

## Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

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## SDXL Chapter 32



### Chapter 32 – What is Love

*Translated by Xiao\_Long\_Nu & Foxs*



*Yang Guo looked across the ravine at the Heart-Breaking Cliff. In the whitish mist, he could almost see the indistinct figure of a woman in white with a red flower in the hair by one of her temples. The woman seemed to move swiftly as she engaged Gongsun Zhi in an intense battle with the pair of swords in her hands.*

When Huang Rong, Yideng, Guo Fu and the other were trapped in the main hall, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were sitting side by side near the flower bushes, chatting. Not too long afterward, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang arrived. Xiao Longnu saw that Cheng Ying was warm and elegant; she felt a sense of attraction toward her. Immediately she

took Cheng Ying's hand and they talked. At the same time, Lu Wushuang told Yang Guo about the fight between Guo Fu and her, how she made her confused and at a loss for words and how Cheng Ying made her lose her sword and lose the moment. After meeting both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang again, Yang Guo once again felt a little guilty and sorry that he couldn't repay their love for him. Aware that Lu Wushuang apparently knew that Xiao Longnu was now his wife, she was still comfortable in front of Xiao Longnu. Cheng Ying was talking with Xiao Longnu quietly, he was greatly relieved.

The four of them sat on a rock, Xiao Longnu was talking to Cheng Ying and Yang Guo was chatting with Lu Wushuang. Xiao Longnu and Cheng Ying's characters were quieter, and they had fewer things to talk about. Yang Guo and Lu Wushuang were talking non-stop and cracking many jokes, calling each other names like "Dumb Egg" (Sha Dan) and "Wifey". All of a sudden, Cheng Ying spoke out cutting off their speech, "Yang Da Ge [Big Brother], you have Yang Da Sao [Big Sister-in-law] here, so you'll have to change your words when addressing my cousin..." She was laughing while she was talking.

Yang Guo let out a soft cry, "ah", and stretched out his hand to cover his mouth. In the mean time, Lu Wushuang suddenly felt embarrassed. Her face reddened immediately. Cheng Ying thought silently, "They were only joking and the words contained no serious meaning. I shouldn't have said it, and now it has made things uncomfortable..." She immediately spoke, "Yang Da Ge, you've got the Passionless Poison in your body, how are you feeling now?" Yang Guo replied, "I'm alright. Auntie Guo is very clever and full of ideas. I believe she can get me the miracle pill. I'm only worried about my wife's injury..." He was pointing towards Xiao Longnu with one finger.

Both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were shocked and asked, "What? Yang Da Sao is also injured? We had no idea." Xiao Longnu smiled slightly and said, "It's actually nothing. I used my internal energy to stop the poison from spreading. I have been fine these past few days." Lu Wushuang replied, "What poison is it? Is it the 'Passionless Poison' again?" Xiao Longnu said, "No it isn't, it is my senior sister's 'Soul Freezing Needles'." Lu Wushuang replied, "Of course it's that disgusting Li Mochou again. Dumb.....Big Brother Yang; didn't you see her 'Five Poison Secrets' book? Though the 'Soul Freezing Needle' maybe strong, it isn't difficult to neutralize."

Yang Guo just sighed softly. Sorrowfully he said, "The poison has infected her blood stream and her internal organs; it is impossible to neutralize it with any ordinary antidote." Then he proceeded to tell them how Guo Fu – unintentionally – launched the 'Soul Freezing Needle' while his wife was trying to cure herself by reversing her blood flow.

Lu Wushuang angrily struck the stone she was sitting on; she was very angry. “Guo Fu really did not follow in her parents’ footsteps; she is ignorant of the laws of heaven. Cousin, we can’t just sit here doing nothing. I don’t care if her parents are chivalrous heroes of the world, I am not afraid of them.”

“We can’t really blame her,” Xiao Longnu commented. “The situation was entirely different than when she chopped off Guo’er’s arm.”

“Yang Da Sao,” Cheng Ying stated, “My Shifu said that with a strong internal energy we can momentarily halt the spread of the poison; however, the longer the poison resides in our bodies, the worse the end condition will be. Therefore, we will have to get rid of it as soon as possible.”

Xiao Longnu only uttered a “Hmm” sound, but Yang Guo thought, “When the Divine Indian Monk wakes up, whether or not he can neutralize the poison, is really hard to say.” He did not want to upset Xiao Longnu, so he did not say what he was thinking, he simply said, “I wonder how Auntie Guo and Reverend Yideng are dealing with that mad monk; we’d better go and take a look.”

Immediately they sought the way to the main hall. While they are still dozens of zhangs [a zhang is approximately 10 feet/3 meters] away, they saw a dark shadow flashing upward, whom they recognized as Gongsun Zhi. Then a very loud crashing was heard; Gongsun Zhi was smashing a hole in the hall’s rooftop and jumping down.

Yang Guo did not dare follow Gongsun Zhi’s way of entering the hall via the rooftop since he was wary of the enemy’s nets. He destroyed the stone door with his heavy iron sword instead.

When Gongsun Zhi entered the hall and saw Huang Rong and the other skilled martial artists, he was not afraid. He thought, “If I can’t fight them, I can always run away, can’t I?” He was about to rush outside when suddenly Yang Guo entered the hall by smashing the door. He was startled. He kicked his feet to the ground and leaped up to get out of the hall the same way he entered. His goal that particular moment was to get the antidote [Passionless Pill] for Li Mochou. Killing Qiu Qianchi and taking back the Passionless Valley could wait another day.

Just as Gongsun Zhi leaped up, Huang Rong followed with the ‘Dog Beating Stick’ in her hand; using the ‘chan’ [entangle] technique she entangled Gongsun Zhi’s leg. “Old thief!” Qiu Qianchi shouted, and launched an iron date stone [zao he ding] toward Gongsun Zhi’s waist. When he was leaping up vertically he had anticipated this attack,

so he swung his saber and knocked the projectile down while maintaining his speed going up. But then his ears heard another sound, the second shot was coming his way. His golden saber was still extended; there was not enough time to pull it back. In the meantime Huang Rong's dog beating stick had already entangled his leg and hit his thigh. He could not let the stone hit his abdomen, so he twisted his body frantically and bent his knees trying to elude it.

To everybody's surprise, Qiu Qianchi launched the stone in a very extraordinary way. Everybody could see that those two date stones were directed at Gongsun Zhi. Who would have thought that about half a foot away from Gongsun Zhi, the second date stone suddenly changed course, made a small circle in the air, and ... flew toward Huang Rong! Not even in her wildest dreams could Huang Rong have predicted what had happened. Frantically she moved her dog-beating stick and tried to knock the nail down, but the force carried by that iron date stone nail was too great; Huang Rong's body shook, her arm and hand hurt. With a 'clank' sound the dog-beating stick fell onto the ground and Huang Rong followed after it.

Because of the interruption, Gongsun Zhi was also forced to come back down. He landed next to Huang Rong and immediately swung his saber horizontally toward her. Yang Guo swung his black sword and a strong gust of wind attacked Gongsun Zhi. Yang Guo's attack was so fierce that Gongsun Zhi's saber was pushed back about three feet. Gongsun Zhi felt the force carried by that sword was earth shattering, in his heart he was frightened no end that Yang Guo – who had lost one arm – had made a tremendous improvement in just one short month.

At that time Lu'E was standing in between her father and mother. She used to be afraid of her father, not daring to speak even half a word; but ever since she overheard her father and Li Mochou's conversation at Broken Heart Cliff, that her father would rather sacrifice his own daughter's life for some woman he barely knew, she experienced a change of heart. She challenged her father, "Father, you crippled Mother's limbs and threw her down into an underground cave. Such viciousness was indeed very rare. Tonight at the Broken Heart Cliff, you discussed something with Li Mochou. May your daughter know what is it about?"

Gongsun Zhi's heart turned cold, he was not aware, that in that secluded place, somebody would have heard their conversation. Even though he was cruel he was still deeply embarrassed, considering his evil plan to harm his own daughter. Now that his daughter confronted him publicly his face paled, "Wh...What? I didn't say anything ..." he stammered.

Lu'E wryly said, "You mean to kill your own daughter for the sake of a woman who is a stranger to our family. I am your daughter. If you want me dead, I certainly would not rebel against you. But Mother has promised to give the Passionless Pill in your hand to somebody else. Please, give that pill back to me." She moved two steps forward and held her hand out to him.

Gongsun Zhi hastily put the porcelain bottle inside his pocket and with a cold laugh said, "One of you betrayed her own husband, while the other rebelled against her father. Both are wicked. I don't want to deal with you just now. Wait for my revenge." Brandishing his sword and saber so that they made a buzzing sound, he walked out the hall with big strides.

After listening to Lu'E, although Yang Guo did not understand the whole story, he lifted his black sword blocking Gongsun Zhi's way. He turned his head toward Lu'E and asked, "Miss Gongsun, I would like to ask you a question."

Hearing his voice Gongsun Lu'E was overwhelmed with self-pity, she thought, "I would sacrifice my life to give you the antidote, yet I can't let you know that. Several years from now your house will be full of your children and grandchildren and you will soon forget this ill-fated wretched woman. Why would I cause you a life-long regret over this matter?" She lowered her head and asked, "Brother Yang, I am waiting for your question."

"You said your father wants to harm you for a stranger, who is that woman? And would you enlighten me on what happened?" Yang Guo asked.

"That woman was Li Mochou. What happened was ..." She hesitated a little bit, and then said, "Even though my father means me harm, he is still my father. I do not want to tell ..."

"Lu'E, speak up! Tell us!" growled her mother. "He had the courage to do evil, why would you be afraid to unmask him?"

The young lady just shook her head and said with a sad voice, "Brother Yang, half of the pill is inside the bottle in Father's hand. I ... I am an unfilial daughter." Speaking to this point she could not contain herself anymore, "Ma!" she called, as she ran toward her mother and hid her face in her bosom.

When she said 'I am an unfilial daughter' Qiu Qianchi thought she was referring to defying her father, but actually she meant she was defying her mother's instructions. The

hall was full of people, but Huang Rong was the only one understood her true meaning.

Since they were surrounded by the enemy Gongsun Zhi had tried to find a way to escape, “Luckily in this critical moment that crazy old hag wounded Madame Guo with her date stone; while they are trying to harm each other, I will have an opportunity to get out of here,” he thought. Laughing hard he shouted, “Good! My sweet child! You and your mother just stay on your guard over there. Let us destroy these scoundrels who dare to enter our Passionless Valley.” Brandishing his sword and saber he attacked Huang Rong.

Huang Rong’s right arm was still hurting; she could not hold the dog-beating stick yet, so she had no choice but to lean sideways to avoid the attack. Guo Fu lifted the sword in her hand trying to protect her mother. Gongsun Zhi’s black sword thrust toward Guo Fu’s throat; Guo Fu parried with her sword. “Watch out!” cried Huang Rong. With a ‘clang’ sound the girl’s sword was cut in two. Gongsun Zhi’s sword kept going! Guo Fu froze! Her heart was almost jumping out of her throat; she was incapable of doing anything.

“Fend off with your right arm!” cried Lu Wushuang from the side.

In that crucial moment, as the black sword almost pierced her throat, Guo Fu raised her right arm without thinking ...

Everybody eyes were wide open. Suddenly Cheng Ying’s voice was heard, “Cousin! How could you ...” Miss Cheng knew that her cousin said that because she held a grudge against Guo Fu who chopped off Yang Guo’s right arm. Cheng Ying was also extremely grieved that Yang Guo lost his arm; she had cried her heart out silently and of course she also hated Guo Fu for acting so rashly. But she realized it was an unfortunate accident; she definitely had never thought of chopping off her arm to retaliate. Therefore, hearing Lu Wushuang, she moved forward trying to block, but that black sword had already pierced Miss Guo’s right arm.

“Rrrrrrip!” Guo Fu’s clothes were slashed open and she staggered backward; but strangely her arm was unharmed, showing not even a drop of blood. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were startled. Gongsun Zi and Qiu Qianchi were shocked. Stabilizing herself Guo Fu exclaimed, “Thank you Big Sister! How did you know ...” Miss Guo was not the smartest kid in the world and she thanked Lu Wushuang for “saving” her life.

Yang Guo quickly interrupted her, “This old scoundrel, Gongsun Zhi, does not know your special skill.” He knew Huang Rong had soft-hedgehog armor, which was not pen-

etrable by even the sharpest sword or saber. When Guo Fu's arm was not even scratched, she immediately realized it was because of the soft-hedgehog armor; thus she was asking, "How did you know ..." she was going to say, "...that I'm wearing the soft-hedgehog armor?" Yang Guo thought it was fortunate that Gongsun Zhi's sharp sword was not able to injure her and that shocked Gongsun Zhi, but it wouldn't serve any good purpose for him to know the whole story. Yang Guo said, "This lady is the daughter of Great Hero Guo and Clan Leader Huang, the granddaughter of the Peach Blossom Island Master Huang Yaoshi; she inherited a very special skill which makes her body impenetrable by any weapon. How could your rusty sword hurt her?"

"Hmm! I was being lenient with her. Do you think I could not take her life?" Gongsun Zhi mockingly swung his sword back and forth, making a buzzing noise.

Guo Fu was furious by his condescending remark. "He would not be able to hurt me because of this protective vest. If I attack fiercely, I will gain the upper hand," she thought, and then said, "Brother Xiuwen, let me lend your sword. This devious old man does not believe in Peach Blossom Island's superior martial arts. Let me introduce them to him."

Xiuwen gave his sword to the young lady, who then brandished it and shouted arrogantly, "Devious old man Gongsun! Let's fight again!"

