

# LEGEND OF THE FIRE SWORD

*Birth of the Demon Slayer*

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### 九: A Tragic Life. The God of War's Past

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"Are you sure? Because you might lose your life if you do not keep up with my pace. But when I'm done with you...you will be a different man. You will become a true master of the sword."

As the sun rose up from the skyline, the sky went from pitch black to dark red, to yellow within minutes. Zi loitered about, sitting on a tree branch and eating an apple, not having a care in the world.

Alex was also sitting on a tree branch on the same tree. Zi finished the apple and threw it on the ground. "Isn't it strange how fate works?" Zi commented. "Your greatest enemy has become your master."

"Yea..."

"Not so talkative today. What's the matter?"

"Nothing." Alex replied.

"Still thinking about your sister?"

"Kind of."

"We'll find her, man. Don't worry about it."

Alex sighed. "It's just that, every time I come close to finding her, she ends up being not here. It's so hopeless...I just don't understand...where the hell is she? Why is she so hard to find? I think I am missing something here."

"The War God said that the duke is the key to finding her. So that means she is back at Yi Ling."

"But what does it mean? When we get there, she probably won't be there. It is just like how we came to the Temple just to find out that she left a few years ago. We're

always a few steps behind. Oh, it is almost time for training." Alex leaped onto the ground.

Zi also leaped and landed next to him. "Don't worry too much, man." said he, tapping on Alex's shoulder. It's a small world so we'll find her eventually. We'll search every single female in the country if we have to. Every young, sexy, single female." "Do you think about anything else besides girls?"

"Heh, the only thing more important than a woman is my sword. I'd never go anywhere without it." Zi replied.

"Well, hold on to it tight, because today you're going to need it."

Master Genzo and his newly appointed student were ready for their first training session. They stood twenty paces from each other and Alex waited patiently for him to speak. "Now, Cheng, before we start your training, I want to warn you again that it is going to be rough."

"I am prepared, War God."

"My real name is **Genzo**. Just call me Master Genzo."

"Yes, Master Genzo."

"Before I start training you, I need to know what skill level you are at first. So come at me and give me everything you have. And do not hold back, just like before."

"Hai." Alex replied obediently.

Both drew their swords and attacked each other. \*Cling clang cling\*

Suddenly, Genzo stopped. "Very interesting."

"What is it? Am I good enough?"

"You're using the sword as if it's a bamboo stick."

"I am?"

"You are holding it with both hands, and you never change your combinations. Holding it with both hands gives the sword more power in the swing, but it limits its movements. It is not flexible."

"I see...it must be a habit from the Temple. They are very conservative when it comes to swords. They use mostly bamboo sticks."

"I see. How long were you at the Temple?"

"Honestly...I lost track. The time I spent there felt like a lifetime, yet it was so short. I've been there for roughly three months."

"Well Cheng, let me tell you something about the art of war - you need to know how to use a variety of weapons in order to survive. Just the sword alone is not enough. Bamboo sticks, knives, daggers, arrows, spears...anything that you can get your hands on. Just in case during combat you lose your sword or it gets shattered. You need to be prepared for everything and anything."

Alex paid careful attention to his master's wise words.

"Let me tell you something, Cheng - you need to be conscious of what weapon you're using at the moment. A bamboo has different applications than a sword. It is longer, so it has more reach - and it is lighter and faster. But one does not use a bamboo stick to kill, but rather its main use is to disable the enemy. A sword, on the other hand, is deadlier. It is designed to kill and make the enemy die of blood loss. But it is heavier and shorter than a bamboo stick. It's much harder to use.

The sword, by far, one of the hardest weapon to use. One does not simply learn to use a sword - a true swordsmen uses a sword **style** - a set of rules and disciplines for using the sword - and styles are passed down from generation to generation. In our kingdoms alone, there are thousands of sword styles - every one of them is different and unique. Some styles are better than others. Some are more commonly used than others. But I personally use the **Heaven's Wrath Style** - it is superior to all the other

styles out there, and it is widely known among the populace. And it is this very style that I will teach you."

"Yes, master."

"Let us continue, shall we?"

Alex nodded and they continued fighting.

Zi still loitered about on the tree branch, shaking his leg and humming.

Sui Long walked by the tree. "Hey you, Mr. Lai."

"Hmmm? What's up?"

"Your friend Cheng has just begun training with Master Genzo."

"Yeah I know."

"And what are you doing up there?" inquired the masked man.

"I'm just chillin' here."

"Why don't you come down and train with us? You are going to with Cheng on his journey, correct? So you need to receive training as well. But Master Genzo can only train one person at a time. But my fellow students and I can train you."

"Oh...sounds interesting." Zi jumped and landed on the ground. "Great, let's do it then."

"Alright." said Sui Long, "But I'm warning you, we're not going to go easy on you."

Zi smiled. "Hah. That's what I expected to hear from a student of the War God."

Genzo walked along the forest path silently, with Alex right behind him. As their walk was about to go uphill, Alex grew curious. "Where are we going to, master?"

"Come, I want to show you something."

"How long will this take?"

"Do not be so impatient. Trust me." replied he.

Thus, Alex continued to follow Genzo's back without saying any more – until they were at the high end of a cliff. From there they could see the forest from a high perspective.

"Wow..." Alex said.

"It feels different from up here than on the bottom, isn't it?"

"It sure does."

There was a long silence. The breeze hit Alex's face and blew his hair. It felt chilly yet slightly comfortable at the same time.

"So why did you bring me up here, Master Genzo?"

"You want to become like me, do you not?"

"Yes, master. Definitely."

"Hmmp. Being a master swordsman has a price...a very expensive price."

"I don't mind! I can handle anything."

"Fool!" Genzo scolded. "You say that, but you cannot handle it! You are still young, so do you think you are invincible or something! You think that you can take all the burden on your shoulders?"

Alex gasped because there was truth in his words.

"Let me tell you a little about myself...my background."

There were images of himself when he was a younger swordsman. He was running away from town. He was holding a bag of his most prized belongings and held it tightly to his chest. As he walked through the crowds, he kept his head down, and his hat covered much of his face.

"-Many years ago, I was branded a criminal, one of the kingdom's most wanted. Scared for my life, I had to flee from society and live here in the valley. Because there was a bounty on my head, many hunters tried to come here to capture me-"

Within the forest, Genzo was sitting behind a tree, holding a sword. Bounty hunters were searching for him.

"Where is he? Let me at him!" one guy said.

"No, when we find him, he is mine." the other guy said.

"We'll see who gets him first."

Suddenly, Genzo ran for it. The hunters sensed him and chased him. But Genzo was sly and tricky, as he was familiar with the wilderness. Instead of taking them all on at once, he used tricks and diversions to separate them...and slaughtered them one by one. When the fight was over, the ground was filled with corpses, as there were bloodstains on the bamboo trees.

"I had to use my instincts to keep myself alive. But that only infuriated the government even more. The more people that came after me, the more I killed. The more I killed, the higher the bounty became on me. The higher the bounty became, the more who wanted to kill me. It was an endless cycle of death and fear. All I wanted was to be left alone. As the years passed by, my real name was forgotten. People began labeling me as the "Forest Killer," "The Cold-blooded Murderer," and eventually, my name became the "War God." I did not choose this name; it was branded upon me by society."

Genzo trained alone in the woods. He held a bamboo stick, hitting it against the bamboo trees. \*Doosh.\*

"-As the years passed by my fighting skills improved. I not only could hold a sword, but a variety of other weapons as well. Since I had nothing else to do, I trained day and night, day and night. The sword became second nature to me. I am the best of the best...but at what price? My life is nothing but emptiness - filled with hate, sorrow, fear, bloodshed and death."

Images of death - the ground was filled with bloody, lifeless bodies. Swords lay all over. The river turned from bright blue to red...

"For these 50-something years, I've been living alone. With the exception of my three apprentices, I have neither friends nor family."

Alex was shocked by his speech.

"So you see, Cheng, being the best swordsman isn't always a good thing. Because when you are at the top, people will instantly get jealous. They'll always try to knock you off, and you'll never have a moment of peace."

"Master..."

"There's an old proverb - everybody wants to be the general, but you better think twice before wanting to be king. To them, I am the 'king' of swordsmen. And all these bounty hunters are jealous 'generals.' I am their target; thus this is the price of being a king."

"I see. By the way, what crime did you commit that made you so hated?"

Genzo tipped his hat up, and Alex saw his eyes for the first time. "Nothing. My comrades betrayed me." And he smiled and walked away.

The wind blew hard as Alex was dumbfounded. Nothing. My comrades betryaed me. Those words were stuck in his head. Genzo shed so much blood...and so many have died...because someone betrayed him?

As Lord Huong approached the bedroom door, he heard sounds of moaning from the inside. He leaned in close to the door, and the sound amplified. A woman was groaning and screaming in pain, and Huong hesitated to enter. But enter he did, and the sounds grew louder as he approached the curtains.

And there were two silhouetted figures on the bed, the woman was moaning and the man laughing as he was all over her. He was quite disturbed that he was witnessing such a barbarous act, and to top it off, the barbarian did not even see Huong. He pulled the curtain aside, and nearly winced at the sight.

Jiax was on top of the woman, who was semi-conscious from all the torture. Poor Celina could barely open her eyes, as she was exhausted from the ordeal. But she was still conscious enough to feel physical pain.

"Ah-hem."

"Oh, Lord Huong? What brings you here?" said the bandit.

"Do you mind not doing this when it's bright and early?"

He grabbed Celina by the hair, pulling her head up slightly. "Why, is there a proper time of the day for this?"

Clearly, he was being sarcastic. These barbarians have a sick sense of humor, thought the noble.

Jiax grabbed her by the neck, pulling her up, and now she was kneeling on the bed. He violated her from behind, grabbing her breasts and stroking various parts of her exposed body. Wearing nothing but ribbons, she could do nothing but moan painfully as the brute violated her delicate body.

"Is this how you treat your prisoners?" asked Huong in disgust.

"Why not? This is such a fine specimen." he said, pulling her head back, and she groaned with her eyes closed. Then he licked her shoulder and glided his tongue to her neck, and face.

"I told you to keep her alive, but you are going to kill her at this rate."

"Look at her, she's not dead yet." said Jiax, still holding her by the hair. Then he forced his lips into hers, and tears streamed down her face.

"I will never understand you...people."

"You're a eunuch, so you won't understand the pleasures of the female body. You probably can't feel anything down there." said Jiax.

"Anyways...I have new instructions from Duke Xiang. You are to report to training first thing in the morning tomorrow."

"Training? What for?"

"Due to the chaos happening in the court, we need to prepare for a possible rebellion by the other high eunuchs. We need every fighter to be prepared for such an event."

"Oh c'mon. It's so cozy and relaxing in here." He shoved his hand up Celina's thigh, and she moaned.

"If I were you...I wouldn't argue with direct orders. That is all." Huong turned around and left the room.

Jiax's hands were still on her breasts as he gazed upon the eunuch. (That bastard Huong...he thinks he's so mighty because he draws his power from the duke. One day I'll kill them and the kingdom will be mine!) Jiax squeezed both her breasts tightly and she groaned in agony.

Celina was lying on the floor, crying and sobbing with her face in her arms. Just now, the door opened and Jiax came in. Celina looked at him and he had this look on his face. She sat up and crawled backwards. "No...no!"

Jiax smiled and approached her. She got up and ran for it, he grabbed the loose ribbon in the air and pulled her into him. He forced her against the pole of the bed and grabbed her breasts and put his face into her hair.

"Ugh! Please, stop!"

He couldn't control his filthy hands. Then he pushed her on the bed. Her face landed on the pillow. He grabbed her leg and lifted it up and laughed. Celina groaned and grabbed the pillow tightly. Once he's done with her leg, he got on top of her and kissed her shoulders. He caressed his face against her skin and it felt good. It was heaven for him, but for Celina, it was sheer hell. She shed tears of pain.

Jiax turned her around and he kissed her neck and the top of her breasts. Celina moaned in pain. "P-Please don't do this. Ugh! Please! I'll p-pay you...ugh!"

Now they were face to face.

Tears drip down her eyes. "I'll p-pay you money. Ten thousand!"

He slapped her. Slap!

"Twenty thousand!"

He slapped her again.

"Fifty thousand!"

Slap!

"A hundred thousand!"

Slap!

Her face was red from the beatings. "Any amount you w-want..." she whimpered with tears.

Jiax: "You think this is about money?" He grabbed her breasts and squeezed them hard.

"Ugh! Aaagh!"

"All you politicians are the same. You think money will solve everything." He pulled her left breast to the left, and her right breast to the right, making them further apart, then he squished them together. He pulled them in all directions. "Heh heh." He could feel them thoroughly through the ribbons.

"Ugh! Aaagh!"

Then Jiax grabbed her chin.

"W-What do you want?" she asked, staring at him with frightful eyes. Her eyes were shaking with fear and shed tears. It took a lot of courage to even speak to him.

"I don't want money. I just want you." He kissed her lips and she shed streams of tears. Each thing he does is more painful than the next. Then he shoved his face between her breasts.

Celina: "I...I d-didn't do a-anything to you...ugh!"

Jiax put his face between her legs and started munching. Celina's hands grabbed the pillow tightly. Her head turned left and right as she groaned and screamed. "I'm going to have you today, no matter what."

All of Celina's efforts to negotiate were in vain. This man only wants to rape her. He did not listen to her pleas. And it's hard to talk when someone's violating her body every second.

Jiax went up to her shoulders and kissed it all over. Then he nibbled her ear and her face.

Celina: "P-Please stop...I'll f-find you a wife. Any woman you want."

He grabbed her hair and stared at her as she cried. "I only want you." He kissed her lips. "What better woman is there than the concubine herself?"

"Y-You're a filthy mongrel!"

He shoved his hand up her thigh into the ribbons, and she groaned in pain.

"What was that? I would choose my words carefully if I were you."

"Ugh!"

One hand grabbed her hair and the other grabbed her left breast.

"This is just how I like my women – weak and helpless." Then he put his face between her breasts and munched on them. It's clear that her feelings are irrelevant to him. To him, Celina is just a piece of meat. And he's preying on her because she's weak and helpless, as he said. Celina shed more tears. She's completely helpless and there's nothing she can do against a strong, bulky man like him. She's just a woman caught in a bad place at a bad time...with a bad man.

He's just a wolf, and she's going to lose everything to him. Not just her body, but her honor as a woman.

Alex Cheng's training continued...and it was as rigorous as Genzo said it would be. But being a fast learner and hard worker – he accelerated quickly, surprising Genzo's three students. Zi showed considerable improvements as well, sparring with the students every day. Today, however, Alex was about to learn something that will change his life...more than he could know.

In their usual training spot stood Alex and his master. "Cheng, today I will teach you a very important move, it a move called the **Phoenix Palm**. It is often dubbed The Move That Saves Lives.

They circled each other as they talk.

"Move that Saves Lives?"

"This technique I will be teaching you is useful in many situations. It is a move that saves lives and takes lives away. Let me explain. Over the centuries, the main source of power for any one man is the sword. It is the symbol of power in our four kingdoms. He who holds it is he who is appreciated and respected. But what goes even further back than the sword is the body itself. The body itself is a weapon. Your fist, your legs, your head, and your palms. Many think the palm is useless, but experts disagree. When there is conflict and combat, there are hostage situations. So what to do in those kinds of scenarios? There is no right answer. But our solution to that is the Phoenix Palm. Observe."

Genzo stared at the two boulders in front of him, one behind the other. He closed his eyes and breathed in and out. Then he did some circular motion with his arms. Then he charged. "Hyaaaaah." He slammed his fist against the rock. "Phoenix Palm!!" The rock behind this rock cracked.

Alex was truly surprised. "Amazing! How did you do that?"

"It takes years of practice and discipline to pull that off."

"I see."

"Cheng, I am going to teach you the fundamentals, and it's up to you to learn it on your own."

"Understood, Master Genzo."

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Subsequently, Alex trained by himself the next day, and the day after that as well. \*Wham\* He slammed his open palm against the boulder, expecting it to have the same effect as when Genzo did it. But the boulder in the back did not crack at all, it did not even move. He did manage to crack the boulder in front, but that is not the point of the Phoenix Palm.

Having already spent most of the day practicing this move, he was tired and drained physically. Most people would have given up at this point, but Alex was still determined to make it work. He stepped back, getting into the proper stance, and took deep breaths. When he was ready, he charged and slammed his fist onto the boulder.  
\*Wham\*

This time too, Alex expected the move to succeed, but he was faced with disappointment once again. He stared at the boulder in disbelief and despair, not knowing why the move did not work for him. He has practiced hundreds of times, yet he is not even close to mastery. Frustrated and out of breath, he stared at the boulder, and then stared at his own palm. He began to doubt his own abilities, clenching his fist tightly.

"I cannot believe that I will not master this move." he murmured to himself. Once again, he ran to the boulder and slammed his palm against it.

Fo Long watched him from a distance. She was still in disbelief that this man is her brother, despite all the indications that he is. He had the same name – Alex Cheng – and the same silver hair that she remembered stroking when he was a kid. Li wanted to reveal her true identity, yet cannot bring herself to. All she could do now was watch him train, and that alone is satisfying, knowing that he is alive and well.

When Fo Long was by herself, she was standing by the lake and watching the sunset. She took off her straw hat and removed the mask, and took a breath of fresh air with her full exposed face.

"How long are you planning to hide it?"

Fo Long gasped, only to realize it was Sui Long who spoke. He is her comrade and knows her identity, as do all the students, so it was fine.

"It is not your concern." replied Fo Long.

"You have not seen each other in nearly a decade, right?" asked Sui Long. "And Alex is going to leave soon...are you not going to tell your brother who you are?"

"No, not yet. I do not want to distract him from his training." she said. "But one day I will tell him...one day very soon." With that said, she became silent, and so did Sui Long, and they both continued to watch the sunset.

The little girl with long, black hair came home one day with much joy in her heart, and cannot wait to tell the news to her family. As she came home, she immediately opened the scroll. "Mom, dad, guess what happened?"

"What it is, Li?" asked her father.

"I am officially accepted as a servant in the imperial palace!"

"Really?" said her mom. "Congratulations." She went over to hug her, and so did her father.

Li's brother, a little boy, went up to her. "Congratulations, sister!" said Alex.

"Thank you, Alex."

"My little girl is growing up so fast." said the father.

Li smiled and laughed heartily as they continued to praise her as if she was made of gold. In this society, it is a prestige and status is a big deal. To even be able to step foot inside the palace is something that a commoner can only dream of. To be a servant of the palace, one must already have experience as a servant, must pass a certain test, and must be recommended by someone of high status.

Fortunately, Li Cheng's parents have connections with someone who is a friend of a noble, and they used this connection to have Li take the servant test. The fact that she passed it shows how diligent and obedient she is, two core traits needed of a



servant. Even though someone else will own her life, at least Li will be taken care of, and not worry about how to make a living. Perhaps if she is lucky enough, someone with a high status will choose her as a wife.

Li Cheng stood in line with all the other female servants. This truly is an exciting day for her, as it will be her first time entering the imperial palace. The head servant walked about, giving them instructions, preparing them for their jobs. There were twenty servants in line, and this is only for one part of the palace. There must be hundreds and thousands of servants who run about the palace day by day, Li thought. She assured herself that she will give it her best and keep up with everyone.

After working for two months, Li became used to the environment. She is to keep her head low and show proper respect to nobles and lords. And of course, she must kneel in front of a member of royalty, just like everyone else. Because of her personality, she easily made friends with the other servants.

Unfortunately, she was assigned to Duke Xixang, someone who has a reputation for treating others in a condescending manner. He is a man who is full of greed and ambition, and extremely impatient. He is not the type that you'd want to upset. But Li never minded that, for she was taught to mind her own business. So as long as she does her job, no one will treat her badly. That is exactly what she did...until one fateful day.

The Duke was sweating heavily, leaning in front of the mirror. "I am not feeling so well..." he said to the mirror.

Li was assigned to be cleaning the halls that day. She heard the Duke's voice coming from the room. She knew that he was by himself, and grew curious as to who he was speaking to. She leaned sideways against the door, pressing her ear against the thin wood.

"How much longer do I have to live like this?" exclaimed Xiang.

Li poked a hole through the fabric and peeped with one eye. What a strange sight, because Xiang's reflection did not show in the mirror, but rather, it was the image of a shadow.

"You need to absorb more souls." said the shadow.

"But then I will risk revealing my identity. Isn't there another way to remain human? You're supposed to have the answer, aren't you, Demon King?"

Their conversation made Li more curious. As Xiang turned around, Li saw his deformed face, and became horrified. Xiang's skin was seemingly melting off his face, and his eyes and lips were deformed. Li let out a gasp, and walked away from the window. She accidentally kicked over the bucket of water, and Xiang heard it.

Li quickly ran down the hallway as Xiang came outside. Li turned around, and they glanced at each other for a second. "You!" said the duke. "You saw it, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't see anything!"

"C'mon here..."

"No!!" Li screamed, and ran away.

That was ten years ago. Ever since that day, Li Cheng did not look back. She had to abandon her parents and her brother for their own sake...lest they should be killed by the duke's men. As she and Sui Long watched the sunset, Li debated whether or not that was the best course of action to take. But as her master says, it is not about the past, it is about deciding what to do in the present.

As Master Genzo said, his training is rigorous and rough, and Alex is always exhausted at night. Tonight he is especially exhausted, and fell asleep while lying on a tree branch.

Cheng finds himself in an unfamiliar place. The room is large and spacey, covered by a red carpet, which leads to a set of stairs. Judging by its contents, it is the royal hall of the imperial palace. He has never been here before, yet somehow he knows what it is. The sky is stormy and lightning flares every few seconds.

As he walks on the red carpet, he sees someone sitting on the king's chair, but it is not the king. Upon closer inspection, it is a woman who was barely covered. She had nothing but pink ribbons, tied as loops around her body, and her legs were mostly exposed, as well as her shoulders and neckline. Her head was facing down; she was either unconscious or not looking up.

Despite her appearance, Alex was not alarmed, but rather, curious. As he walks closer, the woman wakes up and stares at him.

"Please...help me." says Celina.

"Who are you?" asks Alex.

"P-Please help me...before he kills me."

"Who's going to kill you?"

Celina sheds tears and ran towards him and grabs his chest. "Save me...get me out of this horrible place!" Her eyes were shaking and tears dripped down her face. Lightning flared again.

A bearded man who was hiding behind the chair reveals himself, and pulls the ribbon on Celina's body, dragging her into his arms.

"Hey!" Alex screams.

Jiax laughed as he violated Celina. "Heh heh. You cannot save her now. She is lost...just as the kingdom is."

Celina reaches her hand for Alex. "P-Please save me..."

"Let her go!" Alex yelled angrily, and draws his sword.

Jiax pushes the girl away and stabs Alex through his stomach. \*Schleb\* Alex stared at his wound in much dismay, and gazed upon the blood dripping on the sword.

Alex woke up in cold sweat and instinctively put his hand on his stomach. (What was that about?) It was different than his usual dream...could this be an ill omen for him and his upcoming journey?

The three masked warriors stood behind Genzo, who was facing Zi and Alex. Everyone had serious looks on their eyes. Months have passed since Alex first came to the Valley, and today is the day he must leave.

"Cheng", addressed the War God. "Our time is limited because I know you are in a hurry. If you want to kill Duke Xiang, you better make haste. But in these few months, you have learned more under my tutelage than you have learned in your lifetime. You have improved greatly, and I am proud of you. Your training is not complete, and it never will be. Just remember that training lasts a life time. But I feel that you are ready, young man. Congratulations, Cheng."

"Thank you sir."

"You two, Zi Lai. You have improved much whilst training with my students. I bid both of you good luck on your journey."

"Thank you, master." Alex and Zi said, and bowed.

"But before you go, I have one more thing for you, Cheng." He grabbed the sword on his waist and held it horizontally. He pulled the sword out of the patch, and it shined in Alex's eyes.

"This is..."

"This is the **Legendary Fire Sword**. It has been a life saver, and it shall help you in your journey."

Alex was shocked. "This is the Legendary Fire Sword..."

