

LEGEND OF THE FIRE SWORD

Journey to the West

Volume 11

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Summary

八： Dance of the Sword: The Flower Blossoms

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Li meditated in lotus position in a private area outdoors. Meditation is supposed to make one feel peaceful, however, Li felt the opposite. Her eyelids moved about as she was struggling to find an answer. (Besides the Tornado Slicer, how many moves does Raijun have?) From talking to Xiao and watching Raijun fight, she had several flashbacks.

一： The Wind Slicer

二： The Wind Tunnel

三： When he swings his sword, it creates a layer of air so thin and condensed it is as sharp as a knife.

四： Suddenly, Raijun charged at Alex with his glowing Wind Sword. Air currents surrounded his blade, turning it into a deadlier weapon. It would be unthinkable what would happen if it touched something.

五： Raijun pointed his Wind Sword backwards and used the wind to push himself forward like a rocket.

(He has five techniques and possibly more that he hasn't revealed. He can maximize the Wind Sword's capabilities. I still don't understand my Ice Sword enough. I have yet to master the Ice Dragon.)

In the city of Yi ting, there were sightings of a masked female swordsman robbing men. Wanted posters were put all over town by the local police, but the picture of her is of her with a mask so no one knew what she looked like.

In a dark alley, a drunken rich guy, accompanied by his bodyguard stumbled about, bumping into garbage piles. He began to speak incoherently. "If I waz ta talk to dat girl, I woulda totally gotten hers address!"

"Of course, sir!" said the bodyguard, who was a bit tipsy, but still in control of himself.

"I'm tellings ya, girls fall fo me a first sight, bruh!" said the rich man.

Suddenly, a woman dropped down from the roof and landed in front of them. She wore a brightly colored dress and a mask that covered the bottom half of her face. She wielded two swords and brandished them to the two men.

"Ohhhh looks here anotha woman. Didyha come fo a date, babe?"

The bodyguard drew his word. "Identify yourself, woman."

She attacked him using both swords. The bodyguard was overwhelmed by her technique and could not do a thing. She swung her sword into his abdomen, knocking him against the wall. He was cut but it was not deep enough to threaten his life.

The rich man suddenly got scared. "Please don't hurt me! I gots a family at home!" He tossed a bag of gold coins to her feet and he ran away.

The masked woman picked the coins, counted them, and jumped away.

Alex stared at the cracked Fire Sword and sighed in despair. He has used it for such a long time but it never cracked, so why now? Did this ever happen to the sword's previous owner, Masai Genzo? Sensing people behind him, Alex quickly sheathed the sword, as if hiding it in shame. Seeing Xiao and Vincent, he became at ease.

"Xiao, shouldn't you be resting?"

Xiao said, "Shu Tai advised me to stay away from the Council for my own safety. Raijun may see me as a threat to his leadership and his men might try something."

Vincent said, "I am sad you are not the leader anymore. Master Taishi wanted you for the role for a reason. Under your short reign, no one opposed

you. Raijun has been leader for one day and the Council is torn apart. He is the wrong choice.”

“Perhaps.” Xiao replied, “Let heaven decide what happens next. Tai said that I will be safe with you, Alex. I heard that you have a mansion now. I want to check it out and live in your mansion. Temporarily, of course.”

“Of course, you are welcome here anytime. I’m about to go now.” He hopped on his horse.

Xiao hopped on the next horse and they galloped away. Vincent sighed. He loves the council more than anything and it was sad to see it torn in half. Unlike other members who have lives outside the group, Vincent’s entire life was inside the group. In his free time, he would make inventions, such as his steel fans. He would also help other members fix their furniture or other household appliances and teach them where to buy weapons. He also helped manage the finances. The Council was his home, his lifeblood, and he did not know what the future will bring.

The two friends rode on their horses, pulling the reigns hard to make the horse run fast. Although Alex was only one man, she felt safe enough with him in the wilderness. He was a good friend and an owner of another elemental sword, after all. Celina and Li had traveled together several hours prior, so there was no need to worry about them. After a while, the horses grew tired and walked at a normal pace. Xiao grunted and grabbed her chest.

“You’re still hurt and you should be resting.” said Alex.

“You have heart. (有心)¹ I can rest once we get to your mansion. Something seems to be bothering you, besides my wounds. I can tell because your body language is different today.”

“Oh man, nothing gets past you. Take a look.” He revealed the broken Fire Sword.

“What happened?” Xiao said, gasping.

“This happened after I fought Raijun.”

“You did? Didn’t I tell you not to?”

“No, you said to watch out for him.”

Xiao sighed. “You’re right. Was Raijun too powerful of an opponent, is that why it cracked?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I used it a lot these few years.”

“Your master, and the sword’s previous owner was master Genzo, was it not? He was in the Valley of Death and killed a lot of people so the Fire Sword was used a lot.”

“That doesn’t make sense why only my sword cracked. The Ice was used a lot too. And so were the Thunder word and the Wind Sword.”

“Hmmm you’re right. Now I’m worried my Thunder Sword might suffer the same fate. So what do you plan to do now?”

¹ Have heart is an expression meaning you are considerate and kind

Alex's plan was to visit the blacksmith in his city and hopefully he can repair his precious sword. First, he dropped Xiao off at his place so she could rest.

Upon seeing the blacksmith's building, Alex was not impressed. It was just an old house made of wood and straw and it looked like it be blown away by weak wind. He stepped inside and it felt like an infernal. The blacksmith was topless, wearing a band over his head, and sandals.

"How can I help ya, young lad?"

"I need you to repair this sword for me. Money is not an issue."

He handed the sword to the blacksmith for inspection. He pulled it out of its sheath and examined it with one eye closed. "Hmmm. What a peculiar design. The blade is metal but I can feel it wasn't forged by normal methods."

"You're right, this is the Fire Sword." said Alex.

"Oh, is that so?" said the blacksmith nonchalantly. Then he looked up. "The what sword? Did you say this is the Fire Sword, one of the four greatest swords in the world?" He examined it some more and handed it back to Alex. "Sorry lad, I cannot help you."

"Why not?"

"This sword was made by sorcery, a skill I do not have. Only its original creator can fix it."

Alex stared the Fire Sword in disbelief. The original creator was Cho'Ann, the renowned blacksmith at the time. But like Rajun, Cho'Ann has disappeared from the world for five decades, so how is he supposed to find him?

When he exited the building, Celina was there. "I heard you were here." said Celina.

"Yeah, what's up Celina?"

"This city, Yi Ting was my hometown. The Mu Fa Theatre is here."

Alex remembered her background story. Before she was a concubine she was a dancer at the Mu Fa Theatre, and it happened to be in his city. What a small world.

"I want to visit the theater. Can we go there?"

Alex nodded and off they went.

The last time she saw the theatre's front was when she was picked up by the king's men. She was about to enter a horse carriage when she took one last look at her home. As soon as she sat down in the carriage, she knew it would be the last time she saw the theatre. Her new home would be the imperial palace.

They traveled by carriage to the theatre and upon arrival, Celina noticed everything was the same as she remembered it. At the bottom were the large wooden doors, usually guarded by a bouncer. Right now it was not opening hours so no one was at the door. Above it was a huge sign in Chinese characters, the **Mu Fa Theatre** (木发剧场). This was nostalgic for her as this was where she grew up.

She pushed the doors opened, entering the building and Alex walked behind her. She was so distracted she forgot Alex was there. In the showroom, the chairs were on top of the tables and there was dust on the floor. This place did not look maintained, what happened?

Just now, a middle aged woman in a purple dress came to the main room, and upon seeing Celina, she froze. "No way!" said Fa Kay.

Celina's eyes lit up. "Master Fa, I'm back!"

The two ran into each other and hugged enthusiastically. After they were satisfied, they released each other. "You're as beautiful as I remember you." said Celina.

"You sure are sweet with words." Fa touched her student's face. "How's my favorite disciple doing?"

"I've been doing much better nowadays."

"I received all your letters, well, I think all of them. I can't believe his highness Liu Bei died. And a new king succeeded him by the name of Liu Zhang. Right after that another king succeeded him. It's crazy!"

"Mmmm. I have so much to tell you. I'm no longer a concubine; I am free to live my own life now."

Just now, Fa Kay noticed Alex and her expression grew naughty. "Who's the handsome man?" She went over to Alex's left side to check him out, causing him to feel awkward. Then she checked his back side, then his right side.

Celina said, "This is Alex Cheng."

Fa Kay said, "Alex Cheng? Cheng, Cheng, why does that sound familiar?" She pounded her own fist. "You're the Demon Slayer!" She went over to Celina and elbowed her. "He's a famous hero. Not bad, girl."

"Stop it." Celina said, embarrassed.

"But, I don't know if you are worthy to date my number one student." said Fa. She noticed his sword. "I heard you can fight well. I assume you use an expensive sword?"

"My sword has no price in this world, it is the Fire Sword."

Fa Kay thought for a moment. "Hmmm, Fire Sword, Fire Sword, no way! That's like one of the four greatest swords in the world! Not bad Celina. So do you live in the palace?"

"Not anymore." Alex replied. "I have a mansion in this city."

This made Fa Kay go more crazy. "No way! I heard about a rich guy who moved in just recently. That's you?" She elbowed Celina. "He's not a king but he's a pretty good second choice. He's handsome, a hero, and a lord!"

Celina coughed on purpose.

"I think I'll leave you two be, so you can catch up to old times." Alex left the building.

"You know, you don't always have to be so materialistic." said Celina.

"Then what, you expect me to be poor? People are materialistic, get used to it honey."

"So what happened to the theatre? Why is it a mess?"

"I am renovating it. Yeah, that's right. To make it even better than before. It's under construction for a few months, but you know how those construction guys are. They promise one week and it becomes a month, and one month becomes three months."

The two went into a room upstairs to drink tea.

"By the way, have you heard of Fei Tenten?" Celina asked.

"No, who's that?" asked Fa.

"Never mind. Have you heard of Chak'yeung?"

Fa Kay nearly spit out her tea. "How do you know that name?"

"She's Tenten's master." replied Celina.

"That dumbass Chak'yeung actually has a student? She can barely spell her own name."

"So I take it you don't like her?"

"She and I studied the Dance of the Sword together as fellow disciples. But she calls the style Dancing Blade. What a dumbass name, huh?"

"I see. Alright, I won't ask any further questions. Let's focus on us right now."

Fa sipped her tea and put it down. "Do you till remember how I found you?"

"Found? Master, you make me sound like a small animal."

"To me you were. A cute and helpless animal." They both had a flashback of over ten years ago.

[B] Title Contents

Celina and five other kids lived in an orphanage in the outskirts of the city. The owner was a kind old lady who wanted to take care of these kids. But life is difficult when one is poor and the orphanage's rent was overdue and was in danger of being shut down.

One day, three brutes came to intimidate the old lady. The five children, including Celina hid behind the wall, doing their best to remain quiet. The old was trapped by the wall.

"Please, give me three more days!" she said with a pleading gesture.

The first brute put his foot in the wall next to the old woman's hip. "You said that three days ago. Are ya playing games, ya old hag?"

"I will get the money. Please, think of the children. They have no where to go."

The second brute said, "I don't give a rat's ass about the kids. Pay the rent or scram!"

Suddenly, a woman appeared out of nowhere and started insulting the brutes. "Three men bullying one old lady. My my, the city's youths are going down hill."

The third brute walked over to Fa Kay and got in her face. "This ain't none of yo business, so scram, woman."

"What a clichéd situation this is. Three dumbasses with nothing to do, forcing a woman to give them money. These situations usually only end up one way."

The second and first brute went to her. "Ya sure got a big mouth, bitch. How's about I shut it for ya?"

Fa drew her two swords. "And now you're going to say a woman can't use swords right?"

The first brute said, "Nuu-uuh, I wasn't going to say that. Right guys?" The second and third brute nodded. Then all three took out their knives and attacked.

Fa made quick work of them, slashing their clothes. Their shirts were cut in half and torn completely, and one of their pants dropped. He picked up his pants, embarrassed.

"Told ya, these situations only end up one way for you dumbasses."

"This ain't over, bitch!" The three brutes ran away.

Fa rescued the kids and brought them to her dance theatre. The girls were trained to be dancers and the boys were to work in the kitchen. Fa saw the dedication in Celina's eyes and she quickly became her top student. She decided to teach only Celina the art of the sword. She practiced over and over until she memorized all the steps.

Celina had only wooden swords to use and Fa Kay felt bad because it was not sufficient practice. Fa went to a local blacksmith to get two custom swords made fit for a child. Celina used the two custom made swords for practice, and at first they were heavy, but she quickly got used to them. She was shy around others and only opened up to her master. Her talents were magnified by her training and she mastered the basic Dance of the Sword stances in a few years.

When Celina became of marriageable age, the king came to the Mu Fa Theatre and her dancing caught his eye. He offered her a chance to be a dancer at the palace, but his real motive was to make her his concubine. She declined the king's offer, which surprised Fa Kay.

Fa Kay knocked and came into the room. "What is the matter with you, Celina? Has your brain gotten rotten?"

Celina was combing her hair. "How can I accept such a prestigious offer? I am sorry, master. To perform at the palace...is too much responsibility for me. Tonight I was really nervous. I don't think I can handle the pressure."

"What? Do you know what you're saying?"

"I am just no good with people, master."

Fa sighed and put her hands on her shoulder. "Celina, think about it carefully. Every woman's goal is to find and marry a rich man who will take care of her for life. And you caught the attention of the richest man in Shen! The king himself has his eye on you. This is a chance of a lifetime. You may live ten lives

and not have a chance like this again." Fa grabbed Celina's face and made her look at the mirror. "Look at you...you are Celina Ce...the top dancer at the Mu Fa Theater. When I found you, you were just an orphan who only knew how to cry and eat and sleep. But through time and training, you became the best student I ever had. Thanks to you the Mu Fa's reputation has skyrocketed. But to keep you here is to hold you back. You are meant for so much more! Your beauty and grace can melt the hearts of men and make them fight over you."

"Well..." Celina was still hesitant.

"You do plan on getting married someday, right, Celina?" asked Fa.

"Yes, but...not so soon. I want to fall in love and do all that other stuff."

"I understand. But what isn't there to love about him? He's the richest and most powerful man in Shen. Don't let this chance pass you by. This is the one of the most important lessons I can ever teach you. Opportunities don't wait for you." With that said, she left her student alone.

Celina now sat there alone, thinking deeply about her master's words.

The flashback was over and the two women were back to the present, sitting at the table.

"How time flies." Fa commented.

"When I left, the theater was the top theatre in the kingdom, even the king himself wanted to see it for himself. It was perfect the way it was so I don't understand why you need to do construction. Is the theatre in trouble?" asked Celina.

"No heavens no. The building is old and needed an upgrade. It'll be done soon and when it reopens I'll have more business than I've ever had."

"Anyways, I should go home now." said Celina.

She exited the room, walked past the show room and exited the front door. But she had no intention of going home. She went to the backyard of the theatre and crept in through one of the kitchen windows. When she was a kid, she used to come here to steal food from the kitchen when she was hungry. Master Fa was strict with diet, especially sweets. Celina would sneakily come here and eat a dessert.

As she rummaged through the kitchen, she found an opium pipe that was recently used. Now, all the pieces of the puzzle came together.

Alex took Xiao to eat dim sum at a local restaurant. This was a commoner's restaurant so the tables were close enough that they heard the other people's conversation.

Two guys at the next table were discussing a topic that made Alex's ears perk up.

"Have you heard about the masked marauder who has been robbing people? It happened again last night!" said the first guy.

"She's a t it again? There's wanted posters of her all over town." said the second one.

"I saw those posters. The picture shows her with a mask, so it's useless!" said the first.

"Maybe but I heard that this thief uses **two swords**. A woman who uses a two sword style is not very common. I'm sure they'll catch her soon."

Alex's chopstick went to grab the spring roll but did not pick it up. "The masked marauder? Uses two swords?"

"What is it, Alex?" Xiao asked.

"No way. It can't be a coincidence, is it?" Alex connected the dots. Celina's master, Fa Kay taught her the Dance of the Sword, a two handed style. In the same city, the masked marauder appeared and is a female thief who uses two swords? Female swordsmen were rare in ancient times, but a female who uses two swords...what are the chances? But what Fa Kay's motivation for stealing money. It's not like she needs money, she has the theatre...and then he figured it out. The theatre was not being renovated, it was being closed down.

Celina sneakily walked down the hallway, heading toward Master Fa's private room. She poked a hole into the paper wall to take a peek at what her master was doing. She saw something she did not want to see, and she barged in, slamming the door open, startling Fa Kay.

"I knew it!" Celina exclaimed.

Fa Kay was lying on the couch, holding a pipe in her hand, and it was full of opium. "Isn't it rude to walk into someone's room without knocking?"

"You were hiding this from me, Master Fa! You're smoking opium!" she said.

"I'm just smoking casually. What's the big deal?" said Fa.

"What's the big deal? You lied to me about the theatre being renovated. It all makes sense now. The theatre is bankrupt because you spent all your money on opium! You're an addict!"

Fa Kay stood up, annoyed that her student figured out the truth. "This is none of your business, disciple."

"You are hurting yourself and the theatre. This place is my home!"

"**Was** your home. It's not anymore."

"Why are you doing this, Master Fa? What happened to you?"

Fa Kay sighed. "You sure are nosy. Fine, I'll tell you. But after I do, you stay out of my business."

Shortly after Celina became a dancer at the palace, she became the concubine. As a dowry, the king sent a large sum of money to Fa Kay, who was Celina's foster parent. Fa Kay was ecstatic, as she has never seen this much money at one time. She decided to expand her business to a second theatre, which normally was a good idea, as business chains to that. But the economy was not good as Shen was constantly battling the forces of the western army.

Managing two theatres was stressful, and there were months when she was barely breaking even. To relieve stress, she started taking opium. Just like every addict, she thought she'd take it once and stop. But it never happens that way. Just like the spice, all you need is one taste and you are hooked. Fa Kay mismanaged her finances and the second theatre closed down. But her addiction became worse and soon, the Mu Fa also closed down.

Celina was speechless and she just stared in awe. All this time, she thought her master and the dance theatre were doing well. She's always looked up to and admired her master, she was a role model, but that image has been shattered. Much like broken glass, those pieces can never be put back together again.

"I thought things were going well for you. I'm sorry to hear all that happened to you." said Celina. "But this was all your doing."

"I don't need a lecture from you, disciple. I know what I'm doing."

"Master, you have to quit opium." urged Celina.

"I can quit anytime. I'll do it my way and I don't need your help."

"Master, you've been smoking for years and you haven't been able to quit. You need to get help, please."

Fa Kay became more stubborn and crossed her arms and turned sideways. "I don't need your help or anyone else's. It's not your concern."

Celina was getting frustrated at her master's stubbornness. "But you're my master and this is my home. What about the other dancers who rely on this theatre for their livelihoods? You're destroying everything you've built after years of hard work!"

"I can rebuild this place anytime I want. It takes time to restart a business, and I don't need a little girl to tell me what to do."

Upon hearing that remark, Celina had only one response. "I'm not that little girl you found in the orphanage, master."

"I won't say it again. Just stay out of my business."

Celina sighed and finally gave up. Celina may be stubborn, but her master is the queen of stubbornness...or perhaps it was not her master speaking, it was the addiction speaking. In any case, Celina stormed out of the room, slamming the doors open.

[C] Title Contents

If a direct confrontation will not work, then Celina will try another way. She recalled a man named **Lau Sum** who worked at the theatre when she was growing up. He was probably the same age as Master Fa and they got along well. After doing some searching, she found this man's workplace. They recognized each other immediately. Lau Sum looked the same as he did before, except he was older now. He had frizzy hair, but it was not his fault, no matter how much

he combs, it still was frizzy. Celina wasted no time and explained Master Fa's addiction. Lau Sum eagerly agreed to help Celina.

They went to the Mu Fa theatre and saw Fa Kay in the showroom sitting idly by herself.

"Master Fa, look who I brought with me."

Fa Kay stood up and her eyes were lit up as she saw Lau Sum. Likewise, Lau's expression became one of joy when he laid his eyes upon her. Celina's instincts were right, these two were more than just coworkers; they were former lovers.

"It's me, Fa Fa." said Lau warmly.

"Ah Lau...it's you, it's really you!!" she replied, unable to control her emotions.

He opened his arms to embrace her. "That's right, I'm back Fa Fa! I missed you!"

"I missed you too!" she exclaimed.

She walked towards him, opened her arms and slapped him on the face.

Smack! Celina was completely dumbfounded, and judging by Lau Sum's face, so was he.

Fa said, "You finally decide to show up, you bastard?"

Lau said, "This is how you greet your ex, you bitch?"

"This is how I greet men who left me!"

"I left because you were difficult to deal with. But now I am told that you have an addiction to opium?"

Fa turned away from. "Hmph. That's not your concern anymore."

Lau scratched his head and sighed. "Still stubborn as ever, I see."

Celina said, "I didn't know you two broke up. I'm guessing it ended badly?"

Lau explained, "Things were great when we managed two theatres but Fa mismanaged our money and things went downhill from there. I thought she had a gambling addiction but now I find out its opium. How could you do this to me, Fa? Look at how low you've sunk."

"Did you come here to patronize me?"

Lau said, "No I came here to help you. And get back together with you."

Fa said, "Hmph. Neither is happening. I don't need your help."

"But Fa, you've been dealing with this by yourself all this time. Let us help you quit."

"I can quit anytime, and I don't need you to tell me how to do it." Fa walked over to another table and looked at her surroundings. "The Mu Fa Theatre is old and needs to retire. It's better that way."

Lau said, "You don't mean that! The Mu Fa is your blood, sweat and tears! It was our dream to run this place."

Celina jumped in. "The Mu Fa doesn't just belong to us, but everyone who danced here or worked here. Think about what you're throwing away, master!"

Fa Kay grunted and grabbed her head. "You guys are so annoying. What does it take for you to leave me alone?"

Celina said, "I'll leave you alone after you quit opium."

"I've had enough of this crap. Just leave. You two are not welcome here anymore."

Both of them could not believe Fa Kay would go this far. Was it her speaking or the addiction speaking?

"In that case, you leave me no choice." Celina said, "Master Fa, I challenge you to a duel."

Fa looked at her with surprise. "What are you talking about, disciple?"

"We will duel using Dance of the Sword. If I win, you have to quit opium."

"Are you serious? Are you challenging your master to a duel?"

"If it means you quitting opium, then I will fight you if I have to."

Lau can sense a force field surrounding the two women. Though he cannot see it, he senses the electric sparks. Whoever was unlucky to walk in between them would get caught in the crossfire. To them, Lau was invisible, and even if he spoke, he would not be heard.

Fa Kay let out a laugh. "Fine. But if I win, you will never bring up this topic again. You're going to regret this dumbass decision, disciple."

"Let's meet at noon tomorrow at the pavilion." said Celina.

Whoosh Celina practiced by herself, cutting the air with her twin swords. Alex was watching her train and Xiao was a bit further away, watching her while drinking tea. When Alex first heard about Fa Kay, she thought Celina was being impulsive. But watching her train so seriously made him respect her decision more. If Master Fa was stubborn as a mule, then a duel may be the only way to get through to her. He could not help but feel like a bystander in this whole thing.

Alex recalled a time when he was hooked on the spice without even knowing it, and acted like a madman. Celina and his two bodyguards Shen Long and Sui Long tied him up for an entire day. It was the most painful day he has experienced due to the withdrawal symptoms.

Alex thought of an idea and he brought it to Xiao. He would tie up Fa Kay, just as he was tied up that time, and she'd experience withdrawal symptoms and she will not be untied until her addiction has gone away.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." said Xiao.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Celina has already challenged Fa Kay to a duel which means sees it as a problem between herself and her master. If you interfere she will be annoyed at you."

Alex looked out the balcony and sighed. "I think you're right. But the problem is...will she be able to defeat her master?"

The time of the duel was near and the two participants were on opposite sides of the riverbank. They met in the pavilion in the middle. As you approach the pavilion, you see a serene and tranquil structure sitting in the middle of the river. The pavilion is perched on top of several tall stilts that stretch down into the water, allowing it to rise high above the surface. The structure is made entirely of wood, and the intricately carved panels of the walls and roof lend an air of elegance to the pavilion.

The man-made bridge that connects the two sides of the river is just as impressive as the pavilion itself. It stretches out from each riverbank, its wooden planks gleaming in the sunlight. The bridge is supported by several more wooden stilts that are anchored firmly into the riverbed.

At the other pavilion were the audience members, consisting of Alex, Xiao and Lau Sum, and possibly one more. Alex was sure his sister was watching from somewhere.

The two women walked into the pavilion to face their opponent. The first thing Celina noticed was Fa's dried lips and bags under her eyes. Fa had practiced all night last night and didn't take any opium and this was her body's reaction to it.

Without uttering a word, the two began their dance by running into each other and parrying with their double swords. Xiao can see and more importantly, hear each blow being dealt. In the first thirty seconds, they were evenly matched in speed, power and every way. However, everyone knew master Fa has been studying the Dance of the Sword much longer, so their differences in skill will soon be revealed.

They ended up in a power lock. Celina said, "Master, you have to open your eyes! Opium has destroyed our home!"

They pushed each other away and Fa said, "Shut up, you! A student can never defeat her master. You have no hope of winning from the start!"

They clashed blades violently. Celina replied, "You don't know what will happen until the end!"

Fa used **Dance of the Lion**, a power series of strikes, to which Celina blocked the first two strikes and dodged the third. Fa continued attacking randomly.

"I taught you everything you know, I know all of your moves!" said Fa as she swiped furiously.

"Likewise, I know all of your moves!" Celina replied as she dodged left and right. *whoosh whoosh* "Because you taught me well."

"You know nothing! A master is always stronger than the student; that is why she is the master!"

"A student's job is to surpass her master! **Dance of the Eagle!**" She put her swords together like a scissor and plunged them forward.

Fa put her swords vertically to block the form. *scchhhhhinnn*

Xiao's hearing told her that the master and disciple were fighting seriously. But why would they go so far, what point are they trying to prove? Alex was on the edge of his seat. He knew some of Celina's moves but this match was unpredictable. Lau was not a fighter so to him, this was just a fight. Secretly, he hoped Fa would lose so she could quit her addiction.

