

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

SDXL Chapter 24



Chapter 24 – Turbulent Emotions

Translated by Noodles



Yang Guo sat on the floor without any strength to retaliate, he was just holding his arm up across his chest to protect himself but there was no sign of pleading for mercy in his eyes. Guo Fu bit down on her teeth and increasing the strength in her hand, she chopped down with her sword.

Though Yang Guo saw that the Indian monk had a glint in his eye, his lips seemed to have a sorrowful expression and from that, he knew that it would be extremely difficult to cleanse his body of the poison. By now, the monk had finished his examination and so, Yang Guo smiled at him and said, "Reverend, please be honest."

The Indian monk said, “The suffering from the Passion Flower is different to that of other poisons. The poison becomes one with sentiment and thus suffering goes straight to the heart. From what I can tell, the roots of love are deep in you; separating the poison from it will be very difficult. Even if we manage to get the other half of the antidote, you may not fully recover. But if you can sever your roots then there will be no need for any antidote at all. Going to the Passionless Valley is something that we feel must be done, whether you can recover will depend on you only.”

Yang Guo thought, “You want me to stop loving Gu Gu? What’s the point of living then? You might as well just leave me be and let me die.” His mouth gratefully replied, “Thank you for the advice Reverend.” He had wanted to tell Wu Santong and the others not to go to Passionless Valley but he knew that these people value the code of brotherhood strongly and would not listen to him. Talking to them would just be a waste of his efforts.

Wu Santong smiled, “Brother Yang, take care and rest peacefully. We’ll leave first thing in the morning and come back as soon as possible. When you’ve recovered, we’ll have a drink at your and Miss Guo’s wedding.”

This took Yang Guo aback, but he knew that this matter was complicated and he would not be able to clear it up in a short period of time, so he just agreed. After seeing the door close behind the three as they left, Yang Guo closed his eyes once again and rested.

Again, he slept for hours. By the time he woke up, dawn had broken and the sounds of birds chirping could be heard. Yang Guo had not eaten for days and by now was starving; he saw four dishes by the side of the bed and took a few slices of the cakes that were there. After eating two slices, the door suddenly made a noise and after a creak opened lightly.

The red candle that was by the bedside was now about an inch long and was still alight. Yang Guo could see that the person who had entered was wearing a pale red gown and had an angry expression on their face; it was Guo Fu.

Yang Guo froze before saying, “Miss Guo, it’s early.”

Guo Fu replied with a ‘humph’. Without saying a word, she sat down on a chair in front of the bed with her eyebrows raised, and her angry eyes stared at Yang Guo. A long time passed and still, she did not make a sound.

Yang Guo was made uncomfortable by this stare and smiled, “Has Uncle Guo told you to come here to tell me something?”

She replied, “No!”

After being spoken to twice like this, the Yang Guo of a few days back would have just turned his back and ignored her. He saw that there was something bothering her but he couldn't tell why she was here so early in the morning so he asked again, “Is Auntie Guo okay after giving birth?”

Guo Fu's face seemed to become even more frosty and she replied coldly, “My mother's health is none of your concern.”

Apart from Xiao Longnu, Yang Guo would never back down from anyone, after being treated like this, Yang Guo could no longer suppress his pride and thought, “So what if your father is Hero Guo and your mother is Chief Huang?” He replied with a snort of his own.

Guo Fu said, “What are you snorting at?”

Yang Guo ignored her and snorted again.

Guo Fu said loudly, “I said what are you snorting at?”

Yang Guo was amused by this and thought, “Looks like in the end, the little girl can't keep her composure, I just snorted twice and she's already agitated.” He said, “I'm feeling unwell, snorting like this makes my body feel a bit better.”

Guo Fu said angrily, “Always making things up, what a liar, you really are a despicable person.”

After being insulted by her, Yang Guo suddenly thought of something, “Could it be that she knows about the things I'd said to the Wu brothers to stop them fighting?” Though he saw that she was angry, her beauty made him pity her. He was born with a flirtatious nature and he couldn't stop himself from smiling, “Miss Guo, are you offended by what I said to the Wu brothers?”

Guo Fu lowered her voice and said, “What did you say to them? Tell me with your own mouth.”

Yang Guo smiled, “I did it for their own good; I stopped those brothers from fighting each other to the end and prevented grief for their father. Uncle Wu told you this, didn’t he?”

Guo Fu said, “As soon as Uncle Wu saw me, he began to congratulate me and started to praise you to high heaven. How...how can I let you dirty my chaste name as you please?” By now, her voice was starting to break and tears flowed down her cheeks.

Yang Guo lowered his head and didn’t say a word; he was extremely regretful as to what he said that night, he’d let his tongue move too fast when he was talking to the Wu brothers. The more he said, the more arrogant the words became; he did not consider that he had sullied Guo Fu’s name. It was his words that had caused this trouble; it would not be easy for him to repair it.

When Guo Fu saw that he had lowered his head and stayed silent, she was even angrier and cried out, “Uncle Wu said that big and little brother Wu couldn’t beat you and so were forced by you to never see me again, is that true?”

Yang Guo sighed to himself thinking, “Wu Santong doesn’t know when to keep his mouth shut, why did he have to tell her all this?” He could deny no longer and could only nod his head, saying, “I know I shouldn’t have said all those lies but there was no ill intent behind my words; please forgive me.”

Guo Fu wiped away her tears and said with anger, “Uncle Wu said that once you’ve recovered from your illness, he wants to...wants to drink at our wedding, why did you agree?”

Yang Guo thought, “Oh no! So he also told her about what I said last night as well.” He could only argue, “I was still feeling a bit woozy then, I did not hear Uncle Wu’s words properly.”

Guo Fu could tell he was lying and said loudly, “You said that my mother taught you martial arts in secret and had picked you out to be her son-in-law, is this true?”

Yang Guo blushed at her questions and was feeling embarrassed, he thought, “Joking with Miss Guo will just lead to her insulting me a bit more. I’m not a gentleman so it doesn’t really matter much, but lying about Auntie Guo teaching me martial arts is a completely different matter altogether. I can’t let Auntie Guo know about this.” He said quickly, “Miss Guo, this again was due to me speaking without thinking. I implore you, ignore it and don’t let your parents know about the matter.”

Guo Fu laughed coldly, “Since you are afraid of my father, why do you still make up lies to insult my mother?”

Yang Guo quickly said, “I had no intention of insulting Auntie Guo; at that time all I was concerned about was making the Wu brothers forget about you, I was speaking without thinking...”

Guo Fu grew up with the two brothers and had feelings for both of them; when she found out that Yang Guo had lied to the Wu brothers to get them to forget about her and never see her again, how could she control her anger? She asked loudly, “I’ll sort this out later. Where’s my sister? Where did you take her?”

Yang Guo said, “Oh yes, please get Uncle Guo, that’s what I wanted to speak to him about.”

Guo Fu said, “My father has left the city to look for my sister. You... you despicable person, you actually wanted to exchange my sister for your antidote. So it’s like that is it, your life is worth something unlike my sister’s.”

Yang Guo had been ashamed of himself concerning this matter, but now on hearing her bring up the matter about the baby, he felt he had nothing to be ashamed of and said clearly, “My mission was to rescue your sister and bring her back to your parents. No thoughts of exchanging her for my antidote entered the mind of Yang Guo.”

Guo Fu said, “So where’s my sister then? Where is she?”

Yang Guo said, “Li Mochou has her and I’m ashamed of myself for not being able to rescue her. As soon as my strength returns and if I’m still alive, I will immediately go search for her.”

Guo Fu laughed coldly, “Li Mochou is your Martial Uncle isn’t she? You two had been hiding together in a cave, hadn’t you?”

Yang Guo said “That’s right, she is my Martial Uncle but my Master and she have never gotten along with each other.”

Guo Fu said, “Never gotten along with each other? So why did she listen to your request and take my sister away to exchange for the antidote?”

Yang Guo sat up and said angrily, “Miss Guo, watch your reckless words, I Yang Guo may not be a person of great worth but how would I even contemplate such thoughts?”

Guo Fu said, “Well said, this ‘contemplate such thoughts’! This came from your own Master, could it be a lie?”

Yang Guo said, “What did my Master say?”

Guo Fu stood up and pointed her finger at Yang Guo’s nose before saying with anger on her face, “Your Master told Uncle Zhu that you and Li Mochou were in that cave in that valley, she asked Uncle Zhu to take the red horse to you so you can race to the Passionless Valley with my sister...”

Yang Guo interrupted, “Yes, my Master did have this thought; she wanted me to take your sister there and get the antidote first then doing something about the matter afterwards. But this was just one of the ideas that came up, and none would result in harm to your sister...”

Guo Fu butted in, “Within a day of being born, you handed her over to a cold blooded murderer, and yet you talk about not harming my sister. You scoundrel! When you were younger and all alone as an orphan, how did my parents treat you? If they hadn’t taken you to Peach Blossom Island and taken care of you, where would you be now? Who knew that you’d repay kindness with vengeance; you conspired with the Mongols and while my parents were unwell, you took the opportunity to steal my sister away...” Her insults were becoming more and more vicious, how could Yang Guo argue back? His body was weak after being poisoned again and as his breathing became agitated; he fainted and fell back onto the bed with a thud.

After a long while, Yang Guo came around. Guo Fu stared at him coldly and said, “I never would have guessed you still knew what shame was. You knew that this was your intention; you can’t face living with yourself can you?” Her expression was icy and cold, her words were as sharp as a blade.

Yang Guo let out a long sigh and said, “If I really had this thought then why didn’t I take your sister to Passionless Valley?”

Guo Fu said, “It would be difficult for you to travel in your condition so you asked your Martial Uncle for help. Luckily, it seemed fate had other ideas; I overheard your Master’s and Uncle Zhu’s conversation and I immediately hid the red horse away. Let’s see how you and your Master’s evil plan will work now...”

Yang Guo said, “Fine, say whatever you want, there’s no point in me arguing. Where’s my Master? Where is she?”

