

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

SDXL Chapter 30



Chapter 30 – Strange Encounters

Translated by BeeDreamer



Zhou Botong grabbed Xiao Longnu with one arm and put her on the trunk. Ci'en was concentrating on rushing forwards for fear that Xiao Longnu would catch up with him, and so he was the only person who didn't know that there was another person behind him. Sitting on the trunk, Xiao Long Nu was both secure and comfortable, just like riding a horse.

Once again, this quiet and peaceful moment didn't last very long. Just a little while after Guo Xiang fell asleep, from the east came the distant crunching sounds of someone walking on the snow in quick steps. Yang Guo stood up and gazed out from the east side window. Then he saw two old men walking side by side on the snowy ground. One was fat, and the other was thin. And with their ragged clothes, they looked just like people

from the Beggar Clan. Stranded in the snow, they had to be looking for a place to rest their feet. Yang Guo didn't want to meet any people at this time and specially detested those from Wulin [the martial world]. He turned around and said, "There are people outside. You should go lay in the bedroom, pretending to be sick." Xiao Longnu picked up Guo Xiang and went into the bedroom to lie down in bed as suggested. Then she pulled up a tattered wolf skin from the edge of the bed to cover her body.

Yang Guo scooped up some firewood ash and wiped it all over his face and neck. He pulled the hat lower over his face and hid his black iron sword inside a room. Then he heard the two people coming close and knocking on the door. He randomly smeared deer grease on his gown to make him look like a hunter and then went to open the door.

That fat old beggar said, "The snow is coming down heavily in the mountains. It is really miserable out here. May we ask the gentleman to let us beggars stay in your house tonight?" Yang Guo replied, "We are just a hunting family. How could senior call me a gentleman? You may stay here for the night." That fat old beggar then thanked him profusely. Yang Guo recalled how he once displayed himself at a heroes meeting and didn't want to be recognized by them. So he ripped two strips of meat from the roasted deer leg, handed them to the two people, and said, "There are so many things to do to survive in the snow. I've got to get up early tomorrow to catch a fox. I'm afraid I can't keep you two company." The fat old beggar replied, "Please do as you please, little gentleman."

Then in a coarse tone Yang Guo said, "Old wife, how's your cough?" Xiao Longnu replied, "It's the weather change. My chest hurts." While saying that, she let out a loud cough and her hand gently shook Guo Xiang to wake her up. The sound of a coughing woman was mixed with that of a crying baby and so the three of them really presented a perfect picture of a hunting household.

Yang Guo walked into the bedroom and banged the door shut after him. He lay down in bed next to Xiao Longnu and thought to himself, "This fat beggar looks familiar. Where have I seen him before?" But he couldn't remember.

The fat and thin beggars thought that Yang Guo really was a poor hunter living on a wild mountain and didn't suspect anything. While eating the deer leg, they started talking. The thin beggar said, "Today Mount Zhongnan was blasted to the sky. That was well done." With a laugh the fat beggar added, "The Mongolian Royal Army is attacking from east to west and defeating all their enemies under the sky. Wiping out those little Quanzhen Taoists was as easy as crushing an ant nest." The thin beggar said, "But just

recently Jinlun Fawang suffered quite a loss. That was difficult enough.” The fat beggar laughingly said, “That’s even better. It will let the prince know that he must depend on the Chinese to conquer the beautiful homeland of China. Using only the Mongolians and the Western warriors isn’t enough.” The thin beggar then said, “Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], when this business of establishing the Southern Beggar Clan is all done, how is the Mongolian emperor going to reward you?”

Having heard this, Yang Guo suddenly remembered something. He’d seen this old fat beggar at the Dashengguan hero banquet but at that time the beggar was dressed in Mongolian attire with a fur coat, and he was whispering advice to Jinlun Fawang. It was this person. So he thought to himself, “These two fellows are actually the country’s traitors. I will just quickly get rid of them to avoid causing any disturbance here.”

This fat old beggar was precisely one of the four big elders of the Beggar Clan, Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], who had earlier fallen in with the Mongols. Yang Guo heard him continue, “The emperor will bestow on me the position of “Chief General of the Southern Province” but, you know, they say ‘Beg for three years and the emperor still might not see it.’ We are members of the Beggar Clan. Why would we want to become a Government Official?” But while saying this, his tone actually revealed a fervent desire for the position.

The thin beggar said, “Let me congratulate you in advance.” Peng Zhang Lao chuckled and said, “Your accomplishments during these many years are not lacking. Naturally, your own reward won’t be small either.”

That thin beggar said, “I don’t wish to become a public official. You’ve promised to teach me the great “Soul Absorbing Technique”. When will you pass it on to me?”

Peng Zhang Lao replied, “Wait until the Southern Beggar Clan is established and I become the chief of the clan. Both of us will have a lot of free time. Then I will definitely pass it on to you.”

The thin beggar said, “By then you’ll be the Chief of the Southern Beggar Clan and also the Mongolian Chief General of the Southern Province. You would only be even busier. How would you have any free time?”

With a laugh Peng Zhang Lao said, “Lao di [Old little brother], is that to say you still don’t trust your big brother?” That thin beggar said nothing and snorted, showing that he didn’t believe him.

Yang Guo thought to himself, “There’s only one Beggar Clan in the world and it’s never been divided into northern and southern sects. His planning to set up this Southern Beggar Clan must be a devious scheme to help the Mongols.”

The thin beggar continued, “Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng], you’ve promised someone something. Sooner or later you’ve got to do it. You seniors keep putting things off, disappointing other people.”

Peng Zhang Lao blandly asked, “What would you do then?”

The thin beggar retorted, “What would I do? My martial skills are low. My courage is small. I don’t have any great skills. But I’ve been accompanying you, helping you deceive numerous sect brothers. Later on when Chief Huang and Chief Lu come to investigate, I think I’ll tremble with fear and spill everything to wash my hands from this mud.”

Yang Guo thought, “The thin beggar doesn’t want to live. How could he dare say such thing? That Peng Zhang Lao has a lofty aspiration and an evil and cold-blooded nature. You’re really both venomous and foolish.”

Peng Zhang Lao let out a ‘ha-ha’ laugh and said, “We’ll discuss this in time. You don’t have to worry.”

The thin beggar didn’t say a word. But after a while he said, “One tiny deer leg is not filling. I’ll go out and get more food.” While saying that he took down the spear from the wall and pushed the door open.

Yang Guo looked through a crack in the wall and saw that as soon as that thin beggar went out the door, Peng Zhang Lao straightened up his body, drawing out a short knife and hiding it behind the door. He then heard the sounds of footsteps moving towards the west and disappearing out of the door. With a chuckle Yang Guo told Xiao Longnu, “This pair of beggars are about to kill each other, saving us a lot of trouble. That fat beggar is very dangerous. That thin one is definitely not his match.”

Xiao Longnu said, “It’ll be best if the two of them don’t come back. This house is quite peaceful. I don’t want people to come and disturb us.”

“True,” said Yang Guo. Suddenly he lowered his voice, “I hear the sounds of footsteps.” They then heard someone making a detour around the mountain side and come back behind the house.

With a faint smile Yang Guo said, “That thin old man’s come back for a sneak attack.” He pushed the window open and gently leapt out. Then he saw the thin beggar crouching down to peep through a crack in the wall. He didn’t see a trace of Peng Zhang Lao, as if that beggar hadn’t yet come up with a plan. Yang Guo walked up behind the thin man and said with a laugh, “Hey!”

Taken by surprise, the thin beggar snapped his head back, thinking that it was Peng Zhang Lao sneaking up behind him. His face looked alarmed and terrified. “Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid.” Yang Guo said and reached out to press the three pressure points — on his chest, below his ribs, and on his leg. Then he moved the thin beggar to the front door. Before his eyes was a vast field of white deep snow. The child in him sprang up and so he called out, “Long’er, come quickly and help me build a snowman.” He scooped up the white snow on the ground and started piling it onto that thin beggar’s body. Xiao Longnu came out of the house to help. Merrily, the two of them worked on the snowman and a short while later that beggar was thoroughly covered with the white snow. Except the pair of eyeballs that could still move, the thin beggar turned into an extremely fat and heavy snowman.

With a laugh Yang Guo said, “This thin decrepit old man’s become both fat and white in a flash.” Xiao Longnu giggled and said, “And that other fat and white old man... what would you change him into?” Yang Guo had yet to reply when he heard the sounds of footsteps from the distance. He lowered his voice, “That fat old beggar’s back. Let’s hide.” The two people returned to the house and shut the door. Xiao Longnu shook Guo Xiang, making her cry. At the same time she coaxed, “Hush, hush, don’t cry.” In her whole life, she’d never pretended to do anything but this situation was so strange that she didn’t even think about it. She saw that Yang Guo was having fun so she just played along with him.

As Peng Zhang Lao returned, he examined footprints on the snow. He saw the thin old beggar’s footprints going out and coming back again, showing that he was planning an ambush from the left side of the house. He followed the footprints to the back of the house and then came out to the front again. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were about to open the door but then saw his short body bending over to peep into the house through the window, his right hand firmly holding a knife, and his whole body alert.

The thin old beggar was freezing to the bone. He saw that Peng Zhang Lao [Elder Peng] was unsuspectingly standing right in front of him. If only he could move his hand, he would have been able to strike him dead. But the three pressure points on his body had been sealed, making him unable to move.

Peng Zhang Lao saw that there was nobody in the house and thought it was really strange. He pushed open the door, expecting the thin beggar to come out. But suddenly he heard the sounds of footsteps coming from the distance. Peng Zhang Lao's expression changed, and he went to hide behind the door panel, waiting for the thin beggar to return.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were puzzled. That thin beggar had become a snowman. How could there be people coming? While hesitating, they heard that it was two people and knew that they had guests again. Peng Zhang Lao's hearing was far inferior to theirs. As the two people were approaching, he looked alarmed.

Then someone from outside the house said, "Amitufo, we needy monks are stuck here in the mountain snow. May we ask the patrons to let us stay here overnight?" Peng Zhang Lao turned his body around and saw two old monks standing in the snow. One had long white eyebrows, with a benign face. The other was a small-built man with a gray beard, dressed in black. And even in this cold winter month, the two people were wearing thin clothes.

Peng Zhang Lao was still in a trance when Yang Guo came out of the room and said, "Please come in. Why are you two still standing in the doorway?" By this time Peng Zhang Lao saw the snowman. And after some observation, he eventually recognized the thin beggar. Seeing this strange transformation, he was greatly surprised and turned around to look at Yang Guo. But Yang Guo looked to be normal, as if he didn't know anything about it at all.

After having invited the two old monks in Yang Guo thought: "It looks like these two old monks aren't just ordinary people; especially that wicked looking monk dressed in black. With that strange glow in his eyes, I'm afraid he'll turn out to be like this Peng Zhang Lao." Then he said, "Big monks, you've stopped to rest here. We are poor mountain people and can't provide beds for you to sleep in. Do the two of you eat game?"

The white-eye browed monk put his two palms together (he shi) joining ten fingers to pay respect) and said, "That's wrong. That's wrong. We've brought our own food. We dare not burden our patrons."

Yang Guo said, "That's good." Then he came back into the bedroom and whispered into Xiao Longnu's ear, "The two old monks looked to be very powerful masters."