Fa took up a different stance than before, her left sword was in the front while the right sword was raised behind her head. No one had seen this stance before and they were bewildered. Celina attacked as Fa blocked and parried with her left sword carefully. When the time was right, she used the right sword using her dominant hand for a power strike. This strike will come as a surprise, forcing Celina to be cautious of it. Fa Kay came close to hitting her student's shoulder several times.

This style is the same as the African boxing art called Dambe, where the fighter would distract you with his left hand and used the right hand for power strikes.

Celina kept trying to knock her left sword away, but Fa always brought it back up. Celina found it difficult to deal with this unfamiliar stance. She had fought Fei Tenten but this fight was completely different.

She tried to knock away Fa's left sword, but Fa kept stepping back and raising her sword up. Celina stepped forward and struck, and suddenly, Fa brought her right sword down. Celina quickly stepped back. Fa transitioned into Dance of the Tiger, a move where she charged with both blades forward, like a tiger's fangs. Celina blocked as she sidestepped.

Fa returned to her Dambe styled stance. "Well, do you still think you can surpass me?"

"I have to try, for my sake and for your sake!" She attacked.

Fa blocked with her left, smacking Celina's blades away. "You're out of practice; you've been a concubine for too long!" She used the right sword. *Clang!*

Celina did a high block. "Look who's talking! The opium is affecting your movements!"

"My movements are fine!" Fa went on the offensive, forcing Celina to go into the pavilion.

Celina took up a different stance. "Dance of the Phoenix!" She performed the deadly combination of spinning strikes, using momentum to gain power. It is similar to Alex's Infinity Circle, except with two blades.

Fa blocked every single blow methodically from muscle memory. They were back on the bridge. "Did you think that would work? Who do you think taught you that?"

"As expected of Master Fa. There is nothing left to try but **that**." said Celina.

Fa's eyebrow rose. She knew it meant the final form of Dance of the Sword. The audience members, except for Lau, knew what it meant. Alex and Xiao held their breaths, wondering what will happen next.

"I agree." said Fa Kay.

The fight was already serious, but now the tension was off the charts as the two women took up the stance of the Dance of the Dragon. At first Fa was fighting so she could be left alone, but now, she was fighting to prove something to her student. She was the master and will always be. At first Celina challenged Fa to help with her addiction, but now she was trying to prove that she was not a student anymore.

九: Walking Crane: Xiao Ye's Destiny

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Fa Kay and Celina both took the stance of the dragon to prepare for their ultimate move, the Dance of the Dragon. Alex and Xiao were familiar with this move, though Xiao has not fought Celina before, she heard about the awesome powers of the Dance of the Dragon from others. It is a destructive technique that can cause the user to be dizzy and disoriented, so it must be used only in emergencies.

Sweat drops appeared on Celina's head. Fa's mouth was dry and she was short of breath due to the opium, but so far, her fighting skills were still sharp.

Many years ago, Master Fa taught this move to her student. However, Fa knew the last two steps of the dance which she never taught Celina. The reason was unknown, but today, everyone will find out if these two steps will make a difference.

Suddenly, the two dancers started spinning their bodies, and their twin blades spun with them. With each spin, they became faster and closer to each other.

Xiao watched carefully without blinking. They seemed like tornadoes with razors. But they also looked like dragons with two fangs. Perhaps watching this fight will give her ideas on how to deal with Rajun.

Celina and Fa clashed blades and sparks flew. *Clank-clank-clank* It was too fast even for Xiao's hearing. Her ears heard everything but her brain could not keep up. After two seconds of non-stop banging, the two dancers spun away and stopped completely.

Fa's eyes were wide open in surprise. Celina knew the last two steps of the dance. Was it a fluke? No, that's impossible. Fa had to find out for sure and stood in the stance again. Celina copied her, also getting into the stance. Fa started

spinning and Celina did too, and moved towards the collision in the middle.
Clank-clank-clank

Suddenly, the two tornadoes moved away from each other. There was moment of dreadful silence as no one knew who the winner would be. Celina moaned as she was **cut** on the chest. Her right sword had a crack on it, which surprised her. On the other hand, both of Fa's blades had two cracks. She was also cut on the stomach and she grunted and fell down! A second later, Celina also fell, and the audience members gasped for air.

Fa was sighing and panting for breath. "You figured out the last two steps of the dance..."

"I figured out the last two steps intuitively based on the motions."

"You are a true student of the Dance of the Sword...and I was sure you had not surpassed me..."

Celina stood up, putting her swords away, and walked over to her fallen master. She shook her head. "I did not surpass you. But I won because my intentions were stronger than yours. Your skill is still better than mine, but the opium slowed your reaction time, which cancelled your advantage. You have to keep your promise now."

Fa Kay's fingers clenched into fists in frustration. She was frustrated she lost the duel not to anyone, but her own student. But more importantly, she lost to herself. Seconds later, she no longer cared about the duel. Fa finally accepted Celina's kindness and broke down into tears. Her own precious student went as far as fighting her just to help her. Her face was contorted with emotions that had been buried deep within her for so long. The weight of her addiction, the guilt of ruining her home, her business, and her life all came crashing down on her at once.

"I know you are doing this for me. I'm not worthy to have such a nice disciple."

Celina bent down and hugged her. "Without you, I'd be homeless or dead. You gave me everything so this is the least I can do for you. I'm going to help you with your cure every step of the way."

Lau appeared on the bridge. "Don't forget about me. I will help you as well."

Fa Kay was overwhelmed with emotions and cried even harder. She felt a sense of hope that she hadn't felt in a long time. She knew that the road to recovery would be long and difficult, but she had a supportive team behind her. For the first time since her addiction, she felt like she had a purpose again.

Alex said, "They say that the relationship between a disciple and student is one of the most beautiful relationships in the world."

Then Xiao said, "What about the relationship between two lovers?"

"That's a whole different story."

As they were looking out at the beautiful river view, they felt a sense of peace and contentment. The sun was setting, casting a warm glow on their faces.

As long as their hearts were united, they can do anything, be it slaying ancient demons, fighting a war, or getting over drugs. And, in that moment, they knew that nothing could break their bond.

With her newfound determination and the strength borrowed from her loved ones, Fa Kay began the quitting process. However, it was easier said than done as that's the grim reality of drugs. Fa was tied up to the bed in case she tried to hurt someone or herself. Celina volunteered to watch over her, having experience in curing Alex's addiction to the spice, but Lau insisted that he do the job. Celina gave him some advice from her experience: it will not be easy. When she's desperate, Fa may use any method to get what she wants.

Lau Sum walked into the bedroom with a jar of water and poured it into a cup. He noticed that Fa's color was pale and her lips lost their color. She was starting to have withdrawal symptoms.

He put the cup against her lips and she drank it, spilling much water on herself.

"It's so painful." said Fa. She sounded like she was out of breath.

"I know. But if you survive tonight then you should be good." said Lau.

"I dunno if I can last that long. Ah Lau, let me go..."

"I can't. Fa Fa, Just endure it."

"I can't take it anymore! Please just let outta here!"

Celina was right, this will not be easy. Lau kneeled before her and grabbed her face with his hands. "Listen to me, you can do this. I'm here for you! Once you get through this, I will propose to you!"

Fa's reaction was milder than he expected. She was not herself. "You mean it? You're not lying are you?"

"No, I mean it. Just hang on a little bit longer!"

After a while, Fa finally calmed down, but the danger period was not over yet. Lau closed the door, stepping into the hallway when Celina appeared. "How is she?" asked the concerned disciple.

"She's taking a nap." Lau replied.

"I want to see her." Celina said.

"It's better if you don't. She is your master and your idol so you don't want to see her in this weakened state."

"Yeah, I know. If you need any help, let me know." Celina turned around and walked away.

[B] Title Contents

With Fa's recovery on the way, Alex and Xiao were idling around. "Alex, I have a favor to ask of you." she asked.

"What is it?" Alex asked.

"I want to spar with you."

"Why do you want to spar all of a sudden?"

"I want a rematch with Raijun. But I need to use the Thunder Sword to its full potential. The best way to do that is to fight another user of the elemental sword."

"Ah, I understand. I would want a rematch too if I lost that badly. Uhh, sorry, I didn't mean it like that. But I cannot spar you." He unsheathed his Fire Sword and focused on the crack on the middle of the blade. "I don't know if I keep using it, will it crack more?"

"I understand." Xiao replied, disappointed.

Just now, Xiao sensed movement on the roof and looked up. Li was there and she jumped down. "Alex, I found a clue about Cho' Ann's whereabouts."

Alex became enthused and said, "Really? That's great. Where is he?"

Li answered, "He was last seen going up the northern **Xanbei Mountains**."

Alex's enthusiasm died instantly. "The Xanbei Mountains are really far away and the temperature is so cold it can get as low as negative twenty degrees Celsius! Why would a blacksmith go all the way up there?"

"I have no idea," said Li, "But that's our only clue."

"Sorry to interrupt," said Xiao, "Li, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Go ahead. It's not like we're strangers." said Li.

"I want you to spar me. I want to have a rematch with Raijun but I need to prepare for him by fighting someone who has an elemental sword."

"I see. But I don't spar, I take all fights seriously."

"That is fine by me. Don't hold back."

Li smiled, those words were music to her ears. "I won't. You don't hold back either."

The two fighters walked towards the center and stood ten paces from each other. By now, one already knew their default stances. Li's stance was the Heaven's Wrath stand while Xiao took up the Walking Crane's second stance. This is the third time these two women will be facing each other. The first time was in the palace, right after they just met, the second time was in the Cave of Wonders, when they were enemies, and today was the third time. One would think they were familiar with each other's fighting style. But a lot has happened since their second duel, they have picked up new techniques and were different people.

Li analyzed the situation like she usually did. (My Shadow Puppet might not work against Xiao's super hearing, but let's have a try.) She summoned the Shadow Puppet and three clones of her appeared in a straight line. Usually she would summon two and the third one would be a surprise, but Xiao already knew her methods. Li and her three identical clones surrounded Xiao and ran in circles to hide the real Li.

Xiao shut her eyes. (It's no use, Li. Your Shadow Puppet's footsteps are lighter than yours. I can tell them apart easily.)

All four Li's took a different stance and charged at the same time. Xiao charged at the real Li and they clashed blades. The Thunder Sword sparked, causing Li to be shocked and stepped back. Xiao slashed a clone, turning it back into a puppet. A clone came from the left, and she quickly dodged its strike and countered, turning it back into a puppet. A clone came from behind, and Xiao sidestepped, turned herself around and stabbed the clone.

"Your Shadow Puppet won't work on me, Li."

"I figured. But the clones can still hurt you and distract you." Li activated her sorcery again, and the puppets floated in place and became her clones.

Xiao was surrounded again. She was as cautious as she was in the beginning, knowing Li never uses the same attack twice in a row, thus she had to keep her guard up. One clone drew daggers while the real Li's Ice Sword glowed. Xiao used Thunder Storm, electrifying all the clones, as well as everything in her radius. Zzzzzt! The ground sizzled and smoked from the zapping.

Li immediately threw the Ice Blizzard, to which Xiao answered with the Thunder Wave. The two energies crashed and caused sparks and ice chunks to fly all over the place.

After that Li summoned one clone and had it stand next to her. They both charged at Xiao, one from the left and one from the right. Xiao awaited the incoming attack and ignored the clone, allowing it to hit her. She groaned but paid it no mind. The real Li used Heaven's Retribution, plunging her sword straight with her arms straight to gain maximum reach. Xiao knocked the sword away, and Li regained control and stabbed forward. Xiao went low, getting into the grasshopper stance of the Walking Crane, and Li hit the air. Li was not expecting this, and her stance caused her to be open. Xiao plunged her sword at Li's stomach, and the clone pushed her blade with its blade, causing Xiao to scrape Li's thigh. Li quickly backed away.

Xiao took this opportunity and went on the offensive, swiping with her sword. Li blocked and they ended up in a power lock. Then the Thunder Sword zapped Li's sword as well as her arms, causing her to step back.

(I can't even touch her. And she can see through my Shadow Puppets. Xiao is a rare talent that's one in a million.)

Though Li felt immense pressure, she still had another trick up her sleeve. She threw the Ice Storm, creating a wave of ice particles in all three sixty degrees of range. Blocking it was impossible, so predictably, Xiao jumped over it. A clone also jumped up to ambush her. Xiao stabbed it, turning it back into a puppet. Another clone came from behind and performed a flying kick on Xiao's back.

Xiao landed in a crouch. (She combined the Ice Sword's powers with her Shadow Puppet. Li is the only person in the world who could pull that off.) She decided it was time she used a technique she developed recently.

She raised her sword vertically, causing to be curious, as she has not seen this stance before. Li ordered a clone to stand next to her, just in case. Lightning appeared on the Thunder Sword and it looked as though the lighting came from

the sky and touched her sword, but in reality the opposite was true. Xiao brought the sword down, pointed it forward and a beam of lightning was produced. Zzzzzzzzap! The clone blocked the lightning, but it went through her. Li quickly dashed away.

This was Xiao's **Thunder Spear** that she developed in secret and this was the perfect time to test it out. Li was secretly praising and condemning Xiao at the same time. She was impressed that Xiao came up with a new technique, but this means danger for her.

Xiao raised her sword up again, and brought it forward, releasing the Thunder Spear. Unlike the Thunder Wave, which can be blocked easily, the Thunder Spear was as thin as a tube. Li quickly rolled out of harm's way, and the lightning hit the wall behind her, causing the bricks to crack. Li took a glance at the damage, and gazed at Xiao's eyes. Her eyes revealed that Xiao felt triumphant, and was waiting for Li's answer.

Li stood in her Heaven's Wrath stance and closed her eyes. Which move should she try next? The Heaven's Wrath, the Shadow Puppet, or the Ice Sword? Surprisingly, she felt peaceful despite being in the middle of the fight. It was the same feeling she had when she stood over the cliff to use the Ice Sword to search for the Fire Sword. Everything around her became dark and she was full of light. Then the answer came to her and her eyes opened.

Li Cheng performed a dance that was similar to Alex's Fire Dragon. After she finished the moves, she swung her sword forward, creating the **Ice Dragon**. It was so loud it sounded like a roar.

Xiao held her breath as she faced the dragon of icy doom. She blocked with the Thunder Sword, but it was not nearly enough. She was pushed back further and further every second and her body became full of ice. Her elbows and upper arms were frozen, as well as her chest and stomach.

She screamed at the top of her lungs. The force was overwhelming and she fell to one knee. As she struggled for life and death, she could see nothing but ice and whiteness. Suddenly, she felt something hot next to her. Alex was there, blocking with his Fire Sword. The ice beam eventually vaporized, which meant the danger was over.

[C] Title Contents

Li was pissed off. "Alex? What the hell are you doing, interrupting my fight?"

Alex said, "Now now. You've already won. Xiao just recovered and we don't want her to have new injuries, now do we?"

Xiao stood up and bowed to Li. "I appreciate you doing this. Seeing the Ice Dragon has opened my eyes, figuratively speaking."

"To be honest, that was my first time using it." said Li.

"Your first time? You haven't practiced it before?"

"I just felt it, as if the Ice Sword told me what to do. Not in words, but in spirit."

"I see." Xiao had no other words to say.

"So, what will you do now?" Li asked.

"I am going to figure out what my path is. The final form of the Ice Sword is the Ice Dragon, for the Fire Sword it's the Fire Dragon, for the Wind Sword it's the Tornado Slicer. What is the Thunder Sword's final form?"

"I'm sure you'll figure it out in time." said Li. She too was curious about the Thunder Sword's final form.

Alex stepped up to them. "Xiao, I changed my mind. do you want to spar?"

Naturally, Xiao was happy to hear this. "But your sword is broken."

Alex pulled the sword out of its sheath. "The blade is cracked but I think it still works."

They walked ten paces away from each other and prepared themselves for the spar. Alex has not used his Fire Sword since it cracked, so he had some doubts. He held his sword normally, using two hands and the blade diagonal. He did what he normally did and put his feelings into his sword and it glowed red. A second later, it was set aflame. Alex was relieved that the Fire Sword still functioned normally. He looked ahead and saw the Thunder Sword sparkling in Xiao's hands.

Alex threw the Heat Wave, a move everyone was familiar with. Xiao slashed the heat with her sword, cutting it into a million pieces. Xiao threw the Thunder Wave, another familiar move, and Alex ran sideways to avoid it. Blocking any of her thunder attacks with a sword was a bad idea.

Li, the observer, was bored and wondered why they bothered with low level attacks. But Alex and Xiao had a mutual understanding that they would go through all their elemental attacks in order from weakest to strongest. Unlike Li, Alex takes sparring as practice, not as a real fight, so they can be at ease.

Next up, Alex used Firestorm and Xiao countered with Thunderstorm. The two waves smashed into each other and the fire was visibly bigger and pushed the thunder away until it disappeared. The remainder of the flames hit Xiao, causing her to cover her eyes. The damage was not serious, just some burns on her clothes.

Li was impressed. (Alex's Firestorm is more powerful. He has known the Firestorm longer than Xiao has known the Thunderstorm so that's to be expected.)

Everyone knew after the Firestorm would be the Fire Dragon. "Don't move." said Alex. He performed the dance ritual and summoned the Fire Dragon. It was as powerful and loud as Li's Ice Dragon of the opposite element. If the Ice Dragon can freeze death itself, the Fire Dragon can burn heaven itself. It went past Xiao, causing her hair to fly up. *Froom* It hit the wall behind her, smashing the bricks into pieces, and the wall had a hole.

Xiao took a quick glance at the damage. So this was the ultimate move he used to defeat Shao Chongqin's demon form. She was frozen in shock for a moment, contemplating its power. When Xiao met Alex for the first time, she was impressed by him and now, she was yet again impressed by him.

Xiao put her sword back into its sheath. "Thank you for showing me the Fire Dragon."

"Well, do you have the inspiration to find your final attack?" asked Alex.

"Mmm. I will figure it out. If you guys can do it, so can I."

When morning came, the birds were chirping loudly. Baby birds were hungry and wanted to eat while the mother birds went to fetch worms for their children. Celina and Lau came to check on their loved one who was tied to the bed.

Master Fa was already awake and staring at the ceiling. Lau went to the bed to see her face. Last night, she looked pale as a ghost with black circles under eyes. She looked neither ghost nor human. But today, although she was still pale and tired, she looked much better and calmer.

"Fa Fa, how are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm thirsty."

"Of course you are. Have some water." He grabbed a glass, lifted her head up and put the glass to her lips so she could drink. After the glass was emptied, he grabbed a napkin to wipe her mouth.

"I feel fine...better...I don't want opium anymore, just food."

Lau's face lit up in joy. "Looks like our method worked. You passed the critical period." He untied the ropes to her wrists, body, and ankles. He helped her sit up and get off the bed.

"Thank you for watching over me all night."

Lau scratched his head. "It was nothing."

"I...want to thank you. Can you close your eyes?"

Lau noticed that her toes were playing with the floor and she was looking down shyly. He swallowed hard, thinking she was going to kiss him. He closed his eyes and got his lips ready.

Suddenly, she slapped him *Smack*

"Ow! What was that for?"

"That's for tying me up and treating me like a prisoner, dumbass! And this is for saving my life."

Lau shut his eyes expecting a slap, but Fa gave him an embrace, a real and warm one that showed her appreciation. Lau became at ease and returned the hug. Celina sighed in relief.

"Don't forget your promise." said Fa Kay.

"Promise? Of course, a man always keeps his word. I'm going to propose to you as soon as I buy a ring."

Fa Kay bowed to Lau and Celina. "Thank you both so much." Celina was a bit startled, as this was the first time her master bowed to her. Fa continued, "I'm going to rebuild the Mu Fa and make it even better than before. All the lords, princes and kings will come to the Mu Fa!"

Lau said, "And I'll be by your side every step of the way. You don't have to do it alone."

Celina added, "And I will help too!"

In the bedroom, the long haired woman was sitting in front of the drawers, combing her hair in front of the mirror.

"Do you think he will like my hair like this?" said Jade Lee. "...I know that, but Alex is not like other men. He's a hero now." She put down the comb and put on lipstick. She continued to talk to the mirror, pausing every three seconds. "I want to make myself pretty for him... He came to this city. I saw him the other day at the old theatre...Do you think he likes this color...oh...What about this eyeliner...what do you think now?"

"You look gorgeous." said the face in the mirror. "No man can resist you."

"Oh you're just saying that." Jade replied.

"I mean it. If I was him I'd be stunned." It was the face of a woman with skin as pale as snow, heavy makeup, but the most notably thing were two horns protruding from her forehead.

†: Heart of Ice: Snow Lady's Attack

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"Do you think he will like my hair like this?" said Jade.

"It's not worth doing this for a man. Men cannot be trusted." said the woman in the mirror. She was **Xue Nu** (雪女), aka Snow Lady, a demon who lives in the north, where there was freezing weather all year long.

"I know that, but Alex is not like other men. He's a hero now."

"I have not met him, but you have so you would know better I suppose." said Xue Nu. She would lure travelers to their doom by offering to save their lives, but it was a trap. Travelers, usually men traveled through the frozen wastelands, and Xue Nu would appear, bring him to her home and offer them warm food and her company, and when they let their guard down, she would suck their blood dry. It was unknown how many victims she claimed, but they were all men. If she met a female, Xue Nu would let her go.

For reasons unknown, Xue Nu moved away from the frozen wastelands, now living amongst humans. She needed a disciple of her own, a woman who shares a hatred of men, so that she too can become a vengeful demon.

"I want to make myself pretty for him." said Jade.
"Didn't you say he lives in Yi Ling?" asked Xue Nu.
"He came to this city. I saw him the other day at the old theatre." Jade put down the comb and put on lipstick. "Do you think he likes this color?"
"Of course, red is a classic."
"Oh...What about this eyeliner?"
"I like it, it suits you."
"What do you think now?"
"You look gorgeous." said Xue Nu. "No man can resist you."
"Oh you're just saying that." Jade replied.
"I mean it. If I was him I'd be stunned."

Jade went to the busy streets of Yi Ting to do some grocery shopping when she happened to see a man with silver hair walking around. When he turned around, she recognized him as Alex. Before Jade could walk over, however, Li Cheng approached him and talked to him. She had no idea that was his sister and watching him talk to another girl made her feel uncomfortable. When Li was done, she walked away. Jade looked down at her own basket and could not bring herself to approach him.

Alex happened to see Jade from across the street and waved. "Jade!"
"Alex!" She forced herself to smile.
"I heard you moved to Yi Ting. I didn't expect to find you so soon!"
"I know. What are the chances, right? It's like you were meant to find me."
"How are things with you and Mrs. Lee?"
"Both my grandma and I found jobs here. It doesn't pay much but it puts a roof over our heads and puts food on the table. So where is Lady Ce?"
"Oh she's in this city too. She's with her master at the theatre."
"Oh, is that right? So...is it true about Zi? Did he die?"
Alex looked away and there was an awkward silence. "Yes, I'm sorry for not telling you. How did you find out?"
"A friend told me about it." said Jade. She had a flashback of going to visit the four graves in the cemetery. Zi Lai's tombstone was placed next to three others. She knew not the other three deceased nor did she care. She kneeled and cried for a good amount of time. "So...when were you going to tell me?"
"I'm sorry for not telling you. I was saddened by his death and my life has not been the same."

The happy reunion of these childhood friends was ruined and Jade no longer wanted to hang out.

Jade sat down in front of her dresser and sighed. Snow Lady appeared in the glass. "What's wrong, Jade?"

"I don't get it. I thought Alex was with Lady Ce. But today I saw him with another woman, and she's just as pretty."

"Jade, I told you, men cannot be trusted and he is no different. Alex may look like a gentleman, but he had an affair with the concubine! And now he's cheating on that woman with another woman!" said Xue Nu.

"I don't get it. How can he look at all those women but not me?"

"He doesn't appreciate you at all. He doesn't know how to appreciate a good woman. Even after all you and your grandmother did for him, he still treated you like this. Without your grandmother's help, he would not be alive."

"I know. We were friends for a long time. He started from nothing and now he's famous."

"So he made it big. And how did he repay you? By getting you involved with his enemies! Remember when that man named Rubble kidnapped you?"

"But he saved me!" said Jade.

"That was his responsibility because he got you involved in that mess! Whether it is Rubble, or Alex, they are all the same." Xue Nu's disdain of all men was blatantly obvious, but no one knew why. Perhaps in the past she was betrayed by a man or she has seen women betrayed by men, but no matter the cause, she will do anything to push her narrative.

Jade put her face into her arms. "It doesn't make sense! Why didn't he tell me about Zi Lai's death?"

Xue Nu secretly smiled. This was another fact she could use to push her narrative. "Zi and he both kept you in the dark. Alex knew the truth all this time and did not bother to tell you because he never saw you as a friend. He just sees you as an inconvenience!"

Jade lifted her head up. "No, that's not true!"

Snow Lady knew her persuasion was working based on Jade's emotional response. Whatever her demonic powers were was nothing compared to her persuasion skills. It was especially effective with a heartbroken woman like Jade. This was her usual tactic, to find a vulnerable girl who was wronged by a man, and convince her to turn against him. All she needed was a little more convincing. "The truth is already in front of you yet you refuse you see it, silly girl. He has been lying to you all this time. Look at his actions. If you treated you as a close friend, why did he hide so many secrets from you? Why did he not visit you for so long? Was it because he was occupied with all those women?"

"I don't know!"

"Jade, you have to right this wrong. You know what to do to." Xue Nu pointed to a knife on the table.

Jade looked away from the knife. "No, not that!"

"Jade, listen to me, this is the only way."

"No!" The long haired girl ran away from the mirror.

Jade saw Alex in front of a fish supermarket and wanted to approach him, but she stopped moving when another woman approached him first. She quickly hid behind another shop.

Xiao bowed to Alex. "Thank you for sparring me the other day."

"Aw shucks. You don't have to thank me for that. We're comrades so you can ask me anything."

From Jade's perspective, they seem to be getting along well. Her heart sank as they kept chit chatting and smiling a lot. She had no idea what they were discussing but from her point of view, it mattered not. Besides having Lady Ce, he was flirting with Li yesterday and today he was flirting with **another** woman. What Jade believed didn't matter as she can see the evidence before her eyes. Snow Lady's words echoed in her mind. Men are fickle by nature and Alex is the same as the others. He has betrayed Jade again and again with no remorse.

Suddenly, Alex looked in her direction and waved. Jade had no choice but to come out of hiding and walk to him.

"Hey Jade, whatchu up to? Shopping around?"

