

7 Killers – Chapter 3

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Chapter 3 – Yue'er shining on Changjie

Part 1

So the woman's name was Hu Yue'er, and it turned out she and Liu Changjie were friends!

What was going on?

Could it be that they had been putting on an act the whole time?

Why would they put on such an act? And who were they acting for?

Hu Yue'er had stood up and, hand on her waist, gazed at Liu Changjie. "Let me ask you, if there really was a husband and wife who met a person like you, what would happen?"

The question seemed to stump Liu Changjie. He stared blankly for a while before finally responding, "I'm not a good person, but I really wouldn't do something so unethical."

"I didn't say you," said Hu Yue'er. "I said a person like you."

Liu Changjie laughed bitterly. "Well then, I have no idea. I never thought about it."

"The plan was thought up by you, wasn't it?"

Liu Changjie's expression suddenly became very serious. "It was all to convince Dragon Fifth that I'm a bastard. We can't let him have any suspicions, so we have to be cautious at all times. He's too powerful, and has spies everywhere."

"But just now ..."

"Just now one of his spies was here. The driver is definitely one of his men."

"How do you know?"

"I could tellt." He offered further explanation: "If that fellow was a real driver, as soon as he caught sight of two boxes of pure white silver, he would have been tempted beyond control. But, it seems that he is used to such things, and was completely unfazed."

Hu Yue'er thought for a moment, and then laughed. "I've heard you had quite the enjoyable time recently.

With a bitter laugh, Liu Changjie said, "I got my nose broken, you think that was enjoyable?"

"As long as you can have the company of women every day, getting beaten up is worth it."

Liu Changjie sighed. "Unfortunately, none of those women could measure up to you!"

"Stop trying to butter me up," laughed Hu Yue'er. "You know you can't pull a fast one on me. Until the matter is settled, you can forget about laying your hands on me."

"Not even one hand?"

"No. Starting today, I sleep on the bed, you sleep on the floor. And if you even think about trying to secretly climb into the bed during the night, I'll go tell Dragon Fifth all the details of your past."

"You're simply not human. You're a demon!" [1]

"You're just as bad, you womanizer." [2] She laughed and gave him a wink. "Actually, you're just a street, and I'm the moonlight. Moonlight can shine on millions of streets, so I guess I'm just born to mess with you." [3]

He laughed. "I always thought it was strange that you were selected to be my assistant."

She tilted her head. "Because I'm the daughter of 'Power of Hu' Patriarch Hu. And because I'm capable, clever, I understand everything, I know everything..."

"Because," interrupted Liu Changjie, "you're not just a crafty girl, you're also sexy!" [4]

It was actually quite proper to call her crafty, considering her father was known as one of the craftiest people in Jianghu.

Just hearing the name "Power of Hu" would make most people tremble with consternation.

"I also think it's strange," she laughed coldly. "Why does my father always say that only you can take on Dragon Fifth? And why do I need to help you?"

"Because," laughed Liu Changjie, "my martial arts are very powerful, I'm intelligent and capable, and I never brag or show off. But, almost no one in Jianghu has ever seen me. Furthermore, I have very few weaknesses, and lots of strengths. Clearly the old man wants me to be his son-in-law."

Hu Yue'er glared at him. "Maybe it's because you know how to shoot your mouth, and you're also full of crap."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she couldn't help but laugh loudly. But only a moment later her face was like stone. "Have you already met with Dragon Fifth?"

"Twice."

"Then why didn't you capture him? Why let such a good opportunity slip past?"

"If I was as stupid as you, and actually tried to do that, you'd be looking at a dead Liu Changjie right now."

She laughed coldly. "Don't you have really good martial arts? Don't you count as one of the greatest masters under heaven? My father and his friends are constantly singing your praises. Patriarch Wang even treats you like his own son. What reason do you have to be afraid of other people?"

"I'm not afraid of other people," he said solemnly. "I'm afraid of Dragon Fifth!"

She blinked. "Are his martial arts really as frightening as the legends say?"

"Maybe more frightening. I can only say that even counting the grandmasters of the Seven Great Sword Schools, no one exists in Jianghu who could withstand his 200 stances."

"What about you?"

He didn't respond. Instead he said, "Not to mention that he has the assistance of someone who is extremely frightening."

"Lan Tianmeng?"

"That lion is already old," he laughed, "and he's been kept in a cage for too long. He can still bite, but his teeth aren't as sharp as they used to be, and his spirit has been worn down."

Hu Yue'er's eyes turned up in thought. "It's said that Dragon Fifth has a lion, a tiger, and a peacock working for him."

"The lion is old, the black tiger has gone into retirement, and the peacock is beautiful but doesn't bite."

"So you're not talking about them?"

"No."

"Well, who then?"

"It's a middle-aged man who wears a green robe and white stockings. He seems to follow rules like a flunky, but his martial arts are deep. Profoundly deep."

"How could you tell?"

"When the lion made his move against me, the power of his palm was shocking. It was so powerful that everything in the room was shaking. But the middle-aged man just stood calmly to the side. His clothes weren't even moving."

He continued to think. "When he poured wine for me, I looked at his hand. I don't think I've ever seen such a steady hand before. The wine pot he was holding was very heavy, and he seemed to be just randomly pouring, but he poured each cup perfectly, not spilling even a single drop."

Hu Yue'er listened carefully and then sat for a while in contemplation. "Were you able to tell what kind of weapon he uses from looking at his hand?"