Zi was equally as shocked. (This...this is the sword mentioned in the legends. How did the War God come into possession of this? Don't tell me, he's...)

"No...I can't possibly accept this...this sword has been your companion for many decades!"

"Yes, it has been a good companion...and now it shall be your companion. This sword will protect you from the **demons**."

Alex took it and held it like gold. "Master...I don't know what to say...I can't thank you enough. I cannot repay you in any way..."

"You can repay me by slaying the Duke. I dislike demons as much as you do. I have my personal grudges against them. One more thing. Shen Long, Feng Long, and Fo Long, you shall accompany these two on their way to Yi Ling. Aid them in their battles."

Zi overwhelmed by the War God's kindness. "Wow...sir, you really need not do this. We will be fine."

"You need all the help you can get. I have already instructed my students to do as such from the beginning."

The three warriors bowed. "Yes sir!"

"Good luck, my warriors." said the War God.

Alex was so touched that he could cry. He kneeled in front of his master. "Thank you Master Genzo. I owe you! Thank you for everything!"

Our hero, Alex, has ended his training with the War God. It was a rough and brutal time, much tougher than his training from the temple, but today he will walk away a different man...with one of the most powerful swords in the world. It is a priceless gift that he will never let his eyes off of...but will he be able to use it effectively?

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### [⚔: Back to Yi Ling, The Duke's Dark and Secret Plot](#)

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The heroes, as per War God's instructions, were on their way back to the Yi Ling province. This time, however, instead of two, they now have five. As they treaded through the muddy land, pushing away leaves, Alex decided to break the hour long silence.

"You know guys, you really don't have to do this." he said, addressing the three masked warriors. Up until now, neither he nor Zi have seen their faces.

"We are doing it because Master Genzo instructed us to do so." replied Sui Long.

"Wow, you warriors are pretty loyal." Zi commented.

"Indeed we are." replied Sui Long. "Master Genzo did everything for us. I ran away from home many years ago because I had no where to go. I came upon the War God, and not only did he spare my life, but he took me in as his student."

"I see. It's probably a similar story with you two, right?" Zi said, referring to Shen Long. and Fong Long.

"Yes." Shen Long replied.

"Well, I respect Master Genzo's decisions, and I am glad we are not traveling alone." said Alex. "Once we get to Yi Ling, we have a lot of work to do. I can't wait to find my sister."

"You miss her, don't you?" asked Fong Long.

"The sage Ho Sai told me that she is back at Yi Ling. I've looked everywhere for her...I even went to the Temple of Enlightenment to find her. But to my disappointment, I was several years behind. But once we get back to the city, I will continue to search for her."

Fong Long grew silent, filled with guilt. For a long time, she wanted to reveal her identity as Li Cheng to him, but she could not bring herself to do it. Pretending to be a man is not hard, particularly when she is wearing mask and straw hat all the time, but it is getting to her mentally. She just cannot find the right time to confess, but surely, she trusts that the right time will come. Soon...

## Hanging By The WindowContents

Celina's hands grabbed the curtains as Jiax was violating her by the window. "Ugh! Uhhh!" she screamed. He shoved his face into her breasts, letting himself loose completely, while his hands grabbed her back. "Ugh!! Uuuuhhh!"

Jiax then turned her around, making her face the window, and violated her backside. He kissed her shoulders aggressively, as he smelled her hair, and at the same time, his hands were grabbing her breasts. The poor woman could do nothing but hold onto the curtains tightly, since those were the only things she could grab onto.

"Ugh! Uhhhh!! Uh!"

Jiax was enjoying himself, and he never gets tired of sexually abusing this poor woman. Her cries for help and screams of mercy were music to his ears.

Jiax grabbed her hair and shoved her head down, forcing her to stare at the ground below. "This place is pretty high. It would be a shame if someone was to fall, wouldn't it?"

"No...please don't!" Celina cried out.

He grabbed her legs and threw her out the window. The end of her ribbon was already tied to a pole in the room. "Aaah!!!" As she fell, As she fell, the ribbons were coming off her, and she was spinning horizontally. She instinctively grabbed the ribbon with her hands, and now she was hanging by the same ribbon that was wrapped around her body.

If she were to let go, then not only would she die, but die naked. The mere thought of such an embarrassing death was too horrible to even think about, and she must hold on no matter what.

"He he he he heh." laughed Jiax, peering out the window. "How's the weather down there? I can imagine it's a little chilly."

"Please..." she shrieked. "Don't do this!"

"So you don't want to die yet, huh?"

Celina's fingers were slipping from the ribbon. It will only be a matter of time before she runs out of strength...and then only death awaits.

"Please! I beg of you!" she yelled with tears streaming down her face. Her fingers slipped, and she fell a little lower. "Help me!"

"Why don't you ask your precious king to save you?" taunted Jiax. "I guess he's too useless to help you."

Celina's fingers continued to slip. "Help me..."

"Why should I? I have no more use for you. I've already seen everything on your body, and I've had my way with you...over and over."

Those words struck Celina like weapons. But which is worse, having to listen to this brute's harsh words, or having to beg him for her life. Even though she did not want to, Jiax is the only person who can choose whether she lives or dies.

"I...I don't want to die." she murmured.

"Well...I guess I could spare your life." Jiax said. "After all we've been through together. But, what will you do for me?"

"I'll do anything."

"Really? Anything?"

"Anything! Please...help me!" Her cries became more desperate as she was losing strength.

"Then say you are a worthless dog."

"I am..."

"What was that?"

"I am a worthless dog!" Celina replied obediently. At this point, any kind of humiliation is better than death.

"Now that's a good girl." Jiax pulled the ribbon up, bringing her body up little by little.

When she got to the window, Jiax grabbed her head. "By the way, I lied." He grabbed her chin and kissed her lips. Then he let go of the ribbon, making her fall, and she had to hold onto it once again.

"Have a nice view." he said, with a malicious smile on his face.

Poor Celina did not even have time to feel disgusted that he violated her lips. It happened so fast, and now, she finds herself in the same situation, hanging for her life. "Why?" she asked, with tears streaming down her eyes.

"You should enjoy the night air. It's good for your body! Ha ha ha ha!" Jiax left the window, and now she was left in a hopeless situation...to die alone.

Shu Tai came upon the door of an abandoned building and glanced left and right, making sure no one sees him. He knocked on the wooden door. A guard from the inside responded by opening the eye hole on the door, and his eyes could be seen.

"It's me, Captain Tai."

"What is the password?"

"The password is **dragonfly**."

"Okay, you may enter." The guard unlocked the door and opened it. Tai walked down the dark staircase as the guard closed the door. Creeeek. The room in the basement was dark except for the illumination from the candles. Lord Yu and Lord Zhang were anxiously waiting for him.

"Tai! What took you so long?" Yu inquired.

"I am sorry. I had to make absolutely certain that no one saw me come." Tai replied.

"Well, as long as you are here. We were just discussing something of utmost importance." said Zhang.

Tai sat down on his reserved seat.

"Is it true about the rumors I have heard circulating the palace?" Yu asked, although he knew the answer already.

Zhang: "Unfortunately, it is true. The disappearance of two major players in the court - General Chung and Lord Lee have gone missing. We must assume that they are dead."

"Not only that, but ever since Chung is gone, the army is slowly being replaced by degenerates and low lives...including bandits, thieves, and murderers." said Tai.

"The Duke is up to his old tricks again, and this time he is in way over his head." Yu said, slamming his fist on the table. "Why did the king trust someone like him?"

Zhang: "Duke Xiang was never a trustworthy person. Everyone who has half a brain knows that. But who knew he'd go this far...to try to control the king?"

Tai: "The king's concubine...Celina Liu is missing...does this mean he is using her to control him?"

Zhang: "That is the most likely explanation."

Tai: "We cannot just stand by and let him get away with this!"

Yu: "We must not act with haste. We have our own lives to worry about. The Duke has already taken the lives of several eunuchs and even our general. I worry that we will be next. That is why we must meet in secret...outside the palace."

Tai: "Meeting like this is too inconvenient."

Zhang: "That is our safest option, captain. And be very careful who you share your suspicions with. I do not trust Lord Houngh. He is very close with the Duke, and has likely defected to his side. "

Tai: "What do you suggest we do?"

"Firstly, we must get more people on our side and form an alliance. As usual, be very careful with who you can trust. And bringing this matter to King Liu is useless, if our theory about him being blackmailed is correct. He will simply brush it to the side. Secondly, we must find out where Duke Xiang is holding the concubine, Celina."

Alex and his group were walking down the streets of Yi Ling, the streets were he grew up. Jade happened to see her friends. "Alex, is that you?"

"Jade..." said Alex. He was at a loss of words, as he felt awkward about seeing her.

"Long time no see!" Zi replied.

Jade started to become teary eyed. "I was worried about you. I thought you were going to die!" She hugged Zi and proceeded to hug Alex.

"Us, die? No way." Zi replied. "We're strong as steel." Then he flexed his biceps.

"Are these your friends?" asked Jade.

"Uh, yes." Alex said. "Let me introduce you. This is Jade. This is Shen Long, Fong Long, and Sui Long. They are here to help me find my sister."

Jade bowed politely. "Pleased to meet you."

Shen replied, "The pleasure is ours."

"It's always nice to meet an acquaintance of Cheng." said Sui.

"Come on Cheng, let's get going. It is getting dark." said Fong, ever the impatient one.

"Jade, we have to go." Alex said.

"Where do you have to go?" Jade asked with a tone of worry. "You're not going to fight the Duke, are you? Don't do it, it's too dangerous."

"I know, Jade. But I have to do it. I know it is strange, but for some reason, I feel that I am supposed to do this. You could say it's my destiny."

The five men walked on and Jade watched them go. She was surprised to see Zi and Alex return with three new companions, and more so, how Alex has changed since he left the city. He seems more confident and sure of himself; and although she does not know what kind of trainings and hardships he has gone through, his presence definitely speaks of someone who has gained a lot of life experience and a purpose in life.

"Who was that?" asked Fong.

"Oh, she's a childhood friend of mine. We all grew up together."

"I see." replied the masked warrior.

Sui said, "So this is Yi Ling? It is a pretty neat place."

Alex answered, "Yes it is. It is the pride of the Shen Kingdom. Wait 'till you try the food."

Someone's stomach growled. "Speaking of food..." Zi said, touching his stomach.

"We haven't eaten in days! I'm hungry, let's grab a bite."

"Good idea. And I know just the place, you guys are going to love it." Alex said. "It is my favorite restaurant."

"Please show us, Cheng." replied Sui Long. "A warrior cannot fight on an empty stomach."

"You said it!" Zi exclaimed, happy that someone agrees with him.

The group went into Chen's Garden restaurant, and picked a table and sat down. The waiter came over with an enthusiastic smile. "What may I get you gentlemen?"

Alex was holding the menu and ordered on everyone's behalf. As Zi poured tea into the cups, they heard laughter from the other side of the room.

It was Hua, the local bully, and he was drinking with his gangster buddies, talking loudly and laughing.

Fong cannot help but comment. "What an annoying bunch. Have they no manners?"

"Unfortunately, their type does not know of manners. It's Hua, one of the toughest brutes in this city." Alex answered. "I don't think we should stay here."

Fong replied, "Why not? Don't tell me you're afraid of them?"

"No but, if he sees me..."

Hua glanced at their table, and recognized the silver haired man as Alex. He came over to them, along with his gang.

"Oh God...not now..." Alex said to himself.

Hua slammed his palm on the table. "Well looky what we have here? If it isn't Cheng the loser! Ahahahahaha. I never thought you'd be stupid enough to come back, after you ran away last time."

Zi: "Grrrr, listen bub, we're not in the mood for th-" He stopped talking after Hua Den drew his sword.

"Quiet, you runt. I am the only one talking here! So Cheng, do you realize you have a huge bounty on your head? I don't know what you did to those guys up there, but you sure have offended the wrong person. And today I am here to collect my bounty."

Shen: "You have a bounty on your head?"

Alex: "This is between you and me. Leave my friends out of it."

Hua looked at the other four. "Heh, if it isn't your friend, and I see you've brought other friends here as well. What's with the masks? Are yer faces too ugly to be shown in public? Ahahahaha!" The gangsters laughed.

Alex: "Don't provoke them, they are serious swordsmen. I am giving you friendly advice, don't upset them."

Hua: "And why not? Do you think I am afraid of them, hmmm?" He grabbed Alex by the collar.

Fong grabbed Hua's hand. "Let him go."

Hua: "Ehh?"

Fong: "We are Cheng's bodyguards. Our job is to protect him. So let him go."

"You don't give me orders, fool!"

Fong squeezed his wrist, and Hua groaned.

"Aaargh!"

All the gangsters drew swords and grunted. Fong let go of Hua, pushing him away. The brute touched his injured arm. "You son of a bitch...kill them!"

The gangsters attacked the group and Alex, who wishes to avoid a fight, has no choice but to fight. The owner and waiters watched with fright. "Oh no, they're messing up our restaurant!" The customers ran for their lives.

\*Slash. Slice. Dice.\* The masked warriors had no problems dealing with their foes. Tables were broken, teapots were smashed, and chairs were flying all over the room.

Hua and Alex clashed their blades. \*Clang\* Cheng showed him the skill that he learned from Master Genzo. Hua could not believe what he was dealing with. He grunted angrily and charged forward, and Alex swings his Fire Sword against Hua's brute sword, cracking it upon impact.

The brute could not believe his eyes, as he was staring at the remainder of his weapon. "How...can you be this good. It is impossible!"

"I am a different person since I left." Alex replied, and hit Hua's stomach with the back of his sword. \*Whack\* It knocked the wind out of the brute, and he collapsed.

Fong Long approached the fallen brute, about to attack, and Alex stopped him. "Hold on. There is no need to take a life."

"He is going to cause nothing but trouble." Fong replied.

"Just let him be." said Alex. "He's learned his lesson."

They turned around and went towards Zi and Shen Long and Sui Long. Hua, however stared at them with intense hate in his eyes. "I don't need your sympathy..." He grabbed the nearest sword he could grab and ran towards Alex. "You're going down!"

Both Alex and Fong turned around, completely shocked. Suddenly, a knife struck Hua's throat, and he collapsed to the floor. It was Fong who threw the knife.

"Thanks..." said Alex. "You saved me.

"Never show kindness or mercy in a battlefield." said Fong, and he walked away.

The group gathered in an alley. "I thought we were going to lay low?" said Sui.

"Not if Alex is this popular." Zi commented with a slight note of sarcasm.

"In order to find the Duke, we must enter the palace." said Alex.

Fong disagreed. "That is easier said than done. The imperial palace that you speak of is the most heavily guarded stronghold in the Shen Kingdom. Not a soul enters without being inspected over and over again. The only way to get inside is to fly. And none of us has wings."

"We don't need to fly. Thanks to this. This should make things easier for us." said he, taking out the imperial badge which he stole from En Lo.

Shen: "Isn't that..."

Sui: "The imperial badge. Impressive, Cheng. How did you get your hands on this?"

Alex and En Lo bared their swords at each other, staring into each other's eyes with utter coldness. Within a moment's notice, they charged into each other. \*Clang\* While running, saw a shiny object lodged within En Lo's pocket, and decided to grab it. Whoosh. As they went past each other, Alex was slashed, but he was able to get the badge with his enemy knowing.

"I sort of found it from someone. It's a long story."



Fong: "Even with that, we still have problems. We can't just go into the palace...because Sui Long and Shen Long are criminals, as am I. Mask or no mask, we will be suspects. And also, there is a bounty on your head, Cheng. If we go in we will be lamb for the slaughter."

Zi: "It looks like we need a little twist on our plan."

Alex: "What do you have in mind?"

"How about if we go in as someone other than ourselves?"

The heroes hid behind a bush, scattered around a central area. According to Zi's sources, a very important noble will be coming through this road in half an hour. As the time came, the carriage came upon the road, carried by two horses, and accompanied by four guards.

The guards riding the horses, upon seeing a young, silver haired man standing in their way, made the carriage stop. "Hey you." said the guard. "Move out of the way!"

Alex: "I'm afraid I cannot. This is an emergency, and I have orders from above to inform you."

The lord, who was inside the carriage, grew impatient. "What is going on out there?"

Guard: "Who are you?"

Alex took out the imperial badge. The guards got off their horses and approached him. "Are you an imperial soldier?"

"Yes. And I will need to borrow your carriage."

Guard: "Borrow? Why weren't we informed of this?"

Suddenly, Fong Long and Shen Long came out of the bushes, snuck behind the guards, and knocked them unconscious. The two other guards in the rear drew their weapons. Zi snuck behind one of them and elbowed him on the neck, effectively knocking him out. Sui Long jumped out of the bushes, and jabbed the last guard in the stomach.

The lord peered out the window. "What the devil is the meaning of this?"

Alex opened the door and dragged the lord out. "Sorry, but we need to borrow your identity for today." \*Pow\*

### Still Hanging By The Window

Celina held onto the ribbon tightly, as it is the only thing that keeps her from falling to her doom. The ribbon was tied around her body, and the other end of it was tied to a pole inside the room. As long as she keeps her grip, she can live, but with each passing second, she is losing strength.

Jiax was staring at her from the window, with a wicked, ugly grin on his face. "What's the matter?" he said. "Hands getting slippery?"

Little by little, her fingers slipped, and the more she slipped, the more the ribbon came loose off her body. The poor girl had never been in this kind of situation before, being treated like some sort of toy for a brute's amusement. Then again, she has faced situations recently that she never even imagined could happen...being harassed over and over...and now...this. Not only did she have to worry about surviving, but at the same time, she had to worry about not revealing her skin.

"Here, I've got something for you." Jiax left the window, and came back with a bucket of water in hand. Celina gasped, knowing what he was about to do. "I bet you're thirsty. Why don't you have some water?" He poured the cold water down, and much of it landed on her. \*Splash\*

The water felt cold as ice against her face, and her body, which was barely covered. It was painful to withstand, particularly during the night breeze. There was water in her eyes, and she could barely see, but she dare not use her hands to rub her eyes. The water made her hands slip some more, but she continued to hang on with whatever strength she had left.

"Ooh, so resilient, aren't we?" Jiax said, taunting her.

"No...no more...please..." cried Celina, tired from all this torture.

"Let's see how much longer you can hang on." Jiax took out a knife, and started to cut the ribbon from which she was hanging from.

"No, no!"

"Ha ha ha ha!" He cut the left side a little, doing it slowly, just to see her reaction. "It's coming off..."

"No...stop! Don't!" she cried.

Jiax cut the ribbon some more, and now it was half way through the width. "Any last words?"

"Don't do this...please!"

Jiax raised his arm up. "Oh well...it was nice knowing you. Say hi to the devil for me!"

"Nooooo!"

He brings down the knife on the ribbon. \*Slish\* The ribbon was cut, and she fell into the darkness. "Aaaaaaaah!!!" She truly thought that this was the end, the end of her sad life, and she shut her eyes, and her tears of regret and sorrow floated in the air.

Celina landed in a haystack in the back of a horse carriage. \*Sploosh\* Moments later, she opened her eyes and entered a state of confusion, and then shock, as she was still alive. Is she really alive? Suddenly, she felt physical pain all over her body, an injury from the fall. The pain is confirmation that she is indeed alive, and she sat up.

Her eyes glanced around, and when she saw no one, she realized that this is her golden chance to escape this hellhole. The thought of freedom gave her much hope and optimism, as she ignored her injuries and stood up on her feet. Celina walked faster, and then ran forward.

Her heart was racing as she ran, afraid that someone may catch her and bring her back. But no, it will not happen, because once she escapes, she will no longer have to be tortured, and finally be free. No more sadness, no more pain...at last, she will be released.

In her most joyous moment, an arm came out from the end of the wall, and she did not see it in time, and ran into it. \*Thud\* As she was running, her neck and chin hit the arm, causing her to fall backwards.

That hit nearly knocked the wind out of her. Her eyes squinted as she tried to grasp what just happened. Suddenly, she saw a man's foot. The man who was standing in front of her was wearing boots, and thick pants, and a winter coat. He had a curly mustache on his upper lip, and thick eyebrows. He was Manchu, one of the bandits who was allies with Jiax.

Looking at his face, Celina recognized him as one of the bandits who captured her in that dark room...the place where all this began. He was one of the brutes who teamed up to torture her during various times in her captivity.

"Going somewhere, sweetheart?" he said.

"No...please...no!" Celina's hopeful attitude was now completely gone, now replaced with fear and desperation. Once again, she was caught in an unfair situation with her as the victim.

Manchu stepped on her stomach, and she groaned in pain. "Ugh!" The poor girl could not handle such abuse, especially after such a fall, and being hit in the neck.

Manchu grabbed her hands, and dragged her away, her body scraping the floor. "No...stop..." she murmured half-consciously. Celina knew what he wanted...as matter of fact, they only want one thing...

He stopped dragging her when he got to the haystack. He grabbed her by the head, and threw her into the haystack. Celina stared with shaking eyes as Manchu loosened his jacket a little.

"No, please!"

Manchu leaped onto her and let himself loose. He ravaged her soft, frail body, while Celina screamed and groaned in agony. Yet, no matter how much she screams, no one will save her. Ever.

Her greatest moment of hope has turned into her a moment of despair and suffering...and the suffering she had endured up to this point was nothing compared to this. No one could see their bodies behind the haystack, only their feet. Celina's feet kicked and trashed about while she moaned and groaned in pain. "Uuuuugh!! Ahhhhh!"

She was too physically weak to resist, let alone fight back. Still injured from the fall and from being struck on the neck, she must now face more physical pain, a pain that is indescribable for someone who has never been through this before. It was so painful that it is a near death experience for her. But her life does not matter to these brutes, she is only a toy for them to play with. If the toy is broken, then it is of no consequence to them. Her fingers clutched onto the hay as she suffered a fate worst than death.

With the possession of the carriage, the group took off where their victims left off, going to the front gates of the imperial palace. Zi and the masked warriors dressed up as guards, except that they wore masks and straw hats.

The gate guards approached the carriage. "Excuse us, but we need to see your identity."

The lord stuck his heads out the window. Cheng was wearing a fake mustache, along with nobleman's clothes. "It is I, Lord Tien." he said, showing them the shiny badge.

"Very well, you may go." said the gate guard.

The carriage entered the premises, and once no one was looking, they quickly went to a deserted place in the halls of the imperial complex.

Cheng took off his fake mustache. "Phew. I can't believe this actually worked."

"Now comes the hard part." said Sui Long. "We need to find the Duke and eliminate him."

"This place is too big to search building by building." said Zi. "Where do we even start?"

"I know where he is." said Fong Long. "Follow me." He led the group as they snuck about the palace, avoiding the guards and other servants that randomly walked by.

"Are you sure about this?" Zi asked, a bit skeptical.

"Trust me." Fong replied. It's been ten years since Li Cheng came to this palace, and the last time she was here, she was a mere child. But nonetheless, everything looks familiar, just like in her memories.

Upon reaching a certain backyard, Fong stopped and the group stopped, listening in to a conversation.

Lord Huong was giving instructions to one of his servants. "Make sure the other eunuchs are not suspicious."

"Yes sir," the servant replied.

Fong was trying to hear what they were saying, but it was difficult from his distance. Suddenly, a guard saw the group and yelled "Hey you, what are you doing?"

The heroes made a run for it. The guard blew a whistle, signaling other guards to appear.

Two guards appeared from the front of the hall, and two more appeared in the back. Surrounded by troops with spears, the heroes had no choice but to fight this one out.

Tai happened to walk by and witness the scene. "Hey what is happening here?"

"Captain," addressed the original guard, "These intruders got into the palace. We caught them sneaking around."

"Intruders?" asked Tai in a stupor. He then stared at Alex and the two exchanged a long glance. From that one look, Tai deemed that this silver haired man was trustworthy. There was no logical explanation for what he felt, one could say it was a gut feeling. "These gentlemen are with me. I gave them permission to come." The guard turned to Alex. "Is that true?"

"Well, yes, of course!" Zi said. "Tai is our good friend."

"Very well then. Next time, don't wander around so late. We have strict rules here."

