

## Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

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## YTTLJ Chapter 34



### **Chapter 34 – The Bride Tore the Red Dress Barehanded**

*Translated by Foxs*



*Suddenly a red shadow flashed by, someone had already reached Zhao Min's back. From inside the red sleeve came a bare hand, with its five fingers struck down on top of Zhao Min's head. This move was like a rabbit evading the falcon; it was unbelievably fast, and it was more surprising since it came from the bride, Zhou Zhiruo.*

Zhang Wuji, Zhou Zhiruo and Han Lin'er three people went south along the main road, riding the steeds given to them by the rich men of the Beggar Clan. Han Lin'er was very respectful toward his Cult Leader, he did not dare to ride abreast, but followed some distance behind. Along the way he would serve tea and attend to Zhang and Zhou's

needs, acting as their servant. Zhang Wuji felt uncomfortable and said, “Han Dage, although within the Cult you are my subordinate brother, I do respect your character. In business matters you listen to my command, but in day-to-day relationship, we are of the same generation, just like brothers or friends.”

With a terrified look on his face Han Lin'er replied, “Subordinate holds Jiaozhu in the highest regard, how can I be worthy to be considered of the same generation with you? In normal time I am not fortunate enough to be close to Jiaozhu; today I can provide my insignificant service to Jiaozhu with all my heart and that is subordinate's lifelong good fortune.”

Zhou Zhiruo smiled and said, “I am not your Jiaozhu, you don't have to be this respectful to me.”

Han Lin'er replied, “Miss Zhou is like a deity. Xiao Ren [little/lowly person – referring to self] can speak with you, it is already the good karma of my previous life. I am asking Miss' forgiveness for my uncouth behavior.”

Zhou Zhiruo could hear the sincerity in his voice, while his eyes showed utmost respect as if she were really a deity. She knew she was beautiful, enough to shake any man's heart and make them beat faster; but she had never met somebody like Han Lin'er, who admire her almost to the point of worshipping her. It made her young heart extremely happy.

Zhang Wuji asked her how they were captured by the Beggar Clan. Zhou Zhiruo told him that not long after he left the inn that day, suddenly Xie Xun started shivering and became delirious. She was so scared and did all she could to comfort him, but apparently Xie Xun did not recognize her. He jumped madly around the room for a while before he collapsed to the ground and fainted. Right at that moment six, seven masters from the Beggar Clan broke into the room. She did not have enough time to pull her sword, and in the end the two of them were brought to Lulong.

When he was little, Zhang Wuji had heard that because of the main artery injury when training the ‘Qi Shang Quan’ [Seven-injury Fist], combined with the fact that his entire family was decimated by Cheng Kun, his Yifu would occasionally fall into mental confusion. However, Zhang Wuji had never expected that his Yifu's illness would breakout suddenly in such an unfortunate time that he was unable to resist the Beggar Clan's attack. Thinking of this, he could not restrain himself from sighing.

The two of them mulled over Xie Xun's whereabouts, but neither of them had any clue. Zhang Wuji said, "The Capital is the meeting place of all kinds of people, it is in our way going south. Let us stop by Dadu [lit. grand capital, modern day Beijing] to find some information. I think the Green-winged Bat King Wei Xiong [brother Wei] might holds some clues in his hands."

Zhou Zhiruo pursed her lips then she laughed and said, "Do you really want to go to Dadu to see Wei Yixiao?"

Zhang Wuji understood very well what she was saying, he could not help blushing while replying, "We might not see Wei Xiong, but if we can see Yang Zuoshi [left emissary Yang], Ku Toutuo, Peng Heshang [Buddhist monk] or the others, they might be able to give me some ideas."

Zhou Zhiruo smiled and said, "I know someone with divine ability in strategy, plotting and scheming. If you go to Dadu to find her, she will help you find a good idea. Yang Zuoshi, Ku Toutuo, Peng Heshang and the others are simply not equal to this Miss in term of intelligence."

Zhang Wuji did not dare to mention that he met with Zhao Min. This time she mentioned her name, he could not help but feeling bashful. "You always remember Miss Zhao," he said, "And are always happy to make me feel awkward."

Zhou Zhiruo laughed and said, "I am not the only one who always remembers her; there is someone else beside me. I wouldn't be able to see what is in your heart unless you have guilty feelings."

Zhang Wuji thought that Zhou Zhiruo and he were engaged [orig. bai2tou2zhi1yue1 – arrangement/agreement to live together until their heads are white]. This time they were facing a life and death situation together, their feelings could not be divided and he could not conceal anything from her. Thereupon he said, "Zhiruo, there is something I want to tell you. Please don't be angry."

"I will be angry if I deserve to be angry," Zhou Zhiruo said.

Zhang Wuji's heart sank. He thought that he had made a heavy oath in her presence that he would kill Zhao Min to avenge his cousin Yin Li, but when he saw Zhao Min, not only he did not kill her, he spent the night in the wilderness and traveled side-by-side with her instead. This matter was really difficult to explain. He was not good in fabri-

cating lies, and he was ashamed of his own conduct, his awkward expression easily revealed his feelings.

While he was still musing, their rides had reached a small town. Noticing that the day was almost spent, they decided to lodge for the night in a small inn. After dinner, he massaged the acupoints on Zhou Zhiruo's back. He was not familiar with the Beggar Clan's sealing acupoint technique, but a long time had passed; after massaging her arteries all around, finally the acupoints were unsealed. He said in his heart, "Although the Beggar Clan Elders' martial art skill was not extremely strong, their acupoint sealing technique is really marvelous. Zhiruo is too proud to ask them to unseal the acupoints during the banquet, and the man who sealed her acupoint pretended to forget. Hey, hey, these beggars wanted to save face at all cost; after suffering a crushing defeat from me, they wanted to show their superiority in acupoint sealing technique."

Zhou Zhiruo did not like the musty smell of that inn. "Let us go out for a walk," she said, "I need to work my blood circulation."

"All right!" Zhang Wuji said. Holding her hand, he took her outside the town.

By this time the sun was setting, the western sky was as red as blood. They leisurely wandered for a while before finally sitting down under a big tree. They watched as the sun slowly disappeared behind the mountain and the sky gradually turned dark. Zhang Wuji gathered his courage and told her how he met Zhao Min at the Mi Le Temple, how they found Mo Shenggu's corpse inside a cave, how he met Song Yuanqiao and the others, and how he followed the Ming Cult's blazing fire signs in circle around the Hebei province; he told her everything. Finally he grabbed Zhou Zhiruo's hands and said, "Zhiruo, you and I are not married yet, but we can be considered husband and wife already; I am not going to conceal anything from you. Miss Zhao insists to see my Yifu face to face; she says she has some important matters to ask him. At that time, a suspicion started to rise in my heart. Now, the more I think about it, the more afraid I am." As he was saying the last few sentences, his voice started to tremble.

"What are you afraid of?" Zhou Zhiruo asked.

Zhang Wuji felt the pair of small hands in his palms was as cold as ice and slightly trembled. "I remember Yifu's illness," he said, "Whenever it breaks out, he would not recognize other people. In the past his madness suddenly flared-out, and he almost killed my Mama, thereupon Mama shot his eyes blind. When I was born, Yifu was about to kill my Papa and Mama, luckily he heard my cry and regained his consciousness. I am afraid ... I am really afraid ..."

“What are you afraid of?” Zhou Zhiruo asked.

Zhang Wuji sighed and said, “Actually, I cannot bear to say it, but I am really worried that my cousin was ... was ... killed by Yifu.”

Zhou Zhiruo jumped up and with a shaky voice said, “Xie Daxia [great hero Xie] is a chivalrous hero who always upholds justice; he has always shown kindness and love toward us, his juniors. How can he kill Miss Yin?”

“It was a wild guess,” Zhang Wuji replied, “Totally unfounded. Even if my cousin were really killed by Yifu, it was because of his chronic illness breaking out suddenly, just like a nightmare; certainly it was not his [orig. lao3ren2jia1] true intention. Ay, come to think about it, it was all because of Cheng Kun that evil villain.”

Zhou Zhiruo was deep in thought for half a day before shaking her head and said, “Something is not right! Are you telling me that all of us being poisoned by the ‘shi xi-ang ruan jin san’ was also because of him? Where did he get the poison from? Someone suddenly losing his sanity and killing people is not a strange occurrence, but how can he cautiously put poison in our food and drink?”

Zhang Wuji felt as if there was a thick fog hanging over his head, through which he could not see the least bit of bright light. He heard Zhou Zhiruo coldly say, “Wuji Gege [brother Wuji], you are doing your best to free Miss Zhao from any suspicion.”

Zhang Wuji replied, “Supposing Miss Zhao was the real killer, it would be better for her to avoid Yifu. Why did she insist on seeing Yifu, saying that she had some important questions she’d like to ask him?”

With a cold laugh Zhou Zhiruo said, “This Miss’ shrewdness is unparalleled. She wanted to clean herself from all charges. Don’t you think she could not concoct some ingenious way?” All of a sudden her tone turned gentle and soft; she cuddled close to Zhang Wuji’s body and said, “Wuji Gege, you are the most honest and upright person in the world. Speaking about shrewdness and resourcefulness, how can you be Miss Zhao’s match?”

Zhang Wuji sighed, thinking that her words made perfect sense. He stretched out his arm to gently embrace her soft body; in a tender voice he said, “Zhiruo, I only feel that there are endless troubles in this world. Even someone close to me like Yifu cannot avoid my suspicion. I only wish we can accomplish our main task of driving out the

Tartars, and then you and I will live in seclusion in some remote mountain, sharing a peaceful life and forget about the matters of this mundane world.”

“You are the Jiaozhu of the Ming Cult,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “Supposing the Heaven blesses us that we can really drive the barbarians away, at that time, all important affairs of this world will fall into your Ming Cult’s hand, how can they let you live a peaceful life?”

“I am incompetent to be the Jiaozhu, and I don’t want to be the Jiaozhu,” Zhang Wuji said, “If the Ming Cult gains power, there must be a wise, righteous hero who would undertake the Jiaozhu position.”

“You are still young,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “Although your competence is currently lacking, can’t you learn? Besides, I am the Sect Leader of Emei Pai; there is a heavy burden on my shoulders. When Shifu bestowed this Sect Leader’s iron ring to me, she commanded me to work hard for the glory of our school. Even if you could live in seclusion in some remote mountain, I am afraid I would not have that luxury.”

Zhang Wuji gently stroked the iron ring on her finger and said, “When I saw this ring in Chen Youliang’s hand, I was extremely anxious; I was afraid you might have been disgraced by those villains. I was wishing that I had wings so I could fly to you. Zhiruo, I was not able to rescue you sooner that you had to suffer wrongdoings longer. When did they return this iron ring to you?”

Zhou Zhiruo said, “It was Wudang Pai’s Song Qingshu Shaoxia [young hero] who returned it to me.”

Hearing her mentioning Song Qingshu’s name, suddenly Zhang Wuji remembered seeing her sitting side by side with Song Qingshu on the banquet table, eating and drinking together in the hall full of Beggar Clan people. “Song Qingshu treated you very well, didn’t he?” he asked.

Zhou Zhiruo could hear the difference in his tone. “What do you mean by ‘treat you very well’?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Zhang Wuji replied, “I am just asking. Song Dage [big brother Song] is infatuated with you, so much so that he did not hesitate to betray his school and rebel against his father, killing his martial uncle and scheming against his grandmaster. But to you, he was very good.”

Zhou Zhiruo looked up toward the crescent moon rising on the eastern horizon and quietly said, “I will be satisfied if you can be half as good to me as he did.”

Zhang Wuji replied, “I definitely cannot show you the kind of feeling Song Shige [martial (older) brother] has for you; I cannot commit these unfilial and unrighteous acts for your sake.”

“For my sake, you certainly cannot. For Miss Zhao’s sake, you can,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “On that little island you have made a heavy oath to kill this witch to avenge Miss Yin. However, as soon as you saw her face, you forgot your pledge completely.”

“Zhiruo,” Zhang Wuji replied, “If after careful investigation I find out that it was indeed Miss Zhao who stole the Tulong Saber and the Yitian Sword, and that my Biaomei [(female) cousin] did indeed perish under her hands, I definitely will not spare her. But if she is innocent, I certainly cannot kill her without any reason, can I? Perhaps I made a mistake when I made that heavy oath on the island that day.”

Zhou Zhiruo was silent.

“Did I say anything wrong?” Zhang Wuji asked.

“No!” Zhou Zhiruo replied, “I only remember on the Wan An Temple’s pagoda, I also made a very heavy oath in Shifu’s presence. I hate myself for not telling you about this heavy oath when you proposed to me on that island.”

Zhang Wuji was alarmed. “You ... what heavy oath did you make?” he asked.

Zhou Zhiruo said, “I was repeating what Shifu said, that if I became your wife in the future, my departed parents in the ground would not rest in peace, that my Shifu would become a malicious spirit, haunting me night and day for the rest of my life; and if I give birth to sons and daughters with you, let our sons become slaves and our daughters prostitutes.”

As he heard this kind of heavy and ominous oath, Zhang Wuji could not help but shiver. He was silent for half a day before saying, “Zhiruo, that oath does not count. Definitely it does not count. It was because your Shifu thought that the Ming Cult is an evil-doer devil cult, and that I was crafty and evil, a shameless pervert thief, that she forced you to make that heavy oath. If she [orig. lao3ren2jia1 – Senior] knew the truth, she would definitely free you from this oath.”



With tears streaming down her face, Zhou Zhiruo sobbed, “But she ... Senior would not know this.” As she said that, she threw herself into his bosom, while crying uncontrollably.

Zhang Wuji gently stroked her soft hair and consoled her, “If your Shifu in the nether-world knew it, she would definitely not blame you for violating your oath. Tell me, do you think I am really crafty and evil, a shameless pervert thief?”

While embracing his waist, Zhou Zhiruo said, “Right now you are not. But if you are bewitched by Zhao Min later, maybe ... maybe you will turn into crafty, evil and shameless.”

Zhang Wuji lightly nudged her cheek with his finger and said with a laugh, “You underestimate me too much. Is your husband that kind of person?”

Zhou Zhiruo looked up, her cheeks were still wet with tears, but her eyes bore a happy expression. “You are shameless,” she said, “You are not my husband yet. If later on you sneakily go out with that little witch Zhao Min, I won’t want to be with you anymore. Who will guarantee that in the future you will not be like that Song Qingshu, who for the sake of a woman committed a lot of contemptible, shameless shady acts?”

Zhang Wuji lowered his head and planted a kiss on her cheek, before laughing and saying, “Who told you as an immortal to descend to the earth? We are mere mortals, how can we resist your charm? I’ll say it was your father and mother’s fault that they bore too beautiful of a woman, who has the power to kill us, men!”

Suddenly, from behind a large tree about two ‘zhang’s away came ‘hey, hey’, sound of cold laughter. Zhang Wuji was hugging Zhou Zhiruo in his bosom. He was startled and turned his head only to see a shadow dashing away and gone far in a short moment. Zhou Zhiruo jumped up immediately. Her face paled. “It’s Zhao Min!” she said in a shaky voice, “She is following us.”

As Zhang Wuji heard the cold laugh, he knew it was a female voice, but it was hard for him to say it was Zhao Min for sure. In the dark of the night he could not distinguish whose shadow he had seen. “Was it her?” he asked doubtfully, “What is she doing following us?”