"I couldn't. His hand didn't have even a single mark on it to indicate that he practices martial arts."

It doesn't matter what kind of weapon a person uses, their hands would definitely develop calluses. Which in turn is not something easily concealed from a perceptive person.

"Could it be that he uses the other hand?" she muttered.

"Possibly."

"Among the left-handed masters in the martial arts world, who is the best?"

Liu Changjie laughed. "That's a question for you. Aren't you the living record book of the masters of the martial arts world?"

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It really was one of Hu Yue'er's best skills.

She not only had a highly retentive memory, she also was extremely knowledgeable. This was probably due to the fact that her father was one of the most intelligent and well-known persons in Jianghu.

Regarding the history and stories of Jianghu, there was very little she didn't know.

"As far as famous left-handed kung fu masters go, the most amazing is definitely Qin Huhua."

"The Flower Protecting blade?" said Liu Changjie, surprised.

Hu Yue'er nodded. "It's said that the first time he killed was when he was nine years old. It was the notorious Central Plains bandit, Tiger Peng."

"Yes, I've heard the story."

"He was already famous by the time he was thirteen years old. By seventeen, he'd already defeated everyone in the Central Plains, and was called the Central Plains Number One Blade. When he was thirty-one years of age, he took over leadership of the Kongtong Sect, and became the youngest grandmaster in the history of the Seven Great Sword Schools. By that time, it was said that he had defeated over 650 masters of the martial arts world."

"There can't be many people in Jianghu who have created more of a sensation than him," exclaimed Liu Changjie.

"He became famous when he was young, and showed off his talents to the extreme. His skills were incredible, people couldn't help but admire him." Her eyes shone as she continued, "If only I'd been born a dozen or so years sooner, I definitely would have figured out a way to marry him."

"Thankfully, you weren't born a dozen or so years sooner, otherwise I would have to find him and challenge him to a fight to the death!"

Hu Yue'er rolled her eyes. "Unfortunately, the person you mentioned is definitely not him."

"Oh."

"How could someone as proud as him become somebody else's lackey? In any case, he's been missing for years, his whereabouts are completely unknown. Some people say that he traveled across the sea and became an immortal. Others say he died. But regardless of whether he's living or dead, he definitely wouldn't be pouring someone else's wine for them."

Liu Changjie let out a breath. "I really hope it isn't him. I definitely don't want to have that kind of opponent."

His voice suddenly stopped.

In the same moment that his voice stopped, his body was pressed down onto Hu Yue'er.

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It was impossible to see his movement; who would ever think that he had such ability?

Even Hu Yue'er would never have thought it possible.

Baring her teeth and struggling against him, she said, "You pervert, I'm telling you..."

Her voice suddenly stopped, as Liu Changjie's mouth covered hers.

She could only emit sound from her nose. An experienced man knew the type of sound a woman would make in this situation.

It was a sound that, if a man heard it, all the bones in his body would become weak.

She was pushing him back, struggling, clearly wanting to hit him.

But her hands were being held down.

Her face was burning red, and her whole body was as hot as if it were on fire.

What other reaction would one expect from a healthy, mature woman being held down by a man she has feelings for?

However, at that exact moment, a banging sound rang out, and the door crashed open as someone kicked their way in.

A person charged in, carrying a horse-cutter sword in hand. [5] Surprisingly, it was the young carriage driver.

Part 2

Liu Changjie was still pressed down on Hu Yue'er's body, although his lips had left hers.

The driver stood inside the bedroom door, staring at them icily.

His posture was stable, and he gripped his sword skillfully. Anyone could see that his sword skill was anything but weak.

In his callous eyes could be seen a mocking look. "I drove in a big circle outside," he laughed. "And after all that time you still haven't gotten her in bed? Seems like you really aren't very good at handling women."

Liu Changjie replied, "I've still got plenty of time left. I'm not a little boy like you, what's the hurry?" It seemed as if he suddenly realized that he didn't need to explain himself, and his face became very serious. "Why did you come back?"

The driver's face was also serious. "To kill you!" he said.

Liu Changjie seemed shocked. "Why do you want to kill me?"

The driver laughed coldly. "I've been working for him for eighteen years, and I've been destitute the entire time. I can only afford the dirtiest brothels and most disgusting whores. I finally have a chance to hit it big. You have a problem with that?"

Liu Changjie knew who he worked for, but he deliberately asked, "Don't tell me you're also one of Dragon Fifth's men?"

"If you were the least bit perceptive," he responded stonily, "you would know what kind of person Peng Gang is."

"You mean 'Whirlwind Blade' Peng Gang?"

"I never imagined you would know anything, let alone me."

"The Five-tiger Gate-breaking Sword School's highest ranking disciple relegated to driving others in a carriage! Isn't that just too insulting?"

Peng Gang gripped his sword so hard that the veins in his hand began to pop out. His forehead pulsed as he gritted his teeth and said, "I will never again allow others to treat me like bird shit."

"So, you plan to kill me, take the silver and the woman, and flee to some distant place?"

Peng Gang's eyes fell on Hu Yue'er's dainty, gasping mouth. His eyes seemed to shine with fire. "Any man would want to have a good time with a young widow like her."

As soon as she heard the words "young widow," Hu Yue'er called out, "You ... what did you do with the man of the house?"

Peng Gang laughed maliciously. "For the kind of man who is so willing to sell his wife, dying eight times wouldn't be enough. Don't tell me you miss him?"