Just by seeing her move Gongsun Zhi could see her meager abilities. "Alright, please give me a lesson or two!" He snarled and hacked with his saber. Guo Fu leaned sideways eluding that attack and thrust her sword at the same time. She was shocked to see the black sword in front of her face. "Not good!" Guo Fu said in her heart, "I have the soft-hedgehog armor on me, but this sword does not have any protection, if hit by his sword, it would certainly be cut in two." Therefore, she held her thrust and jumped backward. Gongsun Zhi then moved his two weapons to his right hand, while his bare left hand attacked her. Guo Fu was thrilled, "Go ahead and hit my soft-hedgehog armor and injure yourself," she thought. But she also realized that if she took the full force of his hand head on, her internal organs would be injured as well. She then slanted her body slightly to neutralize 70% of his force and waited for his hand to hit her. Surprisingly, Gongsun Zhi leaped backward just before touching her clothes and cried, "Good little girl! You attack me stealthily!" He staggered and almost fell down.

Guo Fu was bewildered, "I didn't attack you stealthily!" but then she thought, "Could it be that the soft-hedgehog armor is so incredible that he is injured even before touching it?"



How would she know Gongsun Zhi was just pretending? His goal was achieved, he had the pill and now he just wanted to dart out and give the pill to Li Mochou. He did not have any time to vie for supremacy with a little kid like Guo Fu. He realized that among these intruders: Yang Guo and Huang Rong were the strongest and that long eyebrowed monk, who was sitting meditating quietly, certainly was not an easy rival. He wanted to use the opportunity, while everybody thought Guo Fu was winning, to sneak out through the back door.

Lu'E, however, had kept her eyes on her father. She immediately made her move. "Father, hold on!" At that moment two date stones flew, Qiu Qianchi was afraid she might injure her daughter, so she aimed toward Gongsun Zhi's head. He quickly ducked and the stones barely missed Lu'E's temple before they hit the wall.

"Get out of the way!" he barked, and lunged toward his daughter.

The young woman held her ground and said, "Give me back the pill ..." But before she could finish, her hand was grabbed and she was held in front of his chest as a shield. He snapped, "Wicked woman! If you want me to die, then let the two of us die together." By that time Qiu Qianchi had already launched two more stones. She was shocked, but fortunately managed to move her head a little so that the stones flew and missed Lu'E's body.

What she did not anticipate was that the stones hit two of the valley disciples. One was hit on the head, the other on the chest. They died instantly. Gongsun Zhi was delighted with this turn of events. In his effort to take the valley back, he would need not only Li Mochou's help, but his disciples' as well.

Without wasting a single moment he shouted, "You wicked woman! You dare to kill my disciples! I will hold you responsible!" But because of this incident, he was held back and Yang Guo already stood in front of him. "Mr. Gongsun...not so fast, we need to talk about these many problems first."

Gongsun Zhi; still holding Lu'E high above his head, smirked, "You dare to block me?" With his left foot as an axis he made one turn, then, with his right foot, he made another one. With these two turns he had moved within four feet of Yang Guo. Yang Guo was afraid that Lu'E would be hurt, so he leaped sideways.

Gongsun Lu'E was held in her father's hands immobilized; when Gongsun Zhi made the circles, she could see that Yang Guo leaped back to avoid hurting her; she was deeply touched and her heart was greatly consoled, "He did not try to get the pill for my sake. I

can die peacefully.” She could not move her limbs, but she could turn her head. A moment later she closed her eyes and sighed, “Yang Lang, Yang Lang! [Translator note: “Lang” could also mean “Dear Husband” – Lu’E regarded Yang Guo as her husband.]” She then stretched her beautiful neck toward her father’s black sword!

“Aiyo!” Yang Guo called out and rushed forward, trying to help, but he was too late! He stood still like he was in a daze. Two streams of tears flowed down his cheeks. A lovely young woman with a heart as big as the sky, had lost her life at her own father’s hand.

Gongsun Zhi was also startled, his heart turn sour, but his ears heard loud and angry scream from across the hall. Suddenly three more iron date stones flew like a flash. Gongsun Zhi threw his daughter’s body to intercept them. Three date stones pierced her lifeless body. Everybody screamed and shouted angrily at his viciousness; after Lu’E died he still had the heartlessness to mutilate her body. They unsheathed their weapons and surrounded him.

“My disciples!” cried Gongsun Zhi, “By forming an alliance with these intruders this wicked woman planned to annihilate everybody in this valley! Come! Let us capture them with the net formation!”

Since they were young, these disciples had always regarded Gongsun Zhi as their benevolent leader. When this cruel man was wounded and driven out of the valley, they had to follow Qiu Qianchi, albeit unwillingly. Now they heard his commanding tone, and, having witnessed earlier the death of two of their own by the old woman’s stones, without thinking they lifted the nets and started to surround the enemy from every direction.

Each net was about twenty feet square, full of sharp blades. The people in the hall were not weak in terms of martial arts, yet they did not know how to deal with this net formation. If the nets ever caught them, their body would have at least ten additional holes in it. The nets were getting closer to them, including Qiu Qianchi who loudly shouted, “My disciples, don’t listen to that old scoundrel’s nonsense; everybody listen to me! Back off!” But the disciples turned a deaf ear on her; they followed Gongsun Zhi’s command obediently.

“‘Kun wang’ [earth net], move to the front, ‘kan wang’ [pit net], diagonally to the left, ‘zhen wang’ [shock net], turn to the right!” Quickly those nets moved to those positions making the circle smaller and smaller.

Huang Rong took some steel needles from her pocket and raised her hand to shoot at the eight green clothed disciples on the west. The distance was close, the steel needles were numerous, at least five or six disciples would be injured, she thought. But they lifted the net up and with “ding, ding” sound all the needles, as well as Qiu Qianchi's stones were stuck to the nets. “Not good!” cried Huang Rong, “Fu’er, lift your sword, protect your head! Hack those nets down!”

Heeding her mother’s instruction, Guo Fu jumped to the northeast. Four valley disciples moved to block her. She managed to parry several blades; either with her sword or her protective vest, but those four disciples spread out and tried to capture her just like fishermen catching fish.

Since Yang Guo was standing close to Gongsun Zhi, he was actually outside the net formation. But then eight valley disciple turned to the left and move to the right surrounding him. Yang Guo realized the situation was critical he leaped toward Guo Fu, exerted his internal energy to his heavy sword and hacked down the net. It broke with a loud noise, and its bearers –four disciples, fell down to the floor. Wu Santong and Yelu Qi immediately pounced and beat them to near death. Yang Guo hacked twice and two more net formations went down. With three hacks he destroyed three nets. If we consider the net material, we should know that they are very tough and ductile. The fact that Yang Guo was able to tear them down demonstrated his magnificent internal energy and his amazing black steel heavy sword. The valley disciples were shocked! They scrambled away in fear.

“Five nets...Attack!” again Gongsun Zhi shouted his command, “This kid has lost his strength.”

Yang Guo was nervous. He wasn’t sure he could hack five nets down at once. He quickly made his move before the enemy did. With one more hack, another net went down. Just as Yang Guo was about to make another move, a loud voice was heard outside, “Where’d you go?”

He was startled. A moment later a yellow shadow darted inside. Everybody was surprised to see it was none other than the ‘Scarlet Serpent Deity’ Li Mochou, who upon entering the hall, stood arrogantly wielding her sword.

Before anybody could react, another shadow darted inside whose body was covered with blood and whose hair was in disarray. It was Zhu Ziliu! He pounced on Li Mochou with his bare hands, left finger and right palm; and even though she was armed, she ran around trying to elude his attack. It was because he attacked as a mad man, with-

out any regard to his own safety. They were both martial arts experts, and in a flash they had already run around the hall six or seven times.

Yang Guo was confused, “Li Mochou is not inferior to Zhu Ziliu; how could she be afraid like that? What about the Divine Indian Monk?” Those two actually possessed almost the same level of martial skills, but in term of lightness kungfu, Li Mochou was a step superior. Therefore, Zhu Ziliu was not able to catch up, plus he was bleeding profusely.

Wu Santong, Dunru and Xiuwen leaped together to block the demoness. “Martial Brother!” cried Zhu Ziliu. “That wicked woman has killed Martial Uncle! Your younger brother ... I ...”... he couldn’t finish, his body swayed and he fell to the floor.

That was indeed a heavy blow to everyone present. Reverend Yideng had a very high level of spiritual strength, not to mention his profound internal energy, he was a very composed monk. But this news made him stand up and he cried, “Ah!” To Yang Guo, the news was more like thunderbolt from a bright and clear sky. He almost blacked-out. He then cast a glance toward his wife, who at that very same moment was looking at him. Two pairs of eyes met. They felt like they were falling down a very dark and cold hole in the ground. Xiao Longnu uttered a soft cry and rushed toward her husband, and leaned her body against his, breathing heavily.

After a while Yang Guo composed himself, threw his heavy sword away, and walked listlessly outside, holding his wife’s hand.

What had happened? How did the Indian Monk fall victim to the demoness? In his effort to cure poison induced illness, the Divine Indian Monk had tested many-many types of poison on his own body. Quite naturally, his body developed immunity to poisons. When pricking himself with the Passionless Flower thorns, he predicted that he would be unconscious for three whole days and nights. It turned out that he had regained his consciousness on the second night. As he opened his eyes he said, “Ziliu, this Passionless Flower is not as lethal as I thought it would be. I am confident that I can neutralize it.”

Ziliu was ecstatic and immediately told his Martial Uncle that Reverend Yideng, Yang Guo, and the others had arrived in the valley. He also mentioned that it was Yang Guo himself who smashed the kiln door where they were being kept prisoner.

“The sooner we can neutralize the poison, the better. Let’s not waste another second,” having said that the Indian Monk immediately walked outside and headed directly to the flower bushes. He looked down and started searching for the herbs he thought

would be the antidote to the poison. It is a natural phenomenon that the poison and the antidote would usually co-exist in the same place.

Unbeknownst to them, Li Mochou was still hiding behind the rocks scattered throughout that area. Seeing the Monk, she launched her “Soul Freezing Needle” at him. The Indian Monk did not possess any martial arts skill so when the needle hit him in the chest, he died instantly.

Hearing the unusual noise, Zhu Ziliu knew something was amiss. He saw Li Mochou and immediately rushed toward his Martial Uncle without regard to his own safety. Li Mochou launched another needle his way. Since Ziliu was not armed, he used his long sleeve to parry the attack but left his back defenseless at the same time. The demoness slashed with her sword and made an inch-deep wound on his right shoulder.

He quickly exerted his internal energy to his fingertip and attacked the demoness’ waist. He knew if he backed off, the demoness would not let him off easily. Ziliu was starting to get anxious because he did not hear anything from his Martial Uncle’s direction, while the ‘Scarlet Serpent Deity’ attacked him relentlessly. “Uncle... Uncle!” he called, but the Monk did not respond.

The demoness sneered, “If you want his answer, you will have to meet him ... in hell!” Li Mochou expected him to lose his concentration. In battle between experts, the outcome is more often that not decided by who lost one’s concentration first. Who knew that Ziliu not only did not lose his, but became fiercer, like he was possessed ...

Under the starry sky Li Mochou could see his unusually bright eyes as he attacked her like there is no tomorrow. The place where they were was so quiet, nobody was around, no sound was heard; but perhaps remembering her own sins, she became nervous and started to feel afraid. Because of that, she increased her attacks, which forced Ziliu to back off a bit, and using the opportunity, she leaped back and ran away. Ziliu immediately checked his Uncle’s wrist and did not find any pulse. The Indian Monk was beyond help. With extreme grief and anger he leaped toward the demoness and started chasing her.

Gongsun Zhi was ecstatic when he saw Li Mochou. “Sister Li! Over here!” he started toward her.

Even though she was injured, Huang Rong did not lose her wit. She saw Gongsun Zhi acting weird and immediately knew what he was up to. “Guo’er!” she cried, “Don’t let those two get close to each other!”

Yang Guo ignored her, he just smiled bitterly. The death of the Indian Monk had broken his heart, and he no longer cared who would get the half-pill.

Yelu Qi saw all this, and he made a swift decision. He picked one end of a net. The one destroyed by the heavy sword. “Wu Brothers!” he shouted, “Help me hold the other end!” Wu Dunru, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan quickly complied, and together they moved and blocked Gongsun Zhi who was trying to approach Li Mochou.

The overall situation was very chaotic. Qiu Qianchi used that opportunity to repeatedly launch her stones. Five or six Passionless Valley disciples fell down, dead. The net formation was completely destroyed and Gongsun Zhi’s minions scrambled out.

Angrily Gongsun Zhi hacked Yelu Yan with his golden saber. Cheng Ying jumped in and attacked the enemy’s hand with her flute. Gongsun Zhi quickly retracted his saber and thrust his black sword toward Cheng Ying. Seeing her cousin in danger, Lu Wushuang quickly came to her rescue and hacked repeatedly with her willow-leaf saber.

Because of this hindrance, Gongsun Zhi’s intention to ally himself with Li Mochou was foiled. He could not give her the pill. Moreover, Qiu Qianchi kept launching her stones toward him. After a few stances he started to get nervous and decided to get out as quickly as he could, and join Li Mochou later. “Sister Li!” he shouted, “Let’s get out of here! I’ll meet you at you-know-where.” As soon as opportunity arrived, they ran past Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu who at the time were still holding hands, walking slowly out of the hall. They seemed oblivious to what happened around them.

“Sister Long, block Gongsun Zhi!” Huang Rong called, “The Passionless Pill is in his hand.”

Xiao Longnu was startled, “After the Divine Monk’s death, Guo’er’s life depends on the pill,” she thought. She let go Yang Guo’s hand and chased him.

“Long’er, let him go!” Yang Guo called out.

“Why?” she asked, but did not stop. Yang Guo was forced to follow. Gongsun Zhi and Li Mochou took their own separate ways; one ran to northeast, the other to northwest. Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo, Cheng Ying and Wushuang ran after Gongsun Zhi; while Wu Santong, his two sons, Zhu Ziliu and Wanyan Ping followed Li Mochou. Yelu Qi, his sister and Guo Fu kept Reverend Yideng and Huang Rong company, while guarding against Qiu Qianchi’s actions.

