金庸

36 作品集

鹿鼎記

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This is a fan translation of Jin Yong's last book, The Deer and the Cauldron (Lu Ding Ji). In translating this story, I am making a conscious effort to stick as close as possible to theoriginal Chinese text (even more so that my previous works), for two reasons:

1. To distance this work as far as possible from existing work,
2. To save time, since I do not have to think too much about the proper English equivalent of the words.

Therefore, the names, titles, and especially curse words (which, surprisingly, Jin Yong used a lot in this book) are kept in their original forms, or translated literally. Those of you who are used to Hollywood-style cussing may find it sounds a bit strange. The only exception is 'tamade' [他妈的], which I translate as 'damn it'. I even keep the units of measurement in their original form, with modern day equivalent in footnote. For the same reason, I apologize for grammatically-inaccurate and other sounds-rather-strange sentences.

WARNING: This story is for mature audience for violence, rape and foul language.

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Appendix

Afterword

Chapter 41

Yuyang instigation sends drunkenness toward the heavens, excessive supervision with poor planning will bring regret too late.

(Translated by Foxs)

Suddenly He Tishou stretched out her left hand to grab the back of Wei Xiaobao's neck and lifted him up to the left, and then 'zip, zip, zip!', three candles on the table were extinguished immediately, followed by a series of dull thuds on the wooden partition on the opposite site, like the resounding patter of rain on wooden board.

The next day Wei Xiaobao led his companions, the troops and horses, with Wu Zhirong and Mao Dongzhu in custody, leaving Yangzhou heading for the Capital. Kangxi's imperial edict to summon him back was very urgent, the party did not dare to tarry too long when they lodged for the night, inevitably they had to skip quite a bit of opportunity to invite wealth by accepting bribes along the way. The news on the street was that after Wu Sangui started deploying his troops, Yunnan's *Tidu* [local commander] Zhang Guogui, Guizhou's *Xunfu* [inspector-general] Cao Shenji and *Tidu* Li Benshen had surrendered, while Yunnan's *Xunfu* Zhu Guozhi was killed, and Yunnan and Guizhou *Zongdu* [governor general] Gan Wenkun committed suicide.

One day they arrived in Shandong. The local official grabbed the imperial bulletin and presented it to the Imperial Envoy Minister. It was an edict in which Kangxi denounced Wu Sangui. Wei Xiaobao summoned the secretary to read it for him. The secretary held the imperial edict with both hands and read aloud, "Rebel thief Wu Sangui desperately trying to gain authority. Remembering his surrender, my ancestors Emperor Zhang awarded him the troops and conferred the nobility title 'Wang' [king], as he bound himself to our mountains and rivers. With his pledge of allegiance he earned the cap (of officialdom), the esteemed hereditary office, with favor bestowed to him on top of everything: wide open space of Yunnan and the south, and whole-hearted responsibility to rely on. By *Zhen*'s time, distinguished and grand favors have been repeatedly granted, his rise through nobility has brought him the title *Qinwang* [prince], the country has heavily relied on him to manage the cities, indeed he was the backbone of the country. Special favor superior gift, resonating throughout the world with no precedence since the ancient times."

Listening to the secretary's reading, Wei Xiaobao nodded his head continuously; he said, "Indeed His Majesty treated this rebel thief very well, it was not an exaggeration at all. Take me, Wei Xiaobao, for example, I am completely loyal and devoted to the Emperor, yet I am given no more than the title *Bojue* [earl]. If I want to reach *Qinwang*, the road I have to take is still missing a large chunk."

The secretary continued reading, "How it surprised me that Wu Sangui's nature is poor and odd, in his bosom there is spying and cheating heart, he is

pampering pride and scheming to go against the law. Just in the seventh month of this year, he himself was asking to be removed from his post. Depending on Wu Sangui's sincerity, and remembering the years his strength is waning, and that master and disciples have been in garrison for a long time, *Zhen* has granted his request and ordered him to rest. Therefore, the placement minister was assigned to prepare a place for him, and special minister was dispatched to announce the content of *Zhen*'s heart. It could be said that *Zhen* had profound sentiment toward Wu Sangui, no more, no less. Reviewing Chuan Hu[1] *Zongdu* Cai Yurong and the others' memorial: Wu Sangui is on his path to rebel; after the kindness of the imperial court to bear the burden of looking after his needs, he is showing off his power, sowing violence and rebellion, blotting out and burning the living beings, reasons and laws cannot contain, hated by both man and god."

For each sentence that he heard, Wei Xiaobao uttered a sentence of praise, "His Majesty is magnanimous; he did not curse Wu Sangui's granny, it can be considered very polite."

Zhang Yong, Zhao Liangdong, Wang Jinbao, Sun Sike, as well as Li Lishi and the others were listening on the side. They all thought, "The imperial edict only says that the Emperor's treatment to him cannot be better, while reprimanding Wu Sangui for forgetting favor and violate justice; it did not mention even half a sentence of Manchu-Han relation, as well as how he murdered Ming Dynasty's royal family, it's extremely brilliant, so that the world only feel that Wu Sangui's rebellion is something that he should not have done."

The secretary continued reading, "The imperial edict urges and instructs local official and the people not to associate with the rebels. If by mistake they already join the thieves, as long as the conviction to turn back is sincere, they will not have to be investigated, their relatives who live in the provinces where the local officials live will not be charged with guilt by association, they will not be doubted. The edict also states: 'Whoever is able to capture Wu Sangui and present him to the army will be granted his nobility title promptly; whoever is able to capture or put the rebel leaders under his command to death, as well as take back the troops, horses, and the cities, will enjoy preferential treatment upon evaluation of his merit. *Zhen* will not go back on my word.'"

Hearing the secretary read, 'His Majesty promises that whoever is able to

capture Wu Sangui and present him to the army, His Majesty will make him Ping Xi *Qinwang'*, Wei Xiaobao could not help to have an itch in his heart that was difficult to scratch. He turned his head around to Li Lishi and the others and said, "Let's go catch Wu Sangui, then we can be Ping Xi *Qinwang*; it will be very interesting." Everybody voiced their agreement.

Zhang Yong and the other military generals thought, "Wu Sangui's troops numerous, his generals many; catching him is easier said than done."

Li Lishi and the others thought, "We want to kill Wu Sangui because he overthrew Han people's rivers and mountains, do you think that we want to strive for the sake of Tatar Emperor? But if Wei *Xiangzhu* can be Ping Xi *Qinwang* and lead troops in Yunnan, he can rise in rebellion again; it won't be too bad."

Finished listening to the imperial edict, Wei Xiaobao ordered immediate departure, he wanted to reach Beijing as soon as possible, he wanted to be sent to the battlefield, so that he would be the first to capture Wu Sangui and snatch the nobility title Ping Xi *Qinwang*.

One day they arrived at Xianghe [county, Langfang, Hebei], which was not far from the Capital. Wei Xiaobao commanded Zhang Yong, leading a large number of troops, to wait here and closely guard offender to the throne Mao Dongzhu, while he and Shuang'er and Tian Di Hui warriors, with Wu Zhirong in custody, turned southwest toward the big house of the Zhuang Family. He wanted to personally deliver Wu Zhirong to the Third Mistress to repay her generous gift of Shuang'er, such a good servant girl.

By that evening they arrived at a small town about twenty *li* away from the Zhuang Family's big house. The party stopped at a restaurant to eat dinner. All of them have changed into civilian clothes. They sealed Wu Zhirong's mute acupoint, as well as several acupoints on his body, but did not bind him to avoid drawing other people's attention. They all sat around two wooden tables. Nobody wanted to sit at the same table with Wu Zhirong. Shuang'er was afraid that he might run away, she was the only one who was willing to sit at his table, to keep a close watch on him.

The food was delivered. Everybody was eating when a dozen or so soldiers entered the inn, led by a *Shoubei* [captain]. Outside the inn, the horses were

neighing continuously, two ordinary soldiers fetched water and fed the horses. A *Bazong* [squad leader] shouted loudly, ordering the innkeeper to quickly kill the chicken and prepare a meal, saying that they were in urgent official business and wanted to reach the Capital as soon as possible to report. The innkeeper said 'yes, yes' repeatedly, while urging the waiters to wait upon the *guanlaoye* [master government official]. He personally wiped the captain's table and chair.

The soldiers had just sat down, from the mouth of the town came the sound of cartwheel and hoof beats. The carriage and horses stopped in front of the inn, several people entered the restaurant. At the front were two big muscular men; the third was a middle-age man with the appearance of a tuberculosis ghost, short and thin, his cheeks were deep and hollow, his cheekbones high, his complexion wax-yellow, without any trace of even half a part of blood, there was a faint darkness surrounding his appearance, every few steps he coughed a bit.

Behind him were an old man and old woman walking side by side, they both appeared to be over eighty years old. The old man was also short and thin, but he looked spirited and full of life, his white beard floated in front of his chest, his face was ruddy. The old woman was slightly taller than the old man, her waist and back was straight, her eyes were bright and full of expression. At the rear were two twenty-something women.

Looking at the way these seven people dressed, the sick looking man's clothes was luxurious, he appeared to be a landlord from a very wealthy family. The two men and two women were menservants and maidservants. The old man and old woman dressed in dark green robes, the material was very coarse, but very clean. It was unclear what their status was.

The old woman said, "Zhang Ma [nurse Zhang], get a bowl of hot water, help *Shaoye* [young master] taking his medication."

One of the maidservants complied; she took out a china bowl from her basket, lifted up the copper kettle in the inn, and poured the hot water into the china bowl. She shook the bowl several times before throwing the water away, and then she poured half a bowl of hot water, and set it down in front of the sickly man.

The old women took out a porcelain bottle from her bosom, pulled the cork

out, and tipped out a red pill, which she brought to the sickly man's mouth. The sickly man opened his mouth and held the pill on his tongue. Picking up the water bowl he drank it to swallow the pill. After taking the pill, the sickly man panted endlessly, while also coughing nonstop.

The old man and the old woman fixed their gaze at the sickly man, their expression showed concern, but they also looked worried. After seeing his breathing slowing down and his coughing stopped they heaved a deep sigh. The sickly man frowned and said, "Dad, Ma, why are you always worried about me? I won't die."

"Humph," the old man snorted, and turned his head away. The old woman laughed and said, "What are you talking about, dead or alive? My child will live to be a hundred years old."

Wei Xiaobao mused, "Even if this fellow took the Jade Emperor's miracle pill, he won't last a few days. Turns out this old man and the old woman are his parents. This tuberculosis ghost is spoiled by his parents since he was little, his dad and mom only looked at him a bit more, his temper flared."

The old woman said, "Zhang Ma, Sun Ma, go warm *Shaoye*'s ginseng soup, and then cook the meal." The two maidservants complied. Each woman carried a basket as they walked toward the rear of the inn.

The captain inquired about the way to Beijing from the innkeeper. The innkeeper said, "Gentlemen may continue your journey twenty, thirty more *li* today, and stop-by for the night in the small town ahead. Tomorrow you may leave early in the morning, you should reach the Capital by the afternoon."

"We have to continue over night," the captain said, "No time to stay in any inn. Innkeeper, within a year from today, I guarantee your business will flourish. You'd better prepare some good food, good wine, so that when the moment comes you won't be caught in confusion."

The innkeeper laughed and said, "*Laoye* [old master] said it well. Small inns' business is always ordinary. Business like today seldom comes by, usually only a few days in a month; it is because *Laoye* and other guests are showing consideration, how can I expect to have a lot of guests honoring us with your presence every day?"

The captain laughed and said, “Innkeeper, let me tell you something: Wu Sangui is rebelling, right now he has reached Hunan. We are hastening to the Capital to deliver military document. Once the big battle breaks out, at least it will take three to five years to defeat him. The troops who send reports of military intelligence every day will pass this place, hereafter you will gain wealth.”

The innkeeper repeatedly expressed his thanks, but in his heart he was grumbling incessantly, “Soldiers like you, what good business is there to make? You’ll eat and drink as much as you like, if you are generous at most you’ll give tips of a few *qian*. After ferociously beat and curse people, you’ll pat your buttocks and leave. Forget three to five years, in just half a year or a year, I will have to hang myself.”

Hearing that Wu Sangui had reached Hunan, Wei Xiaobao, Li Lishi and the others were shocked. “That servant moves very fast,” they thought.

In a low voice Qian Laoben said, “I ask?” Wei Xiaobao nodded. Qian Laoben walked over to the Captain and with a face full of smile he cupped his fist and said, “Just now I heard *Jiangjun* [General] *Daren* said that Wu Sangui has attacked Hunan. *Xiaoren*’s wife and children are actually in Changsha [prefecture, capital of Hunan]; I am very concerned. I wonder how is the situation over there? Is Changsha still safe?”

Being called a ‘general’, the captain was delighted; he said, “Whether Changsha is safe or not, I do not know. Wu Sangui dispatched his subordinate great general Ma Bao from Guizhou to attack Hunan; Yuanzhou has fallen, *Zongbing* Cui Shilu was taken prisoner. Wu Sangui’s subordinates Zhang Guozhu, Gong Yinglin, and Xia Guoxiang separately attacked to the east. Another great general Wang Bingfan went out to attack Sichuan; I heard his troops are very powerful. People of Sichuan and Hunan region are fleeing.”

Qian Laoben showed great concern on his face, “This … this is far from good,” he said, “But the Great Qing’s troops are very formidable, Wu Sangui won’t necessarily win, will he?”

The captain replied, “At first, everybody said so; but after Yuanzhou fell, we knew Wu Sangui’s troops and horses are not easy to resist. Ay, the situation is

very difficult to say."

Qian Laoben cupped his fist and returned to his seat. Some Tian Di Hui warriors thought, "We must not let this big traitor Wu Sangui becomes the Emperor." Some other thought, "It would be best to let Wu Sangui attacked Beijing, let him fight with Manchurian Qing Tatars until both sides suffer."

The soldiers ate and drank in a hurry. The captain stood up and said, "Innkeeper, I deliver to you good news, you should just invite us as your guests."

The innkeeper bowed and said with a forced laugh, "Yes, yes. I should, I should. Gentlemen, *Daren*, please take care."

The captain laughed and said, "Slow down? Then we should sit down and eat again." With an awkward expression, the innkeeper could only force a smile. [Translator's note: in Chinese, 'man zou' (lit. walk slowly) could also mean 'take care' or 'wait a minute'.]

The captain walked toward the door. When he was passing the old man, the old woman, and the sickly man's table, suddenly the sickly man reached out and grabbed his chest. "You are going to Beijing to deliver what document?" he asked, "Take it out, let me look."

The captain's body was thick and solid, but grabbed by this sickly man, he immediately buckled, his body shortened by one section. "Damn it," he angrily shouted, "What are you doing?" He struggled hard until his face was bulging red, but was unable to move a single step.

'Rip!' the sickly man's right hand tore the front piece of the captain's clothes by his chest and took out a large envelope. The sickly man pushed lightly with his left hand, the captain was thrown out, and crashed onto two tables, turning everything upside down. 'Bing, bing, bang, bang!' bowls and plates fell to the floor and broke into pieces.

The rest of the troops shouted, "Rebellion, rebellion!" One after another they pulled their spears and sabers and pounced on the sickly man. The sickly man's two menservants raised their fists and legs, punching and kicking, throwing down the soldiers. In an instant the soldiers were sprawled over the inn's floor.

The sickly man tore the envelope open, removed the document and read it.

The captain was scared out of his wits; in trembling voice he shouted, “That is a memorial to the Emperor; you … you dare to tear up the document, this … this … isn’t this rebellion?”

The sickly man read the document and said, “Hunan *Xunfu* is asking Tatar Emperor to send reinforcement to fight Ping Xi Wang. Humph, even if he sent a million troops, they will still … (cough, cough) … they will still be wiped out by Ping Xi Wang clean.” While speaking, he crumpled the document in his hand, pressed it into the hollow of his palm, and by the time he finished speaking, he spread out his palm and waved it in the air, countless pieces of paper fluttered like butterflies flying in the wind, scattered in all directions.

Seeing this kind of internal energy, the Tian Di Hui warriors’ countenance changed; they all thought, “From the tone of his voice, he seems to be Wu Sangui’s subordinate.”

The captain struggled to crawl up. Pulling the saber hanging on his waist he said, “You destroyed the document, *Laozi* cannot live anyway, I will fight you to the death!” Raising his saber he leaped forward and hacked it down with all his might to the top of the sickly man’s head. The sickly man stayed sitting, he merely raised his left hand and pushed slightly on the captain’s lower abdomen, as if he did not want him to cause trouble. Suddenly the captain’s arm that was holding the saber slowly drooped down, his body slowly slumped down until he sat on the floor. He opened his mouth wide to gasp for breath, but found out that he could not breathe.

Some of the overthrown soldiers crawled up, but they all stood far away. They shouted curses, but were powerless to anything. Nobody dared to step forward to help their superior.

Holding a bowl of hot soup with both hands, a maid carefully set it down in front of the sickly man; she said, “*Shaoye*, please take the ginseng soup.”

The old man and the old woman acted as if they were completely oblivious of the commotion happening around them; they did not pay the slightest bit of attention, their gaze was fixed on their son’s expression.

Xu Tianchuan said in a low voice, “These people are quite demonic, let us leave.” Gao Yanchao paid for the food and drink, and then they all quietly walked

out the door. They saw the old woman held the ginseng bowl; she gently blew the steam and brought the bowl to the sickly man's mouth to feed him the soup.

It was not until Wei Xiaobao and the others reached the outskirt of the small town did they break into discussion as the affiliation of the sickly man. Xu Tianchuan said, "That man ripped the officer's clothes, his strength is that formidable, it's really … really rare."

Priest Xuanzhen said, "He only pushed the officer's lower abdomen lightly, it appeared very sloppy and ordinary, but to evade or block that move is really not easy. Feng *Xiongdi*, what do you think?"

Feng Jizhong said, "Should not go near him three *chi* [foot]."

The warriors thought about it, and agreed that it made sense; it doesn't matter if they wanted to dodge or to block, they could only do it if they were tree feet away from him, if they were too close, they would not be able to evade or to block. Xu Tianchuan suddenly said, "If I grabbed his wrist …" but before finishing it, he shook his head, knowing that the opponent's internal energy was too strong; even if he managed to grab his wrist, as soon as the man flipped his palm and twisted, it would be highly likely that his finger bones, his wrist bones, would all be broken.

Everybody understood that the sickly man was on Wu Sangui's side, but after seeing him violently injured people, nobody dared to make a move to stop him. Although the people he injured were Tatar military officers, in the end, it was not their habit as chivalrous heroes not to do anything. In their hearts they were quite ashamed, inevitably their mood was dampened; after talking for a while, no one was interested to discuss it any longer.

After traveling for several *li*, suddenly they heard hoof beats from behind, two riders galloped fast. The road they were traveling on was a small path leading to the Zhuang Family's big house, it was not wide enough for two riders to ride side by side. The warriors were not in a good mood, although they heard the urgency of the hoof beats, other than Feng Jizhong and Shuang'er who reined their horses and stepped toward the side of the path, nobody else was willing to give way.

In a flash the two riders had reached their backs. The warriors turned their

heads together, and saw that the two riders were unexpectedly the menservants of the sickly man. One of the menservants called out, “Our family’s *Shaoye* is asking gentlemen to wait a moment, he has something to ask gentlemen.”

Although it was not rude, the feeling of condescending could not be clearer. When the warriors heard it, they were all indignant. Priest Xuanzhen shouted, “We are busy, no time to wait. We are strangers, what do you want to ask?”

The servant replied, “It’s our family’s *Shaoye*’s order, it would be better if gentlemen wait, so that everybody won’t be inconvenienced.” This time the threat was obvious.

Qian Laoben said, “Is your master Wu Sangui’s subordinate?”

“Pei!” the servant spat, “What do you think my master’s status is? How can he be Ping Xi Wang’s subordinate?”

The warriors thought, “He did not say ‘Wu Sangui’, but addressed him as ‘Ping Xi Wang’; they must have some relation with that traitor Wu.”

Right this moment, they heard the sound of carriage wheels, a large carriage quickly caught up with them. The servant said, “Our master has arrived.” Turning his horse around, he rode back to welcome the carriage.

If this moment the warriors dismounted their horses and walked over, it would appear that they were afraid of the sickly man; thereupon they stayed on horseback, waiting.

The carriage approached fast, one of the maidservants drove the carriage, the other maid raised the carriage curtain, and they saw the sickly man was sitting right in the middle, his father and mother sat in front and behind him. The sickly man stared at the warriors and asked, “Why did you seal this man’s acupoint?” While saying that he pointed to Wu Zhirong, and then he asked again, “Who are you? Where are you going?” His voice sharp, his tone very arrogant.

Priest Xuanzhen said, “And what is Sire’s honored surname and great name? We are total strangers, river water does not interfere with well water, why are you meddling in other people’s business?”

“Humph,” the sickly man snorted, “You are not fit to ask my name and surname. Just now I asked you two questions, didn’t you hear? Why you did not

answer?”

Priest Xuanzhen angrily said, “I am not fit to ask your name and surname, you are not fit to ask our business either. Wu Sangui started a rebellion, he is a great traitor, you kept calling him Ping Xi Wang, you must be of the same group as this traitor. I can see that Sire’s disease has already attack your vital organs, you had better go home as soon as possible so that you can die in your own bed; otherwise you’ll catch cold and cough, and will breathe your last.”

Amid the Tian Di Hui warriors’ hearty laughter, suddenly a shadow flashed, ‘Slap!’ Priest Xuanzhen’s left cheek was heavily hit by a palm, followed by another palm strike on the left side of his torso that he was thrown down from his horse. These two palm strikes were fast and nimble beyond belief; it was not until he fell to the ground did the warriors see clearly that the one making the move was the old woman. After knocking down Priest Xuanzhen with two palm strikes, she kicked the ground with both feet, and flew back into the carriage.

The warriors broke into a clamor and pounced toward the large carriage. The sickly man grabbed the maid’s, who was driving the carriage, back, lightly lifted her up, and swiftly swapped places with her; he tossed the maid into the carriage and took her seat as the carriage driver. Right this moment Qian Laoben happened to leap with both palms striking down. The sickly man sent out a left punch to meet his palms, surprisingly it was totally silent. Qian Laoben only felt a gust of powerful force rushing toward him, throwing him somersaulting backward twice in the air. As he landed on the ground, he tried to steady his legs, but suddenly felt his knees were without strength and felt that he was about to kneel down. In his shock he hastily struggled to throw himself backward so that he fell face up, hence he avoid being disgraced by kneeling in front of the enemy.

Qian Laoben had just fallen down, Feng Jizhong pounced; the sickly man sent out another punch. Feng Jizhong did not dare to meet the punch head-on, his right palm changed direction midway, suddenly it chopped down on the sickly man’s neck. “Ah!” the man exclaimed, as if he was surprised by the opponent’s superb martial art. His thumb hooked on his middle finger, and he flicked at the hollow of Feng Jizhong’s palm. Feng Jizhong quickly pulled back his palm, his right foot stepped on the mule’s back.

Gao Yanchao and Fan Gang separately attacked the two menservants. The two menservants leaped away from the horseback, “Let *Shaoye* deal with you,” they called out.

Gao and Fan, two people were actually thinking that by fighting the opponent’s menservants they were having an unfair advantage; seeing the two menservants withdrew, which was in agreement with their original thought anyway, they turned around at once and leaped together to attack the sickly man’s left flank.

Suddenly the mule let out a long neigh and limply dropped down to the ground, pulling the large carriage along that it leaned to one side. Turned out when Feng Jizhong stepped on the mule’s back, he secretly exerted his internal energy to his sole that as soon as he kicked, the mule’s backbone broke.

The sickly man’s feet did not seem to leap, his body did not seem to move, but amid his coughing sound he was already standing on the ground. The old man and the old woman in the carriage, each carrying a maid, also leaped out of the carriage. These three people’s movement did not seem too fast, yet they were out of the carriage before the large carriage began to topple.

Qian Laoben and Xu Tianchuan attacked the old man and the old woman. The old woman shook her left hand, while with her right hand she pointed toward the sickly man. “Go over there,” she said with a laugh, “Accompany my child playing.” Her meaning was clear; she wanted these two men to suffer her son’s punches to make him happy.

Xu Tianchuan’s right fist shot down on the top of the old man’s head; it’s just that because he saw the old man was really old, although he knew the old man’s martial art skill was not weak, Xu Tianchuan was afraid he might kill him with one punch, thereupon he shouted, “Watch the fist!” He only used 30% of his strength in this punch. Ever since he accidentally killed Bai Hansong and thus created quite a few of trouble with the Mu Palace, he had been very cautious.

The old man stretched out his hand to catch Xu Tianchuan’s fist. This old man was thin and short, unexpectedly his palm was unusually big; as he squeezed Xu Tianchuan’s fist, he said, “Go over there to play!” Although Xu Tianchuan was considerably younger than the old man, he was, after all, a white-haired old

man; yet the way the old man talked to him was like he was addressing an urchin.

Xu Tianchuan exerted his strength to pull his right hand back, while with his left fist he sent out another punch. It was the move ‘Azure Dragon White Tiger’, a complementary style, in which the left punch was not really intended to strike the opponent, it was only to force the opponent to relinquish his grip; however, if the opponent did not want to let go, this punch would strike the bridge of his nose.

The old man spread his arms while letting go of his grip. Xu Tianchuan only felt a blast of muddy, thick and extremely strong force pushing him away; coupled with his own strength, his left fist punching forward and his right hand pulling back, his body whirled around like a spinning top, straight toward the sickly man.

The sickly man was fighting Feng Jizhong, Gao Yanchao, Fan Gang and Li Lishi; seeing the incoming Xu Tianchuan, he clapped his hands and said with a laugh, “It’s fun, it’s fun!” The four men’s punches and kicks rained down on him like storm, unexpectedly he still had time to clap and cheer; followed by reaching out to push. Xu Tianchuan changed direction; at first he was turning right, but now he was turning left, spinning at great speed toward the old man.

“Dad,” the sickly man said with a laugh, “It’s very fun, send this spinning top back to me!”

Xuanzhen did everything he can to attack. The sickly man casually push and pull, push and pull, unexpectedly he also turned Xuanzhen, Gao Yanchao, Fan Gang, and Li Lishi, four men into spinning tops. Only Feng Jizhong was not spinning, but he felt the *chi* and blood in the pit of his stomach were bubbling up in his chest; hastily he leaped three steps back with his palms as a shield in front of his body.

Five Tian Di Hui warriors were spinning incessantly; they wanted to exert their strength to stop spinning, but no matter what they do, they were unable to stop. When one of them was slowing down, the sickly man would leap and push and pull, immediately he would spin faster again. It was like a child playing with copper coins on the table; he spun five coins like tops, whichever was slowing down and was about to fall, the child would use his fingers to flick it so that the

coin would continue spinning.

Watching all this, Wei Xiaobao was stunned; he was completely horrified. Shuang'er stood in front of him, trying to protect him while she herself was very scared and on edge. Wei Xiaobao said in a low voice, "We must execute the thirty-sixth stance." [i.e. run away]

"Quickly go to the Zhuang house," Shuang'er replied.

"Right," Wei Xiaobao said, "Once we reach the Zhuang house, great luck, great profit. As the banker we can eat the leg vise, and make big killing on the three directions[2]." He turned around and ran. Pulling Wu Zhirong along, Shuang'er ran after him.

The sickly man was having so much fun playing spinning tops, the old couple watched their son with smile on their face. The four menservants and maidservants were clapping and cheering while standing on the side, watching their young master having fun.

Seeing Feng Jizhong was standing firm on horse stance, his left palm high, right palm low, in the style 'Ancient Pine Standing Up Strong', the sickly man immediately stepped forward and stretched out his hand to push Feng Jizhong's right shoulder. Feng Jizhong pulled his right foot one step, hence his shoulder also leaned sideways to evade the push, but he did not dare to strike back with his palm.

The sickly man angrily said, "You are a bad man, you don't want to spin around?" Stretching out his hand again, he tried to push Feng Jizhong's right shoulder.

Feng Jizhong withdrew another step; to his surprise a burst of strong force came pushing the back of his left shoulder, immediately he lost his balance and amidst the sickly man's loud laughter his body started to spin in great speed. He wanted to use 'thousand-catty drop' to stop, but the sickly man gave him another strong push at the back of his waist that he continued spinning.

Seeing the sickly man was giving his opponents trouble, Wu Zhirong realized a good opportunity has presented itself; thereupon after walking a few steps he pretended to trip and fall to the ground. Shuang'er pulled him up, but he was

unwilling to get up. Wei Xiaobao was greatly anxious; afraid that Wu Zhirong would tell the enemy the truth, he grabbed his lower jaw and pinched as hard as he could so that Wu Zhirong opened his mouth. Wei Xiaobao pulled the dagger from his boot and swiped it in Wu Zhirong's mouth, cutting most part of his tongue. Wu Zhirong fainted from the pain.

Shuang'er thought Wei Xiaobao had killed the traitor. "Xianggong," she called out, "Hurry up!" The two of them dashed forward.

They had only run for less than a *li* when they heard the sound of hoof beats from behind, someone was pursuing them on horseback. Wei Xiaobao pointed to the rocky ridge to the left, the two of them left the path and scrambled over the pile of rocks. Riding on horses, the sickly man and one of his menservants soon caught up with them. Seeing the horses could not enter the rocky ridge, the servant jumped down the horse and called out, "Two children don't be afraid. Our family's *Shaoye* wants you to play with him. Come back quickly!"

Wei Xiaobao said, "To be a spinning top, *laozi* don't want to do." He ran even faster. The servant chased into the rocky ridge, but Wei Xiaobao and Shuang'er were able to run very fast, the servant was unable to catch up with them.

The sickly man called out, "Do you want to play hide-and-seek? It's fun, it's fun!" He dismounted; while coughing incessantly, he cut them off from the south.

Wei Xiaobao and Shuang'er turned and ran toward the northeast, rushing straight toward the servant. The servant pounced to catch Wei Xiaobao. Wei Xiaobao used the moved 'Shen Xing Bai Bian' [divine walk hundred changes] taught by Jiu Nan; he leaned sideways, the servant landed on empty space.

Shuang'er sent a backhand palm strike toward the servant's lower back. Seeing she was only a little girl, the servant did not take her seriously at all, unexpectedly he did not even try to parry but stretched out his arm to twist her right arm instead. Shuang'er swiftly pulled her right palm back, 'Crack!' the edge of her palm hit his lower back. "Ah!" the servant cried out in pain. Right this moment, Shuang'er already grabbed his right wrist and twisted it backward. Another 'Crack!' ensued, his elbow joint was dislocated.

"Eh?" the sickly man exclaimed in surprise. Jumping from rock to rock, just in a

few ups and downs he had landed in front of Shuang'er. With a sweep of his left hand he knocked the hat on Shuang'er's head that her head-full of fine hair came loose. The sickly man laughed and said, "It's a girl!" He reached out to grab her hair.

"Ah!" Shuang'er screamed; with the move 'a pair of dragon return' both her elbows struck backward. The sickly man laughed and said, "Good!" His left hand swept from left to right and grabbed both her fists, pulled the fists behind her back, and then with his right hand he pulled her long hair and coiled it twice around her wrists and tied it into a knot, while laughing aloud.

Shuang'er was so anxious that she cried. "Xianggong," she called out, "Quickly run, quickly run!"

The sickly man stretched out his finger to jab lightly on her waist to seal her acupoint. "He won't run away," he said with a laugh. Tossing Shuang'er down, he ran after Wei Xiaobao, and in just a short time managed to get near him.

Wei Xiaobao fled to the east and ran to the west among the rocks, several times the sickly man almost caught him, but in the last moment Wei Xiaobao managed to evade using the 'Shen Xing Bai Bian' skill. The sickly man laughed and said, "Your ability in playing hide-and-seek is very good." [Translator's note: I know it should be 'playing tag', but the original was 捉迷藏, which the dictionary defines as 'hide-and-seek'.]

Wei Xiaobao's internal strength was lacking, after running around for a while, he was already gasping for breath. Knowing that in a short while he would be caught, he called out, "You can't catch me, now it's my turn to catch you. Quickly run, I am going to catch you." While saying that, he turned around and pounced on the sickly man.

The sickly man giggled, and surprisingly enough he did turn around and run around the piles of rocks. Wei Xiaobao had already figured out that although his martial art skill was superior, his conduct was silly like an imbecile; his age must be over forty, but his behavior was like that of a child. Yet he was able to move back and forth among the rocks swiftly; Wei Xiaobao had just seen him on the east, in a flash his shadow suddenly appeared on the west; his lightning speed movement was indeed like a ghost.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly astonished, but also full of admiration. “I will definitely catch you,” he called out, “You won’t be able to escape!” Pretending to run after him, he rushed toward Shuang’er, picked her up, and called loudly, “Hey, even by carrying a person I will catch you.”

The sickly man roared in laughter, “Toot, toot, toot, you are blowing your conch, (cough, cough) … tweet, tweet, tweet, you are blowing your cowhide!” [Both mean: tooting your horn.] Carrying Shuang’er in his bosom, Wei Xiaobao pretended to run after the sickly man, but he ran farther and farther away.

The sickly man called out, “Useless little thing, you can’t catch me … (cough, cough) …” and ran a few steps closer to Wei Xiaobao.

Wei Xiaobao yelled back, “See if this time I won’t catch you. You can’t run away when you are coughing.” While saying that he struck a posture like he was about to pounce.

“Little demon!” the old woman angrily shouted from far away, “You dare to make my child coughing!” ‘Zip!’ a pebble split the air. Although the pebble was small, the sound was astonishingly loud.

“Aiyo!” Wei Xiaobao cried out and squatted down to evade. But he was still one step too late, the pebble hit him behind his knee and he tumbled down and rolled around, along with Shuang’er in his bosom, on the ground.

“Catch them!” the old woman called out. The other servant pounced on Wei Xiaobao and Shuang’er; he caught their backs, brought them to the old woman and tossed them on the ground. The sickly man giggled and clapped his hands and sang, “Useless lot, can only eat shallot, (cough, cough) … drop a lot, bonk, bonk loud!”

Wei Xiaobao was scared and angered at the same time; he saw Xu Tianchuan, Feng Jizhong, and the others were strung together with a long rope into a human chain, with one of the maidservants holding the end of the rope; even Wu Zhirong was also tied at the end of the chain. Everybody had his head hung low in front of his chest, their eyes were closed, it seemed that all of them had passed out.

The old woman said, “You, baby girl who dress as a man, where did you learn your ‘separating tendon dislocating joint’ skill? And you, boy, where did you

learn the ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’ skill?”

Wei Xiaobao was shocked; he thought, “This granny’s vision is indeed formidable, she knew the name of my school’s unique skill.” Thinking that since other people were able to recognize it, his ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’ skill must have been trained to almost perfection; he could not help feeling very proud of himself as he laughed and said, “What ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’? Did you say that I know ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’?”

“Pei!” the old woman spat, “Your doggy leaps did not look like doggy leap, your crabby crawls did not look like crabby crawl; can it be considered ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’?”

Wei Xiaobao sat up and said, “It was you who said ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’, I did not say it. How do I know if it was ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’ or ‘Shen Pa Bai Bian’ [divine crawl hundred changes]?”

The sickly man clapped his hands and said with a laugh, “You know ‘Shen Tiao Bai Bian’ [divine jump/hop hundred changes] and also know ‘Shen Pa Bai Bian’, ha ha … interesting.” He leaned over and poked a finger on Wei Xiaobao’s back.

Wei Xiaobao only felt a whiff of boiling heat stream from his finger penetrating his body, and the numb and aching feeling on his lower limbs immediately disappeared. He stood up and said, “Your unsealing acupoint skill is very brilliant.”

The sickly man said, “Quickly crawl. I want you to crawl in a hundred different styles; crawl like a tortoise, crawl like a frog, then you can call it ‘Divine Crawl a Hundred Changes’.”

“I don’t know any ‘Shen Pa Bai Bian’,” Wei Xiaobao said, “If you do, show me how to crawl.”

“I don’t know either,” the sickly man replied, “My Dad says masters of martial art should not simply learn other people’s skill, but must be able to display originality, must show creativity, only then he can be called a ‘master’. Dad, in the martial art study, is there such thing as ‘Shen Pa Bai Bian’ skill?” The old man frowned; he shook his head.

Wei Xiaobao said, “You are a martial art master. Since there is no such thing as

‘Shen Pa Bai Bian’ skill, you can create one, you can found Shen Pa School …”

Before he could finish, his buttocks were kicked by the old woman; he heard her thundered, “Don’t talk nonsense!” The old woman cast a sidelong glance toward her son, her face showed a concerned expression. Apparently she was afraid her son would listen to this youngster’s advice and really created this new skill ‘Divine Crawl a Hundred Changes’. She did not want her son to think too much; hence she asked Wei Xiaobao again, “What’s your name? Who is your Shifu?”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “These two old monsters and one little monster … no, one midsize monster’s martial art skill is too strong, *Laozi* cannot fight them. A hero must not suffer humiliation in front of their eyes, I had no choice but to deceive them. If *Laozi* pretends to be Wu Sangui’s friend, perhaps they will not dare to give me trouble.” His glance caught Wu Zhirong, and he had a sudden inspiration; he said, “I am surnamed Wu, my name is Wu Zhirong, alias Xianyang, a native of Gaoyou county in Yangzhou. Hot piece mama, before long my *bofu* [paternal (older) uncle] Ping Xi Wang will attack Beijing. If you offended me, Ping Xi Wang will not be polite toward you!”

The old couple and the sickly man were greatly astonished; they looked at each other. “Fake!” the sickly man said, “How could Ping Xi Wang have a nephew like you?”

“How can it be fake?” Wei Xiaobao replied, “There is no harm in you asking me anything about Ping Xi Wang’s household. If I give you one wrong answer, you can just kill me.”

“Alright!” the sickly man said, “What is Ping Xi Wang’s favorite thing?”

“Are you talking about object, or people?” Wei Xiaobao asked, “Previously, the person he loves the most was Chen Yuanyuan; later on when Chen Yuanyuan grew older, he was then very fond of a beautiful woman called ‘four-face Guanyin’. Nowadays, his most beloved beauty is called ‘eight-face Guanyin’.”

“What’s so good about beautiful women?” the sickly man said, “I am talking about his most beloved object.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Ping Xi Wang has three treasures he loves the most. The first is a sheet of white tiger skin, the second is a ruby the size of a chicken-egg,

the third is a marble screen with a painting of a tiger."

The sickly man laughed and said, "Ha ha … you really know. Look here!" Unbuttoning his clothes, his left hand grabbed the front lapel of his long robe and lifted it up, revealing a fur coat he wore on the inside. The fur coat was white with black stripes; it was made of white tiger skin.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly surprised, "Uh, oh! This is Ping Xi Wang's most beloved object, the white tiger skin. You … you … how did you steal it?"

With an air of complacency the sickly man said, "What do you mean 'steal'? Ping Xi Wang gave it to me."

Shaking his head, Wei Xiaobao said, "I don't believe you. I heard my *jiefu* [older sister's husband] Xia Guoxiang said …"

"Xia Guoxiang is your *jiefu*?" the sickly man asked.

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao replied, "My *tang jiefu* [paternal female cousin's husband]; my paternal cousin Wu Zhi … Wu Zhifang is married to him. My *jiefu* is an expert in battle, he is one of the ten great *Zongbing* under Ping Xi Wang's command."

The sickly man nodded. "So be it," he said, "Ping Xi Wang invited my Dad, Ma and myself to drink wine, my Dad and Ma did not go, I went alone. Ping Xi Wang accompanied me personally, the ten *Zongbing* under his command all came, your *jiefu* ranks the first."

"That's right," Wei Xiaobao said, "And then there are Ma Bao, Ma *Dage*, Wang Pingfan, Wang *Dage*, Zhang Guozhu, Zhang *Dage*; those are tops generals, expert in battle, great power and prestige, great aura of death!"

The sickly man said, "What did your *jiefu* say about this white tiger skin?"

Wei Xiaobao was determined to win his favor, he spoke without thinking, "My *jiefu* said, when Chen Yuanyuan was still Ping Xi Wang's favorite, whenever she was under the weather, got a cold or a cough, people were saying that as long as this white skin tiger was used as a blanket, after three days under the cover, she would get well. She wanted to ask Wu … Ping Xi Wang for this white tiger skin. Ping Xi Wang said, 'I don't mind to lend you this blanket for a few days, but there is no way I would give this to you. This is the most auspicious treasure in the world, white tigers only appear once every eight hundred years. Even if it did

appear, we can't necessarily catch it, can't necessarily skin it. If one has this white tiger skin in the house, when demons, ghosts, evil spirits saw it, they would immediately flee far away. When one is sick, no need to take any medicine, just use this white tiger skin as a blanket; a few days under the blanket, the skin will get rid of the illness. In the game of *Pai Jiu* [pai gow], the left gate is called Green Dragon, right gate is called White Tiger. Green dragon skin, white tiger skin, both are priceless treasures."

The old woman listened as Wei Xiaobao was talking with 'living spirit, living image'; her son was sick, and that was her only concern. When she heard that when used as a blanket the white tiger skin was capable of curing coughing, although she was not completely convinced, deep in her heart she hoped that it was true. "Son," she said, "Ping Xi Wang gave this treasure to you, your face indeed is not small. You made the skin into a robe that you can wear, it was very clever. If this white tiger skin can really cure illness …"

The sickly man frowned and said, "I am not sick; why do you keep mentioning it?"

The old woman laughed and said, "Yes, yes, you are as lively as a dragon and as animated as a tiger. These people are Jianghu warriors, but you made them into spinning tops or shooting stars, you are having so much fun playing with them."

The sickly man roared in loud laughter, interspersed with several coughing. The old woman said, "When you go to bed at night, we must remember to wear the skin robe as a blanket." The sickly man turned his head away, refusing to acknowledge her.

The old man pointed to Feng Jizhong and the others and asked, "Are they all Ping Xi Wang's subordinates?"

Wei Xiaobao thought, "I pretend to be the old traitor's nephew, it's not a big deal; but to ask Xu *San Ge* [third (older) brother] and the others to acknowledge that they are Wu Sangui's subordinates, they would never agree. They are hardheaded, I must not let them say anything that will reveal the horse's foot." He said, "They are my subordinates. We heard that Ping Xi Wang arises in rebellion, Prince Consort and the Princess are still in Beijing, they cannot escape. This Wu Yingxiong *Gege* loves to chat with me the most, we have the best

friendship. I am taking these friends to Beijing to rescue the Prince Consort. Although it is a dangerous mission, all of us attach most importance to *yi qi*; this is called ‘going through the water and tread on fire, under no circumstances we will decline, knowing full well that it is a mountain of sabers or a forest of swords, we still want to charge through it.’” These words were spoken with extreme vehemence.

The old man nodded. He walked over; both hands pulled several times, immediately the long rope binding Feng Jizhong and the others fell off. And then he lightly patted each person's back, twice, followed by massaging their back a bit, unsealing everybody's acupoint. One of the maidservants went over to Shuang'er and untied her hair from her wrists. The old man turned to Wei Xiaobao, "I cannot trust you completely just by what you said. This matter is of grave importance, you said you are Ping Xi Wang's nephew, but how can you prove it?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "*Laoyezi* [old master], this is difficult. I do not have my Dad and my Mom in here. How about this: let us go to Beijing and see Prince Consort. If he is arrested by the Emperor, then we'll go see Princess Jianning. I am sure Princess will tell you whether I am a genuine goods at fair prices, cheating neither old nor young, the real Wu Zhirong." He thought that when he got to Beijing, why would he be afraid of them? In case they really twisted his arm and brought him to see Princess Jianning, even if he wanted to pretend to be the Jade Emperor of the Heaven, the Princess would definitely nod her head and confirm that it was true.

The old man and the old woman looked at each other, both were still unconvinced. Wei Xiaobao suddenly remembered something; he laughed and said, "Ah, I know, I have a letter written by Ping Xi Wang. If I show this letter to other people, unavoidably my whole family will be executed unto the third generation. But since you are Ping Xi Wang's friends, there is no harm for you to take a look." While saying that he put his hand into his pocket to retrieve the letter forged by Zha Yihuang, and handed it over to the old man.

The old man took the letter, and read it under the dim twilight. Wei Xiaobao was still afraid they might not understand the letter, he tried to explain, "Desiring to behead the white snake and bestow a gale, all those things are

talking about Zhu Yuanzhang ..." Since he did not understand it himself, as soon as he opened his mouth he had already made a mistake; it was a reference to Liu Bang and not Zhu Yuanzhang. Fortunately the old man and the old woman's attention was focused on the letter, they did not even hear what he was saying.

After reading the letter, the old woman said, "Indeed it's true, Ping Xi Wang wants to be Han *Gaozu*, Ming *Taizu*, and he wants him to be Zhang Zifang, Liu Bowen. *Er Ge* [second (older) brother], Ping Xi Wang said that the insurgence is for the sake of restoring the House of Ming; but judging from the tone of this letter, humph, he ... his own ambition is definitely not small." Casting a glance toward Wei Xiaobao she said, "You are still young ..." Obviously in her heart she was saying, "You are still a baby, do you think you fit to be Zhang Zifang or Liu Bowen?"

The old man folded the letter and put it back into the envelope. Returning it to Wei Xiaobao, he said, "You are indeed Ping Xi Wang's virtuous nephew. We have offended you much."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "You are too kind, you are too kind! One who does not know is not guilty."

By this time Xu Tianchuan and the others already regained their consciousness; hearing Wei Xiaobao claimed himself to be Wu Sangui's nephew, and the opposite side unexpectedly believe without any doubt, they were all greatly surprised, but they were used to their young *Xiangzhu*'s wily and mischievous conduct, thereupon they all kept silent.

Wei Xiaobao mused, "*Laozi* pretended to be Wu Sangui's son in front of that big beard Hantiemo; since I have been his son, what's the harm of being his nephew this time? Next time I'll pretend to be Wu Sangui's papa. As long as I can pull this trick, I won't suffer any loss."

The sky had already darkened, they were all standing in a desolate area, waves of cold breeze were blowing, the sickly man did not stop coughing. Wei Xiaobao said, "May I ask *Laoyezi*, *Laotaitai* [old madame], what is your respected surname?"

"We are surnamed Gui [lit. return]," the old woman replied.

Wei Xiaobao mused, "Why didn't you pick a good surname but pick the 'Gui'

from 'wugui' [turtle, different character] as your surname? It's a ridiculous joke."

The old woman looked at her son and said, "It's getting dark, we'd better find a place to lodge, other things can be discussed slowly."

"Yes, yes," Wei Xiaobao said, "Just now when I was on that hill, I saw smoke coming out from that side, there must be a lot of houses, let us go to ask for lodging." While saying that, he pointed to the direction of the Zhuang Family's big house. Actually, this place was still about ten *li* away from the Zhuang Family's big house, separated by a hill; how could he see any smoke?

The menservants pulled two horses for the old man, old woman and the sickly man. The old woman rode with the sickly man, she sat behind her son, wrapping her arms around him. Wei Xiaobao and the others had their own mounts; they all jumped to their horses and left. The four menservants and maidservants walked.

After traveling for a while, Wei Xiaobao talked to Shuang'er loudly, "Go ride faster, see if ahead is a small town or a village. Find a big house or two and ask for lodging, and prepare hot water immediately. Gui Family *Shaoye* must drink warm ginseng soup. We will wash our feet first with hot water before eating and drinking wine. Give them a bit more money."

For each sentence, Shuang'er said 'yes' one time. From his pocket Wei Xiaobao took out a big ingot of silver, along with a packet of knockout drug. Shuang'er received both, and galloped away.

The old woman's face light up; Wei Xiaobao ordered Shuang'er to boil water and warm the ginseng soup, obviously it was the thing that she intended to do.

After traveling several more *li*, Shuang'er galloped back. "Xianggong," she said, "Ahead is not a small town, and not a village either; it's just a large house. The people in the house said that all the men in that house have left, hence they cannot receive guests. I offered them money, they still refused."

"Stupid girl," Wei Xiaobao scolded her, "I don't care if they want to receive us or not, we'll just go there."

"Yes," Shuang'er replied.

The old woman said, "We only need to stay for one night. They don't have any

men, can't we just force them to receive us in their house?"

The party arrived at the Zhuang House. A servant stepped forward to knock on the door. After a long time an elderly maid came out and opened the door; she was half deaf, and she mumbled indistinctly on and on about there was no man in the house.

The sickly man laughed and said, "There is no man in your house, don't you see there are a lot of men coming into your house now?" He slipped past her into the house, squeezing the old maid to the side.

Everybody followed him inside and sat in the main hall. The old woman said, "Zhang *Ma*, Sun *Ma*, go boil some water and prepare some meal. The host does not like visitors, we will do everything ourselves." The two maidservants complied and went inside to find the kitchen.

Xu Tianchuan had been to the Zhuang House before; later on he heard Wei Xiaobao talking with graceful words, flowery speech, swindling these three martial art experts whose skill was deep and immeasurable, Xu Tianchuan was secretly delighted. Thereupon he took the Tian Di Hui brethren to sit on the steps, far away from the sickly man and Wei Xiaobao, so that they would not reveal the horse's foot.

Pointing to Wu Zhirong, the old man asked, "Who is this fellow with bloody mouth?"

"This fellow is an official of the imperial court," Wei Xiaobao replied, "We met on the road. Afraid that he might inform the authority on our whereabouts, we then … then cut off his tongue."

The old man was quite some distance away from him, but looking at his eyes, it was obvious that he still harbor suspicions in his heart. This time hearing Wei Xiaobao's reply, he was still half-believing half-doubting. Walking over to Wu Zhirong, he asked, "You are an imperial court official, aren't you?" Wu Zhirong was already hovering between life and death from the pain, he nodded immediately.

The old man asked again, "You knew there was going to be rebellion, and you were thinking of reporting it, is that right?" Wu Zhirong thought that he could not deny even if wanted to anyway, plus he was hoping that this old man would

save him; thereupon he repeatedly nodded.

Wei Xiaobao said, “He knew that in the south there is a military general with authority over military force who was going to rebel; this military general is surnamed Wu, and when he starts rising in rebellion, it will be desperately serious.”

“Is that right?” the old man asked Wu Zhirong. Wu Zhirong nodded. The old man did not have any suspicion anymore, his trust in Wei Xiaobao increased several parts. Returning to his seat, he asked Wei Xiaobao, “I wonder which Shifu has taught Wu *Xiongdi* martial arts?”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “I have quite a number of Shifu; one, two, three, altogether there are three, but I … I am stupid and lazy, I haven’t mastered any skill.”

The old man mused, “You haven’t mastered any skill, do you think I did not know it?” Yet he was still having a nagging suspicion about Wei Xiaobao’s ‘divine walk hundred changes’. Although Wei Xiaobao only used superficial technique of the said skill, his stance and footwork was no doubt the first-class *qinggong* ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’. So he asked again, “Where did you learn your *qinggong* from?”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “He determined to know who taught me *qinggong*, he must have some enmity with that Shitai, Shifu of mine; I must not mention her name. He is of the same party with Wu Sangui, most likely he also have good relationship with Tibetan Lama.” Thereupon he said, “There is a Great Lama from Tibet, his name is Sangjie. He saw me at the Ping Xi Wang’s Wuhua Palace in Kunming, he said that my martial art skill is too lacking, I won’t be able to fight anybody, it would be better for me to learn some technique to escape, so he taught me for several days. I practiced very hard, believing that I was doing a great job; who would have thought that as soon as I came across you, *Laogonggong* [old grandpa], *Laopopo* [old grandma], and this young and vigorous Gui *Shaoye*, whose vitality is a hundredfold, it was completely useless.”

Hearing Wei Xiaobao complimenting her son as young and vigorous with a hundredfold vitality, the old woman was happier than if she was hearing any other flattering words; she could not help breaking into a big smile, and cast her

glance toward her son, happiness bubbled up from the bottom of her heart. "*Er Ge*," she said, "This past few days our child's vitality seems to be flourishing."

The old man nodded slightly; however, as he looked at his half-awake, half-asleep son who was slouching on a chair, he was actually very dispirited, he could not help but was very grieved. He turned to Wei Xiaobao and said, "So that's how it is."

The old woman asked, "How did Sangjie know Tie Jian Men's [iron sword school] *qinggong*?"

The old man said, "There is certain Yuzhen Zi in Tie Jian Men [see also Chapter 27], who lived in Tibet for quite a long time."

"Ah, yes," the old woman said, "He was Priest Musang's Shidi. Most likely he passed on his skill to someone in Tibet." Turning toward Shuang'er, she asked, "Little Miss, where did you learn your martial art skill?"

The old couple fixed their gaze at her; it appeared that her martial art school background was very important to them. Being stared at like that, Shuang'er was somewhat flustered. "I … I …" she stammered. She was not used of telling lies, hence she did not know how to answer.

"She is my servant girl," Wei Xiaobao said, "That Sangjie Lama also gave her some directions in martial art."

The old man and the old woman shook their heads together, "Definitely not," they said together with very serious expression.

Right this moment suddenly the sickly man let out loud coughing; the more he coughed, the worse it was. The old woman quickly went over and patted his back gently. The old man also turned his head to look at his son. The two maidservants came out of the kitchen carrying ginseng soup and hot tea on wooden trays. They stood in front of the sickly man; they waited for his cough to stop before serving him the ginseng soup, and then they distributed the teacups to everybody, even Xu Tianchuan and the others also received a cup each.

The old man drank his tea and was about to quiz Shuang'er further, but he saw she was already went to the rear hall. The old man stood up suddenly and asked Shun Ma, "Where did you get the water to make the tea?"

Wei Xiaobao was shocked; his heart was thumping madly. “Bad, bad!” he groaned inwardly, “This old die-hard man knew.”

Sun Ma replied, “Zhang Ma and I boiled it ourselves.”

The old man asked, “What kind of water did you use?”

Sun Ma replied, “We got it from the water jar in the kitchen.”

“We have inspected it carefully,” Zhang Ma added, “It was very clean …” Before she could finish, ‘bonk, bonk!’ the two menservants tumbled down to the floor and fainted.

The old woman sprang up, her body swayed; holding her head in her hand she called out, “There’s poison in the tea!”

Xu Tianchuan and the others had not drunk their tea, they signaled each other with their eyes and fell down together, pretending to pass out. ‘Bing, bing, bang, bang’ the teacups fell to the ground.

“Aiyo!” Wei Xiaobao cried out and fell to the ground with closed eyes.

He heard Zhang Ma and Sun Ma spoke together, “We cooked the water ourselves, there was no one else in the kitchen.”

The old woman said, “The water in the jar is drugged. Son, how do you feel?”

The sickly man replied, “Not bad, not …” His head slumped, he also passed out.

Sun Ma said, “We did not add any water to the ginseng soup, we boiled and brought the water in the ginseng soup ourselves.”

The old man said, “When you boiled the water and warmed the soup at the same time, the steam might enter into the soup.”

“Right!” the old woman said, “And our child’s body is weak; this … this …” Hastily she reached out to touch the sickly man’s forehead, her palm was trembling continuously.

The old man circulated his strong internal energy to suppress the poison inside his stomach so that it did not disperse to other organs. “Go get two pots of cold water,” he said.

Zhang Ma and Sun Ma did not drink the tea, seeing the strange and out-of-

control turn of events, they panicked and ran toward the inside.

The old woman said, “There is something strange about this house.” Since she did not carry any weapon, she stooped down to get a saber from one of the menservants’ waist, but as soon as she lowered her head, she felt as if the sky spun, the earth went around; she was unable to stand and was forced to sit down. She managed to touch the hilt of the saber, but did not have any strength in her grip.

The old man propped himself against the back of a chair with his left hand. His eyes were tightly closed, his body slightly swayed. Wei Xiaobao was lying on the floor; he took a furtive glance, and saw Shuang’er came out, leading a group of women.

The old man suddenly leaped with outstretched palm to hack onto a woman in white clothes, sending her about a *zhang* backward until she crashed onto a chair. Xu Tianchuan and the others yelled and shouted while leaping up toward the old man, but they saw that the old man had already passed out. Feng Jizhong quickly sealed his acupoints; he also sealed the old woman and the sickly man’s acupoints.

Wei Xiaobao sprang up with loud laughter. “Zhuang *San Shaonai* [third young mistress], how are you?” he called out, while bowing in respect toward a woman in white.

That woman was indeed the Third Mistress of the Zhuang Family; she hastily returned the propriety and said, “Wei *Shaoye*, you have captured our archenemy and brought him here, I really don’t know how to repay. *Laotianye* [God/Heaven] has eyes, He lets us avenge our deep enmity. Wei *Shaoye*, please meet our Shifu.” And she took him to a woman wearing yellow garment.

The woman in yellow was massaging the back of the woman struck by the old man. ‘Wah!’ the woman vomited a mouthful of blood, and then a moment later she vomited another mouthful of blood. The woman in yellow smiled and said, “No more danger.” Her voice was soft and was very pleasant to hear.

Wei Xiaobao saw that this woman was already old, but her voice sounded like a young girl. On her head she wore a gold headband, her feet were bare, her waist was adorned with an embroidered belt; all in all, her attire was quite unusual.

Although her hair was greyed, her face was fair and tender, it's just that the corner of her eyes were full of wrinkles. How old she actually was, it was hard to say. Looking at her hair, she looked about sixty, looking at her face, she looked about thirty. He thought that since she was the Third Mistress' Shifu, he immediately stepped forward and kowtowed to her, saying, "*Popo Jiejie* [granny older sister], Wei Xiaobao pays his respect."

The woman laughed and asked, "Child, what did you call me?"

Wei Xiaobao stood up and said, "You are *San Shaonai*'s Shifu, I ought to call you *Popo*, but looking at your appearance, at most you are no more than my *Jiejie*; therefore, I call you *Popo Jiejie*."

The woman giggled. "At most I am no more than your *Jiejie*?" she said, "I wonder if I can be your *Meizi* [younger sister]?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "If I were next door and I heard your voice, I would have called you *Popo Meimei*."

The woman laughed so hard that her body was shaking. "This little 'slippery head' is so amusing," she said, "His mouth is so full of guile and cunning, he really knows how to make others happy, no wonder even such a great hero like my Gui *Shibo* [older martial uncle] also fell under your ruse."

As soon as she said those words, everybody was shocked. Wei Xiaobao pointed to the old man and said, "This … this *Laogonggong* is *Popo Jiejie*'s Shibo?"

"Why not?" the woman said with a laugh, "The Senior and I have not seen each other for about thirty years; at first I did not recognize him, it was not until the Senior made his move that I knew it was him. His palm strike, 'Snow-covered Qinling [mountain range, Shaanxi]' is so bold and powerful, in the Central Plains, there is no second person who can use it like that."

Wei Xiaobao anxiously said, "Since he is on our side, what should we do?"

The woman shook her head and said with a laugh, "I don't know what we should do either. If my Shifu found out, he would definitely scold me until I am stinking-dead." Looking at several maidservants standing on the side with thick ropes in their hands, she laughed and said, "If you ordered them to bind these people, you must issue the order yourself, I don't want to be involved. Shibo is

not bound by me; but if he is not tied, when the Senior wakes up, I won't be his match. *Xiao Didi* [little brother], do you think you can beat him?"

Wei Xiaobao was greatly amused; he laughed and said, "If you can't beat him, I can't beat him even more." He knew she was simply trying to escape responsibility, yet without any meaning to protect her martial uncle; busily he addressed Xu Tianchuan and the others, "These few people are on Wu Sangui's side, they are not good people. We, Tian Di Hui, tie them up; it has nothing to do with *Popo Jiejie*."

Xu Tianchuan and the others were just subjected to the sickly man's jesting, it was an extraordinary shame and humiliation that they had never experienced in all their lives; they had been hatefully gnashing their teeth and were itching for revenge. Immediately they took the ropes and bound the old man, the old woman, the sickly man and the two menservants tightly.

The woman in yellow asked, "How can my Gui *Shibo* be on the same side as Wu Sangui? How are you going to deal with this matter?"

Thereupon Wei Xiaobao explained how they encountered the old man at the restaurant earlier. Naturally he skipped the part where the sickly man used Xu Tianchuan and the others as his toy, he only said that this tuberculosis ghost's martial art was very formidable, and that everybody was not his match.

The woman said, "The Gui Family's *Xiao Shidi*'s [little younger martial art brother] life was saved by my Shifu. Since he was little he has been suffering a serious illness, until today he has not been well. He is Gui *Shibo* couple's only child." After casting a glance toward the old man, she continued, "Gui *Shibo* is an upright man, how can he become that big traitor Wu Sangui's ally? If that's the case, my Shifu can't possibly scold me. Hee … hee …" From the tome of her voice, apparently she was extremely afraid of her Shifu.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Whoever helps Wu Sangui deserves to be killed. If your Shifu knew, he would greatly praise you."

The woman laughed and said, "Is that right?" She looked at the old man and the old woman, and then felt the sickly man's breathing. "*San Shaonai*," she said, "When my *Shibo* awakes, he will be very angry; yet we cannot kill him. Let's do it this way: leave them here, we all will go away quietly, so that they won't

know forever who tied them up. What do you think?”

The Third Mistress replied, “Shifu commanded, we will do as instructed.” But thinking that they had lived there for many years and now suddenly they had to leave, in her heart she was very reluctant, plus she felt that moving everything away was really not easy; hence she could not help showing signs of unwillingness.

An old maidservant wearing white clothes said, “The enemy has been obtained; let us offer sacrifice in front of all the masters, and then the memorial tablets can be cremated.”

The Third Mistress said, “*Popo* is right.”

Thereupon everybody thronged to the mourning hall, dragging Wu Zhirong along. They made him kneel on the floor. The Third Mistress took a book from the sacrificial table and held it with both hands in front of Wu Zhirong. “Wu *Daren*,” she said, “Do you know what book this is?”

Wu Zhirong was very familiar [orig. ripe as a melon that rolls from its vine] with the book since long time ago; as soon as he saw the thickness, the size, and the formatting of the book, he immediately knew it was the ‘History of the Ming Dynasty’, which he relied on to be promoted and gain wealth. When he looked at the cover, it was indeed the ‘Ming Shu Ji Lue’ [‘Compilation of Ming Documents’, see Chapter 1]; thereupon he nodded.

The Third Mistress continued, “Look carefully, the memorial tablets on this sacrificial table, you know them all.”

Wu Zhirong focused his attention to read the names on the memorial tablets, and he noticed that the memorial tablets bore these names: Zhuang Yuncheng, Zhuang Tinglong, Li Lingxi, Cheng Weifan, Li Huan, Wang Zhaozhen, Mao Yuanxi … more than a hundred names on the memorial tablets, each one was executed because of his report to the imperial court in the case of ‘History of the Ming Dynasty’. Wu Zhirong read eight or nine names, and his soul had already flown to the sky. His tongue was cut, it was still bleeding continuously; he was already two-third dead anyway. This moment his body went weak and he slumped down on the ground, while trembling nonstop.

The Third Mistress said, “Due to your lust for fame and fortune you have killed

this many people, other masters and mistresses of their families suffered torture in the prison and perished, some suffered the death of a thousand cuts, their bodies were subjected to thousand blades ten thousand cuts. If we did not receive Heaven's providence and were saved by Shifu, we would have been died because of you. Today if we killed you with one blade, it would be too easy for you. However, the way we handle matters is not as merciless as you did. If you want to die easy, you may make your own decision." While saying that, she unsealed the acupoints on his body. 'Dang!' she also tossed a short blade to the ground.

Wu Zhirong was shaking all over; he picked up the blade, but how could he find the courage to kill himself? Suddenly he turned around and made a dash out of the mourning hall. But he only took one step, he saw his way was blocked by several dozen women in white. His throat made a repeated 'he, he' noise as he slipped and fell, twisted several times, and then stopped moving altogether.

The Third Mistress pulled his body over and found that his breathing had stopped, his face was full of blood, his eyes were open wide, his expression was full of terror. "Evil has its retribution," she said, "At last this traitor is dead." Kneeling in front of the memorial tablets she said, "All of you *Xianggong*, your big enmity has been avenged, may your spirits in Heaven rest in peace." All the women prostrated themselves on the ground as they cried loudly.

Wei Xiaobao and the Tian Di Hui warriors also bowed in front of the spirit tablets. The woman in yellow garment stood still and silently on the side with knitted eyebrows.

After crying for a while, the women turned to kowtow to Wei Xiaobao, thanking him for capturing the enemy and bringing him over. Wei Xiaobao hastily kowtowed in return and said, "A piece of cake, why be polite? If you still have other enemies, please tell me, I will catch them for you."

The Third Mistress said, "Wicked minister Oboi was killed personally by Wei *Shaoye*, Wu Zhirong was also caught and brought over by Wei *Shaoye*. Our great hatred has been avenged in full, there are no more enemies." Immediately the women disassembled the sacrificial table and cremated the memorial tablets.

The woman in yellow watched as these women performed their convoluted

and overelaborate ritual, while making endless noise. Finally she lost her patience and went out to take a look at the people they caught. Wei Xiaobao and Tian Di Hui warriors followed her out. They saw the old man, the old woman and the sickly man were not awake yet.

The woman in yellow smiled and said, “Little baby, if you want to poison these people, you should really learn how to do it well.”

“Yes, yes,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Junior put knockout drug because I really did not know what else to do, their martial art skill is too strong; if I did not use any trick, my neck would have been wrung by them. By using this trick, the heroes and warriors of Jianghu will look down on me. I know I was wrong, next time I will not dare anymore.”

The woman in yellow smiled. “What look down or look up?” she said, “Killing people is killing people; using blade to kill people, using fist to kill people, using poison or drug, won’t it all comes down to one thing: killing people? The heroes and warriors of Jianghu will look down on you? Humph, who needs their opinion anyway? Take that Wu Zhirong for example; he went to report to the imperial court and killed several thousand, several hundred people. He did not use poison, are you saying that we ought to have a high regard for him?”

Every single word had caused happiness and delight to rise from the bottom of Wei Xiaobao’s heart; he could not help but beaming with joy as he said, “*Popo Jiejie*, what you said is very true. When I was a kid, I helped people fighting by scattering lime on the enemy’s eyes; I helped him win the fight and saved his life, but instead of thanking me, he scolded me of using third-class method and he slapped me heavily on the face. Too bad at that time *Popo Jiejie* was not around, otherwise you would have taught him a lesson.”

The woman in yellow said, “But you poisoned my Gui Shibo, I should have slapped you heavily on the face several times.”

“At that time I did not know he was your Shibo,” Wei Xiaobao hastily said.

The woman said, “If you knew that he was my Shibo, and that he was going to wring your neck, while you have the poison in your hand, would you or would you not poison him?”

Wei Xiaobao giggled and said, “My life was threatened, I would have no choice

but to offend him."

"You are telling the truth," the woman said, "Others want to take your life, how could you not want to take their lives first? I said I wanted to slap you, only because you really did not know what's good for you. Others are people with grand reputation, 'Divine Fist Without Equal' Gui Xinshu, Gui *Erye* [second master], how deep of a power does he have? You just used the dog-fart knockout drug to make his head dizzy and make his eyes not able to see, the Senior would just regard it as ground pepper."

"But he … he …" Wei Xiaobao stammered.

The woman said, "You mixed your not-up-to-the-task knockout drug in the tea, others are eighty-year old Jianghu veteran, would he simply being a muddle head and drink it? That is the cheap trick used by black inn criminals. If you want to use poison, you must use first-class one."

Wei Xiaobao was surprised and delighted at the same time. "Turns out … turns out *Popo Jiejie* replaced it with first-class poison," he said.

"Rubbish!" the woman said, "I did not replace it. Gui Shibo and the others were tired, they had headache and passed out; what do I have to do with it? One is a tuberculosis ghost, the others are eighty years old *Lao Gonggong* and *Lao Popo*, they suddenly fainted; what's so strange about it?" Her mouth was speaking in deadly earnest, but her eyes were gleaming with mischievous looks.

Wei Xiaobao knew that she was afraid her Shifu might find out later and scold her, and thus she did not want to admit it; in his heart he had an unspeakable admiration toward this kindred spirit. Suddenly he dropped to his knees and said, "*Popo Jiejie*, I bow to you as my master, please take me as your disciple, I will call you Shifu *Jiejie*."

The woman giggled; she reached out with her right arm and placed her palm under his chin. Wei Xiaobao felt a hard object on his chin; definitely it was not a human hand. When he looked down, he was utterly shocked; what he saw was bluish-black iron hook, the tip of the hook was very sharp, it gleamed under the light.

The woman laughed and said, "Look carefully." With her left hand she pulled her right sleeve to expose a snow white upper arm, but it was cut at the wrist,

there was no hand at all, the iron hook was fastened onto her wrist. “If you want to be my disciple,” the woman said, “I have no reason not to accept you, you simply need to cut your hand, then I’ll give you an iron hook.”

The woman in yellow was none other than the Cult Leader or Five-Poison Cult He Tishou [lit. iron hand], whose fame shook the world in the past. Afterwards she bowed to Yuan Chengzhi to be his disciple, and changed her name to He Tishou [lit. guarding respectfully]. After the Ming Dynasty fell, she accompanied Yuan Chengzhi traveling overseas. That year she was sent on a mission by her master to the Central Plains, by chance she saved the Zhuang Family’s Third Mistress and the other widows, and taught them martial arts.

This time she came again, by chance she saw Shuang’er took out the knockout drug and told her the situation. Although she did not know who the enemy was, she knew that since their martial art skill was high, ordinary knockout drug would be quite useless; thereupon she put another drug into the water jar.

He Tishou’s skill in using poison was unparalleled in her time, only after entering Hua Shan Pai she did not use this skill for a long time. Suddenly seeing someone putting drug into the water jar, she could not stop her hand from itching to try her skill again; as soon as she made her move, who in the world would be able to resist it? Were it not for her, Gui Xinshu’s internal energy was very deep, it was even superior to her own Shifu Yuan Chengzhi’s internal strength, how could the ordinary package of knockout drug Wei Xiaobao obtained from the Imperial Bodyguards drug him that he fainted?

The sickly man, Gui Zhong, had been ill since he was still in his mother’s womb, he was actually not expected to live, later on he took a precious miracle drug that his life was spared, but his body and brain had been damaged, he would never be strong and healthy like ordinary people. Gui Xinshu, husband and wife, only had this child, they loved him more than life. Due to his lingering illness since childhood, inevitably the couple spoiled him rotten and failed to discipline him. Although Gui Zhong had mastered superior martial art skill, even though he was middle-age by now, his character and mental development was no different than an eight or nine years old child.

When He Tishou put poison, she did not know who the opponent was; after she found out that it was her own Gui *Shibo* and his family, she could not help

feeling anxious. But things had come to this, she knew it was too late to worry. Listening to Wei Xiaobao's amusing words, her fondness toward him grew. She thought how could there be such a witty and naughty boy outside the island?

When he heard that he had to cut his hand before he could take her as his master, Wei Xiaobao brought his hand in front of his eyes. He was afraid of pain, plus he really did not want to part with his hand; his face carried an awkward expression. He Tishou laughed and said, "You don't need to bow to me as your Shifu, I don't have time to impart you any martial art skill either. But I do have a very amusing secret projectile that I'd like to give to you, so that you won't grieve in your heart that you have kowtowed to me and called me Shifu *Jiejie* in vain."

"Shifu *Jiejie*," Wei Xiaobao said, "That was not an empty call; even if you did not teach me any martial art skill, you did not give me anything, you are such a pretty young lady, I would be very happy to call you Shifu *Jiejie* several more times."

He Tishou giggled and said, "Oily-mouthed and smooth talking little monkey, you talked drivel to your *Popo* with no respect to your seniors." She was a Miao [ethnic group of southwest China] woman, and had never cared about Han people's etiquette and compass and set-square. Wei Xiaobao praised her as pretty; she did not feel it was inappropriate, on the contrary, she was delighted. She laughed and said, "Little monkey, call me again."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "*Jiejie*, good *Jiejie*!"

He Tishou laughed and said, "Aiyo, it's getting more and more indecent." Suddenly her left hand grabbed the back of his neck, lifted him up to the left, and then 'zip, zip, zip!', three candles on the table were extinguished immediately, followed by a series of dull thuds on the wooden partition on the opposite site, like the resounding patter of rain on wooden board.

Wei Xiaobao was startled and delighted at the same time, "What secret weapons are those?" he asked.

He Tishou laughed and said, "Go look yourself." And then she released her grip to let him fall to the floor.

Wei Xiaobao picked up a candlestick from the side table and went over to the

wooden partition to take a closer look. He saw dozens of flickering steel needles nailed deeply into the wooden wall. He was very impressed. "*Jiejie*," he said, "You did not even move, how did you shoot these many steel needles? This kind of secret projectiles, who in this world would be able to dodge?"

He Tishou laughed and said, "In the past I used these 'Han Sha She Ying'[3] secret projectiles against my Shifu, but he was able to dodge; not a single needle was able to hit him. Other than my Shifu, I am afraid not too many people would be able to do it."

"Your Shifu must have told you to try to shoot him," Wei Xiaobao said, "That's why he was prepared. But if you shoot him suddenly, even if the Senior's martial art skill was higher, how could he evade this kind of shadow-less, trace-less secret projectiles?"

"At that time Shifu and I were opponents," He Tishou said, "We were in a hard fighting. He did not ask me to try to shoot him, he was completely without advance knowledge."

"That is so," Wei Xiaobao said, "But your Shifu was concentrating his attention completely on you, hence he was able to dodge. Supposing that time you pointed to the east and turned your head that way and called out, 'Eh, who's coming?' Your Shifu would definitely turn to look to the east as well; if at that time you suddenly shot him with the secret projectiles, very likely he would be hit."

He Tishou sighed and said, "Perhaps you are right. These steel needles have acute poison on them, if at that time my Shifu failed to evade, he would be killed immediately. At that time I did not wish to kill him at all."

Wei Xiaobao said, "In your heart you were in love with your Shifu, weren't you?"

He Tishou's face blushed slightly. "Pei!" she spat, "There's no such thing. Don't talk rubbish. If my *Shiniang* [Shifu's wife] heard it, she would definitely cut half of your tongue."

The past events when she was young suddenly appeared in her heart; although it was a matter of several decades ago, He Tishou still could not stop her face

from blushing. She took out two deerskin finger sheaths, which she put on her left thumb and index finger, and then she pulled the steel needles from the wooden partition one by one. She also reached into her pocket and took out an iron band, with a steel case mounted on the band, the lid of the steel case had a lot of small holes. Wei Xiaobao suddenly realized; he clapped his hands and called out, "*Jiejie*, this secret projectile is really ingenious. Turns out you wore it inside your clothes, and then you only need to activate the mechanism on the iron band, and the steel needles inside the iron case will shoot out." He assumed that most likely the secret projectile she promised to give to him was this object; he could not help but was bursting with joy.

He Tishou smiled and said, "Even a secret projectile that is a lot more formidable than this will have to rely on the power and accuracy of the hand to shoot it. But your martial art skill is too lacking, other than this 'Han Sha She Ying', you can't use anything else."

Immediately she inserted the steel needles one by one into the case and told him to lift up his robe, and fastened it on his body; the steel case was positioned right on the pit of his stomach. She taught him how to activate the mechanism, she also taught him the ingredients and how to make the poison on the steel needle, as well as the antidote. She said, "The steel needles inside the case can be used for a total of five times. After that you will have to replenish the needles. My Shifu repeatedly warned me never to injure the innocent. These steel needles were originally dipped into lethal poison, but now the poison is not to take anybody's life. When someone is hit, his body will be unbearably itchy and he will lose all his strength. But you still must not use it indiscriminately."

Wei Xiaobao did not open his mouth to respond, he dropped on his knees again to express his gratitude. He Tishou said, "Go and help those three to sit up properly."

Wei Xiaobao complied. He helped Gui Xinshu into a chair first, but when he was helping Gui Zhong, he bumped onto a round and bulging object hanging on his waist, something like a wine gourd. When he lifted up his robe to look, turned out it was a leather sack. Wei Xiaobao's curiosity was piqued; he untied the leather string of the sack and looked inside. Suddenly he cried out, "Aiyo, it's a human head; he … he … he is staring at me."

He Tishou also felt strange; she said, “I wonder what kind of important character he killed, why would he carry the severed head on his waist? Take it out and look.”

“Dead man, oh dead man!” Wei Xiaobao said, “I am going to take you out, you must not bite me.” Slowly he put his hand into the sack, grabbed the severed head by its braid, and took it out and placed it on the table. Under the candlelight he could see clearly, this severed head had its big and round eyes opened wide, its dragon-like beard was long and pointy. Wei Xiaobao screamed and withdrew three steps. “It’s … it’s Wu *Dage*,” he cried out in fear.

He Tishou was slightly startled. “You know him?” she asked.

“He … he is our Society brother,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Wu Liuqi, Wu *Dage*!” His heart was grieving, he sobbed loudly.

The Tian Di Hui warriors heard Wei Xiaobao was screaming and crying loudly, they rushed into the hall, and saw Wu Liuqi’s severed head. They were all shocked with grief and indignation. Everybody pressed their hands on the hilt of their weapons while keeping their gaze fixed on He Tishou, thinking that Wu Liuqi was killed by her.

Soon Shuang’er also rushed inside. Wei Xiaobao pulled her hand and pointed to the severed head, shouting, “Shuang … Shuang’er, this is your sworn brother Wu *Dage*, he … he was murdered by this evil thief!” While saying that, he scrambled toward Gui Zhong and kicked him several times. He then turned to Xu Tianchuan and the others and said, “I found Wu *Dage*’s severed head hanging on this evil thief’s body.”

When everybody examined the severed head carefully, they saw that the blood was already dry, the neck was covered in lime; obviously they used some medicaments and lime to preserve the head so it would not rot.

Shuang’er stroked the severed head while sobbing loudly. Li Lishi said, “Let’s use cold water to wake this evil thief up, we must get the full details from him, and then we’ll kill him to pay for Wu *Dage*’s life.” All the warriors voiced their agreements.

He Tishou said, “This man is my Shidi, you must not touch a single strand of his hair!” While saying that, she stretched out her right hand iron hook and swept it

across a candle on the table several times, before flying into the inner hall.

Priest Xuanzhen angrily shouted, “Even if he was your Shifu, I still want to chop him into mincemeat …”

“Uh!” suddenly Feng Jizhong exclaimed. With two fingers of his left hand he held a piece of candle, about seven or eight *fen* long [1 *fen* is approximately 1/3 of a centimeter or 1/8 of an inch], and picked it up. The candle on the candlestick was originally still seven or eight *cun* long [1 *cun* approx. 2.5cm or 1 inch], but now it was cut into six or seven pieces, each piece was less than a *cun* long, and still neatly stacked together; the candle did not collapse at all. This kind of martial art skill was truly shocking. None of the Tian Di Hui warriors’ countenance did not change.

‘Shua!’ Priest Xuanzhen pulled the saber hanging on his waist and said, “I’ll kill this servant to avenge Wu *Dage*, let that woman kill me.”

“Hold on!” Li Lishi said, “We must ask clearly first, and then we’ll kill the three of them together.”

“Right!” Wei Xiaobao said, “That *Popo Jiejie* is afraid of her Shibo. If we eliminate her Shibo and Shibo’s wife altogether, it should be all right. Shuang’er, go get a pot of cold water, but don’t get the poisoned water from the kitchen.”

Shuang’er went in and came back with a large basin of cold water. Xu Tianchuan took the basin and slowly poured the cold water onto Gui Zhong’s head. Gui Zhong sneezed several times and slowly opened his eyes. As soon as he tried to move, he realized that his hands and feet were bound, and the acupoint on his waist was sealed. “Who?” he said furiously, “Who is joking with me?”

Xuanzhen lightly tapped the blade of his saber on his face and swore, “Your ancestor is joking with you.” Pointing to Wu Liuqi’s head, he asked, “Did you kill this man?”

“Correct!” Gui Zhong replied, “Mama, Daddy, where are you?” He turned around and saw his father and mother were also bound; he was so scared that he almost cried. In all his life he had always followed his father and mother, everything happened as he wished, he had never experienced any setback; when did he ever experience such a scary situation? With a sullen expression he said, “You … what are you doing? You cannot beat me, why … why did you tie me up?

Why did you tie my Daddy, my Mama?”

Xu Tianchuan raised his hand and slapped him on the face with the back of his palm, “How did you kill this man?” he shouted, “Quickly tell us, if there is half a word of lies, I will poke your eyes blind immediately.” While saying that he raised his saber and pointed the tip toward Gui Zhong’s right eye.

Gui Zhong was scared out of his wits; he coughed continuously as he said, “I … I’ll talk … don’t poke my eye blind. If I am blind, I can’t see … can’t see … (cough, cough) … (cough, cough) … Ping Xi Wang said that Tatar Emperor is a big, big ‘bad egg’; he occupies … occupies our … our Great Ming’s rivers and mountains. He asked me to … to kill Tatar Emperor …”

Tian Di Hui warriors looked at each other in dismay; they all thought, “What he said is not wrong.”

But Wei Xiaobao flatly refused to accept. “Hot piece Mama,” he cursed, “Wu Sangui is a damn good thing?”

Gui Zhong said, “Ping Xi Wang is your *Bofu*; he … he … he is not a good thing, then you are not a good thing either.”

Wei Xiaobao kicked him heavily; he cursed, “Nonsense! Wu Sangui is a big traitor, how can he be *Laozi*’s uncle? Wu Sangui is your uncle!”

Gui Zhong yelled, “You said it yourself. Aiyo, so you want to renege on your words? I don’t come, I don’t come!” [renege – 赖 ‘lai’, come - 来 ‘lai’]

Seeing him muddling things together, Li Lishi asked, “Wu Sangui asked you to kill Tatar Emperor, why did you kill him then?” While saying that, he pointed to Wu Liuqi’s severed head.

Gui Zhong said, “This man was high-ranking officer of Guangdong, Ping Xi Wang said that he was a big traitor, who determined to protect the Emperor. Ping Xi Wang wanted to move the troops to attack Guangdong, hence he must have him killed first. Ping Xi Wang gave me a lot of tonic to treat my coughing, he also gave me the white tiger skin. My Ma said that big traitor must be killed. (Cough, cough) … this man’s martial art skill was very good, I … my Ma and me fought him together before he could kill him. You must quickly let me go, release my Dad, my Ma. We are going to Beijing to kill Tatar Emperor, it will be an

enormous service …”

Wei Xiaobao cursed, “Killing the Emperor is not for you, a tuberculosis ghost, to do. All *Gege*, let’s kill these three fellows. I will deal with *Popo Jiejie* later.”

Suddenly they heard outside the manor several dozen people shouted together, “Tuberculosis ghost, get out quickly, we’ll hack you to pieces to avenge Wu *Dage*!” In front of the manor, behind the manor, they heard people all around; even all over the roof there were people shouting and yelling; apparently the manor was surrounded on all directions.

Hearing the incoming people were going to avenge Wu Liuqi, Tian Di Hui warriors knew those people were on their side; in their hearts they were delighted. Qian Laoben called loudly, “Ming restore Qing fought, mother Earth father Heaven. [ming fu qing fan, mu di fu tian – see also Chapter 33, casino scene.] I wonder which peaceful rudder road the friends outside belong to?”

Tian Di Hui slogan was ‘Heaven is my father, Earth is my mother, Fighting the Qing, Restoring the Ming’ [tian fu di mu, fan Qing fu Ming], but in front of unidentified people, these eight characters were reversed. If they were their own Society’s brethren, they would know how to respond; if it were outsiders, the opposite party would not know what they were talking about, hence their real identity would not be exposed.

There were seventeen or eighteen people outside, as well as on the roof of the manor, responding in chorus, “The earth shook the high ridge, a row of mountain creeks gracefully flow for all eternity.”

The warriors in the hall called out, “Morning gate facing the ocean, the water of the Three Rivers flows for ten thousand years.”

Someone on the roof asked, “Brothers from which Hall are in here?”

Qian Laoben replied, “Green Wood Hall brothers welcome our older brothers. *Gege* from which Hall have arrived?”

The door to the hall opened, someone came in and called, “Xiaobao, are you here?” This man was tall and slim, his expression elegant, he was none other than Tian Di Hui *Zongduozhu* Chen Jinnan.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he rushed forward and kneeled down.

“Shifu, Shifu,” he called repeatedly.

“Everybody is well!” Chen Jinnan said, “Unfortunately …” Seeing Wu Liuqi’s severed head on the table he rushed over; he propped himself against the table and was overcome with grief, tears streamed down his face.

One after another people came into the hall; Guangxi’s Latter Family Hall *Xiangzhu* Ma Chaoxing, Guizhou’s Scarlet Fire Hall *Xiangzhu* Gu Zhizhong, and the others were there. When they saw Gui Zhong, they all pulled their sabers. There were more than twenty Guangdong’s Great Obedience Hall brethren in there, their hatred had reached the extreme. Seeing all these people had fiendish expression on their face, Gui Zhong coughed twice, and then he passed out.

Chen Jinnan turned around and asked, “Xiaobao, how did you all capture these three evil thieves?”

Thereupon Wei Xiaobao narrated what they had been through; naturally he skipped the shameful matters where Gui Zhong was amusing himself by playing with Xu Tianchuan and the others and where he was pretending to be Wu Zhirong. Finally he said, “These three evil thieves’ martial art is very formidable, we were no match for them, fortunately there was one *Popo Jiejie* who came to our rescue before we were able to capture them. However, *Popo Jiejie* also said that this old man is her Shibo, hence she did not allow us to kill him to avenge Wu *Dage*.”

Chen Jinnan frowned. “What *Popo Jiejie*?” he asked.

“Although based on her age she is a *Popo*, her appearance looks like a *Jiejie*, hence I call her *Popo Jiejie*,” Wei Xiaobao explained.

“Where is she?” Chen Jinnan asked.

“She is hiding in the back,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “She is unwilling to meet her Shibo. Shifu, Gu *Dage*, Ma *Dage*, how did all of you get here?”

Chen Jinnan said, “This evil thief harmed Wu *Dage*, as soon as we received the news, we all pursued to four sides eight directions.”

The Green Wood Hall warriors and the incoming people greeted each other; turned out there were brothers from all the Halls in Shandong, Henan, Hubei,

Hunan and Anhui, most of them were guarding outside all around the manor. Gu Zhizhong and Ma Chaoxing said, “Wei *Xiongdi* has rendered this great merit once again, Wu *Dage*’s spirit in Heaven will definitely feel deeply grateful.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Wu *Dage* treated me very well, avenging him is something that I ought to do.”

Li Lishi said, “Reporting to *Zongduozhu*: this evil thief has just said that they are going to Beijing to assassinate the Tatar Emperor, he also mentioned some Fighting the Qing, Restoring the Ming matters, I don’t know the real story behind it.”

“What real story?” Wei Xiaobao said, “He was afraid we might kill him, hence he spoke some nonsense. He is wearing this white tiger skin, which was given by Wu Sangui. How can there be any good thing among Wu Sangui’s pig friends and dog companions? We’d better open these three evil thieves’ chests and scoop out their hearts to avenge Wu *Dage*, end of story.”

“Wake these three people up,” Chen Jinnan said, “We’ll ask them clearly.”

Shuang’er fetched another bucket of cold water and doused Gui Xinshu, husband and wife, as well as Gui Zhong to wake them up. As soon as Gui *Erniang* [second lady] awoke, she cursed and swore, saying that putting poison to drug people was Jianghu’s despicable and shameless shady business; but Gui Xinshu did not say a word.

Chen Jinnan said, “Looking at your skill, you are not a nobody. What’s your name? What enmity did you have against our Wu Liuqi, Wu *Dage*? Why did you commit evil scheme and harm his life?”

Gui Erniang angrily said, “You are stinky stuff, shameless little thieves who drugged people, do you think you fit to ask *Laoniang*’s [old lady] name and surname?”

Gu Zhizhong raised his saber threateningly, Gui Erniang was hot-headed, her cursing became even more vile.

“Shifu,” Wei Xiaobao said, “They are surnamed Gui, the ‘gui’ of ‘wugui’ [turtle]; two old turtles and one little turtle. Let me kill the little turtle first and then we’ll talk.” Pulling his dagger, he pointed the tip to Gui Zhong’s throat.

Seeing Wei Xiaobao was going to kill her son, Gui Erniang panicked. “Little demon,” she called out, “If you have guts, come and kill *Laoniang*; just don’t touch a single strand of my child’s hair.”

“But I love to kill little turtle,” Wei Xiaobao replied. He lightly pushed the tip of his dagger into Gui Zhong’s throat. The dagger was extremely sharp, although the push was very light, Gui Zhong’s throat immediately spewed blood.

“Ma,” he cried loudly, “He … he is killing me.”

“Don’t … don’t kill my child!” Gui Erniang shouted.

Wei Xiaobao said, “My Shifu asks you a question, you obediently answer. Within an hour, your tuberculosis ghost son will not die.”

“My child is not sick,” Gui Erniang angrily said, “You are the tuberculosis ghost.” But hearing that Wei Xiaobao promised not to kill her son for the time being, she felt relieved instantly.

Wei Xiaobao pretended to cough; imitating Gui Zhong’s accent he said, “Ma, I … I … (cough, cough) … I almost die … Good Mama, quickly answer them truthfully … (cough, cough) … (cough, cough) … I don’t have tuberculosis, I am suffering from broken-steel-blade sickness … (cough, cough) … also from dagger-penetrating-the-throat illness, whole-body-become-mincemeat illness … (cough, cough) …”

He had an uncanny ability to imitate people’s accent that Gui Erniang was absolutely horrified. “Don’t talk like that! Don’t imitate my child!” she yelled.

Wei Xiaobao continued, “Ma, if you don’t answer their questions, I … I … (cough, cough) … I will also contact the belly-cut-open sickness, intestines-flowing-out illness …” While saying that, he pulled open Gui Zhong’s robe and moved his dagger back and forth in front of Gui Zhong’s scrawny chest.

Gui Erniang could not bear any longer. “Alright!” she said, “We belong to Huashan Pai, our family is known as *Shen Quan Wu Di* [divine fist without equal] Gui *Er Xia* [second hero]. When our prestige was shaking the Central Plains, you, this bunch of little hairy thieves have not been reincarnated.”

Hearing that these two were unexpectedly the famous *Shen Quan Wu Di* Gui Xinshu, husband and wife, Chen Jinnan could not help but feeling deep

veneration toward them. He also remembered how established Wu Liuqi's martial art skill was. According to the Great Obedience Hall brethren who witnessed how he was harmed by this people, only the old woman and the tuberculosis ghost went into action, yet they were able to overthrow a dozen or more Great Obedience Hall's martial art experts. The two of them attacked Wu Liuqi together and killed him, cut his head. These people were not impostors. Divine Fist Without Equal Gui Xinshu had become famous for a long time, but for the last several decades their movement in Jianghu was never heard. It was unclear how they were involved in this terrible tragedy; there must be a strong reason behind it.

Immediately Chen Jinnan stepped forward to bow with cupped fist in front of Gui Xinshu; he said, "Turns out you are Huashan's *Shen Quan Wu Di* Gui *Er Xia* husband and wife. *Xiaoren* Chen Jinnan, indeed I have been lacking in manners." Reaching out, he pulled and broke the ropes binding Gui Xinshu, and then he also massaged his back and his waist to unseal his acupoints. Turning around, he also pulled and broke the ropes binding Gui Erniang and Gui Zhong.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly worried. "Shifu," he said, "These three people are very formidable; we must not release them."

Chen Jinnan smiled and said, "Gui Erniang scolded us for using knockout drug, which is the conduct of Jianghu's despicable low-class people. We, Tian Di Hui, have never used knockout drug. Even if we did, Gui *Er Xia*'s internal energy is very profound, how can despicable low-class people's knockout drug affect him, the Senior …"

"Right, right," Wei Xiaobao said, "We, Tian Di Hui, did not use the knockout drug." He thought that since the drug came from *Popo Jiejie*, and it was she who swapped it, technically they could not be considered drugged by Tian Di Hui. Besides, the drug was really not a knockout drug.

Gui Xinshu's left hand brushed off his wife and son's backs to unseal their acupoints. His technique was a lot faster than Chen Jinnan's. He nodded and said, "It was not an ordinary knockout drug; it was a lot more powerful drug." He stretched out his hand to feel his son's pulse.

Gui Erniang fixed her gaze on her husband's expression, "How is it?" she asked.

Gui Xinshu said, “For the time being he seems to be all right.”

He recalled that just before passing out, he had exchanged a palm strike with someone. Although that person’s martial art skill was very shallow, yet the internal energy cultivation was definitely from Huashan Pai. He also recalled the way Shuang’er run among the rocks on that hill, it was definitely Huashan Pai’s *qinggong*. In a glance he saw her among the crowd.

Seeing his bright and flickering gaze, Shuang’er could not help feeling afraid; she shrunk herself behind Wei Xiaobao. Gui Xinshu said, “Little girl, come here. You belong to Huashan Pai, don’t you?”

“I am not coming!” Shuang’er said, “You killed my sworn brother Wu *Dage*, I want to take revenge for him. I … I don’t belong to any Huashan Pai either.”

When He Tishou taught martial arts to the Third Mistress Zhuang, Shuang’er and the others, she did not officially accept them as her disciples, hence she did not mention her own sect or school either. These three words ‘Huashan Pai’, Shuang’er had just heard it for the first time today.

Gui Xinshu did not want to argue with this little girl. Suddenly he gathered his *chi* on his *dantian*, and with a loud and clear voice said, “Disciples and grand-disciples of Feng Nandi, come out.” Although his voice was not loud, his *chi* surged out, the dust on the roof rained down.

He thought that among the three martial brothers, Yuan Chengzhi’s disciples were all overseas, his *Da Shixiong* [oldest martial brother] Huang Zhen had passed away long time ago, but Huashan Pai still had Huang Zhen’s first disciple Feng Nandi who wielded some power; therefore, the Huashan Pai people in the manor must be Feng Nandi’s disciples. Who would have thought that after waiting for a long time, no noise came from the inner hall?

Chen Jinnan said, “Last year the heroes from all over the world held a general assembly at He Jian Fu, we swore an oath smearing our lips with blood, determined to work as one to kill the big traitor Wu Sangui. Your virtuous *Shizhi* [martial nephew], Senior Feng Nandi was the host of the Turtle-Slaying Assembly of He Jian Fu. Why would Senior Gui join hands with Wu Sangui instead and kill our humble Society’s patriot Wu Liuqi *Xiongdi*? Wouldn’t it be ‘enduring pain for the loved-one, acting in haste for the enemy’?” He said those words politely, but

his remark was pointed and powerful.

Gui Erniang cast him a glance; she said, “I heard people say, ‘Whoever never knew Chen Jinnan, he calls himself a hero in vain,’ but before Sire was born, we, husband and wife, have already criss-crossing the world. If the saying was true, we should have waited for Sire to be born before we could be called ‘hero’. Hey, hey, ridiculous, ridiculous.”

Chen Jinnan said, “Based on martial art skill, *Zaixia* only worth a laugh in front of Gui *Er Xia*, worthy husband and wife. Jianghu friends think highly of *Zaixia*, they are no more than saying that *Zaixia* understands right and wrong, that I am not likely to commit outrages and make friends with bandits.”

Gui Erniang was furious. “Are you saying we committed outrages and made friends with bandits?” she said.

“Wu Sangui is a big traitor!” Chen Jinnan retorted.

Gui Erniang said, “This Wu Liuqi acted as accomplice to the tiger, he became the Tatars’ high-ranking officer, bullying our Han’s common people, yet you open your mouth left and right and calling him *Dage*? Isn’t that committing outrages and making friends with bandits?”

Ma Chaoxing loudly said, “Wu *Dage* lived in Cao camp but had his heart in Han camp. He was Tian Di Hui’s Great Obedience Hall Red Banner *Xiangzhu*. He held power over Guangdong military force, as soon as opportunity arrives, he would move the troops to fight the Tatars. Great Obedience Hall brothers, will you or will you not say that it was so?”

“It’s true!” more than twenty subordinates of Great Obedience Hall replied in chorus.

Ma Chaoxing said, “Bare your chests, let these two great heroes have a look.” Twenty some men pulled the front piece of their jacket with both hands and parted it outward, the dozen or so buttons in front of their chests popped out, exposing their chests. They saw that on each man’s chest these eight characters were engraved deep into their flesh: ‘tian fu di mu, fan Qing fu Ming’ [Heaven is my father, Earth is my mother, Fighting the Qing, Restoring the Ming].

All along Gui Zhong was silent, but now seeing more than twenty men had

their chests engraved with eight characters, he clapped his hands and laughed, “Interesting, interesting!” The Tian Di Hui warriors glowered at him.

Chen Jinnan said to Gui Xinshu, “Your esteemed son thinks it is interesting, what do Gui *Er Xia*, husband and wife think?”

Gui Xinshu was extremely dejected; he shook his head and said to Gui Erniang, “Killed the wrong man.”

Gui Erniang said, “We killed the wrong man! We have fallen into that traitor Wu Sangui’s trick.” Stretching out her left hand, she pulled the single-blade saber from Ma Chaoxing’s waist and swept it across her own neck.

“Don’t …” Chen Jinnan shouted, while swiftly stretching out his right hand to grab her left wrist.

Gui Erniang sent out her right palm, Chen Jinnan raised his left palm to parry, both people swayed. Chen Jinnan stretched out two fingers of his left hand to pinch the back of the blade. Gui Erniang sent out another right palm strike toward the pit of his stomach. If Chen Jinnan withdrew, he would not be able to seize the saber away, and he was afraid that she might try to kill herself again. By exchanging palm strikes with her just now, Chen Jinnan knew that although she was really old, her internal energy was not as strong as his; however, her movement was lightning fast, her fist and palm technique was extremely refined. If he withdrew even for a single step, his bare hand would not be able to snatch the blade from her hand away. Thereupon he braced himself and took the palm on his chest. ‘Bang!’ he was hit by the palm strike.

Gui Erniang was taken aback. Chen Jinnan’s left hand’s two fingers caught her saber and snatched it away. He withdrew two steps back, ‘Wah!’ and spurted a mouthful of fresh blood.

When Gui Erniang was swiping the blade to kill herself, if Gui Xinshu made his move, he could have prevented her; however, since he killed Wu Liuqi by mistake, he was ashamed and full of regrets, he even had thoughts of killing himself to apologize, hence he did not try to stop his wife at all. After seeing Chen Jinnan did not hesitate to put his own life in danger to seize the steel blade in Gui Erniang’s hand, he was even more ashamed. His clumsy words were only, “Chen Jinnan is a hero of the present age, your name is not in vain.”

Chen Jinnan supported himself against the table while regulating his breathing. Only after half a day he managed to say, “One who does not know is not guilty. The criminal ringleader, the main offender in the murder of Wu *Dage* is Wu … Wu San …” speaking to here, he threw up another mouthful of blood.

Although Gui Erniang was old, most of her power of the former years remained. In order to snatch her blade away, Chen Jinnan was unable to circulate his *chi* to protect himself; the palm strike he suffered was really not light. Gui Erniang said, “Chen *Zongduozhu*, if I tried to kill myself again, I would betray your great kindness. We, husband and wife, are determined to kill the Tatar Emperor, and then we will kill that traitor Wu Sangui.” Finished speaking, she kneeled down and kowtowed toward Wu Liuqi’s severed head three times.

Chen Jinnan said, “Wu Liuqi *Dage*’s conduct was always very secretive, a lot of Jianghu people also revile him. Virtuous husband and wife making your move this time, your intention was to kill the traitor; it just that unfortunately … unfortunately …” Speaking to this point, he could not stop the tears from flowing down his face again.

Gui Xinshu, husband and wife, had the same thought; they made up their minds to kill Kangxi and Wu Sangui, and then they were going to kill themselves to apologize to Wu Liuqi. But this moment they did not want to talk too much, they cupped their fists toward Chen Jinnan and said, “Chen *Zongduozhu*, we’ll take our leave now.”

“Would you stay for a moment?” Chen Jinnan asked, “*Zaixia* has something to report.” The Gui couple had already taken their son’s hand and were on their way out; hearing this, they stopped and turned around.

Chen Jinnan said, “Wu Sangui is deploying his troops from Yunnan, very soon the whole country will be in rebellion, this is a golden opportunity to reinstate our Han people’s rivers and mountains. There will be quite a number of heroes who in the coming days will gather in the Capital to discuss countermeasure for dealing with current situation. Everybody will be like-minded, how about the two Seniors consider going to Beijing to join the conference?”

In his heart Gui Xinshu was ashamed, he did not have any desire to see other people; hence he shook his head, and started to walk out again.

Wei Xiaobao heard the two of them said that they were going to assassinate the Emperor. He thought these three fellows surnamed ‘turtle’ had a very high level of martial art skill, the young Emperor had never guarded against them, he must prevent them from killing the emperor. “This is a very important matter concerning the world,” he called out, “Your *Gongzi*’s [young master] conduct is a bit messed up. If this time you spoil this matter, even if the three of you kill yourselves, inevitably your names will … will be a stench for ten thousand years.” He had heard the saying ‘yi chou wan nian’ [to have one’s name go down in history as a byword for infamy], but he could not remember the exact words, hence he said ‘chou qi wan nian’ [stench for ten thousand years].

Although he did not say it correctly, the Gui couple understood his meaning clearly. Gui Xinshu knew that in term of martial art skill he was quite superior, but in term of ability to see things clearly he was rather weak, otherwise he would not have blindly accepted Wu Sangui’s one-sided story as the fact, and thus committed this kind of blunder. Hearing Wei Xiaobao, he could not help but shivered inwardly. He thought, “Assassinating the Emperor is indeed an important matter concerning the fate of the nation.”

Wei Xiaobao continued, “Right now the Emperor is still young, he is not too sensible yet, as soon as Wu Sangui arose in rebellion, he would collapse silly. If you kill him, another Tatar, older and more formidable, will become the Emperor, then our Han people’s rivers and mountains will be spoiled under your hands.” Gui Xinshu nodded slowly and turned around.

Chen Jinnan said, “Two Seniors, this child is young, he talks with no respect for his elders, please don’t be offended.” While saying that he cupped his fist to apologize. And then he continued, “But it seems that his concern needs to be considered at length. Such an important matter like this, we must discuss and decide what would be the best course of action?”

Gui Xinshu thought that he had committed one mistake and must not commit another mistake; just because right now he was ashamed and indignant, he must not let himself to be a sinner for all ages. Thereupon he said, “Very well! I will sincerely listen to Chen *Zongduozhu*’s instruction.”

“That word ‘instruction’,” Chen Jinnan said, “I absolutely do not dare to give. Tomorrow morning we will all go to Beijing. In the evening we will meet at this

child's residence to discuss this important matter. What do the Seniors think?" Gui Xinshu nodded.

Chen Jinnan asked Wei Xiaobao, "Have you moved?"

Wei Xiaobao replied, "Disciple still lives at Tong Maozi [copper hat] Lane in Dongcheng [district, central Beijing]."

"Seniors," Chen Jinnan said, "Tomorrow night *Zaixia* will wait respectfully for the two Seniors' honorable presence in this child's *Zijue Fu* [Viscount Mansion] at Tong Maozi Lane in Dongcheng district in Beijing."

"Shifu," Wei Xiaobao said, "Please don't be angry, right now it is called *Bojue Fu* [Earl Mansion]."

"Hey, you have been promoted," Chen Jinnan said.

Gui Erniang stared at Wei Xiaobao. She asked, "You are Wu Sangui's nephew, but also 'live in Cao camp but have the heart in Han camp'; will you place righteousness before family?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "I am not Wu Sangui's nephew, Wu Sangui desperately wanted to be my grandson."

Chen Jinnan scolded him, "Don't be rude in front of the Seniors. Quickly kowtow and apologize."

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao replied. He struck a posture ready to kneel, but he did so exasperatingly slowly.

Gui Xinshu waved his hands; he took his wife and child, as well as his servants, out of the door without saying anything. He knew perfectly well that there was no other place they could lodge for the night, but he would rather go hungry and spend the night in the wilderness since he did not want to be face the face with Tian Di Hui warriors.

Gui Zhong never had any playmate since he was little, seeing that Wei Xiaobao was very clever with words, plus was still young, he found him very amusing. He waved to him and said, "Baby, come with me, accompany me playing."

"You killed my friend," Wei Xiaobao replied, "I am not playing with you."

Suddenly there was a 'whoosh!' a shadow flashed, Gui Zhong leaped over,

grabbed Wei Xiaobao, and brought him to the door. His movement was very fast, while Chen Jinnan had just suffered quite a heavy injury, plus he was quite some distance away; unexpectedly not a single Tian Di Hui warrior had enough time to react.

Gui Zhong laughed aloud and shouted, “You must play hide-and-seek again with me, we will have a lot of fun!”

Gui Xinshu’s countenance sank; he said sternly, “Child, put him down.”

Gui Zhong did not dare to disobey his father, he was obliged to let Wei Xiaobao down, but his lips were already flat, obviously he was about to cry. Gui Erniang said consolingly, “Child, let us go buy two page boys to accompany you playing.”

“Page boys are no fun,” Gui Zhong said, “This baby is fun, let us go buy him.”

Seeing his son making a fool of himself, Gui Xinshu pulled his hand and went out the door in quick steps.

The crowd of warriors looked at each other in dismay; they all felt that Wu Liuqi was a hero, yet he died for no reason under the hands of an idiot. It was indeed too much of injustice.

“Shifu,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Let me invite *Popo Jiejie* here to meet everybody.” Together with Shuang’er he went into the inner hall. Who would have thought that He Tishou had already left?

The Third Mistress said that it was inappropriate for the womenfolk to meet the heroes, she only instructed the maidservants to prepare food and drink and to be hospitable to the guests.

Book note: In the title of this chapter, Yuyang instigation is an allusion to An Lushan’s rebellion [755-763] in reference to Wu Sangui’s rebellion. ‘Excessive supervision with poor planning’ is an allusion to Jing Ke [would-be assassin of King Ying Zheng of Qin (later the first Emperor, Qin Shi Huang)] assassinating King Tai. Our book borrows the allusion in reference to Gui Xinshu and the others mistakenly assassinated Wu Liuqi. It was too late to regret, yet they also wanted to assassinate Kangxi. The implied meaning has no relevance with actual historical fact.

Chapter 42

Hazy sky outside the imperial watchtower at Jiu Zhong [nine heavy] city walls, blowing wind and cloud spitting discontent.

(Translated by Foxs)

Wei Xiaobao bent his palm like a tiger claw, using qinna power he grabbed the shaft of the brush, dipped it into the ink until the brush was soaked, and dripped a drop of ink. Then he made a straight vertical line down on the left of the dot, writing the character 'Xiao'. Underneath it he drew a circle, and then a squiggly line like an earthworm passing through a

horizontal line.

The next day Wei Xiaobao took his leave from the host, and then he and Chen Jinnan went separately to the Capital. Chen Jinnan said, “Xiaobao, Gui *Er Xia*, husband and wife are going to assassinate the Emperor. They have agreed to accept the decision after everybody has discussed it over. When you reach Beijing, you must not notify the Emperor so that he will be on guard.”

Wei Xiaobao did indeed have this intention, but since his Shifu hit the nail on the head, he hastily said, “Of course; his Tatars occupy our Han people’s rivers and mountains, I became an official in the imperial court under Shifu, you, Senior’s order, how can I support him for real?”

“Then so be it,” Chen Jinnan said, “If you say something without meaning it, and do something to let everybody down, I will be the first who will not spare you.”

“Shifu, please let your hundred and twenty hearts at ease,” Wei Xiaobao said, while in his heart he said, “Let your hundred and nineteen hearts at ease! I, myself, am not too much at ease.”

Taking Shuang’er, Xu Tianchuan and the others, he went back to where Zhang Yong, Zhao Liangdong, and the others were waiting. With Mao Dongzhu in custody, they returned to Beijing.

As soon as he was back at the Tong Maozi Lane, he immediately wanted to see Kangxi, thinking, “The young Emperor is my good friend, how can I let him die under those three turtles’ hands? I got it; I will go to the Palace and order the Imperial Bodyguards to be on high alert, to form tight security. I promised Shifu I won’t tell the Emperor, a real man speaks and keeps his promise, I can’t tell him then I won’t tell him, but I can prevent those three turtles from succeeding.”

Just when he was going out the door, Chen Jinnan, taking Gu Zhizhong and Ma Chaoxing, arrived. Wei Xiaobao groaned inwardly. “How could you arrive so quickly?” he thought in his heart. Without any choice he raised his spirit to prepare the reception banquet.

Not long afterwards one after another Tian Di Hui warriors arrived in small groups, followed by Mu Jiansheng, leading his companions, the Iron Back Blue Dragon Liu Dahong, Shaking-Head Lion Wu Lishen, Divine Physician Hermit Su

Gang and the others also arrived. Actually Mu Palace people were already in Beijing; they came together after they received the information about the conference.

Everybody finished eating and drinking, and waited for quite a long time before the three Gui Family arrived. Wei Xiaobao ordered his servants to prepare another banquet. “We already ate,” Gui Erniang said indifferently.

Gui Zhong glanced around; looking at the grand and luxurious mansion he said, “Baby, the appearance of your house is not too far below Ping Xi Wang’s Wuhua Palace. You did not lie, Wu Sangui is indeed your *Bofu* [father’s elder brother].”

“Right,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Wu Sangui is your …” when he said the word ‘your’, suddenly he closed his mouth, thinking that if blurted out that sentence casually, Shifu must be angry with him. Thereupon he changed his statement to, “Since the three of you have already eaten, please come to the eastern hall to have some tea.”

They all went to the eastern hall to enjoy some green tea and light refreshments, and then Wei Xiaobao sent all the servants out. Chen Jinnan also sent a dozen or so Society brethren to guard around and on the roof of the hall before he closed the door, bolted it, and started the meeting.

Chen Jinnan introduced Gui family husband and wife with the Mu Palace people, but he did not mention anything about Wu Liuqi. Although Gui family husband and wife had lived in seclusion for a long time, Liu Dahong, Wu Lishen, and the others were still full of admirations, they were very respectful to them.

Gui Erniang got straight to the point, “After declaring war Wu Sangui attacked Hunan and Sichuan. The power of his troops is very sharp, as they swept everything. Although in the past Wu Sangui surrendered to the Tatars and forfeited the Great Ming’s world, his crime was great, his evil extreme, but he is, after all, still one of our Han people. In our Gui *Er Ye*’s [second master] opinion, we want to enter the Palace and assassinate the Tatar Emperor, so that the Tatars will be like a dragon without a head, and will be thrown into confusion. Gentlemen, what’s your wise opinion?”

Mu Jiansheng said, “Surely the Tatar Emperor ought to be killed, but if we do that, won’t that mean we give Wu Sangui that traitor a big help?”

Gui Erniang said, “In the past Wu Sangui killed Mu *Wangye*, naturally Mu *Gongzi* does not want to let him off. But the distinction between Manchurian and Han is of utmost importance, we must kill the Tatars first, it won’t be too late to slowly deal with Wu Sangui later.”

Liu Dahong said, “If in this rebellion Wu Sangui triumphs over the opponent, he himself will become the Emperor; to shake him later will not be easy. In *Wanbei*’s [Junior] opinion, we’ll let the Tatars and Wu Sangui massacre each other, fighting desperately against each other until you die, I live. And then we’ll reap the benefit of spreading the net over them. Thus Junior believes that it is inadvisable to assassinate the Tatar Emperor right now.” Although he had a chin full of white beard, Gui Family husband and wife had made their name long time ago, thus the reason he called himself ‘Junior’. Mu Palace’s enmity against Wu Sangui was as deep as the ocean; they would be very pleased to see his destruction first.

Gui Erniang said, “Wu Sangui is fighting for the Ming to demand prisoner of war, to rise the banner in assistance of the Third Zhu Crown Prince to ascend the throne. Here we have dispatch order from Wu Sangui, everybody please see.” From her pocket she took a large sheet of paper and spread it out on the table.

Chen Jinnan immediately read it aloud, “Former Shanhai Pass Guard *Zongbing*, current grand marshal under imperial orders to preside over water and land under the heaven, great general Wu to rise the Ming to demand prisoner of war, writing to make all civil and military officers, government officers, military soldiers and common citizens under the heavens know: our garrison profoundly received the benefit of the Great Ming’s nobility rank, to unite the garrisons of the Shanhai Pass …”

Chen Jinnan knew that most warriors did not understand literature; he read several sentences, then explained these sentences. After explaining clearly the first paragraph, he continued reading. The following section explained how Li Zicheng broke into Beijing, how Chongzhen returned to Heaven, how in order to avenge his lord father’s enmity he acted against his will to turn toward Manchurian Qing’s troops and gave them the opportunity to break in. After that he said, “Fortunately the main offender received favor under successive rulers, inherited command, received duty to guard the border, compensated the

Manchu tribal chief. Caught unprepared by the deceit of going against the oath to the Heaven, availing myself to my inner void, grandly I seize Yanjing [old name for Beijing]. Humbly I become the divine tool of the former Dynasty, transforming my China's crown and lower garment: fully aware that I must repel the entering wolves, and correcting the mistake of carrying firewood to put out a fire."

Gui Erniang said, "Afterwards he was aware that lending assistance to Manchu troop was wrong, unfortunately it was too late."

"Humph," Liu Dahong snorted, "That traitor really know how to talk, it's all a lie."

"Chen *Zongduozhu*," Gui Erniang said, "Please read on."

"Yes!" Chen Jinnan said, and continued reading, "Our garrison pierce the heart and vomit blood, my remorse reaches the extreme, desiring to return to the north, wiping out the stench, receiving the late Emperor's Third Crown Prince. The Crown Prince was only three years old, he did not remember the assassination, he lived as an orphan, he depended on his ancestor's associates. For the time being drinking blood, waiting patiently, growing up in the dark waiting for an opportunity, selecting generals training soldiers, secretly drawing plans to rise and restore, until today, thirty years later!"

Listening to this part, Liu Dahong could not hold his patience any longer. He slapped the table and said, "Fart! Fart! This thief with a heart of wolf and lungs of dog whom the Heaven and the Earth cannot tolerate, if he really have half a heart of rising and restoring the Great Ming, why did he murder Emperor Yongli in the past? The Crown Prince Yongli! This matter is well known throughout the world, how would you deny that?"

When the crowd of heroes saw the look of Liu Dahong's halberd-like eyebrows, none did not admire his loyalty. They thought that the fact that twelve years ago in Kunming City Wu Sangui hanged Emperor Yongli, father and son, could not be disputed.

Gui Erniang said, "Liu *Dage* is not wrong, Wu Sangui is definitely not a loyal subject or a patriot, even a three-year old knows that. The reason we want to assassinate the Tatar Emperor is to fight the Qing and restore the Ming, it is not

to help Wu Sangui to become the Emperor."

Chen Jinnan said, "Let me finish reading this dispatch order, everybody may take your time in reaching the decision." He continued reading, "And now, to capture the tyrannical tribal chief, crafty and evil person of high status, let the scholars of righteousness and justice, colleagues who know: narrow-minded generation, all occupying prominent post …" Reading to this point, he laughed toward Wei Xiaobao and said, "Xiaobao, this sentence is talking about you."

Listening to his Shifu reading the document, Wei Xiaobao only felt that his intonation, the falling and rising of his voice was very pleasant to hear. Suddenly he heard that Wu Sangui's document was mentioning him, he could not help but was pleasantly surprised. "Shifu," he hastily asked, "What did he say about me? That fellow can't be talking anything good about me."

Chen Jinnan said, "He said that well-educated, virtuous good men only become sesame-seed and mung-bean petty officials; those fellows without any skill whatsoever can be high-ranking officer. Isn't he talking about you?"

"What about himself?" Wei Xiaobao said, "His official rank is higher than mine; wouldn't it mean that he is more useless than I am?"

Everybody roared in laughter; they said, "That's right! No one in the imperial court has a higher official position than Ping Xi Qin Wang."

The final paragraph of the document said, "The mountains miserable the water anxious, women cry children sob, to such an extent as the comets fell the sky above shows its wrath, the landslide the soil cracks, the earth below voices its complaint. Our garrison look upward to observe and look down to examine, in sincerity dispatching expedition against cruelty to rescue the people, obeying the Heaven responding to the people's days. Lovingly forecasting the first day of the first month of the *Jiayin* year [51st year of the 60-year cycle], respectfully presenting to the Crown Prince, offering sacrifice to inform the heaven and earth, in veneration ascending the great treasure. Establishing the first Zhou consultant."

Finished reading, Chen Jinnan explained the document. With the exception of Chen Jinnan and Mu Jiansheng two people, these people had never read any literary works, they all thought that this dispatch order seemed to be clear and

logical; if there was anything not right in it, they could not tell.

Mu Jiansheng pondered deeply for a moment before saying, “Chen *Zongduozhu*, if he wanted to present tribute to the Third Crown Prince Zhu and offer him to ascend the Great Treasure, why didn’t he reinstating the Great Ming’s dynasty title, but wanted to change the dynasty title to Zhou? There must be a very big hole in his argument. Let alone we do not know if the Third Crown Prince Zhu or what have you is real or fake; nobody has ever heard anything about him, but all of a sudden he appeared without a head without a brain. Most likely Wu Sangui went out to find a child who does not understand anything, and called him the Third Crown Prince Zhu to appeal to the heart of the people, while in reality he would use him as a puppet.” Everybody nodded their agreement.

Gui Erniang said, “Wu Sangui uses the Third Crown Prince Zhu as his puppet, naturally I do not doubt it. Whether this person is real or fake, there is not much difference. It’s just that the Third Crown Prince Zhu is not a little child, the late Emperor died for his country already thirty years ago, if the Third Crown Prince Zhu is real, at least he would also be in his thirties.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Thirty something baby who does not understand anything is not nonexistent, hee … hee …” While saying that he cast a glance toward Gui Zhong.

Several warriors were not able to stifle their laughter. Gui Erniang’s eyebrows stood up, she was about to lose her temper, but then she had a second thought: Wei Xiaobao was right, her own precious son was already over thirty years of age, but he was still a little baby who did not understand anything. She could not help sighing softly.

They talked for a long time. Some proposed to leave Kangxi alone and get rid of Wu Sangui first, and then draw a plan to restore the country; some thought that although Wu Sangui was crafty and evil, in the end he was still a Han, they ought to help him driving out the Tatars, after the Han people’s rivers and mountains were restored, then they would remove him. They kept debating on and on but could not reach the final conclusion. After a long time, they all turned their eyes toward Chen Jinnan, knowing that he was resourceful, certainly he would have a wise opinion.

Chen Jinnan said, “We attach most importance to our country. If at this moment we kill Kangxi, admittedly Wu Sangui’s momentum will get a lot of boost. But Taiwan’s Zheng *Wangye* can also cross the ocean and attack to the west; their troops could enter via Fujian and Zhejiang, and attacked straight toward Jiangsu. With this east-west converging attack, the Tatars will definitely collapse. At that time, if Wu Sangui wants to be the Emperor, Zheng *Wangye*’s force, combined with Mu Palace, Tian Di Hui and heroes from all over the world will be able to control and overpower him.”

Su Gang coldly said, “By saying that, isn’t Chen *Zongduozhu* leaning somewhat heavily toward the Taiwan’s Zheng *Wangye*?”

Chen Jinnan replied sternly, “Zheng *Wangye*’s loyalty is well-known throughout the world, could it be that Su *Xiong* did not believe him?”

Su Gang said, “Chen *Zongduozhu* is loyal, brave and chivalrous, everybody respect and submit to you. But by Zheng *Wangye*’s side, devious and despicable lowly people are abounded.”

Wei Xiaobao could not bear not to speak up, “That is absolutely correct; take that ‘One Sword Without Blood’ Feng Xifan for example, and then there is Zheng *Wangye*’s younger son Zheng Keshuang. They all are not good people.”

Hearing that Wei Xiaobao did not align himself with him, Chen Jinnan was slightly surprised; but thinking that what he said was not wrong, he could not refrain from heaving a sigh.

Gui Erniang said, “Driving out the Tatars is the most important task; as for who will be the Emperor, we have no right to interfere. Fighting the Qing is something we have to do, whether we restore the Ming or not, there is no harm in discussing it slowly. Emperor Chongzhen of the Great Ming was not a good thing anyway.”

Chen Jinnan and Mu Palace warriors had always been loyal to Zhu Family of Ming; as soon as they heard that, their countenances changed greatly. Mu Jiansheng said, “If we fail to support the offspring of the Zhu Clan to regain the throne, won’t that mean we are supporting that big traitor Wu Sangui?”

Gui Zhong suddenly said, “Wu Sangui is a good man. He gave me this white tiger skin to be made as my robe. Have you seen it?” While saying that, he

opened up the lapel of his robe to expose the white tiger skin underneath, seemingly very pleased with himself.

Gui Erniang said, “Child, don’t talk nonsense in here.”

With a cold laugh Su Gang said, “In Gui *Shaoye*’s opinion, a leather robe is more important than our Han’s rivers and mountains.”

“Child,” Gui Erniang angrily said, “Take that leather robe off!”

Gui Zhong was shocked, “But why?” he asked.

Gui Xinshu stretched out his hand to pull the sword hanging on his son’s waist. White light flashed, ‘swish, swish!’ the sword in Gui Xinshu’s hand continuously flitted across his son’s chest, back, shoulders and arms. Everybody was shocked; they all leaped back from their chairs, they thought Gui Xinshu was killing his son. But then they saw that the leather robe Gui Zhong was wearing had become seventeen or eighteen pieces, falling around his body, revealing the short silk, cotton-padded undergarments. Gui Xinshu’s sword moved very fast; it cut the leather robe into pieces, yet it did not touch the cotton-padded silk undergarments at all. When the crowd of warriors had seen clearly, they all cheered.

Gui Zhong was so scared that he could only stared blankly, while coughing incessantly. He almost cried as he said, “Dad … (cough, cough) … (cough, cough) … Dad … (cough) … I …”

Gui Xinshu waved his hand, the sword went back into its sheath, and then he took off his own cotton robe and draped it over his son’s body. “Put it on!” he said.

Gui Erniang picked up the pieces of white tiger skin from the floor and threw them into the blazing stove; immediately the fire blazed higher, a burst of burning leather smell arose, the white tiger was gradually burned into ashes. “What a pity, what a pity,” Wei Xiaobao repeatedly stated.

“Let’s go,” Gui Xinshu said. He pulled his son’s hand and led him toward the door.

Chen Jinnan said, “Gui *Er Xia* is going to attempt great things, we would like to offer some plans.”

“I do not dare!” Gui Xinshu said, “No need!” While saying that, he walked toward the door of the hall.

Wei Xiaobao knew Gui Xinshu was going to make his move at once, it would be too late to inform the Emperor, he must use all kinds of delaying tactics. Blocking in front of Gui Xinshu, he said in a loud voice, “The number of rooms in the Palace, if not ten thousands, then there are at least five thousands. Do you know where the Tatar Emperor live?”

Gui Xinshu was startled; he realized these words made a lot of sense. Turning his head around he asked, “Do you?”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “Nobody does,” he said, “Tatar Emperor is afraid someone might come to assassinate him, each night he moves from place to place to sleep. Sometimes he sleeps at the Chang Chun [eternal spring (season)] Palace, sometimes he sleeps at the Jing Yang [Bright (scenery) Positive] Palace, sometimes he sleeps at the Xian Fu [harmonious good fortune] Palace, Yan Xi [extended joy] Palace, or perhaps at the Li Jing [beautiful scenery] Pavilion, Yu Hua [rain flower] Loft, or Yu Qing [nurturing (a child) celebration] Palace.” In one breath he mentioned seven or eight different Palace or Pavilion names.

Listening to him, Gui Xinshu frowned. Wei Xiaobao added, “Even the court eunuchs and Imperial Bodyguards who serve on the Emperor’s side do not know where the Emperor will sleep tonight.”

“So how are we going to find the Emperor?” Gui Xinshu asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “When the Emperor holds the morning audience, all civil and military officials will see him. As he entered the building, he will come to see you, others will never find him.” Actually the situation was not as dire as he made it to be, Kangxi did not frequently move around to lie down, but Gui Xinshu, husband and wife, were ‘uncultivated land’ and ‘cloth clothes’; how could they know the Imperial Palace’s inner courtyards’ practices? Hearing Wei Xiaobao’s crazy nonsense, they thought that the Emperor taking strict precautions against assassins was rightly so, hence they were greatly hesitating.

Looking at Gui Xinshu’s expression, Wei Xiaobao knew that he realized the difficulty of this situation; in his heart Wei Xiaobao was very pleased. “Gui *Laoyezi* [old master],” he asked, “Do you know how many concubines the

Emperor has?”

“Humph,” Gui Xinshu snorted; he stared at Wei Xiaobao without saying anything.

Wei Xiaobao said, “The storytellers said that the Emperor has three palaces and six courtyards, the chambers of imperial concubines’ beautiful girls … beautiful women are around three thousand. The Tatar Emperor does not have that many wives, I don’t think he has three thousand, but I’ll say he has at least eight or nine hundreds. Every night he becomes the groom; today he sleeps at the 351st imperial concubine’s room, tomorrow he’ll sleep at the 634th imperial concubine’s room. Even the imperial concubines themselves will not know where the Emperor will spend the night. They might have to wait three years, four years, and still do not know if the Emperor is coming or not.”

“Xiaobao,” Chen Jinnan said, “You have lived in the Palace for a long time, you must know a way to find the Emperor.”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “During the day it is easy to find him, but in the night, no matter what I have no idea how to find him.”

Chen Jinnan said, “In that case, during the day tomorrow we disguise ourselves and with you leading us, we’ll sneak into the Palace to execute the mission. Last time didn’t you take Qian *Xiongdi* and Wu *Er Ge* in and out of the Palace?” While saying that he pointed to Qian Laoben and Wu Lishen, two men.

“Qian *Dage* only went as far as the imperial kitchen,” Wei Xiaobao said, “As soon as Wu *Er Ge* and the others entered the Palace, the bodyguards … the bodyguards discovered them. To see the Emperor’s face, it was still a hundred and eight thousand *li* away. Qian *Dage*, Wu *Er Ge*, don’t you agree?”

Qian and Wu, two men, nodded their heads. The two of them knew that to enter the Palace and look for the Emperor was like fishing a needle from the bottom of the ocean.

“Disciple has a way,” Wei Xiaobao said.

“What way?” Chen Jinnan asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Disciple is going to see the Emperor tomorrow, he will surely want to talk about Wu Sangui’s rebellion, how to send the troops to fight,

disciple will advise him to come out and inspect the cannon. As long as he is out of the Palace, it would be a lot easier to make our move. Whether the assassination attempt is successful or not, we can put oil on the soles of our feet, and will be able to escape a lot easier; it will be a lot less dangerous."

With a cold laugh Gui Erniang said, "So the Emperor will listen to you, a baby? If you do not come out of the Palace for three years, do you think we should wait for three years? You use all sorts of excuses, in the end you are not willing to lead us in, is that it?"

Mu Jiansheng said, "To enter the Palace and assassinate the Emperor, *Xiongdi* has done it. It was shameful actually, our Mu Palace lost quite a number of *Xiongdi*. My own little sister, along with Fang Shimei, also this Wu Shishu, as well as two other Shidi, were trapped inside the Palace and met quite an unexpected fate. Fortunately we received Wei *Xiangzhu*'s help for the sake of loyalty before we could get out of the danger. It's not that we are coward who are afraid to die, this matter is truly difficult to succeed."

Gui Erniang looked coldly at Wei Xiaobao; she asked, "You can rescue them out of danger?"

Wu Lishen hastily said, "Although Wei *Xiangzhu* is young, his benevolence and righteousness surpass others, he is quick-witted and smart; *Xiongdi* owes my life entirely to him."

Gui Erniang said, "Mu Palace failed, that does not necessarily mean that surnamed Gui will also fail for sure."

Liu Dahong stood up abruptly and said, "Gui Family husband and wife are Divine Fist Without Equal; it's only natural that you surpass us, tiny Mu Palace, by a hundredfold. I would suggest you go at once, we will be waiting in here for good news."

A brother from Great Benevolence Hall said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, you'd better also go to the Palace. Wait until the Gui Family Three *Da Xia* [big hero] are captured by the Tatar bodyguards, you'd better find a way to rescue them." He was still bitter over the Gui Family, three people murdered Wu Liuqi, so that even though they were in the presence of their *Zongduozhu*, he could not refrain from mocking them a bit.

Wei Xiaobao cursed in his heart, “If the three of you turtles enter the Palace and are caught, even if my head is chopped I won’t save you out.” He laughed and said, “How can the Gui Family Three *Da Xia* be caught by the Tatar bodyguards? There are more than eight thousand Imperial Bodyguards in the Palace, Gui *Shaoye* only needs to cough several times, these more than eight thousand guards will have their brains shaken and die.” Quite a number of people from Tian Di Hui and Mu Palace broke out in laughter.

Gui Zhong laughed. “Is there really such thing?” he said, “That will be really fun. So they are afraid to hear my (cough … cough, cough) …? (Cough, cough) … (cough, cough) …” The Gui couple was furious; one of them grabbed their son’s arm and the three of them walked out side-by-side.

“Gui *Er Xia*,” Chen Jinnan said, “Please calm down. *Xiongdi* has a plan.”

Gui Erniang always knew that Chen Jinnan was full of stratagems; she turned around, waiting for him to continue.

Chen Jinnan said, “Gui *Er Xia* virtuous husband and wife are exceptionally skillful in martial arts, you are unequaled in the present age, but you are entering a very dangerous ground, all in all there will be multitude of enemies, but only a few friends. We’d better discuss a foolproof plan to …”

Gui Erniang cut him off, “I thought Chen *Zongduozhu* really had a brilliant idea, humph!” Turning around again, she walked toward the door.

Liu Dahong and Wu Lishen suddenly rushed forward and blocked the door. Liu Dahong said, “If the two of you want to help Wu Sangui, we from Mu Palace absolutely will not allow it to happen.”

“What?” Gui Erniang said, “You want to fight?”

Liu Dahong said, “The two of you might better kill me and my martial brothers clean first before going out this door to lend a hand to Wu Sangui.”

“Who says we are going to lend a hand to Wu Sangui?” Gui Erniang said.

Liu Dahong said, “Although the two of you do not have any intention to help that traitor Wu, but if you succeed, that traitor Wu’s momentum will gain a lot of boost, he cannot be controlled anymore.”

“Get out of the way,” Gui Xinshu said in a low voice, while taking a step forward.

Liu Dahong spread his arms to block the door. Gui Xinshu stretched his left hand forward to grab Liu Dahong’s chest. Liu Dahong raised his hand to parry, ‘smack!’ two palms collided, Liu Dahong’s body swayed two times, his entire face turned deathly pale. “I only used fifty-percent of my power,” Gui Xinshu said.

Wu Lishen shook his head and said, “There is no harm in you using a hundred-percent of your power so that all of us martial brothers will die violently.”

Gui Zhong said, “You want a hundred-percent, I’ll give you a hundred-percent.” He raised both hands, one bent close to his body, the other outstretched. Wu Lishen stretched out his arm to parry. Gui Zhong pulled his hand back, Wu Lishen struck an empty space. Gui Zhong seized the opportunity when Wu Lishen was about to pull his hand back, quick as lightning his hands grabbed the acupoints on Wu Lishen’s chest and waist.

Chen Jinnan rushed forward to stop them. “We are all good friends here,” he persuaded, “Let’s not use force.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “We all argue incessantly, in the end we still don’t have any solution. Let’s do it this way: we throw dice, leave it all to luck. If Gui *Laoyezi* wins, not only we will not hinder the three of you from entering the Palace, *Wanbei* [junior] will explain in details the situation in the Palace to the two of you.”

“And if you win?” Gui Erniang asked.

Wei Xiaobao replied, “In that case we will put this matter on the shelf for the time being, after Wu Sangui is dead, we will make our move against the Emperor.”

Gui Erniang thought, “If we do it on our own, Mu Family will most likely go to inform the Tatars, in the end this matter will be difficult to accomplish. We might as well listen to him.” She turned to ask her husband, “*Er Ye* [second master], what do you think?”

Gui Xinshu said to Wei Xiaobao, “If you lose you must not go back on your word.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “A real man gave his words, dead horses cannot pull it back. The Tatar young Emperor is not my *laozi* [old man], why would I want to protect him? It’s just that if we win, we must win it heroically, if we lose, we must lose gracefully. No matter who wins or loses, we must not harm our friendship.”

Chen Jinnan thought that his last sentence made a lot of sense; he said, “This matter involves great responsibility, in the end it will affect the calamity or good fortune of our great undertaking of restoring our country; it is difficult to predict. People of old used divination when they were in doubt, we will roll the dice, the idea is the same. Everybody needs not argue opinionatedly, let’s depend on the Will of Heaven.”

Gui Erniang said, “Child, let him go.”

“I won’t,” Gui Zhong replied.

“This little brother wants to play with you by rolling the dice,” Gui Erniang said.

Gui Zhong was delighted; immediately he relinquished his grip, releasing the acupoint on Wu Lishen’s chest. Wu Lishen felt the pain on the pit of his stomach was unbearable, his breathing could not flow freely, he shook his head continuously.

“Gui *Shaoye*,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Please take your dice out. We’ll use yours.”

“Dice?” Gui Zhong asked, “I don’t have any. Do you have some?”

“I don’t have it either,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Who has some dice?” he asked around. Everybody slowly shook their head, they all thought, “We are not rotten gambling ghost, who would carry dice everywhere?”

Gui Erniang said, “No dice, we’ll flip a coin.”

“Throwing dice is more fair,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Genuine goods at fair prices, cheating neither old nor young. I am a boy, Gui *Shaoye* is an old gentleman, thus it is clear that we must throw dice. I am sure one of the personal guards would have some dice; I’ll go ask.” Finished speaking, he pulled the bolt, open the door, and went out of the hall.

He went out of the eastern hall, entered the main hall, and fetched six dice

from his pouch. The dice were the talisman that he carried everywhere, but if he took out dice on the spot, Gui Family husband and wife would definitely suspect him. He sat down in the main hall for a moment before returning to the east hall and said with a laugh, “I found some dice.”

“How do you decide winning or losing?” Gui Erniang asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “The trick in throwing dice, I don’t understand the least bit. Gui *Shaoye*, how do you say we must gamble?”

Gui Zhong picked up two dice and said, “You and I compete in accuracy.” His finger flicked, ‘chi, chi!’ the two dice flew and extinguished two candles, followed by ‘pop, pop!’ the two dice embedded itself into the wooden partition. The crowd of warriors broke into praise, “Good skill!”