Before he even finished speaking, Hu Yue'er started weeping. It looked completely realistic.

Liu Changjie let out a breath, apparently unwilling to move away from her body. "This woman isn't a goddess," he muttered. "Penniless, willing to sell herself for a little silver, she's really not worth it."

"If you had any skill at all," laughed Peng Gang, "you wouldn't have been beaten half to death like a dog and hung from the eaves."

"So you think you can beat me?"

"I know what's going on. You got beaten up, then suddenly show up with all that silver!"

Liu Changjie sighed. "You really are just an ignorant kid who doesn't know a damned thing. I really couldn't bear to kill you."

"Then you might as well let me kill you!" shouted Peng Gang.

His sword chopped forward, the first stance containing five movements. The Five-tiger Gate-breaking Sword was one of the martial world's most sinister and feared sword techniques, and "Whirlwind Blade" Peng Gang's speed was anything but slow.

Liu Changjie didn't counterattack.

It seemed like he did make any move at all to avoid the blow, and yet Peng Gang's sword somehow couldn't touch him.

Hu Yue'er appeared to be so frightened that she couldn't even cry, and had rolled into a ball in the corner of the bed.

Peng Gang's move was very quick, and Liu Changjie was forced to retreat backwards toward the corner of the room. Suddenly the sword chopped up from below, seeming to come from three different directions, slicing rapidly toward the left side of Liu Changjie's neck.

This was "Heaven and Earth Inverted," one of the Five-tiger Gate-breaking Sword's killing moves.

Liu Changjie could not retreat any further backwards. In an instant, his body had slid directly up the wall, all the way to the ceiling.

A dinging sound rang out, and sparks flew in all directions. Peng Gang had mistakenly assumed the move would result in a fatality. He had used all his strength, and could not pull back the sword, which embedded itself deeply into the wall.

He wrenched the sword free, but at that exact moment a hand crashed through the wall from outside and grabbed the blade of the sword.

The wall was made from bricks, but the hand moved through it as though it were soft clay. The fingers twisted gently, and sword, crafted from fine steel, snapped into two.

Peng Gang's face lost its color, his body stiffened.

He was a worldly-wise person, but this type of martial arts he'd simply never heard of.

A cold voice rang out from the other side of the wall. "You were with Dragon Fifth for eighteen years, and you earned about seventy or eighty silver per month. But this man suddenly gets tens of thousands, and you think you know what's going on. Is that right?"

Peng Gang's face was ashen as he nodded.

The person outside obviously couldn't see him nod, so Liu Changjie called out, "He says yes!"

"But, Mr. Liu was beaten up by Grandpa Lan and then made friends with Meng Fei. Anyone who calls Meng Fei a friend is an enemy of ours. How do you know where the silver came from?"

Peng Gang hesitated, and then finally responded, "I know that Meng Fei doesn't have those kind of resources. Also, that day I saw the young master in Meng Fei's village."

"I never imagined that you were so intelligent," responded the voice insipidly, "or that you paid such close attention to details." Only someone who paid attention to detail would notice things that were invisible to others. "Unfortunately, you have done something extremely stupid."

The source of the voice was outside, but it sounded as though it was directly next to Peng Gang's ear. It continued, "Even though you're perfectly aware that Liu Changjie is one of us, you still want to kill him?"

Peng Gang lowered his head. Sweat dripped down like rain. "I made a mistake."

"Do you know what your mistake was?"

"I ... I violated the family regulations!" As the words left his mouth, it seemed as though all the energy in his body had been depleted.

"Do you know what happens to people who violate the family regulations?"

Peng Gang's face was twisted with fear. It seemed like two invisible hands were gripping his throat.

He suddenly turned, apparently making an effort to flee.

He clearly thought that the person outside couldn't see.

But it was as if the hand itself had eyes.

The hand flicked, and the half-blade flew forward in a flash, embedding itself in Peng Gang's back.

At that exact instant, four muscular men flew into the room. One of them carried a large burlap sack, into which he began stuffing Peng Gang's body.

Another carried two boxes of silver, which he deposited onto the table.

The third carried an iron tool, which he immediately used to repair the door frame so recently destroyed by Peng Gang.

The fourth carried a batch of masonry clay. He immediately set to work patching the hole in the wall.

"I guarantee that you won't be bothered again in the next seven days," said the voice outside the wall. "But you had best remember, you aren't really one of us. You have no connection to the Dragon family."

The voice faded off into the distance.

The hole in the wall was patched, the door frame was repaired, the burlap sack was wrapped up. Not even a drop of blood could be seen on the ground.

During the entire time, the four large men hadn't even glanced at Liu Changjie. And by the time the voice disappeared, so had they.

The room was quite again, as if nothing had happened at all.

These people were precise and efficient, beyond the imagination of most. But at this point, what was not beyond imagination was the fate of anyone who violated the regulations of Dragon Fifth's family!

Part 3

Liu Changjie didn't move, didn't even open his mouth.

Neither did Hu Yue'er move, nor open her mouth.

The only sound that could be heard was that of rustling tree leaves, hens clucking, and dogs barking.

It was suddenly very hot inside the room. Liu Changjie slowly unclasped the front of his garment and then lay down on top of Hu Yue'er.

Surprisingly, she didn't kick him away, but instead just stared at him with her large eyes.

It seems she finally understood how frightening Dragon Fifth truly was.

"They're gone," said Liu Changjie. "All gone."