"Umm yeah. Alex, I have a question for you." Then she paused, making Alex wait in suspense. "Who was that woman you were talking to?"

"That was Xiao Ye, my comrade." said he.

"Comrade, huh? You too sure get along well." she replied.

"Ah yeah we fought many battles together." said Alex.

"What about the woman from yesterday?"

"That was my sister." replied Alex.

"Your sister? The one you've been searching for ten years?"

"Well, yeah."

"We've known each for a long time, right Alex? And you never introduced us."

"Well Li is shy around people and she only appears when she feels like...so I'm sorry I didn't bring her up."

There was moment of silence as Jade was staring down and her long hair covered her eyes. "Why...are you lying to me?"

"Lying? About what?" Alex was dumbfounded.

"You already have Lady Ce, but that's not enough? How many women do you need?"

"Huh? I'm not following you. Li really is my sister and Xiao is my friend. Is there some kind of misunderstanding?"

"I've known you for a long time, but it turns out I don't know you at all. You kept so many secrets from me." Right now, Jade felt the knife in her pocket get heavier.

"Look I'm sorry. A lot of things have happened and you lived so far away so I couldn't tell you--"

"Zi was my friend too! I had to discover his death from someone else! How could you do this to me..." Jade's mental state became shakier and her eyes

grew wet. Alex never went to visit her, not even once, despite their close friendship. Not only that, but Zi's death was a big shock to her. Alex did not bother telling her...and she felt like Alex killed Zi. All these strong emotions confused her ...and there was a pocket knife in her hand and she put it in front of her stomach.

Alex looked down and was shocked. "Jade!"

She stabbed him but he grabbed the knife with his left hand and grabbed her hands with his right hand. She pushed hard and the knife went into his chest, but it was not deep. Blood dripped from Alex's left hand. He fell against a crate of apples.

Jade gasped and covered her mouth in disbelief over what she did. "No...I didn't mean to..." She ran away.

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Li appeared and helped Alex stand up. "Was she an assassin?"

"No! It's a misunderstanding. I'm fine!" he announced. "Go after Jade but don't hurt her!"

Li did as instructed, running after the long haired woman. Jade ran pretty fast for a girl who didn't know martial arts. She was crying and sobbing and didn't know where she went, but her muscle memory took her back home. She ran into the bedroom, shut the door and cried in front of the mirror.

In the mirror, Jade's reflection transformed into Xue Nu's face. "What's wrong, Jade?"

"I...I almost killed him! I can't do it."

"Jade, you did nothing wrong," said Xue Nu.

"How could you suggest such a thing? I thought you were my friend!"

"I **am** your friend. I am trying to protect you from these untrustworthy, fickle, and perverted men."

Li crept against the wall like she was glued to it, inching her way to the window of Jade's bedroom. She heard a girl's voice, presumably Jade and she was talking to herself. Her head was at the window and from here; she could hear two voices from the room. Who was Jade talking to? Li peeped into the window and saw a mirror. Was Jade talking to the mirror? She leaned in further and saw a woman's face in the mirror, but she was not entirely human. She had two horns on her head.

Li suddenly sat down on the ground and covered her mouth. Her heart was beating rapidly and her pupils dilated. She realized that she was afraid, a completely irrational feeling that just took over her. This reminded her of what she saw at the palace. The duke was talking to a demonic face in the mirror, and the duke's face started to melt. It happened many years ago but this childhood memory still haunted her. Li has gotten stronger and slain demons but she still could not shake this fear away.

As she was conversing with Jade, Snow Lady sensed something. Li slowly crawled away from the window and got on her feet and ran away. No one was following her but Li ran as if she was being followed. Her heart was still beating heavily in her chest and it was about to explode any second. She hated this feeling and wanted to shake it off but her body still felt it.

She ran back to Alex and panted for breath. "Alex...it's a demon! I saw, Jade was talking to a demon!"

"A demon? What kind of demon?" he asked.

"The demon was influencing Jade, filling her mind with ideas that you can't be trusted and you betrayed her."

"I see. So it's the demon's fault she tried to stab me. She wasn't herself."

Li grabbed Alex by the shoulders. "Alex, listen to me. Jade isn't completely innocent. She was the one who stabbed you, not the demon."

"It's a big misunderstanding, that's all. I just need to talk to her."

"The demon convinced her you're the enemy, but for that to work; Jade must have had that idea to begin with. The demon merely brought that idea to surface."

Alex's eyeballs looked at someone from afar and Li saw his eyes, so she turned around to see what he was looking at. Jade was there, standing nervously.

"Alex, I didn't mean to do that. I really didn't!" said Jade guiltily.

Li stepped aside to them talk it out but she was cautious the whole time. She had several hidden daggers in her vest and she was ready to pull one out at any moment.

Alex put his palms up. "Look, I'm fine, you see?"

She saw the bandage on his hand and she looked down. Alex then put his hand down and put it behind him. "I'm so sorry. I don't know what to say."

"I know you didn't mean to kill me. You held back so that's why I'm still alive. I know you didn't mean to, Jade, it was the demon, right?"

"I know you're the Demon Slayer but not all demons are bad. Snow Lady is my friend."

"Speaking of which, where is she?" he asked.

"I'm right here." said another woman's voice. Jade's shadow grew longer and a person's head came out of it. Snow Lady's face was revealed and within seconds, her entire body came out of the shadow. She wore a long white robe with blue highlights and long sleeves. Her hands could be seen and they were blue. Despite being a demon, her face was human, with the exception of two horns. Her eyelids were blue, and her eyes shadow was also blue.

Li recognized her as the woman in the mirror. The way she came out of a person's shadow reminded her of Darkstalker, a demon she defeated while back.

Li pulled out her sword. "So you're the one planting weird ideas in Jade's head!"

Jade stood in front of Snow Lady. "No, she's my friend. Don't fight!"

"Jade, get out of the way." said Alex.

"Jade, move out of the way." said Snow Lady.

"No!" shouted the delirious woman. "You are all my friends and I don't want you guys to fight!"

As they argued on, a small crowd surrounded them. Snow Lady's appearance was unique and caught people's attention. They wondered if there's a show happening.

"That demon is dangerous!" said Alex.

"No, you've got it wrong!" she shouted.

Snow Lady pushed Jade out of the way and stepped towards Li. "Why are you pointing that thing at me. Do you mean to fight me?"

Jade lost it and ran past the crowd so she could hide. Alex ran after her, shouting for her to stop.

Li was annoyed at the crowd. These people have no idea what danger they're in and they're in the way. Snow Lady opened her palm and released a blast of ice and wind. Li blocked it with her sword, which neutralized the ice. However, her attack spilled over into the audience. Several people were hit by the ice and one woman's arm was frozen. She screamed out loud and everyone panicked and ran away.

Li threw the Ice Blizzard at Snow.

She blocked it with one hand like it was nothing. "What an interesting sword you have. I have never seen anything like it."

"Thanks. It's called the Ice Sword. It was forged by a blacksmith named Jing Cho'Ann."

Snow Lady frowned. "It was made by a man?" Snow Lady shot another beam of ice and Li blocked it. She swung her sword, cutting her attack into pieces.

(Our attacks use the same element so it won't work on each other.) Li thought.

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"You...Why do you fight for Alex Cheng?" asked Snow Lady.

"He's my brother and I'm not fighting for him. I'm fighting for myself."

"Brothers, husbands, friends, they are all the same! Alex has betrayed Jade and he will do the same to you."

Li summoned two shadow clones and had them surround Snow Lady. Li and her two clones ran in circles to confuse her opponent.

"What kind of trick is this? Why must we women fight each other? We should be on the same side, Li."

"Because you're a demon and I'm not!"

"What difference does it make? The real enemy is men!"

"Listen lady, your hang ups have nothing to do with me. Go see a therapist!" The three Li's charged at her.

Snow Lady extended both arms, fired an ice blast, hitting two clones. The third clone charged from the front. Snow's claws grabbed Li's hands and her other claw grabbed her neck.

"You fell for it!" The real Li was behind the clone and she stabbed through her clone, plunging her blade into Snow Lady's stomach. The fake Li returned to being a puppet made of straw and Snow Lady stepped back and groaned in pain, grabbing her wound.

"Why must you do this to me...you're using a sword made by a man and you're fighting for a man's sake."

Li flicked the blood off her sword and sighed. "I already told you, I'm not doing this for anybody's sake!"

"You will regret this, Li..." Snow Lady began to transform. Her skin turned blue and her claws grew bigger and sharper. Her face turned into that of an ogre, and her horns grew longer. Her black hair became white as pure snow. She floated up to the air, becoming light as a feather.

Li looked up at her opponent, becoming nervous about how to deal with an aerial assault.

"Li Cheng..." said Xue Nu. She fired an ice blast, but this one was different than before, it was stronger than thicker. Li jumped out of the way. "Us women need to stick together against a common enemy." She fired an ice blast with both palms. Li blocked it, or at least she attempted to, but she was pushed back against a column.

Li summoned three clones and they jumped all over. One of them reached the roof, whereas the second one was on the second floor balcony, and the third one was on the opposite roof. They took out daggers.

"Stop!" yelled Alex. Jade finally stopped running and hid her face in the wall. "We need to talk about this. Just talk to me."

"I can't face you...after what I did."

"I don't care anymore. Jade, you're being used by Snow Lady."

"You think so too, huh? Because your sister said that? I know you don't trust her because she's a demon, but she was there for me when I needed her. When my grandma and I came to this city, we had nothing and we knew nobody. Then I found out that Zi died. I was completely alone but I met snow Lady. She talked to me everyday."

Alex sighed. "I know things have been difficult for you and I'm at fault for that. But I have dealt with others like your 'friend.' She came to you at a time of need and she is good at manipulating women who have been wronged. She uses their feelings and turns them into a weapon."

Suddenly, they saw massive numbers of people running in one direction. Alex took Jade by the hand and they ran back to the fight scene.

The Li clones threw their daggers at their aerial target. Snow Lady screamed, creating a force field around her and the daggers were knocked away. She fired an ice blast at clone one, freezing it completely. She fired an ice blast at clone two, the one on the balcony, and it became frozen.

As Snow Lady floated away from her spot, clone three ran parallel to her. Li also ran to close their distance.

Clone three made a leap while holding her sword. Ice balls appeared near Snow Lady's head and as those balls gathered more ice, they became sharp icicles. The icicles flew and hit clone three in the middle of her jump. The clone screamed and brought her sword down, only to have it caught by Snow Lady's claws. She dug her claw into the clone's chest, killing it and turning it back into a puppet. She tore the puppet to shreds, and pieces of straw floated down.

With two of her puppets frozen in place and one torn apart, she could no longer use the Shadow Puppet, reducing her arsenal. Snow Lady made icicles appear and had them thrown down. Li spun her sword to deflect the icicles. She threw the **Ice Storm** upwards. The demon folded her legs and crossed her arms, completely blocking the cold wave.

Snow Lady can keep making icicles at will and threw more. Li jumped back as her icicles hit the ground in a straight line. At this time, Li wondered since the Ice Storm did not work, will the Ice Dragon work? She only did it once when she fought Xiao, and she was unsure if she could do it again.

As Li's gaze switched from Snow Lady to her blade, she saw a small crack on it. She was shocked and distracted. Snow threw another set of icicles, forcing Li to look up. She deflected them but one stabbed her left thigh, causing her to grunt.

"Li Cheng..." the demon wailed. "Why do you make me your enemy?"

Snow fired an ice blast and Li dashed back, but was slow due to her injured leg. She blocked part of the attack, but the rest froze her left leg, disabling it completely. The demon fired another blast, this one freezing Li's arms.

Alex appeared, along with Jade, who was slightly behind him. Snow turned around to face them, and Jade gasped as she saw the ogre's face. She looked nothing like the Xue Nu in the mirror.

"See that? That's your friend's true form." said Alex.

Xue Nu grew instantly annoyed and threw an ice blast. Alex blocked it, his Fire Sword burning brightly. Xue's expression changed to one of fear upon seeing the flaming sword, which Alex noticed. Could she be afraid of fire? He threw the Heat Wave to the air, and Xue flew back and covered her face. As the flames touched her clothes, she flailed about, putting out the fires.

"No, stay away!" she wailed.

Alex saw his sister was frozen and immobile and he got an idea. He swung his sword, throwing some flames at the demon above. Xue Nu moved away and covered her eyes and while she was distracted, Alex ran underneath

her to his sister. Xue Nu threw icicles but they all missed his foot by mere inches. Alex burned off Li's ice and ran past her.

"Alex Cheng..." wailed the demon. "You must perish."

"Stop it!" Jade screamed. She was but a helpless bystander in all this and she was scared, helpless and frustrated. "You're both my friends, so stop fighting!"

Xue Nu shot a blast of ice and Alex countered with the Heat Wave, and the two forces of hot and cold cancelled out.

Despite Jade's desperate pleas, Alex knew he had to vanquish this demon, otherwise she will continue to harm them and others. Xue Nu pretended to be Jade's friend and manipulated her to stab Alex. Xue Nu has done this many times before, turning a woman against a man because of her unabashed hatred of men.

Alex threw the **Fire Storm** into the air. Xue Nu attempted to block it, but the flames were too hot and too plenty and her body was on fire. Her screams and wails can be heard throughout the town. She fell to the street and continued to burn.

With her last breath, Xue Nu cursed her fate. She forgot how long she was alive, but she wandered the frozen ice lands for hundreds, possibly a thousand years. She lured men to their doom, by first seducing them, killing them and feeding on their souls. A long time ago, she fell in love with a man but he betrayed her and ever since then, she has scorned men for millennia. But hating half the population for so long was tiring...and now she gets to rest. Soon, she will feel nothing but emptiness; all her problems will melt away just like the snow. Her arm burned into nothingness and her deathly screams subsided as her body became ashes.

Jade fell on her knees and wallowed in despair. Xue Nu might have done bad things, but she was there for Jade all this time. One day, Xue Nu appeared on her mirror, which startled her at first, but she quickly got used to it. They would talk for hours and Xue Nu complimented and gave her advice like a best friend would.

She looked up and saw Li. Jade stood up and wiped her eyes. "So this sister that you've been searching for all these years?"

Li had a displeased look on her face. "Do you know how much troubled you caused us, huh?"

Alex dragged her away. "Li, you tend to speak your mind with no filters. She's not ready to receive your feedback."

"I can get through to her as a woman to a woman." Li said.

"Jade is a normal woman. Are you?" snapped Alex.

Alex's eyes showed Li he was serious, so she gave in. "Hmph. Do what you want."

Alex went back to Jade. This was a delicate situation, so he knew he had to choose his words carefully.

"I'm sorry about everything."

"I'm sorry too. My life was crazy busy and I neglected you. Jade, feelings cannot be forced. To me you're my good friend and always will be."

"I see. I guess I'm no good, huh?"

"That's not true. You're pretty and a good cook and you are enthusiastic. I'm sure you will find a good man and a great husband. I'm not good for you. I endangered you and your grandmother's life. I believe there's someone out there for everybody."

"I guess that's true."

"We'll always be friends, you and I. And I promise to write more often."

Jade smiled for the first time in days and it felt like years. As these two old friends made up, Li fixed her gaze on her broken Ice Sword. The look on her face was the same as Alex's when his Fire Sword broke.

Now that Li's Ice Sword broke just like Alex's sword, repairing their swords was no longer important, it was an urgent priority. Celina returned home, expecting to see Alex in the bedroom, but instead found a note on the desk. She read the note and Alex basically said he will be traveling to the north to find the blacksmith Cho'Ann and he doesn't know how long this trip will be.

She crumbled the paper and put her palms on the desk. If one could see her face, it was one of shock and despair. He was her partner, how could he leave without telling her in person?

十一: Journey to the West: The Kingdom of Leinwan

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The man in the red robe and silver hair hopped around from rock to rock until he reached the waterfall. Alex saw a woman sitting under the waterfall and although from this distance he could not recognize her, he knew it was Li. She was wearing a gi², sitting in lotus position with her eyes closed. She let the cold water run through her, hitting her hair and going down her face and onto her body. This kind of training was also meditation and was common for ninjas trained in ninjitsu. The word of ninja is 忍者, meaning one who endures. By letting the cold water run through her continuously, her body is conditioned to endure the cold.

Despite the loud splashing noises, Li can sense Alex nearby and her eyes opened.

"I'm ready anytime. Take your time." said he.

² gi is a martial arts uniform, loose jacket and pants with a belt

"I'll be right there." Li stood on her feet and hopped onto the next rock, where her leather uniform lied. She proceeded to take off her gi, removing the jacket, revealing her bare back. Alex turned away. She removed the gi pants and put on her black pants and black vest, and now she was in her usual attire. She tied up her hair into a ponytail and when she turned around, she looked like her usual self. "It's time for a road trip."

In the royal court, an official meeting was being held, and a servant eunuch announced, "Lady Ce arrives."

Lady Ce entered the royal court, where the king was on his throne, and the red carpet was surrounded by eunuchs and lords. She followed the rules and kneeled. "May his majesty live a thousand years." After that she stood up.

"Lady Ce, we missed you here." said Liu Cao. "How are things at Cheng's mansion?"

"It's great, your highness. I want to thank you for giving us, I mean Alex, the mansion. I came here because I heard things are tense with our neighbor Leinwan."

"Those bastards keep burning our ships on the **Yangtze River** and claiming that pirates did it! Ever since Operation Dragonclaw, they have been annoying us over and over."

"May I suggest I become an ambassador again and attempt a peace treaty between our two kingdoms?" Ever since Alex left the mansion, she was left all alone. Even though the mansion had servants, they were not her friends, so they didn't matter. Alex leaving was bad enough, but the fact that he left a letter behind instead of saying goodbye in person made her sadder. She did not want to sit idly by without a purpose.

"I don't see the point. These people do not want peace. Leinwan's general won't stop until he starts a war."

"But, isn't it worth a try? I don't know about the finances, but I know we cannot afford a war after we just had a civil war."

Lord Sima removed the fan from his face. "Your highness, why not give her a chance? She did well on her mission with Shu. Isn't that right, Lady Ce?" He may seem to be defending her, but a schemer like him always has ulterior motives. He was still salty about Cheng receiving Lord Huong's estate so he has his reasons why Lady Ce should go to Leinwan.

"Yes. I am still friends with Duke Jinan and Princess Peinan and she and I still write letters to each other."

Lord Yu stepped forward and folded his hands. "Lady Ce has a keen ability to make friends. I believe she can do the same with Leinwan."

Liu Cao was contemplating in silence.

"Even if she cannot prevent a war, she can still stall for time. Time is what we need."

"But it will be dangerous. What if they try something dirty?" asked Liu Cao.

"I will not be alone." said Lady Ce. "Xiao Ye will be with me on my journey."

"Oh, the Council of Heaven's headmaster?" asked the king. A servant came over to whisper to the king's ear. After that, Cao said, "Xiao Ye is not the headmaster anymore? Why wasn't I told of this?"

General Tai stepped forward and folded his hands. "Your highness, I am sorry I did not inform you. The Council had an internal strife, and we have so much to deal with, so I did not want to bother you with these trivial details."

"But now that it's mentioned, I have become curious. General, give me a full briefing after this meeting."

"Hai." Tai went back into the group of men.

The king continued, "Lady Ce, I grant you this mission to be the ambassador and to travel to Leinwan and meet their ambassador. If Miss Ye is going with you, I feel at ease."

Celina bowed. "Thank you, your highness!"

"But just in case, Shu Tai, give them some bodyguards."

As promised, Tai briefed Liu Cao over everything that happened in the council and this is when he heard Raijun's name. The mention of a strong warrior made Cao curious and triggered his warrior's blood.

Tai gave two bodyguards to Celina, as that was all he could afford, given his situation. He apologized to Celina for giving her only two, and Celina assured him it was not a problem. During her mission to Shu, all of the bodyguards given to her perished in a fight against the Assassin Lodge, so to her, they were not a necessity.

As Liu Cao sat on the throne, he reflected on his past. It was a short time ago when he claimed the throne to Shen for himself. Before that, he spent much time in Seiruun, the capital of Leinwan. When he was a young teen, he traveled by **boat** to Seiruun. The Liu monarchy needed someone to go on a diplomatic mission to their rival kingdom, but no one was willing to do it, with the exception of Liu Cao. He's always interested in western culture, particularly their swordcraft.

General Tsai received a letter from his servant. It was a rolled up document with the imperial seal on it. He took off the seal and opened the piece of paper. "You are Liu Cao, brother of Liu Bei, King of the Shen Kingdom?"

"Hai!" Cao responded with enthusiasm. He even bowed. "I came here to be under your tutelage to learn swordcraft from you."

"How presumptuous. What makes you think I'm going to teach you?"

"Because I very interested in learning your swordcraft and I've heard a lot of good things about you, general."

"Hmph. My training will be rough, young man."

In his next memory, a teen Liu Cao was given a **wooden sword** to spar with Tsai, who also held a wooden sword. They were both wearing gis and inside a dojo with a polished wooden floor.

"I haven't decided to take you in as my student yet. Show you me what you've got." said the general.

"Hai." Liu Cao got into fighting stance.

He charged forward and let out an aggressive flurry of attacks. As Tsai expected, he was reckless and explosive, full of energy but also full of openings. Their wooden swords banged into each other.

"Your swings are too wide!" said Tsai.

They hit again. *Clank*

"Your step is too wide!"

They hit again. *Clank*

"Your face is open!" Tsai swings his sword sideways, hitting Cao in the face. Consequently his face was bruised, but he was not deterred. "You've got a long way to go!"

"Hai!" Cao did not lose any enthusiasm at all. He charged forward and continued to get slapped around.

In his next memory, Liu Cao was now an adult, as many years have passed since he first set foot in Seiruun. In contrast to his younger self, he was a little bit taller and wider. His voice was deeper and his facial features more distinct. Standing before his mentor, General Tsai, he yielded a steel sword. Tsai, on the other hand, has not changed much appearance-wise. He also yielded a steel sword.

Cao yelled and charged forward and started the fight aggressive. However, his movements were more refined and methodical. He combined offense and defense, so that right after he attacks, he was in a position to defend a counter.

Each movement had a purpose; his attacks varied from high to low, front and side, he was unpredictable. Tsai mostly defended but he can see his student's improvement. Cao went from a kid who knew nothing to a professional swordsman.

They exchanged blows and jumped back. A piece of Tsai's sleeve was cut but he was unharmed.

"Well done." said Tsai. Seeing your student become a professional is a hard feeling to describe and it is even harder to compliment him. He has trained Cao for many years...he noticed every bit of improvement...it was slow but steady. Cao has paid the iron price and here he is, able to finally put a scratch on him. All he could say was two words, well done, for he is a man who cannot express his feelings any other way. But those were not ordinary two words...those two words summarized Cao's hard work over a course of several years.

"Thank you master." Likewise, Cao could only respond with simple words. There was no other way he could express the gratitude he felt in that moment. How can he show gratitude to Tsai, who trained him, a foreigner, year after year...while being patient...helping him every step of the way. But there was no need for such sappy emotions, they were both hard men and they understood each other well.

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In his next memory, he was having a peaceful dinner by himself. He sat on the floor, eating in front of a low table, which was a typical way to eat in this culture. A servant entered the room. "A message for you, my lord."

Liu Cao opened the **scroll** while chewing his food. It was from his pen pal Lad Ce, but she insisted he call her Celina in the letters. They have been exchanging letters for a while now, but this one was serious. "Liu Bei has been killed? Liu Zhang has claimed the throne because he is the closest living relative to Liu Bei?" He angrily crushed the scroll. "Liu Zhang you venomous traitor! I always had a bad feeling about him."

Without wasting any time, he arranged a boat for him to get back to Shen. Liu Cao was Liu Bei's half brother while Liu Zhang was a cousin, so the throne belonged to him.

Little did Liu Cao know that Mo Tsai was having the same flashback at the same time. Back in the present, Tsai received a letter and crumbled it in his hand. "So Cao wants to send his ambassador to talk peace with me and it's a woman? Grrr, what is Cao up to? Is he mocking me?"

When Xiao heard that Celina wanted to go to Seiruun, she volunteered to go without hesitation. She was still figuring out the Thunder Sword's final attack but she still had a duty to her comrades at the Council. She knew there was a Seiruun branch and she had to meet the leader so she can gain more allies against Raijun. To get to the capital city by boat would be the quickest path, but the Yangtze River was too dangerous, so they had to travel by land, which will take three days.

The two bodyguards rode on horses while the two female companions were inside the carriage. Three days was a conservative estimate, as they had to go through two forests and then the icy wastelands in the north. It was a long time to spend in a carriage, and Xiao, as usual, wanted to make conversation to get to know her friend better.

"I can't believe I get to see Seiruun's imperial palace." said Xiao excitedly.

"Haven't you seen Yi Ling's palace?"

"Yes but I was blind at the time."

Celina realized her mistake. "Sorry, I forgot So you've never actually seen the palace, huh? That's crazy."

"But you've lived in the palace a long time so you're used to it, huh?"

"Mmm. I wish I could share the same enthusiasm as you. But like the old saying goes, if you eat dragon meat every day you'll get sick of it."

"But you get to be surrounded by such impressive people every day. You live in luxury, wear luxurious clothes and eat fine cuisine every day. I envy you."

She sounded like Master Fa back then, as well as every shallow person who spoke to her. They kept telling Celina how fortunate she was to be a concubine. It was understandable that Xiao thinks this way, as she was an orphan who was poor her whole life.

"It must have been wonderful being a concubine to the king, right? It must be a dream to live in the palace."

"You could say that." Indeed, to be selected by the king himself was the highest honor, but the imperial court was a jungle full of predators. Life in the palace was not all flowers and roses. This brought up some bad memories for Celina, memories she worked hard to forget.

Xiao was busy asking questions and didn't sense her friend's emotions until now. She sensed Celina was apprehensive and this topic made her uncomfortable, so she dropped the topic.

After a three and a half day's journey, the horse carriage made it to General Mo Tsai's mansion. The giant gates opened, allowing the carriage to enter the complex and they were greeted by the ambassador. He was a typical politician, wearing a guanmao with a full beard. Celina and Xiao exited the carriage and the ambassador folded his hands to greet them.

"Welcome to Seiruun." said he. "You two must have had a long journey. Come, let me take you to your residence."

The two guests were pleasantly surprised by his hospitality, considering this was an enemy kingdom. The ambassador and the two women went to the living room of their residence and sat down. The two bodyguards waited outside.