Xiao Longnu frowned and said in a low voice, "There are really many evil people in the world. Deep in the mountain like this, people still won't leave us alone in peace."

Yang Guo bent down to look through a crack in the wall and saw that the white-eye browed monk took out four lumps of fried noodles from his rucksack. He gave two of them to the monk dressed in black and slowly ate the other two. Yang Guo thought, “The white-eye browed monk looks kind and composed, really like an esteemed monk. But there are just so many evil people who look good on the outside. Isn’t this Peng Zhang Lao always laughing and looking very friendly? Still, how come that monk in black looks murderously evil like that?”

While contemplating this, he suddenly heard two ‘lang-lang’ sounds. That monk in black took out black shiny iron objects out of his robe. Peng Zhang Lao who was originally sitting on a bench immediately jumped up and drew out his knife. The monk in black paid him no attention. Instead, he chained his own feet with one of those black objects, which turned out to be an iron manacle, and did the same thing to both of his hands. Yang Guo and Peng Zhang Lao were stunned, unable to figure out why he shackled his own hands and feet. But having seen this, they could somewhat let down their guard against him.

The face of that white-eye browed monk was filled with concern. He asked in a low voice, “It’s acting up again?”

The monk in black replied, “On the way here I didn’t feel very well. I’m afraid that it’ll happen again.” Suddenly he knelt down on the floor, putting his two palms together and pleading, “May Lord Buddha show mercy.” Having said that, he crouched down and stayed motionless in a kneeling position. After a while, he started to shiver and gasp for air, making wheezing noises. Then he unexpectedly let out a bull-like roar, so loud that it shook the wooden walls and sent the snow on the rooftop down to the ground.

Peng Zhang Lao was so frightened that his heart was thumping wildly. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu also gaped at each other in astonishment, not knowing what this monk was doing. Judging from the roar, his body had to be in great distress. Although Yang Guo had been feeling hostility towards him from the beginning, this time he actually couldn’t help pity the man. He mused, “I don’t know what strange disease has struck him. Why hasn’t that white-eyebrowed monk done something about it?”

After a while, the roar from that monk in black slowed, as if he was becoming out of breath. The white-eyebrowed monk soothingly said, “What should not be done will be done; what should be done will be rejected; repent from burning anger and hatred; from now on start anew...” These few sentences were spoken gently. But even amid the loud roar, one could still hear them very clearly.

Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, “This old monk’s internal energy was so profound. Who in the world would be able to match him?” Then he heard the white-eyebrowed monk continue the Buddhist verse, “He who repents for his crime will not be sad but become peaceful. He who repents for his misdeeds will not do evil.”

After the verse was recited, the monk in black stopped panting. He thought dully and croaked, “He who repents for his crime will not be sad... Shifu [master], I know full well I have done all sorts of things, all of them evil and full of hatred. I couldn’t control myself. I was thinking about ‘He who repents for his misdeeds will not do evil.’ But in my heart I couldn’t find peace. How could that be good?”

The white-eyebrowed monk replied, “Being able to repent for past sins is really difficult. We humans are not saints. Who has never erred? Only to know that we...”

As Yang Guo heard this, he vividly remembered something, “Guo Bobo [Uncle Guo] named me ‘Guo,’ meaning to change. He said it came from ‘knowing that we can change is the greatest virtue.’ Can it be that this old monk is a saint, coming today to change me?”

That monk in black said, “My evil is really difficult to expel. Ten years ago, even after I’d already followed master for a long time, I still injured three people. Today, it’s as if my blood is boiling, and it’s been very difficult to control myself. I’m afraid that I’m going to commit a hideous crime. I beg for master’s mercy. Please cut off both of my hands.”

The white-eyebrowed monk replied, “Good, very good! I could chop off your hands for you. But for all the evil thoughts in your heart, you’d have to eliminate them yourself. If your evil thoughts don’t go away, how would my cutting off all your hands and feet help?”

The monk in black shook violently and suddenly choked in tears. He said, “Shifu [master] has enlightened me. But all this time I haven’t been able to get rid of my evil thoughts.”

The white-eyebrowed monk let out a deep sigh and said, “Although you know what’s right and wrong, your heart is filled with hatred. When you don’t know how to love, evil thoughts are always difficult to eliminate. Let me tell you a Buddhist tale of a mother deer.” The monk in black replied, “I’m listening.” Then he sat down cross-legged. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu on the other side of the wall were also listening in silence.

The white-eyebrowed monk said, “A long time ago, there were a mother deer and two small fawns. The mother deer was careless and was captured by a hunter, who wanted to kill her. The mother deer kowtowed to him and begged, ‘I just gave birth to two fawns. They are young and innocent, and do not know how to find water and grass. May I ask you for some time so I can teach them to find food for themselves? After that, I’ll come back to die.’ The hunter wouldn’t listen. But after the mother deer begged and begged (with her sad doe eyes), he was moved and then let her go.”

“The mother deer searched for her two babies. Then she lowered her head and cried, licking her children’s bodies. In her heart was a mixture of happiness and sadness. She told the two fawns, ‘A love relationship is predestined. Meetings have to end, and we rarely have much time. Today I’m your mother. I’m afraid I can’t protect myself. Life and death are everywhere. And danger came too early.’ The two fawns were small and didn’t understand her meaning. And so the mother deer pointed them to a beautiful place with water and grass, tears flowing from her eyes. Then she said, ‘Our time has ended. I fell into a hunter’s hand by accident and was about to be killed. I begged the hunter so I could come back to see you, and today I’ll die. I pity you, having to be motherless so young and living by yourself.’”

Having heard this, Xiao Longnu recalled how her own life would also be cut short. She thought about these few sentences — ‘Life and death are everywhere, and danger came too early’ and ‘I pity you, having to be motherless so young and living by yourself.’ She couldn’t bear it, and tears were flowing from her eyes. Yang Guo knew perfectly well that the white-eyebrowed monk was only telling a Buddhist tale but the tale of the mother deer and her children was very sad, and so he also was moved.

The white-eyebrowed monk continued the story, “Having finished saying this, the mother deer left her two fawns. The two of them cried, weeping in sorrow and following her closely behind. The babies were small and couldn’t run fast but they scrambled, tumbling down and getting up, to follow their mother, not willing to let her go. The mother deer paused. She turned around and said, ‘Babies! You can’t come along. If the hunter sees you, we mother and babies will all be finished. I’m ready to die, only fearing that you two are still weak. Nothing is permanent in the world. Everybody has to leave. I am ill-fated, causing you to lose your mother when you are still small.’ And then she fled to the hunter. The two fawns didn’t fear the hunter’s arrows and arrived after her.”

The hunter saw that the mother deer was trustworthy, giving up her life to keep her words, and that her determination surpassed that of humans. Besides, he saw that the three deer were not willing to leave one another. He felt pity and decided not to kill

her. The three of them shouted out in happiness, thanking the hunter. The hunter then told this story to the king, and the whole nation applauded and stopped evil killings.”

The monk in black listened to this story, tears streaming down his face. He said, “The deer were righteous. The mother deer was compassionate, and her offspring were filial. In no way can I compare to them.”

The white-eyebrowed monk said, “If there is compassion, any killing intention will disappear.” While saying this, he looked at Peng Zhang Lao who was nearby, as if he was also explaining all this to him. The monk in black responded, “True!” The white-eyebrowed monk continued, “If one wants to make amends that also is virtuous. It’s better than repenting and doing nothing. From today on, we should do good deeds.” Then he let out a small sigh, “Even I, in my life, have done many bad things.” Having said this, he shut his eyes and was deep in thought.

Even though the monk in black understood his master’s teaching, he was still troubled, finding it difficult to control himself. He lifted his head, only to see that Elder Peng was staring at him with a cat-like smile, his eyes looking as if they were shining lights. The monk in black was startled, feeling like he’d seen such a person somewhere before. He felt very uncomfortable with this meaningful look, and so he immediately turned his head away to avoid the gaze. But after a short while, he couldn’t bear it and turned back to meet those eyes.

With a smile Elder Peng said, “The snow has been coming down hard, don’t you think?”

The monk in black replied, “Yes, it’s been coming down hard.”

Elder Peng then said, “Come. Let’s go look at the snow.” Having said this, he pushed the door open. The monk in black repeated, “Good, let’s go look at the snow.” Then he got up to go stand side by side with Elder Peng at the door. At this time even though Yang Guo was behind the wall, he could sense that Elder Peng’s eyes were really strange and ominous.

Elder Peng said, “What your master said is right. Murder is wrong in any case. But the power in your body is overflowing. If you don’t let it out, your heart feels very difficult. Is that right?” In a daze, the monk in black replied, “It’s true!” Elder Peng said, “You might as well strike this snow man. Hit him, and you won’t sin.” The monk in black looked at the snowman and lifted both arms, eager to try. By now the two monks had been here for about half an hour, and the thin beggar’s body was thoroughly covered with white snow, even his eyes couldn’t be seen. Elder Peng urged, “Use your palms. Hit

this snowman. Hit...Hit...Hit!" His words were soft, filled with encouragement. The monk in black channeled energy to his arms and said, "Good, I'll hit!"

The white-eyebrowed monk lifted his head and let out a long sigh. In a low voice he said, "Where there is a murderous intention, there is sin."

But then he heard a crashing sound. The monk in black shot out both of his palms, sending the white snow flying. The thin beggar's body was struck, his pressure points unsealed, and so he let out a loud miserable 'ah' cry, which echoed into the distance. Xiao Longnu softly cried out, her hands grabbing Yang Guo's.

The monk in black was shocked. He yelled, "There was someone in the snow!" The white-eyebrowed monk quickly came out and bent down to examine the body. The thin beggar was struck by the extremely powerful palms of the monk in black, and thus he was killed violently. The monk in black was all confused and became dully still.

Elder Peng acted like he was frightened and said, "This person was really strange. Why did he hide in the snow? Eh, why was he holding a knife?" Elder Peng had used his "Soul Absorbing Technique", urging the monk in black to kill the thin beggar. He was very pleased with himself. Still, he couldn't help being puzzled and thought to himself, "Surprisingly this servant had endurance, hiding very still in the snow. Could it be that the snow was blocking his ears and so he didn't hear me urging that man to hit him?"

With a dull look in his eyes the monk in black could only cry out, "Master!" The white-eyebrowed monk said, "Such a pity. It wasn't you who killed this person, yet it was you who did it." The monk in black crouched down on the snow and his voice trembled, "I don't understand." The white-eyebrowed monk said, "You only knew that this was a snowman so you didn't mean to hurt people. But your palms were wickedly powerful, without restraint. How can it be said that you didn't have murderous intentions?" The monk in black said, "I certainly had murderous intentions."

The white-eyebrowed monk looked at Elder Peng with a long steady gaze. His eyes were gentle, yet filled with grief. Simply with just this look, Elder Peng's great 'Soul Absorbing' spell vanished. The monk in black suddenly cried out, "You are one of the Beggar Clan's elders. It now came to my mind!" The cat-like smile on Elder Peng's face disappeared in an instant. He frowned and shrewdly said, "And you are Iron Palms Chief Qiu. How did you become a monk?"