"These seven days, they really won't come back?"

"That man doesn't seem like the kind of person who speaks idly."

"Do you know who he is?" asked Hu Yue'er. "Did you recognize the hand?"

The hand was a right hand, and on it was no vestige to indicate the person had martial arts training. However, anyone could see that if the owner of that hand wanted to kill someone, very few people in the world could offer any resistance.

"I hope I didn't mistake what I saw."

"You hope it's the green-robed man?"

He nodded.

"Why?"

"Because if it is him, it means that sometimes he's not with Dragon Fifth. When I make my move, I really hope he's not there."

"When are you going to make your move?" asked Hu Yue'er.

"I'll wait until he completely trusts me," replied Liu Changjie. "I'll wait until he presents an opportunity."

"You believe that day will come?"

"It will," replied Liu Changjie resolutely.

Hu Yue'er sighed. "I'm afraid a lot of people will have died by the time that day comes."

"You're feeling bad about Stone?"

"Stone was an honest person," she said sadly. "This was supposed to be his last assignment. When it was over, he was going to return to his hometown and start farming. He even bought some land already."

Stone was the man who had been playing the role of her husband.

Liu Changjie listened quietly. "He shouldn't have bought a house and land," he said emotionlessly. "People like us are bound to meet death at some point along the road."

"Yes, but he died so unfairly." She closed her eyes. "His kung fu is just as good as that bastard Peng Gang's. But when Peng Gang attacked, he couldn't defend himself, otherwise he would have revealed our secret. Only ... only by dying could he keep the secret safe."

"He did what he had to do," said Liu Changjie calmly. "That was his duty."

Hu Yue'er's eyes opened. "Are you saying he was supposed to die?"

Liu Changjie said nothing.

"Are you human or not!" she cried. "Do you have any heart in you at all? You ... you"

As she spoke she seemed to get more and more mad, and then suddenly she kicked Liu Changjie off the bed and onto the floor.

Liu Changjie laughed. "If you think Stone was an honest person, then you're wrong. And if you think he died at the hands of that bastard, then you're even more wrong."

He laid on the ground, looking just as comfortable as he had been on the bed. "Maybe he just let Peng Gang land a couple blows to make him think he was dead. If he really let himself get killed by that runt bastard in just one blow, then he shouldn't be called Stone, he should be called Tofu."

Hu Yue'er seemed suspicious. "You really think he's alive?"

"Do you know how important this assignment is? Do you know how much time we spent planning it? If Stone was as honest as you imagine, how could he participate?"

Hu Yue'er laughed. "I don't know about other people, I just know that you are definitely not an honest person."

"Uh..."

Hu Yue'er bit down on her lip. "You know, even if you heard someone outside earlier, you didn't need to do what you did. You were just taking advantage of the situation."

Liu Changjie laughed. "You're half right."

"You mean you had other intentions?"

After a while, he said, "I just wanted you to understand that if I really wanted to force myself on you, there's really nothing you could do about it."

Hu Yue'er rolled her eyes. "Don't tell me ... you don't want to?"

"Don't tell me you want me to try again?"

She started to blush, and began gnawing on her lip again. "You wouldn't dare!"

Liu Changjie laughed again.

Suddenly, he flew onto the bed, pressing down onto Hu Yue'er.

She gasped. "You really are a pervert!"

"But this time you intentionally seduced me. I know that you..."

Before he could finish, he suddenly flew out of the bed, slammed into the wall, and fell onto the floor, clutching his stomach. His face was pale white.

Hu Yue'er looked at him. "Yes, I was seducing you on purpose. Because I wanted you to understand that if I'm not willing, there's really nothing you could do about it."

Liu Changjie twisted his waist. It looked like he was hurt so bad that he couldn't even speak. Sweat dripped down his forehead.

Regret suddenly flashed in Hu Yue'er's eyes. "But," she said softly, "it's like you already said before. Until this assignment is finished, I ... I ..."

She said nothing more, and she didn't need to. Even an idiot should be able to understand what she was getting at.

And yet it seemed that Liu Changjie didn't understand.

He slowly reclined, lying down on the floor. Whereas before his face had been friendly and happy, now it was filled with sorrow and misery.

He said nothing. He just lay there silently for a very long time.

Hu Yue'er's heart was soft. With a calm face, she said, "I know I kicked you, but you don't have to lie on the floor like a child and refuse to get up."

He kept his silence.

"Are you really mad at me?" she asked. "Or are you just thinking?"

He sighed softly. "I was just thinking that you're father will definitely find a great man for you. Someone who doesn't do what we do, someone who isn't constantly courting death. We ..."

Hu Yue'er's expression suddenly changed. "What is that supposed to mean?"

Liu Changjie laughed emptily. "It doesn't mean anything. I just hope that you can grow old together happily, and eventually forget about me."

Hu Yue'er's face was white as a ghost. "Why are you talking like this? Didn't you understand what I was talking about just now?"

"I understood," he said with a sigh. "It's just, I don't think I can wait until that day."

"Why?" she asked.

"The day I accepted this assignment," he said dully, "I also accepted that I would die. Even if I have the chance to kill Dragon Fifth, I ... I will never have a chance to see you again."

His eyes stared at nothing, and a mournful expression filled his face.

Hu Yue'er looked at him, and from the expression on her face, it seemed that there must be needles stabbing through her heart.

Liu Changjie couldn't help but laugh again. "Regardless of anything else, if I'm able to exchange my life for Dragon Fifth's, it will be worth it. I'm a nobody, really. No family. No ..."