"Yes sir, sorry about the inconvenience." Alex replied.

The soldiers walked away.

Zi walked towards Tai. "Thank you sir! I can't even express how grateful we are."

Alex: "Indeed. We all owe you one, Sir Tai."

Tai: "You warriors are not from around here, are you?"

"That's correct. My name is Alex Cheng. This is Zi Lai, and these three are my...uhhh...bodyguards."

Tai: "You're not nobles, are you?"

Alex: "No, and we are not servants either. We snuck in."

"Doing such a thing could get you beheaded."

"We are aware of that. But we want to eliminate the Duke, who has betrayed the king."

Tai was surprised. "How do you outsiders know about this? Anyways, it is not safe to discuss it here. I will take you somewhere."

## 10 - C Title Contents

Tai led the group to the secret headquarters of the other eunuchs, a place far enough from the palace to be safe. Upon exiting the palace, he bribed some of the guards not to tell others about their exit. As usual, Tai must follow standard procedures. When he knocked on the door, the door guard will ask him for the password, to which he will answer "dragonfly."

The hiding place was dark and illuminated by a few candles. The eunuchs grew curious when Tai brought in some unknown faces.

Tai: "Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet some people...these are my allies."

Alex, Zi, and the three masked fighters stood in a straight line.

Yu: "You say they are your allies?"

Tai: "They have come to join the resistance."

"I see. In that case, welcome to our group, warriors. My name is Liu Zhang. I control the military's finances as well as their research and development. "

"And I am Lord Yu. I am the lord who oversees all police matters in every city. You can say that I am the enforcer of the law on the highest level."

Zi: "I'm honored to meet such important people."

Alex: "Before going any further, I'd like to ask a question, if you could please help me out. Do any of you know someone named Li Cheng? She is my long lost sister, and she used to work for the palace. I haven't seen her in many years. Have any of you heard of her?"

Yu: "Sorry lad, I've never heard of her."

Zhang: "There are thousands of servants at the palace. It will be hard to find her, especially with what is happening lately."

Fong Long nudged Alex in the arm. "We are not here to talk about this."

Lord Yu: "Gentlemen, you sure have come at the right time. Things are so chaotic right now, not just in the palace, but in all of Yi Ling. It all started with that bastard Duke Xiang. That vermin was never trustworthy to begin with. He had a bad reputation of doing shady things. He never admits it, and we have no proof. Neither could we convict him because of his status with the king. I swear, his highness is too trusting, and he has fallen victim to Xiang."

This whole thing...this coupe tat happened so quickly, we didn't even notice it until it was too late. It happened at the blink of an eye. It all started with the murder of Lord Lee. It must have been done by someone on the inside...namely the Duke. Then the death of General Chung. Now, the king is being controlled by Duke like a puppet. Every single thing the king does is under the Duke's supervision."

Tai: "We believe this is happening because the Duke has the king's concubine captive."

Yu: "Yes, if it were me, I would choose my family to live as well. We cannot put the entire blame on his highness. First Lee, then Chung. The Duke is replacing key officials with his own men. This way, he is going to have complete control of Shen! We cannot let that happen! Gentlemen, this is a critical stage we're in. We cannot make even one mistake, or we are done for. Xiang is ruthless, he shows no mercy. To fail is equivalent to death."

At this point, Shen whispered to Sui. "This situation is worse than I thought."

"Indeed," Sui whispered back. "Our master didn't mention we'd be dealing with a conspiracy of this caliber."

Yu: "There are also rumors that the Duke is actually a demon in disguise. To think that a demon would be working in the palace...in the imperial court no less...is ludicrous."

Tai: "On top of controlling the king, the Duke is replacing soldiers in the military, for reasons unknown. I am a captain in the military, and I can say with much certainty that soldiers are being replaced - soldiers of all ranks high and low. To be able to replace people so quickly, it is as if everything has been planned ahead of time. Years in advance...even decades."

Zhang: "This will not be easy at all."

Tai: "If we do not fight, death is certain. Even if we run, they will find us sooner or later. Do not forget about the latest law just passed - officials have the right to search anyone's home for any reason."

Lord Yu pointed at a map on the table, and everyone paid attention to it. "Here is our plan," he said. "This is going to be a two fold operation. Getting rid of the Duke is our objective, but getting to him will be extremely difficult. We believe the key to this operation is to rescue the concubine that's been taken hostage, Celina Liu. We eunuchs

can get in with no problem, but our soldiers will not be able to pass due to the tight security."

Zhang: "We are able to get in, but not out. At the rate things are going, we're going to be next." He took out a large piece of paper with portraits on it. The portraits are people of the royal family and high eunuchs. Many of them have an "X" over their faces. "Xiang has taken them out one by one, it is no doubt we are next."

Yu: "The first half of the operation consists of sneaking into the palace undetected. Shu Tai will lead that group."

"There is not a single point in the palace where we can enter without being inspected. Fortunately there is one place that only one knows about." Tai pointed to an area on the map. "There is a secret underground tunnel from the outside that leads inside. This secret has been carefully guarded for generations...only those who are trustworthy to the king have known about this."

Alex: "An underground tunnel?"

Yu: "Yes, it leads directly through the water ways into the confines of the palace. We are not sure which body of water it leads to, so you're on your own from there. This tunnel has major significance in history. During the **Han Dynasty**, there was a massive war. The Han forces were losing, and the main battle took place in none other than the palace itself. Seeing no way to win, the remaining members of the Han family used the tunnel to escape, fleeing death. The enemy never found out what happened.

So here's the plan. Cheng, Lai, and you three will join Tai's group in the infiltration. Lord Zhang and I will gather our troops and attack from the front. Our attack will distract them so you can sneak into the complex and find the concubine, and eliminate Duke Xiang. We will commence at tomorrow night at 6:00 PM sharp. This mission is going to be dangerous, and some of us might get killed. But we must rid the world of Duke Xiang! We will call this **Operation Dragonfly**."

As Alex and his group just met the eunuchs, they were sworn into secrecy after they heard about the plan. Alex was quite disappointed that he did not find his sister, but he is certain that he will find her whereabouts during this operation.

After the mission briefing, everyone went about to do their own thing. Cheng stood on the roof, staring at the evening sky. It was bright orange as the sun was about to set. Fong Long, upon seeing him up there, jumped to the roof. \*Doosh\*

"It is not safe to be outside. You can be easily spotted by the enemy."

"Fong Long, do you see that?" Alex said, pointing at the west. "The imperial palace. A place where only the most important people gather...it is every person's dream to be able to set foot in a place like that. And tomorrow, I am going to infiltrate it and rescue a hostage. My sister used to work there."

"Oh?" asked the masked warrior.

"She worked as Duke Xiang's servant. And I have not seen her since she ran away. I feel that whatever is going to happen tomorrow is going to be big. It is as if my whole life is leading up to this moment. Sometimes I wonder if it is fate, or just coincidence."

"I see." Fong watched the sunset with him with much admiration...after all...Alex Cheng is her brother.

### Blame It On Fate

Inside a certain bedroom chamber, there were screams of agonizing pain from a woman's voice. The screams continued in succession, and each one was as loud as the next. The screams were heard by Lord Huong and one of his servants in the outside hallway.

"What is that?" asked the servant.

"That is Jiax at work." replied Huong, shaking his head at his own comment.

"But who is she? The concubine?"

"Yes. As per the duke's instructions, she is to be kept here, where she cannot be found."

"I feel sorry for her. She is an innocent bystander and has nothing to do with any of this."

"If someone must be blamed, then blame it on fate." said Huong. "She is unlucky to be the concubine of the king. No one can help her now. No one."

Celina grabbed the pillows hard while Jiax was shoving his face into her breasts, munching on them. He shoved his hand up her thigh and into the ribbons and she screamed while turning her head left and right.

Lightning flared in the dark and stormy sky. However, the sky was not as dark as King's Liu mental state right now. As he sat on his chair, he felt worthless and guilty, and not worthy of sitting on the throne chair.

The victim was crawling and reaching for Liu, screaming for help. "Why, your highness? Why! I've remained loyal to you always!!" \*Slash! Slash!\* Blood splattered all over the floor.

(What I have done? I am sorry, my people, I have failed you! Please forgive me, I have no choice...)

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### 十一: Last Thoughts: No Turning Back Now!

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By nighttime, most of the people were asleep. Those who cannot sleep wander around the building and waited for the night to pass. One can't blame them, since tomorrow will be a very important day. Inside a certain bedroom, Alex was tossing and turning in bed. He was having a nightmare, and it probably has something to do with tomorrow's rebellion.

Alex was running down a dark hallway, completely void of light, and thus cannot see anything but darkness. He stopped running when he heard a growl coming from the front. It could be an angry animal of some sort, but clearly it is not, as its red eyes glowed. The creature took a step forward, revealing its face and moments later, its body.

He gasped at the sight of this huge ogre, tall and grotesque. Its red skin reminds him of blood, and the demon smelled like doom itself.

"No, wait!" Alex said. "Don't hurt me!"

The demon thrusts its claw forward, stabbing Alex in the stomach.

Alex sprang up in bed and woke up in cold sweat. Thank goodness, it was just a bad dream. A very bad dream that seemed real, probably a premonition for the future. Whatever the dream meant, he needed time to think, and hopped off the bed.

In the courtyard, Alex was training by himself. As he performed his moves, thoughts of his previous training appeared in his mind. I will teach you the Heaven's Wrath Style, a style that once mastered, is superior to another other style in the kingdom. \*Whoosh!\* He stabbed the air.



Your stance must be firm and grounded, your moves swift and deadly like an eagle. Using his master's advice, Alex charges forward and slashes. \*Whoosh\*

Fong Long came to watch him. He noticed that Cheng has improved considerably since they left the Valley of Death. The moves he was performing were that of Master Genzo.

Alex stopped once he saw the observer. "Hey, Fong Long. What are you doing up?"

"I should ask you the same. Why are you training in this cold night?"

"I am getting ready for tomorrow."

"You will not improve much overnight. You should get some sleep."

"Sleep?" said Alex, "How can I sleep when we might not live to see tomorrow? Do realize how big this thing is? I would never have imaged...that I'd fight a battle as big as this."

"Are you worried?" Fong asked.

"Shouldn't I be? I don't even know what is going to happen tomorrow. I don't want to die yet. I still have people that need me."

Alex's words couldn't be truer. Zi has similar feelings like Alex does, and he is drinking alone. Whenever he feels sad or depressed, he drinks. When something big is about to happen, he drinks. Being a laid back kind of guy, he takes every opportunity he can to have fun or just loiter around.

We need to get into the underground tunnel and enter the palace without being detected. We believe that the key to this operation is Duke Xiang. Find him and eliminate him, and rescue the concubine.

"Tch. It's going to be easier said than done." Zi decided to finish the rest of his alcohol in one gulp, and continued to loiter about to his heart's content.

### How It All Began Contents

There was a woman resting on the bed. It was completely covered by curtains so only her silhouetted figure was seen. She was kneeling on the bed, with her hands on the sheet. Celina's head was facing down the whole time, and she clutched the bed sheet tightly in frustration. Her hair was all messed up, her eyes were tired from crying, and her body is dirty all over. Like always, she was wearing nothing but pink ribbons on her body.

No words could describe the torment she is feeling at this moment. She clutched the bed sheet and secretly cursed her fate. What's done cannot be undone. Nothing can change the past. And worse yet, they will continue to torment her, and it will never end. With a scarred past, and with no future to look forward to, Celina thinks that she must be the unluckiest woman in the world.

She had already forgotten how long she has been a prisoner. Yet, she will never forget how it all began...from that time she was tied up.

The kidnappers laughed maliciously as they watched their victim whimpering and cowering in fear. Celina, without knowing why, became the hostage of these bandits, and she was scared for her life. She was bound to the chair, her arms behind the chair, her wrists tied up together. Her ankles were tied together as well. Her mouth was gagged by a cloth and she could not utter a word, she could only moan and make noises as she sat there and watched in fear as these men decided her fate.

One of the kidnappers was Lord Huong, one of the elder eunuchs. "Now that we have the king's concubine captive, King Liu is under the Duke's control."



"We should just keep her in the dungeon." said one of the bandits.

"No, let's keep her here where we can see her." replied Jiax, the leader of the bandits. "What should we do with her?"

"The Duke's orders are to keep her alive." Huong replied. "As long as she is alive, you may do anything you please."

"Anything, you say?" Jiax asked, staring at Celina.

"Yes, those are the Duke's instructions."

"So, it does not matter what happens to her body...so as long as she is alive?" Jiax asked. Hearing those words, Celina's eyes widened with alarm.

"That is at your discretion. Just do your job." With that said, Huong left the room.

Then Jiax turned to the tied up victim and smiled. "Well, you heard him, men. We need to take good care of our guest." All the bandits were staring at her and snickering, showing their ugly grins.

It was pretty obvious at this point what they were thinking, and Celina feared for her life. She struggled and squirmed in the chair, desperately trying to get free, as Jiax approached. She shook her head left and right and moaned, pleading the bandit not to come closer. "Mmmmf! Mmmmf!"

Celina was only wearing a thin, white dress, and in her situation, she felt completely vulnerable. That china dress is the only layer of protection she has, but she has this sick feeling that they are going to remove it.

When Jiax stood in front of her, his shadow covered her, and Celina was even more scared than ever. She shook her head and moaned. He pointed the knife at her face. She shrieked and turned away. "MMFFF!"

"Aww, look at the concubine now Fate put you at our disposal. A woman's face is the most important thing to her...what would happen if I scar your pretty face?"

He ran the pointy end of the knife along her face, making a scar, and it was red and bleeding. Celina winced from the slight pain, as her head was facing sideways to avoid the knife, and she stared at the blade with her shaking eyes.

"Hmmm, which side of your face should I cut first? This side?" he said tauntingly, and then moved the knife to the other side of her face. "Or this side?"

Celina turned her head the other way and moaned. "MMFF! MMFFF!"

A bandit grabbed Celina's hair from behind and tilted her head up. "C'mon boss, let's just strip her and take everything off at once and have our way with her!"

"Not so fast, mate. Women are meant to be enjoyed. What fun is it if we just take everything off at once? It wouldn't be as exciting." He points the knife at her breasts. "We should take her...piece by piece." He slowly moves the knife down, making a vertical cut on the dress.

Celina gasped as she looked at what he did, and her eyes were swelled with tears. Her face was bright red from embarrassment, and she was in disbelief that these bandits are going to see her skin.

Bandits, a cross between a thief and a murderer, were considered to be the lowest form of criminals. They tend to hide in mountains and rob innocent people who pass by. Often, they will kill without remorse, as well as rape women, and burn down houses. And they are perceived this way because of their lack of morality and disregard for human life. And these bandits are going to see her bare skin, something that she could not even imagine.

Celina moaned and continued to shed tears as Jiax continued to strip her.

"I wonder what's down here?" Jiax put the knife on her leg, making an incision on the dress. As he glided the knife on her thigh, more of her skin was revealed. The bandits watched with glittering eyes as Jiax continued to cut various parts of her dress.

This is the ultimate humiliation, to be stripped in front of these horny men.

Jiax grabbed her head, making her face him directly, and put the knife on her chin. "What a shame...the king's woman is going to be ours tonight." he said with a wicked grin. Celina eyes were shaking from pure intimidation. Being this close to a man and staring eye to eye was completely uncomfortable for her. He had the eyes of a cold blooded killer. Just looking at him sent chills down her spine.

Jiax licked her face, and Celina winced and turned away from his disgusting tongue. Then he let her head go. "Who wants to see more of her?"

The bandits all cheered, and Jiax laughed, and savagely cut her dress. \*Slsh\* \*Slash\* She moaned helplessly as her white dress was being shredded piece by piece. "Mmmfff! Mmmfff!" Bound to the chair, she could do nothing but suffer...

The mere thought of that memory made her shudder, as she clutched her shoulders tightly. Her lips quivered and her eyes swelled up, holding back tears. That was how it all began, when she was bound to that chair...it was the beginning of all her mistreatment.

## 11 - B Title Contents

Fong Long grew tired of watching Alex, and left to get some rest. He continued to train rigorously, despite knowing that he will not improve in one night. This was the only way to put his mind at ease. Invading a palace, rescuing a concubine, and slaying an evil duke, huh? It sounds like something straight from a movie, Alex thought. What a strange turn things have taken. He thinks back to how it all began...

Alex went outside to the yard and quickly jumped into the well. He held on to the rope, and did his best to not make any noises.

En Lo consulted with one of his ninjas. "Did you find anything yet?"

"Not yet, my lord." He bowed.

"Well, keep searching. We saw him go into the house, and we have this place surrounded, so there is no means of escape."

"Right away." The ninja ran and went into the main building.

En Lo loitered around, observing the environment. "Could he be hiding?" he wondered.

Alex pulled himself up, grabbing the edge of the well. In a crouching position, he took out his sword as silently as possible.

"So that is where you are." En Lo said without looking.

"Uh."

En Lo turned around, throwing a dart at him. \*Whip\* Alex caught it just before it hit his face.

"Hmm, not bad." Alex commented. "You can sense me even if I am completely silent."

"Hmph, please. I am trained in the art of ninjutsu. No matter how sneaky you are, I can sense you."

Alex jumped and slashed. \*Clang\* Their blades collided. Then they backed away. An expert can judge an opponent's strength from the very first hit. It shows the warrior's power and balance. They both conclude that their opponent is strong. They continued their fight, exchanging a few more moves.

Now, Alex and En were approximately ten paces from each other. They both got into fighting stance, preparing to charge. Alex had his blade pointed forward, while En

kept his horizontal and close to his chest. The wind blew hard and tree leaves fell. A certain leaf landed on the ground - it was so quiet one can hear the leaves fall.

Suddenly, they charged. \*Slash!\*

Both were hit in the upper arm. Alex saw drops of blood on the floor - and it was his own. En covered up his wound. A slice of his suit was exposing his skin.

En stuck two fingers into his mouth and whistled. It was a signal for his men to come. Alex was aware of that, but before he could move a step, ninjas were behind him.

"Damn." Alex said. He looked around. Ninjas came from the side. He was completely surrounded, and he realized that he is just moments away from death.

It is fortunate that his friend Zi was there to help him out. Together, they fought for their own survival, and consequently, En Lo was forced to retreat. Alex groaned from the pain. He had three cuts in total and he was losing blood fast. Jade and Zi were horrified.

"Are you alright, Alex?" Jade asked worriedly.

"I'm fine. These are but minor scratches."

"We need to take you to a doctor immediately." Zi said.

"No." said the fallen hero. "Not a doctor. They will surely find me again."

"Who are those guys anyway? Why do they want you dead?" Zi asked.

"I am not sure, but I have an idea of that man's identity." He took out a golden badge-like object.

Jade and Zi stared at it in surprise. "What is this?"

"It is the imperial badge." Alex responded.

"Imperial badge? That means they are royal troops?" said Zi.

"Yes. I stole it from that man when I was fighting him."

"But why would the imperial troops want you dead? What did you ever do to them?" Jade asked.

"I do not know for sure, but I have an idea. There is no time to explain. He coughed blood. "Urrrgh."

"Alex! Alex!"

His vision became blurry, and his legs weakened. His body, for some reason, weighted ten times heavier, and he fell unconscious on the concrete. Zi and Jade placed him in his own bed and took care of him while he was unconscious.

They were the two closest people Alex had since he lost his parents. They were, and will always be, his best friends, and the only people he will trust.

Another important memory for him is his first day in the Temple. How could one forget the enthusiastic greetings from fellow monks, who would later become his friends during his training?

"Oh, by the way, my name is Shang Zu. Pleasure to meet you." She shook his hand.

"I am Fu Chen." replied the short monk.

"And my name is Chan Lou." replied the tall one.

"My name is Alex Cheng. It is a pleasure to meet you all."

But, the Temple was not all fun and games. Alex trained hard so he can be strong enough to survive his journey. In order to return to the capital city, Alex must travel through the Valley of Death, but Master Guan had other ideas.

Guan sighed. "Fine, if you must forfeit your life, I will not stop you. It is your choice...I will let you leave on one condition...fight with me first."

Everyone was shocked.

"If you cannot even defeat me, you have no right to face the War God."

"Fine, then, master!" replied Alex confidently.

Guan assumed fighting position and they did the stare. Everyone knew that something intense was about to happen, for it is the fight between pupil and teacher. In this fight, no one hated each other, but their disbeliefs are in disagreement, and this is how warriors must get their point across.

Indeed, they have been through a lot since the day Alex came upon the Temple. From the first moment they met, Guan had taking a liking to Alex. His judgment was confirmed by watching Alex's growth throughout these months. However, Guan did not want to admit the fact that, the reason why he likes Alex is that he reminds him of Li Cheng. They are years apart, yet so similar in many ways.

The moment of truth will be decided soon. Without uttering a word, they charged into each other. "Yaaah!" "Yaaah!" Their bamboo sticks collided. \*Clack\* They went past each other without even blinking.

Both their sticks snapped at the collision point. Guan was shocked. A true master can judge an opponent's strength from a single hit. In that moment, Guan changed his mind, and decided to give way. "Very well. You may go." He did not want to say those words, but say them he must. For he knows that a lion who cares about his cubs lets them loose into the wild so they can truly grow strong.

After leaving the Temple of Enlightenment, Alex and Zi went to the Valley and encountered the legendary manslayer, dubbed the War God. They had a duel and lost, but never did Alex know that he will become a student of the War God, one of the best swordsman in the country.

"You are Alex Cheng?"

"Yes, that's me."

The War God smiled. "I heard about you from Master Ho Sai. He told me that you arrive. Do you want to see your sister?"

"Yes I do." Alex replied. "I want to see her very badly."

"The key to finding your sister is through Duke Xiang." said he with the straw hat. "He is a corrupt official who has taken control of the kingdom. You must defeat him, but in order to do so, you must receive my training. Are you ready for what awaits you?"

"I'll do anything to kill that bastard duke." Alex replied confidently.

"The journey ahead will be dangerous. The training you will receive from me is no ordinary training you have experienced from other so-called masters. Are you ready for it?"

"I am ready for anything." he replied passionately.

The War God saw the fire in this young man's eyes. This look reminded him of his sister, Li Cheng, and it made him smile on the inside.

"Are you sure? Because you might lose your life if you do not keep up with my pace. But when I'm done with you...you will be a different man. You will become a true master of the sword."

"Yes master, I understand!"

"Cheng", addressed the War God. "Our time is limited because I know you are in a hurry. If you want to kill Duke Xiang, you better make haste. But in these few

months, you have learned more under my tutelage than you have learned in your lifetime. You have improved greatly, and I am proud of you. Your training is not complete, and it never will be. Just remember that training lasts a life time. But I feel that you are ready, young man. Congratulations, Cheng."

"Thank you, master." Alex and Zi said, and bowed.

"But before you go, I have one more thing for you, Cheng." He grabbed the sword on his waist and held it horizontally. He pulled the sword out of the patch, and it shined in Alex's eyes.

"This is..."

"This is the **Legendary Fire Sword**. It has been a life saver, and it shall help you in your journey."

Alex was shocked. "This is the Legendary Fire Sword...No...I can't possibly accept this...this sword has been your companion for many decades!"

"Yes, it has been a good companion...and now it shall be your companion. This sword will protect you from the **demons**."

Alex took it and held it like gold. "Master...I don't know what to say...I can't thank you enough. I cannot repay you in any way..."

Alex suddenly came back to the present, with his eyes wide open. Ever since he came back from the Valley, he has been holding onto this sword as if it were more important than his own life, and he never goes anywhere without it. Even when he sleeps, he holds it by his side.

He withdrew the sword halfway from its sheath, and stared at his own face in the reflection of the blade. It is said that the Fire Sword of legend can slay 100 demons, and control the element of fire. It is also said that this is one of the strongest swords in the world, forged by a world famous blacksmith, and its blade can never be broken.

## 11 - C Title Contents

The woman was kneeling on the bed, crying sadly. Her tears dripped on the bed. But no matter how much she cried it is useless. All her tears and screams are in vain. Nothing will change the fact that Jiax is using her as his plaything. To him, she is just a female body for his sexual enjoyment. She just happens to be the king's concubine, and happens to be desirable.