This monk in black was precisely Iron Palms Qiu Qianren. Years ago, on Mount Hua, he suddenly regretted all that he'd done and became a monk under Reverend Yideng's

tutelage. And this white-eyebrowed, old monk was Reverend Yideng, who was in the same league as Wang Chongyang, Huang Yaoshi, Ouyang Feng, and Hong Qigong. Qiu Qianren shaved his head and became a monk named Ci'en, following a Buddhist's path and diligently mending his ways. But he'd done many despicable things in the past, making it very difficult to eliminate the monster in his heart. Facing the many temptations in the world, he couldn't resist hurting people. And so he'd made a pair of strong manacles so that whenever his mind became troubled, he could shackle his hands and feet, keeping his evilness in check. At this time Reverend Yideng, who usually secluded himself in Hunan, had received a letter asking for help from his disciple Zhu Ziliu. So he and Ci'en were now on their way to the Passionless Valley. Nobody could have expected that they would run into Elder Peng on this remote mountain. Ci'en actually had no intention to hurt people.

In over ten years since becoming a monk, although Ci'en had violated some rules, this was actually the first time he had taken someone's life. His mind was greatly disturbed, feeling that over ten years of his Buddhist study was all for nothing. He gave Elder Peng a vicious stare, with raging fire in his eyes.

Reverend Yideng knew that this was a critical moment. If one used force to stop him from getting into a fight, his evilness would multiply. Like a bursting flood, once released, there would be no redemption. Having thought this, he only looked at Ci'en with kindness, hoping that his evil thoughts would just melt away when he came to his senses. He kindly stood by him and gently chanted, "Amitufo, Amitufo!" He repeated this several times until Ci'en stopped staring at Elder Peng and came back to sit in the house, breathing heavily.

Elder Peng had known earlier that Qiu Qianren's martial skills were weighty but he didn't recognize Reverend Yideng. Seeing the snow-white eyebrows, he mistook Reverend Yideng for a weak monk on the verge of death and paid him no attention. He only thought to use his 'Soul Absorbing' skill to control Qiu Qianren and achieve his goal. Who would have thought that as soon as Reverend Yideng looked at him, he felt as if his heart was crushed by a thousand-catty weight, he was not able to use his magical skill. By this time he'd almost wet his pants. He wanted to flee but this Qiu Qianren was also nicknamed "Iron Palms Floating on Water." His lightness skills were strange; he didn't even leave footprints on the snow. It looked like he wouldn't be able to escape so he only hoped that Qiu Qianren would listen to the words of the white-eyebrowed monk, who was persuading Qiu Qianren not to harm him. He shrank himself in the corner of the room, frightened. And as Ci'en's pants grew heavier, his heart also thumped wildly.

Yang Guo had listened to Yideng telling the three-deer story. Now he thought about how no living things could escape death. Even though that thin beggar was wicked and deserved to be damned, his sudden encounter with this disaster was actually quite shocking. And more than that, he saw that Ci'en's palm strength was strangely fierce. Who was this monk with such powerful martial skills?

Then he heard Ci'en panting for air and loudly crying out, "Master, I was born an evil person. Heaven wouldn't let me repent. Although I didn't mean to kill people, I finally couldn't avoid taking somebody's life. I'm not a monk anymore!"

Yideng said, "Sin, sin! Let me tell you another Buddhist tale." Ci'en rudely retorted, "Why should I still listen to your Buddhist tale? You've been deceiving me for more than ten years. I don't believe you anymore." With two 'ge-la' 'ge-la' sounds, the chains on his hands and feet snapped. Yideng gently said, "Ci'en, what's done is done. You don't have to get angry."

Ci'en stood up. Facing Yideng, he shook his head. Then he turned his body around and struck Elder Peng's chest with both palms. With a loud crashing sound, Elder Peng collided with a wall and flew out into open space. After having been struck by these 'Iron Palms', his muscles and bones shattered. Even if he had ten lives, he would still be dead.

Hearing this loud crash, Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu jumped in fright and, side by side, came out of the room. They saw Ci'en raising his hands up high, with his eyes shining with murderous lights. He loudly shouted, "What are you looking at? Once started, I might as well go all the way. Today this old man will start killing." Having said this, he channeled energy to his arms and was about to use his 'Iron Palms' again.

Reverend Yideng walked to the door entrance, shielding Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu's bodies. He sat down cross-legged and recited Buddhist verses. Then he said, "You haven't gone too far on the wrong path. You can still return. Ci'en, do you really want to sink beyond redemption?"

Ci'en's face turned blue and then red. His mind was extremely chaotic, with good and evil battling it out. Today his mind had been troubled since they encountered the snow, and it was also stirred up by the "Soul Absorbing Skill". More than that, he'd killed two people, making it very difficult to control himself. One minute Reverend Yideng was his gracious master who had been helping him, and the next he actually became his biggest personal enemy.

For a moment he stood there stiffly. Then his evil thoughts became stronger and stronger. Suddenly he gave a loud shout and attacked Reverend Yideng with his palm. Reverend Yideng brought his hand up to his chest, his body slightly swaying, as he blocked that palm strike. Ci'en angrily said, "You surely won't be able to defeat me!" Then his left palm struck again. Reverend Yideng raised his hand, yet he didn't counter-strike. Ci'en shouted, "Aren't you clever? You don't hit back. Then you'll die in vain. Don't blame me!"

Even though his mind was disturbed, his words actually made sense. His 'Iron Palms' and Reverend Yideng's "One Yang Finger" both claimed victories in battles, and years ago they were ranked equal in the martial world. Yideng's Buddhist study was the basis of their master-disciple relationship. But speaking of martial skills, even if Yideng used the "One Yang Finger" against the 'Iron Palms' skill it actually would be somewhat inferior. In a one-way attack, using his whole strength to counterstrike, he might only win by a small margin, but as time went by, Yideng would eventually be killed or severely injured. Bravely, Yideng was willing to sacrifice himself, and received Ci'en's palm strikes without hitting back. He only hoped that Ci'en would realize his mistakes and repent. This act of not using force against force was actually a battle between good and evil.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu witnessed how each of Ci'en's 'Iron Palms' was like an axe striking Reverend Yideng. Coming to the fourteenth strike, Yideng let out a 'wa' sound and coughed up blood. Startled, Ci'en said, "Aren't you going to fight back?" Yideng gently responded, "Why should I fight back? What good is it if I win? What good is it if you win? We must fight with ourselves, restrain ourselves!" Ci'en was confused, muttering, "Must fight with ourselves, and restrain ourselves!"

Reverend Yideng's words were like thunder rumbling in Yang Guo's mind. He thought to himself, "Must fight our own nature, and must restrain our foolish thoughts. It's certainly much more difficult than defeating powerful enemies. The words of this esteemed monk are really the truth." He saw that Ci'en's palms pause slightly in midair but, with a shout, they eventually struck down again. Yideng's body shook, and he threw up another pool of blood, staining his white beard and monk's robe.

Having seen Yideng's defense techniques and endurance, Yang Guo knew that his martial skills were in no way inferior to those of the monk in black. But this was a one-sided attack, and even a body of iron and stone could eventually be destroyed. Now, he already admired Yideng to no end, knowing full well that he wanted to sacrifice himself to change that evil person. Anyway, he couldn't bear to see Reverend Yideng perish like this. He thought about how he himself, if using only palm strength, wouldn't be

able to block the 'Iron Palms' of that monk in black. He turned around to grab his black iron sword and wielded it, shielding Yideng's body. He waited for Ci'en to strike with his 'Iron Palms' again and then thrusts forward his sword. The wind stirred up by the black iron sword clashed with the palm wind. Their bodies trembled.

Ci'en let out a surprised sound. Never would he expect that there would be a young hunter with such marvelous martial skills living on a wild mountain. Reverend Yideng also looked at Yang Guo in great surprise.

Ci'en sharply shouted, "Who are you? What are you doing?"

Yang Guo said, "The great reverend has given you great advice, how come you don't realize that? Not listening to the precious words is bad enough, but you have to be hateful and harm him. How would you not be worse than an animal acting like this?"

Ci'en furiously shouted, "Are you from the Beggar Clan too? Do you want to accompany that evil elder of the clan?"

Yang Guo laughed and said, "Those two people were the scum of the Beggar Clan. Your getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed. Why must you beat yourself over it?"

Ci'en was startled, mumbling to himself, "Getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed... Getting rid of those evil people was actually a good deed..."

Yang Guo had been behind the wall listening to their master-disciple verbal exchange, and so he understood Ci'en's concerns, knowing that remorse caused him to hate and stirred up his evil thoughts. He continued, "Those people were traitorous disciples of the Beggar Clan, like a wolf hiding in our homeland of China. Your killing two such people was really a great thing. If they hadn't been killed, I don't know how many of our fellow Buddhists might have had to die. Lord Buddha is merciful but, meeting with such demons, how could benevolence still be used to expel evil spirits?"

Yang Guo's knowledge of Buddhist doctrines was very shallow but to Ci'en's ears what he said actually made sense. He slowly put down his hands but then he changed his mind, vividly recalling that in the past he himself had allied with the Jin, helping them invade the great Song country. And so it was like Yang Guo was actually derogating him. He suddenly raised his palm to hack down at Yang Guo and said, "Little animal, what nonsense are you jabbering?"

This palm was fast and furious. Yang Guo was busy trying to persuade him with words and didn't expect Ci'en to suddenly launch an attack. By the time the wind from his palm arrived, it was too dangerous to counterstrike with his own force. And so he went along with that palm strength, his body leaping backward. There came two crashing sounds as he crashed into a wooden wall, and his body was thrown out of the house. Reverend Yideng was startled and thought to himself, "Would this young man have to die like this? It looked like his martial skills were good! Alas, how would I be able to save his life?" His mind was greatly troubled.

The fire in the room was suddenly blown out by a gust of wind rushing through that hole in the wall. Yang Guo came in with the wind, his sword pointing at Ci'en. He shouted, "Good, today you and I will fight." Ci'en shot out his left palm, aiming to strike Yang Guo's sword tip with his palm strength. But Yang Guo's swordplay was really a testimony of Dugu Qiubai's ingenuity. Even though their ages were far apart, he shouldn't have been able to match this old master. With his sword practice under the mountain streams, the snake gallbladders that boosted his energy, and the Divine Eagle's help, Yang Guo's sword skills were very similar to those of the unparalleled Demonic Sword Master of the past era. As Ci'en's palm arrived, Yang Guo's sword tip was only nudged a few inches aside, and it was still pointing at Ci'en's left arm. Horrified, Ci'en dodged to the right to escape the sword and quickly sent out another palm strike. With the two people's marvelous skills, the palms and the sword were battling violently.

Yideng watched the fight in wonder. This youth was only twenty years old or so but surprisingly, could fight a draw with master Qiu's 'Iron Palms'. His own knowledge was vast, yet he couldn't recognize where Yang Guo's martial skills came from. Also, his heavy sword was marvelously strange. Then he turned his head back and saw Xiao Longnu with a baby in her arms, standing by the door. She appeared a beautiful woman, with an elegant look. Surprisingly she didn't seem to be frightened by the two people's wicked fight at all. He thought to himself, "This young lady isn't a common character either." But then he noticed a dark cloud between her eyebrows and couldn't help letting out an 'ayo' cry. Xiao Longnu faintly smiled and thought, "You've figured it out."

