

# She Diao Ying Xiong Chuan (Eagle Shooting Hero)

by Jin Yong



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## Chapter 31 – Lovers' Handkerchief

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Reverend Yideng narrated all kinds of gratitude and grudges, love and hate that he went through with Concubine Liu in the past. Guo Jing and Huang Rong sat on the mediation mats in front of him, listening intently; while the 'Fisherman', 'Woodcutter', 'Farmer' and 'Scholar', his four disciples, stood behind Reverend Yideng.*

Reverend Yideng lowered his head and sighed, “Actually I only have myself to blame for this unfortunate disaster. You see, my Dali kingdom is small; although it cannot be compared to the Chinese emperor’s palace where there are more than 3,000 women, speaking about the empress and concubines, I had a few. Ay! It truly was a sin. I was very fond of martial arts; very seldom did I come near a woman. Even my own empress could see me only once every few days; how much less time did I have for my concubines?”

Speaking to this point he said to his four disciples, “This is an inside story, you did not know the details before. Today I am going to tell you everything so you’ll understand.”

Huang Rong thought, “They really did not know it, they did not lie to me.”

Yideng continued, “Day in and day out my concubines saw I train martial arts. Some were interested and expressed their desire to learn. So I casually gave directions to one or two of them. I thought by learning martial arts they would be healthier and might have a longer life. Among them a concubine surnamed Liu was the most gifted. She was so smart that each time I taught her something she would understand everything right off. She was young and she trained hard everyday; her martial art advanced greatly. And so it happened one day as she was practicing martial art in the garden she met Zhou Botong, Zhou Shixiong [Martial Brother Zhou] quite by accident. First of all Zhou Shixiong was crazy about martial arts; his natural disposition was also naïve, he did not guard against male-female relationship. He saw Concubine Liu was training enthusiastically, immediately he came forward and sparred with her. Zhou Shixiong’s martial art came from his martial brother, Wang Zhenren [lit. true/real man, a respectful term to address a Taoist priest]; how could Concubine Liu be his match ...?”

“Aiyo!” Huang Rong softly exclaimed, “He did not know whether his hand was light or heavy and has injured Concubine Liu?”

“Nobody was injured,” Reverend Yideng answered, “Only about three moves or two stances later he sealed Concubine Liu’s acupoint, and then he asked if she would admit defeat or not. Naturally Concubine Liu admitted defeat. Zhou Shixiong unsealed her acupoint. He was so proud of himself that he started to talk about the wonderful secret of sealing acupoint technique. Concubine Liu had actually asked me to teach her the acupoint sealing technique before; but just think about it: how could I pass on this profound martial art to an imperial concubine? What she heard from Zhou Shixiong was exactly what she desired. Immediately she respectfully asked him to teach her.”

“(Sigh)! The Old Urchin must be very happy,” Huang Rong said.

“You know Zhou Shixiong?” Yideng asked.

Huang Rong laughed, “We are old acquaintances; he stayed at the Peach Blossom Island for more than ten years, never once leave the island even for a single step.”

“With his character, how can he stay that long?” Yideng wondered.

Huang Rong smiled, “My father imprisoned him, and he was released just recently.”

“That’s so,” Yideng nodded his head, “Is Zhou Shixiong well?” he asked.

Huang Rong replied, "His body is well, but the older he gets the crazier he becomes. He doesn't have any manners." Pointing her finger to Guo Jing she pursed her lips and continued with a smile, "The Old Urchin has performed a ritual to become sworn brothers with him."

Reverend Yideng could not help smiling; then he continued, "The acupoint sealing technique is only taught by a father to his daughter, mother to her son, husband to his wife; other than that no man can teach a woman and no woman can teach a man ..."

"Why is that?" Huang Rong asked.

"Because male and female cannot be intimate," Yideng replied, "Just think, if we don't touch one's whole body acupoints one by one, how can we teach this skill?"

"But didn't you touch my whole body's acupoints?" Huang Rong asked.

The fisherman and the farmer was irritated she kept asking questions and diverting the story; they stared at her angrily. Huang Rong stared back at them and said, "What? Can't I ask any question?"

Yideng smiled, "You can, you can," he said, "You are a little girl, your life was in danger, of course we have to make an exception."

"All right, so be it," Huang Rong said, "And then what happened?"

Yideng continued, "And then one taught, the other learned. Zhou Shixiong was at the prime of his life, Concubine Liu was just coming of age; their flesh and skin touched each other everyday, before long their feelings grew and finally they created a problem which was very difficult to rectify ..."

Huang Rong wanted to ask; her lips were about to move but in the end she held back. She heard Yideng continue, "Some people came and reported to me. Although I was angry, I still honored Wang Zhenren's reputation, I pretended not to know. Who would have thought that after Wang Zhenren found out; he interrogated Zhou Shixiong and he did not conceal anything ..."

Huang Rong was unable to hold back much longer, she blurted out, "What is it? What is the problem that was difficult to rectify?"

Yideng temporarily at a loss of what to say, he hesitated before answering, "They really were not husband and wife, but they acted like one."

"Ah, I know," Huang Rong said, "The Old Urchin and Concubine Liu had a child."

"Ay! It's not that," Yideng said, "They had known each other only for about ten days, how could they have a child? After Wang Zhenren discovered this affair, he bound Zhou Shixiong's hands and took him to my presence for me to judge. We are martial art practitioners; we value loyalty above everything else, we did not put too much of a regard toward women. How could I injure our friendship over a woman? I immediately untied him and summoned Concubine Liu at the same time. I ordered them to get married. Who would have thought that Zhou Shixiong raised a clamor; he said he did not know what he did was wrong, that if he knew, he would have not done it even if he were to be killed. No matter what, he was not willing to take Concubine Liu as his wife. At that

time Wang Zhenren sighed and said, 'If I did not know any better, that he is a fool who doesn't know good from evil, a sword would have already cut him into two as he committed this awful crime.'

Huang Rong stuck out her tongue and said, "The Old Urchin was in a big trouble!"

Yideng continued, "At first I was offended, I said, 'Zhou Shixiong, I am sincerely willing to part with my treasure and give her to you, do you think I have another agenda? There is an ancient saying, 'Brothers are like hands and feet, wives are like clothes'; what is a woman for you to consider it a very big deal?"

"Pei! Pei!" Huang Rong spat, "Uncle, you disregarded women, what you said was a pile of rubbish!"

The farmer could not hold his patience any longer, he shouted, "Just shut up and don't talk nonsense, will you?"

"What he said was wrong, I must refute it," Huang Rong was adamant.

To the fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar, Reverend Yideng was not only their lord, but also their teacher. It never occurred to them to talk back, let alone refuting his words. They regarded him with utmost reverence; now hearing Huang Rong's unrestrained mouth they were shocked and angry at the same time.

Reverend Yideng actually did not seem to mind; he continued his narration, "As Zhou Shixiong heard me, he shook his head. I became angry, I said, 'If you love her, why don't you want her? If you don't love her, why did you do what you did? My Dali is a small country, but do you think you can just drop in and throw an insult like this?' Zhou Shixiong was silent for half a day. Suddenly he bent his knees and kowtowed to me several times; he said, 'Emperor Duan, I am guilty. If you want to kill me, just do it, I won't dare to hit you back.' I was taken aback, I have never expected him to say such thing; I was at a loss momentarily. Finally I said, 'How can I kill you?' He said, 'Then I am leaving!' He took out an embroidered handkerchief from his bosom, handed it over to Concubine Liu and said, 'I give it back to you.' Concubine Liu smiled sadly, she did not take the handkerchief. Zhou Shixiong let the handkerchief go and it fell near my feet. Zhou Shixiong did not say anything else; he turned around and stormed out of the palace. It has been more than a dozen years and I haven't heard anything about him ever since. Wang Zhenren apologized to me over and over again; and then he also left. I heard he passed away that autumn. Wang Zhenren was a brave and heroic man, there was nobody can be compared to him. Ay ..."

"Wang Zhenren's martial art skill might be higher than yours," Huang Rong said, "But speaking of bravery and heroic spirit, I think he did not necessarily exceed Uncle. He had accepted seven disciples and they are all just average, there is nothing special about them. Anyway, what happened to the embroidered handkerchief?"

The four disciples were annoyed that Huang Rong cared so much about trivial things like handkerchief or clothes; but they heard their master said, "I saw Concubine Liu was staring blankly, like her soul had left her. I was very angry; I picked up the handkerchief only to see a couple of embroidered mandarin ducks playing on the water. (Sigh), it was Concubine Liu's gift to her lover. I laughed coldly. I then saw next to the pair of mandarin ducks there was a line of poem ..."

Huang Rong's heart was stirred, she hastily asked, "Was it, 'Four weaving machines, the weaving of mandarin ducks desiring to fly together right away'?"

With a stern voice the farmer shouted, "Even we do not know it, how did you know? Always talk nonsense and disturb the story!" Who would have thought that Reverend Yideng sighed and said, "It was indeed that poem; you knew it?" At his words the four disciples looked at each other in astonishment.

Guo Jing sprang up and called out, "I remember now! That day on the Peach Blossom Island Zhou Dage [Big Brother Zhou] was bitten by a venomous viper; he was delirious and he muttered this poem. It was, it was ... Four weaving machines, a pair on mandarin ducks, and some head turned white. Rong'er, how did it go? I can't remember it anymore."

With a low voice Huang Rong recited, "Four weaving machines, the weaving of mandarin ducks desires to fly together right away. It's a pity not yet old but the hair on the head has turned white. When the green spring grass ripples in the deepest of dawn's cold; standing face to face taking a bath wearing red clothes."

"Exactly!" Guo Jing slapped his thigh, "Zhou Dage once advised me against good-looking women; he said he had seen one and as a result he offended a good friend and provoked his Shige [elder martial brother] to anger. He also said don't ever let her touch your acupoints, otherwise you'll be covered with germs. Rong'er, he even urged me not to be good to you."

"Pei!" Huang Rong angrily spat, "Old Urchin! Next time I see him I am going to twist his ears!" Suddenly she giggled and said, "That day in Lin'an prefecture I teased him that he wasn't able to find a wife; the Old Urchin sulked for half a day. Turned out it was because of this matter."

"When I heard Ying Gu recited this poem I thought I have heard it somewhere, but tried as I might, I could not remember where I heard it. Uh, Rong'er, how come Ying Gu also knew this poem?" Guo Jing said.

Huang sighed, "Ay, it's because Ying Gu is that Concubine Liu."

Among the four disciples, the scholar was the only one who had already guessed 50, 60%; the other three were extremely astonished, they turned toward their master at once. Yideng spoke in a low voice, "Miss is really smart; truly worthy to be Yao Xiong's [Brother Yao] daughter. Concubine Liu's first name was 'Ying'. That day I tossed the handkerchief to her, afterwards I no longer called for her. In my depression I neglected the affairs of the country; I trained martial art every day ..."

Huang Rong interrupted him again, "Uncle, do you know that you loved her very much in your heart? If you did not, you would not be so unhappy."

The four disciples was shocked at her audacity, "Miss!" angrily they called out in one voice.

"What?" Huang Rong said, "Did I say something wrong? Uncle, tell me, was I wrong?"

Yideng gloomily said, "Hereafter in more than half a year I have never called for Concubine Liu, but in my sleep I often dreamt of being with her. One evening I dreamt about her, at midnight I woke up; I could not hold my patience much longer and made up my mind to pay her a visit. I did not let the palace guards or the eunuchs know about my intention, quietly I went to her quarters, I

wanted to know what she was doing. As I arrived on top of her roof I heard a child was crying inside. (Sigh), outside the frost was thick and the wind was cold. I stood in shock for half a night and did not get down until it was dawn. Afterwards I caught a very serious illness.”

Huang Rong thought how he was revered as the emperor, yet in the middle of the night roaming around the palace roof to visit his own concubine; it was truly unusual. The four disciples also recalled their master’s sickness. It was not only very bad, but also took a long time to recover. All this time they wondered: with his profound martial art cold wind would not easily make him sick; even if he was sick, he should not take that long to recover. Only now did they know that it was more of a crushed spirit than a physical illness that he did not use his own internal strength to battle the sickness. She asked again, “Concubine Liu had given you a child; certainly it was good, wasn’t it? Uncle, why were you not happy?”

“Silly kid,” Yideng said, “It was Zhou Shixiong’s child.”

“But Zhou Shixiong had left for a long time,” Huang Rong said, “Could it be that he came back secretly to see her?”

“No,” Yideng replied, “Have you heard the phrase ‘ten-month pregnancy’?”

Huang Rong was suddenly enlightened, “Ah, I know! That child must look like the Old Urchin very much, with pointy ears and high nose; otherwise how did you know it was not your child?”

Reverend Yideng answered, “That is not necessarily so. I haven’t been intimate with Concubine Liu for some time, naturally the child wasn’t mine.”

Huang Rong seemed to understand but she did not understand, but she was aware it was not appropriate to keep asking questions, so she did not pursue further.

Meanwhile Yideng continued, “I was sick for more than half a year; after I recovered, I poured out my attention to internal strength cultivation to dispel boredom and no longer gave thought to this matter. One night about two years later I was meditating in my bedroom, suddenly the curtain on the door was raised and Concubine Liu rushed in. Outside the door a eunuch and two palace guards quickly tried to stop her, but wherever they went, they were struck away by her palm. I looked up and saw she was carrying the child on the crook of her elbow. She wore an extremely panic-stricken expression; she knelt down and cried loudly, she kowtowed in front of me and called out, ‘I ask the Emperor to show mercy, to be infinitely compassionate and spare this child’s life!’ I stood up to take a look. That child’s face was deep red; he was breathing heavily. I took him from her bosom to examine further and found out that five of his ribs were broken.

Concubine Liu wept, ‘Emperor, your lowly concubine has committed a heinous crime worthy of ten thousands death; but I am asking the Emperor to spare this child’s lowly life.’ I was surprised to hear her, so I asked, ‘What happened to the child?’ But she kept knocking her head entreating me. I asked again, ‘Who injured the child?’ Concubine Liu did not answer but kept weeping, ‘Please Emperor, show mercy to him.’ I scratched my head in confusion. She said, ‘If the Emperor bestowed death to me, I would not complain for even half a word, but this child ... this child ...’

‘Who bestowed death to you?’ I asked, ‘How did the child get injured?’ Concubine Liu looked up and with a trembling voice asked, ‘So it wasn’t the Emperor who sent a palace guard to kill this child?’ I knew something was amiss, I busily asked, ‘So it was a palace guard who injured the

child? Which slave did have so much guts?’ Concubine Liu called out, ‘Ah! It was not the Emperor’s imperial edict, so the child’s life can be saved!’ After saying that she fainted and fell to the ground. I helped her up and put her on the bed; I also put the child down on her side. Only after about half a day later she finally awoke. She pulled my hand and weeping she told me what happened.

Turned out she was patting the child to put him to sleep that night, when suddenly from outside the window came a palace guard wearing a mask on his face. The guard pulled the child away and hit his back with a palm. Concubine Liu hurriedly went forward to stop him, but the guard shoved her away. Then his palm hit the child’s chest. Finally he laughed a big laugh and jumped over the window. That palace guard’s martial art skill was very high. She thought it was me who sent him to kill her son; she did not dare to pursue, but she came to my palace to entreat.

The more I heard her story the more amazed I became; I re-examined the child but I could not tell what kind of martial art caused the injury. All I can tell was that the child’s ‘dai mai’ [waist arteries] were shaken and broken. That assassin’s hands were lethal, but obviously he had shown mercy; the baby was so young and weak, but he was still breathing after two palm strikes. Immediately I went to her quarter to investigate, and sure enough, I found very faint tracks on the window sill and on the tile outside the window. I told Concubine Liu, ‘This assassin’s martial art skill is very high, especially his lightness kungfu; it was not a small matter. Apart from me there is no one with this kind of ability in the whole Dali kingdom.’ Suddenly Concubine Liu called out in alarm, ‘Could it be him? Why would he want to kill his own son?’ After saying that her face turned ash gray.”

Huang Rong also muttered in a low voice, “The Old Urchin couldn’t be that bad, could he?”

Reverend Yideng said, “At that time I actually believed it was Zhou Shixiong. Other than him, who in this present age had that kind of ability, and who without any reason at all would injure a baby? I guessed he was not willing to leave an illegitimate child behind and became a disgrace in the Wulin world. After Concubine Liu uttered those words she was bashful and anxious, frightened and ashamed at the same time. She was at a loss. But suddenly she said, ‘No, it definitely was not him! That laughter was not his!’ I said, ‘You were frightened, how could you hear clearly?’ She replied, ‘I will remember this laughter forever, even if I become a ghost I will still remember that laughter! No, it definitely was not him!’”

Listening to this part everybody suddenly felt a chill in the air, goose bumps appeared on their skins. Guo Jing and Huang Rong recalled Ying Gu’s voice and demeanor; they imagined her facial expression when she said those words with clenched teeth, they could not help but shiver in fear.

Reverend Yideng continued, “I heard her so convinced, I believed her. But for the life of me I could not guess who the assassin was. I once thought it might be one of Wang Zhenren’s disciples, maybe Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji or Wang Chuyi? Perhaps they were trying to save Quanzhen Sect’s reputation that they took the thousands of ‘li’s journey to a remote place and kill to close someone’s mouth ...”

Guo Jing’s lips moved, he wanted to say something, but he did not dare to interrupt Reverend Yideng’s story. Yideng saw it and said, “You want to say something? You may as well say it.”

Guo Jing said, “Ma Daozhang [Taoist Priest Ma], Qiu Daozhang, they are all chivalrous heroes; they can’t possibly do this thing.”

“I have met Wang Chuyi at Mount Hua,” Yideng said, “His conduct was alright, but I don’t know about the other disciples. But if they could kill the baby with one palm, why did they leave the baby half dead and half alive?” He raised his head and turned his gaze toward the window, staring blankly. Obviously he had not been able to forget the unsolvable mystery of more than ten years ago. The meditation room was quiet. A moment later Yideng said, “All right, let’s talk about that later ...”

Huang Rong suddenly exclaimed, “Without a doubt, it must be Ouyang Feng.”

Yideng said, “Afterwards I also suspected him. But Ouyang Feng is a western region’s man, he is big and tall; he is at least a head taller than average local men. Concubine Liu said that compared to average men, the assassin can be considered short.”

“That’s strange,” Huang Rong said.

“My thought precisely,” Yideng said, “Concubine Liu was hugging the child and sobbing. This child’s injury was not as severe as Miss Huang’s, but he was very young; he did not have any immune system yet. If I was to treat his injury, it would have consumed all my energy. I hesitated for a long time. I saw Concubine Liu was crying pitifully. Several times I was going to open my mouth to tell her that I would treat his injury, but every time I remembered that if I do that, I can forget about competing against the other experts at the incoming second Sword Meet of Mount Hua to win the Nine Yin Manual. Ay! Wang Zhenren had said that this Manual was the Wulin world’s big root of trouble; it brought harms to many people and brought out the worst of human’s heart. He was absolutely right. Because of that book I lost my compassion towards others. After hesitating for almost two hours I finally started to lean toward treating his injury. Ay, during these two hours I felt like I was lower than an animal. The worst part was, my decision to treat his injury was not because I wanted to do something good, but because I was tired of Concubine Liu’s constant cry for help.”

“Uncle,” Huang Rong said, “I said you loved her very much, I was not wrong.”

Yideng did not seem to hear her, he simply continued his narration, “As Concubine Liu heard my promise to help, she was so happy that she fainted again. I massaged her acupoint to awaken her, then I started to untie the child’s swaddling clothes so that I could massage his acupoints using the ‘xian tian gong’ [inborn/innate energy]. Who would have thought that under the swaddling clothes that child was wearing a ‘du dou’ [an undergarment covering chest and abdomen] on his chest. I stopped on my track, unable to say anything; because on the ‘du dou’ was a pair of embroidered mandarin ducks, and next to the ducks was that ‘four weaving machines’ poem. Turned out this ‘du dou’ was the handkerchief given to Zhou Shixiong a couple of years ago.

Concubine Liu saw my expression and she knew things had turned bad for her. Her face was ashen. Clenching her teeth she pulled a dagger from her waist and pointed it toward her own chest. ‘Emperor,’ she called out, ‘I do not have any face to live longer in this world. I am asking your infinite mercy and compassion, I am willing to trade my life for the child’s. In my next life I will become a dog or a horse to repay your kindness.’ As she said that she pushed the dagger into her chest, hard.” Although everybody knew that Concubine Liu was still alive, they could not help but gasp in horror.

As he narrated this part, it was as if Reverend Yideng did not tell the past events to others, but it seemed like he was simply thinking out loud, “I quickly used ‘qin na fa’ [grappling, capture and

seize technique] to snatch her dagger away. I was fast, but her dagger had already penetrated her chest. Blood was seeping out her clothes. I was afraid she might try to kill herself again, so I sealed the acupoints on her hands and feet. I tended the wound on her chest and let her rest on a chair. She did not say anything, but her eyes looked at me full of sorrow. Neither of us said anything. The room was quiet, save the sound of that child gasping for breath.

While listening to that child's breathing many, many past events flashed in my mind: how she entered the palace for the first time, how I taught her martial art, how I had loved her. She had always revered me, feared me, gently attended to all my needs, never dared to disregard my will; but she had never loved me. At first I was not aware of her true feelings, but that day I saw the way she looked at Zhou Shixiong, then I understood. When a woman truly and wholeheartedly loves a man, she will look at him with that kind of look. I remembered the way she looked when Zhou Shixiong threw that handkerchief down, the way she looked when he turned around and left the palace. That scene had haunted me for several years, made my sleeps restless and my meals taste like sawdust. Even today I can still see it vividly in my mind.

This time once again her heart was broken; not over her lover, but over her son, whose life she was willing to trade her own with! I am an honorable man, and I felt disgraced. Me, the ruler of a country! Having this thought my heart was filled with fury; I lifted my foot and smashed an ivory stool in front of me. I looked up and was dumbstruck. I said, 'You ... what happened to your head?' She did not seem to hear me, her gaze was fixed to her child. I have never really understood before, how someone's gaze could contain so much love, so much compassion. By that time she had realized I was not going to save her child's life, so she wanted to look at him as long as he was still alive.

I took a mirror and held it out in front of her. I said, 'Look at your hair!' In just a short period of time it seemed like she had become several decades older. She was only eighteen, nineteen years old; yet because of fear, anxiety, remorse, despair, grieve, and all kinds of deep emotional attacks innumerable hair on her temples had turned white!

She did not seem to care toward the change in her appearance. She blamed the mirror to be in the way, obstructing her view to the child. 'The mirror, take it away!' she said, candidly. She had forgotten that I was the Emperor, her master. I felt strange; I thought she had always treasured her own looks, why didn't she pay any attention to it now? I tossed the mirror aside only to see without blinking her gaze was fixed on the child. I had never seen such gaze; full of love and hope, a hope that her child would live. I understood that if she could, she would gladly take her own soul and put it inside her child's body to replace his slowly departing soul."

Listening to this Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other; both were thinking in their hearts, "When I was seriously injured and there was little hope for it to be healed you also looked at me that way." Forgetting their surroundings they held out their hands to hold each other. Two hearts beating as one; they felt warmth creeping up their bodies. Amidst listening to how others were grieving of misfortune they could not help of thinking their own good fortune; due to the fact that their loved one was sitting right next to them at that time, that place. Because her injury had been healed; she would not die. Yes, she would not die. In these two youngsters' hearts their loved one would not die forever.

They heard Reverend Yideng continue, "I could not take it much longer; several times I wanted to just take the child and treat his injury, but I kept looking at that handkerchief wrapped around the

child's chest. The handkerchief with a pair of mandarin ducks embroidered on it, their necks intertwined with each other. The mandarin ducks had white heads, symbolizing they would grow old together. But why it was written, 'It's a pity not yet old but the hair on the head has turned white.'? As I turned my head I saw the hair on her temples had turned white, I broke in cold sweats. At that time my heart turned hard, I said, 'Fine, go ahead and grow old together; just leave me lonely and cast away in this palace as an emperor! This is you and your lover's child; why would I sacrifice my whole energy to revive him?'

She looked at me, her last glance. It was full of blame and hatred. Afterwards she had never looked at me anymore, but this one look I will not forget till the day I die. She coldly said, 'Let me go, I want to hold my child!' She was speaking with authority and determination; it was as if she was my master, made it difficult for me to disobey. Thereupon I unsealed her acupoints.

She held the child in her bosom. The child was so much in pain that he wanted to cry, but no sound came out of his tiny lips. His small face had turned purple; he looked at his mother as if asking her to help him. I was so hard-hearted; I did not have the least bit of compassion. I saw one by one her black hair had turned to ash grey, and from ash grey to white. I don't know whether it really did happen, or it was my imagination playing tricks on me.

I heard her gently saying, 'Child, Mama does not have the ability to save you, but Mama also can't let you suffer. Child, have a peaceful rest. Sleep Child, sleep. Don't wake up forever!' I heard she sang a gentle lullaby. It was a very beautiful song. It went like this, 'hmm, hmm ...' Listen!"

Everybody heard him say those words, but actually they did not hear the least bit of a song. They looked at each other in bewilderment.

"Shifu," the scholar said, "You have talked long enough, you must be tired. Please take a rest."

Reverend Yideng did not seem to hear, he kept talking, "The child's face showed a faint happiness, but the pain made his whole body spasm. With a gentle voice she said, 'My precious, my heart and my soul, sleep tight, then you won't feel the pain anymore, not the least bit of pain!' Suddenly 'stab!', her dagger went straight into the child's heart."

Huang Rong screamed in fright; she grabbed Guo Jing's arm tightly. The rest of the listeners were also so shocked that their faces did not show any trace of blood.

Reverend Yideng was oblivious to his surroundings, he continued, "I was so shocked that I cried out and drew back several steps, almost tumbled down. My heart was in turmoil, I was totally at a loss. I saw her slowly stand up and in a low voice she said, 'There will come a day, I will stab your heart with this dagger.' She pointed her finger to the jade bracelet on her wrist and said, 'You gave this to me the day I entered the palace. Just wait, the day I return this jade bracelet to you, will be the day my dagger will follow!'"

Speaking to this point Yideng spun the jade bracelet on his forefinger one time; he showed a faint smile and said, "This is the jade bracelet, I have waited several years for this. At last that day has come."

"Uncle," Huang Rong said, "She killed her own son, what did it have to do with you? You did not injure her child. Moreover, she had used poison trying to kill you; what enmity she had for you had

been paid in full. I am going down the mountain to send her off, I won't allow her to create any disturbance here ...”

She had not finished her words when that young monk came rushing in. “Shifu,” he said, “Somebody delivered this at the foot of the mountain.” He held out both hands to present a small cloth bundle to his master.

Yideng took the bundle and unwrapped it. Everybody called out in alarm as one voice. Turned out inside that bundle was the ‘du dou’ made of the embroidered handkerchief. The silk had turned yellow of age, but the embroidered mandarin ducks were still bright as new. There was a knife hole in between the ducks; the edge of the hole was black from the bloodstain. Yideng stared blankly at the ‘du dou’, overwhelmed with grief. After a long time he finally said, “The weaving of mandarin ducks desiring to fly together right away, hey, desiring to fly together; in the end it was just a dream. She hugged her child’s lifeless body tightly, uttered a long laugh, and jumped over the window sill, flew out of the room and in the blink of an eye disappeared without any trace. I couldn’t drink, I couldn’t eat, and was miserable for three days and three nights. Finally I came to my senses. I bequeathed the throne to my eldest son and decided to tread the immortal path by becoming a monk.” He pointed at his four disciples and said, “They have followed me for a long time and did not want to leave me. Together we went out of the Dali city wall and lived at the ‘tian long si’ [celestial dragon temple]. For the first three years they took turns in helping my son to run the country. Later my son has understood the government affairs; the kingdom was at peace and nothing serious happened. So we went to the Big Snow Mountain to gather medicinal herbs. There Ouyang Feng injured my disciple and we moved to this place. We have never gone back to Dali ever since.

I was so hard-hearted that I was not willing to save that child’s life. Hereafter for the last ten years or so, day and night I have never had a peaceful rest. I always hoped to save many people to redeem my great sin. They did not know my miserable inner feeling, so they always tried to hinder me. Ay, even if I could save thousand people, ten thousand people, that child would still be dead. How else would I repay his life if not with my own? Everyday I have been waiting for Ying Gu, waiting for her to stab her dagger into my heart. I was afraid she might come here too late; I am already dead, then it would be difficult to redeem my sin. Good, finally she will be here. Why would she mix the poison into the Nine-flowered Jade Dew Pills? If I knew she would arrive soon after she poisoned me, I wouldn’t have wasted these past several hours trying to survive, also my martial brother would not need to waste his divine power to neutralize the poison.”

Huang Rong indignantly said, “This woman’s heart is so evil! She had found out Uncle’s dwelling early on, but was afraid that her own martial art would be insufficient; so she deliberately waited for a good opportunity. Coincidentally she met me, suffering the Iron Palm injury, so she guided me to seek your help. She wanted to employ two methods to achieve one goal; first she wanted you to waste your strength, then to seize that opportunity to poison you. I was so gullible to become the unaware weapon of this wicked woman. Uncle, how did Ouyang Feng’s drawing ended up in her hand? What does this drawing have to do with her?”

Reverend Yideng took The Great Buddhist Scripture from the small table beside him, turned several pages and started to read, “The story of the picture is originated from an ancient Indian city: Once there was a king, his name was Shipi. He was a diligent ascetic practitioner, always followed the way of the true enlightenment. One day there was a hawk chasing a pigeon. The pigeon flew in and hid underneath Shipi’s arm, seeking refuge. The hawk demanded the king to return the pigeon to

him, he said, 'If the king saves the pigeon, the hawk will die of starvation.' The king realized he could not save one without harming the other. Thereupon he took a knife and cut his own flesh for the hawk. The hawk said, 'If the king cuts his own flesh, it must be the same weight as the pigeon.' Shipi ordered his guard to fetch a balance. He placed the pigeon on one end and his flesh on the other; but no matter how much he cut his flesh, the pigeon end was still low. The king cut his chest, his back, his arm, his side, but the pigeon was still heavier. Finally he put his whole body onto the balance. Right away the earth shook; music came from the sky, the deities scattered flowers and sweet fragrance filled the whole earth. The dragons, the demons and all heavenly creatures sighed, 'Shan zai, shan zai [lit. good, peace], there has never been this kind of bravery.'" It was only a myth, but Yideng narrated it full of compassion and mercy, and the audience's hearts were moved.

"Uncle," Huang Rong said, "She was afraid you might not be willing to treat my injury, so she used this picture to move your heart."

Yideng smiled and said, "It seemed that way. When she left Dali that day, her heart was set on seeking revenge, so it seems logical for her to roam the Jianghu [lit. rivers and lakes] to learn martial art from a highly skilled person. Some way or another she met Ouyang Feng, and as Ouyang Feng learned about her intention he helped her plan this scheme, he drew this picture and gave it to her. This book is well-spread in the western region, and Ouyang Feng is from the western region, so he must be familiar with this story."

Full of hatred Huang Rong said, "The Old Poison used Ying Gu, in turn Ying Gu used me. This is an evil plan of murder with a borrowed knife."

Yideng sighed, "You don't need to be upset. If you had not met her, she would injure someone else and send that person to me to be treated. Only if that person does not have a highly skilled escort, he won't be able to go up the mountain easily. Ouyang Feng must have drawn this picture a long time ago; they have been setting up this plan for at least ten years. Contrary to their expectation, they were unable to find someone for ten years; that is also because of fate."

"Uncle, I know it," Huang Rong said, "She has something else in her mind which is more important than harming you."

"Ah!" Yideng exclaimed, "What matter?"

Huang Rong replied, "The Old Urchin was imprisoned by my father on the Peach Blossom Island. She wanted to help him out." And then Huang Rong told him how Ying Gu painstakingly learned 'qi men' [strange/wonderful/mysterious gate] and mathematics. Finally she said, "Afterwards she found out that even if she studied for a hundred years more it would still be difficult for her to overcome my father, plus she saw me getting injured, thereupon ..."

Yideng uttered a long laugh; he stood up and said, "Fine, fine. All's well that ends well. Everything has come together. Today finally she will get her wish." With a calm face he turned to his four disciples and said, "You go and welcome Concubine Liu, no, welcome Ying Gu and take her up the mountain. You must not utter even half a word of disrespect." As if by prior agreement the four disciples bowed to the ground and cried, they called out together, "Shifu!"

Yideng sighed, "You have followed me for many, many years, don't you understand your Shifu's heart?" Toward Guo Jing and Huang Rong he said, "I am asking you two a favor."

Jing and Rong answered together, “Just say it, we won’t dare to disobey.”

“Good,” Yideng said, “Now I want you to go down the mountain. All my life I owed Ying Gu a lot. In the future, whenever she is facing a difficulty or is in danger, I am asking you for the Old Monk’s sake, to lend a hand as much as you can. If you two can help in the matter of successful conclusion of her and Zhou Shixiong’s affair, the Old Monk will be forever grateful.”

Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other in astonishment; they did not dare to reply. Yideng saw those two were silent, he pressed again, “This Old Monk’s request, is it difficult for you to give your consent?”

Huang Rong reluctantly replied, “Since Uncle has asked, we will obey.” She tugged Guo Jing’s sleeve and bowed down to bid farewell.

“You don’t have to meet Ying Gu,” Yideng said, “Go down from the back of the mountain.”

Huang Rong gave her reply, pulled Guo Jing’s hand and turned around to go. The four disciples saw she appeared calm without any trace of grief, they secretly scolded her as cold-hearted and mean, seeing her savior was facing danger she was indifferent and walked away. Guo Jing knew Huang Rong would not rest before she cooked another plan, so he followed her out.

When they got to the door Huang Rong whispered something in his ear. Guo Jing looked hesitant but finally he nodded his head. He turned around and slowly walked back.

Yideng said, “Your heart is honest and upright, you will accomplish great things in the future. I am entrusting Ying Gu’s business to you.”

“Very well!” Guo Jing replied, “Junior will do my utmost to tend to the Reverend’s business.” Suddenly he reached backward and grabbed the Indian Monk’s hand sitting next to Yideng. Guo Jing’s left hand went straight and hit his ‘hua gai’ [fancy canopy] and ‘tian zhu’ [heaven’s pillar] two main acupoints. These acupoints were located one on the hand, the other on the foot; once they were sealed then four limbs would be immobilized. This move totally took Yideng and his four disciples by surprise; they called out, “What are you doing?”

Guo Jing did not reply, his left hand went straight toward Yideng’s shoulder. Yideng’s right palm made a turn and fast as lightning grabbed Guo Jing’s left hand. Guo Jing was startled; he thought Yideng was already shrouded inside his palm’s strength, unexpectedly not only he managed to break through but launched a counterattack as well. Moreover, Yideng’s attack was targeting his vital point. It was truly an exquisite skill. Only as Yideng’s palm came within an inch of his hand he could feel Yideng’s palm was weak. Guo Jing took this opportunity to turn his palm around to protect his hand, while his right hand launched ‘Divine Dragon Swings Its Tail’ to repel the fisherman and the woodcutter who attacked him from behind. The forefinger of his left hand was still moving straight forward to seal the ‘feng wei’ [phoenix’s tail] and ‘jing cu’ [near energy] on Yideng’s side. “Uncle,” he said, “I beg your forgiveness.”

Meanwhile Huang Rong had pushed the farmer out of the door using the Dog Beating Stick technique. The scholar was surprised with this abrupt turn of events; he did not understand Guo Jing and Huang Rong’s intention. “If you have something to discuss, say it; please don’t fight!” he repeatedly shouted.

Seeing his Shifu's condition the farmer was like a mad tiger; neglecting his own life he charged toward the meditation room. But the Dog Beating Stick was too much for him, he charged three times and three times Huang Rong's stick pushed him back.

Guo Jing's palms moved in circles with a strong gust of wind, forcing the fisherman, the woodcutter and the scholar to move back step by step toward the door. Huang Rong abruptly swung her stick from the ground upward to the farmer's eyebrow. This move was so swift that the farmer cried out, "Aiyo!" He threw his head backward and leaped back several feet.

"Good!" Huang Rong exclaimed. She reached backward and closed the door. With a chuckle she said, "Gentlemen, please hold your hands! I have something to say."

Every time the woodcutter and the fisherman met with Guo Jing's palm they felt their arms went numb and their feet staggered. They saw Guo Jing was about to strike again, quickly they stood side by side, ready to receive Guo Jing's palm with their combine forces. As Guo Jing heard Huang Rong's words he stopped his palm midway and withdrew it back. Cupping his fists he said, "Please forgive my offense."

The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar looked at each other in consternation. With a serious face Huang Rong said, "I have received Honorable Master's kindness; now I know that Honorable Master is facing a difficulty, how can I just leave and do nothing? We have offended you with the intention to help."

The scholar stepped forward, bowed deeply and said, "The enemy is our Master's wife; it would be inconvenient for us to offend her. If she wants to go up the mountain, we won't have any way of stopping her. Moreover, ever since that ... that young master died, for more than ten years our Shifu's heart was restless. Even if his energy were still intact and he were not poisoned, when he saw Concubine Liu arrive he would not defend himself against her dagger. We cannot disobey our master, yet our hearts are burning with anxiety. We have exhausted our wisdom and used up all our strengths, still we don't know what to do. Miss is so smart; if you can show us a way, even if our bodies and bones are ground to dust we will wish to repay your kindness."

Hearing him speaking earnestly Huang Rong did not dare to joke around like she previously did, she said, "We, martial brother and sister, are very grateful for the Honorable Master's kindness, no different than the four of you, we will use all means possible to help. It will be best if we can prevent Ying Gu from entering the meditation room, but to think that she has been waiting patiently at the Black Marsh for more than ten years, she must have made ample preparation. I am afraid it won't be easy to block her. Little sister's plan involves a great danger. If we succeed, we can expect smooth sailing in the future, without any imminent trouble. But it is extremely risky, that Ying Gu is very astute and sly, her martial art skill is also high, so there is a possibility for failure. My ability and wisdom is very shallow and simple, I can't think of any foolproof plan."

The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar said, "We beg your explanation."

Huang Rong raised her pretty eyebrows and laid down her plan. As the four disciples listened to it, they looked at each other and did not say anything for half a day.

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It was the tenth hour (5 – 7 pm), the sun slowly sank behind the mountain. The strong mountain breeze swayed the leaves of the palm trees planted in rows outside the meditation courtyard. The withered lotus leaves on the pond also made a rustling noise. The evening sun cast its light from behind the mountain peaks, the mountain ridges looked like a silhouette of a giant reclining on the ground. The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar sat cross-legged on the ground by the stone bridge. They opened their eyes wide looking to the front. Each heart was heavy with restlessness.

They had waited for a long time. The sky had darkened, the dusk gradually turned into night. The crows crowed while they were flying in the valley below. A thin white mist rose up from the canyon below. But still no one appeared from the turn at the mountain cliff beyond the stone bridge. The fisherman thought, “If only Concubine Liu has a sudden change of heart and does not blame Shifu, maybe she reined her horse beyond the cliff and decided not to come over ...”

The woodcutter thought, “This Concubine Liu is very crafty; she must have been preparing a really sinister plot.”

The farmer was more anxious and impatient than the others, he thought, “The sooner she arrives, the sooner we can get it over with; whether it will be disaster or fortune, good or evil, we will find out sooner. She said she would come and she hasn’t arrived yet, it really is exasperating.”

The scholar thought, “The more delayed she is, the more dangerous the threat will be. This matter is really difficult to be solved nicely.” It goes without saying that he was a good schemer and tactician; he had been the prime minister of Dali kingdom for more than a dozen of years. He had seen major battle and faced many difficult situations, yet this time he was nervous. He had given this matter a lot of thoughts, but could not put out the least bit of idea. His eyes scanned the darkened surrounding area; his ears heard the distant cry of an owl. Suddenly he remembered when he was a child he often heard people say, ‘The owl [lit. night cat] hides in a secret place and stealthily counts human’s eyebrows. Whoever got his eyebrows counted correctly, that person will not live to see the daylight.’ It was obviously a myth to deceive little children, but in this situation suddenly hearing the cry of the owl, he involuntarily shuddered. “Could it be that Shifu won’t be able to escape this disaster and die under this woman’s hands?” He had just finished his thought when suddenly the woodcutter whispered urgently with a trembling voice, “She is here!”

The scholar lifted his head and saw a black shadow flew across the stone bridge and light as a feather jumped over the gap, as if floating without exerting any energy at all. The four people were astonished, “When she started training with Shifu, we have already been under his tutelage for a long time. How can her martial art exceed ours? In this last dozen of years or so, where did she go to learn such a marvelous skill?” they thought. As they saw that dark shadow come near, four people stood up and positioned themselves on either side of the way.

In a blink of an eye that dark shadow has arrived at the end of the stone bridge; she was wearing black clothes, and her facial features could be vaguely recognized as Concubine Liu whom the Emperor Duan loved very much in the years past.

Four people knelt down and kowtowed, “Xiao Ren [little/lowly people] greets Niang-niang [madam, or in this case can be translated as ‘empress’].”

“Humph,” Ying Gu snorted. Her gaze swept the four people’s faces and she said, “What Niang-niang? Concubine Liu had died long ago, I am Ying Gu. Hmm, the Prime Minister, the General, the Admiral, and the Commanding Officer of the ‘yu lin jun’ [lit. defending woods troops. I am not sure, but I think ‘yu lin jun’ is the personal bodyguards of the emperor] are all here. I thought the Emperor had forsaken worldliness and became a monk, who would have thought that he is hiding in this remote mountain and lives in peace and security as an emperor.” Her voice carried so much hatred that their hearts trembled.

The scholar said, “The Emperor does not look like his former self. I am sure Niang-niang will not recognize him anymore.”

Ying Gu laughed a cold laugh, “You keep saying Niang-niang this and Niang-niang that; are you mocking me? You are stiffly sitting on your knees down here, are you wishing me dead?”

The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar looked at each other and then they stood up. “Your servants wish for your health,” they said.

Ying Gu waved her hand, “The Emperor ordered you to stop me here, do you still have to perform this empty obeisance? If you want to fight, then just fight. You are lords and royalties, I don’t know how many common people you have harmed; why would you still pretend in front of an ordinary woman like me?”

The scholar said, “Our Emperor loves the people like his children, full of generosity and benevolence, the common people of Dali country still praise him even until today. Our Emperor not only has never harmed the innocent all his life, even toward criminal with grave offense oftentimes he bestowed abundant favor. Doesn’t Niang-niang know?”

Ying Gu’s face turned red, with stern voice she said, “Do you dare to offend me?”

“Wei chen [lowly officer] doesn’t dare,” the scholar replied.

Ying Gu said, “With your mouth you acknowledge me as your superior, but in your heart how can you still think there is any royalty-officer relationship between us? I want to see Duan Zhixing; will you let me or will you not?”

‘Duan Zhixing’ was Reverend Yideng’s given name. Although the fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar knew it, they never dared to mention it casually. Now that Ying Gu mentioned his name irreverently they could not help but feel offended. The farmer was formerly the Emperor Duan’s personal bodyguards’ captain; he could not endure patiently. With a loud voice he shouted, “One day became an emperor, he will be honored for the rest of his life. How can it be that you speak without propriety?”

Ying Gu let out a long laugh and without saying anything charged forward. Four people respectively shot out their arms to block; they thought, “Even though her martial art skill is high, with us combining our efforts we should be able to stop her. We are going to disobey our order, but the situation is dire, we’ll talk later.”

Who would have thought that Ying Gu did not use her palm or fist to attack, but utilizing her lightness kungfu she bumped them. The woodcutter saw her coming fast, he did not dare to touch her body, he moved aside swiftly, then stretched out his hand trying to grab her shoulder. His hand

was quick and powerful, but as soon as he touched her shoulder he felt like he was trying to grab something exceptionally slick, so that his hand slipped away.

By this time with a loud shout the farmer and the fisherman attacked from left and right. Ying Gu ducked and just like a slithery snake she slipped underneath the fisherman's armpit. The fisherman's nostrils caught a faint whiff of fragrance, it smelled like an orchid but not quite like an orchid, like musk deer but not quite like musk deer. He was frantic and did not dare to catch her body in between his arms; he opened up his arms instead for fear of touching her body.

The farmer was indignant, "What are you doing?" he shouted. With his ten fingers forming a pair of claws he tried to grab Ying Gu's waist.

"Don't be impolite!" the woodcutter called out.

The farmer turned a deaf ear to him, very soon his fingers had reached Ying Gu's waist, but somehow it was like his fingers were touching a very smooth and oily surface that they slipped away from her waist.

Ying Gu had used the 'ni qiu gong' [mud loach maneuver] she perfected in the Black Marsh to go through these three people. Now she knew that these four were helpless to block her. Her palm slapped backward toward the farmer. The scholar swung his arm with his finger aimed toward the acupoint on her hand. To his surprise Ying Gu did not retract her hand but stuck her index finger up and quick as lightning two fingers collided in the air. The scholar had exerted all his strength to his right hand finger, suddenly he felt his finger went numb, his body felt like he was electrocuted. "Aiyo!" he cried out and fumbled down to the ground. The woodcutter and the fisherman busily stooped down to help.

The farmer's left fist went straight ahead like a hammer hurled toward Ying Gu's body. This attack carried a strong gust of wind, the force was astonishing. Seeing this strong attack Ying Gu stood her ground and did not evade. The farmer was alarmed; he thought if his fist hit her head, her skull would be cracked. Hastily he tried to withdraw his power, but by that time his fist had already touched the tip of Ying Gu's nose. Ying Gu leaned her head slightly, the fist slipped from her nose and slid to her cheek. The farmer retracted his left arm, but it was too late. His hand was grabbed by his opponent and with a 'crack' sound he felt a shot of pain on his arm. His elbow joint was broken by the back of her fist. The farmer gritted his teeth, ignoring the pain, his right hand index finger swiftly attacked the crook of the opponent's elbow.

The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar's acupoint sealing technique was taught by Reverend Yideng. It was inferior to the Solitary Yang Finger with its infinite variations, but it could be considered as a first class acupoint sealing technique in the Wulin world; how would they know that fighting Ying Gu they were like fighting their black star. She was determined to avenge the death of her son; she fully realized Reverend Yideng's finger skill was very fierce, thereupon she spent a great deal of time and energy to find a method to subdue that skill. She was very skillful in embroidery, so she found her inspiration from the wonderful needlework technique. She wore a tiny golden hoop on the tip of her right hand index finger; on the hoop was a three-fen (about 1 cm) long golden needle, which tip was dipped in poison. Her vision was excellent, her hand was steady; after training hard for several years she was able to prick a fly flying in the air. This time fighting the enemy she was able to prick the scholar's index finger. Seeing the direction of the farmer's

finger she laughed coldly, lifting up her delicate hand she aimed her fingertip to his and pricked the farmer's finger.

As the saying goes, 'ten fingers join the heart', the tip of the index finger is connected to the hand's 'yang ming' [positive and bright] passage to the large intestine. As the golden needle pricked in, it hit the 'shang yang xue' [positive quotient acupoint] squarely.

In his last effort to score victory amidst a defeat, the farmer had exerted all his strength to his finger. Ying Gu on the other hand, did not have to exert any strength; all she needed to do was to position her golden needle right on the path of the farmer's finger. Hence she let the farmer prick his own finger by the needle.

As his finger was pricked, the farmer roared like a tiger and fumbled to the ground. Ying Gu coldly mocked, "Nice Captain!" and she dashed toward the courtyard in front of the meditation building.

"Niang-niang, stop!" the fisherman shouted.

Ying Gu halted her step and turned around; "And just how are you going to stop me?" she sneered. By that time she had already at the front of the lotus pond. The pond was connected to the meditation building by a small stone bridge. Ying Gu was standing on the bridge's end, staring at the fisherman. The night was dark, barely enough ambient light to recognize her face. The fisherman stood facing her, he felt her stares were very cold; he shivered involuntarily and did not dare to step forward to stop her.

Ying Gu coldly said, "The Prime Minister and the Captain have been hit by my 'qi jue zhen' [seven lethal needle], nobody in this world can save their lives. Do you want to send your own life off?" Without waiting for an answer she turned around and slowly walked forward. Not once did she turn her head; apparently she was not afraid of any sneak attack.

It was only about twenty steps from the small bridge to the building. As she reached the end of the pathway, suddenly someone came out from the darkness; cupping up his fists he said, "Senior, how are you?"

Ying Gu was startled; she thought, "This person waited quietly here and appeared suddenly; why didn't I heard his breathing before? If he had evil intention I would have been dead or at least wounded." She fixed her eyes to look closer and saw this person was tall and broad-shouldered, with thick eyebrows and big eyes; it was precisely the person she gave directions to, Guo Jing. "Is the young miss' injury healed?" she asked.

Guo Jing bowed and said, "Thank you so much for your directions, Senior. Reverend Yideng has cured my martial sister's injury.

"Humph," Ying Gu snorted, "Why didn't she thank me in person?" Her mouth was speaking, but her feet also kept walking forward.

Guo Jing was standing at the other end of the bridge. "Senior, please return!" he hastily said.

Ying Gu ignored him; she slightly leaned her body sideways and utilizing the 'ni qiu gong' she slipped past by him. Even though Guo Jing had fought Ying Gu at the Black Marsh, he did not anticipate she would slip pass him while still talking and that her body could be this slippery. In his

desperation Guo Jing flung his left arm backward, attacking Ying Gu using the marvelous Vacant Fist of Zhou Botong.

Ying Gu thought that she had already slipped through Guo Jing; who would have thought that suddenly a soft yet strong gust of wind came from his fist pounced toward her face, forcing her to draw back. But Ying Gu was determined not to return, so no matter how strong Guo Jing's attack was, she bravely charged forward as if wanted to receive the blow head-on.

"Watch out!" Guo Jing hurriedly shouted. He felt a warm and soft female body was thrown into the crook of his own elbow. He was stunned. Taking advantage of his situation Ying Gu swept his feet and both of them fell into the lotus pond.

When they were still midair, Ying Gu's left hand slipped underneath Guo Jing's right arm pit, wound around his back and grabbed his left shoulder, her middle finger curled toward Guo Jing's throat while her thumb and index finger pinched the back of his neck with all her strength. It was the fiercest 'qian feng hou bi qi' [sealing front throat shutting air] technique from the 'qin na shou' [grab and capture]; so long as one pinch hit the mark, the enemy's air passage would be sealed and he would not be able to breathe.

While he was falling down Guo Jing felt his shoulder was grabbed, he knew his situation was not good. He bent his right arm to clasp Ying Gu's neck. It was also a technique from the 'qin na shou' called the 'hou xie jing bi qi' [clasping the back of the neck to close up breathing]. Ying Gu knew Guo Jing's arm strength was devastating, and that her own strength was far too inferior; she knew although she attacked first but she could not compete with him in terms of brute force, so she let her hand off Guo Jing shoulder and stretched her finger to prick him instead. Guo Jing used his left arm to parry her finger.

Falling from the stone bridge to the lotus pond actually took a short moment, but two people had exchanged attacks and counterattacks swiftly; in a blink of an eye they had exchanged no less than three stances. Both were utilizing close combat techniques of 'qin na shou'. Ying Gu's skill was profound, yet Guo Jing's strength was astonishing. In these three stances victory and defeat could not be decided. 'Splash!' two people fell into the pond.

The bottom of the pond was covered with mud about three feet high; as they fell, they were immersed in the water up to their chests. Ying Gu's left hand scooped down some mud and smeared it toward Guo Jing's mouth. Guo Jing was shocked and lowered his head to avoid the mud. Ying Gu had lived on the Black Marsh for more than ten years. Her Loach Maneuver was developed based on watching loach diving and moving around in the mud. Fighting on land she was exceptionally slippery, how much more in the mud? She was like a tiger that grew wings. She intentionally dragged Guo Jing to the pond because she was aware of his martial art; she knew it would be difficult to cross the bridge with Guo Jing guarding it. Her finger-pricking technique was actually several times faster in the mud than on dry land; plus every now and then she scooped a handful of mud and smeared it on Guo Jing's face.

Both of Guo Jing's feet sank deep into the mud; moreover, he did not dare to use too much strength and accidentally injure her, so after about only four or five stances he was already at a disadvantage. He heard a swishing sound of mud coming toward his face; hastily he dodged sideways. Who would have thought that as the first mud flew past; the second mud had arrived, followed by the third

handful of mud, which hit him squarely on his face so that his mouth, nose and eyes were covered in stinky mud.

The Six Freaks of Jiangnan had taught him well, so he knew if he was hit by a secret projectile, he must not frantically try to pull out the projectile, because then the enemy would seize the opportunity to assault and make a kill. At this moment he could not breathe and could not open his eyes; he moved his palms and launched three fierce stances so no one would be able to come within five feet near him. Just then he wiped the mud from his face with his left hand and opened his eyes; but Ying Gu had already leaped up to the stone bridge and dashed toward the meditation courtyard.

As Ying Gu successfully went through Guo Jing she secretly scolded herself, “Ashamed! If there were no pond, how would I overcome this dumb kid? It looks like the Heaven is helping me to seek revenge today.”

She sped up her steps and arrived at the temple door shortly. She raised her hand to push; the door was not bolted, it opened immediately with a soft creaking sound. This time she did not rush in, expecting an ambush or some booby trap on the door. She waited outside the door only to see the room was empty, nothing astir. Slowly Ying Gu entered the room. She saw it was a meditation room with a single oil lamp illuminating the image of Buddha with a dignified face. Ying Gu’s heart turned sour, she knelt on the meditation mat and offered a silent prayer.

She just barely prayed for a short moment when suddenly she heard someone chuckle softly behind her. Immediately her left hand flung backward in a sweeping movement to block any potential sneak attack, while her right hand pushed down the meditation mat, borrowing the momentum to leap upward and made a graceful somersault in the air before landing back down to the ground.

“Excellent skill!” she heard a woman’s voice applaud. Ying Gu turned to look and saw a young girl wearing green clothes with red belt around her waist and a bunch of golden hoops flickering under the lamp light on her hair, her pair of beautiful eyes stared at Ying Gu with a hint of smile in them; there was a gleaming dark green bamboo stick in her hand. Needless to say, it was Huang Rong. “Senior Ying Gu, I thank you for your kindness in saving my life,” she said.

“I gave you directions to treat your injury, but my real intention was to harm others,” Ying Gu said matter-of-factly, “So I really was not saving your life. Why should you thank me?”

Huang Rong sighed, “Vengeance and debt of kindness is really difficult to understand. My father imprisoned the Old Urchin Zhou Botong on the Peach Blossom Island for fifteen years. In the end he still could not save my mother’s life.”

As she heard the name ‘Zhou Botong’ was mentioned, Ying Gu was extremely shocked. “What relation did your mother have with Zhou Botong?” she asked sternly.

Hearing her tone Huang Rong knew she suspected Zhou Botong had some love affair with her mother and consequently was imprisoned by her father on the Peach Blossom Island. Apparently even after more than a dozen years her feeling toward Zhou Botong did not subside; otherwise why would she drink vinegar over nothing?

Lowering her head, in a mournful voice Huang Rong said, “My mother died of exhaustion due to the Old Urchin.”

Ying Gu was more suspicious than ever. Under the dim light she could see Huang Rong's skin was as white as snow, her eyes and eyebrows were beautiful; even Ying Gu in her prime years was not as beautiful as she was. She deduced that Huang Rong's mother must also be beautiful; it would be difficult for Zhou Botong to see her and not be attracted to her. Ying Gu frowned involuntarily.

"Don't you have any ideas," Huang Rong said, "My mother is like an angel; that Zhou Botong is as stupid and stubborn as a cow. Unless the woman has eyes but fails to see, nobody would have a crush on him."

Ying Gu knew Huang Rong was mocking her, but her suspicion was gone; she was instantly relieved. Without batting an eyelid she coldly retorted, "Since there is someone who loves Guo Jing who is as stupid as a pig, there must be someone who loves a man as stupid and stubborn as a cow. How did the Old Urchin cause your mother's death?"

Huang Rong pouted and said, "You scold my martial brother; I won't talk to you." She brushed her sleeve and turned around, pretending to be mad.

Ying Gu really wanted to know about Zhou Botong, so she busily said, "All right, I won't do that anymore. Your martial brother is actually very smart."

Huang Rong halted her steps and turned around. "That Old Urchin did not intentionally cause my mother's death," she said, "It was very unfortunate of my mother to die because of him. In his anger my father imprisoned him on the Peach Blossom Island; but afterwards my father regretted it. Injustice has its cause, debt has its originator. If someone killed your loved one you should go to the ends of the earth to seek vengeance on the murderer. Why would you vent your anger toward others?"

This speech was like a severe blow on Ying Gu's head; she stood still without making any noise. She heard Huang Rong continue, "My father had long ago freed the Old Urchin ..." Ying Gu was pleasantly surprised, "Then I don't have to rescue him?" she asked.

Huang Rong smiled, "If my father had not released him, were you going to rescue the Old Urchin?" she asked. Ying Gu was silent.

When Ying Gu left Dali her intention was to look for Zhou Botong. The first few years was spent without hearing any news about him. Then quite by accident she heard from the Twin Killers of the Dark Wind that Zhou Botong was imprisoned on the Peach Blossom Island by Huang Yaoshi; but as for the reason behind it she could not inquire. That day when Zhou Botong renounced her and left Dali she knew that it would be very difficult for him to have a change of heart if not because of some significant cause. This time as she learned about his predicament she was both happy and sad at the same time; sad because the man she loved was in trouble, happy because she thought this was a good opportunity. If she managed to rescue him, how could he not have deep affection toward her? Who would have thought that the roads and pathways on the Peach Blossom Island had a thousand turns and a hundred detours? No need to mention rescuing anybody, she almost died of starvation for three days and three nights. If Huang Yaoshi did not send a deaf and mute servant to show her the way, she would never leave that island alive. Thereupon she made the Black Marsh her residence, diligently learning math and theory of numbers. Now she heard that Zhou Botong had been released she stared blankly with all kinds of thoughts bubbling up in her heart.

Huang Rong smiled and gently said, "The Old Urchin is most willing to listen to me; he won't dare to turn down whatever I say. If you want to see him, follow me and go down the mountain. Let me be the matchmaker between the two of you; just consider it my way of saying thanks for saving my life." Her words had made Ying Gu's cheeks turn red with her heart thumping wild.

Seeing her speech might turn murderous intent into a happy occasion Huang Rong felt smug. Suddenly she heard a slapping sound; Ying Gu's palms struck each other. Her face looked like it was covered with a layer of frost; sternly she said, "What makes him listen to you, a girl surnamed Huang? Why would he follow your direction? Because of your good looks? I have never shown kindness to you, I don't need you to repay. Quickly make way for me, or else don't blame me for being merciless."

"Aiyo, you want to kill me?" Huang Rong laughed.

Ying Gu raised her eyebrows. "What if I do?" she coldly said, "Others are scared of the Old Heretic Huang, I am not afraid of the heaven and the earth."

Huang Rong chuckled, "Killing me is not a big deal," she said cheekily, "But who would help you solve the three mathematical problems I left for you?"

Since that day Huang Rong wrote three mathematical problems on the sand inside the thatched hut at the Black Marsh, Ying Gu had painstakingly racked her brain day and night; but she did not have any clue on how to solve them. At first she studied mathematics with the intention of rescuing Zhou Botong; but later on she was captivated with this complex yet mysterious subject. The further she dug into it, the more fascinated she became that sometimes she forgot to eat or sleep, and could not stop even if she wanted to. She knew perfectly well that even if she could solve these problems, compared to Huang Yaoshi's, her skill would still be like heaven from earth; in other words, it would not help her the least a bit in her plan to rescue Zhou Botong. But curiosity had forced her to rack her brain; without a clear answer it would be difficult for her to keep her mind at peace. Now that Huang Rong mentioned it, the three subjects immediately flashed on her mind clearly; without realizing it her face showed hesitation.

"Don't kill me, I'll teach you," Huang Rong said. She took the oil lamp from the image of Buddha and placed it on the ground. Taking a golden needle out, she started writing numbers and letters on the brick floor.

The first subject was the 'qi yao jiu zhi tian zhu bi suan' [seven dazzling nine grasping Indian method of calculation]. As Ying Gu saw the solution she was dazzled and could not help but secretly sigh in praise. Huang Rong continued with the second subject, the 'li fang zhao bing zhi yin gei mi ti' [lit. standing up soldier supplying silver topic] had profound changes in it. As Ying Gu waited for her to write the last answer she sighed and said, "This middle subject surely has an endless wonderful secret."

A moment later she said, "If we say the third subject to be easy, then it is easy; but if we regard it as difficult, then it is difficult. There is an unknown number; three and three has a remainder of two, five and five has a remainder of three, seven and seven has a remainder of two. What number is that? I know it was twenty-three; but that was a hard guess. I need to line up every number for all interchangeable computational patterns, but even after thinking until I split my head I could not figure it out."

Huang Rong smiled, “It is very easy. Calculating three and three, it amounts to seventy. Calculating five and five, it amounts to twenty-one. Calculating seven and seven, it amounts to fifteen. Adding three numbers together, if not greater than 105, then that’s the correct answer. Otherwise, subtract 105 or its multiple.”

Ying Gu calculated it in her heart and sure enough she got the correct answer. With a low voice she recited, “Calculating three and three, it amounts to seventy. Calculating five and five ...”

Huang Rong said, “You don’t have to memorize it like that. Let me give you a poem to help you memorize it easier: Three people travel together in seventy directions, five plum blossom trees have twenty one branches, seven children reunite for half a month, a hundred and five remained to be known.”

Listening to ‘three people travel together’ and ‘reunite for half a month’ Ying Gu felt offended, she thought, “This girl knows him, she knew my shameful secret from early on. ‘Three people traveling together’ is me one woman serving two men. Could it be that by ‘reunite for half a month’ she was ridiculing me of having a love affair knowing him for only a dozen of days?” What she did in the years past had become a matter of the heart to her, unavoidably she became quite over-suspicious to everybody. “All right,” she said flatly, “Thank you for your directions. ‘Asking direction in the morning, bored to death in the evening’. Must I stay to listen to you speaking more nonsense?”

Huang Rong smiled, “‘Asking direction in the morning, bored to death in the evening.’ The one who died is the one asking; but I’ve never heard the one asking question kill the one preaching the sermon.”

Ying Gu stole a glance toward the meditation room; she knew Emperor Duan must be residing in the back. She saw Huang Rong kept pestering her, something was amiss. Even though Huang Rong was young, her intelligence and eccentricity was not inferior to her father’s. How could a thirty-year-old lady bicker with a baby? She was afraid her luck would turn bad just like a ship capsized in the gutter. She had wasted not a few moments because she wanted to look at Huang Rong’s calculations; while a very important matter was still ahead of her. How could she allow senseless thought over mathematics consume her energy? Therefore, she decided not to answer and immediately lifted up her feet to walk inside.

Crossing over the worship hall she saw there was a dark room ahead with only one flickering light inside. As a wary person she did not dare to rush in; raising her voice up she called out, “Duan Zhixing, are you or are you not going to see me? You hide your tail in the dark, what kind of real man are you?”

Huang Rong followed behind her, laughing, “You don’t like there is no lamp in here? The Reverend was afraid too much light would scare you away, so he ordered us to put the lights out.”

“Humph,” Ying Gu snorted, “I am the kind of person who is not afraid to go to hell, why would a mountain of blades or boiling oil scare me?”

Huang Rong clapped her hands and laughed, “That’s very good! I want to play around the mountain of blades with you.” Taking out a flint from her pocket, lighted it up, then she stooped down and lighted a lamp next to her feet.

Turned out there was an oil lamp on the ground; it surprised even Ying Gu. She looked closer to see that it was not an oil lamp, but a small porcelain tea cup filled halfway with oil, with a cotton ball dipped in it as the wick. Next to the cup was a sharpened bamboo stick about a foot long, inserted on the ground with the sharpened end on the top; it looked really sharp.

Huang Rong did not pause, she kept moving and in just a short moment the floor was filled with flickering lights like stars on a dark night. Next to each cup was a sharp bamboo stick. Before Huang Rong even finished Ying Gu had started counting, and she found out there were 113 teacups with 113 bamboo sticks next to them. She was greatly baffled, "If it is the 'mei hua zhuang' [plum blossom stake] arrangement, then it must have either 72 sticks or 108 sticks, but it has 113 sticks; what kind of arrangement is this? The array seems random, not the 'jiu gong ba gua' [nine-palace eight-diagram], also not 'mei hua wu chu' [plum blossom five arrangements]. Moreover, these bamboo sticks are so sharp, how can somebody stand on them? Ah, right, she must be wearing iron-soled shoes." She further thought, "This girl is prepared, I can't fight her on these things yet I can't ignore this. I'll just go through it then." Thereupon with big strides she walked forward, but the bamboo sticks were densely packed, it was difficult to walk through them, so she kicked around and broke five, six sticks while saying, "What crafty trick is this? The old lady doesn't have time to play around with the baby."

Hurriedly Huang Rong called, "Ah, ah! Don't do that! Don't do that!" Ying Gu ignored her and kept kicking. "All right!" Huang Rong called out, "You don't want to talk reason with me, I am going to turn off the lights. Quickly memorize the bamboo sticks' positions."

Ying Gu was startled, she thought, "If these people gang up and plan to attack me, they must have memorized the position of these sticks early on. I could get killed among the bamboo sticks in the dark. I must leave this dangerous place quickly!" She gave her spirit a boost and sped her steps up, kicking furiously.

"Shameless!" Huang Rong called out. She brandished her bamboo stick trying to block Ying Gu. The oil lamp shone on the dark-green bamboo stick, creating a spooky shadow dancing in front of Ying Gu's face. Of course Ying Gu did not think much about a teenage girl's stick technique. Her left palm hacked vertically down; she thought one palm should be enough to break the bamboo stick. Who would have thought that Huang Rong's stick technique was the Dog Beating Stick's sealing technique; the stick moved horizontally, it was not aimed at the enemy's body, but it turned into a piece of jade-green wall blocking in front of the door. As long as the enemy did not tread a step, the wall would not hurt the least bit, but if one attacked one would immediately hit.

As Ying Gu hacked down her palm, 'crack!' her palm was hit by the end of the stick. Hastily she withdrew her already pain and numb hand. She was not hit on a vital acupoint, but the pain was severe. Formerly Ying Gu did not think much of Huang Rong's martial art, but as she was hit she became startled and angry. She realized now that this young crafty kid was not easy to deal with. She swallowed her anger and cautiously guarded against the opponent's martial art, trying to gain more understanding before deciding on the next course of action. She thought, "I have seen the Twin Killers of the Dark Wind's martial art. Their skills were very profound, but they were already thirty, forty years old. How can this little girl attain this kind of level? It must be that Huang Yaoshi has passed on his lifelong achievement to his only beloved daughter."

When she went to the Peach Blossom Island she had suffered a bitter defeat without even seeing Huang Yaoshi, almost died on the island; therefore, she always feared the Master of the Peach

Blossom Island. She actually did not know that this Dog Beating Technique was the Beggar Clan Leader's unique skill, that even if Huang Yaoshi were there, he would not necessarily be able to penetrate the stick's defense immediately.

While Ying Gu hesitated and held her attack back, Huang Rong kept moving her stick with the sealing technique, blocking Ying Gu from entering the door. In the meantime Huang Rong's feet did not stay idle, she moved from one bamboo stick to the other with agility like a dancing butterfly, kicking the flames one by one. In a short moment she had extinguished most of the 113 oil lamps.

The way she kicked the lamps was amazing; not only she did not step on any teacup, none of the teacups was kicked upside down or smashed, also only a little bit of oil was splashed over. She was fully utilizing the Peach Blossom Island's 'sao ye tui fa' [sweeping leaves leg/kicking technique]. Her movement was swift and accurate, but Ying Gu could see that her skill had not yet reached perfection, it was far inferior to the marvelous changes of the bamboo stick technique. Moreover, although her injury had been healed, her strength had not fully recovered yet. Ying Gu thought that if she attacked the lower part of Huang Rong's body she might score a victory within dozens of stances. However, as Ying Gu was contemplating her course of action only about seven or eight oil lamps were left flickering in the wind on the northeast corner of the room; while the other three corners were already pitch-black.

Suddenly Huang Rong's stick moved twice, Ying Gu was startled; under the faint yellow light of the oil lamp she saw a clearance in between two sharp bamboo stick on the ground, giving her an opportunity to retreat one step. Huang Rong stuck her stick on the ground and using it as a pole her body floated in the air horizontally; her long sleeve whisked off and extinguished the seven, eight remaining lamps.

Ying Gu groaned inwardly, "Although I believe I have a way to score victory, among these sharp bamboo sticks every step I take can pierce a hole on my foot; how am I going to fight?" she thought. In the darkness she heard Huang Rong call out, "Have you memorized the bamboo sticks position? Let us fight for thirty stances; if you can defeat me, I will let you go in to see Emperor Duan, all right?"

Ying Gu replied, "You are the one who arranged these sticks. I don't know how much time you spent practicing here; while you only gave others a wink to look at these many oil lamps."

Huang Rong was still young and proud, she always tried to outdo others, she also had a high confidence on her excellent memory, so she smiled and said, "What's so difficult about it? If you want you can light up the oil lamps rearrange the bamboo sticks as you wish, then extinguish the lamps before we fight again, all right?"

Ying Gu thought, "This is not a martial art contest, but a memorization competition. This little demon's intelligence is matchless, how can I risk my life playing memory game with her while my big enmity is not avenged?" But suddenly she got an inspiration; after thinking about it for a moment she said, "Fine, that's fair enough. Let the Old Lady accompany you playing." Taking a flint from her pocket she lighted the oil lamps.

"Why do you keep calling yourself an old lady?" Huang Rong laughed, "I think you are beautiful, you are prettier than a sixteen years old girl. No wonder Emperor Duan was so crazy about you."

Ying Gu was about to pull a bamboo stick and move it someplace else; hearing this she stopped dead on her track. “He was crazy about me?” she coldly said, “I was in the palace two whole years; just when did he pay any attention to other people?”

“Ah,” Huang Rong was surprised, “Didn’t he teach you martial art?” she asked.

Ying Gu retorted, “Is teaching martial art considered paying attention?”

“Ah, I know,” Huang Rong said, “Emperor Duan was training the ‘xian tian gong’ [innate/inborn strength/energy], that’s why he could not get intimate with you.”

“Humph,” Ying Gu snorted, “What do you know? How come he got the crown prince?”

Huang Rong leaned her head sideways; she thought for a moment before answering, “The crown prince was born before he started training ‘xian tian gong’.”

Ying Gu snorted again but did not say anything. She kept pulling the sticks and inserted them back in different places. As she inserted the bamboo sticks one by one Huang Rong memorized their positions carefully; she did not dare to be careless. It was a matter of life and death, if she missed just a few inches during the fight, it would mean immediate disaster to her foot.

A moment later Huang Rong spoke again, “Emperor Duan was not willing to save your son because of his love for you.”

“You knew everything?” Ying Gu said, “Humph, because of his love to me?” Her voice was brimming with bitterness.

“He was jealous of the Old Urchin,” Huang Rong said, “If he did not love you, why would he be jealous? He saw your ‘four weaving machines’ mandarin ducks handkerchief and was extremely grieved because of it.”

Ying Gu had never thought Emperor Duan had this kind of feeling toward her, she could not help but be lost in thought. Huang Rong continued, “I think you’d better come back.”

Ying Gu coldly said, “Only if you have the ability to defeat me.”

“All right,” Huang Rong said, “Since you insist, I have no alternative but risking my life to accompany you. If you can break through my defense, I definitely will not hinder you anymore. But what if you can’t?”

“I will never go up this mountain again,” Ying Gu said, “I will also free you from your obligation to accompany me for a year.”

“Wonderful!” Huang Rong clapped her hands, “It would be really unbearable for me to accompany you on that rotten black marsh.”

While talking Ying Gu had already inserted about fifty, sixty sticks; immediately she kicked the oil lamps one by one and said, “The rest of them can stay as they are.” In the darkness her five fingers formed a claw fiercely attacking Huang Rong.

Remembering the sticks location Huang Rong slanted her body sideways and without hesitation her left foot landed exactly in between two sticks; while the dog beating stick in her hand shook and attacked Ying Gu's left shoulder. Who would have thought that Ying Gu ignored her attack, she kept moving forward in big strides and with a series of cracking sound she broke about a dozen bamboo sticks with her feet; hence freely she walked to the rear courtyard.

“Aiyo!” Huang Rong was startled; she realized immediately what had happened, “I am duped. Turned out when moving the sticks around she exerted her strength and secretly pinched the sticks broken.” Because she was trying to outdo others she had not suspected Ying Gu would do such thing; she could not help but feel really vexed.

Rushing to the rear courtyard Ying Gu stretched out her hand to shove the door open. She saw an old monk sitting on a meditation mat in the middle of the room; his silvery beard hung down to his chest, a thick monk robe wrapped around his body up to his cheeks, his head hung low in meditation. The fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar, along with several old monks and young apprentices stood on either side.

The woodcutter saw Ying Gu came in, he stepped forward to the old monk, clasped his palms and said, “Shifu, Liu Niang-niang has come to visit.” The old monk slightly nodded his head without saying anything.

There was only a single oil lamp in the entire meditation room, so Ying Gu could not see everybody's face clearly. She had known earlier that Emperor Duan had become a monk, but actually she did not think that after about a dozen years without seeing each other a heroic martial artist emperor could turn into such a fragile old monk. Recalling Huang Rong's speech she realized now that the Emperor was not totally pitiless toward her. Her heart melted and her firm grip of the dagger slowly turned loose.

Lowering her head she saw the embroidered handkerchief that was wrapped around her baby was laid in front of the meditation mat where Emperor Duan was sitting. On top of that ‘du dou’ was the jade bracelet which the Emperor gave her. Instantaneously past events like entering the palace, training martial art, meeting Zhou, love and passion, giving birth to her son, mourning his death, everything came flashing through her mind one by one like scenes on the stage; then she saw her son's look when he was in so much pain. Although he was still a baby it seemed like his eyes spoke thousand sentences ten thousand words wondering why his mother did not alleviate his pain and suffering. Her anger rose, she raised her dagger up and with a swift movement the dagger stabbed Emperor Duan's chest, all through the handle.

She knew Emperor Duan's martial art skill, this stab might not necessarily kill him; moreover, when the dagger went into his chest she had a slightly different feeling. Right away she pulled the dagger back to stab him the second time. Who would have thought that the dagger was firmly stuck between his ribs; she was unable to pull it back in a moment.

The four disciples called out in alarm and rushed forward simultaneously. In her bitterness Ying Gu had painstakingly practiced this stab thousands of times over a dozen of years period. She knew perfectly well that Emperor Duan would surely guard against her attack, so while her right hand did the stabbing, her left palm had already fluttered around, guarding the left, right and the back, three sides of her own body. Now that she could not pull the dagger back, she saw the circumstances had turned to her disadvantage. Her feet moved and she leaped toward the door. Turning her head

around she caught a glimpse of Emperor Duan with his left hand on his chest, seemingly in great pain.

Now that her big enmity had been avenged, just as quick she was not sure of what she did anymore; suddenly remembered, “I had an affair with someone else and gave birth to a child, he did not speak even half a word of reproach and left me live freely in the palace. Not only he did not execute me, but he abundantly provided everything for me. In actuality he was always very good to me.” All along she only remembered that Emperor Duan did not save her son’s life, her heart was filled with hatred. Only after stabbing his chest did she remember all his kindness. She heaved a deep sigh, turned around and went out the door.

As she turned around she gasped in horror with sweats came pouring down her body, because she saw an old monk clasping his palms in front of his chest was standing on the door. Under the lamp light she could see his face looked grand and his eyes showed compassion; although he was wearing a monk robe it was as clear as the day that he was the former ruler of the southern kingdom, Emperor Duan. It was as if Ying Gu was seeing an apparition; like a flash of lightning a thought came into her mind, “Did I just kill the wrong person?” She swept her gaze backward and saw the monk she had just stabbed was slowly standing up; while removing his monk attire his left hand pulled on his chin and the white long beard came off. Ying Gu uttered another cry of shock; it turned out that old monk was Guo Jing in disguise.

It was precisely Huang Rong’s scheme: Guo Jing sealed Reverend Yideng’s acupoint and deliberately took his place to receive Ying Gu’s dagger. He was afraid the Indian Monk’s martial art skill might be high, so he attacked him first; who would have thought that the Indian Monk did not even know martial arts. Later on Huang Rong delayed Ying Gu by explaining the three mathematical problems in the courtyard; and then using the dog beating technique she fought her amidst the sharpened bamboo sticks by the oil lamps. In the meantime the four disciples quickly helped Guo Jing wash up the mud and shave his head clean. They also shaved Reverend Yideng’s long white beard and stuck it underneath Guo Jing’s chin. Actually the four disciples did not feel comfortable treating their master in such a disrespectful manner and to let Guo Jing brave a grave danger; they were feeling very uneasy. But in order to save their master’s life they did not have any other choice; if it were one of the four disciples disguising themselves, their martial art was inferior to Ying Gu, they might die under Ying Gu’s dagger.

As Ying Gu stabbed her dagger Guo Jing deftly moved his two fingers inside the monk robe to pinch the flat sides of the dagger. Who would have thought that Ying Gu’s stab was so powerful that even with Guo Jing’s finger strength the blade still cut through about half an inch of his flesh; luckily it did not break his ribs and he only suffered a superficial wound. He could have worn the soft hedgehog armor, which was impenetrable by the dagger; but Ying Gu was cunning; she would perceive the difference, then they would not get rid of the source of the disaster. If she failed this time, she would come back to seek revenge in the future.

Everybody was delighted to see this ‘jin chan tuo qiao zhi ji’ [lit. golden cicada sheds its shell tactic] accomplished successfully; who would have thought that Yideng chose this very moment to make a sudden appearance. Not only Ying Gu was startled, but everybody else also did not anticipate this to happen.

Because Yideng suffered a heavy injury and lost his strength, Guo Jing did not dare to seal his acupoint with too much strength for fear of injuring him further. In the back room Yideng slowly

circulated his internal energy to unseal his own acupoint, and then he went back to the meditation room, arriving exactly at this moment.

Ying Gu's face was pale like that of a corpse, she thought she had fallen into this trap and certainly would not have a good fortune. But Yideng told Guo Jing, "Return the dagger to her."

Guo Jing did not dare to defy, he returned the dagger to Ying Gu. Ying Gu absentmindedly took the dagger while staring at Yideng. She was wondering what kind of torture he would use against her. But she saw that he slowly removed his monk robe and also his undergarment, and then said, "Nobody shall give her any trouble, let her go down the mountain in peace. All right, go ahead and stab me; I have been waiting for you for a long, long time."

These words were said very gently, but in Ying Gu's ears they were like thunderous lightning in a bright daylight. She stood motionless for half a day, then her grip loosened and the dagger fell to the ground with a clanking sound. Covering her face with both hands she rushed out of the room. They heard her footsteps as she went farther and farther away until finally they could hear her anymore.

Everybody looked at each other in shock, nobody made any noise. Suddenly 'thump, thump' the student and the farmer fell backward to the ground. Turned out because their fingers were poisoned, in the commotion that followed they suppressed the poison using their internal energy; by now they saw their master was well, their hearts were relieved and could not hold the poison much longer.

"Hurry, invite Martial Uncle!" the woodcutter called out.

Before he finished Huang Rong had already accompanied the Indian Monk walking into the room. He was an expert in treating poison related illness. He quickly gave two people some medicine to take, also cut their fingers to get rid of the black blood. His face looked very serious, while his mouth mumbling in Sanskrit, "A ma li, ha shi tu, si gu er, qi nuo dan ji."

Yideng understood Sanskrit, he knew his disciples' lives were not in danger. They would have to be treated for two months then they would be healed completely.

Meanwhile Guo Jing had removed his monk robe and treated the wound on his chest; he bowed to the ground in front of Yideng to apologize. Yideng busily held out his hand to raise him up; he sighed and said, "You risked your life to save mine; nothing to forgive." Then he turned toward his martial brother and explained in Sanskrit what Guo Jing had done.

The Indian monk said, "Si li xing, ang yi na de."

Guo Jing was startled; he knew these two sentences, and he could even recite the next line, "Si re que xu, ha hu wen bo ying ..."

Zhou Botong had taught him to recite the Nine Yin Manual in its entirety. The last part of Manual was full of all these strange sentences. Guo Jing did not understand its meaning, but he was forced to memorize the entire Manual including all these mumbo-jumbo; hence he was able to recite it effortlessly.

Hearing him speaking Sanskrit Yideng and the Indian Monk were stunned; moreover, what he had just said was related to excellent technique to cultivate internal energy; they were even more astonished. Yideng asked him the whole story and Guo Jing told him without concealing anything.

Yideng was endlessly marveled, he said, “I have heard the story behind the Nine Yin Manual from Chongyang Zhenren. Huang Shang, the person who compiled the manual was not only highly skilled, he was also well-versed in the Daoist canon, skilled in the internal energy cultivation, and understood Sanskrit. When the manual was complete, the last chapter was actually the essence of it. Suddenly he realized that if this manual falls into the hand of criminals, they would be able to turn the world upside down without anybody controlling them. But he was also unwilling to destroy this last chapter; thereupon he rewrote the chapter in Sanskrit, but with Chinese transliteration. He thought that it was difficult to say whether the Manual could be passed on to the future generation; the people of Central Plains who knew Sanskrit was very few, and even more rare was the number of people who were well-versed both in martial art and Sanskrit literature. If the Manual fall into the hand of an Indian, although he is proficient in Sanskrit, but he does not speak Chinese. Huang Shang arranged it this way; actually it was the same as not allowing the future generation to understand the content. Because of this Sanskrit part even Chongyang Zhenren did not understand the Manual’s meaning. Who would have thought that through divine intervention you who do not understand Sanskrit can actually memorize this lengthy great theory that sounds like incantations? It is truly a very rare opportunity.” Thereupon he asked Guo Jing to recite the Sanskrit part slowly while he translated it into Chinese, wrote it on a piece of paper and gave it to Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

The overall guiding principle of energy cultivation in the Nine Yin Manual was mysteriously deep; although Reverend Yideng was a proficient scholar with profound internal energy, he could not dissect the theory completely in such a short period of time. “Stay on the mountain for a few days, let me dig into it comprehensively, then I will transfer my knowledge to you two,” he said. He further said, “Usually as my internal strength is damaged, I will need five years of continuous training for a full recovery; but if I practice according to the Manual, it seems like in less than three months I will get a five-year-worth of internal energy cultivation. Although what I practiced is a Buddhist martial art, which was different from the Taoism method of internal energy cultivation in the Manual, but looking at this principle, as the martial art is trained to the highest level, different approaches will lead to the same result; it is no different than the Buddhism method.”

Huang Rong told him how Hong Qigong was injured by Ouyang Feng. Reverend Yideng showed great concern. “You two must tell your Shifu about the Nine Yin internal energy cultivation method; I am certain he will recover his internal strength,” he said. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were very delighted to hear this.

Two people stayed on the mountain for more than ten days. Everyday Reverend Yideng explained the Nine Yin energy cultivation method to them. Huang Rong also took this opportunity for her own recovery.

One particular day they were walking idly outside the meditation building when suddenly they heard anxious cry of eagles in the air; they saw a pair of white eagles in the distance coming from the east. Huang Rong clapped her hands, “Jin wawa [lit. golden baby – see Chapter 29] is here!” The pair of eagles folded their wings and landed, they looked weary. Two people could not help to be alarmed; they saw a gaping wound on the breast of the female eagle. It looked like an arrow wound, but the arrow was no longer there; apparently the eagles had pulled the arrow themselves. There was a piece of green cloth tied on the male eagle’s foot; but they did not bring any ‘jin wawa’ with them.

Huang Rong recognized this piece of green cloth as coming from her father's robe; then the pair of eagles had indeed been to the Peach Blossom Island. Could it be that there were powerful enemies on the Island? Could it be that Huang Yaoshi was too busy engaging the enemy that he did not have a chance to fulfill his daughter's request?

The pair of eagles was smart animals, yet the female eagle was hit by an arrow; indicating the person shooting the arrow must have been an excellent martial artist. Guo Jing quickly applied some ointment and wrapped the wound on the female eagle's breast. Huang Rong was thinking hard for half a day, but in the end she still did not have any clue as to what was happening. Too bad the eagles could not talk, otherwise they would be able to tell what they saw on the Peach Blossom Island.

Two people worried over Huang Yaoshi's safety; hence they bid farewell to Reverend Yideng immediately. "We can still be together for many days to come, but since there is something happening on the Peach Blossom Island I cannot retain you anymore. However, Yao Xiong [Brother Yao] is all-resourceful; he is wise and smart. I believe no one in the present age is able to harm him; you two do not have to be too anxious."

Yideng then sent for the fisherman, the woodcutter, the farmer and the scholar; together with Guo Jing and Huang Rong they sat on meditation mats in front of him. He explained the essence of martial art for several hours. When he was finished Guo Jing and Huang Rong bid their farewell reluctantly. The scholar and the farmer had not recovered yet, so they only sent them off to the gate. The fisherman and the woodcutter walked them off to the foot of the mountain. They waited until the two people found their little red horse and at last said their goodbyes with heavy hearts.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong returned via the same road, the scenery was still the same; but their feeling was entirely different from when they went up the mountain just several days ago. Remembering Reverend Yideng's profound kindness could not help but cause her to bend her knees and bow toward the mountain peak. Guo Jing followed her and kowtowed several times.

Along the way although Huang Rong was concerned about her father, she thought that all the time he had roamed the world far and wide he rarely suffered any setback. Even if he met a powerful enemy, perhaps he would not win, but at least he had enough ability to defend himself; just like Reverend Yideng had said, "No one in the present age is able to harm him." Therefore, she was not overly anxious.

Two people sat on the little red horse's back, chatting casually in light mood. Huang Rong laughed, "I don't know how many times we faced dangers since we met each other, but every time we suffered some loss, we also had some gains. Like this time I suffered injury under that old Qiu Qianren's palms; in the end we found out the marvelous secret of the 'jiu yin shen gong' [lit. nine yin divine strength/energy]; which Wang Chongyang himself did not understand."

"I would rather not know any martial art as long as you are safe and well," Guo Jing said.

In her heart Huang Rong was very happy but she laughed and said, "Aiyu, if you want to flatter others you don't need to blow such a big horn! If you don't know martial art, you would be long dead. Let's not talk about Ouyang Feng, Sha Tongtian and the others; even a black-dressed Iron Palm Clan member would be able to cut your head with a knife."

“No matter what I can’t allow you to be injured anymore,” Guo Jing said, “Last time when I was injured in Lin’an I felt all right; but these past few days looking at you suffering so much pain, ay, that was really not good.”

“Humph,” Huang Rong smiled, “You are a heartless man.”

“Why?” Guo Jing wondered.

“You would rather be injured,” Huang Rong said, “Do you think I will feel all right?”

Guo Jing was taken aback; and then he let out a long laugh. His legs kicked the little red horse’s ribs and the horse ran faster; it looked like its four feet were flying above the ground that by noon they had arrived at Taoyuan prefecture. Huang Rong had not yet recovered fully; after half a day of riding she was very tired, her cheeks were flushed and she was panting for breath. There was only one decent restaurant in the city of Taoyuan, it was called ‘bi qin jiu lou’ [evading qin (dynasty) wine shop; lou – multi-story building]. Its name came from the ‘tao hua yuan ji’ [a note on the origin of peach blossom] a literary work of Tao Yuanming [Translator’s note: different characters from the ‘Taoyuan’ prefecture].

Guo Jing and Huang Rong took a seat and immediately called for food and wine. To the wine shop attendant Guo Jing said, “Brother, we need to go to Hankou; I am wondering if you could go down to the river and invite a boatman to come over here to talk to us.”

The wine shop attendant said, “If Sir is willing to ride the boat together with other people, you will save quite a bit of money. To charter a boat just for the two of you will cost you a lot of money.”

Huang Rong rolled her eyes; she took a silver ingot worth five ‘liang’s and tossed it to the table. “Is it enough?” she asked.

“Enough, enough,” the wine shop attendant busily said with a smile. He turned around and went downstairs.

Guo Jing was afraid Huang Rong’s condition has worsened, so he forbade her from drinking wine; as a result, he also restrained from drinking himself, they only ate the meals. They just ate half a bowl of food when the wine shop attendant came back with a boatman; saying that the boatman agreed to take them to Hankou, the rice was included but the dishes were not, and the total cost would be three ‘liang’s and six ‘qian’s of silver. Huang Rong did not bargain; she simply gave the silver ingot to the boatman. The boatman took the silver and cupped his hands in an expression of gratitude; he pointed to his own mouth and made several hoarse throaty ‘Ah’ sounds. Turned out he was a mute. His hand flailing to the east and pointing to the west, making some hand signals. Huang Rong nodded and also made some hand signals. It seemed like their signals were very complicated and they were communicating at length, exchanging signals incessantly. At last the mute looked pleased, he nodded his head repeatedly and left.

“What were the two of you discussing?” Guo Jing asked.

“He said we’ll leave as soon as we finish eating here,” Huang Rong replied, “I told him to buy several chickens, several catties of meat, some good wine and vegetables; and not to worry about money. I will reimburse everything later.”

Guo Jing sighed, "If I met this mute boatman by myself, I wouldn't know what to do," he said. Since all the servants on the Peach Blossom Island were deaf and mute, Huang Rong had learned how to communicate in sign language since she was two years old.

The honey-steamed cured fish of that restaurant was really tasty; Guo Jing ate several pieces and remembered Hong Qigong. "I wonder where 'en shi' [benevolent master] is, and how is his injury?" he said, "Thinking about him makes me worried." He wished he could wrap some cured fish and gave it to Hong Qigong.

Huang Rong was about to reply when she heard footsteps coming up the stairs. A Taoist priestess appeared. She wore grey Taoist robe with a veil over her face to protect her against the dust. The veil covered her mouth and nose so that only her eyes were visible. The priestess chose a table in the corner and sat down. The wine shop attendant promptly greeted her. The priestess talked in low voice. The wine shop attendant gave his reply and went downstairs. A short moment later he came back with a bowl of vegetable noodle. Huang Rong thought this priestess looked familiar, but she could not figure out where she saw her.

Guo Jing followed her gaze and turned his head toward the priestess, who hastily turned her head around. Apparently the priestess was also looking at him. Huang Rong smiled and whispered, "Jing Gege, that priestess' heart is moved by worldly desire; she must think that you are outstandingly good-looking."

"Pei," Guo Jing spat, "Don't talk nonsense. How can you make fun of 'chu jia ren' [lit. people who leave their homes to become monks or priests]?"

Huang Rong laughed, "If you don't believe me, just wait and see."

They finished eating and walked to the stairs. Huang Rong was still in doubt, she cast another glance toward that priestess, who at that moment lifted up her veil a little bit, revealing her face. Huang Rong gasped and almost cried out in surprise. The priestess shook her hand, put the veil back down immediately and lowering her head she resumed eating the noodle. Guo Jing had walked down and was oblivious to what was going on.

They went downstairs and settled the bill. The mute boatman was already waiting outside the restaurant door. Huang Rong made several hand signals, saying that they needed to buy some things and would be little bit late coming to the boat. The mute boatman nodded, pointed to a boat with a black sail by the river. Huang Rong nodded, but she saw the boatman did not leave, so she took Guo Jing walking to the eastern end of the road. As they walked to a corner they stopped and hid behind a wall, so that they were not visible from the restaurant while they could still see the restaurant entrance.

Not too long afterwards the priestess left the restaurant; she looked at the little red horse and the pair of eagles nearby. It appeared she was looking for Guo Jing and Huang Rong. After looking at four directions without seeing anybody she turned and walked to the west.

"Right, just as I expected," Huang Rong said in a low voice. She pulled Guo Jing's sleeve and hastened to the east. Guo Jing was baffled, but he did not ask any questions, he simply followed her obediently.

The town of Taoyuan was not big; in a short moment they had arrived at the eastern gate. Huang Rong turned around to the south. After passing the southern gate they turned again to the west.

“Are we following that priestess?” Guo Jing asked in a low voice, “Don’t play a joke on me.”

Huang Rong laughed, “What joke?” she said, “The priestess is so beautiful like an angel; if you don’t pursue her you will regret it later.”

Guo Jing anxiously halted his steps, “Rong’er, if you keep making this kind of talk I will be angry,” he said.

“I am not afraid,” Huang Rong said, “I want to see you mad.”

Guo Jing was dumbfounded; he had no choice but to continue walking. Approximately five, six ‘li’s later they saw in the distant that priestess was sitting underneath a locust tree. As soon as the priestess saw Jing and Rong arrive, she stood up and walked along a small pathway leading to a hill. Huang Rong pulled Guo Jing’s hand and they walked toward the pathway.

“Rong’er,” Guo Jing anxiously said, “If you deliberately want to create trouble, then I’ll have to hold you and drag you back.”

“I am really tired of walking,” Huang Rong said, “I think you’d better follow her by yourself.”

Guo Jing’s face showed a deep concern; he squatted and said, “If you are tired then let me carry you on my back.”

Huang Rong giggled and said, “I am going to pull her veil away so you can take a look at her face.” She sped up her footsteps to pursue the priestess. The priestess turned around, waiting for them. Huang Rong grabbed her veil and uncovered her face.

Guo Jing followed behind, he called out, “Rong’er, don’t create trouble!” But as he saw the priestess’ face he was stunned and was at a loss of words. He saw a deep crease between her beautiful eyebrows, her eyes brimming with tears, her face had a pitiful look; obviously she was in distress. She was none other than Mu Nianci.

Huang Rong hugged her waist, “Mu Jiejie [elder sister Mu], what happened? Did that kid Yang Kang bully you?” she asked. Mu Nianci hang down her head without saying anything.

Guo Jing came near and greeted her, “Sister.” Mu Nianci uttered a soft ‘mmm’ sound.

Huang Rong pulled Mu Nianci’s hand toward a weeping willow by a small creek; they sat down underneath the tree. “Sister, how did he bully you?” Huang Rong asked, “We’ll find him to settle the score. Brother Jing and I also suffered and our two lives were almost gone under his hands.” Mu Nianci lowered her head, still did not say anything. Huang Rong and her images were reflected on the clear creek water. Petals of flowers fell down on the water and slowly floated by, disrupting the reflections.

Guo Jing sat on a rock a few feet apart from the two, his mind was filled with questions: why did Sister Mu dressed as a priestess? Why didn’t she greet them at the restaurant? Where did Yang Kang go?

Seeing Mu Nianci's grieving look Huang Rong did not ask anymore questions; she quietly held her hands tight.

After a quite while Mu Nianci opened her mouth, "Meizi [younger sister, term of endearment], Brother Guo, the boat you hired belongs to the Iron Palm Clan. They are setting up a trap to harm you."

Jing and Rong two people were startled; "That mute boatman?" they asked with uneven voices.

"Exactly," Mu Nianci said, "But he is not mute. He is one of the Iron Palm Clan's henchmen, his voice is so loud that he is afraid if he opens his mouth he will rouse your suspicion; hence he pretends to be mute."

Huang Rong was secretly alarmed, "If you did not say I wouldn't see through his disguise," she said, "No wonder this fellow's sign language is very good; he has often disguised himself as a mute many times."

Guo Jing leaped up the willow tree; he swept his gaze around, but other than two, three farmers in the field he did not see anybody else. He thought, "If not because of Rong'er and Sister Mu walked in circle I am afraid the Iron Palm Clan people would be here by now."

Mu Nianci heaved a long sigh and slowly said, "You have already known my affair with Yang Kang. Later on I brought adoptive father's and mother's coffin to the south. I met him again on a desolate place in the Ox Village of Lin'an."

Huang Rong opened her mouth, "That, we also knew; we even saw him killing Ouyang Ke with our own eyes." Mu Nianci looked at her with eyes wide open, Huang Rong's words were hard to believe. Thereupon Huang Rong told her briefly how Guo Jing and she were hiding in the secret room to treat his internal injury, also how Yang Kang had assumed false identity as the Beggar Clan Leader, how two people narrowly escaped danger and so on. It was a long story with all its takes and turns, but Huang Rong was eager to know Mu Nianci's experience, so she only raised the important parts.

Gritting her teeth Mu Nianci said, "This man did all kinds of evil, someday he will not have a good end. I regretted myself to have eyes but failed to see, that I will have to go through all these calamities by unexpectedly meeting him."

Huang Rong groped her pocket for a handkerchief and gently wiped the tears on her cheeks. Mu Nianci's heart was troubled; all kinds of bad things had come her way that in a moment she did not know where to start. She tried to gather her thoughts and slowly calmed herself down; only then did she open her mouth to tell her story.

**End of Chapter 31.**

## Chapter 32 – Rushing River Rugged Shore

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*The mute boatman took out an axe and with two chops he cut the mooring rope. Immediately afterwards he raised the anchor. As the boat came free, the rushing water washed it out down the river. It made a sudden turn as the hull slanted sideways and rushed away as though flying down the river.*

Mu Nianci let Huang Rong hold her right hand; she looked at the fallen flowers floating on the water and said, "When I saw him kill Ouyang Ke I thought he was going to repent from his evil ways. Moreover I saw the two masters from the Beggar Clan were so respectful toward him when they went to the west. I've met those two Beggar Clan uncles before; they were Senior Qigong's trusted aides. Seeing them treat him that way I was very happy; so I followed them till we get to Yuezhou, where the Beggar Clan was having their congress on Mount Jun.

Before then he quietly told me that he had received Hong Enshi's [Benevolent Master Hong] order to become the Beggar Clan's Bangzhu [Clan Leader]. I was surprised and happy. In all honesty it was hard to believe, but I saw even the highest ranking Elders of the Beggar Clan treat him with utmost respect, I didn't have any choice but to believe him. I am not a member of the Beggar Clan, so naturally I could not participate in the congress and had to wait for him in Yuezhou city. I thought that as he become the leader of the Beggar Clan heroes he would be able to do much good for the people and the country, to achieve great things, and in the future would be able to repel the invaders and avenge adoptive father and mother.

That night my mind went back and forth and I couldn't sleep; I thought from now on everything would be all right. It was almost daybreak when I finally felt tired and was about to fall asleep when suddenly he jumped in from the window. I jumped in fright; I thought he was having some ideas towards me. But he actually spoke in low voice, 'Meizi [younger sister, term of endearment], things did not go well, we must go.' I was surprised and asked him what happened; he said, 'There was an internal dispute in the Beggar Clan; the Dirty Clothes Faction refused to accept Hong Bangzhu's order. The Clean Clothes Faction and the Dirty Clothes Faction battled each other in this new Clan Leader business; many people were killed.' I was shocked, 'What should we do?' I asked. He said, 'Because too many people has died, I withdrew my nomination, I did not want to become the Clan Leader anymore.' Taking the entire situation into consideration, I thought he was doing the right thing. He said further, 'The Clean Clothes Faction did not want to let me go; fortunately Qiu Bangzhu from the Iron Palm Clan came to my assistance and helped me leave Mount Jun. Right now we'd better go to the Iron Palm Mountain first and we'll talk it over later.' I did not know whether the Iron Palm Clan was a good clan or an evil one; but since he said so, I followed him.

When we got to the Iron Palm Mountain, I did not see the Qiu Bangzhu from the Iron Palm Clan, but I was watched over with cold eyes. I noticed that the Iron Palm Clan's behavior was sneaky, I saw strange things everywhere. I said to him, 'Although you did not become the Beggar Clan leader, you shouldn't walk away from them. I think you'd better find your Shifu, the Changchun Zi [Eternal Spring] Qiu Daozhang [Taoist Priest], and ask him to gather the heroes of the Jianghu to uphold the justice, to help the Beggar Clan elect a person of virtue and prestige within their clan to assume the Clan Leader position to avoid a bloodbath within the clan. Hence you will be fulfilling Hong Enshi's order to you.' He mumbled indistinctly, neither said yes nor no; but actually raised the matter of his marriage with me. I rebuked him severely; he became angry. We ended up having a heated argument.