Xiao was infatuated by all this luxury. Though she has been to the palace before, she was blind so she did not actually see anything. "Wow, this is our temporary residence? This is like twice as big as my home in the Yi Ling!"

Celina, unlike her friend, was used to these surroundings and paid them no mind. Despite sitting down the whole time, she was tired from her journey.

"Make yourselves at home." said the ambassador.

"Do we get to meet the king?" asked Xiao enthusiastically.

"The king is busy with other matters." said the ambassador. "You will talk with me and General Tsai regarding political matters. Oh, speak of the devil."

Mo Tsai walked through the door. "Greetings ladies. I heard you've traveled a long way here."

Xiao and Celina folded their hands and introduced themselves.

"I am actually hosting a party at my mansion right now. All the important figures will be there, including the three princes."

Xiao grew excited. "A party? With Princes? And many others?"

"You must be tired from all that traveling, perhaps you'd like to rest. But you two are important guests so you are invited. It is up to you."

"We'd love to." said Xiao, deciding for Celina. "We've been sitting in a carriage all day, so we're not tired."

"Very good." Mo Tsai led them outside.

Being a noble himself, the general's estate expanded to several buildings, each one with their own courtyard. He brought them to the main building and the biggest one of his estate. Xiao was constantly impressed by what she saw. She looked left and right like a kid in a candy store. Celina felt the sun was too hot and felt dizzy. Despite not doing much but sit in a carriage, she was tired from her journey. She wanted to get the party over with and go back to her quarters.

Once the door opened, they felt as if they entered another world...well Xiao did. It was full of nobles and important figures in the military. "Wow." Xiao took Celina to the food table and gazed at the desserts. She grabbed a plate and started collecting her favorite desserts into it.

"If you eat all that you'll get fat." Celina joked.

"Just a little but won't hurt, right?" said Xiao. "Aren't you having any?"

"I don't have an appetite."

"Alright, suit yourself."

Tsai went to mingle with some military leaders. Celina looked in his direction and saw someone that made her spine shiver. Two of the men did not fit in with the crowd. The first man, **Bo**, had long hair that was not maintained in a while. He was dressed in ragged clothes of blue color with a sword by his belt. The second man, **Zhao Zen**, had a bulging stomach, short curly hair, and a full mustache and beard. His face was similar to Jiax, a face that Celina wanted to forget.

His face reminded her of bandits that captured her during the traitor duke's rebellion. She thought she had forgotten those miserable memories, but seeing Zen's face triggered her suppressed memories. Celina felt sick in her stomach and whatever it was, it went to her chest and head. She went to the balcony to get some air.

Xiao touched her shoulder. "Are you alright?"

Celina replied, "I'm not feeling well. I should go back to my room."

Her friend rubbed her back and glanced in Zhao Zen's direction. "I don't blame you. I too feel sick by looking at them. Why would the general let bandits into his army? It's distasteful."

Amongst the crowd, the first prince was present. He went to the male ambassador. "Mo Tsai has been recruiting outside help to fill up his ranks. That guy over there is Zen, a barbarian from the northern tribes."

The ambassador nodded. "Even if he wears our clothes, his appearance sticks out like a sore thumb. What is Mo Tsai thinking?"

The first prince whispered back, "He has backing from the other princes and lords so he thinks he can do whatever he wants. Trust me; we're not the only ones who don't like Mo Tsai's ways."

People in the crowd grouped together with those they got along with and chatted within their groups. The chatter became background noise to Celina's ears and eventually became distorted noises. The room was spinning and she fainted, falling into Xiao's arms.

"Celina?" Xiao exclaimed. "Hey, Celina! Get it together!"

The **doctor** came out of the bedroom and shut the door. He had a concerned look on his face. "What happened to her, doctor?" asked Xiao.

"Lady Ce caught a rare disease. I do not have the name of it yet, I need to consult my medical books. It must have happened when you two were traveling."

"Yeah. We traveled through forests, swamps and the northern wastelands. Maybe she was not used to the cold weather."

"In any case, she needs to be quarantined. It's best if you do not see her."

Xiao bowed. "Thank you, doctor."

Zhao Zen went into the living room. "Too bad about yer friend. Hope she's okay. I have something I need to show you."

"What is it?" she asked.

"The general wants to tell you he found the Seiruun branch of the Council. We're meeting him at his mansion. Let's go."

Xiao nodded and proceeded to follow Zen outside. She ordered her bodyguards to stay put and watch Lady Ce. Zen led her to an isolated courtyard that was empty.

"So," asked Xiao. "The general has some information to share with me regarding the Council?"

Zen glanced back for a split second. "Ah yeah. He said it's urgent so we better hurry."

Xiao's **mind's eye** can tell something fishy was going on. Zen was not being honest with his words based on his eyes and body language. Also, the party was full of people but this courtyard had not a soul in sight. Zen was not leading her to the main mansion. She kept her hand near her sword's pommel.

They were about to turn the corner. "This way." Zen announced.

Xiao's feet stopped moving. "What is so urgent that General Tsai needed to see me right now? Could this not have waited until Lady Ce recovers?"

Zen was starting to get worried. "But we dunno when she'll recover. You need to find the branch leader of your group, don't ya?"

"Is this really the way to Tsai's mansion?"

Zen turned around and Xiao unsheathed her sword and slashed. Zen was quick enough to dodge and he drew his sword. They clashed blades and her

Thunder Sword zapped his sword, as well as his whole body, causing him to stumble backwards. She swung her blade, shooting electricity to his leg, and he fell on his bottom.

Xiao heard movement from behind the wall and two archers appeared. They fired arrows and she cut them into pieces with her quick reflexes. She heard more men coming from around the corner, where the trap was, and she ran away.

An arrow flew near her foot and she was relieved it missed her. Another arrow hit the middle of her back and she groaned. "Uuuugh." She continued to run like hell. She hopped over the wall and jumped down, escaping the estate. The soldiers chased her and did not let up for one second as they were hot on her trail.

She ran towards the river and stopped and looked back. Her hunters were close and getting closer and the river was the only way out. *Splash* With her back injured, it was difficult to swim against the heavy current. She wanted to make it to the land on the other side but the current was too strong and swallowed her up.

The hunters got to the edge and no matter how hard they looked; they saw no sign of their target. Half of them ran left and the other half ran right. By now, she has already been swept away. Xiao managed to escape getting murdered by the soldiers, but she may end up getting killed by the strong currents.

[C] Title Contents

Zhao Zen wiped the blood off his sword with a white cloth, which was now dirty. Lady Ce's two bodyguards outside the residence were lying down, immobile and bleeding.

Sick And Weak Contents

Inside the bedroom, there was a woman sleeping on the bed. The light from the evening sky reflected into the room. There was a white blanket draped over her body, covering everything from the toes up to the breasts. Her shoulders were revealed, as well as her arms. Her facial expression was one of suffering as the disease was getting the better of her. Celina was breathing heavily, her diaphragm contracting and her face was pale.

After collapsing during the meeting, she was brought here, but she has no idea where she is. She was unconscious and unaware and completely vulnerable. The door opened and a man came in. His shadow covered her as he approached the bed.

Zen leered at her body, starting from the bottom going to the top. Her feet and legs were covered, but their shape can be seen. Under the blanket were her bare legs, and he cannot wait to see what they look like. Then his eyes moved to

her stomach and her breasts. Her breasts were covered, but from the indent of the blanket, he could tell they were big and round. Then he stared at her face...her sleeping face was so innocent and helpless...like a lamb about to be slaughtered. She was frail and weak and her only protection was this thin white sheet...without the sheet, she would be completely exposed.

Even in her condition, her sense of danger was flaring up and she started to wake up. Her eyes twitched and blinked a few times before opening completely. Upon seeing a man before her, she gasped loudly, and she quickly sat up, pulling the blanket over her chest. Her legs bent and moved away from him.

He came closer to the bed with this evil grin on his face. She could recognize his face from anywhere; he was Zhao Zen, the one from the meeting. His evil grin was sinister and haunts her even in her nightmares; it is a face she'd recognize even a hundred years from now.

Lo and behold, her worst nightmare has manifested into reality. The man she is most afraid of is standing before her...in her state of undress. Unable to utter a word from the shock, she just stared at him with frightful eyes, with her hand clutching the blanket tightly against her bosom.

"Ohh did I wake you up?" he said in a playful tone.

"No...no...!" Her back was against the wall.

"Don't be afraid, I'm your caretaker. I'll make sure to take good care of you." He said while chuckling.

The blanket's bottom was within reach and Zen snatched it with both hands and **pulled**. She screamed and snatched the blanket with both hands, her left hand clutching it against her breast, and her right hand clutching it against her thigh. She was making shrieking noises as they struggled.

The bottoms of her legs were exposed and Zen wanted to see more. He was unable to pull the blanket off, but instead, he dragged her entire body towards him, and her head fell against the pillow.

He crawled onto the bed, pressing down her legs to make sure they don't kick him. He crawled up some more until his face was next to hers. She pushed him and he snatched her arms and they struggled.

"No, please, no!"

"Now now, be a good girl."

Eventually, Zen overpowered her and pinched her arms against the pillow. This was to be expected as his arms were bigger than her skinny frail arms, and she was sick and weak and caught off guard.

"Please no! Please!"

Zen leaned into her body and let himself loose on the poor defenseless woman. Behind the shades, one could see their shadows moving while the woman was screaming for her dear life. His head was merged with her body and they kept struggling. "Uuuuuh! Uuuuuh! Stop! No! Uuuuuuh! Uuuuuugh!"

Her left hand kept thrashing about until it grabbed the bed sheet on the very edge of the bed and squeezed it. Her feet kicked about. Her left leg was mostly exposed and thrashed up and down.

After a while, Zen finally calmed down and stopped torturing her. Celina's eyes were shut and she was panting heavily, while facing sideways. She was completely exhausted and did not have an ounce of energy left. She was already weak to begin with, but after this, she was completely drained.

Zen stared at her face and smiled wickedly. Her suffering is his joy. Everything up till now was the appetizer and he decided it was time for the main dish. He hopped off of her body and lay next to her, and his hand snatched the middle of the blanket. "Hehehehe..."

Celina turned to face him. "No, please...please..."

He pulled the blanket off in one tug, and tossed it into the air. *Whoop*

She screamed while her head turned left and right. Tears drip down her eyes.

Zen can see her naked body and he laughed out loud while blanket slowly dropped to the floor. Now Celina has nothing to protect herself with, she was completely exposed in front of this villain, and there was nothing she could do to defend herself.

Zen's laughter and her screams echoed throughout the room. "Ha ha ha ha ha!"

Birds were hanging out by the window, and upon hearing her screams they all chirped in fear and flew away.

Behind the shades, one could see their shadows moving while the woman was screaming for her dear life. Just next to the bed lay the sheet, completely still. Her fingers grabbed the edge of the bed and squeezed it tightly. That was all she could do, as well as scream in agony.

As she was floating around in her unconscious state, Xiao had a flashback of her brother's untimely demise in Xiyang Forest. It happened a while back but it felt like it happened yesterday. Xiao was on the ground and about to be hit by a storm of arrows when **Jiang Ye** blocked it for her. As a result, he died in her arms.

After joining the Council, She reunited with Master Tze who told her some words of wisdom. Revenge will blind you and those who are driven by anger will lose their way. Despite Master Tze's warning, Xiao was driven by revenge until she finally killed Roh Demos. Her brother has been avenged but this did not bring her brother back from the dead and the hatred still lingered. It is like someone who tastes spicy food and after the meal the spiciness still lingers, but it is so mild that it goes unnoticed even when eating the next meal. Xiao herself has not realized this and this might manifest in several ways, especially in combat.

Her body made it to shore and a farmer discovered her. She still had an arrow stuck in her back and the farmer wondered if she was dead. He checked for breathing by placing a finger under her nose and confirmed she was alive. He brought her home to get her treated.

Xiao was lying in bed on her stomach. The arrow was removed and her wound has been bandaged up. When she woke up, she felt dazed and weak. She sat up and adjusted her clothes. She groaned from the ache in her wound.

The farmer just walked in. "Oh, you're awake."

"Where am I?" she asked.

"You're in my home. I found you in the river with an arrow stuck in your back."

"Am I still in Seiruun?" she asked.

"Certainly but we are on the west side of the river. This is a village that is part of Seiruun. We are on the poor side whereas everything east of the river is prosperous."

"I see." said Xiao. This clear separation of social classes reminded her of her home, the southern district of Yi Ling. She went to the window and she groaned as her wound ached.

"You haven't recovered yet, you should be resting." said the farmer, holding her by the arms.

"I don't have time to be lying in bed. I need to save my friend's life in Tsai's mansion. But that mansion is heavily guarded so I will need to find the Council of Heaven. Do you know where I can find them?"

The farmer sighed. "Yes, I may know someone who can help you."

The farmer led Xiao to a restaurant and pointed to a guy sitting by himself at the table over there. "That's your man. Good luck." said the farmer. Now that his role was over, he left. The man sitting down was middle aged, dressed casually like a fisherman, loose pants and sandals and a straw hat. He looked nothing impressive, but then again, many Council members looked rough like him.

Xiao sat down across from him, causing him to look up. "Miss, there are plenty of other tables." said **Kwan Mei-Ang**.

"Yes but they don't have you."

"You want to talk to me?" he asked.

Xiao can sense he was distrusting of her, and one cannot blame him for that. It's not everyday a pretty girl sits down with him, so he must think it's a trap. "Are you a member of the Council of Heaven?"

"Who are you and how do you know about us?" He became more suspicious and stared at her like the enemy.

"I am a member of the Council just like you, I am Xiao Ye."

"Do you know the password? There once a man who dreamt he was a butterfly."

"But upon waking up, he wondered if he was a butterfly dreaming he is a man."

"How do you know the password?" asked Kwan.

"I'm the former headmaster and a student of Master Tze."

"Wait a minute; your name is Xiao Ye? As in the Blind Prodigy? You're our leader?!" he exclaimed. The other restaurant patrons stared at them, causing them to be embarrassed, and Kwan lowered his voice.

"I'm the former headmaster. What about you?"

"I'm Kwan Mei-Ang, the branch leader of Seiruun."

Xiao was pleasantly surprised that she met the exact man she was seeking, this will save her a lot of time. Without further ado, Kwan took her to the branch headquarters to meet the other members. Unlike the Shen branch which was united, Leinwan branches were divided and fewer in numbers. This is due to the strict laws enforced by Leinwan's king.

Inside the dojo, there were four members besides Kwan, making a total of five. Besides Xiao, one other girl was present.

Kwan introduced her, "Miss Ye, these are our members. Everyone, meet Xiao Ye."

All the members except for Kwan kneeled in respect, causing Xiao to be embarrassed. "No, no, you don't have to do that. I'm not a king." said a flabbergasted Xiao.

All four members stood up and began to praise her. "Wow, so you really are Xiao Ye in the flesh! You're a legend!" said a guy. "Is it true you were blind? How did you learn martial arts while blind?" asked another guy. "Do you really have the Thunder Sword? It's so cool!" asked the girl. "How did you become the branch leader when you're so young?" asked a guy.

Xiao was overwhelmed by these fervent fans and could not answer all their questions. Kwan Mei-Ang coughed and everyone became silent, realizing their mistake.

With everyone calmed down, Xiao can finally address her concerns. "Are these all of our members?"

"Oh heavens no." said Kwan. "These are the ones who have nothing better to do with their lives so they hang out here all the time. If I call an official meeting, at least a hundred of us will show up. With all Leinwan branches combined, we have a thousand members in our sect!"

"That's perfect" replied Xiao. "As you know, I'm no longer the headmaster. A man by the name of Rajun Ruong has taken over."

"Yeah, we heard everything." said the girl. "My brother sent me a letter with all the information so we all know what happened."

"Your brother? That means you're..."

The girl raised her arm up high. "Yep! I'm **Fang Mei-Yang**, Cho Mei-Yang's sister!"

"I see." said Xiao. "That saves me the time to explain everything. Let me get to the point. I do not agree with Raijun's methods and I want to oppose him. Will you guys support me?"

"Of course." Kwan replied. "In our eyes, you are the true leader, not some old guy who disappeared for decades and then shows up out of the blue and takes the position by force."

All the members raised their swords to the air. "Xiao Ye banzai³! Xiao Ye banzai!"

Sometimes, life moves too fast for Xiao Ye. Not long ago, she was obsessed with revenge on Roh Demos for the murder of her brother Jiang Ye. After she killed Roh, she was given another purpose as the headmaster of the Heaven's Council. She was the leader for but a short time before Raijun took over. And now, here she was, in a foreign land, leading another branch of the Council to oppose Raijun's rule.

十二: An Entire Village is Hostage: The Corrupt Magistrate

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Alex and Li have traveled for a while now and happen to come across this quaint (古樸) little village that was not on the map. They were short on supplies so they might as well check out the village and pick up some food and water. Within the first thirty seconds, they noticed something eerie (怪異) about the town. They passed by a couple who sat on the ground, leaning against the fence. They did not seem homeless based on their appearance, but they were bored and stared at the sky. A few meters down, there was another guy who was the same, sitting down and in a daze.

The two passed by a guy walking towards them. His face was lifeless like that of a zombie. He was walking slowly and not paying attention to his surroundings. The two started to notice a pattern.

"Alex, have you noticed the townsfolk are acting strange?" asked Li.

"Of course I have, it's so obvious. Almost everyone is the same." he replied.

"This is so creepy." she said.

As they continued to walk, they passed by more people who had the same behaviors, they were walking about with a lifeless look on their faces and their eyes were dead. Moreover, they were dressed in rags like homeless people.

Alex stopped a woman who was in their path. "Excuse me. Is there something the matter with everyone?"

³ A Japanese expression with Chinese origin, meaning "Long live" or "ten thousand years"

"Huh?" The woman glanced at Alex. "You're not from here..."

"Everyone's behaving so strangely." said he.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." With that said, she walked away from them.

"I don't think you'll get any answers out of these people." said Li.

"Ugh we have to keep asking until someone answers." said he.

Suddenly, they hear a loud bell ringing from the middle of the town. Ding ding ding. A man was banging a large bell and the noise was audible from the entire village.

Suddenly, all the people came to life as if they just woke up, and ran towards the village's center. Some of them bumped into Alex and Li without even apologizing or realizing what they did. The woman who spoke to Alex earlier had the same reaction...first she was like a zombie, but upon hearing the bell, her eyes lit up and she started to run.

"What is going on?" asked Alex.

"There's only one way to find out, that is to follow everybody." said Li.

There was a long table setup for the townsfolk. The table was full of bowls and behind the table were four workers. Behind them stood a man with a peculiar appearance, one that would suggest he was the leader of the entire town. His stomach was bulging (脹形), one would consider him fat, and he had a full mustache and beard. **Magistrate Zhou** stood with his arms behind his back and upright and proud.

All the townsfolk formed four lines behind the table. They were excited and impatient and some of them were drooling. There was a kid standing next to his mom and he was pulling her sleeve. "Mom mom I can't wait to drink the spice!" said the kid, jumping up and down. "Me too dear!" said the mom.

In one line, two guys were arguing. "Hey you cut me off!" "No I didn't, I was here first!" "You lie! You just want to get the spice before me!"

Zhou noticed the commotion in the back and shouted: "No fighting or else you won't get any!"

"Hai!" The two men immediately behaved.

Alex and Li were amazed by what they saw unfold before their eyes. The magistrate said only one sentence and the two guys immediately obeyed him. With just one ring of the bell, the entire town came to life, turning from lifeless zombies to excited enthusiasts. Zhou has the entire town wrapped around his finger⁴...just what exactly is he feeding them?

When a person gets to the table, he receives a bowl of soup from the worker, and he walks to the side and drinks it. Some of them drank it all in one gulp and some of them sipped it slowly, but all of them were satisfied.

"What is in the soup?" Li asked.

⁴ Wrapped around his finger – he had control over everything

"I have an idea...the **spice** is poison!" Alex replied. "He's poisoning these poor people!"

Just now, a middle aged woman held the bowl with her shaking hands. She tripped over a rock and spilled everything. "No! No!" she cried out. She went back to the busy worker. "I spilled my soup...please sir, can I have more?"⁵

"Everyone gets one! Now get lost!" said the annoyed worker.

"Please, I need it! Just one more bowl!" She snatched his arm.

He tried to shake her off, but she kept pulling his arm. He turned to face her and shoved her, causing her to fall on her hands and knees. "I told you to get lost!" He even kicked her on the back.

Suddenly, a man grabbed the worker by the arm. "That's enough." said Alex.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the worker.

"You're going too far." Alex punched him in the face.

Li Cheng helped the fallen woman stand up.

Zhou noticed two people he's never seen before. "Outsiders? What are they doing here? They are disturbing the event! Men, stop them!"

Two of Zhou's bodyguards, Guard A and Guard B drew their swords and approached the heroes. Naturally, Li and Alex drew their weapons and they exchanged moves.

Guard B kept thrusting his sword forward in a predictable pattern so all Li had to do was slip her body left and right. "Is that all?" she taunted. Guard B swings his blade with hard swings and yelled every time, and Li deflected his attacks like they were child's play. Li charged forward and struck his blade, he knocked her attack back, but that was a feint. She swings her blade forward, hitting him in the chest and arm, effectively knocking him down. His arm was bleeding from a cut.

Alex dealt with Guard A, who was just as bad as his partner Guard B. He would use hard, straight swings and yelled before he attacked. Alex deflected his attacks, and saw an opening and countered. Guard A fell and dropped his sword.

"N-No way..." said the disgruntled (不滿) magistrate.

Alex pointed his blade at Zhou.

"Wait, don't kill me!"

"You're poisoning these people with the spice."

"Poison? I don't know what you're getting at." Zhou started to sweat.

"You can't fool me. I know what the spice really is. Its nickname is the **Purple Dragon**." said Alex.

The magistrate's eyes showed a reaction to those words. "So, you know your stuff. Then let me give it to you straight, I am doing nothing wrong. These fools give me their salary and in return I give them the spice. It's what they want."

⁵ A line from the famous book Oliver Twist

Li was getting impatient. "If you don't do as we say you're going to lose everything right here and now."

Zhou turned to the crowd. "Help me! These guys are trying to kill me, and if I die, you know what that means, right? No more spice for any of you!"

The people immediately rushed to Lord Zhou's side, standing before him and Alex's blade. "Don't kill him!" said one of them. "We won't let you kill him!" said another one.

Three people were on Alex's left side and another three were on his right. Li was also barricaded (封鎖) by the villagers and she stood in fighting stance, pointing her blade at them. Alex took a good look at the people protecting Zhou...their eyes were fierce and determined.

"Li, don't hurt them. They're just civilians." Despite his circumstances, he was more worried about the villagers than himself.

"Easy for you to say. What if they do something to us?"

"We can't win here. Let's withdraw." Alex ran away and Li followed him.

[B] Title Contents

The Medicine Contents

Celina was resting peacefully in bed... or least it seemed peaceful. But she was in much pain, as the disease was getting the better of her. She was moaning in her sleep and sweating. There was only a white blanket wrapped around her body and nothing else. Sleeping will ease her pain, but it will not make the disease go away.

"It's time to take your medicine." said Zen.

Zen popped the pill into his teeth and proceeded to hop onto the bed, lying on top of her body. He placed his knees just outside of her legs, and his palms outside of her arms. He leaned into her face. He placed his lips into hers. "Mmmmmmmffffff!"

The pill went into her mouth and she was forced to swallow it. Even though her eyes were shut and she seemed unconscious, she felt everything being done to her. Her eyes were twitching through her eyelids. Her eyebrows were shaking.

Her fingers formed a fist and squeezed the blanket. His hands found her wrist and grabbed it. Then they slid down to her fingers and their fingers interlocked. He did the same with her right hand, their fingers interlocked as the kiss continued. Her feet thrashed about between his legs. "Mmmmmmmffffff!" Tears drip down her eyes. Her fingers were interlocked, not able to do a thing.

After escaping the madness, Alex and Li sat down at a local restaurant to drink some tea. "I know what the townsfolk are going through. I myself was a victim of the spice."

"Really?" Li asked. "When was this?"

"When I was in the palace, Liu Zhang held a party and offered us some soup, but it was his trap. The soup was full of the spice, it is a poison known as the **Purple Dragon**."

"The Purple Dragon?"

Alex nodded. "It's made from a rare flower that can be found only on mountains of the most dangerous kind, namely the Tairainian Mountains. It is so deadly that all it takes is one sip to become addicted to it. Then you are hooked forever."

"So how did you get cured?" asked she.

"You need to go cold turkey⁶, basically do not consume the spice in twenty four hours. Shen Long and Sui Long had to tie me to a chair because I was going crazy. I remember it clearly, I really needed to have the spice, it consumed all my thoughts and I could think of nothing else."

"That's the only cure? But we cannot help these people using that method. Isn't there another way?"

Just now, the owner and some of the customers recognized the heroes. "Hey those are the outsiders." said one of them. "Yeah! They are the ones who attacked Lord Zhou!" The mob approached the two.

Alex and Li stood up from their seats and backed away from the angry mob. "It was for your own good, you bunch of idiots!" Li yelled back.

"It's pointless!" Alex grabbed his sister's wrist and took her outside. The mob followed them outside and screamed and threw rocks at them. Li was obviously angry, but there was nothing she could do against innocent civilians.

At night time, Alex and his sister sneaked into the magistrate's mansion. As rich as he was, he had only two bodyguards and their martial arts were weak, so it should not be a problem. After breaking down the front door, they entered the hallway. They ran down the hallway and entered the main hall. The two bodyguards were seen sitting on sofas, cleaning their blades. When they saw the intruders, they immediately stood up.

"You two again?" said Guard A.

"Get out of the way, we are not here for you. We only want Zhou." said Alex.

"Over our dead bodies!" said Guard B. The two guards pointed their swords at the heroes.

"Let me handle this." Li announced. The two guards charged forward. With just one swing of her Ice Sword, she used the Ice Blizzard. The guards were sent flying against the wall and some of their clothes were frozen.

⁶ cold turkey – avoid it completely

Meanwhile, Zhou was inside his office, counting coins on the table. This was the money he extorted (勒索) from the villagers in exchange for the spice. "What's all the noise about? Huh? Men?"

The door fell down and revealed Alex and Li.

"Gahhh, it's you two outsiders!" Zhou jumped out of his seat.

"It's over!" said Alex. "You tried to get the villagers to attack us, knowing we will not do anything to them. So we came directly to you."

