. The sky is clear. How can there be robbers? General is right here. Do they still dare to plunder?"

That servant had a bitter expression on his face. But he still answered, "Those robbers, they're fierce... they're very fierce... they... they also don't know General that you.... you are here."

Linghu Chong said, "You go tell them then."

The servant answered, "I... I'm only a nobody, I don't dare to go and tell them. They'll chop my head off."

Linghu Chong said, "What kind of place is Huang Fengzai's Chaos Stone Mound?"

The servant answered, "I don't know what kind of place Chaos Stone Mound is. I've never heard of it before. I only know Huang Fengzai's people are very fierce. Two days ago, they plundered a town 30 li north of Nianbapu called Rongshutou. They killed sixty to seventy people and burned more than one hundred houses there. General, you... although your martial art is high, your two

hands would find it difficult to fight four hands. Not counting their big leader, I heard that they have more than three hundred people."

Linghu Chong scolded, "Your granny, so what if they have three hundred people? When General fights a battle with a thousand people and ten thousand horses, then when seven people entered the battle seven people will come out alive, eight people enter then eight people come out alive."

The servant said, "Yes, yes" and turned around to quickly go out.

The situation outside was already in chaos. People were calling out to each other in Zhejiang's speech but in Fujian's dialect. Linghu Chong couldn't understand completely what was being said. He could only guess they were saying something like: "A Mao's mom, have you taken the quilt yet?" or "Da Bao, Xiao Bao, hurry up. The robbers are coming!" When he walked outside, he saw tens of people carrying bundles behind their backs and basket on their hands. They were going south to escape.

Linghu Chong thought, "This is Zhejiang's boundary. Hangzhou and Fuzhou's Generals aren't taking care of this area causing the robbers to create chaos here and hurt the common people. My Quanzhou's big General Wu Tiande is here already so I can't just sit back and do nothing. Killing those robbers' leader would be an accomplishment. This is called feeding him good fortune and being loyal. Your granny, why not? Haha!" After his train of thoughts arrived at this conclusion, he couldn't help but laughed continuously. He called out, "Servants, bring out the wine! General wants to drink wine before killing some thieves."

But at that moment, everyone inside from the guests to shop owner, shop owner's wife, second aunt, third aunt, as well as the shop servants, and the cooks were all going out of the inn one by one. They only slowed down a step when they heard his voice but then continued their escape, afraid of the coming robbers. Linghu Chong kept calling them but no one paid any attention to him. Linghu Chong couldn't stand it anymore so he went to the kitchen himself to fetch the wine. He then sat in the main hall and poured himself some wine. Next, he heard the sounds of chickens, dogs, horses and pigs. He guessed that the townspeople were taking these animals to escape with them. After a moment, it

gradually became quieter. He drank three more bowls of wine and by then all the frightened and anxious sounds were gone. The town had become completely quiet. He thought, "Bad luck for Huang Fengzai's people. I don't know where the townspeople got the news from but when the robbers got here, they wouldn't have anything to plunder."

He was the only remaining person now in this big town. He found the silence really strange and was feeling quite lonely. Suddenly, he heard the sound of horses galloping in the distance. There were four horses coming from the south in a rush. Linghu Chong thought, "The robbers have arrived. But how come there's only a few people?" The four horses galloped down the street making a "zheng, zheng" sound when the horseshoes hit the stone slabs on the road.

A person shouted, "Nianbapu people, listen to Chaos Stone Mound Huang Fengzai's order. All males, females, old and young, get out of town! We won't kill you if you're outside. Everyone who stays inside will be chopped to death." They were shouting continuously while their horses galloped down the street. Linghu Chong went to the main door and opened it a crack to have a look. But the horses had gone past and he was only able to see the back of the people riding the horses. He thought, "This is not right! Looking at those people riding, it's clear they know some martial art. How can the bandits have this kind of people?" He pushed the door open and walked out. After walking for more than one hundred feet, he still couldn't see anyone around. Then he saw a scholar tree on the side of the road, its branches and leaves luxuriant. He quickly went up the tree and sat on the highest branch. There was no sound at all around him. He waited up there for a long time knowing that something was not right. Huang Fengzai's people had come a long time ago but his big group still had not come yet. Could it be that some of the robbers came here to notify the townspeople to escape?

After he had been waiting for an hour, he faintly heard some voices. It was the chirping of females' voices. With rapt attention he heard a few sentences. From the sentences he heard, he knew that it was the Heng-Shan School's disciples. He thought, "How come they arrived here at this time? Oh, they must've spent the

day resting on the mountain." He heard them knocking on the Xian An Inn's door and then went to another inn to knock on that inn's door. There was quite a bit of distance between Nan An Inn and the scholar tree, so when Heng-Shan School people entered the inn, he couldn't hear or see what they were doing in there.

He secretly felt, "In all likelihood, this is the Devil Sect's trap to ambush Heng-Shan School people." At the moment, he was still concealed on top of the tree calmly waiting for something to happen. After waiting for a long time, he saw Yiqing and six disciples went out of the inn to light up the lamps. The whole street was now lit up by the lights from the houses' windows. After another moment, he suddenly heard the voice of a female shouting, "Help!" Linghu Chong was startled: "Aiyo, this is not good. Heng-Shan School disciples have met the Devil Sect's treachery." He immediately jumped down from the tree and went to the house where the scream came from. He looked inside the house from a crack in the window. But there was no light in there and only the pale light from the moon was coming in through the window. He saw seven or eight men standing against the wall and one female standing in the middle of the room. She shouted, "Help, help, someone's murdered!" Linghu Chong looked at the side of her face and noticed that her expression was fierce. It was obvious that they were waiting to ambush people.

As expected, as she just finished calling out, a female disciple outside the house shouted, "Who has committed murder here?" The house's door was pushed open and seven females jumped inside; one of them was Yiqing. These seven disciples were each holding a long sword in hand thinking they were going to save someone. Suddenly that female, who shouted for help before, threw out her right hand and hurled open a roughly four square feet of green cloth. Yiqing and the other six disciples started to tremble. It looks like they were dizzy when they started to turn around in circles and dropped down.

Linghu Chong was alarmed and he felt shocked through his heart, "That woman's green cloth must have some kind of confusion poison in it. If I go in to save them then I'll also fall in their trap. I can only wait and watch what

happens for now." Those men on the wall quickly crowded around, took out some rope, and started binding Yiqing's and the other disciples' hands and feet. Not long after, another female shouted sharply from outside, "What kind of person is here?" When Linghu Chong passed through the Xianxia mountain range, he had met with this bad tempered nun and had also chatted with her. He knew that Yihe was the one out there. He thought, "You are really hot-tempered. This time, you'll become rice dumpling again¹⁴." He heard Yihe shouted again, "Sister Yiqing, are you here?" and a "peng" sound was heard as she kicked the door open.

Yihe and another disciple went forward shoulder to shoulder. As they stepped inside the house, they waved their swords around separately on their left and right sides, protecting themselves from an enemy's attack. At the same time, the other five disciples were walking backwards into the house and were also waving their swords around. When the two of the disciples got inside the house, the woman and her cohorts held their breath and stopped moving completely. Once all seven of the disciples were in the house, that woman hurled open her green cloth again and the disciples were again confused before collapsing to the ground. They were followed by Yu Sao's group which also fell into the same trap. There were now twenty-one of Heng-Shan School disciples that have lost consciousness and tied up at the corner of the house. After a while, an old man in their group made some hand signals and they quietly retreated from the house's back door.

Linghu Chong jumped to the roof and crouched down. He was following them for a short distance when he suddenly heard sounds of flapping clothes from the house in front. The sound was coming from the roof ridge of the house. He saw ten men hand signaling to each other. They were all concealed from the street while seated on the side of the roof ridge. His current hiding place was only tens of feet away from them. Linghu Chong slid down the wall quietly when he saw Dingjing Shi Tai coming to this area leading three disciples.

Linghu Chong thought, "This isn't good. This is using "luring the tiger leaving the mountain" tactic. Those nuns left at the Nan An Inn will be in trouble." In

the distance, he saw shadows moving hurriedly towards the Nan An Inn. What he thought before had become a reality. Suddenly he heard someone whispering, "Delay that old nun from coming over, the seven of you entertain her here." This voice came from above his head so Linghu Chong couldn't move at all or he would be discovered. So he flattened his back on the wall and didn't move at all. He heard Dingjing Shi Tai kicked the door open and called out, "Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao, do you hear me?" Her voice travelled far and then he saw her going around the house and jumping onto the roof. But she didn't look carefully inside the house. Linghu Chong thought, "What is she doing? Why isn't she going inside the house to have a look? Once she goes in then she'll see the twenty one female disciples tied up on the ground." He realised immediately, "It's actually good that she's not going in. Those Devil Sect people are on the roof waiting for her to enter the house. Then they'll immediately surround her from four directions. That's like capturing a turtle in an urn."

He saw Dingjing Shi Tai going here and there realising that she didn't know what to do. Suddenly, she went quickly towards Nan An Inn and those three disciples couldn't keep up with her. As that happened, a lot of people turned up from the side of the street and hurled that green cloth open. Those three disciples immediately collapsed and they were dragged inside a house. With the pale light from the moon, he could blurrily see that Yilin was among those three people. Linghu Chong quickly thought, "Should I quickly go and save little martial sister Yilin?" And another thought quickly followed, "I'm only by myself and the fight will be big. The Devil Sect has captured so many of Heng-Shan School's people. I must be careful not to harm them while I'm taking care of the Devil Sect people. I can't fight in front of them so I must still do this in secret."

He saw Dingjing Shi Tai came out of Nan An Inn and started to scold the Devil Sect in the middle of the street. Then she went up to the roof and started scolding Dongfang Bubai. As expected, Devil Sect people couldn't bear this anymore and seven people went up to fight her. When Linghu Chong saw this, he pondered, "Dingjing Shi Tai's sword art is refined and deep. Even one against seven, she would be able to hold them out for some time. I'll go save martial

sister Yilin first."

His body moved like lightning entering the house. He saw a person in the main hall holding a sabre and the three disciples tied up on the ground beside him. Linghu Chong jumped forward and took out his Yaodao saber. Then using his sheathed sabre, he stabbed it towards that person's throat. That person didn't even react before he died. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded, "How come my sword is so fast? I just extended my hand and it already reached his throat?" He himself didn't know that ever since he practised the Art of Essence Absorbing, the internal energies of the Peach Valley six fairies, Monk No-Commandment, and Mr. Black-White had become his own internal energy to use. His initial idea was that once he stabbed with his sabre then the enemy would raise his own sabre to block and he would then use his sheathed sabre to hit his enemy's legs to drop him on the ground. Then he would be able to save the three martial sisters. Unexpectedly, his enemy didn't even have time to raise his sabre before he got hit and killed.

Linghu Chong felt apologetic as he dragged the dead man away. Then he looked down, he saw that Yilin was among the three female disciples lying on the ground. He extended his hand to check her breathing and found her breathing evenly. Except for being unconscious, she was otherwise unharmed. He quickly went to the kitchen to fetch a ladle of cold water and splashed it on her face. In a little while, Yilin woke up and groaned slightly. At the beginning, she didn't know that she was on the ground. She opened her eyes and suddenly realised what had happened. She quickly jumped up and wanted to draw her sword. But both of her hands and feet were tied up, and she fell back down.

Linghu Chong said, "Little Shi Tai, don't be afraid. That bad person has been killed by General." He then used his sabre to cut away the ropes binding her hands and feet. In the darkness, Yilin heard his voice and it was that person "Big brother Linghu" that she had been thinking of day and night. She was alarmed and happy at the same time. She called out, "You... you are Linghu Big..." This word "brother" wasn't said when she thought that it wasn't right. Her whole face turned red and she quietly whispered, "Who... who are you?"

Linghu Chong heard her recognizing him and then correcting herself. He whispered, "General is here. Those small-time thieves wouldn't dare to bully you anymore."

"Ah, so it's General Wu. How about my... my martial uncle?" asked Yilin.

"She's outside fighting with the enemies. Let's go out and take a look," said Linghu Chong.

"Sister Zheng, Sister Qin..." said Yilin.

She took out from her bosom a fire stick and lighted it up. She saw her two disciple sisters lying on the ground.

She said, "En, they're all here." She wanted to cut the ropes on their hands and feet.

But Linghu Chong said, "Don't bother. Helping your martial uncle is more important at the moment."

Yilin said, "That's true."

Linghu Chong turned around and went outside with Yilin following behind. They had just walked several steps when they saw those seven enemies fleeing. Then they heard the projectiles being deflected and someone praising how high Dingjing Shi Tai's sword art is. Dingjing Shi Tai recognised that the person is from the Songshan School. Not long after that, he saw Dingjing Shi Tai following those men to go into Xian An Inn. Linghu Chong signaled to Yilin to follow him to the inn and hid outside the window to eavesdrop. They heard Dingjing Shi Tai chatting with Zhong Zhen inside the room. That person surnamed Zhong wanted Dingjing Shi Tai to agree to the merging of the Heng-Shan School first before they would help save her disciples. Linghu Chong heard him harbouring evil intentions and taking advantage of someone who was already down. He secretly felt angry. He also heard Dingjing Shi Tai getting more and more angry as Zhong Zhen said more words until she finally jumped out of the inn.

Linghu Chong waited for Dingjing Shi Tai to go a bit further before he went

down and knocked on Xian An Inn's door. He shouted, "Your granny, General wants to drink wine and sleep. Your granny shop servants, why don't you quickly open the door?" It was just at that time that Dingjing Shi Tai had run out of ideas when she heard this general's shout. She felt really happy and quickly went over. Yilin went up to welcome her and called out, "Martial uncle!" Dingjing Shi Tai felt even happier. She hastily asked, "Where did you go before?"

Yilin answered, "I was captured by Devil Sect demons. General rescued me..."

At this time, Linghu Chong had pushed the door open and walked in. Inside the main hall was two candles lighted up and Zhong Zhen was sitting in the middle of the hall. Zhong Zhen gloomily said, "Who's making all those noises? Come out quickly!"

Linghu Chong scolded him, "Your granny! This is general working for the government court; you still have the guts to speak out? Shopkeeper, Boss' wife, servants, quickly come out."

Songshan School people heard him scolding and then asking for the shopkeeper and the boss' wife. It was obvious to them that he looked fierce on the outside but soft on the inside and that he was feeling afraid in his heart. They all found it funny. Zhong Zhen was still thinking about the big matter in his heart when this government dog came in the middle of the night. He quietly said, "Get rid of this chap but don't kill him." Bright Hair Lion Gao Kexin nodded his head. He then laughed aloud and went towards Linghu Chong. He said, "So it's granddad from the government. Pardon me for not paying respect."

"It's already good that you know. You people are only ordinary folks so you don't know any rules..." said Linghu Chong.

Gao Kexin laughed, "Haha! Yes! Yes!" and in a flash, his body was in front of Linghu Chong. He extended his forefinger and stabbed it towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong saw where he was aiming at and he quickly concentrated his internal energy at his waist. Gao Kexin stab found Linghu Chong's laughing acupoint. When an opponent was hit at this point, he would

laugh loudly once and would immediately lose consciousness. To his surprise, Linghu Chong just giggled once and said, "You're not following any rules. What kind of joke are you playing with General moving your hands and feet about?" Gao Kexin was greatly surprised. But he already executed his second stab. This time he was using all of his power in his stab. Linghu Chong laughed loudly and jumped up. He laughingly scolded him, "Your granny, what are you doing rubbing general's waist? You want to steal some silvers? Hmm, you look solemn, handsome and intelligent. But actually you're an unlearned man."

Gao Kexin's left hand shot out to grab Linghu Chong's right wrist and he was going to use his right hand to fling him down to the ground. Unexpectedly, as his hand touched Linghu Chong's wrist, his internal energy started to rush out of his body and he couldn't stop it. He couldn't help but be completely frightened. He wanted to shout but even when his mouth was opened wide, no sound was coming out.

Linghu Chong was aware that his opponent's internal energy was being absorbed into his body. It was just like that day when he grabbed Mr. Black-White's wrist. He was alarmed, "I can't use this demonical method." He quickly flinged Gao Kexin away, breaking the contact.

Gao Kexin felt as if he had received a King's pardon as he was stupidly thrown down. He quickly stood up but felt weak all over as if he had just recovered from a big illness. He shouted, "Art of Essence Absorbing. Art... Art of Essence Absorbing!" His shout came out as more of a hiss but it was full of fear. Zhong Zhen, Deng Bagong and the rest of the Songshan School disciples jumped up at the same time and asked, "What?" Gao Kexin stammered, "This.. this person is using art... art of Essence Absorbing."

All of a sudden the room was filled with lights flickering off swords as everyone drew their long swords out from their scabbards while Divine Whip Deng Bagong held a whip in his hand. Zhong Zhen's sword art was the fastest. Under the trembling cold light of the room, the reflective light of his sword had already pierced Linghu Chong's throat. When that Gao Kexin shouted, Linghu Chong already anticipated that Songshan School people would immediately

gang up on him and they were now thrusting their swords towards him. But as they were pulling their swords out, Linghu Chong also pulled his Yaodao sabre along with its sheath out from his waist and used it like a long sword. His hand shook lightly and the back of everyone's hand was hit and "qiang lang" sounds were heard. The "qiang lang" noise had not stopped yet when all the swords were dropped on the ground. Zhong Zhen's martial art was the highest, even though the back of his hand had been hit by Linghu Chong's scabbard, he still managed to hold on to it. He was frightened and jumped back. Deng Bagong was distressed and let go of the whip's handle, which made the whip lashed up and wrapped around his neck restricting him from drawing any breath.

Zhong Zhen was leaning his back against the wall and his face had lost all colour. "A well known in Jiang Hu. Devil Sect's Chief Ren resurfaces. You... you... you are Chief Ren... are you Ren Woxing?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Your granny, what Ren Woxing, Ren Nixing, General won't change his surname and won't change his name either¹⁵. My surname is Wu, my name is Tiande. From which mound did you come from? Are you that whatever Zai's small time thieves?"

Zhong Zhen clasped both his hands, "Sir, you have re-entered Jiang Hu. Zhong knows that I'm not your match so I'm going." He jumped through the window to get out. Gao Kexin followed him and jumped out the window too. Then one by one, they all jumped out through the window. Although the floor was full of long swords, none of them dared to take any of them. Linghu Chong's left hand was now holding the scabbard while his right hand was holding the sabre's handle. He then used his strength to pull on the handle a few times but that sabre never came out from its sheath. He said, "The rust on this treasured sabre is really bad. I should look for a grindstone and sharpen it."

Dingjing Shi Tai clasped her hands and asked, "General Wu, how do we save my disciples?" Linghu Chong expected that as soon as Zhong Zhen and his people went away, no one would be able to match Dingjing Shi Tai's divine sword. He replied, "General wants to drink a few bowls of wine here. Old Shi Tai, do you want to drink wine too?" When Yilin heard him talking about

drinking wine again, she thought, "If this general meets with big brother Linghu, they would certainly become drinking buddies." As she took a peep at him, she saw that the general was staring at her. Her face turned slightly red and she lowered her head. Dingjing Shi Tai said, "Forgive me. Poor nun doesn't drink wine. General, I won't accompany you!" She clasped her hands again and then turned around to leave. Yilin followed her out but when she reached the door, she couldn't help but to take another look at him. She saw him looking for wine and calling out in a loud voice, "Your granny, all the people in the inn have all disappeared. How come those servants are still not coming out." She thought, "His voice sounds similar to big brother Linghu's but whenever this general speaks, he's very vulgar. Every sentence he has to mention his whatever. Big brother Linghu isn't like that at all. His martial art is also much higher compared to big brother Linghu. I... I must be imagining things... Ai, must be... "

Linghu Chong had finally found some wine and he immediately gulped it down. He thought, "When these nuns, grannies and ladies come back, they'll talk non-stop and I'll have to endure it for sure. It's better if I just run away before then. Saving these people would take around an hour and my tummy would be very hungry by that time. It's better if I find something to eat first."

After he finished a pot of wine, he went to the kitchen looking for something to eat. Suddenly, he heard from somewhere far away, Yilin sharply shouting, "Martial uncle, martial uncle, where are you?" She sounded frightened.

Linghu Chong hurriedly rushed out of the inn and followed the voice. When he got there, he saw Yilin and two young ladies standing on the street. They were calling out, "Martial uncle, master!"

Linghu Chong asked, "What happened?"

Yilin answered, "I went to wake martial sister Zheng and martial sister Qin. Martial uncle was concerned about the other martial sisters so she went ahead to rescue them. But when we got out, maybe... we don't know where she has gone to." Linghu Chong saw that Zheng E was around twenty one two years old while Qin Juan was even younger, looking like fifteen sixteen years old. He thought, "I haven't seen these young ladies before. What's Heng-Shan School doing sending

them out to come here?"

He smiled, "I know where they are. Come with me!"

He walked quickly to the northeast towards the house where the disciples were captured earlier. When he arrived at the house with the broken door, he was afraid that the woman with the confusing drugs was still inside ready to ambush them. He said, "Use your handkerchiefs to cover your mouth and nose. There's a smelly granny inside who releases poison." He pinched his nose using his left hand and shut his lips tightly. Then he rushed into the house. When he reached the main hall, he was dumbfounded.

Previously, the main hall was full of Heng-Shan School female disciples. But now, there wasn't a single trace of them. He was surprised. There was a candle lighting up the hall but the hall was totally empty. Where did they go? He searched every room in the house but found nothing unusual. He called out, "There's something strange here!"

Yilin, Zheng E, and Qin Juan eyes were wide open looking at him, their faces full of doubt. Linghu Chong said, "Your granny, your martial sisters were right here. An old granny had poisoned them all. Then they were tied up right here. How come they're all gone now?"

Zheng E asked, "General Wu, when you saw our martial sisters being poisoned, was it really here?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Last night, when I was sleeping, I had a dream. I saw with my eyes many old nuns, about seven or eight of them lying right here. How can it be wrong?"

Zheng E said, "You... you..."

She wanted to say that it was his dream so how can it be accurate? But she knew that he liked to speak nonsense. He said that it was a dream but he probably saw it with his own eyes so she quickly corrected herself, "Where do you think they've all gone to?"

Linghu Chong hummed deeply, "I'm not sure where we can find big fishes

and big meat. I think they've all gone to have a feast. Or maybe the place where there's opera; they're watching opera."

He moved his hands around and continued, "You three are small girls. So it's better if you stay close behind me. If you want to eat meat or watch opera, we'll do it later."

Although Qin Juan was still young, she knew the situation was really dangerous. Her other martial sisters had all fallen into enemy's hands. While this general blindly said some nice words, she knew they were all not true. Tens of Heng-Shan School disciples had gone out but now only the three of them remained. Except for listening to this general's order, she had no other option. She followed the general outside along with Yilin and Zheng E. Linghu Chong was talking to himself, "Could it be that I saw the wrong people in my dream last night? Tonight, I won't be able to have such a good dream again." But in his heart, he was thinking, "The other female disciples must've been moved away. But how come Dingjing Shi Tai had also disappeared? I'm afraid she might have met the enemy by herself and chased them. Hmm... It wouldn't be appropriate to leave Yilin and these two in Nianbapu town, I'd better take them along." He said, "We don't have anything to do right now. Why don't we go and look for your martial uncle and see where she's playing? What do you think?"

Zheng E answered, "That's extremely good! General's martial art is high and your experience is vast. If General doesn't lead the three of us in looking for martial uncle then I'm afraid it would be very difficult for us to find them."

Linghu Chong laughed, "'Martial art is high and experience is vast', you're not wrong in saying these eight words. In the future, when General hangs up his command and got a promotion and got rich, then I'll send the three of you one hundred, two hundred shining silver taels to buy clothes to wear."

As he was talking non-stop, they've reached the edge of Nianbapu town. He then jumped onto a roof and looked at the four directions. At this time, the morning sun was already above the horizon, the white fog filled the air, and above the treetops the sky was cloudy. He gazed far but there was no one on the two main roads. Suddenly, he saw an object on the main road to the south. He

couldn't see clearly what it was because of the distance. But when the whole road was empty and an item was in the middle of the street like this, then it would definitely catch the attention of your eyes. He jumped down from the roof and quickly went to where that object was. Once he got there, he picked it up. It was a female shoe. Apparently it was identical to the one Yilin was wearing. He waited for Yilin and the other two girls to arrive. He gave the shoe to Yilin and asked, "Is this your shoe? How come it's here?" Yilin received the shoe and realised it was the same type of shoe that she was wearing. She couldn't help but check her feet and saw that she was still wearing her shoes.

Zheng E said, "This... this is the shoe that our martial sisters wear. How did it end up here?"

Qin Juan said, "It must be one of the martial sisters who were captured by the enemy. She must've struggled here and dropped her shoe."

Zheng E replied, "Or she deliberately left the shoe behind to let us know."

Linghu Chong said, "Correct. Your martial art is high and your experience is vast. Should we go chase to the south or to the north?"

Zheng E answered, "Of course to the south."

Linghu Chong quickly started running to the south. At the beginning, the distance between him and the three girls wasn't that far. But as he went on, the distance became really far. Linghu Chong looked carefully along the road and he frequently looked back to watch the three ladies. He was afraid that he might get too far and wouldn't be able to help them if needed. So he waited for them to catch up to him before he ran again. They had gone for more than ten li in this manner when he saw that the road in front was rugged. There were a lot of trees on both sides providing a lot of places for enemies to hide in. If Yilin was captured while they were on these parts of the road, he wouldn't be able to save her. After a long time, he saw Qin Juan running towards him. Both of her cheeks were really red. He knew that she was still young and couldn't run for long distances. He decided to let them walk slowly for the moment. He said loudly, "Your granny, if we keep running that fast then General's leather boots

will be worn through to the bottom. Can't let this happen. Why don't we just go slowly?" After walking for around seven to eight li, Qin Juan suddenly shouted, "Yi!" She crouched besides a shrub on the side and picked up a cap. It was the cap that Heng-Shan School's people wear.

Zheng E said, "General, it's one of our martial sisters' cap. They must've gone through this road."

The three girls quickly continued walking. They were going faster as they went. Linghu Chong was now behind them.

At noon, the four of them found a restaurant on the road. The shop owner saw a general with a nun and two young girls with him. He was really surprised and repeatedly hit the sides of his head. Linghu Chong slapped the table and scolded, "Your granny, what are you looking at? You've never seen monks and nuns before?"

That man said, "Yes, yes. I don't dare."

Zheng E asked, "Uncle, have you seen a few nuns passing by here?"

The man said, "I haven't seen a few nuns but I've seen one. One old Shi Tai passed by here. She was much older compared to this young Shi Tai here..."

Linghu Chong shouted, "You talk too much! One old Shi Tai, then how could her age be younger than this little Shi Tai?"

That man said, "Yes, yes."

Zheng E impatiently asked, "What happened to that old Shi Tai?"

The man answered, "That old Shi Tai hastily asked me whether I've seen a few nuns passing by this road. I said no and she just went. Ai, she's already old but she was still running really fast. She was also holding a sword in her hand. She looked like she was going to play a part in an opera."

Qin Juan clapped her hands and said, "That must be Master. Let's go quickly and chase her."

Linghu Chong said, "Don't rush. We'll eat first."

The four people hastily eat their meals. Just before they left, Qin Juan bought four steamed rolls. She said she was giving it to Master to eat. Linghu Chong's heart turned sour, "She's very filial towards her master. But for me, I can't even be filial to my master."

They chased until the sky became dark. But they had not seen a trace of either Dingjing Shi Tai or the Heng-Shan School's disciples. They kept an eye on the field with thick long grass while the street was getting narrower as they went. As they went further, the long grass was up to their waist and they weren't able to see the road anymore.

Suddenly, they heard some sounds of fighting coming from the northwest. Linghu Chong called out, "There's some fighting going on there. Let's take a look."

Qin Juan said, "Ai yo, maybe it's my Master?"

Linghu Chong went to the direction of the noise. After going for several hundred feet, the surrounding area was suddenly bright. They saw tens of tall fire sticks around the area and the sounds of fighting got noisier.

He quickened his steps as he got near to the area. Then he saw tens of people holding the fire sticks in a circle. Inside that circle was a person with her big sleeve flitting about and her long sword slashing around. It was Dingjing Shi Tai. Outside the circle were tens of people lying down on ground. With one look at their clothes, he knew that it was Heng-Shan School's female disciples. Linghu Chong saw that those people holding the fire sticks were wearing masks on their faces. He walked nearer to the circle step by step. At the moment, every person there had his attention on the fight and no one saw him coming nearer. Linghu Chong laughed loudly and shouted, "Seven against one, that's shameful."

All those people with their faces covered were surprised to suddenly see him appear out of nowhere. They all turned their heads around to look at him. Only the seven people surrounding Dingjing Shi Tai didn't hear him and they kept on fighting. All of them were attacking her upper body. Linghu Chong saw on

Dingjing Shi Tai's gown some splotches of fresh blood. He also saw blood splashed on her face. She was using her left hand to hold her sword. Obviously, her right hand had been injured.

At this time, someone shouted, "Who are you?" As a man jumped in front of Linghu Chong with both of his hands shaped in a knife form.

Linghu Chong shouted, "General has been going everywhere non stop but everyday I have to meet you small time thieves. Let's exchange names, General's sabre here doesn't chop nameless people."

A man laughed, "So it's this muddled person." as he slashed his sword to chop Linghu Chong's leg off.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Ai yo, you're really using your sabre?" His body swayed as he charged into their group with his sheathed sabre up. Seven continuous "Pa, pa, pa" was heard as seven people wrists were hit. Seven weapons fell on the ground one after another. A "ci" sound was heard as Dingjing Shi Tai's sword pierced into an enemy's chest. That person was startled as he couldn't avoid Dingjing Shi Tai's lightning fast sword. Dingjing Shi Tai swayed a few times and as her legs couldn't support her anymore, she sat on the ground.

Qin Juan screamed, "Master, master." as she went towards her master to support her.

One of the masked men lifted his sabre and put it on a Heng-Shan School's disciple's neck. He shouted, "Retreat three steps, if you don't do as I say, I'll kill this woman first."

Linghu Chong laughed, "Very good, very good. If you want us to retreat, then we'll retreat. What's so strange about that? Don't say three steps, even thirty steps is ok."

Suddenly he thrust his Yaodao sabre towards him and the point of the scabbard hit his chest. That person cried out "Ai yo" as his body flew away. Linghu Chong was dumbfounded as he didn't expect that his internal energy would be so strong. He again wielded his sheathed sabre as he hit three more

masked men and shouted, "You're still not retreating? I'm going to capture you one by one and have you sent to the government here. Everyone will get thirty planks."

The leader of those masked men saw that his martial art was high and was really amazing. He clasped his hand and said, "We respect Chief Ren's good name. We'll back down." He waved his left hand and shouted again, "Devil Sect's Chief Ren is here. Everyone be tactful, let's go." They lifted the corpse and the four people who were hit before. They also threw the fire sticks down and retreated towards the northwest. In a short while, they were all gone from the field. Qin Juan took out Heng-Shan School's medicine to apply to her master's wounds. While Yilin and Zheng E untied their martial sisters' hands and feet. Four disciples then took up the fire sticks and gathered around Dingjing Shi Tai. Everyone saw that her injuries were serious and all their faces had a worried expression. They all kept silent. Dingjing Shi Tai's chest was continuously going up and down. She slowly opened her eyes and asked Linghu Chong, "You... you... are really the past... Devil Sect's.... Chief Ren.... Woxing?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "No."

Dingjing Shi Tai's eyes were losing its liveliness. She was expelling a lot of air but inhaling very little air. It was obvious that she was having great difficulty breathing. She gasped a few times and suddenly in a fierce voice said, "If you're Ren Woxing, even if my Heng-Shan School is defeated to the ground and be... be destroyed. Please don't... don't.." As she said till here, she couldn't draw her breath. Linghu Chong saw that her life was in danger and didn't dare to talk nonsense anymore. He said, "I'm still young, how can I be Ren Woxing?"

Dingjing Shi Tai asked, "Then how come you know.... know that art of Essence Absorbing? You're Ren Woxing's disciple..." Linghu Chong remembered the day he was still at Huashan when Master and Master-wife mentioned Devil Sect many evils. These past two days, he had seen with his own eyes the methods that Devil Sect employed to attack Heng-Shan School. He said, "The Devil Sect has committed many evil acts. How can we still make friends with them? That Ren Woxing isn't my master. Shi Tai, don't worry. My

master is a benevolent and kind man. He's heroic and upright. In Wulin, he's looked up by everyone and considered to be a senior hero. Shi Tai has many relations with him."

Dingjing Shi Tai's face revealed a smiling expression. She said, "Then... then I won't worry anymore. I... I won't make it. I want to bother General to bring Heng-Shan School's.... disciples.... to... to... " Her breathing hurried while she talked. After a moment, she said, "Bring them to Fuzhou's Wuxiang Temple ... help them settle down, my school's martial sisters... in a few days... they would arrive."

Linghu Chong said, "Shi Tai, don't worry. Just rest for a few days and you'll recover."

Dingjing Shi Tai asked, "Do you agree?"

Linghu Chong saw her two eyes looking at him full of hope and her face was hoping for him to agree. She was afraid that he might not agree to her request. He said, "I will definitely do Shi Tai's request."

Dingjing Shi Tai smiled, "Amitufo, I've been relieved of this burden. I'm not to be admired. Young hero... who are you really?"

Linghu Chong saw her eyes were unfocused and her breath was very shallow. Her life wasn't long anymore. He couldn't conceal it anymore from her so he put his mouth to her ear and said, "Shi Tai martial uncle, I am Huashan School's ex-disciple Linghu Chong."

Dingjing Shi Tai let out an "ah" and said, "You.... you... Thank you, young hero," and held his hand, her eyes filled with gratitude. She couldn't draw a breath anymore and her breathing stopped¹⁶.

Linghu Chong called out, "Shi Tai, Shi Tai," as he checked her breath. But she had stopped breathing. He couldn't help but feel mournful. Heng-Shan School's disciples started weeping wildly. The fire sticks were dropped onto the ground and one by one, they were extinguished. All around them became really dark. Linghu Chong thought, "Dingjing Shi Tai was considered to be her generation's expert in martial art. But by accident, she had lost her life tonight in this

wilderness. She was only an old nun without anyone else to help her here. Can't the Devil Sect just let her go?"

Suddenly, he thought aloud, "When that masked men's leader went, he said: 'Devil Sect's Chief Ren is here. Everyone be tactful, let's go.' Devil Sect's real name is 'Sun Moon Sect' and when they hear these two words 'Devil Sect', they would feel really insulted. They often kill people who call their sect 'Devil Sect'. So why did this person call his own sect 'Devil Sect'? Since he used the term 'Devil Sect', he must not be from the Devil Sect. So, what's the real origin of this person?" He heard the disciples sorrowfully crying so he didn't disturb them. He leaned on a tree and slept.

When he woke up in the morning, he saw a few senior disciples standing guard besides Dingjing Shi Tai's corpse while the young ladies and nuns slept beside him. Linghu Chong thought, "This General has to take these women to Fuzhou. It'll look really odd and strange, neither fish nor fowl. I also need to go to Fuzhou to look for Master and Master-wife. I don't need to lead them, just protecting them will do."

He coughed and was just about to go when Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhi, and Yizhen quickly went and clasped their hands to him and said, "Poor nuns were rescued by Hero, thanks to Hero's virtue and kindness. There's nothing we wouldn't do to repay Hero's kindness. Martial uncle had met great misfortune and in her last breath entrusted us to Hero. We're waiting for Hero to give orders for us to follow."

They no longer called him General as they believed that this General was a brave person. Linghu Chong said, "What hero? This is not good to hear. When you look at me, just call me General."

Yihe looked at the other disciples and then they all nodded their heads. Linghu Chong said, "Last night I had a dream. In that dream, I saw an old granny poisoned all of you and that you were all lying down inside a big house. How did you all get here?"

Yihe answered, "We didn't know what happened after we were poisoned and

fell unconscious. They splashed cold water to wake us all up later. They released the binds on our feet and led us out from the city through a small road. We didn't stop on the road as they kept pulling us trying to hurry. When we walked a bit slow, those thieves whipped us. Even when night fell, we still didn't stop. Then martial uncle caught up with us. They surrounded her telling her to surrender..." When her narrative arrived at this point, she choked and tears started to drop again.

Linghu Chong said, "So there's another small road besides the main one. No wonder we couldn't find any trace of you at all."

Yiqing said, "General, our most important matter right now is to cremate martial uncle's remains. Could you please show us how to do it?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "General doesn't know anything about the matters of monks or nuns. It'd be like a blind person leading if you want me to guide you. The most important matter is for General to get his promotion. I'd better go!" He quickly took large strides and headed towards the north.

The female disciples shouted, "General, General!"

How could Linghu Chong pay attention to them? When he went around a hillside, he went up a tree. He waited up there for around four hours before he saw the Heng-Shan School disciples walked past in sorrow. He followed behind them from far away, secretly protecting them.

When Linghu Chong arrived at an inn in a small town, he thought, "I've already clashed with the Devil Sect and Songshan School groups. This Quanzhou's General Wu Tiande must have a bit of reputation by now. Your granny, this disguise as a general isn't that good anymore." He called the inn's servant and gave him two silver taels to buy him clothes, shoes and cap to remodel his disguise. He told him that he was handling a case to catch thieves so the servant wouldn't tell anyone about what's he's doing and that if the thieves escaped to the ocean then he would come back and arrest the servant instead.

Later, he arrived at a calm and secluded place. He pulled his fine thick beard off and took off his general's clothes, leather boots, Yaodao sabre, and the

government documents. He then changed into the set the inn's servant brought him. He buried the all of the previous disguise in a big hole. From now on, he couldn't be called "General" anymore. As he finished changing into his new disguise, he felt a slight melancholy missing the General character already.

Two days later, he bought a long sword from a weapon shop in Jianning prefecture and put it in his bundle. He again felt happy that he had no other matters. Linghu Chong then observed the Heng-Shan School's nuns entered Fuzhou's wall to enter a monestary. The board in front of the monastery said, "Wuxiang Temple". He sighed and thought, "This burden has been released from my shoulder. Although I promised Dingjing Shi Tai to bring them here, I didn't really bring them here. But they already arrived here safely so I've already fulfilled my promise."

Chapter 24 Injustice

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



In the picture, Monk Dame's right hand was placed behind his back, and the index finger of his right hand pointed at the ceiling. The gray-haired old man struck out towards the ceiling with both of his palms aiming at the exact spot Damo had pointed at.

Linghu Chong turned around and walked back towards the main road. He then inquired from a passer-by the direction to the Fortune Prestige Escort House. However he actually didn't feel like going there at the moment, so he just wasted some time by wondering around aimlessly on the street. He didn't know

himself whether it's because he didn't dare to meet his Master and Master-Wife or it's because he didn't dare to see his martial sister and martial brother Lin's present situation. But it might also be because he didn't know what to say to them when he met them. So he looked for some distractions to keep himself busy for the moment.

Suddenly, he heard a familiar voice, "Little Lin, are you going to drink wine with me?" Linghu Chong felt heat rising up his chest and suddenly felt dizzy. He had travelled more than a thousand li to come to Fujian just to hear this voice and to look at the owner of that voice's face. But right now, hearing that voice, he didn't dare to turn his head around to take a look. All of a sudden, he was frozen there like a statue and tears started to blur his eyes. The way she called him and the word she used to call him made him realise that his martial sister and martial brother Lin were very intimate with each other.

He then heard Lin Pingzhi replied, "I don't have the time. I'm still not familiar with the lessons that Master taught me."

"Those three sword moves are really easy. After we drink wine, I'll tell you the know-how. Alright?" Yue Lingshan persuaded.

"Master and Master-Wife ordered us not to walk around in the city for the next several days so we don't get into trouble. I think we should just go home," Lin Pingzhi reasoned.

Yue Lingshan retorted back, "Then we also can't take a stroll on the main street? I haven't seen any people from Wulin. If a grand hero from Jiang Hu comes here, we wouldn't interfere with him and he also wouldn't interfere with us. So what else is there to be afraid of?"

As they chatted, they gradually walked further. Linghu Chong slowly turned around and saw Yue Lingshan's slender body at the left and Lin Pingzhi's tall body at the right. The two of them were walking shoulder to shoulder along the street. Yue Lingshan was wearing a lake-green gown and a jade green skirt. Lin Pingzhi was wearing a pale yellow gown. Both of their gowns were new and clean. As he looked at their backs, they looked very beautiful as a couple.

Linghu Chong felt as if there was something stuck in his chest and he could barely draw his breath.

He had been separated from Yue Lingshan for several months now. Although he had not stopped thinking of her, when he saw her today, he knew that he still loved her deeply. His hand was gripping the sword handle tightly itching to pull it out and cut his own throat. Suddenly, his vision became dark and he felt as if the sky was spinning and the ground was shifting. He sat down on the ground heavily. After a while, he composed himself and slowly stood up. He was still feeling dazed, "I shouldn't see these two ever again. What's the use being miserable when seeing them? Tonight, I'll go secretly to look for Master and Master-Wife. I'll leave them a note to tell them that Ren Woxing has reentered Jianghu and wanted to act against Huashan School and that his martial art is strangely high so they'll have to be very careful. There's also no need to leave my name on the note. Then I'll then go far to another region and won't enter the central plains ever again."

He then returned to the inn and called for wine. After he got heavily drunk, he slept with his clothes on. When he woke up in the middle of the night, he jumped over the wall to get out and went towards the Fortune Prestige Escort House. The escort house was big and spacious so it was very easy to recognise. But he saw that all the lights inside the escort house had been extinguished and there was no sound at all coming from there. He thought, "I don't know where Master and Master-Wife are. At this time, they must be asleep already."

Just then, he saw a black shadow moving at the top of the wall to his left. That shadow was coming out of the house and it looked to be a woman. This woman was going towards the southwest. She was using her qinggong and it looked like it was his school's qinggong. Linghu Chong used his qi and quickly gave chase. When he saw indistinctly the shape of the body from the back, he knew it was Yue Lingshan. He pondered, "Where's little martial sister going so late at night?"

When Yue Lingshan reached the town's wall, she stopped for a second before continuing on her way. Linghu Chong felt that this was very weird. He followed her at around forty to fifty feet and he kept his steps light to keep her from

hearing them. On Fuzhou's road, Yue Lingshan turned east and then west, not hesitating at all when she arrived at an intersection. It seemed that she was familiar with the path she was taking. After going for more than two li, she took a turn into a small alley when she reached the side of a stone bridge.

Linghu Chong flew up to the top of a house and saw Yue Lingshan reaching the end of the alley. She then jumped over the wall of the big house to go inside. The house had a black door with white walls. The wall was lined with rattan trees on the top. Inside the house, there were a few windows bright with lights from the inside. Yue Lingshan walked to a side window in the east and peeped through the window. Suddenly, she made a few sharp sounds, "Zi, zi, zi". At first, Linghu Chong thought that this place was an enemy's house that she was peeping into. But when he suddenly heard her made those sharp sounds, he already guessed what she was doing. Even so, when he heard the voice of the person inside, he felt really disappointed.

The person inside said, "Martial sister, are you trying to scare me to death? If I die then I'll become a ghost and be just like you."

Yue Lingshan giggled, "Smelly Lin, dead Lin, are you saying I'm a ghost? Careful, I'll dig your heart out."

"You don't need to do it. I'll do it myself and give it to you," replied Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Lingshan laughed, "Ok. I'm going to tell mommy that you're talking to me in this kind of manner."

Lin Pingzhi also laughed, "If Master-Wife asked when and where did I say these words to you, then how are you gonna answer?"

"I'll say today at noon when we were practising sword moves. You didn't have the heart to practise anymore and just spent the time saying those words to me."

"If Master-Wife got angry then she'll lock me up and I won't be able to see you for three months."

Yue Lingshan replied, "Pei! Am I that desirable? If you don't see me then you

don't see me! Hey, open the window already!"

Lin Pingzhi pushed the window open while laughing at the same time. Yue Lingshan stepped back and went to the side of the window. Lin Pingzhi said to himself, "I thought martial sister has come just then. But there's no one outside," and slowly closed the window. Yue Lingshan quickly jumped through the window. Linghu Chong was crouching at the corner of the house and was able to hear them joking around. They were talking like there was no one else in the world. Linghu Chong wished that he hadn't heard those words. But unfortunately for him, he heard every word very clearly.

From the reflection on the window, it looked like that the two of them were now hugging each other as their laughter gradually quietened down. Linghu Chong lightly sighed as he dropped his head and walked away when he suddenly heard Yue Lingshan said, "It's so late, how come you still haven't slept yet? What were you doing?"

Lin Pingzhi answered, "I was waiting for you."

Yue Lingshan giggled, "Pei, you're not afraid losing your teeth for telling lies. How did you know I was gonna come back?"

Lin Pingzhi explained, "The Mountain God calculated from my fluttering heart that my good martial sister would come back."

Yue Lingshan said, "I understand from looking at this house in such a mess that you must be looking for that sword manual. Am I right?"

Linghu Chong stopped and turned back around when he heard the words "sword manual". Then he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "I've been searching this house for the last several months. I've even turned over the roof tiles one by one. The only thing I haven't done is tear down the wall and look at the bricks. Martial sister, there's really nothing in this old house. How about we really tear the walls down and take a look?"

Yue Lingshan answered, "This is your own Lin family's house. If you wanna tear it down or not, it's up to you. Why do you need to ask me for?"

"That's why I must ask you first."

"Why?"

Lin Pingzhi reasoned, "If I don't ask you then who do I ask? In the future, won't your.... your surname... surname become mine... hng.. hng... hehe."

Hearing this Yue Lingshan laughed and scolded him, "Smelly Lin, dead Lin, you think marrying me would be that easy, don't you?" Then "pa, pa" sounds were heard. It sounded like that she used her hand to hit him. As the two people were laughing inside the house, Linghu Chong was heartstricken outside. He really wanted to leave but that Evil Resisting Sword Manual was a matter of great importance to him.

When Lin Pingzhi's parents died, he was the only one there and they left him a message to give to their son. It was because of this that he had now suffered a lot of blame. He had learnt Dugu Nine Swords from grand martial uncle Feng but everyone from Huashan School believed that he had deceived them and took that Evil Resisting Sword Manual for himself. Even martial sister suspected him of deceiving them. To be fair, the cause of this matter couldn't be blamed on other people. That day when he practiced sword with Master-Wife, he easily stopped her 'Unrivaled and Unmatched, The Thrust of Ning'. At that time, he had spent several months by himself on that cliff. Suddenly, his sword art had advanced by a lot and it wasn't the same as their school's sword art. If he didn't learn another school's sword art then how would he have improved so much? And if this sword art wasn't the Lin family's Evil Resisting sword art then what else could it be?

He had earlier promised grand martial uncle Feng not to reveal anything about him. Thus, he couldn't say anything to argue against other people when they accused him of theft and worse. As he thought tonight, Master must have expelled him because of this although publicly it was said that he was expelled because he was colluding with people from the Devil Sect. But the other major reason must be because they believed that he had embezzled them of the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. Thinking that he had done this despicable conduct, Master wouldn't have tolerated him belonging to the Huashan School anymore.

Right now he had to endure the sour taste in his heart as he heard these two people, Yue and Lin, joking around as they also talked about the sword manual. He had to endure it to wait for the truth to be revealed.

He then heard Yue Lingshan said, "You've already been looking for several months now but still haven't found it. Of course, that sword manual isn't here. Why do you still need to tear the wall down? Big brother.... Big brother said those words to you, do you think they're real?"

Linghu Chong ached in his heart, "She still calls me "Big brother"."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Big brother did pass on dad's final words. He said there's an object left by my ancestor in the old house at Xiang Yang Lane and I wasn't allowed to read it. I think Big brother must have borrowed the sword manual and hasn't returned it yet..." Linghu Chong coldly smiled and thought, "You're saying this so politely and didn't say that I've embezzled you. You only said that I borrowed it and hasn't returned it yet. Hng, hng, you don't have to be that restrained in scolding me."

He then heard Lin Pingzhi continued, "But the words "old house at Xiang Yang Lane" can't be made up by big brother. My dad and mum must've told him these words. Big brother and my family weren't acquainted. Also he had never been to Fuzhou so he wouldn't know that Fuzhou has several Xiang Yang Lanes. Furthermore, he wouldn't know that my ancestors' old house is at Xiang Yang Lane. Even people from Fuzhou might not know much about it."

Yue Lingshan said, "If we consider that what your dad and mum said was true then what do we do?"

"When big brother told me my dad's last word, he also mentioned: "don't read". That thing that I'm not allowed to read, is it a classic scripture or some accounting book? I've been thinking about it over and over, and I'm sure it has something to do with the sword manual. Martial sister, since dad's last word mentioned the old house in Xiang Yang Lane, even though the sword manual isn't here, we might still discover some kind of clue here," said Lin Pingzhi.

"That might be a possibility. These last few days, I saw that you've been

feeling pretty down. At night, you came to this place instead of staying at the escort house and sleeping. I was worried for you and that's why I came here to take a look. So during the day, you're practising sword and accompanying me while at night you're here digging a nest," said Yue Lingshan jestingly.

Lin Pingzhi weakly smiled and sighed, "My dad and mum died miserably. When I find the sword manual, I'll be able to use it to deal with my enemies and console my dad and mum in heaven."

Yue Lingshan said, "I don't know where big brother is right now. If only I can meet him then it'll be good because I can ask him to return the sword manual to you. He has been practising for a long time already so his sword art must be extremely high now. He should return the sword manual back to its owner. I'd say, little Lin, why don't you give up this idea and stop searching inside this old house. If you don't have this sword manual, then finish learning my dad's Divine Art of Violet Twilight then you'll get your revenge."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Of course. But my dad and mum were tormented and died miserably. If I can use the Lin family's sword art to take revenge then it would be a real revenge which would get rid of the insult done to my dad and mum. Also, our school's Divine Art of Violet Twilight isn't easily passed down to the disciples. I was the last one to enter the school so even if Master and Master-Wife want to give me a look, martial brothers and martial sisters would refuse to accept this. They would say... would say... "

"What would they say?" Yue Lingshan demanded.

"They would say that you and I are not a real couple. That it's merely for me to have a look at the Divine Art of Violet Twilight and to get Master and Master-Wife's favor," explained Lin Pingzhi.

Yue Lingshan said, "Pei! I don't care what they say, let them say whatever they want. I only need to know that your heart is real then everything's ok."

Lin Pingzhi laughed, "How do you know that I'm real?"

A "pai" sound was heard. But Linghu Chong didn't know whether she hit his shoulder or his back. She then spat out, "I know that your heart is false and

insincere, you're heartless and cruel!"

Lin Pingzhi laughed, "Ok, ok.... you've been here for a long time already, you should go back. I'll take you back to the escort house. If Master or Master-Wife find out then I'll be in big trouble."

"You're getting rid of me, aren't you? I can go back by myself. I don't need you to take me back." She didn't sound pleased at all. Linghu Chong knew that she must be pouting her small mouth at this moment and looking angry. Her expression must be attractive right now.

Lin Pingzhi said, "Master said that Devil Sect's former Chief, Ren Woxing, has reappeared in Jianghu. I also heard that he had arrived in Fujian and that this person's martial art is immeasurably deep. He's also heartless and ruthless. If when you're walking alone late at night and unfortunately meet him, then... then what would you do?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So Master knew about this matter already. Must be because I've made such a big disturbance in Xianxia mountain range. Everyone must be saying that Ren Woxing has reappeared. How can master not heard about this news? I don't need to write that note anymore."

Yue Lingshan said, "Hng, so if you take me back and we unfortunately meet him then you'll be able to kill or capture him?"

Lin Pingzhi answered, "You're teasing me again. You already knew that my martial art isn't that high. Of course, I'm no match for him but I only wanna be together with you. If we were to die, then we should die together."

Yue Lingshan softly said, "Little Lin, I didn't mean that your martial art isn't high enough. You're practising so hard that in the future, you'll surely be stronger than me. In fact if you're more familiar with the sword art right now and we fight in a real battle, I probably won't be your match."

Lin Pingzhi laughed lightly and said, "Only if you use your left hand then maybe we can have a competition."

"I'll help you look around. You're already too familiar with this house so you

won't notice anything strange. But maybe I'll be able to recognise something," said Yue Lingshan.

Lin Pingzhi said, "Alright. Go have a look and see if there's something strange here."

After that Linghu Chong heard the sound of drawers and tables being pulled. After some time, Yue Lingshan said, "Everything is so ordinary here. Is there any unusual place in this house?"

Lin Pingzhi thought for a while and said, "Unusual place? No."

Yue Lingshan asked, "Where's the courtyard to practise martial art?"

Lin Pingzhi said, "We don't have a courtyard to practise martial art here. When my great grandfather opened the escort house, he moved everything and lived there. Both my grandfather and father also lived and practised their martial art in the escort house. Also, dad said the word "read", what's there to read in the courtyard?"

Yue Lingshan said, "That's true. Let's go to your family's study room and have a look."

Lin Pingzhi said, "We're an escort house. We have an accounting room but no study room. The accounting room is also in the escort house."

Yue Lingshan said, "That thing is really hard to find. What's there to read in this house?"

Lin Pingzhi said, "I've been pondering over what big brother told me. He said dad told me not to read what great granddad left me. But I think that this sentence might be the other way around, it might be that my dad was telling me to look for this thing left by my great granddad in this old house¹⁷. But what's there to read in this house? I've been searching all over this place but I've only found my great granddad's Buddhist scriptures."

Yue Lingshan jumped up and clapped her hands. She said, "Buddhist scriptures! That's very good. Ancestor Da Mo left sword manuals inside Buddhist scriptures. So it's not uncommon for this."

When Linghu Chong heard what Yue Lingshan said, he got excited. He thought, "If martial brother Lin can find that sword manual inside a Buddhist scripture then it'll be good. He won't suspect me of embezzling him anymore."

But he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "I've already thought of this. I've read not only one or two scriptures, or even eight or ten scriptures. I'm afraid I've even read more than one hundred scriptures. I've gone and bought Jingang scripture, Fahua scripture, Xin scripture, Lengqie scripture and compared them all with my great granddad's Buddhist scriptures. But not one word is different. They're all normal scriptures."

Yue Lingshan said, "Then there's no point reading them."

She thought deeply and suddenly said, "Have you looked in between the scriptures binding?"

Lin Pingzhi pondered, "The binding? I haven't thought of that. Let's go take a look."

They each took a candle and walked out of the room hand in hand going towards the back courtyard. While Linghu Chong followed them from the top of the house by looking at lights coming out of the windows. They finally arrived at a room facing the northwest. Linghu Chong followed them and went down to the courtyard. He then peeped through a crack in the window.

Inside the room was a Buddhist hall. A water painting of Da Mo's back was hung in the middle of the room. It was portraying the period of nine years when Da Mo meditated facing a wall. At the east side of the hall were a very old kneeling mat and a meditation table. On the table were a wooden fish, a small wooden hammer and a closed Buddhist scripture. Linghu Chong thought, "This was the place where Senior Lin established the Fortune Prestige Escort House. During those days, his name shook the world and he must have killed quite a few people. In his later years, he must have come here to confess for his killings." He then imagined a grand hero of the Jianghu, with his long white hair flying around, sitting alone in this hall, immersed in reading Buddhist scriptures while striking the wooden fish.

Yue Lingshan picked a scripture up and said, "Let's take apart the scriptures and see if we can find this thing in the binding. If we can't find anything then we'll just patch the scriptures again. What do you think?"

"Alright," answered Lin Pingzhi.

He picked a scripture up and started to pull apart the book-bindings. He then spread the scripture pages around the floor to see if there's any writing on the part of the pages that were bound. While Yue Lingshan took apart another scripture and put up each page in front of the candle to see if there's anything. Linghu Chong was looking at her back but he was able to see her jade white wrist. She was still wearing that silver bracelet on her left hand. Sometimes, he was able to see the side of her face as she gave a look to Lin Pingzhi and smiled at him before going back to take the scriptures apart. He didn't know whether it was because of the candle or because her cheeks had turned red, but the side of her face looked like a ripe peach.

Linghu Chong was standing quietly outside the window feeling sentimental while the two of them tore apart scripture after scripture. Before long, twelve scriptures were torn apart and were now on the table. Suddenly, Linghu Chong heard a sound behind his back. He quickly pulled back from the window and turned his head around. He saw the shadows of two people coming from the south side of the house. They made a hand signal before jumping down to the courtyard and noiselessly landing on the ground. The two of them then went to the window to look inside the Buddhist hall.

After some time, he heard Yue Lingshan disappointingly said, "We've already taken apart all the scriptures. There's nothing there." She was suddenly excited and continued, "Little Lin, I think we should bring over a basin of water."

Lin Pingzhi asked, "For what?"

Yue Lingshan answered, "When I was small, I heard daddy told me a story about manuscripts immersed in acid. Then they would write on it and when it's dried, the letters would disappear. But when the pages were wetted, the letters would appear."

Linghu Chong's heart turned sour as he remembered the time his Master told this story. Yue Lingshan was only eight or nine years old and he was only around seventeen or eighteen years old. Remembering those past days, the memories bubbled over in his heart. He remembered that day when he went with her to catch crickets. He took the biggest and strongest cricket and gave it to her. But her cricket still lost to his in a fight, so she wept incessantly while he tried to comfort her for a long time. Finally, he was able to comfort her before the two of them went to Master to ask him for a story. Remembering these events, tears started to bubble up in his eyes.

Then he heard Lin Pingzhi said, "Right, no harm in trying." As he turned around to go out, Yue Lingshan said, "I'll go with you." The two of them went out hand in hand. Those two people hiding beneath the window were holding their breath and remaining still. After some time, Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan came back to the Buddhist hall with a basin of water. They then soaked seven or eight pages of the scriptures in the basin. Lin Pingzhi couldn't wait anymore and took out a page out of the water and held it up against the candle's light. But there was no new letter appearing on the page. The two of them had tried more than twenty pages but there was still no clue at all. Lin Pingzhi said, "We don't need to test anymore. There's no letters appearing on these pages." After Lin Pingzhi said these words, those two people hiding beneath the window quietly moved to the door and pushed it open. Lin Pingzhi asked, "Who's there?"

The two people rushed in, moving like the wind. Lin Pingzhi lifted his hand ready to fight as one person attacked the side of his body. Yue Lingshan already pulled half her sword out when the enemy's two fingers were thrust towards her eyes. She quickly let go of her sword handle and swept her hand up to block the attack. Without missing a beat, that person changed the direction of his attack and was now stabbing towards her throat. Yue Lingshan was astonished and retreated two steps when she hit the side of the meditation table and couldn't go back anymore. That person immediately lifted his left hand and chopped down on her head. Yue Lingshan raised her two palms to block the attack but unexpectedly this attack was a fake as that person stabbed an acupoint on Yue Lingshan's waist with his right hand. She leaned on the table unable to move.

Linghu Chong saw everything that went on in that room and at the moment wasn't worried about their lives. He was thinking that there was no hurry to save them. Furthermore, he wasn't sure of the background of these enemies. Also, the enemies were looking around the hall right now. One took the kneeling mat and tore it in two. While the other one smashed the wooden fish into seven or eight pieces. Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan were unable to talk or move when they saw these two people tearing the kneeling mat and smashing the wooden fish. It was obvious that they were looking for the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. They both thought the same thing, "How come we didn't think that the sword manual might be in the kneeling mat or the wooden fish." But there was nothing inside the mat or the wooden fish and they both felt happy.

The two intruders were around fifty years old. One was bald and the other one was full of white hair. Those two people moved really fast and before long all the objects on the table were broken to pieces already. They then turned their attention to the portrait of Da Mo. That bald old man extended his hand to grab the portrait but the white-haired old man extended his hand to block it and shouted, "Wait, look at where his finger is pointing to!" Linghu Chong, Lin Pingzhi, and Yue Lingshan immediately looked at the painting. They saw Da Mo's left hand was behind his back holding a sword manual and his right hand was pointing towards the roof.

The bald old man asked, "What's so strange about his fingers?"

The white-haired old man answered, "I don't know! Let's have a look first." He jumped straight up and aimed his two palms at the roof where the portrait of Da Mo was pointing. With a crash, dust and bits of roof tiles started to rain down.

The bald old man asked, "What's there.... " He only said these two words when a red Buddhist robe floated down from the hole in the roof.

The white-haired old man extended his hand and grabbed the robe. He then took a look at it under the candle's light. He said, "It's... it's here." He was overjoyed and his voice was trembling. The bald old man asked, "What?" The white-haired old man said, "Look at it yourself."

Linghu Chong squinted his eyes and saw that there were many small words written on the Buddhist robe. The bald old man said, "Could this be the Evil Resisting Sword Manual?" The white-haired old man said, "Most likely this is the sword manual. Haha, we two brothers have done this great service tonight. Brother, put it away." The bald old man was so happy that his mouth was open as he folded the robe and put it in his bosom. He pointed at Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan with his left hand and asked, "Shall we kill them?" Linghu Chong gripped his sword handle waiting for the white-haired old man to reveal his murderous intention before rushing in there and killing these two old men. Who would have thought that the white-haired old man would say, "We already have the sword manual. Let's not pick a fight with Huashan School. Let them go." The two people then walked out of the Buddhist hall and jumped out over the wall.

Linghu Chong immediately jumped over the wall to follow them and saw that those two old men were extremely quick with their footsteps. Linghu Chong was afraid to lose those two in the dark so he quickened his steps but still kept a distance of twenty feet between them. The two old men went even faster but Linghu Chong kept up with them. Suddenly, they stopped and turned around. Linghu Chong saw a sudden flash of light and felt his right shoulder and right arm hurting. Unexpectedly, his shoulder and arm had already been slashed by their sabres. These two men suddenly stopping, suddenly turning around and suddenly slashing their sabres out were like that of thunder suddenly striking down.

Although Linghu Chong's internal energy was deep and his sword art was brilliant, he was still inferior to first-class fighters by a big level when faced with sudden changes in the battlefield or encountering strange and unusual enemies' skills. The enemies' attacks were so fast that it didn't even need mentioning that he didn't manage to use his sword to fight back. He didn't even have enough time to reach his sword handle before he got heavily injured.

The sabre art of the two old men were very fast as they quickly followed with a second slash. Linghu Chong was startled and hastily jumped back. Fortunately,

his internal energy was deep which allowed him to jump back for twenty feet with one leap. He then jumped back again for another twenty feet. These two old men saw that he had been heavily injured but he was still able to jump really fast and far. They were alarmed but they still rushed forward. Linghu Chong quickly turned around and ran away.

Initially, his injured shoulder and arm didn't hurt that much. But now, the pain was so severe that he felt like fainting. He thought, "These two people have stolen the Buddhist robe with the Evil Resisting Sword Manual written on it. I need it to right this injustice I'm being blamed for. I must take it back and return it to martial brother Lin." He endured the pain on his arm and shoulder as he extended his hand to grip his sword handle. As he pulled the long sword out, it stopped halfway. Unexpectedly, his injured right hand was unable to pull the sword out any further. His right hand had no more energy. He then heard the sound of the wind at the back of his head as the enemies' sabres were chopping down on his head. Linghu Chong gathered his qi and quickly leaped forward while his left hand forcibly pulled on his belt tearing it. He then gripped his sword with his left hand and shook it free from the scabbard. When he felt the cold air rushing towards him again, he turned around and saw the two sabres chopping down.

He leaped back another step. The sky would get brighter soon, but at the moment it was the darkest time just before dawn. Besides the flashes of the sabres, he could see nothing else. When he learned the Dugu Nine Swords, he needed to look at the weakness of the enemy's moves and attack that point. But right now, he wasn't able to see the enemies' movements so he couldn't use his sword art at all. Just then, he felt his left arm also hurt as an enemy's sabre scratched it. He rushed towards a long street with his left hand gripping the sword and pressing down on the injury on his right shoulder to stem the blood from flowing down to the ground.

As the two people chased him, they saw that his steps were really quick that they wouldn't be able to chase him down. Thinking that it was good already that they had grabbed the sword manual, they didn't want to linger anymore so they

stopped chasing. They turned around and went away. Linghu Chong shouted, "Hey, bold thieves, you wanna run after stealing?" and turned around to chase. This angered the two people that they also turned around and wielded their sabres to chop him. Linghu Chong didn't want to cross swords with them so he quickly turned around and ran away again. He secretly prayed, "Someone please pass by carrying a lamp." After running for several steps, he thought of an idea. He quickly jumped onto a roof and looked around. He spotted a house at his left with the light from the window lighting up the area around it. He quickly went to that lighted area. But those two old men had again stopped chasing.

Linghu Chong stooped down, grabbed two roof tiles, and threw it towards them. He shouted, "You've robbed Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual! One bald, one white-haired, you want to escape to the end of the world but Wulin's heroes will capture both of you and cut your corpses into pieces." Those two roof tiles broke as they hit the slab stones on the street.

When the two old men heard him mention the "Evil Resisting Sword Manual", they quickly jumped onto the roof to give chase. Linghu Chong felt his legs becoming weaker and losing his strength. Fiercely, he drew a breath and ran to the lighted area at top speed. Suddenly, he staggered and fell on the ground below. However, he quickly somersaulted using the "Carp's Leap" move and landed on his feet. Then he leaned back against the wall.

The two old men lightly jumped down and approached him separately from his left and right. The bald old man smiling fiercely said, "I've given you one life but you didn't wanna go." Linghu Chong saw his baldhead was shining like a crystal. His heart shivered, "So it's dawn already." He laughed, "Which house or school are you from? Why do you want to kill me?"

The white-haired old man lifted his sabre and slashed it down to split his head in two. Linghu Chong threw his sword into his right hand and lightly pierced his throat. That bald old man was startled and quickly brandished his sabre as he rushed forward. Linghu Chong slashed his sword towards the hand carrying the sabre and cut his wrist off. Then he pointed the sword at his throat and said, "Tell me who you two really are and I'll let you live." The bald old man laughed.

Looking mournful, he said, "We brothers have rarely met a match when running amuck in Jianghu. Today, I'll die under your honor's sword. Really admirable. But I don't know your honor's name. I'll die... die with regrets."

Linghu Chong saw that although he had lost a hand, he was still unafraid. He respected him deeply for this so he said, "I was forced to defend myself, actually I'm not acquainted with you two at all. Handless man, I'm sorry. Sir, please give me the Buddhist robe. Then we don't have to keep going."

That bald old man said, "How can Bald Eagle surrender?" and with a flash of his left hand, he pierced his own heart with a dagger.

Linghu Chong thought, "This person rather die than surrender. What a unique character!"

He then stooped down to take out that Buddhist robe but he felt dizzy and knew that he had lost a lot of blood. He ripped his gown and carelessly struggled to tie his injured shoulder and arm with the cloth. Only then did he take out the Buddhist robe from the bosom of that bald old man. He then felt dizzy again and immediately took a few deep breaths. The sky was brighter now and he was able to recognise the road. He then walked back towards Lin Pingzhi's old house on Xiang Yang Lane.

After walking for a couple hundred feet, he felt he couldn't support himself anymore. He thought, "If I fall down now, I won't be able to protect my name but after I am dead, everyone will think that I did steal the Evil Resisting Sword Manual. With that thing on my body, if I die now my name will be like dirt." So he gathered his energy to continue walking and finally arrived at Xiang Yang Lane. But the Lin family house's main door was closed. Lin Pingzhi and Yue Lingshan had been knocked out by those people so there was no one to open the door. He wanted to jump over the wall but he had no more energy left. He knocked on the door a few times before kicking the door.

But his kick wasn't able to open the big door. Strained to the utmost at this point, he staggered and passed out. When he woke up, he felt that he was lying on a bed. He opened his eyes and saw the Yue Buqun couple in front of the bed.

Linghu Chong was overjoyed and called out, "Master, Master-Wife... I.... I...." He was really excited and tears started to drop. He struggled to sit up. Yue Buqun didn't answer but asked, "What matter do you have here?" Linghu Chong said, "Little martial sister? Is... Is she ok?" Madam Yue answered, "She's fine! How... how come you're in Fuzhou?" Her voice was full of concern and her eyes were red already.

"Martial brother Lin's Evil Resisting Sword Manual was stolen by two old men. I killed those two people and brought it back. Those two... those two people are likely good fighters from the Devil Sect," Linghu Chong explained and reached inside his bosom but that Buddhist robe was gone.

He quickly asked, "Where... where's that Buddhist robe?"

"What's that?" Madam Yue asked.

"There were words written on that Buddhist robe. It was most likely the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual."

"If that's Pingzhi's then he should be the one taking care of it," Madam Yue said.

"Yes. Master-Wife, are you and Master well? Martial brothers and sisters are all well?"

Madam Yue used her sleeve to wipe her teary eyes before saying, "Everyone's fine."

"How did I end up here? Did Master and Master-Wife rescue me?" Linghu Chong queried.

"When I arrived at Pingzhi's old house this morning, I saw you passed out on the ground," Madam Yue explained.

Linghu Chong groaned, "Lucky that Master-Wife found me. Otherwise, if the Devil Sect's people found me first, I'd have been dead."

He knew that Master-Wife came to Xiang Yang Lane to look for her daughter when she didn't see her early in the morning. It was just that it was awkward to mention it right now.

"You said you killed two evil people from the Devil Sect. How did you know they're from the Devil Sect?" Yue Buqun wondered.

Linghu Chong answered, "When disciple was going south, I've run across many Devil Sect's people on the road. I've also fought with them a few times already. These two people's martial arts were weird. They're definitely not from our orthodox schools." Secretly he was feeling happy, "I've returned martial brother Lin's Evil Resisting Sword Manual. Master, Master-Wife, and little martial sister wouldn't suspect me anymore. Also, since I've killed those two Devil Sect's evils, Master wouldn't blame me for colluding with the Devil Sect anymore."

Who would have thought that Yue Buqun's complexion would turn pale on hearing Linghu Chong's reply. He snorted and scolded, "You're still talking nonsense! Do you think I can be deceived that easily?"

Linghu Chong was alarmed and quickly said, "Disciple doesn't dare to fool Master."

Yue Buqun's voice quaked, "Who's your master? I've already disowned you as my disciple."

Linghu Chong quickly got up from the bed and knelt down on the ground. He kowtowed, "Disciple has done many wrong things, I'm willing to receive punishments from Master. But... but my expulsion from the school, I request Master to take me back."

Yue Buqun moved aside not receiving his kowtow. He then coldly said, "The daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren already favors you and you've also been cooperating with them for a long time already. Why do you still need me as your master?"

Linghu Chong was confused, "Daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren? Master, I don't know what you're saying? Although I've heard of that Ren... Ren Woxing's daughter, I've never met her before."

Madam Yue rebuked him lightly, "Chong'er, even now, why are you still telling lies?" She sighed and continued, "That lady Ren gathered those evil people of

Jianghu at the top of Five-Tyrant Ridge to give you medications. That day, didn't we go..."

Linghu Chong was greatly astonished. His voice was trembling as he said, "That lady on the Five-Tyrant Ridge, she's... she's... Yingying... she's Chief Ren's daughter?"

"Get up before speaking," Madam Yue requested.

Linghu Chong slowly stood up. His heart was at a loss and he kept on mumbling, "She's... she's Chief Ren's daughter? How... how can this be?"

Madam Yue was angry and she wasn't pleased at all, "Why are you still telling lies to Master and Master-Wife?"

Yue Buqun indignantly said, "Who's his master or Master-Wife?" He extended his hand and hit the table repeatedly. With each hit, a piece of the table broke away.

Linghu Chong was frightened, "Disciple doesn't dare lie to Master and Master-Wife... "

Yue Buqun fiercely said, "I have eyes but I couldn't see and had accepted such a shameless child as a disciple. I'm very ashamed to face the heroes of the realm. You want to dirty my name, don't you? If you ever call us "Master, Master-Wife" again, then I'll kill you right now." He was extremely angry and his face was turning purple readying his qi.

Linghu Chong answered, "Yes!" as he put his hand on the edge of the bed to support himself. His face was pale and his body was shaking violently. "They did give me some treatments on that ridge. But... but they never told me that she... she was Chief Ren's daughter."

Madam Yue said, "You're bright and clever, you're also very alert, how could you not have figured it out? She's only a very young lady, but with only one word from her, she could control all those evil people. Every one of them struggled to be on that ridge only to give some kind of treatment for you. Besides the daughter of Devil Sect's Chief Ren, who else has such a big

reputation?"

"Disc... I... I thought she was only an old granny at that time," Linghu Chong explained.

"She was disguising herself?" Madam Yue asked.

"She didn't. It's just... it's just that I've never seen her face before," Linghu Chong said.

Yue Buqun uttered a laugh but there was no sign of laughter on his face. Madam Yue sighed, "Chong'er, you're already grown up. Your character has also changed. You're not taking the words that I just said into your heart."

Linghu Chong said, "Master... Master... the words that you said, I... I... " What he wanted to say was: "The words that you said, I wouldn't dare to violate." Master and Master-Wife had repeatedly told him not to make friends with people from Devil Sect. But with the connection he had with Yingying, Xiang Wentian, and Ren Woxing, how can they just merely be called "friends"?

Madam Yue continued, "That daughter of Chief Ren was so nice to you so she gathered so many people to treat your illness. Because of that you were able to live. So maybe this is excusable..."

Yue Buqun indignantly said, "What do you mean excusable? Are you allowed to stop at nothing just to live?" He usually treated Madam Yue very courteously as if she was an honored guest. But today, he had repeatedly spoken to her in a fierce manner and had also cut her off in the middle of her sentence. It was obvious that he was in an uncontrollable rage. Madam Yue understood her husband's mood so she didn't consult with him before continuing, "But why were you together with one of the Devil Sect elders, Xiang Wentian, and killed many of our orthodox school's people? Both of your hands are stained with their blood, you... you quickly get out of here!"

Linghu Chong's back was drenched with cold sweat as he remembered that day on Liang Pavillion. He was welcoming the enemies together with Xiang Wentian and many people from the orthodox schools died under his hand. But at that time the fight was very dangerous so if he didn't kill them, he would have

been the one to get killed. There was really nothing he could do differently at all. But these blood debts would forever be on his hands.

Madam Yue said, "Below the Five-Tyrant Ridge, you joined hands with that Devil Sect's young Lady Ren again to kill a few Shaolin and Kunlun Schools' disciples. Chong'er, I've long regarded you as my own son but these things that have happened so far, your... your Master-Wife is powerless to protect you anymore." As she said this, two teardrops fell on her cheeks.

Linghu Chong bleakly said, "Son has really done some unpardonable wrongs. But I'm responsible for what I did; I cannot let Huashan School's reputation to be covered in dirt. I request you, two honourable, to open a court of law and invite every house and every school to come and witness my execution according to Huashan School's rules."

Yue Buqun sighed, "Master Linghu, if you were still my Huashan School's disciple today, then this might work. Your death would have protected Huashan School's reputation as you would have still been my disciple. But I've already announced to the whole realm about your expulsion from the school. Hereafter, what do your actions have to do with my Huashan School? Also, what position do I have to put you in your place? Hey, hey, the just and evil cannot coexist together. Next time when you're doing evil things, if I bump into you at that time, then I would definitely kill you. I can't just let you do whatever you want."

When he spoke until here, someone called out from the outside, "Master, Master-Wife." It was Lao Denuo.

Yue Buqun asked, "What is it?"

"There are people outside paying a visit to Master and Master-Wife. He said he's Songshan School's Zhong Zhen. His two martial brothers are also here," Lao Denuo answered.

Yue Buqun said, "Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen, he's also in Fujian? I'll come out straight away," and he made his way outside.

Madam Yue looked at Linghu Chong, her eyes were brimming with tears and it looked like she was asking him to wait here. She turned her head again

looking like she had something to say before going out of the room.

Linghu Chong had long regarded Master-Wife as his own mother. He felt extremely remorseful seeing her tender affection towards him. He considered, "I can blame my unrestrained behaviour for a lot of things that have happened. I didn't distinguish "right and wrong" and "good and evil" clearly. Brother Xiang is evidently not a noble person. Why didn't I find out clearly before helping him fight? If I die now, it's no big deal. But not only it would make Master and Master-Wife lose face in front of Wulin's heroes, all the other martial brothers and martial sisters would also lose their faces because people would say Huashan School has produced such an unworthy disciple." He thought more, "So Yingying is Chief Ren's daughter. No wonder Old Man and Zu Qianqiu were so respectful towards her. She thoughtlessly said a word and all those Jianghu heroes were banished to the East China Sea's Huang Island and wouldn't be able to come back to the central plains ever again. Ai, I should have realised it earlier. In Wulin, besides a leader of the Devil Sect, who else has such power? But when she was with me, she was coy and bashful, she was even more so compared to little martial sister. Who would have expected that she would be a head of the Devil Sect? But Chief Ren was imprisoned by Dongfang Bubai at the bottom of the West Lake. How did his daughter get so much power?"

His mind was like a tide, going up and down indeterminately. Suddenly he heard footsteps approaching and a person entered the room quickly. It was the person he had been thinking of day and night. The person whom he had borne in his mind all the time; it was his little martial sister. Linghu Chong called out, "Little martial sister! You... " He was at a loss for words.

Yue Lingshan said, "Big martial brother, quickly... quickly get out of here. Songshan School's people are looking for you." She was very anxious as she was telling him this. But when Linghu Chong saw her, all the matters that were in his mind were all forgotten. What Songshan School? He didn't even hear what she said. All sorts of emotions were bubbling inside of him as he was looking at her. Sweet, sour, bitter, hot, and all sort of other tastes were rushing

forth in his mind.

Yue Lingshan saw him staring at her. Her face turned red as she said, "It's someone surnamed Zhong, he brought two of his martial brothers here. He said that you killed some Songshan School's people and he had chased you till here."

Linghu Chong was dumbfounded and was at a loss, "I killed some people from the Songshan School? I didn't..."

Suddenly, the door to the room banged open and Yue Buqun walked in. He was angry and said fiercely, "Linghu Chong, you've done very well! You've killed Songshan School's seniors but you tried to deceive me by saying that they were Devil Sect's villains."

"Disc... I... I killed Songshan School's seniors? I... I didn't..." Linghu Chong stammered.

" 'White Hair Immortal' Bu Chen, 'Bald Eagle' Sha Tianjiang, didn't you kill these two people?" Yue Buqun asked indignantly.

When Linghu Chong heard the nicknames of these two people, he recalled what that bald old man, who committed suicide, said before he died: "How can Bald Eagle surrender?" Then the other person must be 'White Hair Immortal' Bu Chen. "One white-haired old man and one bald old man, I killed those two people. But... but I didn't know they were from Songshan School. Since they were using sabres, it's definitely not Songshan School's martial art."

"So you killed these two people?" Yue Buqun looked stern as he asked this question again.

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered.

"Dad, those white-haired old man and bald old man..." Yue Lingshan pleaded.

Yue Buqun cut her off, "Get out! Who asked you to come in? Do I want you to interfere while I'm talking here?"

Yue Lingshan could only drop her head and slowly walked out of the room.

Linghu Chong felt miserable and happy at the same time, "Although martial

sister and martial brother Lin are on good terms, she still considered me as a friend. She bravely rebuked her father. And before, she alerted me to quickly run away to avoid disaster."

Yue Buqun laughed coldly, "Do you know all the martial arts of the Five Mountains Sword Schools? These two people, Bu and Sha, came from Songshan School. Since you absolutely have no rules or regulations whatsoever; I don't know what kind of despicable method you used to kill them. But Songshan School tracked the traces of blood all the way back to Pingzhi's old house at Xiang Yang Lane. They then investigated further and traced the clues to here. Now, martial brother Zhong from Songshan School is outside as my guest. Do you have anything else to say?"

Madam Yue walked into the room and said, "They never saw Chong'er killing the two people. They were only relying on the trail of blood. How can they be sure that it was done by someone inside the escort house? Why don't we just tell them that we don't know anything?"

Yue Buqun indignantly retorted, "Martial sister, even until now, you still want to protect this "stop at no evil" good-for-nothing kid? I'm the leader of Huashan School. How can I tell lies just because of this animal? You... You... how can we do that? We mustn't bring ruin and shame upon ourselves."

For the past several years, Linghu Chong had always known that Master and Master-Wife went from martial brother and sister to husband and wife. If he could be like that for one day with little martial sister, then he'll be satisfied and would have no other wish in this life. But when he saw Master talking so fiercely to Master-Wife, he suddenly thought, "If little martial sister were my wife, I'll do whatever she wants me to do. I'll do it if it was a good thing. I'll still do it if it was a bad thing. I'd never brush away her idea in the slightest bit. Even if she wanted me to do ten really evil things, I'd do it in a heartbeat." Yue Buqun suddenly saw Linghu Chong's expression becoming tender and soft with a hint of a smile. Linghu Chong's eyes shone passionately as he thought of that girl standing outside the room. Yue Buqun lashed out "Little animal, what kind of evil plan are you cooking up now?"

Yue Buqun's loud shout woke Linghu Chong up abruptly from his flights of fancy. When he looked up, he saw that his master's face had turned purple and he had his hand raised ready to strike his head. Suddenly, the feeling of joy washed over him as he felt ready to give up all the bitter things that had happened to him. Today, under his Master's hand, he would die happily and be freed. His heart yearned for death especially with little martial sister besides him to see him get killed by her own father.

Gazing at Yue Lingshan, he smiled slightly and waited for his Master's palm to strike down. He heard the wind whistle as Yue Buqun's palm descended. But suddenly, Madam Yue cried out, "No! You can't!" as her finger stabbed towards her husband's "Yu Zhen" acupoint at the back of his head. The two of them had been practising their martial arts together since they were small and were both very familiar with each other's skills. This acupoint that Madam Yue was attacking was a fatal point so Yue Buqun automatically turned around to block the strike while Madam Yue quickly put herself in front of Linghu Chong.