In the Wu Santong's party, Zhu Ziliu had the highest martial art skill but he had already suffered heavy injuries, so he gave up after running a little while. Wu Santong and his sons stopped to check on his condition, which caused them to lose track of the demoness.

"If that wicked woman could elude us, we really do not have any face to see Martial Uncle," sighed Zhu Ziliu bitterly. They tried beating the bushes and other places, but Li Mochou had vanished from sight. "Gongsun Zhi has already arranged a meeting place for them," mused Zhu Ziliu again, "We don't know where it would be, but if we just follow Gongsun Zhi, we'll eventually find her. He needs to give that pill to her anyway."

"You are right," Wu Santong said, "Let's find Gongsun Zhi." So, utilizing their lightness kungfu they changed course to northwest.

Sure enough, not too long after they heard battle sounds. They quickened their pace, but the noise they heard was kind of peculiar; sometimes seemed like it was just around the corner, other times it came from afar. They kept going in circles until the dawn broke, but never found the source of the noise. At daybreak they arrived on a path sloping upward. Suddenly they heard a loud and hair-raising laugh. They stopped and lifted their gaze upward. There, across a ravine, perched on a hill, stood a man laughing maniacally. It was Gongsun Zhi. There was a deep ravine below him, and a very high mountain peak above.

Seeing Gongsun Zhi's madness – real or pretend, Zhu Ziliu was worried, "If he slips, his body will be totally smashed in the abyss below. His death is well-deserved, but he would take the Passionless Pill down with him." He quickly ran ahead and after making a turn he found Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang standing on the verge of the ravine looking up at Gongsun Zhi.

Xiao Longnu approached Zhu Ziliu and softly asked, "Uncle Zhu, can you think of something to force him down?" Zhu Ziliu looked around and found out that between the mountain peak and the place where they stood there was a natural long rock bridge that looked like a tree log, only less than one foot wide. The rock bridge, as well as the stones around the bridge, were covered with moss, which make them slippery. There was no way they could force him down. He had to be tricked into coming down on his own. But Gongsun Zhi was so shrewd. What kind of trick could they use?

Wu Santong remembered his indebtedness for Yang Guo's great kindness. The fact that his two sons were alive and live in harmony with each other was because of Yang Guo's sacrifice. He decided right then and there to repay this debt and, rolling his sleeves up,

immediately said, “Let me drag him down here.” But before he could move a shadow flashed ahead of him. It was Cheng Ying. “Let me do it!” And she already stepped onto the rock. She was quick, Yang Guo was even quicker. She felt somebody tug her sleeve and she was pulled back. “Little Sister, how much am I worth that you make a sacrifice like that?” she heard Yang Guo whisper into her ear. She blushed and was speechless.

Suddenly Xiao Longnu’s voice was heard, “Let me borrow your swords.” With a fluid motion she pulled Dunru’s and Wanyan Ping’s swords. Such a beautiful move! Before they even realized what had happened, the young woman was already perched on the rock.

Gongsun Zhi was shocked to see her bravery; he quickly jumped back to the other end of the bridge. Wielding his sword in front of him he snickered, “Do you really want to die?”

Holding her two swords, Xiao Longnu quietly prayed, “Please God, bless me. Let me die after I get the pill back.” She looked at Gongsun Zhi and softly spoke, “Mr. Gongsun, you have saved my life, yet because of me, you have suffered a lot of misery. I ... my heart ached for you. I do not want to fight you.”

“So, what do you want?” he asked.

“I want to beg you to give me the Passionless Pill to save my husband’s life,” she answered, “I know you have no use for the pill, but I will forever be indebted to you if you just give it to me.”

While they were still speaking, Yang Guo shouted, “Long’er! Get back here! What’s that half-pill for? It won’t save both our lives.”

Looking at her standing atop the rock, her dress fluttered in the wind, and her stunningly beautiful countenance, Gongsun Zhi was mesmerized; how could Li Mochou be compared to her? Suddenly an evil thought came to his mind. “That kid is your husband?” he asked.

“Yes, we are married.”

“Well, if you grant me a request, I will immediately give this pill to you,” Gongsun Zhi continued.



By the look of his eyes, Xiao Longnu knew what he was about to say. She shook her head and said, “I am already married, I can’t marry you. Mr. Gongsun, I know you loved me very much. However, I have already given my heart to someone else. With a deep regret I cannot accept your love.”

Gongsun Zhi’s countenance changed. “Go away!” he barked, “If not, I won’t hold myself back any longer.”

“If we fight, wouldn’t that be very sad?” Xiao Longnu said sadly. She was not pretending, she really was remembering Gongsun Zhi’s kindness.

Gongsun Zhi made an “hmpf” sound and put a really evil smile on his lips. “I want to see that Yang Guo kid screaming and rolling around on the ground dying miserably,” he said, “I want to see a faithful wife wearing mourning clothes.”

“Long’er! Come back!” Yang Guo kept shouting, “Come back! Don’t waste your breath talking to that lowly creature.” He would have come and dragged his wife away if he could find a place to put his feet down.

The young madam smiled sadly. “Listen!” she said, “He’s calling me. He called because he loves me. He’d rather die of the poison than see me hurt by you.”

Gongsun Zhi’s mind was reeling. He wanted very much to make Xiao Longnu his hostage. However, they would both fall into the ravine below if the young wife put up any struggle at all. On the other hand, if he did not capture her, how could he save his own life? He looked at his enemies, and among them, Yang Guo was the only one he was afraid of. But he was relieved to see the young man did not wield his heavy sword. In his mind, unarmed, Yang Guo would not be able to block him. His best bet right now would be to attack Xiao Longnu, try to capture her, or at least push her back far enough for him to escape. Having thought this over, he barked, “Will you or won’t you move back?” and thrust his sword simultaneously. Xiao Longnu’s left sword parried this attack while her right sword counterattacked. A series of metallic sounds echoed throughout the valley.

After learning the ‘Mutual Hands Combat’ technique from Zhou Botong, Xiao Longnu’s swords skills were more than doubled. Even though she was poisoned and her level of energy was weakened somewhat, Gongsun Zhi’s black-sword and golden-saber technique still was no match for her ‘Jade Maiden Swords Technique’. His technique, though carrying seemingly infinite variations, still resulted in a saber remaining a saber, and a sword always a sword. She moved her pair of swords so fast, that her body

was surrounded by the flashing of the swords. Gongsun Zhi felt like he was caught in a rainstorm. Swords everywhere ... He sighed and regretted his decision, "I wouldn't have attacked her in the first place if I had known her true skill." Luckily for him, the "Jade Maiden Swords" was not created with murderous intent, plus Xiao Longnu did not have any intentions to kill him; therefore, he was able to hold his ground for the time being.

In the meantime, Reverend Yideng, Huang Rong, Guo Fu, Yelu Qi and Yelu Yan had also arrived. Together they witnessed this spectacular battle with their hearts pounding.

"Eh, you go help her," Guo Fu told Yelu Qi, "Elder Sister Long can't win by herself."

Yelu Qi only shook his head, "There is no place I can set my foot on."

In spite of her weaknesses and spoiled nature, Guo Fu's natural character was not evil. She became stressed when she saw Xiao Longnu's dire situation and remembered her own experience battling the old man's high martial arts skills. Yelu Qi was not wrong. But Guo Fu insisted, this time to her mother, "Mother! Please help Sister Long." She did not realize that even without her prompting everybody was willing to help. Everyone was just as anxious as she was, and of course they would've helped if it were at all possible.

They saw Gongsun Zhi's golden saber and black sword repeatedly making some killer moves, while Xiao Longnu's double-swords moved gracefully, seemingly without any strength. It gave the impression that she was losing to Gongsun Zhi's vicious attacks. Only Yideng, Yang Guo, Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu knew Xiao Longnu was actually gaining the upper hand. However, they were fighting ferociously on a slippery cliff; if they lost their footing they would surely fall to their deaths. Therefore, each move carried a life or death risk. They saw two shadows dancing around; one surrounded by a golden aura, the other wrapped by a black one. Everybody held their breath, with cold sweat on their palms and foreheads.

After observing for some time, Huang Rong noticed that Xiao Longnu was utilizing the 'Mutual Hands Combat' technique, which as far as she knew, was mastered only by Zhou Botong and her own husband, Guo Jing. She then concluded that Madame Yang had received the Old Urchin's tutelage. Yet more time passed. She witnessed Gongsun Zhi's high level of martial arts and Xiao Longnu's disadvantage because of the poison in her body. Her swordsmanship was a level higher than Gongsun Zhi's, however; she was not able to gain an upper hand even after hundreds of stances.

Huang Rong's intelligent mind started to cook something up. "Guo'er," she said, "let's help Sister Long. We create a disruption for that disgusting man. You disparage him, while I encourage him. He'll lose his concentration."

Yang Guo was delighted and silently praised his smart Auntie Guo.

"Mr. Gongsun, I have killed Qiu Qianchi!" shouted Huang Rong.

Gongsun Zhi heard that, his heart was shaken, half believing, half doubting.

"Gongsun Zhi!" cried Yang Guo, "Li Mochou said that she would beat you to death if you don't give her the pill!"

"No, no!" Huang Rong countered, "Li Mochou did say that she would marry you as soon as you cure her."

"Well, yes! But we won't allow that to happen," Yang Guo continued, "We will capture you and throw you to the Passionless Flower field, so that you too will enjoy the thorns' exotic sensation."

"No, don't be so cruel," said Huang Rong. "Mr. Gongsun, don't you worry. Let's forget this enmity. I want to be your friend."

"How could you befriend this scoundrel!" howled Yang Guo. "Gongsun Zhi. I've heard that you killed your maidservant, Rou'er. I think she has become a ghost and wants revenge. Ah! Look! Behind you! Watch out! The ghost is going to attack!"

This ramble between Yang Guo and Huang Rong had shown some results. Of course Xiao Longnu also heard them, but it has nothing to do with her, and by nature – and her upbringing in the Ancient Tomb – she was always very composed. She had also learned to divide her own mind. She started to gain an upper hand. Gongsun Zhi had been busy eluding left and right, his situation got precarious; this exchange between Huang Rong and Yang Guo made him nervous. He shouted, "What nonsense are you talking about? Shut up!"

"Hey, Gongsun Zhi!" shouted Yang Guo, "Who's that behind you? Eeek! It's a young woman, her hair disheveled, her tongue stick-out, her face full of blood! Ah! She comes near you ... She ... is going to choke you!" Suddenly, he yelled with a loud voice, "Yes! Rou'er! Strangle Gongsun Zhi!"

Gongsun Zhi knew they were just trying to break his concentration. Nevertheless, he remembered his many crimes, and without even realizing it, he looked back. At that very same moment Xiao Longnu's sword flashed diagonally, the point of the sword vibrated and stabbed his left wrist. His saber fell from his grip. Under beautiful rays of dawn that golden saber glittered down into the ravine. It was some time later that a very distant splash was heard, like there was water at the bottom. Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others looked at each other with amazement; the time it took for the saber to fall indicated that the ravine was very, very deep!

Losing his saber, Gongsun Zhi could not defend himself much longer, let alone make any attacks. To him Xiao Longnu's left sword and right sword seemed like four swords. Not long afterward, she managed to disarm him of his black sword as well. With the right sword pointing toward his chest, the left toward his stomach she plainly said, "Mr. Gongsun, just give me the pill. I won't kill you."

The old man was pale. "What about the others?" he asked.

"They won't hurt you," she gave her promise.

He had no choice; he did not want to die, why would he care about Li Mochou anyway? So he took the bottle from his pocket and handed it to her. Still pointing her left sword at his abdomen, Xiao Longnu took the bottle with mixed emotions. "I won't live much longer, but Guo'er's life is spared," she said in her heart. Then she leaped back from the rock bridge.

Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others were not unaware of this young madam's level of martial arts; however, even in their wildest dreams they could not believe Xiao Longnu was able to use two different sword stances at the same time. Of course they heard such skill existed. It was told that in the Jianghu world, only Zhou Botong and Guo Jing have mastered the skill. But ... nobody had ever seen it, therefore they were rather skeptical about it. Now they have seen it with their own eyes and knew what they heard was true. Yelu brother and sister, Wu brothers, Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang and Guo Fu of the younger generation saw that Xiao Longnu's age was not much different than theirs, yet her martial arts were incredibly higher than theirs; they could not help but admired her as their senior.

As she landed on the ground, her clothes fluttered in the wind, and she walked gracefully toward Yang Guo. She looked like a deity, an angel descending from above. Without prompting everybody cheered!

Yang Guo rushed forward, while the others also crowded around them. Xiao Longnu opened the bottle and took the half pill out. “Guo’er,” she said, laughing softly, “I think this is the real thing.”

“Real?” Yang Guo was indifferent. “Long’er, how are you feeling? Why is your face pale? Try concentrating your breathing.”

His wife laughed emotionlessly. She had started to feel uneasiness and heaviness because of blocked energy in her chest as soon as she finished her battle with Gongsun Zhi. She had tried circulating her ‘qi’, but failed. She was dizzy and was about to throw up. She understood very well that this was the symptom of the poison getting worse. She just did not care anymore because she had the Passionless Pill in her hand. To her, Yang Guo’s life was a lot more precious than her own; so she just smiled and did not respond.

Yang Guo held his wife’s hand and was shocked to find it colder than ice. “Long’er!” he said, his heart thumping heavily. “How ... what do you feel?”

“I’m OK. Just swallow this pill,” she answered calmly.

Yang Guo looked at his wife’s face with wide eyes. “No, I don’t want it,” he said. His voice trembled. “Half a Passionless Pill will not save both our lives. Long’er ... ah, Long’er! Do you think if you died I would want to live alone?” Suddenly he took away the half-pill from his wife’s hand and ... threw it down into the ‘bottomless’ gorge. That half-pill – the only thing in the whole wide world that can save his life – flew down into the abyss.