“She likes you!” Zhou Zhiruo indignantly said, “Are you telling me that you didn’t know it? Most likely the two of you have a secret rendezvous to deliberately make a fool out of me.”

Zhang Wuji repeatedly denied the accusation. Zhou Zhiruo stood unmoving in the cold wind, thinking about her fate and could not restrain her tears from falling down. Zhang Wuji gently wrapped his left arm around her shoulder, while with right sleeve he wiped away the tears from her eyes. “Why are you crying while we are having a good time?” he said tenderly, “If I did have a rendezvous with Miss Zhao in here, let the Heaven punish me and the Earth swallow me. Just think, if in my heart I did like her, and I knew she was near, why was I so crazy about you and said those affectionate words? Wouldn’t that mean I deliberately make her angry and put her in an awkward situation?”

Zhou Zhiruo sighed, “That’s true,” she said, “Wuji Gege, my heart is troubled.”

“What is it?” Zhang Wuji asked.

“I can’t forget my heavy oath in Shifu’s presence,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “I also think this Zhao Min will not let me go. I am too far inferior to her both in martial art and intelligence.”

Zhang Wuji said, “I will do my best with all my strength to protect you all around. How can I allow her to harm even a strand of my beloved wife’s hair?”

Zhou Zhiruo said, “If I die in her hand, so be it; I only have my own cruel fate to blame. My only fear is that she manages to confuse you that you believe her sweet talk and fall into her trap and come to kill me. If that happens, I will die with my eyes open.”

Zhang Wuji said with a laugh, “That is truly a groundless fear [orig. ‘the man of Qi fears the sky falling]. Who knows how many people in this world have harmed me, offended me, but I have not killed any of them; why would I kill you?” Unbuttoning his clothes, he showed her the sword scar on his chest and said with a smile, “You stabbed me with the sword here! The deeper the wound, the deeper my love for you.”

Zhou Zhiruo stretched out her tender hand to gently stroke the scar on his chest, with disquieting thoughts filling her heart. Suddenly her face paled, and she said, “An eye for an eye. In the future, you will stab me dead, I will not regret.”

Zhang Wuji opened up his arms and pulled her into his embrace, while softly said, “Wait till we find Yifu, we’ll ask him, Senior, to preside over our wedding. And then the two of us will never leave each other, we’ll grow old together. If you like, you can stab me a few more times, I will not say a single harsh word to you. Is that good enough for you?”

Zhou Zhiruo nuzzled her cheeks on his fiery warm chest and said in low voice, “I do hope you are a real man who will keep your word, and won’t forget what you have said today.”

The two of them cuddled with each other for a long time. It was almost midnight and the wind grew stronger when they finally returned to the inn and went their separate rooms to sleep.

The next morning, three people continued their journey south; they did not see any sign of Zhao Min along the way. They reached Dadu in less than a day. By the time they entered the city gate, it was already evening. They saw the residents, men and women, were busy sprinkling water to the dusty streets and sweeping the streets and alleys clean. There was an incense-burning table in front of every home. Zhang Wuji and the others found an inn and asked the attendant what major event was going on in the city.

“Honored guests came from afar and did not know that you have come at the right moment,” the attendant replied, “You will enjoy a fine sight, for tomorrow is the ‘Great Tour of Imperial City’ day.”

“What is a ‘Great Tour of Imperial City’ day?” Zhang Wuji asked.

The attendant replied, “Tomorrow is one day of the year when the Emperor will travel through the Imperial City. The Emperor is going to offer sacrifice and burn incense in the Qing Shou Si [Celebrate Life Temple], tens of thousands men and women will dress up in a parade, from start to finish the route is about thirty, forty ‘li’s long. Now, that will be a remarkable sight. I suggest the honored guests turn in to bed earlier tonight, and as you wake up really early tomorrow, go to the Jade Virtue Gate of the Palace to watch. If you are lucky, you might be able to see the Emperor, the Empress, the Concubines, the Prince and the Princess. Just think, as a lowly common people, how could we have the good fortune of seeing the Emperor with our own eyes if we weren’t living in Beijing [orig. Jing Shi]?”

Listening to this, Han Lin’er anger rose up; “Shameless traitor! [Translator’s note: the literal translation of the original sentence is: ‘regarding the enemy as (one’s) father, shameless traitor to Han (people)]” he scolded, “What good is the Tartar Emperor?”

The attendant’s eyes grew really big; pointing at him he said, “You ... you ... what you said is the word of a rebel. Aren’t you afraid your head might be chopped off?”

“You are a Han,” Han Lin’er said, “The Tartars have harmed us miserably, yet you keep saying the Emperor this and the Emperor that; don’t you have the least bit of patriotic spirit?”

Seeing his ferocious and threatening expression, the attendant turned around and left; Zhou Zhiruo lifted up her finger and quickly sealed the acupoint on his back. “If this man went out,” she said, “He would open his mouth; I am afraid very soon there will be soldiers coming in here to give us trouble.” While saying that she kicked the attendant under the bed. “Let him starve for a few days,” she said with a laugh, “We’ll let him go when we leave the city.”

Before long, they heard the innkeeper calling out from outside, “Ah Fu, Ah Fu! Are you still chatting incessantly again? Quickly fetch some face-washing water for the guest in room three!”

Han Lin’er was amused; he slapped the table and called out, “Quickly send us some food and wine, your masters are hungry!”

A moment later, another attendant came in delivering food and wine, while muttering to himself, “Ah Fu must have gone to the palace to watch the fireworks. This kid has never done anything proper; he wants to have fun all the time.”

Early morning on the next day, Zhang Wuji was just getting out of bed when he heard a clamorous noise on the street. He went to the door and saw the street was packed with men and women wearing bright colored and fancy clothes. Everybody was heading north, while laughing and joking; the atmosphere was livelier than the New Year celebration, with incessant sounds of firecrackers coming from all directions.

Zhou Zhiruo also came to the door; she said, “Let us also go and watch.”

“I have fought the warriors from the Ruyang Palace,” Zhang Wuji said, “They must not find out I am here. If we want to go, we must go in disguise.”

Immediately, along with Zhou Zhiruo and Han Lin’er, they disguised themselves as farmers and villagers, by smearing yellow mud on their faces and hands; and then following the crowd on the street, they went to the Imperial Palace.

It was around the end of the fourth hour [between 5 – 7 am], and the beginning of the fifth hour [between 7 – 9 am], the ground around the Imperial Palace was like a sea of people; already they could not find a place to set their feet on. Zhang Wuji stretched out

his arms to gently shoved people around to clear the way. Finally they stopped under the eave by the Yan Cun [lit. extended spring (season)] gate of a rich family home. The stairs rose several feet upward, which gave them an advantageous spot to watch the show.

They had not stood too long when they heard the banging noise of a gong. “They are here! They are here!” the crowd cried out. Everybody craned their necks to watch. The gong was getting nearer. They saw 108 big and tall men wearing dark green clothing. Their heft hands lifting up big gongs, about three feet in diameter, and their right hands struck the gongs with mallets. When these 108 gongs were struck together, the noise was deafening.

The gong formation was followed by 360-man drum formation. After that it was people singing, blowing horn and beating the drum; followed by western region people playing ‘pipa’ [Chinese lute], and then Mongolian bugle horn. Each formation consisted of at least more than a hundred people, at most about four, five hundred people. After these marching ensembles, there were a couple of large red satin banners, flying high in the air. One banner carried these letters: ‘An Bang Hu Guo’ [peace to the nation, protecting the country], while the other said: ‘Zhen Xie Fu Mo’ [suppressing demonic influence, subduing the devil]. Other than these large letters, the banners were also full of bright golden Sanskrit characters. Before and after the banners each were two hundreds Mongolian elite troops, the imperial guards, with their long sabers glittering like snow, and their spears like the clouds; these four hundred men all rode on white horses. As the common people watched this display of formidable military prowess, they loudly cheered.

Zhang Wuji sighed inwardly, “In other places there aren’t any common people who do not hate the Mongolian soldiers to the bones, but the people of Beijing have become shameless slaves of the government. To think that for decades day in and day out these people have seen Mongolian imperial household’s impressive power, and thus have forgotten their own perished country.”

As the two banners passed, suddenly from among the west crowd several white light flashed by; two rows of flying daggers flew straight toward the two flagpoles. Each row of flying daggers consisted of seven daggers. These seven daggers neatly pierced the flagpole. Although the flagpoles were thick, after receiving seven cuts, they swayed and finally broke; with a couple of whishing noises they fell down. People were yelling and screaming miserably, as dozens of them were crushed by the flagpoles; while the rest of the people were also shouting and scrambling away. It was total chaos.

This change was so abrupt that even Zhang Wuji and the others were taken by surprise. Han Lin'er was very happy and was about to cheer when suddenly a soft palm reached out and cover his mouth; Zhou Zhiruo managed to curb his shout in time. The four hundred elite troops moved their weapons and charged into the crowd, randomly searched for the shooter.

Zhang Wuji noticed that whoever launched these fourteen flying daggers had a tremendous strength, obviously it was a martial art master of the Wulin world; only among those many onlookers, nobody could tell who the person was. If he could not see who did it, then how could the Mongolian soldiers? They blindly searched among the crowd and not too long afterwards dragged seven, eight men out, who called out miserably, "Injustice ..." But the Mongolian soldiers struck their blades and spears and killed those men on the spot.

Han Lin'er was very angry; "The flying daggers shooter has gone for long, what can this useless bunch do? They massacred innocent people to vent off their anger instead," he said.

"Han Dage, hold your voice!" Zhou Zhiruo hissed, "We are here to watch the 'Great Tour of Imperial City', not to create 'Great Trouble in the Imperial City'." [Translator's note: play of words here, 'Da You Huang Cheng' against 'Da Nao Huang Cheng']

"Yes," Han Lin'er said; he did not dare to open his mouth anymore.

The chaos only lasted a few moments; the sound of music quickly followed, other groups marched by one by one: acrobats who swallow knife and spit fire from their mouths, and various western region entertainers, which sent the crowd cheering and clapping again, quickly put the bloody incidents on the street out of their minds. Next came group by group of puppeteers, jugglers, performers balancing plates over sticks and all kinds of acrobatic acts. After these groups came large parade floats pulled by beautiful steeds. On each float there were handsome men and beautiful women dressed as characters of the classical stories, such as 'Journey to the West' [orig. Tang Sancang went to western sky to fetch the scripture], 'Emperor Tang Ming Touring the Moon Palace', 'Li Cunxiao Beat the Tiger', 'Liu Guanzhang Fought Lu Bu Three Times', 'Zhang Shengyue Gathered the Hawks', and so on; legendary battles and wonderful accomplishments, presented with the best of workmanship.

Zhang Wuji and the others, all three people, grew in poor rural environment; they had never seen this kind of bustling festive atmosphere. They sighed inwardly, thinking today their horizons were broadened.

On each float there was an embroidered silk banner, with inscriptions such as ‘Humble Presentation of so-and-so, the Prefect of Hu Guang [Hubei and Hunan provinces]’, or ‘Respectfully Presented by so-and-so, the Governor of Jiangsu and Zhejiang’. As the procession passed by, the official who presented the float became progressively higher in rank; the float itself became progressively fancier, the men and women playing the characters were now wearing pearls and bright jewels, the hairpins and necklaces were also made of precious jadeite and precious stones. First, the Mongolian princes, dukes, and chancellors wanted to curry favor from the Emperor; second, they also wanted to flaunt their prosperity; therefore, no expense was spared in the building and the adornment of the float.

Amidst the melodious sound of string and woodwind instruments, a float with the ‘Liu Zhiyuan’s Chronicle of the White Rabbit’ theme passed by. Suddenly the cheerful melody changed into an awkward melody of old tune; the plain banner on the float read ‘Zhou Gong banished Guan Cai’. On the float there was a middle-age man with a tablet in his hands [this is the tablet held by officials during imperial audience], he was playing the role of Zhou Gong. On his side sat a small child wearing an Emperor clothes, he was playing the part of the Emperor. Guan Shu and Cai Shu were standing on the side, whispering to each other and pointing their fingers to Zhou Gong. This float was followed by another float with ‘Wang Mang’s Hypocritical Act of Generosity’. The man on this float wore a very thick white face-powder, with gold and silver in his hands, pretending to give generously to poor people. Following these two floats was a cart with white banners on all four sides, with these writings on them, ‘When Zhou Gong feared the days of rumor, Wang Mang enjoyed being praised as a polite and modest scholar. If both of them died at that time, their loyalty and talent would be hidden for eternity.’

Zhang Wuji’s heart was stirred; he mused, “The right and wrong, black and white, in this world is really not easy to know. Zhou Gong was a great sage, but when he banished Guan Shu and Cai Shu, everyone said he was scheming to usurp the throne. Wang Mang was a great traitor, but when at first he bought the people’s hearts, there wasn’t anybody in this world who did not sing praises to him. I heard these two stories on the Bing Huo [ice and fire] Island from Yifu. This is the so-called ‘the distant road tries the horse’s strength, the course of time proves the man’s heart’. A man’s real character cannot be recognized in just a dawn-to-dusk period.” Further, he thought, “These two floats are different than the rest of them. They obviously carry a profound meaning. The man who prepared them must have a character of scholarly knowledge.” And then he silently recited that poem twice in his mind.

Suddenly he heard sounds like broken gongs. A float came by, pulled by a pair of thin horses. The float was very plain and simple without any decoration. As the crowd saw the float, they roared in laughter. “This ragged float also joins the ‘Tour of the Imperial City’, won’t it be the laughingstock of the people?” they said. As the float got near, Zhang Wuji was able to see clearly and he was shocked! He saw a large man on the cart, with his long yellow hair reaching his shoulder. His eyes were closed, and he was sitting on a couch. What character did he play if not Jin Mao Shi Wang Xie Xun? Next to him stood a good-looking young woman wearing green, she had a teacup in her hands, as if she was attentively serving the man. Although her appearance was inferior to Zhou Zhiruo’s beauty, her clothing and adornments were exactly the same as the ones she was wearing at the Wan An Temple Pagoda.

“Miss Zhou,” Han Lin’er said in a low voice, “That girl looks like you.”

“Hmmp,” Zhou Zhiruo snorted, but did not say anything. Zhang Wuji turned his head and saw her complexion went pale, while her chest was heaving; he knew she was enraged. Thereupon he reached out to hold her right hand; while not fully understanding the intention behind this float.

The next float was still depicting the Xie Xun – Zhou Zhiruo story. The actor playing Zhou Zhiruo giggled while walking around toward the corner, then ‘she’ stretched out two fingers and suddenly struck ‘Xie Xun’s back with all ‘her’ might. “Ah!” the fake ‘Xie Xun’ exclaimed loudly, then collapsed to the couch. ‘Zhou Zhiruo’ lifted her foot to step on him, and then raised her sword ready to kill. The spectators broke in loud cheer, “Good! Good! Kill him!”

The third float of this ‘Xie Xun – Zhou Zhiruo’ theme depicted six or seven men dressed as beggars capturing the ‘Xie Xun’ and ‘Zhou Zhiruo’.

By this time all doubts were gone from Zhang Wuji’s mind; he knew these three floats were built by Zhao Min. Expecting Zhou Zhiruo and him to come to Dadu, she arranged for these floats to humiliate Zhou Zhiruo. He stooped down to pick several small pebbles from the ground, and lightly flicked them with his middle finger. ‘Swish, swish!’ the right eyes of the pair of horses pulling the third float were blinded. The pebbles entered the horses’ brains. With long neigh, those horses fell down to the ground, dead. The float flipped over and the actors rolled down to the ground. The street was thrown into chaos.