Jiax brushes the curtains aside. He's smiling evilly as usual and gets on the bed. Her head is facing down and she doesn't move or utter a word.

Jiax grabs her hair. "It's time to have some fun, woman. Well, aren't you going to beg for your life?"

"You've already did it many times." Celina said with tears. "It is useless to resist. Do what you want."

"Now that's the idea. You're finally becoming obedient." Jiax grabs her head and turns her head to the side so he can kiss her lips. Her tears keep on coming. Her fingers clawed the bed sheet. He grabbed her breast and squeezed.

"Aaah! Aaah!"

After he's through with that, he pushed her down, making her lie down. He got on top of her and grabbed her hands. They were so soft and delicate, he could break them at any time. But he doesn't like screwing disabled woman. He wants to keep her fresh and healthy.

He put his face on her head and smells her hair and sighs. He never gets tired of it. He kissed her shoulders and caresses her back with his face. He treats her back like a pillow. It feels comfortable as he hugs it and caresses. And it's so soft.

Then he grabs her pony tail and lifts up her head. "Heh. I knew I'd break your spirit soon or later. It's good that you accept the facts, my dear. You should enjoy it while you can. Ha ha ha ha!" Then he shoves her face into the pillows and she moaned like hell.

Lord Huong, upon entering Xiang's presence, bowed. "Honorable Duke Xiang." "Ah, Lord Huong, just the person I wanted to see. Everything is going well, on my end, as you can see. What about the concubine? What is her status?"

"Do not worry, she is under our care. There is no way she can escape."

"Good." said Xiang, rubbing his beard. "The foolish king cares so much for one woman. This is his weakness and will ultimately lead to his downfall. What about the other high eunuchs?"

"That is what I wanted to discuss with you." Huong replied. "Lord Yu and Zhang, I suspect, are catching on to our plot. And there is one more person we should be cautious of – Captain Tai."

"Tai? I've never heard of him. He's just a soldier, what threat can he be of to us?"

"We should not underestimate him. He has a...history of breaking the rules. And...he is pretty close with Lady Celina. He knows that she's missing, and he will not rest until she is found. "

"In other words, he is already catching onto our plan? Maybe they are beginning to realize that the king is being manipulated and are coming after you."

Huong stared at Xiang with a confused look.

"Just kidding." Xiang said, nullifying his previous statement. "But we should do something about them eventually. They will only get in our way."

"Are you suggesting that we kill them?"

"People like them can be replaced easily. We must not make any mistakes, understand?" Xiang asked, with a stern look in his face. "If the eunuchs were to team up and plot against me, that would be troublesome."

"Yes, honorable one. I understand." Huong replied, and left the room.

The bandits were sitting besides a table in the garden, eating food prepared by servants. Manchu drank a whole cup of wine. "Ahhh. This is the best. This is the life that we deserve!"

"I'd never dream that we would eat such good food! It's as if we're royalty!" said bandit A.

B: "And it's all thanks to our friend, Jiax. If he hadn't made the deal with the Duke, none of this would've happened."

A: "I'll say. Jiax is a lucky bastard. He gets to have his way with that woman."

B: "You mean...the king's favorite concubine?"

C: "She is being held prisoner by Duke Xiang, and Jiax is the one assigned to watch her. What do you think he's been doing all the time? I often walk by that room and hear her screaming."

A: "Her skin is so smooth and clear, she has a flawless complexion. Her breasts are so round and firm..." He made a perverted gesture with his fingers, grabbing the air. "And her legs...oh her legs are so smooth."

C: "Yeah, high class women are the best. And this one is personally selected by the king. I bet she is good."

A: "Man, what I wouldn't do to get a woman like her."

B: "All we have to do is be patient, and everything will come. Xiang has promised us positions within the court. And once we get it, we'll have plenty of women to choose from!"

All three raised their cups to the air. "To a life of money and power!"

C: "Jiax's orders are to keep her alive. But he's known for being brutal. I hope she can survive."

### Wish for FreedomContents

Celina is tired and exhausted from all the ravaging and torture. She's panting for breath and sweating heavily. She is surrounded by these four walls for God knows how long, and everyday she is being mistreated as if she was an animal. She's wearing nothing but pink ribbons and doesn't even get the dignity to wear clothes. Her body is tired and weak from all the harassment she receives, and she's getting weaker every time. She is nothing more than a mere sex object to that bad man. She always hoped and wished that bad man will not hurt her anymore, but he comes when he pleases and does whatever he wants to her. Her body has suffered much, and she wonders how much more she can take before she finally dies. It has come to the point where she wished she was dead.

She looks at the window and sees two birds chirping happily. How nice it must be for them, she thought. Those birds are free to do as they please. They can fly to anyplace they want to be. As a concubine, she has been confined to this palace and cannot leave without the king's permission. And now, things are even worst. She's a prisoner and lost her freedom a long time ago. There is nothing she can do about it and she's sad thinking about it and a few tear drops dripped from her eyes.

Celina once had a good life as the king's favorite concubine. She did not make any political decisions because she just wasn't into that stuff. The king did everything on his own, but he was able to spend time with her despite all his demanding duties. He took her to see the gardens of the palace from time to time. However, she thought this kind of life was boring. She barely gets to leave the palace, and when she does, she is always accompanied by the king or some guards. She had the envy of all high class women, yet she did not treasure the life she had. Thinking back, that kind of life was luxurious and she took it for granted. If only she treasured it while she could. But it is too late. She's learned her lesson, but it is a lesson learned too late. Those days of peace are only memories now. Memories that she can treasure during times like these.

She thinks that she is the unluckiest woman in the world. No one could have suffered as much as she has suffered. This is much worse than death. How did she end up like this? She was just unlucky enough to be caught with her guard down. There's no way Celina could've seen this coming. Jiax always picks on her. Because she's a woman. Maybe this is her fate to be trapped here. A cruel fate. Since this her fate, and she can do nothing about it, it is pointless to fight back. Whenever Jiax comes, she fights back, but never wins. She tried to talk, but he's not a man who listens to logic. Her words mean nothing to him. All he cares about is tasting her flesh. Each time he's done with her, her spirit dies a little bit. It becomes more and more pointless to fight back. She thought about accepting her fate as it is.

Jiax walks into the room and brushes the curtains aside. "Here I am, baby. Did you miss me?"

Celina did not even look at him. She's been through this routine countless times. Too many times. He gets on top of her and puts his hand on her leg. He grabs her thigh and runs his hand up and down. Celina moaned a little. Jiaz proceeds to touch her face, brushing her hair aside to see her complete face. Then he kisses her neck and shoulder and her neckline. He puts his face between her breasts and caressed them.

Celina's head turned to the side to look at the window. Those birds are still there, chirping without a care in the world. Despite her physical pain, watching those birds



made her feel better. Perhaps one day she will be like a bird, and be free to do whatever she pleases. Maybe she will be lucky and receive death and be an angel and fly away from this world. She just watches and sheds fresh tears as he ravaged her.

Jiax went down to her stomach and kissed the area between the ribbons. He indulged and enjoyed her to the fullest, kissing and licking her skin. Then he went down to her sacred area and grabbed her thighs and started munching. Celina's eyes widened as she felt the extreme pain and discomfort. She thought she could get used to this kind of pain, but how can she? It is unbearable to have a man touch you all over with his filthy body. Her fingers clawed and grabbed the bed sheet tightly and never let go.

"Zi! Zi!" cried a voice from a distance.

By now, Zi, who was sitting on the wall, ran out of alcohol. He held the bag upside down, just in case there are a few drops left.

"Zi!" said Alex.

"What is it?"

"I've already decided..." he said, panting for breath. "Let's do our best for tomorrow's mission."

Zi smiled. "I plan to do that already."

"Let's all survive, okay? I don't want anyone to die."

"Surviving is my middle name!"

"Yes. It's a promise then!" said Alex.

"Of course you have to live. There's someone who is waiting for your return."

"Huh?"

"I'm talking about Jade, of course." Zi said, winking.

"Oh right, her. Yes. Of course. Haha."

"We have been through a lot, haven't we?" Zi said, on a more serious note. They both stared at the bright moon.

Jade gazed into the stars in the sky. She held onto the pendant on her neck. "Oh Gods of the Heavens, please give your blessings to Alex. May he overcome his obstacles and survive tomorrow."

Master Ho Sai, while meditating, was pondering about the same person. (The critical event will be tomorrow night. Tomorrow, Cheng will either be a hero...or a dead man.)

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## 十二: Barrage! A Chance Encounter with a Maiden.

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This mission is going to be dangerous, and some of us might get killed. Alex was polishing his sword with a handkerchief. He was completely focused on his task, and his eyes beamed with the light of the blade, and lost track of time as he studied its details carefully. Zi came into his room. "Alex, it's time."

Those were the words he was waiting for this whole time.

"Alright." Alex put the Fire Sword back in its sheath and left the room.



Their moment of fate has brought them here, standing in front of the lake. Tai, the leader of the group, turned around and asked "If anyone wants to go back now, it is not too late."

"We are already committed." said one of the soldiers. "To turn back means the fall of our kingdom. We will not let that happen."

"Good. Mr. Lai."

"Yes?" Zi replied.

"Are you good at swimming?"

"Swimming is one of my many talents." said he.

"And you, Mr. Cheng?"

"I've been swimming as long as I've been holding a sword." said Alex.

"What about you masked fighters?"

"Do not worry about us." said Fong Long "We are skilled in many areas."

"Good. Let us proceed."

The group, led by Captain Tai, jumped into the lake and swims forward. At the end of the lake, there was a wall, and on that wall is a waterway that connects to the tunnel. While still holding their breaths, they continued swimming into the waterway. Once they came up to the surface, everyone took deep breaths. This is the secret tunnel that they mentioned; one that has a cave-like structure. Indeed it is pretty ancient, full of moss and spider webs.

Meanwhile, Lord Zhang and Lord Yu were riding on horses, waiting on a hilltop, with the palace within visible range. Zhang was observing the situation with his binoculars.

"Sir Zhang, I am not so sure about this." Yu said, still doubtful of their plan.

"This is the only viable plan to save our kingdom." Zhang replied. "Tai and his group are going to sneak inside to rescue the concubine and the king, while we attack from the front. Xiang will be distracted with the army, which takes his focus away from the intruders."

"It seems that we will make unnecessary sacrifices for our attack."

"Sacrifices are necessary. It is a small price to pay for justice, isn't it?"

After the group went through the tunnel, they reached one of the ponds of the palace, and went into the water and out of it. Once everyone was out of the water, it was time to clarify the mission.

"I will go find the concubine, Lady Ce. You two will find the duke and distract him." said Tai, referring to Alex and Zi. "After I find Lady Ce, I will take her to the king at the royal hall, which is our rendezvous point. As we speak, Zhang and Yu's army will attack the front gate, which will cause all the soldiers to defend the palace. There should be little or no soldiers around, allowing you to run about freely. Understood?"

"Yes!" Alex and Zi replied, and off they went to their separate ways.

These were the recreational areas of the palace, the place where palace ladies and lords come to observe the scenery or have a cup of tea, and it was easy to see people walking by.

Guards saw Alex's group in the garden. "Hey you!!"

Alex and his group ran away from the soldiers, but they were stopped in their tracks.

"Identify yourself!" yelled the guard.

Everyone drew their weapons and charged. A big sword fight ensued, and at night, it was hard to tell friend from foe. Alex and Zi fought well, indicating that their training paid off after all.

One of the guards whistled, and more guards came from the hallways.

"Alex? Alex? Damn!" Zi couldn't get near his friend, he was distracted by troops trying to kill him. The number of enemy troops became overwhelming, the heroes had no choice but to disperse and flee.

Alex was once again on his own, just like that time when he was lost in the forest. But this time it is different because he is a much better fighter. He ran through the imperial garden, slashing any guard that got in his way, leaving a trail of dead bodies.

Outside the palace, the rebel soldiers were gathered and ready to launch their attack. The archers stood in a straight line, and lit their arrows on fire. The captain gave the signal, and the archers pulled back the strings. Everyone felt the tension in the air, as this is the moment of truth. Once the archers fire, the battle will officially begin.

The captain swings his arms, and the archers released the strings. \*Twang!\*

An arrow hit one of the palace guards on duty. His buddy, who was next to him, was shocked. "We're under attack! Repeat, we're under attack!" \*Twang\* An arrow struck his neck and he died instantly.

Palace archers came to the roof and fired back. The entire rebel army charged towards the wall. Those with ladders put it vertically against the wall so others could climb up.

"It has begun." announced Lord Yu.

### Encounter With A Maiden Contents

A woman's screams were heard in the hallway. Celina was backed against the wall, arms crossed over her chest, and shivering in fear, as the bandit approached. This was business as usual for Jiax...but for Celina, this is sheer hell. To the bandit, this is just a game...and the one who always **loses** is her.

"He he he...come here..." Jiax taunted, slowly approaching his victim.

"No! Stay away!" she yelled.

Turning around, she saw the window next to her. Then she turned to face Jiax. "Don't come closer...or I'll jump!" At this point, dying did not seem like such a bad idea, it was certainly better than living a life of hell.

"Oh, are you threatening me?" Jiax said, amused.

"Stay away..." She crawled onto the window's stool, and now she was standing on the edge. The window was taller than a person and the head was round. Her hands held onto the head of the window. She was standing in an X position, with legs spread out and arms diagonal.

She looked at the night sky and then looked down below. The ground was far far below her and she felt the chilly air against her skin.

"What's the matter? I thought you were gonna jump?" Jiax approached ever closer.

Celina was sure she wanted to end her life, but now that she was staring death in the face, she changed her mind. There was a small ledge that connected to the window stool, it was small enough to fit half a foot. Soon, he's going to pull her back down...and do more horrible things to her. She had to risk it...she put her left foot on the ledge, while her hand held loosely onto one of the bricks. Then she slowly moved her right foot towards the ledge. In this position, she was completely off balance.

Jiax noticed the loose ribbon dangling from her hip. He pulled it, and she gasped, and slipped. "Aaaaah!" During the fall, she managed to turn around and face the wall, and her hands grabbed onto the window stool.

Jiax stared at her in amusement, resting his chin on his hand. "What's the matter? Too scared to die?"

Given her strength, she could not hold on forever, but that short time she may be cut shorter. He took out a knife from his pocket, the blade sparkled. "I wonder how much longer you can hold out." he taunted.

Poor Celina feared for the worst. Not only was her life hanging on by her bare hands, but now she must deal with more dangers. Jiax thrust the knife downwards, and she tilted her head and to avoid it. He thrust the left side, she tilted right, while screaming for her life. He thrust the left right, she tilted left, while screaming for her life. In her weakened state, carrying her body weight with her bare hands was hard enough, but now she had to keep dodging, making her lose strength. He kept thrusting it over and over until he was satisfied.

He placed the knife's tip on the back of her hand. "What would happen if I do this?"

"No, please!" she cried helplessly.

He pressed the tip into her skin. It started to hurt and she winced and made noises. He gradually pressed it deeper. Her left hand loosened and slid off the stool a bit. Now she was hanging on by her five fingers. Then he placed the tip of the blade on her right hand.

"Please, no!" she cried desperately.

Jiax could sense her desperation...her look and her begging. Having control over someone else's life was a thrill for him. He pressed the tip into her skin, slowly going deeper and deeper. She winced and made noises. No matter how much she resisted, her right hand loosened slid off the stool a bit. And now she was hanging literally by her fingers.

He rested his chin and smiled wickedly. "Let's see." He held her pinky with his fingers. "This little piggy went to the bank." He pulled her pinky off the edge...and four fingers remained.

"Please stop it!" cried Celina.

"This little piggy went to the mall." He pulled her ring finger off, and now only three fingers remained on her left hand.

"Please, no!"

"This little piggy went home." He pulled her middle finger off. Only the index finger and thumb remained, but they did not have any strength and just fell off.

Now she was hanging on with just one hand. She was only moments away from death.

"No, don't! I'll do anything! Please don't!"

"This little piggy went to the bank." He pulled her pinky off the edge...and four fingers remained.

"This little piggy went to the mall." He pulled her ring finger off, and now only three fingers remained. But the remaining fingers did not have enough leverage, and they slipped off...and off she screamed as she fell into the **darkness of the abyss**.

While falling, Celina thought that her life was over for good. Her whole life flashed before her eyes in those few seconds. She had flashes of herself as a child living in the orphanage - those were the earliest memories. Although she had difficulty making friends, at least those were happy and peaceful times. Later on, she became a dancer at the tender age of ten, and proceeded to become an official entertainer of

royalty. Then at some point, the king chose her to become his concubine, and that was the turning point of her life.

Unfortunately, the last few moments of her life were not happy memories. Celina was still young and wanted to do many things and go to different places, but now she cannot do any of them. She experienced something that she never should have, yet it happened to her over and over – worse than any nightmare conceivable. Her life was taken away by a gang of brutes, tortured and violated day and night. Even until the very end, she was fighting to stay alive, yet for what reason, she did not know.

But the fighting and struggling is over. This is the end of her sad, pathetic existence. She closed her eyes, and her tears sparkled in the sky. Not only did Celina lose her body, but everything that is important to a person – freedom, happiness, and her reputation as well. She can never face the king again, nor anyone for that matter.

It is all over now, because in death, there will be no more pain, and no more suffering.

Alex came to the courtyard after being separated from his group. He was unfamiliar with this big place, and found himself lost. At night, everything looks the same, which added to the confusion. He came to this particular courtyard after scouting for enemies, and after deciding that it's safe, he came in. As he looked up, he saw a woman falling from above. There was no time to be surprised, because she was about to hit the ground. He ran to the spot where she would land and opened his arms.

\*Plop\* Alex caught her and his arms felt the force of her fall. To his utter surprise, she was wearing nothing except for pink ribbons bandaged around her body. Her semi-conscious face was somewhat angelic...and Alex thought she might be an angel that fell from the sky.

Celina opened her eyes, thinking she was dead, but she was shocked to find that she is alive...and in the arms of a stranger. Both of them stared into each other's eyes in disbelief. Alex was speechless...because it isn't everyday that a beautiful, naked woman falls into his arms. He has never been comfortable being in close proximity with a woman, so this situation was completely foreign to him.

But Celina was more scared than he was. Who is this stranger with silver hair that she is staring at? He came out of nowhere and saved her from certain doom...and he has the most intense, yet caring eyes that she has seen in a man. Her eyes were shaking and she blushed.

"Are you...okay, miss?"

"Uhhh...yes...can you put me down?"

"Uhh, sure." Alex put her down on her feet.

Celina's head was facing down, and very close to his chest, and her hands were holding on to his robe

They were still too close for comfort, and remained speechless.

"You're not hurt, are you?" asked Alex.

She was clinging onto his robe, staring at his chest, unable to speak. Then she looked down and saw his sword. Then she gasped and moved away from him.

"Y-You're...one of them." said Celina frightfully, moving away.

"One of them?"

Celina took another step back. When Alex realized that she was staring at his sheath, he said: "No wait. This isn't what you think!"

Those words have no effect on her, and she continued to back away like a frightened kid would retreat from a bully. "N-No!" she whimpered.

"I'm one of the good guys! I'm not the bad guy!"

"D-Don't come near me!"

But the more that Alex approached, the more scared she grew, and she stepped back even further. Then, she suddenly screamed, and turned around and ran for it.

"Listen to me!" Alex shouted impatiently, and tried to grab her.

But he grabbed the loose ribbon instead, the ribbon that was on her breasts. He pulled it and made her spin a few times, and also revealed the top of her breasts. When Alex saw what he had done, he blushed in surprise and his eyes opened wide. He had never seen a real live naked woman before, and he could not believe what he had done. It was a bad thing, yet his hand would not let go of the ribbon. This was certainly a sight that any man would enjoy, and will probably be burned into his memory.

Celina, having her skin revealed to him even more, grew more frightened, and stood there dumbfounded. She stared at the stranger with shaking eyes, like that of a prey about to be hunted down. Then she shrieked and made a run for it.

"No wait!" he yelled, still trying to convince her. He tried to hold her still, but accidentally grabbed her breasts. For almost a whole second, he did not know what he grabbed, but they felt really soft and firm, much like a pair of meat buns.

Celina could not believe it either. She felt his hands on her breasts, and she looked down and blushed.

"I'm sorry!" Alex said.

She shoved him away and ran to the wall, but now there was no where to run. "D-Don't come near me!" Her back faced the wall, and she had to face the stranger, who was approaching her step by step.

"Just let me explain." Alex said, but none of these words seem to be getting through to her. Everything he's done has made the situation worse, but he still he did not yet have the chance to explain himself.

Celina's arms were crossed over her chest defensively, and her arms were shaking. Her legs were trembling all over, and she just watched helplessly as he got close to her step by step. Her expression was that of fear and pain, and who could blame her, given all that she's been through? But Alex does not know about that, and is still confused as to why she's acting so hostile towards him.

"No, no!" she cried out, with her arms over her shoulders.

Alex grabbed her by the shoulders. "Listen to me, will you!?"

She winced and shut her eyes, fearing for the worst.

Sensing danger, Alex turned around and saw three soldiers behind him. Celina, who was confused, just stared in awe. The soldiers were laughing and snickering at them.

"What have we got here? Intruders." said the first.

"Let's kill the boy and take the girl." said the other, and they snickered.

"Like hell that's going to happen." Alex replied with hostility.

"Oh it looks like we got a spunky one. Let's teach him a good lesson."

Alex ran into the group of soldiers and fought them head on. \*Clang\*

Celina knew that this was her only chance of escaping. Her feet moved away from the wall, but she could not help but watch the fight, as if she cared about the results. Slowly but surely, she reached the entrance of the building, with her eyes still fixated on the silver haired man.

Suddenly, she felt something breathing on her head. "So, you're still alive, eh?"

Celina gasped, as she recognized the voice. She turned around, and saw Jiax, and he grabbed her by the neck. "Aaaaah!!!"

Upon hearing the scream, Alex decided to finish this. \*Slash\* He finished all three of his opponents in one quick motion. He hurried back to the girl, who was under the stranglehold of Jiax. "Don't move boy! Or she gets it." said Jiax, pointing his sword at Alex.

Celina struggled to get free but her movements were in vain. Her hands tried to pull his heavy arm off her neck, but she did not have enough strength to do so. She winced from the pain on her neck, as his thick arm was crushing her, and it was extremely uncomfortable.

"Let her go!" Cheng demanded.

"I call the shots here, boy!" Jiax retorted, exerting his authority. "Don't make any sudden movements."

Cheng grunted angrily, unable to do anything. "You're a coward...using a woman as your shield."

"Ohhh? You seem to care a lot about her, don't cha? Stab yourself and I'll let her live."

Cheng's eyes grew angrier.

"If you don't stab yourself, I'll kill her!" said Jiax. "So what are you waiting for?"

Damn, Cheng thought, what a bad situation to be in. He knew that this bandit will never keep his word. So he had to try calling his bluff. "Hmph. I don't even know her. Why would I die for that woman?"

"Oh, so you don't care, eh? Then you won't mind if I do this." Jiax, using his free hand, grabbed Celina's right breast and squeezed it.

"No, please!!" she said, moaning painfully.

"Hey, stop!" demanded Cheng.

Jiax was getting excited and aroused. "What are you going to do about it, boy? Huh?"

Cheng was pissed off, and his hand clenched the Fire Sword tightly. Jiax could tell that he was angry, and he continued his lewd acts to the poor woman. For some reason, he derives a sick pleasure from torturing Celina and pissing this guy off.

"What'd happen if I do this?" Jiax moved his hand to her thigh.

"Ugh!!" Celina groaned in pain.

His hand rummaged through her thigh, moving up and down and feeling her skin all over. Then he went up the ribbons, into the vagina area. She groaned even louder. "Ughh!! Uuuugh!"

"What are you going to do boy? Ha ha ha ha!"

This man is despicable, and Cheng could not hide his anger any longer. The Fire Sword in his hand was **glowing red**, as if reflecting his emotions.