Yue Buqun's face turned pale and indignantly asked, "What... what are you doing?"

"Chong'er, quickly go! Go!" Madam Yue hurriedly urged.

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I'm not going. If Master wants to kill me then he can kill me. I deserve this punishment for my sins."

Madam Yue stamped her foot and insisted further, "Now that I'm here, he can't kill you. Quickly go, go really far and never come back."

Yue Buqun snorted, "Hng, if he goes then what do we tell those three people from Songshan School waiting outside?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So Master is worried that he might not be able to deal with Zhong Zhen and his brothers. I should go and meet them in his place." Deciding this, he declared, "Alright, I'll go meet them." and went out of the room in big strides.

Madam Yue pleaded after him, "You cannot go. They'll kill you."

But Linghu Chong kept on walking very fast and in no time at all, he arrived at the main hall.

Sure enough, he saw Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen, Divine Whip Deng Bagong, and Bright-Haired Lion Gao Kexin sitting on the guest seats. Linghu Chong went and took a seat opposite to them. He coldly questioned, "You three, what are you doing here?"

At this moment, wearing the clothes of a servant and having no fake beards attached to his face, Linghu Chong looked completely different from the General they had met that night. When Zhong Zhen and his brothers saw this wretched looking and blood-stained young servant being rude to them as soon as he had entered the room, they all became angry.

Gao Kexin shouted, "What kind of thing* are you?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "You three people, what kind of north south¹⁸ are you?"

Gao Kexin was startled and wondered, "How can it be called "north south"?" But he decided that it was just badly spoken. Indignantly he demanded, "Go and get Mr. Yue out here! Do you think you are good enough to talk to us?"

In the mean time, Yue Buqun, Madam Yue, Yue Lingshan, and the multitudes of Huashan School's disciples had arrived by the screen door outside the hall. They all heard how Linghu Chong answered Gao Kexin's question. When Yue Lingshan heard Linghu Chong asking "You three people, what kind of north south are you?", she thought it was very funny even though her big martial brother was being rude. But she knew that because big martial brother had killed people from Songshan School, these three masters and big martial brother would definitely have to fight later and the fight would unavoidably be fierce. Father and mother would be unable to help big martial brother and she didn't know what to do herself. Her heart was so filled with anxiety that she didn't laugh at the joke.

Linghu Chong taunted, "Who's Mr. Yue? Ah, you mean the Huashan School's leader. I came here looking for him. Songshan School has two unworthy

disciples, one is called White-Haired Monster Bu Chen, and the other one is Bald Owl Sha Tianjiang. I killed both of them already. But I heard Songshan School has three more chaps hiding in the Fortune Prestige Escort House. I came to ask Mr. Yue to hand over these people to me but he didn't consent. This irritates me, really irritates me!"

He continued by shouting loudly, "Mr. Yue, there are three idiots here from Songshan School. There's one called Soft Sword Zhong Zhen, another one called Little Ghost Deng Bagong, and the other one called Scabies Skin Cat Gao Kexin. Please quickly bring them out here. I have debts to collect from them. You want to protect them? That won't do! You Five Mountains Sword Schools have the same root but different branches. How can I settle this debt?"

When Yue Buqun and the rest of the people heard his taunts, they weren't shocked at all. They all knew that he was saying all this to let everyone know that Huashan School had nothing to do with him. These three people from the Songshan School had been famous for a long time already, especially the Nine Bent Sword Zhong Zhen. It was obvious to the people outside that Linghu Chong knew the backgrounds of the Songshan School's people already. It was no small matter when Linghu Chong defeated Feng Buping from the sword sect and blinded the eyes of fifteen swordsmen. But at the moment, he was heavily injured and he might not even be able to stand up. They were perplexed as to why was he so daring as to rashly challenge three master-hands?

Gao Kexin was so angry that he jumped up and drew the sword out of his scabbard. As he was about to stab his sword towards Linghu Chong, Zhong Zhen held up his hand to stop him. He then asked Linghu Chong, "What's your honour's name?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Haha, I recognise you but you don't recognise me. Your Songshan School wants to combine the Five Mountains Sword Schools into one by taking over the other four schools. You three "north south" came to Fujian to steal the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual and to kill important people from the Huashan and Heng-Shan School. All these plots of yours; I already know all about them. Haha, very funny, very funny!"

When Yue Buqun and Madam Yue saw what was happening, they both thought, "Why is he unnecessarily saying all these nonsensical talk?"

Zhong Zhen was surprised, "Which school is your honour from?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Big temple didn't want to accept me, small temple also didn't want to accept me. I'm a masterless lonely soul wandering alone on wild mountains and plains. I won't bother with your Songshan School's business. You don't need to worry. Haha, haha." His laughter sounded miserable.

Zhong Zhen said, "Your honour is not from Huashan School so we cannot disturb Mr. Yue anymore. Why don't we go outside to talk?" These words were said softly but his eyes were fierce and were full of murderous intent. At this point, Zhong Zhen had already decided to kill Linghu Chong. But he was slightly afraid of Yue Buqun so he didn't dare to draw his sword to kill him inside the Fortune Prestige Escort House. Hence, he wanted to lead Linghu Chong out of the escort house first before making his move.

This was just what Linghu Chong wanted. Before he went out, he shouted, "Mr. Yue, from now on you must protect yourself better. Devil Sect's Chief Ren Woxing has reappeared. This person can absorb other people's internal energy by using his Art of Essence Absorbing. He said that he wanted to give some trouble to the Huashan School. There's also the matter of Songshan School wanting to swallow up Huashan School. You're an honourable man while other people are heartless and cruel so you must protect yourself." He came to Fuzhou because he wanted to tell his Master these words. After he finished speaking, he took large steps and went out of the house. Zhong Zhen and his martial brothers followed him out.

Just as Linghu Chong was stepping out of the escort house, he saw a group of nuns and women standing outside the main door. They were the female disciples from Heng-Shan School. Yihe and Zheng E were walking in front of the group holding a visit box¹⁹.

It seemed that they had just arrived to pay a visit to Yue Buqun and Madam Yue. Linghu Chong was startled and he hastily turned his head around not

wanting to meet them but Yihe and the other disciples had already seen him. But it was good that Yilin was right at the back of the group and didn't manage to see his appearance.

As soon as Zhong Zhen and his two martial brothers stepped out of the door, Yihe and Zheng E recognised them. Startled, they stopped where they were. Linghu Chong thought, "Heng-Shan School's disciples already know that my Master is here so they came here to visit. There's my Master and Master-Wife to tend to them here so they won't suffer a loss." He didn't want to meet Yilin so he slipped away to the side wanting to get away.

Simultaneously, Zhong Zhen, Deng Bagong, and Gao Kexin drew their swords out and jumped in front of him and shouted, "You want to run away?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "I don't have any weapon. How do I fight?"

At this time, Yue Buqun, Madam Yue and the rest of the Huashan School's disciples had arrived at the door wanting to see how Linghu Chong would cope with Zhong Zhen and his two martial brothers. Yue Lingshan pulled her sword out of the scabbard and shouted, "Big..." intending to toss the sword to him. But Yue Buqun extended his left hand and used two fingers to hit the top of her sword shaking it. Yue Lingshan pleaded, "Dad!" But Yue Buqun just shook his head. Linghu Chong had turned around and saw all this and he was reassured, "Little martial sister still care for me like in the old days." Suddenly, a few people shouted in surprise.

Linghu Chong knew that someone must have started a sneak attack. There wasn't enough time to turn his head around so he immediately jumped forward. His internal energy was very deep, so his jump was very high and fast which enabled him to escape from that attack. But he still heard the sound of the wind at the back of his head as a sword was slashed down close to the back of his body. If he had jumped a fraction of a second later or not used enough energy, he would have been half a foot closer and his body would have been split in two. He had luckily escaped from a very dangerous situation.

Linghu Chong immediately turned his head around as soon as he landed. He

heard someone yelling and saw moving white lights. It was the Heng-Shan School's female disciples joining the fight. They had divided into three groups of seven people each. Each of the group separately surrounded one person. This instance of pulling out the swords, moving, surrounding, fighting and movement of the swords were done extremely fast especially when aided with their qinggong. Their movements were also beautiful. It was obvious that they had practised this type of fighting formation. Each of their swords was pointed at the enemy's head, throat, chest, stomach, waist, back, and side. These seven places on their bodies were threatened simultaneously. Once the formation was completed, the seven disciples all stopped moving.

It was Zhong Zhen who sneakily attacked Linghu Chong just then. After hearing Linghu Chong's harmful speech towards Songshan School, he tried to take advantage of Linghu Chong's unpreparedness and tried to kill him. He wanted to get rid of a potential informant in order to prevent him from saying more which might increase Yue Buqun's suspicion. Even though he executed an extremely deadly move, his opponent still managed to escape. And now the Heng-Shan School's disciples had finished their formation. Although his martial art was high, he couldn't move at all. If he even moved a muscle then a sword would pierce into his body.

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue didn't know that Heng-Shan School and Zhong Zhen's party had met before in Nianbapu town. They were greatly surprised when both parties started to fight each other. The fighting formation of the Heng-Shan School's disciples looked wonderful once it was completed. Twenty-one people were divided into three groups and their twenty-one swords trembled slightly as cold lights flickered around the area. Besides their sleeves floating in the air, everything else was totally still but there were unbounded murderous opportunities in their formation.

When Linghu Chong turned around to protect himself, he saw how Heng-Shan School started and completed their fighting formations with seven swords attacking and surrounding each enemy. He did not find any flaw at all in the formation, as if it had been executed with "No move to break a move" sword

intention from Dugu Nine Swords. He cheered out loud, "Wonderful! What a splendid sword formation!"

Seeing that he had been completely restrained, Zhong Zhen suddenly laughed, dropped his sword and offered, "Everyone is on the same side. What kind of joke are we playing here? I admit defeat, ok?" Yihe was leading the group surrounding him. When she saw that the enemy admitted defeat and dropped his sword, she withdrew her sword. The remaining six people also withdrew their swords. To their surprise, Zhong Zhen used his left foot to kick his long sword up and hit its handle with his hand to shoot the sword forward. As the sword pierced Yihe's right arm, she uttered an "ah" and dropped her sword.

Zhong Zhen laughed as he moved like lightning injuring Heng-Shan School's disciples one by one. In the ensuing confusion, the other fourteen disciples in the other two formations were distracted. Deng Bagong and Gao Kexin simultaneously took advantage of this to launch their attacks. Immediately, there were sounds of swords clashing. Linghu Chong grabbed Yihe's sword from the ground and struck out. There were sounds of "qiang lang", "ah", "hey", and many others as he hit the back of Gao Kexin's hand causing him drop his sword, made Deng Bagong's soft whip turn over and wrap around his own neck, and struck Zhong Zhen's hand forcing him to retreat a few steps. But Zhong Zhen still managed to feebly hold on to his trembling sword with a weakened hand.

Two girls sharply called out; one shouted, "General Wu!" while the other cried, "Big brother Linghu!" Zheng E was the one who called out "General Wu!" The way Linghu Chong made these three people retreat with his sword art was identical to the sword art used to defeat these three people in Nianbapu's inn. Gao Kexin was at a loss, Deng Bagong was choking while Zhong Zhen was startled and angry at the same time. Zheng E had a sharp mind and she had previously seen Linghu Chong used this move. Although his appearance and clothes were now completely different, she still managed to recognise him immediately from his sword move.

The other person who called out, "Big brother Linghu!" was of course Yilin. She was in the group with Yizhen and Yizhi surrounding Deng Bagong. While

they were in formation, everyone was concentrating completely and their eyes were observing the enemy closely. With their eyes so focused, they only saw the point that each was aiming at. The person aiming at the head was only looking at the head and the person aiming at the chest was only looking at the chest. They didn't look at any other parts of the enemy's body. So naturally, they didn't even see the person next to them. Only when the formation was scattered, she was able to see Linghu Chong.

Yilin had not seen him for more than a year when he suddenly appeared in front of her. Yilin's whole body shook and she was feeling giddy. Now that he had been recognized, Linghu Chong realized that he wouldn't be able to conceal his identity anymore. He laughed and chided, "Your granny, you three chaps don't know about good and evil. Heng-Shan School's Shi Tai already spared you a life but you unexpectedly return their kindness with enmity. General isn't pleased in seeing this at all. I... I..." Suddenly, he felt dazed, his vision darkened and with his legs giving out, he fell down on the ground heavily.

Yilin rushed forward quickly to support him and worriedly called out, "Big brother Linghu, big brother Linghu!" She then saw his right shoulder and arm were bleeding profusely. She took out her school's "White Cloud Bear Gallbladder" medicine pill from her sleeve and fed it to him. Zheng E and Yizhen also took out their school's "Heavenly Connecting Glue" and applied it to his wounds. Each of the Heng-Shan School's disciples was grateful to him for helping them. If he hadn't helped them that day, each of them would have lost her life. Not only would they have died miserably, they might also have been insulted by those evildoers.

Heng-Shan disciples busied themselves applying medicines, wiping blood and wrapping the wounds up. They were doing all these tasks with all their hearts. When any female in the world has met with this kind of urgent situation, they would start talking incessantly. Even though Heng-Shan School disciples were warriors of Wulin, they weren't exempt from this female trait. They were all talking at once as they surrounded Linghu Chong. Some were sighing, some were showing concern, some were asking who hurt my General, and some were

saying that the attacker was vicious and heartless. They were all talking about different things while some were also reciting "Amituofu". Huashan School's people were quite surprised when they saw this scene unfolding in front of them.

Yue Buqun thought to himself, "Heng-Shan School's disciples are highly disciplined. Why are these female disciples acting in this way? They're actually fussing over this loafer Linghu Chong and staring at him, not even observing the proper distance between man and woman. They're also calling him big brother and general. When has this young thief become a general? They're really ignorant and have become muddleheaded. How come there is no Heng-Shan School elder in charge of them?"

Zhong Zhen made a hand signal to his two martial brothers and they immediately pointed their weapons and rushed at Linghu Chong. They knew that if this person were not eliminated, they would have endless trouble in the future. Moreover, they had lost twice under his sword. This was a good opportunity to get rid of this person while he was still unconscious.

Yihe whistled and fourteen female disciples immediately formed a row dancing their swords about and blocked Zhong Zhen and his two brothers. Each of these female disciples' martial art wasn't high but when they were fighting in formation, they were like four or five first class masters. Originally, Yue Buqun wanted to mediate between these two sides, but he couldn't anticipate how all these incidents had unfolded. He also didn't know how the two sides had developed this enmity. In addition, he disliked both the Songshan and Heng-Shan Schools. So he thought he should just watch for the moment and wait patiently for things to change. He saw the Heng-Shan School's disciples were defending very tightly. Zhong Zhen was attacking continuously but he wasn't able to get near at all. Kao Gexin came up with an idea. He feigned an attack towards the front person but instead slashed towards Yiqing's thigh. Suddenly injured and seeping blood, Yiqing was distressed even though her injury wasn't heavy.

From his dazed state, Linghu Chong heard the sounds of swords clashing

continuously. He opened his eyes to have a look and saw Yilin's anxious face. She was praying, "All living things are distressed. There is immeasurable bitterness all over the body. Guan Yin with her divine intelligence can offer salvation from this bitterness..." He felt very thankful for Yilin's prayer. As he struggled to stand up, he whispered, "Thank you, little martial sister. Hand me a sword."

"You... you... don't... don't..." Yilin pleaded.

Linghu Chong returned a slight smile as she gave her sword to him. He held onto her shoulder with his left hand to stand up and then staggered and swayed as he walked forward. Yilin was still anxious about his injury but when she felt that she was supporting his weight on her shoulder, she felt more courageous. She then transferred her whole body's energy to her right shoulder. Linghu Chong passed by several female disciples to get in front. With the first strike of his sword, Gao Kexin dropped his sword. With the second strike, Deng Bagong's soft whip wrapped around his neck. The third strike hit the top of Zhong Zhen's sword. Zhong Zhen knew that Linghu Chong's sword art was strangely magical and that he was definitely not his match. But he saw him standing unsteadily. So he relied on his internal energy to hit Linghu Chong's sword out of his hand. As the two swords clashed, he immediately transferred his internal energy into his sword. Suddenly, he felt his internal energy started to flow out swiftly and unexpectedly he couldn't stop it. It was because Linghu Chong's Art of Essence Absorbing had become unwittingly deep. It didn't need contact between skins anymore. As long as the opponent used his internal energy to attack then he would be able to absorb the internal energy through the sword.

Zhong Zhen was alarmed and quickly withdrew his sword. He then thrust his sword out again. Linghu Chong saw the lower part of the side of his body was wide open and wanted to take advantage of this and kill him. But his arm felt weak and he couldn't do what he wanted to do. So he was only able to block the sword. When the swords clashed again, Zhong Zhen's internal energy flowed out once more and his heart rate increased. He was frightened and angry at the

same time but he withdrew his sword again. He then gathered his strength to thrust the long sword forward. Midway through the stroke, the sword changed direction sharply and was now aiming at Yilin's chest. This move was both false and true at the same time. It had many variations and was extremely fierce. If Linghu Chong moved to save Yilin then Zhong Zhen would pierce Linghu Chong's lower abdomen. If Linghu Chong didn't move to save Yilin then this sword would really pierce Yilin. Also, he wanted to confuse Linghu Chong so that an opportunity to kill him would arise. Everyone was calling out in alarm when they saw the point of the sword had already reached Yilin's gown. Linghu Chong's long sword suddenly crossed over and hit the top of Zhong Zhen's sword.

Zhong Zhen's long sword instantly stopped in the middle of the air glued to Linghu Chong's sword. Zhong Zhen used more strength to push his sword forward but unexpectedly it didn't even move the slightest bit. His sword slowly bent upwards and at the same time, his internal energy started to flow out. Summing up the situation really quickly, he hastily withdrew his sword and jumped backwards. However, he had lost a lot of internal energy previously and had not time to gather more energy yet. As his body was in mid air, he suddenly felt paralysed and landed heavily. This landing looked very awkward and it was as if it was done by an ordinary person without any martial arts. Supported by his two hands on the ground, Zhong Zhen slowly struggled to get up but only managed to get up halfway before he tottered to one side and fell to the ground again.

Deng Bagong and Gao Kexin rushed over to help him stand up. They both asked, "Martial brother, what's wrong?"

Zhong Zhen was staring at Linghu Chong's face. His thought turned back to more than ten years ago when Devil Sect's Chief Ren Woxing shook the entire Wulin world. But Ren Woxing couldn't be this twenty something years old youth. He stammered, "You're Ren Woxing's disc... disciple. You know the Art... Art of Essence Absorbing!"

Gao Kexin was alarmed, "Martial brother, did he absorb your internal energy?"

"Yes," answered Zhong Zhen. But he was now standing steadily and he felt his internal energy gradually increasing. It was because Linghu Chong's cultivation of the Art of Essence Absorbing was not that profound yet. Also, he didn't intentionally absorb Zhong Zhen's internal energy. It was just that Zhong Zhen fell awkwardly because he felt his internal energy flowing out and was scared to death.

Deng Bagong whispered, "Let's get out of here. We'll come back here later." Zhong Zhen waved his hands and said to Linghu Chong in a loud voice, "Devil Sect's demon, you're using such an evil method. From now on, you are the enemy of all of the heroes in this world. Today, I'm not your match, but our orthodox schools would never surrender to the disgusting power of your evil method."

He then turned around, gave Yue Buqun a bow and inquired, "Mr. Yue, you have no relationship with this Devil Sect's demon, correct?"

Yue Buqun just uttered an "Hng" but did not answer.

Zhong Zhen didn't dare to be unruly in front of him so he said, "The real situation would eventually be revealed. We'll meet again." He then walked away with his two martial brothers.

Yue Buqun went down the entrance stairs and agitatedly said, "Linghu Chong, you're good. So, you've learned Ren Woxing's Art of Essence Absorbing."

Although Linghu Chong had learned Ren Woxing's martial art accidentally, the fact was he had learned it. So he couldn't dispute it at all. Yue Buqun fiercely asked, "I ask you, is this true?"

"Yes!" Linghu Chong answered.

Yue Buqun viciously declared, "You've practised this evil method. So you're the enemy of all the orthodox schools. Today, you're carrying an injury so I won't take advantage of you. When we meet again, if I don't kill you then it means that you've killed me." He turned sideways and addressed the Huashan School's disciples, "This person is your mortal enemy. Whoever still has any feeling towards him like he was your martial brother, then remove yourself from

this school. All of you understand this?"

All the disciples answered together, "Yes!"

Yue Buqun saw his daughter looking like she had something to say. He said, "Shan'er, even though you're my daughter, I won't make an exception. Do you understand?"

Yue Lingshan answered in a small voice, "I understand."

Linghu Chong was already weak from his injuries but when he heard these words, he suddenly felt both his knees powerless. He dropped his sword and slowly slumped down.

Yihe, who was standing on his right, extended her hand to support him. She ventured, "Martial uncle Yue, there must have been a misunderstanding. It's just too crude to sever your relationship like this when you haven't investigated this matter yet."

Yue Buqun demanded, "What misunderstanding?"

Yihe answered, "My Heng-Shan School's disciples were recently accosted by the Devil Sect's demons. At every battle, this Linghu General Wu helped us in fighting them. If he was a Devil Sect's person, why would he help us in fighting them off and make himself an enemy of the Devil Sect?"

Yihe had heard Yilin called him "Big Brother Linghu" while Yue Buqun had called him "Linghu Chong"; but she knew him as "General Wu". So she decided to just call him with both names.

Yue Buqun said, "Devil Sect's demons are very crafty. Don't believe his act. Which Shi Tai is leading your school's group in coming to the south?"

He believed that these young nuns and ladies had been affected by Linghu Chong's fancy speech and only an experienced senior Shi Tai would be able to see through his ruse.

Yihe mournfully answered, "Martial uncle Dingjing Shi Tai was unfortunately killed by the Devil Sect's demons en route."

Yue Buqun and Madam Yue were both alarmed. Right at that moment, a middle-aged nun came towards the Heng-Shan School's disciples. She stopped in front of Yihe and said, "A letter has arrived from the White Cloud Temple's pigeon", as she offered her a small bamboo tube with both hands. Yihe took the tube, opened its plug, took out the small rolled up cloth from inside the tube and rolled it open. After reading it, she exclaimed, "Ai yo, this is not good!" When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard that a letter had arrived from the White Cloud Temple, they all crowded around Yihe. When they saw Yihe was frightened, they hastily asked, "What?" "What's on Master's letter?" "What's not good?" Yihe gave the letter to Yiqing saying, "Martial sister, have a look." Yiqing took the letter and read it out aloud, "Dingyi Shi Tai and I are besieged by enemies in the Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley²⁰." She then questioned, "This is Abbess'... blood letter²¹. How come they are at Dragon Spring?"

"Let's go!" Yizhen rallied.

"But we don't know who the enemy is?" Yiqing reasoned.

Yihe said, "They're already in an ominous situation, let's hurry up and catch up to them. If we have to die, then we'll die together with Master."

Yiqing thought, "Master and martial uncle's martial arts are levels above us but the enemies still managed to besiege them. If we go there, it's most likely that we won't be able to offer them any aid." She took the blood letter, went in front of Yue Buqun, bowed to him and requested, "Martial uncle Yue, our Abbess sent us a letter, it said: '...besieged in Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley.' Martial uncle, considering the friendship among the Five Mountains Sword Schools, please think of a way to save them." Yue Buqun took the letter and read it. He questioned, "How come Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai are in Zhejiang? The two of them have outstanding martial arts. How did the enemies manage to besiege them? This is really strange. Is this Abbess' writing on the letter?"

"It's my Master's writing. I'm afraid they must have been injured already that they hastily used their blood to write the letter," Yiqing assuredly answered.

"You don't know who the enemy is?" Yue Buqun asked.

"It's probably the Devil Sect's people. Other than them, our school has no other enemy," Yiqing said.

Yue Buqun looked at Linghu Chong from the corner of his eyes and slowly said, "Maybe it's a false letter from a Devil Sect's demon to entice you into a trap. We must be wary of their deceptions."

"This matter is most urgent as Abbess had surely met with a disaster. So the most important thing for us is to go and save them. Martial sister Yiqing, let's go quickly and catch up to them. Martial uncle Yue has no time so it's useless to ask for his help any further," Yihe shouted in a clear voice.

"Right. If we arrive too late, we will regret this for eternity," Yizhen said agreeing with Yihe.

When Heng-Shan School's disciples saw that Yue Buqun had flatly refused their request regardless of its upright intentions, they were all angered.

"Big brother Linghu, you stay at Fuzhou to tend to your wounds. We'll go and save Master and Martial uncle first. Then we'll come back to look for you here," Yilin said.

"Fearless thieves are harming people again. How can this General just sit back and watch? Everybody, let's go and save them," Linghu Chong responded in a loud voice.

"Your injuries are serious. How can you hurry along?" Yilin said.

"This General is ready to give his body to his country and die in the battlefield. I'm going to use my feet to get there. Go, go, hurry up and go!" Linghu Chong said.

Heng-Shan School's disciples were doubtful that they would be able to save their Abbess from danger. But when Linghu Chong said he was going to come with them, their spirits lifted and all their faces were filled with joy. Yizhen said, "In that case, many thanks. We'll look for a horse for you to ride."

"Everybody rides! How can you not get a horse if you want to fight later? Go, go," Linghu Chong said loudly. Seeing how his Master had harshly severed their

relationship earlier, he was feeling bitter and a bit insane.

Yiqing bowed to Yue Buqun and Madam Yue, “We take our leave from seniors.”

Yihe cried out in fury, “Why do you need to be polite to this sort of person? You’re wasting time. Hng, their reputations have no merit and they have no sense of righteousness.”

“Martial sister, say no more!” Yiqing reproached in a loud voice.

Yue Buqun was laughing and didn’t pay attention to what was said.

But Lao Denuo rushed out and shouted, “Watch what your filthy mouth is saying! Our five mountains sword schools have the same root but different branches. When one school encounters a problem, the other four are ready to save them. But you are colluding together with this Devil Sect’s demon Linghu Chong and so your conduct must be crafty and evil. My master has to consider this extensively before giving his help. Why don’t you kill this demon Linghu Chong first to make everything clear. Otherwise, my Huashan School cannot collaborate with your Heng-Shan School and follow your bad example.”

Yihe was indignant when she heard this. She took a big step forward and put her hand on her sword handle. She demanded, “What do you mean ‘follow our bad example’?”

“You are colluding with the Devil Sect. That’s what’s called to follow their bad example,” Lao Denuo said.

Yihe was affronted and she declared, “Hero Linghu is brave and righteous. He helps people in trouble. That’s what you call a real hero, a gentleman. But your type of people, who call yourself a hero but run away from danger and when you see death, you still don’t help. That’s what you call a hypocrite!”

Yue Buqun’s nickname was “Gentleman Sword” and what Huashan School’s people hate the most was being called a “hypocrite”²². When Lao Denuo heard her ridiculing his Master, he pulled his sword out and thrust it towards Yihe’s throat. He was using Huashan School’s clever move “Graceful Phoenix”. Yihe

didn't anticipate that he would suddenly pick a fight so she didn't have time to block the move. She was startled as the sword reached her throat. But at the same time, flickering of swords was seen and seven swords were already piercing towards Lao Denuo. Lao Denuo hastily pulled his sword back but this enabled a sword to reach his chest. Sounds of "chi, chi" were heard as the other six swords also slashed his clothes, each making a rip of about a foot long. It was only because Heng-Shan School's disciples didn't want to take his life that they stopped as their swords reached his skin. But Zheng E's martial art was still shallow so she didn't manage to control the power of her sword properly. Once she had ripped his right sleeve, the point of her sword continued forward and slashed his skin. Lao Denuo frighteningly jumped backwards in a hurry. Just then, a book fell out of his bosom.

The sun was shining brightly. Everyone saw clearly the words "Violet Twilight Secret Manual" written on the book. Lao Denuo's expression changed greatly and he tried to snatch the book back. Linghu Chong shouted, "Stop him!"

Yihe already had a sword in her hand and she quickly made three slashes. Lao Denuo lifted his sword to trade moves but he couldn't advance a single step.

"Dad, how come second martial brother has the secret manual?" Yue Lingshan cried.

"Lao Denuo, you killed sixth martial brother, didn't you?" Linghu Chong asked in a loud voice.

That day when sixth martial brother was killed, the "Violet Twilight Secret Manual" also went missing. He had been blamed for both incidents since then on. But today, it was really unexpected that after Lao Denuo's waist band was cut by Heng-Shan School's disciples, Huashan School's treasured scripture would fall out from his pocket.

"Nonsense!" Lao Denuo shouted.

As he said this, he lowered his body and charged towards a small alley. Linghu Chong was fuming as he gave chase. But he only managed to run a few steps before he swayed and fell down. Yilin and Zheng E quickly rushed to his side to

support him while Yue Lingshan picked the book up and gave it to her father. “Dad, it was second martial brother who stole the book.” Yue Buqun’s expression was pale as he looked at the book and ascertained that it was the internal energy secret manual that had been passed down from the previous Huashan School’s leader. Luckily, the book was still intact and undamaged. He then bitterly said, “It was you who wasn’t good, taking the book because of your feelings.”

Yihe didn’t want to let them off that easily so she said in a loud voice, “That’s what you called to follow your bad example.”

Yu Sao walked in front of Linghu Chong and asked, “Hero Linghu, how do you feel?”

Linghu Chong gritted his teeth, “My martial brother was killed by that thief. It’s a pity I can’t chase him.”

He saw Yue Buqun turned around and entered the escort house followed by his disciples. They then shut the escort house’s main door. He thought, “Master’s first disciple has learned the Devil Sect’s evil martial art. His second disciple killed a martial brother in the same school and stole the school’s secret manual. No wonder he’s outraged!” He then said, “Abbess is being besieged so we can’t delay any longer. Our most urgent matter is to quickly go and save them. Sooner or later, that thief Lao Denuo would fall under my hand.”

Yu Sao said, “You’re currently injured, so... so... ai, I can’t say...”

She was previously a servant. But at this time, her position in Heng-Shan School wasn’t low and her martial art was not weak, but her knowledge was limited. So she didn’t know how to express her appreciation towards him. Linghu Chong said, “Let’s go quickly to the horse market and buy some horses.”

He took out the gold and silver taels out of his bosom and gave them to Yu Sao. But there weren’t enough horses on the market, so the lighter female disciples had to ride double. They rode out quickly towards the north from Fuzhou. After going for more than ten li, they saw more than ten horses grazing on a field guarded by about six or seven soldiers. So these horses must belong

to the military.

“Get those horses.” Linghu Chong said.

“Those are military horses. I’m afraid it’s not appropriate,” Yu Sao hastily replied.

“Saving people is most important. Even if it’s the emperor’s horse, we’ll still take it. What do we care about appropriate or not appropriate?” Linghu Chong argued.

“It’s a crime against the government authorities, I’m afraid...” Yiqing said.

“Is saving your Master more important or obeying the law more important? What his granny government authorities? General Wu is a government authority. If General wants horses, those little soldiers won’t dare to deny him!” Linghu Chong reasoned.

“Yes!” complied Yihe.

“Knock those soldiers down and get their horses,” Linghu Chong cried out.

“Twelve horses are enough,” Yiqing said.

But Linghu Chong roared, “Get them all.”

He had an air of authority about him as he roared out his commands. Ever since Dingjing Shi Tai passed away, the Heng-Shan School's disciples had been mournful, frightened, and were at a loss about what to do. But when they heard Linghu Chong vigorously shouting his command, they urged their horses to charge forward, knocked down the soldiers guarding the horses, and seized all the horses. Those soldiers had never seen outlaw nuns before, so as they were knocked down to the ground and unable to move, they shouted, "What are you doing?" "What kind of joke is this?"

After they had taken the horses, all the disciples were excited. They were all giggling and talking non-stop. They all wanted to get on the fresh horses so they jumped onto the military horses. At noon, they arrived at Nianbapu town. When the townspeople saw a group of nuns leading an army of horses with a male in their group, they were greatly surprised.

When they finished eating their meals, Yiqing counted the money they had and whispered, "Brother Linghu, we don't have enough money." At the horse market, because everyone was thinking about their Master, they weren't in the mood to haggle. All their monies were used up to buy the horses and now they only had coppers left.

"Martial sister Zheng, take Yu Sao to the horse market and sell a horse. But don't sell any of the military horses," Linghu Chong said.

Zheng E complied leading the horse and Yu Sao to the horse market. The other disciples covered their mouths and giggled as they were all thinking, "Yu Sao is finished and Zheng E is such a delicate little lady, it would be a rare sight at the horse market."

But Zheng E was intelligent, clever, and good in speaking. She had only been in Fujian for a few days and she already managed to speak a few hundreds words of the difficult Fujian's dialect. Not long after, she had sold the horse and brought some money back to pay their bills.

When night fell, they were able to see a big town far away with houses scattered like the stars. There were at least around seven to eight hundred houses in the town. When they reached there, they ate their dinner and used the money from selling the horse to pay for the bill. Not much of the money was left afterwards. Zheng E was excited and laughed, "Tomorrow, we have to sell another horse." Linghu Chong whispered, "Go to the street and ask around who the richest person in this town is and also who among the richest is also the meanest or worst."

Zheng E nodded and pulled Qin Juan to come with her. Not long after, they came back, "This town has one very rich person. His surname is White. His nickname is White Peeling Leather. He has a pawnshop and also a rice shop. With a nickname like White Peeling Leather²³, I don't think he's a good person."

Linghu Chong laughed, "Tonight, we'll go and ask him for alms."

Zheng E said, "These type of people are very stingy; I'm afraid we won't get any alms from him."

Linghu Chong smiled slightly but didn't say a word. After a while, he said, "Everybody, let's go."

Everyone saw that the sky was dark already. But Master was in trouble so they were resigned to continue traveling during the night to save them. They went north from the city, but after a few li, Linghu Chong called out, "Ok, we'll stay here to rest for the night." Everyone stayed besides a creek to have a rest. Linghu Chong also closed his eyes to have a rest. After about an hour, Linghu Chong opened his eyes and said to Yu Sao and Yihe, "Each of you bring six martial sisters and go to White Peeling Leather's house to ask for alms. Martial sister Zheng, you lead the way." Yu Sao and Yihe both thought that it was strange but they still complied with his order.

Linghu Chong went on, "Get at least five hundred silver taels, but it'd be best to get two thousand silver taels." Yihe was surprised, "A yo, how can we ask for that much?" Linghu Chong said, "Two thousand silver taels is so small, this General wouldn't even take a look at it. If we get two thousand taels, we keep one thousand taels to use ourselves and give the other thousand to the poor townspeople." They suddenly understood what he meant and they looked at each other.

"You... you want us to plunder the rich and then give it to the poor?" Yihe said.

"It's not plundering. We're getting alms from the rich to aid the poor. We only have a few people here, even if we gather all of our money, we'd probably only get around two silvers. If we don't ask the rich to give us poor common people some money then how do we get to Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley?" Linghu Chong said.

When everyone heard the word "Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley", they all changed their minds and said, "Let's get alms!"

"You're inexperienced at getting this kind of alms, so I'm afraid you won't be getting any money. The method is slightly different. Cover all your faces with handkerchiefs. And when you ask for alms from White Peeling Leather, you

don't need to say anything. When you see the gold and silver, just take them," Linghu Chong said.

Zheng E giggled, "And if he's not giving them?"

"Then that's unappreciative of him. Heng-Shan School's heroes are different from Wulin's other small warriors. Even if other people would send sedan chairs to ask you to visit, you still wouldn't pay them a visit. How can they ask you to come that easily? White Peeling Leather is just a small town boss. What kind of position does he have in Wulin? If he unexpectedly gets a visit from fifteen honourable masters from Heng-Shan School, isn't this giving him a lot of face already? If after seeing you, he still doesn't want to give you alms, then you might as well trade some moves with him. See if White Peeling Leather's martial art is better or martial sister Zheng's fists and kicks are better?" Linghu Chong answered. Some of the disciples laughed as they heard him talking like this.

There were a few people who were more experienced like Yiqing and they secretly thought that this was inappropriate. Heng-Shan School's rules were very strict. They warn against stealing and plundering. This kind of getting alms definitely violated those rules. But Yihe and Zheng E were already hastily walking away so those people who disagreed with this idea didn't manage to say anything more.

When Linghu Chong turned his head around, he saw Yilin's beautiful eyes were watching him attentively. He smiled, "Little martial sister, you think it's not right?"

Yilin avoided his eyes as she replied softly, "I don't know. Whatever you said we should do, I... I think they're always not wrong."

"That day when I wanted to eat a watermelon, didn't you go to the field and take a watermelon for me?"

Yilin's face turned red as she thought of the time she spent together with him in that wild plain. Right at that moment, they suddenly saw shooting stars falling across the night sky leaving long beautiful trails. Linghu Chong queried, "Do you remember what you wished for?"

Yilin replied softly, "I remember", as she turned her head around. She then continued, "Big brother Linghu, this kind of wish is very effective."

"Really? What did you wish for?"

But Yilin just lowered her head and did not reply. In her heart, she was thinking, "I've wished for several hundreds several thousands times to be able to see you again. Finally, my wish came true and I was able to see you again."

Suddenly, they heard the sound of a horse's gallop from far away. A person on horseback was coming from the south towards them from the same road that Yu Sao, Yihe and the other disciples used to go away just then. But Yu Sao's group went without their horses. Who could it be? Everyone stood up and was looking towards the sound of the horse's gallop. Then they heard a female calling out, "Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong!"

Linghu Chong's heart trembled as he recognized Yue Lingshan's voice. He called out, "Little martial sister, I'm here!" Yilin's body shook and her face turned pale. She then retreated a step.

In the dark, a white horse came towards them. When it was still tens of feet away from them, Yue Lingshan stood up and suddenly pulled back on the rein stopping the horse and making it neigh. When Linghu Chong saw her riding hastily, he felt that something wasn't right. He called out, "Martial sister, are Master and Master-Wife alright?"

Yue Lingshan was still on the horse, her face illuminated by the moonlight. He saw her looking pale as he heard her saying, "Who's your Master, Master-Wife? Why do you have to concern about my dad and mum?"

Linghu Chong felt as if someone had punched his chest and his body swayed. Before, it was only Yue Buqun who was acting severely towards him but Madam Yue and Yue Lingshan were still treating him like in the old times and didn't embarrass him. But now hearing Yue Lingshan talking to him in this manner, he couldn't help but feel sad. "Yes, I've already been expelled from Huashan School and don't have the good fortune of calling them Master and Master-Wife anymore."

"You already know you can't call them that anymore, why did you still call them that just now?" Yue Lingshan scolded. Linghu Chong could only hang his head down and felt as if his heart had been stabbed by a knife.

Yue Lingshan uttered an "Hng" as she rode the horse forward a few steps. She demanded, "Give it to me!" as she extended her right hand forward.

Linghu Chong answered despondently, "What?"

"Even now, you're still pretending. Do you think you can conceal it from me?" She suddenly shouted louder, "Give it to me!"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I don't understand. What do you want?"

"What do I want? I want the Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Manual!"

"Evil Resisting Sword Manual? Why are you asking me?" Linghu Chong was baffled.

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "If I don't ask you, then who do I ask? Who took that Buddhist robe from Lin family's old house?"

"Those two chaps from Songshan School, "White Hair Immortal" Bu Chen and "Bald Eagle" Sha Tianjiang."

"Who killed these two chaps, Bu and Sha?"

"I did," Linghu Chong answered.

"And that Buddhist robe, who took it?"

"I did."

"Then give it to me!" Yue Lingshan demanded.

"I was injured at the time and passed out after getting to the old house. Then... then your mother saved me. When I came to, the Buddhist robe wasn't with me anymore," Linghu Chong said.

Yue Lingshan looked up and laughed, but there wasn't a hint of real laughter in her voice. She said, "So according to you, my mum embezzled the manual? What contemptible and shameless words that are coming out of your mouth!"

"I didn't mean that your mother embezzled it. Gods above and inside my heart, I didn't mean to disrespect your mother in the slightest bit. I only said... only said..." Linghu Chong stammered.

"What?" Yue Lingshan shouted.

"Your mother must have seen this Buddhist robe and realised that it belonged to the Lin family so she must have given it to martial brother Lin," Linghu Chong reasoned.

Yue Lingshan coldly said, "Why would my mum search you? You disregarded your own life to snatch that thing back to supposedly return to martial brother Lin. Hng, hng, couldn't you have returned it when you woke up? Why wouldn't she have given you face over this matter?"

Linghu Chong thought, "What she said is true. Then someone had stolen that Buddhist robe?"

As he pondered about this, cold sweat started to pour out from his back. "If it's like that then there must be some other reason."

He then shook his clothes all over. "I don't have the Buddhist robe on me. If you don't believe me, you can search me."

Yue Lingshan replied in a coldly, "You're a very clever person. Why would you keep it on yourself after taking other people's stuff? Also, you have so many shady nuns and monks with you here. One of them could've kept it for you."

Yue Lingshan was treating Linghu Chong like she was examining a prisoner; all the Heng-Shan School's disciples already thought that this was unfair. When they heard her insulting them, a few of them cried out at the same time, "Nonsense!" "What shady nuns!" "There are no monks here!" "Aren't you shady yourself?"

Yue Lingshan grabbed her sword handle and shouted, "You're all Buddhist disciples but you're entangled with this man and followed him day and night. Can't this be called shady? Pei! Shameless!"

Heng-Shan School's disciples were outraged. Seven or eight of them immediately pulled their swords out. Yue Lingshan also drew her sword out and shouted, "You want to rely on numbers to win and shut me up? Come on! If Lady Yue is afraid of you people then I wouldn't be a Huashan School's disciple!"

Linghu Chong waved his left hand stopping the Heng-Shan School's disciples from attacking. He sighed, "You've already suspected me from the beginning so I don't have anything to say to that. How about Lao Denuo? How come you didn't go and ask him? He already stole the "Violet Twilight Secret Manual". Maybe he also stole this Buddhist robe?"

"You want me to ask Lao Denuo, don't you?" Yue Lingshan replied loudly.

Linghu Chong thought that her question was strange but he still answered, "Yes!"

"Ok. Then come here and take my life! You're already proficient in Lin family's Evil Resisting Sword Art, so I'm not your match at all!" Yue Lingshan shouted.

"Why would I... I want to injure you?" Linghu Chong confusedly said.

"You wanted me to ask Lao Denuo. If you don't kill me then how do I meet him in this world?" Yue Lingshan said.

Linghu Chong felt happy and surprised when he heard this. He asked, "Lao Denuo, Mast... your father killed him?" He knew that after he was expelled from Huashan School, Lao Denuo's martial art would be the highest among the disciples. If Yue Buqun didn't kill Lao Denuo himself then other people might not be able to do away with him. Linghu Chong hated Lao Denuo to the bone as he had killed Lu Dayou. So when he heard that Lao Denuo had died already, it was a joyful occasion.

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "When a gentleman does something, he takes responsibility for it. You've killed Lao Denuo, why do you still not admit to it?"

Linghu Chong was totally puzzled, "You said I killed him? If I had really killed

him, why wouldn't I admit to it? This person had killed sixth martial brother and deserved to be killed. My only regret is that I couldn't do it with my own hands."

"Then why did you also kill eighth martial brother? He didn't offend you at all, you... you're so cruel," Yue Lingshan said in a loud voice.

Linghu Chong was even more startled. His voice was trembling, "Eighth martial brother and I are good to each other. Why... why would I want to kill him?"

"Ever since you colluded with the Devil Sect, your behaviour has been really strange. Who knows why... why you want to kill eighth martial brother? You... you..." Her tears started to flow as she said this.

Linghu Chong took a step forward and said, "Little martial sister, don't guess wildly. Eighth martial brother was still very young and didn't have any enmity with anyone or did anyone wrong. Not just me, even other people wouldn't have the heart to harm him."

Yue Lingshan looked outraged as she fiercely shouted, "Then why did you have the heart to kill Lin Pingzhi?"

Linghu Chong was apprehensive as he asked, "Martial brother Lin... he... he also died?"

Yue Lingshan whimpered, "He hasn't died yet, your sword didn't manage to kill him. But... but who knows whether he'll... he'll be alright."

Linghu Chong calmly asked, "He's heavily injured, is he? He would naturally know who attacked him. What did he say?"

"Who else in this world is as crafty as you? You attacked him from behind, he... he has no eyes in the back of his head," Yue Lingshan answered.

Linghu Chong felt heartbroken and bitter. He couldn't check his anger as he pulled his long sword out, gathered his qi, pulled his arm back, drew a breath and threw the sword out. The sword flew out towards a tall tallow tree with a trunk of a few feet diameter wide. It went through the middle of the tree and severed it. Half of the tree started to shake before it crashed thunderously,

throwing up stones and dust off the ground. When Yue Lingshan saw the extent of the power displayed, she pulled her horse's rein back to retreat a couple of steps. "What? So you've already learned the Devil Sect's evil method and your martial art is very good now. You want to show off in front of me?"

Linghu Chong shook his head, "If I wanted to kill martial brother Lin, I didn't have to do it from his back. My strike would not have failed to kill him either."

"Who knows what kind of crafty scheme you're planning? Hng, eighth martial brother must've seen you sneaking around so you killed him to shut him up. Then you chopped his face up imagining that it was second... Lao Denuo."

Linghu Chong took a deep breath knowing that there must be some kind of secret plot going on here. He asked, "Lao Denuo's face was also chopped up?"

"Why do you ask me? How could you not know when you did it with your own hands?"

"Who else from Huashan School was injured?"

"You killed two people and injured one. That's not enough?" Yue Lingshan answered.

When Linghu Chong heard what she said, he knew that no one else had been injured and he felt relief. He thought, "Who did all these?" Suddenly, his heart felt cold as he remembered what Ren Woxing said that day at the Plum Manor. He said that if Linghu Chong didn't join the Devil Sect then he would destroy Huashan School and slaughter everyone in it. Could it be that he had arrived in Fuzhou and already started to destroy Huashan School?

He hurriedly said, "You... you quickly go back and report to your father and mother, I'm afraid... I'm afraid it was the Devil Sect's big leader who has come to harm Huashan School."

She pursed her lips before laughing coldly, "Right, it is a big leader of the Devil Sect who has come to harm my Huashan School. Now he's a big leader of Devil Sect, but in the past, he belonged to the Huashan School. This is called to raise a tiger to sow seeds of disaster and repaying kindness with animosity."

Linghu Chong laughed bitterly and thought, "I promised to go to Dragon Spring to save Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. But my Master and Master-Wife are confronted with a big disaster. What should I do? If it was really Ren Woxing then I'm naturally not his rival. But my respected Master and Master-Wife are now facing a disaster, even if I go there to sacrifice myself, it would still be of no use. But I should be there to die together with them. In all matters, there are important ones and not important ones. And in all relationships, there are those that are close to you and those far from you. Regarding Heng-Shan School's matter, I'm forced to let them manage it by themselves first. If I'm able to stop Ren Woxing, then I'll go catch up to them at Dragon Spring to help." After he decided what to do in his heart, he said, "Ever since I left Fuzhou earlier today, I've been together with martial sisters from Heng-Shan School. How could I have divided my body to go kill eighth martial brother and Lao Denuo? You might as well ask them."

"Hng, ask them? They're already following you and have also followed your bad example. Couldn't they lie for you?"

When Heng-Shan School's disciples heard this, a few of them started shouting again. A few of the Buddhist nuns were retorting politely, while the secular disciples were scolding really sharply. Yue Lingshan pulled the horse's rein to retreat a few steps. "Linghu Chong, little Lin has been injured heavily but even when he's in a coma, he's still concerned about the sword manual. If you still have the slightest feeling then you should return that sword manual to him. Otherwise... otherwise..."

"You really think that I'm such a contemptible and shameless person?" Linghu Chong asked.

Yue Lingshan indignantly said, "If you're not contemptible and shameless, then there's no one else in this world who is contemptible and shameless!"

Yilin heard everything that was said between them. She felt excited as she couldn't bear this anymore. "Lady Yue, Big brother Linghu treats you very well. His heart is actually very sincere towards you. Why are you scolding him so fiercely?"

Yue Lingshan laughed coldly, "Whether he treats me well or not, you're only a nun, what do you know?"

Yilin suddenly felt disdainful as she felt that Linghu Chong had been accused falsely. Even if she had to die a hundred times, she had to plead innocence for him. As for Buddhism's rules and regulations or how Master would blame her in the future, she put all that at the back of her mind. She immediately said clearly, "Big brother Linghu told me himself."

Yue Lingshan said, "Hng, he also talks to you about this sort of things. He... he believed that he treats me well by harming martial brother Lin?"

Linghu Chong sighed, "Martial sister Yilin, say no more. Your respectable school's "Heavely Connecting Glue" and "White-Cloud Bear Gallbladder Pill", could you please give a bit to martial... give a bit to Lady Yue for her to take back to treat the injured?"

Yue Lingshan shook the horse's head to turn her body around. "You didn't manage to kill him, so you want to poison him now? I'm not gonna fall for your trap. Linghu Chong, if little Lin doesn't get better, I... I... " and she started weeping. She then stroke her horsewhip urging her horse to gallop towards the south. As Linghu Chong heard the galloping of the horse gradually getting further, he felt a slight bitterness in his heart.

Qin Juan said, "This girl is so rude. It's best if her little Lin dies."

"Martial sister Qin, we are Buddhists and our hearts should be filled with mercy. Even though that lady isn't, we mustn't wish for other people's death," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong suddenly remembered, "Martial sister Yizhen, can I ask you for a favor to go for a trip?"

"Martial brother Linghu only has to say what it is. I'll do it immediately," Yizhen said.

"I don't dare. That person surnamed Lin is a martial brother from the same school. According to Lady Yue, he was heavily injured. I believe your

respectable school's matchless and divine medicine..." Linghu Chong said.

"You want me to deliver the medicine to him, don't you? Alright, I'll go back to Fuzhou straight away. Martial sister Yiling, accompany me to go back there," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong clasped his hand thanking her, "Thank you two honourable martial sisters for delivering the medicine."

"Martial brother Linghu was always together with us. How could you have killed those people? I'll speak to martial uncle Yue about this injustice," Yizhen said.

Linghu Chong shook his head laughing bitterly as he thought how Master had already believed that he had joined the Devil Sect. That he would stop at nothing and stop at no evil. Do they really think that Master would believe them? He thought of this as he looked at Yizhen and Yiling galloping away from them.

He considered, "They're so concerned about me. If I abandoned them and go back to Fuzhou, how can I feel comfortable? Moreover, Dingxian Shi Tai and her people are being besieged by the enemy. And I don't know whether Ren Woxing really came to Fuzhou or not..." Then he saw Qin Juan retrieving his sword and giving it back to him. He suddenly thought, "If I wanted to kill martial brother Lin, why would I attack at his back? Also how can my sword not manage to kill him? If the person who attacked him was Ren Woxing, how could he fail to kill him with a sword? Then it must be someone else. If it's not Ren Woxing, then Master has nothing to worry about." When he thought about this, he felt slightly relieved.

He then heard the faint sound of horses galloping from somewhere far. From the sound, he gathered that there were several horses coming and thought that it must be Yu Sao and the other disciples coming back from getting alms. Sure enough, not long after, fifteen people on horseback were seen coming towards them. When they arrived in front of him, Yu Sao said, "Young hero Linghu, we... managed to get a lot of gold and silver from begging alms, but I don't know... don't know how much we got. It's in the middle of the night so we can't

go and give some of these to the poor."

"Let's go to Dragon Spring now. We can delay helping the poor till later." Yihe then turned her head towards Yiqing and said, "Just then we met a young girl on the road, did you meet her? I don't know who she is, but we traded some moves."

Linghu Chong was frightened, "She fought with you?"

"Yes. This girl was rushing on a horseback. When she met us, she scolded us for being shady nuns. How shameful!"

Linghu Chong secretly felt miserable and hastily asked, "Was she heavily injured?"

Yihe was surprised, "Hey, how did you know that she was injured?"

Linghu Chong thought, "Your temperament is like a firecracker going off. If she scolded you then you'd definitely fight her. And if she had to fight fifteen of you, then how could she not get injured?" But he asked, "Where did she get injured?"

"I asked her first. Why did she scold us when we didn't even know each other? She said: "Hng, I know who you are. You're Heng-Shan School's nuns who are not following rules and customs." I said: "What not following rules and customs? Nonsense, you should clean your mouth." Then she lashed her horsewhip and didn't pay attention to me anymore. She shouted: "Make way!" So I grabbed her horsewhip and shouted, "Make way!" Then we started to fight," Yihe narrated the incident.

Yu Sao explained, "She pulled her sword out. We saw that she was from Huashan School, but it was too dark for us to look at her appearance clearly. Then I thought that she looked like Mr. Yue's daughter. I quickly told them to stop but her arm was already injured in two places. However, the injuries weren't that serious."

Yihe laughed, "I already knew who she is from the beginning. Those Huashan School's people at Fuzhou treated martial brother Linghu rudely. Also, when

Heng-Shan School has a problem, they just put their hands in their sleeves and didn't care at all. So I wanted her to feel a bit of hardship."

"Martial sister Yihe showed mercy when fighting this Miss Yue. She used the move "Thread of the Golden Needle" to slash Miss Yue's left arm but she only did it lightly and only scratched her arm before she withdrew her sword. If she had used her full power, Miss Yue would have lost her arm," Zheng E added.

Linghu Chong had not calmed down yet when he felt worried again. Little martial sister was very arrogant and she wouldn't admit defeat that easily. She would have considered that tonight's fight was a big insult to her. In all likelihood, she would also blame this on him. All these things happening were fate and he couldn't do anything else. Luckily, her injuries were not serious and it shouldn't be a problem for her.

Zheng E had observed that Linghu Chong's concern towards this girl Yue was unique. She said, "If we knew earlier that she was martial brother Linghu's martial sister, then we would just let her scold us and it would be no problem. But it was so dark so we couldn't see anything clearly. When we meet her the next time, we'll apologise to her."

Yihe angrily said, "Apologise for what? We didn't wrong her at all. It was her who scolded us as soon as she spoke to us. There's no reason to do this anywhere in the world."

Linghu Chong said, "We've already got some alms, let's go now. How did that White Peeling Leather react?"

He was feeling awful and didn't want to hear about Yue Lingshan anymore so he changed the topic. Yihe and the disciples she had taken with her started to talk about how they got the alms. They were all excited and were talking over each other. Yihe said, "Usually when we go to a rich man's place for alms, even begging for one or two taels is already difficult. But tonight, we actually wanted several thousand taels."

Zheng E laughed, "That White Peeling Leather was on the ground crying and shouting. He was saying that several decades of hard work was gone in one

night."

Qin Juan laughed, "Who told him to have the surname White? He's been peeling other people's skin and plundering the things they owned. Now all he can see is a white courtyard."

Everyone was laughing when they heard this. But not long after, they remembered about their Martial uncle and Master still being besieged by the enemies. Their moods became heavy. Linghu Chong said, "We have some funds for our journey now. Let's go catch up to them!"

Chapter 25 Information

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



After several drinks of wine, the down and out Great Mr. Mo suddenly changed into someone cheerful and confident, and kept calling for more wine. But his tolerance was far less than Linghu Chong. After several bowl more, his face had become scarlet.

The group hurried along on their horses. Every day they only slept for around four hours and they didn't tarry along the road. In a few days, they finally arrived at Zhejiang's Dragon Spring. Although Linghu Chong lost a lot of blood after being injured by Bu Chen and Sha Tianjiang, his injuries were mostly flesh wounds. With his abundant internal energy and the Heng-Shan School's

medicines that he had taken, he had mostly recovered by the time they arrived inside Zhejiang's border.

The disciples were so anxious that they started to inquire about the location of the Sword-forging Valley as soon as they entered Zhejiang's border. However, none of the villagers they asked knew the location of the valley. When they finally arrived in Dragon Spring, they saw numerous sabre and sword forges. But surprisingly, none of the blacksmiths knew the location of the Sword-forging Valley.

Everyone was now feeling very worried. They asked two old nuns they met on the road but they didn't hear about any fighting. All the blacksmiths they asked also didn't hear about any fighting. As for nuns, the blacksmiths said that they frequently saw nuns around and that there was a Water Moon Temple near the east wall of the city. The disciples asked for the location of the Water Moon Temple before rushing there on horseback.

But when they arrived there, they saw the temple's main door was tightly shut. Zheng E went up to knock on the door but no one answered even after a long time. Yihe saw Zheng E knocked on the door again but they still didn't hear any sounds coming from the inside. She couldn't bear to wait anymore so she pulled her sword out and jumped over the wall to go inside. Yiqing also followed her in jumping over the wall.

"Look at it. What's this?" Yihe said as she pointed to the ground. They saw on the courtyard around seven to eight bright pieces of sword points. It looked like that they had been cut off. "Anyone inside the temple?" Yihe shouted while going inside the hall. At the same time, Yiqing opened the main door to let Linghu Chong and the other disciples come in. Yiqing then picked up a piece of broken sword point and gave it to Linghu Chong. "Martial brother Linghu, there was some fighting here."

Linghu Chong examined the broken piece and saw that the break was very smooth. He asked, "Do Martial uncle Dingxian and Dingyi use some kind of treasured swords?"

"They don't use any treasured swords. My Master once said that we must practice our sword art till we're very good at it then we would be able to win even if we're using a wooden sword or a bamboo sword. She also said that treasured sabres and treasured swords are too overbearing. If our hands were to slip slightly then we might take someone's life or disable a person's limbs..." answered Yiqing.

Linghu Chong hummed and said, "Then these swords were not broken by martial uncles?"

Yiqing nodded her head.

They then heard Yihe shouted from behind the main hall, "There are also broken swords here."

Everyone then went towards the back courtyard through the main hall. When they got inside the hall, they saw that the tables and everything in the hall were thick with dust. In all the temples in the world, there were always people to sweep the hall and keep it clean. So judging from the amount of dust collected in the hall, it seemed the temple had been uninhabited for several days already.

In the back courtyard, Linghu Chong and the rest of the disciples saw several trees hacked by weapons. They examined the places where the trees had been hacked and realised that they were at least a few days old. There was a hole where the back door was and the door planks were tens of feet away. It looked as if the door had been kicked open. Outside the door was a small path leading to the mountains. They followed the path and after more than a hundred feet, the road branched into two. Yiqing called out, "Everyone, separate and look around. See if there's anything unusual."

Not long after, Qin Juan shouted from the right branch, "There's a projectile here." And another one also called out, "Iron awl! There's an iron awl here!"

They saw this branch of the road passed through a mountain range that went up and down. Everyone quickly rushed towards that small road. Along the road, they often saw projectiles and broken pieces of sabres and swords lying around. Suddenly, Yiqing uttered an "ah" and picked up a long sword from the bushes.

She said to Linghu Chong, "It's our school's sword." Linghu Chong reasoned out loud, "Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai must have fought here. They must have come towards this direction."

Everyone knew that the Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai had fled towards this direction because they could not handle the enemies. What Linghu Chong said was only to make things sounded better. They saw a lot of weapons scattered about on the road and guessed that the fighting must have been fierce here. They had received the urgent call for help many days ago; they did not know whether there was still time to rescue them. Everyone was worried as they hurriedly went forward.

As they climbed further up, the road became more rugged as it circled around the mountain. Amongst the Heng-Shan School's disciples here, Yilin and Qin Juan had the lowest martial art and they fell behind as they kept going. After several li, the road became rocky and there was no more road to follow and also no more weapons to give them some direction. So they stopped paying attention to the road. Suddenly, they saw thick smoke rising from the back of the mountain on their left.

Linghu Chong said, "Let's go there to have a look." and they rushed towards the smoke. They saw the thick smoke getting higher and higher as they get nearer. Finally they rounded a hillside and saw a big valley. In the middle of the valley, there was a big fire roaring up into the sky. The burning woods and leaves crackled loudly. Linghu Chong hid himself behind a rock and then turned around and waved his hand telling the others not to make any sound. Just then, they heard an old person shouted, "Dingxian, Dingyi. Today, I'll send you both into the Buddhist's paradise to confirm your spritual progress in Buddhism. You don't even need to thank us."

Linghu Chong felt happy hearing this, "The two Shi Tai are still alive. Lucky we didn't arrive too late."

Another male joined in, "Chief Dongfang sincerely advised you to surrender but you persistently don't want to listen. From today, there wouldn't be a Heng-Shan School anymore."

The previous person shouted, "You mustn't blame our Divine Sun Moon Sect for being cruel and merciless. You should blame yourself for being obstinate and getting those young disciples killed in vain. What a pity. Haha, haha!"

They now saw the fire in the middle of the valley was getting larger as it burned. They knew that Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai were surrounded by the fire. Linghu Chong grasped his sword and drew a breath before shouting loudly, "Fearless Devil Sect thief, you dare to give trouble to Heng-Shan School's Shi Tai. Five Mountains Sword Schools' masters have come from everywhere to help. Thieves, you're still not surrendering?" His shout was heard everywhere in the valley.

At the valley, the firewood, stacked twenty to thirty feet high, was blocking the road. Linghu Chong didn't think deeply before he jumped inside the fire. Fortunately, the firewood in the middle wasn't burning that much. He went forward a few steps and saw two stone ovens but there was no one around. He shouted, "Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, Heng-Shan School's force has arrived to help!" At this time, Yihe, Yiqing, Yu Sao and the rest of the disciples were outside the fire shouting, "Master, martial uncle, disciples have arrived!" This was followed by the enemies shouting, "Kill them all!" "They're Heng-Shan School's nuns!" "They're bluffing, there's no Five Mountains Sword Schools' masters." This was followed by the clashing of swords between the enemy and the Heng-Shan School's disciples.

Linghu Chong saw a tall shadow of a person coming out of the stone oven. Her whole body was covered with blood. It was Dingyi Shi Tai. Her hand was holding a sword and she stopped at the entrance of the stone oven. Even though her gown was ragged and her face was caked with dirt and blood, she still stood there looking proud and powerful. She had not lost the aura of a master at all. When she saw Linghu Chong, she was greatly startled. "You... you are..."

Linghu Chong bowed, "Disciple Linghu Chong."

Dingyi Shi Tai said, "I know you are Linghu Chong..." She had seen his face before through the window from the outside of the Jade House brothel.

“Disciple will open the way. We’ll fight our way out,” said Linghu Chong as he stooped down to pick up a branch for swatting away the burning woods. Dingyi Shi Tai said, “You already joined the Devil Sect...” She said till here when they heard someone shouted, “Who has come here to disturb us?” The sabre was lightning fast as it chopped down.

Linghu Chong saw that the fire was getting more intense and the situation was desperate. But Dingyi Shi Tai was being suspicious towards him and unexpectedly didn’t want to rush out with him. In this situation, he had to move fast and kill as many enemies as possible. Only then would he be able to save them out of danger.

He took a step back to avoid the sabre chopping down and that person followed his first move with a second slash. Linghu Chong countered this move by cutting off his arm holding the sabre. Then he heard a female disciple shouting sharply in misery from the outside. It was a Heng-Shan School’s disciple who had met with a disaster. Linghu Chong was startled and hurriedly jumped out of the fire.

He saw a group of people on the east hillside and another group on the west hillside. The enemy had more than a hundred people with them. Some of the Heng-Shan School’s disciples were already in groups of seven using the sword formation to fight the enemies. But there were still some disciples who were fighting alone as they didn’t have time to form the formation. Even though those who were fighting in formation didn’t have the upper hand, they were still able to hold their own. But the situation was extremely dangerous for those who were fighting alone. Two female disciples had already been killed.

Linghu Chong swept his eyes across the battlefield to assess the situation. He then saw Yilin and Qin Juan fighting back to back against three men. He gathered his qi and rushed towards them when he suddenly saw a bright light moving towards him. A long sword was being thrust towards him but Linghu Chong promptly killed him by piercing his throat.

He leaped a few times and arrived in front of Yilin. He pierced the back of one man killing him. He killed the second man by piercing the side of his body. The

third person lifted his steel whip to smash it down towards Qin Juan's head but Linghu Chong reversed his sword and slashed upwards cutting off that person's arm at the shoulder. Yilin was looking pale but now there was a slight smile on her face, "Amitufo, big brother Linghu."

Linghu Chong now saw that Yu Sao was being attacked by two good fighters. He rushed towards her and slashed twice. The first slash hit the person on his lower abdomen killing him. The second slash cut off the second person's right wrist.

He turned around and rushed towards Yihe and Yiqing who were fighting against three men. Linghu Chong wielded his swords and the three men cried out miserably before they dropped dead to the ground.

Suddenly he heard an elder shouted, "Join forces and kill this servant first!"

Three grey shadows responded to this call and three swords were thrust towards his throat, chest and lower abdomen. These three sword moves were really wonderful and their positioning was masterful. These were first-class sword art. Linghu Chong was startled, "This is Songshan School's sword art! Could it be that they are from Songshan School?" As Linghu Chong thought of this, the three swords were closing in on his three fatal points. Linghu Chong used the sword-breaking stance from the Dugu Nine Swords as he circled his sword towards the three attacking swords to neutralise them. His sword intention had not finished yet as he forced the enemies to retreat a couple of steps. He saw that the enemy on his left was a fat looking Han Chinese around forty years old with a short beard on his face. The one in the middle was a thin old man with dark skin and bright-looking eyes. He didn't have the time to look at the third person clearly before he slanted his body and escaped.

With two thrusts, he killed the two people attacking Zheng E. The previous three people roared out and chased him. Linghu Chong had already made a decision, "These three people's martial arts are high and I probably won't be able to finish the fight quickly. If I fight too long with them, a lot of disciples from Heng-Shan School would be injured." He gathered his qi and started running non-stop to the east and west thrusting here and there. His sword was

everywhere. With each thrust, an enemy either fell down to the ground or was killed.

Those three masters were still chasing him but the distance between them stayed around ten feet as they weren't able to close in on him. In the time to drink a pot of tea, thirty people had been injured by Linghu Chong's sword. They were being routed as not a single person was able to stop a single move from him. As thirty of the enemies were injured in such a short time, the situation was now reversed. For every enemy that Linghu Chong killed, he slowly managed to free some Heng-Shan School's disciples from the fighting, enabling them to go help the other disciples. In the beginning, the Heng-Shan School was outnumbered greatly by the enemy but now they were gradually turning the situation around and were getting the upper hand. Linghu Chong knew that this fighting today was very dangerous for everyone. He decided that he couldn't spare anyone. If he didn't manage to push the enemy back in a short time then the fire would get even bigger and Dingxian Shi Tai and everyone else inside the stone oven would be unable to escape.

It was as if he was flying, he was sometimes rushing forward and sometimes rushing at an angle. All the enemies within ten feet of him had no way of escaping. Not long after, another twenty enemies had dropped to the ground. Dingyi was surveying the battle scene standing on top of the stone oven. She saw Linghu Chong appearing and disappearing like a demon killing those enemies. His sword art was wonderfully skillful and she had never seen it before. She felt really happy and astonished at the same time. There were around forty to fifty enemies left and they had seen Linghu Chong rampaging like a demon with no one able to resist him. Suddenly, someone sent out a cry and around twenty people escaped into the surrounding grove. After Linghu Chong had killed several more people, the remaining enemies lost their will to fight. Before long, all the enemies who were able had escaped.

Only those three masters still remained as they chased after him but the distance between them was gradually getting farther. It seemed that they were also afraid of him. Linghu Chong stopped suddenly and turned around. He

shouted, "You're from Songshan School, aren't you?" Those three people quickly jumped back.

That tall Han Chinese shouted, "Sir, who are you?"

Linghu Chong didn't answer him but called out to Yu Sao and the other disciples, "Quickly open up a way to save your master, martial-uncle and the others."

The female disciples cut some tree branches and started to beat on the burning firewood while Yihe and a few other disciples jumped inside the fire. The dry branches were already burnt through to the core that they weren't able to extinguish the fire. But everyone worked together to beat on the firewood and before long a gap had been opened up in the fire. Yihe and the others quickly helped the suffocated nuns get out from the inside of the stone oven.

"How's Dingxian Shi Tai?" Linghu Chong asked.

He heard an elderly female's voice answered, "Thank you for your concern." as a nun of medium stature slowly walked out of the ring of fire. Her white gown wasn't stained at all with blood or dirt. There was no weapon on her right hand. In her left hand, instead of a weapon, she held a strand of Buddhist prayer beads. Her appearance was kindly with her spirit calm and her aura leisurely. Linghu Chong was surprised, "Dingxian Shi Tai is so serene. Even after all the difficulties she went through, she still managed to keep her calm countenance. She really lives up to her reputation." He approached and bowed to her, "Linghu Chong pays his respect to Shi Tai." Dingxian Shi Tai returned his propriety but warned, "Someone's attacking. Be careful."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong calmly answered.

Without turning his body, he reversed his sword and slashed it backwards blocking that fat Han Chinese's sword and said, "Disciples was late in coming to help. Shi Tai, please forgive this sin." He blocked a few more thrust from that fat Han Chinese when two more swords were thrust at his back.

At this time, more than ten nuns came out of the fire ring carrying their martial sisters' corpses. Dingyi Shi Tai took large strides to emerge from the fire while

saying fiercely, "Shameless traitor, that wolf's wild schemes..." The bottom of her gown had caught on fire but she didn't care about it at all. Yu Sao went to her to beat on the gown and extinguished the fire.

Linghu Chong exclaimed, "Both Shi Tai are well! This is a joyous occasion." Just then, the sounds of "chi, chi" could be heard behind his body as three long swords were thrust simultaneously at him. At this time, Linghu Chong's sword art was not only one of the best but also not many in this world could match his internal energy strength. Not only did he hear the edge of the swords splitting the air, his internal energy also felt it and he automatically knew the enemies' sword paths. He wielded his long sword and countered the enemies' strikes. But those three people's martial arts were very high and their movements were lightning fast, which enabled them to escape from Linghu Chong's thrust. But the back of the tall Han Chinese's hand was still slashed and fresh blood started to flow. Linghu Chong questioned, "Shi Tai, Songshan School is the leader of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. Also, they have brotherly ties with Hengshan School, why would they suddenly attack your school? I don't understand a single thing."

"Where's martial sister? How come she didn't come?" Dingyi Shi Tai asked.

Qin Juan cried as she answered, "Master... master was besieged by evildoers. She fought vigorously until... until she perished..."

Dingyi Shi Tai was grieved and indignant as she scolded, "Good thieves!" and started to take large strides forward. But after only a few steps, she started to sway that she had to sit down on the ground heavily and threw up some blood from her mouth.

Even though the three Songshan School's masters were cooperating to fight Linghu Chong, they were still unable to endure his attack. Throughout the fight, they had only been looking at the back of his body while Linghu Chong was fighting with the long sword reversed in his hand. His sword art was marvellous and unpredictable. If he actually had turned around to fight them, they would not be his match at all. The three people were secretly feeling miserable and they were thinking of running away.

Suddenly, Linghu Chong turned around and started to attack them. He attacked the enemy on the left from the left and the enemy on the right from the right forcing them to crowd together. His one sword was able to encircle them and after eighteen moves they were unable to return another move. All three people were using Songshan School's wonderful sword art. But under the unceasing attack of Dugu Nine Swords, they were unable to return another move. Linghu Chong actually forced them to use their own school's sword art so they wouldn't be able to deny their association any further. He saw that even though sweat was flowing down on their faces, their expressions were still fearsome and their sword arts were still executed properly. It seemed that each of them had at least practised their sword art for at least ten years; it was really amazing.

"Amitufo. Martial brother Zhao, martial brother Zhang, martial brother Sima, my Heng-Shan School and your respectable school has no enmity with each other. Why did the three of you attack us and wanted to burn us to death? Poor nun doesn't understand and would like to consult with you," Dingxian Shi Tai said.

Those three Songshan School's masters really did have the surnames of Zhao, Zhang, and Sima. The three of them rarely traveled in Jianghu and their positions in the school were a secret. Linghu Chong had already given them so much trouble and now suddenly Dingxian Shi Tai called their surnames out. They were startled.

"Qiang lang", "qiang lang".

Two of them were hit on the wrists and dropped their swords. Linghu Chong pointed his sword at the short person's throat and commanded, "Drop the sword!" That old short person sighed and exclaimed, "The world unexpectedly has this kind of martial art, this kind of sword art! Zhao has been defeated by your sword and I wouldn't regard it as injustice." After saying this, he gathered his qi, passed it into his hand and broke his sword into seven or eight pieces. Linghu Chong moved back a few steps and Yihe with six other disciples drew their long swords and surrounded these three people.

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly said, "Your respectable school wishes to combine the five mountains sword schools into one and create the Five Mountains School. Heng-Shan School has been around for several hundred years. Poor nun doesn't dare to end the school at my hand so I refused your school's proposal. We've already exhausted the discussion on this matter already. But now you disguised yourself as the Devil Sect and tried to wipe out my Heng-Shan School. Isn't this method too high-handed?"

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly butted in, "Why is martial sister saying so much to them? Just kill them so they won't give us anymore trouble in the future..." She then coughed a few times and vomited blood again at the same time.

That tall person surnamed Sima said, "We were just following an order to dispatch a message. We didn't know any details at all..."

"Let them kill us or peel our skins off, why do you need to talk to them?" that old man Zhao indignantly chided.

Sima shut his mouth and stopped talking after being scolded. He looked ashamed.

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "Thirty years ago, the three of you were running amuck in Hebei but suddenly you just disappeared without a trace. Poor nun thought that the three of you had turned away from your unruly ways. But I didn't expect that you would join and conspire with the Songshan School. Ai, Songshan School's leader Zuo is a respected person of our generation but he has accepted many unorthodox... Jianghu's unusual warriors, and together with them cause problems. This is really harboring evil... Ai, I don't understand this." Although she had changed her mind at this time, she still didn't want to offend anyone with her speech. She felt that she might have spoken too much and immediately stopped talking. She sighed, "My martial sister Dingjing Shi Tai, was she harmed by your respectable school as well?"

That cowardly person with the surname Sima wanted to make up for before so he said in a loud voice, "Right, that's martial brother Zhong..."

"Hey!" rebuked that old person surnamed Zhao as he indignantly stared at

him.

That person surnamed Sima realised that he had said the wrong thing, but he still continued, "Now that it has come to this, what's there to hide anymore?"

Leader Zuo divided our forces into two. Each force came to Zhejiang to handle the matter."

"Amitufo, amitufo. Leader Zuo is already the head of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. What higher honour does he want by joining the five schools and becoming its leader? So he wages a war and destroys our alliance, wouldn't the Jianghu heroes laugh at this?" asked Dingxian Shi Tai.

Dingyi Shi Tai fiercely said, "Martial sister, this thief's wild scheme is insatiably greedy... you..."

Dingxian Shi Tai waved her hand then said to those three people, "The net of Heaven stretches everywhere, they might be loose but they never miss. You will suffer retribution for these unrighteous conducts. Get out of here! I'd bother the three of you to tell Leader Zuo that from now on, Heng-Shan School will no longer receive his order. Although my humble school only has weak females, we would not yield under his violence. We won't follow Leader Zuo's order to combine the schools."

Yihe called out, "Martial uncle, they're... they're very malicious... "

"Withdraw the sword formation!" ordered Dingxian Shi Tai.

"Yes!" replied Yihe. Complying with the order, she lifted her sword which was followed by the other six disciples. They then retreated several steps.

Those three masters from Songshan School never expected that they would be released so easily. They couldn't help but feel appreciative as they bowed towards Dingxian Shi Tai. They then turned around and flew off. When they were tens of feet away, that old man Zhao stopped and turned around. He asked in a clear voice, "May I ask the young hero with the godly sword art for your honourable surname and given name? I was defeated today though I don't dare hope to take revenge. But I would like to learn the name of the great hero who

taught you and the name of this sword art."

Linghu Chong laughed, "This General is from Quanzhou prefecture. I'm called General Wu Tiande! Let's exchange names." That old person knew that Linghu Chong's answer was fake so he sighed and turned around to go.

At this time, the fire had gotten larger. There were many dead people from the Songshan School lying on the ground. More than ten of the Songshan people who were lightly injured had slowly crawled out of the valley while those who were heavily injured were lying in pools of blood. They saw the fire was getting closer but they were too powerless to move away. Some of them shouted for help. Dingxian Shi Tai said, "They didn't do this on their own accord. It was Leader Zuo who ordered them to come here because of an error in his thought. Yu Sao, Yiqing, help them." They knew that their Abbess was a merciful person and they didn't dare to disobey her. They separately started to check on the injured Songshan School's people. Those who were still breathing were helped to the side and given some medicine.

Dingxian Shi Tai looked towards the south and there were teardrops falling down her cheeks. She cried out "Martial sister!" She then swayed a few times and fell forward.

Everyone was startled and quickly rushed to her side to support her. They saw fresh blood flowing down from the side of her mouth. It seemed that her injuries were just as serious as Dingyi Shi Tai. The disciples were all frightened and didn't know what to do. They all turned around and looked at Linghu Chong wanting to hear his idea.

Linghu Chong instructed, "Quickly give the two Shi Tai medicines for their wounds. For the injured, wrap their wounds first to stop the bleeding. The fire is still going strong in this place. Everybody, let's go there to rest. Can I ask a few martial sisters to go and look for some fruits to eat?"

The disciples responded to his order and separately did the tasks. Zheng E and Qin Juan attended to Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and the injured disciples. They got some water from the creek with a kettle for them to drink with the

medicine. During the Dragon Spring fight, thirty-seven of the Heng-Shan School's disciples died. When the disciples thought of how Dingjing Shi Tai and the other disciples had died, their hearts were full of grief.

Suddenly, a few people started to cry and this affected the rest of the disciples. They all started to cry. All of a sudden, the valley was filled with cries of sorrow. Dingyi Shi Tai fiercely scolded, “The dead are already dead, why do you take this so hard? You have all read the Buddhist’s sutras and comprehend this matter of “life and death”. What’s so good about this smelly sack of leather?” The disciples knew that Dingyi Shi Tai’s nature was like a raging fire. No one dared to go against her wish. In a short time, the weeping sounds ceased but many of them were still sobbing. Dingyi Shi Tai continued, “How did martial sister finally meet her end? E’er, why don’t you report to Abbess and tell us clearly what happened.”

“Yes,” answered Zheng E. She stood up and started to narrate how they were ambushed in the Xianxia mountain range, how Linghu Chong helped them, how they were captured in Nianbapu town with the use of confusion poison, how Dingjing Shi Tai was threatened by Songshan School’s Zhong Zhen and then besieged by masked men, how Linghu Chong luckily caught up and drove them away, and how Dingjing Shi Tai finally succumbed to her heavy injuries. She narrated everything to them.

Dingyi Shi Tai uttered, “That’s how it is. Songshan School’s thieves were pretending to be Devil Sect to compel martial sister to agree to the merger. Hng, how vicious. If you had all been captured by Songshan School and martial sister didn’t agree, it could’ve been disastrous.” As she said this, she ran out of breath and her voice became weak. After taking a breather, she continued, “When martial sister was besieged on the Xianxia mountain range, she knew that the enemies weren’t easy to handle so she dispatched the pigeons asking for us to send help. Unexpectedly... unexpectedly... this matter, was already anticipated by the enemies.”

Dingxian Shi Tai’s second disciple, Yiwen, said, “Martial uncle, please rest, disciple will narrate how our group met with the enemies.”

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly retorted, “What’s there to tell? Water Moon Temple was attacked by the enemy at night. And we’ve been fighting continuously till today.”

Yiwen said, “Yes.”

It was just a simple narration of how they had been fighting with the enemies for many days. That night, Songshan School’s people raided the temple wearing masks and pretending to be the Devil Sect. The attack on Heng-Shan School that time was so swift that the nuns were worried of being annihilated. Luckily, Water Moon Temple was an artery of Wulin and it stored five treasured swords from the Dragon Spring. In that critical situation, Abbess Qingxiao distributed the treasured swords to Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai to fight the enemies. Dragon Spring’s treasured swords were able to cut through iron as if it were mud. They used the treasured swords to cut many weapons and injured many enemies. They retreated as they fought until they reached this valley. Qingxiao Shi Tai died in protecting them.

This valley used to produce fine iron and several hundred years ago metals were cast here. Later, the iron ran out and the sword forges were moved somewhere else. The only remaining things in this valley were a few stone ovens for smelting. It was lucky that those stone ovens were around as it enabled the Heng-Shan School to fight with the ovens at their back. By doing this, they were able to hold out for many days and averted a big disaster. When Songshan School was unable to break through with their attack, they collected firewood and tried to use fire to burn them. If Linghu Chong and the other disciples had arrived half a day late, it would have been very difficult to save them. Dingyi Shi Tai was impatient to get to the end of Yiwen's narration of the events of the past few days. She stared at Linghu Chong and suddenly said, “You... you are good. Why did your Master expel you from his school? He said that you were colluding with the Devil Sect.”

Linghu Chong answered, “Disciple wasn’t careful while traveling and became acquainted with a few Devil Sect’s people.”

Dingyi Shi Tai uttered an “hng” before saying, “Songshan School is even more

ambitious and vicious compared to what Devil Sect is capable of. Hng! Are people from the orthodox schools better than those from the Devil Sect?"

Yihe said, "Martial brother Linghu, I wouldn't dare to judge whether you master was right or wrong. But he... he knew clearly that my school was facing a difficulty but he just put his hand in his sleeve and would rather be a spectator. Given this... given this... maybe he already approved of Songshan School's plan of combining the schools together."

Linghu Chong's heart was moved and he thought that what Yihe said was not unreasonable. But he had grown up under his respected master and had always looked up to him. So he didn't dare to have any disrespectful thought towards his master. He said, "My respected master wasn't putting his hand in his sleeve and acting as a spectator. It's most likely that he has another matter... this..."

