

Foxs' Wuxia

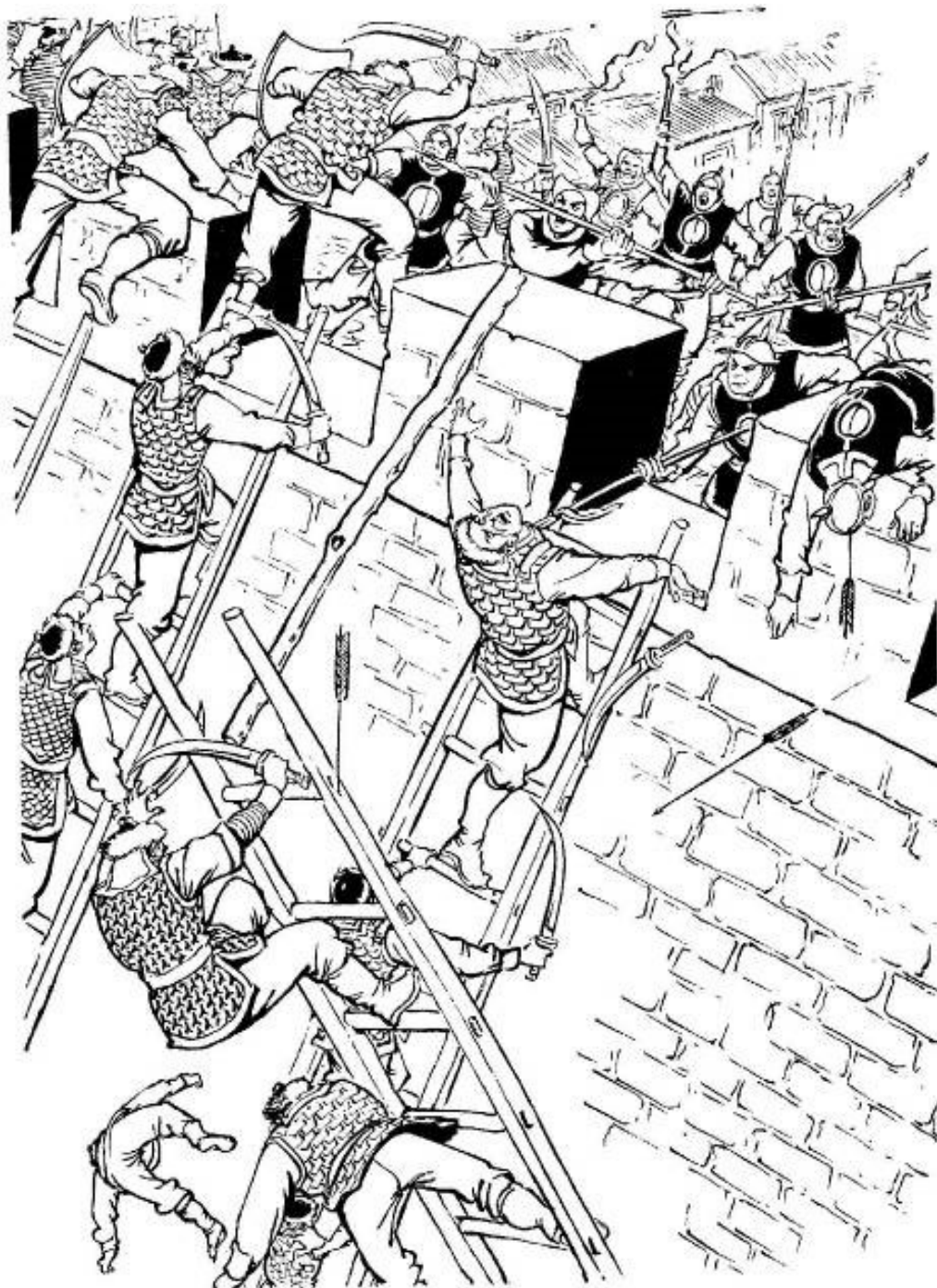
Wuxia Fan Translation

SDXL Chapter 20



Chapter 20 – A Hero's Imperative

Translated by Noodles



The Mongolians attacked Xiang Yang once again. Arrows and stones were sent towards the city like rain and hail. The soldiers at the front of the attack placed ladders around the city of Xiang Yang and climbed up. The city was guarded tightly; groups of eight soldiers held a wooden ram in the arms and were knocking the ladders off the city walls.