"UHHH! Please stop!!" Celina shrieked, squirming left and right as she was being violated.

"Let her go...now." Cheng demanded. By now, the Fire Sword was already on fire. Unable to keep his composure, he ran forward, not caring about the consequences.

Jiax suddenly pushed Celina into him, and he ran away. Alex dropped his sword and held her by the shoulders, as her face was buried in his chest. Then she looked up at him, and they stared into each other's eyes in shock.

Celina was embarrassed and her face was blushing with redness, and her eyes were shaking from anxiousness. Things were happening too fast. Just moments ago, she was being violated, and Alex saw the whole thing. She was still embarrassed about what happened, and she stared frightfully at his eyes, wondering what his intentions are.

Cheng was mesmerized by her beauty. This woman was completely different

than other beautiful women he had seen...there was something special about her, and the look in her eyes. Her body was soft and her skin was nearly flawless. But it was the look in her eyes that kept his attention – they were so big and lively, and full of life, and the fact that she's afraid of him made her even more attractive. She fell into his arms, and now she is in his arms again, and he doesn't want to let her go.

"Don't worry." Cheng said. "I'll take care of that scoundrel. I won't let anything happen to you."

She was dumbfounded and did not say anything. But his words were strong and confident and she believed him. She may have doubted him earlier, but now Celina is certain that he is on her side. And also, he came out of nowhere and saved her from certain doom, it must be fate for them to have met.

Suddenly, he pulled her into him and kissed her lips. This move caught her by complete surprise. Although Celina did not like being touched by men, she could not bring herself to fight back. Something about him was different...she could feel all his emotions through his lips, full of passion, full of youth, and also, provides a sense of safety and security.

Then he let her go, after what seemed like forever. "I'll come back for you, so wait for me." said Alex. He grabbed his sword and ran off.

Celina just stared at his back, completely shocked by what just happened. Seconds later, she broke out of her trance like state, and realizing that she wasn't wearing much, she hid somewhere in the bushes.

Meanwhile, Lord Yu was observing the battle through his binoculars. "How are we doing?" asked Zhang.

"See for yourself." said Yu, passing him the binoculars.

Zhang, looking through the binoculars, caught a glimpse of the battle. Many people were being killed, but their army was able to climb up the walls with their ladders, so they are making progress. "I certainly hope this plan works. We're sacrificing so many soldiers."

"This attack is just a distraction. Whether the plan works or not, it's up to Tai and his group."

## Zi Meets The Maiden Contents

Hiding in the bushes, Celina watched the soldiers move about. There was a lot of activity on the premises. Perhaps there is a battle being fought nearby? Things were moving too fast and she did not understand what was happening. In fact, she did not understand anything from the beginning. All she knew was that she was thrown in a merciless situation, and she was scared and alone. Celina became a prisoner of bandits and she was mistreated the whole time she was captive. Wearing nothing but ribbons around her body, she was vulnerable and helpless, and obviously did not want anyone to discover her. All she wanted was a safe place to rest so she doesn't have to be harassed anymore.

Nearby, Zi was hiding as well. He crawled through the bushes silently. The battle was so chaotic that he was separated from his group, and he cannot do much alone. Just then, he saw movements in the bush across from him. He grew nervous, thinking it is an enemy. It could be a small animal, but he had to make sure. He was not about to let himself be ambushed, but rather, he will be the one giving the surprise attack.

Zi counted to three mentally, and leaped into the bush and attacked. "Hyaaaah!"

Celina shrieked as something jumped out of the bush and grabbed her. He grabbed her wrists, pushing her onto the ground and ended up on top of her. But then he realized that this is not the face of an enemy, it is the face a woman. Not just any woman, but one who is innocent and beautiful, and partially exposed.

Zi thought he was dreaming. The only things covering her body were ribbons, and the top of her breasts were exposed, and he stared in awe.

Celina moaned a little and opened her eyes. Seeing a stranger on top of her, she gasped in fear.

Zi, seeing the fear in her eyes, realized that she thinks he's an enemy. "It's not what you think," he muttered.

Celina pushed him away and crawled backwards. Zi was dumbfounded as he saw her full figure for the first time. She was attractive from head to toe, and Zi could not resist staring at her features. After all, she had a body that no straight man could resist. The only thing covering her frail, naked body were loops and loops of ribbons.

Her legs were almost entirely exposed, and she had the smooth, flawless skin that was begging to be touched. Her legs alone were enough to make Zi swallow hard, but he saw some cleavage as well. Her breasts were covered by ribbons, but one could see their shape easily. They were perfectly round and big, and they could not be ignored. And her face was beautiful as well, particularly when she is fearful.

Zi leered at her face, and then at her legs, and then at her face again.

"W-Who are you?" she shrieked. "Y-You're one of them, aren't you?"

"One of them?" Zi repeated blankly.

Celina stood up and attempted to run away.

"No, wait!!" Zi yelled, running after her. He grabbed her shoulder and arm, and made her turn around to face him, and he noticed how beautiful she was. The way that she flung her hair in the hair, the way that she was looking at him with her innocent look, everything about her was graceful. Her eyes were big and innocent, and she stared at him like a frightened, wounded animal.

He was dumbfounded for a moment and Celina shook her arm free and ran for it.

"Hey, wait!" Zi shouted. He chased her and grabbed the loose ribbon and pulled it, and she was spinning away like a human top. More of her breasts were revealed as she was spinning helplessly, and Zi couldn't believe his eyes. Even though he pulled it by accident, he did not regret doing it at all.

Celina just stared at him with her frightful eyes, scared of what he might do next. He might try to pull it all off and expose her completely. She instinctively covered her breasts with her hands.

"It was an accident...I didn't mean to!" Zi said, with his hand still on the ribbon. Even though he said as such, his hand did not let go.

"No!" she screamed.

Zi pulled the ribbon, and pulled her closer to him.

"You must listen to me...I'm..." He stepped forward and tripped on a rock, and fell on top of her. \*Thud\*

Zi's face landed on something soft and cushion-like, and it felt comfortable. As he moved his face against it, he realized that he was on this woman's breasts.

Celina stared at him in awe, not knowing what to do. Zi quickly sat up and once again tried to explain himself. "It was an accident! I didn't mean to!"

She screamed and pushed him away, making him fall on his behind. Celina crawled backwards until she was against a tree. "No...stay away from me!" she pleaded.

Zi walked towards her, and the closer he got, the more frightened she became.



"No, no!"

Zi tripped over a rock and fell on top of her. His head landed between her legs. Before he realized what had happened, he felt something very smooth and warm on both sides of his face. Then he looked up and saw Celina.

Zi was speechless. "Uhhh..."

Celina shrieked and screamed and kicked him in the face countless times. He tried to defend himself and talk it out, but she would not listen to him no matter what, and continued her thrashing. Frustrated from the kicks on the face, he grabbed her leg and twisted it, and Celina groaned from the pain.

"Uuuugh!"

"I am not the enemy. Why won't you listen, damn it?"

How could she listen to him, while he was holding her leg to the air, and hurting her like so? Who can blame Celina after what she has been through? All she wants is to be left alone. How can she trust a stranger after being violated sexually day and night by a gang of brutes?

Her fingers grabbed the dirt and she moaned while he grabbed her leg. Zi did not care what it took, but he was going to make her listen. He grabbed her arms and they were on top of each other, staring directly in the eyes. They could feel each other's breaths, and it was extremely uncomfortable for Celina. She was never one to be comfortable around men, especially at this close of a distance.

"Just listen! I am on your side! I work for Captain Tai."

"Why should I believe you?" It was difficult for her to speak, but she managed to summon up all her courage to say those words. She was on the brink of tears, and her fear showed in her shaking voice.

"I don't expect you to trust me. But I am your only chance of escaping!"

"H-How do I know you're not lying?"

"If I was working for the Duke, I'd already have my way with you. Why would I need to convince you?" he yelled angrily.

That statement actually made sense, and she finally began to listen to him.

"Look, I am going to let you go, alright?" Zi let go of her wrists and sat up.

Celina sat up and finally began to listen to his reasoning. "Shu Tai sent you here?"

"Yes, my name is Zi Lai. We staged a rebellion and tonight is the night we attack. I'm afraid it is too late to leave from the front. We will have to find a safe place here to hide until the fighting is over. I am not asking you to trust me completely. Once I help you escape this place then you will believe me. We should move to another location, it's not safe to walk around...wearing that."

Celina knew he was referring to her exposed body, and blushed and put her arms over her breasts and looked away. This stranger named Zi claims to be on her side, but she still cannot trust him...because he is a man. It is natural for her to be distrusting, particularly in her situation.

"Don't worry. Like I said, I am here to help you." Suddenly, he sensed footsteps from nearby. Two soldiers walked into the perimeter. "We have company. Come this way before they find us."

Zi, taking her by the hand, walked over to the opposite side, where the wall was located. They crouched low and are hidden underneath the thick bushes.

"Hey I thought I heard something here." said soldier A.

"Are you sure?" asked soldier B. "Should we have a look around?"

Zi: (This is bad. If they discover us here, it will be inconvenient for me to fight with her around. If we fight here they will surely call for help, and since we are in the middle of the enemy's territory, we will be surrounded.) "Listen," he whispered to

Celina, "No matter what you do, don't make a sound." Zi looked at her and became shocked when he saw a snake slithering about the tree behind her.

Its head was close to her hair and was about to make its way to her shoulder. "What is it?" Celina whispered, being uncomfortable with his staring.

"Don't move an inch." he replied.

Celina, feeling something slimy on her shoulder, saw the snake's head and began to scream. Zi suddenly pounced on her and placed his lips upon hers to stop her from screaming. If she screamed the soldiers would hear them, and they will be attacked. Zi landed on top of her, and his lips were pressed against hers firmly, while he grabbed her wrists, keeping them from moving.

Celina opened her eyes and found herself in an awkward situation. With his lips firmly pressed against hers, and her wrists held down, she could do little to struggle. This man claims he is her ally, yet is taking advantage of her. Poor Celina, she wished this would be over with, for this is a situation she has been in countless times, and is once again forced to endure. Each passing second feels like an hour, and each hour feels like an eternity, and it is sheer hell for her.

But as for Zi, he is enjoying every moment of it. Her lips tasted sweet and soft against his lips, much like a sweet candy that one eats after dinner. She might not agree with this, but this was the only way to prevent her from screaming; so in his mind, he is not doing wrong; he is saving them both. He has no choice but to do this, and he is mentally apologizing, and hopefully Celina will understand once this is over.

The soldiers walked by the very bush they were hiding under and stopped. "I see nothing here. It must have been your imagination. Come, we have to join the fight." said soldier B, and off they went.

Even in this position, Zi was focused on the movements of the soldiers. He could hear their footsteps and determine how far they are from where he is. Once the soldiers left completely, Zi stopped the kiss, and Celina shrieked and slapped him.

"That's how you repay someone who saved your life?"

"Was there no other way?" she asked, almost yelling. Clearly, she is mad, and she has every reason to be. But this time, no amount of explaining will be enough.

"I'm sorry, I had no choice." Zi said. But secretly, he would've wanted the kiss to last much, much longer. "Look this place isn't safe. We have to get in doors."

They stood up and began to walk. "I hope you're not mad about that, miss...umm...I never got your name."

"You need not know." she replied, looking away.

"Why can't you tell me?"

"My identity is not important."

Zi showed a face of distrust. He drew his sword and she was shocked. "If you can't tell me your identity, then you can't be trusted. Now that I think about it, how do I know **you** are not working for the Duke?"

"No, it's not what you think." she said.

He pointed the sword at her chest, and she gasped. Now, the situation is different, for she is the one who has to explain herself.

"There's a reason why you're hiding your identity." said Zi, poking the tip of the blade against the top of her breast. She winced as the blade made contact with her exposed skin. "Fess up, you're working as a spy, aren't you?"

"No...you've got it all wrong!" Celina said. There was no way she could reveal he true identity to him. How can she tell him that the one he just kissed is a member of royalty...the king's concubine no less. How can she explain to this man that the concubine is running around outside with no clothes on, indecently exposed in public

like this? It would bring shame to the king and all of the royal family. Even if she tell him, he would not believe it anyway.

Zi moved the blade to her chin, and she turned to the side and shut her eyes and whimpered. "The Duke is an evil person. Anyone who follows him is just as evil."

How will Celina explain herself out of this situation? She was too scared to say anything. She can't reveal her identity, and if she doesn't, who knows what this man will do to her?

Zi slowly moved the blade down to her neck, and down to her breasts, continuing to the ribbons, cutting the top few pieces.

Celina gasped in fear, and her face was blushing red. Not only has her skin been exposed to this man, but now, more will be exposed to him, and that is the last thing she wanted.

"No...you must believe me!"

"How I can believe someone who doesn't tell me her name?"

Zi pointed the blade between her legs, and she gasped. "Ahhh..."

"Your skin isn't bad at all..." he said, moving the blade higher and higher, running along the skin of her leg. It touched the bottom most ribbon. Celina's heart was beating rapidly, and it nearly jumped out of her chest. She grew more and more desperate as Zi tantalizingly moved the blade up, cutting the ribbons along the way. He was a mere two seconds away from her flesh, and Celina prayed for her womanhood. "I should just have my way with you right now..."

Celina whimpered and a tear drop appeared in the corner of her eye.

"It's too bad I'm not that kind of person." Then he retracted his sword. "That's what I would do if I work for the Duke. But, luckily for you, that is not the case."

Celina just looked at him in surprise.

Zi: "If you want to escape this place in one piece, then you have to trust me." Suddenly, he sensed soldiers coming. "Quick, this way!" He took her hand and they ran for it; she had no time to object at all. But at least, being with him is better than being hunted down by these soldiers.

## 12 - C Title Contents

Xiang walked to and fro, seemingly concerned about something. King Liu, sitting on the chair, asked, "What is going on outside?"

"There is nothing to worry about, your highness." Xiang replied. "Everything is under control."

It is clear that the duke is hiding something very important. The king heard rumors that some of the eunuchs are staging a rebellion. Perhaps they are trying to force their way into the palace. King Liu truly hopes that it's the truth, because they are his only hope for him to escape this situation.

## The LibraryContents

Zi took Celina to a safe place and he slammed the door. Both of them leaned against the door and panted for breath. "They won't find us here." Zi said.

"This is the imperial library." Celina said. "If we go to the other end then are close to the royal hall."

"It's good that you're familiar with this place." said Zi.

"We must hurry." she said, starting to walk.

Suddenly, Zi pointed his sword at her shoulder, which surprised her. "How do you know about the imperial library?" Zi became more suspicious. "Only the king and his closest people are allowed to enter this place."

She did not know to reply. "I..."

"I still don't know your identity."

Celina moved backwards until her back was against the wall, and Zi kept his blade tip pointed at her. "It's...it's not what you think..."

"You could be working for the Duke...maybe you're leading me into a trap." The blade was at her face, and she could feel the cold hard steel. She turned her head to the side and silently prayed for her life.

He moved the blade to her chin and Celina swallowed hard. Zi moved the blade down to her neck, and moved it down her neckline, until the tip of the blade was pointed between her breasts.

"No...you have it all wrong." she pleaded desperately.

"So tell me, how do you know so much?"

Celina once again finds herself at the mercy of a man with a sword. She thought being with him would be safe, but now things have changed for the worst.

"You have to believe me...I'm unarmed!"

"Which makes you even more suspicious." Zi moved the sword down to the area between her legs. "How do I know you're not hiding any weapons in here?" The blade slowly moved up until it touched the bottommost ribbon, and Celina gasped and feared for the worst.

Suddenly, two soldiers came and Zi turned around. This is no time for idle chit chat. The soldiers attacked and Zi fought. Clang! Celina hid behind Zi and shrieked. Even though he was not trustworthy, it is still better to stick with him than be killed.

Clang! It was hard to fight with a woman clinging to his back, but he did what he could. Clang! Cling!

Celina backed off to a safer distance, and a soldier grabbed her from behind, and she gasped.

"I got you!"

She tried to escape, but she was in his grip.

Zi just finished off his opponents.

The soldier pulled Celina's ribbon, making her spin, and revealing more of her exposed body. She was spinning away from him and he found it amusing to toy with it.

Zi grabbed her ribbon and pulled. "Let her go!"

"She's mine! I saw her first!" said the soldier.

"No, I saw her first!" Zi said.

They were both pulling the two ends of the ribbons of her body, and poor Celina could do nothing as she was caught in the middle. She was being pulled left and right, and she moaned helplessly.

"You know what, you can have her." Then Zi let her go, and she fell into the soldier's arms. Then Zi punched his face, knocking him out.

Zi: "More of them are coming! Hide somewhere."

Celina nodded and ran into the shelves and shelves of books. She heard sounds of fighting and guys screaming. Hopefully, Zi will survive and get her out of this place.

In the meantime, she can finally take a breath of relief. Someone was sneaking behind her quietly while she did not know what was happening. He grabbed her breasts and she gasped.

"I have you now!" He smelled her hair and squeezed her breasts, and she groaned in pain. She struggled and he pushed her against the column, knocking some books down, and forced his body upon hers. He banged her head against the shelf

continuously. Thud! Thud! Books fell off the column. She screamed in pain as he kept on banging her head. Then he proceeded to smell her hair and he sighed in pleasure.

Celina had nothing to hold onto but the metal bars of the shelf, while he violated her from behind. He kissed her shoulders and neck, and her back. His hands grabbed her thigh and touched it all over.

Clang! Clang! Two soldiers attacked Zi at the same time, and he defended while he was moving backwards. He took a hard swing, knocking both their swords away, and kicked the first one away, and slashed the second.

But no one was there to help poor Celina. She had to fight on her own, and she was weaponless and weak, and being harassed by a perverted soldier. She ran away, the troop grabbed the ribbon on her back and pulled her into him. He slapped her, knocking her against the shelf, and she fell and books fell on top of her.

She was unconscious and that means defenseless. The troop walked over to her and removed the books from her body excitedly. It was like unwrapping a present.

He grabbed her leg and moved his hand into the ribbons, slowly going into her sacred area, and she moaned unconsciously. He was excited as his hand got closer and closer to the ultimate destination. Once he reached it, Celina groaned out loud. The soldier turned her face over to him and he just stared at her in awe. Her lips were so luscious and inviting, and that is exactly the next thing he is going to do. As he put his lips closer to hers, she woke up and gasped. She pushed him and he grabbed Celina's arms and put them to the side and he laughed. He pushed her right arm to the left, and her left arm to the right, putting them over her neck. It was a painful thing for her, and she just groaned in pain. "Ughhhh!!"

He enjoys picking on weaker people. He just stared at her face and laughed while she suffered. "Ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha!"

His grip on her was tight, and she was being crushed by her own arms. There was nothing she could do to escape this hell. Her legs thrashed about, and she turned her head side to side, but it was no use. She was under his mercy, and tears dripped down her eyes while she screamed and groaned.

Clang! Slash! Zi just beat up some more troops, but they keep on coming.

The soldier was still torturing poor Celina the same way, pushing her left arm to the right, and her right arm to the left. He held her wrists tightly and pushed them to their limits, and she groaned helplessly.

In this situation, being the concubine did not matter. She is supposed to have the respect of her people, yet she is being violated sexually by an imperial soldier, one who works for the duke. This palace, which is supposed to be her home, has now turned into her hell. How did she ever get into such an unlucky situation? That does not matter, but what matters is what happens to her now.

Celina screamed and screamed, but it was no use resisting. She cannot even reveal the fact that she is the concubine. Will he believe her? Will he care? Many soldiers have switched over to the duke's side, and they are morally corrupt. Revealing her identity will only make things worst for her...but can things really get worse than this?

Eventually, he got tired of it and pulled her arms off of her neck. Still holding onto her wrists, he put her left hand on the left side, and her right hand to the right side, and he proceeded to force his lips upon hers. It was a horrible moment for her. To be violated by a stranger in the library was the last thing she wanted.

A troop was knocked on a table, and the table broke his fall. Crash! Zi was becoming impatient with all this fighting. He was in a hurry to save that woman, and she could be in danger right now.

Celina was being pressed against the shelves, and books fell off as he forced himself onto her. He kissed her lips and held her arms to prevent the struggling. She pushed him off and ran for it, and the soldier grabbed her from behind.

Wham! The soldier, twisting Celina's arm to her back, grabbed her head slammed her on the table. Piles of books fell off. She was also helpless in this position, and he can practically break her limbs if he wanted to. She groaned painfully as he laughed. The upper half of her body was on the table, while her legs were standing at the edge. He was making her bend over, and he leaned in close and kissed her back all over.

Poor Celina once again found herself in an unfortunate predicament. And things were never in her favor.

She was being bullied because she was weak. That is the way the world works. How naïve she was to think that everything is fair and just. No, it is quite the opposite. This man was bully her because she is a woman, and she is weak and unable to defend herself.

This was what she was thinking as he twisted her arm against her back, and she screamed in pain. But this was not just regular bully, no it is the worst form of bullying. Celina was being violated physically and sexually, and he had no regard for her well being whatsoever.

Once again, they were on the floor. The soldier continued to violate her, while she turned her head left and right and screamed with whatever strength she had left.

This is the royal library, accessible only to a select few. Celina used to come in here when she was bored and read book after book, fascinated by all the knowledge contained in here. The Liu family is very wise people indeed. This place was her sanctuary. When she was alone, she'd come here and find peace. But she never thought she'd be violated in her own sanctuary.

"Ughhh! Aaaah!!!"

The troop kissed her shoulders, putting his face all over her back, and grabbed her thighs with his filthy hands.

This place is sacred to her, it is the place where she can find refuge when she is unhappy. She was married into nobility from a young age, and she did not have many friends, and in a way, these books are her friends. But her sanctuary has become her hell. All the books she read did not matter; all the knowledge and sophistication she acquired did no matter...to these men she is just a piece of meat.

Celina was nothing more than a negotiating tool used to get King Liu to abandon his power. Day and night, she was raped over and over. When she ran into Zi, she thought her torture was over for good. But no, her never ending torture continues.

The soldier grabbed a random book and slapped her with it. Smack! Smack! It was painful.

Then he opened the book and shoved it into her face. "You like to read? Read damn it! Read!"

She groaned in pain. "Uhhh! Uhhh!"

Then he'd rip out the pages and shove it into her mouth.

"MMFFF!"

"Ha ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!" Then he put his face into her breasts and snuggled them and caressed them.

Slish! Slash! Zi ran between the gigantic columns. Two soldiers chased him until he was against the wall. They thought they had him, but it was they were the ones who were trapped. Zi smiled and jumped on the wall, using his feet to bounce him higher, and landed on the other side of the shelf. Then he kicked the shelf, and it fell on top of the soldiers. Crash!

Celina's back was against the wall, and she watched in fear as the troop's shadow covered her. Tears drip down her eyes. The troop had a greedy look on his face. He pointed his sword at her chin, and she turned to the side and winced. More tears dripped down her eyes, thinking of the horrible things he might do to her. She has already been through a lot, but there is still more to her misfortune. The soldier smiled perversely as he moved the tip of the blade down to her neck, and she was breathing hard. The blade moved down to the area between her breasts, and he slowly moved it lower, cutting a few ribbons in the process. Celina gasped.

What can Celina, who is helpless and unprepared, do against an armed man?

He moved the blade down the contents of her body, and put it between her thighs and she gasped. The blade was between her knees, and he moved it up slowly and tantalizingly. It was already at the middle of her upper thighs, and she just feared for the worst. It went higher and higher, and it touched the ribbons, and slowly cut them piece by piece. Celina gasped. The blade moved higher and higher, getting ever so close to her sacred area.

But just when the blade almost touched it, he stopped and there was a surprised look on his face. Then he collapsed, and Zi was behind him.

Celina gasped. "You saved my life."

"Of course," he replied. "This place is not safe anymore. Let's go!"

Cheng, having no idea where he was going, headed to the next building. On his way there, he heard sounds of fighting. Shen Long and Sui Long were being attacked. Immediately, he drew the Fire Sword and jumped in to help his allies. The three of them stood together and charged at the soldiers with all their might. \*Cling! Clang! Slash! Slash!\*

The fight became a bloodbath, and when it was over, only the three heroes remained.