Zhou grunted angrily. "Wait a minute, that appearance, that silver hair, that sword. You are the famous **Demon Slayer**!"

"I'm glad you realize that." said Li. "Who are the villagers going to listen to? The Demon Slayer, the hero of the kingdom, or a greedy magistrate like you?"

"Heh, so what if you are the Demon Slayer? There are no demons here."

"There is one, and that is you." Alex pointed his sword near Zhou's sternum.

Suddenly, Zhou dropped to his knees and kowtowed. "Please have mercy on me! Spare me life!"

Alex did not expect the proud magistrate to beg so he was stunned. Zhou continued to beg and grovel. When he noticed Alex dropping his guard, Zhou pulled something out of his sleeve.

"Watch out!" Li shouted.

Zhou threw dust into Alex's eye, causing him to step back and cover his eyes. The magistrate ran through the wall, breaking the shades. "Help! Someone help!" Some townsfolk were in the area and they heard his scream. "Someone's trying to kill me! Help!"

Alex and his sister arrived. Zhou pointed at those two.

"They're trying to kill me and take the spice away!"

Upon hearing that, some of the townsfolk stepped in front of Zhou to protect him. Others pointed their pitchforks at the two. "Stop!" said Li. "Do you know what you're doing?"

The townsfolk pointed their pitchforks and sticks angrily. "You're not welcome here, outsider. Leave **Lingxiu** village now!"

"You're being deceived!" said Alex. "Why can't you guys see that?"

Li took a look around and saw the desperation and anger in their eyes. Their facial expressions showed that they will not back down no matter what and they will not listen to any reason. Then she looked at Zhou, who had a wicked smile on his face. He was hiding behind two villagers with a smirk and this made her angry. However, she cannot hurt innocent civilians. Earlier this morning, Alex told her to stand down and now she saw the wisdom in his thinking.

"Alex, there's no point in talking to them. I have an idea." Li withdrew from the crowd and so did he.

The two siblings were standing on a rooftop. "Damn!" said Alex, pounding his own fist into his hand. "We almost had Zhou but the villagers keep defending him. Is there no way to save this village?"

"There is a way. I have an idea." said Li Cheng.

Alex turned to face her. "You do?"

"The cause of this is the spice, right? What were to happen if there was no more spice?"

His eyes widened. "Ohhh."

"You said that when you were getting cured, you were angry and violent, right? What would happen if an entire village mob got angry and violent?"

"But how would we find where Zhou has hidden the spice?"

"That's where ninjas come in." Li smiled.

The silver haired man and the ninja girl were sneaking around, hiding behind a wall. They both wore a black mask. In the background, there was a warehouse. Guard A and Guard B exited the warehouse and locked the door.

"Does everything check out?" asked Zhou.

"Hai, everything checks out." said Guard A.

"Good." Zhou rubbed his hands. "As long as we have the spice, I control Lingxiu Village."

"I'm worried about those two outsiders, sir." said Guard B.

"Baahhh, the Demon Slayer and his servant girl are too stupid to discover this place. Sooner or later we will drive them out of my town." Zhou and his two guards left the premises.

Once it was determined to be safe, the two ninjas sneaked inside towards the warehouse. There was a lock on the doors. Li attempted to slash the lock, but the metal was too strong.

"It won't break. In that case..." Her **Ice Sword** glowed and she slashed the lock, freezing it completely. Then, all she had to do to break it was tap it lightly. They opened the doors and went inside.

What they saw bewildered them...there were crates and crates stacked on top of each other. Each crate was full of purple flowers, the ones needed to make the spice.

"Wow, this is where he keeps all the spice. There is so much." said Li.

"And he only gives the people a little bit to drink while he has so much. He is cheap and despicable."

"So how do we get rid of all this?" Li asked.

"I have an idea." His **Fire Sword** glowed and turned into flames.

Zhou and his bodyguards noticed smoke coming from the warehouse's direction. "Sir, isn't that where the warehouse is?" Zhou glanced at his bodyguards and suddenly ran towards that direction.

When they arrived, the warehouse was set on fire. The flames were so strong that they felt hot and going near the smoke made them cough. It was impossible to safely get closer. "Uhhh! This can't be!!" Zhou exclaimed.

The bodyguards quickly ran to the well to get buckets of water.

Zhou fell on his knees. "Who could have done it?!"

The smoke and the fire caught the attention of the townsfolk nearby, and a group of them came by to check it out. Around forty of them arrived and they were making comments about the fire.

"It's those two outsiders!" Zhou exclaimed. "They destroyed everything... grrrrr ..."

"What is happening?" asked townsfolk.

Upon seeing the crowd, Zhou grew nervous. "Nothing, it's nothing at all. Go home."

Alex appeared on the top of the wall. "All the spice has been burned...the spice is no more. You are all free."

The townsfolk glanced at each other in confusion. "Wait, are you saying that the spice is gone? We can't have it anymore?"

"No, he's lying!" Zhou shouted. "Don't listen to that outsider! Men get him!"

The mob of people approached Zhou and surrounded him. "We gave you all our money! Where is the spice?" "Where is it! I need to have it now!" "Give me...the spice..."

The magistrate was completely surrounded and cannot escape. "No, wait, it's not true. It's not true! You have to believe me!"

The townsfolk kept approaching him until there was no room left, they were literally breathing on each other's neck. "Where is the spice?" "Give me...now..." They kept pushing him back and forth, and he fell on his knees.

"No, no, no!" Zhou looked up and saw only the faces of an angry, violent mob.

"Nooooooooo!!" The mob of spice addicts were hungry and will not listen to logic or reason.

The bodyguards were on the outside of the mob, struggling to get to their boss.

Li and Alex were watching this scene from a safe distance. "Well looks like we don't need to administer any punishment to the magistrate." she said.

"Indeed. He screwed over the citizens and it is the citizens who will decide his fate. I almost feel bad for him." said Alex.

"I don't." said Li. This was the exact scenario she imagined in her head, and seeing it in reality made her joyous on the inside. It was the perfect strategy, borrowing someone's knife to kill an enemy⁷, instead of doing it yourself.

If one were to enter this town, the very first thing they will see are three men at the front, they were tied up to logs and stripped of most of their clothing. Zhou was wearing pants and a buttoned shirt that was open in the middle. One can see scars on his stomach and chest area. His head was facing down as he was either sleeping or unconscious. His two bodyguards had the same look, they were wearing the same clothes and they were both scarred.

十三: Pleasure Palace: Sweet Bitter Dreams

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The winds were especially rough today. A man in a straw hat and ragged cape walked through the barren wasteland. Tong Lian had traveled for days with very little water and food. Tong Lian was instructed by his master Raijun to trail Alex Cheng. Though Raijun did not explain his reasons, Tong can guess why. Cheng has the Fire Sword, which makes him a threat to Raijun's Wind Sword. Only those who have one of the four elemental swords were considered a threat to him.

Following Cheng's trail, he found a small village in the middle of nowhere. To his surprise, he saw three men hung at the front gate. Magistrate Zhou was in the middle of his two henchmen and they were all alive but not conscious. Tong had no clue who did this or why, so he asked around.

Tong stopped a woman who was shopping. "Excuse me, miss. What happened to those three guys at the front?"

"Oh you're an outsider." said the woman. "You wouldn't know this, but that's Magistrate Zhou."

"Who did this to them?" asked Tong.

"We the villagers did. He used the spice to control us, but good thing two heroes came and defeated him. One of them had the Fire Sword and the other had the Ice Sword."

"Alex Cheng and Li Cheng? Where are they now?"

"They left a day ago, so you just missed them." the woman answered.

"Did they say where they went?" asked Tong.

"Alex Cheng said they were going up north to Yi Howan."

⁷ Chinese idiom

"Up north? Thanks, miss." Tong did not want to waste time here, so he continued to walk through Lingxiu Village. He wondered why Alex and Li wanted to go north.

Tong made it to the next village and found a nearby restaurant. He sat down and the restaurant owner took his order. Tong had not eaten a decent meal for days and his stomach was rumbling, so today he was going to eat his fill.

At the other tables, four bandits were chatting and laughing loudly but Tong paid them no mind. The bandits, however, paid attention to him, wondering how much money he has on him.

As soon as Tong received his beef noodle soup, he ate like a pig. When he finished, he put the bowl down and sighed. The four trouble makers came over to his table. The owner saw this and had a bad feeling.

"Hey bro," said Bandit A. "You ain't from here, are you?"

"No, but why do you care?" asked Tong.

"It's not you we care about, it's what's in your pocket." said Bandit B.

"You don't need the coins, so why not hand it over to us?" said Bandit A, pointing to his sword.

"And if I refuse?"

"Are you playing games?" Bandit A grabbed him by the collar.

Tong snatched his wrist, twisted it, and grabbed Bandit A's collar, pulled him and slammed his head on the table. Bandit B was about to attack when Tong got off his seat and stepped behind Bandit A, still twisting his arm. The three bandits drew their swords.

The owner hid inside his kitchen, crouched with his hands over his ears, shaking in fear.

Bandit B attacked and Tong grabbed his wrist before his sword could be used, and performed a spinning elbow, hitting Bandit B's face. Tong then hopped onto the table in a crouch. Bandit C charged, and Tong lied down and kicked him away. Right after that, Tong rolled away before Bandit D could slash him. Tong returned to being in a crouch. Bandit A aimed his sword at his feet and Tong jumped over it, then kicked Bandit A in the face. Then Tong hopped off the table and drew his sword.

Bandit A and he exchanged blows and Tong pushed him away. Bandit B attacked and they ended up in a power lock. Though Tong's martial arts was above average, he was not able to handle four guys at once. Bandit C slashed him in the back. Tong shoved Bandit B away and stepped to the side, avoiding Bandit C's slash. As he and Bandit C exchanged blows, Bandit D screamed and stabbed his spear into Tong's stomach, pushing him back and pinning him against a log.

Bandit D chuckled, feeling victorious as he stared at his bleeding victim. Tong's wound was bleeding heavily and blood dripped down his mouth.

"Aww, what's the matter, is it in too deep?" the bandit said, referring to the spear. "You should get a doctor to patch you up."

Tong grunted in agony as he faced down. Then he looked up and laughed. "You've done it now..."

Tong's arms grew out of their clothes, becoming big, white, hairy arms with black stripes and his hands became tiger claws. As he grew bigger, his shirt was torn apart. His face became a tiger, with fangs and fierce eyes.

The bandits watched speechlessly as they watched him transform into a humanoid **tiger** before their eyes. The spear broke off and now Bandit D was holding onto a piece of wood. "Y-You're a demon!" The bandit struck its head with his stick.

The tiger snatched the stick, broke it, and grabbed Bandit D by the neck. It lifted him off his feet and it sunk its claws into his chest and ripped his heart out. The tiger dropped the bandit, followed by his heart.

Bandit C charged and struck the tiger's arm. But its skin was too thick to receive any damage. The tiger shoved the blade away and scratched Bandit C's chest, causing him to bleed and scream. The tiger hopped onto him, pushing him to the ground. The tiger bit him on the neck, effectively killing him.

After seeing the carnage, Bandit A and B approached cautiously. They were both nervous and trembling as the demon approached them. The tiger roared, causing their hair to stand up. Bandit B ran away, abandoning his comrade. Bandit A was more nervous as he stood alone against this freak of nature.

The tiger attacked and made short work of him. It dug its sharp claws into his torso, causing him to bleed heavily and die. The tiger stared at the bloodbath it caused and felt proud. The only regret it had was allowing one bandit to escape.

The tiger took a moment to calm down and reverted back to his human form. His demon form had many advantages, but it was a pain in the ass to deal with clothes. His shirt was completely torn to shreds, his pants barely covered his waist, and his boots were completely destroyed. He went to the fallen bandit and took off his clothes and put them on himself. They were not a perfect fit, but it was better than nothing.

The owner heard silence for a while and stood up. He saw three dead bodies and Tong, who was alive. Tong snatched the bandit's bag of coins and dropped it on the table. "Keep the change."

At the riverside, a monk rowed a boat with his paddle. The monk with six dots on his forehead was Hui. He was sent by Master Ruong to follow Xiao Ye. He discovered she was to enter Seiruun through the north. So he took a shortcut by taking the Yangtze River. During this tense period between Shen and Leinwan, the waters were dangerous and pretty much a death wish. But no one will pay attention to some monk in a small boat.

He arrived on land and took his metal rod with him and abandoned everything else. Since Hui arrived before his target, he just needed to wait for her to show up.

Two days later, Xiao's carriage finally appeared and Hui saw the carriage go inside of Mo Tsai's estate. Right after that, Hui went to the front gate and was blocked by two guards, crossing their spears.

"Stop. Who goes there?" said the guard.

"My name is Hui and I am a member of the Council of Heaven."

The two guards glanced at each other. "What business do you have here?"

"I wish to see General Mo Tsai. I am Xiao Ye's friend and we were supposed to go in together."

"Even If you know Xiao Ye, your name is not on the guest list. Please leave." said the guard.

"Amen." Hui bowed and folded his hand and walked away.

At this time, someone within the estate saw Hui and became curious. The man followed the monk down the street. Hui turned around to confront him, pointing his stick at him. "Why are you following me?"

"Relax." said **En Ko**. He was a man in his late forties to early fifties, with a rough, unshaven beard, curly hair and dressed like a ninja. He wore a blue vest, cotton pants and sandals. "It's me, En Ko. Do you remember?"

Hui put down his stick. "Oh, it is you, Sir En Ko."

"Long time no see, monk boy. Well, for me it's not a long time, but I'd imagine it is for you."

"Amen. It has been many years since that day." said Hui.

"I see you're still the same, eh? Both Raijun and Tong Lian decided to take my offer to turn into demons but only you refused."

"I have my reasons, Sir En Ko."

"I bet you do. You monks still baffle me. So, why were you trying to enter the estate?"

"I was sent on a mission by Raijun." said Hui.

"Well today's your lucky day. Me and Mo Tsai are close pals so I can get you in no probs." said En Ko.

"Amen. I am grateful for your help."

[B] Title Contents

The Chase Contents

En Ko and his disciple Hui were looking at a glass globe. "Let me show you my next prodigy, Zhao Zen." The globe glowed and a visual appeared. It showed the inside of a room and there was a man chasing a woman.

She was wrapped in a sheet and screaming as she was trying desperately to escape from him. He was laughing the whole time. In addition to a visual,

they can hear faint sounds from the globe. In between them there was a table and the only barrier that was keeping him away from his prey. She moved to the left and he'd move to the left, and when she'd move to the right, he'd move to the right.

"Surely this is not the one you speak of?" Hui was not impressed in the slightest. "You must be joking with me?"

"Would I joke about something like this?" he replied.

"I fail to see how he can be the great swordsman that you speak of."

Indeed, how can he take En Ko's word seriously, based on what he is observing?

Zen is nothing more than a pervert chasing a woman. They were running around the table like playing a game of cat and mouse. The faint sounds of the woman screaming can be heard.

"He is definitely rough around the edges. But his swordcraft has a lot of potential. Brutes from the northern tribes are known for their violence and lust, which makes him a perfect candidate."

"Well then, good luck with that. I'd like to see how it turns out."

"Alright, let's move to more important matters." The two turned their attention away from the globe...the globe's visuals continued to display.

Celina screamed in fear as Zen continued to chase her. "Stay away!" she yelled. Zen was laughing and having a good time, just like a kid in a playground would. "No, no!" She was trapped.

Zen suddenly ran to the left, causing her to move away, and kept chasing her until she was at the opposite end of the table.

Suddenly, she noticed the door at the other end. She took the gamble made a run for the door. He grabbed her by the arm pulled her into him, and he wrapped both arms around her torso, capturing her completely. She shrieked and screamed as he dragged her towards the table. One hand grabbed her by the hair and shoved her head down.

Clink The teapot and cups made a noise. Her **face** was pressed against the table cloth. One hand was on her head and the other hand pinned down her shoulder, and in this position, she was as helpless as a lamb. Zen snickered at her helplessness. He dominated her in every possible. He was bigger and stronger than her and it felt good to overpower a small, frail woman. Besides the sheet wrapped around her body, she was practically naked.

Tears of sadness streamed down her eyes. This was never a fair situation to begin with. Celina caught a disease and fell unconscious, and suddenly found herself trapped in this unknown place. From the beginning she was naked and had only this sheet to cover herself with. She was sick, weak, and tired, and unable to defend herself against this brute.

He squished her face left and right. "Mmmm mmmm!" Then he returned her face to its original position, her cheek pressed against the table cloth. Her

vision became blurry... The tears kept flowing as she stared at the contents of the table.

Zen laughed out loud. He grabbed a fork and stabbed it in front of her eyes. Her eyes were wide open with shock and fear. She has no idea what this madman was capable of, and in her defenseless state, he could do what he pleased to her body.

He took the fork out and it was hovering over her left hand. Suddenly, he stabbed the fork into her hand. "Uuuuuugh!" It was not deep enough to causing bleeding, but it still hurt like hell. He stabbed her forearm. "Uuuuuuuugh!" He stabbed her upper arm. "Uuuugh!" He stabbed her left shoulder. "Uuuugh!" He was high on adrenaline and wanted to hurt her more. He stabbed the fork into her upper back. "Uuuuuugh!"

Zen then stabbed her middle back where the sheets were. The sheets were thin and it still hurt. She moaned after stab. He stabbed her lower back. "Uhhh!"

Then he thought of something more fun. He was leaning into her buttocks and he turned away slightly. He stabbed the fork into her butt cheek. She screamed louder than before. "Uuuuaaaaaaagh!!!" Her fingers squeezed the tablecloth so much that it made a lump.

Hearing her cries of pain made him aroused. He kept stabbing various parts of her body and she moaned more and more. Unable to control himself, he put the fork down and leaned in and put his face into her hair and smelled her. He let out a sigh of pleasure. She winced while panting for breath. He went lower and kissed her shoulder and the exposed parts of her back. "Uuuhhh. Uuuuh!" Celina's hand thrashed about and knocked the teapot on the floor. Some cups fell on the floor. *Clink* The tea spilled out from the spout.

After a while, he stopped a moment to catch his breath. Zen pulled her up, now she was leaning at an angle, with his face in her hair. He turned her around and shoved her down so that her front was exposed.

He leaned into her and continued to violate her. She continued to scream in agony. "Aaaaaaah! Uuuuuuh! Aaaaaaah!" Her fingers grabbed the table's edge and squeezed the cloth tightly.

Below the table, the tea continued to spill out. When he was finished, he paused to catch his breath. He grabbed the fork and stabbed her shoulder, causing her to moan. He liked the look on her face. He stabbed her sternum. He stabbed her breast through the sheets.

Her screams continued to be heard throughout the mansion. No words could describe the horrors and torture she had to face for the next few hours.

The traveling siblings made their way to the city of **Yi Hing**. They have been here once during Operation Dragonclaw. Things were so hectic back then they did not get to see the city fully. But this time they can be tourists and take their time.

"We are here again." said Alex. "I wonder how things have been since the big battle?"

The siblings walked around to look at the buildings. Li said, "It looks like they're recovering. Ever since Operation Dragonclaw, the city's economy has suffered tremendously and then came the heavy taxes, making things worse. The citizens don't like Liu Cao."

"They don't know better. Liu Cao fought for the stability of the kingdom."

Somehow, they ended up right in the middle of the red light district and saw a large building that stood out above the rest. It was painted in bright pink and the sign said "**Pleasure Palace.**"

"What is the Pleasure Palace?" Alex wondered."

"To help the city's economy, the magistrate of this town started distributing a drug called the Dreamer Drug. This drug is said to give you nice dreams."

"Is that so? What are the side effects?"

"Surprisingly none. But like all drugs, it is addictive. People keep coming back for more dreams to escape reality."

"Really? I'm actually curious about this dreamer drug. We're not in a hurry, so let's check it out."

The siblings went inside and an employee took them to a room for first timers. It was a large dimly lit room, full of couches and cushions. People were lying down, sleeping, while others just sat there with a blank look on their face. Alex found himself an empty couch.

"Wait, are you really doing this?" asked Li.

"Mmm hmm. I believe all drugs are harmful and I don't believe this drug has no side effects." said Alex.

"But there's no need for you to experiment on yourself." said Li.

"I'm just going to take one dose. If there really are no side effects, then there's nothing to worry about, right?" said Alex. Li was confused and remained silent. "Despite the crazy ups and downs, heaven has been good to me. I am able to spend time with my sister and I have a woman waiting back home...at my mansion. When we were poor I could never have dreamed up such a thing. I wonder if this drug can show me something better."

Li was completely lost by his logic and surrendered. "If you say so."

The employee brought a pipe for Alex to smoke. All he had to do was smoke the entire dose and eventually he will fall asleep. He felt relaxed, knowing Li was beside him.

Alex's eyes felt heavy and he started dozing off.

Dreamer Drug - Alex's Dream

Alex was sitting in the bath, relaxed. His arms were leaning on the edge. Celina was wearing a towel as she approached the barrel. She was too

embarrassed and remained still. One hand was over her breasts and the other hand squeezing the gap between her legs.

Alex's eyes opened. "What's wrong? Don't tell me you're embarrassed."

"But...it's..."

"Just get in already."

Celina took off her towel and placed it on the barrel, and proceeded to step into the water. She put one leg in, then the other leg, then sat down. She took the washcloth from his forehead. "Let me scrub your front." she said.

She placed the cloth on his wrist and scrubbed his entire arm, making sure to get it at each angle. Then she scrubbed his shoulder and his chest. While she's admiring his athletic body. The cloth went to his stomach and lower, into the water. Alex showed a slight reaction to it.

Alex grabbed her arms and pulled her into him so their cheeks met. "Now let me wash you...with my mouth."

Celina gasped. He planted his lips on her neck, kissing her skin as well as sucking the water droplets off her. He glided his lips to her shoulder blade, kissing every inch. His lips made their way to the shoulder's side. Then back to the blade, back to her neck. She moaned.

Then he turned her over, causing her to moan. So that she's leaning against the barrel. He pressed his torso firmly against hers.

He kissed her sternum and down to her breasts. She moaned. Her arms wrapped around his back, left hand still holding the cloth. She squeezed the cloth tightly. He kissed the left breast, then the right one. She moaned. His lips glided up the sternum and to her neck, without leaving her skin. Kissed the bottom of her chin. So close to the lips. Finally, his lips touched hers and pressed them firmly, both their mouths slightly ajar. Fingers squeezed the cloth tightly, squeezing the water out.

When the kiss was done, he kissed her jaw, she turned slightly the other way. He kissed her neck and went down to her breasts. His lips haven't separated from her skin this whole time. His hand grabbed her knee and caressed her thigh. Then his hand slid under the water.

"Uhhh...no not there..."

Fingers squeezed the cloth tightly, squeezing the water out. Her head tilted backwards. Her pony tail dangled off the outside of the barrel.

His face was between her breasts. Then his face went lower...into the water.

"Uhhh...Alex...not there! Uhhhh!"

Fingers squeezed the cloth tightly, squeezing the water out. Her head tilted backwards. Her pony tail dangled off the outside of the barrel.

Alex woke up in cold sweat. He sat up and saw Li sitting by the window, staring blankly at the skyline. Li turned around and saw him. "Well, did you have a nice dream?"

"Yeah. It was nice, too nice. It makes me want to go back and stay there forever. This drug is dangerous." he said. "It must be stopped."

"Do we have time for this?" Li asked.

"The last time we were at Yi Hing we said that if we ever come back, we would do some sightseeing, didn't we? Well, think of this as time away from sightseeing."

"If you say so." Li replied.

[C] Title Contents

A servant came to the magistrate's office and bowed. "Lord Du Mu, two people are here to see you. The man says he's the Demon Slayer and the other is his bodyguard."

Du Mu looked up. "Alright, let them in."

The Cheng siblings came in and folded their hands. "Greetings Lord Du Mu."

"Ah, if it isn't the famous Demon Slayer. What can I do you for? There aren't any demons in my city."

Alex got to the point, "I came to you to talk to you about the Pleasure Palace. I know there are several hotels like that around here. These so called palaces were not here before."

Du Mu said, "The dreamer drug has been selling like crazy and we get many repeat customers. The store owners are happy, the customers are happy, and I'm happy."

"But the dreamer drug is dangerous. They don't see a dream; it's more like a hallucination."

"Well, you call it what you want."

"I want you to stop distributing these drugs."

Magistrate Du Mu looked displeased. How dare this young kid half his age come in to his town and tell him what to do. "To be frank, our economy is in shambles thanks to your king's civil war. If you are to blame anyone, blame him. We are still recovering from the war. People have lost their jobs and their lives, so they are unhappy. They come to the pleasure shops to escape reality because their reality is a nightmare."

"There has to be another way." said Alex.

The magistrate slammed his palms on the table and stood up. "There is no other way! Look, kid, I don't care if you're a hero or lord or whatever, but I've been running this city longer than you've been alive. You can't just come here and make demands like you own this place. This territory belongs to Lord Sima. If you offend me, you offend him."

Li knew not who Sima was, but Alex knew. He has seen Sima plenty of times in the palace. He was Liu Bei's distant cousin, a key figure in the kingdom who owns the lands in the north and Yi Hing is one of his cities. He commands a

private army that belongs to the Sima Clan. Not only that, but one of Sima's daughters, Leifang, was the current king's concubine. His claws have sunk deep into the kingdom and he would be a difficult man to root out.

Alex's tone of voice changed. "Look, I'm asking you to consider it. I have seen an entire village plagued by a drug called the spice. It was a terrible situation. I myself have been addicted to the spice and I personally knew someone addicted to opium so I know well how dangerous drugs are."

Du Mu leered at Li's body, causing her to feel uncomfortable. "Hmmm, I'll consider it if this pretty girl here has dinner with me."

"What did you say?" she asked.

"It's a trade," said Du Mu. "Spend one night with me and I'll get rid of the drugs. It's quite a bargain for you."

By now, anyone who knew Li can predict what happened next. "What kind of dumbass deal is that, you creep!" She stepped forward and put her hand on her sword pommel. Alex restrained her.

"Lord Du Mu," said Alex. "I was hoping we can come to an understanding. But it looks like your mind is as dirty as your city. Don't blame me for what happens next." He dragged Li to the door.

Before they exited, the magistrate wanted the final word. "You're going to learn the hard way, kid. This town has its rules. You cannot change a thing by breaking the rules."

The owner of the Pleasure Palace was in his office with two of his bodyguards, counting the coins on the table. These gold and silver coins were profits from their drug business.