Wei Xiaobao said, “I have seen people throwing the dice; it’s a competition of the number of dots, big or small, not a competition of secret projectile throwing skill.”

“That’s right!” Gui Erniang said, “The two of you throw one time, who has the bigger number of dots wins.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Only throwing one time, maybe his luck is really good, all at once he rolls thirty-six dots.” Thereupon he said, “Let’s do it this way: each one of us will throw three times, two out of three will win.”

Gui Zhong thought that the more they throw the dice the more he would have fun. He said, “Each one of us will throw three hundred times, whoever wins two hundred times will be considered the winners.”

“That will be too much trouble,” Gui Erniang said, “Each one throwing three times is enough.”

Xu Tianchuan pulled the two dice embedded into the wooden partition and put them on the table. “Gui *Shaoye*,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You throw first.”

Gui Zhong picked up the dice, and with a giggle he was ready to throw. “Hold on!” Gui Erniang said. Turning her head, he asked Liu Dahong and Mu Jiansheng, “If we win this game, will Mu Palace be considered lost too?”

Just now Liu Dahong exchanged a palm strike with Gui Xinshu, the blood and

chi in his chest was still bubbling up, by this time he had not been able to regulate it yet; he thought that the opponent had said that he was only using fifty-percent of his power, this man was a senior hero, it must be not an empty word. If he really wanted to go to the Palace to assassinate the Emperor, based on Mu Palace's power alone, how could they stop him? Thereupon he nodded. Mu Jiansheng said, "Let the Heaven reveal its will, the decision will be based entirely on the throw of the two gentlemen."

"Very well!" Gui Erniang said. Turning to Gui Zhong she said, "Throw it! The bigger the number of dots the better."

Gui Zhong examined the dice carefully. He said, "The biggest number of dots is six, the smallest is two, and then there is this big indentation here."

"That big indentation is one dot," Gui Erniang said.

Gui Zhong said, "It's so weird, the four dots are red." Waving his right palm, 'Slap!' the six dice went into the tabletop, all top surfaces had six dots on them. Turned out he arranged the dice on his palm, with all dice have one dot facing up, so that when he slammed the dice down, naturally all six dots were facing up.

Everybody was stunned, but they were also amused. This tuberculosis ghost seemed too weak to stand up to the wind, yet his internal energy was surprisingly this deep; but where in the world would there be throwing dice technique like this?

"Child," Gui Erniang said, "That's not the way to throw the dice." Stretching out her palm, she slapped the table once, the six dice immediately jumped up. Everybody cheered. Gui Erniang picked up the dice and rolled it gently. She said, "Whatever dots come up, that will be the number of dots you get. You can't rely on your own desire."

"So that's how you do it," Gui Zhong said. Imitating his mother's movement, he picked up the dice and gently tossed them on the table. The dice rolled. When they stopped, the number of dots was twenty. Six dice produced twenty dots, the chance of winning was slightly higher.

Wei Xiaobao picked up the dice, his little finger pushed a little bit, he was secretly employing his trick, and then he shouted, "Eat 'em all!" while throwing

the dice away. Five dice stopped to show seventeen dots, the last dice continued rolling. Based on Wei Xiaobao's skill in cheating, the last die should stop at six dots, bringing the total to twenty-three dots, then he would win the first throw. Who would have thought that the die suddenly tripped into a little hole on the table, one of the holes created by Gui Zhong when he slammed the dice just a moment ago. The die shook slightly and stopped rolling altogether. The top surface showed one dot. Eighteen dots; he lost.

Wei Xiaobao said, "There are holes on the table, this one did not count."

He picked up the dice and was about to throw again. Chen Jinnan shook his head and said, "This is the Will of Heaven, you lost the first round."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "There are two more throws, I will definitely win." He handed the dice to Gui Zhong.

Gui Zhong won the first round, he was extremely pleased with himself. He gently rolled the dice, but only got nine dots. When Mu family people saw that this round his lost was guaranteed, they could not help but standing up and cheering.

Wei Xiaobao walked around the table to another corner, far from the six little holes, and threw the dice over there. Unexpectedly he got four dice at six dots each, and two dice at five dots each, bringing the total to thirty-four. Any combination of two dice already won. The victory was completely without any surprise without any risk.

Both sides had won one round each, the third throw would decide win or loss. Gui Zhong threw the dice. Six dice rolled around for a good while, finally they stopped at thirty-one dots, the chance of winning was very high. Anxiety reappeared on the Mu Family's people's faces, thinking that to beat these thirty-one dots they would need enormous good luck. But Wei Xiaobao was not worried at all, he thought, "I will use the same trick, I'll throw thirty-four dots to beat you."

With little finger pressed on the hollow of his palm, he set up the position of the dice and then gently rolled them out. He saw the six dice rolled on the table and stopped one by one; six dots, five dots, five dots, six dots … the first four dice all produced big numbers, he already had twenty-two dots. The fifth die also

stopped at six dots, bringing the total to twenty-eight dots. The last die was still spinning. If it stopped at three, it would be a draw, then they would have to throw another round. One or two dots would mean he lost; four, five or six would give him victory. His chance of winning was 60%. Wei Xiaobao thought, “Even if it is three dots and we have to throw one more time, you won’t necessarily have the same good luck.”

The last die seemed to roll endlessly; they saw that it was going to land on six. “Good!” he shouted excitedly. Suddenly the die flipped over and rolled again. He was stunned. “There’s a ghost!” he cried out.

When he took a glance, he saw Gui Xinshu was blowing gently toward the dice. Right this moment, the die stopped rolling, the big indentation was facing up to the morning sky. It was one dot. Everybody shouted in chorus.

Wei Xiaobao was shocked and angered at the same time, he had seen people cheating in dice countless times, but to see people blowing on the dice to flip it over, this was his very first time; he had never even heard about it before. This old man’s internal energy was outstanding to the extreme, he was able to blow a thin stream of air; not only he was able to turn the six dots into one, perhaps when Gui Zhong threw thirty-on dots just now, it was not entirely due to his good luck in gambling, but because his *laozi* [old man] on the side was blowing air to help him. With face bulging red he shouted, “Gui *Laoyezi*, you … you … (whoosh, whoosh, whoosh)!” While saying that he pursed his lips to blow.

“Twenty-nine dots, you lose!” Gui Xinshu said. Reaching out, he picked the six dice and pinched them between his thumb and middle-finger. ‘Crack!’ the dice shattered, a few drops of mercury flowed out; the drops scattered around the tabletop and immediately turned into hundreds or perhaps thousands of small beads, which rolled everywhere.

Gui Zhong clapped his hands and cheered, “It’s fun, it’s fun! What is that thing? It looks like water, but also looks like silver.”

Seeing Gui Xinshu was exposing the mercury inside the dice to artificially increase their weight, Wei Xiaobao knew he could not argue over him blowing the dice. Pretending to be amazed, he said, “Turns out there is some mercury inside the dice. *Laoyezi*, you have taught Junior something new. The dice are

made of ox bones, today I learned that mercury also come from cows. Previously I thought that it was silver plus water turned into mercury. Cows can cultivate soil, they also can produce mercury. Amazing, amazing!"

Gui Erniang ignored his nonsense; she said, "Anybody has anything else to say? Wei *Xiongdi*, please explain in details the situation of the Imperial Palace."

Wei Xiaobao cast a glance toward his Shifu. Chen Jinnan nodded his head, saying, "It's the Will of Heaven, you must explain honestly to the two Seniors." He knew this disciple of his was very crafty, hence he added the word 'honestly'.

Wei Xiaobao's mind was churning; he had an idea, he said, "Since I have lost, naturally I can't renege on the result of the bet. A real man steals, robs and cheats is not a big deal, but betting result must be honored. There are too many rooms in the Imperial Palace, even if I explain everything I can't make you understand. I'll draw a picture. Xu *San Ge*, Qian *Dage*, please accompany the guests, I'll make the drawing." Cupping his fist toward everybody, he turned around, walked out of the hall, and entered his study room.

This earl mansion was given to him by Prince Kang, inside the study room, the books filled the wall, writing brush and ink stone was prepared on the table. Wei Xiaobao was afraid his gambling luck would turn bad, books and loss ['shu' and 'shu'] are homophone; normally he would not enter this Study Room ['shu fang' – book room, library] even for half a step. Right now he sat in front of the desk and shouted, "Grind the ink!" He had already summoned his personal attendant to serve him.

The *Bojue Daren* [Earl] has never written any letter, the personal attendant was bewildered, but his face showed admiration. Immediately he pulled himself together and started to work. He put fresh water into the antique purple coiled dragon stone ink slab that used to belong to Wang Xizhi[4], took the pine-black fragrant ink that was a leftover from Chu Suiliang[5] of the Tang Dynasty, pressed it by applying force from his wrist to his finger, and then while holding his breath and with full concentration ground the ink on the ink-stone to make thick liquid ink. From the brush container he fetched a writing brush made of mottled bamboo inlaid with silver, with best quality goat hair, manufactured by Zhao Meng of Huzhou. And then he spread a piece of gold-patterned jade edition

notepaper, manufactured under imperial orders of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, on the desk. Lastly, he lighted a dragon-essence musk-fragrance incense stick on the burner just like when Madame usually wrote letters, before waiting respectfully for *Bojue Daren* to start writing. When everything was set up, it was like: 'Zhong Wang Ou Chu Yan Liu Zhao, it was a shame that everybody was inferior to Wei Xiaobao'. [Translator's note: Not sure what it means, but the first line was a bunch of surnames, some of them appeared in the description of the product he was using (Wang Xizhi, Chu Suiliang, Zhao Meng, etc.)]

Wei Xiaobao bent his palm like a tiger claw, using *qinna* [grab and capture/grappling] power he grabbed the shaft of the brush, dipped it into the ink until the brush was soaked, suddenly with a light 'plop!' a large drop of ink dripped from the tip of the brush onto the paper, immediately staining the gold-patterned jade edition notepaper. The personal attendant thought, "Turns out *Bojue Daren* is not writing letters, he is going to paint, Liang-calligraphy style, by splashing ink onto the paper." But then he saw him making a straight vertical line down on the left of the dot, as if he was drawing a curvy tree trunk. And then on the left of the tree trunk he lightly put another dot. It appeared like the northern school's Li Sixun's hatchet hacking style, or perhaps the southern school's Wang Mojie's draping hemp cloth style. It was definitely a combination of the two schools', north and south, major styles.

The attendant had always been serving in the study room, he had quite a bit of ink in his belly [i.e. literary knowledge]; while he was sighing in admiration, suddenly he heard the Earl asked, "Is my 'Xiao' [little] character written well?" The attendant jumped in fright; he did not know that *Bojue Daren* was writing the character 'Xiao' [小]. Hastily he uttered some words of praise, saying, "*Daren*'s penmanship, the stroke from right to left, did not create a square, vertical line from the sky is genius." [Translator's note: honestly, I have no idea what he was talking about, perhaps about Chinese strokes?]

Wei Xiaobao said, "Go, summon Zhang *Tidu* here."

The attendant complied and went out, thinking, "I wonder what *Bojue Daren* is going to write next?" But even if he guessed ten thousand times, he would never have guessed correctly.

Actually, after the character 'Xiao', Wei Xiaobao drew a circle. Underneath the

circle, he drew a horizontal line, something that looked like stiff firewood or shoulder pole, and then a squiggly line like an earthworm passing through the shoulder pole. The earthworm passing through the shoulder pole was actually a 'Zi' [子] character. This three-character string was actually Kangxi's name, 'Xiao Xuanzi'. Since he did not know how to write the character 'Xuan', he substituted it with a circle[6].

He recalled that day when he was a monk in the Qingliang Temple, Kangxi drew some pictures in the imperial decree; Wei Xiaobao was happy and very impressed. Following the example of the Holy Sage, he respectfully copied what he did; today the situation was urgent, hence he submitted the memorial to the throne in drawings.

After writing the name 'Xiao Xuanzi', he drew a sword, with the tip of the sword penetrating the circle. If it meant to be a saber, it did not look like a saber, if it meant to be a sword, it did not look like a sword. Just by drawing these, his forehead was drenched in sweats.

He had just finished the drawing when Zhang Yong arrived.

Wei Xiaobao folded the gold-patterned jade edition notepaper and put it in an envelope. He sealed it well and handed it over to Zhang Yong, while saying in a low voice, "Zhang *Tidu*, this is a very important memorial to the throne. Please deliver it at once to the Palace and present it to His Majesty. Just say that this is my secret memorial, the Imperial Bodyguards and eunuchs will immediately announce your arrival."

Zhang Yong complied. He received the envelope with both hands, and was about to put it into his pocket when they heard the two personal guards outside the study room asked in chorus, "Who's there?" The door opened with a bang, three people burst in, they were none other than Gui Family husband and wife and Gui Zhong.

In a glance Gui Erniang saw the memorial in Zhang Yong's hand; both reached from left and right, she snatched the envelope away, and asked Wei Xiaobao in stern voice, "You are going to inform the Tatar Emperor?"

Wei Xiaobao was so stunned that he could only stare blankly. "No … it's not … it's not …" he stammered.

Gui Erniang tore open the envelope, took the letter out and looked at the strange drawing on the paper. She was puzzled. “Look at this!” she said, while handing it over to Gui Xinshu. “What is this?” she asked Wei Xiaobao.

“I told him to go to the kitchen,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “I am ordering some … some … some dumpling soup for the guests to eat, the small dumplings, not the big ones. I want some pattern to be carved on the dumplings. He … he did not know what I mean, I drew some picture for him.”

Gui Xinshu and Gui Erniang nodded; their expressions softened. The drawing on the paper indeed looked like carving a pattern on the dumpling with a knife, so he was not trying to inform the Emperor at all.

Wei Xiaobao waved his hand to Zhang Yong and said, “Quickly go, quickly go!” Zhang Yong turned around and exited the study room. Wei Xiaobao said, “Tell them to prepare well, get more people, do it quickly! Everybody is going to eat soon, this is life-and-death situation, must not delay even for a moment.” From the door Zhang Yong replied again.

Gui Erniang said, “It’s just light refreshment, no need to rush. Wei *Xiongdi*, have you drawn the Imperial Palace map?”

Wei Xiaobao took another sheet of gold-patterned jade edition notepaper, spread it on the desk, and handed the writing brush to Gui Erniang and said, “I tried drawing some, but it was not good. I’ll say, I’d better ask you to draw it.”

Gui Erniang received the brush, sat down, and said, “Very well. Please start.”

Wei Xiaobao thought that he had nothing to conceal, thereupon he started from Wu Men [Meridian Gate], to the north toward Jin Shui Qiao [Golden Water River Bridge]. Turning to the west, passing Hong Yi Ge [great/extensive righteousness pavilion (usually two-storied)], passing Tai He Dian [Hall of Supreme Harmony], Zhong He Dian [Hall of Central Harmony], Bao He Dian [Hall of Preserving Harmony], three main halls, passing Long Zong Men [grand ancestor gate] toward the imperial kitchen; Wei Xiaobao’s origin. From here to the east, passing Qian Qing Men, to Qian Qing Palace[7].

And then turning toward Tai Dian [grand/safe/peaceful palace hall], Kun Ning Gong[8], Yu Huayuan [imperial (flower) garden], Qin An Dian [veneration

safe/secure hall]; from the imperial kitchen going north was southern warehouse, Yang Xin Dian [Hall of Mental Cultivation], Yong Shou Gong [Palace of Eternal Longevity], Yi Kun Gong [respectable female (see note) palace], Ti He Dian [body/form harmony hall], Chu Xiu Gong [Palace of Gathering Elegance], Li Jing Xuan [beautiful bright pavilion], Shu Fang Zhai [rinsing fragrance study-room], Chong Hua Gong [repeated magnificent palace].

From here southward was Xian Fu Gong [Palace of Universal Happiness], Chang Chun Gong [Palace of Eternal Spring (season)], Ti Yuan Dian [body/form origin/primary hall], Tai Ji Dian [supreme ultimate hall]. To the west was Yu Hua Ge [rain flower pavilion], Bao Hua Dian [magnificent guardian hall], Shou An Gong [long life safe/secure palace], Ying Hua Dian [brave magnificent hall].

Turning south again was Xi San Suo [western three buildings], Shou Kang Gong [long life healthy palace], Ci Ning Gong [Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful], Ci Ning Huayuan [flower garden], Wu Ying Dian [Hall of Martial Valor]. Out of Wu Ying Men [Gate of Martial Valor], passing the bridge going east, passing Xi He Men [Gate of Prosperous Harmony], going back to Wu Men, was Zijincheng's [Forbidden City] western half section.

The Gui Family husband and wife listened as he rambled on for half a day, and only covered the western half section of the Imperial Palace. They could not even remember the names of 'gong dian ge lou' [palace, hall, pavilion, two-storied buildings], hence they could not help but breaking in cold sweats. Gui Erniang dutifully wrote down the names of palaces and gates. Wei Xiaobao then talked about the palaces and gates of the eastern half section. Fortunately his memory was very good, plus he loved to play around everywhere in the Imperial Palace, hence he was very familiar with it.

Gui Erniang wrote for quite a long time before she finally finished writing the position of the Imperial Palace's Nine Inner Halls Forty-Eight Residences. She put down the writing brush, took a deep breath, smiled and said, "Sorry to bother Wei *Xiongdi* to explain everything this clearly. Thank you very much." When listening to Wei Xiaobao mentioning all the palaces and gates' names and locations, she noticed that he was talking as if enumerating his own family's valuables, without the slightest hesitation, hence she presumed that it was the truth. She thought that even if he wanted to fabricate fiction, he did not have

that kind of ability.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “This is the price Gui *Shaoye* collected from winning the dice, you do not need to thank me.” He also said, “The Emperor’s Imperial Bodyguards are usually waiting around the imperial sedan chair station by the Tong Hua Men [east magnificent gate], but now they are at war with Wu Sangui, the Tatar Emperor surely increases security. It may be assumed that in the Forbidden City’s forty-eight residences, there will be Imperial Bodyguards guarding inside.” He thought, “I’d better warn them first, so that when Xiao Xuanzi receives my secret memorial and sends more guards, these three turtles will not suspect me of informing him.”

“That is only natural,” Gui Erniang said.

“Although there are a lot of Imperial Bodyguards in the Palace,” Wei Xiaobao continued, “They are not martial art masters; only there are a lot of them. Manchu people’s archery skill is very formidable, but naturally the three of you do not care about it.”

“Thank you for the advice,” Gui Erniang said, “We’ll take our leave now.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “The three of you must eat some dumplings first, so that you will have the strength to work.” Walking to the door, he said loudly, “Guards, send some refreshments here.” The servant waiting outside the door responded loudly.

“No need,” Gui Erniang said. Taking her son’s hand, she exited the study room side-by-side with Gui Xinshu. Both husband and wife thought, “Most likely there will be some trick in your carved dumplings. Why would you carve something on dumplings? We fell into your trick once, we won’t fall the second time.” In Wei Xiaobao’s mansion, these three people did not even drink half a sip of tea.

Wei Xiaobao walked them out of the door; cupping his fist to bid them farewell, he said, “Junior’s eyes are looking towards the report of victory, my ears are waiting for good news.”

Gui Xinshu stretched out his hand toward the Chinese stone lion by the main gate, his palm struck the head of the lion, immediately fragments of stone swirled in the air. With a ‘hey, hey’ cold laugh, he shook his sleeve and left.

Wei Xiaobao stared blankly for half a day; he mused, “If that palm strikes *laozi*’s head, the feeling won’t be good at all. He is warning me not to spoil their important matter, otherwise he would strike me with his palm.” Stretching out his hand, he also struck the lion’s head with his palm. “Ah!” he cried out, while jumping back; the hollow of his palm hurt really bad. The top of lion’s head was originally very smooth, but because of Gui Xinshu’s palm strike just now quite a bit of stone flaked out that it became jagged and sharp. Wei Xiaobao raised his hand to look at it under the lantern light, fortunately it was not bleeding of cuts.

Returning to the eastern hall, he saw Chen Jinnan and the others were drinking wine. He reported to his Shifu that he had already explain the Forbidden City’s details to the Gui Family husband and wife, and he had just walked the three of them out. Chen Jinnan nodded and said with a sigh, “Even if the Gui Family husband and wife are able to assassinate the Tatar Emperor, I am afraid they won’t be coming back.” The crowd of heroes drank their wine in silence, everybody was busy with their own thought. Occasionally someone would say something, but nobody responded.

More than an hour later, someone outside the door said, “Reporting to *Jueye*: Zhang *Tidu* is seeking an audience.”

Wei Xiaobao was inwardly delighted; yet he said, “In the dead of the night, what urgent matter could it be? Tell him I am already asleep, whatever it is can wait until tomorrow.”

“Yes,” the man responded.

Chen Jinnan said in a low voice, “Perhaps some news from the Palace; go and ask.”

Wei Xiaobao complied. He went to the main hall and saw Zhao Liangdong, Wang Jinbao and Sun Sike, three men were standing in the main hall, their expressions showed that they were panic-stricken, but he did not see Zhang Yong. Wei Xiaobao was startled. “Where is Zhang *Tidu*?” he asked in a low voice.

Wang Jinbao said, “Reporting to *Daren*: Something bad happened to Zhang *Tidu*, he collapsed outside the mansion’s gate, we brought him to the side room over there.”

Wei Xiaobao was shocked. “How … how did he collapse?” he asked, while

rushing toward the side room. He saw Zhang Yong's eyes were tightly closed, his countenance was deathly pale, the pit of his stomach was moving up and down incessantly. "Zhang *Tidu*, what happened to you?" Wei Xiaobao called out.

Zhang Yong slowly opened his eyes, "Lowly … lowly …" he said. His eyes turned over and he fainted again. Wei Xiaobao busily reached out to feel his pocket, and found his own memorial was still there. He took out the envelope and sure enough it was his own 'mist-like pen stroke' drawing; he could not help but groaning inwardly.

Sun Sike said, "Just now the night patrol captain came to report that they found a military officer fainted on the curb several hundred steps outside the mansion gate. Someone went out to look, and recognized Zhang *Tidu*, hence they brought him back here. The blood on the back of Zhang *Tidu*'s head is already dry, apparently he has fainted for quite some time."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "He has been unconscious for a long time, the memorial has not been delivered, that means he met misfortune as soon as he was out of the mansion's gate. Could it be that those three turtles sent people to set an ambush outside the mansion gate because they were afraid I might send someone to inform the Emperor, and thus they made their move against Zhang *Tidu*?" In his heart he was very anxious.

By this time Zhang Yong had slowly regained his consciousness. Wang Jinbao busily raised the wine pot to let him drink several mouthful of *Shaojiu* [same as white wine]. Sun Sike and Zhao Liangdong used the *Shaojiu* to rub Zhang Yong's palms. Zhang Yong's spirit was somewhat aroused. "Lowly officer deserves to die," he said, "Just as I left the mansion gate … not even … several hundred steps, suddenly the pit of my stomach … the pit of my stomach hurt like it was cut by a saber. I endured … endured for several more steps, my eyes suddenly went black, I could not … could not accomplish the task *Daren* entrusted to me. Lowly officer will immediately … immediately go …" While saying that, he propped himself, trying to get up.

"Zhang *Dage*, please lie down to rest," Wei Xiaobao hastily said, "Let these three gentlemen do it, it will be the same." Handing the memorial to Wang Jinbao, he ordered him and Zhao Liangdong and Su Sike, three men to contact the Imperial Bodyguards and rush to the Imperial Palace to submit the memorial.

His heart was anxious, “Those three Guis have already left more than an hour ago, I am afraid Xiao Xuanzi’s life has already gone, we might as well give medicine to a dead horse.” Wang Jinbao and the others, three men, received the order and left.

Zhang Yong said, “That old fellow … old fellow in *Daren*’s study room has a formidable martial art skill. As I walked out of the study room, he pushed lightly on my … on my back … (cough, cough). At that time I did not feel anything; who would have thought that I have already suffered internal injury. As soon as I left the mansion gate, it … it flared out immediately … I failed *Daren*’s important task …”

It was only then did Wei Xiaobao understand that although Gui Xinshu saw the memorial was not a report to inform against them, he was still suspicious, hence he secretly dealt Zhang Yong a heavy hand, so that he would not be able to accomplish his mission. Seeing the ashamed look on Zhang Yong’s face, Wei Xiaobao hastily said, “Zhang *Dage*, set your heart at ease and recuperate, I do not blame you the least bit. Damn it, that old turtle plotted against you, we cannot let it rest.” After comforting Zhang Yong for a while, he ordered his personal guards to prepare some ginseng soup and summon the physician to treat his injury.

Returning to the eastern hall, he said, “That was not news from the Palace. Zhang *Tidu* is heavily injured by Gui *Er Ye*, I am afraid his life can’t be guaranteed.”

Everybody was shocked. “Why did he injure Zhang *Tidu*?” they asked hastily.

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said, “Zhang *Tidu* was patrolling outside the mansion; seeing the three of them exited the mansion, he came forward to question them, Gui *Er Ye* then sent him a palm strike.”

Everyone nodded. They thought, “An ordinary military officer, how can he endure *Shen Quan Wu Di*’s little finger?”

Wei Xiaobao was quite regretful, he mused, “If I had known that Zhang *Tidu* would fall into evil scheme and the memorial could not be delivered to Xiao Xuanzi, I should have not told them the Imperial Palace’s situation that clearly, I should have muddled east, south, west and north randomly. *Laozi* should move

mountains and drain seas for them, changing the Huang Ji Dian to Shou An Gong, Zhong Hua Gong to Wen Hua Dian; let those three turtles wander around in the Imperial Palace, crawling confused and disoriented."

They sat waiting; they heard the 'du di du tang tang tang tang', signaling the fourth night watch period [1 – 3am] from outside the hall. After a while, from the alley some distance away came the sound of barking dogs; they all sprang up while grabbing the hilt of their weapons. Bending their ear to listen attentively, they heard the barks continued for a while before gradually dying down.

After a long while, a faint crow of a single rooster broke the quietness of the night, followed by roosters all around responded. From the lattice of the window they could see the faint streaks of dawn. "It's daybreak," Wei Xiaobao said, "I must go to the Palace to ask around."

Chen Jinnan said, "If the Gui Family, husband, wife and son, should meet misfortune and are defeated, you must find a way to save them. Wu Liuqi *Dage*'s affair was due to misunderstanding; we must not blame them indefinitely. We must attach most importance to virtuous cause and set aside personal matters. Their humiliation to us must not be taken too seriously."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Shifu's instruction, disciple will hold in high regard. It's just that … it's just that if they have already killed the young Emperor, even if disciple stakes my little life, I won't be able to help them out." Thinking that most probably by this time the young Emperor had been assassinated by the Gui Family's three people, he could not stop grief from rising in his heart. Immediately his tears flowed, with a sob he said, "Poor Wu *Dage* …" Seizing the opportunity, he broke into loud crying.

Mu Jiansheng said, "Regardless of whether the Gui Family husband and wife are successful or fail, today Beijing will be in chaos. *Xiongdi* has quite a bit of friends outside, I must hurry up and go out to warn them to disperse and hide; after this storm is passed, we'll talk again."

"Definitely," Chen Jinnan said, "Quite a number of our humble Society brethren are also scattered throughout this city, everybody must go out separately to notify all Jianghu friends, we all must be a bit more careful, don't invite any disaster. Tonight, early tenth hour [5-7 pm] we will meet here again to

discuss what we are going to do next." Everybody agreed.

Immediately four Tian Di Hui brothers were sent out first to go out and scout the situation; after they returned and reported that there was nothing unusual in that vicinity, they left the mansion in small groups.

Wei Xiaobao also went out the door, as it happened, Sun Sike returned, reporting that the memorial had been handed over to the Imperial Bodyguards at the Palace gate. When the Captain of the Imperial Bodyguards heard that it was the *Fu Zongguan* [Deputy Chief] Wei *Daren*'s secret memorial, he received it at once and dashed in to present it to the Emperor. The three of them waited outside the Palace gate. Until the fifth drum strike, the Captain had not come out. At this moment Wang Jinbao and Zhao Liangdong, two men, were still waiting outside the Palace gate for the news. Afraid that Wei Xiaobao might be concerned over them, Sun Sike went back to report to him.

"All right," Wei Xiaobao said, "You may go to take care of Zhang *Tidu*." Deeply worried and sick at heart, he ordered his personal guards to get the fake empress dowager Mao Dongzhu and put her in a small sedan chair and have her brought to the Palace to have an audience with the Emperor.

Arriving at the Palace gate, he saw all around was quiet, about a dozen or so Imperial Bodyguards at the gate rushed forward to pay their respect; they all giggled and said, "*Fu Zongguan* must be exhausted. That place, Yangzhou, is very fun."

Wei Xiaobao was relieved. He thought, "If the Palace is in great confusion, they would not be in the mood to chat about Yangzhou with me." He smiled and nodded his head. "These days," he asked, "Is everybody all right?"

"Relying on *Fu Zongguan*'s good fortune, from top to bottom we are all safe and sound," an Imperial Bodyguard replied, "Only that old fellow Wu Sangui is rebelling, making His Majesty very busy. In the dead of the night he often summons cabinet minister to the Palace to discuss official business." Wei Xiaobao was even more relieved.

Another Imperial Bodyguard said with a laugh, "With *Zongguan Daren* back in the Capital, you can help His Majesty handling important matter, His Majesty would have a bit more time for leisure."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You need not pat the horse’s butt. The stuff I brought back from Yangzhou, good *Xiongdi* all will have some share, nobody will be lacking.” The Imperial Bodyguards were greatly delighted; they all paid their respect and expressed their gratitude.

Pointing to the small sedan chair, Wei Xiaobao said, “That is the prisoner that the Empress Dowager and His Majesty personally wanted me to arrest. I want you to keep an eye on it.”

The attendants opened the sedan chair’s curtain to let the Imperial Bodyguards at the gate to search. The Imperial Bodyguards did their job by checking the sedan chair for any weapons or prohibited objects. They laughed and said, “*Fu Zongguan Daren*’s meritorious service this time is not small, we will be invited for a drink to congratulate your promotion.”

Wei Xiaobao entered the Palace. He inquired of the night guards of the Qian Qing Men, and was told that the Emperor was in conference with cabinet ministers at the Yang Xin Dian since the previous evening and had not withdrawn until now. Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. He thought, “Turns out His Majesty was busy all night long and did not sleep. High-level meeting with cabinet ministers, naturally the security all around will be very tight. There were hundreds or thousands lanterns outside Yang Xin Dian, how could those three Gui Family turtles get near the Emperor? If Xiao Xuanzhi went to bed early, the lantern dark the fire black, I am afraid he might already meet calamity by now. It can clearly be seen that as the Emperor, indeed his flood of good fortune fills the heavens. Fortunately when that old fellow Wu Sangui went to war, he triumphed over the enemy, so that the Emperor is worried and he talked about it all night long.”

Arriving outside the Yang Xin Dian, he quietly stood to wait. Although he was the Emperor’s most favorite person, when the Emperor was talking about military and national affairs with princes and dukes, and cabinet ministers, he would not dare to come in without permission.

After waiting for more than an hour, the night guards opened the door. He saw Prince Kang Giyesu, Ming Zhu, Songgotu, and the others came out one by one. When these high-rankings ministers saw Wei Xiaobao, they all smiled and cupped their fists in greeting, but nobody dared to say anything. The eunuch

announced Wei Xiaobao's arrival, Kangxi immediately summoned him for audience.

Wei Xiaobao kowtowed at the entrance of the Hall before standing up. Seeing Kangxi seated on the imperial throne and was in high spirits, Wei Xiaobao felt of burst of happiness. "Your Majesty," he said, "Your servant sees you, I … I'm really happy." He was worried all night long; seeing Kangxi was safe and sound, he could not stop tears from flowing down his face.

Kangxi laughed and said, "No wind no rain, why are you crying?"

"It is tears of joy," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Seeing him revealing his real feeling, Kangxi laughed and said, "Very good, very good! That old fellow Wu Sangui really rises in rebellion. He attacked and snatched several victories; he thought I would be afraid to see him and would not dare to kill his son. Damn it, yesterday *laozi* chopped Wu Yingxiong's head."

Wei Xiaobao was shocked. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "Your Majesty has killed Wu Yingxiong?"

"Why wouldn't I?" Kangxi replied, "All ministers advised me against killing Wu Yingxiong, they said something like if the kingdom and troops are at disadvantage, we can still have peace talks with Wu Sangui, allowing him not to remove border defense and station him in Yunnan forever. They also said that as soon as we kill Wu Yingxiong, Wu Sangui will not have any apprehension anymore, and will be even more vicious. Pei! Those cowards."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your Majesty is brave and decisive. Your servant has watched the opera 'Distinguished Gathering', in which Zhou Yu and Lu Su told Sun Quan that as ministers they could surrender to Cao Cao, but the Lord and Master must not surrender. Today we are in similar situation, they, as princes, dukes and cabinet ministers are reaching out to Wu Sangui to have peace talks, Your Majesty must absolutely not have any peace talks."

Kangxi was greatly delighted; he slapped the table and got off from his seat. "Xiao Guizi," he said, "If you had arrived one day earlier, you could have explained that argument to the ministers, and then they would not dare to advise me to have peace talks. Humph, if they surrendered to Wu Sangui, they would still be ministers and generals, what advantage would they have?" He

thought that although Wei Xiaobao was without learning or skills, he did not appear to be similar to those ministers who harbored selfish motives and only thought about their own selves.

Pulling Wei Xiaobao's hand, Kangxi took him to a large table with a large map spread on it. Pointing to the map, Kangxi said, "I have sent people to lead the elite troops, to guard all the way from Jingzhou [prefecture, Hubei] to Changde [prefecture, Hunan], all the way from Wuchang [district, Hubei] to Yuezhou [not sure where]; I've appointed Shun Cheng *Jun Wang* [king/prince, not of royal blood] Lei'erjin as the Great General Ning Nan Jing Kou [pacify the south quieting the bandit/enemy] to lead all the generals in destroying the enemy. Just now I also appointed Ministry of Justice *Shangshu* [dept. head] Moluo as *Jinglue*[9] to be stationed and defend Xi'an. Even if Wu Sangui obtained Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan, and attack Hunan, we won't be afraid of him."

"Your Majesty," Wei Xiaobao said, "Please also send your servant to lead troops to deal with that old fellow Wu Sangui!"

Kangxi laughed; he shook his head and said, "Marching to war is not for entertainment. You'd better stay in the Palace to accompany me. Besides, this time the ones I am sending out are all Manchu generals Manchu troops; I am afraid they won't have you rule over them."

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao said. In his heart he thought, "Wu Sangui wanted the Han people all over the world to rise against the Tatars. I am a fake Manchu man, naturally His Majesty does not trust me."

Kangxi could read his mind, he said, "You are loyal and devoted to me, it's not that I do not trust you. Xiao Guizi, Wu Sangui's troops and horses are very formidable, not in three or five years, or even seven or eight years, will we be able to subdue him. A few years ahead of us we will definitely suffer defeat. This is going to be a hard battle, we will taste bitter first and sweet later, defeat first victory later. Do you prefer defeat, or do you prefer victory?"

"Naturally I love victory," Wei Xiaobao replied, "Throwing helmet dumping armor, fleeing in confusion, that won't taste too good!"

Kangxi laughed and said, "You are loyal to me, I won't let you suffer defeat. The defeat in the three to five years ahead of us is just to let others fight and

fight. When we have tired out that rebel Wu until his spirit weary, his strength exhausted, the general situation has been decided, then I'll send you out to Yunnan to personally catch this old fellow away. Do you know what will my imperial edict about this rebellion be?"

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he said, "Your Majesty's benevolence is indeed as high as the heavens and as thick as the earth."

Kangxi laughed and said, "I will proclaim it to the world, I will promise that whoever catches Wu Sangui, Wu Sangui's official rank will be granted to him. Xiao Guizi, this will depend on your good fortune. Damn it, with your revolting behavior, do you think you can act like Ping Xi Wang? Ha ha, ha ha!" He cast a sidelong glance toward Wei Xiaobao for a moment before laughing and saying, "Nowadays you look like a little monkey, so you won't look like him the least bit. But in six or seven years, you will be over twenty, at that time you will be granted the title 'Wang' [king], I am afraid you will be a bit off the chart. Ha ha …"

Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, "Ping Xi Qin Wang or whatever high-level title he has, I am afraid your servant will not have such good fortune to deserve it. But if Your Majesty would appoint me a great general, leading troops to Yunnan to catch Wu Sangui, the great general's awe-inspiring authority resounds to eight direction, your servant will have a *zhang*-long eight-serpent spear in my hand as I shouted loudly, 'Wu Sangui, come out to surrender your name!' It would be extremely awesome. Thank Heaven and thank the Earth, Wu Sangui did not die early on, your servant will personally bring him over to kneel in here and kowtow to Your Majesty."

Kangxi laughed. "Very good, very good!" he said. Instantly his face grew serious as he said, "Xiao Guizi, the first few years of war ahead of us will be very difficult. Defeat in battle is not a big deal, but even if we are defeated, we must not be in disarray. We need generals of great talent to endure defeat without being thrown in confusion, to be able to stand his ground. You are a good-luck general, not a brave general or famous general, and definitely not a great general. Ay, it's a pity that the imperial court does not have any great generals."

"But Your Majesty, you are a great general yourself," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your Majesty already knew that in the few years ahead of us we will suffer defeat, yet even though defeated, definitely we will not be in disarray. Just like playing *Pai*

Jiu [pai-gow], Your Majesty is the banker, you pay him seven or eight losses, you do not give it a damn. Our capital is abundant, a stone tablet is erected on Mount Tai to ward off evil spirit, we keep our composure, losing some money is just lending it to him. Later on, we will get the harmony pair [pair of ones and threes], man pair [all four], earth pair [all ones], heaven pair [all sixes], all the way to supreme pair [one, two, two, four]; pair by pair we beat him up, until we eat 'em all, kill 'em all, throwing that old fellow Wu Sangui's men face up and their horses belly up, that he will be completely routed, completely empty-handed, his pocket inside out, his tiles [cards] are all turned up, each pair he has is a departing ten."

Kangxi roared in laughter; he thought, "There is no great general in the imperial court, but I am a great general; he was right. These eight words 'enduring defeat without being thrown in confusion, maintaining our composure' [sui bai bu luan, chen de shu qi], aside from myself, no other commander-in-chief or high-ranking minister in the imperial court is able to achieve." From the imperial table he picked up the secret memorial Wei Xiaobao presented to him. "You said some people are going to assassinate me, and you wanted me to be careful and be on guard?" he asked.

"Exactly," Wei Xiaobao replied, "At that time the situation was urgent; your servant was under other people's eyes, I could not summon the secretary to write it, without any other choice I drew this picture. Your Majesty is very intelligent, just one look and you understood. Those assassins looked on helplessly, and still did not understand its meaning. The Lord of Ten Thousand Years' flood of good fortune fills the heavens, rebels and traitors trying to scheme against you in vain."

Kangxi asked, "What kind of renegade are they?"

"They were sent to the Capital by Wu Sangui," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Kangxi nodded. "As soon as rebel Wu deployed troops, I tripled the imperial bodyguards. When I received your memorial last night, I added the night guards."

Wei Xiaobao said, "This time Wu Sangui sends assassins with really high martial art skill. Although the Holy Son of Heaven has a hundred deities to protect and

bless, still we must be doubly careful, so that Your Majesty will not be frightened." Suddenly he remembered something, "Your Majesty," he said, "Your servant have a treasured vest, when worn on the body, swords and spears cannot penetrate. Your servant will take it off and ask Your Majesty to wear it." While saying that, he unbuttoned his long robe.

Kangxi smiled, "You took it from Oboi's house, didn't you?" he asked.

Wei Xiaobao was shocked; although his face was really thick, but caught completely off guard this time, unexpectedly his face turned bulging red. He dropped on his knees and said, "Your servant deserves to die, nothing can be concealed from Your Majesty."

Kangxi laughed and said, "This gold-silk vest was obtained from the previous Ming's Palace, at that time Oboi rendered a lot of meritorious service; he charged and broke through enemy lines, hence the injuries from saber, spears, arrows and rocks he received were quite a few. For this reason the former Regent bestowed this vest to him. When I sent you to search and seize Oboi's house that time, this vest is not listed among the confiscated items."

Wei Xiaobao could only giggle nervously, his expression looked very awkward. Kangxi laughed and said, "Today you want to take it off and give it to me to wear, it goes to show that you have an outstandingly loyal heart. But I am in the Palace, with Imperial Bodyguard numbers in hundreds and thousands, even the assassins would not be able to get close to me. I have no need of this vest. You are outside, working for me, oftentimes you encounter dangers. Just consider I give this vest to you today. From this day onward, this stealing is excused."

Wei Xiaobao kneeled down again to express his gratitude, but his body was drenched in cold sweats; he thought, "I stole the Forty-two Chapter Sutra, it would be best if His Majesty did not know about it."

"Xiao Guizi," Kangxi said, "You are loyal to me, and I know that. But you should handle the matters following the rules and regulations. The vest that you are wearing right now, supposing in the future someone else is sent to search and confiscate your possession, and then that person secretly embezzles it, that won't be good."

"Yes, yes," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your servant will not dare anymore." The sweats

on his forehead dripped down as he kowtowed several more times before standing up.

Kangxi said, “The business in Yangzhou, you may return someday.” Finished speaking, he yawned. He did not sleep the whole night, naturally he was very tired.

“Yes,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Relying on Empress Dowager and Your Majesty’s good fortune, your servant has arrested that old wh0re whose crime is great, her evil extreme.”

As soon as Kangxi heard this, he cried out, “Quickly bring her in, quickly bring her in.”

Wei Xiaobao went out and ordered four guards to have Mao Dongzhu brought into the Hall, and have her kneeled in front of Kangxi. Kangxi walked over to her and shouted, “Look up!”

Mao Dongzhu hesitated, then lifted her head, fixing her gaze on Kangxi. Seeing her deathly pale countenance, Kangxi was suddenly overwhelmed with grief, “This woman murdered my birth mother, grieved *Fu Huang*’s heart [father emperor] that he left home to become a monk, making me an orphan without father and mother. She also imprisoned Empress Dowager for many years and tortured her. Among those with great crime and extreme evil in the world, really nobody has surpassed her. But … but … I lost my mother when I was a baby, all along she was the one who raised me. Over the last few years, she actually treated me with bestowed kindness, just like if she was my own mother. Deep in the Palace, those who genuinely care about me, I am afraid only this woman in front of me, and this crafty troublemaker Xiao Guizi.”

In the deepest part of his heart he had an indistinct feeling, “If not for her assassinating Consort Donggo and Consort Donggo’s son Prince Rong, based on how deeply *Fu Huang* doted on Consort Donggo, the throne would definitely be passed on to Prince Rong. Not only I would not be the Emperor, perhaps I should be worried over my life. That being said, I can say that this woman has rendered me a meritorious service.”

A few years ago, Kangxi was still very young, he always thought that the thing he hated the most was losing his father and mother. But for the last few years,

his personal political power had grown, he was fully aware that if someone else seized the throne from him, everything would be lost. In the deepest part of his heart, the imperial power of being the Emperor was heavier than the love of his father and mother. It's just that obviously he must not declare this feeling publicly, that even when in his heart he was thinking about it, he would inevitably feel very guilty.

Seeing Kangxi's expression was changing indeterminably, Mao Dongzhu sighed and slowly said, "Wu Sangui is rebelling, Your Majesty must not be too anxious; you must take a good care of yourself. Do you still take Fu Ling Swallow Nest soup every morning?"

Kangxi was still lost in his thought; hearing her question, he absentmindedly replied, "Yes, I still take it every day."

Mao Dongzhu said, "The sins I have committed are too big, you … please kill me with your own hands."

A burst of sadness filled Kangxi's heart. Shaking his head, he said to Wei Xiaobao, "Take her to Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful to have an audience with Empress Dowager, tell her that I am asking the Holy Sage Empress Dowager to decide on how to deal with the offender."

Wei Xiaobao bent his right knee and complied, "Cha!"

Waving his hand, Kangxi said, "You may go."

From his pocket Wei Xiaobao took out Galdan and Sangjie's two memorials. Taking two steps forward, he presented the memorials with both hands and said, "Congratulations Your Majesty, Tibetan and Mongolian troops and horses are turning their backs against Wu Sangui, they are determined to strive for Your Majesty."

For the last several days Kangxi was moving an army and sending a general, he always had deep worry in his heart that Mongolia and Tibet's military forces would respond to Wu Sangui's rebellion. Hearing what Wei Xiaobao had just said, he could not help but was pleasantly surprised. "Is there such thing?" he asked.

Opening the envelope, he read the memorials, and was even more overjoyed

at the unexpected good news. Waving his hand he ordered the Imperial Bodyguard to take Mao Dongzhu out of the Hall first, and then he asked Wei Xiaobao, “These two great services, how did you do it? Damn it, you are indeed a great good-luck general.”

By that time, Tibet and Mongolia, two places’ military power was considerably strong. Kangxi was aware than Sangjie and Galdan secretly colluded with Wu Sangui; hence he had already deployed massive military force in preparation to face these two fronts. Now that he saw that the wording in the memorials was deferent and sincere, and offered to be a strong support to suppress Wu Sangui instead, how could he not be overjoyed? It’s just that this turn of events was too abrupt that momentarily he could not believe it as the truth.

Wei Xiaobao knew that whenever the young Emperor used the phrase ‘damn it’ to him, it meant that the dragon heart was very happy; with a giggle he said, “Because of Your Majesty’s flood of good fortune, your servant has sworn brotherhood with them. Great Lama Sangjie is *Dage* [first brother], Prince Galdan is *Erge* [second], your servant is *Sandi* [third (younger) brother].”

Kangxi laughed and said, “You really possess great magical power. For them to agree to help me beat Wu Sangui, what benefit have your promised them?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Your Majesty is an enlightened sage, knowing that this sworn brotherhood is pretentious and not to be considered real. With one heart and mind they want Your Majesty to bestow them something. Sangjie wants to be the Living Buddha. Other than Living Buddha Dalai and Living Buddha Banchan, he wants to ask Your Majesty to give him a favor, to appoint him Living Buddha Sangjie. That Prince Galdan actually wants to be a ‘Zhengge’erhao’ [see chapter 39]; which your servant does not understand.”

Kangxi roared in laughter. “Zhengge’erhao?” he asked, “Ah, right, he must want to be Zhun’ga’er’han [Dzungar Khan]. These two matters are not difficult; it won’t cost the imperial court anything. When the moment comes, I’ll write an imperial order while building imperial treasure, sending you as the Imperial Envoy Minister to announce the decree. Go tell your *Dage* and *Erge* that if they really strive for me, just consider that I agree to grant them the desire of their heart. But they must not be two-faced, three-knives [i.e. double-cross/back stabbing]; their mouth says one thing, their conduct says another, seeing the

wind and set the helm, seeing which side has the upper hand and helps that side."

"Your Majesty is right," Wei Xiaobao said, "These two sworn brothers of mine, their moral standing is not particularly brilliant. Your Majesty cannot trust them completely; we must put our guard up a little. As Your Majesty said, in the years ahead we will suffer some defeat, we must guard against not only they do not help the banker, they are helping the opponent instead, and place their bets on the Heaven Gate." He thought that it would be better for him to speak in advance, lest the responsibility he bore would be too big.

Kangxi nodded and said, "You are right. But we are not afraid; if they dare to attack, Heaven Gate, left Green Dragon, right White Tiger, we will eat 'em all!"

Wei Xiaobao burst into loud laughter; he was quite impressed. Turned out the Emperor was adept at playing Pai Jiu.

(Book note: Later on Galdan and Sangjie separately rose in rebellion, and were separately suppressed by Kangxi. Galdan died in Kangxi's thirty-six year, Sangjie died in Kangxi's forty-forth year.)

With Mao Dongzhu in custody, Wei Xiaobao went to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful to see the Empress Dowager. The eunuch passed on the decree, ordering Wei Xiaobao to bring the offender to the throne inside. Wei Xiaobao thought, "Formerly I was a eunuch, hence I could enter the Empress Dowager's bedroom [orig. palace hall to lie down]. But now I am a high-ranking officer, why would she want me to enter the bedroom? Perhaps when Empress Dowager heard that the old wh0re has been caught, she is so happy that she forgot that I am not a eunuch anymore." Thereupon with four eunuchs holding Mao Dongzhu, he went in.

The bedroom was pitch-black, just like when the fake Empress Dowager was still living there. The Empress Dowager sat on the bedside, behind her the bed curtain was drooping down. Wei Xiaobao kneeled down and kowtowed, respectfully wishing the Holy Sage well. The Empress Dowager glanced at Mao Dongzhu, nodded, and said, "You have arrested the offender to the throne. Hmm, you may go!" Wei Xiaobao kowtowed again before withdrawing, leaving Mao Dongzhu in the bedroom.

While walking out of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, his heart was discontented, “I caught the Old Wh0re, rendering a great merit, but Empress Dowager did not appear to be happy at all, she did not even say half a sentence of praise. His granny, whoever lives in the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful is a female b@stard; doesn’t matter if it was the real Empress Dowager or the fake Empress Dowager, they are all old wh0res.”

With a bellyful cursing and swearing he walked through the stone path of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful flower garden. While passing by the side of a rockery, suddenly a shadow flashed, three people jumped out from behind the rockery, one of them reached out and grabbed Wei Xiaobao’s left hand, and said with a laugh, “How are you?”

Wei Xiaobao was shocked; it was an old eunuch. He was about to ask sternly when he saw clearly that the old eunuch was actually Gui Erniang. His shock was no small matter; when he looked at the other two people by her side, he was not surprised to see Gui Xinshu and Gui Zhong, both were wearing night guard uniform. Wei Xiaobao groaned inwardly, “Turns out the three of you are hiding in here.”

Since his left hand was grabbed by Gui Erniang, half of his body was hurting and numb. He knew that if he made the slightest noise, Gui Xinshu would lightly strike him with his palm, his head would immediately shatter into pieces, remembering that his head can’t possibly be harder than the stone lion’s head at the gate of his Earl Mansion. With a forced laugh he said, “Are you, Senior, well?” while his mind was thinking of a plan to escape.

Gui Erniang said in a low voice, “Tell them not to move from here, I have something to say.”

Wei Xiaobao did not dare to disobey; turning his head around, he ordered the several Imperial Bodyguards who followed behind him, “You wait for me here.”

Pulling his hand along, Gui Erniang took several dozen steps forward and said in a low voice, “Take us to find the Emperor.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “The three of you have arrived last night, why haven’t you found the Emperor?”

Gui Erniang said, “We asked several eunuchs and Imperial Bodyguards, they all

said that the Emperor was in a meeting with the cabinet ministers; he did not sleep all night. We had no way of coming in, hence we could not make our move."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Just now I was thinking of seeing the Emperor myself, I wanted to inquire what has happened to the three of you, but the Emperor has gone to bed, I could not see him. The three of you have put on your disguise, nothing can be better than that. Let us go out of the Palace."

Gui Erniang said, "We have not accomplished our mission, why would you want to get out of the Palace?"

"You can't do it during the day," Wei Xiaobao said, "If the three of you wish, there is no harm in coming again tonight to give it another try."

"We came in with great difficulty," Gui Erniang said, "Before the important matter is accomplished, we won't go out. Quickly take us to wherever he is sleeping."

"I don't know where he is sleeping either," Wei Xiaobao said, "I must find a eunuch and ask."

"I won't allow you to talk to anybody!" Gui Erniang said, "A moment ago you said you were going to see the Emperor, how could you not know where he is sleeping? Humph, you are thinking of playing trick in front of *laoniang*? That won't be easy." While saying that, her fingers tightened. Wei Xiaobao felt the pain was penetrating his bones, he felt like his five fingers were about to snap; he could not help making a loud grunt.

Gui Xinshu reached out to stroke the top of his head gently. "Very good!" he said.

Wei Xiaobao knew he was incapable of disobeying them; he had an idea, "I'll take them to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, make a big fuss for a while, the young Emperor will hear it and will increase the guard. If they make their move by killing the Empress Dowager, it's none of my business." Thereupon he said, "I have just walked out of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful; perhaps the Emperor is seeing the Empress Dowager to pay his respect. Let us go back to look."

Gui Erniang did see him walking out of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, so he was not lying. She said, “Since the three of us are already inside the Palace, we are not thinking of coming out alive. If you make the slightest wrong move, I don’t have any choice but to take your little life. The four of us will go together to see Yan Wang [King of Hell], our journey will not be lonesome. My child would be very happy to have you as company.”

With a forced laugh Wei Xiaobao said, “There’s no harm in accompanying you; let us spread out in the imperial garden! I’ll say we don’t have to take that journey to the underworld.”

Gui Erniang said, “Do you like to go to see Yan Wang, or to see the Tatar Emperor? You will have to see either one of these two fellows today.”

Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, “Alright, let’s see the Tatar Emperor then. But I want to be clear, as soon as you see the Emperor, the three of you do whatever you want to do, I will not help you.”

“Who needs your help?” Gui Erniang said, “As long as you take us to see the Emperor, I will immediately let you go. What happens afterward won’t have anything to do with you.”

“Alright!” Wei Xiaobao said, “So be it.”

Coerced by the three people, Wei Xiaobao went back to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful. Seeing the peacocks and red-crowned cranes, Gui Zhong was very fascinated. Wei Xiaobao pointed this and that and chatted with him incessantly, he was hoping to stall as long as possible. Although Gui Erniang was impatient, thinking that her child was sick all his life, and that he would not live for too much longer, in the death’s door he was having a little bit of fun, she could not bear to hinder his keen interest.

From a distance they saw a group of people coming out of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, carrying two sedan chairs. With one hand pulling Wei Xiaobao and the other hand pulling her child, Gui Erniang ducked behind peony flower terrace. Gui Xinshu hid by her side.

The party gradually came near. Wei Xiaobao saw the one at the front was the eunuch from the Empress Dowager’s room; the two sedan chairs followed behind him, one belonged to the First Imperial Concubine, the other one

belonged to the Empress Dowager. Each sedan chair had several eunuchs carried the sedan chair poles, behind the sedan chairs there were eunuchs holding up large yellow gauze umbrellas. At the end of the procession there were several dozen eunuchs and palace maids, plus about a dozen night guards. Usually when the Empress Dowager was traveling within the Palace, she did not have any Imperial Bodyguards to escort her. It may be assumed that ever since the Emperor received his information, he increased the number of Imperial Bodyguards on duty. A bright idea suddenly occurred; he said in a low voice, “Careful! The one inside the sedan chair in the front is the Tatar Emperor, the sedan chair behind it carries the Empress Dowager.”

The Gui Family husband and wife saw the pomp and the prestige of this procession, plus they were coming out of the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, it was only natural that they were the Emperor and the Empress Dowager. They could not refrain their hearts from beating faster, both looked at their child at the same time with tender expression.

“Child,” Gui Erniang said in a low voice, “The one sitting inside the sedan chair in the front is the Emperor. When they come near, I will say ‘go!’ the three of us will attack together and beat him rotten!”

Gui Zhong laughed and said, “Alright, this will be fun!”

The two sedan chairs were coming nearer and nearer. Wei Xiaobao’s palms were wet with perspiration. His ear heard the eunuch from the Empress Dowager’s room calling out incessantly, “Chi! Chi! Chi!” telling people to get out of the way.

In a low voice Gui Erniang commanded, “Go!” The three of them simultaneously charged forward.

These three people’s power and speed were extraordinary, they arrived like unexpected storm. ‘Bang!’ three people, six palms, struck together on the first sedan chair. Gui Xinshu and Gui Erniang were afraid their strike did not kill the Emperor, immediately they pulled the swords from their waists and stabbed forward. In an instant the swords were thrust into the sedan chair four, five times. Each time the swords were pulled, the blades were dripping with blood, even if the person in the sedan chair had ten lives, all ten lives would be gone.

The escorting Imperial Bodyguards were greatly shocked; they shouted and yelled and pulled out their weapons to charge forward.

Gui Erniang called out, “Success!” With her left hand she pulled her child and dashed to the north. Brandishing the sword in his hand, Gui Xinshu charged ahead to open the path; how could the Imperial Bodyguards stop him? They saw the three of them ran along the path in the flower garden west of Shou Kang Palace.

The palace maids and eunuchs were shouting and screaming; it was a total chaos. From all directions came the sound of gongs, hundreds or thousands doors in the Palace were shut and bolted, the night guards and the Imperial Bodyguards quickly blocked all major access in and out of the Palace. Inside and outside the Palace wall, the officers and men of the three banners’ guard battalions, the Vanguard Battalion and the Valiant Cavalry Battalion formed layer after layer of defense with strung bows and unsheathed sabers.

Wei Xiaobao was very happy to see the three people of the Gui Family had assassinated the First Imperial Concubine, how they were thinking that they had succeeded, and how they had escaped. Immediately he leaped out from behind the flower terrace and shouted loudly, “We must not panic, protecting the Empress Dowager is more important!”

The Imperial Bodyguards were in confusion just like a housefly without a head; seeing Wei Xiaobao suddenly appeared and took command, their confidence returned. Wei Xiaobao barked his order again, “Everybody surround the Empress Dowager’s imperial sedan chair, if other assassin comes to assault, we must stake our lives to block!”

The crowd of Imperial Bodyguards complied in chorus, “We receive the order!”

Wei Xiaobao snatched a saber from a guard, he raised it high and said in a loud voice, “Today we display utter loyalty in dedicating ourselves to the service of our country, we fight to the death for the Empress Dowager, for the First Imperial Concubine; even a thousand or ten thousand assassins, everybody must protect the Empress Dowager’s holy self!”

Again the crowd of Imperial Bodyguards complied in chorus, “We receive the order!” They saw the Deputy Chief of the Imperial Bodyguards, the *Bojue*

Daren's [Earl] awe-inspiring presence, how he took command with confidence, his loyalty and devotion, viewing death as a return home, none did not admire him from the bottom of their hearts. They all thought, "Although he is young, he is actually a cut above the others!" About a dozen Imperial Bodyguards formed a fence around the Empress Dowager's imperial sedan chair.

Wei Xiaobao shouted to the crowd of eunuchs and palace maids, "What are you panicking for? Quickly form another circle outside to protect the Empress Dowager. If the assassin attacked, let him chop your people of little value's heads first."

The crowd of eunuchs and palace maids thought that although their heads were of little value, but they were not too willing to have it randomly chopped by others. However, seeing Wei Xiaobao brandishing his saber with imposing expression, nobody dared to disobey; trembling with fear, they had no choice but to form another circle outside the circle of Imperial Bodyguards. Several of them were so scared that they peed in their pants.

It was only then did Wei Xiaobao put down his saber and walked over to the Empress Dowager's imperial sedan chair. He said, "Your servant Wei Xiaobao was too late to save your highness, and has alarmed the Empress Dowager's holy self. I respectfully wish the Empress Dowager holy peace, the assassin has already killed and retreated."

From inside the sedan chair the Empress Dowager said, "Very good!"

Wei Xiaobao reached out to lift open the corner of the sedan chair's curtain, he saw the Empress Dowager's pale countenance, but she was smiling wide while nodding her head repeatedly. "Wei Xiaobao," she said, "You are very good, very good! You saved me once again."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Empress Dowager has ten thousand good fortunes and holy peace, your servant is extremely delighted," and he gently lowered the sedan chair's curtain.

Turning around, he pointed to two Imperial Bodyguards and said, "Quickly go to report to His Majesty, the Empress Dowager's holy self is safe and sound, ask His Majesty not to worry. Tell him his servant Wei Xiaobao is wishing His Majesty holy peace. Summoning courage and determination, all the Imperial Bodyguards

are protecting the holy selves; the assassins have attacked and retreated." The two Imperial Bodyguards received the order and left.

Suddenly he heard Empress Dowager called in low voice, "Wei Xiaobao!"

"Cha!" Wei Xiaobao responded, "Your servant is here."

The Empress Dowager asked in low voice, "Are the two people inside the sedan chair in the front dead?"

"Two people?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

The Empress Dowager said, "Go look, be careful."

Wei Xiaobao complied. He was greatly baffled, "How could there be two people there? Why must I be careful?" He walked over to the first sedan chair, lifted up the sedan chair's curtain, "Ah!" he could not help crying out; dropping down the curtain, he took several steps back. His knees went weak; he nearly fell down on his buttocks.

The sedan chair was bloody and in such a mess; indeed there were two dead people inside! The two bodies had several sword cuts and blood was still flowing out of the wounds. One was the fake Empress Dowager Mao Dongzhu, the other was a short and fat man, his five sense organs were crushed by the palm strikes, but looking at his stature, there was no doubt that he was Thin Toutuo. These two people died in each other's arms.

He was not surprised to see Mao Dongzhu died in the sedan chair, it was he himself who held her in custody and brought her to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful and handed her over to the Empress Dowager; but where did this Thin Toutuo come from? These two people unexpectedly sat inside the First Imperial Concubine's sedan chair, accompanied by the Empress Dowager; but where were they going?

After calming himself down, he returned to the Empress Dowager's sedan chair and said in a low voice, "Reporting to the Empress Dowager: those two people are dead, they are dead in a confused heap, so dead that they could not be even more dead."

The Empress Dowager laughed and said, "Very good! Let us go back to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful. Bring the other sedan chair as well, don't

let anybody open it and look inside."

Wei Xiaobao complied; he passed on the order, and personally escorted the Empress Dowager's imperial sedan chair back to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful. He opened the curtain of the sedan chair and helped the Empress Dowager out. The Empress Dowager smiled to him again and said, "You are very good!"

Wei Xiaobao smiled in return, but in his heart he was wondering, "What's so good about me? Although the Empress Dowager is not young anymore, her appearance is extraordinarily beautiful."

The Empress Dowager beckoned to him, telling him to follow her into the bedroom. She ordered the palace maids and the eunuchs to leave, and told Wei Xiaobao to close the door. Wei Xiaobao's heart was thumping, he could not stop his face from blushing. "Aiyo," he groaned inwardly, "It's desperately serious! The Empress Dowager continuously praised me very good, could it be that she wanted me to be *Lao Huangye*'s [old master Emperor] substitute? The fake Empress Dowager had a Shige who dressed as a palace maid; she also had Thin Toutuo inside her quilt. If this real Empress Dowager also wanted me to dress as a palace maid or squeeze into her quilt, what should I do?"

The Empress Dowager sat on the edge of the bed, she was lost in thought for a half a day before saying, "That was really dangerous; and it all depended on you exerting yourself."

"Your servant has received Empress Dowager and His Majesty's great kindness," Wei Xiaobao said, "Even if my body is torn and my bones crushed I cannot repay it."

The Empress Dowager nodded her head and said, "You are very loyal. His Majesty employs you, it is also our good fortune."

"That is by Empress Dowager and His Majesty's grace," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your servant only know how to display utter loyalty and strive for the sake of my masters." While in his heart he said, "Jade Emperor, *Guanyin Pusa*, please bless and protect me, please don't let her tell me to dress as a palace maid."

The Empress Dowager smiled at him again; this smile made all the hair on Wei Xiaobao's body stood up. He heard her say, "Take those two dead offenders to

the throne, along with the sedan chair, and burn them all. Do not leak this matter even for half a sentence. The Imperial Bodyguards, palace maids and eunuchs who were present just now …” Speaking to here, she hesitated and did not continue.

Wei Xiaobao said, “May Empress Dowager has holy peace. Your servant has a way to make them not dare to even let out half a fart.”

Hearing Wei Xiaobao’s vulgarity, the Empress Dowager frowned slightly; she said, “Just finish the task well; it will be for your own benefit.”

Wei Xiaobao paid his respect and said, “Your servant will do it attentively. If anybody dares to leak the least bit of rumor, Empress Dowager can have your servant’s head.”

“Then I will feel relieved,” the Empress Dowager said, “You may go!”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he kowtowed and withdrew.

As he exited the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, he saw Kangxi’s imperial sedan chair was coming this way; several hundred night guards accompanied him in front, behind, left and right of the sedan chair. The security was several times tighter than normal. Wei Xiaobao stepped aside and waited. From inside the sedan chair Kangxi saw him. “Xiao Guizi,” he called out, “Wait for me here.”

Wei Xiaobao complied. He knew Kangxi must be going to pay his respect to the Empress Dowager. He thought hard, “How could Thin Toutuo hide inside the First Imperial Concubine’s sedan chair? This is really strange!”

Chapter 43

The body becomes like red cloud that always stay close to the sun, the heart follows green jade grass facing the wind.

(Translated by Foxs)

Suddenly they heard 'bang, bang, bang!' loud explosion. From the Earl Mansion black smoke rising, beams, tiles and bricks flew to the air. The group of warriors felt the ground under their feet was shaking. The cannon blast was rumbling continuously, red-blood flame rose high, reaching more than ten zhang into the sky.

Kangxi went out from the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful. Wei Xiaobao followed him back to Yang Xin Dian [Nurturing Heart Palace Hall], and waited outside to hall to be summoned. After waiting for a long time he saw the Vanguard Battalion Commander Ajichi came out of the Hall. Wei Xiaobao thought, “His Majesty must be mobilizing the Vanguard Battalion to intensify the guard against the assassins.” And then a eunuch came out to summon Wei Xiaobao.

Kangxi dismissed the Imperial Bodyguards and the eunuchs, and ordered Wei Xiaobao to close the Hall’s door. With knitted brows Kangxi paced back and forth in the Hall. It looked as if he had a difficult problem but was not sure how to deal with it. Seeing Kangxi like that, Wei Xiaobao was quite anxious and scared. The young Emperor was growing older, his power and influence was flourishing more and more by the day. For each time Wei Xiaobao saw him, he always felt that their closeness decreased by one part, while the fear toward him increased by one part; they were no longer the same boys who wrestled each other absolutely unrestrained.

After a while, Kangxi said, “Xiao Guizi, there is one thing, but I don’t know what to do.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty is intelligent and wise, even Zhuge Liang would step down gracefully to you. Your idea must be brilliant.”

“This time even Zhuge Liang would be at a loss,” Kangxi said, “You have rendered three great merits, yet I have rewarded you not a single thing. Capturing Mao Dongzhu is the first merit. Talking to Mongolia and Tibet that the two military forces surrender to us is the second merit. Just now you sent people to kill the rebel thief and saved the Empress Dowager is the third merit. You are very young, yet you are already bestowed the title *Bojue* [Earl]; I can’t grant you the title *Wang* [King]!” At this point he burst into loud laughter.

Only then did Wei Xiaobao know that the Emperor was joking with him; he said happily, “These several merits are due to the Empress Dowager and Your Majesty’s flood of good fortunes, all merits are Your Majesty’s own meritorious service. Too bad Your Majesty cannot promote your own official rank; otherwise, Your Majesty should promote yourself three grades at once.”

Kangxi roared into laughter again; he said, “Although emperors cannot promote their own official rank, but since ancient times I don’t know how many emperors loved to give themselves honorific title. Whenever they celebrate something, or achieve tiny victory, they would add several titles to their name. Although it was said that the subject respectfully proposed, the fact is still the emperors who paste gold onto their own faces. Genuinely good emperor who praises himself is rather ridiculous, much less there were a lot of tyrants and muddleheaded rulers who bore the title holy sage, adept in pen and sword, brilliant ruler, wise and farsighted, or whatever title they want to string together. The more muddleheaded the emperor, the longer his title was, they really had no sense of shame. Since the ancient times, have there been any virtuous ruler and sovereign who surpassed Yao Shun Yu Tang [see chapter 14]? But Yao is Yao, and Shun is Shun; when later generations want to venerate and look up to, at most they only say ‘Great Shun’ or ‘Great Yu’. Those who become the emperor, if they have only thirty-percent of self-realization, they would not add several-dozen-character long title to their name.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Turns out Niao Sheng Yu Tang [‘raw bird fish soup’; again, see chapter 14] did not add their own title. Your Majesty is ‘raw bird fish soup’, naturally you won’t add any title to your name. It’s just that in your servant’s opinion, after we defeat and pacified Wu Sangui, if Your Majesty did not add several grand titles, you would suffer too much losses.”

Kangxi laughed. “Suffer what loss?” he asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “After defeating and pacifying Wu Sangui, Your Majesty will greatly rewarded the ministers who have given outstanding service, the three armies; everybody will be promoted and gain wealth. Not only Your Majesty yourself will not be promoted, you will have to open wide the coffer instead; glistening yellow gold, shining white silver, will have to be carted out and spent; won’t that mean you will suffer financial loss?”

Kangxi laughed. “You are unlearned, and don’t have any future prospect,” he said, “After sweeping away the rebel Wu, the whole world at peace, common people live in harmony and work happily; that will be your lord’s promotion and gain.”

“I see,” Wei Xiaobao said.

Kangxi continued, “However, after the rebel Wu is wiped out, the ministers will definitely want to propose a title. This kind of ‘bootlicking the big king’ is not something that *Zhen* wants to waste my time worrying about right now. When the task is successfully accomplished, they will come together to bootlick big time.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty has foresight of everything. When that time comes, we will quietly see which ministers will propose some honorific title for Your Majesty, who will bootlick the big king.”

Kangxi laughed. “Right!” he said, “At that time *laozi* will kick some damn dogs’ butt.” Both the lord and his minister burst out in loud laughter.

Indeed it happened as Kangxi had expected; as soon as Wu Sangui was subdued, the ministers immediately proposed honorific title, sang Kangxi’s praises, and bootlicked him big time. Kangxi issued an imperial edict: “Although the traitor has been subdued, the wound has not been healed; the ruler and his ministers should rebuild the country, give relief to the troops and support the people, spreading encouragement, in integrity restoring the affairs to its former condition, together delivering peace and security. If the mission is believed to be satisfied with achievements and virtue, honorific title will be granted; excessive request of grace is very shameful.”

The wording of the edict was very stern, but the ministers still did not understand, they thought Kangxi was only pretending to decline, hence they submit the proposal again. Kangxi issued another decree: “Since childhood *Zhen* has read books, and is aware of the ancient rulers’ conduct, from the beginning to the end very few have been able to escape from this narrow way of life, and I have always tried to guard against it. For fear that several affairs might be neglected, I exercise restrain to the end, eat late and get up early, in vast coldness and flourishing heat, do not dare to neglect. Occasionally feel unwell, also make an effort to go out and head and decide. In the middle of the night several proper memorials are reported, draping my clothes I go out, always planning on behalf of the people under the heavens. Today the efficacy of cleanliness and quietness is even more rare, the people are without abundant health but with rough lives, the ruler and his ministers are completely without merits and achievements that can be recorded. Supposing honorific title for

Zhen is repeated, plus all of you officers get promoted in rank, this vanity is shameful, where is the honor and glory in that?”

The crowd of ministers wanted to ‘pat the horse’s buttocks’ [i.e. bootlick], but they patted the horse’s leg instead; after making so much noise their heads and faces were filthy with grime, so now they did not dare to propose anymore. All of these were something that happened later, our book will not show it.

Kangxi laughed and said, “Emperors who grant themselves honorific titles are indeed too many; it can’t be considered rare. The Ming Dynasty has a certain Emperor Zhengde[10], now that was rare.”

“This Emperor,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant has met him several times.”

“You met him several times?” Kangxi asked in surprise, “In your dream?”

“No,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Your servant saw him on stage. There is a play called ‘Plum Dragon Town’; Emperor Zhengde was roaming the Jiangnan, in Plum Dragon Town he saw a young woman selling wine, Li Fengjie, who was very beautiful. He fooled around with her.”

Kangxi laughed and said, “Emperor Zhengde loved to roam around in plain clothes, it is not known whether this Li Fengjie matter really happened or not. This Emperor did not grant himself any honorific title, but he loved to assign himself an official rank. He bestowed himself the title ‘Zongdu [governor-general] Junwu [military affairs] Wei Wu [formidable/mighty, usually in military force] Dajiangjun [great general] Zongbing [regional commander] Guan [officer]’, coming across something like ‘wind blowing grass moving’. He issued an imperial edict: ‘to the northern bandit rebel boundary, specially assigned *Zongdu Junwu Wei Wu Dajiangjun Zongbing Guan* Zhu Shou in command of six armies took the journey.’ Zhu Shou was his name. Afterwards he fought a battle, which he actually lost, but he said it was a victory, his meritorious service was great, hence he issued another decree, bestowing himself the title of ‘Zhen Guo Gong’[11], plus an official salary of five thousand *dan* of rice.” [1 *dan* is approximately 100 liters or 100 quarts]

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter; he said, “This man did not want to be the Emperor, but wanted to be ‘Zhen Guo Gong’ instead; he was really

muddleheaded.”

Kangxi laughed and said, “At that time his high-ranking ministers opposed the idea, saying that if he took the title ‘Zhen Guo Gong’, he must also confer posthumous title to his ancestors to the third generation. The Emperor became ‘Zhen Guo Gong’ was not a big deal, but the Emperor’s three generation ancestors were all Emperors, they would definitely not agree to be demoted. Emperor Zhengde did not care, he was determined to be ‘Zhen Guo Gong’. Later on he rendered another meritorious service and conferred himself the title of ‘Taishi’ [imperial tutor]. Fortunately he died early, otherwise he would grant himself higher and higher title, until in the end he would have usurped his own throne and just be the Emperor.”

Hearing the word ‘usurping the throne’, two characters [cuan wei], Wei Xiaobao did not dare to talk too much; he only let out some hollow laughs.

Kangxi said, “Emperor Zhengde had done a lot of stupid things, he had caused the common people so much hardship. While it is true that he himself was not good, but half of those were from the eunuchs and ministers who taught him bad things.”

“Yes, yes,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Bad emperors loved to employ bad eunuchs and treacherous court officials, good emperors employ good eunuchs and loyal court officials.”

Kangxi shook his head slightly. “That is not necessarily true,” he said, “Bad eunuchs and treacherous court officials also exist around a good emperor, it’s just that if the emperor is not muddleheaded, even if others deceived him, in the end he would be able to uncover the treacherous official’s sinister plot.”

“Yes, yes,” Wei Xiaobao said, his heart could not help thumping madly.

Kangxi asked, “That s1ut Mao Dongzhu’s lover [orig. male adulterer], what’s his name?”

“He is called Thin Toutuo,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “His real name, your servant does not know.”

Kangxi said, “But he is so fat, he looked like a meatball, why was he called Thin Toutuo?”

“I heard that he was originally very tall and very fat,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Afterwards he took Shen Long Jiao Jiaozhu’s poison, he curled up and became a short and fat person.”

Kangxi asked further, “How did you know he and Mao Dongzhu were hiding inside Shen *Taifei*’s [first imperial concubine Shen] sedan chair, and were forcing the Empress Dowager to escort them out of the Palace?”

Wei Xiaobao’s mind churned lightning fast, “First the Emperor said that I sent people to kill the rebel thief and save the Empress Dowager, and that my merit was very big. But now he said that those two people were hiding inside the *Taifei*’s sedan chair and the Empress Dowager was forced to take them out of the Palace. In that case the Emperor still does not know the matter of Gui Family’s three people assassination attempt. However, whether by this time the Gui Family trio have escaped, or are caught alive, or are killed, in the end this matter cannot be concealed. What should I say?”

Seeing him hesitating without answering, Kangxi asked, “What is it? Is there something I shouldn’t know?”

“No, no!” Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant is wondering in my heart, how could those two rebel thieves hide inside the *Taifei*’s sedan chair? I really cannot figure it out even after thinking about it until my skull cracks. I was about to ask Your Majesty to enlighten me.”

“Let me ask you first,” Kangxi said, “How did you know that the one sitting in the sedan chair was not *Taifei*, and thus you ordered the Imperial Bodyguards to assault the imperial sedan chair?”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Turns out the Emperor still thinks that it was the Imperial Bodyguards of the Palace who killed Thin Toutuo and Mao Dongzhu. This matter will be exposed sooner or later, I’d better tell him the truth.” Thereupon he said, “Your servant is guilty and deserves ten thousand deaths. Your Majesty, please forgive me.” While saying that he dropped to his knees.

Kangxi frowned. “What is it?” he asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant received Your Majesty’s imperial decree to escort the offender to the throne Mao Dongzhu to the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful. When I walked through the imperial garden, suddenly from behind

the rockery ‘hua la!’ jumped out three people wearing Imperial Bodyguards and court eunuchs uniform. They grabbed your servant, and forced me to take them to see Your Majesty. These three people’s martial art was very high; pinched by them, your servant’s fingers were nearly broken.” Speaking to this point, he lifted his left hand, and indeed his five fingers were black and swollen.

“Why did they want to see me?” Kangxi asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Those three must be the assassins sent by Wu Sangui; even if they pinched your servant to death, I would never agree to take them to violate your holy self. It just so happens that … no, not just so happens, it was by good luck. By good luck the Empress Dowager and the First Concubine’s *luan*-selves [luan is mythical bird related to phoenix] came by. Those three assassins were muddleheaded; they thought inside *Taifei*’s sedan chair was Your Majesty’s holy self, right away they dashed out to commit the violent crime. It was due to the Empress Dowager and Your Majesty’s flood of good fortune that unexpectedly the rebel thieves killed other rebel thieves. I don’t know if by this time those three assassins have been killed by the Imperial Bodyguards, or have been captured alive. Your servant will go right away to find out and will come back to present a memorial.”

Kangxi said, “Those three assassins are not necessarily muddleheaded; most likely it was you who gave them direction, wasn’t it? You thought that rather that let the assassins violate my holy self, it would be better to harm *Taifei*. As soon as they made their move, the Palace would be thrown to confusion, they would not be able to harm me, and your little life would also be preserved; isn’t that so?” Having his innermost thought penetrated by Kangxi, Wei Xiaobao knew it was useless to deny, he could only kowtowed repeatedly.

Kangxi said, “You pointed the assassins to endanger *Taifei*, you really deserve to have your head chopped, but considering you still have three-part [i.e. to some degree] loyalty and love to me …”

Wei Xiaobao busily said, “Not three-part, it’s ten-part [i.e. completely], a hundred-part, a thousand-part, ten-thousand-part loyalty and love.”

Kangxi smiled and asked, “Can it be proven?”

“It can be proven, it can be proven,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Totally can be

proven!”

Kangxi stretched out his foot to kick lightly on his forehead. “Damn it,” he said with a laugh, “Get up.”

Wei Xiaobao was so scared that his head was damp with sweats; he kowtowed several more times before standing up. Kangxi laughed and said, “You have rendered three great meritorious services; at first I did not know how to reward you, but now I have found a way. You gave directions to the assassins, hence you offended your superior with violent crime; you also do not have a heart to submit yourself to your master, but I am not going to punish you. You atone for your crimes by meritorious acts; we are even.”

“Marvelous, marvelous,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Just like Your Majesty playing Pai Jiu, at first your servant wins, later on Your Majesty win, in the end we are even. Your Majesty did not eat my money, yet you also do not pay me anything.” In his heart he said, “No promotion is fine. Do you think you are going to bestow me the title ‘Wei Wu Dajiangjun’ [mighty great general], ‘Zhen Guo Gong’ [duke of Zhen country]? Even if you bestowed me the title ‘Taishi’ [imperial tutor], there’s nothing amazing about it. In those years Tang Bohu [Ming painter and poet] painted the Imperial Tutor Hua’s two sons, Hua Da and Hua Er [first and second son, respectively] as fools. The two sons that I, Wei Taishi, will have, Wei Da and Wei Er, will also be a mess, a really big mess.”

Kangxi said, “That short and fat thief, his motive was really malicious. After his lover was caught by you, he knew it was hard to seize her back, anticipating that you would eventually deliver her to the Palace to be dealt with by the Empress Dowager, he unexpectedly took a risk out of desperation and broke into the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, rebelling against the Emperor and coercing the Empress Dowager. At this moment the number of active Imperial Bodyguards was increased several times, the Palace is heavily-guarded, he could not like the last time taking us by surprise and jumped over the wall to escape. He was hoping that by sitting in Shen Taifei’s sedan chair, with the Empress Dowager personally escorted them to the Palace gate, the two of them could escape together. He had never even dreamed that demons and gods at work, unexpectedly you gave the assassins the direction to attack the First Concubine’s *luan* sedan chair, and killed the two rebel thieves.”

Wei Xiaobao suddenly saw the light, “So that’s what happened,” he said, “That Empress Dowager and Your Majesty have a flood of good fortune is indeed not the least bit incorrect.” In his heart he mused, “No wonder when I delivered the old wh0re, the Empress Dowager put on a bad luck face, as if I owed her three million *taels* of silver and did not pay her back. Turns out at that time Thin Toutuo was already hiding in her bedroom, most likely he was hiding in her bed. Thin Toutuo had lived in the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful for many days, naturally he was familiar with the layout. Perhaps he had also slept in that big bed for many nights. We were really lucky that he was thinking of this scheme. I wonder how many days had he been hiding in the Empress Dowager’s bedroom? Perhaps it was several days already. Aiyo, not good! Thin Toutuo and Empress Dowager, one man one woman, hiding in the room for several days in a row, I wonder if they had done some other trick or not? The Buddhist hat on the Old Emperor’s head on Mount Wutai, perhaps it will turn somewhat green.” [‘wearing green hat’ – a cuckold]

Naturally Kangxi could not read his dirty mind; he laughed and said, “Empress Dowager and me have great good fortune, your own good fortune is not small either.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant actually does not have any good fortune, it’s because I have been with Your Majesty for such a long time that Your Majesty’s good fortune has rubbed on me.”

Kangxi burst into loud laughter. He asked, “That Gui Xinshu’s nickname, ‘Shen Quan Wu Di’ [divine fist without equal], is his martial art really that formidable?”

In the midst of his laughter Kangxi suddenly asked this question, in Wei Xiaobao’s ears it was like a thunderclap. His body shook, he felt instead of blood, vinegar was flowing through his legs; they turned limp and painful. “This … this …” he stammered.

With a cold laugh Kangxi said, “Heaven is my father, Earth is my mother, Fighting the Qing, Restoring the Ming! Wei *Xiangzhu*, what a big guts you have!”

Wei Xiaobao felt the sky spun, the earth turned around, his brain crumpled into a ball; the first thought he had was reaching out to pull the dagger in his boot, but he immediately remembered, “He knows everything! Since he even

asked me that, that means his card is better than mine. His martial art skill is higher than mine, I cannot kill him with one stab. Even if I could, I am not sure if I can kill him!" Thereupon without hesitation he kneeled down and called out, "Xiao Guizi surrenders, I ask Xiao Xuanzi to spare my life!"

As soon as these three words 'Xiao Xuanzi' entered his ears, the memory of when they were playing and having martial art contest surged up in Kangxi's mind. He could not help but heaving a deep sigh and said, "You … all along you have concealed everything from me well."

Wei Xiaobao kowtowed and said, "Although your servant's body in Tian Di Hui, toward Your Majesty I am loyal and devoted; I have not done anything that offend Your Majesty."

Kangxi sternly said, "If you have the slightest rebellious thought, how could you live until today?"

Listening to the tone of his voice, Wei Xiaobao could hear the leniency in it; busily he kowtowed again and said, "Your Majesty is 'raw bird fish soup', you surpass Zhuge that Liang, your servant will be loyal to the end to my master, just like Guan Yun that Chang."

Kangxi was unable to restrain a smile; in his heart he swore, "Damn it, what Zhuge that Liang, Guan Yun that Chang?" But it was such a critical junction in their relationship, if he showed a somewhat false expression, this clown would perform some impromptu comedic act [referring to the opera], would crawl up along the stick, and then Kangxi would not be able to subdue him. Thereupon he shouted, "Tell me everything from head to tail! If you speak half a word of empty words, I'll chop you into dog meat in soy paste instantly!" Yet when speaking the last sentence, he could not refrain a smile from appearing on the corner of his mouth.

Wei Xiaobao was crawling on the ground, he could not see that Kangxi's expression had softened, but listening to his grim voice, he busily kowtowed and said, "Yes, yes. Your Majesty already know everything, how can your servant dare to conceal anything?" Thereupon he narrated how he went to Prince Kang's mansion and killed Oboi and was captured by Tian Di Hui, how he bowed to Chen Jinnan and took him as his master, how he was forced to enter the Society and

be the *Xiangzhu* of Green Wood Hall, et cetera. Finally he recounted how he came across the three people of Gui Family, how he lost to Gui Zhong in a game of dice, how he drew the secret memorial, how in the garden of Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful he was captured by Gui Erniang, how he guided the three of them to attack the First Concubine's *luan* sedan chair in order to warn the Emperor, et cetera. Naturally he skipped the part where he stole the Forty-two-chapter Sutra and other important facts surrounding it. He spoke at length and talked in great details; unexpectedly there were very few lies and extremely a lot of truth, it could be considered the first time in his life that he had ever done this.

Kangxi constantly inquired him of Tian Di Hui situation, Wei Xiaobao told him truthfully. After listening for a while, Kangxi nodded and said, "Five men share a poem, the Hong Ying in them nobody knows."

Wei Xiaobao was startled, "The Emperor knew even the secret code used by my Society's brothers to identify each other," he mused. He then recited, "Henceforth it is passed on to the brothers, afterwards knowing each other and have a reunion."

Kangxi said, "Entering the Hong Gate for the first time, swearing brotherhood with elder brothers, that same day taking an open oath to show sincerity."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Pine and cypress [fig. chaste and undefiled] two branches on the left and right, in the middle the Hong Hua [flood/great flower] Pavilion to swear brotherhood."

Kangxi said, "The brothers in front of Zhong Yi [lit. loyal and righteous] Hall, generals and millions of troops selected inside the city wall."

Wei Xiaobao recited, "Taking an oath in front of the Fu De [good fortune and virtue] Ancestral Hall, our Hong Ying desire is to fight the Qing and restore the Ming."

According to Tian Di Hui rule, once this exchange was finished, the two of them would then announce their names and surnames, and give an account of which Hall they were affiliated with, plus their rank and official duty within the Society. But Kangxi only smiled slightly.

Wei Xiaobao happily said, "Turns out Your Majesty is also my Society brother. I

wonder which Hall do you belong to? And how many incense stick do you burn …” Speaking to here, he realized that he had been thoroughly muddleheaded; Kangxi was the Great Qing Emperor, how could he ‘fight the Qing restore the Ming’? “Beat you this silly kid, beat you this silly kid!” he repeatedly said, while ‘slap, slap!’ he gently slapped his own mouth.

Kangxi stood up, he paced up and down the hall, and said, “You are an officer of our Manchu, you eat our Great Qing’s good fortune and rice, yet in your heart you harbor the idea of fighting the Qing and restoring the Ming. If I did not remember that you have rendered some tiny merit, even if you have a hundred heads, all would have been chopped down long ago.”

“Yes, yes!” Wei Xiaobao said, “Only because Your Majesty is magnanimous that your servant’s head can be preserved until today. Your servant will withdraw from the Society at once, I don’t want to be Tian Di Hui *Xiangzhu* no matter what. From now on I won’t fight the Qing restore the Ming at all, I will turn around and fight the Ming restore the Qing.”

In his belly Kangxi was secretly amused; but he cursed, “My Great Qing has not perished yet, what are you going to restore? A mouthful of nonsense!”

“Yes, yes!” Wei Xiaobao hastily said, “Your servant will defend and protect my master’s rivers and mountains for ten thousand years. Whatever Your Majesty wants me to restore, I will restore that. Whatever you want me to fight, your servant will fight it.”

Kangxi lowered his voice, he spoke slowly, word by word, “Very well! I want you to fight Tian Di Hui!”

“Yes, yes!” Wei Xiaobao said; but in his heart he was groaning, automatically his face revealed a distressed look.

Kangxi said, “You have a mouthful of graceful words, flowery speech, saying that no matter what you would be loyal and devoted to me, but I don’t know if that’s the truth or a lie.”

Wei Xiaobao hastily said, “A hundred percent pure gold, a hundred percent pure gold! Nothing can be purer.”

Kangxi said, “I will examine you carefully, whether or not you have not

committed any evil conduct in treason or heresy against me. If you obey my order, this time you incite Tian Di Hui, cut the weeds and eliminate the roots, kill all those rebels clean, then you will atone for your crimes by meritorious acts, I will pardon your guilt of deceiving your lord; maybe I will even reward you with something. If you are still craftily cheating me, being two-faced, three knives, humph, humph, do you think I cannot kill Tian Di Hui's Wei *Xiangzhu*?"

Wei Xiaobao was so scared that his back was drenched in cold sweats. "Yes, yes," he repeatedly said, "Your Majesty want to kill your servant, it will be like pinching an ant. But … but Your Majesty is 'raw bird fish soup', you won't kill a loyal minister."

"Humph," Kangxi snorted, "What loyal minister are you? You are big-white-face treacherous court official."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your Majesty please understand: while it's true that there are something that your servant concealed from Your Majesty, in all honesty I am not a big-white-face treacherous court official. Dong Zhuo, Cao Cao[12], definitely I am not them."

"Alright!" Kangxi said, "Even if you are not a big-white-face treacherous court official, you are a white-nose clown."

The Emperor assigned him different roles of the opera, Wei Xiaobao was relieved instantly; he busily said, "Being a clown is fine. Just like … just like Shi Qian, Zhu Guangzu, they can also render meritorious service to Your Majesty."

Kangxi smiled slightly. "Humph," he said, "You always insist on presenting yourself as a good person. Very well, you select troops and horses, go get Tian Di Hui, Mu Palace, Gui Xinshu, and those bunch of rebel thieves' heads and bring them here. If you short one head, I will chop one of your hands, if you leave four, I will chop your pair of hands and two legs. If you leave five, which part of you should I chop?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "This … this … your servant has no choice but to become a real eunuch."

Kangxi could not help bursting into loud laughter. "Damn it," he cursed, "You really know how to count your chickens before they are hatched."

With a frown on his face Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty chops my two hands and two legs, most likely your servant won’t live. This head above my neck, whether you chop it or not, it would not make much difference.” He thought, “He even knows about the Mu Palace; he is seriously well-informed.”

Kangxi put his hand into his sleeve and took out a sheet of paper. He read, “Tian Di Hui *Zongduozhu* Chen Jinnan, Green Wood Hall *Xiangzhu* Wei Xiaobao, subordinates Li Lishi, Xu Tianchuan, Priest Xuanzhen, Qian Laoben, Gao Yanchao, Feng Jizhong, and the others; Mu Family’s Mu Jiansheng, Liu Dahong, Wu Lishen and the others, the three assassins who entered the Palace were Gui Xinshu, Gui Erniang, Gui Zhong. One, two, three, four, five … altogether there are forty-three rebel thieves. If you are not included, the total is forty-two names.”

Wei Xiaobao dropped on his knees again and knocked his head twice. “Your Majesty,” he said, “Although this bunch of people say that they want to fight the Qing and restore the Ming, they have not been able to fight successfully, nor restore successfully. Let me talk to them. Above Your Majesty know astronomy, below you know geography, past and future, you know everything. Your Majesty have said that the Great Qing’s rivers and mountains will last ten thousand upon ten thousand years; that is definitely not wrong. Fighting the Qing they cannot fight successfully, it would be better if they disband their groups.”

Kangxi reached out and slapped the table heavily; he said in a stern voice, “You are stubbornly refusing to accept orders, unwilling to arrest the rebel thieves?”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Heroes of Jianghu attach most importance to *yi qi*. If I arrest Shifu and the others, His Majesty will definitely chop their heads. If that happens, Wei Xiaobao is selling his friends, I become Wu Sangui. Ay, at that time why I did not masquerade as other people, but masqueraded as Xiao Guizi instead. Xiao Guizi, Xiao Guizi, isn’t that Wu Sangui’s son? [same ‘gui’ character] I don’t want to be *Bojue Daren* anymore, I have to find a way to warn Shifu and the others to run away, to roll out of damn stinking duck egg.”

Seeing he did not answer, Kangxi was even more angry. “So what is it?” he barked, “Don’t you know that you have committed a great crime? I give you a chance to reform and start afresh, a golden opportunity to atone for your crimes by meritorious acts, you are still haggling with me?”

“Your Majesty,” Wei Xiaobao said, “They wanted to come and harm you, I staked everything to stop them; your servant upheld *yi qi* toward you. Your Majesty wanted to arrest them, your servant stood in the middle, it’s hard for me to conduct myself, I have no choice but to plead with you; this is also for the sake of *yi qi*.”

Kangxi angrily said, “In your heart you are leaning toward the rebel thieves; that is ‘undivided obedience toward the rebels, eyes not looking at the lord’, yet you are still talking about *yi qi*?” After a short pause he continued, “You have saved my life, you have saved *Fu Huang*, saved the Empress Dowager. If I kill you today, in your heart you won’t submit; you will say that I did not have *yi qi* toward you, will you not?”

At this stage, Wei Xiaobao might as well harden his scalp. “That’s true,” he said, “Your Majesty has promised that if your servant ever makes mistake, Your Majesty will spare my life. The Lord of Ten Thousand Year’s golden mouth, once said you cannot go back on your word.”

“Alright,” Kangxi said, “You have deep plans and distant thoughts; you have prepared this move early on. Humph, your heart must be put to death.”

Wei Xiaobao did not understand the meaning of the four-word phrase ‘your heart must be put to death’[13], but he presumed it was not a good word. Ever since he knew Kangxi, he had never seen him losing his temper like this; he mused, “My head has been chopped more than half. With the young Emperor’s bad temper, pleading for leniency is useless; I’d better reason with him.” He said, “Your Majesty, I did obeisance to you as my master, you have agreed to take me as your disciple. That Chen Jinnan is also my Shifu. If I harbor any intention to harm you, that means I ‘deceive my master exterminate my ancestor’. If I go to harm that other Shifu, that means I also ‘deceive my master exterminate my ancestor’. Besides … besides, an emperor chopping his servant’s head is of course perfectly normal. But Shifu chopping his disciple’s head, it’s a bit out of place.”

Kangxi thought, “Accepting him as a disciple was just a joke; it was clearly stated then. This kid relies on my favor and his pride, he is undisciplined and out of control, unexpectedly he talked about me and the bandit chief in one breath,

he is really creating a lot of trouble …" While he was thinking to this point, suddenly there was faint noise of people shouting and yelling from a distant, and 'bing bing bang bang' noise of weapons clashing.

Wei Xiaobao sprang up and said, "Seems like there are assassins. Shifu, please sit down and don't move, let disciple block in front of you."

"Humph," Kangxi snorted; he thought, "This kid has committed thousands of inappropriate deeds, but to me he actually has a loyal and loving heart." He said, "Later on you must not me Shifu anymore. You did not abide by the law of our school, as the Shifu, I am expelling you." Speaking those words, he could not help feeling amused.

They heard footsteps, several people were rushing outside the Hall's gate and stopped there. Wei Xiaobao rushed behind the door and immediately lifted up the latch to bolt the door. In a matter of life and death like this, his hands and feet could move very quickly, indeed it was unbelievable. "Who's there?" he shouted.

Outside someone said in a loud voice, "Reporting to Your Majesty: Three assassins are breaking into the Palace, the night guards have already surrounded them, very soon they will be captured."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "In the end the three people of Gui Family are not able to escape." He shouted, "His Majesty knew. Quickly get a hundred Imperial Bodyguards around Yang Xin Hall to protect the holy self, also station thirty guards on the roof." The Imperial Bodyguard Captain outside the Hall acknowledged the order and left.

Kangxi thought, "He is very thorough. That day when I met with danger on Mount Wutai, that nun in white broke the tile from the roof and jumped down, it was indeed very hard to guard against. Luckily this kid dashed on bravely with no thought of his own safety and blocked the sword in front of me."

After a while the sound of clamor gradually diminished, but a moment later the noise of clashing weapons arose again. Kangxi frowned and said, "Only three assassins and they cannot capture them. What if there are three hundred or three thousand assassins?"

"Your Majesty need not be worried," Wei Xiaobao said, "People with

background like Gui Xinshu are very few in the world, at most there are only four or five."

Another moment passed, they heard footsteps and the ringing sound of swords and sabers; the deployed night guards arrived outside the Hall. They also heard noise from all around the roof; the night guards had leaped onto the roof of the Hall. The guards knew that the Emperor was inside the Hall, hence they all stood on the eaves and the corners of the roof; nobody dared to walk across the roof, otherwise it would be extremely disrespectful if they stood above the top of the Emperor's head.

Kangxi knew that around the Yang Xin Hall alone there were at least four or five hundred Imperial Guards protecting him, he had absolutely nothing to worry about, thereupon he no longer care about the assassins. "Look what I have here," he said. From inside his sleeve he took out a piece of paper and spread it out on the table.

Wei Xiaobao came over to look; it was a drawing. In the middle there was a big building, with a flagpole and stone lions in front of the building; it looked a lot like his own Earl Mansion. There were a dozen or more cannon arranged all around the building, the mouths of the cannon were aimed at the big building. After he looked closer, the building looked more and more like his house. "Do you recognize the building?" Kangxi asked.

"It looks a bit like your servant's dog house," Wei Xiaobao replied.

"It's good that you recognize it," Kangxi said. Pointing to the four characters above the drawing he asked, "Do you also recognize these four characters 'Zhong Yong Bo Fu' [Loyal and Brave Earl Mansion]?"

Realizing that the building was indeed his house, Wei Xiaobao could not help but breaking into cold sweats. That many cannon were set up around all four sides of his residence, naturally it was not a good thing. He had personally seen the two foreign devils Tang Ruowang and Nan Huairen fired the cannon; when the cannon went off, with a loud bang a blaze rose to the sky, mud and rocks splashed several dozen *zhang* into the air. Even if he wore a hundred protective treasured vests, he would still be blown into dog meat paste. Thinking about the power of the cannon blast, he could not help but shuddered.

Kangxi slowly said, “Tonight, your Tian Di Hui, Yunnan’s Mu Family, Huashan Pai’s surnamed Gui, plus Wang Wu Pai disciples Situ He and their people will convene at your house. Right now my twelve cannon are set up in private houses all around your house, the cannon are already loaded with cannonballs and gunpowder. We only need to open the window, exposing the muzzle, lighted the fuse, and I am afraid not a single rebel thief will be able to escape alive. If they are not dead from the bombardment and escape outside, several squads of Vanguard Battalion troops and horses are stationed in the surrounding area, they won’t be able to eat rice no matter what. Did you see Vanguard Battalion Commander Ajichi just now? He has gone to inspect the troops in preparation for the action. The Vanguard Battalion has never had a harmonious relation with the Valiant Cavalry Brigade under your command, they may not necessarily let you go.”

Wei Xiaobao said with a trembling voice, “Your Majesty has considered everything, but you tell it clearly to your servant only now, it is because you want to spare your servant’s life. Whatever little merit your servant previously has, hereby it is used to atone for my crime; it is all used up, not the slightest bit is left.”

Kangxi smiled and said, “It’s good that you understand. Just like the two of us playing Pai Jiu, you won quite a bit of money first, but in one bet you lost everything to me. Your previous wins all at once are lost, from now on you neither win nor lose. If we want to keep playing, we have to start anew.”

Wei Xiaobao let out a gentle sigh, he said, “I really have to thank Your Majesty’s kindness. From now on your servant will concentrate on working for Your Majesty. Forget about Tian Di Hui, even Tian Jiu Hui’s [heaven nine society] *Xiangzhu* your servant will not want to do it.” In his heart he was secretly worried, “Shifu and the others agreed to meet again at my house tonight, how can I warn them so they won’t come?” He said, “Your Majesty ordered your servant to capture this bunch of rebel thieves, you were simply testing your servant’s heart. The fact is that Your Majesty has already had divine foresight and amazing plan, everything else is a thousand-*li* distant.”

They heard someone outside the Hall said in a loud and clear voice, “Reporting to Your Majesty: the rebel thieves have been arrested!”

Kangxi's face showed delight. "Bring them in!" he shouted.

"Yes!" Wei Xiaobao complied. He turned around and lifted the bolt and opened the Hall's gate.

Several dozen Imperial Bodyguards, with the Gui Family three people in the midst of them, came in. They shouted together, "Kowtow to His Majesty, kneel down!"

The several dozen Imperial Bodyguards kneeled down together. Gui Xinshu, Gui Erniang and Gui Zhong, three people, were covered in blood, their bodies were full of wounds, but they stood upright and unafraid. All three of them were bound with thick ropes, each person had two Imperial Bodyguards standing by their side holding the other end of the ropes. The Imperial Bodyguard captain shouted, "Kneel down! Kneel down!" But how could the Gui Family trio pay him any attention?

They heard dripping noise in the Hall, the blood from the three Gui Family people and the wounded Imperial Bodyguards was continuously dripping to the floor. Gui Erniang glowered at Wei Xiaobao and shouted, "Little traitor, you … you are a stinky thief!" Seeing the miserable condition of these three people, Wei Xiaobao could not help feeling grieved; he did not even try to answer the insult.

Kangxi nodded and said, "Turns out *Shen Quan Wu Di* Gui Xinshu is such an old man! How many of our men are dead or injured?"

The Imperial Bodyguard captain replied, "Reporting to Your Majesty: the rebel thieves are extremely vicious, Imperial Bodyguards who died in the line of duty were more than thirty, those who are injured are more than forty."

"Hey," Kangxi said, while waving his hand. Inwardly he praised, "Amazing!"

The Imperial Bodyguard captain ordered his men to bring the three people out. Suddenly Gui Xinshu let out a loud shout and exerted his internal strength, his right shoulder crashed onto the Imperial Bodyguard standing by his side.

"Ah!" the Imperial Bodyguard cried out, while his body flew out, his head crashed onto the wall, sending him to instant death.

Gui Xinshu grabbed the rope binding Gui Zhong. Stretching and pulling, 'Snap!' the rope broke. Gui Xinshu grabbed Gui Zhong's body and shouted, "Child,

quickly go, Mama and I will follow really soon.” He threw Gui Zhong outside, Gui Zhong’s body flew out of the Hall’s gate.

Right this moment the Gui Family husband and wife leaped together to pounce on Kangxi. Seeing this adverse turn of events, Wei Xiaobao was greatly shocked; he scrambled up to embrace Kangxi and pull him down underneath the table, his back was facing outward, acting as a shield to protect Kangxi.

They heard ‘slap, slap!’ twice, followed by several Imperial Bodyguards rushed over to protect Kangxi and Wei Xiaobao. When they looked at the Gui Family husband and wife, they saw that they were lying in a pool of blood, with seven or eight sabers and swords sticking out of their backs; looked like they were no longer alive.

After strenuously killing several dozen Imperial Bodyguards, Gui Xinshu suffered serious injury, lastly, he used up his internal energy to break the rope binding his son before pouncing on Kangxi. Gui Erniang understood her husband’s intention. On one hand, at the death’s door they hoped to take the Tatar Emperor’s life with their last strike; on the other hand, they hoped that in the confusion their child would be able to escape. But their hands and feet were firmly tied, they had no strength left to break the ropes; therefore, they both leaped together to attack Kangxi. However, after the fierce battle outside, they were like drying oil lantern. Their bodies were in the air when their mouths spurted blood, they could not endure anymore and fell to the floor; even if the Imperial Bodyguards did not hack and chop, they would have died anyway.

Kangxi calmed down a little bit. He frowned and said, “Pull them out, pull them out!” The Imperial Bodyguards replied in chorus.

They were just about to lift the two bodies when from the Hall’s door a shadow flashed by. Someone was flying in, his movement was extremely fast, he threw himself to the Gui Family husband and wife’s bodies and called out loudly, “Ma, Dad!” It was Gui Zhong.

Several Imperial Bodyguards hacked down with their sabers and swords, unexpectedly Gui Zhong did not evade at all. The blades landed on his body. They only heard him gasping for breath and said, “Ma, you … you are not coming with me, what should I do? I don’t know the way …” He coughed twice, his head

drooped down and he died. In all his life he followed his mother closely; his mother took care of everything. This moment as he left his father and mother, he felt completely lost. Although he managed to leave Yang Xin Hall, in the end he came back to be with his father and mother.

The Imperial Bodyguards *Zongguan* [chief] Dolong rushed into the Hall. He kneeled down and said, “Reporting to Your Majesty: The assassins in the Palace have been completely … completely purged …” Seeing blood all over the floor of the Hall, he was terrified. He kowtowed and said, “The assassins have frightened the Holy Self, your servant … your servant deserves to die!”

Just now Kangxi was grabbed and brought down by Wei Xiaobao. Although it was such a sorry situation and was harmful to his dignity, this person was risking his life to protect the holy self; his loyalty toward the master was undoubtedly real. He said to Dolong, “There are still people outside who want to assassinate Wei Xiaobao. You must protect him well, don’t leave him even a *cun* or a step. You must not let him leave the Palace even more. Tomorrow early in the morning I will give you further instruction.”

“Yes, yes,” Dolong hastily replied, “Your servant will strive to protect Wei *Dutong*.”

Wei Xiaobao groaned inwardly, “The Emperor is going to bombard Tian Di Hui tonight, he is afraid I might tip them off, hence he instructed Dolong to watch over me.”

Kangxi walked to the Hall’s gate; he thought, “Xiao Guizi is cunning and extremely crafty, this old boor Dolong is not his match.” Turning his head around, he said, “Dolong, get more people, follow Wei Xiaobao closely, don’t let him talk to other people, also don’t let him send anything out of the Palace. In short, the situation is dangerous, you just have to treat him like an offender to the throne.”

“Yes, yes,” Dolong replied, “Your Majesty treats your subject with kindness in every possible way.” He thought that the Emperor treasured Wei Xiaobao so much that he did not want to give the assassins any opportunity to harm him.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty’s kindness, your servant cannot repay even if my body torn my bones crushed.” In his heart he knew that by saying that, the

Emperor was taking Wei Xiaobao's face into consideration; in the future he might still find Wei Xiaobao useful.

Kangxi smiled and said, "You won another round. Starting from tomorrow, we will play again. That golden rice bowl of yours, you must hold it firmly with both hands, don't let it be broken and rotten!" Finished speaking he went out the Hall's gate.

Naturally only Wei Xiaobao understood what Kangxi was saying. Just now he had protected Kangxi's holy self, hence Kangxi considered him rendering another merit. Tonight, after his Shifu Chen Jinnan and the others were killed, he would not have anything to do with Tian Di Hui anymore, the Emperor could reinstate him into an important position. The golden rice bowl was engraved with these four characters 'gong zhong ti guo' [serving one's country loyally]. The Emperor wanted him to be loyal and devoted to him, and not be two-hearted.

Wei Xiaobao imagined the devastation of his Shifu and Tian Di Hui brothers, flesh and blood flying everywhere; even if his nobility rank was raised again, how could his heart be at peace? He thought, "If as a human being I do not uphold *yi qi*, what am I if not a turtle b@stard?" He pondered further, "Why is the Emperor so well-informed all of a sudden? Which son of a b1tch told him? This morning when I first saw the Emperor, he was very good to me, saying that he was going to send me to victorious battle, hoping that I would catch Wu Sangui and he would bestow me the title Ping Xi Wang. I am sure at that time the Emperor still did not know anything about Tian Di Hui Wei *Xiangzhu*. He must have received the information while I was taking the old wh0re to be presented to the Empress Dowager; but which dog thief giving him the tip off? Humph, most likely it was Wu Palace people, or perhaps Wang Wu Pai Situ He's subordinate. Otherwise, how could the Emperor not know other matters such as I stole the Forty-two Chapter Sutra, or I became the White Dragon Envoy of the Divine Dragon Cult?"

Seeing Wei Xiaobao frowning and worried, with blank expression on his face, Dolong patted his shoulder and said with a laugh, "Wei *Xiongdi*, His Majesty dotes on you like this, I wonder for how many previous incarnations you have cultivated good deeds? It doesn't matter which, Princes, Beilei, Generals, Cabinet Ministers, of the imperial court, His Majesty has never sent any Imperial

Bodyguards to protect him. Everybody says that before Wei *Dutong* reaches twenty, he will be bestowed the title Gong and Wang. You don't have to worry, as long as you do not step out the Palace gate for one step, even if the rebel thieves have magnificent army with thousands of men and horses, they won't be able to harm a single strand of your hair."

Wei Xiaobao could only force a laugh as he said, "His Majesty's benevolence is as high as the heaven and is deep as the earth, we as the servants can only do our utmost to repay it." He saw dozens of Imperial Bodyguards stood in front of him, behind him, on his left and right; to send a letter to Tian Di Hui brothers would be extremely difficult. He thought, "Any Gong or Wang title, *Laozi* does not want. I would rather the young Emperor kick me in the butt and shout at me: 'Get your Ma's stinky duck egg out of here! From now on I don't want you to see my face.' This kind of protection can't really protect my old life."

Dolong said, "Wei *Xiongdi*, His Majesty instructed you not to move carelessly. Do you want to return to your old residence to rest, or do you want to go to the Imperial Bodyguard office, so that everybody can accompany you several rounds?" He knew throwing dice or playing Pai Jiu would definitely fit Wei Xiaobao's fancy.

Wei Xiaobao had a sudden inspiration, he said, "Empress Dowager ordered me to do something very important, I have to do it right away. Would Duo *Dage* ['Dolong' in Chinese is 'Duo Long'] come with me?"

Dolong's face appeared to be reluctant; he said, "Empress Dowager's order, naturally you must do it immediately. It's just that … it's just that His Majesty's imperial decree was very strict, he said Wei *Xiongdi* must never ever leave the Palace …"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "This is something that I have to do inside the Palace, Duo *Dage* needs not be worried."

Dolong was relieved instantly; he laughed and said, "As long as you don't go out the Palace gate, all taboos are off."

Wei Xiaobao ordered the Imperial Bodyguards to bring the First Imperial Concubine Shen's *luan* sedan chair to the burning ground west of Shen Wu Gate. He said, "Whoever opens the curtain of the sedan chair, Empress Dowager

ordered me to immediately chop his head."

Dolong and the Imperial Bodyguards were all aware about the assassins attacking the First Imperial Concubine's sedan chair. Although they did not know the details, they all knew that it was the Empress Dowager's secret, and all along they felt queasy about it. When they heard that Wei Xiaobao wanted to bring the sedan chair to be cremated at the burning ground, it meant they were getting rid of a fetus of a gargantuan disaster; everybody felt as if a large rock was taken off their heads.

Right away Dolong came with Wei Xiaobao to get the *luan* sedan chair and bring it to the burning ground. Along the way, blood was still dripping from the sedan chair, as for who died in the sedan chair, naturally nobody dared to ask even half a question.

Arriving at the burning ground, they had the *sula* [odd jobs/part-time worker] pile up firewood around the *luan* sedan chair and burn it. Wei Xiaobao picked up a piece of wood and with a charcoal drew a small sparrow on it. He cupped the piece of wood in hands as he faced the burning sedan and prayed, "Thin Toutuo, Old Wh0re, in this world you could not be husband and wife, in the underworld you can be husband and wife for a thousand years, ten thousand years. By this time the three Gui people who killed you are also dead. You two left first, they were right at your heels. If you meet each other at the bridge as you gaze toward the edge of the platform, everybody must be friendly with each other."

Dolong and the others saw him moving his lips, they assumed he was praying for the departed spirit to be reincarnated soon. They saw him moving several pieces of rock and made a small pile, and then he stuck the piece of wood into the rocks, just like an incense stick. How could they know that it was a secret code between him and Tao Hongying when they wanted to communicate with each other?

When the sedan chair and the corpses inside it were burned to ashes, Wei Xiaobao returned to his former dwelling place. Earlier some eunuchs who wanted to fawn on him had already come over and swept the place clean, and delivered food and drink as well as some light refreshments. Wei Xiaobao gave the eunuchs some tips and then he invited Dolong and the Imperial Bodyguards to have some.

“Duo *Dage*,” he said, “You and the gentlemen please sit and relax here, *Xiongdi* has been working all night last night for His Majesty, I am really tired.”

“*Xiongdi*,” Dolong replied, “There is no need to stand on ceremonies, please go to bed quickly. Your *Gege* will protect you.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “That is really one thousand times, ten thousand times, I do not dare to accept. Duo *Dage*, what is it that you want His Majesty bestow to you? Tell me, *Xiongdi* will remember it in my heart. Next time I see His Majesty is happy, I will ask him on your behalf, I have 80% confidence that it will be successful.”

Dolong was greatly delighted. “Wei *Xiongdi* is willing to ask His Majesty on my behalf, how can it not be successful?” he said.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Duo *Dage*’s business is *Xiongdi*’s own business; why would I not strive to accomplish it?”

Dolong laughed and said, “Your *Gege* has been doing errands in the Capital for a while, I am somewhat tired, hence I am thinking of going to outside provinces for a change of pace.”

Wei Xiaobao slapped his thigh and said with a laugh, “*Dage* is not wrong at all. Within the city of Beijing, I don’t know how many princes, dukes and high-ranking officials whose rank is higher than ours; in all honesty we cannot display our prestige at all. If we are out of the Capital, it will be free and easy. If we want several *taels* of silver, we only need to cough, other people will immediately deliver it with both hands.” The two of them roared in laughter.

Wei Xiaobao went into the bedroom and lay down in the bed; he mused, “Duo *Dage* received the Emperor’s decree, he is keeping a very close watch on me. It’s impossible for me to go out of the Palace to warn Shifu. I will have to wait for Tao *Gugu* and ask her to pass on the message. It’s just that I am afraid she will come here too late in the evening. If she arrived in the depth of the night to see me, over there the cannon will already be fired, over here what can I do?” A moment later he thought, “Right now the only plan I have is to send some Imperial Bodyguards out to beat the grass to scare the snake.”

Once his mind was set, he closed his eyes to nap for about two hours. When he woke up, the sun was slightly slanting to the west; it was already passed *Wei*

hour [between 1-3pm]. He walked out of the bedroom to talk to Dolong.

"Duo *Dage*," he said, "Do you know the reason why those bunch of assassins wanted to make their move on me?"

"That, I do not know," Dolong replied.

Wei Xiaobao said, "One group is Tian Di Hui, the other is Mu Palace."

Dolong stuck out his tongue. "Those two groups of rebel thieves are very formidable," he said, "No wonder His Majesty is very anxious."

Wei Xiaobao said, "I am thinking of hiding in the Palace for one day, but I don't want to hide for life. Today although I have Duo *Dage* to protect me, but if the rebel thieves are not wiped out, they will cause no end of trouble."

Dolong said, "By the time His Majesty summons us for the morning audience tomorrow, he will definitely have a marvelous plan. Wei *Xiongdi* does not need to worry."

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao said, "I won't conceal it from *Dage*, in *Xiongdi*'s home, there are several girls whose appearance is like flower or like jade, whom *Xiongdi* loves very much. Apparently tonight the rebel thieves will come to my house to assassinate me. When they fail to harm *Xiongdi*, most probably they will kill these several girls; that … that will be a pity."

Dolong laughed and nodded his head. He recalled the instant when Wei Xiaobao wanted him to pretend and put on airs to give Zheng Keshuang some trouble, it was precisely for the sake of a beauty. This young brother was loose and lecherous; although he was still young, he must have had a collection of not a few good-looking concubines in his house. Thereupon he said, "That's easy, I'll send some men to *Xiongdi*'s mansion to protect them."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he cupped his fist to express his gratitude. "The young girls in *Xiongdi*'s house," he said, "There are three that I most dote on, one is Shuang'er, the second is Zeng Rou, and then there is another one called … called Jianping (he thought that if he mentioned the name Mu Jianping, the word 'Mu' might cause suspicion); their appearances are quite not bad. *Xiongdi* is really worried. I ask *Dage* to send the men to protect them, tell them that tonight some Tian Di Hui and Mu Family assassins will come over, tell them

to hide immediately. It would be best if *Dage* send a bit more people to guard *Xiongdi*'s house, so that when the assassins arrive, they can capture that his granny bunch. Whichever brothers are working hard, I will heavily thank them with gifts."

Dolong struck his chest and said with a laugh, "That's easy. It's Wei *Bojue* Mansion's matter, who would not want to strive to step forward?" Immediately he ordered the Imperial Bodyguard captain to select several men and send them out.

All Imperial Bodyguards knew that Wei Xiaobao was very generous; usually, even without any problem at all he would often tip them eight hundred or a thousand *taels*. This time it was to protect his beloved concubines, he would definitely reward them handsomely. Immediately they all happily accept the assignment. Inevitably those who were out of turn and not selected were sighing and moaning inwardly, blaming their own poor luck.

Wei Xiaobao was somewhat relieved; he thought, "When Shuang'er and the others hear the Imperial Bodyguards' message that the Palace is sending people to protect them, to wait for and arrest Tian Di Hui and Mu Palace's assassins, they will tell my Shifu and the others to flee. But if my Shifu and the others stay out, Shuang'er, Miss Zeng and Xiao Junzhu, three people might die from the bombardment; that would be terrible! But with a large group of Imperial Bodyguards in my house, the gunmen outside will not open fire carelessly."

He then had a second thought, "If the gunmen received the Emperor's strict order, it does not matter if three by seven is twenty-one, they absolutely must open fire, and then what would happen?" Xiao Junzhu and Zeng Rou were not a big deal, but Shuang'er's love and loyalty to him was very deep, she was the most important person in his heart, he simply must not let her delivering her life. Only it was such a dilemma for him; if he ordered the Imperial Bodyguards to get Shuang'er and the others out first, there would be nobody left to warn Shifu and the brothers. If he saved Shuang'er but did not save Shifu, he would be paying more attention to a lover than friends, then he would be a turtle b@stard. Momentarily he paced back and forth in his room in distress for not able to find an ingenious plan.

More than an hour later the captain of the Imperial Bodyguards that was sent

to *Zhong Yong* Earl Mansion returned and reported: they had not reach the Earl Mansion and were already stopped by Vanguard Battalion's officers and men. The *Canling* [regimental commander] of the Vanguard Battalion said that they were on imperial orders to protect the Earl Mansion, there was no need for the Imperial Bodyguards officers to take the trouble. The Imperial Bodyguards wanted to come in to protect the women, but no matter what the Vanguard Battalion would not allow them, saying that everything had been arranged by His Majesty. Afterwards even the Vanguard Battalion's Commander Ah [from 'Ajichi'] also personally stepped forward to stop them. The Imperial Bodyguards were unable to change their mind, and were obliged to return.

When Wei Xiaobao heard this, he uttered a series of groaning in his heart. Dolong laughed and said, "*Xiongdi*, His Majesty is really considerate toward you, unexpectedly he sends the Vanguard Battalion to protect your pretty women. What else are you worried about? Ha ha, ha ha!"

Wei Xiaobao had no choice but to accompany him with some hollow laugh. He thought, "In everything the young Emperor is a thousand *li* ahead of me. This time my Shifu and the others really face imminent catastrophe. The Vanguard Battalion must have received strict order to guard around my Earl Mansion; seeing common people, they let them come in, so that tonight they will be blasted to death together. If it is civil or military government officers, they won't let them in."

His mind went further, "If I suddenly release the 'Han Sha She Ying' [see Chapter 41] secret projectiles, taking Duo *Dage*'s life is not difficult, but there are many Imperial Bodyguards in here, how can I kill them all? Too bad last time my knockout drug has been used up in the Zhuang House." He saw the sun was getting lower and lower, he was like an ant inside a hot pot, his body was burning hot, and he had to pee several time, but all along he could not come up with the least bit of idea.

More than two hours later, the sky was gradually turning dark. Wei Xiaobao pushed the window to look out, and saw seven or eight Imperial Bodyguards patrolling back and forth outside his room, the security was extremely tight. He looked in all directions, but where was Tao Hongying's shadow? Heaving a very deep sigh he dejectedly collapsed onto his bed; thinking that perhaps by this

time quite a few of his friends had already inside the Earl Mansion. For every moment he was delayed, all his brothers were a step closer in their journey to the underworld.

From the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of the big water jar standing at the corner of his building, it was the one Hai Dafu used to use. That day he was totally dependent on this big jar to kill Rui Dong; he thought, “Why don’t I lure Duo *Dage* to enter the room, and kill him with the secret projectile, and then set the room on fire? Then I can escape in the midst of confusion. Duo *Dage*’s treatment to me is not bad at all, without any reason whatsoever I am harming his life, in all honesty I am doing him too much wrong. But there is big *yi qi* and then there is small *yi qi*; the dozens of my Shifu and the others’ lives are somewhat more important than his, one person’s life.”

His mind was set, he took a fire-knife and a flint to light a candle; he thought, “The mosquito net will be burned the fastest; after I kill Duo *Dage*, I’ll set the mosquito net on fire.”

Right this moment he suddenly heard Dolong calling out from outside the room, “Wei *Xiongdi*, the food and drink is here, come out and drink some wine.”

“Let’s the two of us brothers eat inside!” Wei Xiaobao replied.

“Alright!” Dolong said. He instructed the eunuch who deliver the food and drink to bring the food case inside.

The eunuch was around sixteen, seventeen years old. When he entered the room, he paid his respect to Wei Xiaobao before opening the food case and taking out the food and drink. A divine light suddenly flashed inside Wei Xiaobao’s brain, he thought of an idea. “Stay here to serve us drinking the wine,” he said to the eunuch.

The little eunuch was extremely delighted; he had long understood that Wei *Bojue* was formerly the chief of the Imperial Kitchen, and had always treated the people working under him generously. Serving him eating and drinking would definitely be beneficial; thereupon delightedly he set up the bowls and chopsticks.

Dolong followed inside; he said with a laugh, “*Xiongdi*, you have not been working in the Palace for quite a while, yet His Majesty did not take away your

room. Even a prince or a Beilei would not receive such preferential treatment."

"It's not preferential treatment by His Majesty," Wei Xiaobao replied, "His Majesty is dealing with a lot of important matters in the world, how can he care about this kind of irrelevant small matter? Honestly speaking, *Xiongdi* living here is totally against the rule."

Dolong laughed and said, "To others it may be against the rule, but to *Xiongdi* it's not a big deal." He knew that the chief of the court eunuchs wanted to fawn on Wei Xiaobao, so nobody dared to send other people to live in this building. Besides, there was no lack of rooms in the Imperial Palace, plus there was nothing special with Hai Dafu's residence, naturally the eunuch in charge of the imperial kitchen had other accommodation.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "If *Dage* did not mention it, *Xiongdi* would have forgotten. Tomorrow I should notify *Zongguan Taijian* [chief manager eunuch] that I need to hand this room back. If we as external ministers lived in the Palace, if the external imperial censor found out and he submitted a report to our superior, it won't taste very good."

"His Majesty likes you," Dolong said, "Who would care about that?"

"Please sit down, please sit down," Wei Xiaobao said, "This room has nothing special, it's just that *Xiongdi* was accustomed to live here, it's not that *Xiongdi* does not feel that living in the Earl Mansion is not as comfortable as living in here."

He slowly walked around Dolong's back, pulled his dagger, and said, with a laugh, "These eight bowls of dish are all the food that *Xiongdi* loves to eat; the imperial kitchen still remembers. *Dage*, how about trying this crab meat lion's head [i.e. meatballs]?"

Dolong said, "The food that *Xiongdi* loves to eat must be the best …" before he could finish, suddenly he felt coldness on the left side of his back; he slumped to the table and stopped moving. Turned out Wei Xiaobao already aimed the dagger at the middle of his back, and thrust it in.

The dagger was completely noiseless; the little eunuch did not notice at all, he was still pouring the wine. Wei Xiaobao walked over to his back and noiselessly thrust his dagger into his heart. Immediately he turned around and bolted the

door, and quickly took off his clothes and cap, shoes and socks, leaving only his underwear and his protective vest. And then he wore the little eunuch clothes and hat, and put on his clothes and hat on the little eunuch. The two of them were more or less of the same height, hence their clothes and hats also fit on each other's body. Afterwards he dragged the little eunuch's body and sat it on the chair; raising his dagger, he made random cuts on the little eunuch's face, destroying his facial features beyond recognition.

While his hands were busy working, in his heart he said, "Duo *Dage*, you are a Tatar, our Tian Di Hui makes our living by killing Tatars, so I have to kill you. Today I harmed your life, I really am sorry. Luckily you are bound to die anyway. Tonight I escape, tomorrow His Majesty will definitely have your head chopped, so you died only half a day earlier, it can't be considered big loss. Moreover, because I killed you, you died in the line of duty. If the Emperor chopped your head, your possessions will be searched and confiscated, your wife and children will be dragged into this; you might as well die half a day earlier, your family will receive pensions and gift for the bereaved. Come to think about it, you are actually in a much more convenient situation." But thinking that usually Dolong was really not bad toward him, and that he was compelled by circumstances to kill him, in his heart he was genuinely grieved and was unable to stop tears from flowing down his face.

After wiping his tears, he turned around to look at the little eunuch; he said in his heart, "You, *Xiao Xiongdi*, are wearing the Yellow *Magua*, you look very impressive. Originally, even you reincarnate ten times, you could not dream of achieving even half a part of the Yellow *Magua*. On your head you are wearing *Bojue Daren*'s hat. Just the ruby alone is enough to last you seven or eight lifetimes. Hey, hey, you are being promoted and gain wealth, it could be the Will of Heaven. In those days I, Wei Xiaobao, masqueraded Xiao Guizi; since then I enjoyed meteoric rise, until I become a high-ranking officer. Today you masquerade Wei Xiaobao, whether you could enjoy meteoric rise in the future or not, it will depend on your ability."

He also thought, "Previously I masqueraded a little eunuch, today I let a little eunuch masquerade me. The debt I previously owed, I pay it back fair and square. Xiao Xuanzi, oh Xiao Xuanzi, I do not do you any wrong."

Straightening up his clothes and hat and did not see any flaw, he said in a loud voice, “Xiao Wa’er [lit. little baby], you may leave; no need to serve here anymore. Here’s five *taels* for you to buy some candy.”

And then with an unclear voice he said, “Thank you very much *Bojue Daren*.”

Raising his voice again he said, “I am drinking wine and have a heart-to-heart chat with *Duo Zongguan* in here, I don’t want anybody to come in and disturb us!”

In the Palace, the court eunuchs’ assignment was to serve the Emperor, the Empress, the Imperial Concubines, princes and princesses, but it was not uncommon for the senior eunuchs with official duty to have little eunuchs serving them. Although Wei Xiaobao was not a eunuch anymore, previously his prestige in the Palace was impressive, he was a big time eunuch; for him to have a little eunuch serving him and then rewarding him with money was a very common occurrence. When the Imperial Bodyguards outside heard this, nobody notice anything was out of place. They saw the door opened, the little eunuch came out, carrying the food box in his hands, with head hung low he turned around to close the door.

Carrying the food box, Wei Xiaobao walked to the main gate with head hung low. He saw the Imperial Bodyguards were getting rice and pouring wine, nobody paid him any attention. Wei Xiaobao was secretly delighted; he thought, “It will be at least two hours before the Imperial Bodyguards find out that the two people inside the room are dead; they would think that Wei *Bojue* and Duo *Zongguan* were murdered by the assassins. It will scare them off that they will piss in their pants in terror.”

Stepping over the main door, he saw a procession of several eunuchs and palace maids, the leader carried a lantern, the rest of them carried a sedan chair. The sedan chair was decorated like a pheasant tail and feather; it was called a ‘long-tail pheasant sedan chair’. The eunuch leading the procession announced in loud voice, “Her Highness the Princess has arrived.”

Wei Xiaobao was shocked, “The Princess did not come late, she did not come early, but she came exactly at this moment. As soon as she enters the room, she will immediately see me, Wei Xiaobao, killed; won’t she raise a ruckus in the

Palace like the sky and the earth turning upside down? Now it will be extremely difficult to go out."

Momentarily he was at a loss of what to do. He saw the sedan chair stopped, Princess Jianning stepped out from the sedan chair. "Is Xiao Guizi inside?" she called out.

Wei Xiaobao gritted his teeth; he stepped forward and said in a low voice, "Princess, Wei *Jueye* [noble master] is drunk, let your servant take Princess inside."

The lantern was not too bright, the Princess did not recognize him. Seeing the Imperial Bodyguards coming out of the room together to welcome her, she thought, "Why are there so many people?" Frowning, she waved her left hand and said, "Everybody wait outside." In big stride she walked in.

Wei Xiaobao followed her in. As soon as he was in, he turned around and closed the door. The Princess said, "You also go out."

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao said, "Wei *Bojue* is in the inner room."

The Princess entered in quick steps. She pushed the door open, and saw 'Wei Xiaobao' and Dolong two men were slumping over the table; obviously they were very drunk. She knitted her beautiful eyebrows and sternly said, "You are still not out?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said in a low voice, "If I go out, I cannot burn the rattan-armored troops."

The Princess was startled; she quickly turned around, and under the candlelight, she was shocked to see Wei Xiaobao standing behind her. She could not help but was surprised and delighted at the same time. "Ah," she cried out. "You … what are you doing?" she asked.

"Don't make noise!" Wei Xiaobao hissed.

The Princess looked at him, and then she looked at the 'Wei Xiaobao' crouching on the table. "What trick are you playing?" she asked in a low voice.

Wei Xiaobao pulled her into the room and closed the door. "Things are not good," he said in a low voice, "His Majesty wants to kill me!"

"*Huangdi Gege* has already killed the Prince Consort," the Princess said, "Why does he want to kill you too? He … he … if he killed you, I will stake my life against him."

Wei Xiaobao reached out and pulled her into her arms, he planted a kiss on her cheek and said, "Let us quickly flee from the Palace. His Majesty knew about you and me, he wants to chop my head."

Being embraced and kissed by him, the Princess' body went weak; she said in a tender voice, "*Huangdi Gege* has killed the Prince Consort, I thought he was going to give me to you in marriage, how … how could there be such thing? How did he find out?"

"It must be you who tip him off, wasn't it?" Wei Xiaobao said.

The Princess blushed. "It was not," she said, "I only asked several times, when are you coming back."

"And you said it wasn't you?" Wei Xiaobao said, "It does not matter. Anyway, the two of us are already husband and wife; let us quickly get out of the Palace."

The Princess hesitated. "I will plead with *Huangdi Gege* tomorrow," she said, "He can't possibly kill you. When he killed the Prince Consort, he already told me that he really offended me, and he promised to find another good Prince Consort for me. He is always very fond of you …" Speaking to this point, she felt that the reeking of blood in the room was getting thicker and thicker. Sniffing twice, she asked, "What is …" Suddenly a burst of bad *chi* bubbled up in the pit of her stomach, 'Wah!' she leaned over the back of a chair and threw up; her throat felt nauseated, she vomited another mouthful of bad-taste clear liquid.

Wei Xiaobao lightly patted her back and gently comforted her, "What happened? Did you eat any bad food? Are you feeling better?"

The Princess threw up two more times; suddenly she turned around and shot a heavy slap on his face. "I ate some bad food?" she cursed, "It's you who are not good, you are not good!" With both fists she punched the pit of his stomach continuously.

The Princess had always been harsh, unreasonable, and rough; this moment she suddenly threw a fit, Wei Xiaobao did not think it strange; however, realizing

the urgency of the situation, for every moment he was delayed, the time the cannon would be fired would also be a moment closer. He really could not afford to have unnecessary bickering with her. “Alright, alright” he said, “I am not good.”

The Princess twisted his ear and shouted, “You and I are going to see *Huangdi Gege*, the two of us are going to immediately bow to the Heaven and the Earth to become husband and wife.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly anxious; he pleaded, “Leave the matter of bowing to the Heaven and the Earth to be husband and wife to me, but as soon as we see His Majesty, your husband will turn into a headless Prince Consort instantly. Let us flee out of the Palace immediately, it is very important.”

The Princess pulled Wei Xiaobao’s ear hard, he was in so much pain that he could not bear not to cry out. The Princes cursed, “You don’t have any head, what’s the big deal? You are a little demon, originally you did not have any head anyway. What shall I do with the baby little demon in my tummy?” Speaking to this point, ‘Wah!’ she broke into crying.

Wei Xiaobao was shocked, “What … what … baby little demon?”

The Princess’s leg flew, she kicked his lower abdomen, while saying with a cry, “In my tummy there is a baby little demon; it’s you who are not good. If we do not become husband and wife immediately, my belly … my belly will grow every day … His Majesty knew Wu Yingxiong was a eunuch, he could not do it, I … how can I conduct myself as a human?”

Wei Xiaobao’s countenance turned deathly pale; right now a thousand pounds was hanging by a thread, he was facing an urgent matter, and then this highly embarrassing matter arose. He busily said, “If we don’t get out of the Palace quickly, the baby little demon won’t have any Dad. After we escape out of the Palace, we will immediately bow to the Heaven and the Earth and get married. You give birth to a baby little demon, won’t that … won’t that be His Majesty’s nephew [orig. waisheng – sister’s son]? His Majesty becomes a maternal uncle, he will become my *dajiuzi* [wife’s older brother], won’t he feel it’s embarrassing to kill his *meifu* [younger sister’s husband]?”

“Why would he feel embarrassed?” the Princess said, “Wu Yingxiong was his

meifu, didn't he kill him with one chop of a saber?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "His Majesty knew that Wu Yingxiong was a fake *meifu*, I, Wei Xiaobao, on the other hand, is the genuine goods at fair prices. He killed fake *meifu*, he can't possibly kill real *meifu*. Good Princess, after our baby little demon is born, he will wrap his arms around your neck and call you Mama, won't it be beautiful?" While saying that, he reached out to embrace her neck.

The Princess let out a tender giggles; she happily said, "If I can get the beautiful thing, which is you, this son of a b1tch, I won't want any baby little demon calling me Mama." Her mouth said those words, but her hand that was twisting Wei Xiaobao's ear actually loosened up. She said in tender voice, "I haven't seen you for such a long time; were you thinking of me?" While saying that, she threw herself into his embrace.

"I was," Wei Xiaobao replied, "I was thinking of you every day, I was thinking of you every night, I think of you all the time." But in his heart he cursed, "This hopeless romantic is really a damn dead wh0re." He saw her lingering feeling, her blushing face, but this was really not a good time to be intimate with her, yet he did not dare to offend her. In a low voice he said, "As soon as we are out of the Palace, later on day and night we will be together, we won't be separated anymore. Let us go now."

The Princess wriggled herself free from his embrace. "Can't do!" she said, "We must become husband and wife tonight."

"Alright, alright!" Wei Xiaobao said, "If you say tonight, then tonight it is. But we must get out of the Palace first and talk about it later."

"What do you mean get out?" the Princess said, "*Huangdi Gege* loves me most, he is your Shifu, he also loves you the most. Tomorrow we will plead with him, he won't be angry. *Huangdi Gege* hates Wu Sangui the most, you can ask him to issue an imperial decree, assigning you to lead the troops to attack Wu Sangui, I will go with you. I will be the grand marshal of the army, you can become my deputy, we will beat Wu Sangui that he will be utterly defeated. *Huangdi Gege* may bestow you the title *Wangye*." While saying that, she embraced him tightly.

