

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

SDXL Chapter 35



Chapter 35 – The Three Golden Needles

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Guo Xiang said, "I've never even seen your face, how can I claim that I know you? This is not a small matter." Yang Guo said, "Fine!" He reached up to his face and tore the mask off. Guo Xiang saw a suave and handsome face, with sword-like eyebrows and bright and sparkling eyes, but he was slightly pale, and rather slender.

Yang Guo brought about the reunion of Zhou Botong and Yinggu, allowing Ci'en to die peacefully and managed to obtain the Nine-tailed Fox. Through his efforts he performed three good deeds in a row and was very happy and he went back to the Beastly Mountain Village with Guo Xiang and the Divine Eagle.

The Shi brothers saw Yang Guo carrying two foxes in his arm and were very happy and grateful, immediately slitting a fox's leg to draw its blood. Shi Shugang consumed the blood and exercised his internal energy to recuperate.

That night the Beastly Mountain Village threw a banquet and invited Yang Guo to be the guest-of-honour, serving him dozens of exotic dishes like bears' paws which outsiders could never have the chance to taste. They also took out a big plate and piled it up with delicious food for the Divine Eagle to eat. The Shi brothers and the Xishan Ghosts never mentioned their gratitude to Yang Guo as they had already promised themselves in their minds, that since Yang Guo spared their lives, should he have any problems they would gladly give up their lives to help him. During the banquet they talked loudly, discussing the latest news in Jianghu.

Ever since Guo Xiang met Yang Guo, she was extremely delighted, but now she did not utter a single word, silently listening to their conversations. Yang Guo occasionally glanced at her and saw that her face was troubled, but he assured himself that it was because they had just rushed about continuously for the past few days, so it was natural that she was tired. He never expected Guo Xiang to be troubled over their impending departure after such a short meeting and hence was feeling depressed.

After drinking a few bowls of wine an ape outside suddenly screeched loudly, and caused many other apes to shriek as well. The Shi brothers' faces became rather grave. Shi Mengjie said, "Brother Yang, Xishan guests, please remain seated, I'll go check it out." He then hurriedly ran outside.

They all knew a strong foe must have come to their forest, but seeing the many martial experts gathered here, they need not be afraid even if the foe is very highly skilled. The Fairy Ghost said, "It'd be best if it's that Prince Hou Du that's here, we can all fight him together to help Third Brother Shi get back at him."

Before he finished saying, they heard Shi Mengjie say, "Who is this visiting our village in the middle of the night? Please stop there." Then a female voice was heard, saying "Is there a big-headed shortie around here? I want to ask him where on Earth he has taken my sister."

When Guo Xiang heard it was her sister who was here, she was shocked and happy; but when she saw Yang Guo's penetrating gaze and strange expression, she felt strange and swallowed back the "Sister!" she wanted to call out.

Then they heard Shi Mengjie angrily say, “You are a rude woman, why are you not answering my question and instead causing a commotion here?”

Guo Fu shouted, “Out of my way!” There then came the clash of weapons as the two began to fight with Guo Fu trying to force her way in and Shi Mengjie trying to keep her out. Yang Guo had last seen Guo Fu at the Passionless Valley (Jue Qing Gu) more than 10 years ago; now, as he heard her again, he felt a hundred emotions surge through him. Then the clashing sounds of weapons got further and further away as Shi Mengjie managed to draw her away.

The Big Head Ghost said, “She’s heading in my direction. I’ll go meet her.” He then dashed out of the hall, followed by Shi Jiqiang and Feng Yiweng.

Guo Xiang stood up and said, “Big Brother, my sister is here to find me, I’ve got to go.”

Yang Guo was shocked and said, “That... that is your sister?”

Guo Xiang said, “Yeah. I wanted to meet the Eagle Hero, so that big headed Uncle brought me here. I... am very happy...” She did not finish saying this and lowered her head and quickly stepped outside.

Yang Guo saw a tear drop fall into the wine cup and thought, “So she was the baby, she has grown so big now. She came to find me in the middle of the night, she must have a problem, but why doesn’t she mention it? She looks kind of troubled, I must not ignore it.” He swiftly moved out of the hall and chased her. She was about to enter the forest so he strode several large steps and caught up with her, saying, “Little Sister, if you have any problems, just say it.”

Guo Xiang smiled, “No, nothing. I’m OK.” The pale moonlight was shining on her fair and refined face and Yang Guo saw clearly the tear drops in her eyes, so he soothingly said, “So you are Hero Guo and Madam Guo’s youngest daughter. Did your sister bully you?” He thought since Guo Jing and Huang Rong were very capable and their name was well-known throughout the Central Plains, they should have no difficulty solving her problems. Most probably it was Guo Fu being overbearing, obnoxious and bullying her little sister.

Guo Xiang laughed, “Even if my sister bullies me, I’m not afraid of her. If she scolds me, I argue with her, and anyway she wouldn’t dare lay her hands on me.”

Yang Guo said, “Then why did you come to find me? Tell me.”

Guo Xiang said, “At Fenglingdu I heard the people talk of your heroic deeds. I was full of admiration and wanted to meet you; I’ve got no other intentions. Tonight during the banquet I remembered the phrase ‘tian xia mei bu san de yan xi’ (there’s no meeting without a parting) and my heart became heavy. Who knew that before the banquet is over I... already have to go.” Her voice was now cracking.

Yang Guo’s heart quivered, remembering that on the very day she was born he carried her and fought fiercely with the Golden-Wheel Monk (Jinlun Fawang) and Li Mochou. Then he remembered how he and Li Mochou caught the leopard to feed her with milk. Then he took her into the Ancient Tomb and took care of her for a while. He never expected that when he met her again, she would already be a graceful young lady. As he reminisced about the past, he could not help but feel strongly about the matter.

After a while, Guo Xiang said, “Big Brother, I have to go now! I need to trouble you for a favour.”

Yang Guo said, “Just say it.”

Guo Xiang said, “When will you and your wife be reunited?”

Yang Guo said, “The start of winter this year.”

Guo Xiang said, “When you meet her, please send a message to Xiangyang and let me share your joy.”

Yang Guo was very grateful and thought that, although this lady and Guo Fu have the same mother, their characters were worlds apart. He asked, “How are your parents?”

Guo Xiang replied, “They’re fine.” She suddenly thought of a wish and said, “Big Brother, when you meet your wife, please come to Xiangyang and visit me, OK? My parents and you are the heroes of the times; they will surely want to see you.”

Yang Guo said, “When the time comes we shall see. Little Sister, about our meeting – please do not mention it to your sister... hmm... don’t mention it to your parents either.”

Guo Xiang was curious and asked, “Why?” Then she remembered that when the people were talking about the Eagle Hero at Fenglingdu her sister slighted him, so perhaps they may have some grudges, so she said, “OK I won’t say anything.” Guo Xiang smiled sweetly and said, “You treat me very well. Sister often tells people that she’s Hero Guo

and Madam Guo's daughter, I feel embarrassed for her. Although our parents are famous, we don't have to keep on saying it all the time. But if I say the Eagle Hero is my big brother, my sister can't imitate me."

Yang Guo smiled, "Why do you look up to me so highly?" He paused for a while then said, "You're sixteen years old this year. September... October... 22nd... 23rd... 24th... Your birthday is on the 24th of the tenth month, right?"

Guo Xiang was very surprised and exclaimed "Ah!" then said, "Yes, how did you know?"

Yang Guo did not answer and continued, "You were born in Xiangyang, so your given name is 'Xiang', right?"

Guo Xiang said, "So you know everything, yet you pretended not to know me. The day I was born you carried me, true?"

Yang Guo began day-dreaming and did not answer her, he lowered his head and mumbled, "16 years ago, on the 24th of the tenth month, we were fighting with Fawang (Golden-wheel Monk), and Long'er was holding that baby..."

Guo Xiang did not understand what he was talking about, but she heard the fight in the forest becoming more intense and feared her sister would injure Shi Mengjie, so she said, "Big Brother, I really have to go now."

Yang Guo was still mumbling, "On the 24th of the tenth month, time flies, it's almost 16 years already." Suddenly he woke up and said, "Ah... you're going... on the 24th of the tenth month this year you're going to burn joss-sticks to ask for three wishes." He remembered she said that when she asked for her wishes, she would pray for him and Xiao Longnu's reunion.

Guo Xiang said, "Big Brother, if in future I request three wishes from you, will you agree?"

Yang Guo said, "I will definitely try my best to fulfill your wishes." He took out a small box from his bosom and flipped open the lid. Then he took out three golden needles which Xiao Longnu used as projectiles and gave them to Guo Xiang, saying, "When I see these needles, it's like seeing you. If you can't meet me, get someone to send the needles here and I'll carry out your requests."