The next day I started to regret my harshness; I thought even though he could not differentiate the important from the trivial, friends from foe, and oftentimes acted childish, nevertheless he was always kind to me. I felt I was being too hard on him, no wonder he was mad at me. That evening the more I thought about it the more restless I became. I lit a lamp to write a note, saying I did not blame him. Quietly I went to his room; I was going to slip the note through his window, but suddenly I heard him talking with somebody. I took a peek from the window; I saw a rather short

white-bearded old man, he was wearing a yellow coarse-linen short robe, with a large palm leaf fan in his hand.”

Guo Jing and Huang Rong exchanged glances, they both thought, “I wonder if he was Qiu Qianren or Qiu Qianzhang?”

Mu Nianci continued, “That old man took a small porcelain vial from his pocket and put it on the table, he said, ‘Brother Yang, if your fiancée does not listen to you, that is a very simple matter. Just take some medicinal powder from this vial and put it in a cup of green tea, let her drink it, I guarantee you will enjoy a wedding night tonight.’”

As Jing and Rong two people heard this, they both thought, “It was Qiu Qianzhang.”

Mu Nianci continued, “To my surprise that boy Yang Kang beamed with joy and repeatedly said thanks. I was so angry that I almost passed out. A moment later that old man took his leave. Quietly I followed behind him. After it was far enough, I pounced on him, I beat his chest and struck him down. If I were not in a dangerous place, I would’ve taken a knife and killed him right then and there. I repeatedly hit him until he passed out, then I searched his body. This old man’s pocket really did contain many things; some rings, broken sword, a piece of brick, and all kinds of strange things. I think all of them are things to harm people. I also found a book. I didn’t know what it was, but I thought it might be useful somehow, so I put it in my pocket. The more I thought, the madder I became. I made up my mind to deal with Yang Kang.

I went back to Yang Kang’s room. Who would have thought that he was standing at the door? He smiled at me and said, ‘Meizi, please come in.’ Early on I have decided that tonight I must make myself clear to him, so I went in. He pointed to the porcelain vial on the table and smiled, ‘Meizi,’ he said, ‘Can you guess what’s inside this vial?’ I was angry, ‘Who knows all these kinds of dirty things?’ I said. He smiled and said, ‘A friend gave it to me a moment ago, he said if I take some of this medicinal powder and put it in a cup of green tea and give it to you, then everything will happen as I wish.’ His words have actually blown me away, my anger vanished immediately. I took that porcelain vial and threw it out over the window. ‘Did you do it?’ I asked. ‘I respect and adore Meizi like a deity, how can I engage myself in this kind of filthy business?’ he replied.”

Guo Jing nodded his head, “Brother Yang has done the right thing,” he said. “Humph,” Mu Nianci snorted but did not say anything. Huang Rong recalled that day on the Iron Palm Mountain she peeked through the window and saw Yang Kang sit on the edge of the bed, embracing her and talking softly with Mu Nianci. At that time Mu Nianci was smiling, her face was tender. Apparently that happened after she threw the vial away.

“And then what happened?” Guo Jing asked. Zhou Botong told him that whenever somebody was telling a story, a ‘And then what happened?’ every now and then would help keep the story-teller’s interest high; but unexpectedly Mu Nianci’s face turned red, she turned her head away and hang her head low without saying anything.

“Ah, I know!” Huang Rong suddenly called out, “Afterwards you bowed to the heaven and earth and became man and wife.”

Mu Nianci turned her head back, actually her face was a little pale; she bit her lower lip and her eyes shone with a strange look. Huang Rong was scared; she knew she said something wrong. "I am sorry, I talked nonsense," she hastily said, "Good Sister, please don't be offended."

Mu Nianci spoke with a low voice, "You did not talk nonsense, it was I who messed up. I ... I have become his wife, but we did not ... we did not bow to the heaven and earth. I hate myself for not having a stronger self control ..." Speaking to this point tears came streaming down her face.

Seeing her miserable look Huang Rong stretched out her left arm to hold her shoulder. She wanted to say something to comfort her so after a while she pointed to Guo Jing and said, "Sister, you don't have to feel sorry, it was nothing. That day in the Ox Village Jing Gege and I also became man and wife."

As he heard this, Guo Jing was dumbstruck. He was blushing profusely and did not dare to look up; he only mumbled, "We ... we did not ... did not ..."

Huang Rong laughed, "Don't tell me you did not think about that?" she asked.

Guo Jing's face was red from ear to ear; he lowered his head and said softly, "I was not being good."

Huang Rong stretched her right arm and patted Guo Jing's shoulder. "You want to become man and wife with me, and I like that very much. What do you mean you were not being good?" she said with a gentle voice.

Mu Nianci sighed and thought, "Although Sister Huang is extraordinarily smart, she is too young to understand the man-woman relationship. It is truly fortunate for her to meet such an honest and considerate fellow like this Brother Guo."

"Sister," Huang Rong asked, "And then what happened?"

Mu Nianci looked at the creek and said in low voice, "And then ... and then ... I heard commotion outside, like there was a fight going on. He told me not to make any noise, that it was the Iron Palm Clan's internal affair, it had nothing to do with us. Some time later somebody knocked our door, saying that Qiu Bangzhu wanted to talk. He hastily got up and told me to hide in the bed and not to move. He lit up a lamp and someone came in. I looked through the curtain and to my surprise I saw that bad old man I met a while ago. I was worried to find out that he was the Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan; I feared he came to interrogate me about why I plotted against him. How would I know that ... that he was the Clan Leader? Luckily he did not bring this matter up; actually Yang Kang and he discussed things like how to destroy the Beggar Clan and how to support the Jin army movement to the south."

Huang Rong smiled, "Sister, those two old men are not the same person," she said.

"Not the same person?" Mu Nianci was surprised.

Huang Rong laughed, "Those two are twin brothers; they look exactly alike. The one you flattened was called Qiu Qianzhang; his martial art was only so-so, all he could do was just some tricks to deceive people. This Qiu Bangzhu, Qiu Qianren is amazing. Luckily you beat the fake Clan Leader;

if you came across the real Clan Leader, with just one strike of his Iron Palm, I am afraid your little life would be difficult to protect.”

“That’s so,” Mu Nianci gloomily said, “Actually it would be better if I met with the real Qiu Bangzhu that day and if he struck me dead with one palm.”

Huang Rong laughed, “Our Brother Yang might not want to give you up,” she said.

Mu Nianci twisted her body around so that Huang Rong’s hand fell from her shoulder. “Don’t talk to me like that,” she said sternly.

Huang Rong stuck out her tongue and laughed, “All right, it’s me who don’t want to give you up.”

Mu Nianci stood up and said, “Brother Guo, Sister Huang, I am leaving. You two take care; be careful of the Iron Palm Clan’s evil scheme on the boat.”

Huang Rong hastily stood up and held her hand. “Good Sister, please don’t be angry,” she pleaded, “I won’t dare to talk nonsense anymore.”

Mu Nianci heaved a deep sigh, “I wasn’t angry with you, I ... I was grieving.”

“Why?” Huang Rong asked, “Did that boy Yang Kang provoke your anger?” She pulled Mu Nianci to sit back down.

Mu Nianci said, “That night from behind the curtain I heard Yang Kang and that old man surnamed Qiu discussing all kind of plans to betray our country and harm the people; the more I heard the angrier I became. I wanted very much to jump out and kill that old man. They were talking for a long time. Suddenly the commotion outside got louder. That old man said, ‘Xiao Wangye [Young Prince, lit. young king master], I am going to take a look. We’ll talk again later.’ Then he left the room.”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong interrupted, “He went out to pursue Jing Gege and me.”

“After that old man left,” Mu Nianci continued, “Yang Kang went back to make small talk with me. I asked him whether the things he discussed with that old man was a real thing or was he only pretending. He said, ‘We have become man and wife; I don’t need to conceal anything from you. It won’t be long before the Jin army will invade the south. We have received Iron Palm Clan’s great help to strike from both inside and outside. By attacking from two fronts, our victory is guaranteed.’ He was talking excitedly. He said that after the Great Jin destroyed the Song Dynasty, his father king, Zhao Wangye [Prince, lit. king master] will ascend to the great treasure, becoming the Emperor of the Great Jin; he will then be the crown prince. By that time riches and honor will be limitless. I listened without saying anything. He suddenly said, ‘Meizi, at that time you will be the Empress.’ I ... I could not hold my patience much longer; I slapped his face fiercely and ran out the door, anxiously rushed down the mountain.

By then the commotion on the Iron Palm Peak had worsened; countless clan members with torches in their hands rushed toward the highest mountain peak. I was the only one going down the mountain, so I did not meet any resistance.

After this incident my heart felt like it was dying; as a matter of fact, I wanted to die very much. I did not know east from west, north from south, I just kept walking and walking, wandering aimlessly. Finally I saw a Taoist temple. I rushed toward the temple and barely stepped into the door when I fainted. Fortunately there was an old priestess living in that temple who gave me shelter. I was sick for more than ten days and I just got well not a few days ago. I donned this priestess garb and set on a journey to the Ox Village. Unexpectedly I met with you two here.”

Huang Rong was delighted, “Sister, we are on our way to the Peach Blossom Island and happened to go the same way. What do you say the three of us travel together? Then our journey will be more fun. If you don’t look down on me, I’ll teach you some martial arts along the way.”

Mu Nianci shook her head and said, “No, I ... I want to go alone. I appreciate Sister’s good intention very much.” She stood up, took out a book from her pocket and gave it to Guo Jing; she said, “Brother Guo, this book contains some matters concerning the Iron Palm Clan. Please give it to Senior Qigong whenever you see him; perhaps he will have some use for it.”

“Yes,” Guo Jing said, holding out his hand to receive the book.

Mu Nianci walked quickly so that in a short moment she was far away; never once did she turn her head around to see them. Guo Jing and Huang Rong watched her back disappear behind a row of willow trees in the distance. They were silent for half a day.

Guo Jing said, “She is all alone, traveling thousands of ‘li’s to Zhejiang. I do hope she won’t meet some bullies along the way. It’s a good thing that her martial art is not weak; she does not have to fear ordinary criminals.”

“That is difficult to say,” Huang Rong said, “Even people like you and I are still bullied by some bad people.”

Guo Jing sighed, “Er Shifu [Second Master] often said, ‘In a tumultuous time, people are not better than dogs.’ There is nothing we can do about it.”

“All right, let’s kill that mute dog then,” Huang Rong said.

“What mute dog?” Guo Jing asked.

Huang Rong made some ‘ah, ah, uh, uh’ noise, flailing her hands and feet. Guo Jing laughed. “Are we going to ride this mute’s boat?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” Huang Rong said, “That old traitor Qiu Qianren had caused me a lot of pain, how can I just let it go? I am not his match, but I want to kill some of his disciples and followers first and talk about it later.”

They went back to the restaurant immediately, and saw that mute boatman snooping around the restaurant to find them. As he saw them, his face was beaming, he busily greeted them. Jing and Rong two people acted like nothing happened; they followed him boarding the boat.

The boat was not too big nor it was too small, it was covered with black matting; it held around eighty, ninety sacks of rice. This kind of boat was very common along the Yuanjiang [Yuan River],

transporting commodities from the hills of Xiangxi and rice from the fields of the lake front. Two bare-chested young men were scrubbing the deck.

As soon as Jing and Rong two people embarked, the boatman untied the rope and pushed the boat to the river, raising the sail. Under the strong southerly wind and following the current, the boat sailed down the river like an arrow. Guo Jing thought about the affair between Yang Kang and Mu Nianci, and could not help but heave a deep sigh. “Yang Kang is my sworn brother,” he said in his heart, “We have made a vow to share fortune and disaster. Now he is making a wrong choice, I cannot ignore it; no matter what, I have to persuade him to leave his evil ways and go back treading the path of righteousness.” Leaning against the cabin wall he was lost in thought.

Huang Rong suddenly said, “Let me see the book Sister Mu gave you. I wonder what’s written in it.”

Guo Jing took the book out of his pocket and gave it to her. Huang Rong flipped the pages, browsing the book. “Ah, so that’s how it is!” she suddenly called out, “Take a look here.”

Guo Jing moved closer, sat right next to her and read the book in her hand. It was late afternoon, the bright red sunset shone on the river reflecting the ripple of the water on Huang Rong’s face, her clothes, and the book in her hand, creating a waving light dancing on her body.

It turned out that the book was written by the thirteenth Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan, Shangguan Jiannan; a journal of important events within the Clan year after year. Shangguan Jiannan was formerly a high-ranking army officer serving under General Han Shizhong. After Qin Gui killed Yue Fei, Han Shizhong resigned from his military duty to live as a commoner. Most of his officers and soldiers also returned to civilian lives [jie3 jia3 gui1 tian2 – lit. removed armor return to the (rice) field].

Shangguan Jiannan loathed the way the traitor ministers run the government, so he led a group of brethren to become outlaws in the Jing Xiang district, and later on they joined the Iron Palm Clan. Not long afterwards the old clan leader died and Shangguan Jiannan took over the clan leader position. The Iron Palm Clan was originally a tiny underworld organization, after he consolidated it, the clan managed to do much chivalrous deeds. A lot of heroes and warriors around the two Hu’s [i.e. Hunan and Hubei] heard of his patriotism and joined the clan so that in a few years the Clan enjoyed equal reputation among the Jianghu people with the Beggar Clan of the north.

Shangguan Jiannan had never forgotten where his loyalty and patriotism lie, although he lived in the wilderness he had never forgotten his duty to defend the country and destroy the enemy, and to restore his homeland; therefore, he frequently dispatched his men to Lin’an, Bianliang and the surrounding areas to gather information, waiting for a good opportunity.

A few years had passed. An Iron Palm Clan brother happened to be a good friend of the warden where Yue Fei was held prisoner. He learned that after Yue Fei was executed, his belongings were confiscated by the government, among which was a book containing military tactics and strategies. He went to many places to inquire and indeed learned that the book was kept in the imperial palace. A fast horse carrying this piece of information was dispatched to the Iron Palm Peak. That very day Shangguan Jiannan led a group of his highly skilled pugilists to enter the palace in the middle of the night and without too much effort they succeeded in stealing the book away. That very night they delivered the book to his former superior, retired general Han Shizhong.

At that time Han Shizhong was already old; he lived in seclusion by the West Lake (Xihu) with his wife, Madame Liang Hongyu. As he saw Shangguan Jiannan bring over the Yue Fei's Legacy he remembered how the hero died of false accusations and the injustice had not been avenged, he drew his sword and chopped a table in front of him. Holding up his wrist he heaved a long sigh.

In memory of his old friend, Han Shizhong compiled Yue Fei's writings: poetry, essays, military strategies, into one volume and presented this volume to Shangguan Jiannan as a gift; with the hope that he would continue Yue Wumu's [another title of Yue Fei] aspiration of uniting the heroes of the Central Plains to drive away the invaders and restore their land [he2 shan1 – lit. river and mountain].

While Han Shizhong and Shangguan Jiannan were talking, they suddenly remembered: everywhere in this military strategy book Yue Fei always exhorted the people's loyalty and patriotism to dedicate themselves to the service of their country to match Yue Fei's life aspiration. This book contained a lesson in life attitude; in no way Yue Fei would write this book to accompany him to the grave. It must be because Qin Gui's tight guard that he was not able to smuggle it outside the prison. However, considering Yue Fei's extraordinary wisdom, he must have had some way to overcome this obstacle; only it was not clear to whom did he leave his final words. If his message came too late, and that person came to the palace to fetch the book, wouldn't he snatch empty air?

After discussing this matter further, Shangguan Jiannan drew a painting of the Iron Palm Mountain, with a piece of paper hidden in between the layers containing this message: 'Wumu's Legacy at the Iron Palm Mountain, middle finger peak, second knuckle'. Han Shizhong was afraid that person will not understand the message, so he added a poem written by Yue Fei in the old days. He thought the heir of this military strategy book must be either Yue Fei's child or younger brother or his former subordinate; so he must be familiar with this poem, therefore, he added some additional details to the painting. Finally Shangguan Jiannan re-entered the palace and left the painting behind, so that the heir could follow the trail to the Iron Palm Mountain.

Afterwards Shangguan Jiannan returned to the Iron Palm Mountain and assembled a group of patriots to discuss a military expedition to the north. Who would have thought that the government was too afraid of the Jins; not only did they not support this movement, they sent out imperial troops to surround and eventually crush the Iron Palm Clan. After all Iron Palm Clan was smaller and weaker than the army, hence the imperial army managed to break through their defense on the mountain. Shangguan Jiannan himself suffered a heavy injury and eventually died on the Iron Palm Peak.

Guo Jing flipped over the last page and sighed, "I did not think this Shangguan Bangzhu was actually a good man. Up to the point of his death he was still holding dear the Legacy's teachings. I thought he was of the same kind with this Qiu and his brethren; colluding with the Jins and selling our country for his personal gain. I used to despise him very much. If I knew this fact earlier, I would have bowed in front of his remains to show him my respect. I am surprised that the Iron Palm was such a heroic and patriotic Clan in the past, and today it turned into a gang of thieves. If Shangguan Bangzhu's spirit in the underworld knows, he must be very angry."

Meanwhile the sky was turning dark; the boatman cast his anchor nearby a village and went out to butcher the chicken for their dinner. Huang Rong was afraid he might put something into the meal, so with a pretense that she did not want his dirty dishes, she took Guo Jing along and went into the village to find a peasant house and prepare the food herself. The boatman was staring at them

angrily, but because he pretended to be mute, he could not openly curse them and was forced to swallow his indignation. He saw Huang Rong make some hand signals, saying ‘witticism like a bead of pearl, smart tooth like an ivory’ [or something like that ☺]. He had no way of debating her, so all he could do was clench his teeth and wait until Jing and Rong two people went ashore; only then he went into the cabin and swore under his breath.

After dinner two people enjoyed the cool evening breeze underneath a tree in front of a peasant home. Guo Jing said, “When Shangguan Bangzhu ran to the Iron Palm Peak, why didn’t the imperial army go up the Peak to capture him?”

“I don’t know the answer either,” Huang Rong said, “It is likely the middle finger peak is dangerously rugged, so the soldiers did not want to risk their lives climbing it. Or it could be that some highly skilled Clan members were defending the peak and the soldiers were unable to break through, so they simply declared victory and left.” After a moment of silence Huang Rong continued, “I did not expect Qu Lingfeng, Martial Brother Qu had unintentionally rendered this great service.”

Guo Jing just stared at her with a dumb look. Huang Rong explained, “This ‘Wumu Legacy’ was originally hidden in the cave behind the waterfall near the Cui Han Tang [Jade-Green Cold Hall], Shangguan Jiannan had stolen the book, he drew that painting, naturally he would put the painting on the original place where the book laid, wouldn’t he?”

Guo Jing nodded, “That’s true.”

“After my Qu Shige [martial (older) brother] was expelled from the Peach Blossom Island, he longed for his school to take him back. He knew my father loves calligraphy, paintings and antiques; he also knew that the imperial palace naturally was the best place to find the world’s rarest treasures. Therefore, he took a risk by entering the palace and robbed not a few of famous paintings, calligraphy, books ...”

“That’s right, that’s right,” Guo Jing cut her off, “Your Qu Shige stole this painting together with others artworks, and stashed it away inside that secret chamber in the Ox Village. He meant to present them all to your father; unfortunately he was killed by a palace guard. And then when that old traitor Wanyan Honglie came, not only the Wumu Legacy was gone, the painting containing the directions to find it was also gone. Ay, if we knew this early on, we did not need to desperately risking our lives defending the cave; I wouldn’t be injured by the Old Poison, and you did not need to worry for seven whole days and nights.”

“That’s not necessarily true,” Huang Rong said, “If you did not treat your injury inside that secret room in the Ox Village, how could you have seen the painting? Also how could ...” Suddenly she recalled seeing Huazheng in the Ox Village, she could not help but feel depressed. Trying to change the subject she said, “I wonder how father is doing these past few days?” Looking up she saw the crescent moon on the horizon. “Very soon it will be Mid-autumn festival of the eight month. After the martial art contest at the Misty Rain Tavern of Jiaying, are you going back to Mongolia?” she gently asked.

“No,” Guo Jing replied, “I must kill the traitor Wanyan Honglie first, to avenge my father and Uncle Yang.”

Staring at the moon Huang Rong asked again, “After you kill him, then what?”

“We still have many businesses to tend,” Guo Jing said, “I want to treat Shifu’s injury then I want to take Zhou Dage [Big Brother Zhou] to the Black Marsh to see Ying Gu. And there are my six Shifus, I want to go and visit them one by one at their homes. I also want to find my father’s grave.”

“And after you take care of all these business, must you go back to Mongolia?” Huang Rong asked.

Guo Jing could not say he must go, but he also could not say he would not go; in all honesty he did not know what would be the best thing to do.

All of a sudden Huang Rong laughed and said, “Silly me, why should I worry about all these things? As long as we are together, an hour of happiness must be enjoyed for a full hour. As we go through one day, we will have one less of these kind of happy days. Let us go back to the boat and play a joke on that fake mute boatman.”

At the time the two returned to the boat, the boatman and his two helpers had actually fallen asleep on the stern. Guo Jing whispered on Huang Rong’s ear, “Go ahead and sleep, I am going to watch over them.”

Huang Rong said with a low voice, “I’ll teach you some curse words in sign languages; tomorrow you can show them to him.”

“Why don’t you do it yourself?” Guo Jing asked.

Huang Rong chuckled lightly, “Those are vulgar language; a girl from an honorable family shouldn’t say those kind of words.”

“It turns out mute people can curse others too,” Guo Jing said in his heart; but his mouth said, “Go and take a rest now; it won’t be too late to curse him tomorrow.” After recovering from her injury Huang Rong had not gotten her strength back. In all honesty she was tired, so she put her head down on Guo Jing’s legs and slowly she fell asleep.

Initially Guo Jing was thinking of meditating to cultivate his internal energy, but he was afraid the boatman might be suspicious, so he decided to lie down on the cabin deck, silently reciting the theory of energy cultivation from the Nine Yin Manual, which Reverend Yideng translated from Sanskrit. Then he practiced according to the theory for about an hour and he felt his four limbs and all the bones in his body were full of energy. He was delighted. Suddenly he heard Huang Rong mumbled, “Jing Gege, don’t marry the Mongolian Princess; I want to be your wife.”

Guo Jing was startled, he did not know how to answer her; but then he heard Huang Rong said again, “No, no. I was wrong; I don’t want anything. I know in your heart you love me very much, and that is enough for me.”

“Rong’er, Rong’er,” Guo Jing called in a low voice. But Huang Rong did not reply, her breathing was even, apparently she was sleeping. Turned out she was talking in her sleep. Guo Jing felt deep affection and pity toward her at the same time. He started blankly at Huang Rong’s face illuminated by the moonlight. She was just starting to recover from her injury, her face was still pale and under the moonlight it looked like her face was translucent. Guo Jing stared at her for a long time. He saw her eyebrows wrinkle slightly and there were drops of tears in her eyes. Guo Jing said in his heart,

“She must be dreaming of the challenges we are facing. All day she acted like she was carefree, laughing and joking, but in her heart she actually was grieving. Ay, it was I who caused her worries. I wish we did not meet at Zhangjiakou, then her life would be better. But what about me? Would I be willing to give her up?”

One was sleeping with a sad dream, the other was awake with heavy heart; suddenly he heard the water ripple, a boat was coming downstream. Guo Jing thought, “The terrain of this River Yuan is so rugged; what kind of boat is so daring as to travel here in the middle of the night?” He was about to poke his head out of the cabin to take a look when suddenly from the stern of his own boat came three clapping sounds. The clapping was very light, but in the stillness of the night the sound traveled far on the surface of the water. He then heard the sound of a sail being lowered and the oars paddling the water. That incoming boat came closer to the right hand side riverbank and slowly positioned near their boat. A short moment later it was side to side with the boat Guo Jing rode.

Guo Jing gently patted Huang Rong to wake her up; he felt the hull shook slightly. Quickly he raised the cabin covering to look outside, right in time to see a dark shadow leaping from his boat to the incoming boat. Judging from the appearance, that shadow looked like the mute boatman.

“I’ll go over to take a look, you stay and guard here,” Guo Jing said. Huang Rong nodded.

Guo Jing crouched and stealthily walked to the bow; he saw that the incoming boat was swaying on the water, he leaped and landed on the horizontal part of the sail mast, which happened to be the center of gravity of the boat. The hull slightly sunk in, but the inclination of the boat did not change one bit; nobody on that boat noticed. He opened his eyes wide, trying to see through some openings on the cabin’s roof. He saw three men standing in the cabin; they wore the black uniform of the Iron Palm Clan. One of them was quite tall; he was wearing a green cloth wrapped around his head, looked like he was the leader.

Guo Jing’s movement was so quick that even though that pretend-to-be-mute boatman leaped to this boat first, by this time he was just entering the cabin. He cupped his fists and greeted the tall man, “Leader Qiao.”

“Those two little thieves are still in?” Leader Qiao asked.

“Yes,” the boatman replied.

“Do they have any suspicion?” Leader Qiao asked again.

“No suspicion,” the boatman replied, “But those two thieves did not want to dine on board, so I did not have any chance to do anything.”

“Humph,” Leader Qiao said, “They are going to die at the ‘qing long tan’ [green dragon shore]. The day after tomorrow at noon you will arrive at the Green Dragon Shore. About three ‘li’s from the beach is the Green Dragon Village. Break the boat’s rudder there; we will be waiting for you.”

The boatman gave his reply. Leader Qiao continued, “Those two little thieves are very skilled in martial arts, you must be very careful. After the successful completion of this mission our Bangzhu will heap you with generous reward. Now go back from the water, don’t rock the boat and alert them.”

“Yes,” the boatman replied, “Do you have further instructions, Leader Qiao?”

“No,” Leader Qiao waved his hand. The boatman cupped his fists again and retreated; he went down the water from the side of the boat and quietly swam back.

Guo Jing leaped from the mast back to his own boat and told Huang Rong everything he just heard. Huang Rong smiled coldly and said, “We have been through Reverend Yideng’s torrential stream going up the mountain; why should we be scared away by Green Dragon Rugged Shore or White Tiger Rugged Shore? Let’s sleep.”

Their minds were at ease knowing the bandits’ plot. The next day they enjoyed the scenery light-heartedly; and had a good rest in the evening, did not even bother to keep a night watch. Early morning the third day the boatman was about to raise the anchor when suddenly Huang Rong said, “Hold on, let the horse come ashore first, otherwise it will die when the boat capsizes at the Green Dragon Shore.”

The boatman’s face changed slightly, which could not be disguised. Huang Rong raised her both hands, she could not help to ‘say’ several vulgar words to curse him. Each one of the deaf and mute servants of the Peach Blossom Island was a criminal; their skills at cursing people were naturally above average. When Huang Rong started learning those words, she did not understand their real meaning. This time two of her left fingers made a circle, carrying a vulgar sense; with a giggle she let her hand dropped; and then she came alongside Guo Jing taking the horse ashore.

Suddenly Guo Jing said, “Rong’er, let’s not play around with them anymore. We leave the boat and ride the horse from here.”

“Why?” Huang Rong asked.

Guo Jing replied, “These Iron Palm Clan people are criminals, why should we squabble with them? As long as we can live together peacefully, we don’t have to prove that we are stronger.”

“Can we live together peacefully forever?” Huang Rong asked. Guo Jing was silent. He saw Huang Rong loosen the little red horse’s rein and point to the north. The little red horse had a divine intelligence, it had been separated from its master several times and right now understood that its masters wanted to part again temporarily. Without hesitation it ran to the north and in a short moment its shadow could not be seen anymore.

Huang Rong clapped her hands, “Let’s get on board.”

“You are not fully recovered yet,” Guo Jing said, “Must you brave the danger?”

“You can’t just let it go,” Huang Rong replied and walked the downward slope toward the boat. Guo Jing had no other choice but follow her to the boat. Huang Rong smiled, “Sha gege [dumb older brother], we have been through many strange and fantastic adventures together. Someday when we are not together anymore, we will have many memories we can cherish, wouldn’t that be good?”

“In the future, must we ... must we really part?” Guo Jing stammered. Huang Rong stared at him but did not say anything. Guo Jing did not have the slightest idea until today that when at the Ox

Village he promised Tuolei he would marry Huazheng he had caused a deep wound in Huang Rong's heart.

It was almost noon; they have been sailing for a few hours. The further they went, the steeper and steeper the banks became on both sides of the River Yuan. The Green Dragon Shore must be not too far ahead. Jing and Rong two people stood on the bow looking into the distance. They saw that the passing boats were pulled by porters on the banks. Big boats needed more than a dozen men, while the smallest boats needed three, four men. The porters were stooping down at their waists, at several places their foreheads were almost touching the ground; step by step they pulled the boats upstream against the strong current, sometimes as if the boats were motionless, dead as a nail.

The porters wore white headbands, their upper bodies naked, with beads of sweats trickling down their bronze skins, glittering under the bright hot sun; their mouths shouted heave-ho. Several 'li's up and down the river the valley was full of their continuous shouts. With these porters' help the boats were able to move gently and rapidly through the rushing water.

Seeing this Guo Jing was secretly alarmed, he came near Huang Rong and in a low voice said, "Rong'er, I did not know there is such a dangerous part on the Yuan River; we must never let our guards down. It looks to me that the rushing water covers quite some distance. If our boat capsizes while you are not completely fit, I am afraid we'll face disaster."

"What do you think we should do?" Huang Rong asked.

"Overthrow the mute boatman, steer the boat to the shore," Guo Jing replied.

Huang Rong shook her head, "That is not fun."

"At a time like this you still want to have fun?" Guo Jing anxiously said.

Huang Rong pursed her lips and smiled, "I love to play!"

Looking at the muddy water between the steep river banks, Guo Jing saw the current was very strong. Frantically he tried to think some way out of this, but he was slow, what could he possibly come out with?

Ahead of them, there was a bent on the river. In the distance they saw several dozens of houses by the river banks. The houses were scattered high and low on the side of the hill. The current carried the boat rapidly along the river, swifter than a running horse, so that in a short moment they had arrived near those houses. They saw that several dozens of porters were waiting along the bank. The mute boatman tossed a couple of ropes from the boat to the shore. The porters took the ropes and wound them around a big capstan. More than a dozen porters turned the capstan, pulling the boat closer to the shore. This boat was of a very good size, it required about thirty men huffing and puffing to pull it ashore. As they were done, some of the porters lied down by the water, exhausted; it looked like they were unable to move again.

Guo Jing thought, "It looks like the undercurrent is much stronger than on the surface." He saw among the porters were some old men with grey hair, yet some of them were youngsters of fourteen, fifteen years of age; all of them were so thin that their ribs were visible. Suddenly Guo Jing realized that everybody in the world had to work hard to earn a living; his throat choked up involuntarily.

As the boat was ashore, the boatman dropped out the anchor. Guo Jing saw there were more than twenty boats that also dropped their anchors on the nearby bank. Huang Rong asked a man standing nearby, "Brother, what is this place?"

"Green Dragon Village," that man replied.

Huang Rong nodded. She kept a close attention to the mute boatman. She saw him make some hand signals with a big man standing on the sloping bank. Suddenly the boatman took out an axe and with two chops he cut the mooring rope. Immediately afterwards he raised the anchor. As the boat became free, the rushing water washed it out down the river. It made a sudden turn until the hull slanted sideways and flushed away like flying down the river. The people on the shore cried out in alarm.

After the Green Dragon Shore the riverbed changed abruptly, creating a short waterfall. The river current was so strong that water was splashing everywhere. The mute boatman kept his hands on the rudder, with eyes steadily fixed on the surface of the river. His two helpers held long punting poles in their hands, standing on the either side of him. It seemed like they were guarding against the boat from having an accident, but it also looked like they were protecting the boatman from Jing and Rong, two people's attack.

Guo Jing saw that the current was getting stronger and stronger, the boat sailed like crazy; it could smash against a rock any moment and would certainly break. "Rong'er, snatch the rudder!" he loudly called out and ran to the stern.

The two helpers heard his shout; they raised the poles up and blocked Guo Jing from both sides. Guo Jing ignored these two; he kept going toward the starboard.

"Hold on!" suddenly he heard Huang Rong shouted.

Guo Jing halted his steps and turned his head, "Why?"

With a low voice Huang Rong said, "Are you forgetting about our eagles? We'll wait for the boat to capsize then we'll fly away with the eagles. I want to see what they are going to do."

Guo Jing was delighted, he thought, "No wonder Rong'er is not scared of this torrential river; she has already thought about it early on." He then beckoned to the pair of eagles to land on his sides.

The mute boatman saw Guo Jing came rushing toward him but suddenly stop dead on his tracks; he did not know that those two had already prepared an escape plan. He thought these two babies, who were still wet behind their ears, were helplessly frightened by the rushing river that they did not know what to do. Inwardly he was very happy.

Amidst the rumbling sound of the water they could hear the heave-ho of the porters in the distance. A moment later they saw another boat similar to their own was pulled against the current; a black flag was fluttering from this incoming boat's mast. As the mute boatman saw this boat, he raised his axe and with several cracking sound he hacked down the tiller; and then he stood at the port side, ready to jump toward the incoming boat.

Guo Jing pressed down the female eagle's back and called out, "Rong'er, you go first!"

“No need to rush!” Huang Rong replied. Suddenly an idea came into her mind, “Jing Gege, throw the anchor to that boat.” Guo Jing complied and snatched the anchor.

By now their boat had already lost its rudder, it floated along the fierce current uncontrollably. Very soon the distance between two boats was only a little over one ‘zhang’ [about 3 meters or 10 feet]. The incoming boat changed its course to avoid collision. The men on the incoming boat, together with the porters on the hill shouted in alarm. Guo Jing threw the anchor with all his might; the iron anchor flew and hit the pole where the towing rope was tied on the bow of the incoming boat.

The tow rope was made of several hundreds ‘zhang’s of bamboo fibers tightly braided together; it was strung tight like the string of a bow. The iron anchor hit the pole squarely and with a loud ‘crack’ it broke into two pieces. Dozens of porters were pulling the rope with all their might; as the pole broke, they tumbled down to the ground. The incoming boat was like a kite with its string broken; the strong current turned it around so that its stern faced forward and its bow faced backward, it was flushed away downstream. Everybody shouted in alarm; their voices reverberated on the surrounding hills above the noise of the rushing river.

The mute boatman was taken by surprise; his face turned deathly pale and with a loud voice he screamed, “Hey! Help! Help!”

Huang Rong laughed, “The mute can speak, it truly is a wonder of the world.”

Guo Jing had thrown one anchor away; the boat still had one more anchor. He saw that their boat and the incoming boat floated together almost side by side at a very close distance. He took a deep breath and lifted the other anchor, turned his body around three times and hurled the anchor toward the rudder of the incoming boat. He was sure the anchor would hit the rudder and then both boats would be completely destroyed; but suddenly somebody leaped in front of the cabin. That person snatched the long punting pole and shook it toward the handle of the anchor. He exerted his strength toward the pole and made it bent like a bow. ‘Crack!’ the pole broke; but the anchor’s trajectory was also diverted. With a loud splash both the anchor and the half punting pole fell into the water.

The person holding the pole wore a short yellow coarse robe, his white beard curled to his ear, blown by the river wind. Even though the boat was violently jolted by the water, he was standing steadily on the deck. His presence brought an impressive air around him. He was none other than the Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan, Qiu Qianren.

Seeing Qiu Qianren on the boat Guo Jing and Huang Rong were startled. They have not recovered from the shock when suddenly there was a loud crashing sound; the bow of their boat was colliding with a reef. The crash was so hard that two people were sent flying until their backs hit the cabin door.

The boat sank so fast that in a short moment the water had risen to their ankles; they did not have enough time even if they wanted to escape by riding the eagles. In this critical moment Guo Jing acted without thinking; he flew forward and called out, “Follow me!” With the ‘dragon flies to the sky’ he threw his body toward Qiu Qianren. He knew at this moment the difference between life and death was only as wide as a hair strand; if he landed someplace else on the enemy’s boat, Qiu Qianren would definitely make a surprise attack from the side. With his power right now he knew he would be able to bear that attack, but it would compel him to take the defensive and would not give him any chance to set a foothold on the enemy’s boat.

Qiu Qianren was fully aware of his intention; he swung the broken pole in his hands to stab several points on Guo Jing's body in the air, forcing him to change his direction and not land on the boat. Guo Jing inwardly groaned, "Not good!" Stretching his arm toward the pole his body continued falling toward the enemy's boat; but because of this the 'dragon flies to the sky' lost its momentum.

With a long laughter Qiu Qianren let the pole go and his palm struck toward Guo Jing's chest. With him standing steadily on the deck while the enemy was in the air, and his palm striking up, the enemy would be forced to plunge into the water. But before the pole fell, another bamboo stick intercepted it, and borrowing the momentum someone was leaping to the boat; it was Huang Rong. Before the person landed, her stick had already arrived, striking downward three times with killer strikes. Qiu Qianren did not anticipate she was capable of moving this fast; his left eye was in danger of being poked, so he had no choice but immediately withdrew his palm.

Guo Jing seized the opportunity to land on the bow and immediately launched a converging attack. Qiu Qianren did not dare to underestimate this attack, he moved sideways to evade the bamboo stick, while his right leg swept away, forcing Guo Jing to retreat one step; and then 'swish, swish' both of his palms struck out.

How can Iron Palm martial art be ordinary? The Iron Palm Clan built their headquarters on a mountain and for the last several hundred years its power and prestige spread over the Central Plains; it was all because of the exquisiteness of their palm technique. Shangguan Jiannan and Qiu Qianren added even many more subtle variations and refined the stances. Although its overwhelming power was inferior to the 'Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms', but its palm technique was ingenious and finer than the 'Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms'.

In a short moment two men had exchanged seven, eight stances on the bow of the boat. Although they were wary of each other, their palms and feet did not stop moving. The noise of the rushing water was loud, but it could not cover the strong gusts of wind from the four palms.

By now an Iron Palm Clan member had taken over the rudder, slowly steering the boat on the right direction so that they were swiftly floating downstream. The mute boatman's boat had already broken into two sections; the planks, the sail, the mute boatman and his two helpers were marooned on a big silt in the middle of the river with vortex of water all around them. The mute boatman's miserable cry for help could be heard from a distance; surely his voice was loud and clear.

Huang Rong busily waved her left hand behind her back, making a hand signal, 'scolding' the mute boatman. In any case nobody was watching her, so she could be as vulgar as she wished.

Even though the mute boatman and his two helpers were holding to the silt for their dear lives, the vortex was too strong; in a blink of an eye they were sucked into the bottom of the river.

The black-flagged boat was floating swiftly so that when Huang Rong turned her head around, they were already two, three 'li' away from the vortex. The pair of eagles was flying in circles above them, continuously crying. Huang Rong wielded her bamboo stick to push the Iron Palm Clan people from the bow; she intended to help Guo Jing fight Qiu Qianren. Suddenly with the corner of her eye she caught a flash of a blade inside the cabin, somebody was about to chop something inside. Without knowing clearly what it was, her left hand launched a steel needle, hitting that person's arm. That person's saber fell and slashed his own right thigh, and he screamed loudly.

Huang Rong rushed into the cabin, lifted up her leg to kick him out of the way, only to see someone was lying on the deck; with all her hands and feet bound that she could not move. Her cold eyes were staring at Huang Rong; she was the Divine Mathematician Ying Gu.

Never in her life did Huang Rong expect to save Ying Gu's life in this place. She picked the saber from the deck and cut of the ropes binding Ying Gu's hands. As soon as her hands were free Ying Gu stretched out her right hand and snatched the saber from Huang Rong's hand. Huang Rong was startled; she saw the blade flash and Ying Gu had killed that black-dressed man. Only then did she stoop down to cut off the ropes on her own feet.

"Although you have saved my life, don't expect me to repay you in the future," she said.

Huang Rong smiled. "Who wants you to repay?" she said, "You have saved my life, and today I saved yours. Now we are even, nobody owes anybody anything."

Before she finished speaking she had dashed forward to the bow with her bamboo stick to help Guo Jing. Qiu Qianren was attacked from both front and rear; he increased the strength of his palms, trying to stay on the offensive side. But then he heard 'splash, splash' and 'aiyo, aiyo' successively; Ying Gu with saber in her hand had attacked the Iron Palm Clan people and forced them to fall into the river. In this turbulent water they could not expect to keep their lives.

Initially when he was fighting Guo Jing, Qiu Qianren had gradually gained an upper hand; but now Huang Rong came to Guo Jing's rescue with her Dog Beating Stick technique, he was alone against two enemies. A dozen or so stances later he was forced to move back around the boat defending himself. His back was facing the water so that Huang Rong could not attack him from behind.

Guo Jing launched several fierce attacks successively, but Qiu Qianren's feet were as if nailed to the deck, he could not be pushed further even for half an inch. By now he was so close to the edge that one more step backward would make him fall into the river.

Huang Rong said in her heart, "Although your title is 'Iron Palm Floating on the Water', but with the 'floating on the water' part you are merely boasting your excellent lightness kungfu. Not to mention this turbulent water and wild waves of this river, even on a mirror-like calm lake you won't be able to float on the water; unless you have mastered your older brother's trick by planting several thousands or several hundreds wooden stakes under the water beforehand." She noticed that while his palms moved steadily, his eyes were repeatedly scanning the water; it seemed like he was hoping another boat would come to his rescue. She thought, "This old fellow's martial art skill might be high; but with three against one today, if we cannot defeat you, we can consider ourselves as dung."

By then Ying Gu had swept the boat clean of all Iron Palm Clan people, except the man who control the rudder. She saw Guo Jing and Huang Rong could not gain an upper hand, she coldly said, "Little girl, move away, I am coming!"

Hearing the condescending tone in her remarks Huang Rong could not help but be angry; her bamboo stick moved forward and she launched two stances successively; while her feet kept moving forward. When Qiu Qianren stepped aside to evade, she leaped backward two steps while pulling Guo Jing's sleeve and said, "Let her fight." Guo Jing used his palm to guard then he pulled back.

Ying Gu coldly said, “Qiu Bangzhu, your reputation in Jianghu cannot be considered small, but while I was resting in an inn unguarded you used incense to drug me. It was low, even for you.”

“You are captured by my subordinates, what else do you have to say?” Qiu Qianren replied, “If I personally went into action, using only this pair of hands I would be able to capture even ten Divine Mathematicians.”

Ying Gu coldly said, “When did I ever offend the Iron Palm Clan?”

Qiu Qianren replied, “These two little thieves without authorization broke into our Iron Palm Peak’s holy ground; why did you give them asylum at the Black Marsh? I spoke nicely to you asking you to release them, but you dared to lie to me; do you think I, Qiu Qianren, am an easygoing person?”

“Ah, turns out it was because of these two little thieves,” Ying Gu said, “If you have the ability, go and get them; I won’t mind other people’s business anymore.” After saying that she went back several steps and sat cross-legged on the side of the boat, her face looked indifferent; it seemed like she determined to watch the tigers fight, expected Jing and Rong two people and Qiu Qianren to suffer injury. Her action was truly unexpected by Qiu Qianren, Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

It turned out that when her plan to assassinate Reverend Yideng was thwarted by Guo Jing in disguise, and then seeing Yideng bare his chest to her, suddenly she realized Yideng’s kindness to her and she did not have a heart to make a move. She went down the mountain dejectedly, with memory of the tragic death of her son lingering in her mind. She stopped by at an inn to spend the night; confusion, anger and resentment filling her heart, putting her in a very vulnerable situation. Right at that time the Iron Palm Clan people used incense to drug her. Otherwise, with her skill and intelligence, how could she fall into the hands of some lowly, nameless juniors? Right now she saw Guo Jing, Huang Rong, two people, she wanted to vent her anger and frustration by hoping those three people all die in this rushing river.

Huang Rong thought, “All right, we will cope with Qiu Qianren first, we’ll deal with you later.” She made a facial signal to Guo Jing and two people, one with a bamboo stick, the other with his pair of palms, attacked Qiu Qianren side by side. In a moment three people were engaged in a fierce and inextricable combat.

Ying Gu watched the fight with rapt attention. She saw that even though Qiu Qianren’s palm technique was swift and fierce, in the end it would be difficult for him to score victory against these couple. She noticed Qiu Qianren kept moving step by step; it looked like he was trying to defeat the enemies by a surprise attack.

Guo Jing was concerned over Huang Rong’s condition; her serious injury had just recovered, she might lose her strength if this fight was prolonged. “Rong’er,” he said, “Take a rest for a while, then you can come back to help me later.”

“All right!” Huang Rong said with a smile. She raised her stick and withdrew from the fight.

Ying Gu saw the closeness of these two people; Guo Jing loved Huang Rong very much. “Throughout my life, when did someone treat me this way?” she thought. From envy she became jealous, from jealousy came hatred. Suddenly she stood up and called out, “Two against one, what kind of skill is that? Come, let us four people fight in two pairs to determine victory or defeat.” She reached into her pocket with both of her hands and took out two bamboo planks. Without waiting

for Huang Rong to reply the pair of planks went down vertically and swept away horizontally, attacking Huang Rong.

“You are a crazy old woman,” Huang Rong cursed her; “No wonder the Old Urchin did not love you.”

Ying Gu raised her eyebrows and intensified her attacks. Once she went into action, the situation on the boat changed considerably. Although Huang Rong’s Dog Beating Stick technique was exquisite, her internal energy level was still inferior to Ying Gu’s; not to mention after a heavy injury her internal strength had not fully recovered, her movements were not as agile as they used to be. She had to rely on the ‘sealing’ technique with all her strength to barely guard herself against the enemy. Ying Gu was slippery as a fish, the jolting and swaying of the boat only added to her fierceness.

On the other front Guo Jing fought Qiu Qianren; for a while it would be difficult to decide victory and defeat. After receiving instructions from Reverend Yideng on the internal energy cultivation his level of energy actually increased one layer; to his own surprise by exerting all his strength he was able to protect himself thus far. On the other hand Qiu Qianren was baffled by Ying Gu’s action; first she acted as his enemy and did not care to help either side, suddenly now she came to lend him a hand. Inwardly he was delighted, his spirit rose and his palms became fiercer. He believed with a prolonged fight he would eventually subdue Guo Jing.

Qiu Qianren saw Guo Jing’s palm wipe out fiercely, he leaned sideways to avoid a frontal attack, his right palm high, left palm low, they clapped down together. Guo Jing responded by stretching out his palms and four palms collided with a great force. “Hey!” two people shouted together and both withdrew three steps.

Qiu Qianren stumbled toward the stern and grabbed the rudder to steady himself. Guo Jing’s left foot tripped on a rope and he nearly tumbled down. Afraid of the enemy’s subsequent attack while his defense line was empty he continued by rolling down on the deck while readied his palms to protect his body. Qiu Qianren thought victory was at hand, watching the enemy tumble down and at a disadvantage he let out a long laugh and stepped forward.

In the meantime Ying Gu had succeeded in making Huang Rong huffing and puffing, panting for breath; she saw beads of sweat trickling down her forehead, she was delighted. Suddenly she heard the laughter, she was greatly shocked; her countenance abruptly changed and absentmindedly she withdrew the attack with the bamboo plank in her left hand.

Huang Rong saw this opportunity and she did not want to miss it; the bamboo stick in her hand turned to attack Ying Gu’s chest. But as the bamboo stick was about to hit the ‘shen cang’ [divine storage] acupoint on her chest, Ying Gu’s body shook as if she was suffering from a sudden illness. “So it was you!” Ying Gu screamed and pounced toward Qiu Qianren like a mad tiger.

Qiu Qianren saw her with arms opened wide, fiercely throwing herself at him without any regard for her own life. Her mouth opened wide exposing rows of white teeth, as if she wanted to bite him alive. Although his martial art skill was high, seeing this disregarding-her-own-life kind of attack he could not help but was startled. Hastily he leaped sideways to evade and called out, “What are you doing?”

Ying Gu did not answer; she kept throwing herself on him. As soon as her feet landed, she would pound him again and again. Qiu Qianren struck with his left palm toward her head, but Ying Gu kept going with arms extended as if she wanted something; she completely ignored the incoming attack, still ferociously trying to throw herself at him. Qiu Qianren was shocked; he thought if he was caught by this insane woman, he would not be able to break free easily, and if at that time Guo Jing came up with a palm, how could he still alive? Therefore, he abandoned his palm strike immediately; saving his own life was more important, hastily he ducked to the left.

Huang Rong pulled Guo Jing's hand; they moved to the side. Seeing Ying Gu suddenly lost her mind they could not help but feel scared. They saw Ying Gu madly pounced forward, her mouth let out 'heh, heh' sound, her lips opened to reveal her teeth, trying to embrace Qiu Qianren without regard of her own life.

Although Qiu Qianren's martial art skill was high, but Ying Gu attacked him like she did not want to live anymore, he could not keep up with her; he was forced to dodge to the west and evade to the east. He saw the muscle on her face twitch, her expression so ferocious, he became more and more afraid. "Revenge, revenge!" he inwardly groaned, "Today I will die under this mad woman's hands."

Ying Gu pounced several more times, Qiu Qianren evaded her until he arrived next to the rudder. Ying Gu's eyes were red as if they were going to spurt blood. One more time her grab missed its target. She raised her palm and 'bang!' she struck the man controlling the rudder throwing him into the river; then her leg flew and she kicked the rudder broken. The boat immediately floated chaotically as it lost its rudder.

Huang Rong groaned inwardly, "This woman was going to turn mad sooner or later; it seems that we, four people, will have difficulty escaping death this time." Immediately she pursed her lips and whistled loudly to summon the eagles down to save their lives.

Right at this moment the boat hit a big rock. With a loud crashing sound a big hole appeared on the bow. As Qiu Qianren saw Ying Gu break the rudder he knew she had made up her mind to die together with him. He saw the shore was not too far; he thought whether dead or alive he must risk everything to escape; therefore, he jumped toward the shore with all his might. But the shore was still a distance away, 'splash!' he fell into the water and immediately drowned to the bottom of the river. He was aware that as soon as he went up to the surface, the strong current would flush him away and it would be impossible for him to struggle free; hence he firmly held onto the rock at the bottom of the river and using his hands and feet he crawled underwater toward the shore. Utilizing his outstanding martial art, plus the fact that near the shore the current was not as strong as at the middle of the river, although he had to swallow about a dozen mouthful of water, he finally reached the shore. He was utterly exhausted, he sat on a rock to catch his breath and saw the boat quickly turned into a black dot in the distance. Remembering Ying Gu's clenched teeth and scary expression he shivered in fear.

As Ying Gu saw Qiu Qianren jump out the boat she loudly called out, "Evil thief, where are you running to?" She rushed toward the side of the boat, ready to jump into the water. But by then the boat had been flushed to the middle of the river where the current was strongest; in this dangerous billows, how would she survive if she really jumped into the water?

Guo Jing could not bear to see her; he rushed forward to grab her back. Ying Gu was angry, she reached behind her back to attack. Guo Jing hastily ducked to evade. Huang Rong saw the pair of eagles had landed in front of the cabin. "Brother Jing," she called out, "Why do you mind this mad woman? Let us go quickly."

The water violently surged up and very soon it rose up to their ankles. Guo Jing let his grab went loose. Ying Gu covered her face with both hands, crying loudly. "Child! Child!" she shouted miserably.

Huang Rong repeatedly urged him to go, but Guo Jing remembered Reverend Yideng's request to look after Ying Gu. "Go ashore with the eagle, then send them back here to rescue us," he called out.

"There's not enough time," Huang Rong anxiously objected.

"Go, quick!" Guo Jing said, "We can't neglect Reverend Yideng's entrusting."

Huang Rong recalled Yideng's kindness in saving her life, reluctantly she mounted the eagle, knowing she did not have any choice. Suddenly her body shook. With a violent crash the boat hit a big reef in the middle of the river. The water bubbled up toward the cabin, in a flash the hull sank several feet.

"Jump to the reef!" Huang Rong called out. Guo Jing nodded, he went over to take Ying Gu along.

By then Ying Gu was in daze, she knew Guo Jing held out his hand to hold her, she did not resist. Her eyes were staring blankly at the river. Guo Jing slipped his right hand under her armpit and called out, "Jump!" Three people jumped to the reef.

That reef was actually about a foot under the water; the river surrounded three people, splashing their clothes wet. When they stood firm on the reef, they saw the boat slowly sank beside them. Although she had played in the great waves since her childhood, but seeing the muddy water swirling around her Huang Rong could not restrain from having a dizzy spell; she raised her head up looking at the sky, did not dare to look directly into the water.

Guo Jing whistled to call the eagles to come and carry them over; but the eagles were afraid of the water. They flew in circles overhead but did not dare to set their feet on the submerged reef.

Huang Rong looked around and saw a big willow tree on the bank toward their left, about a dozen 'zhang's away. Immediately she had an idea, "Jing Gege," she said, "Hold my hand." Guo Jing took a good grip of her left hand. With a splash Huang Rong disappeared into the water.

Guo Jing was startled; he saw she dove to the sunken boat, he quickly stooped down until his upper body also went into the water. He extended his arm as far as possible while his legs firmly gripped a sticking rock on the reef. With all his strength his right hand gripped her left wrist, lest the current was too strong and he lost his grip, then she might never be able to come up.

Huang Rong dove toward the mast; she pulled down the sail rope, then wound it around the reef. Next, her hands alternately pulled the sail rope until she got about twenty 'zhang's of rope; then she took out her dagger and cut the rope down. Afterwards she extended her arm, calling the female eagle to perch on her shoulder.

By now the pair of eagles was grown and they were quite heavy. Guo Jing was afraid Huang Rong could not take it, so he extended his arm to take the eagle. Huang Rong wound the end of the rope to the female eagle's foot, she pointed to the big willow tree and made a hand signal telling the eagle to fly.

The eagle took the rope and flew in circle several times above the willow tree, then flew back. Huang Rong anxiously said, "Ay! I told you to fly around the tree before coming back." But of course the eagle did not understand what she said, so Huang Rong sighed anxiously. They tried again and on the eight try the eagle coincidentally flew around the tree and came back. Jing and Rong two people were delighted; they pulled the rope to tighten it, then firmly tied the other end to the protruding rock on the reef.

"Rong'er, you go first," Guo Jing said.

"No," Huang Rong replied, "I am staying with you. Let her go first."

Ying Gu stared hard at them. Without saying anything using both hands she pulled herself along the rope, coming ashore.

Huang Rong laughed, "This is my way of having fun when I was little. Master Guo, please be generous with your rewards!" With one leap she landed on the tight rope and utilizing her lightness kungfu to the fullest she walked along the rope just like a tight-rope walker; brandishing her bamboo stick, traversing the great waves of the rushing river below, toward the willow tree on the shore.

Guo Jing had not learned the same trick, he was afraid to make a wrong step, so he did not dare to fool around like her. Just like Ying Gu, he used both hands to pull himself hanging on the rope, heading to the shore.

He was still about several 'zhang's from the shore when suddenly he heard Huang Rong called out, "Hey, where are you going?" She sounded baffled. Guo Jing was afraid Ying Gu had not come to her senses and did something foolish, so he sped up and before even arrived at the willow tree he jumped down.

Huang Rong pointed to the south and said, "She is leaving."

Guo Jing focused his eyes and saw Ying Gu was running with all her might over the rocky mountain path. "Her mind is confused, I am afraid she would hurt herself. Let us pursue her," he said.

"All right!" Huang Rong said; lifting up her legs she was ready to run, but suddenly her legs went weak and she fell sitting down, shaking her head.

Guo Jing knew that she had used excessive strength after the injury; she was exhausted and did not have enough energy to run. "Just sit here and take a rest, I will pursue her and take her back," he said. Immediately he ran toward the direction Ying Gu was last seen; but after crossing a plain in front of him was a fork on the road going three separate directions. Ying Gu's shadow was nowhere to be seen; he did not know which way she took. Here the rocks were big, the grass reached his chest; everywhere he looked he did not see anybody else. Meanwhile the sun was setting behind the

mountain, the sky was turning dark; he was afraid Huang Rong would be worried over him, so he decided to go back.

Two people spent the night among the rocks, hungry and tired. At daybreak they woke up and started to walk along the small pathway by the river banks. They had to find their little red horse before coming back to the main road.

After walking for half a day they found a small inn by the roadside; they bought three chickens, one for them to eat, while with the other two they fed their eagles. The pair of eagles perched on top of a tall tree, eating their cockerels that the feathers fluttered down like snowfall.

They were eating heartily when suddenly the female eagle let out a long cry, dropped the half-eaten cockerel, raised its wing and flew to the north. The male eagle followed its mate with an anxious cry.

“Those two eagles sound very angry, I wonder what they saw?” Guo Jing said.

“Let’s take a look,” Huang Rong said. Two people ran along the main road. They saw the eagles fly in circles in the distance; suddenly they swooped down and soared up again. They circled several more times, then swooped down again.

“They are fighting an enemy,” Guo Jing said.

They sped up their steps and after about two, three ‘li’s they saw a row of houses standing very close to each other; it was a small town. The pair of eagles circled above this town, it seemed like they had lost their enemy’s track. Guo Jing and Huang Rong hastened to the outskirts of the town; they tried to call their eagles down, but the eagles ignored them, they kept circling above as if they were still looking for the enemy.

“I wonder with whom do these eagles have big enmity with,” Guo Jing said.

Only some times later the pair of eagles finally did come down one after another. The male eagle’s left foot was dripping with blood from a really deep saber cut; looked like if its muscle and bone were not strong, that foot would be chopped through. The female eagle’s right claw was firmly grabbing a piece of blackish object. They looked closer and found out that it was a piece of human scalp, with a big clump of hair on it. It looked like the scalp was freshly plucked right from a head, with stains of blood still around it.

Huang Rong applied some cut wound medicine on the male eagle’s foot. Guo Jing flipped over the scalp he took from the female eagle and muttered, “This pair of eagles is so tame ever since they were small; they had never harmed anybody unless they are provoked, how could they suddenly fight with someone?”

“Something is amiss here,” Huang Rong said, “If we can find this person who lost the scalp, we’ll understand everything.”

Two people went into town and found an inn to spend the night; then they went out separately to inquire. But that town was rather big, with quite a large number of people around; they investigated until dark, but did not find the slightest clue.

“I’ve been everywhere to look for a person without a scalp, but could not find anything,” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong smiled, “A person without scalp could always wear a hat to cover his head,” she said.

“Ah!” Guo Jing exclaimed, suddenly enlightened. He remembered seeing quite a lot of people wearing hat in town, but of course he could not take their hats off one by one to take a look.

By daybreak the pair of eagles came back with their little red horse. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were worried about Hong Qigong’s injury, also the martial art match at the Misty Rain Tavern on the mid-autumn festival was drawing near, besides, the enmity the eagles had with whoever was not that important, so they decided to start their journey to the east immediately.

Two people rode on the speeding little red horse with the pair of eagles followed above them. Along the way Huang Rong kept talking and laughing, playing around, looking a lot more lively than she was; sometimes far into the night she was not willing to take a rest. Guo Jing knew she was exhausted, he often urged her to take a rest, but Huang Rong simply ignored him. Sometimes late at night she sat cross-legged on the bed chit-chatting with him over some trivial matters.

One day from the western Jiangnan road they arrived at the southern road within the Zhejiang border. They had been riding the horse for a whole day. It was not too far from the Eastern Sea shore. They stopped by an inn to spend the night. Huang Rong borrowed a shopping basket from the innkeeper; she wanted to go to town to buy some meat and vegetables to prepare some dishes.

“You are tired after traveling the whole day,” Guo Jing tried to persuade her, “Let us just eat in the restaurant here.”

“I want to cook for you,” Huang Rong replied, “Don’t you like my cooking anymore?”

“Naturally I like your cooking,” Guo Jing said, “But I want you to take a lot of rest. Wait till you are well, then you can cook for me. It won’t be too late, will it?”

“Wait till I am well; at that time ...” Huang Rong said. Her arm carried the shopping basket, one foot had already stepped outside the room, she paused as if she was startled.

Guo Jing did not understand her thought; he gently pulled the shopping basket from her arm and said, “That’s right. Wait till we find Shifu, then we can enjoy the food you prepare together.”

Huang Rong stared blankly for half a day. Finally she returned to the bed and soon she looked like she was asleep. The innkeeper came with their food. Guo Jing called her to eat. Huang Rong jumped out of bed at once and said with a laugh, “Jing Gege, we won’t eat this food, come with me.”

Guo Jing complied and followed her out of the inn, they walked toward downtown. Huang Rong randomly picked a house with white fence wall and black door, a rich family’s house. They circled to the back and leaped over the wall, broke into the house. Guo Jing did not know what was going on, but he followed her nonetheless. Straightaway Huang Rong went to the front hall only to see the hall was bright with candles; the host was having a party.

“Wonderful!” Huang Rong called out in delight, “I picked the right house.” Giggling and walking forward she shouted loud and clear, “Everybody get out of my way!”

There were three banquet tables in the hall; the host and about his thirty guests were startled. They saw her as a beautiful looking young girl; they looked at each other, puzzled. Huang Rong casually seized a fat man, her foot moved to trip that fat man, sending him tumbling to the floor. “You still don’t want to scramble?” she said with a laugh.

The guests scrambled at once in great confusion. The host cried out, “Guards! Where are the guards?”

Amidst the commotion two martial art instructors led about a dozen villagers with sabers and sticks in their hands came rushing in. With a laugh Huang Rong rushed forward and with two moves she flattened the two instructors. She snatched a saber and brandished it, creating a bright white light, pretending she was about to make a kill. The guests screamed in terror; they staggered along and running against each other trying to escape.

As the host saw the unfavorable situation, he tried to slip away; but Huang Rong reached out and pulled his beard, her right hand brandished the saber as if she was going to chop him away. The host was so scared that he dropped to his knees and with a trembling voice said, “Nu ... Nu Da Wang [lit. female big king; ‘Da Wang’ was how the people addressed a robber], Good ... Good Miss; you want gold or silver, I will certainly present everything to you. Please just spare my old life ...”

Huang Rong laughed, “Who wants your money?” she said, “I want you to accompany us to drink.” Grabbing his beard with her left hand she pulled him up. The host was in pain but he did not dare to cry out. Huang Rong pulled Guo Jing along to sit at the head table.

“Everybody sit down!” Huang Rong ordered, “Why are you still standing?” Raising the saber in her hand she hacked down and the saber stuck on the table.

The guests were startled and scared, they crowded around the other two tables, nobody dared to sit at the head table.

Huang Rong shouted, “You don’t want to accompany me drinking, do you? Whoever don’t come over, I’ll butcher him first!”

Everybody rushed forward, shoving and elbowing one another, causing seven, eight chairs to tumble over. Huang Rong shouted again, “You are not three years old, are you? Why can’t you sit nicely?”

Still shoving and elbowing one another the guests scrambled over and after half a day they finally managed to sit nicely around the three banquet tables.

Huang Rong poured herself a cup of wine and gulped it down in one go. “What kind of party is this?” she asked the host, “Anybody died in your family? How many have died?”

The host stammered, “Actually, a child was born for me in my later years. Today he is one month old, so I invited friends, relatives and close neighbors to celebrate.”

Huang Rong laughed, “That’s wonderful! Let me take a look at your child,” she said.

The host turned pale; he was afraid Huang Rong would harm the child, but seeing the saber stuck on the table he did not dare to refuse; he ordered the wet nurse to bring the child out.

Huang Rong held the child in her arms; she looked at his small face under the candlelight, and then she looked up to the host. Leaning her head sideways she said, "He doesn't look the least bit like you; are you sure he is your child?"

The host looked awkward; his whole body quivered, he said, "Yes, yes!" It was unclear if he was saying that the child was his, or he was saying, "What Miss said was true." The guests felt funny, but nobody dared to laugh.

Huang Rong took out a gold ingot from her pocket and gave it to the wet nurse; she also handed over the child back to her. "It's a small gift. Just consider it a first meeting gift from his maternal grandmother," she said.

Everybody could see that she is very young, but she called herself a grandmother; they could also see her grand appearance, she looked both heroic and rich; they looked at each other.

The host was overjoyed with this unexpected turn of events, he repeatedly expressed his thanks.

"Come," Huang Rong said, "I'll toast you one bowl!" She took a big bowl and poured wine to the brim, shoving it in front of the host.

The host said, "This old man's drinking capacity is shallow. Miss, please forgive me."

Huang Rong raised her beautiful eyebrows, stretched out her hand to pull his beard. "Are you or are you not going to drink?" she barked.

The host had no choice but to raise his bowl and 'glug, glug' he drank the whole bowl down.

"That's right!" Huang Rong laughed, "Now we are having fun. Come, we'll have drinking stories."

If she wanted to have drinking stories, who at the banquet table dared to refuse? But the guests around the table were not rich merchant or educated people, only peasants and villagers, how could she find a true scholar among them? Everybody was trembling with fear trying to make up some wild stories.

After a while Huang Rong became impatient and shouted loudly, "Everybody stands aside!"

Like they had just received pardon everybody scrambled to stand up. Suddenly 'boom!' the host fell backward on his chair. Turned out he was totally drunk and could not stand up anymore. Huang Rong burst out in laughter. She kept drinking wine and talking with Guo Jing as if there was nobody else around, letting the guests helplessly standing on the side just watching them.

They were eating and drinking until the first watch of the night. Several times Guo Jing tried to persuade her and finally Huang Rong had enough and was willing to leave.

Returning to their inn Huang Rong asked with a laugh, "Jing Gege, are you having fun today?"

Guo Jing replied, "Without reasons you scared people to their deaths; why bother to come in the first place?"

"I am looking for my own well-being and enjoyment," Huang Rong said, "Why would I bother over other people's life and death?"

Guo Jing was startled; he felt her manner of speaking was rather unusual, but momentarily he could not figure out the profound meaning behind those words.

Huang Rong suddenly said, "I want to go out and take a walk. Are you coming?"

"It's the middle of the night," Guo Jing said, "Where do you want to go?"

"I think that child is amusing," Huang Rong said, "Grandmother wants to hold him and play with him for a few days; then I'll give him back to his family."

"How can you do that?" Guo Jing anxiously said.

Huang Rong only smiled and headed out the door, leaping over the wall. Guo Jing hastily overtook her, pulled her arm trying to stop her, "Rong'er, you have played around for along time," he said, "Don't you have enough?"

"Definitely not enough," Huang Rong stood still and replied. She paused for a second then continued, "I want you to keep me company. Only then will I have enough fun. In a few more days you will leave me, you will be with that Princess Huazheng; she definitely won't let you see me again. Our time together is numbered. Each day that passed means one less day I am with you. I want to make one day lasts like two days, like three days, like four days. Still it's not enough for me. Jing Gege, I don't want to sleep at night, I want to play around and talk with you. Do you understand my feelings? Please don't try to stop me."

Guo Jing grabbed her hands tight, he felt deep compassion and love. "Rong'er," he said, "I am so dumb, I have never realized you have this kind of love to me. I ... I ..." Speaking to this point he actually did not know what else to say.

Huang Rong smiled slightly. "Father used to teach me to read many classic poems about anxiety, about hatred, and the like. I only know that he missed my departed mother, that's why he loved to read about those kinds of things. Today I discovered that happiness and joy only come for a moment, but pain and suffering are the matters of a lifetime."

The crescent moon rose atop the willow tree, the night was as cold as the water, gentle breeze brushed their clothes. Initially Guo Jing was ignorant, even though he knew Huang Rong's deep feelings toward him, he did not realize she loved him this much. As he listened to her speaking, everything that happened all throughout that day became clear to him. He said in his heart, "I am a crude and straightforward man. In the future I won't be with her. Although I will certainly think about her often, miss her, eventually I will get over her. But what about her? She will live alone on the Peach Blossom Island with only her father to keep her company. Won't she be lonely?" He thought further, "Someday her father will die, then only some deaf and mute servants will accompany her. She loves to have new ideas, doing new things. With nobody to accompany her, won't she die of boredom?"

Thinking about these things his body trembled involuntarily. His grip on her hands tightened, his eyes stared hard at her face. “Rong’er,” he said, “Even if the sky falls down, I want to be with you on the Peach Blossom Island for as long as I live!”

Huang Rong trembled, she raised her head and said, “You ... what did you say?”

Guo Jing said, “I don’t care about Genghis Khan, about Princess Huazheng. All my life I want to be with you.”

Huang Rong let out a soft cry and buried her head in his bosom. Guo Jing stretched out his arms and embraced her tightly. This matter had been vexing him for a while. This moment, ignoring everything else he suddenly made up his mind; his heart felt happy and relieved. Two people hugged each other tightly; they had forgotten everything else around them.

After a while Huang Rong gently asked, “What about your mother?”

“I will fetch her and take her to the Peach Blossom Island,” Guo Jing replied.

“Aren’t you afraid of your master, Jebeh, and your sworn brother Tuolei?” Huang Rong asked again.

“They love me very much, but I can’t have a divided heart,” Guo Jing answered.

“What about your six masters of Jiangnan? What about Ma Daozhang [Taoist Priest], Qiu Daozhang? What will they say?” Huang Rong asked.

Guo Jing heaved a sigh and said, “They will surely be enraged, but I will slowly talk to them earnestly. Rong’er, you must not leave me, I also won’t leave you.”

Huang Rong said with a laugh, “I have an idea. We can go hiding on the Peach Blossom Island and do not come out forever. My father arranged the island in such a mysterious way that even if they come to the island, they won’t be able to find you and scold you.”

Guo Jing thought this idea of hers might not be appropriate; he was about to ask her of a better idea when suddenly they heard footsteps about a dozen ‘zhang’s away outside the room. Two night-walkers were using their lightness kungfu rushing from the south heading north. One of them said, “The Old Urchin has fallen into Brother Peng’s trick; we don’t have to be afraid of him. Let us go quickly.”

**End of Chapter 32.**

## Chapter 33 – Upcoming Disaster

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Huang Rong cursed, “Do you want to die?” and pushed lightly on Lingzhi Shangren’s shoulder. Without answering that monk tumbled to the ground face up, his hands and his feet did not move, maintaining the cross-legged sitting position; he looked very strange.*

At this moment Guo Jing and Huang Rong were enjoying happiness and contentment in their hearts; they did not want to mind other people's business. But hearing 'The Old Urchin' three characters their hearts were stirred. They both jumped at the same time and pursued those two men. The men's martial art skills looked ordinary; they did not have the slightest idea that they were being followed. Leaving the town they ran for about five, six 'li's more before turning into a valley. They heard continuous shouts and curses coming from behind the mountain.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong picked up their speed and followed into the valley. They saw that a bunch of people were gathered on a part of a field. Two of them had torches in their hands. In the middle of the field Zhou Botong was sitting motionless. It was not clear if he was alive or dead. Facing Zhou Botong there was someone sitting cross-legged, wearing a red kassaya; it was Lingzhi Shangren [lit. upper/above man, a respectful term to address Buddhist monk]. He too, was motionless. On Zhou Botong's left there was a cave. Its entrance was small, so anybody wanted to enter must stoop down. Outside the cave there were five, six people shouting and cursing, but nobody dared to get within a few 'zhang's of the cave, as if they were afraid something might come out of the cave and hurt them.

Guo Jing recalled one of the night walkers say, "The Old Urchin has fallen into Brother Peng's trick;" and now he saw Zhou Botong was sitting motionless just like a corpse. He was afraid that Zhou Botong was injured; he was very anxious and was about to jump forward when Huang Rong pulled his arm and whispered, "Before we do anything, let's investigate what happened first."

Two people hid behind a mountain rock and looked at the people outside the cave. It turned out they were all old acquaintances: Shen Xian Lao Guai [Ginseng Immortal Old Freak] Liang Ziweng, Gui Men Long Wang [Dragon King of Guimen (lit. ghost gate)] Sha Tongtian, Qian Shou Ren Tu [Thousand Hands Butcher] Peng Lianhu, San Tou Jiao [Three Headed Scaly Dragon] Hou Tonghai, plus the two night-walkers they followed earlier. The light from the torches illuminated their faces and Jing and Rong recognized those two as Liang Ziweng's disciples; Guo Jing had fought them the first time he learned the Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms.

Huang Rong thought that now these people were not Guo Jing's and her matches; she looked to all directions but did not see anybody else. With a low voice she said, "With the Old Urchin's skill, how could these several fellows defeat him? It seems like the Western Poison Ouyang Feng is lurking somewhere."

She was about to think of a way to investigate further when Peng Lianhu shouted loud and clear, "Thief male servant bird! [I know this one sounds weird, but it is the literal translation. I'll leave it to the editors to find a more suitable curse words ... ☺] If you don't come out, Old Man here will smoke you out!"

From the cave came a stern voice, "Whatever stinky tricks you have; bring it on!"

Guo Jing recognized it was his Da Shifu [First Master] Ke Zhen'e's voice; he did not care if Ouyang Feng was lurking around somewhere. "Shifu!" he shouted, "Your disciple Guo Jing is here!" His hands had already made some moves while he was still shouting. He grabbed Hou Tonghai's back and flung him aside.

The people outside the cave were thrown into confusion. Sha Tongtian and Peng Lianhu made a simultaneous attack. Liang Ziweng turned around Guo Jing's back, ready to make a sneak attack.

Ke Zhen'Inside the cave heard everything; he raised his hand and launched a 'du ling' [poisonous water caltrop] toward Liang Ziweng's back.

The projectile carried a fierce gust of wind. Liang Ziweng hastily lowered his head; the 'du ling' flew over his head, cutting several strands of his hair. He was so shocked that cold sweats trickled down his back. He knew Ke Zhen'e's secret projectiles contained a violent poison on it; the other day Peng Lianhu nearly got killed under this weapon. Hastily he leaped back several 'zhang's, stretched out his hand to feel the top of his head. Luckily his scalp was not injured. Straightaway he took some 'tou gu ding' [Bone Penetrating Nails] from his pocket and walked quietly toward the left of the cave; he wanted to enter the cave to extract his revenge.

He was just about to raise his hand when suddenly his wrist was numb; something hit his hand. With a clanking noise the 'tou gu ding' fell to the ground. And then he heard a female voice said with a laugh, "Kneel down! Or you'll eat my stick!"

Liang Ziweng quickly turned his head and saw Huang Rong stood smiling, with a bamboo stick in her hand. He was scared and angry at the same time; his left palm struck toward her shoulder, his right hand tried to grab the bamboo stick. Huang Rong stepped aside to evade his left palm, but did not move the bamboo stick, she let him to have a good grip on it. Liang Ziweng was delighted, he held out his hand, thinking that if this young girl did not let go, he would snatch the stick away. As soon as he pulled, he did indeed manage to pull the bamboo stick away, but unexpectedly the end of the stick shook and slid right out of his palm. By this time the end of the bamboo stick had entered his circle of defense. His hands were so close to the stick that he hurriedly reached back to grab; but he was too late. A dark green shadow flashed and 'slap!' his head was squarely hit by the bamboo stick.

Overall his martial art skill was not weak; in this critical moment he was still able to throw himself to the ground and he rolled away more than a 'zhang' away before he sprang back up. He looked with a shocked expression at this young girl with bright eyes and ivory teeth. The top of his head was hurting, his mind was confused, and his face looked awkward.

Huang Rong said with a laugh, "Do you know the name of this stick method? You have been beaten by me, so what did you turn into?"

Liang Ziweng had suffered hardship under this Dog Beating Stick Technique in the past; he was beaten half dead and half alive under Hong Qigong's hands. It had been several years since then, but he still had a lingering fear in his heart. He noticed that the stick was indeed Hong Qigong's Dog Beating Stick, and the stick method was indeed Hong Qigong's Dog Beating Stick Technique, used up against him. It looked like this young girl was truly Hong Qigong's heir. With the corner of his eyes he saw Sha and Peng two people continuously step back under the power of Guo Jing's palms without being able to counterattack; he called out, "In honor of the Old Hong Bangzhu [Clan Leader Hong] we'd better go!" He called out his two disciples and turned around to flee.

Guo Jing's left elbow circled around forcing Sha Tongtian to retreat three steps; followed by the sweep of his left hand. Peng Lianhu saw that this palm carried a strong gust of wind, he did not dare to take it head-on, he hastily stepped aside to evade. Guo Jing's right hand made a hook, grabbed his back and lifted him up.

Peng Lianhu was rather short, being lifted high in the air his legs were kicking around frantically. He tried to hit and kick to free himself, but he did not have any strength left. He saw Guo Jing's left hand make a fist, ready to strike his chest like a hammer pounding a nail; how could he endure this strike? He hastily shouted, "What date is today?"

"What?" Guo Jing was startled.

"Are you going to keep a good faith? Do you stay true to your own promise?" Peng Lianhu asked.

"What?" Guo Jing asked again; his right hand was still holding Peng Lianhu high in the air.

"We have agreed to have a martial art contest in Jiaxing on the fifteenth of the eighth month, at the Misty Rain Tavern," Peng Lianhu said, "We are not in Jiaxing, and today is not the Mid-autumn Festival. How can you injure me?"

Guo Jing thought he was right; he was about to release him when suddenly he remembered something. "What did you do to my Zhou Dage [big brother Zhou]?"

Peng Lianhu replied, "The Old Urchin is betting against that Tibetan monk; whoever moves first lose. What does it have to do with me?"

Guo Jing cast a glance toward the two people sitting on the ground, he felt relieved. "So that's how it is," he thought. Then he shouted, "Da Shifu [first master], are you Senior well?" Ke Zhen'e only uttered an 'Hm' sound from inside the cave.

Guo Jing was afraid as soon as he let Peng Lianhu go, he would kick him on the chest; hence with his right hand he flung Peng Lianhu several feet away, while calling out, "Off you go!"

Peng Lianhu took that opportunity to somersault and land on the ground. He saw Sha Tongtian and Liang Ziwen had already run away. He inwardly scolded them for not remembering their friend. He cupped his fists toward Guo Jing and said, "Seven days later at Misty Rain Tavern we will decide victory and defeat." He turned around and displaying his 'qing gong' [lightness kungfu] he ran away. He was wondering about one thing, "Each time I meet this kid, his martial art is improving by leaps and bounds. Isn't that strange? Did he eat some magic pills or find some immortal secret?"

Huang Rong went toward Zhou Botong and Lingzhi Shangren; she noticed that both of them were staring at each other without blinking their eyes. Looking at the situation she recalled the conversation between those two night-walkers and knew that this must be Peng Lianhu's evil scheme. They must be scared of the Old Urchin's martial art, so they tricked him into making a bet against this Tibetan monk to stay still. Lingzhi Shangren's martial art was nowhere near the Old Urchin's; but by keeping him from moving, others would have the opportunity to deal with Ke Zhen'e.

The Old Urchin would be happy to have someone accompany him to play; he would not care about other matters, so it would be useless to speak reason with him. Although there was an earth-shattering fight going on next to him, he would sit still like Taishan [Mount Tai]; he would not even move his little finger, he was determined to win his bet against Lingzhi Shangren.

"Old Urchin! I'm here!" Huang Rong called out.

Zhou Botong heard her, but he was afraid to lose, so he did not respond.

Huang Rong said, “The way you bet, even if you sit for several more hours you won’t know who wins and who loses; what kind of fun is that? You know what, let me do this: I will tickle both of you on your ‘xiao yao xue’ [laugh waist acupoint] with my both hands; I will make both hands have the same strength. Whoever laughs first will lose.”

Zhou Botong had been sitting impatiently; hearing Huang Rong’s words he agreed wholeheartedly, but he did not dare to show his approval. Huang Rong did not say anything more, she went in between the two and sat down. She put her Dog Beating Stick on the ground and stretched both arms, two index fingers hit both men’s ‘xiao yao xue’. She knew Zhou Botong’s internal energy far surpassed the Tibetan monk’s, so she was not being unfair; she exerted equal strength. But to her surprise while Zhou Botong admittedly did not move, Lingzhi Shangren also seemed like he did not feel anything.

Huang Rong secretly admired him; she thought, “This monk’s skill in closing up his acupoints is really good. If I were hit like this, I would have rolled around in laughter.” Then she exerted more strength to her hands.

Zhou Botong used his internal energy trying hard to resist the strength of Huang Rong’s finger; but this ‘xiao yao xue’ was located very close to the ribs, the muscle was very tender, it was very difficult to send the energy to that spot. If he straightened up his back he could borrow the momentum from the movement to unload the strength; but that would cause him to move and lose the bet. He felt Huang Rong’s finger getting stronger and stronger, he had no choice but desperately resist her finger.

A moment later he could not take it any longer, the muscle under his ribs contract and expand to repel Huang Rong’s finger. He leaped up and laughed out loud, saying, “Fat Monk, you are good! The Old Urchin admits defeat!”

Seeing him admit defeat, Huang Rong was regretful, “If I knew this would happen, I would have add a little more strength to the fat monk’s body,” she thought; and then she stood up and said toward Lingzhi Shangren, “You won. Your grand-aunt does not want your life. Just go! Go!”

Interestingly Lingzhi Shangren seemed not to hear her; he was still sitting motionless. Huang Rong put out a hand and pushed his shoulder, while shouted loudly, “Who wants to see your stupid face here? Do you want to die?” She only pushed lightly, but to her surprise Lingzhi Shangren fell down to the ground, still in the cross-legged sitting position, just like a wooden carving of Buddha.

Zhou Botong, Jing and Rong were stunned. Huang Rong thought, “Could it be that his closing up acupoints skill is not perfected yet and he died while doing it?” She held out her hand to feel his breathing and found that Lingzhi Shangren was still breathing. Immediately she understood what was going on; she was angry but amused at the same time. To Zhou Botong she said, “Old Urchin, you fell into others’ trick without knowing it. You are really dumb!”

Zhou Botong opened his eyes wide. “What?” he was angry.

Huang Rong said with a smile, “You unseal his acupoints first, then we’ll talk.”

Zhou Botong rolled his eyes then he stooped down and traced Lingzhi Shangren's body. He tapped several places and found out that eight of Lingzhi Shangren's major acupoints were sealed by someone else. He jumped up in anger and shouted, "That did not count! That did not count!"

"What did not count?" Huang Rong asked.

Zhou Botong replied, "His friends sealed up his acupoints after he was seated, of course this fat monk could not move. Even if we sit for three more days and nights he won't lose." Turning toward Lingzhi Shangren lying on the ground, he called out, "Come, we'll compete again."

Seeing Zhou Botong was exuberant, he was not by any means injured, Guo Jing was worried about his Shifu. He no longer listened to Zhou Botong talking nonsense, he sneaked into the cave to see Ke Zhen'E without saying anything.

Zhou Botong stooped down to unseal Lingzhi Shangren's acupoints while talking nonstop, "Come, we'll compete again, we'll compete again!"

Huang Rong coldly said, "What about my Shifu? Where did you throw him?"

Zhou Botong was taken aback. "Aiyo!" he cried and turned around, rushing toward the cave. He moved so abruptly that he almost collided with Guo Jing at the cave entrance. Guo Jing was holding Ke Zhen'E's hand, leading him out of the cave. He saw his Shifu was wearing plain white cloth and white headband; Guo Jing was startled, "Shifu!" he asked, "Have any of your family members died? Where are Er Shifu [Second Master] and the others?"

Ke Zhen'E raised his head to the sky without saying anything, two lines of tears flowed down on his cheeks. Guo Jing was shocked, but did not dare to ask. Then he saw Zhou Botong was helping someone else going out of the cave. That person's left hand was holding a wine gourd, his right hand holding half a chicken, his mouth busily nibble on the chicken leg, a broad smile on his face, and he kept nodding his head. He was none other than the Nine-fingered Divine Beggar Hong Qigong.

Jing and Rong two people were overjoyed, "Shifu!" they called out together.

Ke Zhen'E's face suddenly appeared very angry; he lifted up the iron staff and fiercely hit the back of Huang Rong's head. The staff movement was swift and fierce, it was a lethal strike from the 'fu mo zhang fa' [demon subduing staff technique], which he had painstakingly trained to perfection in the Mongolian desert, with the intention to use it against the blinded Mei Chaofeng. It was created so that even though Mei Chaofeng could hear the staff's wind, she would not be able to evade it.

Huang Rong had just seen Hong Qigong after a long time and was squealing with delight; she had never guarded against any sneak attack from her back. By the time she was feeling the wind, the blast of the iron staff had already enveloped her completely. Guo Jing saw the staff was about to shatter her skull, in his desperation his left hand swept horizontally shoving the staff aside; while his right hand stretched out and grabbed the head of the staff. In panic he had used too much power, without realizing that by this time his strength had increased tremendously. The move of his left palm was from the Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms.

Ke Zhen'E felt a sudden surge of strong energy. He was unable to block and the iron staff fell down from his hand, he himself also tumbling down to the ground. Guo Jing was startled; hastily he

stooped down to pick him up. “Da Shifu! [First Master]” he called out. Guo Jing saw Ke Zhen’e’s nose was swollen and two of his teeth were broken.

Ke Zhen’e spat the teeth, along with some blood, into his palm. “For you!” he said in a cold voice.

Guo Jing was dumbstruck. He knelt down and said, “Disciple deserves to die. Shifu, please punish me severely.”

Ke Zhen’e was still holding out his hand, saying, “For you!”

Guo Jing wept. “Da Shifu ...” He choked, not knowing what to say or do.

Zhou Botong laughed and said, “I’ve seen master beating his disciple, but I’ve never seen disciple beating his master until today. Amusing! Truly amusing!”

Hearing this Ke Zhen’e was more furious. “Fine,” he said, “There is a saying: swallow the knocked down tooth and the blood. Shall I do it for you?” Holding out his hand he tossed the teeth into his mouth, throwing his head backward he swallowed the teeth into his belly. Zhou Botong clapped his hands, burst out in laughter and cheered loudly.

Huang Rong noticed the situation was unusual. The grievous expression on Ke Zhen’e’s face had not disappeared. It was unclear why he wanted to kill her; her heart was full of questions. Slowly she went to Hong Qigong and pulled his hand.

Guo Jing knocked his head to the ground and said, “Even if I have to die ten thousands times, disciple will never dare to offend Da Shifu. I was out of my mind to let my hand slip and struck Da Shifu.”

Ke Zhen’e said, “Shifu this and Shifu that, who is your Shifu? You have the Master of the Peach Blossom Island as your father-in-law, why would you need a Shifu? The Seven Freaks of Jiangnan do not have the ability, how can we be worthy to be Guo Daye’s [big master Guo] Shifu?”

Guo Jing heard his words were getting sharper and sharper; he kept knocking his head to the ground.

Finally Hong Qigong could not bear it much longer; he interrupted by saying, “Ke Daxia [Great Hero Ke], Master and disciple spar with each other, somebody losing control is a common occurrence. The stance Jing’er used just now was taught by me. Just blame it on the Old Beggar. Please accept my apology.” And he did indeed cup his fists in respect.

Listening to Hong Qigong, Zhou Botong thought, “Why don’t I say something too?” Thereupon he said, “Ke Daxia, Master and disciple spar with each other, somebody losing control is a common occurrence. The technique Brother Guo Jing used to grab your iron staff just now was taught by me. Just blame it on the Old Urchin. Please accept my apology.” And he also cupped his fists in respect.

He was just talking nonsense and meant it as a joke, but Ke Zhen’e was livid. He believed Zhou Botong intentionally insulted him, and as a result he also regarded Hong Qigong’s good intention as a bad one. With a loud voice he said, “You, Eastern Heretic, Western Poison, Southern Emperor and Northern Beggar, always think that your martial art skills are matchless and you can turn this

world upside-down? Humph! I say many of your deeds are not righteous, certainly nothing good comes out of you.”

With a surprised voice Zhou Botong asked, “Hey, what did the Southern Emperor do to you that you include him in your curse?”

Huang Rong was listening quietly on the side; she knew the more they talked, the worse the situation had become. The Old Urchin being there would only make it more difficult to make Ke Zhen’E’s fury subsided. She opened her mouth and said, “Old Urchin, ‘the weaving of mandarin ducks desiring to fly together right away’ is looking for you; aren’t you going to see her?”

Zhou Botong was startled; he jumped three feet into the air and shouted, “What?!?”

Huang Rong said, “She wants to ‘stand face to face taking a bath wearing red clothes when the green spring grass ripples in the deepest of dawn’s cold’ with you.”

Zhou Botong was even more shocked. “Where? Where?” he shouted.

Huang Rong pointed to the south and said, “Over there! Go see her, quick!”

Zhou Botong said, “I won’t see her. Good Miss, I will do whatever you tell me to do; just don’t ever tell her that you have seen me ...” Before he even finished talking, his feet moved and he ran to the north.

“I’ll hold on to your promise!” Huang Rong called out.

From a distant came Zhou Botong’s reply, “Once the Old Urchin make a promise, I won’t regret it.” As the words ‘regret it’ came out of his mouth, like a flash of lightning his shadow had already disappeared.

Huang Rong’s original intention was for him to see Ying Gu. Who would have thought that Zhou Botong avoided Ying Gu like a serpent or a scorpion and ran away from her in fear. It totally blew her mind away; nevertheless she succeeded in getting rid of him.

Up to this time Guo Jing was still kneeling in front of Ke Zhen’E. With tears in his eyes, he said, “For disciple’s sake Seven Shifus had traveled to a faraway desert. Even if disciple’s body is ground to dust and my bones are shattered, it will still be difficult for me to repay Seven Shifus’ kindness. This palm of mine had offended Da Shifu, disciple does not want it anymore!” Drawing the dagger from his waist Guo Jing chopped it down on his left wrist.

Ke Zhen’E swung his iron staff horizontally, striking the dagger to the side. Although the dagger was light and the iron staff heavy, when the two weapons collided sparks flew up; Ke Zhen’E felt a tingling sensation on his palms. He knew Guo Jing was using his entire strength, thus showing his sincerity.

“Fine,” he said, “If that’s the case, then you must do what I say.”

Guo Jing was very happy. “Whatever Da Shifu says, disciple will not dare to disobey,” he said.

“If you don’t do what I say, I forbid you to see my face in the future and thus our master-disciple relationship is severed,” Ke Zhen’E said.

Guo Jing said, “Disciple will do my best. If I can’t do it, I’d rather die.”

Ke Zhen’E struck his iron staff heavily on the ground and shouted, “Go and cut the Old Heretic Huang’s and his daughter’s heads; then you can come back to see me.”

To say Guo Jing was shocked was an understatement. “Da ... Shi ... Shifu ...” he stammered with a trembling voice.

“What?” Ke Zhen’E asked.

“I wonder how did Huang Daozhu [Island Master Huang] offend you?” Guo Jing asked.

Ke Zhen’E heaved two heavy sighs. Suddenly he gritted his teeth and said, “I really wish the Heaven would restore my sight if only for a moment so I can see your face; you, an ungrateful little animal!” Lifting his iron staff high he hacked it down toward the top of Guo Jing’s head.

As Ke Zhen’E asked Guo Jing to do something for him, Huang Rong had already had a vague guess. When Ke Zhen’E’s iron staff suddenly struck and Guo Jing did not evade, she thought whatever happened, saving Guo Jing’s life was more important; hence from the side her bamboo stick intercepted the iron staff before it reached Guo Jing’s head with the ‘e gou lan lu’ [cutting off a vicious dog’s path] stance. As it hit the iron staff, the bamboo stick shook and coiled around the staff, pushing it slanting sideways. This Dog Beating Stick Technique was truly marvelous; although her strength was inferior, by borrowing the staff’s strength she managed to re-orient its path.

Ke Zhen’E staggered; without waiting for his feet to come to a complete stop he fiercely beat his own chest twice and then ran away to the north. Guo Jing ran after him while calling out, “Da Shifu, wait!”

Ke Zhen’E halted his steps and turned around; with a stern voice he said, “Guo Daye wants to take my old life?” His expression looked mean and ferocious. Guo Jing was taken aback; he did not dare to continue. Hanging his head down he heard the sound of the iron staff against the ground getting farther and farther away, before completely faded away. Remembering his Shifu’s kindness he could not help but go down on his knees and wept bitterly.

Taking Huang Rong’s hand Hong Qigong walked to his side. He said, “Ke Daxia and the Old Heretic Huang both have a very strange temperament; they are always in some kind of disagreement with each other. Don’t worry, leave it to the Old Beggar to be the mediator between them.”

Guo Jing wiped his tears and stood up. “Shifu,” he said, “Do you know ... do you know what it was about?”

Hong Qigong shook his head. “The Old Urchin fell into their trick and was betting against them in staying still. Those traitors wanted to harm me. Luckily we met your Da Shifu outside the Ox Village by accident, and he protected me by taking me hiding in this cave. Thanks to the fierceness of his ‘du ling’ secret projectiles those traitors did not dare to rush in, so we could hold our ground this long. Ay, your Da Shifu has a noble heart, he was very brave in battle defending justice. He

accompanied me in that cave resisting the enemy. Undoubtedly he was determined to fight to the death.”

Speaking to this point he took two mouthfuls of wine, and then took a bite on the chicken leg. Biting and chewing the chicken went into his belly; and then he wiped his greasy mouth with his sleeve. Only then did he continued speaking, “The battle was fierce; my martial art skill is gone. I could not offer any help in fighting the enemy. I only saw your Da Shifu’s face, but did not have the luxury of talking to him about anything. Judging from how he was very angry, I don’t think it was because of your slip of hand. He is a chivalrous hero, how can he have such a narrow mind? Luckily in just a few more days it will be the Mid-autumn Festival of the eight month. Wait till the martial art contest at the Misty Rain Tavern is over, the Old Beggar will speak on your behalf.” Swallowing his tears Guo Jing uttered his gratitude.

Hong Qigong laughed and said, “Your two babies’ martial art skills have advanced tremendously. Ke Daxia can be considered a prominent character in the Wulin world, yet as soon as you two babies made your moves he fell into awkward positions. What is the story behind it?”

In his heart Guo Jing was ashamed; he did not know what to say. Laughing and giggling Huang Rong told Hong Qigong everything they went through after they were separated.

Hong Qigong cheered loudly when he heard that Yang Kang killed Ouyang Ke; he shot curse words when he heard the Beggar Clan’s Elders were swindled by Yang Kang, “Little Bastard! Four old muddle-headed! Lu Youjiao has feet does not have brain!” He was entranced when he listened to how Yideng Dashi [Reverend Yideng – great master Yideng] saved Huang Rong’s life; and how Ying Gu came at midnight to seek vengeance. Finally his expression slightly changed when he heard Ying Gu suddenly went insane at the ‘qing long tan’ [green dragon shore]. “Ah!” he exclaimed.

“Shifu, what is it?” Huang Rong asked, “Do you also know Ying Gu?” While in her heart she mused, “All his life Shifu has never had a wife. Could it be that he was also mesmerized by Ying Gu? Hmm, what’s so good about this Ying Gu anyway? Mystifying, acting like a mad woman, but can captivate the attention of so many experts of the Wulin world?” Luckily Hong Qigong’s answer was pleasing to her ears.

“Nothing,” Hong Qigong said, “I don’t know Ying Gu, but when Emperor Duan left home [meaning: become a monk], I was there by his side. That day he sent a letter to the north, inviting me to go to the south. I knew he wouldn’t send for the Old Beggar if he did not have a very important matter. I also remembered Yunnan’s ham, the ‘over the bridge’ rice-flour noodle, and the chunk of cakes and delicacies; so I left at once. When I saw him, his face was haggard, like he was suffering from a serious illness; it was completely different from when I saw him during the Sword Meet of Mount Hua, where he looked alive with a dragon or a tiger’s appearance. I felt very strange. After I have been there for a few days with the pretense of discussing martial art he wanted to teach me the ‘xian tian gong’ [inborn/innate strength/energy] and ‘yi yang zhi’ [solitary yang finger]. The Old Beggar thought: in the past his Solitary Yang Finger was in a level ground with my Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms, the Old Poison’s Toad Stance, the Old Heretic Huang’s ‘pi kong zhang’ [splitting the air palm] and Divine Flicking Finger; nowadays he had mastered Wang Chongyang’s ‘xian tian gong’. In the second Sword Meet of Mount Hua the title of Number One Martial Artist in the World would certainly belong to him; why would he want to pass on these two special skills to

the Old Beggar, without any reason whatsoever? If he wanted to exchange knowledge, why wasn't he willing to learn my Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms? There must be something behind this.

Later on the Old Beggar mulled over this matter, I talked to him and his four main disciples; finally I found a clue. It turned out that after he passed on these two skills to me he was going to commit suicide. Only why he was grieving so much, even his own disciples were unclear."

Huang Rong said, "Shifu, Emperor Duan was afraid that after he died nobody will be able to control Ouyang Feng anymore."

"That's right," Hong Qigong said, "When I found out, I was adamant of not willing to learn anything from him. At last he told me the truth; he said that although his four disciples were loyal and diligent, their minds have been occupied by the kingdom's affairs for a long time, that they could not concentrate on training martial art, hence it would be difficult for them to achieve success. It seemed like the Quanzhen Seven Masters' martial art also could not reach the pinnacle of perfection. He said it was fine for me not willing to learn the Solitary Yang Finger, but if the 'xian tian gong' is lost, he would not have any face to meet Wang Chongyang Zhenren [lit. true/real person, a respectful term to address a Taoist priest] in the underworld. I asked him to reconsider his decision, but my persuasion was useless. Only, I was unyielding in my stand not to learn from him, with the hope of saving his life. Emperor Duan could not change my mind; finally he relented by abdicating his throne and becoming a monk. I was by his side the day they shaved his head. It has been more than ten years ago. Ay, finally this enmity can be resolved, this is very good."

"Shifu," Huang Rong said, "We have finished telling our story, what about you?"

"About me?" Hong Qigong asked, "Hmm, at the imperial kitchen I ate four dishes of 'yuan yang wu zhen kuai' [minced five-treasure mandarin duck]; it was enough to satiate my craving; and then I ate litchi fruit and kidney, quail soup, sheep tongue in thick sauce, snail in ginger and vinegar sauce, oyster fermented in sheep's tripe ..." on and on he listed the name of the dishes he ate at the imperial kitchen, while constantly swallowing his own saliva and licking his own lips.

"Why is it that later on the Old Urchin could not find you?" Huang Rong interrupted.

Hong Qigong smiled, "The imperial kitchen chefs repeatedly found their prepared dishes vanished into thin air; they thought there was a fox fairy making disturbance in that place, so they burned incense and lighted candles to worship me. Later on they told the chief of the imperial palace guards, who then dispatched eight palace guards to the imperial kitchen to catch the fox. The Old Beggar thought it was a serious situation; and neither the Old Urchin nor his shadow could be seen. I had no choice but slipped away to a remote part to hide for a while. That place was called 'e lu hua tang' [green calyx flower hall] or something, it was full of plum flower trees. From the look of it, it was the winter quarter where that fellow, the Emperor, spends his days enjoying the plum blossoms. Only it was the middle of summer; except several old eunuchs sweeping the ground everyday early in the morning, not even a ghost's shadow came to that place. The Old Beggar was free to roam around. Everywhere in the imperial palace there were things to eat; even a hundred beggars won't die of starvation in that place, thereupon I was able to heal my injury in peace and quiet.

I stayed there for more than ten days. One day in the middle of the night I suddenly heard the Old Urchin's voice pretending to be a ghost; and then the voice turned into dog's howling and cat's meowing. He was turning the palace upside down with the noise. And then I heard some people call

out, 'Hong Qigong, Hong laoyezi [old master Hong], Hong Qigong, Hong laoyezi!' I took a peek. Turned out they were Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian, Liang Ziweng and the other crafty fellows."

"Ah!" Huang Rong exclaimed in surprise, "Why did they look for you?"

"I thought it was very strange too," Hong Qigong said, "As soon as I saw them I went back into hiding. Who would have thought that the Old Urchin had already spotted me. He was ecstatic; he dashed forward and hugged me, saying, 'Thank the heaven and thank the earth for letting me find you at last.' Immediately he ordered Liang Ziweng and the others to follow behind us ..."

"How could Liang Ziweng and the others listen to the Old Urchin's order?" Huang Rong wondered.