Wei Xiaobao was in an extremely difficult situation. Suddenly someone

knocked the window lightly three times, and then after a short pause knocked again twice. Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he said in a low voice, “Is it Tao *Gugu*?” He gently pushed the Princess away, and scrambled toward the window to open it. A shadow flashed, someone leaped in; it was precisely Tao Hongying.

As the two women faced each other, both were shocked. Tao Hongying called in a low voice, “Princess.”

The Princess angrily said, “Who are you? What are you doing here?” Thinking it over, immediately her jealousy arose, thinking that in the dead of the night this palace maid hopped over the window into Xiao Guizi’s room, it couldn’t possibly be a good thing, could it? Doubtlessly she must be his lover. Although she saw that Tao Hongying was old, thinking that Xiao Guizi was fooling around with this old and ugly palace maid, she could not forgive him even more. She was feeling rather amorous, but this woman suddenly broke in and spoiled the mood, her fury blazed like crazy. “Gu …” she loudly called out. Wei Xiaobao had already prepared against this possibility. As soon as he knew that she was going to yell ‘guards’, he reached out and pressed his hand on her mouth.

The Princess struggled hard; she slapped backhandedly to strike Wei Xiaobao’s face. In his panic and fright, Wei Xiaobao’s right hand reached to her neck and tightened his grip. “Dead wh0re,” he cursed, “I’ll strangle you to death!” The Princess could not breathe, her hands and feet flailing randomly. Wei Xiaobao pulled his left hand to hammer it on her head twice.

Seeing he dared to beat up the Princess, Tao Hongying was shocked; she knew immediately that this matter would get noisy really quick. Stretching out her finger, she jabbed the Princess’ waist and the pit of her stomach three times in succession, sealing several acupoints on the upper part of her body. It was only then did Wei Xiaobao let go of his grip.

“*Gugu*,” he said in a low voice, “Things have turned really bad, the Emperor wants to kill me, I have to escape right away.”

“There are a lot of Imperial Bodyguards outside,” Tao Hongying said, “I have been here quite a while ago, I waited behind the flower terrace more than an hour before I was able to sneak in. Look.” She quietly pushed the window a slit.

Wei Xiaobao peeked out, and indeed he saw seven or eight Imperial

Bodyguards patrolling back and forth with lanterns in their hands. He thought for a moment, Thin Toutuo and Mao Dongzhu came into his mind; he mused, “Those two people’s luck was not good, they came across Gui Xinshu, husband and wife. *Laozi* can imitate their method. Those three people from the Gui Family can’t possibly reincarnated in someone else’s bodies, I can ride in the Princess’ sedan chair.”

Turning to the Princess, he said, “Princess, please don’t drink vinegar [i.e. be jealous], she is my *Gugu*, my Dad’s *Meizi* [younger sister], my Mama’s *Jiejie* [older sister]. You must not throw a fit randomly.”

After her acupoints were sealed by Tao Hongying, the Princess was so angry that she nearly pass out; hearing Wei Xiaobao’s explanation, her heart calmed down. She did not think that ‘Dad’s *Meizi* and Mama’s *Jiejie*’ couldn’t possibly be the same person. In any case, this woman was not Xiao Guizi’s lover, so there was no problem. Instantly her face showed a smiling expression as she said, “In that case quickly release me.”

Wei Xiaobao wanted to make her happy; he said, “You are my wife, quickly greet *Gugu*.”

The Princess was very happy, to everybody’s surprise, she really called, “*Gugu*!”

Tao Hongying was bewildered; a moment ago these two were beating each other, how could the Princess suddenly call her ‘Aunt’?

Wei Xiaobao said, “Order the sedan chair to be carried inside the room, and then tell everybody to get out, close the door, and then you and I will ride inside the sedan chair. We will sneak out of the Palace, and immediately bow to the Heaven and the Earth to get married. During the wedding ceremony, we must have an elder standing on the side as the witness, otherwise the ceremony will not count. Our *Gugu* can be the witness. What do you think?”

The Princess was overjoyed; her face blushed as she said in a low voice, “Good!”

Wei Xiaobao pushed her back away and urged, “Quickly go, quickly go!”

Being rushed urgently like that, without waiting for the acupoints on her upper

body to be unsealed, the Princess went to the door and ordered, “Bring the sedan chair into the room!”

All the eunuchs and palace maids were baffled, but this Princess has always been unpredictable, the orders that she gave usually had very little common sense, but had a lot of wildest things imaginable; therefore, they complied in chorus and brought the sedan chair inside.

The First Imperial Concubine Shen’s *luan* sedan chair could be brought into the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful and quietly brought Thin Toutuo and Mao Dongzhu out. Wei Xiaobao’s door was only several *chi* wide, how could the Princess’ long-tail pheasant sedan chair be brought through the door? Only the two long sedan chair poles could go in, the body of the sedan chair was stuck on the doorway and could not get in.

“Useless bunch,” the Princess cursed, “Get out!”

The two eunuchs carrying the front part of the sedan chair thought, “The door is too narrow, how can you blame us?” Immediately they slipped out from the side of the sedan chair.

Wei Xiaobao whispered in the Princess’ ear, “Order the Imperial Bodyguards not to come in.”

The Princess raised her voice, “Xiao Guizi, you must accompany me in the room, I forbid you from going out.”

“Yes,” Wei Xiaobao replied in loud voice, “It’s getting late, Your Highness the Princess please take a rest earlier.”

The Princess cursed, “But I definitely want to go out to have a stroll, what do you care?”

Wei Xiaobao replied loudly, “There’s assassin in the Palace, it would be better if Your Highness the Princess is a bit more careful.”

The Princess said, “His Majesty raised these many Imperial Bodyguards, the only thing they are good at is eating. Have everybody stand outside, nobody can go in.” The crowd of Imperial Bodyguards complied in chorus.

Wei Xiaobao climbed into the sedan chair and sat down; he beckoned Tao

Hongying to unseal the Princess's acupoints. The Princess also climbed into the sedan chair and sat in front of his bosom. Wei Xiaobao wrapped his arms around her and said in a low voice to Tao Hongying, "*Gugu*, please accompany us out of the Palace." He thought that her martial art skill was superb; with her escorting them next to the sedan chair, if their trickery was discovered, she could help fighting and killing people.

Tao Hongying readily agreed. She was wearing palace maid uniform, standing next to the Princess' sedan chair, nobody would suspect anything. The Princess shouted, "Take the sedan chair out."

The two eunuchs carrying the front part of the sedan chair slipped back into the room from the side of the sedan chair. Together with the two eunuchs carrying the rear part of the sedan chair they lifted the sedan chair poles. They brought the sedan chair in reverse for several steps, and then they turned around and carried the sedan chair away. In their hearts they were all puzzled, "How come the sedan chair suddenly grows heavier?"

The Princess followed Wei Xiaobao's direction and ordered their carrier to get out of the Palace via the Shen Wu Gate. When the long-tail pheasant sedan chair reached the Shen Wu Gate, as the Imperial Bodyguards guarding the Gate saw that the Princess' long-tail pheasant sedan chair wanted to get out of the Palace very late at night, they stepped forward to inquire. The Princess leaped out from inside the sedan chair and shouted, "I want to get out of the Palace, quickly open the door."

The captain of the Imperial Bodyguards on duty at the Shen Wu Gate that night happened to be Zhao Qixian. Immediately he bowed to salute and said with a laugh, "Reporting to Your Highness: there are assassins in the Palace tonight, it's not too safe; would Your Highness please wait for the daybreak before going out of the Palace."

The Princess angrily said, "I am in a hurry, I am not scared of the assassins."

Originally Zhao Qixian would not dare to disobey, but he knew that the Prince Consort Wu Yingxiong has been put to death, the Princess wanted to get out of the Palace this late at night, perhaps this matter had something to do with Wu Sangui's rebellion. If that was true and this matter was investigated, he would

not escape grave responsibility. Thereupon he repeatedly bowed in respect, but all along he refused to open the gate. But because the Princess urgently pressing him, he said, “Since that is the case, let your servant ask for Duo *Zongguan*’s instruction. Would the Princess please wait a little bit, as soon as your servant receive the instruction, I will rush back to open the Gate.”

Inside the sedan chair Wei Xiaobao heard the Princess was getting angry, but no matter what Zhao Qixian refused to open the Gate. If he really went to find Dolong, things would turn from bad to worse. In desperation he said, “Zhao Qixian, do you know who I am?”

Zhao Qixian had been following him in various missions for quite some times, naturally he recognized Wei Xiaobao’s voice. Pleasantly surprised, he asked, “Is it Wei *Fu Zongguan* [deputy chief]?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Exactly.” Sticking out his head from inside the sedan chair he beckoned Zhao Qixian to come closer. Zhao Qixian hurriedly came over. Wei Xiaobao said in a low voice, “I received His Majesty’s secret order to go on a top secret mission; if I show my face, I might spoil the mission. Therefore, His Majesty ordered me to sit inside the Princess’ sedan chair, and ask the Princess to cover me up as I go out of the Palace.”

Zhao Qixian was well aware that he was the Emperor’s most doted on and most trusted aide, and was very familiar with the secretive way [orig. gods disappear and devils vanish] he handled his missions; hence Zhao Qixian did not have any doubt. “Yes, yes,” he busily said, “Lowly officer will open the gate immediately.”

Wei Xiaobao was suddenly struck by a brainwave, “Do you want to be promoted and gain wealth?” he asked in a low voice.

Zhao Qixian had worked with him, and all these years his rank had been promoted twice; as for wealth, he had gained more than twenty thousand *taels*. As soon as he heard the four-character phrase ‘be promoted and gain wealth’ [sheng guan fa cai], he knew that since Deputy Chief Wei had already asked the question, it meant that he was supporting him to be promoted to a higher job. Bursting with joy, hastily he bent his knees to pay his respects and said, “Thank you very much *Fu Zongguan* for supporting me. Whatever errand *Fu Zongguan*

is sending me to do, even with torn body and crushed bones lowly officer will not decline under any circumstances."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "You said it yourself. When the cannon bombard, blasting you until your body torn and your bones crushed, you said you won't decline under any circumstances; you must not blame me." He said in a low voice, "There is a group of rebel thieves in collusion with Wu Sangui. His Majesty concocted a brilliant plan, this very moment we managed to lure them into my Earl Mansion. His Majesty is sending me to lead the Vanguard Battalion troops to capture them. The Vanguard Battalion are usually not in good term with my Valiant Cavalry Brigade; do you know why His Majesty is sending me to lead the Vanguard Battalion?"

"Lowly officer is very stupid," Zhao Qixian replied, "I do not know."

Wei Xiaobao lowered his voice even more, "The Vanguard Battalion's Commander Ah colluded with Wu Sangui, His Majesty wanted to seize this opportunity to catch everything in one net. The Princess is Wu Sangui's daughter-in-law, when they see the Princess, they won't suspect a thing."

Zhao Qixian suddenly saw the light, "So that's how it is," he said, "I can't imagine Commander Ah has the audacity to commit treason and heresy. Most likely this matter was uncovered by Wei *Fu Zongguan*'s investigation too, and you have set up another great merit."

"This merit was set up by the Emperor himself, which he then handed over to me," Wei Xiaobao said, "We are good brothers; promotions we enjoy together, wealth we gain together. Take forty Imperial Bodyguards and come with me to render great merit."

Zhao Qixian was greatly delighted; he thanked Wei Xiaobao profusely, while hurriedly asked the Princess to get on the sedan chair. He then selected forty Imperial Bodyguards who usually loved to lick his behind, telling them that they would act on instructions from a secret imperial decree. They opened the Shen Wu Gate wide and escorted the Princess' long-tail pheasant sedan chair out of the Palace. He ordered the remaining sixty Imperial Bodyguards to increase their vigilance in guarding the Gate.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Under no circumstances this Palace Gate is to be opened

tonight; unless there is a direct order from either Duo *Zongguan* or myself, nobody is to be allowed to leave the Palace." Zhao Qixian passed on Wei Xiaobao's order. The remaining sixty Imperial Bodyguards guarding the Palace Gate complied in chorus.

Wei Xiaobao was secretly amused, "This time *Laozi* left, I will never come back. I wonder if Duo *Zongguan*'s ghost can come back to give the order to open the Palace Gate?"

Tong Mao'er [copper hat] Lane was not far from the Imperial Palace, not too long afterwards the party arrived at the *Zhong Yong Bo Fu* [Loyal and Brave Earl Mansion]. Along the way Wei Xiaobao's heart was pounding rapidly, he was afraid that they only reached half way, ahead the cannon were already fired for days on end. Fortunately from beginning to end it was extremely quiet with no sound of activity to be heard.

When they reached the mouth of the alley, the Vanguard Battalion Commander Ajichi, who had already been informed of the arrival of the Princess' long-tail pheasant sedan chair, was already waiting to welcome her. In the sedan chair, the Princess was enjoying Wei Xiaobao rubbing his back as he gave her detailed instruction on what to say and how to act. When she heard that Ajichi announced his greeting, she immediately stuck out her head from behind the sedan chair curtain and said, "Commander Ah, His Majesty's secret imperial order: the task at hand tonight is extremely important; have you prepared everything well?"

Ajichi bowed and responded, "Yes, everything is ready."

The Princess said in a low voice, "Those cannon have also been prepared?"

"Yes," Ajichi replied, "It's under Nan Huairen *Daren*'s personal direction."

Inside the sedan chair, Wei Xiaobao was able to hear everything clearly; he mused, "The Emperor really did not lie to me. That foreign devil Nan Huairen is here to personally aim the cannon, how can they miss?"

The Princess said, "His Majesty's order: I am to enter the Earl Mansion to do something, you come with me."

Ajichi replied, "Reporting to Your Highness: this is a critical time, we must not

come in.”

The Princess angrily said, “What do you mean we can’t come in? This is an imperial edict; you dare to defy?”

“Your servant does not dare,” Ajichi replied, “But … but … it is really very dangerous. Your Highness’ ten-thousand gold body …”

Inside the sedan chair Wei Xiaobao coughed once, Tao Hongying stepped forward, her finger moved like the wind, she sealed the three acupoints on Ajichi’s body, left and right waist and the side of his torso. Ajichi cried out in surprised, the upper part of his body was immediately paralyzed; and then he felt his back turned cold, followed by a sharp pain, as a sharp blade made a long cut on his back. He was scared out of his wits and was totally at a loss.

The Princess said, “His Majesty’s secret order: if you refused, you are to be chopped down immediately, along with the execution of your whole family unto the third generation.”

“Yes, yes,” Ajichi replied in trembling voice.

Wei Xiaobao had an idea, “These Imperial Bodyguards have come with me on various missions, they always obey my orders, why would I want to deliver their lives? I’d better have the Vanguard Battalion as the scapegoats.” He whispered in the Princess’ ear, “Tell him to select fifty Vanguard Battalion officers and men to come with us inside.”

The Princess thundered, “Take fifty of your sergeants, come with us inside to work.”

Ajichi responded with trembling voice, “Yes … yes …” Immediately he passed on an order to have fifty sergeant follow behind the Princess’ sedan chair into the Earl Mansion.

Wei Xiaobao ordered Zhao Qixian to lead his Imperial Bodyguards to guard outside the gate, while the sedan chair proceeded to the second reception hall. The Princess and Wei Xiaobao got off the sedan chair, and ordered the fifty sergeants to wait in formation in the courtyard. With Ajichi in custody, Tao Hongying followed the two of them into the reception pavilion.

When they pushed the door open, they saw Chen Jinnan, Mu Jiansheng, Xu

Tianchuan and the others inside the hall. Everybody was greatly puzzled to see Wei Xiaobao entered with a woman dressed in exquisite attire, a palace maid, and a military officer. Wei Xiaobao beckoned, they all crowded around him; he said in a low voice, “The Emperor found out about our meeting in here. The alley outside is surrounded by officers and men; plus there are about a dozen cannon aimed at this place.”

Everybody was shocked; their countenance changed greatly. Liu Dahong said, “Let’s charge out.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “Can’t do!” he hissed, “The officers and men outside are a lot, and the cannon are even more formidable. I have brought dozens of officers and men. Let us strip their clothes and sneak out.” The crowd of warriors all praised this brilliant scheme.

Wei Xiaobao turned around to talk to the Princess. The Princess nodded and said to Ajichi, “Tell twenty sergeants to come in.”

Ajichi could readily see that the situation was far from good, but there was a steel blade pressed against his neck, how could he dare to disobey? Without any choice he issued the order. Tian Di Hui and Mu Palace warriors laid an ambush behind the door. As soon as twenty Vanguard Battalion sergeants entered the reception pavilion, punches, kicks, elbow-strikes and finger jabs flew everywhere, the twenty men were immediately knocked down.

The second time they called fifteen people, the third time they also called fifteen people; after all fifty sergeants were overthrown, their uniforms were stripped. The crowd of warriors quickly changed their clothes. Even the Princess also changed her clothes.

Wei Xiaobao saw Mu Jianping and Zeng Rou also changed their clothes, but he did not see Shuang’er; hastily he asked Zeng Rou. Zeng Rou said, “Shuang’er *Meizi* saw you entered the Palace and did not come back for a very long time, while Gui *Er Xia* and the others also went into the Palace to assassinate but we also have not heard any news, she was very anxious, hence accompanied by Feng *Daye* [big master, term of respect for older man] they went out to scout for information.”

Mu Jianping said, “The two of them left right after lunch; why haven’t they

come back until now?”

Wei Xiaobao knitted his brows; he was quite worried. Although he knew that Feng Jizhong was exceptionally skillful in martial arts and was quite capable of protecting Shuang’er thoroughly, but the two of them did not know about the Emperor’s plan. Supposing they returned after everybody else escaped and the cannon happened to fire, wouldn’t it be terrible?

After short deliberation he said to Qian Laoben, “Qian *Dage*, Feng *Dage* and Shuang’er went out to scout for information and have not come back, we must leave a number of warning sign so that when they see it, they will immediately leave.”

Qian Laoben complied. The situation was urgent, he pulled a dagger, cut the thigh of two Qing soldiers, cut a piece of their clothes, dipped it to the blood on the two men’s wounds, and wrote two big bloody characters ‘kuai tao’ [quickly flee] on the doors. In succession he wrote the characters on all eight doors, while everybody finished changing their clothes.

Wei Xiaobao led everybody to the stable to get some horses. Four Tian Di Hui brothers masqueraded themselves as eunuchs to carry the Princess’ long-tail pheasant sedan chair. With Ajichi in custody they went out of the Earl Mansion. The fifty sergeants were left inside the Earl Mansion with either their acupoints sealed or their hands and feet bound. Wei Xiaobao was still sitting inside the Princess’ sedan chair. When they were out of the mansion, he sighed, thinking, “Those attendants, stable hands, cooks, personal guards, men and maidservants, in their respective rooms in the Mansion will inevitably die of the cannon blast. But if I told them to leave, the officers and men guarding outside would definitely see something was wrong.” He also recalled, “That day on Mount Wutai by disguising ourselves as Lama, we saved the Old Emperor’s life. Today we are using the same trick. First this ‘turtle shedding its shell’ stratagem saved the Old Emperor’s life, now it saves Xiao Guizi’s life. It is greatly useful.”

The crowd of warriors, with the Princess and Ajichi in the middle, reached the end of the alley. They saw officers and men on patrol, the security was very tight, but momentarily they were not able to see where the cannon were set up.

Having escaped from danger, Wei Xiaobao heaved a deep sigh. Seeing his Shifu

and all his friends escaped the disaster of artillery barrage, he was greatly comforted. He said to Zhao Qixian, “This Commander Ah rebels against the Emperor, he committed treason and heresy; I want you to put him in jail. Unless His Majesty personally wants to bring him to trial, wait for my return before you can let him go.” Zhao Qixian complied.

Wei Xiaobao continued, “This man is an offender to the throne, His Majesty hates him to the bones; when hearing his name, he will be very angry. Tell the brothers, everybody must be a bit more careful, don’t let His Majesty hear this rebel thief’s name.”

Zhao Qixian received the order; leading the forty Imperial Bodyguards, they left with Ajichi in custody. With Ajichi in jail, Wei Xiaobao did not give a damn as to when he was going to be released.

The group of warriors continued walking in silence toward a secluded area. After about a *li* or so, Wei Xiaobao abandoned the sedan chair and mounted a horse instead. Chen Jinnan asked, “After Gui *Er Xia* and the others entered the Palace to assassinate the Emperor, what happened next?”

“The three of them …” Wei Xiaobao started. Suddenly they heard ‘bang, bang, bang!’ loud explosion, followed by black smoke rising from the direction of the Earl Mansion. From the distance they saw beams, tiles and bricks flew to the air. The group of warriors felt the ground under their feet was shaking. At this time the cannon blast was rumbling continuously, from the Earl Mansion red-blood flame rose high, reaching more than ten *zhang* into the sky. The group of warriors was already far away from the Copper Hat Lane, but they still felt blasts of hot air hit them on the face. They looked at each other, aghast; nobody had ever imagined that the cannon power was that formidable. If they were late even for a short moment, how could they stay alive?

Liu Dahong cursed, “His granny, what an earth shaking …” his voice was drowned in the subsequent cannon blast that nobody heard the rest of his words.

Looking toward the Earl Mansion, they saw the flame subsided, but immediately afterwards it rose again to the sky, burning half the sky red. Wei Xiaobao thought, “The young Emperor must have heard the explosion, if he sent

someone to get me, the trickery would be exposed immediately.” Walking away from the sedan chair, he said to Chen Jinnan, “Shifu, we must leave the city without delay. As soon as the news spread, the questioning on the city gates will be very strict, it won’t be easy to leave town.”

“That’s right,” Chen Jinnan said, “Let’s go.”

The Princess leaped out of the sedan chair immediately. Wei Xiaobao turned toward the Princess and said, “You should return to the Palace, after the situation is calmed down, I will come to get you.”

The Princess was shocked and angered at the same time. “What did you say?” she shouted. Wei Xiaobao repeated his words.

The Princess shouted, “You burn the plank after crossing the bridge? You want to cast me away now?”

“No, not that …” Wei Xiaobao started. But before he could finish, ‘Slap!’ his face was heavily slapped.

The crowd of warriors was flabbergasted. Just now the bombardment was shaking the heaven and the earth, everybody thought that were it not for Wei Xiaobao’s scheme to save them, by this time each one of them had already turned into flying ash, there would not be any opportunity to flee for their lives at all. As a result, even though usually they did not hold this youngster *Xiangzhu* in such a high regard, this moment they could not refrain from being grateful and were filled with admiration. Suddenly seeing the Princess made her move and beat him, some people immediately stepped forward to push her away, while some others shouted and scolded her.

The Princess cried loudly and threw a tantrum, “You said you wanted to bow to the heaven and the earth with me, so I obeyed you, I took you out from the Imperial Palace, I also told that Vanguard Battalion commander to save your friends. You … you are a stinky thief, you want to deny, it’s not over between you and me. In my belly …”

Wei Xiaobao was afraid she might have a slip of the tongue and announce the scandal in public; he hastily said, “Alright, alright! You can come with me. Let’s get out of the city and then we’ll talk.” The Princess turned tears into laughter; she turned around and mounted a horse.

The party reached the Chao Yang Gate at the east side of the city. Wei Xiaobao called out, “His Majesty’s secret order: we must get out of the city to pursue and capture the rebel thieves. Quickly open the city gate.”

Valiant Cavalry Brigade, Guarding Military Camp [national guards?], Vanguard Battalion, three military units were the Emperor’s *Yu Lin Jun* [lit. imperial forest army] personal guards. Within the City of Beijing, they were the boss [orig. bashing sideways and colliding straight on]; all civil and military officials were somewhat afraid of them. When the officers and men guarding the gate saw a group of Vanguard Battalion sergeants, how could they dare to disobey? Besides, a moment ago they heard the rumbling of the cannon, there must be something big happening in the city; thereupon they opened the city gate at once.

Everybody exited the city and galloped to the east. Wei Xiaobao and Chen Jinnan rode side by side, he told his Shifu briefly how Gui Xinshu and his family failed in their attempt to assassinate the Emperor, and how the Emperor discovered his secret. Chen Jinnan praised him, “Xiaobao, usually I see you as a flippant and insincere, very dishonest boy, but in this critical moment surprisingly you are able to attach most importance to *yi qi*, not coveting riches and honor by selling your friends; it is indeed rare.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “I don’t care much about other friends, but ‘cardinal offense of exterminating master’ [大义灭师 – da yi mie shi], I absolutely must not do.”

“What do you mean you don’t care much about other friends?” Chen Jinnan said, “As long as he is your friend, you must never betray him. As for ‘cardinal offense of exterminating master’ these four characters, you did not use it correctly.”

Wei Xiaobao stuck out his tongue. “Disciple is unlearned,” he said, “I said it wrong, Shifu must not blame me.” Thinking about how in the past he was able to talk nonsense with the young Emperor and had a good time, but with what had been happening today he would never be able to see him face to face, he could not help feeling sad.

Chen Jinnan said, “We came out dress as Vanguard Battalion sergeants, in less

than a day the Tatars will find out. We'd better change our clothes as soon as possible."

"Precisely," Wei Xiaobao said, "As soon as we reach the small town ahead, we can buy some clothes and change."

They galloped eastwards for more than twenty *li* before reaching a small town, but the town did not have any used clothing store. Chen Jinnan was a veteran in marching to battle, and was very adept in governmental affairs, but facing this kind of trivial matter, momentarily he felt as if he had his hands bound and was unable to do anything; seeing there was no place to buy change of clothes, he said, "Let's go to the next town and see; I hope we can find a used clothing store there."

Passing the small town, they saw at the end of the market there was a large house that must belonged to a rich family; it has high wall and vermillion gate, the building looked grand. Wei Xiaobao had an idea; "Shifu," he said, "Let us go into that house to borrow some clothes so that we can change."

Chen Jinnan hesitated. "I am afraid they won't let us borrow some clothes," he said.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "We are military officers. Military offices do not eat the rich, do not rob from the rich, who else should we eat, who else should we rob?" Leaping down from the horse, 'dang, dang!' he banged the copper door knocker randomly.

A manservant came out to open the gate, everybody swarmed in; whenever they saw someone, they would strip his clothes. The head of the household was a retired government official from the Capital who had returned to his hometown. Seeing these Vanguard Battalion sergeants were acting like wolves and tigers, he repeatedly called, "Gentlemen officers, please do not act rough, let *Xiongdi* order my people to arrange some food and drink that gentlemen can use, I will also prepare some travel expense for you …"

Before he could finish, someone already grabbed him and peel off the robe and socks he was wearing. In his fright he screamed, "*Xiongdi* is already old, this provocation is out of the question …"

Giggling and laughing, the crowd of warriors stripped several dozen men of

their clothes. The retired officer and the womenfolk were frightened as if their souls have left their bodies. Luckily these bunch of Vanguard Battalion officers and men were acting strangely, they only stripped the men's clothes, but did not insult the women at all. After they stripped the men's clothes, they did not do any other shady business either. With roar of laughter they simply went out, leaped onto their horses and left. All the men in the house were left stark naked; they could only look at each other in bewilderment.

When the group of warriors reached a secluded place, they stopped to change their clothes. The Princess, Mu Jianping and Zeng Rou, three women also changed into men's clothing. And then everybody mounted their horse to continue their journey. Wei Xiaobao was very concerned about Shuang'er; he said, "I wonder what happened to Feng *Dage* and my servant girl in the Capital. I am thinking of asking a brother from out of the province whose appearance is not familiar in the Capital to come back and ask around about them." Two Tian Di Hui brothers from Guangxi accepted the order and left.

Seeing that there were no government troops chasing them at all, the group of warriors felt rather relieved. After traveling for a little bit more, "Ah!" suddenly Mu Jianping cried out in alarm, but then she immediately broke into giggle. Turned out Zeng Rou's mount suddenly excreted a large puddle of watery feces, it almost splashed onto Mu Jianping's foot.

Not too long afterwards, several more horses also excreted some watery feces. And then the horse Priest Xuanzhen was riding suddenly neighed and sank to the ground; no longer willing to stand up. "*Daozhang* [Taoist priest]," Qian Laoben said, "Let us two brothers ride on one horse!"

"Alright!" Priest Xuanzhen replied. He leaped onto Qian Laoben's horse to ride behind him.

Wei Xiaobao suddenly realized something; he could not help but was greatly alarmed. "Shifu," he called out, "Retribution! Retribution! This is bad!"

"What is it?" Chen Jinnan asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Wu … Wu Yingxiong ghost is looking for me. He hated me … hated me for capturing him back, also stole his … his …" he really could not bring himself to speak the last two characters 'lao po' [wife].

He remembered when he received the imperial order to pursue Wu Yingxiong that day, because the horses that Wu Yingxiong's party were riding were fed with large amount of croton, along the way the horses constantly excreted watery feces, followed by one after another the horses fell dead. Because of this, Wu Yingxiong was not able to escape far and was captured back by Wei Xiaobao. If that time Wu Yingxiong managed to escape to Yunnan, naturally the Emperor could not kill him. So if he thought it over, Wu Yingxiong's death was caused by him sending people to poison his horses. Now that it was his turn to run away, one by one their horses also suffered diarrhea and fell dead, what is it if not Wu Yingxiong's ghost was playing trick on him? What's more, in his escape Wei Xiaobao was taking Wu Yingxiong's wife along. After Wu Yingxiong had become a ghost, he was still wearing a dark-green-emerald-inlaid one-*pin*-rank big green hat; naturally he was unwilling to let his wife go. The more Wei Xiaobao thought about it, the more frightened he was; he could not stop his body from trembling as he heard several horses whinnying, and two more horses fell down.

Chen Jinnan could also see that something was amiss, hastily he asked for the full details. Wei Xiaobao then told him what happened that day when he captured Wu Yingxiong back; with a trembling voice he said, "Wu Yingxiong ghost lingers on, today he came back for revenge. This … this …"

The Princess angrily said, "That fellow Wu Yingxiong, when he was alive he was stupid and cowardly, after he was dead, he is also a useless ghost. Why are you afraid of him?"

Chen Jinnan frowned and said, "Clear sky under the sun, how could there be any ghost? That day you poisoned Wu Yingxiong's horses, did the Tatar Emperor know about it?"

"He did," Wei Xiaobao replied, "He even praised me as a good-luck general."

Chen Jinnan nodded. "Right," he said, "Since the Tatar Emperor knew you are following the good-luck general way, he also knew that you have a good-luck general body. He is afraid you might escape, hence he had already sent people to feed croton to your horses."

Wei Xiaobao instantly saw the light. "Right, right," he repeatedly said, "That day when we captured Wu Yingxiong, the young Emperor was very happy, he

bestowed a petty official rank to my head stable hand, sending him to work for the officer in charge of the carriage of the Ministry of War. This time he must have sent him to poison my horses."

"That's right," Chen Jinnan said, "He is very familiar with your horses, he knew each horse's temperament, naturally to poison the horse is 'a hundred shots a hundred hits'."

Wei Xiaobao angrily said, "Next time I catch this stable hand, I will stuff all the watery feces in here into his mouth …" Before he could finish, suddenly he felt the mount underneath his crotch lurched forward and dropped on its knees. Wei Xiaobao hopped down, and saw the horse was struggling to get up, but after struggling several times, its hind legs kneeled down again.

Chen Jinnan said, "These animals are no good. We must buy some horses at the next town."

Liu Dahong said, "It's not easy to find dozens of horses all at once."

"Absolutely right," Chen Jinnan said, "Everybody, let's disperse for the time being." While he was still speaking, suddenly they heard faint noise of hoof beats on the road.

Priest Xuanzhen happily said, "Soldiers are coming to pursue us. Let us kill the damn kids and grab their horses."

Chen Jinnan called out, "Tian Di Hui brothers hide on the left of the road, Mu Palace and Wang Wu Mountain brothers hide on the right. Wait till the soldiers arrive, we will attack by surprise. Aiyo, not right …"

They heard the hoof beats was getting nearer, the ground was faintly shaking, the pursuing soldiers were at least one of two thousand men. The group of warriors did not need to ask him why he cried 'aiyo, not right', these four words, their countenance changed greatly. The group of warriors was only several dozen men. Although their martial art skill was not weak, in broad daylight on an open plain fighting a large group of cavalry, the enemy troops would easily surround them several layers thick. Those with high level of martial art skill might escape alive, but most of the rest were bound to deliver their lives.

Chen Jinnan made a prompt decision, "The pursuing troops are not a few," he

called, “We cannot fight a head-on battle, everybody disperse into villages, hills and woods.” He only spoke those few words, the hoof beats were getting even closer. As far as the eye could see, the dust on the road rose high into the sky, like a wide expanse of black cloud rolling near.

“Bad, bad!” Wei Xiaobao cried out, and moved his legs to run.

“Hey!” the Princess called, “Where are you going?” while running close behind him.

“Go back to the Palace,” Wei Xiaobao called out, “Coming with me won’t do you any good.”

“Stinky Xiao Guizi,” the Princess cursed, “You want to run away? Not so easy.”

(Book Note: In the title of this Chapter, ‘red cloud that always stay close to the sun’ is referring to accompanying the Emperor, ‘the heart follows green jade grass’ is referring to the idea of a long journey.)

Chapter 44

People came to faraway and hard-to-reach land as the source of desperate fight, things brought so much grief that everybody was afraid of the truth.

(Translated by Foxs)

With a saber on his right shoulder and a judge pen penetrating deep into his lower abdomen, Cult Leader Hong was howling again and again; he launched several palm strikes in succession. Wei Xiaobao dodged two palm strikes, finally he failed to evade the third strike. 'Bang!' the palm landed squarely on his back, sending him tumbling on the ground, twice.

Wei Xiaobao did not stop whining; he mused, “To get away from the Princess is a lot more difficult than getting away from the pursuing troops.” He saw at the northeast corner there was a field of tall sorghum plants, the plants were taller than a man, immediately he ran desperately toward the sorghum field.

When he got near, he saw behind the sorghum field there were two farmer houses, other than that, he did not see anywhere else he could hide. Thinking that the pursuing troops were fast and that they would be here in a flash, he ran into the sorghum plants straightaway. Suddenly he felt his back tightened; someone grabbed him from behind, followed by the Princess’ laughter as she said, “Why are you lagging behind?”

Wei Xiaobao did not have any choice; with a bitter laugh he turned around and said, “You go and hide over there. We’ll talk when the pursuing troops have gone.”

The Princess shook her head and said, “No way! I want to be with you.” Immediately she crawled into the sorghum field and cuddled next to him.

Before the two of them were able to hide properly, they heard footsteps, followed by Zeng Rou calling, “Wei *Xiangzhu*, Wei *Xiangzhu*!”

Wei Xiaobao stuck his head out and saw Zeng Rou and Mu Jianping were running side-by-side toward him. “I am here,” he said, “Quickly hide in.” Following his order, the two women crawled in.

The four of them went deep into the sorghum field, hiding among the branches and leaves; thinking that the pursuing troops would have a hard time finding them, they felt somewhat relieved.

A short moment later, they heard group by group the pursuing cavalry galloped by on the main road. Wei Xiaobao thought, “That day I was with Ah Ke, Shitai Shifu, and that stinky fellow Zheng Keshuang, also four people, hiding inside the barley stack. Ay, if only by my side is not this mean Princess but Ah Ke, I will die happy. I wonder where is Ah Ke now? Most likely she has already become Zheng Keshuang’s wife. I don’t know what happened to Shuang’er.”

Suddenly they heard voices from a distance; some people were barking orders, followed by a group of cavalry reining their horses to stop. Clatters of hoof beats were moving near, unexpectedly they were searching toward this direction. The

Princess was shocked, “They saw us.”

“Don’t make any noise,” Wei Xiaobao said, “They haven’t seen us.”

“Aren’t they coming this way?” the Princess said.

They heard someone shouted, “The rebel thieves’ horses are falling dead around here, they can’t run away too far. Everybody search carefully.”

“So that’s how it is,” the Princess said in her heart, “Those dead horses really cause a lot of trouble.” Reaching out, she gripped Wei Xiaobao’s hand tightly.

Liaodong, outside the Pass, was vast, but sparsely populated, the soil was fertile; sorghum fields were oftentimes spread thousands of *mu* hundreds of *qing*, as far as the eye can see. [1 *mu* ~ 1/15 of a hectare or 1/6 of an acre, 1 *qing* = 100 *mu*]. The sorghum grew tall, it was known as ‘green muslin screen’. It would be very difficult to find anybody hiding inside. But the sorghum fields in Beijing’s suburb were sparse and a lot shorter. The field where Wei Xiaobao and the others, four people were hiding was only twenty or thirty *mu*; as a large group of officers and men searched carefully, they would be found and captured in no time at all.

When they heard the troops were getting closer and closer, Wei Xiaobao said in a low voice, “Let’s go to the house over there.” After tugging Mu Jianping’s sleeve, he crept toward the two farm houses; the three women followed behind him.

Reaching the bamboo fence, they pushed the door and saw that the house was uninhabited, on one corner quite a few of farm tools were piled up. Wei Xiaobao grabbed several woven rush raincoat and handed them over to the three women, saying, “Quickly wear these.” While he also put one on his body. Putting on a conical bamboo hat, he sat on a corner.

The Princess laughed and said, “We are peasants now; it’s so much fun.”

Mu Jianping shushed her and said in a low voice, “They’re coming!”

‘Bang!’ the plank door was pushed open, seven or eight officers and men came in. Wei Xiaobao and the others quickly turned their heads around.

A moment later, someone said in a loud voice, “There’s no one here, the

peasants are out to the field."

Wei Xiaobao thought that this man's voice and accent sounded familiar. He peeked from under the conical bamboo hat, and sure enough, it was Zhao Liangdong. He was delighted.

A sergeant said, "*Zongbing Daren*, these four people …"

Zhao Liangdong thundered, "Everybody out! Let me search carefully. This room is so small. Damn it, with all of you crowding in here, I can't even turn around." The soldiers voiced their agreement, they all trooped out.

Zhao Liangdong asked in a loud voice, "Have you seen any strangers around here?" As he walked toward Wei Xiaobao, his hand went into his bosom to take out two gold *yuanbao* and three ingots of silver, which he gently put down by Wei Xiaobao's feet. Raising his voice, he said, "Turns out those people are running to the north! They knew His Majesty has lost his temper; if they are captured surely they will be beheaded, thus they are fleeing far, running away as fast as they can. This time it is really serious!" Stooping down, he gave Wei Xiaobao a hug and gently shook him several times before turning around and out of the door, while shouting, "The rebel thieves have run to the north, everybody pursue them quickly!"

Wei Xiaobao sighed. He thought, "Zhao Liangdong has a very strong *yi qi* toward me. If this matter is discovered, he won't be able to protect his own head." He heard the clatter of hooves outside as the officers and men mounted their horses and galloped away to the north.

The Princess was puzzled, "That *Zongbing* obviously saw us, why did he say … Ah, and he gave you gold and silver too? He must be your friend."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Let's get out of here from the back door!" Stuffing the gold and silver into his pocket, he walked to the back.

As they stepped across the rear courtyard, they saw eight or nine people were sitting on the porch. As soon as Wei Xiaobao took a glance, he cried out in fear, turned around and ran. But he only took a couple of steps when the back of his neck was yanked, someone grabbed him and lifted him up. The man coldly said, "You think you can still escape?"

This man was none other than Cult Leader Hong. The rest of the people were Madame Hong, Fat Toutuo, Lu Gaoxuan, Blue Dragon Envoy Xu Xueting, Scarlet Dragon Envoy Priest Wugen, Black Dragon Envoy Zhang Danyue, and Yellow Dragon Envoy Yin Jin. All Divine Dragon Cult most important characters were gathered here. There was also a young woman, Fang Yi.

The Princess angrily said, “Why did you catch him?” Her leg flew toward Cult Leader Hong. Cult Leader Hong slightly bent his left hand, his middle finger flicked on the back of her foot. “Ah!” the Princess cried out and fell down to the ground.

With his body hanging in the air Wei Xiaobao called out, “*Jiaozhu* and Madame enjoy immortal good fortune forever, your long life the same as the Heaven’s. Disciple Wei Xiaobao pays his respect.”

With a cold laugh Cult Leader Hong said, “It’s good that you still remember those few words.”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “Those few words, disciple always remembers in my heart. Early morning when I get up I recite it once, when I wash my face I recite it once, when I eat my breakfast I recited it once, when I eat my lunch I recite it once, when I eat my dinner I recite it once, at night before I go to bed I also recite it once. Never once did I miss to recite it. Every now and then I would remember *Jiaozhu* and Madame’s benevolence, oftentimes I would be overwhelmed and recite it several more times.”

Ever since his old lair on the Divine Dragon Island was destroyed, his members dead or scattered all over, only several old brothers remained by his side, Cult Leader Hong wandered around in Jianghu; nobody recited the ode ‘enjoy immortal good fortune forever, long life the same as the Heaven’s’ with the same vigor anymore, oftentimes he barely heard it once in a day. This time hearing Wei Xiaobao’s flattering words surged like the tide, he could not help feeling delighted. He set him down, and his ice-cold countenance revealed the slightest hint of smile.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Subordinate can see *Jiaozhu* today, from head to foot my spirit is greatly aroused. There is only one thing that I do not understand.”

“What is it?” Cult Leader Hong asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “From that day I took my leave from *Jiaozhu* and Madame, not a few days has passed, how come *Jiaozhu* looks seven, eight years younger, and Madame even looks like you have turned into my little sister. It’s really strange.”

Madame Hong giggled tenderly, she reached out to pinch his cheek and said with a laugh, “Little monkey, your boot-licking skill can be considered number one under the heavens.”

The Princess was enraged; she shouted, “You, this woman, is so shameless; how come you casually grope [orig. moving hands moving feet] other people’s face?”

Madame Hong laughed and said, “I only moved my hands, I did not move my feet at all. Alright! Now I am moving my feet.” Lifting her left foot, ‘smack!’ she heavily kicked the Princess’ buttocks. The Princess screamed in pain.

Suddenly they heard hoof beats, in an instant all around them were horses, nobody knew how many officers and men had surrounded this farmhouse. The main gate opened, more than a dozen officers and men swarmed in. The two leaders entered the courtyard, they eyed everybody one by one, and then one of them said, “Only some unrelated farmers are here.”

Wei Xiaobao heard the voice and knew that it was Wang Jinbao’s. He was delighted and turned his head around. He saw the one by Wang Jinbao’s side was Sun Sike. The two men winked at him and waved their hands to order the sergeants to go out. Sun Sike said in loud voice, “Just some ordinary citizens. Hey, have you seen any escaping rebel thieves? No? Alright, we’ll go look someplace else.”

Wei Xiaobao’s heart was stirred, “This time I fall into Shen Long Jiao’s hands, no matter what graceful words, flowery speech I use, in the end my life is still difficult to protect. I’d rather be with Wang *San Ge* and the others, get out of Shen Long Jiao’s hands first, then ask those two to let me go.” Seeing Wang Jinbao and Sun Sike were just turning around to leave, he called out, “Wang *San Ge*, Sun *Si Ge*, I am Wei Xiaobao. Please take me with you.”

Sun Sike said, “You are just countryfolks, quickly go far away.”

Wang Jinbao said, “This peasant *Xiao Xiongdi* asked you if you have some

money. Do you bring some money?”

“You want some money?” Sun Sike asked, “I have some, I have some!” From his bosom he took a fold of banknotes and handed it to Wei Xiaobao, saying, “There are some rebel thieves running away from Beijing, His Majesty is very angry, he sent several thousand troops and horses in hot pursuit, if they are caught, they will be beheaded immediately. *Xiao Xiongdi*, this place is very dangerous, if you are caught by mistake, you will deliver your life for sure. It’s really not worth it.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Please arrest me, I … I’d rather come with you.”

Wang Jinbao said, “You want to come with us to be a soldier and eat army provision? It won’t be fun. Outside there is firearm brigade that His Majesty personally dispatched, they have blunderbuss. ‘Bang, bang, bang, bang!’ the guns went off, even if your martial art skill were higher, you won’t be able to resist.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “The firearm brigade; that’s even better. Even Hong *Jiaozhu* will not dare to move randomly.” Hastily he said, “I have something I need to report to His Majesty. Please take me with you.”

Wang Jinbao said, “As soon as His Majesty sees you, he will chop your head. The Emperor also has two eyes and one mouth, why do you want to see him? Oh, we’ll leave you thirteen horses, so that you, thirteen countryfolks, can have a horse each. After ten years or eight, you must return the horses back to Beijing. If even one horse dies, you must pay us back. You absolutely must be very careful.” While saying that, he walked out.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly anxious, he stepped forward to stop him. “Wang *San Ge*,” he called out, “Quickly take me with you.”

Suddenly, a large hand was pressed on the crown of his head, and he heard Clan Leader Hong said, “*Xiao Xiongdi*, the General has good intentions, he had just left the Capital, he knew His Majesty’s mind, you must not indulge in flights of fancy.”

Sun Sike loudly said, “That’s right, let us quickly go to pursue the rebel thieves.”

Wei Xiaobao knew that right now his life was hanging in Clan Leader Hong's hands. He only needed to exert a bit of his internal energy, Wei Xiaobao's brain would immediately shatter. But even if he did not die right now, not too long afterwards he would definitely die anyway. Thereupon he said in a loud voice, "You must quickly arrest me, I am Wei Xiaobao!"

Everybody was taken by surprise; they halted their steps. Sun Sike burst into loud laughter and said, "Wei Xiaobao is a teenage boy, you, this old granpa, is nearly eighty years old, yet you raise your voice and play a joke; won't you make people laugh until their mouths askew?" He tugged Wang Jinbao's sleeve; the two of them walked out in big strides.

A moment later they heard someone passing on the order, "Leave thirteen horses in here for the later pursuing troops to transmit information, burn these two thatched huts so that the rebel thieves cannot hide in it."

The crowd of sergeants complied, "We receive the order!" and then someone set the cottages on fire. The sound of hoof beats was heard as the large group of troops and horses galloped north.

Wei Xiaobao sighed. He thought, "This time I will die for sure. Wang *San Ge* and Sun *Si Ge* are afraid I would stay and not leave, then when other pursuing troops arrive, they might not show the same symphaty." He saw the sogon grass on the corner of the hut started to burn, the flame slowly came near.

With a cold laugh Clan Leader Hong said, "Your friends have outstanding *yi qi*, they gave you money, they also give you horses. Let's go."

Mu Jianping helped the Princess up, they all exited the hut from the rear door, and went around to the front. Sure enough, underneath the tree in front of the cottage they found thirteen fine horses. Two of the horses had exquisite saddle and bridle, obviously these two horses were Wang Jinbao and Su Sike's personal mounts.

They got on the horses and galloped eastwards. Wei Xiaobao and his companions, four people, were placed in the middle. Wei Xiaobao was hoping another team of pursuing troops would capture him. The young Emperor had deep friendship toward him, although this time he had offended him greatly, not necessarily he would have his head chopped. Cult Leader Hong was treacherous

and murderous, falling into his hands would mean countless hardship for him. But for the whole journey he did not hear any sound of hoof beats of the pursuing soldiers. The horses they were riding were handpicked by Wang Jinbao, they could run like the wind. Even if there were pursuing troops behind them, there was little chance the troops might be able to overtake them. Much less Zhao, Wang, and Sun, three *Zongbing* [regional commander] had already led the pursuing troops to the north.

Along the way, other than the Princess who was cursing and swearing, everybody else rode in silence. Afterwards Yin Jin sealed the Princess' mute acupoint so that even though her heart was full of anger, she was unable to utter any curses.

Cult Leader Hong led everybody riding through desolate areas as much as possible as they sped along to the southeast. Even at night they also stopped to rest in the wilderness. Several times Wei Xiaobao attempted escape, but Cult Leader Hong's resourcefulness was not inferior to his, every time his body ended up suffering a few more punches; how could he get away from their grasp?

Several days later they reached the seaside. Lu Gaoxuan took an ingot of silver from Wei Xiaobao's bosom to hire a large ocean-going ship. Wei Xiaobao could only groaned inwardly; even hiring the sea-going ship they were using his silver, he was even more discontended.

After boarding the ship, the boat raised its sail and they journeyed to the east. Wei Xiaobao thought, "I am sure this time we are going to Shen Long Island again, the old turtle must want to feed *laozi* to the snakes." Thinking about the vipers on the island would coil around his body and bite him, he could not stop his body from shivering. "I have to somehow find a way to bore a big hole on the bottom of the boat so that everybody will die together," he mulled over. But all the Divine Dragon Cult leaders knew that he was deceitful in many ways, they all guarded him carefully, how could he find the opportunity?

Wei Xiaobao remembered that he had been to the Divine Dragon Island twice before; the first time he and Fang Yi were whispering sweet nothings to each other on the boat, enjoying her gentle and soft touch along the way. The second time he was leading a big navy, his prestige impressed eight directions. This time he suffer a lot of punching and kicking, and was always at the death's door. The

difference between the suffering and delight was as far as the heaven from the earth.

Ever since he met Fang Yi at the farmhouse at the ourskirt of Beijing, along the way they rode together, now at sea they were in the same boat, yet she neither showed any delight nor anger, all along she maintained wooden expression without ever saying anything to him. Although she did not personally torturing him, yet all along she did not look at him either. Sometimes he thought that because she was under the Cult Leader Hong's tyrannical grip, although she had a deep feeling toward him, she did not dare to reveal her feeling through her speech and facial expression. Sometimes he recalled that many times he had fallen into this little wh0re's trick; that she was a treacherous and crafty woman, that no woman on earth could ever surpass her; he could not help gnashing his teeth in hatred.

After traveling for many days, indeed the boat reached the Divine Dragon Island. Lu Gaoxuan and Fat Toutuo escorted Wei Xiaobao, the Princess, Mu Jianping and Zeng Rou, four people ashore. Yin Jin forced the sailors to leave the boat. A sailor protested. Yin Jin immediately killed him with a saber. The rest of the sailors were scared that their souls flew to the outer sky; who would still dare to make any noise? Without any choice they obediently followed.

The trees on the island had withered, there were rubbles everywhere, the remains of the bombardments the other day. From the forest a strong stench assaulted their nostrils, skeletal remains of vipers strewn over the roads. When they arrived at the front of the main hall, they saw the walls had collapsed and the bamboo broken, several dozens bamboo structures had been completely obliterated. Cult Leader Hong stared hard without saying anything. Yin Jin and the others had angry look on their face, some glowered hatefully at Wei Xiaobao.

Zhang Danyue shouted loudly, "Hong *Jiaozhu* has returned to the Island! All Cult disciples quickly come out to pay your respect to *Jiaozhu*!" His internal energy was abundant, as he raised his *chi* to shout, his voice could be heard for several *li*. After waiting for a short time, he shouted again twice, but they only heard the faint echo of his voice from the valley, "Returned to the Island! Pay your respect to *Jiaozhu*! Returned to the Island! Pay your respect to *Jiaozhu*!"

After a long time, all around was still quiet, no sound was to be heard, not only

they did not see a throng of disciples swarming over, they did not even hear a single disciple responding. Cult Leader Hong turned his head around toward Wei Xiaobao and said coldly, “You bombarded our Island, striking in such a way that a big Shen Long Jiao collapses like melting ice. Are you happy now?”

Seeing the fury and malicious expression in his face, Wei Xiaobao could not stop the hair on his body from standing up; with a trembling voice he said, “The old has not passed away, the new will not … not come. Hong *Jiaozhu* is all-powerful, your might greatly … greatly spread out all over the map. You can … can found a new Cult, open a business and get rich; this is called the more it is burned, the more it flourishes; the more it is bombarded, the more prosperous it becomes. *Jiaozhu* and Madame enjoy immortal good fortune forever …”

“Very good!” Hong *Jiaozhu* said. Suddenly he kicked him; Wei Xiaobao flew up and ‘crash!’ he landed heavily on the ground. He felt all the bones and muscles in his body were about to break, he could not crawl up. Seeing Hong *Jiaozhu* was this vicious, although she was afraid, Zeng Rou still went over to help Wei Xiaobao up.

Yin Jin stepped forward and bowed. He said, “Reporting to *Jiaozhu*, this little thief’s crime deserves ten thousand deaths, let subordinate cut him off one blade at a time, one piece at a time.”

“Humph!” Cult Leader Hong said, “There’s no rush!” After a short pause, he continued, “In this kid’s brain a great secret is hiding. The restoration and rise of our Cult rely on this important matter, for the time being we must not kill him.”

“Yes, yes,” Yin Jin said, “*Jiaozhu* stands tall and sees far, subordinate is simple-minded and ill-informed, it’s hard for me to understand the subtlety of this matter.”

Cult Leader Hong sat down on a piece of big rock and was deep in thought for half a day. He said, “From the beginning, the road to great success has always been plagued with misfortunes. Our Cult is suffering a setback for the time being, but it’s nothing to be worried about. Right now our stars are scattered, we ought to think how to reorganize our flags and drums, there is no harm in everybody pouring out your insight.”

Yin Jin said, “*Jiaozhu* is brilliant and wise, even if we think for ten days and ten

nights, it will be fall short of *Jiaozhu*'s bright idea that you find in a flash. It would be better if we ask *Jiaozhu* to point out a good plan, everybody will just follow your order to accomplish it."

Cult Leader Hong nodded and said, "The most important business in front of our eyes is to gather again our disciples. Last time the Tatar soldiers bombarded our Island, although the casualty among our Cult disciple was not a few, it was no more than one pavilion out of three; the remaining two pavilions must be scattered all over the place. Right now I promote Lu Gaoxuan to be the White Dragon Envoy, to bring the number of Five Dragon Envoys to completion." Lu Gaoxuan bowed to express his gratitude.

Cult Leader Hong continued, "In the next few days I want all Green, Yellow, Scarlet, White and Black Dragon Envoys to go to various regions to recruit former subordinates, and if you see young men and young women with desirable natural endowments, you may thus receive them under your command. Recruiting the old accepting the new, we can heavily flourish our Divine Cult."

Yin Jin, Zhang Danyue, and Lu Gaoxuan, three people bowed and said, "We will obey *Jiaozhu*'s order." However, the Scarlet Dragon Envoy Priest Wugen and Blue Dragon Envoy Xu Xueting stayed silent.

Cult Leader Hong cast a sidelong glance toward the two people and asked, "Scarlet Dragon Envoy and Blue Dragon Envoy, do you have something to say?"

Xu Xueting said, "Reporting to *Jiaozhu*, subordinate has two things I'd like to ask, hoping that *Jiaozhu* will approve."

"Humph," Cult Leader Hong snorted. "What is it?" he asked.

Xu Xueting said, "Your subordinates here are always loyal to our Cult and *Jiaozhu*, but all along *Jiaozhu* did not trust our brothers, inevitably our hearts are discouraged. The first matter is this: I earnestly request that *Jiaozhu* will have mercy and bestow us the 'leopard embryo tendon altering pill' antidote, so that the hearts of our brothers are not worried, with heart and soul we will serve *Jiaozhu*."

Cult Leader Hong coldly said, "And if I do not give you the antidote, you won't serve me with your heart and soul?"

“Subordinate does not dare,” Xu Xueting replied. “The second matter is this: those young men and women were unable to accomplish anything but liable to spoil everything. As soon as they encountered big matter, everybody fled everywhere so that no one remained. Presently our Cult is facing trials and tribulations, from start to finish, those who follow *Jiaozhu* and Madame are us, several old brothers. Those younger disciples, ordinarily their mouths said that they would be loyal and would not be double-hearted, that they would go through water and tread on fire, ten thousand deaths would not prevent them, et cetera, but when things came to a head, which one actually exert themselves for *Jiaozhu*? In subordinate’s humble opinion, if we want to see our Cult flourish, we ought to gather responsible, courageous spirited real men. Those whose mouth say yes but their hearts say no, young boys and girls who talk in eight directions, just like this renegade, the little traitor Wei Xiaobao, we need not recruit.”

For each sentence that he spoke, Cult Leader Hong’s countenance turned one shade darker. Xu Xueting was trembling with fear, but he braced himself to finish his speech.

Cult Leader Hong shot a piercing gaze toward Priest Wugen. “What do you say?” he coldly asked.

Priest Wugen took two steps back. He said, “Subordinate thinks that there is some logic behind what Blue Dragon Envoy has said. The former cart is overturned, we cannot travel the same road anymore [overturned cart figuratively means disastrous policy]. You can’t gain knowledge without practical experience, since we have committed the fault, with *Jiaozhu*’s great wisdom and great intelligence, you understood that not only these young boys and girls are useless, they are also unreliable. Just like … just like …” while saying that, he pointed to Mu Jianping and said, “This little girl is my Scarlet Dragon Gate’s subordinate. *Jiaozhu*’s benevolence to her was not shallow, but as soon as we met disaster, she immediately committed apostasy by surrendering to the enemy. This kind of person must be tracked down and brought back one by one, have them hacked into pieces, to guard against this kind of apostasy.”

Cult Leader Hong’s gaze swept Lu Gaoxuan and the others. “Is this a common agreement among all of you?” he asked. The crowd fell silent.

After a moment, Fat Toutuo said, “Reporting to *Jiaozhu*, we did not discuss it beforehand. However … however, subordinate believes that Blue Dragon Envoy, Scarlet Dragon Envoy, two gentlemen’s opinion is somewhat reasonable.”

Cult Leader Hong stared at Zhang Danyue, waiting for him to talk. Trembling with fear, Zhang Danyue said, “This time our Cult met with danger, encountered the disaster of destruction; the main offender, without a doubt, was this little thief Wei Xiaobao. Toward this kind of people, subordinate absolutely cannot trust anymore.”

Cult Leader Hong nodded. “Very good,” he said, “You are also of the same opinion as the other. Lu Gaoxuan, what about you?”

Lu Gaoxuan said, “Subordinate has received *Jiaozhu*’s great benevolence by promoting me to assume heavy responsibility as the White Dragon Envoy, I should strive to display utter loyalty in serving *Jiaozhu*. Blue Dragon Envoy and the others’ thought is in consideration of our Cult and *Jiaozhu*, there is no other intention.”

Yin Jin raised his voice, “What all of you said is very wrong. *Jiaozhu*’s wisdom is a hundred times higher than ours. There is no need for us to speak too much, all we need to do is just listen to *Jiaozhu* and Madame’s instructions. The Tatar troops bombarded our island, it was to wash away the dirt and disgrace of our Cult; those renegades who are not loyal to *Jiaozhu* were blasted away. Were it not for that, how could we know who was loyal and who was the traitor? We, the subordinates, were like the frog at the bottom of the well, our insight was narrow and shallow, all we saw was the gains and the losses of the moment, how can we be compared to *Jiaozhu* who can see through a hole and gaze at a hundred lifetimes?”

Xu Xueting angrily said, “The reason why our Cult failed and was wiped over the floor, was mostly because of people like you, boot-licking ghosts. You flatter randomly, what good will it bring to our Cult? What good will it bring to our *Jiaozhu*?”

“What do you mean boot-licking ghost?” Yin Jin said, “You … you … aren’t you rebelling?”

Xu Xueting angrily said, “You are a shameless lowly person, you ruined our

Cult. You are the rebel!" While saying that, his hand grabbed the hilt of his sword.

Yin Jin took a step back, saying, "That day you started a rebellion and offended your superior, you betrayed *Jiaozhu*; fortunately *Jiaozhu* and Madame are magnanimous, so they did not hold it against you. Today … today you want to rebel again?"

Together Xu Xueting, Priest Wugen, Zhang Danyue, Lu Gaoxuan, and Fat Toutuo, five people turned their eyes toward *Jiaozhu*, suppressing their anger in silence.

Cult Leader Hong turned his head to look at Yin Jin, his eyes blazed with cold light. Yin Jin was shocked; he took another step back. "*Jiaozhu*," he said, "These … these five men conspire to go against the law, they must be punished by death."

In deep and grim voice the Cult Leader Hong said, "What did you just say?"

Seeing his ill expression, Yin Jin was even more terrified; he said in a trembling voice, "Subordinate is loyal … loyal … loyal to *Jiaozhu*; with these rebel thieves I … I cannot exist together."

Cult Leader Hong said, "That day we swore a heavy oath, if we ever raise the same old topic again, if we ever settle the account over what had happened in the past, then what will happen?"

Yin Jin was so scared that his soul had flown into the outer sky. "*Jiao* … *Jiaozhu* have mercy," he said, "Subordinate is only being loyal to you; I have no … no other intention."

Cult Leader Hong said, "That day Madame and I have sworn an oath, if in our hearts we remember the old grievance, we will enter the *Longtan* [Dragon Pool], to be devoured by ten thousand of snakes. This matter has been written off at one stroke a long time ago, everybody has already forgotten about it completely, only you still keep it in your mind constantly. As soon as you have the opportunity, you sow dissension; what is actually your intention? What is your motive?"

Yin Jin's face did not have the least bit of blood, his knees bent, he dropped

down, kneeling. “Subordinate knows my error, from now on I will never dare to raise it up,” he said.

Cult Leader Hong sternly said, “When people of our Cult swear a heavy oath, can you casually violate it? If this oath cannot be applied to you, it will be applied to me. Tell me, do you think you should enter the Dragon Pool, or should I go?”

Yin Jin screamed and leaped several *zhang* backward; he turned around and ran away like mad. The Cult Leader Hong waited until he was several *zhang* away before bending over to pick a piece of rock and threw it away. ‘Whoosh!’ it hit Yin Jin on the back of his head. He let out a long miserable scream, leaped up, and then heavily crashed on the ground. He twisted several times, and died immediately.

Cult Leader Hong saw how Xu Xueting and the others, five people had joined hands. Based on his martial art skill, if he joined forces with Madame and Yin Jin their strength would be enough to subdue these five people. However, after the strength of their Cult took a big hit, only very few people remained, while all Yin Jin could do was fawning and boot-licking, he did not have any real ability. If he killed these five people, it would mean that the troops under his command were completely obliterated. In that split second he weighed the severity of this case, the pros and cons, and took the decision to kill Yin Jin, while pacifying Xu Xueting and the others, five people’s anger.

Zhang Danyue and Lu Gaoxuan bowed and said, “*Jiaozhu*’s word is like a mountain; you killed this treacherous villain, subordinates are full of admiration.”

Xu Xueting, Priest Wugen and Fat Toutuo, three men also said together, “Thank you very much *Jiaozhu*.” These five people usually saw Yin Jin blindly resorted to bragging and flattering, his moral standing was low, they despised him very much; now that they saw that the Cult Leader personally put him to death, all of them were overjoyed.

Cult Leader Hong pointed to Wei Xiaobao and said, “It’s not that I want to spare his life, but this kid knows that in Liaodong’s extreme north bitter cold ground an enormous amount of treasure is buried. Without him leading the way, we cannot find that place. After obtaining this treasure, for us to rebuild our

divine cult is as easy as flipping our hands."

After a short pause, he continued, "Just now the five of you said that those young boys and girls are unreliable, and advised me not to 'follow the track of an overturned cart' [i.e. repeat a disastrous policy]. After thinking about it carefully, I agree that what you said was not without reason. I am going to follow your advice, hereafter the business of our Cult's new recruits must be dealt with seriously, in order to avoid crafty villain sneaking in to infiltrate our Cult."

Xu Xueting and the others' face showed delight; they all bowed to express their thanks. Cult Leader Hong took two porcelain bottles from his pocket, from each bottle he took five pills; there were five yellow pills, and five white pills, and then he put the bottles back inside his pocket. With the pills in his left palm, he said, "These are 'leopard embryo tendon altering pill' antidote, each of you take two pills."

Xu Xueting and the others were greatly delighted; they stepped forward to express their gratitude first before receiving the pills. "You may take the pills immediately," Cult Leader Hong said.

The five of them put the pills into their mouths and swallowed. With a smiling expression on his face, Cult Leader Hong said, "That's very good …" Suddenly he shouted, "Lu Gaoxuan, what do you have in your left hand?"

Lu Gaoxuan took two steps back. "No … nothing," he said. But his left hand hung down, his fingers curled into a fist.

"Open your left hand!" Cult Leader Hong sternly said. His voice thundered, everybody's ears were buzzing.

Lu Gaoxuan's body slightly shook, he slowly opened his left hand, with a light 'pat' a white pill fell to the ground. Xu Xueting and the others, four men's countenance changed greatly. They were well aware that Lu Gaoxuan's knowledge and experience was out of the ordinary, he had quite a wisdom and insight. By hiding this white pill and refusing to take it, he must have a strong reason; but the rest of them had already swallowed the pill, what should they do?

With a stern voice Cult Leader Hong said, "Those white pills are Great Supplement Snow Ginseng pills to strengthen the body and invigorate the spirit;

why do you suspect your leader and have the cheek to conceal it and not taking it?”

Lu Gaoxuan said, “Subordinate … does not … does not dare. Recently subordinate made a mistake in internal energy cultivation, the *chi* and blood channels in my body are disrupted, hence … hence *Jiaozhu*’s benevolence in giving this great supplement pill, I am thinking that after sitting in meditation tonight, I will slowly take it, to avoid my lowly body cannot … cannot withstand it.”

Cult Leader Hong’s countenance softened. “I see,” he said, “Which *chi* and blood channels are disrupted? That’s very easy, I can help you regulate you inner breathing. Come here.”

Lu Gaoxuan took another step back. “I do not dare to toil *Jiaozhu*,” he said, “Subordinate will slowly regulate it myself, then I will get better.”

Cult Leader Hong sighed and said, “So, in the end you still don’t trust me?”

“Subordinate absolutely does not dare,” Lu Gaoxuan replied.

Pointing to the white pill on the ground, Cult Leader Hong said, “In that case, I want you to take that pill immediately. If after taking it your *chi* and blood channels are disrupted, how can I fold my arms and ignore it?”

Lu Gaoxuan turned his gaze toward the pill; he stared blankly for half a day before saying, “Yes!” And then he stooped down to pick it up. But suddenly his middle finger flicked, ‘swish!’ the pill flew to the air, and fell into a distant valley. He said, “Subordinate already took it. Thank you very much *Jiaozhu*.”

Cult Leader Hong burst into loud laughter. “Good, good, good!” he said, “Your guts is indeed not small.”

Lu Gaoxuan said, “Subordinate has always strive loyally for *Jiaozhu*, *Jiaozhu* has given the antidote to neutralize the poison of the ‘leopard embryo tendon altering pill’, but you also bestowed this white hundred-salivary gland pill, which toxicity is more formidable. Subordinate is innocent, I am unwilling to be punished.”

Xu Xueting and the others asked in chorus, “Hundred-salivary gland pill? What poison is that?”

Lu Gaoxuan said, “*Jiaozhu* gathered the salivary glands of a hundred different types of poisonous snakes and insects, and mixed it into these pills. Whether it contains acute poison, I am not too clear; perhaps it really has tonic effect, but I am not sure either. Either way, my guts is very small; I do not dare to try it.”

Xu Xueting and the others were even more terrified; they all rushed toward Lu Gaoxuan. All five of them stood in a row, with eyes staring at Cult Leader Hong.

Cult Leader Hong coldly said, “How do you know this is a hundred-salivary gland pill? You are speaking nonsense, sowing dissension, disturbing the people’s hearts.”

Pointing to Fang Yi, Lu Gaoxuan said, “That day I saw Miss Fang caught snails from the underbrush, I asked her what she was doing, and she told me that it was *Jiaozhu*’s order, she had to catch some snails as drug ingredient. I have also accidentally seen *Jiaozhu*’s hundred-salivary gland pill formula. Although the hundred-salivary gland pill’s toxicity will only flare-out in three years, but first, I doubt that *Jiaozhu* has ever mixed the hundred-salivary gland pill before; I don’t know whether it will truly flare-out after three years. Second, subordinate still want to live many more years, I do not wish to die in three years.”

The dark aura on Cult Leader Hong’s face grew thicker and thicker. “My formula,” he thundered, “How could you see it?”

Lu Gaoxuan cast a glance toward Madame Hong; he said, “Madame asked subordinate to find some medicine for her in *Jiaozhu*’s medicine chest. That formula was inside the medicine chest.”

“Rubbish!” Cult Leader Hong sternly said, “Even if Madame is not well, could it be that she won’t ask for some medicine from me? Why would she ask you? My medicine chest has always been sealed really tight, how could you dare to open it yourself?”

“Subordinate did not open it myself,” Lu Gaoxuan replied.

Cult Leader Hong roared, “You did not open it yourself. Are you saying that I ordered you to …” suddenly he had another thought. Turning his head toward Madame Hong he asked, “Did you open it for him?”

Madame Hong’s countenance paled; she nodded slowly. Cult Leader Hong

asked, “What medicine were you looking for? Why didn’t you ask me?”

Madame Hong suddenly blush deep red, but immediately her face turned deathly pale. Her body shook several times, suddenly she clutched her lower abdomen, her throat made some ‘ow, ow’ noise, and she vomited quite a bit of clear liquid. Cult Leader Hong knitted his brows; he asked in tender voice, “Are you feeling ill? Sit down and rest a little bit!”

Princess Jianning suddenly shouted, “She has a baby. You old b@astard, you are going to have a child, and you don’t know it?”

Cult Leader Hong was shocked; he leaped forward and grabbed Madame’s wrist. “Is she telling the truth?” he sternly asked.

Bending down, Madame Hong did not stop throwing up, her body shook ever worse. Cult Leader Hong coldly said, “You wanted to find a medicine to abort the baby, didn’t you?”

Other than Lu Gaoxuan, none of the listeners was not puzzled. Cult Leader Hong did not have any children, and he loved his wife dearly. If Madame gave her a child, it did not matter whether it was a boy or a girl, it would be a greatly good news; why would she want to abort the baby? They all thought that this time Cult Leader Hong had guessed wrong. Who would have thought that Madame Hong nodded slowly and said, “That’s right. I want to abort the baby. Quickly kill me.”

Cult Leader Hong raised his left palm; he shouted, “Whose child is this?”

Everybody knew that his martial art skill was extremely high, as soon as this palm of his struck down, Madame Hong would immediately die a violent death; surprisingly she lifted her head high instead, and boldly said, “I told you to quickly kill me, why haven’t you made your move?”

Cult Leader Hong’s eyes looked as if they were about to spout fire; with a deep and grim voice he said, “I won’t kill you. Whose child is this?”

Madame Hong closed her mouth tight, with a very unyielding expression on her face. Obviously she had already disregarded her life.

Cult Leader Hong turned his head around and glowered at Lu Gaoxuan, “Is it yours?” he asked.

“No, no!” Lu Gaoxuan busily said, “Subordinate reveres Madame like an immortal, how could I dare to offend her?”

From Lu Gaoxuan Cult Leader Hong’s gaze swept Zhang Danyue, Xu Xueting, Priest Wugen and Fat Toutuo one by one. Whomever his gaze landed, that person shivered in fear.

Madame Hong loudly said, “It’s none of them. Quickly kill me, why do you ask too much?”

The Princess called out, “She is your wife, naturally this child is yours, why blindly suspect others? Such a complete muddle head.”

“Shut up!” Cult Leader Hong bellowed, “You talk one more sentence, I’ll wring your neck.”

The Princess did not dare to speak anymore, but in her heart she refused to submit. How would she know that for the past few years Cult Leader Hong had been cultivating first-class internal energy so that he had not been near women for a long time? Although his feeling as husband and wife toward Madame was genuine, they did not have real husband-wife relationship. It was exactly because of this reason that he had always felt apologetic and uneasy toward her, so that ordinarily he treated her with double-affection.

This moment, as he suddenly heard that Madame was pregnant, myriads of thoughts flitted through his mind: anger, shame, remorse, grief, pain, hatred, love, even fear. His palm was still hanging in the air, but he could not bring it down. Turning his head around, he saw Xu Xueting and the others had terrified look on their faces. He thought, “Today all of them have found out about this big shameful scandal; how can I still have the face to be their *Jiaozhu*? I must kill them all and not leave a single mouth alive. If even the least bit of rumor is leaked out, Jianghu heroes would sneer at me, how can I still be a hero or a warrior?” As soon as his murderous intention arose, suddenly his left hand let go of Madame, he leaped forward, grabbed Lu Gaoxuan, and shouted, “It’s all because of you, the renegade to the Cult, who caused mischief!”

Lu Gaoxuan loudly said, “You want to kill people to shut their …” the word ‘mouth’ had not left his mouth, ‘crack! Cult Leader Hong’s palm struck heavily on his forehead; immediately his eyes popped out, he gave up his breath and died

instantly.

Seeing this situation, Xu Xueting and the others knew that Cult Leader Hong wanted to kill them all to shut their mouths. All four of them immediately pulled their weapons to shield their bodies. Xu Xueting shouted, "*Jiaozhu*, this is your personal matters, it has nothing to do with your subordinates."

Cult Leader Hong screamed at the top of his lungs, "Today everybody will return to heaven together, you can forget about staying alive." And he charged ferociously toward the four men.

Fat Toutuo brandished his twenty-some catties big saber with nine steel rings on its back, he hacked it down head on, the momentum was extremely powerful. Cult Leader Hong leaned sideways to evade, his right palm shot down onto the top of Zhang Danyue's head. Xu Xueting's pair of judge pens successively struck Cult Leader Hong's back twice, while at the same time Priest Wugen's wild-goose tail saber also swept toward his waist. Cult Leader Hong let out a loud shout and leaped high into the air, but his palm still shot down toward Zhang Danyue.

Zhang Danyue moved the pair of mandarin-duck daggers in his hands, it a split second he stabbed seven times. It was the move 'seven stars gathered around the moon', the ultimate skill he developed his entire life. All seven stabs were swift and powerful. Cult Leader Hong's right palm swept diagonally to press lightly on Zhang Danyue's left shoulder; borrowing the momentum, he leaped away. Zhang Danyue roared and rolled on the ground. When he stood up, he felt the pain on the left side of his body was unbearable. "If we don't kill him today, nobody will survive," he cried out. The four up them raised their weapons and surged forward to surround Cult Leader Hong.

These four men were the first-class figureheads of the Divine Dragon Cult, especially Fat Toutuo and Xu Xueting, whose martial art skill was the highest. The nine steel rings on Fat Toutuo's Big Hoop Saber made continuous ringing noise, as he moved the weapon in purely ferociously and 'hard' way. Xu Xueting's skill with his pair of judge pens, on the other hand, was small, delicate, and exquisite; move by move he threatened the vital acupoints on the opponent's body. Priest Wugen brandished his Wild-goose Tail Saber into a circle of white ray. They all thought that after taking the hundred-salivary gland pill today, their lives would be difficult to protect anyway, hence before their deaths they wanted to kill this

treacherous and vicious archenemy. Therefore, out of ten moves, nine were assault moves; their hope was to die together with the enemy.

Zhang Danyue recalled how in the past because his subordinates did not do their best in their mission, they failed to obtain the 'Forty-two Chapter Sutra', if not for Priest Wugen and Xu Xueting's help, he would have been executed early on by the Cult Leader Hong. That he was able to survive this long, he was actually living on a borrowed life. This moment, although his left arm was very painful, he still did everything he could to move his daggers.

Actually, Cult Leader Hong's martial art skill was far superior to these four men, if he wanted to take the life of one of them, it was really not difficult; however, the four of them attacked in succession, if he killed one, it would be hard for him to avoid injury. After fighting for more than forty rounds, the unbearable anger and resentment in his heart gradually calmed down, his mind cleared up, his moves were even more smooth and easy; his pair of bare hands weaved in and out among the four weapons' siege, without any sign of weakness at all. He saw that Zhang Danyue's left dagger gradually lost its power, hence he knew that this was the opponent's weakest link, thereupon he focused his attention to break the powerful enemy.

Seeing the four men fought ferociously, Wei Xiaobao quietly pulled Zeng Rou and Mu Jianping's sleeves, and signaled the Princess to keep quiet. The four of them turned around and quietly walked down the mountain. Cult Leader Hong and the others, five people, were engaged in tight battle that nobody saw them. Even if they did, nobody could afford to get away from the fight to stop them.

After walking for a while, the four of them had left Cult Leader Hong and the others far away, in their hearts they were secretly delighted. Wei Xiaobao turned his head around to look at the five men who were still involved in fierce fighting, saber's ray flashed, palm's shadow fluttered, for a moment it would be hard to decide victory or defeat. "Let's go faster," he said.

The four of them picked up their pace; suddenly they heard footsteps behind them, two people were rushing toward them, Madame Hong and Fang Yi. The four of them were shocked. Wei Xiaobao lamented the fact that when they were captured, the weapons and secret projectiles in their body were searched and confiscated. Fang Yi was not a big problem, but Madame Hong was really

formidable. Thinking that they would not be able to fight the enemy, they had no choice but to run as fast as they could.

After running several dozen steps, the Princess tripped on a rock and tumbled down on the ground; she cried out. Wei Xiaobao thought, “She has my child in her tummy, I cannot not help her.” Thereupon he turned around to help her up.

He saw in several leaps Madame Hong had already arrived in front of them. Standing with arms on her waist, she said, “Wei Xiaobao, are you thinking of running away?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “We are not running away, the scenery is good over here, we came to enjoy it.”

With a cold laugh Madame Hong said, “Very well! You came here to enjoy the scenery, why didn’t you call me along?”

While they were still talking, Fang Yi caught up. Seeing Wei Xiaobao was delayed by Madame Hong, Zeng Rou and Mu Jianping turned around and stood by Wei Xiaobao’s side. Mu Jianping said to Fang Yi, “Shijie, come with us. He … he …” she pointed to Wei Xiaobao, “He always treats you well. Formerly you have sworn an oath as well, have you forgotten about it?”

“I am only loyal to Madame,” Fang Yi replied, “I only take order from Madame.”

Mu Jianping said, “You just took Madame’s drug. Previously I also took some …”

Wei Xiaobao suddenly realized that Fang Yi repeatedly deceived him in the past because she was under Madame Hong’s coercion, not because she had any choice; the hatred and resentment in his heart vanished instantly. “Yi *Jiejie*,” he said, “Please come with us.”

The last time he used these three characters ‘*Yi Jiejie*’ to affectionately call her was when they were traveling together to Divine Dragon Island, enjoying the intimacy and touching emotions on the boat. Suddenly hearing it again, Fang Yi could not stop her face from turning red.

Suddenly they heard Cult Leader Hong cried out in loud voice, “Madame, Madame! Ah Quan, Ah Quan! You … where are you going?” His cry was full of

fear and anxiety, it was obvious that he was afraid Madame Hong would abandon him and leave. But Madame Hong did not seem to hear. Cult Leader Hong called several more times, all along Madame Hong did not respond.

Wei Xiaobao and the others, five people looked at Madame Hong; they all thought, “Why didn’t you answer? *Jiaozhu* is calling you, why don’t you go back?”

They saw a faint blush on Madame Hong’s face; she shook her head and said in a low voice, “Let’s go quickly, let’s escape by boat!”

Wei Xiaobao was pleasantly surprised; he asked, “You … you are coming with us?”

Madame Hong said, “There’s only one boat on the Island, we cannot not coming together. *Jiaozhu* wants to kill me, don’t you know it?” Her face blushed again, and she walked away first.

They all rushed several *zhang* down the mountain when they heard Cult Leader Hong calling out in loud voice again, “Madame, Madame! Ah Quan, Ah Quan! Quickly come back!” Suddenly someone let out a long miserable scream, obviously it was a cry just before death; although it was unclear which of Xu Xueting and the others, four people, had died.

Cult Leader Hong called loudly, “Look, look! I have killed this old fellow Zhang Danyue. He had been by my side all his life until he grew old. Unexpectedly he still wanted to go against me, a complete muddle head. Ah Quan, Ah Quan! Why don’t you come back? I won’t blame you, I’ll forgive you in this matter. Ah! Damn it, you chopped me! Ha ha, Fat Toutuo, you think this palm cannot take your dog life? You brains didn’t work right, why did you follow others and rebel against me? Didn’t that mean you want to die? Ha ha!”

Madame Hong halted her steps, her countenance changed. “He already killed two people,” she said.

“Let’s go faster,” Wei Xiaobao urgently said; and ran even faster.

Suddenly they heard Cult Leader Hong’s shout, “I will deal with you, two rebel thieves, later. Madame, Madame, quickly come back!” His voice was getting closer and closer; unexpectedly from up the mountain he ran after them.

Wei Xiaobao looked back, and saw Cult Leader Hong, with disheveled hair, was running fast toward them; he was scared that his soul flew away and scattered. He ran as fast as he could in desperation.

“Stop him, stop him!” Xu Xueting called out, “He is already injured, we must kill him today.”

Priest Wugen called out, “He can’t escape.” With the weapons in their hands, the two people ran after him.

Shortly afterwards Wei Xiaobao and the others reached the beach, but Cult Leader Hong, Xu Xueting and Priest Wugen, three people were coming fast; one running after the other, they rushed down the mountain, all three people’s faces and bodies were covered in blood.

Cult Leader Hong shouted, “Madame, why didn’t you answer me? Where are you going?”

Xu Xueting called out, “Madame does not want you anymore! She already has a young and handsome boyfriend.”

Cult Leader Hong was enraged. “Rubbish!” he shouted. Leaping up, his left palm shot down ferociously to the top of Xu Xueting’s head. Xu Xueting countered with the pen on his left hand. Priest Wugen caught up, he brandished his saber toward Cult Leader Hong’s waist.

By this time Cult Leader Hong only had two opponents left, but his left leg was limping, his agility was also not as good as before. Cult Leader Hong called out, “Ah Quan, look at me; I am going to have these two rebel thieves under control very soon, kill those four little b1tches first, just don’t kill that little thief yet, let him take us to the treasure.” His mouth was busy shouting, his palms still moved fast and powerful. Xu Xueting and Priest Wugen were not able to penetrate his defense.

Madame Hong let out a soft cold laughter; her gaze swept Mu Jianping and the others one by one. Wei Xiaobao called out, “Madame, if you harm only one of these four girls, I will immediately kill myself. Even becoming a ghost I will not spare you. A real man gave his words, some … some horses cannot pull it back.” In a moment of desperation, he could not even remember ‘dead horses cannot pull it back’.

Suddenly ‘whack!’ Xu Xueting’s waist was hit by a palm, his body swayed, and he fell to the ground. Cult Leader Hong roared in laughter, while leaping up to kick him. Xu Xueting also leaped up and threw himself at Cult Leader Hong, so that Cult Leader Hong’s leg hit the pit of his stomach. ‘Crack!’ several of his ribs broke instantly, but he caught and firmly grabbed Cult Leader Hong’s right leg. Cult Leader Hong struggled hard to free himself, but unexpectedly he failed to throw Xu Xueting down.

Fast as lightning Priest Wugen surged forward and swung his saber. Cult Leader Hong leaned his head sideways to evade and flipped his hand to parry. ‘Wham!’ Priest Wugen’s lower abdomen was hit by a palm, but the saber also cut into Cult Leader Hong’s right shoulder. Priest Wugen spurted a mouthful of blood, all of which landed on the back of Cult Leader Hong’s neck. Priest Wugen wanted to lift his saber to hack again, but unexpectedly his Wild-goose Tail Saber had cut into Cult Leader Hong’s shoulder bone, while his own strength had nearly gone, hence was unable to pull the saber out. Cult Leader Hong called out, “Quick … quickly come … pull him away.”

It was not clear whether Madame Hong was scared that she was only staring blankly, or she really did not have the intention to help him. Seeing the three people were entangled in a fierce fight, unexpectedly she was standing still and did not show any sign that she was going to move.

Xu Xueting picked up a judge pen from the ground and thrust it up as hard as he could into Cult Leader Hong’s waist. Cult Leader Hong roared wildly, his left foot kicked Xu Xueting, sending him flying out, followed by a backward strike of his left elbow. Priest Wugen’s body slowly slumped down. Cult Leader Hong laughed aloud and shouted, “These … rebel thieves, which … which one is my match? They … they wanted to rebel, (cough, cough) … (cough, cough), didn’t they … didn’t they all get killed by me?” Turning toward Madame Hong, he said, “You … why didn’t you help me?”

Madame Hong shook her head. “Your martial art skill is number one under the heavens, why would you need someone else’s help?”

Cult Leader Hong was enraged. “You also rebel against me?” he bellowed, “Are you also a renegade of our Cult?”

“That’s right,” Madame Hong coldly replied, “You only care about yourself. If I helped you, in the end you will still kill me.”

“I’ll strangle you to death, I’ll strangle the renegade to our Cult to death,” Cult Leader Hong shouted, while pouncing on Madame Hong.

“Ah!” Madame Hong screamed and hastily dodged.

Even after suffering serious injury Cult Leader Hong’s movement was very fast; with his left hand he grabbed her arm, with his right hand he strangled her neck. “Speak up, speak up,” he shouted, “If you say you are not, I’ll spare you.”

Madame Hong slowly said, “For a long, long time in my heart I am already rebelling against you. Ever since that day when you forced me to be your wife, I already hate you to the bones. You … you’d better just kill me.” The blood from Cult Leader Hong’s body did not stop dripping onto her head, her face, but unexpectedly Madame Hong’s eyes were staring at him without blinking at all.

“Renegade, rebel thief!” Cult Leader Hong roared, “All of you are rebelling against me. I … I will recruit new people, I will reorganize Shen Long Jiao!” His right hand tightened, immediately Madame Hong’s throat was blocked, her tongue stuck out.

Watching from the side, Wei Xiaobao was extremely terrified. Seeing that Madame Hong was about to be strangled to death, he picked a large round stone from the beach and with all his might threw it toward Cult Leader Hong’s back. ‘Bonk!’ it hit the center of his back. Cult Leader Hong’s vision darkened; the hand that strangled Madame Hong immediately loosened. He turned around and shouted, “You … you little thief, I don’t want buried treasure anymore, I’ll kill you first and talk later.” His palm swept toward Wei Xiaobao.

Wei Xiaobao turned around and ran as fast as he could. Cult Leader Hong moved his legs and ran after him, leaving a long trail of blood on the sandy beach. Wei Xiaobao knew that if this time he was caught, he definitely would not survive; thereupon he desperately ran for his life. Suddenly ‘rip!’ a piece of his clothes was caught and torn by Cult Leader Hong. If Wei Xiaobao was not wearing his treasured protective vest, perhaps a piece of flesh from his back would also be torn away.

In sheer terror he ran even faster, unleashing the *qinggong* ‘Shen Xing Bai

Bian' [divine walk hundred changes] he learned from Jiu Nan; he twisted to the east and slipped to the west, making random turns on the beach. Several times Cult Leader Hong nearly caught him, but in 'a thousand pounds hangs by a thread' situation, he always managed to evade.

If he ran straight up, with his very limited internal energy, he would have been caught early on. But this 'Shen Xing Bai Bian' was Tie Jian Men's [iron sword school] supreme skill, plus during his time Priest Mu Sang had added several new ideas into it, so that the changes were extremely exquisite, strange and mysterious. Wei Xiaobao's 'divine walk' was actually not worth mentioning; the 'hundred changes' part, however, was very similar to his inborn nature; therefore, he managed to master about thirty or forty percent of the skill. Consequently, although he was not a martial art *master* [orig. 'gao shou' – high/top hand]. He could be reckoned to be first or second best escape *master* [orig. 'gao jiao' – high/top feet] of the Wulin world.

Cult Leader Hong was howling again and again; he launched several palm strikes in succession. Wei Xiaobao dodged two palm strikes, finally he failed to evade the third strike. 'Bang!' the palm landed squarely on his back, sending him tumbling on the ground, twice.

Fortunately Cult Leader Hong was seriously hurt, his palm power was greatly reduced, plus Wei Xiaobao was wearing his treasured protective vest; although he was hit that the sky darkened and the earth turned black, he did not suffer serious injury.

He was just about to crawl up when suddenly he felt his shoulder tightened as Cult Leader Hong grabbed him with both hands. Wei Xiaobao felt as if his heart was about to jump out of his chest cavity. In his horror, he could not think about anything [orig. 'when hungry, you can't pick what you eat', and 'in panic, cannot choose the road to travel']; ducking down, he crawled underneath Cult Leader Hong's crotch, and suddenly remembered that this move was the first part on one move from the 'three moves to save life' taught by Cult Leader Hong in the past. Whether the move was called 'imperial consort riding an ox' or 'Xi Shi riding a goat'[14], how could he remember about it right now?

With everything he had he leaped up and landed onto Cult Leader Hong's neck.

Actually he had not practiced this move to perfection; but even if he did, he would never be able to execute the move against a first class martial art master like Cult Leader Hong. It's just that Cult Leader Hong had had a fierce battle against four Divine Dragon Cult's martial art masters, and then Madame Hong denounced him; his mind was disturbed, plus he received several heavy blows one after another, the last one being the Wild-goose Tail Saber cutting deep into his bone, and a judge pen penetrating deep into his lower abdomen. After running for several hundred steps, he lost a lot of blood, his internal energy was depleted, his grab on Wei Xiaobao's back was weak, so that as soon as Wei Xiaobao struggled he was able to free himself and finally rode on his neck. Riding on Cult Leader Hong's shoulder, Wei Xiaobao was afraid he might be thrown down, instinctively he grabbed Cult Leader Hong's head to get a hold, the middle finger of both hands happened to press on Cult Leader Hong's eyelids.

Something flashed like a lightning in Cult Leader Hong's mind; he remembered that it was he himself who taught Wei Xiaobao this move. As soon as he managed to ride on the enemy's neck, he should immediately dig the enemy's eyes out. Cult Leader Hong would never had imagined that as a hero of this age, in the end he would lose his life under this little urchin's hand. Not only that, the move he was using was exactly the one he taught him. It was indeed an appropriate retribution. Remembering the countless number of people he had killed during his lifetime, receiving this karma could not be considered injustice; he could not help but heaving a deep sigh, his hands drooped down by his side.

As soon as Cult Leader Hong relaxed his body, he was unable to bear the load, hence he fell face up. Wei Xiaobao still thought that it was part of some formidable move; hastily he leaped back and ran away. He heard Cult Leader Hong said while gasping for breath, "Ah Quan, Ah Quan, come … come here."

Madame Hong took several steps closer, but she stopped more than a *zhang* away in front of him. Cult Leader Hong said, "The child in … in your belly, actually … actually whose child is it?"

Madame Hong shook her head and said, "Why do you insist on knowing?" While saying that, she involuntarily cast a side long glance toward Wei Xiaobao, her face blushed slightly.

Cult Leader Hong was shocked and angered at the same time; he shouted,

“Could it be … could it be this little demon?”

Madame Hong bit her lip without saying anything; obviously it was a tacit approval. Cult Leader Hong bellowed, “I’ll kill this little demon!” He sprang up and pounced on Wei Xiaobao.

With face full of blood, Cult Leader Hong opened his mouth wide, exposing badly damaged, broken yellowish teeth; his hands were also dripping with blood, as he pounced toward Wei Xiaobao. Wei Xiaobao was so scared that his body and soul separated; he turned around and crawled underneath Madame Hong’s crotch and hid behind her. With arms wide open Madame Hong confronted Cult Leader Hong; she said indifferently, “Your prestige has shaken the world, now it’s enough!”

Cult Leader Hong was leaping in the air, the last ounce of real *chi* in his body disappeared without a trace, ‘Wham!’ his body landed by Madame Hong’s feet. Yet he still fiercely said, “I am the Cult Leader, you … you should obey … obey my command. Why … why … did everybody rebel against me? You … all of you are wrong, only … only I am right. I will kill all of you, only I, one man can … can enjoy immortal good fortune forever … my long life … the same as hea … hea … hea …” Without able to finish the last word ‘heaven’, his mouth gaped open, he breathed his last, but his eyes were still wide open.

Wei Xiaobao crawled away several more steps and then he jumped to run away for several more *zhang* before he turned around and saw that Cult Leader Hong was lying on the ground unmoving. After a long time he took two steps closer, while taking the stance that he was ready to flee any time. “Is he dead?” he asked.

Madame Hong sighed and said quietly, “He is dead.”

Wei Xiaobao took two more steps and asked, “He … how come his eyes are not closed?”

Suddenly ‘slap!’ his face was heavily slapped, followed by a twist on his right ear; it was Princess Jianning. She also kicked Wei Xiaobao’s buttocks while cursing, “You, son of a b1tch, he did not close his eyes because you stole his wife. You … why did you fool around with this shameless woman?”

“Humph,” Madame Hong snorted, while reaching out to grab the back of

Princess Jianning's neck, 'slap!' she also heavily slapped her face. Waving her arm, she tossed the Princess backward to the ground. When this happened, Wei Xiaobao was the one who suffered the most, because the Princess' right hand was still twisting his ear. As her body tumbled backward, she took Wei Xiaobao's ear along that he fell on top of her.

Madame Hong shouted, "You talk without compass and set square. I will kill you at once."

The Princess was furious; she sprang up and charged toward Madame Hong. Madame Hong moved her left foot to hook, the Princess tripped and fell face down. The Princess charged again for the third time, and again she was thrown down to the ground. Finally she realized that her martial art skill was too far below the opponent's. She sat on the ground and broke into crying and swearing. But she did not dare to curse Madame Hong; she merely repeated over and over, "Little b@stard! Dead eunuch! Little animal! Stinky Xiao Guizi!"

Wei Xiaobao stroke his hurting ear, and felt blood on his hand. Turned out the Princess had pulled his ear too hard that she tore a long cut on it.

Madame Hong said in a low voice, "He and I were always husband and wife, is it alright if I bury him?" Her voice was gentle, as if she was pleading that Wei Xiaobao would allow her to do so.

Wei Xiaobao was pleasantly surprised; he hastily said, "Of course it's alright, we should bury him." Picking up the judge pen from the ground, he and Madame Hong started to dig a hole on the beach. Fang Yi and Mu Jianping came along to help. Together they put Cult Leader Hong's body into the hole and bury him.

Madame Hong kneeled down and kowtowed several times; she quietly said, "Although you forced me to marry you, but … but after we got married, you have always treated me well. I have never had any feeling toward you. Now that you are dead, you might as well know about it, you don't need to take it to heart." Finished speaking, she stood up, and could not stop the tears from streaming down her face.

She stood in a daze for a moment, and then she wiped her tears and asked Wei Xiaobao, "Are we going to stay here, or go back to the Central Plains?"

Wei Xiaobao scratched his head, "We definitely cannot stay here," he said,

“Hong *Jiaozhu*, Mr. Lu and the others’ ghosts will definitely demand our lives; it’s desperately serious. But if we return to the Central Plains, the young Emperor wants my head. It would be best if … if we can find a peace and quiet place where we can hide.” Suddenly he remembered a place. “I got it,” he said happily, “Let us go to the Tong Chi Island. There’s no ghost there, and the young Emperor won’t be able to find me.”

“Tong Chi Island?” Madame Hong asked, “Where is it?”

Wei Xiaobao pointed to the west and said with a laugh, “There’s a small island over there, I call it Tong Chi Island.” [reminder: tong chi means ‘eat ‘em all’ (gambling).]

Madame Hong nodded. “If you like to go there, let us all go,” she said. For some reason, she was very obedient to him [orig. ‘a thousand compliance a hundred obedience’].

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. “Go, go!” he shouted, “Let us go together!” Going over to the Princess, he helped her up while saying with a laugh, “Let us go on board!”

The Princess waved her palm, Wei Xiaobao leaned sideways to dodge. The Princess angrily said, “You go to hell! I am not going with you!”

Wei Xiaobao said, “There are lots and lots of ghosts on this island: headless ghosts, legless ghosts, and ghosts whose intestines were blasted by the cannon, and then multi-hand ghosts who love to stroke pregnant women’s belly …”

Hearing that, the Princess was extremely scared; she stomped her foot and said, “And then there’s chewing-maggot ghosts who love to speak nonsense.” Her left foot flew out, she kicked Wei Xiaobao’s buttocks heavily. “Ah!” Wei Xiaobao screamed and jumped away.

Madame Hong camly walked over. The Princess backed off several steps. Madame Hong said, “Later on if you hit Wei *Gongzi* one time, I will hit you ten times. If you kick him one time, I will kick you ten times. I have spoken, and my words always count.”

The Princess was so angry that her countenance turned deathly pale. She said angrily, “Who are you to him? Why do you protect him so? Your … your own

husband is dead, you want to snatch someone else's husband?"

Fang Yi interrupted, "Isn't your own husband also dead?"

The Princess was furious. "Little s1ut," she cursed, "Your husband is also dead."

Madame Hong slowly said, "If you dare to speak one more rude sentence, I'll leave you alone on this island and won't let anybody accompany you."

The Princess thought that this vixen was able to do whatever she was able to say; if she was left alone on the Island, and then a lot of ghosts with spilled intestine, ghosts with many hands came out, what should she do? All her life she lived as the Princess, she only needed to point her finger and people would jump to do her bidding; but this time she had no choice but to put aside her 'golden branch, jade leave' status and her harsh and unreasonable, rough temperament, and obediently stopped making noise.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he thought, "This little vicious gal met her match today; from now on someone is able to control her, so that she would not hit me whenever she is not in a good mood." He raised his hand toward his ear, which was torn by her; it was throbbing with pain.

Madame Hong said to Fang Yi, "Miss Fang, please tell the boatmen to prepare to set sail."

"Yes," Fang Yi replied. She then added, "How could Madame be this polite to your subordinate? I really do not deserve it."

Madame Hong smiled and said, "From this day onward we are sisters; there's no more Madame and subordinate. You call me Quan *Jiejie*, I'll call you Yi *Meimei*. The poison's antidote, I'll give it to you as soon as we get onboard. Henceforth you have nothing to worry about." Fang Yi and Mu Jianping were exremely delighted.

They all went aboard, the boat sailed westward. Wei Xiaobao glanced to the left and right; he was very proud of himself. True to her word, Madame Hong took out the antidote and gave it to Fang Yi. She also opened the boat's safe, took out Wei Xiaobao's dagger, his 'han sha she ying' secret projectile, his banknotes, everything, and gave them back to him. Zeng Rou's and the others'

weapons were also returned.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “How about from now on I also call you Quan *Jiejie*?”

“Very good!” Madame Hong happily replied, “Let’s tell each other our age, see who is older and who is younger.”

Everybody told their birth date, month and year. Naturally Madame Hong, Su Quan was the oldest. Fang Yi was next, and then the Princess. Zeng Rou, Mu Jianping and Wei Xiaobao were born on the same year. Zeng Rou was three months older than he, while Mu Jianping was a few days younger.

Su Quan, Fang Yi, and the others, four women called each other *Jiejie* and *Meimei* [older and younger sisters, respectively] affectionately. Only the Princess stood on the side, sulking. Su Qian said, “She is Her Highness the Princess, naturally she is unwilling to be sisters with us, common people. All of us should keep addressing her as Your Highness the Princess.”

The Princess coldly said, “I do not dare.” She thought about how they unite and form a clique, leaving her alone without any ally; she also thought about the dead eunuch Xiao Guizi, who had no conscience, who was apparently a lot closer to those four women than to her. Thinking about her sad fate, she could not help feeling broken hearted and broke into tears.

Wei Xiaobao leaned to her side, pulling her hand to comfort her, and said in a gentle voice, “Alright, alright; we are all happy here, please don’t cry …”

The Princess raised her palm, and slapped it hard, but suddenly she remembered Su Quan’s warning. This palm strike carried a lot of force, she was unable to hold it back. Without any other choice she changed direction midway, ‘slap!’ it heavily slapped her own chest. “Ah!” she screamed in pain.

Everybody else broke into loud laughter. The Princess was even more furious; she buried her face in Wei Xiaobao’s bosom and cried loudly. “Alright, alright,” Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, “No need to fight. Let’s throw dice, I’ll be the banker.”

But after searching carefully inside the Cult Leader Hong’s safe, they still could not find Wei Xiaobao’s pair of dice. It must be that when Lu Gaoxuan was

searching his body, he tossed the dice away carelessly. Wei Xiaobao was quite dejected. Su Quan laughed and said, “We can carve two dice from a piece of wood.”

“Wood is too light,” Wei Xiaobao said, “They are no fun to throw.”

Zeng Rou put her hand into her pocket, when she pulled it out, her hand was clenched into a fist. “Guess,” she said with a laugh, “What is it?”

“Is it copper coin?” Wei Xiaobao said, “That’s also good. Better than not gambling.”

Zeng Rou laughed and said, “Guess, how many?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Three?”

Zeng Rou opened up her palm; lying on her pink palm were unexpectedly two dice.

“Ah!” Wei Xiaobao cried loudly; he sprang up and asked repeatedly, “Where did you get it? Where did you get it?”

With a soft chuckle Zeng Rou put the dice on the table. Wei Xiaobao scrambled forward, grabbed the dice and started to throw; his excitement knew no bounds. He felt that there was a slight imbalance of weight on these two dice; obviously these dice were loaded with mercury. He thought Zeng Rou was always gentle and shy, how could she possibly play with these kind of loaded dice to cheat some money? Upon further reflection, he remembered, and was very happy. Turning around and gave her a hug, he kissed her face and said with a laugh, “Thank you very much, Rou *Jiejie*, luckily you always keep these two dice by your side.”

Zeng Rou blushed profusely; she struggled and ran outside to the deck. What happened was that when Wei Xiaobao and the Wang Wu Pai disciples threw dice with their lives at stake that day, after he let everybody go, just before leaving Wei Xiaobao’s command tent, Zeng Rou had asked for these two dice. Wei Xiaobao had already forgotten about this, but Zeng Rou had always kept the dice with her.

Now they had the dice, but not a single one of the women had any interest in gambling. Although they did play to keep him company, not only the stake was

low, they did not care much about winning or losing either. After playing for no more than the time needed to eat a meal, everybody no longer had any interest in playing. Compared to the people in Yangzhou's brothel or casino, or people in the Palace, or the people in military, who bet excessively and gamble ferociously, the difference was like night and day. Wei Xiaobao's interest quickly waned. "No more playing, no more playing!" he blurted out, "You don't know how to play."

Thinking that from now on he was going to take refuge on the Tong Chi Island, although there would be five beauties to keep him company, but there would not be any money to gamble, not a play to listen to; his days would be very boring. Besides, even if there was ten million gold or silver, what's the use? Gold and silver would just be like sand and stone; winning money would just like winning sand and stone. Moreover, the concern over whether Shuang'er was alive or was dead, and that Ah Ke's whereabouts was unknown, was constantly in his mind; how could he cast away the thought about these two girls and simply forget about them?

The more he thought about it, the more depressed he was. "Let's not going to Tong Chi Island," he said.

"So, where do you want to go?" Su Quan asked.

Wei Xiaobao thought for a moment before replying, "Let's go to Liaodong, to dig that great amount of buried treasure out."

Su Quan said, "Won't it be great if all of us just spend our days in peace and quiet on an uninhabited island? Even if we can dig the great treasure out, it will be quite useless."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Gold, silver, pearls and jewels by the thousands and tens of thousands, how can it be useless?"

Fang Yi said, "The Tatar Emperor must have sent out troops and horses everywhere to look for you, we'd better hide and lie low until the fuss dies down. After a year or two, this matter will settle down; if you still want to go to Liaodong, then all of us will go, it won't be too late by then."

Wei Xiaobao asked Zeng Rou and Mu Jianping, "What the two of you think?"

Mu Jianping said, "I think *Shijie* is right."

Zeng Rou said, “If you are afraid of boredom, we’ll hide on the island for no more than several months.” Seeing unhappy expression on Wei Xiaobao’s face, she added, “Every day we will accompany you throwing dice and play, whoever lose will be punish by having his or her palm slapped; is it all right?”

Wei Xiaobao mused, “Damn it, what’s so fun about slapping someone’s palm?” But looking at her tender and bashful face, her cute mannerism, he could not stop his heart from being swept away. “Alright, alright,” he said, “I will listen to you all.”

Fang Yi stood up and said with a smile, “I have constantly wronged you in the past, let me make some dishes and invite you to drink wine; just consider it my apology to you, is it all right?”

Wei Xiaobao was delighted; he busily said, “I really don’t dare to accept it.”

Fang Yi went to the stern to cook. Fang Yi’s culinary skill was indeed superb, she paid particular attention to the seasoning; although the boat did not have complete inventory of spices and seasoning, the people who ate it did not stop praising her.

“Let’s play finger-guessing game,” Wei Xiaobao shouted.

Mu Jianping, Zeng Rou and the Princess had never played finger-guessing game before. Wei Xiaobao taught them ‘two good brothers’, ‘the brightest and best of the Five Classics’, ‘four seasons safe and sound’ guesses. At first the Princess was sullen and unhappy, but after guessing several fists, and drank several cups of wine, she started to talk and laugh more.

After spending a night on the boat, the next afternoon they arrived at the Tong Chi Island. They saw the remains of the camp of Qing navy built there, the thatched cottage used as the command tent in those days was still standing, but naturally the impressive air Wei Xiaobao set up as the great general was long gone. Yet Wei Xiaobao did not seem to mind at all; pulling Fang Yi’s hand along he laughed and said, “Yi *Jiejie*, that day it was right here that you tricked me into getting on the boat, and narrowly lose my little life, and was sent away to Luocha Country.”

Fang Yi giggled tenderly and said, “I have already apologized to you; are you saying that I should kowtow and apologize to you?”

“No need to do that,” Wei Xiaobao said, “But good intention has its own good reward; I suffered untold hardships, in the end I can really be with you today.”

From behind them Mu Jianping called out, “What are you two talking about? Can you share it with us?”

Fang Yi laughed and said, “He said he wants to catch you, and carve a little turtle on your face.”

Su Quan said, “Let’s not fool around and play yet, it’s more important that we deal with serious matters first.” Right away she ordered the boatmen to take all the provision and utensils from the boat and brought it to the island; she also ordered them to dismantle the sail, poles for punting boats, oars, ropes, the wooden rudder at the back of the boat, and brought everything to the island, and keep them inside a cave on an overhanging cliff.

Wei Xiaobao praised her, “Quan *Jiejie* is really careful, we must look at these things, this boat must be torn apart, so we need not worry that they will escape.”

He had not finished speaking when from a distance they heard a ‘bang!’ from the direction of the sea, it sounded like a cannon. The six of them were surprised; they all look to the ocean, and saw that amidts the white fog that filled the surface of the ocean, there were two ships heading this way. And then they heard ‘bang, bang!’; obviously the ships opened fire two more times.

“Not good!” Wei Xiaobao called out, “The young Emperor sends people to catch me.”

Zeng Rou said, “Quickly get on the boat and run away.”

Su Quan said, “The sail and the rudder are all ashore, there’s no time to assemble them; we’ll have to hide and act according to circumstances.”

Out of these six people, other than the Princess, the remaining five had experienced many hardships and perils, hence they did not panic at all. Su Quan said, “No matter how we hide, in the end the officers and men will find us. Let us hide inside the cave on that cliff over there; the officers and men could only attack up the cliff one by one. One comes, we kill one. This way we will not be swarmed by them.”

“Right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “This is called ‘a man is shut off, catching a turtle in a jar’.”

Su Quan smiled. “That’s right!” she said. But the Princess could not help bursting into loud laughter.

Wei Xiaobao glowered at her. “What’s so funny?” he asked.

The Princess pursed her lips. “Nothing,” she said with a laugh, “You used your idiom really well, I am full of admiration.”

To some degree Wei Xiaobao knew his own limitation, he presumed that he must have used the idiom incorrectly, hence he glowered at the Princess.

The six of them entered the cave. Su Quan brandished a saber to cut some branches and piled them up in front of the cave as a cover. They looked out from the gaps between the branches, and saw that the two boats, one in front the other behind it, sailed straight toward the Tong Chi Island. The ship on the back continuously fired its cannon, the shells landed on the water all around the ship on the front, columns of water rose up to the sky.

“The boat on the back opens fire to attack the boat at the front,” Wei Xiaobao said.

“Exactly,” Su Quan said, “Turns out the two boats are fighting each other.”

Wei Xiaobao happily said, “In that case perhaps those two boats are not here to look for us.”

“I hope so,” Su Quan said, “It’s just that when they arrive on the Island, they will see the boatmen. As soon as they ask, they will know, and then they will definitely search for us. Even if we rush to kill the boatmen first, there’s not enough time to bury their bodies.”

“How come the ship in the front did not fire back?” Wei Xiaobao wondered, “Totally useless. It would be best if you fire me once, I fire you once, everybody is hit, both ships go down to the bottom of the ocean together.”

The boat at the front was comparatively smaller, the sail absorbed the entire force of the wind, it sailed really fast. Suddenly with a cannon blast the mast broke, the sailcloth caught fire. Wei Xiaobao and the others could not help crying

out in alarm. The boat in the front immediately leaned to one side, the hull turned horizontal. The boat lowered a small skiff, about a dozen people got on the skiff and started rowing. By this time they were already near the Island, the boat on the back also gradually got near, but because the water was shallow, the bigger boat could not reach the shore. This boat also lowered some skiffs, five of them.

The front one skiff trying to escape, the rear five skiff were pursuing them. Shortly afterwards, the front skiff reached the beach, the dozen or so people jumped ashore, they looked around carefully. Someone leaped forward and cried out, “The overhanging cliff overthere can be defended, everybody go that way.”

Hearing the voice, Wei Xiaobao thought it sounded like his Shifu Chen Jinnan. The dozen or so people climbed along the hillside and rushed toward the cliff. When they were near, one of them, with a sword in his hand, stood at the edge of the cliff, giving orders; who would it be if not Chen Jinnan? Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted, from the cave he leaped out and called, “Shifu, Shifu!”

Chen Jinnan turned around and saw Wei Xiaobao; he was also pleasantly surprised. “Xiaobao,” he called out, “How can you be here?”

Wei Xiaobao rushed toward him like flying. Suddenly he stopped dead on his track, because he saw that among the dozen or so people there was a young woman with bright eyes and snow white skin; unexpectedly it was Ah Ke. “Ah Ke!” he called at the top of his lungs, and scrambled over. But then he saw someone standing behind her; unsurprisingly, it was Zheng Keshuang. Since he saw Ah Ke, it was only natural that he would also see Zheng Keshuang; it was only to be expected. But he was greatly delighted, and then suddenly he saw this loathsome fellow, his heart sank instantly; he only stared blankly while his feet were rooted on the spot.

From the side someone called out, “*Xianggong*!”

Another person called out, “Wei *Xiangzhu*!”

Wei Xiaobao acknowledge the call without thinking, he did not even cast any glance from the corner of his eyes toward these two people, he was only staring blankly at Ah Ke. Suddenly a soft small hand reached out to grab his left palm. Wei Xiaobao’s body shook; he turned his head around to look, and saw a pretty

face full of smile was looking at him, with tears continuously streaming down her face. It was Shuang'er.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he pulled her into his embrace. "Good Shuang'er," he called out, "I miss you like crazy." He was so happy that he felt his heart was about to explode. In that instant, even Ah Ke was pushed to the back of his mind.

"Feng *Dage*, Feng *Xiongdi*," Chen Jinnan called out, "Let us guard this pathway." The two men complied in chorus, each one pulled his weapon and stood side by side on the narrow path leading to the cliff. Turned out one was Feng Xifan, the other was Feng Jizhong [Note: different 'feng' characters].

Suddenly seeing these many people, Wei Xiaobao could only asked, "How did you all get here?"

Shuang'er replied, "Feng *Daye* [term of respect for older men] took me to look for you, we came across Chen *Zongduozhu*, and we heard that you went into sea, thereupon … thereupon …" Speaking to this point, she was overwhelmed with joy that her throat choked and she was unable to continue.

By this time the pursuing troops from the five skiffs had also arrived on the beach. Looking down from the cliff, they saw that the troops were Qing soldiers, altogether there were seventy or eighty men. The one in front was holding a long saber, his stature was tall and sturdy, but it was too far, they could not see his facial features too clearly. That man directed the Qing troops to form groups. One group of men stood far away, the general barked his order, the troops took long bows from their backs, and some feathered arrows from their quivers; they strung the arrows on the bow, aiming the arrowhead to the cliff.

Chen Jinnan called out, "Everybody duck down!"

Actually, caught in this kind of situation, Wei Xiaobao did not need his Shifu's order; as soon as he saw the Qing troops with bows in their hands, he had already stationed himself behind a large rock. He heard the general shouted, "Release the arrows!" Immediately there was an unending sound of swishing arrows.

The cliff was very high, shot from the bottom going up, by the time the arrows arrived, they already lost their momentum. Feng Xifan and Feng Jizhong, one

with a sword, the other with a single-blade saber, braved the arrows and broke every single one of them.

"Shi Lang," Feng Xifan called out, "You are a shameless traitor; if you have guts, come up here, let you and *laozi* have a man-to-man duel to the death."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "Turns out the one leading the troops down there is Shi Lang. Marching to war, this man is indeed an expert."

He heard Shi Lang called back, "If you have guts, come down. One-to-one duel, *Laozi* is not afraid of you."

"Alright!" Feng Xifan replied.

He was about to come down, Chen Jinnan said, "Feng *Dage*, don't fall into his trick, this man is contemptible and shameless, he is capable of doing anything."

Feng Xifan was only taking one step before he stopped. He called out, "You said one-to-one duel, why did you send five skiffs … damn it, six skiffs, even our skiff is also stolen. Stinky traitor, you sent the skiffs to get more people, isn't that relying on number to gain victory?"

Shi Lang laughed and said, "Chen *Junshi* [lit. army master, military strategist], Captain Feng, the two of you have superb martial art skill, Ol' Shi has always been full of admiration. There is a common saying, 'a wise man submits to circumstances'. It would be better for you to take Zheng *Gongzi* down and surrender together, His Majesty will definitely bestow the two of you very high ranking official position."

In the past Shi Lang was a great general under Zheng Chenggong's [Koxinga] command; together with Zhou Quanbin, Gan Hui, Ma Xin, and Liu Guoxuan, four people, they were known as 'Five Tiger Generals'[15]. Chen Jinnan was a military strategist; although Feng Xifan was strong in martial art, his commanding and planning skill was not too good, hence he was made the captain of Zheng Chenggong's bodyguards. Shi Lang had fought alongside Chen and Feng, two people, in bloody battle, they had shared trials and tribulations for a long time. This time he still addressed the two people as their former military rank.

From the cliff down the distance was about seven or eight *zhang*, Shi Lang was standing far away, but his internal energy was abundant, every word he said

could be heard clearly. Zheng Keshuang's countenance changed; he said with a trembling voice, "Feng *Shifu*, you … you must not surrender."

"*Gongzi*, don't worry," Feng Xifan replied, "As long as Ol' Feng still has one breath left, I will never surrender to the Tatars."

Although Chen Jinnan knew that Feng Xifan was treacherous and devious, that twice or three times he had attempted to harm him, he wanted to protect Zheng Keshuang in his conspiracy to gain the Yan Ping Jun Wang Heir Apparent position; yet as he heard him speaking with 'devotion to righteousness that inspires reverence', Chen Jinnan was quite impressed. "Feng *Dage*," he said, "Today side-by-side you and I will fight to death; whatever happens we will protect *Er Gongzi* [second young master] through and through."

"I will follow *Junshi*," Feng Xifan said.

Zheng Keshuang said, "By protecting me, *Junshi* will render merit; when we get back to Taiwan, I will definitely present a memorial to let *Fu Wang* [father king] understand clearly, he will definitely bestow great … great reward."

Chen Jinnan said, "It is subordinate's responsibility." While saying that, he walked toward the shore to evaluate the situation.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Zheng *Gongzi*, great reward is not needed. As long as you don't become hostile and heartless by harming my Shifu, we will greatly appreciate it."

Zheng Keshuang shot him a malicious look. Wei Xiaobao lowered his voice, "Shijie, we'd better capture Zheng *Gongzi* and present him to the Qing troops."

Ah Ke spat and said, "As soon as we met, you did not say anything good. Why did you scare him?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Scaring him several times is fun, he won't die of fright anyway. Even if he is scared to death, it's not a big deal."

"Pei!" Ah Ke spat again; suddenly she blushed and lowered her head.

Wei Xiaobao asked Shuang'er, "How did all of you get together?"

Shuang'er said, "Chen *Zongduozhu* took Feng *Daye* and me to go out to sea to look for you. I remembered you have been to this Tong Chi Island, so I told Chen

Zongduozhu about it and we went this way to take a look. Along the way we happened to see the Qing troops pursuing Zheng *Gongzi*'s boat, shooting and sinking it. So we rescued him and we fled this way. Thank heaven and thank the earth, at last we found you." Speaking to this point, her eyes turned red.

Wei Xiaobao reached out to pat her shoulder. "Good Shuang'er," he said, "These days, there was not a single day passed in which I did not think about you." It was not an empty talk; every day he thought about Ah Ke and Shuang'er, two women, if not ten times, then at least eight time. As a matter of fact, he was concerned over Shuang'er's safety more than he thought about Ah Ke.

"Brothers," Chen Jinnan shouted, "While Tatar's reinforcement has not arrived, we go down to charge and kill the enemy. Otherwise, if six skiff-loads of Tatar soldiers arrive, it won't be easy to deal with." Everybody voiced their agreement.

This time, from among the dozen or so people who came to the Island, other than Chen, Feng, Zheng, Feng, as well as Ah Ke and Shuang'er, there were eight Tian Di Hui brothers, and three of Zheng Keshuang's personal bodyguards.

Chen Jinnan said, "Zheng *Gongzi*, Miss Chen, Xiaobao, Shuang'er, the four of you stay here. The rest of you, come with me!" Brandishing his sword, he was the first to rush down the cliff.

Feng Xifan, Feng Jizhong, and the eleven men followed, with loud battle cry they rushed down hill, charging swiftly toward the Qing troops. The Qing troops released the arrows in succession, all were knocked down by Chen, Feng and Feng, three men. Previously they were fighting a naval battle, Shi Lang's boat was a battleship, its cannon was formidable, Chen Jinnan and the others could only take a beating. Presently they were in a close combat, among the Qing troops, other than Shi Lang, one person, the other men's martial art skill was mediocre; how could they fight martial art experts like Chen, Feng, and Feng, three men? Tian Di Hui brothers and Zheng Mansion's bodyguards were also quite skillful; as soon as these fourteen men charged into the formation, the Qing troops were completely routed.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Shijie, Shuang'er, let us also charge a bit." Ah Ke and Shuang'er complied together.

“I am going too!” Zheng Keshuang said.

He saw Wei Xiaobao with a dagger in his hand charged down the cliff, Shuang’er and Ah Ke ran one after another behind him. Zheng Keshuang was only rushing down several steps before he halted his steps; thinking, “I have a thousand-gold body, how can I go to face danger together with these underlings?” He called out, “Ah Ke, you should not go either!” Ah Ke did not respond, she followed close behind Wei Xiaobao.

Although Wei Xiaobao’s martial art skill was so-so, he had four treasures with him; charging into the enemy ranks, it was like crossing a ravine like a flat ground. Which four treasures? The first treasure: his dagger was extremely sharp, the enemy’s weapons broke upon contact; the second treasure: his protective treasured vest, impervious to sword or spear; the third treasure: his exquisite escaping-skill, no enemy could catch up with him; the fourth treasure: Shuang’er always stayed by his side, the Qing troops could not get close to him.

Based on these four treasures, if he had to fight a martial art master, he would not be able to avoid defeat; however, dealing with the Qing troops, the four treasures were more than enough. In a flash he already injured several men; his impressive power was in full display, aura of death emanating from his body. He thought, “In the past Zhao Zilong charged seven times through the ranks of Cao Cao’s army, I am sure it was no more than this. Perhaps even I, Wei Xiaobao …”

They all charged and kill the enemy, the Qing troops fled to all directions. Chen Jinnan fought Shi Lang one on one, for a short white they were locked in a fierce combat. Feng Xifan and Feng Jizhong killed the Qing troops left and right like chopping melon slicing vegetables; in less than a time to eat a meal, out of eighty some Qing troops, fifty or sixty men were either dead or injured. The ruined army, defeated generals scrambled to the sea. These navy sailors were very adept in swimming, they hurriedly swam toward the big boat. On the other side two of Tian Di Hui brothers were dead, one was seriously injured. The rest of them surrounded Shi Lang.

Shi Lang’s steel saber fluttered and flew, it clashed intensely with the sword in Chen Jinnan’s hand. Although trapped and heavily surrounded, he did not show the least bit of fear. Wei Xiaobao called out, “General Shi, if you don’t toss your saber away and surrender, very soon you will become dog meat paste.” Shi

Lang's mind was focused on the fight, he neither saw nor hear the words and actions of the bystanders.

The fierce combat continued. Chen Jinnan let out a long whistle, and thrust his sword forward three times in rapid succession. On the third strike his sword stuck to Shi Lang's steel saber. Chen Jinnan flicked his wrist, and made two circles. "Ah!" Shi lang cried out, the steel saber flew out of his hand. The tip of Chen Jinnan's sword flashed and stopped at his throat. "What do you have to say?" he shouted.

"You have won," Shi Lang angrily retorted, "Just kill me and be done with it. What else do you want me to say?"

Chen Jinnan said, "This moment do you still think yourself as a hero? You turned your back against your master and betrayed your friends, is that the conduct of a hero?"

Shi Lang suddenly threw himself back and rolled on the ground. With this roll he broke away from the tip of the sword on his throat. With both legs he executed chain-kicks, his target was Chen Jinnan's calf. Chen Jinnan pointed his sword in front of his legs. If Shi Lang continued to kick, he would only send his own legs to be impaled by the sword. In desperation he pressed his left hand to the ground to support himself, while with both legs he forcefully feigned a kick upward, and then quickly somersaulted backward. But as soon as he stood on his feet, the tip of Chen Jinnan's sword was already waiting in front of his throat again.

Shi Lang's heart turned cold; he knew in term of martial art he was not Chen Jinnan's match. "*Junshi*," he suddenly asked, "How did *Guoxing Ye* [Koxinga] treat me?"

This question caught Chen Jinnan totally off-guard. In that instant, the entanglement of gratitude and grudges between Zheng Chenggong and Shi Lang flashed through Chen Jinnan's mind. He sighed and said, "To be fair with you, *Guoxing Ye* did indeed wrong you. But we have received *Guoxing Ye*'s great kindness; although we received unjust treatment, what can we do?"

Shi Lang said, "Are you saying that I should immitate Yue Fei, suffer false accusations and die?"

Chen Jinnan said in stern voice, “Even if you cannot be Yue Fei, you must not be Qin Hui[16]. You ran away for your life, that was all right. But how can a real man surrender to the Tatars and become a traitor that is worse than a dog or a pig?”

Shi Lang said, “My father and mother, my brothers, wife and children, what crime have they committed? Why did *Guoxing Ye* kill them all that not a single one survive? He murdered my entire family, I want to kill his entire family to revenge!”

Chen Jinnan said, “Revenge is a small matter, becoming a traitor is a big thing. Today I am going to kill you. I want to know if you will have the face to see *Guoxing Ye*.”

Shi Lang straightened up his head and loudly said, “Go ahead and kill me. I am afraid it will be *Guoxing Ye* who won’t have the face to see me, not I don’t have the face to see him.”

Chen Jinnan sternly said, “Up to this point you still argue forcefully.” He was going to thrust the sword into his throat, but could not help thinking about how in the olden days Shi Lang and he had marched to battle together, how they had gone through life and death together. Under *Guoxing Ye*, Shi Lang started as a lowly soldier; he rose through blood soaked and hard-fought battle, his meritorious service was indeed not small. If not for Madame Dong meddling with military affairs and actively insulting the generals, today this man would be the protective wall of Taiwan. Although going over to the enemy was a treason that could not be forgiven no matter what, his whole innocent family was killed, in all honesty this man deserved sympathy.

“I’ll give you a path to life,” Chen Jinnan said, “If you swear an oath to denounce your surrender and return to serve Zheng *Wangye*, today I will spare your life. From now on you can atone for your crimes by meritorious acts, striving your hardest to resume the great undertaking, and then you can still be considered as a magnificent real man. Shi *Xiongdi*, I encourage you with good words, hoping you would turn around.” The last few words were spoken with utmost sincerity.

Shi Lang lowered his head, his face bore an ashamed look; he said, “If I return

to Taiwan, won't I be a capricious lowly man?"

Chen Jinnan put his sword back into its sheathe; he stepped forward to grip Shi Lang's hand and said, "Shi *Xiongdi*, as decent human beings we must pay particular attention to righteousness and moral integrity. As long as henceforth you serve your country with red-bellied devotion, your muddled past, who would dare to laugh at you? Even Guan *Wangye* in the past also surrendered to Cao Cao."

Suddenly a voice behind him said, "This evil thief said that my *Yeye* [paternal grandfather] killed his entire family. My Taiwan definitely won't pardon him. You quickly kill him."

Chen Jinnan turned his head around and saw that the voice belonged to Zheng Keshuang. "*Er Gongzi*," he said, "General Shi is well versed in the art of war; in those days he had no equal in *Guoxing Ye*'s army. If he surrenders back, he will bring very great benefit to our great cause of fighting the Qing restoring the Ming. We must attach most importance to our country; none of us should take personal gratitude and grudges of the past to heart."

"Humph," with a cold laugh Zheng Keshuang said, "If this man returned to Taiwan and got a grip of military power, do you think our Zheng Family will survive?"

Chen Jinnan said, "As long as General Shi swears a heavy oath, I am willing to guarantee with my own life, as well as my family's, that he will not have a change of heart."

With a cold laugh Zheng Keshuang said, "By the time he killed my entire family, do you think you and your family's lives can compensate for ours? Taiwan belongs to our Zheng Family, not yours, Chen *Junshi*'s, Chen Family's."

Chen Jinnan was so angry that his hands and feet turned ice-cold. He struggled hard to contain his anger. He was about to reply when suddenly Shi Lang moved his feet and dashed away. "*Junshi*," he called out, "Your *yi qi* to me is profound, *Xiongdi* will never forget it. *Xiongdi* is unwilling to be Zheng Family's slave …"

"Shi *Xiongdi*," Chen Jinnan called out, "Come back. Let's talk …" Suddenly he felt sharp pain on his back, a blade entered his back and went all the way until its tip came out of his chest.

It was actually Zheng Keshuang who carried out his evil scheme behind Chen Jinnan's back. Based on Chen Jinnan's martial art skill, even ten Zheng Keshuang would not be able to kill him; however, he saw that Shi Lang was contemplating the idea of surrendering, but Zheng Keshuang cursed him that he left, Chen Jinnan knew that this person was a rare talent, he was hoping to pull him back, and had never expected that Zheng Keshuang, who was standing behind him, would unexpectedly carry out his evil scheme.

After Zheng Chenggong captured Taiwan, he sent his son Zheng Jing to defend Jinmen, Xiamen[17]. Zheng Jing was very adept in military matters, but his conduct was not careful, he slept with a wet nurse and gave birth to a son. When Zheng Chenggong found out about it, he was exceptionally furious; he wanted to send someone with his arrow banner of command to go to Xiamen to kill Zheng Jing. The various generals under his command thought that it was a reckless order, hence they were unwilling to receive the order, together they submit a report, saying that the day to pay a debt of gratitude would come, they must wait indefinitely, and so on.

Seeing his generals refused to follow his order, Zheng Chenggong was even more furious; not long afterwards he fell ill and died at the age of 39. Taiwan's high-ranking military officers threw their full support to Zheng Chenggong's younger brother Zheng Xi and made him their master. From Jinmen and Xiamen Zheng Jing returned to Taiwan and defeated the Taiwan's defenders, hence he inherited the title Yan Ping Wang.

Zheng Chenggong's wife, Madame Dong saw that disaster had struck and that there would be changes in the family, their *Wangye* had died an untimely death, it was all because of the wet nurse giving birth to a son; for this reason she detested the wet nurse's son, Zheng Kesang, and did everything in her power to support her grandson from Zheng Jing's first wife, Zheng Keshuang to be the heir apparent. Zheng Jing, however, refused to obey his mother.

Chen Jinnan had always been loyal and devoted to Zheng Jing. He gave his daughter to Zheng Kesang as his wife. Madame Dong and Feng Xifan conspired in secret; they knew that if they wanted to support Zheng Keshuang, they must kill Chen Jinnan first so that he would not be a stumbling block to their plan. Several times did they try to harm him, but each time he managed to escape.

Unexpectedly this time he rescued Zheng Keshuang's life, but had fallen into this person's evil scheme instead.

The stab from behind happened so suddenly, nobody had ever expected it. Feng Xifan was about to run after Shi Lang when he saw that Wei Xiaobao was thrusting his dagger toward Zheng Keshuang. Feng Xifan raised his sword to block. 'Swish!' the sword in his hand broke into two sections; but the internal energy behind the sword thrust was profound, Wei Xiaobao's dagger was also jolted and flew from his hand. Feng Xifan's leg followed, he kicked Wei Xiaobao and sent him tumbling down on the ground. He was about to pursue and attack, Shuang'er rushed in front of Wei Xiaobao to block. Feng Jizhong and two Tian Di Hui brothers also rushed forward to attack Feng Xifan from left and right.

Wei Xiaobao crawled up, picked up his dagger and howled in grief, "This vile creature killed *Zongduozhu*, everybody must fight him to the death!" while charging toward Zheng Keshuang.

Zheng Keshuang leaned sideways to evade, while thrusting his sword straight toward the back of Wei Xiaobao's head. His martial art skill was far superior to Wei Xiaobao's, this sword move was quite ingenious, it was obvious that Wei Xiaobao would have difficult time evading it. Suddenly a saber from the side parried the sword thrust; it was Ah Ke. She called out, "Don't harm my Shidi!" And then two Tian Di Hui brothers launched a converging attack toward Zheng Keshuang.

Feng Xifan strenuously fought Feng Jizhong, Shuang'er and two Tian Di Hui brothers, four people, he was unable to gain the upper hand. 'Slap!' he sent out a palm strike toward a Tian Di Hui brother, who spurted out a mouthful of blood and fell dead. Suddenly he heard Zheng Keshuang's 'Wah, wah!' loud cry; Feng Xifan abandoned his opponents and rushed toward Zheng Keshuang. With another palm strike he killed another Tian Di Hui brother.

He knew that now that Chen Jinnan was dead, these people would follow Wei Xiaobao's command, hence he must deal with the little demon first. Stretching out his hand, his palm shot down onto the top of Wei Xiaobao's head.

"Xianggong, run!" Shuang'er called out, while leaping toward Feng Xifan's back.

“You must be careful too!” Wei Xiaobao called back and ran away.

Feng Xifan thought, “If I run after this little demon, *Gongzi* will have nobody to protect him.” Reaching out with his left arm, he grabbed Zheng Keshuang and ran after Wei Xiaobao. Although he was carrying a grown man, he was still a bit faster than Wei Xiaobao.

Wei Xiaobao turned his head around to look and jumped in fright. He reached out to press the ‘Han Sha She Ying’ mechanism, but because of this, his footsteps was somewhat delayed, Feng Xifan came very fast, his right palm already arrived. It was a ‘thousand pounds hang by a threat’ situation, if Wei Xiaobao waited to release the secret projectile, most likely his brain would be busted by Feng Xifan’s palm. Without any choice he leaned sideways to evade, and then using the ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’ he ran away. Carried by his own momentum Feng Xifan ran several more steps before hastily halted his steps and turned around to chase him. Wei Xiaobao called out, “My Shifu’s ghost is coming! He is touching your head!” Because he spoke, his feet slowed down, Feng Xifan was one step closer.

Behind, Shuang’er and Feng Jizhong also urgently gave chase; they were hoping they could cut Feng Xifan off. Wei Xiaobao fled to the east and rushed to the west in erratic pattern, while Feng Xifan was carrying Zheng Keshuang, hence his movement was not as nimble, for the time being he was unable to catch him. Shuang’er and Feng Jizhong were still several *zhang* behind.

After running around for a while, Wei Xiaobao gradually felt he was out of breath. In a moment of desperation, he forced himself to run toward the cliff. Feng Xifan was greatly delighted, thinking that this time you are running to a dead-end yourself. He saw that other than a narrow pathway, all around the cliff was empty space, there was no way out; hence he relaxed his speed instead.

Running along the narrow mountain path, Wei Xiaobao did not use the ‘Shen Xing Bai Bian’ skill. He had just set his foot on the top of the cliff, Feng Xifan had also arrived. Wei Xiaobao shouted at the top of his voice, “First wife, middle wife, young wife, everybody quickly come out and help me, if you are not coming out, everybody will become widows.”

Actually, while he was running to the cliff, the five women on the cliff had

already seen him. Su Quan saw Feng Xifan was carrying someone in his left arm, yet he was still able to run and leap like flying; indeed his martial art skill was very strong, perhaps just a notch inferior to Cult Leader Hong. Early on she already had a blade in her hand as she crouched by the side of the cliff. As soon as Feng Xifan caught up, 'Shua!' her saber swiftly sliced across his waist.

When Feng Xifan heard Wei Xiaobao shouting and calling earlier, he still thought that Wei Xiaobao was making a fuss to disturb his attention, he had never expected that someone was really hiding in this place. He saw this saber move was exquisite and unusual, it was indeed a superb move; he was slightly startled and took a step back. With a loud shout his left foot slightly swayed, his right foot suddenly flew out and kicked Su Quan's wrist.

"Ah!" Su Quan cried out, the willow-leaf saber left her hand and flew to the air. Wei Xiaobao seized this split-second opportunity to turn his body to face Feng Xifan, his right hand activate the 'Han Sha She Ying' mechanism, with a series of 'chi, chi, chi' noise a cluster of fine, thin steel needles shot out, all landed on Feng Xifan and Zheng Keshuang's bodies.

Feng Xifan screamed loudly, his grip loosened, Zheng Keshuang fell to the ground. The two of them rolled from the cliff along the narrow path down the mountain. Shuang'er and Feng Jizhong were rushing halfway up the mountain, seeing these two people rolling down fast, they leaped sideways to avoid collision.

Zheng and Feng, two people rolled down to the foot of the cliff. As soon as the poison on the needles flared out, the two of them screamed and squealed like a pig being slaughtered, while still rolling down continuously. Fortunately after He Tishou entered Huashan Pai, she obeyed her master's instruction; henceforth she discarded any sinister and acute poison she had been using. The poison on these 'Han Sha She Ying' steel needles only had anesthetic effect, not life threatening poison at all. Otherwise, based on her status as the Cult Leader of the Five-Poison Cult, the poison on her concealed weapons would immediately seal the throat upon contact with blood, the person hit would immediately die a violent death; before Feng and Zheng, two people reached the foot of the cliff, they would have taken their last breath. Even so, as the steel needles hit their bodies, they still felt unbearably numb and itchy; it was as if several hundred

scorpions and centipedes were crawling and biting all over their bodies at once. Although Feng Xifan was strong and healthy, he still could not bear not to scream unceasingly.