Zhou Zhiruo bit her lower lip and said quietly, “This witch insulted me this way, I ... I ...” Speaking to this point, her voice turned into sobs.



Zhang Wuji felt her hand was ice-cold, her body trembled; hastily he tried to assure her, “Zhiruo, this little bitch [orig. ‘muddy egg’] can think of hundreds of weird tricks, don’t pay her any attention. As long as I know your sincerity, even if others sow dissension, how is it possible for me to believe them?”

“Ah, I remember,” Zhou Zhiruo suddenly said, “That day Yifu was fine, before he suddenly convulsed and fell down to the floor, and then he started talking deliriously. Could it be ... could it be that at that time this witch was hiding in that inn and she shot a secret projectile toward Yifu’s back?”

Zhang Wuji pondered for a moment before saying, “If she made her move then, she might still have enough time to make it to the Mi Le Temple in time. But based on her martial art skill, I don’t think she could evade Yifu’s detection. I am leaning more toward the Xuanming Elders who attacked him.”

While they were talking, the Mongolian soldiers had already pushed the people back and cleared up the street from the dead horses, so that the procession of floats could continue. Zhang Wuji and Zhou Zhiruo’s minds were still occupied by the recent events and they did not have any interest in watching the subsequent floats.

After the last float passed by, they heard intermittent sound of Buddhist monks chanting, followed by the appearance of row after row of foreign monks in red kasaya. After these monks, they heard the tinkling of iron armor, as two thousands ‘Yu Lin Jun’ [special force, the Emperor’s personal bodyguards] troops, in full armor, each one with a lance in his hand, made their appearance, followed by three thousand archers.

After the archers, incense smoke rose up to the sky, as one by one the idols were carried on sedan chairs by porters wearing embroidered clothes; from the Tu Di [Earth God], Cheng Huang [deity in Chinese mythology], Ling Guan [lit. spirit of government official – don’t know the exact translation], Wei Tuo [Celestial Guardian], Cai Shen [God of Wealth]. [Translator’s note: there is one more idol mentioned, but my copy missed one character] A lot of people muttered their prayers, while some went down on their knees to worship.

These idols were followed by guards of honor, carrying ceremonial articles like golden gourd, golden hammer and so on. Next, came feathered fans and jeweled parasols in pairs. The crowd called out, “The Emperor is here! The Emperor is here!” as from a distant came a large sedan chair covered in yellow silk, carried by thirty-two ‘shi wei’ [This is also personal bodyguards of the Emperor. Perhaps someone out there can explain the difference between Shi Wei and Yu Lin Jun] wearing embroidered clothes.

Zhang Wuji focused his attention to see the Mongolian Emperor. He noticed that the Emperor's countenance was thin, pallid, and dispirited. In just one glance it was obvious that he indulged in wine. The Crown Prince rode a horse next to the sedan chair. Contrary to his expectations, the Crown Prince actually showed a heroic spirit. He had a gilded long bow, inlaid with jade, on his shoulder; truly fit the image of a Mongolian young hero.

"Jiaozhu," Han Lin'er whispered on Zhang Wuji's ear, "Let subordinate make an assault, with a stab of my blade I can assassinate the Tartar Emperor, and thus rid the common people of one big evil."

"No, you can't go!" Zhang Wuji said, "The Tartar Emperor is surrounded by martial art masters as his guards. If we are going to do it, I am the one who must go."

"That is inappropriate," suddenly the man standing on Zhang Wuji's left opened his mouth, "Replacing one tyrant with another, I have never seen it work."

Zhang Wuji, Han Lin'er and Zhou Zhiruo were startled; they turned to see this man, and saw he was about fifty years of age, dressed like a medicine peddler, carrying a medicine sack on his back, his right hand held a tiger-head stick. That man turned his thumb up and put his hand in front of his chest, making a Ming Cult's blazing fire signal, and said in a low voice, "Peng Yingyu pays his respects to Jiaozhu. Jiaozhu is well, I am very happy."

"Ah, you are Peng ..." Zhang Wuji was very happy. It turned out that man was Peng Yingyu. His disguise was so ingenious that although he had been standing next to them for a long time, Zhang Wuji and the others did not have the slightest idea of his real identity.

In a low voice Peng Yingyu said, "This is not a good place to talk. The Tartar Emperor must not be killed." Zhang Wuji was aware of his wisdom and knowledge, therefore, he simply nodded and did not ask anymore questions. He only reached out to grab Peng Yingyu's left hand and gently shook it a few times.

In the meantime, the Emperor and the Crown Prince were followed by three thousand armored Yu Lin Jun. After them, the tens of thousands of crowds went down the street to watch the festivities. "Let us go see the Empress, let us go see the Princess," they said to each other while heading westward.

“Let us also go and see,” Zhou Zhiruo said. The four of them mingled with the crowd until they arrived outside the ‘Yu De Dian’ [Jade Virtue Palace]. They saw that seven beautifully decorated raised platforms erected outside the Palace. The platforms were surrounded by the Yu Lin Jun holding rattan sticks to prevent the people from coming too close. Although it was very crowded, Zhang Wuji and the others, four people, managed to squeeze their way through by gently pushing forward and before long they had reached at the front of the platforms.

The Emperor sat on the highest platform, with the two Empresses on either side of him. The Empresses were middle-age fat women, bundled inside robes inlaid with pearls, jade and precious jewels. Needless to say, they glittered with brilliant lights. On their heads, they wore ridiculously strange-looking tall crowns. The Crown Prince sat on the platform to the left of the Emperor, while on the right platform sat a young woman about twenty or so, wearing embroidered gown. She must be the Princess.

Zhang Wuji’s eyes scanned the rest of the platforms; he saw that on the second platform on the left sat a young woman wearing sable fur coat, with a pearl necklace on her neck. Her smile was captivating, her eyes dreamy. It was none other than Zhao Min. On this same platform sat a long-bearded Prince with a majestic expression. He was Zhao Min’s father, the Ruyang Prince, Khakan Timur. Zhao Min’s brother, Kuku Timur, was pacing back and forth on the platform, with eyes like an eagle and steps like a tiger. He looked particularly imposing.

By this time the foreign monks were performing the ‘Tian Mo Da Zhen’ [Heaven and Devil Great Formation]. Five hundred monks with Buddhist religious articles in their hands circled around, to the left and to the right, jumping high and stooping low; the changes and variations were marvelously strange. The crowd broke into cheers and applause; everybody sighed in admiration.

Zhou Zhiruo kept her gaze on Zhao Min for half a day. Finally, she sighed and said, “Let’s go home!” The four of them squeezed their way out and returned to the inn.

Peng Yingyu paid his respects properly toward Zhang Wuji, and then they both recounted what happened since they parted. Zhang Wuji asked whether he heard any news about Xie Xun. Peng Yingyu had just arrived at Dadu from the Huai Si River area; he did not even know that Xie Xun had returned to the Central Plains. He told the accomplishments of Zhu Yuanzhang, Xu Da, Chang Yuchun and the others over the past year. They besieged and captured towns; they performed outstanding military successes and lifted the Ming Cult’s prestige high.

“Peng Da Shi [lit. grand/great master, also used to refer a Buddhist Monk, Reverend],” Han Lin’er said, “Just now if we attacked the platform, with one knife we could chop that Tatar Emperor; why did you let him go?”

Peng Yingyu shook his head, “This Emperor is a stupid tyrant and he is precisely our biggest helper. How can we kill him?” he said.

Han Lin’er was baffled. “The Tatar Emperor is a stupid tyrant; he has caused endless misery to the common people. How can he be our biggest helper?” he asked.

“Han Xiongdi [brother Han], you don’t understand,” Peng Yingyu said, “The Tatar Emperor appointed foreign monks for official businesses, and thus muddling the government; he also ordered the people to build a new road by excavating the Yellow River, tiring the people and squandering the resources, making the people angry and causing them to resent him. In recent years we managed to route the Tatars completely. Do you think that was because our ragtag troop is really superior of the Mongolian crack troops? It was because this muddle-headed Emperor did not use good officers. The Ruyang Prince is very capable of leading the troops. He managed to take things under control in everywhere the Tatar Emperor sent him to quench rebellion. The Emperor is afraid that if he rendered too many services, he would usurp the throne. Therefore, he continually reduces his authority, and dispatches some braggarts, good-for-nothing generals to lead the troops. As the Mongolian army fought the battle, these bastard generals can only lead them to defeat. Tell me, don’t you think this Tatar Emperor is our biggest helper?”

Zhang Wuji and the others nodded their heads in agreement. Peng Yingyu continued, “If we killed this Tatar Emperor, the Crown Prince would rise to the throne. Looking at his appearance, the Crown Prince is not someone easy to deal with. Granted, as the new Emperor, he might lack experience, but he is certainly better than his muddle-headed father. It would be really bad if he appoints veteran generals seasoned in battles to fight us.”

Zhang Wuji said, “It’s good that Da Shi promptly warned us, otherwise, we might act rashly today and spoil an important matter.”

Han Lin’er repeatedly slapped his own mouth while swearing, “I deserve to die! I deserve to die! Later on, don’t you dare to talk rubbish and propose stupid ideas!” Zhang Wuji, Zhou Zhiruo and Peng Yingyu laughed at his silliness.

Peng Yingyu said, “Jiaozhu, you hold a very important role, you bear the heavy responsibility of driving the invaders away and recapture our land; you must not brave unnecessarily danger. Subordinate noticed that among the guards who surrounded the Emperor, the number of masters is truly not a few. Although Jiaozhu is divinely brave and skilled, ultimately you will be overwhelmed by sheer numbers. If you fail, what good will it bring?”

Zhang Wuji cupped his fists and said, “I receive Da Shi’s invaluable advice.”

Zhou Zhiruo sighed and said, “What Peng Da Shi said was absolutely right; how can you recklessly brave danger? Wait until our great undertaking is accomplished, then the one sits on this dragon-chair platform will be you, Zhang Jiaozhu.”

Han Lin’er clapped his hands; he said, “That time, Jiaozhu will be the Emperor, Miss Zhou will be the Empress, Yang Zuo Shi [left emissary Yang] and Peng Da Shi [different ‘shi’] will be the Left and Right Prime Ministers. Now, that will be good!”

Zhou Zhiruo’s cheeks blushed, she bashfully lowered her head, but the corner of her eyes revealed that she was extremely happy.

Zhang Wuji repeatedly shook his hands. “Han Xiongdi,” he said, “You cannot say such thing again. Our Cult’s goal is to save the common people under the Heaven from the fire and the water. The goal accomplished, we retire. Don’t be greedy of riches and honor. That is the character of upright and real men.”

Peng Yingyu said, “Jiaozhu possesses a strong aspiration that not many people will be able to reach. It’s just that by that time, you may not necessarily be able to refuse the yellow robe [Translator’s note: only Emperor could wear yellow robe at that time]. During the Chen Qiao military revolt [960AD, the founding of Song Dynasty], did Zhao Kuangyin [given name of the first Emperor of the Song, the Song Taizu] think of becoming the Emperor?”

“No, no!” Zhang Wuji kept saying, “If I have the least bit of desire to be the Emperor, let the Heaven punish me and the Earth swallow me, let me die a wretched death.”

Listening to his determination, Zhou Zhiruo’s expression changed slightly, she turned her gaze outside the window and no longer said anything.

Four people talked a bit more, and then after dinner, Zhang Wuji said, “Peng Da Shi and I are going out to inquire information about Yifu.” He thought that Han Lin’er was

hot-tempered, if he saw any injustice, he would certainly not hesitate to let his fists do the talking and thus inviting some unwanted disaster; thereupon he said, “Han Xiongdi, you and Zhiruo better stay in the inn tonight. Have a good rest.”

“Yes,” Han Lin’er said, “Jiaozhu, please be careful!”

Zhang Wuji and Peng Yingyu made an agreement right away that one of them would go to the west, and the other to the east. They would meet again at the inn to discuss their findings.

Zhang Wuji went out the inn heading west. Along the way he heard the people were still talking about the ‘Great Tour of the Imperial City’ that morning. He heard somebody was saying, “The Ming Cult is staging a rebellion in the south. Today the Guardian Bodhisattva of the Emperor was brought out in front of the people. Looks like those rebels will be crushed soon.” Another man argued, “The Ming Cult is under the blessing and protection of Mi Le Pu Sa [Maitreya Bodhisattva]; looks like the Guardian Bodhisattva of the Emperor will have a battle against the Mi Le Pu Sa.” Yet another man commented, “The excavation of the Yellow River has unearthed a stone figure with one eye. There are two lines of characters on the back of that figure: ‘Do not say that because the stone figure only has one eye, it is incapable of provoking the Yellow River world.’ This has caused some speculations that some things simply cannot be forced.” [Translator’s note: I am not sure about the last man’s comment.]

Zhang Wuji paid no attention to all these unfounded comments by simple people; he wandered aimlessly until the path he took started to get quieter. Suddenly he looked up and realized that he had reached the small inn where he had a drink with Zhao Min the other day. He was startled and mused, “How did I get here? Could it be that in my heart I still cannot let her go?”

He saw that the door of the inn was ajar, and noticed that it was very quiet inside, apparently there was no guest drinking inside that night. He hesitated for a moment then he pushed the door open and walked in. He saw the attendant was dozing off on the counter table. On a table toward the corner, there was a lone candle flickering weakly in the dark. Next to the candle sat a guest. This table was precisely the table they used both times Zhao Min and he had a drink. Other than this single patron, there was nobody else in sight.

As that guest heard the footsteps approaching, the guest stood up. The candlelight swayed and shone on that person’s face. To Zhang Wuji’s surprise, that person was Zhao Min.

Neither of them expected to see the other. “Ah!” they both exclaimed in shock. “You ...” in a low voice Zhao Min said, “Why are you here?” Her voice trembled, revealing her exceedingly excited heart.

Zhang Wuji replied, “I was passing through, and came in to take a look. I don’t expect ...” while talking, he walked toward her table, and saw that there was another set of cup and chopsticks on the seat opposite hers, thereupon he asked, “Are you expecting someone?”

Zhao Min blushed, “No,” she said, “It was because twice we had a drink here; you were sitting over there, so ... so I told the attendant to set another set of cup and chopsticks.” Zhang Wuji’s heart was touched. He also noticed that the four dishes of food and wine on the table was exactly the same as the food and wine Zhao Min prepared the first time she invited him over. From the bottom of his heart he knew the depth of Zhao Min’s feeling; he could not stop himself from reaching out to grab her hands in his. “Miss Zhao!” he said, his voice shaky.

“I hate it,” Zhao Min gloomily said, “I hate it that I was born to a Mongolian Prince family, and become your enemy ...”

Suddenly, from outside the window came two ‘hey, hey’ cold laugh sounds, followed by something flew in. ‘Slap!’ that thing extinguished the candle on the table, that the room suddenly turned dark.

As they heard the sneer, Zhang Wuji and Zhao Min knew it was Zhou Zhiruo. While they were still at a loss, they heard indistinct footsteps on the roof and Zhou Zhiruo was gone like a wind.

“You are engaged to her, aren’t you?” in a low voice Zhao Min asked.

“Yes,” Zhang Wuji replied, “I shouldn’t conceal the truth from you.”