Yang Guo wanted to keep himself away from this dispute but when he saw how cruel Gongsun Zhi was, his anger erupted and he decided to step forward to argue with him. Just as he was about to do this, Xiao Longnu dashed forward and picked up Qiu Qianchi. She patted her 'Jade Pillow' pressure point a few times and controlled the

bleeding. She then tore off a piece of cloth from her sleeve and covered her wound before shouting at Gongsun Zhi, “Mr. Gongsun, she is your wife, how can you treat her like that? Since you’ve already got a wife, why do you still want to marry me? Even if I married you, won’t you treat me just as you’ve treated her?”

Those three sentences were asked fervently; Gongsun Zhi’s tongue was tied and he couldn’t reply. Ma Guangzuo couldn’t help himself and cheered.

Xiaoxiang Zi said coldly, “This Miss is right.”

Gongsun Zhi really did love Xiao Longnu; though he was made speechless by her he didn’t get angry, he was just embarrassed; he lowered his tone and said to her, “Sister Liu, how can you compare yourself with that evil woman? I can’t love you enough; if I have any ill intent towards you then let heaven condemn me where I stand.”

Xiao Longnu said coldly, “All I need is him to love me; even if your love for me is a hundred times stronger I wouldn’t care.” She then went over to Yang Guo and held his hand.

Yang Guo was filled with resentment, he thought, “Gu Gu loves me like this yet I just have a few days to live and it’s all because of this bastard.” He pointed to Gongsun Zhi and shouted, “You said you have no ill intent towards my Gu Gu, huh! You left me for dead and then lied to my Gu Gu to get her to marry you; is that good intent? She’s been poisoned by the Passion Flowers and you know that there isn’t an antidote to cure her, yet you don’t tell her, is that good intent?”

Xiao Longnu was shocked and quivered, “Is this true?”

Yang Guo said, “Don’t worry; you’ve already taken the antidote.” He then smiled a smile that was filled with grief along with joy, he thought, “I’ve given the antidote to you; I’m willing to die for you.”

Gongsun Zhi looked at Qiu Qianchi and then looked at Xiao Longnu and Yang Guo; his eyes swept across them and jealousy, yearning, anger, shame, embarrassment and disappointment all filled his heart and disturbed him. Although he had great self control, he had now fallen into a semi mad state. He suddenly bent down and took out his yin yang twin blades from under their red cover; he clashed them together and shouted, “Fine, fine! We’ll all die together!”

Everyone gasped; they would never have thought that he had actually brought weapons to his wedding ceremony.

Xiao Longnu chuckled, “Guo’er, we don’t have to be respectful to such an evil person.”

A ‘qiang lang’ sound was heard as she took out a pair of swords from underneath the bridal gown; it was the ‘Gentleman’ and ‘Lady’ swords. Though she wasn’t versed in the ways of the world, she did not have an ounce of mercy in her when dealing with such evil people. When she went to take revenge for Grandma Sun, she frightened all the Taoists of Chongyang Palace witless and the Blithe Sage Hao Datong almost lost his life to her. The thought of killing him entered her mind when Gongsun Zhi had stopped her and Yang Guo from getting back together today. She had hidden the weapons beneath her gown so that when Gongsun Zhi cured Yang Guo, she would immediately take the opportunity to attack him with Yang Guo at her side. If it didn’t work then she would kill herself for Yang Guo; not allowing herself to be sullied in this Passionless Valley.

All the guests were shocked when they saw that both of them had prepared weapons. Only Fawang and the others, who were experienced, knew that this celebration would end in tragedy and weren’t surprised. They were only surprised with the fall of Qiu Qianchi in one attack; this did not match the abilities of someone with the profound internal energy she had just shown.

Yang Guo took the ‘Gentleman’ sword from Xiao Longnu and said, “Gu Gu, today we’ll kill that man to take revenge for me.”

Xiao Longnu’s ‘Lady’ sword trembled and she said surprised, “Take revenge for you?”

Yang Guo was filled with sadness in his heart but he couldn’t tell her about it, he just said, “This bastard has harmed many people.” He flipped his sword and went for Gongsun Zhi’s left side. He knew that this battle was extremely dangerous; though Xiao Longnu’s Passion Flower poison had been cured, he was still poisoned. If they come together and used the “Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay” and stirred feelings of love, he would break out with unbearable pain. He kept his eye on the enemy and used “Quanzhen Swordplay”; every stance and form of his was extremely stringent and cautious. If these stances were performed by Ma Yu, Qiu Chuji and the other old Taoists, the stances will of course be performed steadily and controlled, profound and intense. In the hands of Yang Guo it displayed maturity beyond his years but his stances were slightly less smooth.