Guo Fu’s face became a little red and said, “Like Master like pupil, your Master is not a nice person as well.”

Yang Guo was furious and sat up, saying, “You can shout and insult me all you like, I’ll let it go in respect for your parents. How dare you insult my Master?”

Guo Fu said, “Bah! What about your Master? Who told her to say those words?”

Yang Guo thought, “Gu Gu is an innocent person and does not show the emotions of the human world; how could she provoke her with words?” He scoffed and said, “It’s probably your warped little mind twisting the words of my Master.”

Guo Fu had not wanted to reveal what Xiao Longnu had said to her but after being aggravated by him, she could not control her anger and said, “She said, ‘Miss Guo, Guo’er is a person with a pure and good heart, he has suffered and been lonely all his life, and she must take care of him.’ She then said, ‘You two are... are a match made in heaven! Tell him to forget me, I will not be offended.’ She then gave me a sword and said it was called the Lady Sword; it’s a match with... with your Gentleman Sword. If this isn’t rubbish then what is?” She was angry and embarrassed as she said this and her voice did not carry the sincere and mournful tone that Xiao Longnu had said these words with.

Each time he listened to a sentence, Yang Guo felt as if his heart was being rammed violently, his mind was full of confusion, and he didn’t understand how Xiao Longnu could say something like this. After a while, he noticed that Guo Fu had finished and slowly raised his head. His eyes flashed as he shouted, “You liar, why would my Master say something like that? Where’s the Lady sword? If you can’t show it to me then you are a liar!”

Guo Fu gave a cold laugh and turned her wrist and removed a sword from her back that was black; it was the Lady Sword from the Passionless Valley.

Yang Guo was filled with disappointment and blurted out, “Who wants to be a match with you? This sword belongs to my Master, you stole it from her. You stole it from her!”

Guo Fu had always been a proud girl. Her parents gave her a little leeway and the Wu brothers let her have her way no matter what, how could she take these harsh words?

She only decided to pass on Xiao Longnu's words because Yang Guo had provoked her and left her with no choice. Who knew that he would come up with such a reply? And now the words said seemed to suggest that it was she that made this whole thing up and it was she who wanted to marry him while he plainly refused. With such anger, her hand held the sword and was about to chop down with it but a thought came into her mind, "Since he respects his Master so much, let me tell him something that will drive him mad."

She was filled with anger and she did not even give a thought about the possible terrible consequences that would result from her words. A swooshing sound was heard as she sheathed the half exposed Lady Sword and sat down on a chair, laughing as she did so. She said, "Your Master is beautiful and her martial arts are strong, she is indeed a rare breed but there's just one thing that's not proper about her."

Yang Guo said, "What?"

Guo Fu replied, "It's just a pity that she does not act in a respectable manner and has been sneaking around to meet up with those Quanzhen Taoists."

Yang Guo angrily replied, "My Master has a feud with the Quanzhen sect, why would she be meeting up with them in secret."

Guo Fu gave a cold laugh and said, "When I said that she was 'sneaking around to meet them', I said the polite version. There are some things that would be inappropriate for a girl to say."

Yang Guo was becoming more and more furious as he listened, he shouted loudly, "My Master is pure and chaste; if you say another lie I'll tear your mouth off."

Guo Fu had an icy look in her eyes as she said coldly, "That's right, she was able to do it but I'm unable to say it. What a nice pure and chaste girl, going around being intimate with a rotten Taoist."

Yang Guo's face became green and he shouted, "What did you say?"

Guo Fu said, "I heard it with my own ears, don't tell me I'm wrong. Two Quanzhen Taoists came to pay their respects to my father but they turned up just when the city was in a mess, my parents were unwell and couldn't see them so I had to take care of the guests..."

Yang Guo shouted angrily, “Then what?”

Guo Fu saw that he was furious, his eyes were red and his forehead was tensed up, her plan was working and she continued, “One of the Taoists was called Zhao Zhijing, the other called Yin Zhiping, heard of them?”

Yang Guo said, “Then?”

Guo Fu gave a dry laugh and said, “I instructed my servants to prepare quarters for them and didn’t take notice of them. But in the middle of the night, a Beggar Clan member came to tell me that those two Taoists had drawn swords and were fighting each other in their room...”

Yang Guo snorted as he knew that the two have always been at arms with each other, fighting each other in their room wasn’t anything out of the ordinary.”

Guo Fu continued, “I was curious so I quietly went to their window and looked in. By then, the two had sheathed their swords but they were still arguing. The one named Zhao said that the one named Yin and your Master did this and that and the one named Yin did not deny it, he was just angry with him for being so loud...”

Yang Guo suddenly flung his blanket off and sat up on the bed, he shouted, “What this and that?”

Guo Fu’s face blushed; she looked a little embarrassed and said, “How would I know? Don’t tell me its something good. Your precious Master knows what she’s done.” She said this with a derisive tone.

Yang Guo was angry and agitated, his emotions were in turmoil and he swung his hand out and slapped Guo Fu on the face. In a blaze of fury, his slap came out with great force and knocked Guo Fu into a daze, her face was red and swollen, if it weren’t for the fact that Yang Guo was still not at full strength, this slap would have knocked her teeth out.

When has Guo Fu ever suffered such an insult? In anger, she unsheathed the Lady Sword from her waist, and went for Yang Guo’s neck.

After slapping Guo Fu, he thought, “I’ve insulted Uncle and Auntie Guo’s precious daughter. This girl is the princess of this city, even if Uncle and Auntie forgive me, how can I stay?”

He stretched out his leg to put on his shoes and saw Guo Fu's sword coming towards him, he gave a cold laugh and pulled his left arm inwards and shot out his right hand, then with some light movements, he snatched the Lady Sword away.

Failing with two strokes in succession, Guo Fu's anger rose further. She saw that there was a sword by the head of the bed and grabbed it. Unsheathing the sword, she chopped at Yang Guo's head. Yang Guo saw a glimmer of light coming towards him and raised the Lady Sword across him to block the attack but after being unconscious for seven days, he had no strength to back up his movements. After raising the Lady Sword up to his chest, his arms felt limp and weak and he could raise it no further. Guo Fu's sword came in across and after a light clanging sound as the two swords collided, the Lady Sword fell out of his hand.

Guo Fu was furious about the slap that she had received, she thought, "You've bought harm to my sister you despicable person, I'll take your life today to avenge my sister. My parents will not blame me for this." She saw him sitting on the floor without any strength to retaliate, he was just holding his arm up across his chest to protect himself but there was no sign of pleading for mercy in his eyes. Guo Fu clenched her teeth and increasing the strength in her hand, she chopped down with her sword.

Previously:

That day when Xiao Longnu was looking for Yang Guo and Jinlun Fawang on the red horse, she had headed in the wrong direction. The horse galloped over ten li in one go and by the time she reined in the horse to go back, she had lost them completely. She was very anxious since the more time that passed, the more at risk Yang Guo's life would be. She rode around within thirty to forty li of Xiangyang searching for him.

The red horse was fast but the valley was well hidden and it was not until after midnight that she heard the cries of Wu Santong. Heading in the direction of the cries, she soon came across the sounds of the clashing blades of the Wu brothers and then the sound of Yang Guo's voice. She was delighted that she had found him but was afraid that he had come across some strong foes so she decided to hide and help him in secret. She tied the red horse to a tree and quietly moved behind the rocky outcrop and watched Yang Guo face his foes.

There was no need for her to be anxious after she took a look but what she heard shocked her: Yang Guo was declaring that he and Guo Fu had been engaged long ago and calling her his fiancée. He was referring to Guo Jing and Huang Rong as his in-laws; she heard how Guo Jing and Huang Rong had picked him to be their son-in-law

and secretly transmitted martial arts to him. She also saw how he lost his temper at the Wu brothers, saying they were not allowed to see Guo Fu. Every word of his struck out at her heart like lightning; she was confused and felt that her whole universe had changed within the blink of an eye. If it was anyone else who saw Yang Guo's actions changed suddenly like this, they would become suspicious and would ask him to explain everything afterwards. But Xiao Longnu's mind was as clear as a crystal, untouched by earthly dust; she did not know the lies and tricks of humankind. Yang Guo's tongue was silky smooth and talked rubbish to others; but to Xiao Longnu, he had never told a single lie and because of this that Xiao Longnu had never doubted his words. As she saw the Wu brothers losing, she pitied herself and let out a sigh. When Yang Guo heard the sigh and called out 'GuGu', she did not reply and hid further away. Yang Guo thought that it was Li Mochou who sighed and it was he who was mistaken so he did not give it much thought.

Leading the red horse, Xiao Longnu walked around without aim trying to think but she did not know what to do. She was now over twenty years of age but she had spent her whole life in the tomb. She did not know a thing about the world; her relative experience was akin to that of a newborn baby. She thought, "Since Guo'er is going to marry Miss Guo; that means he won't be able to marry me. It's no wonder the Guo couple would not allow Guo'er and me to get married. Guo'er has kept this from me because he didn't want me to be sad, ah, he's still thinking of me." Her thoughts continued, "He failed to kill Hero Guo on many occasions to avenge his father and it was all because of Miss Guo. It appears that his love for Miss Guo runs very deep as well. If I go to give him the red horse now, he may begin to think about my good points again. This might disrupt their wedding in the future. It's better for me to return to the ancient tomb alone, this outside world is making me mad."

She pondered for a while and made her decision, even though her heart was in great pain, she was still thinking about saving Yang Guo. So she rode the red horse through the night back to Xiangyang and handed the horse over to Zhu Ziliu so he could deliver the red horse to Yang Guo in the valley.

At this time, though the attackers of Xiangyang had left long ago, Guo Jing and Huang Rong had yet to recover and the city was in chaos. The able Zhu Ziliu along with Lu Youjiao worked together on the important task of looking after the security of the city. Right in the middle of all this, Xiao Longnu walked up to him with red horse and asked him to take it to Yang Guo, saying that she wants Yang Guo to get to the Passionless Valley as soon as possible. She said to use the baby daughter of Guo Jing in exchange for the antidote; leaving Zhu Ziliu confused. He tried to ask her to explain but Xiao

Longnu's mind was in turmoil and she did not want to speak much. She just said to get there as fast as possible; any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk.