“I was hiding behind the tree that day,” Zhao Min said, “I heard your sweet words to her. I wished I could die immediately, I wish I have never been born in this world. That day I laughed coldly twice, and today she paid me back by laughing coldly twice. But ... but you have not even said half a word to make me happy yet.”

“Miss Zhao,” Zhang Wuji said apologetically, “I shouldn’t be here. I shouldn’t even see you. I have my people to think about, I shouldn’t make you upset. You are a golden-

branch-and-jade-leaf kind of person, from now on you should forget this village kid, farm boy like me.”

Zhao Min lifted his hand up and gently ran her finger over the scar on his hand. “This is where I bit you,” she said in a tender voice, “Even if your martial art skill were higher, your medical skill were better, you would still not able to take this scar away. If you cannot get rid of the scar on your own hand, how can you take the scar in my heart away?” She wrapped her arms around Zhang Wuji’s neck, and then planted a deep kiss on his lips.

Zhang Wuji’s mind was chaotic to suddenly feel cherry soft lips on his, and sweet fragrance assaulting his nostrils. Suddenly Zhao Min bit his upper lip as hard as she could, until he was bleeding. And then she pushed his shoulder away from her as she turned around and escaped from the window, while calling out, “You are a pervert little thief! I hate you! I hate you ...!”

oOo

As Zhang Wuji and Peng Yingyu left the inn, Han Lin’er said to Zhou Zhiruo, “Miss Zhou, you’d better go to bed earlier tonight.” Without daring to say anything else, he stood up and left the room.

“Han Dage [big brother Han,” Zhou Zhiruo smiled, “Are you afraid of me? You are not willing to be alone with me even for a second.”

Han Lin’er blushed profusely. “No, no,” he hastily said, but his steps were getting faster. He quickly entered his own room, closed the door behind him, and bolted it; while his heart was thumping madly. Trying to calm himself, he reclined on the ‘kang’ [heatable brick bed common in northern China], while thinking of Zhao Zhiruo’s tender and beautiful, simple yet elegant, countenance, and her soft but warm voice. He mused, “In the future, Miss Zhou will become Madame Jiaozhu. I will diligently follow Jiaozhu’s orders and will stake everything to set up a few merits. I will make Miss Zhou happy, and then she will say, ‘Han Dage, really, you troubled yourself too much to do this!’ When that happens, then my, Han Lin’er’s, life will not be in vain.” His daydream made him smile, and he drifted off to sleep.

He slept until midnight, and was awakened by some light tapping on his door. Han Lin’er sat up with a start and asked, “Who is it?”



“It’s me,” he heard Zhou Zhiruo’s voice outside the door, “Please open the door, I need to talk to you.”

“Yes, yes,” Han Lin’er said. He went to the door barefooted, pulled the latch open, then quickly turned around to light the candle. He saw that Zhou Zhiruo’s eyes were red and puffy, her expression looked greatly different. Han Lin’er was scared. “Miss Zhou, you ... you ...” he stammered, without able to continue whatever he was going to say. Suddenly he got an idea; he dashed out the room while saying, “I’ll fetch some water for you to wash your face.”

A short moment later, he returned with a washbasin in his hands, still barefooted. Zhou Zhiruo gave him a mournful smile. She sat on the table, supporting her chin with her hand, staring blankly at the candle.

“You ... please wash your face,” Han Lin’er said.

Zhou Zhiruo did not say a single word; she merely shook her head and suddenly tears start flowing down. In his fright, Han Lin’er was stumped. He relaxed his hands while still standing; wondering why she was so upset, and dying to know what it was she wanted to tell him.

The two of them maintained the silence for a long time. Suddenly a light ‘crack’ was heard as the wax snapped off the candle. Zhou Zhiruo trembled as if she had just awakened from a sleep. “Mmm,” she mumbled softly then she stood up to leave.

“Miss Zhou,” Han Lin’er said loudly, “Who offended you? I, the man surnamed Han will take my dagger to him. Even if I have to die, I will make a few holes on his body. Please tell me!” Zhou Zhiruo only shook her head sadly, and then returned to her room.

From the time she entered his room, Zhou Zhiruo only sat quietly for a long time. It appeared that she had wanted to unburden herself from her troubled mind; but all along she did not utter a single word, so that a hot tempered and rash man like Han Lin’er can only scratch his head in confusion. As she left, he stood absentmindedly, occasionally curling his fist to hit his own head. After thinking for a while without finding anything, he heard ‘bang, bang, bang!’ three times from a distance, and he thought, “Why haven’t Jiaozhu and Peng Da Shi come back yet?” Since there was nothing else he could do, he laid down on the ‘kang’ again to sleep.

While he was dozing off, suddenly he heard a couple of loud noises, as if a chair was knocked down to the floor, coming from the room to his east; it was the room where

Zhou Zhiruo slept. In his anxiety, Han Lin'er leaped up from his bed and ran toward that room.

Under the moonlight he saw a dark shadow inside that eastern room, swaying lightly, as if it was hanging in the air. Han Lin'er was shocked. "Miss Zhou, Miss Zhou!" he called out, while stretching out his hand to push the door, but it was bolted from inside. Using all his strength he pushed the door with his shoulder and the bolt snapped. Rushing into the room, he struck the flint to light the candle first, and then turned around to see Zhou Zhiruo's feet which were hanging in the air, while a rope was wrapped around her neck, and the other end of the rope was tied onto the beam.

Han Lin'er felt as if his soul was about to leave his body. Hastily he jumped up to pull the rope from the beam, and then laid Zhou Zhiruo on the bed. He felt for her breathe and luckily she was still breathing.

"Miss Zhou, Miss Zhou," he called in a very loud voice, "You ... why didn't you look at the bright side? Why did you ... why ..."

Suddenly he heard someone from outside the door calling out, "Han Dage, what is it?" A man walked in, it was Zhang Wuji.

As Zhang Wuji saw what happened, he felt as if a lightning bolt had just struck him. With trembling hands he broke off the rope around Zhou Zhiruo's neck, and then he felt her chest and found that her heart was still beating. "She is all right," he happily said, "I can save her." Reaching down toward her back and lower abdomen, he massaged her acupoints, while transmitting the Jiu Yang divine energy from the palms of his hands. After one round, 'Wah!' Zhou Zhiruo regained her consciousness and started to cry.

"Good, very good!" Han Lin'er exclaimed in exultation, "Miss Zhou is alive!"

Zhou Zhiruo opened her eyes and as she saw Zhang Wuji, she cried again, "Why do you care about me? Let me die in peace." Suddenly she noticed Zhang Wuji's upper lip was still bleeding, with some fine tooth marks on it. She could not suppress her fury; she raised her hand and heavily slapped Zhang Wuji's face left and right.

Han Lin'er was flabbergasted; how could anybody beat the Cult Leader? But in his eyes, Zhou Zhiruo was like an immortal; so he was confused and did not know what to do. Right that moment, someone gently tapped his shoulder twice. Han Lin'er turned his

head and saw Peng Yingyu. In his delight he said, “Peng Da Shi, you’re back! Quick, quickly advise Miss Zhou.”

Peng Yingyu laughed, “Advise what?” Toward Zhang Wuji he said, “Reporting to Jiaozhu: I did not find any information regarding Jin Mao Shi Wang [golden-haired lion king].”

“Hmm,” Zhang Wuji mumbled. He looked awkward.

“Han Xiongdi,” Peng Yingyu said, “Let’s go and take a walk outside.”

“No, no, we can’t,” Han Lin’er replied, “They are going to fight. Miss Zhou is certainly not Jiaozhu’s match.”

Peng Yingyu laughed out loud, “Silly brother!” he said, “Do you think even if the two of us are ganging up with Miss Zhou, we can beat Jiaozhu? I’ll say Jiaozhu is not Miss Zhou’s match.” He winked at Han Lin’er, and pulled his hand out of the room. Han Lin’er was still trying to turn his head, his face showed a deep concern. Zhou Zhiruo could not help but try to stifle her laugh, and then threw herself on the bed and wept again.

Zhang Wuji sat on the edge of the bed, gently tapped her shoulder and said in a tender voice, “Zhiruo, I did not have any appointment to meet her; it was truly an incidental meeting.”

Zhou Zhiruo randomly kicked her feet, while sobbing, “I don’t believe you, I don’t believe you. Whatever lies you are saying, don’t tell me to believe you.”

Zhang Wuji sighed, “When Zhou Gong feared the days of rumor, Wang Mang enjoyed being praised as a polite and modest scholar,” he quoted, “The matters of this world is so easy to be misunderstood ...”

Zhou Zhiruo snorted and sat up, “That Junzhu Niangniang [princess] uses those verses to insult me, yet you consider it so poetic that you memorize it in your heart. Look at your lip, aren’t you ashamed? Where is your dignity?” Speaking to this point, she could not restrain her own cheeks from blushing.

Zhang Wuji thought that whatever he said, the incident today was very difficult to debate. Besides, he had determined to marry Zhou Zhiruo and grow old together. So the only thing he could do was suppress his emotions, and wish that this incident would eventually fade away from her memory as well. Under the candle light, he saw her

pretty face was slightly red, with a deep rope mark around her neck, causing the neck swell on both sides. He thought that if Han Lin'er had been late in realizing what was going on and not rescued her, by the time he returned to the inn, she would have been dead, and no matter what kind of power he had, he would hate himself. Thinking of this, he was both ashamed and felt compassion toward her. He reached out to embrace her and kissed her cherry-red lips.

Zhou Zhiruo turned her head to avoid his kiss, and indignantly said, "You have committed dirty things with others, and come here to annoy me. Do you think you can take advantage of me?"

Zhang Wuji tightened his embrace so that she was unable to free herself, and then he deeply kissed her lips again. Because she could not struggle free, in the end Zhou Zhiruo's heart softened. Zhang Wuji thought that although they were engaged, they were not married yet. Being together in a room deep into the night, unavoidably some people would find it unacceptable. Besides, it would not be good in the eyes of Peng Yingyu, Han Lin'er and the others. Thereupon he let her go and said, "Zhiruo, take a good rest. We'll talk about it tomorrow. If I lied to you and went to see Miss Zhao, although you chop me with a thousand knives and cut me into ten thousand pieces, I will die without any regret."

Zhou Zhiruo's face blushed, her chest was heaving. Taking a deep breath, she said, "What nonsense are you talking about? You know that I will never chop you with a thousand knives and cut you into ten thousand pieces."

Zhang Wuji laughed. "You can always chop my both legs, what do you think?" he said.

Zhou Zhiruo lowered her head, beads of tears streaming down like rain. Zhang Wuji felt bad to walk out the room, he returned to her side, wrapped his arms around her shoulder and gently said, "What makes you sad?"

Zhou Zhiruo did not answer, but she kept crying. Zhang Wuji asked her again and again, but to his surprise, the more he asked, the sadder she was. Zhang Wuji cursed himself and swore, saying that he was a heartless and ungrateful man. Zhou Zhiruo covered her face with her hands and said, "I blame my own cruel fate; I am not blaming you."

"Everybody is suffering right now," Zhang Wuji said, "The Tatars suppress the people of the Central Plains; everybody lives in suffering and great difficulty. Later on, when we

get married and also have driven out the Tatars, then we will live a happy life and not suffer anymore.”

Zhou Zhiruo raised her head. “Wuji Gege,” she said, “I know you are being sincere to me. It’s just that that little witch Zhao Min is trying to seduce you, it’s not that you are of a double-minded person [orig. ‘three-heart two-intention’]. Only ... only she is too smart, her martial art skill is superior, her beauty, her power, everything in her is ten times better than I am. After all is said and done, I simply cannot beat her. It is better for me to die than to live a broken-hearted life. Who would have thought that that fool Han Lin’er would revived me. I have tried to die once, I don’t have the courage to try again. I ... I want to be like Shifu, I want to shave my head and become a Buddhist Nun. Ay, in the end, our Emei Pai’s Zhang Men [Sect Leader] is not a family woman.”

“You are always anxious,” Zhang Wuji said, “Let’s do this: tomorrow, we are leaving for the Huai Si River, we will get married over there.”

“We haven’t found Yifu,” Zhou Zhiruo replied, “Besides, you haven’t destroyed the Barbarians, how can you get married? In the end ... in the end we can’t get married yet.” While saying that, tears started to flow again.

“Naturally we must intensify the search for Yifu,” Zhang Wuji said, “But it will be a lot easier for us to find information if we are among our brethren. As for driving the Tatars away, nobody can tell when would that be. Are you saying that we should wait until we become ‘lao gong gong’ [old man or grandfather] and ‘lao po po’ [old woman, also grandmother] before we can bow to the Heaven and the Earth to get married? A pair of an old man and an old woman getting married is not strange, but we certainly can’t get any children, then the Zhang family of mine will die without any heir.”

Zhou Zhiruo blushed and covered up her mouth. “An honest and naïve person like you, I wonder where did you learn to talk garrulously like that?” It was as if the anxiety clouds and the miserable fog in the sky were lifted up and scattered away with their laughter.

Early morning the next day, Zhang Wuji requested Peng Yingyu to stay in Dadu for three more days to inquire about any news on Xie Xun; while he took Zhou Zhiruo and Han Lin’er heading south toward the Huai Si River area. When they entered Shandong’s border, they saw a large group of defeated Mongolian army, dragging their armor and losing their helmets, swarm in. Seeing the condition of these defeated soldiers, Zhang Wuji and the others avoided them by taking a detour. Later on, they saw a lone soldier fall behind, they captured and interrogated him, and found out that in

Huaibei, Zhu Yuanzhang had repeatedly won several big battles and completely routed the Yuan army.

The three of them were unable to restrain their delight; they picked up their speed and reached the Lu Wan [Anhui province] boundary, which had fallen under the Ming Cult's rebel army [orig. 'yi4 jun1' – justice/righteous army] territory. Someone in the rebel army recognized Han Lin'er and quickly reported to the general mansion. As the three of them approach Haozhou, Han Shantong, leading Zhu Yuanzhang, Xu Da, Chang Yuchun, Deng Yu, Tang He, all the senior generals, were already out welcoming them within thirty 'li's [about 15 km] of the city limit. It was their first meeting after a long separation, so everybody was very happy. As Han Shantong learned about Han Lin'er being captured by the Beggar Clan and how their Cult Leader battled his captors to rescue him, he did not cease from expressing his gratitude. Amidst the clamoring gongs and drums, and dazzling armored entourage, they entered the city of Haozhou.

Zhou Zhiruo rode a horse right behind Zhang Wuji. She looked to the left and glanced to the right, and thought that although this parade was not as glamorous as the Emperor and Empress' 'Tour of the Imperial City', she was quite pleased with it.

Zhang Wuji rested inside the city for a few days. As Yang Xiao, Fan Yao, Yin Tianzheng, Wei Yixiao, Yin Yewang, Priest Tieguan ['iron hat'], Shuo Bude, Zhou Dian, and all leaders of the Five-Element Flags received the news about his arrival, they all came from all over the country. Zhang Wuji told them that Xie Xun had returned to the Central Plains; and how he was captured by the Beggar Clan but went missing later on. He told them everything related to this incident.

Yang Xiao, Fan Yao, Yin Tianzheng, and the others discussed this matter over and over again, but nobody was able to offer any explanation. Fan Yao said, "The origin of that lady in yellow is unknown, but perhaps she holds the key to the information on Xie Xiong's [brother Xie] whereabouts."