Hu Yue'er didn't let him finish.

She threw herself onto him, her soft, tender lips covering his....

The wind blew harder outside. [6]

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The moon was out, and the moonlight shown in through the window onto Hu Yue'er's face. Her face was slightly flushed.

Liu Changjie glanced at her furtively, his eyes filled with joy.

Hu Yue'er gazed at the moon. Suddenly, she spoke. "I know you tricked me."

"I tricked you?"

Once again, she bit down on her lip. "You deliberately said all that stuff to soften me up. You ... you just took the opportunity to bully me. I obviously know you're not a good person, and yet somehow I let myself be fooled by you."

As she spoke, tears rolled out out. It was at this time in a girl's life when she was the weakest, and the most likely to weep.

Liu Changjie let her cry, waiting for her calm down before sighing and saying, "Now I know why you're sad. You're sad because my death is not certain."

Hu Yue'er didn't want to defend herself, but couldn't help it. "You know full well that's not what I meant."

"If you knew I was going to die, wouldn't you feel a little better?"

"But you're not going to die," she replied immediately. "You already said that you would wait until you are sure you can succeed before making your move. If you know you can succeed, who could possibly stop you?"

"If I'm not going to die, and the assignment will be completed, and you'll marry me in the end, then why are you so upset?"

Hu Yue'er seemed stumped.

She suddenly realized that Liu Changjie's laugh was repulsive—but not completely repulsively. It was a little bit cute as well.

She looked at him and sighed softly. "I know that you're feeling pretty pleased with yourself right now. Because you know that I'm going to be much more obedient from now on, since we have no choice but to get married. But if you're not obedient, then I'll make you sleep on the ground instead of with me."

Her lips were next to his ears. "Now do you understand?" she said softly.

"I understand. But," he laughed, "there's another thing I'm not clear about."

"What's that?"

He laughed bitterly. "At this point I'm not sure if it's me who fooled you, or you who fooled me."

Regardless of who fooled who, this kind of trickery would be welcomed by most people.

The days passed happily. The only sad thing was how quickly the days went by.

Seven days seemed to pass like the blink of an eye, and suddenly they had arrived at the last night.

It was the last night, and you would think it would be the sweetest.

Hu Yue'er was dressed up nicely, sitting in the living room. Normally, they would be laying in bed at this time.

Liu Changjie was looking at her. It seemed that he had been studying her for quite some while. Finally, he said, "Okay, what did I do to offend you?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"Then what's wrong?"

"I just don't want to become a widow before I'm even married, that's all."

"There is no one who wants you to be a widow."

"Yes there is."

"Who."

"You." Her face was blank as she continued coldly, "These seven days, any time I want to talk about serious issues, you just talk nonsense. If things continue on like this, I will definitely be a widow very soon."

Liu Changjie sighed. "Serious issues don't need to be discussed with your mouth. You solve them with your hands."

"And what are you planning to do to solve them?"

"So you're acting like this tonight because you want to have a discussion?"

"If we don't discuss it tonight, I'm afraid we won't ever have another chance."

Liu Changjie let out a sigh. "Alright. If you want to talk, let's talk."

"Dragon Fifth wants you to steal a box from Madam Lovesickness?"

"Yes."

"And did you agree?"

"Yes."

"Because you want to have a chance to get close to Dragon Fifth. In order to get that chance, you need to earn his trust. And to earn his trust, you have to do this important thing for him."

"Do you have a better plan?"

"I don't." She sighed. "These past few years, we know that a lot of crimes have been perpetrated by Dragon Fifth, but we haven't been able to find a scrap of evidence."

"Even if you got your hands on some evidence, you might not be able to get your hands on him."

"So, we needed to call in the cavalry."

"And your cavalry is me."

"Therefore, if you want to get your hands on him, you first need to get your hands on evidence of his crimes."

"Therefore, I definitely have to help him."

"Are you confident you can do it?" she asked.

"A little," he replied.

"In one hour, you can kill the seven guards outside, then lift the 1,000 pound iron gate, open the three secret doors, and flee to a place where Madam Lovesickness can't find you?"

"I said that I'm a little bit confident, not that I'm completely confident."

"Do you know what kind of people those seven guards are?"

"I don't."

"What do you know about their martial arts?"

"Nothing."

"You don't know anything, and you say you're only a little bit confident. Isn't this deliberately setting me up to be a widow?"

Liu Changjie laughed. "Even though I don't know about their martial arts, I do know that you're going to tell me."

Hu Yue'er didn't seem to be amused. "Why the hell do you think I would know anything about their martial arts?"

Liu Changjie smiled. "Because you're smart and capable, and know pretty much everything that goes on in Jianghu. Also, these past several days, you haven't slept very well. You've definitely been putting a lot of thought into it."

Her face was blank, but in her eyes could be seen a little bit of warmth. "So," she said softly, "you do have a bit of a conscience after all. You finally realize how hard I've been working."

Liu Changjie walked forward and seized her waist. "I know that you treat me well," he said gently. "And so..."

Before he could finish, Hu Yue'er shoved him away. "So, you should sit down like a good boy," she said coldly. "Listen carefully while I tell you about the martial arts of those seven men. Think of a good way to deal with them, come back to me alive and don't turn me into a widow!"

Liu Changjie had no choice but to sit down. "You really know who the seven people are?" he asked with a bitter laugh.