Gongsun Zhi knew that when the two used their combined swordplay they were powerful so he immediately used the “Yin Yang Wild Blades” with the black sword in his right hand and the gold saber in his left. His stances were getting fiercer and fiercer with every stroke. The “Quanzhen Swordplay” that Yang Guo was using was developed by Wang Chongyang; though it wasn’t vicious and fierce like the opponent’s, it was subtle and had variations. Yang Guo defended cautiously and did not attack as he received three stances. Xiao Longnu called out and raised the ‘Lady’ sword, attacking Gongsun Zhi’s back.

Gongsun Zhi was furious, he thought, “This beautiful girl was going to be my wife and now she’s joined an outsider to attack me.” He continued thinking, “The evil bitch coming back here suddenly and revealing all the things I’ve done has caused me to lose my respect and all face. Not only can’t I force sister Liu to marry me; it looks I won’t be able to keep my position here in the valley.” Though today’s matters are troublesome, he was going to rely on his martial arts to get him out of this mess. All he wanted to do was beat Yang Guo, kidnap Xiao Longnu and run away. He didn’t know that Xiao Longnu’s Passion Flower poison had been cured and still thought that she had less than thirty six days to live; he was still going to force her to marry him. His thoughts were becoming more and more evil and the wild twin blades in his hands were becoming more vicious by the minute.

Xiao Longnu used the “Jade Maiden Swordplay” so that when Yang Guo and she become one, they would be able to unleash the power of the “Pure Heart of the Jade Maiden Swordplay”. But his eyes did not glance over at her once; he was just concentrating on himself as he fought.

Xiao Longnu was extremely surprised and asked, “Guo’er, why aren’t you looking at me?” Her love was gradually being stirred and the light from her sword suddenly enhanced.

When Yang Guo heard her voice, his heart trembled and his chest broke out with an unbearable pain. His sword slowed and a ‘chi’ sound was heard as the black sword cut his sleeve. Xiao Longnu was alarmed and unleashed three stances in a row, blocking Gongsun Zhi’s attack.

Yang Guo said, “I can’t look at you or listen to you.”

Xiao Longnu said tenderly, “Why?”

Yang Guo was afraid that he would meet danger again and replied coarsely, “If you want me to die then continue talking to me!” As soon as his anger stirred the pain immediately stopped and he received the stances of Gongsun Zhi’s black sword.

Xiao Longnu was extremely sorry and said, “Don’t be angry, I won’t say anything more.” Her mind suddenly lit up, “My poison has been cured but his hasn’t! He got the antidote but he didn’t take it and returned here to give it to me.” She was extremely touched and the love in her was boundless; as soon as this feeling grew, the power of the “Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay” enhanced greatly. The stances that she unleashed protected all of Yang Guo’s vital points. Since she was protecting Yang Guo, Yang Guo should protect her, but he didn’t dare to glance over at her; and so she was completely unprotected and exposed to the enemy’s attack.

Gongsun Zhi’s eyes were very sharp; he discovered the weakness in just a few stances but he didn’t want to harm a single hair of Xiao Longnu’s head. He directed all his vicious sword and saber stances towards Yang Guo. He was attacking like a crashing wave but Yang Guo was defending like an unmovable cliff. With Xiao Longnu using all her efforts to protect him, all of Gongsun Zhi’s attacks were actually rendered useless.

By this time, Lu’E had wakened up and stood next to her mother watching the battle. She watched as Xiao Longnu concentrated only on guarding Yang Guo, ignoring all dangers to herself; she couldn’t help but ask herself, “If that was you, could you disregard all the dangers to yourself to protect him?” She sighed lightly and said, “I would definitely be able to act like Miss Long, but he would not act the same way towards me.”

Just at this time, Qiu Qianchi hissed, “The false saber is not a saber; the false sword is not a sword!”

Both Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were startled when they heard this, they didn’t know what she meant by these two sentences.”

Qiu Qianchi called out, “The saber is a saber, the sword is a sword!”