By now the fight between the two people, a sword and two palms became even fiercer. Yang Guo had the advantage of using a weapon but Ci'en had one more arm, and so they were about even. There came a loud crashing sound as a wooden plank was shaken loose. More cracking sounds were heard as a post also snapped. This wooden house was small and not very sturdy. Really, it was no place for the two great masters to fight a battle. Wherever the sword edge and the palm wind went, the wooden boards on the four walls would all fly in chaos. Finally they heard another loud cracking sound

as another post snapped, causing the whole house to collapse. With Guo Xiang in her arms, Xiao Longnu dove out through the window. Yideng guarded their back, using his gown sleeves to brush away the flying debris.

In the howling wind and blowing snow, the two people's wicked fight continued on. In over ten years, Ci'en had never got into a fight like this. He gave out a loud cry, his Iron Palms flitting and flying everywhere. Over a hundred moves passed, but his opponent's sword strength was even more powerful. With his declining years, he'd gradually lose the fight. Yang Guo thrust his sword straight out. Seeing Ci'en dodging the blow, he quickly swept his sword around, and the fierce wind sent the snow swirling. Blinded by the snow, Ci'en quickly lifted his hand to wipe it off. Suddenly the black iron sword made contact with his right shoulder, and he felt as if his body was crushed by a thousand-catty weight. Not being able to keep his balance, he tumbled down with Yang Guo's sword tip on his chest. Although the sword was blunt, its force was strangely fierce. With its tip pressing against his breast bone, he could only breathe out but couldn't breathe in enough air.

At this time the word 'die' flashed in the mind of Ci'en. Since the time he'd learned his marvelous martial skills, he'd roamed Jianghu, only knowing how to kill and injure others. Extremely rarely had he run into any setbacks. He'd been defeated by Zhou Botong, and he'd run away to the Western region. Later on he'd depended on clever tricks to get away from the Old Urchin. This time death was nearing as it never had before. He thought that death itself wasn't a big thing but he felt that if his life was cut short like this, he wouldn't be able to make amends for all sorts of evil things he'd done in the past. Reverend Yideng's thousands and thousands of words couldn't get through to him but Yang Guo's one sword made him realize that, "Killing brings misery. I only knew how to kill people. Being killed like this is actually miserable."

Having seen Yang Guo defeating Ci'en, Reverend Yideng thought to himself, "Such a young hero is really very rare." Then he stepped forward and touched the sword blade with his finger. Heat shot through Yang Guo's left arm, and his black iron sword was immediately brushed aside.

Ci'en stood up and then threw himself down on the ground. He cried out, "Master, I deserve to die a terrible death. I deserve to die a terrible death!" With a faint smile, Yideng patted him on the back and said, "Change is not easy. Why haven't you thanked this young hero for the lesson?"

Yang Guo had earlier suspected that this old monk was Reverend Yideng. Having seen this monk brushing aside his sword blade with one finger, he thought that this 'One

Yang Finger' and Island Master Huang's 'Divine Flicking Finger' were equally exquisite, and there was no third person in the world who could match their finger strength. He immediately kowtowed and said, "Disciple Yang Guo pays respect to Reverend." He saw Ci'en kneeling down before him so he quickly said, "Senior, please don't do that. I'm younger than you. Just now I've offended you enough." Then he pointed at Xiao Longnu and said, "This is my wife, named Long. Quickly come kowtow to the Reverend." With Guo Xiang in her arms, Xiao Longnu stepped forward to greet him.

Ci'en said, "Master, just now I'd gone mad. Is your injury very severe?" Yideng chuckled and asked, "Do you feel better now?" Ci'en felt sorry to no end, not knowing what to say.

The four people sat down on a collapsed post. Yang Guo recounted how he met Wu Santong, Zhu Ziliu and Diancang Yuyin. He also talked about how he got poisoned in the Passionless Valley, and how the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu went there to seek the antidote for him and then got trapped.

Yideng said, "That's why my disciple has gone to the Passionless Valley. But do you know how this monk Ci'en is related to the mistress of the valley?"

He'd heard Elder Peng calling Ci'en "Iron Palms Chief Qiu" so he said, "Reverend Ci'en was born with the last name Qiu. Could it be possible that he was the Iron Palms Chief Qiu?"

Ci'en slowly nodded.

Yang Guo continued, "In that case, the mistress of the Passionless Valley must be your younger sister."

Ci'en responded, "Indeed. Was she well?"

Yang Guo didn't quite know how to answer the question. Qiu Qianchi's husband had destroyed all the tendons in her four limbs, leaving her a cripple. He really couldn't bring himself to say the word 'well.'

Ci'en saw Yang Guo hesitate so he said, "That sister of mine always did as she pleased. I wouldn't be too surprised if she ran into trouble."

Yang Guo then said, "Her limbs were disabled but her body was actually very healthy."

With a sigh Ci'en said, "Many years have passed. We've all grown old. Alas, she and her two brothers..." Having said this, he was lost in thought, recalling old memories.

Yideng knew that Ci'en had yet to let go and that his close brush with death only interrupted the stream of evil thoughts. But really the roots of evil were still there. If stirred up by strong emotions, Ci'en would unavoidably go crazy again. He didn't know how much longer he could live and help Ci'en. He could only let it all depend on fate.

Seeing Yideng look at Ci'en with pity in his eyes, Yang Guo suddenly thought to himself, "Reverend Yideng's martial skills were definitely not inferior to his disciple's. Yet, he wouldn't return the attacks. There must be a reason. I'm afraid my jumping out to fight like that would make the matter worse."

So he quickly said, "Reverend, I, young disciple, acted on the spur of the moment. Please let me know if just now I was rash, and made a mistake."

Yideng replied, "The human mind is hard to fathom. If he'd killed me, he couldn't have awakened like this. He would have sunk to the bottomless pit. You saved my life and brought him back to his senses. How could it be a mistake? I feel it was all for the better."

Then he turned to Xiao Longnu and asked, "How did you get poisoned, young lady?"

Having heard that, Yang Guo felt a ray of hope shining down on him. He quickly said, "We were circulating energy to heal her injury, and it was at that time that the poisons got into her body. Could you help her?" He then knelt down on the ground on both knees.

Yideng helped him up and asked, "How did she circulate her inner energy? Why is her energy flowing in the opposite direction?"

Yang Guo replied, "She used the reverse energy flow technique, along with the Chilled Jade Bed and my help."

Yideng heard his explanation and couldn't help clucking his tongue in approval. He said, "That Ouyang brother was really a strange person. This reverse energy flow technique is quite unconceivable."

He reached out to check Xiao Longnu's pulse. Then his face turned sorrowful. For a long while he didn't say a word.

Yang Guo looked at him nervously, hoping he would say “curable.” Xiao Longnu’s eyes were always on Yang Guo. She herself hadn’t expected to live this long. Seeing a melancholy expression on his face, she slowly said, “Fate determines life and death. How could we have it all as we wish? Guo’er, grief can hurt you. Don’t worry too much.”

This was the first time Xiao Longnu spoke since Yideng’s arrival. Her words were spoken gently and calmly, showing that she understood life and death. Yideng couldn’t help becoming puzzled. He didn’t know that since childhood Xiao Longnu had been taught to have a clear mind and little emotion. This lady was young and fatally poisoned. He’d thought that she’d be extremely saddened. Who would have thought that her speech was that of someone who had deep religious knowledge? He thought to himself, “This young husband and wife are really the world’s perfect couple. The husband has such kungfu. The wife understands life and death. This is really rare. In my entire life, I’ve only seen one couple — Guo Jing and Huang Rong— that can compare to them. My own disciples don’t even come close. Alas, her poisons are so severe. After my injury, I can’t use my “One Yang Finger” to help her.”

With a slight hesitation, he said, “You two are young but your achievements are really not common. May this old monk speak frankly...”

Having heard this, Yang Guo’s heart sank, his hands turning ice-cold.

Then Yideng continued, “The young madam’s poison condition is very severe. If I wasn’t injured, I could use my “One Yang Finger” to temporarily stop the poisons so we could go search for the antidote. But today... luckily your energy foundation is strong. I have this medicine that can save you for seven days. Then let us go to the Passionless Valley together to look for my disciple.”

Yang Guo jumped up and cried out. “Good! This Indian monk is known for his knowledge of poisons. He must have a way to save my wife.”

Yideng said, “If my disciple can find a cure that is natural. In the world some children die shortly after birth. Young lady here has had a chance to get married, that is fortunate.”

Having said this far, he recalled that years ago Zhou Botong and Concubine Liu had a child but because of his own jealousy and hatred, he was not willing to save him. And that child eventually died. And it was actually Ci’en who’d injured him.

Yang Guo looked at Yideng with wide, shocked eyes. He thought to himself, “We still don’t know if Long’er can be cured. Yet, you haven’t said a word of comfort.”

Xiao Longnu made a faint smile and said, “What Reverend said is true.”

She looked out at the heavy snow and weakly said, “These snowflakes are so white and so beautiful. But after the sun comes out, each and every one of them will vanish, without a trace. Next winter there will be a lot of snowflakes again, but they will never be like this year’s snow.”

Yideng nodded and turned his head to look at Ci’en. He asked, “Do you understand?”

Ci’en nodded and thought — when the sun came out, the snow would disappear, and it snowed in winter. What was so complicated about these simple facts?

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu had always been close. They understood even the vaguest thought in the other person’s mind. But now that she was conversing with Yideng, he was left aside. It was as if she and Yideng shared the same thoughts, and he himself was an outsider. This had never happened since he fell in love with her, and he was now perplexed.

Yideng took out an egg from his chest and gave it to Xiao Longnu. He said, “Do you know which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

This was an age-old conundrum which nobody could ever solve. Yang Guo thought to himself, “At a time of life and death like this, why are you asking such a question?”

Xiao Longnu accepted the egg. It was actually a porcelain egg but its color looked as if it wasn’t. She paused a little and then clearly understood. She answered, “The egg hatches a chicken. The chicken lays an egg. Where there is life, there must be death.”

She gently crushed the egg shell, and a pill tumbled out. It was a golden and perfectly round ball like an egg yolk. Yideng said, “Eat it, quickly.”

Knowing that this medicine was precious, Xiao Longnu put it in her mouth, chewed, and swallowed.

Early next morning, it was still snowing. Yang Guo thought that the Passionless Valley was quite a distance away. Although Reverend Yideng’s pill gave them seven extra days,

they had to go as fast as they possibly could, with not even a bit of delay. He asked Yideng, “Reverend, how’s your injury?”

Yideng’s injury was really heavy but he wanted to save his apprentice brother, Zhu Ziliu and Xiao Longnu and knew that all were urgent matters. His gown sleeves flared out as he said, “It’s not a problem.”

He drew in air and sprang forward, covering over ten feet in one leap. The three people followed.

After taking the pill, Xiao Longnu felt a surge of warmth in her abdomen and her strength returning. With her lightness skills, she caught up with Reverend Yideng in no time. Ci’en was startled. This timid young lady actually had quite an awesome kungfu. Suddenly his competitive spirit rose. His feet became swift as he gave chase. One person was a Gu Mu disciple of with unparalleled lightness skills. The other was a renowned master nicknamed ‘Iron Palms Floating on Water.’ In a flash the two people had covered twenty, thirty feet, quickly becoming two gray spots on the snow. Yang Guo was afraid that Ci’en would suddenly become evil and hurt Xiao Longnu so he went after them to protect her. His lightness skills were inferior to those of the two people but his inner energy was solid, and his feet were strong. At the beginning, he was a great distance away from them. Less than half an hour later, the two people’s shadows became clearer.