Wei Xiaobao, Shuang'er, Feng Jizhong, Su Quan, Fang Yi, Mu Jianping, the Princess, Zeng Rou, Ah Ke rushed over one after another; seeing Feng and Zheng, two people's condition, they were all aghast. Wei Xiaobao calmed himself down a little, and then still panting for breath, he rushed toward Chen Jinnan. He saw that Zheng Keshuang's sword bored through Chen Jinnan's chest; it was still stuck on his body, but he had not breathed his last. Wei Xiaobao could not help bursting into tears as he picked up Chen Jinnan's body.

Chen Jinnan's power was very profound, his internal breathing had not yet dispersed. "Xiaobao," he said in a low voice, "Everybody will eventually die. I … I have lived my entire life for my country, for my people, I have a clear conscience against the heaven and the earth. You … you … you don't have to be grieved."

"Shifu, Shifu!" Wei Xiaobao could only cry out. Actually, the days he spent with Chen Jinnan were very few; each time they met he was always afraid Shifu would check the progress of his martial art training, and thus he was always anxious and was always thinking about how to fob his master and offer lame excuses to cover up his unwillingness to make progress; but at least he was very grateful for his Shifu's kind intention.

This moment as he saw that Shifu was about to die, all the unspoken teachings Shifu usually taught him, the way Shifu treated him with the kindness and love of a father, choked his heart, making him wishing that he could die in place of Shifu. "Shifu," he said, "I really was not being good to you; you … you taught me martial art, I … I did not learn it at all."

Chen Jinnan smiled and said, "As long as you are being a good person, Shifu is very happy. Whether you learn martial art or not, that … that is not important at all."

Wei Xiaobao said, "I will definitely listen to you, I will be a good person, not … not a bad person."

Chen Jinnan smiled, "Good child," he said, "You have always been good."

Gnashing his teeth, Wei Xiaobao said, "That evil thief Zheng Keshuang harmed

you, (boo hoo, boo hoo), Shifu, if I can get hold of him, I will definitely chop him into mincemeat to avenge you, (boo hoo, boo hoo …)" He wailed and talked at the same time, with tears raining down his face.

Chen Jinnan's body shook. "No, no!" he hastily said, "I am Zheng *Wangye*'s subordinate. *Guoxing Ye*'s kindness to me was as heavy as the mountain. No matter what we must not murder *Guoxing Ye*'s flesh and blood … I would rather him being ruthless, but I must not be faithless. Xiaobao, I am going to die, you must not damage my loyal and righteous reputation. You … you must by all means listen to me …" His face was originally smiling, but right now he looked extremely anxious. "Xiaobao," he continued, "Promise me, you must let him return to Taiwan; otherwise, otherwise, I won't die with closed eyes."

Wei Xiaobao had no choice; he was obliged to say, "Since Shifu spares this evil thief, I will … I will obey your instruction."

Immediately Chen Jinnan was relieved; he heaved a deep sigh and then said slowly, "Xiaobao, Tian Di Hui's … great undertaking of fighting the Qing restoring the Ming, you must do it well. Our Han people work as one, in the end we will be able to restore our rivers and mountains; too bad … too bad I won't … won't live to see it …" his voice was getting lower and lower, finally he was unable to inhale, and thus he died.

Wei Xiaobao embraced his body and wailed, "Shifu, Shifu!" He cried himself hoarse, yet Chen Jinnan did not stir at all.

All along Su Quan and the others had been standing by his side. Seeing Chen Jinnan died and Wei Xiaobao was unable to control his grief, they were all grief-stricken as well. Su Quan gently stroked his shoulder and said tenderly, "Xiaobao, your Shifu has passed away."

Sobbing, Wei Xiaobao said, "Shifu is dead, he is dead!" He had never had any father, in the deepest part of his heart, he had always considered Shifu as his father to make up for his deficiency, only outwardly he did not realize it. Now that Shifu was dead, the pain in his heart was like flood breaking down the dike; it was hard to suppress. He finally came to the realization that he was after all a wild child without any father.

Su Quan wanted to steer him away from his sorrow, "How are we going to deal

with the murderer of your Shifu?" she asked.

Wei Xiaobao sprang up and cursed, "Hot piece mama, little b@stard. My Shifu was your Zheng Family's subordinate, but I, Wei Xiaobao, have never eaten even a mouthful of your Zheng Family's rice, or spent a *wen* of your Zheng Family's money. Your granny stinky thief, you still owe me ten thousand *taels* that you have not paid back. Shifu wanted me to spare your life, fine, I'll spare your life. But I want you to pay me back the ten thousand *taels* right now. You still don't want to pay it back? Then I'll simply cut your body, one cut for each *tael* of silver." While his mouth was hurling curses continously, he pulled his dagger and walked over toward Zheng Keshuang, whom he then kicked randomly.

The number of poisonous needles that hit Zheng Keshuang was comparatively less than those that hit Feng Xifan; by this time the pain was somewhat lessened. Hearing that Chen Jinnan wanted to spare his life, he was delighted beyond belief. But now that the debtor demanded payent, while he did not carry any money with him, he could only plead, "When I … I will return to Taiwan, I will definitely add ten times; no, I'll add a hundred times to the principal."

Wei Xiaobao kicked him on the head and cursed, "You have a heart of wolf and lungs of dog, a stinky thief who forget favors and violate justice; you speak like fart. You cannot avoid these ten thousand cuts." Lifting up his dagger, he ran it over Zheng Keshuang's face twice.

Zheng Keshuang was so scared that his soul flew to the outer sky; he cast a glance toward Ah Ke, hoping that she would say something to help him. But suddenly he remembered, "Not right, not right! The one this little thief loves the most is precisely Ah Ke, if right now she speak on my behalf, this little thief will hate me even more. It seems like these ten thousand cuts will be unavoidable." He said, "One million *taels* of silver, I will definitely pay you back. Wei *Xiangzhu*, Wei *Xianggong*, if you don't believe …"

Wei Xiaobao kicked him again, "Of course I don't believe! My Shifu believed you, you killed him!" The grief and indignation in his heart was unbearable, he stretched out his dagger to stab Zheng Keshuang's face.

Zheng Keshuang cried out, "If you don't believe me, then I'll have Ah Ke to vouch for me."

“Vouching for you is useless,” Wei Xiaobao said, “She will vouch for you, later on you still won’t pay me back.”

Zheng Keshuang said, “I have a guarantee.”

“Alright,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Leave you dog head as the guarantee; you pay me back one million *taels*, I will return your dog head to you.”

Zheng Keshuang said, “I’ll leave Ah Ke as the guarantee for you!”

In that instant Wei Xiaobao felt the sky spun the earth went around, his hand loosened, the dagger fell to the ground, ‘chi!’ it went deep into the mud, only a few *cun* away from Zheng Keshuang’s head. “Aiyo!” Zheng Keshuang cried out; hastily he pulled his head away and said, “I pawn Ah Ke to you, believe me, I will send one million *taels* to you, and then you can return Ah Ke to me.”

“It can be discussed,” Wei Xiaobao said.

“Cannot, cannot!” Ah Ke cried out, “I am not yours, how can you pawn me?” Speaking to here, she broke into crying.

Zheng Keshuang anxiously said, “Right now I am facing imminent catastrophe, Ah Ke does not care about me at all, this woman is completely lacking any sense of justice, I don’t want her anymore. If Wei *Xiangzhu* agrees to take her, I will sell her to you for one million *taels* of silver. The two of us don’t owe the other anything; you don’t need to cut me ten thousand times anymore.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “In her heart she is always thinking about you, even if you sell her off to me it’s still useless.”

Zheng Keshuang said, “In her belly she already has your child, how could she think about me?”

Wei Xiaobao was pleasantly surprised; his voice quivered, “You … what did you say?”

Zheng Keshuang said, “That day at the Lovely Spring Courtyard in Yangzhou, you and she shared the bed, she has a baby …”

Ah Ke cried out loudly; she suddenly jumped up and rushed to the ocean while covering her face. Shuang’er caught up with her in several steps and pulled her arm to take her back. Ah Ke cried and said, “You … you promised not to tell, why

… why did you say that? You speak like releasing … releasing …" Although she was ashamed and angry, she still thought the word 'fart' was indecent, hence she could not say it out loud.

Seeing the indeterminate changes on Wei Xiaobao's countenance, Zheng Keshuang was afraid he might change his mind; he hastily said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, this child is definitely yours. Ah Ke and I keep our purity, she said that only after bowing to the Heaven and the Earth with me will we become husband and wife. You … you must not be suspicious."

Wei Xiaobao said, "This seems too good for *Laozi*, why didn't you do it?"

Zheng Keshuang said, "Ever since she has your child inside her belly, she often thought about you; when she talked to me, she would mention you all day long. Listening to her I was bored to death, what do you want me to do with her?"

Ah Ke stomped her feet repeatedly, her face alternated between red and white; she said angrily, "You told him … you told him everything." By saying that, she indirectly admitted that he was telling the truth.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. "Alright!" he said, "In that case get your Ma's stinky duck egg out of here!"

Zheng Keshuang was also greatly delighted. "Thank you very much, thank you very much!" he hastily said, "I wish the two of you a hundred years of harmony; the congratulatory gift, *Xiongdi* … *Xiongdi* will deliver later." While saying that he slowly crawled up.

"Pei!" Wei Xiaobao spat a mouthful of saliva to the ground; he cursed, "In all my life I don't want to see you, stinky thief, anymore." He thought, "I promised Shifu I will spare his life today. Someday there's no harm in me sending other people to kill him to avenge Shifu. As long as the one I send is not from Tian Di Hui, other people cannot blame it on Shifu."

All along the three Zheng Mansion bodyguards had been standing far away to the side, it was not until they saw that Wei Xiaobao spared their master's life that they came over to help Zheng Keshuang up, as well as Feng Xifan, who was lying on the ground. Zheng Keshuang looked up to the sea, he hesitated. Shi Lang's battleship had already sailed far away. There were two more boats moored at the beach; his own boat was shot by the Qing troops' cannon, the

mast was broken and the sail destroyed, they could not sail on it. The other boat could be considered in good condition, but obviously it was the boat Wei Xiaobao and the others were going to use; they definitely would not let him use it.

"Feng Shifu," he said in a low voice, "We don't have any boat; what can we do?"

"Let's get on the skiff first and talk later," Feng Xifan replied. The group of people slowly walked toward the beach.

Suddenly from behind them someone shouted in stern voice, "Hold on! Wei *Xiangzhu* spared your lives, but I won't spare it."

Zheng Keshuang was shocked; he saw a man with steel saber in his hand rushed over. It was none other than Tian Di Hui's martial art expert Feng Jizhong. Zheng Keshuang said in a trembling voice, "You … you are Tian Di Hui *Xiongdi*, Tian Di Hui has always been under Taiwan's Yan Ping Mansion's command, you … you …"

"I, I, what?" Feng Jizhong sternly said, "Stop right there!"

Zheng Keshuang was scared; he had no choice but to reply, "Yes."

Feng Jizhong returned to Wei Xiaobao and said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, this man murdered *Zongduozhu*, he is the archenemy with whom our tens of thousands Tian Di Hui *Xiongdi* cannot live under the same sky; we simply cannot spare him. *Zongduozhu* had received *Guoxing Ye*'s great kindness; hence he was unwilling to kill his offspring. Wei *Xiangzhu* has agreed to fulfill his last wish, hence you cannot do it. But subordinate has never seen *Guoxing Ye*; *Zongduozhu*'s last wish was not addressed to me either. Today subordinate wants to put this evil thief to the sword to avenge *Zongduozhu*."

With his right hand's open palm behind his ear Wei Xiaobao cocked his head sideways as if he was trying to hear, "What did you say?" he asked, "My ears are suddenly blocked, I can't hear anything. Feng *Dage*, whatever it is that you want to do, you might as well do it, there's no need to wait for my order. There's something wrong with my ears. Ay, must be that fellow Shi Lang's cannon has deafened me." It could not be any clearer than that; if Feng Jizhong wanted to kill Zheng Keshuang, he could make his move immediately, Wei Xiaobao simply

would not stop him.

Seeing the hesitation on Feng Jizhong's face, Wei Xiaobao added, "When Shifu was at the death's door, he only ordered me not to kill Zheng Keshuang; he did not say that I should protect him for the rest of my life. As long as I do not personally make the move, it's none of my business. There are millions and millions of people under the heavens, each one could kill him, who would be able to control it?"

Feng Jizhong tugged Wei Xiaobao's sleeve, "Wei *Xiangzhu* let's go over there to talk."

The two of them walked a dozen or so *zhang* away, Feng Jizhong halted his steps and said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, His Majesty has always been very fond of you; is that right?"

Wei Xiaobao was greatly taken aback. "That's right," he said, "So?"

Feng Jizhong said, "His Majesty wanted you to kill *Zongduozhu*, you are unwilling, hence you flee to this place; it goes to show that you take *yi qi* very seriously. The heroes and warriors of Jianghu, everybody is full of admiration."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and ruefully said, "But in the end Shifu is still dead."

"*Zongduozhu* was killed by that fellow Zheng Keshuang," Feng Jizhong said, "But the mission His Majesty assigned to Wei *Xiangzhu* can be considered accomplished …"

Wei Xiaobao was greatly astonished. "You … why did you say … say such thing?" he asked.

Feng Jizhong said, "In His Majesty's heart, there are three people he is most afraid of. If these three are not eliminated, His Majesty's dragon courtyard will never be stable. The first person is Wu Sangui; that goes without saying. The second person is precisely *Zongduozhu*; Tian Di Hui *Xiongdi* cover the whole world, the aspiration to fight the Qing and restore the Ming has never slacked off, giving His Majesty a lot of headache. Now that *Zongduozhu* is dead, one big load on His Majesty's mind has been removed …"

Listening to this point, suddenly Wei Xiaobao felt as if a bright light had just

flashed in his mind. “It’s you, it’s you. Turns out it is you!” he said.

Chapter 45

Remaining bamboo piece used as a pole, can be used to check out the net of hearts in a deep pool.

(Translated by Foxs)

A big sea-turtle appeared from the ocean, with its head raised high, its mouth uttered human speech, "The Dragon King of the Eastern Sea especially sent Xiao Jiang to come and respectfully invite Wei Jueye for a feast, with gambling after the feast. Sea Dragon King will use coral and crystal to lay a bet, but everything is interchangeable with banknote used

on land.”

Kangxi seemed to know everything about the inside information of Wei Xiaobao’s conduct and deeds in Tian Di Hui; he was even able to recite fluently the code word and secret exchange within the organization. Yet Kangxi was completely oblivious to the fact that Wei Xiaobao had stolen the Forty-two Chapter Sutra or that he was the White Dragon Envoy of the Divine Dragon Cult. Wei Xiaobao thought it over carefully, he was convinced that the spy must be of Tian Di Hui; not only that, this person must be very close to him. But all Green Wood Hall friends had red-bellied devotion and profound *yi qi*; it was unthinkable that one of them could become a spy and sell out their friends. For this reason, although all along there was a very heavy suspicion in his heart, he did not have the least bit of clue; he only thought that this matter was very strange and was very difficult to solve.

This moment, as Feng Jizhong said those things, Wei Xiaobao suddenly realized, “I really deserve to die,” he thought, “Why have I never thought about this person? That day the young Emperor wanted me to bombard the *Bojue* [Earl] Mansion; all Tian Di Hui people were there, only he alone was not there. It should have been very clear to me, those who were in the *Bojue* Mansion could not be the spy; otherwise, when the cannon were fired, who would be able to escape with their live? Only because he had had the information in advance that he went away first. Ay, I am indeed a silly big melon; if he did not say anything, I would still be kept inside a drum.”

Feng Jizhong was a quiet and uncommunicative person, he appeared to be an extremely honest man; although his martial art skill was high, he always carried the mannerism of a ‘stupid head wooden brain’ country bumpkin. Occasionally when Wei Xiaobao was thinking about who the spy might be, he was always thinking about a person with ‘quick mouth and teeth’, perhaps an unscrupulous businessman like Qian Laoben; or perhaps someone who was light on his feet, shrewd and street-smart Xu Tianchuan; or perhaps a thorough, competent and experienced Gao Yanchao; or perhaps a hot-tempered, wine lover Priest Xuanzhen. Even the experienced and knowledgeable, outspoken and straightforward, honest and frank Fan Gang, as well as the aging Li Lishi, whose health had been deteriorating for the past few years, and sharp and cynical Qi

Qingbiao, were all suspects in his mind. Only toward this did-not-look-like-a-spy Feng Jizhong he did not have the least bit of suspicion.

Suddenly he thought of something else, “That time Shuang’er was also not in the *Bojue* Mansion; could it be that she … she is also a spy, she is also going against me?” Thinking about this, he could not help but was heartbroken. But then he immediately understood, “Feng Jizhong must have intentionally taken Shuang’er out. He knew this girl is my lifeblood; if she was blasted to death, and later on this matter is exposed, I would have hated him for the rest of my life. He is no more than the spy sent by His Majesty to report some information in secret; as soon as Tian Di Hui is wiped out, His Majesty would not have any use of him. If in His Majesty’s presence I gave him some trouble, he would not be able to withstand it; hence he really did not dare to offend me.”

This thought was complicated and not easy to express succinctly, but in Wei Xiaobao’s mind it was a brain-wave that happened in a flash and he understood immediately. “Feng *Dage*,” he said, “Thank you for taking Shuang’er out of *Bojue* Mansion so that the cannon blast would not kill him.”

“Ah!” Feng Jizhong exclaimed; his countenance changed instantly, and he backed off two steps with his hand on the hilt of his saber. “You … you …” he said.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You and I have a tacit mutual understanding; His Majesty has already told me everything since long ago.”

Feng Jizhong knew the Emperor doted on him very much, he must be telling the truth. “Why didn’t you obey the imperial edict then?” he asked. As soon as he asked that question, it was the same as if he openly admitted everything.

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “Feng *Dage*, why are you asking a question that you already know the answer? This is called ‘loyalty cannot satisfy both sides’. The way His Majesty treated me is without question really overflowing with imperial kindness; but Shifu’s treatment toward me was not bad either. Right now Shifu is already dead, what other apprehensions do I have left? It’s just that I do not know whether His Majesty would pardon my capital offence.”

Feng Jizhong said, “Now is a good chance to atone for your offense by meritorious acts. Just now I said that His Majesty is determined to get rid of

three thorns in his side; other than Wu Sangui and Chen Jinnan, the third person is precisely Zheng Jing who occupies Taiwan illegally. We capture Zheng Jing's son, and take him to Beijing; who knows? Maybe we can force Zheng Jing to surrender. If His Majesty is happy, even if Wei *Dutong* committed gargantuan offense, His Majesty may pardon everything." Since he no longer concealed his real identity in front of Wei Xiaobao, the way he was addressing Wei Xiaobao had also changed; now he called him 'Wei *Dutong*'. Even toward the *Zongduozhu* he now referred him by his given name.

In his heart Wei Xiaobao was very angry, "This traitor does not have any *yi qi*, unexpectedly he calls my Shifu by name." But thinking about the possibility of reconciliation with Kangxi, he was quite happy. It did not matter to him whether he could be government official or not, but thinking about the time he could spend chatting with the young Emperor was enough to give him unending delight.

Feng Jizhong continued, "Wei *Dutong*, when we return to Beijing, we must keep everything in secret. If those Tian Di Hui people knew that Chen Jinnan is dead, most likely they would push you to become the *Zongduozhu*. Your *yi qi* is profound, you are willing to discard glory, splendor, wealth and rank; you did not want to be *Bojue*, you did not want to be *Dutong*, all because you wanted to save Tian Di Hui friends' lives. This very moment this fact has been spread throughout the world. Right now Jianghu is bubbling and gurgling, everybody is talking about this matter; which one does not admire Wei *Dutong*'s heroic spirit?"

Wei Xiaobao was very proud of himself; he asked, "Did everybody really say that? You are not lying to me?"

"No, no …" Feng Jizhong replied, "Lowly officer definitely does not dare to lie to *Dutong Daren*."

Wei Xiaobao mused, "Now he calls himself 'lowly officer'; I wonder what is his official rank?" Although curious, he did not dare to ask, because if he did, he would expose the horse's feet immediately; 'His Majesty has already told me everything since long ago' would then be a lie. But then he had a second thought, "There's no harm in asking which rank he had been promoted to." Thereupon he smiled and asked, "You have rendered such a great merit, His

Majesty must have promoted your rank; right now which official position are you holding?”

Feng Jizhong said, “By His Majesty’s grace, he bestowed lowly officer the position *Dusi*.” [都司 – Vice Brigade Commander.]

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Turns out ‘sesame seed mung bean’ lowly military official position; with *Laozi* the difference is damn seventeen twenty-eight levels.”

In the Qing Dynasty’s bureaucratic system, *Bojue* was beyond ‘pin’ rank high-level officers. As the ‘*Dutong*’ (commander) of the Valiant Cavalry Brigade, Wei Xiaobao was a ‘one-pin’ rank officer. Han people’s Green Standard Army[18] military official’s highest rank *Tidu* [local commander, provincial governor] was also ‘one-pin’. *Zongbing* [regional commander] was ‘regular two-pin’, below this were *Fujiang* [deputy general], *Canjiang* [Administrator], *Youji* [Brigade Commander], and then *Dusi* [Vice Brigade Commander]. But looking at Feng Jizhong’s appearance, although his face still showed an extremely honest expression, there was a very proud look in his eyes. Thereupon Wei Xiaobao raised his cupped fist and said with a laugh, “Congratulations, congratulations! This is His Majesty’s personal promotion, you are definitely standing out from the masses.”

Feng Jizhong returned the propriety and said, “Later on I will rely on *Daren* to cultivate me.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “We are on the same side, why did you say such thing? In term of working for His Majesty, your skill greatly surpasses mine.”

“How can lowly officer be compared to even a ten-thousandth of *Daren*?” Feng Jizhong replied, “Reporting to *Daren*, His Majesty has instructed lowly officer that if I see *Daren*, no matter what I must bring *Daren* back to Beijing, I must not disobey the imperial edict. Listening to His Majesty’s tone, lowly officer knew that His Majesty cares about *Daren* greatly; I can say that he miss you very much. This great merit of bringing Taiwan rebel’s son back to Beijing will make His Majesty happy; he will definitely raise *Daren*’s official position.”

“Um,” Wei Xiaobao said, “In that case you should be promoted to *Youji*.”

Feng Jizhong said, “Lowly officer only wish to do my best for His Majesty. When His Majesty sees *Daren*, he will be happy, as his servants we will also greatly rejoice. Whether we are promoted or not, it’s entirely by His Majesty’s grace.”

Wei Xiaobao mused, “I have always thought you were an honest person, turns out you really know how to talk in official jargon.”

Feng Jizhong continued, “If *Daren* assumed the *Zongduozhu* position of Tian Di Hui, you can gather the eighteen provinces Halls’ *Xiangzhu* and every place’s leaders together; we’ll say it’s the memorial ceremony for Chen Jinnan. At that time we’ll catch everything in one net, so that these conspirators against the law, the rebel thieves who commit heresy, will be unable to escape. This great merit will be ten times greater than when we bombarded the *Bojue* Mansion the other day. *Daren*, just think, if that day you obeyed the Emperor’s decree and killed Chen Jinnan, Li Lishi and those people, Tian Di Hui has rebel thieves in each province, one *Zongduozhu* is killed, another *Zongduozhu* will rise; we can’t wipe them out. Only by *Daren* yourself become the *Zongduozhu* will we be able to cut the weeds and eliminate the roots, and then the big worry weighing His Majesty’s heart will disappear forever.”

Hearing this, cold sweats began to form on Wei Xiaobao’s back; he thought, “This evil scheme is really difficult to deal with, I don’t think even you can come up with this plan, I am 90% sure that this is the young Emperor’s stratagem. If I return to Beijing, most likely the young Emperor will pardon my great offense, but he will definitely want me to eradicate Tian Di Hui. This is a clever way with which he is dealing with me, I won’t be able to escape from his clutch anymore.”

The more he thought about it, the more terrified he was; he thought, “The young Emperor wants me to surrender, he wants to beat my buttocks, those are not a big deal; but he wants me to be Tian Di Hui *Zongduozhu* and kill all the brothers’ heads; this I must not do, not in a million years. If I did it, all the heroes throughout the world will f*ck my eighteen generation ancestors; when I die, I won’t be able to see Shifu. All the big girls, little girls in here will also look down on me from the bottom of their hearts. Even if other people don’t care, even if Wei Xiaobao’s conscience is not much, in the end I still have a little bit.”

He cast a glance toward Feng Jizhong, while his mouth uttered, ‘Oh, oh,’

repeatedly; he thought, “If I don’t answer, he might become hostile to me immediately. If it comes to using force, a number of us might not necessarily lose to him, but this servant’s martial art skill is exceptionally strong, if one or two of my big girls, little girls are killed by him, it will be desperately serious. There’s no harm in me playing ‘Han Sha She Ying’ again.” He said hesitantly, “I will be very happy to go see His Majesty, it’s just that … it’s just that to kill that many Tian Di Hui brothers, it’s inevitably going to violate *yi qi* too much. We must discuss it carefully before we trespass our friends.”

“*Daren* is right,” Feng Jizhong said, “But there is a common saying, ‘Those who measure small things are not people of noble character; a great man has to be ruthless’ [orig. no poison, no great man].”

“Right, right!” Wei Xiaobao said, “A great man has to be ruthless … hey, aiyo, how can that fellow Zheng Keshuang escape?”

Feng Jizhong was startled; he turned around to look. Wei Xiaobao aimed his chest to him, he was about to reach down to activate the mechanism to release the poisonous needle when suddenly Shuang’er rushed over and called out, “*Xianggong*, what is it?”

Turned out all along she was watching these two men talking endlessly, and was very concerned; thereupon she slowly crept near. When she suddenly heard Wei Xiaobao cried out ‘aiyo’, immediately she leaped forward. If Wei Xiaobao released the ‘Han Sha She Ying’, Feng Jizhong would be hit for certain, but Shuang’er would also be affected. Although this moment his hand had already reached the mechanism, he did not dare to press the mechanism.

When Feng Jizhong turned his head around, he saw Zheng Keshuang and Feng Xifan were still standing on the beach, they had not moved at all. Immediately he knew something was not right; he ducked down and reached backward to grab Shuang’er and pulled her in front of his body as a shield. Based on Shuang’er’s martial art skill, Feng Jizhong should not necessarily be able to succeed in one grab; it’s just that he moved so suddenly, and Shuang’er did not guard against him at all, so that the main artery on her wrist was caught, her upper body went numb, she was unable to move a single step. In a deep voice Feng Jizhong said, “Wei *Daren*, please raise your hand.”

The golden opportunity to launch a sneak attack had gone, Shuang'er fell under the opponent's control, Wei Xiaobao was put under disadvantageous position; he giggled and said, "Feng *Dage*, what kind of joke are you playing?"

Feng Jizhong said, "Wei *Daren*'s no-shadow no-trace secret projectile is indeed too formidable, lowly officer is very afraid of it; please raise your hands, otherwise, lowly officer will have no choice but to offend you." While saying that, he pushed Shuang'er forward, while he himself hid behind her, so that Wei Xiaobao would not be able to release the secret projectile.

From the other side Su Quan, Fang Yi, Ah Ke, Zeng Rou and the others saw the unforeseen event, one after another they rushed over. Feng Jizhong thought, "This kid loves this girl the most, he won't dare to make his move; but those other women might not cherish her life as much, the one they cherish is this kid." With his left hand he pulled the steel saber hanging on his waist; stretching out his hand, he placed the edge of the blade on Wei Xiaobao's throat. "Nobody come near!" he shouted.

Seeing Wei Xiaobao in danger, Su Quan and the others came to a halt. They were all anxious, but were also baffled; this Feng Jizhong was obviously Wei Xiaobao's friend, they had just fought the enemy side-by-side, how could in an instant, as soon as they had disagreement, he immediately made his move? They supposed it must be because Wei Xiaobao wanted to release Zheng Keshuang, while Feng Jizhong wanted to kill him to avenge Chen Jinnan.

Wei Xiaobao tipped his head backward slightly, the tip of Feng Jizhong's saber followed forward. "Wei *Daren*," he shouted, "Please don't move. Steel saber don't have eyes; don't blame me if I offend you. Please raise your hands."

Wei Xiaobao had no choice, he slowly raised both hands while saying with a laugh, "Feng *Dage*, you want to rise to high-ranking official position, you want to get rich, you should be a bit more polite to me."

"While it's true that to be promoted and gain wealth is important, the first step is till protecting my own life," Feng Jizhong replied. Suddenly his body slightly leaned sideways, he rushed behind Wei Xiaobao, reached out to draw the dagger in Wei Xiaobao's boot, and pointed it to his back. "Wei *Daren*," he said, "Your dagger is very sharp, lowly officer has seen you using it several times."

Wei Xiaobao could only smile wryly. He felt slight pain on his back, and knew that the tip of the dagger had pierced his outer clothing. Although he was wearing his treasured protective vest, it would not stop the treasured dagger.

Feng Jizhong shouted, “Everybody turn around and throw your weapon down.” Seeing this turn of events, Su Quan and the others did not have any choice but to follow his order; they turned around and tossed their weapons to the ground.

Feng Jizhong saw there were still six Tian Di Hui brothers standing on the side; he shouted to them, “Come here, I have something to say.” The six people did not know what was going on, they came over.

Feng Jizhong raised his right elbow, ‘slam’ the point of his elbow struck the ‘da zhui’ [big spine] acupoint on Wei Xiaobao’s back; the steel saber in his left hand swept, accompanied by a series of ‘cha, cha, ah, ah, aiyo’ sound, all six Tian Di Hui brothers were hit by the saber. In an instant he had hacked these six people to their deaths, each saber chop hit a vital point on a man’s body. His saber was swift, his attacks were fierce; it was indeed rarely seen.

Hearing the miserable scream, Su Quan and the others turned around and saw the bodies of those six people scattered around on the ground; from the wound on either their heads, necks, chests, backs, waists, or flanks, blood was gushing out. None of the women did not cry out in fear, none of their faces did not change.

Turned out that as Feng Jizhong saw that his face was exposed, he immediately made his move; he was alone, hence he had to strike first by killing these six Tian Di Hui brothers; first, to intimidate with his power so that Wei Xiaobao and the women would not dare to rebel; second, so that he had six less enemies. This way, although his opponents were numerous, they were no more than one youngster and seven women.

He swung the saber in his left hand, turned around and pressed it against Wei Xiaobao’s neck. “Wei *Daren*,” he said, “Let’s go down to the boat.”

He was thinking to take only Wei Xiaobao and Zheng Keshuang, two people, under arrest and presented them to the Emperor, and thus rendering a great service. These seven women would be left on the island, so that they would not

add trouble to him on the boat. By being lenient and not kill these seven women, he was actually preparing a room for action for himself, to avoid incurring Wei Xiaobao's hatred too much. How the Emperor would deal with this youngster later would be beyond anybody's guess.

When the women saw Wei Xiaobao was under his control, they were all alarmed and frightened; nobody knew what to do. Princess Jianning cursed loudly, "What kind of 'thing' are you? Why do you dare to be this rude? Quickly throw your saber down!" [I know the better translation would be 'who do you think you are?' but I thought preserving the word 'thing' is more fun.]

"Humph," Feng Jizhong only snorted without paying her any attention. He had come with Wei Xiaobao escorting her to Yunnan to get married, so he knew she was the Princess, hence he did not dare to argue with his superior.

Seeing he did not take notice of her, the Princess was even more angry; in this earth, other than the Empress Dowager and the Emperor, plus Wei Xiaobao and Su Quan, four people, she had no regard of anybody else. Stooping down to pick a saber on the ground, she leaped forward to hack down on Feng Jizhong's head.

Feng Jizhong leaned sideways to evade. 'Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!' the Princess hacked three times in a row, Feng Jizhong dodged left and right. If it were another woman, he would have used his leg to kick her down. But the one holding the saber was the Emperor's imperial younger sister, the golden branch, jade leaves Princess. The desire in his heart was only to render merit and get promoted, to repay the kindness of the imperial family; how could he dare to offend the Princess? Thereupon right now he could only dodge.

"Stinky b@stard servant," the Princess cursed, "Stand still, don't move! I want to chop your head. Why do you keep your stinking head running around in circles so that I cannot chop it down? I will tell *Huangdi Gege*, to have him make mincemeat of you!"

Feng Jizhong was stunned; he thought that this woman was capable of doing what she was capable to say, she and the Emperor were brother and sister, while he himself was just a sesame seed mung bean little military official, how could he fight the Princess? But if he obeyed her command by keeping his stinking head steady and unmoving to let Her Highness the Princess' ten thousand gold body's

precious hand's saber chop it, he seemed to have difficulty in obeying it.

While her mouth was busy hurling curses, the Princess' saber hacked to the left and chopped to the right continuously. Feng Jizhong slightly sidestepped and leaned his body sideways, he lightly and easily evaded the attack; although the saber always flashed by a few *cun* away from his body, it was never able to chop him. The Princess became impatient; sweeping the saber horizontally, she hacked across his waist.

"Careful!" Feng Jizhong shouted, and leaped up. It was obvious that the Princess would not be able to stop the momentum of the saber, it would chop Wei Xiaobao's shoulder. While his body was still midair, Feng Jizhong's left foot kicked on Wei Xiaobao's body, throwing him down to the ground, while at the same time he borrowed the momentum to leap several more *zhang* away.

Shuang'er pounced forward, grabbed Wei Xiaobao, and flew several steps away. Feng Jizhong was greatly alarmed; he rushed over with a saber in his hand. Shuang'er's martial art was superb, but after all, her strength was still lacking. She was half a head shorter than Wei Xiaobao, carrying him in her arms like that she was only able to run several *zhang* when Feng Jizhong had already come near.

The acupoint on Wei Xiaobao's back was sealed, his four limbs did not obey his command; he could only said, "Put me down, let me release the secret projectile." But Feng Jizhong came really fast; Shuang'er wanted to let Wei Xiaobao down so that he could release the 'Han Sha She Ying' secret projectile, but it was already too late. In desperation she threw him away.

Feng Jizhong was greatly delighted; he rushed forward and stretched out his hand to catch Wei Xiaobao. Suddenly he heard a light 'click' behind him, like the sound of fire-knife struck against a flint stone, followed by a loud 'Bang!' His body was flying midair, suddenly it dropped down to the ground. He twisted several times, and then stopped moving altogether.

Wei Xiaobao's body landed on the sandy beach, he did not suffer any injury; he struggled for some time to crawl up, but was unable to do so. He saw a wisp of smoke in front of Shuang'er, her hand was holding a short gun; it was precisely the gift she received from Wu Liuqi the day they swore to become brother and

sister. It was a refined firearm made in the Luocha Country; it was formidable beyond compare. Although Feng Jizhong possessed an extraordinary martial art skill, his flesh and blood body was simply unable to withstand it.

Shuang'er herself was so scared that she could only stared blankly. When the gun went off, it shook her hand and arm that she felt numb and painful. Her hand trembled, the gun fell to the ground.

For fear that Feng Jizhong had not died yet, Wei Xiaobao scrambled several steps forward, press the mechanism on his waist, and a cluster of steel needles shot out; all of the needles hit Feng Jizhong's body. But Feng Jizhong did not budge at all; as soon as the gun went off, he was already dead.

The women cheered in chorus and swarmed forward. Seven women plus one Wei Xiaobao, it was literally 'seven openings eight mouths' [chaos (idiom)]; a hundred-percent 'you speak, I talk', everybody wanted to know what was going on. Wei Xiaobao briefly explained to them.

Shuang'er had been in contact with Feng Jizhong for quite a long time, on the journey he always displayed his honest, generous and simple character, treating her with respect and consideration. He was indeed a model of a man, who always did his duty without offending anybody; who would have thought that he was extremely shrewd? The more she thought about it, the more scared she was.

She turned around to pick up the gun from the ground. Suddenly it dawned on her the profound meaning behind Wu Liuqi's desire to swear brotherhood with her that day: this extraordinary Wulin talent was hoping that in the future Wei Xiaobao would take her as his wife, but she was only a servant girl, in term of status, they did not match. After becoming the sworn sister of Tian Di Hui's Red Banner *Xiangzhu*, she would be fit to marry the Tian Di Hui's Green Wood Hall *Xiangzhu*. Remembering her sworn brother's good intention, also that he died in injustice, she could not stop tears from flowing down her face.

Wei Xiaobao turned around and saw Zheng Keshuang and the other four people were walking toward the beach to board the skiff. He thought, "He has killed Shifu; if I let him leave safe and sound, it would be too easy for him." Therefore, with a dagger in his hand, he ran after them and called out, "Hold

on!”

Zheng Keshuang stopped and turned his head around; his countenance turned ash-grey. “Wei … Wei *Xiangzhu*, you promised to let me … let us go,” he said.

With a cold laugh Wei Xiaobao said, “I promised not to kill you. I have not promised not to chop your leg.”

Feng Xifan was furious; he was about to lash it out, but as soon as he raised his hand, his whole body felt limp and painful, he was unable to exert even half a part of strength.

By this time Zheng Keshuang was already scared out of his wits, his knees went weak, and he dropped on the ground. “Wei … Wei *Xiangzhu*,” he said, “If you chop my leg, I … I will definitely not able to live.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “Whether you live or not, it’s not my concern. You owe me one million *taels* of silver, you said you want to use Ah Ke as the guarantee. But she and I have bowed to the Heaven and the Earth, she is my lawfully-wedded wife; in her belly she has my child, and she voluntarily wanted to come with me. How can you use my wife as your guarantee? How could there be such logic in the world?”

By this time Su Quan, Fang Yi, Zeng Rou, the Princess, and the others were already standing by Wei Xiaobao’s side. “It’s preposterous!” they said in chorus.

Zheng Keshuang’s mind was already in chaos, but he had a nagging feeling that something was just not right. “What … what should I do then?” he asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “I’ll chop your arm and your thigh first as the guarantee. When you pay me the one million *taels* of silver in the future, I will return your cutoff arm and leg to you.”

Zheng Keshuang said, “Just now you said that I could sell Ah Ke off to you, the ten thousand *taels* … ten thousand *taels* of silver I owed you is already written off at one stroke.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head vehemently. “Can’t do,” he said, “Just now my head was muddled, and I fell into your big trick. Ah Ke is my wife, how can you sell my wife back to me? Alright, I will sell your mother back to you, she is worth one million *taels* of silver. I will also sell your father back to you, worth another

million *taels* of silver. And then your paternal granny, worth one million *taels* of silver, plus your maternal granny, also at one million *taels* of silver …"

Zheng Keshuang said, "My maternal grandmother has already passed away."

"I can still sell dead people," Wei Xiaobao said, "I will sell your maternal grandmother's corpse to you; dead people only worth 80%, make it eight hundred thousand *taels*. The coffin is included, there's no additional charge for it."

The more he talked the more preposterous he was; Zheng Keshuang thought that he even wanted to sell dead people. If he had to buy his great-grandfather, his great-great-grandfather, his great-grandmother, his great-great-grandmother, even if the dead people were valued at 80%, or even 70, or 60%, he would not be able to tolerate it; but he did not dare to say that he was unwilling to buy. Without any choice he could only plead, "I … I really cannot afford it."

"Alright," Wei Xiaobao said, "Since you can't afford it, I'll spare you. But those you already bought you cannot return. You owe me three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver. How are you going to pay?"

The Princess laughed and said, "That's right, three million eight hundred thousand *taels*. Quickly pay up."

Scowling miserably, Zheng Keshuang said, "I don't even have one thousand *taels* with me, where can I get three million eight hundred thousand *taels*?"

"Never mind!" Wei Xiaobao said, "You don't have any money, I'll let you return the merchandise. Quickly give me back your father, mother, (paternal) granny, and dead (maternal) granny. Not a hair less."

Zheng Keshuang knew that if this unreasonable argument continued, in the end there would still be no solution. He looked at Ah Ke, hoping that she would say something on his behalf, but against expectation she stood some distance away, turning her back on him, determined not to get involved. He was very anxious, looking at Wei Xiaobao, he seemed to be determined to chop his hand his foot; Zheng Keshuang did not have any choice but to repeatedly kowtow and said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, I … I killed Chen *Junshi*, it was really a crime deserving ten thousand deaths. I beseech your magnanimity to spare *Xiaoren*'s life. Even if I

owe you, Senior, three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver, I … I will definitely try to pay you back."

Seeing that he managed to torment Zheng Keshuang so that he was in such a sorry state, Wei Xiaobao's hatred was somewhat diminished; he said, "In that case you must write an I.O.U."

Zheng Keshuang was greatly delighted. "Yes, yes," he busily said. Turning to his bodyguard he said, "Get some pen and paper." But in that uninhabited island, where could they find any pen and paper?

The bodyguard was quite quick-witted; he tore a piece of his own long gown at once, and said, "There are many dead bodies over there, we can write using their blood as the ink." Finished speaking he wanted to drag Feng Jizhong's body immediately. Wei Xiaobao reached out with his left hand to grab Zheng Keshuang's right wrist. White light flashed, he sliced his dagger to cut one section of Zheng Keshuang's right hand index finger.

Zheng Keshuang screamed loudly. Wei Xiaobao said, "Use the blood from your finger to write."

Zheng Keshuang was in so much pain that his whole body trembled; momentarily he was at a loss of what to do. Wei Xiaobao said, "Just write slowly, if your blood dry out, I'll just cut your second finger."

"Yes, yes!" Zheng Keshuang busily said. How could he dare to write slowly? Clenching his teeth he wrote with his cut finger on the piece of cloth, "I owe three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver exactly. Signed, Zheng Keshuang." After writing these thirteen characters, the pain was unbearable that he nearly passed out.

With a cold laugh Wei Xiaobao said, "Shame on you as a magnificent Prince's Mansion's *Gongzi*, you did not work hard on your penmanship; the I.O.U you wrote, these several characters are trembling scrawls, all are faulty strokes, not a single one shows good penmanship." Taking the piece of cloth from Zheng Keshuang, he handed it over to Shuang'er, saying, "Take this, see if the amount is correct. This man is treacherous and sly, don't let him write several *taels* less."

Shuang'er said, "Three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver, no less." While saying that, she put the I.O.U. written in blood into her pocket.

Wei Xiaobao laughed aloud; he kicked Zheng Keshuang's chin and shouted, "Get your dead (maternal) granny out of here!"

Zheng Keshuang tumbled down and rolled away. His bodyguards rushed over to help him up and wrap his cut finger. Two bodyguards separately helped Zheng Keshuang and Feng Xifan to board the skiff, and rowed it out to the sea.

Wei Xiaobao's laughter continued; suddenly he remembered his Shifu's tragic death, and could not help bursting into tears.

After the skiff was rowed several dozen *zhang* away from the beach, panic started to settle into Zheng Keshuang's heart; he said, "Let us seize the big boat and get away with it, I don't think those goddamn male and female dogs will be able to pursue." But as they sailed toward the big boat, they found out that the boat was without the rudder and without any sailing equipment.

Feng Xifan hatefully said, "Those goddamn male and female dogs have already taken care of it."

They look at the vast and obscure ocean, at the billowing waves, while the skiff was without provision and water; how could they make a distant sea voyage? Zheng Keshuang said, "Let us beseech that little thief again, ask him to lend us their boat. At most I will have to write another three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver I.O.U."

Feng Xifan said, "It's their only boat, how can they lend it to us? I'd rather be buried inside the fish's belly that begging that little thief."

Hearing his tone was resolute and decisive, Zheng Keshuang did not dare to disobey; he had no choice but to heave a sigh and instructed his three bodyguards to row the skiff into the ocean.

Wei Xiaobao and the others watched as Zheng Keshuang and the others rowed their skiff toward the big boat, and after finding out that the big boat was not sailable, they finally rowed the skiff away; Wei Xiaobao and the others could not help finding it hilarious.

Su Quan saw Wei Xiaobao was crying and laughing, apparently he still could not get over his grief over his Shifu's death; she wanted to say something to please him, thereupon she said, "This Zheng Family's *Er Gongzi* is devious to the

extreme, obviously he wanted to steal our big boat. Xiaobao, in my opinion, he won't pay you the three million eight hundred thousand *taels* of silver he owes."

"I was thinking the same thing," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Su Quan laughed and said, "Whatever you do, usually you are very astute, but just now that fellow sold you your own wife for ten thousand *taels* to pay his debt. You did not think about it and simply agreed. You must love Ah Ke *Meizi* so much that you turned silly. At that time, if he wanted you to find ten thousand *taels* to pay him, I think you might readily agree."

Wei Xiaobao used his sleeve to wipe the tears from his eyes; and then he laughed and said, "I don't care if he said 'three sevens are twenty-one' [i.e. the facts of the matter], I would have agreed first and talked later; I will slowly settle the account with him."

Fang Yi asked, "And then what happened? Why did you suddenly remember that you have suffered a big loss?"

Wei Xiaobao scratched his head. "After we killed Feng Jizhong, I did not have anything to worry about, suddenly my brain became very clear," he said.

Actually, he had never had any suspicion against Feng Jizhong; it's just that in the deepest part of his heart he had a nagging feeling that he had a great root of trouble nearby, but as for what kind of trouble, he himself was unclear, only he felt fear without any reason. When Feng Jizhong was killed, immediately he felt as if a heavy load had just been released, and he felt entirely free from worry. He thought, "Perhaps early on I was already afraid of this thief, only I did not realize it."

They had just undergone a series of strange dangers, until now, where the powerful enemies were either dead or had run away. Now the island was back to peace and quiet. Everybody felt exhausted, both mentally and physically. Wei Xiaobao felt as if his legs weighed a thousand *catties*, he was unable to stand and hence he lay down on the sandy beach to rest. Su Quan rubbed his back to unseal the acupoint sealed by Feng Jizhong earlier.

The water reflected the setting sun, swayed by the waves the surface of the sea looked like tens of thousands golden snakes crawling and leaping one over another; the scenery was singularly beautiful beyond compare. One by one the

women sat down. Shortly afterwards, Wei Xiaobao was the first to snore, and not to long after that, one by one the women also fell asleep.

More than two hours later, Fang Yi was the first to wake up. She went to the thatched hut that was used by Wei Xiaobao as his command tent in the past to prepare some food, and then she called everybody else to eat. In the main hall they lighted two pine torches so that the room was bright. The eight of them sat in a circle. After dinner, Fang Yi and Shuang'er cleaned up the bowls and the chopsticks.

Wei Xiaobao swept his gaze on Su Quan, Fang Yi, the Princess, Zeng Rou, Mu Jianping, Shuang'er and Ah Ke, seven women's faces one by one. Some were tender and beautiful, some were gentle and soft, some were lively, some were extremely beautiful, each one had her own strength; he could not help but was greatly delighted. This moment he 'leaned on red and cuddled on green-jade', his heart felt so peaceful. Compared to the 'heaven and earth in confusion' time at the Lovely Spring Courtyard when he was under the large blanket with seven women, he felt a lot more safe, peaceful, and happy. He laughed and said, "That day I called this small island 'Tong Chi Island' [eat 'em all, gambling], turns out I already have foresight, knowing that seven *Jiejie Meimei* would be willing to be my wives; it was indeed a mystery of the underworld, the Will of Heaven, that even if we ran, we cannot escape. From this day onward, the eight of us will live on this Tong Chi Island, our long-life the same as the heaven's, enjoy immortal good fortune forever."

"Xiaobao," Su Quan said, "These eight characters [shou yu tian qi, xian fu yong xiang] are ominous, later on you must not say it."

Wei Xiaobao immediately realized his mistake, he knew she did not want to hear anything related to the Cult Leader Hong. "Right, right!" hastily he said, "I was talking rubbish."

Su Quan said, "When Shi Lang and Zheng Keshuang are home, most likely they will bring troops back here to take revenge, we must not live on this island for too long."

Everybody agreed. Fang Yi said, "Quan *Jiejie*, where do you think we should go?"

Su Quan cast a glance toward Wei Xiaobao and said with a laugh, “Why don’t we hear Zhi Zunbao’s [most honorable/senior treasure] idea?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You call me Zhi Zunbao?”

Su Quan replied with a laugh, “If not Zhi Zunbao, how can you sweep ‘em all [tong chi]?”

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter. “I do have a ‘bao’ [treasure] in my name,” he said, “Actually it was a tiny pair of treasure. Pair of fives or two wooden bench tiles, now those are the real Zhi Zunbao.”

Seeing the seven women’s eyes were fixed at him, he pondered a while and then said, “The Central Plains is definitely out of question. Shen Long Island is too close to this place, it’s not a good place either. We must go someplace comfortable but no people around.”

The problem was that desolate places with no people around are not comfortable, comfortable places surely have a lot of people in it. Besides, ‘comfort’ in Wei Xiaobao’s eyes means gambling, opera, storytelling, many different kinds of sights, singing, good dishes, light refreshments, and good-looking young women; not a single one of these was not ‘the more the merrier’. Other than good-looking young women, which, by the way, he already had quite a few by his side, those things could be found only if not in Beijing, then in Yangzhou or other first-class flourishing city in the world; exactly the places where it would be difficult for them to live in happiness.

As he was thinking about these romantic and bustling places, his filial piety heart was suddenly moved. “We gather together in here, it can be considered very exciting,” he said, “But I wonder how is my mother doing, all alone and helpless on her own.”

These women had never heard him mentioning his mother, they all thought that he had a filial heart, which was hard to come by. “Where is your mother right now?” they all asked. Some of them even thought, “Your mother is my mother-in-law, we ought to try to be together with her, to care for her, the Senior.”

Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, “My mother is at the Lovely Spring Courtyard in Yangzhou.”

When the women heard the Lovely Spring Courtyard in Yangzhou, five characters, other than the Princess, the other six immediately felt as if flying red clouds suddenly hit their faces. Some of them turned their heads away, some lowered their heads down.

“Ah, Lovely Spring Courtyard in Yangzhou,” the Princess said, “You have mentioned it before, that is the most fun place in the world; you promised to take me there to play.”

Fang Yi smiled and said, “He was swindling you, don’t believe him. That is the most indecent place on earth.”

“Why is it indecent?” the Princess asked, “Have you played there? Why all of you have such a strange expression on your faces?”

Fang Yi stifled her laugh and was unable to reply. The Princess wrapped her arm around Mu Jianping’s shoulder. “Good *Meizi*,” she said, “Tell me, what is it?”

Mu Jianping blushed deep red; she said, “That is … that is a brothel.”

The Princess still did not understand, “What is his Mama doing in a brothel?” she asked, “I heard that is the place where men come to have fun.”

Fang Yi laughed and said, “He always loves to talk rubbish, if you believe just half a sentence of what he said, it will be enough to give you headache.”

That day in the Lovely Spring Courtyard, Wei Xiaobao slept under the same blanket with seven women; other than the Princess and the old wh0re Mao Dongzhu, the remaining six women at this moment were sitting in front of him. In term of viciousness and roughness, the Princess was not inferior to Mao Dongzhu, but she was not as sinister, ruthless and dangerous as her mother, plus she was a lot younger and prettier than her mother. Wei Xiaobao was secretly congratulating himself, this time the switch was perfectly reasonable; if right now the one accompanied him was not the Princess but her mother, he would not have any idea of what to do. Perhaps after getting hold of her, he would become like the Old Emperor, he would want to leave home to become a monk on Mount Wutai. But if he absolutely must become a monk, he surely would want to have these seven wives coming with him.

Looking at the blushing six women, he presumed they were thinking of the situation that night. He mused, “That night in the dark, I was just fooling around randomly, I don’t know which one I slept with. Ah Ke and Quan *Jiejie* have my child inside their tummies; that’s two. I remember one more, but I don’t know which one. I have to find out slowly.” Smiling happily he said, “Even if we have to live on this Tong Chi Island forever, we won’t be lonely. Quan *Jiejie*, Princess, Ah Ke, the three of you have my child in your tummy; I wonder if someone else also has my child inside your tummy.”

As soon as they heard that, Fang Yi and the others, four women’s faces turned even redder. Mu Jianping hastily said, “I don’t have it, I don’t have it.”

Seeing Wei Xiaobao was looking at her, Zeng Rou shot him a malicious look, “Not me!”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Good Shuang’er, it must be that we are highly successful.”

Shuang’er sprang up and hid in the corner of the room. “No, no!” she said.

Wei Xiaobao turned to Fang Yi, “Yi *Jiejie*,” he said, “What about you? When you were at the Lovely Spring Courtyard, you stuffed a pillow on your belly, pretending to be pregnant; you must have foresight.”

“Pft!” Fang Yi stifled her laugh, but then could not help laughing. “Pei!” she spat, “Dead eunuch, you and I have not … how can I have …”

“Oh yeah,” Mu Jianping said, “Shijie, Zeng *Jiejie*, Shuang’er *Meizi* and me, four people have not bowed to the Heaven and the Earth with you to get married, how can we have a baby? Xiaobao, you deserve to die; you bowed to the Heaven and the Earth with Quan *Jiejie*, the Princess and Ah Ke *Jiejie*, yet you did not tell me, you did not invite me to drink the wedding wine.” In her mind, it was the tying of the knot in the ritual of bowing to the Heaven and the Earth that enable people to have children.

Listening to her naiveté, everybody laughed. While still laughing, Fang Yi wrapped her arm around her waist and said, “*Xiao Shimei*, in that case, tonight you and he should bow to the Heaven and the Earth to be husband and wife.”

“No way,” Mu Jianping replied, “There is no marriage sedan on this barren island. I have seen that the brides are always wearing crimson wedding gown,

and phoenix crown with red clouds cape; we don't have any of those."

Su Quan laughed and said, "It won't be a big deal if you are willing to put up with it a bit. We can pick some flowers and braid it into a flower garland, and consider it phoenix crown."

Hearing the women chatting and joking, Wei Xiaobao was inwardly very anxious. "Who was the other one?" he mused, "Could it be Ah Qi? I remember carrying her in and out, after that I sat her on a chair, I did not bring her into the bed. But that night there were too many girls there, perhaps I muddleheadedly did bring her back into the bed. If she has my child inside her belly, this little fellow will be Mongolian 'zheng ge er hao' [see Chapter 39] prince in the future. Aiyo, not good! Could it be the old wh0re? If it was her, my child might be killed by Gui Xinshu and the others as well."

He heard Mu Jianping said, "If we have to bow to the Heaven and the Earth in here, Fang Shijie must bow first."

"No," Fang Yi said, "You are the *Junzhu Niangniang* [lady princess, see also Chapter 10], it's only natural that you bow first."

Mu Jianping said, "We are the people of a perished nation, why do you even mention Junzhu or not Junzhu?"

Fang Yi smiled and said, "In that case, Shuang'er *Meizi* should bow to the Heaven and the Earth with him first; you have been with him the longest, you have been through life and death together, a friend in times of tribulations, you stand out from the masses."

Shuang'er blushed. "If you say more, I am going to leave," she said, while walking toward the door; but Fang Yi laughed and hugged her.

Su Quan turned to Wei Xiaobao and said with a laugh, "Xiaobao, you decide."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Bowing to the Heaven and the Earth can be discussed slowly. Tomorrow we must bury Shifu first."

When the women heard that, they were immediately filled with respect; nobody expected this man's reverence toward his master was this heavy that he could utter such righteous phrases. Who would have thought that what he said next exposed his true nature: "The seven of you are all my dear good wives,

there is no distinction between early or late, older or younger. Later on, every night all of you will throw dice to decide winning or losing. Whoever wins, that one will accompany me." While saying that, he took the two dice from his pocket, blew it, and rolled it on the table.

"Pei!" the Princess spat, "Do you think you are that sweet-smelling? Whoever loses is the one who should accompany you."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Right, right! Just like playing finger-guessing game, whoever loses must drink a cup of wine as a forfeit. Alright, who will roll first?"

That night in the thatched hut on the inhabited island thoughts of love and warmth abound; there is no need to describe in details the throwing of dice, who won or who lost. From that day on, the throwing of dice among the women of the Wei family became usual practice. Originally Wei Xiaobao loved to throw dice with people to gamble, using gold, silver, money and valuables as the stake. The excitement of winning or losing always brought him abundant delight, but this time he decided on a method that from now on the women would have him as the stake, he would be compelled to stay out of the game. Although there was tenderness and happiness in his heart, the excitement of gambling was gone. Thus it was clear that 'the flowers do not always bloom, the moon has its full and crescent phases, the affairs of the world cannot be expected to always follow the people's expectation'.

The next day the eight of them slept until the sun was on top of the three poles before they got up. Wei Xiaobao led the seven women to bury Chen Jinnan's remains. Seeing the yellow sandy soil covering his Shifu's body, Wei Xiaobao could not help bursting in tears again. The women kneeled down together and did obeisance in front of the grave.

The Princess really did not want to do it, she thought I am the Princess of the magnificent Great Qing, how can I kowtow to you, a rebel thief? But it was clear to her that although she was a 'golden branch, jade leaves', perhaps in Wei Xiaobao's eyes her rank was the lowest instead; in term of closeness, she was not as devoted as Shuang'er, in term of beauty she was not as pretty as Ah Ke, in term of martial art she could not beat Su Quan, in term of capability she was not as smart Fang Yi, in term of naivete and purity she was not as innocent as Mu

Jianping, in term of gentleness she was not as refined as Zeng Rou. One day her shortcomings would catch up, she was nothing more than a harsh and unreasonable, rough and mean woman. If she did not pay her respect, perhaps henceforth Wei Xiaobao would view her in a new light, and might cheat on the dice; every night when they tossed the dice, he would cause her to achieve great victory. Therefore, feeling aggrieved as she was, she also kneeled down, while saying in her heart, “Rebel thief, oh rebel thief, I, Her Highness the Princess, bow to you, which you have never had the good fortune of receiving, until you go to the underworld, I am afraid you will suffer for your actions.”

When they finished paying their respect, they all stood up and turned around. “Aiyo!” Fang Yi suddenly cried out, “Where’s the boat? Where did it go?”

Hearing her terrified cry, everybody turned their eyes toward the sea, and saw that the boat moored on the beach had vanished without a trace; none was not shocked. They looked to the distant and only saw the boundless bluish green sea all the way to the horizon where it met the blue sky, with several dozen white birds swooping up and down on the surface of the water. Su Quan ran up the overhanging cliff to survey the island all around, north, south, east and west, she did not see even the shadow of the boat. Fang Yi rushed to the cave to look at the rudder, sail, and other sailing gear, as expected, those things had gone missing.

They all got back together and looked at each other in dismay; no one could stop fear from creeping into their hearts. Last night the eight of them were having too much fun and did not sleep until very late at night; they completely forgot to set up night guard duty, unexpectedly the boatmen stole the sailing gears and took the boat away. From now on they were trapped on an isolated island and would not be able to escape anymore. Wei Xiaobao thought about the possibility of Shi Lang and Zheng Keshuang returning with troops to take revenge, how could the eight of them fight the enemy? Even if Su Quan, the Princess and Ah Ke gave birth to three children without delay, their number would be no more than eleven.

Su Quan comforted the rest, “Things have come to this, worrying is useless. Let us slowly think of a plan.”

Back to the thatched hut, everybody hurled curses toward the boatmen with

different mouths, same voice; but after swearing and cursing for a couple of hours, they could not come up with any fresh cursing words anymore. Su Quan said to Wei Xiaobao, “Right now we must guard against the Qing troops coming here in large number. Xiaobao, what do you think?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “If the Qing troops are coming, their number will not be a few for sure, we won’t be able to fight them. All we can do is hide, hoping that if they can’t find us in a short while, they would think that we have already sailed away.”

Su Quan nodded. “That’s true,” she said, “The Qing Troops will never have guessed that our boat was stolen.”

Wei Xiaobao was delighted. “If I were Shi Lang,” he said, “I won’t come again. He would presume that without a doubt we would immediately anoint oil on the soles of our feet; it would be foolish for us to stay here. Why would we want to wait for him to come back and arrest us?”

The Princess said, “If he reported to *Huangdi Gege*, *Huangdi Gege* might send people to look for us. Even if we already left, they would search carefully for clues to see where we went.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “Shi Lang will not report to the Emperor,” he said.

With eyes open wide the Princess asked, “Why not?”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “If he did, naturally His Majesty would ask why he did not arrest and take us away. And then he would be forced to admit that he had been defeated in battle; wouldn’t he be inviting trouble for himself then?”

Su Quan laughed and said, “Very true, very true. Xiaobao’s skill as government official is superior. Conceal from superior do not conceal from subordinate; that is government official’s most important trick.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “If Quan *Jiejie* became government official, I guarantee you will be promoted to a high-ranking position and gain great wealth.”

Su Quan smiled. She thought, “The trick that those people in the Shen Long Jiao used in doing their job, isn’t that more or less the same as the one used by the government official?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “As soon as Shi Lang speaks up, His Majesty will blame him as useless; that’s still all right, but His Majesty will definitely send him up with the troops to arrest us. Shi Lang thought we have already run away, where would he find us? Won’t that mean he is just inviting trouble for himself? It would be better for him to just shut up and gain wealth.” When the women heard that, they agreed that it made a lot of sense, their anxiety diminished a bit.

“What about that kid Zheng Keshuang?” the Princess asked, “From the tone of his voice, don’t you think he is unwilling to swallow his defeat just like that?” While saying that, she cast a quick glance toward Ah Ke. Everybody understood her meaning; she was saying, “A woman as delicate as a flower, as refined as a precious jade like Ah Ke, how could he give her up and not bring troops to seize her back?”

Ah Ke’s face blushed deep red; she lowered her head and said, “If he comes back, I … I will kill myself; I will definitely not go with him.” Her voice was filled with determination.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he thought that Ah Ke had always been heartless toward him, it was he who resorted to all kinds of scheme, stealing, snatching and swindling just to get her. This time as he heard her, he was happier than if obtained ten big boats at once. Unable to restrain his joy, he wrapped his arms around her, and ‘smack!’ he landed a kiss on her face. “Good Ah Ke,” he said, “He won’t dare to come back. He still owes me three million eight hundred thousand *taels*. Even if he has gargantuan guts, will he dare to meet his creditor?”

“Aiyo, how corny!” the Princess said, “He will bring the troops to catch you, snatch the I.O.U. from you, and seize Ah Ke away. And then he will sell your dad, mama, granny [nainai - paternal], and granny [waipo - maternal] to you; altogether seven million six hundred *taels* of silver. He will also cut your finger and tell you to write an I.O.U. saying that you owe him money.”

The more Wei Xiaobao listened to her, the more annoyed he got. If he was able to deal with it, he would not be so angry, but if Zheng Keshuang really did that, dealing with him in the same muddled manner, selling him back his own dad, mama, (paternal) granny, and (maternal) granny, mama was not a problem, but

he never knew who his dad was. And if he did not know his dad, naturally he would not know his (paternal) granny. If Zheng Keshuang sold him these two people, who he himself did not even know, hence the starting price was raised by a hundred percent, how could he afford to pay? In rage, he spoke harshly, “Shut up! If that kid Zheng Keshuang comes with the troops, I won’t sell anybody else, except the most valuable person in the world, the Emperor’s imperial sister to him. The child she is carrying in her belly, I will price at ten million *taels*; so he will have to pay me two million four hundred thousand *taels*! Then the deal is done.”

“Wah!” the Princess cried, she covered her face and ran away. Mu Jianping quickly ran after her and consoled her, she told her that Wei Xiaobao would never do such thing, that he was just trying to scare her, that no need for her to feel sad.

Even after lashing out his anger like that, Wei Xiaobao still felt that he had his hands bound and he was unable to do anything about it. In the end everybody listened to Su Quan’s direction. They found a large cave in the dense forest on the island, they swept and fixed it up as a place where they could take shelter and live their daily life. From that day onward, they never set foot inside the thatched hut anymore, hoping that if Shi Lang and Zheng Keshuang really came back, they would see that there was no human footprint on the island, and think that they had gone long ago; hence they would not search carefully.

At first everybody was still scared and was on edge; day and night they took turn to watch the sea. After several months, not only they did not see a single Qing navy or Taiwan battleship, they did not even see a single fishing boat; everybody started to relax, thinking that Shi Lang did not dare to be meddlesome, and since Zheng Keshuang was riding a skiff, he must have been sunk by the stormy sea.

On the island the eight of them spent their days fishing, hunting, shooting birds and picking fruits in peace and quiet. Fortunately the island did not lack birds and beasts, the sea was abound with fish and shrimp. Plus all eight of them knew martial art, hence they were able to fish and hunt quite easily; therefore, they never lacked any food.

Autumn passed, winter came, the weather was growing colder as the days went by. Su Quan, the Princess and Ah Ke, three women’s bellies were also

getting bigger as the days went by. Fang Yi and Shuang'er were busy skinning animals and sewing the hides to make winter clothes, they had also prepared enough infant clothing for the three babies.

Another half a month passed, suddenly a big snow came, in one day and one night, the entire island was covered in pure white snow. The eight of them were prepared; they had abundant supply of cured fish, cured meat, firewood and dried fruit in the cave. Day in and day out they chatted with each other, each time the topic always drifted back to the three babies about to be born.

One night the snow stopped falling, the north wind blew very strong, and cold wind continuously crept into the cave via the wooden plank door. Shuang'er added dry firewood to the bonfire. Wei Xiaobao took out the dice and let the women roll. After five women rolled the dice, Mu Jianping threw a three-dot, the lowest combination; it looked like tonight her lost was decided. Zeng Rou laughed and said, "Jianping *Meizi* lost; I don't need to throw."

Mu Jianping laughed and said, "Quickly throw, quickly throw! Maybe you'll throw a two-dot."

Zeng Rou picked the dice and held them in her hand; imitating Wei Xiaobao, she gently blew the two dice in her palm. She was just about to throw when a burst of north wind blew; in the midst of the wind they faintly heard something that sounded like human voice. Everybody's countenance changed. Actually, Su Quan was already asleep, but suddenly she sat up. Eight people were 'you look at me, I look at you', in that instant everybody's face was drained of any blood. Mu Jianping cried out softly and buried her head into Fang Yi's bosom.

A moment later, the wind carried a loud shout; this time they could hear it clearly, the cry was, "Xiao Guizi, Xiao Guizi, where are you? Xiao Xuanzi is thinking about you!"

Wei Xiaobao sprang up. "Xiao … Xiao Xuanzi is coming to look for me," he said in a trembling voice.

"Who is Xiao Xuanzi?" the Princess asked.

"He is … he is …" Wei Xiaobao replied. Only he alone knew that 'Xiao Xuanzi', three characters, was Kangxi, he had never told anybody else, naturally Kangxi himself would not let anybody know; yet suddenly people were shouting this

name, plus the voice was this loud and clear? His whole body trembled, he felt this matter was very strange. Kangxi must be dead, his ghost was thinking of him, and had come to Tong Chi Island to find him. For a moment he could not stop his eyes from brimming with tears of excitement; from he cave he rushed out and called, “Xiao Xuanzi, Xiao Xuanzi, are you looking for me? Xiao Guizi is here!”

He heard the voice called again, “Xiao Guizi, Xiao Guizi, where are you? Xiao Xuanzi is thinking about you!” The voice was very loud, it did not sound like it came from one person’s mouth, but it sounded like several thousand or several hundred people were shouting together. But several thousand or several hundred people shouting together can’t possibly shout this clearly; however, if it was one person shouting, no matter how outstanding his internal energy was, it would not sound like shaking thunder. Hence, it must be Kangxi’s ghost.

Wei Xiaobao’s heart was extremely grieved, tears flooding out from his eyes as he thought that Xiao Xuanzi’s *yi qi* to me was indeed very profound; after he is dead, his ghost is still coming to look for me. Usually he was extremely scared of ghosts, but this moment he simply must meet Xiao Xuanzi’s ghost no matter what. Thereupon he urged his feet to run faster, straight toward the voice, while calling out, “Xiao Xuanzi, don’t go, Xiao Guizi is here!”

The ground was covered with ice and snow, it was extremely slippery, Wei Xiaobao fell tumbling down, twice, but each time he simply crawled back up and ran again. Rounding a hillside, he saw the beach was full of specks of flame clustered together like a vast sky full of stars. Several hundred people with lanterns and torches in their hands were standing in a neat and tidy formation. Wei Xiaobao was shocked. “Aiyo!” he cried out, turned around and ran away.

From the crowd a man rushed out and called, “Wei *Dutong*, finally we found you!”

Wei Xiaobao only took two steps before realizing the situation; his track had been discovered. The opposite side had several hundred people, if they searched this tiny Tong Chi island, he would not be able to hide at all. Besides, he thought the voice sounded familiar. Therefore, he halted, braced himself, and slowly turned around.

The man called, “Wei *Dutong*, we all miss you very much. Thank the Heaven and thank the Earth, finally we find you.” The voice was brimming with joy and full of emotion. The man lifted up high the torch in his hand and rushed over in quick steps. When he got near, Wei Xiaobao recognized the man was Wang Jinbao.

To come across an old friend, Wei Xiaobao was also very happy. He remembered that day in Beijing outskirts under the imperial order Wang Jinbao was sent to arrest him, but he deliberately pretended not to see him, in complete disregard of his future career, even his own life, he let Wei Xiaobao go, indeed his *yi qi* was profound. He brought the troops today, although it was dangerous, there was still room for negotation. Thereupon Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “Wang *San Ge*, your plan is marvelous, you can trick me to come out.”

Wang Jinbao threw his torch to the ground; bowing, he said, “Subordinate did not dare to play a trick, I really did not know *Dutong* is on the island.”

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “Then it must be His Majesty’s imperial instruction from his brocade sack of miracle plans, isn’t it?”

Wang Jinbao said, “The day His Majesty found out that *Dutong* had fled overseas, he sent subordinate with three sea-going ships bearing imperial order to search each and every small island for you. Each time we went ashore, we shouted like that in accordance with His Majesty’s imperial edict.”

By this time Shuang’er, Su Quan and the others arrived; they stood behind Wei Xiaobao. A moment later, Fang Yi, the Princess and Ah Ke, three women also arrived. Wei Xiaobao turned toward the Princess and said, “Your *Huangdi Gege*’s ability is really good, finally they found us.”

Wang Jinbao recognized the Princess; he kneeled down to pay his respect. The Princess asked, “Did His Majesty send you to arrest and take us back to Beijing?”

“No, he did not,” Wang Jinbao hastily replied, “His Majesty only sent *Xiao Jiang* [little/lowly general] to sea to look for Wei *Dutong*, we are completely unaware that Your Highness the Princess is also here.” The Princess lowered her head to look at her bulging belly; her face blushed.

Wang Jinbao turned to Wei Xiaobao, “Subordinate has left to sea for more than four months ago, and has come ashore, shouted and searched more than

eighty small islands. Tonight we finally meet *Dutong*, I am really very happy."

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, "I am a big criminal, an offender to the throne, long ago I am not your superior anymore, let us get away from calling each other '*Dutong*' and 'subordinate'."

Wang Jinbao said, "His Majesty's idea, after *Dutong* hear the imperial edict, naturally you will understand." Turning around, he beckoned to someone in the crowd. "Wen *Gonggong* [see Chapter 3]," he called, "Please come here."

Someone stepped out from among the crowd, it was actually Wei Xiaobao's old acquaintance, the eunuch of the Upper Study Room, Wen Youfang. He walked over and said in a loud and clear voice, "Hear the imperial edict."

Wen Youfang was a gambling friend Wei Xiaobao met when he first entered the Palace; he could not cheat in playing dice, a 'cattle', who owed Wei Xiaobao countless amount of money. After Wei Xiaobao rose straight up in a clear sky [i.e. rapid promotion], each time they met, eighty times out of a hundred Wei Xiaobao always give him some tips.

As soon as Wei Xiaobao heard the three-character 'hear the imperial edict' [you sheng zhi], he kneeled down. Wen Youfang said, "This is a secret edict, other people must withdraw."

As soon as Wang Jinbao heard that, he withdrew far away. Su Quan and the others also withdrew. But the Princess asked, "*Huangdi Gege*'s imperial edict, even I cannot hear it?"

Wen Youfang replied, "His Majesty's order: this is a secret imperial edict, only Wei Xiaobao, one person may know; if it leaks even for a character or half a sentence, your servant will be executed along with my whole family unto the third generation."

"Humph," the Princess snorted, "How fierce! You'd better be executed along with your whole family unto the third generation then." But thinking that if she stayed nearby, he would not be willing to read the imperial decree anyway, hence without any choice she also withdrew.

From his pocket Wen Youfang took out two yellow envelopes. Wei Xiaobao kneeled down immediately. "Servant Wei Xiaobao receives the imperial decree,"

he said.

Wen Youfang said, “His Majesty’s order: this time you are to receive the imperial decree by standing up, you are not allowed to kneel down and kowtow, and you are not allowed to call yourself a servant.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly surprised, “Where’s the logic in that?” he said.

Wen Youfang said, “His Majesty ordered me just like that, and now I am telling you just like that, whether there is a logic or not, you can ask His Majesty yourself when you see him.”

Wei Xiaobao had no choice but to respond in loud and clear voice, “Yes, thank you Your Majesty for your grace.” And then he stood up.

Wen Youfang handed one yellow envelope to him and said, “You may open and look at it.”

Wei Xiaobao received with both hands, tear the envelope, and took out a sheet of yellow paper. Wen Youfang raised the lantern in his left hand to illuminate the yellow paper. Wei Xiaobao saw six pictures on that piece of paper. The first picture depicted two boys rolling and wrestling on the floor, it was the scene of he and Kangxi in the past wrestling and having martial art competition. The second picture depicted a bunch of boys catching Oboi; Oboi pounced on Kangxi, Wei Xiaobao stabbed Oboi with a dagger. The third picture depicted a little monk carrying an old monk on his back, running away like flying, with six or seven lama holding sabers in their hands pursuing from behind; it was the scene of him rescuing the old Emperor at Qingliang Temple. The fourth picture depicted a nun wearing white clothes pouncing down from high in the air, with sword straight down to assassinate Kangxi, Wei Xiaobao blocked in front of his body, taking the sword on his behalf. The fifth picture depicted Wei Xiaobao at the Palace of Compassionate and Peaceful, with a foot on the fake Empress Dowager lying on the ground, while helping the real Empress Dowager get off the bed. The sixth picture depicted Wei Xiaobao with a Luocha woman, a Mongolian Prince, and and old lama, together they grabbed the braid of an old general; looking at the old general’s attire, he must be Ping Xi Qin Wang. It must be about Wei Xiaobao using a ruse to break up Wu Sangui’s three-way coalition forces.

Kangxi was very adept at painting, the six pictures were very elegant and vivid;

only because he had never seen Wu Sangui, Prince Galdan, Sangjie Lama, and Princess Sophia, four people, the picture did not look like their actual appearance, but the rest of the characters in his drawing were very much like the originals, particularly Wei Xiaobao's mischievous and naughty expression, it was remarkably true to life.

The six pictures did not have a single character on them, but naturally Wei Xiaobao understood that those are six of his great merits. Playing and fooling around and having martial art competition actually could not be considered any meritorious service, nevertheless Kangxi always remembered it in his heart. As for bombarding the Divine Dragon Island, capturing the fake Empress Dowager, arresting Wu Yingxiong and the other meritorious services, they were not worth mentioning in comparison to these six.

Wei Xiaobao looked at the pictures in a daze; he stared blankly with tears streaming down his face. He mused, "He spent this much effort in drawing these six pictures, remembering my meritorious services, that means he does not blame me anymore."

Wen Youfang waited for a moment before asking, "Have you looked at it clearly?"

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Wen Youfang opened the second yellow envelope and said, "I'll read His Majesty's secret imperial decree." Taking out a sheet of paper, he read, "Xiao Guizi, damn it, where have you gone? I miss you very much; you, this stinky fellow are heartless and inconsiderate, have you forgotten *laozi*?"

Wei Xiaobao mumbled in reply, "I have not, I really have not."

Ever since there were 'three sovereigns and five emperors' in China, the Emperor using the word 'damn it', three characters [ta ma de], or the Emperor calls himself '*laozi*', apparently Kangxi's secret imperial edict was not only unprecedented, it was also never to be repeated in the future.

Wen Youfang paused for a moment, and then continue reading, "You did not obey my order, you were unwilling to kill your Shifu; moreover, you kidnapped Princess Jianning and ran away. Damn it, aren't you taking advantage of me to become your *dajiuzi* [wife's older brother]? But your meritorious services are so

great, plus you are very loyal to me, whatever crime you have committed, I forgive them all. I am going to get married, if you don't come to drink the celebratory wine, *laozi* will really not be happy. Let me tell you, you surrender obediently, and come to Beijing immediately, I have already prepared another *Bojue* [Earl] Mansion for you, a lot bigger than the previous one …"

Wei Xiaobao was bursting with joy, "Alright, alright!" he said in a loud voice, "I am coming immediately to drink the celebratory wine."

Wen Youfang continued reading, "Let us get some things straight first, from this day onward, if you are not being obedient, I will definitely chop your head, don't ever say that I swindle you to come to Beijing to kill you. Your Shifu surnamed Chen is already dead, Tian Di Hui has nothing to do with you anymore. You gain a bit more power, and destroy Tian Di Hui completely. I will also send you to fight Wu Sangui. I will give you Princess Jianning as your wife. In the future I will bestow you the title *Gong* [Duke] or *Wang* [King], you will be promoted and gain wealth, you will have a lot of fun. Xiao Xuanzi is your good friend, also your Shifu, raw bird fish soup [see Chapter 14], the words that I said, dead horses cannot chase it. You must come back for me as soon as possible!"

Finished reading the secret imperial decree, Wen Youfang asked, "Have you understood everything?"

"Yes," Wei Xiaobao replied, "I have understood everything."

Wen Youfang put the secret imperial decree into the lantern, lighted it with the candleflame; when he pulled it out, it was burning into ashes.

Wei Xiaobao watched as the secret imperial decree caught fire and turned into flame, and then slowly turned into ashes; myriads of thoughts surging in his mind as he squatted and fiddled with the ashes a little bit.

With smiles all over his face Wen Youfang paid his respect and said with a laugh, "Wei *Daren*, His Majesty doted on you so much, nothing could be better. Henceforth *Xiaode* [little/lowly one] will completely rely on you for my promotion."

Wei Xiaobao sadly shook his head; he pondered, "He wanted me to wipe out Tian Di Hui. This matter will let down my friends too much. If I do such things, won't I be the same as Wu Sangui, Feng Jizhong, that kind of people, become big

traitor (to China), a turtle b@stard? Xiao Xuanzi's bowl of rice is really not easy to eat. This time he spared me and did not kill me, but he said it clearly, next time he won't spare me anymore. If I don't go back, I wonder how he is going to deal with me?" He asked, "If I don't go back to Beijing, what will His Majesty do? Did he tell you to arrest me and bring me back? Or did he tell you to kill me?"

Wen Youfang's face showed complete astonishment. "Wei *Daren* will not accept the imperial order?" he asked, "This … how can there be such thing? This … isn't that … ay, disobedient against the imperial decree? That kind of thing must not be even mentioned."

"Tell me the truth," Wei Xiaobao said, "If I disobey the imperial decree, then what happens?"

Wen Youfang scratched his head and said, "His Majesty only ordered *Xiaode* to do two things: the first is to deliver a secret imperial decree to Wei *Daren*, the other one is that after Wei *Daren* looked at the first imperial decree, to open the second secret imperial decree and to read it out loud. As for the contents of the secret imperial decree, *Xiaode* did not understand the least bit. About other things, naturally I do not know even more."

Wei Xiaobao nodded his head; walking over to Wang Jinbao, he said, "Wang *San Ge*, in His Majesty's secret imperial decree, he wants me to return to Beijing and do something for him. But … but you see, the Princess' belly is getting very big, I really cannot leave now. If I do not follow the imperial edict to return to the Capital, how did His Majesty want you to deal with me?" He thought, "I need to hear the opposite party's setting price first. If he says to kill without negotiation, I will surrender. Otherwise, there's no harm in haggling over the price."

Wang Jinbao replied, "His Majesty only sent subordinate to visit each and every island on the sea to look for Wei *Dutong*; after we found you, to have Wen Gonggong to read the imperial decree. As for what happens afterward, naturally subordinate will follow Wei *Dutong*'s instruction."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. "So His Majesty did not order you to arrest me, kill me?"

"He did not, he did not," Wang Jinbao busily said, "How can there be such thing? His Majesty holds Wei *Dutong* in such a high regard. When Wei *Dutong*

enters the Capital, naturally you will be put in powerful position; if not *Shangshu* [equivalent to department head], then it must be great general."

"Wang *San Ge*," Wei Xiaobao said, "To be honest with you, His Majesty wants me to return to the Capital so that I can lead people to wipe out Tian Di Hui. I am a Tian Di Hui *Xiangzhu*, this kind of 'murdering friends' matter, I absolutely cannot do."

Wang Jinbao had always upheld *yi qi*, he had already understood clearly what happened to Wei Xiaobao; hearing him said so, he could not refrain from nodding his head repeatedly, thinking that selling out friends for the sake of promotion and wealth was worse than a dog or pig.

Wei Xiaobao said, "His Majesty's kindness to me is as heavy as the mountain, but the thing that he commanded me to do, I just can't do it. I do not dare to see His Majesty's face, I have no choice but to work like an ox or like a horse in my next life to repay His Majesty's great kindness. When you see His Majesty, please explain to him my difficulty. I know that loyalty cannot satisfy both sides, putting on a play ought to commit suicide to repay the master, although cutting the neck will be frighteningly painful, I have no way out, I might have to display utter loyalty by sacrificing myself to the service of my country."

Wang Jinbao examined his own heart; if he was faced with this difficult problem, there would be only one way out, *i.e.* committing suicide to repay his lord and emperor for the kindness to recognizing his worth and employing him, but he would not be able to bear crossing over his friends and righteousness. Thereupon he hastily advised him, "Wei *Dutong* must not take this path, we can slowly think of a way out. Let subordinate report *Dutong*'s predicament to His Majesty. These past several months Zhang *Tidu*, Zhao *Zongbing*, Sun *Fujiang* several people have rendered some meritorious service, His Majesty are holding them in high regard. Disregarding our future prospects, all of us will kowtow and plead for leniency on behalf of Wei *Dutong*."

Seeing he was flustered and exasperated, Wei Xiaobao was secretly amused, "To have Wei Xiaobao kills himself is just like expecting the sun to rise from the west. Forget suicide, *laozi* can't even cut my own little finger. Besides, if Xiao Xuanzi wanted to kill me he would kill me immediately, if he wanted to spare me he would simply spare me; nobody knows how much idea he has in his head.

Relying on you, several people, kowtowing to him, what good will it bring?" However, seeing Wang Jinbao's profound *yi qi*, he was deeply grateful. Holding Wang Jinbao's hand, he said, "If that's the case, I will have to toil Wang *San Ge* to present a memorial to the Emperor, tell him that Wei Xiaobao has difficulty left and right, and was about to swipe a sword across my own throat, luckily you are here to rescue me that I did not die."

"Yes, yes!" Wang Jinbao said, while in his heart he thought that eunuch Wen was standing on the side, he had witnessed everything; if Wang Jinbao was to deceive their lord like this, perhaps he would expose this trickery. Wang Jinbao's face could not help showing awkward expression.

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter and said, "Wang *San Ge* need not take it seriously, I was only joking. His Majesty is fully aware of Wei Xiaobao's conduct, committing suicide I am very afraid of the pain. Just report back everything according to the facts." Wang Jinbao was relieved.

Wei Xiaobao thought that if he rode on Wang Jinbao's ship and returned to the Central Plains, and then disappeared without a trace, the Emperor would definitely put the blame on him, most likely he would kill him. If Wei Xiaobao earnestly asked him, most probably Wang Jinbao would not refuse; but unavoidably Wei Xiaobao would wrong him too much. He said, "Our business is done. Wang *San Ge*, *Xiongdi* has not gambled on this uninhabited island for too long; it's really so boring, what do you say we throw a couple of dice?"

Wang Jinbao was greatly delighted, he was a serious gambler, his gambling urge was not below that of Wei Xiaobao's; when he did not have any opponent, oftentimes his left hand would gamble against his right hand. Thereupon he immediately agreed and could not wait to start immediately. He ordered his soldiers to move a large rock with flat top over, six soldiers stood around with lanterns raised high, shouting and cheering while Wang Jinbao and Wei Xiaobao threw the dice. Before long, Wen Youfang, as well as several *Canjiang* [regimental commander] and *Youji* [brigade commander] joined in. The number of people standing around the large rock grew larger and larger.

Mu Jianping watched all this dubiously; she quietly asked Fang Yi, "Shijie, why do they throw dice? Could it be that the loser will … will … but they are all men."

“Pft,” Fang Yi stifled her laughter; she said in a low voice, “Whoever lost the game will have to accompany you.”

Although Mu Jianping did not understand worldly affair, she knew there was no such thing. Stretching out her hand, she tickled Fang Yi’s armpit. The two women broke into giggles.

The gambling continued until daybreak. The money in front of Wei Xiaobao had become three high piles, first, his luck in gambling was really good, second, he was playing a trick; from these crowd of officers and men, nine out of ten had lost to him. Wei Xiaobao was in high spirits; when he turned his head around, he saw the Princess, Ah Ke and Mu Jianping, three women had already fallen asleep crouching on the rocks, while Su Quan, Fang Yi, Shuang’er and Zeng Rou, four women, were struggling hard to keep their sleepy eyes open while they accompanied him on the side. He could not help feeling bad and apologetic toward them. He pushed the three large pile in front of him forward and said, “Wang *San Ge*, these several thousand *taels*, please bestow it on my behalf to the *Xiongdi*. Everybody has come to this barren island, I do not have anything to entertain you; I feel really bad.”

Originally the officers and men who lost had their countenances ash-grey; as soon as they heard him, thunderous happy shouts arose, they all expressed their gratitude in chorus. Wang Jinbao ordered the officers and men to row the skiffs back to the ships, and bring back from the ships rice grains, pork and lamb, good wine, medication, as well as bowls and chopsticks, tables and chairs, pots and pans, kitchen knife, and so on, skiff by skiff. He also ordered the soldiers to build several large thatched huts in the forest. Many people worked together, several hundred officers and men exerted their strength, in just several days everything was in place on the Tong Chi Island; only then did they bade their farewell from Wei Xiaobao.

As he was about to leave, Wen Youfang found out that this island was called Tong Chi Island; he could not help stomping his feet and heaving deep sigh, saying that if he had known earlier, he would have asked Wei Xiaobao to let him be the banker for several rounds. On Tong Chi Island leisurely be a banker, how could he not eat ‘em all?

More than ten days later, Ah Ke gave birth to a baby boy first, the next say Su

Quan also gave birth to another boy. It was more than a month later when the Princess gave birth to a baby girl. Seeing the other women gave birth to baby boys, while she gave birth to a baby girl, the Princess was angry; she cried repeatedly for the next several days. Wei Xiaobao constantly comforted her, telling her that he prefer a daughter over a son; only then did he coax her and turn her tears into laughter.

For the three babies there were seven mothers. Although not a single mother had any experience with babies, with a lot of 'seven hands eight feet' and hundreds of jesting, the three infants were healthy, strong and lively.

The women respectfully asked Wei Xiaobao to give the babies names. Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "I am blind and do not know any letters, you want me to give my sons, my daughter names, that means you are giving me great difficulty. Let's do it this way, we throw dice, whatever the result, that will be their names." Immediately he picked up the dice, with his mouth mumbling some prayers, "God of gambling Bodhisattva please bless, give me three good names. The first one!"

He threw the dice, one produced six dots, the other five dots, a 'tiger head' combination. Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "*Ah Da*'s [basically it means 'the first'] name is not bad, he will be called Wei Hutou [tiger head]."

The second throw produced one-dot and six-dot combination, a 'copper-hammer'. Thereupon *Lao'er* [ol' second] was named Wei Tongchui [you guessed it: copper hammer].

The third throw. The first die rolled to two dots; the second die was rolling continuously, finally it stopped at also two dots, a 'wooden bench' combination. Wei Xiaobao was taken aback, but then the burst out laughing. "Our *Da Guniang*'s [big/oldest miss] name is very strange; she will be called Wei Bandeng [wooden bench]!"

The women were all shocked. The Princess angrily said, "So unpleasant to hear! Such a nice girl, how can you call her 'Bandeng, Bandeng'? Quickly pick another name."

Wei Xiaobao said, "It is the name picked by the God of gambling and Bodhisattva, how can we casually change it at random?" Picking up the baby girl,

he landed a kiss on her face, ‘smack!’ and then he said with a laugh, “Dear one Wei Bandeng little treasure, this name sounds so pretty.”

The Princess angrily said, “No way, no way! No matter what I don’t want to call her Bandeng. I was the one giving birth to the child; such an ugly name, I don’t want it.”

“Humph,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You gave birth to the child, are you the only one who produced the child?”

The Princess snatched the dice away and said, “I’ll throw. Whatever I throw, that will be her name.”

Wei Xiaobao had no choice; he was helpless against her. “Alright,” he said, “This time you cannot renege! What if you also throw a tiger-head or a copper-hammer?”

“Just like her *Gege*, we’ll call her Hutou or Tongchui,” the Princess replied. Shaking the dice continuously in her palm, she said, “God of gambling Bodhisattva, if you don’t give my daughter a good name, I am going to smash your two stinking dice.” And then she rolled the dice.

The two dice rolled around several times before they finally stop. Unexpectedly there is indeed such coincidence in the world, both dice produced two dots, it was still the ‘wooden bench’ combination. The Princess’ eyes grew big as she stared blankly before ‘Wah!’ she broke into tears.

Everybody was amazed and amused at the same time. Su Quan laughed and said, “*Meizi*, don’t worry! Two dots make a pair, a pair of two-dots is Shuangshuang; our daughter will be called Wei Shuangshuang. What do you think?”

The Princess turned the tears into laughter; immediately she perked up. “Good, good!” she said with a laugh, “The name is very interesting, it’s almost the same as Shuang’er *Meizi*’s name.”

Shuang’er was also very happy; she picked up Wei Shuangshuang and hugged her in her bosom with full affection. Mu Jianping laughed and said, “Shuang’er *Meimei*, since you love her that much, quickly feed her milk.”

Shuang’er blushed. “Pei!” she spat, “You’d better feed her yourself!” Reaching

out, she tried to unbutton Mu Jianping's clothes. Mu Jianping quickly ran away. The women roared in laughter.

With the addition of these three babies, Tong Chi Island was even more lively. Since Wang Jinbao left a large quantity of foodstuff and appliances, they had more than enough of everything, there was no need to go fishing and hunting every day. Only whenever they felt like eating some fresh fish, shrimp or game did they go out to get some.

At first everybody was still anxious that since Kangxi summoned Wei Xiaobao and he did not answer, there would be cataclysmic mishap, or perhaps bad repercussion to them. But after several months without any news, they gradually pushed this matter out of their minds.

The next summer, Wang Jinbao suddenly reappeared, leading several big ships, with another imperial edict. This time the imperial edict was like 'four pair of horses pulled side by side and six steed'; the wording was profound. Wei Xiaobao did not understand a single sentence, he relied on Su Quan to explain everything. [Translator's note: thank God Jin Yong did not quote the entire edict. Phew!] Turned out Kangxi did not mention a single sentence about the past events, he only sent a *Canjiang*, leading five hundred soldiers, to be stationed on the island to protect the Princess. Other than that, he also sent sixteen menservants and eight female servants, eight servant girls; the three big ships were packed with various appliances and food.

Wei Xiaobao was secretly worried, "Xiao Xuanzi is giving me these many things, I am afraid he wants me to live on this Tong Chi Island for the rest of my life." His natural disposition was restless; although he passed the time on the Island carefree and without worries, plus he had seven 'delicate as flower, refined as precious jade' wives to accompany him, but he had passed the peace and quiet days for quite a long time, he was really bored. Every now and then he would recall past events, thinking about the time when he was still at the Lovely Spring Courtyard, where people grabbed his little braid and beat and cursed him, yet he felt alive and invigorated.

The twelfth month of the same year, Kangxi sent Zhao Liangdong with yet another imperial decree, the Emperor appointed his second son Yun Reng to be the Crown Prince, general amnesty was proclaimed throughout the world, Wei

Xiaobao's nobility title was raised one rank, he was bestowed the title Second Class Earl of Tong Chi. Wei Xiaobao invited Zhao Liangdong for dinner and wine. During the banquest Zhao Liangdong told him about the crusade against Wu Sangui, saying that Wu Sangui's troops and generals were formidable, various elite troops had suffered defeat.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Zhao *Er Ge*, when you are back, please report to His Majesty that I feel stifled in here and am very bored, I want to ask His Majesty to send me go fight that old fellow Wu Sangui."

Zhao Liangdong said, "His Majesty has foreseen that Jueye is loyal to the ruler and love his country, when you find out about rebel Wu running wild, you would definitely volunteer to go into battle. His Majesty said, if Wei Xiaobao wants to fight Wu Sangui, he can, but he must destroy Tian Di Hui first. Otherwise, he'd better stay on Tong Chi Island fishing and catching turtles." Wei Xiaobao was on the verge of tears, he almost broke out crying.

Zhao Liangdong said, "His Majesty said that once upon a time when the Han Dynasty's Han Guangwu was young, he had a good friend called Yan Ziling[19]. After Han Guangwu became the Emperor, this Yan Ziling did not want to become a high-ranking officer, but lived in Fuchun River [in Zhejiang] to fish. His Majesty also said that in the past King Wu of Zhao had a high-ranking minister called Jiang Taigong [Jiang Ziya], who also loved to fish on the bank of Wei River. King Wu of Zhou and Han Guangwu were good emperors of the ancient times. Therefore, it is clear that every good emperor always has a high-ranking officer who loves to fish. His Majesty said that he wants to be raw bird fish soup. If Wei *Jueye* did not catch bird or fish for him, how can His Majesty become raw bird fish soup? Wei *Jueye*, subordinate is an uncouth man; why His Majesty wants Wei *Jueye* to catch bird and fish in here, I really do not understand. But His Majesty is very wise, there must be a very good reason behind it."

"Yes, yes!" Wei Xiaobao replied. He could only smile bitterly. He knew Kangxi was joking with him; apparently because he did not agree to wipe out Tian Di Hui, the Emperor condemned him to catch fish in here for a lifetime. These five hundred officers and men were supposedly to protect the Princess, but they were actually prison warden, prison guards to monitor them strictly, so that he could not leave the island even for a single step. The more he thought about it,

the more depressed he was. The banquet ended in haste, unexpectedly after drinking he did not even want to gamble. Returning to his room, he stared blankly with tears falling down his face.

Seeing Wei Xiaobao crying, his seven wives were astonished; they came together to console him. He told them what Kangxi had said. The Princess angrily said, “That’s right! *Huangdi Gege* really wanted to raise your official ranking and nobility, from third-class earl to second-class earl, so be it. But where’s the logic behind ‘Tong Chi Bo’? Our Great Qing only has Zhao Xin Bo [bright trust; ‘bo’ means Earl], Wei Yi Bo [staunch prestige], or else Xiang Qin Bo [help/assist hardworking/industrious], Cheng En Bo [continuing grace/kindness]. You are originally Zhong Yong Bo [loyal and brave], which was very good. These three characters ‘Tong Chi Bo’ are clearly to make fun of you. He … he … does not care about me at all.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Earl of Tong Chi is not a big deal; I was the one who picked the name ‘Tong Chi’ for this island, you cannot blame His Majesty. I am the Island Master of the Tong Chi Island, naturally my title is Earl of Tong Chi, which is a lot better than ‘Earl of Tong Pei’ [‘pei’ means paying for loss (in gambling)]. Quan *Jiejie*, can you think of a way to return to the Central Plains? I … I really miss my Mama.”

Su Quan shook her head and said, “This is a really difficult matter, we can only wait patiently for an opportunity.”

Wei Xiaobao picked up a teacup, ‘crash!’ he threw it down to the floor and it shattered into pieces. “You just don’t want to think of a way,” he angrily said, “Fine, I will quietly sneak away alone in the future, you must not blame me. I … I … I would rather be at the Lovely Spring Courtyard, become a turtle who pick up the teapots; I don’t want to be a damn Earl of Tong Chi. The boredom really stifles me to death.”

Su Quan did not get angry; she smiled and said, “Xiaobao, don’t worry, there will come a day His Majesty is going to send you on a mission.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he stood up and bowed deeply. “Good *Jiejie*, I apologize to you. Please tell me quickly, His Majesty may send me on what mission? As long as it’s not to strike Tian Di Hui, I … I will do anything.”

The Princess said, “What if *Huangdi Gege* sends you to the outhouse to wash the chamber pot?”

“I will do it,” Wei Xiaobao angrily said, “But every day I will send you to do it for me.” Seeing he was in such a bad temper, the Princess did not dare to say anything anymore.

Mu Jianping said, “Quan *Jiejie*, tell him quickly. Xiaobao is extremely anxious.”

Su Quan hesitantly replied, “Doing what, I do not know. But reckoning the Emperor’s mind, inevitably there will be one day he may call you back to Beijing. He wants to force you to surrender, he wants you to wipe out Tian Di Hui. For each day you did not agree, he is wasting one day of his time with you. Xiaobao, you want to be a hero or a warrior, you must give careful consideration to *yi qi* toward your friends, this little bit of suffering is the price you have to pay. You want to be a hero, but you also want to hear a ‘powder head’ singing the Eighteen Touches. This hero thing is not easy to do.”

Wei Xiaobao thought what she said made a lot of sense; he stood up and said with a laugh, “I can be a hero, and sing the Eighteen Touches myself, do you think that’s possible?” And then he started to sing, “One touch, two touches, touching the edge of Quan *Jiejie*’s hair …” while reaching out to stroke Su Quan’s hair. Everybody giggled; the little disturbance vanished without a trace.

Since then, day after day, year after year, Wei Xiaobao and the seven women lived on Tong Chi Island. Each year on the twelfth month, Kangxi always sent people with gifts. He bestowed Wei Xiaobao a set of crystal dice, green-jade emerald *Paijiu*, and various gold-inlaid jade gambling equipment; so many that their number could not be counted. Fortunately there were five hundred officers and men on Tong Chi Island that Wei Xiaobao never lacked gambling opponent.

One particular year Sun Sike came to deliver the gifts. Wei Xiaobao saw the red ruby on his hat, an insignia of a one-*pin* rank military officer, so Wei Xiaobao knew that he had been promoted to a *Tidu* [local commander]; hastily he congratulated him, “Sun *Si Ge*, congratulations on your promotion!”

With smile all over his face, Sun Sike saluted and paid his respect, “It’s all because of His Majesty’s grace and Wei *Jueye*’s cultivation.”

He opened the imperial edict and read it out loud. Turned out it was about the

imperial court pacifying the three border defenses: one after another Yunnan's Ping Xi Wang [king who pacifies the west] Wu Sangui, Guangdong's Ping Nan Wang [king who pacifies the south] Shang Zhixin, and Fujian's Jing Nan Wang ['jing' also means peace/tranquil/pacify] Geng Jingzhong, were subdued. Kangxi evaluated everybody's merit and bestowed reward accordingly. The Second-class Earl of Tong Chi Wei Xiaobao was nominated to be a great general; based on his distinguished service, which was very commendable, he rose in nobility rank to First-class Earl of Tong Chi. Even his eldest son Wei Hutou was granted the title 'Yun Qi Wei' [lit. cloud rider military officer[20]].

Finished expressing his gratitude, Wei Xiaobao received various gifts sent by Kangxi, among which was unexpectedly a large marble screen, which he had seen in the study room at Wu Sangui's Wuhua Palace, one of Wu Sangui's three treasures. Zhang Yong, Zhao Liangdong, Wang Jinbao, Sun Sike and the others have also sent generous gifts.

That evening during the banquet, Sun Sike told Wei Xiaobao about the effort of pacifying Wu Sangui. Turned out Zhang Yong inflicted heavy damage on Wu Sangui's main force in Gansu and Ningxia region, repeatedly rendered great merits. By this time he was conferred the title First-class Marquis and *Shaofu* [young tutor], the official tutor to the crown prince; his titles and honors were far above Wei Xiaobao's. Sun Sike said that after Zhang *Houye* [master marquis] was struck by Gui Xinshu's palm in the past, he had never recovered fully; he could not ride horse, he could not even stand, during the battle he always commanded his main forces sitting on sedan chair.

Wei Xiaobao clucked his tongue in amazement; he said, "The sedan chair carriers must also be considered warriors; otherwise, when Zhang *Laoge* [old brother] cried out 'Charge!' and the four sedan chair bearers retreated, won't that be terrible?"

"That's right!" Sun Sike said, "Just before the battle, Zhang *Houye* always had an attendant behind the sedan chair carrying his axe-saber. If the sedan chair wanted to turn around, the big axe-saber would immediately chop down."

Sun Sike also told him how Zhao Liangdong took over Yangping Pass, broke Hanzhong, subdued Chengdu, and attacked down to Kunming. His meritorious

service was very great. The Emperor conferred him the title 'Yonglue Jiangjun' [brave and cunning general], and appointed him the *Zongdu* [governor-general] of Yunnan and Guizhou, also appointed him to be the *Shangshu* [department head] of Ministry of War. Wang Jinbao and Sun Sike himself were also promoted to be *Tidu* due to their ardor in battle.

Seeing Sun Sike was radiant with delight, while he did not personally participate in the excitement, Wei Xiaobao could not help feeling discontented and was not happy at all; but thinking that all four of his good friends had rendered great merit and were conferred titles as high-ranking officials, he was quite happy for them.

Sun Sike said, "Several of us often talked about how these past few years we fought the battles, we really enjoyed it. There is a saying, 'when you drink water, think of its source'; it was all because of His Majesty's grace in recognizing our worth and employing us, and because of Wei *Jueye*'s kindness in recommending us. If only Wei *Jueye* was appointed the Grand Marshal to Pacify the West, leading the four of us to fight Wu Sangui, then everything is perfect. Zhao *Er Ge* and Wang *San Ge* often quarrel with each other, their quarrel has reached His Majesty's imperial presence; even Zhang *Dage* is helpless to keep them under control. Several times His Majesty mentioned Wei *Jueye*, saying that if they always quarrel like this, it means that there are letting you down. Only after that did they finally not dare to quarrel anymore."

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, "Those two always quarrel as soon as they see each other; even after they become great generals, why don't their temperaments change?"

"Isn't that so?" Sun Sike replied, "The two of them individually submitted memorial to the Emperor, I say you are wrong, you say I am wrong. Luckily His Majesty is magnanimous, he did not investigate; otherwise, I am afraid both of them would face disciplinary action against them."

"What happened to that old fellow Wu Sangui?" Wei Xiaobao asked, "Did you grab his braid and kick that damn fellow several times?"

Sun Sike shook his head, "That old fellow's luck was really good …"

Wei Xiaobao was shocked. "He escaped?" he asked.

“It’s not that,” Sun Sike said, “He suffered defeat everywhere, he lost the area he occupied one by one; seeing that he could not hold his ground anymore, just before his death he wanted to satisfy his craving of becoming an emperor. Thereupon he put on yellow gown, and ascended the great treasure, and called his capital Hengzhou. We heard that when he became an emperor, he made a big ruckus. After several big defeats, frightened and angered, he took his own life.”

“I see,” Wei Xiaobao said, “That old fellow had it easy.”

“After the rebel Wu died,” Sun Sike continued, “Various generals under his command threw their support to his grandson, Wu Shifan, to succeed the throne, and retreated to Kunming. Zhao *Er Ge* attacked Kunming, he captured rebel Wu’s great generals Xia Guoxiang and Ma Bao and beheaded them. Wu Shifan committed suicide. The world is peaceful once again.”

“There was a national treasure in Kunming,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I wonder what happened to her?”

“Which national treasure?” Sun Sike asked, “Subordinate has never heard about it.”

“It’s actually a living national treasure,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “The Number One Beauty in the World, Chen Yuanyuan.”

Sun Sike laughed and said, “Turns out it’s Chen Yuanyuan. I did not hear anything about her whereabouts. I don’t know whether she died in the confusion of the battle, or whether she escaped alive.”

“What a pity, what a pity!” Wei Xiaobao repeatedly exclaimed. He thought, “Ah Ke is my wife, that means Chen Yuanyuan is my genuine goods at fair prices Senior, mother-in-law. If Zhao *Er Ge* captured her, and knew that she was my mother-in-law, he would undoubtedly send her to Tong Chi Island, to let her and Ah Ke, mother and daughter, have a reunion. They, mother and daughter, have a reunion is not a big deal, but we, mother-in-law and son-in-law having a reunion is significantly different. Forget everything else, just listening to her plucking her *pipa*, and singing ‘Song of Yuanyuan’, ‘Tune of Fangfang’ [yuan means round, fang means square], it’s really no small matter. On Tong Chi [eat ‘em all] I cannot eat my wife’s mother, but I wonder if ‘son-in-law looking at mother-in-law,

greedily swallow my saliva into my belly', is allowed?"

When the feast was over he returned to the inner hall, and told everything to his seven wives. As Ah Ke heared that her mother's whereabouts was unknown, although since childhood she was stolen by Jiu Nan, hence she was not by her mother's side, but she still had the mother-daughter affection; inevitably she was grieved. Wei Xiaobao comforted Ah Ke by telling her not to worry, saying that no matter which place her mother went, that 'Bai Sheng Dao Wang' [Hundred Victory Saber King] Hu Yizhi [see Chapter 33] would definitely follow and attend upon her by her side, keeping close to her all the time.

"Ah Ke," he said, "This Hu *Dage*'s martial art skill is very high, you have personally seen it. To protect your mother, one person, is as easy as a hand's turn." Ah Ke thought he was right, her knitted eyebrows spread out somewhat.

Suddenly Wei Xiaobao slapped the table and called out, "Aiyo, not good!"

Ah Ke was startled. "What is it?" she asked, "Do you think my *Niang* [mother] is in danger?"

"Your *Niang* is not in danger," Wei Xiaobao replied, "But I am in great danger."

Ah Ke was puzzled, "What danger are you in?" she asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Hu *Dage* and I have sworn brotherhood. If in the turmoil and chaos of war he fool around and snuggle close to your *Niang*, won't he be my father-in-law? This might be really confusing."

"Pei!" Ah Ke spat and shot him a malicious look. "This Hu *Bobo* [uncle, older than one's father] is the most upright and honest man I know, and you think all men in the world are just like you, as soon as you see a woman you'll immediately fool around and snuggle close to her?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Come, come, come, let us fool around and snuggle close to each other!" While saying that he spread his arms wide to embrace her.

After Wei Xiaobao was promoted to be the First-class Earl of Tong Chi, the number of cooks, menservants and maidservants on the Island increased by the dozens. Wei Hutou was still in diapers, yet he had already been conferred the title 'Yun Qi Wei'. Life on the barren island unexpectedly became full of luxury

[orig. brocade garments, jade meals], with all the glory, splendor, and wealth according to his rank. It's just that it was too easy and comfortable that Wei Xiaobao was bored. He tried with thousand ways, a hundred plans to create trouble and play some pranks; he came up with some weird tricks and preposterous plans, in total disregard of his own career. Unfortunately, the seven madams were deadpan in opposing him; day and night they watched over him closely. Even the Princess, who simply loved to act willfully and make a scene, this time refused to accompany him to incite trouble. This First-class Earl of Tong Chi was bound hands and feet; he could only heave a deep sigh dejectedly.

He recalled Sun Sike's story about the punitive expedition against Wu Sangui, big and small battles, some of them were full of all kinds of thrillers, some were saturated with delight, yet he was not involved at all, he did not have any chance to display his full capabilities; he was extremely disappointed. If he was in involved battle, he would not have let Wu Sangui to die that easily; he would think of a way to catch him alive, put him in a cage, from Hengzhou in Hunan all the way to Beijing, he would charge five *qian* to whoever wanted to see him, and one *tael* to whoever wanted to spit on him, children paid half-price, beautiful women free. Common people all over the world hated this big traitor to the bones, why should I, Wei Xiaobao, not take advantage to gain some spending money?

Wu Sangui was defeated, there was no more war to fight; but other than fighting a war, there were so many interesting things in the world, as long as he was able to come to a place with many people, someplace bustling with noise and excitement. In short, he had to leave Tong Chi Island first. But with seven wives, two sons and one daughter, who would follow him closely, it was like ten large stones were hanging on his neck. If they wanted to stealthily leave Tong Chi Island together, it would be more difficult than difficult. It would be better to cast these ten people away, and then he could attempt to escape alone.

Ever since he sent Sun Sike off, not a single day passed where he did not mule over this idea. Sometimes he would sit on a rock, fishing, imagining that he was sitting on the back of a big sea turtle, braving the wind and the billows, leisurely heading toward the Central Plains; wouldn't that be pleasant?

It was almost *Zhongqiu* [mid-autumn, the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month], the weather was blisteringly hot, Wei Xiaobao took his fishing pole and bait, and went fishing for a while. He was quite fidgety that day. Leaning on a big rock his mind went blurry as he was about to fall asleep. Suddenly he heard a voice speaking, “Reporting to Wei *Jueye*, Ocean Dragon King request the pleasure of seeing you!”

Wei Xiaobao was surprised; focusing his eyes, he saw a big sea-turtle on the surface of the ocean, with its head raised high, but its mouth uttered human speech, “The Senior, Dragon King of the Eastern Sea is lonely and bored in the Crystal Palace, he especially sent *Xiao Jiang* [little/lowly general] to come and respectfully invite Wei *Jueye* for a feast, with gambling after the feast. Sea Dragon King will use coral and crystal to lay a bet, but everything is interchangeable with banknote used on land.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. “Wonderful, wonderful!” he cried out, “This distinguished gentleman is so polite, naturally I have to accompany him.”

The big turtle said, “In the Crystal Palace there will also be theatrical troupe, who are very good at playing ‘Qun Ying Hui’ [meeting of heroes], ‘Ding Jun Shan’[21], ‘Zhong Kui married off his younger sister’, ‘White Water Beach’, and all kinds of good stories. There will also be Mr. Storytellers, good at telling the Great Ming’s Legend of Heroic Deeds, Water Margin, and other great books. There will also be countless courtesans, who can sing all kinds of new folksongs, like ‘Tan Wu Geng’ [sighing before dawn (fifth watch period, 03:00-05:00)], ‘Eighteen Touches’, or ‘Si Ji Xiang Si’ [missing each other throughout four seasons]; not a single one cannot sing. Sea Dragon King’s seven Princesses all have countenance of a flower, face like the moon. They have long admired Wei *Jueye*’s distinguished and accomplished intelligence, and all are looking forward to seeing you.”

There was an unbearable itch in Wei Xiaobao’s heart. “Good, good, good!” he repeatedly exclaimed, “Let’s go.”

The big turtle said, “Would *Jueye* please sit on *Xiaode*’s [little/lowly one] back, I will take you to the Crystal Palace.”

Wei Xiaobao leaped down and sat on the big turtle’s back. The big turtle left

the beach and swam steadily toward the Crystal Palace. The Dragon King of the Eastern Sea personally welcomed him outside the Palace, hand-in-hand they entered the Palace. The Dragon King of the Southern Sea had already been waiting inside.

During the feast, more guests arrived in an endless stream; there were Zhu Bajie [The Pig of Journey to the West] and Cow Demon King, two evil spirits, and then there were Zhang Fei, Li Kui[22], Niu Gao[23], and Cheng Yaojin, four great generals, King Zhou and Hegemon Chu, Emperor Yang of Sui, and Ming Dynasty's Emperor Zhengde, four Emperors. These four Emperors, four generals, the pig, the cow, and two dragons, four divine demons, were the most muddleheaded 'cattle' [see Chapter 3] among the celestial, underground, and bottom of the ocean creatures since time immemorial.

After the feast they started gambling; Wei Xiaobao became the banker. He casually grabbed the tiles, practiced fraud over and over, each set of his tiles was either supreme treasure [one, two, two, four], or pair of heavens [all sixes]. He won so big that those twelve people let out 'Wah, wah!' cry. Gold, silver, money and valuables they lost piled up in front of Wei Xiaobao. Finally even King Zhou's Daji[24], Emperor Zhengde's older sister Lie Feng, as well as Zhu Bajie's rake and Zhang Fei's a *zhang*-long eight-serpent spear were also won over.

When General Li Kui's pair of broad axes was won over, Li Kui's gambling character was not good, his black face was bulging dark red, he shouted, "Thief servant bird, as human being when you see something good you ought to restrain yourself. You won someone else's women, it's not a big deal, but you even want to have the tool with which *laozi* eat, you ignore *yi qi* too much." Grabbing Wei Xiaobao's chest, he brought his vinegar-bowl-size fist up and punched down. 'Bang!' he hit Wei Xiaobao above his ear, shaking him so much that his ears were buzzing.

Wei Xiaobao screamed and raised both of his hands, the fishing line was flung upward, the hook hit him at the back of his neck, so that when he jerked the fishing pole up, the hook entered his flesh and his whole body was also jerked upward. In an instant Li Kui, Zhang Fei, Sea Dragon King and so on disappeared without a trace. Suddenly he realized it was just a dream of Nanke [i.e. dreams of

grandeur, empty dream]. But he heard another loud ‘Bang!’ from the direction of the sea.

Chapter 46

Thousand *li* sail and mast going outside the country, nine firmaments wind and rain going through the city.

(Translated by Foxs)

“Leading the Navy, Chen Junshi surrounded two red-haired demons’ main battleships. The cannon blasted, battle cry ensued; the surface of the sea was filled with gun smoke and flames. After fighting for more than two hours, there was a loud explosion; one of the red-haired demons’ main battleships was sunk by our troops.”

Looking up, Wei Xiaobao saw more than a dozen huge battleships, with their sails fully opened to ride the wind, sailing fast toward the island. Wei Xiaobao knew something was amiss; he pulled the string, but was unable to get the hook off, on the contrary, the hook went deeper into the back of his neck that it hurt. Immediately he moved his feet and dashed away, dragging the fishing pole behind him. He thought it must be that young fellow Zheng Keshuang coming with his troops to settle the debt. Settling debt was originally very good, but before the debtor dropped in, he sent several cannon blasts first in torrential rush, certainly it was not a good omen.

Before he even reached his house, Peng *Canjiang* [administrator/colonel] had already rushed over, flustered and exasperated. “Wei … Wei *Jueye* … things … things look bad, Taiwan warships have arrived,” he said.

“How do you know they are Taiwan’s warships?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

Peng *Canjiang* replied, “Lowly officer just … just now used the telescope [orig. ‘thousand *li* lens’] to took, the ship’s … stern … no, no, the ship’s bow is painted with a sun and a moon; that is Taiwan’s Zheng … rebel Zheng’s insignia. If one ship carries five hundred troops and generals, two ships one thousand, thirteen ships means seven or eight thousands …”

Wei Xiaobao took the telescope from his hand and looked at the incoming ships. When he counted, there were indeed thirteen big ships. Looking at the bow, he also vaguely saw the painting of a sun and a moon insignia. “Quickly lead the troops for defense, guard along the shore,” he barked his order, “When the enemy come ashore on skiffs, release the arrows!”

Peng *Canjiang* repeatedly complied and rushed away. Hearing the commotion, Su Quan and the others came out. They heard the incoming ships fired their cannon again, ‘Boom, boom boom!’

“Ah Ke *Meizi*,” the Princess said, “When you go to Taiwan, are you going to take Hutou along or not?”

Ah Ke stomped her feet in anger. “You … what joke are you playing?” she said.

Wei Xiaobao was even angrier; he cursed, “Let the Princess strap her stinky Shuangshuang go to Taiwan …”

“Hey,” Su Quan suddenly exclaimed, “When the shells fall into the sea, why isn’t there any splash of water?”

They heard ‘boom, boom’ again, twice, smoke came out of the cannon’s mouth, but nothing hit the shore, nothing hit the sea either. Wei Xiaobao was stumped, but then he burst out laughing, “Those are gun salute; they are not here to give us trouble.”

“Peaceful measures before using force!” the Princess said.

“Where is that girl Shuangshuang?” Wei Xiaobao angrily said, “Quickly come out, *laozi* is going to spank her butt.”

The Princess was upset, “Without rhyme or reason, why do you want to beat your daughter?” she said.

“Who told her to have such an annoying *Niang* [mother]?” Wei Xiaobao retorted. [Translator’s note: I know I might annoy some readers too, but I just want to show the different words for ‘mother’: muqin, mama, niang … there’s more, but I don’t remember on top of my head.]

The ships were getting near. From the telescope he saw clearly that the flag rising above the ship was unexpectedly the Great Qing’s Yellow Dragon banner; it was not Taiwan’s sun and moon flag at all. Wei Xiaobao was pleasantly surprised, he handed the telescope over to Su Quan and said, “You look, it’s really strange.”

Su Quan looked for a moment and then she smiled and said, “They are the Great Qing’s Navy, not Taiwan’s.”

Wei Xiaobao received the telescope back and looked again; he said with a laugh, “That’s right! They are definitely the Great Qing’s Navy. Aiya! What is it? It damn hurts!” Turning his head around, turned out Wei Hutou, who was carried in Ah Ke’s arms, was grabbing the fishing rod and pulled it hard; the fishhook was still attached to Wei Xiaobao’s neck, naturally when he pulled it Wei Xiaobao yelped in pain.

Stifling her laughter, hastily Ah Ke gently took the hook off. “I am sorry,” she said with a laugh, “Please don’t be angry.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Good son, still very young, yet already have

Jiang Taigong's[25] trick. Amazing!"

"Humph!" the Princess snorted, "Partial (biased) ghost!"

They saw Peng *Canjiang* ran back and called out, "Wei *Jueye*, the ships actually raised Great Qing's flag, I am afraid it's a trick."

"That's right!" Wei Xiaobao replied, "As soon as they send men on a skiff to come ashore, we'll interrogate them clearly first and talk later." Peng *Canjiang* received the order and left.

The Princess said, "It must be that kid Zheng Keshuang in disguise, raising the Great Qing's flag. Obviously those are Taiwan's ships!"

"Very good, very good!" Wei Xiaobao said, "Princess, lately you look so beautiful."

The Princess was taken aback; hearing her husband's praise, she could not help feeling happy. "I am still the same," she said with a smile, "What do you mean 'beautiful'?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your lips are red, your face white, your eyebrows curve like Chang'e [the lady in the moon in Chinese mythology] descending from the moon. When Zheng Keshuang sees you I am sure he will be very happy."

"Pei!" the Princess spat.

Shortly afterwards, the ships arrived near the shore. They dropped anchor, and six or seven sailors rowed a skiff toward the shore. Peng *Canjiang* ordered his troops to bend their bows with the arrows aimed at the skiff. When the skiff was near, someone picked up a megaphone [lit. speech cylinder, I don't know the ancient name of this contraption] and put it on his mouth. "Imperial edict arrives!" he called out, "Navy *Tidu* Shi Junmen [lit. 'military gate'] delivering the decree to Wei *Jueye*."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. "Damn it," he swore, "What strange trick that fellow Shi Lang is playing? Why would he ride Taiwan's ships to deliver a decree?"

Su Quan said, "I am guessing he came across Taiwan ships on the ocean, attacked them and was victorious, he seized the Taiwan's ships away."

“Must be that,” Wei Xiaobao agreed, “Quan *Jiejie* can prophesy with supernatural accuracy.”

The Princess was still not convinced, she whispered, “My guess is Shi Lang surrendered to Taiwan, Zheng Keshuang sent him off to deliver a fake imperial decree.”

Wei Xiaobao’s heart was happy, he did not bother to scold her; he pinched her bottom and slapped her before hurriedly went to the beach to receive the imperial decree.

The man in the skiff was indeed Shi Lang. He stood on the sandy beach and announced the imperial decree in loud voice. Turned out Kangxi sent Shi Lang to attack Taiwan. In the battle of Penghu [Pescadores Islands, Taiwan], the Zheng Navy suffered a crushing defeat. Shi Lang pursued the retreating enemy into Taiwan. The Ming Dynasty’s Yanping Jun Wang Zheng Keshuang surrendered without even a fight, and thus Taiwan became the Great Qing’s territory.

Kangxi evaluated everybody’s merit and bestowed reward accordingly. Based on the merit that in the past Shi Lang stayed in Beijing without doing anything, and it was Wei Xiaobao who sponsored and recommended him for service, Wei Xiaobao was promoted to be Second-class Marquis of Tong Chi, he was simultaneously bestowed the title *Tai Zi Tai Bao* [tutor to the crown prince]. His oldest son, Wei Hutou was promoted to be First-class Qing Che Du Wei [lit. light carriage military rank[26]].

Finished expressing his gratitude, Wei Xiaobao stood and stared blankly; it never occurred to him that finally Taiwan was pacified by Shi Lang.

Each time he and Zheng Keshuang met each other, they always hated each other, his Shifu Chen Jinnan was harmed by him, which drove his hatred deep to the bones; but Taiwan was subdued, it means not a *cun* of land was left of the Great Ming’s world. He could not help feeling depressed.

He was still very young, and never went to school, all those talks about Manchu and Han differences; he had never really cared about the animosity between countries and races. However, he had been with Tian Di Hui for a long time, usually when he attended their meeting, he heard the brothers talked about it a lot, automatically he developed the feeling that Manchu people

occupying our Han people's rivers and mountains was completely inappropriate. This moment as he heard that Shi Lang had captured Zheng Keshuang and brought him to Beijing, he did not feel happy at all. He also thought about his Shifu exhausting his heart and strength throughout his life, hoping to restore the Great Ming's world; even if this great undertaking was unsuccessful, at least he wanted to preserve a piece of land belonging to the Great Ming overseas. Who would have thought that not long after his Shifu was murdered, Zheng Keshuang had already surrendered? If in the underworld Shifu knew about it, he would definitely weep bitter tears.

Wei Xiaobao recalled that the reason his Shifu was killed that day was because he had just had a hard fight with Shi Lang; his spirit was hard-pressed, his physique weary. Otherwise, Zheng Keshuang would not have been successful in plotting against him from his back. Looking at Shi Lang's joyfully satisfied expression, he could not stop anger from rising in his chest. "Shi *Daren* has rendered great merit," he said, "I am sure you are promoted to be a high-ranking official."

Shi Lang smiled and said, "Because of His Majesty's grace, lowly officer has been bestowed the title Third-class Marquis of Jing Hai [From Chapter 34: Shi Lang's original title was 'Jing Hai Jiang Jun' (lit. the general who pacifies the ocean)]."

"Congratulations, congratulations!" Wei Xiaobao said, while in his heart he said, "Originally I was First-class Earl of Tong Chi; with one rank promotion I became Third-class Marquis of Tong Chi. The young Emperor promoted me two ranks in succession, turns out it is so that my rank will still be higher than Shi Lang, to avoid everybody became third-class marquis, which won't feel very good." But thinking about Shi Lang went to battle and pacified Taiwan, what an exciting view it was, while he was bored to death on this barren island. His jealousy grew into anger, he could not help hating Shi Lang even more that his teeth itched.

Shi Lang paid his respect, and then he said respectfully, "His Majesty summoned lowly officer and spoke warmly to me, he encouraged me a lot, and finally said, 'Shi Lang, this time you render great merit, do you know who has been supporting you for promotion? Previously you stayed in Beijing, nobody

paid you any attention; who has given you guarantee and recommendation?' Lowly officer replied, 'Reporting to Your Majesty, that would be Wei *Jueye* who guaranteed me and presented a memorial to the throne for my promotion, plus Your Majesty's grace.' His Majesty said, 'You did not forget your origin; that's good. I want you to promptly go to Tong Chi Island to announce imperial decree to Wei Xiaobao, with my grace his nobility rank will increase, he has the capacity to judge a person's qualities and thus has rendered meritorious service for the imperial court.' For this reason lowly officer rushed over here."

Wei Xiaobao sighed. He thought, "Each and everyone of the people I recommended rendered meritorious service, only I alone am imprisoned on this uninhabited island without able to move a single step. The young Emperor repeatedly raises my official ranking and titular honors, while in fact even if I become the King of Tong Chi, what so amazing about it?" He said, "Shi *Daren*, you sailed on these Taiwan battleship to come here, and gave me quite a fright; I thought it was Taiwan's Navy coming to attack us. Who would have thought that it was you showing off your military strength?"

Shi Lang hastily saluted and apologized. "I do not dare, I do not dare," he said, "Lowly officer received the imperial edict, I was impatient to see *Jueye*, Taiwan's battleships were made well, they are able to sail a lot faster; for this reason I rode Taiwan ships to hurry over here."

"So Taiwan's battleships can travel faster," Wei Xiaobao said, "Because of the insignia of the sun and the moon on the ship I previously thought in my heart that perhaps Shi *Daren* wanted to set himself up as a king in Taiwan; I was quite worried."

Shi Lang was shocked; he busily said, "Lowly officer is extremely muddleheaded, *Daren*'s direction is right. It was due to lowly officer's negligence that I have not removed Taiwan battleships' emblems."

Actually, it was not because of his negligence, but because he had pacified Taiwan, he was extremely proud of himself; as he rode the captured Taiwan's battleship north to Tianjin, and then south to Tong Chi Island, he intentionally did not remove the Taiwan insignia on the bow of the ships, so that people would see it and point fingers at it, and talk about the origin of the battleships. In short, it was to flaunt his outstanding military service. Unexpectedly Wei

Xiaobao spoke up about his suspicion that Shi Lang wanted to set himself up to be King in Taiwan. It was indeed the biggest taboo for a court official; he could not stop cold sweats from covering his back, thinking that the young Emperor had always shown absolute special favor toward this youngster. Shi Lang went to a bloody battle to subdue Taiwan, this youngster comfortably lived on this island doing nothing, yet his meritorious service was still greater than Shi Lang's. He was granted the title Second-class Marquis, while Shi Lang himself was only Third-class Marquis. If Wei Xiaobao returned to Beijing and spoke several sentences of complaint in front of the Emperor, Shi Lang would be in a very deep trouble.

With this fear in mind, Shi Lang's high and mighty manner that he bore when he first went ashore subsided. He ordered several officers who came with him to step forward and pay their respect. Among these people was someone with whom Wei Xiaobao had already met, it was Lin Xingzhu, the Ditang School's martial art expert who came with Chen Jinnan at Liuzhou. Wei Xiaobao was startled, "He was Taiwan's high-ranking military officer," he mused, "How did he become Shi Lang's subordinate?" When Lin Xingzhu reported his own name and rank, Wei Xiaobao found out that he was a *Dusi* [Vice Brigade Commander/Major] in the Navy.

As Lin Xingzhu went ashore and saw Wei Xiaobao, he was also puzzled and doubtful, "He is Chen *Junshi*'s [military strategist] young disciple, how did he become imperial court's high-ranking official? Even Shi *Tidu* is very respectful to him?"

Shi Lang pointed to Lin Xingzhu and another man called Hong Chao, a Navy *Shoubei* [captain], and said, "Lin *Dusi* and Hong *Shoubei* originally served in Taiwan's military. Following Zheng Keshuang *Jueye* and Liu Gaoxuan *Daren*'s lead, they returned and surrender to the imperial court. These two gentlemen are very familiar with maritime matters, thus this time lowly officer brought them along and have them take care of Taiwan's fleet."

"Oh," Wei Xiaobao muttered, "I see." Looking at Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao, he saw that both lowered their heads with ashamed expression on their faces.

Ever since Zheng Chenggong [Koxinga] established government on the Island, Taiwan has had trading relations with Japan, Lu Song, Siam, An Nan, and other

places; it was very prosperous. Shi Lang pacified Taiwan, he obtained a lot of foreign treasures and rare objects, but he himself did not take any, he presented everything to the imperial court. Kangxi told him to take some as a gift to Wei Xiaobao. Other than that, Shi Lang also brought some gifts of his own, but mostly were Taiwan's local products, such as bamboo trunk, grass woven mat, and so on, mostly coarse and plain items.

Seeing the gifts, Wei Xiaobao was getting more angry; he thought, "Zhang *Dage*, Zhao *Er Ge*, Wang *San Ge*, Sun *Si Ge* pacified Wu Sangui, they sent me such lucrative gifts; you, on the other hand, present me with these beggars' rotten things. I wonder if you still have any regards toward me?"

That evening Wei Xiaobao held a banquet to entertain the guests; he had Shi Lang sat on the seat of honor. There were four high-ranking Navy officers, as well as Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao, two people. After the wine made three rounds, Wei Xiaobao asked, "Lin *Dusi*, originally Taiwan's Yanping Jun Wang was Zheng Jing, Zheng *Wangye*, how did it become that fellow Zheng Keshuang? I heard he is Zheng *Wangye*'s second son, according to reason, he should not be the *Wangye*, should he?"

"Yes," Lin Xingzhu replied, "Reporting to *Jueye*, Zheng *Wangye* passed away on the twenty-eighth of the first month this year, leaving his order that the *Da Gongzi* [first/oldest young master] Keshang was to succeed the throne. *Da Gongzi* was brilliant and steadfast, Taiwan's people and soldiers had always had high esteem on him. But Tai Furen [grand/great madame] Dong Guotai did not like him at all; she sent Feng Xifan to assassinate him. [Translator's note: I am not sure if Dong Guotai was her name. 'Guotai' could also mean 'madame of the country'.] After he was killed, the *Er Gongzi* [second young master] Keshuang took over the throne. *Da Gongzi*'s wife, Madame Chen went to see Dong Guotai, saying that *Da Gongzi* was innocent. Dong Guotai was very angry, she ordered her people to drive her away. Holding *Da Gongzi*'s body, Madame Chen cried for a moment, and then she hanged herself and died. That Madame Chen was Chen … Chen *Junshi*'s oldest daughter. In our hearts all the people in Taiwan were very dissatisfied over his matter."

Hearing that his Shifu's daughter was murdered, Wei Xiaobao remembered Shifu, his heart ached. Slapping the table, he cursed, "Damn it, that kid Zheng

Keshuang is stupid and a muddlehead, what kind of fart *Wangye* can he be?"

"Yes," Lin Xingzhu said, "*Er Gongzi* ascended the throne, he bestowed his father-in-law Feng Xifan the title *Tidu* [local commander], all government affairs were handled by him. This man is unfair, he is very selfish. Whenever someone had the guts to speak several sentences about fairness, he would kill those people. Thus the hundreds of civil and military officials dared to be angry but did not dare to speak up. *Da Gongzi* and Madame Chen's ghosts frequently appeared, finally in the fourth month Dong Guotai was scared to death by the ghosts."

"Delighted, delighted!" Wei Xiaobao said, "When this Dong Guotai arrived in the nether world, Guoxing Ye [Koxinga] won't possible let her get away with it."

"Nobody says otherwise," Lin Xingzhu agreed, "Dong Guotai was scared to death by the ghosts, as soon as this matter was known, everybody was delighted. The entire Taiwan, from north to south, everybody released firecrackers for three days; they said it was to chase away the ghosts, but actually it was to celebrate this old revered grandmother's death!"

"Interesting, interesting!" Wei Xiaobao repeatedly exclaimed.

Shi Lang said, "The ghost story is not necessarily true. Presumeably after murdering her oldest grandson and hounding his oldest granddaughter-in-law, Dong Guotai's heart was disturbed. The elderly suspected there were ghosts in the dark, hence day and night she saw ghosts."

"Evil spirits really exist," Wei Xiaobao said seriously, "Especially the people who died of persecution or died because others wronged them. After they become ghosts, they would definitely seek revenge. Shi *Daren*, this time you pacified Taiwan, you killed a lot of people. I am sure there are not a few ghosts on these Taiwan's battleships; it would be best if Shi *Daren* is careful."

Shi Lang's countenance slightly changed, but immediately he laughed and said, "Going into battle in a war, inevitably we will have to kill people. If all the enemy troops and generals who died in battle became ghosts who seek revenge, all military officers will not die a good death."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, "That is not necessarily the case," he said, "Shi *Daren* was originally a great general under Taiwan's Guoxing Ye's command, you

returned and excessively killed Taiwan's troops and generals. The dead people's wronged ghosts are naturally dissatisfied. This is clearly different from other generals."

Shi Lang did not say anything, in his heart he was enraged. He was a Fujian's Jinjiang [county] native, from among Taiwan's Zheng *Wang*'s troops, eight out of ten were Fujian people; there were especially a lot of Minnan [south Fujian] people. After he pacified Taiwan, he had heard not a few rumors and hearsays, cursing him as a traitor to Han, as well as a traitor to Min [short name for Fujian]. There was even an anonymous literary work in the form of a poem scolding him and satirizing him. In the deepest part of his heart he was actually ashamed; only Wei Xiaobao was the first person who openly mocked him on his face.

Helpless against Wei Xiaobao, he vented his anger toward Lin Xingzhu. He glowered at him while saying in his heart, "As soon as we leave this island, *laozi* will deal with you really good."

"Shi *Daren*," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your luck is really good; if Chen *Junshi* was not murdered, he would have defended Zheng Keshang in Taiwan; Dong Guotai, Zheng Keshuang, and the others could not possibly seize the throne. With Chen *Junshi* in command, from top to bottom the troops and the people defended Taiwan wholeheartedly, you may not necessarily be able to succeed."

Shi Lang was silent; he thought that his own ability was definitely far inferior to Chen Jinnan's; if this person did not die, naturally the situation was substantially different.

Hong Chao suddenly interrupted, "Wei *Jueye* is right. All the people, troops and generals of Taiwan also said the same thing. Everybody hated Zheng Keshuang for murdering his loyal minister; he is the damaged Great Wall, indeed he is Guoxing Ye's unworthy grandson."

Shi Lang angrily said, "Hong *Shoubei*, since you have surrendered to the Great Qing, how could you dare to speak this kind of treason and heresy?"

Hong Chao hastily stood up and said, "Lowly officer is muddleheaded, *Daren* please forgive my offence."

"Hong *Laoxiong* [old brother]," Wei Xiaobao said, "You are speaking honestly;

even if His Majesty heard it with his own ears, he would not possibly blame you. Sit down and drink some wine."

"Yes," Hong Chao replied. Trembling with fear, he sat down. He picked up the winecup with both hands, but his hands were trembling so hard that more than half of the wine spilled out the cup.

Wei Xiaobao said, "Chen *Junshi* was murdered by Zheng Keshuang, everybody in Taiwan knew about it, didn't they?"

"Yes," Hong Chao replied, "When Zheng Keshuang returned to Taiwan, he … he said that Chen *Junshi* … was … was …" He cast a glance to Shi Lang, did not dare to continue.

Wei Xiaobao said, "As long as you are telling the truth, nobody will blame you."