Guo Xiang said, “Thanks very much!” She took the needles and said, “I’ll say my first wish now.” She then returned a needle to Yang Guo and said, “I want you to take this mask off and let me see you with my own eyes.”

Yang Guo laughed and said, “This is really too easy. It’s just that I don’t want my old acquaintances to recognize me so I put this mask on. You use one needle so casually, won’t it be a waste?”

Guo Xiang said, “I’ve never even seen your face, how can I claim that I know you? This is not a small matter.”

Yang Guo said, “Fine!” He reached up to his face and lifted the mask off.

Guo Xiang saw a suave and handsome face, with sword-like eyebrows and bright and sparkling eyes, but he was slightly pale and rather slender. Yang Guo saw her closely examining his face and smiled, “What?”

Guo Xiang felt her face go red. She softly said, “Nothing.” But she was thinking, “I never knew you would be so good-looking.”

Guo Xiang pulled herself together and returned another needle to Yang Guo, saying, “I’ll tell you my second wish.”

Yang Guo smiled, “Telling me a few years from now will make no difference, young lady, and you’re having childish wishes.” He did not stretch out his hand to receive the needle.

Guo Xiang stuck the needle in his shirt and said, “My second wish is that on the 24th of the tenth month, which is my birthday, I want you to come down to Xiangyang to have a chat with me.”

This wish required more effort to complete, but was still rather childish. Yang Guo said, “I promise, it’s not so difficult. But I will only meet you alone; I won’t see your parents or your sister.”

Guo Xiang smiled, “That’s alright with me.” Her smooth white hand clutched the third needle and waved it in the moonlight and said, “My third wish is...”

Yang Guo shook his head, thinking, “Do I, Yang Guo, grant wishes so easily? This young lady is naïve and treats this as a game.”

He saw her face had turned red and she laughed, “I can’t think of the third wish now. I’ll tell you some other day.” She then rushed into the forest calling, “Sister, sister!”

Guo Xiang ran towards the clashing sounds and she saw Guo Fu fighting fiercely with Shi Mengjie and the Big Head Ghost, while Feng Yiweng and Shi Jiqiang were watching the fight with their weapons at the ready. Guo Xiang shouted, “Sister, I’m here, and these are good friends.”

Guo Fu’s training had her parents’ guidance in martial arts, while her husband, Yelu Qi, was a highly skilled expert. In the past few years her skills had improved greatly. But she was inattentive and impatient, so she did not train hard. Although her parents and husband were well-known experts, her wugong was only slightly above average. She found it difficult with the two’s continuous onslaught and was becoming listless. Then suddenly she heard her sister calling out, so she shouted, “Sister, come here.”

Shi Mengjie heard Guo Xiang call Yang Guo “Big Brother”, and now Guo Fu called her “sister”, he was surprised and thought, “Can it be that this woman is the Eagle Hero’s wife or sister?” He had just sent out a blow that he quickly withdrew and leapt backwards.

Guo Fu clearly knew her opponent had given way to her, but she was angry and she thrust her sword forward fiercely and slashed Shi Mengjie’s chest. The Big Head Ghost was shocked and shouted, “Hey, what...” Guo Fu made turned the sword with a bright flash and the Big Head Ghost’s back suffered a long slit. She felt proud of herself and said, “Now you know my great prowess!”

Guo Xiang shouted, “Sister, I said these are friends!” Guo Fu angrily said, “Quickly follow me back! Who could be friends with these scoundrels?” Shi Mengjie’s chest injury was not light. He staggered a few steps backwards and collapsed onto the ground.

Guo Xiang hurried forward and bent down to raise him up, asking, “Uncle Shi, how are you?” Shi Mengjie’s chest was bleeding profusely, staining her dress. Guo Xiang quickly tore off a strip of cloth from her dress and dressed his wound.

Guo Fu held her sword and stood aside, nagging, “Hurry up, let’s go! I’ll go back and tell Father and Mother and we’ll see if they beat you!”

Guo Xiang angrily said, “You rashly injured people. I’ll tell Father and Mother as well!” Shi Mengjie saw her face turning red with fury and tears forming in her eyes so he said, “Lady, please don’t worry. I won’t die from it.” Shi Jiqiang held the horn to his

mouth and breathed heavily, but he could not decide if he should fight all out with Guo Fu or attend to his brother's injuries.

Suddenly Guo Fu screamed "Ah!" Two fierce tigers appeared out of the blue silently, then, as she turned away to evade them, she saw two lions squatting in front of her, and four leopards waiting by the side. It was Shi Zhongmeng who had led the animals here and surrounded her. Guo Fu became white as sheet and almost fainted.

Then from within the forest someone shouted, "Fifth brother, how are your wounds?" Shi Mengjie said, "I'm still fine." Then that person said, "The Eagle Hero has instructed us to allow these two ladies to leave." Shi Jiqiang made a few whistles and the animals turned around and disappeared into the darkness.

Guo Xiang said, "Uncle Shi, I apologize on behalf of my sister."

Shi Mengjie's wound was hurting badly, so he laughed bitterly and said, "Because of the Eagle Hero's intervention, even if your sister killed me it would be nothing."

Guo Xiang anxiously asked, "Your injuries... are really not serious?"

Guo Fu grabbed her hand and said, "Are you still not coming?" She pulled her hard and dragged her out of the forest.

When the Shi brothers and Xishan Ghosts saw the sisters leave they all came out together to check Shi Mengjie and the Big Head Ghost's injuries. They started talking and all said Guo Fu was in the wrong. But they did not know what her relationship was with the Eagle Hero, so they did not dare be rude to her. Shi Jiqiang furiously said, "That young lady is such a nice girl, but her sister is so overbearing. Fifth brother clearly gave way to her and she knew it, yet she did such a despicable thing. If the sword had pierced two inches deeper, how could he survive?" The Big Head Ghost said, "Let's ask the Eagle Hero about this woman. At Fenglingdu she kept defaming the Eagle Hero, so I guess he wouldn't protect her."

Someone stepped out from behind a big tree, saying, "Thank God Brother Shi's injuries are not serious. That woman has always been rash. My right arm was actually cut off by her." That person was Yang Guo. When they heard this, they felt very angry and could only stare at him wordlessly. They all wanted to know more, but dare not ask.

Guo Fu dragged her sister all the way to Fenglingdu. By that time the ice on the Huang He (Yellow River) had already melted, so they crossed the river and headed back to

Xiangyang. All along the way Guo Fu nagged like an old woman, continuously chiding Guo Xiang, telling her not to mix with such uncouth people. Guo Xiang pretended to be deaf and largely ignored her, but she could not stop talking about the Eagle Hero.

When they reached Xiangyang, Guo Fu handed over the 'Everlasting Spring Priest', Qiu Chuji's letter to her parents. The letter said that he was old and sick in bed, so he has sent the Quanzhen Sect's new leader Li Zhichang together with the top Quanzhen disciples to help. After this was done, the first thing Guo Fu said was, "Father, Mother, sister was disobedient along the way and caused a lot of trouble." Guo Jing was shocked and asked about the matter. Guo Fu then told of how, at Fenglingdu, Guo Xiang followed someone they did not know and went missing for two days and nights, exaggerating the events as she went along.

At that time Guo Jing was handling some urgent military matters and was quite worried about the situation, so when he heard what Guo Fu said, he got very angry and asked, "Xiang'er, your sister is right, isn't she?"

Guo Xiang laughed happily, saying, "Sister is making a mountain out of a molehill; I went with a friend to see what's going on, what's the big fuss about that!"

Guo Jing frowned and said, "What friend? What's the name?"

Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue and said, "Ah, I never asked his name, but his nickname is 'Big Head Ghost'."

Guo Fu said, "He's one of the so called Xishan Ghosts."

Guo Jing had heard of the Xishan Ghosts, and although they did not commit any evil acts, they were not gentlemen either. When he heard of his daughter's mixing with such people, he got even angrier. But he remained silent, only making a "Hey" sound and saying no more. Huang Rong however rebuked Guo Xiang sternly.

That night Guo Jing organized a family feast and arranged the seating plan for Guo Fu and Guo Polu, but left Guo Xiang out. Yelu Qi tried to persuade his father and mother-in-law otherwise. Guo Jing said, "If that girl is not firmly taken in hand, it will only harm her. Xiang'er has been strange since she was small, causing me to worry about her. Since you're her brother-in-law, you should worry for her too." Yelu Qi did not dare say more.