She ignored Guo Fu who was standing next to Zhu Ziliu and thought, "Your sister will be fine for a few days in the Passionless Valley, this is about the life of your fiancée, you yourself will naturally do all you can." As soon as she thought of Yang Guo, her heart filled with pain, before she could explain herself clearly tears rolled from her eyes. She ran to her room; lying on her bed, she sobbed despondently.

Zhu Ziliu did not know about anything related to this matter so how would he know what Xiao Longnu was talking about? But the words 'to get there as fast as possible, any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk' was startling. All he could do was to go to the valley and then act accordingly. By the time he was ready to make his way to the valley, the red horse was nowhere to be seen. When he asked one of the soldiers, he said that Miss Guo had taken it away. Zhu Ziliu wanted to find her but she had hidden away. Zhu Ziliu sighed to himself and thought that all these young girls are unfathomable, without saying anything or explaining themselves, they just do what they want without thinking.

He was worried about the safety of Yang Guo so he found another fast horse and took a few Beggar Clan members with him. Following Xiao Longnu's directions they found the valley only to see Yang Guo and the Wu brothers lying on the ground with Wu Santong sitting on the ground meditating. The three lying on the ground were breathing shallowly, the words 'to get there as fast as possible, any delay may put Yang Guo's life at risk' were indeed true. He immediately took Yang Guo back to Xiangyang and his recently arrived Martial Uncle Indian Monk immediately tended to Yang Guo.

After crying on her bed for a while, Xiao Longnu was getting more and more depressed as she pondered her situation. She wasn't able to stop her tears. This crying left her sleeves completely soaked. She went to take a handkerchief from her waist to wipe away her tears when her fingertips touched the Lady Sword. She thought, "It'll be worthwhile to go and give this sword to Miss Guo so they'll have a matching pair of swords."

She was deeply in love with Yang Guo, so no matter what it was, as long as something will benefit Yang Guo, she will go and do it without any qualms. She got off the bed and without wiping away the traces of her tears and went to see Guo Fu.

It was deep into the night now; Guo Fu was of course in bed. Xiao Longnu did not wait for any servants to call her, opening the window, she leapt into the room and woke Guo

Fu up. She then said “You two are a match made in heaven!” etc, the words that Guo Fu passed onto Yang Guo. She handed the Lady Sword to Guo Fu and went to leave the room.

Guo Fu did not know what she was talking about and said, “What are you saying? I didn’t understand a thing.”

Xiao Longnu did not reply and leaped out of the window. Guo Fu stuck her head out of the window and called out, “Please come back Miss Long.” However, Xiao Longnu did not turn back.

With her head lowered, Xiao Longnu made her way to the garden. A rose bush’s fragrance floated about and it reminded her of the time on Mount Zhongnan when she and Yang Guo were practicing the Jade Maiden’s Manual between the flower thickets. She wanted to go back to way things were when they were living together as Master and disciple yet there was no way it could happen.

In her daze, a voice came from the room to her left saying, “It’s always Xiao Longnu this, Xiao Longnu that, can you stop saying that name for just one day?”

Xiao Longnu was shocked, “Who’s always talking about me?” She stopped her footsteps and listened. Another person let out a dry laugh before saying, “So you can do it but I can’t say it?”

The first person replied, “We are in someone else’s home; with all these ears and eyes about, what would happen to the name of the Quanzhen sect if someone overhears?”

The other person laughed and said, “Oh, so you still remember about Quanzhen’s name? That night by the rose bushes on Mount Zhongnan, that wonderful feeling... ha-ha.” As he got to this point, he just continued laughing and did not say anything else.

Xiao Longnu was even more shocked when she heard this, her suspicions were roused and she thought, “Could it be that when Guo’er and I were unclothed, we were seen by those two Taoists?” From the sounds of the voices, she could tell it was Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping so she moved quietly to the window and lowered her body as she listened. By now, the two’s voices had become quieter but Xiao Longnu was quite close to them and could still hear everything clearly.

A frustrated Yin Zhiping said, “Martial Brother Zhao, you torture me day and night, what exactly do you want?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “You know what I want.”

Yin Zhiping said, “What do you want me to do? I’ve already agreed, all I wanted was for you stop going on about this yet you are getting worse. Do you want me to die in front of you?”

Zhao Zhijing gave a cold laugh and said, “I don’t know, I just can’t help myself, I’ve got to say it.”

Yin Zhiping suddenly raised his voice a little and said, “You really think I don’t know? You’re just envious of me, envious of brief moment of bliss.” These two sentences were very strange. Zhao Zhijing did not reply, he seemed to want to laugh but could not.

After a long while, Yin Zhiping mumbled, “Yes, that night within the rose bushes, her accupoints were sealed by the Western Poison Ouyang Feng, she wasn’t able to move and I was able to fulfill my dream. I’m not going to deny it. If I didn’t tell you, you wouldn’t know about it, right? After I told you, you torment me non stop... yet, yet I do not regret it, no, not one single bit...” By now, his voice had become soft; it was as if he was talking in his dreams.

As Xiao Longnu heard this, her heart dropped and her mind seemed to run amok with noise. “Could it be that it was him, it wasn’t my beloved Guo’er? No, it wasn’t him, it can’t be him, he’s lying, and it must be Guo’er.”

She heard Zhao Zhijing continue in a cold tone, “Yes, of course you wouldn’t regret your actions. You didn’t have to tell me about this but you couldn’t keep your joy to yourself, you had to tell someone. When I started to remind you day and night about it, why did you become afraid to hear what I had to say?” Suddenly, a thudding noise on the wall was heard; it was Yin Zhiping banging his head against the wall. He said, “Fine say it, tell everyone, tell everyone in the world, I don’t care... no, no, apprentice brother Zhao, I’ll agree to whatever you want, just stop bringing this up.”

In the space of a night, Xiao Longnu had heard two heart shattering pieces of news; she stood outside the window in a dazed state, although she heard what they were saying, she was for the time being, unable to grasp the meaning behind their words.

Zhao Zhijing chuckled a few times and said, “As practicing Taoists, we need to keep a clear mind, a slip in our thoughts will lead to evil. The reason I keep on mentioning Xiao Longnu is so that you will soon begin to hate and detest that name. I’m just helping you to adhere to the Taoist teachings.”

Yin Zhiping said quietly, “She’s a celestial being, how can I hate and detest her?” Suddenly he raised his voice and said, “Don’t try to paint a pretty picture of what you are doing; do you think I’m blind to your ill intentions? One, you are jealous of me and two, you hate Yang Guo, you want to reveal this to everyone so that the two of them will have to live with this for the rest of their lives.”

When Xiao Longnu heard the name ‘Yang Guo’, her heart skipped a beat. Quietly she repeated, “Yang Guo, Yang Guo.” As she said these words, she was filled with a tender feeling and hoped that the two would keep on talking about Yang Guo. As long as someone mentions his name, she would be happy.

She listened on and now heard it was Zhao Zhijing’s turn to raise his voice. He said with hate, “I won’t rest until I teach that bastard a good lesson, humph, it’s just that...”

Yin Zhiping said, “It’s just that his martial arts are too high, neither you nor I are a match for him, right?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “That’s not definite, what’s so special about his evil sect’s unorthodox martial arts? Once he’s in my hands... ha-ha! Our Quanzhen sect’s martial arts are the orthodox way, why should we be afraid of that scum? Apprentice brother Yin, just you watch, I’m not going to let him die easily. I’ll break an arm here or a leg there; I’ll make him wish that he was dead. How wonderful it would be if that Xiao Longnu were there to watch him suffer.”

Xiao Longnu trembled as she heard this; if it was at any other place and time, she would have flown through the window and killed the two with one strike long ago. But now, her despair had completely overwhelmed her; her body felt as if it was no longer under her own control.

She heard Yin Zhiping laugh coldly, “You can believe what you want. Our sect’s orthodox arts may not be able to compete with their so called unorthodox martial arts.”

Zhao Zhijing shouted, “You dog, you Quanzhen traitor! You even praise that Xiao Longnu’s martial arts to high heaven!”

Yin Zhiping has been under this torrent of abuse long enough and could take it no longer, he shouted, “Why are you insulting me? You must know when you are pushing your limits!”

Zhao Zhijing knew that his opponent could do nothing to him. If this matter were leaked back amongst the sect, the previous sect leader Uncle Ma and the current leader Uncle Qiu will surely sentence him to death. That was why he had been handing out insults to him day and night. Yin Zhiping indeed did not retaliate. Now, he could tell that Yin was actually showing signs of rebelling. If he didn't make sure that he was in complete control, it would be difficult for his great plan to succeed, so he took a step forward and sent out a palm.

Yin Zhiping had not thought that he would actually resort to violence; he lowered his head quickly but the palm struck him heavily on the back of his neck, almost sending him to the floor. Enraged, he unsheathed his sword and thrust it forward. Zhao Zhijing moved his body out of the way and laughed, "Oh, so you've actually got the gall to raise your sword against me." He unsheathed his own sword and replied with a stroke of his own.

Yin Zhiping lowered his voice and said, "I'm going to die sooner or later under this constant torment of yours anyway, I might as well get it over with and let you kill me today." He hurried his sword strokes and pressed his opponent. He was Qiu Chuji's strongest student, so he and Zhao Zhijing's martial arts both had their strong points. They both learned the same stances so once a fight started between the two, it would be difficult to tell who was going to be the winner. But Yin Zhiping had made up his mind. All he wanted was to take his opponent down with him while Zhao Zhijing had something else planned and wasn't going to take his life. Twenty or thirty stances later, Zhao Zhijing had been forced into one of the corners of the room and was losing.

The two's struggle had been reported by a Beggar Clan member to Guo Fu. Guo Fu dressed hurriedly and rushed to the scene to see Xiao Longnu standing outside. She called out, "Miss Long!"