Up until now, Dingxian Shi Tai had her eyes closed to meditate. Now, she slowly opened her eyes and said, "My humble school has met with a few big difficulties and young hero Linghu has helped us get through them. This virtue and kindness..."

Linghu Chong hastily said, "I didn't do much. Martial uncle's words flatter me too much. I don't deserve it."

Dingxian Shi Tai shook her head and said, "Why must young hero be so modest? Martial brother Yue is unable to come himself so he sent his eldest disciple to represent him. That's just the same. Yihe, don't talk nonsense and be rude to your elders."

Yihe bowed, "Yes, disciple doesn't dare. But... but martial brother Linghu has already been expelled from Huashan School. Martial uncle Yue doesn't want him anymore. So he didn't really come here to represent martial uncle Yue's school."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled slightly, "You still don't want to give in and want to keep debating it."

Yihe sighed, "It would be good if only martial brother Linghu were a female."

“Why?” asked Dingxian Shi Tai.

“He’s already been expelled from Huashan School and couldn’t go back there again. If he were a girl then he could join our school. We’ve shared a lot of trials and tribulations together, he’s already like our own people...” answered Yihe.

Dingyi Shi Tai shouted, “Nonsense. You’re grown up already, but you’re still speaking like a child.”

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled slightly, “Martial brother Yue must have misunderstood something. Later in the future, he will see clearly and would accept young hero Linghu back into his school. When the news of Songshan School’s plot spread, he would not be able to just sit back any longer given the situation. Then Huashan School would need young hero Linghu to rely on. Also, if he couldn’t go back to Huashan, with his martial art, he could just establish his own school and no one would blame him.”

Zheng E said, “What martial uncle said is true. Martial brother Linghu, Huashan School's people treated you so badly. Why don't you just establish a... a “Linghu School” and show it to them. Hng, then why do you still have to return to Huashan School?”

Linghu Chong smiled bitterly and said, “Martial uncle speaks so highly of me. Disciple is not worthy of your praise. If only my respected master would forgive my faults in the future and permit me to reenter the school, then I won’t have anything more to ask from him.”

“Nothing more to ask from him? How about your little martial sister?” Zheng E asked.

Linghu Chong shook his head and changed the topic, “Shall we bury the remains of martial sisters or cremate them and take the ashes back to Hengshan?”

Dingxian Shi Tai answered, “Cremate them!” and her voice started to choke as she saw the dead bodies of her disciples lying on the ground. Even though she completely understood the human affairs, they had been her disciples for many years and she couldn’t help but feel sad. A few of the disciples started crying

again on hearing this.

Some of the disciples had been dead for several days already and some were hundreds of feet away. While the disciples were moving the bodies, they all kept scolding Songshan School's leader Zuo Lengchan for having sinister intentions and methods. After they had finished cremating their martial sisters' bodies, the sky had turned dark, so they stayed the night in the wild mountain under the stars.

At dawn, the disciples carried Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and their injured martial sisters on their backs. When they arrived at the Dragon Spring town, they went to the harbor and hired seven black boats to travel to the north. Linghu Chong was still afraid that Songshan School might attack them while traveling on water so he followed them north. Now that there were two elders traveling with the Heng-Shan School's party, Linghu Chong controlled himself and didn't dare to talk nonsense to the female disciples anymore.

Dingxian Shi Tai, Dingyi Shi Tai, and the injured disciples' injuries were not light but luckily Heng-Shan School's medicines were very effective. By the time they had passed Qian Tang River, their injuries were not life threatening anymore. As many of the Heng-Shan School's disciples were injured, they didn't want to encounter any incidents on the road and also wanted to avoid meeting anyone from Jianghu. When they reached the Yangtze River, they hired different boats to go upstream towards the Jiangxi Province. They traveled slowly in this manner. When they arrived in Hankou, about six or seven out of ten of the injured had already recovered. So they went back on the road and continued going north towards Hengshan.

On the day they arrived at the bank of Poyang Lake, there were several boats anchored at the mouth of the Nine River. These riverboats were really big and all of them were able to fit into two boats. At midnight, Linghu Chong was sleeping at the stern of the boat with the sailors when he suddenly heard light clapping from the bank of the river. They clapped three times, stopped for a moment, then clapped for another three times. This was followed by clapping from a boat west of them. A person on that boat clapped three times, stopped

for a moment, then clapped for another three times. The sound of the clapping was very light but Linghu Chong still managed to hear it, as his abundant internal energy made his hearing superb.

He immediately woke up upon hearing these unusual sounds as he knew that these were the signals of Jianghu's people greeting each other. For the last few days, he had been watching attentively for unusual signs to protect against any surprise attack. He thought, "No harm in having a look. If it's unrelated to Heng-Shan School then it's good. Otherwise, I'll just take care of it in secret. There's no need to bother Dingxian Shi Tai and the rest of them." He squinted his eyes to look at the boat at the west and saw a black shadow with average qinggong jumping for around ten feet repeatedly till he reached the shore. Linghu Chong lightly flew off and landed on the shore noiselessly. He then went around the back of a row of big baskets filled with oil on the east side. As he hid himself behind the baskets, he heard a person said, "Those nuns on the boat must be from Heng-Shan School."

The other person asked, "What should we do?"

Linghu Chong slowly got nearer and the glimmering light from the stars and moon allowed him to see the faces of the two people. One of them had a face full of beard while the other one had a long and pointed face which was not only oval but was also like an open sunflower seed face. He then heard that Han Chinese with the pointed face said, "White Flood Dragon Clan²⁴ is the only one doing this. Although we have a lot of people, our martial art isn't higher than other people so we shouldn't trade blows with them."

"Who said we're going to trade blows? These nuns' martial art might be good but on water, their water skill might not be that good. Tomorrow, we'll get a boat to go over to their boat. Then we'll go under water to bore some holes in their boats. Then we'll just capture them one by one," That bearded person said.

That pointed-faced Han Chinese happily said, "This plan is very clever. We two brothers would've done a great service for the Nine River's White Flood Dragon Clan. From now on, our names would be heard throughout Jianghu. But I'm still worried about one thing."

"What are you worried about?" asked the bearded person.

"They're in the Five Mountains Sword Schools alliance. They have a saying, same root different branches. If Mr. Mo Da found out about this, he wouldn't let the White Flood Dragon Clan get away with it," replied the pointed face.

"Hng, for the past several years, we've always endured with Hengshan School's influence. Enough already! This time if we don't do this thing for our friend and with all our hearts then if we met with a problem in the future, they won't help us. When we're done with this, maybe Hengshan School would be annihilated, why are you still afraid of Mr. Mo Da for?" said the bearded face.

"Alright, that's the plan then. Let's look for some help who can swim well," said the pointed face agreeing to the plan.

Linghu Chong leapt out and used his sword handle to hit the pointed face at the back of his head knocking him out. That bearded face person threw a punch but Linghu Chong extended his sword handle and hit his left Taiyang acupoint, which made him spin around a few times like a screw before plunking down heavily on the ground. Linghu Chong extended his long sword across to open the lids of the two oil baskets. He picked those two people up and separately squeezed them into the baskets. The baskets were filled with vegetable oil and each weighed around three hundred catties. They were actually for that day's shipments. As the two people were dunked into the basket, their whole bodies were immersed in oil and oil entered their nose and mouth. The cold oil woke them up immediately and made them gasp for air but they only managed to swallow some oil instead. Suddenly, someone at Linghu Chong's back said, "Young hero Linghu, don't kill them."

It was Dingxian Shi Tai's voice. Linghu Chong was slightly alarmed, "When did Dingxian Shi Tai get behind me? I wasn't aware of it." He quickly took both of his hands off their heads and replied, "Yes!" As soon as their heads were released, they wanted to jump out of the basket but Linghu Chong hit the top of their heads forcing them back in and laughingly commanded, "Don't move!"

Those two people had their knees bent to crouch inside while the oil reached

up to their necks and they were having trouble opening their eyes. They were entirely confused about how they had gotten into such difficult circumstances. They then saw another grey shadow leapt from the boat towards the bank. It was Dingyi Shi Tai and she asked, "Martial sister, did you catch some thieves?"

"They're the hall leaders of the Nine River's White Flood Dragon Clan. Young hero Linghu is playing a joke with them." replied Dingxian Shi Tai. She then turned her head towards the bearded face person and asked, "Sir, is your surname Yi or Qi? Is clan leader well?"

That bearded person's surname really was Yi and he asked, "My... my surname is Yi, how did you know? Our clan leader is well."

Dingxian smiled, "White Flood Dragon Clan's hall leader Yi and hall leader Qi are famously known in Jianghu as "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish". Old nun has heard of your names, they're like thunder entering the ears."²⁵

Dingxian Shi Tai was very meticulous; although she rarely went out of the temple, she kept detailed knowledge of all the personalities from every school and every sect. Otherwise, how could she have recognised those three masters from Songshan School previously? The bearded person surnamed Yi and the pointed-faced person surnamed Qi were third or fourth class personalities in Wulin. But as soon as she saw their countenances, she was able to guess their backgrounds correctly.

That pointed-faced Han Chinese felt proud of himself that Dingxian Shi Tai had recognised him and said, "Like thunder entering the ears? I wouldn't dare." Linghu Chong used his sword to press the top of the pointed face's head, forcing him to submerge in the oil and then released his hold. He then laughed, "I've long admired your name, like oil entering the ears." That Han Chinese indignantly said, "You... you... " He wanted to scold Linghu Chong but he didn't dare.

Linghu Chong said, "I have one thing to ask, why don't you answer truthfully. If you lie in the slightest bit, then your nickname "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" will change into "Mud Loaches Dead in Oil"." He then also pressed that

bearded fellow into the oil. But that bearded fellow was already prepared for this so he didn't swallow any oil but the vegetable oil still entered his nose. So he was still feeling distressed over this. Dingxian Shi Tai and Dingyi Shi Tai couldn't hold back their smiles and both thought, "This youth is really naughty. But this can be regarded as a good method to get information."

Linghu Chong asked, "When did your White Flood Dragon Clan start colluding with Songshan School? Why did you want to trouble Heng-Shan School?"

That bearded person was confused, "Collude with Songshan School? That's weird. We don't even know any hero from Songshan School."

Linghu Chong said, "Aha! The first word that came out of your mouth is false. I'll give you a mouthful of oil to drink!" He used his sword to press down on the bearded person forcing him to enter the oil. Although this bearded person was not a first class master, his martial art wasn't that weak. But Linghu Chong transferred his abundant internal energy into his sword. It was as if a thousand catties stone was being pressed onto his head making him unable to move up. The vegetable oil covered both his nose and mouth and exposed both of his eyes. He was feeling very miserable.

Linghu Chong said towards the pointed face man, "Quickly tell me! You want to remain 'Yangtze River's Flying Fish' or become 'Mud Loach Immersed in Oil'?"

That person surnamed Qi answered, "Now that I've met with Hero, even if I don't want to be 'Mud Loach Immersed in Oil', I might still have to become one. But brother Yi didn't lie; we really don't know anyone from Songshan School. Also, Songshan School and Heng-Shan School are allies and everyone in Wulin knows this. Why would Songshan School tell our White Flood Dragon Clan to make life difficult for... your respectable school?"

Linghu Chong released his long sword letting that person surnamed Yi to lift his head above the oil. He then asked, "You said that tomorrow in the middle of Yangtze River, you were going to sink Heng-Shan School's boats. What has

Heng-Shan School done to wrong you?"

Dingyi Shi Tai arrived late so she didn't know why Linghu Chong treated those two people in this manner. But hearing what he said, she became angry and shouted, "Good thieves. You want to kill us in the middle of the river." Her Heng-Shan School's disciples were mostly from the north and they couldn't swim. If the boats were sunk then many disciples would inevitably die. As she thought of this, her body trembled with fear.

That Yi person was afraid that Linghu Chong might push him under the oil again so he quickly said, "Heng-Shan School and our White Flood Dragon Clan have no enmity. We're only a small gang in Nine River's dock. What kind of skills do we have to look for trouble with all the Shi Tai from Heng-Shan School? It's just... it's just that we know that you Buddhists are all one family and we saw your respectable school going westward. So we thought that you were going there to help. That's why... this... we overrate our own ability and concoct this evil plan. We don't dare anymore."

As Linghu Chong heard more, he became even more confused, "What do you mean Buddhists are one family and who do we help by going west? You're not speaking clearly!"

That Yi person said, "Yes, yes! Although Shaolin Temple isn't part of the Five Mountains Sword Schools, we thought that monks and nuns are of one family..."

Dingyi Shi Tai shouted, "Nonsense!"

That Yi person was startled and he involuntarily pulled back and swallowed a mouthful of oil. He was speechless with his mouth feeling so greasy. Dingyi Shi Tai held her smile and said to the pointed face person, "Explain it clearly."

That Qi person said, "Yes, yes! That "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, does Shi Tai know him well?"

Dingyi Shi Tai was indignant as she thought in her heart why would she be well acquainted to such a notorious rapist in Jianghu as "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang and that this servant actually dared to ask her this

question. It was really the greatest insult to her. She lifted her right hand to smash his head open. Dingxian Shi Tai lifted her hand to hinder her and said, "Martial sister, don't be angry. These two have been indulging themselves in the oil basket for a long time now, their brains are probably not too clear right now. Furthermore, don't lower yourself to their level."

That Qi person asked, "What's wrong with Tian Boguang? That "Ten Thousand Miles Loner" Tian Boguang, uncle Tian is a good friend of our clan leader. These last few days, uncle Tian..."

Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly said, "What uncle Tian? You should've killed this despicable evildoer a long time ago. But you're making friends with him instead, I think White Flood Dragon Clan isn't a good clan after all."

That Qi person agreed in a hurry, "Yes, yes, yes. We're not... not good people."

Dingyi Shi Tai questioned, "We asked you before, why did you want to trouble Heng-Shan School? Why do you mention Tian Boguang regarding this?"

Tian Boguang had been inappropriate with her disciple Yilin once before. But Dingyi Shi Tai had yet been unable to kill him to vent her anger so she felt that this was a shameful matter to her. So she didn't wish this person to mention Tian Boguang's name.

That Qi person said, "Yes, yes. Everybody's going to rescue young lady Ren. We were afraid that the orthodox schools are going to help the monks. That's why we two brothers didn't think properly and confusedly cooked up this plan. This method that we wanted to employ towards your respectable school..."

Dingyi Shi Tai still didn't understand in the slightest bit what he was going on about. She sighed, "Martial sister, I'll just let you question these two muddy people."

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled and asked, "Young lady Ren, is that the Devil Sect's previous Chief's daughter?"

Linghu Chong was shocked, "They're talking about Yingying?" His face turned pale and his hands started to sweat.

That Qi person answered, "Yes. Uncle Tian... no, that Tian... Tian Boguang came to Nine River some time ago to drink wine with clan leader Shi. He said that on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month, we are all going to go to Shaolin Temple to make some disturbance and get young lady Ren out of there."

Unable to tolerate what was being said, Dingyi Shi Tai interfered, "Disturb Shaolin Temple? What kind of skills do you think you have to provoke the best there is in the martial world?"

That Qi person replied, "Yes, yes. Of course we're inadequate."

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "That Tian Boguang has the fastest qinggong so he's acting as a messenger, isn't he? Who's presiding over this matter?"

That Yi person answered, "When we heard that young lady Ren was being kept in the Shaolin Temple by those thieves... no, by the Shaolin monks, we all took action separately without consulting each other. We all wanted to save her but there's no one presiding over this matter. We remembered young lady Ren's kindness, so we all said that we're willing to sacrifice ourselves for her."

A moment later, Linghu Chong's heart was filled with countless doubts, "That young lady Ren they're talking about, is it really Yingying? Why would the Shaolin monks detain her? She's so young; what kind of kindness could she have given to these people? Why did so many people want to go and save her without caring about their own life after hearing news of her trouble?"

Dingxian Shi Tai said, "You were afraid that my Heng-Shan School would go and help Shaolin School. That's why you wanted to sink our boats, didn't you?"

"Yes, we thought that monks and nuns... this... that..." That Qi person stammered.

"What this that?" Dingyi Shi Tai indignantly said.

"Yes, yes. This... that... I don't dare say it. I can't say..." That Qi person hastily said.

"On the fifteenth of the twelfth month, your White Flood Dragon Clan is also going to Shaolin?" Dingxian Shi Tai asked.

They both answered at the same time, "We'll obey clan leader Shi's command."

That Qi person went on, "Since everyone else is going, our White Flood Dragon Clan couldn't be left behind."

Dingxian Shi Tai asked, "Everyone? Who's everyone?"

That Qi person answered, "That Tian... Tian Boguang said, Zhejiang's West Sea Sand Clan, Black Wind of East Mountain Association, Western Hunan Sect, ..." In a single breath, he was able to say the name of thirty clans from Jianghu. This person's martial art was only average, but he was able to remember the name of all the clans involved.

Dingyi Shi Tai scowled, "They're all unorthodox clans. Even though they have lots of people, they're not necessarily a match for Shaolin School."

Among the names mentioned by that Qi person were Heavenly River Faction's Chief "Silver-Bearded Dragon" Huang Boliu, Long Whale Island's Chief Sima Big, and a few other people that Linghu Chong had met before on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge. He had no more doubt that the person that they wanted to save really was Yingying and he was happy to have gotten news of her. But she was currently detained in Shaolin School and she had killed a few of their disciples before, so he felt really worried. He asked, "Why did Shaolin School want to detain this... this young lady Ren?"

"I don't know about that. Maybe those Shaolin monks have been eating too much and have nothing else to do. So they just look for trouble and detain her," That Qi person said.

"Please pay my respect to your respectable clan leader Shi and tell him that Heng-Shan School's Dingxian, Dingyi and a good friend passed by the Nine River. We've been impolite for not paying a visit to clan leader Shi; please ask clan leader Shi to excuse us. Tomorrow, we'll keep going to the west by boats. Please pardon us and don't dispatch people to sink our boats," Dingxian Shi Tai said.

Those two people immediately answered, "We don't dare."

Dingxian Shi Tai said to Linghu Chong, "It's a fine night, the moon is white and the air is clear. Young hero, please enjoy the night scenery at the shore slowly. Forgive poor nun for not accompanying." She then held Dingyi Shi Tai's hand and slowly went back to the boat.

Linghu Chong knew that she intentionally left him alone so that he could question these two people further. But for the moment, he was utterly confused and didn't know what else to ask. He just walked back and forth on the riverbank and didn't say anything for a long time. He saw half of the moon's reflection in the middle of the river. The river was flowing to the east and the moon's reflection was trembling incessantly. He suddenly thought, "Today is already the third week of the eleventh month. There's not much time left till the fifteenth of next month when they're going to the Shaolin Temple. Shaolin School's Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng treated me very well. When these people go to save Yingying, a big fight is bound to happen there. No matter who wins or who loses, the injuries to both sides will be enormous. Why don't I go in front of them and ask Abbott Fangzheng to release Yingying and avoid this bloodbath. Wouldn't this be better?"

He thought more, "Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai's injuries are almost fully healed. Although Dingxian Shi Tai's outward appearance is just like any other nun, she's actually very knowledgeable and her experience is vast. She's actually one of Wulin's great masters with very high skill. She's leading them back north; I don't think they'd meet another large number of Songshan School people attacking them. So they'd be able to deal with any kind of calamities they might face. But how can I just say goodbye to them?"

He had gone through a lot of trials and tribulations with these nuns and ladies. They treated him very respectfully and they were also very close and dear to him. Also, although he never mentioned about the time when his master expelled him or when his little martial sister abandoned him, he could tell from their expressions that they shared his sadness as if it was their own. In the Huashan School, besides Lu Dayou, there was no one else that close to him. Now, he suddenly had to say goodbye to them, it was really hard for him to

Speak up. He heard the light footsteps of two people coming closer to him. They were Yilin and Zheng E. When they were still twenty to thirty feet away from Linghu Chong, they called out, "Big brother Linghu." and stopped coming closer.

Linghu Chong went up to welcome them, "You were also woken up?"

Yilin said, "Big brother Linghu, martial uncle Abbess asked us to come to tell you..." She pushed Zheng E and said, "You tell him."

"Martial uncle Abbess wants you to say it," Zheng E said.

"You say it, it's the same," Yilin said.

"Big brother Linghu, martial uncle Abbess said, we don't need to say thanks for your kindness. After today, no matter what kind of matter you have, Heng-Shan School will follow your order. If you want to go to Shaolin to save that young lady Ren, everyone will help you with all their hearts," Zheng E said.

Linghu Chong was surprised and thought, "I didn't say that I was going to save Yingying, how on earth did Dingxian Shi Tai know? Ayo, Yes! Groups of heroes gathered on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge to treat my illness. They must've done it in respect to Yingying. These two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" knows about it, why wouldn't Dingxian Shi Tai know?" As he thought of this matter, his face turned red with embarrassment.

Zheng E went on, "Martial uncle Abbess also said that it's best not to do this by force. Abbess and Dingyi Shi Tai have already gone ahead to Shaolin Temple to meet Great Master Fangzheng to request for her release. She asked that big brother Linghu lead us to go to Shaolin."

When Linghu Chong heard this, he felt dumbfounded and speechless. He lifted his eyes towards the middle of the river and saw a small boat with a small white sail cruising to the north. He felt appreciative towards them but he also felt ashamed. "These two Shi Tai are learned and virtuous Buddhists with high positions in Wulin. Yet, they're willing to go by themselves to ask for Shaolin's compassion. This is probably the best way. Compared to me, an unrestrained, improper, and nameless person of Wulin, their reputations are a hundred times

better. It's most likely that when Abbott Fangzheng saw the two Shi Tai, he would have to consider their reputations and agree to release Yingying."

As he thought of this, he felt relieved. He turned his head around to look at those two, Qi and Yi, person who are still immersed in the oil baskets as they were afraid to climb out. He saw that these two were enthusiastic in saving Yingying so he felt that he had wronged them and felt quite sorry for them. He went up to them and cupped his hands. He solemnly offered, "I was being rude before and offended the two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" heroes from the White Flood Dragon Clan not knowing your reasons. Please forgive me."

Those two "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" were greatly surprised as they saw him turned respectful towards them so suddenly. They hastily returned his propriety and also cupped their fists. In their haste, the vegetable oil splashed everywhere and some was actually splashed on Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong smiled and nodded his head.

He turned towards Yilin and Zheng E saying, "Let's go!" and returned to their boat. Heng-Shan School's other disciples unexpectedly didn't say anything when they got back. Even Yihe and Qin Juan, who were usually curious, didn't ask him anything. It was because Dingxian Shi Tai had ordered them not to ask questions to save Linghu Chong from embarrassment. Linghu Chong appreciated this inwardly but he saw shadows of a smile on a few of the female disciples. Unavoidably, he now found himself in a difficult situation. He thought, "They must be thinking that Yingying is my sweetheart. Actually, there's nothing between Yingying and me. But since they're not asking me anything, how do I explain?" When he saw Qin Juan's bright and cunning eyes smiling at him, he couldn't endure it anymore and said, "It's not like that at all. Don't... don't let your imagination run wild."

Qin Juan giggled, "What am I imagining?"

Linghu Chong blushed, "I've already guessed it."

Qin Juan teased him, "Guess what?"

But Linghu Chong didn't answer her. Yihe reproached, "Martial sister Qin,

don't say it anymore. Have you forgotten Martial uncle Abbess' order?"

Qin Juan pursed her lips holding back her laugh, "Yes, yes, I didn't forget."

Linghu Chong turned his head away to avoid her eyes only to see Yilin sitting alone in the boat's cabin. She was looking pale and her expression was indifferent. He felt anxious, "What is she thinking? What did I say to upset her?"

He was startled when he suddenly remembered that day outside Hengshan. He recalled her expression while she was running and carrying him until they reached the wilderness. At that time, she was deeply troubled and excited, unlike her very indifferent expression right now. Why? Why?

Yihe suddenly said, "Martial brother Linghu!" But Linghu Chong didn't hear her so he didn't answer her. Yihe called out louder, "Martial brother Linghu!"

Linghu Chong was startled and turned his head around, "Hmm, what?"

Yihe said, "Martial uncle Abbess also said that we should listen to Martial brother Linghu's plan whether we should go by road or boat tomorrow."

Linghu Chong actually wanted to go by land to learn about Yingying. But looking from the corner of his eyes, he saw tears flowing down Yilin's cheeks looking very pitiful. So he decided, "Martial uncle Abbess told us to just go slowly so we'll just travel in this boat then. I don't think those people from White Flood Dragon Clan would dare to bother us."

Qin Juan giggled, "You're not worried?" Linghu Chong blushed and didn't answer her.

Yihe shouted, "Martial sister Qin, you're just like a child, can you stop talking?"

Qin Juan giggled, "I can! Why can't I? Amitufofo, I feel worried."

At dawnbreak, the boat sailed westward and Linghu Chong ordered it to stay close to the shore to protect against a potential White Flood Dragon Clan's attack. But everything was quiet as they entered Hubei's border. These last few days, Linghu Chong didn't chit chat much with Heng-Shan School's disciples. Every night when they dropped anchor, he went ashore by himself to drink wine

until he got drunk.

That day, the boat went pass Xiakou and turned north going to the Hanshui River. At night, they stopped at the dock of a small town. He again went ashore and drank wine at a small store. After a few bowls of wine, he suddenly thought, "I wonder how little martial sister's injuries are? Martial sisters Yizhen and Yiling delivered Heng-Shan School's medicine to them. So her injuries should be healed by now. I wonder if martial brother Lin has recovered from his injuries? If martial brother Lin's injuries didn't get better, how would she react?" As he thought till here, he was startled, "Linghu Chong, Linghu Chong, you're such a contemptible person! Even though you're hoping that little martial sister would recover, but inside you're also hoping that martial brother Lin would die. Even if martial brother Lin is dead, little martial sister still wouldn't marry you."

He was feeling bored and after he finished three bowls of wine, he again thought, "I don't know who killed Lao Denuo and eighth martial brother? Why did that person also want to harm martial brother Lin? I wonder how Master and Master-wife are doing recently?"

He picked up another bowl of wine and grabbed some salty peanuts to eat. He suddenly heard someone sighing behind him and said, "Ai! All the males in this world have no feeling at all."

Linghu Chong turned his head around to see who spoke those words. Under the candlelight, beside himself in that small store, there was another person crouching beside a table in the corner. On top of the table were also a wine pot and a wine cup. That person's gown was ragged and he looked shabby. He didn't look like an educated or elegant person. So Linghu Chong ceased paying any attention to him and continued to drink another bowl of wine. He then heard that voice spoke behind him again, "A person has been confined in a sunless place because of you but you're spending every single day together with those girls. Young ladies, bald nuns, old grandmas, they're all together with you. Ai, what a shame, what a shame." Linghu Chong knew that this ragged person was talking about him but he didn't turn around. He thought, "Who's this person? He said that a person has been confined in a sunless place because of me. Is he

talking about Yingying? Why was she confined because of me?"

He again heard that person said, "Even people who have no connection to this thing are saying that they want to sacrifice themselves to help her. Everyone wants to be the alliance chief. The person hasn't been rescued yet but there's already fierce fighting inside the group. Ai, old person has never seen this kind of matter in Jianghu before."

Linghu Chong picked his wine bowl up and went over to sit opposite that person, "There are a lot of matters that are not clear to me. Old chap please teach me what to do."

That person still lay prostrated on the table. Without raising his head, he said, "Ai, how much is because of a weakness for women, how much is sin? Heng-Shan School's ladies and nuns will be in real trouble because of this."

Linghu Chong was even more startled that he quickly stood up and saluted earnestly. "Linghu Chong pays his respect to senior. Please bestow your guidance."

Standing there, he suddenly saw a very old, deep yellow-coloured huqin on the chair. A thought flashed in his mind and he realized who this person was. He immediately paid respect to him, "Junior Linghu Chong is lucky to have met martial uncle Mo from Hengshan School. Sorry for my inappropriateness."

That person lifted his head and his bright eyes swept across Linghu Chong's face. It was really Hengshan School's "Xiao Xiang Night Rain" Mo Da. He uttered an "hng" before saying, "You called me martial uncle. You flatter me. Hero Linghu, these last few days you've been really happy!"

Linghu Chong bowed, "Martial uncle Mo is wise. Disciple received martial uncle Dingxian's order to accompany Heng-Shan School's martial sisters to go to Shaolin. Although disciple is ignorant, I don't dare to be inappropriate with martial sisters from Heng-Shan School."

Mr. Mo Da sighed, "Please sit! Ai, how could you not know that the rumours being spoken by all these people in Jianghu can even melt metal?"

Linghu Chong smiled bitterly, "Junior's behaviour was imprudent and I didn't check myself. I can't even show my face in front of my own school. But I don't think we should care too much about these idle talks in Jianghu."

Mr. Mo Da laughed coldly, "Your name is already dragged through the mud, who would pay any attention to you? But Heng-Shan School's hundreds of years of reputation will be ruined by your conduct. This does not move you at all? There are many talks in Jianghu about how you're an adult male mixing with all the ladies and nuns from Heng-Shan School. So many of their names are damaged by you, even... those two very disciplined old Shi Tai are being laughed at. This... this won't do at all."

Linghu Chong retreated two steps and grasped his sword handle, "I don't know who dare to spread these rumours and say all these shameless words. Martial uncle Mo, please tell me."

"You want to kill them? The number of people who says this in Jianghu is around eight thousands. You want to kill them all? Hng, everyone is envious of your luck in love, what's not good about that?" Mr. Mo Da said.

Linghu Chong dejectedly sat down and thought, "Whenever I do things, I never thought about the past or the future but I only ask myself to have a clear conscience. But I never thought that I would implicate everyone from Heng-Shan School. How... how can this be good?"

Mr. Mo Da sighed and warmly said, "For the last five days, I've been prying into your boats every night..." Linghu Chong let out an "ah" and thought, "Martial uncle Mo has been prying into our boats for five nights already but I didn't even notice him. I'm really incompetent."

Mr. Mo Da went on, "I saw you slept on the stern of the boat every night, you don't even chat with any of them. Your conduct is irreproachable with these Heng-Shan School's female disciples. Brother Linghu, you're not only not a loafer, but you're actually a real gentleman. Even though the boat is full of young nuns and pretty maidens, you never showed any interest in them. Not even one night, but for tens of nights you didn't show any interest. Your type of

person, a gentleman, is really rare nowadays. I, Mo Da, really admire you." He raised his right thumbs up praising him. He then slammed his fist down, "Come, come, come! I, Mo Da, am saluting you." He picked up the wine pot and poured wine for them.

Linghu Chong said, "Martial uncle Mo's words scares nephew here. Little nephew's conduct is mostly improper; that's why I wasn't tolerated in my own school. But these Heng-Shan School's martial sisters who I'm traveling with, why would I dare to offend them?"

Mr. Mo Da laughed a few times before answering, "To be frank, this is actually the true colours of males. If I, Mo Da, were still in my twenties and had to accompany all these ladies every night, I wouldn't be able to follow your example in maintaining my moral integrity. This is rare, very rare! Come, bottoms up!" The two of them lifted their wine bowls and gulped them down. Then they laughed together.

Linghu Chong saw that Mr. Mo Da's appearance was unrestrained and his clothing and personal adornments were poor. He didn't look like an earth-shattering figure of a school leader in Jianghu. But as his eyes swept across, it was sharp as a knife-edge. But this fierce look disappeared immediately and he again became a sleepy old man. Linghu Chong thought, "Heng-Shan's leader Dingxian Shi Tai is kind and gentle. Taishan's leader Priest Tianmen is dignified and sincere. Songshan's leader Zuo Lengchan is like a dangerous bird of prey. My respected master is a refined gentleman. Martial uncle Mo's appearance, on the other hand, is common and humble, just like any other ordinary person. However, within the five mountains sword schools' five leaders, he's actually the wisest one. I, Linghu Chong, am only a crude-fellow; compared to them I still lack by a long distance."

Mr. Mo Da said, "When I was in Hunan, I heard about you mixing together with the nuns and ladies from the Heng-Shan School. I was really surprised. I wondered how Dingxian Shi Tai could allow this matter to arise from her school? Later, I found out your whereabouts from the White Flood Dragon Clan and caught up with you. Brother Linghu, when you made that disturbance in

Hengshan's Jade House, at that time I, Mo Da, firmly believed that you were a frivolous young man. Later, after you helped my martial brother Liu Zhengfeng, I held a good opinion of you. I wanted to catch up to give you some advice. Who would've thought that I would meet a hero of this generation. Unexpectedly, brother, you're such a great young hero. Very good, very good! Come, come, come! We'll drink three cups!"

He then called out to the shop servant to add more wine to drink with Linghu Chong. After a few bowls of wine, a sad and poor looking Mr. Mo Da suddenly became cheerful and energetic as he continuously called for more wine. But his tolerance for wine was far less than Linghu Chong. After a few more bowls, his face had become bright scarlet.

"Brother Linghu, I know that you really like to drink wine. Mo Da didn't consider my own position and accompanied you to drink many bowls of wine already. Hey, hey, in Wulin, Mo Da hasn't accompanied many people to drink wine. That day at a meeting in Songshan, there was this Songyang Palm Fei Bin. This person was really bossy and arrogant, the more Mo Da looked at him, the more I didn't like him. So I didn't even drink a drop of wine. The words coming out of his mouth were also rude. Damn it, don't you think he's annoying?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "Yes, this kind of person overrates his own ability and his conduct's really overbearing. At the end, he didn't have a good fate."

"Later, this person just suddenly disappeared. His whereabouts is also unclear and no one knows where he's gone. This is really strange," Mr. Mo Da said.

Linghu Chong wondered about that day outside the walls of Hengshan city. He clearly saw Mr. Mo Da used his wonderfully divine sword art to kill Fei Bin then and he was also sure that Mr. Mo Da saw him there witnessing the whole event. But how come Mr. Mo was saying he didn't know what happened to Fei Bin? Linghu Chong didn't want to appear as if he knew something about it so he said, "Songshan School has no other people who they can rely on. So probably this Fei Bin is holed up somewhere in a cave on Songshan mountain diligently practising his sword art."

Mr. Mo Da's eyes suddenly flashed with a cunning look. He laughed lightly and slapped the table, "That must be it! If brother didn't mention this, I would've racked my brain trying to figure out where he's gone to and still wouldn't have figured out the reason." He drank a mouthful of wine before asking, "Brother Linghu, why are you really mixing with Heng-Shan School's disciples? Devil Sect's young lady Ren has deep feelings towards you. So you should never disappoint her."

Linghu Chong's face turned red when he heard this. "Martial uncle Mo is wise. Little nephew is already frustrated in love. This matter of male and female, I've long been indifferent to this already." As he thought of his little martial sister, Yue Lingshan, his heart turned sour and his eyes couldn't help but turn red. Suddenly, he laughed loudly and in a clear voice said, "Little nephew is already disillusioned with this mortal world and wanted to become a monk. But I'm afraid that the regulations for the monks are too strict. Like can't drink wine. So I didn't go and become a monk. Haha, haha!" Even though he was laughing loudly, it sounded mournful.

After a while, he related the story of how he met Dingjing, Dingxian, and Dingyi Shi Tai and how he helped them. He just thoughtlessly described every event while playing down his role in it.

Mr. Mo Da calmly listened to his story till the end. He then just dumbly stared at the wine pot for a long time before saying, "Zuo Lengchan's desire is to annex the other four schools into his own to make one big school. This one big school would then be able to match the two big schools of Shaolin and Wudang and stand as their equal. He hatched this secret plot a long time ago. Although he's concealed it deeply, I've seen clues of it for a long time now. His granny, he didn't allow my martial brother Liu to wash his hand and also helped the sword branch of Huashan School to challenge and usurp Mr. Yue's leadership. All these things happened because of this reason. But I never thought that he would be so rash as to brazenly attack Heng-Shan School."

Linghu Chong said, "He didn't attack openly with boldness. Originally, he pretended to be from the Devil Sect to force Heng-Shan School to have no other

alternative but to agree to combine their schools.”

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head agreeing with him, “Correct. The next step he'll be taking must be to deal with Taishan School's Priest Tianmen. Hng, even though Devil Sect is vicious, they're not necessarily more vicious than Zuo Lengchan. Brother Linghu, you're no longer in Huashan School, you're free like the cloud and cranes in the field. You're unrestrained. So you don't need to care about this orthodox school and Devil Sect matters anymore. I advise you, don't become a monk and also don't grieve because of this. Go and rescue that young lady Ren out of Shaolin and marry her. Even if other people don't want to come and drink your celebration wine, I, Mo Da, will come and drink three cups. Damn Zho Lengchan! Does he think we're afraid of him?”

Mr. Mo sometimes talked in a refined manner but sometimes he talked really vulgarly. He didn't look like a leader of a school at all.

Linghu Chong thought, “He thinks that I'm discouraged about love because of Yingying. But it's not good talking to him about the matter of little martial sister.” He then asked, “Martial uncle Mo, why did the Shaolin School imprison young lady Ren?”

Mr. Mo Da's mouth dropped open. He eyed Linghu Chong intensely with his expression full of amazement, “Why did the Shaolin School imprison young lady Ren? You really don't know, or you already know but you are still asking? Everyone in Jianghu already knows why, you... you... what are you asking for?”

“For the past several months, little nephew was imprisoned by some people and didn't hear of any news from Jianghu. After that young lady Ren killed four disciples of Shaolin School, little nephew was together with her for some time. But I didn't know how we got separated later and how she ended up being captured by Shaolin School?” Linghu Chong explained.

Mr. Mo Da answered, “If that's the case, you really don't know the whole story then. Your body's internal injury was incurable by any medicine. I heard that the unorthodox sects assembled thousands of people on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge to flatter this young lady Ren and to heal your injury. The result is

that no one was able to do anything for you, is this right?”

“Right,” replied Linghu Chong.

“This whole event shook Jianghu. Everyone was wondering how this kid Linghu Chong got so much good fortune. Unexpectedly, it was because the Dark Wood Cliff’s Sacred Lady Miss Ren favours you. So even though your illness couldn’t be cured, it wasn’t all in vain,” Mr. Mo Da said.

“Martial uncle Mo is teasing me,” said Linghu Chong while he thought, “Although Old Man and Zhu Qianqiu had good intentions, their method was really crude and they announced this matter to everyone. No wonder Yingying was angry.”

“So how did you finally get better? It’s Shaolin School’s “Tendon Altering Sutra” divine art, wasn’t it?” Mr. Mo Da asked.

“It’s not. Shaolin School’s Abbot Fangzheng was merciful and forgave old animosities. He agreed to impart Shaolin School’s unsurpassed internal energy cultivation method to me. It was little nephew who didn’t want to join the Shaolin School. This Shaolin’s divine martial art wasn’t allowed to be imparted to outsiders so I had to disappoint Abbott Fangzheng’s kindness,” Linghu Chong answered.

“Shaolin School is Wulin’s most respected school. At that time, you have already been expelled from the Huashan School, so it was by chance that you were able to join Shaolin. This is once in a lifetime opportunity. Why didn’t you take into consideration about that and about your own life too?” Mr. Mo Da said.

“Little nephew has been with my respected Master and Master-Wife since I was young. Even if my body is grounded till dust, I still hope that someday my respected Master would allow little nephew to correct myself and join the Huashan School again. I didn’t want to be greedy to preserve my life and be afraid of death and join another school,” Linghu Chong said.

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head, “So that’s the reason. In that case, your internal injury was healed by another method.”

“Yes! Actually little nephew’s internal injury isn’t completely healed yet,” Linghu Chong answered.

Mr. Mo Da stared at him and said, “Shaolin School never had any relationship with you. Although Buddhist people are merciful, they wouldn’t just casually pass on their divine martial art to anyone. When Great Master Fangzheng promised to teach you “Tendon Altering Sutra”, you didn’t know the reason behind this?”

“Little nephew really don’t know. I hope that martial uncle Mo can tell me,” Linghu Chong said.

“Alright! Everyone in Jianghu says, that day, Dark Wood Cliff’s young lady Ren carried you on her back and went to Shaolin Temple. Once there, she begged to see the Abbott and told him that he must save your life and she would leave herself to the mercy of the Shaolin temple. If they wanted to kill or peel her flesh, she wouldn’t object,” Mr. Mo Da said.

“Ah!” uttered Linghu Chong as he jumped up and turned over the wine bowls on the table. His whole body was suddenly covered in cold sweat and his limbs were trembling. His voice trembled, “This... this... this...” His mind was confused. He thought back to those days when his body was getting weaker as days passed by. One night, when he was sleeping, he heard Yingying wept sorrowfully. She said, “You’re getting thinner every day. I... I...” She was saying this very sincerely and he appreciated her concern. Then he vomited some blood and lost consciousness. When he became clear-headed, he was already inside the Shaolin temple and Great Master Fangsheng had already passed him countless amount of inner energy to save him. But he didn’t know how he ended up in Shaolin or where Yingying had gone. She had actually risked her own life to save his own. He couldn’t help as tears filled his eyes and finally flowed down his cheeks.

Mr. Mo Da sighed. “Although this young lady Ren’s family background is from the Devil Sect, she treated you with sincerity and passion. From Shaolin School, Xin Guoliang, Yi Guozi, Huang Guobo, and Jueyue had all fallen under her hand. So when she went to Shaolin, she didn’t expect to return alive, but in

order to save you, she... she disregarded her own life. Seeing this, Great Master Fangzheng didn't want to kill her but he also couldn't just let her go. That's why she was imprisoned inside a cave at the back of the Shaolin temple. This Young lady Ren has many generations of subordinates from various clans. Of course they all wanted to save her. I heard these last few months, Shaolin School hasn't had one day of peace. From the day they captured her till now, some people said more than a hundred people had gone there to rescue her."

Linghu Chong's mood surged when he heard this and he couldn't control it for a long time. As his feelings subsided, he asked, "Martial uncle Mo, you said before everyone was vying for the Chief position and there's already fierce fighting inside the rescue group. How is this matter?"

Mr. Mo Da sighed. "I heard that these people from the unorthodox sects usually just follow young lady Ren's order. Without someone with authority to order them around, they're just madly running and fighting with each other. None of them would submit to anyone. Now they're going to Shaolin temple on a rescue mission. They all know that Shaolin temple is the realm's oldest martial art school and matters would be difficult to handle there. Moreover, if they go there one by one then they know they would never be able to go back out alive. That's why they gathered so many people to form an alliance before going. After this alliance was formed, then there must be a leader. I heard in these last few days, they've been fighting over this leadership position. Several people have died and been injured and they've lost many people because of this. Brother Linghu, I think you should rush over there and control them. Whatever you say, who would dare to disobey you, haha, haha!"

Mr. Mo Da was laughing happily while Linghu Chong's face turned scarlet red. He knew that what he said was correct, but the alliance would only submit to him because of their respect towards Yingying. Later, when she found out about this, she would surely throw a big tantrum. Suddenly, he thought, "Yingying has very deep feelings towards me but she's very thin-skinned. What I'm afraid most is if people joke at her saying that her love towards me is unrequited and I can't repay her kindness. I must repay her kindness but when news of this spread

throughout Jianghu, people will say that Linghu Chong is passionately devoted to her, then she probably don't want to live anymore because of embarrassment. It's best if I just rushed into Shaolin by myself and rescues her. If I couldn't rescue her, then they can just say that I made a disturbance there to beg for alms." At this thought, he said, "Heng-Shan School's Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai already went to Shaolin temple to seek for Abbott Fangzheng's compassion to release Young lady Ren. They're doing this in order to avoid a bloodbath in the Shaolin temple."

Mr. Mo Da nodded his head. "No wonder, no wonder! I found it really strange that Dingxian Shi Tai wasn't worried that you were left alone with her school's young ladies and nuns. So it was because of you that she's going to Shaolin."

Linghu Chong said, "Martial uncle Mo, little nephew now knows about this matter and feels really worried. I wish I could fly to Shaolin temple to see how the two Shi Tai are doing with their request. It's just that Heng-Shan School's martial sisters are all women and I'm worried that they might meet some difficulties en route to Shaolin."

Mr. Mo Da answered, "You can go!"

Linghu Chong happily said, "There's no harm if I go first?"

Mr. Mo Da didn't answer but picked up his huqin instead, and started playing it. Linghu Chong knew the meaning behind his word was that he was going to tend to Heng-Shan School's disciples. Martial uncle Mo's martial art and experience was not ordinary. No matter whether he was protecting them in secret or not, Heng-Shan School would be safe. He immediately bowed and said, "Thank you for your kindness."

Mr. Mo Da replied, "Five Mountains Sword Schools, same root different branches. Why do you need to thank me for protecting them? If that Young lady Ren found out, I'm afraid she'll drink vinegar because of this."

Linghu Chong said, "Goodbye. Little nephew will bother martial uncle Mo to look after Heng-Shan School's martial sisters then." As he finished saying this, he rushed out of the shop.

He halted a step and looked towards the middle of the river. He saw lights from the windows on the boat spilled over and reflected on the Hanshui River. In the shop behind him, the sound of Mr. Mo Da's huqin rapidly disappeared. He could only hear the calm of the night. It was really peaceful.

Chapter 26 Besieging the Temple

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



Two days later, the mob arrived at Shaolin Temple on Mount Shaoshi. The mob had grown to the size of over five thousand people. Loud drumbeats from hundreds of huge drums thumped all together with earthshaking power.

Linghu Chong travelled quickly to the north and reached a large town on a clear and beautiful day. He went into a restaurant in the city. Hubei's most famous pastry was dried bean curd with vegetables and meat wrapped inside a skin made from bean curd powder. It was very tasty. Linghu Chong finished three plates of these before he came out of the shop.

As he stepped out of the shop, he saw a group of people walking towards him. Among them was a short and plump fellow. Surprisingly, he was "Old Ancestor of Yellow River" Old Man. Linghu Chong was really happy to see them and called out loudly, "Old Man! How are you?" Old Man was surprised and looked at him awkwardly. He

hesitated for a moment before he drew out his sabre.

Linghu Chong already took a step forward to welcome them. "Zu Qianqiu..." he had not said anything more when Old Man lifted his sabre and chopped down on him. Even though there was a lot of power in this chop, the accuracy was off as Old Man missed Linghu Chong's shoulder by around a foot. He cried out and chopped down again.

Linghu Chong was frightened and quickly jumped back. "Mr. Old, I'm... I'm Linghu Chong!"

Old Man replied with a shout. "Of course I know you're Linghu Chong. Everyone heard you already. Sacred Lady gave us an order that anyone who meets Linghu Chong must kill him. She will then shower us with gifts for following this order. Everyone understand?"

"We understand." The group of people who were with him replied loudly.

Although they replied Old Man with such conviction, they just looked at each other with awkward expressions on their faces and no one drew their sabres out. Some people were actually laughing thinking that this was amusing.

Linghu Chong's face turned red thinking about the day Yingying gave that order for Old Man to spread in Jianghu. The order was for them to kill Linghu Chong when they met him. But she actually gave that order because she hoped that Linghu Chong would never leave her side. It was also to inform the heroes of Jianghu that young lady Ren was

not crazily in love with Linghu Chong but instead hated him to the bone. Later, after so many unforeseen events, he had completely forgotten about this order. At this time, after hearing what Old Man said, he realised that her order had not been cancelled yet.

When Old Man informed them of Sacred Lady's order, the people in the group did not believe him. In order to save Linghu Chong's life, she had willingly gone to Shaolin to sacrifice her life. At that time, the news of the incident in which she killed four secular disciples of Shaolin temple had already spread and created a sensation in Jianghu. Everybody praised her bravery for going to Shaolin, but they also found it really funny and also thought that this young lady wanted to show Shaolin that she was better than them by going there. It was clear that she loved Linghu Chong deeply because she was willing to exchange her own life to save him. It was also clear that she didn't

want to admit to her feelings for him. But it was unavoidable that everyone else understood her feelings for him.

Concerning this matter, Yingying's subordinates from the unorthodox sects were aware of it extensively. But the orthodox schools also knew some of the details. In everyday chats, this matter often became a laughingstock. So when the people in this group suddenly saw Linghu Chong, they were pleasantly surprised but at the same time they also didn't know what to do.

Old Man said, "Master Linghu, Sacred Lady ordered us to kill you. But your martial art is too high, just then my sabre didn't manage to chop you. Please show mercy and don't take my life. Friends, everyone already saw that it's not that we didn't want to kill Master Linghu, but it's just that we couldn't kill him. Old Man couldn't do it, so of course none of you could do it either. Isn't that right?"

Everyone erupted in laughter and shouted, "Right!" One person shouted, "Just now, we've all fought with all our hearts until both parties are so tired that we couldn't even kill each other. It's better if we just stop fighting. Everyone, let's go and fight in drinking wine. If there's a hero here who can make Master Linghu dead drunk then later when we meet Sacred Lady, we'll tell her that we managed to kill him."

Everyone laughed madly holding their stomachs while saying, "Wonderful, wonderful!"

Another person laughingly said, "Sacred Lady wants us to kill Master Linghu, but she didn't say that we have to use swords to do it. So it makes sense to use beautiful wine to make him dead drunk. This can be called using wisdom to subdue the enemy instead of brawn."

Cheering loudly, they crowded around Linghu Chong and took him to the biggest wine shop in the city. There were more than forty people in the group and they filled up six tables in that shop. A few of them knocked on the benches calling out, "Bring out the wine!" Once Linghu Chong sat down, he asked, "How is Sacred Lady? I'm worried to death." When that group of people heard him worrying about Yingying, they

were all really happy.

"Everybody decided already that on the fifteenth of the twelfth month, we're all going to the Shaolin temple to get Sacred Lady out of there. In the last few days, the people in the alliance had been fighting endlessly to decide who's going to be the leader and had injured each other. It's good that Master Linghu already arrived. If this leadership isn't taken by you, then who else can do it? If another person were to lead this alliance, later, when we got Sacred Lady out of the temple, she definitely won't be happy," Old Man told him.

A white-bearded old fellow laughed, "Yeah! Master Linghu must be the Chief of this alliance. Even if we later meet with difficulties and were unable to get Sacred Lady out, when she heard news of you leading us, she'll still be extremely happy. This position of Chief is a match made in heavens for you and only Master Linghu can take it."

"This matter of Chief is not important. The most important thing is to rescue Sacred Lady out of the temple. Even if I died a cruel death in doing so, I'm still willing to do it," Linghu Chong said.

He didn't just say these words thoughtlessly. He really appreciated Yingying's sacrificing her own life for him. Even if he had to die for Yingying, he wouldn't have given much thought to it. However, if it were just any other day, even though he still would've thought the same thing in his heart, he wouldn't have

said this publicly. Now, this speech of risking death was said with passion and righteousness, it warned everyone not to make fun of Yingying.

When they heard him said this, they were all reassured of him. They felt that Sacred Lady's judgement was right about this person. That white-bearded person said, "So Master Linghu is actually a passionate and righteous hero. If that false rumour in Jianghu were true that Master Linghu doesn't care about anyone but himself, then everyone

here would've turned cold towards you."

Linghu Chong said, "For the last few months, I was imprisoned and didn't know anything about the things happening in Jianghu. But night and day, I was thinking about Sacred Lady until all my hair turned white. Come, come, come! Let me salute my fellow friends with a cup. Thank you everyone for striving for Sacred Lady." Saying this, he

stood up and lifted his cup to drink and was followed by the others.

"Mr. Old, you said that many friends are fighting for the Chief position and injuring each other needlessly. It's still not too late for us to go there immediately and advise them to stop," Linghu Chong said.

"True. Zu Qianqiu and Night Cat already went. We should go catch up with them," Old Man said.

"Where are they?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Everyone's gathering at the Yellow Keep Plain," Old Man said.

"Yellow Keep Plain?" Linghu Chong queried.

"It's west of Xiang Yang in the middle of Mountain Jing," That white-bearded old man said.

"Let's eat and drink quickly then we'll go to Yellow Keep Plain. We've already fought for three days and three nights drinking wine up till now and everyone had already thought of every means, but no one's been able to make Linghu Chong dead drunk. Later, when everyone meets Sacred Lady, you can confess this to her," Linghu Chong said.

They all laughed and said, "Master Linghu wine's capacity is like an ocean. Even if we drink for three days and three nights, we're afraid that we won't be able to keep up."

Walking side by side with Old Man, Linghu Chong asked, "How's your daughter's illness? Is she much better now?"

Old Man replied, "Master, your heart is concerned about a lot of matters. Although she's not better, I'm happy that she also hasn't gotten any worse."

Linghu Chong had been holding a question in his heart since the beginning. Seeing the people behind him were tens of feet away, he asked, "A lot of friends said that Sacred Lady has been benevolent to everybody. I don't understand how she could have been kind to so many people in Jianghu when she is still so very young."

"Master really doesn't know the reason?" Old Man asked.

Linghu Chong shook his head, "I don't know."

"Master isn't an outsider so we don't need to conceal it from you. But everyone has sworn an oath to Sacred Lady not to divulge this secret. Master, please forgive our sin," Old Man said.

Linghu Chong nodded, "Is it because it's inconvenient to say or is it better not to say it?"

Old Man said, "Leave it to Sacred Lady to personally tell master, won't that be much better?"

Linghu Chong said, "The earlier the day I get to see her in person the better."

On the road, they met two more groups of people going to Yellow Keep Plain. When combined, the three groups consisted of more than a hundred people.

They arrived at Yellow Keep Plain really late at night and saw a gathering at the west side of the plain. They were still a li away from the gathering but the sounds of people calling out could already be heard. Linghu Chong quickened his steps towards the crowd. Under the moonlight, he could see a very large crowd surrounding an empty ground. He guessed there were more than one

thousand people gathering around. He heard a person shouting, "Chief, Chief, naturally there's only one person who becomes Chief. With six of you guys, how do you all become Chief?"

Another person answered, "The six of us can be considered as one, and one as six. If you obey our six brothers' orders then we six brothers are Chief. You talk too much; we'll tear you into four pieces first before we talk further."

Linghu Chong didn't need to see who was talking; he already knew that it was one of the Peach Valley Six Fairies. But each of their voices sounded almost the same so he couldn't tell which one it was. Everyone was frightened by what that Peach Valley Fairy said and didn't dare to shout anymore. However, it was apparent that the crowd refused to accept the Peach Valley Six Fairies' words as final. Some people at the outer edge of the crowd were still scolding, while others were laughing loudly unseen, and some were throwing rocks around. It was total chaos.

"Who's throwing rocks at old man?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy loudly shouted.

"Your old man," Someone answered from the darkness.

"What? If you're my brother's old man, then you're my old man too?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy indignantly asked.

Another person said, "That's not necessarily true." Several hundred people erupted in laughter when they heard this.

"Why not necessarily true?" Peachtree Flower Fairy was confused.

"I also don't know why. I only have one son," Another person chimed in.

"You only have one son, what's that got to do with us?" Peachtree Root Fairy questioned.

Another person with a rough voice laughed loudly, "Got nothing to do with you. But probably got something to do with your brothers."

"Has it got to anything do with me then?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy inquired.

One of the earlier person laughed, "Well, you have to look whether your

appearance is similar to them or not."

"Do you think my appearance is somewhat similar? Come out and take a look," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

"What's there to look at? Look at it yourself in the mirror," That person laughed.

Suddenly, four shadows moved extremely fast. They pushed forward and grabbed that person out. That person was tall and big. He probably weighed around 200 catties. The Peach Valley Six Fairies had caught four of his limbs but they didn't tear him apart. The four fairies looked at his face under the moonlight. Then Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "Doesn't look like me. How can I look that ugly? Number three, I'm afraid he looks a bit like you."

"Pei, am I uglier than you? All the realm's heroes are here, let's ask them to compare," Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

The people in the crowd had seen earlier that the Peach Valley Six Fairies weren't pleasant to look at with weird body shapes and ugly faces. If they had to pick which one was the best looking then that wouldn't be an easy task at all. Right now, they were looking at that big man seized in the hands of four of the fairies. At any

moment, he could be torn to four pieces. Everyone was feeling apprehensive and no one dared to laugh.

Linghu Chong was aware of the temperaments of the Peach Valley Six Fairies. If something went slightly wrong, then this big man would be torn to pieces. He called out clearly, "Peach Valley Six Fairies, how about if you let Linghu Chong appraise you?" As he said this, he slowly stepped out from the crowd.

When they heard the name "Linghu Chong", it created a sensation throughout the crowd. More than a thousand pair of eyes were now trained on him. But Linghu Chong didn't look away from the Peach Valley Six Fairies afraid that they might get excited and rip that big man apart. He said, "Put this friend down first then I'll have a look at you." The four fairies immediately put the big man down.

This man's stature was very grand and when he stood up on the ground, he looked like an iron pagoda. He had just escaped from death and was still scared stiff. His face was grey like a corpse and his whole body was trembling. He knew that trembling like that was not appropriate for a hero, but his body was trembling by itself and he couldn't stop it from shaking. He wanted to say a few words to save his face but he only managed to tremble, "I... I... I..."

Linghu Chong saw him scared to death but still looking handsome. He said to the Peach Valley Six Fairies, "Six Peachtree brothers, you don't look like this friend at all. Compared to him, you're even more handsome. Peachtree Root Fairy's bones are wonderful, Peachtree Trunk Fairy's stature is big and tall, Peachtree Branch Fairy's limbs are slender, Peachtree Leaf Fairy's eyebrows are distinct and eyes are elegant, Peachtree Flower Fairy's... his... his eyes are like the stars, and Peachtree Fruit Fairy is full of vigour. Whoever meets any of you, he will promptly recognise your six righteous and heroic faces, young... middle-aged and handsome."

The crowd heard this and burst into laughter, but the Peach Valley Six Fairies were very happy. Old Man had already experienced suffering under the hands of the Peach Valley Six Fairies before, so he knew they were not to be trifled with. He addressed the crowd, "In my opinion, looking around at all the heroes here, you all have many

types of good martial arts. But speaking of facial appearances, no one can compare with the Peach Valley Six Fairies."

After hearing this, the crowd started to call out. Someone hollered, "Not only handsome but also elegant. No one in the world can come close to them."

Another one called out, "When Pan An retreated, Song Yu also retreated."

And another one chimed in, "In Wulin, the number one to number six most handsome men are these six people. Master Linghu is number seven at most."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies grinned from ear to ear thinking that those people were actually praising them. They didn't realise that they were actually being teased. Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "My mum used to say that the six of us are

stinking ugly. So she was wrong." Another person laughed, "Of course she's wrong. There are only six of you, how do you turn into stinking ugly?"²⁶

Another person softly said, "Add into that their dad and mum..." but before he managed to finish this sentence, the people around him quickly covered up his mouth.

Old Man said in a loud voice, "Friends, we have some luck tonight. Master Linghu was just about to single-handedly break through Shaolin temple and get Sacred Lady out. But he met us on the way and heard that everyone is here so he came to talk with us. He said their appearances are handsome, naturally we'll regard Peach Valley Six Fairies..." When the crowd heard this, they burst into laughter again.

Old Man waved his hand telling them to stop but among the laughter, someone said, "Breaking through Shaolin temple to save Sacred Lady is a big matter. What does it have to do with facial appearances? In my opinion, we should just offer Master Linghu the Chief position and ask him to preside over all matters and give out orders. Everyone will then respectfully comply with his orders. What does everyone think of this?"

Everyone in the crowd knew that Sacred Lady was trapped in Shaolin because of Linghu Chong. They also knew that Linghu Chong's martial art was outstanding. That day in Henan, he fought together with Xiang Wentian against heroes from all paths. That incident created a sensation in Jianghu. But even if he was weak, they would still give him the position of chief in respect to Sacred Lady. When they heard what Old Man and the other person said, they were all happy and started to cheer and applaud. Peachtree Flower Fairy suddenly said awkwardly, "After we rescued young lady Ren out of the temple, will she become Linghu Chong's wife?"

All of the people here revered young lady Ren but they also thought what Peachtree Flower Fairy said wasn't wrong. But they would never have dared to publicly say this. Linghu Chong was completely embarrassed and stayed silent. Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "He wants a wife and also wants to become Chief. That's too nice of him. We'll help him rescue his wife, but it's better if the

position of Chief is occupied by us, six brothers." Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Yeah! Only if his skill is better than us then we don't have to discuss this matter anymore."

Suddenly, Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, and Peachtree Fruit Fairies moved together. They grabbed Linghu Chong's four limbs and lifted him up in the air. They moved really fast and there was no hint that they were going to do this so it was too late for Linghu Chong to avoid it.

The crowd was frightened to see this and they called out together, "Don't do that! Let go of him!"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy laughed, "Don't worry everyone. We're not going to hurt him. We're just going to make him promise to make us Chief..."

He had not finished speaking when Peachtree Root, Peachtree Trunk, Peachtree Branch, and Peachtree Fruit Fairies suddenly shouted strangely and tossed Linghu Chong away. They blurted out, "You... why are you using such a demonical method?"

When Linghu Chong's four limbs were grabbed by these four idiots, he was really afraid that they would really rip him apart so he immediately used his Art of Essence Absorbing. The four Peachtree Fairies felt their internal energy flowing out of their palms. When they tried to use their inner energy to resist the flow, it actually poured out even faster. So they were frightened and quickly let go of him. Linghu Chong somersaulted and landed steadily on his feet.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy hastily asked, "What?"

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered together, "This... this Linghu Chong's martial art is really weird. We can't hold on to him."

"It's not that we can't hold on to him. Just that suddenly, we don't want to hold on to him anymore," Peachtree Trunk Fairy corrected.

The people in the crowd cheered loudly and said, "Peach Valley Six Fairies, do you submit now?"

"Linghu Chong is our six brothers' good friend. Linghu Chong is the same as

Peach Valley Six Fairies. Peach Valley Six Fairies is the same as Linghu Chong. If Linghu Chong becomes Chief then it'll be just like the Peach Valley Six Fairies becoming Chief. So what's there not to submit to?" Peachtree Root Fairy said.

"In the whole world, how can you not submit to yourself? Your question is too stupid," Peachtree Fruit Fairy added.

When the crowd looked at the expressions of the Peach Valley Six Fairies, they guessed that the Peach Valley Six Fairies had suffered a loss when they grabbed Linghu Chong but they were now just saving face and didn't want to acknowledge it. Although the crowd didn't really understand the reason, they started cheering and laughing anyway.

Linghu Chong said, "Friends, this time we're going to meet the Sacred Lady and also rescue our many friends who have been trapped in Shaolin temple. Shaolin temple is Wulin's most respected place and their 72 unique skills have long been famous for several hundred years. Any sect alone would not be able to contend against them, but we'll just overwhelm them with number since we have over a thousand heroes here

and more good men to come. Although our martial art is inferior compared to Shaolin's monks and their secular disciples, we'll surely win by fighting them ten to one."

Everyone cheered, "Right, right! Is it really true that Shaolin's monks have three heads and six arms?"

Linghu Chong continued, "However, even though Shaolin's Great Masters have imprisoned Sacred Lady, they haven't treated her badly. The temple's Great Masters are learned and righteous eminent monks. They are also merciful and people respect them for their virtues. So even if we destroy Shaolin temple, I'm afraid Jianghu's heroes will say that we've won only by relying on our sheer number, which is not the

behaviour of heroes. That's why in my opinion, we should talk respectfully with them first before fighting then we can say that we've yielded a step to Shaolin temple. This way, we would put Sacred Lady and our other friends out

of danger. We would also avoid a big battle which is a good thing."

"Master Linghu's words suit well with me. If we're really going to fight, then both sides will suffer many deaths and injuries," Zu Qianqiu said.

"But Master Linghu's words don't suit me. If both parties don't fight then there won't be many deaths and injuries on both sides. Where's the fun then?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

"We already agreed that Master Linghu is Chief. So everyone must listen to his order," Zu Qianqiu said.

"Correct, you should let us six brothers give orders out," Peachtree Root Fairy said.

The crowd heard those six brothers creating a scene and obstructing the real issues being discussed. They were mad and a lot of people grasped the handles of their swords and sabres already waiting for Linghu Chong's order. Once the order was given, they would immediately chop these six brothers into pieces. Although the six brothers' martial arts were higher, they would never be able to continuously block the attacks from dozens of people.

Zu Qianqiu said, "What does a Chief do? Naturally they give orders out. If he doesn't give orders out then how can he still be called Chief? Of course this character "zhu" means that he has to give out orders."²⁷

"Since that's the case, just call him "meng" only without the "zhu"," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy shook his head, "Calling him "meng" only is very difficult."

"In my esteemed opinion, since calling him "meng" only is difficult, why don't we tear apart this character and we can call him "ming xue"!" Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"Wrong, wrong! When you tear open the character "meng", the character at the bottom, less a "pie", isn't the character "xue". So what character is that?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies didn't know the character "min" was from the word "qi min" (Household utensils). Everyone in the crowd didn't want to follow their shameful behaviour so they didn't say anything.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "It may less a 'bit', it's still 'xue'. It's best if I cut you to show you, if I cut you deeply then a lot of blood will come out. So it's still blood. If I take into consideration the feelings between us and cut you lightly then not much blood will come out. Although it's less, it's still blood."²⁸

Peachtree Branch Fairy indignantly said, "If you're giving me a cut then of course it's going to be light. There's no need to take into consideration the feelings between us. Why do you want to give me a cut?"

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "My "ke" doesn't have cut. My hand also doesn't have a sabre."²⁹

Peachtree Flower Fairy asked, "Then what happened if your hand has a sabre?"

The crowd heard them talking even more nonsense as they talked more and they couldn't take it anymore, "Be quiet! Everyone's trying to listen to Chief's order."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "He already finished giving his order, why must we be quiet?"

Linghu Chong raised his voice, "Friends, the fifteenth of the twelfth is still seventeen days away. Everyone, let's move there slowly. By the time we got to Songshan, it'd be around that date already. This time, we're not going in secret so we'll be going with big banners and beating on drums. Tomorrow, we'll buy cloths to make big banners and write "World's Heroes Going to Shaolin Temple to Meet Sacred Lady". We'll also buy some leather drums to beat on when we're moving. When the Shaolin's monks and secular disciples hear this, they'll feel discouraged before fighting."

Most of these unorthodox people were actually good people. So when they heard of his plan, they were extremely happy and started to cheer loudly shaking

the whole valley. Among them there were also a number of experienced and steady older people who didn't express their opinion. But when they heard the crowd feeling pleased, they just smiled. At dawn, Linghu Chong asked Zu Qianqiu, Ji Wushi, and Old Man to make the banners and buy some leather drums. At noon, they finished writing those words on the banner and had bought a few leather drums.

Linghu Chong said, "We'll start our journey now. Along the road, we'll be passing a lot of towns so we'll just keep buying more stocks there."

The crowd were beating on the drums and roaring battle cries as they moved north in squadrons. Linghu Chong had seen how Heng-Shan School's disciples were ambushed at the Xianxia mountain range. After some discussion, he dispatched seven sects. Two sects were sent to the front to act as sentries, two sects were protecting the left, two sects were protecting the right, and the other one stayed behind to help wherever needed while the rest of the people moved with the main group. He also dispatched Hanshui River's Divine Crow Clan to act as messengers. Divine Crow Clan was a local clan and their circle of influence extended from Hubei at the north down to Henan at the south. If there were the slightest sign of trouble, they would know of it as soon as possible. As he assigned orders, besides the Peach Valley Six Fairies, everyone obeyed his orders completely.

In the few days that they were travelling, heroes continuously joined their group. They also had more banners and more drums as they went. Along with the sounds of drums, it was very noisy with two thousands people shouting along as they went towards Shaolin.

When they arrived at the foot of Mount Wudang, Linghu Chong said, "Wudang School is Wulin's second biggest school. The name of their school flourishes and they're second only to Shaolin. Even though we're going to rescue Sacred Lady from Shaolin School, we don't want to offend Shaolin. Naturally, we don't want to offend Wudang School either. So we'll avoid the main road to go across this area to show the leader of Wudang School some respect and to show them that we're not attacking their school. What does

everyone think of this?"

"Whatever Master Linghu says, we'll do it. We'll be satisfied so long as we are able to rescue the Sacred Lady. So there's no need to do other irrelevant things or make powerful enemies with anyone else. What's the use of levelling the Wudang School but not being able to rescue Sacred Lady?" Old Man said.

Linghu Chong said, "That's very good then! Please pass the order to stop the drums and lower the banners. We're turning to the east." In a short moment, everyone started to go east.

As they were travelling that day, they saw a person riding a donkey coming towards them. Following behind him were two farmers each carrying a basket on a pole on his shoulder. One was carrying vegetables and the other one was carrying some firewood. The old person riding the donkey had a bent back and was coughing incessantly. The clothes he was wearing was full of patches. When the crowd saw this trio coming towards them without making way, a lot of them put their hands on the handles of their weapons. Along the road, they had been making a lot of noise and whenever any pedestrian saw them, they immediately went to one side of the road letting them pass. But these three people turned a blind eye to them and just kept on coming towards the group.

Peachtree Root Fairy scolded, "What are you doing?" as he pushed the donkey with his hand. The donkey neighed once before dropping down as its leg was broken. The old person riding the donkey was thrown to the ground and stayed down huffing and puffing. Linghu Chong felt sorry as he stooped down to help the old man get up. "I'm really sorry. Elder, are you hurt?"

That old man was still huffing and puffing, "What... what... what's going on? I'm a poor man..." The two farmers put their loads down and stood in the middle of the road. They put both their hands on their waist and were looking angry.

The person carrying the vegetable pantingly said, "This is the foot of Mount Wudang. Who are you people to daringly hit people around here?"

"The foot of Mount Wudang, what kind of place is that?" Peachtree Root Fairy

asked.

That man said, "Everyone at the foot of Mount Wudang knows martial art. You're strangers here. Why do you act recklessly here in the fields at the foot of Mount Wudang and ask for trouble?"

The people in the group saw that these people had yellow faces and were very thin. They were around fifty years old. When that person carrying the vegetable spoke, his breath wasn't strong but he claimed to be capable in martial art so the people in group were laughing loudly at them.

"You also know martial art?" Peachtree Flower Fairy teased.

That man replied, "At the foot of mount Wudang, even a three year old can do shadowboxing, a five year old can already use a sword. What's so rare about that?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy pointed to the person carrying firewood and laughed, "How about him? He also knows martial art?"

The person carrying firewood replied, "I... I... when I was small, I learned martial art for a few months. But I haven't practised it for several years now. This martial art... sigh, they've become rusted now."

"Wudang School's martial art is number one in the world. It only needs to be studied for a few months and you won't be our match," the vegetable-person said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy laughed, "Why don't you do a few movements to give us a look?"

"Show what? You won't be able to understand it anyway," the firewood-person said.

The crowd erupted in laughter and they all said, "We may not understand but we can still look."

The firewood-person said, "Ai, in that case, I'll show you a few moves then. Don't know if I still remember all of them... Lend me a sword." A person came out from the crowd and handed him a sword. The firewood man then went out

to the middle of the hardened rice field and started to thrust to the east and slash to the west. After about three or four moves, he suddenly forgot what the next move was. He scratched his head thinking for a little bit then showed a few more moves. Everyone saw that his sword movements were not methodical and his body and hand movements were extremely clumsy. They all clutched their stomachs laughing loudly at him.

"What's so funny? Let me show you a few moves. Give me a sword," The vegetable-person said. He then started to thrust and slash the sword very rapidly in a disorderly fashion as if he was insane. This made the crowd laughed even harder. In the beginning, Linghu Chong also laughed but after seeing more than ten moves, he was astounded. These two people's sword art, one being sluggish and the other one being very fast, actually had very little flaws. Their moves looked very ugly but the sword moves actually had many variations. It seemed that they had only displayed a fraction of the sword move's power and didn't reveal the remaining potential power of the sword moves.

Linghu Chong immediately stepped forward and bowed towards them. He said heartily, "Today, I paid my respect to two seniors and observed your high sword arts. I feel really honoured." The two men put their swords away.

The firewood-person stared at him, "Little kid, you understood our sword art?"

"I don't dare to say that I understand. Both of you have profound sword arts, how would I dare to say that I understand them? Wudang School's sword art is very famous throughout the world. It really makes one praises to the heavens," Linghu Chong replied.

The vegetable-person asked, "Little kid, what's your name?"

Linghu Chong had not answered yet when a few people from the crowd called out, "What little kid?" "He's our Chief, Master Linghu." "Country bumpkins, speak more politely!"

The firewood-person said, "Linghu Melon? Not A Mao or A Gou, but some kind of melon seed. Your name's really ugly."

Linghu Chong cupped his fist, "Today, Linghu Chong is able to see Wudang's divine sword art. It's really admirable. I will go up the mountain to meet Priest Chongxu another day. I sincerely admire him. Can two seniors please reveal your honourable surnames and given names?"

The firewood-person spat on the ground and said, "You have so many people making so much noise here. Beating gongs and drums non-stop. Is this a funeral procession?"

Linghu Chong knew that these two people must be masters from the Wudang School. So he respectfully bowed to them, "We have a friend who is being detained inside the Shaolin temple. We're going there to beg Abbot Fangzheng's mercy to release this person."

The vegetable-person said, "So it's not a funeral procession! But you've hurt my uncle's donkey, are you going to pay?"

Linghu Chong led three steeds over and said, "These three horses aren't as good as senior's donkey. But I'm forced to ask seniors to accept them. We juniors didn't know that it was senior who was riding. Please forgive us." After he finished saying this, he led the three horses over to them.

The crowd saw Linghu Chong's attitude becoming more and more modest and respectful. They saw that he was doing this on purpose and were very surprised to see this.

"You already know our sword art now. Do you want to compare some moves?" The vegetable-person asked.

"Junior is not the match of two seniors," Linghu Chong said.

The firewood-person said, "You don't want to fight. But I want to fight." At the same time he said this, he thrust his sword crookedly towards Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong saw this sword move was wonderful as it covered nine fatal points on his upper body. "Good sword art!" Linghu Chong called out and at the same time, pulled his long sword out and also thrust his sword. That firewood-

person looked as if he just randomly thrust his sword at an empty space and Linghu Chong countered by sweeping his sword in a circle at the same empty space. The two people had used

around seven to eight moves. Each of their thrust was always aimed at an empty space and their swords had not clashed yet, but the firewood-person kept retreating step by step.

The vegetable-person called out, "Melon seed, so you have a bit of skill after all," as he raised his sword and disorderly started to thrust and slash. In a short moment, he had slashed out around twenty times. Not only was each of his slash towards Linghu Chong didn't hit him but the tip of his sword was actually still around seven to eight feet away from Linghu Chong's body. Raising his sword, Linghu Chong sometimes

performed a move towards that firewood-person and sometimes he thrust at an empty space towards that vegetable-person. The tip of his sword was also around seven to eight feet away from their bodies. But when these two people saw Linghu Chong's move, their expressions revealed their urgency either to jump to avoid his slash or to brandish their swords to block.

The crowd of heroes watching this were all stupefied. The tip of Linghu Chong's sword was still far away from the two people and there wasn't the slightest bit of wind when he thrust his sword and they were certain that he wasn't using any kind of invisible sword energy to attack. But why are these two people looking frightened as if they were too late in avoiding or blocking the sword?

As they observed more closely, the crowd came to understand that these two people must be two martial arts masters. At this time, when these two people were using their moves to attack, one was still attacking sluggishly and one was still attacking like a mad man. But at the same time, they still managed to concentrate fully on defending themselves. When they were avoiding or blocking Linghu Chong's attack, their movements were light and steady. Now there was no more laughter from the crowd.

Suddenly Linghu Chong heard those two people whistled and changed their sword art completely. The firewood-person slashed his long sword in a large circular path. While the vegetable-person used very fast movements going back and forth creating a starlike reflection with his sword.

Linghu Chong pointed his sword at a slight upward angle and unexpectedly he stopped completely. His two eyes were now sometimes staring at the firewood-person and sometimes casting a sidelong glance at that vegetable-person. As his eyes looked at a certain place, those two people did one of these three things -- they quickly changed their sword moves or cried out then retreated or turned their attacks into defence.

Ji Wushi, Old Man, and Zu Qianqiu had good martial arts. They gradually realised that when these two people moved to defend themselves, it was because of Linghu Chong's stare. He was always staring at their fatal acupoints.

They saw the firewood-person lifted his sword to slash it down and Linghu Chong gazed at his lower abdomen's Shanggu acupoint. He had not finished his slash when he quickly withdrew it to block his Shanggu acupoint. At this time, the vegetable-person thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong responded by looking at the Tianting acupoint which was at the left side of his neck. That person

hastily lowered his head which caused his sword to penetrate deep into the hardened rice field. It was as if Linghu Chong's two eyes were shooting projectiles and he wouldn't permit Linghu Chong's two eyes to take a look at his neck's Tianting acupoint.

Those two people were still utilising their sword moves and the sweat on their bodies was seeping through their clothes. In a short while, their trousers had also become wet with their sweat. That old man riding the donkey had so far just stayed on the side and not said a thing. He suddenly coughed and said, "Admirable, admirable. The two of you step back."

The two men replied together, "Yes!" But Linghu Chong's eyes were still circling around, never leaving their fatal acupoints. The two people waved their

swords and retreated at the same time. From the beginning to the end, they didn't manage to break away from Linghu Chong's gaze.

That old person said, "Good sword art! Master Linghu, allow this old man to ask for your advice."

Linghu Chong replied, "You flatter me!" as he turned around and cupped his fist greeting the old man. Only now the two people were finally freed from the restraint of Linghu Chong's eyes. At the same time, they jumped backwards feeling just like two freed birds as they flew for tens of feet away.

The crowd cheered them. Even though the crowd didn't understand their sword arts at all, they could see the duo's high martial arts from the way they jumped, the distance they covered, and the beauty of their movements.

The old man said, "Master Linghu was very forgiving with his sword moves. If he were really fighting, you two would have a thousand holes and a hundred injuries on your bodies. And do you think he would have allowed you to finish your sword moves? Come here quickly to thank him."

The two men quickly flew over and bowed deeply. The vegetable-person said, "Today I found out that there's a heaven outside this heaven and there's another person above me. Master's high martial art is very rare in this world. Please forgive me for my rudeness before."

Linghu Chong returned his propriety, "Wudang's sword art is divine. Your two sword arts, one is Yin and one is Yang. Can they be the Taiji Sword?"

The vegetable-person said, "Master is laughing at us. The sword art we're using is the "Double Ritual Sword Art". It is divided into Yin and Yang but we haven't managed to combine them yet."

"Before when I was watching on the side, I was having difficulties distinguishing the sword art's subtlety. If we were actually fighting for real, I would certainly not be able to take advantage of the sword art's weakness," Linghu Chong said.

The old man said, "Why must master be so modest? The spots that master was

looking at are definitely the Double Ritual Sword Art's weak points. Ai, this type of sword art... this type of sword art..." He continuously shook his head, "More than fifty years ago, Wudang School had two priests. It was on this road that the Double Ritual Sword Art was developed through their tens of years of hard work. I was aware that the sword art consists of one Yin and one Yang, soft and hard, Ai!"

He let out a long sigh, "I'm also aware that this sword art would not stand against a master swordsman."

Linghu Chong respectfully said, "These two uncles' sword arts are already so wonderful. If it were Wudang School's Priest Chongxu or the other masters, then it would be impossible for me to distinguish the secret of the sword art by myself. Junior and friends here have gone past the bottom of Wudang Mountain, but we currently have a matter we must do. So we have to be impolite and not go up the mountain to pay our respects to Priest Chongxu. Once we've finished with this matter, I would go up to the Wudang Monastery and kowtow to the gods and Priest Chongxu."

At first, Linghu Chong was feeling haughty towards them. But after seeing the hard and soft aspects of their sword arts together and the many miraculous variations of it, he actually felt some admiration in his heart. Thus, although he had discovered the flaws in the sword moves, in his heart, he actually really admired them. After all, in

this world, which sword move didn't have any flaws?

He was guessing that this old man must be Wudang School's first-class master. That was why he said these few sentences so sincerely. That old man nodded his head, "You're still young but you're not arrogant at all. This is also very rare. Master Linghu, were you taught by Huashan School's senior Feng Qingyang?"

Linghu Chong was startled and thought, "Wow, his eyesight is so good. I didn't expect that he would find out about my sword art's background. Even though I can't disclose grand martial uncle Feng's whereabouts, because he already inquired frankly, I couldn't lie to him." He said, "Junior was lucky. I

once had the opportunity to learn some of grand martial uncle Feng's sword art at a superficial level." These words had two meanings and it didn't reveal that Feng Qingyang had once taught him personally.

That old man smiled slightly, "Superficial knowledge, superficial knowledge! Hey, hey, superficial knowledge of senior Feng's sword art, is it that easy to acquire?" He took the sword from the firewood-person's hand and grasped it in his left hand. "Let me receive some lessons from this superficial knowledge of senior Feng's sword art."

Linghu Chong said, "How can Junior dare to fight senior?"

That old man just smiled slightly while he slowly turned to the right and raised his left hand upwards till his sword was in front of his chest. The point of his sword started to move circularly as if it was surrounding a ball about the size of two palms. Linghu Chong watched his sword attentively as he understood that this move contained infinite variations. That old man slowly moved forward with his sword still circling. Linghu Chong felt a dense cold air pressing up to him and if he didn't return his move now then he wouldn't be able to do it later. He said, "Sorry for offending senior." He wasn't able to see the weakness in the sword movement so he just made a false thrust with his sword.

Suddenly, that old man threw his sword into his right hand. With a flash of light, the sword slashed towards Linghu Chong's neck. This slash was an extremely fast killing movement. The spectators couldn't help but gasp in worry.

But as the old man exerted himself in this strike, Linghu Chong saw a weak point at the lower part of his body. He thrust his sword towards the old man's Yuanye acupoint at the lower part of his body. The old man moved his sword to block the thrust and the two swords clashed. Both people retreated a step. Linghu Chong felt that the old man's

sword was laced with internal energy which made his right hand shook. Linghu Chong could also feel needles and pins on his arm because of the impact. That old man was also surprised and an expression of amazement could be seen on his face.