Yang Guo had fought Gongsun Zhi twice; all along he has been pondering about where the essence of the “Yin Yang Wild Blades” lies but the light, airy black sword chopped solidly while the heavy gold saber was swift and flighty, following the way of the sword. The stances he was using were the complete opposite to the orthodox martial arts theories. It would be fine if the saber was using sword techniques only and the sword was using saber techniques only; but the reality was, that in the midst of the sword techniques there were saber stances; buried within the saber stances were the

lethality of sword strokes. The variation was mysterious and difficult to grasp; when he heard those words of Qiu Qianchi he thought, “Could it be that the sword techniques of the saber and the saber techniques of the sword are all illusions?” He saw the black sword chopping across his shoulders; this was definitely a saber stance. He then treated it as a sword and extended his ‘Gentleman’ sword forward; the swords collided and they both took a step back. Only then did he know that the black sword was still just a sword, and the saber stances that he was using were merely trying to confuse his opponent. But if the opponent’s martial arts were slightly poor, the saber techniques would still be able to cause harm.

With this immediate success, Yang Guo was delighted and continued to search for weaknesses in the opponent’s sword and saber. He was thinking that although the jumbled stances were masterly, the ways of these blades would not be refined. A few more stances passed when he heard Qiu Qianchi say, “Attack his right leg; attack his right leg.”

Yang Guo saw that Gongsun Zhi’s saber was like a blur; there was no open space to attack on his lower body at all. But he thought that, although Qiu Qianchi was not able to perform martial arts anymore, her knowledge was still there. She was the one who taught Gongsun Zhi martial arts; she would definitely know what was real and what was false; so he listened to her and attacked his right leg. Gongsun Zhi swept his saber across and there was no way to hit his right leg; but as he did this, his left shoulder and left side were left unprotected. Yang Guo did not wait for Qiu Qianchi to prompt him and flashed his sword towards him, cutting through his gown underneath his armpit.

Gongsun Zhi cursed and leapt back; he stared angrily at Qiu Qianchi and shouted, “Old witch; do you think I’m going to let you go?” He then continued to attack Yang Guo with the saber and sword.

Yang Guo raised his sword to block the attack. Qiu Qianchi continued, “Kick his back!”

The two of them were facing each other, there was no way he could kick his back; but Yang Guo was confident in Qiu Qianchi. He knew that there was a deeper meaning behind her words; he didn’t care what would happen and dashed towards the back of his opponent. Gongsun Zhi used his saber to cut backwards.

Qiu Qianchi called out, “Pierce his forehead.”

Yang Guo thought, “I’ve just turned towards his back and now you’re telling me to pierce his forehead?” It was an urgent situation and he didn’t give it much thought, he

turned back towards the enemy's front and he was just about to pierce his enemy's forehead when Qiu Qianchi called out, "Cut his arse!"

Lu'E watched with sweaty palms; she knitted her eyebrows and thought, "By calling madly like this, isn't mother helping father instead?" She kept her thoughts to herself but Ma Guangzuo couldn't contain himself and he shouted out, "Brother Yang, don't fall into the trap of that old woman; she wants to kill you."

Yang Guo had twisted and turned many times and had an inkling as to what her meaning was; when she called out go forward he turned forward and when she shouted go backward he immediately dashed behind him. Indeed, after a few twists and turns, Gongsun Zhi's right side was uncovered. Yang Guo sent his sword towards Gongsun Zhi's right side and a 'chi' sound was heard as it the sword cut through his gown, piercing about an inch into Gongsun Zhi's side; blood immediately flowed down his side.

The crowd gave an 'ah' call and stood up. Fawang and the others now understood. Qiu Qianchi was not instructing Yang Guo on how to gain victory; she was instructing him on how to gain an opportunity to win in a situation where it was impossible to gain victory. She was not pointing out the weakness of Gongsun Zhi, but was trying to make Yang Guo force a flaw in the opponent from his flawless stances. After being prompted by Qiu Qianchi a few times, Yang Guo immediately understood this advanced martial art notion; he was in awe of her and thought, "If the opponent is a skilled fighter, what flaws will they show in their stances? This piece of advice from this senior is more than enough for a lifetime's use."

But to force a flaw in Gongsun Zhi required not only for one's martial arts to be higher than his, but one must also be familiar with his stances. A person must be clear on all his variations and reactions over ten stances beforehand, before luring him step by step into making an error. Only Qiu Qianchi was able to do this. Yang Guo understood but he was not able to realize it. He heard her prompt and the sword suddenly flashed out, attacking Gongsun Zhi's back, front and sides urgently. Over twenty stances later, Gongsun Zhi's leg was cut.