What had happened was beyond everybody’s expectations, they gasped in shock! Xiao Longnu could feel his deep and profound love toward her, she was sad yet grateful. She was no longer able to maintain her consciousness and fainted in her husband’s arm.

Guo Fu, Wu Brothers, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan were baffled since they did not know the whole story; they all talked at the same time among themselves. Suddenly Wu Santong shouted, “Li Mochou! Don’t ever think you will live a day longer!” And then he ran towards the left. Everybody turned their head and saw Gongsun Zhi was running to the west toward Li Mochou, who was standing on top of a small hill. They were getting closer, while Wu Santong and the others were still quite a long way away.

Just before Gongsun Zhi reached her, a hearty laugh could be heard behind the hill, and a healthy looking old man appeared. He carried a big wooden box on his back.

That old man had white hair and beard, and it was none other than Zhou Botong.

“Old Urchin!” called Huang Rong, “Chase that yellow-robed Taoist priestess over here!”

“Wonderful! Watch what the Old Urchin can do!” he answered, opening his wooden box and waving his arm. A swarm of bees came out of the box and flew toward Li Mochou. Turned out that when the Mongolian soldiers burned down Mount Zhongnan, the Quanzhen disciples retreated while saving their books and other temple’s articles. He on the other hand, was busy collecting the Jade Bees and put them into this wooden box. Even though he was childish and loved to fool around, he was very smart. After a while, with the help of a jar of honey from Xiao Longnu, he figured out how to control the bees.

Seeing the grey bees, Gongsun Zhi was frightened. He turned around and ran toward the valley. Li Mochou was also shocked. There were bees behind her and enemies in front of her. She decided to run to the east. Wu Brothers, Cheng Ying, Wushuang, and the others quickly surround her with weapons unsheathed. “Shifu,” Yelu Qi called, “pull your bees back!”

Zhou Botong repeatedly shouted his commands to pull his bees back; but in the commotion the Jade Bees did not respond and kept going after the demoness. Wu Santong was afraid his archenemy would escape again, he ran toward her ignoring the bees’ attack.

While everybody was chasing Li Mochou, Yang Guo stayed where he was, still holding his wife tightly. He whispered into her ears, “Long’er ... Long’er ...” Slowly Xiao Longnu opened her eyes. She heard the Jade Bees humming seemingly so distant. She thought she was dreaming and was inside the Ancient Tomb. Her countenance brightened a little and she whispered back, “Are we home ...?”

A short while later, she regained full consciousness and became fully aware of what was happening around her. She whistled and softly shouted her commands. Hearing their master the Jade Bees gathered above Li Mochou’s head. “Shi jie [elder martial sister],” she said, “now it has come to this, aren’t you going to repent of all your past crimes?”

Li Mochou’s face was sheet-white. “Where’s the pill?” she inquired. Her martial sister sadly smiled, “Inside that bottomless abyss.” She continued, “Why did you kill that Divine Monk? If he were alive, not only he would save Guo’er’s life and mine, but yours as well.”

She was shocked! Her martial sister had never lied. She would never have imagined that using just one of her own “Soul Freezing Needles” would eventually kill her.

In the meantime, Wu Santong and his two sons, Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang, and the others had formed a tight formation around her; while Zhou Botong was still busy shouting his commands. “Elder Zhou,” Xiao Longnu called, “you have to whistle this way.” She then gave him some examples, which were imitated by the Old Urchin. Thousands of bees immediately gathered around him and then entered the box. The old man was so delighted. “Miss Long, thank you ... thank you ...”

Observing this old man, Reverend Yideng smiled and called, “Brother Botong, it’s been a long time. You look as if you did not age at all.”

Zhou Botong was surprised. He quickly closed the bee box and said, “You are well, I am too. Everybody’s well.” He swung the box to his shoulder and ran away without saying anything else.

Of those Li Mochou saw around her; Huang Rong, Yang Guo or Xiao Longnu alone would be enough to defeat her, let alone being surrounded on every side like this. She started to realize that she would not come out of this alive. She became desperate. She looked around and said, “Huh-huh! You consider yourself as heroes. Huh-huh! Today you will win by sheer numbers. Martial Sister! I am a disciple of the Ancient Tomb. I can’t let myself be killed by an outsider. Come! You do it.” She then reversed her own sword so that its blade pointed to her own chest.

Xiao Longnu shook her head, “Why would I want to kill you?” she asked.

“Li Mochou!” snapped Wu Santong. “Let me ask you this: what did you do to Lu Zhanyuan and He Yuanjun’s bodies?”

The demoness trembled. “I burned them,” she said menacingly. “I spread their ashes: one on the peak of Mount Hua, the other on Eastern Sea, so that they won’t see each other for eternity.” Her cruelty made everybody’s heart pound.

“Sister Long has a benevolent heart, she won’t kill you,” said Lu Wushuang. “But my whole family died by your hand, not a single dog or chicken was left; only I survived. I want revenge this very day. Cousin, come!”

“My mother died by your hands,” the Wu brothers continued. “Other people can show mercy to you, but my brother and I will never forgive you.”

Li Mochou was indifferent, “During my life I have killed countless people; if everybody came for revenge, how many lives have I to compensate? Considering the thousands of hatreds and tens of thousands of injustices, I have nothing more than just this one life.”

Lu Wushuang and Wu Xiuwen called out, “It’s too cheap for you!” One using a saber and the other a sword they stepped forward simultaneously.

Li Mochou exerted her energy to her sword and “Crack!” that sword was broken into two pieces. She smirked, held her hands behind her back, totally ignoring their attack.

Suddenly at that moment heavy smoke and fire appeared to the east. “Aiyo!” cried Huang Rong, “The compound is on fire!”

“Let’s postpone killing her, saving Martial Uncle’s body is more important,” said Zhu Ziliu. He leaped toward Li Mochou, and sealed three of her accupoints with his famous “Yang Solitary Finger” to prevent the priestess from escaping.

“Miss Gongsun’s body too!” cried Cheng Ying.

“Right!” answered the others. They ran toward the Valley Master Hall. The Wu Brothers dragged Li Mochou along. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Huang Rong and Reverend Yideng were not far behind. They walked slowly because of the injuries. About a quarter of kilometer away from the valley complex, they began to feel the heat. People were shouting and screaming and buildings were collapsing.

“That Gongsun Zhi is really cruel,” Wu Santong said, “Miss Long should’ve killed him!”

“I don’t think it was him who’s burning this place down,” commented Zhu Ziliu. “If I am not mistaken, this is that old granny’s doing.”

“Why Qiu Qianchi?” asked Santong, “Isn’t the Passionless Valley hers?”

“Well, the valley disciples have rebelled against her. Even if we killed Gongsun Zhi, she would not be able to live here any longer,” Zhu Ziliu explained. “I think that granny is just narrow-minded ...” He did not continue and exerted his energy, quickly running to the kiln. Fortunately the kiln was a little bit away from the main complex. Hastily Zhu Ziliu lifted his Martial Uncle’s body away. The Monk’s countenance was still smiling, like he’d found something delightful just before he died.

Wu Santong shed some tears. “Martial Uncle died without suffering.”



Zhu Ziliu hesitated, “Martial Uncle was killed when he was searching for the Passionless Flower antidote,” he explained.

In the mean time, Huang Rong and her company arrived. Hearing Zhu Ziliu’s explanation, she immediately examined the Indian Monk’s body, but she could not find anything. She searched all the pockets in his clothes... nothing. “Did your Martial Uncle say anything to you?” she asked.

“No,” answered Zhu Ziliu. “When Martial Uncle and I came out of this kiln, we never thought danger was lurking.”

Huang Rong fixed her gaze on the Indian Monk’s smiling face and a thought flashed into her mind. She stooped and looked at the Divine Monk’s hands. Her heart was pounding, for she saw between his right thumb and index finger some dark-purplish grass-like herbs. Slowly she pried open his fingers and took the grass away. “What kind of grass is this?” she mused. Zhu Ziliu only shook his head. Huang Rong smelled it. The grass had an awful smell, she almost threw-up.

“Madame Guo, careful!” said Yideng, “That is ‘Intestine Severing’ grass. It’s very poisonous.” Huang Rong stared blankly. She lost hope.

At that moment the Wu brothers along with Li Mochou arrived. Upon hearing that the grass was very dangerous, Xiuwen said to Huang Rong, “Shiniang [martial female master – Shifu’s wife], let’s give that grass to this demoness.”

“Shan zai! Shan zai! [lit. good, peace] Young man, don’t be so cruel,” Yideng rebuked him.

“Grand Martial Master,” said Xiuwen, “Are we supposed to show mercy to an evil person like this woman?”

By now the fire had reached the trees and bushes around the kiln.

“The fire comes from the east, let us retreat to that hilly area to the north, and talk this matter over,” Huang Rong gave her command. Everybody complied and as they arrived there, the buildings around the kiln had started to burn.

Although Li Mochou’s accupoints were sealed, she was still able to walk, but without her internal energy. Secretly cursing her bad luck she tried to unseal herself. She thought she would try to escape when the enemy was not looking. Unexpectedly, her

chest and stomach hurt like hell as soon as she did that, “Ah!” she screamed in agony. What happened was that she had depressed the poison using her internal energy before. However, when her accupoints were sealed, her energy was also neutralized. Now that she tried to circulate her energy, the poison was flowing alongside and attacked her inner organs.

Her eyes saw stars floating around; she was writhing in agony and almost lost consciousness. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu walked toward her, but what she saw was a young couple, a handsome man and a lovely young woman and right in front of her they suddenly turned into Lu Zhanyuan and He Yuanjun. She leaped and screamed, “Zhanyuan! You are so cruel! You still have a face to see me?” Because she was thinking about love, the poison in her body became more active than ever. She was in so much pain that her body writhed, her face contorted and white as a sheet of paper. She looked so frightening. Everybody stepped back a few steps seeing her behaving like a mad woman.

Li Mochou had always been a proud woman; never in her life did she ask any favor from anybody. But with her dying breath she cried incessantly, “Oohh... ah! Help! Ohh ... somebody help me, please ...” Her voice was truly heartrending.

“The only one who could help you was my Martial Uncle,” Zhu Ziliu answered and pointed to the Indian Monk’s body. “Why did you kill him?”

“Yes! I killed him!” the demoness gritted her teeth and screamed, “I’ve killed all kinds of people, good people, bad people, I killed them all! I want to die! Why are you still alive? I want you to die with me!” Her body swayed, her breathing shortened, and suddenly she lunged toward Wu Dunru’s sword.

For many-many years Wu Dunru had dreamed of stabbing the demoness with his very own sword. However, at that moment he was taken aback, and pulled his sword away unwittingly. Li Mochou missed the sword; she fell down to the ground and her body rolled away toward the blazing flames in the valley below.

Everybody shouted! In a flash her clothes were like a giant torch, blazing with fire. She struggled and eventually managed to stand up in the middle of the flames.

Xiao Longnu, remembering their sisterhood, was the only one compassionate toward her. She immediately cried, “Sister, get out of there!” But Li Mochou did not budge, it seemed like she was not even feeling the intense heat. It was a terrifying scene ...

everybody's eyes were wide open. Suddenly, from her mouth came a heartrending voice; she was singing ...!

*O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?*

*To all corners, in pair we fly... braving summer and winter, by and by...*

*Union is bliss, parting is woe, agony is boundless, for a lovelorn soul, sweetheart...*

*Give me word, trail of clouds drifting forward...*

*And mountains capped with snow, whither shall my lonesome shadow go? [Noodle's translation]*

Her voice was getting weaker and weaker, until it finally faded away amidst the raging fire ...

[Her song, Liu Bo – flowing waves – was the one she used to sing with Lu Zhanyuan, when they were still together. She also sang it with tears flowing down her cheeks when Yang Guo and Cheng Ying were playing and singing this song – see Chapter 15]

Xiao Longnu could not hold her tears back any longer. She sobbed uncontrollably in Yang Guo's single arm. Nobody was exempt from feeling sadness creeping into his or her heart. The 'Scarlet Serpent Deity' finally paid for her sins with a well-deserved death; however, they could not help but feel pity for her. She was actually a weak and blind woman; weakened and blinded by love.

Wu Santong and his two sons, Lu Wushuang and Cheng Ying had a very deep animosity toward her, and had always wanted their revenge. But now that she was dead, they did not feel a single bit of joy in their hearts. Huang Rong remembered how the demoness – despite of her evil and cruel character – had taken care of her little Guo Xiang with love and kindness for many-many days. She then lifted the baby up, put her little hands together, and waved them toward the blazing fire as a gesture of final respect toward the ill-fated woman.

Yang Guo looked at the fire then turned his gaze toward the Valley Master Hall. He sighed ceaselessly. He had rushed from the Broken Heart Cliff toward the building complex to save Lu'E's body from the fire. Yet now he saw the whole complex was burned down almost to the ground. He felt a deep sense of loss. He remembered both women, Lu'E and Li Mochou. One was an angel, the other a demon. Both died and became ashes because of love. Without even realizing it, tears started flowing down his cheeks.

While Yang Guo was still staring blankly into the fire, a long, loud and terrifying laugh was heard, coming from the top of the hill to their northeast. That voice was supported

by a high level of internal energy. “Qiu Qianchi!” Yang Guo was startled. “How did she climb that hill?”

Xiao Longnu’s heart stirred. “Let’s ask her if she has another Passionless Pill in her hand,” she said.

“Long’er...ah Long’er! Are you still dreaming?” her husband said with bitter smile.

Huang Rong, Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and the others heard what Xiao Longnu said; they thought, “What’s wrong in asking her? If we can get the pill, Yang Guo needs to be compelled to take it; we can’t let him deliberately destroy the pill and die.” Almost everybody had the same thought, as a matter of fact, several of them immediately said, “Let’s go and take a look.” Wu Santong and his sons, Yelu Qi, Wanyan Ping and the others rushed toward the hill. Yang Guo sighed and shook his head. “Only if you can find a divine pill to save both husband and wife’s lives ...”