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "At that time I was also racking my brain but could not figure out the reason. All I can say was that they were very afraid of the Old Urchin. Whatever he said, they did not dare to disobey. He ordered Liang Ziweng and the others to follow behind us, while he carried me to the Ox Village to find you two people. Along the way he told me that he had looked for me everywhere but could not find me, he was very worried. And then quite by accident he bumped into Liang Ziweng and the others by the city wall. In his frustration he beat each and every one of them really bad, and then ordered them to comb all streets and alleys the whole day and the whole night to look for me. He said they had been searching around the imperial palace for a while, but the palace was huge while I was hiding in a remote place. All throughout, they did not see me."

Huang Rong said with a smile, "I did not expect the Old Urchin to be that smart, able to make those devil heads to follow his orders obediently. I wonder why they did not run away."

Hong Qigong smiled and said, "The Old Urchin employed a mischievous trick. He rubbed some dirt from his body and made more than a dozen pills. He forced them to take three pills for each person, said that this poison would react in seven by seven, forty nine days. The poison was so lethal and nobody in the world other than himself would be able to neutralize it. If they were obedient, he would give them the antidote on the forty-eighth day. Although these wicked thieves half believed and half doubted, they certainly could not take a risk with their own lives; in the end they did not have any choice but to believe and they were compelled to listen to the Old Urchin's yelling and screaming, without daring to defy."

Initially Guo Jing was grieving, but hearing Hong Qigong's story he could not help but smile. Hong Qigong continued, "When we arrived at the Ox Village we could not find you two. The Old Urchin again forced them to go out and search for you. Last night they all came back with their heads hung low. The Old Urchin scolded and cursed them. He was getting angrier and angrier until suddenly he said, 'If by tomorrow you still cannot find those two babies Guo Jing and Huang Rong, I will make urine pulp pills and give them to you!' Of course they began to get suspicious and repeatedly provoked him to talk. The Old Urchin was screaming and kicking, finally they found out that the pills they took earlier were not poison at all. I know the situation would turn dangerous; these traitors would certainly create not a small trouble. I told the Old Urchin to kill them all. Who would have thought that Peng Lianhu also saw the danger, immediately he hatched a deception; he told that fat Tibetan monk to compete against the Old Urchin in sitting still in meditation. I could not stop them, and was forced to run out of the Ox Village. I came across Ke Daxia outside the village. He protected me and we ran to this place. Peng Lianhu and the others chased us. Although the Old Urchin was muddle-headed, he knew better than leaving me alone, so he busily overtook us here.

These traitors constantly provoked him, until finally the Old Urchin could not take it anymore and agreed to bet against the monk.”

Listening to this story Huang Rong was both angry and amused at the same time, she said, “If we did not meet them by accident, Shifu, your life would be delivered under the Old Urchin’s hand.”

Hong Qigong said, “My life is almost gone anyway, it doesn’t really matter whose hand will deliver it away.”

Huang Rong suddenly remembered something. “Shifu,” she said, “That day when we came back from Ming Xia Dao [bright red clouds island] ...”

“It’s not Ming Xia Dao, it’s ‘ya gui dao’ [crushing ghost island],” Hong Qigong interrupted.

“Fine,” Huang Rong smiled slightly, “It’s Ya Gui Dao then. Now, that Ouyang Ke is not the least bit a fake ghost, he is a real ghost. That day when we rescued Ouyang Feng uncle and nephew, on the wooden raft the Old Poison said that there was one man in this whole wide world who can heal your injury. Only this person’s martial art is matchless; so we can’t use force against him, and you are not willing to harm others to benefit yourself by asking him to help you. At that time you were not willing to mention this person’s name. Later on Jing Gege and I went to Xiangxi. Naturally now we know that other than Emperor Duan then, or Reverend Yideng now, there is no one else.”

Hong Qigong sighed, “If he used Yiyang Zhi [Solitary Yang Finger] to attack my ‘qi jing ba mai’ [lit. marvelous/mysterious passage 8 pulses, Kwok & Huang Yushi from Wuxiapedia translated it as: Eight Extraordinary Channels], without a doubt he would heal my injury. But this kind of skill will injure his own internal strength for as long as five years or as few as three years, it’s hard to say. Let’s just say that he does not care about the second Sword Meet of Mount Hua, but he is already over sixty years of age; just how much longer is he going to live? How can the Old Beggar open his mouth and ask for his help?”

“Shifu,” Guo Jing said happily, “This is great! We don’t need anybody’s help, I can go through your ‘qi jing ba mai’.”

Hong Qigong was surprised, “What?” he asked.

Huang Rong said, “Jing Gege recited that babbling and mumbling part from the Manual and Reverend Yideng has translated it for us. He told us to tell you, Senior, to use this technique to open your own ‘qi jing ba mai’.” Straightaway she recited Yideng’s translation from memory.

After listening to this Hong Qigong pondered for a long time, and then he jumped in joy and exclaimed, “Wonderful! Wonderful! I believe I will need only about one and a half year to recover.”

Huang Rong said, “In the Misty Rain Tavern martial art contest our opponent will surely invite Ouyang Feng to help their side. The Old Urchin’s martial art might not be inferior to his, but he is a wild person. I am afraid he won’t show up during the competition time. We must go to the Peach Blossom Island to get my father’s help to ensure victory.”

“What you said is not wrong,” Hong Qigong said, “I will go to Jiaxing first, the two of you go to the Peach Blossom Island.”

Guo Jing was reluctant to leave his shifu, he insisted on escorting Hong Qigong to Jiaying. Hong Qigong said, "I will ride your little red horse. If there is any problem along the way, the Old Beggar will just run away. Who can chase after me?" Immediately he mounted the horse. With a couple of 'glug, glug' he drank his wine, and then pressed the horse's belly with his legs. The little red horse let out a long neigh toward Guo Jing and Huang Rong, as if it did not want to leave them, and then galloped like the wind to the north.

Guo Jing watched until he could not see Hong Qigong's shadow anymore, he also recalled how Ke Zhen'EWanted to kill Huang Rong, his heart was heavy. Huang Rong did not try to comfort him. She went alone to find a boat for hire then they set sail toward the Peach Blossom Island.

When they arrived on the Island, they immediately sent the boat away. Huang Rong said, "Jing Gege, I am going to ask a favor from you. Will you promise to grant it?"

"What is it?" Guo Jing asked, "I don't want to do something I won't be able to do."

Huang Rong laughed and said, "I am not going to ask you to cut off your six masters' heads."

Guo Jing was upset. "Rong'er," he said, "Can't you not mention this matter anymore?"

"Why can't I mention it?" Huang Rong countered, "You may have already forgotten about it; but I can't. Even though I am good to you, I don't want you to cut down my head."

Guo Jing sighed and said, "I really don't understand why Da Shifu was so angry. He knew you are the love of my life. I'd rather die a thousand times, ten thousand times, than hurting you the least bit."

Huang Rong could hear the sincerity in his voice, her heart was moved. She pulled his hand and leaned against his body. Pointing to a row of willow trees by the creek she said with a tender voice, "Jing Gege, do you think this Peach Blossom Island is beautiful?"

"It truly looks like a fairyland," Guo Jing replied.

Huang Rong sighed, "I want to live here forever, I don't want to be killed by you," she said.

Guo Jing gently stroked her hair and said, "Good Rong'er, how can I kill you?"

Huang Rong said, "What if your six masters, your Mama, your good friend, they all ask you to kill me? Will you do it or not?"

Guo Jing confidently said, "Even though everybody in the world wants to make things difficult for you, I will always protect you."

Huang Rong held his hand tightly and asked, "Will you be willing to leave all these people for me?"

Guo Jing hesitated and did not answer. Huang Rong looked up and gazed at his eyes, with anxious expression on her face, waiting for his answer.

Guo Jing finally said, "Rong'er, I said that I would accompany you on the Peach Blossom Island for the rest of my life. I have made that decision before I opened my mouth."

“Good!” Huang Rong said, “Then from this day on, you are not going to leave this island.”

Guo Jing was taken aback, “From this day on?”

“Um, yes,” Huang Rong said, “From this day on! I am going to ask Father to go to Misty Rain Tavern and fight for us. Father and I will go to kill Wanyan Honglie to avenge your father. Father and I will go to Mongolia to fetch your Mama. I will even ask Father not to blame your six masters. I am going to take care of every single one of your concerns for you.”

Guo Jing saw the expression on her face was a little bit unusual; he said, “Rong’er, what I said to you, you can definitely count on it. Don’t you worry; you don’t have to do all these things.”

Huang Rong sighed, “The matters in this world are difficult to say,” she said, “When you agreed to marry that Mongolian Princess, did you ever think that someday you’ll regret your own decision? Previously I only knew that whatever I wanted, I got it. But now I know ... Ay! Whatever you wish you have, just pray that the Heaven will not make things difficult for you.” Speaking to this point she could not restrain her eyes from turning red. She hung her head low.

Guo Jing was silent; his heart was filled with tumultuous thoughts. He realized how much Huang Rong loved him, and it made him wanting to stay on the Island to be with her forever. But he felt it was inappropriate for him to ignore all his concerns; only why it was inappropriate, he did not know.

Huang Rong softly said, “It’s not that I don’t believe you or want to force you to live here; it’s just that I am really scared.” Speaking of this she suddenly threw herself into his arms and sobbed on his shoulder.

Guo Jing was caught by surprise; he was at a loss of what to do. He quickly said, “Rong’er, what are you afraid of?” Huang Rong did not reply, but she started to weep.

Ever since Guo Jing knew her, they had been through many difficult and dangerous, sometimes miserable situations, but he had always seen her smiling and laughing. This time she was back in her home and very soon will see her father; why was she scared all of a sudden? He asked, “Are you afraid your father has met some accident?”

Huang Rong shook her head. Guo Jing asked again, “Are you afraid once I leave this island I won’t be coming back?” Again Huang Rong shook her head. Guo Jing successively asked four, five questions but she shook her head again and again.

After a while Huang Rong lifted her head up and said, “Jing Gege, I don’t know what I am afraid of. I remember your Da Shifu’s expression when he told you to kill me, I just can’t shake it off my mind. I always feel there will come a day you are going to listen to him and kill me. That was the reason I asked you not to leave this place. Will you promise me?”

Guo Jing smiled and said, “I was wondering what important matter worries you so much; turns out it is only over this. That day in Beijing didn’t my Six Shifus cursed you as little female demon [xiao yao nu, yao – goblin/witch/devil/monster] or something like that? Afterwards I ran away with you, but we don’t have any problem until today. My Six Shifus seem strict and mean, but their hearts are kind and loving. Once you get to know each other I am sure they will certainly like you. Er Shifu’s

[Second Shifu] skill in picking other people's pocket is amazing; you can learn from him. I am sure you'll have a lot of fun. Qi Shifu [Seventh Shifu] is tender and friendly ..."

Huang Rong cut him off, "So you are determined to leave this place?" she asked.

Guo Jing replied, "The two of us will leave together; we'll both go to Mongolia to fetch my Mother, we'll kill Wanyan Honglie together, and then together we will come back to this place. Won't that be great?"

With a startled look on her face Huang Rong said, "If that's the case, I am afraid we won't be coming back together forever, we won't be together for rest of our lives."

"Why?" Guo Jing wondered.

Huang Rong shook her head and said, "I don't know. But when I saw your Da Shifu's expression that was what I felt. It seemed like killing me is not enough; his hatred went deep into his bones and marrow."

As Guo Jing listened to her, he could see that her heart was broken. Although her face still showed that childlike naïveté, her eyebrows and the corner of her eyes clearly showed her feelings towards the upcoming disaster. He recalled that she was always right; if this time he did not listen to what she said and some day a disaster befell her, how would that be good? Thinking about this his heart ached; he was overwhelmed with emotion and blurted out, "All right! I am not going to leave this place, ever!"

Hearing him Huang Rong fixed her gaze to his face for half a day without saying anything; two streams of tears slowly flowed down her cheeks. Guo Jing said in low voice, "Rong'er, what else do you want?"

"What else do I want?" Huang Rong said, "I want nothing else!" She raised her beautiful eyebrows up. "Even if I want something else, the Heaven won't let me." Her long sleeve gently rose up, she danced underneath the flower trees. As she turned her head around, the golden band on her hair glittered under the sun. Her clothes fluttered in the breeze. She danced faster and faster; every now and then she held out her hand to shake down the trees and petals of flowers fell down like rain: red flower, white flower, yellow flower, purple flower, they fluttered in the air just like butterflies dancing around her, creating a very beautiful scenery.

She danced for a moment, suddenly leaped up a tree, and then leaped over to another tree, dancing from tree to tree performing the 'yan shuang fei' [the fly of a pair of swallows] and 'luo ying shen jian zhang' [falling (leaves) divine sword palm technique] stances. She looked so happy.

Guo Jing thought, "Mama often told me stories about a fairy mountain on the eastern sea, where many fairies lived. I wonder if there is a fairy mountain more beautiful than the Peach Blossom Island, and if there is a fairy more beautiful than Rong'er?"

**End of Chapter 33.**

## Chapter 34 – Radical Changes on the Island

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Inside the room the table was flipped over and the stool lay on its side, books, pen and ink were scattered on the floor and half the scrolls of painting and poems on the wall were pulled down. Guo Jing stood motionless; his eyes looked straight without any expression on his face.*

While Huang Rong was dancing in the air, suddenly she let out a soft exclaim, “Ah!” and jumped down the tree. Beckoning to Guo Jing she walked into the forest. Guo Jing was afraid he would get lost, so he followed closely and did not dare to lag more than half a step behind her. Huang Rong walked fast along the winding pathway and then abruptly stopped. Pointing her finger to a yellow pile on the ground she asked, “What is that?”

Guo Jing rushed forward several steps and saw it was a yellow horse lying on the ground. He quickly came closer and stooped down to take a look; he recognized it was his San Shifu [Third Shifu] Han Baoju’s yellow horse. He held out his hand to feel the horse’s back and found it was already cold; the horse had died many days ago. This horse had followed Han Baoju to the far away desert; Guo Jing had known the horse since he was little. It was like a good friend to him. To suddenly see the horse dead here Guo Jing was grieved. He carefully considered, “This horse was old, but it was a divine steed and not an ordinary horse. It had galloped north and south all these years with nimble footsteps, it did not show any sign of old age; how could it unexpectedly fall dead in here? San Shifu must be very sad.”

He looked closer and noticed that the yellow horse did not lie on its side, but curled with its legs under its belly, crumpled together into one heap of meat. Guo Jing’s heart turned cold; he remembered how with just a strike of his palm Huang Yaoshi had killed Princess Huazheng’s horse just like this. Quickly he stretched out his left arm trying to lift underneath the horse’s neck, and held out his right hand to examine the horse’s front legs. He found out that the bones of the legs were broken. He withdrew his hands and retraced the horse’s back, only to find that the backbones were also broken. Guo Jing was increasingly alarmed. He took his hand off the horse and jumped in fright because he saw that his palm was full of blood. The blood had turned purplish black, but the blood smell remained. It seemed like the blood was about three, four days old. Quickly he turned the horse’s body around to examine it closely, but he did not see a single wound on its entire body. Absentmindedly he sat on the ground and thought, “Could it be San Shifu’s blood? Where is he?”

While Guo Jing was examining the horse Huang Rong stood quietly on the side; only then did she say in a low voice, “Don’t you worry, let us investigate this matter carefully.” Brushing the flower bushes away she looked to the ground and slowly walked forward. Guo Jing also saw the trace of dripping blood on the ground. Without thinking that he might get lost, he slipped through Huang Rong and anxiously rushed ahead to follow the bloodstain.

The trace sometimes disappeared so Guo Jing took the wrong turn several times. Huang Rong was always careful; she would examine the nearby bushes or the thick patch of grass among the rocks to find the trace of blood. Sometimes the bloodstain vanished altogether so she looked for a hoof print or some horse hair.

After following the trace for several ‘li’s they saw that ahead of them was a row of short flower bushes, with a grave in the middle of the grove. Huang Rong anxiously rushed toward the grave. Guo Jing had seen this grave before when he first came to the Peach Blossom Island, so he knew it was Huang Rong’s mother’s grave. He saw the tombstone lying on the ground, so he raised it up to stand. He saw the line of characters on the tombstone, ‘tao hua dao nu zhu feng shi mai xiang zhi zhong’ [the fragrant burial ground of Mistress surnamed Feng of the Peach Blossom Island].

Huang Rong saw the grave’s door was open and vaguely guessed that there were radical changes on the island. She did not enter the tomb right away, but looked carefully around the grave. She saw the green grass toward the left of the grave was trampled really bad, while there were some vestiges

made by blade on the door of the grave. She listened attentively for half a day by the doorway and did not hear anything from the inside, finally she stooped down and entered in.

Guo Jing was afraid he might lost her, he immediately followed. Everywhere along the pathway inside the tomb he saw chipped or even shattered stones from the wall, a sign of a very fierce fight. Two people were very alarmed.

Several 'zhang's ahead Huang Rong stooped down to pick something from the floor. The pathway inside the tomb was dim, but they vaguely recognized that it was a half of Quan Jinfa's balance beam. This balance beam was made of wrought iron, it was as thick as a child's arm; but right now they saw the beam was broken by someone. Huang Rong and Guo Jing looked at each other, they did not dare to say anything. They knew in their hearts that there were only a handful of people in this whole wide world capable of breaking this balance beam barehanded; on this Peach Blossom Island, naturally there was nobody else aside from Huang Yaoshi.

Huang Rong held the broken beam with trembling hands. Guo Jing took the beam from Huang Rong's hand and inserted it in his belt. He stooped down trying to find the other half of the beam. He felt like his heart was pulled down by fifteen buckets of water; filled with tumultuous thoughts. Part of him hoped he would find it, part of him hoped he would not.

Several steps later the pathway was getting darker. Guo Jing groped on the floor and found a round object. Turned out it was the balance weight, which Quan Jinfa usually used as flying hammer to strike the enemy. Guo Jing put it inside his pocket. Suddenly he felt his hand touching something cold, soft and somewhat greasy; it felt like someone's face. He jumped up in fright and bumped his head to the ceiling of the tomb pathway. Without feeling the pain he hastily fetched his fire paper and lit it. He let out a bitter cry, feeling like the sky was turning around him and the earth shook beneath him, he fell backward and fainted.

The fire paper was still in Guo Jing's hand and the fire was still flickering. Under the fire light Huang Rong saw Quan Jinfa with his eyes open, dead on the ground; the other half of the balance beam stuck out from his chest. Everything became clear to Huang Rong now. She calmed herself down, and then gathering up her courage she took the fire paper from Guo Jing's hand. She placed the fire underneath Guo Jing's nostrils. The smoke rose up, Guo Jing sneezed hard twice and regained his consciousness. He stared blankly at Huang Rong before finally standing up, and two people walked to enter to tomb.

They saw the tomb was in chaos; one corner of the sacrificial table was broken, Nan Xiren's shoulder pole was laid slanting on the floor. On the left corner they saw someone lying down; he was wearing a cloth headband on his head, his shoes fallen down. From the look of his back who else but Zhu Cong?

Guo Jing quietly walked near and pulled Zhu Cong's body. Under the fire light he saw that the corner of Zhu Cong's mouth showed a faint smile, while his body had been cold for a long time. In his condition, the smile appeared to be strange yet sad. With a low voice Guo Jing said, "Er Shifu [Second Shifu], disciple Guo Jing is here!" Gently he picked Zhu Cong's body up. 'Clink, clink, clank, clank' there was a series of light noise, countless pearls and precious stones fell down from Zhu Cong's pocket, scattered on the floor.

Huang Rong picked a handful of jewels to take a closer look, but threw them away immediately. With a long sigh she said, “These are things my Father placed here to accompany my Mother.”

Guo Jing fixed his gaze at her, his eyes looked like they are about to spurt out blood, with a low and calm voice he said, “You are saying ... saying that my Er Shifu came here to steal the gems? You dare to say my Er Shifu ...”

Huang Rong did not flinch under his glowering stare at all; she stared back at Guo Jing, only her stare was full of desperation and painful anxiety.

Guo Jing continued, “My Shifu was a warrior and a true hero, how could he steal your father’s jewels? He couldn’t possibly ... couldn’t possibly come over to plunder your Mama’s grave.” But looking at Huang Rong’s expression his tone gradually changed from angry to sad. The fact was, the jewels fell from Zhu Cong’s pocket, he also remembered his Er Shifu was known as ‘miao shou shu sheng’ [Magic Hand Scholar]; he was able to effortlessly pick anything from anybody’s pocket. Could it be that he really came over here to steal the jewels from this grave? No, no, his Er Shifu was always honest and frank, he simply could not do such a dirty and despicable act; there must be an explanation to this. Guo Jing was grieved and angry at the same time, the hair on his forehead was wet with sweat, his mind was dark, he clasped his fists so hard that the joints were making cracking sounds.

Huang Rong softly said, “When I saw your Da Shifu’s expression the other day, I had a feeling that it would be difficult for you and I to have something good between us. If you want to kill me, just do it. My Mama is here. I only ask you to bury me by her side. After burying me, quickly leave the island, don’t let my father see you.”

Guo Jing did not answer; he walked back and forth in big strides, breathing heavily at the same time. Huang Rong’s gaze was fixed on the painting of her mother on the wall. Suddenly she saw something of the face of the painting. She came closer and saw two secret projectiles. Carefully she took them down and gave them to Guo Jing; they were the ‘du ling’ [poisonous water caltrop] Ke Zhen’E used. She pulled the curtain behind the sacrificial table open, revealing her mother’s coffin behind it. She walked to the coffin’s side, and was unable to restrain exclaiming, “Ah!” She saw Han Baoju and Han Xiaoying, brother and sister have died behind the jade coffin.

It seemed like Han Xiaoying had slashed her own throat, her hand was still holding tight the sword hilt. Half of Han Baoju’s body was draped over the coffin, five finger holes were clearly seen on the center of his forehead.

Guo Jing walked past Huang Rong to take Han Baoju’s body away, while mumbling, “I personally saw Mei Chaofeng has died; who else but Huang Yaoshi in this world who can use this ‘jiu yin bai gu zhua’ [Nine Yin White Bone Claw]?” He gently put Han Baoju’s body on the floor, then he went back to take Han Xiaoying’s body, and brought the body outside. He walked past Huang Rong without looking at her, as if he did not even know she was there.

Huang Rong’s heart turned cold; she stared blankly for half a day. Suddenly the tomb was dark; the fire paper had been burned out. She was used to coming over to this tomb, but now there were four dead people inside. She could not help but feel afraid of the darkness and hastily ran out of the tomb. She tripped on something and almost fell over, but she ran ahead. Only after she was out of the tomb did she recall that she must be stumbling over Quan Jinfa’s body.

She noticed the tombstone was askew; she put out her hand to straighten it up. She was about to close the grave's door when suddenly something dawned on her, "After killing the Four Freaks of Jiangnan, how come Father did not close the door of the grave? He loves Mama very much. Even though he was in such a hurry, he would not leave this door open wide like this." One thought led to another, her suspicion aroused, "How could Father let the Four Freaks accompany Mama in the grave? It's impossible. Could it be that Father also met a mishap?" Immediately she pushed the tombstone three times to the right and three times to the left to close the door, and then rushed to the house.

Guo Jing left the tomb earlier than she did, but after walking a dozen of steps, turning to the left and circling to the right, he was lost. He saw Huang Rong walking by and immediately followed behind her.

Without saying anything two people walked through the bamboo grove, over the lotus pond, toward the study room where Huang Yaoshi took up his residence. They saw the building was in a mess; the beams were broken and the pillars bent.

"Father! Father!" Huang Rong called out; rushing inside she saw that the table was flipped over and the stool laid on its side, books, pen and ink were scattered on the floor, half of the scrolls of painting and poems on the wall were pulled down, but where was Huang Yaoshi's shadow? Huang Rong propped herself on the turned over table, her body shook and she was about to fall.

After half a day she managed to calm herself down. She rushed toward the mute servants' quarter, but did not see a single soul. The ashes on the stove had turned cold. If they did not die, all of them had left some time ago. It looked like there was nobody else on this island except Guo Jing and herself.

Slowly she walked back to the study room, only to see Guo Jing inside standing motionless; his eyes looked straight without any expression on his face. With a trembling voice Huang Rong said, "Jing Gege, go ahead and cry. Quickly cry, then we'll talk!" She knew Guo Jing and his six shifus had a parents and child relationship; right now his heart was extremely grieved. His internal energy had been trained to such an excellent level, that if he was unable to vent his great sadness and pain he would suffer a serious internal injury. Who would have thought that Guo Jing did not seem to hear anything; he only stared at her blankly.

Huang Rong wanted to urge him again, but she was overwhelmed with grief as well. She only said, "Jing Gege," and could not say anything else.

Two people stood silently for half a day; Guo Jing mumbled with a low voice, "I must not kill Rong'er, I must not kill Rong'er!"

Huang Rong's heart was bitter, she said, "Your Shifus are dead, just cry your heart out."

Guo Jing thought aloud, "I am not crying, I am not crying."

After this exchange, the room fell into silence one more time. The sound of the distant waves was faintly heard; in just a short moment a multitude of thoughts swirling inside Huang Rong's mind. All kinds of things she went through on this island, since she was little until she was fifteen years old, one by one flashed through her brain clearly; and then her body shook again.

She heard Guo Jing said as if he was talking to himself, "I must bury my Shifus first. Must I? Must I bury my Shifus first?"

"Right," Huang Rong replied, "We must bury Shifus first." She went out to show the way, back to her mother's grave. Without saying anything Guo Jing followed behind her.

Huang Rong held out her hand to open the grave, suddenly Guo Jing rushed ahead, his right leg flew up, sweeping toward the middle of the tombstone. The tombstone was made from solid and extremely hard granite; even if Guo Jing's kick was ten times stronger all he could do was to push the tombstone slightly askew, and not making the slightest dent on it. His right foot was bleeding, but he did not seem to feel the pain. His pair of palms ferociously struck and pushed the stone. He pulled the half of Quan Jinfa's balance beam and struck the tombstone over and over. Sparks and debris flew everywhere. Suddenly, 'crack!' the beam snapped. With both of his hands Guo Jing furiously cracked the stone open, revealing the steel rod inside it. He grabbed the steel rod, trying to break it; but the grave door had actually opened before the rod was bent.

Guo Jing stared with a dull expression; suddenly he shouted, "Other than Huang Yaoshi, who can open the gate? Who can lure my 'en shi' [benevolent/kind master] to enter this crafty grave? If it is not he then who is? Who is it?" He threw his head back and shouted, then ran into the grave.

Guo Jing's blood on the broken stone flowed down to cover his hand print. Seeing his deep hatred toward her mother's grave Huang Rong was determined, "If he destroys my mother's jade coffin to vent his anger, I am going to die over it first." She was about to enter the grave when Guo Jing walked back out carrying Quan Jinfa's body. He put the body down on the ground, then went back in and respectfully carried Zhu Cong, Han Baoju and Han Xiaoying one by one and laid them down on the ground.

Huang Rong stole a glance toward him and saw the love and admiration on his face; her heart turned icy cold, "He loves his shifus a lot more than he loves me. I must look for my Father, I must look for my Father!"

Guo Jing carried his four shifus' bodies into the forest, several hundreds steps away from the grave, before he finally stooped down to dig a hole. At first he dug using Han Xiaoying's long sword, he dug faster and faster and finally the sword snapped; even the handle was broken. Suddenly a burst of heat bubbled up from his chest and he spat out two mouthfuls of blood. He did not stop; he bent down his waist and used his hands to continue digging; scooping the earth and throwing it aside like crazy.

Huang Rong went to the quarter of the mute servants in charge of planting the tree and took two shovels. She tossed one shovel to Guo Jing and used the other to help digging the hole. Without saying anything Guo Jing snatched the shovel from her hand, broke it into two and tossed it to the ground; while he continued to dig alone with the other shovel. Huang Rong did not cry at all; she simply sat on the ground to watch.

Guo Jing exerted all his strength and he managed to dig two holes, one big and the other small, within the time needed to cook rice. He put Han Xiaoying's body into the small hole. He knelt down and knocked his head on the ground several times; and then stared blankly at Han Xiaoying's face for half a day before he finally covered it with earth. Next, he picked Zhu Cong's body and was about to put it into the big hole when suddenly his heart was stirred, "How can Huang Yaoshi's

filthy jewels accompany my Er Shifu in his grave?” Thereupon he put forth his hand into Zhu Cong’s pocket and took the pearls, jade, and gemstones one by one and without looking at them he tossed everything to the ground. At last he reached the bottom of the pocket and took a sheet of paper out. He unfolded the paper and read these words:

*‘From Jiangnan, the humble Ke Zhen’E, Zhu Cong, Han Baoju, Nan Xiren, Quan Jinfa and Han Xiaoying are paying a visit to the Senior, Master of the Peach Blossom Island. A short while ago we heard a rumor that disregarding their own lack of ability the Quanzhen Six Masters are about to settle their matter with the Peach Blossom Island. Juniors here realize this matter involves some miscommunication, only we regret that we are not able to act as the mediator between the two parties involved. Senior is an expert of the present age, a peer of the late Wang Chongyang, Wang Zhenren [lit. true/real man, a term of respect to a Taoist priest]; how can Senior let your honor and prestige fall by arguing with younger generations about right and wrong? In the past Lin Xiangru yielded to Lian Po, and it was regarded as a grand occasion in history. A heroic gentleman’s heart is as broad as the sea, and would certainly not be bothered by bickering chicken and worms. The day will come when the Quanzhen disciples will humble themselves in front of the Island Master, and the warriors of the world will admire Senior’s honorable chivalry; wouldn’t that be great?’*

Guo Jing recognized his Er Shifu’s handwriting, he held the paper with trembling hands; he said in his heart, “When the Quanzhen Seven Masters were fighting Huang Yaoshi at the Ox Village, Ouyang Feng launched a sneak attack and killed Changzhen Zi [Eternal Truth] Tan Chuduan. At that time Ouyang Feng shifted the blame to Huang Yaoshi. This Old Heretic Huang is a haughty man, he did not bother to argue, so naturally the Quanzhen Sect hates him to the bone. When my six Shifus learned the Quanzhen Sect was coming in full power to seek revenge, they were afraid both sides would suffer injury, so they wrote this letter urging Huang Yaoshi to temporarily avoid confrontation and think of ways to reveal the truth in the future. My Shifus had a kind intention, how could this old thief Huang Yaoshi made his move and brought this calamity upon them?” But then he thought, “Er Shifu had already written this letter, why didn’t he deliver it, but kept it in his pocket? Ah, right, the situation must be pressing, the Quanzhen Six Masters were coming quickly, so they did not have enough time to deliver this letter; therefore, my Six Shifus came in a hurry to prevent the battle.” Following which he thought, “Old Heretic Huang, oh, Old Heretic Huang, you must think my Six Shifus came to help the Quanzhen Sect; and thus without separating the green from the red or black or white you just attacked with your poisonous hand.”

He was busy with his own thought for a while, and then he folded the paper to put it back into his pocket, suddenly he saw several characters were scribbled on the back of the letter. He quickly turned it over and his heart was thumping hard and jumping madly since he saw some crooked writing, “This business has turned for the worse, everybody guard against ...” the last character was only written three strokes; looked like the disaster had already stricken, so it was unfinished.

Guo Jing called out, “This is obviously the character ‘east’; Er Shifu warned everybody to guard against the Eastern Heretic; what a pity he did not have enough time.” He crushed the paper into a ball; clenching his jaws he said, “Er Shifu, Er Shifu, the Old Heretic Huang has viewed your good intention as an evil one.” His grip loosened and the paper ball fell to the ground. Stooping down he picked Zhu Cong’s body.

Huang Rong had always kept her eyes on Guo Jing as he was reading the paper; she saw his expression change several times, she knew the letter must be very important. As the paper fell, she slowly walked over and picked it up, she read both sides and said in her heart, “His Six Shifus came

to the Peach Blossom Island with a good intention. Too bad this Magic Hand Scholar had a crooked heart; he was accustomed to stealing his entire life, so that when he saw my mother's many rare treasures he could not help but violating my Father's biggest taboo ...”

In her grief and remorse she saw that Guo Jing was laying down Zhu Cong's body. Zhu Cong's left hand was tightly curled into a fist. Guo Jing pried it open and took something out and held it in his hand. Huang Rong looked closer and saw it was a women's shoe carved from a green jade, approximately an inch long. Although it was a toy, it looked just like a real shoe; the carving was fine and exquisite, truly it was an expensive work of art. Only she had never seen this shoe in her mother's grave before; she wondered where Zhu Cong got it from.

Guo Jing turned the shoe over in his hand to take a look; there was a 'zhao' [to recruit] character engraved on the sole, while another character 'bi' [contest/compete] was engraved inside, other than these characters there was nothing unusual about the shoe. Guo Jing hated these treasures very much, 'swish!' he tossed the shoe to the ground. He stared blankly for a while, then slowly picked Zhu Cong's, Han Baoju's and Quan Jinfa's bodies and put them in the hole. He was about to cover them with earth, but looking at his three shifus' faces he could not bear to do so. He called out, "Er Shifu, San Shifu, Liu Shifu [Sixth Shifu], you ... you died!" His voice was gentle, the same voice he had used when talking to his shifus in the past.

After about half a day he cast a sidelong gaze toward the pile of treasure by the hole; his anger rose. With both of his hands he scooped them up and walked briskly toward Huang Rong's mother's grave. Huang Rong was afraid he was going to violate her mother's jade coffin; she anxiously caught up, stretching out her arms she blocked the entrance of the grave. "What are you doing?" she imposingly asked.

Guo Jing did not answer, his left arm gently shoved her aside; both of his hands threw the treasures inside the grave. A series of long clinking noise was heard as the jewels hit the ground. Huang Rong saw that jade-green shoe fell near her feet; she stooped down to pick it up and said, "This one is not my Mother's." She handed the shoe over to him. Guo Jing only stared at her blankly, ignoring her. Huang Rong put the shoe in her pocket. Guo Jing turned around and returned to the hole; he shoveled the earth and buried his three shifus' bodies.

Guo Jing was busy for half a day. The sky had gradually turned dark. Huang Rong still did not see him cry; she was getting more and more concerned. She thought perhaps if she leaves him alone he would cry; so she went back to the house to fetch some salted fish and ham and cooked some simple dishes. She put everything in a basket and went back to see that Guo Jing was still standing next to his shifus' grave. It took Huang Rong approximately an hour to prepare the dishes, yet not only Guo Jing did not move a single step; his expression also did not change the slightest bit.

To see Guo Jing standing like a stone statue in the dark Huang Rong was alarmed and scared. "Jing Gege, how are you feeling?" she called out; but Guo Jing did not pay her any attention. Huang Rong called again, "Come here and eat, you have been hungry for a whole day!"

"I'd rather die of starvation than to eat anything on the Peach Blossom Island," Guo Jing said.

Hearing him talking Huang Rong was somewhat relieved; she knew his stubborn temperament. His heart was broken and hurt, once he said he would not eat anything on this island then he would not eat. Thereupon she slowly put the basket down on the ground and sat down.

One standing up the other sitting down, time quietly passed, the crescent moon rose from the sea and slowly reached the top of their heads. The food in the basket had already turned cold, as cold as the hearts of this couple.

In this chilly wind under the cold moon, amidst the faint sound of waves breaking the shore, suddenly from a distance came a cry. The sound was intensely mournful, like a wolf's howl or a tiger's roar, but it also sounded like a human's voice. The sound was transmitted by the wind, so when the wind died, the sound also disappeared. Huang Rong inclined her ears to listen attentively; she vaguely recognized it was the voice of someone struggling in severe pain, only it was not clear whether the voice belonged to a human or a beast. After determining where the voice came from, she moved her feet and rushed toward that voice.

Actually she wanted to take Guo Jing along, but then she changed her mind, "Most likely this is not something good, it will only increase his anxiety." Darkness enveloped her on every side, she was actually afraid to go alone; fortunately she knew every grass and every tree on the Peach Blossom Island very well, hence although her heart was thumping hard, she gathered all her courage and went forward.

She had only walked for about a dozen of steps when suddenly felt a gust of wind by her side; Guo Jing dashed past her and was running ahead of her. He did not know the way, so very soon he was lost. Huang Rong saw his hands hacking and his feet kicking, trying to destroy the trees and bushes blocking his way, as if he was losing his mind. "Follow me," Huang Rong said.

"Si Shifu [Fourth Shifu], Si Shifu!" Guo Jing called out. He had recognized his Si Shifu, Nan Xiren's voice.

Huang Rong's heart turned cold, she thought, "It will be very strange if his Si Shifu saw me and did not want to take my life." But by now she had already disregarded all consequences; she knew perfectly well a big disaster was looming ahead, but she did not even try to run away from it. She led Guo Jing into the thick forest on the east side of the island. They saw underneath a peach tree a man was rolling around with twisted body.

Guo Jing cried out and rushed ahead to hug him. Nan Xiren's face showed a smile, his mouth produced 'heh, heh' sound. Guo Jing was scared but also happy; suddenly, 'wah!' he broke into crying. He was crying and calling out, "Si Shifu! Si Shifu!"

Nan Xiren did not say anything; he struck Guo Jing with the back of his palm. Guo Jing was taken by surprise; instinctively he ducked to avoid the blow. As his palm did not hit its target Nan Xiren's left fist struck out. This time Guo Jing thought that his shifu was punishing him; he was happy, so he let Nan Xiren's fist to hit him. Who would have thought that Nan Xiren's fist carried a surprisingly strong force. 'Bang!' Guo Jing was sent rolling down on the ground.

Since he was little Guo Jing had practiced fist technique with Nan Xiren several hundreds or thousands times; he knew perfectly well the strength of Nan Xiren's fists and palms, he was greatly surprised to find Nan Xiren's strength suddenly increased several folds. Guo Jing had just barely stood up when Nan Xiren's fist came again. Guo Jing still did not want to fend off. This fist carried an even stronger force; Guo Jing saw stars dancing in front of his eyes, he almost passed out. Nan Xiren stooped down to pick a big rock up, and fiercely pounded it down on top of Guo Jing's head.

If Guo Jing did not evade, this big rock would certainly crack his skull open and turn his brain to mush.

From the sideline Huang Rong saw the critical situation, she quickly flew forward and pushed Nan Xiren's arm with her left hand. Nan Xiren, with the rock still in his hands, fell down to the ground. His mouth made a 'heh, heh' sound and to everybody's surprise he did not crawl back up.

"Why did you push my Si Shifu?" Guo Jing shouted angrily.

Huang Rong's sole purpose was to save Guo Jing, she did not expect Nan Xiren would be this weak; as soon as she pushed, she hastily held out her hands to help him up. Under the moonlight she saw his face was smiling, but this smile resembled the exaggerated smile of an actor on stage; his face looked very frightening. Huang Rong called out in alarm and withdrew her hands immediately, she did not dare to touch his body. All of a sudden Nan Xiren turned over and struck her left shoulder with his fist. Two people shouted in pain simultaneously.

Although her body was protected by the soft hedgehog armor, this fist had given her enough pain and sent her staggered a few steps back. Blood was dripping from Nan Xiren's fist, which was pricked by the thorns on the armor. Amidst the two people's shouts Guo Jing called out, "Si Shifu!"

Nan Xiren looked at Guo Jing as if he had just recognized him; he opened his mouth to speak, but no matter how much the muscle around his mouth twitched, he still could not say anything. His face showed a smile, but his eyes showed extreme despair.

"Si Shifu," Guo Jing said, "Please take a rest. Whatever it is you want to say, you can say it later."

Nan Xiren tried hard to say something, he lifted his neck to look up, but his lips were unable to form the words. After straining for a while his head dropped, looking down to the ground.

"Si Shifu!" Guo Jing repeatedly called out; he rushed forward to lift Nan Xiren up.

From the side Huang Rong could see clearly. "Your Shifu is writing," she said.

Guo Jing looked sideways and saw Nan Xiren's right index finger was slowly writing on the soft earth. Under the moonlight he saw Nan Xiren wrote character by character: "My ... killer ... is ..."

Huang Rong noticed he wrote with great difficulty, her heart was thumping hard; suddenly she remembered something, "He is on the Peach Blossom Island, even an idiot will know that it is my Father who killed him. But he is on the verge of death and is still using his very last strength to write the killer's name, could it be that the murderer is someone else?" She was watching Nan Xiren's finger with a rapt attention; she noticed that the finger moved slower as if losing its strength, so she kept praying in her heart, "If he is going to write some other name, please, please let him write it down quickly."

Nan Xiren was writing the fifth character [Chinese character, that is], he started from the upper left hand corner and wrote a small 'ten' ( ) character, then his finger trembled and stopped moving all together.

Guo Jing was kneeling on the ground, hugging his shifu. He felt Nan Xiren's body shook violently then he stopped breathing. He looked at the small 'ten' character and called out, "Si Shifu, I know

you were going to write the Huang ( ) character, you were going to write the Huang character!” He threw himself on Nan Xiren’s body and wept bitterly. In this one cry he had vented up the grief and indignation that had been welled up in his heart the whole day. He cried for quite a while, then his body fell on top of Nan Xiren’s lifeless body; he had fainted.

Without knowing how much time had passed, he woke up under the bright morning sunlight. He stood up and swept his gaze around. Huang Rong was gone, and Nan Xiren’s body was still lying down on the ground with his eyes open. Guo Jing remembered a saying, ‘die without closing his eyes’; he was unable to restrain tears from flowing down his cheeks again. Stretching out his hand he gently closed Nan Xiren’s eyes. Suddenly he recalled just before he died Nan Xiren’s facial expression was very strange; he wonder what kind of injury was so fatal. Thereupon he untied Nan Xiren’s clothes to examine his whole body. Strange to say, except for the pricked hand from hitting Huang Rong’s soft hedgehog armor last night, from head to toe, Guo Jing could not find a single scar on Nan Xiren’s body. Neither his chest nor his back showed any sign of injury by internal strength strike; the skin was neither black nor burnt, so there was no sign of poisoning either.

Guo Jing picked up Nan Xiren’s body and carried it to be buried together with Zhu Cong and the others; but the pathways in the forest were so strange that after about dozens of steps he lost his bearing. He had no choice but turn back and dig a hole underneath a peach tree to bury Nan Xiren.

Guo Jing had not eaten for a whole day; his stomach hurt from hunger. He wanted to find a way to go back to the shore and find a boat to return to the mainland, but the farther he went, the more confused he became. He sat down to take a rest for a while, then he stood up with a renewed vigor and walked again. This time he had an idea, regardless of he found a pathway or not, he would keep his eyes toward the sun in the east.

After walking for a while ahead of him was a dense forest, seemingly impassable. Nothing strange about the forest, it was just that each tree was full of long and thorny rattan cane; it would be truly difficult for him to set his feet on. He made the decision, “I am not coming back today!” and then jumped up to the tree top.

He only walked one step on the tree when ‘rip!’ the corner of his trouser was tore by a thorn and his calf was bleeding from several cuts. He walked two more steps, and his left leg was entangled in some long canes. He took his dagger out and cut the canes. Lifting his head up he saw far ahead the rattan trees were very dense, seemingly without end. He called out, “Even if my legs are sheared, I have to leave this cursed island!”

He was about to jump ahead when suddenly Huang Rong called out from the ground, “Get down, I’ll take you out.” He looked down and saw Huang Rong standing underneath a rattan tree on his left.

Guo Jing did not reply, he jumped down and saw Huang Rong’s face was deathly pale, as if her blood was drained completely out. He could not help but startle; he wanted to ask whether her injury recurred, but he forced himself to bite his lips. Huang Rong noticed he wanted to say something, but as soon as his lips started to move he turned his head around. She waited for a moment without seeing any response from Guo Jing; she sighed gently and said, “Let’s go!” Two people walked along the winding path heading east.

Huang Rong's injury had not been completely healed, and she had to face this heavy misfortune; she was tossing and turning in her sleep the previous night. She knew she could not blame her Jing Gege, she could not blame her father, and she could not even blame the Six Freaks of Jiangnan. She only resented herself; why would she have to endure the Heaven's punishment like this? Did the Heaven hate people who lead a happy life?

She led Guo Jing toward the beach; knowing in her heart that this time he would never come back, it would be difficult for them to see each other anymore, so she felt that with every step a piece of her heart was also taken away.

Just beyond the rattan trees forest they could see the beach ahead. Huang Rong felt weary, she was unable to restrain her body from shaking; hastily she used the bamboo stick to brace herself, but unexpectedly there was no strength left on her arm, the bamboo stick skewed and she fell down to the ground.

Instinctively Guo Jing outstretched his right hand to hold her, but just as his finger was about to touch her arm, the injustice his shifus suffered flashed in his mind. His left hand moved and 'slap!' it struck his own right wrist. He was using Zhou Botong's Mutual Hands Combat Technique; as his right hand was stricken, he turned his palm over and leapt backward immediately.

Without receiving any help Huang Rong fell down to the ground. As Guo Jing saw her falling down, remorse, affection, grief, indignation and all kinds of emotions bubbled up inside his heart. Even if his heart was made of stone he could not restrain himself from stooping down and pick her up. He looked at all directions trying to find a comfortable place to lay her down, and it was then did he saw a green cloth flutter in the wind on the rock toward his northeast.

Huang Rong opened her eyes and saw Guo Jing's gaze was fixed on a distant place; she followed his gaze and also saw the green cloth. "Father!" she called out in alarm. Guo Jing let her down, and hand in hand they ran toward the rock. They saw it was a long gown, stuck in the crook of the rock; they also saw a piece of human skin mask lying next to it. Obviously they belonged to Huang Yaoshi.

Huang Rong was really alarmed; she stooped down to pick up the gown and clearly saw a bloody hand print on the lapel of the gown, with the fingers left winding traces. It looked very scary.

Guo Jing remembered, "After killing my San Shifu with the Nine Yin White Bone Claw Huang Yaoshi must have wiped his fingers with this cloth."

Initially he was holding Huang Rong's hand, but now his blood was boiling inside his chest; he shook Huang Rong's hand away, snatched the gown, and with a 'rip!' sound he tore the gown into two parts. He saw the corner of the gown was torn, looked like it was the green piece of cloth tied on the eagle's foot. The blood print was so clear that under the bright sunlight it looked as if the palm would jump out of the clothes and slap someone on the face; but it provoked Guo Jing's anger even more so that he felt he was going to go insane from grief and indignation. He tucked his own gown into his belt and waded into the water towards a sailboat.

The mute and deaf servants on the boat had long gone, disappeared without a trace. Without looking back to Huang Rong he drew his dagger out and cut the rope, hoisted the anchor and sailed to the sea.

Huang Rong watched the boat sail to the west. At first she was hoping that he would change his mind, turn the rudder and head back to the island to take her traveling together; but then she saw the boat was getting smaller and smaller, while her heart was turning colder and colder. She stared blankly at the sea until the boat disappeared on the horizon. Suddenly she remembered that she was alone on the island; Jing Gege had gone, and she did not know whether her father would ever return. How could she pass the rest of her days? Would she just stand on this shore forever? Rong'er, Rong'er, you must not take a short cut and die!

All by himself Guo Jing steered the boat, leaving the Peach Blossom Island, heading west. He had sailed for several dozen 'li's when he suddenly heard the eagles' anxious cry high above his head. The pair of eagles had followed him and perched on the sail arms. Guo Jing thought, "The eagles come after me, Rong'er is alone on the island, she must be very lonely!" Overcome with pity and regret he spontaneously turned the rudder around, wanting to take her to travel together. But after sailing for a short while he remembered, "Da Shifu told me to cut Huang Yaoshi's and Rong'er's heads before I can come and see him. Da Shifu, Er Shifu and the others came to the Peach Blossom Island and fell under Huang Yaoshi's poisonous hands. Although Da Shifu is blind, he can hear clearly. For some reason he was fortunate to escape and stay alive. He raised his iron staff to kill Rong'er; he wanted me to kill Rong'er, what did Rong'er do? I can't kill Rong'er; Er Shifu and the others were not killed by Rong'er. But how can I be together with her? I must cut Huang Yaoshi's head and take it away to see Da Shifu. If I am not the Old Heretic Huang's match, then I'll let him kill me." Immediately he turned the rudder again, making a circle on the sea surface, heading west once more.

Late on the third day the boat reached the shore. Out of hatred of everything from the Peach Blossom Island he took the anchor and smashed the bottom of the boat before leaping onto the beach. He watched while the sailboat slowly leaned sideways and sunk to the bottom of the ocean. He could not help but feel a loss in his heart. Leaving the shore he walked to the west; he found a peasant home and bought some rice to eat. After finding the right direction he went straight to Jiaying.

That evening he spent the night by the bank of Qiantang River; he saw the reflection of the bright moon on the river, like a big golden wheel floating on the water. Suddenly he jumped up with a start; he was afraid he missed the martial art contest appointment at the Misty Rain Tavern. Immediately he asked the host where he lodged, and found out that today was the thirteenth of the eighth month. Hastily he crossed the river that very same night; he bought a healthy horse and whipped the horse to gallop quickly, and arrived at Jiaying by early afternoon of the next day.

Since his childhood he had heard his six shifus recounted their battle with Qiu Chuji; how they had a wine drinking contest out of the huge copper vat at the Drunken Immortal Tavern [zui xian lou], the exquisiteness of their martial art skills and the heroism surrounding that battle. Six people loved to tell the story good-naturedly. So as soon as he entered the southern gate he asked the location of the Drunken Immortal Tavern.

The Drunken Immortal Tavern was located by the bank of Nan Hu [South Lake]. Guo Jing arrived at the front of the tavern. He looked up and saw this tavern's appearance was exactly like what Han Xiaoying had told him. The tavern had been imprinted in his mind for a dozen of years, today he had seen it for the first time with his own eyes; he noticed the exquisiteness of the carving of the eaves, it was truly a beautiful building. At the front of the tavern stood a big wooden sign with 'tai bai yi feng' [the great (Li) Bai (a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty)'s left behind

manner/custom/air] four letters engraved on it; while above the main entrance there was a sign with 'zui xian lou' [Drunken Immortal Tavern], inscribed by Su Dongpo [a famous calligrapher of the Song Dynasty], in golden letters, gleaming under the bright sunlight.

Guo Jing's heart was thumping madly; walking and leaping, he went upstairs. A wine shop attendant welcomed him and said, "Honorable Guest, please use the downstairs room, since the upstairs is already reserved for some other guests."

Guo Jing was about to reply when suddenly someone was calling, "Jing'er, you are here!" Guo Jing looked up and saw a Taoist priest sitting and drinking wine, his long beard reached his chest, his face was ruddy; it was none other than Changchun Zi [Eternal Spring] Qiu Chuji.

Guo Jing rushed forward and bowed to the ground, "Qiu Daozhang [Taoist Priest Qiu]!" he called out. His voice was somewhat choked.

Qiu Chuji held out his hand to raise him up; he said, "You are a day early, that is very good. I am also a day early. I thought tomorrow we are going to fight Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian and the others, so I want to be here early to drink wine and reminisce about the past with your Six Shifus. Have your Six Shifus arrived? I have prepared some tables for them."

Guo Jing saw there were nine tables on this upstairs floor; except for Qiu Chuji's table, which was full with dishes and wine, the other eight tables only had a pair of chopsticks and a wine cup. Qiu Chuji said, "Eighteen years ago I met your Seven Shifus for the very first time in this place; they arranged the tables just like this. This one table of vegetarian dishes was for Jiaomu Da Shi [Reverend Burnt Wood], it's a pity that I can no longer meet him and your Wu Shifu [Fifth Shifu]." He sounded very grieved. Guo Jing turned his head around, did not dare to look at him straight ahead.

Qiu Chuji did not notice anything, he kept talking, "That day we had a contest on drinking from the copper vat, so today I went to 'fa hua si' [magnificent (Buddhist) way temple] and fetched the vat. As soon as your Six Shifus are here we can drink again just like in the old days."

Guo Jing turned his head to look at the big copper vat by the screen. The outside of the vat was blackish green from the copper rust, but the inside had been washed and scrubbed clean, and filled to the brim with high quality wine, the fragrance attacked his nostrils. Guo Jing stared blankly at the copper vat for half a day then he turned his attention to the eight empty tables. He thought, "Other than Da Shifu, nobody would be able to enjoy the banquet again. If only I can see my seven benevolent masters sit together, drinking wine, talking and laughing, getting drunk for the whole day, I would be very happy even if I have to die immediately."

He heard Qiu Chuji continue, "At that time we agreed that on the twenty-fourth day of the third month this year, you and Yang Kang will have a martial art contest in here. I respect your Seven Shifus as noble hearted chivalrous warriors; I was hoping you would win and lift up the name of the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan in the world. Besides, I was always wandering everywhere, weeding out the criminals from this world; I did not have enough time to spend on nurturing Yang Kang. It was all right not to teach him a good martial art, but I should have taught him to have loyalty and chivalry. For this I am so ashamed toward your Uncle Yang. Although he now thoroughly repented of his former misdeeds, the evil influence in his life will be difficult to eradicate completely; when I think about this, my heart is filled with utmost regret."

Guo Jing wanted to recount Yang Kang's dishonorable behavior, but it was a long story so he did not know where to start. Meanwhile Qiu Chuji continued, "In a person's life, literary or martial art skill is not everything, the most important things are two characters, loyalty and patriotism. Even if Yang Kang's martial art skill is better than yours a hundred folds, speaking of character, the martial art contest of the Drunken Immortal Tavern is still won by your shifu. Hey, hey, Qiu Chuji lost with a satisfied heart." He laughed a big laugh. Suddenly he saw Guo Jing's tears flow down like rain, he was surprised, "Ah, why are you so sad?"

Guo Jing scrambled over one step, he bowed to the ground and wept, "My ... my ... my five benevolent masters have passed away."

Qiu Chuji was shocked. "What?!?" he almost shouted.

Still crying Guo Jing said, "Except for my Da Shifu, the other five are ... are dead."

These two sentences struck Qiu Chuji like a loud thunder in bright sunlight; he was silent for half a day. He was hoping he would meet some old friends and have a good time together, who would have thought that suddenly disaster struck. Although his time together with the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan was not much, for the last eighteen years he had already regarded them as his lifelong friends. Now that he heard this shocking news, his heart was filled with grief. He went over to the railings in big strides; he looked out toward the vast lake in front of him, throwing his head backward he let out a long cry. One by one faces of the Seven Freaks flashed in his mind. He turned around and picked up the copper vat, with a loud voice he cried out, "My friends are dead, what use do I have of you?" Sending his strength to his arms he threw the vat away. The copper vat fell into the lake with a loud splash, the water flew everywhere. Turning his head toward Guo Jing he grabbed Guo Jing's arms and asked, "How did they die? Tell me!"

Guo Jing was about to reply when with the corner of his eye he caught sight of someone silently enter the room; he was wearing green clothes, his face was elegant and unrestrained, it was the Master of the Peach Blossom Island, Huang Yaoshi. Guo Jing looked twice, he was afraid of mistaking him for someone else; he fixed his eyes with rapt attention. Who was he but Huang Yaoshi?

Huang Yaoshi also saw him here and was surprised. Suddenly he felt a gust of wind on his face; Guo Jing attacked him over the table using the Proud Dragon Repents. In this one palm Guo Jing had sent out his whole strength, the power was astonishing. Huang Yaoshi slightly moved sideways, his left hand shot out and pushed Guo Jing's palm to the side. A series of cracking noise were heard, Guo Jing could not hold his ground; he bored through the wooden partition and fell downstairs.

It was a bad day for the Drunken Immortal Tavern, Guo Jing happened to land on the shelf containing cups and bowls. 'Bing! Bang! Bing! Bang!' bowls, plates, trays, wine cups; everything was smashed to hundreds and thousands of pieces.

That afternoon, when the old innkeeper heard Qiu Chuji ordered the tables to be arranged in such a way, also saw him bringing the huge copper vat upstairs, he remembered what happened eighteen years ago; he had already had a queasy feeling about it. Now that the upstairs and downstairs were shattered, he could not help but bitterly cry out. He prayed head over heels, "Please help those in distress, oh Goddess of Mercy, the Jade Emperor of Heaven, the God of the City ..."

Guo Jing was afraid the dishes and bowls fragments would injure his palm, so he did not dare to push himself up. He twisted his waist and leaped up, and rushed back upstairs immediately. He only saw a grey shadow flashed, followed by a green shadow; Qiu Chuji and Huang Yaoshi leaped down the window one after another. Guo Jing thought, "This old thief's martial art is above mine; I can't fight him barehanded." He drew two kinds of weapons from his waist, with his mouth he bit the dagger given by Qiu Chuji, in his right hand he held the golden blade given by Genghis Khan. He thought, "Even if I have to stake it all and endure that old thief's fist or kick, I have to make a couple of holes on his body." He rushed to the window and jumped down.

By now the street was bustling with pedestrians; they heard that some people jumped out from the tavern and came to take a look. Suddenly they saw that someone else was jumping out of the window with a shining blade in his hand; the crowd cried out in alarm, they pushed and shoved each other and several people tumbled down. Guo Jing could not see Qiu, Huang two people because of the crowd; he quickly took the dagger from his mouth and asked an old man nearby, "Where did the two people that jumped down from the upstairs go?"

That old man was startled, he cried out, "Mr. Hero, please spare my life, it's none of my business."

Guo Jing repeated his question, but that old man was so scared that he kept calling out, "Help! Help!" Guo Jing gently pushed him aside and rushed out from the crowd, but Qiu and Huang two people had disappeared completely.

He rushed back upstairs and looked to all directions, he saw a small boat on the lake carrying Qiu and Huang two people; it looked like they were heading toward the Misty Rain Tavern on the island in the middle of the lake. Huang Yaoshi sat in the cabin, while Qiu Chuji sat on the stern, rowing. When he saw this Guo Jing was startled, he thought, "Those two people will certainly fight to the death at the Misty Rain Tavern. Qiu Daozhang is brave, but how can he be that old thief's match?" Anxiously he rushed back downstairs, grabbed a small boat and paddled furiously to catch up with them.

Seeing his enemy ahead it was very difficulty for him to be calm, but he knew he ought to be patient on the water; 'snap' the handle of oar was broken because he exerted too much energy. He was furious and anxious at the same time; he took a plank from the boat and used it to paddle the boat. Now instead of going faster he was going slower; the distance between his boat and the two people's boat gradually increased. By the time he managed to land the boat with a great deal of trouble, those two had already gone.

Guo Jing thought aloud, "I have to swallow my anger, I can't lose my life before avenging this enmity." He took a deep breath and spat three times; then he cocked his ears in full attention. He heard from behind the tavern faintly came the noise of blades splitting the air, mixed with people calling and responding each other; apparently it was not Qiu and Huang two people. Guo Jing looked around assessing the situation around him, and then tiptoeing into the Misty Rain Tavern. He saw nobody downstairs, so he rushed upstairs only to see by the window someone was leaning against the railings, looking out, his mouth was still noisily chewing something. It was none other than Hong Qigong.

"Shifu!" Guo Jing rushed forward and called out. Hong Qigong nodded his head, pointed outside and raised a cooked half lamb leg in his hand and took a big bite.

Guo Jing quickly went to the window. He saw flashing swords in the clearing behind the tavern, eight, nine people were surrounding Huang Yaoshi. Seeing the enemy was fighting a multitude of opponents he was slightly relieved; but after looking clearly at who these people were, he could not help but feel surprised. He saw his Da Shifu Ke Zhen'E wielding his iron staff with a young Taoist priest standing behind him. He thought, "How come Da Shifu is also here?" He looked again and found out that the young priest was Qiu Chuji's disciple Yin Zhiping; who was wielding his long sword to protect Ke Zhen'E's back, not to attack Huang Yaoshi. The other six were all Taoist priests, they were Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the rest of the Quanzhen Six Masters.

Guo Jing watched for a moment and realized the Quanzhen Sect was using their Big Dipper Formation to fight the enemy. Only the Changzhen Zi [Eternal Truth] Tan Chuduan had died, so the 'tian xuan' [sky jade/gem] position was occupied by Ke Zhen'E. Too bad his martial art skill was not on par with the others, plus he was not familiar with the formation, so Yin Zhiping was protecting his back while giving him directions. The Quanzhen Six Masters were brandishing their swords, advancing and retreating, dispersing and gathering together, keeping Huang Yaoshi inside their circle fighting an intense battle.

That day during the fierce battle at the Ox Village only two of the Quanzhen Seven Masters wielded their long swords; the rest of them were fighting using their bare palms, the battle was already very intense. This time there were seven long swords and one iron staff, so the fierceness was scary.

Huang Yaoshi remained barehanded; he floated around amidst the flashing swords and staff, as if he was forced to defend himself without being able to launch any counterattack; for dozens of moves he only moved around to avoid the enemies' blades without launching a single fist or kick. Guo Jing was secretly delighted, "Regardless of your resourcefulness, it will be difficult for you to run away from justice today."

Suddenly he saw that Huang Yaoshi swept his right foot around his body twice with his left foot firmly on the ground; compelling eight people to simultaneously withdraw three steps. "Excellent Sweeping Leaves Kick Technique!" Guo Jing praised.

Huang Yaoshi turned his head and waved his hand toward Hong and Guo two people upstairs and nodded his head in greeting. Guo Jing saw his face was relaxed and composed; he did not look like someone who was gasping for breath, which caused Guo Jing to be suspicious. He saw Huang Yaoshi's left palm sweep diagonally towards the top of Changsheng Zi [Eternal Life], Liu Chuxuan's head; so Huang Yaoshi had moved abruptly from defensive to offensive.

Actually Liu Chuxuan should not fend off against this palm; the 'tian quan' [sky power/authority], Qiu Chuji and the 'tian xuan' Ke Zhen'E should have made flank attacks from the side to rescue him; however, Ke Zhen'E was blind, unlike average people, he relied on his acute hearing, how could he guard against Huang Yaoshi's silent and brilliant palm technique? Qiu Chuji's sword flickered toward Huang Yaoshi's right armpit, Ke Zhen'E moved following Yin Zhiping's direction, but he was one step too late. Liu Chuxuan heard the palm slicing the wind just above his head, in his shock he threw himself to the ground and rolled away.

Ma Yu and Wang Chuyi realized the situation was critically dangerous, they launched a simultaneous flank attacks with their swords. Liu Chuxuan escaped the danger, but the Big Dipper Formation was broken. Huang Yaoshi laughed and dashed toward Sun Bu'er; he only moved for three steps, suddenly turned around and hit Guangning Zi [Infinite Peace] Hao Datong's chest. Hao

Datong had never seen this kind of strange move, he hesitated slightly before stabbing his sword toward Huang Yaoshi's back. Huang Yaoshi moved like a rabbit, he broke through the encirclement and stood about two 'zhang's away from the crowd.

Hong Qigong laughed and said, "Old Heretic Huang, that was a very smart move!"

"I am going down," Guo Jing called out and moved toward the stairs.

"Slow down, slow down!" Hong Qigong said, "From the start your father-in-law has never hit back. At first I was worried about your Da Shifu, but looks like he does not have any intention to harm anybody."

Guo Jing returned to the window and asked, "How can you tell?"

Hong Qigong replied, "If he wanted to harm anybody, do you think that skinny monkey priest will still be alive? That little priest is not his match, not his match at all!" He took another bite at the lamb leg and said, "Before your father-in-law and Qiu Chuji arrived, I saw these old priests and your Da Shifu arrange their formation over there; but how can the Big Dipper Formation be learned in such a short time? Those old priests persuaded your Da Shifu to temporarily fill the empty position. Your Da Shifu clenched his teeth without saying anything. I don't know what enmity your Da Shifu has against your father-in-law. He followed that young priest to take the 'tian xuan' position; but in the end they still cannot block your father-in-law's deathly hand."

"He is not my father-in-law," Guo Jing said, full of hatred.

Hong Qigong was surprised, "Eh, what do you mean he is not your father-in-law?" he asked.

Clenching his teeth Guo Jing said, "He ... he ... humph!"

"How is Rong'er?" Hong Qigong asked, "You had an argument with her, didn't you?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with Rong'er," Guo Jing answered, "This old thief, he, he has killed my five shifus. My hatred to him is as deep as the ocean."

Hong Qigong jumped in surprise, he quickly asked, "Is that so?" But Guo Jing did not hear his question; his attention was focused on the fierce battle downstairs. By now the situation has changed, Huang Yaoshi was using his 'pi kong zhang fa' [splitting the air palm technique], creating strong gusts of wind, blocking his eight opponents' attacks.

Speaking about martial art skills of Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and the others, Huang Yaoshi should not be able to penetrate within a 'zhang' of their defense by relying on his bare palm only; but in the Big Dipper Formation they moved forward and backward together, Sun Bu'er, Ke Zhen'E and Yin Zhiping three people's martial art was comparatively weaker, as one person was compelled to draw back, the rest of the formation would have no choice but to follow. And so for each step forward everybody was forced to retreat two steps; they were separated farther and farther away from Huang Yaoshi, but the Big Dipper Formation was not the slightest bit chaotic.

By this time the Quanzhen Sect's long swords were already too far to reach Huang Yaoshi's body; it looked like he was just waiting for an opportunity to attack. Several moves later Hong Qigong said, "Hmm, so that's how it is."

“What is it?” Guo Jing busily asked.

Hong Qigong replied, “The Old Heretic Huang is deliberately forcing them to open up their formation, because he wants to learn the Big Dipper Formation’s mystery; that’s why he has not launched any killer attack yet. In less than ten moves he is going to reduce the circle once again.”

Although Hong Qigong had lost his martial art power, his judgment was still very clear; and sure enough, Huang Yaoshi hacking palm’s strength weakened and the Quanzhen Masters gradually tightened their encirclement. In less than a time to drink tea later everybody crowded together into one lump of people. Liu Chuxuan, Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and Hao Datong were simultaneously stabbing their swords into Huang Yaoshi’s body, but somehow when their swords almost reached Huang Yaoshi’s skin, they all missed by several inches. If not for their fast reactions, these four swords would have pierced a hole on their fellow apprentice’s body.

Fighting in this tight circle the difference between one move to the other was only a hair’s width. Guo Jing knew that as soon as Huang Yaoshi was well acquainted with the formation he would not leisurely fight these people anymore. To break the formation he must struck the weakest link, which was his Da Shifu and Yin Zhiping two people. He was too far from those people, if the situation became critical he would not have time to help, while right now he saw dangerous situations occur one after another. “Disciple goes down,” he said to Hong Qigong. Without waiting for an answer he dashed downstairs.

When he got near the battle situation was again changed; Huang Yaoshi continuously moved toward Ma Yu’s left side, but the more he moved the farther away he was from the crowd, as if he was trying to run away. Guo Jing held the dagger in his hand, ready to pound as soon as he had the opportunity. Suddenly Wang Chuyi let out a whistle and he, along with Hao Datong and Sun Bu’er, who formed the handle of the Big Dipper, turned forward from the left, to keep Huang Yaoshi in the middle of the formation.

Huang Yaoshi changed his position three times, but Wang Chuyi also moved the handle of the Big Dipper, just like Qiu Chuji was also moving the four stars of the Dipper, preventing Huang Yaoshi from occupying the position by Ma Yu’s left side. As he was making his fourth attempt suddenly Guo Jing understood, “Ah, right, he wants to steal the north polar star position.”

When he was treating his injury at the Ox Village, from behind the wall he saw the Quanzhen Seven Masters fought Mai Chaofeng, and later on Huang Yaoshi, using the Big Dipper Formation. Later on he learned in detail from Huang Rong the Big Dipper constellation and the north polar star; he knew that the ‘tian shu’ [sky pivot] and ‘tian xuan’ [sky jade/gem] were linked in a straight line with the north polar star. Since the north polar star is always on the north, every night the Big Dipper constellation would revolve around this star. Later on he was captured by the Beggar Clan on Mount Jun at the Dongting Lake, again he pondered about this Big Dipper constellation; not only did he gain more than a few understanding of the Big Dipper characteristics, but also the movement of the Big Dipper Formation, and applied this ingenious method to advance his own martial art skill.

Huang Yaoshi’s intelligence was a hundred folds better than Guo Jing’s; he was also well-versed in astronomy and the study of yin-yang wu hang [lit. negative and positive five lines]. After he failed to break the Quanzhen Seven Masters’ Big Dipper Formation during the battle at the Ox Village he meditated over this for a long time, until he finally comprehended the flaw of this formation.

Guo Jing was thinking about this formation because he wanted to ‘learn’ it; while Huang Yaoshi thought it was not worth his time to learn Wang Chongyang’s technique, so he concentrated on ‘breaking’ the formation. He knew that all he needed to do was to snatch the north polar star position, and the formation would break; or at least if he occupied the central position, he would be able to control the formation, he could wait leisurely for the enemy to be exhausted, while he himself would stand in an invincible position.

The Quanzhen Masters were also aware that he was trying to break the formation by stealing the crucial position; they were inwardly anxious. If Tan Chuduan were still alive, the seven of them could move as one body, certainly they would not let Huang Yaoshi steal the north polar star position. This time the ‘tian xuan’ was occupied by Ke Zhen’E and Yin Zhiping; which, admittedly had inferior martial art skill, and were not familiar with the formation technique, as a result the Big Dipper Formation’s effectiveness was significantly reduced.

Ma Yu and the others knew that a prolonged fight would not do them any good; moreover, Guo Jing was standing on the side, if Huang Yaoshi was in a real danger, as a son-in-law, how could he not help? But their martial uncle’s and brother’s death must be avenged. Their deceased master Wang Chongyang was the number one martial artist of the world; if six of his disciples joined forces against one Huang Yaoshi and still could not gain any victory, the reputation of Quanzhen Sect would be ruined.

They heard Huang Yaoshi laugh and say, “I didn’t know Chongyang’s disciples are so stubborn that they do not know what’s good for them!” While talking he moved swiftly towards Sun Bu’er and hacked with his palms three times. Ma Yu and Hao Datong raised their swords to rescue her. Huang Yaoshi slightly leaned sideways to evade the swords, ‘swish! swish! swish!’ he hacked three more times toward Sun Bu’er.

The Master of the Peach Blossom Island’s palm technique was naturally very exquisite. Even if Wang Chongyang lived again, or Hong Qigong recovered from his injury, they would not be able to evade these six palms easily; how could Sun Bu’er block them off? She saw the palm was coming swiftly, she had no choice but to brandish her sword in a flower pattern and furiously protect her face with all her might. Suddenly Huang Yaoshi swept his legs repeatedly and kicked her six times. These ‘luo ying shen jian zhang’ [falling (leaves) divine sword palm technique] and ‘sao ye tui’ [sweeping leaves kick technique] were the Peach Blossom Island’s ‘kuang feng jue ji’ [fierce wind stunt/unique skill]; if the enemy did not retreat within the first six moves, the next six moves would follow, faster than the previous ones. Within six by six, thirty six moves even if a hero or a warrior could avoid the slap, he would not be able to evade the kick.

Ma Yu and the others noticed that Huang Yaoshi concentrated his ferocious attack toward Sun Bu’er; immediately they came to her rescue, as a result, in this pressing situation the formation became disorderly. Ke Zhen’E was blind, so the movement of the formation was somewhat delayed; Huang Yaoshi let out a long laugh and he was already on Ke Zhen’E’s back. “Aiyu!” suddenly Ke Zhen’E heard someone cry out in midair, that person was flying to the top of the roof of the Misty Rain Tavern. It turned out that Huang Yaoshi grabbed Yin Zhiping’s back and threw him away.

The gap in the formation was getting bigger. Without giving the enemy any opportunity to mend the formation, Huang Yaoshi dashed toward Ma Yu, fully expecting Ma Yu to evade. To his surprise as

his sword fended off the attack, the sword in Ma Yu's left hand went straight toward Huang Yaoshi's eyebrow; his movement was steady, backed by a profound internal energy.

Huang Yaoshi was forced to lean sideways to evade, he could not restrain from praising, "Good! You deserve to be the Quanzhen Sect's head disciple." Suddenly his leg swept downward, kicking Hao Datong's leg while at the same time he stooped down to snatch Hao Datong's sword and stabbed it toward his chest. Liu Chuxuan was shocked; he wielded his sword to parry. Huang Yaoshi laughed a big laugh and flicked his hand. 'Crack!' both swords were broken.

A dark green shadow flashed, the Master of the Peach Blossom Island was moving toward the north polar star position. By this moment the formation was in total chaos, nobody was able to stop him. The Quanzhen Masters cried out bitterly, they knew Huang Yaoshi was about to exercise mastery over them. Ma Yu heaved a deep sigh and was about to throw his sword to admit defeat and ready to take whatever punishment the enemy would send their way. Suddenly he saw the dark green shadow flashed back; there was already someone occupying the north polar star position. It was Guo Jing.

Among the Quanzhen Masters, only Qiu Chuji was overjoyed; he had seen Guo Jing staked it all in attacking Huang Yaoshi at the Drunken Immortal Tavern. Ma Yu and Wang Chuyi knew Guo Jing was kind-hearted and honest; even though they thought he was going to help his father-in-law, certainly he would not harm his own shifu Ke Zhen'E. The rest of the Masters were shocked, they saw Guo Jing had already occupied the north polar star position; as soon as these father-in-law and son-in-law joined hands, Quanzhen Sect would die without any burial place. But they were even more surprised to see Guo Jing was attacking Huang Yaoshi with a bare left palm and a sword in his right hand.

As he succeeded in breaking the formation, Huang Yaoshi wanted to force Quanzhen Sect to admit they were wrong; who would have thought that suddenly someone was occupying the north polar star position. His attention was focused on fighting the Quanzhen Masters, so without looking back he sent his palm backward using the 'pi kong zhang' toward the enemy's chest. That person stretched out his left palm to parry the incoming force, yet he did not move even for half a step. Huang Yaoshi was surprised, he thought, "Very few people in the world have the strength to block my palm, who is this person?" He turned his head to look and saw that it was Guo Jing.

By this time Huang Yaoshi was surrounded by the enemies front and rear; if he could not drive Guo Jing away, the Big Dipper Formation would outflank him from behind and that would put him in a very dangerous situation. He sent out three palm attacks in succession toward Guo Jing, one palm was fiercer than the last, but each time Guo Jing simply blocked it away. The fourth palm contain a fake and a real attack, expecting Guo Jing to take advantage of an opening and launch a counterattack; who would have thought that Guo Jing only took a defensive position and did not counterattack. Guo Jing lifted the dagger up in front of his chest, while his left palm slowly swept across his own lower abdomen. In this way although he received one stance with two attacks from Huang Yaoshi, both attacks were neutralized.

Huang Yaoshi was startled, he thought, "This dumb kid knew how to defend and break the formation; he steadily defending the north polar star position and did not want to move even half a step. Ah, right, he must have received Quanzhen Masters' instruction and came here to help them to fight me."

He did not know that his guess was only half correct. Guo Jing did indeed know the secret of the Big Dipper Formation, but he learned it from the Nine Yin Manual and not from the Quanzhen Masters. As Guo Jing was facing the enemy with whom he held an enormous enmity, he suppressed his anger to keep his position; it was as if his feet were firmly planted to the ground, he simply turned his eyes blind to whatever trick Huang Yaoshi used to tempt him to attack.

Huang Yaoshi groaned silently; he thought, “This dumb kid doesn’t know when to proceed and when to retreat! Humph! Even if Rong’er blames me, I am going to hurt you today; otherwise you won’t want to back off.” His left hand made a circle about seven inches in front of his chest, his right palm rode on the left hand; borrowing the strength from the left hand it was propelled forward, the force doubled. But before it hit Guo Jing’s face, he suddenly remembered, “If he doesn’t evade, this palm will certainly cause him a heavy injury. Whatever the reason, Rong’er will not be happy for the rest of her life.”

Guo Jing saw him borrow the strength of his left hand to launch a palm attack, he knew the incoming force would not be a small matter; gritting his teeth he launched the ‘xian long zai tian’ [dragon appears on the field], a stake-it-all stance from the Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms. He realized his martial art was far inferior to the enemy’s; he would suffer serious injury if he took the incoming palm head-on, but in order to evade the attack, he would have to leave the north polar star position, which would set him back into a more difficult situation. Hence in this one move he was ready to sacrifice his own life. Who would have thought that as his palm was about a foot away from his face, Huang Yaoshi suddenly withdrew his attack and called out, “Dumb Kid, go away! Why do you make things difficult for me?”

Guo Jing held his sword tight, he looked at Huang Yaoshi with full attention to protect himself against any trick he might do; he did not reply. By now the Quanzhen Masters had already reorganized their formation; they made encirclement some distance away from Huang Yaoshi’s back, waiting for an opportunity to attack.

“Where is Rong’er?” Huang Yaoshi asked.

Guo Jing still did not answer, his face looked gloomy, his eyes spouted anger. Seeing his expression Huang Yaoshi’s suspicion grew; he was afraid his daughter had met some accident. “What did you do to her? Speak up!” he barked.

Guo Jing gritted his teeth and bit his lips; his right hand, which was holding the sword, slightly trembled. Huang Yaoshi’s attention was focused on him; each slight movement Guo Jing made did not escape his eyes. Seeing Guo Jing’s unusual expression he was even more alarmed. “Why is your hand trembling? Why aren’t you talking?” he called out.

Guo Jing recalled how his shifus died a horrible death on the Peach Blossom Island, grief and indignation burst forth in his heart; his body shook violently, his eyes bloodshot. Seeing him not willing to talk, tears streaming down his face, Huang Yaoshi was more alarmed. He knew his daughter had a heated argument with Guo Jing over the Princess Huazheng’s affair; he was afraid Guo Jing had killed Huang Rong. He kicked his feet and pounced forward.

As soon as Huang Yaoshi made his move Qiu Chuji thrust his long sword out, at the same time the Big Dipper Formation started to move. Wang Chuyi and Hao Datong attacked from Huang Yaoshi’s left and right, one with sword in his hand, the other with a bare palm. Guo Jing’s palm neutralized

the incoming attack, while his dagger stung with a lightning speed to make a counterattack move. Huang Yaoshi did not fend it off; he flipped his hand over trying to seize the dagger. Although his movement was accurate and swift, Wang Chuyi's sword had already arrived at his back; he had no choice but to twist his waist to evade, and thus his fingers missed Guo Jing's dagger by two inches. Guo Jing used this opportunity to stab forward. This fierce battle was several times more intense than the previous one.

The Quanzhen Masters' sole desire was to kill Huang Yaoshi to avenge Zhou Botong and Tan Chuduan. Huang Yaoshi knew perfectly well that there was a misunderstanding here, but he was a proud man, he also felt that as someone of higher rank it would be beneath his dignity to explain. He wanted to defeat them completely; to make them throw their swords and surrender, and then he would make everything clear. Thereupon he launched attack after attack while being lenient; otherwise, although Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the others might be able to defend themselves, but how could Sun Bu'er and Yin Zhiping keep their lives? Unexpectedly Guo Jing appeared and not only he did not help Huang Yaoshi, but it seemed like he hated Huang Yaoshi to his death. Huang Yaoshi thought that if Guo Jing did not kill Huang Rong, why was he so afraid of him?

This time Huang Yaoshi did not show any mercy; he wanted to grab Guo Jing and ask for some explanation. If Guo Jing did indeed kill Huang Rong, even if he tore him apart to pieces it would not be enough to vent his anger. Unfortunately Guo Jing occupied the north polar star position; although Yin Zhiping had not crawled down from the Misty Rain Tavern's roof, the battle situation had been reversed. The Big Dipper Formation moved like a billowing wave; they launched offensive moves without ceasing.

Huang Yaoshi tried several times to penetrate Guo Jing's defense but failed, he started to get impatient. Each time he launched a fierce attack the Quanzhen Masters were always there to block him. He wanted to launch a deathly attack and kill some of them to break the formation, but the Big Dipper Formation gradually tightened its encirclement. He started to think that although he could shake himself loose, it would be difficult for him to escape unscathed.

Fighting for a while Ma Yu pointed his sword and called out, "Hold on!"

The Quanzhen Masters held their hands, firmly stood on their respective positions. Ma Yu said, "Huang Daozhu [Island Master Huang], you are a prominent grandmaster of your martial art school; how can we, the younger generation, dare to offend you? Today we rely on sheer number to fight you; it is because the situation forces us to do so. We want to know how you are going to settle the blood debts of our Zhou Shishu [martial uncle] and Tan Shidi [martial (younger) brother]!"

With a cold laugh Huang Yaoshi said, "What else there is to say? Just go ahead and kill the Old Heretic Huang to protect the Quanzhen Sect's reputation; won't that be great? Be on your guard!" Without moving his body or lifting up his arm his right palm had already chopped toward Ma Yu's face.

Ma Yu tried to evade sideways in panic, but Huang Yaoshi's palm came without warning; this feign hack was immediately followed by the real attack. This combination of void and solid was a killer stance from the 'luo ying shen jian zhang fa'. Huang Yaoshi had perfected it for ten years; he intended to use it in the second sword meet of Mount Hua. This stance was not designed to fight a group of enemies, but it was very effective in a one on one combat. Danyang Zi's [Scarlet Sun] skill might be profound, but how could he be the Eastern Heretic's match?

It would be better if Ma Yu did not evade; once he moved to the right, the second attack came. Ma Yu groaned inwardly, "Not good!" He was going to block by stretching out his hand, but the enemy's palm had already arrived at his chest. As soon as Huang Yaoshi exerted his strength, Ma Yu's internal organs would be shaken and he would suffer serious internal injury.

The Quanzhen Five Masters were shocked; swords and palms came to the rescue, but how could there still be time? They saw Ma Yu was at the point of death, surprisingly Huang Yaoshi laughed and withdrew his palm; he said, "If I break your formation this way, you won't accept your defeat easily. The Old Heretic Huang may die, but how can I let myself be the laughingstock of all the heroes under the sky? Good Priests, come, let us fight!"

Liu Chuxuan snorted and shook his fist, Wang Chuyi followed with his sword; the Big Dipper Formation was ready to go into action. It was to be the seventeenth stance, Wang Chuyi was supposed to move after Ma Yu. He stabbed his sword into the air, ready to strike; but Ma Yu did not move forward, on the contrary, he retreated two steps backward and called out, "Hold it!" Everybody held their steps again. Ma Yu said, "Huang Daozhu, thank you for holding your hand."

"You flattered me," Huang Yaoshi replied.

Ma Yu said, "Reasonably said, right now wanbei's [younger generation, he was referring to himself] life should have been gone, and this formation developed by my deceased master should have been broken by you. If we know good from evil, we should admit defeat and throw ourselves at your mercy. But we do not dare not to seek revenge because of our deep enmity with you. After this matter is settled, wanbei will slash my own throat as a gesture of gratitude toward Daozhu."

Huang Yaoshi's expression was gloomy, he waved his hand and said, "It's useless to talk too much, you can just begin. The matter of kindness and enmity in this world is difficult to understand."

Guo Jing thought, "Turned out Ma Daozhang and the others fight him to avenge their Shisu and Shidi. But Zhou Dage [Big Brother Zhou] is still alive and well, also Tan Daozhang's death has nothing to do with Huang Daozhu. However, if I explain the real situation the Quanzhen Masters will withdraw themselves from the battle, leaving Da Shifu and me two people; how can we be his match? Let's not talk about avenging Shifus' death, we can't even guarantee we will still be alive by the time we are done." But then he remembered, "If I do not tell the truth, how am I going to be different from a coward? Shifus often said that we might lose our head, but not our righteousness." Thereupon with a loud and clear voice he said, "Ma Daozhang, Qiu Daozhang, Wang Daozhang, your Zhou Shisu has not died yet; and it was Ouyang Feng who killed Tan Daozhang."

"What did you say?" Qiu Chuji was surprised. Thereupon Guo Jing recounted how he treated his injury inside a secret room at the Ox Village, how from behind the wall he saw and heard Qiu Qianzhang fabricate a rumor to incite both sides to fight each other, how Ouyang Feng place the blame on Huang Yaoshi, he told them everything. Although he was clumsy with words, everybody understood his explanation very clearly.

The Quanzhen Masters were listening, half believing and half doubting. Qiu Chuji loudly asked, "Are you telling the truth?"

Guo Jing pointed his finger to Huang Yaoshi and said, "Disciple hates this old thief that I do not wish to live in the same earth with him, why would I help him? Only it was the truth, so disciple cannot keep his mouth shut."

The Six Masters knew him as an honest person; moreover, he had shown so much hatred toward Huang Yaoshi, so what he said must be the truth.

It was beyond Huang Yaoshi's expectation to hear him saying things in his favor; he was astonished and asked, "Why do you hate me so much? Where is Rong'er?"

Ke Zhen'E cut him off, "You don't know what you did? Jing'er, although we can't win, we must fight this old thief to our deaths." Finished speaking he lifted his iron staff and swept it toward Huang Yaoshi.

Hearing his shifu, Guo Jing knew that he was forgiven; he felt very happy and immediately tears flowed down his face. "Da Shifu," he called out, "Er Shifu and the others, they ... all five of them died a miserable death!"

Huang Yaoshi was grabbing the head of Ke Zhen'E staff with an outstretched hand, he turned to Guo Jing and asked, "What did you say? Zhu Cong, Han Baoju and the others were nicely received as guests on my island, why did you say they are dead?"

Ke Zhen'E furiously tried to pull his iron staff, but it did not even budge. Huang Yaoshi asked Guo Jing again, "Disregarding your elders and superiors you talked nonsense to me, attacking me like crazy, is that because of Zhu Cong and the others?"

Guo Jing's eyes looked like they were spurting blood; he called out, "You have harmed my five Shifus with your own hands, and now you pretend you did not know?" Lifting his dagger up, he stabbed it forward with a straight arm.

Huang Yaoshi moved the iron staff in his hand to block; 'bang!' the staff and the dagger collided, sparks flew out everywhere. The dagger was so sharp that it actually nicked the iron staff. Huang Yaoshi asked again, "Who saw it?"

Guo Jing said, "I buried my Five Shifus with my own hands, are you saying that I slander you?"

Hung Yaoshi laughed coldly and said, "So what if you slander me? For all my life the Old Heretic Huang come and go alone; why would I deny killing these several people? You are correct, I killed your shifus!"

Suddenly a female voice was calling out, "No, Father, it wasn't you. Don't take the blame on your own shoulder."

Everybody turned their heads around and saw the one who spoke was indeed Huang Rong. They had been so engrossed in the fierce battle that nobody knew she had arrived. As Guo Jing saw her again, he was lost in thought, he did not know whether he should feel happy or anxious.

As Huang Yaoshi saw his daughter was alive and well, he was very happy; his hatred toward Guo Jing disappeared, he laughed a big laugh and said, "Good child, come, let Father hug you."

For the past several days Huang Rong had been suffering a lot of heartache, it was only today she heard a loving word for the first time; she dashed forward and threw herself into her father's bosom and cried, "Father, this dumb kid slandered you, he ... he also bullied me."

Huang Yaoshi embraced his daughter and said with a smile, "The Old Heretic Huang always does as he pleases, ever since dozens of years ago ignorant people have always put the crime of the world on your father's head, so what difference will it make to add several more crimes to the pile? The Five Freaks of Jiangnan were your Mei Shijie's [martial (older) sister] archenemies, so of course I killed them with my own hands."

"No, no," Huang Rong anxiously said, "It wasn't you. I know it wasn't you."

Huang Yaoshi showed a faint smile and said, "That dumb kid is so bold, he dares to bully my good child. Just watch, Father will teach him a lesson." He had just finished speaking when suddenly like a lightning the back of his palm struck, without a shadow, without a trace. Guo Jing was thinking about what these father and daughter were talking about, when 'slap!' he felt a burning sensation on his left cheek. He was just about to raise his hand to block, but Huang Yaoshi's palm had already returned to Huang Rong's head, gently stroking her elegant hair.

This palm made a loud noise, but actually the force was weak; Guo Jing felt his cheek burning, but he did not suffer any injury. He was at a loss; did not know whether he should charge forward or he should stay where he was.

Ke Zhen'E heard the slap on Guo Jing's face, he was afraid Huang Yaoshi might have stricken him with a deadly blow. "Jing'er, how are you?" he anxiously asked.

"I am all right," Guo Jing replied.

Ke Zhen'E said, "Don't listen to this demon and this witch telling lies. I don't have eyes to see, but your Si Shifu [Fourth Shifu] said: he saw this old thief killed your Er Shifu and forced to death your Qi [Seventh] ..." Guo Jing did not wait for him to finish, he charged forward toward Huang Yaoshi. Ke Zhen'E followed by wielding his iron staff.

Huang Yaoshi let his daughter go and evaded Guo Jing's palm, while at the same time stretched his hand to grab Ke Zhen'E's iron staff. This time Ke Zhen'E had guarded against his grab so that Huang Yaoshi missed the staff. Master and disciple joined hands fighting a tight battle with Huang Yaoshi.

Although Guo Jing had repeatedly met some outstandingly able people and had learned not a few of wonderful martial art skills, he was still too far behind compared to this grandmaster of a martial art school, the Master of the Peach Blossom Island. Even with Ke Zhen'E's help he could not do much. After only about twenty, thirty moves he had already moved his hands and feet with great difficulty.

Qiu Chuji thought, "In a critical time Quanzhen Sect has received these master and disciple's help; currently these two are in the brink of defeat, how can we sit down and watch without doing anything? Whether Zhou Shishu is alive or dead, we need to defeat the Old Heretic Huang first, then we'll talk later." Brandishing his sword he called out, "Ke Daxia [Chivalrous Hero], go back to your position!"

By this time Yin Zhiping had already crawled down from the Misty Rain Tavern's roof. Although he was black and blue and had a swollen nose from the fall, he did not suffer a serious injury. He rushed toward Ke Zhen'E's back and wielded his sword to protect him. Once again the Big Dipper Formation went into action, encircled Huang Yaoshi, father and daughter in the middle.

Huang Yaoshi was enraged, he thought, "Before it was a misunderstanding, so I can understand you attacking me; but after this dumb kid explained everything this crowd of mixed-up hairs still rely on sheer numbers to attack me. Do you think the Old Heretic Huang cannot kill people?" Like a flash of shadow he had already moved toward Ke Zhen'E's left.

Huang Rong saw the murderous look on her father's face; she knew his hands would not be light, her heart turned cold. She saw that Wang Chuyi and Ma Yu blocked her father's palm; Ke Zhen'E's iron staff ferociously struck toward her shoulder while his mouth shot curses, "Unforgivable lowly criminal, female demon! The Peach Blossom Island's slut!"

Huang Rong had never been willing to swallow the least bit of defeat; listening him open up his mouth in foul language, anger started to rise up her chest, she called out, "Scold me again if you have guts!"

The Seven Freaks of Jiangnan grew up in the marketplace where all kinds of people buy and sell, cursing each other for generations, what was so difficult about scolding other people? Ke Zhen'E hated Huang Yaoshi, father and daughter; listened to her say so, immediately his extensive vocabulary of malicious words flew out of his mouth. Huang Rong had always lived alone since she was little; she never had any experience with this kind of foul language. To her advantage she was very intelligent so that each time Ke Zhen'E scolded she was able to figure out what he was talking about and even scold him back; but afterwards the more she listened the more she could not talk back, because the more she did not understand. She spat and said, "Shame on you! You are someone's shifu yet you are not afraid to have a filthy mouth."

Ke Zhen'E scolded back, "With a clean person the old man talks clean words, with stinky and lowly people I speak filthy words! You are a filthy person, so the old man here talks even dirtier words."

Huang Rong was angry; she raised her bamboo stick toward Ke Zhen'E's face. Ke Zhen'E returned the attack with his iron staff; who would have thought that the Dog Beating Stick Technique was extremely marvelous beyond his imagination. Only several moves later his iron staff was completely under Huang Rong's control, using the 'lead' letter of the technique; as the stick went east the staff went east, when the stick went west the staff followed, it totally did not have the mind of its own.

Ke Zhen'E was occupying the 'tian xuan' position of the Formation. As soon as his movement was restrained, the entire formation's movement was somewhat restricted. Qiu Chuji's flickering sword stabbing Huang Rong's back, his intention was to help Ke Zhen'E; but Huang Rong relied on the armor she was wearing, to his surprise she ignored the stab, changing her stick movement she sent out three stances in succession. Qiu Chuji's sword was about to touch her clothes when he suddenly thought, "What kind of person is the Old Qiu, how can I harm this little girl?" The tip of his sword touched Huang Rong's back, but he did not push further.

Taking advantage of this slight hesitation Huang Rong's bamboo stick pulled Ke Zhen'E's iron staff. Borrowing his 'fu mo zhang fa' [demon subduing staff technique] energy Huang Rong push

the staff down and then jerked it up to the left. Ke Zhen'E was not able to control his strength; the staff left his grasp and flew to the air, 'splash!' it fell into the Nan Hu [South Lake].

Wang Chuyi was afraid Huang Rong might use this opportunity to harm Ke Zhen'E; he rushed in front of Ke Zhen'E with his sword blocking in front of his chest. Although his experience was vast, he had never seen the Dog Beating Technique before, so he was caught in surprise.

Seeing his master suffer a setback, Guo Jing called out, "Da Shifu, go and take a rest, I'll fight for you." Leaving the north polar star position he jumped into the 'tian xuan' position. By this time his martial art skill had already exceeded those of the Quanzhen Masters, plus he was familiar with the Big Dipper method; so as soon as he made his move the Formation's power increased substantially.

Actually the Big Dipper Formation revolved around the 'tian quan' position, but as soon as he entered, the key position moved to 'tian xuan' position, and the Formation's movement was altered. This modification was actually inferior to the original movement, but in this short moment Huang Yaoshi was not able to find a way to penetrate the formation's airtight defense; although he had his daughter to help, they were defending themselves with difficulty. Luckily for the most part the Quanzhen Masters took a defensive position; Guo Jing was the only one who fought with his life, forcing Huang Yaoshi to reluctantly face him.

Guo Jing kept pressing forward, forcing Huang Yaoshi to fight a tight battle. With the Quanzhen Masters backing Guo Jing up, Huang Yaoshi was not able to inflict any injury to him, and was forced to use his 'qing gong' [lightness kungfu] to evade Guo Jing's series of a mad-tiger-like attacks.

Huang Rong saw that Guo Jing's normally genial and kind face was now enveloped by a layer of murderous look; his expression was so frighteningly ferocious that he looked like a different person, completely different from the Guo Jing she used to know. She was startled and frightened at the same time; she stepped in front of her father and said, "Kill me first!"

Guo Jing glowered at her and barked, "Get out of my way!"

Huang Rong was taken aback, "How can you speak to me like that?" she thought.

Guo Jing charged forward and shoved her aside then he pounced towards Huang Yaoshi. Suddenly he heard someone laughed loudly and called out behind him, "Don't worry Yao Xiong [Brother Yao], I have come to help you!" His voice was like ear-piercing grating metals.

Nobody dared to turn their bodies right away; the entire Big Dipper Formation turned around Huang Yaoshi's back before they finally saw five, six tall and short people standing on the lakeside, led by someone with long arms and long legs, which was none other than the Western Poison Ouyang Feng.

The Quanzhen Six Masters cried out in anger. Qiu Chuji said, "Jing'er, let us settle the debt with the Western Poison first!" His long sword raised, the Quanzhen Six Masters surrounded Ouyang Feng. Who would have thought that Guo Jing's gaze was fixed on Huang Yaoshi; it seemed like he did not hear Qiu Chuji at all. As soon as the Quanzhen Six Masters left, he pounced toward Huang Yaoshi again and in a short moment two people had quickly exchanged five, six moves.

Both sides did not hit their target, so both leaped backward, looking over their shoulders, staring at each other. Guo Jing gave out a loud shout then attacked forward. Several times they exchanged several stances and then separated again.

This time the Quanzhen Six Masters had rearranged their battle formation. They looked at Ke Zhen'E and saw him barehanded, standing behind Huang Yaoshi, his head inclined, listening attentively; his arms were open wide, revealing his intention to sacrifice himself, throwing himself to grab Huang Yaoshi firmly, giving Guo Jing the opportunity to strike Huang Yaoshi's vital point. Because of this Qiu Chuji beckoned to Yin Zhiping, telling him to occupy the 'tian xuan' position.

Ma Yu loudly recited, "Holding hands the departed soul forcing itself to leave like a bead of pearls. Heart opens to hear the sound of nature, unlike the blowing flute!" It was the poem Tan Chuduan recited just before he closed his eyes. As the Quanzhen Masters heard it, their anger rose; with flickering swords and floating palms they attacked Ouyang Feng together.

The snake staff in Ouyang Feng's hand pushed and pulled abruptly, forcing the seven Quanzhen people to back off. Ouyang Feng had seen the Big Dipper Formation's fierceness at the Ox Village; he was quite intimidated by that, so he decided to keep a tight defense and wait for the enemy to reveal its own flaw. Once the Big Dipper Formation unfolded, it struck to the front and hit to the back, like a continuous wave of attacks. Ouyang Feng carefully met stance with stance, while opening his eyes wide to see any potential to break the formation. A moment later he noticed Yin Zhiping's 'tian xuan' was the Formation's weak link. He thought if he could destroy this link, he did not have anything else to fear; therefore, he brandished the snake staff in his hand trying to inflict some harm, while his eyes scanning around, assessing the situation around him.

Guo Jing and Huang Yaoshi were still engaged in a tight combat. Huang Rong moved her bamboo stick to keep Ke Zhen'E more than a 'zhang' away from these two people. She kept shouting, "Please stop fighting; please listen to me!" But Guo Jing turned a deaf ear to her; palm by palm he struck ferociously, in total disregard of his own life.

At first Huang Rong saw her father holding back, but Guo Jing kept provoking him so that gradually she saw his anger rise, his hands were getting heavier and heavier. She knew the situation was critical; either one of them would certainly suffer a heavy injury if he made a slight mistake. She lifted his head and saw Hong Qigong was leaning against the railing of the Misty Rain Tavern, watching the battle. "Shifu, Shifu," she hastily called, "Come down and help me explain everything."

Hong Qigong has seen early on that the situation was far from good, he regretted losing his martial art skill and was powerless to settle this dispute, and hence he was really anxious. Hearing Huang Rong cry out he had an idea, "If only the Old Heretic Huang still has some respect to me left, I think I can still do something." His hands pressed on the railing and he floated in the air coming down. "Everybody hold your hand!" he called out, "The Old Beggar has something to say." The Nine-fingered Divine Beggar had such a prestige in the Jianghu that when they saw his sudden appearance everybody's heart shivered and they could not help but to stop fighting.

Ouyang Feng was the first to secretly groan, he thought, "How can the Old Beggar's martial art come back?" He did not know that after listening to Guo Jing's explanation on the Sanskrit part of the Nine Yin Manual Hong Qigong spent these past few days to practice according to the technique

and was able to open up his 'qi jing ba mai' [marvelous/mysterious passage 8 pulses, Eight Extraordinary Channels].

Hong Qigong's martial art skill was very profound to begin with, after listening to an excellent internal energy secret such as treating one's own internal injury, with his divine comprehension within this short period of time he managed to open up one of the eight pulses; his lightness kungfu was 30, 40% recovered. Strictly speaking, if he were involved in a brawl just relying on his fists' and palms' strength, he could not even defeat a strong man who did not know any martial art. But in leaping up and down his movement was light and lively, at least in Ouyang Feng's eyes he did not look like someone who was devoid of any internal strength.

Hong Qigong was amazed to see these people were still in awe of him, he considered it carefully, "If the Old Beggar does not put on some airs, today's crisis will be difficult to resolve; but what can I say, so that the Quanzhen Masters will listen to my order, and also the Old Poison will comply without giving me too much difficulty?" Momentarily not knowing what to do he threw his head backward and laughed a big laugh; while he was looking up, he saw the moon was beginning to rise up, the bright circle looked like a wheel made of ice with one side of it slightly broken. An idea came into his mind, he said, "You are all experts in the Wulin world, but you deal with each other just like scoundrels and rascals, your words are just like farts."

Everybody was startled. They knew Hong Qigong always talked crazy words without any restrain, so they did not think much about his language; however, he must have a reason to say such thing. Ma Yu bowed in respect and asked, "Asking Qianbei [Senior] to grant us instruction."