Though this cut wasn't deep, it was long, at least five or six inches long. Gongsun Zhi thought, "The two of them are guarding each other, I can't hurt the one named Yang; if this continues, with the old hag giving advice, I'll die by this bastard's sword." Years ago, in order to save his own life he killed his lover; in this desperate situation he couldn't care about Xiao Longnu anymore. He moved his black sword and swiped his saber, slashing towards Xiao Longnu's shoulders.

Yang Guo was alarmed, he stretched his sword forward to protect her from this attack when he heard Qiu Qianchi call out, “Stab his waist.” Yang Guo was startled and thought, “Gu Gu is being attacked right now, how can I not save her? But each time Senior Qiu Lao has given me advice, it has a deeper meaning behind it. It looks like this is a ‘surrounding Wei to rescue Zhao’ plan.” He changed his mind and the sword arrived at Gongsun Zhi’s waist. Suddenly Xiao Longnu called out, her right arm was cut and the ‘Lady’ sword fell onto the floor. Gongsun Zhi’s black sword slanted across and blocked Yang Guo’s sword.

Yang Guo was extremely shocked and quickly called out, “Move back, I’ll take him by myself.” His love and care for her was stirred and his chest broke out in an aching pain again. Xiao Longnu’s injury was not slight; she moved backwards and tore off a piece of her sleeve, wrapping it around her wound. Yang Guo fought with his life; he was furious with Qiu Qianchi and glanced at her with rage.

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, “Why are you blaming me? I’m just helping you defeat your enemy; who’s trying to help you to rescue someone? Ha-ha, what’s her life got to do with me? It’s better if she dies!”

Yang Guo said angrily, “You and your husband are a perfect match; there isn’t an ounce of goodness in either of your hearts!”

Qiu Qianchi just chuckled; she didn’t get angry and remained composed as she concentrated on the battle.

Yang Guo glanced over at Xiao Longnu and saw her leaning on a chair with her wound wrapped up. It looked like it wasn’t serious and his spirits were roused. His sword techniques suddenly changed from “Quanzhen Swordplay” to “Jade Maiden Swordplay”. Gongsun Zhi saw his sword stances had been steady and cautious; but suddenly they were now supple and lively, graceful and attractive. It was as if Yang Guo had changed into another person. Gongsun Zhi was surprised and thought, “This person is extremely crafty, what is he trying now?” After taking a few stances, he felt that his opponent’s swordplay had the same elegant and lofty air of a distinguished family; the same type of swordplay that Xiao Longnu had used. All Gongsun Zhi’s doubts were erased and he attacked with both his sword and saber.

Ten or so stances later, Yang Guo was gradually being put on the back foot (a sign of coming defeat) and forced to retreat. Qiu Qianchi gave advice to Yang Guo repeatedly but he was furious with her for deliberately intending to get Xiao Longnu injured. He ignored her and said to himself, “Who needs your annoying words?” He unleashed four

strokes and hummed, “The minutiae of a fine horse, a radiant and beautiful coat, the left grabs the many weak, the right receives the forgotten retreat.” The verses matched the sword stances and he performed the sword strokes with great elegance.

Gongsun Zhi was startled and said, “What?”

Yang Guo continued, “The galloping wind and the flashing lightning, the chasing image flying away. Swift and powerful from the central plains, appearance is the aim.” The stances were grouped in fours, reflecting the verse. Where it said, ‘the galloping wind and the flashing lightning, the chasing image flying away’, the sword stances were extremely quick; when it said, ‘swift and powerful from the central plains, appearance is the aim’, the sword strokes were swift and vicious yet also carried elegance along with it.

Gongsun Zhi had never seen these sword stances before. The verses were pleasing to the ear and he slowed down his attacks, trying to concentrate on the meanings behind each line. He knew that the sword stances and the verses matched each other; all he has to do is to grasp the meaning behind the verses and he’ll be able to defeat this swordplay.

Yang Guo continued, “Stopping at the orchid garden, the horse is fed at Mount Hua. The eyes return unto the swan, the hand strumming the five strings.” The verse was said with a modest tone but the sword strokes were towering and majestic, especially the last two stances which were extremely exquisite and sudden. It appeared to go to the east but went west, the sword hinted up but went down, one stance but two strokes, and it was difficult to tell what was real and what was false.

Xiao Longnu had now finished wrapping up her wound. She watched Yang Guo’s swordplay and felt it was pleasing to the eye; but she had never heard him talk about this swordplay before so she asked, “Guo’er, what swordplay is this; who taught you?”