The old man switched his sword to his left hand again and drew two circles in front of his body. Linghu Chong saw that his sword moved continuously and protected his whole body. It was unexpectedly without any flaws. Linghu Chong was secretly amazed, "I have never seen a sword art without any weakness before. If he attacks like this, how do I break it? Perhaps Senior Ren Woxing's sword art is more powerful compared to this old mister, but every move of his still has a weakness. How can it be that this old man's sword art has no weakness at all?" He started to feel afraid and beads of sweat started to form on his forehead.

That old man formed his right fingers into a sword form and his left hand was continuously moving. Suddenly he thrust out, the tip of the sword vibrating; no one could see where the sword was aiming at.

This thrust enveloped seven major acupoints on Linghu Chong's upper body. But because of this, Linghu Chong was also able to see three weaknesses on his opponent's upper body. He did not need to attack all these weak points, one would be sufficient to take the old man's life. He thought, "When he's defending, he has no weakness at all. But when he starts to attack, there's still a weakness that can be

attacked." as he casually pierced his long sword towards the old man's left eyebrow.

If that old man continued with his thrust then his left forehead would be pierced first. Even though his thrust was earlier than Linghu Chong's, it was still a step too late.

That old man quickly turned his sword around. Suddenly, Linghu Chong saw a few circles of white light. Big circle, small circle, upright circle, slanting circle, they were all flickering incessantly. As he saw these flowery patterns in his eyes, he quickly turned his sword and slantingly attacked the sword circles. "Tang" as both swords

clashed with each other. Linghu Chong felt his arm tingling from the impact.

That old man continued to move his swords creating more and more

flickering circles as they moved. Not long after, his whole body was surrounded in the middle of these rings of light. One circle of light had not yet disappeared when another circle of light was formed. Even though his long sword was extremely fast, there was no sound of the sword's edge splitting the air at all. It indicated that he had reached the stage of perfection where the sword was soft but yet still strong.

At this time, Linghu Chong couldn't see any weakness in his sword art and felt as if there were thousands of swords protecting this old man's whole body. The old man was purely defending at the moment so there was no weakness in his sword art. But this sword front was actually like a moving fort and the thousands of light circles

resembled a tide as it slowly rushed forward. That old man wasn't attacking using one move at a time anymore. He was now using tens of moves to protect himself while at the same time used this to attack. Linghu Chong was unable to resist this as he retreated to avoid it.

He retreated a step and the circles of light moved forward a step. In a short time, Linghu Chong had retreated seven to eight steps. The crowd saw that their Chief was now in an unfavourable situation and was about to lose. They were holding their breath watching and cold sweat started to wet their hands. Peachtree Root Fairy suddenly said, "What sword art is that? It's like a child drawing some circles. I can draw too."

"Come, I'll draw some circles. My circle would definitely be more round than his," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

"Brother Linghu, don't be afraid. If you lose, we'll tear this old fellow into four pieces to vent your anger," Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

"What you said was wrong. One, he's Chief Linghu not brother Linghu. Two, how do you know that he's afraid?" Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

"Even though Linghu Chong has become Chief, he's still younger than me. So once he's chief, does he then also become big brother Linghu, uncle Linghu, grandpa Linghu, great grandpa Linghu?" Peachtree Branch Fairy said.

At this time, Linghu Chong retreated again and the crowd was feeling very anxious. When they heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies talking nonsense, they now got angry.

Linghu Chong retreated another step and his left foot stepped into a puddle of water. A thought flashed in his mind, "That day grand martial uncle Feng repeatedly told me to keep in my heart that the world's martial art is ever changing and there are also unusual ones. But no matter how wonderful the opponent's moves are, they are still

moves. So there must be a weakness. When hero Dugu passed on his sword art, he had no match in this world because he was able to see his enemy's weakness. Right now, this senior's sword art is circling around and has no weakness at all. But it must be because I had not been able to see the weakness yet."

He retreated a few more steps as he gazed at his opponent's countless circles of light. Suddenly, a thought leapt into his head, "Maybe the centre of the circle is the weakness. But if it's not a weakness and I thrust in there, he can twist his sword and cut my arm off."

He also thought, "Luckily, his way of attack can only go forward slowly. If he really wants to kill me, it won't be that easy. But if I keep retreating, that's just the same as losing. If I lose this battle, everyone would be discouraged. Then how would we be able to break through Shaolin and save Yingying?"

At the thought of Yingying's kindness towards him, if he loses an arm because of her, what's the harm in that? From the depth of his heart, he was really pleased to actually sacrifice an arm for her. He also felt that he owed her a lot and only by suffering a heavy injury would he be able to repay for her kindness. At this thought, he whole-heartedly hoped that his opponent would really cut his arm as he extended his arm to thrust his long sword into the centre of the circle. A "tang" sound resounded as Linghu Chong felt his chest shook and felt blood bubbling forth but his arm was still intact. That old man retreated a couple of steps and put away his sword. The expression on his face was odd. There were also expressions of surprise and shame together with some expression of

sympathy towards him. After some time, he said, "Master Linghu's sword art is brilliant and your courage and wisdom are excellent. Admirable, admirable!"

At this time Linghu Chong just realised, when he took that risk to thrust his sword, he had actually succeeded in finding his opponent's sword art's weak point. It was just that this old man's sword art was really high. The centre of the circle was actually the most dangerous place and he had unexpectedly practised this sword art so that it

would also be the weak point. The thousands of swordsmen in the world, it would be very rare for one to be brave enough to go through this danger and thrust his sword in there. He was pleased with himself and thought, "Lucky, lucky!" as he felt sweat running down his back. He quickly bowed, "Senior's sword art is divine. I'm really

indebted to your advice. The benefit to Junior isn't shallow." His words were not just common talk. This fight had actually benefited his martial art greatly as it made him learn that the enemy's strongest point could unexpectedly be their weakest point. If he

could break the move at the strongest place then he would be able to break the rest of the weaknesses easily.

When masters competed in swords, one move could decide the outcome. That old man saw Linghu Chong dared to thrust into the middle of his circle of lights so they didn't need to compete anymore. He gazed at Linghu Chong for a while before saying, "Master Linghu, old man has a few words I want to say to you."

Linghu Chong replied, "Yes, I'll listen to senior's advice." That old man gave his long sword to the vegetable-person and walked away to the east. Linghu Chong threw his long sword on the ground and followed behind him.

He stopped besides a big tree. They were tens of feet away from the crowd, even though they were still able to see the crowd, their voices would not carry that far. The old man sat down under the tree's shade and pointed to a big rock, "Please sit down." He waited for Linghu Chong to settle himself before continuing, "Master Linghu, among the younger generations, it's very rare to

find someone with your kind of talent." Linghu Chong said, "I don't dare. Junior's conduct is improper and my reputation is already ruined. My own master can't even tolerate me. How can I deserve to receive senior's praise?"

That old man said, "The martial people of my generation, our conduct must be open and aboveboard and have no qualms in our heart. Although your action is sometimes bold and wild, and also not according to the custom, it is still gentlemanly. I secretly sent some people to find out what misdeeds you've truly done. It's not sufficient to just rely on the rumours and slanders going around in Jianghu."

When Linghu Chong heard him said this, it struck a chord in his heart. He felt gratitude towards this old man. He thought, "This senior must have a high position in Wudang School. Otherwise, how would he be able to send people to investigate about my conduct?"

The old man went on, "It's common that youngsters like to show off. Mr. Yue's outward appearance is calm, but he's easily offended..."

Linghu Chong quickly stood up and said, "Respected master is like a father to me. Junior doesn't dare to hear about Master."

That old man smiled slightly, "You didn't forget your roots, that's very good. Old man just made an indiscreet remark." Suddenly, his face turned serious and asked, "How long have you been learning the Art of Essence Absorbing?"

Linghu Chong replied, "Half a year ago, Junior accidentally learned this skill. At that time, I didn't know that this was the Art of Essence Absorbing."

That old man nodded, "That's how it is! Just then we clashed sword three times and with each clash, you absorbed my internal energy. But I was aware that you're still not good at using this disastrous demonic skill. Old man has an advise to give you but I don't know whether young hero would listen to it or not?"

Linghu Chong was greatly terrified and quickly bowed, "Junior will certainly obey senior's precious words."

The old man replied, "Although this Art of Essence Absorbing has great power, it is also harmful towards the user's body. As your skill in it gets deeper, it will harm you even more. If young hero could abandon this demonic skill altogether then that will be the best. Otherwise, you can just stop practising it from now on."

That day in Plum Manor, he had heard Ren Woxing telling him that there would be great danger after practising the Art of Essence Absorbing for sometime. He wanted him to join the Devil Sect before divulging to him the method to meld the internal energies together. When he heard what this old man said, he believed even more what Ren Woxing said was true. "Junior will never forget senior's teaching. Junior

already knows that this method isn't right and already decided not to use this method to harm other people. It's just that my body already learned this method, so even if I didn't want to use it, it's not that easy."

The old man nodded, "That's what I've heard too. I have another matter to raise to young hero. Perhaps this will be difficult for young hero to do. But as a hero, you must do what ordinary people won't do. In Shaolin temple, they have a skill called "Tendon Altering Sutra". Young hero must've heard of this skill before."

Linghu Chong said, "I have. I heard that this is Wulin's most supreme internal energy method. And only the most eminent monks in Shaolin are allowed to learn this skill."

That old man said, "Young hero is leading so many people to go to Shaolin, I'm afraid nothing good will come out of this. No matter which side is victorious, both sides would lose numerous masters and would bring bad luck to Wulin. Old man has no talent, but I'm willing to go to Shaolin to ask for Abbot's mercy to give the "Tendon

Altering Sutra" to young hero. Then young hero can disband this large group of people to stop this disaster from happening. What does young hero think of this?"

"How about young lady Ren who is being detained in Shaolin temple?"
Linghu Chong asked.

That old man said, "Young lady Ren has killed four disciples of Shaolin School and has also stirred up trouble in Jianghu and caused harm in the world. Great Master Fangzheng put her into seclusion not to take revenge for his own school. It is actually because of his kind heartedness to benefit the Jianghu people. How can young hero

with good conduct mix up with this nameless lady? Why should you associate with this Devil Sect's witch and ruin your reputation and future?"

"I've received her kindness so I must repay her. Junior appreciates senior's good idea but I don't dare to follow it," Linghu Chong said.

That old man let out a long sigh and shook his head, "When young people are drowned in beauty and has been snared by it, it's hard to free themselves from it."

Linghu Chong bowed, "Junior will take my leave now."

That old man said, "Wait. Although old man and Huashan School doesn't have many dealings, Mr. Yue would surely give me some face. If you follow my advice, old man and Shaolin temple's abbot will together guarantee that you will be accepted back into Huashan School. Do you trust me?"

Linghu Chong was moved by this as returning to Huashan was his biggest wish. From the level of this old man's martial art and from what he just said, the old man must certainly be a famous Wudang School's senior. He said that Abbot Fangzheng and he would guarantee this matter believing that they would certainly succeed. Master had always taken into consideration relationship between everyone from the orthodox sects. Shaolin and Wudang were the two biggest schools in Wulin at the present time. When the leaders of these two schools speak out, it would be very difficult for Master not to do them the favour for the sake of their relationship.

Master was like a father to himself. This matter of him being expelled from Huashan was because he had made friends with Xiang Wentian and Yingying

and made Master lose face in front of all the orthodox schools. But if the leaders of Shaolin and Wudang acted on behalf of him, Master would definitely accept him back. When he returned to Huashan, he would be able to see little martial sister from dawn to dusk. However, how could he just leave Yingying to suffer in a Shaolin's cave at the back of the mountain? At this thought, he felt heat coming up his chest, "If junior can't rescue young lady Ren out of Shaolin temple then I'll be a useless person. No matter if we win or lose in this matter, if I'm still alive after that, I will definitely go up Mount Wudang to thank Priest Chongxu and senior."

That old man let out a long sigh, "You don't regard your life highly nor your master highly nor your future reputation. You acted wilfully just for this Devil Sect's witch. In the future, if she become heartless towards you and harm you, you won't regret it?"

"My life was saved by young lady Ren. What's there to regret if I lose my life because of her?" Linghu Chong said.

That old man nodded, "Alright, you can go."

Linghu Chong bowed to take his leave again. He then turned around towards the crowd and shouted, "Let's go!"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy asked, "That old fellow competed in swordplay with you but how come there's no winner or loser? There's no need to compete then."

Even though Linghu Chong and the old man duelled, the winner and loser had not been decided. It was because the old man merely decided that he wasn't Linghu Chong's match and thus immediately gave up. But everyone else in the crowd didn't know that Linghu Chong had attacked the old man's sword art's flaw so they didn't know what happened.

"This senior's sword art is very high. If we keep on fighting, it won't be easy for me so it's better if we just don't fight," Linghu Chong said.

"You're so stupid. Since there's no winner or loser, you should've kept fighting and you'd definitely win," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Not necessarily."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "What not necessarily? That old fellow is already much older than you so of course he's not as strong as you. After a long time, you'll naturally get the upper hand."

Linghu Chong had not replied yet when Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Why is it when you're older, you're not as strong anymore?"

Linghu Chong understood what Peachtree Root Fairy meant. Between those Peach Valley Six Fairies, Peachtree Root Fairy was the oldest while Peachtree Fruit Fairy was the youngest. When Peachtree Fruit Fairy said when you're older then you wouldn't be as strong anymore, of course Peachtree Root Fairy didn't agree.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "If the younger you are, the stronger you get, then a three year old child would be the strongest then?"

"That's not true. A three year old child can't be the strongest. A two year old child would be stronger than a three year old," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

"You're also wrong. A one year old child would be stronger than a two year old," Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"A foetus that hasn't come out from his mother's womb would be the strongest then," Peachtree Leaf Fairy said.

They kept on going north and had finally entered the boundary of Henan. Unexpectedly, they met with two more groups of heroes coming from the east and the west. They already had more than two thousand people with them before. But after adding those two extra groups to their main group, they now had more than four thousand people with them. These four thousand people just slept anywhere at night. It didn't matter whether it was on grass, forest or wild hill, they just put their heads down and slept. But foods and drinks were a big problem. After many days, at the restaurants and drink shops on the towns that they were going through, they broke all the pots, tables and chairs because they didn't get enough to drink and eat. They were all angry and destroyed the restaurants.

Linghu Chong saw that these Jianghu's heroes were quite violent but they were also very loyal and frank people. If Shaolin Temple didn't want to release Yingying, then both sides would get into a bloody battle and the outcome would unavoidably be horrible. Everyday, he waited for news from Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. He was hoping that due to the two Shi Tai's reputations, Abbot Fangzheng would agree to release Yingying and avoid the catastrophe from happening. Only three days remained until the fifteenth of the twelfth month and they were now less than a hundred li from the Shaolin Temple but there was still no news from the two Shi Tai. The way they were going to Shaolin temple with banners flying and drums beating, everyone must have heard of their advance. But so far, there was no movement from the other party at all as if nothing was happening. Linghu Chong raised this issue with Zu Qianqiu and Ji Wushi and they also felt worried about this.

That night, the group stayed in an open field. Sentries were put on the outside of the group to prevent possible night raids from the enemy. The wind was blowing coldly and the grey clouds hanged low on the sky. It appeared that a big rain was about to pour down. The open field was filled with cooking fires in tens of li in every direction. Not restrained by any military command, the group of warriors acted more or less as a mob as they gathered together singing and shouting loudly shaking the ground. There were also people with swords and sabres out competing with each other while some were wrestling. Everywhere, it was noisy and filled with shouts.

Linghu Chong thought, "It's best if I don't let these people step on the grounds of Shaolin Temple. Why don't I go first to ask Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng? If I can get Yingying out, wouldn't it be a great celebration for everyone?" At this thought, his whole body felt hot. After he thought more on this, he changed his mind,

"But if I fight the Shaolin's monks just by myself then I'll be captured or even killed. I'm not worried about dying but there'll be no one to preside over these people. Without a leader, there will be chaos in this group of heroes and they wouldn't be able to get Yingying out. More over, many of these several

thousands of courageous and upright friends would probably be killed on Mount Shaoshi. If I acted rashly and ruin this matter, how would I be able to apologise to all these people?"

He stood up and looked around him. Looking at the people besides the piles of fire, he thought, "If they're not doing this for Yingying, they wouldn't have submitted to me at all."

Two days later, they arrived on Mount Shaoshi and were just outside of the Shaolin Temple. During these two days, even more warriors joined their group. The people he had met on that day on Five-Tyrant Ridge's gathering including Huang Boliu, Sima Big, Blue Phoenix as well as White Flood Dragon's Clan leader Shi and the "Yangtze River's Pair of Flying Fish" had all come. There were still many heroes that Linghu

Chong didn't manage to see who had come as well. Conservatively, they had around five to six thousands people now.

Several hundred drums were beating shaking the ground and trembling the sky. The group was beating the drums for a long time but not a single monk came out of the temple. Linghu Chong roared out his command, "Stop the drum!" The beating sounds gradually became lighter until they finally stopped. Linghu Chong took a deep breath and in a clear voice said, "Junior Linghu Chong and many friends from Jianghu have come to pay a visit to Shaolin's Abbot. I ask respectfully to be granted a meeting." Linghu Chong attached abundant of internal energy into his voice and he was heard from many li but there was still no sound from inside the temple. Linghu Chong spoke again and yet there was still no response from the temple. Linghu Chong said, "Brother Zu, please offer our visit card."

"Yes," Zu Qianqiu complied as he carried the prepared visit box which stored the card with Linghu Chong's name and the names of leaders from various sects. He went up to the main gate of the Shaolin Temple and knocked on it a few times. When there was still no sound coming from the temple, he lightly pushed on the gate. The gate wasn't bolted and it opened easily. He looked inside and couldn't see anyone

around. He didn't dare to go into the temple without authorisation so he turned around to report to Linghu Chong. Although Linghu Chong's martial art was high, he still didn't have much experience and had never led a large group of people before. With this unanticipated situation before him, he didn't know what to do. He was momentarily stupefied and speechless.

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "All the monks in the temple have all escaped? Let's go inside! If we see any shiny head, we'll kill him straight away."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "You said all the monks have all escaped. If so, where are you going to find some shiny heads to kill?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Don't nuns also have shiny heads?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "It's a monk's temple, how can there be nuns in there?"

Peachtree Root Fairy quickly pointed his fingers at a person. "This man here isn't a monk, he's also not a nun, but he has a shiny head."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy asked, "Why do you want to kill him?"

Ji Wushi interrupted, "How about we go in and take a look?"

Linghu Chong replied, "That's good. Brother Ji, brother Old, brother Zu, and clan leader Huang, please accompany me into the temple. Everybody please pass this order to restrict your subordinates from acting wildly and tell them they must not be rude to any Shaolin monk. Also they can't burn any grass or trees on this mountain."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Then you can't even pull out any grass?"

Linghu Chong was feeling worried about Yingying so he strode purposefully into the temple. Ji Wushi and the other three people followed behind him.

After entering through the gate, they walked on a stone path and went past the front courtyard and the front hall, and arrived at the Great Hero Precious Hall. In the hall, they saw the majestic likeness of Rulai Buddha. They saw the floor and the table were covered with a thin layer of dust. Zu Qianqiu said, "Could it be that all the monks in the temple have escaped?" Linghu Chong chided, "Brother

Zu, don't say this word 'escape'."

The five people stood quietly and tried to listen for any sounds. But apart from the clamoring noise from the group outside the temple, there was no sound at all coming from the temple.

"The Shaolin monks must be hiding around the place to ambush us," Ji Wushi whispered.

Linghu Chong thought, "Abbot Fangzheng and Great Master Fangsheng are all eminent monks. Why would they use deceit? But knowing that a lot of unorthodox sects came together to attack, the Shaolin monks may have wanted a battle of wits instead of strength. That's not unusual." He saw that Shaolin Temple was a huge place but saw no sign of anyone. A sense of dread started to wash over him as he worried about what they might have done to Yingying.

The five of them looked around and listened to all directions as they walked further in. After passing two large courtyards, they arrived at the back hall. Suddenly, Linghu Chong and Ji Wushi stopped at the same time and made some hand signals. Old Man and the other two people immediately stopped. Linghu Chong pointed to a side room on the northwest side and quietly walked there. Old Man and the other three people followed him. They heard light groaning sounds coming from the inside of the room. Linghu Chong stopped in front of the door and pulled his sword out. He then extended his hand to push the door open while leaning his body to one side to protect himself against projectiles from inside the room. As the door creaked open, they again heard the light groaning sound from inside.

Linghu Chong turned his head to look inside the room and was greatly surprised to see two old nuns on the floor. He recognized the nun facing towards him as Dingyi Shi Tai. With her face pale and her eyes closed, it looked as if she had died. His body shot forward like an arrow going into the room. Zu Qianqiu called out, "Chief, be careful!" as he followed him in. Linghu Chong went around Dingyi Shi Tai's body to have a look at the other person lying down. As expected, she was Heng-Shan School's leader Dingxian Shi Tai.

Linghu Chong stooped down and called out, “Shi Tai, Shi Tai.”

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly opened her eyes. She was really sluggish at the beginning but there was a flash of happiness in her eyes as she recognised him. Her mouth moved like she was trying to say something but she couldn't get any sound out. Linghu Chong stooped even lower, “It's Junior Linghu Chong.” Dingxian Shi Tai's mouth moved again and managed to whisper really lightly. Linghu Chong managed to hear her saying, “You... you... you...” He saw her injuries were really serious and didn't know how much longer she would live. Dingxian Shi Tai uttered a few more words, “You... You promise me...”

Linghu Chong hastily said, “Yes, yes. Whatever Shi Tai orders, Linghu Chong will do it. Even until my body turned to dust, I will still accomplish it.”

Thinking of the two Shi Tai dying in Shaolin Temple on his account, tears started to flow down his cheeks. Dingxian Shi Tai whispered, “You... you're certain that you can promise... promise me?”

Linghu Chong replied, “I promise!”

Dingxian Shi Tai's glimmered with happiness. “You... you promise to take charge of... take charge of Heng-Shan School family...” After saying these few words, she was out of breath.

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised, “Junior is a male, I can't be your noble school's leader. But Shi Tai be at ease, no matter what kind of difficulty or calamity your noble school is in, Junior will do my best to undertake the burden.”

Dingxian Shi Tai slowly shook her head, “No, no. I... I'm passing you Linghu Chong, the Heng-Shan School... Heng-Shan School's leadership. If you... you don't agree, I'll die... die with an unfulfilled wish.”

Zu Qianqiu and the other three people were standing behind Linghu Chong. They all felt Dingxian Shi Tai's last wish was too unthinkable. Linghu Chong's heart was in great confusion and felt that this was a really difficult matter to decide on. But he saw that Dingxian Shi Tai only had a short time to live. With blood welling up in his heart, he promised, “Alright, Junior agrees to Shi Tai's

request.”

Dingxian Shi Tai smiled and whispered, “Many... many thanks! Heng-Shan School’s hundreds of disc... disciples, from now on they’ll all bother... bother young hero Linghu.” Linghu Chong was alarmed, indignant, and grieved, “Shaolin temple is so unreasonable, why would they be so violent towards Shi Tai, Junior...” Just then Dingxian Shi Tai’s head lolled to one side and her eyes closed. Greatly alarmed, Linghu Chong quickly extended his hand to check on her breathing but she had stopped breathing. His heart was grieved. He turned around and touched Dingyi Shi Tai’s hand. Her cold hands indicated that she had been dead for a long time. Indignation and sadness washed over him and he found himself choked with tears.

Old Man said, “Master Linghu, we must avenge the two Shi Tai. All those bald donkeys have run away from the temple. Let’s burn this Shaolin Temple to the ground.”

Linghu Chong’s heart was filled with grief and indignation; he slapped his thigh and said, “Alright! Let’s burn Shaolin Temple to the ground.”

Ji Wushi hastily said, “No! No! If Sacred Lady is still imprisoned in here then she’ll also be burnt to death.”

Linghu Chong had said that absent-mindedly. He felt cold sweat breaking out from his back as he conceded, “I was confused. If brother Ji didn’t remind me, I would’ve ruined this matter. What should we do now?”

Ji Wushi replied, “Shaolin temple has many rooms, it’ll be hard for the five of us to search all the places. Chief, please pass an order to call two hundred brothers to come in and search the temple.”

Linghu Chong said, “Right. Brother Ji, please go out and get more people.”

“Yes,” Ji Wushi replied and turned his body around to go out.

Zu Qianqiu called out, “Don’t let those Peach Valley Six Weirdos come in.”

Linghu Chong lifted the bodies of the two Shi Tai and put them on a bed. Kneeling down, he kowtowed a few times to them and silently prayed, “Disciple

will do my best to avenge both Shi Tai. You can rest easy in heaven about the Heng-Shan School family.” He stood up and looked carefully at the injuries on the two bodies but didn’t see any cut or traces of blood on them. It was also inappropriate for him to lift their gowns to investigate further. He guessed that it was masters from Shaolin who must have used their palm’s inner energy and caused fatal internal injuries.

The sound of steps from two hundred heroes was then heard entering the temple as they separately went to search the area. Suddenly, someone shouted from outside the gate, “Linghu Chong’s not letting us in. But we want to go in, what’s he going to do?” It was Peachtree Branch Fairy’s voice. Linghu Chong scowled pretending not to have heard it. Then he heard Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, “We’ve come to the world’s famous Shaolin Temple. But we’re not allowed to go in and take a stroll in there, how can he treat us so unjustly?”

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, “If we entered the Shaolin Temple and don’t meet the world’s famous Shaolin monks then that’ll be even more injustice.”

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, “If we can’t meet Shaolin temple’s monks then we can’t compare martial art against the world’s famous Shaolin School’s martial art. That’s even more injustice.”

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, “The most famous ones are in Shaolin Temple but we can’t see a single monk here. This is really strange.”

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, “There’s no monk, that’s not strange. But the strange thing is there are two nuns.”

Peachtree Root Fairy said, “There are two nuns, that’s also not strange. What’s strange is that the nuns are not only old, they’re also dead.”

The six brothers were talking back and forth as they walked towards the back courtyard.

Linghu Chong together with Zu Qianqiu, Old Man, and Huang Boliu walked away from the side room. Once they were out of the door, they saw the group that was searching around inside the Shaolin temple. After a while, people started to come and continuously reported their findings. They reported that not

only the monks were gone from the temple but also the porters and cooks had also gone. One person reported that the Buddhist scriptures, records, and appliances had also been moved away. Not even a bowl was left behind. Another person reported that the firewood, rice, oil, and salt had all been emptied out. Even the vegetables in the garden had been pulled clean.

Every time Linghu Chong heard a report, he was more and more disheartened. He thought, "The Shaolin Temple's monks cleaned this place up so thoroughly. So much so that they didn't even leave behind a single vegetable in the garden. They must've moved Yingying somewhere else too. The world is so big, where do I begin to look for her?"

Close to two hours later, the two hundred people had finished searching the thousands of rooms in the Shaolin temple. They had even searched underneath the Buddha statues and the back of the Shaolin's name board. But not even a single piece of paper was found. There were people who were pleased with themselves saying, "Shaolin School is Wulin's number one school. But when they heard us coming, they unexpectedly ran away. This thing has never happened in more than a thousand year."

Another person said, "We're so powerful. So no one in Wulin dares to look down upon us."

But there was a person who said, "The Shaolin monks were definitely driven away from hearing our might, but what about Sacred Lady? We came here to meet Sacred Lady, not to drive away the monks."

Everyone thought that this was reasonable. When some people heard this, they hanged their heads down as if someone had died. There were some who looked towards Linghu Chong waiting to hear what he had to say. Linghu Chong said, "This is beyond our expectations. Who would have expected that Shaolin monks would leave their temple. I have no idea how to handle this situation. One person's thought is limited, if we have more than two then we would have more ideas. So please give me your opinions."

Huang Boliu said, "In my opinion, finding Sacred Lady is difficult while

finding Shaolin monks is easier. Shaolin temple's monks numbered more than a thousand, they can't always hide forever. Once we found those Shaolin's monks, we'll definitely get a scent of where Sacred Lady is."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Clan leader Huang is right. We'll just stay inside this temple. Those Shaolin School's disciples would definitely not be willing to part with their thousand years old residence and allow us to live here. When they wanted to take back this temple from us then we'll ask them about Sacred Lady's whereabouts."

A person said, "Ask about Sacred Lady whereabouts? Why would they agree to tell us?"

Old Man said, "This so called asking is merely a polite way of saying it. We'll extort from them the answer. When we see any Shaolin monks, we'll capture them but not kill them. Then after we've captured eight to ten of them, are we still afraid that they won't tell us?"

Another person said, "If these monks still didn't want to tell us, then what do we do?"

Old Man said, "That's easy. We'll just ask Chief Blue to release some of her Divine Dragon, Divine Object on their bodies. Do we then still be afraid of them not disclosing the information?" Many people nodded their heads agreeing with what he said. Everyone knew that this so called "Chief Blue's Divine Dragon, Divine Object" was Chief Blue Phoenix's five poisons of viper and poison worm. When these venomous pests were put on people's bodies, they would start gnawing on their flesh. The pain would be comparable to the worst punishment that existed in this world. Blue Phoenix smiled and said, "Shaolin temple's monks have undergone lots of practice for a long time. I'm not sure if my Divine Dragon, Divine Object would work on them."

Linghu Chong suddenly thought, "We don't need to deal them with excessive punishment. We just need to capture as many monks as we can. After capturing a hundred of them, then we'll trade a hundred for one. That way we'll surely be able to get Yingying out."

Suddenly, a person with coarse voice said, "We haven't eaten meat for half a day, I'm starving. There's also no monks in the temple, otherwise we'll capture one with thin and white skin and steam him. That'll be very wonderful!" The person who said this had a high stature. It was the tall White Bear from the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert. Everyone knew that Black Bear and White Bear liked to eat human flesh. Although these few words of his could make other people vomit from hearing it, they had been on Mount Shaoshi for a long time now and had not had anything to eat or drink. Everyone felt hungry and thirsty and some people's stomachs were croaking from hunger.

Huang Boliu said, "Shaolin School is using this plan of strengthen whatever clear whatever."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Strengthen the defenses and clear the field."³⁰

Huang Boliu said, "Right. They were hoping that we'd get hungry inside the temple then obediently go down the mountain. How can there be such an easy thing in this world?"

Linghu Chong asked, "What's clan leader Huang's opinion?"

Huang Boliu replied, "We'll send a group of brothers to go down the mountain and find out where these Shaolin monks had gone to. We'll send another group to purchase foodstuffs. Everyone else will be staying in the temple to guard... hmm.. whatever waiting for rabbit in order to avoid these monks' throwing... throwing whatever net." Huang Boliu loved to use proverbs when speaking but he didn't remember them clearly so the idioms he used would frequently be wrong.

Linghu Chong said, "That's a good idea. Clan leader Huang, please take the order and get five hundred astute and capable brothers to go down the mountain and find out the whereabouts of Shaolin monks. About this matter of purchasing foodstuffs, I ask clan leader Huang to handle this matter too." Huang Boliu complied with his order and turned around to go out.

Blue Phoenix laughed, "Hopefully clan leader Huang can handle this matter. Otherwise, White Bear and Black Bear would be very hungry and start to eat

everything they see."

Huang Boliu laughed, "Old man will take care of this. But even if those Bear Duo of Northern Desert get really hungry till their belly is shrunken, they still wouldn't dare to even touch Chief Blue's fingers."

Zu Qianqiu said, "The temple's monks have all gone out. I'd like to ask friends here to do this one thing. Could you please have a look everywhere again? See if there's anything unusual, maybe we'll be able to find some clues." The crowd boomed their replies and started to go to take a look around.

Linghu Chong sat on a kneeling mat in the Great Hero Precious Hall and was looking at the majestic likeness of the Rulai Buddha. The statue had an expression of pity and mercifulness. He thought, "Abbott Fangzheng is an eminent monk. When he found out that we were coming here, he'd rather destroy Shaolin School's reputation than to lead people to fight us. In the end, he has avoided a big bloodbath here. But why did they kill Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai? I'm guessing the one who killed the two Shi Tai must be a vicious monk from this temple and the Abbott may have no idea at all about this. I must respect Abbott's good intentions and must not look for Shaolin monks to give them trouble. I must think of another way to save Yingying."

Suddenly, a burst of wind blew in through the door and hurled open the screen in front of him. The ash in the incense pot was blown all over the hall. Linghu Chong walked towards the hall's entrance and looked at the sky. The clouds were grey and the north wind was blowing hard. He thought in his heart, "It's going to rain tonight." Just as he thought of this, flakes of snow started to float down from the sky. "The sky is cold and the ground is going to be frozen. I don't know if Yingying has winter clothes with her. Shaolin School has so many people they can deploy efficiently while we're only using bravery here to get Yingying out. This is impossible to do."

With his hands behind his back, he walked back and forth in the passage in front of the hall. The snow was falling on his head, face, gown, and hands. It quickly melted as it touched him.

His thought continued, "Just before Dingxian Shi Tai passed away, even though her injury was serious, she was still clear headed and wasn't confused in the slightest bit. But why did she want me to become Heng-Shan School's leader? Heng-Shan School doesn't even have a single man in their school. I also heard that all their previous leaders were all nuns. How can I be the leader of Heng-Shan School when I'm a man? When this gets out, people in Jianghu will laugh till their jaws drop. Hng, I already agreed to her request, how can a gentleman eat his own word? What I do or where I go, even if other people laughed at me, what's that got to do with them?" At this thought, his heroic spirit rose up.

Suddenly he heard light noises from half the mountain of people shouting. Not long after, the big group outside of the temple started to make a lot of noise. Linghu Chong was alarmed and he quickly rushed towards the temple's main gate. He saw Huang Boliu walking towards him with his face full of fresh blood. An arrow was stuck in his shoulder and the cut out shaft was trembling. He called out, "Chief, enemy... enemy is guarding the road going down the mountain. We have... have been thrown that... hmm, that net."

Linghu Chong was startled, "Are they Shaolin monks?"

Huang Boliu said, "They're not monks. They're just ordinary people. His granny, we haven't gone more than three li when we were forced back by their arrows. Around ten brothers died and there are around seventy to eighty people injured. That's the whole army annihilated."

He then saw several hundred people rushing to retreat back to the temple. Many people in that group had been hit by arrows. The people in the main group were calling out like thunder as they prepared to die charging down the mountain. Linghu Chong asked, "What school is the enemy from? Did clan leader Huang manage to get a look?"

Huang Boliu said, "We didn't get near to the enemy. His granny, they're very good with their bows and arrows. We didn't get to see those bastards' faces clearly. They were shooting those arrows continuously. Usually, it's make friends when you're far and attack when you're near then all the arrows would hit its

target."

Zu Qianqiu said, "It seems that Shaolin School deliberately left the temple to snare us. We're like a turtle captured in a jar."

Old Man said, "What turtle captured in a jar? How can you grow the enemy's spirit and extinguish our own power? This is... this is called to lure the enemy to penetrate deeply into their territory."

Zu Qianqiu said, "Alright. We'll say that it's luring the enemy to penetrate deeply into their territory. We're already here so what else is there to say? These monks want us to die of starvation on top of this Mount Shaoshi."

White Bear shouted, "Who wants to charge down the mountain with me to kill these bastards?" This was followed by more than a thousand people answering him.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Wait! The opponents are shooting arrows, we must think of a way to deal with them to avoid futilely injuring ourselves."

Ji Wushi said, "There's nothing else in this Buddhist temple but there are thousands of putuan here."

This reminded everyone as they said together, "Use those as shields. Those are just as good."

Several hundred people quickly rushed into the temple and brought out many putuans with them.

Linghu Chong called out, "Use these to block the arrows! Everyone rush down the mountain."

Ji Wushi said, "Chief, where should we gather after we rush down, what are we going to do after that, how are we going to save Sacred Lady, we have to arrange all these first."

Linghu Chong said, "Right. You saw just before how I didn't speak up on that matter, how can I still be Chief? I think after we got down the mountain, everyone should temporarily go back home first and ask around for the whereabouts of the Sacred Lady. We'll talk later to think of a way to save Sacred

Lady."

Ji Wushi said, "Alright." and he quickly shouted Linghu Chong's order to the rest of the group.

That flesh eating monk Black Bear said, "Shaolin temple's bald donkeys are so hateful. Everyone, let's burn this ghost temple down then we'll rush down and stake our lives." He himself was a monk but he scolded them as "bald donkey" and didn't care about it.

The crowd cheered his idea. Linghu Chong waved his hand and shouted, "Sacred Lady is still in their hands right now, no one must be rude to them. Sacred Lady might be disadvantaged by that."

Everyone thought that what he said was right, "Alright, we'll let them off then."

Linghu Chong said, "Brother Ji, how do we charge down? Please assign us."

Ji Wushi saw Linghu Chong had no aptitude in commanding this group of heroes when dealing with the dangers so he didn't hesitate in taking control of the situation. He said in a loud and clear voice, "Friends, please listen to Chief's order. Everyone will go down the mountain through eight paths. East, south, west, and north are four of the paths. Southeast, southwest, northeast, and northwest are the other four paths. We'll just quickly rush out of the encirclement and don't worry about killing them." He then assigned the path that each clan and school would be taking. About five to six hundred or seven to eight hundred people would be rushing each path.

Ji Wushi said, "The south path is the main road to go down the mountain and it has the most enemy there. Chief, we'll rush down the south road first and lead the enemy along with us. This will make it easier for the rest of the brothers to rush out of the encirclement."

Linghu Chong grasped his sword but didn't take a putuan with him as he strode to go down the mountain. The crowd roared their battle cry and separately rushed down through the eight paths. But on top of the mountain, there weren't eight paths to actually go down from so some people leaped as

they went down. In the beginning, there were eight paths they were taking but later they were just like bees swarming down the mountain. After Linghu Chong had gone for a few li, he heard many whirring sounds as a rain of arrows was released from the forest in front of him. He used Dugu Nine Swords' "Arrow-breaking stance" to bat away the arrows raining down on him while he was still rushing down the mountain. Suddenly, he heard someone crying out behind him. It was Blue Phoenix falling down as her left leg and left shoulder was hit at the same time. Linghu Chong hastily turned around to support her and said, "I'll protect you." Blue Phoenix said, "Don't worry about me. You... you... you going down the mountain is most important." At this time, the air was still buzzing from the arrows being shot towards them. Linghu Chong was still waving his hand around blocking the arrows coming towards him. But he saw people kept falling on the ground one by one as they were struck by the arrows.

Linghu Chong seized Blue Phoenix with his left hand and rushed down the mountain. The arrows kept on coming and Linghu Chong kept scattering them away with his sword. He felt worried as the arrows kept raining down. The people shooting the arrows had strong martial art and the air was thick with arrows. Although the group of heroes had putuans to use, it was still hard for them to block these arrows as more and more people were hit. Linghu Chong couldn't decide whether to keep rushing down or turn back to the temple.

Ji Wushi called out, "Chief, enemy's arrows are too severe. Our brethren can't rush down the mountain and many have been injured or killed. Let's call everyone back and we'll think of an idea." Linghu Chong knew that they were about to be defeated. If they clashed with the enemies, then the situation would be hopeless. He immediately called out, "Everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple! Everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple!" Even though thousands of people were shouting and crying out as they fought, his shout was still audible everywhere because of his abundant internal energy. Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, and tens of other people shouted out, "Chief's order, everyone retreat to the Shaolin temple." The crowd heard the order and started to retreat.

In front of the Shaolin temple, people were cursing, groaning, and calling out.

The ground from east to west was covered by blood. Ji Wushi was giving out order to eight hundred uninjured people to separate into eight groups and guard the eight paths. These thousands of people who had come to Shaolin temple, half of them belonged to clans or sects and they were obeying orders. But the other two thousand people were just mobs and after they had been defeated, they were in confusion. They were each doing their own things and didn't know what to do.

Linghu Chong said, "Everyone, quickly treat our injured brethren and give medicines to them." In his heart, he was thinking, "It's a shame that Heng-Shan School's disciples aren't here and we don't have their medicines." He continued thinking, "If Heng-Shan School's people are here, would they help me or would they side with the orthodox schools? En, the two Shi Tai were killed, of course they would help me."

He heard the crowd was still clamouring incessantly and he felt uneasy. If he was the only one who had been trapped on this mountain top, then he would've rushed down the mountain a long time ago. He wouldn't care if he died or live. But he was the leader of all these heroes and was responsible for these thousand of people's lives. As he thought of this, he didn't know what to do.

He saw that it was sunset already. Suddenly, sounds of drums and people calling out were heard from the mountainside. Linghu Chong drew his long sword out and rushed to the intersection of the road. The crowd of heroes also grasped their sabres wanting to fight the enemy to the death. They heard the sounds of drums getting louder and louder but the enemy didn't rush up. After a moment, the drums stopped and the crowd of heroes said one after another, "The drums stopped, they're coming up now." "If they rush up then we'll spill their blood till it flows like water and not spare a single one of them." "His granny, these bastards want us to die up here from hunger and thirst." "If those sons of a turtle aren't coming up then we'll rush down to them." "If you want to rush down then why are you still talking?"

Ji Wushi whispered to Linghu Chong, "If we can't sleep tonight and add to that we would also be hungry for one day and one night. Then everyone would

be powerless to fight."

Linghu Chong replied, "Right. We'll select two to three hundred people with high martial art to open the way for us. At night, the enemy's arrows wouldn't be as accurate. We'll just disrupt the enemy and we can all rush forth to go down."

Ji Wushi said, "That's the plan then."

At this moment, the sounds of drums from the mountainside rose again followed by around a hundred people with white cloth wrapped around their heads rushing up the mountain. The group of heroes cried out and rushed forth to fight them. But these one hundred people only attacked for a short while before they whistled and retreated back down the mountain. The crowd of heroes put their weapons down to rest. The drums sounded again and another group of people with white head wrap went up the mountain to attack. After fighting for a short while, they again retreated back down the mountain. Even though the enemy was retreating, the drums kept beating and another battle cry rose up not letting them rest.

Ji Wushi said, "Chief, the enemy is wearying our army and preventing us from taking a rest."

Linghu Chong said, "Yes. Brother Ji, please take care of it." Ji Wushi quickly passed down the order that if the enemy came up again, then only those people on guard duty would fight while the others would take a rest and not pay attention to them.

Zu Qianqiu said, "Let's talk now and pick three hundred good fighters. We then wait till the middle of the night, when the enemy attacks then these three hundred people would rush down. Once they started fighting with the enemy, these bastards wouldn't be able to shoot their arrows and everyone will rush down the mountain. Only by using this tactic of creating chaos would we be able to escape from this."

Linghu Chong said, "Fabulous. Brother Zu, please pick the people. Order them to wait for some confusion first before they charged down."

After about an hour, Zu Qianqiu had finished picking the three hundred first-

class fighters to furiously rush down the mountain. Even if the enemy had a thousand people lined up to block them, they might not necessarily be able to stop these three hundred fierce tigers. Linghu Chong's vigour rose and he walked with Zu Qianqiu towards the mountain edge on the west side. He saw the three hundred people lined up there. Linghu Chong said, "Everyone, please sit down and rest. Wait until the sky is completely dark before going down to fight to the death." Those people boomed their replied.

At this time, the snow had been falling for some time and a thin layer of snow had accumulated on top of the ground and the people's heads and gowns. There were some water jar in the temple but they were all empty. Even the water well had dried up. Everyone took up a handful of snow and started to put it in their mouths to quench their thirst. The sky was getting darker and darker until they could only vaguely looked at other people's faces. Zu Qianqiu said, "Fortunately tonight is snowing. Otherwise, tonight on the fifteenth, the moon would be very bright."

Suddenly, the quiet enveloped the whole area. Inside and outside the Shaolin temple where thousands of heroes were gathered, and also from the mountainside to the foot of the Mount Shaoshi where around two to three thousand people were, everyone had unexpectedly become quiet at the same time. The people who were about to say something also stayed silent as the quiet atmosphere scared them. Only the light sound of snowflakes falling on the tree leaves and grass was heard. Linghu Chong suddenly thought, "I wonder what little martial sister is doing at this time."

The sound of "wu, wu, wu" was heard throughout the mountainside followed by a loud cry from every direction. This time the enemy appeared to have taken advantage of the darkness to launch their attack with full power, unlike before when they were just bluffing. Linghu Chong waved his long sword and lightly said, "Charge!" Linghu Chong along with Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, Tian Boguang, Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, and those three hundred chosen warriors rushed down towards the northwest path.

The three hundred people rushed down the path as nothing was blocking

them. After going for a li, Zu Qianqiu took out a small flare, lit it up, and shot it up into the air. It exploded with fireworks in the air. This was the signal for the heroes on top of the mountain to rush out of the temple.

Linghu Chong was rushing down the mountain when he felt his feet were hurting. It felt like he was trampling on nails. He felt uneasy about it and hastily leaped to the top of a tree. Zu Qianqiu and the rest of the people behind started to cry out: "Ayo, not good, there's some trap on the ground!". Everyone felt their feet were being pricked by nails and some of their feet were even stabbed all the way through. The pain was unbearable. Dozens of their people were still rushing down ignoring the pain when suddenly they fell down a big pit. More than ten spears were quickly thrust out stabbing those people in the pit. Cries of pain were coming out of the pit and they were heard throughout the mountain.

"Chief, quickly give out the order to retreat back up the mountain!" Ji Wushi screamed.

Linghu Chong saw the situation and it was obvious that the orthodox schools had set up a trap at the bottom of the mountain. If they kept rushing down, the whole army would be annihilated. He quickly shouted, "Everyone go back to Shaolin temple! Everyone go back to Shaolin temple!"

He leaped to the top of another tree besides the pit and poked his long sword down stabbing three spearmen. He then jumped down to the ground and landed besides one of the spearmen with the thought that there wouldn't be any nails where these spearmen were standing on. All of a sudden, he had stabbed seven to eight people already. The remaining spearmen cried out and retreated. The forty or more people who had fallen down the pit jumped out one by one. But more than ten people were killed inside that pit. All they could see was the darkness of the night as they walked back. Even though the snow provided some light, they couldn't see where the traps might be. They limped back up the mountains with their heads hanging down. Fortunately, the enemy didn't take this opportunity to chase them.

The group of heroes went back into the temple. Under the candle light, they checked their injuries and found that nine out of ten people's feet were pierced

by the nails. Everyone was swearing at the enemy. Apparently, when the enemy was beating those drums several times, they were actually covering the sound of them digging the pit and scattering the nails. These nails were around a foot long and were very sharp. Seven part of it was buried underneath the ground with three part of it sticking out of the ground. It seemed that nails were scattered throughout the mountain. There may even be more than one hundred thousand of these nails buried on the ground.

Of course they had prepared these nails before hand. Otherwise, where would the enemy accumulate these many nails from? Even the more experienced heroes were still surprised and amazed when they thought of this. Ji Wushi pulled Linghu Chong to a side and quietly talked to him, "Master Linghu, we can't retreat anymore. We've been thinking day and night hoping to save Sacred Lady. We're forced to ask master to undertake this big matter alone."

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised, "You... you... what's the meaning of this?"

"We know that master is willing to help people and would not just abandon us and go by yourself. But in the future, who would take revenge for this big enmity we have? Sacred Lady is also still being imprisoned, who would rescue her to see the sky again?"

Linghu Chong laughed, "So brother Ji wants me to escape this mountain by myself. Don't think about this anymore. If we're going to die then we're just going to die, why do we need to think so much for? In this world, who doesn't die? We'll just die together. Sacred Lady is being imprisoned but in the future, she'll also die. Even though the orthodox schools are victorious today, years from now, wouldn't they also die one by one? This matter of winning or losing only determines whether you die sooner or later."

Seeing how Linghu Chong ignored his advice, Ji Wushi saw that it was no use to persuade him any further. But if Linghu Chong didn't take advantage of the darkness to escape then it would be impossible to run away. When day time comes again, the enemy would start to attack them and it would not be possible to flee. At this thought, he let out a long sigh.

Suddenly, they heard a few people laughing. They were getting more joyous as they laughed. The group of heroes had had a major defeat and was now bunched together inside the temple. Their lives would probably only last till morning. Unexpectedly, there were still some people who could laugh so happily at this time. When Linghu Chong and Ji Wushi heard this laughter, they both knew that it was the Peach Valley Six Fairies. They both thought, "In this world, only these six weirdos can still laugh like this when facing their deaths."

They heard one of the Peach Valley Six Fairies said, "In this world, there are actually these kinds of fools! Stepping their feet nicely on those nails, Hahaha, this is really funny."

Another one said, "You're all a bunch of idiots. You should've tested the ground with your feet first. If it hurts, of course they're steel nails. Haha, is it comfortable with these iron nails piercing through your feet?"

Another one laughed, "You've already tasted how it feels to have a steel nail through your feet. Why don't you use a steel hammer to hammer down some nails through your feet? Hahaha, hehehe, hahaha."

The six brothers were laughing until they were out of breath thinking that this was the funniest thing in the world. But no one else thought that this was funny.

The people who had their feet pierced by these steel nails were still crying out in pain. Yet, there were some inconsiderate people ridiculing and shouting abuses at them. But to scold back at the Peach Valley Six Fairies was a very difficult thing to do. They would debate every single word that came out of your mouth. If you scolded them "zhi niang zei" (straight mother thief), they would ask what's "zhe niang" (straight mother) and why not "wan niang" (bent mother); If you scolded them "wang ba dan" (king eight eggs or bastard), they'd persistently ask you how come it wasn't "wang qi dan, wang jiu dan" (king seven eggs or king nine eggs) and why must it be "wang ba dan" (king eight eggs).

In a short time, the hall became really noisy with people shouting. Some people even looked for weapons to fight them. Linghu Chong saw the situation

was getting out of hand. He suddenly called out, "Yi, what's this? Fascinating, fascinating, this is very odd!"

When Peach Valley Six Fairies heard him, they immediately went over to him and asked, "What's so interesting?"

"I saw six rats biting a cat passing by here," Linghu Chong answered.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies were amused and they all asked, "I've never seen a mouse biting a cat before. Where did they go?"

Linghu Chong pointed somewhere and said, "They went there."

Peachtree Root Fairy pulled his hand, "Go, go! Everyone, let's take a look."

The group of heroes knew that Linghu Chong was actually referring to the Peach Valley Six Fairies as the six mice. Unexpectedly, the Fairies actually believed that there were actually six mice and felt really happy. The Peach Valley Six Fairies crowded Linghu Chong pushing him to go towards the path at the back of the hall.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Yi! Is that it?"

"I didn't see," Peachtree Fruit Fairy said.

Linghu Chong was intentionally trying to lead them far away from the rest of the people to prevent them from fighting. So he was just pointing anywhere and they walked farther and farther away from the group.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy pushed open a door on the side of the hall. Inside was jet black and they couldn't see anything.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Ayo, six mice are carrying a big cat and entering a cave."

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "Don't fool us." He lighted a fire stick but there was nothing inside the room besides a statue of Bodhisattva in a sitting position facing the wall. Peachtree Root Fairy went up to the offering table to light up the oil lamp. He said, "Where's the cave? Let's drive these mice out." He took the oil lamp from the table to inspect the room but there was no cave at all.

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "I'm afraid it might be behind the Bodhisattva."

"Behind the Bodhisattva is us seven people. Are we the mice?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy said.

"Bodhisattva is facing the wall. So its back is its front," Peachtree Branch Fairy reasoned.

"You know you said it wrong but don't want to admit it! How can the back be the front?" admonished Peachtree Trunk Fairy.

"The back is fine, front is also fine. Let's pull it open and have a look," Peachtree Flower Fairy said.

Peachtree Leaf Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy replied together, "Yes." The three of them went forward to pull the statue open.

Linghu Chong called out, "Don't do that, this is ancestor Da Mo." He knew that ancestor Da Mo was Shaolin temple's grandmaster. Shaolin Temple was the leader in the study of the martial art because ancestor Da Mo passed his martial art down. Their martial art had been around for more than a thousand year without declining. Some time in the past, Da Mo sat facing the wall for nine years until he finally gained enlightenment. That was the reason why the statue of Da Mo in the temple was also facing the wall. Ancestor Da Mo was the ancestor of the Zen Buddhism in the central plain and he was held in reverence in both the Wulin world and in Buddhism. So far, the crowd of heroes had been following his order and didn't destroy any object in the temple. He didn't want them now to insult the statue of Da Mo.

But Peachtree Flower Fairy and his two brothers' playfulness were out already and they didn't pay attention to Linghu Chong's shout. The three people used their strength, which exceeded a thousand catty, to turn the statue of Da Mo around. Suddenly, the seven people shouted in surprise as they saw an iron panel slowly rose up and exposed a big hole. The hardened rust on the hinges of the iron panel buckled open under the pressure of Peachtree Flower Fairy and the other two fairies' pull.

"There's really a cave!" Peachtree Branch Fairy exclaimed.

"Let's go have a look at those six mice carrying a cat," Peachtree Root Fairy said. He lowered his head and entered the hole. They all entered the hole one by one with Peachtree Trunk Fairy entering last. Inside, the hole was enormous and when the six people entered the hole, they were only able to hear their own footsteps. They only spent a short time in there admiring the hole before coming out.

Peachtree Branch Fairy called out, "It's so dark and deep inside that we can't see the bottom."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Since it's so dark, how do you know it's deep for certain? Maybe after a few more steps, we'll arrive at the bottom."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "If you already knew that you'll reach the bottom after a few more steps, why do you need to keep walking to find out if the bottom is there?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "I said "maybe" not "for certain". "Maybe" and "for certain" are different."

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "You already know that it's "maybe", why do you still speak so much then?"

Peachtree Root Fairy said, "What are you quarrelling about? Quickly get two fire sticks to go inside and have a look."

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "Why only two fire sticks, can't we light three sticks instead?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "If you light three sticks, why don't you light four then?"

These six people kept on talking incessantly but their hands were moving quickly. They broke the table's legs and lighted up four fire sticks. After fighting over the fire sticks for a while, they entered the hole. Linghu Chong considered, "This must be a secret path of the Shaolin temple. That day when I was trapped in the Plum Manor, I also went through a long path. It seems that Yingying is being imprisoned here."

At this thought, his heart started to thump wildly and he quickly entered the hole. He quickened his steps to catch up to the Peach Valley Six Fairies. The path was wide and it was completely different from the narrow and damp path in Plum Manor. But it was very mouldy in the tunnel which made breathing uncomfortable.

Peachtree Fruit Fairy said, "We still haven't seen those six mice. I'm afraid they didn't come through this hole. Let's turn back and look in another area."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy said, "Turn back when we reach the end, we still have time."

The six people continued to walk forward again when suddenly a meditation stick dropped out of nowhere startling all of them. Peachtree Flower Fairy was walking in front and he hastily jumped back bumping into Peachtree Fruit Fairy's chest. They saw a monk holding a meditation stick striking from the right wall. Peachtree Flower Fairy was angry and he shouted, "His granny, bald donkey, they're hiding here to plot against grandpa." He extended his hand towards the wall to grab him. But another meditation stick thrust out from the left wall. Peachtree Flower Fairy could not step back anymore to avoid this stick so he leaped forward. His left foot just touched the ground when another stick flew out from the right wall.

At this time, Linghu Chong had seen everything clearly. There was no enemy using those meditation sticks but a couple of iron statues. These equipments were really wonderful. As soon as someone stepped on the ground these statues were covering, they would not only strike out but every strike was wonderfully and severely done. Peachtree Flower Fairy took out a short iron stick and blocked the strike but it was shaken violently as it flew out of his hand. Peachtree Flower Fairy cried out and rolled around on the ground. But another iron meditation stick struck down towards his head. Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Branch Fairy took out their short iron sticks and rushed forward to save their brother. They raised both their sticks blocking the incoming meditation stick. But as the first one was blocked, the second one struck. Peachtree Trunk Fairy, Peachtree Leaf Fairy, and Peachtree Fruit Fairy rushed

forward blocking this second strike. They were using these five sticks to block the incessant strikes of the two meditation sticks from the wall. Even though the iron monks using these meditation sticks were not alive, they were crafted very smartly and it was as if real Shaolin's monks were executing these skills or some eminent monks were directing the statues. Each strike done by these iron monks was very severe and pointed at a dangerous spot.

The meditation stick along with the iron monk's arm was made of fine steel which altogether weighed close to a hundred catty. This was further added to the force generated from the moving arm, which made the strike to be very powerful and similar to that of a master. Even though the Peach Valley Six Fairies' martial arts were powerful, the short iron sticks they were using were too short which made it hard for them to block the meditation sticks. The six brothers were calling out in pain. They wanted to withdraw but the way back was completely blocked by the meditation sticks. However, for every step they took going forward, more iron monks joined the fight.

Linghu Chong saw that the situation was dangerous and he also saw that although these iron monks' movements were refined, each movement had enormous flaws in it. He immediately drew his long sword out and pierced it towards an iron monk's two wrists. Bursts of sparks flew out as the long sword bounced back after colliding with the acupoints in the iron monk's wrists. At this moment, he heard the Peachtree Root Fairy shouting ferociously as he was hit by the meditation stick and fell on the ground. Linghu Chong was frightened seeing this and his mind was in confusion. He saw the meditation sticks moved again and without thinking any further, he thrust his sword out.

"Zheng, zheng"

He had again hit two strategic points on the iron monk's body. But even though these two thrust were perfect and wonderful, they only managed to scrape away the rust on the iron monk's chest and lower abdomen. He heard the wind whistled on top of his head as a meditation stick was smashing down on him. Linghu Chong was greatly alarmed and quickly avoided the strike. But another meditation stick was striking out from the left side of his body.

Suddenly, everything turned dark and he couldn't see anything anymore. It was because the four fire sticks that the Peach Valley Six Fairies were carrying were thrown to the ground as they started to fight the iron monks. These fire sticks were made from the legs of a table. They were able to burn easily when they were being carried by hands. But when dropped on the ground, they got extinguished in a short time. When Linghu Chong first rushed forward, three of the fire sticks were already extinguished. Right when he was avoiding that strike, the fourth fire stick was extinguished. He was helpless as he couldn't see anything in that hole. He felt pain shooting up on his left shoulder and dropped down onto the ground. He heard the Peach Valley Six Fairies calling out one after another: "Ayo!" "Hng!" "My mommy!" as they were also hit and dropped to the ground.

Linghu Chong was staying down and he heard behind him the "hu, hu" sound of the sticks sweeping over. He was terrified feeling like he was in a nightmare and was completely powerless. But not long after, the sound of the meditation sticks splitting the air was getting lighter and lighter. Until finally, he heard a "ji, ji, ge, ge" sound. The sticks had finally stopped and the iron monks returned to their original positions.

Suddenly, the area around him was bright and he heard a person calling out, "Master Linghu, are you here?"

Linghu Chong was happy to hear his voice and quickly called out, "I'm... I'm here..." But he didn't dare to move and lay still on the ground. He heard the footsteps of a few people entering the hole and approaching him. He heard Ji Wushi uttered in amazement.

"Don't... don't come over... mechanism... mechanism is really fierce," Linghu Chong warned them.

Ji Wushi was worried when Linghu Chong had not come back yet after a long time. So he went out with more than ten men to search for him. In the Da Mo room, they found the entrance to the hole. They were astonished to see Linghu Chong and the Peach Valley Six Fairies lying on the ground with blood all over them.

"Master Linghu, what happened?" Zu Qianqiu called out.

"Stay there, don't move. One move and you'll trigger the mechanism," Linghu Chong said.

"Yes! How about if I use a soft whip to drag all of you out?" Zu Qianqiu asked.

"That's the best way," Linghu Chong answered.

Zu Qianqiu flung his soft whip out and coiled it around Peachtree Branch Fairy's left leg. He dragged Peachtree Branch Fairy out of there. Peachtree Branch Fairy was the closest one to him so Zu Qianqiu dragged him out first. He then flung his whip and wrapped it around Linghu Chong's right leg. "Sorry for the offence!" He dragged him out. Using this method, he dragged all of them out one by one without triggering the mechanism.

Linghu Chong falteringly stood up and hastily went to look at the Peach Valley Six Fairies. The six people's shoulders, heads, and backs were hit by the meditation sticks. Luckily, they had thick skins and flesh along with their deep internal energies to resist the hits. So they only received flesh wounds. Peachtree Root Fairy was already bragging, "These iron monks are good, but the Peach Valley Six Fairies broke them already." Peachtree Flower Fairy felt that it was inappropriate to claim this achievement for themselves only so he said, "Master Linghu also worked hard, but he didn't work as hard as us six brothers."

Linghu Chong endured the pain on his shoulder and head while laughing, "Of course, who can work harder than the Peach Valley Six Fairies?"

"Master Linghu, what's this all about?" Zu Qianqiu inquired.

Linghu Chong told him what he thought. "It's very likely that Sacred Lady is being held in here. Let's think of a plan to break those iron monks."

Zu Qianqiu glared at the Peach Valley Six Fairies. "So the iron monks aren't broken yet."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy gave an excuse. "What's so hard to break those iron monks? We just didn't feel like breaking them before."

"Yeah, wherever Peach Valley Six Fairies go, there's nothing we can't destroy and there's no enemy that we can't handle," Peachtree Fruit Fairy bragged.

"We don't know how good these iron monks are. Can the Peach Valley Six Fairies rush in again to activate those machines and let us see how good they are?" Ji Wushi implored.

The Peach Valley Six Fairies had suffered under these machines before. How could they agree to this request to go in there and experience those meditation sticks again?

"Everyone, we've all seen a cat catching a mouse. But has anyone see a mouse catching a rat?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy tried to change the topic.

"We seven people saw it just then and it has really widened our eyes since we've never seen it before," Peachtree Leaf Fairy told everyone.

These six brothers had a really unique skill. When they met with a difficult problem that they had no answer to, then they would start talking about anything and change the topic.

"Someone please go and get some big rock here. Those ones that weighed around one to two hundred catties," Linghu Chong ordered.

Three people immediately went out and brought three big rocks in. These rocks were the fake rock mountains from the Shaolin Temple's courtyard. Linghu Chong carried one rock, gathered his qi and bowled the rock forward. The rock rumbled forward triggering the mechanism and one by one the iron monks emerged from the walls. They were only able to see the shadows of the sticks moving as the iron monks started to strike downwards continuously. After a long time, the iron monks went back into the walls one after another. Everyone had now seen the dizzying speed at which those sticks were striking down and they were all at loss for words.

Ji Wushi suggested his opinion. "Master, these iron monks have some kind of trigger. The trigger applied a lot of power to turn an iron chain somewhere to move those iron men. We can roll those big rocks a few more times until the power of the trigger is exhausted then those iron monks won't be able to move

anymore."

Linghu Chong wanted to get Yingying out of danger as soon as possible. "I saw that those iron monks aren't slow at all when deploying those sticks and I don't know how many times they hit each time. If we try seven or eight more rocks to exhaust the trigger then it'll be dawn already. Do any brothers have a treasured sabre or treasured sword that I can borrow?"

A person immediately stepped forward and drew his sabre out. "Chief, this sabre is really sharp."

Linghu Chong saw this person had a high nose, deep eyes, and yellow beard on his chin. It seemed that he was a person from the west region. As he took that sabre, he felt an unusually abundant cold air emanating from it. "Many thanks! I'm going to use this treasured sabre to scrape those iron men. Please don't blame me if it's damaged."

That person laughed. "For Sacred Lady, we wouldn't regret to sacrifice our lives. The sabre is only an object, don't worry about it."

Linghu Chong nodded and strode forward purposefully. Peach Valley Six Fairies called out at the same time, "Be careful!"

Linghu Chong took another two large strides when the iron monk was triggered and a meditation stick was striking downwards towards his head. This was the third time he saw this move so he didn't need to think as he wielded his sabre slashing towards the right wrist of the iron monk. The wrist was cut easily and the iron hand along with the meditation stick dropped to the ground.

"Good sabre!" Linghu Chong praised. In the beginning, he was afraid that this sabre might not be sharp enough to cut the iron monk's wrist. But seeing how this sabre cut iron like it was mud, his spirit was roused greatly.

"Shua, shua" as he cut two more of the iron monks' wrists. He was using the sabre like it was a sword and used the moves from the "Dugu Nine Swords". The iron monks kept on coming out of the walls to attack but their wrists had already been cut and their meditation sticks had already fallen on the ground. Even though their two arms were still intact and they were still moving them

around, no more meditation sticks were on their hands which made them harmless. Linghu Chong kept on going forward and the moves the iron monks used were wonderful. He secretly admired them but they were only dead objects after all. So as they used their moves, there were many flaws on them. Even after all their wrists were cut off, the trigger was still working continuously. But everything had become a waste now. The group lifted the fire sticks high above their heads to follow him and to light the way. After cutting more than a hundred iron wrists, there was no more iron monks coming out of the wall. Someone counted and there were actually one hundred and eight iron monks. The crowd was excited and started to cheer loudly.

Linghu Chong wanted to urgently meet Yingying so he took a fire stick and rushed forward. He was being careful as he passed along in case he touches some kind of trigger. The tunnel continuously slanted downwards. After going for more than three li, the tunnel had gone past several natural caves and they didn't meet any kind of trigger. Suddenly, they saw a pale light coming from in front. Linghu Chong rushed forward and as he stepped outside, he felt that the ground was soft. He had unexpectedly stepped on a layer of snow. At the same time, a wave of cold air blew on his chest. He was unexpectedly at an empty place.

He looked at all the directions and saw the dark sky and the snow flakes falling down. He also heard the sound of water from a creek nearby. Suddenly, he felt disappointed as the tunnel wasn't going to where Yingying was being imprisoned. He heard Ji Wushi behind him said, "Everyone be quiet. Don't make any noise. It's very likely that we're at the bottom of Mount Shaoshi."

"So we've escaped from danger?" Linghu Chong asked.

"Master, in the depth of winter, the stream on the mountaintop would have no running water. It seemed that we've passed through the tunnel and arrived at the foot of the mountain."

"Yes, somehow we've stumbled into Shaolin Temple's secret tunnel," Zu Qianqiu said.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He gave the treasured sabre back to that hero from the west region and said, "Then quickly pass the word back to the main group and ask them to use the tunnel to get out."

Ji Wushi ordered tens of brothers to find out their exact location at the foot of the mountain and guard the tunnel's exit in case of the enemy attacking before all the brothers had gone out. If the tunnel's exit was blocked before all the brothers were out, then they would all be trapped inside.

Not long after, the people finding out their exact location returned to confirm that they were at the bottom of Mount Shaoshi and they were also at the back of the mountain. If they raised their heads, they would be able to see the cloister at the top of the mountain. The group of heroes had still not escaped from danger at this moment so no one dared to speak loudly. The number of warriors coming out of the tunnel gradually increased. They were also carrying the injured and dead out with them.

Even though the group of heroes had escaped with their lives, they didn't cheer but just discussed it quietly and were all feeling happy. The Black Bear from the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert said, "Chief, those bastards still thought that we're in the temple. It would be good to attack their butt and cut off their tail. That way we can vent our anger."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy butted in, "Bastards have tails?"

"We came to Shaolin Temple to meet with Sacred Lady. But we didn't get to meet the Sacred Lady so we must continue to look for her. There's no need for more killings," Linghu Chong said.

White Bear said, "Hng, no matter what, I have to grab some of those bastards. If not then they've bullied us too much."

"Please pass this order down. Everyone go separately and if you meet anyone from the orthodox school, it's best if you don't fight with them. If anyone heard of any news of Sacred Lady then please spread it around. As long as I, Linghu Chong, am still alive, no matter what kind of difficulty or danger I have to go through, I will definitely get Sacred Lady out. Are there anymore brothers still

inside the temple?" Linghu Chong announced.

Ji Wushi walked to the tunnel's exit and called out into the tunnel a few times. After waiting for some time, he called out a few more times but there was no response from inside the tunnel. He reported, "They're all out already!" Linghu Chong's childish heart was roused, "Everyone, let's call out three times and give those orthodox school's people a fright."

Zu Qianqiu laughed, "Wonderful! Everyone follow Chief and call out loudly."

Linghu Chong used his inner energy to call out, "Everyone call out after me, one, two, three! "Wei, we've gone down the mountain already!"."

"Wei, we've gone down the mountain already!" the thousands of people called out.

Linghu Chong continued, "Enjoy the snow on the mountaintop!"

"Enjoy the snow on the mountaintop!" the group of heroes called out.

Linghu Chong called out again, "The green mountains never change and the river will always flow far, till we meet again!"

"The green mountains never change and the river will always flow far, till we meet again!" the group of heroes called out loudly.

Linghu Chong laughed, "Let's go!"

Suddenly, some people called out, "You son of a turtle bastards, go to your granny."

"You son of a turtle bastards, go to your granny," the group of heroes followed.

These vulgar words were also repeated after by the crowd with their voices shaking the valley. Linghu Chong called out, "Alright, no need to call out anymore, let's go!"

The group of heroes was still excited and they also echoed him, "Alright, no need to call out anymore, let's go!"

After they had finished calling out, they saw that the mountaintop stayed calm

and still. The sky was gradually becoming brighter so one by one, they started to leave. Linghu Chong thought, "Right now, the first big matter I have to do is to find out Yingying's whereabouts. Next, I have to find out who killed Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai. Where should I go to accomplish these two matters?" A thought suddenly flashed through his mind, "Shaolin monks and the orthodox school's people must know by now that we've gone down the mountain and escaped their trap. Naturally, they'll go back to the temple. Maybe they brought Yingying with them. To do these two matters, I have to go back to Shaolin." He thought further, "The less people going back to Shaolin temple the better. I can't let Ji Wushi and the rest of them follow me back."

He went to Ji Wushi, Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, Blue Phoenix, Huang Boliu, and the rest of them to say, "Everyone worked hard. We'll celebrate after we've met Sacred Lady."

"Master, where are you going?" Ji Wushi asked.

"Please forgive little brother. I can't say where I'm going for now. I'll tell you everything later," Linghu Chong said.

They all didn't dare to ask anymore and one by one said their goodbyes to him.

Chapter 27 Three Fights

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



Great Master Fangzheng's hand moves were completely unpredictable. Every time when he struck out, while the hand was still on the way to the target, it had already switched into several positions. Ren Woxing's hand moves were quite simply. When he struck out or pull the hand back, it always looked stiff.

Linghu Chong leapt into the forest and went up a tree concealing himself among the tree's dense leaves. After a long time, the sound of those heroes gradually disappeared, and finally, everything was quiet. He thought everyone must have gone already when he slowly walked back to the tunnel's exit. As he

expected, there was no one there. The exit of the tunnel was concealed by two large rocks and long grass. For someone who didn't know of the existence of this tunnel, even if he stood besides it, he probably still would not be able to discover it.

Linghu Chong quickly re-entered the tunnel and ran back to the temple. When he arrived at the Da Mo hall, he heard the sound of people talking from the front hall. It was the orthodox schools' people carefully and slowly searching for traps. Linghu Chong gathered his power into both of his arms and pushed the statue of Da Mo back into its place. After putting the statue back, he considered, "Where can I go to eavesdrop on the gathering of the orthodox schools' leaders to find out the whereabouts of Yingying? Shaolin temple has more than a thousand rooms and I don't even know which room they're going to use."

He remembered that day when Great Master Fangsheng led him to see the Abbot. Great Master Fangsheng took him to the Abbot's mediation room, which he could still vaguely remember the direction to. He quickly went out of the Da Mo Hall and went on the path towards the back. But Shaolin temple had so many rooms that after going for a while, he was still unable to find the Abbot's meditation room.

He was in a sitting room at the side of a hall when he heard footsteps approaching. Linghu Chong quickly took a look around the hall and saw that there was nowhere for him to hide. But there was a wooden signage suspended on top of the hall with the gold letter writing of "Refreshing Realm". So he leapt up and hid behind the wooden signage. The footsteps gradually got nearer; and seven to eight people entered the hall.

One person said, "Those demons' skills are not bad. We surrounded them from all directions like an iron pail but they still escaped down the hill."

"It seems that there's a secret tunnel from the top of the mountain going all the way to the bottom. Otherwise, how could they have managed to escape?" Another person replied.

"I don't think there's any tunnel here. I've been in this temple for more than

twenty years already, but I've never heard of any secret tunnel going down to the bottom of the mountain," another person added.

"It's called a secret. Of course not many people know about it," one of the earlier person said.

"I may have not known about it, but wouldn't our Abbot know? If there were a secret tunnel in this temple, my humble temple's Abbot would have ordered one of the schools to guard it. Why would we allow those demons to escape?" that Shaolin monk said.

All of a sudden, Linghu Chong heard one of the person shouted, "Who's there? Come out!"

Linghu Chong was greatly startled. "Did he discover my footprints?" Just as he was about to jump down, he suddenly heard the sound of laughter from behind a wooden signage on the east side of the hall. "Old man breathed too deeply and blew some dust down, and you guys actually saw it. Hey, you have very good vision." The voice was clear and loud. It was Xiang Wentian's voice.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. "So it's big brother Xiang hiding here. He held his breath really well. I've been here for so long but I didn't hear anything. If it wasn't for the dust falling down, that person wouldn't have perceived..."

Just then, his thoughts were interrupted by two "ta, ta" sounds. Two people had jumped down from the sides of that east signage at the same time. This was followed by three people crying out, "What..." "You..." "Who..." These three people only managed to utter one word before they were muted. Linghu Chong couldn't stand it anymore. He poked his head out to take a look. He saw two dark shadows flying around in the big hall, one person was Xiang Wentian, and the other person had a big and tall stature. He was Ren Woxing. These two people noiselessly struck out with their palms. With every palm strike, a person fell down on the floor. In a short time, eight people had fallen on the hall's floor. Among them, five people were facing the ground while the other three were facing up. Their eyes were wide open and they looked terrified. Their faces

twitched once before they became motionless. It was obvious that they had died violently under the hands of these two people, Ren and Xiang.

Ren Woxing wiped his hands on the side of his body. "Ying'er, come down!"

A person floated down from behind the eastern wooden signage appearing graceful and elegant. It was really Yingying, the person whom he had not seen for many days. She was wearing a coarse gown and her face was looking feeble. Linghu Chong felt giddy looking at her. He really wanted to leap down and meet her but Ren Woxing waved his hands a few times towards his hiding place.

Linghu Chong thought, "They arrived here first. So they naturally know that I'm hiding behind this wooden signage. Mr. Ren is telling me not to come out, what's his idea?"

But in an instant later, he understood Ren Woxing's idea. He saw a few people rushing through the door to come into the hall. With a glance, he saw his Master and Master-Wife along with the Shaolin Abbot Fangzheng and many other people. He didn't dare to look anymore and quickly pulled his head back behind the wooden signage. His heart skipped a beat as he thought, "Yingying and the rest of them had been surrounded. I... even if my body were grounded to dust and my bones broken to pieces, I have to help them escape from danger." He heard Great Master Fangzheng said, "Amitufo! You, three honourables, have very fierce palms. The female honourable had already departed Shaolin, why did you come back again? These two people must be Dark Wood Cliff's masters. Forgive old monk for not recognising."

"This person is Divine Sun Moon Sect's Chief Ren. I'm Xiang Wentian," Xiang Wentian introduced. The two of them had very high reputations. When Xiang Wentian mentioned their two names, many people in the hall exclaimed their surprise.

"So it's Chief Ren and Left Protector Xiang. I've been looking up to your names for a long time already. What lessons do you have to teach me by coming here?" Fangzheng said.

"Old man hadn't paid attention to worldly matters for a long time so I don't

recognise many of the promising youths in Jianghu of this generation. I don't know who these little friends are," Ren Woxing said.

"Let old monk introduces them to you. This Taoist is Wudang School's headmaster, his name is Chongxu," Fangzheng said.

An elder spoke out, "Poor Taoist is perhaps a few years older than Mr. Ren. But when I took over the leadership of Wudang School, Mr. Ren had already retreated in secret from Wulin. Youth is youth but this word 'promising', you're flattering me, hehe."

When Linghu Chong heard this elder's voice, he thought, "The voice of this Wudang School's leader sounds familiar." Another thought quickly followed. "Ayo! I met three people at the foot of Mount Wudang. One was carrying firewood, one was carrying vegetable, and the other one was an old man riding a donkey who possesses a wonderful sword art. So he's actually the headmaster of Wudang School." Suddenly, a good feeling rushed forth in his heart and his hands started to sweat. Wudang School and Shaolin School had been famous for several hundred years. One had soft movements and the other had hard movements, but each had their own specialties. Priest Chongxu's sword art was wonderful and esteemed. He was delighted when he suddenly learned that he had unexpectedly defeated Priest Chongxu.

He then heard Ren Woxing said, "This big leader Zuo, we've met before. Master Zuo, these last few years, your 'Great Songyang Divine Palm' must've improved by a lot, right?"

Linghu Chong was again startled. "So Songshan School's leader, martial uncle Zuo, is also here." He then heard a person said coldly, "I heard Mr. Ren was imprisoned by your own subordinate and was in hibernation for many years. Congratulations on coming out again. I haven't used this 'Great Songyang Divine Palm' for many years now. I'm afraid I've probably forgotten half of it."

Ren Woxing laughed. "How can Jianghu be that lonely? When old man was hidden away, there's no one else who can trade palms with brother Zuo. What a pity, what a pity."

"In Jianghu, there are many people with martial art equal to Mr. Ren, such as Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. But we can't just go around asking for a lesson without any reason at all," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Very well. If there's some free time, let me try out your new moves."

"I'll certainly accompany you."

Hearing these two people speaking to each other, it was obvious that they had fought before. But who won or lost, they could not tell from just hearing what these two people were saying. Great Master Fangzheng continued with his introduction. "This person is Taishan School's headmaster, Priest Tianmen. This person is Huashan School's headmaster, Mr. Yue. This person is Madam Yue, back then she was known as Heroine Ning. Mr. Ren must have heard of her."

"I already know of Huashan School's Heroine Ning. But this Mr. Yue whatever, I've never heard of him before."

Linghu Chong was displeased. "My Master's name was known before Master-Wife's. If he said that he doesn't know them both then that's fine. But there's no one who only knows Heroine Ning but doesn't know Mr. Yue. He was imprisoned under the West Lake for close to ten years. Before that time, my master's name was already known throughout the realm. It's obvious that he's doing this on purpose to provoke my Master."

Yue Buqun indifferently replied, "Junior's name is lowly. It would insult Mr. Ren's ears to hear my name."

"Mr. Yue, I'd like to ask you about a person. I don't know if you know of his whereabouts. I heard that he was formerly under your Huashan School," Ren Woxing said.

"Who's Mr. Ren asking for?"

"This person's martial art is extremely high. His conduct is also very rare in this world. My heart was blind before and was actually jealous of him so I kicked him out. But he actually felt like an old friend to me when I first met him. Now, I wholeheartedly want to betroth my darling daughter to him..."

When Linghu Chong heard him saying this, his heart started to thump loudly. He felt that something big was going to happen soon. He heard Ren Woxing continued, "This youth has passion and righteousness. When he heard that my darling daughter was being imprisoned in Shaolin temple, he led a few thousand heroes to come to Shaolin to greet his wife. But I don't know his whereabouts now and it's making me very anxious. It's for this reason that I'm asking you about it."

Yue Buqun looked towards the sky and laughed. "Mr. Ren is very resourceful. How come you've lost your own son-in-law? This youth Mr. Ren is talking about, is he that little thief Linghu Chong who was expelled from my humble school?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "I clearly saw a piece of jade but you saw gravels. Old brother, your vision has become really poor. This youth I'm talking about really is Linghu Chong. Haha, you scolded him as little thief, doesn't this mean that you're scolding me as an old thief?"

Yue Buqun sternly replied, "This little thief's conduct is very inappropriate and he has a weakness for women. Just because of one woman, he roused groups of unorthodox sects, foxes and dogs, and come to Shaolin temple causing a lot of disturbance. If it weren't for Songshan's martial brother Zuo's arrangements, this thousand year old temple would've been burned to the ground. This would've been a big sin that even a thousand deaths wouldn't have been able to atone. This little thief was indeed part of my Huashan School before, but unfortunately, I didn't teach him enough manners. Now, he's shaming everyone."

Xiang Wentian hastily replied, "Mr. Yue is wrong! Brother Linghu came to Shaolin just to meet lady Ren and not to absurdly cause a disturbance. You go and have a look. So many friends were in Shaolin temple for one day and one night, but did they burn a single piece of grass or tree? They didn't even eat a single grain of rice and they also didn't even drink a mouthful of water."

Suddenly someone interrupted, "Shaolin temple has instead gained many items when these swine and dog friends came here."

Linghu Chong heard the sharp voice of this person and recognised him to be the Qingcheng School's headmaster Yu Canghai. He thought, "So this person has also come."

"May I ask Priest Yu, what has Shaolin temple gained?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"Cow shit, horse piss. Everywhere on the ground is full of yellow stuff." Yu Canghai answered. A few people laughed hearing this but Linghu Chong felt apologetic. "I only restricted those brothers not to damage anything but I didn't ask them not to urinate on the ground. Those crude people just pulled their pants down and pee everywhere and soiled the clean ground of the temple."

Great Master Fangzheng said, "When Master Linghu led so many people to come to Shaolin, old monk was really worried that this temple would be burned down. But when those friends were in Shaolin, not a single thing was damaged. This must be because of Master Linghu's merciful heart restricting these people. Everyone from the temple is really appreciative towards him. When I meet Master Linghu in the future, I will thank him wholeheartedly. Mr. Xiang, never mind about what Priest Yu said."

Xiang Wentian praised, "So there's actually an eminent monk here who is very open minded and very different from other people. Compared to hypocrites and really small-minded people, he's completely different."