Hong Qigong angrily said, "The Old Beggar heard some people say that on the eighth month's mid-autumn day this year there will be people fighting at the Misty Rain Tavern. The Old Beggar was afraid that his hearing was not clear, so while it is still early I want to laze around and sleep in peace and quiet here. Who knew that since early this morning I have been hearing clackety-clack and yakety-yak of people quarreling and fighting nonstop. I heard chamber pot formation or bed urinal formation, and then there was a husband beating his wife, a son-in-law attacking his father-in-law; very noisy just like killing pig or slaughtering dog, so noisy that the Old Beggar cannot take a nap in peace and quiet. Look at the moon, what day is today?"

Listening to his speech everybody remembered that today was the fourteenth of the eighth month, so the martial art contest was going to be the next day. Besides, Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian and their company had not arrived yet, so fighting today did not make much sense. Qiu Chuji said, "Lao Qianbei [Senior] is right, we should not have made disturbance here today." He turned his head toward Ouyang Feng and said, "Ouyang Feng, let us find someplace else to decide who will be alive and who will be dead."

"Wonderful, wonderful," Ouyang Feng laughed, "I'll gladly accompany you."

Hong Qigong's face turned sour, he said, "As soon as Wang Chongyang returned to heaven, the Quanzhen Sect's bunch of mixed-up hair has become a reckless empty-headed bunch. Let me tell you something: five priests and one priestess, plus a little priest with low martial art skill, all of you join hands, you are still not the Old Poison's match. Wang Chongyang has never left anything good for me; it is none of the Old Beggar's business whether the bunch of mixed-up hairs will be alive or dead, but let me ask you this: you have a martial art contest appointment tomorrow, who will keep the appointment? Will seven dead Taoists be able to fight?"

This speech sounded like he was ridiculing the Quanzhen priests, but in it he reminded them that by fighting Ouyang Feng they would die and would not live. The seven of them could not defeat Huang Yaoshi then, obviously now they were not Ouyang Feng's match. All of the Six Masters were experienced Jianghu characters, how could they fail to catch the real meaning of his speech? But they were facing their archenemy right now, how could they cower?

With the corner of his eye Hong Qigong saw Guo Jing was staring angrily at Huang Yaoshi; while Huang Rong was crying with tears streaming down her cheeks. He knew whatever it was, it must be a very complicated matter; he thought carefully, "I'll wait for the Old Urchin; with his martial art skill he will be able to subdue everybody. At that time the Old Beggar will speak again." Thereupon he shouted, "The Old Beggar is going to take a nap; whoever lift up his fist or his kick deliberately wants to offend me. Come tomorrow evening, I don't care if you turn the sky over or shake the earth, the Old Beggar will not help anybody. Ma Yu, take this bunch of mixed-up hairs and sit down here with me cultivating your internal energy. Make a one notch internal strength gain is a gain; waiting for the last minute will not guarantee your victory. Jing'er, Rong'er, come over here and massage my legs."

Ouyang Feng was rather scared of him; he thought that if Hong Qigong joined hands with the Quanzhen Masters, they would be difficult for him to fight. He said, "Old Beggar, Yao Xiong and I two guys have some unfinished business with the Quanzhen Sect. The Nine-fingered Divine Beggar's words are like mountain; I'll follow your direction today, and tomorrow you may not help either side."

Hong Qigong was secretly amused, "If you push me with your little finger now, I am afraid I will fall down." Thereupon he loudly said, "The Old Beggar's fart is still sweeter than your words; I said I won't help, then I won't help. Are you sure you'll win?" Then he laid down face up on the ground, using his wine gourd as a pillow and called out, "Two children, come and massage my legs!"

By now only the bone was left of the lamb leg in his hand, but he was still reluctant to throw it away, he kept gnawing and licking like it was still tasty. He looked at the clouds looming over the horizon and said, "Those clouds look strange, I am afraid the weather will change very soon!" He also noticed thin mist rose from the surface of the lake; he took several deep breaths and shook his head, "It's very strange!" Turning his head toward Huang Yaoshi he said, "Yao Xiong, do you think I can borrow your daughter to massage my legs?"

Huang Yaoshi only showed a faint smile. Huang Rong came over and sat next to Hong Qigong, then started to massage his leg gently. Hong Qigong sighed, "Ay, these old bones have never enjoyed this kind of good fortune!" Staring at Guo Jing he said, "Dumb kid, are your dog's paws broken by the Old Heretic Huang?"

"Yes," Guo Jing replied. He came over the other side of Hong Qigong and started massaging his leg.

Ke Zhen'E was leaning on a willow tree by the lakeside; his pair of blind eyes was fixed at Huang Yaoshi. He was using his ears in place of his eyes. Huang Yaoshi was pacing around by the water. He walked to the east, Ke Zhen'E's head followed his movement to the east, he turned west Ke Zhen'E followed him to the west. Huang Yaoshi did not pay him any attention, only the corners of his mouth showed a cold smile.

The Quanzhen Six Masters and Yin Zhiping were sitting cross-legged on the ground, maintaining their respective positions of the Big Dipper Formation; their heads were hung low, they were quietly training their internal energy.

Ouyang Feng's servants, the snake shepherds, took out a table and a chair, set them up underneath the Misty Rain Tavern and served wine and food. With his back toward everybody else Ouyang Feng sat alone eating and drinking; he was wondering in his heart how Hong Qigong could recover that quick from the heavy injury his palm inflicted.

Meanwhile the weather was stifling hot, small insects were flying everywhere, and thin mist hovered on the surface of the lake. Hong Qigong said, "My thigh bone is sore, a storm must be coming; if we can see moon tomorrow at the mid-autumn festival, I will chop my own thigh and give it to you." Casting a sidelong glance toward Guo Jing and Huang Rong, he noticed that their eyes had always looked somewhere else, and had never looked at each other. Hong Qigong was always frank and honest; seeing this awkward situation, how could he keep his peace? But after asking several questions, those two mumbled indistinctly without giving him any answer.

Hong Qigong raised his voice asking Huang Yaoshi, "Yao Xiong, what is the other name of this Nan Hu?"

"It's called 'yuan yang hu' [Mandarin Duck Lake]," Huang Yaoshi replied.

"Indeed!" Hong Qigong said, "How come on this 'yuan yang hu' [Translator's note: mandarin ducks have always been regarded as the symbol of lovers] your daughter and your son-in-law are having an argument and the father and father-in-law did not advise them?"

Guo Jing stood up immediately, he pointed to Huang Yaoshi and said, "He ... he ... has killed my five shifus, how can I still call him my father-in-law?"

Huang Yaoshi coldly laughed and said, "Is that strange? The Seven Freaks of Jiangnan are not completely dead; there is still a stinky blind kid left. I'll say he won't live to see tomorrow ..."

Without waiting for him to finish Ke Zhen'E had already pounced toward him. Guo Jing also jumped forward, and despite the fact he moved later, he arrived sooner. Huang Yaoshi launched a single stance, his palms crossed and 'bang!' he shook Guo Jing's body, forcing him to retreat two steps.

Hong Qigong shouted, "I said don't fight! Do you think the Old Beggar's words are just fart?"

Guo Jing did not dare to attack again, he stared angrily at Huang Yaoshi. Hong Qigong asked, "Old Heretic Huang, the Six Freaks of Jiangnan are chivalrous heroes, why did you kill the innocents? The Old Beggar thinks this kind of behavior is not pleasing to the eyes."

Huang Yaoshi said, "I kill whoever I want, why do you care?"

Huang Rong called out, "Father, his five shifus were not killed by you; I know it. Please say that you did not kill them."

Under the moonlight Huang Yaoshi saw his daughter's face was thin and pale, he could not help but feel compassion toward her; but when he turned his eyes toward Guo Jing he saw murder written all over Guo Jing's face, his heart turned hard and he said, "I killed them."

With a choking voice Huang Rong said, "Father, why do you insist on confessing the murder?"

With a loud voice Huang Yaoshi replied, "Everybody says your father is wicked and strange, didn't you know it? Can a criminal do a good deed? All crimes in the world are your father's. The Six Freaks of Jiangnan considered themselves righteous and chivalrous heroes; when I see this kind of self-proclaimed hero I become angry."

Ouyang Feng burst out in laughter and loudly said, "Yao Xiong, your words are right on target. Let Xiong Di [younger brother, referring to himself] toast you!" Lifting up his wine cup he drank it in one go; he said, "Yao Xiong, let me present you a gift." His right hand slightly waved, he threw a cloth bundle away.

He was several 'zhang's apart from Huang Yaoshi, but by a casual wave of the hand the bundle flew like a bullet cutting the air; everyone was astonished and impressed. Huang Yaoshi held out his hand to receive it; the content of the bundle felt like a human head to him. After unwrapping the bundle he found it was indeed a human head, newly beheaded; the head wore a square hat, with beard on its chin, the face was not of someone he knew.

Ouyang Feng said with a laugh, "Xiong Di left for the west this morning and took a rest at a schoolhouse. I heard this rotten scholar taught the students to be loyal ministers and filial sons. Xiong Di loathes hearing such things, so I killed this rotten scholar. You and I are the Eastern Heretic and the Western Poison, we both are of the same kind." Then he let out a long laugh.

Huang Yaoshi's face changed, he said, "All my life I always respect loyal ministers and filial sons." Stooping down he dug a hole with his hand, buried that human's head, and respectfully bowed three times.

Ouyang Feng lost his interest, but he laughed and said, "The Old Heretic Huang has enjoyed a false reputation, turns out he also adheres to propriety and etiquette."

Huang Yaoshi imposingly said, "Loyalty and being filial is integrity, it is not propriety and etiquette!"

He had just closed his mouth when suddenly a thunder crashed. Everybody looked up and saw black clouds covering half of the sky; a thunderstorm was coming. Right at that moment they heard loud music; seven, eight big boats on the lake approached near. The boats were decorated with red lanterns; on the bows stood signs like 'Su Jing' and 'Hui Bi'; looked like they belong to a high ranking government officer.

**End of Chapter 34.**

## Chapter 35 – In the Temple of the Iron Spear

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Two soldiers were forced to carry Ke Zhen'E as they continued their journey. Huang Rong moved her bamboo stick, constantly whipping them. Towards the evening they arrived at the Temple of the Iron Spear. On the tall pagoda next to the temple crows had made their nests for generations; thousands crows flew back and forth in the air.*

As the boat reached the shore, twenty, thirty people came ashore; among them were Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian and their company. The last ones to come ashore were two men, one tall the other short; the tall one was the Great Jin's Prince Zhao, Wanyan Honglie, the short one was the Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan, Qiu Qianren. Apparently Wanyan Honglie relied on Ouyang Feng and Qiu Qianren to help them; so he was confident they would win this martial contest, hence he went as far as personally come over to Jiangnan.

Pointing to Qiu Qianren Huang Rong said, "Father, this old man has hit your daughter with his palm that I nearly lost my life."

At the Cloud Village Huang Yaoshi had seen Qiu Qianren's disgraceful act; he did not know it was actually Qiu Qianren in disguise. He thought it was strange how with just a little bit of trick this man could injure his daughter.

In the meantime Ouyang Feng was having a discussion with Wanyan Honglie and the others; they were talking in a low voice. After about half a day Ouyang Feng came to Hong Qigong and said, "Qi Xiong, you have said that in the upcoming martial art contest you are not going to help either side, haven't you?"

Hong Qigong said in his heart, "I have the desire but am powerless; even if I want to help I don't have the ability to do so." With no other choice he replied, "Contest or no contest, I said the fifteenth of the eighth month."

"That is so," Ouyang Feng said, "Yao Xiong, the Quanzhen Sect and the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan are seeking enmity with you; you are a grandmaster and a senior, it will be below your dignity to deal with these people. Let Xiong Di [younger brother, referring to himself] deal with them on your behalf, you can just stand on the side and be the spectator, what do you say?"

Huang Yaoshi thought about the battle situation from both sides' point of view: if Hong Qigong did not go into action, the Quanzhen Masters would certainly fall under Ouyang Feng's deadly hand, thus the Quanzhen Sect faced an imminent destruction. If Guo Jing helped them by defending the 'tian xuan', Ouyang Feng would not be the Big Dipper Formation's match; but if this dumb kid kept pestering Huang Yaoshi, the situation would not be the same, he thought, "This kid Guo Jing is still wet behind his ears, the Quanzhen Sect's life or death, fortune or disaster, actually depends on him. If Wang Chongyang in the underworld knew, all he could do is to laugh bitterly."

Ouyang Feng saw that he looked indifferent without answering his question, if Zhou Botong arrived, the situation would be detrimental to him; therefore, he let out a long laugh and called out, "Everybody, attack! What are you waiting for?"

Hong Qigong was angry, "Was that a human speaking or a dog farting?"

Ouyang Feng pointed to the sky and said with a smile, "'Zi shi' [first hour, midnight, between 11 pm and 1 am] has passed, right now it is already early morning of the fifteenth of the eighth month."

Hong Qigong looked up only to see that the moon had slightly shifted to the west, half of it was still covered by the dark clouds, it was indeed the end of the 'zi shi' and the start of 'chou shi' [second hour, between 1 am and 3 am].

Ouyang Feng's snake staff struck, its target was Qiu Chuji's chest. Facing their archenemy, with Peng Lianhu watching intently on the side, ready to strike, the Quanzhen Six Masters knew that the slightest mistake today would result in their demise; hence they pulled themselves together immediately and fought Ouyang Feng with all their might, but after just a few stances, the six of them groaned inwardly.

This time the Western Poison's intention was to show off his power in front of everybody; everything he displayed was swift and deadly move, particularly the two snakes on the head of his staff, which was extended or withdrawn, striking or evading in sudden movements, it was virtually impossible to guard against. Qiu Chuji, Wang Chuyi and the others had tried several times to stab these snakes, but how could they match their speed?

Huang Rong saw Guo Jing was still staring angrily at her father; it was only because Hong Qigong was on his way that he did not dare to attack. She got a sudden inspiration and said, "All day long talking about avenging his father, humph, now that the killer is here he is afraid."

Her words reminded Guo Jing, he turned his gaze to her and thought, "Kill the Jin dog first, then look for Huang Yaoshi; it won't be too late." Drawing his dagger he charged toward Wanyan Honglie.

Together Sha Tongtian and Peng Lianhu dashed forward, blocking in front of Wanyan Honglie. Guo Jing flicked his wrist and the dagger in his hand stabbed slanting down. Peng Lianhu blocked with his pair of judge pens, 'clang!' the weapons collided and he felt tingling sensation on his palms. Guo Jing successively went passed two people. Sha Tongtian's 'yi xing huan wei' [altering form changing position] technique was also unable to stop him; hastily Sha Tongtian tried to pursue him. Lingzhi Shangren and Liang Ziweng, each with weapon in their hands positioned themselves to intercept Guo Jing.

Guo Jing flashed sideways to evade two of Liang Ziweng's 'tou gu ding' [bone penetrating nail]; his both hands, one with a dagger the other with a palm, launched 'di yang chu fan' [ram charging fence], throwing his whole body forward.

Liang Ziweng saw that the incoming force was swift and fierce; he rolled away on the ground to evade. Lingzhi Shangren was big and fat, he was not as agile; he thought if he evaded, the enemy would have clear access to the Prince Zhao, so he raised his pair of cymbals, trying to block this attack. With two loud 'Bang! Bang!' his hands were shaken and the two cymbals flew to the air, while the wind from Guo Jing's palm continued hacking toward his face. Relying on the strength of, and poison on, his palms, Lingzhi Shangren fended off Guo Jing's palm, only to feel his chest constricted and his arm sore and numb; his palms hang loosely down, his wrist joints were shaken and to his shock he could not use his poisonous palm skill. He stood dumbly without knowing what to do. If Guo Jing took this opportunity and sent out a palm, he could easily take Lingzhi Shangren's life, but he remembered his main target was Wanyan Honglie, so he did not give Lingzhi Shangren another look.

The pair of copper cymbals flew in the air and glimmering under the moonlight one after another they fell back down to the earth. 'Bang!' the first cymbal landed on Lingzhi Shangren's head. Luckily it was in a horizontal position; otherwise with its knife-like sharp edge it would chop the Tibetan monk's bald head in two. Another loud 'Bang!' followed, louder and brighter than the first;

the second cymbal landed on the first, creating a continuous buzzing noise, which reached far into the lake and echoed back on the surface of the lake.

Wanyan Honglie saw how Guo Jing was able to go through four martial art masters without missing a step and suddenly arrive in front of him, he was unable to restrain his great shock and cried out, "Aiyo!" while turning his body around and run away.

With the dagger in his hand Guo Jing chased him; but he only managed to pursue several steps when suddenly a yellow shadow flashed by, a pair of palms came slanting down on him. Guo Jing stepped aside to evade, while the dagger in his hand stabbed forward; but his body was swayed by the incoming palms; hastily he steadied his step and saw that the enemy was the Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan, Qiu Qianren. Guo Jing knew the enemy's martial art skill is superior to his own, so he would not be able to pursue his personal enemy; immediately, with the dagger in his right hand and a bare palm on his left, he focused his attention to fight the enemy.

Peng Lianhu knew the critical situation had passed as he saw Guo Jing was tied down by Qiu Qianren while Liang Ziweng and Sha Tongtian were guarding in front of Wanyan Honglie; he turned his attention to Ke Zhen'E and said with a smile, "Ke Daxia, how come only one freak out of the Seven Freaks of Jiangnan showed up?"

Ke Zhen'E's iron staff was thrown into the Southern Lake by Huang Rong; hearing the enemy's insult he waved his hand to send out an iron caltrop, while he immediately jumped backward. Under the dim moonlight the iron caltrop looked so swift and powerful. Peng Lianhu had experienced suffering because of this poisonous secret projectile; he was scared like a bird was scared of a bow, he did not dare to fend off with his judge pen, so he hastily pushed the pens on the ground to using it as a brace to help him jump high in the air. With a 'swish' sound the iron caltrop barely missed the bottom of his foot. He noticed Ke Zhen'E did not have any weapon in his hand; clenching his teeth he struck forward with his pens.

Ke Zhen'E was disabled; he usually walked aided by his staff. He heard the wind as the enemy attack arrived, he had no choice but using all his strength he leaped two steps to the side, and almost fell down as his left foot landed on soft earth.

Peng Lianhu was delighted; with his left pen he guarded against Ke Zhen'E, should he be desperate enough to launch an attack to save his own life, while his right pen fiercely smashed down toward Ke Zhen'E's chest.

Ke Zhen'E listened to the sound to distinguish the shape, he rolled away to evade. Peng Lianhu's steel judge pen struck a rock on the ground, sparks flew everywhere. "Blind thief," he cursed, "You are very slippery!" The pen in his left hand also struck.

While he was rolling away, 'swish!' he released another iron caltrop. Lingzhi Shangren was standing nearby, his left hand was holding his right hand, his mouth was busy cursing in Tibetan; as he saw Ke Zhen'E was rolling near him, he raised his foot trying to trample him.

Ke Zhen'E heard the wind; using his left hand to brace the ground he threw himself sideways to escape. But evading the Tibetan monk's foot he could not escape the pair of judge pen on his back. He felt a stabbing pain and secretly shouted, "Not good!" He closed his eyes, ready to die. Suddenly he heard a tender voice called out, "Off you go!" followed by "Aiyo!" finally he heard a loud 'bang!'

Turned out Huang Rong used the Dog Beating Stick Technique to block the judge pen, turned it around and jerked it up, throwing both the pen and Peng Lianhu away. This stick technique was exactly the same stance Huang Rong used to fling Ke Zhen'E's iron staff away; only Peng Lianhu held his pens tight and would not let them go no matter what, so both Peng Lianhu and his pen fell down together.

Peng Lianhu was shocked and angry at the same time, he crawled back up only to see Huang Rong was using her stick to protect Ke Zhen'E, giving him the opportunity to stand up. "Little witch [Translator's note: the Chinese characters used were 'xiao yao nu', with 'yao' being 'goblin/witch/demon/monster', see also Chapter 25], who asked for your help?"

Ignoring him Huang Rong called out, "Father, look after this blind muddle-head, don't let anybody harm him." While saying that she rushed toward Guo Jing to help him fight Qiu Qianren.

Ke Zhen'E was dumbstruck; he stood motionless not knowing what to do. Peng Lianhu saw Huang Yaoshi was standing quite a distant away, with his back facing them, apparently he did not hear his daughter's call. Quietly Peng Lianhu went behind Ke Zhen'E and suddenly lunged his judge pen toward Ke Zhen'E's back. This move was both swift and violent, so much so that even if Ke Zhen'E still had the iron staff in his hand he would not necessarily be able to block it. Peng Lianhu saw he was about to succeed when suddenly a 'swish' sound was heard; something flew splitting the air, hit the judge pen, and shattered into dust; turned out it was a small grain of gravel. Peng Lianhu's palm was numb and the judge pen fell to the ground.

Peng Lianhu was shocked; he did not know where the gravel came from, and how could it carry such a tremendous force. He saw Huang Yaoshi with his hands behind his back, still looking at the black clouds on the horizon.

At the Cloud Village Ke Zhen'E had heard this Divine Flicking Finger skill; he knew it was Huang Yaoshi who saved him. In rage he pounced toward Huang Yaoshi's back, while shouting, "Seven brothers and sister only one left, why would I want to live?"

Huang Yaoshi still did not turn his head; he waited until Ke Zhen'E was about three feet away before his left hand lightly waved backward. Ke Zhen'E felt a strong force pushing him back that he fell face up. Quickly he sat down, but felt his blood surging up his chest and he was not able to stand up.

By this time the sky was getting darker, the fog hovering on the surface of the lake was getting thicker, it spilled over to the ground; submerging everybody's legs in it. Guo Jing and Huang Rong managed to fight Qiu Qianren evenly. On the other side, the Quanzhen Sect was in dire circumstances; Hao Datong's thigh was swept by the snake staff, half of Sun Bu'er's Taoist robe

was torn. Wang Chuyi was secretly alarmed; he knew that if this fight continued, someone would be either dead or wounded before long. So when Ma Yu and Liu Chuxuan were launching a flank attack, he took a rocket from his pocket. With a hissing sound the rocket flew up to the sky, like a meteor with a long tail in the dark sky.

Actually, all Seven Masters of the Quanzhen Sect had accepted not a few disciples; they formed quite a number of the third generation disciples. Besides Yin Zhiping, there were Li Zhichang, Zhang Zhijing, Wang Zhitan, Qi Zhicheng, Zhang Zhixian, Zhao Zhijing, and the others; they were all outstanding people. In the martial art contest at Misty Rain Tavern in Jiaxing this time, the Seven Masters were afraid that Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian and the others would bring their disciples in their attempt to gain victory by sheer numbers; therefore, they also took their disciples along to Jiaxing and told them to wait by the shore of the Southern Lake. As soon as they saw the rocket they were supposed to immediately come and render their assistance. So now recognizing their precarious situation Wang Chuyi released the rocket. Unfortunately the fog was too thick; even separated by several feet it was already difficult to distinguish people, so he was afraid the disciples would not be able to see through this fog.

Later on, after fighting a little while, the white fog was getting heavier, everybody was enveloped inside the thick fog that they suddenly felt alone. The gathering dark clouds in the sky were getting thicker and thicker; the dim moonlight which penetrated these layers of cloud was getting weaker and weaker, until finally it disappeared all together. Everybody was alarmed; although they did not stop fighting, the distance between them were getting farther and farther away, their stances were most of the time defensives and very few offensives.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were fighting Qiu Qianren together; suddenly the thick fog welled up and shrouded these three people. Guo Jing saw Qiu and Huang two people suddenly disappear, he decided to look for Wanyan Honglie immediately. His eyes were wide open, trying to catch a glimpse of the flashing of the golden crown on Wanyan Honglie's head. But the fog was very dense; he could not even see anything beyond three feet. He hurried to the east and dashed to the west to seek the enemy, suddenly he heard someone was calling out in the fog, "Zhou Botong is here, who wants to fight with me?"

Guo Jing was ecstatic, he was about to reply but Qiu Chuji beat him, "Zhou Shishu [martial uncle], are you Senior well?"

Right at this moment the dark clouds revealed a gap and suddenly everybody could see their enemies were actually almost within reach of each other, if anybody launched any attack, they would certainly be injured. As if by prior agreement they all cried out in alarm and leaped back.

Zhou Botong was giggling as he stood among these people, he said in a loud voice, "There are so many people here, very lively. Wonderful! Wonderful!" His right hand reached beneath the crook of his left elbow, he rubbed some dirt and rolled it, he said, "I'll give you some poison!" and he shoved the dirt into Sha Tongtian's mouth nearby.

Sha Tongtian quickly evaded, but although he used his 'yi xing huan wei', he was still not fast enough; his left arm was grabbed by Zhou Botong and the dirt was squeezed into his mouth. He had suffered quite a bit under Zhou Botong's hand, he knew if he spat the dirt, he would certainly be beaten; therefore, he had no choice but stay silent and keep the dirt in his mouth. He knew the dirt was not poison, so he certainly was not afraid.

As Wang Chuyi saw Zhou Botong suddenly arrive he was overjoyed, “Shishu,” he called out, “Turned out it’s true that you are not killed by Huang Daozhu [Island Master].”

“Who said I am dead?” Zhou Botong angrily asked, “The Old Heretic Huang had always wanted to harm me, but it’s been more than ten years and he still has not succeeded yet. Ha, Old Heretic Huang, come and try again.” While saying that he waved his fist toward Huang Yaoshi’s shoulder.

Huang Yaoshi did not dare to ignore him; he counterattacked with a stance from the ‘shen jian luo ying zhang’ [divine sword falling leaves palm] while calling out at the same time, “The mixed-up hairs from Quanzhen Sect blamed me of killing you, they are pestering me without any reason, saying that they were seeking revenge for you.”

Zhou Botong was angry, “You killed me? Are you dreaming? When did you kill me? Look clearly, am I a human or am I a ghost?” While spouting nonsense he fought faster and faster.

Huang Yaoshi knew Zhou Botong would not listen to reason, and he was attacking him out of a whim, but his moves were very exquisite and marvelous; Huang Yaoshi had no choice but fight him with all his might.

The Quanzhen Masters thought that as soon as their Shishu arrived, he would join hands with Huang Yaoshi to fight Ouyang Feng; who would have thought that this Shishu did not want to listen to them but entangled Huang Yaoshi in a close combat instead. “Shishu, don’t fight with Huang Daozhu!” Ma Yu repeatedly called.

Ouyang Feng interjected, “That’s right Old Urchin, you are in no way the Old Heretic’s match; quickly run away to save your life! Quick, quick!”

Listening to this provocation Zhou Botong was all the more not willing to give up. Huang Rong called out, “Old Urchin, you use the martial art from the Nine Yin Manual to fight my father; what would your Shixiong [martial brother] say in the underworld?”

Zhou Botong burst out in laughter, he sounded very smug when he said, “Look carefully, do you see I am using the martial art from the Manual? I have spent a great deal of effort trying to forget the Manual. Hey, hey, learning was easy, forgetting is actually a lot of trouble! What I am using now is the 72-stance Vacant Fist, the Old Urchin’s very own creation, do you think it is the same as the Nine Yin Manual even for a fart?”

When fighting him at the Peach Blossom Island, Huang Yaoshi thought his fist and kick strength was much stronger; now he saw that although his fist technique was refined and wonderful, the strength was actually less than he remembered, but Zhou Botong was able to fight evenly with him, which he thought was very strange. Listening to Zhou Botong’s words Huang Yaoshi was secretly impressed; regardless of what kind of bizarre technique he employed, Zhou Botong was able to create an excellent martial art all by himself and thus he founded his own martial art school.

From inside the fog Ouyang Feng could indistinctly see the fight between Zhou Botong and Huang Yaoshi; he was inwardly very happy, but was also afraid that as soon as he defeated Huang Yaoshi Zhou Botong would join hands with the Quanzhen Masters and deal with him. Thereupon he thought as he had the opportunity, he should break the Big Dipper Formation first. Immediately he wielded his snake staff and pressed on bit by bit, placing the Big Dipper Formation in more and more dangerous situation.

Wang Chuyi and Liu Chuxuan called out, "Zhou Shishu, kill Ouyang Feng first!"

Zhou Botong saw his martial nephews' desperate situation, with a left palm and a right fist he swept horizontally. When he was very close to Huang Yaoshi's face, suddenly with a laughter the fist changed into a palm and the palm became a fist, continuing their attack across each other.

Huang Yaoshi had never anticipated this kind of strange move, he hurriedly raised his arms to block, but the tip of his eyebrow was brushed lightly by the edge of Zhou Botong's palm. He was not injured, but Huang Yaoshi felt his eyebrow was burning hot.

As Zhou Botong's palm brushed his opponent suddenly he was shocked; his left hand slapped his own right wrist and he cursed, "Damn it! Damn it! This is the martial art from the Nine Yin Manual!"

Huang Yaoshi was slightly startled; but his palm had already struck with a lightning fast speed, without any noise landed on Zhou Botong's shoulder. Zhou Botong bent his waist and shrunk his shoulder. "Aiyo!" he cried out, "The payback is so quick!"

Meanwhile the fog was getting thicker; it was getting more difficult to see anything. Guo Jing was afraid his two shifus would be injured; he held out his hand to help Ke Zhen'E, pulling his arm toward Hong Qigong. With a low voice he said, "Two Shifus, please take a rest at the Misty Rain Tavern; we'll wait for the fog to recede then we'll talk again." He heard Huang Rong called out, "Old Urchin, are you going to obey me or not?"

"I can't beat your father," Zhou Botong replied, "So don't worry."

"I want you to beat the Old Poison," Huang Rong said, "Just don't kill him."

"Why?" Zhou Botong asked; but his hands and feet were not slowing down.

Huang Rong called out, "If you don't do what I say, I am going to reveal your stinky history."

"What stinky history?" Zhou Botong asked, "You talk nonsense."

"All right," with deliberation Huang Rong said, "Four weaving machines, the weaving of mandarin ducks desiring to fly together right away."

Hearing these two sentences Zhou Botong was so scared that it was as if his soul had left him; "All right, all right, I'll listen to you," he busily said, "Old Poison, where are you?" He heard Ma Yu's voice penetrating the thick fog, "Zhou Shishu, occupy the north polar star to surround him."

Huang Rong said again, "Father, this Qiu Qianren collaborates with a foreign kingdom, he is a big traitor; please kill him quickly."

"Child," Huang Yaoshi said, "Come to my side." In the heavy fog he could not see where Qiu Qianren was. But he heard Zhou Botong was laughing a big laugh while calling out, "Old Poison, quickly kneel down and kowtow to your grandfather; I'll spare your life today."

Guo Jing sent Hong and Ke two people to the side of the tavern; then he turned his body around, trying to find Wanyan Honglie. Who would have thought that as he left the Misty Rain Tavern, not

only he could not find Wanyan Honglie, but also Sha Tongtian, Qiu Qianren and the others had all disappeared. He heard Zhou Botong call out, “Uh, where is the Old Poison? Where did he run to?”

This fog was unusually thick, everybody was very close to each other, yet one could not see the face of someone else standing next to them; they only saw a vague image of a human form. Their voices were also somewhat muffled by the fog, as if there was some layers separating each other. Each one of them was an experienced fighter, yet in this battle they felt like they were blindfolded; not a single one of them was not anxious. Huang Rong was leaning close to her father, Ma Yu was giving out orders in low voice to shrink their circle. Everyone was straining their ears to listen to any enemy’s activity; for a moment nobody made any noise. A little while later suddenly Qiu Chuji called out, “Listen! What’s that?”

They heard hissing noise all around them, strange noise from a distant coming near. Huang Rong called out in alarm, “The Old Poison dispatches his snakes! Really shameless!”

At the end of the tavern Hong Qigong had also heard the snakes, he loudly called out, “It’s the Old Poison’s snake formation; everybody quickly come up the stairs!”

Zhou Botong’s martial art could be considered number one among those present, but for all his life he was afraid of snakes, so with a loud cry he dashed wildly toward the Misty Rain Tavern. He was afraid the snakes would bite his heel, so he skipped the upstairs room and utilizing his ‘qing gong’ [lightness kungfu] to the fullest he leaped onto the roof, and sat on the highest ridge, still trembling with fear.

Not too long afterwards the sound of the snakes was getting louder. Huang Rong pulled her father’s hand to go up the Misty Rain Tavern. Holding each other’s hand the Quanzhen Masters were groping their way upstairs. Yin Zhiping stepped on a crack and fell down real hard that his head grew a swollen lump; quickly he crawled back upstairs.

Huang Rong had not heard Guo Jing’s voice, she was concerned; “Jing Gege, where are you?” she called. After calling out several times she still had not heard any reply; she became anxious and said, “Father, I am going back to look for him.”

Suddenly she heard Guo Jing’s cold voice, “Why should you look for me? Don’t call me; I am not going to answer you.” It turned out he was right next to her.

Huang Yaoshi was angry, “Muddle-headed kid, stinky boy,” he scolded; his arm swung across sending out a palm. Guo Jing ducked his head to evade; he was just about to launch a counterattack when suddenly ‘whiz, whiz’ noise of arrows was heard, several long arrows soared in the air and nailed the window lattice.

Everybody was startled; they heard shouts and feathered arrows came one after another. In the darkness nobody knew how many soldiers had arrived; they heard clamoring noise of people outside the building, they were shouting, “Don’t let these thieves escape!”

Wang Chuyi was angry, “Looks like the Jin dog colludes with Jiaxing’s corrupt government official; they are sending out troops to deal with us!”

Qiu Chuji called out, “Let’s go down and completely route them.”

“Not good, snake, snake!” Hao Datong shouted. They heard the noise of the arrows getting thicker, while the hissing noise of the snakes getting closer; they realized that Wanyan Honglie and Ouyang Feng had arranged this treacherous plan in advance; only this thick fog was beyond anybody’s anticipation, so whether a curse or a luck, it was difficult to say.

Hong Qigong called out, “We can fight the arrows, but cannot fight the snakes; if we evade the snakes, it will be difficult to keep off the arrows! Everybody quickly withdraw!” They heard Zhou Botong, still shouting abusive words from the top of the roof; he had caught two arrows and used them to fend off the incoming arrows.

Three sides of the Misty Rain Tavern faced the water. The soldiers rode on small boats surrounding the building and showered it with arrows. It was because of the thick fog that they did not dare to press closer to the banks. Hong Qigong called out, “We go to the west, we take the land route.” He was the chief of the world’s largest clan; each word he said carried a lot of authority and influence. In this chaotic situation everybody accepted his leadership without question; they groped their way back downstairs. They tried hard to open their eyes, but could not see farther than half a foot ahead; how did they know which direction was east, west, south or north? They struck down several arrows while walking in line, holding each other’s hand to avoid getting lost. Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi led the way with swords in their hands; their swords combined and complemented each other, forming a sword umbrella to keep off the arrow rain.

Guo Jing’s right hand was pulling Hong Qigong, while his left hand grabbed someone’s hand behind him. He felt this hand was soft, warm and slightly sweaty; turned out it was Huang Rong’s small hand. His heart skipped a beat; hastily he let her hand go, only to listen to Huang Rong’s cold voice said, “Who needs your concern?” Suddenly he heard Qiu Chuji called out, “Turn around, quick! There are snakes ahead; we can’t go through!”

Huang Yaoshi and Ma Yu were at the end of the line blocking the pursuing soldiers; hearing Qiu Chuji’s cry they turned their head anxiously. Huang Yaoshi picked a couple of bamboo sticks and swept them outward to strike the snakes. In the fog they heard the hissing sound of the snakes, and a foul stench attacked their nostrils. Huang Rong could not endure it any longer, with a ‘wah!’ sound she threw up. Huang Yaoshi sighed and said, “There is no way out, everyone fight for your own life!” Tossing his bamboo sticks aside he carried his daughter in his hands.

Based on everyone’s martial art skill, actually the soldiers’ arrows would not be able to stop them; but the Western Poison’s snake formation was tens of thousands more lethal, as soon as one was bitten, one’s life immediately would be gone. Listening to these frightening snakes everybody could not help but feel terrified. Huang Yaoshi’s jade flute was broken, Hong Qigong’s steel needles were not easy to be launched; the most difficult part was the fog was too thick that nobody could see anything. Even if there were an escape route, nobody knew where to go.

In this critical situation suddenly they heard someone with a cold voice say, “Little witch, give your bamboo stick to this blind man.” It was Ke Zhen’E’s voice.

Hearing him saying the ‘blind man’, two characters, Huang Rong immediately understood his intention; she was very happy and without hesitation handed over the Dog Beating Stick to him. Ke Zhen’E maintained his composure; tapping the stick on the ground he said, “Everyone, follow this blind man to safety. There is always fog and mist around the Misty Rain Tavern; what’s so strange about it? Otherwise how can it be called the Misty Rain Tavern?” He was a native of Jiaxing; ever

since he was little all streets and alleys around the Misty Rain Tavern had been ingrained in his heart. Both of his eyes were blind, normally he would be inferior to ordinary man, but now the fog was really thick, black clouds covered the sky; to him it was not the least bit of obstacle.

Listening to the snakes and the arrows he knew that there was an alley to the west with no enemies in that direction. Limping away he immediately led the way. Who would have thought that over the past several years this small alley had been covered with green bamboos, which render it impassable. Ke Zhen'E was very familiar with this road; yet he had not visited this place for decades, so he did not know that this alley had turned into a bamboo grove. He walked only for seven, eight steps and had to stop because the bamboo was on his way. Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi again brandished their swords and the bamboo flew out, opening up a passageway where everybody could pass through.

Ma Yu called, "Zhou Shishu, come over here! Where are you?" Zhou Botong was still sitting on the roof; hearing the sound of snakes all around him, how could he dare to reply? He was most afraid that the snakes' favorite food was the Old Urchin's flesh, so if he opened his mouth and let the snakes heard his voice, wouldn't he be finished then?

Walking for dozens of 'zhang's they saw the bamboo grove was getting thin; ahead they could see an alley. The snakes sound was getting farther away, but the soldiers' shouts were actually getting closer; it sounded like some of the soldiers came around to outflank them. This group of warriors was afraid of snakes, they did not even look at ordinary soldiers. Liu Chuxuan said, "Hao Shidi [martial (younger) brother Hao], let us kill some of the dog officers to vent our anger."

"Good!" Hao Datong replied. Two people brandished their swords to block the incoming arrows which came suddenly like locusts.

Walking a little longer they arrived at a bigger road; above them lightning flashed and thunder struck, followed by heavy rain pouring down from the sky. But because of this downpour the fog cleared up. Although the sky was still covered with dark clouds, they started to be able to see each other's shadow. "Good, good," everybody said, "The thick fog is dispersing."

Ke Zhen'E said, "The danger has passed, everyone can do as they please." Giving the bamboo stick back to Huang Rong he walked to the east without turning his head back.

"Shifu!" Guo Jing called out.

Ke Zhen'E said, "You go and send Hong Laoxia [Old Hero Hong] someplace peaceful and quiet where he can recover from his injury; then come to the Ke Jia Cun [Ke Family Village] to see me."

"Yes," Guo Jing replied.

Huang Yaoshi stretched out his hand to block one incoming arrow, then he went to Ke Zhen'E and said, "I was not willing to explain to you if not for the fact that you saved my life today ..."

Ke Zhen'E did not wait for him to finish, he spat thick phlegm toward the bridge of Huang Yaoshi's nose; he cursed, "Because of what I did today, I won't have any face to see my six brothers and sister!"

Angrily Huang Yaoshi raised his palm. Guo Jing watched this in shock, he flew in trying to rescue; he knew that as soon as this palm struck down, his Da Shifu's life would be gone. But he was more than a dozen steps away from Ke and Huang two people, so he knew he would be too late. Under the dim light of the moon he saw Huang Yaoshi's palm slowly went down. Huang Yaoshi laughed a big laugh and said, "What kind of a man is Huang Yaoshi? How can I lower myself to the same level with you?" With his sleeve he wiped the phlegm from his face; turning around to Huang Rong he said, "Rong'er, let's go!"

Hearing these words Guo Jing's heart was shaken with doubt; only he was unclear of what had actually stirred his doubt. He only vaguely felt that something was not completely right. It was like something was flashing in his mind, then suddenly it disappeared into a thick fog.

Suddenly he heard an outburst of shouting, a group of soldiers came charging in. The Quanzhen Six Masters with swords in their hands engaged the enemy. Huang Yaoshi felt it was beneath his dignity to fight soldiers, so he turned around to pull Hong Qigong's arm and said, "Qi Xiong, let us two brothers go on ahead and drink some wine; we'll talk about it later."

It was precisely what Hong Qigong had been expecting; he said with a laugh, "Wonderful, just wonderful!" In a moment two people disappeared into the darkness.

Guo Jing wanted to take Ke Zhen'E away, but another group of soldiers came attacking them. Guo Jing did not want to kill too many people, so he pushed his arms forward to open a way. In this confusion he heard Qiu Chuji and the others were fighting a fierce battle; it turned out Wanyan Honglie had dispatched several of his own personal bodyguards among the soldiers, also joining their ranks were a group of valiant Iron Palm Clan people, making them difficult to push back in a short period of time. Guo Jing was afraid his shifu would be injured in this chaotic battle, he shouted, "Da Shifu, Da Shifu, where are you?" By now the battle cry and the clashing of the weapons had merged into one chaotic noise; but all along he did not hear Ke Zhen'E's reply.

After taking the bamboo stick back from Ke Zhen'E's hand Huang Rong had stayed near him all the time. She saw him spitting her father, her mind was tumultuous. She believed this matter had grown out of proportion; her long life's beautiful dream was shattered into pieces. Hence when the soldiers came she just stood alone, leaning on a tree; when the soldiers galloped quickly past her, it was as if she did neither see nor hear them, she was totally lost in her thought.

Suddenly she heard a call, "Aiyo!" It was Ke Zhen'E's voice. Following the source of the sound she went out to take a look, only to see Ke Zhen'E was laying by the roadside; an officer was holding a saber high above his head, ready to chop it down into Ke Zhen'E's back. Ke Zhen'E rolled away to evade, he sat up and threw a backward fist, hitting the officer squarely that he fainted. Ke Zhen'E was about to stand up when he suddenly fell back down. Huang Rong rushed forward and saw that his leg was hit by an arrow; immediately she pulled his arm and helped him up.

Ke Zhen'E made an effort to shed her hand away, but one of his legs was lame, the other was injured by the arrow; his legs lost their strength that his body staggered, he swayed forward and fell back down. Huang Rong held out her right hand to grab the collar on the back of his neck; she said with a cold laugh, "Still flaunting your heroism?" Her left hand lightly waved, she sealed the 'jian

shen xue' [shoulder chaste acupoint] on his right shoulder with a move from 'lan hua fu xue shou' [brushing orchid acupoint technique]. Then she released his collar and grabbed his left arm.

Ke Zhen'E wanted to struggle free, but half of his body was numb; he was unable to move. He had no choice but let her help him up, but his mouth did not stop muttering curses.

Huang Rong let him away for a dozen of steps and took him hiding behind a big tree. They were just catching their breath when another group of soldiers spotted these two people. A dozen or so arrows came whizzing by. Huang Rong stepped forward and brandished her bamboo stick to protect her head and her face from the arrows; letting the arrows hitting her soft-hedgehog armor.

Ke Zhen'E heard the arrows and knew she was risking her life to save his; his heart softened, he said in a low voice, "You don't need to worry over me, just go save yourself!"

"Hmm," Huang Rong said, "I want to save you; I want you to receive my kindness. What are you going to do about it?"

While they were talking, two people slowly withdrew behind a short wall. The arrows no longer came, but Ke Zhen'E was heavy, Huang Rong was exhausted, her breathing was short; she leaned against the wall to rest. Ke Zhen'E sighed, "It is finished, between you and me gratitude and grudges are over. Off you go, from now on just consider the blind man Ke has died."

With a cold voice Huang Rong said, "Obviously you are not dead, why do you consider yourself dead? You are not seeking revenge against me, I will come looking for you." The bamboo stick in her hand swiftly stretched out and swiftly shrunk back, sealing the 'wei zhong xue' [I don't know how to translate this] on the back of his knees.

Ke Zhen'E was totally caught off guard, he fell sitting down on the ground. Silently he cursed and wondered what kind of malicious method this little demon would use to torture him. His heart was thumping in anger, but he heard her footsteps were getting farther away, it sounded like she was leaving the short wall. By now the battle noise was farther and weaker; apparently the Quanzhen Masters had either killed or driven the soldiers away. Amidst this faraway noise he faintly heard Guo Jing's voice calling out, "Da Shifu!" But the call was going farther and farther away, indicating Guo Jing was looking for him in the wrong direction. He wanted to call, but because of his injury he could not gather enough strength, he could not even hear his own voice.

A moment later all he could hear was quietness, with roosters started crowing in the distant. Ke Zhen'E mused, "This is the last time I hear the rooster! Tomorrow all across the Jiaying prefecture the roosters will crow again, but I will die under the little demon's hands and won't hear it anymore." Thinking to this point he suddenly heard footsteps; three people came over. The first's footsteps were light, he recognized it to be Huang Rong; the other two were heavy, sounded like they were dragging their feet.

He heard Huang Rong say, "This is Daye [lit. big master], quickly lift him up." While saying that she stretched out her hand to massage his body and unsealed his acupoints.

Ke Zhen'E felt he was lifted up by two people and placed on a bamboo stretcher, and then he was taken away. Ke Zhen'E was flabbergasted; he wanted to ask, but suddenly remembered the last time he said something it backfired to him. While hesitating he heard a 'swish!' sound, the man carrying him on the front cried out in pain, "Aiyo!" It sounded like he ate Huang Rong's stick. He also heard her scolding, "Walk faster! What are you mumbling about? You, the soldiers, are used to bully common people; no one is good!" Then another 'swish!' was heard; the man on the back also ate her stick, but this one did not dare to say anything.

Ke Zhen'E understood, "It turned out she captured two soldiers to carry me up; she is so smart to come up with this idea." By this time the arrow wound on his leg was getting more painful, but he was afraid Huang Rong might mock him, so he bit his lips to prevent any moan from escaping his mouth. He felt his body was jolted up and down, he knew he was being carried along a rugged pathway. A moment later he felt tree branches and leaves brushing his head and face, so he knew they were walking in the woods. The two soldiers staggered along, they were gasping for breath, but Huang Rong's bamboo stick kept whipping them mercilessly.

About thirty 'li's later Ke Zhen'E estimated that it was already the end of sixth hour [9 – 11am], early seventh hour [11am – 1pm]; the early morning rain had long gone, the sun had dried out half of his wet clothes. He heard the cicadas calling and the dogs barking, a distant sound of men and women singing in the field; it was a perfect picture of peace and tranquility, a totally different world from the vicious battle at the South Lake this morning.

They stopped by a peasant home to take a rest. Huang Rong bought two big pumpkins from the peasant family, she cooked them with rice, and placed a bowl in front of Ke Zhen'E.

"I am not hungry," Ke Zhen'E said.

"Your leg hurts, do you think I don't know?" Huang Rong said, "What hungry or not hungry? I want you to be in so much pain that you will listen to me."

Ke Zhen'E was very angry; using both hands he lifted up the bowl full of hot steaming pumpkin and threw it to her face. Huang Rong laughed coldly, but one of the soldiers called out in pain. Ke Zhen'E knew she must have moved sideways to evade and the bowl of hot pumpkin must have splashed on the soldier's body.

"What?" Huang Rong scolded, "Ke Daye [Big Master Ke] is giving you the pumpkin to eat, you are not happy? Quickly eat them up." That soldier was afraid Huang Rong might beat him again, but also his stomach was very hungry; so enduring the burning ache on his face he picked the pumpkin up and ate it piece by piece.

This time Ke Zhen'E could not decide whether he should be angry or whether he should laugh; half standing and half sitting he leaned against the bench. He felt very awkward; he wanted to pull out the arrow, but was afraid his blood would spurt out like crazy. She certainly would see someone in danger and not willing to help; most probably she would even mock him.

While he was still hesitating he heard Huang Rong said, “Go get some fresh water, quick!” Her speech was followed by a ‘Slap!’ apparently she had just slapped one of the soldiers on the ear.

In his heart Ke Zhen’E mused, “This little demon, she is all right as long as she does not say anything; but as soon as she opens her mouth, she makes others suffer.”

Huang Rong continued, “Take this knife and cut the clothes around Ke Daye’s arrow wound.” One of the soldiers complied and did as she said. Huang Rong said, “You, the one with surname Ke, you’d better not cry out in pain; otherwise, your Miss may not pay you any more attention if she is annoyed.”

“Who wants your attention anyway?” Ke Zhen’E angrily replied, “Just scram as far as possible.” He had not finished his words when suddenly he felt a severe pain on his wound. It seemed to him that Huang Rong had grabbed the shaft of the arrow, and instead of pulling it out, she thrust it into his flesh. Ke Zhen’E was shocked and angry; he was about to throw a punch out when he felt another stab of severe pain and suddenly his palm was holding a shaft of arrow. Turned out Huang Rong had pulled the arrow out and squeezed it into his hand.

Ke Zhen’E heard Huang Rong say, “You move one more time, I am going to slap your ear really good.”

Ke Zhen’E knew she was capable of doing what she said she would do. Currently he was not the little demon’s match; if she killed him with a blade, then it would be a clean end to his life, but if she ever slapped his face, he would suffer disgrace for the rest of his life, so with a pale face he stayed silent. Hearing some ripping sounds he knew she was tearing several strips of clothes. She wrapped the cloth around his thigh, above and below the wound, tightly to stop the bleeding; and then he felt icy cold water on his wound, apparently she was washing his wound with cold water. He was stupefied, thinking, “If she had evil intention, why did she save me? But if she said she doesn’t harbor evil intention, humph, humph, can anything good come out of the Peach Blossom Island’s sorcerers, father and daughter? She must have some evil plan for me later on. Ay, these people are so full of craftiness; it is really difficult to guess her real thoughts.”

While he was busy with his own thoughts, Huang Rong had already applied some cut wound medicine and wrapped it up properly; he felt his wound was cool and for the most part the pain was gone, but suddenly he heard rumbles from inside his tummy.

Huang Rong coldly said, “I thought you were not hungry, but it turns out you are really starving. Too bad we don’t have anything to eat right now. All right, let’s go!” With two ‘slap, slap’ sounds her stick beat the two soldiers, telling those two to lift Ke Zhen’E up and continue their journey.

About thirty, forty ‘li’s later, the sky was getting dark. They heard the loud cry of crows; hundreds of thousands crows flew back and forth in the air. Hearing these crows Ke Zhen’E knew they were in the vicinity of the ‘tie qiang miao’ [Temple of the Iron Spear]. This Temple of the Iron Spear was built to honor a well known general from the Five Dynasties period, the Iron Spear, Wang Yanzhang. Next to the temple there was a tall pagoda. For generations the crows had made their nest on top of this pagoda. There was a legend among the locals that the crows of the Temple of the

Iron Spear were the spirits of dead soldiers and generals, so nobody dared to disturb them to such an extent that the crows breed and multiplied, became as many as they were that day.

“Hey,” Huang Rong said, “The sky is getting dark, where can we spend the night?”

Ke Zhen'E thought for a moment, “If we lodge at someone's residence I am afraid they might open their mouths and lead the soldiers to come and arrest us.” So he said, “Not too far from here there is an old temple.”

“What's so interesting about crows?” Huang Rong scolded, “You have never seen one before? Go!” This time Ke Zhen'E did not hear the sound of the stick, nevertheless the two soldiers cried out in pain. He wondered whether she pierced them with her finger or kicked them with her foot.

Not too long afterwards they arrived in front of the Temple of the Iron Spear. Ke Zhen'E heard Huang Rong kick the temple door open. The strong odor of crows' dung and dust assaulted their nostrils. Apparently this temple had been deserted for a long time. He was afraid she would complain of the filth, but surprisingly it seemed like she did not even notice. He heard her ordering the two soldiers to sweep the floor; she also ordered them to go to the kitchen and boil some water. Then he heard she was softly singing a song about some 'pair of mandarin ducks desire to fly together' and some 'not yet old but the hair on the head has turned white.'

A moment later the soldiers brought the hot water over. Huang Rong changed the wrap on Ke Zhen'E's wound first before washing her own face and feet. Ke Zhen'E was lying down on the ground, using the meditation mat as his pillow. Suddenly he heard she spat and said, “Why are you looking at my feet? Do you think my feet are for you to look? I'll dig your eyeballs out!”

That soldier was so scared that his soul almost left him; 'bonk, bonk, bonk' he knocked his head on the ground. Huang Rong asked, “Tell me, why did you look at me washing my feet?”

That soldier did not dare to lie; while still knocking his head he said, “Xiao De [lit. little/lowly one] deserves to die. Xiao De saw Miss' feet are very ... very beautiful ...”

Ke Zhen'E was startled, he thought, “This thief male servant bird's death is imminent, he still has a lewd heart! I wonder if the little demon will pull his muscle out or peel his skin alive.” Surprisingly Huang Rong only laughed and said, “A crude and stupid man like you knows what's good and what's ugly?” ‘Bang!’ the stick in her hand shot out and that soldier rolling around on the ground, but she did not pursue this matter further.

The two soldiers ran to the rear courtyard with their tails between their legs, and did not dare to reappear. Ke Zhen'E stayed still, quietly waiting for what would happen next. He heard Huang Rong pacing back and forth in the main hall; she muttered, “Wang the Iron Spear's prestige shook the world in his era; in the end he was captured and decapitated. How could he flaunt himself as a hero? As some kind of warrior? Hmm, I am afraid this iron spear is not made of real cast iron.”

When he was little, Ke Zhen'E, along with Zhu Cong, Han Baoju, Nan Xiren, Zhang Asheng and the others, often came to this temple to play. Although they were kids, every one of them had

already had exceptional strength; they took turn brandishing that iron spear to play. When he heard what Huang Rong had just said he opened his mouth, “Of course it is made of real iron; how can it be faked?”

“Hmm,” Huang Rong stretched out her hand to pull out the iron spear; she said, “It is about thirty ‘jin’s [catty; 1 jin = about 0.5kg]. I have lost your iron staff and momentarily can not give you any replacement. Tomorrow we’ll bid good-bye; we’ll go our own ways. You don’t have any weapon with which to defend yourself. Why don’t you use this spear as temporary replacement of your iron staff?” Without waiting for Ke Zhen’E to reply she went out and took a large rock from the courtyard; ‘bang, bang’ she broke the spearhead and handed the pole over to him.

Since his parents and brother died, Ke Zhen’E was inseparable with his six brothers and sister. Right now he did not have any relative left. Although he had been together with Huang Rong for only a day, unconsciously he felt that he hated to part with her; listening to her saying, ‘Tomorrow we’ll bid good-bye; we’ll go our own ways’ he suddenly felt something was lost. Absent-mindedly he received the iron spear, thinking that this spear was approximately the same size and weight as his lost staff, so definitely he could use this weapon. He also thought, “She gave me this weapon, so she did not have any evil intention.”

He heard her saying, “This is the ‘tian qi sha dan san’ [powdered medicine made of tian qi (lit. field/farm seven) shark’s gallbladder] made by my father; it is very beneficial to your wound. You hate us father and daughter; whether you want to use it or not, it’s up to you!” She handed the medicine pouch over to him. Ke Zhen’E held out his hand to receive it, and then slowly put it in his pocket. He wanted to say something, but nothing came out of his mouth. He hoped she would say something else, but she only said, “All right, let’s take a rest!”

Ke Zhen’E laid down on his side, with the iron spear by his side; his heart was filled with disquieting thoughts, how could he sleep? He heard the noisy crows on top of the pagoda eventually quiet down until all he could hear was silence everywhere. He did not hear her sleeping, but he heard her tossing and turning; it seemed like she was also restless.

After half a day he heard she was reciting quietly, “Four weaving machines, the weaving of mandarin ducks desires to fly together right away. It’s a pity not yet old but the hair on the head has turned white. When the green spring grass ripples in the deepest of dawn’s cold; standing face to face taking a bath wearing red clothes.”

He heard she repeated the recitation softly, as if she was trying to understand its meaning. Ke Zhen’E did not understand literature, he did not understand what she was reciting, but he could hear the sadness in her voice, as if she was grieving of a heart break; he could not help but feel dazed.

A long time passed. He heard her arrange some meditation mats for her bed; then she lay down and her breathing gradually slowed down, sounded like she was falling asleep. Ke Zhen’E gently stroked the iron spear by his side; all kinds of childhood memories came flooding back into his mind. He saw Zhu Cong with an old book in his hand, reading aloud with his head swaying back and forth. He saw Han Baoju and Quan Jinfa were riding on the idol’s shoulders, pulling its beard; Nan Xiren and himself were pulling one end of the iron spear while Zhang Asheng was pulling the other end; they were playing tug-of-war with each other. At that time Han Xiaoying was only about

four, five years old; two lengths of braided hair on her head, giggling and laughing, cheering over them. There were bright red ribbons on her braids, bobbing along as she moved her head. Suddenly everything turned pitch-black. Six sworn brothers and sister, his own brother, and his pair of eyes, everything was successively destroyed under Huang Yaoshi's and his disciples' hands. His heart was burned with hatred, which was very difficult to suppress.

Slowly he raised his iron spear, he quietly walked toward Huang Rong. He heard her gentle and even breathing, she was sleeping soundly. He thought, "Once my iron spear goes down, she will die without feeling anything. Hey, if not, the Old Heretic Huang's martial art is matchless, how can I avenge this deep enmity in this lifetime? His daughter is sleeping right here; the Heaven is granting me a very good opportunity, so that he knows the pain of mourning for his daughter."

But then another thought came into his mind, "This girl has saved my life, how can I repay kindness with evil? (Sigh!) After killing her, I am going to kill myself right next to her to repay today's kindness." Thinking of this, he made up his mind; he thought, "I, Ke Zhen'E, have been an upright man all my life; for decades I have never done anything shameful against the world. Right now I am going to launch a sneak attack toward a sleeping person; it is a cowardly act, but with my death I am going to repay her kindness."

Lifting his iron spear, he was just about to strike Huang Rong's head when suddenly he heard someone was laughing in the distant; the sound was ear-piercing, in the dead of the night it caused the hair on his back stood up on its end.

Huang Rong was awakened by the laughter; she leaped up and saw Ke Zhen'E with the iron spear lifted up, right in front of her. She was so shocked; she called out, "Ouyang Feng!"

Hearing her woke up, Ke Zhen'E could not strike his iron spear anymore; he heard people talking and walking toward the temple. Only they were still quite a distance away that he did not hear clearly what they were talking about. A moment later he started to hear some footsteps; there were about thirty, forty people. Ke Zhen'E was very familiar with this temple with its front hall and rear courtyard; with a low voice he said, "The Old Poison and the others must have seen the crow pagoda and come over here. Let us try to hide from them."

"Yes," Huang Rong said. She kicked the meditation mats to scatter them around the hall.

Ke Zhen'E led her hand toward the rear courtyard; he tried to push the gate, but it was bolted from the outside. "Those two thief soldiers!" he scolded viciously. He guessed those two soldiers were running away in the dark; they were afraid Huang Rong would find out, so they bolted the door in advance.

By now it was too late to strike the gate with his iron spear, since he heard the main gate was pushed open. He knew there was no hiding place in the main hall; he whispered, "Behind the idol."

Two people had barely sat behind the idol when about a dozen people entered the main hall. Ke Zhen'E heard a 'chi' sound, followed by a burst of sulfur smell; he knew someone was lighting the fire. Then he heard Ouyang Feng said, "Zhao Wangye [Prince Zhao; lit. master king], although we did not get what we want at the Misty Rain Tavern, in the end, we managed to dampen the enemy's spirit."

Wanyan Honglie laughed and said, "This entire battle was under Mister's control."

Ouyang Feng let out some 'heh, heh' laughter, then he said, "Xiao Wangye [Young Prince] arranged an ingenious plan; gathering the soldiers from Jiaying prefecture, firing out tens of thousands of arrows. We should have been able to round up the whole gang in one swoop; unexpectedly at the right time the thick fog came and gave this group of traitors the opportunity to slip away."

A young voice said, "With Mr. Ouyang and Qiu Bangzhu [clan leader] go into action, although the group of traitors escaped today, they will be annihilated one by one in the future. Only too bad 'wan bei' [junior, younger generation] was one step too late that I could not see Mr. Ouyang greatly unfold his divine power. It was truly a pity."

Ke Zhen'E recognized it was Yang Kang's voice; he could not restrain rage from filling his heart. Then he heard Liang Ziweng, Peng Lianhu, Sha Tongtian and the others uttered flattering words; they praised Ouyang Feng to the utmost, saying how he single-handedly fought the Quanzhen Sect, placing the group of Taoists in an extremely difficult situation, Qiu Qianren was nothing compared to him.

Listening to these many masters gathered together like this, Ke Zhen'E did not dare to breathe out loud. Just now he wanted to end his life together with Huang Rong; but somehow, this time he was afraid to be discovered by the enemy and Huang Rong and he would be killed. He heard Wanyan Honglie's people prepare some bedding and then invite Wanyan Honglie, Ouyang Feng and Yang Kang three people to sleep on them.

Yang Kang heaved a deep sigh and said, "Mr. Ouyang, your nephew's martial art skill was high, his conduct was natural and elegant. Wan bei admired him very much; I hoped to be good friends with him, unexpectedly he was harmed by the Quanzhen Sect's mixed-up hairs. Each time 'wan bei' remembers that, I am always grieved to the utmost. I swear to kill those evil Taoists from Quanzhen Sect one by one with my own hand to console Brother Ouyang's soul in heaven. It's a pity 'wan bei's martial art skill is meager; I truly have the desire but lack the power to do it."

Ouyang Feng was silent for a long time then he slowly said, "My nephew was unfortunate to meet his tragic death. At first I thought he died under Guo Jing's violent hand; but listening to you recount Qiu Chuji's words, I have just found out it was the Quanzhen Sect's group of evil Taoists who did it. Nowadays my White Camel Mountain does not have any heir, let me take you as my disciple."

"Shifu!" Yang Kang loudly called out, "Disciple pays his respect to you." His voice was full of happiness, followed by 'bonk, bonk, bonk' noise as he crawled into Ouyang Feng's presence and kowtowed several times.

Ke Zhen'E thought this person was a good and loyal man's descendant, yet he not only admitted an enemy as his father, but took an evil man as his master as well; he was drowned deeper and deeper. Ke Zhen'E was afraid it would be too difficult for Yang Kang to turn around; he was very angry. He heard Wanyan Honglie say, "In this foreign place we don't have any gift to offer the master, we will do it properly in the future."

Ouyang Feng sighed and said, "Pearls and jewels, the White Camel Mountain also has some. Ouyang Feng simply looks at this child's intelligence; I only wish to have an heir of the martial art I possess."

“Xiao Wang [lit. little king, referring to himself] spoke incorrectly,” Wanyan Honglie said, “Mister, please forgive me.”

Immediately one by one Liang Ziweng and the others offered their congratulations to these three people. In this clamor suddenly someone was calling out, “Shagu is hungry, I am starving to death; how come nobody is giving me food to eat?”

Ke Zhen'E was greatly surprised to hear Shagu's cry; he wondered how did this girl hang around with Wanyan Honglie, Ouyang Feng and the others? He heard Yang Kang say with a laugh, “That's right, quickly get some refreshments for this Miss to eat; don't let her get ill from starvation.”

A moment later Shagu was heard chewing loudly, she was eating. While still chewing she said, “Good Brother, you said you are going to take me home if I listen to what you say; how come we are not home yet?”

“We'll get there tomorrow,” Yang Kang replied, “Eat until you are full, then go to bed.”

Yet another moment later Shagu suddenly said, “Good Brother, there is some noise in that pagoda, what is that?”

“If not bird, then it must be a mouse,” Yang Kang answered.

“I am scared,” Shagu said.

Yang Kang laughed, “Sha Guniang [dumb miss], what are you afraid of?” he asked.

“I am scared of ghosts,” Shagu replied.

Yang Kang laughed, “We have many people here, ghosts won't dare to come.”

“I am scared of that short and fat man's ghost,” Shagu said.

Forcing a laugh Yang Kang said, “Don't talk nonsense, what short and fat man?”

“Hmm,” Shagu said, “I know, that short and fat man died inside 'popo's [maternal grandmother] grave; popo's ghost will chase that short and fat man's ghost away, she won't let that him stay in the grave. He will come over here to ask retribution from you.”

“You talk too much,” Yang Kang shouted, “I am going to call your grandfather and he'll come and get you, he'll take you back to the Peach Blossom Island.”

Shagu did not dare to say anything anymore. Suddenly Sha Tongtian shouted, “Hey, don't step on my foot! Just sit nicely and don't move!” It seemed that because of her fear of ghosts Shagu had randomly squeezed herself into the crowd.

As Ke Zhen'E heard this exchange, his doubt arose: the short and fat man Shagu mentioned must be his San Shidi [third martial (younger) brother], Han Baoju. He died on the Peach Blossom Island, obviously was killed by Huang Yaoshi; how could his ghost come looking for Yang Kang for retribution? Although Shagu was dumb, there must be a reason behind what she had said earlier. Too bad there were too many powerful enemies in their presence that he could not go out and ask

her clearly. He further thought, "In front of the Misty Rain Tavern Huang Yaoshi said to me, 'What kind of a man is Huang Yaoshi? How can I lower myself to the same level with you?' If he did not want to kill me, why did he kill my five brothers and sister? But if it was not Huang Yaoshi, why did Si Di [fourth (younger) brother] said he saw with his own eyes that Huang Yaoshi killed Er Di [second (younger) brother] and Qi Mei [seventh (younger) sister]?"

He was mulling around these thoughts in his mind when suddenly he felt Huang Rong pull his left hand. With her finger she wrote on his palm one character, 'qiu' [ask/request], followed by character after character, '...you a favor.'

Ke Zhen'E wrote back on her palm, "What is it?"

Huang Rong wrote, "Tell my father who killed me."

Ke Zhen'E was startled, he did not understand her intention; he was about to pull her hand to ask further when he felt a breeze right next to him. Huang Rong had leaped out. He heard her said with a smile, "Uncle Ouyang, how are you?"

Nobody had ever expected that someone was hiding behind the idol. 'Ca, ca, zheng, zheng' were heard as the people unsheathed their weapons and surrounded her, while shouting, "Who is it?" "Assassin!" "Who are you?"

Huang Rong smiled and said, "My Father told me to wait for Uncle Ouyang here; what are you making such a fuss for?"

"How did your father know I will be here?" Ouyang Feng asked.

Huang Rong replied, "My father knows medicine, divination and astrology, there is nothing he doesn't know. He can do the Wang Xiantian divine calculation and he'd know everything." [Translator's note: I am not sure about this part]

Nine out of ten Ouyang Feng did not believe her, but he knew even if he asked, she would not tell the truth anyway, so he just smiled and did not say anything. Sha Tongtian and the others went outside the temple to take a look and did not find anybody else, so they went back in and stood around Wanyan Honglie.

Huang Rong sat on a meditation mat, smiling and chuckling she said, "Uncle Ouyang, you have given my father a hard time!"

Ouyang Feng smiled without answering. He knew that although Huang Rong was young, she was full of tricks. If he gave her one wrong answer, she would grab the opportunity to ridicule him; and in front of all these people he simply could not lose face. Therefore, he waited for her to explain her purpose in coming here before he would decide on the appropriate countermeasure. He heard her said, "Uncle Ouyang, my father is surrounded by the Taoist priests of Quanzhen Sect at the Xincheng town of Xiaopenglai; if you don't rescue him, I am afraid it would be difficult for him to escape."

Ouyang Feng showed a faint smile; "Is that so?" he asked.

Huang Rong anxiously said, “You say it as it is nothing! A real man will take responsibility of his own action; clearly it was you who killed Tan Chudian from the Quanzhen Sect, but I don’t know how it started, those stinky priests are always pestering my father. On top of that, Zhou Botong stirred up the muddy waters; while my father refused to argue with them. What do we do?”

Inwardly Ouyang Feng was delighted; he said, “Your father is a martial art expert; how can those several mixed-up hairs from Quanzhen Sect defeat him?”

“The Quanzhen Sect’s ox-nosed plus the Old Urchin, my father is not their match,” Huang Rong said, “My father told me to come to you and say that after painstakingly pondering for seven days and seven nights, finally he understood the meaning of some sentences.”

“What sentences?” Ouyang Feng asked.

Huang Rong said, “Si li xing, ang yi na de. Si re que xu, ha hu wen bo ying.”

To Ke Zhen’E, Wanyan Honglie and the others, these mumbling sentences did not mean anything, but Ouyang Feng was surprised; it was the strange sentence from the last part of the Nine Yin Manual. Could it be that Huang Yaoshi really understood its meaning? His heart was thumping fast, but his face did not show any changes; he indifferently said, “Little girl loves to swindle people. Who can understand those mumbling sentences?”

Huang Rong replied, “Father has translated these strange characters; from top to bottom, clearly. I saw it with my own eyes; how can I swindle you?”

Ouyang Feng knew Huang Yaoshi’s ability very well. Originally he thought that if nobody was able to solve these strange characters, then so be it; but if there was anybody who could find the solution, it must be Huang Yaoshi, for nobody else in this world had the same intelligence. Still, with an unenthusiastic voice he said, “Let me congratulate your father, then.”

Huang Rong caught the real meaning behind his words, she knew he was still half believing and half doubting; she continued, “I think I still remember some of what I saw. I don’t mind if you want to listen to it.” Immediately she recited, “Either when the body moves, or feels heavy as if pressed by something, or feels light like it is ready to fly, or feels constricted, or feels extraordinarily cold or hot, or feels delightful or restless, or feels like touching something nasty and the hair stood on its end, or feels happy while drunk; all these things must be channeled through divine passages according to the following method.”

This explanation of the Manual made Ouyang Feng’s heart unbearably itch. Turned out Huang Rong recited the section Reverend Yideng translated from the Nine Yin Manual. All these strange conditions were actually the actual situations anybody who cultivated internal energy would experience; each one of these conditions was enough to intimidate the state of mind that may cause the practitioner to suffer a fire-deviation. If there was a method to channel these conditions through the divine passages; then the method could truly be considered as highly valuable. So what Huang Rong said was indeed from the Manual and not from her own random fabrication. Ouyang Feng’s internal energy was exquisite, naturally he knew whether what he heard was real or fake. His suspicion was gone. “What comes next?” he asked.

Huang Rong said, “I don’t remember the rest, but I vaguely remember something like this: At the time the pores all over the body are empty, right away with careful consideration examine the thirty

six matters inside the body; it will be like opening the door to the barn and see various kinds of straw and peas, the heart is pleasantly surprised, and quickly becomes quiet and peaceful.” First she explained the strange conditions from the Manual, and then she described the marvelous method of training; in a way she had divulged the secret method of the Manual. But Ouyang Feng was silent; he thought with her intelligence, it was impossible for her to forget, so she must be deliberately unwilling to tell him; he wondered what her intention really was.

Huang Rong continued, “My father told me to ask Uncle Ouyang: Do you want 5,000 characters, or 3,000 characters?”

“Please explain it to me,” Ouyang Feng said.

Huang Rong said, “If you go and help my father, two people join forces to destroy the Quanzhen Masters. In that case I am going to recite all 5,000 characters of this marvelous ‘jiu yin shen gong’ [Nine Yin Divine Energy] for you.”

Ouyang Feng smiled, “And if I don’t go?” he asked.

Huang Rong replied, “Then Father asked you to avenge him. After you kill Zhou Botong and the Quanzhen Six Masters, I will read the 3,000 characters for you.”

Ouyang Feng smiled and said, “Your father and I are just casual acquaintances, how come he suddenly places so much respect toward the Old Poison?”

Huang Rong said, “My father said that: First, the killer of your nephew is a Quanzhen Sect’s disciple, so he supposed you will want to seek revenge ...”

Listening to this part Yang Kang could not help but shiver; he was Qiu Chuji’s disciple, so with her words Huang Rong obviously meant him. Shagu was standing right next to him, she asked, “Good Brother, are you cold?” Yang Kang mumbled his reply.

Huang Rong continued, “Second, after translating the Manual, he was challenged into battle by the Quanzhen priests; he did not have time to explain everything to me. Thinking that this matchlessly wonderful book is difficult to find, how can he let it be lost with his demise? Nowadays you are the only one who has similar personality with him. He remembered Uncle Ouyang went to the Peach Blossom Island to seek a marriage alliance. Although your nephew was unfortunate to fall under the Quanzhen Sect’s disciple, my father said you should not thinking about him too much; therefore, he wanted you to train this ‘shen gong’ [divine power/energy] and teach it to me later on.”

Ouyang Feng felt a pang of pain in his heart; but he thought, “What she said was reasonable; if there is no direction from an expert, although this little girl memorized the Manual in its entirety it will still be useless.” But then something else came into his mind, he said, “How do I know you will tell me the real Manual or a fake one?”

Huang Rong replied, “Guo Jing, that muddle-head has written the Manual for you; as I read the crucial points from the translation, you check it against your copy, then you’ll know whether it is real or fake.”

Ouyang Feng said, “You are right. Let me think about it; we’ll leave in the morning to rescue your father.”

Huang Rong anxiously said, “Helping people is like fighting fire, how can we wait till tomorrow?”

Ouyang Feng said with a laugh, “Then I will avenge your father; won’t that be the same?” He had made a decision that as the Manual had already been in his hand, later on he could compel Huang Rong to recite to him the crucial points; and then he could think it over to understand the meaning. For now, let Huang Yaoshi and the Quanzhen Sect fight each other. Hopefully both sides would hurt each other; wouldn’t that be great?

Hiding behind the idol Ke Zhen’E was listening to two people conversing about the Nine Yin Manual; he wondered why Huang Rong wrote on his palm ‘Tell my father who killed me,’ seven characters [the original Chinese was ‘gao wo fu he ren sha wo,’ 7 characters]; he did not understand her intention. He heard Huang Rong say, “Then we will leave early in the morning tomorrow, is that all right?”

“Absolutely,” Ouyang Feng said with a smile, “Now you go take a rest!”

Ke Zhen’E heard Huang Rong drag a meditation mat over to sit nearby Shagu. “Shagu,” she said, “Yeye [lit. paternal grandfather] took you to the Peach Blossom Island, how come you are here?”

“I don’t want to follow Yeye, I want to go home,” Shagu said.

“This good brother surnamed Yang; didn’t he come to the island and took you on his boat, and come over here together?” Huang Rong asked.

“That’s right,” Shagu said, “He treats me really good.”

Ke Zhen’E’s heart was stirred, “When did Yang Kang come to the Peach Blossom Island?” He heard Huang Rong asked again, “Where did Yeye go?”

Shagu was startled, “Don’t tell him I am running away,” she said, “Yeye will beat me.”

Huang Rong smiled, “I won’t tell him, but whatever I ask you, you must answer me nicely.”

“You must not tell Yeye,” Shagu said, “He wants to take me back and teach me to write.”

Huang Rong laughed, “I certainly won’t tell him,” she said, “Did you say Yeye wanted to teach you to write?”

“That’s right,” Shagu said, “That day Yeye took me to his study room and taught me to write; he said my father’s surname was Qu Qu-something, so my surname is also Qu Qu-something. He wrote the Qu Qu-something character and told me to remember. He also told me my father’s name was Qu Qu-something, something Feng. I could not remember the name. Yeye got angry and scolded me that I am very dumb. I AM called Shagu [sha – dumb, gu – paternal aunt, see also my note in Chapter 23]!”

Huang Rong laughed, “Shagu is naturally dumb. Yeye scolded you, Yeye is bad, Shagu is good!” Shagu was very happy to hear that. “And then what happened?” Huang Rong asked.

Shagu said, “I said I want to go home, Yeye was even angrier. Suddenly a deaf and mute servant came, his finger pointing to the east and to the west, his mouth uttered ‘yi yi ah ah’. Yeye said, ‘I

don't want to receive any guest; tell them to go back!' A moment later that mute servant came back with a piece of paper in his hand. Yeye took a look and then put it down on the table. He told me to go with the mute servant to receive the guest. Ha, ha, that short and fat man was so ugly! I stared at him and he stared back at me."

Ke Zhen'E remembered that when they visited the Peach Blossom Island to seek audience, it was exactly like Shagu had just said; at first Huang Yaoshi did not want to see the six of them, then Zhu Cong wrote a letter to be delivered, afterwards Shagu came out to receive them. But the Third Brother was no longer alive; he could not help but feel grief in his heart.

He heard Huang Rong ask again, "Did Yeye see them?"

Shagu said, "Yeye told me to accompany the guests to eat, but he went out. I don't like to see that short and fat man, so I slipped away and went out. I saw Yeye was sitting behind a rock, looking out at the ocean. I also looked at the ocean. I saw a boat in the distant coming toward the island. On the boat there were some Taoist priests."

Ke Zhen'E thought, "That day we heard the Quanzhen Sect was going to go to the Peach Blossom Island to seek revenge; so we went ahead of them to inform Huang Yaoshi to temporarily keep himself away from them, and wait for the Six Freaks of Jiangnan to explain the whole story to the Quanzhen Sect. But all along we have never seen the Quanzhen Masters on the Island, why did this Shagu said that there were Taoist priests came in by boat?"

He heard Huang Rong asked, "Then what did Yeye do?"

Shagu replied, "Yeye beckoned me to come over. I jumped in fright; turned out he had already seen me slipping out to play. I did not dare to come over, I was afraid he would hit me. He said "I won't hit you, you come over here". So I went over. He said he wanted to take a boat ride and go fishing, he told me to wait for the Taoist priests and to let them in as soon as they came ashore; he told me to let them eat together with the short and fat man six people. I said I wanted to go fishing too. Yeye said I could not come; I had to wait for the Taoist priests and let them in, because they did not know the way on the Island."

"And then what happened?" Huang Rong asked.

Shagu said, "And then Yeye went beyond the big rock and set sail. I know, these Taoist priests are ugly, Yeye did not want to meet them."

Huang Rong praised her, "That's right, what you said is totally correct. When did Yeye come back?"

"Come back?" Shagu said, "He did not come back."

Ke Zhen'E was shaken; he heard Huang Rong ask, "Are you sure? Then what happened?" He could hear her voice was slightly trembling; apparently she also realized this was a crucial point.

Shagu replied, "Yeye was about to set sail, suddenly a pair of big birds came flying by; they were your birds. Yeye beckoned and whistled toward the birds, this pair of birds came down. There was

something tied on the bird's foot, it looked so amusing. I shouted, 'Yeye, give it to me, give it to me!' ..." Speaking to this point she actually shouted loudly.

Yang Kang chided her, "Quiet! Everybody is trying to sleep."

"Shagu," Huang Rong said, "Just continue your story."

Shagu said, "I will speak quietly." And she indeed lowered her voice, "Yeye ignored me; he ripped a cloth from his robe and tied it up on the big bird's foot, then he let them go."

"Hmm," Huang Rong talked to herself, "Father was going to avoid the Quanzhen Masters, no wonder he did not have time to fetch the 'jin wawa' [see Chapter 29]. But who shot the female eagle with an arrow?" So she asked, "Who shot an arrow to the bird?"

"Arrow? There was no arrow," Shagu said; and then she went silent like she was lost in thought.

"All right," Huang Rong said, "Why don't you continue?"

Shagu continued, "Yeye saw his robe was torn, he took it off and told me to go and get another one for him. But when I came back Yeye was gone, the Taoist priests' boat was also gone, I only saw that torn robe lying on the ground."

Listening to her to this point Huang Rong no longer asked; she silently mulled it over in her head. Half a day later she said, "Where did they go?"

"I saw them," Shagu said, "I called Yeye, but he did not reply. I climbed to the top of a big tree and looked, I saw Yeye's little boat in front, the Taoist priests' big boat followed behind, slowly they sailed on the ocean and disappeared. I don't like to see that short and fat man, I stayed on the beach, kicking the gravel and playing all day until dark, and came back with this Yeye and this good brother."

"So it was this Yeye, and not the one who taught you to write?" Huang Rong asked.

Shagu giggled and said, "This Yeye is good, not only he did not want to teach me to write, he even gave me a piece of cake."

"Uncle Ouyang," Huang Rong said, "Do you still have the cake? Can you give her some more?"

Ouyang Feng dryly laughed, "I do."

Ke Zhen'E felt as if his heart was jumping out his throat, "Turned out Ouyang Feng was on the Island that day," he thought.

"Aiyo!" suddenly he heard Shagu cry out, followed by 'slap, slap' two times, some people were fighting, and then someone leaped back and landed again. He heard Huang Rong call out, "You want to kill her to close her mouth?"

Ouyang Feng laughed, "This matter might be hidden from other people, but certainly won't be hidden from your father. Why would I want to kill this dumb girl? If you want to ask, then just ask

her.” But Shagu was moaning and groaning and could not talk anymore. Ke Zhen’E wondered which part of her was hit by Ouyang Feng.

“I don’t have to ask,” Huang Rong said, “I’ve already guessed correctly; I only want Shagu to say it with her own mouth.”

Ouyang Feng laughed and said, “This little girl is really smart. How did you guess? Why don’t you tell me?”

Huang Rong said, “When I first saw the situation of the Island, I also thought that Father had killed the Five Freaks of Jiangnan. But then I remembered something, and I knew it must not be him. Just think, how can my father leave these stinky male corpses in my mother’s grave to accompany her? How can he leave the grave without closing the door?”

“Aiyo,” Ouyang Feng slapped his thigh, “We really overlooked that. Kang’er, isn’t that so?”

Hearing this Ke Zhen’E felt his chest was about to burst open; only now did he realize that Huang Rong had early on known that the killers were Ouyang Feng and Yang Kang, two people. The reason she suddenly went out and sacrificed her own life was to reveal the truth and clear up her father from being wrongly accused. She knew perfectly well that when she went out, most likely she would be unfortunate rather than fortunate; that was why she asked Ke Zhen’E to tell her father who killed her. Ke Zhen’E was filled with grief and regret, he said in his heart, “Good Miss, it would be enough if you just told me who the killer is; why do you deliver your life in vain?” But then he thought, “I, the ‘fei tian bian fu’ [Flying Bat, lit. bat flying to the sky], am so hot-tempered. I am blind, yet I placed the blame on father and daughter. Even if she told me clearly, would I believe her? Ke Zhen’E, oh, Ke Zhen’E, you stinky blind man, you deserve to be killed with a thousand blades; you have forced this good Miss’ death.”

In his regret he wanted to lift his hand and fiercely slap his own ear, but he heard Ouyang Feng said, “How did you guess it was me?”

Huang Rong said, “Is it difficult? In this present age, those who are able to strike the yellow horse and to break the balance beam are not many. But at first I was thinking of a different person. At the point of his death Nan Xiren had written several characters with his finger on the ground, ‘My killer is ten’; he died before the fifth character [translator’s note: the original Chinese text was ‘sha wo zhe nai shi’] was finished. I thought your name does not start with a ‘ten’ (十), so I thought it was the character ‘Qiu’ (裘) from Qiu Qianren.”

Ouyang Feng laughed out loud, he said, “This man Nan Xiren was truly a die hard; unexpectedly he survived and saw you.”

Huang Rong said, “I saw his condition before his death, I was sure he was hit by a strange poison; I thought Qiu Qianren practiced poisonous palm skill, that’s why I guessed it was him.”

Ouyang Feng said with a smile, “Qiu Qianren’s martial art is based on palm strength and not poisonous palm. His palms do not have any poison on them. He used boiling poison to train his palms, but it is merely palm strength’s training method. He forced the poison gas to come out, henceforth his palm strength increased. When he died, that Nan Xiren opened his mouth, but could not say anything, his face showed a smiling expression, is that right?”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong said, “What kind of poison is that?”

Ouyang Feng did not answer, he asked again, “His body was twisted, he was rolling around on the ground, he suddenly possessed unusually great strength, is that right?”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong said, “This violent poison, I thought other than the Iron Palm Clan, nobody in the world can possibly have it.”

It was obvious that Huang Rong said that to provoke Ouyang Feng, and he knew it very well, but he still could not restrain from being agitated and angry, “Do you think people call me the Old Poison for nothing?” He stomped his snake staff heavily on the ground and shouted, “The snake on this staff bit him on his tongue, that’s why there was no wound on his body, but he could not speak.”

Hearing this Ke Zhen’E felt warm blood bubbling up straight to his brain, he almost fainted several times. Huang Rong heard movement from behind the idol, she let out some coughs, trying to cover up the noise, and then slowly said, “The Five Freaks of Jiangnan died under your hands, Ke Zhen’E who escaped does not have eyes to see, in the end nobody knew the real killer.”

Listening to her Ke Zhen’E’s heart was stirred, “She is saying that to remind me, telling me not to act rashly so that the two of us will not lose our lives and die without explanation.” He heard Ouyang Feng laugh dryly, “How can that stinky blind man escape my palm? I deliberately let him go.”

“Ah, right,” Huang Rong said, “You killed five people, and let him believe it was my father who killed them. He would go and publicize this matter, then rally the heroes of the world to attack my father.”

Ouyang Feng said with a smile, “It was actually not my idea, but Kang’er’s; isn’t that right?” Yang Kang mumbled his reply.

Huang Rong said, “It is truly a divine and marvelous strategy. My utmost admiration!”

Ouyang Feng said, “You changed the topic; what made you think of me?”

Huang Rong replied, “I thought Qiu Qianren and I fought at the southern road between Hunan and Hubei; even though it is possible for him to overtake us and arrive at the Peach Blossom Island ahead of us, it was actually very difficult with us riding the little red horse. I thought again about what Zhu Cong wrote at the back of the letter, he called everybody to stay on their guard. The last character was not finished, he only made three strokes: one horizontal line, one vertical, and another horizontal like a hook. It could be the start of ‘east’ ( 東 ) character, or it could be ‘west’ ( 西 ) character, couldn’t it? If not ‘Eastern Heretic’ then it must be ‘Western Poison’. I have thought about this on the Peach Blossom Island; but there are some details I do not understand yet.”

Ouyang Feng sighed, “I thought I have done everything flawlessly, who would have thought there are so many trails I left behind. That dirty scholar was so quick, I did not even see him moving his pen to write anything.”

“He was known as the Magic Hand Scholar,” Huang Rong said, “Naturally he would not let you see whatever he was doing. I pondered deeply over the character ‘ten’ ( 十 ) Nan Xiren wrote; I wonder what could it be? It was because I thought this Xiao Wangye’s [young prince, lit. young master

king] martial art skill is so low that definitely he did not have the ability to kill the Five Freaks of Jiangnan in one stroke, therefore, I have never suspected him.”

“Humph,” Yang Kang snorted.

Huang Rong continued, “That day I was all alone on the Peach Blossom Island, tossing and turning between being asleep and awake; I could not find the right conclusion. I was dreaming of many, many people, I dreamt about Mu Jiejie [elder sister Mu], I dreamt she was in Beijing, during the joust to find a spouse. I suddenly was awakened from the dream, sprang up, and only then did I know the killer was actually this Xiao Wangye!”

Hearing Huang Rong saying these words with sharp voice Yang Kang was drenched in cold sweats; forcing a laugh he said, “Did Mu Nianci tell you in a dream?”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong said, “If not for this dream, how could I guess it was you? Where is that little emerald shoe of yours?”

Yang Kang was startled, with a stern voice he asked, “How did you know? Did Mu Nianci also tell you in a dream?”

With a cold smile Huang Rong said, “Do you think I need it? After you two killed Zhu Cong, you stuffed the treasures inside my mother’s grave in his pocket; so that when other people see it, they would think he robbed the treasures and was found out by my father; thus he lost his life. Framing someone like this is actually a clever idea; only you forgot one thing: Zhu Cong was known as the Magic Hand Scholar.”

Ouyang Feng’s curiosity arose, “What about the Magic Hand Scholar?” he asked.

“Humph,” Huang Rong sneered, “He only knows putting treasures on other, he actually did not know that other took a treasure from his body.”

Ouyang Feng did not understand, “What treasure?” he asked.

Huang Rong said, “Although Zhu Cong’s martial art skill was inferior to you, at the point of his death again he displayed his magic hand skill; he took something from this Xiao Wangye and grasped it in his hand, of course you did not know. If not because of this thing, not in a million years would I expect this Xiao Wangye to pay a visit on the Peach Blossom Island.”

Ouyang Feng said with a smile, “This matter becomes more and more interesting; this Magic Hand Scholar was actually highly skilled, his life had already gone yet he was still able to leave you a clue. The thing he took must be that little emerald shoe you were talking about.”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong said, “I have seen all the treasures inside Mother’s grave since I was little; and I have never seen this little emerald shoe before. Even in his death Zhu Cong still grasped this shoe tightly; there must be a reason behind it. The front of this shoe has a ‘bi’ [contest, compete] character on it, while on the opposite side there was a ‘zhao’ [to recruit] character. I painstakingly thought about this, but all along could not penetrate the mystery. That night I had a dream, I saw Mu Jiejie on a street corner in Beijing showing off her martial art skill. There was an embroidered banner stood on the side, with the word ‘bi wu zhao qin’ [Joust to find a spouse – lit.

martial art contest to recruit a relative/person with intimate relation] on it. Suddenly it dawned on me and everything clicked together.”

Ouyang Feng laughed and said, “Turned out these two characters on the shoe have this romantic history! Ha, ha, ha, ha!” He laughed happily, but actually Ke Zhen’E was listening in indignation, since he did not understand what it was that dawned on Huang Rong’s mind.

Huang Rong knew Ke Zhen’E did not understand, so with the pretense of talking to Ouyang Feng, she explained clearly, “That day in Beijing Mu Jiejie was jousting for a spouse, Xiao Wangye happened to display his full capability. Lucky for me I was there in the crowd to witness this lively occasion. After contesting for a while, Xiao Wangye snatched Mu Jiejie’s embroidered shoe. He won the martial art contest, so he should marry her, but actually there were many complicated affairs involved.”

This joust to find a spouse did indeed have too many repercussions later on. At that time Liang Ziwen, Sha Tongtian and the others were also present to be the witnesses: Wanyan Honglie mourned his wife, Yang Kang met his biological father, and all kinds of circumstances surrounding it. Listening to this point everybody’s heart was filled with sadness and regret.

Huang Rong said, “After I remembered this, I was able to figure out what had happened. Xiao Wangye and Mu Jiejie privately agreed to spend their lives together in the future; naturally they decided the engraved jade shoes would make the best token of engagement. This pair of jade shoes complement each other; one has the ‘bi’ and ‘zhao’ two characters, the other must have the ‘wu’ [martial art] and ‘qin’ [relative/person with intimate relation] on it. Xiao Wangye, did I guess correctly?” Yang Kang did not answer.

Huang Rong continued, “Once I figured this thing out, the rest was easy. Han Baoju was killed by the ‘jiu yin bai gu zhua’ [Nine Yin White Bone Claw]. In this world only ‘hei feng shuang sha’ [the Twin Killers of the Dark Wind] practiced this martial art; but these two had already died. Others would certainly think that the Twin Killers of the Dark Wind’s shifu must be also proficient in this skill. Who would have thought that my father had never practiced this Nine Yin White Bone Claw or any skill similar to this martial art; yet the Copper Corpse Mei Chaofeng had received a skilled disciple when she was still alive. Therefore, the tiny ‘ten’ character Nan Xiren wrote must be the start of ‘yang’ (杨) character. Unexpectedly that muddle-head kid Guo Jing insisted it was the ‘huang’ (黄) character.” Speaking to this point Huang Rong could not help feeling gloomy.

Ouyang Feng let out a long laugh and said, “No wonder that Guo Jing kid disregarded his own life attacking your father at the Misty Rain Tavern.”

Huang Rong sighed, “Your trick was really marvelous; in his anger that muddle-head kid could not distinguish right from wrong. At first I thought you captured one of the deaf and mute servants and forced him to show you the way; only today did I realize it was Shagu who let you in. Xiao Wangye must have promised to take her back to the Ox Village; Shagu was so happy and did whatever you told her to do. Hmm, you two must have set up an ambush inside my mother’s grave; then you told Shagu to invite the Six Freaks of Jiangnan in my father’s name, telling them to come into the grave. With Uncle Ouyang blocking the grave entrance, how could the Six Freaks of Jiangnan escape your cruel hands? It was truly capturing the turtle inside an earthen jar.”

Listening to her Ke Zhen'E got the impression that she was there to witness everything; the feeling when that day they fought powerful enemy in the tomb came back to his mind. He heard Huang Rong continue, "Uncle Ouyang had seen my father's long robe on the shore; he took and wore it. The light inside the grave room was dim, in a flash several of the Six Freaks were injured or killed, how could the rest of them recognize the enemy in that desperate situation? So Nan Xiren told Ke Zhen'E that the killer was my father. Zhu Cong and Quan Jinfa were killed by Uncle Ouyang; Han Baoju was killed by Xiao Wangye while Han Xiaoying cut her own throat. Ke and Nan two people managed to escape from the grave, and fought furiously in the study room. You deliberately let Ke Zhen'E escape. By the time Nan Xiren recognized the killer to be the one surnamed Yang, he had already been bitten by the snake."

Ouyang Feng sighed, "This little girl has a god-like analytical ability. All these things happened by chance; it was the Six Freaks' fate that they should die this way. When I went to the Peach Blossom Island with Kang'er, we did not know the Six Freaks of Jiangnan would be there."

"That's true," Huang Rong said, "Although the Six Freaks of Jiangnan enjoyed sound reputation in the Jianghu, it was because of their 'xia yi' [chivalry], two characters. If we are talking about martial art skill, Uncle Ouyang would not even look at them. So if you two went through great length executing your scheme, you must have another big plan in your mind."

Ouyang Feng smiled and said, "Little girl is very smart; you must have guessed correctly."

Huang Rong said, "Indeed I have; but I ask Uncle Ouyang's forgiveness if it is incorrect. I believe your initial intention was to see the Quanzhen Masters and my father fight each other and injure each other, and then just like Bian Zhuang stabbing the tiger you would destroy both Quanzhen Sect and the Peach Blossom Island in one fell swoop. Who would have thought that you were one step too late; my father and the Taoist priests of Quanzhen Sect have already left the Island. Xiao Wangye interrogated Shagu, and found out that the Six Freaks of Jiangnan were there. Mmm, thereupon you two fully displaying your capabilities by killing the Five Freaks, and arranged it so that all blames will fall to my father. You killed all the deaf and mute servants on the Island, and burned their bodies down to leave no trace; hence there would be no evidence at all. Later on when this matter is known, how can Hong Qigong, Emperor Duan and the others not make things difficult for my father? Xiao Wangye was afraid my father would return early and erase all sorts of traces you left behind on the Peach Blossom Island; therefore, you intentionally let Ke Zhen'E escape. This man is blind, but his tongue is not rotten yet. It's true that he cannot see, but he can say all kinds of nonsense."

Listening to this Ke Zhen'E could not help but feeling grieved and angry, but also ashamed. He heard Ouyang Feng sigh and say, "I really envy the Old Heretic Huang to have such a good daughter. Everything that happened was really very complicated, but you guessed everything correctly, as if you have seen everything with your own eyes. Little baby doll, you are really smart."

**End of Chapter 35.**

## Chapter 36 – Expedition to the West

*Translated by Frans Soetomo, with special thanks to Mr. Jamin Soetomo*



*Ke Zhen'E moved his spear to attack the incoming hand. Ouyang Feng raised his arm a little and Ke Zhen'E's arms were numb and he felt pressure on his chest. His spear flew upward, making a hole in the ceiling and landing on the temple's roof.*

Huang Rong quietly said, "I appreciate Uncle Ouyang's compliments to me. Too bad Guo Jing is so gullible that right now he doesn't even want to live in the same world as my father and I. After you save my father, if your nephew were still alive, ay! Couldn't the marriage proposal of the past be pursued further?"

Ouyang Feng's heart was stirred, "What is she getting at by bringing this matter up?" he pondered. In the meantime, Huang Rong continued, "Shagu, this good brother is very nice to you, isn't he?"

"Yes," Shagu answered, "He is going to take me home. I don't want to play on that island anymore, I want to go home."

"What are you going to do at home?" Huang Rong asked, "There is a dead man in your house; there is a ghost there."

"Ah!" Shagu cried, she was scared, "Ah! There is a ghost in my house, a ghost! I don't want to go home."

"Who killed that man?" Huang Rong asked.

"I saw it, it was this good brother ..." Shagu answered, but before she finished, 'bing! bing!' a couple of metallic sounds were heard, two secret projectiles fell down on the ground.

Huang Rong laughed, "Xiao Wangye [Young Prince], you don't want her to talk? Fine. Just don't use secret projectiles to hurt her."

Yang Kang was indignant, "This idiot talked nonsense, with ghost and everything."

"Shagu," Huang Rong said, "You can keep talking. This nice Yeye [grandpa] loved to hear your story."

"No," Shagu answered, "Good brother doesn't want Shagu to talk, Shagu won't talk."

"That's right," Yang Kang said, "Go lie down and sleep. If you open your mouth for just one more word, I'll have the ghost come over and eat you."

Shagu was very scared, "Oh, Oh," she said. Then Ke Zhen'E heard some rustling sound. It was Shagu's clothes, she lied down and slept.

"Shagu," Huang Rong said, "If you don't want to talk to me, I'll get Yeye to take you back to the Island."

"I don't want to go, I don't want to go," Shagu cried.

"Then you'll have to talk," Huang Rong said, "This good brother has killed someone in your house; what kind of man has he killed?" Everybody felt strange on why she suddenly wanted to talk about Yang Kang killing a man.

Yang Kang's heart was thumping loudly, he got his right hand ready; as soon as Shagu revealed his secret about him killing someone at the Ox Village, even if it would arouse Ouyang Feng's suspicion, he would use the 'Nine Yin White-bone Claw' to kill Shagu. He was wondering in his

heart at the same time, “When I killed Ouyang Ke, only Mu Nianci, Cheng Yaojia and Lu Guanying, three people saw it. Did any one of them leak the secret? Hmm, it is likely that Shagu was also there to witness it, I was not being careful.”

The temple was quiet and everybody was waiting for Shagu to open her mouth. Ke Zhen'E could feel the tension, but he did not dare to make a slightest move. After waiting for half a day Shagu still did not say anything, only her light snore was heard; apparently she had fallen asleep.

Yang Kang breathed out a sigh of relief; his palm was sweating cold, “This Shagu poses a great danger to me,” he thought, “I must think of a way to get rid of her.” He cast his glance toward Ouyang Feng who was sitting quietly with his eyes closed. The moon illuminated the side of his face. He looked indifferent, seemed like he was unconcerned of everything that was going on around him.

Everybody else thought Huang Rong was just talking nonsense. Shagu was asleep; looked like the case was closed. They started to lie down or sat leaning against the wall, trying to get some sleep.

Just when the moon was rising higher they heard Shagu's startled voice. She jumped up and shouted, “Don't hurt me! Ouch, it hurt!”

With shrilling voice Huang Rong cried, “Ghost! Ghost! It's a ghost without legs! Shagu, you killed that young mister without legs; he is coming to get you!”

In the quietness of the night Huang Rong's voice made the hair on everybody's back rose up.

“No!” Shagu cried, “It wasn't me! It was this good brother ...” she had not finished when suddenly ‘Ah!’ ‘Bang!’ ‘Aiyoi!’ were heard simultaneously. Yang Kang abruptly sprang up, his arms outstretched, his fingers forming a claw heading straight toward Shagu's skull, but Huang Rong had used her dog-beating stick to entangle his legs.

The temple was in chaos; Sha Tongtian and the others immediately surrounded Huang Rong. Huang Rong, however, seemed oblivious to all this, her left index finger pointed toward the temple's door; she cried out, “Mister with no legs, come here, Shagu is here!”

Shagu looked at the temple door. It was dark, so all she could see was blackness, but she was always scared of ghosts ever since she was little; quickly she pulled Huang Rong's sleeve and cried in panic, “Don't come to take my life, it was this good brother who killed you with an iron spearhead. I was in the kitchen watching through the door ... ghost with no legs, don't come looking for me!”