"Yes, yes," Hong Chao said, "Zheng Keshuang and Feng Xifan, two people, along with several bodyguards were drifting on the sea in a skiff, they came across a fishing boat who rescued them and brought them back to Taiwan. Zheng Keshuang said that Chen *Junshi* was killed by General Shi. When Zheng *Wangye* heard about it, he wept bitterly for several days. Later on after Zheng Keshuang usurped the throne, he personally announced in public that he had killed Chen *Junshi* with his own hands; he even bragged that his martial art skill was so amazing. A lot of Chen *Junshi*'s subordinates did not want accept it; they inquired of him what crime has Chen *Junshi* committed. But they were all arrested by Feng Xifan and executed."

Wei Xiaobao banged the wine cup in his hand heavily on the table. "F*ck his granny!" he cursed. Suddenly he roared in laughter and said, "Usually we swear at people's granny, but this man's granny is indeed rather not worthwhile. Only f*cking Zheng Keshuang's granny is really 'made by Heaven and arranged by Earth', '*ding* three pays twenty four' [don't know what it is]; nothing is more fitting than this."

When Shi Lang heard these few sentences, his heart was quite happy. Because he offended Zheng Chenggong his entire family was executed; it was all because of Dong Guotai's provocation. He said, "What Wei *Jueye* said is very true, we can f*ck his granny. Guoxing Ye was a hero and a warrior, everything in him was good, only he took a wrong wife."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said, “Other people can f*ck Zheng Keshuang’s granny, in this world only General Shi alone must not f*ck her. General Shi’s glory, riches and honor came from this old revered grandmother. Although your parents, wife and child were all murdered by her, in return you get Navy *Tidu*, Third-class Marquis of Jing Hai. You are better off doing this business deal.”

Immediately Shi Lang’s countenance turned deep red; in his heart he cursed, “*Laozi* wants to f*ck your, Wei Xiaobao’s, granny.” Supressing his anger, he picked up the winecup with both hands and took a big mouthful. But his breathing was adversed, as soon as the wine entered his throat, he suddenly broke into violent coughing.

Wei Xiaobao mused, “Looking at your face, in your heart naturally you want to f*ck my granny in a big way; too bad I don’t know who my dad is, I don’t know who my granny is even more. You want to f*ck my granny, you will definitely f*ck the wrong person. In your heart most likely you still want to be my *laozi* [old man], in that case my granny will be your ma. You want to f*ck my granny, won’t that mean you are at sixes and sevens with your own *Niang*, a complete confusion?” He looked at Shi Lang with an amused look.

A navy *Fujiang* [deputy general] surnamed Lu was also sitting on their table, he was afraid these two people would vent their feeling toward each other; he said, “Wei *Jueye*, this time Shi *Junmen* pacified Taiwan, the success was entirely due to his sweat and blood in disregarding everything. Shi *Junmen* received the imperial order, from the fourth of the sixth month he commanded more than six hundred warships, and more than sixty thousand sergeants on the expedition to Taiwan. On the ocean we went against the wind, and it took eleven days for us to reach Penghu. We fought Taiwan troops under the command of Liu Guoxuan in big battle, so fierce that the sky darkened and the earth black, the sun and the moon gave forth no more of its light, even Shi *Junmen* was very concerned …”

Wei Xiaobao noticed that both Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao hung their heads with an angry look on their faces; he presumed these two were also fighting at the battle of Penghu, and he knew naturally in this battle Shi Lang was victorious, hence he did not want to hear Lu *Fujiang* telling him the story of Shi Lang’s proud past achievemens. He asked, “General Shi, that day when Guoxing

Ye took Taiwan, he was also attacking from Penghu, wasn't he?"

"Exactly," Shi Lang replied.

Wei Xiaobao said, "At that time you were under Guoxing Ye's command, I wonder how did the battle go?"

Shi Lang said, "The red-haired demons did not dispatch troops to defend Penghu."

Wei Xiaobao asked Lin Xingzhu, "In those days Guoxing Ye crossed the ocean attacking east, I heard Lin *Dage* led cane-shield troops to chop the demons' legs; I wonder how did you do that?"

Lin Xingzhu thought, "About the cane-shield troops chopping the demons' legs, I have already told you the story. And now you are asking me again, naturally it is because you don't want to listen to the stinking history about Shi Lang subduing Taiwan, but want to listen to Guoxing Ye and Chen *Junshi*'s heroic deeds instead. I must not talk about my own deeds too much, because if Shi Lang harbors a grudge in his heart, he would definitely deal with me. I'd better hold him up in good light." Thereupon he said, "Twice has Shi *Junmen* attacked Taiwan, his meritorious service is indeed very big. In those days Guoxing Ye assembled all the generals to dicuss whether or not they should cross the ocean and attack to the east. A lot of generals said that Taiwan's natural barrier is difficult to attack, the wind and waves on the sea is very big, red-haired demons' guns were difficult to deal with; this mission is indeed dangerous. But Chen *Junshi* and General Shi made a supreme effort to endorse it, and in the end they set up great merits." Hearing this, Shi Lang's face showed a pleased expression.

Lin Xingzhu continued, "It was Yongli's fifteenth year second month …"

Shi Lang said, "Lin *Dusi*, the former Ming's era name must not be mentioned anymore; it was the Great Qing Shunzhi's eighteenth year."

"Yes, yes," Lin Xingzhu said, "On the second month that year, Guoxing Ye moved his camp to Jinmen City. On the first day of the third month the entire force made a vow and offered sacrifice to the sea. For the first ten days afterwards, Guoxing Ye and Chen *Junshi* assembled the troops under their command into Right Martial Guards, Left and Right Tiger Guards, Valiant Cavalry Camp, Left Vanguard, Center Attacking Force, Rear Guard Camp, Front and Rear

Communication Team, Auxilliary Destroyer Rear Camp, into the navy ships and gathered them at Liaoluo Bay to wait for the wind. At that time the troops' hearts were anxious, a lot of people were afraid to go out to sea, Guoxing Ye and Chen *Junshi*, General Shi, separately went to the camps to encourage the hearts of the troops. We waited until noon of the twenty-third day before the sky was clear, the wind and the waves ceased to blow; thereupon the great force moved out. By the afternoon of the twenty-fourth we arrived at Penghu. But after we reached Penghu, the gale returned, the wind and the waves on the sea were growing, for several days we were unable to set sail. There was no food on all the islands of Penghu, there was food shortage in the troops, we had to live on eating sweet potatoes; the hearts of the troops started to panic. By the thirtieth, we simply could not wait anymore. Guoxing Ye gave his order to set off, regardless of big wind big waves, we must go into battle. That day in the middle of the night, after the first watch, Guoxing Ye's central command's warship flew the command banner and fired the cannon three times, the metal drums were sounded, the battleships raised their sails toward the east. At that time black clouds covered the whole sky, the great waves on the sea looked like small hills pouncing on the bow of the ships. Strong wind, heavy rain, everybody was soaked to the bones. Guoxing Ye stood on the bow, with a sword in his hand; he shouted, 'Display utter loyalty to defend our country, not afraid of the wind and the waves!' Tens of thousands troops echoed in chorus, 'Display utter loyalty to defend our country, not afraid of the wind and the waves!' The yelling was so loud that the sound of the gale and the billows were nearly drown."

Wei Xiaobao said to Shi Lang, "At that time naturally General Shi also shouted like that?"

Shi Lang replied, "That time lowly officer received the order to defend Xiamen, I did not go to Taiwan."

"I see," Wei Xiaobao said, "What a pity, what a pity!"

Lu *Fujiang* said, "When Zheng *Wangye* arrived at Penghu, he did not encounter strong wind and big waves, but Shi *Junmen*'s bloody battle; now *that* was 'startling the heart moving the soul'. Liu Guoxuan assembled the Navy at Penghu's Niu Xin [ox heart] Bay, Ji Long [chickeen coop] Islet, and built earthen rampart for twenty *li* along the coast, each section of the rampart was

reinforced with a cannon. When the Great Qing Navy arrived, the cannon on the shore were fired simultaneously; there were also rockets, mortars, it was desperately serious …"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Lu *Fujiang*, I'll say your gut is more or less the same as mine."

"I do not dare," Lu *Fujiang* said, "How can lowly officer be compared to *Jueye*?"

"You can't be compared with me?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

"Naturally I can't," Lu *Fujiang* replied.

"That's strange," Wei Xiaobao said, "I always thought I am as meek as a mouse; it's considered very disappointing. Turns out you are even more useless than I am, ha ha … that's strange, that's strange." Lu *Fujiang* face swollen red; he did not dare to make any noise.

Wei Xiaobao asked Lin Xingzhu, "After Guoxing Ye took the troops to sea, and then what happened?"

Lin Xingzhu said, "The battleships sailed in the gale and big waves for four hours; by the third watch of the night [11pm – 1am] suddenly the breeze was still, the waves were quiet, the black cloud dissipated. A moment later, the wind turned into tail wind instead; the joyous cry of the troops thundered, everybody said *Laotian* [God/Heaven] was blessing them, the victory was guaranteed. Early morning on the first day of the following month, the battleships finally reached outside Lu Er Men [deer ear gate]. Using the bamboo pole to gauge the water, unexpectedly it was high sand shallow water; there was no way we could sail forward. Guoxing Ye was very anxious, he set up an incense burner table, to pray to the Heaven. Not too long afterwards, suddenly the tide arose, all battleships overflowed into the Lu Er Men. The red-haired troops on the shore opened fire to bombard us. Over there the red-haired demons had built two cities, one was called 're lan zhe cheng' [Fort Zeelandia], the other was called 'pu luo min zhe cheng'[27] …"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "The devils' place names are so weird; what 're lai che' [hot covering], 'leng lai che' [cold covering], 'na mo bo luo mi duo

Guanshiyin Pu zhe' [namo paramita Guanyin Bodhisattva]?"

Lin Xingzhu smiled and continued his story, "At that time Guoxing Ye used the telescope to look, he saw the red-haired demons' main force had two big warships, two battle cruisers, plus several hundreds small battleships and small boats. Thereupon he passed on an order, sending the Front Communication Team's Commander Chen Ze to lead a fleet of ships to land on Lu Er Men Island, to guard North Shanwei to prevent other red-haired fleet from giving their assistance.

He sent Huang Zhao to lead five hundred *Xian Shou* [lit. shining metal hand] men, with twenty cannon, divided into three teams, to be stationed at the tail of Yi Kun Shen in formation, to block the enemy from moving southward. He sent lowly officer with five hundred *Teng Pai Shou* [rattan shield hand] men, from behind the demons' port going around the left of Kun Shen to intercept and kill. He also sent Xiao Gongchen to lead twenty fast-ships; as soon as they saw the red-haired fleet passing the seven Kun Shen [Translator's note: I thought it was a place name, but am not sure. 鲲身 Any help?] to attack, they were to pretend that they were going to land to besiege the city, and to make a lot of loud noise to give the impression that they succeeded in pinning down the enemy. In the meantime, various generals received orders to set off separately, while the cannon on the ships also returned fire. On the other side Chen *Junshi* led the Navy to surround and strike the red-haired demons' main battleships.

Battle cry ensued; the surface of the sea was filled with gun smoke and flames. After fighting for more than two hours, there was a loud explosion; one of the red-haired demons' main battleships was sunk by our troops. It was only later that I found out that it was the 'bei ke de ya' [not sure, Becker or Baker something?], the red-haired demons' Navy elite ship. The other ship, Maria, suffered serious damage; it escaped eastwards toward the ocean and its whereabouts was unknown. Two red-haired demons' ships also retreated. At that time the brothers under Chen Ze's command encountered red-haired demon troops, they all strived to be the first to fight; although the red-haired demons' firearms were formidable, seeing our troops rushed in and killed the enemy courageously, they were so scared that they lost the will to fight, and retreated back into the city. Our troops landed at Chikan [Fort Provintia], and

stormed toward ‘pu luo min zhe cheng’.”

(Author’s note: When Zheng Chenggong attacked Taiwan, from Penghu he landed in the vicinity of modern day Tainan. At that time the Holland’s massive military force was also stationed in Tainan region.)

Wei Xiaobao poured a cup of wine and handed it over to Lin Xingzhu with both hand. “Lin *Dage*,” he said, “You fought well. I toast you a cup.”

Lin Xingzhu stood up to receive it; he expressed his thanks, and after drinking it up he continued, “After our troops landed at Provintia, local Chinese people swarmed out to welcome us, a lot of people were so happy that they cried. They said, ‘This time our liberator has finally arrived.’ Wei *Jueye*, Guoxing Ye’s esteemed father, Zheng Taishi [imperial tutor] was originally doing business without capital on the ocean, Taiwan was his, the Senior’s lair. Later on the Senior brought his subordinate brothers back to the Central Plains. Hence Taiwan was separately occupied by Holland demons and Spain demons; Holland demons in the south, Spain demons in the north. Two demons fought each other, the Spain demons were defeated, and entire Taiwan fell under Holland demons’ grip. Our Chinese people on the island were mistreated and killed to death by the Holland’s red-haired demons. There was a brother, former subordinate of Zheng Taishi, called Guo Huaiyi; he was a warrior. He remained on the island and did not leave. Seeing Chinese people were bullied very badly by the red-haired demons, he assembled the brothers in secret, notified Chinese people everywhere that on the fifteenth of the eight month, the Mid-Autumn Festival, they were to move together to kill all the red-haired demons on the island. Unexpectedly there was a traitor, called Puzai, who went as far as to inform the red-haired demons …”

Wei Xiaobao slapped the table and cursed, “His granny, Chinese people’s affair was spoiled by a traitor.”

“That’s right,” Lin Xingzhu said, “When Guo Huaiyi *Dage* saw that Puzai ran away, he knew the situation had turned worse. Immediately he led more than sixteen-thousand Chinese to attack ‘pu luo min zhe cheng’, destroying and setting the red-haired demons’ government buildings and shops on fire. The red-haired demons deployed a large army to counterattack, their guns were formidable. Our Chinese people, other than several fiery-dragon spears, were

only using broadswords, iron spears, hoes, wooden sticks, and similar types of weapons. In Provintia they fought for fifteen days straight. Guo Huaiyi *Dage* was unfortunate and was killed by the red-haired demon's gun …"

"Aiya, that's bad," Wei Xiaobao exclaimed.

"It was," Lin Xingzhu said, "Guo Huaiyi *Dage* died, the snake was without a head; the Chinese people were defeated and driven out of the city. On the bank of the Great Lake the bloody battle continued for seven days and seven nights. The number of Chinese people killed on the bank of Great Lake totalled more than four thousand; women and girls also rather die than submit, more than five hundred of them were killed. The rest were captured by the red-haired demons, women were forced to be barracks' prostitute, the men were either pulled to death by five horses running separate directions, or branded to slow death by branding irons …"

Wei Xiaobao was enraged; he cried out, "Red-haired demons are this cruel, they are more vicious than the Great Qing troops' massacre of our people in Yangzhou!"

Shi Lang and Lu *Fujiang* looked at each other in dismay; they could only smile wryly. They both thought, "The way this youngster talk is really without any regard of the gravity of things."

Lin Xingzhu said, "It was Yongli's sixth year, the eighth month …"

Hong Chao bent his fingers and counted, "Yongli's sixth year, that is the Great Qing Shunzhi's seventh … eighth … ninth … Shunzhi's ninth year."

"Is that right?" Lin Xingzhu said, "Anyway, ever since that great massacre, the Chinese people of Taiwan and the red-haired demons cannot exist together. As soon as there is the tiniest reason, the red-haired demons would kill Chinese people randomly. Therefore, when they saw Guoxing Ye's main forces, it was as if the Emperor Bodhisattva Savior has arrived. Men, women, young and old, everybody shared with us their grievance. That very evening, the red-haired demon governor knew defeat was imminent; he took his anger out on the Chinese people, he killed the Chinese who lived in Kun Shen; no matter young or old, he gathered them together and killed altogether more than five hundred people. The next day Guoxing Ye dispatched the troops to attack 'pu luo min zhe

cheng'. Chen *Junshi* came up with a strategy, we trained the rattan shield troops to roll around on the ground to chop the demon troops' leg; and thus 'pu luo min zhe cheng' fell."

"That is *Laoxiong*'s great merit," Wei Xiaobao said.

"It was all due to Chen *Junshi*'s brilliant scheme," Lin Xingzhu replied, "Lowly officer did not have any merit." He continued, "Immediately afterwards Guoxing Ye deployed the troops to attack Fort Zeelandia, where the red-haired demon governor was stationed. The artillery barrage from the top of the city wall was very fierce, our troops suffered heavy casualties. But General Ma Xin and General Liu Guoxuan courageously attacked Yi Kun Shen. Seeing too many brothers died, Guoxing Ye built earthen rampart outside the city, surrounding Fort Zeelandia all around, and installed cannon on the rampart, pounding the city walls with artillery barrage. Before long our second Navy's Left Attacking Force, Front Attacking Force, Wisdom Force, Valiant Troops, Amphibious Force, Palace Hall Troops, all ships have also arrived; our power rose up. While dispatching the troops to clear up the wild area for farming, Guoxing Ye also intensified the besieging of the city. Besieged until the fifth month, suddenly the red-haired demons' reinforcement from Batavia arrived. The red-haired demons from the city came out to attack. There were big battles on land and sea, our troops dauntlessly rushed in and killed the enemy, the sea water was dyed red with blood."

Wei Xiaobao slapped the table and exclaimed, "Fierce, fierce!" Turning to Shi Lang he said, "Too bad at that time General Shi was in Xiamen; otherwise, you could keep up with these several big battles, and killed several hundreds of those damn red-haired demons, and then you can really be considered a hero." Shi Lang stayed silent.

Wei Xiaobao asked Hong Chao, "Hong *Dage*, at that time which group were you in?"

Hong Chao replied, "At that time lowly officer was under Liu Guoxuan, General Liu's command; along with Chen Ze, General Chen's navy we besieged the red-haired demons' reinforcement, in a big battle at the North Shanwei region. The red-haired demons' warships were huge, their guns very sharp; when the bullets from our firearms reached the red-haired demons' big warship, they all bounced

back from the armor plating, we could not harm the ship. Seeing we could not withstand the enemy, the Front Communication Team's Lin Jinshen, General Lin personally led two-hundred-men suicide team, with their bodies covered in gunpowder they braved death by jumping into the red-haired demons' big warship to damage and explode the cannon on the ship. Seeing us attacking violently with no fear of death at all, the red-haired demons' were thrown into confusion. We killed a red-haired demon commander, captured two battleships, and utterly routed the red-haired demons' navy. On land Chen *Junshi* led the troops in great battle also seized total victory. Later on seven red-haired demons' lead bullets were dug out from Chen *Junshi*'s body."

"Hey," Wei Xiaobao said, "My Shifu did not die under the red-haired demons' guns; he died under his granny Zheng Keshuang, that kid's sword. General Shi, real men kill foreign devils, now that is amazing. Chinese people kill Chinese people, even if he killed a lot, he cannot be considered a hero. Do you agree?"

"Humph," Shi Lang snorted, but did not say anything.

Lin Xingzhu said, "The red-haired demons suffered defeat after defeat, they wanted to burn our troops' provision, but each time Chen *Junshi* always saw through their plan, they were never able to steal our chicken or nibble our grain. The red-haired demon governor was trapped in an isolated city, he had his hands bound and was unable to do anything about it. He sent people across the sea to contact the Great Qing's Fujian and Zhejiang *Zongdu* [governor-general] Li Lutai, to ask him to send troops and rescued them. That Li *Daren* was an interesting fellow; he sent a letter asking the red-haired demons to come to Fujian first to crush Guoxing Ye's garrisons in Jinmen and Xiamen regions, and then the Great Qing troops would come to Taiwan and launch converging attack from inside and outside. At that time the red-haired demons were powerless to defend themselves; they were like a turtle shrinking its head inside Fort Zeelandia, how could they send troops to Jinmen, Xiamen?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "The red-haired demons speak like a fart; all along they didn't want to attack Jinmen, Xiamen, did they? When Great Qing speak, we always keep our words; didn't we eventually send troops to attack Taiwan? We're only twenty, thirty years late; it's not a big deal! When General Shi led the troops to attack Taiwan, I wonder if there were red-haired demons with whom

you coordinate inside and outside offensives."

Shi Lang could not endure patiently anymore; he stood up abruptly and said, "Wei *Jueye*, *Xiongdi* and you are ministers of the same palace hall, both of us are Great Qing officials; why do you always speak cold words and make sarcastic comments, always mocking *Xiongdi*?"

"Eh? That's strange," Wei Xiaobao exclaimed in surprise, "When did I ever mock General Shi? General Shi did not have any illicit relations with foreign country, that's great. But if you do have an illicit relations with foreign country, I'll say there's still time. General Shi holds massive military power in your hands, red-haired demons, Spaniard demons, Portuguese demons, Luocha demons, will be very happy to make friends with you."

Shi Lang shivered in his heart, "Not good!" he mused, "If this little demon made an accusation in front of His Majesty, framing me of having illicit relations with foreign country, my entire life would be destroyed in his hands." Just now his temper flared, he spoke rudely; he could not help feeling remorse. Hastily he forced a laugh and said, "*Xiongdi* has drank several cups too much, and has offended quite a bit, Wei *Jueye* please forgive me."

When Wei Xiaobao saw that he was angry, originally he was rather scared, but then he saw that Shi Lang changed his attitude and offered an apology, he knew that Shi Lang was afraid of him. Thereupon he laughed and said, "If General Shi seriously wants to establish yourself as a king in Taiwan, it would be better for you to kill *Xiongdi* first to silence me, so that I would not report it to His Majesty. But if you are just making a loud of noise and throwing a fit, although *Xiongdi*'s gut is small, I am not afraid."

Shi Lang's countenance turned deathly pale. Leaving his seat he bowed deeply with cupped fist and said, "Wei *Jueye*, a person of great moral stature does not remember the offenses committed by one of low moral stature; lowly officer was preposterous, I am willing to accept punishment. But establishing myself as a king in Taiwan or having illicit relations with foreign country, lowly officer absolutely never has this intention. Lowly officer single-mindedly exerting myself for His Majesty, following his order with loyalty, definitely not double-minded."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Please sit down, please sit down. We will wait

and see." Turning his head toward Lin Xingzhu he said, "Your story is more interesting than Mr. Storyteller. This episode, Guoxing Ye fought a bloody battle in Taiwan, the red-haired demons pissed in their pants in terror. And then what happened?"

"By that time," Lin Xingzhu continued, "The news that Guoxing Ye led a large army to attack Taiwan had reached the inland. Huang Wu, Huang *Daren* immediately submitted a proposal to the imperial court, he submitted what was called 'Five Plans to Fortify Defenses and Raze the Fields in Pacifying the Ocean'."

"Who is that Huang Wu?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

Lin Xingzhu cast a glance toward Shi Lang, he coughed several times, but did not immediately reply. Shi Lang said, "This Huang *Daren* was originally also a subordinate of Guoxing Ye, his rank was a *Zongbing* [regional commander]. After he submitted to the imperial court, his political career took off smoothly. By the time of his death, his title was First-class Duke of Hai Deng [hai – ocean, deng – settling of liquid; maybe a place's name.]."

"Hey," Wei Xiaobao exclaimed, "Turns out he was also a trai …" in the end he forcibly swallowed the last syllable 'tor'.

Shi Lang's countenance turned red; he mused, "You curse me as a traitor, I'll say you are a fake Manchu; we are no better or worse than the other."

Wei Xiaobao said, "What kind of clever scheme did this Huang Wu use to pat His Majesty's bottom that in a short while he was bestowed the title Duke? His skill is really not small! This trick we may want to polish and refine, and try to emulate."

"This Huang Wu," Lin Xingzhu said, "In those days Guoxing Ye sent him to guard Hai Deng, but he surrendered Hai Deng to the imperial court. The officers and soldiers who were unwilling to surrender, he killed them all. At that time the imperial court was at a loss on how to deal with Guoxing Ye, suddenly there was this general in command of the troops from the other side who wanted to surrender along with the entire city; naturally the imperial court was overjoyed. Hence the reason he received such a preferential treatment."

"So that's how it is," Wei Xiaobao said, "What plan did he propose?"

Lin Xingzhu sighed and said, “This Huang *Daren* really did a lot of harm to the common people. His ‘Five Plans to Pacify the Ocean’, number one was to move all common people from the coastal area inland, so that those Jinmen, Xiamen, as well as Taiwan, would not get any material assistance. Number two was to burn down all ships and boats in the coast; henceforth not a *cun* of wood was allowed to go out to sea. Number three was to kill Guoxing Ye’s father, Zheng Taishi. Number four was to excavate the tomb of Guoxing Ye’s ancestors, to damage his *fengshui* [geomancy]. Number five was to relocate the officers and men, former subordinates of Guoxing Ye who had surrendered inland to open up land for farming in various provinces, to avoid future misfortune.”

“Hey,” Wei Xiaobao said, “This fellow’s plans are indeed very malicious.”

“Aren’t they?” Lin Xingzhu said, “At that time Emperor Shunzhi had just passed away, His Majesty had just ascended the throne, his age was young, Oboi arrogated all powers. That treacherous bandit Oboi saw Huang Wu’s ‘Five Plans to Pacify the Ocean’ and agreed that it made a lot of sense, he issued an order from Liaodong all the way to Zhili, Jiangsi, Zhejiang, Fujian, as well as Guangdong, nobody was allowed to live within thirty *li* from the coast, all vessels were to be burned down. In those days common people lived in the coastal area by the thousands and tens of thousands, none was not forced out from their homes and wandering about, a lot of them did not survive.”

Shi Lang spoke up, “Huang Wu’s scheme went indeed a bit too far. It was not until the current ruler took office, Wei *Daren* took down Oboi, that the sea ban was lifted. But the common people in seven coastal provinces have already suffered harmful effects. At that time the imperial court issued strict order, common people who violated the ban were arrested and immediately beheaded. A lot of people could not survive, they went to the seaside to catch fish; I don’t know how many were killed. At that time Zheng Taishi was also killed. Oboi sent the Minister of War *Shangshu* Sunahai on a special mission to Quanzhou’s [prefecture] Nan An Xian [South An County] in Fujian to dig out Zheng family’s ancestral tomb.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Oboi claimed to be a warrior, but he committed such a senseless act; if he really have skills, he should challenge Guoxing Ye with real swords, real spears. By relocating the coastal population inland, isn’t it clear that

he was afraid? His Majesty cherishes common people, if Huang Wu's plans were presented to His Majesty, he would definitely have his head chopped."

"Exactly," Shi Lang said, "Huang Wu died early, it could be considered his luck."

Lin Xingzhu said, "When the news of Zheng Taishi's death reached Taiwan, Guoxing Ye was afraid it might shake the troops' heart, so he said it was a lie and that they must not be gullible. But according to his personal guards, Guoxing Ye often cried bitterly in the middle of the night. Guoxing Ye also confided with Chen *Junshi* and several other generals that Huang Wu's plot was indeed sinister. Fortunately they had gone on a punitive expedition to the east to Taiwan; otherwise, tens of thousands soldiers could not have a foothold in Jinmen and Xiamen. By then we have held our siege for a long time, several times the red-haired troops wanted to break the siege, each time they were beaten back into the city. Hence Guoxing Ye issued an order that before the New Year we must attack and bring Fort Zeelandia down." Turning toward Hong Chao he said, "We attacked on the twenty-third of the eleventh month, didn't we?"

"Yes," Hong Chao replied, "That day the wind was strong, with heavy rain. Our troops fired the cannon from all the earthen ramparts at the same time, damaging the corner of the city wall, the fortifications on the east and west of the city were also broken. The red-haired demons desperately rushed out, but after several hundreds of them died, they were driven back into the city. Thereupon the red-haired governor raised a white flag to surrender. At that time the Chinese people in Taiwan wanted to take revenge by killing the red-haired demons clean. Guoxing Ye enlightened the people that our China is a country with etiquette, the enemy surrendered must not be killed. He allowed the red-haired governor to write a letter of surrender with fourteen sections before he led the ruined army, defeated generals boarded the ships and left Taiwan to flee to Batavia. The red-haired demons occupied Taiwan since the Ming Dynasty's Tian Qi's fourth year, for a total of 38 years, until that year, the Yongli's fifteenth year … which was the Great Qing's Shunzhi's eighteenth year, eleventh month, twenty-ninth day, when Taiwan returned to be China's territory."

Lin Xingzhu said, "Guoxing Ye issued a military order not to kill the surrendering red-haired troops, but Chinese people were unbearably angry; they

continuously spat on them and threw rocks at them. Little children even made up a song to mock them. The red-haired troops with broken hands broken feet, hanging their heads dispiritedly; they did not dare to utter even a single word of demon language. After their battleship set off, they lowered their flag, and fired a gun salute, saying that it was to show their humble respect to Guoxing Ye for his kindness of not killing them."

"Good!" Wei Xiaobao said, "We, Chinese, have a really great power and prestige. The red-haired demons' cannon were that formidable, to conquer Taiwan was really not easy, really not easy!"

Hong Chao said, "Guoxing Ye changed the name Fort Zeelandia to Anping Zhen [lit. safe and peaceful, zhen – small town], he changed 'pu luo min zhe cheng' into Chengtian Fu [lit. supporting heaven, fu – prefecture]; henceforth both have always been Taiwan's strategic town."

Lu *Fujiang* interjected, "When Shi *Junmen* took over Taiwan, the path he took was the old path taken by Guoxing Ye in the past; he went in from Lu Er Men …"

Wei Xiaobao waved his hand to stop him; he yawned big and said, "Chinese defeating the red-haired demons and driving them out to see, *that* is an immensely enjoyable story. Our people defeating our people, it's approximately no more than that. General Shi, we have drank quite a bit of wine, let's adjourn now."

Shi Lang stood up and said, "Yes, thank you very much *Jueye* for the dinner, lowly officer takes my leave."

Wei Xiaobao went back to the inner hall and told his wives how he stopped Shi Lang from talking; in short he prevented him from boasting about his outstanding military service in taking over Taiwan. His six wives found the story amusing, only Ah Ke remained silent. She thought that if she was married to Zheng Keshuang, she would have been captured and taken prisoner together with him; brought to Beijing, as a concubine of a vanquished nation, it would be difficult to escape humiliation. That day when she saw Zheng Keshuang left Tong Chi Island on a skiff, she did not care about his life or death. This moment as she heard that his country perished and he surrendered to the enemy, she did not have the slightest concern. Recalling the past events, she was amazed that she

was actually crazy about his elegant manner and his appearance, knowing full well that this man was someone without any backbone, a spoiled son of rich parents without any future prospects. She realized that it was as if she was blind by being deeply attached to him. This moment as she thought back, she was still feeling deeply ashamed.

The Princess said, "*Huangdi Gege* was too generous to him, that fellow Zheng Keshuang surrendered, unexpectedly he bestowed him a first-class duke title, his nobility rank is above Xiaobao's. It really upsets me."

Wei Xiaobao waved his hand, "Not a big deal, not a big deal. Guoxing Ye was a great hero, His Majesty was looking at Guoxing Ye's face that he bestowed his offspring the title of first-class duke. Based on Zheng Keshuang's own ability, at most he would only be bestowed the title first-class caterpillar."

At noon the next day, Wei Xiaobao singled out Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao, two people for a small banquet; he asked them about Shi Lang taking over Taiwan.

Turned out the Qing troops and Taiwan troops were engaged in bloody battle for several days at Penghu Islands' Niu Xin Bay and Ji Long islet. The first day Shi Lang lost, afterwards Qing's Navy reinforcement arrived, the battle raged again. Taiwan's vessels were burned and suffered heavy defeat, the number of casualties among the officers and soldiers reaching more than ten thousand men, the battleships were either sunk or burned, the total damage reaching more than three hundred boats. Liu Guoxuan led the defeated army back into Taiwan.

Shi Lang led the Navy to attack Taiwan. Lu Er Men had shallow water, battleships could not enter; they dropped anchor on the ocean for twelve days, with no strategy left to try. Suddenly thick fog filled the sky, the tide swelled, Qing warships swarmed in. In Taiwan, everybody from top to bottom was greatly alarmed; they all said, "In the past because of the tide rose in Lu Er Men Guoxing Ye was able to enter Taiwan; and now Lu Er Men's tide rises again, the natural barrier is lost, this is the Will of Heaven that made it so, fighting again is useless."

When Zheng Keshuang was informed that the boats of Qing troops had entered Lu Er Men, he was already thrown into panic mode, when Feng Xifan advised him to surrender, naturally he readily agreed. It's just that he was afraid

Shi Lang would avenge his personal enmity and would make things difficult for Zheng Clan's offspring that he was greatly hesitant. Immediately Liu Guoxuan sent a letter to Shi Lang, saying that they were willing to surrender, but Guoxing Ye's descendants must be saved from harm, or else the entire Taiwan population, military and civilian alike, would recall fondly Guoxing Ye's kindness and righteousness, and would rather fight to the last man. Shi Lang immediately replied, guaranteeing that he would not bother about the old grievance, otherwise, let Heaven and men abandon him, and let his descendants be cut-off from the earth. Thereupon Zheng Keshuang, Feng Xifan and Liu Guoxuan led Taiwan's civil and military officials to surrender. The Ming Dynasty's imperial clan Prince Ningjing Zhu Shugui committed suicide to die for his country, his five concubines were buried alive as sacrifice together with their husband, and thus the Ming family was cut short.

Wei Xiaobao thought, "This Ming Dynasty Emperor's descendants committed suicide to die for his country, five of his wives followed him in death. If I, Wei Xiaobao, commit suicide, I wonder from my seven wives, how many would want to accompany me? I am sure Shuang'er would, the Princess would surely apologize for not accompanying me. As for the other five, most likely they would throw dice to decide who would die and who would live. When Fang Yi throw the dice, she would definitely cheat, calling me, the dead person, a 'cattle'."

Lin Xingzhu continued, saying that after Shi Lang led the troops to land, he indeed kept his words, he did not give the Zheng Clan offspring any trouble. He even personally went to Zheng Chenggong's Yan Ping Jun Wang ancestral shrine to offer sacrifice and cried bitterly for a moment.

Hong Chao said, "During the sacrifice he read a memorial in which there were some sentences like this: 'From Tong'an [district, Xiamen, Fujian] Hou [marquis] entered Taiwan, only then did Taiwan soil have inhabitant. Overtaking the bestowed confidence to open land and initiate the cliff boundary, who would dare to do it? Today by the authority of the Son of Heaven Lang leads military power, subduing this land, did not decline to wipe out the country and punish the guilty, for the reason of loyalty to the imperial court as well as to fulfill the duty to avenge father and brother. Alone Lang rose through the ranks, with Ci Xing[28] was as delighted as fish meet water, there was not the slightest bit of

resentment, but it led to great violation. Lang and Ci Xing had enmity and hatred, but my feeling is still like minister and his master. The poor scholar in the midst of reed, justice will not be done. Righteousness and personal kindness, henceforth it is over.' These several sentences were on everyone's lips for a period of time."

"What was he rambling about?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

"The poor scholar in the midst of reed was Wu Zixu," Hong Chao replied, "In the past Wu Zixu wiped out the State of Chu, he dug Chu's King Ping's body from the grave and lashed the corpse three hundred times to avenge the enmity of him killing Wu Zixu's father and brother. Shi Lang was saying that he definitely won't do such thing."

"Humph," Wei Xiaobao said with a cold laugh, "Does he dare? Although Guoxing Ye is dead, Shi Lang is still extremely afraid of him. He defeated the Zheng Family's family estate, he is afraid Guoxing Ye's brave spirit would find him and give him trouble, thereupon he went to Guoxing Ye's ancestral shrine to kowtow and plea for leniency. This man is very treacherous, you must not fall into his trick." Lin and Hong, two people, voiced their agreement.

"The story of Wu Zixu," Wei Xiaobao continued, "I have watched a play about him. Wu Zixu closed himself up, in one night the hair on his head turned white from fright, right?"

"Yes, yes," Hong Chao replied, "*Jueye*'s memory is very good."

Wei Xiaobao had not heard stories for a long time, thereupon he asked about Wu Zixu's story from the beginning to end. By coincidence this Hong Chao was a *Xiuxai* [a person who has passed the county level imperial exam]; although he had not passed a university entrance exam, he had quite a bit of ink in his belly; thereupon he narrated the story in details [lit. count by fives and tens].

Wei Xiaobao listened with keen interest and with pleasure; he said, "In this barren island I am truly bored to death, fortunately two gentlemen came to tell stories to relieve my boredom. It would be best if you two stay several days longer, there is no hurry to leave."

Lin Xingzhu said, "We are surrendered enemy generals from Taiwan, while we were talking yesterday we have offended General Shi. If General Shi wanted to

deal with us, it will be as easy as pinching an ant dead. All he needs is a carelessly spoken word with rebellious intent, then he will charge us with conspiracy against the law, immediately behead us first and submit report later. Even if after chopping our heads he did not submit any report, nobody would investigate. Wei *Daren*, please speak to General Shi on our behalf, tell him that you want us to stay here to serve you."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. "Hong *Dage*, what do you have in mind?" he asked.

Hong Chao said, "Last night lowly officer and Lin *Dage* talked it over, if Wei *Daren* cannot save our lives, the two of us undoubtedly will die without burial site."

Wei Xiaobao said, "If the two of you want to follow me, you must listen to what I say."

Lin and Hong, two people bowed together and said, "No matter what Wei *Daren* tells us to do, lowly officer will follow obediently."

Wei Xiaobao was extremely delighted; he thought, "With these two good helpers, I have a way of leaving this ghost place."

Kangxi sent Peng *Canjiang* with his troops to guard Tong Chi Island with strict imperial order in advance that they must not let Wei Xiaobao and his family to leave the island even for one step. Peng *Canjiang*'s brain was not too bright; he did not have any special skill either. But toward the Emperor's imperial edict, even if his head was chopped seventeen, eighteen times, he would not dare to violate the least bit. Kangxi wanted him to guard closely, he would guard closely. If Wei Xiaobao wanted to take his life, it would be as easy as lifting his hand; but even if he wiped these 501 soldiers guarding him clean, without a boat, in the end he could not leave the island. Hong and Ling, two people were veteran generals of the Navy; certainly they had skill in handling ships and navigating the ocean.

That evening he held another banquet for Shi Lang. This time he only invited Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao, two people to accompany them. After some chitchat, Wei Xiaobao said, "General Shi, are you going to stay here for one or two months?"

“Actually, lowly officer was thinking of staying a few days, to hear *Daren*’s instruction more often,” Shi Lang replied, “But Taiwan has just started to be put in order, it can’t be left too long. I am thinking of taking my leave from *Daren* tomorrow.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You said you wanted to stay here with me for a few days to hear my instruction more often. Are you serious, or did you just say that to make me happy?”

“Naturally I am one-hundred percent serious,” Shi Lang replied, “Lowly officer said it from the bottom of my heart. That year lowly officer followed *Daren*, the troops were stationed on Tong Chi Island, while we were bombarding Shen Long Island. Every day I had the pleasure of hearing *Daren* giving instructions, drinking wine, gambling, chatting and laughing with *Daren*; that kind of days, I had a great fun.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “If you could have that kind of days, will you be happy?”

“Naturally I will,” Shi Lang replied, “Someday His Majesty will send *Daren* on an important mission with heavy responsibility involving national military, lowly officer still want to follow *Daren*.”

Wei Xiaobao nodded. “It’s very easy,” he said, “You want to follow me, you want to hear me and joke with me, it’s not difficult at all. Tomorrow all of us will go to Taiwan together.”

Shi Lang was shocked. He stood up and said with a trembling voice, “This … this … this matter is not on His Majesty’s imperial edict; lowly officer does not dare to receive order. Please … please *Daren* forgive me.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “It’s not that I want to go to Taiwan to do anything, it’s just that I heard your story, it is so exciting. Guoxing Ye opened up new land in Tainan and Taipei, developing a new and colorful world, I want to see it with my own eyes. When we get to Taiwan, aren’t you going to hear my instruction more often? You said it so yourself. It’s just that I think you conduct yourself very well, plus you have followed me in the past; we are old boss, old subordinate, our friendship is more than ordinary, so I thought hard to find a way to grant your wish. I am going to Taiwan to play for a month or two, and

then I'll come back here. The gods do not know, the ghosts do not perceive; if you don't say anything, I don't say anything, there is no way His Majesty will find out."

Shi Lang's expression looked very awkward. He bowed and said, "Wei *Daren*, this matter is really difficult to do. Whatever *Daren* commands, lowly officer will obey faithfully, but if His Majesty put the blame on me, it would be a great inconvenience. If lowly officer does not submit a memorial to the Emperor, it would be a great crime of deceiving one's lord; lowly officer absolutely will not dare to do it."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Please sit down, please sit down. General Shi, since you are unwilling, it's a trivial matter, no need to be mentioned anymore."

Shi Lang felt as if a heavy burden had just removed from him; he repeatedly said 'yes', and sat back on the banquet table.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Speaking about great crime of deceiving one's lord, let me be honest with you: I have deceived His Majesty several times. It's just that His Majesty is magnanimous; when he found out later, he only swore at me several times, but never made a big deal out of it."

"Yes, yes," Shi Lang said, "Everybody says that His Majesty treated Wei *Daren* with deep kindness and profound benevolence; it is indeed very different. A ruler and his minister hit it off like this, it is unprecedented in history. But a small general, an external minister without any good fortune like lowly officer, I absolutely will not dare to follow Wei *Daren*'s example."

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, "General Shi speaks as if you are very timid, while in my opinion, your guts in the contrary are very big. I heard that after General Shi attacked Taiwan, you wrote a memorial and presented it as a memorial to Guoxing Ye; is there such thing?"

Shi Lang said, "Reporting to *Daren*, the three characters 'Guoxing Ye' are not supposed to be mentioned. Presently the national surname is Aisin Gioro [reminder: 'Guoxing Ye' means 'Lord of the Imperial Surname']. When we are talking about Zheng Chenggong, if we want to be a bit polite, we may say 'Former Ming's Ci Xing' [see Note 2 above]. As a result, lowly officer's memorial only mentioned 'Ci Xing', two characters; I definitely am not bold enough to

violate the taboo."

He presumed that since he was unwilling to take Wei Xiaobao to Taiwan, this little demon would be bound to look for bones in the egg, determined to find a setback for Shi Lang. The three-character 'Guoxing Ye' was the name the people were accustomed to, but Zheng Chenggong was bestowed the surname Zhu by the Ming Dynasty, his national surname was Ming Dynasty's national surname, not Qing Dynasty's national surname. If Wei Xiaobao insisted to make a big deal of these three characters in the memorial, saying that Shi Lang keep in his mind constantly that the national surname was Zhu, and reporting it to the imperial court, this matter maybe big or maybe small, but it could also grow into a disaster. Thereupon he seized the initiative to offer an explanation first.

Actually, Wei Xiaobao did not have the slightest knowledge; he failed to grasp the crucial point of what Shi Lang was saying. After Shi Lang argued, Wei Xiaobao was able to find something to grab on instead. "General Shi," he said, "You have once received rank and emolument of nobility from the Ming Dynasty, it's no wonder that the surname bestowed by the previous dynasty was constantly in your mind. If you are really loyal to our Great Qing, you should have called Zheng Chenggong 'Nixing' [rebel surname], 'Weixing' [bogus surname], 'Feixing' [bandit surname], 'Gouxing' [dog surname]."

Shi Lang lowered his head in silence. Although in his heart he 120% disapproved, he felt it was inappropriate to debate over this matter with Wei Xiaobao. By calling Zheng Chenggong 'Ci Xing', indeed it was an indication that he had not forgotten the previous dynasty's idea.

Wei Xiaobao said, "General Shi's memorial must be written very well, I wonder if it is alright for you to recite it to me?"

Shi Lang only knew how to lead the troops and go to war, how could he write a eulogy? This funeral oration was written by a secretary, one of his aides and advisors. This secretary was quite talented, the memorial was written with such passion and rich in imagery, the meaning behind it sincere. Shi Lang had heard not a few people praised it, he was very proud, thereupon he had memorized quite a bit of sentences from it to show off in front of other people. Immediately he said, "Lowly officer invented several sentences of crazy nonsense; I will only make Wei *Daren* laugh at me." Thereupon he recited several important passages

from the memorial.

Finished listening to the section ‘Alone Lang rose through the ranks, with Ci Xing was as delighted as fish meet water, there was not the slightest bit of resentment, but it led to great violation. Lang and Ci Xing had enmity and hatred, but my feeling is still like minister and his master. The poor scholar in the midst of reed, justice will not be done. Righteousness and personal kindness, henceforth it is over.’ Wei Xiaobao nodded and praised, “Good essay, good essay. This memorial, let’s forget the fact that even if my head is chopped I will never be able to write one, even if someone wrote it for me and had me memorize it, I won’t be able to remember it in ten days or eight days. General Shi is well-versed in both civil and military affairs; your memory is very good. My admiration, my admiration.”

Shi Lang’s face blushed slightly; he said in his heart, “You know perfectly well that I can’t write something like that, someone else wrote it, I simply memorized it well and recited it back. You ridicule me like this, no need for me to talk to you too much.”

Wei Xiaobao asked, “About that ‘The poor scholar in the midst of reed, justice will not be done’, what does that mean? My learning is very disappointing, I don’t understand it.”

Shi Lang said, “’The poor scholar in the midst of reed’ was referring to Wu Zixu. In the past from the State of Chu he ran away to the State of Wu. When he reached the river bank, an elderly fisherman took him cross the river, and left to get him some rice to eat. Wu Zixu was afraid the pursuing troops would catch him; he hid in the cluster of reeds on the river bank. The elderly fisherman returned; seeing someone was hiding in the reeds, he called out, ‘You in the reeds, you in the reeds, aren’t you the poor scholar?’ Afterwards Wu Zixu led Wu troops to attack and defeat the State of Chu. He dug the King Ping of Chu’s corpse from the grave and whipped the corpse three hundred times to avenge the enmity of him killing Wu Zixu’s father and brother. Ci Xing … Zheng Chenggong has killed my father, brother, wife and child, Taiwan people were afraid after I broke Taiwan, I would also dig the grave to exact revenge. In this memorial lowly officer was saying that this kind of matter I resolved not to do. Zheng Chenggong’s spirit in heaven may rest in peace, Taiwan troops and people

also have nothing to worry about."

"I see," Wei Xiaobao said, "General Shi is comparing yourself to Wu Zixu."

"Wu Zixu was a great hero, great warrior," Shi Lang said, "How can lowly officer dare to be compared to him? It's just that Wu Zixu's entire family ran into misfortune, he alone escaped. In the end he returned with the troops and avenged this big enmity. This part is similar to what lowly officer has gone through. That's all."

Wei Xiaobao nodded; he said, "I wish that General Shi's outcome in the future will be greatly different from Wu Zixu, otherwise it will be really not good."

Shi Lang immediately remembered that Wu Zixu rendered great merit in the State of Wu, but in the end he was killed by the King of Wu. He could not stop his countenance from changing greatly; his hand that was holding the wine cup was also trembling.

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said, "I heard Wu Zixu rendered great merit, he became conceited, and was very disrespectful toward the King of Wu. General Shi, you compared yourself to Wu Zixu, it was really inappropriate. I am sure that the memorial of yours has already relayed to Beijing, His Majesty also has seen it. If you have nobody help you to explain it to His Majesty, I think, hey, hey, ay, too bad, too bad, I am afraid a great meritorious service will be thrown into running water …"

Shi Lang hastily said, "*Daren* please understand, lowly officer said that I am not Wu Zixu, I do not dare to say that I want to be Wu Zixu. This … this matter is entirely … entirely different."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your memorial has spread everywhere, General Shi compared himself to Wu Zixu, everybody in the world knows that."

Shi Lang stood up, his voice trembling, "His Majesty is an enlightened sage, his benevolence is like a mountain, he will save his subject with merit from harm. Lowly officer is serving a good master; compared to Wu Zixu, my good fortune is a lot better."

"What you said is true," Wei Xiaobao said, "I am not too clear on Wu Zixu's motive in the end, why he harbored evil intention. But I have seen the play, when

the King of Wu was going to kill him, Wu Zixu said, ‘Dig my eyes and embed them on the city gate, let me see the Yue troops breaching the city and the demise of the State of Wu.’ Afterwards I think the State of Wu was indeed wiped out. General Shi is adept in pen and sword, I am sure you know the story, is that true?”

Shi Lang could not help feeling a slight chill from his back penetrated straight to his bones. Initially he only thought that after rendering great merit Wu Zixu was killed by the King of Wu, this matter was not clear in history books, he was already feeling uneasy, but he did not expect that at the death’s door Wu Zixu was uttering those words. His memorial said, ‘The poor scholar in the midst of reed, justice will not be done.’ Although he did not do what Wu Zixu did, but the fact that he was comparing himself to Wu Zixu was very clear in other people’s eyes and ears. His memorial mentioned Wu Zixu, it only referred to ‘whipping the corpse to take revenge’, who would have thought that Wei Xiaobao could pull the ‘cursing the demise of the nation’ matter up? If other people charged him with this kind of grave accusation, the disaster would be truly unspeakable.

What Wei Xiaobao had said, if it was conveyed to the Emperor’s ears, even if the Emperor was an enlightened sage and would not charge him with the guilt, in his heart he must not be too happy. Shi Lang was sure that he could forget the prospect of any future promotion. If, like Wei Xiaobao, the Emperor’s trusted aides also add oil to the fire, incite disharmony by saying that in his heart Shi Lang was harboring the thought of blaming and ridiculing the imperial court for killing minister who has given outstanding service, the head on top of his neck would really be difficult to protect.

In that instant his thoughts were surging like the tide, he had a thousand regrets, ten thousand regrets, he really thought he should not offer sacrifice to Zheng Chenggong, he should not order the secretary to write this eulogy to such an extent as to have this freak elf little demon grabbed the ‘foot of the pain’. He stood silently with a blank expression on his face, not knowing what to say to defend himself.

Wei Xiaobao said, “General Shi, when His Majesty personally took over the government, what was the first major issue he dealt with?”

“Killing the treacherous official Oboi,” Shi Lang replied.

“That’s right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “While admittedly Oboi was a treacherous court official, he was the appointed high-ranking minister who look after the government. During the besieging of towns and breaking the enemy, he rendered enormous merit to our Great Qing. His Majesty once said, ‘I killed Oboi, perhaps someone would say that I do not empathize with minister who has given outstanding service, they would say something bird something bow.’ What did he say? I can’t remember it.”

Shi Lang said, “It’s ‘the birds are gone, the bow is put away’.”

“Right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Even you said the same thing …”

“No, no,” Shi Lang busily said, “I did not talk about His Majesty, it was the idiom.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You did say that idiom to describe His Majesty killing Oboi.”

Shi Lang anxiously said, “*Daren* asked me what that idiom is, lowly officer only answered *Daren*’s question; I absolutely do not dare … do not dare to slander or speak ill of His Majesty.”

Wei Xiaobao fixed his gaze at him, he could see the panic in Shi Lang’s heart.

Since the ancient times, when any feudal official thought that their merit was great but the reward was meager, the emperor would definitely hate it. The official did not need to speak up, as long as in their hearts they were ‘harboring the thought of blaming or complaining’, four characters [‘xin cun yuan wang’], it would mean immediate beheading.

While his heart was shaken, Shi Lang was lured by Wei Xiaobao to say the four-character ‘the birds are gone, the bow is put away’ [niao jin gong cang]. Immediately he knew things went bad, but he had said it, there was no way he could take it back. Besides, other than Wei Xiaobao, there were Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao on the side, there was no way he could deny it.

Wei Xiaobao said, “General Shi did say ‘the birds are gone, the bow is put away’; whether those words are to slander or speak ill of His Majesty, I don’t know. In the imperial court, there are many learned *Da Xue Shi*, *Shangshu*, and *Hanlin* [see Chapter 37] ministers; there is no harm in us asking them to judge. However, my days of serving His Majesty are not a few, I seem to remember His

Majesty loves people calling him ‘niao sheng yu tang’ [raw bird fish soup, see Chapter 14], but he does not like people calling him ‘niao jin gong cang’. Both idioms have the word ‘bird’, but I am afraid the two are substantially different. One is good bird, the other is evil bird; don’t you think?”

Shi Lang was shocked and angered at the same time; he thought since things have come to this, he’d better go through to the end. You frame me like this, I might as well kill all three of you, to get rid of the root of future trouble. Entertaining this thought in his mind, he could not stop his eyes from exposing ominous glint.

Wei Xiaobao could see the sinister expression suddenly appeared on Shi Lang’s face; he could not prevent his heart from shivering. Forcing a laughed, he said, “Once General Shi spoke the words, dead horse cannot chase it. Right now there are two roads you can take. The first is: immediately kill me along with Lin and Hong, two people, kill all my wives and children, and then lead your troops to Taiwan, immediately set yourself as the king. It’s just that the troops you have right now are the Great Qing’s officers and men, they may not necessarily be willing to follow you in rebellion, while Taiwan’s military and civilians may not necessarily submit to you.”

In his heart Shi Lang was pondering about the same thing, but as soon as Wei Xiaobao hit the nail on the head, he forced himself to restrain his ferocity. Busily he said, “Lowly officer does not have that thought at all, *Daren* must not be overly suspicious and add heavy criminal accusation on lowly officer. But I wonder what the second road that Daren was talking about is? Would *Daren* show favor by giving me directions?”

Hearing the softening of the way Shi Lang spoke, Wei Xiaobao’s heart was relieved. With his toes on the ground he leaned forward and said, “The second road is: only by allowing *Xiongdi* and Lin and Hong, two gentlemen, to help you will you get out of trouble. Just now when General Shi mentioned the word ‘bird’, it was a respectful eulogy to His Majesty as the ‘raw bird fish soup’, which is very good. Someday when *Xiongdi* sees His Majesty, I will definitely say that General Shi is loyal in working for His Majesty, that you keep in mind constantly the vast and mighty imperial kindness, that while we were chatting, you often mentioned Wu Zixu’s forgetting favor and violating justice, that since the King of

Wu dispatched an army to help him to avenge the enmity of his father's murder, later on no matter what mission he was sent for, even if it was to enter the fire he ought to enter the fire, if it was to enter the water, he should have entered the water; how could he complain and harbor resentment in his heart? If General Shi were to become Wu Zixu, not only you would defend King of Wu's rivers and mountains for ten thousand upon ten thousand years, not only you would save Xi Shi, this kind of beauty, you could even snatch Dong Shi, Nan Shi, Bei Shi, Zhong Shi, the whole bunch, and presented them to the King of Wu[29]. What Wu Zixu constantly had in his mind was only himself, while what General Shi constantly has in your mind is exactly our Great Qing's enlightened sage the Son of Heaven. Good intention will have good reward, His Majesty bestows reward based on evaluation of merit, naturally General Shi will also have Duke and Marquis titles for ten thousand generations."

Hearing this, Shi Lang was elated; hastily he bowed deeply with cupped fist and said, "If *Daren* really speaks those kind words in front of His Majesty, lowly officer will never dare to forget *Daren*'s benevolence forever."

Wei Xiaobao stood up to return the propriety and said with a smile, "These words are a kind act that costs nothing; if my mood is good, I will definitely submit the memorial to His Majesty."

Shi Lang thought, "If I don't let you come to Taiwan, how can you, this kid, have a good mood?" Sitting back on his chair he said, "Taiwan has just been pacified, the hearts of the people are still in doubt. Lowly officer was just thinking of sending a memorial to explain everything to His Majesty, asking him to send a senior and revered high official to go on his behalf to declare the Holy Sage's virtuous intention and reassure the hearts of the common people. Naturally Wei *daren* is the most appropriate high official. Lowly officer will immediately pay my respect and present the memorial, asking His Majesty to issue an imperial edict, to appoint *Daren* to go first and appease Taiwan."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, "You pay your respect and submit memorial to the Emperor in Beijing, once you left, several months will pass, I am afraid the idle gossip that is going to enter His Majesty's ears, if not a thousand sentences, it will be at least eight hundred sentences. This kind of matter cannot be delayed even for a moment. It would be best if General Shi asked a high official, one of

His Majesty's trusted aides to go to Taiwan and investigate thoroughly. Only then will you demonstrate that you did not have any intention to set up yourself as a king in Taiwan. The rumor outside is that you even have a title picked, something called 'Great Ming Taiwan King of Jing Hai'; is that right?"

Hearing the seven characters 'da ming tai wan jing hai wang', Shi Lang could not help jumping in fright. He thought you lived in an uninhabited island, yet you heard rumor like that? Certainly it is something you randomly blurt out. But if this rumor reached Beijing, surely the imperial court would rather believe it than dismissing it, and then Shi Lang would die without a burial site. Thereupon he hastily said, "That rumor, *Daren* absolutely must not believe it."

"Right," Wei Xiaobao said indifferently, "You and I have known each other for a long time, naturally I did not believe it. But General Shi pacified Taiwan, you killed a lot of people, I am sure you made a lot of enemies. If your enemies want to slander you, I'll say not much you can do about it; it would be hard for you to plead your innocence. There is a common saying, 'in the imperial court, everybody is a government official'. I wonder if there is a high or senior official in the imperial court who would be willing to disregard his body, family, even his life, and with all his strength defend General Shi."

There was another shock in Shi Lang's heart; he did not have any powerful support in the imperial court. Or else he would not have stayed in Beijing lying idle for a long time in the past. He went around everywhere trying to curry favor, yet there was no path or door he could take. Indeed the only one who could get him somewhere was only the gentleman in front of him right now, the Wei *Daren*. Therefore, clenching his teeth, he said, "*Daren*'s directions, lowly officer cannot thank you enough. Since this matter is urgent, lowly officer will be so bold as to ask *Daren* to leave for Taiwan tomorrow to investigate and ascertain the truth."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted, but he thought that since now you are asking me, there is no harm in playing hard to get. He said, "Based on our, two brothers' friendship, clearing up injustice on behalf of General Shi, even if I have to exhaust myself, it is nothing. It's just that I have lived on this island for a long time, if I go out to sea I am afraid I will become seasick. Besides, I have my wives and children who are by my side every day, I would hate to be separated from

them.”

Shi Lang silently cursed in his belly, “I don’t know how many times you have gone out to sea, I have never seen you dizzy in any damn boat!” Forcing a laugh he said, “Naturally *Daren*’s madams, young master and young lady may accompany you for a visit. Lowly officer will select the biggest ship for *Daren* to ride. These days there are no storms on the sea at all, *Daren* may set your heart at ease.”

Wei Xiaobao frowned and said, “In that case, *Xiongdi* has no choice but to brave the difficulty and take a trip with General Shi.” Shi Lang repeatedly expressed his thanks.

The next day Wei Xiaobao took his seven wives, his two sons Hutou and Tongchui, and his daughter Shuangshuang to board Shi Lang’s flagship. Peng *Canjiang* tried to stop them, Shi Lang immediately give his order to have him tied on a tree. The ships weighed their anchors and sailed away.

Looking at Tong Chi Island, on which he resided for several years, Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “The banker has left the Island, this place cannot be called Tong Chi Island anymore. Han Guangwu had Yan Ziling who loved to fish. Every enlightened sage the Son of Heaven must have loyal minister who loves to fish. His Majesty sent me here to fish, it’s only right if we change the name.”

“Absolutely,” Shi Lang said, “What does *Daren* think, what name will be best?”

Wei Xiaobao thought for a moment before answering, “One time His Majesty sent someone to deliver an imperial decree, saying that King Wen of Zhou had Jiang Taigong who loved to fish, let’s call this island ‘Diaoyu Dao’ [diaoyu – fishing (with line and hook), dao – island].”

Shi Lang clapped and praised, “The name *Daren* gives, nothing is better than that. On one hand it is a eulogy, comparing His Majesty with King Wen of Zhou and Han Guangwu; on the other hand it will appear that *Daren* is an expert in pen and sword just like Jiang Taigong, also like Yan Ziling who was pure, honest, and elegant. Right, right, from now on we are going to call this island Diaoyu Island.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “It’s just that my title the Marquis of Tong Chi should be changed to Marquis of Diaoyu. Someday when official rank is

promoted and my nobility is advancing, I will be called Duke of Diaoyu [‘diaoyu gong’, ‘gong’ can also be used as a term of respect to address older men]; it doesn’t sound too good.”

Shi Lang laughed and said, “Elderly fisherman has great benefit, enjoying great, great harvest; it will sound very good.”

Wei Xiaobao nodded and said, “His Majesty conferred to me the title Earl of Tong Chi, Marquis of Tong Chi, I thought it sounded nice, but my several wives were not too happy. Someday I will submit a memorial asking His Majesty to change my title to Marquis of Diaoyu, perhaps everybody will be happy.”

In his tummy Shi Lang was amused; he thought, “What Earl of Tong Chi, Marquis of Tong Chi? His Majesty was just making fun of you, he treated you as a court jester, there was no meaning of respect. Even if you change it to Marquis of Diaoyu, what’s so nice about it?” But with his mouth he said, “There was an old story about a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer and a scholar; the fisherman ranked number one, the scholar was number four. The titles Duke of Diaoyu, King of Diaoyu, are more respectable than Hanlin’s Zhuangyuan[30].” [Translator’s note: perhaps I am reading too much into it, but I could have sworn that he was referring to Reverend Yideng’s four disciples.]

Whether in succeeding generations this Diaoyu Island became Diaoyutai Islands [Senkaku Islands, between Taiwan and Okinawa], it is a pity that this fact cannot be verified by historical records. If we could try to find historical remains of Wei Xiaobao on the island, we would know that during Kangxi’s early years, probably there were already our fellow countrymen who dwelled in that place for a long time, probably the five hundred troops who were stationed over there.

One particular day, Wei Xiaobao, riding on Shi Lang’s flagship, arrived in Taiwan; they came ashore at Anping Prefecture. Along the way Lin Xingzhu and Hong Chao showed how in those days Zheng Chenggong led the troops, how he routed the red-haired troops. Wei Xiaobao listened with keen interest and pleasure. Since Shi Lang had agreed to take him to Taiwan, he no longer ridiculed him in his talks.

In the General Mansion Shi Lang prepared a large banquet, showing Wei Xiaobao grand hospitality. During the feast, suddenly he received a report that

an imperial decree has just arrived from Beijing. Shi Lang hurriedly went out to receive the decree. When he returned, he carried a strange expression on his face.

"Wei *Daren*," he said, "The imperial edict says we must give up defending Taiwan. This is really bad."

"Why is that?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

Shi Lang replied, "The imperial edict ordered lowly officer to make any preparation necessary to leave Taiwan. Entire Taiwan, military personnel and civilian alike, everybody has to move inland, not a single family, a single mouth is allowed to stay. Lowly officer asked the envoy minister who brought the decree, turns out there was a proposal by the cabinet ministers in the imperial court: Taiwan is a separate area overseas, easy to become robbers' abyss and marsh [meeting place of fish and beast, *i.e.* breeding ground of crime], not easy for the imperial court to control. If they sent large army to defend, it will cost a lot of money for soldier's pay and provision. Consequently, they decided they don't want it."

Wei Xiaobao pondered this matter silently for half a day. He asked, "General Shi, do you know the real intention of those high-ranking senior ministers of the imperial court?"

Shi Lang was startled, "Could it be … could it be that the talk about Wu Zixu has reached Beijing?" he asked in a trembling voice.

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, "There's a common saying: 'Good deeds do not go beyond the door, evil deeds spread a thousand miles.' The imperial court is worried that General really wanted to be some 'Great Ming Taiwan King of Jing Hai'; that's certainly is a possibility."

"What … what should we do?" Shi Lang asked, "Taiwan's common people numbers several tens of thousands people, they have lived here in peace and worked happily for decades; these bunch of people are sent inland, what are they supposed to do to pass their days? If they are forced to migrate, definitely there will be huge changes. Besides, as soon as the Great Qing's officers and men leave, the red-haired troops will immediately take it over. We, the Chinese, worked hard in establishing the foundation, now we present it with both hands

to the red-haired demons, how can the people be willing to do that?”

Wei Xiaobao hesitated for half a day. “This matter,” he started, “I believe it’s not completely irreversible. His Majesty is most compassionate toward common people, General must plead on behalf of common people, you never know, maybe His Majesty will grant your request.”

Shi Lang was somewhat comforted. He said, “But if there are already rumors and hearsays in the imperial court, and lowly officer plead with His Majesty like that, it would appear that I am unwilling to leave Taiwan, then I will appear … appear not to have enough loyalty.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This time you must immediately go to Beijing, explain in person the hows and whys to His Majesty. Since you are in Beijing, if there is any rumor that says that you intend to establish yourself as king in Taiwan, naturally nobody will believe anymore.”

Shi Lang slapped his thigh and said, “Right, right! *Daren*’s advice is very true, lowly officer will leave tomorrow.” Suddenly he was struck by an inspiration, “Taiwan’s civil and military official business, I will have to ask *Daren* to temporarily manage. There is no one His Majesty trusts more than *Daren*, only if *Daren* presides over Taiwan will no one in the imperial court dare to utter half a sentence of gossip.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he thought he could satisfy his craving of holding a government post, it would feel really great. He laughed and said, “You did not receive imperial edict, on your own initiative you hand over the power over military forces to me; if His Majesty blames you, then what?”

When Shi Lang heard it, he was greatly hesitant. He pondered, “He is Chen Jinnan’s disciple, an accomplice of Tian Di Hui rebels. Although His Majesty dotes on him, over the years he was exiled on Tong Chi Island, without giving him any political power or mission to do. If he has this power over the troops and horses, and joins hands with Tian Di Hui and rises in rebellion, I … I will commit capital offense.” But then he had a second thought, “I only need to bring the entire Navy fleet with me, he will not dare to budge. If he brazenly takes any rash action, if he has the impertinence to revolt, the Navy will return and immediately pacify him.” Thereupon he laughed and said, “If I hand over the power over the

troops and horses to other people, maybe His Majesty will blame me, but if I hand it over to *Daren*, of course all taboos are off."

Presently the banquet ended prematurely. That very night Shi Lang issued an order to have all high-ranking civil and military officials to pay their respect to Wei Xiaobao, giving him the full authority to conduct all government affairs as he saw fit. He also requested the secretary to put together a memorial to the throne on Wei Xiaobao's behalf, stating that he was concerned over the national affairs, and had come to Taiwan with a specific purpose in mind to temporarily take control of the situation, so that the imperial court would have no reason to be concerned, and asked for forgiveness for the crime of acting without permission. He also said that the common people of Taiwan have live peacefully over there for a long time, that 'your servant' the minister has seen Taiwan with his own eyes, it appeared that moving the people was not suitable.

By the time everything was settled, it was already morning the next day. Shi Lang wanted to depart immediately. Wei Xiaobao asked, "There is one big thing, have you prepared it?"

"I wonder which big thing?" Shi Lang asked.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Something to spend!"

"Something to spend?" Shi Lang did not understand.

"That's right!" Wei Xiaobao replied, "This time you pacified Taiwan, your merit is not small. Those high-ranking ministers of the imperial court, how much gift are you going to give to each one?"

Shi Lang was taken aback, he said, "This is all because of the Son of Heaven's powerful benevolence, it was because the officers and soldiers were following the order that we succeeded in pacifying Taiwan. Those high-ranking ministers of the imperial court did not spend any effort."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head. "Ay, Old Shi, you are so proud of yourself, your old shortcoming flares out again. You pacified Taiwan, everybody thinks that you hogged the mountain of gold and the mountain of silver you found here and made a fortune. The officers in the imperial court, which one would not be jealous of you?"

Shi Lang anxiously said, “*Daren* please understand, if for personal gain Shi Lang helped himself to even one *tael* of Taiwan’s money, this time I go to Beijing, let His Majesty hack me to pieces, let me be executed by lingering death.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You yourself want to be an honest and upright official, but you can’t expect everybody to follow you to be an honest and upright official. The more you are honest, the more people will find it easier to slander you; they will say that in Taiwan you bought the heart of the people, with the intention of going against the law. So, this time you go to Beijing empty-handed without bringing anything?”

Shi Lang said, “I’ll bring some local products of Taiwan, such as wood carvings, bamboo basket, straw mats, leather suitcases …”

Wei Xiaobao burst into loud laughter. At first Shi Lang was flushed with anger, but suddenly he saw the light; in the end he resolved to make up for the previous mistakes. Immediately he bowed deeply with cupped fist toward Wei Xiaobao and said, “Thank you *Daren* for giving me directions. Lowly officer nearly rush into big disaster this time.”

Wei Xiaobao assembled the civil and military officials, he said, “This time General Shi is going to Beijing to plead on behalf of the common people; if he does not succeed, everybody will be destitute and homeless. This mission will cost money, could it be that General Shi has to cover the cost alone? Gentlemen, brothers, let’s everybody hurry to raise money, let’s share the pleading cost together!”

When Shi Lang took the official position, he did it with honesty; all the time he was in Taiwan, he had never taken gold and silver from the people. This moment Wei Xiaobao took over his duty, the first order of business was to raise the ‘pleading cost’.

As soon as the people of Taiwan heard the news about moving inland, they already panicked. When they learned that Shi Lang was following Wei Xiaobao’s advice to go to Beijing to plead for the people so that they would not have to move, everybody was most willing to contribute to this ‘pleading cost’. Fortunately there was no lack of riches and honor among the people of Taiwan; in just half a day they had raised more than three-hundred thousand *taels* of

silver. Wei Xiaobao ordered the treasurer to advance more than six-hundred thousand *taels*, bringing the total to more than one million *taels*. He instructed Shi Lang on to whom he had to give more, to whom there would not be any harm if he gave less. Shi Lang could not thank him enough. It was not until the first watch of the night [7 to 9pm] that evening that he finally set sail.

The next morning Wei Xiaobao held a general assembly; he addressed the officials, "General Shi left for Beijing last night. After calculating the 'pleading cost' back and forth, we are still short by more than one million *taels*. In consideration to the entire people of Taiwan, *Xiongdi* has no choice but to scrape my personal savings over the year, also my seven wives' pearls and jewels, and managed to collect one million *taels*, which I handed to General Shi to be brought away and used for this mission. Ay, taking an official post in Taiwan is really not easy. *Xiongdi* is just taking the office temporarily, the first day I already suffer one million *taels* deficit. This time I lose my family fortune, and am completely wiped out."

The prefectural magistrate of Taiwan bowed and said, "*Daren* cherishes common people, you are being a father and a mother to the people, you are indeed the benefactor of ten thousand families. Other than the six-hundred thousand *taels* advance payment from the public treasury that we have to pay back, naturally the entire people of Taiwan will return Wei *Daren*'s one million *taels* with thanks."

Wei Xiaobao nodded and said, "Each one of you must also contribute some money, everybody has worked with 'both sleeves flowing in the breeze' [i.e. unsoiled by corrupt practice] or something like that, I am not clear about it. Those with high official post should contribute ten thousand *taels*, those with lower official post's contribution may vary from several thousand *taels* to several hundred *taels*. Everybody work as one, no matter how you look at it, in the end it is for the common people. This advance funds, naturally the locals will have to pay back. We, as father and mother officials of the people, should not extract interest from the people; everybody will have to suffer a bit of loss, as long as we can get our capital back, then that's it. This is called, 'loving the common people as our own children'."

The officials were greatly delighted; they all expressed their gratitude, thinking

that this Wei *Daren* was very considerate toward the feeling of the masses, and was willing to spend his own wealth for them; he was indeed a good superior.

The first day Wei Xiaobao took office, he had already scraped one million *taels*. Hereafter profits pouring in from all sides; his endless ingenuity need not be explained in details.

Several days later, Wei Xiaobao instructed his subordinate to prepare an offering, he wanted to go to Zheng Chenggong's ancestral hall to offer scrifice; he wanted to see what did this Guoxing Ye, whose fame shook the world, really look like.

Arriving at the shrine, he looked up to see, and saw the statue of Zheng Chenggong sitting on a chair. His face was oval, his upper lip, his lower lip, as well as his lower jaw, were covered in short black beard; his ears were very big, but his eyes were very small. His eyebrows curved, he looked rather like a benevolent man; there was no bold and powerful, heroic air on him. Wei Xiaobao was quite disappointed. He asked the officials who were coming with him, "Did Guoxing Ye really look like this?"

Lin Xingzhu replied, "This statue looks quite like Guoxing Ye. Guoxing Ye was born as a scholar; although he was a big hero and great warrior, he had a very elegant appearance."

"I see," Wei Xiaobao said. He saw that on either side of the statue there was smaller statue; a women on the left and a man on the right. He asked, "And who are those two?"

"The woman was Dong Taifei [grand concubine], the man was the heir *Wangye*," Lin Xingzhu explained.

"What do you mean heir *Wangye*?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

"He was the young master of Guoxing Ye," Lin Xingzhu replied, "Who succeeded him as the *Wangye*."

Wei Xiaobao nodded. "Ah, it's Zheng Jing," he said, "He looked a bit similar to that kid Zheng Keshuang. Where is my Shifu Chen *Junshi*'s statue?"

"Chen *Junshi* did not have any statue," Lin Xingzhu replied.

Wei Xiaobao said, “This Dong Taifei was very bad, quickly pull her down. Don’t delay, get someone to make a statue in Chen *Junshi*’s image and put it here to accompany Guoxing Ye.” Lin Xingzhu was greatly delighted; he personally climbed onto the idol platform, and took the Dong Taifei’s image down.

Wei Xiaobao kneeled down in front of Guoxing Ye’s image and kowtowed several times. “Guoxing Ye,” he said, “You are a hero, a warrior. I am kowtowing to you, I assume you will receive it. This old revered granny spoiled your great undertaking, yet she accompanies you every day, you must be angry. I am helping you driving her out, and let my Shifu Chen *Junshi* come to accompany you.” Thinking about his Shifu’s tragic death, he could not help shedding some tears.

The entire population of Taiwan hated Dong Taifei to the bones, while they loved Chen Yonghua for stationing soldiers, developing farms and running schools, for always promoting what was useful and getting rid of what was harmful, plus for loving the people. Common people referred him as ‘Taiwan’s Zhuge Liang’. When Zheng Keshuang took over the country, nobody dared to speak any malicious word against Dong Taifei, nobody dared to say any words of praise of Chen Yonghua.

This moment Wei Xiaobao issued the order ‘remove Dong install Chen’, the people were very happy. They also heard that he kowtowed and shed tears in front of Guoxing Ye’s image, all the people were even more grateful. Although this Wei *Daren*’s demand of money was, quite frankly, rather serious, first of all, he was Chen *Junshi*’s disciple, Taiwan’s military personel and civilians alike inevitably were fond of him. Secondly, Shi Lang led the Qing troops to take over Taiwan, he wiped out the last remaining rivers and mountains of the Great Ming overseas. For these reasons, although ‘Shi was just and honest, Wei was corrupt’, contrary to expectation, the common people felt that this Wei *Daren* was affable; they would rather have him guarding Taiwan and thought that it would be best if Shi Lang never returned forever.

However, things turn out contrary to the way they wished; after more than a month, Shi Lang, leading the Navy, came back to Taiwan. Wei Xiaobao waited on the shore to welcome him. He saw a high ranking officer wearing the attire of a one-*pin* rank high official accompanied Shi Lang as he disembarked from the

boat. The high-ranking officer was still walking on the gangplank, he already called out loudly, “Wei *Xiongdi*, how are you? You made your *Gege* miss you very much.” Turned out he was Songgotu.

Wei Xiaobao was overjoyed; he scrambled forward. Two people pulled each other’s hand while they both were still on the gangplank, and both roared in laughter.

Songgotu said with a laugh, “*Xiongdi*, congratuations, congratulations! His Majesty issued an imperial edict, you are to go to Beijing.”

In his heart Wei Xiaobao was both delighted and worried; he thought, “If I wanted to go to Beijing, I would have gone long time ago. The young Emperor is so obstinate, he can’t possibly yield to me. I won’t agree to attack Tian Di Hui, he won’t want to see my face.”

Shi Lang chuckled and said, “The Emperor’s benevolence is vast and mighty, it is indeed unspeakable. His Majesty has agreed to withdraw the decree of moving Taiwan people inland.”

For the past month or so, day and night all Taiwan military-civilian were anxious, afraid that the Emperor would insist on evacuating Taiwan. Everybody said that the Emperor’s mouth was ‘golden mouth’; whatever he said, he would not renege. As soon as Shi Lang spoke those words, the government officials on the shore heard it, they could not help but cheer loudly. They broke into loud cry together, “Long live, long live, long, long live!” The news spread like wildfire, sound of cheering rose up everywhere, followed by ‘pi pi pa pa’ noise of firecrackers. The atmosphere was much more lively than the New Year celebration.

Songgotu announced the imperial decree, Kangxi was giving Wei Xiaobao quite encouragement and exhortation, ordering him to go to Beijing as soon as possible because he had another appointment for him. After Wei Xiaobao finished expressing his gratitude, the two of them went to the inner hall for a private discussion.

“*Xiongdi*,” Songgotu said, “This time your face is indeed not small, afraid that you still have apprehensions, His Majesty ordered me to personally deliver the imperial edict in haste. Do you know what mission His Majesty is going to send

you to?”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “His Majesty’s divine intention, wonderful consideration, we as his servants will never be able to guess.”

Songgotu leaned forward and whispered in Wei Xiaobao’s ear, “Attack Luocha demons!”

Wei Xiaobao was startled; but then he sprang up and cried out, “Wonderful!”

Songgotu said, “His Majesty said that as soon as you find out, you must be very happy. Sure enough, he was right. *Xiongdi*, ever since Shunzhi’s years, Luocha demons have been occupying our Heilongjiang region, and they run amock over there. The late Emperor and His Majesty are magnanimous, they refuse to be bothered about it. Who would have thought that Luocha demons won a *cun* [inch], they wanted a *chi* [foot], they took more and more of our land. Liaodong is the place where our Great Qing has our root, how can we let the demons threaten it? Right now the three border defense rebels and Taiwan’s Zheng Clan have all been pacified, there’s no problem in the world, thereupon His Majesty decided to use military force against the Luocha.”

Wei Xiaobao had stayed on Tong Chi Island doing nothing for several years, he was so bored that he felt like while playing *Pai Jiu* he repeatedly grabbed ten pairs of ‘departing ten’. At this time as he heard the news, he was so happy that he grinned from ear to ear.

Songgotu said, “In order to keep the peace, His Majesty has issued several imperial edicts to the Luocha Country’s Great Khan, but all along they never respond. Afterwards Holland’s envoy minister communicated the information that although Luocha country is big, it is actually a country of barbarians, in the entire country there is not a single person who understand Chinese characters. His Majesty’s imperial decrees that they received were just a completely unfathomable mystery to them, thereupon without any better option they decided not to respond. However, all along Luocha troops come to the east to occupy our land in endless stream. His Majesty said, our China pays particular attention to benevolence and righteousness, we can’t simply punish the barbarians without telling them first. We need to tell them their error first, and give them the opportunity to repent and change quickly and completely. If after

the imperial edict they are still stiffnecked and refuse to accept the enlightenment, only then would we have to kill them. Among the ministers of the imperial court, only Wei *Xiongdi*, one person is proficient in Luocha language."

(Book note: During the China-Russia negotiation, it was a known fact that neither party understood the other's language and script. The history records that Russian Tsar delivered letter to Kangxi, saying, 'In the former times the Emperor bestowed a letter, our humble country did not understand the content, hence we did not go through it.')

Wei Xiaobao thought, "Turns out it was because I understand Luocha demons' language that the young Emperor surrenders to me." He could not help dancing and gesticulating for joy, feeling very proud of himself.

Songgotu laughed and said, "*Xiongdi* is proficient in Luocha language, admittedly it is amazing; but there is one great skill that nobody can reach up to you. We heard that Luocha Country's Queen Regent is the Great Khan's *Jiejie*, this Queen is *Xiongdi*'s good old friend; is that right?"

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter and said, "Luocha women's whole body is covered in golden hair. This Queen Regent Sophia's appearance is not bad, but when you caress her skin, it felt very rough."

Songgotu laughed and said, "His Majesty wants *Xiongdi* to set out on a mission immediately and make an effort to brave the difficulty again, to caress her skin once again."

Wei Xiaobao laughed while shaking his head. "I have no appetite, I have no appetite," he said.

Songgotu said, "*Xiongdi* caresses her, two countries will be good friends, from now on we can avoid the calamity of blade and troops; this is a wonderful merit of bringing peace and stability to our country."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Turns out His Majesty did not send me to lead the troops to war, but he wants to unleash my 'shiba mo shengong' [eighteen-touch divine skill; 'mo' can mean touch/caress/feel (with hand) or grope]. Ha ha …!" And then he started singing, "One touch, two touches, touching the side of Luocha Country Queen's hair. The Queen's hair is like gold, Suo *Dage* [reminder: Songgotu in Chinese is Suo E'tu] and Wei Xiaobao have all the money to spend!"

The two of them roared in laughter.

Wei Xiaobao asked about the details of Luocha Country invading and occupying Heilongjiang, Songgotu told him everything he knew. Turned out during the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty [1573-1619] Luocha people determined to invade east. (Book note: Luocha was Russia. The Draft History of the Qing Dynasty, commentaries by Lang Tan, *et al.* recorded, 'Russia was called Luocha, with different interpretation to the ears, slow and fast.' The slow reading was Russia [Eluosi], the fast reading was Luocha. According to Russian original pronounciation, Luocha was closer.)

One after another, Tomsk, Yeniseysk, Yakutsk, Okhotsk and the others in Siberia built fortification. In Shunzhi's sixth year, Luocha people built fortification in Mount Luding, and called it Albazin (in China it was referred to as Yakesa [Jaxa]), while at the same time spreading to the east, robbing and plundering along the way.

In Shunzhi's ninth year, Manchurian Qing's Liaoning Guta [district] Commander Ba Hai leading 2,000 troops routed Luocha troops at the bank of Heilongjiang [river]. Later on at the mouth of Songhua River, Manchurian Qing's Commander in Ming Anda [county, Suihua, Heilongjiang] courageously fought Luocha troops and inflicted heavy damage. The Luocha troops withdrew to the west and built fortification in Nerchisk, while dispatching an envoy to Moscow to beg for assistance. Along the way the envoy spread rumors, saying that in Heilongjiang region gold and silver were everywhere, oxen and horses in large numbers, the houses of the people were inlaid with gold. The Luocha people dreamed of vast wealth, the troops marched to the east, robbing and plundering along the way, devastating the common people. Cossack cavalry was especially bloody and cruel.

Manchurian Qing's Liaoning Guta Commander Sha'erhuda, Liaoning Guta General Bahai led the troops to met the enemy, during Shunzhi's sixteenth and seventeenth year they scored several victories, killing the Luocha troops' commanders and generals, killing and beheading more than half Cossack cavalry. For this reason Luocha people did not dare to come to the bank of Heilongjiang anymore.

During Kangxi's early years, Luocha military and civilian marched to the east in

large scale again, they made Yakesa their base of operations. After Kangxi grew older, he knew Luocha people had enormous ambition, hence he took more rigorous action in defense, by stationing Jilin Navy at Heilongjiang to guard the area. Luocha troops also received continuous reinforcements, and built Yakesa's city wall to make it completely secured, while at the same time setting up stations along the major road all the way back to Luocha Country's headquarters, determined to engulf the vast land of Heilongjiang region.

At that time Kangxi was focusing all his resources to deal with Wu Sangui; he could not afford to divide his forces to defend against Luocha Country's invasion. It was only after the three border defenses were pacified and the Zheng Clan of Taiwan surrendered, that he had no fear of trouble from the rear, did he finally turn his attention to deal with Luocha Country. He remembered Wei Xiaobao had been to Moscow; not only he was familiar with the nation's situation, he also had a rather unusual relationship with the Queen Regent who held the power over Luocha Country, since he had offered her advice to escape from the trap and helped her seizing power, and was bestowed nobility title by her. It was a very powerful chess piece Kangxi had in his hand; why not use it? As soon as Kangxi learned that Wei Xiaobao had gone to Taiwan, he sent Songgotu to announce the summons.

Wei Xiaobao took his wives and children, and had his servants carried the 'pleading wealth' he had gained in Taiwan, 'both sleeves in the golden breeze', went onboard the ship to sail north. Before departure he asked Shi Lang for original Taiwan's high-ranking officers to come with him to assist him in the incoming mission: Lin Xingzhu, Hong Chao, as well as five hundred rattan-shield troops. Shi Lang knew that this time Wei Xiaobao went to the Capital, he would be put in an important position, while in order to maintain his position, Shi Lang himself needed somebody powerful in the imperial court to back him up; naturally he did not raise any objection, on the contrary, he sent off Wei Xiaobao and Songgotu with some serious gifts.

Taiwan people knew that in the imperial court's withdrawal of the decree to abandon Taiwan and move them inland, this Wei *Daren* had rendered a very big meritorious service; everybody was grateful. Tens of thousand people sent him off with countless umbrellas, 'protecting the people' banners, and so on. When

Wei Xiaobao was about to get on the boat, two elderly men took off his boots and held it high above their heads, saying that it was something left behind to consider. Originally this 'shedding of boots' ceremony was only performed on upright and honorable local official that the common people loved and respected. Wei Xiaobao was a 'corrupt official', unexpectedly he also enjoyed this rare honor; not only it was unprecedented; perhaps it would never happen again in the future. The crackling of firecrackers to send him off did not need to be mentioned.

Book note: According to the historical records, when the Qing court determined to abandon Taiwan, the decision had been made; but because Shi Lang contended strongly, the *Da Xueshi* Li Lei mediated for him. It was only then did the court decide establish local government and set up garrison. At that time it seemed like a trivial matter, but it had significant effects toward the later generations. If at that time Shi Lang did not contend strongly, the Qing court abandoned Taiwan as soon as they pacified the Zheng Clan and moved the entire Taiwan military personel and civilians inland, the Dutch was bound to come back, henceforth Taiwan would not be part of China's territory. For this reason, although some people pointed their fingers to Shi Lang as a traitor to China, with regard to the Chinese people, he strenously opposed the proposal to abandon Taiwan, keeping this wide expanse of land as China's territory, his meritorious service can be considered enormous. Shi Lang also submitted a memorial to the Emperor to lower Taiwan's land tax. Based on his proposal, Kangxi gave the common people of Taiwan quite some benefits.

Shi Lang's second son Shi Shilun was also an uncorrupted government official; whenever the commoners had any dispute with the 'red silk member of the gentry', Shi Shilun always took the common people's side. For this reason among the people he was called 'Shi Qingtian' [Blue Sky Shi, *i.e.* upright and honorable official]; he was also the leading character of the later generations' book 'Shi Gong'an' ['gong an' means judge's desk/complex legal case].

Shi Lang's sixth son Shi Shibiao became the *Tidu* [local commander] of Fujian Navy. In Kangxi's sixtieth year he was stationed in Taiwan; it was known in history as 'The thirteenth day of the eighth month, the disaster of strange wind and violent rain caught them unprepared, a lot of soldiers and civilians died. All

through the night Shibiao stood outside. Because of this he fell ill. In the ninth month, he died on the line of duty. Imperial decree was issued as lamentation and expression of sympathy, bestowing him the title of *Taizi Taibao*' [Tutor to the crown prince]. In the middle of the hurricane that attacked Taiwan this man stayed outside overnight to direct the relieve effort, until he fell ill and died; he could be considered a good officer who loved the people.

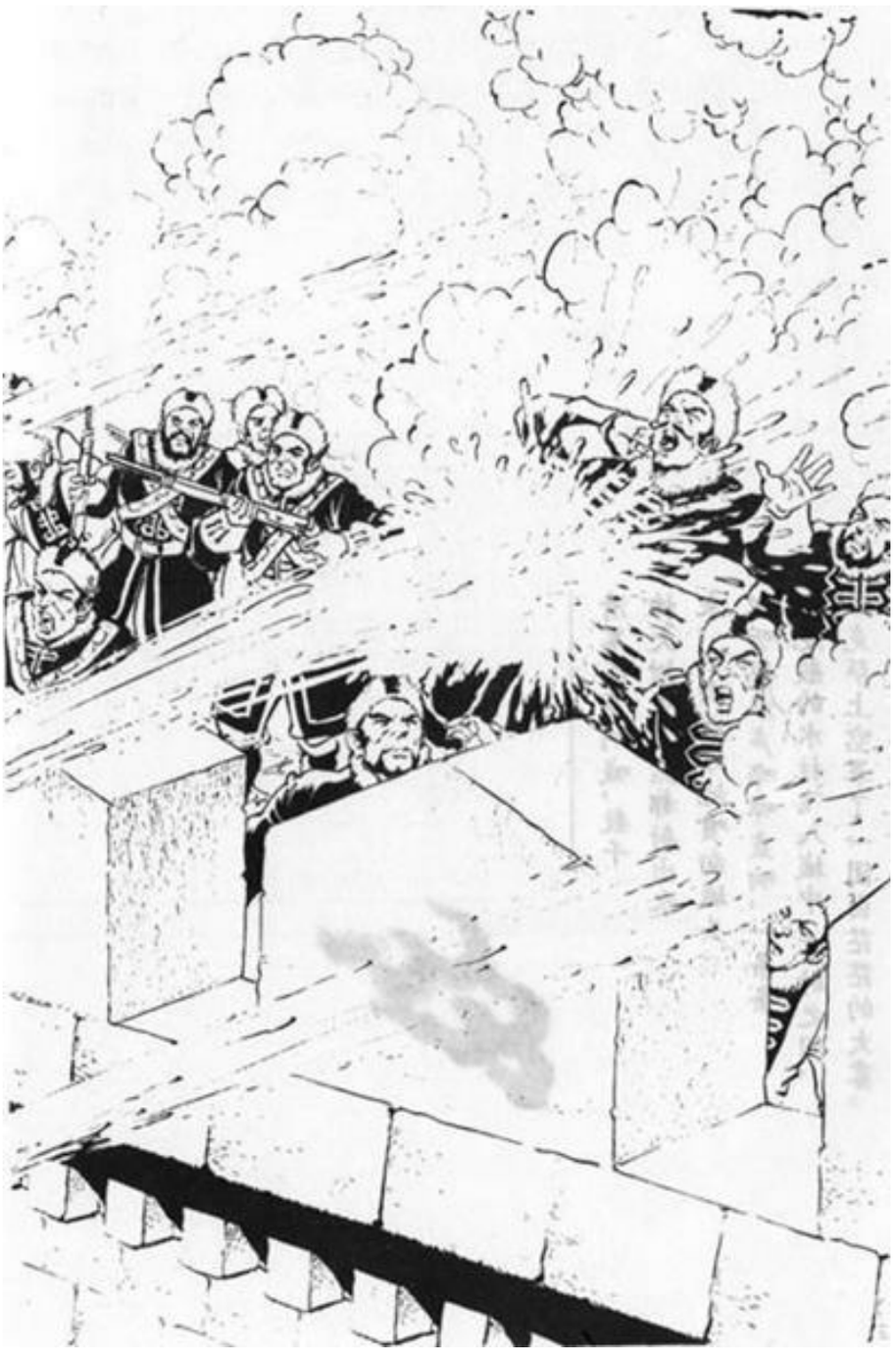
Our country historians have always had prejudice against Manchurian-Han relations; they always attacked Shi Lang's takeover of Taiwan as his fault, calling him 'a traitor (to Han)'. When our book was first written, it was also based on the same general impressions. Contemporary historians, however, persevere to rally the Chinese people to have a unified notion, giving Shi Lang's contribution in integrating Taiwan a considerable praise.

In commemorating this national hero, the author has visited Shi Lang's native place of Quanzhou [Fujian] on a tour, witnessing how the locals erected Shi Lang's statue by the sea, and built a 'Qing Hai Hou [marquis of ocean pacifier] Temple'; therefore, our book's original views of negating Shi Lang is hereby slightly revised.

Chapter 47

The banner pointing to the clouds went out in the autumn to take tactical border position, the sound of drum transmitted by the wind at the end of the night overlooked the Pass.

(Translated by Foxs)



The Qing troops shouted together, several thousand tree trunks suddenly shot water; from four sides eight directions water spurted into the city. They heard above their heads the water swooshing incessantly. Just like white dragons streams of water flew into the city. In an instant the city of

Yakesa was covered in boundless thick fog.

One day the ship arrived at Tanggu. Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu and their men disembarked and continued their journey by land, passing through Tianjin and continuing to Beijing. When he entered the gate of the Capital, Wei Xiaobao felt as if it was a thing of the previous generation; his heart was bursting with joy, he felt his body was as light as the immortals. Immediately he went to the Palace to appear before the Emperor.

Kangxi summoned him for an audience at the Upper Study Room. Wei Xiaobao walked to Kangxi's presence, where he kneeled down and kowtowed. Before straightening up his body, his heart was suddenly overwhelmed with mixed feelings of grief and joy; he could not help bursting into tears while still crouching down.

Seeing Wei Xiaobao's arrival, the greater part of Kangxi's heart was happy, but there was a small part of his heart that was enraged; he mused, "This kid is undisciplined and out of control, he has the cheek to repeatedly defy the imperial decree. This time although I am going to send him on a mission, I must discipline him well, lest he will rely on my favor and become arrogant, then I can't control him any longer." Who would have thought that as soon as Wei Xiaobao saw him he unexpectedly cried loudly? Kangxi's heart melted. He laughed and said, "Damn it, as soon as you, this kid, saw *Laozi*, why are you crying?"

Still sobbing, Wei Xiaobao replied, "Your servant thought that for the rest of my life I won't be able to see Your Majesty. Today we finally meet, my joy is unbearable."

Kangxi laughed and said, "Get up, get up! Let me look at you."

Wei Xiaobao crawled up, his face was covered in tears and snot, but the corners of his mouth revealed a smile.

Kangxi laughed and said, "Damn it, you, this kid, has grown." With childlike innocence he suddenly stood up and walked down his throne. "Let me see," he said, "Are you taller, or am I taller?" He walked pass him and stood back to back with him. Wei Xiaobao could see right away that in term of height the two of them were comparable to each other; but the Emperor wanted to compare

height, how could he be taller than the Emperor? He slightly bent his knees at once.

Kangxi held his hand above their heads to measure, he was about one *cun* taller. He laughed and said, “We are about the same height.” Turning around and walked a few steps away, he asked with a smile, “Xiao Guizi, how many children do you have?”

“Your servant is no good at anything,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “I only have two sons and a daughter.”

Kangxi laughed heartily and said, “I am better in this matter. I already have four sons and three daughters.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty has great skill and strategy, naturally … naturally you are also extraordinary in this matter.”

Kangxi laughed and said, “We have not seen each other for several years, your literary knowledge did not make the least bit of progress. What does having sons and daughters have anything to do with great skill and strategy?”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “In the past King Wen of Zhou had one hundred sons; every good emperor certainly has a lot of sons.”

Kangxi laughed, “How do you know?” he asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty sent your servant to fish; the two of us are like King Wen of Zhou and Jiang Taigong. King Wen of Zhou’s affairs, naturally your servant has to ask clearly, so that when I see Your Majesty, I can report back to my superior.”

These past several years Kangxi was busy fighting the war against Wu Sangui; day and night he worked hard, making plans, dealing with national affairs; he missed having this young minister, Wei Xiaobao, by his side, with whom he used to chat and joke to relieve boredom, so much so that sometimes he was extremely bored. This moment as the ruler and his minister reunited, he was very happy. After some more chitchat, he asked Wei Xiaobao about his life on Tong Chi Island, he also wanted to know Taiwan’s local conditions and the people there.

“Taiwan’s soil is fertile,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “The climate is warm, the output

is abundant; the people there pass their days in happiness. When they found out that Your Majesty allows them to continue living in Taiwan, everybody was grateful for the vast and mighty imperial kindness; they all said that Your Majesty is a hundred per cent raw bird fish soup [see Chapter 14].”

Kangxi nodded and said, “Governance should not be a nuisance. The people have lived in peace and worked happily in Taiwan, forcing them to move inland is greatly disruptive. The high-ranking ministers of the imperial court do not understand Taiwan’s situation, they submitted this preposterous proposal and nearly spoiled the big affair. You and Shi Lang submitted the advice, your merit is not small.”

‘Poof’, Wei Xiaobao sank on his knees; he kowtowed and said, “Your servant repeatedly disobeyed the imperial decree, I deserve to be beheaded seventeen, eighteen times; no matter what merit, Your Majesty need not care about it. I am just asking Your Majesty’s grace, please spare your servant’s life, allow me to serve by your side.”

Kangxi smiled and said, “You knew you deserve to be beheaded seventeen, eighteen times; too bad you don’t have eighteen heads. Otherwise, I would definitely chop seventeen of those heads.”

“Yes, yes,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant does not want too many heads either. Only one head with a mouth to speak and eat, and I will be perfectly contented.”

Kangxi said, “Whether your head will remain or not, I must see first whether you are loyal or not, whether you still dare to disobey the imperial decree.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “In term of loyalty, your servant is loyal and devoted, I have a red-bellied devotion, I will display utter loyalty to dedicate myself to the service of my country.”

Kangxi laughed and said, “You remember quite a bit of those idioms with the ‘loyalty’ character in them; are there some more?” [Translator’s note: as you may already guessed, each of the idioms (expression made up of four characters) Wei Xiaobao mentioned above has a ‘loyal’ character in it.]

Wei Xiaobao said, “In my heart I only have one ‘loyal’ character, naturally I remember some. There’s … there’s ‘loyal to the lord love one’s country’, and

then ‘loyal minister are not afraid of death, those who are afraid of death are not loyal minister’ [naturally this last one is not strictly an idiom of four characters]. And then there’s ‘loyal, considerate, open and guileless’ …”

“Get up!” Kangxi said, “If you are really ‘loyal, considerate, open and guileless’, there is nobody in the world who is wicked, mischievous, and crafty.”

Wei Xiaobao stood up and said, “Reporting to Your Majesty: I am loyal and devoted to you, one person, only. Regarding other people, I am not that loyal, sometimes I still swindle him a bit. Your servant’s character is a bit slippery, this fact Your Majesty also knows very well. However, toward Your Majesty I pay particular attention to ‘loyalty’ [zhong xin], toward my friends I pay particular attention to ‘spirit of loyalty and self-sacrifice/code of brotherhood’ [yi qi]. When loyalty and righteousness cannot satisfy both sides, your servant has no choice but to shrink my head like a turtle and went fishing on Tong Chi Island.”

“No need to worry,” Kangxi said, “We are going to talk about this day onward; I am not going to order you to attack Tian Di Hui.”

With hands behind his back Kangxi paced back and forth several times; he said slowly, “Toward your friends you uphold *yi qi*, that is a virtue; I can’t blame you for that. The sage [usually refers to Confucius] paid particular attention to loyalty and forgiveness; this ‘loyal’ character does not necessarily refer only to the ruler, toward everybody we must spare no effort, and that is the real meaning of ‘loyalty’. Loyal and righteousness [zhong yi], two characters, originally one cannot exist without the other. You would rather die than turning your back on your friends, you are unwilling to sell your friends for the sake of riches and honor, glory and splendor, it is also considered very rare, you really have the air of the ancient people. Since you are unwilling to turn your back on your friends, naturally you will not turn your back on me. Xiao Guizi, I pardon your guilt, not entirely because of your past meritorious service, not entirely because you and I are kindred spirits since we were young, but it is also because you attach importance to *yi qi*, which is really not a bad thing.”

Wei Xiaobao shed tears of gratitude; choking with emotion he said, “Your servant … your servant does not understand anything. I only feel that other people sincerely treat me well, I really … really cannot … cannot do them wrong.”

Kangxi nodded his head and said, “Your Luocha Country’s Queen Regent, her treatment to you was not bad either, but now I am sending you to attack her; what do you think?”

“Pft,” Wei Xiaobao broke out in laughter. “She was locked up by others, her life almost could not be guaranteed. Your servant taught her to instigate the gunmen to start a rebellion and finally seize the throne; it can be considered I already repaid her kindness. She sent her troops, presumably to seize Your Majesty’s beautiful rivers and mountains, we simply cannot let her do that. This woman is a fickle; today she fools around with this man, tomorrow she will fool around with that man, she really must not do that. It’s a pity that Luocha Country is really too far, otherwise your servant will bring some troops to capture this Queen and have Your Majesty look at her. It will be quite interesting.”

“Luocha Country is really too far,” Kangxi repeated, “These five characters are very important. Based on these five characters alone, once we go out to war, we must grasp the victory. Although Luocha Country’s firearms are sharp, their cavalry brave, but they are far, we are near. They came tens of thousands *li* to the east; their soldiers, horses, firearms, ammunitions, grain and straw, their clothes, everything is not easy to get. Presently I have already sent the Minister of Revenue Yu Sang’a to go ahead to Guta, Liaoning, to build the two cities Aigun and Kumarsk, to amass grain and straw and ammunition, also to set up ten relay stations for post horses, so that military logistic and army provisions can flow unimpeded, continuous from the source. The other day I also issued an imperical decree to Mongolia, forbiding them to have any trade relation with Luocha people. Moreover, I sent Heilongjiang General Sabusu to dispatch cavalry far and wide; if they see Luocha people’s rations and fodder and their vehicles, to set those damn things on fire, if they see Luocha troops’ horses, to immediately slaughter those damn horses.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he said, “Your Majesty so deployed, whatever is near, whatever is thousand *li* distant, this war has already been won seventy, eighty percent.”

“That’s not necessarily true,” Kangxi replied, “Luocha is a big country. According to Nan Huairen, the extent of their country is bigger than our China,

we really must not underestimate the enemy. If we lose the war, Liaodong will fall, the foundation of our country will be shaken. If they are defeated, it won't affect their present situation; all they have to do is retreat to the west. Hence in this war we must win and cannot lose. If you are defeated, I will have to personally lead the troops out of the Pass. The first order of business is to chop your head." While speaking the last sentence, his voice was stern.

"Your Majesty," Wei Xiaobao said, "Please set your heart at ease. If your servant cannot save my neck, it is because Luocha troops chop it down, definitely I won't let Your Majesty come and do it."

"It's good that you understand it," Kangxi said, "Weapons are ominous, war is dangerous, nobody can guarantee victory. I only tell you that you absolutely cannot be careless; war is not a matter of smooth talk and oily mouth."

Wei Xiaobao respectfully replied, "Yes."

Kangxi continued, "If the only thing I need is sending the troops to fight, I did not need to send you. But this time we start a war with Luocha Country, it is not to wipe them out at all, I only want them to sound out the difficulties and retreat to avoid defeat, and won't dare to come and invade our territory, that's all. Thus we must show them kindness and power at the same time, to make them deeply grateful, to have both countries live in harmony forever. If you indulge in killings, the Luocha Country's monarch might become hostile out of shame, and incite the whole country to attack. Even if we can win, it will be a military disaster, the gains will not make up for the losses. Only if we can live in harmony, not fighting or wrong the other's troops, will it be considered very auspicious. If you can persuade the Luocha Country Queen Regent to withdraw the troops, both countries make peace, it will be your greatest merit."

Wei Xiaobao said, "When your servant sees Luocha troop's generals, I will enlighten them with Your Majesty's imperial edict, and ask them to bring words back to Luocha Country Queen Regent."

Kangxi said, "I have had quite a few western missionaries here, I asked them in details about Luocha Country history, dynasty and past events, their natural conditions and social customs, geography, military and administrative affairs …"

"Right, right," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your Majesty knows them and knows

ourselves, we will emerge victorious in every battle."

Kangxi showed a faint smile; he said, "Those clergymen all said that Luocha people love to take unfair advantage of good people but are afraid of the evil ones. If we blindly speak good words with them, they win a *cun* and want a *chi*, they will be more and more vicious. We should explicitly show our true colors, let them know that we are not to be trifled with. Consequently, on one hand we must mobilize a large army, prepare everything well, so if we have to fight we'll fight; on the other hand we must appear to be a righteous nation. China is a superior country, we won't show off our power and bully people at will."

"Your servant understands," Wei Xiaobao said, "Sometimes we put up our red face, draw our knife and use the damn thing; sometimes we put up our white face, laughing happily stroking him several times. Just like Zhuge Liang captured Meng Huo seven times, so that he would submit completely and henceforth did not dare to revolt."

Kangxi let out a 'hey, hey' laughter; he said, "That's exactly it."

Noticing Kangxi's strange laughter, Wei Xiaobao had a second thought; he understood Kangxi's mind. He laughed and said, "Just like the Lord of Ten Thousand Years captured Xiao Guizi seven times, so that your servant would be grateful and afraid at the same time, henceforth will not dare to play any trick. Xiao Guizi is just like Sun Wukong [Monkey King, Journey to the West]; in a word, he cannot jump out of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years' Tathagata Buddha's palm."

Kangxi laughed and said, "As you grew several years older, you also become more and more modest. If you really want to jump out of my palm, I can't really catch you."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your servant is very comfortable in Your Majesty's palm, why would I want to jump out?"

Kangxi said, "Speaking about pacifying Wu Sangui, your merit is really not small; this is one thing that you have not caught up yet. Presently I am sending you to lead the three armies of water and land, in a campaign against the Luocha. The city of Yakesa is built on Mount Luding [deer and cauldron], I confer to you the title of Third-class Duke of Luding, Great General of Fuyuan [county,

Heilongjiang; ‘fu yuan’ itself means ‘consoling/pacifying (places) far away’]. In military affairs, Commander Peng Chun, Heilongjiang General Sabusu, and Liaoning Guta General Ba Hai will assist you. In the administrative side, Songgotu will assist you. We will set out four-way cavalry and infantry first, plus 5000-men Navy. If that is not enough, we will send whatever is necessary. All horses and logistics are in place. Aigun and Liaoning Guta are already stocked with provisions, enough to be used by the large army for a period of three years. There are 350 battlefield cannon, and there are fifty siege cannon. Do you think this is enough?”

For each sentence Kangxi spoke, Wei Xiaobao thanked him for his grace. When Kangxi finished, Wei Xiaobao hastily kneeled down and kowtowed over and over.

Kangxi said, “Luocha Country only has no more than six thousand cavalry and infantry at Yakesa and Nerchinsk. We have seven or eight times that number to deal with them, indeed it is the sound of thunder ten-thousand great power; I only hope that you won’t fail our magnificent China’s national prestige.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “In this war your servant is fighting on behalf of Your Majesty; if we show even the tiniest setback, the Luocha people will look down on us. In spite of everything, Your Majesty please set your heart at ease.”

“Very good,” Kangxi said, “What else do you need?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “From Taiwan your servant brought along five hundred rattan-shield troops to the Capital. They have been in battle with the red-haired troops, and are very good at resisting firearms. Your servant is thinking to take them to destroy Luocha.”

“That’s very good!” Kangxi said happily, “Zheng Chenggong’s troops have defeated Dutch’s red-haired troops, you bring them to fight Luocha troops, our chance of victory is increased by thirty-percent. Originally I was worried the Luocha troops’ firearms are formidable, I am afraid there will be too many casualties among our officers and soldiers.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Rattan shield can withstand flintlock musket’s bullet, these rattan-shield troops can roll pass their defense line and use broadsword to chop demon troops’ demon legs.”

Kangxi was greatly delighted, “Wonderful, wonderful!” he repeatedly

exclaimed.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant also has a young concubine, in those days she came with me to Moscow, she is proficient in Luocha demon language. I want to ask Your Majesty’s gracious approval to let her come with the army to handle affairs.” According to Qing Dynasty regulation, taking one’s family along in a military expedition was a grave offense; therefore, he had to ask permission first.

Kangxi nodded. “I know,” he said, “Now go and set up meritorious service!”

Wei Xiaobao kowtowed to take his leave. When he retreated toward the door, Kangxi suddenly asked, “I heard that your Shifu Chen Yonghua was murdered by Zheng Keshuang; is that right?”

Wei Xiaobao was startled. “Yes,” he replied.

Kangxi said, “Zheng Keshuang has surrendered to the imperial court. I have agreed to preserve the entire Zheng Clan’s descendants. You must not give them any trouble.” Wei Xiaobao had no choice but to say ‘yes’.

Before reaching the Capital this time, he had long planned on looking for Zheng Keshuang and made life difficult for him; who would have thought that Kangxi has already anticipated this and ordered him in this way? If he made his move, he would definitely disobey the imperial decree. He mused, “Could it be that I have to forget the big enmity of this kid murdering my Shifu?”

As he walked away slowly with his head hung low, suddenly he heard someone said, “Wei *Xiongdi*, congratulations!”

Wei Xiaobao thought the voice sounded very familiar. When he looked up, he saw a tall man with wide shoulder standing in front of him; the man looked at him with smile on his face. It was none other than the Imperial Bodyguard *Zongguan* [chief manager] Dolong. Wei Xiaobao’s shock was no small matter. When he escaped from the Palace that day, he had obviously stabbed Dolong to his death with a dagger in his residence; wasn’t this his ghost coming to demand his life back? In that instant Wei Xiaobao was so scared that his whole body trembled; he wanted to turn around and flee, he also wanted to kneel down and plead for mercy, but he felt as if his feet were nailed to the ground, he could not move even for half a step, all around the lower part of his body felt tense, in that instant he felt a very strong urge to defecate and urinate at the same time.

Dolong came over, he pulled Wei Xiaobao's hand and said with a laugh, "Good *Xiongdi*, I have not seen you for many years, your *Gege* miss you very much, and have come to make sure that everything is according to your wishes. I heard you went fishing for His Majesty on Tong Chi Island, and His Majesty constantly promotes your official ranking and titular honors. I am very happy to hear that."

Wei Xiaobao felt Dolong's palm was warm, under the sunlight illuminating the colonnade, he saw a shadow by Dolong's side; apparently he was not a ghost, his fright was reduced somewhat. "Yes, yes," he mumbled in reply. He was also afraid that Dolong might remember the former enmity and wanted to settle this old debt. But the dagger clearly penetrated Dolong's back and pierced his heart; how did he not die? In his panic, he could not think of anything.

Dolong said, "That day in *Xiongdi*'s residence, your *Gege* has fallen into the enemy's plot. Fortunately I received *Xiongdi*'s help who drove the assassin away so that my life was protected. I have never been able to personally thank you over this matter, I often thought about it in my heart. You also asked Shi Lang to deliver gift for me from Taiwan; I really owe you too much."

Seeing his sincere expression, Wei Xiaobao decided that Dolong was not being sarcastic; he thought, "He is the Imperial Bodyguard *Zongguan*, a member of His Majesty's inner ministerial circle. This time Shi Lang came to give presents, naturally Dolong received his share. Presumably he asked Shi Lang about me, and Shi Lang simply did me a favor with little cost to himself, saying that part of the gift was from me, so that it will appear that he and I have very deep friendship; in turn, people will look at my face and will not give Shi Lang any difficulty. By why did he say that I drove the assassin away? I really don't understand."

Dolong saw Wei Xiaobao's face was white, alternating with blue; he also looked restless. Thinking that Wei Xiaobao must have just received Kangxi's rebuke, Dolong tried to console him, "His Majesty's temper has not been too good recently, most probably it's because the Luocha Country bullies people too much; *Xiongdi* don't have to worry about it. Wait till my shift is over, we'll have a nice dinner together and chat."

Wei Xiaobao said, "His Majesty's benevolence is as high as the sky and as deep as the earth. Just now he promoted my official rank again. *Xiongdi* is deeply

grateful, I really don't know how to repay our lord's kindness."

Dolong laughed and said, "Congratulations! Congratulations! *Xiongdi* is very competent, you can share His Majesty's tribulations. To have your official ranking and titular honors raised, of course it is proper and to be expected." There was a hint of envy in his voice.

Wei Xiaobao noticed the warmth and the envy in the tone of his voice and in his facial expression. Knowing that Dolong was a straightforward man, Wei Xiaobao knew he was not pretending; the fear in his heart vanished completely. He laughed and said, "Duo *Dage* [in Chinese, Dolong is spelled Duo Long], please wait a moment, *Xiongdi* really need to go pee. His Majesty summoned me for an audience, he gave me a lot of instructions and warnings, *Xiongdi* tried to hold it that long, but now I can't hold it much longer."

Dolong roared in laughter; he knew that when the Emperor summoned his ministers, if he did not indicate that the meeting was finished, the ministers would not dare to withdraw. If the minister had an urgent need to urinate, it would be an enormous difficulty. It's just that only toward a favored minister like Wei Xiaobao would the Emperor talk for quite so long. With other ministers, usually the Emperor only talked for two, three sentences, and he was dismissed; hence there has never been any urgent need for the ministers to urinate or defecate. Dolong had always been close to Wei Xiaobao; today as they met again after a long time, he was genuinely happy. Immediately he took Wei Xiaobao's hand and took him to the door of the latrine [orig. 'thatched hut'], and waited outside as Wei Xiaobao finished his business.

That day, in order to save his Shifu's life, as well as his Tian Di Hui brothers, Wei Xiaobao had no choice but to stab Dolong. Recalling that ordinarily Dolong treated him well, in the deepest part of his heart Wei Xiaobao was actually quite regretful and uneasy; who would have thought that not only Dolong did not die, he also did not show any sign that he took offense of what had happened. Wei Xiaobao urinated with a happy heart. When he went out of the latrine, he casually sounded Dolong out on what happened that day.

Dolong said, "When I woke up that day, I found out that I had been lying in bed for three days and four nights. The Imperial Physician Guan told me that fortunately I was born with an anomaly; my heart was slanted, so that the

assassin's blade only pierced my lung and did not harm my heart at all. He said that someone with a slanted heart like me, in a hundred thousand people you won't necessarily find one."

In his heart Wei Xiaobao cried out, "Ashamed! So that's what happened." He laughed and said, "I always thought that *Dage* is a hero with straight heart and intestine, who would have thought that *Dage* is a prejudiced man? ['slanted heart' means partial/biased/prejudiced]. *Dage* is prejudiced, are you particularly doting on young Auntie, or on your son?"

Dolong was taken aback. He then laughed and said, "If *Xiongdi* did not mention it, I would not have thought about it. I do dote on my eighth concubine Fang a bit more than the rest; it may be assumed that it is due to my slanted heart condition." The two of them roared in laughter.

Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, "That assassin's martial art skill was very high; he came to plot against *Dage*, unexpectedly *Xiongdi* was not aware of him in advance."

"That's right," Dolong said. Lowering his voice he added, "By coincidence at that time Princess Jianning came from the Hall to see *Xiongdi*. This kind of affair, as servants we do not dare to ask one question too many. I recuperated for three months and was completely healed. His Majesty revealed to me that it was Wei *Xiongdi* who courageously saved my life and personally killed the assassin. *Xiongdi* need not mention the particulars of this event; in short, your *Gege* owes you a lot."

Wei Xiaobao's skin was thick, during Kangxi's reign, he could be reckoned as first or second best; however, listening to Dolong, he could not stop his face from turning red. Only then did he find out that the Emperor has concealed his secret. First, because it was the Emperor himself who told him, Dolong had no reason to be suspicious. Second, since it involved the Princess' private business, the people in the Palace understood that the less it was brought up the better. Even if they had doubt as big as the sky, they had no choice but to bury it deep inside their hearts. Were it not for this, they would have to take a lot of trouble to concoct a lie to cover up the past events.

Wei Xiaobao was ashamed; he also felt that he must repay this honest,

considerate and naïve man well. He said, “From Taiwan *Xiongdi* has brought some local products as souvenirs; as soon as I get home I will have someone deliver some to *Dage*’s mansion.”

Dolong repeatedly shook his hand, “No need, no need,” he said, “We are family, why bother like this? Last time the gift Shi Lang brought was already too much.”

Wei Xiaobao suddenly remembered something, “It’s a kind act that costs nothing,” he mused, “Even if His Majesty finds out, he cannot blame me for disobeying the imperial decree.” Thereupon he asked, “Duo *Dage*, after that kid Zheng Keshuang surrendered, how is he doing in Beijing?”

“His Majesty treated him very well,” Dolong replied, “He was bestowed First-class Duke title. This kid does not know how to do anything, he only relies on his ancestors’ fortune; unexpectedly his nobility is higher than you, *Xiongdi*.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “When we joke around that day, we falsely accused him of owing the Imperial Bodyguards ten thousand *taels* of silver, and then *Xiongdi* took out some money to pay for him. Does *Dage* still remember that?”

Dolong burst out laughing. “I remember, I remember,” he said, “That Miss, *Xiongdi*’s good friend, what happened to her next? If she still follows Zheng Keshuang, we may go and take her back.”

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “That Miss has already become my wife long ago, she even gave birth to my son.”

Dolong laughed and said, ““Congratulations, congratulations! Otherwise, since that kid Zheng Keshuang is in Beijing, I don’t care if he is a first-class duke or second-class duke, in the end he will become a no-entitlement, no-power empty-headed *Jueye* [master noble]. Let us drop him a visit, so that this kid won’t dare to release a fart. This kind of surrendering border defense king, he spends his days trembling with fear, afraid that His Majesty might suspect in his heart he has not really surrendered and would rise again in rebellion.”

“We don’t have to bully him,” Wei Xiaobao said, “It’s just that those who murdered people must pay with his life, those who owed a debt must return the money. This is an absolutely fair and reasonable matter. Forget that he is merely a first-class duke, even if he is a Prince or a Bei Lei [see note 15 chapter 13], he

can't owe a debt and refuse to pay."

"Right, right," Dolong said, "That day he owed *Xiongdi* ten thousand *taels* of silver, not a few of our Imperial Bodyguard brothers witnessed this; we can go to demand payment from him."

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, "This kid has not made much progress. Only ten thousand *taels* of silver is nothing; afterwards he continuously amassed a lot of debt from *Xiongdi*. He has personally written an I.O.U. that I have it in my hand. For three generations his Zheng Family became *Wangye* in Taiwan, how much gold, silver, money and valuables they accumulated has he spent? He must have brought everything to Beijing. Zheng Chenggong and Zheng Jing were good people, presumably they would not milk common people dry; but this kid Zheng Keshuang, could he be polite? He became *Wangye* for a day, at least he would plunder above one million *taels*; two days two millions, three days three millions. He has become *Wangye* for several days, just calculate how much money he has acquired!"

Dolong's jaw dropped and his tongue was tied. "Awesome, awesome," he muttered.

Wei Xiaobao said, "When *Xiongdi* is back home, I will have the loan receipt delivered to *Dage*. This money, *Xiongdi* does not want any …"

"We can't do that," Dolong hastily said, "Your *Gege* will collect the payment for you, I guarantee that you won't get a *qian* less. I will take my men the Imperial Bodyguards to pay a visit; even if he has guts as big as the sky he won't dare not to pay."

"This debt is rather large," Wei Xiaobao said, "In those days this kid spent his time in drinking and pleasure, he spent money like flowing water. To have him pay everything back at once is really not easy. Let's do it this way: *Dage* bring people to collect, if within eight or ten days he cannot pay, let him break up the whole debt into pieces, have him write separate I.O.U., put the Imperial Bodyguard brothers' names as the creditors. Each I.O.U. can be a thousand *taels*, two thousand *taels*, I don't care. Whichever Imperial Bodyguard brother can collect the debt, let it be his."

"Absolutely not!" Dolong said, "All Imperial Bodyguards are your old

subordinates. Doing a trivial thing like collecting the debt for an old boss and still want some reward, where's the logic in that?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "They are all my old subordinates, my good brothers, my good friends. For the last several years *Xiongdi*'s promotion to the nobility is like spurring the horse to full speed, yet all along I did not give any benefit to everybody; when I think about it, I find it quite embarrassing. I want the Imperial Bodyguard brothers to have a share on this several million *taels*."

Dolong was stunned. "What … there are several … several million *taels*?" he asked in a trembling voice.

Wei Xiaobao smiled, "Speaking about capital," he said, "I did not spend that much. Some of it was spending money, some was a trick; profit after profit, the total amount is not small. This money, *Dage* may take a bit bigger share."

Dolong still did not believe; he mumbled, "Several million *taels*? This … isn't this too much?"

"That's why," Wei Xiaobao said, "I wanted him to break it up into smaller I.O.U.s. It's going to be easier to collect." Lowering his voice, he said, "I cannot be involved in this matter; if the Imperial Censor found out, they might submit report, saying *Xiongdi* is in association with outside border defense, lending money and exacting interest. Whether it's big or small, I will have to face criminal charge. But if the Imperial Bodyguards want to collect some gambling debt from him, each one collects one or two thousand *taels*, it won't be such a big deal. If *Dage* is afraid to have the Imperial Bodyguards eating this money alone the responsibility is too great, there's no harm in asking some Valiant Cavalry Brigade officers to come along. They are also my old subordinates; I should also share some benefits with them."

Dolong repeatedly voiced his agreement. He had made up his mind, when this debt was collected, he would return at least half to Wei Xiaobao. Although Wei Xiaobao was generous and easy-mannered, Dolong could not let him lose his life savings.

Wei Xiaobao was so proud of himself; he thought that if Dolong bring along these 'like wolves and tigers' group of Imperial Bodyguards and Valiant Cavalry Brigade officers to collect the debt, this time Zheng Keshuang would definitely

have a bad headache. Although the Emperor had ordered him in advance not to personally give Zheng Keshuang any trouble, this big enmity of murdering his Shifu, if he could not avenge it, at least he would make Zheng Keshuang lose half of his family property. In this matter most likely Zheng Keshuang would quietly suffer in silence [orig. 'eat yellow lotus'], and would not dare to make it public. If other people found out, it would be personal matters between Zheng Keshuang and the Imperial Bodyguards and the Valiant Cavalry Brigade officers who collected gambling debt. People always said that Zheng Keshuang was a hedonistic son of rich parents, that he did not have a good family foundation, as soon as he arrived at the Capital, he gambled and made a scene; no one would put the blame on Wei Xiaobao.

When he exited the Palace, Prince Kang Giyesu, Li Lei, Ming Zhu, Songgotu, Lei Dehong, Du Lide, Feng Pu, Tu Hai, Wang Xi, Huang Ji, Wu Zhengzhi, Zong Deyi, and the other Manchu-Han high-ranking ministers were waiting outside the Palace gate. One after another they stepped forward to congratulate him. With Wei Xiaobao in the middle, they all went to the Tong Mao'er [copper hat] Alley.

When they reached the mouth of the alley, Wei Xiaobao saw a grand mansion towering above the houses around it, compared to his old earl mansion it was a lot bigger. Above the main gate there was a vermillion-painted horizontal inscribed board, but it was completely empty without a single character on it. Characters as big as watermelon, Wei Xiaobao's knowledge was limited to only a handful, but even he was able to see that the board did not have any character on it; he could not help but was stunned.

Prince Kang laughed and said, "Wei *Xiongdi*, His Majesty's grace and favor to you is indeed as high as the sky and as deep as the earth. That year when your earl mansion caught fire and was burned down, you were not in town. When His Majesty was informed, he immediately ordered your *Gege* to build another mansion for you. The imperial edict did not mention any budgetary number; it only mentioned that all expenses are to be covered by the internal treasury. This is His Majesty bestowing you a reward, why would your *Gege* try to save His Majesty some money? Naturally I did not spare any expense. *Xiongdi*, look, is this acceptable?" While saying that, he stroked his beard with a smile on his face.

Wei Xiaobao busily expressed his thanks. From the main gate he entered in. It was indeed a splendid and magnificent building, not much different compared to Prince Kang's mansion. All the ministers clucked their tongues in praise, they all expressed their admirations.

Prince Kang said, "This mansion has been ready for quite some time, all along it stayed empty, waiting for *Xiongdi* to come back and live in it. It's just that we did not know what other grace His Majesty would bestow you, what title and honors he was going to confer to you, hence the plaque above the mansion's gate is still empty. The 'Lu Ding Gong Fu' [Duke of Deer and Cauldron's Mansion], four characters, I will ask our Li *Da Xueshi* to move his brush."

Li Lei was the Hall of Preserving Harmony's [Bao He Dian] *Da Xue Shi* [see also Chapter 37], while holding the post of Minister of Revenue at the same time. The *Da Xue Shi* with most profound experience in wealth management was appointed the head. This moment he did not decline; picking up the brush he wrote in regular script, 'Lu Ding Gong Fu', four large characters. A minor government official was ordered to have an artisan cast gold lettering and embed it on the plaque.

That evening Wei Xiaobao held a big banquet at the Duke of Luding's mansion to entertain the high-ranking ministers who had personally come to congratulate him earlier. Zheng Keshuang, Feng Xifan, and other Taiwan people who surrendered also sent some gifts, but they did not personally come to congratulate him.

After sending off the guests, Wei Xiaobao had another banquet for his family. His seven wives raised their wine cups to celebrate. Wei Xiaobao mentioned that he was going to take Shuang'er to accompany him in this punitive expedition to the north. The other six wives raised their voices at once to protest, saying that he was too partial. Wei Xiaobao was obliged to explain with graceful words, flowery speech, saying that it was His Majesty's imperial edict; because he knew that Shuang'er has been to Luocha Country and understood Luocha language, he was sending her to serve in the army.

The six wives did not have any choice but to drop this matter. Luckily Shuang'er was gentle and amiable, her friendship with every single one of the other wives was very good, so nobody was jealous of her. Only Princess Jianning

was thinking that based on her status as the Emperor's imperial sister, a golden branch, jade leaves, unexpectedly she could not compare to a little servant girl with humble background, in her heart she was quite angry. However, usually when the seven wives had an argument, the other six women would unite to deal with the Princess. Princess Jianning was on her own, even Wei Xiaobao did not side with her; for the past few years her fiery temper had mellowed considerably, she did not dare to rashly pick a quarrel.

The next day Wei Xiaobao asked Shuang'er to take out Zheng Keshuang's I.O.U. which was written in blood on Tong Chi Island that year. He invited Dolong to come over and handed it over to him. Dolong was greatly delighted; he said, "With a hand-written I.O.U. like this, we can even squeeze oil from a stone. If that kid Zheng Keshuang dares to renege and refuse to pay, we, the Imperial Bodyguards and the Valiant Cavalry Brigade officers, won't have any face to mingle in the Capital anymore."

For the next several days, Kangxi repeatedly summoned Wei Xiaobao to the Palace. He gave Wei Xiaobao a giant map; how to advance, how to engage the enemy, how to besiege a city, how to strike at the enemy's reinforcements, he gave Wei Xiaobao detailed instructions. With vermillion brush he drew on the map clearly.

Wei Xiaobao said, "This war is just like Your Majesty personally leading the troops and fighting it, your servant will not dare to act on my own initiative, I will do everything in accordance with Your Majesty's instruction. Otherwise, even if I am victorious, Your Majesty will not be happy."

Kangxi smiled and nodded. What Wei Xiaobao said was very close to his heart's intention. Since he was little he learned martial art, and had never been able to put it to use, only with Wei Xiaobao he could wrestle and have fun. Later on he unceasingly sent Wei Xiaobao on various missions outside; in the deepest part of his heart he always thought that Wei Xiaobao was a standin for him. Wei Xiaobao was younger than he, in terms of martial art skill, intelligence, knowledge and foresight, none could surpass Kangxi's. If Wei Xiaobao could successfully accomplish the mission, naturally Kangxi would be able to handle the butcher's knife with more ease. Recalling Ming Dynasty's Emperor Zhengde who conferred himself the title *Weiwu Dajiangjun Zhen Guo Gong* [see Chapter

43], and personally went into battle, Kangxi was unwilling to be left out, he wanted to display his talent too. Kangxi would never make fool of himself like Emperor Zhengde, but by sending Wei Xiaobao on missions like that, he derived inside satisfaction.

During the years of Wu Sangui's rebellion, Kangxi had to deal with a high-ranking minister, a veteran general. Wu Sangui was a fierce general, a veteran of a hundred battles, not a simple matter at all; if he had sent Wei Xiaobao, he would have been defeated for sure. By this time Kangxi had gained several years' worth of war. Although he did not personally go to the front line, he always inquired in details that he understood clearly every military campaign, its merits and drawbacks, gains and losses; not a single battle he did not know like the palm of his own hand. From the actual combat he learned the art of war.

This time he was about to start a war with the Luocha Country, he would deal with any matter, regardless of its importance; everything has been prepared properly. Before the main force even marched out the gate, he already had confidence that he would achieve victory. Indeed it was a far cry [orig. 'mustn't speak of two things on the same day'] from when he was trembling with fear in dealing with Wu Sangui in the past.

Since his departure for war was imminent, Wei Xiaobao did not dare to mess with Tian Di Hui brothers. He thought, "His Majesty did not tell me to exterminate Tian Di Hui, it means he has surrendered to me, it means he has given me enough face. If I am not being sensitive, and go to visit Li Lishi, Xu Tianchuan and the others, and His Majesty finds out, he might raise the former matter again. This is the same as Wei Xiaobao picks up a rock and smashes it against my own foot. Being a human being I must not be overly stupid and act too tactlessly."

The directorate of astronomy picked up an ecliptic propitious day for the main force to set off on their punitive expedition to the north. That day Kangxi bestowed a feast at the Taihe Men [Gate of Supreme Harmony]. There was a large sandy field outside the Wu Men [Meridian Gate], where His Majesty's yellow tent was erected. The imperial throne was set up, royal seal was on display, hundreds of princes and dukes and ministers congregated. Kangxi took his seat. The Great General Fuyuan, Duke of Luding Wei Xiaobao led his military

officers Peng Chun, Sabusu, Lang Tan, Lin Xingzhu, and the others, the logistic officer Songgotu and the others, to step forward and kneel down. Internal courtyard cabinet minister declared the imperial order in Manchurian, Mongolian and Han, three languages. He handed over the great general seal of authority, and conferred a set of clothes, a horse, a bow and a saber.

The officers going into battle separately sat on the north of Jinshui [golden water] Bridge. There were music everywhere, hundreds of play were being performed. Kangxi ordered the Great General to step forward toward the throne. When they were face-to-face, he personally conferred the imperial wine. The Great General received it, kowtowed, and drank it. The commanders, deputy commanders, and so on also stepped forward. The Emperor ordered the Imperial Bodyguards to bestow the drink. Afterwards he ordered the hundreds of government officials everywhere to offer the wine to the troops, along with money and some clothes. The hundreds of officials and all the troops expressed their gratitude, and then the main forces set out.

Kangxi personally sent them off outside the Meridian Gate. The Great General and all the officers kneeled down to ask the holy self to return home. Afterwards the water and land main forces set off to the north. All the ministers saw Wei Xiaobao in his complete martial attire, happy and giggling, without the slightest bit of mighty air of the Commander-in-Chief of a large army. They already knew this man was without learning or skills, a marketplace hoodlum; he was leading the troops into battle, most likely he would spoil the great endeavor and might bring disgrace to the country and make it lose face. But they also knew that Kangxi doted on him very much; who would dare to utter even half a sentence of objection? Not a few of these princes, dukes and ministers put on a smile on their faces, but in their hearts they were sighing. It was:

The ministers swarm around the stage like a school of fish, the general majestically ascends the sacrificial altar[31].

Ever since Wei Xiaobao went out on mission for the Emperor, he has never gone out with this kind of pomp and circumstances; the pride in his heart need not be mentioned. He knew this time the stake was very high, in the army he exercised strong self-control, unexpectedly he did not dare to gamble at all. When boredom hit along the way, he would invite several high-ranking generals

to throw some dice, the loser was punished by drinking some wine; nothing more.

One day the main force went out the Shanhai Pass [eastern pass of Great Wall], and continued north to Liaodong [peninsula]. It was the place Wei Xiaobao previously visited, only that time he and Shuang'er had to catch deer in the forest to eat while they were hiding to the east and escaping to the west, battered and exhausted; there was no awe-inspiring authority like this time they went out of the Pass on a military campaign to the north.

It was a crisp, clear autumn weather, the cloudless sky spread for thousands of *li*, the army marched farther and farther north, the north wind was getting stronger by the day. Until one day they were only a hundred or so *li* away from Yakesa. He You from the Vanguard Battalion reported to the main force: the reconnaissance team had been informed by the locals, common people, that Luocha troops had been harassing the people, killing people, burning houses, raping, robbing; no crime that they did not do. Every ten days or so they would come out once; hence he estimated that they would come out again in a few days.

Wei Xiaobao had already received Kangxi's instructions on what to do under given circumstances; he ordered the main force to pitch camp right there and did not advance farther. And then he ordered He You to lead ten hundred-man squadron to set ambush about thirty *li* from the city of Yakesa. If any Luocha troops came out in large number, they were to lie low and did not come out to avoid an open war. But if they encountered the enemy force in small groups, they were to attack, kill and captured all of them, no one was to be allowed to go back to the city. He You received the order and left.

Several days later before noon they heard faint noise of firearms from the distant, shot after shot, long and continuous; the noise did not cease for quite a long time. Presumably the Vanguard Battalion was engaged in battle with the Luocha troops. Later that afternoon He You sent his people to the main force to report their success, saying that they wiped out twenty-fice Luocha men and captured twelve. Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted.

That evening the Vanguard Battalion escorted the twelve prisoners to the main force. Wei Xiaobao had them in his tent and personally interrogated them.

Hearing Wei Xiaobao unexpectedly could speak Luocha language, the twelve Luocha troops were greatly astonished; however, everyone of them was extremely unyielding, they said they were ambushed, that Qing troops had superior number, that the victory was without honor. Wei Xiaobao was very angry; he ordered two Luocha troops to step forward. He took dice from his pocket and said, “You two throw the dice!”

Throwing dice had existed in the West since ancient times, the ones excavated from ancient Egyptian tomb were no different than the ones used in China; Luocha troops had also been accustomed to playing with dice. Two Luocha troops looked at each other in shock; they wondered what kind of trick this young general if the Qing troops was playing. They followed his order and threw the dice. One got sevent dots, the other five.

Wei Xiaobao pointed to the Luocha troop with five dots and said, “You lost! *Simanji*!” In Luocha language, ‘simanji’ means ‘death’. He turned his head around and ordered his personal guard, “Take him out and chop his head!”

Four personal guards dragged the Luocha troop to the entrance of the tent and chopped his head, and then they presented the severed head to Wei Xiaobao. The remaining eleven Luocha troops saw this and their countenances changed greatly.

Wei Xiaobao pointed to two more Luocha troops and said, “You two throw the dice.”

How could the two men be willing to throw the dice? As if by prior agreement they both said, “I won’t throw!”

“Alright, you won’t throw,” Wei Xiaobao said. Turning to his personal guards he said, “Take both out and chop their heads!” In an instant two more people died.

Wei Xiaobao pointed to two more Luocha troops and said, “You two throw the dice.”

The two men knew that if they did not throw, they would be killed immediately, but if they threw, there was a fifty-fifty chance that they would live. One of them picked up the dice, while trembling with fear. He was about to throw when the other Luocha troop scrambled past him and said to Wei

Xiaobao, “I’ll throw against you!” His expression looked extremely arrogant.