Xiao Longnu's mind was somewhere else and she did not hear her.

Guo Fu was curious and so decided not to enter immediately. She too stood outside the window only to hear Zhao Zhijing coming out with derisive comments between his swords strokes. Every single comment related to Xiao Longnu.

When Guo Fu heard their words becoming more and more inappropriate: she decided to move away from the window. When she turned her head to move away, she caught a glimpse of a disorientated Xiao Longnu. It appeared that she did not take offence at what the two were saying; Guo Fu became extremely curious and quietly asked, "Is what they're saying true?"

Xiao Longnu nodded her head and said, “I don’t know, maybe... maybe its true.”

Feelings of condescension towards Xiao Longnu gathered inside Guo Fu and she left with a snort and did not turn back.

During the fight, Yin and Zhao both heard someone talking outside their room; after a clashing of weapons, the two separated and leapt back and both asked at the same time, “Who’s there?”

Xiao Longnu said slowly, “Me.”

Yin Zhiping trembled all over and asked with a shaking voice, “Who’s me?”

Xiao Longnu replied, “Xiao Longnu!”

Once those three words came out, not only did Yin Zhiping freeze, Zhao Zhijing did so as well. That day at the Heroes’ Feast of Da Xingguan, just one stance of hers allowed her to place a palm on his chest; the resulting injury was serious and it took him days to completely recover. There was no way he could defend himself against her. He could never have guessed that Xiao Longnu would be in Xiangyang as well; all the insults that he had just said were most likely heard by her. He was scared witless and was thinking, “How am I going to get out alive?”

Yin Zhiping was shocked as well but he was not thinking about how to escape, instead, he stretched out his hand and pushed open the window. Beside the flower bushes stood a silent, somber girl in white; it was the person who had filled his thoughts during the day and his dreams at night, the most enchanting girl in the world, Xiao Longnu!

Yin Zhiping replied in disbelief, “It’s you?”

Xiao Longnu replied, “Yes, it’s me. What you two said just now, is it true?”

Yin Zhiping nodded his head, “Yes! Just kill me!” He turned his sword towards her and handed it to her through the window.

Xiao Longnu’s eyes lit up, her sorrow had reached its peak, her anger had met its limit, she felt that even if she killed a thousand people, or even ten thousand, she would no longer be the pure and chaste girl she once was. She could no longer love Yang Guo as deeply as she did before. When she saw the sword through the window, she did not

take it and just looked at the two of them with uncertainty. She really could not decide on what to do.

Zhao Zhijing saw his chance had come, the girl seemed lost in her mind right now, if he doesn't take this chance to escape, when could he? He grabbed Yin Zhiping's arm and said with a snicker, "Let's go, let's go now, it looks like she can't bear to kill you!" He pulled hard and staggered out of the door. Yin Zhiping's mind was completely elsewhere, his body put up no resistance and he followed. Zhao Zhijing utilized his lightness kung fu and ran. Yin Zhiping had allowed himself to be pulled by him but after a few li, he himself started to use his own lightness kung fu. Both of them had begun practicing martial arts before Guo Jing had started. As soon as they put effort into it, they soon arrived at the gates in the eastern part of the city.

There were a few Beggar Clan members patrolling the area by the gates. The leader of the group recognized the two and knew they were eminent members of the Quanzhen sect. When it came to status, they were Guo Jing's peers. When he heard Zhao Zhijing say that they had to leave the city due to urgent business, he immediately allowed the gates to be opened. The gates were opened just wide enough for one person to exit and the two of them rushed out of the city at once. The Beggar Clan member praised, "Excellent lightness kung fu!" Just as he was about to close the gates, a white blur passed his eyes, it seemed that someone else had left the city. In shock, he said, "What?" The person was long gone. As he went to take a look from the gates, the dawn was just breaking, he could only see within sixty or seventy feet, so how could he see who was there? He turned around to ask the others but no one saw anything. He narrowed his eyes and cursed, "Must have been a ghost!" He had been working tirelessly the past few days; it must have been his eyes playing tricks on him.

Yin and Zhao did not dare stop and only after running a few li from the city did they slow their steps. Zhao Zhijing used his sleeve to wipe the sweat from his forehead and called out, "Damn, that was close!" He turned around and looked back. His knees went limp and he nearly fell to the ground. What he saw, about a hundred feet behind them, was a girl in white, looking at them fixated. If it wasn't Xiao Longnu, who else could it be?

Zhao Zhijing was frightened at what he saw, he let out a 'no'. He had thought that they had left her behind long ago, but who knew that she was following behind them without making a sound; he himself did not notice it. He immediately grabbed Yin Zhiping's arm and ran.

He ran over one hundred feet in one breath but when he turned his head back once again, Xiao Longnu was still in sight, following closely behind them with a gap of around thirty or forty feet between them. Zhao Zhijing did not know what to do; he just lowered his head and ran with all his might. He did not dare to keep on checking whether Xiao Longnu was there or not because each time he did, his heart would suffer a shock and his legs became weaker as a result. He said, “Apprentice brother Yin, she could kill us right here right now if she wanted to, she must be up to something.”

Yin Zhiping asked in confusion, “Up to something?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “From what I can tell, it looks like she wants to capture us and then reveal what you did in front of the world’s heroes. This will ruin the reputation of the Quanzhen sect forever.”

Yin Zhiping’s heart skipped a beat, he no longer cared about his life, if Xiao Longnu wanted to kill him, he would not retaliate. He had been in the tutelage of Qiu Chuji since he was young and he loved his teacher; he couldn’t let the reputation of the world renowned Quanzhen sect be tarnished by his hands. As he thought about this, his spine broke out in a cold sweat. He increased his efforts and ran shoulder to shoulder with Zhao Zhijing.

The two picked pathless grounds to run through. Sometimes, they would take a peek back but still, Xiao Longnu would still be there, just a few zhangs (1 zhang=3.3 meters / 10+ feet) away from them at all times. The Ancient Tomb’s lightness kung fu is unmatched in the world; following the two would not take much effort but she really did not know what she wanted to do. All she could do was to keep the two within her sight.

The two of them had already been frightened and confused when they first saw Xiao Longnu, but after seeing her follow them like a shadow, they couldn’t help themselves from conjuring up worse and worse scenarios as to what Xiao Longnu was planning for them. They became even more frightened. From dawn to noon, and from noon to the afternoon, running ten or so hours like this non-stop was something the two could not keep up even if the two had profound internal energy. They were out of breath and struggling and were now a lot slower than before. It was deep into the day and the air was hot and the two were soaked in sweat. After a while, the two were hungry and thirsty. They soon came to a brook and thought, “Even if I get captured, I can’t do anything about it.” They threw themselves down beside the brook and drank.

Xiao Longnu strolled casually to the brook and she too took a few mouthfuls of water. In the crystal clear running water of the brook was an image of a girl in white, a pic-

ture of beauty, an image of the Ling Bo Goddess. Xiao Longnu's heart felt empty and she forgot about her state of mind for the moment and plucked a flower from the brook's bank. She placed it into her hair above her ear and stared at the reflection in the water, her mind a blank.

The two men were drinking and glancing over at her at the same time. Seeing that it appeared that she was preoccupied by something else and looked as if she had completely forgotten about her intentions, the two signaled to each other with their eyes and quietly got up. They silently made their way behind Xiao Longnu and moved away slowly. After looking back a few times to see her still standing by the brook, the two quickly sped up their steps and ran. Not long after, they came to a main road.

The two of them thought that this time, they'd finally managed to escape her; but Yin Zhiping took a glance over his shoulder and saw otherwise. Xiao Longnu was still following them.

Yin Zhiping's face became grey and called out, "Alas, it's no use! Apprentice brother Zhao; just let her do what she wants!" He stopped running.

Zhao Zhijing was furious and shouted, "You deserve to die; why should I die with you?" He pulled his arm to take him with him but Yin Zhiping did not want to run anymore. Zhao Zhijing was frightened and angry at the same time; he raised his palm and struck his face.

Yin Zhiping said angrily, "Hitting me again?"

Xiao Longnu felt that it was extremely odd when she saw the two of them suddenly start to fight once again.

Right at this time, two horses came galloping towards them. The riders were Mongolian dispatchers. A thought came into Zhao Zhijing's head and he quietly said, "Snatch the horses! We'll pretend to fight but don't let Xiao Longnu know what we are going to do." He then chopped forward with a palm. Yin Zhiping raised his arm to block and sent out a palm of his own. Zhao Zhijing took a few steps back and the two gradually moved towards the centre of the road. With the road blocked, the Mongolians reigned in their horses and shouted. Yin and Zhao suddenly leapt up and pulled the Mongolians to the ground. They then mounted the horses and galloped north.

Both these horses were top class steeds and they galloped with great speed. When the two turned back to see that Xiao Longnu was no longer behind them, they finally man-

aged a sigh of relief. After traveling over thirty li (15km / 9+miles) or so, they reached a three-forked road.

Zhao Zhijing said, “She saw us head north, we’ll change directions and head east instead.” He pulled his reigns to the right and they headed along the easterly road. By nightfall, they had reached a small town.

After running all day, the two were extremely tired and hungry. They immediately found a restaurant and ordered a plate of beef and a few jin (grams) of pancakes.

Zhao Zhijing sat down and calmed himself. But fear still lingered in his heart as he recalled the day’s events. Xiao Longnu had been following them all day yet why had she yet to make a move on them? Yin Zhiping’s face was grey as ash, his head was lowered and it seemed that his mind drifted away. The beef and pancakes soon arrived but just as they were picking up the chopsticks to eat, sounds of horses neighing and people shouting arose from outside the restaurant.

Someone shouted, “Who do those horses belong to? Why are they here?” There was a Mongolian accent behind those words.

Zhao Zhijing stood up and went to the entrance. He saw a Mongolian Sergeant with a group of seven or eight soldiers pointing at the horses that Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping had ridden. The waiter at the restaurant was frightened and bowed to the Mongolian as he said, “Sir...Sir!”