Cheng Ying, who all this time stood quietly beside him, suddenly said, “Yang Da Ge, you should not belittle everybody’s loving concern toward you. We love you. Let us go together.” As we all know, Cheng Ying had always loved Yang Guo, and treated him with nothing but kindness. Yang Guo was not unaware of that fact. Even though he had already given his heart to another, he had always regarded Cheng Ying with nothing but respect and brotherly love. The young miss had never asked him for anything until now. How could he refuse? Therefore, he nodded his head and said, “Very well, let us see what evil scheme that old hag on top of that hill has.”

Quickly they climbed the hill toward Qiu Qianchi. Very soon Yang Guo could see that it was the hill where the old granny, together with Lu’E and himself had escaped from the underground cave. The trees and everything around were still the same, but the golden-hearted lady was no longer here. He sighed and was deeply saddened.

Within about a ‘li’ they could see from afar that Qiu Qianchi was sitting on a chair on the hilltop. She was laughing with a creepy voice, and kept looking off in the distance. She looked and behaved like a mad woman. “I think she’s gone crazy,” said Wushuang.

“Don’t get too close,” said Huang Rong, “That woman is so cruel that we have to be on our guard against her evil schemes. In my opinion she is not crazy.”

Everybody stopped. They were wary of the old granny’s iron date stones. Carefully Huang Rong approached her, but before she said anything, somebody appeared from behind a big rock. He was wearing a blue robe, and was none other than Gongsun Zhi

himself. Laughing menacingly he took his robe off, and with his profound internal energy, made the robe hard and stiff like a stick. Huang Rong and the others were impressed with this internal energy demonstration. “Wicked woman,” he cursed, “You have destroyed everything I had, and everything my ancestors had owned, with a torch. I will not show any mercy to you!” And he ran toward her.

With a swish sound Qiu Qianchi launched a stone, stopping Gongsun Zhi’s attack. From the top of that hill the stone could reach far and it also created a violent wind gust. Gongsun Zhi parried with his robe. The stone penetrated several layers of cloth, but did not hurt him at all. Gongsun Zhi was able to neutralize her “hard” energy with his “soft”. He was initially not sure if he could withstand her stone, but in his anger toward the granny who burned down everything he had, he was determined to kill her. Besides, he knew that as soon as the intruders intervened, he wouldn’t be able to even get near her. Therefore, he was delighted to find that his energy was sufficient to counter Qiu Qianchi’s.

Shouting a terrifying cry he leaped towards her.

“Help!” cried Qiu Qianchi, her eyes wide open.

“Mother... That granny’s going to die!” said Guo Fu, her heart pounding.

“I don’t understand,” Huang Rong said, her eyes never leaving those two people, “She is not crazy, but why did she act like it? Was it to lure Gongsun Zhi here?”

In the mean time two more swishing sounds were heard, Qiu Qianchi launched two date stones in close succession. Gongsun Zhi again used his robe while leaping forward. Suddenly, he vanished from sight in a blink of the eyes. The granny opened her mouth to laugh.

That laugh only sent out two “Ha .. ha ...” when suddenly a long robe appeared from below. Like a snake it wrapped itself around the leg of the chair Qiu Qianchi was sitting on. A fraction of a second later that chair flew down into the opening, taking Qiu Qianchi with it. Qiu Qianchi’s laughter turned into a terrifying cry intermingled with Gongsun Zhi’s cry of horror. Then everything fell silent ...

Everyone witnessed and heard everything, but nobody knew what had really happened; except Yang Guo. He sighed and softly said, “Revenge! Revenge!” Quickly, Huang Rong and the others climbed to the hilltop. There they saw four female bodies lying around near a big hole in the ground. Looking down, all they could see was darkness.

In her desire to seek revenge, Qiu Qianchi had become more cruel and evil than ever. After burning the building complex, she commanded four slave girls to carry her to that hilltop, to the underground cave mouth, where she and her daughter were rescued by Yang Guo. She commanded the girls to cover the hole with tree branches and leaves. Afterwards, she cruelly murdered them with her iron date stones. Then she pretended to be crazy to lure Gongsun Zhi. Her cry for help when Gongsun Zhi first attacked was part of her ploy to lure him closer.

Gongsun Zhi had forgotten the cave entrance; hence he fell into her trap. In his last struggle to save his own life, he threw his robe up, with the hope that he could use the chair as an anchor to pull himself out of the hole. Unfortunately, the chair – with Qiu Qianchi on it, fell down into the cave because his pull was too strong. So it happened that, husband and wife became archenemies, and died together on the same day, on the same hour, smashed together inside that underground cave.

Yang Guo then told the rest what he knew about their life story. Everybody sighed and could not help but feel sorry for them. Cheng Ying along with Yelu Qi and his sister dug a big hole and buried the bodies of the four slave girls.

The fire was still raging down in the valley, and the whole building complex was destroyed. There were no other buildings around for them to rest in. Besides, after witnessing so many deaths that day, nobody wanted to stay around much longer.

“Brother Yang has not found cure for his injury, we have to find another doctor promptly,” Zhu Ziliu said. Several others voiced their agreement.

“No,” said Huang Rong. “We cannot leave today.”

“What is your suggestion then, Madame Guo?” asked Zhu Ziliu.

Huang Rong knitted her eyebrows, “I receive an injury from Qiu Qianchi’s date stone, and it hurts badly right now,” she answered. “Could we stay overnight here, please? We will leave tomorrow first thing in the morning. What do you say?”

Of course nobody objected. They spread out and searched for some caves or anywhere suitable to stay overnight.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu walked hand in hand going down the hill, but before they got too far, they heard Huang Rong call, “Sister Long, could you come over here,

please? I have something to discuss with you.” Having said this she put Guo Xiang in Guo Fu’s care and walked toward Xiao Longnu.

Holding Xiao Longnu’s hand she turned her head toward Yang Guo and smiled, “Guo’er, don’t you worry. She has become your wife, and I certainly will not try to persuade her to leave you.”

Yang Guo smiled but didn’t say anything. He couldn’t help wondering in his heart, “What does Auntie Guo want to talk about?” He saw Huang Rong holding Xiao Longnu’s hand, walking toward a big tree and then they both sat down underneath it. Yang Guo felt a little bit of uneasiness, but he felt it was not proper for him to sneak in and eavesdrop on them. “Long’er has never concealed anything from me, why would I worry she wouldn’t tell me about it?” he thought.

“Sister Long,” Huang Rong began. “My spoiled brat daughter has caused you and Guo’er many miseries. I feel really bad.”

Xiao Longnu just smiled and said, “Oh, it’s alright.” But in her heart she was thinking, “Her single Soul Freezing Needle is taking both of our lives, what good is your apology?”

Seeing her dark expression Huang Rong felt even worse. She did not enter the Ancient Tomb, hence did not know the whole story. She remembered how Wu Santong and Yang Guo himself had suffered injury from the needles, yet they fully recovered. She did not know that Xiao Longnu was poisoned when she was reversing her blood flow; hence, Guo Fu’s needle was a death sentence for her.

“There is one thing I do not understand about Yang Guo, and I want to ask your explanation,” she inquired further. “By risking your own life you had succeeded in getting the pill back from Gongsun Zhi. Why was Yang Guo not willing to take it? Why throw it down the ravine instead? Why? I really don’t understand.”

Xiao Longnu sighed slightly, said in her heart, “I am about to die and Guo’er’s love for me is very deep, how could he live alone? But things have come this far and I don’t want to create more trouble.” She only said, “Yang Guo has a strong character.”

“Guo’er’s heart is full of love,” said Huang Rong, “Could it be that because Miss Gongsun sacrificed her life for the pill, Yang Guo did not have the heart to take it? Thus he is willing to sacrifice his own life to repay her love. Sister, that action shows his benevolent character, deserving our highest respect. However, we cannot make the dead live

again. On the other hand, his stubbornness in refusing any antidote would negate Miss Gongsun's sacrifice."

Xiao Longnu nodded her head.

Huang Rong paused for a moment, and then continued, "You have risked your life battling Gongsun Zhi on the stone bridge above the Broken Heart Cliff. That was also an act of ultimate sacrifice. Yang Guo will listen to nobody but you alone. Therefore, my Sister, please talk with him and persuade him for his own good."

Xiao Longnu could not hold her tears any longer; they flowed down her lovely cheeks. "If only he were willing to listen to me ... but even then, where can we find another Passionless Pill?" she said, sobbing.

"There are no more Passionless Pills in this whole wide world," Huang Rong said, "but I believe there is another antidote to neutralize the poison in him. What I feel is most difficult is to get him to take it."

Xiao Longnu was surprised and delighted at the same time. "Is that so?" she stood up and asked, "Is ... is there another antidote?"

Huang Rong pulled her hand, "Please sit down." She groped her pocket and took the purplish grass out. "This is the 'Severed Intestine Grass' [duan chang cao] that was in the Divine Indian Monk's hand when he died. According to Brother Zhu, he was searching for the antidote when that needle took his life. As you also witnessed, Sister, even though he was dead, his countenance showed a satisfied smile. My only conclusion is that he was satisfied because he found this grass, which is the antidote to the Passionless Flower. According to my Master – the Venerable Hong Qigong – inside a snake's lair always exist some kind of plant, which is the antidote of that particular snake's venom. This fact also holds true for other kinds of poisons as well. Natural Law, it is how nature governs itself. This grass indeed grew underneath the Passionless Flower. We only knew that this grass is poisonous; however, after pondering for a while, I realize that this grass is the antidote to the flower. Poison against poison. One poison neutralizes the other."

Xiao Longnu listened to her explanation and repeatedly nodded her head in agreement.

Huang Rong continued, "Taking this poisonous grass indeed poses a great risk; but we don't have any other alternative right now, we need to take this risk. In my opinion, I



am 90% confident that this medicine will be effective.” She knew that Huang Rong was very intelligent, and listening to her confidence, she could not help but feel her own confidence grow as well. Besides, as Huang Rong said, they did not have any other alternative anyway. After witnessing Li Mochou’s suffering caused by the Passion Flower she felt that for Yang Guo to die from the grass’ poison would be preferable to dying of the flower’s poison. Therefore, after a moment or two careful consideration, she made up her mind and said confidently, “Very well. Let me persuade him to take the grass.”

Huang Rong immediately reached in her pocket and took out several handfuls of grass and gave it to Xiao Longnu. “I picked these grasses along the way, and I believe these handfuls would be sufficient,” she said. “You will have to tell him to try a few strands of grass first, while protecting his internal organs with his energy. If it works, then he can take more later.”

Xiao Longnu then put the grass into her pocket and stood up, then knelt down in front of Huang Rong. “Guo’er ... he ... he’s an orphan and has nobody to look after him. He has suffered a lot,” she was choked up ... “He is rash and often times does whatever his heart desires ... I beg Madame Guo to look after him.”

Huang Rong quickly lifted her up. “Guo’er is under your loving care, and I trust you are a hundred times better than me in this matter,” she was emotional as well, “After Xiangyang is saved from the Mongols, we shall go together to the Peach Blossom Island and have some good times together.”

As intelligent as she was, Madame Guo did not have any clue as to why Xiao Longnu had asked her the favor. Xiao Longnu expected she would die any moment and had asked Huang Rong to take care of Yang Guo.

While his wife was having a conversation with Huang Rong, Yang Guo waited patiently. Now that he saw his wife stand up and walk away, he immediately came to her. “Guo’er,” said Xiao Longnu, smiling sweetly, “our days are numbered. Let us not be burdened with other’s business and just be together, you and I... Would you accompany me looking around this place?”

“Good!” Yang Guo replied, “I was just going to propose the same thing.” Holding hands they left the crowd and walked slowly down a quiet path..

They hadn’t walked too far when they saw a young couple having a quiet talk under a tree. It was Wu Dunru and Yelu Yan. Yang Guo smiled and turned the other way. Again, they hadn’t walked too far when suddenly somebody ran out of the bushes ahead,

laughing merrily, with somebody behind, chasing her. It was Wanyan Ping, being chased by Wu Xiuwen. “I want to know where you are going!” cried the young man. Seeing Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, Wanyan Ping blushed. “Brother Yang, Sister Long,” she greeted them sheepishly. Then she ran toward the forest to their left. Xiuwen was not too far behind.

“O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?” Yang Guo softly murmured. He was silent for a minute before continuing, “Those two brothers were fighting to the death to win Miss Guo’s attention. Only a short time later they love someone else already. There are people in this world who could love only one person – for life. Yet there are others like Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi who turned love into hatred. Ay! ‘O mortals, what is love? That binds beyond life on earth?’ this is a very deep question and worthy to be pondered.” Xiao Longnu was silent. She put her head down, quietly walked along, like she was thinking very hard.

They arrived at a foothill a little while later. Looking up they could see the sun was low on the mountain top. Its red rays illuminating purple clouds in the blue sky. The evening mist starting to cover up the mountain peaks. It was a beautiful evening beyond words. They were convinced that they would not be together much longer; they were reluctant to part with this beautiful scenery.

“Guo’er,” Xiao Longnu suddenly broke the silence, “didn’t you say that after we are dead, our spirits will go to the underworld? Is it true there is a Yan Luowang [king of the underworld]?”

“I do hope so,” answered Yang Guo. “Even if the underworld was a sea of blades, boiling oil, or other kind torture, I would rather the underworld exist, than having our souls separated for eternity.”

“That’s true,” said his wife, “I do too; hope that there is an underworld somewhere. People say that on the way there an old granny meets the departing spirit and gives that spirit a bowl of water that makes the spirit forget everything mortal. As for me, I would refuse to drink that water. Guo’er, you have to promise me that you won’t forget my love forever.”