Fangzheng continued, "Old monk doesn't understand one matter here. How did Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai die in my humble temple?"

"Ah!" Yingying exclaimed in surprise. Her voice trembled as she asked, "What... what? Dingxian, Dingyi Shi Tai... died?"

"That is so. We found their bodies inside the temple. Their time of deaths is around the time that those many Jianghu friends entered the temple. Could it be that Master Linghu didn't restrict his subordinates and the two Shi Tai were outnumbered and lost their lives here? Amituofu, amitufo," Fangzheng let out a long sigh after saying this.

"This... this is really strange. That day I met with the two Shi Tai in the hall behind the temple. Because of Abbot's merciful heart and the two Shi Tai, you

agreed to release me." Yingying said.

Linghu Chong's heart swelled with gratitude towards the two Shi Tai but he also felt sad at the same time. "The two Shi Tai pleaded for Abbot's mercy and Abbot actually released Yingying out of the temple. But the two of them lost their lives because of this. They've died because of Yingying and me. But who are their murderers? I must seek revenge for them." He heard Yingying said, "These last few days, many friends from Jianghu had come here to rescue me and make some disturbance at Shaolin temple. But more than a hundred of them were captured by the Shaolin temple. Great Master Abbot is merciful and talked to them about the ten heavenly ways, hoping that they would turn from their violent ways before they were released. But I was already imprisoned for a long time so I was allowed to go earlier."

"This Great Master Fangzheng is really a good person but he's slightly pedantic. How can Yingying's subordinates turn from their violent ways after just hearing you talk to them about the ten heavenly ways?" Linghu Chong thought.

He heard Yingying continued, "I have so much gratitude towards the two Shi Tai. After thanking Great Master Abbot, I accompanied them down Mount Shaoshi. On the third day, I heard Linghu... Master Linghu was leading friends from Jianghu to come to Shaolin temple to meet me. Dingxian Shi Tai said: "We must travel at twice the speed to intercept those people in order to avoid disturbing the eminent monks in Shaolin temple." That night, we met a friend from Jianghu. He said that people were coming from all directions and have decided to gather at Shaolin on the fifteenth of the twelfth month. The two Shi Tai discussed this and said that Jianghu's good and bad warriors of outstanding abilities are mixing together. Furthermore, they were all coming from all directions. So it might happen that not everyone would listen to Master Linghu's order. So Dingxian Shi Tai instructed me to go catch up and meet with him... Master Linghu, and ask everyone to disperse while the two Shi Tai would go back to Shaolin to lend their help to Great Master Abbot."

She said all this clearly and elegantly. When she was speaking of the two Shi

Tai, there was a hint of sadness in her voice. When she was speaking of 'Master Linghu', she couldn't cover up her bashfulness. Linghu Chong's heart was thumping hearing all these from behind the wooden signage.

"Amitufo! Old monk appreciates the two Shi Tai's good intention. When news of the difficulty facing the Shaolin temple spread, all the orthodox schools, whether they knew what the difficulty was or not, came to help. My humble school doesn't know how to repay them for all their efforts. Luckily, we didn't fight and avoided a bloodbath. Ai, the two Shi Tai understood the Buddhist teachings very well. They were kind and merciful. We've now lost two eminent people of our Buddhist faith. What a pity, what a pity," Fangzheng said.

Yingying continued, "After I parted ways with the two Shi Tai, I was overwhelmed by sheer number and was captured by Mr. Zuo's Songshan School on that same night. I was then imprisoned for a few days before daddy and uncle Xiang came and rescued me. By then, those friends from Jianghu have already entered the Shaolin temple, so the three of us went to Shaolin temple to find them. We've been here for around an hour but didn't know where everyone had gone to. We also didn't know that the two Shi Tai had died."

"If that's the case, then the two Shi Tai were not harmed by Mr. Ren or Left Protector Xiang," Fangzheng said.

"I'm indebted to the two Shi Tai for rescuing me and I only have gratitude towards them. If my daddy and uncle Xiang had met with the two Shi Tai and had a disagreement, I would have definitely mediated between them. There's no way that I would just stand by and do nothing," Yingying said.

"Well said," Fangzheng complimented.

Suddenly Yu Canghai interrupted, "Devil Sect's people's conducts are usually opposite to that of other people. Common people returns kindness with kindness. But the disciples of those demons repay kindness with enmity."

"That's strange, very strange! When did Priest Yu join the Divine Sun Moon Sect?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"What? Who said I joined the Devil Sect?" Yu Canghai replied indignantly.

"You said my divine sect's people repay kindness with enmity. Escort leader Lin from Fujian's Fortune Prestige Escort House assisted with the lives of your household. Every year they sent ten thousand silver taels to you. But your Qingcheng School repaid them by killing escort leader Lin. Priest Yu's reputation for repaying kindness with enmity is well known throughout the world. No one in the world doesn't know about this. So given your conduct, Headmaster Yu must be a member of my sect then. Very good, very good, welcome to the sect," Xiang Wentian remarked.

"Nonsense, don't fart here!" Yu Canghai was livid.

"I was sincere in my welcome but Priest Yu is scolding me of farting. If this is not repaying kindness with enmity, then what is it called? So, it's clear that rivers and mountains can be easily changed but character is hard to change. When one person repays kindness with enmity for his whole life, then his speech and action clearly shows this," Xiang Wentian said.

Fangzheng was afraid that they would get into a fight over this senseless dispute. He said, "We should ask Master Linghu who killed the two Shi Tai. This will make things come to light. But the three of you have come to Shaolin temple and killed eight disciples of the orthodox schools. Why did you do this for?"

"Old man has always wandered Jianghu by myself and no one has dared to be rude towards me. These eight people shouted at old man here telling me to come out from my hiding place. Don't they deserve to be killed for this?" Ren Woxing asked.

"Amitufo, so it was only because they shouted at you that you violently killed them. Isn't that too much?" Fangzheng said.

Ren Woxing laughed before answering, "Great Master Abbot said that it's too much then it's too much. You didn't give my daughter any more trouble so old man has received your compassion in that regard. At first I came here to thank you so I don't want debate with you this time. So there's no need to say thanks anymore now, let's just call it even between us."

"Since Mr. Ren already said that we're even, then we're even. But the three of you have come to my humble temple and killed eight people. What should we do about this matter?"

"What's there to decide? My Sun Moon Sect has a lot of disciples and you have skills. Just kill eight of them."

"Amitufo. Killing people carelessly is a very big sin. Headmaster Zuo, from these eight people who were killed, two of them were from your respectable school. What do you think we should do?"

Zuo Lengchan had not said anything when Ren Woxing hurriedly said, "I killed those people. Why did you have to ask other people what to do and not ask me? Listening to your tone, it sounds as if you're relying on the superiority in numbers to kill the three of us. Isn't this right?"

"How would I dare to do that? It's just that Mr. Ren has come out again and this will make Jianghu very eventful. I'm afraid countless number of people will lose their lives under Mr. Ren's hands. Old monk has this thought to keep the three of you in my humble temple to read Buddhist scriptures so there would be peace in Jianghu. What do the three of you think of this?"

Ren Woxing looked up towards the sky and laughed loudly. "Wonderful, wonderful, this idea is brilliant."

"When your daughter resided at the back of my humble temple, everyone in this temple treated her with respect and she didn't lack for anything. Old monk kept your daughter here but not because I wanted to avenge the disciples of my school who were killed. Ai, revenge breeds revenge, you'll get entangled endlessly. How can a Buddhist disciple act like that? The few disciples of Shaolin School who were killed by your daughter's hands; maybe this was revenge from the previous life. But... but she's very vicious and kills people easily. If she can stay in my humble temple to cultivate her mind and grow her soul, then that would be to the benefit of everyone."

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "In that case, Great Master Abbot's intention was good then."

"That is so. But old monk didn't anticipate that this matter would unexpectedly lead to a great disturbance in Jianghu. Also, that day your daughter carried young hero Linghu on her back to the temple to seek help. She said that if old monk agrees to save young hero Linghu's life then she would be willing to repay the killing of the temple disciples with her own life. Old monk told her that there was no need for her to repay with her life, but she must stay in seclusion on top of Mount Shaoshi, and she can't leave the mountain without old monk's permission. She immediately agreed to this. Miss Ren, is what I said true?" Fangzheng said.

Yingying answered quietly, "It's true."

Linghu Chong's heart swelled with gratitude when he heard the story of that day told from the Great Master Abbot's own mouth. Even though he had heard this story from other people before, it was very different hearing it directly from Great Master Fangzheng's own mouth. Also, hearing how Yingying undertook this matter by herself, he couldn't help his eyes becoming moist from tears.

Yu Canghai laughed coldly. "So it was all because of love. But it's a pity this Linghu Chong's conduct is very lacking. During that time in Hengshan, I saw it with my own eyes how he went to the brothel to sleep with prostitutes. Ai, he has really let down young lady Ren's affection."

Xiang Wentian laughingly asked, "So Priest Yu was inside the brothel observing all this and can't possibly be wrong?"

"Of course, how can I be wrong?"

Xiang Wentian lowered his voice and said, "Priest Yu, so you often visit brothels just like I do. Who's your favourite in that brothel? Is she pretty?"

Yu Canghai was furious. "Bullshit, bullshit!"

"It stinks, it stinks!" Xiang Wentian smiled.

"Mr. Ren, if the three of you agree to stay secluded on Mount Shaoshi then everyone here will turn from enemies into friends. So long as the three of you do not go down the mountain, old monk will guarantee that no one will bother

the three of you. From this time onwards, you will enjoy complete happiness. Wouldn't this be a great happiness for everyone?" Fangzheng said.

Linghu Chong heard utmost sincerity in Great Master Fangzheng's speech. He thought, "This eminent monk doesn't understand worldly matters at all and he's also being very unrealistic. These three people kill people without even blinking and you want them to voluntarily be restrained on Mount Shaoshi? You must be dreaming."

Ren Woxing smiled slightly and said, "Abbot's idea is very good and you have also thought of this from all aspects. The right way is for me to follow this idea."

Fangzheng was happy to hear this. "Then 'shi zhu' is willing to stay on Mount Shaoshi?" ³¹

"Right," Ren Woxing answered.

"Then old monk will prepare the rooms. From now on, the three of you are Shaolin Temple's honoured guests," Fangzheng said happily.

"But we can only stay here for six hours and no longer than that," Ren Woxing added.

Fangzheng was greatly disappointed to hear this. "Six hours? What's the use then?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "Originally, I wanted to stay here for many days and linger with all the friends here. But my name's not good and there's nothing I can do about that."

Fangzheng was stupefied as he asked, "Old monk doesn't understand. What's shi zhu's name got to do with it?"

Ren Woxing explained, "My surname isn't good. My given name is also not good. My surname is Ren and I'm called Woxing. If I've known about this earlier, then I would've been called Nixing and it would've been more convenient. But I'm already called Woxing, so I'm forced to do as I please. Wherever I want to go then that's where I'll be going to." ³²

Fangzheng angrily said, "So Mr. Ren was making fun of old monk."

"I don't dare, I don't dare. Within the world's highly skilled martial artists, there are only a few people that I admire. Counting the numbers, there are only three and a half. Great monk is one of them. Also there are three and a half people that old man doesn't admire," Ren Woxing said. He said all this heartily without a hint of ridicule in his voice.

"Amitufo, old monk doesn't deserve it."

Linghu Chong became really curious when he heard him say that within the world's highly skilled martial artists, there were three and a half that he admired and there were three and a half that he didn't admire. He wanted to know who Ren Woxing would point out. Besides Fangzheng, who are the rest of the people?

He heard a person with a loud booming voice asked, "Mr. Ren, who else do you admire?"

After Fangzheng introduced the Yue Buqun couple to Ren Woxing, both parties started to argue non-stop so there was no opportunity to introduce the rest of the people. Counting the breathings of the people underneath, Linghu Chong guessed that there were ten people altogether in Fangzheng's group. Besides Great Master Fangzheng, Master, Master-Wife, Priest Chongxu, Zuo Lengchan, Priest Tianmen, and Yu Canghai, there were still three other people. He didn't know whom this booming voice belonged to.

Ren Woxing laughed. "I'm really sorry but you're not in it Sir."

That person replied, "How would I dare to stand shoulder to shoulder with Great Master Fangzheng? Naturally, I'll be one of the people Mr. Ren doesn't admire."

"You're also not one of the three and a half people I don't admire. If you practise your martial art for thirty more years, then maybe you'll become one of the people I don't admire."

That person uttered a "hey" and stopped talking. Linghu Chong thought, "You

want to be one of the people not admired, but it's not that easy."

"Mr. Ren's opinion is very novel," Fangzheng said.

"Great monk, do you want to know who I admire and who I don't admire?" Ren Woxing asked.

"I will listen to shi zhu's enlightening words."

"Great monk, your study in Tendon Altering Sutra is profound and your internal energy has also reached the top. But your heart is still kind and modest, unlike old man here clamouring around Jianghu. That's why I admire you," Ren Woxing explained.

"I don't deserve it," Fangzheng said.

"But among the people that I admire, great monk isn't number one. The number one person that I admire in Wulin is the person who usurped the chief position of my Divine Sun Moon Sect. This person is Dongfang Bubai."

Everyone uttered an "ah". Obviously this was beyond their expectation. Luckily, Linghu Chong managed to stop himself from uttering his "ah". But he was thinking in his heart why Ren Woxing would regard Dongfang Bubai as the top person he admired. Dongfang Bubai imprisoned him for many years so of course he must hate Dongfang Bubai to the bone. But who would have thought that he admired Dongfang Bubai?

"Old man's martial art is already very high, I also have a very keen mind, and it's known in the realm that I have no match in this world. But I was unexpectedly fooled by Dongfang Bubai's sweet talk and as a result was buried underneath a lake. Dongfang Bubai is such a fierce person, how could old man dare not to admire him?"

"So that's how it is," Fangzheng remarked.

"The third person that I admire is the top master of Huashan School at the moment," Ren Woxing said.

This was really beyond Linghu Chong's expectation. When Ren Woxing was talking to Yue Buqun before, he didn't even give him any face. Who would've

thought that inside his heart, Ren Woxing would actually admire Yue Buqun?

Madam Yue said, “You don’t need to say these false talks and ridicule people.”

Ren Woxing laughed. “Haha, Madam Yue, you thought that the person I was referring to was your husband? He... he lacks by a lot. The person I admire has a godly sword art. He’s Feng Qingyang. Mr. Feng’s sword art is much higher compared to me and I wouldn’t be able to reach that stage at all. I sincerely admire him.”

“Mr. Yue, is Mr. Feng still alive?” Fangzheng asked.

“Martial uncle Feng went into... into seclusion for tens of years already and we’ve never heard news of him ever since. If he’s still alive then that would be a big fortune for our school,” Yue Buqun said.

Ren Woxing laughed coldly. “Mr. Feng is from the sword branch and you’re from the qi branch. These two branches of sword and qi can’t co-exist together in the Huashan School. If Mr. Feng is still alive, why would it be so fortunate for you?”

Yue Buqun just stayed silent after he was reprimanded by Ren Woxing.

Linghu Chong had guessed before that Feng Qingyang was from the sword branch. When he heard what Ren Woxing said and how his master didn’t dispute it, he no longer doubted it. Ren Woxing laughed. “Don’t worry. Mr. Feng is a highly skilled person outside of Wulin. Do you think he still needs your Huashan School's leadership and would take over your throne?”

“I’m just a dumb person. If martial uncle Feng can give me some guidance then it would make me very happy. Mr. Ren, if you can point me to the direction where I can pay a visit to martial uncle Feng, then the Huashan School will appreciate your kindness,” Yue Buqun said with apparent sincerity.

“One, I don’t know where Mr. Feng is. Two, even if I know, I wouldn’t tell you. A frontal attack is easily avoided but a stab in the back is hard to protect against. A real villain is easy to cope with but a hypocrite will give a lot of headache,” Ren Woxing said.

Yue Buqun did not speak anymore.

Linghu Chong thought, “My master is a refined gentleman and doesn't want to speak vulgarly towards Mr. Ren.”

Ren Woxing turned towards Wudang School's leader Priest Chongxu and said, “The fourth person that old man admire is this old ox-nosed priest. Your Wudang School's Taiji Sword is wonderful. You also exercise self control to protect yourself from immorality and stay away from many idle matters in Jianghu, but you don't know how to teach to your disciples. Wudang School has no one of potential and if you wait till you die then Taiji Sword Art would be lost forever. Also, even though your Taiji Sword Art is high, you might not win against old man. That's why I only admire you one half.”

Priest Chongxu laughed. “I'm actually admired by Mr. Ren by one half, this is already giving me a lot of face. Many thanks!”

“No need to be so polite,” Ren Woxing said. He then turned his head towards Zuo Lengchan. “Great leader Zuo, you don't need to keep that smile on your face when you're actually feeling angry. While you're not one of the people I admire, you're one of the three and half people that I don't admire. You're number one in this list.”

Zuo Lengchan laughed. “I feel extremely flattered.”

“Your martial art is sufficient and your scheming is very deep, very suitable to my taste. You want to annex the five mountains sword schools and to stand as an equal with Shaolin and Wudang. You have really high fantasy. But your movements are very suspicious and you planned all sort of conspiracies and deceits. This is not the behaviour of a hero. That's why I have absolutely no admiration for you,” Ren Woxing explained.

Zuo Lengchan replied, “From the three and a half people that I don't admire in this world, you're only one half.”

Ren Woxing continued, “All you can do is copy other people's ideas and have no thought of your own; so that's why no one admires you. Even though your study of Songshan School's martial art is profound, everything was passed

down by the people before you. If you have to depend on just your own ability, I'm afraid even after many years, we won't be able to see any new moves in the martial art."

Zuo Lengchan uttered an "Hng" before coldly laughing. "Sir, you're talking here and there. Are you just dragging along the time or are you actually waiting for help to arrive?"

Ren Woxing laughed coldly. "The way you said this; are you still relying on numbers to besiege the three of us?"

Zuo Lengchan said, "You've come to Shaolin and killed many people here. Today, if you think you can still retreat with your whole body intact, then you're looking down at everyone here. You said we're relying on numbers to win, that's alright. If you want to say that we're not following Wulin's customs, that's also alright. You've already killed some disciples of the Songshan School. Since Zuo Lengchan is here today, I want to see how good you really are."

Ren Woxing turned toward Fangzheng and asked, "Great Master Abbot, is this Shaolin temple or Songshan School's courtyard?"

"Shi zhu is still asking even though you already know. Of course, it's Shaolin temple here," Fangzheng answered.

"Then, concerning this matter, is Shaolin's Abbot presiding over it or Songshan School's headmaster presiding over it?" Ren Woxing asked.

"Although old monk is presiding over this matter, if any of the friends here has any esteemed opinion then old monk will definitely listen to it," Fangzheng said.

Ren Woxing looked up the sky and laughed heartily. "Good, it's really an esteemed opinion to know that you'll lose if you fight alone so you have to gang up to fight us.

Zuo, you're blocking me here today. I don't need to fight you, I'll just cut my own throat to commit suicide in front of you."

Zuo Lengchan said coldly, "We have ten people here. We might not be able to

stop you here but to kill your daughter won't be hard to do."

"Amitufo, you can't kill her," Fangzheng said.

Linghu Chong's heart started thumping wildly. He knew that Zuo Lengchan was saying the truth. Although he didn't know who the other three people were, he thought that their position must be similar to Fangzheng or Chongxu. Even if they were not a leader of a school, they would still be elite masters. Ren Woxing's martial art was powerful and at worst, he would escape injured. But it was hard to say whether Xiang Wentian would be able to escape with his life. As for Yingying, she would have no hope.

Ren Woxing calmly said, "That's wonderful. Headmaster Zuo has a son and I heard his martial art is poor so he should be easy to kill. Gentleman Yue has a daughter. Priest Yu, I think have a few lovely concubines and three sons. Priest Tianmen has no son or daughter but has a lot of beloved disciples. Mr. Mo Da still has his old father and mother. Kunlun School's Qiankun One Sword Zhenshan Zi has one grandson. There's still Beggar Clan's big clan leader Xie. Left protector Xiang, who does clan leader Xie have?"

Linghu Chong thought, "So martial uncle Mo is also here. Actually Mr. Ren doesn't need Great Master Fangzheng's introduction. He already knew the appearances of these ten people from the beginning. Not only that, he must have been familiar with each of their life's experiences."

Xiang Wentian said, "I heard that in Beggar Clan, there are these two people called Green Lotus Emissary and White Lotus Emissary. Although they don't have the Xie surname, they're both clan leader Xie's sons."

"You're not wrong about this? We don't want to wrongly kill a good person here," Ren Woxing said.

"I'm not wrong. Subordinate already asked clearly," Xiang Wentian reassured him.

Ren Woxing nodded his head. "If we kill wrongly then it can't be helped. But if we kill thirty-four people from Beggar Clan then we'll at least kill a few people correctly."

"Chief's opinion is esteemed!" Xiang Wentian praised.

Ren Woxing had mentioned each of their loved ones. Zuo Lengchan and clan leader Xie were shivering in fear. They knew that this person was not just saying some false threat. These people here would not be able to stop him from leaving. But if they kill his daughter then he would certainly avenge her death by violently killing each of their loved ones. They were afraid that it would be very difficult for their loved ones to escape his violent hands. Thinking of this made them trembled with fear. In that moment, everything was quiet and all their faces changed colour.

After some time, Fangzheng spoke out, "Revenge will always breed revenge. Shi zhu Ren, we had decided not to harm young lady Ren, but we want you three honourables to stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

"We can't. My murderous nature has been aroused. I can't wait to kill Headmaster Zuo's son and Priest Yu's concubines and sons. Especially Mr. Yue's lovely daughter, I can't allow her to live in this world," Ren Woxing replied.

Linghu Chong was greatly alarmed. He didn't know whether this head of Devil Sect was just saying this to threaten them or he really wanted to kill them.

"Mr. Ren, why don't we gamble? What do you think of this?" Priest Chongxu asked.

"Old man's luck in gambling isn't good so I have no confidence in making a bet. But I have confidence in killing people. Killing master-hands, I don't have confidence. But killing master-hands' parents, children, big wives, or small wives, I have lots of confidence," Ren Woxing replied.

"Those people don't know martial art. Killing them isn't what heroes do."

"Even though it's not what heroes do, it would make my enemies grieve for their whole lifetime and make me really happy."

"If you don't have your daughter anymore, you also won't be happy. If you don't have your daughter then you wouldn't have your son-in-law anymore. Your son-in-law would become other people's son-in-law and you would lose

your reputation."

"That can't be helped... that can't be helped. I'm forced to kill all of them. Who said that my son-in-law doesn't respect my daughter?"

"How about this? We won't rely on numbers to win and you won't carelessly kill people. We'll make it equal and let our martial arts decide the winner and loser. The three of you fight three of our people in three fights. The winner would be the one who won two fights out of three."

Fangzheng hastily said, "This is good, Brother Chongxu's esteemed opinion is really out of the ordinary. We'll just fight as necessary and there's no need to hurt anyone."

Ren Woxing asked, "If the three of us lose, then we have to stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years and aren't allowed to go down the mountain. Is this right?"

Priest Chongxu answered, "Right. If the three of you won two fights, then we have naturally lost the fight and you're free to go down the mountain. And we'll just regard that these eight disciples have died in vain."

"In my heart, I admire you ox-nosed by one half. I feel that these words you said is half right. So who are the three people fighting for your side? Can I choose the people?" Ren Woxing inquired.

Zuo Lengchan butted in, "Great Master Abbot is the host here. So he would definitely fight. My martial art hasn't seen any use for the last ten years so I'll give it a try. And the third fight? This competition was Priest Chongxu's idea so he won't just be a spectator in this and let other people face this problem. So he has to show his Taiji Sword Art here." Although each of these ten people was not just any ordinary fighter, Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu and he himself had the highest martial arts. When he picked these three people to fight, it could be said that they were now in an invincible position. Yingying was only an eighteen to nineteen years old girl, even though her martial art was high, her cultivation of it was still limited. So no matter which school leader she fought, she was doomed to lose. Yue Buqun and the rest of the people also agreed to this method.

Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and Zuo Lengchan were the orthodox school's three top masters. Any of their martial art was unlikely to be below Ren Woxing. Compared to Xiang Wentian, they were most likely better by half a level. So they were most likely to win this best two out of three fights. Even if they had to win all three fights, they still had a fifty percent chance.

What everyone worried about was that they would fail to capture Ren Woxing and allow him to escape down the mountain. He then would violently harm each of their loved ones. So only if they fought upright and decisive battles would they have nothing to fear.

Ren Woxing said, "Best two out of three fights is inappropriate. Let's just fight one battle. You pick one person to come out and we'll also pick one person. And just fight one fight to decide this."

"Brother Ren, if you only fight by yourself today, you'll be at a disadvantage. Not just the ten people here, even if you have three times more people, Great Master Abbot can call out twenty to thirty more masters from the Shaolin School. And we haven't even counted the number of good fighters from the other schools," Zuo Lengchan said.

"That's why you're going to rely on numbers to win," Ren Woxing sneered.

"Right, we're going to rely on numbers to win."

"How shameless!"

"Killing people for no reason is also shameless."

"Killing people must have a reason? Headmaster Zuo, do you eat meat or are you a vegetarian?"

"Hng, if I want to kill someone then I'll kill him. Why do I have to be a vegetarian?"

"Every person you killed deserved to be killed?"

"Naturally," Zuo Lengchan said confidently.

But Ren Woxing continued, "You eat cows and sheep. These cows and sheep,

what kind of sins do they have?"

Great Master Fangzheng said, "Amitufo, what shi zhu Ren said is according the heart of Buddha."

"Great Master Fangzheng, don't be fooled by his words. He's saying that our eight innocent disciples are like cows and sheep," Zuo Lengchan said.

"Insects, ants, cows, sheeps, immortal Buddha, mortal people, they're all living things," Ren Woxing said.

Fangzheng again said, "Yes, yes. Amitufo."

"Brother Ren, you keep delaying this, you're afraid to fight today?" provoked Zuo Lengchan.

Ren Woxing suddenly let out a long whistle which rattled and shook all the tiles in the room. The twelve candles on the offering table dimmed. When he stopped whistling, the candles burned brightly again. Hearing his whistle, everyone felt their hearts thumping wildly. Their faces changed colours.

Ren Woxing declared, "Alright. Zuo, let's fight."

Zuo Lengchan affirmed what was at stake. "What a gentleman said cannot be taken back. Best two out of three fights, if the three of you lost two fights then all of you must stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

"Alright! Best two out of three fights, if we lose two out of three fights then the three of us will stay on Mount Shaoshi for ten years."

When the orthodox people heard how Ren Woxing was provoked by Zuo Lengchan into agreeing to the fight, all their faces looked happy.

Ren Woxing continued, "I'll fight you for one fight. Left protector Xiang will fight this dwarf Yu. My daughter is a female so she'll fight a woman. She'll fight heroine Ning."

Zuo Lengchan hastily said, "No. We decide ourselves who will fight for our side. How can you appoint the people for us?"

"So you must choose yourself and can't let the other party choose for you?"

Ren Woxing asked.

Zuo Lengchan confirmed, "That's right. Shaolin and Wudang's big leaders. Also, add me in there."

Ren Woxing questioned, "Depending on your prestige, status and martial art, how can you be on par with Shaolin and Wudang's two big leaders?"

Zuo Lengchan uttered an "Hng" and said, "I don't dare to consider myself to be on par with Shaolin and Wudang's big leaders. But I'll manage to fight with you."

Ren Woxing laughed loudly. "Great Master Fangzheng, I want to ask you to teach me Shaolin's divine fist, you want to accompany me?"

"Amitufo, old monk hasn't practised my martial art for a long time and isn't shi zhu's match. But old monk is already here and wants to keep you on this mountain so I'll have to put my old bones through some of your punches and kicks."

Zuo Lengchan saw him unexpectedly challenge Great Master Fangzheng. He understood that he did this to scorn him. But he was actually happy that this happened. "I was originally worried that I would have to fight with him, and he would let Xiang Wentian fight Chongxu. Then he would get his daughter to fight Fangzheng. If Priest Chongxu is careless and I lost to you, it would've been disastrous." He didn't say anything anymore and stepped back a few steps. The other people moved the corpses of those eight people aside to clear the middle of the hall.

"Great Master Abbot, please." Both of Ren Woxing's sleeves were hanging down as he cupped his fist.

Fangzheng put his palms together to return the propriety. "Shi zhu, please move first."

"I'm using Sun Moon Sect's orthodox martial art. Great Master is using Shaolin School's orthodox skills. We're both using orthodox skill to fight orthodox skill, so we definitely have to go on with this fight."

Yu Canghai said, "Pei! What orthodox skills does your Devil Sect have? No shame."

"Abbot, let me kill this dwarf Yu first then I'll fight you," Ren Woxing said.

Fangzheng hastily replied, "You can't." He knew that this person's fist was like lightning and his strikes were like thunder. So he didn't tarry and immediately sent a palm out. "Shi zhu Ren, guard yourself."

This palm he sent out looked ordinary. But halfway through the strike, it suddenly swayed. The single palm suddenly turned into two palms. Two palms turned into four palms. Four palms turned into eight palms. "Thousand Hands of Rulai!" the words escaped Ren Woxing's mouth. He knew that if he was late for a bit longer, his eight palms would turn into sixteen palms and then it would continue to transform into thirty two palms. With a shout, Ren Woxing immediately sent a palm out to attack Fangzheng's right shoulder. Fangzheng shot his left palm out underneath the bottom of his right palm. It then swayed slightly and started to transform. The shadows of the palm turned from one to two and two to four. Ren Woxing jumped up and shot out two palms of his own.

Linghu Chong peered from his vantage point to observe the fight. Great Master Fangzheng's palm moves were unpredictable. Every strike he shot out, it always changed into many different directions when it reached halfway. The palm moves were like illusions and couldn't be observed. On the other hand, Ren Woxing's palm moves were simple. When he struck out or pulled his palm back, it looked quite stiff. But no matter where Fangzheng's palm struck out, Ren Woxing would immediately follow every change and sent his palm there. Linghu Chong saw that these two people were well-matched as they fought with all their powers. His bare-fist martial art was very shallow so he was still not proficient on Dugu Nine Swords' "palm breaking stance". Thus, he was not able to see the flaws in their fist martial art and was unable to see where he could attack.

These two masters were executing the world highest and most profound palm moves. Linghu Chong was bewildered and did not understand the refined

essences of the moves. "In sword art, I was victorious against Priest Chongxu and I wouldn't lose to Mr. Ren if we fight. But against these two people's palm martial art, I have to constantly attack them with a sharp sword. Grand Master uncle Feng said, I have to practise for twenty years before I can fight the world's elite masters. When he said that he was probably mainly referring to the "palm breaking stance"."

He watched for a while longer and suddenly saw Ren Woxing pushing out with both hands forcing Great Master Fangzheng to retreat three steps. Linghu Chong was alarmed. "Ayo, this is bad, Great Master Fangzheng is going to lose."

After that he saw Great Master Fangzheng's left palm drew a few circles while his right palm struck out. It struck out to the top, bottom, left, and right. After striking out a few times, Ren Woxing retreated a step. After a few more strikes, Ren Woxing retreated a step again. Linghu Chong thought, "Good, good!" He softly let out a sigh and thought, "Why do I worry when Great Master Fangzheng is losing but become comforted when I saw him fight back? That must be it. Great Master Fangzheng is a righteous eminent monk while Chief Ren is after all a person from the unorthodox sect. My heart still distinguishes between 'good and evil' and 'right and wrong'." But he changed his mind and again thought, "But if Chief Ren lost, Yingying will be detained on Mount Shaoshi for ten years. How can that be what my heart wish for?" After a moment, he did not know himself who he really wanted to win or lose. In his heart, he secretly felt that when this Ren Woxing father, daughter and Xiang Wentian entered Jianghu, then there would be great disturbance. But in his heart, he also thought, "What's so bad about great disturbance? Wouldn't that be very lively?" He slowly swept his eyes across to look at Yingying.

She was leaning on a pillar looking very delicate and fragile. Her eyebrows were slightly wrinkled looking really worried. Suddenly, a feeling of pity flourished in Linghu Chong's heart. "How can I let her be held captive for ten years here? How can she pass through this kind of torment?" At this thought, he remembered how Yingying was willing to give her life up to save his life. Throughout his whole life, he had had many generous martial friends, but not

one of them would go so far as to give their lives for him. A hot feeling started to rush forth in his chest. He did not care anymore if Yingying was the daughter of the Devil Sect's Chief or if the evil things she had done were unpardonable. He was resigned to the fact that everyone in the world would want to kill him as he decided that he was going to protect her and not let any harm come to her.

The eleven pairs of eyes in the hall were watching the fight between Great Master Fangzheng and Ren Woxing attentively. They were praising the palm moves of both fighters in their hearts. Zuo Lengchan was relieved, "Luckily this old freak Ren picked the fight with Great Master Fangzheng. Otherwise, I wouldn't know how to handle this clumsy palm move of his. Compared to my own school's Great Songyang Divine Palm, his palm move seems to be more complicated and have more changes. His palm move is better than mine. He only attacks at a specific point and nothing else."

Xiang Wentian was thinking, "Shaolin School's martial arts have enjoyed their reputation for a thousand year. They are really no small matter. Even though Great Master Fangzheng's 'Thousand Hands of Rulai' is very complicated, its power isn't dispersed at all. This is very difficult to do. If I have to fight him, I won't be able to trade palm moves with him so I have to compare inner power with him." Yue Buqun, Yu Canghai, and the rest of the people there were also comparing their own martial arts against these two people's palm moves.

Ren Woxing had now fought for a long time. He gradually felt that Great Master Fangzheng's palm moves were getting slightly slower. He secretly felt happy. "Even though your palm move is wonderful, you're old already. It's hard to keep it up for a long time." He immediately attacked repeatedly. After his fourth strike, he felt a slight tingling on his right arm as he pulled his palm back and he felt his internal energy not working smoothly. He felt alarmed and knew that it was his own inner energy that was disturbed. He thought, "This old monk's Tendon Altering Sutra is indeed powerful. We haven't clashed palms yet but he can restrain my internal energy." He knew that if they fight longer, his opponent's abundant internal energy would eventually come out and he would be in an unfavourable position.

He saw Great Master Fangzheng's left palm struck out. With a cry, he also sent his left palm out rapidly. The two palms clashed and they both retreated a step. Ren Woxing felt that even though his opponent's internal energy was soft, it was abundant and matchless. He also used his "Art of Essence Absorbing" but unexpectedly he could not absorb Great Master Fangzheng's internal energy at all. He was confounded.

Great Master Fangzheng said, "Well done! Well done!" and followed with his right palm striking out. Ren Woxing again struck his right palm out to meet it. Both people faltered from the impact. Ren Woxing felt his whole body shaken and immediately took two steps backwards. When his second step landed, he turned his body around and his right hand shot out and grabbed Yu Canghai's chest. Then, he raised his left hand to smash it down on Yu Canghai's head.

This situation was just like a rabbit being captured by a falcon and nobody had expected this turn of event. They all had their eyes on the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng and saw that the situation was gradually becoming disadvantageous towards Ren Woxing. Normally, he would put all his power into protecting himself. But who would have thought that he would turn around and attack Yu Canghai. This turn of event was just too strange and too quick for Yu Canghai even though he was a martial artist of the same generation. If he were to actually fight with Ren Woxing, even though he would lose at the end, he would not have been captured in just one move.

Everyone gasped in surprise while Great Master Fangzheng leapt and struck his two palms out. It was as if he was flying as he rushed at Ren Woxing aiming at the back of his head. This move was known in martial study as 'attacking the enemy's rear in order to make him give up his own attack' and the enemy would have no choice but to rescue himself. The aim of this attack was to make Ren Woxing withdraw his own attack towards Yu Canghai's head and turn around to block the incoming attack.

The other masters saw how Great Master Fangzheng shot this palm out in the blink of an eye and they were all impressed by this. But there was not enough time to cheer although they knew that he had saved Yu Canghai's life. But no

one could have guessed that when Ren Woxing withdrew his left hand, he did not try to block the strike. Instead, his left hand grabbed Great Master Fangzheng's Tanzhong acupoint while his right hand was thrust towards the chest. Great Master Fangzheng's body became immediately weak and dropped to the ground. Everyone was surprised and one by one called out as they crowded around him.

Zuo Lengchan suddenly flew out and violently shot his palm out towards Ren Woxing's back. Ren Woxing turned his hand around to strike back. He shouted at the same time, "Alright, this is the second fight." Zuo Lengchan's hand suddenly kept on changing. It changed from a fist into a palm into a stab into a grab. In a short time, it had changed more than ten times.

Even though he was repeatedly attacked, Ren Woxing was able to resist for a moment by exerting his power. He had just fought with Great Master Fangzheng. Even though the last three moves he used against the Abbot were mostly based on his ingenuity and cunning, he had still used up a lot of energy. Otherwise, how can this Shaolin School's headmaster with abundant internal energy let him grab his Tanzhong acupoint? How could he let him hit his heart with his fingers? These last few moves were done with all of his strength, as he was staking everything on this attack. As a result, Ren Woxing was victorious against Great Master Fangzheng through dishonest means. He took into account his opponent's merciful heart and immediately dashed to Yu Canghai to kill him. Firstly, the distance between that Yu person and Great Master Fangzheng was great that Great Master would not have been able to help Yu Canghai in time. Secondly, none of the other school leaders had any deep feeling towards Yu Canghai that they would brave danger and stake their lives just to save him. So the only person who would try to save Yu Canghai was Great Master Fangzheng.

When the Shaolin Abbot attacked him to free Yu Canghai, he did not try to block or parry Great Master Fangzheng's strike but seized his fatal acupoint instead. At that time, his plan reached its most dangerous point. The two palms of Great Master Fangzheng that were aiming at the back of his head did not need to actually reach his head to kill him. The wind from the palms was fully

capable of bursting his skull open.

When he grabbed Yu Canghai, he had already staked his own life in this gamble. He gambled on this eminent Buddhist monk's merciful heart. When Great Master Fangzheng's two palms were about to reach the back of Ren Woxing's head, the Abbot took his palms back which left half of his body wide open. In order to take back the two palms, Great Master Fangzheng had to use the power from his whole body to do so. Even though this was done by a master, the internal energy in between the chest and stomach region was still left empty. When Ren Woxing's grab and stab had reached Great Master Fangzheng, Fangzheng had actually wanted to transfer his power into his two palms and smash Ren Woxing's head open, but the internal energy in his Dantian region was unable to go up.

Priest Chongxu hastily supported Great Master Fangzheng and opened his sealed acupoint. He sighed, "Brother Abbot is too humane and was taken advantage of by an evildoer."

"Amitufo. Shi zhu Ren's mind is very keen and he used wits instead of brawn. Old man has lost," Fangzheng said.

Yue Buqun said loudly, "Mr. Ren's conduct is traitorous and deceitful. Your win is not from upright and frank method. This is not the behaviour of an upright gentleman."

Xiang Wentian laughed. "In my Divine Sun Moon Sect, how can there be any upright gentleman? If Chief Ren is an upright gentleman, he would've followed your bad example from a long time ago. Do you think we would be having this competition now if he did?"

Yue Buqun was lost for words.

Ren Woxing was leaning his back on the wooden pillar and sluggishly striking his palm out to block every fist and kick from Zuo Lengchan. Zuo Lengchan was a proud person. If it was any other time, he would not have fought Ren Woxing after his opponent had just fought with Shaolin School's number one master. He knew that this was a cheap behaviour and not something that a

master of a school would do. Instead, this behaviour was something that people would condemn. But Ren Woxing used dishonest means and took advantage of Great Master Fangzheng's kind heart to defeat him and this made everyone really angry. When Zuo Lengchan disregarded his own safety and boldly attacked, everyone there regarded that he did this because of righteous anger and did not care that he fought the enemy in succession without giving him a necessary pause. This was a once in a thousand years opportunity for Zuo Lengchan. Xiang Wentian saw that Ren Woxing did not have a chance to draw breath yet so he rushed besides the pillar. "Big leader Zuo, you're receiving such a kindness, aren't you ashamed? I'll fight with you."

Zuo Lengchan replied, "Wait till I flatten this Ren first then I'll fight you. Do you think old man here is afraid to fight you in succession?" With a shout, he struck a fist out towards Ren Woxing.

Ren Woxing lifted his left hand up and coldly said, "Brother Xiang, step back!"

Xiang Wentian knew that Chief liked to outdo others so he did not dare to disobey him. "Alright, I'll retreat for now. But this Zuo is too shameless, so I want to kick his butt." With a kick, he flew out behind Zuo Lengchan and booted at his bottom.

Zuo Lengchan was indignant. "Two against one?" He sneered as he slanted his body to avoid the kick. How could he have known that even though Xiang Wentian raised his leg, he did not kick it out. He merely raised his right leg up and lightly moved it. When Xiang Wentian saw that Zuo Lengchan was fooled, he laughed loudly. "Bastard grandson relies on numbers to win." He then leapt back to stand besides Yingying.

As soon as he was let off, Zuo Lengchan resumed his attack against Ren Woxing. When masters fight, the difference between them would be small. When Ren Woxing was freed for a time, he drew a deep breath and regulated his qi smoothly. His vigor was greatly roused after this.

"Peng, peng, peng" as he struck three palms out. Zuo Lengchan exerted his

power to protect himself and he was secretly shocked. "I haven't met this old man for more than ten years and his skill has greatly improved. I must use all of my power today if I want to win."

This was the second time these two people had fought. This fight was a fight to the death in front of the masters in Jianghu. The two of them regarded the winning and losing of this fight to be very serious unlike the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng which was peaceful.

As soon as Ren Woxing was re-energised, all his moves were killing moves. Both of his hands changed to knife-forms and he started hacking down. Zuo Lengchan kept changing his hand from fist into palm into a grab into a seize. This was the strong point of his palm move. The two people were getting quicker as they fought. Linghu Chong's eyes were just seeing patterns as he watched the fight from behind the wooden signage. When he was watching the fight between Ren Woxing and Great Master Fangzheng, he did not understand the essences of their martial art, but he unexpectedly also did not understand the extremely fast moves from these two people.

He turned his eyes towards Yingying and noticed her snow white complexion. She had her eyes lowered and he could see her long eyelashes hanging down. There was no amazement or worry on her face. Xiang Wentian's face was sometimes happy and sometimes worried. In a moment, it changed into doubt. In another moment, it changed into regret. Another moment, it changed into an angry glare. It was as if he was personally fighting this battle. Linghu Chong thought, "Brother Xiang's experience is much higher compared to Yingying. Looking at him being so nervous, I'm afraid it would be really hard for Mr. Ren to win this battle." He slowly turned his eyes to look at where his Master and Master-Wife were standing at. Besides them were Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu. The two people behind them were Taishan School's leader Priest Tianmen and Hengshan School's leader Mr. Mo Da. Ever since Mr. Mo Da arrived inside the hall, he had not made any noise at all. When Linghu Chong saw his thin and small body, he felt warmth in his heart followed by the thought, "Martial sister Yilin and the rest of the Heng-Shan School's disciples have no

more masters. I don't know how they'll cope with it." Qingcheng School's headmaster Priest Yu was standing at the back wall with his hand grasping his sword handle and was looking indignant. Standing by the west was a beggar with white hair. He was Beggar Clan's leader Xie Feng. The other person was wearing a green gown and his appearance was quite natural. He was Kunlun School's leader Qiankun One Sword Zhenshan Zi.

These nine people were the present orthodox schools' most powerful masters. If the nine of them were not fully concentrating on the fight, even if he had used all of his power to hold his breath, it was more than likely that he would have been discovered a long time ago. He thought, "The gathering below has so many masters. Especially Master and Master-Wife are also there. Then there are Great Master Fangzheng, Wudang's leader, and Mr. Mo Da, the three seniors I respect completely. But I'm being really disrespectful hiding here and eavesdropping to what they're saying. Even though I was here before them, I've eavesdropped to what they were saying. If any of them felt my presence here then I'd be really shamed."

He hoped that Ren Woxing would quickly win this fight and thus win the best two out of three fights and go down the mountain with Yingying. When Great Master Fangzheng and the rest of the masters had gone out of the hall, he would then hurry down the mountain to meet Yingying. At the thought of meeting Yingying, his chest felt hot and his ears were also feeling hot. He pondered, "From now on, are Yingying and I really going to be man and wife? She treated me with passion and righteousness, but I... but I..." These last few days, although he had been thinking of Yingying, he had always thought of protecting her because of her kindness towards him. He wanted to help her get out of her imprisonment and declare to everyone in Jianghu that it was him who adored her and that it really was not her idea. Thus, it would stop the warriors of Jianghu from ridiculing her and causing her to be embarrassed. Every time Yingying's image appeared in his mind, there was no feeling of happiness or warmth in his heart. It was very different with the feeling of warmth when he remembered his little martial sister Yue Lingshan. There was actually a bit of fear when he thought of Yingying.

When he first met Yingying, he thought that she was an old granny and he respected her and felt grateful towards her. Later, after he saw her lifted her hands to kill people and commanded those group of heroes, it was unavoidable that his respect was mixed with fear. Only after he found out recently that she had some feelings for him that this little bit of fear in his heart started to gradually lighten. And later when he found out that she was willing to give her own life to Shaolin to save him, his feelings for her became full of gratitude. But even though his feeling of gratitude was deep, he did not have any thoughts to be intimate with her and only wished that he could repay her kindness. Hearing Ren Woxing say that he was his son-in-law, he felt uneasy in his heart. Just now, when he saw her magnificent beauty, he only felt that the distance between them was far. After looking at Yingying for a few times, he did not dare to take a look again. He saw Xiang Wentian made a fist with both of his hands and his two eyes were wide open. Xiang Wentian was looking intently at Ren Woxing and Zuo Lengchan.

He saw Zuo Lengchan had already pulled back to one corner of the hall while Ren Woxing was still hacking repeatedly. Each of his palms was like a big hatchet and the power was astonishing. Zuo Lengchan was completely in an unfavourable situation. His two arms could not attack as he kept withdrawing them as soon as they had gone out for one foot. It seemed that he was only defending and not attacking. Suddenly, Ren Woxing shouted loudly and pushed both of his palms towards Zuo Lengchan's chest. The four palms clashed and Zuo Lengchan hit the wall behind him. Dust from the top fell down from the impact. The four palms did not separate. Linghu Chong felt his body shook and it looked as if the wooden signage he was hiding behind was about to fall down. He felt alarmed. "Martial uncle Zuo is in trouble. They're both competing inner energy, Ren Woxing would use the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' to absorb his inner energy. After some time, martial uncle Zuo will definitely lose." He saw Zuo Lengchan pulled his right palm back and unexpectedly only used his left palm to resist his opponent's palm while extending two fingers in his right hand to poke Ren Woxing. Ren Woxing shouted in alarm and leapt back immediately. Zuo Lengchan stabbed again with his right hand. He successively stabbed three

times and Ren Woxing stepped back three times. Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu and the rest of the people were surprised: "I've heard that Ren Woxing's 'Art of Essence Absorbing' will absorb the opponent's inner energy without exception, but how come when their four palms connected, Zuo Lengchan was unexpectedly unharmed? Could it be that his Songshan School's inner energy cultivation does not fear the 'Art of Essence Absorbing'?" All the masters looking at the fight were in amazement but Ren Woxing was even more astonished.

More than ten years ago, when Ren Woxing fought with Zuo Lengchan, he did not have to use his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' before gaining the advantage. He was able to stop Zuo Lengchan then even though at that fight, he had a sudden pain in his heart and found it hard to control his power. He had been truly frightened as he knew it was because of the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' reversing. Under normal circumstances, he could have calmly meditated to regulate his inner energy. However, how could he do that with the enemy right in front of him? He had been at a loss as to what to do when he suddenly saw two people appearing behind Zuo Lengchan. They were Zuo Lengchan's martial brothers, "Tower Holding Palm" Ding Mian and "Great Songyang Palm" Fei Bin. Ren Woxing had immediately leapt away and laughed loudly. "We agreed to fight one on one but you secretly have some helpers. A gentleman doesn't want to be disadvantaged so I'll meet you at some other time. Today, grandpa won't accompany you anymore." If his opponent had not voluntarily ceased the fight, Zuo Lengchan's loss would have been guaranteed. It had been such a good turn of events for Zuo Lengchan that he had not dared to refute his opponent's accusation by saying something like "To have helpers is not the way of the hero". He had been afraid that Ren Woxing might have gotten angry and started fighting again. It would have been also inappropriate for Ding Mian and Fei Bin to enter the fight and help as it could have ruined his good reputation. Instead he had immediately said, "Who told you not to bring some of your Devil Sect's helper?" Ren Woxing had laughed coldly and left.

Thus, the victory or defeat of that previous fight to the death was not decided. But they both had known in their hearts that each of their martial arts had a big

flaw. They had been lucky not to lose to each other and to be able to train hard after the fight to correct the flaws. Especially Ren Woxing as he had known that the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' had a secret danger attached to the skill, just like gangrene to the bone. He had used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' to absorb many opponents' inner energies where the opponents were from different schools and they all had different inner energies. Because he did not have the method to harmonise them into one in the past, the various energies had frequently come out unexpectedly. His own internal energy had already been very powerful so when he had felt these different inner energies surging and swirling, he had immediately suppress them before they became dangerous. In his first confrontation with an extremely powerful master, he had used up a great amount of his internal energy, and as a result, his own internal energy, which had long suppressed the others, had been weakened. When fronted with a powerful enemy, he not only had to contend with their attacks but also worry about his own internal problem. That had been an extremely difficult dilemma for Ren Woxing.

Later on, he had thought deeply to search for a method to make uniform all these internal energies. When concentrating fully on this, even the most intelligent hero would not be aware of the rebellion happening under him. In the end, he was imprisoned by Dongfang Bubai. While he was imprisoned under the West Lake for ten years, his mind was focused on fixing the "Art of Essence Absorbing" until he finally comprehended the right method to suppress all the various internal energies from different schools that there would no longer be the danger of the "Art of Essence Absorbing" reversing.

At the current fight, when Ren Woxing had not won after a while, he used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' when their two palms clashed. But unexpectedly, he found that Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was completely empty and he did not know where it went to. Ren Woxing was greatly startled that he couldn't absorb his opponent's inner energy. It was incredibly strange. Just before then he was also not able to absorb Fangzheng's inner energy, but it was because in a blink of an eye Fangzheng was able to hide his internal energy without a trace and made his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' powerless. Not only had he not experienced

this before, even in his dream, he would never have thought that this kind of strange matter could happen.

He used the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' a few more times, but he could not feel where Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was. When he saw the fierce stab by Zuo Lengchan, he immediately retreated three steps and changed his moves. He then used a chopping move whose power was unrivaled. Zuo Lengchan changed into defence. The two people had fought for twenty to thirty more moves when Ren Woxing left hand chopped down while Zuo Lengchan's right hand stabbed towards Ren Woxing's left rib. Ren Woxing saw that the power of this poke was very fierce. He thought, "This poke really has no inner power?" In fact, he had deliberately revealed that empty spot allowing Zuo Lengchan to poke it. At the same time, he diffused his 'Art of Essence Absorbing' from his chest. He thought, "You have a deep inner energy but you're not letting my Art of Essence Absorbing absorb it. But this poke you used to attack me, if it has no inner energy, then it would be just like an itch to me. But if it was laced with any internal energy, then I'd absorb it."

As this thought flashed in his mind, Zuo Lengchan's finger poked his Tianchi acupoint. The spectators all cried out in surprise.

Zuo Lengchan's finger only stayed on Ren Woxing's chest for a short time. Ren Woxing immediately transferred his whole power. Sure enough, his opponent's internal energy was like a river dam broken open as it rushed into his Tianchi acupoint. He felt really happy and intensified his effort to absorb his opponent's internal energy faster. Suddenly, his body faltered. He slowly stepped back one step at a time. He did not say anything and was staring at Zuo Lengchan. His body trembled and he was now motionless just like when people had their acupoints sealed.

Yingying frightenedly called out, "Dad!" and rushed to support him. She felt his hand was ice cold. She turned her head around and called out, "Uncle Xiang!" Xiang Wentian rushed in front of Ren Woxing and pushed his chest a few times. "Hey!" Ren Woxing reacted. He was looking angry and his complexion was pale. "Very good, I've never experienced this kind of game

before. Let's compete again." Zuo Lengchan just shook his head.

Yue Buqun said, "The winner and loser have been determined, what's there to compete again? Didn't Headmaster Zuo seal Mr. Ren's Tianchi acupoint?"

Ren Woxing shouted, "Pei! Good, I was swindled so we'll just count this fight as my loss."

Zuo Lengchan's earlier technique was most hazardous. He had accumulated 'Polar Ice Energy' for over a decade and transferred all that energy into his index finger at that moment. He risked the danger of losing a lot of his internal strength and allowed Ren Woxing to absorb his internal power. Not only did he allow him to absorb it, he even forced it towards Ren Woxing by pouring it through his acupoint. Zuo Lengchan's polar ice energy was similar to the Boreal Finger of Plum Manor's Mr. Black-White; both were extreme yin and cold martial arts. However, Zuo Lengchan's internal energy was a lot deeper. In a few moments, Ren Woxing was frozen solid. Zuo Lengchan took advantage of this moment when the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' stopped by transferring his internal energy and sealing Ren Woxing's acupoint³³.

Usually you would only see acupoints sealed in a fight between second or third class fighters in Wulin. When masters fought, they would never use such an ordinary martial art. But Zuo Lengchan was willing to part with a large amount of his internal energy and used a second or third class martial art method to win. Even though this method was dishonest, without an extremely good internal energy, it would be very difficult to accomplish. Xiang Wentian knew that even though Zuo Lengchan had won, his internal energy had been exhausted and it would probably take several months for him to recover. He immediately said, "Just then Headmaster Zuo said that you would fight me after you had flattened Chief Ren. Please begin now."

Great Master Fangzheng, Priest Chongxu, and the rest of the people understood what he meant. After Zuo Lengchan had poked Ren Woxing, his face was wretchedly pale and he had not dared to say a single word. It was obvious that he had used up a lot of his internal energy. If the two of them fought, not only would Zuo Lengchan lose, after many moves he would be

killed by Xiang Wentian. But Zuo Lengchan really did say those words before when Xiang Wentian challenged him. Would he actually eat his own words now? Everyone was hesitating on what to do when Yue Buqun said, "We already said before that for these three fights, each side will choose for themselves on who will go out to fight and not the other side. Didn't Chief Ren agree to this? Chief Ren is a big hero, a grand hero, how can we not regard what he said?"

Xiang Wentian coldly laughed and said, "Mr. Yue's dispute is really good and caused other people to admire you. But this word 'gentleman', there's something that doesn't fit. This kind of talking aimlessly resembled something a small person would do."

Yue Buqun replied indifferently, "From the point of view of a gentleman, everyone in this world is a gentleman. From the point of view of a small person, there's no small person in this world."

Zuo Lengchan slowly dragged his feet back a few steps till his back was on the pillar. He was having difficulty just to stand up let alone having to fight. Priest Chongxu moved a couple of steps forward and said, "I've heard that Left Protector Xiang is called 'Old Heavenly King' and your abilities are earth-shaking. Poor Taoist is ashamed to be the headmaster of Wudang. In this fight between the orthodox schools and your respectable sect, I haven't done anything. I feel really ashamed. It'll be lucky today if I can fight with 'Old Heavenly King'. It would be a real glorious favour."

He was the leader of a martial art school but he was talking to Xiang Wentian in this way. Isn't that giving the opponent too much credit? It was hard for Xiang Wentian to refuse this so he said, "I have to respectfully obey your order. I respect Priest Chongxu's unrivalled 'Taiji Sword Art'. I will risk my life to accompany you and reveal my shortcomings." Xiang Wentian cupped his fist and retreated a couple of steps. Priest Chongxu also cupped his fist returning the propriety.

The two of them stood opposite each other. They were looking at each other for a while without drawing their swords. Suddenly, Ren Woxing shouted, "Wait! Brother Xiang, step back," and drew the sword on his waist. Everyone

there was astonished: "He already fought two masters and his internal energy has been greatly harmed. Now he wants to fight a third time against Priest Chongxu?"

Zuo Lengchan was surprised, he thought, "My ten years of hard work on this Polar Ice Energy was poured into his Tianchi acupoint. Even if it were someone with a martial art ten times better than him would need around six to eight hours to recover. How can he fight another person after just a short while?"

How could anyone know that Ren Woxing was actually feeling like there were dozens of knives slashing and stabbing in his Dantian region. He was using all of his power just to talk calmly and steadily while not revealing the pain he was under.

Priest Chongxu smiled. "Chief Ren wants to grant some lesson? We've already said before that both sides will decide for themselves who will go out to fight. If Chief Ren wants to grant some lesson, we won't disobey what we've agreed upon. It's just that poor Taoist's advantage is too large."

"I've already staked my life in fighting two masters before. If I want to fight against Priest again, then I would be looking down at your Wudang School's sword art's hundred of years of reputation. Even though I'm mad, I wouldn't do this."

Priest Chongxu felt happy to hear this and nodded his head. "Many thanks."

When he first saw Ren Woxing drew his sword out, he hesitated. If he prevailed against Ren Woxing after they had fought him in succession, it would be said that it was not honourable. However, if he lost, then Wudang School would have no face to stand in Jianghu anymore. When he heard that Ren Woxing was not going to fight, he was relieved.

Ren Woxing continued, "Priest Chongxu is a new force in your respectable side. So we'll also get a new force for our side." He then looked up and shouted, "Little brother Linghu Chong, please come down!"

Everyone was greatly surprised and followed Ren Woxing's eyes in looking up towards the wooden signage. Linghu Chong was even more confounded. He

was now in a very difficult position and did not know what to do for a short moment. But seeing that he could not hide anymore, he leapt down. He then knelt down in front of Great Master Fangzheng and kowtowed a few times to pay his respect. "I rushed into your treasured temple without permission. This is a really big sin. I'm ready to receive Abbot's punishment."

Fangzheng laughed before answering, "So it's young hero Linghu. I heard young hero's even breathing and sensed that your internal energy is profound. I felt it was really strange. I didn't know which master was visiting my humble temple. Please rise, please rise, this is too big a propriety, I don't deserve it." As he was speaking, he was joining his two palms together returning the propriety.

Linghu Chong thought, "So he already knew for some time that I was hiding behind that wooden signage."

Beggar Clan's leader Xie Feng suddenly said, "Linghu Chong, come and take a look at these words."

Linghu Chong stood up and followed his finger to look at three sentences behind a wooden pillar. The first sentence was: "Someone's behind the signage." The second sentence was: "I'll grab him down." The third sentence was: "Wait, this person's internal energy is orthodox and demonical. Don't know yet whether he's friend or foe." Every word was carved deeply and was clearly seen on the wooden pillar. They were written by Great Master Fangzheng and Xie Feng by using their fingers. Linghu Chong was alarmed and impressed. He thought, "Great Master Fangzheng detected my very weak breathing and was able to distinguish the origin of my martial art. He's really a divine person." He then immediately gave his respect to everyone around. "When seniors came to the hall, because I was afraid, I didn't dare to come down and pay my respect. Please forgive me." He believed that his master's face must be looking furious at the moment so he did not dare to look at his eyes.

Xie Feng laughed. "You were afraid like a thief? What are you trying to steal from Shaolin temple?"

"I heard that young lady Ren was detained at Shaolin temple. So I bravely

came here to get her out," Linghu Chong replied.

Xie Feng laughed. "So you came here to steal your wife, haha, this is not afraid like a thief but it's called extremely daring in lewdness."

Linghu Chong replied with a straight face, "Young lady Ren treated me very kindly. Even if my body is grounded to dust and my bones are chopped into pieces, I'm still willing."

Xie Feng let out a long sigh. "What a pity, what a pity. A very promising youth's future is harmed because of a woman. If you don't abandon your evil way, then this honourable position of Huashan School's leader, do you think it would still be able to come to your hand?"

Ren Woxing said loudly, "What's so rare about being a leader of Huashan? When I die, the position of Chief in Divine Sun Moon Sect, wouldn't that be in my lucky son-in-law's hand?"

Linghu Chong was startled and tremblingly said, "Can... can.. cannot..."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Alright. No need for this idle talk anymore. Chong'er, why don't you get some lesson from this headmaster of Wudang's divine sword? Priest Chongxu's sword art is using soft to overcome hard and has this circling motion. It's very rare in the world so you must be really careful."

He called him 'Chong'er'. This was really regarding him as his son-in-law already. Linghu Chong silently examined the situation. Both sides had now won one fight each so this third fight would determine whether Yingying would be able to go down the mountain. He had already fought Priest Chongxu before and knew that he could win against him. In order to save Yingying, he must enter the fight. He turned his body around and knelt in front of Priest Chongxu to pay his respect.

Priest Chongxu hastily extended his hand to ask him to get up. He then oddly asked, "Why such a big propriety?"

Linghu Chong answered, "I really respect Priest. But under these circumstances, I'm forced to ask Priest to grant me a lesson. My heart feels

uneasy about this.”

Priest Chongxu laughed loudly and said, “Little brother’s propriety is too excessive.”

Linghu Chong stood up and Ren Woxing passed over the long sword to him. Linghu Chong took the sword in his hand. Then with the sword pointing down, he leaned his body forward. Priest Chongxu lifted his eyes to look at the sky outside the hall and was lost in thought thinking about Linghu Chong’s sword art. Everyone there saw him not moving as if he was meditating and they all felt that this was really strange. After a long time, Priest Chongxu let out a long sigh. “We don’t need to fight this battle. The four of you can go down the mountain.”

When these words were spoken, everyone was astonished. Exulted, Linghu Chong bowed towards Priest Chongxu. Xie Feng said, “Priest, what do you mean by those words?”

Priest Chongxu replied, “I can’t think of a way to break his sword art. This battle, poor priest admits my defeat.”

Xie Feng said, “The two of you haven’t fought yet.”

Chongxu told everyone, “Many days ago, at the foot of Mount Wudang, I’ve already fought him for more than three hundred moves and I lost. If we fight today, I would still lose.”

Fangzheng and the rest of them asked, "Did this really happen?"

“Little brother Linghu’s sword art was passed down by Feng Qingyang, Senior Feng. I’m not his match,” Chongxu said. After he said this, he smiled slightly and stepped back.

Ren Woxing laughed loudly and said, “Priest is very open-minded, this is really admirable. At first, old man here only admires you by one half. Now, I admire you seven-tenths.” He said seven-tenths, but it was after all still not full. He then folded his hands in salute towards Great Master Fangzheng and said, “Great Master Fangzheng, we’ll meet again some other time.” Linghu Chong walked up in front of his Master and Master-Wife and kowtowed to them. Yue

Buqun leaned his body to avoid it and coldly said, "You flatter me!" Madam Yue's heart was sore and tears filled her eyes. Linghu Chong went to Mr. Mo Da to pay his respect. He knew that Mr. Mo Da would not want other people to know about their contact in the past so he only kowtowed three times and did not say anything.

One of Ren Woxing's hands was leading Yingying and his other hand was leading Linghu Chong. He laughed, "Let's go!" He strode purposefully towards the door of the hall. Xie Feng, Zhenshan Zi, Yu Canghai, Priest Tianmen, and the other people were not as good as Priest Chongxu in terms of martial art. Since Chongxu already admitted that he was not a match for Linghu Chong's sword art, even though they did not believe him, they also did not dare to rashly go up to fight and brought shame to themselves.

Just as Ren Woxing was about to step outside of the hall, they suddenly heard Yue Buqun shouted, "Wait!"

Ren Woxing turned his head around and asked, "What?"

"Priest Chongxu is an educated man. He doesn't want to fight someone with a narrow mind. We haven't fought out this third fight yet. Linghu Chong, I'll accompany you for this fight."

Linghu Chong was surprised and his whole body started to shake. His mouth was chattering as he said, "Master, I... I... how can..."

But Yue Buqun was calm when he replied, "Other people said that you've taken some pointers from martial uncle Feng and received the essence of swordsmanship from Huashan School. It seems that even I'm not your match. Even though you've already been expelled from Huashan, but in Jianghu, you're still setting up your reputation using our school's sword art. Because I am unable to teach you, all the seniors of the orthodox schools are exasperated by you, unworthy youth. If I don't take care of this then do I let other people take responsibility for this? Today, if I don't kill you, then you'll kill me." As he said these last few words, his voice became fierce. He then drew his sword out and shouted, "The two of us no longer have a master disciple relationship, en

guard!” Linghu Chong took a step back and said, “Disciple doesn’t dare!”

Yue Buqun thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong's chest. Linghu Chong leaned to the side avoiding it. Yue Buqun followed this with another two thrusts which Linghu Chong also avoided. Linghu Chong's long sword was still pointing at the ground and he had not used it to block the thrusts. Yue Buqun said, "You already gave me three moves. Consider that as finishing the respect we have. Ready your sword!"

Ren Woxing said, "Chong'er, you're still not returning any move, do you really want to die here?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Yes", and immediately lifted his sword up. In this fight, should he let Master win or should he win over Master? If he deliberately held back and lost, even if he received heavy injuries, he wouldn't care, but Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying would all be detained on Mount Shaoshi for ten years. Great Master Fangzheng was surely a righteous eminent monk, but there was no guarantee that Zuo Lengchan and the rest of the Shaolin monks would not harm the three of them. In this ten year of imprisonment, it would be very hard to say whether they would be able to keep their lives. But he also thought about how he had been by himself since he was young, and it was Master and Master-Wife who brought him up. He considered them as his own parents and he had not repaid them for their kindness yet. How could he defeat Master in front of all the world's heroes and make him lose face and reputation?

As he was hesitating on what to do, Yue Buqun had already attacked him with more than twenty moves. Linghu Chong only used the Huashan sword moves previously taught by his master to block. He didn't dare to use the 'Dugu Nine Swords' as each of its moves was an attacking method meant to harm the opponent. After he studied 'Dugu Nine Swords', his knowledge had greatly advanced and furthermore, his internal energy was abundant. Although he was only using a common Huashan sword art, his sword's power and class naturally differed by a lot compared to the past. Yue Buqun was attacking continuously but he had not managed to harm him yet.

The spectators saw how Linghu Chong was wielding his sword and they

naturally understood that he was intentionally giving way. When Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian looked at this, both their faces showed their worries. Both of them remembered that day at the Plum Manor on Hangzhou's Mount Gu when Ren Woxing invited Linghu Chong to join the Divine Sun Moon Sect. He was giving him the Right Protector position and later on, the position of Chief. Ren Woxing would also impart to him the secret of how to harmonise the various internal energies in his body after using the 'Art of Essence Absorbing'. But this youth was hardly moved by this offer and was very loyal to his school.

At this time, seeing how he was so respectful towards his former master and master-wife, it seemed that if Yue Buqun were to stab him to death, Linghu Chong would even be willing to accept this in his heart. He was actually only using defensive moves so how would he be able to win? It was apparent that Linghu Chong had already decided not to win over his master, especially since they were fighting in front of so many accomplished heroes. He would have abandoned his sword and admitted defeat a long time ago if it was not for the fact that Yingying, Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian would be imprisoned on Mount Shaoshi if he lost. The two people, Ren and Xiang, were pacing back and forth not knowing what to do. They looked at the fight again and they thought, "What should we do?"

Ren Woxing turned his head around towards Yingying and whispered, "Go in front."

Yingying understood her dad's intention well. He was afraid that Linghu Chong would take into consideration the kindness of his former master and would intentionally lose the fight. He wanted her to go in front so that Linghu Chong would be able to see her and be reminded how she had treated him, so he would use his power and gain victory. She lightly groaned but did not move. After some time, when Ren Woxing saw Linghu Chong kept retreating, he became even more worried and again told Yingying, "Go in front." Yingying still did not move and groaned again not answering him. She thought in her heart, "You already understand how I treated you. If you think I'm more important then you'd help me go down the mountain and you'd be able to gain victory by

yourself. If you think your master is more important, even if I pulled your sleeve and cry, it would still be useless. Why must I stand in front of you to remind you of this?" She deeply felt that it was natural for two people to love each other. If she had to give some signs before Linghu Chong would consider her love for him then that was just too tasteless.

Linghu Chong was not restricted to using Huashan sword art when blocking each of his master's attack. If he had actually counter attacked, Yue Buqun would have been forced to throw away his sword and admit defeat a long time ago. He had seen a lot of flaws in his master's sword moves but he had not even attacked once. Yue Buqun understood Linghu Chong's heart from the beginning, so he attacked continuously using his Divine Violet Twilight Art in conjunction with his Huashan sword art. He already knew that Linghu Chong would not attack back so he kept advancing with all of his attacks and did not care about the flaws in his sword art anymore. As he did this, the power of his sword art had now greatly multiplied. The spectators saw that Yue Buqun's sword art was wonderful and he had also received an advantage, but he had not been able to stab Linghu Chong from the beginning. They also saw that when Linghu Chong wielded his sword, sometimes there was a move and sometimes there was no move. When there was no move, it looked like as if his long sword was just blocking in a disorderly fashion but looked marvellous at the same time. He only had to touch Yue Buqun's sword lightly to protect himself. The more they watched, the more they admired him. They all thought, "Priest Chongxu said that his sword art is inferior, seems like he didn't just make that up."

Yue Buqun had been fighting for a long time without stopping and he was becoming impatient. Suddenly, he thought, "Ayo, this is not good! This little traitor doesn't want other people to say that he doesn't know how to repay the kindness of other people so he kept on fighting me. Even though he's not attacking, he's still making it difficult for me to gain victory. Everyone here is a master and is very observant. At this time, they must have observed a long time ago that this little traitor is purposely giving way to me. I've been continuously attacking him from the start, what would become of my dignity? How can this be considered as the behaviour of a school leader? This little traitor wants to

give me some difficulties and force me to give way and voluntarily admit defeat."

He quickly transferred his Divine Violet Twilight Art into his sword. His sword hacked down splitting the air. Linghu Chong slanted his body and avoided the chop. Yue Buqun circled his sword and slashed towards Linghu Chong's waist. Linghu Chong leapt above the sword. Yue Buqun flicked his sword upwards aiming towards the back of his body. The change in this sword move was extremely fast. There were no eyes at the back of Linghu Chong's body and the situation was very difficult for him to avoid. Everyone gasped in surprised. Linghu Chong was in mid air and there was nowhere for him to step on to launch his body forward. It was also too late for him to use his sword to block the strike. But then, they saw him using his sword to hit the wooden pillar in front him. Borrowing this force, he jumped to the back of the pillar and with a 'pu' sound, Yue Buqun's long sword penetrated the wooden pillar. The sword was pliable but with his internal energy injected to it, the long sword went through the pillar and the point of the sword stopped just inches away from Linghu Chong's body.

"Ah!" everyone gasped in surprise. The sound of this cry was full of happiness, delight and praise. Unexpectedly, everyone was happy for Linghu Chong. They admired him for the skilful and clever way he avoided the attack. They were also celebrating the fact that Yue Buqun did not manage to stab him. Yue Buqun had executed his unique skill, Three-Linking Strike, but was still unable to hit Linghu Chong. Furthermore, he felt angry when he heard the spectators calling out in compassion towards his opponent.

This 'Life Snatching Three-Linking Immortal Sword' was a move from the Huashan School's sword branch, which he, a qi branch disciple, did not initially know. In those years, when the two branches were destroying each other, disciples of the sword branch used this sword art to kill many good fighters from the qi branch. At the same time, disciples from the qi branch were also slaughtering the disciples from the sword branch. After they had taken the leadership of the Huashan School, the good fighters from the qi branch

attentively studied in detail these three advance sword moves 'Life Snatching Three-Linking Immortal Sword'. When they thought of the power of these Three-Linking moves on that day, there was still lingering fear in their hearts. During the study of this Three-Linking sword art, everyone said that this sword art belonged to the demonical path. But as they were seeking the exquisiteness of this sword art, they all forgot their own school's difficult 'Qi Drives the Sword' principle. They only said that the sword move was beautiful but in their hearts, they actually really admired it.

Seeing Yue Buqun and Linghu Chong fighting, Madam Yue was full of grief. When she saw her husband suddenly using these three moves, she thought in her heart, "In those years, the two branches wanted to destroy each other because of the dispute about the importance of qi cultivation and sword art. He's the head disciple of the qi branch but at this moment, he suddenly used the move from the sword branch. If an outsider saw through this, wouldn't they contemptibly mock us? Ai, he must have no choice but to use this move. But he's clearly not Chong'er's match, why is he still continuing to fight?"

She wanted to ask them to stop but this matter concerned a lot of people and not just her own school. She wanted to go forward but changed her mind, she grasped the handle of her sword and her heart was worried to death. Yue Buqun lifted his right hand and pulled his sword out from the pillar. Linghu Chong did not move and stood still behind the pillar. Yue Buqun only saw how he stayed behind the wooden pillar looking like he was hiding from further attacks. He regarded that this happened because Linghu Chong was afraid of him and also because Linghu Chong respected his reputation. The two people studied each other. Linghu Chong said in a low voice, "Disciple isn't your match. We don't need to fight anymore." Yue Buqun uttered an 'hng'.

Ren Woxing said, "There can be no winner and loser in this fight between master and disciple. Great Master Abbot, there's no winner and loser for these three fights. Old man will pay for my sin, how about if we stop this?"

Madam Yue relaxed and inwardly sighed, "We clearly lost this fight. Chief Ren said this to give us face. In this case, it's best if we stop."

Fangzheng said, "Amitufo! What Shi Zhu Ren said saves everyone from injury and shows your wisdom. Old monk doesn't..." The word 'mind' had not been said when Zuo Lengchan interrupted, "Then we're going to let these four go down the mountain and let them harm Jianghu and massacre the innocents? Let their eight palms to be covered in the blood of hundreds and thousands of people and destroy everything good in this world? Should we still regard martial brother Yue as the headmaster of Huashan School?"

Fangzheng hesitated when a 'chi' sound was heard. Yue Buqun had gone around to the back of the pillar and thrust his sword towards Linghu Chong. Fast as lightning, Linghu Chong avoided the thrust. After many moves, the two of them were back in the middle of the hall. Yue Buqun wielded his sword and attacked quickly, advancing at every opportunity. Linghu Chong smothered these attacks by either blocking or avoiding. After more than twenty moves, Ren Woxing laughed. "To decide who wins this fight, we'll just have to wait for seven to eight days and see who dies from starvation first. I'm sure we'll find out by then." Everyone felt that even though what he said was an exaggeration, it's likely that if they kept on fighting like this, it would be hard to get a result within a few hours.

Ren Woxing thought, "This old fellow Yue just thickened his face and kept on fighting. He's in an invincible position and couldn't possibly lose. But if Chong'er made a slight mistake then everything would be spoiled. The longer this fight goes, the more harmful it would be to us. I must say something to incite him." He then said, "Brother Xiang, we've really widened our view today in Shaolin temple."

Xiang Wentian replied, "Right. All of the top masters from Wulin are gathering here..."

"Among them, there's one who is better than the rest."

"Which one?"

"This person learned a divine martial art and other people will admire him when they see it."

"What divine martial art is this?"

"This person is learning Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art," Ren Woxing told him.

"Subordinate has heard about Golden Bell Cover, Metal Gown, but I've never heard of this Golden Face Cover, Iron Face."

"Other people's Golden Bell Cover, Metal Gown martial art makes one's body impervious to sabre. This person's Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art will make the face hard when practised."

"This Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art, which school or sect has this martial art?" Xiang Wentian asked.

"They said that this martial art is no small matter. It was created in the west mountain of Huashan by the headmaster of Huashan School, Jianghu's venerable Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun, Mr. Yue."

"I heard that Gentleman Sword Yue Buqun's internal energy art is unrivalled and his sword art is unmatched. As expected, it wasn't just an empty reputation. This Golden Face Cover, Iron Face Divine Art, after it's learned then your face will be impervious to sabres, is this right?"

"This move has a lot of usefulness. We're not disciples of the Huashan School so we wouldn't know the secret to this art."

"Mr. Yue already created this kind of divine martial art, then his name would be known throughout Jianghu and would forever be praised as an immortal."

"Of course. When we later meet with anyone from Huashan School, we must be really careful with their Iron Face Divine Art," Ren Woxing said.

"Yes, subordinate will remember this in my heart."

The two of them were talking back and forth like they were the actors in a comical drama, but there was a hint of ridicule in their tones towards Yue Buqun. Yu Canghai was giggling non-stop, taking pleasure in other's misfortune. Madam Yue's was blushing furiously. But it seemed that Yue Buqun didn't hear any of these conversations. He thrust his sword and Linghu Chong avoided it by

slanting to the left. He quickly followed to the right and slashed his sword forward. Suddenly, he circled his sword back and the point of the sword thrust back out again. It was the Huashan School's sword move called 'Return of the Prodigal Son'. Linghu Chong lifted his sword to block it. Yue Buqun's sword was now dancing around in mid-air, executing the sword move called 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests'. Linghu Chong again blocked the attack.

Yue Buqun slashed twice with his sword. Linghu Chong was startled and hurriedly retreated two steps. His face was blushing as he called out, "Master!" Yue Buqun snorted and continued with his attack forcing Linghu Chong to take another step back. Everyone saw that Linghu Chong's face was blushing and he seemed to be in a desperate situation. They did not understand a single thing and all thought, "There's nothing strange about his master's three attacks, what's so great about it? How can it unexpectedly make things difficult for Linghu Chong?" None of them knew that these three moves that Yue Buqun used were from the sword art that Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan created, the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. Linghu Chong suddenly felt sentimental, remembering the past when he was looking forward to the days when he would be able to share marital vows with his little martial sister, and when Yue Lingshan treated him nicely. With their childish thoughts, they had then felt that if the Yue couple could pass down martial arts, then the rest of the disciples would be able to as well. Thus, the two of them tried to create a set of sword art of their own and only the two of them were able to use this set of 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. That's why seeing this set of sword moves gave him a bittersweet taste in his heart.

He didn't expect Yue Buqun would unexpectedly use these three sword moves. Linghu Chong felt helpless, ashamed, and sad. He thought, "Little martial sister had already broken our ties of love. You're using this set of sword moves to make me recall my feelings and to put my mind in confusion. You want to kill me then just kill me." He felt that there was nothing for him to continue living on this world and death would be better.

Yue Buqun's long sword was thrust out again. The move he used was 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute'. Linghu Chong knew this move very well and he just

unconsciously blocked it. Yue Buqun followed with a move called 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon'. These two moves complemented each other and the movements were graceful. Especially 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' with the long sword dancing in the air, looking like a divine dragon flying elegantly through the air.

According to a story, during the time of Chun Qiu, Qin Mukong had a daughter called Nong Yu who loved to play the flute. There was a youth called Xiao Shi, who arrived riding a dragon and could play the flute divinely. Later on, he taught Nong Yu how to play the flute. Qin Mukong then allowed him to take her to be his wife. 'Ideal Son-in-Law' was the literary reference that these moves were taken from. Later on, the pair of husband and wife transcended to immortality together and occupied the middle peak of the Huashan Mountain. Huashan's Jade Maiden Peak had 'Phoenix Pavillion', the middle peak had Jade Maiden Temple, Jade Maiden Cave, Jade Maiden hair washing basin, and a dressing table, every one of them gained their fame from this fable. Linghu Chong and Yue Lingshan had often gone to all these places but the meaning behind the story of Xiao Shi and Nong Yu, their happiness, and also what went on in the heart of those two people, they never knew any of those.

At the moment he saw Yue Buqun used the move 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon', Linghu Chong's heart became confused while his hand moved to block the attack. He thought, "Why does Master want to use this move? Does he want to remind me of my mistakes and kill me?"

After Yue Buqun used this move, he again used the move 'Return of the Prodigal Son' followed by 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests' which was followed by the three moves from the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. These moves were again followed by 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute' and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' moves. When masters competed, even when the moves went above a thousand, they would never duplicate the pattern. This pattern of moves had already been executed to fight the opponent before so using them again would be useless. When the enemy was familiar with your pattern then he could take advantage of it to make an attack. When Yue Buqun used this pattern for a second time, it

caused all the spectators to be puzzled.

Linghu Chong saw Yue Buqun used the move 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' for the second time. This time, this move was followed by the three moves from the 'Chong Ling Sword Art'. Suddenly, a thought flashed in his mind and he was enlightened. "So Master used these sword arts to remind me. I must abandon my evil ways and return to the righteous way, and then the return of the prodigal son means that I would be accepted back into the Huashan School."

There were many ancient pine trees on Mount Huashan with branches full of leaves hanging down and stretching, as if they were welcoming guests who were coming up the mountain. They are called 'Welcoming Guests Pine Trees'. The move 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests' was formed to resemble the appearance of these ancient pines. He thought, "Master is saying that if I return to the family of Huashan School, not only would I be welcomed back, even the pine trees on the mountain would welcome me back." His heart trembled, "Master said that not only would I be welcomed back into the family of Huashan School, he would also give little martial sister as my wife. Master used the few moves from that 'Chong Ling Sword Art' to make me understand his intention clearly. It's just that I was muddled and didn't understand him so he used the two moves of 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute' and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' again." Returning to Huashan and marrying Yue Lingshan were two of his biggest desire. Suddenly, in front of all these masters, Yue Buqun promised him these two matters. Even though it wasn't conveyed outright by words, he understood it completely from these several sword moves. Linghu Chong knew that Master's most important vow was to never take back what he already said. He had already promised to take him back into the Huashan family and also betroth his daughter to him. So if he fulfilled his promises then these matters would definitely happen. In that instant, a feeling of happiness filled his chest.