The Cheng siblings barged in, surprising the three men.

"Who the hell are you?" said the started owner.

"I want you to shut down the Pleasure Palace," Alex said.

"Like hell I will! Get them!" The owner pointed at the intruders and his bodyguards drew their swords and attacked.

Alex blocked the guy's attack, then slashed burned him at the same time. The guy was trapped against the wall, and his arms were shaking. Alex knocked his sword away, leaving him defenseless. Alex then struck his head with the back of his sword, knocking him to the floor.

A second guy attacked Li, and she shoved his sword to the side, leaving himself open. She stabbed his sword into his shoulder, causing him great pain, and his shoulder became frozen. She kicked him against the wall and threw an ice wave at him, freezing half his body.

The owner was bewildered. "You guys are useless! What did I hire you for?" He pulled a sword from the wall and stood in his defensive stance.

Alex approached him cautiously, with Li slightly behind Alex.

"I'm warning you, I have been training in martial arts for twenty years. I know the Eagle's Style, the Praying Mantis and the Flying Crane!"

Alex stepped forward cautiously. "That makes you quite impressive, doesn't it?"

The owner switched stances, causing Alex to step back. He looked at the owner's eyes, which showed unwavering confidence. They showed he has fought countless battles before this one. They were facing a martial arts adept, and even though he has the Fire Sword, he still must be careful. Li was ready to jump in any time as they both anxiously waiting for the owner's move.

Suddenly, the owner screamed, turned around and jumped through the window. Still screaming, he dropped his sword and continued running like hell.

Li did a face palm on herself. "That guy was bluffing!"

Alex sighed. "Well, look at it this way. That's one less guy we have to fight."

The next morning, Alex and Li went to check on the Pleasure Palace. With the owner gone, it should be shut down, but to their surprise, it was not. People were still walking in and out of the building. "Why..." Alex murmured. He went inside the Pleasure Palace and was greeted by a receptionist. "What happened to the owner?" he asked.

"Last night, for whatever reason, the previous owner left town." said the receptionist. "Lord Du Mu replaced him with a new owner."

"That fast?" Alex exclaimed.

"Mmm hmm. By the way, are you Alex Cheng?"

"Yeah, how do you know?"

"You match the description Lord Du Mu gave me. By the way, he left a message for you." The receptionist handed him a note.

"For me?" Alex opened the note. All it said was 'I told you so.' Alex crumbled the paper and ripped it to shreds. He stepped outside, his fingers clenching into fists.

Li tapped his shoulder. "Look Alex, we are good at fighting, but this is not our area of expertise. I want to smack this Du Mu guy, but that will cause us bigger problems than it's worth."

"Arrrgh. This is so frustrating."

Four local police officers arrived and Li can sense more officers hiding in various corners. "You must be Alex Cheng." said the officer. "The magistrate said you're not welcome here anymore. Allow us to escort you out of town."

Alex turned to Li. The look on her face was one of consent. "This is one battle we cannot win." She has never cared about the city to begin with and was not interested in fixing its problems. She went along with Alex but it turned out to be a waste of time. She was impatiently waiting to get her Ice Sword fixed.

"I swear to heaven that the day will come when I fix this." said Alex. He may have succeeded in the village of the spice, so he thought he could do the same in Yi Hing. But clearly, Yi Hing was of a different animal. Alex had to learn

a tough lesson, which was not to fight the last battle. What worked in the past may not work in the future.

十四: The Northern Mountains: Beware of the Snowmen!

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After their last failure, Alex and his traveling companion Li continued to travel north. The Xanbei Mountains were visible in the background. The closer they got to **Yi Howan**, the bigger the mountains became. Yi Howan was the northernmost city of the kingdom. This city is also the coldest one and it often snows in the winter. But this cold was nothing compared to what they were about to face in the mountains. To deal with the cold weather, they went to buy winter coats. They were thick and made of cotton and had hoodies.

"So Cho'Ann the blacksmith is hiding in the Xanbei Mountains? Is your source reliable?" asked Alex.

"I'm not sure, but it's the only lead we've got." Li replied.

They have just arrived to the magistrate's office. "Remember, let me do the talking." Alex reminded.

"Yeah yeah, I know. I've got a quick temper, right?"

"I'm glad you know."

"But if this guy hits on me like that Du Mu guy, I'm going to kick his ass."

Magistrate **Lau Mu** was drinking his morning tea and reading the newspaper. A servant came in and announced he had guests, and the magistrate approved it, and the servant let the guests in.

Alex and Li came in and folded their hands. "Greetings, Lord Lau Mu."

"I've been expecting you, Sir Cheng, and..."

"This is my sister, Li Cheng." said Alex. "We've traveled a long way to get to Yi Howan."

"I heard that your mansion is in Yi Ting? It must have been a long journey. Let me provide you a hotel room." said Lau Mu.

"Thank you, but that's not necessary. I want to ask you a favor. We want to borrow some men and horses from you for our journey to the north."

"Hmmm, where do you intend to go?"

"We wish to go to the Xanbei Mountains."

Lau Mu's expression became displeased. "For what purpose?"

Alex glanced at Li. "We heard that the blacksmith Cho'Ann is there and we want him to repair our swords."

"The Xanbei Mountains are too dangerous! Rumors have it that **Yeti** live there. Many travelers go there but few return alive."

"We need your help." said Alex.

"I heard about the blacksmith too. He has not been seen in fifty years, how can you be sure he's alive? I'm not wasting my men on your hunch."

"We just need two horses." said Alex.

"Absolutely not." said Lau Mu. "I need all of my resources to defend the kingdom against the northern barbarians. I don't have time to indulge in your field trip."

Li could not hold back any longer. "We're not going on a field trip!"

"Forget it." Alex shook his head. "This is one fight we cannot win." These words were an echo of his sister's words back in Yi Hing. Li understood what he meant and they promptly left the office.

"They really think they can survive the Xanbei Mountains?" Lau Mu asked rhetorically. The Cheng siblings did not know that he was Du Mu's cousin. Du Mu had sent a letter to Lau Mu, telling him not to provide any help to Cheng.

The Xanbei Mountains were just an hour away from Yi Howan, so they arrived quickly by foot. As they approached the mountains, they noticed the temperature dropping rapidly, and snow began to fall heavily. They wrapped themselves tightly in their winter coats and kept moving forward.

The further they went into the mountains, the more snow they encountered. It was up to their knees, and they had to take slow steps to avoid slipping on the icy ground. They could see their breath turning into mist, and the wind was howling in their ears. If they had brought horses, those horses would not have survived.

The snowfall continued, and soon it turned into a drizzle, making the mountainside even more treacherous. The snow became wet and slippery, and they had to be careful not to slip and fall. They trudged on, one step at a time, their footsteps crunching in the snow. They could barely see anything around them, as the snowflakes were falling thick and fast, covering everything in a white blanket.

Li Cheng has been through many kinds of weather, but this was the most extreme cold she ever had to deal with. Even she found this to be a difficult climb.

Alex made conversation to distract himself from the cold. "Hey Li, they say that there are snow demons that frequent these areas."

"Snow demons?" Li repeated.

"In the east they are called yeti, and in the west they call them **Abominable Snowmen.**"

"I remember the magistrate mentioned something about the yeti. But don't worry, ice and snow are my elements and my Ice Sword is more powerful in this environment."

"That's reassuring. You know, because they are rarely seen, some people doubt yeti exist."

"Some people doubt that demons exist. Those doubters are people who live an easy life and never faced danger before. They are spoiled, naïve people who never left their home town."

Alex smiled not at Li's words, but at her usual attitude. That's the Li he knows, looking down at people she's never met. Though his body was freezing, he felt warm on the inside.

"Did you hear that?" Li asked.

"Hear what?" Alex asked. All he could hear was wind howling and snow falling.

Li's stealth senses were diluted by the environment so she could have been mistaken. They continue to trudge on. Slightly behind them, the snow started to move. As they walked uphill a foot, whatever was buried in the snow moved a foot, following their pace. Li sensed something again and she turned around but saw nothing but whiteness. Alex was five paces away from her, which was too far, so she hurried to catch up to him. The snow behind them shifted, continuing to follow them.

"You know what?" said Alex, continuing to make conversation. "I think the magistrate would have given us horses if you seduced him."

"What...no way." she replied.

"It would have worked. Remember that time you entered the palace with me and Liu Cao and you dressed up as a palace lady? You looked good in those clothes."

"But they don't suit me at all. It's so hard to move around in those sleeves and there are so many layers. Besides, even if we had horses, they would have died already."

Suddenly, a creature popped out from the snow, standing upright, causing them to turn around. It was an ape-like creature at least eight foot tall, a thick and muscular build with shaggy white fur. Its face resembled a polar bear, broad and flat with a brow ridge and a snub nose. Its eyes were deep-set and seemed expressive. It let out a loud ape-like roar that alerted the others. Based on its appearance, it was no doubt a yeti.

The siblings had done the obvious already, drawing their Fire Sword and Ice Sword. Li used **Ice Blizzard**, hitting the yeti directly but it did not even budge. "It has no effect?!" Li calmed down to think. It could be because her Ice Sword was cracked. No, that doesn't matter, as proven by Alex. He was still able to burn Xue Nu with his broken Fire Sword. Perhaps yeti were just like Xue Nu, immune to their own element. That has to be it! Yeti deal with these icy cold conditions constantly and everyday was like an ice blizzard.

Suddenly, three more abominable snowmen appeared atop the hill. They can stand upright or run on all fours, making it faster. Alex's blade glowed red and was set on fire. The yeti gasped and crawled back. Alex kept swinging his sword aimlessly, forcing all three of them to back off.

"They're afraid of fire!" he announced.

“Just like Xue Nu!” Li said. Alex and Li stood back to back and they were encaged by the four yeti, two downhill and two uphill. Li’s attacks did not work so she was helpless as a lamb.

“Hya! Hya!” Alex kept swinging his Fire Sword, causing the yeti to move back. But as two moved back, the other two moved forward, causing Alex to face the other direction and shift his focus. He shooed them away with his Fire Sword, but the two yeti from behind crawled closer. These snow demons were intelligent creatures capable of using strategy and teamwork.

Li used **Ice Storm**, thinking a stronger attack should work. It hit two yeti but they merely covered their faces, letting the ice pierce their body like water splashing a fish.

Alex threw the Heat wave at one of them, burning it. It roared loudly from the pain, and then retreated. Alex used Heat Wave over and over, but the yeti dodged them. Not only were they strong, but they were agile creatures.

Li hated being helpless and she wanted to try something else. She was able to summon the Ice Dragon once, but she was not confident it will work again. She closed her eyes and waited until the feeling was right. She can feel the yeti coming closer and the danger increased every second but she remained calm. The yeti found her behavior usual and approached cautiously, smelling her with its nose.

Suddenly, her eyes opened, signaling her readiness. She performed the ritualistic dance and summoned the **Ice Dragon**. Its roar was louder than the snowmen’s roar and flew faster than a bird. The yeti was hit directly, feeling its power fully, and was knocked on its backside. The two yeti lied down in a kowtow position, becoming white balls. The dragon passed them in its entirety and they survived. Afterwards, the yeti stood up again. Li was speechless...the Ice Dragon was successful...but also unsuccessful.

The good news was she still had one more trick up her sleeve.

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The DoctorContents

The doctor entered the living room, hoping to check on his patient. To his surprise, she was lying on the floor near the table. Celina was wrapped in a white sheet that covered most of her body. She crawled towards him and he remained still, stunned by what he saw.

“Please h-help me.” she cried out. She pulled his pants sleeve. “Help me!” Her quivering voice and face was one of desperation. The doctor had never seen anyone beg so desperately before.

Zen grabbed her by the ankles, trying to pull her away. “Where do you think you’re going?”

Celina pulled the doctor’s pants even harder. “No, no! Save me, please!”

"What are you doing to her?" the doctor asked.

"What does it look like? I am making sure she gets back to bed." Despite being sick and weak, she tugged his pants with the last of her strength. It took Zen some effort but he managed to drag her away from the doctor's leg.

The doctor frowned. "You are mistreating her."

"On the contrary, I am taking good care of her."

"She is my patient," said the doctor angrily. "You cannot treat her this way."

"Listen you are only a doctor here and your job is to treat her disease while I'm the caretaker."

"She is very sick and needs this medicine."

"Leave it on the table." Zen ordered.

The doctor placed the bottle of pills on the dinner table. "I have to make sure she takes the medicine..."

"I assure you she will. I will take care of it. Your job is done, doctor."

The old man had more to say but hesitated. He spoke up anyways. "You shouldn't treat her this way..."

"Don't forget, good doctor, I am the one who runs the show here. So play your role and do as you are told. Now, if you don't mind, you may leave now."

The doctor realized that he was stepping out of line, and it could cost him his career, or even his life to disobey. Thus he turned around and regrettably shut the door behind him.

Celina attempted to crawl towards the door. Zen kicked her in the stomach causing her to groan. "Uugh!" He kicked her several more times in the stomach and abdomen and chest. "Uugh! Uugh! Uugh!" The poor girl was weak and defenseless, yet this brute did not hold back at all. As her guardian, he decided how to treat her and this was his idea of 'taking care' of her. "Uugh! Uugh! Uugh!" When he was finished abusing her, she stopped moving and lay there sideways, shivering and coughing from the pain.

Using his foot, he flipped her over to her front. Zen snatched the bottle and opened it. She crawled back to the table, staring like an animal about to be hunted.

"Time to take your medicine, woman!" He poured the pills into his mouth, not caring if they spill out.

She knew what it meant, and she did not want that to happen. "No, not that! Please, anything but that!"

He knelt on her hips, causing her to moan. "Uhhh." They struggled for control as her arms flailed about, but it was not much of a struggle.

He grabbed her wrists and shoved them to the side. "No please! Please!"

His mouth still full of pills, he shoved his face into her breasts and the pills spilled all over her body. He enjoyed himself fully, caressing her skin with his face, pushing the pills to the floor.

From an outside view, one can see the man's boots and the woman's bare feet protruding out of the table. Her feet trashed about.

He scooped up a pill on her sternum with his teeth. He kissed her lips. "MMMMMFFFF!" The pill went inside her mouth. Her fingers formed a fist while his fingers squeezed her wrists tightly.

From an outside view, one can see their legs protruding out of the table. Her feet flopped about aimlessly. "Mmmmmmmffff!"

Li summoned three clones, resulting in all of them standing in a straight line. The clones went and faced off against one yeti each. The yeti's intelligence worked against them as they were confused. There was one woman but now there were four. Sensing something fishy, they grew cautious, no longer aggressive like before.

As Alex kept swinging his fiery weapon, opponent kept retreating a little bit at a time, goading Alex to follow him. They went to the top of the hill. Li saw this and yelled, "Alex! Alex!" He was too far away to hear her. "Damn it!"

The yeti slashed the clones, tearing them to shreds. Li charged and struck a yeti who blocked with its arm. Its skin was cut but was too thick to receive major damage. It smacked Li onto the snow. It then hopped on top of her and growled at her, showing all of its teeth and its tongue and the black hole of its throat.

Alex kept chasing his yeti until he realized Li was not near him. He didn't notice passing by two big white balls that was not made of snow. Those white balls stood up, revealing themselves to be yeti and surrounded Alex on three sides.

The Demon Slayer realized his blunder. "Ah crap..." The good news for him was he had the advantage of fire. He used Firestorm, creating a wall of fire that spread three hundred sixty degrees. The snowmen kowtowed, becoming balls and endured the flames.

"You've got to be kidding me!" exclaimed the disgruntled Alex. The snowman smacked snow onto his Fire Sword, extinguishing its flames. A second snowman hopped in front of him and grabbed him by the neck. This one was nine feet tall so Alex was lifted up quite high. As expected, the snowman's grip was strong and he was unable to escape its death grip. Li was also trapped by a snowman. Is this the end for our heroes?

"Hold it!" shouted a man's voice. Everyone paid attention to the newcomer, who was riding on top of another yeti. The snowmen stopped being hostile and ceased what they were doing. The siblings were bewildered that the snowmen obey this man and his appearance was unique compared to everyone the siblings have seen so far. His skin was dark brown and he had strange face tattoos as well as body tattoos. His eyes glanced at the strangers, Alex and Li and noticed their swords. "The Fire Sword and the Ice Sword? Who are you people?"

The yeti released Li, who was about to be yeti food. The other yeti released Alex, who landed on the snow. "I am Alex Cheng and that's my sister Li Cheng. What about you?"

"I am Jing Cho'Ann." he announced.

Both of the siblings were shocked. "Y-You're the legendary blacksmith?" exclaimed Li.

"I see you've met my friends." Cho'Ann said, referring to the abominable snowmen. Alex and Li picked up their swords and walked towards Cho'Ann.

"Come, you two must be tired from your journey. Let me take you to a warmer place."

The entire group, led by the blacksmith, walked towards a nearby cave. Li stuck close to Cho'Ann and away from the yeti. "How did you manage to control the yeti?" she asked.

"Not control, lead. I lead, they follow."

"Yeah. How did you get them to follow you?"

"Save your questions for when we get inside. It is too cold to talk, must save energy."

The blacksmith brought them inside a cave, a place he has made his home. He had all the accommodations in one large room, a sleeping area, a table for writing and eating, a stack of books, and a bonfire. They sat down across each other from the bonfire.

Alex said, "I see you've made yourself at home."

Cho'Ann replied, "I've been living here for over fifty five years. My only friends are the abominable snowmen."

She handed him the Ice Sword and likewise Alex handed him the Fire Sword. "You forged the Ice Sword and Fire Sword a long time ago." said Li. "But for some reason, they are damaged. You are the only one who can repair it. Please help us."

Alex was surprised she can be so polite. At times, she can be quite convincing.

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Cho'ann examined the blades while Li and Alex waited in suspense. "They are cracked but they are indeed my creations. I have not seen them in a long time."

"We need to get them repaired. Can you help us?" Alex asked.

"I can repair them but I refuse to."

"Why not?" Li exclaimed, refraining from showing disdain.

"I originally made these swords for the Four Brothers because they said they would use it to save lives. But instead they use it to murder in cold blood for their own ambitions, just like everyone else."

"We're not using these swords for evil." said Li Cheng.

Cho'ann put the blade close to his face to take a closer look. "Why do you need them repaired? So they can sit on a shelf to collect dust? The very nature of a weapon is evil. Have you ever used it to kill a man?"

"We only kill to make our kingdom a better place." said Alex.

Cho'ann put the blade down in his palms. "Everyone says the same thing. The Four Brothers came and asked me to make them the most powerful weapons in the world. They said they will use it to save lives. Those swords will be the symbol of hope that will unite the country. I did my best to deliver to them the ultimate weapons. The Fire Sword was forged in the lava pits of a volcano. The Ice Sword was forged from the coldest ice in existence. I put a sword in the ground and let lightning strike it every day, and the Thunder Sword was born. I took another sword and placed it on the highest mountain in the world and let strong winds hit it daily, and the Wind Sword was born. The Fire Sword was given to Genzo, Ice Sword to Chu Yen, Thunder Sword to Taishi, and the Wind Sword to Rajun. The four elements were made for balance. They used these ultimate weapons to create order from chaos and create four city-states in which they rule. But Chu Yen betrayed the brotherhood and used the ultimate weapons for evil. The War God killed many people in cold blood."

Alex placed his hand on Li's arm, signaling her not to lose her temper. Li said, "The Four Brothers came to you during a time of need. Chu Yen was evil, but Master Genzo was not like that. Taishi was not like that either!"

Alex spoke up as well. "Please, we need these swords re-"

Cho'Ann put his palm up, interrupting Alex. "I have already made my decision, so you can stop trying to change my mind. You two feel free to stay here as long as you wish."

Li's fingers formed lists on her lap. They came all the way from Yi Ting, halfway throughout the kingdom just to see this blacksmith...they went through so many dangers and were nearly killed by yeti...only to be rejected? "Are you telling me we did all that for nothing?!"

"No, we just need to give him time."

"Time is the one luxury I don't have. Look, I know different torture techniques I can try on him."

Alex shook his head. "Absolutely not. I will convince him, alright? Leave it to me."

The siblings followed Jing Cho'Ann to a larger room, full of cooking equipment and other tools they have not seen before. As soon as they entered, they were greeted by a sweet, inviting aroma with hints of spice and freshly roasted nuts.

"So, I'm curious, how you manage to become the yeti's leader?" asked Alex.

As Jing began his explanation, Li leaned against the wall with her arms crossed. He flashed back to that fateful day when he stepped foot on the Xanbei Mountains.

Jing was hiking up the snowy mountain, wearing an Eskimo jacket with a hood full of fur, a backpack and a walking stick. He walked past what he thought were giant balls of snow...until the balls started moving...and growling. The snowmen revealed themselves and he feared for his life. One of them growled at him and pounced on him.

"Wait! Don't kill me!" Jing winced, expecting his face to be chewed up. But he was still alive. The snowman was sniffing at his pocket. "Oh you can smell it? You want it?" He took out a **chocolate bar** from his pocket. The snowman sniffed it and took a bite. It made a noise signaling its pleasure.

"I have more." Jing took out more chocolate bars from his backpack and split them amongst the four snowmen.

The snowmen took an immediate liking to him, and one even carried him on its shoulder. They took Jing to their cave, which was their home. Unfortunately, chocolate was extremely hard to make and he only had three bars on his person, but fortunately, he knew how to make more.

"Your secret is cho-co-late?" Li repeated stupidly. "What is that?"

"Ah, you Chinese people don't know about it. It is a special kind of candy made in my country." Jing grabbed a chocolate bar and unwrapped it in front of them.

The siblings stared at it like literal kids in a candy store. He broke it in half and gave a piece to both of them.

"Why is it so hard?" asked Alex.

"Why is it this color?" asked Li.

"Go ahead, take a bite." Jing insisted.

They were skeptical but curious and took a bite. They can immediately feel its crunchiness as the pieces broke down inside their mouths. Their taste buds exploded with a rich, creamy flavor. The chocolate was smooth and silky, with a hint of sweetness that lingered on their tongues. They chewed slowly, savoring every moment of the chocolaty flavor. One bite was not enough; they finished the entire bar within seconds.

"It's amazing," said Alex, his eyes widening in delight.

"I've never tasted anything like it," added Li, nodding in agreement.

Jing smiled at their reaction. "Chocolate is one of the greatest pleasures in life," he said. "It's a shame that it doesn't exist in China."

"I've noticed your weird appearance from the start and I had a feeling you're not Chinese." said Li.

"I am from a country west of Leinwan called **India**."

The siblings glanced at each other. "No wonder. You're Indian so that's why your skin is so dark. So anyway, is it hard to make chocolate?"

"Oh its not hard, it is extremely difficult." said Jing. "I combined my knowledge of science and sorcery to develop a process for making chocolate over and over again. For a normal person, this is impossible."

"This is not interesting at all." Li sensed a long lecture coming and bailed out before Jing started.

Jing said, "The first step is to harvest cocoa beans, which grow on trees only in tropical regions of the world. It is impossible to grow plants on the Xanbei Mountains due to the harsh conditions, so I grow them inside this cave. The beans are removed from the pods and then fermented, which helps to develop their flavor. After fermentation, the beans are roasted to bring out their flavor and aroma."

Jing's hands glowed as he fermented them inside the box. Using sorcery speeds up the fermenting process. Normally it would take five to seven days for the beans to be fully fermented. Jing dropped the beans onto a steel wok placed over an open fire, and waited for them to be roasted. Alex was all ears and watched with glittering eyes, not wanting to miss a thing.

"Once roasted, the beans are then cracked open to remove the outer shell, leaving behind the cocoa nibs. The nibs need to be grounded into a paste called chocolate liquor." Jing distributed the nibs into two bowls, one for himself and one for Alex. He took a round stick and grounded the pieces in the bowl. Alex copied him, working diligently. "The grinding process is the one part where no sorcery is needed, just strength and hard work."

"I can do strength and hard work!" said Alex. After doing it for a while, his shoulders began to feel it, but slowly but surely the pieces were turning into liquid so he kept going.

Finally, the paste was done and Jing explained the next part. "The chocolate liquor is pressed to remove the cocoa butter, which is a fat that gives chocolate its smooth and creamy texture." For this part, he used sorcery to get the needed cocoa butter. His hands glowed as he touched the bowl, and the cocoa butter was squeezed through a hole which led to another bowl.

Alex marveled at the entire process. He could imagine Cho'Ann's hands glowing as he forged the ultimate swords.

Li went to another part of the cave and encountered a yeti. "I'm your friend, not enemy." she said, pointing at herself. "F-F-friend. Understand?"

The yeti got on all fours and crawled to her and sniffed her pocket.

"Oh, you smell this? You want some?" She took out a chocolate bar and gave it to him. The yeti chewed it slowly to enjoy the taste. Li petted its fur and it felt soft and fuzzy. Despite being overgrown, dangerous killers, these yeti have a cute side, she thought.

The yeti, by far, were the most intelligent demons found in the wild. Humans who transform into demons do not count in this category. For example, water demons were slow, fish-like demons that attack anything that moves, and although strong, they moved slow and were stupid. Desert demons were similar; they were brainless creatures that were easily killed. Werewolves can be found in the jungle, and although they were fast, they do not work in teams.

It's a good thing the yeti were on her side. If not, she and Alex would have died already.

"Next, the remaining solid material from the chocolate liquor needs to be grounded and then we will have cocoa powder." He handed the bowl to Alex, who took it happily. After grinding for a while, he had the cocoa butter.

Jing then mixed the cocoa butter and cocoa powder, along with sugar and other ingredients to enhance the taste. The next step was tempering, which involved melting and cooling to get the chocolate's smooth crystal like structure. The mixture needed to be melted into a liquid form and stirred. Alex stirred and cooled by adding more nibs into it. Jing warned the mixture must not exceed 35 degrees Celsius or the tempering will be ruined.

Now, it was time to test the tempering. Alex took out a small portion of the liquid and spread it over a piece paper. He was told to wait five minutes for it to crystallize and he guarded it like a hawk. He took this more seriously than his sword training. Finally, it was time to test it. He took the piece of chocolate and ripped it in half. It felt hard and firm like it was supposed to and he ate the piece. "Mmm, it's good."

"Good." Jing explained they were at the last step. After the tempering was complete, they poured the dark liquid into plastic molds to shape it. They need to wait four hours before the chocolate can be eaten. "Well done, young man." said Jing.