Wei Xiaobao laughed, “Alright,” he said, “Since you have the audacity to challenge me, you throw first.”

The soldier threw a seven-dot. Wei Xiaobao threw a ten. “How about it?” he asked with a laugh.

The soldier looked distressed. “My luck is not good,” he said, “I have nothing to say.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You came to China, how many Chinese people did you kill?”

The soldier was upright and unafraid. “I lost track,” he said, “At least seventeen, eighteen people. You kill me, I don’t lose out anyway.”

Wei Xiaobao commanded his guards to chop his head. Pointing to the other Luocha troop he said, “You throw.”

The soldier picked up the dice, his hand was trembling. The two dice rolled on the table one after another, surprisingly he got eleven-dot, his chance of winning was very big. Wei Xiaobao wanted to play the trick to get twelve-dot; who would have thought that due to the lack of practice his technique failed, the two dice did not have their six-dot sides facing upward but downward instead, producing only two dots. He was stunned, but then he laughed aloud and said, “I win!”

The soldier hastily said, “I got eleven, you only got two; what do you mean you won?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This time the smaller dots win, the bigger dots lose.”

The soldier did not give in; he said, “Naturally the bigger dots win. In our Luocha Country the rule has always been so.”

Wei Xiaobao pulled a face and said, “Are we in China, or is this Luocha’s land?”

The soldier replied, “It’s … it’s China.”

“Since this is China, naturally we use Chinese rule,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Who told you to come to China? Next time when I am in Luocha and I throw the dice against you, we can play with Luocha rule. You ‘*simanji*’!” Turning toward his personal guards he said, “Take him out and chop his head!”

He called another Luocha troop to come out. The soldier was careful, he asked first, “According to Chinese rule, is this time bigger dots win, or smaller dots win?”

“According to Chinese rule,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Chinese people win. If the Chinese man’s dots big, then bigger dots win; if the Chinese man’s dots small, then smaller dots win.”

The soldier angrily said, “You are very unreasonable, you don’t follow logic at all.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You Luocha troop’s came to China, killing and robbing. It’s not us, Chinese people who came to Luocha killing and robbing. Is Luocha people unreasonable, or Chinese people unreasonable?” The soldier was speechless.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Quickly throw, quickly throw!”

“I will lose anyway,” the soldier said, “Why bother?”

“You don’t throw, *simanji*! *Simanji*!” Wei Xiaobao said.

He called another Luocha troop to come out. This soldier was big and tall, with long whisker on his face; he said in a loud voice, “Chinese kid, you don’t need to play crafty trick, just be straightforward and kill me. This time you have superior number, you set an ambush on snowy ground and caught us by surprise; there is no honor in that kind of victory. When our Luocha Country’s main force arrives, each and every one of you will be killed.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You were caught by us, and in your heart you refuse to submit, is that right?”

“Naturally I won’t submit!” the soldier replied.

Wei Xiaobao said, “If we have the same number of people, and have a battle face to face, you are so sure that you will win; is that right?”

“Of course!” the soldier haughtily replied, “One of us, Luocha man, can beat five of you, Chinese men. Otherwise, we would not have come to China. I bet you, send five of your men to fight with me. If you win, you can chop my head, if I win, just let me go.” This man was the most famous warrior of the Luocha army, he was born with supernatural power. Seeing all the generals and personal

guards in Wei Xiaobao's tent were at least a head shorter than he was, he thought that even fighting five to one, his chance of winning was still very high.

All along Shuang'er has been sitting quietly on the side. This moment as she heard his arrogant talk, she opened her mouth for the first time, "Luocha men, useless. Chinese women, will beat you." While saying that she stood up and came over to stand by Wei Xiaobao's side.

Seeing her delicate figure, her beautiful face, the soldier could not help bursting in laughter. "You have to have a duel with me?" he asked.

Wei Xiaobao ordered his personal guard to cut the rope binding the man's hands. He smiled and said, "Good Shuang'er, let him experience Chinese women's fierceness."

The soldier said, "Chinese woman, you can talk Luocha language. Very good, very good."

Shuang'er's command of Luocha language was actually far below Wei Xiaobao's, she could not express her ideas very well, hence she was unwilling to talk to him too much. Waving her left hand, she launched a feign slap toward his face. The soldier hastily raised his head while stretched out his hand to block. Shuang'er's right leg flew up, 'pow!' she kicked his lower abdomen.

The soldier howled in pain, he rained down punches with both hands. He was Luocha Country's boxing champion, his punches were fast, heavy and powerful. Seeing his fierceness, Shuang'er leaped toward his back, using the move 'striking water right and left', 'whack, whack!' she kicked both sides of the small of his back with her left and right feet. It was so painful that the soldier squatted down. "You use your legs; a foul, a foul!" he hollered. Turned out according to Luocha people's boxing rule, they must not use their legs.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "This is China, we fight according to Chinese rule."

Shuang'er called out, "With Luocha rule, I still win." She dodged in front of the soldier; with her right fist she punched his lower abdomen. The soldier held out his hand to block. Shuang'er's punch was actually an empty move; without waiting for his block to arrive, she pulled her right fist, and struck the pit of his stomach with her left fist. Again the soldier stretched out his arm to block.

Shuang'er launched left punch, right punch; she sent twelve punches in succession. But all her punches were empty move, in Chinese martial art technique, it was called 'the mirage', meaning everything is imaginary. Just because each move was not really striking and it was executed without any real power, it was several times faster than ordinary punch.

The soldier blocked several times, but each time he blocked an empty punch; he laughed aloud and said, "Little girl's trick, it's useless …" Before he could finish, 'whack, whack!' twice, his left and right cheeks were hit by Shuang'er's palms. The soldier roared, his two arms attacked violently up and down. Shuang'er leaned sideways to evade, the forefinger of her right hand suddenly jabbed, it hit the 'taiyang' [sun] acupoint on the soldier's right temple. The man was overwhelmed with dizziness, his body swayed. Shuang'er leaped up, her palm hacked down, and hit the 'yuzhen' [jade pillow] acupoint on the back of the man's head. It was a vital acupoint on human's body, although the soldier was big and sturdy, he could not withstand it. 'Wham!' he tumbled down to the ground and was unable to crawl back up.

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; holding Shuang'er's hand, he kicked the soldier's forehead and asked, "Do you submit now?"

Still in daze, the soldier said, "Chinese woman … use witchcraft … she is a witch …"

"Stinky pig," Wei Xiaobao cursed, "What witchcraft? Take him out and chop his head! You, Luocha troops, which one of you won't submit? Let him come out and have a duel."

The remaining five Luocha troops looked at each other in dismay; they saw how their warrior was defeated, there was no way they could beat her. Nobody dared to say anything.

Wei Xiaobao said, "If you concede and surrender, you will be spared and won't be killed. Otherwise, you may throw dice against me. We will play by Chinese rule; if you win, you will live, if you lose, then *simanji*!" While saying that his right hand made a beheading gesture.

The five soldiers thought, "According to Chinese rule, it does not matter how many dots, he wins." Thereupon one soldier bowed and said, "I surrender!"

Wei Xiaobao happily said, “Very good! Get some wine and meat, let him eat.”

His personal guards went to the back of the tent and returned with a large bowl of wine and a large bowl of meat. The soldier was released from his bound and was free to eat and drink.

In Luocha Country the weather was bitter cold, everybody drank wine. Although Wei Xiaobao was not a drinker, the wine in the army was the best quality sorghum wine. As soon as this bowl of wine was brought in, the aroma filled the entire tent; as soon as the four Luocha troops smelled the wine, their mouth watered. When they saw the surrendering soldier drank and his eyebrows rose up and his eyes twinkled, their hearts were unbearably itchy. One after another they all said, “Surrender, surrender! I want wine.”

Wei Xiaobao commanded his guards to untie the four soldiers and ordered four other personal guards to get four bowls of wine and meat and gave it to them. The Luocha troops ate and drank, but they were still not full. Wei Xiaobao ordered his guards to get another set of wine and meat for each of them. The five Luocha troops were drunk, they waved their hands around and sang. After singing for a while, they remembered that they had just escaped mortal danger, unexpectedly they could eat and drink as much as they liked; they were very happy and bowed to Wei Xiaobao to express their thanks.

Afterwards, every several days He You continuously sent Luocha troops as prisoners, as many as sixteen, seventeen soldiers, and as few as one or two soldiers. After these prisoners talked with the five soldiers who surrendered first, they found out that if they threw the dice, they death was guaranteed; but if they surrendered, there would be meat and wine for their enjoyments. Thereupon everyone surrendered.

These Luocha troops were originally scoundrels who fled to the east to avoid prison; if not thieves and robbers, then they must be criminals who were exiled by the court of law. Out of ten, perhaps eight or nine of them would not shrink from any crime. They went east to take their chances, nobody had any good intentions in their heart. When they first went out to kill Chinese civilians, their missions always went without a hitch, hence in their hearts they despised Chinese people. Therefore, when they were captured, they were still very arrogant. It was not until Wei Xiaobao had several troops executed and thus

established his prestige that the rest realized how formidable the enemy was. These arrogant barbarians bullied good people but were scared of wicked ones; seeing the opposite side was even more barbarian and even more wicked, they obediently surrendered.

By this time the Governor-general Galitzine had been summoned by Princess Sophia back to Moscow to hold higher office. The general in command of Yakesa troops was called Tu'erbuqing (Alexi Tolbusin). Small groups of Luocha troops went out to plunder, they went missing for several days running. Tolbusin sent out people to investigate, but these people also never came back. He felt something was not right, thereupon he picked half of the cavalry in the city, totaling more than two thousand men and horses, and personally led them out of the city to investigate.

Along the way Tolbusin did not see any sign of the enemy; whenever he saw Chinese people's farmhouse or residence, he ordered his men to burn it down, and killed the people, ordinary men and women. After traveling for more than twenty *li*, suddenly he heard hoof beats, a group of cavalry was charging their way. Tolbusin shouted his order to have his troops scattered. He saw a group of Qing cavalry galloped toward them, approximately five hundred men, shooting them with arrows. Tolbusin laughed aloud and said, "Chinese barbarians only know how to release arrows, how can they fight our Luocha Country's formidable firearms?" He shouted his order, his men fired, a dozen or so Qing troops fell down from their horses.

The Qing troops turned their horses around and galloped away to the south. Tolbusin ordered his men to pursue. The horses this Qing cavalry rode were all handpicked fine horses, they ran very fast, for a short while the Luocha troops were unable to catch up.

After pursuing for seven or eight *li*, they saw a yellow dragon banner standing by the wooded area ahead of them, when the Luocha troops came closer, they saw seven, eight military tents belonging to the Qing troops. The Luocha troops rained their bullets to the tents, several dozen Qing troops ran out of the tents, while shooting arrows at the Luocha troops, and then mounted their horses and galloped southward.

The Luocha troops on the front rushed into the tents, they saw the Qing

troops had run away completely. Tolbusin dismounted his horse and entered the tent. He saw the wine, meat and vegetable dishes on the table were still steaming hot, while gold and silver ingots, as well as brocade clothes, pearls and jewels were scattered around on the ground. Tolbusin was greatly delighted. “The Chinese barbarian great general is running away in a hurry, he did not even have time to carry all these gold and silver. Everybody, let’s get on our horses and run after them! Whoever catches this barbarian great general will be rewarded heavily; the barbarian great general must be carrying a lot of gold and silver, we will seize everything away!”

When the soldiers saw gold, silver, pearls and jewels, they just like ‘you grabbed I took’; some even picked up the wine and meat from the table and ate it. Hearing their commander’s order, they cheered and rushed out of the tent, jumped onto their horses, and galloped toward the southeast, following the hoofprints. Along the way they saw gold ingots, silver ingots, swords and spears, bow and arrows scattered on the ground by the road. They all said that Chinese troops saw the arrival of Luocha troops, they were scared and pissed in their pants in terror, that they even threw their weapons away.

After pursuing for a while, they saw several pairs of boots and several red-tasseled hats. Tolbusin called out, “Chinese barbarians’ marshal changed his clothes to run for his life; most probably he disguised himself as a lowly soldier. We must not let them hide him.”

His attendant said, “General can prophesy with supernatural accuracy; it must be so.”

Tolbusin ordered his men to pick up the boots and hat; he said, “When we catch the Chinese barbarians, it doesn’t matter if he is a lowly soldier or a gunman, tell them to try the hat, clothes and boots. If everything fits, most likely he is the great general.” Again his subordinates chorused their praise, saying that the General was intelligent and wise, that no one could ever match him.

After pursuing several more *li*, they attacked and seized another Qing army’s tent. Scattered on the ground, they saw not only gold, silver and weapons, but also a lot of red and green, bright colored women’s clothing. They even found rouge, face powder and other cosmetics, handkerchief, hairpins, and other women’s accessories. The soldiers’ sexual desire was aroused; they all cried out,

“Quickly pursue, quickly pursue! Chinese barbarians brought some women.”

Pursuing this way, they successively seized seven more army tents before from ahead of them they heard faint noise of people shouting and screaming. Tolbusin halted his mount and took out his telescope to look. He saw several *li* ahead a group of Chinese soldiers were running for their lives; seemingly in great distress, their banner was in disarray, their formation in disorder. Tolbusin was greatly delighted, “We got them!” he shouted. Pulling out his saber, he waved it in the air several time while shouting, “Charge! Kill!” Leading his troops and generals, he swiftly charged forward.

Along the way they saw more than twenty Qing army’s horses fallen dead on the road. The soldiers and generals happily said, “The barbarians’ horses had no strength left to run!” Urgently spurring their horses on hot pursuit, they pursued farther and farther away.

They saw that the Qing troops had escaped via a narrow passageway in between two hills. Tolbusin pursued to the mouth of the road, and saw the dangerous terrain ahead. He was slightly startled. “If the enemy prepares an ambush here,” he thought, “It won’t be good.”

Suddenly he heard from the valley ahead someone shouting in Luocha language, “Chinese barbarians, you have surrendered. Very good, very good!” Another voice called out, “Ha ha, this time Chinese barbarians suffer disastrous defeat.” It was the voice of their own soldiers, no doubt about it.

Tolbusin was greatly delighted, his suspicion was gone, he spurred his horse into the valley. Behind him more than two thousand cavalry followed in. Tolbusin called out, “Which unit is in the front? Where are you?”

He only heard behind the mountain wall a dozen or so men responding in chorus, “We are here! Chinese barbarian soldiers have surrendered!”

“Marvelous!” Tolbusin called out. He was just about to pull his horse’s reins when suddenly he heard ‘bang, bang!’ from behind. Tolbusin was shocked; turning around, he saw the mouth of the valley was covered in smoke, fire flashed from the woods on the mountain walls on his left and right, volley after volley of firearms shot down. The Luocha officers and men screamed together. Tolbusin shouted, “Turn around, get out of the valley!”

He heard from the top of the mountain walls on both sides several thousand people shouted together, “Luocha troops, surrender, surrender!” Countless large rocks and logs of wood rolled down, in an instant the mountain path was blocked. The Luocha officers and men were crammed into a narrow mountain path, you push I shove, the people screamed the horses neighed, it was a total chaos.

From the top of the mountain the Qing troops looking down, arrows and bullets rained down continuously. Tolbusin groaned inwardly, he knew they had fallen into the enemy’s trick. Seeing the escape route was cut off, he had no choice but turn his horse again and shouted, “Everybody charge forward!”

They only rushed out for several *zhang*, suddenly they heard ‘Bang! Bang!’ loud explosions, cannon were fired at them, killing a dozen or so soldiers. Tolbusin was so scared that his soul flew to the outer sky; he had never anticipated that the Qing troops’ firearms were this sharp, unexpectedly they also had cannon on this rugged mountainous terrain. He jumped down his mount in panic and called out, “Abandon your horse! Focus our firepower, let’s charge out of the mountain road.”

One after another the Luocha troops dismounted from their horses, and crawled over the huge stones and logs blocking the entrance to the valley, while the team on the back opened fire at both sides of the mountain walls to provide cover for their comrades. Luocha troops’ firearms had greater firepower, the range was also farther, in the end they managed to kill not a few Qing soldiers. But the Qing troops’ cannon continuously bombarded them, the momentum was fierce.

Several hundred Luocha troops were just crawling on top of the rocks blocking the way when suddenly a loud explosion was heard, the earth under their feet exploded, some of the several hundred officers and men were thrown a dozen *zhang* into the air, some of them lost their heads or limbs, flesh and blood flying everywhere. Those who were fortunate and did not die hastily crawled back down.

Tolbusin saw there was no way out ahead and behind, he was completely helpless in this crisis. A very brave officer led several dozen troops in a suicide mission to climb the north side of the mountain wall, they attempted to kill the

enemy to open up a way out. But the mountain wall was very steep, plus it was slippery, there was no place they could put their feet on; after climbing for several *zhang*, several dozen of them slipped and fell down, either dead or injured. The Qing troops on the hilltop threw rocks at them, wiping out the remaining several dozen troops. The officer leading the mission was thrown down, his skull was smashed and he immediately met a violent death.

All this time the Qing army's cannon did not stop firing, the mountain walls were full of Luocha troops' wretched scream. Knowing that in just a short while they would be completely wiped out, Tolbusin called out, "Stop fighting! Ceasefire, ceasefire!" But the explosions and the scream of the troops drowned his voice. The officers and men around him immediately cried out together, "Ceasefire, ceasefire!" Soon the rest of his troops also cried out.

The Qing troops halted the artillery barrage. Someone called out in Luocha language, "Throw down your guns, your sabers and swords, take all your clothes off!"

Tolbusin was angry, he shouted back, "Throw the weapons, don't take off your clothes!"

Someone in Qing army called, "Throw down your guns, your sabers and swords, take all your clothes off! Helaxiao! Come out and drink wine. If you don't take off your clothes, simanji!"

Tolbusin called out, "We won't take off our clothes!"

As soon as those words went out of his mouth, there were explosions, the Qing cannon resume their firing. Some Luocha troops were afraid of death, at once they threw their weapons down and started to take off their clothes. Tolbusin raised his short gun and shot dead a soldier who was taking off his clothes. "Those who undress will be executed!" he shouted. But under the violent artillery barrage of the Qing army, nobody paid attention to their general's strict order. More than a dozen soldiers, already stripped naked, clambered over the rocks blocking their way out.

The Qing army on both sides of the mountain walls clapped their hands and cheered. "Quickly undress!" they shouted. More and more Luocha troops took off their clothes and fled for their lives. Tolbusin repeatedly fired his short gun,

killing two more soldiers, but how could he stop his men?

The Qing cannon temporarily stopped. From the top of the mountain wall someone called out, “Those who want to live, quickly take off all your clothes.”

By this time the Luocha officers and men had lost their will to fight; eight or nine out of ten people already took off their boots. Tolbusin heaved a deep sigh and put his gun toward his own temple, ready to kill himself. A lieutenant standing by his side wrestled the gun from his hand and said, “General, don’t! As long as the eagle still have its wings, it can still fly across the high mountain.” It was a Luocha idiom, equivalent to Chinese idiom ‘while the green hills last, there’ll be wood to burn’.

They heard someone in the Qing army called in Luocha language, “Take Tolbusin’s clothes off, and then come out together; otherwise the firing will commence.” These Luocha words were spoken with very articulate pronunciation, because it was actually a surrendering Luocha troop who was forced to say it.

Tolbusin was unable to restraint his anger, but he was aware that several troops under his command were staring at him, clearly they harbored malicious intentions toward him. He reached out to pull the saber hanging on his waist, but as soon as his fingers touched the hilt, a soldier pounced him from behind and wrapped his arms around Tolbusin’s neck. Five or six soldiers pounced together, they pinned him to the ground. Seven hands eight feet, immediately his clothes were stripped clean before he was carried out.

For each one of the Luocha troop who came out, there were two Qing troops who stepped forward to receive him, binding his hands behind his back, and leading him to walk several *li* toward a spacious empty field. In this incident, out of more than two thousand Luocha officers and men, six or seven hundred were killed or were seriously injured, the remaining eighteen hundred soldiers or so had their hands tied behind their backs and were forced to stand in line. The autumn wind was blowing, they could not help shivering from the cold.

The Qing troops held Tolbusin in custody in front of the rows of Luocha troops. The Luocha troops were originally hanging their heads dejectedly, their hearts were alarmed, they were trembling in fear, but suddenly they saw this strict

general, who was usually harsh and ruthless, was reduced to this kind of appearance, they were amused. When they saw their commanding general's smooth naked buttocks, several dozen men could not help laughing. The laughter was getting louder and louder, not too long afterwards more than a thousand officers and men were laughing aloud.

Tolbusin was furious; he turned around and shouted, "Stand in attention! What are you laughing at?" He was not wearing even a thread on his body, yet he was still assuming this awe-inspiring demeanor; it was extremely comical. Although the officers and men were usually very afraid of him, how could they refrain from laughing this time?

In the middle of the laughter, suddenly the cannon were fired eight times, followed by the drums, as a squadron of Qing troops appeared from the back of the mountain, flying a yellow banner, and stood in formation on the east side. And then three more squadrons of Qing troops, flying red, white and blue, three colors banners, separately standing on the south, east and north, three directions, surrounding the Luocha officers and men in the middle. The Luocha officers and men saw all the Qing troops were carrying either long spears, broadswords, bow and arrows, or even firearms; their body armor and helmet were shining, their weapons looked sharp, while they themselves did not wear even a *cun* of thread. They were feeling even more intimidated by the enemy's weapons, one by one they stopped laughing, while a great sense of dread started to overwhelm their hearts.

When the Qing troops were in formation, the cannon from the back of the mountain were fired again three times; and then accompanied by string and flute instruments two large banners appeared. The large banner on the left had these characters on it: 'Fuyuan Great General Wei'; the large banner on the right had these characters on it: 'Great Qing Duke of Luding Wei'. Several hundred soldiers with broadswords in their hands marched out around a young general riding on a horse. This general was wearing red cap on his head and a yellow magua on his body, his eyebrows were raised, his eyes gleaming with laughter, he looked extremely wily. He lightly shook a feather fan in his left hand, just like Zhuge Liang; in his right hand he solemnly held a broadsword, just like Guan Yunzhang. It was none other than Duke Wei Xiaobao.

He dismounted from his horse, threw his head back, and let out three laughter, “Ha ha ha!” Just like Caocao in the opera. Too bad that there was no lackey by his side who would ask, “General, why are you laughing?”

By this time Tolbusin’s heart was filled with anger, yet he was unable to vent it out; in his rage he no longer cared about life or death. In a loud voice he cursed, “Chinese little demon, you use trick to capture me, you are not a hero. If you want to kill just kill, why do you humiliate me like this?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “How did I humiliate you?”

Tolbusin angrily said, “I … I am like this, isn’t this … isn’t this humiliation?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and asked, “Your pants, who took them off?”

Tolbusin was speechless; his clothes and pants were stripped by his own subordinates, obviously he could not blame it on this little demon general. In his fury, his face was bulging deep red; he rushed forward, wanted to stake his life in desperate fight against Wei Xiaobao.

Four personal guards by Wei Xiaobao’s side immediately rushed forward with long spears in their hands, the gleaming spearheads were pointing at him. Tolbusin had no choice but to stop; his hands involuntarily went down to cover his genitals. Seeing this, the officers and men of both sides roared in laughter.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Since you have surrendered, you will submit to the Great Qing, go to Beijing immediately to kowtow to the Chinese Emperor!”

“I won’t surrender,” Tolbusin said, “Chop me and make mincemeat out of me, but I won’t surrender.”

Raising his voice, Wei Xiaobao asked the rest of Luocha officers and men, “Are you all going to surrender or not?” The officers and men lowered their heads without saying anything.

Wei Xiaobao pointed to the white flag on the west side and called out, “Officers and soldiers who surrender, stand over there!” The officers and men stood still. Some of them wanted to surrender, but seeing nobody did, they did not dare to go first.

“Very well,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Since nobody surrenders, Cooks, come out!”

From behind the group of personal guards ten cooks came out. Their upper body was bare, there were daggers and iron skewers in their hands; they stepped forward and bowed to take the order.

Wei Xiaobao said to Tolbusin, “Your Luocha Country has some kind of dish called shashlyk [‘xiashunike’[32]], I have enjoyed it in the past when I was in Moskow, the taste is really not bad. Right now I want to eat some!” Turning his head toward then ten cooks he said, “Make some shashlyk!”

The ten cooks replied, “We receive the order!”

Twenty soldiers pushed out ten iron stoves out, the charcoal in the stoves were glowing red. The Luocha officers and men looked at each other in astonishment; they wondered what trick this Chinese general was playing.

Wei Xiaobao waved his hand, immediately twenty of his personal guards pulled ten Luocha troops out. Wei Xiaobao shouted in Luocha language, “Cut their flesh, roast it into shashlyk!” Shashlyk was beef on iron skewer, barbequed over open fire; it was Luocha Country’s most famous dish.

The ten cooks walked over to the ten Luocha troops with the gleaming dagger in their hands raised high and thrust it down. The ten Luocha troops let out a blood-curdling screech. The personal guards dragged the ten Luocha troops toward the back of the hill, the ground was drenched with blood. Shortly afterward the iron skewers in the ten cooks’ hand had pieces of meat on it, which they brought to the charcoal stove and roasted it over the fire.

The Luocha officers and men watched in horror. In the quietness that ensued, they heard the crackling noise of the fire, and the fat dripping onto the fire, making a ‘chi, chi’ noise. Wei Xiaobao called out, “Get ten more Luocha troops, make more shashlyk!”

Twenty personal guards immediately pulled more Luocha troops. From ten Luocha troops being pulled away, four immediately shouted, “Surrender, surrender!”

“Alright,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Those who surrender stand over there.” The personal guards dragged the surrendering troops toward the white flag. Immediately several guards served them wine and meat.

The personal guards dragged four more Luocha troops. These four soldiers saw that those who surrendered enjoyed wine and meat, while those who did not surrender had their body cut and roasted to be shashlyk. Although they did not see which body part was cut, they saw that the Qing troops' gaze was always fixed on the lower part of their bodies, which was not a good sign at all. Heart alarmed, trembling in fear, they could not help but screamed, "Surrender!"

By this time the six soldiers who previously did not surrender had also lost their stubbornness; they all cried out, "Surrender!"

Since there were people who set the example by surrendering first, the rest of the soldiers did not dare to flaunt their bravery. Without waiting for the personal guards to pull them, some of them walked over to the white flag. In a short period of time, more than eighteen hundred Luocha officers and men had surrendered, leaving Tolbusin alone standing stiffly on his original position.

"Are you going to surrender or not?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

"I would rather die than surrender!" Tolbusin replied.

"Very well!" Wei Xiaobao said, "I'll let you go back to Yakesa." He ordered Hong Chao to lead five hundred troops to escort Tolbusin back to Yakesa.

Tolbusin thought that since he was so unyielding, this Qing army commander would definitely kill him; unexpectedly he was willing to set him free, he was caught by surprise. "Since you agree to let me go, please return my clothes!" he said.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "I can't return your clothes." Turning to Hong Chao he said, "Escort him to Yakesa's city wall, relay my message that we are going to besiege the city. Lead this naked-butt Luocha general around the city wall three times before letting him go into the city."

Hong Chao received the order. He led the Qing troops away, shouting and laughing, dragging the stark naked Tolbusin along.

Lin Xingzhu said, "May I ask Commander, since we already caught this Luocha general, why did we let him go? The subtlety of this matter, would Commander kindly enlighten me?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Today we scored a great victory, do you know

which stratagem we are using?”

“That is Commander’s divine strategy and amazing foresight,” Lin Xingzhu replied, “Subordinate can only prostrate myself in admiration.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “It was not my divine strategy and amazing foresight,” he replied, “It was the scheme that His Majesty has personally arranged. His Majesty said that in the past Zhuge Liang captured Meng Huo seven times, the strategy worked very well; he instructed me to imitate him. Have you seen the play ‘Seven captures of Meng Huo’? If you haven’t, have you at least heard mister storyteller narrated this story? Zhuge Liang ordered the state of Wei to prolong the battle, they could only lose, must not win. After fifteen consecutive defeats, he let Meng Huo captured seven army camps, luring him to enter the Pan She [coiling snake] Valley, and then burned the rattan-shield troops. The stratagem we used today was exactly Zhuge Liang’s stratagem.”

All the generals voiced their admiration. Wei Xiaobao continued, “His Majesty is merciful, he said that Zhuge Liang was too cruel in burning the rattan-shield troops, there were too many lives lost. If the Luocha troops surrendered, their lives should be spared.”

Fu Dutong [deputy commander] Lang Tan said, “If not for Commander using that shashlyk tactic by cutting ten Luocha troops’ flesh and roasted it so that they were scared that their souls flew to the outer sky, these Luocha troops are extremely valiant, I am afraid they would not be willing to surrender. This stratagem is actually superior to Zhuge Liang’s.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Actually, the ten cooks have already prepared ten pieces of raw beef and hid them; they only made several cuts on the Luocha troops’ thigh, making them shouting and screaming loudly. The meat roasted on the stove is actually high-quality beef; as for what it tastes like, there is no harm in gentlemen having a taste.” The generals burst out in laughter. They instructed the cooks to present the ten pieces of beef shashlyk, cut it in pieces and put it into their mouths. Sure enough, it was sweet and tender, the skewered beef was delicious.

The generals asked again, “Since Commander has caught the enemy’s chief,

yet you let him go, are you going to capture him seven times and release him seven times, so that he will not dare to rebel anymore?”

“It’s not that,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Actually when I was still in Beijing I also asked His Majesty the same question. I said that His Majesty is a ‘raw bird fish soup’, he is magnanimous, would he want to copy Zhuge Liang, capturing the Luocha commander and release him seven times? ‘That’s not it,’ His Majesty said, ‘If we want to copy Zhuge Liang, we must use strategy that is alive, not a dead one. Meng Huo was a barbarian tribal chief; if he said that he would not rebel, he would not rebel forever. We captured Luocha troops’ Commander-in-chief, even if he said he would not rebel, it would not do us any good. Luocha Country’s Tsar and Queen Regent may send other Commander-in-chief, and come here to infringe on our border.”

The generals nodded their head in agreement. Wei Xiaobao said, “Yakesa’s garrison soldiers are fierce and tough, their cannon formidable. If we kill Luocha Commander, the officers and men inside the city might elect another commander, who is more aggressive. Right now we stripped the Luocha Commander naked, and have him march around the city three times. From now on the Luocha troops inside the city will look down on him. He no longer has the prestige; when he boss people around later, he won’t be respected too much.”

The generals expressed their agreement together. Lin Xingzhu asked, “Was it part of His Majesty’s instruction to strip the enemy’s Commander-in-chief’s clothes and pants?”

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter and said, “How could His Majesty think about something so preposterous? His Majesty only told me to find a way to boost our own troops’ spirit, while breaking the Luocha troops’ power and prestige. His Majesty said, ‘Luocha troops are big and tall, their entire body is hairy, they look like savages, plus their firearms are very sharp. When we go into battle against them, our troops will see their fierceness, most likely they will be afraid in their hearts; once their spirit is broken, it would be hard to achieve victory.’ His Majesty said, ‘Xiao Guizi, you know a lot of tricks, find a way to make our troops, from top to bottom, to look down on those barbarians.’ I thought about it long and hard, but did not find anything good. Until one night, suddenly I remember when I was small I went to gamble.”

The generals all thought, “What does you went to gamble when you were little have anything to do with Luocha troops?”

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “When I was small I went to gamble with other people in Yangzhou. My gambling temperament was not good, when I won some money, I would leave my pouch behind; when I lost I would be so engrossed in it that I lost my mind, if someone provoked me I would fight him, I am not afraid. There was one time someone fixed me up really good; the winner grabbed me, stripped my pants and let me go home with naked butts. People on the street clapped their hands and laughed at me. From then on my gambling temperament made considerable progress.” The generals roared in laughter.

Wei Xiaobao also laughed and said, “His Majesty said that fighting war must be flexible and adaptable, His Majesty can only point out the strategy in large scale, the actual execution of the plan will depend on my own thinking. I remember when I was little, I was afraid people might take my pants off, how could these Luocha troops not afraid? Sure enough, as soon as their pants were stripped, they obediently surrendered.”

The generals chorused their agreement, they were all very impressed. Some even thought, “This ‘pants stripping tactic’, even Sun Tzu’s ‘The Art of War’ does not have it. This Wei Tzu’s Art of War is actually very formidable.”

Wei Xiaobao ordered to have the Luocha generals and soldiers to be dressed in Qing troops clothes and hats, and then he sent a *Canjiang* [regimental commander, colonel] leading two thousand Qing troops to escort the surrendering troops to Beijing to be presented as prisoners of war to the Emperor. He retained twenty surrendering soldiers with loud voice to be used later. The secretary composed a memorial to the Emperor, saying that following His Majesty’s imperial instruction Fuyuan Great General Wei Xiaobao has won a victory on raising the flag, that Luocha troops admired China as a superior nation, that their hearts were bathed in submission, and thus they acknowledged our Emperor as the Holy Sage whose heavenly virtue transformed the barbarians, and so on. That evening Wei Xiaobao bestowed great rewards to the three armies.

By dawn the next day he personally led various army units to Yakesa. He saw smoke and fire covering the top of the city wall, within and without the city the

cry of the battling soldiers shook the sky, the guns and cannon rumbled unceasingly. The besieging troops commander Peng Chun reported to the main force: the artillery barrage from the city was fierce, our besieging force suffered not a few injuries and deaths. Wei Xiaobao said, “Use our cannon, blast the damn city.”

Peng Chun left to relay the order. Not too long afterwards from east, south, west and north the cannon were fired simultaneously. Blast by blast the cannon bombarded the city. But Luocha people had lived in Yakesa for a long time, the defensive structure was built extremely strong, the soldiers and generals hid inside the solid rampart. Although the Qing troops had numerous cannon, the bombardment collapsed quite a number of building, the Luocha troops held fast and did not come out, in the end nothing could be done to them.

After several day of heavy assasult, He You led a thousand warriors climbing up the wall, from the top of the wall the enemy fired down over and over, killing three to four hundred Qing troops. Seeing the unfavorable situation, Peng Chun beat the gong to recall the troops. The Luocha troops standing on the wall clapped their hands and cheered. Several dozens Luocha troops even pulled down their pants and shot their pee down the wall; they were extremely haughty.

Heilongjiang’s general Sabusu was very angry, he personally led the troops to besiege the city. The troops on the wall rained down their bullets, Sabusu was shot and he fell from the horse. The Qing troops were immediately thrown into confusion. The city gate opened, several hundred Luocha troops charged out. Leading the rattan-shield troops Lin Xingzhu rolled down on the ground to intercept, brandishing his broadsword. The Luocha troops hastily jumped to evade.

This rattan-shield team was personally trained by Lin Xingzhu, they were adept in ‘Ditang Saber Technique’; as they rolled on the ground, the rattan-shield on their left hand blocked the enemy’s bullets, while the broadsword in their right hand hacked the Luocha troops’ leg. Seeing the unfavorable situation, Tolbusin hurriedly ordered his troops to withdraw. Lin Xingzhu was able to rescue Sabusu. The right side of Sabusu’s forehead was grazed by a bullet, luckily the bullet did not enter his skull; although his injury was serious, his life was not threatened. In

this battle both sides suffered heavy loss, but the number of casualties on Qing troops' side was higher.

Taking the military doctor along, Wei Xiaobao personally went to Sabusu's tent to express his sympathy and his wish for speedy recovery. He also rewarded Lin Xingzhu heavily. And then he issued an order to withdraw the camp five *li* away from the city wall. That night he held a general assembly in his command tent to discuss the strategy to besiege the city.

Several generals said that that day the rattan-shield troops had set up great merit, tomorrow they should lure the demon troops to get out of the city so that the rattan-shield troops could chop the demons' legs. Some said that the demon troops' spirit was broken, perhaps they would not dare to get out and fight; it would be better to build long rampart to besiege the city all around, so that the enemy would die of starvation. Some proposed to dig tunnel and attack from underground.

Digging tunnel in besieging a city was an ancient technique in China. This idea reminded Wei Xiaobao of the tunnel underneath Yakesa, which he himself had used in the past, when he embraced the stark-naked Princess Sophia. Presently she had become the Queen Regent wielding power over the Luocha Country's army and government, while Wei Xiaobao fought with the troops and horses under her command in here. He mused, "If right now she is in the city of Yakesa personally commanding the troops, I can enter the city from the underground tunnel and climb into her bed, one touch, two touches, touching her whole body I make her weak, this loose woman will definitely cry 'surrender'."

Seeing Wei Xiaobao was deep in thought but there was a hint of smile on his face, the generals thought that he had a brilliant idea. Immediately they all shut up and quietly wait for the Grand Marshal's instruction. It never occurred to them that right this moment Wei Xiaobao was thinking about how to gently caress and stroke the golden-hair covered naked skin of Princess Sophia. They saw his eyes were closed, as he quietly muttered, "It's so troublesome, even if I have the strength, I cannot eat her up completely."

The generals looked at each other in bewilderment. They heard their Grand Marshal, "Damn it, with one kick she kicked me off the bed." The generals were even more at a loss. They heard he said again, "Although this Luocha s1ut is

formidable, *Laozi* will eventually find a way to handle her."

"Commander is right," Peng Chun said, "Even if Luocha demons are more formidable, we will eventually find a way to deal with them."

Wei Xiaobao was startled. He opened his eyes and said in surprise, "We? So you are going to touch her as well?" But immediately he burst into loud laughter and said, "Right, right! The tunnel is too narrow, only one person can crawl at one time; also, the exit is in the general's room, I believe by this time he has already had it blocked. We must dig another tunnel." The generals were even more confused.

Wei Xiaobao stood up and said, "All gentlemen generals' ideas are very good, we are going to eat them all, Green Dragon, White Tiger and Heaven's Gate. Early in the morning tomorrow, everybody will separately build long rampart, dig the tunnel, while at the same time firing the cannon, luring them to come out and fight, then we'll send the rattan-shield troops to chop the demons' leg." Since all their recommendations were accepted by their Commander-in-chief, the generals exited the tent with happy hearts.

Just before dawn the next day, the generals ordered the troops under their command to do different tasks. Peng Chun supervised and directed the troops to carry soil and build the rampart. Lang Tan arranged and set up the cannon, Ba Hai excavated the tunnel. Heading five hundred soldiers Hong Chao went to learn cursing words from the Luocha officers and soldiers to be used under the city wall. Only a pity Luocha people were shallow and unlearned; their cursing vocabulary was rather limited. Although the soldiers could curse loudly, the meaning was only so-so; after cursing back and forth it all came down to something like 'you are a stinky pig', or 'you ate feces', and so on. How could it be compared to our Chinese cursing with a lot of flavor, many postures and endless variation? After listening for a while, Wei Xiaobao was completely bored.

The Luocha troops suffered heavy setback the previous day by having their legs chopped; seeing the Qing troops' might, they resolutely refused to come out; they only hid behind the city wall and cursed back.

The Qing troops fired cannonballs into the city, but the damage was minimal. In those days, gunpowder was stuffed into the cannon's barrel, ignited, and

catapulted the iron cannonballs into the city. If it was a direct hit, it could break human's tendon and smash the bones, but if it fell on the ground, it would not cause sufficient damage.

For the last dozen of years or so, the common people in that area had suffered Luocha troops' mistreating and killing them, countless families went bankrupt and more people died. When they learned about the Emperor sending troops to fight the Luocha demons, no one was not wildly delighted. Immediately some people brought wine and food to express their support for the officers and soldiers. Some even brought their hoes and shoulder poles to help building the earthen rampart. The news spread far and wide, even people from within several hundred *li* from this area also came to support the war.

From the top of the city wall Tolbusin looked down, and saw people like ants, continuously carrying earth to build the rampart; the long barrier outside the city was growing taller and taller, he knew that if this situation continued, they would be trapped to death. His hope was that the Luocha troops from Nerchinsk to their west would come to their aid. Only with pincher attack from inside and outside would they have a hope victory. He did not know that Kangxi had already anticipated this and had dispatched another unit of cavalry to pretend to attack Nerchinsk, hence gaining control over the enemy's movement. The defending general of Nerchinsk was also hoping that Tolbusin would come to their rescue.

Luocha troops' firearms had longer range, the Qing troops did not dare to be too close to the city. Yakesa was the base of Luocha troops' operation on the east. Luocha people had grand ambition, they were planning on occupying the vast land over the Heilongjiang and Songhuajiang [Songhua River, Jilin province through Harbin] regions first, and then invade southward to collect the entire China into their domain, they wanted the millions upon millions people to acknowledge allegiance to them and became an empire. For this reason the Yakesa city wall was solid and thick, with enough ammunition in the city, army provisions piled up like a mountain, and would be able to withstand a siege for three years or five changes of seasons without suffering any deficiency. Deep wells were dug inside the city, there was no lack of fresh drinking water. Tolbusin was afraid the Chinese people inside the city would rise in revolt and join the attack from the inside, hence he brought all Chinese males to the city wall and

killed them all, throwing their bodies down the city wall. When the Chinese soldiers and people outside the city saw this, they all hatefully hurled curses.

Gradually the tunnel was dug closer to the city. Wei Xiaobao thought that Mount Luding was the place where the Emperor's dragon vein was located; if they dug and cut the dragon's vein, he would have caused Kangxi's demise, it would be greatly inappropriate. Thereupon he issued an order not to dig straight into town, but only to the ground underneath the city wall so that they could bury explosive and blow up the city wall, and then the main force could break into the city.

One day several wells inside the city suddenly dried up. Tolbusin was adept at military strategy, after receiving the report he thought about it for a while, and guessed correctly than the enemy troops were digging a tunnel, to such an extent that the source of underground water was cut somewhere upstream. Immediately he surveyed and evaluated the direction of the tunnel, and then dropped explosive on top of it. With a loud bang more than a hundred Qing troops digging the tunnel were killed, the tunnel was also blocked.

The city of Yakesa could not be broken, the weather was turning colder as the days gone by. Late autumn in this extreme-north, bitter-cold place, the temperature drop was not a small matter. When winter came, a water drop would immediately turn into ice. If one was not sufficiently protected, oftentimes one's nose or ear would freeze and fall off. The tip of one's finger stiffen, hands and feet freeze rotten, was a common occurrence.

After several days of heavy snow, the common people who helped the attack already could not withstand the cold; they bade their farewell to the officers and men, promising that they would return early summer the following year, when the ice thawed, to help the attack. They also advised the officers to withdraw to the south so that they would not freeze in this world of ice and snow.

Sabusu, Ba Hai, and the other officers had been stationed in the north for a long time, they knew when the winter came, the situation would be extremely dangerous. If there was a cold wave attack in the night, it would not be surprising if more than half of the officers and men would freeze to death in just one night. The Luocha troops lived in buildings, the walls would stop the cold air, but the Qing troops lived in army tents on the wilderness. Even though they

could make fire, it would not be of any use. Thereupon they submitted their recommendation to Wei Xiaobao to withdraw to the south to avoid the cold.

Wei Xiaobao thought that the Emperor sent me to go into battle, not even a single city was taken, and he already wanted to withdraw the troops, inevitably he felt he was too useless; hence he hesitated for several days, without being able to make up his mind. His subordinate later reported that there were dozens of injured soldiers who were not able to withstand the cold and had been frozen to death. Wei Xiaobao was out of his wits when suddenly an imperial edict arrived.

Kangxi's imperial edict said, "The troops sent out under the Fuyuan Great General Wei Xiaobao have done well, their excellent effort is to be commended. Presently the Luocha's surrendering generals have received the Great Qing's imperial order to go to Moscow to announce the imperial edict to the Luocha sovereign, urging him to cease dispatching troops, both countries will be reconciled forever. Thinking about the bitter cold weather, the soldiers and generals toil and sleep outdoors on ice and snow, *Zhen*'s heart is sorrowful; hereby Wei Xiaobao is to withdraw the troops to the south and station in Aigun and Kumarsk, two cities, to rest the troops and recuperate the warriors. When spring arrives and the Luocha troops are still obstinately resisting, and refuse to accept the beneficial influence of the sovereign, then you can march the troops again and sweep away and pacify the enemy in one stroke. Hereby Fuyuan Great General, as well as the generals, commanders, vice commanders and all officers and men under their command are to be rewarded with a set of clothes, gold and silver, wine, and food according to their rank. Various officers and generals must comply with *Zhen*'s desire, to cherish common soldiers, not greedy of quick meritorious service. Elite troops are sent on a punitive expedition to the north, the original intention was to protect the people; soldiers are also people. By the Emperor himself."

Wei Xiaobao and his generals expressed their gratitude for the imperial decree. The generals all said that the Lord of Ten Thousand Years cherished officers and soldiers, the imperial kindness was vast and mighty, only thinking about by withdrawing from the siege, inevitably they had to abandon the meritorious deed in front of their eyes, everybody thought it was a pity. The imperial envoy

delivering the imperial decree went around the camp to announce the decree and bestow rewards, the sound of soldiers' cheering shook the earth.

The next day Wei Xiaobao ordered Sabusu to lead his troops to be the first to withdraw; he then ordered Ba Hai and Lin Xingzhu to stay behind, if the Luocha troops dared to get out of the city, they were to kill them and rout them completely.

Seeing the Qing troops retreating, the sound of Luocha troops cheering inside the city rose up; more than a thousand Luocha troops stood on top of the city wall and shot their pee down. Wei Xiaobao was enraged; he ordered his troops to pee toward the city together. Tens of thousands Qing troops urinating together, it was indeed a magnificent sight. On top and below the city wall, the roar of laughter and cursing mixed together. However, the Luocha troops were on higher plane looking down, their urine shot down the city wall, while the Qing troops could not shoot their urine up; hence in this urine battle they had lost.

There was urine everywhere under the city wall. When the cold wind blew, in an instant the urine turned into a layer of glistening yellow ice. Wei Xiaobao was so angry that he almost choked; pointing his finger to the top of the city wall he rained curses. The imperial envoy who had come to deliver the imperial edict tried to calm him down, "Luocha troops are just like beasts, Grand Marshal need not lower yourself to their level."

"Can't do," Wei Xiaobao replied, "If we lose, we lose too much face!" He ordered his men to fetch the fire hose.

The fire hose was firefighting equipment; to guard against fire, whenever the troops march out and pitch camp, they always brought some. His personal guards came back, pulling more than a dozen fire hose equipment. Wei Xiaobao ordered them to push the equipment to the top of the earthen rampart. By this time the river water already froze, no water could be used. Thereupon he ordered the firefighting captain to melt ice and snow in a large cauldron, and pour the hot water into the hose. Wei Xiaobao pulled down his pants and peed into the hot water, and then he shouted his order to his personal guards, "Shoot to the top of the wall!"

Seeing their boss, the Commander-in-chief came up with this brilliant trick, the

personal guards were excited; in high spirit they pulled the lever of the fire hose, pumping the water in the pipe so that a stream of hot water shot straight toward the top of the city wall. The personal guards shouted together, “Grand Marshal Wei bestows Luocha demons some urine to drink!”

As the hot water arrived, the Luocha troops shouted, cursed, and jumped around to evade. Some of the generals under Wei Xiaobao’s command inwardly exclaimed, “He’s making a scene!” Some others wanted to curry the Grand Marshal’s favor; they shouted and cheered on the side. It’s just that the weather was simply too cold, almost in no time at all the hot water inside the fire hose turned into ice so that they had to add more hot water.

Wei Xiaobao was in high spirit; he boasted and praised himself, “Zhuge Liang set the Pan She [coiling snake] valley on fire; Wei Xiaobao shot urine on Mount Luding. Both are equally impressive!”

Standing on the side, Vice Commander Lang Tan praised, “Grand Marshal’s urine shot greatly broke Luocha demons’ fighting spirit.”

Suddenly Wei Xiaobao was startled, his eyes grew big as he stared blankly. “Wow!” he cried loudly, jumped up and down, and laughed a loud. “Wonderful, wonderful!”

Wei Xiaobao ordered the drum to be sounded to summon the generals into his command tent; he asked, “How many fire hose altogether we have in the camp?”

The *Canjiang* in charge of military supplies responded, “Reporting to Grand Marshal: altogether we have eighteen units.”

Wei Xiaobao frowned. “Too few, too few!” he said, “Why didn’t you bring a bit more?”

“Yes!” the *Canjiang* replied. In his heart he mused, “Army camp caught on fire very rarely happened, eighteen fire hoses are more than enough.”

“I want a thousand units,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Quickly send people to the cities and towns around here to get more. When can we have it?”

That place was extreme north, close to the border, the area was vast, but sparsely populated, the nearest town was several hundred *li* away. These cities

and towns only had several hundred families, the residents were impoverished and destitute, it was not likely that they would have fire hose in town; collecting a thousand fire hoses was a definite impossibility. The *Canjiang* looked distressed as he said, “Reporting to Grand Marshal: a thousand fire hoses, I am afraid we cannot find outside the Pass; we must go inside the Pass, to Beijing, Tianjin, and ship them here.”

“Fart!” Wei Xiaobao angrily said, “Go to Beijing, Tianjin and ship the fire hose back here, how long will it take? Fighting a war, even half a day delay is not acceptable!”

The *Canjiang* mumbled his agreement, his countenance changed greatly; he thought, “This time my head will be removed.”

The imperial envoy was sitting on the side; he could not bear not to advise, “Grand Marshal, you have already shot your precious urine up the Luocha people’s city wall. This … this precious spirit is not too honorable. We have already won the war, in *Xiongdi*’s humble opinion, it seemed that the cornered enemy … the cornered enemy need not be shot again.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, “No, can’t do!” he said, “Without a thousand fire hose, this great undertaking cannot be accomplished.”

The imperial envoy thought, “You, the Grand Marshal, is just acting willfully and make a scene; shooting urine to vent your grudge, playing joke once in a while is not a big deal, why would you want to do it with such great fanfare? The Young Emperor loves to use young general; these two, a ruler and his minister, are of kindred spirit, other people do not dare to talk too much. But if you are making a scene, excessively doing things not according with decorum, unavoidably we will be the laughingstock of the world.”

He wanted to advise further, but he heard Wei Xiaobao said, “Gentlemen, generals, which of you can propose a brilliant scheme to immediately obtain one thousand or two fire hoses, it will indeed be a meritorious service of utmost importance.”

Peng Chun said, “May I ask Grand Marshal: you want these thousand fire hoses, is it to be used for … used for shooting urine to the top of the wall?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “If we have the thousand fire hose and want to

use it to shoot urine to the top of the wall, how can we have enough people to pee? One million soldiers will not be enough."

"Precisely," Peng Chun said, "Subordinate is extremely stupid, I must ask for Grand Marshal's direction."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Just now I saw our Marshal's precious urine shot to the top of the city wall, it turned into ice instantly. If we use a thousand or two fire hose, day after day, night after night we shoot hot water into the city, what will happen?"

The generals were startled. Those whose brain was quick cheered first, and then the rest also understood; joyous cheers thundered inside the big tent, all generals cried out, "Brilliant, brilliant! Water floods Yakesa, ice freeze Mount Luding!"

After the joyous cheering subsided a moment later, someone said, "Even if we can have it shipped from Beijing and Tianjin, those thousand fire hose must be sent overnight." Immediately several *Fujiang* and *Zuoling* volunteered to accept the order to obtain the fire hose.

Hong Chao's official rank was rather low, he stood at the very back row. This moment he bowed and said, "Reporting to Grand Marshal: lowly general has a shallow opinion, would Grand Marshal hear it?"

"You may speak!" Wei Xiaobao said.

Hong Chao said, "Lowly general is a Fujian native, my hometown is very poor, we could not afford fire hose, when the countryside caught fire, everybody used bamboo tube as water guns to fight the fire. The bamboo water gun is made of coarse bamboo, with the blocks removed, at the tip we drilled a small hole, about the size of a copper coin. On the other end we used a wooden piston inserted into the bamboo tube. During the firefighting, the end with small hole was dipped into the water, the piston was pulled back, hence the bamboo tube sucks water until it was full, and then we pushed the piston, the water inside the water gun then shot out."

"Hmm," Wei Xiaobao muttered; he was trying to figure out how the water gun would work.

He You said, “Reporting to Grand Marshal: this water gun can be made big or small. When I was little, lowly officer played with my friends, we used water gun to shoot at people; it was fun. It’s a pity this area does not have big coarse bamboo. If we want to make water guns, this kind of coarse bamboo must be shipped from around the Changjiang [Yangtze River].”

“Do you have a better idea?” Wei Xiaobao asked Hong Chao.

Hong Chao replied, “Lowly general was just thinking, this area does not have big coarse bamboo, but big pine, big fir trees are abundant. We can chop down trees; if the center is gouged out, we can make big water guns.”

“Isn’t gouging the center of a big pine log not easy to do?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

A *Fujiang* [deputy general] surnamed Ban was born into a carpenter family in Shanxi; he said, “Reporting to Grand Marshal: this is actually not too difficult to do. We can saw the big log into two halves first, and then on the center of each half we can scoop out a semicircle groove, grind it really smooth, afterwards we join both halves together, the log will then have a hollow circular hole in the middle. When we put together the two halves, if we want to be exquisite, we can use bamboo shoot; but if it just a rough work, using big iron nails will also work.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted. “Wonderful!” he cried out, “How long will it take for you to build this big water gun?”

Ban *Fujiang* replied, “If lowly general work on it myself, I can make one in a day. If I work a day and a night, I may be able to produce two.”

Wei Xiaobao frowned, “Too slow, too slow,” he said, “You go around the camp to select your assistants, do it together, you be the Shifu, teach your apprentice. This is a rough work, you are not making the bride’s red-painted chamber pot, or a rich man’s wife’s coffin. The tree bark outside the water gun need not be stripped, as long as it can shoot water into the city, it’s good enough. Generals, let’s do it right away, cut the trees to make water guns!”

The generals received the order; they separately went out to lead their soldiers to do the assigned task. Some went to the woods to fell the trees. Some were dispatched on fast horses to common people’s houses to borrow hatchets, chisels, saws, carpenter’s planes, and other woodworking equipment.

Outside the Great Wall there were pine and fir trees everywhere, Argun River area was practically a forest, with countless century-old towering trees everywhere. The Qing army set to work, in less than half a day they already felled several thousand big logs. The number of soldiers who were originally carpenters was more than a hundred.

Ban *Fujiang* gathered these soldiers together, plus he selected four, five hundred handymen among the soldiers to be the assistants. They started to work that same night to make water guns. Ban *Fujiang* made the first water gun as the model. The water gun had a two-*chi* diameter hole in the middle [about 2 feet, 60cm], the barrel was about a *zhang* long [about 10 feet/3 meters]. At the end of the wooden piston he put a wooden crossbar, six soldiers, three on each side, were to pull and push this crossbar together. After the muzzle was put into hot water, Ban *Fujiang* gave the signal, six soldiers pushed the piston together, the hot water shot out of the water gun more than two hundred steps away.

Watching the demonstration, Wei Xiaobao cheered repeatedly. He said, “This is not water gun, it is a water cannon. We must pick a good name for it. Let’s call it … call it White Dragon Water Cannon.” Taking out some gold and silver, he rewarded Ban *Fujiang* and the officers and men who helped him building the cannon, while ordering them to work day and night to build more.

Seeing the Qing troops retreated, but then they came back, Tolbusin stood on the city wall to survey the situation; he saw countless logs piled up in the Qing army camp and thought, “Chinese barbarian cut down woods to build fire to warm themselves, apparently they wanted to continue the siege and not leaving. Humph, in half a month the blizzard will arrive, you will have to bear the brunt of it. Even if you build bigger fire, you won’t be able to block the ill wind and cold air in this ice hell.” He went down the city wall, ordered his personal guards to add fuel to the stove heating his room, and then he poured some strong Luocha wine and summoned two Chinese young women prisoners to serve him drinking the wine.

Peng Chun, He You, and the others dispatched the cavalry to go to the common people homes within several hundred *li* radius to borrow iron cauldrons and iron pots and brought everything to the main camp. They dug the ground to make furnace, piled the firewood, and collected ice and snow into piles so that

from a distant the piles looked like small hills. They also covered each finished ‘White Dragon Water Cannon’ with tree branches so that the Luocha troops would not find out about it.

Several days later, Ban *Fujiang* reported that they had manufactured three thousand White Dragon Water Cannon. According to the position of the sun, the next day was an auspicious day, in the *maoshi* hour [between 5-7am] Wei Xiaobao was already out of his tent. The drums were struck to assemble the generals. He ordered the water cannon to be brought to the top of the rampart, with the muzzles aimed toward the city. The bugle horns were sounded, ‘Bang! Bang! Bang!’ the signaling cannon were fired nine times in succession. Officers and soldiers of all units immediately moved; they shoveled the ice and snow into the iron cauldrons and pots to melt it.

Tolbusin was sleeping peacefully underneath his warm blanket, suddenly he heard the cannon blasts outside the city. Hastily he jumped up and hurriedly put on his clothes, draped a sable fur coat over his shoulder, and ran to the top of the city walls to watch. At that time a blizzard was blowing, the sky looked like it was dusk; in the haze he saw wooden logs spread along the long rampart built by the Qing troops. While he was wondering what was going on, suddenly he heard the Qing troops shouted together, as if the mountain was split the earth cracked open, several thousand tree trunks suddenly shot water; from four sides eight directions water spurted into the city.

Tolbusin was shocked. He could only cry out one word, “Aiyo!” as a stream of hot water hit his chest. Actually the weather was really too cold, so that when the hot water was shot, it did not burn at all, but the momentum was enough to knock him off his feet that he stumbled and fell on the top of the wall. The personal guard standing next to him hastily helped him up.

They heard all around them people were screaming, while above their heads the water swooshing incessantly. Just like white dragons streams of water flew into the city. In an instant the city of Yakesa was covered in boundless thick fog, created by the water vapor condensing due to the contact with cold air. Tolbusin’s heart was shaken, “Chinese barbarians are using witchcraft!” he called out. Big tree trunks unexpectedly could spurt out water, no doubt it was witchcraft.

In his fright, he shouted, “Everybody open fire, don’t let the Chinese barbarians break into the city!” However, ever since that day when the Qing troops stripped him naked and paraded him around the city three times, he had suffered great lost in term of prestige in the eyes of his people, when he barked his order, the troops under his command did not jump to it like before. It was only because the situation was urgent due to Qing troops’ siege that the Luocha troops were afraid that if the city was broken none of them could survive alive, hence they defended the city with everything they had.

Suddenly seeing the huge and unexpected change this time, with several thousand columns of water shooting into the city, the troops scattered in all directions; how could they find the time to heed his order? Fortunately the Qing troops only shot water without trying to attack the city. After panicking for a while the Luocha troops started to calm down, yet they saw the water on the ground was turning into ice, while overhead streams of water freely rained down like it was poured from the sky, splashing down on them.

By this time in the city of Yakesa all the Chinese males had been killed, only some young women left, forced to be army camp prostitutes and to provide degenerate pleasures to the Luocha troops. Other than Luocha soldiers and military officers, Yakesa residents included civil officers sent by Moscow, missionaries and army chaplains, some military merchants, some rogue characters who went to the east to get rich by ill-gotten wealth, and some small thieves and big robbers, and criminals who avoided prison. In no time at all everybody was drenched like a drowned rat.

At first the water was still rather warm, but very soon the wet clothes turned cold; another moment, the wet clothes began to freeze. Everybody was shocked. In panic they took off their clothes, underpants and leather boots. They all knew that if the clothes froze, it would stick onto their skin; by that time their fingers would be too stiff to take it off. Even if someone helped them, oftentimes the skin would be torn, along with the clothes, pants, shoes or boots. It was really dangerous.

The level of water on the ground rose steadily, it slowly solidified into something like thin porridge. Since the Luocha people were barefooted, the cold penetrated their bones; they could not help jumping around while screaming,

“Chilled to the bones, chilled to the bones!” Everybody tried to scramble to higher elevation, some people even climbed up their roof. Someone in the crowd cried out, “Surrender, surrender! If we don’t surrender, all of us will freeze to death.”

Wearing sable fur coat and holding an umbrella in his left hand, Tolbusin rode on a big and tall horse going back and forth on inspection. Hearing someone cried ‘surrender’, he shouted in anger, “Who is disturbing the troops’ heart here? Spy! Pull him down and shoot him dead!”

Everybody could see that the sable fur coat he was wearing was waterproof, his body was warm, yet he was shouting and cursing in here, while other people were freezing and hovering between life and death; everybody was indignant. Immediately someone picked up a piece of ice chunk and made a snowball, and threw it to him. Tolbusin raised the short gun, ‘bang, bang!’ he shot randomly toward the crowd, and killed two people instantly. The rest of the people immediately threw ice chunks and snowballs to him. Someone even pounced on him to pull him down from the horseback. His bodyguards brandished their saber to attack and kill, but how could they stop the mob?

In this chaos a small team of cavalry rushed over, Luocha mob dispersed in confusion. Tolbusin crawled up from the ground. By lucky coincidence two streams of water above his head happened to pour down, immediately his entire body was drenched. He bounced around while cursing loudly, and had no choice but to order his bodyguards to help him shedding his clothes and boots.

The Qing troops could see the sorry situation the Luocha troops were in, their shout of joy thundered over the earthen rampart. In mixed accent, north and south, they started to sing vulgar songs. One of the songs was inevitably Wei Xiaobao’s ‘one touch, two touches’, the ‘Eighteen Touches’ song.

Peng Chun and the other officers were busy giving directions. The team of carpenters led by Ban *Fujiang* intensified their effort repairing the failed water cannon. The water-boiler team was busy adding firewood to maintain the fire, while continuously shoveling the ice and snow into the pots. The water-transporter team brought hot water bucket by bucket and fed it into the cannon’s muzzle. When the barrel was full of water, “One, two, three, fire!” Six gunners pushed the piston as hard as they could. A stream of water like arrow

shot out of the muzzle and flew into the city.

The Qing troops' water cannon shot hot water columns as straight as a pillar. Some columns of water burst into water droplets as they reach the sky above the city, and sprayed down just like heavy rain. Some others were shot low, but maintained their shape and did not scatter as the stream hit a person. The quality of the water cannon differed one from another, some had great power and were able to shoot far, some had very short range, some even had their barrels cracked and burst open after only several shots; as a result not a few of the Qing troop's 'gunners' were scalded.

After shooting hot water for more than two hours, out of three thousand water cannon, about six or seven hundred cannon went bad. At the same time, the water-boiler team could not boil ice and snow fast enough to feed the cannon, eventually the 'ammunition' failed to keep up with the firing of the cannon. After shooting for more than another hour, more water cannon were damaged, the hot water supply diminished, only about eight or nine hundred water cannon were still operating, the assault power was greatly reduced.

Wei Xiaobao was frustrated; suddenly he saw the city gate opened wide, several hundred Luocha troops rushed forth and shouting, "Surrender, surrender!"

By this time the gunshot wound on Sabusu's head was almost healed; immediately he led his thousand-man cavalry forward to intercept. "Those who surrender sit on the ground!" he shouted.

The Luocha people looked at each other, they did not understand. One low-level officer in Qing army sat down on the ground, he shouted, "Sit down, sit down!"

Right this moment, the city gate closed again. From the top of city walls several volleys of gunfire shot down, killing several dozen of surrendering Luocha people. The rest of them scattered in all directions. The Qing troops aimed the water cannon to the Luocha soldiers and generals who opened fire at top of the city wall, streams of water were shot, the Luocha troops fell on the city wall.

By this time the water inside the city had reached two *chi*, and for the most part had turned into ice. For the whole city to be covered in ice and turned it

into one big freezing city, it would need at least ten days to half a month. But the Luocha troops were without clothes without shoes, and they could not light fire, everybody was shivering in cold, their faces started to turn blue. Several soldiers pressed their bodies close together trying to warm themselves.

Tolbusin ran around freely while shouting and berating his troops, ordering them to defend the city. But his troops turned their heads around and ignored him. Tolbusin was angry, he reached out to slap an officer. The officer turned around and ran, Tolbusin chased him. Suddenly his foot slipped on the ice and he fell to the ground. A soldier nearby reached down to push him into a hole to collect water on the ground. Tolbusin struggled hard, but his hands and feet were numb, he was unable to crawl up. “Help me, help me!” he cried out.

The soldiers and officers all looked at him in despise, they congregated around the water hole. Not too long afterwards, the water in the hole started to freeze into ice, freezing Tolbusin along. His upper body was still outside the ice hole, he was still gasping for breath, but from the chest down it was as if he was buried alive in the ice.

At this point everybody had the same thought; they opened the city gate and shouted, “Surrender!” and swarmed outside.

In his ecstasy, Wei Xiaobao was dancing and flailing his hands and feet, while babbling nonsense. He tried to issue an order, but his words were completely unintelligible. Fortunately the high-ranking officers in the Qing army were all veteran generals who had been through many battles; they all responded, “We receive the order!” but actually they handled the surrendering troops on their own. They entered the city, disarmed the soldiers, and cleared up all formalities; everything was executed in clear and orderly manner, but actually it had nothing to do with Grand Marshal Wei’s order at all.

When they previously shot water into the city, they were afraid it was not enough, but now they wanted to burn the ice to melt it, turning it into water and disgorged it outside the city; however, it was not easy at all. In the end they had to let nature take its course.

Lang Tan led his troops to clear up the governor-general mansion first, they tidied it up properly before inviting Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu and the imperial

envoy to enter. And then he went to the ammunition storage, firearm armory, gold and silver warehouse, and other strategic locations to seal them up, and assigned his troops to guard.

In those days the Qing Dynasty was strong, discipline in the army was strict. Inevitably high-ranking officials like Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu and the others could seize the opportunity to make easy money, but military officers and soldiers did not dare to take even one object without permission.

Inside and outside the city people were slaughtering the cattle and butchered the sheep in large scale celebration. Flattery from Songgotu and the others surged like the tide; they said that Grand Marshal Wei deployed the troops like deity, that even if Sunwu [Sun Tzu] of the ancient time was reborn, he would not be superior. The imperial envoy said, “This time *Xiongdi* went out, His Majesty repeatedly advised Grand Marshal Wei not to kill and injure too many people. Today Grand Marshal Wei took strong city, admittedly you have rendered amazing merit; what’s more impressive is that unexpectedly saber, spear, sword and halberd, bow and arrow and firearm, not a single one was used, not even one lowly soldier was killed in battle. In one day we devastated strong enemy, subdued famous city, without losing a single general a single troop; since ancient time, Grand Marshal Wei is the only one who can do this. Not only it is unprecedented, I am sure it will not be repeated in the future.”

Wei Xiaobao was immensely proud of himself; he blew his horn, “Breaking Yakesa would have not been difficult. The difficulty lies in the vast and mighty imperial kindness, who empathize with officers and soldiers, and do not allow too much casualties. For this reason *Xiongdi* wanted to wait until today to use this tactic, so that Imperial Envoy Minister can see it with your own eyes. We are working for His Majesty, fighting a victorious battle, that is nothing, anybody can do it, it cannot be considered rare. But to look up to honor His Majesty’s holy intention, to fight a victorious battle without killing people, this is a bit more difficult.”

All the generals thought that although he was tooting his horn, but to fight a victorious battle without killing people was indeed an enormous difficulty; thereupon they all nodded their heads. Songgotu said, “This is His Majesty’s flood of good fortune that Grand Marshal Wei is a genius.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Today, from top to bottom, everybody has rendered very big merit. If not for Imperial Envoy *Daren* and Suo *Daren* went in person to the front line, dauntlessly supervised and directed the battle, we would not achieve the victory this easy.”

The imperial envoy and Songgotu were greatly delighted, they were extremely grateful. During the battle just now, the two of them, civil officials, were hiding far away, for fear that they would be injured by firearm, arrow or rock; there was no such thing as ‘going in person to the front line, dauntlessly supervising and directing the battle’. But since Wei Xiaobao said so, that means in the report of their success, there would be a mention of their part in rendering some great merit.

Manchurian Qing army’s system of bestowing rewards for merit was most generous, far above any other meritorious service in other areas. There was a common saying, “Everybody carries the spending [money] sedan chair.” Wei Xiaobao was deeply versed in the way of the government officials, giving the imperial envoy that kind of merit did not cost him anything, he also had nothing to lose. When the imperial envoy returned to Beijing, he would definitely report and brag on Wei Xiaobao’s behalf in front of the Emperor, increasing his contribution from fifty-percent to a hundred percent, while at the same time, if Wei Xiaobao had done something that was beyond army regulation or went over his boundary, the imperial envoy and Songgotu would definitely spare no effort in concealing it, in guarding their mouths like a closed bottle.

After everybody had had their fill of food and wine, Sabusu’s subordinate who was in charge of the Luocha troops came to report that they had dug Tolbusin out of the icy hole, and brought him to the steps outside the building. By this time Tolbusin had already frozen to death, his whole body was blue. Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, “This man picked an unlucky name. If he was not called Tu’er Bu Qing [this is the transliteration of Tolbusin’s name, with ‘bu qing’ means ‘spreading blue’], but Tu’er Bu Cai [‘bu cai’ means ‘spreading wealth’], he couldn’t possibly turn blue, but he could make a fortune.” He ordered his men to fetch a coffin and prepare Tolbusin for burial.

After the surrendering troops were counted and the property, equipment, weapons, *etc.* in the city were properly inventoried, Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu and

the imperial envoy jointly prepared a memorial to the Emperor. They then dispatched riders on fast horses to Beijing to report the success of their mission to the Emperor.

Book note:

In the military campaign this time, Deputy Commander Lang Tan was acting as the famous general Wu Bai's son. Wu Bai was originally conferred the title 'Jing Qi Ni Ha Pan' (that is, 'viscount'). After rendering great merit in Yakesa, Lang Tan was also conferred nobility title.

Chapter 48

Duhu cannot establish Yumen [jade gate] Pass, generals attach utmost importance to copper pillar as boundary marker.

(Translated by Foxs)

Utilizing Ditang Saber Technique the Qing's rattan shield troops used rattan shield to protect their bodies, while rolling around on the ground. In an instant the Cossak cavalry charged forward, the two troops clashed with each other. The rattan shield troops brandished their sharp blades, chopping the horses' legs. The horses neighed and fell one after another.

That evening Wei Xiaobao and Shuang'er went to sleep in the governor-general's bedroom. The fire was blazing high in the stove, they had fox fur quilt and sable fur mattress, the room was as warm as spring. This was the place he had previously visited. He opened the lid of the big wooden chest by the bed to look, inside the chest there were army uniforms and some firearms.

Shuang'er smiled and said, "*Xianggong* is hoping that a Luocha Princess is going to come out of the chest, right?"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "You are a Chinese Princess, much better than a Luocha Princess."

Shuang'er said with a laugh, "Too bad your Chinese Princess is in Beijing, she is not here."

"Good Shuang'er," Wei Xiaobao said, "Don't you agree that today we have achieved 'great success'?"

Shuang'er smiled sweetly, her cheeks blushed. Although she and Wei Xiaobao had been husband and wife for a long time, hearing her husband's teasing she was still very bashful.

Wei Xiaobao wrapped his arm around her waist, the two of them sat side-by-side on the bed. Wei Xiaobao said, "You pieced together the map, spending not a few heart's blood, in the end we reached Mount Luding, His Majesty conferred me the title Duke of Mount Luding, most likely he would let me govern this city. Underneath this mountain countless gold, pearls and treasured objects are hidden, we can slowly dig it out. I, Wei Xiaobao can change my name to 'Wei Duobao' ['xiaobao' – little treasure, 'duobao' – lots of treasure]."

Shuang'er said, "*Xianggong* already has a lot of gold and silver, you won't be able to spend it all in several lifetimes; more pearls and jewels will be useless. I think becoming Wei Xiaobao is better."

Wei Xiaobao gently kissed her face. "Right, right!" he said, "These days I cannot make up my mind. If I dig the treasure up, I am afraid I would sever the Manchuria's dragon's vein, and kill the Emperor. His Majesty always treated me not too badly, if he is killed, I would be rather unfair to him. But if I don't dig the treasure, I feel it's a pity. So, let us for the time being not dig the treasure out, wait 'till His Majesty's imperial self ascend to heaven, we turn poor and are

hungry, then at that time we will dig."

At this point, suddenly they heard a light 'crack' in the wooden chest. The two of them signaled each other with their eyes, while fixing their gaze on the wooden chest; after quite a while, however, nothing astir. Wei Xiaobao lightly clapped his hands three times, Shuang'er went over to the door and opened it, the four personal guards on duty outside the room bowed to receive the order. Wei Xiaobao pointed to the wooden chest and said in a low voice, "Someone's inside!"

The four personal guards were shocked. They rushed over to the chest and opened the lid, but saw the chest was full of clothes. Wei Xiaobao signaled with his hands, the personal guards moved the clothes away, and lifted up the bottom of the chest, revealing a big hole. Right this moment, 'Bang!' a shot rang from the hole. "Ah!" one of the personal guards cried out as his shoulder was hit by the bullet and he tumbled backward.

Shuang'er hastily pulled Wei Xiaobao back and shielded him with her own body. Wei Xiaobao pointed to the charcoal stove and made a sign of dumping it. A personal guard picked up the charcoal stove and poured the blazing coals into the hole. They heard someone inside the hole cried out in Luocha language, "Don't dump fire, I surrender!" followed by a series of coughing.

Wei Xiaobao called out using Luocha language, "Throw your guns up first, and then climb out."

A short gun was tossed out of the hole, followed by a Luocha soldier's head. A personal guard grabbed his hair and pulled him up, another personal guard pressed a saber on his neck. The Luocha soldier's beard was caught on fire and it has not been extinguished; he was in so much pain that he bawled out 'wah, wah!' while climbing out of the hole in a very difficult situation.

"Anybody else down there?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

Someone in the hole cried out, "There's one more! Surrender! Surrender!"

"Throw your gun up!" Wei Xiaobao shouted. With a white flash a cavalry sword was thrown up the hole, followed by a ball of fire appeared. Turned out this Luocha soldier's hair was on fire.

The other personal guards outside heard the commotion in the Grand Marshal's room, several of them rushed in. Seven or eight personal guards grabbed the two Luocha soldiers and put out the flame on the two's head and beard before tying their hands behind their backs.

Wei Xiaobao suddenly pointed to one of the Luocha soldiers and called out, "Hey, you are Wangba Siji [lit. tortoise (b@stard) dead chicken]."

The soldier's face lit up. "Yes, yes," he said, "Chinese little child high-ranking official, I am Huabosiji [needless to say, completely different set of characters. Vassili Poyarkov (Courtesy of Ace High)]."

The other Luocha soldier also called out, "Chinese little child high-ranking official, I … I am Qiluonuofu [Onufriy Stepanov (Courtesy of Ace High)]."

Wei Xiaobao stared at him for half a day; he noticed that his beard was burned into a mess, his face was red and swollen, but in the end he recognized him. "Right!" he said with a laugh, "You are Zhuluonuofu [lit. pig tribe coward]!"

Stepanov was greatly delighted. "Right, right!" he called out, "Chinese little child high-ranking official, I am your old friend."

Poyarkov and Stepanov were Princess Sophia's bodyguards. That year from Yakesa they travelled back to Moscow together with Wei Xiaobao. The two of them joined the gunmen rebellion at the Hunting Palace, and had rendered great merit. After Princess Sophia grasped the power, she rewarded the imperial guards and promoted her personal bodyguards to be captains. Four of them went to the east wanting to render more merit and get rich. When the city fell, one died in battle, one froze to death, the other two quietly slipped into the underground tunnel, thinking that they could escape out of the city. Who would have thought that the tunnel entrance outside the city was already blocked long ago? These two men could not advance or retreat, finally their trail was discovered.

In those days Wei Xiaobao called them 'turtle b@stard dead chicken' and 'pig tribe coward', how could the two of them understand the meaning? They only thought that the Chinese little child could not pronounce their names properly, hence they responded. They heard the Princess calling him 'Chinese little child', then they simply followed their example by calling him 'Chinese little child'. After

Wei Xiaobao rendered meritorious service, the Princess conferred him a nobility title. Thereupon the bodyguards also called him the ‘Chinese little child high-ranking official’.

Wei Xiaobao told them to tell him their story, and then he ordered his personal guards to untie them, and to take them out and serve them wine and food.

The personal guards were afraid there were more spies in the tunnel, they went into the tunnel and searched carefully. Only after verifying that there was no other tunnel leading to the city wall did they withdraw from Wei Xiaobao’s presence. The personal guards’ captain was terrified and repeatedly admitting his guilt; he thought that he was indeed very luckly, if these two Luocha troops came out in the middle of the night and murdered Grand Marshal Wei, the captain would have been executed along with his whole family unto the third generation.

The next morning Wei Xiaobao summoned Poyarkov and Stepanov, two people, and asked them the current situation of Princess Sophia. The two of them said that Her Highness the Princess was the Premier over the imperial court. The entire Luocha country, the princes and dukes, high-ranking ministers, generals and bishops, nobody dared to disobey her. The two Tsars were still young, in everything they obeyed their older sister.

Stepanov said, “Her Highness the Princess miss Chinese little child high-ranking official very much, she sent us here to find any news about you. She told us that when we see you, we must invite you back to Moscow to play, Princess will heavily reward you.”

Poyarkov said, “Her Highness the Princess did not know that Chinese little child high-ranking official led the troops here to fight. Otherwise, we all are beloved sweethearts, we all are old friends, there is no need to fight the battle.”

“You are speaking nonsense,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You lie!” The two of them swore an oath, saying that what they said was absolutely true, definitely not a lie.

Wei Xiaobao pondered, “His Majesty actually wanted me to find a way to make peace with Luocha country, there’s no harm in having these two fellows convey my message to Princess Sophia.” He said, “I'm going to write a letter, I want you

to deliver it to the Princess, but I can't write Luocha earthworm characters, you write the letter for me.”

Poyarkov and Stepanov looked at each other in dismay; they both had an awkward expression on their faces. They only knew how to ride horse and shoot firearms, but when it comes to take up the pen and write, it did not even enter a single aperture of their head. Stepanov said, “Chinese little child high-ranking official wants to write a letter, the two of us cannot do it. We … we go find a priest to write.” Wei Xiaobao agreed, he ordered his personal guards to take these two men to the Luocha prisoners to find someone who can write.

Shortly afterwards, the two of them returned with a full-bearded army chaplain. At that time most of Luocha troops were illiterate; other than praying on their behalf and counseling the troops on spiritual matters, these clergies also had a very important duty, namely, writing letters for these troops to be sent home. The chaplain was wearing Qing troop uniform, but the uniform was too small; it looked as if the clothes were ready to burst at any time, he looked very ridiculous.

Trembling with fear, the clergy followed the two captains to see Wei Xiaobao. He said, “May God bless Chinese Great General, the Great Nobility, I wish for the Chinese Great General’s entire family to be safe and sound.”

Wei Xiaobao told him to sit down; he said, “I want you to write a letter for me, to be sent to your Princess Sophia.” The clergy repeatedly said yes.

Wei Xiaobao’s personal guards had already prepared the four treasures of the study [i.e. brush, ink, paper, and ink stone] on the table. The clergy picked the brush, spread the paper, and wrote curvy Luocha characters. He felt the brush was too soft, the stroke varied thick and thin uncontrollably; it was unspeakably difficult, yet he did not dare to criticize Chinese pen and ink even for half a sentence, for fear that he might provoke this Chinese general.

Wei Xiaobao said, “You write: Since we parted, I often miss Princess, I only wish I could marry the Princess and take you as my wife …”

The clergy jumped in fright. The brush dripped a blot of ink on the paper. Stepanov said, “This Chinese little child high-ranking official is Her Highness Princess Sophia’s lover. Her Highness the Princess loves him very much, she

often says that Chinese lover surpasses Luocha lover a hundred times." He wanted to curry Wei Xiaobao's favor, inevitably he exaggerated greatly.

The clergy nodded repeatedly. "Yes, yes," he said, "Surpasses a hundred times." His heart was shaken, his train of thought in writing was distracted, but he did not dare to write what Wei Xiaobao had said verbatim; he had no choice but to write some cliché that he usually wrote, which was the letter from the soldiers to their wives at home, some corny sentences like 'my dear sweetheart', or 'last night I dreamed about you', or 'I want to kiss you ten thousand times', et cetera.

Seeing his brush moved like flying, Wei Xiaobao was very satisfied; he said, "You, Luocha troops, occupy our Chinese territory, you killed many Chinese common people, the Great Emperor of China is very angry, he sent me leading the troops here, to catch all of you. I want to cut them all piece by piece, to roast them into 'xiashunike' …"

The clergy was startled, "Ah!" he exclaimed, "Oh my God!"

Wei Xiaobao continued, "But looking at you, the Princess' face, I am not going to cut and roast them for the time being. If you promise that later on Luocha troops will not come again to violate our Chinese boundary, China and Luocha country will become friends forever. If you don't obey, I will send troops to wipe out your Luocha men, and then you won't have any Luocha men to accompany you in bed. If you want a man to sleep with you, you can only find Chinese man in the world."

The clergy disagreed greatly in his heart; he thought, "Other than Luocha men, there are only Chinese men in the world, this sentence is too illogical." He also thought that this kind of disrespectful sentences should never be written to the Princess; therefore, he decided to revise these several sentences with more respectful and intimate ones, presuming that this Chinese general would not know the difference anyway. But he was a careful man; afraid that his trickery would be discovered, he changed these several sentences into Latin. After he was done, he could not refrain from smiling.

Wei Xiaobao continued, "Now I am sending Wangba Siji and Zhuluonuofu to deliver this letter to you, along with my gifts. Whether you wish to be my lover or

my enemy, you must decide for yourself.”

The clergy also changed the last sentence to a very respectful one. He wrote, “Cherishing the memory of Your Highness’ grace, the Chinese young minister sincerely offers tribute, as a token of his devotion and honesty. The young minister has grown over the year, but he has never been double-minded toward Her Highness. He hopes both countries to become reconciled, so that the Luocha army and civilian prisoners can be returned to their homeland; this would be Your Highness immeasurable benevolence.” This last sentence was due to his own selfish desire; he thought that if the two countries could not find agreement, he and the rest of the surrendering Luocha people would undoubtedly die in a foreign land, and would not return to their homeland forever.

When he finished writing, Wei Xiaobao said, “That’s it. Read it again for me.”

Holding the letter with both hands, the clergy read aloud; but when he reached the part where he revised the wording, he recited Wei Xiaobao’s original wording. Wei Xiaobao’s comprehension of Luocha language was rather limited. He heard the letter was seemingly more or less correct, how could he ever suspect that the clergy had the impertinence to alter it at will? He nodded his head and said, “Very good!” He took out the golden official seal ‘Fuyuan Great General Wei’ and stamped the letter using vermillion ink.

This letter was not exactly a love letter, yet it was not exactly an official document either. He ordered his guards to give the clergy a reward, and to summon the army secretary to put the letter into an envelope and write Princess Sophia’s name in Chinese characters on the envelope.

The secretary ground the ink stick to make thick ink. Dipping his brush he started to write the first line, ‘The Great Qing’s Fuyuan Great General Duke of Luding Wei offers the letter.’ The second line was, ‘E’Luosi Queen Regent Sufeixia [苏飞霞] Her Highness the Princess Gulunchang.’

The two-character ‘Luocha’ in Buddhist texts carried the meaning of ‘devil’, for this reason it was called ‘E’guo’ [i.e. another name for Russia in Chinese], to avoid giving any offense; in the formal document, it became ‘E’Luosi’. The secretary also felt that the three-character ‘Su fei ya’ [苏菲亚] did not sound too

elegant, since the character ‘fei’ would remind people of ‘luxurious fragrant grass’ [芳草菲菲 (fang cao fei fei)], which would appear to be mocking her entire body which was covered in hair; thereupon he changed it into ‘Su fei xia’ [‘fei xia’ means flying red cloud], an allusion to the classical quotation ‘in the red cloud of the setting sun, a flock of ducks fly’, as well as the idiom ‘like red clouds hitting someone in the face’ to describe a woman’s beauty. Princess Gulun Chang was a title granted to the Qing Dynasty’s most respected Princess. The Emperor’s older or younger sisters were ‘Princess Chang’, the Emperor’s daughter was ‘Princess’. Since this noble woman was the Regent, plus she was the older sister of the two side-by-side Tsars, naturally she was a first-class princess.

When the secretary heard Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, “This Luocha Princess has personal relationship with me. We have not seen each other for several years, I wonder how is she?” he added two more lines on the envelope: ‘Matter of personal, military, and the good fortune of the country. Like harmonious music, if there is any discordant, please take part in building harmony.’ [Translator’s note: sorry, it’s beyond me.] He thought that too bad the Luochas were unlearned nation that they could not necessarily understand Chinese classical works, or catch the meaning of play on words, or even analyze it, so that to them this quotation from the ‘Mr. Zuo’s annals’ was like a blind looking at smart countenance, inevitably this was a case of ‘pearls cast before swine’; he could not help but sigh.

Actually, not only the Chinese characters ‘E’Luosi Queen Regent Sufeixia Her Highness the Princess Gulunchang’ were foreign to Wei Xiaobao, even the phrase ‘The Great Qing’s Fuyuan Great General Duke of Luding Wei’, other than his own surname and two ‘da’ [大, from ‘Great Qing’ and ‘Great General’] characters, he did not recognize a single character. Seeing the secretary wrote lines of character in front of and at the back of the envelope, he said, “Enough, enough. Your handwriting is very good, a lot better than the Luocha’s big beard.”

He ordered to have the secretary rewarded by precious gift, fortunately it came from the treasury of the captured Yakesa, he did not need to spend a single *wen* of his own capital. And then he had Poyarkov and Stepanov, two captains, summoned to his presence. He instructed the two of them to select

one hundred Luocha soldiers as their escort, and to deliver the letter to Moscow immediately. The two captains were overjoyed at this unexpected news; they did not stop bowing to express their gratitude, they also picked up Wei Xiaobao's hand and repeatedly kissed the back of his hand. Tickled by the two men's moustache, Wei Xiaobao was unable to refrain from laughing aloud.

The city of Yakesa was small, it could not hold the entire army. After discussing this matter with Songgotu and the imperial envoy, Wei Xiaobao assigned Lang Tan and Lin Xingzhu with two thousand troops to guard the city, while the main force would withdraw to the south, to Aigun and Kumarsk two cities to wait for the imperial decree. Before leaving, Wei Xiaobao solemnly warned Lang Tan and Lin Xingzhu, two people, not to dig well or excavate any tunnel within Yakesa's city walls.

The army marched south. Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu, Peng Chun and the others were stationed at Aigun. Sabusu let the other army unit to be stationed at Kumarsk. Wei Xiaobao ordered the surrendering Luocha troops to wear Qing army uniform, and sent someone to teach them Chinese language. He had them memorize sentences like 'Long live, long, long live to Our Emperor', 'The Holy Son of Heaven lives ten thousand years of boundless longevity', 'Chinese Emperor's virtue reaches the four oceans, his imperial kindness vast and mighty', and some others, and then he dispatched troops to escort them to Beijing. He told the prisoners to shout loudly along the main streets of Beijing, and when they had an audience with Kangxi, they must shout even louder. He said that the louder and more energetic they shout, the Emperor would reward them even more handsomely.

Several months passed, the winter turned into spring. Although in Aigun Wei Xiaobao lived comfortably, he missed Ah Ke, Su Quan, and his other wives, as well as Hutou and the others, his sons and daughter. He even dispatched his personal guards to deliver gifts back home. In return, his six wives also sent back clothing and other supplies. They all knew that he was illiterate, hence they did not send any letter; they only told the personal guards to convey their oral message: everybody in the family, big and small, were safe and sound; they all hoped the Grand Marshal would return triumphantly soon.

More than twenty days later, Kangxi's written imperial order arrived; he

greatly commended the officers and soldiers who went to war. Wei Xiaobao was promoted to be Duke of Luding, Second-class, the rest of the officers and soldiers were also promoted one rank. The imperial envoy who delivered the imperial edict handed a small wooden case sealed with burned lacquer to Wei Xiaobao, saying that it was a gift from the Emperor. Wei Xiaobao kowtowed to express his gratitude before opening the wooden case; he could not help but staring blankly. Inside the box was a golden rice bowl. The bowl was engraved with these four characters: 'Gong Zhong Ti Guo' [serving one's country loyally']; very likely it was the rice bowl Shi Lang gave him in the past. It's just that the engraving was damaged, but was repaired.

Wei Xiaobao remembered that he left this golden bowl in his earl mansion at Tong Mao Alley; that night he escaped in panic, hence he did not bring it along. After thinking for a while, he understood the reason. After bombarding the earl mansion that night, the Vanguard Regiment sergeants must have been searching through the ruins to make a list of the remains of his property, to be presented to the Emperor.

This golden bowl had been damaged once, this time he held it carefully in his hand, so that he would not damage it again. Wei Xiaobao thought, "The young emperor is upholding *yi qi* toward me. We are even, I must not dig his dragon's vein."

That night he held a grand banquet, the imperial envoy and various generals came to be his guests.

Another month passed, Kangxi sent another imperial edict. This time he rebuked Wei Xiaobao harshly, saying that Wei Xiaobao deliberately acting willfully and making a scene by sending the surrendering Luocha troops to shout 'ten thousand years of boundless longevity'; it was extremely senseless. The imperial edict said, "As the ruler, guardian of the government, it is my duty to do the will of Heaven, to cherish the common people. Although Luocha is a barbarian country outside the sphere of civilization, its people are also human beings. Since they have already surrendered to submission, they should not be bullied and humiliated. You as a high-ranking minister must reflect the ruler's way of loving the people. If *Zhen* favors the crowd, although not having long life, I will be wise ruler. If I am arrogant, presumptuous and tyrannical, this 'ten

thousand years of boundless longevity' will only bring suffering all over the world. High-ranking minister resorts to heretical flattery, it indicates the ruler is not virtuous. The guilt is the most grave, definitely it has to be prohibited."

This time Wei Xiaobao wanted to pat the horse's butts, but he patted the horse's foot instead; he bumped into a hard nail. Luckily his face was very thick, he did not give it another thought. In front of the imperial envoy who delivered the edict he cursed himself, saying that he deserved to die, but in his heart he said, "Who in the world does not love to be flattered? It must be that those Luocha troops did not say the Chinese words correctly, so that the Emperor could not make any sense of it, hence he was angry." He summoned the several secretaries whom he ordered to teach the Luocha troops to speak Chinese, and reprimanded them severely. Finished cursing, he opened up a table and gambled with them; they threw several rounds of dice, Kangxi's reprimand was already tossed beyond the topmost clouds.

One day another imperial edict arrived from Beijing, appointing Wei Xiaobao and Songgotu as high-ranking minister to negotiate peace, to draw up a peace treaty with the Luocha country. Kangxi also sent the Bordered Yellow Banner's Han Army's Commander, First-class Duke Tong Guogang, Army Guardian Commander Ma La, *Shangshu* [see Chapter 37] A'erni, and Left Imperial Censor Ma Qi, four people as their assistants.

Finished reading the imperial edict, Tong Guogang took out another scroll of document and read it aloud. Actually it was the letter sent to Kangxi by the Luocha country's two Tsars, which was translated into Chinese by Dutch missionary in Beijing. The official document read, "Sincerely offered to pacifier of the far away *Huaxia* [old name for China, Cathay], steeped in the universe, leading the worthy ministers for a common plan to govern, appointing separate territories, unified by the Manchurian Qing, your reputation reaches far and wide, the Great Sage Emperor said: toward his father Aleksey Mikhailovich, who has bestowed Nicolai and the others the Celestial Empire, to have friendly relations, yet was not well-versed in Chinese ceremony, language and manners; for the vulgarity, uncouthness and lack of culture, we hope for forgiveness. In praise of the Emperor, any erroneous, confusing or lacking in manners, are also because our location in the desolate, distant place, rituals are unadorned and

concealed from us, hence the Emperor did not see it and put the blame on us.

In the past the Emperor has bestowed a letter, our humble country did not understand the meaning, not because it was intentional. Until Nicolai and the others returned and inquired, still they stated that we do not owe the Celestial Empire's Minister escaping people like Gentemu'er and the others, as well as any news of disturbance on the frontier. When we heard the Emperor is dispatching troops, it brings disgrace to the border, and loses the friendly relations. In the event that our humble country's people who live on the border starting a dispute and rise in revolt, the Celestial Empire should dispatch an envoy to clearly indicate the situation, and propose a strict measure to control the guilt; why bother to easily resort to arms?

Today receiving the imperial decree, only then did we understood the situation from beginning to end, thereupon we issue an order to dispatch our humble country's officers and soldiers, by no means to engage in war. Respectfully requesting our people who started the rebellion to be sent back to face the law, while at the same time dispatching an envoy minister to agree upon the boundary of our countries, Xianlingmoqi, Fo'erweiniugao, Ivan, Fa'eluowa and the others [these must be Russian names, but I have no idea the correct transliteration] to rapidly confer the letter. Begging you to remove the siege of Yakesa, to document all cases in details, and let our humble country know. When all of these are put to rest, forever we will look back at it from the distant.

Your precious country's high-ranking minister, His Excellency Wei Xiaobao in the past has met our Her Highness the Imperial Sister Queen Regent Sophia, and from afar has visited our capital Moscow, has brought order out of chaos, and has rendered great merit to our humble nation. For your precious country's favor, our humble country's ruler and his ministers will not dare to forget. We sincerely send the heaviest gift to be presented to Your Majesty, the Great Sage Emperor, and next in line to be presented to His Excellency Minister Wei Xiaobao, to show our humble nation's genuine desire to cultivate friendship with our neighbor."

(Book note: This official document sent by Russia was verified in accordance with historical records. Only the last section pertaining Wei Xiaobao was perhaps only exist in the novel, and should not be taken at face value.)

After Tong Guogang finished reading the official letter, the secretary explained in details the content of the letter to Wei Xiaobao. It was a standard procedure in the army; official documents come and go, sometimes the writing was rather complicated, while the number of illiterate generals leading the troops was in fact numerous. Although those generals went to school for several years, sometimes their knowledge was rather limited. Military communications concerned important military and intelligence information, if it was misunderstood, the responsibility was too great; for this reason, any Manchurian army unit always had a secretary who explains the provision of the document.

Tong Guogang laughed and said, “This Queen Regent of Luocha country cherishes old friendships with Grand Marshal Wei quite a bit, the gifts she sent are indeed not a few. His Majesty instructed *Xiongdi* to bring everything to be handed personally to Grand Marshal Wei.”

Wei Xiaobao cupped his fist and said, “Thank you very much, thank you very much.” And then he added, “Luocha people do not understand etiquette, they did not say that their gifts are light, they really blow their horn by saying that their gifts are heavy. The gift to His Majesty is heaviest, the gift to me is the next heaviest; they are not afraid people would laugh at them.”

“Yes,” Tong Guogang replied, “The surrendering Luocha people Grand Marshal Wei presented to the Capital have been personally examined by His Majesty; he found out that among them, there is one high-ranking Luocha official …”

“Ah!” Wei Xiaobao exclaimed in surprise, “Is there such thing?”

Tong Guogang said, “This man is extremely crafty, he mingled among the lowly soldiers, not making the slightest bit of word or movement. That day His Majesty interrogated the surrendering people one by one, he had a Dutch missionary as the interpreter. After the interrogation, His Majesty spoke several Latin sentences to the missionary, among the surrendering Luocha people, there was one lowly soldier whose face suddenly changed. His Majesty asked him if he understood Latin. The lowly soldier repeatedly shook his head. So then His Majesty said in Latin, ‘Take this soldier out and chop his head.’ The soldier’s countenance changed greatly. He kneeled down and begged for mercy, confessing that he understood Latin.”

“What is Latin language?” Wei Xiaobao asked, “When those Luocha people were talking about pulling able-bodied men to carry army provision[33], how can His Majesty understand?”

“His Majesty is intelligent and wise,” Tong Guogang replied, “Nothing that he does not know. Luocha people were talking about pulling able-bodied men, he can also talk like that.”

“Why is it when Luocha people speak about other thing His Majesty does not understand, but then they are talking about pulling able-bodied men he can understand?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

Tong Guogang did not know how to answer that question; he laughed and said, “The reason behind it, none of us can understand. Next time the Grand Marshal have an audience with His Majesty, you may kowtow and ask him personally.”

Wei Xiaobao nodded. “What happened to that Luocha man?” he asked.

Tong Guogang said, “His Majesty interrogated him carefully, in the end that man could not conceal the truth, bit by bit he told him everything. Turned out that man was called Ya’erqingsiji [Yerofei Khabarov?]; he was the governor-general of Nerchinsk and Yakesa, two cities.”

When everybody heard this, they could not help exclaiming, “Ah!”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This fellow’s official position is not low.”

“Isn’t that so?” Tong Guogang said, “Among the government officials Luocha country sent to the east, his official rank is the highest. When the city of Yakesa fell, he must have changed into lowly soldier’s uniform so that he was well-hidden.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said with a laugh, “When we made a breakthrough on the Yakesa city that day, Luocha’s generals, lowly soldiers, high-ranking officials, low-ranking officials, everybody was stripped naked. Looking back and forth, they all looked the same, there was really no distinction one from another. We could not see that those with higher official rank would have a bit bigger thingy. *Xiongdi* did not … I could not recognize this high-ranking official, it’s actually not our fault.” The generals roared in laughter; they then told Tong

Guogang about the fall of city of Yakesa that day.

Tong Guogang laughed and said, “So that’s how it is. No wonder. His Majesty said: Wei Xiaobao captured Nerchinsk and Yakesa, two cities; his meritorious credit is not small. But he thought this man was an ordinary soldier, the way he work is too muddleheaded. His merit compensates for his guilt, in this case there is no reward and no punishment.”

Wei Xiaobao stood up and respectfully said, “His Majesty’s grace, his servant is extremely grateful.”

Tong Guogang said, “His Majesty interrogated this Ya’erqingsiji six days in a row. Luocha country’s army and government, territory and products, everything was questioned in details. His Majesty is indeed divinely brilliant, from this Ya’erqingsiji he found a secret. According to Grand Marshal Wei, when this man was captured, he was not wearing one thread; who would have thought that he had a way to conceal secret document?”

“His granny,” Wei Xiaobao cursed, “This A’erxiansiji [lit. ol’ second convulsing dead chicken] is really full of devilish tricks and cunning stratagem. Next time I see him, I must look at him really well. This secret document, where did he hide it? Could it be he hid it inside his @ss … @ss …”

Tong Guogang said, “Before the surrendering Luocha people had an audience with His Majesty, naturally their whole body would be searched carefully by the Imperial Bodyguards; hair, beard, must be groped, pants and boots must be taken off and examined. Foreigners who conceal wicked intentions, if they hide sharp weapon in their body, what would happen then? Naturally this Ya’erqingsiji was also searched carefully, but nothing was found on him. However, His Majesty can see clearly down to the smallest detail; he saw his right shoulder was bulging, and he was constantly looking askance on it, so he asked him what the object on his shoulder was. Ya’erqingsiji pulled his sleeve, showing a thick bandage on his arm, saying that it was an injury he received in Yakesa. His Majesty ordered him to step forward, and then with force he pinched on his arm. Ya’erqingsiji cried out, ‘Aiyo!’ but his voice did not sound like he was in pain.”

“Interesting, interesting!” Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, “This Luocha

demon’s injury is fake.”

“Isn’t that so?” Tong Guogang said, “His Majesty immediately ordered the Imperial Bodyguards to take off the bandage on his arm. Ya’erqingsiji’s countenance turned ash grey, he was so scared that his whole body trembled. Grand Marshal Wei, can you guess what was hidden in his bandage?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Just now you said it was a secret document, could it be it was exactly that?”

Tong Guogang clapped his hands and said, “Exactly. No wonder His Majesty often praise you and say you are smart, sure enough you got it with only one guess. The object hidden inside that Ya’erqingsiji’s bandage was precisely a secret document, the imperial order given to him by Luocha country’s Tsar. His Majesty had the Dutch missionary translated it to him, and I have a copy of it here.”

From an envelope he took a document and read it in loud voice, “Thou shalt make Chinese Emperor aware: The owner of the entire Great E’luosi [Russia], the Minor Russia, the White Russia is the authoritarian monarch, the Great Sovereign Emperor and the Great King over many nations His Majesty Russian Emperor. When the Emperor arrives at distant places, the sovereign kings of many nations take refuge under His Majesty the Great Emperor’s supreme rule. That Chinese Emperor should also try to obtain the owner of the entire Great Russia, the Minor Russia, the White Russia, the authoritarian monarch, the Great Sovereign Emperor’s grace, and take refuge under His Majesty the Great Emperor’s supreme rule. His Majesty the Great Emperor will definitely love and protect the Chinese Emperor according to his vast and mighty imperial kindness; furthermore, he will protect him, will save him from the enemy threat. If that Chinese Emperor alone takes refuge under His Majesty the Great Sovereign, submit himself under His Majesty the Russian Emperor’s supreme rule, and everlastingly faithful, and bring tribute to the Great Sovereign, His Majesty the Great Sovereign’s subordinates shall be allowed to have freedom in setting up military camp and conduct trades within the Chinese border. For this reason the Chinese Emperor should agree to let His Majesty the Great Emperor’s envoys and ministers to pass freely without hindrance. Furthermore he should respond to His Majesty the Great Emperor’s letter.”

(Book note: This document is authentic. When Kangxi arrested Russian minister, he was imprisoned for half a month before being sent back to his own country. This document was confiscated from his possession, and was stored in the Palace's archive. The original photograph can be seen in the 'Forbidden City Russian History'.)

For each sentence Tong Guogang read, Wei Xiaobao cursed one word, "Fart!" By the time Tong Guogang finished, Wei Xiaobao already cursed several dozen of "Fart!"

Tong Guogang said, "His Majesty issued an imperial edict: Luocha people has grand ambition, they are extremely rude. The Luocha Emperor who issued this secret document was the father of current two Tsars; he had already passed away. At that time he still did not know that we, Chinese people, are formidable. Now Luocha people have suffered hardship, presumably they would not dare to be as wanton as they used to be. But when we are negotiating peace with them, we still have to use gentle methods and force [i.e. carrot and stick]; we can't be too careless."

"Absolutely," Wei Xiaobao said, "His Majesty has commanded, we give them a few slaps on their mouths, a few kicks, but also a few pats on their shoulder, and a few rubs on their back."

Tong Guogang continued, "That Queen Regent is very crafty, she pretended that she did not know that Yakesa has fallen into our hands, she issued an order that Luocha troops must not have armed confrontation with us. But the official document has exposed the horse's foot, she asked the Emperor to send back the captured Luocha people so that they could face the law."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "How can it be so easy? She sent me several mink fur coats, several pieces of precious stones as the next heaviest gift, and then wanted us to release her officers and men?"

Tong Guogang said, "His Majesty's order: Since the Luocha people are looking for peace, there is no harm in negotiating peace with them. But we must bring the main force along, and set the terms of their surrender [orig. 'pledge under the city wall']."

"What is that 'pledge under the city wall'?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

Tong Guogang explained, “When two countries are at war, our main force besieging a foreign city. The foreigners ask for peace, we set up peace treaty under his city walls. This is called ‘terms of the surrender’. Although the foreigners can’t be considered surrendering, in the end they are admitting defeat.”

“I see,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Actually, we sent the troops to take down Nerchinsk, it was not too difficult.”

Tong Guogang said, “His Majesty’s imperial edict: to attack and take over several more cities is actually within our grasp. But Luocha is a big country in the present age, the number of small nations under its command is a lot. If they are defeated silly in the east, their prestige would suffer great damage, the smaller nations under its command would not accept it. If that happens, Luocha will definitely send their main force to retaliate, and then we will be ravaged by successive wars, which will last for I don’t know how many years, how many months. His Majesty interrogated that Ya’erqingsiji, and found out that west of Luocha there is another big country called Sweden, and these two countries are on the verge of a great war. If Luocha has to fight both wars, east and west at the same time, they will have a headache. If we seize this opportunity the set up peace treaty with them, it would be greatly advantageous to us. At least we can guarantee a hundred years of peace and security north of Xinjiang.”

After achieving great victory, Wei Xiaobao was still very fired-up that he wanted to take down Nerchinsk as well; but when he heard that the Emperor has agreed to pursue peace agreement with the Luocha country, his spirit was greatly dampened. However, this was the Emperor’s strategic decision, no matter what he wanted to do, or how far he wanted to go, he simply could not disobey the imperial edict. But then he thought, “You are His Majesty’s *jiujiu* [maternal uncle], hence you are also my wife’s *jiujiu*, so you can be considered my elder. You are a first-class duke, I have just been promoted to be a second-class duke. This time negotiating peace with Luocha people, His Majesty is sending you to be my assistant; the face His Majesty is giving me is indeed not small.”

Tong Guogang’s father, Tong Tulai was Kangxi’s mother, Empress Xiao Kang’s father, a Han. As a result, Kangxi’s lineage was actually half Manchu half Han. By

this time Tong Tulai had already died, Tong Guogang inherited his title as the First-Class Duke. In his early years Tong Tulai surrendered to the Manchurian Qing outside the Pass, and joined the Bordered Yellow Banner. His military contribution was outstanding, his reputation was well-known. Only Wei Xiaobao thought that his name was quite disappointing. Tulai, Tulai, it sounded like someone lost in gambling and wanted to renege [‘du’ – gambling, ‘lai’ – renege; different characters from Tulai]; a magnificent country’s father-in-law, why would he want to do that?

That evening, after the feast to welcome the guests, under the Grand Marshal Wei’s recommendation, they threw several rounds of dice. Indeed Tong Guogang lost; but pushing away six hundred *taels*, he did not even blink, not in the least wanted to renege. Seeing he could take the loss in a frank and straightforward way, without putting on an air at all, Wei Xiaobao was quite impressed. It was not until he returned to his bedroom and lay down on his bed that he suddenly realized, “His name is Tong Guguang [‘gu’ – bones, ‘guang’ – bright, different characters from Guogang], clearly I must beat him clean [‘qing guang’] in dominoes [‘gu pai’]. This man’s gambling character is fabulous, I can make friends with him.”

The next day Wei Xiaobao had a meeting with various ministers. Everybody agreed that since they were going to discuss the terms of surrender with the opposite side, there was no harm in bringing the main force along, to wait leisurely for the exhausted enemy. Wei Xiaobao nodded his approval, and promptly issued an order for the forces in Aigun and Kumarsk to start moving and meet outside the city of Nerchinsk. By this time it was already summer, the weather was warm, the snow had disappeared completely; the army marched very comfortably.

One day they reached the bank of Hailar River, the vanguard unit came back to report that there was a small company of Luocha troops, the captain of this group was seeking an audience with the Grand Marshal. Wei Xiaobao summoned the captain. Turned out they were Poyarkov and Stepanov, two people.

“Very good, very good!” Wei Xiaobao said, “Turns out it’s tortoise b@stard dead chicken [Wangbasiji] and pig tribe coward [Zhuluonuofu].” The two men bowed and saluted before presenting Princess Sophia’s letter.

Up to this time the Luocha clergy still remained in the Qing army camp in case his service was still needed. In order to negotiate peace and sign the treaty document, Kangxi also dispatched a Dutch missionary to help them. Wei Xiaobao summoned both clergies to his tent, and ordered them to translate Princess Sophia's reply.

That day the Luocha clergy altered the intent of Wei Xiaobao's love letter; right now he was very anxious and fearful, afraid that the Princess' letter would expose the horse' foot. Hastily he took the letter and scanned it once; only then did he feel relieved. The Dutch missionary then translated the Luocha text into Chinese.

The letter said: Ever since we parted, I often think of you, hoping that after the peace treaty is signed, Wei Xiaobao can visit Moscow and rekindle old friendship. Wei Xiaobao is doted on by the rulers of both countries; therefore, he must explain and clear up all kinds of misunderstanding, remove the estrangement, and establish the foundation with which both countries will be reconciled for all ages.

The letter also said: China and Luocha were separated east and west; furthermore, both are great countries of this age. If the two join hands and form an alliance, we can dominate the world, no other country will be able to defy. If the two countries are in hostility with each other, engaging in long-term conflict, inevitably both sides will suffer. For this reason I hope Wei Xiaobao can facilitate this matter; while admittedly he will set up great merit to China, Luocha country will definitely also reward him heavily. In addition, would Wei Xiaobao please talk to Chinese Emperor, to release the prisoners, the captured Luocha coutry's officers and soldiers, so that their family and beloved will be delighted to meet again.

After the Dutch missionary finished translating, Wei Xiaobao saw Poyarkov and Stepanov, two men, repeatedly gave him meaningful look; he knew that there must be another matter. Dismissing the two clergies, he asked, "Is there anything else you want to say?"

Poyarkov said, "Her Highness the Princess wanted us to tell Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official that Her Highness the Princess miss you very much, Luocha men are not good, Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official is number one in the

world, she insists on inviting you to Moscow."

"Humph," Wei Xiaobao thought, "This is Luocha flattery [orig. confusing soup], absolutely cannot be trusted."

Stepanov said, "Her Highness the Princess has a few other things she would like Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official to do. This is the gift Her Highness the Princess gives you." While saying that he removed a copper chain from his neck, at the end of the chain was a leather purse. Poyarkov also did the same. Presumably because the two of them were traveling a long and difficult trek, they were afraid they might lose it, thus they tied it on their neck using copper chain.

The openings of these two leather purses were locked using copper locks. Poyarkov took out a key from his belt to unlock Stepanov's copper lock. Stepanov also took out his own key to open the lock on Poyarkov's leather purse. The two of them respectfully put the leather purses on the table in front of Wei Xiaobao.

Wei Xiaobao turned the leather purse upside down, with a 'ding dang' jingling noise several dozen precious stones came out, all kinds of sizes and colors, rich and diverse, glittering gloriously; there were huge ruby, sapphire, and yellow gem. The other purse contained diamonds and emeralds. Instantly the tent was filled with their glitter, dazzling and beautiful. Wei Xiaobao has seen countless jewels and precious stones in his life, but he had never seen these many big precious stones lumped together. He laughed and said, "Princess gives me this kind of heavy gift, I really cannot accept."

(Book note: According to 'Yanjing [old name for Beijing] Scholarly Journal', volume 25, Liu Xuanmin wrote the 'Examination on China-Russia early commercial trade', Russia sent the ambassador Feodor Alekseyevich Golovin to negotiate with China on the boundary, trade relation, and economic affair. During his journey east, Golovin received imperial court's secret order, seriously instructed him: if he could obtain favorable trade relationship with China, there was no harm in giving up Yakesa to the Chinese. Furthermore, as long as it did not damage the Russian Emperor's prestige and within limit, he was authorized to secretly give considerable gifts to the Chinese delegation as a bribe.)

Poyarkov said, “Her Highness the Princess said that if Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official succeed, there will be more precious gift for you; plus beautiful women from Great Russia, Minor Russia, White Russia, Cossack, Tatar, Sweden, Persia, Poland, Germany, and Denmark, ten countries, one from each country, each one is young and good looking, all are virgins, no widows at all. Everything will be delivered to Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official.”

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter. “I can’t deal with my seven wives already,” he said, “With ten more beautiful women, Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official will immediately breathe his last.”

“Can’t be, can’t be,” Poyarkov repeatedly said, “Her Highness the Princess has already prepared these ten beautiful women, we have seen them with our own eyes, everyone’s countenance is as pretty as a rose, their skin is as white as milk, their voice as beautiful as nightingale.”

Wei Xiaobao was hooked; he asked, “What does Her Highness the Princess want me to do?”

Stepanov said, “First, both countries must become reconciled, the demarcation of boundary is fair, and from now on we won’t have armed-conflict.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “The young Emperor also wants the same thing; consider it done.” He said, “West of your Luocha country, there is a country called Swe … Swe something; they send an emissary, wanting us to send troops together, to attack Luocha country from east and west, and divide your country evenly. At that time those Great Russia, Minor Russia, not-big-not-small Russia, Black Russia, White Russia, multi-colored Russia, no matter how many beautiful women we want, we will get, no need for your Her Highness the Princess to send us any. Besides, each one you sent will be too clumsy and miserable from the cold!”

As soon as the two Luocha captains heard this, they were shocked. At that time Sweden was under the rule of King Karl XI, an astute and promising young monarch, who was training the army and refining the military; he was inclined to launch a military expedition to Luocha on the east. These days his large cavalry was moving to the east. All the civil and military officials in Moscow were

concerned; unexpectedly Sweden wanted to form an alliance with China. Although Luocha was strong, if they had to face multiple enemies, their power would fail.

Looking at these two men's countenance, Wei Xiaobao knew that his empty threat has hit its target; thereupon he said, "But Her Highness the Princess and I are lovers and good friends; how could I agree to Swe something's request? Right now our Chinese Emperor has not made up his mind; if Luocha country sincerely wants to make peace, I can chase that Swe something's envoy back to his country."

The two captains were greatly delighted; they repeatedly said, "Luocha country is one hundred per cent sincere, there is not the least bit falsehood. Would Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official quickly chase that Sweden envoy back to his country? Even better, with one chop of a saber, off with his head."

Wei Xiaobao shook his head, "Envoy's head cannot be chopped at will, much less he also sent me a lot of precious stones, dozen or so beautiful women. This saber cannot be chopped down, can it?"

The two captains repeatedly voiced their agreement; they thought, "Turns out Sweden pays particular attention to win their favor; they deliver gifts first and receive the payment later. This trick of the trade is more sophisticated than ours." They also thought, "Fortunately the Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official is our Princess' lover; otherwise, this matter would turn significantly worse."

Wei Xiaobao asked, "What other thing Her Highness the Princess wanted me to do?"

Poyarkov smiled and said, "The thing that Her Highness the Princess really wants Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official to do is for you to go to Kremlin Palace in Moscow, and do it in the Princess' bedroom."

Wei Xiaobao made a 'hey' sound; he thought, "This is Luocha's confusing soup [see above], definitely a Luocha soup; I can drink it but I can't trust it." He laughed and said, "Turns out Luocha men are unfit for anything."

"It's not that Luocha men are unfit for anything," Stepanov said, "It's just that Her Highness the Princess particularly miss Chinese Little Child High-ranking

Official.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Another bowl of Luocha soup.” He said, “Since that’s the case, the Princess does not have anything else in mind?”

Poyarkov said, “Her Highness the Princess wants to ask His Majesty the Chinese Emperor’s permission to allow the merchants to come and go and trade freely across the two countries’ border.”

Stepanov said, “If the two countries’ merchants are coming and going in abundance, Princess could write a letter or send gifts more often.”

“Damn it,” Wei Xiaobao mused, “Another bowl.” He said, “In that case, the reason of two countries having trading relations is for Princess’ selfish desire, not for the public?”

“Yes, yes,” Stepanov said, “Totally for the sake of Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official.”

“Right now I am not a little child anymore,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You must not call me Chinese Little Child High-ranking Official anymore.”

The two men bowed deeply together. “Yes, yes!” they said, “Your Excellency Chinese High Official.”

Wei Xiaobao smiled. “Alright, alright,” he said, “Go and rest. We are going to Nerchinsk, you two may come with us.”

The two of them were startled; they looked at each other and thought, “What is Chinese army doing in Nerchinsk? Are they going to besiege it?”

“Don’t you worry,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I promise the Princess that the two countries are going to be reconciled, and not going to fight any war.”

The two men bowed together again, they said, “Thank you very much Chinese Little … no … Your Excellency High-ranking Official.” Poyarkov added, “Princess heard that Chinese bridges are well-built; no matter how wide or how big a river, you are able to build the bridge using large stones, without stone pillars underneath it for support. Princess loves Your Excellency Chinese High Official, she also loves Chinese stuffs; therefore, she asks that *Daren* send several bridge craftsmen and technicians to Moscow to build several Chinese magical stone

bridges. Her Highness the Princess will look at Chinese stone bridge every day, she will take a stroll on the bridge; it's like seeing Your Excellency High-ranking Official every day."

Wei Xiaobao thought, "Bowl by bowl Luocha soup is pouring; if I drink it again, I might vomit. The Princess especially likes our Chinese stone bridge; I wonder what's the reason behind it? There must be some strange reason. I must not fall into this Luocha fox-spirit's trickery." He said, "Princess miss me, there is no need to build a stone bridge, the project is too big. I'll send her some Chinese silk quilt, several Chinese pillows, let her hold it in her arms when she sleeps; it will be as if every night there is an Excellency Chinese High Official accompanying her in bed."

The two Luocha captains looked at each other; their expression looked very awkward. Stepanov said, "This … it looks like …" Poyarkov's brain was a lot quicker; he said, "Your Excellency *Daren*'s idea is extremely lofty; Chinese silk quilt, Chinese pillows, we will definitely bring back some. The Princess cannot embrace Your Excellency Chinese High Official, holding Chinese silk quilt and Chinese pillows is all right. But after several years, silk quilt and pillows will be worn-out, it's not as sturdy as a stone bridge. Therefore, we would like *Daren* to still please send the technical experts to build the stone bridge."

Hearing the tone of the two men's voice, Wei Xiaobao thought that Luocha imperial court seemed very eager to have the technical expert of building stone bridges; hence there must be crafty scheme behind this. He did not know that at that time Chinese technology in bridge building was the first under the heavens. When foreigners came to China and saw the construction of magnificent stone bridge, they would definitely click their tongue in amazement, and would admire incessantly. Seeing an arch bridge that can span the surface of the river without requiring pillars underneath it, they felt it was magical beyond human's comprehension. Luocha people were hoping to learn this bridge building technology, actually it was due to their admiration to Chinese science and technology, not because any other crafty scheme.

(Book note: In Kangxi's fifteenth year, Russia did send N.G. Spatnary as the imperial envoy, leading his fellow countrymen, experts in precious stones and specialists in herbal medicine to Beijing. They submitted many requests, among

which was ‘To allow Russia borrow bridge building experts’. However, because the imperial envoy was unwilling to kowtow to Kangxi, the Qing imperial court expelled them back to their own country.)

Wei Xiaobao thought, “The more you want it, the more *laozi* does not want to give you.” He said, “I know, go now!” The two captains did not dare to say more; they saluted and withdrew.

One day, Luocha imperial envoy minister Feodor in Nerchinsk received report that the large Qing army has arrived. Busily he sent people to send word, asking the Qing army to stop where they were, while he immediately set off to meet them.

(Book note: Luocha imperial envoy who negotiated peace was actually Feodor A. Golovin, but at that time the Chinese did not know that western people has their given name first and surname last; thereupon in Chinese history book he was known as Feodor.)

Wei Xiaobao said, “No need to be polite, we had better come to pay our respect!”

With grandiose the Qing army pressed on to Nerchinsk city wall. Sabusu, Peng Chun, Ma La and the others separately leading the cavalry going around Nerchinsk to block all major roads on the north, west and south of the city; not only they were cutting off Luocha troops escape route from Nerchinsk, they were also stopping any reinforcement from the west. Wei Xiaobao personally commanded the main force on the east of the city. The army shot fireworks, cannon and fiery arrows to the sky to signal each other.

Inside Nerchinsk, Luocha ministers, military generals, and the soldiers all were looking on as the Qing army coordinated the siege, displaying their magnificent military power; no one in the Luocha camp did not have their spirit shaken. At once Feodor prepared gifts and sent people to the Qing army to deliver a letter to the Chinese imperial envoy minister, saying that the emperors of both countries have agreed to cease-fire and negotiate peace, the purpose of the meeting this time was to sign a peace treaty, hence it was inadvisable to have the troops of both side to stay too close to each other, in order to avoid inciting armed conflict and thus damaging the good relationship of the two countries.

Wei Xiaobao and the other ministers discussed this matter over. Everybody agreed that as a superior nation, China must not be rude and be a bully; that they must strive to use peaceful measures before using force. Thereupon Wei Xiaobao issued an order to have the troops withdrawn several *li*, and stationed at the Shilka River; he also ordered the Qing army on the north, west and south of Nerchinsk to retreat to the hills and wait for order.

Seeing the Qing army retreated, Feodor was slightly relieved. He wrote another letter, proposing four-point condition of the meeting: One, they were to meet in the middle between Nerchinsk and Shilka River. Two, on the day of the meeting, the imperial envoys of both countries may bring forty attendants each. Three, both countries may dispatch five hundred troops each, Russian army would be stationed outside the city wall, Qing army would be stationed on the riverbank. Four, the number of personal guards both countries' diplomatic envoys may bring was limited to two hundred and sixty men each; other than saber and sword, they must not bring any firearms. He set up these four conditions because the Qing army had superior number, Russian army was small; if both sides did not limit the number of people, the Russian army would be put in a disadvantageous position. But Luocha troops' firearms were formidable, if both sides had equal number of troops, Russian soldiers would occupy a dominant position, he expected the other side would not agree; hence he proposed in advance that the bodyguards could only bring saber and sword. The letter also proposed that the meeting to be held the following day.

After discussing it with the other ministers, Wei Xiaobao deemed the proposal feasible and immediately accepted it. That same evening he sent the troops to build a tent as the meeting place.

Early morning the next day, Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu, Tong Guogang and the other imperial envoys led the attendants, along with two-hundred sixty rattan-shield troops, to the meeting place. They saw Nerchinsk's city gate opened, more than two hundred Cossacks on horseback with long sabers in their hands, rode around a group of Luocha officers out of the city. This company of cavalry was imposing, the men were tall the horses big. The Qing army's rattan-shield troops were infantry, they looked small in comparison, their prestige was considerably less.

“His granny,” Tong Guogang cursed, “Luocha demons are very crafty; the first step and we already cannot match them. They only say about two hundred sixty bodyguards; he just forgot to mention cavalry or infantry. And now they are already two hundred sixty horses superior to us.”

Songgotu said, “This matter reminds us that when we are dealing with the Luocha demons, we have to be twelve times extremely alert; if we have only half a part of carelessness, we will put in a disadvantageous situation.”

While they were still talking, the Luocha troops arrived. Tong Guogang said, “We are following His Majesty’s instruction, in everything we must give careful consideration to China being a superior nation in observing etiquette; let us dismount.”

“Very well,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Let us dismount.” Everybody dismounted from their horses and cupped their fist in greeting while standing tall.

When the Luocha imperial envoy Feodor saw this situation, he shouted his order, all the officers also dismounted from their horses and bowed to salute. Both sides walked over toward each other.

Feodor said, “Russian Imperial Envoy Feodor, under the order of the Tsar, humbly offers the Great Qing Emperor the wish of safety and well-being.”

Copying his words, Wei Xiaobao also said, “The Great Qing Imperial Envoy Wei Xiaobao, under the Great Emperor’s order, humbly offers the Luocha Tsar the wish of safety and well-being.” But he added another sentence, “We also wish the Queen Regent Her Highness the Princess Sophia beauty and happiness.”

Feodor showed a faint smile; he thought, “The Great Qing Emperor wishes our Princess beauty and happiness; this wish is rather weird. But if the Princess hears it, surely she will be delighted.”

The two of them exchanged some pleasantries while introducing their delegation. The interpreters of both countries translated everything.

Wei Xiaobao noticed that the Luocha officers were standing tall and listening respectfully; they were quite polite and attentive. However, the two hundred sixty Cossack cavalry stayed upright and unafraid on the horsebacks, their hands were still on their long sabers as the horses stood in formation, carrying the

expression that ‘they were living high and looking down’ on the other side; there was even a hint of threatening look on their faces. The more Wei Xiaobao looked at them, the more he was angry. He said, “Your bodyguards are too rude; seeing Chinese high-ranking officials, why didn’t they dismount?” His Luocha language was grammatically upside-down, his words and sentences jumbled together; but in his anger, without waiting for the interpreter he simply blurted out in Russian.

Feodor said, “According to our humble nation’s law, when the cavalry is on duty, even seeing His Majesty the Tsar, they do not need to dismount.”

“This is Chinese territory,” Wei Xiaobao said, “When you are in China, you must follow China’s rule.”

Feodor shook his head, “I’m sorry,” he said, “Sire is mistaken. This is Russian Tsar’s territory, not Chinese territory.”

“This is clearly Chinese territory,” Wei Xiaobao insisted, “You are occupying it by force.”

“I’m sorry,” Feodor said, “Your Excellency Chinese Imperial Envoy Minister misunderstood. This is Russian Tsar’s territory. Nerchinsk was built by Russians.”

The reason the two countries were having a meeting this time was originally to draw border and strife for land, whether certain ground belong to China or Russia was the key point. The two imperial envoys had just met, they had not even entered the tent yet, the dispute had already started.

Wei Xiaobao said, “You Luocha people built a city on our Chinese land, and you want to consider it yours? Where’s the logic in that?”

“This is Russian land,” Feodor said, “Russian people built fortification in here, Chinese people did not build fortification in here; this is the proof that this is Russian land. Your Excellency Chinese Imperial Envoy Minister said this is Chinese land, I wonder based on what proof?”

The Nerchinsk region had always been no-man’s land; China-Russia, the two countries’ border had not been defined, when all is said and done, whether the land belonged to China or Russia, nobody had any proof yet.

Hearing Feodor asked such question, Wei Xiaobao could not help feeling at a loss. He wanted to win the debate; too bad his Luocha language was insufficient

to express his ideas. If regular answer already difficult to contest the question, how could he come up with a clever answer? His heart was enraged, he said, “This is Chinese land, the proofs are many.” And then he cursed using Yangzhou dialect, “Hot piece mama, f*ck your demon’s seventeen, eighteen generations ancestor.” As soon as he started, vulgar Yangzhou cussing words immediately flowed from his mouth like running water. He cursed Feodor’s great-great-grandmother, paternal great-grandmother, down to paternal grandmother, mother, older and younger sisters, maternal grandmother, maternal aunt, paternal aunt; he poured dog’s blood on everybody [i.e. curse], not one of all the female members of the Feodor family in Luocha was lucky enough to escape.

When both sides, the Chinese and Russian officials, saw the Chinese Imperial Envoy Minister was angry, nobody was not stunned. It’s just that his speech was like a string of firecrackers; forget Feodor who was unable to make head or tail of it, even Chinese officials and the interpreters of both sides were also at a loss and could not understand what he was talking about. Wei Xiaobao’s curses were entirely Yangzhou’s marketplace vulgar and low-class people’s language. Even Yangzhou’s gentlemen and ladies could not necessarily understand twenty, thirty-percent of it, much less Songgotu, Tong Guogang and the other Manchurian banner men, who had perhaps lived as military official in the north for a long time.

After raining curses for a while, Wei Xiaobao felt better; he could not help bursting in laughter. Although Feodor did not understand what he was saying, looking at his expression, he knew Wei Xiaobao was angry; but then suddenly he roared in laughter. Feodor was even more confused; he asked, “Excuse me, may I ask just now honorable envoy spoke a lengthy talk, what instruction were you giving? Honorable envoy’s words were profound, the humble one’s scholarly knowledge is shallow and crude, it was difficult for me to comprehend. Would you repeat it slowly so that I could receive the advice?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Just now I said, you were speaking unreasonably. I want to have your paternal grandmother as my sweetheart, as my wife.”

Feodor smiled and said, “My paternal grandmother was indeed a well-known beauty in the city of Moscow, she was Count Peter Marek Jankulovski’s daughter. Turns out Your Excellency Chinese High-ranking official has also heard

my paternal grandmother's fame; the humble one is extremely honored. Unfortunately, my paternal grandmother has passed away thirty-eight years ago."

Wei Xiaobao said, "In that case, I want your mother to be my sweetheart, my wife."

Feodor had an amused look on his face, he was even more delighted. He said, "My Mama is an offspring of a famous family, her skin is white and tender, she knows how to compose French poems. In Moscow, not a few princes, dukes and generals adore her very much. In Russia we have a poet, he wrote several dozen poems in praise of my Mama. Although this year she turned sixty-three, her appearance is still comparable to that of a woman in her thirties. When Your Excellency Chinese High-ranking official visit Moscow in the future, the humble one will surely introduce you to my Mama. However, I am afraid you cannot marry her. As for becoming her lover, as long as my Mama agrees, that is still possible."

According to western social custom, when people praise one's mother or wife as beautiful, not only one would not think it as inappropriate, one would be deeply honored instead; he would be more happy than if he himself was being praised. However, Wei Xiaobao erroneously thought that Feodor was afraid of him, unexpectedly he agreed to offer his own mother and was willing to take Wei Xiaobao as a stepfather. The hot anger filling his heart immediately vanished. He laughed and said, "Very good, very good. If I go to Moscow, I will definitely visit your mansion." Pulling Feodor's hand, he took him into the tent.

The assistants and attendants of both parties followed into the tent. Wei Xiaobao and his party sat on the east side, Feodor and his party sat on the west side. Feodor said, "Our humble country's Queen Regent Her Highness the Princess instructed us that this time we are drawing the boundary and discuss peace, we have great faith that both sides will be fair, neither will take advantage of the other side. For this reason our humble country proposes that we decide Heilongjiang as the border between the two countries. South of the River belong to China, north of the river belong to Russia. After the border is defined, Russian troops can no longer cross the river to the south, Chinese troops also cannot cross to the north."

Wei Xiaobao asked, “Is Yakesa south of the river, or is it north?”

“It’s north of the river,” Feodor replied, “The city was built by us, the Russian; hence it can be clearly seen that the land north of Heilongjiang belong to the Russian.”

When Wei Xiaobao heard that, his anger flared again. He asked, “There is a small hill inside the city of Yakesa; do you know the name of that hill?”

Feodor turned to ask his assistant; he replied, “It is called ‘Gaozhulue’ Mountain.”

Wei Xiaobao knew that in Luocha language, ‘gaozhulue’ means ‘deer’. He said, “In Chinese we call it Mount Luding. Do you know my nobility title?”

“Your Excellency is Duke of Luding,” Feodor replied, “In our Luocha language that would be Duke of Gaozhulue.”

“In that case,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You are deliberately making my life difficult. You clearly know that I am the Duke of Luding [deer and cauldron], yet you want to occupy my Mount Luding; won’t that mean you want me not to be Duke anymore?”

“No, no,” Feodor hastily said, “Definitely no such intention.”

Wei Xiaobao asked, “What is your nobility title?”

Feodor replied, “Humble one is the Marquis of Luomonuoshafa.”

“Very well,” Wei Xiaobao said, “In that case Luomonuoshafa can be considered Chinese territory.”

Feodor was taken aback; but then he smiled and said, “The Luomonuoshafa granted by the Emperor to the humble one is located west of Moscow; how can it be Chinese territory?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You said the territory granted to you is called Laomaolashifa [‘old cat defecating method’] …”

“Luomonuoshafa,” Feodor said.

Wei Xiaobao ignored him; he continued, “How far is it from our capital Beijing to Laomaolashifa? How many days of travel?”

Feodor said, “From Luomonuoshafa to Moscow there are five hundred *li* altogether, five days of travel. From Moscow to Beijing, it will take at least three months.”

“In that case,” Wei Xiaobao said, “From Beijing to Laomaolashifa will require three months and five days of travel. It’s very far.”

“Very far, very far!” Feodor said.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Such a distance, naturally Laomaolashifa cannot be considered Chinese territory.”

Feodor smiled and said, “Nothing is more reasonable than what the Duke has just said.”

Wei Xiaobao raised his wine cup and said, “Please drink.”

Luocha people loved wine as their lives, the wine cup was placed in front of Feodor for quite a while, the aroma of wine had already assaulted his nostrils for quite some time. But since the host did not offer a toast, he did not dare to drink. This moment as Wei Xiaobao offered him a drink, he was greatly delighted; quickly he picked up the cup and drank it in one gulp.

The Qing attendants quickly refilled his cup. They also took out vegetable and meat dishes from the food box. All dishes were the culinary arts of famous Beijing chefs. At this time Luocha country had just entered civilization not too long ago. When the Emperor Peter the Great grew up, to prevent his older sister Princess Sophia from seizing power, he had Sophia imprisoned in a convent. Later on he aggressively imported Western Europe culture. By the time Wei Xiaobao arrived in Moscow, the entire system of civilization, culture, and arts was far removed from China. As for culinary arts, even until today Russia was still 108,000 *li* away from China.

That day outside Nerchinsk Feodor has had a taste of Chinese gourmet, he was dumbstruck, he even nearly swallowed his own tongue into his belly. Wei Xiaobao accompanied him sampling every dish, and explained to him that that was shark fin, this was swallow’s nest. He also explained how to prepare duck feet into treasure dish, how to turn chicken liver into precious gourmet. Feodor was sighing in admiration; his delight knew no bound.

Wei Xiaobao casually asked, “I wonder which day did Honorable Envoy leave Moscow this time?”

Feodor replied, “Humble one received Her Highness the Princess’ imperial order on the twelfth of the fourth month, and immediately set off from Moscow.”

“Very good,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Come, let’s have another cup. Our Tong *Gongye* [duke] here, his wine capacity is very good. The two of you must toast each other.” Immediately Tong Guogang offered Feodor a toast. They drank three cups in succession.

Wei Xiaobao asked, “Did Honorable Envoy arrive in Nerchinsk this month?”

Feodor replied, “Humble one arrived on the fifteenth of last month.”

“Wow,” Wei Xiaobao exclaimed, “From the twelfth of the fourth month to the fifteenth of the seventh month; you have travelled more than three months.”

“Yes,” Feodor replied, “I have travelled more than three months. Fortunately the weather was warm, it was not a hard journey at all.”

Wei Xiaobao raised his thumb and praised, “Very good! Honorable Envoy is telling the truth; finally you admitted that Nerchinsk does not belong to Luocha country.”

After drinking more than a dozen cups of wine, Feodor was slightly drunk. “I … when did I ever admit that?” he asked in shock.

Wei Xiaobao said, “From Beijing to Laomaolashifa, it will take more than three months, a very great distance, and this Laomaolashifa is not Chinese territory. From Moscow to Nerchinsk, you also travelled for more than three months, the distance is not near either. Naturally Nerchinsk is not Russian territory.”

Feodor opened his eyes wide, momentarily he was at a loss of what to say. After staring blankly for half a day, he finally said, “Our Russia is so big; it’s not the same at all.”

“Our Great Qing is not small either,” Wei Xiaobao replied.

With a forced laugh Feodor said, “Honorable Envoy loves to joke. These … these two matters cannot … cannot be lumped together.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “You insist that Nerchinsk is Luocha country’s territory, in that case let’s swap. I am going to Moscow and ask the Princess to confer you the title Count of Nerchinsk, and confer me the title Duke of Laomaolashifa. Then this Laomaolashifa can be considered Chinese territory.”