He naturally knew of the deep love between Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi. He also knew that she did not love him any more but instead felt hatred towards him. But the marriage between man and woman was decided entirely by the parents and the daughter had no say in it. It had been that way for more than a

thousand years. Yue Buqun had already betrothed his daughter to him, and Yue Lingshan would not be able to reject it. Linghu Chong thought in his heart, "If I were to be able to re-enter the Huashan School, I would be thanking the heaven and earth already. But to also become partner with little martial sister; that would really be a joy from heaven. Little martial sister would surely be unhappy at the beginning but I would be suitable for her. After a long time, she would see that I'm sincere towards her and would slowly change her attitude."

He was beaming from ear to ear and was feeling very happy in his heart. Yue Buqun continuously used the moves 'Return of the Prodigal Son' followed by 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests'. His sword moves were becoming urgent looking like he was becoming impatient. Linghu Chong comprehended what Yue Buqun meant, "Master is telling me, the prodigal son, to return. Of course he couldn't say this out loud but he wants me to throw away my sword and admit defeat immediately. Then I would be able to rejoin the school immediately. I would be able to return to Huashan and get married to little martial sister. My life would be returned to me, what else do I want? But what about Yingying, Chief Ren, and brother Xiang? If I lose this fight then the three of them would be detained on top of Mount Shaoshi and they might be even be killed. I'm only coveting for my own happiness and not repaying other people's kindness. Can I still be called a person?" At this thought, the back of his body was covered with cold sweat and his vision became blurry. He saw Yue Buqun slashed his sword horizontally passing very close to his mouth then pointing the sword towards him, pushed forward. This was the move 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute'. Linghu Chong's heart was moved again. "Yingying was willing to die for me but I didn't even pay any attention to her plight. Is there anyone else in this world who is more vicious than Linghu Chong? No matter what, I have to repay Yingying's kindness." Suddenly, he felt dizzy, and heard a 'zheng' sound as a long sword fell on the ground.

All the spectators cried out in surprise.

Linghu Chong's body was swaying. When he opened his eyes, he saw Yue Buqun had leapt back and was looking furious. Yue Buqun's right wrist was

bleeding. Linghu Chong checked the point of his sword and saw blood dripping from it. He was greatly startled. He knew that while his mind was in confusion, his hand was blocking the attack. But somehow, he unexpectedly used the 'Dugu Nine Sword' move to pierce Yue Buqun's right wrist. He immediately threw away his sword and knelt on the ground. "Master, disciple has sinned and deserves death."

Yue Buqun kicked out and hit him squarely on his chest. The kick was very fierce and swift causing Linghu Chong to fly off. While his body was in mid air, his vision became dark. He heard a 'peng' sound, and his body dropped on the ground. But he didn't feel any pain as he passed out.

Chapter 28 Accumulation of Snow

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



"I want to write some words on these four snowmen," said Yue Lingshan. She drew her sword and started writing on the snowmen with the sword tip.

Without knowing how much time had passed, Linghu Chong gradually felt his body feeling colder. He slowly opened his eyes and saw a firelight which dazzled him. He quickly shut his eyes and heard Yingying happily called out, "You... you're awake!" Linghu Chong opened his eyes once again. He saw Yingying's pair of beautiful eyes staring at him with her face full of joy. Linghu Chong tried to sit up, but Yingying waved her hand. "Rest for a bit more."

Linghu Chong looked around, and saw that he was inside a mountain cave. Outside the cave, there was a big bonfire. He then remembered that he was kicked by his master. "What happened to my Master and Master-Wife?"

Yingying flatly answered him, "You're still calling him master? In this world, there's no such shameless master. You've already given way, but he didn't know what was good for him, and at the end, he was unable to get out of an awkward situation. He gave you a very fierce kick but broke his leg, serves him right!"

"My master broke his leg?" Linghu Chong asked, startled.

Yingying giggled. "Isn't it good enough that he wasn't shaken to death? Daddy said you still don't know how to use the Art of Essence Absorbing yet, otherwise you wouldn't have gotten injured."

Linghu Chong mumbled, "I stabbed master and also broke his leg. This is really... really..."

"You regret it?" Yingying asked.

Linghu Chong felt extremely ashamed. "I shouldn't have done that. If it weren't for Master and Master-Wife bringing me up, maybe I would've died a long time ago. How can there be a today? I repaid their kindness with enmity, I'm worse than an animal."

"He repeatedly wanted to kill you with his fierce moves but you just endured it and let him do it; that can be said that you've repaid your master's kindness. Also, looking at the type of person you are, how could you have died? Even if the Yue couple didn't bring you up, you'd be called the little beggar in Jianghu because I don't think you would have died. Also, he already expelled you from Huashan, so the master disciple relation between you two was severed a long time ago. What is he to you now?" Yingying suddenly lowered her voice, "Brother Chong, you offended your master and master-wife because of me. My... my heart..." She lowered her head, and both of her cheeks were blushing.

Linghu Chong saw her revealing her little girl's shyness, while her beauty was enhanced by the raging fire outside the cave shining on her face. His heart was moved. Extending his hand, he held her left hand, and sighed, not knowing

what to say. Yingying softly murmured, "Why did you sigh? You regret knowing me?"

"No, no! How can I regret it? Because of me, you were willing to give up your life in Shaolin temple. Even if later on my body were grounded to dust and my bones broken to pieces, I still wouldn't be able to repay for your kindness," Linghu Chong said.

Yingying stared into both of his eyes. "Why are you talking like that? Even until now, your heart is still regarding me as a stranger."

Linghu Chong felt ashamed. In his heart, there was always a feeling of estrangement towards her. "I said it wrong. From today onwards, I will wholeheartedly treat you well." As he said these words, he couldn't refrain from thinking, "How about little martial sister? Little martial sister? Could it be that I'll forget little martial sister?"

Yingying's eyes flashed with happiness. "Brother Chong, are you speaking the truth, or are you deceiving me?"

Suddenly Linghu Chong was no longer thinking of himself or of his longing for Yue Lingshan. He sincerely answered, "If I'm deceiving you, then let me be split in two by thunder, and not die a good death."

Yingying's left hand slowly turned over and gripped Linghu Chong's hand, which was already holding her hand. She felt that this moment was the most precious moment in her whole life. She felt her whole body becoming hot, and her heart felt as if it were floating on clouds. She wished that this moment would last forever. After a long time, she slowly said, "We're people who live in Wulin, I'm afraid we're destined not to die a good death. If later on you become ungrateful towards me, I won't hope that you'll be split in two by thunder. I... I... I'd rather kill you nicely with a single stab of my sword."

Linghu Chong was startled. He never expected her to suddenly say such words. When he recovered from his shock, he laughed. "My life was saved by you, so it already belongs to you. If you want to take it back, then you can come and take it back anytime."

Yingying smiled and said, "Other people said that you're a cunning and mannerless romantic. As expected, the words coming out of your mouth are suave and sly, and not decent and proper at all. I don't know what kind of fate that made me... made me like a frivolous romantic like you."

Linghu Chong laughed. "When was I being frivolous towards you? You said that I did, so now I want to be frivolous towards you." As he said this, he sat up.

Both of Yingying's feet twitched, and she shot out for a few feet. She lowered her head and said, "I regard you well and we've been adhering to customs and rules. If you think that I'm a lascivious girl, and that you can just take advantage of me as you please, then you're mistaken about me."

Linghu Chong replied in a serious manner, "How can I dare to regard you as a lascivious girl? You're an old granny of good moral standing and reputation, you didn't even allow me to turn my head around to look at you."

Yingying laughed and remembered the first time she met Linghu Chong. At that time, he kept calling her 'granny', and was being very respectful towards her. She couldn't help smiling and her dimples showed. She then sat down around three to four feet away from Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong laughed and said, "You're not allowing me to be frivolous. From now on, I'll just keep calling you granny."

Yingying giggled. "Alright. Good grandson."

"Granny, my heart has..."

"You can't call me granny! Wait for sixty years before calling me that."

"If I could start calling you 'granny' from now till sixty years later, then my life wouldn't have been in vain."

Yingying felt touched and thought, "If I could really accompany him for sixty years, that would be as good as having ascended to heaven and becoming an immortal."

Linghu Chong gazed at her profile. Her nose was slightly pointed, her long

eyelashes were hanging down, her appearance was delicate and tender, and her complexion was warm and soft. He thought, "Such a beautiful lady, why do those thousands of cruel and wild heroes from Jianghu respect and fear her, and they're also willing to go through fire and water for her?" He wanted to ask, but he felt that talking about this sort of things at this time would dampen their spirits, so he stopped himself from asking.

"Whatever you want to say, just say it," Yingying said.

"From the beginning, I felt there's something odd. How come Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and the rest of them fear you so much."

Yingying charmingly laughed. "I know that if you don't understand this matter well, then you will always feel uneasy. I'm afraid in your heart, you've always regarded me as a monster."

"No, no, I regard you as a vastly knowledgeable Immortal."

Yingying smiled. "You can't say three words without speaking nonsense. In fact your type of person, you might not necessarily be frivolous and mannerless, but you merely love to talk sweetly. That's why other people said that you're a dissolute person."

"When I call you granny, do you think I was just talking sweetly?"

"Call me granny for the rest of your life then."

"I want to call you for the rest of my life, but it's not to call you granny."

Yingying's face turned bright red, and she felt sweetness swelled in her heart. She whispered, "I hope these words you just said aren't just sweet talk."

"You're afraid that I was just talking sweetly. For the rest of my life, when you cook meals for me, you don't have to put oil in them then."³⁴

Yingying smiled and said, "I can't cook; I even burnt the frogs I was roasting."

Linghu Chong remembered those days when the two of them were roasting frogs in a wild field besides a creek. He felt at this very moment that the feeling of that time had returned. His heart was filled with tender affection.

Yingying said quietly, "If you're not afraid of my burnt meals, then I'll cook for you for the rest of your life."

"Why not? If you cook for me, then I'll eat three big bowls of burnt meals everyday."

Yingying softly said, "You love to joke around to your heart's content. Actually, you speak teasingly to make me happy, and I feel very happy hearing them." Their eyes met, and for a long time, they just looked at each other without speaking. After some time, Yingying slowly said, "You already know that my daddy was originally the chief of the Divine Sun Moon Sect. Later, uncle Dongfang... .. no, Dongfang Bubai. I keep calling him uncle, I'm too used to it. He used deceit and imprisoned daddy, and fooled everyone else. He said that daddy had died somewhere and had assigned him to be Chief when that happened. At that time, I was still small, while Dongfang Bubai was very cunning and his plan didn't have any flaw, so I also didn't have any suspicion. After Dongfang Bubai managed to deceive everyone, he treated me unusually and was being very polite and gave me a lot of favour. No matter what I said, he never rejected it. That's why when I was in the sect, I was in a very honoured position."

"Those Jianghu's heroes, they're all subordinates of the Divine Sun Moon Sect?"

"They can't be regarded as members of the sect, but they've always been under my sect's subordination. Most of their leaders have taken my sect's 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill'."

Linghu Chong snorted. That day at Plum Manor on Mount Gu, when the elders of Devil Sect, such as Bao Dachu, Qin Weibang, and the others saw Ren Woxing's red pills of 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill', they were all frightened to death. When Linghu Chong remembered the event of that day, he couldn't help scowling. Yingying continued, "Once you've taken this 'Divine Three Corpse Brain Pill', every year after that, you have to take an antidote. Otherwise, the poison will come out and you'll die a miserable death. Dongfang Bubai treated those heroic warriors severely. If there were a small matter that's not up to his

expectation, then he wouldn't give them the medicine. Every time, I have to seek his compassion to give them the medicines."

"You're their saviour then."

"I'm not a saviour. They came to me asking for help, and I didn't have the heart to just ignore them. This was originally also Dongfang Bubai's plan in deceiving the people in the sect. He wanted everyone to know that he's taking care of me and really respects me. Then, naturally, no one suspects him of actually usurping the position of Chief."

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, "This person is a shrewd schemer."

"But it's bothersome for me to always ask for compassion from Dongfang Bubai. Furthermore, the situation inside the sect is very different from the past. Everyone also sees how Dongfang Bubai wants to be flattered, it's very disgusting. The spring of the year before last, I asked martial nephew Elder Bamboo Green to accompany me roaming the hills and playing with the water, and also to get out from the sect's matters and from saying those shameless words to Dongfang Bubai. Didn't think that I would meet you then." She then looked at Linghu Chong, and the memory of the first time she met him at the bamboo alley rose up. She lightly sighed and her heart was filled with tender feelings. After a long time, she went on, "Those thousands of heroes who came to Shaolin temple, of course not all of them had taken the medicines that I asked for. But it only needs one person to receive my favour, then his family members, good friends, sect members, brothers, and many others, they naturally have also received my favour. Also, when they went to Mount Shaoshi, it's not necessarily because of me. It's more likely that they were answering big hero Linghu's summon, and they didn't dare not to come." When she said this, she pursed her lips smiling.

Linghu Chong sighed. "You won't get any benefit from following me. But it's very likely that you'll advance a lot in the art of talking smoothly and sweetly." Yingying burst into laughter. In her whole life, everyone from the Divine Sun Moon Sect had always regarded her like a princess, and no one dared to disobey her. As she grew up, she became bossier, whatever she wanted was done, and

no one dared to say any jokes to her. At this time, as she joked around with Linghu Chong, it was the happiest time in her life. After a time, Yingying turned her head around to face the wall. "I'm naturally happy that you led so many people to Shaolin temple to meet me. But those people are garrulous and crude, behind my back, they're saying I... saying I treated you well, but you're actually a romantic person, and leaves the seeds of love everywhere. And you don't really care about me at all..." As she said this, her voice gradually quietened down. She then quietly continued, "You're really giving me a lot of face by making such a big disturbance, even if I... even if I died, I won't regret getting this good name."

"When you carried me on your back to Shaolin temple seeking for a cure, I was completely unaware. Later on, I was imprisoned under the West Lake, and when I got out, I encountered Heng-Shan School's matter. Then I worked hard after getting the information before finally meeting you, but you've suffered immensely there," Linghu Chong explained.

"I didn't suffer living at the mountain behind Shaolin temple. I lived alone in a stone house, and every ten days, an old monk came to give me firewood and rice. Apart from this, I didn't see anyone else until Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai came to Shaolin. Then Abbot wanted to see me, and I found out that he didn't pass on to you the Tendon Altering Sutra. When I found out that I was swindled, I was really angry and scolded that old monk. Dingxian Shi Tai told me not to worry, and she said that you are safe and well. She also said that you asked the two Shi Tai to go to the Shaolin Abbot to ask for his compassion," Yingying told him.

"When you heard her explanation, you stopped scolding Great Master Abbot?"

"When the Shaolin Temple's Abbot heard me scolding him, he only smiled and didn't get angry. He said: "Female shi zhu, old monk wanted young hero Linghu to join Shaolin on that day, and to take him as my disciple. After that, old monk would have taught him the internal art of Tendon Altering Sutra to repel the various internal energies in his body. But he resolutely refused, and old monk had no way to force him. Also, that day you carried him to come up... that

day when he came up the mountain, he was on the verge of death. But when he went down the mountain, he was walking like a normal person. At the very least, Shaolin temple has given him some help." I thought what he said was reasonable so I said: "Then why do you detain me on the mountain? Buddhists don't tell lies, isn't what you're doing, deceiving me?" Yingying narrated.

"Yes, they shouldn't have concealed that from you."

"That old monk gave me another reason. He said detaining me on Mount Shaoshi was because he hoped that the Buddhist way would change my violent nature. What nonsense!" Yingying complained.

"Yes, what kind of violent nature do you have?"

"You don't need to say some nice words to make me happy. Of course, I have a violent nature. Not only have, but I have a considerable violence in me. But you don't have to worry, I won't use it on you," Yingying said.

"I hold you in a new light now, and thank you very much."

Yingying continued, "At that time, I said to the old monk: "You're already old, but you're still bullying the young. How shameless." That old monk replied: "That day you voluntarily came to Shaolin temple willing to give up your life in exchange for young hero Linghu's life. Even though we didn't cure young hero Linghu, we also didn't take your life. Hearing from the two Shi Tai from Heng-Shan School, young hero Linghu had recently done many heroic deeds in Jianghu. Old monk is really happy for him. Taking into consideration the good reputation of the Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai, you can go down the mountain." He also promised to release hundreds of my Jianghu friends being detained there. I've received a lot of his kindness, so I paid my respect to him a few times. After that, I followed Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai to go down the mountain. Later at the bottom of the mountain, I met someone called 'Ten Thousand Miles Loner' Tian Boguang. He said that you're already leading a few thousand people to come to Shaolin temple to meet me. The two Shi Tai said Shaolin temple was facing a difficulty so they couldn't just put their hands in their sleeves. So we parted ways then, and they wanted me to intercept you.

Unexpectedly, the two kind and gentle seniors died in Shaolin temple." After she said this, she let out a really long sigh.

Linghu Chong also sighed. "I don't know who did it. There were no traces of injury on their bodies and I also don't know how they lost their lives."

"What do you mean no traces of injury? Daddy, uncle Xiang and I went to have a look at the bodies of the two Shi Tai at the temple. I undid their gowns to have a look and saw on their chests two red holes the size of a needle. They were killed after being pierced by iron needles," Yingying told him.

Linghu Chong was startled and uttered an "ah". "Poison needle? Who uses poison needles in Wulin?"

Yingying shook her head. "Daddy and uncle Xiang's experiences are vast, but they also don't know. Daddy said that it wasn't poison needle. It's actually a pointed weapon aimed at a fatal point that killed them. But the needle piercing Dingxian Shi Tai was slightly slanted."

"Yes. When I saw Dingxian Shi Tai, she was still alive. This needle pierced into her chest, so it wasn't done secretly, and they were actually fighting face to face. The person who killed the two Shi Tai must've been masters with high martial art," Linghu Chong concluded.

Yingying added, "That's what my daddy also said. Since we have this clue, it won't be hard to find who the murderer is."

Linghu Chong slapped his hand on the cave's wall and said loudly, "Yingying, while the two of us still have our lives, we must avenge the two Shi Tai."

"Yes," Yingying replied.

Linghu Chong then put his hand on the wall to support himself in getting up. But he felt his four limbs feeling normal, and there was no soreness on his chest. It was as if he had not received any injury. "This is strange. My master gave me a kick, but it seems that I'm not injured."

"My daddy said that you've absorbed much inner energy from other people, and your internal energy is far above your master. But because you didn't use

your power to resist your master, you got injured. But your profound internal energy protected you, so your injury was light. Uncle Xiang gave you a few push to arouse your own internal energy to cure your injury, and you were alright in no time. But your master's leg unexpectedly broke. That was really strange, daddy thought for a long time, and he couldn't come up with an answer," Yingying explained.

"My internal energy is already powerful. So when master kicked me, the counter force from my internal energy broke his leg. Why's that strange?"

"It's not that. Daddy said that even though absorbing other people's energies would protect your body, but you must use it to injure other people. Compared to the completed internal art, you're still one level lower."

"So that's how it is," Linghu Chong said. He didn't really understand the reasons, so he didn't think much about it. But when he thought of how he injured his master in front of all those masters, he felt really guilty.

After a moment, both of them became quiet. They heard the crackling sound of the bonfire outside the cave, but they saw large snowflakes floating down. Compared to when they were still in the Shaolin temple, the snow had gotten even larger. Suddenly, Linghu Chong heard sounds of heavy breathing from the east outside the cave, and he immediately strained to listen to it. Yingying's internal energy wasn't as good as his so she didn't hear anything. She saw his expression and asked, "What did you hear?"

"I heard some sounds of panting just then; there's someone coming. But he's gasping heavily. That person's martial art is low so there should be nothing to worry about." He then asked, "Where's your dad?"

Yingying answered, "Daddy and uncle Xiang said they were going out for a stroll." As she said this, her face turned red. She knew that her father deliberately left to leave her alone with Linghu Chong so that when he woke up, they could talk about their time apart. Linghu Chong again heard the sound of gasping. "Let's go out and take a look."

When the two of them went out of the cave, they saw the mark of Ren and

Xiang's footsteps mostly covered up by the new snow. Linghu Chong pointed in the direction of the footsteps. "The gasping sounds are coming from that direction." The two of them started following the trail of footsteps. After more than a hundred feet, they came to a level area of the mountain. They saw Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian standing still next to each other in the middle of the snowfield. The two of them were startled, and rushed forward at the same time.

Yingying called out, "Dad!" She extended her hand and pulled Ren Woxing's left hand. Her whole body was shaken as she touched her father, and felt cold energy from her father's hand entering the marrow of her bones. She was frightened and called out, "Dad, you... what's..." She had not finished speaking when her body trembled and her teeth started chattering. But she immediately understood what was happening. After her father was hit by Zuo Lengchan's 'Polar Ice Energy', he had been using his power to suppress it. But at this time, he finally couldn't suppress it any longer and the cold energy had come out, and Xiang Wentian was exhausting his power in helping her father to resist it.

At Shaolin temple, Ren Woxing was deceived by Zuo Lengchan and had his acupoint sealed. After they had gone down the mountain, he briefly told her this. Linghu Chong had not yet understood what was going on, and from the light reflection on the snow, he saw the serious complexions of those two people, Ren and Xiang, and how Ren Woxing was gasping for air. He then realised that the gasping sound that he heard before was coming from Ren Woxing. When he saw Yingying's body trembling, he quickly extended his hand to grasp her left hand, and felt a wave of cold air entering his body. He immediately understood. Ren Woxing was hit by his enemy's Polar Ice Energy, and was now in the process of distributing his internal energy according to the method written on the iron panel underneath the West Lake. He was slowly driving out the cold energy out of his body.

When Ren Woxing obtained Linghu Chong's help, he felt relieved. Xiang Wentian and Yingying's internal energies were different from his, and were only able to help him resist the cold energy and not to drive it out. He was already using all of his power just to stop his whole body from freezing, and had no

more energy to drive the cold energy out. He had already resisted the cold energy for a long time and was feeling his power being drained as time went on. Linghu Chong's method was his last line of defence, which was slowly drawing the 'Polar Ice Energy' out of Ren Woxing's body and scattering it out. The four of them were holding hands standing in the middle of the snowfield, looking like statues. Big snowflakes kept falling on the four people's heads and faces, and gradually, their heads, eyes, noses, and gowns were being covered. Linghu Chong was using his energy and he inwardly thought there was something strange, "How come the snow's not melting on my face?" He didn't know that Zuo Lengchan had practised his 'Polar Ice Energy' to an extremely high level, so much so that the cold air coming out was as cold as the snow.

At this moment, their internal organs still held their warmth, but their skins were already ice cold causing the snowflakes falling on their bodies not to melt at all. Compared to the snow falling on the ground, it was accumulating faster on their bodies. After a long time, the sky slowly got brighter but the snow kept on falling down. Linghu Chong was worried that Yingying was weak and that she wouldn't be able to endure the invasion of the cold energy for long. But the poisonous cold air inside Ren Woxing's body had not been emptied yet. Even though he wasn't gasping anymore, he didn't know whether they could part hands at this time, and whether his condition would change if they parted hands. Unable to settle on an idea, he continued helping him scatter the cold energy. He felt from holding Yingying's palm that even though her skin was cold, she had stopped quivering. He was also able to feel the tiny pulse on her palm. At this time, a few inches of white snow had accumulated on top of his two eyes, so he could only feel without seeing how the sky had become brighter. He continually increased his effort hoping that the cold energy in Ren Woxing's body would be completely driven out by morning.

After a long time, the sound of horse's hoof beats coming closer was suddenly heard from the northeast. They heard one horse was being ridden in front of the other horse. Then they heard a person shouting, "Martial sister, martial sister, please hear me out."

Even though both of Linghu Chong's ears were already covered by snow, he still heard him clearly. It was his master Yue Buqun's voice. Both horses were still galloping as they came nearer, and they heard Yue Buqun calling out again, "You don't understand the reason but you're throwing a tantrum already. Please hear me out." This was followed by Madam Yue shouting, "I'm not in a cheerful mood. What's that got to do with you? What's there to say?" Hearing the two people calling out to each other, they deduced that Madam Yue's horse was at the front, and Yue Buqun's horse was at the back chasing her. Linghu Chong felt it very strange. "Master-Wife is so furious. How did master offend her?" But he heard the horse Madam Yue was riding kept on going. Suddenly, she uttered a 'yi', and it was followed by the long neighing sound of the horse. It must be because she had suddenly reined in her horse to stop it, and both horses and person were now standing still.

A short time later, Yue Buqun caught up to her on his horse. "Martial sister, don't you think these four piles of snow look like snowmen?" Madam Yue uttered an 'hng', it seemed that her anger had not abated yet. She just said to herself, "We're in the wilderness, how can there be people making these four snowmen?"

Linghu Chong thought, "How can there be snowmen in this wilderness?" He then realized, "The four of us are covered in white snow until we look swollen. That's why Master and Master-Wife thought that we're snowmen." Master and Master-Wife were right in front of him now, and the circumstance seemed awkward and yet actually very funny. He was afraid as he thought, "Once master found out that it's us, he's bound to give each of us a stab. If he wanted to kill us now, he wouldn't need to spend too much energy."

Yue Buqun said, "There's no foot marks on the snow. These four snowmen must've been made a few days ago. Martial sister, have a look, it seems like three of them are male and one is female."

"They all look similar, how can you tell they're male or female?" Madam Yue replied, and with a shout, urged her horse to go again.

"Martial sister, you're so quick-tempered! There's no one around here, let's talk

about it. How can that be not good?" Yue Buqun urged.

"What quick-slow tempered? I'm going back to Huashan. You love to flatter Zuo Lengchan, you can go up Songshan by yourself."

"Who said I love to flatter Zuo Lengchan? I don't even want this position of Huashan School's leader, why do I want to be subservient to Songshan School?"

"That's right! I don't understand why you want to be subservient towards Zuo Lengchan and listen to all his instructions? Although he's the chief of the Five Mountains Sword Schools, he shouldn't be involved in the matters of our Huashan School. Once the five sword schools are joined into one, will there still be a Huashan School? When Master gave you the leadership of the Huashan School, what did he say?" Madam Yue retorted.

"The respected master wanted me to increase the reputation of Huashan School."

"That's right. If you agreed to Zuo Lengchan and joined Huashan School with Songshan School, how do you repay the late respected master? As the saying goes: would rather have chicken's beak, wouldn't want cow's buttock³⁵. Even though Huashan School is small, we can support ourselves, and we don't need to depend on other people," Madam Yue said.

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh before saying, "Martial sister, Heng-Shan School's Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai's martial art, compared to the two of us, which one is higher and which one is lower?"

"We've never duelled before, I think we're about similar. Why are you asking this?"

Yue Buqun answered, "I also think that we're about similar. The two Shi Tai lost their lives in the Shaolin temple, it's obvious that it was Zuo Lengchan's doing."

Linghu Chong was surprised. He had also originally thought that it was Zuo Lengchan's doing, otherwise there was no one else with such good martial art. Although the martial art of the Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders were high,

they were both such gentlemen and would have never harmed the two Shi tai. Songshan School had besieged the three nuns of Heng-Shan School many times. It seemed now that Zuo Lengchan had personally taken care of it. Ren Woxing had such good martial art, but he still lost under Zuo Lengchan's hand. So, Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai were naturally not his match.

Madam Yue said, "Killed by Zuo Lengchan? So what? If you have any evidence, then quickly invite all the heroes from the orthodox schools to confront Zuo Lengchan to avenge the two Shi Tai."

"One, I don't have any evidence. Two, we're weak that we can't fight him."

"What do you mean 'weak and can't fight him'? We'll ask Shaolin School's Abbot Fangzheng and Wudang School's Priest Chongxu to preside over this justice. How would Zuo Lengchan dare to fight us?"

"I'm afraid before we can invite Abbot Fangzheng and the others, we'll both be like Heng-Shan School's two Shi Tai," Yue Buqun reasoned.

"You're saying Zuo Lengchan would kill the two of us? Hng, we've already striven for so long in Wulin, is it really necessary to think that much? If we're afraid of the tiger in front and the wolf at the back, can we still be standing in Jianghu?"

Linghu Chong inwardly admired, "Even though Master-Wife is a woman, her heroic spirit is astounding."

Yue Buqun replied, "I won't regret the two of us dying, but what's the use of that? When Zuo Lengchan secretly moves against us, the two of us will die without knowing why or how. As a result, he would still be able to resume his plan and finish making the Five Mountains School. Maybe he would even fabricate some accusations to put on us." Madam Yue just hummed without answering him.

Yue Buqun continued, "Once we died, the disciples of the Huashan School would become easy pickings for Zuo Lengchan. How could they fight back? No matter what, we must always think of Shan'er."

Madam Yue held back her words. It seemed that her husband's words had finally moved her. After some time, she said, "En, we'll do what you say and won't uncover Zuo Lengchan's plot for now. We'll play along and be polite in front of him, and wait for an opportunity to move."

"You've agreed to my words, then it's very good. Pingzhi's family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual' had already been stolen by that little thief Linghu Chong. If he agreed to give it back to Pingzhi, then my Huashan disciples could all learn from it. Then what else do we have to fear from Zuo Lengchan? My Huashan School is now in a precarious position, how can we survive?"

Madam Yue said, "Why are you still suspicious of Chong'er just because he had greatly advanced in his sword art? Are you still thinking that it's because he embezzled Pingzhi's family's 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'? During the battle at Shaolin temple, Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu both said that his wonderful sword art was passed down by martial uncle Feng. Even though martial uncle Feng is from the sword branch, he's still from our Huashan School. Of course it's wrong for Chong'er to join hands with the demons from the Devil Sect, but anyhow, we can't wrongly accuse him of embezzling the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. If you still don't believe Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu, then who would you believe in this world?"

Linghu Chong felt a swell of gratitude as he heard Master-Wife explaining things on his behalf. He really wanted to go out there to give her a hug. Suddenly, the top of his head was shaken a few times as someone patted him. He thought, "This isn't good, we've been discovered. Chief Ren's poisonous cold energy hasn't been completely driven out yet. If Master and Master-Wife were to duel with me again, how can that be good?" He felt the internal energy coming from Yingying's hand became more severe. He guessed that Ren Woxing was also feeling uneasy. Again, someone lightly tapped his head a few more times, but then there was no more movement. Then he heard Madam Yue saying, "Yesterday when you were fighting Chong'er, you used 'Return of the Prodigal Son', 'Green Pines Welcoming Guests', 'Nong Yu Playing the Flute', and 'Xiao Shi Riding the Dragon' successively. What's the meaning behind this?"

"Hey, hey, even though this little thief's conduct is improper, he was still brought up by the two of us. It's very pitiful to see him mistakenly going down the wrong path. I only wanted him, the prodigal son, to return and to let him know that I'll allow him to return to the Huashan family," Yue Buqun told her.

"I got the meaning of that, but how about the other two moves?"

"You already know about it, why do you still ask?"

"If Chong'er agreed to return to the right path, then you promised Shan'er to be his wife, didn't you?"

"Right."

"This hint of yours, was it just a momentary measure, or was it for real?" Madam Yue asked, but Yue Buqun didn't answer. Linghu Chong again felt someone lightly tapping the top of his head. He immediately realized that Yue Buqun was pondering and lightly tapping the snowman at the same time. It wasn't because the four of them had been discovered. He then heard Yue Buqun answering, "A gentleman's word is like a mountain. I would not renege on a promise I've already made to him."

"He's completely infatuated by that Devil Sect's witch, how could you not know that?" Madam Yue queried.

"No, he felt appreciative towards that witch, but he's not infatuated with her. He treats that witch very differently compared to the loving manner that he treats Shan'er. You didn't see that?"

"I naturally see it too. You're saying he still has feelings for Shan'er?"

"Not only still has feelings, he simply... simply still loves her deeply. Once he understood the meaning behind the sword moves that I used, didn't you see how he became deliriously happy and ecstatic?"

Madam Yue coldly said, "So, for this reason you used Shan'er as a bait to hook him? You were going to use Shan'er to make him lose to you?"

Even though Linghu Chong's ears were full of snow, he still heard the anger and ridicule in the words that his Master-Wife said. He had never heard his

Master-Wife used this kind of tone before. The Yue Buqun couple had always regarded him as their son, and they had always spoken to him about everything without keeping any secret. Madam Yue was quick tempered, and she occasionally argued with her husband when they were at home. But in front of the school's disciples, she always respected her husband's position as leader of the school and did not defy his orders. The way she spoke just then showed her heart's discontent.

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh. "So even you can't understand my intention. My own success and failure is a small matter, while the prosperity and decline of the Huashan School is a big matter. If I could persuade Linghu Chong to return to Huashan, then I would've solved four matters in one fell swoop. This would've been a fine deed."

"What four matters in one fell swoop?" Madam Yue asked.

"Linghu Chong's sword art is extremely high, and is far above me. It's alright if he got his sword art from the Evil Resisting Sword manual. It's also alright if he got it from martial uncle Feng. If he returned to Huashan, the prestige of my Huashan School would greatly rise and its reputation would spread throughout the realm. This is the first big matter. Zuo Lengchan's plot of annexing Huashan School would no doubt become hard to accomplish, and the three schools of Taishan, Heng-Shan, and Hengshan would also be safe. This is the second big matter. When he returns to the orthodox school, it will not only make the Devil Sect lose a powerful ally, they will instead have gained a big enemy. The orthodox would flourish while the demonical would become weak. This is the third big matter. Martial sister, don't you think this is right?" Yue Buqun spoke.

"En, what's the fourth matter?"

"The fourth matter, we don't have any son so we've always regarded Chong'er as our own. Seeing him mistakenly gone down the wrong path is actually very painful for me. I'm not young anymore, this reputation that I have in the world, why do I need to be concerned about it? I only want him to change his way and return to the orthodox path so as to allow our family to have a harmonious reunion. How can this be not a happy matter?" Yue Buqun answered. When

Linghu Chong heard this, he couldn't help his heart feeling excited, and he nearly called out, "Master! Master-Wife!"

"Shan'er and Pingzhi are perfectly suited to each other. Are you really willing to tear apart the two of them and make Shan'er begrudge you for the rest your life?"

"I'm doing this for Shan'er's own good."

"For Shan'er's own good? Pingzhi is diligent, earnest, and well-behaved, what's not good about that?"

"Even though Pingzhi is diligent, but compared to Linghu chong, he still lacks by a sky deep. Even if he gallops on a horse for his whole lifetime, he wouldn't be able to catch up to Linghu Chong."

"Strong martial art makes good husband? I'm really hoping that Chong'er would return to the orthodox path and return to our school. But he creates trouble as he pleases, is frivolous and is too fond of good wine. If Shan'er marries him, she is bound to get neglected for the rest of her life."

Linghu Chong felt ashamed in his heart. "Martial mother judges me to be 'creating trouble as I please, frivolous and fond of good wine'. But if little martial sister really become my wife, would I disappoint her? No, never!"

Yue Buqun let out a long sigh and then said, "In any case, I threw caution to the wind, but this little traitor has fallen very deeply. These words that we're talking about are all in vain. Martial sister, are you still angry at me?"

Madam Yue didn't answer him. But after a while, she asked, "Does your leg still hurt a lot?"

"It's only an external injury, it's not that serious. Let's go back to Huashan," Yue Buqun answered, and Madam Yue acknowledged him. They then heard the sound of two horses galloping farther and farther away from them.

Linghu Chong was utterly confused, and he repeatedly went over the conversation between his Master and Master-Wife in his head. So much so that he forgot to move his internal energy. Suddenly, a portion of the cold energy

rushed up his arm and he was unable to restrain it. He felt the cold strangely entering the bones in his whole body, and he hastily regulated his internal energy to resist it. At the moment he regulated his energy, he suddenly felt that it was blocked at his left shoulder, so he hastily increased his energy. But the 'Art of Essence Absorbing' that he had practised was only according to the secrets engraved on the iron panel, which he had learned by himself without any teacher. So there were still many kinds of refined and obscure techniques that he had not learned yet. By forcefully rushing his energy, his energy was dissipated even more. So what started as a gradual stiffness in his left arm was followed by the numbness on the left side of his body, left waist, and all the way down to his leg which was now feeling numb. Linghu Chong felt frightened, and opened his mouth to shout, but he found that even his lips couldn't move.

Right then, they heard the sounds of hoof beats from two horses coming closer. A person exclaimed, "There's a mess of hoof prints here. Dad and mum must've stopped here for a moment." It was really Yue Lingshan's voice. Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He thought, "How come little martial sister is also here?" Then he heard another voice saying, "Master's leg was injured, let's not go astray and quickly catch up to them." It was Lin Pingzhi's voice.

Linghu Chong thought, "Yes, the snow on the ground shows the hoof prints clearly. Little martial sister and martial brother Lin must've been chasing Master and Master-Wife, so they're on the same road and had finally come here."

Yue Lingshan suddenly called out, "Little Lin, look at those four snowmen, they look like fun. They're standing in a row and holding hands."

"There's no houses nearby, how come there's people here making snowmen?"

Yue Lingshan laughed. "Let's make two snowmen for ourselves, alright?"

"Alright, we'll make one man and one girl, and they'll be holding hands too," Lin Pingzhi acknowledged.

Yue Lingshan turned her body over and dismounted her horse. She cupped the snow on her hand and started to make her snowman.

“Let’s find Master and Master-Wife first; it’s more important. After we’ve found them, then we’ll make our two snowmen,” Lin Pingzhi told her.

“You always know how to make people lose interest. Even though daddy’s leg is injured, he can still ride a horse just fine. Also mommy is besides him, what’s there to be afraid of? When the two of them started to use their swords in Jianghu, you weren’t even born yet.”

“What you said isn’t wrong. But because we haven’t found Master and Master-Wife, we’ll feel uneasy while playing here.”

“Alright, I’ll listen to you then. But after we’ve found dad and mom, you have to accompany me in making two very good looking snowmen.”

“Of course,” Lin Pingzhi answered.

Linghu Chong thought, “I thought for sure that he would’ve said: ‘We’ll make it as good looking as you.’ or maybe: ‘It’ll be very hard to make it as good looking as you.’ I never expected him to just say ‘Of course’ in finishing up the matter.” He then thought more, “Martial brother Lin is honest and settled, how can he be frivolous like me? If little martial sister wanted me to make snowmen with her, even if there were a big matter, I would put it to the back of my mind. Little martial sister is very submissive towards him, even though she’s not willing, she doesn’t fight back or argue at all. How can she be like that when she’s talking to me? En, martial brother Lin has recovered, but I don’t know whose sword chopped him, and little martial sister has put the blame on my head.” He was striving to listen to the conversation between Yue Lingshan and Lin Pingzhi, and had again forgotten about the stiffness in his own body. But this actually fitted in with the secret of the ‘Art of Essence Absorbing’ which was: ‘Don’t concentrate, don’t feel anything’. The numbness in his left leg and left waist gradually lightened.

Then he heard Yue Lingshan saying, “Alright, since we can’t make snowmen, I want to write some words on these four snowmen.” With a ‘shua’ sound, she drew her long sword out.

Linghu Chong was again startled. “She wants to use her sword to slash and

stab words on our bodies? This is going to be disastrous.”

He wanted to call out or use his hand to stop her, but he was unable to say anything and he couldn't move his arms. But he heard a few light sounds of 'chi, chi' as she used the point of her sword to write a few words on the snow on Xiang Wentian's body. She wrote more words and finally reached Linghu Chong's body. Fortunately, she only drew her words shallowly and didn't go deep enough to see the clothes or to harm Linghu Chong's skin. Linghu Chong was thinking, "What is she writing on our bodies?"

He then heard Yue Lingshan softly saying, "Come and write a few words."

"Alright!" Lin Pingzhi answered. He took her sword and also wrote on their bodies from right to left. He stopped when he reached Linghu Chong's body. Linghu Chong thought, "And what did he write?"

He only heard Yue Lingshan said, "That's right, the two of us are going to be like that."

The two of them were quiet for a long time. Linghu Chong felt it even more strange, he thought, "What must they be like? After the two of them are gone and Chief Ren's poisonous cold energy is driven out, then I'll get out and take a look. Aiyo, that's not good. Once I move, then the snow on my body will fall and the words on my body will be gone. If the four of us move at the same time, then all the words will be gone."

After some time, he heard a group of horses galloping from somewhere far coming towards them. Linghu Chong deduced from the horses' hoof beats that there were more than ten horses coming. He thought, "It's most likely they're the rest of the Huashan School's martial brothers and sisters."

The hoof beats were gradually getting nearer, but the two people, Lin and Yue, seemed to not care about it. He heard those people were coming from the northeast as they came nearer. When they were still a few li away, seven to eight people broke off and galloped to the west, while the rest of the people continued to come nearer. It was obvious that they were trying to outflank the two wings. Linghu Chong was worried. "The incoming people are harbouring evil

intentions!”

Suddenly, Yue Lingshan called out, “Aiyo, there are people coming!” The sound of the horses galloping became faster as those people urged their horses. Two ‘sou, sou’ sounds were heard as they shot two long arrows. This was followed by the sound of two horses neighing sorrowfully and dropping heavily on the ground. Linghu Chong thought, “The martial arts of these people are not weak, and their intentions are evil and cruel. They shot little martial sister and martial brother Lin’s horses first to prevent them from escaping.”

He then heard the laughter and shouting from these people as they approached on their horses. Yue Lingshan was frightened and stepped back a few steps. Linghu Chong again heard a person laughed and said, “One little brother, one little sister, which family or school are you from?”

Lin Pingzhi answered in a clear voice, “I’m Lin Pingzhi from the Huashan School, this is my martial sister with the surname Yue. We’re not acquainted with you, why did you kill our horses?”

That person laughed. “Huashan School? En, your master, was he the one defeated by his own disciple, and called Gentleman Sword Mr. Yue?”

Linghu Chong’s heart was pained to hear this. “These groups of heroes were gathering at Shaolin, and I offended Master. It only happened yesterday, but in a short time, everyone around the world has already known about it. I troubled Master and made other people ridicule him. This is a very grave sin.”

“Linghu Chong’s conduct is improper, and time and again, he violated the rules and customs. The year before, he was expelled from the family of Huashan School,” Lin Pingzhi said. The meaning behind his words was that even though Master had lost to Linghu Chong, he had lost to an outsider and not to a disciple of his own school.

That person laughed. “This lady’s surname is Yue, what is she to Yue Buqun?”

Yue Lingshan indignantly said, “What’s that got to do with you? You killed my horse, pay back for my horse!”

That person laughed again. "She looks unrestrained and vigorous, it's most likely that she's Yue Buqun's little mistress."

The remaining ten more people burst into laughter. Linghu Chong was inwardly startled, "These people are vulgar and coarse, seems that they're not people from the orthodox schools. I'm afraid that they'll harm little martial sister."

Lin Pingzhi said, "Sir, you're a senior in Jianghu. How can you speak such filth? My martial sister is my master's daughter."

That person laughed. "So it's Yue Buqun's young lady. Only your reputation sounds good."

Another person on the side asked, "Brother Lu, why does only her reputation sound good?"

That person answered, "I once heard people said that Yue Buqun's daughter is the most beautiful girl in the whole world. But that's not the case when I look at her now."

Another person laughed and said, "This little girl's appearance looks ordinary but she has a fair white skin. If we stripped her, she might look alright. Haha, haha!"

Those people all laughed loudly hearing this. Their laughter was full of lewd meaning. When Yue Lingshan, Lin Pingzhi, and Linghu Chong heard such rude talk, they were all furious. Lin Pingzhi pulled his long sword out and shouted, "You're spouting such shameless words, I pledge my life to deal with you."

That person laughed. "Have a look, what did these two lewd people write on the snowmen?"

Lin Pingzhi loudly called out, "I'll fight with you." Linghu Chong heard a 'chi' sound, and he knew that it was Lin Pingzhi stabbing with his sword. This was followed by the continuous clashing sound of weapons, as some people jumped down from their horses to fight him. Yue Lingshan immediately pulled her sword out. Seven to eight people called out at the same time, "I'll fight this little

girl." One man laughed and said, "Everyone don't fight, everybody will get their turn." Weapons clashed and Yue Lingshan started to fight with the enemies. A person bellowed painfully as he was stabbed. A man said, "This little girl is very fierce. Old Three Shi, I'll avenge you."

As the sound of battle rumbled on, Yue Lingshan called out, "Be careful!" A loud 'tang' sound was heard and Lin Pingzhi uttered an 'hng'. Yue Lingshan was startled and called out, "Little Lin!" It seemed that Lin Pingzhi had been injured.

A person called out, "Let's butcher this little kid!"

The leader of that group answered, "Don't kill him, capture him alive. Once we've captured Yue Buqun's daughter and son-in-law, we don't have to be afraid that hypocrite not listening to us."

Linghu Chong was striving to listen but all he could hear was the sound of weapons splitting the air. Suddenly, a loud 'tang' sound was heard followed by a slapping sound. A man scolded, "Damn it, stinky lady." Linghu Chong suddenly felt someone leaning against his body, and he heard Yue Lingshan gasping for air. It was really her leaning on his 'snowman' body. After numerous 'ting tang' sound, a man happily shouted, "This still can't capture you?"

"Ah!" Yue Lingshan was startled and the sound of battle stopped, while those people started laughing loudly.

Linghu Chong felt that Yue Lingshan was being dragged away by someone, and he heard her screaming, "Release me! Release me!"

A person laughed. "Old Two Min, you said that her whole body is white. I don't believe it, let's open up her gown and have a look." This was accompanied by the sounds of people clapping and cheering.

Lin Pingzhi scolded, "Dog..." A slapping sound was heard as someone kicked him. This was followed by the sound of clothes being ripped. When Linghu Chong heard little martial sister being insulted by those thieves, why would he care whether Ren Woxing's poisonous cold energy had been completely driven out or not? He used his power to jump out of the snow. His right hand pulled the long sword out of his waist, and his left hand moved to wipe the snow on his

face. But who would've thought that his left hand didn't respond to his thought and didn't move at all.

Those people cried out in surprise. He extended his right hand to wipe the snow on his face, then as his vision cleared, he sent his long sword out and three men were pierced through their throats. He turned around and slashed twice killing two more people. He saw in front of him one man holding both of Yue Lingshan's arms behind her back, while one man was standing in front of her waiting for him. Linghu Chong stabbed his long sword at the lower left side of that person. Then he lifted his right leg kicking that person's corpse away to clear his long sword. He heard people attacking from behind him, and without turning his head, he reversed his sword and stabbed two people's hearts. He held his sword normally again and stabbed the throat of that person holding Yue Lingshan's arms. That person lost his hold and dropped forward onto Yue Lingshan's shoulder with blood gushing out from his throat.

The situation had completely changed all of a sudden. Linghu Chong had killed nine people successively in just the blink of an eye. The leader of those people shouted and smashed down two iron plates on Linghu Chong's head. Linghu Chong's long sword trembled, went through the gap between the two iron plates and stabbed the leader's left eye. That person screamed in pain until he finally dropped down on the ground. Linghu Chong turned his head around and slashed his sword out killing three more people. The remaining four people cried out as they were frightened to death and quickly ran for their lives. Linghu Chong shouted, "You've insulted my little martial sister, none of you will get out of here alive!" He chased two people and stabbed both of them from their backs. Each stab penetrated through their chests. The two people had been running very quickly. Even though the sword had cut their breaths, their legs were still running forward. They still ran for more than ten steps before dropping on the ground.

Linghu Chong saw the remaining two people were also running away. One was running towards the east and one was running towards the west. He turned to the east and tossed his sword. The long sword flew like a silver of light and

struck the back of that person's waist. Linghu Chong turned westward and gave chase to the last remaining person. After running for more than a hundred feet, he caught up to that person. He extended his hand and only then did he realize that there was no weapon in his hand. So he moved his power into his finger and poked the back of that person. That person felt pain at his back and turned around hacking his sabre down. Linghu Chong's bare hand martial art was just ordinary. Even though his poke managed to hit the enemy, he didn't know the method of moving his energy so he didn't injure his enemy. When he saw his opponent chopping his sabre down, he couldn't help feeling nervous and hastily avoided it. At the same time, he saw a big weakness on the right side of that person, so he formed a fist with his left hand and punched out. But unexpectedly, his left arm only moved a little and he was unable to lift it further when his enemy's sabre was already chopping down. Astonished, Linghu Chong hastily jumped back. That person lifted his sabre and ferociously charged at Linghu Chong. Since Linghu Chong didn't have any weapon in his hand, he didn't dare to fight with the enemy, so he quickly turned around to escape.

Yue Lingshan picked up a long sword from the ground and called out, "Big martial brother, sword!" She then tossed the long sword towards him. Linghu Chong grabbed the sword with his right hand and turned around laughing loudly. That person still had his sabre lifted above his head waiting to chop it down when he suddenly saw Linghu Chong's sword flickered. In that moment, he was stupefied and unexpectedly didn't chop his sabre down.

Linghu Chong slowly walked toward him. That person's whole body was trembling with both his knees bent as he sat heavily on the snow. Linghu Chong indignantly said, "You insulted my martial sister so I can't spare you." He lifted his long sword onto his opponent's throat. But something flashed in his mind, so he walked a step closer, then in a whisper asked, "What was written on the snowmen?"

That person tremblingly answered, "It's... it's... 'Till the sea is dried... sea is dried... and the rocks are dust, our... love... love will never... will never change.'"

From the moment this phrase 'Till the sea is dried and the rocks are dust, our love will never change' existed in this world, this was probably the first time ever that it was being said in such a frightened and sad manner.

Linghu Chong was expressionless and said, "En, it's 'Till the sea is dried and the rocks are dust, our love will never change.'"

He felt sour in his heart, and sent his long sword out and pierced that person's throat. He turned around and saw Yue Lingshan was supporting Lin Pingzhi to get up. Both of their faces and bodies were full of blood. Lin Pingzhi stood up and cupped his hands towards Linghu Chong. "Many thanks to brother Linghu for your kindness in helping us."

"What's that for? Your injuries aren't serious?" Linghu Chong asked.

"It's alright," Lin Pingzhi answered.

Linghu Chong returned the long sword to Yue Lingshan, then he pointed towards the hoof prints on the snow. "Master and Master-Wife went that way."

"Alright," Lin Pingzhi said.

Yue Lingshan led two of the enemy's horses and mounted one of them. She said, "We'll go find dad and mom." As Lin Pingzhi struggled to mount his horse, Yue Lingshan rode her horse to go besides Linghu Chong. She reined her horse in and looked at his face. Linghu Chong also looked back directly into her eyes.

"Many... many thanks to you..." Yue Lingshan stammered. Then she turned around, lifted her rein, and the two horses started to go towards the northwest following the hoof prints left by the Yue Buqun couple.

Linghu Chong was disquieted as he watched the back of those two people entering the distant forest. He then slowly turned around and saw Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying had already shaken out the snow on them and were now looking at him. Linghu Chong happily inquired, "Chief Ren, I didn't trouble you?"

Ren Woxing laughed bitterly. "I wasn't troubled, but you may be in trouble. How's your left arm?"

"Something's not right with the meridian on my arm, my qi can't go through it and I actually can't move it."

Ren Woxing scowled. "This is a little bit troublesome, we have to think of something to do about it. You rescued Yue family's young lady, that can be counted as repaying the kindness of your master. From now on, nobody owes anyone anything. Brother Xiang, how come that old Lu didn't progress? Why is he doing this kind of despicable thing?"

Xiang Wentian answered, "Hearing from his tone, it seemed that he wanted to capture these two young people and take them to the Dark Wood Cliff."

"Could it be that this is Dongfang Bubai's idea? What connection does he have with this hypocrite?" Ren Woxing pondered.

Linghu Chong pointed at the corpses on the snow and asked, "These people are Dongfang Bubai's subordinates?"

"They're my subordinates," Ren Woxing answered and Linghu Chong nodded his head.

"Daddy, how about his arm?" Yingying worriedly said.

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "Don't worry! My good son-in-law helped daddy repel that cold energy, so father-in-law will think of a way to cure his arm." After he said this, he laughed loudly and stared at Linghu Chong studying him. He saw Linghu Chong standing there looking very embarrassed. Yingying said quietly, "Daddy, take a rest on speaking these kinds of words. Brother Chong has been friends with Huashan's Miss Yue since childhood and they've grown up together. The look that Brother Chong was giving young lady Yue, how could it be that you still don't understand?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "What kind of person is that hypocrite Yue Buqun? How can his daughter be compared to my daughter? Also, this girl Yue already has someone else in her heart. From now on, Chong'er will never think of this fickle girl anymore. The matter that happened when you're kids, how can that be allowed?"

"Brother Chong made such a big disturbance at the Shaolin temple because of me and the whole world heard about this. Also, because of me, he wasn't willing to go back to Huashan. My heart's already very satisfied over these two matters. There's no need to raise any other talk," Yingying said.

Ren Woxing was well aware that his daughter liked to win. Since Linghu Chong had not proposed the issue of marriage yet, it was inappropriate to talk about it too much. However, sooner or later, they had to talk about this matter. He again laughed loudly. "Very good, very good, we must talk slowly about important lifelong matters. Chong'er, let me tell you the trick to make your arm's meridian passable." He then stood besides Linghu Chong and told him how to move his qi and how to make his meridian passable. He then waited for Linghu Chong to repeat back to him the method to make sure that he remembered. He then said, "You helped me repelled that poisonous cold energy and I taught you how to make your meridian smooth, so we don't owe each other anything. You must wait for seven days before the meridian on your left arm is recovered, you mustn't be impatient."

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered.

Ren Woxing waved his hand calling for Xiang Wentian and Yingying to come over. "Chong'er, that day in Plum Manor on Mount Gu, I invited you to join my Divine Sun Moon Sect. At that time, you refused. Today, the situation is very different and I'm bringing up that old matter again. This time, you couldn't possibly refuse with your excuses again?" Linghu Chong hesitated and didn't answer.

Ren Woxing said again, "You already studied my Art of Essence Absorbing, later on, you'll suffer endlessly. Once your various internal energies came out, then you won't be able to save your life anymore, and you won't be able to die either. What I said before, I definitely cannot renege on it. If you don't join my sect, even if Yingying married you, I still wouldn't be able to impart to you this melding method. Even if my daughter blamed me for this for the rest of my life, I will still say the same thing. We have an important matter right now. We're going to Dongfang Bubai to settle some debt. Will you follow us?"

"Chief, please don't blame me. Junior has decided not to enter the Divine Sun Moon Sect." These two sentences were said clearly and very firmly. There was no compromise in his voice.

When Ren Woxing and the other two heard this, their faces changed colour. Xiang Wentian said, "Why is that? You don't have any regards for the Divine Sun Moon Sect?"

Linghu Chong pointed to the corpses on the snow and said, "There are these kinds of people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect. Even though junior isn't worthy, I'll be ashamed to be associated with them. Also, junior promised Dingxian Shi Tai to be Heng-Shan School's headmaster."

Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying all showed a weird expression on their faces when they heard this. Linghu Chong not wanting to enter the sect was not strange at all. But his last sentence was extremely strange. The three people simply couldn't believe what they heard.

Ren Woxing pointed his finger at Linghu Chong's face. Suddenly, he burst out in laughter which shook the snow on the trees and made them fall down. He was again caught up in a wave of laughter before saying, "You... you... you want to become a nun? Go and become the leader of nuns?"

Linghu Chong answered unequivocally, "No, not to become a nun, but I'm going to become Heng-Shan School's headmaster. Just before Dingxian Shi Tai died, she requested this of me. If junior didn't agree, then she would've died with an unfulfilled wish. Dingxian Shi Tai died because of me. Junior knows that this matter is bound to astonish people when they hear this, but I had no way to refuse it." Ren Woxing was still laughing non-stop.

Yingying said, "Dingxian Shi Tai died because of me." Linghu Chong looked at her and felt appreciative towards her.

Ren Woxing slowly managed to stop his laughter. "If other people requested something of you, you'll always abide by them?"

Linghu Chong answered, "Correct. Dingxian Shi Tai died because she was carrying out my request."

Ren Woxing nodded. "That's also good! I'm an old freak and you're a little freak. If we don't do something unusual, how can we be great men? You go and become those nuns' headmaster. So you're going to Heng-Shan now?"

Linghu Chong shook his head. "No! Junior is going to Shaolin Temple."

Ren Woxing felt that was a bit strange but he immediately understood. "You're going to take the two Shi Tai's corpses back to Heng-Shan." He then turned his head towards Yingying and asked, "Are you going to follow Chong'er and go back to the Shaolin Temple?"

"No! I'm going to follow daddy," Yingying answered.

"That's right, it won't do for you to follow him up Heng-Shan to become a nun." After he said this, he again laughed loudly. This laughter sounded bitter.

Linghu Chong folded his hand in salute and bowed deeply. "Chief Ren, Brother Xiang, Yingying, we'll part ways here." He turned around and strode purposefully away. After he had walked more than ten steps away, he turned his head around and asked, "Chief Ren, when are you going to go up Dark Wood Cliff!"

Ren Woxing answered, "This is the sect's internal matter; outsiders don't need to worry about it." He knew that Linghu Chong asked because he wanted to be there to help him fight Dongfang Bubai together so he immediately rejected this help. Linghu Chong nodded his head and stooped down to pick up a long sword. He hanged the sword on his waist before turning around and then walked away.

Chapter 29 Headmaster

Translated by Pokit

Edited by Hhaung.



The four senior apprentices handed over the Buddhism instruments one by one. They were a book of Buddhism, a wooden fish, a string of beads, and a short sword. Seeing the wooden fish and the beads, Linghu Chong felt quite embarrassed.]

At dusk, Linghu Chong arrived at the Shaolin Temple and told the welcoming monk that he was there to take the remains of Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai back to Heng-Shan. The welcoming monk went in to report, and after some time, he came out to tell Linghu Chong, "Abbot said: The two Shi Tai's remains were cremated already. The monks in the temple are now reading scriptures to

respectfully send them on their way. We'll send someone to deliver the ashes of the two Shi Tai to Heng-Shan."

Linghu Chong walked into the hall where they were praying for the two Shi Tai. He knelt in front of the altar with the ashes and the funeral tablet³⁶, and respectfully kowtowed a few times. He inwardly prayed, "As long as Linghu Chong lives, I will carry Heng-Shan School forward with all my heart and might. I won't lose Shi Tai's trust in me." Later, he didn't ask to see Great Master Abbot but immediately went out of the temple after parting ways with the welcoming monk.

When he reached the bottom of the mountain, it was still snowing heavily so he quickly found a farmer's house to stay for the night. At dawn, he continued his journey to the north. When he arrived at a city, he bought a horse to ride on. Everyday, he travelled for around seventy to eighty li and as soon as he stopped by at an inn, he immediately moved his qi according to the method taught by Ren Woxing and slowly unblocked his meridian. After seven days, his left arm was able to move again normally.

One day while he was traveling, he was at a wine shop drinking wine when he noticed people busily walking here and there on the street. Many families were preparing for the New Year and there was an air of happiness around them. Linghu Chong poured himself another drink and thought, "On Huashan, Master-Wife has always led all the martial brothers and sisters in cleaning up, grinding the flour for New Year's cake, managing the New Year's red pockets³⁷, and stitching new gowns. Little martial sister would be cutting many paper-cut window decorations. How lively those New Years were. This year, I'm here all by myself drinking this stuffy wine."

As he was feeling melancholy, he suddenly heard the sound of people coming up the stairs. One person said, "I'm very thirsty. It wouldn't be bad drinking a few cups here."

Another person said, "If you're not thirsty, could it be that it's bad to drink?"

Another person replied, "Drinking wine is drinking wine, thirsty is thirsty."

How can you mix these two matters together?"

Another person added, "The more you drink wine, the thirstier you'll get. Not only you can't mix these two matters together, they're completely different."

When Linghu Chong heard this, he knew that it was the Peach Valley Six Fairies who had just arrived. He felt really happy and shouted, "Six Peach Valley brothers, quickly come up and drink wine together with me."

Suddenly, a 'hu hu' sound reverberated around the room as the Peach Valley Six Fairies flew up the stairs. They rushed at Linghu Chong and grabbed his shoulders and arms. Then one by one called out, "I saw him first." "I grabbed him first." "I spoke first, Master Linghu heard me first." "If I didn't say that I wanted to come here, how could we have met him?"

Linghu Chong felt odd. He laughingly asked, "What tricks are you six playing at?"

Peachtree Flower Fairy went to the wine shop's window and called out loudly, "Young nuns, big nuns, old nuns, not old not young nuns! I, Peachtree Flower Fairy, have found Master Linghu, quickly hand me over the one thousand silver taels."

Peachtree Branch Fairy also went towards the window and called out, "I, Peachtree Branch Fairy, found him first. Big young nuns, quickly give me all the silver."

Peachtree Root Fairy and Peachtree Fruit Fairy each grabbed one of Linghu Chong's arms and shouted, "I found him first!" "It was me! It was me!"

Then, from the end of the street, some female voices called out, "You've found hero Linghu?"

"I found Linghu Chong, quickly hand over the money," Peachtree Fruit Fairy called out.

"One hand gets the money, one hand delivers the goods!" Peachtree Trunk Fairy shouted.

"Right, right! If those small nuns don't want to pay their debts, then we'll hide

Linghu Chong away and not give him to them," Peachtree Root Fairy agreed.

Peachtree Branch Fairy asked, "How do we hide him away? Do we shut him off somewhere and don't let those small nuns to meet him?"

There were sounds of people going up the stairs as a few females rushed up. The first person to reach the landing was really a disciple of the Heng-Shan School, Yihe. Behind her were four more nuns and two young ladies, who were Zheng E and Qin Juan. When the seven of them saw Linghu Chong, their faces filled with happiness. Some were calling him 'hero Linghu', some were calling 'big brother Linghu', and there were also some who called him 'Master Linghu'. Peachtree Trunk Fairy and his brothers extended their arms to block the path to Linghu Chong. "If you don't give us the thousand silver taels, then we won't deliver the goods."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "Peach Valley Six brothers, how did these one thousand silver taels come about?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy answered, "We met them just before and they asked me whether I've seen you or not. I said that temporarily I haven't met you yet, but we met you not long after that."

Qin Juan said, "This uncle is lying. He said: 'I haven't. Linghu Chong's feet are alive so it's most likely that he's at the end of the earth now. How could we have met him?'"

"Wrong, wrong. We had the foresight already that we were going to meet Linghu Chong here," Peachtree Flower Fairy disagreed.

Peachtree Trunk Fairy added, "That's right! Otherwise, why would we come here and not somewhere else?"

Linghu Chong laughed. "I've guessed it. These martial sisters are looking for me so they entrusted the six of you to help them look for me. Then you said that you wanted one thousand silver taels, isn't that right?"

"We asked for one thousand silver taels. We know it's an exorbitant price. But if they could do business, then it must be worth it. Who knew that they're very

generous, this middle-aged nun said: 'Alright, once you've succeeded in finding hero Linghu, we'll give you one thousand silver taels.' Are these words true?" Peachtree Trunk Fairy explained.

Yihe answered, "Correct. Once they found hero Linghu, then Heng-Shan School will give them one thousand silver taels." Six palms immediately shot out and the Peach Valley Six Fairies said at the same time, "Hand it over."

"We're Buddhists. Why would we carry so much silver on us? I'd like to bother the six of you to go to Heng-Shan to fetch it," Yihe said.

She reasoned that the Peach Valley Six Fairies wouldn't want to be troubled. Who would've thought that they would think it over and answered at the same time, "Very well, we'll go up Heng-Shan with you to avoid you not paying your debt."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "Congratulations on becoming rich and selling me at such a great price."

The Peach Valley Six Fairies' orange-like faces were full of happiness. They cupped their hands and said, "Thank you, thank you! It's our luck, our luck!"

But Yihe and the other six women became grieved and they knelt towards Linghu Chong. Linghu Chong was surprised. "Why is everyone giving me such a big propriety?" and he hastily returned their propriety.

"We pay our respect to Headmaster," Yihe said.

"So you already knew? Please quickly get up."

"Yeah, it's not convenient talking while kneeling on the ground," Peachtree Root Fairy said.

Linghu Chong stood up and said, "Six Peach brothers, Heng-Shan School and I have a few important matters we have to discuss. Please drink wine on the side and don't bother us, otherwise you might not be getting your one thousand silver taels." Originally, the Peach Valley Six Fairies wanted to annoy them. But hearing that last sentence, they quickly shut up and walked to the table besides the window. They then ordered some wine and dishes.

Yihe and the other disciples stood up. As they thought of Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai dying miserably, they couldn't help crying sorrowfully.

Peachtree Flower Fairy interrupted, "Yi, strange, strange, how come you're crying suddenly? If you are crying after seeing Linghu Chong, then it's better not to have seen him then."

Linghu Chong glared angrily towards him. Frightened, Peachtree Flower Fairy quickly put his hand on his mouth.

Yihe was still crying as she said, "That day big brother Linghu... no, Headmaster, you went ashore to drink wine but didn't come back to the boat. Later on, Hengshan School's martial uncle Mo Da came and told us that you've gone to Shaolin temple to meet martial uncle Abbess and Master. We consulted with each other and decided that it's better for us to go to Shaolin temple to meet with all of you. But we didn't expect to meet many Jianghu heroes on the way, and we heard them talking passionately about how you led a group of heroes to attack Shaolin temple, and how the thousands of monks from Shaolin temple ran away. There was a person with a big head with short and plump body. He said his surname was Old. He said... he said that martial uncle Abbess and Master were killed in the Shaolin temple. Before martial uncle Abbess passed away, she wanted you... wanted you to take over the Headmaster position of Heng-Shan and that you've agreed to it. These words were already heard by a lot of people..." She said till here and started to sob uncontrollably. The remaining six disciples also started to weep.

Linghu Chong sighed. "It's true that Dingxian Shi Tai really put this heavy responsibility on my shoulder. But I'm just a young man and my reputation is really poor, and everyone already knows that I'm a loafer of poor character. How can I be the Headmaster of the Heng-Shan School? But it was just that the situation at that time forced me to agree. If I didn't agree, then Dingxian Shi Tai would've died with an unfulfilled wish. Ai, this is a very difficult matter."

"We... we all hope that you... hope that you come and take up the leadership of the Heng-Shan family," Yihe pleaded.

Zheng E reasoned, "Martial uncle Headmaster, you've led us going in and out of dangers, and you've also rescued many of the disciples' lives more than once. All the disciples of the Heng-Shan School already know that you're an upright gentleman. Even though you're a man, our school has no regulation that doesn't allow a man to be the Headmaster."

A middle-aged nun called Yiwen added, "When we heard the news of Master and Martial Uncle's deaths, we all felt very sad. But when we found out that Martial Uncle Headmaster is coming to take over the leadership of the school, we all felt really comforted as Heng-Shan School wouldn't be destroyed."

Yihe said, "My master and my two martial uncles were killed by someone. Heng-Shan School's three elders of the 'Ding' generation have successively died within these several months yet we don't know who the murderers are. Martial Uncle Headmaster, you becoming the Headmaster is the best thing possible. If you weren't our headmaster, then we would never be able to avenge our three elders."

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, "I take full responsibility for avenging the death of the three Shi Tai."

Qin Juan said, "You're already been driven out from Huashan School; so now you can be Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. West mountain or north mountain, we're on par with one another in Wulin. When you meet Mr. Yue in the future, you won't need to call him master anymore. At most, you call him Brother Yue."

Linghu Chong only smiled bitterly. He thought, "I don't have anymore face to meet this Brother Yue."

Zheng E said, "After we heard of this sad news, we doubled our effort to get to the Shaolin temple. On the way we met with Martial Uncle Mo Da again. He told us that you're not in the temple anymore but he wanted us to quickly look for you, Martial Uncle Headmaster."

Qin Juan continued the story, "Martial Uncle Mo Da said that the sooner we find you the better it would be. If we were late for a step then you may have been persuaded to enter the Devil Sect. The orthodox and the demonical cannot

mix like that of water and fire. Heng-Shan School would then have no more Headmaster."

Zheng E glared at her and said, "Martial sister Qin talks without thinking. How can Martial Uncle Headmaster join the Devil Sect?"

"Yes, but Martial Uncle Mo Da really did say this," Qin Juan replied.

Linghu Chong thought, "Martial Uncle Mo Da is very concerned about this matter. Even though I didn't join the Sun Moon Sect, I very nearly did. That day, if Chief Ren didn't tempt me with the secret of the internal art, and if he had actually asked me sincerely and earnestly to join the sect, it would've been a very difficult decision for me. Also, considering Yingying's and big brother Xiang's parts in asking me, I might have immediately pledged my oath after attending to Heng-Shan School's big matter." He then said, "That's why you offered one thousand silver taels for the capture of Linghu Chong?"

Qin Juan broke from her tears and smiled. "Capture Linghu Chong? How could we dare?"

Zheng E said, "After everyone heard Martial Uncle Mo Da's instruction, we divided into groups of seven to look for Martial Uncle Headmaster, and to ask you to come up to Heng-Shan to handle the school's responsibilities. Today, when we met the Peach Valley Six Fairies, they asked for one thousand silver taels. To look for Martial Uncle Headmaster, don't mention one thousand silver taels, even if it were ten thousand silver taels, we would think of a way to give it to them."

Linghu Chong smiled. "There's no benefit for you when I become your Headmaster. But your skill in getting alms from corrupt officials, village bosses, and greedy rich people will surely advance by a lot." The seven disciples thought of that day in Fujian when they asked for alms from White Peeling Leather. Their sadness was slightly relieved and they all broke into smiles. "Alright, don't worry everyone. Linghu Chong already promised Dingxian Shi Tai so I can't just disregard what I said. I'll definitely become your Headmaster. We'll eat till we're full then we'll go up Heng-Shan." The seven disciples all

rejoiced when they heard this.

Linghu Chong then drank some wine together with the Peach Valley Six Fairies. He asked the six of them what they wanted to use one thousand silver taels for. Peachtree Root Fairy answered, "Night Cat Ji Wushi is extremely poor. If he didn't have one thousand silver taels, he wouldn't be able to live from day to day, so we promised to give him our help as best as we can."

Peachtree Trunk Fairy added, "That day inside the Shaolin temple, we brothers made a bet with Ji Wushi..."

Peachtree Flower Fairy interrupted, "Of course Ji Wushi lost. How could this little kid win from us brothers?"

But Linghu Chong thought, "You made a bet with Ji Wushi, of course the one who lost is you guys." He asked, "What did you bet on?"

Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered, "The matter we bet on concerns you. We guessed that you surely won't become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster, no... no... we guessed that you'll surely become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster."

Peachtree Flower Fairy said, "Night Cat guessed that you surely won't become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. We then said, gentleman's words must be believed. You already promised that old nun to become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. The world's heroes have already heard what you said, how could you deny it?"

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, "Night Cat said, Linghu Chong is loitering around Jianghu and soon he will take Devil Sect's Sacred Lady as his wife. Why does he want to chit chat with some old and young nuns?"

Linghu Chong thought, "Night Cat reveres Yingying completely. How can it be possible that he said 'Devil Sect'? It must be the Peach Valley Six Fairies who inverted their story telling." He then said, "So then you gambled one thousand silver taels on this?"

Peachtree Root Fairy replied, "Right, at that time, we were certain that we're going to win. Ji Wushi then said that this one thousand silver taels must be

earned honestly and we can't steal it off people. We told him of course, would Peach Valley Six Fairies rob people?"

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, "Today, we met several of these nuns while they're looking for you. They said that they want to invite you to become Heng-Shan School's Headmaster. We agreed to help look for you for the cost of one thousand silver taels."

Linghu Chong smiled and said, "You felt pitiful when you thought that Night Cat would lose one thousand silver taels to you. That's why you wanted to earn one thousand silver taels to give to him, so that he could give this to you when he loses?"

Peach Valley Six Fairies answered at the same time, "That's right, that's right. Your prediction is really accurate."

Peachtree Leaf Fairy added, "Compared to our prediction skill, your prediction skill doesn't lack by too much."

Afterwards, Linghu Chong and his party set out to Heng-Shan. On the day they finally arrived at the foot of the mountain, the disciples from the school were respectfully waiting at the foot of the mountain as they had received a message about the arrival. They quickly paid their respects to Linghu Chong when they saw him. Linghu Chong hastily returned their propriety. He told them how Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai passed away, and all of them felt grieved. Linghu Chong saw Yilin amongst the rest of the disciples. She seemed to be looking feeble and much thinner since the last time he saw her. He asked, "Martial sister Yilin, you've been unwell recently?"

Both of Yilin's eyes were red as she answered, "It's nothing." After a moment, she continued, "You're our headmaster now, so you can't call me martial sister anymore."

On their way to the mountain, Yihe and the rest of the disciples all called Linghu Chong as 'Martial Uncle Headmaster'. He kept telling everyone not to call him that but none of them agreed. After hearing Yilin telling him not to call her 'Martial Sister', he said in a clear voice, "Martial sisters, Linghu Chong is

taking the leadership of the Heng-Shan School's family because of the former Abbess's order. Actually, I don't have the virtue or ability to do this job; I really don't deserve it."

All the disciples replied, "It's actually the fortune of this school that Martial Uncle Headmaster is willing to take on this heavy responsibility."

"Then everyone must promise me one thing," Linghu Chong answered.

Yihe and the rest of the disciples said, "We would never disobey Headmaster's order."

"I'm only becoming your Martial Brother Headmaster, not your Martial Uncle Headmaster," Linghu Chong told them.

Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhen, Yiwen, and the rest of the older disciples consulted with each other and then reported back, "Headmaster is very modest, we'll obey your order."

Linghu Chong happily said, "That's very good."

Then they all went up the Heng-Shan mountain together. The summit of Heng-Shan was very tall. Even though everyone was walking really quickly, it still took them half a day to reach the Xianxing Peak after seeing it from afar. The main convent of the Heng-Shan School was the Wuse convent, which was a really small convent, while the other convent had more than thirty stone houses where the disciples resided in. Linghu Chong saw that the Wuse Convent only consisted of two rooms; one at the front and the other in the back. Compared to the grand temple of Shaolin, it was like comparing an ant to an elephant.

When he arrived inside the convent, he saw a statue of the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin. The inside of the convent was spotlessly clean and everything was arranged simply. He never thought that Heng-Shan School with such an earth-shattering name in Jianghu, would have such a plain convent. After paying his respect to the Guanyin deity, Yu Sao led him to Dingxian Shi Tai's meditation place, but he saw the four walls were dull and there was only an old putuan on the floor. Besides that, there was nothing else. Linghu Chong loved liveliness, drinking, and eating. How could he possibly stay in that quiet and calm room to

meditate? If he took wine, dog meat or any meat in general into the room to eat and drink, then that would be too impolite towards everyone there. He then asked Yu Sao, "Even though I'm the headmaster of Heng-Shan School, I'm not a Buddhist and I'm also not a nun. The disciples of the school are all women while I'm a man; so living inside the convent isn't appropriate. Please give me and the Peach Valley Six Fairies an empty and far away house to live in. Then that'll be appropriate."

Yu Sao said, "Yes. The west peak has three big houses. They're originally guest houses, which we offered to the parents of the school's disciples whenever they come for a visit. If they're acceptable to Headmaster then Headmaster can stay there temporarily while we build a new residence for Headmaster."

Linghu Chong happily replied, "It's already good that there's a house; why do you need to build a new house?", while he thought in his heart, "Could it be that I'll be Heng-Shan School's headmaster for the rest of my life? Once I've found a suitable person from the school to whom all the disciples will submit to, then I'll pass on this headmaster position to her. Then I'll pat my buttocks and travel around Jianghu leisurely and happily."

When he arrived at the house on the west peak, he saw the bed, mattress, chair, and the rest of the things resembled that of a rich farmer's house. Even though they were still simple and humble, they didn't appear as dull as in the convent. Yu Sao said, "Headmaster, please sit. I'll go and get you some wine."

Linghu Chong was happily surprised, "There's wine on this mountain?"

Yu Sao smiled and said, "Not only do we have wine, we have good wine here. When little martial sister Yilin heard that Headmaster is coming up Heng-Shan, she told me that if we don't have good wine, then she's afraid that you won't be headmaster for long. On that same night, we sent people to go down the mountain to buy many jars of good wine."

Linghu Chong felt embarrassed. He smiled and said, "Everyone worked so hard and spent so much money because of me. I don't think that's justified."

Yiqing smiled. "That day we got a lot of silver from White Peeling Leather.

Even though we give half of it to the poor, we still have plenty remaining. Also, we already sold those government horses for some money. So Martial Brother Headmaster can drink for ten years or twenty years, we'll have enough money to buy wine." That night, Linghu Chong and Peach Valley Six Fairies drank to their hearts' content.

The next morning, he consulted with Yu Sao, Yiqing, Yihe and the other disciples on how to welcome the ashes of the two Shi Tai and how to avenge the three Shi Tai.

Yiqing said, "Martial Brother Headmaster has now taken the post of headmaster. So we must announce this to all the orthodox people of Wulin, and we must also dispatch people to tell the Five Mountains Sword Schools' Chief, Martial Uncle Zuo."

Yihe indignantly said, "Pei, my master was killed by these traitors from Songshan School. The two martial uncles were most likely killed by them as well. What do we tell them for?"

Yiqing replied, "We mustn't lack any propriety. Wait until we have investigated this clearly. If the three honourables were really killed by Songshan School, then at that time, Martial Brother Headmaster will lead us to confront them about their sin."

Linghu Chong nodded his head. "What martial sister Yiqing said is true. But regarding the position of Headmaster, let me just do the job; there's no need for any celebration." He remembered the time when Master became the leader of Huashan. He was still very young at that time, and he recalled that there were so many formal celebrations. There were also numerous people from Wulin of the orthodox path who came up the mountain to congratulate his master and attend the ceremonies. He also remembered how the city of Hengshan was completely filled by many heroes for Hengshan School's Liu Zhengfeng's 'Gold Basin Hand Washing' ceremony.

Heng-Shan, Huashan, and Hengshan schools all had the same reputation. If there weren't many people turning up at the ceremony to congratulate him for

taking up the Headmaster position, then it would be very humiliating. Even if there were many people attending, it is most likely for them to laugh at him for taking up the leadership of a group of nuns. Yiqing understood his heart so she said, "Since Martial Brother Headmaster doesn't want to alarm the friends in Wulin, we wouldn't invite guests to come up the mountain to attend the ceremony. But we must decide on a day for Headmaster to officially take up the position so that we can officially inform everyone."

Linghu Chong felt that if he took up the headmaster position of the Heng-Shan School too carelessly, it would damage Heng-Shan School's prestige and reputation since Heng-Shan is one of the five mountains sword schools. So he nodded his head agreeing to Yiqing.

Yiqing took up a calendar and perused it for some time. She then said, "Sixteenth of the second month, eight of the third month, twenty seventh of the third month, these three days are lucky days. Martial Brother Headmaster, have a look, which day is suitable?" Linghu Chong had never believed in any lucky or unlucky days. All he thought about in his heart was that the earlier the ceremony was, then the less people there would be to take part in the ceremony, and he would be able to avoid much embarrassment. So he said, "Is there any good days for this month?"

Yiqing answered, "There are actually many good days during this month. But they're all for going on a journey, breaking the ground³⁸, wedding, opening a business, and others like that. It's not until the second month that there are good days for 'receiving seal and taking up office'."

Linghu Chong smiled. "I'm not taking up a government position so it's not really receiving a seal."

Yihe laughed. "Weren't you a general before? Becoming a headmaster is also receiving a seal."

Linghu Chong didn't want to brush away their ideas so he said, "Since it's like that, then make it the sixteenth of the second month."

Afterwards, they immediately sent disciples separately: to Shaolin temple to

take back the two Shi Tai's ashes, and to other schools to give notifications. He told all the disciples who were going down the mountain not to publicly announce this matter. He also said, "You must report to the headmaster of each school that we haven't avenged Dingxian Shi Tai's death yet and that the disciples of Heng-Shan School are still in mourning, so there won't be any grand ceremony for the taking up of the headmaster's office. Please ask them not to send anyone to attend the ceremony."

After he talked to the departing disciples, Linghu Chong thought, "Since I'm now the headmaster of Heng-Shan, I must carefully research the sword art of the Heng-Shan School." He gathered the remaining disciples and tested each of their sword art from the basic introductory level martial art to the highest Heng-Shan sword art styles, which was displayed by Yihe and Yiqing, two of the oldest disciples. Linghu Chong saw that the Heng-Shan School's sword art was defensively very tight, and the killing moves were frequently aimed at spots where other people least expected. However, it did not have enough swiftness or ferociousness. These martial arts were really suitable for women. All the previous master generations of Heng-Shan School had all been women, so their martial arts weren't as powerful or fierce like the ones that men used. But Heng-Shan School's sword art could be said to be one of the sword arts with the least amount of flaws in them. If speaking about their defence, they were just slightly below Wudang School's 'Taiji Sword Art'. But talking about how they could suddenly attack, these sword arts were above 'Taiji Sword Art'. Heng-Shan School was one of the most outstanding schools in Wulin, so it had its own unique skills.

In his mind, he carefully went over the drawings engraved on the cave wall on Huashan. There were some Heng-Shan School's sword arts drawn there, which had wonderful variations, and were far above the sword art that Yihe and Yiqing were using. Even though this set of sword art had been defeated by other people, if in the future Heng-Shan School wanted to be glorious in Wulin, then its basic skills needed to be improved. He also thought of the time he saw Dingjing Shi Tai fighting with other people. Her internal energy was abundant and her moves were fierce. She was really very far above Yihe and the other

disciples. He had also heard that Dingxian Shi Tai's martial art was even higher. It seemed that the three senior Shi Tai had not imparted a great deal of their martial art to their disciples yet. When the three Shi Tai had successively passed away in the last several months, many of Heng-Shan School's wonderful martial art had possibly been lost forever.

Yihe saw him without any expressions on his face and noticed that he didn't comment on any of the disciples' sword arts. So she said, "Martial brother Headmaster, you must be looking down on our sword art, please give us some advice."