The Guo couple had spoiled Guo Fu too much, thus allowing her to create so much trouble. So now they were stricter with Guo Xiang and Guo Polu. Guo Polu was quiet and serious, just like his father, but Guo Xiang usually agreed on the outside, yet she was usually dissatisfied on the inside. That night she heard the maid say that Master and Mistress organized a family feast but intentionally did not invite her. Guo Xiang got angry and went on hunger strike and starved for two whole days. On the third day, Huang Rong's heart softened and without informing Guo Jing she personally cooked several dishes and cajoled her daughter, finally making her smile. Huang Rong's cooking skills were the best in the world; even though she had not cooked for a long time she was still able to cook delicious food for Guo Xiang. But in doing so all the effort to discipline her had gone right down the drain.

The Mongols had conquered Dali and sent the troops north; another division headed south, planning on meeting at Xiangyang. They aimed to destroy the Song Dynasty in one fell swoop. The Mongols had been planning this campaign for many years, and the north division was led by the Great Khan's brother Khubilai. The south division was led by the Great Khan Mengke himself, together with all their valiant and capable generals. The large number of troops involved was unprecedented in Mongol history. The troops looked grand and unyielding, showing the Mongols' might.

Before the Mongols arrived, Xiangyang was already in a state of shock. However, the useless Song Premier Ding Daquan was a traitor and dismissed this matter totally. Xiangyang dispatched numerous urgent messages, but the traitorous premier just said, "The Mongolians have been attacking Xiangyang for many decades and have never succeeded; they just may go back empty-handed this time as well. This is just a small matter; why should we bother ourselves with it?"

When the Mongols' south division conquered Dali, Guo Jing immediately knew the urgency of this matter and sent letters to all the heroes in Jianghu, inviting them to meet at Xiangyang to assist with the defense. The Mongol troops were swift and deadly and were able to conquer Dali in just a short time. The King of Dali, the great-grandson of Yideng, was young and ignorant and he had only ruled for two years when Dali was conquered. He was rescued in the final hour by Zhu Ziliu, Wu Santong and the Fisherman.

The Mongolian troops were steadily advancing closer and closer. The Heroes' Summit was scheduled for the 15th of the tenth month and was to last 10 days. Today was the 13th, two days away from the meet, and all the heroes from all over Jianghu had gathered at Xiangyang. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were concentrating on military affairs

and gave the responsibility of welcoming the guests to Lu Youjiao and Yelu Qi, with the Wu brothers and their wives Yelu Yan and Wanyan Ping to assist them.

On this day Zhu Ziliu, the Fisherman, Wu Santong, Quanzhen Sect's leader Li Zhichang and his fellow sect disciples, the Beggar Clan elders with the seventh and eighth grade members, Lu Guanying and Cheng Yaojia had all arrived... Xiangyang was now filled with many well known martial experts. Many old heroes who rarely appeared in Jianghu were also present. This time the Heroes' Summit may decide the fate of Xiangyang. They also respected the Guo couple, so all of them rushed to Xiangyang upon receiving the invitation. This Meet was grander than the one at Dasheng many years ago.

That night, Guo Jing had a private banquet with his old friends, inviting more than 10 people to dine with him, including Zhu Ziliu and Wu Santong. They drank past the third watch but the Beggar Clan Chief still did not turn up. They thought he must have been busy with the Beggar Clan affairs and so did not find anything amiss. They ate and drank, discussing Jianghu events of the past 10 years. Yelu Qi, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers group had a table to themselves and they chatted animatedly.

Suddenly an eighth grade member of the Beggar Clan burst in and whispered something to Huang Rong. Huang Rong's face became grave and she stood up, saying loudly, "What?" The people were shocked and all turned to stare at her. Huang Rong said, "There are no outsiders here. Just say it. How did this happen?" They saw tears well up in her eyes as she spoke, so it must be something terrible. Then the beggar said, "This afternoon Clan Leader Lu took two seventh grade sect members to patrol outside the city but they didn't return. I could not let the matter rest and went to investigate. We went to the Yang Tai Fu Temple down the hill and found Clan Leader Lu's corpse there..." The group gave a cry of "Ah!" when they heard this.

The beggar's voice cracked as he said this, he knew Lu Youjiao's martial arts were not excellent, but he was responsible and caring and had earned the respect of the beggars. The beggar continued, "The two seventh grade members are not dead yet. They said the three of them were ambushed by the Mongolian prince Hou Du who killed the Clan Leader. The two seventh grade members fought with him and were severely injured by his palms."

Guo Jing was so angered his face turned white and only said, "Hou Du!" He thought that if he had known this would happen, he would not have spared him at Chongyang Palace years ago.

Huang Rong said, “Did Hou Du leave any message?”

The beggar said, “I dare not say.”

Huang Rong said, “Why not? He wants Guo Jing and Huang Rong to surrender to the Mongols, or they will end up like Lu Youjiao, right?”

The beggar said, “The Chief is brilliant. The scoundrel Hou Du said exactly that.” According to tradition, Huang Rong was no longer the Beggar Clan leader, but the beggars all still addressed her as “Chief”.

Huang Rong frowned and said, “Lu Youjiao’s “Dog Beating Stick” has been taken by Hou Du, right?” The beggar said, “Yes.”

The guests all left the banquet and went to see Lu Youjiao’s body. They observed a steel fan’s mark on Lu Youjiao’s back and a rib bone was broken. This showed that Hou Du had snuck up and attacked with his fan from behind, then killed him with his palm. The people all felt deeply grieved when they saw this.

At that time thousands of beggars in Jianghu were gathered in Xiangyang. When they heard that Lu Youjiao had been killed, the city fell into a gloomy silence.

Guo Xiang was on good terms with Lu Youjiao, often pulling him out into the wilderness to drink wine and chat about Jianghu affairs. The two usually chatting for half a day, and were very friendly. The Yang Tai Fu Temple was not far from Xiangyang, so Guo Xiang and Lu Youjiao often went there. When she heard her dear old friend was killed there she was greatly hurt and aggrieved, so she took a pot of wine and went to the temple like she usually did.

Late that night, Guo Xiang put down two cups and filled them with wine, saying, “Uncle Lu, half a month ago, when we were merrily chatting here, who knew such a hero would meet such a tragic end? Let me offer you a toast.” She took up a cup and poured the wine onto the ground in a sweeping motion, remembering their past friendship. She felt overwhelmed by sadness and tears welled up in her eyes. She said, “Uncle Lu, rest peacefully.” She held the other cup forward with both hands and then drank the wine.

Her tolerance for liquor was not very good, but she was open-minded and friendly with the heroes of Jianghu and often drank with them. When she drank two cups of wine she felt giddy and slightly hot.

In the darkness a shadow suddenly flashed past and she thought it must be Lu Youjiao's spirit who had come and said, "Is that Uncle Lu? Please come here." Although her heart was beating rapidly, she still wanted to meet Lu Youjiao's spirit. However a female voice was heard saying, "Why are you fooling around here in the middle of the night? Mother wants you to go back quickly." The person came into the temple in a flash – it was Guo Fu.

Guo Xiang was very disappointed and said, "I'm waiting here for Uncle Lu's spirit. Now you come barging in like this, how would he show up? Sister, you return first, I'll be following you shortly."

Guo Fu said, "Stop talking rubbish. You're just imagining things. Why would Lu Youjiao's spirit want to see you?"

Guo Xiang said, "He was very friendly with me, moreover I promised to share my private thoughts with him. I said I would tell him on my birthday. Who knew he couldn't be here." She became depressed as she said this.

Guo Fu said, "Mother saw that you had disappeared and predicted you'd be here. You monkey, you're getting naughtier, but you can't escape from Mother's palm. Mother is angry with you for being so daring – who knows, that Hou Du might be lurking around here somewhere; won't that be dangerous?"

Guo Xiang sighed and said, "I was thinking about Uncle Lu and forgot about the danger. Good sister, please accompany me for a while, maybe Uncle Lu's spirit might still come and see me. But you shouldn't talk, lest you scare him away."

Guo Fu had never really respected Lu Youjiao and felt that he became the Beggar Clan Leader all due to her mother's grooming and recommendations. She thought that even if his spirit came, she would not be afraid. She also knew her sister's character – since she wanted to wait there, unless if their parents personally came to stop her, she would not budge no matter what Guo Fu said. So she sat down and sighed, "Sister, you're getting older, yet you are still so childish. You're sixteen this year; in two or three years you'll be getting married. Please don't tell me, that even when you move into your in-laws' place, you'll still act so crazily?"

Guo Xiang said, "What's the difference? After you married brother-in-law, you are still as carefree as a single woman."