"Cheng, I must say, your skills has improved." Sui Long complimented. "From the day you met the War God until today, you have made much improvements, not just in terms of skill."

"Thank you." Cheng replied.

Sui: "You had us worried. I am glad you are safe."

"I was separated from the group during the first fight." Cheng replied.

Shen: "I know. We were separated from Captain Tai in the process, and we do not know his location."

Sui: "We are basically on our own."

Suddenly, the door broke down, and a horde of troops charged in.

Sui: "We must flee!"

Shen: "This way!"

The three ran up the stairs inside the tower. They continued to run until they reached the roof and slammed the door shut, and locked it by placing a piece of wood horizontal to the door.

The troops, unable to open the door, resorted to brute force. \*Bang Bang!\* Cheng and Sui Long were holding the doors, keeping them from breaking open. Shen went to the edge of the roof to check their height. At this altitude, if they were to jump off, it would be a jump to the death.

"We cannot jump off here."

"And we can't leave from the stairs." said Cheng. "What now?"

"It means we are trapped." Sui replied. "And there is no way out. The only way out is..."

There was a long silence, since no one wanted to state the grim situation that they were in. "It is we fight to the death...or jump to our deaths." said Shen. "So we have no choice but to fight."

Sui: "So it has come down to this. I foresee this day coming since I left the Valley of Death."

Cheng: "There has to be another way for us to escape!"

Shen: "There is no means for all of us to escape, but there is a means for you to escape." He pointed at the rope that was attached to the other tower.

Cheng: "That is too high, I can't make it!"

Shen: "You can with our help."

Cheng: "You mean...but what about you two? Shen Long and Sui Long?"

Sui: "Do not worry about us. Our mission is to ensure your safety, and we intend to carry that mission to the very end."

"Your mission?" Cheng inquired.

Sui: "We are following Master Genzo's orders. What happens to us is not important. Your safety is our top priority."

The soldiers were at the brink of breaking the door. \*Bang Bang!\*

Sui: "Hurry Cheng, we are out of time!"

Alex nodded.

Sui Long jumped onto Shen Long's shoulders. Alex ran towards them and leaped up, stepping onto Sui Long's hands, and Sui gave him a boost up. This is probably the biggest and most dangerous jump he will take in his life, and one that he will never forget. "Aaaaaaah!!!" He reached with all his might and grabbed the rope tightly.

It swings him all the way to the other tower. His feet hit the wall first, as he planned, rather than letting his body hit the wall, which would be stupid. He saw a window below him and jumped into it and rolled on the floor.

Shen: "It looks like we made it safely."

Sui: "It is unfortunate that I cannot say the same for us."

The door broke down, and in comes a barrage of angry soldiers who thirst for blood.

Shen: "So, this is how it ends, hmm?"

Sui: "Without Master Genzo, we would have been dead already. I will embrace death with honor."

The masked warriors got into fighting position and charged bravely into the horde of soldiers and fought with the best of their abilities, for it could be the last fight of their lives.

Alex, now in safe spot, looked over to the other tower, where his comrades are.

(Sui Long, Shen Long. We haven't known each other for very long, but I consider you my comrades. You have to make it out alive!) With that thought, he ran off.

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Alex Cheng, still hanging onto the rope, tightened his grip. One slip and it is all over. Noticing a window below him, he slid down the rope with his feet walking against the wall. He slipped into the window and rolled a couple of times. He is now safe, but his comrades are still in danger, and he looked in their direction. (Sui Long, Shen Long. We haven't known each other for very long, but I consider you my comrades. You have to make it out alive!)

Suddenly, Alex saw someone standing in front of him, Fong Long.

"Are you alright?" Fong asked.

"Uhhh yeah. How did you get here?" Alex replied.

"I was separated from the others during the fight. And I wandered here by myself. Did you come by yourself?"

"Yes."

"And what about Shen Long and Sui Long?"

"They're ummm...a little busy right now."

"We can't worry about them now." said Fong Long. "We need to find the king and get an answer from him. I am sure if we find the king, we will find the duke as well."

"The thing is...we're separated from Tai's group, and I don't have a map. This place is huge."

"Don't worry. I know where the royal hall is."

Without wasting any time, they went off, running down the dark hallway.

"I hope Shen Long and Sui Long are alright." Alex said while running.

"Don't worry about them. They are trained professionals. They are ready to throw their lives away for their mission." Fong replied.

"Throw their lives away?"

"We have all been rejects of society." Fong said while running. "It is not by our choice. I do not completely know of Shen and Sui's situations, but they told me briefly that they were both fugitives who were marked for death. To stay in Yi Ling would mean death, so they sought refuge in the Valley of Death. For some reason, Master Genzo did not kill them, but rather, accepted them as pupils. Kind of the same thing that happened to you and your friend."

"I see. I can assume your story is similar?"

"Yes." Fong simply replied.

"You don't talk much about yourself." said Alex.

Fong, not wanting him to know his (or her) true identity, remained silent, thinking of a response. Suddenly, soldiers appeared at the front of the hall.

"Hey you!"

Alex and Fong ran away from them, but were bombarded by soldiers. The enemies were in front and behind them, and that means they were surrounded. Just when Alex thought escaped with his life, he once again finds himself in a life and death situation in the imperial palace.

### Jumping Off The Building

Zi was holding the hand of his newfound companion, Celina, as they ran away from the hordes of pursuing soldiers. Although the soldiers were nowhere close to the two, they can still see them, and may catch up at any time.

"This way!" Zi yelled, making a turn to the left.

Celina was tired as well, and panted for breath. She tried her best to keep up with Zi, lest if she should fall behind, the soldiers will catch her, and it was something she did not want to happen. They ran up the stairs in the dark building, and Celina, having no idea where she was being taken, had no choice but to trust Zi.

Zi also had no idea where he was going. He was running to avoid the enemy and to help keep the girl safe. He pushed the door open and realized that he was on the roof.

The two ran to the edge of the roof and took a good look down. The building was 7 stories high, a height deemed too dangerous for a jump.

"Damn it!" Zi exclaimed.

"What do we do now?" Celina inquired.

"If we go back, the soldiers will catch us. But if we jump, death is certain."

"This can't be the end! You have to think of something..."

Zi thought really hard but came up with no answers. Time is of the essence, and their survival depends on him.

"This is a bad situation to be in. There's no way out..." Then he glanced at Celina's body. "Unless..." He stared at the loose ribbon hanging on her breasts, and when she noticed his staring, she blushed and covered her breasts.

"What are you looking at?" she asked, taking a step back.

"The only way down is to have a really long rope. But there isn't any rope here...but..."

Celina gasped, realizing what he was suggesting. "No...I c-can't..." she said shyly.

"This is the only way to get to the ground. Once I'm down there, you jump and I'll catch you."

"No..." she replied. "I can't."

"Now's not the time to be modest." Said Zi.

She stared at the ground, while still covering her breasts. Celina did not like the idea of using the remainder of the ribbons she had...more of her skin would be exposed. It is something she just cannot bring herself to do, even in a situation like this.

"Look, if we both jump down, we'll die for sure. And if the soldiers come up here...they'll kill me. And who knows what they'll do to you?"

The mere thought of what Zi said made her shudder. It was a tough decision to make, but finally, she agreed by nodding silently.

\*Doosh\* Zi slid down the building, with his feet against the wall, as he was holding onto the pink ribbon from above. \*Dooosh\*

"A little more." he shouted.

Celina pulled more of the ribbons out of her own body, allowing Zi to go a little bit lower.

"A little more." he repeated.

"Can you make it?" she asked.

"Almost!"

Suddenly, a soldier came to the rooftop and saw the girl. When he saw what she was wearing, he grew horny and a wicked smile fell upon his lips. He approached the girl stealthily until and once he was close enough, grabbed her shoulders. Celina, caught by surprise, gasped. "Ahhhh!"

"What have we got here?" said the soldier, trying to feel her up.

Celina squirmed while he held her arms tight, shoving her against the fence. "Ugh!"

"You shouldn't be sneaking around at night." he said, almost whispering into her ear. "Bad things can happen to you." He continued to exert his physical strength over her, pushing her head down, forcing her to stare at what's below.

Zi saw what was going on. "Damn it...what a bad time for this to happen!"

As he harassed her, he noticed that she was holding onto something. "Hmmm, what's this?" he said, grabbing the loose ribbon. He looked down saw Zi hanging onto the ribbon. "Ohhh that's what you're trying to do."

"Crap!" Zi exclaimed.

"I'm afraid that we have no room for thieves here." The soldier took out a knife, and his intentions were clear.

"No!" Celina cried out, and grabbed his hands. However, her resistance was short lived, as he shoved her away.

"Don't do it!" Zi yelled. He slid down as fast as he could, hoping to lessen his fall. But he was still too high up, and if he fell from this distance, it could be the end for him.

"Say bye bye!" said the soldier, and cut the ribbon. \*Slit\*

Zi fell all the way down into the bushes. \*Wham\*

Celina stared down below, checking on her friend, hoping that he's okay. But he was nowhere to be seen. The soldier grabbed her and shoved her down, and continued to violate her from behind. "Ugh! Aahh!"

Then he turned her around, so that they were facing each other, and he continued to violate her.

Zi sat up and rubbed his back. "Ahh! Damn that hurts!" he exclaimed. He stood up limply, with his hand on his injured buttocks. "If it wasn't for my training, I would be dead meat." Then he looked up and saw the soldier harassing Celina – the same soldier who made him fall. He figured this would be a good time to get back at him.

Zi stepped back until he was 20 paces away from the wall, and took out his bow and arrow and aimed. From this spot, he could shoot the arrow diagonally at his target, which is the guy's head.

Unfortunately, Celina's head was in the way, and as they continued to struggle, his head was moving, making it hard to aim. Suddenly, the soldier shoved Celina's face down and laughed.

Now was his chance – Zi let go of the arrow. \*Twang\* It hit the guy directly in the forehead, killing him instantly.

Celina opened her eyes and saw that the guy holding her was dead, and screamed and shoved him away, causing him to fall.

"Hey, you okay?" Zi screamed.

Celina quickly turned around. "You're alive!"

"Of course I am. It takes more than a little fall to kill me."

For once, she felt a sense of relief. Nothing but bad things have happened to her today, but this is the first good thing that happened since she was imprisoned. A smile fell on her lips.

"I'll be coming up, so I'll meet up with you halfway! Run before more soldiers come!"

Celina nodded, and hurried over to the staircase.

Zi ran to the side of the building, where the entrance is supposed to be. But there was a group of soldiers coming his way, and when they saw each other, Zi ran away. "Crap! I can't take them on!" He was worried about the girl's safety, but his life is a priority.

\*Slash! Slish!\* Alex and Fong Long just killed some soldiers. "There are more and more enemies. Which means we are getting closer to the duke."

"This place is so heavily guarded. I'd expect it to be mostly empty since there's a battle going on outside." said Alex.

"They must have known that we've broken in." Fong declared. "At this point we have no choice but to move forward."

"This way!" shouted a captain, leading his troops. When they saw Alex and his masked friend, they instinctively attacked with their spears.

\*Whoosh\* Troop A plunged his spear forward, Alex blocked it with his sword, effectively pushing it to the side. Then he charged forward and stabbed the troop in the stomach. Troop B thrusts his spear forward, and Alex ducked. \*Whoosh\* Then the troop tried to attack low, aiming for his feet. Alex jumped up and kned the troop in the face. \*Wham\*

Suddenly, Troop C appeared and hit Alex's stomach from the side, shoving him to the wall. Seeing a fiery torch next to him, Alex suddenly got an idea. He pointed the tip of his sword at the fire, and now the Fire Sword was in flames and glowing red.

The captain and his men were startled. "That sword...is it..."

"It has to be the Legendary Fire Sword."

"So what?" the captain yelled. "He's only one man. Now take him down!"

The soldiers must obey orders and they charged forward together. Alex intercepted their rush, giving them cuts with a burning sensation. \*Slash\* They've never felt such pain from being struck with a blade before and screamed in agony.

Another soldier tried to attack him, and Alex swings his sword to the air, spreading its flames. The soldier winced from the fire being close to his eyes, and for the split second that he was distracted, Alex slashed him in the stomach. \*Slash\*

Within minutes, Alex and Fong Long eliminated all threats.

"So you are starting to learn how to use the Fire Sword. You've made great improvements." Fong declared.

"Yes, this little thing comes in handy."

"An ordinary person cannot use the sword to its true potential. It takes talent and skill and years of experience to master its powers."

"It sounds like hard work."

"Master Genzo has entrusted you with this sword...and I trust his judgment."

"I still can't believe he gave such a valuable item to me."

"Perhaps I should explain what exactly the Fire Sword is. It is an ancient weapon that is made over a hundred years ago...forged by the great blacksmith **Cho'Ann** himself. In fact, he did not make just one, but four swords. The first one he made was the Fire Sword, then the **Ice Sword**, followed by the **Thunder Sword**, and finally, the **Wind Sword**. Each of those enchanted weapons possesses the power of the elements, which gives them unimaginable power. They were used by the **Four Brothers of China**."

"The Four Brothers of China?" Alex repeated.

"Correct. They used those elemental swords during the **Demon and Human War** fifty years ago. The Four Brothers used those swords to exterminate the demons, leading the humans to victory in the war. One of those brothers happens to be Master Genzo himself."

"What?" said the hero in shock. "Master Genzo, the War God, used to be one of the Four Brothers of China? What the hell happened to him?"

"Unfortunately, not long after the demons were exterminated, Genzo was betrayed by the other brothers. They labeled him a traitor and he has been on the run ever since." said Fong Long.

"Wow. I never knew that. Master Genzo fought demons fifty years ago...so today he must be really old. But he fights like he's in his twenties."

"He practices swordcraft everyday, so what do you expect? However, no one can win the fight against time. His sword craft is gradually decreasing everyday. He needs a successor."

"A successor?"

"He plans to give his successor his most prized possession, the Fire Sword."

Alex became shocked. "That means...I'm his successor?"

"He has high hopes for you, Cheng. He hopes that you will take his place and wipe demons off the face of the earth."

Alex raised the Fire Sword to eye level and stared deeply at his own reflection. What his companion told him was too much to absorb.

### Exposed Skin Contents

Celina wandered about the dark hallways, alone and scared. She was searching for her companion, Zi, but he was nowhere to be found. He said he would be here, yet he still has not appeared after what feels like a long time. Perhaps he has been killed in battle? She brushed that thought aside, knowing that he cannot die so easily, considering he survived a fall like that. But still, it does not change the fact that she is alone. Celina must find a place to hide, lest she will be discovered.

Suddenly, a soldier appeared in front of her, and they were both shocked to see each other. The soldier's eyes opened wide upon seeing this beautiful woman, who was scantily dressed. His jaw dropped in disbelief.

Celina was too scared to even move or say anything, she just stood there like a deer in headlights. Here this random man is standing there, looking at her exposed skin, something that he should never see.

A woman's most precious asset is her own body, and she should never, ever let a man see her natural form – with only one exception – the man that she loves. Even if she is with the man she loves, she must be conservative with her body – because women must preserve their dignity. In a highly conservative society such as this kingdom, conventional rules like these must be enforced. Women do not follow these conventions, those who are too "loose", and those who are prostitutes, are frowned upon by society.

Celina is a more extreme case, for she is extremely shy, particularly around men. One could say she is the modest of the modest, the shyest of the shy. Even if a man glances at her the wrong way, she will feel unease and discomfort, and she will stare at the floor or somewhere else, never making direct eye contact. Often times, she will accompany the king in celebratory meetings, where men gather and drink wine. Being in a room full of men makes her feel unease, for they are loud and rough with their words.

But now, this shy girl is facing an unthinkable situation. This soldier, who was wearing armor from head to toe, was adequately protected. But Celina, on the other hand, was wearing only ribbons around her body, covering only the essentials. And after that previous incident with Zi, she lost a lot of the ribbons, which makes her feel even more vulnerable.

She became instantly embarrassed, and her face grew bright red. In fact, her whole head became red, everything from her neck up to her forehead. She crossed her arms over her chest and trembled all over.

"Well, what have we got here?" said he, with a wicked smile on his lips.

"N-No...no!" she muttered with whatever strength she could summon. Her legs were shaking, and they would not move, no matter how hard she tried. Her arms were shaking as well, and her whole body shivered at the sight of this soldier, who was approaching ever so closer.

"Today must be my lucky day." he said, moving forward.

As the pervert came closer, Celina stepped back to keep the distance, trembling with every step.

"Come here..." said the soldier, his hands in a perverted grabbing gesture.

Celina backed away until she was against the wall, and now there is no escape. She could only watch as the soldier's shadow covered her. He was only 3 steps away, and 2 steps away, and he was within distance to touch her.

The mere thought of being harassed by this pervert made her scared, and her body reacted instinctively, she winced and tried to slap him. But he caught her hand before it hit his face, and he smiled. Then he grabbed her other hand and pushed them against the wall. And now he was face to face with Celina, and they were so close she could feel his breath. He could practically kiss her if he wanted to.

"You're a cutie. I'm going to make you mine."

Poor Celina stared in sheer horror – no words could describe the dread and fear she was feeling at this moment. This man is too close to her, way too close than what she is used to.

She's always had a fear of men, an illogical fear that she's had her whole life. Celina is easily intimidated by men, and even if they are friendly, she misunderstands their intentions. Being extremely shy, trusting men is hard for her. All her friends have been females, but since entering the palace, she has no friends except for Tai.

Although married to the king, he is still a man nonetheless, and is intimidated by him. When the king wanted to take her as a concubine, she did not have much of a choice – disobedience means death to her and her kin. Liu Bei has a kingdom to run, so he is never around, and as a result Celina spends most of her days alone in a cold, empty palace.

Love and intimacy is something to be desired. She's read stories about people falling in love, but for a concubine, it may never happen. What a pity it is, for a girl so young to never have experienced true intimacy with a man.

And now, she is eye to eye with a complete stranger, a stranger who sees her as a piece of meat. Once again, she finds herself being the victim of the situation – first, she was harassed by bandits day and night, facing unspeaking horrors – and when she escaped their grasp, she thought it was all over, but now she has to face another rapist. He had her wrists locked, so she could not move, all she could do was stare with her frightful, shaking eyes. Her mouth was wide open with shock, and not a sound would come out. Her heart was beating rapidly, and her throat was dried up.

Alex was still staring at his reflection on the blade. "I'm the War God's successor? There has to be a mistake."

"Master Genzo's judgment is never wrong. He saw something in you, Alex." Fong Long replied.

"You're right, there has to be a mistake." said a third voice, which caught the attention of both. A group of soldiers arrived, and this group was led by someone who Alex had met earlier, Jiax.

"It's you!" Alex exclaimed.

"My name is not you! You will address me as Lord Jiax."

"What kind of lord are you? You don't even look like one." Alex taunted.

"Heh, you're one to talk. You're just a brat, yet you have one of the most powerful swords in the world."

"And what of it?"

"What luck it is for me to have found the Legendary Fire Sword." said Jiax.

"Now, you will kindly hand it over – and I will promise you a quick and painless death."

"In your dreams. This sword is Master Genzo's sword, and it is not to be stained by your filthy hands."

"Then you choose the slow and painful way." Jiax raised his blade to the air.

"Get them, men!"

This group was actually a mix of soldiers and bandits, but to the heroes, they are all the same – they all bleed the same way and die the same way. Alex and Fong Long charged courageously into the group and fought like they always did. \*Slish slash\*

However, despite their valiant efforts, Alex was separated from Fong Long – although they were in the same room, they were fighting in opposite corners, which is the worst possible scenario.

Fong discovered that these bandits, although not as disciplined as the soldiers, were very aggressive and hard to defend against. He was being pushed back until he was against the wall. \*Quong\* He blocked a bandit's incoming attack, and kicked him away. \*Thud\*

\*Slish\* Alex finished off another troop, and the floor quickly piled up with dead bodies. A particular bandit was standing in front of Jiax was scared. "Oh my God...he's too good. I can't match his skill."

"You may not be able to do it, but you can still be of use to me." said Jiax with a wicked smile.

"Huh?"

Jiax pushed his henchmen forward, and Alex stabbed him in the stomach. With his sword stuck in the man's stomach, Jiax can now make his move. He plunged through the chest of his half-dead henchmen, and the blade came out of him and hit Alex's shoulder. \*Schleb\*

Fortunately, Alex's quick reflexes allowed him to step back and avoid a fatal hit. "You'd go that far just to get me?"

"Of course, this is war! The only thing that matters is victory. Once I kill you and your friend, I will bring the Fire Sword back to Duke Xiang and receive a promotion."

"You..."

Jiax charged forward and swings his blade, and Alex, without his weapon can only dodge. \*whoosh\* He tilted his head left and right while moving backwards – this has become a desperate situation for our hero.

(One wrong move and I'm done for. I can't fight without a sword!) Alex continued to retreat until he sensed that he was close to the wall. He did not have much of a choice, so he took a risk. As Jiax was about to swing his sword at him, Alex caught the blade between his palms. Jiax then kicked him in the stomach, knocking him against the wall. \*Thud\*

Jiax laughed triumphantly. "This is where you die, boy."

He held his sword up and got ready to strike. Alex grabbed the picture he was leaning on and used it as a shield, and Jiax's sword went through it. \*Scrrrrh\* The picture was in the way and Jiax could not see the other side, and Alex used the torn up picture to push him back, and hit him in the face. \*Pow\*

Alex stepped away from the wall and realized that the portrait was that of King Liu. "Thanks your highness, I owe you one." he mumbled to the portrait. He felt a sense of irony that somehow the king saved him, even though he came here to save the king. Then he focused on Jiax. "You've dropped your weapon too, so now it's a fair fight."

"Don't be conceited! You're light years behind me in strength." Jiax replied.

Alex charged and punched, Jiax blocked and grabbed his fist and squeezed it. Alex, surprised at the pain, groaned heavily. Jiax hit him in the chest. \*Thud\* The pain was paralyzing. It seems that his enemy is not just big, but he can back it up with brute strength.

"Heh heh. I bet you felt that."

Alex wiped the blood off his lips. At this point, he knew that a fist fight is out of the question. He quickly ran back to retrieve his sword. As Jiax pulled his sword out of the portrait, Alex pulled his sword out of the dead guy.

"Now we can have a real fight."

"Tch. You are no match for me, boy." said Jiax.

"How would you know? You never fight fair, fatso."

"Grrr, the name is Lord Jiax! I'll make you remember it." Jiax made the first strike - a high attack. Alex blocked it instinctively and countered.

### 13 - C Title Contents

Meanwhile, Sui Long and Shen Long were still fighting to the death. \*Slish\* Shen Long just killed a guy and he jumped back to where Sui was. "There must be a way out." Shen shouted. "I do not want to die yet."

"Neither do I. But there is no way out." Sui replied. Indeed, their situation seems hopeless - it was two against a horde of soldiers.

"Is this our destiny? Is this what Master Ho Sai predicts?"

"This is it...are you ready?"

The masked warriors charged bravely into the bloodthirsty soldiers. Suddenly, the front door broke open, and a group of resistance soldiers charged in. "Let's get them!" shouted Captain Tai.

Shen and Sui were relieved to see their comrades. "They broke through the front!"

"I knew they could do it!" Shen replied.

Now the heroes have a renewed sense of hope. Rather than fighting to die, they are now fighting to survive, which is certainly a much better motivation.

### Exposed Skin - 2

He made a move, and Celina turned her head to the side and winced. He kissed her neck and her shoulder, and Celina moaned and groaned in pain. It was extremely uncomfortable for her, to say the least. There was nothing she could do as the soldier put his dirty lips on her skin, kissing and licking her all over, and her back was pressed against the stone wall. The texture of the wall was hurting her skin, and this soldier was pressing her body against the wall constantly.

Then he shoved his face into her breasts, and she moaned even harder. "Aaaah!!"

Despite being over powered, she continued to struggle, anything to get away from this pervert. She shoved him in the chest, pushing him away slightly, and tried to get away, but the soldier grabbed her from behind. He was laughing the whole time, while she was screaming for her life.