Taking the sword from Yihe's hand, Linghu Chong replied, "There's this set of Heng-Shan School's sword art; I don't know if the three Shi Tai had imparted it to you or not?" and started to show the Heng-Shan School's sword art engraved on the cave wall. He was doing the moves really slowly to let the disciples see it clearly. After a few moves, all the disciples started cheering. They saw that each move of his still contained the basic essence of Heng-Shan's sword art, but the variations were wonderful. They didn't know just how much higher in level this set was when compared to each of the sets they had learnt in the past. Everyone was looking at each move enthusiastically and they felt pleased seeing it. The engraving of this set of sword moves on the cave wall was dead, so when Linghu Chong was using it, he linked them up one by one. In between each move, it was unavoidable that he had to add some of his idea into it. When he finally finished showing them this set of sword art, all the disciples cheered and they all bowed saluting him.

Yihe said, "Martial brother Headmaster, this is clearly our Heng-Shan School's sword art, but we've never seen it before. I'm afraid even my master and the two martial uncles didn't know about this sword art. Where did you learn it?"

Linghu Chong answered, "I saw it on a mountain cave wall. If you were willing to learn it, then how about if I imparted this sword art to you?" All the disciples were happy to hear this and they thanked him. That day Linghu Chong imparted three moves to them. He explained the intricacies of those three moves clearly and personally conducted the drills.

Even though it was only three moves from the sword art, these three moves were extremely profound and deep. Even the brightest and the most skilled disciples such as Yihe and Yiqing took seven to eight days to learn it. When it came to Zheng E, Yilin, Qin Juan, and the others, it was even more difficult for them to comprehend it. After nine days, Linghu Chong imparted two more moves to them. There were not many moves in this set of sword arts engraved on the cave wall. But they had actually spent more than one month before they completed rudimentary training. As to the mastery of this sword art, it depended on each person's ability and comprehension.

After more than a month, the disciples who were sent as emissaries started to return from their trip one by one, and for the most part, they didn't look pleased at all. They were afraid to talk when they reported to Linghu Chong. He knew for sure without asking that they had been ridiculed as a group of nuns wanting a man to be their headmaster. All he could do was console them with words. Then he asked them to separately learn from their martial sisters the sword art he had imparted to them. If there were anything they weren't clear about, then he would personally advise them.

Two experienced disciples, Yu Sao and Yiwen were sent to Huashan to deliver the epistle. The distance between Heng-Shan and Huashan wasn't that far, so they should have returned much earlier. Even when all the disciples who went to the south had returned, Yu Sao and Yiwen still hadn't come back yet. As they neared the sixteenth of the second month, the day for taking office, and still hadn't seen any sign of Yu Sao and Yiwen, they sent two more disciples, Yiguang and Yishi, to go to their aid.

The disciples did not anticipate any sect or school sending anyone to attend the ceremony, so they didn't prepare any lodging or food for guests. However, everyone had earlier weeded the ground, swept all the rooms clean, and sewn new gowns and shoes to wear. Zheng E and some disciples had sewn a black gown for Linghu Chong to wear for this day. Heng-Shan was the north mountain among the five mountains and the colour of their uniform was black.

On the morning of the sixteenth of the second month, when Linghu Chong got

out after getting out of bed, he saw lamps and festoons hanging from the top of each house, showing the day's happy occasion. Seeing the care and dedication that went into making each of the decoration and securely arranging them, Linghu Chong again felt ashamed, but he also felt appreciation towards them. He thought, "The two Shi Tai died tragically because of me, but they didn't blame me for it. Instead, they gave much regards to me. If Linghu Chong couldn't avenge the three Shi Tai then I'll be a useless person."

Suddenly, he heard someone shouting from behind the corner of the mountain, "A'lin, A'lin, your dad has come to look at you. Are you well? A'lin, your dad's here." His voice was booming, shaking the valley, and before the echo had finished, he again shouted, "A'lin... A'lin... your dad..." Yilin had already heard his voice so she quickly got out of the convent and called out, "Dad, dad!" Then from around the corner of the mountain, a tall and strong monk emerged. It was really Yilin's father, Monk No Commandment, and there was also another monk behind him. The two of them were walking really fast and in a short time had reached the convent. Monk No Commandment loudly exclaimed, "Master Linghu, you didn't die from your heavy injuries, and now you're going to become my daughter's headmaster. That's very good!"

Linghu Chong smiled. "This is thanks to Great Master."

Yilin walked up to her father and lovingly pulled on his arm. She smiled, "Dad, you know today is the day that big brother Linghu officially takes up office as the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. Did you come here to congratulate him?"

No Commandment laughed. "There's no need for congratulation. I'm here to join the Heng-Shan School. Everyone is from the same school, what's there to congratulate?"

Linghu Chong was startled and he quickly asked, "Great Master wants to join Heng-Shan School?"

No Commandment answered, "Yeah. My daughter is in Heng-Shan School. I'm her old man, so naturally I'm also in the Heng-Shan School. His granny, I

heard everyone ridiculing you. They're saying that you're a man but you want to become the headmaster of a bunch of nuns and young ladies. His granny, they didn't know that you're full of passion and righteousness. The mind..." His eyebrows turned into a smile and it appeared that he was really happy. He looked at his daughter and said, "Old man punched that guy's mouth and broke all his teeth. I shouted to him, "You little kid knows fart! How can everyone in Heng-Shan School be all nuns and young ladies? Old man is from Heng-Shan School, even though old man has a shiny head, do you think I'm a nun? I'm going to pull my pants down to give you a look!" So I pulled my pants down but this kid fell down and then ran away. Haha, haha!" Linghu Chong and Yilin both laughed freely when they heard this.

Yilin smiled. "Dad, you're so crude in doing things. You're also not afraid of people laughing at you!"

No Commandment replied, "If I didn't let him look clearly, then this kid still wouldn't know whether I'm a nun or a monk. Brother Linghu, I've joined the Heng-Shan School. I've also brought this grand disciple along. Cannot Have No Commandment, quickly greet Headmaster Linghu."

While Monk No Commandment was speaking, the monk following him had his back turned towards them for the whole time, not willing to look at Linghu Chong or Yilin. As he turned around, his face was full of embarrassment. He looked at Linghu Chong and smiled slightly. Linghu Chong felt that this monk looked familiar but he couldn't figure out who he was. Then, he was startled as he unexpectedly recognised the Ten Thousand Miles Loner Tian Boguang. He was totally amazed and blurted out, "It's... it's Brother Tian?"

That monk was really Tian Boguang. He smiled bitterly then bowed towards Yilin. "Greet... greeting Master."

Yilin was also very surprised. "How... how did you become a Buddhist? Is it a disguise?"

Great Master No Commandment was feeling proud of himself and he laughingly answered, "This is the real thing and he's not deceiving anyone here.

He had really become a monk. Cannot Have No Commandment, tell your master what your Buddhist name is.”

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly and said, “Master, grand Martial Master gave me a Buddhist name called ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’.”

Yilin asked strangely, “What ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’? How can there be such a long name?”

Her father replied, “What do you know? In Buddhist scripture, what does it matter how long the Buddha’s name is! ‘Buddha of Compassion and Sorrow Helps the Distressed and Watches the World’s Voice’, isn’t that name long? ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’ only has four words in his name, how can that be long?”

Yilin nodded. “So that’s how it is. How did he become a Buddhist? Dad, was it you who took him as your disciple?”

No Commandment answered, “No. He’s your disciple; I’m his grand martial grandpa. But you’re only a little nun and since he had already paid his respect to take you as his master, if he didn’t become a monk, then he would’ve ruined the good name of Heng-Shan School. That’s why I advised him to become a monk.”

Yilin laughingly said, “What do you mean advised him? Dad, you must’ve forced him to become a Buddhist, didn’t you?”

“He voluntarily did it; you can’t force someone to become a Buddhist. Whatever goodness this person has, there’s an equal amount of badness in him. That’s why I gave him the Buddhist name of ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’.”

Yilin’s face became slightly red as she understood the meaning behind her father’s words. This Tian Boguang was a very lecherous person and he was somehow captured by her father in the past. At that time, his life was spared but a lot of strange punishments were heaped on him. This time, it seemed that he had been forced to become a monk.

Then No Commandment continued, “My Buddhist name is No Commandment, so I don’t adhere to any rules or commandments. But this Tian Boguang has committed a lot of bad things in Jianghu. If he didn’t abstain from committing more of these piles of misdemeanours, how can he be under your school and become your disciple? Master Linghu wouldn’t have liked this also. In the future, he’s going to receive my alms bowl; that’s why his name also has the words ‘No Commandment’.”

They suddenly heard a person said, “Monk No Commandment and Monk Cannot Have No Commandment are both joining the Heng-Shan School. The Peach Valley Six Fairies are also going to join Heng-Shan School.”

The Peach Valley Six Fairies had come and the one who spoke just then was Peachtree Trunk Fairy.

Peachtree Root Fairy said, “We were the first people to see Linghu Chong, so the six of us are big martial brothers, while Monk No Commandment is little martial brother.”

Linghu Chong thought, “Since there are Great Master No Commandment and Tian Boguang in Heng-Shan School already, there’s no harm in accepting the Peach Valley Six Fairies as well. This way, it’ll remove those talks in Jianghu about Linghu Chong becoming the headmaster of a group of nuns and young ladies.” He then said, “Peachtree Six brothers are willing to enter the Heng-Shan School, then that’s really good then. But it’s very troublesome to arrange the seniority order one by one so it’s better if we just leave it alone!”

Peachtree Leaf Fairy said, “No Commandment’s disciple is called Cannot Have No Commandment. When in the future, Cannot Have No Commandment accepts a disciple, what will his Buddhist name be?”

Peachtree Fruit Fairy answered, “Cannot Have No Commandment’s disciple’s Buddhist name must also have the words ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’. He can be called, ‘Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment’.”

Peachtree Branch Fairy said, “Then the disciple of ‘Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment’; what would his Buddhist name be?”

Linghu Chong saw Tian Boguang's plight so he took his arm and led him away. "I have a few words to ask you."

"Alright," Tian Boguang answered.

The two of them quickened their steps and moved tens of feet away. But behind them, they still heard Peachtree Trunk Fairy saying, "His Buddhist name can be 'With Reason and Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Peachtree Flower Fairy added, "Then how about disciple of 'With Reason and Without Doubt Cannot Have No Commandment'? What would his Buddhist name be?"

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly and said, "Headmaster Linghu, that day I was forced by Grand Martial Master to go to Huashan to invite you to come and see the little Shi Tai. But there's a long story behind that."

Linghu Chong said, "I know that he forced you to take a poison, and he also tricked you by saying that he'd already sealed your death acupoint."

"I've already told you about that before. That day in the courtyard of the Jade House, I fought with that shorty Yu. After that, I thought about it and decided that there were too many heroes from the orthodox path for me to stay there for long. So I went north towards Hunan. I'm ashamed to talk about those days. My shortcoming became visible not long after. In Kaifeng prefecture, I sneaked into the room of a rich family's young lady in the middle of the night. I lifted the mosquito net and extended my hands to cop a feel, but I unexpectedly felt a bald head instead."

Linghu Chong laughed and said, "So to your surprise, she's a nun."

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. "No, it was a monk."

Linghu Chong laughed loudly. "The young lady was inside the quilt sleeping with a monk. Never thought that this young lady would've stolen a man, and the man she'd stolen would be a monk."

Tian Boguang shook his head and said, "That's not it! That monk was Grand Martial Master. Originally, Grand Martial Master was looking for me. When he

finally tracked my trail down, he found me at Kaifeng prefecture. That afternoon I was spying around that house and Grand Martial Master saw me. He guessed that I was up to no good, so he talked to that family and told that young lady to get out of trouble. Then he slept on that bed waiting for me.”

Linghu Chong laughed. “Brother Tian must have really suffered this time.”

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. “Does that need saying? When I rubbed Grand Martial Master’s head, I already knew that something’s not right. Then I felt my stomach felt numb because he hit my acupoint there. Grand Martial Master jumped out of the bed and lighted a lamp. Then he asked me whether I want to die or live. I know that for my whole life I’ve been doing evil things, so there would be one day when I’d have a reckoning. So I quickly said, ‘I want to die!’. Grand Martial Master thought that this was really strange so he asked me: ‘Why do you want to die?’ I said: ‘I wasn’t being careful and was captured by you. How can I still hope to live?’ Grand Martial Master gave me a blank expression then indignantly said, ‘You said you were captured by me only because you weren’t careful. So you are implying that if you were a bit more careful, then I wouldn’t be able to capture you. Alright!’ As he said ‘alright’, he released my acupoint. Then I sat down and asked him: ‘What is your order?’ He said: ‘You have a knife on your belt, how come you’re not using it to chop me? You have two legs underneath your body, how come you’re not jumping out of the window to escape?’ I said: ‘I’m a gentleman, how can I act like a shameless nobody?’ He just laughed loudly and said: ‘You’re not a shameless nobody? You already paid respect to my daughter to take her as your master and yet how come you’re disclaiming it?’ I thought this was really strange so I asked: ‘Your daughter?’ He answered: ‘On the top floor of that wine shop, you made a bet with that youngster from Huashan School. Saying that whoever lost would take my daughter as master. Could it be that it’s all fake? I went up Heng-Shan to look for my daughter, and she told me everything from the beginning to the end.’ I said: ‘So that’s how it is. That little nun is your daughter, that’s really weird.’ He asked: ‘What’s weird about that?’”

Linghu Chong laughed. "This matter really is quite strange. Other people

become a monk after they've gotten a daughter, but Great Master No Commandment became a monk first before getting a daughter. His Buddhist name is called No Commandment. It means that he won't comply with any rules or commandments."

Tian Boguang said, "That's right. At that time, I said: 'That bet was only a trick, how could you take it as real? You're not wrong that I lost the fight in that bet, so I won't bother your daughter anymore.' Grand Martial Master then said: 'That won't do. You already said that you're going to take her as master, so you must take her as your master. You cannot not take my daughter as a master. I can't let anyone bully my own daughter. I spent a lot of effort to find you. You're very slippery and if it weren't for you committing these rapes, then it would've been really difficult to capture you.'

I saw him getting muddled and not speaking clearly, so I quickly used my 'Three Cloud Steps' and jumped out of the window. I thought that once I've used my lightness martial art, Grand Martial Master would definitely not be able to keep up with me. But I was surprised when I heard footsteps behind me because Grand Martial Master had chased me down. I called out: 'Big monk, you didn't kill me just then, so I won't kill you either. If you kept on chasing then I won't be polite anymore.' Grand Martial Master laughed loudly and said: 'How do you become impolite?' I pulled my knife out, turned around, and chopped down on him. But Grand Martial Master's martial art was really high. He only used his palms to trade moves with me. I didn't know how to use my fast knife to chop him, and after more than forty moves, he grabbed the back of my neck and snatched my knife away.

Then he asked me: 'Give up yet?' I said: 'I give up, you can kill me now!' He said: 'What's the use of killing you? Would it make my daughter alive again?' I was startled so I asked: 'Little Shi Tai is dead?' He said: 'She hasn't died yet, but she's as good as dead. I saw her at Heng-Shan and she was so thin that I can even see her bones. I cried when I saw her, and then I slowly asked her what happened. It was you who harmed her.' I said: 'If you wanted to kill me then kill me. Tian Boguang is an honest person and would never tell lies. I was rude to

your daughter at first, but she was saved by Huashan School's Linghu Chong. I didn't violate her; she's still a young lady as pure as jade.' Grand Martial Master said: 'Your granny, what's the use of being as pure as jade? My daughter is lovesick; if Linghu Chong wouldn't take her as his wife, she wouldn't continue on living. But when I mentioned this to her, my daughter scolded me. She said something like Buddhists cannot have worldly desires; otherwise Buddha reproaches them and when you die you enter the eighteenth level of Hell.' Suddenly he clutched my neck and scolded me, 'Stinky kid, this is all your doing. If you weren't being rude to my daughter that day then Linghu Chong wouldn't have to come and save her. Then my daughter wouldn't have become that thin.' I said: 'That's not for certain. Little Shi Tai's beauty is like a goddess, even if I weren't being rude to her that day, Linghu Chong would certainly have come up with another reason to approach her'."

Linghu Chong scowled and said, "Brother Tian, what you said was too much."

Tian Boguang laughed and said, "I'm sorry that I offended you. At that time, the situation was desperate. If I didn't say that, Grand Martial Master would never have released me. Sure enough, when he heard this, he turned from angry to happy and said: 'Stinky kid, think for yourself how many bad things you have done in your lifetime? If it weren't for the discourteous way you treated my daughter, I would've flattened your head a long time ago.'"

Linghu Chong felt this was very odd, so he asked, "He's happy that you're being rude to her daughter?"

Tian Boguang answered, "He wasn't being happy, he was praising my foresight."

Linghu Chong couldn't help smiling. Tian Boguang went on, "Grand Martial Master lifted me in mid air with his left hand while his right hand gave me seventeen to eighteen whacks on the ear and I fainted. Then he soaked me in a small brook. When I woke up, he said: 'I'm giving you one month to go and invite Linghu Chong to go up Heng-Shan to see my daughter. Even if he couldn't take her as his wife for now, they can still talk and that'll be good enough. My daughter's life would be protected then. Your master has a problem

but how come you didn't come and help as her disciple?' He then poked some of my acupoints and told me that they're the death acupoints. Then he forced me to take some poison saying that if I managed to invite you to come and see the little Shi Tai within the one month period, he would give me the medicine. Otherwise, the poison would come out and no medicine would be able to save me."

Linghu Chong had at last understood. That day when Tian Boguang came up to Huashan to invite him to come down the mountain, he kept everything a secret and didn't want to say anything clearly. Linghu Chong didn't expect that he would actually tell him everything at this time. Tian Boguang continued, "I went up Huashan to invite you, but I was defeated and I knew that it would be hard to keep my life further. To my surprise, Grand Martial Master was feeling uneasy so he personally took the little Shi Tai to come up to Huashan to look for you. Then he gave me the antidote, and afterwards I also listened to your advice not to rape and do those lecherous things anymore. But Tian Boguang's nature is lascivious and there are lots of women around. So whenever I have some money, I went to look for some prostitutes which is not a difficult thing to do. Half a month ago, Grand Martial Master found me again. He said that you were going to become Heng-Shan School's headmaster, but other people are ridiculing you behind your back and your reputation in Jianghu is being ruined. He loves everything, loves his daughter and son-in-law..."

Linghu Chong scowled and interrupted, "Brother Tian, you must never speak of this nonsense ever again."

Tian Boguang replied, "Yes, yes. I was just repeating what Grand Martial Master said. He said that he wanted to join Heng-Shan School and told me to follow his plan. The first step was to accept me as a disciple on behalf of his daughter. I didn't consent to this so he beat me up. I'm not his match and I also couldn't run away so I was forced to pay my respect to Master." He said till here when he frowned and his expression turned dark.

Linghu Chong said, "You only have to pay your respect to your master. It doesn't mean that you have to become a monk as well. Doesn't Shaolin School

have a lot of secular disciples?”

Tian Boguang shook his head and answered, “Grand Martial Master had another idea. He said: ‘You’re such a lecherous person. Once you’ve entered Heng-Shan School, your martial uncles will all be beautiful nuns, so that’s going to be very inappropriate. The best plan would be to cut out the source of trouble first.’ He then knocked me down, pulled my pants down, grabbed his knife and gave me a chop. He cut half of my thing.”

Linghu Chong uttered an ‘ah’ as he was startled by this, and shook his head. Even though he felt that this was very cruel, he also thought that Tian Boguang had harmed too many women of good families, so it was a deserved retribution. Tian Boguang was also shaking his head before he continued, “I fainted immediately. When I woke up, Grand Martial Master had applied some medicine on me and had also wrapped up my injury. He told me to rest for a few days to recover from my injury. Then he forced me to shave my head and become a monk. He gave me a Buddhist name called ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’. He said: ‘Since I already chopped your thing, you can’t rape anymore. So, of course there’s no need for you to become a monk. But I made you become a monk and gave you the Buddhist name ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’ so that everyone will know. That way, Heng-Shan School’s reputation will also be preserved. Ordinarily, it’s inappropriate for people who have become a monk to mix up with nuns. But since your name is ‘Cannot Have No Commandment’, then it doesn’t matter.”

Linghu Chong smiled and said, “Your Grand Martial Master is very thoughtful.”

Tian Boguang replied, “Grand Martial Master wanted me to tell you about all these. He also wants me to ask you not to blame my master.”

Confused, Linghu Chong asked, “Why would I want to blame your master? She doesn’t know anything about this matter.”

Tian Boguang answered, “Grand Martial Master said: Every time he saw my master, he noticed how she became a little bit thinner and her complexion a little

worse. When he asked her about it, she always sheds a tear and never says anything. Grand Martial Master said: It must be you who's bullying her."

Linghu Chong was alarmed. "I didn't! I never talk to your master in an angry manner. Also, she's always so good, why would I scold her?"

Tian Boguang said, "You never scolded her, that's why she cried."

"I don't understand."

"Grand Martial Master beat me up when I asked about this too."

Linghu Chong scratched his head thinking that Great Master No Commandment's entangled way of speaking was just like that of the Peach Valley Six Fairies.

Tian Boguang said, "Grand Martial Master said: after he got married to Grand Martial Mother, they quarrelled all the time, and the fiercer the scolding was, the more love there was. You're not scolding my master so it means that you're not taking my master to be your wife."

"This... your master is a Buddhist nun, so I've never thought of this matter."

"I also said that. Grand Martial Master got angry and beat me up for a time. He said: my Grand Martial Mother was originally a nun and when he wanted to marry her, he became a monk. If Buddhist nuns or monks couldn't get married, how can there be my master in this world? If my master isn't in this world, how can there be me?"

Linghu Chong couldn't help thinking that this was funny. He thought Tian Boguang was much older compared to Little Martial Sister Yilin; how could he mention those two things together? Tian Boguang went on, "Grand Martial Master also said: if you didn't think of marrying my master, then what are you doing becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster? He said: there are a lot of nuns in Heng-Shan School but not one can be compared to my master's beauty. If you didn't do it for my master, then for which nun are you doing it for?"

Linghu Chong was secretly feeling miserable and couldn't take this anymore, he thought, "Great Master No Commandment became a monk so that he could

marry a nun. He now thinks that everyone in the world thinks the same way as him. If these words got out, how could it not cause a lot of problem?"

Tian Boguang smiled bitterly. "Grand Martial Master asked me whether my master is the most beautiful woman in the whole world. I answered: 'She's not the most beautiful, but she's very beautiful.' He got angry and punched me causing two of my teeth to fall off. Then he said: 'How come she's not the most beautiful? If she weren't beautiful, then why did you have rude intentions towards her on that day? And why did that little kid Linghu Chong risked his life to save her?' I quickly said: 'Most beautiful, most beautiful. How could Grand Martial Master's daughter not be the most beautiful woman in the world?' When he heard these words, he became happy and praised my brilliant vision."

Linghu Chong smiled. "Little martial sister Yilin is of course beautiful, it's no wonder that great Master No Commandment is proud of her."

Tian Boguang happily said, "You agree that my master is beautiful; that's very good then."

Linghu Chong oddly asked, "Why is that good?"

"Grand Martial Master gave me a task, he wants me to think of a way to call you... call you..."

"Call me what?" Linghu Chong asked.

Tian Boguang smiled. "Call you my master-husband."

Linghu Chong was stupefied. "Brother Tian, Great Master No Commandment loves his daughter a lot. But you should already know that this matter is impossible to do."

"That's true. I said that's really hard to do, I said that you once led a large group of people to attack Shaolin temple because of Divine Sect's young lady Ren. I said: 'Even though young lady Ren's beauty isn't above my master, Master Linghu was already predestined to be with her. He's already infatuated with her and other people wouldn't be able to interfere.' Master Linghu, in front of Grand Martial Master, I had no choice but to say this in order to protect my

remaining teeth so I have something to eat with, please don't blame me."

Linghu Chong smiled and said, "Of course I understand."

"Grand Martial Master then said: He already knows about this and that it's very easy to solve this problem because all that is required is to think of a way to kill young lady Ren without you knowing. I quickly said not to do that because if young lady Ren were killed, then Linghu Chong would definitely commit suicide. Grand Martial Master said: 'What you said was right. If this little kid Linghu Chong died, then my daughter will be widowed, how can that be not a bad luck? How about this? You talk to this little kid Linghu Chong; tell him my daughter will marry him and make his second house. This will be alright.' I said: 'Grand Martial Master, how can you wrong your daughter like that?' He sighed then said: 'You don't know. If my daughter couldn't marry Linghu Chong, she would die sooner or later; she definitely won't have a long life.' As he said this, his tears flowed down. Ai, this is their father-daughter inborn nature revealing their true feelings, it couldn't be fake."

The two of them were looking at each other, both of them feeling pretty awkward. Tian Boguang then said, "Master Linghu, I've already said everything that Grand Martial Master wanted me to tell you. I know that some of these are hard to do, even taboo, especially since you're the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. But I advise you to speak more to my master and let her be happy. You can deal with this later on."

Linghu Chong nodded his head and said, "Alright." In the last few days, every time he had seen Yilin, she seemed to be thinner and thinner. He now knew that it was because she was lovesick. Yilin loved him so deeply; how come he didn't know? But she was a Buddhist nun and still very young, so he expected her feelings would lessen as days passed by and would finally be gone. After meeting her again at Xianxia mountain range, and from Fujian to Jiangxi, he was never alone with her to talk about anything. Ever since he had been on Heng-Shan, he avoided doing anything that might rouse suspicion. He didn't care if other people slandered his own name, as his name was already not good, but he felt he must never spoil the clean reputation of the Heng-Shan School. Besides

the time he was imparting the sword art to the Heng-Shan's female disciples, he never chatted with anyone. Compared to the past days of clowning around, he was very different. As he listened to Tian Boguang speaking of the past, and about Yilin's tender feelings towards him, feelings suddenly burst forth in his heart.

He looked up towards the mountain peak where the white snow was accumulating as he pondered. Suddenly, he heard the clamouring sounds of people coming up the mountain path. The mountain summit had always been quiet and peaceful, and there was never people shouting or making noises. He was really astonished when he heard footsteps of several hundred people coming up the mountain. The first person called out, "Congratulations, Master Linghu. Today is your happy day." This person was short and plump; he was Old Man. Behind him were Ji Wushi, Zu Qianqiu, Huang Boliu, Sima Big, Blue Phoenix, You Xun, the Bear Duo of the Northern Desert, and many other people who had unexpectedly come here.

Linghu Chong was surprised and happy at the same time. He quickly went forward to welcome them. "I received Dingxian Shi Tai's last order so I must take the leadership of the Heng-Shan School, but I didn't dare to alarm all the friends here. How come you've all come here?"

These people had once followed Linghu Chong in attacking Shaolin temple and had gone through life and death battles with him. So they had become friends through trials and tribulations. They came up the mountain one by one and circled him. Old Man said in a loud and clear voice, "Everyone heard that Master managed to get Sacred Lady out, and we all felt really happy. This matter of Master taking up the headmaster position of Heng-Shan School; it was already known in Jianghu for quite a long time. If we didn't come up the mountain today to give our congratulations, then we deserve to die." These heroes were upright and straightforward people, after talking for a short while, they were able to joke around.

Ever since he had taken residence on Heng-Shan, Linghu Chong had only been around a group of nuns and young ladies so he had to talk with the utmost

restriction. Now, suddenly, as he found so many old friends around him, he was extremely happy. Huang Boliu said, "We're uninvited guests so Heng-Shan School certainly hasn't prepared any food or drink for us. So we brought food and wine up the mountain."

Linghu Chong happily said, "That's very good then." He thought, "This situation is starting to resemble that big assembly on top of the Five-Tyrant Ridge."

As they were talking, around a few hundred people had come up the mountain. Ji Wushi smiled and said, "Master, we're all people from the same family so there's no need to be polite. Your educated and cultured female disciples shouldn't come and greet crude people like us. So it's best if we just talk amongst ourselves."

Now he found the mountain peak very noisy and lively. Heng-Shan School certainly didn't expect that so many guests would suddenly turn up to congratulate them, so all of them became excited. There were some old disciples who were more experienced; they saw that the guests who had come to congratulate them were neither fish nor fowl. Even though there were a few well known heroes, they were all masters from the demonical path. Also, a lot of them were heroes and thieves from the dark path. Heng-Shan School's rules were strict and all the disciples guarded themselves strictly. Not only do they have a lot of contact with people from the orthodox path, they have not paid much attention to them. Unexpectedly, a large group of unorthodox people had come up to the peak today. But they saw their headmaster was holding and pulling on their hands, looking very close, and talking to them nicely.

At noon, several hundred men brought chicken, duck, cow, sheep, wine, and many other dishes to the top of the mountain. Linghu Chong thought, "The peak of the mountain is a sacred ground for the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin. I'm the Headmaster here, but if we were to eat fish and meat, kill pigs and slaughter sheep, we will be offending the ancestors of the Heng-Shan School. I would be sorry to let this happen." He immediately told these people to cook the dishes on the mountainside. However, the smell of the wine and meat drifted up to the

mountaintop which caused many nuns to secretly scowl. After these heroes cooked their meals, they went to the front of the convent to sit inside the large open area there. Linghu Chong sat on the west side while the several hundred female disciples sat behind him according to their seniority. They were waiting until the lucky hour to initiate the "taking up the office" ceremony.

Suddenly, they heard the sounds of a group of people playing flutes coming nearer. Two old men with green gowns strode up the mountain. The group of heroes uttered "yi, ah" from everywhere and many people stood up. The old man on the left, with a yellow complexion, cried out in a clear voice, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's Chief Dongfang's delegates Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun come to congratulate Hero Linghu's honour in becoming Heng-Shan School's headmaster. We wish Heng-Shan School to be prosperous and Headmaster Linghu to be prestigious in Wulin."

When he finished his speech, the group of heroes uttered an 'ah' and exploded in cheers. Half of these unorthodox path's heroes were connected to the Devil Sect, and among them, there were people who had taken Dongfang Bubai's 'Three Brain Corpse Pill'. So when they heard the words 'Chief Dongfang' mentioned, they were scared to death. The group of heroes didn't recognise who these two people were, but they had long heard of their names. The person on the left was called 'Honourable Yellow Face' Jia Bu, while the one on the right was called Shangguan Yun, with the nickname 'Eagle Hero'. The martial arts of these two people were high; it was said that their martial arts were way above those of all the headmasters, chiefs, and clan leaders in Wulin. The services and qualifications of these people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect weren't extremely impressive. But over the last many years, the sect had undergone a big change. Many older members such as Xiang Wentian and others were removed or went into seclusion. At the present time, Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun were two of the most powerful and first-class figures in the sect and it can be said that Dongfang Bubai was giving Linghu Chong a lot of respect by sending the two of them here.

Linghu Chong went forward to welcome them. "Mr. Dongfang and I have no

acquaintance with each other. I don't deserve your two honourable presences."

Linghu Chong saw that 'Honourable Yellow Face' Jia Bu had a thin face resembling a candle, and his two Taiyang acupoints were very pronounced as if each point has a piece of peach underneath. The 'Eagle Hero' Shangguan Yun, with long arms, long legs, and an air of assured authority, had glitteringly bright eyes. These indicated that the two of them had profound internal energy.

Jia Bu said, "Today is Hero Linghu's big day. Chief Dongfang said that originally he wanted to congratulate you personally. But there are too many matters of the sect that are hindering him, and since there's no way for him to be in two places at once, he asked Headmaster Linghu not to blame him."

"I wouldn't dare," Linghu Chong replied, while he thought in his heart, "It looks as if Dongfang Bubai is still flourishing which means Chief Ren still hasn't snatched the leadership of the sect yet. I wonder how Chief Ren, Brother Xiang, and Yingying are doing right now."

Jia Bu leaned to one side and indicated with a wave of his left hand. "Here are some meagre gifts, small tokens of regards from Chief Dongfang. Headmaster Linghu, please accept them." Amidst the sound of flutes, more than a hundred people brought forth forty large red boxes. Each box was being carried by four strong men, and from the heavy steps of each man, it seemed that the items inside the boxes weren't light.

Linghu Chong quickly refused, "Linghu Chong is already honoured by the presence of your two honourable; I would never dare to receive these gifts. Also, please reply to Mr. Dongfang that Linghu Chong said many thanks. On this mountain, Heng-Shan School's disciples live frugally but have a clean and honest life, so we have no use for these splendid and expensive items."

Jia Bu replied, "If Headmaster Linghu doesn't accept these gifts, Shangguan Yun and I will be in big trouble." He slightly tilted his head towards Shangguan Yun and said, "Brother Shangguan, don't you think what I said was right?"

"It's right!" Shangguan Yun answered.

Linghu Chong was troubled. He thought, "Heng-Shan School is an orthodox

school and we're like water and fire with your Devil Sect. It's already good that the two parties aren't fighting right now, but we still can't make friends with them. Also, Chief Ren and Yingying are going to settle their debt with Dongfang Bubai, so how can I accept their gifts?" He then said, "Brothers, please tell Mr. Dongfang that I don't dare to receive his gifts. If you didn't agree to take back these gifts then I'll send people to deliver these gifts back to your noble sect."

Jia Bu smiled slightly and said, "Headmaster Linghu, do you know what's in these forty boxes?"

"Of course I don't know."

Jia Bu laughed and replied, "Once Headmaster Linghu looked at it, you surely wouldn't refuse it. In these forty boxes, actually, they're not all gifts from Chief Dongfang. A portion of it actually belongs to Headmaster Linghu. We're just bringing them up to return these items to their original owner."

Linghu Chong was surprised. "My items? What could they be?"

Jia Bu took a big step forward and replied in a whisper, "The majority of these items were the items left behind by young lady Ren at Dark Wood Cliff, such as clothes, jewellery, and other common things. Chief Dongfang told me to send them back for young lady Ren to use. And some of the other gifts are Chief's gifts to Hero Linghu and young lady Ren. Many of the items are mixed together so they can't be separated. Headmaster Linghu, there's no need to be polite. Haha, haha."

Linghu Chong's natural disposition was open-minded and carefree, and didn't confine himself to customs. Seeing that Dongfang Bubai had sent these gifts sincerely, and many of the items also belonged to Yingying, he didn't refuse them anymore. He laughed loudly and said, "In that case, many thanks."

Just then, a female disciple came quickly towards him and reported, "Wudang School's Priest Chongxu has come to attend the ceremony."

Surprised, Linghu Chong quickly walked towards the entrance of the mountain peak to welcome Priest Chongxu who had come with eight of his disciples. Linghu Chong bowed to salute him. "Honorable Priest, Linghu Chong

is deeply grateful."

Priest Chongxu smiled. "When Poor Priest heard of you becoming the Headmaster of Heng-Shan, I was really happy. Shaolin's Great Master Fangzheng and Fangsheng are also coming to congratulate you. Have they arrived yet?"

Linghu Chong was even more confounded. At this moment, there were a group of monks walking up towards the mountaintop. The two people walking in front had their sleeves floating around. They were Abbot Fangzheng and Great Master Fangsheng. Fangzheng called out, "Priest Chongxu, you walked really fast and arrived here before us."

Linghu Chong went down the mountain to welcome them. He called out, "Great Masters have come here personally, how is Linghu Chong worthy of this?"

Fangsheng laughed. "Young hero, you had entered Shaolin three times already, and yet this is just our first visit to you here at Heng-Shan. So it can be said that we're just respectfully visiting each other."

Linghu Chong welcomed the Shaolin's monks and Wudang's priests up the mountaintop. When the group of heroes on the mountaintop saw that Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders personally came, they were astonished and didn't dare to speak so loudly. All the Heng-Shan School's female disciples appeared pleased, and they all thought, "Martial brother Headmaster's reputation is so large."

Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun gave a glance and then turned a blind eye towards Fangzheng, Fangsheng, Chongxu, and the rest of their people.

Linghu Chong asked Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu to take a seat while he pondered, "I remembered when Master became the leader of Huashan, the leaders of Shaolin School and Wudang School didn't personally come; they just sent their people. I was still young at that time and didn't know any of the guests, but when Master and Master-Wife talked about what was happening at that time, they never mentioned the presence of Shaolin and Wudang Schools' leaders. Today, they both arrived at the same time; did they

really come here to congratulate me or do they have other intentions?"

A stream of people continued coming up the mountain. Most of them were the heroes who took part in attacking the Shaolin temple. Kunlun School, Diancang School, Emei School, Kongtong School, Beggar Clan, and all the other big clans sent representatives to congratulate and deliver the gifts. When Linghu Chong saw that the number of people who had come up to congratulate him was quite large, he felt relieved. "They've all come here because of Heng-Shan School and Dingxian Shi Tai's reputations. It's not because of Linghu Chong's reputation." Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan, and Taishan Schools didn't send anyone to congratulate him.

As the thunderous sound of firecrackers went off, marking the arrival of the auspicious hour, Linghu Chong stood in the middle of the field and bowed, saluting everyone around him. Then he said in a clear voice, "Heng-Shan School's former leader, Dingxian Shi Tai, sadly met with someone's plot, and together with Dingyi Shi Tai, she passed away. I, Linghu Chong, bear the last wish of Dingxian Shi Tai to take up the leadership of Heng-Shan School. Everyone in Heng-Shan School feels grateful for the presence of all the honourable seniors and friends here." Then, accompanied by the sound of cymbals, Heng-Shan School's disciples lined up in two rows, one after another. In the middle were four of the most senior disciples, Yihe, Yiqing, Yizhen, and Yizhi; each of them was holding a Buddhist relic. They walked up to Linghu Chong and bowed to him. Linghu Chong joined his two palms, returning the respect. Yihe said, "These four Buddhist relics were passed down by ancestor Xiaofeng Shi Tai during the inauguration of the Heng-Shan School. They are to be passed down to successive Headmasters. New Headmaster, martial brother Linghu, please receive these items."

"Yes," Linghu Chong responded.

The four disciples handed over each item accordingly. The items were a scroll of scripture, a wooden fish, a strand of prayer beads, and a dagger. When Linghu Chong saw the wooden fish and the prayer beads, he felt embarrassed. He extended his hands to receive them but both of his eyes were looking at the

ground, afraid to look at the eyes of the people in the crowd. Yiqing unfolded the scroll and said, "Heng-Shan School's five commandments: The first commandment is to never disobey your superior, the second commandment is to never harm people in the same school, the third commandment is to never kill the innocents, the fourth commandment is to always be an upright person, and the fifth commandment is to never make friends with evil. These are the instructions left behind by the ancestor of the Heng-Shan School. Martial brother Headmaster must personally set an example and lead the disciples; these rules must be obeyed."

"Yes!" Linghu Chong responded. He thought in his heart, "The first three commandments are alright. But Linghu Chong isn't that upright, and this commandment "not to make friends with evil people" will be very hard to do. Today on this mountaintop, half of the guests here are people from the unorthodox path."

Suddenly he heard people coming up the mountain calling out, "Five Mountains Sword Schools' Chief Zuo has an order. Linghu Chong can't usurp the leadership of Heng-Shan School."

Amidst the clamour, five people rushed up followed by tens of people behind them. These first five people were each holding an embroidered flag, which were the alliance flags of the Five Mountains Sword Schools. They stopped tens of feet away from the crowd. Among those five people was a short and stout person, with a yellow chubby face, looking to be around fifty years old. Linghu Chong recognised that person as Yue Hou with the nickname 'Great Yin and Yang Palms'. He was a good fighter from the Songshan School. That day in the wilderness in Henan, Linghu Chong had fought with him and had pierced both of Yue Hou's palms with his long sword, and caused a deep hatred between them. But Yue Hou was a gentleman; On another day, he ambushed Linghu Chong and managed to defeat him but instead of killing him, he jumped back to give Linghu Chong a chance to fight again. For this, Linghu Chong felt thankful towards Yue Hou³⁹.

Linghu Chong immediately cupped his fist and said, "Senior Yue, you are

well."

Yue Hou waved the command flag and bellowed, "Heng-Shan School is a member of the five mountains sword schools alliance so you must obey Chief Zuo's order."

"After Linghu Chong assumed the leadership of Heng-Shan School, we'll need to discuss whether we're still a part of the five mountains sword schools alliance or not," Linghu Chong replied.

By then, the remaining people had arrived on top of the mountain. They were disciples from Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan, and Taishan Schools. The eight disciples from Huashan were Linghu Chong's former martial brothers, but Lin Pingzhi wasn't among them. These people formed four rows and stood quietly while grasping the handle of their swords. Yue Hou said in a loud voice, "The school of Heng-Shan must be led by a Buddhist nun. Linghu Chong is a man. How can he violate the school rules that had stood for a hundred years at Heng-Shan?"

"Rules are made up by people, so they can also be changed by people. This is our own sect's internal matter and cannot be interfered with by outsiders," Linghu Chong responded.

From within the crowd, people started to scold Yue Hou, "This is their Heng-Shan School's matter. What's that got to do with your Songshan School?" "Your granny, quickly scram!" "What five mountains chief? Dog Chief, how shameless!"

Yue Hou said towards Linghu Chong, "What are these filthy people doing here?"

"All these brothers are my friends, they're here to attend the ceremony," Linghu Chong answered.

"Alright. Heng-Shan School has five major commandments. What's the fifth one?" Yue Hou asked.

Linghu Chong thought, "You're deliberately trying to put me down, so I'm

going to debate this with you." He answered, "Of Heng-Shan School's five major commandments, the fifth one is never to make friends with evil. Linghu Chong definitely would never make friends with people like brother Yue."

When the crowd heard this, they erupted in laughter and shouted, "Evil disciples, quickly scram!" Yue Hou, along with the disciples from Songshan, Huashan, and the rest of the schools saw the situation, and each one of them thought that the enemies were plenty and they were few. If the enemies were to fight with them, then they would be in big trouble. Yue Hou then thought, "Martial brother Zuo has lost this time. He anticipated that we only have to deal with a bunch of nuns and young ladies, so the disciples from the four schools would be enough to take control of the situation. Even though Linghu Chong's sword art is good, we would be at an advantage when there's no sword in his hand. The five of us brothers could attack him now and we would certainly be able to kill him. Who would've thought that there would be so many guests up here, along with the leaders of Shaolin and Wudang Schools." He immediately turned his body towards Fangzheng and Chongxu and said, "Seniors, you are currently the two top masters in Wulin and people look up to you. Today, I ask you to please speak a few words here. Linghu Chong had gathered so many demons here at Heng-Shan; isn't this in violation of Heng-Shan School's commandment to never make friends with evil people? Heng-Shan School has lasted for so long and has enjoyed a grand reputation as an orthodox school. Everything would turn upside down in Linghu Chong's hand; are the two of you just going to sit there and do nothing?"

Fangzheng coughed before saying, "This... this... hmmm..." He thought that what this person said was reasonable. The majority of people present there were people from the unorthodox path, but how could he ask Linghu Chong to tell them all to go down the mountain?

Suddenly, coming up the mountain path, they heard a clear and crisp voice of a lady announcing, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's young lady Ren has arrived!"

Linghu Chong was happy and surprised at the same time. He couldn't stop himself from blurting out, "Yingying has come!" He hurriedly went towards the

mountain side and saw two big men carrying a little green-coloured sedan chair quickly up the path. Behind the sedan chair followed four maids wearing green dresses.

When the people from the unorthodox path heard that Yingying had come, they rushed down the mountain to welcome her. They shouted their welcomes to her and crowded around the sedan chair as it came up to the peak.

When the sedan chair stopped, the curtain parted, and a girl wearing a pale green gown stepped out of it. It was really Yingying. The crowd cheered, "Sacred Lady! Sacred Lady!" and they all bowed towards her showing expressions of respect, admiration, and fear. The joy they showed was genuine and came from their hearts. Linghu Chong walked up a few steps and smiled. "Yingying, you've also come!"

Yingying returned his smile and said, "Today is your big day, how can I not come?" She then glanced across the crowd, walked a few steps, and gave her propriety towards Fangzheng and Chongxu. "Great Master Abbot, Headmaster Priest, I give you my respect."

Fangzheng and Chongxu returned her propriety, while they both thought in their hearts, "Linghu Chong and you are on good terms, but you shouldn't have come today. You're just making things more difficult for Linghu Chong."

Yue Hou said in a loud voice, "This lady is an important figure in the Devil Sect. Linghu Chong, what do you say to this?"

"What if she is?" Linghu Chong replied.

"Heng-Shan School's fifth major commandment stipulates that you must never make friends with evil. If you don't sever your relationship with these evil people, then you can't be the headmaster of Heng-Shan School."

"I won't be the headmaster then, what's so important about that?"

Yingying gave him a look; both of her eyes were full of affection. She thought, "Just for me, you'd forsake everything." She asked, "Headmaster Linghu, who is this person? Why did he come here asking about Heng-Shan

School's matter?"

Linghu Chong answered, "He was sent here by Songshan School's Headmaster Zuo. In his hand is Headmaster Zuo's command flag. Let alone a small command flag, even if Headmaster Zuo had come personally, how can I just let him meddle in my Heng-Shan School's matter?"

Yingying nodded her head and agreed, "Right." Her thoughts went back to the fight that occurred in Shaolin temple where Zuo Lengchan gave them a lot of problem by using the Polar Ice Energy to heavily injure her father, and how her father came close to losing his life. She couldn't help feeling angry as she said, "Who said that this is Five Mountains Sword Schools' alliance flag? He's swindling people..." She had not finished her words when her body swayed and the flicker of a short sword was seen on her left hand as she stabbed it towards Yue Hou's chest.

Yue Hou had never expected that such a delicate and beautiful lady would attack so viciously. She didn't give any hint beforehand that she was going to attack and her attack was fast as lightning. As her sword stabbed out, it was too late for him to pull out his own sword, so he slanted his body avoiding the stab. But he didn't anticipate that Yingying's move was a false move, so as he slanted his body, the grip on his right hand loosened and his opponent snatched the embroidered flag. Yingying didn't stop there but stabbed four more times at four flag holders, which allowed her to snatch all five flags. She used the same exact move for all five moves. The other four Songshan School's disciples were all Yue Hou's martial brothers, and their bare hand martial arts were all good. Zuo Lengchan had dispatched them with the intention of making a surprise attack on Linghu Chong using their bare hands. But Yingying's attack was too quick, and in a moment, she had managed to snatch all the flags without them managing to attack back. Even though they had lost, it could be said that they were ambushed.

Yingying brought the flags over and turned around behind Linghu Chong's body. She said loudly, "Headmaster Linghu, these flags are fake. These aren't the five mountains sword schools' command flags. These are the Five Fairies Sect's

five poison flags." She then furling open the five flags and everyone understood. On the five flags were the drawings of five venomous pests: snake, centipede, spider, scorpion, and toad. The colours were bright and the pests looked alive. How could they be the five mountains sword schools' command flags?

Yue Hou and his group were stunned and didn't know what to say. Old Man, Zu Qianqiu and their group of heroes were cheering loudly. Everyone knew that after Yingying snatched the command flags, she immediately hid them away and somehow exchanged them with the five poison flags. But her hand was actually too fast, and no one saw clearly how she did this.

Yingying called out, "Chief Blue!" A beautiful Miao girl walked out from the crowd and laughingly answered, "I'm here! What's Sacred Lady's order?" She was Blue Phoenix, the chief of the Five Fairies Sect. Yingying asked, "How did your five poison flags end up in Songshan School's hands?"

Blue Phoenix laughed and answered, "These Songshan School disciples are all good friends of my sect's female disciples. They must've uttered sweet words to swindle my sect's five poison flags."

"That's how it is. I'll return these five flags to you then," Yingying then tossed the five flags to her.

Blue Phoenix laughed and said, "Many thanks." She extended her hand and grabbed the flags.

Yue Hou was furious. He scolded, "Shameless witch, what kind of demonical methods are you using to deceive us? Quickly give us back the command flags."

Yingying smiled, "If you want the five poison flags, why don't you ask Chief Blue for them?"

Yue Hou didn't know what to do so he turned towards Fangzheng and Chongxu. "Great Master Abbot, Priest Chongxu, you are seniors of noble character and high prestige, please preside over this injustice."

Fangzheng stammered, "This... hmmm... never make friends with evil, Heng-Shan School certainly has this commandment, but... but... today, these friends

from Jianghu are coming to attend the ceremony, so Headmaster Linghu can't just shut the door and turn them away, that's just too disrespectful..."

Yue Hou suddenly pointed to a person in the crowd and loudly shouted, "He... he... I recognise him as that rapist Tian Boguang! He's disguising himself as a monk. Are you trying to conceal yourself from my eyes? Are these kinds of people also Linghu Chong's friends?" Then in a fierce tone, he shouted, "Tian Boguang, what are you doing in Heng-Shan?"

"I came to pay my respect to Master," Tian Boguang replied.

Yue Hou was baffled, "Pay your respect to Master?"

"That's right." Tian Boguang then walked up to Yilin and kowtowed a few times. "Master, disciple pays his respect. Disciple is correcting my wrongs and my Buddhist name is called 'Cannot Have No Commandment'."

Yilin blushed and slightly moved away avoiding the kowtow. "You... you..."

Yingying smiled and said, "Master Tian is turning his heart away from the demonical and returning to the orthodox path, and had also taken a master; that's really good. He has also become a Buddhist with the name 'Cannot Have No Commandment'; this shows that he's sincere in his intention. Great Master Fangzheng, the correct way is to abandon the knife and join the Buddhist order. When a person is determined to correct his ways, then Buddha will give this person a new path to tread on, isn't this right?"

Fangzheng happily replied, "That right! Cannot Have No Commandment has joined the Heng-Shan School, and must strictly follow the school's rules from now on. This is really the good fortune of Wulin."

Yingying then said loudly, "Everyone heard it; we've all come here today to join the Heng-Shan School. If Headmaster Linghu is willing to accept us, then all of us will become the disciples of Heng-Shan School. How can Heng-Shan's disciples be regarded as evil?"

Suddenly, a flash of comprehension went through Linghu Chong. "So Yingying knew that I'd be embarrassed to be the headmaster of a group of

female disciples. If there were a lot of male members in the school, then no one would be able to ridicule me. That's why she told all these people to join Heng-Shan School." He quickly asked in a clear voice, "Martial sister Yihe, is there any school rule that prohibit the school from accepting male disciples?"

Yihe replied, "There's no rule that prohibits accepting male disciples into the school, but... but..." Temporarily, she couldn't get her mind to work. She thought that it was inappropriate for so many male disciples to be suddenly in the school.

Linghu Chong said, "It's very good that everyone wants to join the Heng-Shan School. But there's no need to pay your respect. Heng-Shan School will arrange another... hmmm... a 'Heng-Shan Other Courtyard' for everybody to settle in. That Tong Yuan valley over there is a good place for that."

The Tong Yuan valley was situated besides the Xianxing Peak. According to the stories, during the Tang dynasty, Zhang Guolao meditated there to become a deity. There was also a big rock on Heng-Shan with a lot of donkey hoof marks on it, and the stories say these hoof marks were made by the donkey ridden by Zhang Guolao. These donkey's hoof marks were imprinted deeply in granite; if this were not done by a deity then how could it have been done? Emperor Tang Xuanzong gave the title of 'Mr. Tong Yuan' to Zhang Guolao. The name of Tong Yuan Valley was taken from this. Tong Yuan Valley was not far from Xianxing Peak, which was where the convent was located. But from the valley to the peak, the mountain path was dangerous. Linghu Chong arranged the living quarters for these Jianghu heroes at Tong Yuan Valley so that there would be separation between males and females so as to avoid slanders.

Fangzheng nodded his head and said, "That's very good. These friends are joining the Heng-Shan School and agreed to abide by Heng-Shan School's terms. This is really a joyful occasion in Wulin."

Yue Hou realised that his opponents had increased in numbers when he saw Great Master Fangzheng talking like this. It seemed that today he would not be able to stop Linghu Chong from becoming the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. So he proceeded to convey Zuo Lengchan's second task.

He coughed to gain attention and said in a clear voice, "Five Mountains Sword Schools Chief Zuo has an order: on the fifteenth of the third month, all five mountains sword schools must send their disciples to Songshan to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. Everyone must attend and must arrive on time."

Linghu Chong asked, "Whose idea is it to combine the five mountains sword schools into one?"

Yue Hou answered, "Songshan, Taishan, Huashan, and Hengshan Schools have all approved of this. If your Heng-Shan School objected to this, then you would be openly making things difficult for the other four schools, and you'll only be asking for trouble." He then turned around towards the Taishan School's disciples and asked, "Do you not think that this is the truth?" The tens of people standing behind him answered together, "That's right!"

Yue Hou laughed coldly and turned around to leave. After a few steps, he turned his head around to look at Yingying. He thought, "How do I get back those five command flags?"

Blue Phoenix laughed, "Teacher Yue, now that you've lost these flags, how can you return to Headmaster Zuo? It'd be better if I return it to you!" After she said this, she tossed a flag at him.

When Yue Hou saw the little flag flying towards him, he thought, "This is your Five Poison flag, not the Five Mountains command flag, why would I want it?" However, the flag had almost reached his throat so he quickly extended his hand to catch it. As soon as he caught it, he suddenly called out loudly and hastily dropped the flag. His palm felt like it was on fire. He turned his palm over to take a look and saw his palm had turned purple. He realized that there was poison on the pole of the flag and he had been trapped by the Five Fairies Sect. Feeling alarmed and angry, he angrily scolded, "Witch..."

Blue Phoenix laughingly said, "You call 'Headmaster Linghu' and ask for his help, then I'll give you the medicine. Otherwise, your whole palm would rot."

Yue Hou knew of the severity of the Five Fairies Sect's poison. In his

hesitation, he felt his palm getting numb and losing feeling. His whole lifetime's martial art was in his two palms. If his two palms were to rot then he would become a cripple. This made him frightened with worries. He quickly called out, "Headmaster Linghu, you... "

Blue Phoenix laughed and interrupted him, "Ask for help."

"Headmaster Linghu, I offended you, I ask... ask you to please give me the med... medicine."

Linghu Chong smiled and replied, "Lady Blue, brother Yue was only doing what Headmaster Zuo ordered. Please give him the medicine."

Blue Phoenix laughed and waved her hand towards a Miao girl standing besides her. That Miao girl took a packet out from her bosom, walked forward a few steps, and tossed that packet to Yue Hou. Yue Hou grabbed the packet in a hurry and the crowd erupted in laughter. He quickly walked down the mountain followed by his people.

Linghu Chong announced in a clear voice, "Friends, since you all agreed to reside at Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard; you must all comply with the school's commandments. These commandments are actually not hard to follow, but the fifth commandment of never making friends with evils is a bit troublesome. But from today onwards, everyone has become Heng-Shan School member, and since Heng-Shan School's disciples are naturally not evil, you must take care in making friends when you're outside the school." The crowd boomed their acknowledgement.

Linghu Chong went on, "You can still drink wine and eat meat, but from now on, anyone who's not a vegetarian cannot come to the Xianxing Peak anymore."

Fangzheng cupped his hand and said, "Good, good! You must never desecrate the sacred ground of Buddha."

Linghu Chong laughed. "Alright, just regard that I've now become headmaster. Everyone's belly must be feeling hungry now, quickly get the vegetarian dishes out. I'll accompany Shaolin's Abbot, Wudang's Headmaster and all the other seniors in eating. I'll drink wine with everyone else tomorrow."

After they finished eating, Fangzheng said, "Headmaster Linghu, old monk and Chongxu have a few words to discuss with Headmaster."

"Yes," Linghu Chong answered. He thought in his heart, "The headmasters of the current top two schools in Wulin came to Heng-Shan today. They certainly have something important to say. With dragons and snakes mixing together on top of Xianxiang Peak, no matter where we speak, it's unavoidable that walls will have ears."

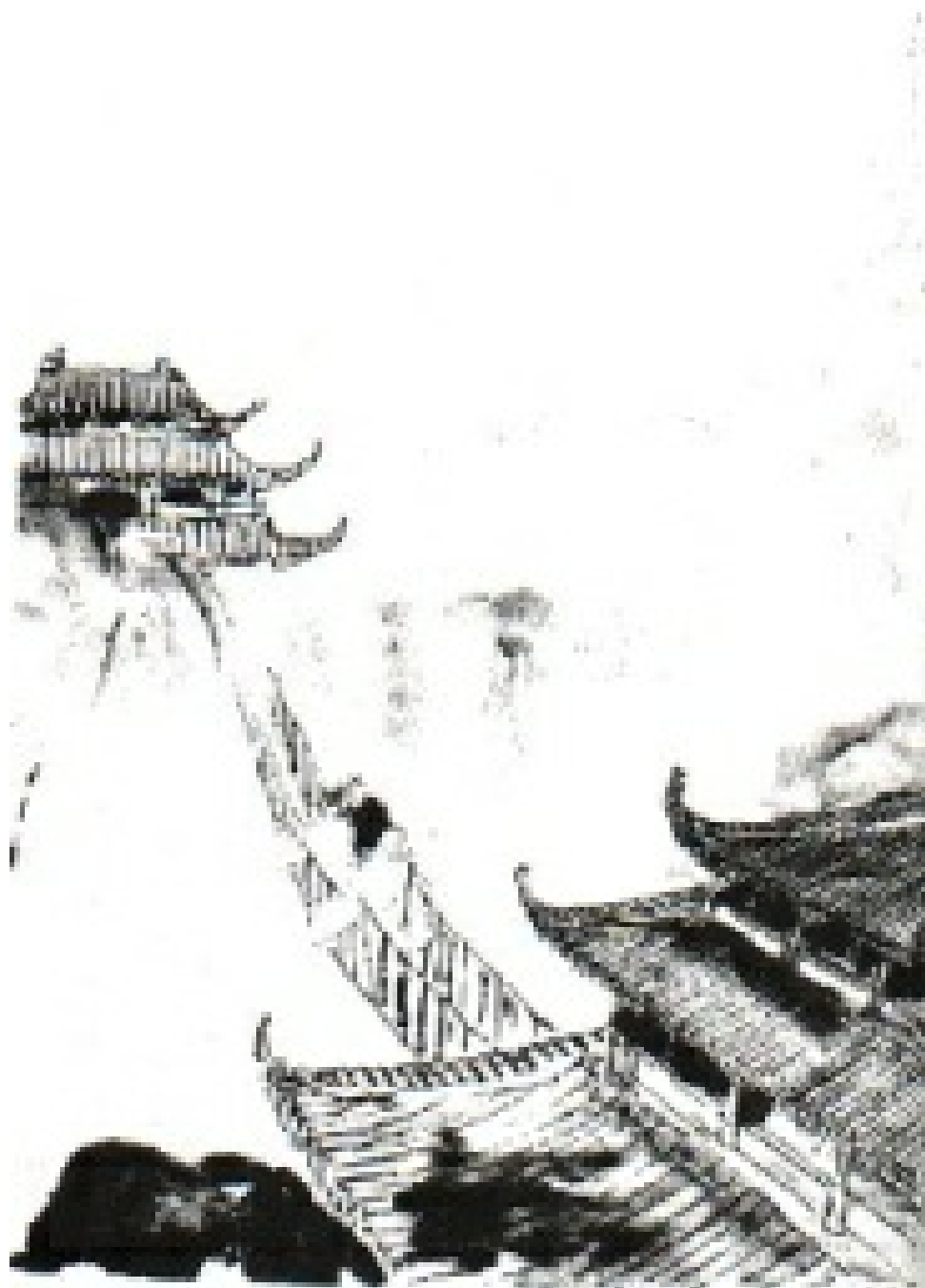
He immediately ordered Yihe, Yiqing and the other disciples to entertain the guests. Then he turned towards Fangzheng and Chongxu and said, "Down at the back of this mountain, there's a mountain besides the Porcelain Oven Pass which is called Mount Cui Ping. This mountain has a mirror-like cliff and on top of it, there's a Hanging Temple. This is the panorama unique to Heng-Shan. If the two seniors are interested, please allow Junior to lead you there."

Priest Chongxu happily answered, "I've long heard that the Hanging Temple on Mount Cui Ping was built around the Northern Song dynasty. Pines trees can't grow there and not even monkeys can climb up there. Someone had really exerted a lot of effort in building a temple in the clouds. That's really a marvel in this world; I've admired it for a long time already and would really like to see it."

Chapter 30 Secret Meeting

Translated by: Pokit and Bliss

Edited by: Hhaung



Linghu Chong, Fangzheng and Chongxu walked onto the suspension bridge. The bridge was only several feet wide. When one walked on the bridge, looked at the emptiness in all direction, and enjoyed the clouds flowing by under, it almost seemed to be in heaven. In such a wonderful spot, all three enjoyed the ease of mind!

Linghu Chong led Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu down Xianxing Peak. They hastened through Porcelain Oven Pass, and arrived under

Mount Cui Ping. Fangzheng and Chongxu looked up and saw two pavilions on top of the mountain. The pavilions looked as if they were constructed by deities as their rooftops pierced through the cloud. Fangzheng sighed and commented, "The person who built this pavilion really had lofty imagination. For a person with high aspirations, nothing in the world is difficult." The three people slowly climbed up the mountain and finally arrived at the Hanging Temple. The Hanging Temple had two pavilions; each three stories high and soaring hundreds of feet above the ground. The two pavilions were separated from each other by a distance of tens of steps away and were connected by a sky bridge on the second floor.

Inside the temple was an old servant woman sweeping the floor. When she saw Linghu Chong, Abbot Fangzheng, and Priest Chongxu, she just stared at them, not greeting or saluting them. More than ten days ago, Linghu Chong had come here with Yihe, Yiqing, Yilin and the rest of the disciples, so he knew that this servant was deaf and mute, and that she also did not seem to understand anything nor pay attention to anyone. He proceeded to the sky bridge with Fangzheng and Chongxu in tow. The sky bridge was only a few feet wide. If ordinary people were to ascend the bridge to view the scenery from up there, they would see the empty space all around them with cloud filling their view, and they would feel as if they were standing in the sky and it would be unavoidable that they would start to shake and feel as if their limbs had turned into jelly. But these three people were first class masters, so they were not daunted and their minds were at ease.

Fangzheng and Chongxu gazed at a hazy cloud in the north and they were able to faintly see the outline of a city wall. There was also water flowing through the two cliffs of Porcelain Oven Pass. The view was really majestic.

"The ancient people said that one man guarding the pass would stop ten thousand people from passing through. The terrain here really suits this saying," Fangzheng said.

"During the years of the Northern Song, Yang Lao ordered Gong E to guard three passes and he made his base here. This place is strategically placed and

would suit any war tactician. From the moment I saw the Hanging Temple, I feel that the building is grand and I admire the perseverance of people in the old days. But the Hanging Temple became insignificant when you compared it to this five hundred li of chiselled mountain path.”

Linghu Chong was surprised, “Priest, you’re saying that this several hundred li of mountain path was also man made?”

“The history book says that Emperor Wei Daowu placed his soldiers here from Mount Zhong to Pingzheng during his first year of reign, and ordered tens of thousands of soldiers to dig out the Heng mountain range to make the five hundred li mountain path. Porcelain Oven Pass is at the end of this road,” Chongxu answered.

Fangzheng said, “Even though it is called five hundred li straight road, the majority of it was actually nature made. Northern Song’s Emperor Wei sent out tens of thousands of soldiers only to open a pass through this mountain. But even so, the project was really large and it was shocking for most people.”

“No wonder that so many people want to become an emperor. He only has to open his mouth and say a few words, and tens of thousands of soldiers immediately chiselled out a mountain pass for him,” Linghu Chong said.

“In those ancient times, there were many bold and outstanding heroes. And with this kind of power and influence to aspire to, you can imagine how difficult things were. But you don’t need to mention about emperors, there’s already a lot of disturbances and continuous fighting in the current Wulin even without ‘power and influence’ coming into play,” Chongxu told him.

Linghu Chong felt a shiver in his heart as he thought, “He’s come to the topic he wants to discuss.” He asked, “Junior doesn’t understand. Two seniors, please give me some advice.”

“Headmaster Linghu, today, Songshan School’s old Yue led a lot of people to come here. What do you think it was for?” Fangzheng asked.

Linghu Chong answered, “He was conveying Chief Zuo’s order to not allow junior to take over the leadership of Heng-Shan School.”

“Why is Chief Zuo not willing to allow you to become the headmaster of Heng-Shan School?”

“Chief Zuo wants to combine the five mountains sword schools into one, and Junior has repeatedly thwarted his plan and has also killed many Songshan School people. So Chief Zuo abhors junior completely.”

Fangzheng asked, “Why do you want to thwart his plan?”

Linghu Chong was stupefied and found it hard to answer. He repeatedly mumbled, “Why do I want to thwart his plan?”

Fangzheng asked, “Do you believe that combining the five mountains sword schools into one is inappropriate?”

“At that time, junior didn’t think whether it’s appropriate or not. But in order to force Heng-Shan School to agree, Songshan School disguised themselves as the Sun Moon Sect, captured the disciples of Heng-Shan, and besieged Dingjing Shi Tai. And they use contemptible methods in doing these. Junior coincidentally met these matters and felt that they were wrong, so I helped Heng-Shan. Later on, Songshan School wanted to burn Dingxian and Dingyi Shi Tai in the Sword-forging Valley; this was even more despicable. Junior have thought this over. If merging the five mountains sword schools was a good thing, then why doesn’t Songshan School discuss this clearly and openly with each school’s headmaster instead of doing all these sly and evil things?”

Chongxu nodded his head before saying, “Headmaster Linghu’s view isn’t wrong. Zuo Lengchan’s wild ambition is enormous and he wants to become the number one person in Wulin. He himself knows that it’s difficult to subdue a lot of people so he’s forced to plot secretly.”

Fangzheng sighed before adding, “Chief Zuo is cultured in the military arts and is also an illustrious person in Wulin. And within the five mountains sword school, there’s originally no one who can compare to him. But his ambition is too enormous, and he also wishes to overwhelm the two schools of Wudang and Shaolin in a hurry. So it’s unavoidable that he would use some unscrupulous methods to achieve this.”

Chongxu said, "Shaolin School is publicly accepted as the leader of Wulin. Wudang is on the same level as Shaolin. Kunlun, Emei, and Kongtong Schools are at the next level. Brother Linghu, each of these schools was founded several hundred years ago by numerous heroes who had spent countless sweat and blood in establishing their schools. Every set of their martial arts, every little detail has been refined in those hundreds of years; this isn't just the result from a single day of work. The five mountains sword schools alliance had only established themselves in Wulin within the last seventy to eighty years. Even though they had flourished quickly, their martial arts still aren't as good as Kunlun or Emei, let alone Shaolin School's profound seventy two unique arts." Linghu Chong nodded his head in affirmation.

Chongxu continued, "Within each school, there has also been one or two talented master with powerful martial arts. It's common in Wulin that an outstanding master's reputation would be known everywhere. But it would unprecedented if this reputation were earned solely on strength alone by taking control of all the schools in the realm. Zuo Lengchan is full of wild ambition, and this is precisely what he wants to do. When he became the chief of the five mountains sword schools alliance, Great Master Abbot anticipated that things in Wulin would be eventful from then on. In the past few years, Zuo Lengchan has acted exactly as Great Master Abbot predicted."

Fangzheng let out a prayer, "Amitufo."

Chongxu went on, "It was only Zuo Lengchan's first step when he became chief of the five mountains sword schools alliance. His second step is to merge the five mountains schools into one and install himself as the headmaster. After merging the five schools, he would have a lot of manpower and would become an equal with Shaolin and Wudang Schools. Then, as a third step, he'll absorb Kunlun, Emei, Kongtong, and Qingcheng Schools. Then he's certain to declare war on Devil Sect and lead Shaolin and Wudang Schools in attacking the Devil Sect. This would be the fourth step."

Linghu Chong felt fear in his heart as he heard this. "This ambitious plan is really hard to execute and Zuo Lengchan's martial art isn't necessarily unbeatable

in this world. How did he come by such an ambitious plan?"

Chongxu answered, "A person's heart is difficult to predict. No matter how difficult a worldly matter is, there's always someone who would want to try it out. Have a look, wasn't this five hundred li mountain path man-made? Wasn't this Hanging Temple built by someone? If Zuo Lengchan manage to destroy the Devil Sect then he'll be the best in Wulin, and next he would want to annex Wudang and clean up Shaolin. This could possibly happen. And of course he doesn't need to rely only on his martial art to do all of these things."

Fangzheng let out another prayer, "Amitufo!"

"Right now, Zuo Lengchan wants all the Wulin's warriors in the realm to be under his command," Linghu Chong said.

"That's right! After that, I'm afraid he'll want to become the emperor. After he's become the emperor, then he would want to have a long life. May you attain boundless longevity! This is called 'Human's greed is like a snake trying to swallow an elephant'. It's been like that since the ancient times. Of all the heroes in this world, there's not many who can escape the trap of 'power and influence'," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong was silent. He couldn't help from shivering as the cold northern wind swept through. "We humans only live for dozens of years, and the most important thing in life is to be happy. Why do you have to attain power, influence, and all that? Zuo Lengchan wants to exterminate Kongtong and Kunlun, and annex Shaolin and Wudang. How many people would he kill? How much blood would be shed?"

Chongxu clapped and said, "That's right, the three of us have this heavy responsibility to prevent Zuo Lengchan from succeeding in order to avoid a bloodbath."

Linghu Chong became alarmed. "Priest is making junior terrified by speaking like that. Junior's knowledge is shallow; I will listen to seniors' plan."

"That day when you led so many heroes to go to Shaolin to meet young lady Ren, you didn't damage a single grass or tree in Shaolin temple. Great Master

Abbot received your compassion on that day," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong's face turned scarlet. "I'm afraid Junior had really made a big disturbance."

Chongxu went on, "After you went away, Zuo Lengchan and the others also left one by one while I stayed on at Shaolin temple for seven days to have many long talks with Great Master Abbot. We talked deeply about our worries regarding Zuo Lengchan's wild ambition. That day, just as Ren Woxing used deceit to gain the upper hand on Great Master Fangzheng, Zuo Lengchan also used deceit to subdue Ren Woxing. Originally, this would not have been a big deal, but those ignorant disciples in Wulin would say: 'Great Master Fangzheng isn't Ren Woxing's match, while Ren Woxing isn't Zuo Lengchan's match...'"

Linghu Chong continuously shook his head and disagreed, "Not likely, not likely!"

"We all know that it's unlikely. But Zuo Lengchan's reputation is likely to increase greatly because of this fight, and he will become even more conceited and his wild ambition will grow even more. Later on, we separately received news of Brother becoming the headmaster of Heng-Shan School. We both decided to personally come to Heng-Shan to attend the ceremony to give our congratulations and to discuss about

this big matter," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong said, "Junior doesn't deserve all the favours that seniors have shown me."

"That Yue Hou came to convey Zuo Lengchan's order. He said that on the fifteenth of the third month, everyone from the five mountains sword schools would gather at Songshan to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. This act has long been predicted by Great Master Abbot, but we never thought that he would do this so soon. When he said that it was to elect the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, he made it sound as if the merging of the five mountains sword schools were a sure thing. Actually, Hengshan's Mr. Mo Da's temperament is peculiar and it's unlikely that he would be attached to Zuo

Lengchan. Taishan's Priest Tianmen is very firm and he also would never bend to other people's wishes. Your master Mr. Yue looks relaxed on the outside but he's actually very serious on the inside and very strict about preserving the tradition of Huashan School. Mr. Yue would definitely fight against Zuo Lengchan seeing that Zuo Lengchan would wipe out the reputation of Huashan School. This leaves Heng-Shan School. The three senior Shi Tai have all passed away and this left the female disciples powerless to fight against Zuo Lengchan and therefore they probably would've surrendered. Who would've thought that Dingxian Shi Tai would break with custom and hand the headmaster position into Brother's hand. Brother Great Master Abbot and I have talked about Dingxian Shi Tai's foresight, and we really admire her. It was all the more difficult for her to think about this especially when she was already injured heavily. But she still managed to think it through. This shows just how much Dingxian Shi Tai had trained herself that even as she was a breath away from dying, she still had a clear mind. If Taishan, Hengshan, Huashan, and Heng-Shan Schools ally together and do not permit the forming of this Five Mountains School, only then would Zuo Lengchan's plot be foiled," Chongxu said.

Linghu Chong said, "But judging from the tone of voice Yue Hou used when he gave that order today, it seems that Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are already under Zuo Lengchan's control."

Chongxu nodded and said, "Yes. Lately, when we think of your master Mr. Yue, Great Master Abbot and I have become really confused. We heard that Fuzhou's Lin Family has a son who has taken your master as his master, is this right?"

"Yes. This martial brother Lin's name is Lin Pingzhi," Linghu Chong answered.

"His great grandfather has passed down a book called the 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. This rumour has been going around in Jianghu for a very long time. Everyone said that this book contains a very powerful sword art. Brother must surely have heard of this," Chongxu said.

"I have," Linghu Chong answered. Then he immediately told them of the

search for the Buddhist robe in Fuzhou's Xiangyang Lane, how Songshan School sent people to snatch it, and how he himself got injured.

Chongxu hummed deeply after listening to his story. He then said, "It is reasonable to suppose that your master found this Buddhist robe on you and gave it to your martial brother Lin."

"Yes. But later on, martial sister chased me and asked for this 'Evil Resisting Sword Manual'. I find this problem really hard to solve and as Junior has already been wrongly blamed for this for a long time, I didn't pay further attention to this problem. But what's really the truth behind this Evil Resisting Sword Art, could seniors please tell me?"

Chongxu looked at Fangzheng and said, "Great Master Abbot, please tell Brother Linghu the whole story."

Fangzheng nodded his head a few times before saying, "Headmaster Linghu, have you heard of the name 'Sunflower Manual'?"

"I've heard Junior's master mentioned it before. He said 'Sunflower Manual' is a secret which contained a supreme martial art study, but it has been lost for a long time and no one knows of its whereabouts. Later on, Junior heard Chief Ren saying that he passed this 'Sunflower Manual' down to Dongfang Bubai. So this item 'Sunflower Manual' is currently in the hands of Sun Moon Sect."

Fangzheng shook his head and said, "The book Sun Moon Sect has is incomplete and isn't the original."

"Yes," Linghu Chong responded. He felt that if these two seniors didn't know of this secret in Wulin then no one else would know of it. He also felt that Great Master Fangzheng was on the verge of revealing this really big secret.

Fangzheng lifted his head and longingly looked at the floating white clouds. "During the days that Huashan School was separated into two, the Qi faction and the Sword faction, Huashan School's seniors were killing each other because of this division. Do you also know about this?"

"Yes. But my master didn't talk about this in detail," Linghu Chong answered.

Fangzheng nodded. "Internal fighting in the school is really not a good thing so Mr. Yue didn't want to talk too much about it. The reason why Huashan School was divided into Qi faction and Sword faction was said to be because of this 'Sunflower Manual'." He paused for a time before slowly continuing, "For a long time in Wulin, it has been said that this 'Sunflower Manual' originated from the previous dynasty, created by an official of the Imperial Court."

"A government official?" Linghu Chong asked.

Fang Zheng went on, "The government official was a eunuch. The name of this master is forever lost. In addition, just why exactly such a highly skilled master became a eunuch in the imperial court will never be known to us now. What we do know is that the martial arts inscribed in that manual are deep and profound to the extreme. For the past 300 some odd years, no one person has been able to take possession of the manual and master its arts. About a hundred years ago, the manual came into the possession of the Putian Shaolin Temple. At that time, the abbot of that Shaolin temple was Reverend Hongxie. He was an extremely wise and intelligent person, which was reflected in his vast understanding of martial arts. Reverend Hongxie was the perfect candidate who possessed enough talent to master the Manual's profound martial arts. But it has been claimed by Reverend Hongxie's students that their master never mastered the Sunflower Manual. Moreover, they have even said that after studying it for quite some time, Reverend Hongxie never even began to practice it at all."

Linghu Chong reasoned, "It must be because there was some secret part of the Manual that was missing, that even such a talent like Reverend Hongxie wasn't able to fully comprehend the Sunflower Manual without it."

Fang Zheng nodded and answered, "That might be a possibility. However, the Old Taoist and I have never had the fortune of encountering this Manual. Not saying that we would dare to practice its arts, but perhaps seeing what kind of profound and mystical writings are in it would be interesting."

Chong Xu smiled slightly and said, "Great Master, you are being affected by worldly desires. We are practitioners of the martial arts. Because we haven't had the chance to see the Manual we can say we won't practice. But if we actually

did get to see it, most likely we would be losing sleep and not eating, tirelessly studying the Manual's words and meaning. The result would be that not only would we mistakenly waste our cultivation, but it would lead our mind to endless troubles and confusion. Because we haven't had the fortune to have seen the Manual, I would say that we are the ones who are truly fortunate."

Fang Zheng laughed. "Old Taoist you are right. Old monk is still not free of worldly longings. How shameful it is." He then turned his head back around to Linghu Chong and continued, "Huashan School had two martial brothers who happened to be visiting the Shaolin Temple at that time and they caught sight of the Sunflower Manual there."

Linghu Chong thought, "Because the manual was so important, Shaolin must have taken measures not to allow anyone to see the Manual. Those two martial brothers of Huashan must have secretly peeped at the Manual."

Fang Zheng continued, "Because of the urgency of the situation, those two brothers couldn't spend time to study the Manual in depth during their stay at Shaolin. So the two divided up the work and each read and memorized half of the Sunflower Manual. Afterwards, they returned to Huashan and together studied and discussed each part that they read. But what happened was that the two martial brothers disagreed on a lot of what was written in the Manual. When they tried putting their parts together, a lot of it did not make sense. Each believed what he read and memorized was correct, what he interpreted was correct, and the other person was mistaken. However, from the individual parts that each of them had memorized, neither one could come up with or practice anything substantial either. The two brothers used to be very close and were the best of friends. However after this clash of interests, they became very heated rivals and this was the cause of the split of Huashan into Qi and Sword factions."

Linghu Chong added, "Those two senior martial brothers, are they Huashan School's seniors Yue Su and Cai Zifeng?" Yue Su was the founder of Huashan's Qi branch and Cai Zifeng was the founder of Huashan's Sword branch. The splitting of the two sects of Huashan was a thing of the distant past.

Fang Zheng went on with his story, "Yes. The incident with Yue and Cai was soon discovered by Reverend Hongxie. He understood that although the martial arts philosophies inside the Sunflower Manual were profound and deep, they were also brutal, ferocious and dangerous. He stated that the first step was the most difficult step in learning the arts of the Sunflower Manual. After the first step, learning the rest was relatively simple. All the martial arts in this world are relatively easy to learn in the beginning and get increasingly difficult as one progresses further. The Sunflower Manual was the exact opposite. The first step was extremely difficult and if even a small mistake was made when training, if one didn't die from it one would certainly be severely injured. So therefore he sent his disciple Reverend Duyuan to try to convince the two Huashan brothers to stop trying to practice the Sunflower Manual as it could be extremely harmful to them."

Linghu Chong said, "This martial art was unexpectedly very hard to learn in the beginning. If no one gave you any direction, and you only learn from the book, then of course it would be very dangerous. But could it be that the two Huashan martial brothers didn't listen to his advice?"

Fang Zheng answered, "That wasn't the case. That would be wrongly blaming the two of them. Looking at a person like me who's been practicing martial art for my whole lifetime, if one day I had the chance to take a peek at a deep and profound martial art's secret, how could I not be willing to study it? Old monk has cultivated my study

in Buddhism for tens of years, but if one day I managed to get my hands on the Manual, I would definitely still read it. Priest Chongxu laughed at this earlier. So how can a secular martial art master refuse it? Unexpectedly, this was exactly what happened to Reverend Duyuan when he went up to see them."

Linghu Chong asked, "Could it be that the two Huashan brothers had ill intentions toward Reverend Duyuan when he tried to coerce them into giving up the Manual?"

Fangzheng shook his head. "That wasn't the case. They were actually very courteous to Reverend Duyuan and admitted that they had actually looked at the

'Sunflower Manual'. On the one hand, they apologized and on the other hand, they asked for Duyuan's advice on the writings of the Manual. But they never expected that even though Reverend Duyuan was Reverend Hongxie's precious disciple, he had never once before heard or encountered the Manual at all. Because Hongxie himself never

really understood the writings of the Manual so he couldn't teach it to his disciple. But the two brothers, Yue and Cai, were certain that Reverend Duyuan was proficient in the martial arts study of the Manual, so they wanted to get his opinion on it. At the time, Duyuan didn't really understand the verses from the Manual that they recited to him either. He just casually explained the writings as they recited, and couldn't help but secretly memorize what they recited. Reverend Duyuan was also an exceptional martial arts master as well as an extremely wise and intelligent person. Through his logical deductions of what the two brothers recited, the explanations he gave actually fit and made sense."

Linghu Chong said, "So it turns out that Reverend Duyuan was learning the script of the Manual from two brothers as they recited it."

Fang Zheng nodded his head. "Correct. But originally, what the two brothers recited was not very much. But after hearing how the explanations Reverend Duyuan gave them made sense, they couldn't resist the temptation and invited him to stay at Huashan for 8 more days. But after this visit, Duyuan never returned to the Shaolin

temple."

Linghu Chong was surprised, "Never returned? Where did he go afterwards?"

Fang Zheng replied, "At that time, no one knew. But not long afterwards, Reverend Hongxie received a letter from Reverend Duyuan stating that his attachments to the world were too great that he decided to leave the Buddhist realm and renounce his monkhood. He was also very ashamed and couldn't face his master anymore." Linghu Chong felt that this was very strange and that there must be another reason for this.

Fangzheng continued, "After that incident, there was much suspicion and

distrust between Shaolin and Huashan. The news that Huashan disciples had secretly studied the Sunflower Manual leaked to the public and soon after, the ten elders of the Devil Sect attacked Huashan." Just then, Linghu Chong remembered the bones and skulls inside the cave behind the Cliff of Contemplation. He also recalled the engravings of the various sword arts on the cave wall and couldn't help from uttering an 'ah' in acknowledging his comprehension.