Zhao Zhijing’s anger had been building up all day after being chased by Xiao Longnu, he longed for a release to his tension; when he saw the Mongolians, he immediately went up to them and shouted, “The horses belong to me! What about it?”

The Sergeant said, “Where did you get them from?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “They’re mine! What is it to you?”

By this time, all the land to the north of Xiangyang had fallen into Mongolian hands, all the Han were being oppressed by the Mongolians. Who would dare raise their voice to a Mongolian like this? The Mongolian saw that Zhao Zhijing looked a bit shifty and he had a sword at his waist, he was suspicious of him and said, “Did you buy them or steal them?”

Zhao Zhijing shouted, “What are you talking about? I reared these horses myself.”

The Sergeant signaled with his hand and ordered, "Get him!" Seven or eight armed Mongolians encircled them.

Zhao Zhijing placed his hand on his sword handle and shouted, "What's your problem?"

The Mongolian Sergeant laughed coldly and said, "Horse thief! You've really got guts, these horses belong to the Mongolian army, are you going to admit now?" He then went up to the horses and moved their tails to the side to reveal a Mongolian brand. All Mongolian horses had a brand on them to distinguish which camp they belong to. Zhao Zhijing stole these horses from some Mongolians, how would he know about this? When he saw the mark he became silent but continued to argue, "Who said they belong to the Mongolian army? I like to mark my horses, is that a crime?"

The Sergeant was furious; throughout his travels to the south he had never met such a brazen fellow. He took a step forward and reached out to grab Zhao Zhijing by his clothing. Zhao Zhijing bent his left arm and grabbed the Mongolian's wrist. Then he sent out his right palm and grabbed the Mongolian from behind before lifting him up and swinging him around his head three times before throwing him. The Sergeant was tossed away and landed in a porcelain shop. Non-stop sounds of smashing were heard as shelves of porcelain plates and bowls came crashing down. The sharp debris sliced up the Mongolian Sergeant and he was bleeding all over. He was unable to get up amongst the debris. The other soldiers went to help him; some moved the shelves and debris away while others helped him up. They no longer cared about trying to capture the horse thief.

Zhao Zhijing laughed out loud and walked back inside the restaurant to continue his meal. However, all the towns shops had closed and were boarded up as a result of the clash and all the customers that were in the restaurant had long ago cleared out. Everyone thought that with the Mongolians' malicious nature, surely they would be back to wash the town in blood. Zhao Zhijing had a few more bites of his food when the owner of the restaurant came up to him and suddenly dropped to the floor and started to bow to him. Zhao Zhijing knew that owner was afraid of the trouble that he would bring so he stood up and laughed, "Don't worry, we've eaten enough, we'll go immediately."

The owner's face became even greyer with fright and continued to bow to him.

Yin Zhiping said, "He's afraid that once we've left, the Mongolians will be back for us." He had always been a thoughtful and a strong man; it was only because of his mad love

for Xiao Longnu that led him to his actions. His method of approach to everyday problems surpassed Zhao Zhijing in everyway and it was because of this that Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the others wanted to pass on the sect's leadership to him. He suddenly had a thought and said, "Bring me the best food and wine, we'll take responsibility for what we've done, why are you afraid?" The owner picked himself up and agreed compliantly before giving out orders to bring them food and wine.

The Mongolian Sergeant was injured pretty badly and had to be carried to his horse.

Zhao Zhijing laughed, "Brother Yin, after what we've been through today, we've really got to let off some steam once we're back."

Yin Zhiping gave a grunt and looked on as the Mongolians left. After steadying their nerves, everyone in the restaurant brought food and wine to them and filled up a table.

The two of them ate for a while when suddenly Yin Zhiping got up and raised his palm, sending the waiter who was serving him to the floor. The owner was alarmed and quickly walked forward and smiled, "This idiot doesn't know what he's doing, please don't get mad sir..." Before he finished, Yin Zhiping had kicked out with his left leg and lightly kicked him to the floor.

Zhao Zhijing thought he had lost it and called, "Brother Yin... you..."

Yin Zhiping flipped a table and sent bowls and plates smashing to the floor before immediately sending another two waiters to the floor. He then sealed everyone's accupoints before bringing his hands together and said, "When the Mongolians come and see you in this state, they won't vent their anger on you, do you understand? You should add a few injuries here and there as well." He then unsealed everyone's accupoints.

They suddenly understood and thought it was a great plan. They then started to beat each other up and tear each other's clothes, eyes were blackened and noses were bruised. Not long after, the sounds of hoofs from many galloping horses could be heard on the street's pavement. Everyone in the restaurant fell to the floor and cried out, "No, please stop!" "Mercy...have mercy!" "Please sir, I beg you!"

The horses did indeed stop outside the restaurant. Four Mongolian soldiers entered and were followed by a tall skinny Tibetan monk and a short dark man. This dark man had both his legs removed and was supporting himself with crutches.

When the soldiers saw the state of the restaurant they frowned and shouted, “Hurry up and bring us some food, we’re in a rush.”

The owner was taken aback by this and thought, “So these guys are from another group. What am I going to do when those other soldiers get back?” Just as he was hesitating, some of the soldiers struck at his head with their horse whips. The owner took the blows and complied but struggled to get up. One of the other waiters served and set places for them.

The Tibetan monk was Jinlun Fawang; the short dark man was Nimoxing. That day, after both of them had fallen victim to the ‘Soul Freezing Needles’, the two of them struggled outside the cave and fell off a cliff. Luckily, the sides of the cliff had a large tree growing from it and Fawang managed to grab onto it just in time. Nimoxing was in a dazed state by now but he still clutched onto Fawang. Fawang took a look at his surroundings before he gathered his strength in his left arm and pushed; the two of them fell down towards the bushes at the bottom of the cliff. They rolled down a steep hill for around a hundred feet, only stopping once they’d reached the bottom of the valley. The two of them were scratched all over by thorns.

Fawang flipped over and used his minor grappling techniques on Nimoxing’s arm and shouted, “Are you going to release me or not?”

In his dazed state, Nimoxing had no more strength to resist Fawang’s pull; his left arm loosened but his right arm was still clutching onto the back of Fawang.

Fawang laughed coldly, “Your legs have contracted a lethal poison, why aren’t you trying to save yourself and instead still trying to struggle with me?”

These two sentences made Nimoxing look down at his legs. His lower legs had swollen up badly, if he didn’t do something about it soon, his life would be in danger. He clenched his teeth and took out the Iron Snake weapon from his waist and cut his lower legs off. Blood poured out copiously and he passed out. Fawang admired this steely behavior and now that he was a cripple and no longer a threat to him, he decided to help him. He sealed his knees’ ‘Crooked Spring’ accupoints and his thigh’s ‘Five Li’ accupoints to stop the bleeding. He then took out some medicine for external wounds and tore off Nimoxing’s outer garment to bandage his legs.

A lot of Indian martial artists have practiced pain resisting arts such as sleeping on a bed of nails or sitting on a seat of knives. Nimoxing was well versed in such arts and as

soon as his wounds stopped bleeding he awoke and sat up saying; “Good, since you’ve saved me, we’ll forget all our past feuds.”

Fawang showed a bitter smile, “Though you’ve lost your legs, the poison in your body has been cleansed, but I’m still in danger.” So he sat down with his legs folded and circulated his chi, slowly forcing out the poison from his foot. It took him an exhausting two hours to force just a minute amount of the poison out.

The two of them rested in the remote valley for a few days. Fawang used his advanced internal energy to force the rest of the poison out and Nimoxing’s wounds no longer bled. Nimoxing made two crutches from some tree branches and the two made their way out of the valley. They soon came across a group of Mongolian soldiers and they made their way back to Khubilai’s camp. On the way back, they came across the same town that Yin and Zhao were in.

When Zhao Zhijing and Yin Zhiping saw Fawang, they looked at each other in shock. They both were present at the Heroes’ Gathering at Da Xingguan and saw Fawang demonstrate his amazing martial arts. Both remembered when his disciples Da’erba and Huo Dou attacked the Chongyang Palace years ago; even some of the Quanzhen Masters found them difficult to contend with. They were filled with fear of this encounter. The two signaled to each other with their eyes and wanted to slip away.

That day at Da Xingguan there were hundreds or thousands of heroes attending the gathering, Zhao and Yin may have recognized Fawang but Fawang did not recognize them. Though Fawang saw that the restaurant was in a rough state, but since it was during a time of war, this wasn’t anything out of the ordinary. This fruitless attack on Xiangyang that ended with defeat was not going to be his greatest moment in front of Khubilai. All he was thinking about at the moment was how to cover it up; he didn’t care about the Taoists who were eating their meal.

Just at this time, there was a commotion outside the restaurant, and group of Mongolian soldiers came bursting in. As soon as they saw Yin and Zhao, they all roared and went forward to capture them. Yin Zhiping saw that Fawang was sitting near the door, if they dashed out past him, most probably he would intervene so he said quietly, “Exit through the backdoor!” He pushed a table and bowls and plates, causing a sudden noise as they crashed to the floor. The two of them leapt back and ran towards the backdoor.

Just as he was about to make it to the backyard, Yin Zhiping glanced over at Fawang and saw him holding a cup. Thinking to himself, “He’s ignoring what was going on in

the restaurant.” He was delighted and thought, “He’s not going to interfere.” Suddenly, a black blur came at him; the short Western regions person had come and was waving his left hand, striking out at the heads of Yin and Zhao with his crutch. Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing had never seen this person before, but seeing his swift movements and powerful attacks, they immediately lowered their shoulders and dodged to the side.

Hitting thin air, Nimoxing cried out ‘Oh’, these two Taoists weren’t weaklings and he was slightly surprised. He used his left crutch as a support and then attacked with his right crutch, blocking the Taoists path. The two of them unsheathed their swords and attacked from both sides, trying to force him back and make a path for an escape.