When he grew tired of trying to restrain her, he shoved her to the ground.  
\*Thud\*

Celina crawled away, but the soldier followed her closely, amused by her desperate acts. He stepped on her leg, and she groaned in pain.

"Where do you think you're going?" he taunted as he pressed his feet on her lower thigh. She moaned from the pain. Then he kicked her in the buttocks, causing her to fall face flat on the floor.

The soldier laughed in amusement while the poor girl lay there and suffered. She crawled desperately, crawling for her dear life. Even though she knew she could not escape, she had to try, anything is better than this.

\*Clang\* Jiax retreated as Alex advanced, swiping his sword valiantly. In just a few moves, Jiax could tell the difference between their skill levels. Still, he was too proud to admit defeat, and continued to defend until he was by the window.

"Why you..."

"What's the matter, fatso? Can't win in a fair fight?"

"Grrrr, shut up!" Jiax made a reckless charge, and Alex knocked his sword away. Now, Jiax is the weaponless one. "W-Wait a minute, boy. You don't wanna kill me. I can tell you the secrets to the palace."

"I don't need your help, I already have a guide."

"Uhhh. I know Duke Xiang's secret. You're good, but you can't defeat him with your skills."

"Hmmm?" Alex mumbled, raising an eyebrow.

"Look I am not that loyal to the duke anyway. I can help you take him out. You can't beat him in a fight. I know his greatest weakness."

Alex took a step forward. "So this is what you resort to? When you're not using a woman as a shield, and when you're not using one of your men as a sacrifice, you resort to these little tricks? Right now, I don't want anything from you, except your death!"

"What?!"

Alex slashed him, and he fell out the window and into the lake. \*Splash\* At last, that nuisance has been taken care of. Alex looked out the window to see the water. He did not see a body, but falling from this height, and with those injuries, he can safely assume that Jiax is dead. Alex was still angry about what he did to Celina, but at least he will not hurt anyone ever again. Considering Jiax's crimes, this is an easy death for him.

Fong and the bandits were slashing about, breaking things in the room. Jars fell and broke and pictures were torn apart. Two bandits charged forward, and Fong moved in between them, with lightning speed, struck them both. They went past each other, and the bandits fell and died instantly.

The remaining bandit grew angry. He let out a yell and did a jumping attack. Fong dodged his blade and stabbed him in the stomach.

"Ugh..." Blood came out of his mouth as he has a surprised look on his face. He can't believe he's going to die so soon. With his final ounce of energy, he slashed Fong's shoulder and died.

Alex came into the room but something about him was different, Fong noticed. Her brother is suddenly very calm and confident about the situation.

"I finished the fat guy." said he.

"Good." Fong added. "And I am done here."

After defeating Jiax and his group of bandits, Alex and his masked companion went into a hiding place to get away from incoming soldiers. This was an old building used for worshipping, but it is no longer used, and it is dark and full of spider webs.

Fong Long closed the door. Creek. "We should be safe here." Then he turned around. "How are your wounds?"

"It's nothing major. We don't need to worry."

Such words made Fong Long even more worried, as Alex's sister should be worried for her brother. "Even the smallest wounds are fatal when untreated. You can't go around fighting like this."

Alex had a cut on his right bicep, and one on his left shoulder. Even if it is not fatal, the pain was getting to him. "You're right. I need to meditate."

"Meditate? You mean that kind of meditation?"

"Yes, I've learned many things from the temple besides fighting. Meditation can put your mind at peace and speed up recovery of your body."

"Alright. I'll keep watch and make sure no one finds us." said Fong Long.

"Please do." Alex replied. He sat down on a soft cushion and got into the posture – sitting cross legged and putting his palms together. This is an old technique that Master Guan Du taught him, and the first time he used it was when he first entered the temple. From that moment to today was less than a year ago, yet it somehow felt like years. Alex missed the temple and more important, the people there, including his monk friends and his teacher, Guan Du.

He felt that he owed a lot to Master Du for his teachings and his patience. Yet Alex had to fight his master to get permission to leave the temple. They did not leave on good terms, but Alex felt that it needed to be done.

Things were quiet as Fong Long kept watch, and these two have a moment of peace. Her mind raced back to the past, a very distant past where all of these struggles began. It was more than a decade ago when she was a servant in the palace – but everything is the way she remembered it. Certain things looked different, but the structure and the hallways are exactly the same.

Being selected to work in the imperial palace is a great honor for commoners. Li Cheng was one of such lucky individuals, chosen at a young age to work in the palace. Although servants had no rights, it was better to work in the palace than to live in poverty. Servants of the palace are expected to abide by high standards – hard work, loyalty, and never talk back to superiors.

All the new girls lined up, single file. The head master, an overgrown, pompous woman, came into the scene. She walked down the line, inspecting all the girls with her eyes. Li was nervous, especially when the head master glanced at her.

"Listen up," said the head master. "You are all servants working for the most important people in the kingdom. Some of you were chosen to be here, some of you were bought here from your families. How you got here does not matter because you have no past. Your identity is that of a palace servant. And you will listen to my orders, understood?"

There was a moment of silence.

"Understood?" she repeated.

"Yes, head master!" everyone shouted.

"Good. I'm glad we have an understanding. Those who slack off – or worse yet – those who disobey orders – will be punished severely. Now, I am going to give each of you your assignments."

Li Cheng was selected for cleaning duties. It sounded like a tedious job, but she was happy to do whatever was asked of her.

However, that happiness was taken away from her ever since that fateful incident. As Li was cleaning the floors, humming along, she heard a strange noise coming from the other room. She knows she's supposed to mind her own business, but her curiosity got the better of her, and she quietly crept to the duke's room.

She poked a hole through the door and peered in. The duke was talking to himself in the mirror – at least that is what it seems like – he is just some crazy old man. But upon closer inspection, the face in the mirror was deformed and twisted, as if his face was melting.

"I cannot handle it anymore...I need more souls..." Duke Xiang cried out. Then he turned around and Li saw his face directly. It was so grotesque that Li was scared. She covered mouth to prevent herself from screaming, and stepped back. \*crash\* Her feet just kicked over a bucket of flowers.

"Who's there?" yelled Xiang.

Li quickly ran away from the scene.

"I want to find that girl no matter what." The duke yelled at the woman.

"I'm sorry. We will find her right away." replied the head master, keeping her head low.

"Hurry up! You better not let her escape."

"Yes. I'm very sorry."

Li was hiding behind the wall as servants searched for her. She was only fourteen years old, and scared to death. (If they find me, they'll kill me. I don't want to die) The only option is to sneak out of the palace and hide somewhere. Going home is out of the question because they know where she lives and she will involve her family.

Indeed, her only choice is to run away to keep her own life.

Traveling in the forest alone was a tough job, but she pulled through somehow. Li Cheng has been traveling for weeks now, trying to find the Valley of Death. All she had was a rusty map to rely on, and her own instincts. It was a miracle that she made it this far; perhaps it was heaven that guided her to this place.

Suddenly, she heard an echo. "Who dares trespass in into the Valley of Death?"

Li became frightened, despite the fact that this was the person she was seeking – the War God. "Are you...the War God?" she inquired.

"Who wants to know?" said the voice. Suddenly, a man in a battle suit and straw hat landed behind her. "Don't you know what this place is?"

"Yes." she replied. "It is said that no one who has ever set foot here and lived."

"Oh. You came here, knowing that. You sure have a lot of guts coming here, little girl."

"If I stay in my home town, I am going to die anyway." Li Cheng replied. "I came so I can be your apprentice, War God!" She knelt.

The warrior was taken aback by her surprising actions. "What're you doing?"

"Please accept me as your student, master. I have no home and no family. I have nothing."

The War God withdrew his sword. "Go home, little girl. This is no place for you." He walked away.

Despite his warnings, Li Cheng did not leave. Not only did she stay, but she followed the War God wherever he went.

## Trust & DeceptionContents

Celina was hiding behind the wall as she watched some soldiers run by. They seem to be in a hurry, most likely going to the battle. She was sweating nervously while watching, fearing that someone may see her. The only thing on her mind is to find a safe hiding spot and stay there so no one can hurt her anymore.

She did not really understand the situation, nor did she care. She was thrown into this dangerous situation without any preparation whatsoever, and safety is her number one priority. Poor Celina found herself facing one merciless situation after another. She had no weapons, and on top of that, had nothing to wear but the ribbons. She was vulnerable, and weak and tired, and if she were to be caught by anyone, then things will be bad.

Suddenly, a hand covered her mouth and she realized there was someone behind her. She couldn't speak and the man dragged her away to another hallway.

"Sshhhh!" he said. "I'm on your side." He let her go and she looked at him with distrust and fear.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm one of Shu Tai's men, of course." he replied. The soldier certainly sounds convincing, but he did not look trustworthy. He looked like the other perverted soldiers. "And I'm here to rescue you..." he said, glancing up and down on her body. "...from your situation."

Celina blushed and covered her breasts instinctively.

"You can't walk around like that, can you?"

"Are you really with Tai?"

"Of course I am." he replied, smiling. "They're coming!"

He grabbed her hand and ran down the hallway, and took her into a storage room and closed the door.

Celina panted for breath as she leaned against the shelf. Running around is tiring. She still was not certain if she could trust this man, but considering how chaotic things are, having any ally is better than none. Both Alex and Zi claimed to be allies of Tai, so there must be more of them.

The soldier put the horizontal block on the door. "Now that we're all alone, we can get acquainted with one another..." he approached her with a perverted grabbing gesture.

"What are you doing?" Celina asked.

He tried to grab her, she screamed and ran away, and her back was against another wall.

"Come over here!" he said, and tried to grab her.

"Aaah!" she ran away.

He grabbed the ribbon and pulled it, making her spin like a top, and revealing more of her breasts. "Aaah. I got you now."

"Aaah! Stop!" she screamed.

The soldier pulled the ribbon some more, and pulled her body into him. He pushed her against the shelf, pressing her face on it. His body was pressed against hers, and his face was in her hair.

"Y-You said you were with Tai..."

"Guess what? I lied."

He grabbed her wrists and pressed his face against her back, and kissed her back all over, while she moaned and groaned. "Ugh...ahhh!"

His hand went between her thighs and touched around, and she moaned.

Then he grabbed her by the hair, and threw her on the floor.

Poor Celina can never get a break. She was already tired and beaten up, but now must suffer more pain. She barely has the strength to even stand up.

The soldier got on top of her and started to violate her from behind. Then he turned her around and kissed her neck and shoulders, and put his face between her breasts.

He grabbed her chin and forced her to look at him, but she resisted, turning her head to the side. Tears streamed down her eyes.

"You really believe that I work for Tai? You're too gullible." the soldier taunted with a crooked smile. He put his face into her neck and started to ravage her. And she screamed in agony.

### Fighting Back Contents

The palace is supposed to be her home, but today it looks unfamiliar. As Celina looked around, she recognized none of the walls nor the floors. This place is a completely different place, and to her, it is no different than a foreign country. It has now become a battlefield, a place where danger lurks in every corner, and death is only within reach. Her home has become her hell.

Celina found a storage room and immediately went in. She slid down to the floor and rested against the wall, finally having a moment to catch her breath. If she stayed outside any longer, someone will discover her, and very bad things will happen. This place is roaming with perverts – and she did not want to be harassed anymore. She was not just tired physically, she was just tired of everything.

Finally, she had some room to breathe and reflect upon all the bad things that happened to her. Ever since she was kidnapped she was picked on and tortured. And when the palace was under siege, she escaped, but still, men from all around abused her. There is no peace anywhere.

A soldier came by and looked through the hole in the door, and saw her. He opened the door, and walked in slowly with a wicked smile on his face. What fortune brought him here, to have found this poor woman sitting there.

She was too tired to even notice him coming in. When she heard his footsteps, she looked up, and her eyes widened. She is in danger once again.

Once again, Celina found herself cornered with no way to escape. The soldier was directly in front of her, and the exit to the room was behind him. The only way out is to go through him, but that is highly unlikely she is able to fight him.

"Come here baby..." said the soldier, with a perverted grabbing gesture. "Let's have some fun while we're here....heh heh."

Celina's back was against the wall, and she watched helplessly as he came closer...step by step. This one, like the others, had only one thing on his mind. The thing that she hated the most, the one thing she is most scared of. Celina had no room to escape, as there is a wall behind her. And with every step the man took, she was closer to her demise.

She continued to step back until her back hit the wall. Then she saw a bunch of wooden sticks lying there to her right. They reminded Celina of what her master said.

"When you are cornered, you must fight back," said Master Fa.

"But what if the opponent is stronger than you?" she asked.

"You fight anyway. Celina, no matter what the odds are against you, you cannot give up, you must put up a good fight, at the very least."

Celina looked at the sticks and realized that this is her only chance of escape. Even though she was scared for her life, she must fight, as her master said. She must act despite her fear...otherwise the man will surely do unthinkable things to her.

She grabbed one of the sticks and pointed it at the soldier as if it was a lance. "Stop...don't come closer!" she yelled. Holding a weapon made her feel more secure, and not completely helpless. Master Fa was right - even though she is scared to death right now, this is probably her only chance. Even if she fails, at least she tried, right? But what if...just what if she can succeed?

Of course, the soldier was not worried. She is the one who is trapped, and even if she wields a weapon, she doesn't know how to use it.

"Ohhh... what're you going to do with that?" asked he, a bit amused.

"Don't come c-closer...or else!"

"Oooh, you're going to fight me? Well let's see what you can do." He continued to step forward despite her warnings.

Celina's instincts told her to attack. She must do it now, or she will never have a chance. She took some deep breaths and summoned all the courage she had...and charged forward to strike.

He dodged to the side and grabbed the stick with both hands. He overpowered her, and that is when Celina realized that she lost. Even though she was holding it, his strength is clearly superior, and pushed the stick against her stomach. \*Thud\* It pushed her against the wall, and she felt the full blow of the hit.

Then he grabbed the stick and pushed it against her shoulders. She grabbed it but was unable to push it away. He shoved the stick against her neck, and she groaned in pain. The man laughed at her helplessly as he continued to dominate her, continuously pushing the stick against her neck. Poor Celina couldn't do anything as the stick was pressed against her neck.

Then he elevated it and pushed the stick against her chin, forcing her entire body to move up, taking her feet off the floor. There was nothing she could do but offer little resistance, just enough to keep it interesting for him. Her hands were on the bow, trying to push it off, but it was no use. He pushed the bow against her neck, and she moaned in pain while he laughed.

## 14 - B Title Contents

Captain Tai and his group have taken over a building so they can rest and assess the situation. Shen Long and Sui Long are worried about their companions. "Tai, Alex Cheng and Fong Long are missing."

"I understand your concern. But those two are not the priority. We must find the king and the Lady Ce."

"Then I will look for them myself," said Shen Long.

"It's too dangerous to go by yourselves." Tai replied.

"We are soldiers too. And we are not going to do this without them." Shen retorted. "We have sworn to protect Alex, even if it means our lives." With that said, both he and Sui Long left the building.

Tai grimaced at his actions, but deep down, he admired their warrior spirit. These masked warriors care this much about their comrades...if only people in the military were like that.

Celina was in the same situation, her back against the wall, and the stick jammed against her. The soldier was laughing and enjoyed torturing her. There was nothing she could do but shed tears of pain and misery.

Then he finally let go, and pulled her forward, and then pushed her onto the ground, with the bow still on top of her. He pressed it against her neck and laughed as she tried to struggle. Now her situation has worsened.

She was helpless and weak. There was nothing she could do. His body was on top of hers, and he was heavy with the armor. His legs were between hers, and she kicked and thrashed to no avail. Every second felt like an hour as she felt the pain and helplessness of her situation. They were staring at each other face to face.

He was smiling at her, like that of a predator whose hunt succeeded. Tears dripped down her eyes.

He stared at her while she shed tears of pain and agony. They were nose to nose and he was breathing on her. Tears streamed down her face, as she was being harassed by a total stranger. Then he forced his lips upon hers and tears streamed down her face.

Liu Zhang and Lord Yu were mounted on horses, watching the battle from a safe distance. The troops were trying to break through the front gate with a huge log. It took ten men on each side just to carry such a big object.

"How do you think we are doing?" asked Lord Yu.

"Judging from what I see from the outside, not good." Liu Zhang replied calmly. But many of our troops have snuck inside, including Captain Tai. It is what we do not see that counts."

"It is rather unfortunate that we cannot see the battle inside the palace."

Suddenly, the log broke through the front gates. The troops did a battle cry and they pick up their weapons and swarmed inside.

"It looks like we're doing well on the outside." said Yu.

"I wonder how long can the duke hold us back?"

A scout whispered into Duke Xiang's ears. "You don't say." he replied. "They have broken through the main door? It is time for you to make an appearance."

Tsu came out from the darkness. "You called, my lord?" Tsu was a man of menacing appearance, fully clad in armor from head to toe. His helmet was of traditional design for officers of the army - a silver plated headpiece with sharp points. He had a mustache and black beard. He had a large round stomach, a typical body type of brutes his size.

"I want you to kill all the traitors." said the duke.

"As you wish." General Tsu replied.

Xiang rubbed his beard. "Lord Yu...you know you can't beat me by attacking me head on. What exactly are you up to?"

## 14 - C Title Contents

### Identity Revealed Contents

Celina was resting against the bookcase, panting for breath. She was exhausted from all the running. She was not just tired physically. She was just tired of everything.

Finally, she had some room to breathe and reflect upon all the bad things that happened to her. Ever since she was kidnapped she was picked on and tortured. And when the palace was under siege, she escaped, but still, men from all around abused her. There is no peace anywhere.

A soldier peeped through the door and saw a woman inside, and curious, he opened the door subtly as to not make any noise. Any sudden noise might alarm her, so he walked in quietly, and got behind her.

Celina had no idea someone was behind her. She was too tired to even notice her surroundings, and just wanted to take a break from all the struggling. Suddenly, two hands grabbed her from behind, and she gasped.

The man laughed as he grabbed her breasts and squeezed them as he liked. Too weak to even offer resistance, she moaned from the pain. Poor Celina was too tired to even put up a fight. Her luck is just bad today, for this is happening over and over; she finds a place to rest, but is attacked by a soldier.

"S-Stop...p-please." she muttered under her breath.

The soldier, like the others, enjoyed her begging and continued to harass her from behind.

"Ugh...uhhh!"

"It's quite unusual for someone to be out here at this hour...tell me, who are you?"

Celina did not speak, she continued to moan and groan from the pain.

Zi heard sounds that resembled screaming, so he crept into the room. To his surprise, it was that woman he just met earlier, and some other guy. He was harassing her from behind. He instinctively put his hand on his sword.

"Oh? No answer eh? Maybe this will change your mind." The pervert moved his hand on her thigh, and went into the ribbons.

Celina groaned even harder. "Uhhh, uhhh!"

Zi was curious about her identity as well. He decided not to attack just yet, and watch the scene unfold. He felt wrongly to do so, to watch this beautiful girl being tortured by this low-life, but he needs to know who she is before he can trust her.

"You're not an ordinary servant. What is your identity?" asked the soldier, his hand still between her thighs.

"Uhhhh!! Uhhh!!"

"Let's see how long you can last like this." the soldier whispered against her ear. His hand went deeper into the ribbons, violating her private area. Celina could do nothing in her position, but scream and suffer helplessly. Her hands grabbed the bookshelf tightly, while tears dripped down her eyes.

She continued to groan, and one can hear the agony and suffering in her voice. But these cries were enjoyable to the soldier.

"Why don't you just tell me, and I'll let you off easy?"

"Uuuugh, uhhhh!!" The unlucky woman was about to reach her limit, but she continued to resist. However, after a certain point, she gave up. "S-stop..."

"You're going to tell me now?"

"I...I am Celina Liu...the king's concubine."

The soldier was shocked, and Zi was shocked as well. "You're the king's favorite concubine?" said the man. "I see, so you're the one that Xiang kidnapped. What luck it



is that I've found you." He shoved his hand into the ribbons, continuing right where he left off, while his other hand grabbed her breast.

"Uuuugh! Uuugh!!"

Zi grabbed the man's shoulder, to which he turned around, and received a punch in the face that knocked him unconscious.

Celina was so weak that she fell on her knees. She looked up and saw Zi, and gasped, with fresh tears still on her eyes. "It's you?"

"Is it true?" Zi asked. "Is it true that you're the king's concubine? The one that caused him to give his power to the duke?"

"Yes..." she replied quietly, looking away in shame. Kneeling against the bookcase, she had her arms crossed over her chest.

"Why didn't you tell me? I'm on your side, remember?" Zi said.

"After all that's happened...how could I tell anyone...how can I live this down?" she replied with much sadness in her voice. She was on the verge of crying. "After all that's happened...how could I live with myself?!" she said, almost screaming.

Zi was shocked, and he listened very attentively.

"They used me to bribe the king...to get him to do what they wanted...they did all this to me...they..." She stared at the ground, her hands clenching her shoulders tightly, and she was trembling all over. Tears dripped on the ground.

She did not want to mention what they did, the fact that they raped her day in and day out. Once Celina finally escaped, wearing nothing but what she had on her body, she was harassed by all these soldiers. How could she say something like this out loud? But she need not say it, for Zi understood her meaning. It is obvious because of the way she was dressed.

"What would they say if they found the king's concubine like this...my reputation is already ruined...and his reputation will be ruined as well! Nobody can understand how I feel...nobody can understand what I went through..." Streams of tears came out of her eyes, and dripped on the floor.

Zi felt a wrench in his heart as he listened to the girl talk like this, crying and sobbing. She indeed went through a lot, more than any man can understand.

"I'm already useless as a woman...the king wouldn't take me back... I'm better off dead!" More tears dripped down as she screamed those words. "If he saw me like this... why would he want someone...who's already been used up?! No one will want me ever again!"

Suddenly **Zi grabbed her chin and kissed her lips**. She was shocked, with wide open eyes, and the tears continued to drip down.

"That's not true!" Zi said, almost screaming.

Celina shoved him away and crawled back to get away from him. "Stop talking like you understand...you don't understand anything!" She stood up and ran away from him, and Zi quickly grabbed her from behind, accidentally grabbing her breasts. Celina looked down at where his hands were, and she blushed. When Zi realized what he was grabbing, he let go, and she continued to struggle.

Zi grabbed her hand while she screamed and thrashed, and her feet hit something, and they ended up falling down, with Zi on top of her.

This was an extremely awkward position, especially for Celina, who has been through this countless times.

"Just listen to me!" he said, trying to get her to listen.

"Let me go!" she yelled, turning her head left and right. Zi held her wrists to the floor, but her arms kept struggling. "Just let me die! Just let me die!" Tears continued to drip down her face.

Zi realized that she is not going to listen to him, not in her mental state. She is beyond logic, and will not stop until something gets through to her. So he decided to do something to make her calm down, and she is not going to like it, but it is for the best.

"That's enough." he said, and **put his lips upon hers**. Celina, who was completely shocked by this, stopped struggling, and just watched with tear-filled eyes.

Eventually, Zi released his lips from hers, just so he can breathe. Celina gasped for breath, still staring at him with those frightful eyes.

"Do you really want to die that badly?" he asked in a serious tone.

Celina turned her head to the side. "I have nothing left to live for."

Zi got off of her and Celina sat up on her knees, wondering what he will do. He reached for his sword, pulling it out of its sheath, and pointed it at her chin.

At first she was surprised to see the blade pointing at her, but then again, it was what she asked for, wasn't it?

"If you want to die that badly, then I will end your life for you." said Zi.

He really meant it, she could see it in his eyes. She shut her eyes and prepared for the end.

Zi's arm began shaking from hesitation.

\*Thud\*

Celina's eyes opened, surprised that she was still alive. The sword ended up hitting the bookshelf next to her. In the end, Zi could not go through with it. He was ashamed of himself for changing his mind, but he was ashamed more so of even thinking about killing her. He grabbed the sword and stormed out of the room.