Alex wiped the sweat off his brow. "Man, this was more complicated than I thought. It makes me appreciate chocolate even more." Little did these two men know that a thousand years in the future, chocolate will become one of the most eaten candies in the world. It is synonymous with Valentine's Day, a favorite candy for young girls and anyone with a sweet tooth. In fact, more people will eat chocolate than rice! And it all started with a blacksmith and a swordsman inside a cave up in the mountains.

Back at the Heaven's council at the Yi Ling branch, a messenger pigeon just arrived and landed at Cho Mei-Yang's window. He recognized this particular pigeon as the one his sister uses. He opened the scroll attached to the pigeon's leg. His eyes stared wide open in disbelief. "They tried to kill Xiao Ye and they kidnapped Lady Ce?"

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Plants do not grow this high up in the mountains, making this a harsh and brutal area for living creatures. The yeti survive by feeding off of small animals such as rabbits.

Li went with one group of yeti to hunt for food. They spotted a small rabbit and it ran into a small hole in the mountain wall. A yeti stuck its hand inside to root it out. Another yeti dug through the snow and clawed into the stone structure to find its nest. Eventually, the rabbit was cornered, and it jumped out and ran away. Li threw an ice blast at the rabbit, freezing it and killing it on the spot. It never stood a chance. A yeti grabbed the frozen rabbit and examined it.

Somewhere else, Alex was hunting with another group. A rabbit was spotted running into a hole underground. Alex stuck his Fire Sword inside and let it burn. Eventually, the nest was too hot and the rabbit came out from another hole. A yeti snatched it and stabbed its neck, causing its blood to drip on the snow.

The two groups returned to the cave promptly for dinner. Alex and Li each held a rabbit and each of the four yeti were holding onto their prey. Cho'Ann waited by the cave's entrance. With these two extra helping hands, he no longer needed to hunt and can focus on his other tasks. He noticed that the yeti took a liking to them. It was certain and Alex and Li were not bad people.

The company of three had dinner over the bonfire. They ate roasted rabbit as the main course and afterwards they ate chocolate. Li bit into the chocolate bar and chewed slowly.

"By the way, do you know a blacksmith named **Sha'Uri**?" Alex asked.

Cho'Ann had a look of surprise. "How do you know about Sha'Uri?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued. "He used to be my disciple. I taught him all of my techniques but I was not able to teach him the right way to think. He grew too ambitious and created the **Water Sword** without my permission."

"I fought a pirate named Raizo who found the Water Sword." said Alex. "We went to an island south of the Yangtze River, it was full of demons."

Li was also there and she killed a demon named Darkstalker. Usually she would brag about her win but she was too preoccupied with chocolate.

"You fought against the Water Sword?" asked Cho'Ann.

"Yes but it broke, so it was defective. After I killed the pirate, I tossed the Water Sword back where it belongs, deep in the ocean."

There was a moment of silence as Cho'Ann contemplated Alex Cheng's decision. He agreed with what Alex did. In fact, if he had the Water Sword, he too would have thrown it into the ocean. Most swordsmen would have claimed the Water Sword for themselves to become more powerful. At first, Cho'Ann thought of Alex like a typical swordsman, but now he saw Alex in a different light.

He glanced at Li, who was still chomping down chocolate bars. At first, she appeared to be an assassin with a heart of ice, but now she seemed like an innocent girl.

Cho'Ann said, "To make an elemental sword like the ones I made takes time, practice and patience. Sha'Uri had the skill but not the other things. He was impatient, ambitious, and egotistical. I regret ever taking him on as a student. He was part of the reason why I hid in the mountains."

"That's too bad." Li replied. "But you shouldn't give up because of one bad student. You can find another one, can't you?"

"Teaching sorcery is not the issue. I need someone who has the right character traits. A blacksmith with character defects will forge a weapon that has defects. I have to pass on my legacy but I have to make sure this power doesn't fall into the wrong hands."

"Did you learn sorcery by yourself or from a master?" Alex asked.

"My master was a blacksmith and was so his master.

I am the descendent of a long line of blacksmiths with origins in India. My ancestors discovered sorcery during the time you call the Xia Dynasty."

"That's a long time ago!" Li exclaimed.

Cho'Ann nodded as he smoked the pipe. "No one really knows how far back it goes. But every generation, a master finds a student to pass on his knowledge to. My master taught me everything before he passed away. My techniques are not new; they are old, so old I don't know its origins."

The siblings were flabbergasted by what they heard. It was crazy to think that his blacksmith techniques were passed down several dynasties. They knew what Cho'Ann could make, but what kind of incredible weapons have these blacksmiths made in the past?

"But if you hide up here, you can't find another student." said Li.

"I am not planning to make any more weapons and I do wish to teach the dark arts anymore. I am ending the legacy."

The siblings glanced at each other, wondering if he was serious. "Are you serious?" asked Alex. "You should think about it carefully first. It's not just your legacy, it's your master's and your master's master, and everyone who came before you."

Cho'Ann took another huff of smoke and blew it out. "I've already decided." He left the bonfire.

While Alex played with the yeti, Li entered the kitchen and saw Cho'Ann working diligently on his next batch of chocolate. "What is it, Li? Do you want more chocolate? There are some fresh ones on that table over there."

"You know, I know a little bit of sorcery, so I know how hard it is to master it. You can make candy, weapons, anything you want. But what I don't get is why you want to give up all that?"

"I already told you. The Four Brothers said they would use my ultimate swords to bring peace and stop the killings, yet nothing has changed. I'm not going to make weapons for murder."

"You're right that there is no such thing as peace. But at the time, the land was overrun by demons and people never ate a decent meal or slept a wink. The Four Brothers brought stability and paved the way for four kingdoms to be born. Some order is better than no order, so to me, they kept their promise."

Cho'Ann turned around to look at her. She had the fire in her eyes just like Masai Genzo did.

"I'm not asking you to make weapons, I just want you to fix the ones you already made." said Li. "My brother and I need them desperately. We have something to fight for. I admit I have killed in cold blood but Alex is different. He really can make a difference in this world, that's what I believe."

"Is war the only way to bring about peace and stability? As a blacksmith all I do is make weapons for murder."

"I don't know. But in Greek mythology, Pandora's box was opened and all the evils and miseries of mankind were released. Greed, hatred, wrath, corruption, suffering...but one thing remained inside the box which was hope."

Cho'Ann placed his palms on the table. "Give me some time to think about it."

"Fine, I will not rush you. But let me remind you that every second without my Ice Sword is another second I could be saving lives."

[B] Title Contents

Wiping Off Sweat Contents

Meanwhile, in Zhao Zen's mansion, Celina was still in the same situation. She was still resting in the same bed, tucked naked under the blanket. She was unconscious and in dire pain and her condition has not gotten any better.

Dr. Yueh came into the room. He noticed a wet cloth on her forehead. She was breathing hard and her skin was pale colored. She was sweating profusely. Her arms and shoulders were seen and there was sweat on them. The doctor took the wet cloth off her forehead and dried it off. He dipped the cloth into a bowl of fresh water and squeezed it dry.

The first place he wiped was her left arm. He lifted up her arm by the wrist and wiped down, starting from the wrist and going to her elbow. Then he

wiped her upper arm, making sure to get the bicep and triceps thoroughly. Then he wiped her shoulder left shoulder. After that he repeated the process with her right arm and shoulder.

Then the doctor proceeded to wipe her neck, making sure to get all angles except the back. He glided the cloth to her jaw line and cheek, going to her forehead. She moaned a little bit, causing him to pause briefly. But he continued to wipe her forehead and her right cheek.

The doctor then cleaned the cloth again. He realized that her back would be sweating so he must wipe that part too. He was nervous about it, as his morals were getting in the way. But it was simply to clean her back so he shrugged off his doubts.

He gently shoved her so she lay on her side. The blanket was in the way so he pulled it down until it was at her lower back. Most of her back was revealed and his eyes got a treat. Her skin was flawless and her shape was good and she had curves in the right places.

He began to wipe her shoulders, moving slowly to make sure he covered every inch. He swallowed hard. He was getting turned on just by wiping her back. The cloth went lower to her laterals. Then lower to the lower back. But he stopped there as he was too nervous to go lower. He was curious as to what was below that area, but she might wake up at anytime.

Once Dr. Yueh was done with her back, he wiped his own forehead.
Phew This was more difficult than he thought.

He flipped her over so she was lying on her back and her front was facing up. He noticed her cleavage protruding out of the blanket. And she was sweating in that area. He felt obligated to wipe her sweat. He glanced at her face. Her eyes were still shut and she was breathing hard. Then he stared at her cleavage and gulped.

He placed the cloth on her neck and began to wipe and his eyes did not blink even once. The cloth went down to her sternum and then to her cleavage. His left hand was shaking as he reached for the blanket. His fingers clutched the blanket and pulled it down an inch. He began to wipe her exposed skin. He kept pulling the blanket lower and lower until her entire breasts were revealed. He wiped her breasts all over. His breath nearly stopped while he did.

Celina moaned a little bit and her head turned a bit. When he was done, he pulled the blanket up to where it originally was. Finally he was able to breathe and he was sweating. He wiped the sweat with his own sleeve.

Then he looked at the cloth in his hand and thought to wipe himself with it. His eyes lit up. He just wiped Celina's skin with this and now he's going to wipe his own skin. He put the cloth against his cheek. Even though it was the same cloth physically it felt different. It felt special. It smelled better. He wiped his forehead and both cheeks. Then he smelled it and sighed. It's as if he's smelling a piece of clothing she wore.

Then he glanced at her **legs** under the blanket and he gulped. He wiped the upper body so the natural thing to do is to wipe the lower body, isn't it? It wouldn't be right to leave it like this. His right hand pulled the blanket up a few inches, revealing her thighs.

His left hand placed the cloth on her knee and started to rub it up and down. Celina panted for breath. It was unknown if she felt his touches or not. He finished one leg and wiped the other leg. He pulled the blanket up another inch, revealing another inch of her thighs. He wiped her thigh, moving the cloth as deep as he could see. He pulled the blanket up another inch, his gaze was fixed on her legs and he did not know how much more he could pull up. He made sure to wipe the entire area of the thigh, going from the outside to the top to the inside. Then he moved the cloth up and down.

He pulled the blanket up another inch and kept wiping. Suddenly, the cloth touched something soft and he realized he hit her **spot**. Her head shook a bit and her eyes twitched. The doctor gulped and continued his motions, moving the cloth down and then up, touching her spot.

She moaned quietly and the doctor suddenly stopped to look at her face. He quickly removed his hand from inside the blanket and pulled it down. Her eyes blinked a few times and she woke up. She saw him sitting beside her and she sat up, clutching the blanket against her bosom.

"You shouldn't be getting up," he said. "You need more rest."

"Never mind me. Where is Xiao Ye?"

"I don't know, unfortunately."

She put her hand on his shoulder. "I need to see her. She's my...friend..." She suddenly felt dizzy and fell into him, surprising the old man.

"Ohhhh," he gasped.

They accidentally **embraced**, her cheek was touching his and his hands were touching her back. This old man was married but his wife was as old as him and they do not even touch each other anymore, so he was easily excitable.

Celina smelled nice and he nearly forgot the scent of a young woman. The way her skin felt against his hands, the way she smelled, and the way she was breathing heavily was too much stimulation. He gently put her down, her head lying on the pillow.

"Just focus on resting..." he said.

She was too tired to argue and just relaxed and closed her eyes and sure enough, she fell asleep.

Bo just fell down his butt after being struck by Zhao. "Is that all you've got? You fight like a girl." Zhao taunted.

"I'm no match for you, bro." Bo stood up and patted the dust off his clothes. Just like his senior, Bo was a warrior from the northern tribes that was recruited by Mo Tsai.

To the east of the cold Xanbei Mountains were the tropical Tairainian Mountains, and further east were a smaller range of mountains and grassy plains. These mountains were not too high up and full of animals and vegetation, making it a perfect habitat for bandits and tribes. Zhao Zen, the leader of his tribe, and Bo, his right-hand man, spent their days robbing travelers and torturing people for fun; they were the lowest of the low. But how did these men with such dubious backgrounds end up working for General Tsai? Zhao had a flashback on what happened.

Zhao and his men saw a carriage passing by as they watched atop the hill. They went downhill and surrounded the carriage. The horse driver was killed. Inside there was a man and a woman. The bandits took all of the man's possessions and after that he had no use, so they cut his throat.

They kidnapped the woman and brought her back to their cave. Zhao approached the frightened woman, bound by ropes. She kept crawling back as he drew closer. He laughed and she cried as his shadow covered her. Outside the cave, a woman's screams were heard.

One day, the general, accompanied by two soldiers, went to visit Zhao's hideout. Zhao can tell by Mo Tsai's armor that he must be the highest rank in the military. As they entered the cave, Zhao whistled. "I wasn't expecting a guest of your rank here. How can I help ya, my lord?"

Mo Tsai's eyes scanned the room. "So this is how you live, huh? What a dirty and filthy rat hole this is."

"This rat hole is our home and we have tons of stolen treasure in the back room, so we're not as poor as we look." said Zhao Zen.

"You can do much better than this." said Mo Tsai. "I have been hearing the news that your group attacked some poor, unsuspecting travelers."

"We are bandits, that's what we do. Did you come here to ask me about that?"

"I came here to hire you to work for me." said Mo Tsai.

"What would a soldier like you want a bunch of ruffians like us for? With your wealth, you can hire any martial arts sect to fight for you." asked Zhao Zen.

"It is precisely because you are ruffians." Mo Tsai said, pointing at him. "You don't play by the rules. You can sneak up on people and hide in the forest. You can fight in different terrains. You have combat experience, something my soldiers do not have. I think you'll agree with me, Mr. Zen."

The two soldiers brought a treasure box and dropped in on the floor. Zhao and his bandits knelt down and opened it and they saw the shine of gold coins. Their eyes lit up as they have never seen this much money in one place before.

Mo Tsai predicted that they were driven by greed, and seeing their facial expressions, he was right. "Here's a down payment. Unless, if you think it's not enough."

"Oh, it's enough." He could barely contain his excitement.

"If you work for me long enough, you can have a palace of your own. Or perhaps you prefer to live like an animal?"

Zhao stood up. "We'll do as you say, general."

Since that day, Zhao and his tribesmen have been working closely with the imperial army as their own division. They attracted a lot of naysayers but they quickly shut up when Zhao proved his strength to them. During sparring, Zhao outdid soldiers with official training.

Shortly afterwards, Zhao was approached by a mysterious man named En Ko. He gave Zhao Zen a choice to become a demon, and of course he accepted. Why would he turn down an offer to be immortal and all powerful?

Just recently, Zhao heard that the Shen's ambassador would arrive at the mansion. The ambassador was actually two women and his job was to kill one and imprison the other one.

During the fancy party, Zhao saw two frail looking young women who arrived late. He thought lady luck was with him for getting such an easy assignment.

[C] Title Contents

For dinner, the party of three once again had roasted rabbits. They'd tie it to a stick and put it over the fire until it was properly cooked. Cooking this way tends to make the food overcooked, but being overcooked is better than being undercooked.

"So, have you considered what I told you earlier?" Li asked.

Cho'Ann sighed. "Look, I know I said you two can stay however long you'd like, but it won't work if you keep asking me the same thing over and over. I know you came a long way to meet me, but I don't want to waste your time."

"It's not a waste of time." said Alex. "I get to learn how to make chocolate and hang out with the yeti. I have only asked you to repair the swords once and after that I left that issue alone." Indeed, Alex's strategy was not to bug Cho'ann, but to let Cho'Ann decide for himself to repair the swords.

Li, on the other hand, did not have that kind of patience. She decided to tell the blacksmith everything she heard from Raijun that day. It was the day when Raijun met with the elders and Li was spying on them. Raijun gave a long, detailed explanation but the key points were: Chiri Kingdom, Sorceress Shou'an Xi'an, sorcery, and drugs. These lethal combinations make Chiri's army an invincible one. Like an avalanche, their army will soon spread throughout the land and consume everything to the west.

The blacksmith let out a puff of smoke to relax himself after hearing such stressful news. This was the first time Alex heard about this, so he was shocked too.

Cho'Ann said, "To be honest, I met the sorceress before. Back then she went by a different name, but she is the same person as Shou'an. She begged me

to teach her sorcery and even kowtowed to me. I found it hard to refuse her so I taught her a few tricks. It was only twenty percent of what I knew, but with such a little knowledge, she was able to expand her knowledge and now her sorcery is better than mine. Sorcery is a scary thing especially in the hands of the wrong person."

However, Cho'Ann purposely excluded another detail. Shou'an seduced him and they slept together. He knew not if he taught her sorcery out of love, kindness, or sympathy as his emotions were confused, but he regretted doing it. Even heroes have a difficult time overcoming the beauty's trap. Shou'an seduced Cho'Ann so she must have seduced countless other men to get to her high position of grand advisor.

Li continued, "Right now Raijun is combating the sorceress in his own way and Alex and I don't agree with his way. Xiao Ye is figuring out her own way. Everyone is doing something about it. If you think you can change the world by hiding in this cave, then continue to hide here forever."

Alex could not believe his ears. These few days her tongue was occupied with chocolate so she did not say much but now the regular Li with her sharp tongue has returned.

Cho'Ann sat there for a moment to reflect on not Li's words, but her character. Even though Li has a heart of ice, her blood was still warm, boiling, in fact, and her soul was on fire. Cho'Ann, on the other hand, has already frozen his heart for five decades and has given up. These young siblings reminded him of his younger self. "I will repair the swords for you."

The siblings could not believe their ears. They both stared at each other with wide grins on their faces.

The next morning, Jing Cho'Ann immediately began to work. He put the Fire Sword over a furnace and banged the metal with a hammer over and over. After that, his hands glowed and hovered over the blade. After that he returned to banging the blade and kept alternating between these two tasks. Li watched, leaning against the wall and chomping down a chocolate bar.

Meanwhile, Alex was in the other room, stirring a bowl of chocolate. He was in the tempering stage, where the liquid must cool down before being molded.

After hours of labor, the blacksmith was done with the forging and wiped the sweat off his brow. There was, however, one last step. He stuck the Fire Sword inside the oven and left it there so the fires can burn the blade constantly. He took the Ice Sword and stuck it inside the snow.

Four hours later, Cho'Ann announced that the swords were ready. Alex pulled the Fire Sword of the oven and even the pommel was warm. He stared at the newly furnished blade; it shined and showed a reflection of his face. He flourished the sword, using motions from the Heaven's Wrath style. The sword felt perfect, it was light, powerful and beautiful.

Li pulled her sword out of the snow to stare at her newly repaired blade. It was flawless and nothing short of perfection. The Ice Sword glowed a blue-white color as it activated its powers. She was surrounded by the cold and snow under her feet and the Ice Sword thrived in its natural element. She brandished her sword, swinging it against the air, making some whoosh sounds. Then she threw the Ice Blizzard at the wall and was satisfied with the results. Although the Ice Dragon did not work against the yeti, it will work against the next unfortunate opponent who will face her.

The Cheng siblings kneeled before Cho' Ann to show respect and gratitude. They thought it was a shame for a man with his talents to hide in a cave outside of society, but Cho' Ann thought it was for the best. Four elemental swords were enough and there will not be a fifth. These four swords once saved the country and perhaps they will again, depending on who uses it.

Now that the swords were repaired, the siblings have to leave. It was a short and enjoyable stay and one they shall never forget. Li and Alex thanked the blacksmith by bowing to him. As they walked out of the cave, Li carried a big bag on her back.

Alex asked, "Li, what's that? Don't tell me...it's all chocolate?"

"Chocolate doesn't exist anywhere. This is my last chance to eat some."

"You're going to carry all that stuff back home. It will melt before we get there. Cho' Ann taught me the formula for making chocolate. I am a lord now, so have the resources to build a chocolate factory."

"That's true." Li contemplated. "I dunno...you might mess it up. It might not taste the same as Cho' Ann's hand made chocolate."

The siblings went downhill, accompanied by three yeti. One of the yeti took Li's bag for her. "Thank you." she said.

As they made their way downhill, the ground began to shake. Suddenly, a loud rumbling noise echoed through the mountain, and a massive avalanche came crashing down behind them. Looking up, everyone saw a massive wall of ice and snow hurtling down the slope. It was so big that it covered up the sky and it seemed like the entire mountain was crashing down on them.

Avalanches are typically caused by a combination of factors, such a heavy snowfall, rapid temperature changes, and strong winds. Heavy snowfall can create an unstable snowpack, and the temperature rises, causing the snow to melt, creating a weak layer that can easily fracture.

"Avalanche! Run!!!" Alex screamed.

The siblings and the yeti ran for their lives but it was a futile effort as the avalanche of snow fell faster than them.

They were nearly swept up by the snow when the yeti grabbed onto Li and Alex and curled up into white balls. The three balls of fur rolled downhill with great speed, dodging rocks and trees. Due to momentum, the speed of their roll increased, allowing them to stay slightly ahead of the avalanche of doom.

For the siblings, everything seemed to blur together. Snow and ice whizzed by them at breakneck speed, and the ground shook violently. It felt like they were trapped in a giant washing machine, being tossed and turned with no control.

The snow finally came to a stop at the bottom of the slope. After passing the danger point, the white balls continued to roll down the next hill until they could no longer roll due to the flat angle of the slope. As the yeti uncurled, Li and Alex face flat on the snow.

"I feel sick." said Li.

"I'm dizzy." said Alex.

These two had the ride of a lifetime but the yeti had no choice as this was the only way to keep them alive. It took several minutes for the humans to become oriented and be able to stand up.

"Look!" Alex yelled, pointing down. Li's eyes were wide open with shock as she was able to see the ground level in her field of vision. It took them three days to walk uphill to get to the cave, but only three minutes of rolling downhill to get near ground level. Including the recovery time from being dizzy, it was no more than ten minutes. These yeti were amazing and helpful creatures. They should not even be classified as demons, but more like dogs, loyal and intelligent.

In addition to their lives, Li's bag of chocolate was also saved by the third yeti. She promptly took the bag. If the yeti was a man, she'd be in love with it. The siblings thanked the yeti for their hospitality, friendship, and help.

"Do you think they understand human language?" asked Li.

"I don't know, but they can understand Cho'Ann, right?" said Alex.

"Maybe they don't understand words, but they can read our hearts and minds. That's what I believe."

"So they're all like Xiao Ye." said Li jokingly.

"I hope not. One of her is enough." Alex replied with the same lightness.

They both laughed out loud. It was an adventure of many firsts and unexpectedly, Li made her first joke. It seems this journey healed not only their swords but many other things.

十六: Operation Angel Wings. The Cold Wind Arrives

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After Cho Mei-Yang received his sister's letter, he told his best friend Vincent and they held a meeting in secret. "The letter says they tried to kill Miss Ye and she was hit in the back with an arrow." said Cho. "But good thing she

was strong and survived. Lady Ce is still stuck trapped in General Tsai's mansion and her status is unknown."

Vincent rarely lost his temper but this was an exception. He slammed his fist on the table, causing the tea cups to shake. "How dare that lowlife general do this? They betrayed us and betrayed the imperials with this one move."

Even Cho was in no mood for tea. "Lady Ce went there to negotiate for peace. Even I did not expect him to make this cowardly move. Looks like Leinwan's general wants war."

Vincent fanned himself. "I remember sparring Lady Ce. She was so polite and skilled and also beautiful."

Indeed, he remembered it like it happened yesterday. The Council suddenly gained four members, Alex, Li, Celina and of course, Xiao. Since then the council has been livelier than it ever has. Vincent wanted to experience the Dance of the Sword, as he was curious about a female's sword style. He and Celina exchanged blows and she ended with Dance of the Phoenix, a move that opened his eyes.

"It would be nice to spar her again. We need to rescue her. Let's make it covert rescue mission." said Vincent.

"We're going to need others to get on board." said Cho. "Most of our people support Raijun."

"Tenma will help us. He hates Raijun."

"Perfect. Let's call this mission...**Operation Angel Wings**."

Vincent sighed. "Where do you come up with these names?"

Cho smiled. "I'm the one who created the previous password, remember? The one about heaven and angels."

As predicted, Tenma was on board with the secret mission. In addition, ten more members agreed to join the cause, totaling twelve. Even though this mission was low key, twelve people was not enough. Cho suggested they ask for General Tai's help, as he and Xiao were on good terms. Vincent agreed and Cho sent a letter to the military base in Yi Ling which was received by General Tai.

Shu Tai was outraged when he heard the bad news. Lady Ce was his friend and Xiao was...well more than just a friend to him. He wanted to send his entire army but of course that cannot happen. He went to consult the high lords about this matter. They did not feel the same way as Tai.

Lord Sima said, "Ten or twenty men will do. No need to send more than that."

Tai said, "I want to participate in Operation Angel Wings personally."

Lord Yu said, "General, we are in the middle of a war. You are the leader of the military so we cannot risk your life."

Lord Fei said, "After all, it's just two women. They are dispensable."

Tai was outraged, as they were not just two women. But he had to control himself. "I...understand. I will send my men to work with the Council's men, but

I will not go myself. I will have Admiral Hongba arrange ships for us to get to Seiruun."

Admiral Hongba was master of ships and the highest rank of the navy. His role was crucial during this period of tension, preventing Leinwan's ships from attacking Shen's coastline cities. Though he was a military leader and he took orders from Tai, his real master was Lord Fei, the one who financed the navy's ships and weapons.

"Big news! Big news!" yelled the young girl, nearly tripping as she ran down the hall. The other members wondered what the commotion was about. Fan Mei-Yang pushed the sliding door open and interrupted a meeting between Xiao and branch leader Kwan.

"Don't run in the hallway." Kwan said, sounding like a parent. "And knock before you enter."

"Sorry! Our comrades in Shen are organizing a rescue mission for Lady Ce. Vincent Chan is the one in charge." said Fang.

"That's great!" Xiao exclaimed. "I know Vincent well. He is reliable. How are things on our end, Mr. Kwan?"

"We have our weapons and our team is ready anytime. Our group will attack from the west while Vincent's group attacks from the east."

"One more thing!" yelled Fang. "My brother told me that Raijun is coming to visit us!"

Everybody was shocked to hear this. "How was he able to find us?" asked Xiao.

"In any case," said Kwan, "I only support you, Miss Ye. I will oppose Raijun for your sake."

Xiao shook her head. "He is too dangerous to oppose. I fought him before so I know his abilities well. You don't want to risk angering him."