Yang Guo laughed, “I thought of it myself. Gu Gu, is it good? A few days ago I was resting in bed from some injuries and I saw a book of poetry by the bed. I thought the poems were quite nice so I committed them to memory. At the heroes’ feast, Zhu Ziliu merged calligraphy into martial arts; I thought it would definitely be possible to merge poetry into martial arts.”

Xiao Longnu said, “It’s very good...”

Suddenly, Jinlun Fawang praised, “Brother Yang, I can only look on in awe at your intelligence and wisdom. The following verse is of course, “Bowling to and revering one’s content, the good mood of the heart is too obscure, fishing and searching for something, the trap is forgotten once the fish is caught.”

Gongsun Zhi’s mind lit up, “That monk is trying to help me.” He didn’t think about what the monk wanted but concentrated on the first line of the verse, ‘Bowling to and revering one’s content’, the sword will definitely be aimed upwards followed by a downwards stroke. He guarded his upper body with the black sword and chopped his gold saber from the middle of his body.

Jinlun Fawang was versed in both martial arts and culture. Although he lived in Tibet, he knew Han philosophies, their history and Confucian classics. When he heard Yang Guo reciting the poem, he knew from long ago what the following verses would be. He revealed this to Gongsun Zhi in hope that he would be able to use Gongsun Zhi to kill Yang Guo for him.

Gongsun Zhi did indeed manage to get the first move in when he heard this. Before Yang Guo unleashed his sword strokes, Gongsun Zhi had sealed off all of the sword’s paths while at the same time, chopping out his jagged golden saber from the middle of his body to attack him.

Luckily, Yang Guo had heard Fawang and was prepared for this, he didn’t continue on with his “Four Lined Poem Swordplay” and guarded his midriff with his sword while the middle finger of his left hand flicked out, striking the back of the golden saber.

Gongsun Zhi’s arm trembled and the joints in his hand felt slightly numb from this flick, he was shocked and thought, “This little punk has much strange kung fu.”

This flick of Yang Guo’s was the “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” that Huang Yaoshi taught him; but he was unable to subdue his enemy because his internal energy wasn’t strong enough. If Huang Yaoshi performed this move, the jagged golden saber of Gongsun Zhi would have flown out of his hand as soon as it was struck. However, this flick of Yang Guo’s was still good enough to allow him to regain the upper hand; he moved his sword forward and used Huang Yaoshi’s “Jade Flute Swordplay”. The “Divine Release of the Flicking Finger” and “Jade Flute Swordplay” both concentrated on attacking the opponent’s pressure points. When they were used together, it was ingenious and subtle and even though Yang Guo’s mastery of these skills wasn’t refined; after a bout of urgent attacking it was still good enough to trouble Gongsun Zhi.

At that time, Qiu Qianchi called out again, “His sword is going for the waist, and his saber is chopping towards the neck”. “The sword is going to slash towards your right shoulder while his saber guards his left.” She called out every stance of Gongsun Zhi’s in advance.

Yang Guo now held the upper hand completely. With his poetry ceased, Fawang was unable to tell where his sword would go and couldn’t aid Gongsun Zhi.

Gongsun Zhi’s family art the “Yin Yang Twin Blades” were inspected thoroughly by Qiu Qianchi and then subsequently improved by her. All of Gongsun Zhi’s stances were known to her; no matter how sudden his changes were, Qiu Qianchi would call it out in advance. As they were absorbed in the battle, Qiu Qianchi suddenly called out, “Both his sword and saber are going to attack your upper body.” These words were called out at just the exact time as Gongsun Zhi sent out both his saber and sword; it was now difficult for him to change his stance halfway through. Yang Guo had more than enough time to block this attack.

Yang Guo lowered his head and dashed forward while protecting his back with his sword. His left finger came out and jabbed the opponent’s ‘Ocean of Air’ pressure point an inch and a half below the navel. Yang Guo was delighted with this successful attack at the first attempt. He thought that his opponent would suffer a serious injury with this attack but Gongsun Zhi’s leg came out, striking him on the jaw.

Yang Guo was shocked and leapt to the side a few feet. He then remembered how strange the pressure points were on this person; previously he had used the golden sphere silk belt to strike his pressure points but it had no effect on him. Gongsun Zhi came at him once again.

Qiu Qianchi called out once again, “His blades will cross, the right sword attacking left, the left saber attacking right.”

Yang Guo did not give it much thought and defended with all his might.

When it came to internal energy, Yang Guo was not a match for his opponent; he would have lost out long ago if it weren’t for Qiu Qianchi’s advice.