Not in a million years would Ouyang Feng guess that his beloved nephew was killed by Yang Kang; yet he always thought that Yang Kang was unable to tell lies. Obviously Shagu could not lie.

Sad and angry he laughed maniacally, casting a sharp glance toward Yang Kang. “Xiao Wangye, my nephew deserved to die. It's good that you killed him, it's good!” he said. His laughter sent a chill on everybody's spine; his voice was very mournful, making ears buzzing like innumerable needles were piercing their eardrums at the same time. Everybody was trembling, their teeth chattered. There were thousands of white-head crows on the temple's pagoda that night; Ouyang Feng's laughter startled them. ‘Caw! Caw! Caw!’ they were crying noisily and then they flew away loudly flapping their wings.

Yang Kang thought he would not live to see another day; both eyes looking left and right, trying to find a way to escape.

Wanyan Honglie was also secretly frightened. After the crows noise subsided he said, “This girl is insane, Mister Ouyang, how can you believe what she said? Your honorable nephew came by Xiao Wangye’s invitation because Xiao Wang [lit. little king – he was referring to himself] is relying heavily on his assistance. How could Xiao Wangye harm him without any reason?”

Seemingly without making any effort Ouyang Feng stood up, his body glided over and with a slight bend on his knees he landed on Shagu’s side. His left hand grabbed Shagu’s arm. “Why did he kill my nephew? Speak up!” he roared.

Shagu was scared to death. “I didn’t kill him, don’t hurt me! Don’t hurt me!” she cried. She struggled hard, but Ouyang Feng’s grip was like a pair of steel pliers, how could Shagu free herself? The more she struggled, the harder his grip became. Shagu was frightened and cried, “Mama!”

Ouyang Feng repeated his question several times; Shagu became so scared from crying that she did not dare to cry anymore. She only stared at Ouyang Feng’s face with a blank expression.

“Shagu,” Huang Rong soothingly said, “Don’t be afraid, this nice grandpa is going to give you a cake.”

Her words reminded Ouyang Feng. He realized that if he used force, Shagu would not dare to talk; therefore, he groped inside his pocket and produced a dried and already cold steamed bun and held it out to Shagu’s hand. “That’s right! Here, you can eat this cake.”

Shagu grabbed the bun, her fear was gone. “Yeye, you grabbed my arm, it hurt, you must not grab me anymore,” she said.

“Good Shagu, you are an obedient child,” Ouyang Feng warmly said, “Yeye won’t grab your arm anymore.”

Huang Rong said, “That day the mister without legs was hugging a lady. Tell me, was she pretty?”

Shagu nodded. “Very pretty. I wonder where she is going.”

Huang Rong asked again, “Do you know who she is? You don’t know, do you?”

Shagu’s face lit, she was so proud of herself; she clapped her hands and said, “I know, I know! She is this good brother’s wife!”

Hearing this, any doubt left in Ouyang Feng’s heart was gone. He knew his nephew’s lecherous character; it must be because of Mu Nianci that his nephew met his fate. But, Ouyang Ke’s martial art was higher than Yang Kang’s; even though his legs were injured, Yang Kang was still not his match; he could not figure out how Yang Kang was able to kill him? He turned his head toward Yang Kang and said, “My nephew was oblivious to what’s good and what’s not, he dared to offend the Xiao Wangye’s concubine; he deserved to die ten thousand times.”

“No ... No ...” Yang Kang stammered. “It wasn’t me ...”

“Then who?” Ouyang Feng sternly asked.

Yang Kang was so scared that his knees turned into rubber, cold sweats pouring down his forehead; his usual shrewdness was gone, he was unable to utter a single word.

Huang Rong sighed, “Uncle Ouyang, you can’t blame the Xiao Wangye of being heartless, you can’t blame your nephew flirtatious character either, you have only your superb martial art to blame.”

“How so?” Ouyang Feng was puzzled.

Huang Rong answered, “I don’t know why, but in that house at the Ox Village I heard a couple, a man and a woman, were talking. I do not understand what they were discussing.”

Listening to this muddy talk with so many unknown Ouyang Feng was more confounded, “What did they say?” he asked.

Huang Rong answered, “I will repeat what they said word for word, I won’t add or subtract a single word; please Uncle hear me out. I did not see their faces, I don’t know who the man was, I don’t know who the woman was either; what I heard was that man said, ‘If this fact that I killed Ouyang Ke ever leaks out, won’t that be a disaster?’ That woman replied, ‘A real man is not afraid to take responsibility of his action. If you are afraid, you shouldn’t have killed him yesterday. Even though his uncle is very fierce, we can run away to some far away place, he won’t be able to find us.’”

Listening to Huang Rong, Ouyang Feng said, “That woman was right. What did the man say?”

While these two were talking, one asked the questions and the other answered, Yang Kang was getting more and more afraid than ever. The moon cast its light through the temple’s door, throwing a slanting column of light illuminating the face of the temple’s idol. Yang Kang slowly moved away from the light, quietly walked toward Huang Rong’s back. He heard Huang Rong answered Ouyang Feng’s question.

“That man said, ‘Meizi [sister/beloved], I have another thought: his uncle’s martial art is unparalleled, I wanted to take him as my master, I have had this thought for a while, but they followed a very strict rule: they only take one disciple per generation. Now that this man is dead, his uncle might take me as his disciple!’”

Huang Rong did not mention anybody’s name, but she had an uncanny ability to imitate Yang Kang’s accent. Yang Kang grew up in the northern area, but Bai Xirou, his mother, was a native of Lin’an in the south; so Yang Kang’s accent was a mixture between northerners and southerners. As soon as Huang Rong said these things, everybody knew it was Yang Kang she was imitating.

Ouyang Feng laughed coldly; he turned his head but did not see Yang Kang.

Suddenly they heard ‘whack!’, then ‘Aiyo!’ Someone was crying in alarm. They saw Yang Kang standing under the moonlight with blood dripping from his right hand, his face was deathly pale.

Turned out that when Yang Kang heard Huang Rong was revealing his secret he could not restrain himself much longer; he leaped ferociously, his claw was aimed toward Huang Rong’s head. As Huang Rong imitated Yang Kang’s accent, she was fully aware he would certainly attack her;

therefore, she had guarded against this attack from the start. Her martial art level was higher than Yang Kang's. As soon as she heard the gust of wind she leaned her head sideways to elude, so the claw fell on her shoulder.

Yang Kang had launched the 'Nine Yin White-bone Claw' with all his might, his five fingers landed on the soft hedgehog armor Huang Rong was wearing. A shot of pain traveled from his fingers to his brain; he almost pass out.

The others were clueless as whether it was Yang Kang who made the sneak attack, or was it Huang Rong or Ouyang Feng who attacked him. They were all scared of Ouyang Feng, so nobody dared to say anything.

Wanyan Honglie rushed forward, trying to help. "Kang'er, what happened to you? Where does it hurt?" he asked. Casually he took out the dagger on his belt and placed it on Yang Kang's hand. He realized Ouyang Feng would not have good intention. He was hoping that in a chaotic battle they, father and son, would be able to save their lives.

Enduring his pain Yang Kang said, "I am all right." He held out his hand to grab the dagger, but his hand was numb, 'clank!' the dagger fell on the floor. Hastily he stooped down to pick it up, but strangely his arm was stiff; it did not want to follow his command anymore. He was extremely shocked. He tried to pinch his right arm with his left fingers, but he did not feel anything. He looked up toward Huang Rong and cried out in horror, "Poison! Poison! You used poison to harm me!"

Peng Lianhu and the others knew they were going to offend Ouyang Feng, but Wanyan Honglie was the Great Jin's prominent Prince; surely this Ouyang Ke affair could be discussed peacefully later. Seeing Yang Kang's frightened expression, they immediately rushed forward to offer words of sympathy and called out to Huang Rong, "Quickly give the antidote to Xiao Wangye!" but everybody stayed as far as possible from Ouyang Feng.

Huang Rong was indifferent, "Don't make a fuss; my soft hedgehog armor does not have any poison on it. There is somebody here who wants to kill him, I don't have to lift a finger to harm him."

But suddenly Yang Kang shouted, "I ... I ... I can't move!" His knees buckled, his body slowly slid down, his mouth was producing a growling noise much like a wild beast.

Huang Rong felt strange and she turned toward Ouyang Feng, but saw that he was carrying a puzzled expression as well. She turned back toward Yang Kang, she saw Yang Kang was strangely happy, a crack of smile appeared on the corners of his mouth. Under the silvery moonlight he looked inhumanly ghastly. Suddenly a thought came into her mind, she said, "It was Uncle Ouyang who poisoned you."

Ouyang Feng was puzzled, "From the look of him, it was indeed my marvelous snake's poison. I had wanted him to taste it, this little girl had done it on my behalf. Wonderful! Wonderful! But those snakes, I am the only one in this world who owns them, where did the little girl get it from?"

"Where can I get that kind of snakes?" Huang Rong asked, "This is your own poison, you have unwittingly poison him yourself."

"You are talking weird," Ouyang Feng said.

“Uncle Ouyang,” Huang Rong said, “I remember your bet against the Old Urchin. You took the poison from your snakes and feed it to a shark. As this shark died of the poison, the second shark ate its flesh and died of the same poison. This way the poison was spreading endlessly. Isn’t that so?”

Ouyang Feng laughed, “If my poison is not extraordinary, won’t my title ‘Western Poison’ be in vain?”

“That’s right,” Huang Rong said, “Nan Xiren was the first shark.”

By that time Yang Kang was already rolling around on the ground like a madman. Liang Ziweng wanted to comfort him, but how could he stop him?

Ouyang Feng ignored everything, he knitted his eyebrows trying to understand what Huang Rong was saying, but it was still dark to him. “Please elaborate,” he said.

“Hmm, you used your viper to bite Nan Xiren. That day I came across him on the Peach Blossom Island and he hit me. His fist landed on my left shoulder. The sharp needles of my soft hedgehog armor punctured his hand, so his poisonous blood was transferred to my soft hedgehog armor, which became the second shark. When Xiao Wangye attacked me, heaven’s net tightened, his claw grabbed my shoulder. Nan Xiren’s poisoned blood was transferred once again to him. Hey, hey, he is the third shark.”

Hearing Huang Rong’s explanation everybody realized how deathly Ouyang Feng’s poison was. They also remembered Yang Kang’s treacherous plan in killing the Five Freaks; in the end it was Nan Xiren’s blood which kill him. It was truly a revenge well-deserved. A chill crept into everybody’s back.

Wanyan Honglie walked toward Ouyang Feng, knelt in front of him and asked, “Mr. Ouyang, please help save my son’s life; Xiao Wang will always remember your benevolence.”

Ouyang Feng laughed sinisterly, “Your son’s life is a life indeed, my nephew’s life was not a life!” His gaze swept through Peng Lianhu and the others’ faces and coldly said, “Which hero does not agree with me, please speak up!” Everybody recoiled simultaneously. Who would dare to open his mouth?

Yang Kang suddenly leaped up, ‘bang!’ he hit Liang Ziweng, sending him somersaulted in the air and passed out. Wanyan Honglie stood up, calling, “Quick! Take Xiao Wangye back to Lin’an; we’ll find a good doctor to cure his injury.”

Ouyang Feng laughed, “Who in this world can neutralize The Old Poison’s venom? Which doctor won’t want to live and dare to mess up my handiwork?”

Wanyan Honglie ignored him, he shouted toward his martial artists, “What are you waiting for? Quickly take Xiao Wangye away.”

Suddenly Yang Kang jumped high until his head almost hit the beam. He pointed his finger at Wanyan Honglie and he shouted, “You are not my father! You killed my mother, now you kill me!”

Wanyan Honglie stepped back and stumbled down. Sha Tongtian said, “Xiao Wangye, please calm down.” He stepped forward to grab Yang Kang’s arms. Unexpectedly Yang Kang flipped his hand to push away Sha Tongtian’s hand and quickly seized his arm. Yang Kang’s left hand formed a claw scratching Sha Tongtian’s arm.

Sha Tongtian cried in pain, hastily he rolled backward to escape, but a moment later he felt itchiness on his arm. He was terror-stricken!

“This is the fourth shark,” Huang Rong coldly said.

Peng Lianhu and Sha Tongtian were good friends, moreover, Peng Lianhu was also an expert poison user, he knew Sha Tongtian was poisoned and his life was in grave danger. In this critical moment almost without thinking he took the saber from his waist and swiftly chopped Sha Tongtian’s arm halfway down.

Hou Tonghai did not understand Peng Lianhu’s good intention, “Peng Lianhu, you dare to hurt my ‘Shige’? [Elder martial brother]” He charged Peng Lianhu disregarding his own safety.

Sha Tongtian endured the pain and shouted, “Idiot, back-off! Brother Peng was saving my life!”

By this time Yang Kang’s mind was cloudy, he was charging to the east and striking to the west, kicking and biting randomly. Everybody saw what happened to Sha Tongtian, nobody dared to come close to him; shouting and yelling they darted out of the temple.

It was a very chaotic situation; the crows on the pagoda were startled, they flew around in confusion under the moonlight around the temple’s courtyard. Their noisy cries intermingled with Yang Kang’s neighing voice.

As Wanyan Honglie was heading toward the temple door he turned his head one more time and called out, “Kang’er! Kang’er!”

Yang Kang’s eyes were brimming with tears; he also called out, “Fu Wang! Fu Wang! [Father King]” He walked toward Wanyan Honglie.

Wanyan Honglie was delighted, he spread out his arms and hugged Yang Kang tightly, “Child, are you feeling better?”

Under the moonlight Yang Kang’s face suddenly changed; he opened his mouth, revealing two rows of white teeth, ready to bite. Wanyan Honglie was shocked. His left hand pushed out, breaking the hug. Yang Kang’s strength was completely gone; he fell backwards. He struggled hard to crawl back up to no avail.

Wanyan Honglie did not dare to linger much longer, without looking back he hurriedly went out the temple, mounted his horse and ran as fast as he could. The others were close on his heels, and in a short moment the temple was quiet again.

Ouyang Feng and Huang Rong saw Yang Kang was rolling around on the ground, each with his/her own thought, nobody said anything. A moment later Yang Kang’s body curled up and then ceased to move altogether.

“Enough commotion for half a night,” Ouyang Feng coldly said, “It’s almost daybreak; let us go looking for your father.”

“Right now my father is on the Peach Blossom Island,” Huang Rong said, “Why do you want to look for him?”

Ouyang Feng was taken aback, “So the little girl was lying all along,” he sneered.

“The first few sentences were indeed to swindle you,” Huang Rong admitted, “What kind of man do you think my father is? How could he let himself surrounded by a bunch of stinky Quanzhen priests? If I did not mention the Nine Yin Manual you wouldn’t let me interrogate Shagu.”

By this time Ke Zhen’E had totally admired Huang Rong, but he was sad and full of regret at the same time. He only hoped she would find a clever trick to escape soon. He heard Ouyang Feng said, “There were three parts truth in your lies, otherwise, the Old Poison wouldn’t be so easily deceived. All right then, recite your father’s translation to me from the beginning to the end, don’t skip even half a word.”

“What if I don’t remember?” Huang Rong asked.

“It will be best if you remember, otherwise the beautiful face of a smart little girl would be bitten by my snakes, now that won’t be fun, will it?” Ouyang Feng threatened.

When Huang Rong jumped out from behind the idol she was ready to die; but seeing Yang Kang’s pitiful death she could not help but feeling frightened. She thought, “Even if I give him Reverend Yideng’s translation he still won’t let me go. Is it so difficult to escape from his grip?”

She paced back and forth for a while but still could not think of a good way to escape, so she decided to buy some time and think again later. “If I read the original text I might remember the interpretation. Why don’t you recite it to me, let me try explaining it to you,” she said.

“Who could memorize these mumbo jumbo sentences?” Ouyang Feng said, “You don’t have to confuse me.”

As she heard Ouyang Feng was not able to recite it from memory Huang Rong got a sudden inspiration. After contemplating it back and forth she came to a conclusion, “He can’t memorize it, so he must treat the manual as precious as his life.” She quickly said, “All right then, take out the manual and read it to me.”

Ouyang Feng was determined to hear the explanation; immediately he took an oil-cloth package from his pocket, after opening three layers of cloth he produced Guo Jing’s altered manual from it. Huang Rong was amused, “Jing Gege wrote a whole bunch of nonsense, yet the Old Poison treats it as the most precious object.”

Ouyang Feng lighted a fire and found a half-burned candle from the worship table, with which light he started to read the manual, “Hu bu er, ken xing duo de, si gen liu bu.”

“That means ‘differentiate it well then divide it into twelve air passages’,” Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng was delighted, “Ji er wen hua si, ha hu,” he read again.

“Capable of healing various illness, gradually entering divine perfection,” Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng read, “Qu da bie si tu, en ni qu.”

Huang Rong hesitated for a moment, shaking her head she said, “Not right, you did not read correctly.”

“No, I read it correctly,” Ouyang Feng said, “That is what was written.”

“That’s strange,” Huang Rong said, “How come it’s so muddled?” Her left hand on her head, she pretended to be thinking hard.

Ouyang Feng was anxious. He stared at her, hoping she would find the answer quickly. A moment later Huang Rong exclaimed, “Ah, I know! It must be that dumb kid Guo Jing writing it wrong. Let me see.”

Ouyang Feng was not afraid Huang Rong would steal it from him, he handed the manual over. Huang Rong held out her right hand to take the manual, while her left hand took the candlestick, pretending to examine the manual closely. Suddenly her feet kicked the ground; she leaped backward for more than a ‘zhang’ [10 feet/3 meter]. She held the manual within half a ‘chi’ [approximately half a foot] to the candle and shouted, “Uncle Ouyang, this manual is fake, I’d better burn it down.”

Ouyang Feng was shocked, hastily said, “Hey, hey, what are you doing? Quickly give that back to me.”

Huang Rong smiled, “Do you want the manual, or my life?”

“What do I want your life for? Quickly give that back to me,” Ouyang Feng said. His voice was urgent, unusually anxious. His body leaned forward as if ready to strike anytime.

Huang Rong held the manual two more inches closer to the candle. “Stop! I am going to burn this manual as soon as you move one more step, then you’ll regret it for the rest of your life.”

Ouyang Feng silently agreed with what she said. “Humph, you win,” he said, “Put that manual down and go before I change my mind!”

“You are a grand master of your school, you must not go back on your own words,” Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng calmly said, “I said just put the manual down and you can go.”

Huang Rong knew that he was a proud man; although he was evil and cruel he had never broken his promise to anybody, so she put the manual along with the candle on the ground and smiled, “Uncle Ouyang, please excuse me.” Carrying her dog-beating stick she turned around and walked away.

Contrary to what she was expecting, Ouyang Feng did not even look at her. He jumped back and with a loud ‘bang!’ he smashed the Wang Yanzhang idol with the back of his hand, the idol broke halfway down. “Blind man Ke, roll out!” he shouted.

Huang Rong was startled; she turned her head only to see Ke Zhen'E had jumped out from behind the idol, brandishing his iron spear in front of his body. Huang Rong immediately realized her misjudgment, "With the Old Poison's ability how could he not know Master Ke was hiding behind the idol? He must've heard his breathing early on, only he waited patiently for a good opportunity to expose him." She dashed forward quickly, standing in front of Ke Zhen'E with the bamboo stick in front of her body.

"Uncle Ouyang, I am not going, you let him go," said Huang Rong.

"No, Rong'er, you go" Ke Zhen'E said, "Go find Jing'er, tell him to avenge our six lives."

Huang Rong mournfully answered, "If he is ever going to believe what I say, he would have already believed what I said. Master Ke, if you don't go, my father and I will have a hard time proving our innocence. Tell Guo Jing that I don't blame him, tell him not to feel bad." But how could Ke Zhen'E let her embrace danger to save his own life? Two people were bickering incessantly.

Ouyang Feng became impatient, "Little girl, I let you go, you don't want to go. What are you waiting for?"

"I'd love to stay," Huang Rong said, "Uncle Ouyang, get this blind man out of here, I will accompany you chit-chatting, just don't hurt him."

Ouyang Feng thought, "You want to stay, that was what I want. Whether this blind man lives or dies, what does it have anything to do with me?" With big strides he went forward, holding out his hand to grab Ke Zhen'E on his chest.

Ke Zhen'E moved his spear to attack the incoming hand. Ouyang Feng raised his arm a little bit and Ke Zhen'E's arms were numb, he felt pressure on his chest. 'Clank!' his spear flew upward, made a hole on the ceiling and landed on the temple's roof.

Ke Zhen'E hastily leaped backward, but before his feet landed on the floor he felt his collar was pulled, his body was hung in front of Ouyang Feng. His battle experience was vast; in this dangerous moment he did not get nervous. His left hand moved slightly and two 'du ling' [poisonous water chestnut] flew toward the enemy's face.

Ouyang Feng did not anticipate that in the face of danger Ke Zhen'E was still able to attack. They were very close to each other, the incoming attack was strong, it was difficult to parry; Ouyang Feng bent his body backward but his hand did not let Ke Zhen'E go, Ke Zhen'E was thrown across the top of his head.

When he jumped out from behind the idol Ke Zhen'E was facing the temple's door, so Ouyang Feng's throw made him fly out of the door. Because Ouyang Feng's force was so strong, Ke Zhen'E's body was actually flying faster than his own 'du ling'. The 'du ling' missed Ouyang Feng's head and flew straight toward Ke Zhen'E's body.

"Aiyo!" Huang Rong cried out. But she saw that while he was airborne Ke Zhen'E was able to turn his body slightly, stretched out his right hand and deftly caught his own two 'du ling's. His ability to hear and differentiate secret-projectiles wind had been trained to near perfection; his ears could hear as clearly as other people could see.

“You are good!” Ouyang Feng exclaimed, “Blind man Ke, I’ll let you go.”

Ke Zhen’E landed on his feet, he was reluctant to go. Huang Rong laughed, “Master Ke, Ouyang Feng wanted to be my disciple; he wants to learn the Nine Yin Manual from me. You still want to stay; do you also want to be my disciple?”

Ke Zhen’E knew that although Huang Rong talked jokingly, but her situation was extremely precarious. He stood on the temple courtyard, but was hesitant to go.

Ouyang Feng looked up to the sky and said, “It’s daybreak. Let’s go!” Pulling Huang Rong’s hand they walked out the temple’s door.

“Master Ke, remember the letter I wrote on your palm,” Huang Rong called out. They moved really fast, Huang Rong’s last few words were heard from several ‘zhang’s away.

Ke Zhen’E stayed motionless for a long time. He heard flock upon flock of crows that came into the temple to feast on the corpse, so he leaped onto the roof to find his spear pole. Leaning against his pole on the roof again he stayed motionless for a while, thinking the heaven and earth are boundless, but what kind of place could a blind man like him call home? Then he heard the crows cried mournfully and they dropped to the ground one by one. Turned out those crows were feasting on Yang Kang’s corpse and they were poisoned one after another. Ke Zhen’E could not help but heaving a long sighed. He jumped back down to the ground, wielding his spear he walked to the north.

On the third day suddenly he heard eagle cry high up in the sky. He thought that if the birds were close by, then Guo Jing must not be very far; therefore, he raised his voice and shouted in the middle of the wilderness, “Jing’er, Jing’er!”

Not too long afterwards he heard hoof beats; it was indeed Guo Jing riding the little red horse coming toward him. He was separated from Ke Zhen’E in the chaotic battle the other night; this time he saw his master was well his joy was unspeakable. He did not even wait for the horse to stop; he jumped from the horseback and rushed to embrace his master, calling loudly, “Da Shifu!”

Unexpectedly Ke Zhen’E slapped him left and right until his ears were red. Guo Jing was stunned, but did not dare to fend off. He let his master off his embrace. Ke Zhen’E continued to slap Guo Jing with his left hand, while his right hand slapped his own face until his own ears were red.

Guo Jing was confounded, “Da Shifu, what happened to you?”

Ke Zhen’E viciously scolded, “You are the little muddle-head; I am the old muddle-head.”

Dozens or so slaps later he calmed down and stopped. Both men’s faces were red and swollen. Ke Zhen’E kept cursing Guo Jing and himself for half a day before finally he narrated everything that had happened in the temple.

Guo Jing was surprised yet happy, sorrowful yet ashamed, “So that’s what actually happened. I had wrongly accused Rong’er,” he thought.

“Tell me, don’t we deserve to die?” Ke Zhen’E shouted. Guo Jing agreed, he also said, “Disciple deserves to die; Da Shifu’s eyes are not perfect, you cannot be blamed.”

Ke Zhen'E was angry, "Damn it! My eyes are blind, is my heart also blind?"

Guo Jing tried to divert his attention, "We must quickly think of something to rescue Rong'er."

"What about her father?" Ke Zhen'E asked.

"Huang Daozhu [Island Master Huang] had taken Hong Enshi [Benevolent Master Hong] to recuperate on the Peach Blossom Island," Guo Jing answered, "Da Shifu, where do you think Ouyang Feng is taking Rong'er?"

Ke Zhen'E pondered for a moment, then said, "Rong'er is in his hands, even if she did not die, I don't know what kind of tortures she would be subjected to. Jing'er, you quickly rescue her, I am going to kill myself to thank her."

"No!" Guo Jing cried out in alarm, "Don't even think of doing such thing." However, he knew his first master's stubbornness very well, he would not listen to other people; once he said he would die, he was not going to back off; therefore, Guo Jing quickly said, "Da Shifu, you'd better go to the Peach Blossom Island to ask Huang Daozhu to lend us a hand. In all honesty, I am not Ouyang Feng's match."

Ke Zhen'E thought it was not a bad idea, so he picked his spear and left. Guo Jing was reluctant to part with his first master, he followed him behind. Ke Zhen'E knew he was being followed, he swung his spear backward and scolded, "You are still not going? If you don't rescue my beloved Rong'er, I am going to take your little life!"

Guo Jing had no choice but stopped, his gaze followed his master until he disappeared beyond the mulberry grove toward the east. He had no idea where to start looking for Huang Rong. After thinking hard for quite a while he took his horse and pair of eagles and walked back to the Temple of the Iron Spear.

Around the temple he saw countless dead crows; on the courtyard he saw a pile of human remains. Guo Jing hated Yang Kang for killing his masters, but thought that Yang Kang was already dead, so he was willing to write-off that debt; moreover, he was his sworn brother. Guo Jing picked the remains and buried Yang Kang on the temple's courtyard. He bowed in respect in front of the grave and said, "Brother Yang, if you know how I buried your remains today, you have to bless me in finding Rong'er; that way you can make up for your crimes during your lifetime." Afterward Guo Jing started to make inquiries everywhere, trying to track Huang Rong's trail.

Half a year had passed, autumn turned into winter, then winter turned into spring. Guo Jing, accompanied by his red horse and a pair of eagles have looked everywhere; he asked the Beggar Clan, went to the Quanzhen Sect, and inquired all Wulin characters he knew, yet nobody heard even a little bit of news about Huang Rong. He was miserable. He imagined how much suffering Huang Rong had to endure this past half a year; it was like a knife was piercing his heart. He was determined to find her, even to the end of the earth.

He had been to Yanjing, twice he had tried to find Wanyan Honglie at Bianliang, yet Wanyan Honglie also disappeared without a trace. The Beggar Clan members all over the country had tried to find their Bangzhu [Clan Leader], but still there were no words about Huang Rong. Guo Jing also stopped by the Cloud Village, but the village was burned to the ground. He did not know what kind of disaster Lu Chengfeng and Lu Guanying had encountered.

One day he arrived within the Shandong border. Nine out of ten houses he saw along the way were deserted; he barely saw other people walking around. He heard that the Mongolians and the Jins were fighting each other in that area. The Jins were defeated and while retreating they stopped at nothing; raping and plundering the people along their way.

Guo Jing walked for three more days heading north. The further he went, the more devastation he witnessed. His heart was embittered looking at the suffering of the common people as the result of war.

That day he arrived at a small village by a river bank in a valley; he was going to stop by for food and water for him as well as his horse, when suddenly he heard a commotion just ahead of him. People were screaming and horses were neighing in panic; dozens of Jin soldiers had entered the village. They set the village on fire, forcing the people to go out of their houses. If there was a young girl in the house, the soldiers would seize her and bind her with ropes. The rest of the people, young and old alike, were killed right there and then.

Guo Jing was seething with anger; he charged his horse toward the leader of this pack, snatching his spear; the back of Guo Jing's left hand smacked his 'tai yang' [sun] acupoint. By that time Guo Jing had already reached high level in term of martial art skill; his strength was profound. With just one hit that officer's eyes came out of their sockets and he died instantly.

The rest of the soldiers were shouting and yelling; sabers and spears attacked simultaneously. The little red horse was not afraid of battle; it dashed forward carrying Guo Jing on its back. Guo Jing snatched a saber with his left hand, and using the mutual hands combat technique he thrust the spear in his right hand and hacked the saber in his left, attacking the soldiers left and right.

As soon as the Jin soldiers saw this person's fierceness, they lost their will to fight; they turned around and fled from the village. But suddenly a big banner appeared amidst the smoke; a squad of Mongolian soldiers had arrived. The Jin soldiers who had been defeated earlier did not dare to fight the Mongolian troops head-on so they turned back to the village, hoping they would be able to slip by Guo Jing relying on sheer numbers.

Guo Jing hated the Jin soldiers for cruelly abusing the people; he charged his horse toward the village entrance and single-handedly defending it against the intruders. About a dozen or so soldiers courageously attacked him; Guo Jing killed them all. The rest of the soldiers did not dare to attack but they could not go back either; they ran around in confusion, screaming in fear.

The Mongolian soldiers saw ahead of them somebody was helping them; they charged the rest of the Jin soldiers and killed them all. The 'bai fu zhang' [leader of a 100 men unit] was about to inquire Guo Jing's background when suddenly one the Mongolian soldier recognized him. That soldier shouted, "Jin dao fu ma! [the golden-blade consort]" and immediately kneeled on the ground.

The 'bai fu zhang' heard Guo Jing was their Great Khan's son-in-law, he did not dare to be impolite; hastily he dismounted his horse and also kneeled on the ground while dispatching a courier to quickly inform their commander-in-chief.

The villagers, young and old, were coming out of their hiding places to thank Guo Jing when suddenly from outside the village came a loud thundering noise of cavalry's hoof beats. The people were frightened; they looked at each other in blank dismay.

A bay horse with a black mane came fast, a young general shouted, "Where is Guo Jing Anda [Mongolian term for sworn brother]?"

Guo Jing saw it was Tuolei, he was delighted. "Tuolei Anda," he answered. They rushed forward and hugged each other. The pair of eagles recognized Tuolei, they flew down and lovingly rubbed their necks to him.

Tuolei ordered a 'qian fu zhang' [leader of a 1000-men unit] to pursue the Jin soldiers, while the rest of his troops pitched their tents right there on the hillside; then he told Guo Jing everything that had happened since the last time they parted.

Tuolei told the war affair of the northern countries; only then did Guo Jing find out that within the last few years Genghis Khan attacked to the east and sent expedition to the west, expanded his territory. Jochi, Chagatai, Ogedei and Tuolei, four princes; plus Mukhali, Borchu, Boroul and Chilaun, the Great Khan's four heroes, his right-hand men, all had established many distinguished services.

Presently Tuolei and Mukhali were leading their troops to attack the Jin toward the east; they had fought several battles and utterly routed Jin's army. The Jins ran to the fortified city of Tongguan; did not dare to come out to Shandong to fight.

Guo Jing stayed with Tuolei's troops for several days. A fast dispatch came one day; Genghis Khan ordered all princes and generals to go back north for a general assembly. Tuolei and Mukhali did not dare to linger much longer, they assigned their second-in-commands to lead the troops and that very same night they rode north. Guo Jing missed his mother, so he came along with Tuolei to the north.

In less than a day they had arrived at the bank of River Onon. As far as eyes could see, the vast prairies were full of tents, tens of thousands of warhorses running around and neighing, tens of thousands spearheads gleaming brilliantly under the bright sun light. In the middle of countless gray tents towered a big yellow silk tent. The tent ornaments were made of cast gold; above it fluttered nine big banners.

Guo Jing's horse stood on the river bank as he watched this awe-inspiring military prowess. He thought about how the great power in this Golden Tent had shaken the desert, wiping out the other rulers of the area. He imagined how Genghis Khan would issue his commands from the Golden Tent; then fast horses would be dispatched to deliver the orders to the tens of thousands soldiers under the princes and the generals. The bugles would sound and the beacons on the prairie would be lighted, their fires reaching the sky. Arrows would fill the sky like a swarm of locusts, spears and blades would flash, horses and infantrymen would march amidst the dust rising to the sky.

Guo Jing thought, "The Great Khan wants to amass this much land, I wonder what he wants to do with it?" Suddenly he saw the dust rise and a group of cavalry came to welcome them. Three people, Tuolei, Mukhali and Guo Jing entered the Golden Tent to see the Great Khan. To his surprise he saw all the princes and the generals were already sitting on either side of the tent.

Genghis Khan was overjoyed to see these three people. Tuolei and Mukhali immediately reported the military situation. Guo Jing stepped forward and kneeled, saying, “The Great Khan has assigned me to sever the Jin prince, Wanyan Honglie’s head. I met him several times, yet every time he was able to escape. I am ready to accept The Great Khan’s punishment.”

Genghis Khan laughed, he said, “When the young eagle grows up, there will come a day when it will catch the fox. Why would I want to punish you? You arrived just in time; I often thought about you.”

The assembly then proceeded by discussing military plans to destroy the Jins. Mukhali proposed that since the Jins occupied the fortified city of Tongguan, it would be difficult to attack; the best plan would be forming an alliance with the Southern Song and execute a converging attack.

“Good! Let us do it then,” Genghis Khan said. Immediately he assigned his secretary to write the letter and sent an envoy to go south. The general assembly convened until dusk that day.

Guo Jing left the Golden Tent, under the darkened sky he walked to his mother’s tent. Suddenly a pair of hands appeared from behind, about to cover his eyes. With his current martial art skill how could he let anybody launched a sneak attack? He leaned sideways and was going to push that person away when suddenly his nostrils caught a whiff of perfume, then he saw it was a girl. Quickly he pulled back his hand and called out, “Sister Huazheng!” It was indeed Princess Huazheng standing in the dark with smile all over her face.

They have not seen each other for several years. This time they met again, Guo Jing saw she was growing taller. She just stood there among the tall grass, her skin jade-white; she looked beautiful yet valiant. Guo Jing called again, “Meizi! [Younger Sister, used in a more intimate way]”

Huazheng was extremely happy that tears flowed down her cheeks, “You really came back!”

Guo Jing was touched by the sincere expression of her feeling. Thousands of words were dancing around his mind, but he did not know where to start.

After a few minutes of silence Huazheng said, “Go see your mother. You came back alive, guess who will be happier, your mother or I?”

“My mother will be very happy, I am sure,” Guo Jing said.

Huazheng pouted, “Do you think I am not happy?”

The Mongolians were more frank, they would say what they think. Guo Jing had lived among the southerners for quite some time; unconsciously he had been influenced by the way the southerners talked. Now he went back to his childhood home and heard Huazheng talked in a friendly manner, a warm feeling filled his heart. Two people walked hand in hand toward Li Ping’s tent. Mother and son met and there were more tears of happiness.

Several days later Genghis Khan summoned Guo Jing, “I have heard your conducts and deeds from Tuolei. You keep your words and have an upright heart, I like that very much. Just wait several more days, I am going to give you my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

Guo Jing was startled, he thought, “Right now I don’t even know if Rong’er is dead or alive. How can I marry someone else?” Seeing Genghis Khan’s imposing appearance, although he wanted to disobey, he stammered and nothing intelligible came out of his mouth. Genghis Khan misunderstood his behavior; he thought Guo Jing was ecstatic that he turned silly. Immediately Genghis Khan prepared a dowry for Guo Jing: one thousand maidservants, one hundred catties of gold, five hundred cows, two thousand sheep, plus he was told to prepare his own wedding and take anything he needed from Khan’s treasury.

Huazheng was Genghis Khan’s only daughter from his first wife; she was her father’s beloved since she was very little. By that time Genghis Khan’s power had already spread throughout the Mongolian desert, he had subdued many other Khans; who, upon hearing their Great Khan was going to give his daughter’s hand in marriage, immediately sent precious gifts in abundance. Not too long afterwards, more than a dozen big tents were needed to store all the gifts.

Princess Huazheng was so happy that she could not erase the smile from her face; Guo Jing, on the other hand, looked so haggard, his mind was filled with anxiety. He was often caught looking blankly to a far away place with a dejected look on his face.

Li Ping noticed her son’s countenance was unusual, one evening she asked Guo Jing point blankly inside their tent. Guo Jing recounted everything about Huang Rong, from the day they met until they parted a few months ago. Li Ping listened attentively; she was silent for half a day.

“Ma [Mother],” Guo Jing asked, “Your son is in a difficult situation, I don’t know how to manage this.”

“Great Khan has shown profound kindness to us, how can we forget it?” Li Ping answered, “But that Rong’er, that Rong’er, ay! Even though I have never met her, I believe she is an adorable girl.”

“Ma,” Guo Jing suddenly said, “If Father were in this situation, how would he act?”

This question was unexpected to Li Ping; she was silent for half a day; remembering her late husband’s personality; and then with conviction in her voice said, “Your father would rather suffer a hardship than offending other people.”

Guo Jing stood up, with a quivering voice he said, “Even though this son of yours has never seen his father, I should follow my father’s footsteps. If Rong’er is safe, your son will honor my promise to marry Princess Huazheng; but if Rong’er faced calamity, your son will not marry for as long as I live.”

Li Ping thought, “That is a proper thing to do, but how can I let you be the last descendant of the Guo family? Nevertheless, this child is the same as his father, both were stubborn. Once they made a decision what other people say would be useless.” Thereupon she asked, “How are you going to report to the Great Khan?”

“I will tell the Great Khan the truth,” Guo Jing answered.

Li Ping was willing to support her son’s intention. “Good,” she said, “We can’t put this off much longer. Go ahead and say thank you to the Great Khan, we, mother and son, will leave for the south even today.” Guo Jing nodded his approval.

That very same evening mother and son prepared their bags. Other than a few changes of clothes and some silvers, they left the Great Khan's gifts in the tent.

As soon as they were finished Guo Jing said, "I am going to take my leave from the Princess."

Li Ping hesitated, "How can you tell her? We'd better leave quietly, spare her the heartache," she said.

"No," Guo Jing said, "I will personally tell her." Leaving his tent, he walked towards Huazheng's tent.

Huazheng and her mother lived in a big tent; they were busy discussing the wedding preparation. Suddenly Huazheng heard Guo Jing's voice calling her from outside the tent. She was blushing, "Ma!" she said.

Her mother smiled, "You are going to get married in a few days, yet you cannot bear not to see each other for just a day. All right, you may go."

Huazheng smiled and walked out the tent. "Guo Jing Gege [big brother]," she called.

"Meizi [younger sister], I have something I need to tell you," Guo Jing said. He led her walking to the west. Two people walked several li's into the prairie, far from the big camp, and sat side by side on the grass.

Huazheng leaned against Guo Jing's body. Lowering her head she said, "Jing Gege, I also have something I want to tell you."

Guo Jing was slightly startled, "Ah! So you know already?" he said. He thought it would be better for her to find out, since he did not know where to start.

"Know what?" Huazheng was confused, "I wanted to tell you that I am not the Great Khan's daughter."

"What?" Guo Jing was surprised.

Huazheng lifted up her eyes toward the crescent moon on the horizon, she slowly said, "After I am married to you, I will forget that I am the Great Khan's daughter, I am only Guo Jing's wife. If you want to beat me or scold me, go ahead and do it. Don't think that because my father is the Great Khan you have to submit to me."

Guo Jing felt a mixture of bitter-sweet and warm and fuzzy feeling in his heart, he said, "Meizi, you treated me very well. It's a pity I don't deserve to have you."

"What do you mean you don't deserve me?" Huazheng countered, "You are the kindest man in the world, except for my father, nobody is better than you. Even my four elder brothers don't hold a candle compared to you."

Guo Jing was silent for a long time; he was going to leave Mongolia for the south early in the morning the next day, yet he did not know how to tell her.

Huazheng continued, “These past several days I have been so happy. I remember that time when I heard you had died I was going to die with you. Lucky for me Brother Tuolei snatched the dagger from my hand; otherwise how can I marry you now? Guo Jing Gege, I’d rather die than not being your wife.”

Guo Jing silently thought, “Rong’er won’t talk to me like this; but both of them are very kind to me.” Thinking about Huang Rong he could not help letting out a long sigh.

“Uh, why did you sigh?” Huazheng wondered.

“It was nothing,” Guo Jing reluctantly said.

Huazheng said, “Hmm, my first brother and second brother didn’t like you, but my third brother and fourth brother are very fond of you. I have told my father frankly that the first brother and second brother are not good, third brother and fourth brother are good, so you don’t have to worry.”

“Why would I worry?” Guo Jing wondered.

Huazheng was very proud of herself, “I heard mother said that since Father is getting older, he wants to appoint the Khan’s Crown Prince. Can you guess who will be chosen?”

“Naturally your first brother, Jochi. Not only he is the oldest, but has rendered most service as well,” Guo Jing said.

Huazheng shook her head, “My guess is not the first brother, most likely the third brother, or even the fourth brother.”

Guo Jing knew Genghis Khan’s eldest son Jochi was smart and very competent; the second son, Chagatai was brave and a good strategist. These two men did not bow to each other, their competition was most ardent. The third son Ogedei loved to drink and to hunt; generosity was one of his traits. He realized that after his father passed away, the successor would be either his first or second brother. But among the four princes of the Khan, actually Tuolei was his father’s favorite. He realized he had no chance to become the next Khan; therefore, he had never fought over the position of the crown prince. He was in good terms with all of his three brothers.

Guo Jing was not convinced by Huazheng’s explanation, “Would the Great Khan appoint the Khan’s Crown Prince based on what you said?” he asked.

“I am not sure about that either,” Huazheng said, “That was my blind guess. But even if the first brother or the second brother becomes the next Khan, you don’t have to worry either. If they make things difficult for you, I will fight them to the death.” Huazheng was Genghis Khan’s beloved daughter; 30% of the time her four elder brothers yielded to her.

Guo Jing knew she would do what she said; he slightly smile and said, “You don’t have to do that.”

“Why not?” Huazheng said, “If my brothers don’t treat us nicely, we can go together to the south.”

“That’s what I was going to say,” Guo Jing blurted, “I must go back to the south.”

Huazheng was silent for a moment, “I am afraid mother and father won’t let me go,” she said.

“It’s only me ...” Guo Jing started to say, but Huazheng cut him off, “Hmm, I will always listen to you. If you say we are going south, I am coming with you. If mother and father won’t give their permission, we’ll elope.”

Guo Jing could not hold himself much longer, he jumped and stood up, “It’s only two people, me and my mother who are going back south,” he said. Having said this, one was standing up, the other was sitting down, four eyes looked at each other, both stayed still like a pair or statues.

Huazheng’s face showed confusion and despair, she did not understand what he was saying. “Meizi,” Guo Jing broke the silence, “Please forgive me! I can’t marry you.”

“Why? What did I do wrong? You are blaming me for not killing myself, are you not?” Huazheng was confused.

Guo Jing almost shouted, “NO! No! It’s not your fault. I don’t know whose fault it is; I have thought back and forth, and if I should blame anybody, it should be me.”

Henceforth he started telling Huazheng everything about Huang Rong. When he got to the part on how Huang Rong was currently held captive by Ouyang Feng, and that he had searched high and low for half a year without finding any trace of her; Huazheng could feel the excitement in his voice, she was unable to hold her tears from falling down.

Finally Guo Jing said, “Meizi, please just forget me, I must go and look for her.”

“After you found her, would you come back here looking for me?” Huazheng asked.

“If she is safe and well, I will certainly go back north,” Guo Jing promised, “At that time, if you did not shut me off and still want me, I will marry you. I definitely won’t regret it.”

Huazheng slowly said, “You don’t have to say that. You know I will always want you to marry me. Go and find her, whether it will be ten years, twenty years, as long as I am still alive, I am going to wait for you in this grassland.”

Guo Jing was excited, “Yes,” he exclaimed, “Ten years, twenty years, I am going to look for her. Ten years, twenty years, I will also remember that you are waiting for me in this grassland.”

Huazheng sprang up and threw herself into his bosom, weeping uncontrollably. Guo Jing embraced her gently, his eyes were turning red. Two people hugged each other without saying anything. Things had come this far, they knew if they say another word they would only grieve the other.

After a long time, they saw four riders from the west came rushing by; they swept pass by Guo Jing and Huazheng’s side, went directly to the Golden Tent. They were still about dozens of ‘zhang’s away from the Golden Tent when suddenly one of the horses fell down and was unable to stand again; it was obvious that this horse was very tired, it dropped dead right then and there. The rider stood up and without casting a single glance toward his dead horse he dashed wildly into the Golden Tent.

A short moment later ten men with horns in their hand rushed out of the Golden Tent; they faced four directions and blow their horns, “Whooo! Whooo! Whooo!”

Guo Jing knew it was Genghis Khan's most urgent call, whether it was his own son or his beloved general, if anybody did not show up by the time the Great Khan had bent all his ten fingers, he would be beheaded immediately, no question asked.

"The Great Khan summons us!" Guo Jing shouted. Without saying anything to Huazheng he used his lightness kungfu and flew toward the Golden Tent. He heard hoof beats coming urgently from all directions.

When Guo Jing arrived at the tent, Genghis Khan had only bent three fingers; and when he had bent eight fingers all the princes and senior generals were fully assembled. Genghis Khan loudly roared, "Does that dog king Muhammad have quicker princes? Does he have such gallant generals?"

"NO!" the assembly answered in unison.

Genghis Khan beat his chest and shouted, "Look! These are my special envoys to Khoresm; see how did that dog king Muhammad treat my loyal servants?" Every eye followed the Great Khan's finger. They saw several Mongolians with their faces swollen black and blue; their beards completely burnt. Beards were the Mongolian warriors' sign of dignity; it was considered a great insult just to bump into it, how much more insulting was it to burn it completely? As soon as the assembly saw this, everyone exploded in angry roars.

Genghis Khan said, "Khoresm is a big country with a strong army, but are we afraid of them? Because we have been concentrating our effort to battle the Jins, we were very lenient to them. Jochi my son, tell everybody how we should deal with that dog king Muhammad."

Jochi stepped forward and said with a loud voice, "That year Father King sent your son to attack the deserved-to-die Mergid people. Your son returned triumphantly. That dog king Muhammad also sent a big army to attack the Mergids. Two armies met. Your son sent a good-will envoy, saying that Father King sincerely wished to be friend with the Khoresm. That red-bearded dog king actually said, 'Genghis Khan did not order you to attack me, but Allah had sent me to attack you.' As a result we were engaged in a fierce battle. We had gained the upper hand, but because the enemy was ten-times our number, we quietly withdrew the troops at midnight."

Boroul suddenly said, "For all that the Great Khan still showed respect towards this dog king. We sent a trade caravan, but the cargo was robbed by that dog king, while our merchants were killed. This time we sent ambassadors of goodwill, that dog king has listened to that Jin dog prince Wanyan Honglie's instigation; he killed half of the Great Khan's messengers, while burning the other half's beards and sent them back home."

Hearing the name Wanyan Honglie, Guo Jing's heart turned cold, "Is Wanyan Honglie at the Khoresm?" he asked.

One of the burnt messengers answered, "I recognized him. He sat by that dog king's side, constantly talking in low voice with that dog king."

Genghis Khan called out, "The Jin dog has joined forces with Khoresm, they are going to press us from both sides, are we afraid of them?"

The assembly answered with one voice, "Our Great Khan is peerless in the world. You order us to attack the Khoesms, we will crush their cities, burn down their buildings, kill their men off, taking captive of their women and livestock!"

Genghis Khan shouted, "We must capture Muhammad! We must capture Wanyan Honglie!" The assembly answered his cry with a cheering so loud that the candle lights inside the tent swayed. Genghis Khan took his saber out and swung it in front of him. He rushed outside the tent, leaped onto his horseback. The assembly followed him out of the tent and mounted their horses.

Genghis Khan rode his horse several 'li's into the prairie until he arrived at a small hill. The assembly knew he wanted to be left alone to think, so they did not go up the hill, but formed a ring surrounding the small hill. Genghis Khan saw Guo Jing was standing not too far from him, he called, "Son, come here." Guo Jing galloped his horse uphill.

Genghis Khan swept his gaze on the prairie, where the light from his army camp flickered like stars scattered throughout the vast grassland. He raised his whip and said, "Son, that day we were surrounded by Sangum and Jamukha on the mountain, I had said something to you. Do you remember what I said?"

"I remember," Guo Jing answered, "The Great Khan said that we the Mongolians have many valiant men. As long as we do not fight our own people and join our forces, we will be able to call the world our grazing land."

'Crack!' Genghis Khan twirled his horse whip into the air, he called out, "That's right! Now the Mongolians have joined forces, let us go and capture that Wanyan Honglie."

Guo Jing had decided to go back south with his mother the next day, suddenly this matter arose, how could he forget to avenge his father's death? Moreover, his mother and he have received Khan's generosity. The opportunity had presented itself for him to repay this debt of gratitude; so he called out, "This time we will surely capture that scoundrel Wanyan Honglie."

"Rumor has it that the Khoesms army is one million men strong, but I estimate their number to be close to six, seven hundred thousands," Genghis Khan said, "We only have two-hundred thousand men, but we have to spare several thousands men to fight the Jin dogs. A hundred and fifty thousands against seven hundreds, what would you say? Will we win?"

Guo Jing was completely oblivious of battle strategy, but he was not a coward. Hearing the Great Khan so inquired, he boldly said, "We will win!"

"Of course we will win," Genghis Khan said, "That day I said I will treat you as my own son. Once Temujin says something, he won't forget it. You come with me on this expedition to the west; once we have captured Muhammad and Wanyan Honglie, we will go back home and consummate your marriage with my daughter." This was precisely what he was hoping for, so Guo Jing agreed immediately.

Genghis Khan rode his horse descending that hill, "Summon the soldiers!" he gave his command. Immediately his personal guard sounded the bugle while Genghis Khan speedily went back to his camp.

Along the way men were seen moving around like shadows and horses were galloping back and forth but not a single voice was heard; a sign of a highly disciplined army. Before the Khan even arrived at the Golden Tent, his thirty thousand soldiers had already neatly arranged on the prairie. The bright moonlight shone on row upon row of spears and blade, making the prairie glittered with silvery gleams.

Genghis Khan entered the Golden Tent and called his secretary, assigning him to write a war declaration. The secretary immediately composed a lengthy letter on a sheet or parchment; then he knelt down in front of the Great Khan to read his letter: “The Heaven has appointed me as the Great Khan over many nations, enlarged my territory by tens of thousands ‘li’s, helped me to crush countless countries. From the ancient of days there is no one who can be called my equal. Once my thunder strikes, how can you resist? Your country’s existence until today depends on three things: unless you send a tribute, the great Mongolian army will ...”

The more Genghis Khan heard, the angrier he became; he kicked that white-bearded secretary upside down and cursed him, “Who are you writing to? Why would Genghis Khan used such flowery words toward a dog king?” Raising his horse whip he struck the secretary’s face several times, and then called out, “Listen to me, what I say, you write down.”

That secretary gingerly crawled back up, he took a fresh parchment and knelt on the floor, looking intently to the Great Khan’s lips.

Genghis Khan walked to the tent entrance and opened up the curtain, looking toward his thirty-thousand strong cavalry. With a low and calm voice he said, “Write it this way, only six characters.” He paused for a moment then shouted, “If you want to fight, then fight!” [ni yao zhan, bian zou zhan – 6 characters]

The secretary was stunned, thinking this kind of official document was so scandalously unusual, but his face was still burning from the whip earlier, how could he dare to object? He wrote those six characters in large letters immediately.

“Put my gold seal on it and send it by the fastest horse,” Genghis Khan commanded. Mukhali put the seal on the letter and dispatch a ‘qian fu zhang’ [leader of a 1000 men unit] with his troops to deliver the letter.

The rest of the assembly learned about the Great Khan’s letter, which only had six characters on it, their spirit rose. They heard the hoof beats of the messengers gradually disappear into the prairie, suddenly as if by prior agreement they shouted in one voice, “If you want to fight, then fight!” While outside, the thirty-thousand soldiers cheered, “He hu! He hu! [lit. ‘hey! (or ‘I say!) Shout!’] It was the Mongolian cavalry’s battle cry. As the horses heard their masters shout they neighed loudly while lifting up their front legs. The noise on the prairie that night was deafening, as if they were in an actual battle.

Genghis Khan dismissed his army then he sat alone in his Golden Tent, deep in thought. The chair he was sitting on was taken from the Jins; a dragon snatching a giant pearl was carved on its back, while a pair of ferocious tiger heads was carved on its two armrests. It was the throne that belonged to the Jin emperor.

Genghis Khan reminisced his own youth, which was full of sufferings and difficult times; he recalled his own mother, his wife, his four sons and a beloved daughter; he also remembered his beautiful concubines, his ever-victorious army, his vast and boundless empire; at last he thought about the upcoming war against a powerful enemy.

Although he was getting old his hearing was as keen as when he was young; he heard a distant mournful cry of a warhorse, then the cry stopped abruptly. He understood it was an old horse with an incurable disease; its master could not bear to see it suffer, so he must have killed the horse. Suddenly he remembered, "I am also getting old, this time I am going to war, will I go back home alive? If I lose my life in the battlefield, my four sons will fight over the Great Khan position; it definitely will be a devastating fight. Ay, I wish I can live forever and not see death."

Even if one was an invincible, fearless warrior; once one's strength gradually faded, one's mind would involuntarily think about 'death'. He could not help but feeling trepidation; his heart trembled with fear.

"I heard in the south there exists a class of people called 'Taoist Priests' who can teach people how to become deity who will never grow old and never see death. I wonder if it is true?" he mused. Clapping his hands twice he called a guard to summon Guo Jing into the tent.

As soon as Guo Jing arrived Genghis Khan asked him about this matter. "I don't know about becoming immortal deity, but there indeed some people who can teach you how to meditate, to do breathing exercise, circulating your energy; in the end, it will prolong your life," Guo Jing answered.

Genghis Khan was delighted, "Do you know such person? Quickly go and find one to see me," he said.

"This kind of people won't come with any casual invitation," Guo Jing replied.

"Correct," Genghis Khan said, "I am going to send a high official to invite him to the north. Tell me, whom should I invite?"

Guo Jing thought, "Among the Taoist orthodox sects, the Quanzhen is the best. Among the Quanzhen Six Masters, Qiu Daozhang's [Taoist Priest] martial art is the highest, he is also the most amiable, perhaps he would be willing to come." Therefore, he mentioned the name of Changchun Zi [Eternal Spring] Qiu Chuji.

Genghis Khan was ecstatic; he summoned his secretary immediately, told him his intention and ordered him to write an imperial letter.

The secretary had a bitter experience earlier that day, he thought for a long time, then finally wrote the imperial letter, "I have something to talk, please come immediately [zhen you shi, bian ji lai]." He followed the Great Khan's literary style, also only used six characters. He thought this time surely the Great Khan would be pleased with his work. Who would have thought that as soon as Genghis Khan heard the letter, he was angry, and once again his whip hit the secretary's face.

"I said that way to a dog king, but how can I treat an honorable Taoist Priest the same way?" Genghis Khan scolded, "You must write a long letter, a modest and respectful one."

The secretary knelt down on the ground and started to compose this imperial letter:

‘The Heaven despises the arrogant in the Central Plains, I rule in the northern desert yet I also share the sentiment. I wish for a simple and pure character, shun the extravagance and embrace frugality. Each clothes each meal, along with the livestock in the corral enjoying the Heaven providence. Regarding the people like newborn babies, raising warriors like brothers, seeking harmony with the earth’s element and the living beings.

Training tens of thousands soldiers, dispatching hundreds of military expeditions with me leading in the front; within seven years I have completed great undertakings, uniting six elements into harmony. Not by my own virtue, but because of the Jin’s government’s lack of patience and the Heaven bestowed its blessing and gave honor to me.

To the south I made an alliance with the Zhao family’s Song Dynasty, to the north annexed the Hui Ge, to the east Xia and to the west Yi [name of countries, not sure the exact location]; all acknowledging Genghis Khan’s sovereignty, unparalleled since the founding of my Great Mongolia for thousands of years and hundreds of generations. However, my responsibilities are heavy; there is something I lack to maintain peace.

Just like marking the side of the boat where the sword fell into the lake, thinking that the water did not flow [meaning: vanity, something stupid]. I need worthy men to assist me in achieving peace under the sky. I assumed the throne with diligent mind to build a better nation; but three out of nine positions is not filled properly.

I seek Master Teacher Qiu to give guidance, governing nature, nourishing an exhausted mind; applying the strong Taoist virtue, cherishing the respected manners of honorable people of old; embracing the sage’s elegant deeds, living above the cliffs and valleys leading an invisible life. Enlightened forefathers have left behind a message: to devote one’s life in the way of the warrior.

An ancient saying shows the paths to immortality, every single one worthy of praise. Even after taking up arms, I am aware that the Master still possesses secret ancient way which I look up to cherish as my own.’

The secretary wrote to this point, he raised his head and asked, “Is it long enough?”

Genghis Khan smiled and said, “Such a nice letter. Enough. Write that I am dispatching a Han high ranking officer, Liu Zhonglu with my greetings to invite him over.”

The secretary continued,

‘If not for the battle how can one realize he needs the assistance of a secluded expert, that he visited the thatched hut three times? [Background info: Liu Bei visited Zhuge Liang three times before the latter agreed to help the former] The mountains and rivers are vast, yet missed to give a revered welcome.

It is time for me to leave my position. I fast and clean up my body, and I send my officer Liu Zhonglu, riding a plain carriage, enduring a thousand ‘li’s travel, to respectfully invite the Master to spare a moment from your journey treading immortal path, to brave the desolate desert in distant land, to tend to the affair of common people; and perhaps to give relief to the weary.

I long to go to the immortal place and wish not the immortal Master to spit on my desire. I will be happy to hear just one word of encouragement clearly; sincerely hope the Master would be willing to take the higher road to befriend me and not disappoint the hope of all living beings. Herewith the imperial letter ends; to be read by the appropriate addressee.'

Genghis Khan said, "Good, let it be like that." He rewarded that secretary five 'liang's of gold; he also asked Guo Jing to write a personal letter of invitation to earnestly ask Qiu Chuji to come over. That very same day he sent Liu Zhonglu with the imperial letter to the south.

[Author's note: Genghis Khan's invitation to Qiu Chuji was based on the original text according to historical documents]

The next day Genghis Khan held a general assembly of all his high-ranking officials discussing the expedition to the west; conferring Guo Jing the title of 'Noyon', placing him in command of a ten-thousand men unit. 'Noyon' was the Mongolian highest official title, normally given only to the Great Khan's close relative or a very senior general. By this time Guo Jing's martial art had advanced immensely, but his military strategy knowledge was next to zero. He had no alternative but went to Jebek, Subotai and other senior generals, asking for some advice. But he was slow and military tactics had an almost infinite variation; how could he learn it all in just a short period of time?

He saw the other generals were busy preparing their soldiers, gathering provisions and choosing their horses and weaponry; everybody was very busy. One hundred and fifty thousands cavalry went on an expedition to the west, going through bitter cold and barren desert lands, the preparation was certainly not a small matter. He had no clue on what to do, hence he simply assigned ten 'qian fu zhang' [leader of a 1000 men unit] under his command to separately handle the preparations and Jebek and Tuolei oftentimes giving their advice to help him out.

A month or so later he still felt his preparation to be inadequate. He realized it was beyond him to command his troops. To attack a strong army of a million using the '18-Dragon Subduing Palms' or even the Nine Yin Manual would not be possible. If he issued a wrong order even for only one time, he would be defeated by the enemy. Not only Genghis Khan's reputation would be marred, but the lives of ten thousand men would be jeopardized as well.

That day he was seriously contemplating to see the Great Khan and resign from his position; he was willing to be a low ranking soldier under somebody else's command, fighting the enemy as an individual, when suddenly his second-in-command came to report that more than a thousand Han people were waiting outside, they were seeking an audience with him.

Guo Jing was delighted, he thought, "Qiu Daozhang has arrived this soon?" Hastily he went out his tent to welcome the visitor. To his surprised however, he saw on the prairie stood a group of people dressed as beggars. Three men rushed forward and bowed to greet him; turned out they were the Beggar Clan's Lu Youjiao, along with Jian and Liang Zhanglao [Elders].

"Have you heard anything about Miss Huang Rong?" Guo Jing anxiously asked.

"Xiao Ren [lit. little/lowly person] had anxiously waited for any news, but the Bangzhu's whereabouts is still unknown. We heard Sir ['guan ren', lit. government officer] is commanding a troop on the expedition to the west. We come to offer our assistance," Lu Youjiao answered.

Guo Jing was greatly surprised, “How did you know?”

“The Great Khan sent a messenger inviting Qiu Chuji, Priest Qiu; we heard it from the Quanzhen people,” Lu Youjiao replied.

Guo Jing was silent for half a day, staring blankly toward the clouds on the southern horizon, he thought, “The Beggar Clan has eyes and ears all over the world, yet they don’t know Rong’er’s whereabouts. I am afraid her being in danger is more likely than not.” Thinking about Huang Rong his eyes turned red involuntarily. He assigned his second-in-command to help the newcomers settled down while he himself went to inform the Great Khan.

“Good,” Genghis Khan said, “Place them under your command.”

When Guo Jing conveyed his intention to resign, Genghis Khan was angry, “Who can fight a battle as soon as they are born? Nobody can. After fighting several battles you will pick up. You grew up with me, what are you afraid of? How could Genghis Khan’s son-in-law not go to war?”

Guo Jing did not dare to say another word. He returned to his tent with an anxious face. Lu Youjiao asked him what the matter was, and then tried to console him. When evening came Lu Youjiao came to his tent and said, “If I knew it would be this way, Xiao Ren would have brought ‘Sun Tzu’s Art of War’, or ‘Tai Gong’s Summary of Military Strategy’ from the south; then everything will be all right.”

It suddenly dawned on Guo Jing that he had the ‘Wumu’s Legacy’ by his side. It was a military manual; how could he forget about it? Right away he took the book out from his clothes pouch, and then read it by the lantern light all night long through the next day, stopping only because he felt tired.

This book contained all kinds of military strategy; from reconnaissance, planning an attack, defense strategy, to military training, officer management, troop disposition, field operation, as well as safety and danger situation overview and escape strategy, all were discussed in details.

That day Guo Jing had browsed through it on the boat at Yuanjiang, he did not pay too much attention. But this time he needed military guidance, so he read until he had a good grasp of what was written. When he did not understand any part of the book, he would invite Lu Youjiao to ask his advice. Lu Youjiao would answer, “Right now Xiao Ren does not understand, but let me think about it.” He would leave Guo Jing’s tent only for a moment then came back with a very detailed explanation. Guo Jing was delighted and would ask him more questions. Strangely, Lu Youjiao would always not able to answer immediately; he always asked for some time to think, but then afterwards would always come up with answers no matter how difficult the problem was. At first Guo Jing did not notice, but after several days this answer-finding-process repeated, he could not help but feeling suspicious.

One evening Guo Jing picked a character from the book and asked him what it meant. Lu Youjiao said he wasn’t clear about that, so he needed sometime to think about it, then he went out the tent. Guo Jing thought, “The book is difficult, it’s all right if you need some time to ponder its meaning; but it is only a character, how could you not know its meaning?”

Although holding a position of general, Guo Jing was still very young and he still had a childish character. As soon as Lu Youjiao exited his tent he followed immediately. He stealthily hid among

the tall grass wanting to know Lu Youjiao's secret. He saw Lu Youjiao entered a tiny tent, and in just a short while he went out the tent again. Guo Jing hastily went back to his own tent. Lu Youjiao went in and said, "Xiao Ren has thought about it." Then he proceeded by explaining the character's correct pronunciation and its meaning.

Guo Jing smiled, "Lu Zhaglao, you have an expert master; why don't you invite your master to see me?"

Lu Youjiao was startled, "I don't," he said.

Guo Jing grabbed his hand and smiled, "We will go out and see." He pulled his hand and went out the tent, walked toward that tiny tent he saw earlier.

Outside that tiny tent two Beggar Clan members were standing on guard duty. As soon as they saw Guo Jing they coughed lightly. Guo Jing noticed their coughs he let Lu Youjiao's hand go and darted toward the tent. As soon as he lifted the tent's entrance he saw the rear part of the tent fluttered a little bit. Definitely someone has just gone out the tent. Guo Jing rushed forward and lifted up the tent, but he only saw tall grass, not a single human's shadow was to be seen. He was perplexed, was silent for a while.

Guo Jing turned around and asked Lu Youjiao, but Lu Youjiao said the tent was his, nobody else lived there.

Guo Jing did not give up, he kept asking Lu Youjiao difficult questions from the 'Wumu's Legacy', but from now on Lu Youjiao would wait for the next day before he could answer his questions.

Guo Jing knew the person in that tent did not have any ill intention, only did not want to see him. Guo Jing decided that person must be an expert from the Jianghu, and it would be difficult to deal with people like that, so he put this matter aside temporarily.

He studied the book in the evening then trained his soldiers during the day according to method he learned from the book. The Mongolian cavalry was used to fight an open battle, now they had to train battle formations; they were having a very difficult time. But an order is an order, they did not dare to disobey, so they had no choice and trained hard.

Another month had passed; Genghis Khan's army and its logistic were ready. Guo Jing managed to train his ten thousand soldiers in all eight battle formations: 'tian fu' [high as the sky], 'di zai' [strong as the earth], 'feng yang' [scattered like a wind], 'yun chui' [dangling like a cloud], 'long fei' [flying dragon], 'hu yi' [winged tiger], 'niao xiang' [soaring bird], and 'she pan' [coiling snake]; which they have mastered skillfully.

These eight formations were originally created by Zhuge Liang based on ancient methods; when they got to Yue Fei's hand, he added many changes and variations. When Yue Fei was young, he went to war under Zong Ze who said, "Your bravery, wisdom and skill have exceeded those of the ancient times; however, in a real battle we can't predict everything." He was referring to the troop disposition method. Yue Fei answered, "In a real battle, the art of war does not change. Whoever manages to utilize its wonder will save their own hearts and minds." Zong Ze could not help but agree to what he said. Later on Yue Fei led many other troop movements. He was aware that he could not always follow certain method, yet he still trained his officers and soldiers according to

these methods. Only when it came to the real battle he executed his plan dynamically, thus had defeated countless enemies. This process was also recorded in the 'Wumu's Legacy' book.

One particular day the weather was clear and the air was fresh, the sky stretched out for tens of thousands miles, blue like it was fresh from the laundry. The one hundred and fifty thousand Mongolian cavalry were arranged in row after row on the prairie. Genghis Khan offered a sacrifice to the heaven and earth, making a vow before going into battle. Toward all his generals he said, "Stone has no skin, but there is a limit to human's life. My hair and beard have all turned white. This time I go to war, don't know if I am going back home alive. My concubine has reminded me last night, and I think she was right. I have to assign one of my sons today to lift high my banner after I am gone."

The generals had fought hundreds of battle, following Genghis Khan's attacks to the east and expeditions to the west. His white hair had been gray. Suddenly hearing the Great Khan was going to appoint his successor, they were all surprised and delighted at the same time. All eyes gazed toward his face, waiting for him to say his successor's name.

Genghis Khan said, "Jochi, you are my eldest son, tell me, whom should I appoint?" Jochi's heart skipped a beat. He was very capable, had rendered the most service, besides, he was the eldest son. He had always thought that when his father king died, naturally the position would fall into his lap. Now that the Great Khan suddenly asked, he did not know how to reply.

Genghis Khan's second son, Chagatai, was like a raging fire. He did not live harmoniously with his eldest brother. Hearing his father king asking his brother, he opened his mouth, "He wants Jochi to speak, what order will he receive? How can we let this Mergid bastard rule over us?"

Actually when Genghis Khan was young, his army was weak; as a result his wife was captured by their enemy, the Mergids. After several years in captivity, his wife was taken back, but by that time she had already given birth to Jochi. Genghis Khan accepted this fact with an open mind; he regarded Jochi as his own son.

Listening to his own brother's insult Jochi could not hold his patience any longer, he charged forward, grabbing Chagatai's chest, shouted, "Father King had never regarded me as an outsider, how dare you insulted me? What skill do you have that I don't? You are nothing more than an irritable hot-tempered arrogant man. Let's go out and have a duel; if I lost to you in archery, I will rip my own thumb. If I lost to you in martial arts, I will throw myself on the ground and never get up!" Turning his head toward Genghis Khan he said, "Father King, please give your order." Two brothers grabbed each other's chest, ready to have a duel right then and there.

The rest of the generals stepped forward to separate them; Bourchu pulled Jochi's hand, while Mukhali held Chagatai's hand.

Genghis Khan was silent; he remembered his own disgrace in his youth that he was not even able to defend his wife's honor, which had caused today's dispute. The generals all blamed Chagatai for bringing up past events and hurt their parents' hearts.

"Both of you, drop it!" finally Genghis Khan said, "Jochi is my eldest son; I will always love him no matter what. I forbid anyone to speak bad about him."

Chagatai let Jochi go, he said, “Jochi is very capable, everybody knows that. But in term of generosity and benevolence, he is inferior to the third brother, Ogedei. I vote for Ogedei.”

“Jochi, what do you say?” Genghis Khan asked.

Jochi could see the unfavorable situation; he knew his hope to be the Great Khan was shattered. He had always had good relationship with his third brother; he knew the third brother was kindhearted, certainly would not do him any harm in the future, therefore, he said, “Very well, I also support Ogedei.”

The fourth prince Tuolei did not challenge that nomination, Ogedei was about to decline; but Genghis Khan said, “You don’t need to decline. Your battle skill is inferior to your two elder brothers, but you treat people kindly. When you become the Great Khan in the future, all princes and generals won’t fight each other. We the Mongolian people will have no enemy as long as we don’t fight each other. What are we anxious about then?”

That day Genghis Khan threw a big feast in celebration of the newly appointed crown prince. All the troops, from the generals to the soldiers drank until very late that night. Guo Jing went back to his tent a little tipsy. He was just about to take out his clothes to sleep when suddenly one of his officers came rushing in, gave him this report, “‘Fu Ma Ye’ [Master Consort], it’s not good; the First Prince and the Second Prince were drunk. Each took his troops to kill each other.”

Guo Jing was stunned, quickly said, “Inform the Great Khan!”

“The Great Khan is also drunk, we couldn’t wake him up,” the officer replied.

Guo Jing knew both Jochi and Chagatai had loyal followers, the troops under their flags were ferocious; if they killed each other the Mongolian army’s strength would be hurt considerably. They were having a brawl in the Great Khan’s presence earlier, but this time both were drunk; he had the urge to help, but how could he separate them? He was lost at what to do, pacing back and forth inside his tent while tapping his own forehead, musing, “If only Rong’er is here, she would know what to do.” He heard a distant battle cry, looked like both troops were about to kill each other.

Guo Jing was getting more anxious than ever; but suddenly Lu Youjiao rushed in and handed him a piece of paper with this message, “Use ‘coiled snake’ to cut off two armies, then use ‘winged tiger’ to capture those who refuse to surrender.” By that time Guo Jing had mastered the ‘Wumu’s Legacy’ from top to bottom. As soon as he saw these two lines of characters his mind was enlightened. He shouted, “How could I be so stupid? What’s the use of reading the military strategy book?” Immediately he gave orders for his own troops to move.

The discipline among the Mongolian army was very strict; even though all the officers and soldiers were drunk once the order was given, they armed themselves and mounted their horse; in a very short time had formed a neat battle formation.

The drums were sounded three times, the bugle was blown, the troops under Guo Jing’s command started to move toward the northeast. Several li’s later his scout came back reporting that the First and the Second Princes’ troops had started to battle each other; their ‘He hu! He hu!’ shouts were heard from afar.

Guo Jing was anxious, "I am afraid I come one step too late and not able to prevent this big calamity." Hastily he waved his hand to give orders; his ten thousand men divided itself, the right-hand 'hou tian' [rear sky]'s three axes moved forward, the right-hand 'hou di' [rear earth]'s three axes moved toward the tail; the right 'hou tian' charged, the right 'hou di' charged, moved toward northwest and northeast they occupied the right-hand position. Their corresponding left-hand teams did the same and occupied the left-hand position; while Guo Jing's big banner moved in the center, followed by a 'coiled snake' formation fiercely broke through the front.

Jochi and Chagatai had each brought their twenty-thousand men, fighting with long saber in their hands. Guo Jing's 'coiled snake' suddenly charged in between still maintaining their neat formation. The battling troops were startled, they scattered slightly disorderly.

Chagatai's loud voice was heard, "Who's there? Who's there? Are you coming to help me or to help this bastard Jochi?"

Guo Jing paid no attention, his command flag waved, his teams moved around, the 'coiled snake' changed into 'winged tiger' immediately, the four smaller groups left-hand and right-hand 'qian tian' [front sky] occupied the front position, the rest of the groups enveloped Chagatai's troops from both sides, their corresponding left groups outflanked Jochi's troops on the other side.

By this time Chagatai could see Guo Jing's banner clearly; angrily he swore, "I knew from the start the southern barbarian is not a good person." He gave an order to his troops to kill Guo Jing's. But those tiger's wings contained subtle variations; each was very powerful; it was the formation Han Xin used to crush Xiang Yu at Gai Xia. It was called, "Ten principles to surround the enemy" in the military strategy books. It was said to have a power of surrounding the enemy ten times stronger, the principle of small number surrounding many using ever changing movements.

Chagatai's troops saw Guo Jing's small groups came and went continually, they did not know the exact number of the enemy and their hearts trembled with fear. In a short moment Chagatai's twenty-thousand troops had been cut off, each group could not help the other.

The fight against Jochi's troops took a different turn since their fighting spirit was already weakened. First, it was their fellow countrymen, more than half of them were good friends to each other. Second, they were afraid of the Great Khan's wrath. As soon as Guo Jing small groups surrounded them in confusing movements, they lost their will to fight.

Among the troop movement Guo Jing's loud voice could be heard, "We are all Mongolian brothers, no need to kill each other. Quickly put down your sabers, spears, bows and arrows to avoid the Great Khan's beheadings." Almost all officers and soldiers listened to his plea; immediately they dismounted their horses and threw their weapons to the ground.

Chagatai and about a thousand of his loyal followers charged ferociously toward Guo Jing's troops, but three drumbeats were heard, eight groups of riders came surrounding them from all directions; they carried horse-tripping ropes. One by one the thousand troops fell down their horsebacks. From those eight groups, four or five soldiers surrounded one of Chagatai's loyal followers. They were forced to sit on the ground with their hands tied behind their backs.

Jochi saw how Guo Jing's troops routed Chagatai, he could not help but feeling scared but happy. He was about to move forward to talk to Guo Jing when suddenly the horn sounded again, Guo

Jing's front teams moved backward and the rear teams moved forward, very soon Jochi was surrounded on all directions.

Jochi had an extensive battle experience, but he had never seen anything like this. Hastily ordered his men to attack, but Guo Jing's ten thousand men split into twelve smaller groups, did not charge forward, but moved backward instead. Jochi was marveled; he did not know that these twelve groups were:

'da hei zi' [black darkness, 11pm – 1am, the first hour],  
'po di chou' [worn out enemy, 1 – 3am, the second hour],  
'zuo tu yin' [dashing to the left, 3 – 5am, the third hour],  
'qing she mao' [green snake, 5 – 7am, the fourth hour],  
'cui xiong chen' [terrible devastation, 7 – 9am, the fifth hour],  
'qian chong si' [charge forward, 9 – 11am, the sixth hour],  
'da chi wu' [great scarlet, 11am – 1pm, the seventh hour],  
'xian feng wei' [first tip (of the tool/weapon), 1 – 3pm, the eighth hour],  
'you ji shen' [right-hand strike, 3 – 5pm, the ninth hour],  
'bai yun you' [white cloud, 5 – 7pm, the tenth hour],  
'jue sheng xu' [sure victory, 7 – 9pm, the eleventh hour],  
and 'hou wei hai' [rear guard, 9 – 11pm, the twelfth hour ], according to the twelve two-hour periods of the day; with strange variations, swiftly moved back and forth.

These twelve groups moved around, the right-hand groups charged to the left, the left-hand groups strike to the right; Jochi's troops were confused. Less than the time to eat a bowl of rice later Jochi and his men were also surrounded and captured.

Jochi remembered when all of them were kids he had whipped Guo Jing half-dead. Chagatai also remembered he let his dogs loose and bite Guo Jing really bad. Both were afraid that Guo Jing would seek revenge; they sobered up immediately. They were also really scared that their father king would punish them severely.

After capturing these two people Guo Jing thought that as an outsider he had interfered in this sibling rivalry; he was not sure if his action might result in disaster or good luck. He was thinking of discussing this matter over with Ogedei and Tuolei when suddenly he heard loud horn sound; amidst the flickering torches the Great Khan's nine big banners came galloping fast.

Genghis Khan had sobered up from wine, he received the report that his two sons were about to kill each other. He was startled and angrily jumped out of his bed. Without wearing clothes or armor, with his hair unkempt he jumped on his horse and sped to the prairie.

When he came near, he saw his sons' troops sat on the ground, with Guo Jing's troops standing around, guarding them. His two sons, although they were still sitting on the horsebacks, but each were surrounded by eight of Guo Jing's men wielding unsheathed blades in their hands. He was very surprised.

Guo Jing stepped forward and knelt down on the ground, reporting everything. Realizing that a major disaster had been unexpectedly thwarted, Genghis Khan's delight was unspeakable. He came rushing in thinking that two Mongolian armies had fought each other, the casualty must be serious;

his two sons might be dead already. Who would have thought that his two sons were alive and well, three armies were intact. Of course he was delighted.

Immediately he called a general assembly of all the princes and generals. He scolded Jochi and Chagatai, and heavily rewarded Guo Jing and his men. He said to Guo Jing, “Do you still say that you cannot lead troops to war? Your merit in this matter alone can easily dwarf the war against the Jin country. If we cannot destroy the enemy’s city wall today, we can always come back tomorrow and try again. But if my sons were dead, how can we make them alive again?”

Guo Jing took the rewards, but divided the gold, silver and livestock to his troops. There was a thunderous cheering and applause among his troops that day. All generals came to congratulate him on this great merit.

After sending off the guests, Guo Jing took out the note given to him by Lu Youjiao. He examined it carefully, the handwriting was shoddy, most likely it was Lu Youjiao’s handwriting, but he was suspicious, “Although I have trained my troops in ‘coiled snake’ and ‘winged tiger’ formations, but I have never mentioned these names to Lu Zhangleo. The difficult parts of the book that I asked him for advice also do not have anything to do with this battle formations. How did he know? Did he read my military strategy book without my knowledge?”

Right away he invited Lu Youjiao into his tent. “Lu Zhangleo, if you like to read this military strategy book, I will gladly lend it to you.”

Lu Youjiao smiled, “A poor beggar like me will not become a general in my lifetime; leading a whole bunch of little beggars also did not need to use the art of war. What use will the military strategy book for me?”

Guo Jing pointed his finger to the note, “Then how did you know about the ‘coiled snake’ and ‘winged tiger’ formations?”

“Sir has mentioned it to Xiao Ren, have you forgotten?” Lu Youjiao said. Guo Jing knew he was not telling the truth. The more he thought about it the more he was perplexed; but he was not sure what did Lu Youjiao hide.

The next day Genghis Khan held another general assembly. The vanguard was under Chagatai and Ogedei’s command. The left flank was under Jochi’s command, while the right was under Guo Jing’s. Each of the vanguard, left and right units were thirty thousand men strong. Genghis Khan and Tuolei commanded over sixty thousand soldiers as the main army. Each soldier rode on one of a pair of horses; they would ride one horse at a time to conserve the horses’ strength. The officers took even more horses. With one hundred and fifty thousand men, they took with them nearly a million horses.

The horns were sounded, the drums were beaten, the noise was deafening. The thirty-thousand strong vanguard cavalry unit started to gallop majestically to the west. The great army moved farther and farther west, entering Khorasm territory with irresistible force. Muhammad’s army was bigger, but they were not the Mongolian’s army match. Guo Jing led his unit destroying cities and killing the enemies, he had rendered not a few merits.

## **End of Chapter 36.**

## Chapter 37 – Descending From the Sky

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*From all over the camp officers and soldiers alike came to the command tent to watch the marvelous sight. The soldiers joined strength to raise the ice column. Under the bright torch light they saw Ouyang Feng showing his teeth with an angry look on his face, his hands and feet splayed wide. He was frozen inside the ice column and could not move even one bit. The officers and soldiers erupted in thunderous applause.*

One day Guo Jing's troops pitched a camp by a riverbank. In the evening Guo Jing was reading the military strategy book when suddenly there was a commotion outside his tent. The curtain to his tent was opened, and somebody was forcing his way in. The guards outside shouted, trying to stop him, but that person moved his hand and one by one the guards fell to the ground. That man lifted up his head and laughed. Under the bright candlelight Guo Jing could see his face clearly; it was none other than the Western Poison Ouyang Feng, whom Guo Jing had searched high and low for tens of thousands 'li's. Unexpectedly he appeared here in a foreign land, Guo Jing was pleasantly surprised. He jumped up from his seat and called out, "Where is Miss Huang?"

"I was just about to ask you," Ouyang Feng replied, "Where is that little girl? Quickly hand her over to me!"

Hearing this, Guo Jing's delight was beyond measure, "So Rong'er is still alive; not only that, but she managed to escape from his evil hands too," he thought.

"Where is that little girl?" Ouyang Feng sternly asked again.

"She went with you in Jiangnan, then what happened? She ... is she well? You haven't killed her, I really should thank you! I ... I must thank you," Guo Jing said. He was sobbing from overwhelming delight.

Ouyang Feng knew Guo Jing was not able to lie, but all signs indicated that Huang Rong was with him; how could he be so oblivious, Ouyang Feng had to re-think his assumptions. He sat cross-legged on the carpet in Guo Jing's tent.

Guo Jing wiped out his tears, then unsealed his guards' acupoints and asked them to deliver 'ru jiu lao cha' [lit. milk wine cream tea – don't know exactly what kind of drink it was].

Ouyang Feng drank a bowl of 'ma ru jiu' [horse milk wine], he said, "Dumb kid, I might as well speak frankly with you. That little girl was with me since we were at the Temple of the Iron Spear in Jiaying, unexpectedly several days later she escaped from me."

Guo Jing cheered ecstatically, he said, "She is so smart, once she decided to escape, she will find a way to escape. How did she do it?"

Ouyang Feng full of hatred said, "At the Cloud Manor, by Lake Tai ... Bah!" he spat, "Why would I tell you? In short, she ran away."

Guo Jing knew Ouyang Feng was a conceited man; he did not expect him to personally reveal his own setback, so he stopped asking question. Knowing Huang Rong was alive and well he was elated, he kept shouting, "Wonderful! Just wonderful!"

Ouyang Feng was annoyed, "What do you mean wonderful?" he asked, "After she escaped I was hot on her trail; several times I almost caught her, but every time she managed to get away relying on her craftiness. But I always followed her closely, she could not run away to the Peach Blossom Island. I chased her to the Mongolian border then suddenly her trail disappeared. I thought she must be hiding in your troops; therefore, I am standing on my guard to prevent her from running away again."

Hearing that Huang Rong was in Mongolia, Guo Jing was pleasantly surprised, “Have you seen her?” he asked.

Ouyang Feng was indignant, “If I saw her, wouldn’t I capture her?” he said, “Day and night I stayed in your troops keeping my eyes open, I did not even see this little girl’s shadow. Dumb kid, what kind of crafty trick are you playing?”

Guo Jing was silent for half a day, he asked, “Day and night you are in my troops? How come I did not recognize you?”

Ouyang Feng smiled, “I am just a lowly western area soldier in your ‘tian qian’ [front sky] group; you are the commander-in-chief, how would you recognize me?” In the Mongolian army, there were many prisoners of war who were then given jobs as soldiers; Ouyang Feng was from the west, once he intermingled with other soldiers from the same region, it was really not easy to single him out.

Listening to him Guo Jing was startled, he thought, “If he meant me harm, I would be dead by now.” He muttered, “Why did you say Rong’er is in my army?”

“You captured the Great Khan’s two sons, you destroyed cities and crushed the enemies, if not by that little girl’s direction, how can a dumb kid like you accomplish all that?” Ouyang Feng replied, “But that little girl has never shown herself up; it’s really strange. I have no choice but forcing you to hand her over to me.”

Guo Jing smiled, “If Rong’er is willing to show herself up that will be my earnest desire. Just think: would I hand her over to you?”

“Fine,” Ouyang Feng said, “You are not willing to hand her over to me, I’ll find my way to get hold of her. You have great authority as the commander of tens of thousands soldiers, but in Ouyang Feng’s eye, hey, hey ... outside or inside this tent, I can come and go as I like; who can stop me?”

Guo Jing nodded, silently agreed to what he said.

“Dumb kid, what do you say we make an agreement?” Ouyang Feng asked.

“What agreement?” Guo Jing replied with a question.

Ouyang Feng said, “You tell me her hiding place, I guarantee not to harm even a single strand of her hair. But if you don’t want to tell me, I will find her sooner or later anyway. When that time comes, humph, it doesn’t matter anymore, does it?”

Guo Jing knew Ouyang Feng was smart and resourceful; as long as Huang Rong was not on the Peach Blossom Island, there would come a day when she would be captured by him. Ouyang Feng was not making an empty threat. He hesitated for a moment before finally saying, “All right, I am going to make an agreement with you, but not like what you said.”

“What do you mean?” Ouyang Feng asked.

“Mr. Ouyang,” Guo Jing said, “Your martial art is a lot higher than mine, but I am a lot younger than you are. One day you will grow old and your strength will be gone; you won’t be able to defeat

me anymore.” Before, Guo Jing always called him ‘Uncle Ouyang’ but since he killed Guo Jing’s five benevolent masters, Guo Jing’s hatred was as deep as the ocean; therefore, he could not say the word ‘Uncle’ anymore.

It never occurred to Ouyang Feng that someday he would grow old and lose his strength; this revelation send a chill to his heart, “What this dumb said is actually not dumb at all,” he thought. “What then?” he asked.

“There is very deep enmity between us,” Guo Jing said, “I can’t leave this enmity un-avenged. Even if you fly to the sky, there will come a day when I will come looking for you.”

Ouyang Feng lifted up his head and laughed loudly, “Before I grow old and lose my strength, I will kill you!” As soon as he finished talking he bent his knees slightly, and thrust both palms forward with an earth-shattering force.

By this time Guo Jing had mastered the ‘yi jin duan gu pian’ [changing muscle forging bone] from the Nine Yin Manual. Also he had trained himself in the part that Reverend Yideng had translated; his internal energy had enjoyed quite a bit of improvement. He leaned his body slightly to avoid the attack, and at the same time counterattack with ‘jian long zai tian’ [seeing dragon in the field].

Ouyang Feng received Guo Jing’s attack head-on, thinking that he was already familiar with this ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’. Besides, Guo Jing was Hong Qigong’s disciple, so his strength should be a lot less than Hong Qigong. Hence, he did not put too much energy on his defense. But unexpectedly when their palms met he was shaken. If his internal energy was not strong enough, he would be seriously injured. He was being careless and nearly lost in Guo Jing’s hand. He was shocked, “Perhaps this kid will already catch up with me before I grow old and lose my strength” he thought. Quickly he sent his left palm out.

Guo Jing again leaned sideways to evade, then returned the attack. This time Ouyang Feng did not dare to take it head on, he flicked his hand to redirect Guo Jing’s palm. Guo Jing did not know Ouyang Feng’s real intention, he thought Ouyang Feng simply parried his attack, who would have thought that inside that defensive move there was a hidden attack; Guo Jing felt a strong force surging toward his face, there was not enough time to evade, so he was forced to stretch out his right palm to block.

Speaking about internal energy strength, Guo Jing was still one level inferior to Ouyang Feng. The current situation was similar to the day at the imperial palace in Lin’an, inside the cave behind the waterfall; although Guo Jing would be able to hold his ground for a while, but in the end he would suffer a heavy injury or even death.

Ouyang Feng’s movement resembled a gourd, enticing the opponent to enter; which Guo Jing did. Ouyang Feng was delighted, but suddenly sensed Guo Jing pulled his right palm slightly, like he was losing his strength. Ouyang Feng sent more force to his palm, pressing harder; who would have thought that Guo Jing’s palm slid a little bit and thus avoid being crushed.

Ouyang Feng grunted ferociously, sending all his strength to his palm, thinking, “Today is the day you are going to die.”

Seeing the opponent’s fingertip swept to his chest, Guo Jing parried by sweeping his left palm horizontally while his right-hand index finger stretched out and fiercely went to Ouyang Feng’s ‘tai

yang' [sun] acupoint. It was the 'Solitary Yang Finger' he saw Reverend Yideng used. However, what he learned was superficial, he only saw the form, but did not know the variations within. In this critical moment instinctively he used mutual hands combat technique.

'Solitary Yang Finger' was the 'Toad Stance's adversary, how could Ouyang Feng not startled when he saw it? He leaped backward to elude, shouted angrily, "Old Duan Zhixing wants to give me a hard time?"

Unfortunately Guo Jing's finger technique was not the real 'Solitary Yang Finger', hence it could not break the Toad Stance; but Ouyang Feng was scared away, without looking clearly he jumped back in shock. Only afterwards did he remember that the Solitary Yang Finger had an infinite variations; how could after launching an attack Guo Jing retracted his finger? Hence he knew Guo Jing had not learned it in its entirety. Without waiting for Guo Jing to launch the next stance both of his palms, one upward the other downward, one attack the other guarded, moved toward Guo Jing. This attack was so swift that Guo Jing did not have time to think, he simply jumped back to escape. 'Crack!' the small table behind him was smashed by the Western Poison's palms.

Since he was gaining an upper hand, Ouyang Feng continued his attack by successively sending his palms; but suddenly he felt a gust of wind coming from behind, somebody attacked him. Without turning around he sent his left foot kicking backward. Turned out the attacker was also using his leg, so two legs collided, the attacker was thrown backward; luckily his bone was not broken, it looked like he had anticipated Ouyang Feng's counterattack.

Ouyang Feng turned his head around only to see three old beggars standing on the tent's entrance, they were the Beggar Clan's three elders, Lu, Jian and Liang. Lu Youjiao swiftly moved toward Jian and Liang Zhanglao [Elders], then interlinked his arms with theirs. It was the Beggar Clan's technique of combining power to fight a superior enemy using the-weak-subdue-the-strong method. During the Beggar Clan general assembly at Mount Jun to elect the new Bangzhu [Clan Leader] the other day, the Beggar Clan disciples had formed a human wall, rendering Guo Jing and Huang Rong helpless against them.

Ouyang Feng had never fought these three people, but from his first contact with Lu Youjiao's leg he knew that Lu's internal energy was not weak. The other two beggars looked not much different. If he fight Guo Jing one on one, he was certain he would win; but with the addition of these three stinky beggars he knew things would not end too good for him. He laughed a big laugh and said, "Dumb kid, your martial art has improved tremendously."

He bent his legs and sat on the carpet, totally ignoring Lu Youjiao and the other two beggars. "What kind of agreement you want to make? Let me hear it," he said.

"You want Miss Huang to explain the Nine Yin Manual to you," Guo Jing said, "Whether she is willing to do that or not, it is entirely up to her; you must not harm even a single strand of her hair."

Ouyang Feng laughed, "If she is willing, of course I won't want to harm her in any way. Do you think it is easy to deal with the Old Heretic Huang?" he said, "But if she is not willing, how can it be that I can't use a little bit of persuasion?"

Guo Jing shook his head, "No, you can't."

"Well, you want me to agree to this, what is there for me?" Ouyang Feng asked.

“From now on, if you fall into my hand, I will spare your life three times,” Guo Jing replied.

Ouyang Feng stood up, letting out a long laughter. His laugh was supported by a strong internal energy; it traveled far into the prairie. The horses were disturbed, they neighed and made commotion.

Guo Jing’s gaze pierced Ouyang Feng’s eyes, with a low voice he said, “This is not funny, and you know it. There will come a day you will fall into my hand.”

Although he was laughing Ouyang Feng was actually scared. He realized this kid knew the secret of the Nine Yin Manual, his martial art was improving by leaps and bounds; he really must not underestimate him. While his mouth was laughing, his mind had made a decision. “I, Ouyang Feng, am going to ask you, a stinky kid, for mercy? All right, let’s just wait and see,” he said with a smile.

Guo Jing extended his hand and said, “Once a gentleman said a word.”

Ouyang Feng smiled and replied, “Like a fast horse getting a whip.” He also extended his hand and patted Guo Jing’s hand three times. This was the way the people of Song Dynasty sealed their agreement; whoever broke it would be despised and disgraced for the rest of his life.

After sealing their agreement Ouyang Feng was about to interrogate Guo Jing on Huang Rong’s whereabouts some more, but suddenly with the corner of his eyes he caught a shadow moving outside the tent. That shadow was very swift; Ouyang Feng’s heart was stirred, quickly he went out the tent, but did not see anyone. He turned his head and said, “Within ten days I am going to visit you again. We’ll see whether you will spare my life, or will I spare yours?” With a loud laughter he moved swiftly, and a sort moment later his laughter was heard dozens of ‘zhang’s away.

Lu, Jian and Liang three elders looked at each other in astonishment, they thought, “This man’s martial art is really high. He is an extraordinary character, truly in par with our Hong Bangzhu.”

Guo Jing then told the three visitors the reason of Ouyang Feng’s visit. Lu Youjiao said, “He said Huang Bangzhu is in our army, that’s nonsense. If the Huang Bangzhu is here, how could we not know? Besides ...”

Guo Jing sat back down, one hand supporting his cheek. “I actually think what he said is very reasonable. Oftentimes I have a feeling that Miss Huang is by my side; no matter how difficult the problem I am facing, she always gives me a wonderful solution. Only no matter what I think, I still can’t see her.” Speaking thus his eyes welled up with tears.

Lu Youjiao tried to console him, “Sir, please don’t worry, to be separated but for a moment, to be united forever in the future.”

“I have offended Miss Huang,” Guo Jing said, “I am afraid she won’t be willing to see me again. I don’t know what I must do to pay for this guilt.”

Lu, Jian and Liang three people looked at each other without saying anything.

Guo Jing continued, “Even if she is not willing to talk to me, if only she would let me see her once, I will be very much comforted.”

“Sir is tired, better go to bed soon,” Jian Zhanglao said, “Tomorrow morning we will discuss how we are going to deal with Ouyang Feng if he stirs up trouble again.”

The next morning the army continued their journey to the west. That evening after they pitched camp Lu Youjiao came and said, “Years ago Xiao Ren bought a painting in Jiangnan. I am a rough uneducated man, how could I comprehend the meaning behind this painting? While Sir is lonely in this army, Sir may enjoy this leisurely.” While speaking he put a roll of painting on the table.

Guo Jing unrolled the painting to take a look, he could not help but feeling astonished. The painting depicted a young maiden with a flower on her hair; she was sitting weaving silk on a loom. Her appearance resembled Huang Rong’s, only she looked distressed; her eyebrows were knitted together and her face looked thin and pale.

Guo Jing looked in surprise for half a day, he saw next to the picture were two lines of poem. The first one read, “Seven looms, in the springtime silkworms spit their raw silk, it is not easy to weave them into silk cloth. Do not use a pair of scissors so recklessly, otherwise the immortal ‘luan’ [a mythical bird] and the phoenix will be separated on two sides of the clothes.” The other one read, “Nine looms, a pair of flowers, a pair of leafs, and a pair of branches. From ancient time a shallow love often parts. From head to toe two hearts are bound together, passing through a strand of silk thread.” These two stanzas resembled the ‘si zhang ji’ [four looms/weaving machines] poem of Ying Gu, but the pain they carried was twice the ‘four looms’ had.

Although it was hard for Guo Jing to interpret the poem, he understood the ‘From ancient time a shallow love often parts’ part. After pondering it for half a day he thought, “This painting must be Rong’er’s handiwork; where did Lu Zhanglao get it from?”

He raised his head to ask, but Lu Youjiao had left early on. Hastily Guo Jing ordered his personal guard to summon him back. Lu Youjiao was persistent with what he said earlier, that he bought that painting at a bookstore in Jiangnan. Even if Guo Jing was ten times dumber, he’d know something was wrong. Lu Youjiao was a straightforward and rough warrior; how could he stroll into a bookstore and buy a painting? If the painting was a gift, he would throw it away without giving it a second thought. If he did buy it at a bookstore in Jiangnan, how come the maiden in the painting bore a very close resemblance to Huang Rong? But Lu Youjiao was determined not to reveal the truth; there was nothing he could do.

While he was hesitating, Jian Zhanglao walked in and whispered in his ears, “Just now Xiao Ren saw a shadow of a man moving on the tent toward our northeast; it swiftly disappeared without any trace. I am afraid that old scoundrel Ouyang Feng is going to sneak in tonight.”

“Good,” Guo Jing said, “We, four people will cooperate here to capture him.”

“Xiao Ren has an idea,” Jian Zhanglao said, “Let’s see if Sir will agree.”

“Any idea is good,” Guo Jing said, “Please tell me.”

Jian Zhanglao said, “This is a very ordinary idea: we dig a deep hole here, then we place twenty soldiers with bags of sand waiting outside. If he did not show up, consider him lucky, but if he did, I guarantee he can come but won’t be able to leave.”

Guo Jing was delighted, he thought that Ouyang Feng was very conceited, never considered others worthy to be looked at. This idea was an old trick, but actually very effective against somebody like him.

The three elders immediately supervised several soldiers to dig a very deep hole. The top of the hole was then covered with a rug, and a light wooden chair was placed on top of the rug. Twenty soldiers with sand bags in their hand were waiting outside the tent.

It was not uncommon for an army to dig holes in the desert, looking for water; so the activity was gone unnoticed.

The set up was completed and Guo Jing waited by the candlelight, reading. But Ouyang Feng did not show up that night. After pitching their camp the next day, again the three elders had some soldiers dug another hole, but again nothing happened that night. Toward the evening of the fourth day Guo Jing heard some strange noise among the tents; his heart was thumping fast. Suddenly there was a rustling noise outside his tent; with a long laugh Ouyang Feng walked inside his tent then casually walked toward the wooden chair.

‘Crack! Crack!’ with a loud noise both the man and the chair fell into the hole. The trap’s depth was about seven, eight ‘zhang’s [70 – 80 feet, about 25 meters], the mouth was narrow. Even if Ouyang Feng’s martial art were higher, how could he jump back up easily? Twenty soldiers swarmed the tent, and forty bags of sand were rapidly poured into the hole, burying Ouyang Feng’s body.

Lu Youjiao burst up in laughter, “Huang Bangzhu predicts like a deity ...” he said.

Jian Zhanglao cast him a glance; Lu Youjiao closed his mouth immediately.

“What Huang Bangzhu?” Guo Jing quickly asked.

“Xiao Ren had a slip of tongue,” Lu Youjiao said, “I mean Hong Bangzhu. If Hong Bangzhu were here, he would have been delighted.”

Guo Jing stared at him, hard. He was about to ask another question when suddenly the soldiers outside his tent were shouting noisily. Guo Jing and the three elders quickly went out the tent to see the soldiers were pointing their fingers to the ground, shouting loudly. Guo Jing rushed forward to take a look, he saw the ground was rising up gradually, looked like something was trying to come out of the ground. Immediately Guo Jing realized what was going on, “With his excellent martial art Ouyang Feng is drilling the ground, trying to climb up,” he said. He commanded a dozen or so of his soldiers to ride their horses and trampled the ground at once.