"In recent years, the number of people in Jianghu who have been forced into fugitive status could number one or two hundred. But among them, many are either too weak in martial arts or too old for Madam Lovesickness to even glance at."

"And certainly a lot in that group have died."

Hu Yue'er nodded. "So, I've thought about it a lot, and I've come to the conclusion that the number of people Madam Lovesickness could have taken in numbers about thirteen at the most. Among those, there are seven who are the most likely candidates."

"How the hell did you figure that out?"

"Because these seven not only covet riches, they also fear death. Only men who fear death would be willing to be a woman's lackey."

Liu Changjie laughed bitterly. "I don't fear death, and yet I've already become your lackey."

She stared at him. "Do you want to know about the seven men, or not?"

"Yes, I do."

Hu Yue'er continued, "Have you ever heard of someone called 'Little Fifth Omniscient'?"

"You mean the Deflowering Bandit?"

"Fifth Omniscient" was one of the demons of the Jiangnan Temple of Licentiousness. So it made sense that "Little Fifth Omniscient" and the Deflowering Bandit were one and the same.

"Even though he is not one of the Five Gates' worst sexual predators, his Qing Gong [7] and Palm techniques are not bad. The most dangerous thing about him are his three concealed poison weapons, especially his Barkcloth Tree poison, it's extremely potent." [8]

"I heard he's a member of the Tang Family from Sichuan. Their poisoned weapon kung fu is definitely the real deal."

The Tang clan from Sichuan and their concealed poison weapons were well known in Jianghu. In their three hundred year history, few people in Jianghu had been willing to provoke them, and they were also not reluctant to offend others. The Tang Clan family regulations were very strict and well known.

"Little Fifth Omniscient" Tang Qing was definitely a member of the Tang Clan, but perhaps the worst representative of the family. If he was really relying on help from Madam Lovesickness, it must be because he was worried that the Tang Clan would try to apprehend him and punish him according to their family regulations.

"Among those seven men, you especially need to be careful of his concealed poisoned weapons. I think that before facing him, you should go to Sichuan and get the antidote to their poison."

"Sadly," said Liu Changjie with a bitter laugh, "I'm afraid even if I want it, I can't have it. It's not like they sell it."

"Then you have to take care of him first; don't give him a chance to use his poison on you."

Liu Changjie nodded. "Don't worry. I know that getting Tang Clan poison powder on your skin is extremely painful."

"For safety's sake, you should wear very thick clothes. I know you don't like the heat, but heat never killed anyone."

"I'll definitely wear a thick, cotton jacket."

Hu Yue'er finally seemed satisfied. She continued, "Among the seven, his kung fu is not the best."

"Whose is?"

"Three of them have very powerful kung fu. One is 'Ghost Meteor' Shan Yifei, another is 'Soul Seducing' Zhao, and another is 'Iron Monk.'"

Liu Changjie's brow furrowed. He had clearly heard all three of these names before.

"Iron Monk is especially dangerous," continued Hu Yue'er. "He used to be one of the Eight Great Shaolin disciples, and it's said that he practices Virgin Kung Fu. [9] He's not obsessed with money or with sex, but with killing people. The methods he uses are so inhuman that he ended up being expelled by Shaolin."

"Maybe he developed mental problems from practicing Virgin Kung Fu, and that's why he developed a taste for indiscriminate killing."

"Even if he does have mental problems, he doesn't have any problems with his kung fu. Reportedly, his Thirteen Heroes Skill has reached the level that his body is impervious to blades." [10]

Liu Changjie laughed. "Maybe because he's killed so many people, he himself has started to fear death. And because he fears dying, he decided to practice this kind of blade-resisting kung fu."

"There have been a lot of supposedly invincible people that have died under your hand, so you're not concerned about him at all, are you?"

"Precisely correct," laughed Liu Changjie.

Hu Yue'er stared at him and then sighed. "Actually, what I'm really worried about is not them."

"Who, then?"

"It's a woman."

Women are always worried about other women.

"You mean one of the seven is actually a woman?" asked Liu Changjie.

"Yes, one is a woman."

"What kind of woman is she?"

"She's a fake woman."

"Real women can't entice me," laughed Liu Changjie, "and you're worried about fake women?"

"It's because she's fake that I'm worried."

"Why?"

"You've seen lots of normal women, but as for this type of fake woman, I guarantee you've never seen the likes of her before."

Liu Changjie's eyes narrowed. He was interested in women in general, whether real or fake.

Hu Yue'er stared at him obliquely. "I know you," she said coldly. "As long as there is a pretty woman, no matter real or not, you couldn't help but be tempted."

"Ah."

"And if you get tempted, you'll be dead."

"So you want me to not look at her?"

"I want you to kill her the instant you see her."

"It seemed like just now you wanted me to go after Tang Qing first."

"Correct."

"You want me to kill two people at the same time?"

"Two won't be enough."

Liu Changjie laughed again, but this time it was devoid of mirth.

Hu Yue'er continued, "There's one more among the seven who doesn't count as human."

"If he's not human, what is he?" he laughed bitterly.

"A wild dog."

He frowned. "Invincible Li the Mastiff?"

Hu Yue'er nodded. "Because he's a wild dog, he's very hard to kill. Even if you chop a sword right into his head, you couldn't say for sure that he still wouldn't be able to turn around and bite you."

"Getting bitten by a wild dog hurts just as much as poison."