Yang Guo and Gongsun Zhi continued for another seven or eight hundred stances. The members of the valley watched with their hearts on the verge of jumping out of their mouths. At the same time Xiaoxiang Zi and the others were also fixed on the great battle, but they couldn’t tell who would win it. In the midst of the blurs of the saber and

sword, one could see Gongsun Zhi panting while Yang Guo was soaked with sweat. The movements of the two were now not as quick as before.

Gongsun Lu'E thought that if the two carried on like this, one of them would be seriously injured. Of course she didn't want Yang Guo to lose; but she couldn't bear to see her father get hurt, so she whispered to Qiu Qianchi, "Mother, tell them to stop. We'll settle this by talking it over."

Qiu Qianchi gave a 'heng' grunt and said, "Pour two bowls of tea."

Lu'E was confused but did as she was told and brought the bowls of teas to her mother. Qiu Qianchi took off the piece of bloody cloth that was wrapped around the wound on her head. When she was knocked into the pillar, blood poured out of her head and it was Xiao Longnu who tore off her sleeve and covered her wound. The bleeding on her head started again as she took off the cloth.

Lu'E was alarmed and called out; "Mother!"

Qiu Qianchi called out, "I won't die!" She threw the bloody cloth onto her knees and took the bowls. Her four fingers held the bowls but the thumb of each hand was in the tea. The blood on her thumbs mixed into the tea. She quickly swirled the tea and the traces of blood were gone. She called out, "You should be tired now; have a bowl of tea!" She said to Lu'E, "Give one bowl of tea to each of them to quench their thirst."

Lu'E knew her mother hated her father deeply and wouldn't have any good intentions towards him. This bowl of tea wasn't meant to quench his thirst but to poison him. However, she poured the bowls of tea herself and there was no poison in any of them; they were just ordinary bowls of tea. It must be because her mother sympathized with Yang Guo. If her father didn't have a bowl, he would not stop and Yang Guo would not be able to take a drink. She saw that the two were really very tired so she went to the middle of the hall and called out clearly, "Please have some tea!"

Gongsun Zhi and Yang Guo were both very thirsty; when they heard Qiu Qianchi call out; they both stopped and jumped backwards.

Lu'E first took the tray of tea to her father. Gongsun Zhi knew that it was Qiu Qianchi who ordered her to bring these bowls of tea to him, so there'll definitely be something wrong with it. Most likely they had poison in them. He held up his hand and said to Yang Guo, "You drink first."

Yang Guo had no fear and casually picked up a bowl of tea; he placed it on his lip and took a sip.

Gongsun Zhi said, “Good, I’ll have that bowl!” He took Yang Guo’s bowl from his hand.

Yang Guo laughed, “It was your daughter who poured the tea; don’t tell me you think there’s poison in them?” Yang Guo took the other bowl of tea and drank it in one go.

Gongsun Zhi looked at his daughter’s face and saw that it was calm and relaxed, he thought, “Lu’E loves that punk, of course there would be no poison in his cup of tea; I’ve already swapped the bowls, what have I got to be afraid of?” He too drank the bowl of tea in one go and then clashed his weapons, saying, “There’s no need for a break, continue. Huh, if it weren’t for that old witch giving you tips, you would have died from my black sword and golden saber long ago even if you had ten lives to spare.”

Qiu Qianchi replaced the bandage on her head and said evilly, “His “Closure of the Pressure Points” has been defeated; you can hit his pressure points.”

Gongsun Zhi felt a slight taste of blood on his tongue and was shocked; a shock that was indescribable. This particular family art has one big drawback; the practitioner cannot taste an ounce of meat otherwise this art will be neutralized immediately. His ancestors were afraid that they’d taste meat by accident and so passed a strict order in the valley; no one can eat meat. Though the others didn’t practice this art, they were still forced to be vegetarians. Gongsun Zhi had always been very careful; but how would he have known that Qiu Qianchi would actually use such an evil plan and put her own blood in the bowls of tea?

Yang Guo was not affected by drinking this bowl of blood containing tea; but the “Closure of the Pressure Points” technique that Gongsun Zhi had been training bitterly all his life was gone, just like that.

He turned his head around in fury and looked at Qiu Qianchi who had a plate of dates on her knees that had been served to the guests. She was eating them and savoring the taste. She said slowly, “I told you before, twenty years ago, this art of the Gongsun family is hard to learn yet easy to neutralize; it’s not worth practicing.”