Finally, things were quiet again. Celina, still kneeling on the floor, took a sigh of relief. Moments ago, she truly wanted to end her sad life, but she did not have the courage to do so. It seems that Zi made the decision for her. Despite how he acts, this strange man a strong sense of compassion. But now, the answer is still up to her, whether to continue living or not.

Alex went into another building of the imperial complex. This place was too big and he was lost, so he took out a map and examined it closely. "Hmmm, this is where the royal hall is. And I am here, in the garden. I have to go this way." He crumbled the map and shoved it back into his pocket and hurried off.

In one of the conference rooms, General Tsu and his men were having a meeting. Being informed of the outside raid, they were taking precautionary measures. Suddenly, Alex kicked down the door and charged into the room, and everyone became startled.

General Tsu stood up. "Who the hell are you?"

"You are the one of the people who work for Xiang, aren't you?"

"You're right on the dot. I am General Tsu. You must be one of Lord Yu's followers."

Alex drew his sword. "If I eliminate you, then the Duke's forces will be disempowered."

"Ha ha ha ha! You want to challenge me? You have a lot of nerve, boy. You are either really confident, or really stupid."

Alex charged forward and Tsu's troops attacked. Slash! Wham! Tables were turned and things broke in the fight. Tsu joined the fight and dominated. Alex was pushed back. Slash! Alex was pushed to the wall, and knocked down one of the torches.

The fire spilled over and touched his blade. His sword caught the fire and the fire spread throughout the entire blade.

Alex: "This...this must be the power of the Fire Sword!"

Tsu: "You have the Legendary Fire Sword? That's impossible. The Fire Sword belongs to the War God of the valley. How can a simple man like you possess such a weapon?"

Alex smiled as the troops came at him. Slash! The burning sword hit and burned their skin at the same time, like a double attack. Using quick movements, he made quick work of the pawns.

Cheng: "Master, I cannot possibly accept such a gift. I am unworthy of it."

War God: "You need it more than I do. It has been my companion for many years. This sword, when activated, will become fire itself. Thus, it is called the Fire Sword. It will slice an opponent's flesh and give them a burning sensation at the same time. That is what makes it so deadly."

Slash!! Alex just finished off another guy, and there was no one left.

Tsu: "It must be a fake. Yes, that's right, it is a fake. You can't fool me!"

The two warriors fought valiantly, hitting hard with their swords and they exchanged some moves.

Tsu: (He is not all bluff. His skills are top class. And his sword is dangerous, but I will not let it burn me.)

The general screamed like a barbarian and ran forward. Alex blocked his attack, but the force of his push was so strong that Alex was pushed back, and his feet scraped the floor. Scrrrrrch!

Tsu jumped to the wooden confines of the ceiling and remained there. Then he jumped down and pointed his sword downwards, and hit the floor with all his might. "Ground Smasher!!" Doosh! When the sword came in contact with the wood, it broke apart, and pieces of it flew everywhere. Alex quickly laid low and blocked the flying debris with his sword.

The general's attack made a hole on the floor, and the force of his strike made a ripple that sent pieces of wood flying everywhere.

Alex: (That was a close one.)

Tsu laughed out loud. "Ha ha ha ha. That was the Ground Smasher, one of my specialties. Are you impressed?"

"It was a nuisance."

"What did you say, punk?" said Tsu, who was upset.

"I dare you to try it again."

"With pleasure!" It is a shame, for General Tsu is a prideful warrior, and sometimes his pride blinds him.

He jumped up to the platform, and Alex followed suit. They stood on the same piece of wood.

Tsu: (What is doing? Is he trying to copy me? Does that idiot think he can do my move just by seeing it once? He will die for his stupidity!) Both of them jumped down simultaneously and smashed their swords into the ground.

The flying debris from both of their impacts cancelled each other out, but some pieces of wood pierced their bodies. They were knocked down.

Tsu got up. "Impossible...How did you learn my technique...just like that?"

"That is no technique, it is just a trick. Anyone with half a brain can learn a trick."

General Tsu grew angry and he swings his blade forward. The Fire Sword grew red and became embed in fire and Alex swings equally as hard, breaking Tsu's sword,

and slashed him in the stomach. The general was surprised that he was beaten by someone with more skill.

Alex put his sword back into its case. "This is a technique."  
He collapsed and died.

With their plan set in action, the quiet confines of the Imperial Palace have now become a battlefield. Troops were slaughtered every minute and the ground was filled with the blood of those who were killed.

Duke Xiang, safe in some room, wandered back and forth. His uneasiness was making King Liu even more worried. "Where is the reporter? Damn it, he's late." He continued moving to and fro. "What is taking him so long?"

A troop entered the royal room and bowed. "Sire!

Xiang: "There you are! What kept you up?"

"Sorry, but we have our hands full. I almost did not make it. Things are more chaotic than we thought, sire. An army being led by Captain Tai, Lord Yu, and Lord Zhang are raiding us from the front and from the inside. And that is not the only problem. In the confusion, some of our men are betraying us and killing our own."

"What?!" shouted Xiang. "It is that bad?"

"I'm afraid so, sire. Our men are doing the best they can."

Xiang was biting on some cloth. "Damn you Shu Tai, this is all your doing, isn't it? You've been scheming this ever since I took over the hierarchy. I won't go down so easily."

A scout bowed to Duke Xiang. "Sir, the enemy has broken in. They will get here soon."

Everyone is holding their breath as they wait for the end of the battle. This fight will determine not just the life of King Liu, but the fate of the entire Shen Kingdom.

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## 十五: The Light That Shatters the Darkness! Birth of the Demon Slayer!

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Alex and Fo reached the royal chamber. They saw a silhouetted man sitting on the king's chair, but they were sure he's not the king. Lightning flared. It was the Duke. "Welcome to my kingdom." said the Duke.

"Your kingdom?" Alex said. "You just stole it from the real king. Give it back to who it belongs."

"Enough chit-chatting." Fo said. "We have come a long way to fight you. Come down and fight us, Duke Xiang"

"Unfortunately, I will not be your opponent today. He is."

Liu Bei came out from the curtains, and came up to the chair.

Duke: "Liu, Eliminate these annoying bugs immediately."

"As you wish." Liu replied in a dead voice. He drew his sword, ran down the stairs, and screamed.

Fo got in front of Alex. "Watch out."

Fo intercepted Liu's attack, and they jumped up. Xiang threw some needles at Fo, and surprised him, Liu kicked him away. Doosh. Crash.

"No!" Alex shouted. He attacked Liu.

Liu jumped back, and did his stance.

Alex: (He's using a long-range sword. It has good range, but it's slower. What's this? He's using an ancient style, that of the Liu family...I have to be careful.)

Xiang smiled as he watched the duel. (This guy doesn't stand a chance.)

Alex: (Is this the famous King Liu Bei? Is he being manipulated by the Duke?)

Xiang suddenly saw Alex's sword. (What?! He has the legendary Fire Sword? It can't be.)

Liu made the first strike. Alex counter attacked. His sword glowed red and had burning flames, he swings the sword, and the flames made a wave of energy, Liu jumped away to avoid harm.

Xiang stood up. (There is no doubt about it, I am sure that is the Fire Sword. There is only one sword like it in the world. How did this man possess such an item?)

Slash!

(Did War God give him the sword? Is he the War God's successor?)

Slash!

Both warriors backed up.

Xiang: "Interesting. To give King Liu...I mean, my servant Liu, such a hard time, you must have an interesting origin. What is your name, young man?"

"My name? My name is Alex Cheng."

That name struck Xiang like a thunderbolt to the head. "Cheng?" He suddenly thought about the little girl named Cheng who sneaked up on him and saw him in his semi-transformed state. That girl ran away before he could silence her. (Cheng? Is he related to that little wretch? No, it's just a coincidence.)

The Duke got mad for no reason. "Liu, finish him off now, or you won't see your concubine alive! Kill him!"

Liu: "Sorry I have to do this. But I must end your life here."

Cheng got ready. "Why are you doing this?"

Liu made his move. Whoosh! He was so fast Alex couldn't see it. Alex blocked with his sword vertically. Clang!

Alex: "Why are you working for this madman?"

Liu: "I have to...or my concubine will be killed! I have no choice."

Xiang: "Enough! Stop talking and kill him already."

Fo was recovering from being unconscious. "Ugh..."

Liu charged and slashed, Alex jumped over the blade and landed behind him. Liu turned around and made a forward strike, Alex blocked and got pushed backwards. "Listen to me, your highness. It doesn't have to be this way!"

Xiang: "Don't listen to him."

"What would you know? You don't know what I've been through!"

"Listen to me! This man is going to ruin your life, King Liu! You can't let him control you...or you will lose your entire kingdom. Right now Tai and his men are fighting to save you. Wherever your concubine is, I'm sure she doesn't want to see you like this...Please, King Liu, please wake up."

Liu was shocked beyond words. The words of this swordsman struck true. What has he been doing this whole time?

Xiang was getting impatient with Liu's indecisiveness. For some reason, he was getting angrier and it's uncontrollable.

Liu was still in shock. "I can't...I can't let this happen...to my kingdom...my people..."

Alex: "Your highness..."

Suddenly, Xiang threw a dagger at Liu's back, and he fell face forward.

Slash! "Argh!"

Fo just slashed Duke in the back. The Duke threw a smoke bomb and ran away. Fo coughed. "That slippery bastard...you're not getting away!" He ran into the darkness.

Alex went to pick up the king. "Your highness?"

"Do not worry about me..." he said weakly. "I am not going to die from something like this. Just go and kill the duke. Avenge my fallen comrades!"

"Don't worry, I will. I promise you." he said in that same strong and confident tone. With that said, he ran off into the darkness.

Xiang walked limply back to his room, to his drawer, where the mirror stood. He looked into the glass. "Demon King!! I am calling you, Demon King!" His blood was dripping on the floor. "Damn you, I am calling you!"

The face on the mirror appeared. "What is the matter, mighty Duke? Things are not going as planned?"

"Those blasted mortals ruined everything. I need more power!"

"Look at you, **Ko-Raztul** you are pathetic. You cannot even hold the castle on your own. But I shall give you one last chance." The face's eyes glowed.

Xiang suddenly started sweating. His body grew bigger and redder, and he transformed into his demon form. He was now a big ogre, with spikes on his back.

Face: "Don't fail me again."

Xiang: "Damn you Demon King, I am tired of taking orders from you. From now on I take things into my own hands." He ripped the mirror from the drawer and walked outside.

Face: "What are you doing, fool?"

Xiang: "Shut up!" He smashed the mirror on the floor, it cracked into pieces. The face was gone.

Alex and Fo came to the scene. "What the..."

Xiang turned around and hissed. Alex and Fo were startled. Xiang's appearance has noticeably changed. His skin was pale and his face looked like it was melting. He ran to the exit quicker than he was before. The heroes followed suit.

Zi just sensed something. "Hmmm?" He ran towards that direction.

## The Demon Appears

Celina, who was scared and alone, walked down the dark hallway, hoping to find a place to hide so she can avoid this madness. She has already been through a lot, and just wants to rest and take a breather. Tired and worn out from the running, she just wanted to be left alone.

She stopped when she heard loud footsteps coming her way. Judging by the sound, these footsteps were not those of a normal person...but she had no idea what it was. **\*Stomp stomp\*** As the **demon** emerged from the darkness, Celina was horrified by the sight and she froze in fear. The demon duke walked towards her with its grotesque body, hissed at her.

To say she was scared was an understatement...for she had never seen anything this horrifying in her life. This must be some sort of nightmare...a very bad nightmare. But unfortunately for her, this is real, and she happened to run into the demon...alone. Her mouth was wide open, yet no words would come out. Her eyes were wide open due to the shock and they were shaking in fear. Her entire body was trembling,

especially her legs. Instinctively, she covered her breasts with her arms and took a step back, but her body would not move.

The demon was drooling and staring at her like she was its next meal. The shock was too much for her, and she fainted. The duke approached the unconscious woman and grabbed her by the arms and lifted her up. He proceeded to lick her breasts, moving his tongue to her neck and face, and she tasted good. He then carried her frail body, and ran down the hall, to a more secluded place where he can continue his debaucherous act.

The duke placed the unconscious Celina on the floor. What luck he ran into today, to have found the concubine on his way here. Her body was exposed, covered by nothing but pink ribbons wrapped around her. Her skin and meat looked deliciously, and he drooled as he was thinking about all the things he wanted to do to his victim. For some reason, his appetite increased tenfold in his body, it must be the demonic hunger for human flesh.

Celina's eyes twitched and she was regaining consciousness. Her vision was blurry at first, but as her eyes were completely open, she saw the ogre directly in front of her. And so the thing she saw before was no dream, and it was still here, staring at her. She screamed and quickly sat up. The ogre drooled as its claws reached for her.

"AAAAAH!!" she shrieked in horror as the claw approached her. She turned away, stood on her feet, and made a run for it.

The demon grabbed the loose ribbon in the air, and she could no longer run. "Uuuh! Nooo!"

"Where do you think you're going?" said the ogre. "Am I that hideous that you want to get away from me?" it said as it pulled Celina closer to him.

Celina shrieked as she tried to pull the ribbon, but it was no use, the demon's arms are too strong for her, and she eventually was dragged into him. He grabbed her arms and she screamed, trying to escape his grip.

"The king had always had you as his possession...but since he is no longer here, his possession is now mine! Ha ha ha ha!" The duke's giant tongue came out of his mouth, and proceeded to lick the frightened woman's body. Slllllrrrrpppp!

"Uuuuh!" screamed Celina, as she was being licked all over. "NO PLEASE NO! STOP PLEASE!" She felt the disgusting tongue of the demon; it was slimy and scaly, and full of saliva. And it touched her all over, starting from her stomach, up to her breasts, and to her neck. He kept on licking her, enjoying the taste of her skin. The tongue even touched her face, and she winced and turned away, shedding tears of fear and pain. The tongue felt slimy and sticky and wet upon her face, and left some saliva on her.

The demon grabbed her ankles and lifted her upside down. "Uhhhhh!" He licked her legs, starting from one end to the other. "Uuuugh!! STOP PLEASE! NO! NO!"

Poor Celina, for she once again finds herself in a compromising situation. First, she was violated by soldiers and brutes, and now of all things, a demon.

When the ogre was done licking her, he dropped her on the ground. \*Thud\*

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Alex and Fo encountered the duke's soldiers in the hallway. "Halt!" shouted one of them. The heroes made quick work of the soldiers. They heard a woman's scream and hurried down the hallway.



Celina crawled back in fear as the demon's claws hovered over her. "Please! No! Please! Don't!!!"

"Stop!" Cheng yelled.

The Duke turned around and hissed at them. "You are nothing but a pest, an insect! And I will crush you like a bug!"

Alex and Fo have never seen anything like this before, but nonetheless they attacked full throttle. Xiang scratched and swiped with his claws, occasionally throwing a punch. Alex jumped over his claw and landed near Celina. "It's not safe. Better hide somewhere."

Celina nodded and ran away.

\*Slash\* Fo's straw hat fell off, revealing a woman's face behind a mask. Alex thought it was a man all this time. But he had no time to be shocked.

Zi showed up. "Don't worry, I have come to save you!"

"Zi?" Alex shouted in surprise.

Xiang turned his attention to new arrival. He roared and charged forward. Zi slashed and hit the demon's shoulder. Xiang snatched the sword from him, and bent the blade. "You think your human toys can kill me?"

Zi threw daggers at the demon's chest. \*Stab\* Xiang roared in pain. He charged forward and smacked Zi against the wall. "Ugh!"

Alex saw his chance. His Fire Sword became burning and he jumped and slashed Xiang's back.

"Uuuuuargh!" Xiang turned around and smacked Alex away and he hit the wall.

Fo kept attacking the demon, jumping around and hitting about. Suddenly, they went past each other and hit! \*Slash!\* The demon's claws ripped off the mask. It fell to the floor. Fo's face was revealed for the first time. Surprisingly, she turned out to be a woman. Her straw hat fell off, revealing her long, black hair.

"What? You're a girl?" Alex said in shock.

"What's it to you?" she replied.

Duke recognized her face. He suddenly thought of the servant who spied on him several years ago. "So...you are that girl? You are Li Cheng?"

Alex: "Cheng? Wait a minute...that means...you're my sister?"

Fo looked at him in the eyes. "Yes, I am Li Cheng. I am the sister you've been looking for."

Zi was barely conscious. His vision and auditory senses were blurry, but he had an idea of what's happening.

Alex: "But why..."

"Sorry for the deception, brother. I didn't want you to know so soon." Li said. "I wanted you to find out...when the time was right."

"I've been searching for my sister all this time, and she's been with me all along!"

Duke: "Awwww, how sweet. I'd hate to break your touching reunion, but someone has to die today! You two can reunite in hell!" The demon roared and pounded its chest like a gorilla.

Alex and Li jumped around the demon and slashed him. Whish! Whoosh! The Duke screamed in anger and pain. Smack! Alex was hit. Xiang grabbed Li and put her in a head lock.

Duke: "Muahahaha. One more step, and the girl dies."

Alex: "Let her go."

Duke: "Stay where you are."

Alex's fist grew tighter and tighter, and his sword grew redder and its flames burned even more.

Li: "Al-lex...forget about me...kill Duke Xiang..."



Alex: "I can't!"

Li: "You must...use the Phoenix Palm."

"The Phoenix Palm?" Alex suddenly had a flash back of War God's training.

"It is known as the Move that Saves Lives. It is called The Phoenix Palm." Then War God demonstrated it to his pupil.

Alex got ready. He put the sword back in its patch and got into fighting stance. It was the deciding moment of his fate and his sister's as well.

(It is the only choice I have. It is a risky move, one wrong mistake could kill my sister. I have to do it right! Please, War God, give me the strength to save my sister!)

Xiang: "What are you doing? You still want to fight? Give up now, mortal!"

"Huyaaaah!" Alex charged. He hit his palm on Li's stomach. Everyone was shocked.

Zi and Celina stared dumbfounded. Li was speechless.

Suddenly, Xiang coughed blood. The energy went from Alex's fist to Li's stomach, but it went through her and hit the demon's stomach. "Uargh..."

Alex jumped, drew the Fire Sword, and cut the demon's head off. It rolled on the floor. Doosh doosh.

Li fell on her knees, then fell completely. But then she got up. "I'm...alright. You did it, Alex."

"The Phoenix Palm...it **truly** is the move that saves lives."

Suddenly, the doors slammed open and storms of soldiers came in.

Li ran at the window and jumped out.

"Wait!!" Alex yelled. Too late, she was gone already.

The troops were on their side. They helped Zi get up. Tai walked up to Alex, and seeing the demon's body, he opened his mouth in shock. "My God...Cheng...you did it. You've slain Duke Xiang!"

Alex smiled.

Liu: "The ceremony will begin shortly. Prepare yourself, hero." He winked. Celina walked towards Liu. "If you don't mind, I'd like to have a word with him."

"Sure thing. But make it quick." Liu walked past her.

Alex took a good look at Celina and recognized her immediately. She was the woman he saved earlier! What a coincidence. He almost didn't recognize her in that white dress. The first time he saw her, she was wearing...almost nothing.

"Y-You're Lady Celina?" he said nervously.

She smiled. "Yes, I am the imperial concubine."

He bowed and stared at the floor, afraid to make eye contact. "It's an honor meeting you." He blushed, and his heart was beating rapidly. He was worried she might bring up what happened that night.

"No, the honor is mine."

She touched his hands. "Thank you for saving our lives." she said and smiled warmly. Her warm, genuine smile made Alex feel at ease.

"Oh, your welcome, your highness. I was just doing the right thing." Alex was glad she didn't bring up anything.

Horns blew. King Liu began to speak. "Cheng Alex. As King of Shen, I have my duties and I cannot ignore your actions and leave you un-rewarded. Coming out of nowhere, you decided to help me save my kingdom. You saved my life as well as my concubine's as you fought selflessly through hundreds of soldiers. You have also slain the dog Duke Xiang, killing him in his demon form. You alone, with your mighty

sword, saved the entire Kingdom of Shen. You did it, by your own bare hands and feet. You alone saved the kingdom from certain corruption and downfall.”

The king then put his sword on Alex’s shoulder. “Thus, I shall pronounce you as the hero and savior of the Kingdom of Shen. You alone will be remembered as the greatest warrior of all time - you will become a legend. People all over China will know your name! Imagine that! When people talk of the bravest and most courageous warrior who hath ever lived, they will speak of your name, Cheng Alex. I shall give you the title - **Demon Slayer**, and the Hero of Shen, and finally, the Hero of The Ages.”

Alex opened his palms, as Liu handed him the royal sword. Alex bowed his head, then stood up. “I thank you, your highness.”

Everyone clapped and cheered loudly.

Liu smiled. “Well done, warrior.”

Celina smiled as well, seeing him get the recognition he deserves. Jade and Zi cheered and screamed loudly, their voices meshed into the audience’s. Jade jumped up and down and hugged Zi tight. Feng Long and Shen Long had smiles behind their masks.

Alex still can’t believe this is happening to him. It is like a dream come true. Everyone is cheering for him and for his honorable accomplishments.

Ho Sai, meditating, suddenly opened his eyes. “That young lad...he did it. He saved the Kingdom of Shen from certain doom. Even I had not predicted such a...surprise.” Ho Sai smiled for the first time in a long time.

Guan and his students, Chan, Fu, and Shang, continued about their duties. They know not of the events of the outside world, but they can never forget the impact that Li and Alex left on them. Even though Alex’s stay was short, his spirit and passion left a mark that can never be erased.

The War God stood by the mountain edge, watching the skyline. He is no psychic, but somehow he too knew about Cheng’s success.

After the ceremony, Alex walked the halls of the palace alone. He needed some quiet time, especially after all the crazy things that have taken place. He now understood why Ho Sai allowed him to enter the Valley of Death. All the events lead to one another, and eventually led him to become the Demon Slayer. It is part of his fate.

No words can express the satisfaction he felt right now. One day, he was running away from the law, and the next, he became an imperial lord. Everybody loves him, especially the king, and he has friends who will never part from him. But despite all this, one thing is missing. He found Li, who was Fong Long in disguise. But now that her identity is revealed, she has disappeared again, for what reason he knew not.

Looking out the window, Alex was thinking that she could be anywhere in the kingdom, and only the sky can see where she is. Alex thought that if he was the sky, then he can find her. And he secretly swore to himself that he will find her no matter what it takes.

Main Characters - Legend of the Fire Sword		
Name	Role	Type
Alex Cheng	Main character, brother of Li Cheng	S
Zi Lai	Alex's best friend since childhood	A
Jade Lee	Alex's childhood friend, jewelry saleswoman	A
Fo Long	Third student of War God, wanted criminal	S-A
Shen Long	Second student of War God, wanted criminal	T
Sui Long	First student of War God, wanted criminal	S
Celina aka "Lady Ce"	The king's concubine	S
King Liu aka Liu Bei	King of Shen	R
Duke Xiang	Eunuch who wants to take over the kingdom	A
Shu Tai	Captain of the army, former thief	T
Ho Sai	Headmaster of Temple	T
Guan Du	Teacher in Temple, Chie's brother	S
Chie Du	Teacher in Temple, Gua's brother	S
Chan Lou	Student of Temple, Alex's rival	A
Fu	Student of Temple, Alex's friend	R
Shang	Female student of Temple, Alex's friend	R

Nobles		
Lord Liu Zhang	Eunuch, supporter of Lord Yu	T
Lord Yu	Eunuch, supporter of Liu Bei	S
Lord Sima	Eunuch, supporter of Yu	T
Lord Fei	Eunuch, supporter of Yu	T
Lord Huang	Eunuch, supporter of the Duke	T
Lord Lee	Eunuch, Xiang's rival	T

Minor Characters <sup>1</sup>		
En Lo	Xiang's imperial captain	T
Kiyang	Mountain bandit	A
General Chung	General of the army, Xiang's rival	T
General Tsu	Duke Xiang's replacement for General Chung	T
Hua	Local gangster who used to bully Alex	A
Jiax	Leader of his gang of brutes	A

<sup>1</sup> Updated characters table. Zhao Zen is replaced with Hua. Liu Tai becomes Shu Tai. Liu Yiu becomes Lord Yu.

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