Though Nimoxing’s martial arts were stronger than that of Yin and Zhao, he had lost his legs only just recently and had yet to fully recover. Fighting with his crutches against the two would require at least one crutch to remain on the ground at all times. A few stances later, he could no longer keep it up. Fawang walked forward slowly and saw Zhao Zhijing’s sword going for Nimoxing’s chest. Nimoxing raised his crutch to block the attack and as he did so, Yin Zhiping went for his right side. This stance was extremely vicious, Nimoxing had to abandon his crutch and push back if he wanted to avoid it. Fawang took a stride forward and met with Nimoxing’s flying body; Fawang supported him with his left arm and then placed his right hand on Nimoxing’s arm. Nimoxing’s crutch and Zhao Zhijing’s sword had yet to separate at this point. Fawang transferred his internal energy through the crutch. Zhao Zhijing felt his arm shaking violently and half his upper body began to grow hot, a ‘dang’ sound was heard as he dropped his sword.

Nimoxing’s internal energy was lacking but his changes in stance were extremely swift. As soon as he saw Zhao Zhijing’s sword fall from his hands, he immediately swung his crutch towards Yin Zhiping and trapped his sword. Fawang touched Nimoxing’s arm once again. Yin Zhiping saw what had happened to Zhao Zhijing previously so he immediately circulated his internal energy to counter the attack. Fawang’s internal energy had both softness and hardness within, after a ‘kala’ sound, the sword broke, leaving Yin Zhiping with a broken sword in his hand. Fawang lowered Nimoxing to the ground lightly and then stretched out his hands, placing them on the shoulders of the two. He smiled, “Why come to arms with strangers? With your martial arts, you two must be first class fighters of the central plains, why don’t we sit down and have a chat?”

There didn’t seem to be any malicious intent in his movements but once his hands touched them, the two could not move. All they felt was a force like a thousand jin (500kg / 1kg=2.2lbs) pressing down on their shoulders. All they could do was try to circulate their internal energy to resist the force; how could they even reply? If they

opened their mouths, their internal energy would disperse and their bones from their shoulder to their waist would surely be crushed.

The soldiers who rushed in had by now completely surrounded them. The leader of the pack was a Noyan and he recognized Fawang, who was the First Protector of Mongolia and commanded great respect from Khubilai. He immediately went up to Fawang and bowed, “Your eminence, these two Taoists stole our horses and beat up our soldiers, thank you for your eminence’s help...” Before he finished, he glanced over at Yin Zhiping a few times and suddenly asked, “Is this the person Yin Zhiping?”

Yin Zhiping nodded but he did not recognize this man.

Fawang loosened his grip on the two and reduced the force he was exerting and thought, “These two Taoists are only forty years of age or so yet their internal energy is so pure.”

The Mongolian Noyan said, “Does Master Yin not recognize me? Nineteen years ago, we were eating roast lamb in the desert, I’m Sa Duo.”

Yin Zhiping looked at him carefully and said with delight, “Oh, yes, that’s right! I didn’t recognize you with that beard!”

Sa Duo smiled, “I’ve ridden thousands of li (1 li = 0.5km) all over the lands; all my hair has gone white yet you haven’t changed much. No wonder Genghis Khan claimed practicing Taoists are immortal.” He turned to Fawang and said, “Your eminence, this Taoist has visited the Western regions in the past, he was a guest of Genghis Khan, it could be said that he’s one of us.” Fawang nodded and released his hands from their shoulders.

Years ago, Genghis Khan had invited Qiu Chuji to Western regions to see him, hoping he could learn the secrets of immortality. Qiu Chuji traveled thousands of li and took nineteen disciples with him. Yin Zhiping was his senior student so he of course was within the group. Genghis Khan sent two hundred men to accompany Qiu Chuji and his disciples. Sa Duo was just a lowly soldier at that time and he was within that group; that is why he was able to recognize Yin Zhiping. He had fought for over twenty years and his deeds were rewarded with a promotion to the position of Noyan. He was delighted with this unexpected meeting with Yin Zhiping. He had great respect for Yin Zhiping and laughed off what happened with the horses. Sa Duo asked him about the well being of Qiu Chuji and the others that were on the expedition, and as he talked the past, his pride became visible.

Fawang had also heard about Qiu Chuji before and knew that he was Quanzhen's best fighter. He saw that Yin Zhiping's and Zhao Zhijing's martial arts weren't bad and thought that the reputation of the Quanzhen is deserved. We were lucky that he was able to strike first and take the initiative, otherwise, had a fight really broken out, it would take him at least twenty or thirty stances to beat them.

Suddenly there was a blur at the door and a girl in white entered. Fawang, Nimoxing, Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing were all alarmed to see that this girl was Xiao Longnu. Only Nimoxing had no fear of her and said, "The Passionless Valley's bride, greetings!"

Xiao Longnu nodded slightly and then sat down in the corner at a small table. She ignored everyone and quietly ordered some mushroom noodles from a waiter.

The faces of Yin and Zhao were white one minute and green the next; both of them were agitated. Fawang was afraid that Yang Guo would soon arrive; there was nothing that he feared in the world except those two's 'Pure Heart of Jade Maiden' swordplay. The three of them were occupied with their thoughts and ate without saying a word. Yin and Zhao were full a long time ago but if they suddenly went quiet, the others would be suspicious of them, so they ate without stopping so as to occupy their mouths.

Sa Duo however was in a joyous mood, he asked, "Master Yin, have you ever seen our Fourth Prince?"

Yin Zhiping shook his head.

Sa Dou continued, "Khubilai is the Fourth Prince son of the Fourth Prince Tou Lei. He is wise and compassionate and he has the respect of everyone in the camp. I was just on my way to report to him; if you two have nothing to do, why not come along and meet him?"

Yin Zhiping shook his head with other things on his mind. Zhao Zhijing suddenly had a thought and asked, "Reverend, are you going to see the Fourth Prince as well?"

Fawang said, "Yes! The prince is a real man of the world, you two must meet him."

Zhao Zhijing said with joy, "Good, we'll go with you and Sa Dou." He patted Yin Zhiping's leg beneath the table and made a signal with his eyes to him.

Sa Duo said with delight "Good...very good!"

Yin Zhiping's intelligence is normally higher than that of Zhao Zhijing but as soon as he saw Xiao Longnu, he had drifted off into his own world. Only after a long while did he get Zhao Zhijing's plan. He wanted to rely on Fawang's protection to escape from Xiao Longnu.

Everyone quickly finished their meals and all left at the same time, making their way on horseback. Fawang was relieved to see that Yang Guo was still nowhere to be seen and thought, "The Quanzhen sect is one of the central plains largest sects, if I can enlist their help to aid Mongolia, it would be a great achievement. I at least have something to report back to his Highness tomorrow." He then tried to convey his intent of enlisting them through his words to the Taoists.

The sky was now getting dark, after riding for a while, the sounds of hoofs could be heard from behind them. They looked back and saw Xiao Longnu following slowly behind them on a donkey.

Fawang was alarmed and thought, "She can't beat me by herself so why is she being so brash and following us? Could it be that Yang Guo is following along in secret as well?" He had just met Yin and Zhao and did not want to lose any face in front of them so he pretended that he did not know that Xiao Longnu was following them.

The group rode for half a night before they reached a forest. Sa Duo ordered his men to take rest. About a hundred feet away, Xiao Longnu too had gotten off her donkey and sat down in the forest. The more secretive her actions were, the harder Fawang concentrated; he did not dare to make a rash move. Zhao Zhijing remembered that Nimoxing had greeted Xiao Longnu, but did not know what ties Fawang had with her. He dare not look at her. After resting for an hour, everyone got on their horses once again and after they left the forest, the sounds of hoofs could again be heard as Xiao Longnu followed once again.

Day had broken and still, Xiao Longnu was following them with a distance of about a hundred feet between them.

By now they had reached an open plain. Fawang looked all around and saw that there were no signs of anyone else. Evil intent stirred in him as he thought, "I have been invincible all my life, yet as soon as I stepped onto the central plains, I was defeated by those kids Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's twin swordplay. She's following me non-stop and must be up to something. Why don't I attack out of the blue and kill her? Even if she has help, they'll be too late. Once this girl dies, no one in the world can threaten me." He had made his mind up and just as he was about to reign in his horse the sound

of bells ringing could be heard in front of them. A dust cloud could be seen a few li in front of them as horses galloped towards them.

Fawang regretted his missed opportunity, “If I knew that her help would arrive now, I would have killed her long ago.”

Suddenly, Sa Duo cried out, “Oh! That’s strange.”

Fawang saw that a group of four horses were riding towards them and the first horse on the right was carrying a flag. On the flag pole were seven different types of white wool fluttering in the wind; it was Khubilai’s banner yet from afar, there appeared to be no rider on the horse.

Sa Duo called out, “His Highness is here!” He rode forwards and about a distance of half a li from the horses, he got off and stood in a respectful stance.

Fawang thought, “Since his Highness is here, it would not be appropriate to kill the girl now.” If Khubilai saw him fight a girl on her own, Khubilai would look down upon him. He rode forward slowly and saw that in the group of four horses sat a man in midair. The man had white hair, a white beard with a big smile on his face; it was none other than Zhou Botong.

From afar Zhou Botong called out, “Good, good, the big monk is here and the dark shortie is here, we meet again. Oh, and that young girl is here as well.”

Fawang was curious; this person was full of tricks but how was he able to sit in midair? Once the horses got closer, he was able to see what was happening. The horses were holding a makeshift net made from ropes on their backs and he was sitting on the net.

Zhou Botong had always kept away from the Chongyang Palace and very rarely saw the Quanzhen Masters; because of this, Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing did not recognize him. Though they have heard from the Masters that they have a Grand Martial Uncle who was a free wanderer, they had not heard from him for a long time and thought probably he must have passed away. The thought that this could be him had never entered their minds. Years ago at that great battle at the Smokey Rain Pavilion the place was covered with fog and no one could see anything. Zhou Botong was there; although Yin Zhiping had heard of him, he did not see him.

Fawang frowned; this person’s martial arts are extremely high, it would be best not to get mixed up with him. He asked, “Is his Highness behind you?”