Guo Fu said, “Hey! How can others compare to your brother-in-law? He’s a hero of the times and is very broad-minded, he wouldn’t restrict my movements. He’s talented in martial arts and literature. Among the younger generation, who can compare to him? If your future husband is half as good as him, Father and Mother will be very satisfied.”

Guo Xiang knew she was so boastful and said, “Brother-in-law is of course talented, but I don’t believe there’s none in this world who can compare to him.” She felt proud of herself as she said that. Guo Xiang said, “I know someone who’s ten times better than brother-in-law.”

Guo Fu got angry, saying, “Who? Tell me.”

Guo Xiang said, “Why must I say it? It’s good enough for me to know.”

Guo Fu laughed coldly, asking, “Is it Brother Zhu? Wang Jianming?” She named a few young heroes.

Guo Xiang kept shaking her head, saying, “They can’t even compete with brother-in-law, how can they be ten times better?”

Guo Fu said, “Unless you’re talking about Grandfather, Father, Mother, and Uncle Zhu, they are older heroes.”

Guo Xiang said, “No! The person I mentioned is younger than brother-in-law, and he’s more handsome and his martial arts are very much better. The difference is as great as night and day, you can’t even compare them...” As she said this, Guo Fu continuously spit, “Pui...pui...pui...pui...”

Guo Xiang ignored her and continued, “If you don’t believe me that’s up to you. He has a good character. If anyone is in trouble, he’d lend a hand whether he knows them or not.” She lifted her head and started day-dreaming.

Guo Fu angrily said, “You’re just making things up. Lu Youjiao’s dead, now the Beggar Clan doesn’t have a leader. Mother said that, since so many heroes are here for the Heroes’ Meet, there will be a martial arts contest to pick a highly-skilled expert to lead the Beggar Clan and prevent it from splitting up into the Dirty Faction and Clean Faction again. You said this man is so powerful, tell him to spar with your brother-in-law and see who will be the next Beggar Clan Leader.”

Guo Xiang laughed, “He doesn’t want to be the Beggar Clan Leader.”

Guo Fu scolded, “You dare to look down on the Leader’s status? Elder Hong was the leader, Mother was the leader; you dare to look down on Elder Hong and Mother?”

Guo Xiang said, “When did I say I looked down on the Leader? You knew Uncle Lu and I were good friends.”

Guo Fu said, “OK! Tell your grand hero to spar with your brother-in-law, and then we shall clearly see who the hero is and who the useless bum is.”

Guo Xiang said, “Sister, you always talk unreasonably. When did I say brother-in-law was a useless bum? If he’s one, then that makes you an animal. We have the same mother, so I’d be ashamed too.”

Guo Fu heard this and did not know whether to laugh or flare up, so she stood up and said, “I don’t have the energy to talk nonsense with you. If you still won’t come back, I’ll get a scolding too.”

Guo Xiang had a razor-sharp tongue and liked to argue with her sister, so she said, “Even though you’re married, Father and Mother dote on you the most. Who will have the guts to scold you if you are the wife of the next Clan Leader?”

Guo Fu heard her sister address her as the ‘wife of the next Clan Leader’, she became smug and said, “There are so many heroes here and he’s not the Leader yet; don’t say such things, you’ll only make people laugh.”

Guo Xiang woke up from her day-dream and saw that the pale moon was almost full. Then she sighed and said, “It looks like Uncle Lu’s spirit won’t be coming. Sister, why the hurry to choose a new Leader? Why can’t we mourn Uncle Lu a little longer?”

Guo Fu said, “You’re being childish again. The Beggar Clan is the number one sect in Jianghu, how can it go without a leader even for a day?”

Guo Xiang said, “Which day did Mother say the Leader would be chosen?”

Guo Fu said, “The Heroes’ Summit will start on the 15th, the most important issue is to discuss how to allocate all the heroes in Jianghu to resist the Mongolians. This should take about five to nine days, so the new leader should be chosen on the 23rd or 24th.”

Guo Xiang exclaimed, “Ah.”

Guo Fu asked, “What?”

Guo Xiang said, “Nothing. The 24th just happens to be my birthday. Everyone will be busy preparing for this Meet, so Mother won’t be celebrating my birthday for me.”

Guo Fu laughed, “Ha-ha, you’re a little baby, what significance is your birthday? How can you put it on the same level as the Leader’s selection? People would laugh their teeth out. Ah, there can only be one such person like you on this Earth, remembering such trivial matters.”

Guo Xiang’s face turned red, saying, “Father may not remember, but Mother will surely remember. You say it’s a small matter, but I think otherwise. I’m going to be 16, you know?”

Guo Fu laughed even louder and needled her, “On that day all the heroes will congratulate our Miss Guo on her sixteenth birthday. She’s no longer a baby, she’s a lady now! Ha...ha...ha!”

Guo Xiang shook her head and said, “Others might not care, but there will be at least one hero who will remember my birthday. He promised that he will come to see me.” She felt very happy as she said this.

Guo Fu said, “What hero? Ah, is he the one who is superior to your brother-in-law? Let me tell you – Number 1, there’s no such person, you’re just fantasizing; Number 2, even if there’s such a person, he must have many things to do, how would he have the time to celebrate your birthday? If he’s attending the Heroes’ Summit, then he will come to Xiangyang.”

Guo Xiang heard this and was almost moved to tears. She stamped her feet and said, “He promised, he promised. He won’t attend the Heroes’ Summit; he won’t vie to be the Leader.”

Guo Fu said, “If he’s not a hero, our parents would not invite him. Even if he comes, he may not be fit to attend.”

Guo Xiang took out her handkerchief to dab her tears and said, “If that’s the case, I won’t attend the Heroes’ Summit either, nor will I even look in at the Leader’s selection.”

Guo Fu coldly laughed, “Ah, Miss Guo’s not attending the Heroes’ Feast, all the grandeur is gone. Where’s the glory of being the new Leader? Face it, nobody would miss you.”

Guo Xiang covered her ears and dashed out of the temple.

Suddenly a black shadow flashed across and stood silently at the temple’s entrance, blocking it. Guo Xiang was shocked and leapt back to prevent herself from running into him. The tall person stood under the moon light, exhibiting his dark face, but his upper body was rather short. Looking closely, she noticed that he had two legs missing, his arms supporting his body with six-foot long crutches. His pants were very long, dangling on the ground, making him look like a giant.

Guo Fu was shocked and said, “You’re Nimoxing?”

That person was indeed Nimoxing. This time the Khan was commanding the campaign himself, so all the brave warriors followed him north from Dali. The warriors all tried to prove themselves to win glory for their names. Although Nimoxing’s legs were gone, he did not lose his martial skills; in fact he trained harder and he was better than before he lost his legs. The Mongols were still a hundred li from Xiangyang, but some warriors were sent ahead to Xiangyang to scout first, so Nimoxing reached Xiangyang earlier. On this night he was wandering around the temple and he overheard the Guo sisters’ conversation. Then he got very excited, thinking that since Guo Jing was leading Xiangyang’s defense, if he captured the Guo sisters he could force him to surrender or at least demoralize him and thus contribute greatly to the Mongol war effort. He heard that Guo Fu knew him, so he said, “Miss Guo is very sharp, I’ve not seen you for so many years and you have grown even more pretty. Don’t cause any trouble, just be good and follow me!”

Guo Fu was shocked and angry. She knew his martial arts were very high, even if she and Guo Xiang attacked him together, they would still lose, so she could not help but glare at Guo Xiang, thinking, “It’s entirely your fault, how are we going to get out of this mess?”

Guo Xiang asked Nimoxing, “Why are your two pant legs so strange? Were your legs very long before you lost them?”

Nimoxing snorted and ignored her, telling Guo Fu, “You two walk in front. Don’t try any tricks!” He treated them as his prisoners as he said that.

Guo Xiang said, “You’re talking very strangely. Where do you want to take us in the middle of the night?”

Nimoxing angrily said, “Little girl, just shut up and follow me.” He was afraid that there might be strong opponents from Xiangyang coming to help, so he wanted to leave quickly.

Guo Fu whispered, “Sister, this black guy is a Mongolian warrior and his martial arts are great; you attack his right while I attack his left.” She drew out her sword and thrust towards Nimoxing’s waist.

Guo Xiang did not bring any weapons out of the city and thought that since he had lost his legs and was using his crutches to fight, how could he fight her sister? So she said, “Sister, this person is pitiful, don’t hurt him!”