"So when you attack, you have chop his head clean off, that way he won't have any chance to counterattack."

"So it seems I need to kill three people at once."

"Three isn't too many."

"It's a pity I only have two hands," he sighed.

"You have feet too."

He laughed. "You want me to use my left hand to kill Tang Qing, my right hand to kill the wild dog, and a foot to kill the woman?"

"Like I said, you can't give them any openings. I know it won't be easy to kill three people in one shot, unless you get extremely lucky."

"You just wait and see how lucky I can be."

"Okay," she said. "Great!"

Liu Chagjie closed his eyes. "How did I ever become so lucky?"

Hu Yue'er smiled sweetly. "Your luck started improving the day you met me." She suddenly changed the subject. "Have you ever heard of a type of hidden weapon that can be shot out from your shoes?"

"I believe I have," he replied.

"And, do you wear shoes?"

"I believe I do."

"Good, then you're set."

"I'm set?"

"I just happen to own that type of weapon, and you just happen to wear shoes."

Few people have the skill to evade hidden weapons shot from shoes.

Hu Yue'er continued, "You move very quickly; if you have a weapon concealed in your shoe, killing three people at the same time won't be too difficult."

"Unfortunately, I've only ever heard of that weapon. And only one time."

"You'll be able to see it almost immediately."

"Oh? Where is it?"

"It should be on the way here already."

"You sent for someone to bring it?"

"As soon as I realized those three people were involved, I sent for it."

"You left the house?"

"I didn't leave, but a message sent by me left."

Liu Changjie stared at her.

He wasn't stupid, but he couldn't for the life of him think how Hu Yue'er had been able to send out a message.

Hu Yue'er said, "I know this place is under surveillance by Dragon Fifth. But, no matter how powerful he is, he won't prevent people from eating.

Liu Changjie still didn't understand. What did eating have to do with it?

Hu Yue'er continued. "In order to eat, you have to cook. And in order to cook, you need to light a fire..."

Finally Liu Changjie understood. "If you light a fire, there will be smoke."

"You aren't so stupid after all," she said sweetly.

Using smoke to send messages was an ancient method, and a reliable one.

Hu Yue'er fixed her eyes on Liu Changjie. Her gaze was as steady as granite, her voice as tender as the spring rain: "As long as you have a plan, and understand the method, any object will obey your commands, and do things for you. Even smoke leaving through the chimney can speak for you."

Part 4

The night was dark and quiet. From far away could be heard the yipping of dogs.

Hu Yue'er said, "Other than the hidden weapon, you will also need a sword capable of cutting off a person's head in one blow."

"Is the sword on its way?"

"For the sword, just ask Dragon Fifth. Of the thirteen most famous blades in Jianghu, he has at least seven of them."

Liu Changjie stared at her, at her chest, and said, "Do you have any other orders for me?"

"No"

"Then can we get in bed and go to sleep?"

"You can."

"And you?"

She sighed. "I should start preparing to die."

Shocked, Liu Changjie replied, "Prepare to die?"

"After you leave, Dragon Fifth definitely won't let me go free. Even if he trusts you not to divulge any secrets, he still won't leave any witnesses behind."

Liu Changjie finally understood. "Whoever he sends here to kill you, you can't offer any resistance, because you're supposed to be the wife of a farmer."

Hu Yue'er nodded and she laughed. "I might as well die by your hand."

"Die by my hand? You want me to kill you?"

"You couldn't bring yourself to do it?"

He laughed bitterly. "Do you think I'm also a wild dog who bites people?"

"I know you aren't," she responded sweetly. "And I also know you couldn't bring yourself to kill me. But..." She laughed mysteriously. "There are many ways to kill people, and many ways to be killed."

Liu Changjie didn't press further.

He didn't completely understand what she was getting at. Furthermore, he heard the sound of approaching footfalls.

The footsteps had reached the outer courtyard, and moments later, there was a knocking at the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me." It was the voice of a woman, young and pleasing to the ear. "I'm here to deliver eggs."

"Oh, it's Ah De," said Hu Yue'er. "You're so anxious just to deliver a few eggs?"

"I was passing by," she replied. "Tonight I have to go into the village to get someone."

"Get someone? Who?"

"The old devil left yesterday morning for the village and never came back. I heard that he's been whoring it up the whole time. This time I really..."

She stopped talking.

After she entered the room, she caught sight of Liu Changjie. She seemed surprised.

Liu Changjie was looking at her.

She was young, firm, and plump, like a ripe persimmon, fragrant and soft.

Hu Yue'er had already closed the door. She looked back at Liu Changjie and laughed. "What do you think of her?"

"Very good."

"You want to sleep with her tonight?"

"Yes."

He really did.

The clothes the woman wore were very thin, so much so that you could see her nipples beneath the cloth, hardening.

Did she want the same thing?

Hu Yue'er smiled. "You can take off your clothes now."

Ah De bit her lip, and then without hesitation slipped out of her clothes.

She did it very quickly.

Hu Yue'er also stripped off her clothes, just as fast.

They were both beautiful women, both young, with long, straight legs.

Liu Changjie looked at them both, and his heart sank.

He suddenly understood what Hu Yue'er had said moments ago.

"There are many ways to kill people, and many ways to be killed."

As it turns out, she had already prepared to have this woman substitute for her in death.

Their physiques were similar, their faces as well. With a little bit of makeup, Dragon Fifth's subordinates would never be able to tell the difference.