The weight of the dozens or so soldiers and their horses was heavy enough to trample the raising ground back down. Even though Ouyang Feng’s strength was incredible he was not able to penetrate the ground, so the earth was slowly leveled up as before. To everybody surprise, in another location the ground was starting to rise again. The soldiers simply rode their horses to wherever the ground rose and trampled it flat.

Not too long afterwards the ground no longer rose anywhere. They assumed Ouyang Feng had lost his strength or even died of suffocation. Guo Jing ordered the soldiers to dismount their horses and dug the ground. It was already the first hour [between 11pm – 1 am]; the soldiers lifted up their torches high, they stood in a circle surrounding the digging.

About a dozen soldiers used spades and shovels dug a little over a 'zhang' before finally they saw Ouyang Feng was standing inside the sand. This location was a few 'zhang's away from the tent. Although the sand was soft, yet by using his bare hands Ouyang Feng was able to dig underground just like a mole. It was a demonstration of a very strong internal energy, truly extraordinary. The soldiers were astounded but full of admiration; they lifted him up and laid him on the ground.

Lu Youjiao probed him for breath, but felt his chest was still warm; he ordered the soldiers to get some iron chain to tie him up, for fear that Ouyang Feng would create problem once he was awake. Who would have thought that when he was crawling in the sand Ouyang Feng was unable to excavate his way upward because of the horses, he feigned death, thinking he would escape later. He suspended his own breath, and did not see Lu Youjiao stood beside him. But as soon as Lu Youjiao shouted his order to take some chain, Ouyang Feng leaped up, gave a loud shout, and grabbed Lu Youjiao's main artery on his right hand.

It was a sudden change; a corpse went back to live. Everybody was shocked. Guo Jing rushed forward, his left hand pressed the 'tao dao' [pleasing talk] acupoint on Ouyang Feng's back, while his right hand attacked the 'ji zhong' [spine's central] acupoint on Ouyang Feng's waist. These two were two main acupoints on the back; if Ouyang Feng was not buried under the ground, half-dead, and was very tired, how could he let his main acupoints be sealed that easily?

Ouyang Feng was startled, he swung his hand backward trying to fend off, but his acupoints were numb. He realized Guo Jing did not use his full strength; otherwise his internal organs would be shaken. Moreover, his hands and feet were weak; even if Guo Jing did not seal his acupoints still he would not be Guo Jing's match. He was forced to let Lu Youjiao go and stood still.

"Mr. Ouyang," Guo Jing said, "May I ask did you see Miss Huang?"

"I saw her shadow, that's why I came looking for her," Ouyang Feng replied.

"Did you see her clearly?" Guo Jing pressed.

Ouyang Feng hatefully said, "If that sly little girl is not in this, I bet you wouldn't think of some clever trap like this."

Guo Jing was silent for half a day, then he finally said, "You can go. I spare your life." His right hand lightly waved, sending Ouyang Feng tumbled down a little over a 'zhang'. He was afraid if he freed him in close proximity, Ouyang Feng would suddenly execute a counterattack.

Ouyang Feng turned around and said coldly, "I've never used any weapon dealing with a junior; but you are secretly helped by that sly girl of yours. She is very crafty. What happened to me tonight was the proof. I will be back within ten days with my snake staff. You have seen the vipers with your own eyes. Just watch out." As soon as he finished speaking, Ouyang Feng flew away.

As Guo Jing looked at his shadow swiftly disappearing into the dark towards the north a chill crept up his spine. Remembering the venomous snake staff and the exquisiteness of Ouyang Feng's stick technique very well; he could not refrain from feeling apprehensive. Although he had trained extensively in weaponry from the Six Freaks of Jiangnan, among those he had mastered none would be adequate to fight someone Ouyang Feng's caliber; while it certainly was not a good idea to face the snake staff with his bare hands.

He was at a loss for a while; lifting up his eyes toward the sky he saw white snow flakes floating down in the darkness. Not long after he returned to his tent the weather turned cold. His soldiers started bonfires and got their horses inside their tents to protect them against the bitter cold weather outside.

The Beggar Clan people did not have any fur coats with them; with the sudden change in temperature they were forced to circulate their internal energy to keep their bodies warm. Right away Guo Jing ordered his troops to slaughter some sheep and make some leather coats. They were not as good as the tanned leather coats, but they helped the beggars to fight the cold.

The next day the weather turned even colder; the snow on the ground had turned into ice. The Khoresm's army took advantage of this cold weather and made an attack; luckily Guo Jing had already anticipated this possibility. Using the 'flying dragon' formation they scored a big victory over the enemy; chasing them far into the night towards the snow-covered northern plains.

There was an ancient poem about the expedition to the west amidst a bitter cold weather: "The army general did not take out their golden armor at night. In the middle of the night the army set aside their spears, the wind blowing like a cutting knife. The sweats on the horses' mane rose up like steam in the snow, the five-petal flower pattern on the (money) coin felt like ice, inside the tent the liquid ink to write letters froze over."

Then there was another poem: "The soldiers and prisoners squeezed in the same station, the bones on the battlefield wrapped around the grassroots. Blowing wind like the blade of a sword sweeping wide, the horses' hoofs got away from the frozen sand and stone."

Guo Jing grew up in the northern desert, he was used to the bitter cold weather, but he remembered if Huang Rong were really in his army, she was raised in the south (Jiangnan), would she be able to withstand this bitter cold weather? His anxiety multiplied. The next several nights he roamed around the tents without alerting anybody; quietly investigate each and every tent, but not even Huang Rong's shadow was to be seen.

Returning to his command-center tent, he saw Lu Youjiao was supervising the soldiers to dig another hole. "This Ouyang Feng is sly and alert, first time he fell into the trap, how can he fall for the second time?" Guo Jing asked.

"He would certainly think that we are going to prepare some other trap, but he would not expect us to prepare the same trap," Lu Youjiao said, "It is called 'a void inside a solid, and solid in an emptiness,' an indiscernible combination of void and solid."

Guo Jing cast a glance toward him, he thought, "You said leading little beggars did not need to use any military strategy, but you remembered the content of the military strategy book very well."

Lu Youjiao continued, "But this man must have thought of a way to escape the sand piling on top of him, therefore, we must strive for a different method. We are going to use boiling water to soak him up."

Guo Jing saw dozens of soldiers preparing about twenty big iron pots outside his tent. The soldiers used hatchets to break the ice and feed them into the pots using shovels. "Won't he die of scalding?" Guo Jing asked.

“Sir had made an agreement with him that if he falls into your hands you will spare his life three times. But this time if he die from scalding, he won’t die in your hands, even if you want to spare his life you are powerless, therefore, it can’t be said that you break your promise,” Lu Youjiao reasoned.

Not too long afterwards the hole was dug, the mouth was covered with a rug, and a light wooden chair was placed on it. Outside the tent the soldiers were busy adding fuel to the fire underneath the pots; the ice were slowly melting into water, but the weather was just too cold; the water on the surface was slowly turning back into ice. “More heat, more heat!” Lu Youjiao urged.

Suddenly on the snow outside a shadow came lightning fast; Ouyang Feng with the stick in his hand had arrived on the tent’s entrance. “Dumb kid, whatever trap you prepared, your grandfather is not scared!” he said while flying toward the chair to sit.

Elders Lu, Jian, and Liang did not expect Ouyang Feng would arrive this soon; the ice inside the pots were barely melted into water; a very cold water, which certainly would not scald people to death. The water was even too cold to take a shower. They saw Ouyang Feng moved toward the chair, they could not help but feeling disappointed.

‘Crack!’ one more time with loud cursing the man and the chair fell into the hole. This time there were no sand bags around. With his level of martial art it was an easy matter for Ouyang Feng to climb back up. The three elders were helpless, they were afraid Guo Jing would be injured, “Sir, get out of the tent, quick!” they shouted in panic.

But suddenly somebody shouted from behind the tent, “Pour the water!” As soon as Lu Youjiao heard this voice, without hesitation he shouted, “Pour the water!” The soldiers lifted up the pots and poured the water into the hole.

Ouyang Feng was about to jump back up when the water from the first pot was poured over his head. He was shocked and was forced to fall back down. He used his snake staff as a brace against the bottom of the hole, and tried to jump up for the second time. This time he was prepared, he was sure he would not be forced to fall down by pouring water. Unexpectedly to him the weather was really cold, as the water left the pot it froze up immediately; as Ouyang Feng was jumping up, the water around his feet was turning into ice. With his incredible strength he tried to jump up, but ‘Bonk!’ he felt a shot of pain as his head was hit by a block of ice. He tried hard to kick around, but his feet were firmly buried in ice, he could not even move them. He was extremely shocked; with a loud shout he struggled with all his might; but just as his feet start to loosen up, his upper body was drenched in cold water, which also turned into ice.

The soldiers pouring the water had been trained well; four soldiers lifted the pot to pour water, while the other four-man teams were ready behind them. One team after another they pour water into the hole like a waterwheel. To protect themselves from the boiling water, each man bound a cloth on their faces. Who would have thought that the snow would not boil, but the cold water could also paralyze the enemy. In a short period of time twenty pots of water had been poured into the hole, forming a four, five ‘zhang’s and about seven feet in diameter ice column.

Everybody was excited, what they thought was a failure turned into a huge success. The three elders supervised the soldiers to dig around the hole; then tied a rope around the ice column. With the help of twenty horses the ice column was pulled up to the ground.

From all over the camp officers and soldiers alike came to the command-center tent to watch the marvelous sight. The soldiers joined their strength to raise the ice column up. Under the bright torch light they saw Ouyang Feng showing his teeth with an angry look on his face, his hands and feet splayed wide. He was frozen inside the ice column, could not move even one bit. The officers and soldiers erupted in thunderous applause.

Lu Youjiao was afraid with his profound internal energy Ouyang Feng would be able to melt the ice; he ordered the soldiers to melt some more ice and pour the water on the ice column to make it thicker.

“I had made an agreement with him, to spare his life three times. Break the ice, let him go!” Guo Jing ordered.

The three elders were disappointed, but a hero ought to keep his words, so they did not say anything. Lu Youjiao took a hammer and walked toward the ice column to break it when suddenly Jian Zhanglao called out, “Hold on!” He turned to Guo Jing and asked, “Sir, with his ability, how long do you think Ouyang Feng will survive inside the ice?”

“He might be able to survive for a couple of hours,” Guo Jing said, “Longer than that his life might be in danger.”

“Very well,” Elder Jian said, “Let him suffer two more hours. We can spare his life, but he has to suffer for a while.”

Remembering Ouyang Feng had killed his masters, Guo Jing nodded his head in approval.

The news traveled fast, officers and soldiers from other units heard about it and they came to watch. To the three elders Guo Jing said, “From the ancient times there was a saying, ‘a hero could be killed, but not humiliated.’ Although he is an evil man, but he is still a grandmaster of his martial art school. How can we let him be the laughingstock of others?” Straightaway he ordered his soldiers to erect a tent around the ice column and arranged a sentry duty. Nobody was allowed to enter the tent to see, not even a general.

Two hours later the three elders shattered the ice column, let Ouyang Feng free. Ouyang Feng sat cross-legged on the ground, circulating his energy. After vomiting three mouthfuls of dark blood he went away angrily.

Guo Jing and the three elders were watching him the whole two hours; although looked weary he was able to walk away just like that, he had made them sigh in admiration.

All this time Guo Jing was continuously in a daze. He was afraid when Ouyang Feng was still inside the ice column, but after Ouyang Feng was gone, he still could not calm his heart down.

He sat down, thinking hard. Never in his life had he felt so lonely, his heart was empty. He tried hard to think the reason behind it all. Suddenly it dawned on him that before Lu Youjiao issued the command to pour the water, he recalled hearing someone shouted in low voice, ‘Pour the water!’ He felt that voice was so familiar, he was 80, 90% certain that voice had Huang Rong’s accent; but because Ouyang Feng was falling into the trap that he was thinking of a more urgent matter and did not pay too much attention to the voice. ‘Pour the water!’ these words were buzzing in his ears while his heart was full of doubt. He sprang up and muttered, “Rong’er is really in the army. I have

to examine everybody, officers and soldiers alike, not overlooking anyone. I am sure she won't get away this time." But then another thought came into his mind, "She doesn't want to see me, why would I painstakingly force her to come out?" Unrolling the painting, he stared blankly at the girl in it; his heart was filled with bitter sweet feeling.

In the quiet night suddenly he heard hoof beats coming fast from afar. A short while later he heard his guard asked permission and soon a messenger entered his tent, bringing Genghis Khan's military dispatch. Turned out the Mongolian army had advanced far into the enemy's territory, enjoying victory everywhere they went. Just a few hundred 'li's to the west they would reach Khoesm's fortified city of Samarkhand. Genghis Khan had learned that this city had become Khoesm's new capital. It was defended by a large army of at least a hundred thousand strong with enough provision to last a long time. The defense was solid; the city wall had enjoyed a notorious reputation as unbreakable. Therefore, Genghis Khan ordered the four armies to join forces and attack simultaneously.

At daybreak the next day, Guo Jing's army left their camp heading south along the river. In ten days they arrived outside Samarkhand's city wall. Seeing Guo Jing's small army, the enemy went out the city to engage them in fierce battle. With his 'feng yang' [scattering wind] and 'yun chui' [dangled cloud] Guo Jing managed to kill about five thousand enemy's soldier in just half a day. With this defeat the Khoesm army was forced to go back inside their fortified city.

On the third day Genghis Khan's big army, as well as Jochi's and Chagatai's, arrived one after another. More than a hundred thousand soldiers surrounded the city, attacking it from all directions. But Samarkhand's defense was so tight; thousands of Mongolian soldiers and officers were wounded or dead, yet the city was still standing strong.

The next day Chagatai's eldest son attempted to render meritorious merit; bravely he attacked the city wall, unfortunately an arrow was shot from the city wall, hit his head and he died. Genghis Khan loved this grandson, seeing him die in the battlefield his grief and anger was unspeakable. When the grandson's personal guards brought his body over, Genghis Khan threw himself over the corpse with tears in his eyes, embracing his dead grandson. He pulled the arrow that killed him, only to see it was a wolf tooth arrow decorated with an eagle's feather, the shaft was inlaid with gold, engraved with four characters, 'da jin zhao wang' [Prince Zhao Wang of the Great Jin]. The people around him who were literate read those words to him.

"Ah!" Genghis Khan angrily roared, "It's that scoundrel Wanyan Honglie!" Leaping to his horseback he issued a decree, "All officers and soldiers, big and small, hear this: Anybody who is brave enough to break the city's defense and capture Wanyan Honglie to avenge my grandson; the city's women and children, jade and silk, everything is his." A hundred riders immediately were dispatch everywhere to announce the Great Khan's decree.

The other three armies heard this proclamation and their spirit rose; like a swarm of locust they attacked the city wall with earth-shattering battle cry. Some were trying to climb the wall barehanded; some were scaling ladders, some were throwing ropes with hook, some were using large tree trunk as a battering ram against the city gate. But the warriors on the city wall defended their city bravely. The battle continued until evening; the Mongolians had lost about four thousand men, yet the city of Samarkand was still standing like a mountain.

Since his military expedition against Khorasm started, this was Genghis Khan's first major defeat. That night inside his tent he grieved over his beloved grandson's death, his anger erupted like a thunder.

Guo Jing went back to his tent, browsing through his 'Wumu's Legacy', trying to find a way to break the city; but Samarkhand was different from the cities in China, hence the methods described in the book were useless.

Guo Jing invited Lu Youjiao to his tent to discuss this situation. Knowing Lu Youjiao would go to Huang Rong for advice, as soon as he left the tent, Guo Jing followed behind. Who would have thought that Lu Youjiao had arranged Beggar Clan disciples to stand all the way from Guo Jing's tent to his own? As they see Guo Jing, those disciples saluted him with loud voice.

Guo Jing understood immediately, "This must be another one of Rong'er's schemes," he thought, "Ay! She has always found a way to evade me. She is able to predict my every action and every movement accurately."

More than two hours later, Lu Youjiao came back and reported, "This big city is really difficult to break, Xiao Ren has not found any good idea. Let us wait a few more days, perhaps an opportunity will present itself for us to attack."

Guo Jing nodded without saying anything. When he left Mongolia heading south for the first time, he was just a naïve and simple-hearted youngster; but over the past year he had experienced misery, difficult and sometimes dangerous days. His experience had matured him tremendously. That night inside his tent he could not help but feel emotional as he quietly pondered the meaning of two lines of poems in the painting. He thought, "Rong'er must think I am heartless, she is waiting for me to apologize. Too bad I am stupid since the day I was born, I don't know how to make amends, I don't know how to do as she wishes." Thinking these things he became more anxious than ever.

That night he could not sleep well, his thought was full of Huang Rong; he kept tossing and turning in his tent. It was after the third hour that he finally was able to sleep. He dreamt of meeting Huang Rong. He asked her how he could apologize to her. Huang Rong replied by whispering something in his ears. Guo Jing was elated, he woke up immediately; but then he could not remember what Huang Rong had said. He tried painstakingly to remember, but no such luck. He wanted to go back to sleep again and asked Huang Rong in his dream, but it seemed like the sleep had already left him.

Burning with anxiety he knocked his own head several times; suddenly he got an inspiration, "I can't remember, but why don't I ask her again?" He loudly shouted, "Quickly invite Lu Zhanglao to come over."

Lu Youjiao thought what kind of urgent military affair would need his attention? Wrapping his body with the sheepskin he went barefooted to Guo Jing's tent.

"Lu Zhanglao, no matter what I want to meet with Miss Huang tomorrow evening," Guo Jing said, "I don't care how you'd do it. Whether you come up with an idea yourself, or you ask others, but I want you to present me with a clever idea how I can see her. I give you until noon tomorrow."

Lu Youjiao was flabbergasted. "Huang Bangzhu is not here, how can Sir meet with her?"

“You have a divine wisdom, you should be able to think of something,” Guo Jing replied, “If you can’t present a good idea by noon tomorrow, I am going to handle you according to the military law.” Being aware that he was speaking nonsense, Guo Jing was secretly amused.

Lu Youjiao was about to reason when Guo Jing turned his head to tell his guard, “Prepare a hundred soldiers to act as executioners tomorrow at noon.” His guard acknowledged with a loud voice.

Lu Youjiao looked distressed; dejectedly he walked back to his tent.

It was snowing heavily early morning the next day; the city wall was covered with ice, slick like oil. It was impossible to scale the wall. Genghis Khan withdrew his army that day. He thought the winter was coming, the coming days would get colder and colder; they wouldn’t see warmer days until the second or third month, which was still several months away. If he decided to leave this city and proceeded to the west, then he would practically leave around a hundred thousand enemies behind him, with a potential to cut his way back to Mongolia. But if he stationed some of his army to guard the city, he was afraid the enemy would get some enforcement then his troops would be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. Once a battle broke, his troops might be scattered in this foreign land and he would lost considerable men and horses.

Genghis Khan paced back and forth in front of his tent with his hands behind his back. He was lost in thought and stared blankly at the snow-covered peak on which the city was built. That peak was so high that it reached to the clouds above. Genghis Khan creased his brows. He saw the peak was extremely weird; it towered alone in the middle of a desert. There was no vegetation grew on it, the locals called it ‘tu mu feng’ [the bald wooden peak]. Samarkhand was built leaning on this peak, the foothill was actually served as the west city wall. He imagined whoever built this city must have spared no expense; the military strategists and the builders who designed this city must have had incredible ability and wisdom. This hill was very steep, practically a huge solid rock, nothing could grow on it; even monkeys or apes had no way of climbing it up. Samarkhand had this kind of truly impenetrable defense.

Genghis Khan thought, “Ever since the start of my military career, I have been in hundreds of battles, big and small; yet I have never faced as difficult situation as I have today. I wonder if the Heaven is going to cut me short?” He sat on the horseback, staring blankly at the falling snowflakes. The tents were covered with snow; while inside the city smokes went up the chimneys. Everything just added to his misery.

Guo Jing’s mind was filled with another kind of apprehension; he was wondering if his brute force method of forcing Huang Rong to show herself would actually make her hate him even more. What if Lu Youjiao had determined not to open his mouth? Certainly he could not behead him, could he?

It was almost noon, with composed face Guo Jing sat in his tent; while on the either sides of the tent stood the executioners, waiting. Then the bugle sounded, announcing it was noon.

Lu Youjiao walked into the tent, “Xiao Ren has thought of an idea, but I am afraid Sir would find it difficult to do,” he said.

Guo Jing was delighted, “Tell me, quick! I don’t care even if it requires my life. What’s so difficult?” he asked.

Lu Youjiao pointed to the peak of the 'bald wooden peak' and said, "Tonight about half an hour to midnight, Huang Bangzhu will be waiting there."

Guo Jing was silent. "How can she climb there?" he asked, "Aren't you just making a fool out of me?"

"Didn't I say from the start it's not going to be easy?" Lu Youjiao said, "Even if I invented an ingenious plan, it would be in vain anyway." Finished speaking he made a bow, turned around and walked out the tent.

Guo Jing thought, "Sure enough it was Huang Rong's words; she is calling me useless. This bald peak is a lot steeper than the Iron Palm Peak, the Mongolian cliff was nothing compared to it. I wonder if there is a deity on the peak who will hang down a rope for me to climb?"

Dejectedly he dismissed the executioners then walked toward the peak, staring blankly at the top. He noticed that from top to bottom the peak did not show any difference, its surface was covered with a thick layer of ice, looked like a slippery crystal, much like the ice column enclosing Ouyang Feng the other day. It was an out-of-this-world mountain, other than birds, no man or beast would be able to reach the top.

Guo Jing looked up to the peak; suddenly 'splat!' his fur cap fell on the snow. In an instant a thought came flashing in his mind, "If I can't see Rong'er, it would be better to die anyway. Although this peak is dangerous, I should risk my life climbing it. Even if I fall down and die, I would still die for her." Once he reached a decision he felt better immediately.

That evening he ate until he was full; then he inserted a dagger on his waist and slung a coil of rope on his back. It was not dark yet when he walked out his tent. To his surprise he saw the three elders Lu, Jian, and Liang were waiting outside, they said, "Xiao Ren will see Sir off to the peak."

"See me off to the peak?" Guo Jing was confused.

"Certainly," Lu Youjiao said, "Doesn't Sir have an appointment to meet Huang Bangzhu on the peak tonight?"

Guo Jing was pleasantly surprised, "So Rong'er is not deceiving me after all," he thought. With a delighted heart he walked along the three elders to the 'bald wooden peak'.

He saw dozens of his soldiers were waiting by the peak with dozens of cattle and sheep. Lu Youjiao said, "Butcher!"

The soldier lifted up his saber and slashed the sheep's hind leg. While the blood was still warm, the leg was planted on the peak's wall. The blood froze in short time, the leg was firmly planted on the stone wall, then it was further reinforced with iron nails.

Guo Jing had not understood yet what they were doing. Another soldier chopped the other sheep's hind leg and stuck it to the wall, approximately four feet above the first one. Guo Jing was delighted, he understood now that the three elders were making sheep legs ladder. It was cruelty against the animals, but there was simply no better way of doing this.

He saw Lu Youjiao leaped vertically up and perched on the second leg; Jian Zhanglao chopped the next sheep leg and tossed it upward, Lu Youjiao stuck the leg to the wall. Several legs later, this 'sheep ladder' had reached dozens of 'zhang's high; when the legs were chopped on the ground and tossed up, they would freeze up by the time they reached their destination. Guo Jing helped the three elders hung the rope down. They hoisted the sheep up alive and butcher them just before sticking up their legs on the wall.

As the 'sheep ladder' had reached about a half way up, they felt the wind was a lot stronger compared to the ground. Fortunately these four were martial art experts; their bodies slightly swayed, but their feet were steadily planted on the legs. Still, for fear that they might skid on the legs and lose their footing they tied a long rope on their waists, so the four of them would be able to help each other in case of an accident.

They were busy working until almost midnight when finally the 'sheep ladder' reached the peak. The three elders no doubt were exhausted, while Guo Jing himself was sweating profusely. Lu Youjiao was panting and smiling at the same time, "Sir, can you forgive Xiao Ren?" he asked.

Guo Jing felt bad, but also grateful, "I really don't know how to repay three gentlemen's kindness," he said.

"It was Bangzhu's idea, even if it is more difficult than it was, we still would have to obey. Who told us to have such a cunning and weird Bangzhu?" Lu Youjiao said. Three elders burst in laughter, turned around and slowly descended the peak.

Only after watching the three elders step by step scaling the hillside safely that Guo Jing turned around and saw the magnificent scenery on the hilltop. Ten thousands years of cold had created a world of crystal of many colors; some resembled reddish-green flowers and grass; some resembled strange beast or exotic birds; some resembled a forest of rocks; some resembled tree branches or bamboo grooves. Guo Jing enjoyed the scenery with amazement; his heart was full of praises.

Thinking that very soon Huang Rong would climb the 'sheep ladder' to see him, his blood rushed through his body, giving him a warm, fuzzy feeling, making his cheeks red. He was in daze. Suddenly he heard a girl's soft giggle. This giggle was like an electric shock surged through Guo Jing. He turned around quickly, and saw under the moonlight a young girl smiled sweetly looking at him. Who else if not Huang Rong? Although Guo Jing knew perfectly well that she had promised to see him there, but to actually see her in person, he felt like he was dreaming.

Two people stared at each other for a moment then both of them rushed toward each other, ignoring the slippery cold ice of the peak; because of their grief and joy, they ran and slipped together. Guo Jing was afraid Huang Rong might be injured, before he even touched the ground he kicked back and propelled his body forward, grabbing her, embracing her in his arms. They had been separated for more than a year and they missed each other like crazy. This time they meet again, how could they not be happy?

After quite a while Huang Rong gently pried herself loose. They sat side by side on a round-stone-like ice block. "If I did not see how crazily you missed me, I wouldn't want to see you," she said.

Guo Jing only stared at her, did not say even half a word. After a long time he opened his mouth, "Rong'er."

“Mmm?” Huang Rong answered.

Guo Jing was extremely joyful; he called again, “Rong’er.”

Huang Rong smiled, “Haven’t you called me enough?” she asked, “These past few days, even though I was not with you, haven’t you called me dozens of times every day?”

“How did you know?” Guo Jing asked.

Huang Rong smiled again, “You could not see me, but actually I saw you quite often.”

“You are always in our army, how come you did not let me see you?” Guo Jing asked.

“You still have a face to ask me?” Huang Rong was angry. “Once you found out I am alive and well, aren’t you going to marry that Princess Huazheng? I’d rather not let you know my whereabouts. Do you think I am dumb?”

As soon as he heard she mentioned the name ‘Huazheng’ Guo Jing’s delight was gone; his face looked so depressed that Huang Rong quickly looked around and said, “That crystal palace is so beautiful, let us go inside and find someplace to sit and chat.”

Guo Jing followed her gaze and saw a bulk solid ice resembling a cavern; under the dim moonlight it glowed beautifully. It did look like a big crystal block carved into a palace. Two people walked hand in hand entering the cave, and then found someplace to sit on.

“Speaking about how you treated me on the Peach Blossom Island, tell me, should I forgive you?” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing stood up and said, “Rong’er, let me kowtow to you a hundred times to apologize.” He was serious, immediately knelt down and started kowtowing.

Huang Rong sweetly smiled, held out her hands to stand him up. “Let it be. If I haven’t forgiven you, I wouldn’t want to crawl to this peak even if you chop Lu Youjiao’s head a hundred times!”

Guo Jing was really happy, “Rong’er, you are really good.”

“What are you talking about good or not good?” Huang Rong said, “Originally I thought you wholeheartedly wanted to avenge your masters, certainly you don’t have the least of me in your heart; naturally I was really angry! Later on I learned about how you strike an agreement with Ouyang Feng; you are willing to spare his life three times for my sake. Only then did I know that you still have me in your heart.”

Guo Jing shook his head, “I can’t believe it’s only now that you know my heart.”

Huang Rong pursed her lips and smiled, “Did you see what I am wearing?” she asked.

Thus far Guo Jing’s eyes only looked at Huang Rong’s face; only after Huang Rong mentioned it that he turned his gaze to her clothes. Turned out she was wearing the black sable fur coat that he gave her when they first met at Zhangjiakou [Kalgan]. His heart was moved, he held out his hand and tightly hold Huang Rong’s hand.

Two people sat leaning to each other for a moment. Finally Guo Jing broke the silence, “Rong’er, Da Shifu [First Master] said that you were captured by Ouyang Feng at the Temple of the Iron Spear; how did you manage to escape from his hand?”

Huang Rong sighed. “I feel sorry for Lu Shige’s [Martial (older) Brother] nice Cloud Village. The Old Poison wanted me to explain the Nine Yin Manual for him. I said the explanation is not difficult, but I needed a good and quiet place. The Old Poison said if that was the case, we would find some secluded temple. I said Buddhist monks are disgusting, I don’t like eating vegetarian food. The Old Poison then asked what I wanted. I said nearby Lake Tai there was a place called the Cloud Village; the scenery is beautiful, the food and wine are superb. The only thing is that the village master is my friend; it made him rather suspicious.”

“That’s right,” Guo Jing said, “Did he decide not to go?”

“No, he is arrogant,” Huang Rong said, “He is never afraid of other people. The more I told him, the more he wanted to go. He said no matter how many friends I have, the Old Poison would face them all. When we arrived at the Cloud Village, actually Lu Shige father and son were not home; they went north of the river to the city of Baoying, to visit their in-laws, Cheng Da Xiaojie’s [Eldest Miss Cheng] family. You know that the Zhuangzhu [Village Master] had learned building technique from my father according to the ‘wu xing ba gua’ [five ways eight diagram]. As soon as the Old Poison stepped into the village, he felt something was not right. He wanted to pull me out of there, but I entered to the east and turned to the west, very soon he lost my track. Hard as he tried, he could not find me, and in his anger he burned the Cloud Village down.”

“Ah!” Guo Jing gasped, “I did stop by the Cloud Village looking for you, but I found it in rubble. Turned out it was the Old Poison’s doing.”

“I knew he was going to destroy the village,” Huang Rong said, “So I warned everybody to get out. Although he could not catch me, the Old Poison is really evil and cruel. He guarded the way toward the Peach Blossom Island, hoping to catch me there. Several times I was nearly caught. Afterwards I ran to the north, toward the Mongolian border, and he followed. ‘Sha gege’ [dumb big brother], luckily you are dumb. If you are as smart as the Old Poison, you two will surround me from both directions. I may not know where to hide.”

Guo Jing simply blushed and smiled stupidly.

“But finally you are getting smarter, you knew how to push Lu Youjiao to think of something,” Huang Rong said.

“Rong’er, it was you who taught me,” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong was astonished, “I taught you?”

“You taught me in a dream,” Guo Jing replied. Then he told her the dream he had the other night.

This time Huang Rong did not laugh at him, in fact, her heart was moved. She said quietly, “The people of ancient times used to say that perfect honesty and sincerity could open up metal and stone. You think about me and miss me this much; I should’ve let you see me sooner.”

“Rong’er,” Guo Jing said, “Later on you will never leave me forever, won’t that be good?”

Huang Rong swept her gaze around the marvelous structures cluttered on the peak. “Jing Gege, I am cold,” she suddenly said.

Guo Jing hastily took his own fur coat off and wrapped it on Huang Rong’s body. “Let us go down,” he said.

“All right,” Huang Rong said, “We’ll come back here tomorrow night. I am going to explain the Nine Yin Manual in detail for you.”

Guo Jing was astounded, “What?” he asked.

Huang Rong’s right hand was still holding Guo Jing’s left hand; she squeezed her hand and said, “My father has translated the last part of the manual, where the sentences were jumbled. I’ll explain everything to you tomorrow night.”

“This Sanskrit part is obviously translated by Reverend Yideng,” Guo Jing thought, “Why did she say it was his father?” He was full of doubts, was about to ask again when Huang Rong squeezed his hand one more time. He knew there must be a reason, so he agreed without asking anymore questions. Two people went down the peak.

Once they were in his tent, Huang Rong whispered in his ear, “Ouyang Feng also climbed the ‘bald wooden peak’, he hid behind us as we speak, secretly listening to us.”

Guo Jing was startled, “Ah! I didn’t even know he was there.”

“He was hiding behind a huge ice block,” Huang Rong said, “The Old Poison is extremely crafty, but this time he forgot that the ice is transparent, it could not conceal anything. It was not until the moonlight shone on it did I see a blurry shadow behind it.”

“So you talked about the Nine Yin Manual was actually for his benefit,” Guo Jing said.

“Hmm, I want to lure him to the peak, then we remove the ‘sheep ladder’; let’s see if he can meditate to become an immortal on that mountain peak, maybe he’ll become a deity,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing was very happy; he clapped his hands and cheered.

The next day Genghis Khan attacked the city again. Another thousand or so Mongolian soldiers died. The Khoesm soldiers on the city wall threw some insults and cursed their enemy. Genghis Khan flew into rage; but sweeping the battlefield with his eyes he saw the dead body of Mongolian soldiers and horses; he was upset.

That very evening Guo Jing, Huang Rong and the three Beggar Clan Elders readied themselves, they only had to wait for Ouyang Feng to climb the peak, then they would destroy the sheep ladder immediately. Who would have thought that Ouyang Feng was so cunning and had anticipated this; as long as Guo Jing and Huang Rong did not climb up, he also stayed down, hiding.

Huang Rong was forced to think of something else. She took some ropes and soaked them in oil. Khoesm was rich in petroleum; more than a thousand years ago the people dug a well to find water,

but they found oil instead. Since then the people had used oil to cook their meals. The Mongolian army had seized several barrels of this oil and used them as fuel.

Jing and Rong, two people climbed to the peak with ropes soaked in oil on their back. Then they hid the ropes behind a big ice block. Two people sat inside the crystal palace talking to each other. Not too long afterwards they saw Ouyang Feng's indistinct shadow appeared behind a big ice block. His lightness kungfu had been trained to perfection; he was extremely quiet, he never expected those two people to be aware that he was there.

Right away Huang Rong started talking about the manual, which they discussed earnestly. Of course they were discussing the real Manual. Ouyang Feng listened attentively, he found the manual was really marvelous; could not help but feeling ecstatic. He thought even if he compelled this little girl to explain, she might not tell him the whole thing, but right now he was eavesdropping he felt very fortunate.

Huang Rong slowly explained, and Guo Jing pretended to ask a lot of questions. Ouyang Feng thought, "He did not get such a simple truth, he is really stupid."

Suddenly the horn was sounded urgently on the ground. Guo Jing jumped up immediately, "The Great Khan summons the generals, I have to go," he called out. Actually it was a false alarm; he had made this arrangement in advance.

"We'll go down together," Huang Rong said.

"We are going up and down this peak, so much hassle," Guo Jing said, "Can't we do it inside my tent?"

"No, that Old Ouyang Feng has been looking for me everywhere, he is so cunning; it is extremely difficult to find a place to hide from him," Huang Rong said, "But even if he were ten times more cunning, definitely he won't guess that we are able to come up to this peak."

Ouyang Feng was really smug, he thought, "Hey, this tiny, tiny peak is nothing; even if you run to the end of the earth I will still chase you."

"Then you'd better wait here," Guo Jing said, "I should be finished within an hour or so; I'll hurry back up here."

Huang Rong nodded her approval.

Without saying anything else Guo Jing climbed down the peak. He was a little bit apprehensive about leaving Huang Rong alone on the top with Ouyang Feng, but he thought Ouyang Feng must be dying to listen to the Manual's secret; certainly he would not harm Huang Rong yet.

About the time needed to eat a bowl of rice later Huang Rong stood up and thought aloud, "Why is Jing Gege not back yet? I wonder if there are ghosts on this peak. Maybe Yang Kang or Ouyang Ke's ghosts are here. I think I'd better go down, I'll comeback with Jing Gege later on."

Ouyang Feng was afraid she might see him, he curled up behind the ice block, did not dare to move even so slightly. He saw Huang Rong was climbing down the peak.

Guo Jing and the three elders were waiting on the ground. As soon as Huang Rong was down, they lighted a fire and burned the rope. Turned out when Guo Jing went down, he wrapped the oil-soaked rope on each of the sheep legs. As the rope was burned, the heat melted the ice that held the legs frozen to the wall, so that the legs dropped one by one to the ground.

The fire slowly crept upward along the winding rope. The dark night made the fire's reflection on the snow and ice looked frighteningly beautiful. Huang Rong clapped her hands in delight and asked, "Jing Gege, would you say we should spare his life this time?"

"This is the third time," Guo Jing said, "We can't break our agreement."

Huang Rong smiled, "I have an idea," she said, "You don't have to break your agreement, but you can kill him to avenge your masters."

Guo Jing was delighted, "Rong'er, you are always full of ideas," he said, "Tell me your marvelous idea."

Huang Rong smiled, "It's not difficult," she said, "We let the Old Poison eat the northwest wind for ten whole days and nights; let him freeze and starve, he will be dead tired. Then we rebuild the 'sheep ladder', help him get back down. That will be the third time we spare his life, won't it?"

"That's correct," Guo Jing said.

"You have spared his life three times by then, you don't have to show leniency anymore," Huang Rong said. "We wait here on the ground. As soon as he is down, we can start fighting him. We will have the three elders' help; so with five people against a half-dead man, you say can we kill him?"

"We certainly can," Guo Jing said, "But this way we are not acting too gentlemanly, don't you think?"

"Hey," Huang Rong scolded, "Do we need to talk gentlemanly toward this kind of evil and cruel man? Did he act gentlemanly when he killed your five masters?"

Thinking about his benevolent masters' cruel death, Guo Jing was enraged. He also thought that Ouyang Feng's skill was so high that if he let him off this time, he might not find another opportunity to seek revenge. Therefore, he gritted his teeth and said, "Very well, let's do it."

Two people went inside the tent. This time they discussed the Nine Yin Manual for real. They found out that the other party's martial art was progressing tremendously, they were really grateful.

After the discussion Guo Jing said, "That traitor Wanyan Honglie is inside the city wall. We know he is there, but there is nothing we can do. Can you think of some marvelous way to break the city's defense?"

Huang Rong was doubtful. "These past several days I have been racking my brain," she said, "I can think of at least a dozen ways to do it, but none of these guarantees victory."

Guo Jing replied, "Within the Beggar Clan there are some brothers, perhaps a dozen of them, whose lightness kungfu is superb. What if they plus we, two people, try to climb the city wall?"

Huang Rong shook her head. “Not that easy,” she said, “Every ‘zhang’ of the wall is heavily guarded by soldiers with bows and arrows. Let’s not talk about climbing the wall; once inside, there are more than a hundred-thousand troops. We can’t even force our way to open up the gate.”

Two people talked all night long; they did not even go to sleep.

The next day Genghis Khan attacked the city again. About ten thousand Mongolian soldiers used rock-throwers, rained the city with large rocks. But the soldiers defending the city took shelter inside blockhouses; the stones devastated the common people’s residences, but the casualty among the defending troops was actually only a few. The attack went on until the third day. The Mongolian army had used hundreds of different tactics, but so far the result was minimal.

On the fourth day snowflakes came floating down from the sky. Guo Jing looked up the peak and said, “I think we don’t have to wait for ten days, Ouyang Feng would be frozen to half-dead.”

“His internal energy is very profound,” Huang Rong said, “Chances are he will survive for ten days.” She was just closing her mouth when both of them cried out in alarm; something was falling from the peak, it looked like Ouyang Feng.

Huang Rong clapped her hands, “The Old Poison can’t take it anymore, he is killing himself!” she said; but straight away she called out in wonder, “Uh, strange! How did he do that?” Ouyang Feng did not fall straight down, but his body was floating in the sky like a kite.

Jing and Rong, two people were extremely astonished; how could someone fall from thousands of ‘zhang’ tall mountain peak did not meet a violent death, but floating slowly instead? Could it be the Old Poison possessed some witchcraft?

In the meantime, Ouyang Feng had fallen further down. Now two people could see clearly that he was naked, but there were two balloon-like things on top of his head. Suddenly Huang Rong understood what was going on, “It’s too bad!” she called out.

Turned out when Ouyang Feng was stranded on the ‘bald wooden peak’, although his martial art was profound, he knew he could not slide down this thousand-zhang peak. After enduring several days of hunger and cold he had a sudden inspiration. He stripped down to his underpants and firmly tied his trousers into knots. Afraid that his trousers might not be enough, he took the robe and tied it to his pants, then tied the whole thing onto his waist. Clenching up his teeth he jumped down from the mountain peak.

It was an extremely risky endeavor, but he was desperate; he had no other alternative. Once he jumped from the peak, his pair of trousers ballooned up and weakened his fall. He was naked, his hands were nearly frozen; he fought the cold and the wind by circulating his deep internal energy.

Huang Rong was amused and upset at the same time; momentarily she was at lost on how to deal with this new development.

By this time both armies inside and outside the city wall had found out about this; tens of thousand pairs of eyes looked up to see this flying man in the sky. Many low-ranking soldiers thought it was a deity descending to the earth; they all knelt down on the ground, worshiping.

Guo Jing saw the direction Ouyang Feng was falling; looked like he was going to land inside the city wall. He waited until Ouyang Feng was dozens of 'zhang's away, then grabbing an iron bow and an arrow he shot Ouyang Feng's body. He thought being airborne, Ouyang Feng would not be able to fend off; however, he still remembered his agreement to spare Ouyang Feng's life three times, so he aimed at a non-fatal spot; Ouyang Feng's thigh.

While he was airborne, however, Ouyang Feng opened his eyes wide, looking to all directions. He saw the arrow coming his way, he bent his waist, swept his legs and struck down Guo Jing's arrows one by one.

Although in a different army unit, Genghis Khan was also aware of Guo Jing's agreement. He ordered his troops to shoot arrows. Immediately tens of thousands arrows shot out like a swarm of locusts flying toward Ouyang Feng.

Even if he had a thousand hands and ten thousands legs, it was no way Ouyang Feng could knock all the arrows down. He was naked, and being airborne his movement was limited; perhaps very soon he would look like a porcupine. In this dire situation Ouyang Feng let his hands go, he fell down head first to the ground. Hundreds of thousands people shouted with one voice, the noise was earth-shattering.

Amazingly Ouyang Feng flexed his waist midair and threw himself toward a flag inside the city. That time the northwesterly wind was blowing very strong, the flag fluttered straight from west to east. Ouyang Feng stretched out his left hand and grabbed the corner of the flag, tearing it into two pieces. Borrowing the strength of the flag, Ouyang Feng made a somersault, hurling his legs toward the flag pole. Hugging the pole he slid downward and vanished inside the city wall.

Both armies witnessed this marvelous show, they talked about it to each other, momentarily forgot they are in the midst of a battle.

"This can't be considered sparing his life," Guo Jing thought, "How can I still have to spare his life next time? Rong'er must be very upset." Who would have thought that as he turned his head he saw Huang Rong's eyes were gleaming with smile on her face. Quickly he asked, "Rong'er, what's wrong? Why are you so happy?"

Huang Rong clapped her hands and laughed, "I present to you a great gift, wonder if you'll like it or not?"

"What gift?" Guo Jing asked.

"The City of Samarkhand," Huang Rong replied.

Guo Jing was dumbstruck.

"The Old Poison has taught me a method to break the city's defense," Huang Rong said, "Go and prepare your troops. Tonight you will render a great service." Then she whispered in Guo Jing's ear, explaining what to do next. Once he understood, Guo Jing was so happy that he repeatedly cheered and applauded.

That afternoon Guo Jing issued a secret order, assigned his troops to take their tents down and cut them into round umbrella shapes; then to tie leather ropes to this umbrella. He wanted ten thousands of umbrellas to be sewn and ready within an hour.

All the officers and soldiers were puzzled. They thought without tents in this bitter cold weather, the nights were unendurable. But the commander-in-chief had issued an order; they had no alternative but to comply.

Guo Jing also ordered his army to gather the cattle and sheep under the snowy peak. Furthermore he assigned a ten thousand men unit to be ready outside the north gate in four battle formations: ‘tian fu’ [sky high], ‘di zai’ [strong earth], ‘feng yang’ [scattered wind], and ‘yun chui’ [dangling cloud]; ready to assault the enemy. Then he placed another ten thousand men unit on the either sides of the north gate in four battle formations: ‘long fei’ [flying dragon], ‘hu yi’ [winged tiger], ‘niao xiang’ [soaring bird], and ‘she pan’ [coiled snake]. Their main assignment was to drive the enemy into the first unit’s ambush. The third ten thousand men unit was readied on the side to be deployed later.

That evening Guo Jing’s troops ate their provisions until everybody was satisfied, then the two ten-thousand men units moved to their appointed position on the north gate. Around the end of the eleventh hour, early the twelfth hour [approximately 9pm] Guo Jing dispatched one of his guards to report to the Great Khan, asking him to dispatch the army to surround the city, for the gates were about to be broken. Genghis Khan was surprised, he was doubtful. He told the guard to go and summon Guo Jing to his Golden Tent. That guard replied, “The Golden Blade Consort [jin dao fu ma] at this very moment has already led his troops to launch an attack. He is waiting for the Great Khan to render assistance.”

Right around that moment a horn sounded from the direction of Guo Jing’s troops; about a thousand soldiers started to butcher the cattle and the sheep, building the sheep ladder on the peak wall. The Beggar Clan disciples with their high level of martial arts skill went up and down lending their hands; very soon dozens of ‘sheep ladders’ were constructed.

Guo Jing shouted his command, and was the first to go up the peak. Ten thousand officers and soldiers followed, with long ropes tied to their waists, slowly climbing up the ladder. They were all under a strict order that was issued earlier not to make any noise at all.

In the dark night dozens of long strings of soldiers crawling and twisting like gigantic dragon slithering up the peak.

The top was actually not very wide, so it was impossible to hold ten thousand men at once. As soon as he had gathered enough people, Guo Jing led the soldiers to tie the umbrella to their waist; then with unsheathed weapons in their hands they were ready to leap into the city. Their target was the south gate.

With a clap of his hands Guo Jing was the first to jump down, followed by several hundreds of the Beggar Clan disciples.

Actually this jumping down from the peak was very dangerous, but the Mongolian soldiers were very brave. Earlier that day they saw Ouyang Feng had jumped from the peak with a pair of trousers as his parachute; they believed their umbrellas were a lot safer than the trousers; moreover, their commander-in-chief had given them the example; therefore, one by one they leaped down

courageously. Very soon the sky was full with thousands of blooming parachutes, taking the officers and soldiers slowly down.

Huang Rong was sitting on an ice block on the peak. She saw the first phase of their plan was successfully completed; she could not help but feeling ecstatic. “Whether Genghis Khan can break the city defense or not, it has nothing to do with me. But if Jing Gege listens to what I say, he can seize the opportunity to do great things.”

Once his feet landed on the ground Guo Jing tore the parachute from his waist, brandishing his big saber he fiercely swept the defending troops. By that time there were some defending troops on night watch duty. They saw thousands of enemy troops descending from the sky; they were amazed and scared, they lost their will to fight. Moreover, those who landed first were the Beggar Clan disciples, each one skilled in martial art. In a short moment they were approaching the city gate.

After that the Mongolian army successively landed. Although there were some soldiers who lost their lives because their parachutes failed to open, but in ten soldiers, nine actually made it to the ground safe and sound. Some of them were blown away by the strong wind and landed outside the city gate; some landed separate from their unit, these soldiers were either captured or killed by the enemy. But those who landed successfully were numbered around one or two thousands. Guo Jing ordered half of them to fight the enemy, while the other half moved toward the city gate.

Genghis Khan saw Guo Jing’s troops flew into the city, he was amazed and pleasantly surprised. He ordered all three units of his army to attack concurrently. They saw the south gate was widely open; several hundreds Mongolian soldiers with spears in their hands guarded the gate, letting several thousands of their companions enter the city; and then they immediately joined themselves with Guo Jing’s troops, decimating the enemies.

The hundred-thousand defending troops were in panic; they did not know where the enemy came from. The Mongolians killed and splashed oil everywhere, setting the city on fire. The inferno reached the sky, Khoesm army was in total chaos.

It was almost dawn, the defending troops were scattered everywhere. The Khoesm king, Muhammad, received a report that there was no enemy at the north gate, so he rushed to the north to escape. Unexpectedly to him, Guo Jing’s ten thousand men had already waited at the either sides of the north gate; arrows and spears moved and made a great kill.

Muhammad did not want to prolong the fight. He ordered Wanyan Honglie to command the defending troops, while he took his personal guards trying to save his own life.

Guo Jing’s sole purpose was to find Wanyan Honglie; seeing his golden helmet flashing among the chaotic battle, Guo Jing ordered his troops to hunt him down. The Khoesm army knew they had lost, but their number was greater; they fought desperately, almost to the point of disregarding their own lives. Guo Jing’s troops were smaller, their movement was hindered. From the front came a fast horse reporting that the enemy troops soon would make a break through.

Guo Jing remembered the military strategy book had this saying, “Do not eat enemy’s bait, do not stop retreating troops. Surrounded troops are not necessarily weak, exhausted enemy should not be pursued too far.” He issued an order to change tactic immediately. His signal flag unfolding, the four formations: sky, earth, wind and cloud, dispersed to surround the enemy. By that time the

enemy troops remained around the palace was about ten thousand men; although all were warriors, but they realized the imminent defeat and had lost their fighting spirit; they were easily captured by Guo Jing's troops.

Guo Jing examined the prisoners, but did not see Wanyan Honglie among them. Even though he had achieved victory, but his heart was unavoidably discontented.

By daybreak the city defense was completely destroyed. Genghis Khan held a general assembly inside Muhammad's imperial palace. Guo Jing was in the process of going through his troops, taking care of the dead and comforting the wounded, when he heard the Great Khan's golden horn sounded. Immediately he rushed toward the royal palace.

By the palace gate he saw a small squad of soldiers; Huang Rong, Lu Youjiao and the other elders were standing among them. Huang Rong clapped her hands and two soldiers stepped forward carrying a big gunnysack. She smiled and said, "Hey, can you guess what's inside this sack?"

Guo Jing laughed, "This city has all kinds of strange and wonderful things, how can I guess?" he said.

"This one is my gift to you, I am sure you will like it," Huang Rong said.

Suddenly Guo Jing remembered; could it be that she found a good looking woman in the city and gave her to him as a joke? Quickly he shook his head, "I don't want it," he said.

Huang Rong laughed, "Are you sure?" she asked. "You can't change your mind after you see it."

Immediately she shook the sack and indeed somebody rolled out of it. His hair was disheveled, his face was full of blood; he was wearing a Khoresm army uniform. Guo Jing looked at his face intently, and to his awe, found out that he was the Great Jin's Prince Zhao, Wanyan Honglie. Guo Jing was ecstatic, "Amazing! Where did you capture him?" he asked.

Huang Rong said, "I saw the defeated and dispersed soldiers were fleeing toward the north gate. A squad of soldiers bearing the Prince Zhao's banner were heading east with someone wearing a golden helmet leading them. I thought this scoundrel Wanyan Honglie was slyer than that; in no way would he blatantly flaunt the Prince Zhao's banner in time of defeat. I thought if his banner flew to the east, he must be running to the west; so I took Elder Lu and the others to prepare an ambush in the west. We did indeed capture this scoundrel immediately."

Guo Jing bowed deeply to her, he said, "Rong'er, you have avenged my dear father for me. I really don't know how to express my gratitude."

Huang Rong pursed her lips and smiled, "It was just a coincidence. You have rendered this great service, the Great Khan will generously reward you. Won't that be great?" she said.

"I don't want anything," Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong stepped to the side and whispered, "Come here." Guo Jing followed. "You really don't want anything in the world?" Huang Rong asked.

Guo Jing was taken aback, "All I want is never to be separated from you anymore," he earnestly said.

Huang Rong smiled. "Today you have rendered this great service. Whatever you ask, I believe the Great Khan won't get angry at you."

"Hmm," Guo Jing still did not understand. Huang Rong continued, "Right this moment if you ask him to appoint you as some high ranking official, he won't deny it. If you ask him not to appoint you, it will also be difficult for him to deny. Important thing is, you have to make him promise in advance. Whatever you ask, he has to grant it."

"Right!" Guo Jing said.

Listening to his short reply 'Right!' without saying anything else, Huang Rong shook her head; she was mad. "Looks like becoming the Golden Blade Consort is the best thing that ever happened to you, isn't it?"

Her words made Guo Jing understand, he called out, "Hmm, I understand. You want me to ask the Great Khan to cancel my marriage; but I have to make sure he promises in advance he won't deny whatever I ask."

Huang Rong was hurt, "It all depends on you. You probably do want to be the Consort?"

"Rong'er," Guo Jing said, "Sister Huazheng treats me with nothing but sincerity, but my love to her is a brotherly love. At first I thought I was holding to my gentleman's agreement, since I did not object to the marriage arrangement a long time ago. But if the Great Khan is willing to nullify the agreement, that would certainly satisfy all parties involved."

Huang Rong was overjoyed; she cast a sidelong glance to him with the sweetest smile on her face. Guo Jing wanted to stay and talk with her some more, but the horn was sounded for the second time from the palace. He placed his hand on hers and said, "Rong'er, wait for my good news here." He dragged Wanyan Honglie inside the palace to see the Great Khan.

Genghis Khan was very delighted to see Guo Jing arrived; he left his throne to greet him, and then took his hand to enter the hall together. He ordered Guo Jing to take a stool covered with embroidery work and tell him to sit next to him. Listening to Guo Jing's report on the capture of Wanyan Honglie he was even happier. Seeing Wanyan Honglie kneel down in front of him Genghis Khan lifted his right foot to tread on Wanyan Honglie's head. Smiling broadly he said, "That day you came to Mongolia flaunting your military power and prestige, did you ever think that there will come a day like today?"

Wanyan Honglie knew his death was imminent, he raised his head boldly and said, "That time my Great Jin country was rich and powerful. I regret the fact that we did not extinguish your tiny Mongolia early on, rather than living to this day."

Genghis Khan laughed a big laugh, ordering his guard to take Wanyan Honglie out and behead him in front of the palace. Guo Jing remembered his father's death was finally avenged; his heart was filled with happiness and grief.

Genghis Khan said, "I have promised that whoever breaks the city defense and capture Wanyan Honglie I will give this city's women and children, with all its gold and silk. Go ahead and receive your rewards."

Guo Jing shook his head, "My mother and I have enjoyed the Great Khan's benevolence. We have enough food and clothing. I don't have any use of slaves or gold and silk."

"Good," Genghis Khan said, "That was precisely the true quality of a hero. What then you do want? All you have to do is ask, I will not deny anything."

Guo Jing left his seat and bowed in front of the Khan. "I do have a favor to ask; Great Khan, please do not get angry," he said.

Genghis Khan laughed, "Just say it," he said.

Guo Jing was about to talk about the betrothal when suddenly he heard a heart-rending, earth-shaking cry of thousands of people from a distance. The assembled generals leaped up from their seats, unsheathing their weapons. They thought the surrendered Khoresm soldiers and people suddenly staged a rebellion; they were ready to dash out and suppress it. Genghis Khan laughed. "It's all right! It's all right!" he said, "This dog city refuses to subdue under the Heaven's power, had killed many of my officers and soldiers, it even killed my beloved grandson; it has to be cleansed by slaughter. Let us go and take a look." He left his seat immediately followed by the generals.

They left the palace on horseback heading toward the western part of the city. The nearer they got, the more miserable the cry became. Just outside the city gate they saw hundreds of thousands common people running around wailing loudly, they pushed and rolled and threw themselves down in panic, with Mongolian soldiers on horseback chasing them, killing the people with long sabers.

Earlier the Mongolian soldiers ordered all the inhabitants to go out of the city, nobody was left behind. At the beginning the people thought the Mongolians were going to search for spies among them; who would have thought that after searching for weapons, they also searched for all kinds of valuables; then they took all good looking young women, married or not, tied them together with long ropes. Samarkhand's residents now realized that they were facing a grave danger. Some people showed resistance, but they were killed immediately with long sabers. Finally several thousands of Mongolian soldiers with loud battle cries charged toward these people, and went on a killing spree with their long sabers. Male or female, young or old, they were randomly chopped down. This massacre was truly with unprecedented brutality; from white or gray haired old men and women, to babies on their mothers' arms, nobody could escape by luck.

When Genghis Khan and his entourage arrived to watch; more than ten thousands people had already fallen victim to the soldiers' brutality; flesh and blood splattered to all directions, the Mongolian horses' iron horseshoes tread on corpses everywhere; going back and forth among the people and kill some more.

Genghis Khan laughed big and called out, "Kill well! Kill well! Let them know my fierceness."

After watching for a short moment, Guo Jing could not endure patiently, he dashed to the front of Genghis Khan's horse and called out, "Great Khan, please spare their lives."

Genghis Khan waved his hand, shouted loudly, “Kill them all, don’t leave anybody standing.”

Guo Jing did not dare to say anything, but then he saw a boy about seven, eight years old, dash out from the crowd and threw himself down at a woman who was just knocked down by a horse, calling out, “Mama!” A Mongolian soldier dashed in and swung his long saber, mother and son were chopped into four parts. The child’s hands were still clutching tightly to his mother.

Guo Jing’s blood boiled; he forgot everything and called out, “Great Khan, you said that this city’s women and children, along with all gold and silk are mine; why did you give your order to massacre them?”

Genghis Khan was startled; he smiled, “You said you didn’t want it.”

“You said that whatever I ask you, you will not deny it, didn’t you?” Guo Jing asked.

Genghis Khan nodded, still smiling.

With a loud voice Guo Jing said, “The Great Khan’s words are like a mountain; I am asking you to spare this tens of thousands lives.”

Genghis Khan was greatly astounded, not in his wildest dream would he guess Guo Jing would ask him this; but he had already given his promise, how could he refuse? He was enraged, his eyes blazing with fire looking at Guo Jing. His hand squeezed his saber’s hilt, he roared, “Kid, you really want this?”

All the princes and generals were scared to see Genghis Khan this angry. Genghis Khan was surrounded by brave warriors, each one had fought countless battles, none were weak or had a feeble heart, they faced death straight in the face; but facing Genghis Khan’s anger they could not help but tremble.

Guo Jing had never seen Genghis Khan look at him this way, he was also extremely scared; his body could not stop shivering, but he said, “I am asking the Great Khan to spare these people’s lives.”

With a low growling voice Genghis Khan asked, “You won’t regret it?”

Guo Jing remembered Huang Rong told him to ask for cancellation of his betrothal; now he let this good opportunity slipped away. He had lost the Great Khan’s favor forever, which he didn’t mind; but he actually realized his relationship with Huang Rong was just being thrown down the drain. He had seen and heard these hundreds of thousands common people wailing pitifully; how could he see others facing death and do nothing? Therefore, boldly he said, “I won’t regret it.”

Genghis Khan heard his trembling voice, he knew Guo Jing was scared to death, but still he boldly made a request. He was forced to admire Guo Jing’s guts; drawing a long saber he called out, “Withdraw troops!”

His guard blew the horn. Tens of thousands Mongolian cavalry with blood all over their bodies reined their horses and arranged themselves in neat formation.

Since Genghis Khan became the Great Khan, nobody had ever dared to defy his order. This time Guo Jing bravely hampered his order to massacre the city; he was really angry. With a loud shout he threw his long saber to the ground; then sped his horse back to the city.

The other generals cast their angry looks toward Guo Jing; now that the Great Khan was angry who knew who would be unlucky enough to bear the brunt of his anger. They were also discontented, since as Samarkhand's defense was broken, they were hoping to plunder and kill to their hearts' content for several days; but now their hopes were shattered.

Guo Jing knew the resentment of others, but he ignored them all, he rode his little red horse slowly to a secluded place. Since the beginning of the war, thousands upon thousands homes had been burnt to the ground, corpses scattered everywhere, the snow covered plain was dyed red with blood. He thought, "War brings wretched disaster; bad as it is now. In order for me to seek vengeance for my father I have commanded troops to kill these many people. In order to rule the world, the Great Khan has killed even more people. But for the officers, soldiers, and the common people, what did they do to deserve the cruelest death; their bones abandoned in the wilderness?"

The more he thought, the more restless his heart became, "I destroyed a city to avenge my father, actually killed these many people. In the end, is it worth it?" He wandered around the wilderness on horseback, going back and forth while painstakingly thinking deeply. It was dark when finally decided to go back to his camp.

As he arrived at the camp's gate, he saw the Great Khan's two personal guards were waiting outside. They stepped forward and bowed, reporting, "The Great Khan summons Master Consort. Xiao Ren had been waiting for a long time; asking Master Consort to quickly go."

Guo Jing thought, "Today I have defied his command; the Great Khan might want to behead me. It has gone thus far, I just have to wait and see what will happen." Beckoning to his own guard he whispered to his ear, ordering him to tell Lu Youjiao that he is going to the palace. He was anxious, but he had determined, "No matter how angry he is, I won't take back my request to spare these people's lives. He is the Great Khan, he can't go back on his words."

His heart was full of the idea that the Great Khan would unleash his anger, who would have thought that as he approached the palace gate he actually heard the Great Khan's merry laughter were heard intermittently from inside the palace. Guo Jing could not help but to be a little bit surprised. He sped up his footstep entering the main hall.

He saw next to the Great Khan sat a man, and next to his foot a young maiden sat leaning on his knee. The man had a ruddy face with white hair, he was none other than the Perpetual Spring [Changchun Zi] Qiu Chuji. As for the young woman; who else but Princess Huazheng?

Guo Jing was delighted, hastily he rushed to meet them. Suddenly Genghis Khan snatched a long halberd from his guard's hand, turned around and fiercely attacked Guo Jing's head with the halberd.

Guo Jing was shocked, he leaned sideways to elude. 'Crack!' the halberd's shaft hit his left shoulder and broke into two pieces. Genghis Khan burst into laughter, "Kid, let the bygone be bygone. If I am not looking at Qiu Daozhang [Taoist Priest] and my daughter's face, I should have taken your head away today."

Princess Huazheng sprang up, she called out, “Father, you must be bullying my Brother Guo Jing while I am not here.”

Genghis Khan tossed the broken halberd to the floor. He laughed, “Who said that?”

“I’ve seen it with my own eyes, how could you deny it?” Huazheng said, “For that reason my heart was troubled, I came with Qiu Daozhang to take a look.”

Genghis Khan laughed, he pulled his daughter with one hand, and Guo Jing with the other; he said, “Let’s not bicker, just sit nicely, listen while Qiu Daozhang recites his poem.”

At the battle of Misty Rain Tavern [‘yan yu lou’ – ‘lou’ means upper level of buildings with more than one floor] Qiu Chuji saw with his own eyes that Zhou Botong was alive and well; he also realized that Tan Chuduan was killed by Ouyang Feng. Along with Ma Yu and the others they went to apologize to Huang Yaoshi. Later on Quanzhen Six Masters came across Ke Zhen’e who told them everything, which made everybody sigh deeply. Qiu Chuji regretted deeply that he had been careless with his disciple, he taught Yang Kang martial arts, but did not take him out of the palace. The youngster was spoiled in riches and honor, and finally met his tragic end.

One day he received Genghis Khan’s and Guo Jing’s letter; he thought Mongolia was getting stronger and might swallow up China. It was exceptional that Genghis Khan should invite someone to come over. He thought he might want to seize the opportunity to give the Khan some advice, trying to open up his heart to the truth, so if he might prevent the slaughter of countless people all over the world, that would be his greatest contribution to mankind. Also, he missed seeing Guo Jing; therefore, braving the cold he took more than a dozen of his disciples to the west.

Qiu Chuji saw Guo Jing had been through wind and snow, his skin was darker, but his body actually looked stronger and healthier; Qiu Chuji was delighted. Before Guo Jing arrived he had been discussing what he had seen and heard with the Great Khan. He said that he experienced the harshness of the weather first hand, so he composed several poems. Stroking his beard he started to recite: “For ten years the people had dreaded the calamity of war, among millions not even one or two could survive. The past year met a good fortune receiving merciful imperial order, this spring braving the cold making the journey. Taming the three-thousand ‘li’ of northern mountain range, roaming two-hundred eastern hill provinces. Exhausted and anxious, gasping for the last breath of life; consumed by the people’s suffering.”

An officer with understanding of Chinese literature called Yelu Chucai translated the poem into Mongolian. Genghis Khan listened; he nodded his head but did not say anything.

To Guo Jing Qiu Chuji said, “That year when your seven masters and I were having a martial art contest at the Drunken Immortal Tavern, your Second Master took a half-finished poem from my pocket. This time I am traveling to the west without being able to see your seven masters again; but finally I have finished this poem.” He started reciting immediately, “ ‘Since the ancient time, the moon of ‘zhong-qiu’ [mid-autumn festival] has always been the brightest; the cool breeze of the night is so clear. The day the shooting star is brighter than the Milky Way, the dragons of the four seas leaped from the water.’ These first four lines were the ones your Second Master had read; I have just finished the next four, he had not seen them yet. ‘The song from the Wu and Yue kingdoms tower was heard extensively, the military barrack of Qin kingdom was full with songs,

food and wine. I arrived before the emperor upstream of the river, desiring to stop the spears, wishing for peace and security.”

Remembering The Seven Freaks of Jiangnan, Guo Jing’s eyes were brimming in tears.

Genghis Khan said, “During the journey to the west, the Priest must have seen my Mongolia’s military prowess. I wonder if you have composed a poem about it?”

Qiu Chuji answered, “Along the way I have seen the Great Khan’s power in destroying the cities and ransacking the earth. It made a deep impression in my heart, gave me inspiration to write two stanzas. The first one is, ‘The Heaven has sent a messenger down to the earth, why not try to save millions of suffering souls? These millions of souls day and night put to death by dismemberment, drinking the wrath, swallowing their weeping without uttering a word. They looked up and cried to the Heaven, but the Heaven did not answer; it was a mere trivial thing unworthy of Heaven’s attention. Peace among thousands of chaos, without religion building refined souls.’”

Yelu Chuchai thought Genghis Khan would not be happy listening to this, so he hesitated and did not translate immediately. Qiu Chuji ignored him, he continued, “My second poem is this, ‘Alas, the world is opened wide, on it live millions of living beings. Cruelty and wickedness battle each other incessantly, carrying the human suffering to its utmost. The Emperor of Heaven, the Queen of the earth, along with all deities, witnessing death; why not help? The messenger is sad but helpless, day and night full of heartache in vain’” [Translator’s note: all these poems consist of seven-character sub-sentences]

These two poems although not really deep, but the essence of lamenting the fate of mankind was so obvious. Earlier that day Guo Jing had witnessed first hand the massacre of the people in that city, he was even more somber.

“The Priest’s poems must be good, what did they say? Quick, translate them for me,” Genghis Khan said.

Yelu Chuchai thought, “I have advised the Great Khan not to kill too many innocent civilians, but he didn’t want to listen. Luckily this Priest has a deep merciful feeling and composed these beautiful poems. I hope he can persuade the Great Khan.” He translated the poem immediately.

Listening to the poems, Genghis Khan was dissatisfied, he turned to Qiu Chuji and said, “I heard there is a technique to reach immortality, to never get old, in China. I hope the Priest would teach me that.”

“There is no such thing as reaching immortality, to never get old,” Qiu Chuji replied, “But there is indeed a Taoist method of circulating the breathing that will result in preventing illness and prolong life.”

“May I ask what the most important thing in that breathing exercise is?” Genghis Khan asked.

“The way of Heaven knows no favorite, always recognizes good man,” Qiu Chuji answered.

“Which one would you call good?” Genghis Khan asked.

“A saint’s heart is undivided, his heart is for the common people,” Qiu Chuji said.

Genghis Khan was silent. Qiu Chuji continued, “There is a scripture in China, it is called the ‘Dao De Jing’ [Holy Scripture of Virtue] which we, Taoists view as our treasure. The ‘the way of Heaven knows’ and ‘a saint’s heart’ were taken from that book. There is another saying in that book, ‘Soldiers and weapons are inauspicious devices, not the tool of person with noble character. The tool will be used against his own will, not to gain fame or fortune from it. But woe is the man who loves to murder. Those who love to kill will not be able to realize his wish under the sky.’”

When Qiu Chuji was traveling to the west, he saw the savageness of the war disaster; his heart was filled with sorrow. He took advantage of Genghis Khan asking him the secret of long life to repeatedly pleading for common people’s lives.

Genghis Khan was getting old, his strength waned, he wanted to learn the technique of immortality; he was very delighted to see Qiu Chuji arrive, thinking that very soon he would learn the technique to defy death and the method to prolong his life. Who would have thought that instead he was advised not to resort of military power and not to kill too much? This conversation did not suit his taste. Therefore, after talking a little bit more he turned to Guo Jing and said, “Go and accompany the Priest to take a rest.”

[Author’s note:

1. Khoresm is a great Islamic country, located on the southern part of Soviet Union, near Afghanistan and Iran. Samarkhand is located in modern day Soviet Union’s Uzbekistan Republic. According to the ‘yuan shi’ [the history of Yuan dynasty], Genghis Khan attacked Khoresm during the year of ‘yu long jie chi’ [jade dragon, scarlet hero], using petroleum to burn the city down and break their defense.
2. According to historical records, Qiu Chuji and Genghis Khan exchanged correspondence three times before finally he took eighteen of his disciples traveling through the snowy Kunlun Mountains. His disciple, Li Zhicang compiled a book called ‘chang chun zhen ren xi you ji’ [Changchun (perpetual spring) Sage’s journey to the west], recording their experience en route. This book is still highly esteemed by the scholars of today.]

**End of Chapter 37.**

## Chapter 38 – Secret Order in Embroidered Pouch

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Guo Jing grabbed one end of his long robe and let his horse run close to Ouyang Feng. Ouyang Feng held out his hand and grabbed the other end. Guo Jing squeezed his legs and gave a loud shout. The little red horse furiously charged forward and with a loud splashing sound Ouyang Feng was pulled out of the mire and dragged along on the snowy ground.*

Guo Jing accompanied Qiu Chuji and his eighteen disciples, among them were Li Zhichang, Yin Zhiping, Xia Zhicheng, Yu Zhike, Zhang Zhizsu, Wang Zhiming, and Song Defang. When they went out of the palace, they saw Huang Rong and the three elders, Lu, Jian, and Liang, as well as about a thousand Beggar Clan disciples all on horseback, waiting outside the palace.

As soon as she saw Guo Jing leave the palace, Huang Rong slapped her horse to move forward, smiling she asked “Is everything all right?”

Guo Jing smiled, “My luck is not bad; Qiu Daozhang [Taoist Priest] arrived just in time, changing the Great Khan’s mood to the better,” he said.

Huang Rong paid her respects to Qiu Chuji, then she asked Guo Jing again, “I was afraid the Great Khan would kill you in his wrath, I took everybody here ready to rescue you. What did the Great Khan say? Did he agree to cancel your betrothal?”

Guo Jing hesitated for half a day before replying, “I did not ask.”

“Why?” Huang Rong was startled.

“Rong’er, please don’t get angry,” Guo Jing said, “It was because ...” Right then Princess Huazheng rushed out of the palace, loudly called out, “Guo Jing Gege [big brother – a term of endearment].”

As soon as she saw her, Huang Rong’s face changed immediately. She quickly mounted her horse and galloped away. Guo Jing was about to open his mouth to explain, when Huazheng pulled his hand and said, “Weren’t you surprised I came here? Are you happy to see me?”

Guo Jing nodded, he turned his head to see Huang Rong, but she had already disappeared. Huazheng only had her eyes to Guo Jing, she did not notice Huang Rong at all; she held his hand, laughing, giggling and telling him how much she missed him.

Guo Jing secretly groaned, “Rong’er must think it was because I saw Huazheng that I did not ask the Great Khan to cancel my betrothal.” He was silent and did not hear what Huazheng was saying.

A moment later Huazheng realized Guo Jing was in a daze, she was offended, “What’s the matter with you? I came from far away just to see you and you do not pay any attention to me?”

“Meizi [younger sister – term of endearment],” Guo Jing said, “I have a very important matter I need to take care of, we will talk when I come back.” Without waiting for her answer he assigned his personal guard to take care of Qiu Chuji, then hurriedly he went back to his camp, looking for Huang Rong.

His guard said, “Miss Huang came back to take the painting, then left toward the eastern gate.”

Guo Jing was startled, “What painting?” he asked.

“The painting Master Consort frequently looked at,” his guard replied.

Now Guo Jing really freaked out. “She took away this picture that means she really severed her relationship with me. No matter what, I have to go south to look for her.” Hurriedly he wrote a letter to Qiu Chuji, then mounting his little red horse he went out of town to pursue.

That little red horse was very fast; but Guo Jing was afraid he might not see Huang Rong anymore, so he kept urging the horse to run even faster. In a short moment they had covered more than ten ‘li’s, already at the outskirts of the city; soldiers and horses’ remains scattered everywhere. Another dozen or so ‘li’s later, all he saw was a vast open prairie covered with white snow. To his delight, there were horse’s tracks on the snow heading east.

“The little red horse is so swift that no other horse in this world is its match. A little more time and I should be able to catch Rong’er,” he thought, “I will take mother, then the three of us will go south at once. I don’t care if Huazheng Meizi would blame me.”

Another dozen of ‘li’s the track suddenly turned north, and there were human footprints beside the horse’s track. The footprints were really peculiar, since the distance between two feet was about four feet; also, the size of the feet were big, but sank into the snow only lightly, only a few inches deep. Guo Jing was startled, “This person’s lightness kungfu is excellent.” Immediately he recalled something, “There is no one other than Ouyang Feng who has this kind of ability. Could it be that he is pursuing Rong’er?” Thinking of this, even though the cold wind was blowing, he could not help but sweat all over. The little red horse was truly smart, somehow it knew its master was in distress; so without Guo Jing pulling the rein it immediately ran following the tracks.

Guo Jing saw the footprints were always right by the horse’s track. Several ‘li’s later both the track and the footprint suddenly turned west, and then turned south; turning and winding around, there was not a single section that was straight. Guo Jing thought, “Rong’er must have found out Ouyang Feng was chasing her, so she tried to shake him off. But the track is imprinted clearly on the snow, Old Poison won’t have any difficulty following her.”

Another dozen of ‘li’s or so, the footprint and the horse track intermingled, they were overlapping another set of footprint and horse track altogether. Guo Jing dismounted the horse to look closer. He was able to tell which set was made earlier and which set was made later. Looking both sets of tracks stretched out far on the snow he suddenly realized something, “Rong’er must have used her father’s ‘qi men zhi shu’ [strange/wonderful/mysterious gate technique]; deliberately winding around to the east and circling to the west to confuse Ouyang Feng. Once he lost her track, she came back to her original route.”

He stood back up, his heart was happy and anxious at the same time; happy because he knew most probably Ouyang Feng would not be able to overtake Huang Rong, anxious because of the confusing horse’s track he also lost his trail. Standing on the snow he thought, “Rong’er went in circle, but eventually she must be heading east. I have to pursue to the east then.” Leaping to his horseback, he looked to the sky to find his bearing then he rode to the east.

After speeding for quite some times, the horse’s track indeed reappeared. He saw in the distance, where the blue sky met the snowy plain, a shadow of a person. Guo Jing urged his horse to run even faster and saw that the person was indeed Ouyang Feng. By now Ouyang Feng had also recognized Guo Jing, he called out, “Come, quick! Miss Huang has fallen into the quicksand.” Guo Jing was shocked, his legs squeezed his horse, and the little red horse shot like an arrow forward.

When he was still about a dozen ‘zhang’s away from where Ouyang Feng was standing, suddenly he felt his horse’s hoofs no longer tread on a solid ground, as if under the white snow was some kind of marsh. The little red horse also felt it was stepping on a softer ground, hurriedly it pulled its leg and sped forward. Guo Jing brought the horse in a big circle and came back, only to see Ouyang Feng continuously running around a small tree.

“Is he doing some kind of black magic?” Guo Jing wondered. He pulled his rein to stop the horse because he wanted to ask a question; who would have thought that his little red horse did not want to stop, but sped forward and circled back. Guo Jing realized immediately, “Turned out underneath the snow is a soft-mud marsh; we will sink down as soon as I stop.” But then his blood froze, “Is it possible that Rong’er fell into this marsh?”

“Where is Miss Huang?” he called out to Ouyang Feng.

Ouyang Feng did not stop running, he called out, “I followed her horse’s track to this place, then suddenly it disappeared. Look!” While speaking he pointed his finger toward the small tree.

Guo Jing sped past the tree on the horseback, he saw a bright yellow ring on the tree branch. He made the little red horse run close to the tree, stretched out his hand and snatched that ring. It was the golden band Huang Rong wore on her hair. His heart almost jumped out through his throat.

He turned his horse’s head toward the east. Several ‘li’s later he saw something glittering on the snow ahead. Bending his body, hanging from the horseback he stretched his arm out and scooped that thing. It was the flower-patterned gold inlaid pearl head ornament that Huang Rong often wore. Guo Jing was very anxious, “Rong’er, Rong’er, where are you?” he shouted at the top of his lungs. He looked around as far as his eyes could see, but there was not a single movement on the vast and boundless white plain.

He went several ‘li’s further, toward his left he saw a black sable fur coat lying on the snowy ground. It was his own coat that he gave to Huang Rong when they first met at Zhangjiakou [Kalgan?]. He made the little red horse circle around the coat, while shouting loudly, “Rong’er!” His voice traveled far on the open snowy plain. There was no hill or mountain around, therefore, there was no echo answering his call. Guo Jing was extremely anxious, he wanted to cry but no sound was coming out from his throat.

A moment later Ouyang Feng arrived, “Let me rest on your horseback, then we will seek Miss Huang together,” he said.

Guo Jing was indignant, “If you did not chase her, how could she fall into this marsh?” he scolded. Squeezing his legs he made his little red horse leap forward.

Ouyang Feng was angry, he leaped forward, and in three jumps he had already behind the horse, stretching his hand to grab the horse’s tail.

Guo Jing did not expect him to come this quick, with a ‘Divine Dragon Swings Its Tail’ his right palm shot backward, crashing Ouyang Feng’s palm, both people were using their full strength. Guo Jing was blown by Ouyang Feng’s palm strength, his body flew from his saddle. Fortunately his red horse dashed forward; he stretched his left hand, grabbing the horse’s buttocks, and swinging his body forward he was back on his saddle in no time.

Ouyang Feng, on the other hand, was pushed two steps backwards. Because of Guo Jing's palm strength he landed heavily; his left leg unexpectedly fell deeply into the mud, straight to his knee. Ouyang Feng was totally shocked; he knew on this kind of quicksand, as soon as he exerted his strength and tried to jump out, his right foot would also fall into the mud. Once both legs were in, it did not matter if his skill was as high as the sky, he would have a very difficult time pulling his own body out of the mud. In desperation he laid his body horizontally on the ground, then rolled around while at the same time kicked his right leg to the air. Using 'lian huan yuan yang tui' [chain mandarin duck's leg] he borrowed the strength from his right kick to lift his left foot. Mud splashed everywhere, but his legs were free.

He turned over and stood up, only to hear Guo Jing's loud calls, "Rong'er! Rong'er!" The man on the horse had left him for more than a 'li'. He saw the little red horse was running steadily; apparently they were already out of the marsh area. Ouyang Feng decided to pursue, but the further he ran, the more he felt the ground underneath his feet was getting softer; as if he was at the edge of the marsh and now he had treaded into the center of it.

Three times had Ouyang Feng fallen under Guo Jing's hands; the last time he was forced to be naked in front of hundreds of thousands people. It was an extremely dangerous situation; other people might admire his martial art skill, but he actually thought that was his greatest disgrace. This time he met Guo Jing again, alone. Good or bad he simply had to seek revenge. Even though the terrain was dangerous, he simply could not let this good opportunity pass. Much less Huang Rong's life or death was still unknown; he could not give up in light of this, no way; therefore, in his anger he decided to pursue Guo Jing.

Displaying his excellent lightness kungfu; in just several 'li's he had reached the speed of a fast horse. Guo Jing heard footsteps on the snow behind him; he turned his head quickly only to see Ouyang Feng was only several 'zhang's behind his horse's tail. He was startled, hastily urged his horse to run faster. In just a short moment they have covered more than a dozen 'li's.

Guo Jing did stop calling, "Rong'er!" but he saw the sky was getting darker; Huang Rong's fate was increasingly uncertain. His voice was hoarse from shouting, his occasional choke turned into sobs. The little red horse understood the danger they were on from the start, as it felt softer ground underneath, it ran even faster; eventually its four hooves moved so fast as if they were flying above the snow.

'Han xue bao ma' [precious horse with blood-like sweats] was a rare animal capable of running very fast; but Ouyang Feng's lightness kungfu was not inferior. Unfortunately he was getting tired, after running for a long time his breathing was getting heavier, his legs' strength diminished, his footsteps gradually slowing down. Little red horse was also sweating profusely; beads of red sweats trickled down from its body, splashing to the white snow below, next to its hoof tracks, like cherry blossom in full bloom.

By the time the sky was completely dark the little red horse had completely left the marsh; early on Ouyang Feng had disappeared without a trace. Guo Jing thought, "The horse Rong'er was riding did not have this kind of divine speed; it wouldn't run for half a li into the marsh without falling into the mud below. Even if I have to lose my life I must try to rescue her." He very well realized that Huang Rong had been missing for a very long time; if she did fall into the marsh, even if he could pull her out, he would not be able to bring her back to life. So his motivation was really for his own peace of mind.

Guo Jing dismounted his horse to give it a rest; caressing his horse's back he said, "Little horse, oh little horse, today I am asking you not to be afraid of exhaustion. Let's take a short rest and then we'll go again."

Guo Jing leaped back to his saddle and pulled the rein to turn the horse's head. The little red horse was afraid to tread back into the marsh, but Guo Jing kept urging it to go. Finally with a loud neigh the horse's four hooves splashed back into the marsh. The horse knew their destination was still far away, so it ran with all its might, faster and faster into the marsh.

Suddenly they heard Ouyang Feng's desperate cry, "Help! Help!" Guo Jing sped his horse up. Under the glimmering reflection of the white snow he saw Ouyang Feng had fallen into the mud. His hands were high in the air, flailing chaotically. The mud was slowly rising, it already reached his chest. As soon as it reached his mouth and nose, he would certainly be suffocated to death.

Guo Jing could see his desperate situation; he recalled Huang Rong might face similar danger. His blood boiled inside his chest; he almost dismounted his horse and fell into the same trap; but decided against doing so at the last minute.

"Quick, help me!" Ouyang Feng cried out.

Guo Jing gritted his teeth and said, "You killed my benevolent masters, you also killed Miss Huang; do you still want me to save you? Dream on!"

With a stern voice Ouyang Feng replied, "We had made an agreement, you have to spare my life three times. This is the third time. Are you saying you don't give a thought to the good faith?"

With tears in his eyes Guo Jing said, "Miss Huang is no longer alive, what use is our agreement?"

Ouyang Feng shouted curse and abusive words, but Guo Jing simply ignored him; he rode his horse away. Only a dozen 'zhang's later he heard Ouyang Feng's pitiful cry. Guo Jing could not bear it anymore. He heaved a sigh and turned his horse around. The mud had already reached Ouyang Feng's neck. "I am willing to save you, but if both of us ride on this horse, we will sink into the mud together," he said.

"Use a rope to tow me," Ouyang Feng suggested. Guo Jing did not carry any rope, but he remembered his long robe. Grabbing one end, he let his horse ran close to Ouyang Feng. Ouyang Feng held out his hand and grabbed the other end. Guo Jing squeezed his legs and gave a loud shout. The little red horse furiously charged forward and with a loud splashing sound Ouyang Feng was pulled out of the mire and dragged along on the snowy ground.

If they were heading east, very soon they were going to leave the marsh area; but Guo Jing was very anxious over Huang Rong, how would he be willing to give up searching for her? Therefore, they were galloping to the west. Ouyang Feng was still holding on to the robe, he laid down facing up, being dragged rapidly on the snow. He used this opportunity to catch his breath.

The little red horse ran very fast, before daybreak they had crossed the marsh. Guo Jing saw horse's track on the snow; it was Huang Rong's horse entering the marsh area. The track was still there, but what about Huang Rong? Guo Jing dismounted his horse, stood on the snow, lost in thought.

In his grief he had completely forgotten his archenemy; he stood with his left hand holding the rein, and his right hand holding the fur coat, his eyes gazing into the distance, his heart was shaken, beating rapidly.

Suddenly he felt a light touch on his shoulder. He turned around in shock, only to see Ouyang Feng's palm was touching his 'tao dao' [pottery way] acupoint. When Ouyang Feng fell into Guo Jing's trap and he came out from the sand, Guo Jing had sealed his 'tao dao' acupoint. This time Ouyang Feng managed to do the same to Guo Jing, it was a pay back time; Ouyang Feng could not help but laugh merrily.

Guo Jing was overwhelmed with grief, he had no regard of his life anymore; "If you want to kill me then just kill me; we don't have any agreement that you should spare my life anyway," he wryly said.

Ouyang Feng was taken aback; he had thought of torturing Guo Jing to disgrace him before finally taking his life. Who would have thought that Guo Jing did not expect to live? Ouyang Feng thought, "This dumb kid loves that little girl very much; if I kill him, then I am helping him fulfilling his desire to die together in the name of love." He changed his mind and thought, "That little girl is already buried beneath this snow; he becomes my only hope of the explanation of the manual." Grabbing Guo Jing's arm he lifted him up and leaped to the horseback. They rode toward a valley in the south.

About the sixth hour [between 9 – 11 am] he saw a village by the roadside. Ouyang Feng steered the horse to enter the village, but everywhere he looked there were corpses scattered around the village. Because the weather was cold, the corpses were preserved; they looked exactly like the day they were mutilated and killed by the passing Mongolian army. Ouyang Feng called out several times, but nobody answered; looked like everybody in that village had died. Instead, he heard cattle mooing and sheep bleating. Ouyang Feng was delighted. He took Guo Jing to a stone house and said, "You are my prisoner now. I won't kill you. If you can defeat me, you are free to go." Having said that he took a sheep, butchered it, and boiled it in the kitchen.

The more Guo Jing saw his smug expression, the more he hated Ouyang Feng. Ouyang Feng threw a mutton leg to him and said, "I'll wait until your stomach is full, then we'll fight."

Guo Jing was angry, "You want to fight then fight. Why wait for the full stomach?" His body flew, his palm hacked down. Ouyang Feng raised his hand to block then sent out a fist to counterattack.

Very soon they were fighting inside the stone house, among upturned table and broken chairs. About thirty stances later Guo Jing had to admit his inferiority; he was half a step in front of Ouyang Feng when Ouyang Feng's right palm swung onto his side. It was very difficult for Guo Jing to fend off, all he could do was to wait for his death. Unexpectedly Ouyang Feng did not exert any strength; he laughed and said, "It's enough for today. You go ahead and train martial art from the manual; tomorrow we'll fight again."

"Bah!" Guo Jing spat; he sat on an overturned chair, picked the mutton leg up and started to eat. He thought, "He wanted to see me using the martial art from the manual, so that he might observe and steal it. I won't be fooled. If he wants to kill me, let him kill ... Hmm, his swing just now, how would I block it?"

Thinking about all kinds of fist techniques and palm methods in the manual, he could not find a single move capable of blocking Ouyang Feng's attack. He did remember, however, that there was a technique in the manual called 'fei xu jin' [flying cotton strength], which would allow him to strengthen his back and render Ouyang Feng's attack useless.

"I'd better train internal strength; even if he wants to see it, he can't," Guo Jing thought. Immediately he ate the mutton leg clean then sat cross-legged on the ground; he recited the manual in his heart then started practicing according to the manual. Since mastering the 'yi jin duan gu pian' [changing muscle forging bone technique], his foundation was getting stronger; moreover, with what Reverend Yideng had taught him the Manual became like a second nature to him. This 'fei xu jin' for instance, in less than four hours he had learned how to use it.

With the corner of his eye he looked at Ouyang Feng, who was also sitting quietly, meditating. "Watch out!" Guo Jing called out. Without standing up his palm hacked down on the enemy.

Ouyang Feng parried the attack while sending out a counterattack. He wanted to repeat his earlier stance toward Guo Jing's side. But to his surprise his palm slid down Guo Jing's back, slanting to one side; because of his own strength he was slightly propelled forward. Taking that opportunity Guo Jing's left palm shot toward his neck.

Ouyang Feng was startled and pleased at the same time; he continued moving forward and thus had evaded the attack. He turned around and called out, "Good move! Was it from the Manual? What is it called?"

"Sha cha yi tui, ai mo qin er," Guo Jing said.

Ouyang Feng was startled, but then he remembered the weird sentences from the manual. He thought, "This dumb kid has a profound strength, but he is as hardheaded as a bull. I have to trick him since brute force will be useless." Changing his tactic he fought Guo Jing carefully.

Two people fought without ceasing. As soon as Guo Jing lost they would stop, then Guo Jing would train himself in new stances. Guo Jing slept soundly during the nights, but Ouyang Feng slept with trepidation; he was afraid Guo Jing might attack him in the middle of the night, or that he would try to escape in the dark.

They lived like that in the stone house for over a month, and had eaten almost half of the cattle and sheep in the village. Within this one month Guo Jing was forced to train his martial art, while Ouyang Feng tried hard to steal it. What Ouyang Feng had learned was already profound, but when he verified what he saw at Guo Jing, he realized there were many discrepancies; it was very difficult from him to link from one sentence to the next. The more he pondered, the more he did not understand; and he could not get anything from Guo Jing. In the meantime, within this month Guo Jing's martial art had unexpectedly advanced by leaps and bounds.

Ouyang Feng could not help but secretly anxious, "If we continue like this, before I understand the essence of the manual, I might not be this dumb kid's match."

The first several days Guo Jing was filled with hatred; after every fight he would be more determined than ever to score a victory, he wanted to master a fierce martial art to kill his enemy. However, he soon learned that this matter was extremely difficult. He was not discouraged nonetheless; his anger had decreased somewhat, but his firm resolution had actually increased.

One day he picked a steel sword from among the corpses lying around in the village; then trained hard on swordsmanship to fight Ouyang Feng's wooden staff.

Ouyang Feng's original snake staff fell and was lost in the ocean when he was fighting Hong Qigong on the boat. Afterwards he made another cast steel staff complete with new pair of strange snake; but it was also lost when he was trapped inside the ice block, destroyed by Lu Youjiao. Right now he was using an ordinary wooden staff, without any assistance from his strange snakes; but his staff technique was still out-of-this-world, with infinite variations. Several times the staff shook the sword in Guo Jing's hand and made it fly. If there were snakes on his staff, definitely Guo Jing would not be able to resist at all.

In the meantime they heard Genghis Khan's army returning to the east; the people and the horses were marching noisily, the noise did not stop for several days. But two people were engrossed in fighting each other violently, they did not pay the slightest attention to this. One evening the noise simply stopped, the army had all gone and nothing was heard except the quietness of the night.

Guo Jing raised his sword straight up, thinking, "Although I can't win over you tonight, your wooden staff won't shake my sword in any way." He was anxious to try the new stance he had just learned, but he waited calmly for the opponent to attack first. Suddenly from outside the house somebody was shouting loudly, "Traitor! Where are you running to?" Guo Jing was absolutely certain it was the Old Urchin Zhou Botong's voice.

Ouyang Feng and Guo Jing looked at each other in bewilderment, they both thought, "Why did he go thousands of miles to the west?" They wanted to say something, but heard footsteps came approaching; then two people, one after another, rushed toward the stone house. There were numerous other buildings in the village, but apparently they saw that firelight came from this house.

Ouyang Feng waved his left hand and with his internal strength extinguished the fire. By that time the front door was shoved open, somebody rushed in, with somebody else hot on his heels; the latter one was indeed Zhou Botong. Both men's footsteps were extraordinarily light and nimble; the man in the front's martial art certainly not below Zhou Botong's.

Ouyang Feng marveled greatly, "This man surprisingly able to escape the Old Urchin's hand. His skill is very rare among the experts of this generation. If it were Huang Yaoshi or Hong Qigong, the Old Poison won't be so surprised." Because of this thought he refrained from making any move.

They heard the man in the front jump vertically up and sat on the beam. Zhou Botong laughed, "The Old Urchin's favorite game is the hide-and-peek; I won't let you slip away anymore." In the darkness they heard him closing down the front door, and placed a nearby big rock behind it. He called out, "Stinky thief, where are you?" At the same time he groped around back and forth to find him.

Guo Jing was thinking of making some noise to tell him the enemy was on the beam, when suddenly Zhou Botong leaped high while laughing loudly, grabbing that man on the beam. Turned out he was aware from the start that his enemy was on the beam. He was deliberately groping around to the east and to the west to throw him off guard, then suddenly launched a sudden attack.

The man on the beam was not weak either; without waiting for Zhou's fingers to touch him he somersaulted and crouched by the north wall. Even though his mouth was babbling nonsense, but

Zhou Botong was actually very wary of this man. He stopped to listen to his exact location; did not dare to act rashly. In the quietness of the night he heard three distinct breathings. He had known from the start that this house must be occupied, since he saw the fire was extinguished. But since they did not make any sound, he thought they must be frightened; thereupon he called out, "Master of the house please don't be afraid, I am here to capture this little thief. Once I get him I will go out immediately."

He knew ordinary people's breathing was rough and heavy, while those with strong internal energy would breathe slowly and long, light and deep; with just a little attention they were very easy to distinguish. But when he cocked his ears to listen, the people toward his north, east and west were all breathing low and slowly.

Zhou Botong was greatly surprised, "Traitor," he called out, "You have prepared an ambush here!"

Guo Jing wanted to open his mouth to greet him, but changed his mind at the last minute; he thought, "Ouyang Feng is lurking on the side, the man Zhou Dage [Big Brother Zhou] is chasing is another powerful enemy. I'd better stay quiet and wait for a good opportunity to help him."

Zhou Botong moved step by step toward the front door while mumbling, "Looked like before the Old Urchin can capture the enemy, he would be captured by the enemy." He had made a decision to dash out the door if the situation was unfavorable. Right at that moment came a rumbling noise from a distance; hoof beats sounded like an evening tide came crashing the shore. It looked like a strong army with multitude of horses had arrived to kill.

Zhou Botong called out, "You have more and more helpers coming, the Old Urchin doesn't want to play anymore." While saying that he picked the rock stopping the door as if he was about to open the door and leave; but then suddenly he hurled the rock toward the man he chased. The rock was not light; Ouyang Feng placed that rock behind the door every night, so that if Guo Jing wanted to sneak out he would find out even when he was sleeping.

Ouyang Feng heard the wind carried a lot of strength in it, he thought that when the Old Urchin threw the stone, his right flank must have been defenseless; if he attacked him first, not only he would have one less enemy for the present time, but also during the second Sword Meet of Mount Hua he would have one less powerful contestant. Having this intention he bent his knee, slightly squatting, pushed both hands together to launch a 'Toad Stance' attack.

He was squatting on the west, therefore, his attack was toward the east, carrying a very strong energy. Guo Jing had fought him for dozens of days, he knew by heart Ouyang Feng's every action and every movement even though the room was pitch black. As soon as he heard the gust of wind, he knew Ouyang Feng was attacking Zhou Botong. Guo Jing stepped forward and launched the 'Proud Dragon Repents' to meet Ouyang Feng's 'Toad Stance' head-on.

In the meantime the man who was standing on the north also heard the big rock was flying his way; he bent his knees to get a stronger stand, and push both hands forward, creating a strong force striking the big rock.

Four people from four directions sending out four forces; even though they did not release their energy at exactly the same time, but the forces were actually not inferior one to another. The big

rock was struck by forces from east, south, west and north; it fell on the center of the room. 'Crash!' with a loud noise it broke the table to smithereens.

The sound was actually very loud; which Zhou Botong thought amusing. He could not restrain from bursting into loud laughter. But his laughter was drowned by the sound of thousands of cavalry soldiers entering the village. They could hear the warhorses neighing, the weapons clashing, and the soldiers shouting their battle cry.

Guo Jing listened to the officers' commands, and he found out they were the defeated army of Khoesm entering the village, perhaps trying to hold their ground in the village; but it sounded like the Mongolian army had pursued them. He heard the hoof beats, the sound of battle flag fluttered in the wind, the loud battle cry, as well as flying arrows near and far. It sounded like the armies were engaged in a close hand-to-hand combat. The four people in the house did not know for certain how many soldiers were fighting outside. Suddenly someone shoved the door open and came in. Zhou Botong grabbed that person and flung him back outside; then he lifted the rock and placed it back behind the door.

As Ouyang Feng's attack failed, he thought that he had been discovered anyway, so he called out, "Old Urchin, do you know who I am?"

Zhou Botong indistinctly heard someone speaking, but because of the noise he could not distinguish who the speaker was. He raised his left hand to guard against an attack while stretching his right hand to grab. Ouyang Feng easily neutralized this grab with his right hand, while slapping with the back of his left hand. Zhou Botong parried this attack, he was startled, "The Old Poison! You are here?" he called out. He swayed his body slightly, leaning to the left. At that very moment the man on the north took the opportunity to attack Zhou Botong's back.

Zhou Botong's right hand engaged Ouyang Feng, while his left fist parried the attack to his back. He was thinking of testing the mutual hands combat that he created on the Peach Blossom Island. Until that day Zhou Botong had not tested his special skill against two masters; so even though he was in danger, he could not let this good opportunity to pass. But suddenly Guo Jing from the east threw himself into the fight; his right hand parried Zhou Botong's fist, while his left hand engaged that person's attack.

Three people simultaneously called out in alarm; Zhou Botong shouted, "Guo Xiongdi [Brother Guo]," that person shouted, "Guo Jing," and Guo Jing himself cried out, "Qiu Qianren."

Zhou Botong was scared by the snakes at the martial art contest at the 'yan yu lou' [Misty Rain Tavern]; he saw no way to escape, so he laid down on top of the tavern's roof, using layers upon layers of split-bamboo sheets to cover up his body. Because his 'armor' was so thick no arrow could harm him, Ouyang Feng's vipers were also helpless to climb to the roof. When the morning fog was gone, the snakes, as well as the soldiers were also gone; so was everybody else, he did not know where they went. He was bored to death, so he just wandered around everywhere.

A few months later a Beggar Clan disciple delivered a letter to him; it was from Huang Rong. In the letter Huang Rong reminded him that he had promised no matter what Huang Rong asked, he would comply. Now Huang Rong wanted him to go kill the Clan Leader of the Iron Palm Clan, Qiu Qianren. She explained that Emperor Duan's Concubine Liu had a very deep enmity against this man; if he killed him, Concubine Liu would not look for him anymore. Otherwise, Concubine Liu

would find him even to the end of the earth, to take him as her husband. Huang Rong also gave him the detail of the Iron Palm Peak's exact location.

Zhou Botong thought that his promise 'to comply no matter what' was actually given to Huang Rong; but that old scoundrel Qiu Qianren colluded with the Jins, he was a traitor, so he felt it was appropriate to kill him. As for his own affair with Concubine Liu, he realized he had offended her deeply; she had a deep enmity against Qiu Qianren, so if he lent her a hand, she might not come and bother him anymore, and that would be an awfully good luck for him. Therefore, he decided to go to the Iron Palm Peak.

At first Qiu Qianren was able to match him stance for stance, but as soon as Zhou Botong used the mutual hands combat technique, Qiu Qianren was forced to withdraw. When martial art masters contended, as soon as one admit inferiority, then victory or defeat should be decided; who would have thought that Zhou Botong did not want to stop and kept chasing him. Qiu Qianren did ask him the reason behind it several times, but Zhou Botong only looked at him with a blank expression; could not tell him the real reason. He only said three characters 'liu gui fei' [Concubine Liu]; and that would be enough to take his head.

Two men fought and stop, one ran away the other chased; they went farther and farther away. Zhou Botong's martial art was slightly superior to Qiu Qianren's; yet it would not be easy for him to kill Qiu Qianren. Qiu Qianren had tried any means possible to get rid of him; but Zhou Botong doggedly chased him anywhere he went. He thought, "Would you still chase me if I go to the bitter cold west?" On the other hand Zhou Botong thought, "I want to see where you would go; then I'll go back home."