As she said this, Nimoxing braced his left crutch on the ground and defended himself with his right crutch. Then he struck Guo Fu’s sword, causing sparks to fly and Guo Fu’s sword to fly out of her hand. She felt her hand go numb and her chest was hurting. Then she used a special stance to follow the sword and retrieve it with her left hand. Striking forward with the ‘Sword of the Yue Maiden’ [Chao Nu Jian Fa] as she fought with Nimoxing. This ‘Chao Nu Jian Fa’ was taught to Guo Jing by Han Xiaoying of the Jiangnan Seven Freaks. Guo Jing taught this skill to his two daughters out of gratitude to her. This sword skill was smooth and contained subtle changes and was a powerful skill. If Guo Jing executed this skill, it would be strong and powerful and would not be overcome easily, but Guo Fu was not very strong; although the strokes were good, they were not good enough to defend against Nimoxing’s crutches.

Guo Xiang saw how Nimoxing was using his crutches. The left and right crutches were swapping roles intermittently and were very swift. The crutches were long as well, so her sister was losing to his fierce attacks. She then became more anxious. Guo Fu felt the pressure from his crutches getting stronger and stronger, hitting her sword with great force, causing her strokes to be unsteady. Guo Xiang was worried about her sister but was unarmed so she sent out her palms and struck towards Nimoxing.

Nimoxing shouted and poked his left crutch on the ground and leapt into the air, attacking with both crutches at great speed. The crutches hit Guo Xiang in the shoulder and Guo Fu in the chest. Guo Xiang stumbled and retreated several steps. Guo Fu was hit quite hard and could not withstand the pain and she sat down heavily. Nimoxing was feeling proud of himself and swaggered towards Guo Fu, laughing coldly, “I told you to be good and follow me...”

Guo Fu jumped up and said, “Let’s escape from the back of the temple!”

Nimoxing was shocked. He had obviously hit her “Shen Cang” (Hiding Deity) Accupoint, how could she still move? He did not know about Guo Fu’s soft armour and thought she must have learned some great skills from the Guo family that prevented her accupoint from being sealed. Actually, Guo Fu’s accupoint was not sealed, but she was injured by that strike and could not use her sword. Guo Xiang then unleashed the ‘Descending Hero’s Palm Skill’ [Luo Ying Zhang Fa] to protect her sister and shouted, “Sister, you go first!”

Nimoxing raised his left crutch and sent it towards Guo Xiang, stopping three inches in front of her nose, but the wind generated was so great that her face hurt. He shouted, “Don’t move!”

Guo Xiang angrily said, “At first I pitied you, but you’re such an evil person!”

Nimoxing laughed, “Little girl, if you don’t suffer you won’t know my strength.” His crutch hit the ground, his face was fierce and ugly, he opened his mouth, exposing his white teeth and charged forwards screaming like he wanted to bite someone.

Suddenly someone behind said, “Don’t be afraid! Use secret projectiles on him.”

This was a dangerous moment and Guo Xiang did not care who that was and felt around her body and urgently said, “I don’t have any.” She saw Nimoxing getting closer and was at her wits’ end and tried to use a palm stance called the ‘Flower Spreading Stance’ [Shan Hua Shi] to protect herself. She out stretched her palms and felt a breeze suddenly blow across them; then her hands trembled slightly and two thin golden bangles flew out, striking Nimoxing’s crutches.

Although the sound made on impact was not very loud, Nimoxing knew he could not withstand it and his crutches flew backwards, hitting the wall, causing dust and mud to fly on impact. Nimoxing lost his crutches and fell down. He hit his back on the ground and then jumped up, screaming angrily and struck his palms out, sending his whole body forwards with his palms aiming at Guo Xiang.

Guo Xiang did not think and reacted by taking a hair pin out of her hair and tried to hit Nimoxing, then she felt the breeze behind her again and sent the pin flying forward. Nimoxing suddenly saw the pin flying towards him and quickly tried to use both hands to block, then he cried, “Strange!” and fell onto the ground, unmoving.

Guo Xiang feared that he was up to no good, so she jumped to Guo Fu and said, “Sister, let’s go!”

The two sisters were standing next to a deity’s statue in the temple and saw that Nimoxing did not move at all, so Guo Fu said, “Did he suddenly have a stroke and die?” She raised her voice and said, “Nimoxing, what are you doing?” She thought that since he’d lost his crutches, it would not be convenient for him to move, so she was not afraid and advanced to him. She saw his eyes staring blankly upwards, his face without colour and his mouth wide open; he was dead.

Guo Fu was very surprised and lit the candles in the temple, wanting to investigate further when she heard someone outside the temple saying, “Fu, Second Sister, are you in the temple?” It was Yelu Qi. Guo Fu happily said, “Brother Qi, come quickly. Strange... this is strange!”

When Guo Fu went to find her sister and did not return for quite some time, Yelu Qi, remembering that Lu Youjiao was ambushed and killed and the enemy was just outside Xiangyang, got worried and went to find the two sisters. He brought two sixth grade Beggar Clan members and hurried there only to find Nimoxing dead on the ground, and he was shocked. He knew this short person’s martial arts were good; even he could not handle this person himself, so he was surprised that his wife had killed Nimoxing. He took the candle from Guo Fu’s hand and looked closely.

He saw two holes in Nimoxing’s palms and a hair pin stuck in the Shen Ting (Deity’s Hall) Accupoint. This pin hit with great force but did not break and instead was able to penetrate this highly-skilled expert’s palms and kill him. Such a powerful skill like that is unthinkable. He turned to Guo Fu and said, “Is Grandfather here (referring to Huang Yaoshi), quickly lead me to greet him.”

Guo Fu curiously said, “Who said Grandfather was here?”

Yelu Qi said, “It’s not Grandfather?” He swept the place with his eyes and said excitedly, “So it must be Master.” He looked around but could not find Zhou Botong. He knew his master was mischievous, so he must have hid himself to scare them. He went out of the temple and jumped onto the roof, but he saw no one.

Guo Fu said, “Hey! Why are you saying such silly things? What Grandfather, what master?”

Yelu Qi then came down and asked how they met Nimoxing and how he met his end. Guo Fu told him, but she completely could not explain how her sister's hair pin could kill him. Yelu Qi said, "Some powerful hero must be helping Sister secretly. The only people I know with such martial arts are Father-in-law, Grandfather, Master, Reverend Yideng and the Golden Wheel Monk (Jinlun Fawang). Fawang is the Mongolian Guo Shi (Spiritual Leader), he wouldn't kill Nimoxing, while Reverend Yideng won't kill anyone, so I thought since it's not Grandfather; it must be Master. Sister, who do you think helped you?"

After Guo Xiang's hair pin killed Nimoxing, she immediately turned around but saw no one, and kept repeating "Don't be afraid! Use secret projectiles on him," to herself. She thought the voice familiar. She wondered if it could be Yang Guo. But as she thought of him, she said to herself, "That's impossible! It must be because I was thinking of him, and I mistook that voice for his." Yelu Qi saw that she seemed to be day-dreaming and might not have heard him.

Guo Fu saw that her sister's eyes were red and tears were streaming down her face and she was looking lost. Guo Fu thought she must be in a shock and held her hand, asking, "Sister, what's up with you?"

Guo Xiang trembled and her face turned red, saying, "Nothing."

Guo Fu said, "Brother-in-law was asking you who saved you just now, didn't you hear?"

Guo Xiang said, "Who saved me? It must be him! Who else would have such excellent skills?"

Guo Fu asked, "Him? Who's he? Is he the special hero you were talking about?"

Guo Xiang felt her heart beating heavily and quickly said, "No, no! I'm talking about Uncle Lu's spirit." Guo Fu spat "Pui" and threw down her hand. Guo Xiang said, "I didn't even see a shadow just now, it must be Uncle Lu secretly helping me. You know we were good friends when he was still alive."

Guo Fu half-believed what she said and was wondering if Lu Youjiao's spirit refused to go away. But if it was not a spirit, how could a person kill someone without even showing himself?

Yelu Qi took up Nimoxing's crutches and sighed, "This level of martial arts really commands admiration." Guo Fu and Guo Xiang looked carefully, observing that both

crutches had a golden bangle lodged deep into them, as though they were made that way. This person actually used his internal energy (nei gong) to hit Nimoxing's crutches out of his hands, so it was no wonder Yelu Qi praised him like that.

Guo Fu said, "Let's bring them to Mother, she should know who did this."

The two beggars carried the body, the crutches and followed Yelu Qi and the two sisters back into the city. Guo Jing and Huang Rong heard Guo Fu's narration and thought about the matter, causing them to be shocked.

Guo Xiang thought she would surely be scolded by her parents for getting into such trouble again. However Guo Jing liked his daughter's deep loyalty so he consoled her instead. Huang Rong saw that he was not angry so she hugged her and comforted her. She saw Nimoxing's body and crutches and said to Guo Jing, "Brother Jing, who do you think it is?"