Feodor’s face bulged red; he said anxiously, “This … how can this be?” He could not help feeling anxious because the Princess was Wei Xiaobao’s lover; if he poured a large quantity of Chinese ‘confusing soup’ by the pillow, she might agree to swap, then it would be more than awful. He also thought, “My Luomonuoshafa is a territory granted by the Emperor and has been in my family for generations, a rich land. If the Princess swapped it with Nerchinsk, this place is cold, the population is scarce, it will drive me to my death. Much less right now I am a marquis, if I become the Count of Nerchinsk, won’t that mean I am being demoted?”

Seeing Feodor’s deeply worried and sick at heart expression, Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You wanted to take my Yakesa as your territory, making me cannot be the Duke of Luding; what can I do? Without any better option I must become Duke of Laomaolashifa. Although your land’s name is so unpleasant to the ears, what ‘old cat defecating’ or ‘little dog defecating’, I have no choice but to accept it.”

Feodor considered, “You, China, want to take over my Luomonuoshafa; that would never happen. But you, Wei Xiaobao, have already received nobility title from my Russian Empire; if you want to overtake my land, it would be troublesome for me. We do not really want to keep Yakesa anyway, you have already attacked and taken it, if I want you to retreat, naturally you are unwilling.” Thereupon with a smiling face he said, “Since Yakesa is Honorable Envoy’s territory granted by the Emperor, we are willing to withdraw one step. The two countries still have Heilongjiang as our border, but Yakesa and the area within ten *li* of the city belong to China. This arrangement is completely for Honorable Envoy’s sake, the maximum concession we have ever made.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “You have been defeated in battle, yet still put on such an air. If this battle was won by you, Luocha people, I am afraid you will even want to have Beijing as your territory.” He said, “We have fought a battle. I wonder if it was you who won, or was it us?”

Feodor knitted his brows and said, “It was a tiny battle, we can’t say who won who lost. Her Highness the Princess has already issued a strict order, in order to give careful consideration to the reconciliation with your respected country, we must not open hostilities; as a result when your respected country’s troops attacked, our humble country’s officers and soldiers did not fight back. Otherwise, the situation would be greatly different.”

When Wei Xiaobao heard this, he was enraged. “So Luocha troops firearms cannot be considered fighting back?” he asked.

Feodor said, “They are merely defending our country’s land, it cannot be considered fighting back. If Luocha people really fight a battle, they would not stay still and did not attack. If the two countries are really at war, Luocha gunmen and Cossack cavalry would attack the city of Beijing.”

Wei Xiaobao was extremely furious; he thought, “Your granny, you yellow-haired demons talk big to scare people. If I am frightened by you, I will take your surname, I will become your son, my name is not Wei Xiaobao, but Xiaobao Feodor.” He had been to Moscow, so he knew that Luocha people’s custom was to have given name first and family name last, but Feodor was his given name, not family name; this fact he did not know. He said, “That’s very good! That’s great! *Hojue* [marquis] *Daren*, do you know what is the one thing that my heart desires the most?”

“I do not know,” Feodor replied, “Please advise.”

“Currently I am a duke,” Wei Xiaobao said, “But in my heart I hope for promotion to the nobility, to become a *Junwang*, a *Qinwang*[34] .”

Feodor thought, “Promotion to the nobility, who does not want it?” He smiled and said, “*Gongjue* [duke] *Daren* is able and efficient, plus your respected country’s Emperor dotes on and trusts you; you only need to render several more merits, you will be conferred the title *Junwang* or *Qinwang*. I have no doubt about it. The humble one earnestly and sincerely wishes you will succeed earlier.”

Wei Xiaobao lowered his voice, “This matter can only succeed if you help me, otherwise I am afraid I would fail.”

Feodor was surprised. “Humble one will definitely help,” he said, “But I wonder how can I help?”

Wei Xiaobao leaned over to put his mouth near Feodor’s ear and whispered, “According to our Great Qing rule, only after achieving great victory in battle and rendering military service will one be conferred the title *Wang* [king]. Right now our country is peaceful, there is no disturbance, all rebellions are already suppressed. In the next twenty, thirty years, I am afraid there won’t be any battle to fight. My desire to be a *Wang* would be very difficult to achieve. This time we are drawing boundary and negotiating peace, you do not want to yield at all; it would be best if you send your troops to challenge us, to kill one or two of our high-ranking ministers in here. Our two countries will fight a war, you send your gunmen and Cossack cavalry to attack Beijing. We make an alliance with Sweden, have them send their troops to attack Moscow. We kill until the sand surging on, until the blood flow becomes a river; at that time I can be a *Wang*. Please, please, by all means, help me in this big effort. But don’t talk too loud, don’t let others hear it.”

The more Feodor listened to him, the more he was surprised; he thought that this youngster was too brazen, in order to be conferred the title ‘King’, he did not hesitate to provoke both countries to war, he even wanted to form an alliance with Sweden. If this war really broke, although in the future who won who lost were still unknown, but right this moment the other side was numerous while my side was few, there was a wide gap between the two sides’ military power, right away his defeat was guaranteed. In his heart he quite regretted that he had made the threat earlier by saying those things about gunmen and Cossack cavalry attacking the city of Beijing. This youngster thought it was real, not only he was no afraid, he was delighted instead. This time Feodor felt like he had outsmarted himself. However, if he exposed any hint that he was intimidated, he knew Wei Xiaobao would look down on him. Momentarily he was at a loss of what to say.

Wei Xiaobao continued, “Moscow is too far from here, if the Qing troops is going to attack, in all honesty I do not have any confidence we would win; perhaps we will be defeated and then His Majesty will blame me instead …”

Hearing this, Feodor saw an opportunity to take a turn for the better; his face

lit up as he busily said, “Yes, yes. If I may offer a bit of advice, Your Excellency had better not take the risks.”

“I only want to render some merit so that I could be conferred the title ‘King’, it’s not that I want to wipe out Luocha country,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Your respected country is so big, I don’t have the capability to wipe it out.” Feodor repeatedly agreed.

Lowering his voice again Wei Xiaobao said, “How about this: you send your troops to attack Beijing, I will send my troops to attack Nerchinsk. The two of us brothers attack our respective target; conquering Beijing will be your merit, conquering Nerchinsk would be mine. Don’t you think this strategy is wonderful?”

Feodor groaned inwardly; in his hands he only had a little more than two thousand cavalry, even to attack Yakesa he was powerless, much less to attack Beijing. He thought that if he did not admit he was wrong, perhaps this youngster would turn pretense into reality. Without any choice he forced a laugh and said, “*Gongjue Daren*, please do not take offense. Just now I said gunmen and Cossack cavalry would attack the city of Beijing, you must not think it was the truth. I made a mistake, and I want to take it back completely.”

“Something that you have said, how could you take it back?” Wei Xiaobao asked in surprise.

Feodor said, “Humble one was only provoking *Gongjue Daren*, please forget that I ever said those words.”

“In that case,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Luocha troops will not attack Beijing?”

“We won’t,” Feodor said, “Definitely we won’t.”

“And you won’t take over my Yakesa either?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

Feodor shook his head, “We won’t, we won’t,” he said.

Wei Xiaobao said, “How about Nerchinsk? You decided you won’t dare to covet it anymore?”

Feodor was startled. He said, “This Nerchinsk is our Tsar’s territory, *Gongjue Daren* please forgive me.”

Wei Xiaobao thought, “Suzhou people say ‘the whole sky demand for value, the whole earth still has to pay’. I asked him for Nerchinsk, he does not want to hand it over. I want to see what he would say if I ask for the land west of Nerchinsk.” He said, “This time we negotiate peace, we have to have fair dealing, cheating neither old nor young, neither side can suffer any loss; is that right?”

Feodor nodded. “That’s right,” he said, “Both countries are defining the boundary, establishing lasting peace.”

“That’s very good,” Wei Xiaobao said, “If we draw the border too close to Moscow, you Luocha people will suffer loss. If we draw the border too close to Beijing, we Chinese will suffer loss. The best method is to draw it right in the middle; one half equal to zero point five.”

“What does ‘one half equal to zero point five’ mean?” Feodor asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, “From Moscow to Beijing is approximately three months; is that right?”

“Right,” Feodor replied.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Three months divided by two, is what?”

Feodor did not understand his intention, he simply replied, “Is one and a half month.”

“That’s right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “We don’t need to talk too much. Everybody go back to our own capital. And then from Moscow you set off to the east, from Beijing I set off to the west. We all travel for one and a half month, naturally we will come across each other, right?”

“Yes,” Feodor replied, “But I still don’t know *Daren*’s intention.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This is the most impartial way of defining the border. The place where we meet is the border between the two countries. That place is one and a half month away from Moscow, it is also one and a half month from Beijing. You do not take any advantage, and we do not suffer any loss. However, our recent victory would be considered void. In the end you are still having the advantage, are you not?”

Feodor’s entire face flushed red. “This … this … this …” he said, while standing

up.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You also think that this way is extremely fair, don’t you?”

Feodor shook his hand at once. “No, no!” he said, “Absolutely not. If we draw the border this way, won’t that mean half of the Russian Empire will fall into your hands?”

“Can’t be half,” Wei Xiaobao said, “West of your Moscow, there are a lot of land. Those areas need not be divided evenly with China; why be so polite?”

Feodor was so angry that his beard was sticking out. After quite a while, he finally said, “*Gongjue Daren*, if you sincerely want to negotiate peace, you ought to offer fair and reasonable proposition. This … this kind of method, in which you want half of our country, you are … you are bullying us too much.” Panting with rage, he sat back down on his chair. ‘Bang!’ he landed so hard that the chair was creaking incessantly.

In a low voice Wei Xiaobao said, “Actually, negotiating peace and drawing boundaries is not so much fun, I like the idea of us fighting a war first. What do you say?”

Feodor panting for breath continuously; he could not refrain from slapping the table and standing up. “If you want to fight then let’s fight!” he shouted on top of his lungs. But then he thought that if the war continued, the aftermath was indeed too grave; his side was completely without hope that they would win. He had no choice but struggling hard to restraint himself and keep silent.

Wei Xiaobao suddenly reached out and slapped the table. “I got it, I got it!” he said with a laugh, “I know another fair way.” Putting his hand into his pocket, he took out two dice, blew it, and tossed the dice onto the table. “You don’t want to fight a war, you don’t want to go fifty-fifty either. Let us throw the dice; let’s just say that there is a ten thousand *li* of road from Beijing to Moscow, we divide it into ten equal parts, each part is one thousand *li*. You and I will throw the dice for ten rounds, for each round, the stake is one thousand *li* of land. If your luck is good and you won all ten rounds, then all the land up to Beijing’s city wall will belong to Luocha country.”

“Humph,” Feodor said, “And if I lose all ten rounds?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Why don’t you tell me?”

Feodor said, “Could it be that east of Moscow, ten thousand *li* of rivers and mountains, will belong to China?”

“I am guessing that your luck will not be that bad,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I can’t imagine that in ten rounds you won’t win at least one round. For each round you win, you preserve a thousand *li* of land, two rounds two thousand *li*; if you win six rounds, you already gain advantage.”

“What advantage?” Feodor angrily said, “East of Moscow, six thousand *li* is originally Russian territory. Seven thousand *li*, eight thousand *li*, are also Russian territory.”

While Wei Xiaobao and Feodor were having these incessant exchanges, on the side, the Dutch clergyman also constantly translated it into Chinese in low voice. Tong Guogang, Songgotu and the others listened attentively. At first they thought that Feodor was capricious, harsh and unreasonable; unexpectedly he demanded that Heilongjiang to be the boundary between the two countries. How could he force China to give up Liaodong, which was the Manchuria’s dragon rising place? In their hearts they were quite angry. Afterwards they heard how Wei Xiaobao conveyed his voracious desire to fight a war to establish meritorious service so that he could be conferred the title ‘King’, and the Russian envoy appeared to show strength while weak inside; he did not dare to respond. And then they heard how Wei Xiaobao was rambling incoherently, about swapping the territory granted by their respective emperor, how he proposed to go fifty-fifty, and lastly how to throw the dice to define the boundary, with one thousand *li* of land as the stake for each round. They knew he was talking rubbish, the opposite party could not possibly agree to this. But they could also see that Feodor’s arrogance has been greatly dampened; they thought, “Luocha people are harsh and unreasonable, certainly it is a fully justified reputation. If we negotiate with them in deadly earnest, we will definitely be put in a disadvantageous position. His Majesty sent Wei *Gongjue* to be in charge of this negotiation, he really knew how to use a man according to his ability. This foreign demon is a barbarian, only a marketplace hoodlum without learning or skills like Wei *Gongjue* can oppose him with equal harshness, fighting barbarian with a barbarian.”

Although on their faces Tong Guogang, Songgotu and the other ministers were very respectful and courteous toward Wei Xiaobao, in the bottom of their hearts they actually looked down on him; they all felt that he was no more than a clown, a court jester whom the Emperor doted on. His day-to-day speech and action was oftentimes shameful; he was clever, but clearly had no sense of shame, one who think highly of himself. This time he was appointed envoy minister to stop the enemy at the banquet table, they thought it would be difficult for their country to avoid humiliation in front of a foreign nation, to cause their country to lose face. Who would have imagined that the Emperor actually had the capacity to judge character and utilize people to their ability? If he did not send this mischievous character on this particular mission, among the civil and military ministers in the Manchurian Qing's court, there was really no other man who would be able to accomplish it. The more the crowd of ministers listened, the more they admired him; they felt that the Emperor was extremely wise and farsighted; far from the reach of anybody among the high-ranking ministers.

Listening to this point, Songgotu suddenly interjected, "Moscow is actually our China's territory."

The Dutch priest translated the sentence. Feodor was stunned; he thought, "This youngster is babbling nonsense; that is still all right. But you, an old man, also shamelessly talk drivel? You said our country's capital, Moscow is your China's territory?"

Songgotu said, "According to Honorable Envoy's argument, as long as Luocha people temporarily occupy an area, that land will be considered Luocha country's territory; is that right?"

"Isn't that so?" Feodor said, "Honorable Envoy said that Moscow is Chinese territory, hey hey, that … that is a joke, a ridiculous argument."

Songgotu said, "Luocha country's people consist of Great Russia, Minor Russia, White Russia, also Cossacks, Tatars, and the other. Those are all Luocha people."

"Absolutely right," Feodor said, "Our country's territory is vast, the people are numerous."

Songgotu said, "The ethnicities of our country's common people are also

numerous. We have Manchu people, Mongolian, Han, Miao, Hui, Tibetan, and so on."

"Exactly," Feodor said, "Russia is a great country, China is also a great country. Our two countries are the biggest countries of the present age."

Songgotu said, "The bodyguards that Honorable Envoy brings this time seem to be Cossack cavalry."

Feodor smiled and said, "Cossack cavalry's bravery is unequalled, they are the most formidable warriors in the world."

Songgotu said, "Is Cossack cavalry a lot more formidable than Russians?"

"We can't say that," Feodor replied, "The Cossacks are Luocha's common people, Russians are also Luocha's common people; there is not the least bit difference between the two. Just like Manchu people are Chinese, Mongolians, Hans, are also Chinese; there is not the least bit difference."

Songgotu nodded. "That is so," he said, "Consequently, Moscow is our Chinese territory."

Listening to this point, Wei Xiaobao still did not understand Songgotu's intention; he was fully aware that Moscow was tens of thousand *li* away, definitely it was not Chinese territory. But he saw that Songgotu seemed to be pressing the issue, and that Feodor's veins were bulging on his forehead, his countenance alternated between ashen and deep red, he appeared to be very angry that he had turned mad. Thereupon Wei Xiaobao interrupted, "Moscow is Chinese territory, that is absolutely true. Chinese Emperor is magnanimous, he let you did like Liu Bei borrowed Jingzhou, but after borrowing it he never returned it back."

Naturally Feodor did not know anything about Liu Bei borrowing Jingzhou, he just felt that these Chinese barbarians did not speak with reasons, they talked not as civilized people. He said with a cold laugh, "I previously heard that China was long-established, that Chinese people were very well-learned; who would have thought … hey, hey, you are experts in talking drivel without any proof."

Songgotu said, "Honorable Envoy is a high-ranking minister of Luocha country, even if you did not have much learning, but you would know Luocha country's

history, I presume?”

Feodor said, “Our country’s history is well-written as a proof, everything is written down clearly, not at all like other people speak thoughtlessly and casually.”

“That’s very good,” Songgotu said, “In the past China had an emperor, called Genghis Khan …”

As soon as Feodor heard the name ‘Genghis Khan’, four characters [cheng ji si han], he could not help blurting out ‘Aiyo’, while in his heart he groaned, “Bad, bad! Why was I so muddleheaded that I completely forgot about this big matter?”

Songgotu continued, “This Genghis Khan, in China we call him Yuan *Taizu* [lit. grand ancestor], because he was the Great Ancestor who founded our China’s Yuan Dynasty. He was a Mongol; Honorable Envoy has just said that Manchus, Mongols, Hans, are all Chinese, there is not the least bit difference. At that time Mongolian cavalry launched military expedition to the west, and have had quite a few major battles with the Luocha troops. Your respected country’s history books have the proof, everything is written down clearly, it’s not something that other people speak thoughtlessly and casually. These several battles, I wonder if they were won by us, the Chinese, or were they won by your respected country, Luocha people?”

Feodor was speechless. After quite a while, he finally replied, “The Mongols won.”

“And Mongols are Chinese!” Songgotu said.

Feodor stared blankly for half a day, finally he slowly nodded his head.

Wei Xiaobao did not know that there was such thing in the past; when he heard that, immediately his spirit received a big boost. “Chinese and Luocha people fought a war, undoubtedly Luocha people would lose. Your ability is a bit inferior, next time we fight another war, we only need to use one hand. Otherwise, the difference between the two sides is too far, the war would not have been fun to fight.”

Feodor glowered at him; he mused, “If not for Her Highness the Princess has

issued a strict order that this time we could only use peaceful method and not use force, just based on this word of yours that you are insulting us, Luocha people, I would have challenged you for a duel."

With a giggle Wei Xiaobao asked Songgotu, "Suo *Dage*, how did Genghis Khan defeat Luocha troops?"

Songgotu said, "In those days Genghis Khan deployed two ten-thousand men companies on the military expedition to the west, altogether there were only twenty thousand men and horses. They attacked and inflicted heavy damage to more than a hundred thousand men Luocha coalition army. Genghis Khan's grandson, Batu was also a great hero, his army defeated the Luocha troops utterly, and he occupied Moscow, striking all the way to Poland, Hungary, and crossed the Danube. For the next several hundred years, Luocha's princes, dukes, and the nobles had to obey us, the Chinese. At that time our Chinese Mongolian heroes lived in gold-inlaid tents. Moscow's princes and dukes oftentimes had to come and kowtow to Chinese people. When the Chinese said they wanted to spank these people' bottom, they would simply spank their bottoms. When they said they wanted to slap, they simply slapped, the Luocha people would still giggle and cry out that the beating was good, the beating was too few. Otherwise, he could not be a duke anymore."

(Book note: In 1238AD Mongolian Great General Batu took over Moscow and Kiev. From 1240 to 1480AD, for 240 years the Mongolians ruled Russian vast territory, they established the 'Golden Horde' [lit. golden tent Khanate]. The 'Encyclopedia Britannica' has the following entry on the subject of Russia: 'The Princes and Dukes of Moscow must go to Sarai city at the mouth of Volga River to have an audience with the Mongolian Khan in his golden tent before they could receive the nobility title. They had to endure many different kinds of humiliation. After paying their respect and returning to Moscow they then could collect taxes from the Tatars and could push around the neighboring smaller states' feudal vassals.')[35]

Hearing this, Wei Xiaobao was radiant with delight; he struck the table and exclaimed happily, "Dear dragon of the east! Turns out Moscow indeed belongs to China."

Feodor's face alternated between green and white. Songgotu was stating a historical fact, it was not a false statement at all, it's just that Luocha people previously did not admit Mongolians as Chinese. This time, however, Mongolia indeed belonged to China, hence the inference that Moscow also belonged to China was not completely baseless.

"Your Excellency Marquis," Wei Xiaobao said, "I'll say this discussion about defining border need not be continued. Please go back and ask the Princess when she is going to return Moscow to China. I will also go back to Beijing, to procure leather and gold to manufacture golden tent, and then tear down Kremlin Palace and erect the golden tent on its place, and ask Princess Sophia to sleep in it. Ha ha, ha ha …!"

Hearing to this point, Feodor could no longer show restraint; he sprang up and rushed out of the tent. They heard his angry voice like thunder, shouting order and issuing his instruction, followed by the sound of hoof beats. More than two hundred horses rushed over. Wei Xiaobao was shocked. "Aiyo!" he cried out, "These hairy people are going to attack, we'd better run for our lives."

Tong Guogang had been through many battles, he was completely calm. "Wei *Gongjue* don't panic," he shouted, "If he wants to fight then let's fight; who is afraid of him?"

They heard outside the tent the Cossack cavalry shouted together. Wei Xiaobao was so scared that his entire body trembled. He ducked down and hid underneath the table. Tong Guogang and Songgotu looked at each other in dismay; in their hearts they could not help but panicking as well.

The tent curtain was opened, a general strode in, it was none other than the commander of the rattan shield troops, Lin Xingzhu. He said in a loud and clear voice, "Reporting to Grand Marshal …" but he did not see the Grand Marshal.

From underneath the table Wei Xiaobao said, "I … I … I am here. Everybody quickly … quickly run for your lives."

Lin Xingzhu squatted down to speak to the Grand Marshal Wei underneath the table, "Reporting to Grand Marshal: Luocha troops' prestige is impressive, but we must not show weakness; if we have to fight then let's damn fight."

Hearing he spoke with confidence, Wei Xiaobao's spirit calmed down;

immediately he crawled out of the table. Just now he hastily took refuge under the table, but actually he was not being a coward blindly. Patting his chest he said, “Right, if we want to fight then let’s fight their grannies. *Laozi* being a soldier, bravely go … bravely go not … not in the front. No, that’s not right! Bravely go to show my worth.” (He wanted to say, ‘Bravely go to show one’s worth, not bravely go is of little value’.)

Pulling Lin Xingzhu’s hand he strode out the tent. As soon as he was outside, he saw two hundred sixty Cossack cavalry raising high their long sabers, riding on their fine horses, surrounding the tent to show off their military strength, speeding along in circles around the tent. Feodor shouted his command, the cavalry rushed away from the tent. They stopped approximately two hundred *zhang* away and arranged themselves in formation; two hundred sixty riders in ten neat and tidy rows. Suddenly they shouted together and rushed toward Wei Xiaobao.

“Mother!” Wei Xiaobao cried out, and turned around, ready to dash into the tent. But then he thought, “If the Luocha demons want to kill me, even if I hide inside the tent, they will still grab me. I must not lose this face.” His body was trembling, his face was the color of the earth, but unexpectedly he stood upright and did not move.

Lin Xingzhu thundered, “Rattan shield troops, protect the Grand Marshal! Come over!”

The two hundred sixty rattan shield troops responded in chorus, “Yes.” Quickly they moved and stood in front of Wei Xiaobao and the other high-ranking ministers.

From his boot Wei Xiaobao pulled his dagger, thinking, “If Luocha demons really want to resort to violence, everybody will fight desperately together, *yi qi* cannot be disregarded.” He rushed over in front of Songgotu and called out, “Suo *Dage*, don’t be afraid, I will protect you.”

Songgotu was a civil officer, he was already scared that his body and soul separated. He said, “I completely … completely rely on *Xiongdi*.”

They saw ten rows of Cossack cavalry charged swiftly toward them. When they were about five *zhang* away from the Qing troops, the captain in the front

waved his long saber in the air and shouted his order. The cavalry straightened their backs and pulled the reins, two hundred sixty horses immediately stopped. The captain shouted his order again, the cavalry divided into two groups, a hundred and thirty riders split to the north, the other hundred and thirty riders went to the south. After speeding along for several dozen *zhang*, they made a big circle and returned to their original position, about two hundred *zhang* away from the tent and stopped. The formation was strictly maintained, they were not in disorder at all. These two hundred sixty men and horses were like one man one horse, indeed they were a highly trained group of elite troops.

Feodor laughed aloud and cried in a loud voice, "*Gongjue Daren*, what do you think of our Luocha troops?"

It was only then did Wei Xiaobao know that he was merely showing off their military prowess. In his heart he was furious. "That is no more than circus monkey stuff," he cried, "In a real battle, it will be completely useless."

Feodor angrily said, "We'll do it again!" In his heart he said, "This time let them charge right in front of you, I want to see if you are going to run away or not." He called out, "Knock the Chinese troops' hat off their heads."

The Cossack cavalry captain shouted his order, two hundred sixty cavalry charged forward again.

"Chop the horses' legs!" Wei Xiaobao called out.

"Receive the order!" Lin Xingzhu responded. "Chop the horses' legs! Don't hurt the people!"

They heard the thundering hoof beats, two hundred sixty horses were getting closer and closer, Cossack cavalry's long sabers flickered under the sunlight, soon they were only about thirty *zhang* away, then twenty *zhang*, ten *zhang* … and still they did not stop. When they were about four, five *zhang* away, Lin Xingzhu shouted, "Roll down, move, move, move!" Two hundred and sixty rattan shield troops leaped forward and rolled on the ground.

These two hundred and sixty men were under Lin Xingzhu's personal training, they were expert in Di Tang Saber Technique; their movement and saber playing had been trained to perfection. As they rolled forward, the rattan shield protected their bodies, but did not reveal the least bit of saber's glitter.

The Cossack cavalry suddenly saw the Qing troops rolled on the ground, they were all stunned. The troops defending Yakesa had suffered defeat under the rattan shield troops' hands, but those defenders were either dead or taken captive; they were completely wiped out. The Cossack cavalry was fresh from Moscow, escorting Feodor to the east; they had never seen the rattan shield troops' movement, they all thought that by rolling around on the ground, you look really silly, so don't blame us if you are trampled to your death by the horses.

In an instant the first row of cavalry clashed with the rattan shield troops. Suddenly the horses neighed and fell down one after another. The rattan shield troops brandished their sharp blades, one saber sweep chopped one or two horse's legs. With the rattan shield protecting their bodies, they continuously rolled around and chopped more horses. Amidst the cry of Luocha troops and the neigh of their horses, the rattan shield troops already swept pass all ten rows, chopping a hundred seventy or a hundred eighty horses' legs. And then they all stood in formation behind the Cossack cavalry. Under Lin Xingzhu's leadership the rattan shield troops then ran quickly back and lined up in front of Wei Xiaobao. From the two hundred sixty men, only about a dozen or so suffered bruises from the horses' kicks, but their injuries were light, the injured bore their pain silently as they stood in formation.

More than half of the two hundred and sixty Cossack cavalry were thrown down from their horses, some were crushed by their own mounts, they were lying on the ground, groaning and crying out in distress. Only several dozen men still stayed on their horses as they ran far away. Most of them stood on the ground, at a loss of what to do. All their lives these cavalry troops spent their time on the horseback; only by riding their mounts would these men be swift, fierce and brave. With their feet on the ground, they were like fish out of the water, without their mounts they had nothing to rely on.

Wei Xiaobao called out, "Divide the troops, surround the high-ranking Luocha officials."

Lin Xingzhu shouted his order, immediately a hundred rattan shield troops surrounded Feodor and the others, a dozen or so Luocha ministers, a hundred broadswords formed a large blade ring, the blades were facing inward; just with

one order these hundred broadswords would press in, Feodor and the others would definitely turn into Luocha meatloaf.

Seeing this situation, the deputy captain of the Cossack cavalry dashed forward and shouted, “Must not harm people, must not harm people!”

Wei Xiaobao turned his head around and spoke to Shuang’er, who was wearing personal guard uniform, “Go seal their acupoints.”

“Alright!” Shuang’er replied, and leaped out behind the Cossack cavalry captain; stretching out her finger she sealed the acupoint on his lower back, and then she also sealed the deputy captain’s acupoint.

A junior captain put his hand into his pocket and pulled a short gun. “Don’t move!” he shouted.

Shuang’er grabbed a Luocha soldier by her side and held him in front of her body. With the soldier as a shield, she pressed several steps forward. The junior captain did not dare to open fire. “Don’t move!” he shouted again.

Shuang’er threw the Luocha soldier toward him. The junior captain was startled; he dodged sideways. Shuang’er leaped forward, and sealed the acupoints on his chest and waist, and then she grabbed the gun in his hand, pointed it to the sky, and then ‘bang!’ it went off.

Wei Xiaobao shouted loudly, “Well, well, both sides have agreed not to carry firearms; you Luocha demons cannot be trusted at all.” Taking several steps forward, he said to Feodor, “Hey, tell your men to throw their weapons down, get down from their horses, and stand in line. Those who carry firearms must hand it over.”

Feodor knew he could not defy, hence he issued the order; the Cossack cavalry had no choice but to throw down their sabers and swords, dismounted from their horses and stood in formation. Wei Xiaobao ordered the two hundred and sixty rattan shield troops to surround and searched the Luocha troops. From two hundred and sixty men, they found more than two hundred and eighty short guns; some men carried two.

The Luocha troops standing guard at Nerchinsk city wall saw the turn of events, they advanced slowly. The Qing troops on the east also slowly moving

forward. When the distance between them was about several hundred steps, both armies arranged themselves in formation, facing each other. Seeing their commander-in-chief was surrounded, the Luocha troops could only groan inwardly, they did not dare to move further.

Wei Xiaobao asked Feodor, "*Hojue Daren*, what did you bring that many firearms for?"

Feodor hung his head and said, "I am so sorry, my bodyguards did not obey the order, they secretly carried firearms. When we get back I will severely punish them."

Wei Xiaobao called out, "Rattan shield troops, open your clothes, let them see if you are carrying firearms or not?"

Two hundred and sixty rattan shield troops tossed their shields aside, with their left hands they undid their clothes, with their right hands they held the broadsword high to guard against the enemy making a move. Everybody opened their clothes, exposing their chests, and hopped several times. Sure enough, nobody carried any firearm. Feodor was very ashamed, he hung his head low and did not say anything.

Wei Xiaobao shouted in Luocha language, "Luocha people have no sense of shame, strip their clothes and pants, see if they still conceal firearms or not?"

Feodor was greatly alarmed; he hastily said, "*Gongjue Daren*, please show mercy. If you … you strip my pants, I … I will have no choice but to commit suicide."

"This stripping of pants must be done," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Feodor said, "Please forgive us just this one time, in other matters we will obey whatever you tell us to do."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Just now your cavalry rushed over and scared me that I hid under the table; the *Gongjue Daren* has lost a lot of face. What do you do about that?"

Feodor thought, "You are the one who is a coward, what can I do about it?" But since the Qing troops' blade flickered around him, he had no choice but to say, "The humble one is ready to pay for the damage."

Wei Xiaobao was secretly delighted; he thought, “Luocha bamboo pole is coming.” [See note 11, Chapter 10 on ‘bamboo pole’.] Momentarily he could not think of what he wanted Feodor to give him; he turned his head around and issued an order, “Cut the belts of all Luocha high-ranking officials and lowly soldiers’ pants.”

“Receive the order!” the rattan shield troops shouted. They lifted their blades, insert it into Luocha men’s waist with the sharp of the blade facing outward, and pulled. The belts were immediately cut. From Feodor down, all Luocha men were scared out of their wits. With both hands they held their pants tight, for fear they would fall.

Wei Xiaobao roared in laughter. He issued another order, “Escort the Luocha people back to our camp in triumph!”

By this time all Luocha officers and men were worried that their pants would drop down, nobody dared to resist; they followed the Qing troops marching to the east.

Tong Guogang said with a laugh, “Grand Marshal Wei’s brilliant scheme is indeed admirable. Cutting their belts is the same as instantly tying the hands of two hundred and sixty Luocha officers and men behind their back.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Luocha men are very afraid to take off their pants, on the contrary, Luocha women are not afraid at all; isn’t that very strange?” Tong Guogang and the others laughed at this sexual innuendo.

The party met with the main army. The Qing troops pushed out more than four hundred cannon and took off the cannon covering, the cannon’s muzzles were trained at the Luocha troops. Although Luocha country’s firearms were sharp, in their mission to the east this time, their preparation was not as good as Kangxi, who had half the number of cannon available in the entire country sent to Nerchinsk. Therefore, in term of firepower, the Qing army was several times more superior. When the Luocha troops suddenly saw these many cannon, they all looked at each other with fear on their faces. Their commander hastily issued an order to return to the city and close the city gate tightly. The Qing army did not continue besieging the city either.

In the meantime the Cossack cavalry captain, deputy captain, and the junior

captain's acupoints were still sealed by Shuang'er, they were unable to move a single step. The three men were standing on the open space like clay figurine or wooden statue. When the Luocha troops returned and entered Nerchinsk, they were in such a hurry that they did not pay attention. By the time they climbed the city wall and looked, they were astonished, but nobody dared to get out of the city to help. After about an hour, they saw the three men were still unmoving, so then a company of Cossack cavalry went out of the city to rescue them. But they only walked a dozen of *zhang* or so, the Qing army's cannon were fired several times. The general defending the city hastily ordered the trumpeter to sound the bugle to order the cavalry to return to the city; he was afraid the Qing army would attack so that the rescuing team would also fall into their trap.

On top of the city wall, under the city wall, the two armies watched from a distance the three men were still standing motionless in a rather weird posture. The Qing troops roared in laughter. The Luocha troops were overwhelmed with shock. Wei Xiaobao invited Feodor and his delegation to enter the command tent and have everybody sat separately as the hosts and guests. Wei Xiaobao only chuckled without saying anything.

"*Gongjue Daren*," Feodor angrily said, "You don't need to play tricks with me. If you want to kill me then just kill me."

Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, "You and I are friends, why would I want to kill you? Let us continue the talk about defining the border." He thought that since the ministers, the opposite party's delegation to discuss the border had fallen into their hands, no matter what condition he raised, it would be hard for the opposite party to refuse.

Who would have thought that Feodor was born from a military family, he was extremely unyielding. Boldly he said, "I am your prisoner, not a diplomatic envoy of equal standing to discuss the border. I am under your threats, any talk cannot continue. Even if the talk continued and the treaty signed, it cannot take effect."

"Why can't it take effect?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

Feodor said, "Because all clause are decided by you, what is there to talk about? You cannot force me to negotiate with you."

"Why can't I force you to negotiate with me?" Wei Xiaobao asked.

“I will never surrender,” Feodor replied, “Brandish your blade and kill me, shoot me with your gun, feel free to make your move.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “What if I have people strip your pants?”

Feodor was enraged; he suddenly stood up and shouted, “You …” He only said one word, ‘you’, his pants suddenly slipped down; hastily he reached down and grabbed them. His belt was cut off, when he sat down, he did not need to hold his pants, but in rage he stood up and forgot about it. Fortunately he managed to grab his pants promptly that he did not make a fool of himself. All the ministers and attendants on Qing’s side in the tent roared in laughter.

Feodor was so angry that his face turned snow white, his hands held on to his pants, his expression looked extremely awkward. He wanted to make a vehement speech, too bad he could not brandish his hands to add emphasis; no matter how passionate he spoke, it would be bound to be limited. “Pei!” he spat angrily and sat down. “I am His Majesty the Tsar of Luocha country’s ambassador, you cannot humiliate me,” he said.

“You may rest assured that I will not humiliate you,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Let us discuss the national boundary nicely.”

Feodor took out a handkerchief from his pocket, wrapped it around his own mouth, and tied it behind his back; the meaning was that he was resolved not to talk. Wei Xiaobao ordered his personal guards to get some fine wine and delicious food and set it up on the table. He poured a cup of wine and said with a laugh, “Please, please, don’t be polite.”

Smelling the aroma of the food and wine, Feodor was unable to resist; he untied the handkerchief, picked up the cup and drank. Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Marquis, you are using your mouth?”

Feodor continued drinking wine and eating the food, but did not answer, stating that his mouth was only used to eat and drink, and not for anything else. Wei Xiaobao repeatedly urged him to drink more wine, thinking that if he could get him drunk, perhaps he could get him to surrender. Who would have thought that even after drinking a dozen or more cups of wine, eating several chunks of beef, he used the handkerchief to wipe his mouth, and tied it again over his mouth? Seeing that, Wei Xiaobao was quite amused. He ordered his personal

guards to take Feodor to a tent in the back to let him rest, and to guard him well; while he discussed how to deal with this matter with Songgotu, Tong Guogang and the others.

Tong Guogang said, “This man is so stubborn, he resolutely refuse to talk peace in our army camp. But I am not willing to let him go back to his camp.”

Songgotu said, “We can detain him for ten days, eight days, every day we slaughter one Luocha demon in his presence, I want to see if he will still be that stubborn.”

Tong Guogang said, “If we hound him to death, inevitably this matter will be brought to deadlock. We use military force to capture the opposite side’s minister to negotiate peace, perhaps His Majesty would put the blame on us.”

“Tong *Gongye* [duke] is right,” Songgotu said, “Blindly using force on him is not the way to deal with him.”

After long deliberation, the high-ranking ministers still could not come up with a wise policy. Today they were able to capture Feodor; although it was a victory, it was not the original idea of the Emperor in seeking peace. It could be said that they had violated the imperial court’s project of paramount importance, that they had handled this matter poorly; it was possible that the table would turn and they would be charged with the serious crime of disobeying the imperial edict.

At the end of the deliberation, all the ministers advised Wei Xiaobao to release Feodor. “Very well!” Wei Xiaobao said, “Let’s detain him for one night, early morning tomorrow we will let him go.”

Returning to his tent, he paced back and forth while considering this matter. Suddenly he recalled something, “Earlier I copied Zhuge Liang burning down the Coiling Snake Valley, and achieved great victory by taking down Yakesa. *Laozi* can also copy Zhou Yu’s trick in the play ‘Meeting of Heroes’.” After thinking about it for a while, he came up with an idea.

Returning to the command tent, he invited the translator, the Dutch missionary to come over and had a serious discussion with him. Wei Xiaobao asked him to teach him some twenty Luocha sentences, and he learned to say those sentences correctly. He also summoned four high-ranking military officers,

along with the captain of his personal guards, and instructed them to do certain things. Everybody received the order and left.

Feodor was sleeping in a tent on the back. Different thoughts surging in his mind; there was fright, and then there was remorse, how could he sleep? He tossed and turned until midnight, and then he heard snores like thunder coming from the entrance to the tent, unexpectedly the three personal guards who were on guard duty had fallen asleep.

Feodor thought, “If I don’t agree to the Chinese barbarians’ terms, it would be difficult for me to escape. If tomorrow I provoke that little demon and he gets angry and kills me, won’t I die in injustice? Heaven helps me that these three guards are asleep, why not take chances and escape now?” Quietly he got up from the bed, untied the leather strap across his back and wrapped it around his waist to prevent his pants from falling down, and then he tiptoed to the tent entrance. He saw the three personal guards were leaning against the tent posts and were sleeping soundly.

He reached out toward a personal guard’s waist with the intention to pull the saber hanging on the guard’s waist. The guard suddenly sneezed. Feodor jumped in fright and hastily pulled his hand back. After a while and he still did not see any movement, he went for another guard’s saber. The personal guard suddenly stretched out and mumbled some indistinct words. Feodor did not dare to tarry anymore, he quietly went out of the tent, fortunately the three personal guards neither saw nor sensed that he was gone.

Once Feodor was outside, he hid in the shadows; he saw the night guards on patrol with lanterns in one hand and saber in the other. There were patrolling soldiers to his north, east and south, only the west side was pitch-black, obviously there was no one on that side. Thereupon step by step he crept to the west, each time he saw a patrolling guard, he shrank behind a tent. Luckily all the way to the west the terrain was flat with nothing obstructing him.

He had just reached a large tent when suddenly he saw from the west a group of patrolling soldiers approaching. Feodor hastily crouched behind the tent. He heard someone inside was speaking; surprisingly the man was speaking in Luocha language. He heard the man said, “*Gongjue Daren* is determined to attack Moscow, it is not impossible, it’s just that it’s too far, it is really

dangerous."

Feodor was greatly alarmed. At once he crouched even lower to open a corner of the tent and looked inside. Once he got a good look, his heart was thumping madly. Inside, the tent was as bright as daytime. Wei Xiaobao was wearing full military attire, he was sitting in the middle, on either side of him stood a dozen or so high-ranking military officers, and further down there were several dozens of personal guards with broadsword in their hands. Standing by the table in front of Wei Xiaobao was the Dutch missionary, who acted as their interpreter earlier, talking to him.

He heard Wei Xiaobao spoke in Luocha language, "We drink wine and chat with Feodor in here, everything is fake, not real. We can talk with him for a month, two months, speaking back and forth, everything is fake, while our main force stealthily advancing to the west. Let Luocha princess receive that fool, Feodor's report, constantly, letting her know that we are still talking, then she won't be afraid, let her dance and go to bed with her sweetheart every day. Chinese main forces will suddenly arrived outside Moscow, with a sudden attack, the two Tsars and Princess Sophia will be captured. Luocha people will weep, kneel, surrender!"

The Dutch missionary said, "I don't know anything about marching to war and fighting a battle, but holding a peace talk while sending troops for a sneak attack on their capital, won't that mean we are breaching their trust too much? God gave us commandments, we must not cheat, we must not lie."

"Ha ha," Wei Xiaobao laughed, "It was Luocha people who cheated first, we have had an agreement, the guards of both sides carry firearms, not allowed. But on their bodies they hid firearms, short ones. They cheated, we cheat back. He bit me, once, I want to bite him, twice; bite him hard!"

"Hey," the missionary exclaimed. After a while, he said, "I still advise *Gongjue Daren* not to go to war. The two countries go to war, the dead are all God's people …"

Wei Xiaobao shook his hand, "No need to say too much. We only believe Buddha, we don't believe God. If that Feodor is willing to have a fair negotiation, letting China has a bit more land, we can have a peaceful talk. But he is unwilling

to yield even one *li* of land. After we attack and take over Moscow, Luocha men will go to heaven; the women, become Chinese people's wives."

The more Feodor heard, the more scared he was. "Oh my God," he mused, "Chinese barbarians really disregard the law and natural morality, they are indeed daredevils."

He heard Wei Xiaobao continued, "Today I sent a personal guard, on the three Cossack cavalry captains' body, use finger to jab several times. These three captains, cannot move. Did you see that?"

"I did," the missionary replied, "What kind of magic was that? It was very strange."

"Chinese magic," Wei Xiaobao replied, "Genghis Khan, handed down. Genghis Khan used this method, attacked Luocha people, they kneeled and surrendered. We use the same method to attack them, Luocha country, will die!"

Feodor thought, "In those days Mongolia only had twenty thousand cavalry, they attacked all the way to Poland and Hungary; nobody in the world was able to stop them, apparently they were using magic. Eastern people are very strange, they are coming and will use magic; this … what should we do about it?"

He heard the missionary said, "If Luocha people open fire from the distance, your magic will be useless."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "That's right. Consequently, we must pretend to have the negotiation in here, while the main forces are attacking Moscow. Just like little thieves, we sneak into the city. I have been to Moscow, there are a lot of Tatars in the city. Our troops will masquerade as Tatar shepherds, and sneak into the city. I guarantee the Luocha guards will not find out."

Cold sweats started to run down Feodor's back; he thought, "This Chinese little demon's devilish plan is indeed formidable. Chinese soldiers traveling in disguise as Tatar shepherds, infiltrating our capital, unleashing their magical skill, how can we resist?"

He did not know that Shuang'er's acupoint sealing technique was a high-level martial art skill, it required internal energy cultivation to reach high level stage before the practitioner could use it. From among the tens of thousands officers

and men of the Qing army, she was the only one who could use the acupoint sealing technique. But Feodor thought that the magic only need to be taught, then anybody could use it. With just one touch of a finger, the opponents would be unable to move a single step. If tens of thousands Chinese soldiers used this technique in sneak attack against Moscow, perhaps Luocha country would be destroyed, its people annihilated.

He heard the missionary said, “If *Gongjue Daren* wants to send twenty thousand Chinese troops to sneak into Moscow, using the magic passed down by Genghis Khan to control the Luocha troops, then your plan to capture the two Tsars and the Princess may indeed be successful. However … however, this matter must be kept top secret. A big army traveling to the west, Luocha people must not find out about it. *Gongjue Daren*, Luocha country today is very strong, it is substantially different from when Genghis Khan fought the Luocha people in the past.”

“I have been to Moscow,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “I know the Luocha country’s situation very clearly. Early morning tomorrow we will release Feodor, let him go back. Afterwards we can continue negotiating with him; of course everything is fake. He is unwilling to agree, we negotiate in here for one day, Chinese main force is one day closer to Moscow.”

“Yes, yes,” the missionary said, “*Daren* must be careful in everything. This matter is really very dangerous.”

“I know,” Wei Xiaobao said, “You must not say anything. Don’t raise Feodor’s suspicion.” The missionary complied and withdrew.

Wei Xiaobao shouted, “Summon ‘tortoise b@stard dead chicken’ and ‘pig tribe coward’!”

His personal guard went out the tent, and returned with Poyarkov and Stepanov in tow. Wei Xiaobao said to the two men, “Tomorrow, I send two teams to Moscow, with many, many gifts, for Princess Sophia. On the road, robbers are many, send more troops to protect.”

Poyarkov said, “From here to Moscow there are only some small groups of Tatar bandits, plus they are not too ferocious. *Gongjue Daren* may set your heart at ease.”

“You don’t know,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Tatar robbers, eight or nine thousand men per group, some even twenty thousand, thirty thousand men.” Poyarkov and Stepanov looked at each other, their expressions showed their disbelief.

Wei Xiaobao said, “The two teams I send, will take two separate routes to Moscow, north and south. Wangbasiji will lead the one taking northern route, Zhuluonuofu will lead the southern route. These two routes, how are they?”

Poyarkov said, “Taking the northern route, from here going west to Chita, pass through Wusiwude [Ulan-Ude?], around the southern end of Great Lake Baikal, westward pass through Tomsk, Omsk, and the other cities, to Moscow.”

Stepanov said, “Taking the southern route, at first we will take the same road, after Lake Baikal the roads separate, heading southwest pass through the place where the Kazakhs live, continue westward through Osk, Uralsk, and so on, to Moscow.”

Wei Xiaobao nodded. “That’s right, those are the routes. My gifts, letter, and the Chinese envoy to deliver it to the Princess, the two of you lead the way. Lead well, rewards, lots of reward. Lead not well, Chinese generals will lead the troops, chop your heads. Dismiss!”

After the two Luocha captains withdrew, Wei Xiaobao picked up the golden arrow banner of command and issued his order. One by one the Chinese great generals bowed to receive the order. Feodor did not understand what they were speaking, but he saw that all Chinese great generals who receive the order had vehement expression on their faces; they struck their own chest with their fist and raised their hand to the sky as if making an oath. Apparently they pledged to their Grand Marshal that whatever happened they would achieve great success. Some even ran their palm across their own neck, some pulled their dagger and made a motion of stabbing it to their own chest, while with their mouth they did not stop chanting, “Moscow, Moscow.” Presumably they were saying that if they fail to take down Moscow, they would commit suicide.

Wei Xiaobao rambled on for a while. Four personal guards picked up a large map from the table, the map happened to face Feodor. He saw Wei Xiaobao traced his finger on the map, from Nerchinsk all the way to the west, following a thick red line, stopping at a red circle. Although Feodor could not read any

Chinese character on the map, by looking at the bearing, he knew that the red circle represented Moscow. Wei Xiaobao rambled on again, his finger traced another line to Moscow. Feodor thought, “These Chinese barbarians are really vile; turns out they have thought through deliberately and methodically, they have long been prepared to attack Moscow.

Wei Xiaobao went on to say something, he repeatedly mentioned the name ‘Feodor’. When the generals heard him, they all roared in laughter. Feodor said in his heart, “You must be laughing at me, calling me an idiot; you are fooling me to negotiate the boundary, stalling me here for days, while surreptitiously you send troops to attack Moscow. Humph, I will not fall into your trick anymore.”

Slowly he stood up, thinking, “God bless me, He lets me discover Chinese barbarians’ big crafty scheme. It is clear that God shows concern for my Russian Empire, the fate of our nation will definitely be prosperous and grand. In any case, he is going to release me tomorrow, there is no need for me to take risks by running away tonight.”

He saw on the west side the patrolling soldiers come and go unendingly, but the east side was pitch-black and no one was in sight. Quietly he returned to his tent. Luckily the Qing troops did not see him at all. When he reached his tent, he saw that the three guards were still asleep; thereupon he entered his tent and went to sleep.

The next morning Feodor ate a sumptuous breakfast before following a personal guard back to the command tent. Wei Xiaobao laughed and asked, “Did *Hojue Daren* sleep well last night?”

“Humph,” Feodor said, “Your guards guarding me thoughtfully, naturally I slept very well.”

“Today you are not angry anymore?” Wei Xiaobao asked, “Are we going to talk about the terms in defining the boundary?”

Feodor did not reply. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped it around his mouth. Wei Xiaobao was enraged; he shouted, “You are so stubborn. I will kill you immediately.”

Feodor was not afraid at all; he thought, “You already decided to release me today, why putting on airs? Who’s afraid of you?”

Wei Xiaobao threw a tantrum, but seeing Feodor did not budge, he was helpless. He had no choice but to say, “Very well! You are so brave, I admire you. I will let you go. Go back and rest well. After ten days, we will select another place to negotiate the boundary.”

Feodor thought, “You desperately want to delay, I am afraid by this time the troops to sneak attack Moscow have already left. I must not fall into your trick.” He said, “You let me go, then I thank you very much. To express our good faith, I propose we continue the negotiation in the afternoon today, no need to wait ten days.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “There is no rush, we all can rest first and slowly reconvene later.”

Feodor said, “Both countries’ sovereigns are hoping that the negotiation will succeed sooner rather than later. We can sign the treaty on the border definition first, taking a rest later will not be too late.”

“Our Emperor is not in a hurry,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “Let’s continue the talk in five days.”

Feodor shook his head and said, “No need to delay, let’s do it today.”

“How about three days?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

“No, today!” Feodor replied.

“Tomorrow?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

“Today!” Feodor replied.

Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, “You are so resolute, I have no choice but to give up. But I must warn you, when talking about drawing the borders, I will definitely not budge casually. We will haggle one foot by one foot, one inch by one inch.”

Feodor thought, “Drawing the national boundary you want to haggle every foot every inch, by the time this matter is settled, you already breach Moscow’s city wall. You still think I am such a silly big melon?” Immediately he stood up and said, “In that case the humble one will take my leave, thank you for *Gongjue Daren*’s food and drink.”

Wei Xiaobao walked him out the tent. He dispatched a team of rattan shield

troops to escort Feodor back to Nerchinsk, but he did not release the two hundred sixty Cossack cavalry.

When Feodor was outside the tent, he saw the place where the army camp was standing yesterday was absolutely empty, the main forces of the Qing army have already struck the camp and left. He was secretly fearful, “Chinese barbarians say something and immediately do it, indeed they are very formidable.”

When the group reached the tent where they had the talk the previous day, they saw the three Cossack captains were still standing at the same place, even their posture was still exactly the same as yesterday, they did not move at all. A thin and small officer leaped out from among the Qing troops. The officer went to the three captains while chanting loudly, “Genghis Khan, Genghis Khan!” and then patted and kneaded several places on the three men’s body. The three captains were then able to move slowly. It’s just that after standing half a day and one full night, they were extremely exhausted, their legs were numb, they dropped sitting down on the ground.

Six rattan shield troops stepped forward to help them up. After walking a dozen *zhang* or so, the three captains were able to walk by themselves. Feodor was even more astonished, “The magic passed down by Genghis Khan is incomparably formidable, no wonder he was able to move unhindered throughout the world and nobody was able to stop him. Fortunately right now the firearm is already invented so that we can keep the enemy from getting too close. Otherwise, the Chinese pagans would rule the world again, we who believe in God, the Christians, would become their slaves.”

The rattan shield troops escorted Feodor to Nerchinsk’s eastern city gate before returning to their camp. Feodor asked the three Cossack captains on how they were hit by magic. The three captains all said that at that time they only felt the middle of their back and their waist went numb, and then their whole body stiffened and could not move.

Feodor asked, “Are you wearing crucifix on your body?” The three captains untied their jacket, exposing the crucifix hanging on their necks, one even had the image of Jesus on it.

Feodor knitted his brows; he mused, “Genghis Khan’s magic is really formidable, even Jesus Christ’ crucifix cannot dispel the demonic influence.” Immediately he wrote three memorials to the throne and sent fifteen cavalry to take three different routes toward Moscow to report an emergency: Chinese army already left to launch sneak attack, they disguised themselves as Tatar shepherds to sneak into the Capital, must increase vigilant to guard against the attack.

By noon, one after another the three teams of messengers returned to the city, saying that all the roads to the west have been blocked by Chinese troops; as soon as they saw Luocha cavalry, they shot arrows from a distance; it was really difficult to go through them. Feodor was even more worried, “I must reach an agreement with the Chinese barbarians on the border treaty, so that they would withdraw the troops and horses immediately.”

By the *wei* hour [between 1-3pm], Feodor took a dozen or so attendants and went to the tent where the meeting was being held. This time he did not bring any Cossack cavalry at all, in order to show his good intention. Besides, even if he brought bodyguards, they could not withstand Chinese troops’ ‘Genghis Khan Magic’ anyway, hence they would be useless. Feodor had profound scholarly knowledge, he was a capable and experienced minister; he was actually not a person who was prone to be deceived by others, but the fear of Genghis Khan in Luocha people’s heart was deep-rooted, Shuang’er’s acupoint sealing skill was utterly exquisite, he had seen it with his own eyes, hence he cannot not believe.

He arrived at the tent first. Not too long afterwards Wei Xiaobao, Songgotu, Tong Guogang and the other, the high-ranking Qing delegation also arrived. Seeing the opposite party did not bring any guards, Wei Xiaobao also ordered the escorting rattan shield troops to withdraw. Both parties spoke some polite greetings, nobody mentioned anything about what happened yesterday, they went straight into negotiating the boundary.

Feodor aimed for speedy negotiation, he conceded to everything, his manner was completely different from the previous day. Wei Xiaobao laughed in his heart, knowing that the Zhou Yu’s trick in the play ‘Meeting of Heroes’ last night was highly successful. He did not understand anything about defining boundaries, hence he handed this matter over to Songgotu with the assistance

of the Dutch missionary as the interpreter, to discuss the terms of the treaty with the opposite side.

He saw the two men, Songgotu and Feodor spread out a large map on the table. Songgotu's finger constantly moving to the north, Feodor knitted his brows, *cun* by *cun* his finger retreated to the north. For each *cun* the finger yielded on the map, a hundred or so *li* of land fell under the jurisdiction of China.

After listening for a while, Wei Xiaobao could not endure anymore; he sat on another table and ordered the attendant to fetch the food case. Sitting cross-legged, he slowly chewed the pastries and delicacies, while softly humming the song 'eighteen touches'.

Feodor had made up his mind to yield, but Songgotu was afraid of getting into trouble, hence he refrained from going to the extremes. However, the wording of the treaty was thorough, the clergymen of both sides translated everything into Latin, they discussed everything over and over again, it was a very time-consuming process. By the evening of the fourth day, the 'Treaty of Nerchinsk' with six clauses was completed.

Wei Xiaobao had Songgotu and Tong Guogang explained everything to him, he knew the substance of the treaty was very favorable to China, the land that was taken back into China's territory was extremely vast, far more than Kangxi had intended in his imperial order. The treaty was made into four copies, one in Chinese, one in Luocha language, and two in Latin, explicitly provided for both sides so that when the text in both sides' languages had a substantial difference, the Latin copy would serve as the reference.

Immediately the attendants ground some ink and dipped the brush, and then respectfully invited the Chinese Chief Imperial Envoy to sign the treaty. Wei Xiaobao knew the three characters comprising his name, it's just that he often confused the character 'zhang' [章 – chapter/section] with the character 'Wei' [韋 – his surname], and character 'mai' [賣 – sell] with character 'Bao' [寶 – treasure]; hence when the characters were mixed together he often made mistake. Albeit with difficulty, he could handle the character 'Xiao' [小 - small]; the other two characters in front and in the back [orig. 'head and tail'], however, he simply could not write, no matter what.

In all his life he seldom blushed, but right now unexpectedly a cinnabar color appeared on his face. It was not from anger, he was not drunk of wine either, but because he was somewhat ashamed. Knowing Wei Xiaobao very well, Songgotu said, “This kind of official document only need to be signed in some symbol used in place of a signature. Wei *Daren* may randomly write the character ‘Xiao’, it can already be considered your signature.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he thought, “Writing the character ‘Xiao’, I am an expert.” Immediately he picked up the brush and started by drawing a circle on the left, another circle on the right, and one thick vertical bar straight down in the middle. Songgotu smiled and said, “That will do; you wrote it well.”

Wei Xiaobao cocked his head sideways to admire his ‘Xiao’ character. Suddenly he threw his head back and laughed aloud. “Grand Marshal Wei, what’s so funny?” Songgotu asked.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Look at this character, one small bird and two eggs, doesn’t that look like that thing?”

The high-ranking ministers of the Qing side could not help bursting in laughter; even the attendants and personal guards were also laughing. Feodor just stared at them; he did not understand why everybody was laughing.

Right away Wei Xiaobao put his signature on the four copies of the treaty. On the Luocha copy, he made the straight vertical line extra thick. And then Feodor, Songgotu, and the Russian lieutenant envoy also signed the treaty. Thereupon the first treaty between China and Russia was completed and signed.

It was actually the first treaty China has ever signed with any foreign country. Due to Kangxi’s meticulous planning and preparation, and his all-out effort plus the very capable personnel he dispatched to handle this matter, the Treaty of Nerchinsk defining the boundaries between the two countries was highly advantageous to China. The treaty defined the northern Xing’an mountain range as the boundary; the whole modern day Soviet Union’s Amur province and the provinces bordering the sea belonged to China, as well as east and southeast regions all the way to the sea.

During the negotiation to define the boundaries, both sides did not take the previous owner of any localities into consideration. None of Chinese land fell into

Luocha territory, but the forts and colonies that Luocha already built were forced to retreat after the signing; indeed it was a Chinese military and diplomatic victory. According to the treaty, the land incorporated into China covering a total of two million square kilometers, about twice the area of northeastern Chinese provinces of today. After the treaty took effect, China's northeast frontier enjoyed more than a hundred and fifty years of peace, while Luocha's endeavor of eastern invasion was blocked, and their ambition to encroach other country was somewhat restrained. Since Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong, and other imperial rulers after them, Manchurian Qing has taken part in signing treaties with other countries, China has never lost either land or authority. Kangxi and Wei Xiaobao greatly raised national prestige into an awe-inspiring level that year, no one in later generations has ever seen nor repeated.

(Book note: Wei Xiaobao's odd signature on the treaty was unrecognizable. Later generation's historians only knew Songgotu and Feodor's names. Even archeologists of Guo Moruo[36] caliber, who understood oracle script, did not know that there was a 'Xiao' character signature on the Treaty of Nerchinsk; so Wei Xiaobao's great name passed into oblivion. The historical records of later generations stated that the Treaty of Nerchinsk was signed by Songgotu and Feodor. Throughout the ages, those who know that the character Wei Xiaobao once existed on the earth are only the readers of 'The Deer and The Cauldron'. With the exception of supplementary account involving Wei Xiaobao, which the history books omitted, our book's narrative on the signing of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, as well as its content, are all based on historical records.)

According to the custom of those days, both parties released salvo simultaneously, made an oath to the Heaven, promised to be unswervingly faithful. Qing side's four hundred cannon were all fired together on Nerchinsk's east, south, west and north sides, the explosion shook the earth. Russian side's cannon were only about twenty, the sound was weak, the difference in intensity and momentum could not be measured by *li*. Feodor inwardly admitted that they were lucky; if the peace negotiation failed, and war broke, Russia would definitely suffer a crushing defeat.

Right away the envoys of both countries exchanged gifts. Feodor presented Wei Xiaobao and the others with watch, telescope, silverware, mink fur, saber

and sword, and other gifts. Wei Xiaobao presented the opposite party's diplomatic envoys with horse, saddle and reins, golden cups, silk garments, silk fabrics, and so on. In addition, the two hundred sixty Cossack cavalry received twenty *taels* of fine silver each to compensate their belts being cutoff by the Qing troops.

That evening there was a big feast to celebrate the completed treaty. Feodor was still worried, he did not know whether the troops sent to attack Moscow had been recalled or not. He continuously tried to sound out Wei Xiaobao, but Wei Xiaobao pretended not knowing anything.

Two days later Feodor received a report that a large group of Qing troops arrived from the west. He climbed to the top of the city wall and looked using the telescope. Sure enough, he saw a large group of Qing troops were approaching from the west, marched pass Nerchinsk, and pitched camp to the east. Feodor was greatly delighted; he knew that the Qing troops to attack the west had been recalled. He did not realize that this large group of Qing troops set up camp only about two hundred *li* west of Nerchinsk, waiting for orders. As soon as they heard the cannon, they struck camp and slowly pulling back to the east.

Several days later, stone carvers already completed the boundary markers. The upright stone tablets had inscriptions in five languages, Manchu, Han, Mongolian, Latin and Luocha. The border markers were erected on the eastern bank of Gorbitsa River, southern bank or Argun River, as well as other places throughout the northeast via the Great Mountain Yike'alin, and other places.

The inscription on the tablet stated clearly that Gorbitsa River was the boundary between the two countries: "Following this river going upstream to the barren land, to the great Xing'an down to the sea, where the river flows from the region south of the mountain into Heilongjiang, everything belongs to China; the river north of the mountain belongs to Russia." It also stated clearly, "The Argun River flowing into Heilongjiang is the border, the southern bank of the river belongs to China, the northern bank of the river belongs to Russia. Therefore, all the Russian settlements on the southern bank toward Meile'erke estuary must be moved to the northern bank." It also stated clearly, "The buildings of Russian people in Yakesa, as well as various belongings, must all be removed toward Chahanhan." It also stated clearly, "Ordinary citizen, livestock,

and so on must not cross the border. If the people meet while holding hunting weapons in their hands, those who kill and loot will be promptly arrested and persecuted by law. Small affair must not be allowed to spoil big affair. China and Russia, two countries are reconciled, this fact is not to be disputed."

The imperial envoys of both countries sent their subordinates to survey the land, after it was verified that there was no mistake, the boundary markers were erected. These border marks ought to define the unchanging border between China and Russia, two countries, for ten thousand years. However, a hundred and some dozen of years later, Russia took advantage when China was in decline, unexpectedly they nibbled away China's territory step by step, disregarding the border markers that were installed in the past, annexing China's wide expanse of rich and fertile land into their territory. When the later generations read the history of this affair, they could only sigh and comment, "The land Kangxi and Wei Xiaobao secured, as well as their effort in chasing away the ambition of wild wolves of Luocha people, how could we restore it to our homeland?"

The establishment of boundary markers finished, the imperial envoys of both countries saluted each other and bade farewell, separately returning to their capital to give report on the completion of this mission.

Wei Xiaobao summoned Poyarkov and Stepanov, instructing them to present his gifts to Princess Sophia, included among these were brocade quilt, embroidered pillow. The northern country was a desolate and rural land, these items could not be purchased anywhere in that area, so these items actually belonged to Shuang'er. Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, "If the Princess really miss me, she can cuddle the silk blanket and pillow."

Poyarkov said, "Her Highness the Princess' affection to Your Excellency *Daren* is enduring while the world lasts, blanket and pillow are easily worn out, it would be better if *Daren* assign several bridge-building experts to Moscow to build a stone bridge. A stone bridge will not wear out forever."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "I have given this matter a lot of thought, you need not be long-winded." He ordered his personal guards to lift up a large wooden chest, about eight *chi* long, four *chi* wide, all in all, it looked a lot like a coffin. Eight personal guards carried it using large shoulder poles; it appeared to be very heavy. The outside of the chest was wrapped with heavy iron strips,

sealed with hot-lacquer seal. Wei Xiaobao said, “This gift is extremely important, you must protect it well, do not damage it. When the Princess sees it, she will definitely be happy. This enduring-while-the-world-lasts affection will be completely as secure as a Chinese stone bridge.” The two Luocha captains did not dare to ask too much, they received the wooden chest and left.

This large wooden chest weighed more than a thousand catties, it was transported tens of thousands of *li* from the remote Nechinsk all the way to Moscow; it was indeed a hard work. After Princess Sophia received and opened it, to her surprise it was a naked stone statue of Wei Xiaobao, beaming from ear to ear, vivid and lifelike. Turned out Wei Xiaobao had the stone carvers who prepared the boundary markers to carve his image; he also had the Dutch missionary write ‘I will always love you’ in Luocha character, and carve the words on the stone statue’s chest.

When Sophia saw it, she did not know whether to laugh or to cry; she recalled that this Chinese little child was an eccentric elf, but no Luocha men could match him. She could not help remembering him with fondness, her spirit seemed to gallop ten thousand *li*. This stone statue was kept inside Kremlin Palace. Later on Peter the Great launched a coup, he expelled Princess Sophia out of the Palace; since the stone statue was related to her, it was smashed to pieces. Only a piece of the stone statue was smuggled out by an ordinary soldier. Ignorant Luocha women who prayed for a child would gently caress and stroke the stone statue’s lower body, allegedly it was very effective.

(Book Note: ‘Duhu’ was the army and government governor-general of Han Dynasty who ruled various states in the western region. ‘Yumen Pass’ was the major road going through the western region during the Han era. ‘Cannot establish Yumen Pass’ means the territory was so large, the original gate of the Pass could not become a strategic focal of frontier defense. ‘Attach utmost importance to copper pillar as boundary marker’ refers to after the Eastern Han’s Ma Yuan conquering the former southernmost province of the Chinese Empire (Annan), he opened up new territory and set up copper pillars to demarcate the boundary, thinking that it would be beneficial to China’s border.)

Chapter 49

Good government official adorned the carriage by strengthening it with fur coat, lone visitor suspected the heart of an old friend.

(Translated by Foxs)

Sitting on an open top ox cart with his hands tied behind his back,Mao Shiba was brought to the execution ground at the mouth of the food market,while common people crowded by the street to watch. Mao Shiba shouted and yelled, “After eighteen years, Laozi is still a hero, that’s why I am called Mao Shiba. I already knew that I was going to be beheaded.” The

common people by the street cheered in praise.

Wei Xiaobao returned to the capital in triumph. When the main force arrived outside the city of Beijing, the high-ranking ministers of the imperial court greeted them at the city gate. Wei Xiaobao led Tong Guogang, Songgotu, Ma La, A'erni, Ma Qi, Peng Chun, Sabusu, Lang Tan, Ba Hai, Lin Xingzhu, and the others to have an audience with Kangxi. The Emperor spoke to them warmly, he encouraged and exhorted everybody. He issued an edict, promoting Wei Xiaobao to be the First-class Duke of Luding [deer and cauldron]; Tong Guogang, Songgotu and the other high-ranking officials, as well as military officers and common soldiers, all received promotion and reward.

In the next several days, Kangxi repeatedly summoned Wei Xiaobao, asking him the details about the capture of Yakesa, about the talk to define the boundary, and so on. Wei Xiaobao reported everything according to the fact, surprisingly he did not exaggerate or blow his horn. Kangxi was extremely delighted; he praised Wei Xiaobao by saying that he had made a lot of progress. Kangxi also bestowed rewards to his seven wives and two sons.

One day Kangxi held a banquet in honor of the Great General Fuyuan, the Duke of Deer and Cauldron Wei Xiaobao and various ministers who had rendered great merit. During the banquet Kangxi discussed two poems, all the members of the Hanlin Imperial Academy who attended the banquet respectfully joined the discussion, celebrating the heroic deed and magnificent triumph.

After the feast, carrying the precious things bestowed by the Emperor, immensely proud of himself, Wei Xiaobao went out of the Palace. With an officer shouting in front of him and his personal guards thronged behind him, he went home in a ceremonial procession. Suddenly by the main street someone shouted, "Wei Xiaobao, you are a dog thief who forget favors and violate justice!"

Wei Xiaobao was shocked, especially since he thought the voice sounded familiar. Turning his head sideways, he saw a big man ran from under the eaves to the middle of the street, pointed his finger to him and cursed, "Wei Xiaobao, I want to hack you, this little thief, to pieces. You are a Han, yet you surrendered to the Manchurian Qing, becoming Tatar's hunting dog and slave. You murdered your own Shifu, you killed your own good *Xiongdi*, today the Tatar Emperor

bestowed you the title Duke and Marquis, you have glory, splendor, wealth and rank, you are showing off your air. Your granny, *laozi* will stab a white blade into you, and it will be red on exit, I will stab your little thief's body using your Ma's blade seventeen or twenty eight times. I want to see if you can still be a Tortoise Duke, a Turtle Duke?" The big man was naked from the waist up, his chest was covered in long, shaggy black hair, his eyebrows were thick, his eyes big, his expression looked fierce and malicious; he was none other than Mao Shiba, who had taken Wei Xiaobao to Beijing in the past.

While Wei Xiaobao was stunned, a dozen or so personal guards already surrounded Mao Shiba. From his leg wrappings Mao Shiba pulled a short blade to fight back. The personal guards moved together, some placed their blades on Mao Shiba's neck, some snatched away the short blade in his hand, some pounced on him and dragged him down to the ground and tied him up.

Mao Shiba was still cursing incessantly, "Wei Xiaobao, you little thief, son of a wh0re, that year *laozi* took you to Beijing, it was my biggest mistake. I have wronged Chen Jinnan, Chen *Zongduozhu*, I have wronged the heroes and warriors of Tian Di Hui. Today *laozi* no longer wish to live, I want to let everybody in the world know that you, Wei Xiaobao has betrayed your friends to seek glory, a dog thief who forget favors and violate justice; in your desire to be promoted and gain wealth, you have become the Tatar Emperor's hunting dog …"

The personal guards struck his mouth, Mao Shiba was still cursing incessantly. Wei Xiaobao hastily shouted his personal guards to stop, he told them not to use violence. A personal guard took out a handkerchief and stuffed it into Mao Shiba's mouth. Mao Shiba was still grunting endlessly, presumably he was still cursing.

Wei Xiaobao ordered his personal guard, "Bring this man inside, guard him well, don't give him trouble, give him wine and food, in a moment I will interrogate him personally."

When he was back at his mansion, Wei Xiaobao arranged a feast in his study room, and invited Mao Shiba to accompany him. Afraid that he might resort to violence, he asked Su Quan and Shuang'er, two women to accompany him, dressed as personal guards. His personal guards dragged Mao Shiba inside. Wei Xiaobao ordered them to remove the shackles on Mao Shiba's hands and feet,

and then he ordered the personal guards to withdraw.

With a smile on his face Wei Xiaobao said, “Mao *Dage*, long time no see, how are you?” [reminder: in Chinese, ‘how are you?’ is ‘ni hao?’ – ‘are you good?’]

“What’s so good or not good about me?” Mao Shiba angrily replied, “Originally I was perfectly all right, but ever since I met you, I became not good.”

Wei Xiaobao said with a laugh, “Mao *Dage*, please sit back and relax, let *Xiongdi* toast you three cups of wine to cool your temper first. How did *Xiongdi* offend Mao *Dage*, you may curse me after drinking; it won’t be too late by then.”

Mao Shiba took a large stride forward and shouted, “I will beat you, this little thief to death first before I drink the wine.” Swinging his rice-bowl size fist, ‘whoosh!’ he punched Wei Xiaobao’s face.

Su Quan darted forward and stretched out her left hand to grab Mao Shiba’s wrist. She lightly twisted it, and then using her right hand she tapped his shoulder twice. Instantly half of Mao Shiba’s body went numb; he could not help but fell sitting down into a chair. He was shocked and angered at the same time; struggling hard he leaped up and cursed, “Little thief …”

Su Quan stood behind him, with both hands she seized the ‘jian zhen’ [shoulder chaste] acupoints on his shoulder, and then she lightly pressed downward. Mao Shiba was unable to withstand, he fell back into the chair again. He was a big and tall man, he was at least twice as big as Su Quan, but with her profound martial art she was able to control him; it was as if with hands and feet tied he was forced to sit down. He was even more enraged as with a loud voice he said, “Today *laozi* cursed you, this little traitor (to Han), in the middle of the street, I have already given up any hope of staying alive. I just want the people throughout the world to know that you are a despicable and shameless man who betrayed your master and your friends …”

“Mao *Dage*,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I was away on a mission for His Majesty, it was to attack the Luocha demons, not to kill any Han people; you can’t call me a traitor to Han.”

Mao Shiba said, “Then … then why did you kill your Shifu Chen Jinnan?”

“How could I kill my Shifu?” Wei Xiaobao anxiously asked, “My Shifu was clearly murdered by that fellow Zheng Keshuang.”

“You still deny it?” Mao Shiba angrily rebuked him, “The Tatar Emperor’s damn imperial edict cannot state it more clearly than that.”

Wei Xiaobao was startled, “His Majesty’s imperial edict?” he said, “How … how can it say that I killed my Shifu?” Totally confused, he turned his eyes toward Su Quan.

Su Quan said, “A few days ago His Majesty promoted you to be a first-class duke, he issued a statement listing your meritorious service as the basis of granting you the title. I don’t know who wrote the statement, but it says that you ‘recommending able generals, sweeping away and pacifying the rebel Wu, recovering Taiwan as our territory, leading the army into battle, capturing cities, propagating the national prestige in foreign country’, which are true. However, there are a few words like, 'Capturing and beheading Tian Di Hui rebel leaders Chen Jinnan, Feng Jizhong, and the others, successfully crumbling the pillar, creating setback leading to total collapse, putting the bandits into confusion, leading them to renew their faces and wash their hearts'. Those words are incorrect."

Wei Xiaobao frowned. "What exactly is renewing the faces and wash the hearts?" he asked.

Su Quan said, "The statement says you captured Chen Jinnan, Feng Jizhong, and the others, and killed them, scarring Tian Di Hui people so that they do not dare to rebel anymore."

Wei Xiaobao jumped and cried out, "How … how can there be such thing? Isn't this wrongly accusing me?"

Su Quan slowly shook her head. "Feng Jizhong was a spy, we did kill him, the imperial edict was not wrong," she said, "However, it has three extra characters: 'Chen Jinnan'."

Wei Xiaobao anxiously said, "Chen Jinnan was my benevolent master, I … how could I harm him, the Senior? His Majesty … His Majesty's imperial edict … ay … when you saw the imperial edict, why didn't you tell me?"

Su Quan said, "We discussed this matter over, the imperial edict has three extra characters 'Chen Jinnan', if you knew about it, you would be greatly unhappy."

Wei Xiaobao understood that 'we discussed this matter over' means his seven wives talked it over together; turning his head, he looked at Shuang'er. Shuang'er nodded. Wei Xiaobao said, "Mao *Dage*, my Shifu was definitely not harmed by me. Feng Jizhong was Tian Du Hui's traitor, he secretly disclosed information to the Emperor …"

With a cold laugh Mao Shiba said, "So you are actually the good guy?"

Wei Xiaobao dejectedly sat down and said, "I will explain to His Majesty, I will ask him to change ... to change ... to change ..." He said the words 'to change' three times, but knew for sure that just because there were three extra characters 'Chen Jinnan' in the imperial edict, Kangxi would not issue another imperial edict to amend it. He thought, "I wonder which dog thief blabbed too much and told His Majesty that I killed Shifu. In His Majesty's eyes, it was the evidence of my loyalty, but … but … how can I, Wei Xiaobao, still be considered a human being?" His heart was anxious, "Wah!" he suddenly cried. "Mao *Dage*, Quan *Jiejie*, Good … Good Shuang'er," he called out, "I did not kill my Shifu!"

Seeing him suddenly broke into crying, the three people were stunned. Su Quan hastily came over and wrapped her arms around his shoulder, she said tenderly, "That Zheng Keshuang killed your Shifu at Tong Chi Island, all of us have seen it with our own eyes." She took out a handkerchief and helped him wiping his tears. It was only now that Mao Shiba saw that this 'personal guard' with strong martial art skill was actually a woman; he could not help feeling greatly amazed.

Wei Xiaobao suddenly remembered something. "Mao *Dage*," he said, "That fellow Zheng Keshuang is also in Beijing; let us confront him directly. I'll say he will not dare to deny. Right, right! Let us go now …"

Right this moment, suddenly they heard outside the door the personal guard loudly said, “Imperial edict is here. Imperial Bodyguard Duo *Zongguan* has arrived to announce the Imperial Decree.”

Wei Xiaobao stood up and went to the door to welcome the guest; he saw

Dolong walked in with a smile on his face. Wei Xiaobao kowtowed to the north, while respectfully wishing the Holy Sage well. Dolong waited until Wei Xiaobao finished the ceremony before saying, “His Majesty’s instruction: he wants to personally interrogate the rebel thief who cursed you on the street.”

Wei Xiaobao’s heart turned cold; he said, “That … that man? *Xiongdi* has already arrested him and questioned him in details; turns out he is a mad man. This man babbled about Jade Emperor, Taishang Laojun [Taoist deity], that kind of nonsense. *Xiongdi* could not make any sense of it. After I had him flogged for a while, I let him go. How did His Majesty find out about this matter? Actually it’s not a big deal …”

Listening to this point, Mao Shiba could not bear anymore; he slapped the table so hard that the bowls and cups jumped up and crashed onto the floor, ‘bing bing bang bang!’ “Damn Wei Xiaobao,” he cursed loudly, “Who is the mad man? The man who cursed the Tatar Emperor on the street today was *Laozi*! *Laozi* is not afraid to be hacked to pieces, do you think *Laozi* is afraid to see the damn Tatar Emperor?”

Wei Xiaobao groaned inwardly; he was hoping he could fool Kangxi and Dolong, and then he would let Mao Shiba go. Who would have thought that this man was completely oblivious of his intention to protect him; he insulted the Emperor in public, even if Mao Shiba had eighteen heads, he would not be able to protect even one. [Reminder: the ‘shiba’ in Mao Shiba’s name means ‘eighteen’.]

Dolong sighed and said, “*Xiongdi*, you have exceptional *yi qi* toward Jianghu friends, for that I am full of admiration. In this matter you have done your best, it can be considered extreme benevolence, utmost duty already. Let’s go.”

Mao Shiba walked to the door in large strides; suddenly he turned back and shot a mouthful of saliva toward Wei Xiaobao’s face. Wei Xiaobao’s mind was tumultuous, it was too late for him to dodge, ‘slap!’ the saliva hit right between his eyes. Several personal guards immediately pulled their weapons and rushed toward Mao Shiba. Wei Xiaobao waved his hand and sadly said, “Forget it, don’t give him any trouble.” Dolong’s men took out a pair of handcuffs and shackled Mao Shiba.

Wei Xiaobao pondered, “His Majesty personally interrogates Mao *Dage*, I guarantee before he even asks three questions, he would have him pushed out and beheaded. I must go to see His Majesty immediately. No matter what I have to think of a way to save him.” He said to Dolong, “I want to go asking His Majesty, to explain everything clearly; don’t let this crude man come across His Majesty.”

The party arrived at the Palace. Wei Xiaobao heard that the Emperor was in the Upper Study Room, immediately he went over asking for an audience. Kangxi summoned him in. Wei Xiaobao kowtowed several times before standing up.

Kangxi said, “The man who cursed you and cursed me on the street today, he is your good friend, isn’t he?”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “Your Majesty can see clearly for ten thousand *li*, there is nothing that you need to guess twice.”

“Does he belong to Tian Di Hui?” Kangxi asked.

“He has not officially joined the Society,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “But he knew quite a number of people in the Society. He admires my Shifu very much. Your Majesty’s imperial edict says that I killed Shifu, as soon as he heard that he was very angry, hence he reprimanded me severely. As for toward Your Majesty, he did not dare to be disrespectful even for half a word.”

Kangxi smiled and said, “You have made a clean break with Tian Di Hui, from now on you won’t have any dealings with them, is that right?”

“Yes,” Wei Xiaobao replied, “This time I went to fight the Luocha demons, your servant did not bring any Tian Di Hui people.”

Kangxi asked, “If later on your old Tian Di Hui friends come to find you, what are you going to do?”

Wei Xiaobao replied, “Your servant simply will not see them, so that everybody will not feel uncomfortable.”

Kangxi nodded and said, “For that reason in that statement I personally added Chen Jinnan and Feng Jizhong, two names, to spare you a lot of trouble in the future. Xiao Guizi, one man cannot always have his feet on two boats. If you are loyal to me, single-mindedly work for the imperial court, you must not tread the

muddy water of Tian Di Hui anymore. If you are determined to become Tian Di Hui's *Xiangzhu*, then you must single-mindedly rebel against me."

Wei Xiaobao jumped in fright; he kowtowed and said, "Your servant definitely will not rebel. When your servant was little, I was muddleheaded, I did not understand reason; but now I have a high notion of my duty, I have 'washed my face and renewed my heart', I am completely different now."

Kangxi nodded and said with a laugh, "That's very good. The lunatic who cursed you on the street today, I want you to personally supervise his execution tomorrow. Just kill him."

Wei Xiaobao kowtowed and said, "Your Majesty please understand, your servant came to Beijing and was able to see Your Majesty's golden face, it was entirely due to this man. Your servant has not repaid his kindness, I boldly beg Your Majesty to spare this man. Your servant would rather … would rather my contribution of defeating the Luocha demons, Your Majesty take back everything. Your servant is willing to go back to become Marquis of Luding."

With a wooden countenance Kangxi said, "The nobility granted by the imperial court, you treat it as a trivial matter? You are conferred the title First-class Duke of Luding, it was by my grace, yet you use the rank and benefit of nobility to bargain with me, to haggle over the price; what a nerve!"

Wei Xiaobao repeatedly kowtowed; he said, "Your servant is reaching out to the sky asking for grace, Your Majesty may reach down and grant me my request. If Marquis of Luding does not work, how about move me back to Count of Tong Chi or Viscount of Tong Chi?"

Kangxi wanted to scare him, he wanted to let him know some imperial court rules and regulations; who would have thought that this man was a lowly person of the marketplace? Although he achieved the titles First-class Duke, Great General, his hoodlum character did not change the least bit. Kangxi could not help feeling angry, but was amused at the same time. "Damn it!" he shouted, "Stand up!" Wei Xiaobao kowtowed and stood up.

Still maintaining a wooden expression Kangxi said, "Your granny, *Laozi* reaches down to you, you ask me to spare this rebel, so I want to have your head in exchange of his head."

Frowning and worried, Wei Xiaobao said, “Your Majesty’s counter offer is too aggressive, please rise it some.”

“Alright,” Kangxi said, “I will yield one step. You cut your own egg, and enter the Palace as a real eunuch.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Please Your Majesty rise your offer more.”

Kangxi said, “That’s my final offer. If you don’t kill him, that means you are not loyal to me. When one is loyal, he is loyal to the end; if he is not loyal, then he is not. How can there be any bargaining?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant is loyal to His Majesty, holding righteousness to my friends, filial to my mother, loving to my wives …”

Kangxi laughed aloud; he said, “Unexpectedly you, this fellow are everything: loyal, filial, and holding to moral integrity and righteousness. Alright, my utmost admiration. By this time tomorrow, get a head to show me. If it is not that rebel’s head, then it must be your own head.”

Wei Xiaobao had no choice; he kowtowed and withdrew. When he reached the door, Kangxi said, “Xiao Guizi, are you thinking of escaping?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This time I do not dare. Your servant is going home, put a pillow under my head, lie down and think it over carefully. It would be best if I could make Your Majesty happy while upholding *yi qi* toward a friend, and keeping your servant’s head firmly attached to my body at the same time.”

Kangxi smiled, “Very good,” he said, “I have not seen Princess Jianning for a long time, I miss her very much. I have already had her brought into the Palace.” After a short pause, he continued, “Your other six wives, three children, will also accompany the Princess to the Palace to have an audience with the Empress Dowager. Empress Dowager said that your contribution is not small, she wants to reward your wives and children well.”

“Thank you very much for the Empress Dowager and Your Majesty’s grace,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Even if my body turns to dust your servant finds it difficult to repay.” Retreating two steps, he could not bear not to say, “Your Majesty, your servant once said to you, you are the Tathagata Buddha, I am Sun Wukong. No matter what your servant cannot jump out of your palm.”

Kangxi smiled and said, “You possess great magical power, there is no need to stand on ceremonies.”

Wei Xiaobao went out the study room; he could not help but moaning and groaning in his heart, “His Majesty detains all my seven wives and three kids, even if I have the guts to run away, I cannot bear to part with them.”

When he reached the long corridor, Dolong came over to meet him with a laugh, “Wei *Xiongdi*, Empress Dowager summoned your wives, young masters, young miss; the reward must not be a few. Congratulations to you.”

Wei Xiaobao cupped his fist and said, “Thanks to your lucky influence, thank you.”

Dolong smiled and said, “This time before *Xiongdi* led the troops into battle, you instructed me to demand payment for you. To date, we have had seventy, eighty percent. Two million six hundred and some *taels* of banknotes, I will have it delivered to your mansion.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “*Dage*’s ability is not small, unexpectedly you managed to extract that much.” Immediately he said hatefully, “That fellow Zheng Keshuang murdered my Shifu, until today, he is still giving me a lot of headache. His granny, that mad man who cursed me on the street, I bet you it was Zheng Keshuang who planted the root of trouble.” The more he thought, the more hateful he became. “*Dage*,” he said, “Please get more men, let us go to demand payment.”

Dolong heard that they were going to the Zheng mansion to demand payment, it was the number one pleasure of his heart. Today they had the Great General Fuyuan, the First-class Duke of Luding Wei *Gongye* leading the troops, the way they handle this matter would be even more unrestrained. At once he repeatedly agreed and ordered the Deputy Chief of the Imperial Bodyguards to take over his duty in the Palace, while he took a hundred Imperial Bodyguards to escort Wei Xiaobao to the Zheng mansion.

Although Zheng Keshuang was also conferred the title duke, compared to Wei Xiaobao’s dukedom it was like heaven and earth apart. One was a surrendering rebel of border defense king, the other was a high-ranking minister who has given outstanding service, the Emperor’s personal favorite. Both had duke

mansions, but the size, as well as the style, were substantially different. The four characters 'Hai Cheng Gong Fu' [Mansion of the duke who settled the ocean] written on the horizontal inscribed board above the main gate were in black, not as good as Wei Xiaobao's gold lettering of 'Lu Ding Gong Fu'. When Wei Xiaobao saw it, he was somewhat happy; he said, "The signboard on this fellow's door is not as good as my gold lettering signboard."

The Imperial Bodyguards were accustomed with visiting the 'Hai Cheng Gong Fu' every two, three days to demand payment. Without waiting for the doorkeeper to announce their arrival, they simply burst into the mansion. Wei Xiaobao sat on a chair in the middle of the main hall, Dolong sat next to him. When Zheng Keshuang heard about the Great General Fuyuan's arrival, which was his number one nemesis, he could not help but panicked, but he did not dare not to meet him. Without any choice he changed into his duke attire; trembling with fear he came out to meet them. Taking a step forward he cupped his fist and greeted, "Wei *Daren*!"

Wei Xiaobao did not stand up; he sat unmoving, with head held high he snorted and said to Dolong, "Duo *Dage*, this Zheng Keshuang is very rude. We have been here for half a day, he neither pay attention nor care about us; isn't he looking down upon people?"

"That's right!" Dolong said, "Killing people one must pay with his own life, owing money one must pay back. Always shrinking his head like a turtle, in the end he still won't be able to hide."

Zheng Keshuang was furious; it's just that 'under other people's eaves, one must lower his head'. One of his guests was the great general holding power over the military, the other was the Chief of the Imperial Bodyguards, while Zheng Keshuang was not only without power without authority, he was always under suspicion. Although he had the honor and glory of nobility, actually his plight was even worse than common people; without any choice he struggled hard to contain his anger. He coughed lightly and said, "Wei *Daren*, Duo *Zongguan*, how are you two gentlemen?"

Wei Xiaobao slowly lowered his head. He saw standing before him was an old man with bent waist and crooked back, his hair grizzled, his countenance unbearably haggard. After looking at the man carefully, Wei Xiaobao realized

that this man was not too old, it's just that he was frowning and worried, the corner of his eyes were wrinkled, the short beard under his chin was also grizzled. Upon more concentrated look, Wei Xiaobao recognized the man; who else but Zheng Keshuang? They had not seen each other for several years, unexpectedly he had aged twenty, thirty years. At first Wei Xiaobao was greatly surprised, but then he understood. For the last several years Zheng Keshuang lived in torment, no wonder he suddenly aged. Wei Xiaobao could not help feeling pity, but then he recalled how in the past with his own hand Zheng Keshuang viciously killed Chen Jinnan at Tong Chi Island. Wei Xiaobao's anger immediately bubbled up. With a cold laugh he said, "Who are you?"

"*Zaixia* Zheng Keshuang," Zheng Keshuang said, "How can Wei *Daren* not recognize me?"

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said, "Zheng Keshuang? Isn't Zheng Keshuang the Yanping Jun Wang of Taiwan? How can he be in Beijing? You must be a fake."

"*Zaixia* surrendered to the Great Qing," Zheng Keshuang replied, "I received His Majesty's grace and was conferred the rank and emolument of nobility."

"Oh, so that's how it is," Wei Xiaobao said, "In the past you blew your horn in Taiwan, saying that you wanted to attack Beijing and seize the throne, saying that you wanted to do this and that; do those words still count?"

Zheng Keshuang's back was wet with cold sweats; he thought, "He wants to put criminal charge on me, fabricating some words indiscriminately. His Majesty always listens to him, he can't possibly listen to me."

Ever since Dolong led the Imperial Bodyguards and Valiant Cavalry Brigade's sergeants came to cause trouble unceasingly, for Zheng Keshuang, a day dragged on like a year. The large sum of money, his family property that he brought from Taiwan, eight or nine parts out of ten had been extorted by these men. In order to raise some two million *taels*, which was a huge amount of money, he had already sold off his pearls, jewels, everything, until practically nothing left. In his heart he already repented several hundreds or thousands times: he should not have surrendered. When Shi Lang came to attack, if he did everything he could to lead the troops and fight to the death, they might not necessarily be defeated. Besides, even if they failed and he died in battle, he

would not have let his (paternal) grandfather and his father's spirits in heaven down. Not in such a way that after he surrendered, he would suffer this endless distressing humiliation. This time as he heard Wei Xiaobao, he felt even more dejected and really wanted to die.

"Duo *Dage*," Wei Xiaobao said, "In the past, this Zheng *Wangye*'s prestige was very impressive. Recently *Xiongdi* heard people say that some people want Zheng *Wangye* back to Taiwan and establish his kingdom there. Zheng *Wangye*, I wonder what did those people who want to join you say? *Xiongdi* wants to investigate this matter clearly, so that I can report it to His Majesty."

With a trembling voice Zheng Keshuang said, "Wei *Daren*, please be magnanimous. Those things that you are talking about, those are completely … completely non-existent …"

"Huh? That's odd," Wei Xiaobao said, "Duo *Dage*, didn't we arrest a rebel yesterday? He cursed His Majesty, he also scolded *Xiongdi*. This man said that he was Zheng *Wangye*'s old subordinate, he said that in Beijing Zheng *Wangye* is being bullied, so he wanted to avenge him, he wanted to wipe out Manchurian Qing Tatars or something like that."

Listening to this point, Zheng Keshuang could not bear any longer; he bent his knees and dropped to the ground, and said in a trembling voice, "Wei *Daren* please have mercy! In the past *Xiaoren* has offended you, Senior; I deserve to die ten thousand deaths. You, Senior, is magnanimous, please leave me a path of life, I pray *Laotianye* will bless you and grant your ten thousand generations to be duke and marquis."

With a cold laugh Wei Xiaobao said, "When you murdered my Shifu that day, did you ever imagine that a day like today will come?"

Suddenly from the rear hall a man walked in in big strides; his stature was slim, his expression swift and fierce. He was none other than the 'One Sword Without Blood' Feng Xifan. He rushed to stand by Zheng Keshuang's side, and stretched out his hand to pull him back. Turning his head toward Wei Xiaobao he said, "The murder of Chen Jinnan that day was entirely my idea, it has nothing to do with Zheng *Gongzi*. If you want to avenge your Shifu, please feel free to come to me."

Wei Xiaobao had always been very afraid of Feng Xifan; seeing his fierce and

intimidating expression, he could not help shrinking back into his chair. “You … you want to hit people?” he said in a trembling voice.

Dolong sprang up and called, “Guards!” Immediately more than ten Imperial Bodyguards rushed over and surround him.

Seeing his side had many men and great force, Wei Xiaobao was relieved; he said in a loud voice, “This man dared to commit violent crime in the Capital, arrest him.” Four Imperial Bodyguards immediately reached out to grab Feng Xifan’s arms.

Feng Xifan did not resist; he said in a loud and clear voice, “We surrendered to the Imperial Court, His Majesty conferred Zheng *Gongye* the title of ‘Duke of Hai Cheng’, he conferred me the title of ‘Earl of Zhongcheng’ [lit. devoted, loyal]. His Majesty’s golden mouth has said it, this matter has been sealed with one stroke of a pen, it is not something that can be disputed. Wei *Daren*, you want to use official authority for private interest, wrongly accuse good people, we have no choice but to appeal before His Majesty to explain everything clearly.”

With a cold laugh Wei Xiaobao said, “You are a good person, hey, hey, turns out ‘One Sword Without Blood’ Feng *Daren* is a very good person. This is the first day that I have ever heard about it!”

Feng Xifan said, “Ever since we arrived in Beijing, we have never seen outsiders, we do not dare to violate half a law even more. These Imperial Bodyguards *Daren* unceasingly came to demand payment, we dealt with it by losing our family fortune, it was nothing. Wei *Daren*, you want to put criminal charge on us, His Majesty can see clearly for ten thousand of *li*, I am afraid he will be beyond your control.”

This man had guts and knowledge, he was far superior compared to Zheng Keshuang, he spoke with confidence and matter-of-factly, it was difficult for Wei Xiaobao to refute. He thought that although these two men were surrendering people of Taiwan, they were conferred nobility titles by the imperial court; while it was true that it was not difficult to bully them, if he really wanted to drag them down, the Emperor only needed to ask a few questions, hs true colors would be exposed immediately. The Emperor had already anticipated that Wei Xiaobao would want to avenge his Shifu; he would definitely put the blame on Wei

Xiaobao. Wei Xiaobao's heart had softened, but in his mouth he was still extremely unyielding. He said, "Yesterday we arrested a rebel, he personally confessed that he wanted Zheng *Wangye* back to Taiwan; could it be that he was lying?"

Feng Xifan said, "This kind of people casually make presumptous claim, how can we consider that their words count? *Daren* please bring this man over, we will have direct confrontation in front of the Ministry of Justice."

"You want direct confrontation?" Wei Xiaobao said, "That's great, wonderful, very nice, very exciting." Turning his head he asked Zheng Keshuang, "Zheng *Wangye*, the money you owe me, when are you going to pay back?"

Feng Xifan noticed that left and right Wei Xiaobao was trying to evade him subtly, and his countenance had changed; he guessed that Wei Xiaobao was afraid the Emperor would find out. He thought that since he had gained this piece of farmland, he might as well enlarge his courage and raise a ruckuss in front of the Emperor. He thought that although the Emperor was young, he was very brilliant, definitely he would be able to differentiate right from wrong. If Feng Xifan did not seize this opportunity, this matter would drag on endlessly. He really thought that he should not yield to this fellow surnamed Wei anymore, a cornered dog will jump the wall, a cornered man will hang from the beam. If you force me to hang myself, I would fight back desperately. Having made up his mind, he said, "Wei *Daren*, Duo *Zongguan*, let us appeal to the imperial court."

Wei Xiaobao was startled; he thought that if this matter was reported to the Emperor, he himself would have to bear endless responsibility, but he simply could not back off. "Very good!" he said, "Take this surnamed Zheng along! Take both of them into the jail first and keep them in confinement, let them live enjoy a happy and prosperous life for a year or a half, and then we will slowly present the memorial to explain everything to His Majesty."

Dolong was hesitant, Zheng Keshuang was a duke by the Emperor's appointment, there was no harm in demanding payment from him; but arresting him would definitely require an imperial edict. He said in a low voice, "Wei *Daren*, we must go present the memorial to His Majesty first, and then come back to take them away."

Zheng Keshuang was relieved; he hastily said, “That’s right, I have no crime, how can you arrest me?”

To see the wind and setting his sails was actually Wei Xiaobao’s expertise. He immediately said, “Whether you have crime or not, it is not yet known. The money you owe me has not been paid in full, what are you going to do about it? You pay me back, or you want to come with me?”

Hearing that he might be saved from arrest, he repeatedly exclaimed, “I will pay, I will pay!” Hastily he went inside and returned with a stack of banknotes, followed by two servants holding trays filled with gold, silver and jewelry.

Zheng Keshuang said, “Wei *Daren*, lowly officer has turned over the chest and flipped the sack upside down, I managed to find thirty or forty thousand *taels*, I really cannot come up with anything anymore.”

“You can’t come up with anything anymore?” Wei Xiaobao said, “I don’t believe you. Let *Xiongdi* accompany you inside to look.”

Zheng Keshuang said, “This … this … this is not too convenient.”

Feng Xifan said in a loud voice, “We did not violate any law, Wei *Daren* wants to search our home, do you have an imperial edict, or do you have any official document from the Ministry of Justice’s main hall?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “This is not a search. Zheng *Wangye* said he can’t come up with anything anymore, I say he still have a lot to present. Perhaps among his gold, silver, pearls and jewels there are still a large quantities of sabers, spears and firearms, perhaps there are dragon chair and dragon robe hidden in the secret rooms in the basement. Since he could not find anything, everybody will help him look.”

Zheng Keshuang busily said, “What sabers, spears and firearms, dragon chair and dragon robe? I … How can I dare to hide those things secretly? Besides, lowly officer is just … is just a duke. This ‘*Wangye*’ appellation, I really dare not accept it.”

Wei Xiaobao said to Dolong, “Duo *Dage*, please count for me, how much money in total?”

Dolong and two Imperial Bodyguards counted the banknotes; they said, “The

banknotes are thirty four thousand and three hundred *taels*, and then there are some jewelry of little value, I don't know how to value them."

Wei Xiaobao reached out to rummage through the jewelry, he picked up a golden phoenix hairpin and pretended to be shocked. "Aiyo," he said, "Duo *Dage*, this is a forbidden object, His Majesty is the dragon, the Empress is the phoenix; how … how can Zheng *Wangye*'s *Wangfei* [king's wife] also wear golden phoenix hairpin?"

Feng Xifan was even more enraged. "Wei *Daren*," he loudly said, "You want to pick a bone from an egg, the one surnamed Fan will stake everything against you today. Among the gold, silver and jewelry stores throughout the world, which one does not have golden phoenix hairpin? All the women of the official families in Beijing, which one does not wear golden phoenix hairpin?"

"Turns out Feng *Daren* have looked at the women of the official families around Beijing," Wei Xiaobao said, "Mm, what do you think, which family's *Taitai, Xiaojie* [madame, miss, respectively] is the most good-looking? Tsk, tsk, tsk, awesome, awesome; you have looked at a lot of womenfolk from different families, such a treat for your eyes, you are lucky. Prince Kang's *Wangfei*, Ministry of War *Shangshu Daren*'s young lady, have you seen them?"

Feng Xifan was so angry that he could not say anything; in his heart he was rather afraid, knowing that this young man had a good relationship with each and every one of the influential officials of the imperial court. If he added some oil and paste and spoke these words openly, Feng Xifan would definitely be in a lot of trouble.

Zheng Keshuang repeatedly bowed with cupped fist and said, "Wei *Daren*, please be lenient, lowly officer beseech you."

Wei Xiaobao knew that his words had scared Feng Xifan that he did not dare to make any noise. Feeling that he has had enough tail wind, he laughed aloud and said, "Duo *Dage*, *Xiongdi*'s face is actually not as good as yours. Duo *Dage* came to demand payment, you managed to get more than two million *taels*, *Xiongdi* personally came, I only got such a meager amount."

Zheng Keshuang said, "Lowly officer really does not have anything left in my house, it's not that … it's not that I dare to renege on my debt."

“Off we go then!” Wei Xiaobao said, “I’ll wait ten days, half a month, after Zheng *Wangye* get more gold and silver from Taiwan, I will be back to settle the account.” While saying that, he stood up and walked out of the hall.

When Feng Xifan heard that, he knew that Wei Xiaobao was framing Zheng Keshuang up, saying that he conspired against the law by still maintaining contact with his former subordinates in Taiwan; which was a capital offense punishable by extermination of the entire family. If they did not explain clearly, for the rest of their lives they would live under forced submission, it would be difficult for them to conduct themselves. Thereupon he said in a loud and clear voice, “We are law-abiding citizens, we do not dare to take even half a step on the path of fault. Today what Wei *Daren*, Duo *Zongguan* have spoken in here, we must present in a memorial to His Majesty systematically and in full details [orig. ‘count by fives and tens’]. Otherwise, although the Heaven and the Earth is big, we will not have a place to set out feet on.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You want a place to set your foot? There is, there is. If Zheng *Wangye* and General Feng return to Taiwan, won’t you have a lot of land to set your feet on? If the two of you want to discuss about establishing your foothold, we are not going to bother you.” Pulling Dolong’s hand along, he walked out the door with his head held high.

When Wei Xiaobao was back in his mansion, immediately he prepared a feast; he invited the Imperial Bodyguards to drink wine. Dolong had his subordinates, the Imperial Bodyguards to fetch four big chests and opened them; all were full of gold, silver, pearls and jewels, as well as stacks of banknotes. He laughed and said, “After several months of collecting the debt, most of this fellow Zheng Keshuang’s family property is in here. Wei *Xiongdi*, you double check it.”

Wei Xiaobao took a stack of banknotes, worth about more than a hundred thousand *taels*; he said, “This dog thief murdered my Shifu, yet His Majesty conferred nobility title to him, my enmity cannot be avenged. Thank you very much *Dage* and all *Xiongdi* for making his life miserable, and vent this anger on *Xiongdi*’s behalf. My Shifu did not have either wife or children, *Xiongdi* wants to take some of this money and have people go to Taiwan to build a grand memorial hall to enshrine and worship my Shifu. As for the rest of the money, I’d like *Dage* and all *Xiongdi* to divide it among yourselves.”

Dolong repeatedly shook his hand, “No, can’t do; no, can’t do!” he repeatedly said, “This is the money Zheng Keshuang owed *Xiongdi*. You only need to send out several Qing troops, every day pay a visit to demand payment, I am not afraid he won’t pay up. We are only doing you a tiny favor, we all are family, how can we covet your money?”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “To tell you the truth, *Xiongdi*’s family property is already too much that I cannot use it up my entire life. A good friend is well-off, everybody can use it together, why bother about mine or yours?”

But Dolong was adamant, he simply refused to receive it. The two of them strived to best each other until their faces were flushed with excitement. Finally it was decided that the Imperial Bodyguards would receive one million *taels* as the ‘debt collection fee’. The other three hundred thousand *taels* were given to the Valiant Cavalry Brigade brethren to be divided among themselves. Dolong took the rest and personally brought it to Wei mansion’s inner hall.

All the Imperial Bodyguards, even those who were on duty in the Palace, received their share, about several thousand *taels* per person. Everybody was happy and excited, they ate and drank to their hearts’ content, and then they opened up *Pai Jiu* and dice tables in the Duke mansion’s reception hall. Since he was playing against the brethren, Wei Xiaobao did not practice any cheating.

They gambled until the second watch of the night [between 9-11pm]. Wei Xiaobao said to Dolong, “Duo *Dage*, *Xiongdi* has another favor to ask you.”

Dolong’s gambling luck was flourishing, he was in a very good mood. “Alright,” he said with a laugh, “No matter what, you only need to instruct me.” But he immediately recalled something; he said, “Only one matter I cannot do! That lunatic who cursed you on the street, His Majesty commanded me to have strict custody over him; early in the morning tomorrow you and I will supervise his execution. If for personal gain I let him go, His Majesty will definitely have my head chopped.”

The favor Wei Xiaobao was going to ask was precisely this matter; who would have thought that before he even mentioned it, Dolong had already shot him down. He thought, “His Majesty indeed has supernatural foresight, he has anticipated everything. Even one million *taels* of silver cannot buy Mao *Dage*’s

life.” He was angry and his heart was full of grievances, thereupon he wanted to come back to Zheng Keshuang’s house to demand payment. But then he recalled Zheng Keshuang’s dejected appearance, he felt that to bully such a pitiful creature was not the conduct of a hero. He thought better of it and said, “It was His Majesty himself who give us the order concerning that lunatic, even if I had gargantuan guts I would not dare to let him go. Today we went to demand payment, that fellow Zheng Keshuang is alright, but his subordinate, that Feng Xifan was really annoying, he took unfair advantage of us. When *Xiongdi* remembers this, I really cannot swallow.”

Several Imperial Bodyguards nearby heard him, they all parroted his words, “When we saw that today, everybody was angry. Wei *Daren* need not be worried, let us all pay him a visit. He is a surrendering soldier of defeated army, unexpectedly he has the audacity to flaunt his prestige inside the city of Beijing. This kind of disregard of the law and natural morality, do we still need to tolerate?” The more they talked about it, the angrier they got; the Imperial Bodyguards all said that they would leave immediately to tear down Feng Xifan’s earl mansion.

Wei Xiaobao said, “If we are going to deal with this son of a turtle, we must not come publicly and let the imperial censor finds out and submits a memorial to the Emperor. It won’t be too good for the Imperial Bodyguards’ reputation.”

“Yes, yes,” Dolong hastily said, “*Xiongdi*’s apprehension is very true.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Duo *Dage* do not need to act personally, let’s just have Zhang *Dage* and Zhao *Dage* take several men to do it.” Turning to Zhang Kangnian and Zhao Qixian he said, “Disguise yourselves as Vanguard Battalion’s Tai *Dutong*’s [commander] subordinates. Pretend that you have an urgent official business, ask Feng Xifan that son of a turtle for a discussion. Even if he has suspicions in his heart, he won’t dare not to come out. Somewhere along the way, put his hands and feet on shackles, cover his eyes with black cloth, stuff his mouth with rags, take him in circle to the east of the city and the west of the city, finally bring him here. We all then beat him severely, strip off his clothes, and send him to Tai *Dutong*’s concubine’s bed.” All the Imperial Bodyguards roared in laughter; they repeatedly praised it as a brilliant scheme.

Imperial Bodyguards and Vanguard Battalion had always been at odds with

each other; when they came across each other, oftentimes they would fight. The Vanguard Battalion's commander was originally Ajichi; that day Wei Xiaobao schemed against him and put him in prison, although later on he was released, Kangxi blamed him as useless, did not do his job properly, thereupon he was deposed from his position. Nowadays the *Dutong* was a man surnamed Tai. Dolong and Chief Tai were 'struggling in the light and fighting in the dark'; the animosity had been going on for a long time, but neither one could overcome the other.

Dolong was even more elated; he said, "That fellow Ol' Tai is afraid of his wife, he took maids and concubines, but did not dare to take them home. His newest concubine, the number eight concubine, lives at the Tian Shui Jing [Sweet Water Well] Alley, Ol' Tai does not stay overnight there. We strip Feng Xifan stark naked and then put him in the new concubine's bed, Ol' Tai will definitely be half-dead angry. Even if he suspects it was us who play him trick, as long as all of us keep our mouths shut, he won't be able to do anything."

Immediately the Imperial Bodyguards took off their uniforms and insignias before going out the door, giggling and laughing. Wei Xiaobao and Dolong waited in the hall, drinking.

Wei Xiaobao's subordinates, his personal guards constantly made discreet inquiry and came back to report the progress of the operation: the Imperial Bodyguards had arrived at the door of 'Zhongcheng Earl Mansion' and identified themselves as Vanguard Battalion, they knocked the door asking for an audience. Feng Xifan came out to greet them and invited everybody in for some tea. Zhang Kangnian said that they received Tai *Dutong*'s order, there was an urgent military intelligence from Taiwan, asking for his presence for immediate consultation. Feng Xifan climbed into a sedan chair, the Imperial Bodyguards escorted him to the western city. The Imperial Bodyguards put Feng Xifan in shackles, they even arrested the people who came with him. The group then went to the northern city; the *Tidu* [local commander] of Jiu Men [Nine Gate] on night duty shouted questions, Zhao Qixian loudly replied that they were Vanguard Battalion, inside the sedan chair Feng Xifan definitely could hear the exchange clearly. The crowd was heading back here to this mansion …

After the time needed to burn an incense stick, the Imperial Bodyguards with

Feng Xifan in custody came in. Zhang Kangnian said in loud voice, “Reporting to Tai *Dutong*: the rebellious officer Feng Xifan is here.”

Wei Xiaobao’s right hand clenched into a fist, he made a gesture to beat him. The Imperial Bodyguards called out, “Rebellious officer Feng Xifan colludes with the rebels, he conspires against the law. Tai *Dutong*’s order: beat him severely.” Punches and kicks flew toward him at once.

Feng Xifan’s martial art skill was extremely high, he was also very perceptive; when the Imperial Bodyguards, posing as the Vanguard Battalion, came to get him, he immediately saw something was amiss. If he wanted to escape, although the Imperial Bodyguards were superior in number, they would never be able to capture him. However, since he surrendered and was conferred the title Earl, he thought that although the opponents intentionally wanted to frame him, the Emperor was wise, he was always able to distinguish right from wrong. If Feng Xifan ran away, inevitably he would be charged with the offense of escaping arrest, henceforth his honor and glory, his rank and emolument of nobility, would go down the drain. Therefore, all along he did not resist. Just because he coveted riches and honor, this martial art master of the present age had unexpectedly fallen into the hands of these Imperial Bodyguards and was beaten until he was hovering between life and death.

Seeing his bleeding nose, and knowing that his internal injury was quite heavy, Wei Xiaobao was overjoyed; at last the enmity of the murder of his Shifu was avenged to some degree. If the beating continued, he was afraid Feng Xifan would die; thereupon he shook his hand to stop them. He then ordered his personal guards to strip Feng Xifan naked, and wrap him inside a felt blanket. By this time Feng Xifan was at his last gasp, he had already lost consciousness.

Dolong laughed and said, “Take him to the Ol’ Tai’s eighth concubine’s house.”

Zhao Qixian said with a laugh, “It would be best if we also strip the Ol’ Tai’s eighth concubine naked and tie the two of them together.”

The Imperial Bodyguards were greatly delighted; they all roared in cheers. Dolong wanted to see the Ol’ Tai’s eighth concubine being stripped; he laughed and said, “This time I am going to lead the troops.”

His party carried Feng Xifan and was about to leave when suddenly two

personal guards came in in quick steps and reported to Wei Xiaobao, “Reporting to *Daren*: there is a fight going on outside Tai *Dutong*’s residence in Tian Shui Jing Alley right now, the sky and the earth are turning upside down.”

Everyone was shocked, thinking, “How did the secret leak out? Tai *Dutong* already guards against it, this matter could turn bad.”

“What kind of people are fighting?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

A personal guard said, “Eight of us, *Xiaoren* received *Daren*’s order to scout out the Tian Shui Jing Alley, suddenly we saw a group of armed women, about thirty or forty of them …”

Wei Xiaobao frowned, “What armed women?” he wondered aloud.

The personal guard said, “Reporting to *Daren*: this large group of people consists of women with big feet, some carry bread rollers, some carry laundry sticks, and then there are some carry door bolts and shoulder poles; they all stormed into Tai *Dutong*’s residence. ‘Bing, bing, bang, bang!’ they ransacked the place and dragged a young woman who did not have time to escape and lashed her fiercely with a whip.”

“That’s strange!” Wei Xiaobao exclaimed, “Go and find out more.” Two personal guards received the order and left.

The second team of scouts arrived and reported, “Reporting to *Daren*: riding on fast horse Tai *Dutong* arrived at the Tian Shui Jing Alley, his clothes was in a mess, his left foot was wearing a boot, his right foot was bare. Turns out the leader of the armed women attacking Tian Shui Jing Alley was Madame Tai *Dutong*.”

As soon as they heard it, the whole room roared with laughter. It was only then did they realize that Madame Tai *Dutong* drank vinegar [i.e. jealous] and went to attack his ‘outside’ residence.

When the personal guard spoke to this point, he also could not help laughing before continuing, “That Madame grabbed Tai *Dutong* and ‘slap, slap!’ she slapped him on the face, followed by a kick; she was really formidable. Tai *Dutong* bowed respectfully and repeatedly said, ‘Madame, calm down!’”

Dolong waved his hands in excitement; he said, “This time Ol’ Tai received

what he deserved."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "*Dage*, quickly lead the troops to urge them to stop fighting. This time you can grab the Ol' Tai's pigtail, I guarantee that from now on the Vanguard Battalion will never dare to go against us, the Imperial Bodyguards."

Reminded by Wei Xiaobao, Dolong was greatly delighted. He slapped his own forehead and said with a laugh, "I am such a muddle head! Such a good opportunity and I almost miss it. Brothers, let us all go to watch the excitement." Leading the Imperial Bodyguards, he rushed toward Tian Shui Jing Alley.

Wei Xiaobao looked at Feng Xifan who was still lying on the floor; he pondered, "How am I going to handle this fellow? If I release him, he would definitely report to His Majesty. Even if he did not mention my name, His Majesty would definitely guess that I have something to do with it." With his hands behind his back he paced back and forth in the hall. He thought further, "Come dawn, Mao *Dage* will be executed. How can I save his life? A big name mansion attacking the execution ground, that won't do. Execution ground, execution ground …" Suddenly he remembered the opera 'exchanging a child on the execution ground'. "That's it! Xue Gang ran into misfortune, he was executed along with his whole family unto the third generation. There was a white-bearded old man, Xu somebody, who took his own child to the execution ground and exchanged the child with the baby Xue somebody and took him out …"

The number of opera he watched was indeed not a few, he might not be able to metion the names of the character in the play, but he remembered the stories very well. As soon as he recalled the 'exchanging a child on the execution ground', another opera came into his mind, "The 'Searching alone saving alone'! This story is also not bad, there was this black-bearded man called Cheng Ying, who exchanged his own son with his master's son, he let his own son be beheaded in order to save his master's son's life. It's desperately serious. Fortunately Mao *Dage*'s age is not the same as my son's. Otherwise, I would have to deliver Hutou, Tongchui to the execution ground to be beheaded in exchange for Mao *Dage*'s life. Although *yi qi* to a friend is most important, I can't ever do this kind of matter. Very good, very good!" He kicked Feng Xifan, who was still lying on the floor, heavily and said, "Your luck is not bad, Wei *Daren*

hereby accept you as my adopted son. Wei *Daren*'s real son I can't bear to exchange, adopted son I can exchange as I wish."

Immediately he summoned the captain of his personal guards and gave him secret orders, he gave him one thousand *taels*, and another thousand *taels* to be divided among the other personal guards who were going to handle this matter. The captain bowed to express his thanks; he said, "*Daren* set your heart at ease, everything will be handled properly, there will be no mistake."

Finished making arrangement, Wei Xiaobao entered the inner hall. His seven wives and sons and daughter were summoned into the Palace by the Empress Dowager, the house was cold and cheerless. Still fully clothed he lay down in his bed for a while, soon dawn would arrive.

By the *chenpai* hour [5th earthly branch, 7-9am] the Palace issued an imperial edict, "Jiang Yang Da Dao [notorious criminal, see also note 6 of Chapter 2] Mao Shiba has committed treason and heresy, insulted a high-ranking minister, he is to be beheaded. The Great General Fuyuan, First-class Duke of Luding Wei Xiaobao is hereby ordered to supervise the execution."

Wei Xiaobao received the imperial decree. Outside his mansion's gate he selected several personal guards to accompany him. He saw Dolong, leading several dozen Imperial Bodyguards with Mao Shiba in custody, arrived. Mao Shiba's eyes were blue, his nose swollen, his face was full of blood. It was obvious that he had received quite a beating. As soon as he saw Wei Xiaobao, he cursed and scolded, "Wei Xiaobao, you are a shameless traitor (to China). Today you become the supervising officer of *Laozi*'s execution, *Laozi* will die without any regret. Who told me that day to be so blind, that from a wh0re nest in Yangzhou I took you, this little traitor all the way to Beijing?"

The personal guards shouted at him, but Mao Shiba's cursing was growing more vicious. Wei Xiaobao did not pay him any attention, he asked Dolong, "How was Ol' Tai?"

Dolong laughed and said, "Last night I rushed over there, Ol' Tai has already been grabbed by his Madame, his face was full of blood traces. As soon as he saw me, his face looked very awkward. I persuaded using all possible arguments, urging his Madame. I also took his eighth concubine into my home, and let my

two concubines accompany her. Ol' Tai showered me with a thousand thanks and ten thousand gratitudes, his appreciation was boundless."

"What does the eighth concubine look like?" Wei Xiaobao asked with a laugh.

Dolong raised his thumb and said, "Hey, hey, amazing!"

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "You must not 'seing a beauty conceive a scheme', taking advantage of someone else's misfortune!"

Dolong laughed aloud and said, "*Xiongdi*, set your hundred and twenty hearts at ease, how can your *Dage* be like that? Although Ol' Tai is my longstanding opponent, this kind of shady business your *Dage* will definitely never do."

Presently the two of them brought Mao Shiba to the execution ground at the mouth of the food market. Dolong rode a horse, Wei Xiaobao rode a large carriage. Mao Shiba sat on an open top ox cart, his hands were tied behind his back, a piece of wooden signboard was on his neck; it said, "Offender to the throne: Mao Shiba."

The ox cart travelled along the main street from the horse and mule market westward, common people crowded by the street to watch. Along the way Mao Shiba was shouting and yelling, "After eighteen years, *Laozi* is still a hero, that's why I am called Mao Shiba. I already knew that I was going to be beheaded."

The common people by the street cheered; they praised him, "He has guts, a really tough man."

They reached the execution ground at the mouth of the food market, at the intersection between the horse and mule market and the Xuan Wu Gate main street. That same night Wei Xiaobao's personal guards had erected raised canopy. In front and at the rear of the canopy the security was very tight. Dolong received Kangxi's instruction that there was a possibility Tian Di Hui would attack the execution ground, thereupon he had the Jiu Men *Tidu* deployed two thousand officers and men to guard all around the execution ground.

Mao Shiba stood boldly at the center of the execution ground; he shouted, "We all are the people of the Great Han, our beautiful rivers and mountains are occupied by the Tatars. There will come a day that the Tatars will be wiped out completely!"

Wei Xiaobao got down from his carriage and entered the canopy. The carriage was parked right next to the canopy. Wei Xiaobao took his seat, and then he invited Dolong to sit right next to him. Dolong knitted his brows and said, “This criminal is shouting treason and heresy, he is inciting the people in here. We must chop his head as quickly as possible.”

“Yes,” Wei Xiaobao replied. He shouted, “Bring the prisoner!”

Four personal guards pushed Mao Shiba into the canopy and pushed him down to kneel, but Mao Shiba refused to kneel no matter what.

“No need to kneel,” Wei Xiaobao said. Turning to Dolong he said, “*Dage*, please identify the prisoner, is he the one?”

“He is!” Dolong said.

“He is identified,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Offender to the throne: Mao Shiba.”

Picking up a vermillion brush he drew a large circle on the wooden signboard, and threw it out. A personal guard picked up the signboard and dragged Mao Shiba out.

“Duo *Dage*,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I want to show you something interesting.” While saying that, he took out a fold of handkerchiefs from his sleeve pocket and showed it over in front of Dolong’s face.

The handkerchief was embroidered with erotic picture. The man and woman featured in the picture looked beautiful and handsome, their posture was vivid. As soon as Dolong saw it, his eyes were glued to it. He flipped the handkerchief over, underneath was another embroidered handkerchief with different erotic picture, the posture was very strange. Dolong laughed and said, “This style looks very weird.”

Flipping the handkerchiefs over, he found more embroidered erotic pictures, the posture in each picture was weirder than the previous ones; there was one man with two women, two men and three women, and so on. Dolong just looked on and his blood was boiling. “*Xiongdi*,” he said with a laugh, “Where did you get this treasure? Please buy another set for your *Gege*.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “This is *Xiongdi*’s gift to show filial respect to *Dage*.”

It was as if Dolong had just acquired the most precious treasure, smiling broadly he repeatedly said thanks, while folding the handkerchiefs and carefully put it into his pocket.

Right this moment, they heard ‘bang, bang, bang!’ the cannon fired three salvos. The captain of Wei Xiaobao’s personal guards came to report, “The time has come. *Daren* please supervise the execution.”

“Alright!” Wei Xiaobao replied. He stood up and pulled Dolong’s hand to walk out of the canopy together.

They saw Mao Shiba kneeling in the execution ground with his head hung dejectedly, as if he had lost his consciousness. The drummer began to beat the drum. When the drum stopped, the executioner, draped with red hood over his head, raised his arm, and swung the ghost-headed saber down. Immediately the convict’s head rolled. The executioner’s left foot flew, he kicked the head away. The convict’s body slumped forward with blood gushing out of his neck.

“It’s done,” Dolong said, “Let us part now. I am going to see His Majesty to report the completion of the imperial decree.”

Wei Xiaobao choked with sobs. “Duo *Dage*,” he said, “This man had deep friendship with me. It’s just that His Majesty’s order was very strict that I was not able to save him. Ay!” While saying that, he used his sleeve to wipe the tears; sobbing and sniffling, he cried loudly.

Dolong sighed and said, “*Xiongdi* indeed has enough *yi qi*. You may prepare his body for burial well; give him proper burial, this way you are not letting the dead down.” Wei Xiaobao complied, then he continued crying.

When Wei Xiaobao used his sleeve to wipe the tears, he actually had fresh ginger in his sleeve, with which he rubbed his eyes. The pungent ginger made his eyes red and made him shedding tears continuously, but in his heart he was laughing, delighted that his scheme was successful. Dolong comforted him some more and walked him to his carriage before he himself mounted his horse and left. Surrounded by his personal guards he rode the carriage back to his duke mansion. Several personal guards rolled the convict’s body in a straw mat and placed the body in a coffin that was prepared earlier on the side, and then they nailed the coffin’s lid solid.

The common people who were witnessing the execution expressed their opinions. They all said that at the death's door Mao Shiba still dared to swear and curse, he was a real hero. Yet some who were afraid of getting involved reprimanded the others, saying that the offender to the throne spoke treason and heresy, hence they should not praise him to avoid any disaster befalling them.

When Wei Xiaobao reached his mansion, he got off the carriage; but the carriage quietly continued southward, out of Beijing, all the way to the south, heading toward Yangzhou. Wei Xiaobao then went to the Palace to report the completion of the imperial decree. Kangxi immediately granted him an audience.

Kangxi had received Dolong's report, and knew that when supervising the execution of Mao Shiba, Wei Xiaobao did not stop crying. This time, seeing Wei Xiaobao's red eyes, Kangxi felt sorry and rather uneasy; he thought that Wei Xiaobao attached most importance to loyalty, it was a rare trait. After consoling him warmly for a bit, Kangxi said, "Xiao Guizi, those Luocha troops you captured, the majority asked me to set them free to return to their country. I have already released them, but there are about two hundred who wish to remain in China."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Beijing is livelier and more fun compared to Moscow. Following His Majesty and working for you will be a lot better-off than working for those two unfit for anything Luocha young Tsars."

Kangxi smiled and said, "I organized these Luocha troops into two 'Russian Companies', and put these two companies under your command. You must control them well, don't let them create any trouble in the Capital."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he kneeled down to express his gratitude. Outside the Palace, the two Luocha companies had already been waiting outside the Gate of Supreme Harmony by the Jinshui [golden water] Bridge. The Luocha troops were wearing new Qing troop uniform, bright, neat and well-fitting; they looked really impressive. Wei Xiaobao issued his order: each man received twenty *taels* and was granted three days furlough. The Luocha troops cried out, "Wula!" incessantly.

Until the end of Kangxi's reign, these Luocha troops were serving in the Qing army, they were loyal and were not double-minded. When foreign nation's

ambassador came to Beijing, they saw Chinese Emperor employed Luocha officers and men, no one was not impressed. It was not until these Luocha troops gradually died of old age that the 'Russian Company' organizations began to dissolve.

(Book note: Concerning the details of the captured Luocha troops serving in the Qing army, please see Yu Zhengxie's 'Guizi [thirtieth year of the 60 year cycle] Class Manuscript' volume IX, 'Examining the Russian Company'. In Xiao Yishan's [1902-1978] 'General History of the Qing Dynasty', it was written that 'the prisoners were offered to stay in the Capital, to receive the Emperor's pardon and were organized into companies, comprised solely of Russian ethnicity. Their offspring still exist today.' These Russian men intermarried with Chinese women and produced children.)

Back to his mansion, Wei Xiaobao saw that the Princess, along with his six other wives and three sons and daughter, had returned from the Palace. Every one received not a few rewards from the Empress Dowager, but the Princess did not look happy. Wei Xiaobao asked, and learned that the Empress Dowager treated everyone equally favorably, although the Princess was her own daughter, she did not utter half a word of affection to her. Naturally Wei Xiaobao understood the reason behind it; he thought, "Empress Dowager did not particularly treat you badly, it was because she was looking at your husband's face." He said, "Empress Dowager is very thoughtful, she was afraid that if she is particularly good to you, the six *Meimei* would be jealous."

The Princess angrily said, "She is my own mother, if she is a bit good to me, how can they be jealous?"

Wei Xiaobao embraced her and said with a laugh, "I am particularly good to you, let's see if they are going to be jealous or not?" The women chattered continuously, they all laughed together. The Princess was a frank person, as soon as everybody broke into chatting and laughing, she felt better already.

Hereafter in the next ten days or so, one after another the princes, dukes and high-ranking ministers invited Wei Xiaobao for a banquet to congratulate him on his meritorious service. He went to the opera, he gambled; not a single evening he was idle.

One day Dolong paid him a visit, telling him that Feng Xifan had been missing for more than ten days. His family had already reported to *Shun Tian Fu*[37]. Dolong asked in a low voice, "*Xiongdi*, what happened after we beat him up that night?"

"Afterwards I sent him home," Wei Xiaobao replied, "I wonder where has that fellow gone?"

"You didn't kill him, did you?" Dolong asked.

Wei Xiaobao replied, "If I sent people to kill him, you would be standing at the side, watching. Duo *Dage*, did you see me doing that?"

"No, no," Dolong said, "We only beat him up severely; when did we kill him?"

"That's right," Wei Xiaobao said, "Ever since *Xiongdi* received the imperial order to lead the troops, although I have given up the *Fu Zongguan* [deputy chief] position, but as long as it is related to the Imperial Bodyguards, no matter what kind of responsibility, *Xiongdi* will definitely face it together with *Dage*."

Dolong smiled and said, "Nothing's wrong. The Feng family insists that that night it was the Vanguard Battalion's Ol' Tai who sent his men to pick him up, but he never returned. *Shun Tian Fu* personally paid a visit to Ol' Tai, asking him about that night. Ol' Tai was very embarrassed, he hummed and hawed but was unwilling to tell the truth. Later on Ol' Tai became angry and lost his temper, *Shun Tian Fu* did not dare to investigate further." While saying that, he stood up and patted Wei Xiaobao's shoulder. "*Xiongdi*," he said with a laugh, "You are a good-luck general. Who would have thought that in this matter you can be so lucky? Madame Ol' Tai did not come earlier or later, but right that night she was prompted by a sudden impulse to lead the armed women going to attack Tian Shui Jing Alley. This way, everything will fall into Ol' Tai's responsibility."

He was certain that Feng Xifan must have been killed in secret by Wei Xiaobao. Although in this matter he shared some responsibility, putting the blame on the Vanguard Battalion's Tai *Dutong* fit very well with his own intention. Naturally he did not know that the fact that Madame Tai *Dutong* did not come earlier or later and sent out her troops right that moment was actually not a coincidence at all. Wei Xiaobao had calculated the precise moment and sent people to tip her off. Naturally Dolong would never know that when Wei Xiaobao dispatched the Qing

troops to supervise the execution, he had the canopy constructed with double wall, and hid Feng Xifan inside. Once Mao Shiba was identified, when he was dragged away from the canopy, Wei Xiaobao took out the handkerchiefs with erotic pictures to divert Dolong's attention, while Wei Xiaobao's personal guards immediately swapped Mao Shiba and Feng Xifan. By this time Feng Xifan was still unconscious, his face was full of blood, the guards put the exact same clothes as Mao Shiba's on him; he was made to kneel down on the execution ground with head hanging low, and was immediately beheaded. Although Feng and Mao, two men's appearances and statures were not the same, nobody detected the difference. The head the executioner chopped actually belonged to Feng Xifan.

In the meantime, the personal guards locked Mao Shiba inside Wei *Daren*'s carriage, which was parked next to the canopy; they gagged his mouth, and then carried him nonstop to Yangzhou. It was after they crossed the Yellow River that they explained everything to him clearly; they also gave him three thousand *taels*. In mortal danger Mao Shiba escaped alive, his acute spirit was dampened; he also realized that Wei Xiaobao staked his own life to save him, that Wei Xiaobao was not a person who violated *yi qi*. Henceforth he went into hiding and did not appear in public anymore.

Day after day Wei Xiaobao exchanged toasts, he was somewhat tired; he was also concerned about Tian Di Hui brethren. The Emperor was more and more formidable, while Wei Xiaobao lived comfortably in his mansion, he knew that he must not let the Emperor catch the Green Wood Hall brethren in one net; therefore, he must discuss a plan to guard against this. As a result, he disguised himself as a young master of a rich family, with Shuang'er disguised as his personal attendant.

The two of them went to the Heavenly Bridge, and mingled with the crowd there for an hour before they saw Xu Tianchuan, carrying a medicine box on his back, sitting in a small teahouse, drinking tea. Wei Xiaobao entered the teahouse at once and sat down in front of Xu Tianchuan. "Xu *Dage*!" he greeted in a low voice.

Xu Tianchuan stood up suddenly, and strode out with an angry look on his face. Wei Xiaobao was startled; he followed out, and saw Xu Tianchuan was heading toward a secluded spot. Immediately he and Shuang'er followed from a

distant.

Xu Tianchuan passed through three lanes, two small streets, and came to an alley; at the end of the alley there were two big ginkgo trees. He entered the alley, and knocked on the gate of the fifth house several times. The wooden door opened, Fan Gang came out to greet him. As soon as Fan Gang saw Wei Xiaobao, he was startled, but immediately anger filled his face.

Wei Xiaobao stepped forward and said with a laugh, “Fan *Dage*, how are you?”

“Humph!” Fan Gang snorted, but he did not reply.

With a wooden face Xu Tianchuan asked, “Wei *Daren*, do you bring troops to catch us all?”

Wei Xiaobao hastily said, “Xu *San Ge*, how can … how can you joke like that?”

Fan Gang quickly walked to the mouth of the alley and looked. Back to the house, he quickly closed the door. Wei Xiaobao and Shuang’er followed the two of them across the courtyard and into the main hall. They saw Li Lishi, Qi Biaoqing, Priest Xuanzhen, Gao Yanchao, Qian Laoben and the others were congregating in the hall. As soon as they saw Wei Xiaobao, everybody let out an ‘Ah!’, and sprang up.

Wei Xiaobao cupped his fist and said, “Gentlemen, *Gege*, how are you all doing?”

Priest Xuanzhen angrily said, “We haven’t been killed by you, I consider our situation not too bad!” ‘Shua!’ he pulled the saber hanging on his waist.

Wei Xiaobao took a step back and said in a trembling voice, “Why are you … you like this to … to me? I did not do … do anything to wrong you.”

Priest Xuanzhen loudly shouted in anger, “*Zongduozhu* was killed by you, Feng *Er Ge* was also killed by you, just a few days ago you killed Mao Shiba! I … we really wish we could rip your tendon and peel your skin.”

Wei Xiaobao was greatly anxious. “There’s no … no such thing,” he hastily said, “Those are all lies.”

Xuanzhen rushed one step forward; with his left hand he grabbed Wei Xiaobao’s lapel, and said sternly, “We couldn’t figure out how we are going to kill

you, today you … you this little traitor drop in to deliver your own life. Indeed *Zongduozhu*'s spirit in heaven has blessed us."

Seeing the situation turned from bad to worse, Wei Xiaobao turned his head around; he wanted to unleash his 'Shen Xing Bai Bian' [divine walk hundred changes] skill to escape, but he saw Xu Tianchuan and Fan Gang, both with weapons in their hands, were standing right behind him. He had no choice but to say, "We are all brothers, why be … why be this impatient?"

"Who wants to be brothers with you, little traitor?" Xuanzhen said, "Your, this little demon, graceful words, flowery speech, we don't want to hear it. I want to cut open your heart of wolf and lungs of dog to be offered as sacrifice to *Zongduozhu* and Feng *Er Ge* first, and then we'll talk later." Withdrawing his left arm, he pulled Wei Xiaobao closer.

"Injustice, injustice!" Wei Xiaobao cried out.

Seeing the situation was critical, Shuang'er took the Luocha short gun from her pocket and fired it toward the roof. 'Bang!' the room immediately filled with smoke. She grabbed Wei Xiaobao's back and tore him off Priest Xuanzhen's grab. In the past Xuanzhen had suffered greatly under western firearms; his father and brothers had died from guns. As soon as he heard the gunshot, his heart was shaken, and Wei Xiaobao was snatched away by Shuang'er.

Shuang'er leaped to the corner of the room and stood in front of Wei Xiaobao. Pointing the muzzle of the gun to the crowd she shouted, "Are you going to listen to reason or not?"

Xuanzhen's eyes turned red; he cried, "Everyone, charge! We'll fight them to the death!"

Raising his sword, he wanted to charge forward. Qian Laoben reached out to pull him back; he said, "*Daozhang* [priest], hold it!" Turning to Shuang'er he said, "What reason you want to talk, speak up, let us hear it."

"Alright!" Shuang'er said. Thereupon she narrated in details how Wei Xiaobao went into exile because he tried to save Chen Jinnan and the heroes in his house; how he was captured by Divine Dragon Cult and ended up on Tong Chi Island; how Chen Jinnan was killed by Zheng Keshuang and Feng Xifan, two people; how Feng Jizhong's plot fell through and his treachery was exposed, and how he was

killed by Shuang'er's gunshot; how Kangxi repeatedly ordered Wei Xiaobao to destroy Tian Di Hui, but he simply refused to follow orders; and finally how recently he saved Mao Shiba's life by swapping him with someone else. She was not an articulate person, her story was not particularly pleasant to hear, but this group of warriors had known her for a long time, they all knew that she was honest and never committed fraud; plus she was speaking casually, without the slightest hint of hesitation. They knew she did not have the ability to fabricate all these things in intricate details. Besides, in order to save them all Wei Xiaobao had lost his official position, his earl mansion was blasted flat, these people had experienced it firsthand. Now that they thought about Feng Jizhong's conduct, everything fit together; they could not help but to believe.