As soon as they arrive at the desert outside the great wall, the landscape was flat, it was easy to follow someone's trail; Qiu Qianren did not have any place to hide. Fortunately Zhou Botong had shown a good faith toward him; whenever Qiu Qianren needed to sleep or sat down to eat his meal, or perhaps he was having a bowel movement or urinating, Zhou Botong did not disturb him in any way; he simply did the same. But no matter what Qiu Qianren did, no matter how bad he cursed him, the Old Urchin haunted him like a ghost, continuously pestering him.

The more Zhou Botong fought Qiu Qianren, the more excited he became. Several times he did gain an upper hand, but unexpectedly he did not kill Qiu Qianren. That particular day, two men fought and ran and by a pure coincidence rushed into the stone building.

Now Zhou and Guo two people knew who the other three people were, but when the three of them called out each other's name, their voices were drown by the loud commotion outside; hence Ouyang Feng still did not know who the other person was. He only knew that person was Zhou Botong's enemy. On the other hand, Qiu Qianren thought the other two were on the same side.

Zhou, Qiu and Ouyang, all three people possessed outstanding martial art skills; but after battling Ouyang Feng for more than a month, Guo Jing's martial art level was also improving by leaps and bound, which enable him to keep pace with the other three. These four martial art masters were confined in a pitch-black, approximately two 'zhang's square room; they could not see a thing, could not hear each other, and could not talk to each other. It was as if they had turned into deaf, mute and blind people.

“If I block Ouyang Feng, then Zhou Dage can finish off Qiu Qianren. After that it won’t be too difficult for us two people to join forces to kill Ouyang Feng,” Guo Jing thought. Once he reached that decision, his hands started to move. His right hand hit an empty air, while his left palm met someone else’s hand.

On the Peach Blossom Island Guo Jing had fought Zhou Botong countless of times; therefore, as soon as his palm touched Zhou’s hand, he knew immediately it was his Zhou Dage, he retracted his palm quickly. Unexpectedly Zhou Botong’s childlike enthusiasm was aroused; he slightly shrank his left arm then sent out a right fist toward Guo Jing’s shoulder. This hit did not carry any strong internal energy, but since Guo Jing did not guard against it, he felt pain nonetheless.

“Hao Xiongdi [Good Brother], you want to test your Dage’s martial art? Be careful!” Zhou Botong said, his left palm shot out. Guo Jing could not hear what he said, but this time he was prepared; he wielded his arms and neutralized the attack.

By this time Ouyang Feng and Qiu Qianren had also exchanged several stances; as a result they recognized the opponent by his martial art. These two men did not have any enmity against each other, but they both thought that the Sword Meet of Mount Hua was coming. Potentially they were going to fight a life and death battle against each other anyway; therefore, why not try to inflict as much damage as possible to the opponent since they have the opportunity now? Hence they did not slack one bit.

After fighting for a moment they felt gusts of wind blowing behind them, to their surprise Zhou Botong was fighting Guo Jing. They were bewildered, but then they remembered Zhou Botong always handled matters differently, he was an unpredictable man; besides, it gave them a good opportunity, why wouldn’t they be happy? Thus without prior agreement they both attacked Zhou Botong and Guo Jing.

After exchanging more than a dozen moves with Guo Jing; Zhou Botong found out that Guo Jing’s martial art was far more advanced than what he had known, he was pleasantly surprised. “Xiongdi, where did you learn your martial art from?” he asked. But the noise outside was deafening, how could Guo Jing hear what he said? Zhou Botong was offended, “Fine, you don’t want to tell me. Do you think I care?” Right at that moment he felt a gust of wind on his face, Ouyang and Qiu’s attacks had arrived. Zhou Botong kicked the ground and leaped up to the beam. “I’ll let you fight these two alone!” he called out.

Ouyang Feng and Qiu Qianren felt the wind from Zhou Botong’s sleeves, they realized he had jumped to the beam; they had the same thought of joining forces and kill this dumb kid, suddenly Guo Jing had to face a converging attack from left and right.

Initially Guo Jing was surrounded by Zhou Botong’s attacks; he had tried four, five different techniques but was unable to free himself. He was waiting for Zhou Botong to withdraw when two powerful enemies attacked; which forced him to groan inwardly. He had no choice but braced himself and used the mutual hands combat technique to resist these two.

After fighting for a while Ouyang Feng and Qiu Qianren were unable to restrain their amazement. Knowing Guo Jing’s skill, either one of Ouyang Feng or Qiu Qianren should be able to defeat him easily. Who would have thought that after fighting two against one, Guo Jing’s left palm could

block Ouyang Feng's attacks, while his right fist thwarted Qiu's palms? Two people were helpless against one.

Zhou Botong was sitting on the beam; he had decided to get down, but was afraid Guo Jing might get hurt, so quietly he slid down the wall, stretching out both his hands arbitrarily, and by coincidence caught Ouyang Feng's back.

Ouyang Feng was squatting on the ground, ready to strike Guo Jing with his fierce Toad Stance; suddenly he felt somebody on his back, hastily he sent his palms backward. Guo Jing seized this opportunity to kick Qiu Qianren then leap to the corner of the house, gasping for breath. If Zhou Botong were one step late, he would be injured by Ouyang Feng's attack.

Four people in the pitch-black room clashed to each other then separated from each other. Sometimes Zhou Botong fought Qiu Qianren, sometimes Guo Jing fought Qiu Qianren, sometimes Ouyang Feng fought Qiu Qianren, sometimes Zhou Botong fought Ouyang Feng, and sometimes Guo Jing fought Zhou Botong. Four people engaged in this mixed-up fight, among them Zhou Botong was most excited; it was the most fun among all of his fights, of course he would not let this opportunity pass.

After fighting for a while an idea popped up in his head. "My two hands can be considered two people; Ouyang and Qiu are also two. See if you can fight four people at once. Have you ever tried this?" he asked Guo Jing.

Guo Jing did not hear what he said, but suddenly felt three people attack him at the same time; desperately he tried to block and evade. "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid," Zhou Botong encouraged him, "I will help you if you are in danger." But in this dark room, as soon as somebody sent out a fist or a kick, his life would be in grave danger; how could Zhou Botong have time to help?

A dozen or so stances later Guo Jing was already dead-tired; he felt Ouyang and Qiu, two people's fists were getting heavier and heavier, he was forced to step back one step after another. He wanted to jump up the beam to catch his breath, but Zhou Botong's palms did not give him any slack. He was both alarmed and angry, finally he lost his patience, "Zhou Dage, you silly old man, why do you bother me?" but his words were drowned by the commotion outside, nobody heard him.

Guo Jing withdrew several more steps, suddenly his feet knocked the big rock on the ground; he nearly tumbled down. Before he had any chance to straighten up his waist, Qiu Qianren's iron palm was ready to slap him down. In this dire situation Guo Jing did not lose his wit, swiftly he picked the big rock up and held it in front of his chest. Qiu Qianren's palm hit the rock. Guo Jing focused his strength on his arms and pushed the rock forward to meet the attack. Suddenly he felt gust of wind coming from his left; Ouyang Feng's palm had arrived. With a loud shout Guo Jing threw the big rock upward, while he jumped sideways to evade the attack.

The big rock flew through the roof; bricks and plasters fell down like rain. Immediately the stars in the sky above cast a dim light through the hole. Zhou Botong was angry, "Look what you did! Now we lost all the fun!"

Guo Jing was extremely exhausted; he kicked the ground and jumped out through the hole. Ouyang Feng hastily flew up to chase him. Zhou Botong shouted, "Don't go! Don't go! Stay here and play with me." He stretched out his hand to grab Ouyang Feng's left foot. Ouyang Feng was startled,

quickly his right foot kicked, forcing Zhou Botong's hand to let go; but as a result he could not jump and was forced to land back down.

Qiu Qianren did not wait for him to land, he sent out a kick toward Ouyang Feng's chest. Ouyang Feng slightly pulled his chest back while stretching out his arm to grab Qiu Qianren's ankle. Three people once again engaged in a fierce battle against each other. This time they could vaguely see each other's shadow; while the battle noise outside was also gradually diminishing. The thrill of the fight decreased substantially.

Zhou Botong was upset, he lost his interest; he vented his disappointment toward these two people. His fist technique changed abruptly, he fought the two people with murderous intention.

After escaping from the house via the roof, Guo Jing saw the troops and horses running around swiftly; he could also hear the sound of clashing weapons in a distance. Oftentimes he heard heart-rending groan and cry of soldiers wounded by blades or arrows. He dashed through these miserable people, running toward a small wood outside the village to lie down and take some rest.

He had fought fiercely for half a night, as he lay down, he felt his whole body, muscles and bones were aching, like they were going to crack. Recalling the fight inside that stone house, he shivered involuntarily. Although worried about Zhou Botong's safety, but with his martial art level he knew even if he came back there he would not be able to help Zhou escape. Finally he closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

Early morning the next day he felt his face was wet and cold, something was wiggling around on his face. Startled he opened his eyes and leaped up, only to listen to a happy neighing sound. Turned out it was his little red horse licking his face. Guo Jing was delighted, immediately he hugged the horse's neck; one man and one horse embraced in a joyful reunion.

When Guo Jing was held captive by Ouyang Feng, the red horse was let loose outside; it went grazing on the nearby prairie. During the fierce battle last night the horse utilized its swift legs to escape. When the soldiers were gone, the horse came back and found its master.

Guo Jing led the red horse returned to the village only to see broken bows and arrows everywhere, dead soldiers and horses scattered all around. Here and there he saw injured soldiers who were still alive, crying out pitifully. He had been in a lot of battles, he was accustomed to dead or wounded soldiers; but recalling his own life experience he could not refrain from feeling a great sorrow.

Quietly he returned to the stone building. Cocking his ears outside he tried to listen, but the house was quiet. He took a peek through a crack in the door and saw no one inside. He pushed the door open to see; but Zhou Botong, Ouyang Feng, and Qiu Qianren three people had already disappeared without a trace.

He stared blankly for half a day then mounted his horse heading east. The little red horse ran very fast, very soon they caught up with Genghis Khan's main army.

By this time Khoresm cities had either surrendered or been destroyed; hundreds of thousand warriors had fallen like broken tiles. Khoresm king, Muhammad, was a haughty tyrant; he was deserted by his friends and allies. He led the remnants of his defeated army desperately escape to the west. Genghis Khan assigned his senior generals, Subotai and Jebeh to lead twenty thousand soldiers to pursue to the west; while he led the main army went home to the east.

Subotai and Jebeh pursued to the west of modern day city of Moscow, to the city of Kiev nearby the bank of Dnieper River. They crushed several hundred thousands of Russia and Kipchak alliance army; destroyed the city of Kiev and killed the Hertog [Grand Duke] of Kiev along with eleven princes by running a chariot over them. This war was called 'The Battle of the Kalka River'. Since then the Russian prairie groaned under the Mongolian horses' hoofs.

Muhammad went as far west as he could, finally he escaped to a deserted island on the Caspian Sea and died of illness there.

When suddenly Guo Jing disappeared at Samarkhand, Genghis Khan was very worried. He was afraid that Guo Jing somehow got killed in the chaotic battle without anybody knowing it. Seeing him return safe and sound he was really thrilled. Needless to say, Princess Huazheng was even more overjoyed.

Qiu Chuji followed the main army went back to the east. Along the way he was always giving advice to the Great Khan to love the people more and kill innocent civilians less. Although Genghis Khan did not necessarily agree with his view, he realized the Priest spoke reasonably, hence he did not argue too much. In the chaotic battles that followed, Qiu Chuji had succeeded in saving innumerable civilians' lives.

Khoresm was located tens of thousands of 'li's from Mongolia; the return of Genghis Khan's army to the east took a very long time. As soon as they arrived back home, he held a big feast to celebrate their victory by the bank of Onon River; while giving the injured soldiers time to recuperate. Qiu Chuji and his disciples, along with Lu Youjiao and the rest of the Beggar Clan disciples took their leave and went back to the south.

Several months later Genghis Khan saw his warriors had eaten to their hearts' contents, their horses galloped freely on the prairie; his interest to attack the south was rekindled. One day he held a general assembly to discuss strategies to defeat the Jin country.

Ever since Huang Rong's death, Guo Jing was broken hearted; oftentimes he went riding alone with only his little red horse and his pair of eagles to keep him company, wandering the vast Mongolian prairie. Most of the time he would just stare blankly and not say anything for a few days. Princess Huazheng was always trying to speak warmly to him, but it seemed like he did not hear anything she said. Everybody knew his feelings, knew that he was grieving, so nobody dared to bring up the wedding plan; while Genghis Khan was busy preparing the expedition to the south and did not pay attention to this matter.

That day at the general assembly inside the Great Khan's Golden Tent, many generals proposed various tactics and strategies to attack the south; yet Guo Jing did not utter a single word.

After dismissing his generals, Genghis Khan went to the top of a small hill and stayed there for half a day, to think of the actions he would take. The next day he dispatched his army to attack the Jins from three directions. At that moment his eldest son Jochi and his second son Chagatai were still busy consolidating their conquests in the west; therefore, he put the main army to take the Jins down under his third son, Ogedei; while the left flank was placed under the command of his fourth son, Tuolei, and the right flank was placed under Guo Jing's command.

Genghis Khan summoned the three commander-in-chiefs privately; he even ordered his personal guards to leave the tent. To Ogedei, Tuolei and Guo Jing he said, “The Jins concentrate their defense in the city of Tongguan; the city is bordered on the south by a mountain and on the north by a river, it really is difficult to break. Numerous generals’ proposals all have some ground to them, but if we advance frontally, unavoidably we will waste a lot of time. Currently our Mongolia has formed an alliance with the Great Song; I think the best strategy would be advancing through the Song territory. From Tangzhou the army to proceed via Dengzhou straight to the Jin capital Daliang.”

As Ogedei, Tuolei and Guo Jing three people heard to this point, they jumped and hugged each other, loudly shouted, “Ingenious plan!”

Genghis Khan smiled and asked Guo Jing, “You are very good in battle strategy; truly a man after my own heart. Let me ask you, after attacking Daliang, then what?”

Guo Jing contemplated for a while then shook his head, “We are not attacking Daliang,” he said.

Ogedei and Tuolei clearly heard their father king said they were going to attack Daliang, why did Guo Jing say they were not going to? They were startled and looked at him with a questioning look. Genghis Khan still showed a faint smile on his face, “Not attacking Daliang, then what?” he asked.

“Not attacking is actually attacking; attack but do not attack, do not attack but attack,” Guo Jing said. He made Ogedei and Tuolei more confused than ever.

“Attack but do not attack, do not attack but attack [gong er bu gong, bu gong er gong],” Genghis Khan smiled, “These eight characters were very well said. Explain it to your two brothers.”

Guo Jing complied. “I can guess the Great Khan’s troops advancement method; we pretend to attack the Jin capital, destroying the enemy under the city wall. Daliang is where the Jin Emperor resides, but the troops stationed there are actually not too many. As soon as it is under attack, the Jins will immediately send troops from the neighboring city Tongguan to rescue. Chinese military strategist said, ‘A massive troops movement can’t be done in a day; traveling hundreds of ‘li’s is draining the energy and crippling the three generals. Strong at first, weary in the end. This is the eleventh method.’ By traveling fast for a hundred ‘li’s, the soldiers strength will be reduced to only 10% of their original strength. As they leave Tongguan and go to Daliang, the great distance is their biggest disadvantage; they should take ten rest stops, but can only take one instead. Even if they reach Daliang on time, they will be weary and unable to fight. Our troops simply have to wait for the exhausted enemy then we can easily destroy the Jin army. Once the strong Jin army is defeated, then Daliang will fall. If we concentrate on directly attacking Daliang, not only it will be difficult, but we can be attacked from both front and rear.”

Genghis Khan clapped his hands and laughed aloud, he called out, “Well said, well said!” He pulled a scroll out and spread it on the table. Three people looked at it and were greatly astonished. Turned out it was the map of Daliang and its neighboring area. On it were drawn routes of troop’s movement, both theirs and the enemy’s. It also contained strategies on how to attack the enemy’s rear flank, how to attack the enemy’s main body, how to lure and destroy the incoming enemies from Tongguan, how to make them weary and obliterate them outside the city wall; everything was just as Guo Jing had said.

Ogedei and Tuolei looked at their father king, also looked at Guo Jing with bewilderment and admiration on their face. Guo Jing's heart was also full of admiration, he thought, "I learned the military strategy from the 'Wumu Legacy', nothing strange about it; but the Great Khan is illiterate, he possesses a natural ability for this kind of things."

Genghis Khan continued, "In our expedition to the south this time, I am sure the Jins will be destroyed. I have here three embroidered pouches for each one of you. After Daliang falls, the three of you should gather inside the imperial palace of the Jin emperor; you can open them up and act accordingly." Upon saying that he took those embroidered pouches from his pocket and gave one to each of them.

As Guo Jing received the pouch, he saw that the mouth was sealed with wax and the seal carried the image of Genghis Khan's signet ring.

"Before entering Daliang, I forbid you to open the pouch without authorization," Genghis Khan said, "Before you open them, I want the three of you to examine each other's pouch to see if the seal is damaged."

The three of them bowed and said, "Who dare to defy The Great Khan's decree?"

Genghis Khan asked Guo Jing, "You are usually slow in dealing everyday affairs; but how come you are so resourceful in dealing with military strategy?" Guo Jin then told him how he studied the military strategy from the 'Wumu Legacy'. Genghis Khan asked him the life story of Yue Fei. Guo Jing told him how Yue Fei scored a big victory over the Jins at the 'zhu xian zhen' [vermillion immortal small town]; that the Jins gave him a nickname, 'Yue Yeye' [grandfather Yue]; that they had a saying, 'shaking a mountain is easy, shaking Yue's army is difficult'; Guo Jing recounted everything.

Genghis Khan was silent, carrying his hands behind his back he paced back and forth inside his tent; sighing, "I regret I was not born a hundred years earlier to befriend this great hero. In this world today, who can be my rival?" His words carried a great loneliness.

As he was leaving the Golden Tent, Guo Jing remembered that in the past several days he had been busy with military business and did not spend as much time with his mother as he should. Since the next day he was going south leading the troops to avenge his country, the Great Song, against its archenemy, the Jin; today he wanted to spend as much time with his mother as he could. Hence he immediately headed toward his mother's tent.

To his surprise, the tent was empty, all her clothes and other belongings were moved someplace else; only an old soldier stayed there on guard duty. He asked the soldier, and was told that the madam surnamed Li had received the Great Khan's order to move to another tent. Guo Jing asked where the new tent was, and quickly walked over. He was surprised to see the tent was several times bigger than the one she used to live in. He lifted the curtain to enter, and he was even more surprised; the tent was full of gold, jade, and precious jewels, as well as fancy clothes and embroidery works; they were all the spoils of Mongolian army's military expedition.

Princess Huazheng was sitting next to Li Ping, listening to her story about Guo Jing's childhood. As she saw Guo Jing enter, she smiled, stood up and greeted him.

"Ma [mother], where did all these things come from?" Guo Jing asked.

“The Great Khan says you have rendered a great service in the west; therefore, he bestowed all of these for you to enjoy,” Li Ping answered. “Actually, we are simple people and have no use of these extravagances.”

Guo Jing nodded, he also saw there were more than eight maids attending to his mother’s needs; they were also captives that the troops seized.

After making some idle talk with Guo Jing and his mother for a while, Huazheng took her leave. She thought Guo Jing would leave for another long journey the next day, so he must have had a lot to talk about with her today. Who would have thought that after waiting outside the tent for half a day Guo Jing did not come out. Li Ping understood, she said, “Jing’er, Princess is waiting for you outside, you need to say goodbye to her.”

Guo Jing replied in affirmative, but did not budge from his chair. Li Ping sighed, “We have lived in this northern country for twenty years. Although we have received the Great Khan’s benevolence like we are part of his family, but actually I miss my hometown very much. I hope you can defeat the Jin country soon, so that we, mother and son, will be able to return to our hometown. We can live in the Ox Village, where your father’s home used to be. I know you are not greedy of fame and fortune, so you don’t need to go back north. Only this business with the Princess, I don’t know how to deal with; it is a really difficult matter.”

“Your son had early on told the Princess, that if Rong’er died, your son will never marry for the rest of my life,” Guo Jing said.

Li Ping sighed, “Perhaps the Princess can accept that, but what worries me most is the Great Khan.”

“What about the Great Khan?” Guo Jing asked.

“These past few days the Great Khan all of a sudden treats us, mother and child, with an unusual kindness,” Li Ping answered, “He showered us with money, precious jewels, everything. He said it was your reward from the expedition to the west, but I have lived in this northern Mongolian desert for twenty years, I know the Great Khan’s personality. I feel like there is more to it than what meets the eye.”

“Ma,” Guo Jing said, “What do you think it is?”

“I am just a simple woman, how could I have a respected opinion?” Li Ping said, “But if my intuition is right, the Great Khan wants to compel us to do something for him.”

“Hmm, perhaps he wants me to marry the Princess,” Guo Jing guessed.

“Getting married is a good thing,” Li Ping answered, “Even if the Great Khan does not know your feeling, he does not need to compel you. The way I see it, you are commanding a big army to the south; maybe the Great Khan is afraid you will have a change of heart and rebel against him.”

Guo Jing shook his head, “I have no intention to gain riches and honor, and the Great Khan knew it. Why would I rebel against him?”

“I have an idea,” Li Ping said, “We will find out quietly what the Great Khan’s real intention is. Tell him that I miss my hometown very much, and want to go along to the south with you. Tell him that, see what he would say.”

Guo Jing was delighted, “Ma, why didn’t you say so earlier? We go home together, that will be wonderful! I am sure the Great Khan will give his permission.” He went out the tent and did not see Huazheng outside. He thought perhaps she had waited for a while and could not wait much longer.

Guo Jing was gone for half a day, and he came back dejected. “The Great Khan did not give us his permission, did he?” Li Ping asked.

“I don’t understand,” Guo Jing replied, “Why would the Great Khan want to keep you here?” Li Ping was silent. “The Great Khan said,” Guo Jing continued, “That as soon as the Jin country is defeated, he will let me take you home; we will return with all the glory and honor. Why would I want that? I said mother misses her home very much and wants to go home sooner. The Great Khan suddenly looked angry, he kept shaking his head, did not give us his permission.”

Li Ping hesitated. “What else did the Great Khan say to you today?” she asked.

Guo Jing told her everything that happened inside the Golden Tent earlier, how he received his assignment, including the secret order he received inside the embroidered pouch.

“Ay!” Li Ping sighed, “If only your Second Master and Rong’er were here, they should be able to shed some lights on this matter. It’s a pity I am only a simple country girl. The more I think about it, the more restless I became; I don’t know why.”

Guo Jing played with the embroidered pouch in his hand; he said, “When the Great Khan gave this embroidered pouch, his face looked unusual. I am afraid it has something to do with this secret order.”

Li Ping took the embroidered pouch from his hand; she looked at it carefully, then she dismissed all the maids and suddenly said, “Let’s open it up and take a look.”

Guo Jing was shocked, “No! Breaking the royal seal means death.”

Li Ping smiled, “Do you know that the embroidery work of the Lin’an prefecture is well-known throughout the world? Your mother is a Lin’an native, I have learned embroidery since my childhood. I can open up this pouch without damaging the seal, and I can sew it back on as good as new. Nobody will find out.”

Guo Jing was delighted. Li Ping fetched her needles and carefully undid the silk thread that was holding the embroidered pouch together. She took a folded paper through the seam and spread it out to take a look. As they read the paper, mother and son looked at each other; a chill crept up their bodies.

Turned out it was Genghis Khan’s secret order to Ogedei, Tuolei and Guo Jing; as soon as the Jin is defeated, they were to proceed south to Lin’an in the shortest time possible, to defeat the Song and unify it under the Great Mongolia. The secret order also said that if Guo Jing rendered a great merit, he was to be crowned the prince with all glory and honor belonging to that title; but if he harbored a

different mind, Ogedei and Tuolei were to behead him immediately, and his mother must also be executed.

Guo Jing stared blankly for half a day, finally he said, “Ma, if not for your skill in opening up this pouch, I don’t know if we, mother and child, could have kept our lives. I am a citizen of our Great Song, how could I sell my own country for personal gain?”

“What are we going to do?” Li Ping asked.

“Ma, I regret that you will have to suffer some hardship,” Guo Jing said, “We are running away to the south, tonight.”

“Absolutely,” Li Ping replied, “Go and make necessary preparation; don’t let anybody find out our plan.”

Guo Jing nodded; quickly returned to his own tent. He only took several changes of clothing. Other than his little red horse, he took eight horses, with the thought of his mother and he could rely on those horses to escape in case the Great Khan’s army pursued them. He left all the gold and precious jewels the Great Khan gave him, along with the tiger-head hilt golden blade, in the tent. He removed his general uniform and put on regular leather clothing. He grew up in the desert, today he was going to leave for good, never to return, he could not refrain from feeling sadness in his heart. He left the tent he considered to be home with a heavy heart. He saw the sky was getting darker, so quickly he went back to his mother’s tent.

Lifting the tent cover his heart skipped a beat. His mother was gone; only two bundles lying on the ground. “Ma!” he called out, but nobody answered. He felt something was terribly wrong; he was about to go out of the tent to look for his mother when suddenly the curtain was lifted up, a bright light from a torch dazzled his eyes. General Chilaun was standing outside the tent, calling out, “The Great Khan summons the Golden Blade Consort!” Chilaun was accompanied by a great number of soldiers, all wielding spears.

Seeing this situation Guo Jing was really anxious. If he relied on his martial art, Chilaun would not be able to do anything to him, but he remembered his mother, “Mother must be captured by the Great Khan, how I could escape alone?” he thought. Thus he followed Chilaun walking toward the Golden Tent.

He saw two-thousand of the Great Khan’s archers were arrayed in row after row outside the tent, all wielding long sabers or halberds. Chilaun said, “The Great Khan ordered me to bind you. Please forgive me for offending the Consort.” Guo Jing nodded, put his hands behind his back, then in big strides he entered the tent.

It was very bright, almost like a daytime, with dozens of butter candles burning inside the tent. Genghis Khan looked very angry, he slapped a table and shouted, “I have never treated you badly; I raised you up since you were little; I also gave my beloved daughter to be your wife. Little thief, you dare to rebel against me?”

Guo Jing saw the embroidered pouch and the letter inside it were lying on the table; he knew he would die soon. Boldly he answered, “I am the Great Song’s citizen. How can I obey your order to attack my own country?”

Hearing him boldly defying his words, Genghis Khan was enraged. “Take him out and execute him!” he shouted.

Guo Jing’s hands were tightly tied behind his back, while eight soldiers wielding sabers guarded him; he was unable to resist, he shouted loudly, “You made an alliance with the Great Song to defeat the Jins; halfway there you renounced your own promise, you failed to keep your word, what kind of hero is that?”

Genghis Khan was livid; his foot flew out and kicked the table upside down, shouted loudly, “After the Jin is defeated my alliance with the Song will be completed. If I attack the south, how can you say I break my promise? Quickly behead him!”

A lot of the generals were actually good to Guo Jing, but seeing their Great Khan was in fury, nobody dared to say anything. Guo Jing did not say another word. He walked out of the tent in big strides.

Suddenly from the prairie Toulei came rushing in, riding on a horseback, shouting loudly, “Hold your blade!” His upper body was naked, while only wearing a pair of leather pants on his lower body. It looked like he was asleep when the report came; hastily he came over to plead for Guo Jing. He rushed into the Golden Tent and said, “Father King, Guo Jing Anda has rendered a great service; he had saved your life as well as mine. Although he had committed a capital crime, you can’t behead him.”

Recalling Guo Jing’s merits Genghis Khan called out, “Bring him back!” The guards took him back into the tent.

Genghis Khan was silent for half a day; he finally said, “You are loyal to the Song; what good does it bring you? Once you told me the story of Yue Fei; he was utterly loyal, serving his country, yet in the end he was executed anyway. You help me conquering the Song Dynasty, today in front of all these people I give you my oath that I am going to make you the king of the Song, then you can unify your river and mountain [jiang shan – meaning country].”

“I have never dared to rebel against the Great Khan,” Guo Jing said, “But if you want me to sell my own country in exchange of my own riches and honor, then although a thousand blades and ten thousand arrows should pierce my body, I still cannot follow your order.”

“Bring his mother here!” Genghis Khan ordered. Two of his guards took Li Ping out from the back of the tent.

Guo Jing saw his mother, “Ma!” he called out trying to approach her, but the guards raised their blades to block. “This matter is only known to us, mother and son, who could have leaked our secret?” Guo Jing thought.

Genghis Khan said, “If you will obey my command, you and your mother will enjoy abundant riches and glory; if not, your mother will be executed, that means you bring your own mother’s death. You will become an unfilial son.”

Guo Jing was intimidated by his words, he was terror-stricken, and could only lower his head without knowing what to do.

“Anda,” Tuolei urged, “You grew up in Mongolia, you are no different than Mongolian people. The Song Dynasty is a corrupt government, colluding with the Jins in killing your father and forcing your mother to leave home. If not for my Father King’s benevolence, where would you be today? You and I are brothers who love each other so much; I cannot let you become an unfilial person. I do hope you will reconsider your decision; receive and obey the Great Khan’s command.”

Guo Jing looked at his mother, wanting to ask her opinion; but he recalled what his mother had taught him all this time he was growing up. He also remembered the pitiable condition of the people of the western countries Mongolia had conquered; how families were broken up and killed. It was truly a difficult dilemma he was facing.

Genghis Khan’s pair of tiger eyes stared at him, waiting for him to speak. The several hundreds people inside the Golden Tent held their breath; all eyes were trained toward Guo Jing.

“I . . .,” Guo Jing said, moved forward one step, but did not continue.

“Great Khan,” suddenly Li Ping opened her mouth, “I am afraid this child doesn’t understand this matter clearly; why don’t I try to give him some advice?”

Genghis Khan was delighted, he quickly agreed, “Very well, quickly advice him.”

Li Ping stepped forward, pulled Guo Jing’s arm, took him to a corner of the Golden Tent, then they sat down together. Li Ping embraced her son tight in her bosom, then gently said, “Twenty years ago at the Ox Village in Lin’an prefecture, I was expecting a child: you. It was snowing heavily that day, when Priest Qiu Chuji met your father. He presented a gift of two daggers; one he gave to your father, the other he gave to your Uncle Yang.” While saying that, she took the dagger from Guo Jing’s waist, and pointed to the two characters carved on the dagger’s hilt, ‘Guo Jing’. She said, “Qiu Daozhang gave the name ‘Guo Jing’ to you, and ‘Yang Kang’ to Uncle Yang’s child. Do you know the story behind those names?”

“Qiu Daozhang wanted us not to forget the disgrace of Jingkang,” Guo Jing answered.

“Right,” Li Ping said, “That Yang family kid regarded an enemy for a father, and as a result his body perished and his name disgraced. But it’s useless to talk about him. I just feel bad for your Uncle Yang; he was such a great hero, his own son has tarnished his illustrious name.” Sighing heavily she continued, “I have endured suffering and shame for many years; raising you in this bitter cold desert of the north, why did I do that? Would I raise someone who would sell his own country and become a traitor; so that your father in the underworld would be grieved and disgraced?”

“Ma!” Guo Jing almost shouted; tears flowing down his cheeks.

Li Ping was speaking in Chinese, Genghis Khan, Tuolei, and the other generals did not understand what she said, but they saw Guo Jing burst into tears; they thought Li Ping was afraid of death and she had succeeded in persuading her son, they were secretly pleased.

Li Ping continued, “Man can only live for a hundred years, it will pass in a flash; what’s the big deal about living or dying? As long as you live with an upright heart and keep your honor clean; then your life won’t be in vain. If other people treat us badly, we don’t need to repay their wickedness. Child, remember what I said!” She looked at Guo Jing intently for a long time; her face

looked very tender. Finally she said, “Child, you must take a good care of yourself!” While saying that she raised the dagger and cut the ropes binding Guo Jing’s hands; then straightaway turned the blade and thrust it into her own chest.

Guo Jing untied his hands, and rushed to snatch the dagger away, but he was too late. The dagger was extremely sharp, it had already entered her chest up to the hilt.

Genghis Khan was shocked, “Seize him!” he shouted. The eight guards did not dare to hurt the Consort; they threw their blades to the ground and pounced on Guo Jing.

Guo Jing’s heart was full of sorrow; while holding his mother tight, he swept his leg and two guards were sent flying and tumbling down to the ground. His left elbow shot backwards, and with a ‘crack’ sound hit a guard on the chest, breaking his ribs.

Several generals shouted and stepped forward. Guo Jing dashed toward the back of the tent. His left hand pulled the rope that held the tent taut, and half of the golden tent collapsed, falling on top of the officers’ heads.

Amidst the confusion he leaped up and out of the tent, still holding his mother tight. But the horn was sounded, officers and soldiers mounted their horses and pursued after him. Guo Jing was weeping and calling his mother, “Ma!” yet his mother did not answer; he felt for her breathing, but his mother had already died. Holding his mother’s corpse he tried to take advantage of the dark and break through the camp, but everywhere he heard people shouting and horses neighing; then torches were lighted up, illuminating the camp like millions of stars illuminating the dark night.

He was nervous not knowing which way he should go; everywhere he looked he saw Mongolian officers and soldiers. Even if he were supernaturally brave, but he was only one man; how could he face tens of thousands Mongolian army by himself? If he were riding on his little red horse, then he could outrun all these people, but he was on foot carrying his mother. It was a million times more difficult to escape from danger.

He stopped crying and without saying another word ran forward as fast as he could. He thought that as long as he could reach the cliff, he could use his lightness kungfu to climb the cliff. Although Mongolian soldiers were many, nobody could crawl up the cliff. Hence he might evade their chase momentarily and thought about ways to escape.

While rushing forward suddenly he heard shouts coming from the front, a cavalry was coming, under the torch light he saw they were led by a red-face, white-bearded general; it was one of the four warriors, senior general Chilaun. Guo Jing leaned sideways to evade Chilaun’s hacking saber. Instead of turning back to run away, he charged into the cavalry. The Mongolian soldiers were startled and shouted even louder.

Guo Jing stretched out his left hand, grabbing a ‘shi zhang fu’ [leader of a ten men unit] right leg; at the same time his right foot kicked the ground and he flew upwards. He landed on the horseback, put down his mother’s corpse on the horseback. Without too much trouble he threw the ‘shi zhang fu’ to the ground while simultaneously snatched his spear.

The jump to the horseback, putting down his mother, throwing the ‘shi zhang fu’ down, and snatching his spear; four actions were executed in one swift and fluid motion. On the horseback he became like a tiger grew a pair of wings; his legs squeezed the horse, and sweeping his spear he

charged through the cavalry. Chilaun shouted his order and his troops turned back to pursue Guo Jing.

He managed to escape from the enemy, but the direction his horse was running was actually opposite to the direction to the cliff; the more the horse ran, the farther they became. Should he run directly to the south, or should he try to reach the cliff?

While he was still contemplating which way to go, another senior general, Bourchu had arrived with his troops. This time Genghis Khan had flown into a rage; he passed an order to capture Guo Jing at all cost. Group by group the cavalries were dispatched; thousand of riders ran quickly to the south, trying to block all passages leading to the south. Guo Jing outran the group led by Bourchu; his clothes and his horse were full of blood.

It was a good thing that the Great Khan ordered them to capture Guo Jing alive; otherwise the Mongolian soldiers would assault him with arrows. With arrows coming from all three directions, even if Guo Jing were supernaturally brave, how could he escape this tight siege?

Guo Jing felt his mother's body in his hand turned colder and colder; he struggled hard to hold his tears, urging his horse to keep running south. He had left the pursuers far behind, but the day was getting brighter, soon it would be dawn; while he was still in the center of Mongolian territory; ten thousands 'li's away from the Central Plains. With only a horse and a spear, how could he escape to his hometown?

Riding for a while, he saw the dust was rising from the ground ahead of him; a group of cavalry was coming his way. Guo Jing held the rein and turned to the east. But his horse had been running for half a night, continuously supporting Guo Jing and his mother's body; suddenly its front legs gave up, it fell kneeling on the ground, unable to stand any longer. It was a very critical situation, yet Guo Jing still did not want to be separated from his mother's corpse. With his left arm holding her and his right arm wielding the spear, he charged into the incoming cavalry.

He saw the cavalry was getting very close; suddenly amidst the rising dust came a swishing noise, an arrow flew in and hit his spear. The arrow was very strong, Guo Jing's hand was shaken and the spearhead was broken. While he was still in shock, another arrow flew toward his chest. Guo Jing tossed the broken spear sideways and held out his hand in front of his body to catch the arrow. To his surprise, the arrowhead was already broken. He lifted his head only to see a general holding his rein and stopped in front of Guo Jing. It was the man who taught him archery; the Divine Archer Jebeh.

"Shifu!" Guo Jing called out, "Are you going to take me back?"

"Absolutely," Jebeh said.

Guo Jing thought, "In any way it will be difficult for me to escape this tight siege today. Rather than let others capture me, why don't I let Shifu have this merit?" Therefore, he said, "Very well, just let me bury my mother first."

Looking at four directions he saw toward his left a small mound. He carried his mother's body to that mound; dug the earth with his broken spear and lowered his mother gently into the hole. He saw the dagger in her chest, but he could not bear to take it out. He knelt on the ground and kowtowed several times before finally pouring the sandy soil on top of her body. He remembered

his mother's bitter suffering in raising him since he was a baby until he became an adult; and in the end he had to bury her just like this. He was overwhelmed with grief that he was unable to cry anymore.

Jebah dismounted his horse and kowtowed four times in front of Li Ping's grave. He stood up, then took his quiver, his bow, and his spear; and gave everything to Guo Jing. He also led his horse by the reins, and placed the reins in Guo Jing's hand, he said, "Go. I am afraid we are not going to see each other anymore."

Guo Jing was taken aback, "Shifu!" he called out.

"You dared to risk your life for me in the past; am I not a real man that I don't dare to risk my life for you?" Jebah said.

"Shifu, you are defying the Great Khan's order," Guo Jing said, "You will be in great danger."

"I have followed him attacking to the east and going to war in the west, my contribution is not small," Jebah said, "At most the Great Khan will beat me to half dead, he won't behead me. Just go, quick!"

Guo Jing was still hesitating; Jebah continued, "I am afraid my own troops would not want to listen to me, so I took the troops you led in the expedition to the west. Go ahead and asked them, whether they are greedy of riches and honor to turn you in?"

Leading his horse Guo Jing stepped forward; the cavalry dismounted their horses at once, and then knelt down on the ground, shouted, "Xiao Ren respectfully send General home to the south." Guo Jing raised his eyes to see, and they were indeed the officers and soldiers who faced death with him in the west. Guo Jing's heart was so moved. He said, "I have offended the Great Khan, deserving a capital punishment. You let me go; if the Great Khan finds out, all of you will be in big trouble."

The soldiers replied, "General has treated us with benevolence as high as the mountain; we won't forget that."

Guo Jing sighed. He raised his hands to say goodbye to the troops, then with the spear in his hand he leaped to the horseback. He was about to move when suddenly the dust rose ahead of him, another group of cavalry came approaching.

Jebah, Guo Jing, and the troops' expression changed. Jebah thought, "I have deliberately defied Khan's order by letting Guo Jing go; but if I fight these troops, that would be a blatant rebellion." Yet he did not change his mind, "Guo Jing, go!" he shouted. However, from the incoming army came a loud shout, "Don't hurt the Consort!" Everybody was stunned. They saw the rushing army bore the Fourth Prince's banner.

Amidst the rising cloud of dust Tuolei appeared and arrived in a flash; turned out he was riding Guo Jing's swift little red horse. He held his rein and jumped down from the horseback, anxiously asked, "Anda, are you all right?"

"I am fine," Guo Jing replied, "Master Jebah is going to take me back to see the Great Khan." He was deliberately protecting Jebah; so that the Great Khan would not find out the real story.

Toulei cast a sidelong glance toward Jebah, he said, “Anda, take this little red horse and leave quickly.” He also put a bundle on the saddle and continued, “Here is a thousand ‘liang’ of gold; we brothers will see each other again some other time.”

They were both great warriors; in time like this there was no need to say another word. Guo Jing stood up and mounted his little red horse. “Tell Huazheng Meizi [little sister – term of endearment] to take a good care of herself. Tell her to marry another man, just forget about me.”

Tuolei heaved a long sigh, “Huazheng Meizi will never agree to marry another. I think she is going to look for you in the south. At that time I will send somebody to escort her.”

“No, don’t come looking for me,” Guo Jing hastily said, “Not to mention the world is big, but even if she can find me, that will only add to our agony.”

Tuolei was silent; they looked at each other without saying anything. After half a day finally Tuolei said, “Just go, I will see you off for a while.”

Two people rode fast to the south; very soon they have covered more than thirty ‘li’s. “Anda,” Guo Jing said, ““Even if one sees someone off a thousand ‘li’s, in the end they must part’, you can go back now!”

“Let me see you off some more time,” Tuolei answered.

About ten more ‘li’s later, both men dismounted their horses and said their goodbyes; tears rolling down their cheeks.

Tuolei gazed at Guo Jing’s back, which became smaller and smaller; it looked like a dark shadow on the vastness of the desert, finally disappeared on the southern horizon. He stood motionless for a long time, then sadly mounted his horse and headed back north.

**End of Chapter 38.**

## Chapter 39 – Discerning Good From Evil

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*It was actually Mount Hua's most dangerous place, called the 'to give one's life cliff' [she shen ya]; whoever jumped from this place would certainly meet a cruel death. Huang Rong dashed forward to grab Guo Jing's clothes. Her hand pulled hard a she jumped over his shoulder and a moment later she was the one standing at the edge of the cliff.*

Guo Jing rode his horse for several days, leaving the dangerous area, slowly heading south. The day was getting warmer, the grass looked longer; along the way he saw the remnants of war: broken walls and ruined homes, human bones scattered here and there. The sights, the smell ... Everything brought a dreadful and nauseating feeling in his heart.

One day he stopped to take a rest in a pavilion by the roadside. He saw these inscriptions on the pavilion's wall, "A poem from a Tang Dynasty man: 'Water trickles downward day by day, ultimately overpowering the cry of chicken and dogs. Thousand villages fell to become food to the wild animals. The people vanished in smoke to give way to the flowers.' My Central Plains' beautiful river and mountain unexpectedly fallen victim to violent battles. People turned into ashes as if the above poem was written for today's situation."

Looking at these lines of characters Guo Jing was entranced, sadness came creeping into his heart and he could not refrain from shedding some tears.

He had roamed this vast and boundless world, but actually did not know where he should go. Within just one short year his mother, Huang Rong, his five masters, the people that were dear to him had all died. Ouyang Feng had killed his masters and Huang Rong; he was going to find him and seek revenge. But as soon as he thought about the words 'seek revenge', the tragic massacre of the people of Khoresm came into his mind. In order for him to avenge his father's death he had to kill so many innocent civilians, how could he have peace in his heart? It looked like this 'seeking revenge' matter was not necessarily a right thing to do.

Thinking about all other things, he came into this thought, "All my life I painstakingly trained myself in martial arts that finally I reached my current level, and then what? I can't even protect my own mother and Rong'er, then what use is my martial art skill? I wanted with all my heart to be a good person, but in the end who would be happy because of me? Mother, Rong'er, both died because of me. Huazheng Meizi has to suffer forever because of me. Truly the number of people who suffered miserably because of me is not a few."

"Wanyan Honglie and Muhammad were bad people. But what about Genghis Khan? He killed Wanyan Honglie; so I should say he is a good person. But then he ordered me to attack the Great Song. He took care of my mother and me for twenty years, but in the end he had caused my mother's death."

"Yang Kang and I became sworn brothers, but our hearts were a world apart from the start. Sister Mu Nianci is a good person, but why did her heart set on loving only Yang Kang? Tuolei Anda and I love each other, but when he leads the army attacking south and we meet each other on the battlefield, should he and I kill each other? No, no. Everybody has a mother, a mother who carries him for ten months, who painstakingly nurture and raise him up; how could I kill somebody's son and cause his mother to weep bitterly? He doesn't have a heart to kill me; I don't have a heart to kill him. However, shall I ignore the fact that he kills my Great Song's innocent people?"

"Training martial art is for beating and killing people, it looks like I spent twenty years of my life incorrectly; I studied and learned diligently, painstakingly; in the end all I can do is bringing harm to other people. If I knew it from the start, I wouldn't train to have a better skill in martial art. But if I don't learn martial art, then what should I do? I live in this world, in the end, what is my purpose of life? Decades from now, what will happen to me? Is it better to live longer, or to die sooner? Right now I have already had endless anxiety, if I live longer, won't I have more anxiety? But if I

die sooner, why would my mother give birth to me? Why would she endure hardship and suffering to raise me up?" Tossing and turning with these thoughts, the more he thought, the more confused he became.

For several days he could not eat during the day, and could not sleep during the night; he went back and forth in the wilderness pondering all these things.

"Mother and my benevolent masters all taught me to uphold justice and keep my words. Therefore, although I loved Rong'er dearly I could not ask the Great Khan to cancel our betrothal. But in the end, not only I drove mother and Rong'er to their injustice death, but did I make the Great Khan, Tuolei, and Huazheng happy? The Seven Heroes of Jiangnan, my seven masters, and benevolent master Hong, are all heroic people of honor, yet none of them ended up enjoying the fruit of their good deeds. Ouyang Feng and Qiu Qianren do not uphold justice and righteousness, yet they live free and unrestrained. Is there any justice in this world? Can 'lao tian ye' [the Heaven, God] really see?"

One day he arrived at a small town in Jinan prefecture, Shandong province. He stopped by a restaurant to drink some wine. He had just drunk three cups when suddenly a man rushed in, pointed his finger to Guo Jing and cursed him, "Barbarian thief, you have destroyed my home and killed my family; I must kill you!" While saying that his fist flew toward Guo Jing's face.

Guo Jing was startled, he turned his left hand around and caught his hand, gently twisted it; and the man fell tumbling down. Apparently that man did not know martial art at all. Guo Jing did not have any intention to harm him; he felt really bad that he had caused that man to fall down and bleed from his head. Hastily he held out his hand to raise that man up, saying, "Brother, you must have mistaken me for others!"

That man was bawling and kept cursing him, "Barbarian thief!" Dozens more men came from outside and start kicking and hitting Guo Jing for no reason at all. After pondering about the dire consequences of using martial art, Guo Jing had made a decision not to harm others using his martial art skill. Besides, these people were neither known to him nor did they know any martial arts; they were attacking him randomly. Hence he only evaded to the east and dodged to the west, but did not fight back at all. However, there were more and more people coming in from outside; the restaurant was small, so against his will Guo Jing had to taste some fists and kicks nonetheless.

He was about to use his strength to shove his way out of the restaurant when suddenly somebody loudly called from outside, "Jing'er! What are you doing here?"

Guo Jing raised his head up and saw the person calling was wearing a Taoist robe, with a long white beard; it was none other than the Changchun Zi [Eternal Spring] Qiu Chuji. Guo Jing was delighted, "Qiu Daozhang [Taoist Priest Qiu]," he called, "These people are hitting me for no reason at all."

Qiu Chuji pushed his arms out and opened up a way for Guo Jing to escape; he pulled Guo Jing out of the restaurant. The people rushed out to attack them, but Qiu and Guo, two people faced them while moving backward step by step. Once outside Guo Jing whistled to call his red horse and not too long afterwards two people riding on one horse sped out of the town and disappeared into the wilderness.

Guo Jing again told about how those town people without any reason pounced on him and beat him. Qiu Chuji smiled, “You are dressed as a Mongolian; they thought you are a Barbarian Mongolian.” Then he proceeded by telling Guo Jing how the Mongolians and the Jins had violent battles in the Shandong province. The local people had been under the Jin’s oppression for a long time, they raised arm to help the Mongolians. Who would have thought that the Mongolian’s officers and soldiers were as oppressive and tyrannical as the Jins were; they destroyed, they killed, they took captive and they plundered; they made the lives of the common people miserable beyond description. When a Mongolian army was passing through, the people did not dare to do anything, but if there was a lone Mongolian officer or soldier left behind, usually he would be killed by the people.

“Why did you let them beat you?” Qiu Chuji asked, “Just look at you, bruised and swollen all over.”

Guo Jing heaved a deep sigh and then told him how Genghis Khan had issued a secret order to him to attack the south, and how his mother had died because of it. He told Priest Qiu everything.

Qiu Chuji was shocked, “If Genghis Khan is going to attack our Great Song, then we must go south immediately to inform the government to guard against this invasion,” he said.

Guo Jing shook his head, “What good will that bring? The result would be corpses of officers and soldiers from both sides piling up as high as a mountain; innocent people’s families being broken and killed.”

“But if the Song perishes under the Mongolia, the common people will suffer even more,” Qiu Chuji said, “An endless hardship!”

“Qiu Daozhang,” Guo Jing said, “There are so many things I am not able to think through; I want to ask you to give me directions.”

Qiu Chuji pulled his hand, led him to a big locust tree and took him sitting underneath it. “Speak to me!” he said.

Guo Jing immediately poured out what had been troubling his heart these past few days; how he felt that his skill in martial art only brought harm to other people. Finally he sighed and said, “Therefore, disciple has decided not to fight with anybody for the rest of my life. I wish I could forget everything I know about martial arts, only an old habit will always come back. I was careless today, and made someone bleed from his head.”

Qiu Chuji shook his head, “Jing’er, your thinking is incorrect,” he said, “Dozens of years ago, the Wulin world secret manual, the Nine Yin Manual, appeared for the first time. I don’t know how many warriors of the Jianghu had died from fighting over this book. Afterwards at the Sword Meet of Huashan [Mount Hua] my master Chongyang Zhenren [Sage, lit. true/real man, a respectful term to address a Taoist priest] had defeated everybody and took possession of the manual. Initially he intended to destroy the book, but later on he said, ‘Water can carry the boat, but can also capsize it; be it fortune or calamity, in the end it depends on the person who uses it.’ In the end he decided to preserve the manual. Every talent in the world, whether it is ‘wen’ [literature] or ‘wu’ [martial art]; a strong army or a sophisticated device, not a single one of them does not benefit mankind; but the opposite is also true, every single one of them has the potential to bring calamity to the world. As

long as you have a good heart, the stronger your martial art, the better it is for you. Why would you want to forget it?"

Guo Jing hesitated for a moment before saying, "What Daozhang said was not wrong, but among the current Jianghu heroes; the Eastern Heretic, the Western Poison, the Southern Emperor and the Northern Beggar have the strongest martial arts. Disciple has been thinking carefully; to reach the martial art level of these four experts one must undergoes difficulties, to the point of almost impossible, hardship and suffering. Yet even if one is able to endure all that, what good would that be for people other than oneself?"

Qiu Chuji was silent for a moment before answering, "Huang Yaoshi is an eccentric man; although outwardly he shows anger to the world and detests mundane affair, but in his heart there is an unspeakable bitterness. He acts as he pleases, he does not have any consideration toward other people. I won't take him as an example. Ouyang Feng does all kinds of evil; we don't need to talk about him. Emperor Duan is compassionate and benevolent; if he stayed on the throne he would be able to benefit the common people. It's a pity that because of personal resentment over a tiny, tiny affair he withdrew from society and lives in seclusion; he can't be regarded as great man with great courage. Only Hong Qigong, Hong Bangzhu [Clan Leader Hong] is left who is a great hero to uphold justice; always helping those in distress. He has my full admiration. The second Sword Meet of Mount Hua is right around the corner; I think there might be someone who can exceed Hong Bangzhu in term of martial art. But I believe the people will elect him as the Number One in the Wulin World."

Hearing the four characters 'Sword Meet of Mount Hua', Guo Jing's heart shivered. "Is my benevolent master completely healed from his injury? Do you think the Senior is going to attend the meeting at Mount Hua?" he asked.

"After returning from the west, I have never seen Hong Bangzhu," Qiu Chuji said, "But whether he will take part in the Sword Meet or not, I think he will go to Mount Hua. Actually, I am passing through this place on my way over there; why don't you come with me to take a look?"

These past several days Guo Jing was very downhearted; he lost interest in, and loathed all kinds of, fighting. He shook his head and said, "Disciple is not coming, please forgive me."

"Where are you going?" Qiu Chuji asked.

Guo Jing awkwardly said, "Disciple does not know; I'll go wherever my feet lead me!"

Qiu Chuji could see that his face had lost its color, he looked so ghastly; like someone who was just recovered from a severe illness. Qiu Chuji was very concerned, but no matter how he persuaded, Guo Jing simply shook his head and did not say anything. Qiu Chuji thought, "He would normally listen to Hong Bangzhu; if he goes to Mount Hua, then master and disciple will see each other, his spirit might be aroused and be back to his old kind self. But how can I convince him to go?" All of a sudden a thought came into his mind, "Jing'er," he said, "If you really want to forget the martial art you have already learned, I think I might have a way."

"Really?" Guo Jing said.

"I know someone who had accidentally learned the Nine Yin Manual's excellent martial arts," Qiu Chuji said, "But later on he realized that he had broken his own promise, he had betrayed something

entrusted to him; in the end he strived to forget the skills he had learned. If you really want to follow his example, you must talk to him.”

Guo Jing jumped up immediately. “Right!” he exclaimed, “It’s Zhou Botong, Zhou Dage [big brother Zhou]!” But suddenly he remembered that Zhou Botong was Qiu Chuji’s martial uncle, while he casually called him big brother; he felt he was usurping Qiu Chuji’s seniority by one generation. He could not restrain from feeling really awkward.

Qiu Chuji simply smiled slightly, he said, “Zhou Shishu [Martial Uncle Zhou] has never had any regard of anybody’s seniority; you can call him whatever you like, I don’t mind a bit.”

“Where is he?” Guo Jing asked.

“I am sure Zhou Shishu will not miss the meeting at Mount Hua,” Qiu Chuji replied.

“Very well,” Guo Jing said, “In that case I will come with Daozhang to Mount Hua.”

Two men traveled together to the nearest town ahead then Guo Jing took out some silvers and bought a steed for Qiu Chuji to ride. They went riding to the west, and in less than one day arrived at the foot of Mount Hua.

This Mount Hua was one of the five mountains called the Western Mountains; people of the ancient time equate these five mountains with five scriptures. They said Mount Hua was like ‘chun qiu’ [spring and autumn period – 770-476 BC], possessed the same lethality as the Wei kingdom. Among the mountains in the world, the ruggedness of Mount Hua was matchless.

Two men arrived at the ‘shan sun ting’ [mountain grass pavilion] at the southern entrance of Mount Hua. Next to this pavilion they saw twelve big dragon rattans, so called because their trunks and branches intertwined each other resembled flying dragons.

Looking at these ancient twelve rattans with their branches rising up to the sky, suddenly the ‘fei long zai tian’ [dragon flies to the sky] came into Guo Jing’s mind. Following the Nine Yin Manual principles, these twelve rattans formed different stances of the dragon postures, creating twelve grand stances where the move might be executed. From being lost in thought, suddenly he woke up with a start, “I was hoping I could forget the martial art I already learned, how I could think about creating a new move to defeat and to kill others? I have fallen too deep, truly I am incorrigible.”

Suddenly Qiu Chuji voice was heard, “Mount Hua is our Taoist holy mountain; these twelve dragon rattans were supposedly planted by ‘chen tuan lao zu’, [ancestor Chen Tuan].

“Chen tuan lao zu?” Guo Jing asked, “Was he the deity who slept for many years without waking up?”

“Chen tuan lao zu was born toward the latter part of the Tang Dynasty,” Qiu Chuji explained, “During the Five Dynasties period: Liang, Tang, Jin, Han, Zhou, every time he heard the kingdom changed ruler, he was always worried and not happy; so he closed his door and refused to come out. Hence the people said he was sleeping for many years. Actually he was just troubled by the world’s anxiety, that the common people always suffered hardships; that’s why he was not willing to go out. Finally he heard ‘Song Dai Zu’ [the great ancestor of Song Dynasty] rose up to the throne; he laughed heartily and in his happiness he fell from the donkey’s back, saying that the world

henceforth would be peaceful. Song Dai Zu was kind and had a deep affection toward the common people; his contribution was truly not a few.”

“If Chen tuan lao zu were born today, he would unavoidably close his door and sleep for exhausting years and tiring months,” Guo Jing commented.

Qiu Chuji heaved a deep sigh and said, “Mongolians rule in the north, deliberately will invade the south. It’s a pity the Song Dynasty’s princes and ministers are muddle-headed idiots; they have eyes but cannot see the problem we are facing. But we are real men, although we realize we are helpless, still we need to fight. Even though Chen tuan lao zu was an honorable person, he hid himself whenever the world was in trouble; that was a bad example of chivalry.”

Guo Jing silently agreed.

Two men had to leave their steeds at the foot of the mountain. They continued on foot; slowly climbing through the ‘tao hua ping’ [peach blossom plain], crossing the ‘xi yi xia’ [lit. rare barbarian box, I don’t know what it is], climbing ‘sha meng ping’ [grassy dream plain]. The further they went, the more dangerous the terrain became. After reaching ‘xi xuan men’ [western mysterious gate] they had to ascend holding on to an iron chain. Utilizing their lightness kungfu, two men climbed up rapidly. After about seven ‘li’s, they reached the ‘qing ping’ [green plain]. Beyond this plain they saw a row of rocks that looked like they were truncated. Toward the north of this wall there was a big rock blocking the pathway.

“This rock is called ‘hui xin shi’ [lit. turn-around heart stone],” Qiu Chuji said, “Beyond this stone the pathway is getting more rugged and dangerous than ever. Casual travelers are advised to turn back here.”

In the distant they saw a small stone pavilion. “That is the ‘du qi ting’ [gambling chess pavilion],” Qiu Chuji explained, “Legend has it that the Song Emperor, Song Dai Zu made a bet playing chess with Mister Xi Yi [the same ‘xi yi’ as in the paragraph above]. The Mount Hua was the stake. The Emperor lost, and ever since the Mount Hua territory is exempt from paying tribute.”

Guo Jing said, “Genghis Khan, the Khoresm King, the Great Jin Emperor, the Great Song Emperor; seemed like they are all gambling with this world as the stake.”

Qiu Chuji nodded. “Absolutely,” he said, “Jing’er, looks to me like you have done a lot of thinking lately. I can see the difference; you are no longer your muddle-headed-dumb-kid previous self.” Then he continued, “These emperors and generals view the world as their gambling stake; if they lose, not only they will lose the ‘jiang shan’ [lit. river and mountain – country/homeland], they will also lose their lives, as well as making the world a living hell for common people.”

Crossing the ‘qian chi xia’ [thousand-foot gorge], the ‘bai chi xia’ [hundred-foot gorge], they had to walk sideways. Guo Jing thought, “It will be very difficult to ward off if suddenly an enemy attack in this place.” He was just having this thought when suddenly someone shouted from ahead of them, “Qiu Chuji, we spared your life at the Misty Rain Tavern [yan yu lou]; what are you doing climbing Mount Hua?”

Qiu Chuji hastily rushed ahead several steps until he reached a small cavity on the side of the cliff before he raised his head to see Sha Tongtian, Peng Lianhu, Lingzhi Shangren [lit. upper/above

man, a respectful term to address Buddhist monk], and Hou Tonghai, four people standing at the end of the pathway.

When he climbed the mountain, Qiu Chuji had expected at some point to see Ouyang Feng, Qiu Qianren and other archenemies; he thought Zhou Botong, Hong Qigong, Guo Jing and the others would meet their match. But he had never expected that Sha Tongtian and the others had the guts to climb this mountain. Although he was standing on an open space, the terrain was extremely dangerous. If he was crowded by the enemy, chances are he would fall into the tens of thousands 'zhang's deep canyon below.

In this critical time he did not have time to think, with a 'shua' sound he pulled his sword and with 'bai hong jing tian' [bright rainbow across the sky] he ferociously attacked Hou Tonghai. Among these four enemies, Hou Tonghai was the weakest, but he was also the closest; Qiu Chuji's sword stance was precisely aimed to the weakest point of the enemy.

Hou Tonghai saw the sword was swift and fierce, he had no alternative, he leaned sideways to evade and lifted up his three-prong fork to block the sword. Peng Lianhu's judge pen and Lingzhi Shangren's copper cymbals made a converging attack with the intention of forcing Qiu Chuji to fall into the ravine below.

As Qiu Chuji's sword made contact with Hou Tonghai's three-prong fork, he transferred his energy to the tip of the sword and borrowing the strength, his body soared above Hou Tonghai's head. Sparks flew everywhere as Peng Lianhu and Lingzhi Shangren's weapon hit a rock.

Sha Tongtian had lost an arm at the Temple of the Iron Spear; by this time his wound was completely healed. Seeing his 'shi di' [younger martial brother] fail to block the enemy, he executed the 'yi xing huan wei' [altering shape changing position] technique right in front of Qiu Chuji to prevent him from running away. Qiu Chuji's sword moved swiftly; Sha Tongtian only saw bright lights flashing around him, aiming his vital points. Sha Tongtian was dazzled and unable to fend off the sword; he was forced to move back several steps, giving Qiu Chuji an opportunity to dash forward.

Sha and Peng shouted loudly and pursued him. Qiu Chuji turned his sword around and launched several stances. At that moment Lingzhi Shangren arrived sweeping his cymbals. Three different types of weapons clashed.

Seeing Qiu Chuji's precarious condition Guo Jing should have gone forward and help, but he felt that people who resort to violence were very bad. He loathed watching both sides fought violently; turning his head, unwilling to watch, he continued his journey, holding on to a rattan branch. Unexpectedly the path was sloping down.

While strolling leisurely two thoughts were waging war inside his mind, "Shall I help Qiu Daozhang? Or shall I stick to my commitment of not fighting anybody anymore?" The more he thought, the more confused he became. He considered, "If Qiu Daozhang is killed by Peng Lianhu and the others, how can I not blame myself? But if I did help and struck Peng Lianhu and the others that they fell into the ravine below, do they really deserve to die?"

He walked farther and farther away until he could not hear the clashing sound of the weapons anymore. He sat leaning on a rock, deep in thought. After a long time suddenly he heard a noise

from behind the pine tree next to him, and a man appeared. Guo Jing turned around to see that man had white hair, but ruddy face; turned out it was 'shen xian lao guai' [ginseng immortal old freak] Liang Ziweng. But Guo Jing ignored him; he still sat quietly lost in thought.

Liang Ziweng was startled, he knew Guo Jing's martial art had advanced greatly; early on he was not Guo Jing match anymore. Immediately he shrunk back behind the tree. A moment later he saw Guo Jing did not pursue, he also saw that Guo Jing looked to be absentminded, his eyebrows creased on a distressed face; he was mumbling indistinctly, like he was possessed by some kind of evil spirit. Liang Ziweng thought, "Today this kid looks so weird. Let me try provoking him." He did not dare to approach; he picked up a pebble and threw it toward Guo Jing's back.

Guo Jing heard the wind, but he simply leaned sideways to evade, and still did not pay any attention to Liang Ziweng. Liang Ziweng became bolder; he came out from behind the tree, came several steps closer, and called out in a soft voice, "Guo Jing, what are you doing here?"

"I am thinking," Guo Jing replied, "If I use martial art to fight someone, do I have a good reason for it?"

Liang Ziweng was stupefied and delighted at the same time, he thought, "This dumb kid has become crazier." He approached several steps closer and said, "Hurting people is a very bad thing, of course you don't have any reason to do it."

"You think so?" Guo Jing said, "I really hope I can forget all the martial arts I've learned."

Liang Ziweng saw Guo Jing's eyes were gazing into the horizon with a blank look on his face; slowly he came from behind Guo Jing's back. "I am also in the process of forgetting my own martial art, how about I lend you a helping hand to forget yours?" he softly asked.

"Fine," Guo Jing said, "What should I do?"

"Hmm, I have an idea," Liang Ziweng said. Both of his hands made a sudden movement and expertly grabbed two major acupoints: 'tian zhu' [sky pillar] on Guo Jing's neck and 'shen tang' [divine hall] on his back.

Guo Jing was shocked, he felt his whole body went numb and he could not move. With a wicked grin on his face Liang Ziweng said, "Let me suck the blood out of your body, then you will forget using your martial art ever again." Opening his mouth wide he bit into Guo Jing's throat and sucked with all his might. He remembered how this dumb kid had sucked the valuable blood of the viper he laboriously raised so this dumb kid's martial art had improved tremendously while his own did not make any progress; by sucking Guo Jing's blood he hoped he would gain some benefit while venting off his anger at the same time. Actually, it had been a long time since Guo Jing drank the viper's blood, that the effectiveness of the blood had long gone; but in his deep resentment he ignored that fact completely.

This sudden turn of event shocked Guo Jing; he felt a severe pain on his neck that he was seeing stars in his eyes. Hastily he tried to struggle free, but his two major acupoints were sealed by enemy, his whole body unexpectedly did not have the least bit of strength. He saw Liang Ziweng's pair of eyes was red, his face looked so scary; Guo Jing felt his bite was getting harder and harder. It felt like his throat was about to be cut, then his life would left him for sure.

In desperation he did not have time to think whether it was appropriate to use martial art to resist the enemy or not; immediately he used the 'yi jin duan gu pian' [changing muscle forging bone] to send out internal energy from his 'dan tian' toward the 'tian zhu' and 'shen tang' acupoints.

Both of Liang Ziweng's hands were holding Guo Jing extremely tight when suddenly he felt a surge of energy bursting out from within his victim's body through the two major acupoints, his hands shook and they could not help but slip. Guo Jing lowered his head and shrank his shoulder, and then using his waist's strength he struggled up. As a result Liang Ziweng's body was lifted up and flung away. With a hair-rising shriek he fell into the tens of thousands 'zhang's deep canyon below.

His scream reverberated on the canyon walls, creating a series of terrifying echoes seemingly coming from everywhere. Guo Jing was horrified; the hair behind his back rose up involuntarily. He was in a daze for half a day before he gradually calmed down. Absent-mindedly he caressed his injured neck and only then he remembered that he had accidentally killed a man using his martial art. But he thought, "If I did not kill him, he would kill me. If I don't have any reason to kill him, did he have any reason to kill me?" He stretched his neck trying to see into the valley below, but the canyon was so deep that he could not even see the bottom; did not know where Shen Xian Lao Guai's body could be.

Guo Jing sat on a rock. Tearing a piece of cloth from his robe he wrapped the wound on his neck. Suddenly he was startled by a 'bonk, bonk, bonk' noise; it sounded like a monster was coming out from behind the cliff. He was frightened; he turned his gaze to look, turned out it was a human. But this man stood with his head on the bottom and his feet on the top; with a stone in each hand. He used those hands in place of his feet, and those 'bonk, bonk, bonk' noise was actually the sound of the stones knocking the mountain's stony pathway. Guo Jing was stunned; he squatted down to take a good look at that man's face, and he was even more surprised. That weird man was actually the Western Poison, Ouyang Feng.

Guo Jing had just received a surprise attack; seeing Ouyang Feng in this weird position he believed he was up to no good. Guo Jing retreated two steps, fully alert to guard against any potential attack. But Ouyang Feng only bent his arms and jumped on top of a big rock; standing upside down using his head as his feet, his arms stretched wide, resembled a stiff corpse.

Guo Jing's curiosity was piqued, "Mr. Ouyang, what are you doing?" he called out.

Ouyang Feng did not answer; seemed like his mind was someplace else and he did not even hear his question.

Guo Jing withdrew several more steps to make more distance between them. He raised his left hand in front of his chest to guard against Ouyang Feng's sudden attack; only then did he pay close attention of what Ouyang Feng was doing.

For about the time needed to drink a cup of tea Ouyang Feng stood upside down motionless. Guo Jing was more curious than ever; he wanted to see more clearly, so he stooped down and looked through his legs to see Ouyang Feng's face was sweating profusely; he looked in pain, like he was cultivating some strange internal energy. A moment later he stretched his arm horizontally, his body started spinning like a big top, turning faster and faster until his clothes created a strong gust of wind.

“He really is practicing martial art,” Guo Jing thought, “But this kind of martial art that requires upside down position is so strange.” Further he thought that a person who practice internal energy cultivation was usually vulnerable, probably because while circulating the energy within, the body itself devoid of any defense against outside circumstances. That was the reason usually somebody, be it his master or a friend with high level of martial art skill, would stay alongside to protect that person. Moreover, they would usually find a secluded place to avoid mishap. But strangely Ouyang Feng was practicing alone without anybody to accompany him; seemingly oblivious to outside interference. It was almost time for the second Sword Meet of Mount Hua; there would be many martial art experts in attendance, with more enemies than friends to Ouyang Feng; how could he be so bold as to practice martial art alone in this place? At this time, not to mention an expert in martial art, if even an ordinary person without any martial art skill would hit or kick him, he would certainly suffer a severe internal injury.

In Guo Jing’s eyes Ouyang Feng was like a sacrificial animal on the table, ready to be butchered. If Guo Jing did not seek revenge now, what was he waiting for? Only he had just killed Liang Ziweng; he had this heavy guilty feeling in his heart. He only moved forward a couple of steps then stood still, unable to kill Ouyang Feng.

Ouyang Feng practiced for about the time needed to boil tea; he gradually slowed down until his body stopped spinning. Finally he stretched his arms and grabbed the rocks, then ‘bonk, bonk, bonk’ he went back to where he was coming from.

Guo Jing’s curiosity was really piqued, he wanted to know where Ouyang Feng was heading, and what kind of marvelous martial art he practiced by standing upside down; therefore, quietly Guo Jing followed after him.

Ouyang Feng walked using his hands, surprisingly it was not any slower than walking with his feet. He climbed to a hill peak, going higher and higher. Guo Jing followed not too far behind until they arrived at the jade-green lush, beautiful peak. He saw Ouyang Feng was heading straight into a cave and stopped in front it. Guo Jing hid himself behind a big rock; suddenly he heard Ouyang Feng sternly said, “Ha hu wen ying, xing er ji jin, si gu er. Your explanation is not right; I could not practice appropriately.”

Guo Jing was startled, at first he thought that those three lines were the Sanskrit lines from the Nine Yin Manual; but it sounded a little bit different. And then he immediately remembered that those were the lines he deliberately altered per his benevolent master Hong’s instruction on the boat. But why did Ouyang Feng suddenly recite those lines? Whom did he speak to?

He heard a crisp and clear female voice came out from the cave, “Your martial art is not adequate, of course you can’t practice appropriately. How could I explain incorrectly?” Guo Jing was so surprised that he almost cried out; it was the voice Huang Rong for whom he day and night mourned with grief. Didn’t she get killed in the desert? Was he dreaming? Was he in heaven? Or perhaps because of his deep affection he thought it was Huang Rong’s voice?

“I have practiced according to what you said, no mistake about it, but why did my ‘yi ren mai’ [appointed arteries] and ‘yang wei mai’ [positive dimension arteries] unexpectedly flow in reverse?” Ouyang Feng asked.

That female voice answered, “You didn’t want to wait, your strength is wanting.” This voice was clearly Huang Rong’s voice, Guo Jing had no doubt whatsoever. He was so surprised and happy at the same time that he became giddy and faltered, almost lost his conscience. Because of this excitement the wound on his neck was broken, blood seeped through the wrapped cloth; but he did not seem to notice it.

He heard Ouyang Feng turn angry, “By noon tomorrow the sword meet will start; how can I practice leisurely? Quickly translate the whole manual for me, don’t try to mess with me.”

At last Guo Jing understood why Ouyang Feng practiced internal energy cultivation right there; turned out he was anxious about the sword meet and wanted to get a quick result. He heard Huang Rong laugh, “You have made an agreement with my Jing Gege; he would spare your life three times in exchange of you not compelling me against my wishes. You have to wait until I am happy enough to teach you.”

Hearing her say the word ‘my Jing Gege’ a sweet, happy feeling flooded Guo Jing’s heart. He was almost unable to refrain from leaping out and shout his delight.

Ouyang Feng coldly said, “This is important, my business today takes precedence over all agreements I made in the past.” After he said that, he moved his arms, flexed his body and stood right-side up. Then he walked toward the cave in big strides.

“You are shameless!” Huang Rong called out, “I am not going to teach you!”

Ouyang Feng grinned wickedly, “I want to see if you are going to teach me or not,” he said in low voice.

Guo Jing heard Huang Rong cry out, “Aiyo!” then he heard Ouyang Feng’s cold laugh, followed by a sound of ripping clothes. At a moment like this Guo Jing did not have any time to think whether it was appropriate to fight anybody using his martial art; he leaped out and shouted, “Rong’er! I am here!” With the left palm guarding in front of his body he rushed into the cave.

Ouyang Feng’s left hand was grabbing Huang Rong’s bamboo stick, while his right hand was just about to grab her left arm. Huang Rong launched the ‘bang tiau lai quan’ [carrying a skin-diseased dog on a stick] by slanting her stick in front of her body and with a jerk pulled the stick from Ouyang Feng’s hand. Ouyang Feng shouted and was about to continue his attack when suddenly he heard Guo Jing’s voice outside.

Ouyang Feng was the grand master of his martial art school; he had never broken his words to anybody. This time it was in his desperation that he used force against Huang Rong; when suddenly Guo Jing arrived. His face turned beet red, he was ashamed of breaking his own agreement. He flicked his sleeve to cover his own face then fast as lightning he darted through Guo Jing’s side, went out of the cave in a hurry and in a moment not even his shadow was to be seen.

Guo Jing rushed forward to grip Huang Rong’s hands, he called out, “I almost died thinking about you!” He was so agitated that his whole body shivered.

Huang Rong pulled her hands out and coldly said, “Who are you? Why are you holding my hands?”

Guo Jing was stunned. “I ... I am Guo Jing. You ... you are not dead. I ... I ...” he stuttered.

“I don’t know you!” Huang Rong cut him off; and then she went out the cave.

Guo Jing followed her outside, repeatedly bowing in front of her. “Rong’er, Rong’er, please listen to me!” he begged.

“Hmm,” Huang Rong snorted, “Do you think you can call Rong’er’s name just like that? What are you?”

Guo Jing opened his mouth wide, but did not know what to say.

Huang Rong looked at him; she saw he was rather thin, his face haggard; for an instant she felt sorry for him. But immediately she remembered how he had dumped her over and over; her anger flared. She took a step forward.

Guo Jing was really anxious, he pulled her sleeve and said, “Please listen to me.”

“Speak!” Huang Rong said.

“I saw your golden hair band and black sable fur coat on the marsh, I thought you ...” Guo Jing said. But Huang Rong cut him off again, “Very well, you wanted me to listen to you, and I did!” She pulled her sleeve and walked away.

Guo Jing felt awkward and anxious at the same time. He knew how exceptionally mule-headed Huang Rong could be; he was afraid he might lose her again but he did not know how to express himself. Seeing her sleeve floating while she was climbing the mountain, he had no choice but silently follow.

When she came across Guo Jing earlier, Huang Rong was overwhelmed with mixed feeling. She recalled how she deliberately threw Ouyang Feng from her trail by leaving her golden hair band and her black sable fur coat on the marsh. Then heartbroken she headed back to the east. Her intention was to go back to the Peach Blossom Island to see her father; unfortunately when she reached Shandong she fell sick with nobody to care for her. On her sickbed, while her body was either feverishly hot or cold, she lamented the fact that Guo Jing was a fickle lover; she regretted that her parents had given birth to her that now she had to endure pain and sufferings. When she recovered from her illness she came across Ouyang Feng on the southern Shandong road; and was compelled to follow him to Mount Hua to explain the manual to him.

Looking back to the past she hated everything that had happened. She heard Guo Jing was following her closely. When she walked quickly, Guo Jing also walked quickly; when she slowed down, Guo Jing also slowed down. After walking for a while she turned around abruptly and shouted, “Why are you following me?”

“I will forever follow you, I will never leave you as long as I live,” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong sneered, “You are the Great Khan’s son-in-law, what do you want from me, a poor little girl?”

“The Great Khan has caused my mother’s death, how can I become his son-in-law?” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong was angry, her entire face turned red, “Good! I thought you still have a heart for me. Turned out the Great Khan has kicked you out! Now that you are not the Master Consort anymore you come looking for the poor little girl. Am I that cheap that you can bully me as you wish?” Speaking to this point she could not control her anger any longer and broke in uncontrollable sobs.

Seeing her bursting in tears Guo Jing was flabbergasted. He wanted to say some comforting words, but he was tongue-tied, did not know what to say. After stayed silent for half a day he finally opened his mouth, “Rong’er, I am here. You want to hit me or kill me; you can do what you want.”

“Why would I want to hit you or kill you?” Huang Rong asked mournfully, “Let’s just say that we have known each other in vain. Please, I am asking you, stop following me.”

Seeing she was not willing to forgive him, Guo Jing’s countenance paled. With a trembling voice he asked, “What do I have to do to make you understand what’s in my heart?”

“Today you are good to me, but if tomorrow you see Huazheng Meizi or Huazheng Jiejie [elder sister], you will immediately shove me away from your brain,” Huang Rong said, “Only if you die in front of me will I believe what you said.”

The blood in Guo Jing’s chest boiled; he nodded and turned around, walked in big strides toward the cliff nearby. It was actually Mount Hua’s most dangerous place, called the ‘she shen ya’ [to give one’s life cliff]; whoever jumped from this place would certainly meet a cruel death.

Knowing his strong-willed temper well, Huang Rong realized Guo Jing was capable of doing what he said he would do. Hastily she dashed forward to grab his clothes. Her hand pulled hard and she jumped over Guo Jing’s shoulder that a moment later she was the one standing at the edge of the cliff. She was angry and anxious at the same time; with tears in her eyes she said, “Fine! I know you don’t care about me one bit. I spoke thoughtless words out of anger and you didn’t miss that opportunity. I am telling you: you don’t need to get angry with me; just don’t see me anymore.”

Huang Rong’s body trembled, her face was snow-white; she stood on the edge of the cliff, leaning against ice-covered rock. She looked like a white ‘cha hua’ [camellia?] gently swaying in the wind.

Because he did not care about his own life, Guo Jing had exerted his strength to jump into the canyon below; but now seeing Huang Rong on the cliff edge he was afraid she might lost her footing. “Come over here,” he hastily said.

Huang Rong could hear the affection in his voice, she was unable to restrain from feeling sad; she cried, “Who wants to hear your fake words? I was sick in Shandong, nobody cared for me; you didn’t even come looking for me. I was captured by that old scoundrel Ouyang Feng and was unable to escape; you didn’t come to rescue me. My mother did not want me; she died and left me to fend for myself. My father did not want me; he did not come looking for me. Worst of all, you obviously did not want me either! There is nobody in this world wants me, nobody loves me!” While saying that she stomped her feet and cried loudly; sounded like she was releasing all anger, sadness, and frustration pent-up for several days.

Guo Jing’s heart was overwhelmed with love and affection, yet he realized what she said was not wrong; the more he listened to her, the more he hated himself.

A cold wind blew, Huang Rong felt cold, her body trembled a little bit. Guo Jing took out his outer coat and was about to drape it across her shoulder when suddenly someone shouted from the side of the cliff, “Who has such guts, dared to bully my Miss Huang?” A man with white beard and long hair appeared, climbing up the cliff. It was none other than the Old Urchin Zhou Botong.

Guo Jing’s attention was focused on Huang Rong; he did not care who came toward them. Huang Rong was not in the mood to joke around, she shouted, “Old Urchin, I told you to kill Qiu Qianren. Where is his head?”

Zhou Botong giggled, he did not know how to answer her; so before she pursued further, he tried to shift the blame, “Miss Huang, who made you angry? The Old Urchin will vent your anger for you.”

Huang Rong pointed her finger to Guo Jing, “Who else if not him?” she said.

Zhou Botong only knew he had to win Huang Rong’s heart, so without saying anything his hand moved; once with the back of his hand, then another with his palm, ‘Slap! Slap!’ he whacked Guo Jing’s ears twice.

Guo Jing’s mind was someplace else, he did not guard against any attack; the Old Urchin’s hand was rather heavy, Guo Jing’s vision turned black and his cheeks were swollen red.

“Miss Huang, is that enough?” Zhou Botong asked, “If not enough I will beat him some more.”

Seeing Guo Jing’s face was swollen with red five-finger print on each cheek, Huang Rong’s anger turned into affection; and her affection toward Guo Jing turned into anger toward Zhou Botong. “I am angry at him, what does it have to do with you? Who told you to beat him up?” she angrily said, “I told you to kill Qiu Qianren, why didn’t you do what I told you?”

Zhou Botong stuck out his tongue, could not answer her question; he said in his heart, “Turned out in wanting to beat a horse fart the Old Urchin has beaten the horse’s hoof instead.” In that difficult situation he suddenly heard from behind the cliff some noise of weapons clashing and indistinct voices of people fighting. He thought if he did not slip away right now, he would not get another chance; he called out immediately, “Most probably that old Qiu Qianren has arrived. I am going to kill him at once.” Before he finished speaking, he had disappeared behind the cliff in a flash.

Actually, if it was really Qiu Qianren, Zhou Botong would not dare to even come near to him. That day Zhou Botong blindly fought with Qiu Qianren, Ouyang Feng and Guo Jing inside the stone house in the western region; Guo Jing escaped and Ouyang Feng followed not too long afterwards. Then Qiu Qianren finally found an opportunity to run away. Zhou Botong did not give up chasing him until Qiu Qianren was exhausted. Qiu Qianren was furious and desperate; he was the clan leader of a big clan in Wulin world, and he was forced to run away from the enemy, he felt really humiliated. He thought he would be better off killing himself rather than falling into the enemy’s hands and suffer further humiliation. He caught a glimpse of several vipers on the sand and stone by the road side. He knew this kind of viper was very poisonous; once he got bitten, the whole body would be numb immediately and he would die without too much pain. Therefore, he caught one viper and held it by pinching the snake at seven inches from the head; he called out, “Zhou Botong the old thief, look here!”

He was about to let the viper bite his own hand; but who would have thought that Zhou Botong was extremely afraid of snakes that he cried out, turned around and ran away. Qiu Qianren was startled,

but after half a day, he realized Zhou Botong was afraid of his snake. Unexpectedly the situation was reversed to his benefit. With his left hand he caught another viper, and shouted loudly he gave Zhou Botong a chase.

Zhou Botong was terrified, he ran like crazy. Qiu Qianren was known as the ‘tie zhang shui shang piao’ [iron palm floating on the water]; his lightness kungfu was superior from Zhou Botong’s. If he was not scared of Zhou Botong, he would have caught up with him early on.

Two men chasing each other noisily until the day turned dark. Zhou Botong ran with all his might, Qiu Qianren was actually looking for an opportunity to escape; he was secretly amused and pretended to chase Zhou Botong seriously. On the second day Zhou Botong found a horse which he quickly mounted and rode back into the east; afraid that Qiu Qianren might overtake him.

Seeing Zhou Botong sneaked out, Huang Rong cast a sidelong glance toward Guo Jing, sighed, and lowered her head without saying anything.

“Rong’er,” Guo Jing called.

“Hmm,” Huang Rong lightly uttered.

Guo Jing wanted to apologize and asked for her forgiveness, but realizing he was clumsy, he was afraid he might say something wrong and actually stirred up her anger. Two people stood side by side in the wind; suddenly Huang Rong sneezed. Immediately Guo Jing took his coat off and spread it over Huang Rong’s body. Huang Rong lowered her head, seemingly oblivious to him. Suddenly they heard Zhou Botong’s loud laughter, followed by his shouts, “Wonderful! Wonderful!”

Huang Rong held out her hand, touching Guo Jing’s hand, “Jing Gege, let’s take a look,” she said with a low voice. Guo Jing was so happy that tears rolled down his cheeks, he could not say anything. Huang Rong wiped out the tears with her sleeve; she laughed and said, “You have tears on your face; also fingerprints on your cheeks. People will say I beat you until you cry.” Her smile was so graceful; signifying the two of them had been reconciled. After this incident, actually the bond between them grew deeper.

Hand in hand the two of them walked down the cliff; they saw Zhou Botong was bending over with laughter, he looked so proud of himself. Qiu Chuji stood on the side with a sword in his hand. Sha Tongtian, Peng Lianhu, Lingzhi Shangren, and Hou Tonghai, four people were seen with weapons in their hands in various postures; some were attacking, some were retreating or eluding an attack, but they all looked like motionless wooden statues. Turned out their acupoints had been sealed by Zhou Botong.

Zhou Botong said, “The other day I made some pills from the dirt on my body and gave them to you. But you stinky thieves are actually crafty and smart; as soon as you found out they were not poisonous, you did not want to obey your grandfather anymore. Hmm, hmm ... how about today?”

Even though he managed to overpower these four men, but actually he had no idea what to do with them. Hence, as soon as he saw Guo Jing and Huang Rong walked over he said, “Miss Huang, I present these four stinky thieves to you!”

“What do I want to do with them?” Huang Rong said, “Hmm, you don’t want to kill them, you also don’t want to release them. You subdued these four stinky thieves, yet don’t have any idea what to do with them. Call me ‘Good Elder Sister’ three times, I will teach you what to do.”

Zhou Botong was delighted; immediately he called, “Good Elder Sister!” three times; each time he added a cupping of his fists.

Huang Rong pursed her lips and laughed. Pointing her finger to Peng Lianhu she said, “Search his pocket.”

Zhou Botong immediately complied; from Peng Lianhu’s body he took out a ring with poisonous needle on it, and two bottles of antidotes.

“He had once used this needle to prick your Martial Nephew Ma Yu, now prick him several times with that same needle,” Huang Rong said.

Peng Lianhu and the others could hear everything clearly, they were so frightened that they felt their souls were leaving their bodies; but their acupoints were sealed, they could not move. They felt severe pain since each of them was pricked several times by Zhou Botong.

“The antidote is in your hand, whatever you want them to do, I want to see if they will dare to defy,” Huang Rong said.

Zhou Botong was delighted; he rubbed some dirt from his body and mixed them with the antidote, he made some pills from the mixture and gave the pills to Qiu Chuji. He said, “You take these four stinky thieves as prisoners; take them to Mount Zhongnan, imprison them at the Chongyang Palace for twenty years. If they behave well along the way, give each of them one of my wonder pill; otherwise let them enjoy the poison. This is called taking consequences for their own actions. Show no mercy!”

Qiu Chuji bowed and complied.

Huang Rong laughed, “Old Urchin, what you said was very reasonable. I haven’t seen you for a year and look how far you have progressed!”

Zhou Botong was very pleased with himself, he unsealed Peng Lianhu and the others’ acupoints and said, “You go to the Chongyang Palace, stay there meditating your lives for twenty years. If you are really willing to repent, you might still be able to live as good people in the future. But if you don’t want to repent, hmmm ... just know that our Quanzhen people are experts in killing people without batting an eye; we can torture without creasing an eyebrow; we can make you four stinky thieves into meatballs and everybody can come and eat you. By that time I want to see what other trick you have in your sleeve?”

Peng Lianhu and the others did not dare to say anything; they only nodded and mumbled their consents. Qiu Chuji stifled his laughter; he bade Zhou Botong farewell, then with a sword in his hand herded four people walking down the mountain.

Huang Rong laughed, “Old Urchin, when did you learn to teach others? The front part of your speech made a lot of sense, but the latter part was a lot of nonsense.”

Zhou Botong looked up to the sky and laughed; but suddenly he saw toward his left there was a flashing white light. Apparently it was a weapon reflecting the sunlight. "Well, what is that?" he called out.

Jing and Rong lifted their heads to see, but the flashing light was gone. Zhou Botong was afraid Huang Rong would raise Qiu Qianren's matter to him, he quickly said, "Let me take a look." And he flew to the nearby peak.

Jing and Rong two people had a lot to talk; they looked for a cave and poured out their hearts' content to each other. They talked and talked until the sun disappeared behind the western peak; still there were more to talk about. Guo Jing took some dried food from his backpack and gave some to Huang Rong.

Huang Rong ate and smiled, "That old scoundrel Ouyang Feng compelled me to explain to him the Nine Yin Manual; his source was the one you wrote randomly, so I also gave him a random explanation. He accepted it as real, and he trained hard on it for several months. I told him that this type of martial art has to be practiced upside down; he really turned head over heels training diligently. He managed to reverse the whole body passage through which vital energy circulates. It was really not easy; his 'yin wei' [negative dimension], 'yang wei' [positive dimension], yin and yang; four main arteries are flowing in reverse. I don't know how he will look like if his entire system flows in reverse." Having said that she giggled.

Guo Jing was also smiling, "No wonder I saw him upside down in the middle of the road," he said, "It was really not easy to do."

"You are coming to Mount Hua; are you going to join the contest to win the title Number One Martial Artist of the World?" Huang Rong asked.

"Rong'er, why are you teasing me?" Guo Jing said, "I am here to ask Zhou Dage on how I can forget the martial arts I have already learned." And then he told Huang Rong everything he had pondered in his heart these past several days.

Huang Rong leaned her head slightly and thought for a moment. "Ay! It's good if we can forget it," she said, "The more we train, the stronger our martial art become; but actually our heart is not getting happier. I wish we were just like little children who don't know anything; nothing burdened our minds, no worry, no anxiety." She forgot that as one grew older, the more hardship and anxiety one would have to face; it had nothing to do with whether one's martial art skill was high or not.

Huang Rong continued, "I heard Ouyang Feng saying that tomorrow is the sword meet day; I am sure my father will come to this mountain. You said you are not going to join the contest; how about we think of something to help my father win the title?"

"Rong'er," Guo Jing said, "It's not that I don't want to help you, but I think in term of conduct, Benevolent Master Hong is superior to your father."

Originally Huang Rong was leaning against Guo Jing's body, but as she heard him saying her father was not good, she pushed him away in anger. Guo Jing was startled, he was confused. But suddenly Huang Rong laughed, "Hmm, actually Benevolent Master Hong's treatment to us was not bad. Let's just not help any of them, what do you think?"

“Both your father and Benevolent Master Hong are honorable warriors; they won’t like it if we secretly help them,” Guo Jing said.

“Fine! Now you are saying that I am sly and crafty, that I am a wicked traitor coward?” Huang Rong said pulling up her face.

“I am sorry,” Guo Jing said, “I am a fool, always say wrong things and provoke you to anger.” His face looked really terrified.

Huang Rong stifled her laughter, “I don’t know how many more times I am going to be mad at you.”

Guo Jing was perplexed; he scratched his head and looked at her with blank expression.

“If you don’t dump me anymore, we will have many days to be together. I really don’t care how many more times you are going to say stupid things,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing was ecstatic, he gripped her hands tight and earnestly said, “How can I dump you? How can I?”

“It was because the princess didn’t want you that naturally you have no choice but looking for me, a poor little girl,” Huang Rong said.

What Huang Rong said had brought back a flood of sad memories into Guo Jing’s mind; he remembered his mother’s tragic death in the desert, he looked so dispirited and was silent. It was a new moon, silver light like water shone on them. Huang Rong saw his dejected countenance and realized she had offended him deeply; she quickly tried to change the subject. “Jing Gege, let us not talk about past matters. Being together with you like this makes my heart so happy. How about I let you kiss my cheek?”

Guo Jing’s entire face turned red; indeed he did not dare to kiss her. Huang Rong flashed a captivating smile; she was fully aware that she had embarrassed both Guo Jing and herself, so she changed the subject again, “On the sword meet tomorrow, who do you say will win?” she asked.

“That is really difficult to say,” Guo Jing replied, “I wonder if Reverend Yideng is coming?”

“The reverend has entered emptiness; he would not want to fight over empty reputation,” Huang Rong reasoned.

Guo Jing nodded his agreement, “I think so too. Your father, Benevolent Master Hong, Big Brother Zhou, Qiu Qianren and Ouyang Feng, five people; each one is the grandmaster of their respective school, each one has their own unique skill. I am just wondering if Benevolent Master Hong has recovered from his injury. Can his skill level back to where it was?” Remembering his master Guo Jing was saddened.

“Reasonably speaking, the Old Urchin’s martial art is the strongest,” Huang Rong said, “However, if he does not use the martial art from the Nine Yin Manual, then he is still inferior to the other four.”

Two people talked until Huang Rong felt tired; then she leaned on Guo Jing's bosom and fell asleep. Guo Jing was also weary and was dozing off when suddenly he heard footsteps approaching. Two dark shadows, one in front of the other, were rushing over the cliff. Those two people's clothes were fluttering in the wind, they were running very fast. From their footwork, looked like the one in the front was the Old Urchin Zhou Botong, and the one pursuing him was surprisingly Qiu Qianren. Guo Jing did not know that Qiu Qianren had used vipers to scare Zhou Botong off; he was baffled, in the western region Qiu Qianren was running away for his life because of Zhou Botong, how come the situation was reversed now? Lightly he nudged Huang Rong and whispered in her ear, "Look!"

Huang Rong raised her head and saw under the moonlight Zhou Botong eloped to the east and escaped to the west; did not dare to face the enemy at all. Zhou Botong was heard shouting, "Old thief surnamed Qiu, I have somebody here who is an expert in catching viper; you'd better run away as quick as you can!"

Qiu Qianren laughed, "Do you think I am a three-year old kid?" he said.

"Guo Xiongdi [Brother Guo], Miss Huang! Come and help me, please!" Zhou Botong shouted.

Guo Jing was about to leap out, but Huang Rong pushed his chest back, "Don't move!" she hissed.

Zhou Botong had run around in circles yet did not see Jing and Rong two people come out, he started to curse, "Stinky Kid, Crafty Girl, if you don't come out, I am going to curse your ancestors to the eighteenth generation."

Huang Rong stood up and laughed, "I don't want to come out, curse if you can."

Zhou Botong saw the vipers in Qiu Qianren's hands lifted their heads high with their tongues stuck out; he was so scared that his knees turned into jelly. "Miss Huang, please come, please come. What about if I curse my own ancestors to the eighteenth generation?" he begged.

Qiu Qianren was shocked to see Jing and Rong two people were standing nearby. Quickly he cooked up some ideas to slip away; otherwise if those three people ganged up against him, definitely things would not go well for him. Tomorrow would be another story; he would fight each of them on a one-to-one battle, he was not afraid of any of them. He started to move his feet, but before running away he flung the vipers toward Zhou Botong's face.

Zhou Botong wielded his sleeve in panic, he stepped aside to elude; suddenly there was a light plopping sound and he felt something cold fell on his neck, straight through his collar into his back. That something wiggled and bounced around inside his clothes; it felt slippery. He was so scared, it felt like his soul was leaving his body. "I am dying, I am dying!" he cried. He did not dare to put his hands into his clothes to pull the 'snakes' out; he only jumped around wildly. Suddenly he felt the 'snake' bit him in the chest; he thought he really died this time, his whole body tingled with numbness and he fell down to the ground.

Jing and Rong two people were shocked, they quickly leaped forward to help. Seeing Zhou Botong suddenly fall down, Qiu Qianren was also surprised; he was about to seek a way to go down the mountain when suddenly a black shadow appeared from among the trees. That shadow coldly said, "Old thief Qiu, today you can't run away anymore."

That person's back was facing the moon, so Qiu Qianren could not see that person's face clearly. Qiu Qianren felt a chill creep up his back. "Who are you?" he barked.

Zhou Botong was lying on the ground, bedazzled. He felt he would soon be gone to the underworld; but suddenly he felt someone helped him up. "Master Zhou, don't be afraid, that is not a snake," he heard that person said. Zhou Botong was startled, he quickly stood up, but that cold thing on his back started to bounce around again; he jumped around and shouted madly, "It is biting me, it's a snake, it's a snake!"

"It's a 'jin wa wa' [golden baby doll, see Chapter 29] fish, not a snake," that person said. By now Jing and Rong two people could see clearly that person's appearance; turned out it was the Fisherman from the Fisherman, Woodcutter, Farmer, and Scholar, four main disciples of Reverend Yideng. They saw him stretching out his arm and took a 'jin wa wa' from Zhou Botong's clothes.

Turned out that fisherman saw a pair of 'jin wa wa' in a creek nearby; he caught them and kept them in his bosom. One of them slipped and jumped high into a tree; as luck had it, it fell down inside Zhou Botong's collar. That 'jin wa wa' did not bite, but Zhou Botong was so scared of snakes that he imagined this cold and slippery thing was actually a viper biting his back. If the Fisherman was one step late, Zhou Botong might pass out of fright.

Zhou Botong opened his eyes and saw the fisherman; but he was still in shock. He knew he had met this person before, but he could not remember who it was. He turned his head to see Qiu Qianren was walking step-by-step backward, while the black shadow in front of him walked step-by-step forward, slowly approaching. Zhou Botong was a little bit relaxed but then he was startled and frightened out of his wits; he saw clearly that the black shadow was precisely the Concubine Liu Ying Gu from the Dali country's royal palace.

Qiu Qianren was led to believe at the present time only Zhou Botong's martial art was superior to his. If he managed to scare Zhou Botong away with his snakes, then on the sword meet the next day he was certain he would have a great chance to come out the winner. Unexpectedly on the eve of the sword meet Ying Gu appeared. That day on the 'qing long tan' [green dragon shore] she madly fought him; he thought that if this granny entangled him in another fight while his enemies were standing on the side; his life would be in grave danger. But then he heard she hissed with a throaty voice, "Give me back my son's life!"

Qiu Qianren's heart turned cold; he thought that that night when he entered the royal palace and injured her son in his attempt to force Emperor Duan to waste his strength he had disguised himself carefully. Who would have thought that the emperor did not save the child's life, and now she had somehow learned the truth? He forced a smile and said, "Crazy Granny, why are you bothering me?"

"Give me back my son's life!" Ying Gu called out.

"What son?" Qiu Qianren asked, "Your son died, it has nothing to do with me."

"Hmm, that night I did not see your face, but I remember your laughter," Ying Gu said, "You laugh, now! Laugh! Laugh!"

Qiu Qianren saw her stretching both hands to pounce on him; he withdrew two steps, slightly leaned his body to the side, then his left palm slapped his right, and his right palm swept diagonally to

strike Ying Gu's abdomen. It was the fiercest one of his thirteen stances Iron Palms, called the 'yin yang gui yi' [negative and positive converge into one].

Ying Gu realized the fierceness of this attack; she used the Loach Maneuver to evade. Who would have thought that the enemy's strike was so swift that before she could even move her feet, his palm was already less than half a foot from her body. Ying Gu felt a stab of pain in her heart; knowing that her hope of seeking revenge was shattered. Disregarding his palm, she jumped forward with the intention of grabbing his body so that both of them would fall down into the canyon below. Suddenly she heard a gust of wind and a fist cut like a knife in front of her. Just before his palm reached its target, Qiu Qianren was forced to retract his arm and parry that incoming fist. He was angry, "Old Urchin, it's you again!"

When Zhou Botong saw the danger threatening Ying Gu, he used the skill he learned from the Nine Yin Manual to its fullest extent to defeat the Iron Palm stance. Zhou Botong did not dare to look straight to Ying Gu; putting his back to her he said, "Ying Gu, you are not this old scoundrel's match. Quickly go! I will go too!"

He was about to fly down the mountain when suddenly Ying Gu called out, "Zhou Botong, why don't you avenge your son?"

Zhou Botong was dumbstruck. "What? My son?"

"Exactly," Ying Gu said, "Your son is killed by Qiu Qianren."

Zhou Botong still did not know that his affair with Ying Gu had resulted in they having a child. His mind was muddled; he was at lost. He turned his head to see that there were several more people standing next to Ying Gu; other than Guo Jing and Huang Rong, there were Reverend Yideng and his four disciples.

At that time Qiu Qianren had walked away from the edge of the cliff less than three feet, suddenly he saw in front of him a group of formidable enemies while the terrain they were on was really dangerous. He knew he was facing a grave danger. He clapped his hands and boldly said, "I am climbing the Mount Hua to fight over the 'Number One Martial Artist in the World' title. Hmm, hmm ... all of you gang up to get rid of a powerful opponent. It's truly despicable!"