Guo Jing shook his head and said, "This internal energy is so fierce and powerful, from what I know, only two people are capable of it."

Huang Rong said, "But Master Hong Qigong passed away long ago and it is not you." She asked for the details but could not think of an explanation.

After taking Guo Fu and Guo Xiang back to their rooms to rest, she said, "Brother Jing, our second lady has hidden something from us, do you know that?" Guo Jing curiously asked, "Hiding what?" Huang Rong said, "Ever since she returned from sending the Heroes' Summit invitations, she has been day-dreaming alone. Tonight she was speaking even more strangely." Guo Jing said, "She has suffered a shock, so she's not thinking clearly."

Huang Rong said, "No. Sometimes she would be shy, sometimes she would smile to herself, and this is obviously not symptoms of suffering a shock. She actually has a joy in her heart which she can't say." Guo Jing said, "When a child suddenly fights an expert, she would be shocked and happy, there's nothing strange about that." Huang Rong smiled and thought, "Regarding matters concerning a girl's heart, you didn't understand when you were young, now that you're old, what do you know?" They changed the topic, discussing strategies to defeat the enemy, how to welcome the guests to the Heroes' Summit, how to arrange the seating etc. before resting.

Huang Rong lay on her bed and thought of Guo Xiang's affairs and found it hard to sleep, so she thought, "This girl met with much hardship and troubles when she was

born, I'm worried her life may be rather troubled. She has fortunately lived the past 16 years peacefully; don't tell me she will meet with some serious disaster now?" She thought about the strong enemy's imminent attack and the impending hardships for the people. If she had some prior intelligence, it would greatly aid them. Yet her daughter has been very strange since birth. If she did not want to say something, she would not say it no matter how her parents coerced or scolded her. Instead her face would turn red but she would not reveal a single word. Her parents found it funny yet still got angry.

The more Huang Rong thought of it, the more worried she was, so she stood up and went to the city wall, ordering the guards to open the gate and she went to the Yang Tai Temple.

The sky was cloudy, hiding the Moon and the stars. Huang Rong took a white candle and used her qing gong (lightness skill) to ascend Mount Xian. Suddenly, she heard voices dozens of meters away near "Dropping Tears Tablet". She crouched down and crept forward and hid behind a tree several meters away, not moving any closer.

Someone said, "Brother Sun, the Benefactor told us to wait behind the Dropping Tears Tablet, but why does this place have such a unique name?"

The one named Sun said, "The Benefactor must have had some problematic affairs of the heart. So whenever he sees any place named Duan Chang (Severed Intestine), You Chou (Worries) or Duo Lei (Dropping Tears), he remembers them easily."

The first person said, "With the Benefactor's great skills, he should be able to solve any problem, but whenever I see his expression or hear his tone of voice, it seems like he has indeed some unhappy problems. I think he actually named this place Dropping Tears Tablet himself."

The one named Sun said, "No. I've always heard Master Guo'er Shu say that during the Three Kingdoms Period, Xiangyang belonged to the Wei Kingdom. The general in charge, Yang Hu, had great merit in administrating the city and protecting the people. He used to tour this mountain. When he was dead the people remembered his contributions and built the Yang Tai Temple on this mountain and made this tablet to remember him. When the people remembered what he had done for them, they would be moved to tears, so this place is called the 'Dropping Tears Tablet'. Brother Chen, someone who has done as much as Grand Elder Yang is really a great man."

The one named Chen said, “The Benefactor has done many heroic deeds and helped countless people around the world. If he were the general of Xiangyang, he may even be better than Yang Hu.”

The one named Sun smiled, “Xiangyang’s Hero Guo is defending the people and does many heroic deeds, so he must be on the same level as Grand Elder Yang and the Benefactor.”

Huang Rong heard them praise her husband and was secretly pleased, but thought, “Who is the Benefactor they’re referring to? Is he the one who secretly helped Xiang-
Er?”

Then Mr. Sun said, “Long ago we were the Benefactor’s enemies, then the Benefactor saved our lives; the Benefactor’s kind personality of treating his enemies as his friends might be comparable with Grand Elder Yang Hu. About that story during the Three Kingdoms Period, that master also mentioned that when Yang Hu was protecting Xiangyang, the enemy opposing him was General Lu Xun’s son Lu Kang of the Wu Kingdom. Yang Hu sent troops into Wu territory to fight the enemy, whenever he harvested the people’s rice for his military provisions he would compensate them. When Lu Kang was sick, Yang Hu sent medicine to him and Lu Kang took it without any suspicions. His lieutenants advised him to be careful, but he said, “Someone like Uncle Yang (“Zhen De Mu Pang Huan Xi Pang”) did not resort to despicable tactics. Uncle Yang is Yang Hu. His character was above question and the enemy respected him. When he died, even the Wu Kingdom Generals mourned him. The way he treated others really made him deserve to be a hero.”

(Some background information: the three countries of the Three Kingdom Period were Wu, Shu and Wei. Wei was controlled by Cao Cao and Wu by Sun Quan. When Shu’s Liu Bei attacked Wu in retaliation for the killing of Guan Yu, Lu Xun defended Wu. He managed to destroy Liu Bei’s 700,000 strong army with his 50,000 troops. Liu Bei did not listen to his advisor Zhuge Liang’s advice. This Zhuge Liang of Xiangyang was mentioned in earlier chapters by Guo Jing.)

Mr. Chen kept sighing as he touched the stone tablet, then after a while he said, “The Benefactor told us to meet here, is it also to admire Grand Elder Yang’s character?”

Mr. Sun said, “I heard the Benefactor mention before that when Yang Hu was alive there was a sentence that he always remembered.”

Mr. Chen asked, “What was that? Say it slowly, I must memorize this. If the Benefactor admired it, this sentence must be something great.”

Mr. Sun said, “After Lu Kang died, the Lord of the Wu Kingdom said that Yang Hu treated the Wu Kingdom sincerely and saved many Wu Kingdom citizens, but he was serving the traitors of the Imperial Court, so Yang Hu sighed, ‘Tian Xia Bu Ru Yi Si, Shi Chang Ju Qi Ba’ (easy matters are often complicated). The Benefactor praised these words.”

Mr. Chen never expected it to be such a sentence and was slightly disappointed and sighed, then suddenly said loudly, “Brother Sun, Yang Hu – this name sounds the same...”

Mr. Sun said, “Hush! Someone’s here.”

Huang Rong was slightly surprised, and then she heard someone running round the mountain. Then she thought, “Sounds the same as ‘Yang Hu’ but uses different characters? Could it be ‘Yang Guo’? No, no way. Even if Guo’er’s martial arts have improved, it can’t have reached such an unimaginable level. This person couldn’t be saying that it sounds the same but uses different characters.”

After a short while, the person ascending the mountain clapped lightly twice and Mr. Sun returned three claps. That person walked to the Dropping Tears Tablet and said, “Brothers Sun and Chen, the Benefactor tells you not to wait for him; here are two invitations from the Benefactor, please help him deliver them. Brother Sun, this invitation is for Old Master Zhao of Henan’s Xingyang Mansion on Crows Mountain; Brother Chen, this invitation is for the deaf-mute Head Camel of Hu Nan’s Changde Mansion. Please tell them that they are requested to meet here within ten days.” Mr. Chen and Mr. Sun respectfully agreed, they took the invitations and placed them in their inner pockets.

When Huang Rong heard this, she was greatly surprised. Old Master Zhao of Xingyang was working for the Imperial Court, his Thirty-two Long Punches and Eighteen Rod Stances were the special skills of his family and were passed from generation to generation within his family. He was a nobleman and never bothered about Jianghu affairs. The Head Camel of Crows Mountain was a famous elder in Wulin, his martial arts were very good, but because he was a deaf-mute, he seldom mixed with outsiders. For this Heroes’ Summit at Xiangyang, Guo Jing and Huang Rong knew these two people liked seclusion and would not attend the meet, but they still respected their reputation and sent them invitations. Obviously they replied and declined. Could it be that this so-

called 'Benefactor' has such a great influence on them and is able to draw them out of seclusion and hurry them here based on his invitation alone?

Then Huang Rong thought again, "The Heroes Meet would start tomorrow and this person is summoning all the experts in Jianghu to Xiangyang, what is his motive? Could he actually be helping the Mongols? That'd be unfavorable for us." Then she felt that although Old Master Zhao and Deaf-Mute Head Camel were loners, they were not traitors. This 'Benefactor' secretly helped Xiang'er kill Nimoxing, so he must not be one of them.