Zhou Botong pointed behind him and laughed, “About thirty or forty li back is his tent. Hey monk, a word of advice, I don’t think it’s the best time to see him right now.”

Fawang said, “Why?”

Zhou Botong said, “Right now, he’s pissed off. If you go see him now, you’ll probably lose your bald head.”

Fawang said angrily, “Rubbish! Why would his Highness be angry?”

Zhou Botong pointed to the flag and laughed, “I stole his Highness’ flag, why shouldn’t he be angry?”

Fawang was shocked and asked, “Why did you steal it?”

Zhou Botong said, “Do you know Guo Jing?”

Fawang nodded and said, “So?”

Zhou Botong said, “He’s my sworn brother. I haven’t seen him in years; I miss him a lot so I decided to go see him. He’s fighting the Mongols at Xiangyang at the moment so I went and stole the Mongol’s royal banner to give it to him as a gift.”

Fawang was shocked and thought this was terrible; they are unable to break Xiangyang down and now, the royal banner has been stolen. This would bring great disgrace to the Mongols; he must come up with a way to get the banner back at all costs.

Zhou Botong shouted and the horses rushed forward, galloping like the wind in a westerly direction before making a circle and returning. The banner fluttered in the wind. Zhou Botong stood up with four reigns in his hands as he rode across the open plains, he looked like a great General.

He looked extremely pleased with himself and as he got close to them, he shouted and the horses immediately stopped. His hands must be extremely powerful to be able to control the four horses as he pleased.

Zhou Botong laughed, “Hey monk, how’re my riding skills?”

Fawang gave a thumbs up and praised, “Brilliant, absolutely brilliant!” In his mind, he was trying to come up with a way to get the flag back.

Zhou Botong waved his left hand and laughed, “Big monk, little girl, the Old Urchin’s going!”

When Yin Zhiping and Zhao Zhijing heard the ‘Old Urchin’, they both yelled out, “Grand Martial Uncle?” They both leapt off their horses.

Yin Zhiping said, “Is this Senior Zhou of the Quanzhen sect?”

Zhou Botong’s eyes rolled around and said, “Hmm, what’s this? You better start your kowtows.”

The two of them were about to greet him but when they heard his words, they were shocked and were afraid that they were mistaken.

Zhou Botong asked, “Who is your Master?”

Yin Zhiping replied respectfully, “Zhao Zhijing is the disciple of the Jade Sun Elder Wang; I am the disciple of the Eternal Spring Elder Qiu.”

Zhou Botong said, “Hmm, seems like each generation is getting worse and worse, and it looks like you two are bad characters.” Suddenly he kicked out with both his legs and his shoes went flying forward towards them.

Yin Zhiping saw that the shoe was coming at him quite slowly without much force; even if it struck him in the face it wouldn’t hurt, he dare not lose his manners and kept bowing. But Zhao Zhijing stretched out his hand to catch the shoe. But who knew that when they arrived within three feet of them, the shoes suddenly curled back. Zhao Zhijing grabbed empty air as the left shoe turned right and the right shoe turned left. The shoes circled back and crossed each other and went back to Zhou Botong. Zhou Botong stretched out his feet and the shoes slipped on.

Though this was just a trick, without extremely profound internal energy, it would be impossible to kick the shoes with the right weight and force like this. Jinlun Fawang and Nimoxing had seen him throw some spearheads in Khubilai’s tent that dropped midway in their flight. The shoes were kicked off with the same type of skill except that an extra back force was added. That was why they weren’t shocked when they saw this. But when Zhao Zhijing stretched out his hand and missed, he was shocked. With his martial arts, even the most lethal projectile would be plucked out of the air by him yet he wasn’t able to catch this slow shoe. He no longer had any doubts and did as Yin Zhiping did and bowed, saying, “Disciple Zhao Zhijing greets great Martial Uncle.”

Zhou Botong laughed, “Qiu Chuji and Wang Chuyi’s eyes must be bad; none of their disciples are up to it. Just forget it, who wants kowtows from you?” He roared, “Onwards!” The four horses galloped forward.

Fawang leapt off his horse and blurred towards the horses’ path. He called out, “Wait!” Each of his palms was pressed onto one horse each. The horses were advancing forward at this time but this press by Fawang actually made them move two steps back.

Zhou Botong was furious and shouted, “Big monk, do you want a fight? The Old Urchin hasn’t found a worthy opponent for years; my fists are getting a bit itchy. Come now, let’s have a few rounds.” He loved martial arts and in recent years, his martial arts have been getting better and better; finding a worthy opponent was an extremely difficult task. He knew Fawang’s martial arts were of a high standard, someone worthy to exchange stances with, so he got off his horse ready to fight.

Fawang waved his hand and said, “I never fight with shameless scoundrels. Fight if you want, I won’t.”

Zhou Botong was angry and said, “You dare call me a shameless scoundrel?”

Fawang said, “You knew that I wasn’t at the camp so you went and stole the banner, wouldn’t you call that shameless? You knew that you weren’t a match for me so you waited until you were sure that I wasn’t there before you sneakily stole the flag. Ha-ha, Zhou Botong, looks like you don’t have any pride.”

Zhou Botong said, “Fine, we’ll know whether I’m a match for you after we’ve had a fight.”

Fawang shook his head and said, “I said I don’t fight with shameless scoundrels, you can’t force me to fight. My knuckles are very proud, once they hit any shameless scoundrels, the knuckles would be covered with a stench that’ll hang around for three years and six months.”

Zhou Botong shouted, “What do you want to do?”

Fawang said, “Hand the banner back to me and then come back later tonight to steal it again while I’ll guard it. No matter what method you use, if you are able to steal it again, I’ll give my respects to you as a great hero.”

Zhou Botong could never resist challenges and the harder it was, the greater the urge to do it. He immediately shot the flag back to Fawang and said, “Catch, I’ll be back for it tonight.”

Fawang stretched out his hand and caught the flag pole only to realize the great force behind the throw, he quickly circulated his internal energy to resist but in the end, he still had to take two steps back before he steadied himself.

The horses had been pressing forward but were held back by Fawang; now, Fawang’s hold on them loosened. All the horses suddenly leapt forward at least twenty feet and galloped ahead. Everyone watched as Zhou Botong and the horses raced away further and further into the distance until they were small dots.

Fawang’s mind was occupied for a while before he passed the flag over to Sa Duo and said, “Let’s make a move.”

Fawang knew that Zhou Botong’s actions were hard to fathom, how was he going to win? He thought for a while on the horseback but couldn’t come up with anything. By chance, he looked around and saw Yin and Zhao were speaking quietly to each other and were constantly looking back at Xiao Longnu with fear on their faces. He thought, “Could it be that she has come for them?” So he decided to investigate and said, “Brother Yin, do you know Miss Long?”

Yin Zhiping’s face changed and he replied, “Hmm.” Fawang knew that there more to this so he continued, “You two have offended her and now she’s looking for you to get her own back, right? That girl is extremely powerful; to offend her is not a good idea.” He had no idea what was going on but from the fearful look on the two’s faces, he made a guess, tested the two, and managed to get the right answer straight away.

Zhao Zhijing took this opportunity to reply, “She has offended you as well; that day at the ‘Heroes’ gathering she beat you, you must avenge what she did to you.”

Fawang scoffed, “You know as well?”

Zhao Zhijing replied, “Everyone in the world of Wulin knows about this.”

Fawang thought, “This Taoist is not so simple. I want him to help me defeat my enemy yet he’s trying to use me to help him escape his predicament.” He continued, “These two men are not your average men, if I just leave it out in the open, things will go a lot

easier.” So he said, “That Miss Long wants to kill you but you can’t beat her so you seek my protection, right?”

Zhao Zhijing replied furiously, “Do I look like someone who needs to rely on others to save myself? Besides, the good Reverend here may not be able to beat her.”

Fawang was shocked by his proud reply and thought, “Could my assumptions be wrong?” He could not tell what the two were thinking so he smiled, “Her twin sword-play with Yang Guo is indeed extremely powerful. But she’s alone right now; it would be extremely easy for me to kill her.”

Zhao Zhijing shook his head, “I’m afraid it’s not as easy as it sounds. Everyone in the Jianghu world says that Jinlun Fawang was defeated by Xiao Longnu.”

Fawang laughed, “I have meditated for years, so how could your words anger me?” From what Zhao Zhijing said, he knew that Zhao Zhijing was hoping that he would defeat Xiao Longnu for him. Before Zhou Botong arrived, he had planned on killing Xiao Longnu but, with the bet he made with Zhou Botong, he had a use for the two. If he killed Xiao Longnu, he no longer had any leverage over the two, so he cupped his hands and said, “Since it is so, I will make my way. After you’ve sorted out the matter with Xiao Longnu, please come and visit his Highness’ camp.” He pulled his reigns and rode forward.

Zhao Zhijing was getting anxious, he knew that as soon as Fawang leaves, Xiao Longnu would catch up with them and torture them. As he thought about the suffering that he had from the Jade Bees on Mount Zhongnan he couldn’t stop himself from worrying. It appeared that this Tibetan monk possessed not only terrific martial arts but also a calculating mind that exceeded his own. Seeing Fawang ride ahead, he quickly caught up and called out, “Reverend, please wait! I am not familiar with the roads here; I will be indebted forever if Reverend would trouble himself to enlighten me.”

When Fawang heard ‘indebted forever’, he smiled and thought, “It looks like it’s the one named Zhao that has offended Miss Long, that’s why he is so afraid, and it looks like it has nothing to do with the one named Yin.” He said, “Fine, but I might need to trouble you later on.”

Zhao Zhijing said quickly, “No matter what the Reverend requests, I will follow the order.”

He and Fawang rode together and as they did so, Fawang asked about the situation at Quanzhen and Zhao Zhijing told all. Yin Zhiping followed behind in a daze.

Fawang said, “Oh, so Elder Ma no longer runs the sect because of old age. I hear that the current leader Elder Qiu is getting on as well.”

Zhao Zhijing said, “Yes, Martial Uncle Qiu is already seventy years of age.”