"So he has the Wind Sword, big deal! That doesn't mean he can just barge in here and do whatever he wants." said Kwan.

"I have an idea." said Fang, gaining their attention. "We will pretend to support Raijun. When he gets here, we act like we don't know anything and we never met Xiao. We just follow him until the moment is right and we'll stab him in the back. See, we don't have to fight him directly."

"Wow." said Kwan. "That is brilliant."

"I'm so glad you're on our side." said Xiao.

The two Heaven's Council branches continued to plan Operation Angel Wings entirely through letters sent back and forth without Raijun's knowledge.

On the Yangtze River, a single man in a blue robe stood on a rowboat. Crossing this river that stood between two kingdoms was dangerous, but a man like Raijun fears nothing and needs no bodyguards. He does not even need a paddle. He used his Wind Sword to generate wind to propel his boat forward.

He was able to land on Leinwan territory rather quickly and went to the restaurant where Kwan frequented.

Just like what Xiao did, Raijun sat at Kwan's table and said the password. Kwan took him to the headquarters and entered a private meeting room. Xiao was hiding outside, leaning against the wall and remained still.

Raijun and Kwan kneeled on the floor. Fang entered and brought a teapot. "Do you want some oolong tea?" she asked.

"Mmm, thanks." said Raijun.

She poured and promptly left the room.

"How kind of you to visit us all the way from Shen." said Kwan.

"I apologize for not letting you know sooner. Things have been hectic ever since I left the Chiri Kingdom."

"Ah, you came all the way from the east." said Kwan. "Most of my members, no, I am sure none of my members have been to Chiri. It's so far away."

"How many members do we have in this kingdom?" Raijun asked.

"At least twelve hundred. I can recruit more." Kwan replied.

"I'm sure you know these past few years, there have been bad relations between our two kingdoms. But recently, it has gotten to the breaking point and war is inevitable."

"That's the area of kings and politicians. We the Heaven's Council don't participate in wars."

"But desperate times call for desperate measures. When the time for battle comes, I want your branch to join my branch and fight Shen together."

Kwan spat out his eat. He looked at Raijun's eyes, and they were dead serious. "Why do you want the Council involved in a war? What good will that do us?"

Raijun explained the same story to him as he did to the elders in Yi Ling. The Chiri Kingdom has been prosperous under the leadership of the Sorceress. But human greed has no limits, and Chiri has started a campaign to expand their territory and have already begun to invade their neighbor, Shu. The Sorceress has access to different drugs she uses to control people. Liu Zhang was no longer alive, which made the Sorceress the most dangerous person in this world. Shu was plagued by internal politics and the Assassin Lodge, so they were not capable of handling Chiri. Shen was plagued by a civil war that just happened so they were not equipped to deal with Chiri. Leinwan was the only kingdom that can handle them.

After he finished, his tea got cold. Xiao, who was unseen by both men, was shocked. She looked like she had seen a ghost. Despite how compelling his reasons were, Kwan must remember the original plan. "Alright, I understand. We'll do as you say."

Harassment On Chair 1 Of 2 Contents

Zen was sitting in his chair polishing his blade with a hand cloth. At the other end of the room Celina stood with her back against the wall. Her left hand clasped the **blanket** to her bosom to prevent the top from falling off while right left hand clutched the blanket against her stomach. The blanket was long enough to drape over her feet with a few extra inches laying flat on the floor.

Zen looked up at the woman and raised his blade to his eye level. Now the blade and the woman were in the same view. "Well whatcha waiting for? Come over here to greet your lord."

"Yes my lord." she said shyly and proceeded to step forward. The blanket dragged through the floor as she made her way towards Zen. Her skin was peachy and smooth, just like the white blanket. The bottom of her thigh can be seen through the slit of the blanket. She was staring at the floor the whole time. Now she stood directly in front of him, their feet only inches apart.

"You learn fast." Zen complimented. "That's the proper way to address your lord. Don't forget it."

"Yes my lord." she said. Now that she stopped fighting back and said the right words, she looked even more attractive. Not only does she have the perfect feminine look, but her submissive nature makes her a true woman through and through.

He pointed the tip of his blade at her **thigh**. He glided the tip to her inside thighs, pushing against the white fabric, causing her to gasp. "Now...why don't you drop the whole thing so I can see you naked?"

Celina's eyes started shaking and her mouth formed a grimace. "No...not that." she murmured.

"What was that?"

"No, my lord! Anything but that!"

He pointed the blade at her womanhood. She gasped.

"Still so shy eh?" He moved the blade's tip to her hand. "I said drop it. Or I'll cut you." He pressed the tip into her hand.

"Please, my lord! Not that! Please!"

"Oh. Your dignity is that important to you. I guess I need to take it slow with you." He moved the blade away from her hand and to her stomach. He moved the blade slowly to her left hand. "A little bit at a time." The tip poked her left hand. "Feel like dropping it now?"

He could see her hand shaking as it clutched the blanket tightly against her bosom. Her entire arm was trembling. Zen could see that she was afraid of him, which is good. But her shame and embarrassment were also strong feelings and they were conflicting with her fear.

Zen moved the tip of the blade to her neck, and then poked the tip at her cheek, making her turn to the side. "You do understand what happens if you disobey me, right?"

A teardrop streamed down her cheek and fell on the blade. "Y-Yes my lord."

"Now, for starters, why don't you show me those pretty legs of yours? Hmmm?" He pointed the blade at her thigh and she gasped.

"Y-Yes, as you wish m-my lord." She felt vulnerable wearing only these sheets. She has to obey him and comply with his perverted requests.

She was reluctant to do so as evident by her left hand clutching the blanket tightly between her legs. Slowly but surely, she lifted up the sheet. Zhao Zen's eyes glittered as he watched without blinking. Some of her shins were exposed and as she pulled the sheet higher, he could see all of her **shins**. She pulled it up higher and her knee was exposed and a little bit of her upper thighs. She pulled it up more and revealed more of her **thighs**.

It was so difficult to do this, especially seeing his greedy eyes. At this point she stopped, as even an inch more would expose her womanhood.

"Why'd you stop?" he asked, a bit disappointed.

"No more, please."

He pointed the blade between her legs. She could feel the cold metal touching her thigh and she grew nervous. The blade moved higher and touched the blanket and she gasped. He kept nudging the blade up and down and playing with it.

Then he withdrew the blade from her legs, letting the sheet drop to her feet.

"Now what else should I play with?" He pointed it at her stomach.

He pointed it at the hand on her chest. "Now...let go of it."

She gasped. "No, not that! Anything but that..."

"I said drop it." he repeated sternly.

"Please, no!"

"Drop it or else I'll take it off for you, it's your choice."

Her hands were shaking as they clutched the sheet tightly against her body. A woman is not supposed to show her naked body to any man...even another woman...only to her husband and no one else. But if she did not obey, who knows what he will do to her? So she had no choice...if he removes it for her, it will be worse.

In her mind she slowly counted to three...and released her right hand. And then the left hand...but her left hand would not move. She kept staring at the floor in a grimace. Suddenly, her hand dropped to the side of her hip.

Plop The sheets dropped onto her feet neatly in a circle. His eyes lit up and his jaw dropped in shock. And right after that he had a wide perverted grin. A grin that can give a kid nightmares. From the back view, her bare legs were seen and between them was Zen in his chair.

From the window view, one can see Celina's body obscured by Zen's head.

The unthinkable has happened; she stood before this villain naked. His grinning made her more embarrassed. Her arms were dangling by her hips doing nothing. Suddenly, they moved on their own and covered herself. Right hand covered her breasts and left hand covered her spot. Her head faced slightly down.

"Why are you covering up, eh?" He pointed the blade at her **stomach**.

He noticed her body was shivering all over as if she's caught a cold. Tears drip down her eyes.

Her tears and sad face was a nice look. And he wanted to bully her more to see her cry more.

He put the tip of the blade against her wrist. Using sorcery, the tip became red hot and burned her skin. She moaned quietly. "Nnnhhh!" He put the blade on her forearm and burned it. "Nnnhhh!" He enjoyed those noises she was making. He glided the blade to her stomach and burned it. "Nnnhhh!"

It touched her right forearm and burned it. "Nnnhhh!" More tears drip down her eyes. The sword tip touched her shoulder and burned it. "Nnnhhh!"

Then the tip went to her neck. Her head turned to the side. She was scared and full of tears and sobbing. The tip touched her cheek. A tear drop dripped on the blade.

"Please...let me put it back on!"

"Why would I let you do that? I like you better this way." The tip burned her shoulder. Then her sternum. Then her arm.

"Please! My lord! Please!"

He burned more parts of her body.

From the bottom view, tears dripped next to the blanket.

The tip touched her thigh and burned it. Then other thigh.

Celina reached her limit and lost strength in her legs. She fell down on her knees and cried and sobbed. More tears dripped on the floor.

Zen watched for a while. "Fine. You can cover yourself up."

She immediately snatched it and wrapped it around herself. She was so relieved. The sobbing continued.

He pointed the blade at her forehead

He pointed the blade's tip at her forehead. "See? I'm such a nice guy. How about some gratitude?"

"Th-Thank you my lord."

"Good. Now stand up."

Still sobbing, she stood up.

"Turn around."

She did that. "Drop it."

She froze.

"Drop it."

She let go and let the blanket drop. *Plop* Her entire backside was seen. Zen took a good look. He used the blade to poke her in various places.

She fell on her knees, and clutched the blanket against her front. Wrapped it around herself and stood up.

"I didn't say you could put it back on. Drop it!"

"Please, no!"

Raijun Ruong's next visit was Mo Tsai's estate. Of course, the guards did not let him in, having no idea who he was. However, his Wind Sword was pretty good at "convincing" them to let him inside to get an audience with the general. The general with two of his soldiers went outside to see Raijun in the courtyard. The general took one look at Raijun and knew he was the real deal, based on his demeanor and killer aura.

"Well well well." said General Tsai. "I never expected to receive a visit from a martial arts legend. It is an honor to have Sir Ruong in my own backyard."

"It is honor to meet someone of your status. I know you're a busy man so I'll get to the point. I am the headmaster of all the branches of the Council of Heaven. We will become your allies."

"Oh is that right?" asked Mo.

"Your army just increased by several thousand. A lot of martial arts sects follow the Council of Heaven so they will follow what we do." said Raijun.

"Oh? Sounds too good to be true. What do you want in return?" Mo has been dealing with sellswords long enough to know they never do anything for free.

"I want you to grant me an audience with the king."

"You wish to meet King Lumen? With someone of your status, it is not a problem. His highness would love to meet one of the Four Brothers. Let me arrange it. In the meantime, you can live here." With that said, Mo and his two men left.

Later, Raijun was by himself in the courtyard, practicing sword swings. No matter how experienced one becomes, it is always good to go back to the basics. Raijun sensed he was being watched. "You can stop hiding now."

A man entered the doorway. "Still sharp as ever, eh, Raijun old boy?"

Raijun's expression became one of surprise. "En Ko?"

"Yep. My current name is Locke but you can call me by either name."

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I'm General Tsai's friend and I live here." said En Ko.

"You must be looking for other candidates. Don't you ever get tired of it?"

"When you've lived as long as me, you find things to occupy your time with. I'm always looking for candidates, but they are like a needle in a haystack. But this general guy seems to attract all the right people. We've got sellswords, politicians, murderers, all perfect candidates." said En Ko.

"Hmph, don't group me with those people." said Raijun.

"I know, I know, you're not them. But at the end of the day, you're still a demon. Have you been absorbing souls?"

"It's been a while. Is it really necessary?"

"It is if you want to stay healthy...and alive. I know you don't like it, so why not just find some guy to kill and get it over with?"

"I will, when the time is right." said Raijun.

The servant was ringing his bell when he entered the royal court, and behind him was Raijun. They walked slowly towards the center until they were directly in front of the stairs of the throne. Once Raijun was in position, the servant trotted backwards and blended into the group of eunuchs.

Every single important person gathered at the court to see the famous Raijun of the Four Brothers. To the left of the red carpet were the princes, lords, and other royal family members and to the right were eunuchs, generals, and magistrates. They were lined up in order of rank, with the highest rank closest to the throne.

As he looked ahead, there was a small flight of stairs leading up to a platform, made of jade and the most expensive materials found on earth. The king sat on the golden throne chair with his golden gown, made of fine silk. There was a green dragon that covered the chest and stomach. **King Lumen** had a long, pointy white beard that concealed his neck, as well as a full mustache. His jaw line was covered in white hair as well. He had random spots on his hands, and his skin was wrinkly, revealing his old age. Lumen has ruled this kingdom for fifty years, the longest reign out of all the four kingdoms in this era.

Some of the officials started whispering to each other. The king glared at them and they became silent.

"Greetings, Sir Ruong." said Lumen. "I was quite surprised when I heard a hero like you wanted to visit us."

"I am but a humble servant, your highness. It is an honor to be in your presence."

"So, I have heard you are the headmaster of the Council of Heaven." asked Lumen.

"Yes, your highness." said Raijun. "The Council is the largest martial arts sect in the country, spanning three kingdoms and is in alliance with other sects. You could say we are the leader of the martial arts world. What we do, other sects will follow. In other words, on my command, thousands will become allies with the court."

The first prince who was present in Mo Tsai's party, whispered to his friend, "He pretends to be a hero but he's another guy looking for money."

"Oh." said King Lumen. "Having all those sects on our side certainly helps us a lot. And what would you like in exchange for your loyalty, Sir Ruong? Gold? Status? Women?"

Raijun replied, "I am not doing it for any of those things. I just want to bring order to the country. The Council has dated as far back as the Chao Dynasty. Its original purpose was to serve heaven's justice to all. Currently, our country is plagued by many problems that I want to bring to your attention, your highness."

The officials started whispering to each other. The king stroked his beard, and he and his advisor exchanged quick glances. "Very well. Let us discuss this matter in more detail, shall we?"

Afterwards, King Lumen had tea in a pavilion inside the palace. A servant led Raijun to the pavilion, and he kneeled. "May his highness live a thousand years."

"Please, sit." said Lumen.

Raijun sat down across from the king. "Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, sire."

"Non-sense. All I do is live in my palace, eat and drink and deal with politics all day. I have nothing but free time. So, Sir Ruong, General Tsai told me you wanted to talk to me directly. I know there were certain things you could not say in front of an audience."

Raijun once again explained the situation in the Chiri Kingdom and emphasized how dangerous Sorceress Shou'an was. Unlike the other listeners who reacted with shock, Lumen remained calm and stoic.

"I see." Lumen stroked his beard. "Actually, I have connections in the Shu Kingdom and they have informed me of this."

"So you knew?" Raijun asked.

"I knew a little bit, but not as much detail as you. You were able to give me new information I did not have before."

"As expected of you, sire, you are well informed. Then let me cut to the chase. I wish to destroy the Shen Kingdom."

There was a moment of silent tension between these two men. Lumen was surprised that Raijun could say something so drastic so calmly. "Why do you say that?" Lumen asked.

"Right now your kingdom is the only thing that can stand a chance against Chiri. Shen is in the way. If the two kingdoms can cooperate, that would be best, but I know you and they are enemies so that's impossible. If you can conquer Shen, then Leinwan's land and resources will double."

Lumen sighed and stroked his beard. "I see. That's an extreme plan you came up with. I also want to conquer Shen, but for a different reason. Inside of Shen's royal family there is a poison that, if left alone, will spread everywhere. This poison is called Liu Zhang, a five hundred year old demon."

"But didn't Liu Zhang perish in battle? He transformed into a dragon and was burned to death by Alex Cheng. Hundreds of witnesses saw this."

"I am not doubting that the dragon died. But did the crafty old demon really die? Or is that what he wants us to think?"

"Wait, are you saying Liu Zhang could be alive?" asked Raijun.

"I cannot prove or disprove a thing. But I wish to verify that Liu Zhang is dead so I can sleep easy at night. As you know, I am growing old and I don't have much time left. I'd like this to be my final mission."

[C] Title Contents

Harassment On Chair 2 Of 2 Contents

"Still can't drop it huh? I guess you need more convincing." Zen pulled the blanket on her leg towards him, making her step forward. She gasped as her knees bumped into his knees and she fell forward. Her hands caught the chair's back and her breasts landed on his forehead. Zen tossed the sword to the side as it was not needed anymore.

Zen lifted his head up and grabbed her back, pulling her **breasts** into his face. He let himself loose and snuggled her breasts, turning his face left and right. She moaned. "Uhhh, uhhh, uhhh."

This was the perfect position as he can violate her without much effort. All he had to do was have his head facing up to enjoy her breasts. Her moans made this extra enjoyable, it was a nice bonus. Celina's hands grabbed the chair's back while she moaned and suffered. His hands slid down to her buttocks and squeezed them. "Uhhh, uhhh!"

Then he pulled her into him so that their cheeks were touching. He smelled her shoulder and neck and sighed in pleasure. She smelled nice.

Then he flipped her over so her back was resting on the armrest while her legs dangled on top of his legs. "Uhhhh!"

He shoved his face into her breasts. "Uhhh! Uhhh! No! Please!"

His left arm grabbed her legs and pulled them up, so that she was lying completely horizontal. Her buttocks were lying on his waist while her legs dangled off the armrest.

He put his face into her breasts, causing her to moan some more. His hand caressed her thigh while shoving it inside the blanket, trying to get to her womanhood. Her right hand desperately clutched the blanket around her legs.

"Uhhh! Uhhh!" She was violated in two places at once. Her head dangled upside down and tears drip from her eyes and hit the floor.

"Please stop! Please! Uhhh! Uhhh!" While upside down her head turned left and right. "Please stop! Please!"

After a while, Zen took a break, giving her a brief moment of rest. He lowered her back so that she was completely horizontal, her head dangling in the air.

He leered at her legs which were resting on his lap. He grabbed the sheet and pushed it up, revealing much of her thighs. His eyes lit up as he saw more of her skin, and it was like opening a present.

Zhao released his right hand from under her and lifted her leg up with two hands. Up close, he can see all of its details, her smooth, pale skin, and the shape of her heel and toes. While holding her by the heel, he kissed her ankle all over, including the bridge of the foot, smothering it with wet sloppy kisses. he kissed every inch of her shin, making sure to leave nothing out. He kissed her knee.

He put her leg down. His hand caressed her **thigh** and went deeper and deeper into the sheets. He hand found her spot and shoved his hand in there.

Celina squirmed and moaned even harder. "Uuhhhh, uuuhhhh, uuuuh!" It was extremely uncomfortable to be lying flat on a chair and not only that, to have his hand violating her spot like that. Her head was nearly upside down and kept turning left and right as she screamed. Tears drip down her eyes and fell to the floor. From the left side view, her head was upside down and her pony tail just hung in the air. Her eyes were shut and her mouth was open since she was moaning. "Uuhhhh, uuuhhhh, uuuuh!"

From the right side view, the sheet was draped over the armrest and almost touched the floor. Her legs were not covered but exposed and they thrashed about and her toes curled. "Uuhhhh, uuuhhhh, uuuuh!"

Zen lifted her back up at an angle, and he lowered his head to meet her. Now they were face to face, their noses almost touching. "Please, no! Please!" she murmured. **Tears** were streaming down her wet eyes as she stared at him in pure fear. He liked that look in her eyes; those are the eyes of a defeated, submissive woman who knows her place.

"It's please my lord. Say it!" His arms shook her a little bit, causing her to moan a bit.

The tears continued to drip down her eyes as she murmured the next few words. "P-Please...my...lord..."

He placed his **lips** on top of hers. "Mmmmmmmffffff!" More tears instantly drip down her eyes and fell silently on the floor. The tear drops were invisible on the dark room and no one noticed them...just as no one noticed her suffering and torment.

The candle atop the window was still burning brightly. Celina's moans can be heard throughout the dark room as well as the hallway. She continued to suffer until the candle burnt out...and suffered afterwards. No one knew for how long this lasted, but knowing Zhao the brute, he would torture this woman all night long.

Tong Lian tracked Cheng all the way to Yi Howan. He found out Alex and his sister went up the Xanbei Mountains. He looked up and stared at the mountains in the background and felt overwhelmed by its sized. He was not

looking forward to this journey. The mountains were deathly cold and inhabited by snow demons, not that it mattered to Tong, as he himself was a demon.

Tong traveled along the path that led to the base of the mountain. In the middle of the path, he sensed two people on the road below. He sprawled and peeped at them. They were a silver haired man and a woman in black clothes. It was no doubt the person he was looking for. Li sensed something move on the rocks above, but then the movement stopped. She shrugged it off, thinking it was a rabbit or something.

Li and her brother continued to walk into a forestry area. "By the way, Alex, someone has been following us."

"Really? You're telling me now?" said Alex.

"I didn't want to alarm you." Li turned one hundred eighty degrees. "I know you're there."

Tong came out of hiding. "You're better than I thought."

Li was surprised. "I remember you. You're that guy who was with Raijun!" Indeed, Tong participated in the Heaven's Eye, along with his master and fellow disciple Hui.

"The name's Tong Lian. It's true what my master said. Where Alex Cheng is, Li Cheng will follow."

"I don't follow him. He follows me." Li corrected.

"You guys had quite the road trip." said Tong, making light of things. "You went through several cities and villages as well as Lingxiu village and tied up those three guys."

"Three guys?" Alex repeated. "Oh, you mean that magistrate? We didn't do it. The villagers did."

"You even went up the Xanbei Mountains. What were you doing up there?" asked Tong.

"I could tell you but it won't be free." said Li.

"Hmph. Won't talk, huh? Fine by me." Tong drew his sword.

"So who's going to take him?" asked Li.

"It's just one guy. Let me handle this." said Alex.

"I'm not just a guy." said Tong. "You'll soon regret it!"

The two men charged and exchanged blows. Alex has fought all kinds of opponents, including soldiers, pirates and even veterans at the level of the Four Brothers. Tong's attacks were good, but not better than Alex's. Soon, their gap in skill will be revealed. After thirty seconds of parrying, they moved away from one another.

Alex switched his stance, holding his sword straight with his arms straight to get maximum range, causing Tong to be more cautious. Alex's eyes changed and he dashed with the Heaven's Retribution. Li watched with all eyes. He made the first strike, which was the feint, and Tong smacked his sword away. Alex made his sword straight and made the killing blow. Tong realized his

mistake and quickly turned his sword vertical and stepped away, but Alex's blade pushed hard, cutting him in the abdomen.

Tong backed away and groaned from his wound. Then he stood in his defensive stance, with his left hand pointing the sword straight.

Alex's sword glowed red and flames appeared. He has seen these flames countless times, but this time, the flames appeared redder and hotter than before. He swung his blade, causing bits of flame to fly and Tong backed away while covering his eyes.

Tong attacked with his left hand strikes and backed away. Tong took off his cape and flung at him. Alex slashed it in half.

"Watch out!" Li shouted.

Alex looked up and saw Tong in the air, ready to deliver a heavy blow. Alex rolled under him and Tong landed. Both fighters faced away from each other and then turned around.

They dashed into each other and parried. Alex saw an opening and knocked Tong's sword to the side and slashed his chest. Tong grabbed his wound and just glared angrily at his opponent.

"You're as good as they say you are. Good! Otherwise it won't be any fun." In a move that surprised both Alex and Li, Tong stabbed his own stomach and pulled it out.

The Cheng siblings realized there was only one reason. He was a demon and the only question was what kind? Tong's limbs became bigger and hairier and his fingers turned into paws with sharp claws. His skin was white with black stripes and his face became a tiger's face.

Alex threw the Heat Wave and the tiger jumped over it. It ran fast as lighting and struck with both claws. Alex stepped back with his quick footwork as he bobbed and weaved through those claws. He jumped back before the tiger made a swipe. The tiger screamed, creating a shockwave that caused everything on the ground to shake and the leaves flew away. Alex's ears hurt and he dropped his weapon and covered his ears.

The human ear can handle seventy decibels of noise and more but at one hundred decibels, the sound can hurt the ears and cause damage. The tiger's scream was way beyond the hundred decibel limit and caused immediate paralyzing pain. Tong's ability was like Chu Yen's sonic wave in his werewolf form. The key difference was that Chu Yen's scream destroyed objects and Tong's screamed destroyed the ears.

The scream was over but Alex was still on the ground, covering his ears. His eyes were shut, his head hurt and ears were ringing. Suddenly, the Ice Blizzard came and the tiger jumped over it.

As Tong took a closer look, Li had her ears frozen. "Your attack won't work me."

"Do you think that will work?" said the tiger.

"I can't hear you!" Li said with a smile.

The tiger screamed and the sound waves hit Li, cracking the ice, and she fell down and covered her ears. The tiger got its claw ready as it approached her. Alex stood up and picked up his sword, but he fell down again. That distraction gave Li enough time to summon two clones.

Tong has never seen this trick before so he remained still. He was surrounded by three copies of Li and did not know what to make of it. This has to be sorcery. Is she also a demon, he wondered.

Tong picked one Li at random and screamed at it. That Li was unaffected and charged at him. Tong dug its claw into her stomach, causing her transform to into a doll. Li struck and Tong blocked the blade with its claw. Clone two came from behind and struck the tiger in the back. The tiger roared and shoved Li away and slashed the clone.

The tiger had to divide its focus between Li and Alex, who might recover at anytime. Despite being in demon form, he was not invincible and not equipped to deal with sorcery and illusions. The tiger ran away from them and jumped over a boulder, disappearing completely.

The danger was over but the damage remained. "Sister, my ears are still ringing." moaned Alex.

"Mine too. But at least the chocolate is unharmed.

"Oh Li, forget the chocolate. I told you, we can make more when we get home."

Summary Contents

Check out the next volume of the Fire Sword series:

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/byseries/54203>

Legend of the Fire Sword - Volume 12 - War with Leinwan

Unable to prevent the inevitable, Liu Cao has declared war on Leinwan. The Demon Slayer is asked to join. An ancient demon En Ko appears. Shao Chongqin is still alive. Those who wield the ultimate swords are destined to meet and do battle. Between Alex, Xiao, and Li, who will be the one to defeat Raijun?

Next chapter: 十七: The Angel's Flight! Capital City Seiruun

Finished 04/15/2023

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An Entire Village is Hostage: The Corrupt Magistrate The Medicine
Pleasure Palace: Sweet Bitter Dreams The Chase
The Northern Mountains: Beware of the Yeti! The Doctor
Cave of Solitude: The Blacksmith's Resolve Wiping Off Sweat
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