As she was talking to herself, she heard the three people talking softly but she could not hear clearly as she was too far away, then she heard Mr. Chen say, "Benefactor has never entrusted us with such an important assignment, this assignment will... it would be a grand event... our present..." She missed several words in between. Mr. Sun said, "OK! Let's do it. Rest assured we will not mess up the Benefactor's plans." When he said that, the three people descended the mountain.

Huang Rong could not guess the origin of that 'Benefactor' but she did not want to blow things up by capturing the three people to ask about the matter. When they were gone far, she went into the temple and looked around but did not see anything amiss. When the enemy attacked the area, all the worshippers and caretakers at the temple fled into the city so there was no one there. When she went back, it was already dawn.

When she was near the city's west gate, two horses charged along the road and she had to leap aside to avoid them. She saw two big and strong men riding the horses. The two horses went to the intersection and separated, with one heading west and the other heading south. She heard one of them say, "You must remember to tell Fat Zhang that he must bring the musical instruments and the show's costumes himself. And don't forget to bring decorations experts." The other laughed, "Don't nag at me, if you're late by one day in inviting Master Chuan Chai, even if the Benefactor forgives you, we won't." The first man laughed, "Hey, that's alright. If I'm late by one day, cut off my head to feed the pigs." The two men saluted each other and rode off.

As Huang Rong entered the city, she mumbled to herself, "I heard Fat Zhang is a tyrant, even chivalrous outlaws respected him, and how could this 'Benefactor' get him here with one word? They talked about flags and drums, what could they be used for?" Suddenly she thought of something and said, "Yes, yes! It must be so."

She went into the Government Office and asked Guo Jing, "Brother Jing, did we miss out any invitations?"

Guo Jing curiously said, “How could we have missed anything? We checked for many days, it couldn’t have happened.”

Huang Rong said, “I think so too; we must have offended a great hero who’s not that famous, so he sent invitations to those who obviously won’t come. From the way it looks, it must be a great man who’s dissatisfied with us, so he also wants to host another Heroes’ Summit to compete with us.”

Guo Jing happily said, “This hero has the same motives as us, nothing could be better. We will invite him to chair the Heroes’ Summit and get him to command the heroes to defend against the Mongolians; it’s alright for the both of us to listen to him.”

Huang Rong frowned and said, “But from what I hear of him, he might not be here to defend the city. He sent invitations to Xiangyang’s Old Master Zhao, Deaf-Mute Head Camel of Crows Mountain and Hankou’s Fat Zhang and others.”

Guo Jing was surprised and happy; he clapped and said, “If this man can invite such great people here, Xiangyang would be strengthened. Rong’er, we must definitely meet such a man.”

Huang Rong became quiet. She knew that the beggars from Jiangnan would arrive soon, so Guo Jing and Huang Rong went forth to welcome them. On that day heroes from all around Jianghu arrived and Huang Rong was so busy entertaining the guests that she almost had no time to breathe and of course forgot the events of the previous night.

The next day was the banquet for the ‘Heroes’ Summit, and the heroes sat around four hundred-odd tables, with Xiangyang’s Commander General Lu Wende and Defense Official General Wang Jian offering toasts to the heroes. The people in the banquet hall talked about the Mongols’ cruelty and how they invaded Song territory and killed its citizens. All the heroes expressed their indignation and their will to fight the invaders. That night everyone unanimously elected Guo Jing to chair the Meet and they swore to kill the invaders.

Guo Xiang and her sister argued at the temple the other night and she said she would not attend the ‘Heroes’ Summit. Of course she was absent and was instead dining in her own room alone. She told the servant, “Sister is attending the ‘Heroes’ Summit while I’m here comfortably drinking wine. She may not be as happy as I am.” Guo Jing and Huang Rong were occupied with strategies to defeat the enemy, how could they care about what their daughter was doing? Guo Jing did not even know her whereabouts

nor bother to find out. Huang Rong asked around but knew her daughter's strange character so she could only laugh.

Many of the heroes present had great capacity for liquor and felt that the wine was excellent, their spirits were boosted and they displayed their martial skills. Huang Rong missed her daughter and told Guo Fu, "Go get your sister here to join in the fun. This kind of grand occasion occurs only once in a lifetime."

Guo Fu said, "No way am I going. Sister is unhappy now and is waiting for any opportunity to argue with me, I'm not going to bang my head against the wall."

Guo Polu said, "I'll get her here." He hurriedly left and walked towards her room.

After a short while Guo Polu returned alone; before he could say anything Guo Fu said, "Didn't I say she wouldn't come?"

Huang Rong saw her son's face was devoid of colour and asked, "What did she say?"

Guo Polu said, "She said she's hosting a mini 'Heroes' Summit in her room, so she won't be attending the major 'Heroes' Summit."

Huang Rong smiled, "Only your sister can think of such crazy things, leave her alone."

Guo Polu said, "But she has guests. Five males and two females are drinking inside Sister's room."

Huang Rong frowned and thought that this girl was getting more and more out of hand. How could a young girl invite men to her room to dine? Her 'Little Eastern Heretic' nickname was indeed fully deserved, but today there were many guests so she could not be punished and spoil the atmosphere. So she told Guo Fu, "Your brother is young and doesn't know how to entertain guests, you go. Invite your sister's friends to the banquet as well, so that we can get to know each other."

Guo Fu was curious to find out what sort of guests her sister had. She knew her sister did not bother about what was proper between males and females and enjoyed making friends with all kinds of people. She thought these people must be thugs or similar characters. When she heard her mother instruct her to do so, she immediately got up and went to Guo Xiang's room.

As she stood near the door, she heard Guo Xiang say, “Little Wooden Head, tell the kitchen to send another two pots of wine.” ‘Little Wooden Head’ was a maid and Guo Xiang had given her the unusual nickname. The maid acknowledged the order. Then she heard Guo Xiang say again, “Tell the kitchen to cook another two goats’ legs and 20 jin of beef.” The maid replied affirmatively and exited the room. Then from the room came a rough voice saying, “Miss Guo is frank and straightforward, too bad I, Ren Chuzi, didn’t know that before or I’d have been friends with you long ago.” Guo Xiang laughed, “Becoming friends now is not too late.”

Guo Fu frowned and looked through the window slit. She saw a short table in her sister’s room and there were many wine cups on the table. The eight people were sitting on the floor and drinking merrily. There was a fat man facing her with his shirt exposing half his chest, showing his thick and black chest hair. On his left was a scholar with neat clothes and he was fanning himself lightly with his fan, appearing to be refined. His fan had a drawing of a ghost sticking out its tongue. On his left was a woman of about forty years old with a delicate face, but her face had around ten sword scars. Sitting opposite her was a tall and skinny camel-like man with a shiny golden head-dress and his mouth was biting into half a chicken and eating joyously. There were three whose backs were facing the window, so Guo Fu could not see their faces. She saw that two of them were white haired men while the other was a black-clad priestess. Guo Xiang was sitting in between them and her face was red like an apple, her eyes showed signs of her consuming liquor and she was talking merrily. Guo Fu thought they were so happy here, if she invited them to the banquet they looked like they would not go.

Then one of the white-haired men stood up and said, “Today’s feast is almost over, on this lady’s birthday, we shall come and drink again. This old man has a small gift; it might make the lady laugh.” As he said that he took out a box and placed it on the table. The other old man said, “Bai Chaoxian, what are you giving her, let me see.” He then flipped open the box and could not help but draw in his breath sharply, saying, “Ah, this is a thousand-year-old snow Ginseng, did you get it from the bottom of the river?” He placed it in his palm.

Guo Fu saw him holding a foot-long snowy white Ginseng, with its ‘head’, ‘body’ ‘hands’ and ‘feet’ all in place and showing a slight trace of red, indicating that it was a rare and exclusive Ginseng root.

The people all praised it and that old man was very proud; then he said, “This snow Ginseng can cure terminal diseases, neutralize hundreds of poisons; it’s even said to be able to resurrect a person. This lady will live to be a hundred, so she doesn’t have to use

it. But on her 100th birthday, she just may need to take it so she can live for another 100 years.” The people all clapped and praised him.

The fat Ren Chuzi took out a money box from his bosom and laughed, “This is a small toy, and hopefully it can amuse the lady.” He opened the box and took out two metal-cast monks of around seven inches tall and activated a mechanism, causing the monks to exchange punches and kicks. The people all laughed as they watched this. The monks displayed strokes from Shaolin’s Luo Han boxing, and exchanged dozens of moves before stopping, then standing at attention, which was the style of highly-skilled Shaolin monks.

The people all stopped laughing when they saw this and their faces changed colour. The scar-faced woman said, “Ren Chuzi, don’t bring trouble to Miss Guo! This is the metal Luo Han from the Shaolin Temple, how could you steal them?”