Xiao Longnu was raised and trained by the Ancient Tomb Sect, where she learned how to suppress all emotions. Therefore, while her heart was broken, she was able to speak with a steady voice. Yang Guo, on the other hand, could not hold back his tears any longer. He quickly walked away, turned his head from his wife and wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

Xiao Longnu sighed. “Ah! How can we mortals know anything about the underworld matters?” she said, “But if I were given any choice, I would rather live forever with you .... Guo’er, look! That flower is very pretty.”

Yang Guo turned his head to where his wife was pointing, and he saw a beautiful red flower. It was so big, bigger than a rice bowl. The flower was swaying from the soft early evening breeze. It looked like a peony [mu dan] yet different; it looked similar to the type called ‘Chinese Peony’ [shao yao] yet different. “This flower is truly rare; it is still winter, but it blooms so brightly. If I were to give this flower a name, I would name it ‘Dragon Lady Flower’ [Longnu Hua].” He stooped down, picked the stem of the flower, and slipped it into his wife’s hair.

“Thank you, for giving me a beautiful flower, and for giving the flower a beautiful name,” Xiao Longnu smiled. After walking a little bit longer they sat down on a grassy hill, resting. “Guo’er, do you still remember everything you promised when I took you as my disciple?” asked the young madam.

“Why wouldn’t I?” he answered.

“Well, do you remember taking an oath to always obey what I command as long as you live?” she continued, “Whatever I say, you cannot disobey. But I have become your wife now. Tell me, do I have to obey you, or will you forever obey me because I was your master and teacher? What do you think?”

“I will always obey you,” promised Yang Guo. “Teacher’s word has to be obeyed. Wife’s word even more, I cannot disobey.”

“Hmm!” said his wife, “It’s good to know you remembered.”

They sat shoulder-to-shoulder, leaning against each other, enjoying the beautiful dusk scenery around them. From a distance they heard Wu Santong calling them for dinner. They looked at each other and smiled. Who would want to eat while enjoying this breathtakingly wonderful time?

Eventually, the sun set, and the moon slowly rose. Night was falling. They were tired, and unwittingly fell asleep.

Yang Guo stirred and opened his eyes around midnight. The weather had turned cold. Half-asleep he asked his wife, “Long’er, are you cold?” He stretched out his arm, wanting to embrace her. With a sudden jolt he felt like his blood was drained completely

from his body, because his hand only grabbed a handful of dirt! He leaped up instantly. His wife was nowhere to be seen! He looked everywhere, but all he could see were mountaintops and trees, gleaming under the silver light of the moon. He stretched his neck, trying to listen; but all he could hear was a gentle breeze, carrying soft chirping and buzzing of the little critters. Where could Xiao Longnu be? His heart was pounding very hard! He exerted his internal energy, ran to the hilltop and shouted at the top of his lungs, “Long’er! Long’er!”

Frantically he dashed to another hilltop. “Long’er! Long’er!” His voice echoed throughout the valley. “Long’er! Long’er ...!” but Xiao Longnu did not answer. Yang Guo’s heart turned cold, “Where could she go? She slept next to me; it is impossible for an enemy to capture her, or even a beast to harm her without my knowing.”

His cry had awakened Yideng, Huang Rong, Zhu Ziliu and the others. Knowing what happened, immediately they spread out around the valley, trying to find the young madam; while their hearts were puzzled. Xiao Longnu was nowhere to be seen, even after searching high and low.

Yang Guo was running around like crazy. A moment later they gathered together again. Yang Guo also stopped running, he thought, “She must have left of her own will, otherwise I would certainly know; but why? I believe Mrs. Guo had something to do with it. She once ran away from me and went to the Passionless Valley because of her.” Because of this thought his blood boiled and he exploded, “Auntie Guo! What exactly did you say to her this afternoon?”

Huang Rong herself was confounded; she did not have any idea why Xiao Longnu would suddenly disappear. She saw Yang Guo’s veins showing on his face and neck, and realized how critical this moment was. “I only advised her to persuade you to take the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ to neutralize the poison inside your body,” she explained patiently.

“Since her life cannot be saved, do you really think I would want to live alone?” Yang Guo screamed.

“Don’t you worry,” said his auntie soothingly, “Miss Long possesses a very high level of martial arts. It is unthinkable that something bad has happened to her that she could not overcome. Why did you say ‘her life cannot be saved’?”

In his unbearable grief Yang Guo lost his temper and snapped, “Huh! This is all your precious daughter’s doing. She struck her with a ‘Soul Freezing Needle’ while she was

reversing her blood flow, so that the lethal poison attacked her internal organs. My wife is not a deity, how could she endure that?”

How would Huang Rong know what had happened? Her daughter indeed told her that she had accidentally injured the Yang – Long couple with a Soul Freezing Needle; but those two were from the Ancient Tomb Sect, the same sect Li Mochou was from. Certainly they must have the antidote. Yes, they would be hurt momentarily, but she did not think the poison would threaten their lives. Yang Guo's answer was like a thunderbolt from a blue sky. Her countenance was sheet-white. Now she understood, “So it turns out Guo'er was adamant about not taking the pill because he would rather die than live alone. But where could Xiao Longnu go?” She looked up towards the hill where Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi met their tragic ends. She shuddered involuntarily.

Yang Guo had kept his gaze on Huang Rong and understood why she shuddered. He was shocked and angry beyond any reasoning. “You knew it! You knew she is beyond help and persuaded her to kill herself to save my life, didn't you?” he screamed. “You think you are doing me a big favor, but ... but ... I HATE YOU!!!” His chest tightened, he fainted and collapsed to the ground. Reverend Yideng immediately gave him a massage and after a moment he regained his consciousness.

“I only persuaded her to save your life,” said Huang Rong, “I have never told anybody to commit suicide. Whether you believe me or you don't, it's up to you.”

Everybody was looking at each other, they did not know what to say or do. “Let us go to that hilltop and take a look,” Huang Rong said. Everybody left at once. But the hole on that hilltop was deep and so dark, they could not see anything.

“I think we'd better make a rope for me to go down into the cave to investigate,” Cheng Ying broke the silence. “Perhaps ... perhaps ... Sister-in-law slipped ...”

Huang Rong sighed. “Very well, let's find out.”

They immediately unsheathed their weapons and gathered tree bark, which was then braided into a long rope. They worked hard and around dawn, more than a hundred zhangs [a zhang is approximately 10 feet or 3 meters] of rope was ready. Several of the youngsters immediately offered to go down first. “Let me go first,” said Yang Guo.

Everybody looked at Huang Rong for approval. Mrs. Guo thought hard. She was sure that if she said ‘no’, Yang Guo would insist on going anyway; but if she said ‘yes’ and –

God forbid – Xiao Longnu were found inside, Yang Guo would certainly not be willing to come back up. While she hesitated, Cheng Ying once again offered a solution, “Brother Yang, let me go. Don’t you trust me?”

Other than his wife, Cheng Ying was the only person Yang Guo loved and respected. Besides, he felt weak from excessive grief anyway, so he just nodded his agreement.

Wu Santong and his sons, along with Yelu Qi slowly lowered Miss Cheng into the opening. The cave entrance was located on or near the hilltop, so we can safely conclude that the depth of the cave is approximately the same as the height of the hill itself. Therefore, when they had almost run out of rope, Cheng Ying finally reached the bottom.

Everybody stood around the hole without making any sound; intently looking at the hole, waiting for some word from Cheng Ying. It was a suspenseful moment, as it seemed like Cheng Ying stayed in the cave for a long time.

Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu exchanged a glance; they both had a similar thought, “If Xiao Longnu is really dead inside, Yang Guo would surely jump into the hole. We must not let him do so.”

Yang Guo caught sight of their exchange, he thought, “If I really want to die, I can do that quietly, no need to involve all of you; unlike that foolish couple earlier.”

Suddenly the rope in Wu Santong’s hands moved. “Quick! Pull!” Guo Fu and the Wu Brothers shouted almost simultaneously. Quickly they helped pulling the rope. Even before she reached the top, Cheng Ying had shouted at top of her lungs, “Not here! Sister-in-law is not here!”

Everybody was so relieved that they sighed almost simultaneously. A little later Cheng Ying reached the top and immediately said, “I have looked every where, every corner of the cave. Nothing was there except Gongsun Zhi and Qiu Qianchi’s bodies.”

Zhu Ziliu spoke in a low and somewhat muffled voice: “We have looked everywhere, so I think Miss Long has already left the valley.”

Suddenly, Lu Wushuang said, “There is another place where we have not gone to look. Perhaps she is trying to fish that Passionless Pill out...”

Yang Guo's heart skipped a beat. Before Lu Wushuang could finish speaking, he dashed towards the Broken Heart Cliff. As he ran, he shouted: "Long'er, Long'er!" When he got to the edge of the cliff, he looked into the deep ravine below. All he saw was a vast sheet of grayish mist, how could anyone be seen in there?

He thought, "Long'er's thoughts are simple and pure. If she had any problems, she would have certainly not kept them from me." Then, he recalled the words that Xiao Longnu had uttered earlier, "She had asked me only to remember forever the vow that she had asked of me. I would naturally never go against her wishes, so why was there even a need to speak of it? But she did not even ask anything of me in the first place."

Lifting his head, he said in a soft voice: "Long'er, Long'er, where exactly have you gone? What are the words that you want me to obey?" Looking across the ravine at the Broken Heart Cliff, he could almost imagine the indistinct figure of a woman in white with a red flower in the hair by one of her temples. The woman seemed to move swiftly as she engaged Gongsun Zhi in an intense battle with the pair of swords in her hands.

"Long'er!" called Yang Guo. Then, pulling himself together, he realized that Xiao Longnu was not there. All he saw were floating sheets of whitish mist ... but that red flower was indeed at the bottom of the opposite cliff.

Struck by the oddity of the discovery, he thought, "When Long'er fought Gongsun Zhi in that place yesterday, the flower was certainly not there. The whole area is nothing but rock that does not encourage even the growth of grass or trees; how can there be any flowers? If I say that the wind blew the flower there; that would be too much of a coincidence."

Exerting his internal energy he leaped toward the cliff and crossed the stone bridge. His chest tightened! That flower was the one he slipped into his wife's hair just a few hours ago. He was sure of it, since one side of the flower was a bit flattened.

Yang Guo bent down and picked the flower up. Underneath it he found a paper package, which he hastily opened. Inside he found a few strands of purple grass, the "Severed Intestine Grass". His heart was beating fast. He looked at the paper, but he found nothing, not even a single stroke of a character was to be seen.

Suddenly he heard Lu Wushuang shout, "Brother Yang, what are you doing?"

He turned his head and his gaze was caught by two lines of characters carved by a sword on the cliff's wall. It read, "Sixteen years from now we will meet here. The love

between husband and wife is profoundly great. Do not break your promise.” Underneath was carved in smaller characters, “Xiao Longnu addresses my husband Yang-Lang. Please treasure this and I beg that you fulfill this reunion.”

Yang Guo stared at those characters like he was losing his mind. His head felt dizzy. He really could not decipher what it meant. Unanswerable questions kept floating around in his mind. “She wants me to meet her here in sixteen years; then where did she go? She is heavily poisoned, she might not survive another ten days or even half a year; how can she wait sixteen years? She knows I threw the Passionless Pill away, why did she ask me to wait sixteen years?” The more he thought, the more his mind was confused; he staggered a few times and almost fell down.

The others stood on the opposite side of the cliff and saw his dazed and confused condition; they were afraid he might make a wrong step and fall down into the bottomless abyss below. But the stone bridge was so narrow that only one person could stand on it. Yang Guo’s martial arts were so profound that if someone went to him and he acted up they would certainly die together. Huang Rong frowned and turning to Cheng Ying she said, “Shimei [Younger Martial Sister], go talk to him. I think he will listen to you.”

“Very well, I will go to him,” she responded, leaping onto the rock, and walking slowly toward Yang Guo.

Hearing footsteps coming near Yang Guo snapped, “Go away!” He turned his head with fire in his eyes.

“Yang Da Ge, it’s me,” the young miss said softly. “I just want to help you find Yang Da Sao, nothing else.” Yang Guo stared hard at her sad face. Slowly his countenance softened.

“Is this red flower left by Sister-in-law?” asked Cheng Ying, approaching him.

“Yes,” he said, “She wants me to wait sixteen years...Why sixteen years?”

Cheng Ying read the message. She was perplexed. “Madame Guo is very intelligent, nothing can get past her,” she said, “Why don’t we ask her what she thinks. I am sure she can solve this puzzle.”

“That’s right,” said Yang Guo, “Be careful! That stone is slippery.”

They immediately walked back down and told everything they knew to Huang Rong.



She was silent for a moment, frowning deeply. Suddenly her eyes lit. Clapping her hands she exclaimed, “Guo’er, Congratulations, congratulations!”

Yang Guo was flabbergasted. He was shocked but a bit thrilled at the same time, “What ... Why ... What for?” He stammered.

“Congratulations! How can I not congratulate you!” his auntie was laughing ecstatically. “Sister Long has met the ‘Divine Nun of the South Sea’ [nan hai zhen ni]. This is a very extraordinary destiny.”

Yang Guo’s face looked puzzled: “Divine Nun of the South Sea? Who’s that?”

“Nan Hai Shen Ni is a divine Buddhist nun with a very high level of martial arts,” she explained, “Just how high her skill is, nobody can tell. Because she seldom comes to the mainland, almost nobody in the Central Plains knew her big name. My father met her and was taught a very high-level fist technique. That was sixteen, thirty-two ... yes, it was thirty-two years ago.”

“Thirty-two years ago?” Yang Guo repeated absent-mindedly.

“Yes,” she continued, “I think the ‘Divine Nun of the South Sea’ is almost a hundred years old now. According to my father, she always visits the mainland once every sixteen years. Woe to the evil men who crosses her path. She has a benevolent heart and is always ready to help anybody in need. I am sure Miss Long has met her, was taken as her disciple, and was taken back to the South Sea.”