Suddenly he heard Reverend Yideng laughing from behind him. Yideng said, “Young gentleman’s inner energy is so profound. This really is rare. May I ask who your master is?”

Yang Guo slowed down to move side by side with him. He replied, “My wife taught me my martial skills.”

Yideng asked in wonder, “Is she as good as you?”

Yang Guo said, “For these past few months, my inner energy has somehow kept increasing. I myself don’t understand why.”

Yideng asked, “Is it possible that you’ve taken some kind of medicine that boosts inner energy? Perhaps shaped ginsengs or millennium mushrooms?”

Yang Guo shook his head and said, “I had dozens of snake gallbladders. Since then, my strength has skyrocketed. Do you think they are related?”

Yideng said, “Snake gallbladders? Snake gallbladders can cure rheumatism. They have nothing to do with inner strength.”

Yang Guo said, “These gallbladders were from very strange poisonous snakes. Their scales glittered like gold, and their heads were crested. The shape was really weird.”

Yideng paused for a bit and suddenly said, “Ah, they are the ‘pu-si-qu’ snakes, mentioned in a Buddhist record. They said these snakes lived underground, moved like a wind, and were extremely difficult to catch.”

Yang Guo said, “A big eagle caught them for me.”

“That really is the strangest thing in the world.” Yideng exclaimed.

While the two people talked, their feet didn’t slow down at all. After a while, they were nearing Xiao Longnu and Ci’en. Yideng and Yang Guo exchanged a smile. Even though their lightness skills were inferior to those of Xiao Longnu and Ci’en, speed declined with increasing distance, and it was then up to their inner energy. By this time, because her inner energy was inferior, Xiao Longnu had already dropped some ten feet behind Ci’en. And as soon as they rounded the mountain, Yang Guo pointed ahead and said, “Eh, how come there are three people?”

It looked like someone was closely trailing Xiao Longnu. Yang Guo took a look and sensed that this person’s lightness skills were not less than those of Xiao Longnu and Ci’en. On his back he was carrying something that looked like a trunk yet his feet were still swift, and he was always twenty or thirty feet behind Xiao Longnu. Yideng was also puzzled. Surprisingly there was another skilled master on this wild mountain. Last night he ran into this pair of young and elegant couple. Today he saw this person, obviously an old man.

Not long after being overtaken by Ci’en, the distance between Ci’en and Xiao Longnu widened. She heard the sounds of footsteps from behind and thought it was Yang Guo. She said, “Guo’er, that monk’s lightness skills are incredible. I can’t beat him. You go try.”

The person laughed and said, “Come sit on this trunk and gather your strength. You don’t have to fear that old monk.”

Hearing the words, Xiao Longnu was puzzled. She turned her head back and saw a man with a white beard and hair. It was the Old Urchin Zhou Botong.

With a laugh, he pointed at the trunk he'd been carrying on his back and said, "Come ... come ... come!"

In this trunk was the stuff that had been in the Sacred Scripture Chamber of the Chongyang Palace and looked like it was filled with the Quanzhen sect's Taoist scrolls. Zhou Botong had brought it with him on his back. Xiao Longnu faintly smiled but said nothing. Zhou Botong suddenly dashed forward. He grabbed her with one arm and put her on the trunk. His body movements were so fast and his hand technique was so strange that Xiao Longnu couldn't even resist. While carrying the wooden trunk, he couldn't help thinking, "The Quanzhen sect is known throughout the world as an orthodox martial school. The Taoists at the Chongyang Palace couldn't defeat me. It must be because they hadn't learned the essence of their sect's martial skills."

By now Yang Guo and Yideng had recognized Zhou Botong. Ci'en was concentrating on rushing forwards for fear that Xiao Longnu would catch up with him, and so he was the only person who didn't know that there was another person behind him.

Zhou Botong followed him in big strides and said, "Another half an hour, he'll slow down."

With a smile Xiao Longnu asked, "How do you know?"

Zhou Botong said, "I've fought with him, pursuing him from Zhongyuan [China] to the Western region and from the Western region back to Zhongyuan. After running around for tens of thousands of li, how could I not know?"

Sitting on the trunk, Xiao Longnu was both secure and comfortable, just like riding a horse. She softly asked, "Old Urchin, why are you helping me?"

Zhou Botong replied, "You are quite likeable, not like that crafty and strange Huang Rong. I stole your bee honey, and you are not mad."

They ran for another half an hour. And just like Zhou Botong had predicted, Ci'en started to slow down. Zhou Botong said, "You are off!"

He shrugged his shoulders, sending Xiao Longnu out over ten feet. Energy was sent to her feet, and she ran forwards. In just a moment she caught up with Ci'en and giggled. Startled, Ci'en sped up. But the two people's lightness skills were about the same level. One person had just had a long rest while the other had been running non-stop. The more they ran the further the distance between them. Ci'en had no way to catch up.

In his whole life, Ci'en had two of martial skills that no one in the world could compare but, in just one day and one night, his 'Iron Palms' was defeated by Yang Guo and his lightness skills were outmatched by Xiao Longnu's. He couldn't help becoming depressed. Sensing that his legs were about to give out, he thought to himself in alarm, "I can't even defeat a young girl, can it be that my death is near?"

Last night he had his evil spell. After injuring his master, he had become restless. Just now he'd used all his strength in a lightness kungfu competition with Xiao Longnu and still lost. Even though his mind was troubled, he felt like all things in the world no longer made sense.

Observing them from behind, Yang Guo clearly understood. Seeing that Zhou Botong had secretly helped Xiao Longnu defeating Ci'en, his interest was piqued. He sped up to walk side by side with him and laughingly said, "Senior Zhou, many thanks."

Zhou Botong said, "Haven't seen this Qiu Qianren for a long time. The older he is, the crazier. How come he's shaved his head and become a monk?"

Yang Guo said, "He's now Reverend Yideng's disciple, don't you know?"

Having said this, he pointed to the back. Zhou Botong was horrified, crying out, "Emperor Duan is here too?"

He turned his head back and saw Yideng from a distance. He said, "I've got to run."

Then he immediately fled into the woods. Yang Guo didn't know who 'Emperor Duan' was. He only saw the trees and bushes moving. Zhou Botong had disappeared without a trace. Yang Guo thought to himself, "This person is so strange. There aren't many like him in the world."

As soon as Zhou Botong ran away, Yideng quickly stepped forward. Seeing that Ci'en looked withered and broken and all his earlier bravado had vanished, Yideng said, "With all your victories, how come you haven't figured this out?"

Disheartened, Ci'en didn't say a word.

Yideng continued, "You were blinded by your desires. With your strong martial skills, if not for your lust to win, how could you not know there was another person behind?"

The four of them traveled with haste, and the next five days flew by quickly. On the morning of the sixth day, Yideng's injury worsened, and he could barely support himself. Yang Guo said, "Reverend, please take a rest for a moment. Let your body recover. The Passionless Valley isn't very far from here. We, husband and wife, will hurry into the Valley with Reverend Ci'en and we'll rescue the Divine Monk and Uncle Zhu too."

Yideng faintly smiled and said, "I can't put my mind at ease."

He paused and then continued, "It's dangerous in the valley. I'd better come along."

Ci'en said, "I'll carry you." Having said that he put Yideng on his back and marched forward in big strides.

They arrived at the valley entrance in the afternoon. Yang Guo turned to Ci'en and said, "Should we let them know we are here so your sister can come out to greet you?"

Ci'en was nervous and had yet to reply. Suddenly he heard the faint sounds of clashing weapons. Ci'en thought about his sister and was afraid that she would be fighting with Wu Santong and the others. No matter who was injured, it would be quite bad. He said, "We must rush to stop them."

With his lightness kungfu he sped up. He was not fully familiar with the roads to the valley, and Yang Guo pointed in one direction.

The four of them rushed forward only to see seven or eight people in green holding their weapons, defending themselves just outside the woods. They heard the sounds of clashing weapons but couldn't see who the people in green were actually fighting with.

Seeing that there were more enemies coming, the valley disciples in green gave out a shout and charged forward. But as soon as they got closer and recognized Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, they halted. The leading disciple walked over and raised his sword to greet them. He said, "Have you already accomplished our chief mother's task?"

But Yang Guo asked, "Who are the people fighting in the woods?"

That disciple in green did not reply. Instead, he narrowed his eyes, not knowing whether Yang Guo had come with a good or bad intention.

With a faint smile Yang Guo said, "I (little brother) didn't come here to cause harm. Is Madame Gongsun well? Is Miss Gongsun all right?"

That disciple's hostility was somewhat resolved. He said, "Bless you. Chief mother and Miss Gongsun are well." Then he asked, "Who are these two monks?" Did they come with the four women?"

Yang Guo said, "What four women?"

That disciple replied, "They were actually two groups of two, barging in here. Chief mother ordered us to stop them but they wouldn't listen. Both groups went into the Passion Flower field. But as soon as the two groups saw each other, they started fighting."

Hearing him mention 'Passion Flower field,' Yang Guo was startled, not knowing which four women he was talking about. If they were Huang Rong, Guo Fu, Wanyan Ping, and Yelu Yan, how could they be fighting? So he said, "May I ask you to lead me there? If I (little brother) know them, I may be able to break up the fight before going with them to greet the Chief."

That disciple thought that the four women had already been detained anyway and that if he let Yang Guo see them, it would only show him the power of the Passionless Valley. So he led the four people into the woods, where they saw the two groups of women fighting.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were secretly alarmed. The four women were standing on a narrow strip of lawn about twenty feet long, encircled with row upon row of Passion Flowers. No matter from which direction they tried to come out, there would be seventy or eighty feet of Passion Flowers blocking them. And no matter how powerful their kungfu was, they still wouldn't be able to escape. Even a halfway jump would still be very difficult.

Xiao Longnu cried out, "It's my martial sister!"

To the south they saw two women, Li Mochou and her disciple Hong Lingbo. The two of them were using long swords because Li Mochou's fly whisk had been broken at Gu Mu.

They were fighting with another two women. One was holding the Willow Leaf saber, the other wielding a flute. The two girl's movements were swift and elegant, showing that their martial skills were not weak. Still, they couldn't match Li Mochou.

Yang Guo was alarmed and thought, "Aren't those the Cheng-Lu cousins?"

Now, Hong Lingbo slanted her body to attack. The young lady in yellow turned her head halfway backwards, and the one in purple dress also turned her body sideways. These girls were Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang.

The four people's fighting on a lawn this size was like holding a martial arts contest in a very small arena. The terrain was limited, not allowing for trivial mistakes. As if they were tied hand and feet, the four people couldn't unleash the power of their kungfu. It was fortunate that Li Mochou wasn't used to her new sword and that, with her former ties with Lu Wushuang, Hong Lingbo didn't really have a murderous intention. And so, even though the Cheng-Lu cousins were much inferior, they could still hold their own against their opponents.

Yang Guo asked the disciple in green, "How did the four people get in there to fight in the first place?"