Fawang said, “So after Elder Qiu hands over the leadership, Elder Wang would be the leader.” These words struck out at the thoughts of Zhao Zhijing, his face changed slightly and said, “My Master is also of an old age. In recent years, the Masters have been studying the ways of life; the matters of the sect are passed on mostly to my apprentice brother Yin.”

Fawang saw that as he said this he had a slightly angry expression on his face and said quietly, “From what I see, though your apprentice brother Yin’s martial arts are good, they are not as good as yours and when it comes to intelligence, yours is far superior. The important task of sect leader should fall to you.”

These words had been hidden away in Zhao Zhijing’s mind for seven or eight years now but he had never said it publicly. Hearing these words from Fawang, his anger was even more telling. By appointing Yin Zhiping as the head disciple of the third generation, the Quanzhen Masters are indicating they want him to be the next sect leader. At first, Zhao Zhijing was just jealous and couldn’t accept it, but since he has managed to find a way to blackmail him he has been pondering ways to snatch the sect’s leadership from him. Yin Zhiping’s raping of Xiao Longnu broke major rules of the Quanzhen sect; if the Masters found out his life would be at risk. But Zhao Zhijing well knew that he was a reckless man and had never pleased the Quanzhen Masters. He did not get along with most of his apprentice brothers so even if Yin Zhiping’s name and reputation is tarnished, the title of sect leader would not fall to him. This is the reason why he had kept it to himself all this time.

Having figured out his thoughts, Fawang thought to himself, “If I help him get the sect’s leadership, he will follow my orders completely. The Quanzhen sect has great influence and has followers everywhere; if I can enlist them to our side, it will greatly aid his Highness’ task of invading the south. This would be a great achievement, probably even more so than killing Guo Jing.” Fawang looked back and saw that Xiao Longnu was standing about a li away and was not advancing further. He thought, “With her there, those two Taoists will definitely fall for the bait.”

Everyone entered the royal tent and Khubilai was in a bad temper over losing his royal flag. The royal flag is the army's lead, in a battle, the thousands and thousands of soldiers follow the flag's actions and it is an extremely important object. Losing the flag like this without anyone knowing what happened was like losing an important battle. Khubilai's mood changed when he saw Fawang enter the tent with the flag in his hand and quickly went up to greet him.

Khubilai had both knowledge and valor in abundance and had followed his ancestor Genghis Khan. When he heard Fawang introduce Yin and Zhao as Taoists from Quanzhen, he immediately welcomed them with open arms showing he appreciated great people. He forgot about the incident with the flag and immediately ordered a banquet for them. Yin Zhiping was not concentrating and was thinking only about Xiao Longnu. Zhao Zhijing had always respected people of importance, when he saw how Khubilai treated him, he was out of this world with delight.

Khubilai did not mention the failure to assassinate Guo Jing and instead kept on mentioning how loyal Nimoxing was. Because of his legs, he was invited to head the banquet. Khubilai and he drank with each other. Nimoxing was extremely touched and thought that no matter what Khubilai needed, he would do so without any qualms.

After the banquet, Fawang accompanied Yin and Zhao to their tent. Yin Zhiping's mind was tired and he went to sleep. Fawang said, "Brother Zhao, we have some idle time, let's take a walk."

From faraway, Zhao Zhijing saw Xiao Longnu sitting underneath a tree with her donkey tied to it. His face changed at the sight of her. Fawang pretended he did not see her and asked more about the situation at Quanzhen.

In Northern Song, there originally was only one Taoist sect; Zheng Yi had originated in Sanxi's Mountain of Dragons and Tigers, headed by Zhang Tianshi. After the invasion by the Jurchens, the Song moved south and in Hubei, three new Taoist sects emerged; Quanzhen, Dadao and Taiyi. The Quanzhen was the most successful and its members were heroic and came to the aid of the needy. During this time, the northern areas were in chaos, the citizens were suffering; they saw that there was no hope from the royal court and everyone saw the Quanzhen sect as their saviors. At that time, someone said, "The Central Plains are shifting, the Southern Song are weak. All the heroes of the world must join if they wish to defend the land. The Founder Chongyang, the Eternal Spring Elder Qiu, models to all, their unique sect's conduct influences all men of promise, bringing peace to the nation. It is the way of the heavens to have leaders like these."

And so on. North of the great river during this time, the power of the Beggar Clan and the Quanzhen sect were sometimes greater than that of the authorities.

Zhao Zhijing saw that Fawang was treating him with great respect and was touched by this, whatever Fawang asked, he answered, telling him where the sect's influence lay and where its strongholds were.

The two talked and walked at the same time and soon reached a place where they were alone. Fawang sighed and said, "Reverend Zhao, for your sect to be what it is today is no mean feat. Please forgive me; I must say that Elders Ma, Qiu and Wang do not know what they are doing in this matter. How can they elect brother Yin as the next sect leader?"

Recently, Zhao Zhijing had been thinking about how he was going to wait until Yin was the sect leader and until all the Quanzhen Masters passed away before forcing Yin to hand over the leadership. But he was an impatient man, even if this was going to succeed, it would take years before it would happen. This reminder made him sigh and he looked at Xiao Longnu once again.

Fawang said, "I will take care of the matter concerning Miss Long, and there is no need to worry. The most important matter right now is to make sure the leadership of your sect does not fall into the wrong hands."

Zhao Zhijing became excited and said, "If Reverend can enlighten me on this matter then I will follow and be your aide for life."

Fawang raised his eyebrows and said clearly, "A gentleman's word is a promise; you cannot take back your word."

Zhao Zhijing said, "Of course."

Fawang said, "Fine, I'll guarantee you that you'll be the sect leader within half a year."

Zhao Zhijing was delighted to hear this, but he knew that it would be difficult to achieve this and still had some doubts.

Fawang said, "You don't believe me?"

Zhao Zhijing said, "I do, I do. The good Reverend is full of wisdom, he must have a plan."

Fawang said, “I have no ties with your sect; whoever becomes the sect leader is of no importance. But for some reason, when I saw you it was like seeing an old friend, I had to intervene.”

Zhao Zhijing was excited and did not know what the best way was to express his thanks.

Fawang said, “The first step is that we must gain a strong supporter for you within the sect. Whose position is the highest within the sect?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “That is of course Grand Martial Uncle Zhou who we met today.”

Fawang said, “Correct. If he agrees to support you, brother Yin would most likely have no chance.”

Zhao Zhijing said with joy, “Yes, Martial Uncle Ma, Martial Uncle Qiu and my Master all have to call him Martial Uncle. Whatever he says must be respected. But what ingenious plan would you use to persuade Great Martial Uncle Zhou to support me.”

Fawang said, “I made a bet with Zhou Botong today about stealing the royal flag. Do you think he’s going to come?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “Of course he’ll come.”

Fawang said, “The flag will not be hoisted on the flag pole tonight, and we’ll hide it in a secret place. The camp has thousands of tents, even if Zhou Botong has the ability to move heaven and earth, there is no way he’ll be able to find the flag in one night.”

Zhao Zhijing said, “Yes!” But he was thinking, “This isn’t the most honorable thing to do.”

Fawang said, “You must be thinking, this isn’t an honorable thing to do. But I’m just thinking of you.” Zhao Zhijing looked at him and didn’t understand what he meant.

Fawang patted his shoulder lightly and said, “I’ll tell you where I hid the flag and then you’ll go and tell Zhou Botong where the flag is and let him find it, how wonderful would that be?”

Zhao Zhijing said, “Yes, yes, that will definitely please Great Martial Uncle Zhou.” But then he said, “But won’t that mean you’ve lost the bet?”

Fawang said, “For friends, men like us can ignore a defeat here or there, what’s so important about that?”

Zhao Zhijing was extremely touched by this and said, “I do not know how to express my thanks.”

Fawang smiled, “Once you’ve got the support of Zhou Botong, with my help you’ll be able to elect yourself as sect leader.” He then pointed to the left and said, “Let’s take a look over there.”

About a li away from the camp were some small hills, in a short while they reached one of the hills. Fawang said, “We’ll find a cave and hide the flag there.” The first two hills they came across were open and bare without any caves there. On the third hill they found that it was covered with woodlands and there was cave after cave.

Fawang said, “This looks like the best place.”

Between two large trees he saw a cave with a well-hidden entrance that was not easy to spot at a glance, he said, “Remember this place, I’ll place the flag in there. Later on tonight, bring Zhou Botong here.”

Zhao Zhijing kept on saying yes, he was filled with delight. He looked hard and long at the two trees thinking with these two trees as a marker, he will definitely remember the right cave. The two returned to the camp and did not mention this again.

After supper, Zhao Zhijing kept talking to Yin Zhiping. Yin Zhiping just stared and sometimes said a word here or there, not really replying. The sky was getting dark and the gong for the first hour sounded. Zhao Zhijing slipped away from the camp and sat beside a sandy hill. He saw the patrols and how heavily guarded the camp was and thought, “It really would be difficult to take just one step into this camp. Yet Great Martial Uncle Zhou came and went as he pleased when he took the flag; his abilities are unimaginable.”

The sky above him was now dark blue, like a Mongolian tent that covered the plains. The stars were twinkling in the sky and the stars of the dipper were especially bright. He thought, “If Fawang’s words are true, three months from now I’ll be the leader of the Quanzhen sect; its three thousand branches and eighty thousand disciples will be under my command, ha-ha. Then it would be so easy to take the life of that punk Yang Guo.” The more he thought about it, the more arrogant he became. He stood up and looked into the distance and made out that Xiao Longnu was still sitting underneath

that same tree. He thought, “That Miss Long’s beauty really is unmatched, even I feel something, no wonder apprentice brother Yin is so crazy about her. But how can those who want to achieve greatness let things like women get in the way?”

Just as he was feeling pleased with himself, he suddenly saw a black shadow coming from the west. The shadow was darting about within the camp and soon reached the flagpole. The person had a broad gown and large sleeves, his white beard was fluttering in the wind; Zhou Botong had arrived.



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