“Sixteen years ... sixteen ... Reverend, is there such person?” Yang Guo turned to Yideng. His voice was hoarse.

Yideng was about to answer with an “hmm” when Huang Rong quickly cut him off. “The ‘Divine Nun of the South Sea’ excels in martial arts, but her character is a bit weird. Reverend, have you ever met her?”

“The old monk is unfortunate, he has not met her,” he answered, shaking his head.

Huang Rong sighed. “Ah, that Senior is really ignorant,” she said, “to separate a young couple like that...and for sixteen years! Sister Long already possesses a level high martial art. After sixteen years, wouldn’t her husband looked like chicken compared to her?” Then she burst out in laughter.

“No, Auntie Guo, I don’t think that was what she had in mind,” countered Yang Guo.

“What then?” asked the aunt? Without further ado Yang Guo reminded her, that Guo Fu unintentionally struck her with a “Soul Freezing Needle” while his wife was reversing her blood flow to cure her injury. That caused the poison to attack her internal organs. “If what you said is true, I think the Shen Ni is trying to cure her within that sixteen years period.” He sighed, “You know, before this new development, I thought Long’er’s condition was terminal.”

“That spoiled brat of mine truly has caused you two too many troubles,” said Mrs. Guo. “I think you are right. That poison has resided inside Sister Long’s body for too long. Even if she was given a miracle cure, she would certainly need a long time to recover fully. Guo’er, let us hope that Sister Long will recover sooner, and that the ‘Divine Nun of the South Sea’ will release her sooner too.”

Yang Guo was lost in thought with a heart full of questions. It was hard to believe his auntie, yet the Xiao Longnu’s letter seemed to corroborate her argument. If she killed herself, why would she say sixteen years? Suddenly he turned his gaze toward Huang Rong and asked, “Auntie Guo, how do you know Nan Hai Shen Ni took Long’er away? Why didn’t Long’er say so in the message, so that I wouldn’t worry?”

“I came to that conclusion because of the words ‘sixteen years later’,” she explained. “I know this for a fact, that the ‘Divine Nun of the South Sea’ visits the mainland only once every sixteen years. Nobody else has that peculiar habit. Reverend, have you known anybody else with that custom?”

“No,” he answered.

“Father said that the Shen Ni does not like to be mentioned,” Mrs. Guo continued, “so it’s understandable if Sister Long did not mention her name in the message. My only concern is that I am not sure the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ will save your life. If ... Ay! ... if sixteen years pass and Sister Long comes back and she cannot see you, it is very possible that ... that she would not want to live any longer.”

Yang Guo shed some more tears. He could see clearly in his mind a shadow of things to come. He saw a white shadow; it was his wife, comeback to meet him sixteen years from now. He then saw his wife was grieving because he was no more.

A gentle breeze blew and Yang Guo shivered. “Auntie Guo,” he said, “I think I’d better go to the South Sea to find her. Do you know where the Shen Ni lives?”

“Guo’er, don’t be silly,” rebuked his auntie softly, “The ‘Great Wisdom Island’ [da zhi dao] where the Shen Ni lives has never been visited by strangers. Woe to the man who visits the island uninvited. My Father received her tutelage, but even Father has never set foot on this island. Now that she’s taken Sister Long under her wing, I am confident that someday you two will meet again. What is sixteen years anyway? It will pass in the blink of an eye. Why do you have to rush?”

Yang Guo looked intently at Huang Rong’s face and asked, “Auntie Guo, are you telling me the truth?”

“You go and examine that message,” she countered, “If that message was not written by Sister Long, you can say whatever you want.”

“It was indeed written by Long’er herself.” Yang Guo said, “Every time she writes the character ‘Yang’, she always add a short stroke on the right. Nobody writes it like that.”

“Very good, then,” said his auntie, clapping her hands. “Honestly, I wasn’t sure myself. I thought it was too much of a coincidence. I thought it was Brother Zhu’s doing trying to comfort you.”

Yang Guo was lost in thought again, his eyes stared hard at the Broken Heart Cliff. “Very well,” he finally said, “I will take the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’. If it fails, I hope sixteen years from now Auntie will tell my poor wife everything.” He turned to Zhu Ziliu and asked, “Uncle Zhu, how do I take the grass?”

Zhu Ziliu only knew the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ was a poisonous plant. He had no idea on how that poison would neutralize other poisons. Therefore, he turned to Yideng and asked, “Shifu, I think we need your insight on this matter.”

Extending his right hand forefinger, Yideng quickly sealed four of Yang Guo’s accupoints: the ‘shao hai’ [lit. lesser sea], ‘tong li’ [lit. open inside], ‘shen men’ [lit. divine gate], and ‘shao chong’ [lit. little highway]. These four accupoints can be classified as the basic positive passages of the ‘shou shao yang xin jing’ [elementary positive heart manual(?)]. Yang Guo felt a warm feeling flowing from these accupoints toward his chest, and loosened the tightness in his breast. “The Passionless Poison mostly attacks the organs closely linked to the feelings or emotions,” Yideng explained, “The ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ poison would most likely attack your heart as well. Therefore, I sealed your four accupoints to protect your heart. Go ahead, take some strands.”

Yang Guo bowed to express his gratitude.

Yideng sighed, “If my Martial Brother were here, he would know how to take it properly, so that we would not have to make a wild guess.”

When the Divine Indian Monk was killed by Li Mochou, Yang Guo thought Xiao Longnu was beyond hope, so he desired to die; but now he was determined to live for at least sixteen years longer. He put the grass into his mouth and started to chew, then swallowed it. The ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ was very bitter, but he endured it. He thought of how miserable Xiao Longnu would be if, sixteen years from now, she came back and did not see him. He quickly sat down and exerted his internal energy to protect his heart, liver, and other sensitive organs.

After not too long, he started to feel his stomach growling, followed by excruciating pain like he had swallowed thousands of needles. The name ‘Severed Intestine’ was not an empty name. He endured the pain, gritting his teeth. After another moment or two, the pain surged through his entire body, to his hands and feet, but his heart felt quite comfortable. This demonstrated the excellence of the ‘Solitary Yang Finger’ of Reverend Yideng. An hour or so later, the pain was concentrated back in his stomach, and he threw up some blood. The blood glittered and looked redder than regular blood.

“Ah!” seeing him vomiting blood, Cheng Ying, Wushuang, and the others were shocked! Only Reverend Yideng looked delighted. “Shi di... [Younger Martial Brother]! Shi di!” he said softly, “even after your death you were still able to save your fellow man.”

Yang Guo leaped up and declared with a voice full of emotion, “Today my life has been saved by the Divine Indian Monk, Reverend Yideng, and Auntie Guo.”

“Is the poison completely eradicated from your body?” asked Wushuang gleefully.

“How could it be that quick?” he answered. “But now that we know the grass works, I will take a couple of strands every day until the poison is completely gone.”

“But how would you know when your body is clean?” inquired Miss Lu further, “I mean, if the poison is completely neutralized and you continue taking the grass, wouldn’t the grass poison you?”

“I can tell,” he answered, “if the Passion Flower poison is still here and I ... I ... I think about love, my chest will hurt.”

Guo Fu had been listening the whole time and suddenly quipped, “Yang Da Ge is thinking about Yang Da Sao, not you!” When she parried Gongsun Zhi’s sword with her right

arm earlier, she was heeding Lu Wushuang's advice. At first she thought Wushuang was being nice to her; but afterwards realized Lu Wushuang did not know about the soft-hedgehog armor. Lu Wushuang must have wanted her to lose her right arm just as she'd chopped off Yang Guo's right arm. She'd kept her anger pent up for a long time and now she could not restrain herself.

"Fu'er! Shut up!" her mother rebuked harshly.

Hearing her, Lu Wushuang's face was flushed with anger, but Guo Fu wasn't finished yet, she continued, "Sixteen years from now, Sister-in-law will come back. Don't you get any weird ideas."

Wushuang unsheathed her willow-leaf-saber. "Wicked woman!" she snapped, pointing her saber to Guo Fu, "If not for you, Yang Da Ge wouldn't have to be separated from Yang Da Sao for sixteen years. Do you have the slightest idea how badly you have hurt Yang Da Ge?"

Guo Fu was about to counter when Huang Rong rebuked her with anger in her voice; "Fu'er! If you can't behave, go to the Peach Blossom Island. I'll forbid you to come back to Xiangyang." Guo Fu did not dare to open her mouth, but she still looked at Wushuang menacingly.

Yang Guo heaved a sigh and sorrowfully said, "It was an accident. Miss Guo did not intentionally want to hurt Long'er. Sister Lu, I forbid you to raise this incident again."

Hearing Yang Guo used the term "Sister Lu" to address her, while he called Guo Fu "Miss Guo", thus differentiating a good friend from an acquaintance, Wushuang was very pleased and sheathed her saber.

"Yang Shao Xia [Young Hero Yang] has eaten the 'Severed Intestine Grass'; but he did not experienced any bad side effects. That proved the grass was indeed the antidote to the Passionless Flower's poison," Yideng said. "In my opinion, however, I think it will be better for Mr. Yang not to take the grass continually. Wait another seven days or so, and then you can have the second dose, even then, you should reduce the amount a little bit."

"Thank you for your priceless advice, Reverend." Yang Guo said, bowing.

The sun was already high in the sky. Huang Rong said, "We've been gone from Xiangyang for a while, and have not heard any news on the war situation. My mind

keeps wandering back there, so I think we'd better go back today. Guo'er, I think you'd better come along, your Uncle Guo was really worried about you."

"Let me stay here and ... and wait for Long'er," he answered.

"You want to wait here sixteen years?" Guo Fu asked in disbelief.

"I don't know. I just feel like there is nowhere better," he answered.

"Very well then," decided Huang Rong, "It's all right if you want to wait here ten days to half a month. But if Sister Long does not come back, you'd better come to Xiangyang."

Yang Guo cast his glance toward the cliff but did not say anything.

Everybody bade Yang Guo farewell. Only Lu Wushuang seemed reluctant to leave. Of course Guo Fu saw that, and she could not help making a comment, "Hey, Lu Wushuang, do you want to stay here to accompany Brother Yang?"

Miss Lu blushed. "None of your business!" she snapped.

Suddenly Cheng Ying said, "Brother Yang has not fully recovered yet. Let Cousin and I stay here to accompany him for a few days."

Huang Rong knew, as sweet and gentle as she looked, in reality her younger martial sister had a very strong character. If her own daughter messed things up, she would not keep her peace. She looked sternly at Guo Fu, signaling her not to say another word. "Guo'er, I think it is a great idea to have Martial Sister and Miss Lu taking care of you," she said, "However, as soon as you are cured, I do hope you will come to Xiangyang, where my husband and I will wait for the three of you."

Yang Guo, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang stood on the hill side, watching Yideng, Huang Rong and the others slowly fading away from their sight; disappearing among the trees. In the mean time, the fire that had been raging all night long had slowly died away.

"Sisters," said Yang Guo suddenly, "I would like to suggest something. I do hope you won't get offended."

"Who has ever been offended by you?" Wushuang asked.

Yang Guo smiled sadly, his voice trembling, “We have known each other for some time now; we love each other and we have even faced danger together. When I was a young boy I lived alone, with neither brothers nor sisters. My heart’s desire is that we become sworn brother and sisters. What do you think?”

Cheng Ying was touched. She was sensitive and knew exactly what Yang Guo was thinking. She knew Yang Guo loved Xiao Longnu with all his heart. He had made that suggestion because he had to wait sixteen years, and because they would have to live together for several days. He wanted to avoid anything that could cause embarrassment or would make them uncomfortable. Lu Wushuang put her head down, tears flowing from her eyes. “I would have never dreamed of being your sworn sister,” she said softly. “We will be proud and honored to have a big brother like you.”

After saying that, she walked toward a Passionless Flower nearby and picked three strands of the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’. “Others become sworn brothers and sisters with incense sticks, here we use grass instead.” She tried to make a joke and sound cheerful, but toward the end, her voice was hoarse. Before Yang Guo could respond, she immediately knelt down on the ground. Yang Guo and Cheng Ying quickly knelt at either side of Miss Lu, and, just like the regular ceremony of becoming sworn brothers and sisters; they kowtowed eight times, and then bowed to each other in respect.

“Second Sister, Third Sister, what I hate most in this world is the Passionless Flower,” Yang Guo said. “If that flower ever spreads outside this valley, it would be a real disaster for mankind. Therefore, let us make an oath to completely wipe out the Passionless Flower from the face of the earth. What do you think?”

“Your desire Big Brother is a very noble one,” said Cheng Ying. “I am sure the Goddess of Mercy will bless you so that you will meet Sister-in-law much earlier.”

Hearing his sister’s words, Yang Guo’s spirits rose. Immediately they went to the building complex ruins, trying to find some tools like machete or axe to cut down the poisonous flowers. They had to work very slowly. Not only there were lots of shrubs to cut, but if not careful, they would get pricked by the thorns. They finished cutting the shrubs after toiling for six whole days. Then they walked around the whole valley, making sure not a single shrub was spared. It was because of their hard work that the world was free of the Passionless Flowers.

Early morning the next day, Wushuang took some more ‘Severed Intestine Grass’, went to her sworn brother and said, “Big Brother, it’s time for you to take another dose of the grass.”

After his first experience seven days ago, Yang Guo was not hesitant. Although the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ was poisonous, it was effective against the poison in his body. He immediately sat down on the ground, exerted his internal energy to protect his heart and liver, and quickly ate the grass. This time the pain was not so severe. After about an hour or so he threw up some blood and the pain lessened almost immediately.

He stood up, stretched his arms and legs, and saw Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang’s joyful countenance. “I am so lucky to have two very loving sworn sisters.” he said to himself. “One is more than enough, now I have two. How can I repay their kindness?” He looked down, thinking hard. Then he thought, “Second Sister has had an excellent Master, and I am sure someday she will be an excellent martial artist. Not so with Third Sister.”