Nobody had ever heard about that in the Wulin world there existed this lady in yellow. They could not offer anything except exhorting Zhang Wuji not to worry. "Judging from her speech and conduct, this lady in yellow does not hold any ill intention," they said, "If Jin Mao Shi Wang has fallen into her hands surely he won't come into any harm. Perhaps all this woman wants is some information on the Tulong Saber."

Zhang Wuji was still feeling an inexplicable concern in his heart, but he could not do anything except dispatch the Five-Element Flags to go everywhere to find information.

The next day Peng Yingyu arrived from Dadu; he also said that he could not find any news about Xie Xun.

Although the Ming Cult's rebel army had achieved great victory everywhere, the casualties in their side were also very serious. Hereafter they would be busy in the next two, three months to reorganize their troops and recruit new soldiers; hence, they were unable to engage the Yuan army in a large-scale battle for the time being.

Peng Yingyu knew that Zhou Zhiruo attempted suicide that night. Although he was unclear of the real reason behind it, he speculated that it had something to do with jealousy between the two. Fan Yao and the others were also aware of Zhang Wuji's unusual relationship with Zhao Min. If the Cult Leader of the Ming Cult took a Mongolian princess as his wife, the threat facing their great undertaking of resisting the Yuan would not be small. Since currently there wasn't any important matter at hand, they all agreed to urge Zhang Wuji to conclude his marriage with Zhou Zhiruo. Since Zhang Wuji had had a talk with Zhou Zhiruo beforehand, he readily agreed. Yang Xiao immediately decided that the fifteenth day of the third month would be an auspicious day.

The entire Ming Cult was jubilant; straightaway they busied themselves making preparation for their Jiaozhu's wedding. By this time, the Ming Cult's name had shaken the world. To the east, Han Shantong repeatedly scored major victories around the Huai Si River area. To the west, Xu Shouhui also defeated the Yuan army again and again around the northern Hubei and southern Henan. As the big news of the Cult Leader's marriage spread out, the Wulin world's figures' congratulatory gifts came flooding in like a tidal wave of the river.

Kunlun, Kongtong, and various other Sects were originally in enmity with the Ming Cult. However, first, Zhang Wuji had rescued them from the Dadu's Wan An Temple, and thus each Sect felt indebted to him; second, Zhou Zhiruo was the Sect Leader of Emei, so that each Sect Leader was obligated to send their representative to deliver their gift. Kongtong Five Elders' [Kongtong Wu Lao] gift was especially lavish.

The gift from Zhang Sanfeng consisted of calligraphy of four characters, 'Jia Er Jia Fu' [lit. excellent son (husband), excellent woman (wife)], and his own writing of the 'Tai Ji Quan Jing' [Taiji Fist Manual], which were delivered by Song Yuanqiao, Yu Lianzhou, and Yin Liting, three of his chief disciples. By this time, Yin Liting had already married Yang Buhui, who also came to Haozhou.

Zhang Wuji welcomed her with a big smile on his face. "Liu Shi Shen [sixth martial aunt]!" he called out loudly. Yang Buhui blushed profusely. She pulled his hand away to

reminisce about the past; with a heart full of joy and gratefulness.

Zhang Wuji was afraid Chen Youliang and Song Qingshu had not given up on their wicked scheme and would take this opportunity to strike. Thereupon he sent Wei Yixiao as his envoy to convey his gratitude to Wudang Mountain. He quietly told Wei Yixiao in detail how Song Qingshu had killed Mo Shenggu, and how he had conspired to harm Zhang Sanfeng. He asked that after Wei Yixiao paid his respects to Zhang Sanfeng, to collaborate with Yu Daiyan and Zhang Songxi in guarding against Chen Youliang's evil plan; and that he should wait until Song Yuanqiao and the others return to Wudang before he leaves.

Wei Yixiao spitefully said, "Following Jiaozhu's order, Wei Yixiao does not dare to suck others' blood; but this time, if I ever come across those two traitors, I must suck their blood dry."

Zhang Wuji hastily said, "About that Chen Youliang, I don't care if Wei Xiong [brother Wei] get rid of him. But Song Qingshu is my Song Da Shibo's only beloved son, he is also Wudang Pai's future Sect Leader. Besides, we should let Wudang clean up their own school. We must avoid hurting my Song Da Shibo's feelings." Wei Yixiao complied and left immediately.

By the tenth of the third month, the heroines of Emei arrived at Haozhou bringing gifts. Ding Minjun sent her gift, but she did not personally come.

When the fifteenth of the third month came, everybody from the Ming Cult, from top to bottom, were wearing new clothes. The wedding ceremony was to be held at the mansion belonging to the richest man in Haozhou. The reception hall was adorned with hanging lanterns and colorful embroidered banners of congratulations. Zhang Sanfeng's calligraphy, 'Jia Er Jia Fu' was hung in the middle.

Yin Tianzheng presided over the groom's family, while Chang Yuchun presided over the bride's side. Priest Tieguan was in charge of Haozhou's security; he deployed the Cult disciples to patrol around town, to guard against the enemy mingled in and caused trouble. Tang He stationed his army of elite troops to guard the city's perimeter.

That morning, the delegations from Shaolin Pai and Huashan Pai also arrived with their gifts.

When the ninth hour [between 3 – 5 pm] came, the wedding ceremony started. Cannons were fired repeatedly. The guests flooded the reception hall. Upon the com-



mand of Master of Ceremony, Song Yuanqiao and Yin Yewang walked Zhang Wuji into the hall. The string and woodwind ensemble started to play; the mood was bright.

Accompanied by eight of Emei Pai's young heroines, Zhou Zhiruo willowy and elegantly stepped into the hall. Zhou Zhiruo was wearing red embroidered dress, with phoenix crown and red-cloud cape on her head, and red veil covered her face. The male on the left and the female on the right, the bride and the groom stood side by side.

"Bow to the Heaven!" the Master of Ceremony shouted.

Zhang Wuji and Zhou Zhiruo were about to kneel down on the red-felt rug when suddenly from outside the main gate someone shouted, "Hold it!" A dark green shadow flashed, and a young woman in dark green clothes stood in the middle of the hall, smiling softly; it was none other than Zhao Min.

As the crowd saw that it was her, they exclaimed in surprise. Many masters from Ming Cult and various Sects had suffered under her hands; they did not expect her to be as bold as to enter this dangerous place alone. The hot-tempered among them were ready to pounce forward.

"Hold it!" Yang Xiao spread out his arms and shouted. To the guests he said, "Today is our humble Cult's Jiaozhu and the Emei Pai's Zhang Men's [Sect Leader] day of happiness. Since Miss Zhao has come to join us in this celebration, she is also our honored guest. Therefore, I am asking everybody to look at Emei Pai and Ming Cult's humble faces and willing set aside the old grudges temporarily; and thus not to treat Miss Zhao impolitely."

He cast a meaningful glance toward Shuo Bude and Peng Yingyu. They understood his intention. Circling to the rear of the hall, they went outside to investigate, to observe how many martial art masters Zhao Min took with her.

To Zhao Min he said, "Miss Zhao, please have a seat over here and watch the ceremony. Later on I will salute you with three cups of insipid wine."

Zhao Min smiled slightly and said, "I have something I want to say to Zhang Jiaozhu. I will leave as soon as I am finished. I will come back later to accept your hospitality."

"Whatever it is that Miss Zhao wants to say, it won't be too late to wait after the ceremony is over," Yang Xiao said.

“After the ceremony, it will be too late,” Zhao Min said.

Yang Xiao and Fan Yao exchanged a look, knowing that she had come today to deliberately create trouble. Whatever it was, they must prevent it at any cost, so as to avoid disruption of the ceremony, embarrassment, and to displease the guests.

Yang Xiao took two steps forward and said, “As your host today, we have exhausted our propriety. Miss Zhao is asking us to act harshly.” He had decided that if Zhao Min kept making disturbance, he would swiftly seal her acupoints and deal with her later.

“Ku Da Shi,” Zhao Min turned to Fan Yao, “Others are going to attack me, are you going to help me or not?”

Fan Yao knitted his brows and said, “Junzhu [princess], in the matters of this world, 80, 90% of them do not happen according to one’s wishes. Since we have come to this, you should not force me to do anything.”

Zhao Min said, “I want to force you.” Turning toward Zhang Wuji she said, “Zhang Wuji, you are the Ming Cult Jiaozhu, as a real man, will you or will you not do what you have promised?”

Ever since he saw Zhao Min arrive, Zhang Wuji’s heart had been beating faster; he had hoped Yang Xiao would be able to deal with her nicely and had her leave without any struggle. Now that she directly asked him, he had no choice but answered, “Of course I will do what I promised.”

Zhao Min continued, “When I saved your Yu Sanshu [third martial uncle] and Yin Liushu’s [sixth uncle] lives, you promised to do three things I would ask you to do, did you or did you not?”

“That’s right,” Zhang Wuji replied, “You wanted me to borrow the Tulong Saber for you to look at, and not only you have looked at it, you have even stolen the precious saber.”

For the last several decades, the Jianghu people had been concerned about this ‘wu lin zhi zun’ [the most revered in the Wulin world] Tulong Saber’s whereabouts. Now that they suddenly heard that the Saber had fallen into Zhao Min’s hands, they were in an uproar.

“Only Jin Mao Shi Wang Xie Daxia knows into whose hands the Tulong Saber has fallen” Zhao Min said, “You can go and ask him personally.”

Actually, not too many Wulin people aware that Xie Xun had returned to the Central Plains; hearing her mentioning ‘The Golden-Haired Lion King’, they were thrown into commotion again.

“I am most concerned about my Yifu’s whereabouts these days,” Zhang Wuji said, “I hope Miss could shed some light on this matter.”

Zhao Min smiled mysteriously and said, “I have asked you to do three things for me, and you have promised to comply as long as the matter does not violate the Wulin world code of brotherhood or the chivalrous way. As of borrowing the Tulong Saber to look at, although I did not really look at it, but I have seen it after all; I cannot blame you if the precious Saber was stolen later. Just consider you have accomplished the first matter. Right now I have the second matter I’d like you to do. Zhang Wuji, in front of these heroes and warriors of the world, you cannot back off on your word.”

“What do you want me to do?” Zhang Wuji asked.

“Miss Zhao,” Yang Xiao interrupted, “Whatever it is you want our humble Cult’s Jiaozhu to do, since he has made a promise, as long as it does not violate the Wulin world’s way of chivalry, not only Zhang Jiaozhu will do it, our entire Cult, from top to bottom, will do our utmost to accomplish it. However, now is the time Zhang Jiaozhu and his new bride to bow to the Heaven and the Earth, other matter can wait, so please do not say too much and disturb the ceremony.”

By the last sentence, his tone was rather stern. But Zhao Min looked as if she did not care much about this Ming Cult’s Left Emissary of the Brightness, whose prestige had shaken the Jianghu.

“My business is even more important,” Zhao Min languidly said, “It cannot be delayed even for a second.” Suddenly she took several steps toward Zhang Wuji, stood on her toes, and whispered in Zhang Wuji’s ear, “My second request is that you do not marry Miss Zhou today.”

“What?” Zhang Wuji was stunned.

Zhao Min said, “That was my second request. I’ll think about the third and let you know later.”

Although she was speaking in a low voice, it was loud enough so that Zhou Zhiruo, as well as those who stood nearby, such as Song Yuanqiao, Yu Lianzhou, Yin Liting, and

the eight Emei female disciples, could heard her clearly. Everybody's face was changed. The eight Emei disciples silently curled their fists inside their long sleeves; as soon as Zhao Min said anything else to disgrace the Emei Pai Sect Leader, they would make her suffer.

Zhang Wuji shook his head. "I can't do it," he said.

"So you decide not to honor your own word?" Zhao Min asked.

Zhang Wuji replied, "We have stated explicitly that it cannot violate the 'xia yi' . Miss Zhou and I are engaged; if I do what you said, I will violate this 'xia yi'."

With a cold laugh Zhao Min said, "If you marry her today, then you are unfilial and doing an injustice. Didn't you see how your Yifu fell into others' wicked plot during the 'Tour of the Imperial City' at Dadu?"

Zhang Wuji felt anger rising in his breast. "Miss Zhao," he said in a loud voice, "Today I respect you as my guest, therefore, I yield to you 30%. If you keep talking rubbish, don't blame me for offending you."

Zhao Min was unfazed. "So you have decided not to comply with my second request?" she asked.

Zhang Wuji remembered that with the honor she had as a princess, she did not hesitate to show her face in public [this is a literal translation of 'pao1 tou2 lou4 mian4', but I am sure the readers will understand what Jin Yong was saying], and ask him earnestly in the presence of all these heroes and warriors not to get married. It must be because of her feelings toward him. He could not restrain his heart from softening. "Miss Zhao," he said gently, "Since we have come to this, I am asking you ... I am asking you to understand. I, Zhang Wuji, am only an uncouth peasant; I am not worthy ... not worthy ..."

"All right," Zhao Min said, "Why don't you look; what is this?" Extending her right arm, she held out her hand in front of Zhang Wuji's face.

As Zhang Wuji saw it, he was so shocked that his body shivered. "This ... this is my ..." he said in a shaky voice.

Zhao Min quickly withdrew her hand and put that thing back into her pocket. "It's up to you whether you want to comply with my second request or not," she said, and then turned straight toward the main gate.

Nobody knew what kind of object she showed to Zhang Wuji, which made him looked so frightened and at a loss. Zhou Zhiruo's eyes were covered by the red veil, so although she heard the exchange between Zhang Wuji and Zhao Min, she was not able to see what it was.

“Miss ... Miss Zhao,” Zhang Wuji anxiously called, “Please don't go.”

“If you want to follow me, you must not bow to the Heaven and the Earth with your new bride too quickly,” Zhao Min said, “A real man without a strong determination will suffer a lifelong regret.” She was speaking in a loud and clear voice, but her steps were not hindered at all; quickly she had walked pass the main gate.

“Miss Zhao, please wait! We need to discuss it further,” Zhang Wuji called out.

Instead of slowing down, she picked up her speed and called back, “All right, as long as you do not get married today,” Zhao Min halted her steps, “Then you can come with me.”

Zhang Wuji turned his head around and looked at Zhou Zhiruo; his heart full of regret and guilt. He wanted to say something to her, but Zhao Min had already out of his sight. The matter on hand was very urgent, he must take the bull by the horn. Thereupon he gritted his teeth and pursued after Zhao Min.

Zhang Wuji had just reached the main gate when a red shadow flashed by his side; someone had already reached Zhao Min's back. From the inside of the red sleeve came a bare hand, with its five fingers struck down on top of Zhao Min's head. This move was like a rabbit evading the falcon; it was unbelievably fast, and it was more surprising since it came from the bride, Zhou Zhiruo.

Zhang Wuji felt strange, “This move is so fierce! Where did Zhiruo learn this exquisite stance from?”

He saw Zhou Zhiruo's palm had already covered the top of Zhao Min's head; with her five fingers threatened to crush Zhao Min's brain. Almost without thinking Zhang Wuji flew forward and reached Zhou Zhiruo's main artery. In an abrupt movement, Zhou Zhiruo retracted her arm and ‘bang’, her elbow struck his chest. The Jiu Yang Shen Gong inside Zhang Wuji's body reacted automatically and neutralized this incoming force, but he felt his blood was bubbling up inside his chest, and his feet staggered slightly.