Ren Chuzi laughed, “Heh-heh, even if I’m not afraid of the sky or the Earth, I wouldn’t dare steal anything from the Shaolin Temple. This was given to me by Reverend Wuse of the Shaolin Temple’s Luo Han Hall. The elder said when this lady celebrates her birthday, quickly go down to Xiangyang to wish her a happy birthday. Eh, this is my gift.” He took off the inner lid from the box and took out a black jade bangle.

The black bangle looked dull and nothing special. Ren Chuzi then drew a thick-backed ghost-headed knife from his waist and chopped down on the bangle. The knife hit the bangle with a ‘dang’ sound and flew upwards, not even leaving a scratch on the bangle. The people all cheered, then the scholar, priestess, Head Camel and the woman all presented their gifts to Guo Xiang, all highlighting how unique their gifts were. Guo Xiang smiled happily as she received the gifts.

Guo Fu was more and more curious and surprised, so she headed back to the banquet hall and told everything to Huang Rong.

When Huang Rong heard this, she was even more surprised than Guo Fu, so she waved to Zhu Ziliu and the three people went to Guo Xiang’s room. Huang Rong told her daughter to repeat the story. Zhu Ziliu was equally surprised and said, “Ren Chuzi and Bai Chaoxian actually came to Xiangyang? That black-robed priestess should be the Merciless Killer Priestess Shenyang. The scholar’s fan has a drawing of a ghost, hmm; he should be the Turning Wheel King Zhang Yimang.” As he said this, Huang Rong nodded her head. Zhu Ziliu kept shaking his head instead, saying, “There’s nothing much to this. Miss Guo has never gone beyond 10 li of Xiangyang except for once recently, how could she get to know such strange people? Moreover, I heard Shaolin Temple’s

Reverend Wuse has not shown his face in recent years; even eminent people of Wulin who visit the Shaolin Temple don't get to see him. Why would he come to Xiangyang to wish a girl happy birthday? Hmm, maybe she just wants to fool around with her sister by coming up with this."

Huang Rong said lowly, "But we seldom mention people like Priestess Shenyang and Zhang Yimang, so even if Xiang'er knew, she couldn't have thought of this."

Zhu Ziliu said, "Then it must be true. Let's go take a look and meet them. Since they're her friends, they wouldn't have any bad intentions by coming to Xiangyang."

Huang Rong said, "I think so too, but people like Priestess Shenyang and Turning Wheel King Zhang Yimang are hard to classify as good or bad. Although this is not a big problem, it is enough to cause a headache. Here we are defending against the enemy and now we're not sure how to deal with these weird people..."

Suddenly someone outside the window laughed, saying, "Madam Guo, this group of people are visiting Xiangyang only to convey our birthday wishes, we have no other intentions, why the headache? When the last few words were heard, the voice was already far away. Huang Rong, Zhu Ziliu and Guo Fu went to the window together and saw black shadows flashing out and disappearing behind the wall. Guo Fu wanted to give chase but was held back by Huang Rong, who said, "Don't bother; you can't catch up with them!" Then they saw a white fan hanging from a tree branch outside.

That fan was up in the tree about four yards away, Guo Fu knew she couldn't reach it and called, "Mother!" Huang Rong nodded her head, and lightly leapt forwards and grabbed a branch with her left hand, then flipped around and grabbed another branch with her right hand. She caught the fan and lightly jumped to the ground.

The three people went back indoors and under the candle light, saw the drawing of a ghost sticking out its tongue with a silly grin and both hands clutched together. On the side were several words, "Wishing Miss Guo many happy returns and living to a ripe old age." Huang Rong flipped over the fan and the words said, "Black-robed priestess Shenyang, Bai Chaoxian, Jiu Sisen, Dog-meat Head Camel, Han Wugou and Zhang Yimang greet Hero Guo and Madam Guo. We celebrated your daughter's birthday without permission, we apologize for the offence."

Zhu Ziliu was an expert in calligraphy, so he praised, "Good, good calligraphy!"

Huang Rong said, "Let's go see Xiang'er."

Zhu Ziliu was already quite old and was not suspicious of the girl so they all went into Guo Xiang's room. They saw Little Wooden Head and another servant clearing the dishes. Guo Xiang said, "Uncle Zhu, Mother, Sister, look at the birthday gifts my guests have given me."

When Huang Rong and Zhu Ziliu saw the snow Ginseng, twin iron Luo Han statues, black jade bangle and the other presents, they both praised and marveled at them. Guo Xiang activated the mechanism and the two Luo Han statues started to spar, which made her feel really proud. Huang Rong watched the Luo Han perform the Luo Han Boxing. When they had finished she gently asked, "Xiang'er, what's going on? Tell Mother."

Guo Xiang laughed and said, "A few new friends knew my birthday is approaching, so they gave me these amusing things."

Huang Rong asked, "How did you get to know these people?"

Guo Xiang said, "I got to know them only today. I was alone in the room drinking wine, when Sister Han Wugou stood outside the window and asked, 'Little lady, we'd like to come in and drink with you, alright?' I said, 'Nothing could be better, please come in!' All of them jumped in through the window then said that on the 24th itself they would come and celebrate my birthday. How do they know my birthday? Mother, they are yours and Father's friends, right? Or why else would they give me such wonderful things?"

Huang Rong said, "Your Father and I don't know them. You met some strange friends by appointment, true?"

Guo Xiang laughed, "I don't have any strange friends, unless it's Brother-in-law."

Guo Fu angrily said, "Rubbish! How can your brother-in-law be a strange man?"

Guo Xiang stuck out her tongue and laughed, "After he married you, how can he not be strange?" Guo Fu stretched out her hand to hit her but Guo Xiang laughed and evaded to the side.

Huang Rong said, "You two stop it. Xiang'er, let me ask you, did the Turning Wheel King, Bai Chaoxian (Hundred Plants Deity) and the others say anything about attending the 'Heroes' Summit?"

Guo Xiang said, “No, but they said they admire and respect Father.”

She asked a few more questions and felt that Guo Xiang was not hiding anything so she said, “OK! Go to sleep.” Then she, Zhu Ziliu and Guo Fu went out.

Guo Xiang ran to the door and said, “Mother, this snow Ginseng seems to be rather useful, you take half and Father can take the other half.”

Huang Rong said, “But this was given to you as a birthday present!”

Guo Xiang said, “After I was born I didn’t do anything much, but you have suffered.” Huang Rong did not want to reject her daughter’s filial wishes so she took the Ginseng and thought back to Guo Xiang’s hardships when she was born and sighed.

The ‘Heroes’ Feast had dispersed happily and Guo Jing returned to his room. He told his wife about the heroes’ determination to drive out the enemy and expressed his joy. Huang Rong then told him about Priestess Shenyang, Bai Chaoxian etc. visiting Guo Xiang.

Guo Jing was surprised, saying, “There’s such a thing?” Then he looked at the snow Ginseng and knew that it was a rare and precious gift.

Huang Rong laughed, “Looks like our precious lady’s influence far surpasses her parents’.” Guo Jing remained silent and bowed his head, thinking about the people she mentioned.

Huang Rong said, “Brother Jing, maybe we should host the Beggar Clan Leader’s Selection earlier and not postpone Guo Xiang’s birthday. If those people actually come, we might not be able to deal with them while we’re busy with the Leader’s Selection.”

Guo Jing said, “I have another idea. Let’s hold it on her birthday itself instead. Then if they actually turn up we can invite them to battle the enemy with us, won’t that be great?”

Huang Rong frowned and said, “I’m afraid they’re only using Guo Xiang’s birthday as an excuse to come, but are actually coming here to cause trouble. Just think what could their relationship with Xiang’er be? Could they be here just to celebrate her birthday? ‘A big tree will catch more wind’; there might be many people in Wulin who’re not willing to let you be the Chancellor of Wulin.”

Guo Jing stood up and laughed, saying, “Rong’er, when it comes to fighting the enemy, the more people the better. Someone else being the Chancellor of Wulin, it would still be the same. Moreover, evil cannot triumph over good; if they’re really here to create trouble, we’ll entertain them. Your “Dog Beating” skill and my “Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palms” have not seen action for several years but they may not be rusty yet.”

Huang Rong saw that he was in good spirits so she laughed, “OK! We’ll do as you say. You take this Snow Ginseng; I think it’s worth three to five years of training.”

Guo Jing said, “No! You’ve had three children; your internal strength is weakened, so you should take it.”

The husband and wife were very loving and kept pushing the Ginseng to each other for half a day. Guo Jing finally said, “There will be fierce and brutal battles in the coming days and many of our friends will be injured. This snow Ginseng can save many lives, so let’s keep it for then.”



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