Xuanzhen said, "Since that's the case, in Tatar Emperor's imp … imp … damn it, imperial edict, why did he say that Wei *Xiangzhu* killed *Zongduozhu*?" By changing the way he addressed Wei Xiaobao as Wei '*Xiangzhu*', it goes to show that in his heart he had 90% believed.

Shuang'er shook her head and said, "This, I don't understand either."

Qi Biaoqing said, "It must be the Tatar Emperor's plot. He wanted Wei *Xiangzhu* to make a clean break with our Society; hereafter his mind would be firmly made up, with no possibility to change, to become Tatar high-ranking official."

"Qi *Xiongdi* is right," Xu Tianchuan said. Returning the saber into its sheath, he bent his knees in front of Wei Xiaobao and said, "We are a bunch of muddleheaded maggots and were hot-headed to the extreme, we have offended Wei *Xiangzhu*, a crime deserving ten thousand deaths; we are willing to receive punishment."

The rest of the warriors also kneeled down together. Xuanzhen repeatedly slapped his own face and cursed, "Deserve to die, deserve to die!"

Wei Xiaobao and Shuang'er hastily kneeled down to return the propriety. Now that Wei Xiaobao was not in panic, he said, "All *Gege*, please rise. There is a common saying, 'One who does not know is not guilty.' It was just temporary misunderstanding, what's the big deal?"

The group of warriors stood up and repeatedly apologized. By this time Wei

Xiaobao was very proud of himself, with his hands danced his feet tripped, he recounted the past events. Naturally his narrative was very lively and in full color, everything was a hundred times more exciting; but in the warriors' ears, it was far less credible than Shuang'er's.

The group of warriors huddled together and talked in low voices for a while. Li Lishi said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, *Zongduozhu* was unfortunate and died under the crafty scoundrel's hands. Tian Di Hui is like a dragon without a head, the brothers of the ten Halls have been in deliberation to elect a new *Zongduozhu*. We, the brothers of the Green Wood Hall, want to nominate you as the *Zongduozhu*. It's just that we are afraid the other nine Halls' brothers would not accept, or perhaps they would be suspicious. We all agree to ask you to set up a great merit."

Wei Xiaobao shook his hand repeatedly. "I definitely don't want to be *Zongduozhu*," he said. But his curiosity was piqued; he asked, "I wonder what great merit you want me to accomplish?"

Li Lishi said, "The three feudatories rebellion have been crushed, Taiwan has fallen into the Tatars' hands, in the north, Luocha people have been repelled by Wei *Xiangzhu*. Our great undertaking of fighting the Qing restoring the Ming has been increasingly more difficult."

Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, "That's right." But in his heart he mused, "Since it is very difficult, let's everybody just sit back, relax, and not doing fighting the Qing restoring the Ming."

Li Lishi said, "Although the Tatar Emperor is young, he is very able and efficient, plus he is able to win the people's hearts. The common people throughout the world gradually forget about the previous dynasty. If this situation drags on for several more years, I am afraid Tatars' rivers and mountains will be more stable."

Wei Xiaobao sighed again and said, "That's right." In his heart he said, "Xiao Xuanzi stabilizing the rivers and mountains, there is nothing bad about it."

Li Lishi continued, "The Emperor dotes on and trusts Wei *Xiangzhu* very much, we all want to ask you to think of a plan, to bring the brothers into the Palace to assassinate the Emperor."

Wei Xiaobao was greatly alarmed. “This … this is impossible,” he said in a trembling voice.

Fan Gang said, “May I ask Wei *Xiangzhu*, what’s the difficulty?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “There are too many Imperial Bodyguards in the Palace, and then there is Valiant Cavalry Brigade, Vanguard Battalion, *Hu Jun* [Protecting-Army] Battalion, Firearm Brigade, *Jian Tui* [Strong and Acute] Battalion, Tiger Spear Battalion, and so on, to protect the Emperor; it’s desperately serious. Just the Imperial Bodyguards alone, there are *Yu Qian Shiwei* [lit. Bodyguards in front of the Imperial], *Gan Qing Men Shiwei* [lit. Imperial Bodyguards in charge of Qing Gate], *San Qi Shiwei* [lit. Imperial Bodyguards of the Three Banners]. That day heroes like *Shen Quan Wu Di* [divine fist without equal] Gui Xinshu *Laoyezi* and the others still failed and met violent death, much less me? To assassinate His Majesty is difficult above difficult.”

Hearing he flatly refused, the crowd of warriors was displeased; plus the way he mentioned ‘His Majesty’, which showed that he had enough slave mentality, put an angry look on everybody’s face.

Fan Gang cast a glance toward the brethren and then said to Wei Xiaobao, “Wei *Xiangzhu*, assassinating the Tatar Emperor is without a doubt very difficult; however, we have you to take charge of the operation, so it’s not like we do not have any hope of success. We, brothers, who are going into the Palace, not a single one of us is hoping to come out alive, but whatever happens we will protect Wei *Xiangzhu* and keep you safe and sound. You have rendered not a few of great merits for our Society, among the tens of thousands brothers in our Society, in all honesty not a single one is as good as you. Tian Di Hui and the Tatars cannot live under the same sky. Hereafter the great undertaking of fighting the Qing restoring the Ming will rely solely on Wei *Xiangzhu*’s inspiration.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head and said, “This matter I definitely don’t want to so. His Majesty wanted me to wipe out Tian Di Hui, I was unwilling, because I am holding up *yi qi*. Now all of you want me to assassinate the Emperor, I am also unwilling, because I am holding up *yi qi* still.”

Xuanzhen angrily said, “You are a Han, yet you are holding up *yi qi* for the Tatar

Emperor; won't that make you … make you a *Han* …" He was about to curse him the 'Hanjian' [traitor to China], two characters; but in the end he forced himself to hold back.

Fan Gang said, "This matter is extremely important. It's hard for Wei *Xiangzhu* to agree immediately, that is very reasonable. Please give it a careful consideration and then give us your instruction."

"Very well, very well," Wei Xiaobao busily said, "I will think about it carefully, I will think about it carefully."

Seeing that he was not being sincere at all, Xu Tianchuan said, "I hope Wei *Xiangzhu* will not forget the late *Zongduozhu*'s aspiration, you must not forget the terrible tragedy of our vanquished nation. We are Han people, we must never be Tatars' slaves."

"Right, right," Wei Xiaobao said, "We must not forget that."

The crowd of warriors knew that he was speaking without meaning it; they all fell silent.

Wei Xiaobao looked this way, and then he looked that way; finally he laughed and said, "Why are all *Gege* not talking?" The group of warriors stayed silent.

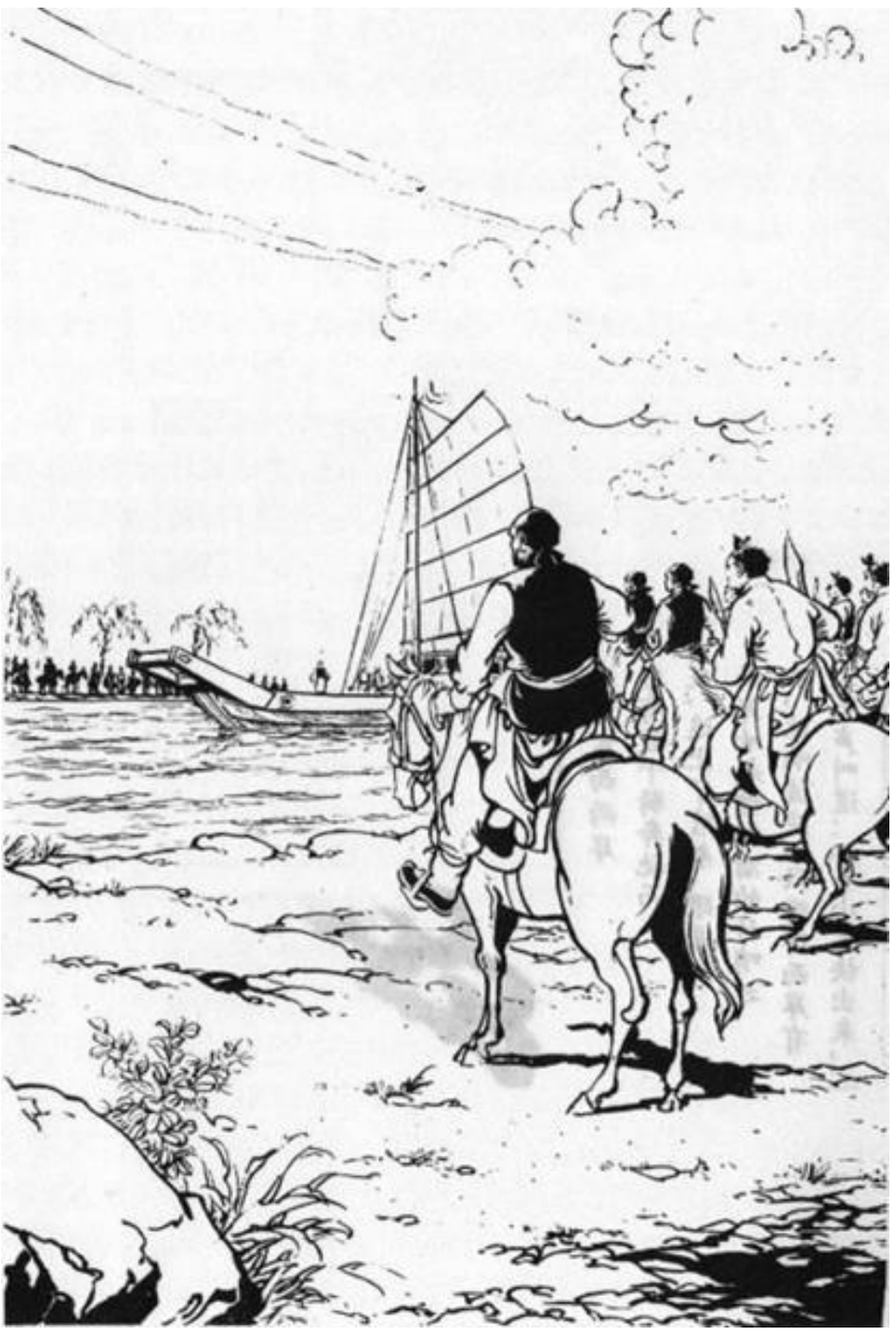
Wei Xiaobao felt extremely awkward; it was as if there were thorns and brambles on his back. He said, "In that case, let us part for the time being. I will go back and think about it carefully, and then I will discuss it with all *Dage*." While saying that he stood up.

The crowd of warriors walked him off to the mouth of the alley, respectfully saluted him, and then took their leave.

Chapter 50

Fish hawk soared high in the clouds gallantly, eastern bean goose flew to the outer sky mysteriously.

(Translated by Foxs)



On both eastern and western banks of the canal several dozen of riders galloped toward the official boats. They heard over the dike of both banks the whistling boise of bamboo whistle calling and answering each other. From the western bank someone called out, "Wei Xiaobao, come out!"

Wei Xiaobao returned to his mansion, he sat in the side room feeling

depressed. By the afternoon, an imperial edict arrived, the Emperor was summoning him to the Palace. Wei Xiaobao went to the Upper Study Room and kowtowed. Kangxi asked, “Feng Xifan is suddenly missing, what is going on here?”

Wei Xiaobao was shocked; he thought, “Why ask me?” He said, “Reporting to His Majesty: the night Feng Xifan went missing, all along your servant was having fun with Duo *Zongguan* and the Imperial Bodyguards. Later on I heard Vanguard Battalion’s Tai *Dutong* was looking for Feng Xifan. I don’t know for a fact, but this Feng Xifan was then gone without a trace. These surrendering people from Taiwan are sneaky, their behavior is very strange, we don’t want them to conspire against the law in secret, let your servant investigate carefully.”

Kangxi smiled and said, “Very well, I give you the task of investigating this Feng Xifan’s whereabouts clearly, come back here in a few days to report. I promised the surrendering people of Taiwan that I will protect them thoroughly. This man suddenly disappeared mysteriously, if I cannot give a clear account, it would mean that I break my promise to the world.”

Cold sweats suddenly appeared on Wei Xiaobao’s forehead; he thought, “His Majesty is this serious, could it be that he knew I killed Feng Xifan?” Without any choice he responded, “Yes, yes.”

Kangxi asked further, “Earlier today you went to Yinxing [Ginkgo] Alley, was it fun?”

Wei Xiaobao was taken aback, “Yinxing Alley?” he asked. Immediately he recalled that at the mouth of the alley where Tian Di Hui warriors had their temporary lodging there were two big ginkgo trees; apparently that alley is called ‘Ginkgo Alley’. The Emperor even knew the name of the alley, what else could he conceal from him? This time the cold sweat appeared on Wei Xiaobao’s entire body, his legs went weak, he kneeled down at once, kowtowed and said, “Your Majesty can see clearly for ten thousand *li*. All in all, your servant is loyal to you.”

Kangxi sighed and said, “Those rebel thieves forced you to harm me, but you refused to comply no matter what. You are holding *yi qi* toward me very much; however … however, Xiao Guizi, in your whole life, will you always have your feet on two boats like this?”

Wei Xiaobao repeatedly kowtowed; he said, “Your Majesty please understand, becoming the Tian Di Hui *Zongduozhu*, your servant will never do. Your Majesty may set your hundred and twenty hearts at peace.”

Kangxi sighed again. Looking up, he stared blankly for half a day, and then slowly said, “I become the Emperor of China, although I am not as good as Yao Shun Yu Tang [See Chapter 14], I cherish common people, I strive for good governance. Among the emperors of the Ming Dynasty, which one was better than I am? Now three feudatories rebellion has been crushed, Taiwan has been taken over, Luocha country won’t dare to violate the border anymore, from now on the whole world is at peace, common people live in peace and work happily. Tian Di Hui’s rebel thieves still determine to restore Zhu family’s Ming Dynasty, do you think under an emperor surnamed Zhu common people’s daily life will be better than today?”

In his heart Wei Xiaobao said, “This, I do not know.” He said, “Your servant heard Fengyang [county, Chuzhou, Anhui] flower-drum[38] people sang about ‘ever since Zhu Emperor came out, there was scarcity nine out of ten years. Rich families sold their land, poor families sold their children.’ Right now the wind changes, the rain’s favorable, the country prospers, the people at peace, Your Majesty is raw bird fish soup [see ‘yao shun yu tang’ above], Zhu emperors were 108,000 *li* apart from you, even patting the horse’s bottom they would not be able to chase after you.”

Kangxi smiled slightly and said, “Stand up.” He also stood up and paced back and forth in the Upper Study Room. He said, “*Fu Huang* [father emperor] is a Manchu, but my birth mother Empress Xiao Kang was a Han army banner person, so I am half Han. I treat common people under the heavens equally, I have never treated Han people unfairly the slightest bit, why do they hate me that much, and determine to kill me?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “These rebels commit treason and heresy, they are totally muddleheaded, Your Majesty must not take them to heart.”

Kangxi shook his head, suddenly there was a depressed and lonely expression on his face. After quite a long time, he said, “There are good and bad Manchu people, there are also good and bad Han people. Bad people in the world are too

many, we can't kill them all, but to guide them back to the path of righteousness, I do not have that kind of ability. Ay, becoming an emperor is very difficult." He stared at Wei Xiaobao for half a day before finally he said, "You may go!"

Wei Xiaobao kowtowed and took his leave. He felt his entire body was cold. Turned out just now he was so scared that his undergarment and underpants were soaked with cold sweats. It was not until he was out of the Palace that he took a deep breath. "There is a spy infiltrating Tian Di Hui," he pondered, "We killed one Feng Jizhong, another one appeared in his place. Otherwise, how could he know that they wanted me to assassinate the Emperor? But I wonder who is this spy?"

Returning to his mansion, he sat down and pondered carefully, but he could not find any clue. He thought further, "His Majesty gave me the task of investigating Feng Xifan's whereabouts, looking at His Majesty's expression, he suspects that this is my doing, it's just that he does not have any incriminating evidence. How am I going to fob him off in this matter? Just now at the Yinxing Alley Shuang'er mentioned how I swapped people at the execution ground to save Mao *Dage*'s life; fortunately I have not told her that I swapped him with Feng Xifan. Otherwise, this naïve girl would certainly blurt it out, and then the spy would report it to His Majesty. If my First-class Duke of Luding did not repeatedly demoted seventeen or twenty eight levels, my surname is surely not Wei."

Thinking to the east, pondering to the west, he was deeply troubled. Prior to entering the service in the Palace, he and Kangxi could chat and laugh, the two of them were very happy. Now they all grew up, the Emperor was very imposing; Wei Xiaobao talked a lot of nonsense, he got so scared that he was not able to talk anymore. All these high-ranking positions, Great General Fuyuan, First-class Duke of Luding, are not fun to do anymore, not as interesting as when as a kid he became a little servant at Lovely Spring Courtyard; so free, unfettered and happy.

He thought, "Tian Di Hui brothers are forcing me to assassinate the Emperor, the Emperor is forcing me to wipe out Tian Di Hui. His Majesty said, 'Xiao Guizi, in your whole life, will you always have your feet on two boats like this?' His

granny, *Laozi* won't do it anymore! I won't have anything to do with everything anymore!" As soon as these five characters '*Laozi* won't do it anymore' emerged in his heart, he felt unspeakably relax and at ease.

Taking dice from his pocket, he threw the dice on the table and shouted, "If I have to quit, let me throw a 'hall full of red' [i.e. success across the board]!" Four dice rolled around, three dice landed with red dots facing up, but the fourth die landed on six dots; nothing can be blacker than that. Actually, when he threw the dice, he already cheated, but still he was unsuccessful.

"Damn it!" he cursed. Picking up the dice, he threw several more times; it was not until the eighth throw that he managed to get all dice landed on red. He cheerfully said, "Turns out *Laotianye* [God] wants me to do seven things for His Majesty before I quit." He mused, "I have accomplished seven things early on. Killing Oboi was the first, saving the Old Emperor was the second, blocking in front of His Majesty's holy self on Mount Wutai was the third, rescuing the Empress Dowager was the fourth, contacting Mongolia and Tibet was the fifth, destroying Shen Long Jiao was the sixth, capturing Wu Yingxiong was the seventh, recommending Zhang Yong, Zhao Liangdong, and the others for service that they defeated Wu Sangui was the eighth, capturing Yakesa was the ninth … too many, too many. If I don't count the small things, the big things must be exactly seven. No more, no less." But this time he did not feel like thinking of which seven things could be considered big things. In short, "*Laozi* won't do it anymore!"

"One, I won't be government official; two, I won't rebel. So what is *Laozi* going to do?" Thinking back and forth, he still thought that he was happiest back in Yangzhou. As soon as he thought about returning to Yangzhou, he could not help bursting with joy. "Guards!" he called loudly.

He ordered his personal guards to fetch food and wine. He drank alone while figuring out what he ought to do so that there would not be any future danger, that Kangxi could not send anybody to capture him, Tian Di Hui also could not pressure him to rebel. He thought that if he asked the Princess to come with him to Yangzhou, to spend her life in drinking and pleasure, she would definitely refuse. But if he wanted to open a brothel in Yangzhou, very likely Su Quan, Ah Ke, Fang Yi, Mu Jianping and Zeng Rou would not agree. "Alright," he thought,

“We’ll take it one step at a time. *Laozi* has several million *taels* of family property, not opening a brothel will not starve me to death; it’s just that I won’t have anything fun to do.”

During the family dinner at the mansion that night, the seven wives saw him smiling in high spirit, he talked cheerfully and wittily, totally different from his frowning and always on the edge these past several days; they all asked, “Why are you so cheerful?”

Wei Xiaobao smiled and said, “Mysteries of heaven must not be revealed.”

The Princess asked, “Did *Huangdi Gege* [emperor older brother] promote you again?”

Zeng Rou asked, “Did you win big in gambling?”

Shuang’er asked, “Tian Di Hui matter did not trouble you anymore?”

“Pei,” Ah Ke spat, “Most likely this fellow fancies some young lady and wants to take her as the eighth wife.”

Wei Xiaobao simply shook his head.

After all his wives had stopped asking questions, Wei Xiaobao said, “Originally I did not want to tell you, but you all insist on knowing; I have no choice but to tell you.”

The seven madames stopped whatever they were doing and listened attentively. With a serious expression Wei Xiaobao said, “I have become a high-ranking officer, become a Duke, but am unable to distinguish good from bad, it is indeed too inappropriate. Starting tomorrow, I am going to study literature, take the exam to be a *zhuangyuan* [top scorer in imperial exam] and enter the Hanlin Academy.”

The seven wives looked at each other, followed by all of them roared in laughter. Everybody knew that this husband of theirs could kill and burn, steal, rob and swindle; he could do anything in the world but one thing: he definitely could not study and learn to read.

Early morning the next day, *Shun Tian Fu* [see Chapter 49] came to pay a visit, saying that they received instruction from their superior and were informed that

the Emperor appointed Duke Wei to investigate the missing of Earl of Zhongcheng Feng Xifan; therefore, they especially came to await instruction.

Frowning, Wei Xiaobao asked, “Your *Shun Tian Fu yamen* has captured criminals and obtained information a lot, what clue did you find these past few days?”

The prefectural magistrate replied, “Reporting to *Gongye* [duke]: Feng *Bojue* [Earl] went missing, the circumstances are very peculiar. Day after day lowly officer supervised, direct and led the operation, opened enquiries and secret search, but failed to obtain the slightest clue; indeed we are extremely anxious. Today we found out His Majesty issued special decree appointing Wei *Gongye* to be in charge, lowly officer is happier than obtaining promotion three levels in a row. Wei *Gongye* is our Dynasty’s number one brilliant and competent high-ranking minister, on the horseback you manage the army, down the horseback you manage the people; regardless how thorny the big problem that fell into *Gongye*’s hands, the bamboo will split upon contact with the knife’s edge [i.e. solved immediately]. To be able to work for *Gongye* in a case like this, truly my ancestors had accumulated a lot of merit. In lowly officer’s *yamen*, everybody is overjoyed, saying that this time we are very fortunate to take a shelter under the big tree’s shade. When Wei *Gongye* went into action, even Luocha demons were defeated and driven away in confusion, would we be afraid of not finding Feng *Bojue*’s whereabouts?”

Wei Xiaobao was aware that although the prefectural magistrate’s flattering words surged like the tide, everything he said was very pleasant to hear, in actuality he was pushing the responsibility on Wei Xiaobao’s shoulder. He thought, “I don’t know where that Feng Xifan’s body was hidden, tonight I must use the 'Corpse Transforming Powder' on it, don’t let it fall into other people’s hands. As long as there is no evidence, nobody can point fingers at me. I should have transformed the corpse early on, these past few days I have been too busy and did not expect this matter. But how am I going to explain it in His Majesty’s presence? His Majesty assigned me to do it. I, Xiao Guizi, am not bragging, but there is not a single mission I failed to accomplish.”

The prefectural magistrate continued, “Every day Madame Earl of Zhongcheng sends people to lowly officer’s *yamen*, and will not leave until they get an

answer. Lowly officer really have a hard time dealing with them. Yesterday the Feng Mansion people came to report another case to the authorities, saying that one of *Bojue*'s concubines by the name of Lan Xiang [orchid fragrance] ran away with some stable boy; they stole quite a few of gold, silver and jewelry. If the Earl of Zhongcheng did not reappear, perhaps one by one all the concubines, maidservants and menservants in the house would leave and none would remain."

"Humph," Wei Xiaobao snorted, "I don't know where this Feng Xifan is hiding, having fun with women. Send more people to search low-grade brothels everywhere. Perhaps he is dining, wining, whoring and gambling and forget to go home. His mistress eloped with another man, he deserves it."

"Yes, yes," the prefectural magistrate replied, "It is reasonable to say that if Feng *Bojue* is enjoying himself in the red-light district at Willow Lane, it has been many days, he ought to be home by now."

"It's hard to say," Wei Xiaobao said, "That fellow Feng Xifan is an old pervert, he is not like *Laoxiong* here, who is an upright gentleman; if you stroll into a low-grade brothel, you will only visit for a day or half a night."

With a forced laugh the prefectural magistrate hastily said, "Lowly officer does not dare, lowly officer does not dare."

Just then Earl of Zhongcheng's Madame Feng sent her brother to deliver eight kinds of gifts, saying they wanted to kowtow to Duke Wei, thanking Duke Wei for striving to investigate this case. Wei Xiaobao instructed his guards to stop the visitor, he did not wish to see them, and he did not wish to receive the gifts either.

The personal guard reported back, "Reporting to *Daren*: the man from Feng family is very rude, ever since he arrived he did not stop sneering, saying something like grievance will be recompensed, enmity will be avenged; saying that His Majesty is already aware of this matter, in the end it will be 'as the water recedes, the rocks appear', that other people must not think his hand will cover the heaven, concealing everything from the Enlightened Sage, the Son of Heaven. Reporting to *Daren*: this man has the audacity to come to our door and display shockingly bad behavior, *Xiaode* [lowly one] really wants to give him

several slaps on the ear.” This personal guard also took part in swapping people at the execution ground the other day, hearing the Feng mansion people’s fierce speech, as if he already guessed the inside story, the guard could not help feeling nervous.

Wei Xiaobao also felt guilty as a thief; he could not stop his countenance from changing. He thought, “If they continued making noise like this, I am afraid the hanky-panky would be exposed. Your granny, Feng Xifan himself was killed by *Laozi*, could it be that *Laozi* is afraid of your, dead demon’s wife?”

Suddenly he thought of an idea, immediately his face was all smiles. He said to the prefectural magistrate, “There’s no hurry in your honor leaving now, please wait here for a moment.” Returning to the inner shall, he summoned the captain of his personal guards and gave him detailed instructions. The captain received the order and left.

Wei Xiaobao returned to the main hall and said, “His Majesty sends me to handle this matter, we as his servants must spare no effort to repay our holy lord. Let us go right now to the Feng house to have an on-site survey.”

The prefectural magistrate was startled; he thought, “Earl of Zhongcheng went missing, what is there to survey in his house?” Yet his mouth repeatedly agreed.

Wei Xiaobao said, “This case is very difficult, we need to interrogate Feng family people, from big to small, one by one, carefully. Perhaps we can find some prospect of solution.”

“Yes,” the prefectural magistrate replied, “*Gongye*’s opinion is very true. Lowly officer is stupid to the extreme, from beginning to end did not think of doing it.”

Actually, since he was a lowly prefectural magistrate, how could he dare to go to the Earl of Zhongcheng’s mansion and conduct comprehensive cross-examination? While at the same time, the people of *Shun Tian Fu yamen*, from top to bottom, knew that Feng Xifan was the Great General Fuyuan Duke Wei’s arch-enemy. This man disappeared, nine out of ten it was Duke Wei who sent people to kill him. Duke Wei was the most favorite person of the reigning sovereign, he held the seal of authority over the military, who would have the gall to grow hair on his side, have the guts to swat the fly on the tiger’s head? Therefore, in investigating this case, nobody was taking it seriously; they all

hoped to stretch this case as long as possible until finally they could settle this matter by leaving it unsettled.

This moment the prefectural magistrate thought, “Wei *Gongye* murdered Feng *Bojue*, and still want to make things difficult for his family. That Madame Feng is really not being too tactful, she is sending people here to talk rubbish; no wonder Wei *Gongye* is angry.”

Accompanied by *Shun Tian Fu* prefectural magistrate and his people, Wei Xiaobao arrived at the Earl of Zhongcheng mansion in an eight-man big sedan chair. He saw the mansion was already surrounded by several hundred personal guards all around. Upon entering the mansion, the captain of the personal guards stepped forward to report, “Reporting to *Daren*: There are altogether 79 people in the Feng family, men and women; they are all waiting in the western hall to be questioned by *Daren*.” Wei Xiaobao nodded. The Captain added, “Reporting to *Daren*: the court of law is being held in the eastern hall.”

Wei Xiaobao went to the eastern hall, and saw the courtroom was duly prepared, with a judge’s desk arranged in the middle. Thereupon he took his seat, and ordered the prefectural magistrate to sit in the right-hand seat to accompany him.

The personal guards took a young woman in, approximately twenty-three or twenty-four years old, her appearance and demeanor was really not bad; delicately and gracefully she kneeled down before the Court. “Who are you?” Wei Xiaobao started the cross-examination.

The woman replied, “Humble woman is *Bojue Daren*’s fifth young concubine.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Please sit down, please sit down; I do not dare to accept you kneeling down in front of me.”

The woman did not dare to stand up. Wei Xiaobao stood up and said with a laugh, “You won’t stand up, I will have to kneel down in front of you.” The women smiled sweetly and stood up. Wei Xiaobao sat back down.

The prefectural magistrate thought, “Wei *Gongye* does not treat the Feng family viciously, it’s just that his lecherousness is not too dignified.”

Wei Xiaobao asked, “What’s your name?”

The woman replied, “I am called Ju Fang [lit. chrysanthemum fragrance].”

Wei Xiaobao sniffed around a few times and said with a laugh, “Good name! No wonder as soon as you came in, there’s a whiff of chrysanthemum flower’s fragrance in here.”

Ju Fang also laughed and said in a tender voice, “*Gongye* is making fun of me.”

Wei Xiaobao shook his head while staring at her intently for half a day before asking, “I heard that a concubine has run away from your precious home?”

“That’s right,” Ju Fang replied, “She is called Lan Xiang. Humph, that s1ut has no sense of shame.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Husband suddenly disappeared, she followed the second man. Um, that is quite understandable, not altogether … not altogether …” Turning to the prefectural magistrate he asked, “Not altogether what is it?”

The prefectural magistrate replied, “Reporting to *Gongye*: not altogether inexcusable.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed aloud; he said, “That’s it, not altogether inexcusable. Ju Fang *Jiejie*, why didn’t you run away?”

Hearing this, the prefectural magistrate frowned immediately; he mused, “This is more and more inappropriate; how could he use this appellation ‘*Jiejie*’ [older sister]?”

Ju Fang lowered her head. But she cast Wei Xiaobao a coquettish glance. Wei Xiaobao was greatly delighted; he felt as if he was visiting a low-grade brothel. He laughed and asked, “Can you sing ‘eight …’” the word was right at the tip of his tongue, but in the end he swallowed it back. Turning to his personal guards he ordered, “Reward this Miss Ju Fang twenty *taels*.”

Several personal guards responded in chorus; they called out, “*Daren* gives reward, thank him for the reward!”

Ju Fang was pleasantly surprise for the good fortune; she charmingly said, “Thank you very much *Daye* [big master]!” Turned out originally she was a prostitute in a brothel; as soon as someone gave her tip, out of habit she called him ‘*Daye*’ instead of ‘*Gongye*’.

Wei Xiaobao summoned the Feng family people one by one to be cross-examined, all females. The young and good-looking ones he questioned and cajoled a bit; the old and ugly ones he reprimanded a bit, saying that they did not serve the Earl well, to such an extent as to drive him out to find merriment outside and unwilling to go home.

When the questioning had been going on for almost an hour, the captain of his personal guards entered the hall and stood behind Wei Xiaobao. Wei Xiaobao continued giving two more people cursory questioning before he stood up and said, “We shall examine all places.” He took the prefectural magistrate, *Shun Tian Fu* (legal) clerk, special force chief [lit. ‘capture quick’], and his personal guards to examine each pavilion, hall, and room.

When they entered the third western side room, as usual the personal guards opened the trunks and turned the storage baskets upside down to be searched. A personal guard suddenly cried out, “Ah!” and picked up a saber from underneath the trunk. The blade was stained with quite a bit of dried blood. Bending one knee in half-kneel posture he raised he saber with both hands and said, “Reporting to *Daren*: we found the murder weapon.”

“Um,” Wei Xiaobao said, “Continue the investigation.” Turning to the prefectural magistrate he said, “*Laoxiong*, please look at this. Is this stain really blood?”

The prefectural magistrate received the saber, brought it to his nose and sniffed a bit. Sure enough, it was still reeking of blood albeit faintly. “Reporting to *Gongye*,” he said, “It seems to be blood.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “There’s a hole on the head of this saber, what kind of saber is this?”

The *Shun Tian Fu* clerk examined the saber carefully and then said, “Reporting to *Gongye*: this is a lever-style guillotine to chop fodder, it is used mainly in stables.”

Wei Xiaobao nodded. “I see,” he said.

The captain of personal guards ordered his subordinates to get a bucket of water and sloshed it on the ground. “What are you doing?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

The captain replied, “Reporting to *Daren*: if there is any place that was dug, the soil is not solid, the water will seep quickly in.” Before he finished talking, they saw that under the bed the water quickly seeped into the soil. The personal guards cheered in chorus. They lifted up the bed, took pickaxe, hoe and shovel and dug the earth. Shortly afterwards, a body was dug out.

The corpse’s body was intact, but the head was missing. It was already rotten, obviously it had died many days. The body was wearing earl attire. As soon as the prefectural magistrate saw it, he exclaimed, “This … this is Feng *Jueye*!”

“Is it Feng Xifan?” Wei Xiaobao asked, “How do you know?”

“Yes, yes,” the prefectural magistrate said, “We must find the head, and then we can reach a verdict.” Turning his head he asked the special force captain by his side, “Whose room is this?”

The captain said, “*Xiaoren* will find out immediately.” He went to the western hall and called a Feng family member to be questioned. Turned out that room used to be the run away Lan Xiang’s room.

The captain returned and said, “Reporting to *Gongye*, reporting to *Futai* [inspector general] *Daren*: the murder weapon is the machete used to slice fodder in the barn, the one who took Lan Xiang along with a bundle of valuables and ran away was this mansion’s stable hand Xing Si [lit. ‘Xing the fourth’]. Let *Xiaoren* go to the stable and investigate.”

Everybody went to the stable to search. As expected, from underneath the trough they dug out a head. They asked Madame Feng to identify the corpse; there was no doubt that it was Feng Xifan. Immediately the coroner tested and determined: Feng Xifan was wounded with the saber, his body and head were separated and he died.

By this time the Feng mansion people had been released from the western hall, the cries of grief in the mansion shook the heavens, everybody cursed Xing Si and Lan Xiang as heartless for killing their master. The news spread out; in less than half a day, the city of Beijing was bubbling and gurgling, everybody was talking about this matter.

The prefectural magistrate was both ashamed and grateful, thinking that were it not for Duke Wei rapidly solving the case, perhaps his own future prospect

would be greatly hindered. He profusely expressed his gratitude, while issuing the order to capture the 'fugitive who killed his master', Xing Si and Lan Xiang, and composing the report to his superior.

Only the special force captain was suspicious; he noticed that the cut wound on the neck was neat, apparently it was cut by a sharp blade, it did not look like it was cut by a fodder machete. He also noticed that in both places, the soil in which the body and the head were buried was relatively fresh, obviously the holes were dug not too long ago; the holes did not look like they were dug more than ten days ago. But Duke Wei had helped him solve this major case, the reward he received was generous, the Feng mansion also rewarded him with quite a lot of money, asking him to wrap up the case as quickly as possible, so that close relatives of the Feng mansion would not make a fool of themselves in *yamen*. Even if he had gargantuan suspicion, how could he dare to expose even half a sentence? He could only pondered in his heart, "During the investigation in the Feng mansion, Wei *Gongye*'s personal guards were everywhere, nobody was allowed to move around, if they wanted to move corpse and plant evidence, it would be very easy. Forget about burying one corpse, even if they wanted to bury a hundred or eighty corpses, it's not difficult at all."

Wei Xiaobao took the *Shun Tian Fu* prefectural magistrate's closing document and went to see Kangxi to report the details of the conclusion of this case. Kangxi smiled and said, "Xiao Guizi, your ability in solving a case is not bad, everybody praised you as the reincarnation of Bao Longtu [see note 9, Chapter 39]."

Wei Xiaobao said, "It was all due to Your Majesty's flood of good fortune, your servant just happen to uncover a criminal plot."

"Humph," Kangxi snorted. He stared at Wei Xiaobao and coldly said, "Grafting flowers onto a tree has nothing to do with my flood of good fortune."

Wei Xiaobao jumped in fright; he thought, "How did His Majesty know?" But he immediately understood, "Of course, it is only natural that His Majesty has a secret agent within my personal guards."

He was still thinking of how to respond when Kangxi sighed and said, "The case is closed this way, it's also very good, so that there won't be any criticism from

the people outside. It's just that you have brazenly taken rash action, I really don't know what to do with you." Wei Xiaobao was relieved; he knew the Emperor spared his life this time. Immediately he kneeled down and kowtowed repeatedly.

Kangxi said, "Presently all four oceans are peaceful, there is no need of troop movement, your title of Great General Fuyuan may be removed."

"Yes, yes," Wei Xiaobao said. He knew that the Emperor was punishing him for acting willfully and making a scene; he added, "Your servant's First-class Duke of Luding may also be degraded."

"Alright," Kangxi said, "I demote you to be a second-class duke."

Wei Xiaobao said, "Your servant made a lot of trouble, my heart is uneasy, would Your Majesty please degrade me to be a third-class duke."

Kangxi burst into loud laughter. "Damn it," he said, "I am surprised that your heart can be uneasy; the sun must be rising from the west."

When Wei Xiaobao heard the three-character 'tamade', he knew the Emperor's anger had subsided; he stood up and said, "Although your servant does not have too much conscience, I always have a little."

Kangxi nodded and said, "Precisely it was because I saw that you still have a bit of conscience; otherwise, I would have chopped your head early on and bury it under your wives Ah Ke, Shuang'er's bed."

Wei Xiaobao anxiously said, "This must never happen."

Kangxi asked, "What must never happen?"

Wei Xiaobao said, "Ah Ke and Shuang'er will never run away with the stable hand."

Kangxi laughed and said, "They won't run away with a stable hand, they might run away with …" Speaking to this point, he stopped talking; thinking that if this talk continued, inevitably it would turn frivolous and senseless. Besides, although Wei Xiaobao had disregard of the law and natural morality, after all is said and done, he was very loyal to him. A ruler and his minister may chat and laugh with each other, but must not bring dishonor upon himself. Momentarily at a loss of

what to say, Kangxi decided to ignore him. Lowering his head, he flipped through the memorial on his desk.

Wei Xiaobao stood on the side with hands hung down. He saw Kangxi's brows were slightly knitted, he looked to be in deep concern. Wei Xiaobao thought, "Oftentimes His Majesty is not happy. Although being the Emperor one has an awesome prestige, it is not necessarily a fun thing to do."

Kangxi thumbed through the memorial for a while; he lifted up his head and sighed. Wei Xiaobao said, "Your Majesty, whatever it is, please send your servant to deal with it. Let your servant atone for his crimes by meritorious acts, repaying my master's dragon kindness."

"In this matter," Kangxi said, "I cannot send you. Shi Lang presented the memorial, saying that Taiwan has been hit by a hurricane, on the plain the water is four *chi* deep, common people's houses are damaged, families went bankrupt and the people died, the disaster is very serious."

Wei Xiaobao saw that while talking, Kangxi's eyes were glistening with tears; he thought, "We are good friends since childhood, I cannot not helping him." He said, "Your servant has a way."

"What way?" Kangxi asked.

Wei Xiaobao said, "To be honest with Your Majesty, when your servant served as an officer in Taiwan, I made a small fortune. More recently, I recovered a number of old debts from a Taiwan moneybags. By Your Majesty's grace your servant was able to hold with both hands the golden rice bowl that was damaged and was restored. For a lifetime I will not die of starvation. Too much money is useless, I would rather present it as an offering, asking Your Majesty to comfort and give relief to the victims of disaster in Taiwan."

Kangxi smiled and said, "The number of people affected by the disaster is a lot, your small fortune, no matter what, cannot be used. I will issue an edict at once, the Palace will cut down on palace maids and eunuchs, reduce the clothes, reduce the meals, let the Palace Internal Affairs make a plan to save four, five hundred thousand *taels* to be used as emergency relief for the victims."

"Your servant deserves to die," Wei Xiaobao said, "Indeed it is desperately serious."

“What is it?” Kangxi asked.

Wei Xiaobao replied, “As a government official, your servant has committed corruption, in Taiwan I got one million *taels*, recently the debt I collected, which was from Zheng Keshuang actually, amounted to another million *taels* …”

Kangxi was shocked. “That much?” he asked.

Wei Xiaobao lightly slapped his own mouth and cursed, “Xiao Guizi deserves to die!”

Yet Kangxi laughed and said, “Your ability in debt collection is really superior; I had no idea at all.”

Wei Xiaobao cursed again, “Xiao Guizi deserves to die!” But his face showed that he was pleased with himself. He mused, “When a government official reaches out to take money, how can he let you as the Emperor, know? You planted a spy among my subordinates, you can only investigate whether I dare to revolt or not. Your *Meifu* [younger sister’s husband] collect money with his right hand, put money in the bag with his left hand, even your *Da Meizi* [oldest younger sister] does not know, you, this *Da Jiuzi* [wife’s older brother], absolutely cannot know.” In his mouth he called himself ‘your servant’, in his heart he considered himself ‘*meifu*’.

Kangxi pondered for half a day. He said, “You have a heart that is loyal to your lord and loving to the people, it is indeed hard to come by. Let’s do it this way: you contribute one million five hundred *taels*, I will add five hundred *taels*. We, the ruler and his minister, collect two million *taels*. Taiwan victims number about ten thousand or so households, each family will receive more than a hundred *taels*, that will be plenty.”

Impulsively Wei Xiaobao was feeling generous and wanted to donate, but just as quickly his heart ached and he already regretted it; when he heard that Kangxi would save five hundred *taels* for him, immediately he was overjoyed and hastily said, “Yes, yes. Your Majesty love common people as your own children, *Laotianye* bless and protect Your Majesty with favorable weather, the country prospers, the people at peace.”

Because of serious disaster in Taiwan, this past half day Kangxi’s heart was heavy; now that without rhyme and reason he suddenly obtained a lot of money,

he was truly happy. He smiled and said, “Also bless and protect you to be promoted and gain wealth, lots of good fortune and long life.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “Thank you very much for *Wanshui Ye*’s [Lord of Ten Thousand Years] golden mouth. Your servant will be promoted and gain wealth, lots of good fortune and long life, it is entirely due to Your Majesty’s grace. Besides, your servant’s small fortune originally belonged to Taiwan people, now that we return it to the common people of Taiwan, it is no more than returning the jade annulus to … to Tai.”

Kangxi roared in laughter and said, “It’s the saying ‘returning the jade annulus to Zhao’ [i.e. return something intact to its rightful owner]. Damn it, you change it to ‘returning the jade annulus to Tai(wan).’”

“Yes,” Wei Xiaobao said, “It was ‘returning the jade annulus to Zhao’. Just now I could not recall this character ‘Zhao’. Zhao Qian Sun Li, Zhou Wu Chen Wang. The ‘Hundred Family Names’ lists ‘Zhao’ as the number one, no wonder they are flourishing so much, turns out the jade annulus and what have you are all returned to their Zhao family.”

Kangxi was even more amused; he thought that this man was ‘without learning or knowledge’, and he could not be taught too much either. Kangxi laughed and said, “Very true, very true. There is another saying, ‘Wei bian san jue’ [lit. the leather binding of the bamboo scrolls has broken three times; fig. to study diligently.]. It speaks about your Wei family being industrious in studying. Their learning is very good. You, surnamed Wei, are also very remarkable.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Your servant’s learning is very lacking, I am letting my old Wei ancestors down.”

(Book note: In the saying ‘the leather binding of the bamboo scrolls has broken three times’, the character ‘Wei’ [which is Wei Xiaobao’s surname, ‘wei’ itself means ‘soft leather’] points to the leather strap boring through and joining the bamboo writing slips in ancient China. Kangxi deliberately distorted it to make fun of Wei Xiaobao.)

Kangxi said, “This time going to Taiwan for disaster relief effort …” Originally, according to reason, he should have sent Wei Xiaobao to handle this matter; but then he had a second thought, “This man contributes this large amount of

money, only because he holds *yi qi* toward me, not necessarily because he really has love toward common people. I am afraid that as soon as he is out of the Palace's gate, he would immediately regret it. If he went to Taiwan to distribute two million *taels* disaster relief, most probably he would want to recover his capital to avoid suffering loss. Perhaps he would even add one percent or two as the interest." He knew Wei Xiaobao as well as he knew himself, immediately he changed his statement, "… is a very easy mission; there is no need for you to handle it personally. Xiao Guizi, your First-class Duke of Luding need not be degraded. Let my sister's son light the lantern, business as usual."

Wei Xiaobao kneeled down to express his gratitude. After kowtowing, he stood up and said, "Your servant donate a little bit of money, it is only returning the jade annulus to … to Zhao Qian Sun Li, but Your Majesty consider it as meritorious service. Your Majesty reduces the clothes, reduce the meals, that is real saving, and that is really not easy to do."

Kangxi shook his head and said, "Wrong. Everything in the Palace, each *tael* of silver comes from common people under the heaven. Common people supply my brocade garments, jade meals. I lord over all the people, I should spare no effort in working for the common people. You eat official salary from your ruler, you should be loyal to your master. I eat official salary from the people, I should be loyal to the people. The ancient book says, 'four oceans exhausted, possession of the empire will be used up'. If common people are destitute, that means the Emperor is no good, the Heaven will be furious, then I can't be the Emperor anymore."

"That must not happen," Wei Xiaobao said, "Absolutely must never happen."

Kangxi said, "You became a high-ranking minister, it was due to my grace. I became the Emperor, it was due to the Heaven's grace. If you are not being loyal, I will chop your head. If I don't become a good Emperor, the Heaven may replace me with someone else. The 'Book of History' says, 'Heaven and Earth will correct their primary son'. Primary son [yuan zi] here means the Emperor. If the Emperor is not good, the Heaven might oust him."

"Yes, yes," Wei Xiaobao said, "You are called Xiao Xuanzi; turns out 'xuan zi' means the Emperor." [See also note 3 of Chapter 42: in Cantonese, 'xuan' and 'yuan' are homophone.]

Kangxi said, “This character ‘xuan’ [玄] is not the same as that character ‘yuan’ [元].”

“Yes, yes,” Wei Xiaobao said. But in his heart he thought, “In round dumpling [圆子 - yuanzi] soup, all the dumplings look the same.” In any case, he did not know the character ‘yuan’ [元] from ‘xuan’ [玄], so why bother explaining it to him?

From his desk Kangxi picked up a book and said, “The inspector-general of Zhejiang presented a book to me, called ‘Ming Yi Dai Fang Lu’ [investigative record of Ming-barbarians dealing][39], written by Zhejiang man Huang Lizhou just recently. Zhejiang’s inspector-general reported that the book contains a lot of treason and heresy, and is asking for stricter investigation. I was just looking at the book, but I think this book makes a lot of sense. I have already written my comment on the report to Zhejiang’s inspector-general, telling him not to be meddlesome.”

While saying that, he opened the book and said, “In his book he said that as a ruler, ‘one man receives order from the world’, and not ‘the world receives order from one man’; this idea is well said. He also said, ‘The Son of Heaven is not necessarily right, the Son of Heaven is not necessarily wrong.’ This is also very true. Which man is not? The Son of Heaven is also a man, how could as soon as he became the Emperor, ‘everything is right, he is never wrong’?”

After speaking for a while, Kangxi noticed that although Wei Xiaobao repeatedly voiced his agreement, his face showed that he was at a loss; he could not help feeling amused inwardly. Kangxi thought, “I am talking about big principles with this little ruffian, how can he understand? If I continued on, I am afraid he would yawn repeatedly.” Thereupon he waved his left hand and said, “You may go.” But his right hand was still holding the book, his mouth was still reading aloud, “To think that the authority over the land under the heavens, good or bad, is in my hand, I must not use the world’s goodness entirely for myself, and use the world’s badness entirely for the people. I must not dare being selfish in employing the people under the heavens, must not dare to use it for my own benefit. If I use my private life to be fair to the world, only then will the shame gone, and long-term peace come, regarding the world as the most important estate, to be passed on to my offspring, for endless enjoyment.”

To Wei Xiaobao, all these were unfathomable mystery; but the Emperor was reading a book, so he had no choice but to repeatedly praised him, how could he not sing Kangxi's praise from the side? Seeing Kangxi putting down the book, he asked, "Your Majesty, what is the book talking about? What is so good about it?"

Kangxi replied, "He said that the person who became the Emperor was calling the people under the heavens not to be selfish, must not seek their own benefit, only he, the Emperor, may have no regard for others, as well as have everything for self and selfish profit; he could go as far as saying that he was the great ruler of the world. At first the person who became the emperor did not feel right, he felt rather ashamed instead, but later on the habit became nature, unexpectedly he thought he was absolutely right, other people were wrong."

Wei Xiaobao said, "This man must be talking about bad emperor. Applied to a raw bird fish soup emperor like Your Majesty, what he said is wrong."

"Hey, hey!" Kangxi said, "Everybody who became the emperor thought that he was a raw bird fish soup; who has ever resigned himself to be called a cruel, tyrannical ruler? To say nothing of by each muddleheaded ruler's side, there must be a lot of shameless high-ranking ministers to sing him praises, elevating the muddleheaded ruler to be a raw bird fish soup."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Fortunately Your Majesty is genuine goods at fair prices, an unalterable raw bird fish soup. Otherwise, your servant would become one of those shameless high-ranking ministers."

Kangxi's left foot stomped the ground and he said with a laugh, "You have a lot of shame; get your egg out of here!"

"Your Majesty," Wei Xiaobao said, "Your servant wants to ask for your grace, would Your Majesty grant your servant a leave, so that I can go to Yangzhou to see my mother."

Kangxi smiled and said, "You have this filial piety; that is how it should be. Besides, 'riches and honor do not return to the homeland, it is like wearing brocade clothes on a night walk'. You ought to go back in grandiose. The sooner you leave, the sooner you will return. Bring your mother back to Beijing. I will have an imperial decree to confer your mother the title of one-*pin* rank grand

madame. Your deceased old man's name, submit a report to the Ministry of Appointments, let him be conferred an official position posthumously. We should have had this matter dealt with the last time you went to Yangzhou, it's just that Wu Sangui happened to rebel at the same time that it is delayed until now."

He thought that most likely Wei Xiaobao did not know how to write his father's name, and thus he did not inquire. Although Kangxi was brilliant, in this matter he only 'knew one but did not know two'. While it was true that Wei Xiaobao did not know how to write his father's name, the actual fact was: he did not even know who his father was.

Wei Xiaobao thanked Kangxi for his grace, and left the Palace. He returned to his mansion to fetch the million and a half *taels* banknotes, and handed it over to the Ministry of Revenue's 'silver warehouse'. And then he went to the Ministry of War to return the official seal of authority of the 'Great General Fuyuan'. Lastly, he asked Su Quan to pick a name of his father on his behalf, as well as names of his ancestors up to the third generation, along with their wives and concubines. He had everything copied clearly, and then he submitted it to the Ministry of Appointments to be conferred posthumous, inherited, government-appointed hereditary official title of 'Yan Feng Si' [lit. officer in charge of examining titles bestowed by the imperial court].

Everything was settled, travel preparation was completed. Wei Xiaobao was quite popular in the imperial court, plus he was a grand relative of the holy family; princes, dukes and high-ranking ministers held a send-off banquet for him, it was very lively. At the point of departure Wei Xiaobao remembered the million and a half *taels* he donated, and his heart ached; thereupon he sent his personal guards to extort more than ten thousand *taels* from Zheng Keshuang as the 'old debt'. Only then did they leave the Capital.

From Han Lu [Han Street] they reached Tongzhou [district, east of Beijing], where they boarded boats, and sailed along the canal southward, passing Tianjin, Linqing, crossing the Yellow River, passing Ji Ning, and one day arrived at Huaiyin [district, Jiangsu]. The official boat anchored at Siyangji [county, Jiangsu] to spend the night there.

Wei Xiaobao and his seven wives sat on the boat, chatting while having dinner.

Su Quan said, “Xiaobao, tomorrow we will arrive at Huaiyin. In the old days, there was one man whose nobility title was Marquis of Huaiyin …”

“Um,” Wei Xiaobao said, “His rank was not as high as mine.”

Su Quan smiled and said, “That is not so. His original title was King, he was conferred the nobility title King. Afterwards the Emperor was afraid he might revolt, he removed his King title and changed it into Marquis of Huaiyin. This man was surnamed Han, given name Xin[40]. He was very famous.”

Wei Xiaobao slapped his thigh and said, “I know him. ‘Chasing after Han Xin under the dreary moon’, ‘Ambush from ten sides’, ‘Overlord need not worry about concubine’. All those plays have Han Xin in them.”

“Exactly,” Su Quan said, “This man was very capable, his meritorious service was very big, even a hero like the Overlord of Chu was defeated under his hands. It’s a pity that his end was not good, he was killed by the Emperor and the Empress.”

Wei Xiaobao sighed and said, “What a pity, what a pity! Why did the Emperor kill him? Did he want to rebel?”

Su Quan shook her head and said, “No, he did not. The Emperor was jealous of his ability, he was afraid he might rebel.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “Fortunately my ability is very low, in everything His Majesty is better than I am, and thus he can’t possibly be jealous of me. I have only one thing better than His Majesty, apart from this, in everything else I absolutely fall short of him.”

Ah Ke asked, “In which aspect you are better than the Emperor?”

Wei Xiaobao said, “I have seven wives as flower as jade, in all the world, you won’t find the eighth of such beautiful women. His Majesty’s flood of good fortune fills the heavens, I, Wei Xiaobao has romantic good fortune that fills the heaven. We, the ruler and his minister, two people each has his own strength, hence we are somewhat even.” He had thick skin and loved to toot his horn; the seven wives roared in laughter.

Fang Yi said with a laugh, “The Emperor’s flood of good fortune fills the

heavens, you are the Great Sage the Equal of Heaven[41].”

“Right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I am the Beautiful Monkey King of Shuilian [water curtain] Cave, leading a bunch of female monkeys and little monkeys, passing the days freely and leisurely.”

While they were chatting and laughing, outside the cabin a servant said in a loud and clear voice, “Reporting to *Gongye*: there are guests requesting an audience.”

The maid entered to present four visiting cards. Su Quan received the cards and said in low voice, “The visitors are Gu Yanwu, Zha Jizuo, Huang Lizhou, and Lu Liuliang, four gentlemen.”

“It’s Mr. Gu and his friends,” Wei Xiaobao said, “I must see them.” After instructing his servant to receive the guests in the large boat’s cabin and serve them tea, he immediately changed his clothes and came out to meet them.

In the past, Gu, Zha and Huang, three men were arrested by Wu Zhirong in Yangzhou and nearly lost their lives; fortunately Wei Xiaobao saved them. As for Lu Liuliang, it was the very first time that they met. Behind him there were two young men in their twenties; they were Lu Liuliang’s sons, Lu Baozhong and Lu Yizhong. After greeting each other, they sat down as host and guests. Lu Baozhong and Lu Yizhong stood behind their father.

Gu Yanwu spoke in low voice, “Wei *Xiangzhu*, this time we came to pay you a visit, there is one very important thing we’d like to discuss with you. There are numerous eyes and ears in Siyangji, it’s inconvenient for us to talk. Is it possible to ask you to instruct the boat to sail out several *li* and anchor in some secluded, uninhabited place where we can talk?”

In the Turtle-slaying Assembly in Hejianfu that year, Gu Yanwu was elected the Chief Military Counselor by the heroes of various paths; in Jianghu, his reputation was very resounding, Wei Xiaobao had always been admiring him. He immediately went back to tell Su Quan and the others about their plan. Su Quan said, “We can’t be overly cautious. Our boat will follow. Anything happen, we can provide good support.”

Thinking about he was going with Gu Yanwu and the others to ‘some secluded,

uninhabited place', in his heart Wei Xiaobao was actually rather scared. With the seven wives escorting him, he felt he had something to depend on; thereupon he repeatedly agreed and ordered the boatmen to sail southward, telling them that they wanted to drink wine and admire the full moon amidst the elegant scenery along the canal. When Duke Wei was in a refined and elegant frame of mind, he might come up with some good poems. The remaining boats stayed in Siyangji, waiting for their return.

Wei Xiaobao returned to the big boat to accompany the guests. The two boats sailed south for about seven, eight *li*; they saw flat and empty land on both sides of the river, illuminated by the bright moon in the sky, no other human beings everywhere they looked. Wei Xiaobao ordered the boatmen to drop the anchor and told the boatmen and the attendants to go to the stern, so that they would not spoil Duke Wei and the six gifted scholars' mood in creating poetry.

When there were no other people around, Gu Yanwu and the others expressed their gratitude once again for Wei Xiaobao's great kindness in saving their lives in the past. Wei Xiaobao modestly responded, and then he told them about how Wu Liuqi and Chen Jinnan met their ends one after another. Everybody sighed endlessly. Gu Yanwu said, "The rumors floating around in Jianghu all said that Wei *Xiangzhu* coveted riches and honor and murdered your master to gain glory. But Huang *Xiong*, Zha *Xiong* and *Xiongdi* knew that it was not true. The three of us were total strangers to Wei *Xiangzhu*, yet unexpectedly Wei *Xiangzhu* was willing to brave great danger by killing that servant Wu Zhirong and saved our lives. How can someone whose righteousness reaches the clouds and the sky murder his benevolent master?"

Zha Jizuo said, "When we heard Jianghu friends mentioning this matter, we always do our best to defend Wei *Xiangzhu* against the accusation. But they said that Tatar Emperor's imperial edict said so, how could it be false? Yet we know that Wei *Xiangzhu* live in Cao camp but have your heart in Han camp, you cannot always explain everything to the outsiders. From the beginning all heroes and warriors must undertake a task despite criticism. In order for Duke of Zhou to be a great sage great virtuous person, he still had to manage Cai spreading rumors, much less other people? For this reason, Wei *Xiangzhu* need not take it to heart." Wei Xiaobao did not understand what he was talking about, the Duke of

Zhou managing Cai and so on; he could only say ‘yes, yes’.

Lu Liuliang said, “Wei *Xiangzhu* made painstaking effort in planning great undertaking, actually you do not need to seek the people of the whole world’s understanding. As long as in the end you come out with a world-shaking achievement, everybody will understand that previously they have accused you wrongly.”

Wei Xiaobao mused, “What kind of world-shaking achievement I can possibly do? Aiyo, not good, they want to persuade me to assassinate the Emperor. How can I ‘refuse three obstruct four’ [i.e. use all sorts of excuses], refuse five obstruct six toward them? My way out is already bolted.” He said, “*Xiongdi* does not have any ability, literary knowledge is even less, whatever I attempted to do, I always did not get the desired outcome on both sides. *Xiongdi* is very discouraged, this time I am ‘announcing old age and returning home’ [i.e. to retire from public life]; later on I won’t do anything.”

“Pft,” Lu Yizhong saw that Wei Xiaobao was a few years younger than himself, yet unexpectedly he spoke about ‘announcing old age and returning home’, he stifled a laughter, but in the end could not help bursting in laughter. Gu Yanwu and the others were also amused; they looked at each other with smile on their faces.

Huang Lizhou smiled and said, “Wei *Xiangzhu* is a young hero, your future prospect is immeasureable. Ignorant people’s temporary misunderstanding needs not be bothered about.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “This one comparatively has to be regarded as important. Mr. Huang, you wrote a good book, called … called … Ming … Ming something something Huahualulu?”

Huang Lizhou was greatly surprised, “This man’s eyes cannot recognize the letter ‘T’, how did he know about my book?” He said, “It’s ‘Ming Yi Dai Fang Lu’.”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “In your book there are a lot of words reprimanding the Emperor, is that right?”

Huang Lizhou and the others where shocked; they all thought, “Even this man knew about it. I’m afraid there will be another big literary inquisition.”

Gu Yanwu said, “It’s not reprimanding the Emperor. In his book Huang *Xiong* wrote his clear and penetrating opinion, he explained which road the ruler ought to take.”

“That’s right,” Wei Xiaobao said, “These days His Majesty read Mr. Huang’s book every day, he did not stop praising you for writing the book so well, maybe he is going to invite you to become a *Zhuangyuan*, become the prime minister.”

“Wei *Xiangzhu* is making fun of me,” Huang Lizhou said, “How can there be such thing?”

Thereupon Wei Xiaobao explained how Kangxi greatly praised the ‘investigative record of Ming-barbarians dealing’; only then did everybody feel relieved. Huang Lizhou said, “Turns out the Tatar Emperor is able to distinguish right from wrong.”

Wei Xiaobao seized the opportunity by saying, “That’s right. The Young Emperor said, although he is not a raw bird fish soup, compared to those Ming Dynasty Emperors, he is not necessarily inferior; perhaps he is even a bit better. With him being the Emperor, common people throughout the world pass their days better than during the Ming Dynasty. *Xiongdi* is unlearned, I have no knowledge and experience, I don’t know if what he was saying is right.”

Gu, Zha, Huang, and Lu, four people ‘you look at me, I look at you’, recalling each emperor of the Ming Dynasty; from the founder of the Dynasty, Ming *Taizu* all the way to the last emperor of the dynasty, Emperor Chongzhen. If not a cruel tyrant, then it must be a muddleheaded emperor; which one was as good as Kangxi? These four people were the great scholars of the present age, they were well acquainted with history. Unwilling to rule out conscience, they could not help but nodding their head silently.

“Therefore,” Wei Xiaobao continued, “The Emperor is good, Tian Di Hui is also good. The Emperor wanted me to exterminate Tian Di Hui, I determined not to do it. Tian Di Hui brothers wanted me to assassinate the Emperor, I also made up my mind not to do it. The outcome is that both sides are blaming me. *Xiongdi* has thought it through from different angles, hence I want to ‘announce old age and return home’.”

“Wei *Xiangzhu*,” Gu Yanwu said, “We came this time, not to ask you to

assassinate the Emperor."

"That's very good," Wei Xiaobao happily said, "As long as it is not assassinating the Emperor, *Xiongdi* will not shirk without dishonor in everything else. I wonder what four senior gentlemen, two young gentlemen want me to do?"

Gu Yanwu pushed the cabin's window open, looked out, and saw that all around them was peace and quiet. He looked back and said, "We came to persuade Wei *Xiangzhu* to be the Emperor!"

'Bing, bang!' the teacup in Wei Xiaobao's hand fell down to the floor and shattered. He was shocked. "This … this is not a joke?" he asked.

"Definitely not a joke," Zha Jizuo replied, "A few of us have been deliberating over this matter for several months, we all feel that the Great Ming's fortune is gone, common people throughout the world will not go back to the previous Ming. In all honesty all the emperors of the former Ming had caused too much suffering to the common people, everybody remembers them with hate. But the Tatars are occupying our Han family's rivers and mountains, they want Han people all over the world to have our heads shaved and tie a braid, changing our clothes to barbarians' attire; this is always hard to swallow. Wei *Xiangzhu* holds the power over the military, plus you are the Tatar Emperor's trusted aide. As long as you are willing to raise the righteous banner and stand on your own feet as the Emperor, the people throughout the world will certainly look at you for direction."

Wei Xiaobao was still in panic mode; he repeatedly shook his hand and said, "I … I don't have that kind of good fortune, I cannot be the emperor."

Gu Yanwu said, "Wei *Xiangzhu* always uphold justice, your good fortune is even more profound. Look around the world, if not you becoming the emperor, among the Han people there is nobody that has this kind of good fortune."

Lu Liuliang said, "We, Han people, are a hundred times more numerous than the Manchus. One hundred people against their one person, how can we not achieve victory? That day Wu Sangui rose in rebellion, it was only because he forfeited the Great Ming's rivers and mountains and became a big traitor that the Han people all over the world gnashed our teeth in bitter hatred and thus he could not succeed. Wei *Xiangzhu* has the heaven and the people on your side,

recently you pacified Luocha, setting up an amazing merit to China, your prestige is rising, like the sun in the middle of the day. As soon as Wei *Xiangzhu* nod your head, we will immediately contact the heroes and warriors of Jianghu, together we draw a plan for this great undertaking."

Wei Xiaobao's heart was thumping madly, not even in his wildest dream would he expect that anybody would exhort him to be the Emperor. After staring blankly for half a day, he finally said, "I came from a small hoodlum background, my expertise is in cursing people and gambling. I became a general and a high-ranking officer, already other people are not happy about it; how can I be the Emperor? The Son of Heaven is ordained by the Heaven, he has to have gargantuan good fortune. My birthdate characters[42] [used in fortune-telling] are not right, the fortune-teller has already calculated that if I became the Emperor, I will not live pass three days."

Hearing him talking nonsense, Lu Yizhong stifled another laughter. Zha Jizuo said, "What are Wei *Xiangzhu*'s birthdate characters? Let us find a brilliant fortune-teller and have him make calculation." He knew that Wei Xiaobao did not have any profound knowledge, hence reasoning with him, they could only speak about little righteousness, not big righteousness. Describing virtuous cause to him, he would only understand little potential, and would not understand big potential. But if they bribed a fortune-teller to say that he was indeed the Son of Heaven ordained by the Heaven, that he received the mandate of Heaven to sit on the Dragon Throne, he might believe instead.

Who would have thought that Wei Xiaobao said, "The time of my birth and my birth characters are known only to my mother. When we get to Yangzhou, I am going to ask her."

Everybody knew he did not mean it; he was merely making excuses. Lu Liuliang said, "Among the heroes and warriors, most do not confine themselves to particulars. Han Gaozu [first Han emperor Liu Bang] was open-minded and generous; compared to Wei *Xiangzhu* he was a lot more easygoing." In his heart he said, "You came from a small hoodlum background, it is nothing. Han Gaozu came from big hoodlum background; he cursed people and gambled, compared to you he was a lot more troublesome, yet in the end he became the King who founded the Han Dynasty."

Wei Xiaobao shook his hand and said, “We all are good friends, let me tell you the truth.” While saying that, he stroked his own head. “This guy here has a mouth,” he continued, “This mouth still want to eat damned several dozen of years of rice. This guy also has a pair of eyes, they like to watch a play and look at beautiful women. On it grew a pair of ears, they want to listen to stories, listen to songs. If I became the Emperor, this guy most likely cannot be protected, once it is chopped down, everything will collapse silly. Besides, becoming an emperor is not much fun. Taiwan suffers a hurricane, he was anxious; someone in Yunnan rose up in rebellion, he had to mind him. The job as an emperor is exhausting but not fun. I absolutely don’t want to do it.”

Gu Yanwu and the others looked at each other in dismay; they felt what he said made a lot of sense. Since Wei Xiaobao did not have any ambition in his heart, and he was unwilling to step forward bravely for the sake of the country and the people, to move his heart was indeed a very difficult matter.

After half a day, Gu Yanwu said, “This is a big matter, it is not easy to make decision in such a short time …” Speaking to this point, suddenly they heard faint hoof beats, several dozen of riders approached from the north along the western bank; in the dead of the night, the sound was twice as clear.

Huang Lizhou said, “Very late at night, how can there be a large group of riders?”

Lu Liuliang said, “Could it be the night patrol?”

Zha Jizuo shook his head and said, “Can’t be. Night patrol will ride their horses very slow, not galloping like this. Could it be Jianghu visitor?”

While they were still talking, they heard several dozen more riders on the eastern bank. The canal was not too wide, when there were horses galloping on both sides of the river, the people on the boat could hear it clearly. The boatmen of the boat on the rear received order to use the punting pole to get two boats close to each other. Su Quan and Shuang’er leaped onto the bow.

“*Xianggong*,” Su Quan said, “I am afraid the incoming people harbor malicious intentions, let’s gather everybody together.”

“Alright!” Wei Xiaobao said, “Mr. Gu and the others are old gentlemen, they don’t look like lechers. Everybody come in, even if they see them it won’t be a big

deal.”

In their hearts Gu Yanwu and the others said, “Rubbish!” They felt it was inappropriate for them to meet the females in Wei Xiaobao’s family; therefore, they moved to the stern. The Princess, Ah Ke and the others, seven women, carried their children into the bow cabin.

They heard over the dike of the eastern and western banks the whistling sound of bamboo whistle calling and answering each other. Wei Xiaobao happily said, “It’s Tian Di Hui whistle.”

Several dozen of riders on both sides galloped toward the official boats. From the western bank someone called out, “Wei Xiaobao, come out!”

“Damn it,” Wei Xiaobao cursed in low voice, “No respect for seniors at all, they don’t even call ‘Wei *Xiangzhu*’ once.”

He was about to walk toward the bow, Su Quan pulled him back and said, “Let me question them clearly.” Walking toward the door of the cabin she asked, “Which heroes are here to see Wei *Xianggong*?” Looking toward both banks, she saw all riders were wearing dark green cloth headband, while holding weapons in their hands.

The leader of the people on the western bank said, “We are from Tian Di Hui.”

Su Quan lowered her voice, “What is the secret code when you meet Tian Di Hui people?”

Wei Xiaobao went to the cabin’s door and said in a loud and clear voice, “Five men separately compose a poem, nobody knows the Hong Ying [lit. great courage. See also Chapter 8 for more info on Tian Di Hui.] on their body.”

The man on the horse replied, “That is Tian Di Hui’s old secret code. Ever since Wei Xiaobao betrayed the Society and surrendered to the enemy, murdered his master to seek honor, all the secret code of the Society have been changed.”

Wei Xiaobao was startled. “Who are you?” he asked, “How can you say such thing?”

The man said, “Are you Wei Xiaobao?”

Wei Xiaobao thought there was no use in denying; he said, “I am Wei

Xiaobao."

The man said, "Then I can tell you this: I am from Great Transformation Hall of Tian Di Hui, my surname is Shu."

"Turns out it's Shu *Dage*," Wei Xiaobao said, "There is a lot of misunderstanding here. Is your honorable Hall's Li *Xiangzhu* around?"

The man surnamed Shu hatefully said, "Your evil crimes fill the heavens. Li *Xiangzhu* died of anger because of you."

The people on the western bank shouted loudly, "Wei Xiaobao betrayed the Society and surrendered to the enemy, murdered his master to seek honor; Shu *Dage* does not need to talk to him too much. Today we are going to chop his body into ten thousand pieces, to avenge Chen *Zongduozhu* and Li *Xiangzhu*."

When the people on the eastern bank heard this, they also shouted in loud voices. Suddenly 'whoosh!' someone threw a piece of flying locust rock. Wei Xiaobao hastily withdrew into the cabin, while groaning inwardly, "Turns out Great Transformation Hall's Li *Xiangzhu* has passed away; without distinguishing red-blue or black-white these brothers are acting recklessly, what should I do?"

He heard a series of 'pi pi pai pai' on the sail of their boat, secret projectiles from both sides continuously arrived. Finally the official boat stopped in the middle of the canal, the distance from either side was equally far, some secret projectiles fell into the water, even if they reached the sail, the momentum was very weak. Wei Xiaobao said, "This is 'straw boat to borrow arrows', I … I am Lu Su, I can only trembling with fear. Which one of you is Zhuge … Zhuge Liang? Quickly … quickly think of a plan."

Seeing the secret projectiles were shot one after another, Gu Yanwu and the others, along with the boatmen, were hiding in the hold of the boat. Suddenly a flame flickered, several flaming arrows were shot toward the sail. Immediately the sail caught fire. "Aiyo!" Wei Xiaobao cried out, "It's desperately serious, Wei Xiaobao is on fire!"

Su Quan shouted loudly, "Mr. Gu Yanwu is in here, you must not be rude." She thought that Gu Yanwu's prestige in Jianghu was quite resounding, presumably Tian Di Hui people would not dare to offend him. But amid the noise over the river, her voice was drowned.

Wei Xiaobao said, “Wives, let us shout together, ‘Mr. Gu Yanwu is here!’ One, two, three!”

Seven madams followed after Wei Xiaobao, “Mr. Gu Yanwu is here!”

After they had shouted three times, the noise of the people ashore gradually died down, the secret projectiles attack also stopped at once. The man surnamed Shu asked in loud voice, “Is Mr. Gu Yanwu on the boat?”

Gu Yanwu stood on the bow, cupped his fist and said, “*Xiongdi* Gu Yanwu is here.”

“Aiyo!” the man surnamed Shu cried out, and hastily issued his order, “Brothers with water skill, quickly jump into the river and tow the boat to the shore.”

They heard continuous splashing noise as dozens of Society members jumped into the canal and pushed and pulled the official boat toward the western bank. By this time the fire on the boat was burning high. Shuang’er pulled Wei Xiaobao and took him jumping to the shore, the remaining people also went ashore one after another. With unsheathed weapons in their hands, Tian Di Hui people surrounded them all around.

The man surnamed Shu cupped his fist and bowed to Gu Yanwu; he said, “*Zaixia* Tian Di Hui Great Transformation Hall’s Shu Hualong paying his respect to Mr. Gu Yanwu.”

Gu Yanwu cupped his fist to return the salute. An old man from Tian Di Hui bowed and said, “That year in the Turtle-Slaying Assembly of Hejianfu, the heroes all over the world elected Mr. Gu as *Zong Junshi* [Chief Military Counselor], *Zaixia* has seen Mr. Gu’s face once. We brothers are being reckless, please pardon our offense.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You are indeed too reckless.”

The old man said in stern voice, “I am talking to Mr. Gu; who spoke to you, this little traitor?” Stretching out his hand, he wanted to grab Wei Xiaobao’s chest. Su Quan blocked with her left hand, followed by a hand-flip, she caught and twisted the man’s wrist; borrowing the momentum, she pushed forward. The old man was unable to hold his stand; he was thrown down outward. Two Tian Di

Hui members hastily rushed forward to hold him up.

Gu Yanwu called out, “If you have something to talk, let’s talk. Don’t use force, don’t use force!”

By this time the inside of the cabin had already caught fire. Under the blazing fire the faces of the people on the shore could be seen clearly. Su Quan felt that she and Shuang’er had superior martial art skill, to protect their husband and break the siege was not a difficult matter. Tian Di Hui people only wanted to deal with Wei Xiaobao, one person; all they need to do was to ensure he could escape, these Jianghu warriors would certainly not give trouble to women and children. Thereupon she and Shuang’er stood on Wei Xiaobao’s left and right. They already had their eyes on three horses, as soon as the talk reached a deadlock, they would immediately make their move to snatch the horses.

Gu Yanwu pulled Shu Hualong’s hand and said, “Shu *Dage*, please step aside to talk.” The two of them walked off several *zhang*. Shu Hualong listened to Gu Yanwu’s explanation, and then with a loud voice he called six or seven names to come forward. Looking at their appearance, these men were the leaders of this group. The old man who was thrown down by Su Quan was one of them, the remaining forty or so men were still surrounding Wei Xiaobao all around.

Wei Xiaobao said, “My valuables in the boat are indeed not a few, you burned it down. Hey, hey, if the Great Transformation Hall wants to compensate for my loss, it will break your money coffer big time.” Some of the people raised their sabers to threaten; some opened their mouths in cursing. Wei Xiaobao did not pay them any attention; he expected Gu Yanwu would explain the truth to Shu Hualong.

As expected, when Shu Hualong and the other Great Transformation Hall leaders heard Gu Yanwu’s explanation, they found out that there were many twists and turns in this story, Wei Xiaobao worked as a high-ranking officer in the imperial court, although they did not understand everything, but the murder of *Zongduozhu* Chen Jinnan was not done by him, hence the bitter hatred in their hearts disappeared.

They came together to him. Shu Hualong cupped his fist and said, “Wei *Xiangzhu*, just now we misunderstood you. If not for Mr. Gu’s enlightenment,

we all nearly committed an offense."

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "To really offend me is not that easy." While saying that, he leaned sideways, unleashing the 'Shen Xing Bai Bian' [divine line hundred changes] he charged to the left, passed through to the right, went up and down twice or three times, and already he was about five, six *zhang* away from the Great Transformation Hall's encirclement, and then with one leap he landed on a horseback.

Shu Hualong and the others were shocked; nobody expected that his lightness skill was surprisingly marvelous beyond measure. This man had such an outstanding martial art, no wonder although he was young, he had become Tian Di Hui Green Wood Hall's *Xiangzhu*. Admittedly famous master would produce brilliant student, *Zongduozhu*'s direct disciple indeed was not a small matter. That old man from Great Transformation Hall's martial art was also very strong, the brothers had always admired him, but with one twist and one push by Su Quan, he had no room to parry, and was narrowly thrown down to the ground. It appeared that each and every one of the other six ladies was also martial art expert. If they really had to fight, although their sides had more people, perhaps they would be beaten and had their heads and faces filthy with grime.

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, "Excuse me, I must leave now!" Raising the reins, he galloped the horse away. But after rushing to the west about a dozen *zhang*, he swiftly leaped down from the horse and charged northwest; slipping to the left ducking to the right, somehow he returned to the encirclement and stood at his original spot with a grin on his face. Nobody could see clearly when did he come in.

Tian Di Hui members looked at each other, overwhelmed with amazement. Shu Hualong cupped his fist and said, "Wei *Xiangzhu*'s martial art is superb. My utmost admiration, my utmost admiration."

Wei Xiaobao also cupped his fist and said with a laugh, "It was just a shameful display."

Shu Hualong said, "Mr. Gu has explained to us that Wei *Xiangzhu* live in Cao camp but have your heart in Han camp, and is about to attempt a world-shaking great undertaking, to raise aspiration of the Han people throughout the world.

When Wei *Xiangzhu* is ready to stage an uprising, although we, the Great Transformation Hall's brothers, do not have much skill, as long as Wei *Xiangzhu* has anything for us to do, we will go through water and tread on fire, under no circumstances will we decline to do it."

"Yes, yes," Wei Xiaobao replied.

Shu Hualong noticed Wei Xiaobao's unenthusiastic expression. Suddenly he raised his right index finger, 'pop!' he poked his own left eye. Immediately blood flowed out. Everybody screamed in fright. Wei Xiaobao, Gu Yanwu, and the others asked in alarm, "Shu *Dage*, what … what are you doing?"

Upright and unafraid Shu Hualong replied, "*Xiongdi* has offended Wei *Xiangzhu*, violating our Society's commandment against disrespecting superior. I should have poked both of my eyeballs as a reprimand that I have eyes but failed to see. But *Xiongdi* wants to leave the other eye, I want to see how will Wei *Xiangzhu* accomplish the world-shaking great undertaking in the end."

The old man said awe-inspiringly, "Supposing Mr. Gu and the others were deceived, Wei *Xiangzhu* only talked without actually doing it, all along he covets riches and honor, and only wanted to be a high-ranking officer; then what?"

Shu Hualong said, "Then Wei *Xiangzhu* also has to dig his own eyeball to compensate for mine." Finished speaking he turned to Gu Yanwu and Wei Xiaobao, bowed and saluted, and said, "We are waiting for good news from Wei *Xiangzhu*." Waving his left hand, everybody withdrew, mounted their horses and galloped away.

The old man turned his head around and called out, "Wei *Xiangzhu*, when you are home, ask your *Niang* [mother], is your *Laozi* [old man] a Han, or a Manchu? As a human being you must not forget your own ancestor."

The bamboo whistle was blown, the crowd of warriors on the eastern bank also galloped away southward. In a short period of time, the riders on both banks had completely gone. The boat on the water was still burning.

Gu Yanwu sighed and said, "These brothers are still suspicious toward Wei *Xiongdi*. They are warriors of the wilderness, inevitably their speech is boorish, but they have loyal and righteous hearts, other people cannot help but feeling respect. Wei *Xiangzhu*, we have not finished what we wanted to talk to you

about. We only hope that you will not forget the Great Han's descendants. We are taking our leave now, I am sure we'll meet again some day." Finished speaking he cupped his fist, and then with Huang, Zha and the Lu's they bade farewell.

Wei Xiaobao stood dejectedly at the riverbank, the autumn wind was bringing slight chill, the fire on the official boat gradually died down, occasionally the burning boat emitted some crackling noise, the flame roared for a moment, and then slowly getting smaller and smaller. He mumbled to himself, "What should I do? What should I do?"

Su Quan said, "Luckily we have the other boat. Let us go back to Siyangji, we'll think about it and make decision later."

Wei Xiaobao said, "That old man told me to go home and ask my *Niang*, my *Laozi* is a Han or a Manchu. Hey, hey, it's not a bad idea."

"Xiaobao," Su Quan consoled him, "This kind of uncouth people's random talk, why do you take it seriously? Let us get on the boat."

Wei Xiaobao stood motionless, his heart was in turmoil. Looking down, he saw drops of blood on the ground, blood from Shu Hualong's self-inflicted wound on his left eye. Suddenly he cried out, "*Laozi* don't want to do it, *Laozi* don't want to do it!"

The seven madams were startled. Wei Shuangshuang was already fast asleep in her mother's arms, because of his loud shout, she woke up with a start and cried.

Wei Xiaobao said in a loud voice, "The Emperor forces me to strike Tian Di Hui, Tian Di Hui forces me to strike the Emperor. *Laozi*'s feet are treading on two boats, both sides do not give me any fruitful outcome to reward my labor. One side wants to chop my head, the other side wants to dig my eyeball. How many heads and how many eyeballs can one person have? You come to chop, I come to dig, what else will *Laozi* have left? I quit. No matter what *Laozi* don't want to do it anymore!"

Seeing his abnormal expression, Su Quan advised him in tender voice, "Becoming an imperial court official, your days are spent in fear and always on edge, there is nothing fun about it. Becoming a Tian Di Hui *Xiangzhu* is also not

fun to do. You decide to quit, nothing can't be better than that."

Wei Xiaobao happily said, "So all of you advise me to quit?"

Su Quan, Fang Yi, Ah Ke, Zeng Rou, Mu Jianping, and Shuang'er, six women nodded their heads. Only Princess Jianning said, "You have only achieved dukedom, how can you think of quitting your government position? You must be conferred the title King, becoming chief assistant great learning scholar [not sure, 首辅大学士], have both civil and military authorities, and then it would be a good time to announce your retirement. Besides, if you resign your post right now, I am sure *Huangdi Gege* won't allow it."

Wei Xiaobao angrily said, "I don't want to be government official, I don't need the Emperor to care about it. He is no more than my *Dajiuzi* [wife's older brother]. Damn it, why bother and talk too much? I don't even want this *Dajiuzi* anymore." Not wanting the Emperor as *Dajiuzi* means he did not want the Princess to be his wife. The Princess was scared; how could she dare to talk too much?

Seeing his seven wives did not have anything else to say, immediately Wei Xiaobao was happy and excited. He said, "The Great Transformation Hall burned my boat, they really burned it well, burn it swell, burn it all the way to hell. We can quietly hide, the local officials will report to the imperial court, they will say that I am burned to death by the bandits. From now on my *Dajiuzi* can't find me anymore."

Su Quan and the others clapped together, only the Princess was silent. Immediately the eight of them discussed a plan. Wei Xiaobao, the Princess, and Shuang'er, three people would change their clothes, go to Huaiyinan inn and wait there. Su Quan would lead Fang Yi, Ah Ke, Mu Jianping and Zeng Rou, four women, to go back to Siyangji to collect the gold, silver and valuables, as well as other things they wanted to take from the remaining boats, and then spread rumor that Duke Wei's official boat was attacked by a gang of bandits in the night, the boat was burned, the people perished. However, those several boatmen saw that Wei Xiaobao did not die; they would create danger later. In Su Quan's opinion, they should be killed to shut their mouths, and have their bodies abandoned at the riverbank; then it would be even more believable. Mu Jianping could not bear to do it, she insisted on not murdering the innocent.

“Very well,” Su Quan said, “Jianping *Meizi* has good conscience, *Laotianye* will bless you with many healthy sons. Xiaobao, I’ll lift my sword to kill you, you run into the woods, scream loudly, pretend that I am killing you.”

Wei Xiaobao laughed and said, “You are a brutish woman, you want to murder your own husband?” Raising his voice he cried out, “Murder, murder!” And started to run. After running in circle several times, he fled to the woods. With a sword in her hand, Su Quan ran after him into the woods. They heard Wei Xiaobao screamed, “Help, help! He …” the last ‘help’ was abruptly cut-off and then suddenly he went silent.

Mu Jianping was fully aware that they were pretending, but hearing Wei Xiaobao’s mournful cry, she could not refrain her heart from thumping madly. “Shuang’er *Meizi*,” she asked in a low voice, “It’s … it’s not real, is it?”

Shuang’er said, “Don’t be afraid. Nat … naturally it’s not real.” But she could not help feeling afraid herself.

They saw Su Quan walked out of the woods with the sword still in her hand; she called out, “Kill all the boatmen!”

All along the boatmen were squatting on the shore. Seeing Tian Di Hui people set the boat on fire, and Su Quan killing Wei *Jueye*, they were already trembling with fear. Seeing Su Quan came with sword in her hand to kill them, they scattered in all directions to protect their lives; instantly they all disappeared without a trace.

Shuang’er was worried over Wei Xiaobao, she rushed toward the woods, and saw him lying on the ground, motionless. Shuang’er was so scared that her body and soul separated, thinking how could she kill him for real? Throwing herself on him she called out, “*Xianggong*, *Xianggong*!”

Seeing Wei Xiaobao’s body was stiff, she panicked even more. Hastily she reached out to lift him up. Suddenly Wei Xiaobao opened up his arms and embraced her tightly, while calling out, “Great success, you deserve a kiss!”

Husband and wives, eight people proceeded according to plan; they fetched their belongings, and continued on to Yangzhou in disguise. After picking up Wei Xiaobao’s mother, the whole family went to Yunnan. Henceforth they lived incognito, spending their free and leisure days in Dali city.

In his free time, Wei Xiaobao often felt bored, and remembered the huge amount of treasures hidden in Mount Luding under the city of Yakesa that had not been dug yet. He thought that if he could be the richest man in the world, he would be perfectly satisfied. However, remembering his friendship with Kangxi, he could not bear to sever his dragon's vein.

Kangxi was well aware of Wei Xiaobao's character and ability; he knew he would not be easily harmed by the bandits, let alone even though they searched, they could not find his body. Hereafter Kangxi unceasingly sent people on open enquiries and secret search, yet there were no result.

Later generation historians wrote an account on Kangxi went down to Jiangnan six times, with the purpose of inspecting the work on Yellow River. But he had never been to Jiangnan before; why was it that as soon as Wei Xiaobao went missing, that very same year he went to Jiangnan? If he was inspecting the river work, why did he go as far as Hangzhou? Why did each time he stop over in Yangzhou for so long? And why did each time he send out a large number of Imperial Bodyguards to every brothel, casino, teahouse and wine shop to inquire about Wei Xiaobao? When the inquiry failed to get any result, why was he depressed?

Based on later generation research, the 'Hong Lou Meng' [Dream of Red Mansions] author Cao Xueqin's paternal grandfather Cao Yin was originally an Imperial Bodyguard, who was once serving under Wei Xiaobao's command. Later on Kangxi sent him to Suzhou's weaving industry, and also appointed him to be in charge of Jiangning's weaving industry, ordering him to set his headquarters in a bustling city in Jiangnan, to enable him to search for news of Wei Xiaobao in the neighboring areas.

That day when Wei Xiaobao finally reached Yangzhou, he brought his wives, sons and daughter to Lovely Spring Courtyard to see his mother. Mother and child met in person, their joy was unbearable. Wei Chunfang saw her seven daughter-in-laws were all as beautiful as flower and as jade; she thought, "Xiaobao, this little thief's eyesight in selecting women is not bad. If he opened up a courtyard, he would certainly make a lot of money."

Wei Xiaobao pulled his mother into her room and asked, "Ma, actually, who is my *laozi*?"

With eyes opened wide Wei Chunfang said, “How do I know?”

Knitting his brows, Wei Xiaobao said, “Before you got me in your belly, what kind of visitors did you receive?”

“At that time your *Niang* was a very pretty woman,” Wei Chunfang replied, “Every day I received several visitors. How could I remember that many people?”

“Were all those visitors Han people?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

Wei Chunfang replied, “Naturally there were some Han, but there were some Manchu officers, and some Mongolian military officers too.”

“Were there any foreign demons?” Wei Xiaobao asked.

Wei Chunfang was angry. “You think your *Niang* is a rotten wh0re that I would receive foreign demons? ” she said, “Hot piece mama, if Luocha demons, red-haired demons came to Lovely Spring Courtyard, *Laoniang* would swat them out with a big broom.”

Wei Xiaobao was relieved. “That’s very good!”

Wei Chunfang looked up, recalling past events. She said, “At that time there was a Hui kid, he often came here looking for me; his appearance was very handsome. I often said in my heart, my Xiaobao has a good nose, it looks a bit like him.”

Wei Xiaobao said, “There were Han, Manchu, Mongol and Hui men; was there any Tibetan?”

“Why not?” Wei Chunfang proudly said, “That Tibetan Lama, before he went to bed, he always chanted Buddhist scripture. While chanting, his eyeballs ran all over me. Your eyes are wily and too happy, just like that Lama’s!”

THE END.

Appendix

Kangxi Imperial Court's Secret Memorials

In the story 'The Deer and the Cauldron', Kangxi was said to have secret agents among Wei Xiaobao's subordinates, so that he knew a lot of Wei Xiaobao's covert activities. The tale in the novel is a bit exaggerated. At the beginning of Qing, the government structure was equivalent to Qing-Ming. The Ming Dynasty's Eastern Faction, Western Faction, Internal Faction, Brocade-clothed Guard, and other special assignment military units were disbanded; the Emperor did not have personal special agents. All the way until the demise of Qing, there was no special intelligence unit. Legend has it that Yongzheng established the 'Flying Guillotine', but it was only in the novel, there was no historical evidence.

However, it was a fact that Kangxi paid particular attention to the activity of his ministers and the condition of the local people; for this, the ruler must have had informants. From the beginning, ever since before Kangxi ascended the throne, the Qing court established 'secret memorial (to the emperor)' system. In the original system, the imperial court had a so-called 'General Secretarial Institution'. Memorials submitted by ordinary officials in the Capital, reports from local officials, everything must be submitted to the General Secretary first, after he reviewed it, then it would be transferred to the Emperor. Kangxi thought that this system could lead to constriction and leakage of classified information; therefore, he had a minister whom he extremely trusted to review the memorials. Reports no longer went through the General Secretary, but were submitted directly to the Emperor. On the cover of secret reports, the name and surname of the people who submitted it was not written clearly, it was only stamped with 'Solemnly Submitted to the South Study Room[43]'. And thus the memorial was personally delivered to the Imperial Study Room and handed over to the court eunuch. After the Emperor gave the official reply, it would be hand-delivered back to the Imperial Study Room.

Later on, the scope of this system of memorials was extended; it was not limited to trusted minister who could submit secret memorial to the emperor, ordinary local governor generals, high officials in the Capital, could now submit memorials directly to the emperor. By Yongzheng's years, the provision was

extended further to ‘class officers’ (middle level officials), every day one person would take turns to submit the memorial to the emperor. Big matter, small matter, everything must be reported, even if there was nothing to report, they still had to explain why there was nothing to report. With this system, the Emperor’s power was greatly expanded, while at the same time government officials of all levels did not dare to conceal anything.

Looking at the memorial submitted during Kangxi’s reign, in most part the contents of the memorial were grain prices in all parts of the country, the rain water, the harvest, public opinion, and whether the government officials were just and honest or corrupt. It can clearly be seen that Kangxi was most concerned about the common people’s economy and life quality, as well as whether the officials governing the people were corrupt or not. Naturally he also paid particular attention to rebellion or insurgency in any place.

On the memorials, Kangxi would write comments using vermillion ink. Most of the time he only wrote “Noted”, three characters [zhi dao le – lit. “I know.”], but sometimes he would write detailed directives. From these directives, it is clear that Kangxi was brilliant and very prudent, while at the same time his treatment toward his ministers and the common people was very lenient and considerate.

Wang Hongxu's memorials

Wang Hongxu was nine years older than Kangxi, a native of Huating [county], Jiangsu province. He graduated as a Jinshi in Kangxi’s twelfth year, and became compiler and editor of Hanlin Academy, the Minister of Department of Transport & Irrigation, Minister of Revenue, and several other high-ranking official positions; he was a minister whom Kangxi trusted very much. On the memorial that he submitted to Kangxi, he only wrote ‘Confidential Report. Subject Wang Hongxu solemnly presents.’ He did not write his official rank, it was completely without any polite set of phrases usually used by government officials. He took an official post in the Capital, the secret reports he submitted were mostly about the state of affairs of Beijing’s government officials.

Kangxi dispatched his trusted aides to gather information, at first he only sent high-ranking ministers, but the number was extremely limited, furthermore, he repeatedly warned these people to keep it top secret. On the memorial submitted by Wang Hongxu, he personally wrote, “The matter that can be heard

in the Capital, *Qing* [term used by the emperor for his subjects] submitted in confidential report, with the wish for good health in the memorial, must not be known by other people. If it flows out swiftly (leak out), the repercussion will be substantial. Careful, careful."

"In the years before the tour to the south, there were many unworthy people deceiving Suzhou women. Even at home, *Zhen* [I, imperial use] knows. This year I am afraid such thing will happen again, thou shall carefully investigate, if there is indeed such thing, personally write a memorial secretly. This matter must not be known by other people. If someone finds out, thou will be inconvenienced." (Suzhou women were well known for their beauty; probably some people were taking the opportunity of Kangxi's tour to the south to hold a beauty contest and offer it as a tribute, or perhaps borrowing their names to cheat Suzhou women's families.)

"If there is any problem later on, submit the memorial using the southern tour as precedent. There are numerous ears and eyes in the Palace, inevitably people will know, in which case, do not submit any memorials."

"If you hear any information, treat it in accordance with the previous memorial."

Having received the Emperor's commission, Wang Hongxu absolutely did not dare to leak anything. In the memorial he said, "By being selected from among the scholars, *Chen* [minister/subject, term of address used when speaking to a ruler] experiences and receives the sage's grace, there is no way I can render service to repay kindness, no matter what; for which I am really ashamed. Now entering the palace courtyard on the thirteenth day of the month, *miao ke* [4th earthly branch, 5-7am] hour, respectfully received imperial confirmation along with the sealed secret order, by this time Cai and Zha, two ministers have not arrived. Acting with reverence *Chen* opened it and read it silently, I cannot bear to be extremely grateful and frightened at the same time. I have to admit that *Chen* was ignorant, and have been ignorant several times, and thus it is my responsibility to look up to the Heaven's kindness, for breaking the rule in appointing the confidential, only by exhausting myself by being a dog or a horse I vow my strength in loyalty, looking up to repay the holy sage's ten-thousand and one kindness. To find favor and untiring instruction from above, to think over

how *Chen* somehow exposed some rumor, the responsibility is indeed too great, all the more *Chen* feels like weeping, forever strictly abide by this moment, three times sealing my mouth, even toward my own flesh and blood like father, son or brothers, I will also never tell, I will make doubly sure to look up to the monarch's will in understanding your idea. From now on, any affair that I hear in the Capital, at any time *Chen* will respectfully request the holy sage to transcribe tiny suitable memorial, a confidential report to be reviewed. As for confidential matter related to the imperial decree, it will be reported in accompanying memorial. I have been instructed." (Kangxi noted: 'Yes'.)

For the most part, the memorials submitted by Wang Hongxu pertaining to land tax, transportation, money minting, salt trade, and other public financial matters. He was especially interested in finance and economics affairs; therefore, for a long time afterwards, he served as the Minister of Department of Transport & Irrigation and the Minister of Revenue. Originally, these finance and economics affairs may be reported via formal memorial to the throne, but since secret memorials were mostly dealing with corrupt practices, violations in matters that those government officials had vested interest in, confidential reports seemed to be more appropriate.

Apart from corrupt practices in finance and economics, the nature of Wang Hongxu's secret memorials was extremely extensive. There were several secret memorials related to 'The Chen Rubi Case'. This legal case started when Chen Rubi took three thousand *taels* bribe, and later on it developed into a big case, 'The minister political affair, the Nine Ministers' *zhan shi* [lit. excellent matters] Ke Dao, and the others visited the Ministry of Justice *yamen* for a joint hearing.'

Wang Hongxu participated in the joint hearing, and wrote the proceedings in detail in a secret memorial to Kangxi. Among other things he spoke about the dispute between Manchurian and Han officials: "… in Chen Rubi's case, the decision was to have him beheaded, all Manchurian *Daren* already agreed. Li Zhenyu and *Chen* said: convicting without oral confession, all *Daren* ought to deliberate, what words Chen Rubi wrote in his letter yesterday. *Chen* also said: not to conceal anything. Manchurian *Daren* should have the officer in charge of this case to come over and let all *Daren* listen to him … Manchurian *Daren* said, it has nothing to do, there is no need to get oral confession. Han *Daren* said,

these four characters 'pretending to be dead' [jia zhuang shen si] ought to go, the former muddleheadedness and confusion of yesterday must also go. For this reason these four characters are deleted. Tu Cuizhong said: concealing records and the crime of obtaining stolen goods are not enough to warrant beheading. The political affair minister said: Change it. Thereupon Shu Lu changed it to 'Execution by hanging'. Ke Dao said: Still, we must execute under the San Fa Si's [three judicial chief ministries in imperial China] supervision. Before the group of Manchurian *Daren* responded, a messenger from Chen Rubi's household arrived to deliver the oral confession he personally wrote, but Manchurian *Daren* did not accept it. Li Luyu said: Previously the San Fa Si failed to obtain Chen Rubi's personal confession, today his own family came to deliver it, yet we do not want to accept it. How are we going to deal with it? … This confession actually contains very few words compared to what Shu Lu actually wrote … For the interrogating officer to change confession or make up confession, it has always been a crime deserving disciplinary action, the regulation about this is very serious … All Manchurian *Daren* are afraid to attract blame, they were unwilling to speak up. The political affair minister has no choice but to listen to Shu Lu's ruling …"

Kangxi remarked, "This memorial is very good, it profoundly adheres to high-ranking minister's style. *Zhen* understood."

The principal content of the memorial was to say that 'Manchurian *Daren*' accused wrongly the defendant's circumstances, while the 'Han *Daren*' did everything in their power to exonerate him. How this case was subsequently closed is unclear, it is believed that Kangxi was being comparatively lenient in his ruling. It's worth noting that although Manchu officials traditionally held more power in the imperial court, yet Kangxi did not side with Manchu officers at all. At the same time it is worth seeing that deciding on death penalty at that time was a very serious business, that it could not be decided based on one high-ranking minister's words.

Occasionally there are some trivial matters in Wang Hongxu's secret memorials; reading it today, it is quite fascinating: There is a lengthy report about the transportation [orig. 'horse'] affair, the last paragraph says, "… Li Xiu, Yin Debu, two people, I don't know who told them this, but they said that on the

outside Your Majesty says that they are big gangsters; Li Xiu and Yin Debu panicked and said other things. Afterwards *Chen* explain in a secret memorial, and beg Your Majesty to keep it in sealed envelope, and put imperial seal on it, to guard against people take a peek and disclose it to create harm …" (Kangxi remarked: Noted.)

And then there is a lengthy confidential report about whether the Chief Examiner, the Deputy Chief Examiner have committed fraud. The last paragraph says, "A certain Song Yunxi, young son of Song Luo, a successful candidate in the imperial provincial examination, went to capital to take the metropolitan examination on the twenty-first day of the eleventh month. He told people: all these years his father has dizziness that usually flare-out only once in a long while, but this year he had a dizzy spell in the military once, and then when he went to Yangzhou he got another one, which were a bit more tense compared to the previous ones; fortunately after it passes, he is still able to work. This report asks for new grace, in the future when he requires approval he would come to the Capital to explain other things …" (Kangxi remarked: Noted.)

Song Luo was originally the inspector-general of Jiangning (district, Nanjing, Jiangsu), the new appointment was the Shangshu [department head] of the Ministry of Appointments. He was very capable. Kangxi cared about his health.

There was a secret memorial reporting a government official who was guilty and was banished to an army post as a punishment, the guards who escorted him extorted money from him, ten *taels* of silver per person. The government official did not want to give, but raining insult on them instead. One night the official was suddenly tied up, all money in his possession was taken away. This is an insignificant matter, yet Wang Hongxu reported it just the same.

Li Xu's memorials

Li Xu was Kangxi's trusted aide, he held the official post as the supervisor of weaving industry in Suzhou for thirty years. Li Xu's brother-in-law [lit. younger sister's husband] Cao Yin was the supervisor of weaving industry in Jiangning for more than twenty years. Cao Yin was the paternal grandfather of Cao Xueqin, the author of 'A Dream of Red Mansions'. Li Xu, Cao Yin, as well as the supervisor of weaving industry in Hangzhou Sun Wencheng, three people constantly presented secret memorials to Kangxi, reporting about the situation in Jiangnan.

For the large part, the reports pertaining to rain water, harvest, the price of rice, epidemic, the situation of the people, the reputation of the government officials, et cetera. At that time there was no newspaper, Kangxi's main source of information about the actual situation in all parts of the country was these memorials to the throne.

In the summer of Kangxi's thirty-second year there was drought at Huai and Xu rivers in Jiangnan, with rainfall in the sixth month, Li Xu reported the harvest and the price of rice. Kangxi noted: "I heard the sun rose erroneously south of Huai and Xu rivers in the fifth month, the summer failed to arrived at the appointed time, the people are flustered and in panic, especially in the two Zhejiang. Morning and night *Zhen* anxiously consider this matter, my lying down and eating are disturbed, yet in the visit to the south, must ask for details, hearing thy memorials, the night and evening's toil is lessened. After the harvest, write more memorials."

Forty-seventh year, nineteenth day of the first month, Li Xu sent a memorial like this: "Respectfully wish the Ten-thousand Year ten thousand of peace. Early twelfth month, on the seventh day, last year, humble official got wind of the robbery case in Taicang [county, Suzhou, Jiangsu], while dispatching people to investigate, I promptly write a report, together with non-jointed bamboo strips, and send Wang Kecheng of my household to present it to superior. Today is the seventeenth day of the first month, Wang Kecheng returned and stated, 'All the non-jointed bamboo strip memorials have been submitted, folded report [usually in accordion form] have not been issued.' Hearing this, *Chen* Li Xu panicked. Thinking that all the folded reports have been imperially distributed, that is, if they haven't received comments from superior, the original report must have been issued. learning that they have not been issued today, *Chen*'s heart is extremely bewildered. Repeatedly extracting information rigorously, only learned about this: 'The folded report was hidden inside the pouch, in the hastening on the journey all night, the fastening was not tight, the pouch was lost along the way to Dezhou, nowhere to be found. Because the bamboo strips are critical, did not dare to delay, *Xiaode* [the lowly one] went to the Capital, hazily delivered the bamboo strips, muddle headedly said there is no folded report. This is the truth.' And other similar confessions. Accordingly *Chen* Li Xu had Wang Kecheng severely locked up and flogged, while waiting for the imperial

decree on how to deal with him. Yet *Chen* is unable to employ people appropriately, to such an extent as to commit mistakes. Alarmed, frightened, scared; this guilt is really cannot be dismissed, asking the Ten-thousand Year to promptly bestow punishment. Hereby the original report is re-transcribed and submitted, begging the Holy Sage to review. Waiting for the blame *Chen* Li Xu cannot bear to tremble extremely."

Kangxi remarked in vermillion ink: "Thy memorial was no more than secret report that cannot be associated with the local officials. Be lenient with thy household person. If outsiders hear about it, it would not be too good."

It is worth noting that it was not so much as Kangxi's clemency; rather, it was his fundamental attitude: the Emperor sent people out to make secret inquiry and received secret memorial was a dishonorable matter, a disreputable matter, not an upright and frank work, not a just and honorable way to handle matters, that no matter what no outsiders were to find out. In replying officially to the secret memorials sent by his subordinates, Kangxi has never used other people's hand. There was one time when his right hand was hurt and he could not write, with difficulty he replied officially with his left hand. In today's world, the ruler of every country dispatches spies and inquires secret reports for private reasons, yet the public accepts it as the way it should be, although it could be said that it is politically a great fall. This kind of system of values toward the 'special task operatives' was perhaps a clear dividing line between the Qing and Ming political corruptness. Wu Zetian [624-705, Tang empress, reigned 690-705] used special agents excessively, Qin Hui [1090-1155, Song Dynasty official who betrayed Yue Fei] used a lot of special agents, during the late Ming, special agents went on the rampage; later generations mostly believe that it led to downward spiral of the Ming Dynasty's political system. In order to increase the antipathy toward Emperor Yongzheng, later generation people fabricated a legend that he had used the 'flying guillotine', a special assassin team to kill people.

Kangxi's forty-eighth year, sixth day of the seventh month, in his report to wish good health, Li Xu also included the news of Jiangnan's *Tidu* [local commander] Zhang Yunyi's death due to sickness. To wish good health to the Emperor means 'to wish the Lord of Ten-thousand Years good luck and success, ten thousand good fortunes and peace like gold', wishing great luck, great profit is a proper

thing to do, the news of death must be reported in separate memorial, certainly these two cannot be mixed together, otherwise, it would implicitly cursing the Emperor to die. Li Xu's memorial has violated the fundamental taboo, it was an extremely muddleheaded report.

In the memorial he said, "Respectfully wishing the Ten-thousand Years ten-thousand of peace. The *Tidu* over the military affairs of the whole province of Jiangnan, subject Zhang Yunyi, fell ill on Kangxi's forty-eighth year, eighteenth day of the sixth month, with carbuncle on his lower back. He did not recover and died on the 'si' hour [9-11am] of third day of the seventh month, at the age of fifty-eight; it is included here for your information. The weather in Suzhou during the sixth month is also included in the report, begging the Holy Sage to review."

Seeing this greatly ominous memorial, naturally Kangxi was greatly displeased, but his reprimand to him still carried a humorous tone. He wrote in vermillion ink, "Report of wishing good health must not be mixed together with this kind of matter, it is extremely irreverent. Thou knew several foul words, I wonder which one I should use?"

Seeing the imperial remark, naturally Li Xu was scared that his soul flew away and scattered; hastily he wrote another memorial to apologize for the offense, while thoroughly confessed his guilt. Kangxi remarked, "Noted."

Kangxi's fifty-first year, seventh month, weaving supervisor of Jiangning, Cao Yin (Cao Xueqin's grandfather) received order to go to Yangzhou to manage the engraving of the 'Pei Wen Yun Fu' [lit. government mansion of 'respectful cultural charm'] when he caught malaria and his condition was very serious. Li Xu promptly went to visit him, Cao Yin asked him to write a memorial, asking for some medicine from Kangxi.

As soon as Kangxi received the memorial, he replied in vermillion ink, "Thy memorial has been received well. I hereby bestow the medicine to treat malaria. Afraid that it would be delayed, I bestow post horse to rush overnight. Yet if the malaria does not turn into diarrhea, it won't be bad. If the illness changes, this medicine must not be used. The charlatans of the south often use a dose of this medicine, the number of people they harm cannot be counted, you must be careful. If Cao Yin originally ate ginseng, he may caught present illness from the ginseng. Jinjina (that is 'quinine', the original text used Manchurian script) is

used specifically for the treatment of malaria. Use two *qian* [1 qian = 1/10 of a *tael*], that's it. And then take a dose of wine. If the illness is getting somewhat lighter, take another dose; it should control the sickness. After it is under control, take perhaps one *qian* or eight *fen*. Take two doses in succession, may even take the roots. If it is not malaria, this medicine must not be taken; you must take this seriously. Urgent, urgent, urgent, urgent!"

Kangxi wrote four 'urgent' words in succession, he also dispatched post horses to expressly deliver the medicine to Yangzhou, so that it arrived in nine days; it can clearly be seen that he cherished and extremely concerned about Cao Yin. Quinine was the correct medicine to be prescribed to cure malaria; however, it is possible that Cao Yin had other complications that in the end he succumbed to the illness and died. Kangxi deeply lamented his passing, he ordered Li Xu to properly take care for the family Cao Yin left behind.

In his memorials, Li Xu also talked a lot about the experiments in new kind of rice. Kangxi attached great importance to the quality of rice. After growing crops on a trial basis in many other ways, they managed to breed a good variety, and then they sent the seeds to various regions for the government officials and members of the gentry to do the test planting. Li Xu then presented the memorials reporting the progress of the test planting, official so-and-so planted how many *mu* [unit area, approx. 1/15 of a hectare], each *mu* produced how many *dan* [unit volume, approx. 100 liters] how many *dou* [1/10 of a *dan*]; merchant so-and-so grew how many *mu*, each *mu* yielded how many *dan*, how many *dou*, and so on. Take the memorial submitted on Kangxi's fifty-eighth year, the twenty-forth day of the sixth month for example: "Your humble servant has planted imperial paddy one hundred *mu*, and gathered in the crops on the fifteenth of the sixth month. Each *mu* obtains approximately four *dan* two *dou* three *sheng* [1/10 of a *dou*], respectfully milled one *dou* of the new rice to be presented. The original field was put in order without delay, by the twenty-third day of the sixth month the second seedling has been planted. As for the imperial paddy planted by Suzhou's squires, all have also been harvested. The breakdown of the harvest in place of the original, the breakdown of the new crops, is respectfully submitted for imperial review." It can clearly be seen that Li Xu was still responsible for the task of 'planting imperial paddy on experimental fields'.

Kangxi assigned this ‘imperial paddy’ test-planting task to government officials, members of the gentry, and business people in various regions of the country, each person planted at least two, three *mu* of field. Li Xu planted a hundred *mu*, he had the largest experimental farm. At that time the crop was called ‘imperial park’s rouge rice’, the color was red and it was sweet smelling; made into rice porridge it looked pleasing to the eye. In the ‘Dream of Red Mansions’, the gift presented by the village head Wu to the Jia Mansion was precisely this kind of rice.

During his tour to the south, Kangxi saw that the people loaded the boats full of pig’s hair and chicken feather. Upon asking about the purpose of those things, he found out that people used it as fertilizer in paddy fields. Later on he issued an imperial decree to perform experiments; the result was very good. Compared to later generation who did not pay attention to fertilizer, who did not go through experiments and large scale testing in satellite fields but submitted fraudulent report to conceal the truth, Kangxi’s practice in developing paddy was much more scientific.

Li Lincheng’s memorials

Kangxi had considerable sense of humor; even in giving criticism in serious documents, he often used humor.

On Kangxi’s fortieth year, twenty-fourth day of the tenth month, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces’ *Tidu* Li Lincheng submitted a memorial to the throne. This man’s official title was: ‘*Tidu* of Shaanxi, Gansu, and other places’ *Zongbing* [regional commander] and Right *Dudu* [provincial military governor], plus first class downgraded to second class bearing the guilt of pursuing meritorious service’. The memorial said, “Your Majesty inquired, ‘Is *Tidu* well, your body well? All officers are well? Formerly, from time to time the one holding *Tidu* position submitted a memorial about the situation of rainwater, now that you came to take up the post, why you did not submit any memorials? From now on you ought to send memorials from time to time about the situation in your place to let the Emperor know. The Emperor also bestows you deer tongue, deer tail, dried meat and so on, you may inspect and receive’, and so on. Although *Chen* respectfully setting up an incense burner table, leading fellow generals and other government officials, gazing toward the imperial city watchtower to thank the

Emperor's favor, the receiving is finished. Apart from *Chen* respectfully offering silky noise and conferring foodstuff, looking at other ways to present memorials to thank the Heaven's kindness, I will also present and announce the matters of this place, the situation of rainwater, to declare the imperial edict to the subjects; *Chen* will solemnly obey Your Majesty's decree and reply in everything. Admittedly *Chen* has been stupid, fortunately it is the time when the Holy Sage is born that I encounter Yao Shun lord [from 'yao shun yu tang' - see Chapter 14], that I undergo years of peace and security, not in the least getting what I deserve, morning and night being fearful and in terror …"

This man did not understand Kangxi's character, his memorial contained a great amount of polite phrases to sing Kangxi's praises; concerning local issues and situation of rainwater, he only reported the good news and not the bad news. Most probably this man was a military officer of the Han army banner, and he had employed a secretary, who did not understand the customs; he also put an official seal on the cover of his memorial.

Kangxi's remarked in vermillion ink: "Noted. Next time in your report use Qing character, no need to use seal." 'Qing character' was Manchu scribe, Kangxi's meaning was: this kind of memorial was a secret report, not a formal document at all; he wanted Li Lincheng to write it himself, if he did not know Han characters, then he should have used Manchu characters.

Upon receiving the imperial criticism, Li Lincheng submitted another memorial: "… Looking up only toward my Emperor who is continuing on to the utmost heaven, having divine martial art skill and brave literary knowledge; although during the day the Emperor's holy body has ten thousand crucial points, it is as if there is not a time when you do not remember the people's welfare. In former times because Hedong [lit. river east; not sure, perhaps his alias?] apologize for ages, since in Holy Sage's bosom above there are abundant compassion and special favor, in reply leniency has been issued, sincere merit lofty ten-thousand ages, virtuous steps a hundred rulers, encompassing inside and outside of the ocean, not uncommon to the Yao [see above] in heaven … In responding to the imperial decree, it is only proper that *Chen* use Qing character in writing the memorial; however, although *Chen* knew a little bit Qing character, over the years my eyes have become weak and I am muddleheaded, I cannot write, plus

Qing words' construction make no sense, if I have other people transcribing it, *Chen* is not well-versed in its profound meaning, honestly I am afraid the words and sentences will be improper. I further ask in earnest for the imperial kindness, to let *Chen* from now on when presenting matters in memorials, to be allowed to still use the Han characters, to avoid the crime of contradicting the multitude of common people."

Kangxi's comment: "Noted. These Han characters thou may not necessarily able to use either." He was fully aware that this military employee had limited ink in his belly, the memorial must have been written by other people, thereupon he mocked him a little bit. Afterwards he also did not expect to receive memorials or local secret report written personally by him.

Although Li Lincheng had his secretary wrote the memorials, he still did not follow the rule. For example, 'although *Chen* knew a little bit Qing character, over the years my eyes have become weak and I am muddleheaded, I cannot write, plus Qing words' construction make no sense'. It should be 'plus I do not understand Qing words' construction'. [Translator's note: in the original text, the difference is in the placement of the word 'make no sense'. 又兼清字之文理不通 vs. 又兼不通清字之文理.] The original sentence in the memorial actually criticized Manchu words as 'make no sense'. Fortunately Kangxi was magnanimous, he did not pursue; if it were the meticulous and deep-probing Emperor Yongzheng, perhaps he would issue an imperial decree to harshly reprimand him, to punish him by 'downgrading him one class bearing the guilt of pursuing meritorious service'.

Afterword

The Deer and The Cauldron was first published as a serial in Ming Pao newspaper (Hong Kong) on October 24, 1969, and ended on September 23, 1972; altogether it was serialized for two years eleven months. My usual practice in writing this serial was to write a segment a day, and publish it the next day, so this novel was also written continuously in two years eleven months. If there is nothing extraordinary happens (in life, there will always be extraordinary things happen), this will be my last wuxia novel.

However, 'The Deer and The Cauldron' already does not look too much like a wuxia novel, rather, it is a historical novel. When this novel was published in the newspaper, the readers unceasingly wrote to ask: "Is 'The Deer and The Cauldron' written by someone else?" Because they found that this novel is greatly different than my former work. The fact is that this novel was written completely by myself. I am very grateful for the readers who doted on me and pampered me; when they don't like certain book or certain passage that I write, they concluded: "It is written by others." They would reserve positive review for myself, and push the unfavorable review to some 'ghost writer'.

'The Deer and The Cauldron' is completely different from my previous wuxia novels; it was intentional. An author should not always repeat his style and form, he should try to create something new as far as possible.

Some readers were not happy with 'The Deer and The Cauldron', because of the main protagonist Wei Xiaobao's moral character, and because of excessive violation of system of values. Readers of wuxia novels are accustomed to substitute themselves into the hero of the book, yet Wei Xiaobao cannot be substituted. In this regard, some readers were deprived of some fun, for which I apologize.

However, it is not necessary that the protagonist of a novel is a ‘good guy’. One of the primary missions of a novel is to create characters: good guys, bad guys, good guys with shortcomings, bad guys with good merits, and so on, anything can be written. In China during Kangxi’s era, a character like Wei Xiaobao is not out of question. When an author writes about a character, the intention is not to make this character necessarily typical. Hamlet’s indecision, Luo Ting who can speak but cannot do, the priest in ‘Scarlet Letter’ who took part in adultery, Anna Karenina who betrayed her husband; the authors are simply portraying characters like them, not at all encouraging the readers to imitate their behavior. It would be best if the readers do not act like Li Kui of ‘The Water Margin’, who lost in gambling and stole money, or like Song Jiang, who chopped the mistress who unceasingly blackmailed him to death. Lin Daiyu [from ‘The Dream of Red Mansions’] is clearly not a role model for the modern female readers. The sexual relations Wei Xiaobao had with women were not as many as Jia Baoyu at all, to say the least, Wei Xiaobao was not as gay as Jia Baoyu, who already had Qin Zhong, but also had Jiang Yuhan. Lu Xun [1881-1936, one of the earliest and best known modern Chinese writers] wrote ‘The True Story of Ah Q’ [1921], it was not to agitate the vitality of victory at all.

If the characters in the novels are perfect, unavoidably it is not realistic. Novels reflect the society; in real-life society there is no such thing as absolutely perfect person. Novels are not textbooks in morality at all. It’s just that a lot of the readers of my novels are teenage girls, hence I ought to remind these naïve young friends this one thing: Wei Xiaobao attached most importance to *yi qi*, indeed this is a good moral character; as for his other actions, absolutely must never be copied.

Altogether I wrote twelve long wuxia novels, two novelettes, and one short story. The fourteen characters of the first character of the titles make a rhyming couplet:

飞雪连天射白鹿

笑书神侠倚碧鸳

[from Wikipedia: Loose translation: Shooting a white deer, snow flutters around the skies; Smiling, [one] writes about the divine chivalrous one, leaning against bluish lovebirds (or lover)]

The last insignificant short story ‘The Sword of Yue Maiden’ was not included.

I started to write the earliest ‘The Book and The Sword’ [Translator’s note: actually, the literal translation of the title is ‘the story of book and sword, debt of gratitude coupled with duty to avenge’] in 1955, and finished writing the last book ‘The Deer and The Cauldron’ in September 1972; fifteen long and short novels written in seventeen years. The revision work began in March 1970, and finished in mid-1980, a total of ten years. Of course, during all that time I also did many other things, primarily managing ‘Ming Pao’ and writing editorials for ‘Ming Pao’.

During encounters with early readers, the most often asked question was: “Which of your own novels do you like best?” This question is very difficult to answer, therefore, I often did not reply. Speaking about ‘personal preference’, I prefer several books with comparatively intense emotion: ‘Divine Eagle Gallant Knights’, ‘Heavenly Sword and Dragon-slaying Saber’, ‘The Other Tales of The Flying Fox’, ‘Smiling Proud Wanderer’, ‘Demi Gods and Semi Devils’. People often asked, “Which of your own novel you think is the best?” This is a question about technique and value. I believe that over the course of my writing career I have made some progress: the long novels are slightly better than the novelettes and the short story, the later works are somewhat better than the early ones. But many readers did not agree. And I really like it that they do not agree.

1981-6-22

My fifteen wuxia novels are finally revised by the beginning of the 21st century,

the project is completed in July of 2006, mainly it was revision of writing style, there are no major changes on the plot. I seriously considered major change on 'The Deer and The Cauldron', but in the end I decided not to, because this novel tells the story of the golden age of the Qing Dynasty during Kangxi's reign, the main focus was the era itself rather than the people. In that era, this kind of story is plausible. I definitely do not encourage present-age young people to imitate Wei Xiaobao: not opposing mother becoming a prostitute, not knowing Han script, bribing and being corrupt, exchanging people at the execution ground, contempt of the law, after killing someone using drug to dispose the body, even taking seven wives. Just as 'The Dream of Red Mansions' and 'The Water Margin' are good novels, but in modern society, Jia Baoyu and Li Kui's actions cannot be imitated.

2006-7-15

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[1] Chuan is abbreviation for Sichuan province. I am not sure about the 'Hu' (lake), since Hunan/Hubei are not adjacent to Sichuan.

[2] Zhuang house, 'zhuang jia' can also mean 'banker' (in gambling); 'leg vise' (夹棍), I don't know what it is, I am assuming it has something to do with gambling; 'three directions', usually there are four positions in a gambling table, denoted by east, south, west, and north, respectively.

[3] I don't know how to translate this without sounding strange: Han Sha She Ying, 'han' – to suck, to keep in the mouth, 'sha' – sand/grain, 'she' – shoot, 'ying' – shadow; 'shooting at shadow with the sand kept inside the mouth'? Interestingly, the dictionary has special definition for 'han sha she ying': to attack someone by innuendo/to insinuate.

[4] Wang Xizhi (303-361), famous calligrapher of Eastern Jin, known as the sage of calligraphy.

[5] Chu Suiliang (597–658), a chancellor of the Tang Dynasty, during the reigns

of Emperor Taizong and Emperor Taizong's son Emperor Gaozong. He became increasingly trusted by Emperor Taizong toward the end of his reign and was charged with the responsibilities of serving as the imperial historian and providing honest advice.

[6] In Cantonese, 'Xuan' of Xiao Xuanzi's name is a homophone for circle. (Courtesy of Pannonian) [7] Qian Qing Men: 'qian' – one of eight trigrams (bagua), symbolizing heaven, male principle, 'qing' – clear/quiet, 'men' – gate. Gate of Heavenly Purity. Qian Qing Gong – Palace of Heavenly Purity.

[8] Kun Ning Gong: 'kun' – one of eight trigrams, symbolizing earth, female principle, 'ning' – peaceful, 'gong' – palace. Palace of Earthly Tranquility. (Most of the English names are courtesy of Ace High.) [9] Jing Lue - military position that was translated as the 'managing governor'. [Faerie Queene, White Haired Demoness]

[10] Zhengde, 11th Ming Emperor Zhu Houzhao (1491-1521, reigned 1505-1521).

[11] Duke who Receives Grace and Guards the Nation (奉恩镇国公; *feng en zhen guo gong*), simplified as 'Duke who Guards the Nation' (镇国公; *zhen guo gong*) is the first subgrade of National Dukes (国公; *guó gōng*), a title granted only to members of the imperial clan. The rank of National Duke (国公; *guó gōng)* was higher than 'Commoner' Duke (民公; *mín gōng*)' which often simplified as 'Duke', but lower than a king (王; *wáng*). (Courtesy of Ace High)

[12] Dong Zhuo (-192), top general of late Han, usurped power in 189, murdered empress dowager and child emperor, killed in 192 by Lü Bu. Cao Cao (155-220), famous statesman and general at the end of Han, noted poet and calligrapher, later warlord, founder and first king of Cao Wei, father of Emperor Cao Pi, the main villain of novel the Romance of Three Kingdoms.

[13] 'your heart must be put to death' (其心可诛) is a chengyu which essentially means that a person is worthy of punishment due to having prepared

a premeditated plan/intention, even if that plan wasn't carried out. Basically, it means that the premeditated intent, in and of itself, is sufficient to condemn someone as guilty. In this specific instance, Kangxi is saying that Wei Xiaobao's preparation of an escape route for himself, in and of itself, was sufficient to condemn him as being guilty, even if it was never used (which he now was). (Courtesy of Ren Wo Xing) [14] Imperial Consort, 'gui fei', I believe it refers to Yang Guifei; she and Xi Shi were two of the four legendary beauties of ancient China.

[15] From the dictionary: 'Five Tiger Generals' was an allusion to the Romance of the Three Kingdom's five great generals under Liu Bei's command, *i.e.* Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, Ma Chao and Huang Zhong.

[16] Yue Fei (1103-1142), Song dynasty patriot and general. Qin Hui (1090-1155), Song dynasty official who betrayed Yue Fei.

[17] Jinmen – Kinmen or Quemoy Islands off Fujian coast; Xiamen or Amoy, sub provincial city in Fujian.

[18] Green standard army – standing infantry during Qing Dynasty; originally formed from Ming and other Chinese army units.

[19] Yan Zi Ling (ca. 40 BC to ca. 40 AD) is one of the most famous examples of a scholar who declined public life in favour of honourable reclusion. Around the year 14 AD, Yan studied at the state academy in Changan. He was then about 40, having spent a number of years in retirement, together with other honorable men, in the Shaoxing area, due to the turmoil that took place while the usurper Wang Mang was in power (6-23). At the academy Yan met Liu Xiu, who later ruled as the Han dynasty Guang Wu emperor. Although Liu Xiu was then about 20 years younger than Yan, they became very close friends, and several stories attest to their strong personal relationship. When Liu Xiu became emperor he was able to persuade Yan Zi Ling to visit him in the capital, but he could not persuade him to take office. Instead Yan went into retirement again, this time in a secluded spot up the Fu Chun River about 100 km. southwest of Hangzhou, spending his time enjoying nature. (Courtesy of Ace High) [20] Commandant of

Fleet-as-Clouds Cavalry was the eighth in order of precedence out of nine grades of the peerage awarded for valor, achievement and distinction. It was not divided into subclasses unlike the top seven. It was equivalent to a fifth rank position in the nine ranks system. It was also a rough equivalent of Companion or Commander of a chivalric order. (Courtesy of Ace High) [21] Mount Ding Jun – referring to Battle of Mount Ding Jun – Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

[22] Li Kui is a fictional character in the Outlaws of the Marsh. He ranks 22nd of the 36 Heavenly Spirits of the 108 Liangshan heroes and is nicknamed Black Whirlwind. Li Kui is one of the most memorable characters in Outlaws of the Marsh, often ridiculed and used for comedic effect. He represents both a light and dark side of the outlaws. His exploits with Taoist Luo and his journeys with Yan Qing represent the most humorous side of the novel. He is perhaps the most controversial character in the story. Often depicted as reckless, violent and cannibalistic, he kills indiscriminately whenever his blood lust is aroused. Men from even his own combat unit were sometimes afraid to go near him during battle. At the behest of Song Jiang and Wu Yong, he once killed a four-year-old child to force Zhu Tong to become an outlaw. Taoist Luo nonetheless describes Li Kui as a Heavenly Spirit sent to Earth to destroy the wicked. (Courtesy of Ace High) [23] Niu Gao was a very capable general under Yue Fei. He is sent to relieve Ou Yang Pass which is besieged by a powerful Jurchen army. After he routs the besiegers, the garrison commander offers him his sister-in-law as wife. The woman is also an expert in martial skills, so on their wedding night the husband and wife engage in a friendly duel in their bedchamber. (Courtesy of Ace High) [24] Daji (c. 11th century BC), mythical fox spirit and concubine of the last Shang Dynasty Emperor Zhou Xin.

[25] Lü Shang, ancestral name Jiang (姜), clan name Lü (呂), given name Shang (尚), and style name Ziya (子牙). Also known by various titles including Jiang Tai Gong (Grand Duke Jiang), Tai Gong Wang, and Shang Fu (Father Shang). The last ruler of the Shang dynasty, King Zhou of Shang (16th - 11th century BC) was a tyrannical and debauched slave owner who spent his days carousing with his favorite concubine Daji and mercilessly executing or punishing upright officials and all others who objected to his ways. After faithfully serving the Shang court

for approximately twenty years, Jiang came to find King Zhou insufferable, and feigned madness in order to escape court life and the ruler's power. Jiang was an expert in military affairs and hoped that someday someone would call on him to help overthrow the king. Jiang disappeared, only to resurface in the Zhou countryside at the apocryphal age of seventy-two, when he was recruited by King Wen of Zhou and became instrumental in Zhou affairs. It is said that, while in exile, he continued to wait placidly, fishing in a tributary of the Wei River (near today's Xi'an) using a barbless hook or even no hook at all, on the theory that the fish would come to him of their own volition when they were ready. (Wikipedia)

[26] Chief Commandant of Light Chariots was the sixth in order of precedence out of nine grades of the peerage awarded for valour, achievement and distinction. It was divided into three subclasses. It was equivalent to a third rank position in the nine ranks system. It was also the rough equivalent to a Knight Grand Cross of a chivalric order. (Courtesy of Ace High)

[27] pu luo min zhe cheng [普罗民遮城] is currently called 'chi kan lou' [赤崁楼 – Chihkan Tower], a tourist attraction. It was built by the Dutch and known as Provintia then. It was used as gunpowder storage at the time of Koxinga. (Courtesy of Chowbeng)

[28] Ci Xing – bestowed surname (emperor conferring favor on ethnic group). Guoxing Ye itself means 'Lord of the Imperial Surname'.

[29] Xi Shi was a famous beauty given by King Gou Jian of Yue as concubine to King of Wu as part of a successful plan to destroy Wu. The character 'Xi' of Xi Shi means 'west'. Subsequently, 'Dong', 'Nan', 'Bei' and 'Zhong' are 'east', 'south', 'north' and 'middle', respectively.

[30] Hanlin's Zhuangyuan refers to the top scorer in the examination administered by Hanlin Imperial Academy.

[31] It appears to be a reference to an obscure poem written by Qing dynasty poet Zha Shenxing [see the author's note at the end of Chapter 1] named "大清军威", "The Great Qing's Military Might". The full poem is as follows:

赚得儿童仰面看，影缨袨服最无端。
国门他日生悬价，驵侩何人敢卖官。

丞相鱼鱼**工**拥**笏**，**将**军跃跃俨**登**坛。

星奴结**柳翻多事**，**五鬼争**弹贡**禹冠** (Courtesy of Ren Wo Xing) [32] Shashlyk (literally ‘skewing meat’) is a form of Shish kebab popular throughout the former Soviet Union, parts of Eastern Europe, Mongolia, Iran and Israel. Shashlyk is originally lamb (in some extent pork or beef) depending on local preferences and religious observances. These skewers of meat are either all meat, all fat, or alternating pieces of meat, fat, and vegetables such as bell pepper, onion and tomato. Meat for shashlyk (as opposed to other forms of shish kebab) is usually marinated overnight in a high-acidity marinade like vinegar, dry wine or sour fruit/vegetable juice with the addition of herbs and spices. (Courtesy of Ace High) [33] Latin – ‘la ding’; pulling able-bodied men (capable of fighting in a war) – ‘la zhuang ding’. ‘La ding’ itself can mean ‘kidnaping and forcing people into service’.

[34] Both are prince: Qinwang - Prince of the Blood or Prince of the First Rank. Granted solely to direct male-line descendants of an emperor, with the only known exception was Wu San Gui. Junwang - Prince a Commandery or Prince of the Second Rank. Wu San Gui (previously), Geng Jing Zhong, Shang Ke Xi and Zheng Jing were of this rank. (Courtesy of Ace High)

[35] The original expedition to the west during Genghis's reign indeed consisted of 2 *tumen* (a *tumen* is a division of 10,000 men). The *tumen* were commanded by Jebe (Guo Jing's teacher) and Subedei. Jebe was dead by the time Ogedei decided on a full-scale invasion of the west, but Subedei was still alive, and he was the chief subordinate commander under Batu (Jochi's son). After a couple of crushing victories over European armies, the campaign was cut short by news of Ogedei's death, which necessitated the return of Batu and other members of Genghis's family to elect a new leader. After the election of Guyuk, Ogedei's son, much of Batu's forces were stripped from him, and he was obliged to reorganize his conquests rather than further them. What is now western Russia was organized into vassal states under Batu's Golden Khanate. (Courtesy of Pannonian)

[36] From the dictionary: Guo Moruo (1892-1978), writer, communist party intellectual and cultural apparatchik.

[37] See Note 13, Chapter 34. Shuntian Fu can be used to refer to either Shuntian Prefecture or the prefect's office, or even the prefect himself. Prefect of Shuntian Prefecture title was *fǔyǐn* (府尹) and of rank 3a. Prefects of other prefectures such as Yangzhou and Huizhou title was *zhīfǔ* (知府) and of rank 4b. Jin Yong used *zhīfǔ* for Prefect of Shuntian. (Additional info courtesy of Ace High)

[38] Fengyang flower-drum: folk art involving singing and dancing.

[39] *Waiting for the Dawn* (明夷待訪錄; Ming Yi Dai Fang Lu) was a summary of ideas about political reform that had been advanced by various scholars since the reign of Wan Li (1573–1619). The political tract begins with a condemnation of selfish autocratic rule, and declares that the world should belong to the people.

The third and fifth section of the work, "On Laws" and "Schools", respectively, are particularly famous. In the former, Huang declares that all laws and regulatory bodies should be an outgrowth of local needs, not imposed by leaders with a political agenda. In the latter, he advocates using the education system as a semiofficial forum for educated opinion on public affairs.

In the sixth and seventh sections of the work, entitled "Selecting Good Men", Huang also lays out his ideas for reform of the Imperial examination system. In later sections, he discusses equitable distribution of landholdings, the division between men of civil and military background, fiscal reform, and the problem of eunuch power during the Ming dynasty. (Courtesy of Ace High)

[40] Han Xin (-196BC), famous general of first Han emperor Liu Bang.

[41] Great Sage the Equal of Heaven was the self-proclaimed title of the Monkey King Sun Wukong (Journey to the West).

[42] Eight Characters of Birth Time or the Four Pillars of Destiny is conceptual term that describes the four components creating a person's destiny or fate. The four components within the moment of birth are year, month, day, and hour. It is called BāZì (八字), Eight Characters, because each of the four pillars (representing the year, month, day, and hour of one's birth respectively) is represented by two characters; one character for a Heavenly Stem and one character for an Earthly Branch. There are 10 Heavenly Stems (天干; TiānGān) and 12 Earthly Branches (地支; DìZhī). (Courtesy of Ace High) [43] The Southern Study (Chinese: Nánshūfáng, 南書房) was an institution that held the highest policy-making power after its establishment in 1677. It was abolished in 1898. The Southern Study was built by Kang Xi in the south-western corner of the Palace of Heavenly Purity. Members of the Hanlin Academy, selected on the basis of literary merit, were posted to the Study so that the Emperor had easy access to them when he sought counsel or discussion. When posted to the Study, officials were known as '[having] access to the Southern Study' (南書房行走). Because of their proximity to the Emperor, official posted to the Study became highly influential to the Emperor. After the establishment of the Grand Council, the Southern Study remained an important institution but lost its policy advisory role. Officials regarded secondment to the Southern Study as an honorable recognition of their literary achievements. In Chinese, the term 'access to the Southern Study' in modern usage indicates a person who, through channels other than formal government office, has significant influence over leaders of the government. (Courtesy of Ace High)