Fan Yao saw the dangerous situation and immediately stepped forward to help; stretching out his palm he pushed toward Zhou Zhiruo's shoulder. Zhou Zhiruo's left hand moved slightly and lightly brushed away. Fan Yao felt his wrist go numb and his push failed. But because of these hindrances, Zhao Min was able to move half a step backward and thus avoid the strike on her head; however, she felt a stabbing pain on her shoulder, as the five fingers of Zhou Zhiruo's right hand penetrated her shoulder near her neck.

"Ah!" Zhang Wuji exclaimed, and pushed Zhou Zhiruo away.

Although the red veil on her head had not been removed, she could hear the wind to distinguish the movement. She turned her left palm around and hacked down on Zhang Wuji's wrist. Zhang Wuji did not want to fight her, but he saw her attacks to be extremely swift and fierce. Each one of those attacks could take Zhao Min's life. He had no choice but to fend her off.

Zhou Zhiruo's upper body did not move, her stance was steady, but her pair of hands successively launched eight dangerous attacks. Zhang Wuji was forced to use the Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi just to ward her off.

Eight attacks, eight blocks, all movements happened lightning fast that it was over in just the blink of an eye. Everybody in the main hall held their breaths and stood still with a shock expression on their faces. Zhao Min's shoulder was seriously wounded. She fell down to the floor with blood gushing out from the five holes on her shoulder, and in a short moment dyed her clothes red.

Zhou Zhiruo held her hands and said, "Zhang Wuji, you have been so enchanted by this little witch that you really want to give me up?"

"Zhiruo," Zhang Wuji pleaded, "Please understand my difficulty. We are engaged. Zhang Wuji will not regret that. I only ask for a few days delay ..."

Zhou Zhiruo said coldly, "Once you leave, don't ever think to come back. I only hope you won't regret your decision."

Zhao Min gritted her teeth and stood up. Without saying anything she walked gingerly outside. Blood was still flowing out from her shoulder, drenching her clothes.

Although the crowd of heroes and warriors had seen almost everything in the Jianghu, they had never seen two women fighting over a husband, blood splashing all over the

hall and the bride with red veil on her head injuring her rival with some mysterious martial art. There was not anyone who was not shocked and alarmed; nobody was able to utter anything.

Zhang Wuji stomped his foot and said, “Yifu’s kindness to me is as heavy as the mountain. Zhiruo, Zhiruo, please forgive me.” Having said that, he ran after Zhao Min. Yin Tianzheng, Yang Xiao, Yu Lianzhou, Yin Liting, and the others were not clear of what had happened; nobody dared to stop him.

Zhou Zhiruo reached up and tore the red veil from her face away; in a loud voice she said, “Everybody, you are my witnesses today: It was he who abandoned me, and not I who abandoned him. From this day on, Zhou Zhiruo and that surnamed Zhang have no relation whatsoever.” Then she lifted up the phoenix crown from her head, grabbed a pearl from it and tossed the phoenix crown to the ground. As she rubbed the pearl in her palms, the pearl turned into powder, which then trickled down to the floor. She said, “If I, Zhou Zhiruo, do not wash away today’s disgrace, let me be just like this pearl.”

Yin Tianzheng, Song Yuanqiao, Yang Xiao, and the others wanted to console her, telling her to wait for Zhang Wuji to return, and then discuss it further; but they saw Zhou Zhiruo pulled her dress with her bare hands. ‘Rip!’ the red long embroidered gown was torn into two pieces, and then she tossed it to the ground. She kicked the ground and flew up, making a graceful somersault in the air, and landed on the roof. Yang Xiao, Yin Tianzheng and the others were taken by surprise; they saw her like a floating red cloud, flying to the east. Her ‘qing gong’ [lightness skill] was superb, looked like it was not inferior to the Green-winged Bat King Wei Yixiao.

Yang Xiao and the others knew it was useless to pursue her. They were at a loss and stood silently outside for half a day before finally returning to the main hall. In a blink of an eye, Zhao Min’s disturbance had made a joyous celebration like a cloud dispersed by the wind. All the Ming Cult people felt a slap on their faces, while the guests who came to congratulate them were also disappointed. Everybody tried to guess what kind of object Zhao Min showed to Zhang Wuji, which made him forget everything and pursue her. Listening to his words, obviously, this object had a very important relation to Xie Xun; but the truth was, nobody knew anything for sure.

The Emei heroines were talking among themselves in low voices, and then indignantly they took their leave. Yin Tianzheng repeatedly apologized to them, saying that he would make Zhang Wuji come to Emei to seriously apologize and conclude the matrimony, that he sure hoped the good relationship between two families would not be

damaged. The Emei heroines declined to make any comment; they dispersed to look for Zhou Zhiruo, while muttering quietly that the man who should be blamed was not worthy to enjoy the good fortune.

oOo

Actually, the object Zhao Min held in her palm and showed to Zhang Wuji was a lock of yellow hair. As soon as he saw it, Zhang Wuji recognized it as Xie Xun's hair. Xie Xun practiced an unusual type of internal energy cultivation, plus, he had a different innate characteristic, so that by the time he was middle-aged, the long hair on his head had turned light yellow, however, the color was not the same as the western region color-eyed people's blonde hair. Zhang Wuji thought that since Xie Xun's hair was cut by Zhao Min, then the person must have fallen into her hands as well. If Zhang Wuji had bowed to the Heaven and the Earth with Zhou Zhiruo, in her anger, Zhao Min might kill Xie Xun. He could not take that risk, but he also could not explain the real reason to Zhou Zhiruo in front of all the heroes and warriors. He knew that practically everybody present at the hall, other than people from the Ming Cult and Wudang Pai, would love to know Xie Xun's whereabouts. Some of them wanted to seek revenge of the killing spree Xie Xun committed in his former days, but most of them had the real intention of snatching the precious Tulong Saber away.

As Zhang Wuji saw Zhao Min was leaving, he knew he would extremely offend Zhou Zhiruo, yet to him his Yifu's life was more important, therefore, he decided to run after Zhao Min. He saw Zhao Min running as fast as her feet could take her, with blood still dripping from her shoulder to the road along the way. Taking a deep breath, he flew several 'zhang's [1 zhang is approximately 10 feet or 3m] forward to cut her off.

"Miss Zhao," he said, "Please don't compel me to be an unrighteous person that I will be reviled by the heroes and warriors of the world."

Zhao Min's shoulder injury was rather serious. At first, driven by her anger, he made an effort to walk away. But now, listening to Zhang Wuji's words, she said, "You ... you ..." Her anger subsided and she collapsed to the ground.

Zhang Wuji stooped down. "Tell me where my Yifu first," he said.

"Take me to rescue him," Zhao Min said, "I will ... I will ... give you directions."

"Is he [Senior] alive?" Zhang Wuji asked.



Zhao Min had the will, but not the strength. “Your Yifu ... Yifu fell into Cheng Kun’s hands,” she said.

As he heard the name ‘Cheng Kun’, Zhang Wuji felt as if blood had been drained from his body; this man was not only an expert in martial art, he was also very crafty and cruel. There was a deep enmity, as deep as the ocean, between Xie Xun and him, so if Xie Xun fell into his hands, he would face an unspeakable danger indeed.

“You can’t do it alone,” Zhao Min said, “Call ... call Yang Xiao and the others to come with you.” As she saying that, she pointed her finger to the west, but suddenly her head limped backward and she passed out.

Zhang Wuji imagined all kind of sufferings his Yifu was subjected to right at this moment; he felt as if his five internal organs were burning. Immediately he embraced Zhao Min, hurriedly ripped her clothes and wrapped the wound. Seeing a Ming Cult disciple by the side of the road, he beckoned him to come, and gave his order, “Quickly report to Yang Zuo Shi [left emissary], tell him to lead everybody to the west at once, tell him that I have an important matter to attend.” The disciple complied and ran to report the order.

Zhang Wuji thought the sooner he leaves the better. Who knows? Perhaps this delay for few minutes would cost him the opportunity to save his Yifu’s life. He carried Zhao Min immediately, and walked quickly toward the city gate, where he ordered the soldier guarding the gate to fetch a steed. Flying up, he mounted the steed and galloped it westward.

After speeding up several ‘li’s, he felt Zhao Min’s body in his bosom gradually turn cold; checking her pulse, he found it to be weak. He was in panic. Stopping down to un-wrap the wound, he saw the five holes were very deep, reaching the shoulder bone, and the skin around the wound had turned blackish purple, an obvious sign of poisoning.

Zhang Wuji was startled, “Zhiruo is Emei disciple,” he mused, “How did she learn this kind of poisonous martial art? Her move was very fierce, even fiercer than Miejue Shitai’s; how is that possible?” He knew that if Zhao Min did not receive help immediately, she would die of poisoning. But he was wearing the groom clothes, why would he bring any anti-poison drug?

He pondered for a moment then leaped down from the horse. Carrying Zhao Min in his arms, he jumped toward the mountain on his left. He looked around trying to find

some herbs to treat poisoning, but after looking for a while he did not find even an ordinary herbal medicine.

With his heart thumping madly, he ran around the hills and the valleys, while muttering a silent prayer. Suddenly his eyes caught some bright color; he saw ahead of him, slightly to the right, there was a bush of about four, five little red flower trees. They were the 'fo zuo xiao hong lian' [little red lotus, seat base of Buddha], which had quite some effect of fighting poison. Although by this time it was the second month of spring, when hundreds of flowers were in full bloom, but to be able to find this red flower right then and there was truly a Heaven's blessing.

In his great delight he carried Zhao Min across two mountain streams toward the bushes. He took some red flowers, chewed them in his mouth, and then he fed half into Zhao Min's mouth, while applied the other half on her shoulder. Everything done, he carried Zhao Min again and continued westward.

Rushing about thirty 'li's, Zhao Min stirred and moaned, and then she awoke, "I ... am I still alive?" she asked in a low voice.

Knowing that the 'fo zuo xiao hong lian' was really effective, Zhang Wuji was very happy. He laughed and replied, "How do you feel?"

"My shoulder itches very much," Zhao Min said, "Ay, Miss Zhou's hand this time was very fierce."

Zhang Wuji gently put her down, and looked at her shoulder again. He saw the black was not diminishing, but her pulse was not as weak as before. Zhang Wuji thought for a moment. He knew 'fo zuo xiao hong lian' was very slow and was not enough to neutralize the poison. Thereupon he stooped down to put his mouth on her shoulder, and sucked the poisonous blood from her wounds, which he then spat on the ground. The stench attacked his nose and he wanted to vomit.

Zhao Min looked at Zhang Wuji with the corner of her eyes then she reached up and gently stroke his head. "Wuji Gege," she sighed, "Have you figured out what was happening?"

Zhang Wuji had finished sucking the blood and was going to a small creek to rinse his mouth. He walked back and sat by her side. "What is happening?" he asked.

Zhao Min said, “Miss Zhou is a disciple of a famous upright sect. How did she learn this kind of poisonous, heretical martial art?”

“I myself also thought it strange,” Zhang Wuji said, “I wonder who taught her that skill?”

Zhao Min laughed sweetly and said, “It must be the little thief from the heretical sect Devil Cult.”

Zhang Wuji laughed, “Although the Devil Cult has many devil-heads, nobody knew this kind of martial art. Only Qing Yi Fu Wang’s sucking-blood-from-people’s-neck skill is similar to Zhang Wuji’s sucking-blood-from-people’s-shoulder skill.” And then he asked, “How did my Yifu fall into Cheng Kun’s hands? Where is he right now?”

“I’ll take you there and help you to think of a way to rescue him,” Zhao Min said, “As for the exact location, that is Bu Dai Heshang [cloth sack monk] Shuo Bude. [Zhao Min was playing with words here, Shuo Bude means ‘can’t say’, he was one of the Five Wanderers, and his title was ‘Bu Dai Heshang’. I guess for those of you who have not read the missing chapters, you will have to wait patiently to know a little bit more about him.] As soon as I tell you, you will dash ahead and drop me without giving me another thought.”

Zhang Wuji sighed. “Surely I am not that heartless and without any sense of righteousness, am I?” he asked.

“For your Yifu’s sake, you were willing to abandon your pretty-as-a-flower, precious-as-a-jade new bride; much less me?” Zhao Min said, while slowly leaning her body against his. “Today I disrupted your wedding [orig. dong4 fang2 hua1 zhu2 – lit. cave room flowery (or fancy) candle], are you blaming me?”

Without knowing the reason, right at this moment Zhang Wuji felt happy and content. Other than his concern over Xie Xun’s safety, he was even more happy and content than when he was going to bow to the Heaven and the Earth with Zhou Zhiruo. But why he felt like that, he could not explain. However, he could not admit that he was happy because Zhao Min had disrupted his wedding ceremony; therefore, he said, “Of course I blame you. Next time, when you and that elegant hero who will become the ‘jun ma ye’ [princess’ husband] are bowing to the Heaven and the Earth, I will also come and create a great disturbance; I will not let you be the new bride peacefully and easily.”

A trace of blush arose on Zhao Min's pale face. "If you come and disrupt, I am going to kill you," she said with a laugh.

Suddenly Zhang Wuji heaved a sigh, he was silent and looked low-spirited.

"What is it?" Zhao Min asked.

"I wonder," said Zhang Wuji, "That Jun Ma Ye must have done many good deeds in his previous life that he deserves such a good fortune."

Zhao Min said with a smile, "It is not too late for you to do some good deeds right now."

Zhang Wuji's heart skipped a beat. "What?" he asked.

Zhao Min blushed, and suddenly went silent. At this point, the two of them felt uncomfortable to continue having an intimate talk, so after they rested for a moment, Zhang Wuji re-applied the medicine and carried her westward.

Zhao Min was carried on his back, her cheek were close to the left side of his face. Zhang Wuji's nose caught the fragrance of her perfume, his hands were supporting the soft flesh her warm body; he could not help his heart from racing like a wild horse and his mind jumping around like an ape. If only he was not anxious to rescue Yifu, he was seriously contemplating of slowing down his pace to enjoy this once-in-a-life-time opportunity of strolling in the wilderness.

That evening they spent the night on the uncultivated hills at the western suburb of Haozhou. It was only the next day that they found a small town, where they bought two healthy horses. Zhao Min's poisoned wounds were very difficult to heal that quickly, her body was still too weak to ride the horse alone; she had to lean on Zhang Wuji, riding one horse together. Riding this way, after five days they arrived within the boundary of Henan.

They were riding along that day, when suddenly they saw the dust was raising ahead of them, as more than a hundred riders gallop their way. They heard the tinkling of iron armors, and saw that it was the Mongolian cavalry. Zhang Wuji held the rein and stopped by the side of the road to make way.

As this Mongolian cavalry group galloped past, dozens of 'zhang's behind them there was another group of riders. This latter group was not arranged in neat formation, some were riding ahead, some were lagging behind, in a very loose array.

Zhang Wuji took a glance and to his surprise saw that the ‘shen jian ba xiong’ [Eight Divine Archers] were among these riders. “Not good!” he silently groaned, and quickly turned his head away.

These twenty-odd riders saw Zhang Wuji’s clothes to be expensive and fancy, with a young woman in his bosom, their faces were turned the other way, actually they did not give these two any thought. The Eight Divine Archers also did not recognize them.

As the riders past, Zhang Wuji was just about to pull the rein to continue forward, when suddenly they heard the sound of hooves beats again. Three riders flew by. The horse in the middle was white, the rider wore an embroidered robe and gold crown. On the either side of him was a chestnut horse. On their saddles Lu Zhangke and He Biweng, the Xuanming Elders, were sitting impressively.