The disciple in green was very pleased with himself and proudly replied, "This was Chief Gongsun's creation. We led them into this Passion Flower field and then piled up the flowers, blocking the entrance. How would they come out?"

Yang Guo quickly asked, "Have they been poisoned?"

"Looks like they haven't but it won't take long," replied that man in green.

Yang Guo thought to himself, "With your martial skills alone, how could you force Li Mochou into the Passion Flower field? Oh, you must have used your sect's evil fishnet. If the Cheng-Lu girls get poisoned, there won't be any antidote in the world to cure them."

And so, he immediately raised his voice, "Sister Cheng, Sister Lu, I'm right here. The flowers around you are deadly poisonous. You must be careful absolutely."

Li Mochou had noticed earlier that the Passion Flowers looked strange. On top of that, those disciples in green had used the flowers to block their way out, so she knew there had to be a reason. After entering the Passion Flower field, she warned Hong Lingbo to be very careful and keep away from the Passion Flowers. Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were both skilled and clever, how could they not see the danger? The four people had originally thought there were some kinds of traps or poisoned arrows hidden in the flower shrubs. Now that they heard Yang Guo's words, they dreaded the flowers around them even more. They all inched closer towards the center of the lawn, their bodies colliding. The fight became even more vicious.

Hearing Yang Guo calling them, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang were delighted. They wanted to rush out to see him but the enemies were vicious, not allowing them to withdraw. Li Mochou actually wanted to kill the two girls so she could use their bodies as stepping stones to escape from the Passion Flower field. When she saw Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu, she was frightened. Luckily, they were separated by the Passion Flowers and so Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu couldn't come in to help the two girls. She fiercely shouted, "Lingbo, if you still don't fight with all your strength, you yourself will die in here."

"Yes, Master!" Hong Lingbo quickly replied, adding more strength to her sword and driving it towards Cheng Ying.

Cheng Ying raised her flute to block the strike but Li Mochou's long sword flew towards her throat. Lu Wushuang lunged forwards, raising her saber. Li Mochou sneered, blocking the saber with her long sword. Her left leg then flew up, kicking Lu Wushuang's wrist and sending her Willow Leaf saber into a Passion Flower shrub. Suddenly lights flashed. Li Mochou swung her sword three times at Cheng Ying. Unable to withstand the force, Cheng Ying had to move backwards. At this point, if she fell back one more step, her left foot would land on a flower shrub.

Lu Wushuang cried out in alarm, "Sister (cousin), you can't move back any further."

With a cold laugh Li Mochou said, "You can't move back any further. Then let's move forward." Having said that, she allowed Cheng Ying one step forward. Cheng Ying knew full well that Li Mochou didn't mean well but she herself was dangerously cornered. She had no choice but to move forwards.

Li Mochou sneered and said, "Really very brave!" Her long sword vibrated. Silver lights flashed, and her sword tip reached the upper part of Cheng Ying's body.

Yang Guo was observing them from outside and understood that Li Mochou was using one of Gu Mu's vicious sword techniques called "Cold Moon Attack". If one didn't understand the intricacies of the stances, he was likely to deplete his energy guarding the upper body and leaving his abdomen vulnerable. Seeing that Cheng Ying was busy protecting her chest, he quickly picked up a pebble from the ground, placing it between his thumb and middle finger. Then, with a whishing sound, the pebble was shot out fiercely, straight towards Li Mochou's eyes. Li Mochou's sword had already moved downwards and was only a few inches away from Cheng Ying's abdomen. Suddenly seeing a pebble flying her way, she had to let the enemy off and swung her sword back to hit the pebble.

What Yang Guo just displayed was Huang Yaoshi's "Divine Flicking Finger" skill. But his cultivated energy hadn't reached its peak so he could only use this technique to divert the enemy, forcing her to be on the defensive. If it were Huang Yaoshi himself flicking the pebble, he would have knocked Li Mochou's sword loose, and it would have been almost impossible to miss the target at this range. It was fortunate that he taught Yang Guo this technique because it came back to save the life of his own disciple. But even so, Yang Guo and Cheng Ying were already drenched in a cold sweat.

Cheng Ying had just narrowly escaped death, color draining from her white and tender cheeks. Li Mochou knew that she was still in shock, and so she shouted, "Here I come again!" The long sword vibrated as she used the "Cold Moon Attack" technique once again. Cheng Ying was clever, knowing that the upper body attack was a fake and the middle body strike was real, and so she immediately protected her abdomen. Who would have thought that Li Mochou would slyly change her stance? While her sword tip pointed at Cheng Ying's abdomen, she dashed forwards, stretching out her left hand to seal the 'Jade Hall' point on Cheng Ying's chest. Then her left leg swept out to kick Lu Wushuang and at the same time the tip of her foot struck the 'Sun' point on the side of Cheng Ying's knee. These few stances were incredibly fast, sending both Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang to the ground. Yang Guo definitely couldn't help them both.

Li Mochou then grabbed Cheng Ying's back and threw her out with force. She did the same to Lu Wushuang and shouted, "Lingbo, step on their bodies..."

Before she could finish saying that, Yang Guo jumped in to grab Cheng Ying and moved forwards. Even though the accupoints on her chest and leg had been sealed, she could use her free arms to grasp Lu Wushuang.

She cried out, "Brother Yang, you..."

She had always had deep feelings for Yang Guo. And now she saw him jumping into the Passion Flower field, giving up his life to save hers, she was all overwhelmed.

Having grabbed the two girls, Yang Guo leapt back out and gently put them on the ground. With her stiff legs, Cheng Ying couldn't stand by herself. Xiao Longnu unsealed her pressure points. Then the three girls all looked at Yang Guo. His pants were ripped by the poisonous thorns, blood dripping from his thighs and calf's. Nobody knew how much poison had entered his body.

While Cheng Ying wept, Lu Wushuang said, "You... you... didn't have to save me. Who told you to do this?"

With a bright smile Yang Guo said, “I’ve already got the passion flower poison in my body, a little more makes no difference.”

But everybody knew that the amount of poison in his body really made a big difference. He only said this to comfort the three girls in front of him.

Cheng Ying looked at Yang Guo’s empty right sleeve with tears in her eyes. Lu Wushuang said, “Sha Dan (Dumb Egg), your... your right arm? How did you lose it?”

Seeing that the two girls were extremely worried about Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu immediately thought of them as very good friends. With a smile she said, “He’s not dumb, why do you call him dumb egg?”

Lu Wushuang let out an ‘ah’ sound and apologetically said, “I used to call him that. It’s hard to change.”

She looked at Cheng Ying and asked, “And this sister is?”

Yang Guo replied, “This is...”

Cheng Ying quickly said, “This sister’s name must be Xiao Longnu.”

“Right. I should have known, seeing how angelic she is.” Lu Wushuang said.

With the knowledge that Yang Guo only had Xiao Longnu on his mind, the two Cheng-Lu girls had been jealous. Now that they actually met Xiao Longnu, they couldn’t help feeling inferior. Both thought to themselves, “How can I ever compare to her?”

Lu Wushuang asked, “Brother Yang, what’s happened to your arm? Has the wound healed?”

“It’s already healed. Someone cut it off,” replied Yang Guo.

Lu Wushuang asked angrily, “Which evil villain did it? That person must have used a low and despicable trick. Was it that wretched witch?”

Suddenly a cold voice from behind said, “You defame people behind their back. Isn’t that lower and more despicable?”

Lu Wushuang was startled. She turned head back and saw a beautiful young girl. It was Guo Fu with a sword in her hand, looking enraged. Standing by her were several men and women.

Lu Wushuang was puzzled. She said, "I didn't scold you. I was scolding the evil person who cut off Brother Yang's arm."

With a 'shua' sound, Guo Fu pulled her sword halfway from its sheath. She said, "His arm was cut off by me. I've already apologized, and my parents have already punished me. Now you people are scolding me behind my back..." Having said this, her eyes turned red. She felt she was wronged by these people.

Days ago Wu Santong, Guo Fu, Yelu Qi, and the Wu brothers hid from the mountain fires in the creek. They waited for the fires to die down and then got out of the water to meet with Huang Rong, Wanyan Ping and Yelu Yan. They then all came to the Passionless Valley. The group arrived here long before Yang Guo and the others but they were searching the areas around the valley, trying to find the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu, without any success. That's why they were delayed. As for Li Mochou, her disciple, and the Cheng-Lu cousins, they were led into the valley by Zhou Botong.

Huang Rong, Wu Santong and the others quickly went to greet Reverend Yideng, and they all exchanged greetings. Although Cheng Ying had never met Huang Rong before, she knew this martial sister by reputation and greatly admired her. She immediately went over and kowtowed with utmost respect. She called out, "Martial sister!"

Knowing from Yang Guo that years ago her father had accepted another female disciple, now she found out that it was this extremely beautiful girl. As Huang Rong asked about her father and learned that he was strong and healthy, she was delighted.

The disciples in green had been watching them from the edge of the woods. Now seeing that the enemies from outside all gathered, making a noisy commotion, they didn't dare to block them. Instead, they ran back to report the matter to Qiu Qianchi.

Guo Fu and Lu Wushuang glared at each other angrily, with mutual hatred. As Guo Fu heard her mother order her to greet Cheng Ying, she was not pleased at all. She had to force herself to say 'Martial Uncle'.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were standing in each other's arms on the other side. Yang Guo looked at Guo Xiang in Xiao Longnu's arms and said, "Long'er, let's give the little girl back to her mother."

Xiao Longnu lifted up Guo Xiang and kissed her on the cheek. Then she walked over to hand the little girl back to Huang Rong. She said, “Madame Guo, your child.”

Huang Rong thanked her and took the little girl. From the time the girl was born until now, this was the first time Huang Rong had her child firmly in her hands. There were no words that could describe her happiness and joy.

Yang Guo turned to Guo Fu and clearly said, “Miss Guo, your little sister is well. I didn’t use her to trade for the antidote to save my life.”

Guo Fu retorted angrily, “My mother is here. Of course, you don’t dare to. But if you didn’t have such intention, what did you bring my sister here for?”

In this situation, Yang Guo in the former days would have quarreled with her. But his encounters with life and death during these past few months had changed him. Paying no attention to her, he only let out a dry laugh and walked away with Xiao Longnu.

Lu Wushuang looked at Guo Xiang and said to Cheng Ying, “Is this your martial sister’s little girl? I hope she won’t grow up to be evil and vicious.”

It was impossible for Guo Fu to not understand that the words were meant to attack her, and so she retorted, “What business of yours is it if my sister becomes evil and vicious? What are you trying to say?”

Lu Wushuang said, “I didn’t speak to you. Everybody has the right to deal with evil and vicious people. How could it not be my business?” Lu Wushuang only had Yang Guo on her mind. Having seen that Yang Guo’s arm was chopped off, she and Cheng Ying were very angry. But she couldn’t control her temper like her cousin did. Even though it was in front of many people, she still had to let it show.

Guo Fu was furious. Grabbing her sword, she shouted, “You cripple...”

Huang Rong yelled, “Fu’er, don’t be rude!”

At this time, they all heard a loud ‘ah’ cry from the distance. They turned their heads back towards the Passion Flower field and saw Li Mochou hoisting Hong Lingbo’s body high up in the air. The sound they heard just now was Hong Lingbo’s cry. While people had been busy arguing, they forgot all about Li Mochou and her disciple who were stuck in the sea of flowers. Startled, Lu Wushuang cried out, “Rats. Master is using her disciple as a stepping stone. Quick, we have to find a way to help...”