In truth, they wouldn't pay very close attention to the wife of a farmer. They would only know that they were being sent to kill a woman. If this woman looked the same as the first one, they wouldn't be able to tell.

Hu Yue'er had already begun to put on Ah De's garments. Looking at Liu Changjie out of the corner of her eye, she said, "What are you looking at her for? Aren't you going to carry her to the bed?"

Ah De's face was flushed.

She clearly didn't know the true role she was to play; she only knew that she was supposed to switch places with a woman, and accompany a man.

The man wasn't the scary type. She clearly wanted Hu Yue'er to leave as quickly as possible.

Hu Yue'er was ready to leave. Giggling, she suddenly spun around and struck Ah De in the chest with her palm.

Ah De's mouth opened, but nothing came out. Not sound, not blood. Because Hu Yue'er had already stuffed one of the eggs she had just delivered into her mouth...

Liu Changjie watched her fall to the ground, feeling as though someone had stuffed an egg into his mouth as well. His tongue had a bitter and fishy taste on it.

Hu Yue'er sighed. "The original plan was to leave her here with you for a while, then have you kill her."

He was quiet for a long time. After a while, he quietly said, "Why did you suddenly change your mind?"

"Because I couldn't stand the expression on your face just now when you were looking at her."

"Ah."

Hu Yue'er bit her lip. "One look at her, it seemed like you couldn't wait to get your hand up her skirt."

He let out a breath. "It doesn't really matter. She was going to die sooner or later. When there is a matter as important as what we are doing, there will always be people who die along the way."

"I just hope that whoever Dragon Fifth sends to get you isn't a woman."

"If it's a woman, are you going to kill her?"

Hu Yue'er slowly put all of the eggs onto the table, emptying the basket.

On her face was a strange expression. After a while she said, "I know I'm not the first woman you've been with, but I really hope that I'm the last."

**

Some of the eggs were empty, and inside were hidden several pieces of copper machinery. When assembled together, they formed a very delicate hidden weapon, the type that could be concealed inside one's shoe.

If one exerted the right amount of pressure with the toe, poisoned needles would fly out. The poison was like that from the fangs of a green bamboo snake, the needles as sharp as a bee's stinger.

And like the heart of a woman!

"I won't sit," said Hu Yue'er. "I need to get back to the town." Carrying the empty basket, she left, smiling proudly, and then laughing happily.

The darkness outside was very deep.

(1) In Chinese when you say that someone "isn't human" or isn't a person, it's pretty insulting.

(2) He literally says that she is a "living ghost" 活鬼. After that she calls him a womanizer, using the word 色鬼, which literally translated is "colored ghost," but means lecher, womanizer, pervert. This little banter using the character for "ghost" is pretty clever.

(3) This part is funny because her name Yue'er 月儿 contains the character for moon. And don't forget that his name Changjie 长街 literally means "long street."

(4) The direct translation would be: ("Because," interrupted Liu Changjie, "you're not just a little fox, you're also a fox spirit." It was actually quite proper to call her a little fox, considering her father was the oldest old fox in Jianghu.) Calling a person a fox in this way implies that they are crafty, thus I translated it as crafty. Also, I'm sure most people are familiar with fox spirits in Chinese mythology. In this case, he's not calling her a literal fox spirit, he's just saying that she is pretty, because fox spirits tend to be super hot. Another reason why this whole passage is funny, is because she makes a big deal about her father's nickname "Power of Hu." In Chinese it's "hu li." The word for fox is also "hu li" so it's a cute play on words.

(5) Here is the type of sword that the driver is wielding: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pudao>

(6) I omitted a which to me really didn't make sense, and sort of took away from the flow of the story in English. Right after it says "the wind outside blew harder" there is an additional line in Chinese that says "the mother hen just laid a nest full of eggs..." In Chinese it implies that they are sleeping together I think, but in English it just seems silly.

(7) Qing Gong is the martial arts ability to make your body light, move very quickly, and also fly

(8) The name of the poison in Chinese is 见血封喉. This is a type of tree that is actually poisonous, and was used in ancient China to coat poisoned arrows. As for the English translation, there are a handful of names for this tree, but I picked the most simple and descriptive.

(9) Virgin Kung Fu is a real Shaolin art. Here is an excerpt from an article about it: Tongzigong, or Virgin Kung Fu, is one of the most spectacular forms of Shaolin kung fu, and yet it has no direct fighting applications. It is a fundamental building block of Shaolin practice, and yet it is too extreme for most practitioners to even begin to attempt. It is one of Shaolin's deepest meditation techniques, and yet it is the centerpiece act in almost every Shaolin theatrical show that toured the globe over the last two decades. To achieve its highest levels, tongzigong must be practiced rigorously before the body is fully matured. Once the bones are set, mastery of this discipline is unattainable. The body must be molded as it grows. Tongzi means child, boy or virgin. Gong means work. It's actually the same character as kung in kung fu (功夫), which literally means skill, art, labor or effort. To the untrained eye, tongzigong is a spectacle of contortionism, a real show-stopper on stage. But for Shaolin practitioners, tongzigong is far more than just a circus act. Within tongzigong lies an internal cultivation that is key to the very essence of all Shaolin kung fu.

(10) What I translated as "Thirteen Heroes Skill" is 十三太保横练, or literally Thirteen High Officials Cross-training? Like Virgin Kung Fu, it is a real Shaolin art. Here is an article in Chinese about it <http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=Tc13...thMAwDYUyx1VPa>

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