Zhang Wuji was about to turn his head around when Lu Zhangke saw these two and called out, “Jun Zhu Niang-niang [princess], don’t worry, help is on the way!” While He Biweng made a long whistle.

The Eight Divine Archers and their company heard his whistle and immediately turned around, encircling Zhang Wuji two people in the middle. Zhang Wuji was startled; he looked at Zhao Min in his bosom as if he was saying, “So you are secretly preparing an ambush here to attack me?” But then he noticed her anxious expression and realized he had wrongly accused her, so his heart was relieved.

“Gege [big brother],” he heard Zhao Min say, “I did not expect to see you here. Is Father well?”

It was only after hearing Zhao Min said ‘gege’ two characters did Zhang Wuji pay attention to the young man in embroidered robe; he recognized him as Zhao Min’s brother, Kuku Timur, who adopted a Han name of Wang Baobao. Zhang Wuji had seen him at Dadu twice, but this time his full attention was on Xuanming Elders, so he did not recognize the third person right away.

As Wang Baobao saw his beloved sister again, he was pleasantly surprised; but he did not know Zhang Wuji. Frowning, he said, “Meizi [younger sister, term of endearment], you ... you ...”

“Gege,” Zhao Min said, “I fell into the enemy’s evil plot and suffer a heavy poisoned wound. Luckily this Zhang Gongzi [young master] came to help me; otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to see Gege today.”

Lu Zhangke put his mouth next to Wang Baobao's ear and said in a low voice, "Xiao Wangye [young prince], that man is the Devil Cult's Cult Leader, Zhang Wuji."

Wang Baobao had long heard Zhang Wuji's name; he believed Zhao Min was under his control and was forced to say such thing. He waved his right hand, and Xuanming Elders immediately came to within five feet to the left and to the right of Zhang Wuji. Four of the Eight Divine Archers also bent their bows, with the arrows aimed toward Zhang Wuji's back.

"Zhang Jiaozhu," Wang Baobao said, "Sire is the leader of a cult, a renowned hero within the Wulin world, yet you are bullying my weak little sister; won't you be a laughingstock of the people? Quickly release her and I'll spare your life today."

"Gege," Zhao Min said, "Why did you say that? Zhang Gongzi definitely showed kindness to me, why did you say he was bullying me?"

Wang Baobao still believed that his sister was under the enemy's power that she did not have any choice but saying like she did. "Zhang Jiaozhu," he said loudly, "Although your martial art skill is strong, a pair of fists cannot match four hands; quickly put my sister down. Today we, both sides, are not going to fight each other. I, Wang Baobao, is true to my words, you don't have to be overly suspicious."

Zhang Wuji thought, "Miss Zhao's poisoned wound is serious; if she is busy running around with me for a thousand 'li's, she won't be easily recovered. Now that we meet her brother, she'd better go with him. The renowned doctors in the prince's palace will certainly do her good." Therefore, he said, "Miss Zhao, your honorable brother wants you to go back, let us part here then. Only, please tell me my Yifu's location, I'll think of some way to rescue him. We will meet again in the future."

While saying that, he could not help but feel heartbroken, knowing full well that they were of different tribes, a Han and a Mongolian, of different status, a royalty and a commoner; the enmity between two sides was very deep. But on the verge of this separation, he had to admit that he felt strong attachment to her. To his surprise, Zhao Min replied, "All along I was intentionally unwilling to tell you Xie Daxia's whereabouts. I only promised to take you there, but I can't tell you the place."

Zhang Wuji was taken aback. "Your heavy injury is not healed yet," he said, "It won't be beneficial for you to make a long and wearisome trip with me. I think you'd better follow your honorable brother to go back home."

Zhao Min's face bore a stubborn expression. "If you cast me away, you won't know Xie Daxia's whereabouts," she resolutely said, "My injury is getting better by the day. The longer we go, the faster I will heal. If I return to the palace, I will die of suffocation."

"Xiao Wangye," Zhang Wuji turned to Wang Baobao, "Please persuade your honorable sister."

Wang Baobao felt strange, he thought for a moment then said with a cold laugh, "Hey hey, your acting is not bad. What kind of trick are you playing? Your palm is on her vital acupoint, of course she will say whatever you want her to say. Such rubbish!"

Zhang Wuji dismounted the horse immediately. Two of the Eight Divine Archers assumed he was going to attack Wang Baobao. 'Swish, swish!' two arrows flew with a strong gust of wind toward him. Zhang Wuji's left hand pulled and pushed, utilizing the Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi divine skill, two wolf-tooth arrows turned around with an even stronger gust of wind. 'Bang, bang!' the arrows struck and broke the bows in their masters' hands. If those two archers did not move fast enough, they would have suffered serious injuries. Even after they struck the bow, the power of these arrows did not diminish; they continued their flight until they hit the ground, with the arrow tails sticking up, the eagle feather vibrated incessantly. Everybody was stunned.

Zhang Wuji stood some distance away from Zhao Min and said, "Miss Zhao, please return home to tend your injury, I will find a way to see you again."

Zhao Min shook her head. "Which palace doctor is better than you are?" she asked, "You are sending me to my death."

Wang Baobao saw that Zhang Wuji had left his sister's side, yet she still insisted on going together with him. He was surprised, but also angry. He said to the Xuanming Elders, "I will have to bother two gentlemen to protect my humble sister. Let us go!"

"Yes!" the Xuanming Elders replied, and went to Zhao Min's horse.

"Mr. Lu and Mr. He," Zhao Min said in loud voice, "I have an important matter I need to take care with Zhang Jiaozhu. Our power is not enough. The two of you better come with me."

The Xuanming Elders cast a glance toward Wang Baobao. Lu Zhangke said, "The Devil Cult's devil head is so crafty, it is inappropriate for Junzhu [princess] to be associated with him too much. We'd better come home with Xiao Wangye to the palace."

Zhao Min knitted her pretty brows, “So the two of you are listening to my brother’s order, but not mine anymore?” she asked.

Lu Zhangke smiled and said, “Xiao Wangye has Junzhu’s well-being in his mind.”

“Humph,” Zhao Min snorted. To Wang Baobao she said, “Gege, I have received Father’s permission long ago to roam the Jianghu alone, you don’t have to worry about me, I can take care of myself. When you see Father, please send my respects to him.”

Wang Baobao knew their father had always doted on his beloved daughter, so he did not want to force his will too much; but if he let her go alone with the Devil Cult’s Cult Leader, he would never be able to set his own mind at ease. He looked at Zhao Min who was crouching on the saddle, she looked so frail and tender; but as she was lifting the rein to go west, he spread out his arms to block her and said, “Good sister, Father will be here shortly. Why don’t you wait for a little while? It won’t be too late for you to go after reporting everything to him.”

Zhao Min laughed, “As soon as Father comes, I can’t leave,” she said, “Gege, I don’t meddle in your business, I ask you not to meddle in mine.”

Again Wang Baobao looked at Zhang Wuji, sizing him up; he noticed that Zhang Wuji’s body was like jade, his face handsome. It was obvious from his sister’s manner of speaking that she had fallen in love with him. But the Ming Cult revolted against the government and caused lots of problem; thus this man was the enemy of the imperial government. If his sister was bewitched by this devil, the disaster they were facing was not small. Thereupon he waved his left hand and shouted his order, “Arrest this devil head first!”

Lu Zhangke brandished his deer staff, He Biweng moved his crane pens; together they created one golden ray and two circular black shadows striking toward Zhang Wuji.

Zhao Min knew the Xuanming Elders’ power very well. Even if Zhang Wuji were stronger, but with one against two, plus he did not have any weapon in his hand, Zhao Min was afraid he might be injured. “Xuanming Er Lao!” she called out, “If you harm Zhang Jiaozhu, I am going to report it to Father, and he will not spare you.”

Wang Baobao was indignant. “Everybody has the right to punish a rebel,” he said, “Xuanming Er Lao, kill this little devil head, Fu Wang [Father King] and I will reward you handsomely.” And then he added, “Mr. Lu, Xiao Wang [young prince – referring to self] will add four beautiful women for you, I guarantee you will not be disappointed.”



These brother and sister were giving them conflicting order; one wanted to kill him, the other said he must not be harmed. The Xuanming Elders were in a difficult position. Finally, Lu Zhangke winked at his martial brother and said in a low voice, “Seize him alive.”

Suddenly Zhang Wuji launched the martial art from Sheng Huo Ling; his body slanted slightly, his right arm bent from the elbow, and then turned around from an unthinkable direction and ‘Slap!’ Lu Zhangke’s ear was slapped heavily. “Try to seize me alive!” he shouted.

As he suddenly suffered a great setback, Lu Zhangke was startled and angry at the same time; but he was a top ranking martial art expert, his mind was clear. He twirled his deer-head staff that even wind and rain would not penetrate it. Zhang Wuji wanted to continue with another sneak attack, but he was unable to do so because of this tight defense.

Zhao Min pulled her reins to make her horse jump forward, but Wang Baobao swept his whip. ‘Crack!’ it hit Zhao Min’s horse right above its left eye. The horse made a long neigh in pain, and its front legs gave up.

Zhao Min was still weak from her injury, she was almost thrown away from her saddle. “Gege,” she angrily said, “Must you stop me?”

“Good sister,” Wang Baobao said, “Follow me home. Gege will apologize to you later.”

“Gege,” Zhao Min said, “If you stop me, someone is going to die a terrible death then Zhang Jiaozhu is going to hate me to the bone. It will be hard for your meizi ... your meizi to live.”

“What are you talking about?” Wang Baobao said, “The martial art experts in the Ruyang Palace are as numerous as the clouds, they can protect you all around. Let’s not talk about this little devil head trying to harm you; he cannot even see you even if he wants to.”

Zhao Min sighed. “It’s exactly because I am afraid I cannot see him again,” she said, “If that happens, I ... I don’t want to live anymore.”

These two, brother and sister, were very close ever since their childhood; they always told each other everything. Therefore, she did not hesitate to tell him her true feelings for Zhang Wuji.

Wang Baobao was angry. “Meizi,” he said, “You are confused. You are a Mongolian princess, you are like a tree with golden branch and jade leaves, how can you fall in love with a crude man, a lowly dog? If Father finds out, how can he, Senior, not be angry with you?”

He waved his left hand, and three of his warriors went forward to attack. By this time Zhang Wuji and the Xuanming Elders were competing internal energy. A few ‘zhang’s around them, the strong gust of wind was as sharp as the knife, how could these three warriors launch their attacks?

“Zhang Gongzi,” Zhao Min called out, “If you want to save Yifu, you must save me first.”

Seeing he could not change his sister’s mind, Wang Baobao was very anxious. He reached out and grabbed her. Putting her in front of him on the saddle, his legs squeezed and the horse jumped forward and ran.

Zhao Min’s martial art skill was actually higher than her brother, but her strength was gone because of the heavy injury; all she could do was crying out, “Zhang Gongzi, save me! Zhang Gongzi, save me!”

‘Whoosh! Whoosh!’ Zhang Wuji sent out two palm attacks with all his power, forcing the Xuanming Elders to withdraw three steps backward. Utilizing his ‘qing gong’ [lightness skill], he ran after Wang Baobao’s horse.

The Xuanming Elders and the three warriors were shocked; they also ran after him. Each time these five people were closing in, Zhang Wuji would launch a backward palm strike, sending out the formidable power of his Jiu Yang Shen Gong [divine energy from Jiu Yang]. Each time his palm struck, the Xuanming Elders were forced to evade, since they did not dare to take his palm head on.

After three times of such strike, Zhang Wuji was able to take the speeding horse over. He leaped up and grabbed the back of Wang Baobao’s neck. His grab was coupled with an acupoint sealing technique that Wang Baobao’s upper body was immediately paralyzed and his embrace on Zhao Min loosened. Zhang Wuji lifted him up and threw him toward Lu Zhangke.

Lu Zhangke hastily opened up his arms to catch him. Meanwhile, Zhang Wuji had caught Zhao Min, leaped down from the horseback, and dashed toward the hillside on their left. He Biweng and the rest of the warriors ran after them shouting and yelling. But the hill was several hundred ‘zhang’s tall, climbing it would really test their ‘qing

gong'. Although the Xuanming Elders possessed strong internal energy, their 'qing gong' was actually not top-ranking. Even four or five warriors were able to run ahead of He Biweng.

Zhang Wuji picked up some rocks and threw them down. Immediately some of the pursuers were hit and fell rolling down the hill. The rest of the pursuers were scared. Although they did not dare to stop because their young prince was watching, their steps were slowing down nonetheless. They saw Zhang Wuji carry Zhao Min higher up the hill and they did not dare to pursue farther.

Wang Baobao opened his mouth to curse, and then he called out, "Release the arrow, release the arrow!" While he also picked up his bow and shoot. 'Swish!' the arrow flew toward Zhang Wuji's back.

His shooting power was actually quite strong, but the distance was simply too far. The tip of the arrow was still a few 'zhang's away from Zhang Wuji's back when finally it fell down to the ground.

Zhao Min was holding tight on Zhang Wuji's neck. Knowing that the pursuers had stopped pursuing, finally she put her heart at rest. She said with a sigh, "Luckily I have known it all along and did not tell you Xie Daxia's whereabouts. Otherwise you, the heartless little devil head, will not be willing to save me with all your might."

Zhang Wuji was running around a depression on the mountain, his steps were not slowing down the least bit. "You tell me," he said, "Won't you be satisfying both sides if you are going home to tend to your injury? Why did you even bother to offend your brother and come with me facing the hardship?"

"I have decided to face hardship with you," Zhao Min said, "As for that brother of mine, I will offend him sooner or later anyway. My only fear is that you won't let me be with you. I don't care much of everything else."

Although Zhang Wuji knew that she loved him, he had always thought that it was a young girl's infatuation, which would pass in a moment. He had never thought that she loved him this much that she would consider riches and honor as dung and dirt, abandon royalty and honor like worn-out shoes. He looked down on her face, and saw the deep emotion on her thin and pale visage; her eyes were looking back at him with a passion similar to the flowing waves. He could not even describe the boundless charm she had on him. Unable to restrain himself, he lowered his head and kissed her slightly trembling cherry lips.

As soon as she was kissed, Zhao Min's face turned completely red. The excitement was too much for her and she unexpectedly passed out.

Zhang Wuji possessed enough medical knowledge to know that she was all right; actually, the appreciation in his heart was growing. But suddenly he remembered, "Even Zhiruo has never treated me this good!"

Zhao Min only lost her conscience for a moment; as she woke up, she saw his pensive look and asked, "What are you thinking? Are you thinking about Miss Zhou?"

Zhang Wuji did not try to lie; he simply nodded. "I am thinking that I have treated her badly," he said.

"Do you regret your decision?" Zhao Min asked.

"When I was about to bow to the Heaven and the Earth with her, I thought about you; and I could not help but feel sad," Zhang Wuji said, "This time I am thinking about her, I actually feel sorry for her."

Zhao Min smiled and said, "That means you love me a lot more, don't you?"

Zhang Wuji replied, "Honestly speaking: you, I love and I hate; Zhiruo, I respect and I fear."

"Ha ha!" Zhao Min laughed, "I would rather have you love and fear me, and respect and hate her."