While the people outside were staring in confusion, Li Mochou suddenly threw Hong Lingbo out. As the body fell into the Passion Flower shrubs, Li Mochou sprang up, her left foot stepping on Hong Lingbo's chest. She then jumped up again with both legs high in the air, and her right hand grabbing and hurling Hong Lingbo out one more time. Again, she descended on top of her disciple's body.

She used this "Strength Borrowing" tactic twice, expecting to fall outside the flower shrubs on her third jump. Afraid that Huang Rong would be waiting to block her, she flew out again in the opposite direction, away from the group of people. But this time as her body shot up, Hong Lingbo suddenly gave out a loud cry and leapt up with her, grasping Li Mochou's left leg. Losing her momentum, Li Mochou started to sink. Then her right leg shot out, kicking Hong Lingbo in the chest with a 'peng' sound. This kick was lethal, destroying Hong Lingbo's internal organs and killing her instantly. Somehow, Hong Lingbo's hands were still gripping Li Mochou's leg, and the two of them plunged down together, falling into the flower shrubs just two feet short of the edge of the flower bed. When Li Mochou landed she received an unimaginable amount of poison which surged into her body.

Everybody was shocked speechless, staring wide-eyed at this sadly horrifying development. Lu Wushuang thought about how her martial sister used to take care of her. Grief-stricken, she wept loudly and cried out, "Martial sister, martial sister!"

Yang Guo remembered how years ago he'd played tricks on Hong Lingbo. He couldn't help feeling heavyhearted.

Li Mochou bent down to pry away Hong Lingbo's hands and saw that her open eyes were filled with hatred. She thought to herself, "I've been poisoned by the Passion Flowers. The antidote surely must be here in the valley." As she was about to walk around the piles of flowers and be on her way, she suddenly heard Huang Rong calling out, "Sister Li, please come over here. I have a few words to say to you." Li Mochou was surprised, and with a slight hesitation, she moved forwards twenty or thirty feet. "What?" She asked. She secretly hoped that Huang Rong would give her the antidote, or at least tell her how to find it.

"You didn't need to kill your disciple to leave the flower thicket," said Huang Rong.

Li Mochou reached for her sword and coldly said, "Are you trying to teach me?"

With a faint smile Huang Rong replied, "I wouldn't dare to. I'm only going to tell you one thing. You should have used your long sword to dig up the soil and wrapped it with

your outer gown, making two very large balls. And if you had thrown them into the flower thicket, wouldn't they have made good stepping stones? Not only could you have gotten out safely, you wouldn't have had to hurt anyone."

Li Mochou's face color changed from white to red and then red to white. She was struck by enormous grief. What Huang Rong had just explained was really not difficult, but because she was anxious, she couldn't figure it out. Instead, she had just killed the only person in the world that mattered and actually fallen to her own doom. She couldn't help saying bitterly, "No matter, it's already too late."

Huang Rong said, "Yes. It's way too late. Really, whether or not you are poisoned by the Passion Flowers makes no difference."

Li Mochou stared fixedly at her, not understanding the meaning of her words.

Huang Rong added, "You've already been poisoned by your own foolish, unrestrained passion. You hurt people, and so you hurt yourself. As of now..." Huang Rong sighed. "It is way too late."

Li Mochou turned arrogant. She said in a stern voice, "It was I who gave my disciple her life. Had it not been for me taking care of her since childhood, she wouldn't have lived until today. I gave her life. I then gave her death. It was only fair."

Huang Rong said, "Parents give life to their own children. Yet, they have no right to kill them. Who are you to think that you do?"

Wu Xiuwen held out his sword and shouted, "Li Mochou, today you'll pay for your innumerable crimes. There's no need for more talking. We'll fight."

Then the six of them – Wu Xiuwen, Wu Dunru, Wu Santong, Yelu Qi, Yelu Yan, and Guo Fu – arranged themselves in two lines and marched forward.

Armed with a saber and a flute, Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang moved a couple of steps forward. Lu Wushuang said, "You slaughtered my whole family, today your one life is way too cheap. Worse, you had to be so evil, killing Sister Hong. Your death won't even cover it."

Guo Fu turned to Lu Wushuang and said with a sneer, "You've got such a good master!"

Lu Wushuang returned the stare and said, “Even if someone with a big backer, does evil things, she should die just the same! You don’t need to look to this demoness for an example!”

As Li Mochou heard Lu Wushuang mention “a backer,” something came to her mind. She raised her voice and called out, “Little martial sister, have you completely forgotten our martial ties?”

She had roamed Jianghu all her life and never paid attention to anyone. This time she was asking Xiao Longnu for help. It could only mean that she had realized how grave her situation was. Besides, after killing Hong Lingbo, she felt a pang of guilt, her mind became disturbed.

Xiao Longnu didn’t know how to reply but Yang Guo retorted, “You treacherously killed your own disciple; how could you mention any martial ties?”

“So be it!” Li Mochou said with a sigh. Swinging her long sword, she said, “You all come at once. The more people the better.”

The Wu brothers pulled out their swords. On the left side Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang both lunged forwards. Wu Santong, Yelu Qi and the others also held their weapons at the ready. Having seen the way she despicably killed Hong Lingbo just now, everybody was extremely hate filled and disgusted. Even Reverend Yideng thought that if Li Mochou was allowed to live, she would only murder more people. But the ‘ding dang’ sounds of clashing weapons went on. Li Mochou’s martial skills were high and she disrupted the many people’s offense in a flash.

Suddenly Li Mochou’s left hand flew out. She shouted, “Projectiles!”

Knowing that her “Soul Freezing Needles” were deadly, all of them all froze stiff, only to see her body spring up and fall into the Passion Flower thicket. They couldn’t help crying out in alarm. Li Mochou did this because she already had the poison in her body and she thought that if she got pricked again, it wouldn’t be much worse. Even Huang Rong and Yang Guo hadn’t expected this. They all saw her return through the flower thicket and then went straight into the woods.

Wu Xiuwen said, “We pursue!”

Brandishing his long sword, he made a detour and followed Li Mochou into the woods from the east side. But the pathways in the woods were winding, with sharp turns. Only

twenty or thirty feet in there, he ran into a three-way junction. While still hesitating, he suddenly saw five girls dressed in green coming out. The one in front was holding a flower in her hand, and the other four trailing behind wore long swords at their waists.

The girl in front asked, “The Valley Chief requests your presence. Would you please come with us?”

Yang Guo saw her from afar so he called out, “Miss Gongsun, it’s us.”

That girl was of course Gongsun Lu’E. Upon hearing Yang Guo’s voice, she lost her composure and quickly stepped forwards. Happily she said, “Big Brother Yang, have you accomplished your big task? Let’s quickly go see my mother.”

“Miss Gongsun, let me introduce you to these several elders,” said Yang Guo.

He first introduced her to Reverend Yideng, and then Ci’en and Huang Rong.

Gongsun Lu’E did not know that the monk in black in front of her was her own uncle, and so she walked over to pay him respect without much thought. But then she heard Yang Guo address Huang Rong as Madame Guo. She knew that this person was her mother’s personal enemy. Not only had Yang Guo not killed her, he led her into the valley. Greatly suspicious, she moved a couple of steps backwards, refusing to greet her. She said, “My mother invites everybody for tea in the main hall.”

She thought to herself that she’d better do as her mother had ordered, so she led the many people to the main hall.

In the hall, Qiu Qianchi was sitting in a chair. She said, “This old woman’s limbs are disabled. I can’t get up to welcome you. Please accept my apology.”

Ci’en remembered his little sister. At the time she married Gongsun Zhi, she was a fledgling girl of eighteen, full of tenderness and grace. Nobody could have imagined that she would turn into an old, bald, wrinkled, ugly woman like this. He thought of the past and felt at a loss.

Yideng saw the strange gleam in his eyes and couldn’t help being worried. In his life, the only worry he had left was this disciple who still couldn’t wake up and turn a new leaf. This was because Ci’en’s kungfu was profound. Years ago, he was an unmatched master in the martial realm, and so his deep attachment to the past made change even more difficult. Over the past ten years, he’d lived in seclusion on a remote mountain

and had calmed down. But this time when he stepped back into Jianghu, he ran into things that reminded him of the past. There was a saying that “He, who never encounters desires, will have a peaceful heart.” And so, when running into things that triggered a worldly desire, his mind would become disturbed, how would Ci'en be able to control himself? Yideng had brought Ci'en with him to the Passionless Valley this time because he wanted to help his martial brother and Zhu Ziliu. But it was also very hard on Ci'en because his mind was greatly afflicted.

Because Yang Guo didn't return to the Passionless Valley in time, Qiu Qianchi had thought that he had already died from the poison. Suddenly seeing him still alive and well, standing before her, she was puzzled. She asked, “You are not dead yet?”

“I've taken an antidote. Your flower poison is now gone.” Yang Guo said with a laugh.

Qiu Qianchi made a surprised sound. She thought to herself, “Surprisingly, there is an antidote that can detoxify the Passion Flower Poison. How strange...”

But suddenly she figured it out. With a sneer she said, “What kind of lie is this? If there really was an antidote, why would that Indian monk and that Zhu person have come here?”

Yang Guo said, “Senior Qiu, where did you imprison the Indian monk and Senior Zhu? I (junior) am already here. Please let them go!”

With a sneer Qiu Qianchi said, “To tie a tiger is easy; to let it go is hard!”

These words of hers actually made sense. All her four limbs were disabled, and so she could only rely on her sect's fishnets to capture the Indian monk and Zhu Ziliu. If released, the Indian monk would be all right because he didn't know kungfu but Zhu Ziliu would definitely retaliate. None of the disciples of the Passionless Valley was his match.

Yang Guo thought that if she saw her elder brother, their blood ties would make things friendlier. And so, he said with a faint smile, “Senior Qiu, please look at us carefully. Who did I bring back here? I'm sure you'll be delighted.”

For decades Qiu Qianchi hadn't seen her brother. Although she knew that he had become a monk, in her mind she only remembered him as a victorious and courageous youth. How would she be able to recognize this old monk? Hearing from her daughter that Huang Rong, her own personal enemy, had arrived, her eyes scanned the faces of many people and finally came to stop on Huang Rong.

Clenching her teeth, Qiu Qianchi said, “You are Huang Rong. My elder brother died at your hand.”

Yang Guo was startled. His original intention was to have the brother and sister meet. Instead, she recognized her archenemy. He quickly said, “Senior Qiu, we’ll put that on abeyance for now. Won’t you take a look again to see who else is here?”

Qiu Qianchi shouted, “You mean Guo Jing is here too? How wonderful... how wonderful!”

Then she looked at Wu Santong and Yelu Qi. One was too old, the other too young, looking not quite right. Frustrated, she searched for Guo Jing among the many people. Then her eyes met with those of Ci’en. They exchanged a stare, finally recognizing each other.

Ci’en jumped forward and cried out, “Third sister!”

Qiu Qianchi also gave out a loud cry, “Second brother!”

The two of them had countless things to say to each other, yet at this time they couldn’t think of anything to say.