Having had that thought, he said to Wushuang, “Third Sister, your master and mine were martial sisters. That makes us people of the same sect. The highest level of the Ancient Tomb Sect’s martial arts was written in the ‘Jade Maiden Manual’. Li Mochou’s lifelong desire was to get hold of this manual, fortunately she did not get her wish right up to the day she died. While we have the opportunity, I’d like to teach you one or two arts from our sect. What do you say?”

Lu Wushuang was delighted, “Thank you Big Brother,” she said. “Next time Guo Fu and I meet, she will not dare to pick a fight with me.”

Yang Guo smiled faintly and immediately taught the theory of ‘Jade Maiden Manual’ to his sister, beginning from the elementary to the advanced. “You have to memorize the theory first, and later on ask Second Sister’s help when it comes to training,” explained the big brother. “This quiet Passionless Valley is a very suitable place to learn martial arts.”

For a few days Wushuang used all her waking moments to memorize the theory. Since her background was also from the Ancient Tomb Sect, she did not have any difficulty understanding the elementary lessons. Very soon however, she arrived at the more difficult part of the lesson and started to have some trouble understanding the theory. Yang Guo advised her to just memorize the theory blindly; she would eventually understand the whole lesson. So Wushuang spent almost the whole month memorizing the entire ‘Jade Maiden Manual’. In the mean time Yang Guo ate the ‘Severed Intestine Grass’ every seven days and his pain gradually lessened.

One morning, as usual Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang prepared their breakfast, and then waited for Yang Guo to come. After waiting for quite a while, Yang Guo did not



come. They went to their big brother's cave, only to find some characters written on the ground at the cave's entrance. It said, "To part for a while, to be together forever. Brotherly love shines like the sun and the moon."

Both girls were shocked. "He ... finally he left us," Lu Wushuang said, running toward a hill and looked around. Cheng Ying followed not too far behind. All they could see were clouds on the mountain peaks. Miss Lu's heart was broken. She asked, with an uneven voice, "Second Sister ... where ... where did he go? Can we ... can we see him again?"

"Third Sister," her older sister replied, "Do you see those clouds? They gathered together, then were blown away by the wind, to be gathered again somewhere else. We are just like those clouds. Now we gather, then we part. Why is your heart troubled?" Even though her mouth said those words, her heart was also full of sorrow.

Yang Guo had remained on the Broken Heart Cliff for about over a month and imparted the 'Jade Maiden Manual' to Lu Wushuang. During all this time, he did not find any more clues or news about the whereabouts of Xiao Longnu and knew that it would be no use to wait any longer. He gathered a bunch of the 'Severed Intestine Grass' and then left a parting a message in the sand before leaving the cliff. However, he had still not given up hope of seeing Xiao Longnu again, so he returned to mount Zhongnan and went back into the Ancient Tomb. But after seeing that the wedding garments were left untouched and were lying on the bed and floor, his heart was broken once again.

He left the mountain and roamed Jianghu for a few months. One day, he found himself near the city of Xiangyang. The burned wastelands that the Mongols had left was showing signs of human activity and it appeared that in the past months the Mongols were once again heading south.

He missed Guo Jing, but he did not want to see Guo Fu and thought to himself, "It's been a long time since I parted with Brother Eagle, why don't I go visit him?" He then made his way to the wild valley.

As he neared the home of Sword Demon Dugu Qiubai [Dugu Seeking-A-Loss], he gave a long whistle. He walked and whistled at the same time and not long after, he heard chirrup calls from the base of the mountain. He raised his head and saw the Divine Eagle below a large tree with a wolf in its claws. When the Divine Eagle saw Yang Guo, it released the wolf and made its way to him. After managing to keep its life after facing the jaws of death, the wolf darted straight into the bushes without turning back.

Yang Guo hugged the eagle; both man and beast were extremely happy. They made their way back to the cave. In just a few months, Yang Guo had found himself slipping from life to death and from death back to life again, grief and joy both came and went, the trials and tribulations he had gone through, countless. It was a pity that the eagle could not speak; otherwise Yang Guo could tell it all the things that have been on his mind.

He stayed in the valley with the eagle as his companion for months. One day out of boredom, he made his way to the cliff where Dugu Qiubai buried his swords. He made his way to the top of the cliff and looked at the words underneath the decayed wooden sword:

“After the age of forty, I no longer relied on weaponry. Even bushes, trees, bamboo sticks or rocks can all be my sword. From then on, I achieved great progress and slowly reached the realm of overcoming the sword without a sword.”

Yang Guo thought to himself, “With the heavy iron sword, it can be said that I had no match under heaven’s skies; but from senior Dugu’s words, it appears that the wooden sword can defeat the heavy iron sword, and finally, no sword can defeat the wooden sword. Since Long’er said that we will only be able to see each other again in sixteen years time, with all these years to come, I might as well study the ways to defeat the heavy iron sword with the wooden sword and how to overcome a sword without a sword.”

He broke a branch and formed a sword with it and pondered, “The heavy iron sword is around seventy jin in weight, there are only two possibilities on how to overcome it with such a light and fragile wooden sword. One is through ingenuity of the sword strokes, using speed to overcome the slow; the other is through overbearing internal energy, using strength to subdue the weak.”

From that day on, he trained his internal energy hard night and day and studied the art of the sword. Every time it rained; he went to the mountain torrents to fight the water in order to increase the power in his sword strokes.

Summer ended and autumn arrived, autumn went and winter came. Though Yang Guo trained with dedication, he made little progress with his internal energy and sword arts. However, he knew that his level of martial arts was already very high; to gain any sort of improvement from such a state was, in reality, a hard task to accomplish, so he wasn’t troubled by it.

One day, it started to snow. The Divine Eagle called out with joy and leapt into the open. It spread its wings and created a strong gust of wind, blowing the snow away. Yang Guo had a thought, “There are no mountain torrents in the winter; practicing in the snow is a great alternative.”

He watched on as the gusts of wind created by the eagle became stronger and stronger; though the snow was heavy, not a flake landed on its body.

Yang Guo’s interests were stirred. He picked up the wooden sword and he too went out into the snow. He used his sword with his left hand and swung his right sleeve at the same time. Whenever flakes of snow got close, either the wind from the wooden sword or the force from his right sleeve would repel it. He continued for a half a day and felt that the power in both his sword and sleeve seemed to have made some improvements.

It snowed for three days and Yang Guo practiced in the snow each day. On the afternoon of the third day, the snow became even heavier. Yang Guo was in the middle of concentrating on attacking the snow when suddenly, the Divine Eagle swept its wings at him. Yang Guo was not prepared for this and was almost tripped by this attack. He leaped up urgently to avoid this attack but as soon as he did this, he felt coolness on his forehead, two flakes of snow had landed on it. He immediately understood, “That day on top of the cliff, Brother Eagle used its wings to fight me and helped me to make great improvements in my sword arts; today he is helping me to train my sword skills once again.” He then extended his sword and thrust forward, a ‘crack’ sound was heard as the sword met the eagle’s wings; the sword broke. The Divine Eagle did not continue its attack and instead it straightened up and chirruped with an impression of blame.

Yang Guo thought, “The only way to fight against your frightening strength with a wooden sword is to dodge, evade and wait for a chance to attack from afar.” He made another wooden sword and once again, fought with the Divine Eagle in the snow. This time, he managed ten stances before the sword broke.

Training as hard as this without stop, Yang Guo felt that the Divine Eagle was like a strict teacher and showed no signs of letting up; he was touched by this but he was also ashamed of himself, “If I don’t manage to learn the wooden sword, won’t I have let down Brother Eagle’s good intentions? Anyway, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity, how can I let it slip away?”

From then on, he thought about how to increase his internal energy, about how to evade and how to strike out with the sword even in his dreams. He trained rigorously and as a result, his thoughts of Xiao Longnu did not engulf his mind as it had in the pre-

vious months. The poison from the Passion Flower had now been cleansed from his body, his internal energy had improved, he was in prime shape and he no longer had the haggard and distressed look of old.

It was now the anniversary of his parting with Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo said, “Brother Eagle, I want to visit the Passionless Valley; I’m going to have to leave you for a while.” He then picked up his wooden sword and made his way out of the valley. The Divine Eagle followed. When they reached the fork in the road, Yang Guo bowed to the Divine Eagle and made his way on the road to the north. But to his surprise, the Divine Eagle tugged at his clothes and pulled him towards the south.

Yang Guo said, “Brother Eagle, I have something to do in the north, let us part now.” But the eagle kept on pulling him south. Yang Guo was curious, “Brother Eagle has been very understanding; why is he being so stubborn now?” He could not get through to it with words and could only follow the Divine Eagle south. When the Divine Eagle saw that Yang Guo was following, it let go of Yang Guo’s clothes: but as soon as Yang Guo turned around and tried to go north, it got hold of his clothes once again.

Yang Guo thought, “Brother Eagle is a divine creature, it must have a reason for wanting me to go to the south with him, I might as well go.” He dropped his thoughts of returning to Passionless Valley and followed the eagle to the southeast.

After traveling over ten li, Yang Guo suddenly had a thought, “Could it be that Brother Eagle is leading me to the South Sea to allow me to see Long’er?” As soon as this thought finished, he was filled with excitement and started to take greater strides as he followed the Divine Eagle. Within a month, they had reached the coast of the South Sea.

He stood on a rock and gazed into the sea. He watched the waves of the sea as all manners of emotions filled his mind. After a while, he heard the thunderous sounds of the tides that went on without stop. After spending part of his childhood on the Peach Blossom Island, he knew that the tides of the sea always kept its cycle; it would come at the first and seventh hour of the day. The sun was in the sky and it appeared that it was the time for the turn of the tide. The tide was getting louder and louder, sounding like the hoofs of ten thousand horses. The tide made a white line as it surged towards the coast; the force shown by the tide was greater than the hue and cries of thunder and lightning. Yang Guo could not believe that there existed such a force and after seeing this display, he couldn’t stop his face from changing expression.

In the blink of an eye, the waves had reached him and were about to engulf him. Yang Guo leaped backwards, but suddenly he felt a great force pushing him from behind. It

was the Divine Eagle using its wings to hit him. He was in midair and had no control over where he was going. With a splash he landed in the foamy waves. He felt a salty taste in his mouth as he swallowed two mouthfuls of seawater.

It was an extremely dangerous situation but luckily for him, he had spent a long time training in the mountain torrents and he immediately used the 'Thousand Pound Plummet', steadying himself on the rocks below the sea's surface. The bottom of the sea was a lot calmer than the turbulent waves on top. He gathered his thoughts and immediately knew what was happening, "Brother Eagle has led me here because he wants me to train my sword arts in the waves of the sea." He lifted his legs and leapt up to the surface of the sea and into the fierce winds, meeting the first of the waves head on. He pushed against the water with his left arm and leapt above the waves before quickly drawing a deep breath and returning to the bottom of the sea.

He repeated this until the tide calmed; by then he was so exhausted that his face had turned white. When the tide came again that night, he took the wooden sword with him and leapt into the waves to again train his sword skills. However, unlike the mountain torrents where all he had to contend with was the force of the water heading in one direction, the forces of the waves came from everywhere; whenever he could not take it any longer, he would dive down to the sea bed to avoid the waves.

From then on, he trained twice a day and within a month, he felt his internal energy had made great improvements. When he used the wooden sword on dry land, he was able to produce a faint sound that sounded like sound of the tide. Whenever the Divine Eagle sparred with him, it started to avoid the sword and did not dare to meet it with its wings.

One day, Yang Guo was getting deeply engrossed in the sparring sessions and slashed the wooden sword with all his might. The Divine Eagle called out and leapt to the side. Yang Guo could not withdraw the force of his sword in time and it struck a tree. The wooden sword broke but the tree was cut in two.

Yang Guo held the broken sword's handle and thought, "This wooden sword is light and fragile, but it was still able to cut a tree; this is because of the internal energy in my hand. If in the future the tree breaks and the sword does not then I won't be too far off the divine skill of Senior Dugu."

Spring went and autumn came, the months flowed by. He trained his sword arts in the sea's waves night and day, whatever the weather. The sound produced by the wooden sword was getting louder and louder to the point where it was able to produce great

volume of noise. After a few months, the sound from the wooden sword got quieter and quieter until no more noise came from it. Another few months passed and the sword produced sound again. This process of going from soft to loud and loud to soft repeated itself seven times. Eventually, he was able to produce whatever sound he desired, loud or soft. By the time he reached this stage, he counted on his fingers and realized he had been by the sea for six years.

By this time, when Yang Guo trained in the sea's waves with the wooden sword in his hand, the wind generated by his sword could repel the waves and the Divine Eagle, with its frightening strength, could last not more than three stances of the wooden sword. At this point, he realized what the Sword Demon Dugu Qiubai must have felt all those years ago, "With a sword art such as this, who, on this earth, can stand up to it? No wonder Senior Dugu felt lonely and buried his sword away in the deep valley." He then thought, "If Brother Eagle hadn't witnessed how Senior Dugu trained his sword skills, how would I have been able to obtain such a divine skill? I call him Brother Eagle but in reality he is my kind master. When it comes to age, I don't know how old he is, I'm afraid that I could even call it Grandfather Eagle or Grandmaster Eagle."

During his training by the sea, Yang Guo would often ask the passengers on passing boats about a 'Divine Nun of the South Sea' [Nan Hai Shen Ni]. He has asked thousands of sailors and passengers but there was nothing. He knew that seeing Xiao Longnu before the sixteen years was up was going to be a near impossible task.

One dark, windy and rainy day, something stirred in Yang Guo's heart, he placed the wooden sword at his waist and covered himself with his tattered gown. The man and eagle made their way west and from then on, made their way back into Central Plains and roamed the southern region [Jiangnan].



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