Zhang Wuji smiled. "Well, it's different now. I hate you and I fear you. I hate you because you broke up my happy marriage, and I fear that you won't pay me back for the damage."

"How do I pay to you?" Zhao Min asked.

Zhang Wuji laughed and said, "I want you to pay it with your own self, so that I can continue the wedding festivities [orig. dong4 fang2 hua1 zhu2 – see similar occurrence above]."

"No! No!" Zhao Min blushed profusely, "You'll have to speak with my father [orig. die1 die1] first ... and I need to make amends to my Gege. Only then ... only then ..."

“And if your Papa wouldn’t let you?” Zhang Wuji asked.

Zhao Min sighed. “Then marry the devil follow the devil. I have no choice but follow you, the little devil head, to become the little devil mother.”

With a straight face Zhang Wuji roared, “Audacious witch! You follow Zhang Wuji, the pervert thief who rebels and creates trouble. What punishment do you think you deserve?”

With the same straight face Zhao Min unflinchingly said, “As your punishment, the two of you are to be a happy couple, to live together to old age, and after you die, you are to be banished to the eighteenth level of the underworld, and will not be reincarnated for ten thousand years.”

Speaking to this point, they both broke out in laughter. Suddenly from ahead of them came a loud and clear voice, “Junzhu Niang-niang, Xiao Seng [lit. little/lowly or humble monk – referring to self] have been waiting here for a while.” About twenty something foreign monks appeared from behind the mountain. All of them were wearing red robes.

Zhang Wuji recognized these monks’ clothing and adornment; that night, on the ground below the Wan An Temple Pagoda, these monks had tried to stop him. Their martial art skill was very strong; luckily Wei Yixiao had set the Ruyang Palace on fire thus forcing them to retreat. Otherwise, it would not be easy for him to rescue the warriors from the Six Major Sects.

One of the foreign monks clasped his palms and bowed, while saying, “Xiao Seng receives the Prince’s order to accompany Junzhu return to the Palace.”

“What are you doing here?” Zhao Min asked.

“Junzhu is injured,” the foreign monk replied, “The Prince is very concerned, he ordered Xiao Seng to take Junzhu home.” While speaking, he lifted up a white pigeon in his hand.

Zhao Min understood that her brother had sent a message to their father via a homing pigeon, and so their father must have dispatched these foreign monks to intercept them. “Where is my Father?” she asked.

The foreign monk replied, “The Prince is waiting at the foot of the mountain. He is anxious to see the condition of Junzhu’s injury.”

Zhang Wuji knew too much talking would not do them any good; he strode forward straight toward them, while shouting loudly, “If you want to live, quickly move aside. Otherwise, don’t blame me for being merciless.”

Two foreign monks stepped forward side by side, they both stretched out their right palms pushing against Zhang Wuji’s chest. Zhang Wuji’s left hand made a turn in a pulling and pushing action, he sent the two monks’ palms strength back.

The two foreign monks cried out together, “Ami amihong, ami amihong!” It sounded like they were chanting an incantation, or it could be that they were cursing.

Zhao Min was not willing to be overdone; she also shouted, “Ami amihong yourself!”

‘Tap, tap, tap!’ the foreign monks took three steps back. Two other foreign monks behind them stretched out their right palms to stop the first two monks’ backs, and pushed them forward again. These two foreign monks kept using the same stance from the ‘pai shan zhang’ [‘row of mountains’ palm].

Zhang Wuji was not willing to fight them strength with strength and thus waste his energy; so he launched the Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi to divert the monks’ force away. To his surprise, as his fingers were barely touching the edge of those two monks’ palms, he felt just like iron pulled by magnet, his fingers stuck firmly onto the monks’ palms.

The two monks cried out again, ““Ami amihong, ami amihong!”

Twice Zhang Wuji tried to shake them off, but both times he failed. He had no choice but strike back with the Jiu Yang Shen Gong through his fingers. Surprisingly, he failed to push the two monks away. And then he saw that behind these two monks, the other twenty two monks arranged themselves in two rows, with each one’s right palm on the back of the monk in front of him. Twenty four foreign monks lined up neatly in two rows.

Zhang Wuji suddenly remembered, “I have heard Tai Shifu [great master – referring to Zhang Sanfeng] said that in the martial art world of India there is a technique to combine power. These twenty four foreign monks are combining their strength to fight my palms. Even if my internal strength were stronger, I still cannot defeat the combined power of these twenty four men.”

He was afraid the pursuing soldiers would soon arrive, so letting out a long whistle, he added 30% more power to his palms and then abruptly pushed diagonally down, while he dodged to the left. He knew that these twenty four foreign monks could not possibly combine their strength in one straight line. The six foremost monks had already faltered from the direct impact of the push. Zhang Wuji immediately sent both his palms out, 'Slap, slap, slap, slap, slap, slap!' six times, the six foreign monks tumbled down on the ground with blood spurting out from their mouths. But the seventh and the eighth foreign monks continued their attacks forward.

"You want to follow your comrades?" Zhang Wuji thought. His right palm struck out to block these two monks' palms. Focusing his strength, he was about to push diagonally again when suddenly he heard light footsteps from behind; somebody was sending him a palm attack. He swung his left palm backhandedly to parry this incoming palm attack, but his Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi was relying on his Jiu Yang Shen Gong, while right at that moment he was using his entire strength to deal with the combined power of the eighteen foreign monks in front of him; therefore, his strike backward only carried not more than 20% of his normal strength. He felt a blast of cold energy penetrating his palm and went straight into his body. His whole body shivered, he staggered, his body bent down and he fell. It was Lu Zhangke who launched a sneak attack on him with the Xuanming Shen Zhang [black/mysteriously dark divine palm].

"Mr. Lu, stop!" Zhao Min cried out in fear, throwing her own body on top of Zhang Wuji's. "Who dares to make a move?" she shouted.

Actually, Lu Zhangke wanted to follow up with another palm strike, and thus take the life of the number one formidable enemy he had ever faced in his entire life. But seeing how the princess was protecting him, he had no choice but to hold his hand up and step back. He let out a long and loud whistle to signal his companions that everything went well so that it was safe for them to come over.

"Junzhu Niang-niang," he said, "The Prince only wishes Junzhu Niang-niang to come home; no more than that. This man is the leader of the rebels; why does Junzhu care about him this much?"

Zhao Min was bitterly angry with him, and was thinking of scolding him badly, but she changed her mind as she did not want to incite his anger that he would harm Zhang Wuji's life. Therefore, keeping her peace, she sat down, embracing Zhang Wuji in her arms.

A short moment later, they heard jingling bells, as three riders came up the mountain. One of them was He Biweng, the other as Wang Baobao, and the last one was the Ruyang Prince himself. As they came near, they jumped down from their horses. The Ruyang Prince frowned and said, “Minmin, what’s wrong with you? Why didn’t you obey your brother but deliberately create trouble in here instead?”

With tears flooding down her cheeks, Zhao Min cried out, “Father, you sent people to bully your daughter like this.”

The Ruyang Prince took several steps forward, putting out a hand to pull her up. Zhao Min flipped her right hand over, a white ray flashed as she took a dagger from her bosom and pointed it toward her own abdomen. “Father,” she called out, “If you don’t let me go, your daughter will die in your presence today.”

The Ruyang Prince was frightened that he retreated two steps backward. In a trembling voice he said, “We can talk, don’t be like this! You ... what do you want?”

With her left hand Zhao Min pulled the clothes covering her right shoulder. She took off the bandage to reveal five finger holes. The poison had been taken away, but the wounds had not healed yet. Her flesh was vaguely exposed underneath traces of blood, making the wound looked even more ghastly.

Seeing her terrible wounds, Ruyang Prince’s heart melted; she was, after all, the beloved daughter he dearly loved. “What happened? How did the wound become this bad?” he repeatedly asked.

Zhao Min pointed toward Lu Zhangke and said, “This man was having an ill intention; he was going to rape your daughter. Of course I resisted him to the death. He ... he ... then grabbed me like this. Please, Father ... Father must help me.”

Lu Zhangke was so frightened that he felt as if his soul was fleeing out of his body. “Even to the death Xiao Ren will not dare. How can ... how can there be such thing?”

“Humph!” the Ruyang Prince stared at him angrily. “Such a nerve!” he said, “I was being lenient to you by not investigating the Han Ji affair, now you have the guts to offend my daughter. Seize him!”

By this time, one by one his personal bodyguards and warriors had caught up with them. Even though they knew the severity of Lu Zhangke’s martial arts, upon hearing



their prince shouting his order to seize the man, four of them stepped in to surround him.

Lu Zhangke was shocked and angered; thinking that the princess was taking advantage of their father-daughter relationship. Just because she was angry he had injured her boyfriend, she had unexpectedly framed him. Like the saying goes, 'blood is thicker than water'. The princess was exceptionally crafty. How could he retaliate to her? In the meantime, he swept away with his palm, forcing the four warriors to retreat. He sighed and said, "Shidi [martial (younger) brother], let's go!"

He Biweng hesitated. Zhao Min called out, "Mr. He, you are a good man, not a lecher like your Shixiong [martial brother]. Quickly arrest your Shixiong, my Father will bestow a high-ranking official position to you, and will reward you handsomely."

The Xuanming Elders' martial art skills might be outstanding, but they were greedy of rank, fame and fortune. Ignoring the dignity of their master, they threw themselves into the Palace for worldly gain. He Biweng knew very well his martial brother's excessive lascivious nature. Listening to what Zhao Min had said, he was 70, 80% convinced. The offer of promotion had made his heart racing. Only, Lu Zhangke and he were not only martial brothers, they were also best friends; how could he make his move against him? So for a moment he was unable to make a decision.

Lu Zhangke's face showed his grief; with a trembling voice he said, "Shidi, if you want promotion, come and arrest me."

He Biweng sighed. "Shige," he said, "Let's go!" Walking side-by-side, Lu Zhangke and He Biweng left.

The Xuanming Elders' prestige had shaken the capital [orig. Jing Shi – modern day Beijing]; the warriors of the Ruyang Palace respected them as immortals. Who would dare to step out and stop them?

The Ruyang Prince shouted his order over and over again, but the warriors only put on an act of shouting and moving around; they just looked on as the Xuanming Elders went down the mountain.

"Minmin," the Ruyang Prince said, "You are injured. Quickly come home with me to recuperate."

Zhao Min pointed toward Zhang Wuji and said, “This Zhang Gongzi saw me being bullied by Lu Zhangke. Seeing the injustice, he went out of his way to save me. But Gege did not know the real story, he accused him of being some leader of the rebels. Father, I have an important business I need to take care with Zhang Gongzi. As soon as we are done, I am going to take him to see you.”

From her words, the Ruyang Prince deduced that his daughter wanted to marry this man, but his son had told him that this man was the Cult Leader of the Ming Cult. Right at that moment, his leaving the capital heading south was to consolidate the troops, to deal with the Ming Cult rebels on the Huai Si and Henan-Hubei region. How could he let his daughter go with this man? He asked, “Your Gege said that this man is the Devil Cult’s Jiaozhu. Is that true?”

“Gege loves to joke,” Zhao Min said, “Father, take a look at him and tell me how old do you think he is? How can he be the brain behind the rebellion?”

The Ruyang Prince sized Zhang Wuji up; he saw a young man, not more than 21 or 22 years old, his face pale from the injury, hence it was devoid of the heroic and valiant air he used to have, he looked even less like someone who was in charge of hundreds of thousands strong rebel army. But the Prince also knew that his daughter was very shrewd. In addition, the Ming Cult had caused the nation some major disasters. Perhaps this man was not the Cult Leader of the Ming Cult, but he must be one of the important characters within the Ming Cult. Certainly he could not let him go. “Take him inside the city,” he finally decided, “We’ll examine him carefully. If he is not one of the Devil Cult people, I will grant him rewards.” He said that to save his daughter’s face, so that in front of all these people she would not look like a spoiled brat.

Four warriors immediately responded; they walked toward Zhao Min.

“Father,” Zhao Min cried, “Do you really want your daughter to die?” She pressed the dagger in her hand about half an inch [orig. ‘cun’ – thumb, approximately equal to an inch] into her stomach; immediately blood seeped out and dyed her clothes red.

The Ruyang Prince was shocked. “Minmin,” he said, “Please don’t make a scene here.”

Zhao Min cried even louder. “Father, your daughter is unfilial. I have secretly become man and wife with Zhang Gongzi. Please just consider you have never had any daughter. Let your daughter go. Otherwise, I’d rather die in your presence.”

The Ruyang Prince kept pulling his beard with his left hand; cold sweats started to form on his forehead. He had held command over generals and soldiers, he had battled and crushed enemies; he was used to make decision in split second. But today, confronted by his own beloved daughter's embarrassing affair, his hands were bound and he was unable to do anything.

"Meizi," Wang Baobao said, "Both you and Zhang Gongzi are injured. Let us all come home with Father. We will invite renowned doctors to treat you. Afterwards, we will have Father to preside over your wedding. Father will have an ideal son-in-law, and I will have a hero as my brother-in-law. Won't that be good?"

His words were pleasant to be heard, but Zhao Min had been aware early on that he was trying to buy time. If Zhang Wuji fell into their hands, how could he keep his life? He would be executed in less than an hour. Thereupon Zhao Min said, "Father, things have come to this, your daughter marries a chicken, she will follow the chicken; she marries a dog, she will follow the dog. In life or in death, I will follow Zhang Gongzi. Whatever trick you and Gege are playing, you can't hide it from me. I will not fall on it. Right now there are only two choices: if you are willing to spare your daughter's life, let me go. If you want your daughter's death, you won't have to waste any effort."

"Minmin," the Ruyang Prince was angry, "You may want to think it over. Once you follow this rebel thief, you can't be my daughter anymore."

Zhao Min felt as if her intestines were tied in hundreds knots. She did not want to part with her father and her big brother, remembering that they loved her dearly and had always pampered her. She felt as if her heart was sliced by a knife; but she knew that if she hesitated even so slightly, Zhang Wuji's life will be gone immediately. Right now, the most important thing was saving her lover's life; she would seek her father and her brother's forgiveness later.

"Father, Gege," she said, "All this is Minmin's fault. You ... please forgive me."

Seeing he would not be able to change her daughter's mind, the Ruyang Prince regretted that he had spoiled her too much. He let her roam the Jianghu unrestrained to such an extent as to cause this kind of trouble. He knew she was strong-willed ever since her childhood, if he forced her, she would certainly commit suicide by stabbing herself. All he could do was heave a long sigh, with tears pouring down from his eyes. "Minmin," his voice was hoarse, "Take a good care of yourself. Father is leaving ... you ... you have to be careful in everything."

Zhao Min only nodded, she did not dare to look at her father anymore. The Ruyang Prince turned around and slowly walked down the mountain. His personal attendant followed him behind, leading his horse, but he seemed oblivious; he did not even remember to mount the horse.

After walking for a dozen of 'zhang's, he suddenly turned his head around and said, "Minmin, is your injury all right? Do you have enough money?"

Swallowing her tears, Zhao Min nodded.

To his personal attendant the Ruyang Prince said, "Give my two horses to Junzhu." The personal attendant warrior complied and led the horses to Zhao Min, and then he followed the Ruyang Prince and walked down the mountain.

The six foreign monks were still lying on the ground; they were incapable of standing up. The rest of the foreign monks, with two monks helping one, carried them follow behind. A short while later everybody had left, leaving only Zhang Wuji and Zhao Min two people.



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