A while passed, and then Qiu Qianchi asked, “Second brother, how did you become a monk?”

Ci’en asked back, “Third sister, how did your limbs become disabled?”

“It was that villain Gongsun Zhi who did it,” replied Qiu Qianchi.

Ci’en said in alarm, “Gongsun Zhi? It was your husband? Where is he right now?”

Qiu Qianchi said bitterly, “Why do you still call him ‘my husband’? The traitor has a wolf’s heart and dog’s lungs. He plotted against me.”

Unable to suppress his anger, Ci’en cried out, “Where did the villain go? I’ll tear him to shreds, and make it up to you.”

Qiu Qianchi coldly said, “Although I was the subject of an evil plan, luckily I could escape death. Our big brother, on the other hand, was already murdered.”

Ci'en said darkly, "Right!"

Qiu Qianchi gathered her chi and ferociously shouted, "Your body is skilled and able, and why are you not avenging our big brother's death? Where is your brotherly loyalty?"

Startled, Ci'en muttered, "Avenging our big brother's death? Avenging our big brother's death?"

Qiu Qianchi bellowed, "That evil Huang Rong is right in front of you. You kill her first and then go look for Guo Jing."

Ci'en gazed at Huang Rong, with a strange gleam in his eyes.

Yideng slowly stepped forwards and softly said, "Ci'en, how can a monk have murderous thoughts? The fact is that your brother brought about his own death, you can't blame other people."

Ci'en nodded and was lost in thought. After a while, he said in a low voice, "What my master said is right. Third sister, we can't avenge his death."

Qiu Qianchi gave Yideng a stare and snarled, "This old monk is spouting nonsense. Second brother, our Qiu family has been brave and heroic. Our big brother was killed. If you don't avenge his death, how can you still call yourself a heroic true man?"

Having heard that, Ci'en's mind became chaotic. He muttered, "How can I still call myself a heroic true man?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Right! Years go you roamed Jianghu. The name "Iron Palms Floating on Water" was famous and prestigious. Who would have thought that, in old age, you'd turn into a coward who is afraid of death? Qiu Qianren, I'm telling you now. If you don't avenge our big brother's death, do not call me your sister!"

Seeing her become fiercer and fiercer, everyone thought, "This bald old woman is quite lethal."

Years ago, Huang Rong was struck by Qiu Qianren's palm. Luckily Reverend Yideng came to her rescue, and so she narrowly escaped death. Naturally she knew him well. As soon as she saw him, she'd already thought about pulling out her horse whip.

Again, Guo Fu couldn't bear it and shouted, "My mother doesn't want to stoop to your level. Who's afraid of you old woman? If you continue to egg people on, I'm going to have to be impolite."

Huang Rong was about to tell Guo Fu to stop but then she figured, "That Qiu Qianren must be urged by his sister to act. Fu'er's attack may actually help divert his attention."

Noticing that her mother didn't try to stop her, Guo Fu carried on, "We are your guests. Yet, you are not treating us accordingly. Actually, you are rude, how would you call yourself a hero?"

Qiu Qianchi gave her a cold stare and said, "You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter, aren't you?"

Guo Fu replied, "Correct, and if you want to fight, you have to do it yourself. Your brother has already become a monk. How could he ever kill anybody again?"

Qiu Qianchi muttered, "You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter. You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's..."

She didn't say the word 'daughter' again. Instead, with a 'hu' sound, an iron date stone was suddenly spat out from her mouth, violently coming towards Guo Fu. Her words 'You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's daughter' were followed by 'You are Guo Jing and Huang Rong's...' Everybody naturally thought she was going to say 'daughter.' None could have thought that in the blink of an eye she would shoot a projectile from her mouth. This sudden date stone kungfu of hers was really ingenious. It even blinded the right eye of Gongsun Zhi, who was a remarkable kungfu master. Guo Fu definitely didn't stand a chance. She didn't even have the time to think about dodging the projectile. [Note: Since the last visit to the Passionless Valley, Qiu Qianchi must have had iron date stones made by someone in the valley to increase her 'fire power'.]

Among all these people, only Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu knew that Qiu Qianchi had such strange kungfu. While Xiao Longnu didn't think she would harm people, Yang Guo had been paying close attention, his eyes never leaving her face. Seeing that her lips were not about to say the word 'daughter, he plunged forwards, pulling out the long sword from Guo Fu's waist and swung it. A dang sound echoed as the iron date stone hit the blade. The sword immediately broke into two pieces before falling on the floor.

In one voice, many people cried out in alarm. Huang Rong and Guo Fu were startled, the color draining from their faces.

Huang Rong mused, “I was guarding against her vicious attack but never would I have expected that she could shoot out a ferocious projectile like this without even moving her body, limbs, or neck.”

The iron date stone broke the sword, showing that it was shot out with great force. Everybody understood and thought, “If not for Yang Guo’s interfering, would Miss Guo still be alive? And his movement was so swift that it was really shocking.”

Qiu Qianchi stared at Yang Guo in disbelief. She hadn’t expected him to have the nerve to help Guo Fu. She coldly said, “Today you were poisoned again by the Passion Flower. The poison doesn’t manifest itself now but it will, in less than three days. In the whole world there is only my half-pill here that can save your life. Don’t you believe that?”

At the time Yang Guo jumped in to save Guo Fu, everything happened so fast that he didn’t even think of this matter. As Qiu Qianchi brought it up now, he couldn’t help feeling discouraged.

Stepping forward, he gave her a bow and said, “Senior Qiu, I (junior) haven’t done anything to you. If you give me the pill, I’ll forever be grateful.”

Qiu Qianchi replied, “Never! Although it’s true that I have today because of you, this old Qiu has revenge to exact and gratitude can’t be taken into account. You promised me you’d go bring me Guo Jing and Huang Rong’s heads. Then I’d grant you the antidote. Who would think that not only did you not keep your promise, you just saved my personal enemy. What else is there to say?”

Seeing that the matter was escalating, Gongsun Lu’E said, “Mother, my uncle’s death has nothing to do with Big Brother Yang. You... please bestow mercy.”

Qiu Qianchi said, “I’ll only give this half pill to my son-in-law. I’m not going to give it to anybody else.”

Having heard this, Gongsun Lu’E blushed furiously in shame and anxiety.

Yang Guo had saved Guo Fu’s life. By this time, she realized that Yang Guo was truly benevolent and really didn’t intend to trade her little sister for the antidote. She thought about how she had repeatedly hurt him but he always returned her viciousness with kindness. In a loud voice she said, “Big Brother Yang, I (little sister) have wronged you. Please forgive me.”

But for some unknown reason, old grudges are hard to let go. As soon as she apologized, she thought, “You saved me because you wanted to show off your ability. You wanted me to submit to you and feel grateful to you. You wanted to show me that even though you had only one arm, you were still much stronger than me with two arms. Humph, isn’t that just great?”

Yang Guo let out a faint sigh, which was actually quite bitter and with no humor. He thought to himself, “How very easy for you to admit that you were wrong. You don’t even know how much suffering you brought on me and Long’er.”

Then he saw that Qiu Qianchi was giving him a fixed stare. Obviously, if he didn’t agree to marry her daughter, she would never give him that half pill to save his life. Again, he refused to compromise and made things awkward for Gongsun Lu’E and Xiao Longnu.

He brightly said, “I’m already married to Long’er. Even I, Yang Guo, am doomed to die, how can I shirk my responsibilities?” Having said this, he turned around, taking Xiao Longnu by hand. While walking to the hall entrance, he thought to himself, “Let them squabble in the hall. I’d better go rescue the Indian monk and Uncle Zhu.”

With a sneer Qiu Qianchi said, “Good, good! You yourself volunteered to die; this has nothing to do with me.”

She turned her head back towards Ci’en and said, “Second brother, I’ve heard that Huang Rong is Chief of the Beggar Clan. We, “Iron Palm Clan”, don’t dare to offend her.”

Ci’en said, “Iron Palm Clan? It’s already been disbanded. How could there still be such a clan?”

Qiu Qianchi said, “No wonder, no wonder. You don’t want to fight. You’ve become a coward...”

Qiu Qianchi was still talking but Gongsun Lu’E no longer listened to her. Watching Yang Guo step out of the hall, she suddenly dashed forwards. She cried out, “Yang Guo, you heartless scoundrel, I must have been blind.”

Yang Guo paused in his steps, wondering why this girl, who had always been courteous, was acting out of character. Could it be because she heard that he and Long’er were married and became enraged? He felt a slight regret, and so he turned his back and said, “Miss Gongsun...”

Gongsun Lu'E scolded, "Crafty thief, it's easy to come into the valley but hard to get out..." But although she was berating him, her facial expression was actually warm and gentle, her eyes conveying a hidden message. Yang Guo knew that there had to be a reason.

In a loud voice he said, "What is it? You say this small Passionless Valley is hard to get out of?" He was facing the main hall. Qiu Qianchi saw him very clearly and therefore didn't see anything strange.

Lu'E scolded, "I wish I could split you in half. I would rip out your heart so I can see..." She suddenly opened her mouth and, with a puff of air, a date stone was spat out, flying towards Yang Guo's face.

Yang Guo caught it with his hand. He sneered, "Just let me leave quickly and I won't hurt you. You think your little skill could stop me?"

Gongsun Lu'E gave him another meaningful glance and let him leave. Suddenly she covered her face with both hands and cried out, "Mother, he... he's a big bully!" She fled back into the main hall. Her loved one was gone. He had married another girl. This sadness was actually not false.

Seeing tears stream down her face, Qiu Qianchi shouted, "E'er, what's wrong with you? That boy's life won't last very long." Lu'E crouched down at her mother's knee and her sobs continued.

Everybody in the hall was deceived by this performance. There was only Huang Rong who secretly thought it to be funny. She mused, "She pretended to be mad at Yang Guo so her mother wouldn't be suspicious and later she could steal the antidote. Who would have thought that this boy Yang Guo would leave a trail of broken hearts behind him everywhere he went. All these beautiful girls pine for him." Having thought this, she gave Cheng Ying and Lu Wushuang a glance.

After catching that date stone, Yang Guo walked out very quickly. Lu'E's words were very strange, and he still couldn't figure out her intention. Xiao Longnu saw the expression on Lu'E's face and knew that her tirade was pretended. She asked, "Guo'er, she pretended to be mad at you. Was it because she was trying to fool her mother so she could steal the antidote?"

Yang Guo replied "It would seem so."

As soon as the two people rounded a curve in the path and saw that they were alone, Yang Guo raised his hand and looked at the date stone in his palm. It was actually an olive seed, with tiny stitches in the middle. Yang Guo squeezed it with his fingers, breaking it in half. The middle of the seed was actually hollow, with a thin sheet of paper hidden in there.

With a smile Xiao Longnu said, “This girl told you a riddle. She actually meant this when she said ...split you in half. I would rip out your heart so I can see...”

Yang Guo unfolded the thin paper, and the two of them bent their heads to look at the words. The paper read, “Mother hid the half pill in a secret place. I will plan to steal it for you. The Indian monk and senior Zhu are confined in ‘the fire room’. ” (kiln) Next to the characters was a map showing a winding path that ended at ‘the fire room.’

Yang Guo said in delight, “Let us go quickly. It’s good that no one is here to stop us right now.”



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