"What is it?" Fangzheng asked.

Linghu Chong's face turned red and said, "I've interrupted Abbot's story, please forgive me."

Fangzheng nodded his head and continued, "This incident happened before your master was even born. The Elders of the Devil Sect attacked Huashan with the intention of stealing the Sunflower Manual. It was because of this incident that Taishan, Songshan, Huashan, Hengshan and Hengshan formed an alliance. After receiving word, the other four schools came to Huashan's aid. A bloody battle occurred on Huashan, and all ten of the Devil Sect Elders were badly wounded. Yue and Cai also lost their lives in this battle and as a result, the version of the Manual that they penned was snatched away by the Devil Sect. That's why it's hard to say who had actually won this battle. Five years later, the Devil Sect returned to attack, but this time the ten elders came prepared. They had managed to understand the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools comprehensively and thought up counter moves to break all the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools. Priest Chongxu and old monk believe that even though the martial arts of the Ten Elders were great already, to be able to comprehend and counter all the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools, the Sunflower Manual must have played some role in giving them such insights into martial arts theories. At this second battle, the five mountains schools actually suffered great losses. Many great masters lost their lives and since that day many of the intricate and complex sword arts of those schools were lost as well. However, those ten Devil Sect elders were also unable to escape Huashan. Thinking of the fighting that happened at that time, it must've been ferocious

and bloody."

Linghu Chong said, "Junior saw the remains of these ten Devil Sect's elders inside a cave in Huashan's Cliff of Contemplation, and I also saw a number of inscriptions engraved on the stone wall."

"Did you? What was written on the wall?" Chongxu asked.

"The inscription was written in big letters and it says: 'THE FIVE MOUNTAINS SWORD ALLIANCE, YOU SHAMELESS AND DESPICABLE BUNCH, CAN'T

WIN IN A FAIR FIGHT, DIRTY TRICKS ARE YOUR SPECIALTY'. Besides it were more sentences written in small letters cursing and swearing at the five mountains sword schools, like shameless, etc, etc," Linghu Chong told them.

"How could Huashan School let these slanders remain on the stone wall? This is really strange," Chongxu pondered.

"Junior discovered this stone cave accidentally, and no one else knows of its existence," Linghu Chong explained. He then immediately told them how he discovered this stone cave, and he also told them how someone with an axe had dug several hundred feet through the mountain, but this person had died from exhaustion inches away from breaking through.

Great Master Fangzheng asked, "Using an axe? Could it be that he was 'Divine Strength Demon' Fan Song?"

"He was! There was a sentence on the wall that says: 'Fan Song and Zhao He defeat Heng-Shan sword art here'."

"Zhao He? He's one of the ten elders called 'Divine Flying Demon'. Was he using a thunder mace?" Fangzheng asked.

"Junior doesn't know about this, but on the ground of the cave, there was a thunder mace there. Junior remembered the inscription on the stone wall, the ones who defeated the Huashan School's sword art were called Zhang Chengfeng and Zhang Chengyun."

"It's true then, they are the two brothers 'Divine Golden Monkey Demon'

Zhang Chengfeng and 'Divine White Ape Demon' Zhang Chengyun. It was said that their weapons were copper cudgels," Fangzheng said.

"That's right. The pictures on the stone wall showed cudgels defeating my Huashan School's sword art. It was really wonderful and unthinkable."

"That place you saw is apparently the trap that the five mountains sword schools had prepared to capture those ten elders from the Devil Sect. Once they were trapped in that mountain cave, they were locked up and were unable to get out," Fangzheng deduced.

"Junior also has the same thought. That's why those people thought that they had been treated unfairly and wrote those swear words on the stone wall and touted that they had defeated all the sword arts of the five mountains sword schools. They wanted to let people know in the future that they hadn't been defeated in a fight but had been trapped instead. There were also some Huashan School's sword arts engraved on the stone wall, they were extremely wonderful and it seems that even my master and master-wife don't know about them. Junior doesn't know the reason for this but now that I've heard Great Master Abbot relating the past story, it's certain that these high sword arts were lost after most of Huashan School's seniors lost their lives there. Heng-Shan, Taishan, and the other schools seemed to have lost their

high sword arts as well since then."

"That's right," Chongxu affirmed.

"There were also some long swords that belonged to the five mountains sword schools besides the bones of the Devil Sect's ten elders," Linghu Chong added.

Fangzheng let out an unusual expression and said, "I don't know the reason. Maybe the ten elders snatched them from the hands of the five mountains sword schools people. Have you talked to anyone about what you saw in that cave?"

"After Junior discovered that cave, I've been going from one misfortune to the next and haven't had any time to mention this to master and master-wife. But grand martial uncle Feng knows about it already," Linghu Chong said.

Fangzheng nodded his head. "My younger martial brother Fangsheng once had the opportunity to meet senior Feng and received his favour. Martial brother Fangsheng told me that your sword technique was taught by senior Feng. We know that during the time when Huashan split into two branches, senior Feng had already decided to leave Huashan to be on his own."

Chong Xu said, "It was said in Wulin that during the time when Huashan split into two and were fighting amongst themselves, senior Feng was away in Jiangnan getting married. When he heard news of the fighting, he quickly returned to Huashan but the Sword faction had already lost with numerous casualties on their side. Otherwise with his wonderful sword art in the fight, the Qi faction would never have gotten the upper hand. Senior Feng felt immediately that the Jiangnan's family that his wife was supposed to be from might be a hoax. Actually, that guy Yue Zhang had secretly received instruction from the Huashan's Qi faction to hire a prostitute and tell her to pretend to be a lady from an esteemed background looking to be married so that they can restrain Senior Feng in Jiangnan. Senior Feng then went back to Jiangnan to look for that Yue's family he was to marry, but everyone was missing. He realized then that he had been tricked. Rumor has it that Senior Feng was so extremely angry that he cut off his own head."

Fangzheng's expression changed as he looked at Chongxu wanting him to stop talking. But Chongxu pretended not to understand and the last thing he said was, "Headmaster Linghu, poor Taoist respects senior Feng completely and would never dare to talk about his private life. So I told you about this matter today so that you understand that heroes get into trouble because of women. When a gentleman makes a mistake, it's not such a big deal, but they can't keep falling deeper and deeper into that mistake."

Linghu Chong knew that he was using the analogy to talk about Yingying. But knowing that Priest Chongxu had said this with good intentions, Linghu Chong just sighed and did not answer. He thought, "Grand martial uncle Feng has been living at the Cliff of Contemplation for all these years. So he really regrets about his past and he's too ashamed to see people of the orthodox path in Wulin."

That's why he told me not to tell anyone of his whereabouts and he also said that from then on he doesn't want to see anyone from the Huashan School anymore. A grievous misfortune befell on him and for these past tens of years, he has been living by himself. After I've settled this big matter, I'll go up Cliff of Contemplation to talk to him for a while. Now that I'm no longer a member of the Huashan School, paying him a visit wouldn't be considered violating his order."

The three people talked for half a day until the sun was going down the mountain, painting a crimson colour across the horizon. Fangzheng said, "Not long after Huashan School's Yue Su and Cai Zifeng wrote down the 'Sunflower Manual', they were killed by the Devil Sect's ten elders so they didn't have time to practise it yet and the Manual was taken by the Devil Sect. That's why no one in Huashan School had managed to learn any martial art from the Manual. But Yue and Cai had perceived the Manual differently; one said the study of qi was more important while the other gave more importance to the study of sword. They had separately convinced the school's disciples with their own viewpoints and this later resulted in the division of Huashan School into two branches - Qi and Sword. This division caused the disciples from the two branches to fight amongst themselves within the school. This Manual really is a very inauspicious item."

Chongxu nodded his head. "The five colours blind people, the five tones deafen people, that's the theory."

Fangzheng said, "Even though the Devil Sect managed to get the partially completed Manual written by these two brothers, perhaps it has no benefit at all. The ten elders perished on Huashan because of this. Headmaster Linghu said before that Chief Ren passed the Manual down to Dongfang Bubai. Perhaps the hatred between these two people was also caused by this Manual. In actuality, this incomplete manual is probably not even as good as the one memorised by Lin Yuantu."

Linghu Chong asked, "Who's Lin Yuantu?"

"En, Lin Yuantu was your martial brother Lin's great grandfather, the founder

of the Fortune Prestige Escort House, the one who used the seventy-two stances of Evil Resisting Sword Art to shake the world; that was him," Fangzheng answered.

"This senior Lin, did he also see the 'Sunflower Manual' before?" Linghu Chong inquired.

"He was Reverend Duyuan, the disciple of Reverend Hongxie!" Fangzheng explained.

Linghu Chong was shaken when he heard this. "So that's what happened."

"Reverend Duyuan originally had the surname Lin, so when he went back to the secular world, he retook his original surname," Fangzheng said.

"So Senior Lin was Reverend Duyuan, and he was also the same person who shook Jianghu with the seventy-two stances of Evil Resisting Sword Art. This is really unexpected," Linghu Chong mumbled. Suddenly, sadness swelled over him as he remembered how Lin Zhennan died on that night in the worn-out temple outside Hengshan city.

"Duyuan is 'Tu Yuan'. After this Senior Reverend went back to the secular world, he reverted back to his original surname but he inverted his Buddhist name and took the name Yuantu. He got married, founded the escort house, and caused a big uproar in Jianghu. This Senior Lin was an upright person. Even though he was running an escort house, his conduct was still heroic and righteous, and he was still eager to help people in distress. He was no longer a Buddhist monk but he was still acting like a Buddhist. One only has to have a good heart to be a Buddhist; not much difference exists between such a person and a Buddhist. Of course, not long after that Reverend Hongxie heard about these events and realised that the head of the Lin escort house was his most loved disciple. But he never paid him a visit." Fangzheng told him.

"Where did this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' come from after this Senior Lin obtain the essence of the 'Sunflower Manual' from the recitation of Huashan School's seniors Yue and Cai? How come this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' that's been passed down in the Lin family is not very good?" Linghu Chong asked.

Fangzheng replied, "Evil Resisting Sword Art comes from the incomplete book of 'Sunflower Manual'. Both items came from the same origin but both had only a small portion of the original Manual." Fangzheng turned his head around to Chongxu and said, "Brother Taoist, you have more understanding about the art of sword compared to me. Why don't you talk to young hero Linghu about this matter?"

Chongxu laughed. "If we hadn't been friends for many years, old Taoist would've thought that you were teasing me with that kind of talk. In the art of sword, besides Senior Feng's excellence at the current time, who else is above young hero Linghu?"

Fangzheng said, "Even though young hero Linghu's sword art is excellent, no one could even come close to you in comparing the study of sword arts. We're all friends here so we never have to say any meaningless words; there's no need to be polite."

Chongxu let out a sigh before saying, "Actually, Old Taoist knows that the knowledge of the study of sword arts is vast like the sea and that what I know is only like a grain in a big granary. In the future, I don't know whether I'll have the chance to meet Senior Feng to consult him about this." He then turned towards Linghu Chong and said, "Today, the Evil Resisting Sword Art of the Lin family is ordinary and nothing spectacular. But actually it is the same sword art as the one that senior Lin Yuantu used to shake Jianghu back then. In those days, the headmaster of Qingcheng School was Zhang Qingzi (Translator's note: Evergreen in Lanny's translation.) with the nickname 'Number One Sword in the West's Three Gorges' but he still lost to Senior Lin. Today, Qingcheng School's sword art is much better compared to the Fortune Prestige Escort House's Evil Resisting Sword Art; so there must be another reason behind this. What it is, I've been thinking about for a long time already. Actually, all the warriors who study the art of sword have all been thinking of the reason behind this."

Linghu Chong said, "The family of Martial Brother Lin has all perished; both his father and mother died miserably, that was all because of this doubt?"

"That's right. The reputation of the Evil Resisting Sword Art is very well

known, but the martial art of Lin Zhennan was very low. This disparity involuntarily caused other people to think that Lin Zhennan was too dumb and couldn't learn his own family's martial art. They then thought a step further; if this sword manual were in my hand, of course I would be able to learn it until my sword art is as splendid as Lin Yuantu back then. Brother, for the last one hundred years, Lin Yuantu wasn't the only one with a reputable sword art. But Shaolin, Wudang, Emei, Kunlun, Diancang, Qingcheng, and also the five mountains sword schools, all have people to pass their sword arts down to, and other people never thought of actually taking these schools' sword arts. But Lin Zhennan's martial art was very poor like that of a three years old baby, and he also had a lot of gold in his hand, so everyone had the intention of robbing him," Chongxu explained.

Linghu Chong said, "This Senior Lin Yuantu was Reverend Hongxie's disciple and he had studied martial art in the Putian Shaolin Temple. He had most likely studied some astonishing martial art while he was there, so this Evil Resisting Sword Art might be a sword art from the Shaolin School with a few changes and addition of his own. It's not necessarily true that it's a completely different sword art."

Chongxu replied, "There were also many people who thought the same thing. But Evil Resisting Sword Art and Shaolin School's martial art were completely different and all the warriors studying the sword art knew it when they saw it. Hey, hey, even though there were many people with the intention of robbing this sword manual, it was finally that shorty from Qingcheng who moved first. Even though that shorty Yu has a really thick face, he's so stupid. How can he be compared to your master Mr. Yue who just bided his time and reaped the benefit?"

Linghu Chong's face changed colour as he stammered, "Priest, what... what are you saying?"

Chongxu smiled slightly and said, "That Lin Pingzhi was accepted into your Huashan School. Naturally, that 'Evil Resisting Sword Art' would also be carried into the school with him. I heard that Mr. Yue also has a lovely daughter who he

wants to give away to your martial brother Lin, is this right? He really is farsighted."

When Linghu Chong heard Chongxu saying 'Your master Mr. Yue who just bided his time and reaped the benefit', he felt angry that Chongxu was insulting his honoured master. But hearing him say that his master was 'farsighted', he suddenly thought of the days when Master sent second martial brother Lao Denuo in disguise along with little martial sister to Fuzhou to open up a wine shop. He didn't understand Master's intention at that time, but as he thought of it now, it must've been in connection with the Fortune Prestige Escort House. Lin Zhennan's martial art was ordinary and Master had actually planned that move so deliberately, if it weren't for the 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', what else could it be for? But Master's plan was done skilfully, unlike that of Yu Canghai and Mu Gaofeng. Another thought immediately followed, "Little martial sister is an unmarried young girl, but why would Master told her to go out and open up a wine

shop?" At this thought, a cold shiver ran up his spine and he suddenly understood, "Master wanted little martial sister to accompany martial brother Lin; actually this has been arranged a long time ago."

From the look of his face, Fangzheng and Chongxu noted that he looked uncertain and distressed. They knew that he respected his master and that this kind of talk hurt him deeply. Fangzheng said, "These were only idle talks between old monk and Priest Chongxu, we were just wildly speculating. Your respected master is very upright and known in Wulin as a gentleman. I'm afraid we're just thinking like a small person and absurdly blaming the gentleman." Chongxu smiled slightly on hearing this.

Linghu Chong's heart was in confusion. He was hoping that what Chongxu said was not true, but deep down he knew that every word said was right. Suddenly he thought, "Originally, Senior Lin Yuantu was a monk; that's why there was a Buddhist hall in Xiangyang Lane, and that sword manual was also written on a Buddhist robe. My guess would be that he remembered every word and sentence by heart after being consulted about the Manual by seniors Yue Su

and Cai Zifeng on Huashan. As he was still a monk then, that same night he immediately wrote everything down on his robe so that he wouldn't forget anything."

Chongxu said, "Even now, this 'Sunflower Manual' still carries a profound martial art study. Devil Sect has a part of it and your master Mr. Yue has a part of it also. Your martial brother Lin has already joined the Huashan School, so Zuo Lengchan will definitely give Mr. Yue some trouble. He'll have two intentions: one is to kill Mr. Yue in order to merge the five mountains sword schools, and the second one is to snatch this 'Evil Resisting Sword Art'."

Linghu Chong continuously nodded his head and said, "Priest thought correctly. The complete Manual is in Putian Shaolin Temple, does Zuo Lengchan know this? If he does then I'm afraid he'd go and attack the Putian Shaolin Temple."

Fangzheng smiled. "The 'Sunflower Manual' in Putian Shaolin Temple was destroyed a long time ago. So there's no need to worry about it."

Linghu Chong was surprised, "Destroyed?"

Fangzheng answered, "Just before Reverend Hongxie passed away, he gathered all the disciples and told them the result of studying the Manual. Then he immediately put it into the fire saying, "The martial art study in this manual is profoundly deep and wonderful, but there are many crucial points in its study. The person who had created it

didn't necessarily manage to study it completely as there are still many difficulties left in the Manual especially the first step in its study. This first step isn't only difficult, it simply couldn't be done. So if it were to be passed on to later generation, it would really be the bad luck of Wulin." He then left behind a letter for the abbot in Songshan's temple saying the same thing."

Linghu Chong sighed. "Reverend Hongxie was really wise. If there were no 'Sunflower Manual' in this world, then all these changes in Wulin wouldn't happen." His thought immediately followed, "No 'Sunflower Manual' means that there's no 'Evil Resisting Sword Art', then master wouldn't have arranged little

martial sister to accompany martial brother Lin, and martial brother Lin wouldn't have joined the Huashan School, and he wouldn't have met little martial sister." But he turned around and thought, "But I'm just a wanderer who makes friends with people from the unorthodox path, so what's that has to do with 'Sunflower Manual'? A gentleman follows his own instincts and reaps what he sows; there's no need to blame anyone else."

Chongxu said, "On the fifteenth of next month, Zuo Lengchan will be gathering the five mountains sword schools on Songshan to elect a head master. What's Young Hero Linghu's esteemed opinion on this?"

Linghu Chong laughed. "Is there even a need for an election? This headmaster position naturally belongs to Zuo Lengchan."

"Young Hero Linghu doesn't want to oppose it?" Chongxu asked.

"Songshan, Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are already secured by him, while my Heng-Shan School is the only one left. Even if we oppose the merger, it'll still be in vain," Linghu Chong answered.

Chongxu shook his head and replied, "That's not so! Taishan, Hengshan, and Huashan Schools are intimidated by the power of Songshan School so they don't dare to openly object to this. Even if they've said that they agree to the merger, they might not necessarily agree to this in their hearts."

Fangzheng said, "In old monk's opinion, Young Hero must oppose the merger of the five schools. As a principled person, Zuo Lengchan would not necessarily say that everyone

has submitted to his idea. But if the merger were to happen after the talks, then the position of headmaster would definitely be decided by a martial art competition. If Young Hero were to use all of your power, then you'll be able to win the headmaster position from Zuo Lengchan with your superior sword art."

Linghu Chong was greatly surprised. "I... I... How can I do that? I cannot!"

Chongxu said, "Great Master Abbot and Old Taoist already talked about this for a long time and we both feel that Brother is a frank person who does as he

pleases; you can even make friends with people from the Devil Sect. If you become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, to be honest, the rules of the Five Mountains School would

relax and the conduct of the disciples might go down. This isn't necessarily the good fortune of Wulin... "

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "What priest said is right, how can junior be capable of taking care of a bunch of other people? If the top were crooked then the bottom would be crooked too. I am only a loafer who likes to drink wine."

Chongxu said, "Neither a loafer nor a wine-lover will harm people, but a person of wild ambition can harm a lot of people. If Brother becomes the headmaster of the Five Mountains School, then firstly, the seniors and disciples of the five mountains sword schools wouldn't be bullied around; secondly, you wouldn't go and attack the Devil Sect

nor would you come to annex our two schools - Shaolin and Wudang; thirdly, Brother also wouldn't annex other schools like Emei, Kunlun and the others."

Fangzheng smiled. "Priest Chongxu and Old Monk have agreed to this plan. Even though we're saying that we're doing this to benefit Jianghu, half of what we're doing is actually for our own benefit."

Chongxu added, "We're speaking frankly here. The old monk and old priest came to Heng-Shan to give our support to Brother and to plead for the lives of people from both the orthodox and demonical path."

Fangzheng joined his palms together and prayed, "Amitufo, if Zuo Lengchan were to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School then who would know when the killings would end."

Linghu Chong took a deep breath and said, "Linghu Chong wouldn't dare decline the order given by seniors. But Junior is a useless person, and it's already very absurd that I became the headmaster of Heng-Shan, but I was forced into it so there's nothing I can do. However, the heroes of the realm will laugh till their teeth fall off if I aspire to become the headmaster of the Five

Mountains School. Junior clearly understands the three things mentioned and yet Junior doesn't dare to become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School. On the fifteenth of the third month, Junior will surely go to Songshan to make a big disturbance and say that Zuo Lengchan can't become the Five Mountains School's headmaster. Perhaps it would be enough for Linghu Chong to just make a big disturbance there."

Chongxu said, "That's absurd. When the time comes and you're forced to do it then you must become the headmaster of the Five Mountains School." Linghu Chong just shook his head. Chongxu went on, "If you didn't go against Zuo Lengchan, then he would definitely become the headmaster. Once the five schools become one, the first thing Headmaster Zuo would do is naturally to kill you first."

Linghu Chong was silent and let out a long sigh. He then said, "That can't be helped then."

Chongxu said, "But if you were able to escape and he was unable to capture you, then Zuo Lengchan will just help himself to killing the disciples of your Heng-Shan School. Dingxian Shi Tai put so many disciples under your hand, are you just going to leave them to be butchered by Zuo Lengchan?"

Linghu Chong slapped the railing on the bridge and said loudly, "I cannot!"

Fangzheng also added, "By then, Zuo Lengchan would also not let your master, master-wife, martial brothers, and martial sisters off. In the years after that, big misfortunes will definitely fall on their heads. Are you still going to ignore all of this?"

Linghu Chong shivered in fear and the hair at the back of his neck stood up. He stepped back a couple of steps and saluted Fangzheng and Chongxu deeply. "Thank you for seniors' advice, otherwise Linghu Chong wouldn't have worked hard and would've harmed many people."

Fangzheng and Chongxu returned his propriety. Fangzheng said, "On the fifteenth of the third month, Old Monk and Priest Chongxu will lead our disciples to go to Songshan to help Young Hero Linghu."

Chongxu said, "If Zuo Lengchan's Songshan School does something against the rules then our Shaolin and Wudang Schools will put a stop to it."

Linghu Chong was happy to hear this and said, "If the two seniors were there to preside over the proceedings then Zuo Lengchan wouldn't dare to commit his evil acts."

The three of them finally finished their discussion. Even though there were many difficult things ahead of them, they felt easier after deciding what to do. Chongxu laughed, "We should return. The new headmaster has been accompanying an old monk and an old Taoist for a long time, they must be wondering where you are. I'm afraid they must be worried by now." The three of them turned around and had just walked seven or eight steps when suddenly they all halted at the same time.

Linghu Chong shouted, "Who's there?" He was aware of the sounds of breathing coming from one end of the sky bridge. It was apparent that there were people hiding inside the left Spirit Turtle Pavilion of the Hanging Temple.

As soon as he called out, with the sounds of 'peng, peng, peng', many windows of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion were slammed open at the same time. Many arrows were seen pointing out from the windows aimed at the three of them. At the same time, the windows of the Divine Snake Pavillion behind them also slammed open and more arrows were aimed at the three of them.

Fangzheng, Chongxu, and Linghu Chong were the present world's top masters. Under ordinary circumstances, even though the bows and arrows were not ordinary weapons and the people using them were not ordinary either, how could any group actually fight the three of them? But the three of them were on the sky bridge spanning between the two pavilions and below them was a bottomless abyss which prevented them from jumping down. Further more, the bridge was only a few feet wide and limited their manoeuvrability, and added to that, they didn't have any weapons with them. Thus, the trio couldn't help feeling frightened of this ambush.

As a host, Linghu Chong quickly stepped in front of the other two people and

shouted, "Daring rats, you don't dare to show yourselves?"

But they only heard someone shouted, "Shoot!"

Seventeen to eighteen black water arrows were immediately shot out from the windows. Unlike ordinary feathered arrows, these water arrows carried water and the water was released from the point of the arrows when shot out. As these water arrows were shot towards the sky, they looked jet black. But as they tipped over in the evening sky, the arrows turned into a strange colour and the air around Linghu Chong and company was filled with rotten corpse or dead fish smell which made them want to vomit. The tipped over water arrows started to rain down onto the bridge. Some of the water hit the wooden railings of the sky bridge and burned small holes through them. Even though Fangzheng and Chongxu were very experienced, they had never seen this kind of fierce poison water before. If the arrows were just ordinary feathered ones, the three of them could have blocked them by transferring their qi into their sleeves. But as the poison water moistened the top of their bodies, they became afraid that it might bore through to their bones. The two elders looked at each other and saw their expressions changed and their eyes filled with fear. Such fear in the eyes of these two headmasters were really rarely seen.

After this wave of poison water was shot out, that person behind the window shouted out in a clear voice, "This poison water was shot towards the sky. If it was aimed at your bodies, what do you think would have happened?" As he said this, seventeen to eighteen arrows were slowly lowered and aimed at the three of them. The sky bridge ran ten feet long with its left side connected to the Spirit Turtle Pavilion while its right side was connected to the Divine Snake Pavilion. Both pavilions were filled with people pointing poisonous arrows at them. Even though the three of them had high martial arts, it was still very difficult for them to escape. When Linghu Chong heard the bright and clear voice of this person, he recalled whose voice it was. "Chief Dongfang's people with the gift; what a good gift!"

The person speaking from inside the Spirit Turtle Pavilion was really Jia Bu, who was the person sent by Dongfang Bubai with those gifts. Jia Bu laughed

loudly and shouted, "Master Linghu is very bright to be able to recognise me from my voice. Since I already used a contemptible deceit to gain the upper hand, and a bright person wouldn't want to fight a losing battle, does master Linghu admit defeat?"

Jia Bu himself already admitted to using a contemptible deceit so Linghu Chong couldn't find any fault with what he said. He moved his qi into his Dantian region and laughed long and loud, shaking the whole valley. "I'm here conversing with seniors from Shaolin and Wudang, and all the people who came up the mountain today are my good friends, so I didn't arrange for any protection. So now I have fallen into Brother Jia's trap and I cannot not admit my defeat." Linghu Chong answered.

Jia Bu replied, "That's very good. Chief Dongfang respects the seniors of Wulin and regards the importance of young heroes highly. Furthermore, Young Lady Ren has grown up under Chief Dongfang from a very young age. So in respect towards Young Lady Ren, we don't dare to be rude towards Master Linghu." Linghu Chong just uttered an 'hng' without answering back.

While Linghu Chong was talking to Jia Bu, Fangzheng and Chongxu were observing the situation and were looking for a crack in their line to rush at. But looking at the numerous water arrows at their front and back, even though they would be able to wipe out more than ten arrows at the same time, it would be impossible to take them all out. Even if their enemies managed to just shoot one water arrow through, it would be very difficult for the three of them to protect their lives. After the two of them had a look around, both of their eyes seemed to be saying, "We can't act rashly."

They heard Jia Bu went on, "Since Master Linghu already admitted defeat, both parties can avoid injuries. This is really what I wished for. Chief Dongfang actually ordered us to invite Master Linghu, Shaolin Temple's Abbot, and Wudang School's Headmaster Priest to attend a banquet at my humble sect's gathering altar on Dark Wood Cliff for several days. It's really our good fortune that the three of you are here together. How about if we go now?"

Linghu Chong uttered another 'hng', thinking how could there be such an easy

thing in this world because once the three of them left the sky bridge, subduing Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun would be as easy as turning over his palm. As expected, Jia Bu followed by saying, "But the martial arts of the three of you are too high; if you change your mind midway through the journey and are not willing to go to Dark Wood Cliff, then we'll have no way of stopping you. That's why we gathered our nerves to ask the three of you to lend us your three right hands."

"Lend you our three right hands?" Linghu Chong asked.

"That's right. Could the three of you please cut your right arms first? Then we'll be much more at ease," Jia Bu replied.

Linghu Chong laughed loudly and said, "That's how it is. Dongfang Bubai is afraid of our sword arts so he planned this trap. He wanted us to cut our right arms so we couldn't use any weapons. Then, he'll have no more worries."

Jia Bu replied, "It's not certain that he'll have no more worries. But Ren Woxing would've lost a powerful help and that would've weakened him by a lot."

"Sir, you're speaking very frankly," Linghu Chong said.

"I'm just a nobody," Jia Bu said. He raised his voice and said, "Great Master Abbot, Headmaster Priest, are you two going to peacefully give your arms up or are you going to stake your lives here?"

Chongxu replied, "Alright! Dongfang Bubai wants to borrow our arms, so we'll lend our arms to him. But we're not carrying any weapons with us so it's difficult to cut our arms off." As he just finished saying this, a flash of light flew out from the window as a steel ring was tossed out. This steel ring was a foot long in diameter and had a very sharp edge. There was a horizontal bar in the middle to hold it. It was another sect's weapon. If there was a pair of these, then it would become a 'Qiankun Ring'. Linghu Chong was standing at the front so he extended his hand to grab it. He couldn't help laughing bitterly as he thought that this Jia Bu had really calculated everything. Even though the edge of this steel ring was very sharp and useful for cutting off their arms, it was too short to

brandish around and block the incoming water arrows.

Jia Bu shouted out severely, “Since you have already promised, quickly cut your arm off! Don’t drag the time along thinking that someone’s coming to your rescue. I’m going to count to three! If your arms are not cut by then, I’ll release the poison water. One!”

Linghu Chong said in a whisper, “I’ll charge at them first, follow behind me!”

“No!” Chongxu replied.

“Two!” Jia Bu continued with his count.

Linghu Chong lifted the steel ring with his left hand while thinking, “Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu are my Heng-Shan School’s guests, so I can’t let them be harmed. When his count reaches three, I’m going to toss this steel ring, brandish my sleeves and charge up. All the poison water would definitely be aimed at me and the two of them may find an opportunity to get away.” He then heard Jia Bu calling out, “Everyone, get ready! I’m about to call ‘three’!”

Suddenly, they heard a clear and crisp female voice shouting from the top of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion. “Wait!” Someone wearing a pale green gown floated down from the top of the pavilion and landed in front of Linghu Chong. It was Yingying.

Linghu Chong hastily called out, “Yingying, step back!”

Yingying shook her left hand a few times at Linghu Chong at her back. She then called out, “Uncle Jia, the Honourable Yellow Face is very well known throughout Jianghu. Since when are you doing this kind of improper things!”

Jia Bu replied, “This... Young Lady, you... move away, don’t touch the water.”

“What are you doing here? Uncle Dongfang told you and Uncle Shangguan to deliver gifts to me here. How did you get bribed by Songshan School’s Zuo Lengchan that you are actually being rude towards the Headmaster of Heng-Shan School?” Yingying chided.

“Who said I’ve been bribed by Zuo Lengchan? I received Chief Dongfang’s secret order to capture Linghu Chong and bring him back to the Dark Wood Cliff.”

“Nonsense. Chief’s Dark Command Wood is here. Chief’s order is: Jia Bu is secretly rebelling. Anyone who sees him must capture and execute him immediately and will be heaped with gifts!” As she said this, she raised her right hand high above her hand holding the Dark Command Wood.

Jia Bu was furious and he shouted, “Release the arrow!”

“Did Chief Dongfang tell you to kill me?” Yingying asked.

“You’re disobeying Chief’s decree...”

“Uncle Shangguan, seize that traitor Jia Bu and you’ll be promoted to the position of Elder of the Green Dragon Hall,” Yingying called out.

Shangguan Yun thought to himself that his martial art was much higher than Jia Bu and that his experience was much deeper compared to Jia Bu when they entered the sect. But Jia Bu was the Green Dragon Hall’s Elder, while he was an Elder of a lower hall which was called the White Tiger Hall, so of course there was much jealousy in his heart. Once he heard Yingying’s call, he hesitated on what to do. Yingying was the daughter of the former Chief Ren, who now had re-entered Jianghu and would definitely plan to take back the chief position. Even though Chief Dongfang had always been respectful towards Young Lady Ren, his attitude towards her would certainly be very different now. However, he still would never dare to lead these men to shoot poison water at Yingying.

Jia Bu again called out, “Release the arrow!”

But those men he commanded had always revered Yingying as if she was a goddess, and also, she was holding the Dark Command Wood in her hand. How could they dare to be rude towards her?

Suddenly, in the middle of this deadlock, someone from below the Spirit Turtle Pavilion shouted, “Fire, fire!” A red flame was burning and black smoke rose above. It seemed that there really was a fire burning at the bottom floor of

the pavilion. Yingying loudly called out, “Jia Bu, you’re very cruel! Why are you trying to burn your subordinates to death?”

Jia Bu angrily responded, “Nonsen...”

Yingying interrupted, “Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu! People from the Divine Sun Moon Sect, Chief Dongfang has an order: Quickly put out the fire!” After she said this, she quickly charged forward.

Linghu Chong, Fangzheng, and Chongxu took advantage of the situation to charge forward. Between Yingying calling out the sect's motto and the fire burning underneath the pavilion, chaos ensued amongst the sect's people. Linghu Chong and his two companions flew halfway past the sky bridge and rushed into the building through the window which made the people inside unable to release their poison arrows. Linghu Chong quickly grabbed a long candlestick and wielded it in his right hand. He knew that the poison water was very severe and only a little bit of it had to be splashed on your body for you to suffer endlessly. Fangzheng and Chongxu were using their palms to chop and legs to kick without any mercy, and in no time at all, seven to eight people had been killed. He treated the candlestick in his hand like a long sword and stabbed it towards people's throats, and in a short time had killed six people. When Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun came to Heng-Shan, they carried forty boxes with them which were carried by two people each (I guess Jin Yong miscounted.... In ch 29, he said four people carried each box.). So altogether they had eighty people. These eighty people were actually the most powerful people in the Divine Sun Moon Sect with good martial arts. Forty people were distributed to encircle the Hanging Temple, while the remaining forty people were hidden in the two pavilions. In a short time, Linghu Chong and the other two people had killed all twenty people in that one pavilion.

Jia Bu was using a pair of judge's pens while Yingying was using a pair of long and short swords as they fought fiercely. When Linghu Chong first met Yingying, he only heard her voice but never saw her. Later on, he experienced how powerful she was and saw how she was feared by that crowd of heroes but he didn't know the reason. He felt feelings of affection but didn't know where

his feelings came from. That day when Yingying killed some Shaolin disciples and fought against Great Master Fangsheng, Linghu Chong only saw her shadow and did not actually see her fight. So this was the first time that he had clearly seen her fighting with someone. Seeing her moving lightly and quickly, swiftly going here and there with her pair of long and

short swords fluttering all of a sudden, attacking strangely with intermingled feints and true thrusts, even though she was really in front of him, in Linghu Chong's heart, he still felt as if he was floating, like the smoke, like the fog.

The two judge's pens that Jia Bu was using were really heavy. When he slashed them out, it was as if he was using a steel whip and Yingying didn't want her pair of swords to clash with his judge's pens. Each of Jia Bu's moves was aimed at a major acupoint on Yingying's body but he was always a hairsbreadth short in striking her.

Great Master Fangzheng shouted, "Evil creature, you're still not putting down your weapon and be captured?"

Jia Bu saw that there was only death waiting for him today, so he combined his pair of pens into one and stabbed them towards Yingying's throat. Linghu Chong was startled and was really afraid that Yingying might not be able to avoid this attack, so he quickly stabbed out with the candlestick in his hand. He stabbed out twice hitting both of Jia Bu's wrists. Jia Bu felt his fingers became powerless and dropped both of his judge's pens. He quickly rushed at Linghu Chong with both of his palms together.

Great Master Fangzheng sent both of his palms up in a slant and captured both of Jia Bu's hands. Jia Bu forcefully struggled but he was unable to get away. He immediately kicked out violently with his left leg towards Fangzheng's lower body. Fangzheng let out a sigh and sent out both of his palms and sent Jia Bu flying out of the door. They heard him roaring out miserably, and his shout receded further and further away from them as he fell down towards the deep valley outside of Mount Cui Ping. Linghu Chong smiled towards Yingying and said, "Lucky you came to the rescue!"

Yingying smiled back at him. "Luckily I arrived in time!" She followed by shouting, "Put out the fire!"

Someone from below the pavilion responded, "Yes!"

Originally, the fire that was underneath the pavilion was burnt by using sulfur mixed with grass so that it would make Jia Bu uneasy. It wasn't actually a real fire. Yingying walked to the window and called out towards the Divine Snake Pavilion, "Uncle Shangguan, Jia Bu defied orders and that's why he met with this disaster. Why don't you lead those people out of the pavilion now? I won't give you any trouble."

Shangguan Yun replied, "Young lady, swear it for me to believe you."

"I'll swear to the past dynasties of the sect. If Shangguan Yun listens to my orders, then from now on, I won't harm him. If I violate this oath, then the three corpse bugs will eat my brain to death," Yingying swore.

This was Sun Moon Sect's highest form of oath, so when Shangguan Yun heard it, he was immediately relieved and led the twenty people out of the pavilion. When Linghu Chong and others walked out of the Spirit Turtle Pavilion, they saw Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and tens of other people waiting underneath the pavilion. Linghu Chong asked Yingying, "How did you know that Jia Bu and his men wanted to attack us?"

"Why would Dongfang Bubai be that nice to you and be sincere in giving you gifts? I already suspected from the beginning that those forty boxes contained some kind of deceit. Later, I saw Jia Bu acting suspiciously and leading his men here, so I was really suspicious and took Mr. Old and the others here to take a look. Those rice buckets guarding at the foot of Mount Cui Ping didn't want to let us go up the

mountain, and in a short while revealed their true character," Yingying told him.

Old Man, Zu Qianqiu, and the men laughed at this. Shangguan Yun hung his head down looking ashamed. Linghu Chong sighed, "This is only my first day as the Headmaster of the Heng-Shan School, and my true character as an

incapable fool has already been revealed. I knew that those people sent by Dongfang Bubai were up to no good but I didn't take any precautions. If Linghu Chong dies, then that's deserved. But if Great Master Fangzheng and Priest Chongxu suffered under the hands of those traitors... Ai!" As he said this, he kept shaking his head.

Yingying said, "Uncle Shangguan, from today onwards, are you going to follow me or are you still going to follow Dongfang Bubai?"

Shangguan Yun's face changed colour as it was a hard decision for him to make to betray Chief Dongfang. Yingying went on, "Amongst the ten elders in the divine sect, six have taken my father's three corpse brain pills. Are you going to take this pill or not?" She extended her hand and in her open palm was a red pill. Shangguan Yun trembled, "Young lady, you're saying from amongst the sect's ten elders, six elders have... six elders..."

"That's right. You've never worked for my father before. So you're not considered to have betrayed my father when you worked for Dongfang Bubai in these last few years. If you could abandon that dark world, then I'd appreciate it, and my father would definitely appreciate it too," Yingying said.

Shangguan Yun looked around and he thought in his heart, "If I don't surrender, it seems that I'll lose my life right here. Since six out of the ten elders have returned to Chief Ren, things have moved really quickly. I couldn't be the last one left still swearing loyalty to Chief Dongfang." Having decided thus, he immediately took the three-corpse brain pill from Yingying's palm and swallowed it. He then said bowing to Yingying, "Shangguan Yun is thankful for young lady's kindness for not killing me. From today, I will strive to complete your order and would never dare to disobey them."

"We're on the same side, there's no need for such a huge propriety. These brothers under you, they naturally follow you?" Yingying asked.

Shangguan Yun turned his head to look at the twenty men behind him. Those men saw that their leader had just surrendered and had also taken the three-corpse brain pill, so they immediately prostrated themselves on the ground and

paid their respects to Yingying. They all said, "We're willing to obey Sacred Lady's order, ten thousand

deaths will not deter us." At this time, the crowd of heroes had extinguished the fire. When they saw that Yingying had subdued Shangguan Yun, they all congratulated her. Shangguan Yun's martial art was already very high in the Sun Moon Sect, and his position was also very honourable, so with Yingying subduing him, this had helped Ren Woxing greatly in taking back the leadership of the sect.

Fangzheng and Chongxu saw that the situation had gone back to normal so they took their leaves and went down the mountain. Linghu Chong went with them for several li before parting ways. Yingying and Linghu Chong were walking shoulder to shoulder as they went back to Xianxing Peak. She said, "Dongfang Bubai is a very violent person, and you already saw this methods for yourself. My father and Uncle Xiang are in the process of getting more support from inside the sect to return the sect to its former leadership. The ones who happily submit to us are naturally the best, while the ones who don't agree are settled one by one, so that Dongfang Bubai will be weakened. At this moment, Dongfang Bubai has started his counter attack. He sent Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun to take care of you. This was a really good move from him because my father and Uncle Xiang's whereabouts are a secret so Dongfang Bubai couldn't find them. But if they wanted to harm you, I...I..." As she said this, her face blushed furiously and she turned her head away.

As the evening set in, the night wind blew her soft hair around till they covered both of her cheeks. Seeing her snow white neck, his heart was moved. He thought, "She's been passionately devoted to me for a long time and everyone in the world knows about this. Even Dongfang Bubai wanted to capture me in order to threaten her and also to threaten her father. On top of the sky bridge at the Hanging Temple, she knew clearly that the ambush was unpassable so she jumped in front of me afraid that I might get injured. To have a wife like this, what more can Linghu Chong ask for?" With this thought, he extended his arms to hug her waist.

Yingying giggled and leaned her body to one side making Linghu Chong hug an empty space. Even though his sword art was wonderful and his internal energy was abundant, his fist, kicking, hand-seizing, lightness, and other martial arts lacked by a lot. Yingying laughed, "As a Headmaster of a school, how can you act with no rules or customs?"

Laughing also, Linghu Chong replied, "Amongst all the headmasters in the world, Heng-Shan School's headmaster is by far the most ordinary and is the one laughed at by everyone."

Yingying seriously said, "Why are you saying that? Even the Abbot of Shaolin and the headmaster of Wudang respect you. Who would dare to look down on you? Are you going to keep the matter of your expulsion from Huashan in your heart forever and always be ashamed in front of other people?" These few words that Yingying said really touched the matter that was in Linghu Chong's heart. Even though he had a carefree nature, he was still heartbroken and still harboured a deep hurt for being expelled from the Huashan School. He couldn't help sighing when he heard this and bowed his head. Yingying pulled his hand and said, "You're now the Headmaster of Heng-Shan and you should be proud and elated in front of the realm's heroes. The reputations of the two schools Heng-Shan and Huashan are equal. Could it be that the honourable position of Heng-Shan School's Headmaster isn't as good as being the disciple of Huashan School?"

"Thank you for your advice. But I've always felt being the headmaster of nuns is embarrassing and laughable," Linghu Chong replied.

"Today, there's close to a thousand heroes who have joined the Heng-Shan School. Amongst the five mountains sword schools, if we talk about the glory of the schools, only Songshan School could be compared to you. How could the other schools like Taishan, Hengshan and Huashan be compared to you?" Yingying said.

"I haven't thanked you for this yet."

Yingying smiled. "Thank me for what?"

"You were afraid that it won't be too reputable for me to become the leader of nuns so you sent your men to join Heng-Shan. If it weren't for Sacred Lady's order, how could those wild and unruly friends agree to become the martial brothers and sisters of these nuns – not to mention obediently receiving my restrictions?"

Yingying, with pursed lips holding her laughter, said, "That might not be true. You have been their chief when you were attacking the Shaolin Temple, so everyone had already accepted you long before."

The two of them chatted easily as they went up the mountain. When they got closer to the convent, they faintly heard the clamours of those heroes. Yingying halted her step and said, "We'll part here. Once my father's matter is settled then I'll come here to see you."

Linghu Chong's chest suddenly felt heated and he replied, "You're going to the Dark Wood Cliff?"

"Yes."

"I'll go with you."

Yingying's eyes flashed with happiness but she shook her head.

Linghu Chong asked, "You don't want me to go with you?"

"You just became the headmaster of Heng-Shan School today and now you want to come with me to settle the Sun Moon Sect's matter. Even though there's no one higher than you in Heng-Shan School, don't you think doing this is too much?"

Linghu Chong reasoned, "It's very dangerous to go up against Dongfang Bubai. How could I just stay outside of the matter and let you go into danger by yourself?"

"Those Jianghu friends who are living in Heng-Shan's Other Courtyard, I can't say for certain that they won't offend the ladies in Heng-Shan School."

"You only need to order them not to do it then they definitely won't dare."

"Alright, since you're willing to go with me, I thank you on behalf of Daddy."

Linghu Chong laughingly said, "You're thanking me and I'm thanking you, why are we being so polite?"

Yingying smiled captivatingly and said, "Don't blame me for being impolite to you in the future."

After walking for a while, Yingying said, "My daddy said that since you don't want to join the sect, he doesn't want your help in taking back the sect's leadership, but... but..." She said till here when her face turned scarlet.

"Even though I'm not joining the Sun Moon Sect, I'm not an outsider to you. If your father asks me to leave, then I'll just thicken my face and refuse to leave," Linghu Chong told her.

Yingying smiled, "My daddy would surely feel happy to get your help."

The two of them returned to the top of Xianxing Peak and separately went to their disciples to leave them with some orders. Linghu Chong ordered all his disciples to practise their martial arts diligently, and told them that he was escorting Yingying back and would be returning to the mountain after that. Yingying told the group of heroes that if any of them dared to set foot on Xianxing Peak from that day onwards, she would have their legs cut off. If their left foot stepped on the peak then their left leg would be chopped, if it were their right foot then their right leg would be chopped, and if both feet stepped on the Peak then both legs would be chopped off.

At dawn the next morning, Linghu Chong and Yingying said their many goodbyes, and went down the mountain with Shangguan Yun and his twenty men and commenced on their journey to Dark Wood Cliff.

Dark Wood Cliff lay east of Heng-Shan inside the prefecture of Hebei. Within a day, they had arrived at the boundary of that prefecture. During the journey, Linghu Chong and Yingying separately sat inside two sedan chairs and always kept the curtains down to avoid Dongfang Bubai from detecting them. That very evening, Yingying and Linghu Chong stayed at an inn very close to the gathering altar of the Sun Moon Sect, so the place around the inn was crawling with the

sect's people coming and going. Shangguan Yun ordered four of his men to guard the front and back of the inn and not let anyone into the inn. At supper time, Yingying accompanied Linghu Chong in drinking wine. The fireplace in the inn was blazing brightly and the light shone on Yingying's face, revealing her tenderness.

After drinking a few cups of wine, Linghu Chong said, "That day inside the Shaolin Temple, your father said that amongst all the heroes in the realm, there are three and a half who he admires. Amongst them, Dongfang Bubai is number one. This person snatched the chief position from your father's hands, so naturally his ability and wisdom are high. It's also said in Jianghu that Dongfang Bubai is number one in terms of martial art, is this saying true?"

"This Dongfang Bubai definitely works really hard and is also very scheming. But I'm not certain about the level of his martial art because in the last few years, I've actually not seen him."

Linghu Chong nodded. "These past few years you've been living at the Bamboo Alley at Luoyang city so of course you haven't seen him."

"That's not true. Even though I lived in that Bamboo Alley, I went back to Dark Wood Cliff once or twice every year and yet, I never got to see Dongfang Bubai. I heard from the elders in the sect that for the past few years, it was getting harder and harder to see Chief," Yingying told him.

Linghu Chong said, "A person of such high status often doesn't want to see other people so no one can see how different they are."

Yingying replied, "This certainly is one of the reasons. But my guess is that he's ardently practising the 'Sunflower Manual' martial arts, and isn't willing to be disturbed by sect's matters."

"Your father once said that during the time he was studying 'The Art of Essence Absorbing' to meld all the different types of internal energy in his body, he ignored all sect's matters, and let Dongfang Bubai usurped his power. Could it be that Dongfang Bubai is repeating the same mistake that your father made?"

"Since Dongfang Bubai isn't personally taking care of sect's business, in these

last few years, all of the sect's affairs and power have been turned over to a little kid surnamed Yang. This little kid couldn't possibly seize Dongfang Bubai's power and thus repeat the same thing again," Yingying explained.

"A little kid named Yang? Who's that? How come I've never heard of him before?"

Yingying's face suddenly turned red, and she smiled, "There's no dirtier thing to say except for his name. No one in the sect would even mention his name; so no one outside the sect would know of him. So, of course, you've never heard his name before."

Linghu Chong's curiosity was peaked. "My dear, tell me about him."

"That Yang person is called Yang Lianting. He's around twenty years old, his martial art is really low, and he has no ability at all. But recently Dongfang Bubai had pampered him so much; it really is remarkable." As she said this, her whole face turned dark and her mouth twisted; it seemed that she really despised this person.

Linghu Chong was disappointed. "Ah, this Yang person is Dongfang Bubai's boyfriend. Originally, Dongfang Bubai was a great hero, but he likes... likes pretty boys."

Yingying said, "Don't say it! I don't understand what Dongfang Bubai's thoughts are. He always tells Yang Lianting to handle all of his business, and a lot of brothers in the sect have been harmed by this Yang kid. We must kill..."

Suddenly, someone from outside the window laughed. "You're wrong. We should thank Yang Lianting."

Yingying happily called out, "Daddy!" And she quickly went to the door to open it.

Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian entered the room. The two of them were wearing farmers' garb and the big hats on their heads covered half of their faces. If they hadn't heard Ren Woxing's voice, they wouldn't have been able to recognise them just by their faces. Linghu Chong stood up to pay his respects

and told the servant to bring two more sets of chopsticks, more wine and dishes.

Ren Woxing was looking high-spirited as he said, "These last few days, Brother Xiang and I have been contacting our old comrades in the sect, and it was unexpectedly very easy to get them on our side. Eight out of ten people that we contacted were extremely happy. They all said that in the last few years, most of his friends and allies have already left him because Dongfang Bubai's actions have been really perverse especially with regards to Yang Lianting. Yang Lianting was originally just a lowly soldier in the sect. But for whatever reason, he managed to curry favour from Dongfang Bubai and take over the sect's power in his hand. Many of the people in the sect have either been removed or killed by him. If it weren't for the strict rules of the sect, they would've rebelled a long time ago. That Yang Lianting has helped us greatly in this matter, how could we not thank him greatly for this?"

Yingying said, "That's right." Then she asked, "Daddy, how did you know that we've arrived?"

Ren Woxing laughed. "Brother Xiang and Shangguan Yun fought for a while before he found out that Shangguan Yun had surrendered to you."

"Uncle Xiang, did you hurt him?"

Xiang Wentian laughed and replied, "Hurting the Eagle Hero Shangguan isn't an easy thing to do."

Suddenly, they heard the sounds of whistling which made the hair at the back of their neck stood up.

Yingying said, "Could it be that Dongfang Bubai know that we're here?" She then turned around to Linghu Chong to explain, "This whistling sound is our sect's signal to notify that there are rebels and assassins in the area. Once the people in the sect hear this, they would be prepared to apprehend the rebels with all their might."

After some time, they heard four horses galloping quickly across the long street. The people on the horses were passing on the order: "Chief's order: Wind and Thunder Hall's Elder Tong Baixiong is colluding with the enemy to rebel

against the sect. Apprehend him immediately! If there is anyone who disobeys this order, kill them without question."

Yingying absentmindedly said, "Uncle Tong! How can that be?" They heard the sound of horses' hooves gradually getting farther away as the riders passed the order down. Observing this situation, it seemed that Sun Moon Sect had control of the entire area and the local government had no power at all.

Ren Woxing said, "Dongfang Bubai is very well informed; we just met with old Tong yesterday."

Yingying imploringly asked, "Uncle Tong already promised to help us?"

Ren Woxing shook his head. "How could he agree to betray Dongfang Bubai? Brother Xiang and I talked with him for half a day, and at the end that Old Tong said: 'Brother Dongfang and I are friends beyond death. The two of you don't realise that by talking to me today, you've looked down on Tong Baixiong, thinking that I'm a friend who could be bought. Recently, Chief Dongfang had been confounded by a lot of small people and had made a lot of mistakes. But thinking that he's bringing ruin and shame to himself, I can't bring myself to blame him for this. I'm not your match so if you want to kill me or peel my flesh off - then go ahead.' This Old Tong really is something, the older he gets the more vicious he gets."

Linghu Chong praised him, "Good man!"

Yingying said, "If he didn't agree to help us, how come Dongfang Bubai wants to capture him?"

Xiang Wentian replied, "This is called taking unreasonable measures. Dongfang Bubai isn't that old yet, but he's very confused already. Old Tong is such a loyal friend to him; where else can you find such a man in this world?"

Ren Woxing clapped his hands and laughed. "If Dongfang Bubai can even get angry at the type of people like Old Tong, we'll definitely complete our business! Come, bottoms up!" The four of them drank their cups. Yingying said to Linghu Chong, "Uncle Tong is our sect's first elder and he has done a big service to the sect sometime in the past, and everyone in the sect respects him

deeply. He never got on well with daddy but is very close with Dongfang Bubai. So according to reason, even if he did a big mistake, Dongfang Bubai wouldn't trouble him."

Ren Woxing was jubilant as he said, "As Dongfang Bubai is focusing on capturing Tong Baixiong, the situation on top of Dark Wood Cliff is likely chaotic. We can take advantage of this time to go up the cliff. This is very good."

Xiang Wentian said, "We'll ask Brother Shangguan to discuss this with us."

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "Very good."

Xiang Wentian went out and immediately came back into the room with Shangguan Yun. When Shangguan Yun saw Ren Woxing, he immediately bowed and said, "Subordinate Shangguan Yun pays his respect to Chief. Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Ren Woxing laughed. "Brother Shangguan, I heard that you're a hard man who doesn't like to speak much. How come you're speaking like that now?"

Shangguan Yun looked blank as he said, "Subordinate doesn't understand. Chief, please advise me."

"Daddy, you heard Uncle Shangguan said 'Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu', and you felt that these words were too lofty, didn't you?" Yingying inquired.

"What long live, unify the Jianghu, am I an emperor?" Ren Woxing asked.

Yingying smilingly replied, "This was Dongfang Bubai's idea. He wanted all the subordinates to say these words when they see him. He also wanted the brothers in the sect to also say this to each other when he's not around. This phrase was made up not too long ago. Uncle Shangguan is too accustomed in saying this so he also said this to you."

Ren Woxing nodded his head and said, "I see. Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu. What a beautiful idea! But I'm not an immortal, so how can I live for thousands of years? Brother Shangguan, I heard that Dongfang Bubai wants to capture old Tong, so I thought we should go up the cliff tonight as Dark Wood

Cliff would be in confusion. What do you think of this?"⁴⁰

Shangguan Yun answered, "Chief's order is wise. This is a foolproof plan that really opens everyone's eyes. This plan is for the benefit of every common people in this world. This plan cannot be defeated and thus, victory is assured. Subordinate will carry out this order. I will always be loyal to Chief and would never balk at a thousand deaths."

Ren Woxing muttered to himself, "People in Jianghu says that 'Eagle Hero' Shangguan Yun's martial art is high and he's a frank person. How come he talks so flatteringly and says so many clichés just like a shameless small person? Could it be that those rumours in Jianghu are false, and his reputation is false?" He scowled at this thought.

Yingying smilingly said, "Daddy, we must disguise ourselves before going up the Dark Wood Cliff so we don't get recognised. But the most important thing is for us to learn the jargons of Dark Wood Cliff, or else you'll say everything wrongly."

"What Dark Wood Cliff's jargons?"

"Uncle Shangguan said something like 'Chief's order is wise. This is a foolproof plan that really opens everyone's eyes'; also 'Subordinate will carry out this order. I will always be loyal to Chief and would never balk at a thousand deaths'. These kinds of talks are the jargons of the upper class people in Dark Wood Cliff for the last few years now. All these jargons were thought of by that Yang Lianting to flatter Dongfang Bubai. The more he heard it, the more he liked it, so later, when someone doesn't speak like this, it's a really big offence to him. Also, if there were a slight disrespect in the way you say it, you'll immediately be killed," Yingying explained.

"Do you also say all these bullshits when you see Dongfang Bubai?" Ren Woxing asked.

"If I'm at Dark Wood Cliff, what can I do but to say these words? That's why I live at Luoyang city to avoid all these crazy talks."

"Brother Shangguan, you don't need to say these words between us," Ren

Woxing told him.

"Yes. Chief's sacred order only comes around every one hundred years and it cannot be replaced by ten thousand lives. The sacred order is like the brilliance of the sun and the moon illuminating the world, subordinate will obey the order," Shangguan Yun replied. Yingying pursed her lips, not daring to laugh.

Ren Woxing asked, "What do you think is the best way for us to go up Dark Wood Cliff?"

Shangguan Yun replied, "Chief is confident and is a divine strategist; in the present age nobody can come close to your brilliance. In the presence of Chief, how can subordinate dare to offer my trivial idea?"

Ren Woxing scowled and said, "When Dongfang Bubai discusses a matter with the sect, no one dares to say anything?"

"Dongfang Bubai's ability and wisdom is above everyone, and no one has as much experience as he is. Even if someone has a thought about it, they wouldn't dare to speak to avoid a sudden misfortune befalling them," Yingying said.

Ren Woxing said, "That's how it is. That's very good, extremely good! Brother Shangguan, what order did Dongfang Bubai give you to capture Linghu Chong?"

"He said whoever captures Hero Linghu would be heaped with gifts. If we couldn't capture him, then we should bring our own heads to him," Shangguan Yun said.

Ren Woxing laughed. "Very good, tie Linghu Chong up and claim your gifts."

Shangguan Yun retreated a step, and fear was etched on his face. "Hero Linghu is Chief's beloved general, and he has done a big service to our sect. How could Subordinate dare to commit this sin?"

Ren Woxing laughed and said, "It's very hard to go up to Dongfang Bubai's place, but if you're taking the bound up Linghu Chong up, he would definitely let us see him."

Yingying smiled, "Wonderful plan! We'll go up and see Dongfang Bubai

pretending to be Uncle Shangguan's subordinates. Once we see him, we'll get our weapons out and attack him. Even though his martial art is high, he'll still find it difficult to fight four pair of hands with his one pair."

Xiang Wentian added, "It'll be best if Brother Linghu pretends to be heavily injured and has his feet and hands bound. We'll splash some blood on him to make it real and then we'll carry him up using a stretcher. Dongfang Bubai wouldn't have any protections against this plan, and we can also store weapons in the stretcher."

"Very good, very good," Ren Woxing agreed with this plan.

They then heard the sound of horses' hooves galloping on the long street, with someone shouting, "We've captured the Master of Wind and Thunder Hall. We've captured the Master of Wind and Thunder Hall!"

Yingying beckoned Linghu Chong to go with her. The two of them went to the entrance of the inn and saw tens of men on horses carrying torches. They were crowding around a tall and strong old man as they went past the street. That old man had a white beard and his face was full of blood. His two hands were bound behind his back and his eyes were staring ahead brightly as if they were spouting fire. It was apparent that he was furious.

Yingying whispered, "Five to six years ago, when Dongfang Bubai met uncle Tong, they were even more close to each other than the two bear brothers. Who could've thought that he would turn ruthless against him today?"

Not long after that, Shangguan Yun came carrying a stretcher with him. Yingying bound Linghu Chong's arms using a white cloth and hung the cloth on his neck. They then slaughtered a sheep and smeared the sheep's blood all over his body. Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian both changed into the uniform of the sect, and Yingying also changed into a man's clothes. They all smeared their faces black. After all of them had eaten and worn the uniforms of Shangguan Yun's subordinates, they went on their way to Dark Wood Cliff.

Forty li northwest of the Dingzhou prefecture, the mountain rock was dark red like blood, and there was a creek called Ape Creek with water rushing by. As

they went further north, the cliffs on their sides rose up like walls, and the mountain road spanned only five feet wide in between the two cliffs. The road to the gathering altar of the Sun Moon Sect was heavily guarded by members of the sect, who were very respectful toward them because of Shangguan Yun. After passing three checkpoints, they arrived to another creek. Shangguan Yun released a signal arrow and three boats from the other side came over to them. Linghu Chong secretly thought, "Sun Moon Sect's hundreds years of existence really isn't a small matter. If it weren't for Shangguan Yun leading the way, we would've had to attack from the outside. That wouldn't be very easy at all."

On the other side of the creek, the way up the mountain was very steep. Everyone had to abandon their horses. Some people in the party carried torches to light up their way. Yingying walked besides the stretcher with her hand on her pair of swords guarding Linghu Chong.

Linghu Chong felt the constant danger he was in as they went up the mountain. If the people carrying the stretcher decided that they didn't want to carry him anymore, they could just dump him into the deep valley besides the road and he would certainly die by their hands. When they reached the gathering altar, the sky was still dark. Shangguan Yun quickly ordered someone to report to Dongfang Bubai that he had successfully completed Chief's order. After some time, the sound of tinkling bells was heard and Shangguan Yun immediately stood up and respectfully waited.

Yingying pulled Ren Woxing up and whispered, "Chief's order has arrived. Quickly get up." Ren Woxing immediately stood up and saw that all the sect members inside the altar were suddenly standing still and motionless, as if they had come under a demonic spell. The tinkling bells rang really fast before stopping. Not long after it stopped, a person wearing the yellow gown of a sect's disciple appeared holding a yellow scroll with both hands. He read the scroll out loud, "Divine Sun Moon Sect's refined scholar, kindhearted warrior, just and wise Chief Dongfang commands: Jia Bu and Shangguan Yun have successfully carried out the order and have returned. This is an excellent achievement. Bring the captive along with you up the cliff."

Shangguan Yun bowed. "Long live the Chief, unify the Jianghu."

Linghu Chong found this hilarious. He thought to himself, "Isn't this what the court eunuchs usually read out?"

He then heard Shangguan Yun's loud reply, "Chief has granted subordinate to ascend the cliff. I will never forget this supreme virtue and benevolence."

Shangguan Yun's subordinates also replied together, "Chief has granted subordinates to ascend the cliff. We will never forget this supreme virtue and benevolence." Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian followed along but secretly cursed.

Their party went up the stone steps ascending toward the cliff and passed three iron doors along the way. At each iron door, a person asked them for that night's password and also inspected what they were carrying on their bodies. At last, they reached a stone gate with inscriptions on each side of it. The sentence on the right side read 'Refined Scholar, Kindhearted Warrior', while the sentence on the left side said 'Just and Wise'. There was a board hung horizontally above the gate with the red letterings saying 'Brilliance of Sun and Moon'.

After they passed the stone gate, they saw a big bamboo basket on the ground which could probably hold more than ten catties worth of rice. Shangguan Yun shouted, "Take the captive in." Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying stooped down to pick up the stretcher and entered into the bamboo basket.

A copper gong was sounded three times and the bamboo basket was slowly pulled up. There was a pulley system on the top which allowed the bamboo basket to be pulled up. As the bamboo basket slowly ascended, Linghu Chong raised his head to take a look and saw only many dots of stars around him which made him realize how high the Dark Wood Cliff really was. Yingying extended her right arm and held his left hand. In the middle of the night, they were still able to see white clouds floating just above their heads. After some time, they entered a white fog, and when they looked down, they were not able to see anything except darkness around them.

After a long time, the bamboo basket finally stopped. Shangguan Yun and his

men helped lift Linghu Chong out of the basket. Then they proceeded to the left for tens of feet before encountering another bamboo basket. Actually the peak of the cliff was too high so it required four pulley systems to reach the top. Linghu Chong pondered in his heart, "It'd be very difficult for Dongfang Bubai's subordinates to see him since he lives in such a high place."

When they reached the cliff's peak, the sun had already risen and it was shining brightly from the east. The sun's rays shone on an enormous decorated archway made from white jade, on which written in gold letters were the words 'For the Benefit of Common People'. The gold coating of the letters reflected the sunlight and bursts of gold glittered everywhere. When people saw this, a feeling of profound respect would blossom in their hearts.

Linghu Chong thought, "There's no one in Wulin who could setup this kind of fanfare like Dongfang Bubai. Even Shaolin and Songshan wouldn't be able to follow this. As for Huashan and Hengshan, they lack even further. He's really a learned man, unlike other crude and ordinary heroes in the realm."

Ren Woxing softly muttered, "For the benefit of common people, hng!"

Shangguan Yun called out in a clear voice, "Subordinate from White Tiger Hall, Elder Shangguan Yun, has received Chief's order and has come to pay a visit to Chief."

Four people came out of a stone house from their right and walked toward them. They were all wearing purple gowns. One of them said, "Congratulations Elder Shangguan for completing a great service. How come Elder Jia didn't come?"

"Elder Jia died for the cause and has repaid Chief's kindness," Shangguan Yun replied.

"That's how it is. Then Elder Shangguan will surely be promoted," that person replied.

"If Chief promotes me, then I wouldn't dare forget Brother's help," Shangguan Yun said.

When that person heard this promise of a bribe, a smile crept into his eyes. “We should thank you first!” He gave Linghu Chong a glance and laughingly said, “Is this the little kid that Young Lady Ren admires? I thought he would have a face like Pan An or Song Yu, but I guess I was wrong. Green Dragon Hall’s Elder Shangguan, please come through here.”

“Chief hasn’t promoted me yet so don’t say this too early. If Chief or General Yang heard this, then we’d be in big trouble.”

That person stuck his tongue out and then led the way for them. They passed underneath the decorated archway and walked through a perfectly straight slab of road leading to a big door. After they went through the big door, another two people in purple gowns welcomed the five of them into the reception hall. One of them said, “General Yang wants to see you so just wait here.”

“Yes!” Shangguan Yun acknowledged and put both of his arms besides his body. Even after a long time, that ‘General Yang’ still hadn’t come out yet, but Shangguan Yun just stood there respectfully waiting. Linghu Chong thought, “Elder Shangguan’s position in the sect isn’t low, but once he comes up the cliff, everyone looks down on him and treats him just like a servant. Even the servants here seem to have more power than him. What kind of person is that General Yang? Most likely, he’s that Yang Lianting person. Before he came to be a general, he was just some ordinary servant doing some trifle things. But now the White Tiger Hall’s elder actually has to wait respectfully for his arrival. Dongfang Bubai has really gone too far!”

After another long wait, footsteps were heard coming towards them. From the sound of the steps, it seemed that the person had no internal energy at all. With a cough, a person emerged from behind the screen. Linghu Chong took a peek and saw that this person was around thirty years old and was wearing a red jujube satin gown. He appeared tall and strong, and his face was full of beard. In appearance, he really looked like a healthy and powerful martial artist.

Linghu Chong thought, “Yingying said that Dongfang Bubai is very pampering towards this guy, and she also said that the relationship between these two is shady. I always thought that he would look like a girly and pretty man, who

would've thought he'd be this big and burly fellow. This is really outside my imagination. Could it be that he's not Yang Lianting?" He then heard that person said, "Elder Shangguan, you successfully accomplished your goal of capturing Linghu Chong. Chief will definitely be happy with this." His voice was really deep and was pleasant to hear.

Shangguan Yun bowed to him and said, "That's all because of Chief's good fortune and General Yang's thorough advice. Subordinate is merely carrying out Chief's order."

Linghu Chong inwardly felt strange. "This person must surely be Yang Lianting!"

Yang Lianting walked to the side of the stretcher and took a look at Linghu Chong's face. Linghu Chong's eyes were unfocused, his mouth hung slightly open, and he was wearing a stupefied expression while his whole body was bloodied as though he had received some heavy injuries. Yang Lianting asked, "Is this almost dead person Linghu Chong? Are you sure you got the right person?"

"Subordinate saw with my own eyes when he took the leadership of Hengshan School, so it couldn't be wrong. In addition, he gave Elder Jia three stabs in his major acupoints and also injured Subordinate's two palms. My injuries are serious, it's likely that it won't be healed in one and a half year," Shangguan Yun reported.

Yang Lianting laughed, "You beat up Young Lady Ren's beloved until he's like this. Be careful, she'll come and kill you."

"Subordinate is loyal to Chief. I don't care about other people's hatred towards me. It's Subordinate's wish to be loyal to Chief till death; then my whole family would've been honoured," Shangguan Yun replied.

"Very good, very good. I must tell Chief about your loyalty, Chief will definitely heap you with gifts. The Wind and Thunder Hall's elder has betrayed Chief and sowed confusion. Have you known about this?"

"Subordinate doesn't know the details, but would like to consult General

about this. If Chief or General has an order, subordinate will put my life on the line to do it. I will go through fire and water and I wouldn't balk at a thousand deaths," Shangguan Yun said.

Yang Lianting sat on a chair and let out a long sigh. "This old guy Tong Baixiong, he's always relied on Chief's kindheartedness. He regards himself highly and has always looked down on other people. In the last few years, he's been secretly plotting to rebel with some of his friends. I've seen clues of this for a long time already. Who would've thought that he becomes even more and more of an outlaw as days go by. He even went to collude with that sect rebel Ren Woxing; how absurd!"

"He actually went to... went to collude with that Ren?" Shangguan Yun's voice was trembling, it was obvious that he was greatly shocked.

"Elder Shangguan, why are you so afraid? That Ren Woxing doesn't have three heads and six arms. In the days gone by, Chief played him till he was doing everything that Chief asked him to. It was only because of Chief's kindness that he's still alive today. If he doesn't come to Dark Wood Cliff then it doesn't matter, but if he dares to come here, wouldn't it be just like slaughtering a chicken?"

"Yes, yes," Shangguan Yun agreeing with him. "But how did Tong Baixiong collude with him?"

Yang Lianting explained, "Tong Baixiong secretly met with Ren Woxing, and the two of them had a long chat for many hours. Another traitor of the sect was also there, Xiang Wentian. Someone saw them having the meeting. What could he be talking about with these two traitors for so long? It must've been a secret meeting to rebel against Chief. When Tong Baixiong returned to Dark Wood Cliff, I asked him whether this meeting happened. He actually admitted it!"

Shangguan Yun said, "He already admitted it then naturally he didn't do anything wrong."

Yang Lianting said, "I asked him why didn't he go and report to Chief after meeting Ren Woxing. He said: 'Brother Ren came to me to have a chat. He

regards me as a friend, I also regard him as a friend, why can't friends have a chat with each other?' I asked him: 'Ren Woxing has returned to Jianghu and he's intending to attack Chief. You already know about this point. Since he's not going to be polite to Chief, how can you still regard him as a friend?' His reply was even more ridiculous, damn him, this old chap actually said: 'I'm afraid it's Chief who's being impolite to other people, it's not necessarily other people who's being impolite to Chief!'"

"This old chap is talking nonsense! Chief's righteousness is as high as the sky and he treats his friends very generously, how can he be impolite to people? That naturally is being ungrateful to Chief." When Yang Lianting heard these words, of course he believed that the word 'Chief' was referring to Dongfang Bubai. But Shangguan Yun was actually praising Ren Woxing. Linghu Chong and party then heard him continue, "Since Subordinate has already vowed my loyalty and devotion to Chief, if I heard any daring rats to speak rudely about Chief, I would never let them go." These words were actually aimed to scold Yang Lianting, but how would he know? Yang Lianting laughed and said, "Very good, if all the brothers in the sect can be like Elder Shangguan and be very loyal to Chief, what else do we need to worry about? You've worked hard already, go down and take a rest."

Shangguan Yun was startled. "Subordinate would really like to meet Chief. Every time Subordinate sees Chief, I would feel greatly vigorous and would be able to do my duty with enthusiasm. It'd be as if I had cultivated my internal energy for ten years."

Yang Lianting tastelessly laughed and said, "Chief is very busy, I'm afraid he doesn't have time to see you."

Shangguan Yun put his hand into his bosom and when he took it out, there were more than ten pearls on his palm. He walked forward a few steps and whispered, "General Yang, when subordinate went on the mission this time, I managed to get these eighteen pearls. I'd like to give these as a present. I hope that General would let me see Chief. If Chief likes them, maybe he would promote me and then heap me with gifts."

Yang Lianting smiled falsely. "We're brothers, why do we need to be so polite? Thank you very much." Then he lowered his voice and said, "When I see Chief, I'll put in a good word for you and advise him to promote you to be the elder of the Green Dragon Hall."

Shangguan Yun bowed again and again. Then he said, "If I get promoted, Shangguan Yun would never forget Chief's and General's kindness."

Yang Lianting said, "Wait here till Chief is free, then he'll ask you to come in."

"Yes, yes, yes!" Shangguan Yun excitedly replied. He then closed his hand around the pearls and retreated a few steps. Yang Lianting stood up and in a grand manner went inside. After another long time, a purple-gowned servant came out. He stood erect and in a clear voice announced, "Refined scholar, kindhearted warrior, the just and wise Chief commands: Elder Shangguan Yun of White Tiger Hall, take the prisoner and enter."

Shangguan Yun said, "Thank you for Chief's grace. I wish Chief a long life and to unify the Jianghu." He then swung his left hand across asking the purple gown servant to lead the way. Ren Woxing, Xiang Wentian, and Yingying carried Linghu Chong behind them. As they walked in, the veranda above them was full of warriors armed with spears. They entered three iron gates and arrived at a long corridor whose sides were lined up by hundreds of warriors. Each of the warriors carried a long sabre in his hand and had crossed the sabres above their heads. Shangguan Yun and his party bent their waists and lowered their heads as they walked along the corridor. If any of these hundreds of sabres suddenly chopped down then they would surely lose their heads. Ren Woxing and Xiang Wentian had gone through more than a hundred battles and they wouldn't have even given these warriors a thought, but to be able to see Dongfang Bubai, they had to endure these insults first. They felt vehemence in their hearts. Linghu Chong thought, "Dongfang Bubai treats his subordinates so rudely. How can they remain loyal to him? His subordinates haven't rebelled yet only because they're afraid of him. But if Dongfang Bubai looks down on this people, how can he not be defeated?"

After they went through the sabre path, they arrived at a doorway covered by

a curtain. Shangguan Yun parted the curtain and went inside. Suddenly, flickering of lights was seen as eight spears were thrust at him from everywhere. Four spears were aimed at the front of his chest while the other four spears were aimed at the back of his body, the spears stopped inches from touching him. Linghu Chong immediately surmised the situation and thus extended his hand to grab the long sword stored underneath the bandage on his thigh. But he saw Shangguan Yun just standing there motionless while calling out clearly, “Elder Shangguan Yun from the White Tiger Hall is here to pay his respect to the refined scholar, kindhearted warrior, the just and wise Chief!”

Someone from inside the hall shouted, “Enter!”

The eight spearmen immediately retreated to form two lines on either side. Linghu Chong only then understood. Originally, when these eight spearmen stabbed out with their spears, they were just trying to frighten them. If the people coming into the hall had bad intentions, when they saw the eight spears being thrust towards them, they would immediately draw their weapons to fight back. Then the betrayal would’ve been exposed.

They entered a big hall and Linghu Chong thought, “What a long hall!” The width of the hall was only around thirty feet, but the depth of the hall was around three hundred feet. At the end of the hall, an old man with a long beard was seated. That person was Dongfang Bubai.

There was no window inside the hall, and only candles illuminated the inside of the hall. On both sides of Dongfang Bubai’s seat were two flickering oil lamps. At the distance they were at, they couldn’t see Dongfang Bubai’s appearance clearly. Shangguan Yun knelt at the bottom of the stairs and said clearly, “Chief is a refined scholar and kindhearted warrior; just and wise, flourishes the Divine Sect, and benefits the common people. Subordinate Elder Shangguan Yun of White Tiger Hall pays his respect to Chief.”

The purple-gowned servant standing besides Dongfang Bubai shouted, “How come your subordinates aren’t kneeling when paying their respects to Chief?”

Ren Woxing thought, “The moment hasn’t arrived yet. What’s the harm in

kneeling to you? Wait until I pull your muscle out and skin you alive.” At this thought, he immediately lowered his head and knelt down. When Xiang Wentian and Yingying saw him kneeling down, they also knelt down. Shangguan Yun said, “Subordinate’s men have always longed to see Chief. Today, Chief has finally bestowed us with this kindness. This is really a kindness that has favoured eighteen generations of their ancestors. Once they saw Chief, they were so pleased that they forgot to kneel down. Please forgive them.”

Yang Lianting was standing besides Dongfang Bubai. He said, “Report to Chief how Elder Jia died for the sect.”

Shangguan Yun replied, “Elder Jia and Subordinate were carrying out Chief’s order. In the last few years, we both have been promoted by Chief. This is a big kindness that’s hard to repay. So this time when Chief put this heavy responsibility on both of us, we both were feeling very vigorous. We felt that since Chief instructed us to do this, and also because of Chief’s foolproof plan, no matter who’s been assigned to capture Linghu Chong, they would never fail. Since Chief sent the two of us, we had no concern whatsoever...” Linghu Chong was lying on the stretcher and his mind was secretly scolding, “Disgusting, disgusting! Shangguan Yun’s nickname has the word ‘hero’ in it. But he can say this without his face turning red or his ears turning red, I didn’t know there’s such a shameless person in this world.”

At this moment, he heard someone shouting from behind them, “Brother Dongfang, was it really you who sent people to capture me?” This person’s voice sounded old but his inner energy was abundant. After he had spoken these words, the echo from his voice reverberated throughout the hall showing just how powerful he was. He guessed that this person was the Wind and Thunder Hall’s elder, Tong Baixiong.

Notes

[←1]

Ren Woxing means “go anywhere I wish” in Chinese.

[←2]

Jin-Jing is an acupoint.

[←3]

Dan-Tian is an acupoint, but is normally used to refer to the lower abdomen region where inner energy can be stored at.

[←4]

Catty is a unit of weight used in Southeast Asia, especially a Chinese measure equal to 500 grams (approximately 1.1 pounds).

[←5]

Dan-Zhong is an acupoint in the middle of one's chest by the Solar Plexus.

[←6]

Your granny is a swear word that this officer likes to use

[←7]

Shi Tai means a nun who is already old but it can also be a title to a nun who holds a high position in the temple. For lack of a better word in English, I'm leaving it as Shi Tai.

[←8]

DongFang BiBai means DongFang is defeated, whereas his original name
DongFang BuBai means DongFang undefeated

[←9]

Play of words on her name

[←10]

A" bucket of rice" means good for nothing

[←11]

It's bad luck for someone to jump over your head

[←12]

"Ma Ge Guo Shi" is a phrase that means "to die in the battlefield". When this is translated literally, it means "corpse wrapped in horse's skin". But what Linghu Chong said "Ma Ge Li Shi" has no meaning. He deliberately replaced the word "Guo" with "Li".

[←13]

He's telling Dingjing Shi Tai which characters his name "Tiande" use.

[←14]

This means that she'll be easy pickings

[←15]

Ren Woxing: the Wo in his name mean I, Ren Nixing: the Ni in this name means You.

[←16]

This is a 3rd edition addition. added from Athena's post.

[←17]

The words in Chinese are rearranged to come up with the second interpretation.

[←18]

Gao Kexin said "Dong Xi" which literally means "east west". But these two words together means "object".

[←19]

: A visit box is a wooden box containing the visitor's calling card which is given to the host's servants at the gate to be presented to the host.

[←20]

Dragon Spring or Longquan in Chinese is the name of a city in the Zhejiang province. Near that city is a valley that has creeks running through it that were used by Ou Yezi to forge some legendary swords. That valley is called Dragon Spring Sword-forging Valley. If you'd like to find out more, look at "Legend of the White Hair Demoness" chapter 11 translation by Fairie Queene.)

[←21]

Blood letter is a letter written in blood

[←22]

The word “gentleman” consists of two Chinese characters. By adding an extra character in front of it, it becomes the word “hypocrite”. That’s the connection between these two words

[←23]

Peeling Leather means to kill people

[←24]

Flood Dragon is a mythical creature capable of invoking storm and flood.

[←25]

"Like thunder entering the ears" is an idiom that means "have long resounded in my ears"

[←26]

Stinking ugly in Chinese contains the character "eight" in the phrase. But it doesn't translate well in English here with the joke.

[←27]

Some Chinese lessons to understand the next part. For this case, the Chief here is called "meng zhu" (盟主). Meng means alliance (盟); Zhu means lord/master (主). The character "meng" consists of two characters "ming" (明) on top and "min" (皿) at the bottom. Ming means clear/bright; Min means shallow container.

Now, when a downwards-left curved character stroke called "pie" is added to the character "min" (皿), then it becomes "xue" (血). Xue means blood.

[←28]

Peachtree Trunk Fairy misheard the pronunciation so he thought
Peachtree Branch Fairy said "Less a bit" and not "Less a "pie""

[←29]

This is still play on words in Chinese

[←30]

This means to fortify the defence works and to leave nothing usable to the invading enemy.

[←31]

Shi zhu is a term of address used by monks or nuns referring to a believer in Buddhism.

[←32]

Ren Woxing's name means "To do what I please". He's saying Nixing which means "To do what you want me to do"

[←33]

I took part of this translation from Athena's post on 3rd edition changes in SPW

[←34]

A Chinese idiom which literally has the meaning 'Oil Mouth Slippery Tongue' means 'Sweet talk without being sincere'. The joke on the oil is connected to this.

[←35]

This saying means 'would rather have a low but independent position than hold a high position under the control of others'

[←36]

On this tablet is usually written the name of the deceased and his/her title.

[←37]

Red pocket is a red coloured paper bag that contains money. Usually the elders give this to youngsters. But as soon as you're married, then you're counted as one of the elders and are expected to give out red pockets during the New Year. http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_e...ntent_43896.htm has a paper cut example.

[←38]

Breaking the ground means to start a building project

In the third edition, this person was changed to Ding Mian. This is from Athena's post on this change: Ding Mian (martial arts brother of Zuo Lengchan) is the one who leads a group of people to prevent Linghu Chong from assuming leadership of the Northern Hengshan School. In the previous editions this was Yue Hou (Great Yin and Yang Palms). Yue Hou was a rather decent chap, so I think this change was to retain the image of him being a rather decent bloke. Ding Mian is famous for being a butcher, so humiliating him was not such a big deal.

[←40]

Long live literal translation from Chinese is 'Thousand Year Ten Thousand Years'.