Zhou Botong thought what this old thief said was reasonable, he said, "All right, I am going to wait until after the sword meet tomorrow, then I am going to take your dog life."

Ying Gu angrily called out, "I want to seek revenge, how can I wait until tomorrow?"

Huang Rong also said, "Old Urchin, toward a person with a good faith we speak with a good faith; toward a deceitful person we speak deceitfully. Let us just get rid of him once and for all; I want to see what he is going to do."

Qiu Qianren face turned deathly pale, he realized his precarious situation; but suddenly he got an idea, "Why do you want to kill me?" he called out.

The scholar replied, "You have done all kinds of evil deeds; everybody deserved to punish you."

Qiu Qianren lifted his face to the sky and laughed, "Speaking about martial art, you rely on numbers to bully me, certainly I am not your match. But speaking about right and wrong, good and evil, hey, hey ... Qiu Qianren is not alone. Whoever among you who has never killed anybody or done anything wrong; you can start punishing me. I will stretch out my neck to die in your hand; if I even creased my eyebrows; don't consider me a real man."

Reverend Yideng heaved a deep sigh, he was the first to step back then he lowered his head and sat cross-legged on the ground. Everybody else was deeply affected by Qiu Qianren's words; each thought how they have committed countless errors in their lives. The Fisherman, Woodcutter, Farmer, and the Scholar were all high-ranking government officials of the Dali country; they had killed people. Although they were acting in enforcing the justice, in the end they had unavoidably made some mistakes.

Zhou Botong and Ying Gu looked at each other; they recalled the love and hate between them, and each felt ashamed. During the expedition to the west Guo Jing had killed numerous people, and he still blamed himself for that. Huang Rong remembered how she had made her father suffer, how she was being an unfilial daughter, and how many times she had deceived others; truly she had committed not a few faults of her own.

Qiu Qianren thought that his speech had silenced everybody, now it was a good time to slip away; therefore, with big strides he walked pass Guo Jing's left side to leave. He saw Guo Jing step aside to let him go; he exerted his strength and about to flee when suddenly a bamboo stick appeared from behind the mountain rock, blocking his way. This bamboo stick was so swift, Qiu Qianren's left palm flew up, his wrist made a turn, trying to catch the stick's end; but unexpectedly the stick poked three times swiftly, targeting three major acupoints on his chest. Qiu Qianren was shocked; he felt that the bamboo stick's incoming force was like a strong wind. He was unable to neither parry nor evade, and had no choice but step backwards and thus return to where he started, by the edge of the cliff. From behind the rock a dark shadow appeared with the stick in his hand, and then stood up in front of him.

"Shifu!" Guo Jing and Huang Rong cried out. The 'jiu zhi shen gai' [nine-fingered divine beggar] Hong Qigong had arrived.

"Stinky beggar, you come to meddle. It's not time for the sword meet yet," Qiu Qianren cursed.

"I came to get rid of a traitor. Who wants to have a contest with you?" Hong Qigong said.

"Fine! What a great hero and warrior [actually, here he used the term 'da ying xiong da xia shi' - I don't know how to differentiate 'ying xiong' and 'xia'] you are, and I am a traitor. You are a good man and have never committed any misconduct," Qiu Qianren said.

"That's correct," Hong Qigong replied, "During my lifetime the Old Beggar has killed 231 people; all these 231 people were wicked, if not greedy and corrupt officials, then they were local bullies or criminals who oppressed common people; they were all evil people who had no regard of justice and honor. The Old Beggar is a glutton, but in all my life I have never killed an innocent person. Qiu Qianren, you are the 232nd person!"

His speech had made Qiu Qianren shiver with fear; he felt like his life had been taken from him. Hong Qigong continued, "Qiu Qianren, your Iron Palm Clan's past Clan Leader Shangguan Jian

Nan was a true hero; he devoted his entire life to serve the country, he was loyal till the day he died. Didn't your master advise you to be a real man? You succeeded your master as the Iron Palm Clan Leader; yet you colluded with the Jins, betraying your own country. When you die, do you have any face to meet your master and Shangguan Jian Nan, Shangguan Bangzhu? You climb Mount Hua in a vain attempt to compete against other martial art experts to win the 'Number One Martial Artist in the World'. Not only your martial art is inferior to everybody else's; but even if your martial art were matchless, which hero of this world would want to submit to a traitor who sells his own country?"

This speech was like a bucket of cold water drenched over Qiu Qianren; everything he had ever done in the past dozens of years came into his mind one by one. He remembered his master's instructions. How his master at his deathbed had imparted the Iron Palm Clan rules and regulations after he assumed the Clan Leader position; earnestly warning him to be a patriot, loyal to his country and love its people. Who would have thought that the older he got, the stronger his martial art became, the more he forgot his oath to love his country; he has become a traitor and a criminal, killing people who oppose his personal ambition. He fell deeper and deeper, until the clan members who were loyal and righteous left him, and in their place he took criminals as his disciples. He went as far as changing the upright Iron Palm Clan into a gang of bandits; sheltering evil people and support their evil practices; carrying out all kinds of evil things.

He lifted up his eyes to see the bright moon in the sky; he lowered his eyes to see Hong Qigong's bright pair of eyes with a penetrating gaze looking at him. Suddenly his conscience was awakened; he felt that among all of his life conducts not one could be called honorable. His body was drenched in cold sweats; he sighed, "Hong Bangzhu, you are right." He turned around and jumped into the canyon below.

Hong Qigong was holding tight his bamboo stick to guard against Qiu Qianren lest he would launch a sudden attack from shame. This person's martial art is nothing to be trifled with; in his desperation his attack must be really fierce. Not in a million years would he expect him to suddenly attempt to commit suicide. He was stunned, but suddenly a grey shadow flew by his side; Reverend Yideng had arrived at the cliff edge. Initially he was sitting cross-legged, and when he moved, he was still cross-legged. His left arm stretched out and grabbed Qiu Qianren's feet, pulled him strongly back to safety.

"Zhan zai, zhan cai!" he said, "The sea of bitterness knows no bounds; turn around and you will see the shore. You have already repented of your previous wrong doings; it's not too late to become a new man."

Qiu Qianren wept loudly, he knelt down in front of Yideng. He had millions of things he wanted to say, but was unable to utter a single word.

Ying Gu saw his back was in front of her; it was a very good opportunity for her to seek her revenge. She took a dagger from her bosom and fiercely thrust it into Qiu Qianren's back.

"Wait!" Zhou Botong called out; stretching his hand to block Ying Gu's dagger.

Ying Gu was angry, "What are you doing?" she asked sternly.

Since the first time Zhou Botong saw Ying Gu, he had been scared. Now that she scolded him, he shouted, “Aiyo!” and turned around, rushing down the mountain.

“Where are you going?” Ying Gu called out and immediately pursued him.

“I have tummy ache, I need to defecate!” Zhou Botong shouted. Ying Gu was startled only for a second, then she ignored him and did not stop pursuing Zhou Botong.

Zhou Botong was stunned, “Aiyo! Not good! I have shits all over my pants; it stinks to high heaven. Don’t come over here!” he anxiously shouted.

Ying Gu had been searching for him for over twenty years; she believed that if she missed him again this time, she would not see him anymore. Hence she did not care whether Zhou Botong was really defecating or just pretending, she kept pursuing him.

Zhou Botong heard the sound of footsteps approaching; he was scared out of his wits. Initially he said he was defecating to scare Ying Gu out from coming near him; he was hoping that he would find an opportunity to slip away. Who would have thought that Ying Gu ignored his words. He was so frightened that he cried out; and from pretending, Zhou Botong actually did start urinating and defecating.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were amused to watch this couple who quickly disappear beyond the cliff in the distant; and then they turned their heads to see Reverend Yideng was speaking in low voice on Qiu Qianren’s ears. Qiu Qianren did not say anything, he simply nodded his head repeatedly. Yideng spoke for a long while then finally he stood up and said, “Let’s go.”

Jing and Rong two people hurriedly went forward to pay their respects; they also bowed to the Fisherman, the Woodcutter, the Farmer and the Scholar. Yideng held out his hand to stroke their heads; he looked at them tenderly with a gentle smile on his face. “Qi Xiong,” he turned to Hong Qigong, “You are in good shape, your bravery is as great as I remember it; you also received these two fine disciples. I must congratulate you.”

Hong Qigong bowed and said, “Reverend is also well.”

Yideng smiled, “The mountain is tall and the river is long; till we meet again,” he said. Putting his palms together he turned around and left.

“Tomorrow is the sword meet, why are you leaving?” Hong Qigong called out.

Yideng turned his head and smiled, “The Old Monk is an outsider; how could I dare to compete with world class heroes over a title? The Old Monk is here today to take care of twenty years’ worth of gratitude and grudges; and I am happy my intention has been achieved. Qi Xiong, who is the present age hero but you? Why are you being modest?” Again he put his palms together, took Qiu Qianren’s hand, and walked down the mountain.

The four main disciples of Dali bowed toward Hong Qigong then followed behind their master. The Scholar walked by Huang Rong’s side. Seeing her cheeks were glowing he raised his eyebrows and smiled while reciting a line, “On the marshy land there was a ‘chang chu’ tree, its branches are soft and willowy!”

Hearing him tease her, Huang Rong replied with another line, “The chicken perched on their roost, the evening has arrived.”

The Scholar laughed a big laughter, he cupped his fists and left.

Guo Jing was bewildered, “Rong’er,” he asked, “Was that another Sanskrit line?”

“No,” Huang Rong smiled, “It was from ‘the book of poems’” she explained.

Hearing they were exchanging poetry, Guo Jing did not ask further. Looking at him Huang Rong smiled. She thought, “This ‘zhuang yuan’ [honorable title conferred to the person who scored highest in the imperial examination] is really smart; he had guessed correctly what’s in my heart. The next lines of what he recited from the book of poems are ‘pleasure does not need knowledge, pleasure does not need a family, pleasure does not need a room’. It was about a maiden adoring a bachelor’s love song. It is very appropriate to Jing Gege’s situation; he was saying that this scattered brain dumb kid has finally found a wife. I am very happy!” Having thought this suddenly she uttered a soft cry, “Aiyo!”

“What is it?” Guo Jing hastily asked.

Huang Rong smiled and said, “The next lines of what I recited are ‘The sheep and the cows coming down, the sheep and the cows went into the pen.’ The poem says that it was getting late, the sheep and the cows from the hillside returned to the fold and the gate was closed. In short I called that ‘zhuang yuan’ an animal. But it can be considered that I called Reverend Yideng an animal too!”

Guo Jing did not pay too much attention to this poetry exchange; he was pondering on what Hong Qigong had said to Qiu Qianren earlier. His heart was heavy with doubts and anxiety for these past several days; all his questions were answered in just a few words. His mind became open and he understood, “Shifu said he has killed 231 people; but these 231 people were all wicked. As long as he did not kill an innocent person, then his conscience is clear. Look how Shifu reprimanded Qiu Qianren, physical prowess is useless. This Qiu Qianren’s martial art is not necessary below that of Shifu’s, but because his heart was not upright, he cowered in Shifu’s presence. As long as I use my martial art to uphold justice, why would I want to put my martial art behind?”

It was actually a clear cut truth, even Qiu Chuji had spoken to him about the same truth. It was not that he did not believe Qiu Chuji, it was just that he recently joined Genghis Khan’s expedition to the west; he saw with his own eyes the terrible massacre, the cruelty on the battlefield, the suffering of the people, the tragic death of his mother under his own dagger; he loathed all kinds of war and violence and his mind was overwhelmed with this bitter thought. But after going through this deep thinking in his mind, finally his determination to do good deeds was getting stronger.

Jing and Rong two people went forward and kowtowed in front of their master; then they talked about things that happened after they parted. Turned out Hong Qigong followed Huang Yaoshi back to the Peach Blossom Island to tend to his injury. Using the method from the Nine Yin Manual he was able to revive his internal strength and open up the passages through which the vital energy circulate. It took him about half a year to heal his internal injury, then another half a year to recover his internal strength.

Huang Yaoshi was worried about his daughter; therefore, as soon as Hong Qigong’s injury was healed, he went to the north looking for her. Hong Qigong left the island much later than Huang

Yaoshi did, and only a few days ago he came across Lu Youjiao; thus for the most part he had learned what happened to his disciples Jing and Rong.

Three people talked for a while. Finally Guo Jing said, “Shifu, please take some rest. Come daybreak you will compete in the sword meet; you will need a lot of energy.”

Hong Qigong laughed, “The older I get, my desire to outdo others is actually getting stronger; but thinking that very soon I am going to fight the Eastern Heretic and Western Poison, my heart is anxious. It is ridiculous! Rong’er, in the recent years your father’s martial art has improved tremendously. Tell me, in the upcoming contest between your father and your Shifu, who is strong and who is weak?”

Huang Rong replied, “The martial art of yours, Senior, and that of my father’s are always difficult to compare; but now you have mastered the ‘jiu yin shen gong’ [nine yin divine energy]; how can my father be your match? Later when I see my father I am going to advise him not to compete with you; he’d better go back home to the Peach Blossom Island early on.”

Listening to her manner of speaking, Hong Qigong felt something was strange. After pondering it for a while he understood her intention. He laughed loudly and said, “You don’t need to talk in circle to me; I got the ‘jiu yin shen gong’ from you two. You don’t have to goad me; the Old Beggar’s face is not thick enough to use that skill. When I compete with the Old Heretic Huang later, I am going to use only my own original skills.”

Huang Rong was expecting him to say these exact words; so she smiled and said, “Shifu, if you lose under my father’s hand, I am going to prepare a hundred types of food for you to eat. So winning you will no doubt be delighted, losing you will also be happy.”

Hong Qigong swallowed his saliva. “Hmm, this girl’s heart is not good. You provoke me then you bribe me. You are wickedly shrewd; you hope wholeheartedly your own father will win.”

Huang Rong smiled, but before she could answer Hong Qigong suddenly stood up. He pointed his finger toward Huang Rong’s back and called out, “Old Poison, you arrived very early!”

Guo Jing and Huang Rong were startled; quickly they sprang up and stood next to Hong Qigong. They turned their heads and saw Ouyang Feng with his tall stature standing nearby. He arrived so quietly that these two people were not aware of his presence; they were greatly astonished.

**End of Chapter 39.**

## Chapter 40 – Sword Meet of Mount Hua

*Translated by Frans Soetomo*



*Genghis Khan fetched his iron bow and aimed the arrow toward the female eagle. The eagle was able to skew itself and sweep its wing to strike the arrow. The male eagle was angry; it let out a long cry and dived to strike Genghis Khan's head.*

Ouyang Feng coldly said, “Arrive early compete early, arrive late compete late. Old Beggar, tell me, our contest today, is it just to decide victory or defeat, or is it for our lives?”

“To achieve victory sometimes means risking our lives,” Hong Qigong said, “When we start, you don’t need to be lenient.”

“Good!” Ouyang Feng said. His left hand was behind his back, but suddenly he moved it forward, showing a snake staff. Tapping the staff’s end to a rock he asked, “Here, or do you need a more open space?”

Hong Qigong has not opened his mouth when Huang Rong interrupted, “Mount Hua is not a good place to compete, we’d better go to find a boat.”

Hong Qigong was puzzled, “What?”

“To give Mr. Ouyang another good opportunity to reply kindness with evil, to make a sneak attack from behind again,” Huang Rong explained.

Hong Qigong burst out in laughter, “Fall into a trap once, learn to be smart once; don’t expect the Old Beggar to show mercy anymore.”

Listening to Huang Rong’s insult Ouyang Feng’s face did not show any emotion. He bent his knees a little bit, moved his staff to his right hand, and launched the Toad Stance with his left hand.

Huang Rong gave the dog-beating stick in her hand to Hong Qigong, “Shifu, use the Dog Beating Stick Technique and the Nine Yin Manual’s martial arts. We don’t talk about honor and honesty with an old traitor like him.”

Hong Qigong thought, “It really is not easy to win relying on my own martial arts alone; if I spend too much energy fighting the Old Poison, I won’t be able to fight the Old Heretic Huang later on.” So he nodded his head and took the dog-beating stick. Immediately his left hand launched ‘da cao jing she’ [beating the grass scaring the snake], while his right hand launched ‘bo cao xun she’ [brushing the grass aside looking for snakes]; attacking from both sides.

Ouyang Feng had fought him several times yet he had never seen Hong Qigong use the Dog Beating Stick Technique. Even in a critical situation when they were fighting on the burning boat Hong Qigong did not use this technique. Ouyang Feng had seen Huang Rong use this technique before and he did not dare to look down on the technique; now that the stick was in Hong Qigong’s hand it moved fast, carrying gusts of wind, truly not something to be trifled with. The snake staff in his hand shook; parried the left and evaded the right, he struck toward the middle.

He had lost his snake staff twice; the one currently in his hand was a new one. The staff had the same scary head carved on it, but the two venomous snakes wrapped around it were new; even though their poison was as lethal as the previous ones, but they haven’t been used too long; thus their effectiveness was inferior to the previous ones.

In the past Hong Qigong had been bitten by this kind of venomous snake, he had also suffered under Ouyang Feng’s vicious palms to the point of almost losing his life; which took him nearly two years to recover and get his martial art skill back. That was his greatest defeat and greatest

danger he had to face his entire life; how could he not avenge this enmity? Thus he moved his stick with all his might, attacking furiously.

The first time those two fought was over the Nine Yin Manual during the Sword Meet of Mount Hua. The second time was on the Peach Blossom Island, fighting over Guo Jing and Ouyang Ke's marriage proposal; this fight was to decide victory and defeat only, not a life-and-death situation. The third time was on the small boat in the middle of the sea; where life and death were separated only by a thin line, but Hong Qigong still held his uprightness. This fight was the fourth time they battled each other fiercely; each one threw everything they had, no more mercy. They both knew that the opponent had trained hard and improved their martial art skill throughout all these years; their martial arts were very fierce, so if they were careless and yield even for half a stance, it would be difficult not to lose their own lives.

Two people turning around and hitting each other for about two hundred moves when suddenly the moon disappeared, the darkness came blanketing everything. It was the darkest hour of the night before dawn. Both were afraid the opponent would launch a sneak attack, so they were focusing their attention on defense and did not care much on offense. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were anxious about their master's safety; each moved forward several steps, ready to help if Hong Qigong's life were threatened.

While watching intently on the fierce battle in front of his eyes, Guo Jing had a disquieting thought, "These two people are the top skilled martial artists, but one is heroically upholding justice, while the other one is deceitfully wicked. Obviously martial art in itself does not differentiate good from evil; it all comes back to the person using it. If used to do good deeds, then the higher the skill the better, but if it used to do evil deeds, then the higher the skill the more wicked the martial art becomes."

The darkness made the battle difficult to watch, but the weapons made loud clashing sound and strong gusts of wind; Guo Jing's heart was beating faster. "Shifu has wasted two years worth of training because of his injury. Originally they were in par with each other; this time the outcome will be decided by a step forward or backward; I am afraid Ouyang Feng will gain a half-step advantage because of that. If I knew this would happen I wouldn't have shown mercy to him three times," he silently mused.

Guo Jing remembered Qiu Chuji once explained the 'xin yi' [trust and honor], that big trust and big honor should be differentiated from small trust and small honor. If a person's entire being lacking trust and honor, it was the same as if that person did not have any trust and honor at all. Thinking about this, he felt his blood rushing through his system, he thought, "Although Shifu and Ouyang Feng clearly said that the battle will be a one-to-one combat, but what if Ouyang Feng harmed Shifu? What if from this time on, he would run amuck in the world? I don't know how many good people will be hurt in his hands. I wasn't clear about truth and righteousness before, hence I committed not a few foolishnesses." Because of this thought he lifted up his palms, ready to move forward to help his master.

But suddenly he heard Huang Rong called out, "Ouyang Feng, you and my Jing Gege had made an agreement which resulted in you being spared from death three times; who would have thought that you still relying on your strength bullying me? You proved yourself untrustworthy, much like a nameless pawn of the Wulin; yet you are still dreaming of becoming the number one martial artist of the world?"

Ouyang Feng had committed countless ruthless acts in his life, but he was a proud man, he would call 'one' as 'one', and 'two' as 'two'; never backed off on his own words. If it was not because of his desire to learn the Nine Yin Manual he wouldn't break his promise to Guo Jing. This time he was fighting a fierce battle with Hong Qigong and suddenly Huang Rong brought it up; his ears turned red and his mind was muddled; he lost his concentration and the dog beating stick almost hit him.

"You are known as the Western Poison," Huang Rong continued, "So all kinds of evil are not stranger to you; but to have a junior sparing your life three times? You have lost your face. Where is your honor? How could you swallow your own words toward a junior? You have become the laughingstock of all the valiant people of the Jianghu till their mouths crooked. Ouyang Feng! Oh, Ouyang Feng! There is one title you deserve to have: you are the number one shameless man of the world!"

Ouyang Feng was angry, but he realized it was Huang Rong's clever trick to break his concentration; to make him feel ashamed. And as long as his internal strength was affected he would fall under Hong Qigong's hands, hence he turned a deaf ear toward Huang Rong. Who would have thought that Huang Rong kept accusing him with more and more evil and wicked deeds; sounded like every crime ever committed in the martial art world was his doing. If it was just ruthless deeds, Ouyang Feng did not care, but Huang Rong's tongue was getting more and more vicious. She mentioned all kinds of lowly and cowardice acts that even a bandit in the Jianghu would not do. Furthermore she said Ouyang Feng kissed Lingzhi Shangren's rear end; that he respectfully called Sha Tongtian his 'beloved uncle'; that he regarded Peng Lianhu as his 'honorable father' and begging for the secret ingredient of the poison Peng was using; that he repeatedly asked Wanyan Honglie for the captain of the guards position, so that he could live at the Zhao palace and be their night watch. She went as far as how Guo Jing in the west had spared his life three times, how Guo Jing rescued him from the sand, but Huang Rong add some spices to her story, made Ouyang Feng appear completely helpless and the rescue ten times more dramatic.

At first Ouyang Feng was still able to control his emotion, but as the story progressed to extreme nonsense he could not restrain from refuting Huang Rong several times. It was exactly what Huang Rong wanted: to engage him in useless debate and deliberately losing his fighting concentration. Thus Ouyang Feng had to fight in two fronts: with his hands and feet he fiercely battled Hong Qigong, with his mouth he argued with Huang Rong. Unfortunately for him, Huang Rong's mouth was a lot sharper than Hong Qigong's hands and feet.

After fighting for half a day Ouyang Feng began to feel the pressure, he thought, "It would be difficult to win if I don't use the martial art from the Nine Yin Manual." Although he had not mastered Huang Rong's explanation on reversing the blood flow through vital energy passages, he had been able to train for half a year; due to his own intelligent and profound martial art, he managed to somewhat improve his internal strength. Therefore, his snake staff suddenly made strange movements.

Hong Qigong was startled; he had to increase his attention. Huang Rong called out, "Yuan si ying er, ba ba xi luo zhao, xue liu wen bing." Ouyang Feng was startled, "What is the meaning of that?" he asked himself. How would he know that Huang Rong was letting her tongue loose and talk whatever came into her mind? That it did not carry any meaning at all? Huang Rong repeatedly talked gibberish, changing the tone of her voice; sometimes sounded like she was scolding him, other time encouraging, but suddenly turned to a sigh; then the sigh turned into cheers. Some

sentences sounded like they were questions; or urgently asking for advice. Ouyang Feng had determined to ignore her, but in the end his curiosity won, “What are you talking about?”

Huang Rong answered him using Sanskrit sentences she learned. Ouyang Feng was confused; he tried hard to remember the altered manual Guo Jing wrote for him. Suddenly a flood of chaotic sounds, images, strategic moves and martial arts theories came streaming into his mind. He felt dizzy and suffer a momentary memory loss.

Hong Qigong saw an opening in Ouyang Feng’s staff movement, “Got you!” he cried, and swung his stick toward the top of Ouyang Feng’s head.

This hit did not carry tremendous strength; Ouyang Feng was already confused, but after his head was hit he became more confused. He was in a daze; screamed and dragging along his snake staff he ran away.

“Where are you running to?” Guo Jing called out. He jumped to catch up. Ouyang Feng leaped high, made three somersaults in the air; then rolling and crawling, climbing a hill nearby, he disappeared without a trace.

Hong Qigong, Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other, perplexed; then they smiled out of surprise. Hong Qigong sighed, “Rong’er, your part in my victory over the Old Poison today is actually big. But with us, master and disciple, against one opponent, it was a rather shallow victory.”

Huang Rong smiled, “Shifu, it was you who taught me this skill.”

Hong Qigong laughed, “It was your natural ability,” he said, “Only a crafty old fellow as your father can have a crafty daughter like you.”

Suddenly someone called out from behind the mountain, “Good! You talk about other people behind their backs. Old Beggar, aren’t you ashamed?”

“Father!” Huang Rong called and leaped to him.

It was dawn, the morning light shone on a man wearing a green robe, walking leisurely. It was none other than the Master of the Peach Blossom Island, Huang Yaoshi.

Huang Rong threw herself into her father’s bosom; father and daughter hugged each other. Huang Yaoshi could see the childish expression had gone from his daughter’s face; she had grown into a beautiful young woman. She looked much like his late wife, that his heart was both happy and sad at the same time.

“Old Heretic Huang,” Hong Qigong said, “Didn’t I tell you on the Peach Blossom Island that your virgin daughter is so smart? She is so crafty; others won’t bully her that easily, so there is nothing for you to worry. Now tell me, was the Old Beggar wrong?”

Huang Yaoshi smiled faintly, holding his daughter’s hand he went near and said, “Congratulations! You made the Old Poison ran away. His defeat means you and I have one less problem to face.”

“You and I are the current experts of the world,” Hong Qigong said, “As soon as I saw your daughter the worms in my tummy started to dance around, my mouth watered. Let us just compete and get it over with; you become the number one is fine with me, I become the number one is also good. I only want to eat Rong’er’s cooked meals.”

“Not so fast,” Huang Rong laughed, “Only if you lose I will cook something for you to eat.”

“Bah!” Hong Qigong spat, “You are shameless. You are extorting me, aren’t you?”

“Old Beggar,” Huang Yaoshi said, “You have wasted two full years to recover from your injuries. I am afraid you are not my match. Rong’er, no matter who wins and who loses, you will cook some food for your Shifu to eat.”

“Right!” Hong Qigong exclaimed, “Now THAT is a speech befitting a great master of a martial art school! How can the Master of the Peach Blossom Island have the same petty thought as a little girl? We don’t have to wait until noon to start our competition. Come!” He swung his bamboo stick and moved forward to begin.

Huang Yaoshi shook his head, “You have just fought the Old Poison for quite a while. Although your energy is not completely depleted, you are tired nonetheless. How can Old Huang gain a slight advantage over you? We will wait till noon to compete, you need to restore your strength.”

Even though Hong Qigong knew what he said was right, but he was too impatient to wait, so he insisted on starting right away. Huang Yaoshi simply sat on a big rock, totally ignoring him.

Seeing these two could not reach any agreement Huang Rong said, “Father, Shifu, I have an idea: the two of you can compete immediately without Father taking any advantage over Shifu.”

“Good! What is it?” Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi asked.

“The two of you have been friends for many-many years, no matter who wins or loses; your friendship will be damaged. But today is the Sword Meet of Mount Hua, so no matter what, victory and defeat must be decided, does it not?”

Hong and Huang two people’s interests were piqued. They were aware that she was right; and if she indeed had an excellent idea, then they would kill three birds with one stone: one, they could compete immediately; two, Huang Yaoshi would not take any advantage over Hong Qigong; three, their friendship would not be damaged. So they enthusiastically asked, “Tell us your great idea.”

“My idea is this,” Huang Rong explained, “First, Father compete with Jing Gege. We will see how many stances Father will need to defeat him. Then Shifu will also compete with Jing Gege. If Father uses 99 moves to score victory but Shifu needs 100 moves, then Father wins. But if Shifu only need 98 moves, then Shifu wins.”

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” Hong Qigong exclaimed.

Huang Rong continued, “Jing Gege will compete with Father first; both are still fresh. Then when he competes with Shifu, both parties have each fought one time. Don’t you say it is a fair deal?”

Huang Yaoshi nodded his head, “This is a good idea. Jing’er, come! Are you going to use weapon or not?”

“I am not going to,” Guo Jing said. He was about to step forward when Huang Rong said again, “Hold on a second. There is one more thing I want to say: What if you two seniors cannot defeat Jing Gege in 300 moves?”

Hong Qigong burst out in laughter, “Old Heretic Huang, originally I envy you of having a smart daughter, who is always looking after her Father’s well-being. Ay! Who would have thought that a girl is always a girl; born to leave home. Actually she wanted this dumb kid to hold the title ‘Number One Martial Artist in the World’!”

Huang Yaoshi might be eccentric, but he loved his daughter with all his heart. He secretly thought, “Let me help her achieve her wish.” So he said, “What Rong’er had said is true. If we two old men cannot defeat Jing’er in 300 moves, would we have any face to become the Number One?” But suddenly he had another thought, “I intended to hold back and let him to fight me for 300 stances, but what if the Old Beggar does not hold back and score victory in less than 300 moves? Then I won’t be holding back for Jing’er’s sake, but for the Old Beggar’s.” He hesitated on what to do.

Hong Qigong shoved Guo Jing forward, “Go, fight! What are you waiting for?” he said.

Guo Jing staggered and stepped forward to face Huang Yaoshi. “All right,” Huang Yaoshi thought, “Let me try his skill first, then I’ll decide what to do later.” Raising his left palm he hacked diagonally toward Guo Jing’s neck. “First move!” he called out.

While Huang Yaoshi was not sure what to do, Guo Jing also had some doubt of his own, “There is no way I can win the world’s number one title; but shall I let Daozhu [Island Master] win, or shall I let Shifu win?” He was still thinking when Huang Yaoshi had made his move. Guo Jing lifted up his right hand to parry. His body shook and he almost fell down. “Stupid!” he scolded himself, “Why would I worry about whom I should let to win? Even if I fight with all my might I may not be able to keep up for 300 stances.”

In the mean time Huang Yaoshi had launched the second move, so he was forced to focus his attention. He made a decision right then and there, to compete with those two people with all his might. Who is swift and who is slow, let them use their skill to defeat him. He would not be one sided.

Several stances later Huang Yaoshi was astonished. “How did this dumb kid reach this level? If I held back, not only I might not be able to defeat him in 300 stances, I might even lose in his hands.” In a battle between martial art experts one cannot let back even half a step. Because initially Huang Yaoshi was only using 70% of his strength, he fell under Guo Jing’s control. He started to feel alarmed, and busily launched the ‘luo ying shen jian zhang’ [falling flower divine sword palm technique], his body floating around at full strength. But Guo Jing now was not the same as Guo Jing then. Huang Yaoshi had used dozens different palm techniques, yet it was still difficult for him to gain an upper hand.

After about one hundred moves Huang Yaoshi suddenly launched a trick move. Guo Jing did not expect him to make such move; he was almost kicked down by Huang Yaoshi’s left leg. Frantically

Guo Jing retreated two steps and steadied himself. Because of this Huang Yaoshi managed to even up the battle situation.

Huang Yaoshi took that opportunity to take a deep breath. “Amazing!” he secretly praised.

Huang Yaoshi worked very hard to gain an upper hand, but unexpectedly Guo Jing’s position was very firm. Guo Jing had decided all along to put up a very tight defense line; he knew it was impossible for him to win, so he only hoped he would not lose.

Listening to his daughter on the side counting, “Two-hundred and three, two-hundred and four,” Huang Yaoshi became impatient. “Old Beggar may use a heavy hand; if he defeats Jing’er in 100 moves, where would I put my face at?” he silently thought. He changed his attacks: now his palms floating around like a shadow; his hands were very swift.

Guo Jing started to feel the pressure; his chest tightened, like it was pressed under a huge mountain. He started to get disoriented, but he bravely stood his ground.

Huang Yaoshi’s hands moved faster and faster, his offensive power increased. In the meantime Huang Rong’s mouth was also counting faster and faster.

Guo Jing started to feel his lips and tongue dry up, his movements became sluggish; getting more and more difficult. The only thing kept him going was his strong will. In this critical moment suddenly he heard Huang Rong call out, “Three hundred!”

Huang Yaoshi’s countenance changed, he leaped back.

Guo Jing, on the other hand, still felt dizzy. His body did not stop spinning; he turned around more than a dozen times. He knew he was going to fall, hence he focused his energy to his left leg with ‘qian jin zhui’ [thousand-catty plummet], trying to anchor his body down. But Huang Yaoshi power was incredible; even after he pulled back his hands, the force did not vanish away. Guo Jing lost his balance and fell down; but he used his right hand to push himself back up again. Immediately he launched dozens of stances from the ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’ and thus cleared his mind up. He stayed silent for a moment, then turned his head toward Huang Yaoshi and said, “Huang Daozhu, several moves more and I will fall down to the ground.”

Seeing Guo Jing was unexpectedly able to withstand his more than ten years worth of ‘qi men wu zhuan’ [wonderful gate five revolutions] cultivation, Huang Yaoshi was not angry; on the contrary, he was happy. “Old Beggar,” he said, “I am useless, the title Number One in the World is yours.” He cupped his fists and turned around to leave.

“Not too fast! Not too fast!” Hong Qigong said, “I won’t necessarily win. Could you lend your iron flute to Jing’er, please?”

Huang Yaoshi’s jade flute was already broken, so he wielded an iron flute on his waist instead. He pulled the flute and gave it to Guo Jing.

Hong Qigong turned to Guo Jing and said, “You use a weapon. I will fight you barehanded.”

Guo Jing was dumbstruck, “This ...”

Hong Qigong said, “Your bare hand techniques came from me. If you use your hands and feet, how can we call it competition? Come!” His left hand’s fingers forming a hook, showing off his grabbing skill, trying to snatch the iron flute in Guo Jing’s hand. Guo Jing did not understand his intention; he let the flute go without any resistance.

“Dumb kid!” Hong Qigong scolded, “We are competing martial arts skill!” With his left hand he gave the flute back to Guo Jing, while with his right hand he tried to snatch it one more time. This time Guo Jing moved his flute to evade the attack. Huang Rong started counting, “First move!”

In the battle between experts, using weapon or being barehanded did not make too much difference. Hong Qigong used his ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’ attacking ferociously; the gust of wind could be felt a ‘zhang’ [10 feet/3 meters] away. Even with the iron flute in his hand, how could Guo Jing get close to him? Moreover, Guo Jing was not used to use weapon until in the western region he was forced to battle Ouyang Feng on the stone cliff. It was then that he started improving his sword technique. Even then he did not put too much emphasis on the offense; his swordsmanship was 80% for defense, and only 20% for offense.

The weapon techniques he learned from the Six Freaks of Jiangnan were inadequate to battle an expert; it was after he learned the Nine Yin Manual that his weapon technique improved greatly. Actually it was inside that stone building in the west he started learning many defensive techniques in using a sword to defend against Ouyang Feng’s snake staff. This time he was using an iron flute as a sword to ward off Hong Qigong’s fierce palm attacks; and he was able to defend himself quite well.

Hong Qigong could see his strong defense line and was delighted, he thought, “This kid made a tremendous advancement; I did not teach him in vain. But it won’t look good for the Old Heretic Huang if I defeat him in under 200 moves. I’d better wait until after 200 moves then I am going to increase my power.” And so Hong Qigong kept using his ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’, from the first variation to the ninth; with gusts of wind so strong surrounded Guo Jing completely.

This was where Hong Qigong made a mistake. Guo Jing’s weapon skill had not reached perfection yet; if he kept pressing Guo Jing with a heavy hand, Guo Jing would not be able to withstand, but he wanted to wait until after the 200<sup>th</sup> move. Initially Guo Jing’s strength was already profound; after completed the ‘yi jin duan gu pian’ [changing muscle forging bone chapter], his internal strength increased by leaps and bounds. On the other hand, Hong Qigong had advanced in age, plus he had suffered a heavy injury under Ouyang Feng’s snake staff. It was true that he had completely recovered, but his stamina could not compete with Guo Jing’s in an endurance race. To make matter worse for him, the ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’ required a lot of energy; so after 9 rounds (or 162 stances) even if his attacks were still strong and fierce, but his stamina was gradually decreasing.

After about 200 moves not only the iron flute in Guo Jing’s right hand increased in offensive power, but he was actually getting better in coordinating the right sword technique with his left hand palm technique. Hong Qigong was secretly groaning; realizing that he would not win relying on his brute force, he had to use strategy to defeat this dumb kid, so immediately he changed the way he fought. He opened his hands wide.

Guo Jing was startled, “Shifu has not taught me this stance yet,” he thought. If it was a fight against an enemy, he would attack toward the chest since it was wide open, but the opponent he faced was his own benevolent master, how could he use a killer strike?

While he hesitated, Hong Qigong smiled and said, “You are tricked!” His left foot swiftly moved upward to knock the iron flute in Guo Jing’s hand down, while his right palm slanting downward, attacking Guo Jing’s shoulder. He only used 80% of his strength on this attack since he did not have any intention to hurt Guo Jing. He only wanted to knock Guo Jing down, and thus achieved victory.

Who would have thought that these past several years Guo Jing had endured wind and frost; his body became resilient. This heavy blow made him stagger and caused him to suffer a severe pain, but he did not fall down.

Hong Qigong was surprised Guo Jing was able to withstand his palm, he busily said, “Quickly spit three times and breathe in, breathe out; see if you suffer an internal injury.”

Guo Jing followed his advice, and his chest was not constricted, anymore so he said, “Disciple has lost.”

“No,” Hong Qigong said, “We have to keep fighting. If you admit defeat, the Old Heretic Huang won’t accept it. Come!” Immediately he sent his palm to attack.

Guo Jing did not have any weapon in his hand anymore, while the incoming attack was fierce, so he used Zhou Botong’s Vacant Fist to parry the attack.

The Vacant Fist technique was the softest fist technique in the world; it was created by Zhou Botong based on the Taoist principles found in the ‘Dao De Jing’ [moral/virtue scripture – Taoist’s holy scripture]. The ‘Dao De Jing’ said, ‘A strong army can be decimated; a strong tree can be broken. Strength will fail; suppleness will prevail.’ Also, “The most flexible substance under the sky is water, but it is not easy to withstand its strong attack. Suppleness’ victory is powerful; softness’ victory is strong. No one in the world is unaware, no one can stand.’

On the other hand, ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’ technique was the strongest/hardest martial art. There was a saying, ‘Softness can overcome hardness.’ However, if it was Hong Qigong’s level of ‘hardness,’ then it would not be easy for Zhou Botong’s ‘softness’ to overcome. Fortunately, Guo Jing had mastered the mutual hands combat technique, so with his right hand he launch the soft Vacant Fist, while with his left he employed the Dragon Subduing Palm; hard and soft worked together, yin and yang complemented each other. No matter how fierce Hong Qigong’s attack was, he could not penetrate Guo Jing’s defense.

On the side Huang Rong kept counting; it was almost 300 stances, and Guo Jing did not show any sign that he would be defeated soon. One move after another ... Hong Qigong heard her calling out the number two hundred and ninety-nine; he became edgy, wanted to win the contest; so for the last move he launched the ‘Proud Dragon Repents’ full-strength, with earth-shattering power to back it up. But once it was launched, he began to feel regret; afraid that Guo Jing would not be able to withstand and suffer a heavy injury, so he shouted, “Watch out!”

Guo Jing understood his warning, but the gust of wind had already reached his face; he knew it was very strong. He also knew that his Vacant Fist wouldn’t be able to parry this attack; so in this critical moment his right hand made a circle and with a loud shout launched the very same ‘Proud Dragon Repents’.

Two palms collided with a deafening sound; both men felt their bodies shook violently. Huang Yaoshi and Huang Rong both cried out in shock, simultaneously they jumped toward the men, only to see both men stood still with their palms stuck together like they were glued to each other.

Guo Jing had a mind to yield, but knew very well that his master's overbearing power was still pushing his palm. If he let go and his master did not take his strength away, he might end up getting seriously injured. Hence he was forced to wait for his master to take the pressure away then he would admit defeat.

Seeing Guo Jing was able to block this palm, which he sent with his lifetime cultivation of energy, Hong Qigong could not help but feel pleasantly surprised. He regretted his proud thinking of wanting to be the number one; now he wanted his disciple to win this contest and build up a name for himself. Therefore, gradually he decreased his power to nothing.

Right when these two men were still in a stalemate position, where nobody wins or loses, suddenly someone was heard shouting three times from behind the cliff; then someone leaped and made three somersaults in the air before landing on the ground close to them; it was the Western Poison Ouyang Feng. Hong Qigong and Guo Jing simultaneously retracted their palms and leaped backward.

Ouyang Feng's clothes were tattered, his face full of blood, he shouted, "I have mastered the Nine Yin Manual! My martial art is number one in the world!" Lifting up his snake staff he swept away all four people.

Hong Qigong picked up his dog-beating stick and parried the snake staff. After a while all four people were astonished. Ouyang Feng's stances had always been unusual, but this time they were weirder than ever: he would suddenly claw his own face or kick his own buttock; while launching an attack he would suddenly change direction midway in an unpredictable way. Hong Qigong was extremely amazed; he put a strong defense with his dog-beating technique and did not dare to act carelessly.

While fighting ferociously, 'Slap! Slap! Slap!' suddenly Ouyang Feng slapped his own face red, then he shouted loudly; put down his hands and crawled around like an animal.

Hong Qigong was surprised, but also amused, he thought, "My stick technique is the best at beating dogs, you act like a dog, aren't you just coming straight for the trap?" Lifting up his bamboo stick he aimed for Ouyang Feng's waist. Unexpectedly Ouyang Feng rolled his body around and pinched the stick to the ground; then he rolled alongside the stick upward. Hong Qigong was so startled that his grab loosened and the bamboo stick fell down. Ouyang Feng suddenly leaped up and kicked both feet toward Hong Qigong's head. Hong Qigong was taken by surprise and forced to step back in anxiety.

By this time Huang Rong had already bent down and picked the iron flute up, giving it to her father. Huang Yaoshi used that flute as a sword piercing toward Ouyang Feng. "Emperor Duan! I am not afraid of your 'Solitary Yang Finger'!" Ouyang Feng called out; he jumped and threw himself up.

Seeing his behavior like that, Huang Yaoshi knew that his mind was confused; but to Huang Yaoshi's amazement his attack was fiercer than before. Even though he was smart, Huang Yaoshi did not have any idea what had happened. He did not know that Ouyang Feng had diligently trained

himself according to the altered manual Guo Jing wrote for him; and then Huang Rong led him along the wrong path by giving him random interpretation. Driven by his desire to win the competition he followed her instruction blindly and trained hard. Only his martial art was profound, so even though following the wrong path with lots of mistakes, he somehow managed to achieve some improvement and gave Hong and Huang, two men of great learning and integrity, a hard time.

Dozens of stances later Huang Yaoshi was forced to admit defeat. Guo Jing stepped forward to face the enemy. Ouyang Feng suddenly stopped and wept, "My son, you died a tragic death!" Throwing his snake staff aside he opened up his arms wide to hug Guo Jing.

Guo Jing knew he was remembering his nephew, Ouyang Ke. Ouyang Feng's voice sounded so miserable that Guo Jing felt sorry for him; but he was also scared, so he held out his hand to shove Ouyang Feng's arms away. But Ouyang Feng turned his left wrist over and grabbed Guo Jing's arm, while his right arm tightly hugged Guo Jing's body. Guo Jing frantically struggled to free himself but Ouyang Feng was too strong for him; he could not get away from Ouyang Feng's embrace.

Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi, father and daughter, were shocked; they moved together to rescue Guo Jing. Hong Qigong stretched out his finger to attack the 'feng wei' [phoenix tail] acupoint on Ouyang Feng's shoulder, to force him loosen up his grip. Unexpectedly by that time Ouyang Feng's energy passages had been reversed, his acupoints were entirely dislodged, that although Hong Qigong's finger was right on target seemed like he did not even aware of the attack.

Huang Rong picked up a rock and smashed the top of Ouyang Feng's head. Ouyang Feng casually swung his right fist upward; Huang Rong was not able to hold the rock, it flew toward the valley below. But because of this interference Guo Jing was free from Ouyang Feng's right arm; he struggled hard and leaped backward. After calming down a moment he saw Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi were engaged in a fierce battle.

Huang Yaoshi had inserted his flute back to his waist and fought barehanded. This time Ouyang Feng's movement was really bizarre, weird beyond imagination. Sometimes he stood upright, some other time he would lean to the side with body as straight as a stick, yet some other time his body was horizontally off the ground, supported with one hand while the other hand launched strange attacks. Huang Yaoshi had to put all his concentration to face this kind of opponent, since Ouyang Feng's movement was totally unpredictable.

Hong Qigong, Guo Jing and Huang Rong three people were watching intently with their hearts beating fast. Seeing her father's precarious condition, Huang Rong called out, "Shifu, toward this lunatic we don't have to follow Wulin's rules, let us fight together!"

Hong Qigong shook his head, "If it were some other day, we can cooperate to capture him, but today is the Sword Meet of Mount Hua; the men of valor under the heaven must fight one on one. If we relied on numbers we will be disgraced by the heroes of Jianghu." But he also could see that Ouyang Feng's mental condition was so severe; his mouth foaming, spitting his saliva everywhere. Huang Yaoshi had a difficult time avoiding this attack and was forced to step back.

A moment later Ouyang Feng stooped down, seemingly in pain; his back was completely undefended. Huang Yaoshi was delighted, he thought, "His madness is spreading after all." With the 'Divine Flicking Finger' he attacked the 'ying xiang' [welcoming fragrance] acupoint on the

side of Ouyang Feng's nose. This finger attack was executed swiftly but unexpectedly as soon as it touched his face, Ouyang Feng slightly turned his head and bit Huang Yaoshi's index finger.

Huang Yaoshi was so startled and quickly hit the 'tai yang' [sun] acupoint with his left hand; forcing the mouth to loosen up. Ouyang Feng thrust his right hand up while his mouth bit even harder.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong simultaneously attacked from both sides. Ouyang Feng was forced to loosen up his bit on Huang Yaoshi's finger, but his ten fingers forming two claws tried to grab Huang Rong's face. Under the bright sunlight his face looked so nauseatingly fierce and full of blood. Huang Rong was so scared that she ran away screaming.

Guo Jing hurriedly came to her rescue; Ouyang Feng was forced to parry this palm attack toward his back, giving Huang Rong an opportunity to escape.

Only about a dozen of so stances later Guo Jing's shoulder and leg were hit one after another. "Jing'er, back off! Let me try," Hong Qigong shouted, rushed ahead barehanded. Two people were engaged in a fierce battle for the second time in one day, this time more ferocious than the last.

Hong Qigong had been paying close attention when Ouyang Feng battled Huang Yaoshi and Guo Jing. He found out that even though Ouyang Feng's movements were strange, he could see a pattern on them; they were actually based on the 'Toad Stance' launched backward, like upward movement became downward, left became right. Although his comprehension was incomplete, but Hong Qigong thought that with 70, 80% certainty he had a general idea on how to battle him. He proceeded with utmost caution, and was able to launch a counterattack for roughly every three attacks he received.

Huang Rong took out her handkerchief and wrapped her father's wound. Huang Yaoshi turned his attention to the ongoing battle and after watching a moment he started to shout one after another, "Qi Xiong, kick him upside down." "Strike his 'ju que' [gigantic capital]!" "Hack his 'tian zhu' [pillar of heaven] with the back of your hand."

As a spectator Huang Yaoshi could see clearly; Hong Qigong followed his instructions and a short while later was able to gain a slight advantage over his opponent. But actually these two people were ashamed of what they were doing, they thought, "This time the Eastern Heretic and the Northern Beggar two people join forces to battle the Western Poison, one person." Seeing his defeat is imminent, suddenly Ouyang Feng opened up his mouth and spat his saliva toward Hong Qigong's face.

Hong Qigong quickly leaned sideways to evade, but unexpectedly Ouyang Feng had already anticipated his move. Ouyang Feng's palm flew and slapped the side of Hong Qigong's head; while simultaneously spat saliva toward his face. Hong Qigong was in an awkward position; he did not have any chance to evade. If he let the spittle hit his eyeball he knew he would suffer an injury, or at least very hurt; and if the opponent used that opportunity to attack it would be very difficult for him to parry. He did not have any choice but extending his right hand and took the spittle with his palm, while his left hand counterattacked.

Several stances later Ouyang Feng again spat his saliva; looked like he was using his spittle as secret projectile to confuse enemy's defense. Hong Qigong felt icky and angry at the same time. He

still had the spittle on his right palm; he was not able to shake it loose or wipe it on his clothes since he had to focus his entire concentration to fight the enemy. With a sudden movement he stretched his right palm and shouted, "Got you!" He smeared his right palm on Ouyang Feng's face. Looked like he was casually smearing the spittle on Ouyang Feng's face, but in actuality his palm carried a murderous intention.

Even though Ouyang Feng's mind was confused his senses were as keen as before. Seeing Hong Qigong's palm was about to wipe his face he leaned sideways slightly, evading the attack. Hong Qigong flipped his palm and moved vertically up. Ouyang Feng turned his head slightly and opened his mouth to bite. It was exactly the same bite that defeated Huang Yaoshi's unique skill. It looked ridiculous, but since his movement was so quick that even somebody who had reached martial art perfection like Huang Yaoshi was not able to evade.

Huang Yaoshi, Huang Rong and Guo Jing could see clearly Hong Qigong's palm went straight into Ouyang Feng's mouth; and within an inch from the target suddenly the mouth opened showing two rows of white teeth gleaming under the bright sunlight; ready to bite Hong Qigong's finger. They could not refrain from shouting in alarm, "Watch out!"

What these three people, along with Ouyang Feng, forgot was that Hong Qigong was widely known as the 'jiu zhi shen gai' [Nine-fingered Divine Beggar]. One time because of his gluttonous character he was late in saving the life of a Jianghu's man of valor. In his regret and anger toward himself he chopped off his right index finger.

Ouyang Feng's bite was swift and accurate, if it were other people he would certainly succeed in biting other's finger; but because Hong Qigong did not have an index finger 'clack!' his teeth were biting air.

Actually Ouyang Feng, and everybody else for that matter, knew that Hong Qigong only had nine fingers; but in a ferocious battle situation like this, who would have time to remember little detail like that? The battle between experts, where both contenders' martial arts have been refined through fire, more often than not the end result would be decided by slight oversight like this. When Ouyang Feng bit an empty space, how could Hong Qigong let this opportunity pass? With the 'xiao kou ya ya' [the laughter of a mute] immediately his middle finger struck the 'di cang' [earthen storehouse] acupoint on the side of Ouyang Feng's mouth.

Seeing Hong Qigong's attack went well, the three spectators were ready to applaud, but their mouths were just saying the word 'good' when suddenly Hong Qigong somersaulted several times backward; while Ouyang Feng staggered backward like a drunk before finally came to a stop and let out a big laugh.

Turned out the energy passages in his body were reversed, so that when Hong Qigong hit his major acupoint of 'zu yang ming wei jing' [lit. positive foot, bright stomach passage] he only experienced a slight numbness, then immediately back to normal. Taking that opportunity his palm hit Hong Qigong's shoulder. Lucky for him, because his finger was stretched out, he did not get hit too severely. Hong Qigong further neutralized the hit by somersaulting backward while launching the 'jian long zai tian' [seeing dragon on the field], which made Ouyang Feng stagger back.

Hong Qigong avoided serious injury by moving fast, yet his body was sore, temporarily unable to move. Hong Qigong was the grand master of his respective martial art school; even if he did not

want to admit defeat to a confused man, yet he had to admit that the opponent's martial art was admirable. He cupped his fists and said, "Ouyang Xiong, the Old Beggar admits defeat, you are the Number One Martial Artist in the World!"

Ouyang Feng looked up to the sky and let out a long laugh, his arms waving chaotically in the air. He turned toward Huang Yaoshi and asked, "Emperor Duan, do you or do you not admit defeat?"

Huang Yaoshi was not happy, he thought, "The Number One Martial Artist in The World title fell to a lunatic; won't the Old Beggar and I become the laughingstock of the heroes of the world?" But he realized that even if he'd fight again, it would be difficult for him to score victory anyway, so he did not have any choice but nod his agreement.

Ouyang Feng turned to Guo Jing and said, "Son, your father's martial art is matchless, unrivalled in the world, aren't you happy?"

Ouyang Ke was officially his nephew, but actually he was his son; they were known as uncle and nephew but actually they were father and son. In his confused mind he saw Guo Jing as Ouyang Ke, and thus revealing the secret he had kept for decades.

Guo Jing thought no one present was able to defeat him, so he was worthy of the title Number One Martial Artist in the World; "We can't defeat you!" he said.

Ouyang Feng giggled foolishly, he turned toward Huang Rong and said, "Good daughter-in-law, aren't you happy?"

Huang Rong saw her father, her master and Guo Jing were defeated one after another; she had been thinking of a way to cope with this lunatic early on, but could not think of anything good. Now Ouyang Feng was asking her, she saw he was dancing joyfully with a strange facial expression. Under the bright sunlight his shadow was also dancing back and forth in confusion; suddenly an idea came into her mind, "Who said you are number one in the world?" she asked, "There is one person you can't defeat for sure."

Ouyang Feng was very angry, he beat his chest and roared, "Who? Who? Let him come here and fight me!"

"This man's martial art is so high, you are not his match," Huang Rong said.

"Who? Who? Let him come here and fight me!" Ouyang Feng said.

"He is called Ouyang Feng," Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng scratched his head, musing, "Ouyang Feng?"

Huang Rong continued, "Right! Your martial art may be high, but you won't stand against Ouyang Feng."

Ouyang Feng's mind was totally confused; he knew the name 'Ouyang Feng' to have a very close relationship with himself, but who could that be? "Who am I?" he asked nobody in particular.

"You are you," Huang Rong sneered, "You don't know who you are, why do you ask me?"

Ouyang Feng's heart turned cold, he leaned his head sideways, trying to think hard; but his brain did not want to cooperate, he could not figure out who he was, he could not understand anything.

He was an intelligent man; oftentimes when he was alone he liked to ponder the old-age philosophical questions like, "Who am I? What am I during my lifetime? What will I become after I die?" Ouyang Feng was a smart person, his comprehension ability was outstanding; these questions sometimes came flashing in his mind. That particular day he had defeated three great martial artists but his energy passages were reversed; he would be happy but suddenly turn angry. Listening to Huang Rong he looked around in confusion and muttered, "I, who am I? Where am I? What happened to me?"

"Ouyang Feng wanted to fight you, he wanted to snatch the Nine Yin Manual away from you!" Huang Rong said.

"Where is he?" Ouyang Feng asked

Huang Rong pointed toward his own shadow and said, "Look! He is behind you!"

Ouyang Feng quickly turned around and saw his own shadow. He was shocked. "This ... this ... he ... he ..."

"He is going to beat you!" Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng squatted and hacked the shadow. The shadow also squatted and hacked him.

Ouyang Feng was scared, he hacked and he chopped left and right, but the shadow also moving incessantly. Ouyang Feng felt his opponent was so fierce, he turned around to evade. Facing the sunlight he did not see his shadow anymore "Where did you run?" he shouted, and ran toward the left.

Their left side was actually a barren rock wall. The sun was behind him, casting a shadow on the wall. It looked like the enemy was standing straight in front of him. Ouyang Feng sent out his right palm, striking the wall with all his might. He felt a shot of pain straight to his bone. "Very fierce!" he shouted. Immediately he sent a left kick toward the wall, and the shadow also sent him a kick. His foot hit the wall, hard. The pain was unbearable. Ouyang Feng did not dare to fight again; he turned around and ran away.

This time he was running toward the sun, the enemy disappeared. Several 'zhang's later he turned around to look, and to his surprise the enemy was right behind him. He was frightened and shouted loudly, "You can be the world's number one, I admit defeat." But the shadow was motionless.

Ouyang Feng turned around and ran again, but as soon as he turned his head he saw the shadow was closely following him. He could not run, he could not fight, his heart was stricken with terror; screaming and cursing he ran toward the valley below. A moment later his voice could still be heard from the other side of the hill, "Don't chase me, don't chase me!"

Seeing a great grand master of martial art of their generation ended up this way Huang Yaoshi and Hong Qigong looked at each other and heaved a deep sigh. By that time Ouyang Feng's cry was intermittent, it sounded like he was already several 'li's away. The mountains and valleys echoed

his cry, which sounded like a wolf's howl or a ghost's cry. The four of them were standing under the bright sunlight, yet they felt coldness creep into their hearts.

Hong Qigong sighed, "This man won't live much longer."

All of a sudden Guo Jing mumbled, "I? Who am I?"

Huang Rong knew him to be honest and upright, she was afraid he might think over this matter too much and as a result being possessed by an evil spirit; quickly she said, "You are Guo Jing, Jing Gege. Quickly think about yourself, don't think too much about other matters."

Guo Jing shivered in cold, startled, and came to his senses, "Right! Shifu, Huang Daozhu, let us go down the mountain."

"Dumb kid!" Hong Qigong scolded him, "You are still calling him Huang Daozhu? I'm going to give you several slaps on your face."

Guo Jing was startled; he saw Huang Rong was blushing, looked like she was smiling, yet she was not. He knew what to do; bashfully he called, "Father-in-law!" his face was red.

Huang Yaoshi laughed a big laugh; he pulled his daughter's hand with one hand, then pulled Guo Jing's hand with the other, said to Hong Qigong, "Qi Xiong, martial art study is inexhaustible. Today we've seen the Old Poison's martial art, which made others frightened and ashamed at the same time. Ever since Chongyang Zhenren died, there is no more the Number One Martial Artist in the World."

"Rong'er's culinary skill is number one in the world, this I can guarantee," Hong Qigong said.

Huang Rong pursed up her lips and laughed, "No need to praise me, let us go down the mountain; I am going to prepare some good food for you to enjoy."

Hong Qigong, Huang Yaoshi, Guo Jing and Huang Rong four people went down Mount Hua. Huang Rong demonstrated her superb culinary skill by handpicked the ingredients and cooked some out-of-this-world quality dishes. Hong Qigong ate to his heart's content.

That very evening four people slept in an inn; Huang Yaoshi father and daughter shared a room, while Guo Jing and Hong Qigong shared another. Early the next morning Guo Jing awoke only to find the other bed empty; Hong Qigong was nowhere to be seen. On the table top he saw three letters written with grease: 'I am gone'; it was unclear whether the letters were written with a chicken leg's bone or a pork hoof.

Guo Jing quickly went to the other room to alert Huang Yaoshi father and daughter. Huang Yaoshi simply sighed and said, "Qi Xiong leads a busy life, he is like a divine dragon; we can see its head but not its tail." He turned his gaze to Jing and Rong couple and said, "Jing'er, your parents have passed away, the closest relative to you would be your Da Shifu Ke Zhen'e. Why don't you come along with us to the Peach Blossom Island and ask your Da Shifu to act in your parents' behalf to preside at your wedding with Rong'er?"

Guo Jing was both grieved and joyful, he could not say anything but nodded his head repeatedly. Huang Rong pursed her lips and smiled; she wanted to scold him 'Dumb' but looking at her father she refrained from saying so.

Three people traveled together crossing mountains and rivers, heading southeast. In less than a day, they arrived in between the two parts of Zhejiang; the Peach Blossom Island was not too far ahead. Suddenly they heard an eagle's cry high up in the air; two white eagles were seen flying from the north. Guo Jing was delighted, he whistled and the pair of eagle dived down and perched on his shoulders.

When he left Mongolia Guo Jing was such in a hurry that he did not take his eagles along; but now that they met his joy was unspeakable. He held out his hands to stroke the eagles' back and then he saw a piece of leather rolled into a small cylinder tied on the male eagle's foot. Quickly he used his dagger to take the leather and found a letter carved on it. It was written in Mongolian characters and read, 'We are going south to attack Xiangyang, Knowing my lord's loyalty to his country I braved death to inform you. I have caused my lord's mother tragic death, am so ashamed I don't have the face to see you. I want to say goodbye, am going to the west to live with my eldest brother; won't come back to my homeland forever. I wish my lord's good fortune, long life and happiness.'

The letter did not bear any signature, but as soon as he saw it Guo Jing recognized Princess Huazheng's handwriting. He translated the letter for Huang Yaoshi father and daughter, and asked, "Father-in-law, what do you think?"

Huang Yaoshi answered, "This place is close to Lin'an, but if we inform the royal government they won't necessarily believe us; even if they did, it will take a long time for them to react. This is an urgent matter; your little red horse is swift. Leave for Xiangyang today. If the garrison commander is willing to cooperate, help him defend the city. If not, kill him and lead the troops and the people to fight the Mongolians. Rong'er and I will wait for you on the Peach Blossom Island."

Guo Jing asserted his agreement, but Huang Rong's countenance changed. There was nobody who knows her heart better than her father, so Huang Yaoshi smiled and said, "Very well, Rong'er, you can go too. Come home as soon as you are done; if the government wants to reward you, don't take it."

Huang Rong was ecstatic, "That's for sure," she said.

The young couple took their leave from their father, riding the little red horse heading west. Guo Jing was afraid they would be late; if the Mongolians had already attacked the city, he knew the massacre would be unimaginable; therefore, they continued their journey almost nonstop.

One night they stopped by an inn to spend the night. They were already nearing the two southern roads which linked towards Jiangxi. Guo Jing's mind was occupied with Huazheng's letter; he recalled their childhood together, how he, Huazheng and Toulei played together in the desert. And then his mind wandered to things that happened since until today. His heart was depressed. Huang Rong saw he was staring blankly, lost in thought; she sat by the lamp sewing her clothes.

"Rong'er," suddenly Guo Jing broke the silence, "She said she had caused my mother's tragic death that she is ashamed to see me ever again; what did she mean by that?"

“Her father had forced your mother to her death; naturally she felt sorry for that,” Huang Rong reasoned.

“Mmm,” Guo Jing mumbled. Lowering his head he tried to recall the scene surrounding his mother’s death. Suddenly he leaped up and slap the table, “I know! So that’s how it is!” Huang Rong was startled that the needle punctured the tip of her finger and a drop of blood came out. She smiled and asked, “What is it? You made a fuss about nothing; what did you know?”

Guo Jing said, “When my mother and I opened the Khan’s secret order and decided to go back south there was nobody around, yet Khan immediately found out and captured us, mother and son. In the end my mother committed suicide and died. Who reported on us? I have been thinking hard about it. Turned out ... turned out it was she.”

Huang Rong shook her head, “Princess Huazheng loved you very much; it is impossible for her to betray you.”

“She did not mean to,” Guo Jing explained, “She was outside, accidentally heard everything my mother and I said. She told her father so that Khan would prohibit us from going back home; who would have thought that it ended up in a great tragedy?” Saying thus he sighed and sighed again.

“Because she did that unwittingly, you must go to the west to find her,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing disagreed, “I love her as my sister. She is now with her brother in the west; she has all the honor and riches she deserves; why would I go and seek her?”

Huang Rong smiled, secretly she was very happy.

Another day they arrived at the southern Jiangxi town of Shangrao; the horse trotted along the mountain road where the grass was tall. It was a desolate place. Ahead of them was a dark forest thick with trees. High above them the pair of eagles let out a loud angry cry, and then they dived down and in a blink of an eye disappeared into the forest. Jing and Rong knew something was not right, quickly they urged their horse to run ahead.

Winding through the forest path they saw their eagles were spiraling down above a man who was trying to fight them frantically. They came closer and found out that the man was Peng Zhanglao [Elder Peng] from the Beggar Clan.

Peng Zhanglao was brandishing a steel saber trying to protect himself. The saber moved swiftly; although the eagles were brave it would be difficult for them to score victory. The female eagle made a sudden attack from behind and managed to snatch Elder Peng’s head covering, showing a patch of baldness on his head. Peng Zhanglao’s saber swept up, cutting down some of its feathers.

As soon as Huang Rong saw the baldness on Elder Peng’s head she remembered something, “That day the eagle’s breast was injured by a short arrow; turned out it was this evil beggar who did it. Afterwards the pair of eagle fought the criminal again by the ‘qing long tan’ [Green Dragon Shore] where they managed to snatch a piece of scalp; so it was this evil beggar.”

“Surnamed Peng!” Huang Rong loudly called out, “Look who is here.”

Peng Zhanglao lifted up his eye to see two people, he was scared out of his wits; he turned around and ran away. The male eagle dived down and struck the top of his head. Peng Zhanglao swung his saber to protect his head. The female eagle swooped from the side and pecked his left eye. Peng Zhanglao screamed, throwing his saber away he ran without looking where he was going and entered thick thorn bushes nearby. Peng Zhanglao valued his life more than a few stabbing pain from the thorns, so he went even deeper into the bush. The pair of eagles still did not want to let him go, they circled above the thorn bushes.

“He has lost one eye, just let him go,” Guo Jing called his pair of eagles. Suddenly he heard a baby’s noise among the thick patch of grass nearby. “Ah!” Guo Jing cried. Quickly he dismounted his horse and parted the grass only to see a baby sat on the ground. Next to that baby he saw a pair of a woman’s feet. He parted the grass further and saw a woman wearing dark green clothing was fainted on the ground. It was none other than Mu Nianci.

Huang Rong was pleasantly surprised, “Mu Jiejie [Elder sister]!” she cried; then she stoop down to help her up. Guo Jing carried the baby in his arms. The baby’s bright eyes were staring at him intently, they did not show any sign of fear at all.

Huang Rong massaged several acupoints on Mu Nianci’s upper body; then she also pinched the acupoint next to her nose. Mu Nianci slowly regained her consciousness; she opened her eyes and saw these couple. She thought she was dreaming, “You ... you are Guo Dage [eldest brother Guo] ... Huang Jia Meizi [younger sister from the Huang family] ...”

“Sister Mu, why are you here? Are you injured?” Guo Jing asked.

Mu Nianci struggled to stand up, but she fell down again; turned out her hands and feet were bound by pieces of ropes. Huang Rong quickly took her dagger out and cut the ropes. Mu Nianci quickly took the baby from Guo Jing’s arms. After calming down herself for half a day bashfully she started to recount what had happened to her.

Turned out Mu Nianci lost her chastity to Yang Kang at the Iron Palm Peak, and she was pregnant. She had hoped to return to her hometown at Lin’an, but when she reached Zhangrao she was too weak to continue; so she found an empty hut in the forest and took a rest. Not too long afterwards she gave birth to a baby boy. Since she had no desire to see other people, she stayed in the forest, hunting and picking up wild fruits to survive. Luckily the baby boy was so smart, so she was comforted amidst her suffering and loneliness. That particular day she took the baby out to gather some fire woods, unfortunately they met with Peng Zhanglao. Seeing her beauty Peng Zhanglao wanted to rape her. Mu Nianci’s martial art was not weak, but Peng Zhanglao was one of the four Elders of the Beggar Clan; he was the peer of Lu Youjiao Zhanglao; second only to the Bangzhu [Clan Leader], Hong Qigong. Naturally Mu Nianci was not his match. She was subdued easily and her hands and feet bound. In her anger and desperation she passed out. If Jing and Rong, two people did not arrive at this exact moment, and with their sharp eyes their pair of eagles spotted their common enemy, Mu Nianci would suffer a terrible fate, molested and disgraced by this evil man.

That evening Jing and Rong spent the night at Mu Nianci’s hut. When Huang Rong told her that Yang Kang had died at the Temple of the Iron Spear in Jiaxing, Mu Nianci’s tears came down like rain. Huang Rong understood the depth of her love to him, so Huang Rong did not dare to tell her the details surrounding his death; she only said that Yang Kang was poisoned by Ouyang Feng. “I did not lie, didn’t he die because of Ouyang Feng’s snake venom?” she said in her heart.

Guo Jing saw the boy was handsome, he recalled how he became sworn brothers with Yang Kang, could not refrain from heaving a deep sigh.

Amidst her tears Mu Nianci said, “Guo Dage, would you give this child a name, please?”

Guo Jing thought for a moment, then said, “His father and I were sworn brothers; it’s a pity he did not finish well. I regretted the fact that I was not able to fulfill my responsibility to steer him from his wrong way of life. I hope when he grows up this child will cross over/change (‘guo’) the mistakes and correct (‘gai’) them; he will uphold justice and righteousness with all his might. I am giving him the name Yang Guo, alias Gaizhi; is it all right with you?”

Mu Nianci thanked him and said, “I hope it would be like just what Guo Dage said.”

Early the next morning Guo Jing and Huang Rong presented Mu Nianci not a few silver ‘liang’s to help them, mother and son, to pass the days. Guo Jing urged her to return to Lin’an; but Mu Nianci shook her head. A moment later she softly said, “We, mother and son, are going to the Temple of the Iron Spear in Jiaying so he can see his father’s grave.”

Three people bid farewell to each other and Guo Jing and Huang Rong left with heavy hearts.

Two people headed west and arrived at the Hunan-Hubei border, then they turned north and in less than a day they arrived at Xiangyang. They saw the people were calm, the city was prosperous, there was no sign of any military activity; they knew the great Mongolian army had not arrived, they were relieved.

Xiangyang was an important city located on the northern border of the Southern Song Dynasty. It was under the authority of a garrison commander in charge of the troop to defend the border. Guo Jing thought the situation is critical, so without trying to find any inn they went directly to the Commander Lu Wende’s official residence.

This commander was in charge of the whole garrison, he was a high-ranking officer. Even though Guo Jing was a marshal in the Mongolian army, but in the Southern Song Dynasty he was a nobody. How could he seek audience with a high-ranking officer just like that?

Huang Rong knew that money solved everything, so she gave a ‘liang’ of gold to the receptionist. Immediately the receptionist treated them nicely; he looked happy, but still could not guarantee audience that very same day. He said that the earliest opportunity would be half a month away; even then he could not guarantee the commander would be willing to receive Guo Jing.

Guo Jing’s temper flared, “This is an urgent military situation, how can I wait?” he shouted.

Huang Rong quickly cast a meaningful glance toward him, pulled him to the side and whispered, “We’ll comeback tonight.”

They found a temporary lodging, waited until the second hour that night and using their lightness kungfu they went to the commander’s mansion. Commander Lu Wende was having a private party, he hired some professional female entertainer and was having fun with his concubines. Guo and Huang two people jumped down from the roof. Guo Jing cupped his fists, “Xiao Ren [little/lowly people] has an urgent military matter to report,” he said.

Lu Wende was startled, “Assassin!” he shouted; shoving the female entertainers away he went hiding underneath the table.

Guo Jing stepped forward in big strides and said, “Commander, please calm down. Xiao Ren does not have any ill intention toward you.” He pulled the commander back to his seat.

Lu Wende’s face was pale, he kept trembling. Then he saw dozen or so soldiers with their swords and spears ready to rescue him. Huang Rong immediately took out her dagger and pointed it toward Lu Wende’s chest. The soldiers yelling and shouting loudly, but nobody dared to go forward. “Tell them to shut up, we have something to say to you,” Huang Rong said.

Lu Wende was still trembling all over, he signaled the soldiers to be quiet. Guo Jing silently sighed seeing the man who held authority over the troop with a heavy responsibility to guard against the enemy was such a useless fool. He reported that the Mongolian army was going to attack Xiangyang and asked the commander to deploy troops immediately and arranged the necessary defense.

In his heart Lu Wende did not believe him at all, but his mouth repeatedly said yes. Huang Rong saw he kept trembling, “Did you hear what he said?” she asked.

“I did ... I heard,” Lu Wende answered.

“What did you hear?” Huang Rong pressed.

“That ... that the Jin army are planning a sneak attack, must arrange defense, must arrange defense,” Lu Wende mumbled.

Huang Rong was angry, “It’s the Mongolian army, not the Jins!” she said.

Lu Wende was scared out of his wits, “Mongolian army? That’s impossible, that’s impossible. The Mongolians have signed an agreement with our minister to fight the Jins together; they won’t breach that agreement.”

Huang Rong was really angry, “I said the Mongolian army! It is the Mongolian army!”

Lu Wende repeatedly nodded his head, “If Miss says it is the Mongolian army, then it is Mongolian army.”

“The whole country and the people’s lives are in the hand of ‘Da Ren’ [lit. big person – common term for government official]. Xiangyang is the Southern Song’s first defense, Da Ren must really care about it,” Guo Jing said.

“Right, right,” Lu Wende said, “What ‘lao xiong’ [‘old chap’] said was absolutely right.”

Jing and Rong two people sighed. They leaped over the wall and went out, amidst the chaotic shouting, “Catch the assassins! Catch the assassins!”

Two people waited for two more days, but did not see any increased activity on the city wall at all. “This Commander is to be cursed!” Guo Jing said, “Father-in-law was right, I’d better kill him and think about something later.”

“The enemy will arrive within the next few days,” Huang Rong said, “Killing this dog government official is not enough. The city will certainly be chaotic, the troops will not have anybody to lead them; it will be difficult to fight the enemy.”

Guo Jing creased his brows, “Then, what do we do?”

Huang Rong hesitated, “The ‘zuo zhuan’ [lit. left biography] has a story called ‘xian gao kao shi’ [Xian Gao presenting a gift to an army]. We might be able to follow this example.”

Guo Jing was delighted, “Rong’er, reading books truly brings endless wonders. What story was that? Quickly narrate it for me. Can we do it?”

Huang Rong said, “We can do it, but it all depends on your body.”

Guo Jing was puzzled, “What?”

Huang Rong did not answer, but she softly laughed.

A moment later she continued, “Very well, I’ll narrate the story for you to hear. During the ‘chun qiu’ period [spring and autumn, ca. 770-476 BC] in the Zheng country there was a merchant whose name was Xian Gao. While doing business out of town he came across the Qin army who was going to attack the Zheng country. That time the Zhengs were not prepared, therefore, if the Qins attacked they would surely perish. Even though Xian Gao was a businessman he was also a patriot. He cooked up a plan. He dispatched a courier traveling at night to alert his country, while he himself prepared twelve oxen and requested an audience with the enemy’s general. He said he represented the Zheng government to present a gift for the Qin army. The Qin’s army general thought that the Zheng had already prepared to battle; he did not dare to proceed and pulled the army back to their own country.”

Guo Jing was delighted, “That was a wonderful story; but what does it have to do with my body?” he asked.

Huang Rong laughed, “Didn’t he use twelve oxen? Your zodiac is the ox, isn’t it?”

Guo Jing threw his hands in desperation, “Good! You used a story to indirectly curse me.” He stretched his fingers to tickle Huang Rong. Huang Rong laughed and ran away.

After having a good laugh, Huang Rong said, “Tonight we’ll plunder the Commander’s residence for gold and precious jewels. Tomorrow I will disguise myself as a male government officer and welcome the great army of Mongolia. We’ll see whether we can deceive them to withdraw their troops.”

Guo Jing applauded.

That very evening two people plundered the Commander’s mansion. They found Lu Wende had amassed riches as high as a mountain. They took away a large amount of gold and jewels plus a set of government official’s costume; while the people inside the mansion slumbered.

Huang Rong dressed herself in the costume and she was transformed into a handsome high-ranking officer. Taking the gold and jewelry she rode the little red horse headed north.

Guo Jing was waiting for the news from Huang Rong outside the north gate about mid-day on the second day when he saw the little red horse came galloping fast; dust flying behind. Huang Rong pulled the rein; her face was ashen. With a trembling voice she said, “The Mongolian army is more than a hundred thousand strong; how can we fight them?”

Guo Jing was shocked! “That many?” he muttered.

“Looked like Genghis Khan has determined to crush the Southern Song in one swoop,” Huang Rong said, “I presented the gift to the commander of their vanguard regiment. He did not know that we are already aware of their real intention; he said they were going to attack the Jins and not the Songs. When I told him point blankly he was startled and immediately held their movement and sent words to their general.”

“It certainly is best if they decided to withdraw, but I am afraid ... I am afraid ...,” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong raised her beautiful eyebrows. “Judging from their preparation, they won’t withdraw that easily.”

“Can you think of another wonderful idea?” Guo Jing asked.

Huang Rong shook her head. “I have racked my brain for a whole day and a whole night. Brother Jing, if we fight one on one, there are probably only two or three people in the world that can defeat you; even if the enemy is ten or a hundred men strong, we won’t be deterred by them; but the enemy is thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands strong; what can we do?”

Guo Jing heaved a deep sigh. “Our Great Song people are actually dozens times more than the Mongolians. If all the millions people are all of one mind; why would we fear the Mongolian army? It’s a pity our government officials are cowards and fools; that the people have to suffer.”

“The Mongolians are not here yet; even if they were, we can always kill some of them. If the situation becomes really critical we can still depend on the little red horse to escape. The anxiety of this world is enough to burden us down,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing’s expression changed, “Rong’er, please don’t say such a thing. Both of us have already learned the art of war from the book ‘Wu Mu’ [General Yue Fei] left behind; how can we forget Yue Wu Mu’s teachings, ‘jin zhong bao guo’ [with utmost loyalty serving the country]? Even though the two of us won’t make significant contribution, but we must dedicate our lives to defend the country will all of our might. Even if we have to lay down our lives here, we won’t let our parents’ and masters’ upbringing in vain.”

Huang Rong sighed, “I knew early on that it would be difficult to avoid a day like this. All right! You live I live, you die I will also die!”

Once these two made a decision, their hearts were peaceful. They returned to their lodging immediately, drinking and chatting. They knew the enemy was threatening the border; they knew they might part forever, so they felt closer than in the previous days.

They were drinking until about the second hour that evening, when suddenly a commotion outside the city wall was heard. It was so loud and sounded really bad. “They are here!” Huang Rong called out.

Two people jumped and rushed to the top of the city wall to see outside the city thousands of refugees had arrived; young and old, endless streams of people rushing to the city. Who would have expected that the captain of the guards had ordered the soldiers to shut the gate tightly; not allowing the refugees to enter the city? Not too long afterwards Lu Wende sent reinforcement with bows and arrows. They started shooting toward the refugees, forcing them to withdraw from the city wall.

“The Mongolian soldiers come and kill us!” the refugees loudly shout. But the captain did not open the gate. The refugees under the city wall cried and screamed, their voices shook the sky.

Jing and Rong two people stood atop the city wall; they looked as far as their eyes could see, and saw in the distant a column of torches flickering in the wind coming near. The vanguard regiment of the Mongolian army had arrived.

Guo Jing had served under the Genghis Khan for quite a while. He knew that the Mongolian’s tactic to break city walls was forcing refugees to flee into the city and attack as soon as the city gate was open. Guo Jing saw tens of thousands of refugees gathered around the city gate; as soon as the army arrived, they would kill everybody, outside and inside the Xiangyang’s city wall.

In this critical moment Guo Jing made up his mind. He stood on top of the city wall, he raised his arm and loudly shouted, “If the Mongolian army breaks Xiangyang’s wall, nobody will live. Men of valor, quickly follow me to kill the enemy!”

The captain of the guards at the north gate was one of Lu Wende’s trusted aides; hearing Guo Jing’s shout he was angry, “A traitor trying to trouble people’s mind; arrest him!”

Guo Jing leaped down from the top of the city wall; stretching his right arm he grabbed the captain’s chest, lifted his body up and mounted his horse.

There were many patriots among the soldiers and people of the Central Plains. They saw how the refugees were crying bitterly outside the city wall; they were indignant. This time Guo Jing grabbed the captain they could not help but feel pleasantly surprised; obviously nobody went forward to rescue the captain.

Guo Jing barked his order, “Quick, tell the soldiers to open the gate!”

The captain was a coward; he had no alternative but to comply. The north gate was opened, and the refugees came flooding in.

Guo Jing handed out the captain to Huang Rong while he himself took a spear and went out of the city gate on the horse back. “Wait!” Huang Rong called. She took the captain’s helmet and armor and put them on Guo Jing. “Use a fake imperial decree; command the troop to go out of the city,” she whispered in Guo Jing’s ear. With the back of her hand Huang Rong struck the captain’s acupoint and threw him by the city gate.

Guo Jing thought it was a great idea, so he shouted loud and clear, “Hear the imperial decree: Due to his incapability, the Garrison Commander Lu Wende is removed from his duty. The army is to follow me going out of the city and fight the enemy.” His speech was supported by profound internal strength; so that although the city was in chaos but his voice was clearly heard above the clamoring people. For a brief moment everybody was quiet. In this panic-stricken situation who could differentiate whether the decree was real or not? Almost everybody in the army, from top to

bottom, did not hold Lu Wende in high regard; they knew he was a coward, afraid of death. This time a powerful enemy was threatening their border. In this time of panic suddenly hearing that the corrupt official is being removed from his office and somebody stepping up to lead them to face the enemy, they were cheering with one voice.

Guo Jing lead about six, seven thousands of infantry and cavalry troops going out of the city. They were not observing military discipline, the troop was scattered in disorder; how could they be compared to the refined Mongolian army?

Guo Jing recalled Yue Fei's book had this principle, 'in a critical situation, use unconventional tactic', he ordered over three thousands soldiers and their sergeants to hide on the eastern hillside; as they heard the canon once, they were to shout at the top of their lungs, raising and waving flags, but did not go out to fight the enemy. Then he ordered another three thousands soldiers and their sergeants to hide on the western hillside; as they heard the canon twice, they were to do the same.

Both companies could see Guo Jing's confidence, giving up orders with ease and competence; they accepted the command and went to their respective positions.

It was already dawn when the entire refugees had entered the city. They heard the drums and the battle cry, the sound of iron horseshoes treading on the ground. They also saw the dust rising from the earth; the vanguard regiment of Mongolian army had arrived at the city wall.

Huang Rong had also donned battle armor; mounting on a horse she took a spear and rode next to Guo Jing to face death. Guo Jing gave his order loud and clear, "Open wide all four city gates! Everybody in the city hide inside the houses. Whoever dares to come out will be beheaded immediately!"

Actually he did not need to issue this order; early on everybody in the city had disappeared into the houses, while the brave soldiers had positioned themselves on the east and western hillsides. Lu Wende hid underneath a table, busily read his prayers with a trembling voice.

Hundreds of Mongolian cavalry galloped like the wind spreading out along the city wall; they saw Xiangyang's city gate was wide open and a pair of young people, a man and a woman, on horsebacks with spears in their hands. Their horses stood in front of the hanging bridge across the moat.

The vanguard regiment's 'qian fu zhang' [leader of a thousand unit] felt strange; he did not dare to proceed without authorization. Quickly he dispatched a messenger to the 'wan fu zhang' [leader of a ten thousand unit]. The 'wan fu zhang' was a veteran; listening to this strange report he rode his horse to the city wall. When he saw Guo Jing he was shocked. He had joined the expedition to the west, time and again he had seen Guo Jing's strange and wonderful tactics in battle. Guo Jing's troops were invincible. His paratroopers flying down and breaking Samarkhand defense was a legend, making Guo Jing the object of full admiration of the whole Mongolian army; as a matter of fact, his accomplishments were still the talk of the troops. This time he saw Guo Jing was standing in front of the city, while the city looked empty and deserted; how could he dare to attack? Immediately he dismounted his horse, raised his hands in salute and called out, "Jin dao fu ma [golden blade consort], your subordinate pays his respect."

Guo Jing returned his salute, but did not say anything. That ‘wan fu zhang’ withdrew and flew to report to his commander-in-chief. About an hour or so later a group of riders bearing a large military banner came near; a young looking general came forward to the bridge. It was the Fourth Prince Tuolei. He shouted, “Guo Jing Anda [Mongolian term for sworn brother], how are you?”

Guo Jing moved his horse forward and said, “Tuolei Anda, so it is you?”

Whenever these two sworn brothers met in the past, they would always hugged each other in delight, but this time both of them held their horses’ reins when they were still about five ‘zhang’s [about 50 feet or 15 meters] apart as if they had a prior agreement.

“Anda, you are leading your troop to attack my Great Song, are you not?” Guo Jing asked.

“I bear my ‘fu huang’s [Emperor Father] decree, I don’t have liberty. I ask for your forgiveness,” Tuolei replied.

Guo Jing swept his gaze across the field; he saw flags fluttering like clouds, the blades gleaming white like snow; he did not know for sure how many soldiers were there. “Once this cavalry attacks, I, Guo Jing, will give up my life,” he thought. With a clear voice he said, “Very well! Then go ahead and take my life!”

Tuolei was taken aback, he mused, “This man commands an army like a deity, truly I am not his match; much less he and I are as close as flesh and blood brothers. How could I injure this sworn brother’s relationship?” He hesitated and did not know what to do.

Huang Rong turned her head and signaled with her right hand. Immediately the soldiers in the city shot a canon. As soon as they heard the canon, the soldiers on the eastern hillside raised their voices and waved their flags. Tuolei’s face changed. The canon was shot again, and the soldiers on the western hillside were also shouting loudly. Tuolei thought, “Not good! I fell into his ambush.”

Tuolei had served under Genghis Khan fighting to the east and attacking to the west; he had been in countless battles. What major battle he had not seen? How could this little ambush by several thousands soldiers scare him? It was because during the expedition to the west Guo Jing had demonstrated wonderful and strange warfare. Tuolei was already scared of Guo Jing. Now he saw the situation was unusual, he was afraid he might fall into Guo Jing’s trap. He gave an order for his troops to withdraw about thirty ‘li’s and pitched a camp there.

Seeing the Mongolian army retreat, Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other and smiled. “Jing Gege, congratulations on your empty city tactic.”

Guo Jing smiled, but his face still showed anxiety, he said, “Tuolei is smart and brave. He retreated today, but he will be back tomorrow. How would we fight him?”

Huang Rong hesitated for half a day before opened her mouth, “I have an idea, but I am afraid you love your sworn brother too much and will not be willing to do it.”

Guo Jing’s heart turned cold, “You want me to assassinate him?” he asked.

“He is the youngest and most beloved son of the Great Khan,” Huang Rong replied, “Unlike other senior generals, he holds incomparable honors. If the Fourth Prince dies, the troops will retreat immediately.”

Guo Jing lowered his head without saying anything; they turned back and entered the city. Seeing the enemy retreat, the troops marched back to the city, still in disorderly manner. Lu Wende heard how Guo Jing made the enemy retreat simply by talking; he was overjoyed and immediately paid two people a visit at their lodgings, inviting them back to his mansion for a drink.

Guo Jing wanted to discuss city defense with him, but as soon as Lu Wende heard that the Mongolian army would be back the next day his knees weakened and he was speechless for half a day. When he finally opened his mouth what he said was, “Prepare a sedan chair, I am going home. Prepare a sedan chair, I am going home.” He determined to abandon the city and head south that very same night.

Guo Jing was very depressed, he could not eat. The sky gradually darkened. He heard people crying all over the city. He was afraid that by this time the next day there wouldn't be a single living Great Song people in Xiangyang. He had seen not a few times where the Mongolian troops were on a killing spree, washing the city wall they subdued with the blood of the people. He could never take the massacre of the people of Samarkhand out of his mind. “Crack!” he slapped the table with his palm and shouted, “Rong'er, the people of old sacrificed their own family for the country; today how can I concern myself with sworn brotherhood?”

Huang Rong sighed, “This is actually a very difficult matter.”

As soon as his mind was made up, Guo Jing changed into night clothing. Together with Huang Rong they rode the little red horse toward the Mongolian camp. They stopped at a hill nearby to leave the red horse then walked the rest of the way, looking for Tuolei's tent.

They caught two night watch guards, sealed their acupoints, and donned their uniforms. Guo Jing grew up among the Mongolian warriors; he spoke their language, and was familiar with Mongolian army regulations; so without too much effort they found the big tent where Tuolei slept.

It was a pitch black night; two people crouched down behind the big tent, peeking inside through the tent seams. They saw Tuolei was pacing back and forth, his face gloomy. Tuolei was muttering, “Guo Jing, Anda! Anda, Guo Jing.”

Guo Jing was startled; he thought his presence had been detected. He almost opened his mouth to answer when Huang Rong, who had anticipated early on what would happen, immediately covered his mouth with her hand. Guo Jing silently cursed his own stupidity, he felt partly funny, partly mad at himself.

Huang Rong whispered in his ear, “Do it now, a real man takes the bull by the horns; wavering is useless.”

Right at that moment they heard a distant sound of horse hoof galloping fast; the sound was getting closer as the rider came toward the big tent. Guo Jing knew it was an urgent military dispatch, so he bent back down and whispered in Huang Rong's ear, “I want to listen to the military situation, it won't be too late to kill him later.”

They saw the messenger dressed in yellow dismount his horse and enter the tent. He bowed to Tuolei, "Fourth Prince, a message from the Great Khan," he said.

"What did the Great Khan say?" Tuolei asked. The messenger bent his knees and started to sing. The Mongolian culture had not been developed too long; although they had written words, Genghis Khan was not literate; he could neither read nor write. The decree would be issued orally; and to avoid mistakes in the transmission, oftentimes the decree was made into a song which the messenger memorized and recited over and over along the way before finally delivering it to the recipient.

The messenger only sang three lines when Tuolei and Guo Jing were both shocked; Tuolei even shed some tears. It turned out that after the expedition to the west Genghis Khan got sick; for the last few days he got worse, sometimes he lost consciousness. He summoned Tuolei to go back home as soon as he could. At the end of his message he said that he missed Guo Jing very much; and if Tuolei in the south knew his whereabouts, to invite him back north and bade farewell with the Great Khan. Khan had pardoned every single offense he had committed.

Listening to this part Guo Jing used his dagger to rip open the tent. He jumped in and called out, "Tuolei Anda, I am coming with you."

Tuolei was startled, but seeing it was Guo Jing his delight was unspeakable. Finally they both hugged each other.

The messenger recognized Guo Jing, he stepped forward and kneeled in front of Guo Jing and said, "Jin dao fu ma, the Great Khan requested you come to the Golden Tent to see him."

Hearing the messenger still called him 'jin dao fu ma' Guo Jing was anxious for fear that Huang Rong would make a big deal out of it. Immediately he jumped out through the rip on the tent and pull Huang Rong's hand, "Rong'er, you and I will go together and return together."

Huang Rong lowered her head but did not say anything.

"Don't you believe me?" Guo Jing nervously asked.

Huang Rong smiled sweetly, "If you are still thinking of becoming 'fu ma' or 'fu niu' [fu ma – consort, ma – horse, niu – cow], I'll kill you with this dagger."

That very evening Tuolei issued an order to withdraw the army; they would be leaving at daybreak.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong went back to get the red horse and their pair of eagles, ready to leave with the army heading north the next morning.

Tuolei was afraid he would not be able to see his father, so he delegated his command to his second in command, while he himself sped up north with Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

In less than a month they had arrived at Genghis Khan's golden tent. From the distant Tuolei saw in front of the golden tent nine big banners were still fluttering in the wind. He knew the Khan was still well; he shouted in joy and urged the horse to run faster.

Guo Jing held his rein. He recalled Khan's generosity in raising him up; yet the same Khan had caused the tragic death of his mother. He loved and hated Khan at the same time. He lowered his head and did not say anything.

Suddenly he heard the bugle being sounded, two rows of Khan's personal guards lined up in front of the Golden Tent. Genghis Khan, wearing a black eagle's feather coat, walked out in big strides supported by Tuolei's shoulder. His footsteps were as majestic as in days past, but he was trembling slightly.

Guo Jing rushed forward and kneeled down. Genghis Khan's eyes were brimming with tears, with a trembling voice he said, "Get up, get up! I am thinking of you every day."

Guo Jing stood up. He saw the Great Khan's face was full of wrinkles; his cheeks were deep, it looked like his days in this world were numbered. Suddenly he felt he did not hate Khan that much anymore.

Genghis Khan placed his other hand on Guo Jing's left shoulder. He looked at Tuolei, then at Guo Jing, and heaved a deep sigh. He lifted up his eyes to the distant desert and stood silent, lost in thought. Guo Jing and Tuolei did not know what he was thinking, they did not dare to make any noise.

After a long time Genghis Khan sighed, "A long time ago Anda Jamuqa and I became sworn brothers; who would have thought that there came a day when I had no choice but to kill him. I have become the Great Khan; he died under my own hands. A few more days and what difference will we have? Won't I be the same with him, return to the yellow dirt? Who succeeds and who fails, in the end what difference does it make?" Tapping both men's shoulders he continued, "You two have to live in harmony from the beginning to the end; don't ever think of killing each other. Anda Jamuqa had died, the matter between us is finished; but every time I remembered our brotherhood, many, many nights I could not close my eyes to sleep."

Tuolei and Guo Jing remembered how they almost killed each other outside the Xiangyang's city gate, they were secretly ashamed.

After standing up for a while Genghis Khan felt tired. He was about to return to his tent when suddenly a small group of riders approached fast. The one in the front wore a white robe with a golden belt on his waist. As soon as Genghis Khan saw his enemy, his spirit rose.

The men held their reins quite a distance away, dismounted their horses and anxiously stepped forward. They kneeled on the ground from a far, did not dare to approach at all. Respectfully the leader said, "The Jin emissary seeks an audience with the Great Khan."

"The Jin is not willing to surrender, what does it want by sending someone to see me?" Genghis Khan angrily asked.

That emissary bowed to the ground and said, "Our lowly country realized that we have been too bold; offending the divine power of the Great Khan; a crime deserving death. We are offering one thousand pearls to appease the Great Khan's anger; we are asking the Great Khan to pardon our sins. These thousand pearls are our country's heritage treasure; we earnestly hope the Great Khan would accept this humble gift." The emissary took a big bundle from his back, produced a jade tray,

and again from his sack poured innumerable pearls onto the tray. He knelt on the ground and lifted the tray high above his head with both hands.

Genghis Khan slightly squinted and looked at the pearls; those were big pearls, about the size of a fingertip each, surrounding a giant pearl in the middle of the tray. Just one pearl would worth a fortune, let alone a thousand of them. Except for the giant pearl in the middle, the rest of them were roughly of the same size. The pearls were gleaming brilliantly under the sun light; there was a layer of rainbow-like light above the jade tray.

On a normal day Genghis Khan would love this kind of gift; but that particular day he only raised his eyebrows and to his personal guard said, "Take it." The personal guard took the jade tray.

Seeing the Great Khan accepted the gift, the emissary's joy was unbounded. He said, "The Great Khan has accepted our humble gift; our lowly nation, from the ruler to the people, are very grateful."

Genghis Khan was indignant, "Who said I accept your gift? I am going to dispatch my army to attack the Jin dogs left and right. Seize him!" His personal guards immediately surrounded the emissary and his men.

"Even if there are a thousand more pearls, it is still difficult for me to live longer!" Genghis Khan sighed. He took the jade tray from his guard and threw everything high in the air; the pearls scattered everywhere. Everybody was startled.

Many of these pearls were later picked up by the Mongolian soldiers and people; but many more were still hidden among the tall grass that hundreds of years later lucky herdsmen would find them.

Genghis Khan was indifferent, he returned to his tent.

That evening just before dusk he told Guo Jing to accompany him for a stroll along the prairie. Two people on horseback had ridden for about a dozen of 'li's when they heard the cry of eagles high above their heads. They looked up and saw Guo Jing's pair of eagles circling in the air. Genghis Khan fetched his iron bow and aimed the arrow toward the female eagle.

"Great Khan, don't shoot!" Guo Jing cried out in alarm.

Although Genghis Khan was feeble, his hand was still quick; by the time Guo Jing cried, the arrow had already left the bow. Guo Jing secretly groaned, he was fully aware that Genghis Khan had an outstanding physical strength. Once the arrow left his bow his beloved eagle would be killed for sure. Who would have thought that the eagle was able to skew itself and sweep its wing to strike the arrow. The male eagle was angry, it let out a long cry and dived to strike Genghis Khan's head.

"Eagle, you want to die?" Guo Jing barked and raised his whip to hit the male eagle. The male eagle saw its master was angry flew back to the sky, letting out a loud cry a pair of eagles soared to the sky.

Genghis Khan was dejected, he threw his bow and arrow to the ground and sadly said, "For dozens of years this is the first time I could not shoot an eagle down; I guess my time is drawing really near."

Gou Jing wanted to console him but actually he did not know anything good to say. Suddenly Genghis Khan kicked his legs and his horse sped to the north. Guo Jing was afraid he would be lost, so he urged his horse to follow. The little red horse ran like the wind and in a blink of an eye they caught up with the Great Khan.

Genghis Khan held his rein; looking at all direction he suddenly said, “Jing’er, I built this great country; no other dynasty, past or future, can match its splendor. It will take one full year to travel from the center of my kingdom to the outermost part of it, east, west, south and north. Tell me, among the heroes of the world, who achieved more than I do?”

Guo Jing hesitated a moment before answering, “Great Khan’s accomplishment is exceptional, no one can match it since time immemorial. However, for Great Khan one person to achieve this level of awe-inspiring power, I don’t know how many bones have been piled up, how many orphans and widows out there, and how many tears have been shed?”

Genghis Khan’s eyebrows were raised. He lifted his horsewhip high, ready to strike Guo Jing’s head; but seeing Guo Jing imposingly looking at him without any trace of fear in his eyes, his whip stopped midair. He roared, “What did you say?”

Guo Jing said in his heart, “After today the days for me to say goodbye to the Great Khan are numbered; even if I provoke him to anger I have to make him understand what’s in my heart.” Therefore, fearlessly he said, “Great Khan, you raised me up and taught me, yet you also caused my mother’s tragic death. This is personal grudge and gratitude; let us not talk about it. I only want to ask you: when somebody died and buried, how much land would he occupy?”

Genghis Khan was startled, but he answered anyway, “About this big,” he made a circle with his whip.

Guo Jing said, “That’s right. Then you killed so many people, shed so much blood, and invaded so many countries; in the end, what’s the use of all that?”

Genghis Khan was silent.

Guo Jing continued, “The true measure of a real hero, the one admired by the future generation, is how much he did for the benefit of his people; who always seek the good of the common people. In my opinion, someone who killed many people is not necessarily a hero.” [Translator’s note: the word ‘hero’ here is ‘ying xiong’.]

“Are you saying that in all my life I did not do a single good deed?” Genghis Khan asked.

“Good deeds, certainly there are many, but you attacked the south and conquered the west, piling dead bodies like a mountain. Whether that act could be considered right or wrong, might be very difficult to say,” Guo Jing answered. His natural disposition was simple and straightforward, he said what was in his heart.

All of his life Genghis Khan was a conceited man, nobody dared to tell him anything. This time he was scolded by a youngster, worse yet, he found it difficult to refute what Guo Jing had said. He looked back to his past, also looked around him on the horseback. He felt something is suddenly taken away from him. Half a day later, ‘wah!’ he spurted fresh blood to the ground.

Guo Jing was scared, he realized his tongue had been too sharp; busily he held out his hand to support the Khan and said, "Great Khan, let's go back and rest. I have been too bold and affronted you, I beg for your forgiveness."

Genghis Khan gave a slight wry smile, his face was pale like a yellow wax, he sighed, "Among the people around me, there is none who is as bold as you are, dare to tell me what you really think in your heart." Immediately his eyebrows were raised, put an arrogant face and proudly said, "I have wandered back and fro over the earth, crushing countless countries, yet in your opinion I can't be counted as a hero? Hey! It truly is childish talk!" He raised his whip and struck his horse's back, speeding back to his tent.

That very evening Genghis Khan collapsed inside his Golden Tent. Just before he died he mumbled, "Hero ... hero ..." Apparently he had been pondering in his heart what Guo Jing had said earlier.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong paid their final respect to the Great Khan; and after bidding Tuolei farewell, they headed south that very same day.

Along the way two people saw the white bones that were scattered among the tall grass of the prairie; they could not refrain from lamenting incessantly; both were thinking that the two of them loved each other, they would live harmoniously, they did not have any regrets; yet the common people's misery was deep; they did not know the day peace and prosperity would reign on earth. It was as written:

*After the soldiers and fire become ashes,  
Only then the poor village sprouting families.  
No one's to know when the war is over,  
Until they are buried in the cold sand under the waning moon.*

(**The end of the entire book.** The narration of Guo Jing, Huang Rong, and the others' accomplishment is continued in the 'Divine Eagle, Gallant Knight'.)

**THE END**