Fire erupted in Gongsun Zhi’s eyes and he raised his weapons, dashing forward towards Qiu Qianchi. Lu’E was alarmed and dashed in front of her mother to protect her. Suddenly a gust of wind brushed past her ear; it sounded like some kind of projectile.

Gongsun Zhi howled. Blood poured down from his right eye; he turned around and dashed out of the hall with his sword and saber. A trail of blood was left in his wake. His wretched howl was getting further and further away, gradually getting quieter and quieter until silence fell within the mountain walls of the valley.

Everyone looked at each other, wondering how Qiu Qianchi achieved this.

Only Lu'E and Yang Guo knew that she had used her date stone spitting kung fu to do this.

When Gongsun Zhi and Yang Guo were fighting, she had placed seven or eight date stones in her mouth in advance. She saw that Gongsun Zhi's martial arts had improved greatly; even if she made a sneak attack, he would be able to avoid them. When he's on his guard, it would be difficult to harm him. Because of this, she waited until he was completely absorbed in the battle before using the blood tea to defeat his "Closure of the Pressure Points" technique. While he was reacting furiously, she took the opportunity to suddenly launch her date stone at him. This was the one and only martial art she had and she trained it vigorously over the years; the power and accuracy of it was not below any of the world's greatest projectile arts. If it wasn't for Lu'E dashing forward and blocking her view, not only would both eyes of Gongsun Zhi's be blinded; the pressure point between his eyes would have also been struck. This would have immediately sent him to his death.

Lu'E couldn't bear this. She stood there stunned for a while; before calling out, "Father, father!" She wanted to go after him.

Qiu Qianchi said sternly, "If you want your father then go; don't ever see me again."

Lu'E stopped her feet; she was in a difficult position; but then she thought about how all of this was the fault of her father. All the suffering that her mother endured was tens of times greater than what he endured. Anyway, her father had long gone and she couldn't catch up even if she wanted to. She stopped and turned from the door, silently heading back into the hall slowly, with her head hung down.

Qiu Qianchi sat on her chair and looked to either side of her; she chuckled, "Good, you've all come here for a celebratory drink; won't everyone's mood being ruined if we don't have a drink?" Her icy cold eyes gave everyone goose bumps; they were all afraid that she was going to spit out some kind of strange projectile without any warning. The people of the valley were afraid while Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others prepared themselves.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were both surprised with the state that Gongsun Zhi ended up in. They both let out a long sigh and reached out for each other's hand, holding it tightly. The two's thoughts were as one and they made their way towards the exit.

When they reached the door, Qiu Qianchi suddenly shouted, "Yang Guo, where are you going?"

Yang Guo turned around and made a long bow to her before saying, "Senior Qiu Lao, Miss Lu, we'll be leaving now." He knew that he didn't have long to live and so he didn't say things like 'I'll see you again'.

Lu'E returned the greeting and kept silent in misery.

Qiu Qianchi's face was filled with anger and she shouted, "I've betrothed my only daughter to you and you do not call me mother-in-law? And you're leaving just like that?"

Yang Guo was startled and thought, "Though you've betrothed your daughter to me, I didn't say that I accepted."

Qiu Qianchi said, "We've got everything here, decorations, candles and guests. We're martial artists, we'll get straight to the point; you two are getting married today."

Jinlun Fawang and the others had just seen Yang Guo fight Gongsun Zhi with his life for Xiao Longnu; when they heard Qiu Qianchi say this they all knew that there was going to be another great show. They looked at each other; some showed a wry smile and some were shaking their heads slightly.

Yang Guo held Xiao Longnu's elbow with his left hand and his right hand held the handle of the 'Gentleman' sword. He said, "I am extremely touched by senior Qiu Lao's offer. But my heart belongs to someone else." He moved backwards slowly after he said this. He was afraid that Qiu Qianchi would spit out date stones at them in anger and so he held his sword just in case.

Qiu Qianchi's angry eyes swept over Xiao Longnu and said coldly, "Huh, that little seductress is indeed beautiful; no wonder both old and young go mad over her."

Lu'E said, "Mother, brother Yang and Miss Long decided to marry each other long ago; I'll tell you all the details later on."

Qiu Qianchi replied angrily, “What kind of person do you think your mother is? How can I take back what I’ve said? The one named Yang, my daughter is beautiful and she’s more than worthy of you. But even if she was an ugly troll, I’m still going to make you marry her today.”

When Ma Guangzuo heard how unreasonable she was he couldn’t stop himself from laughing and calling out, “This particular couple in this valley are a perfect match: the husband forces a young girl to marry him while the wife forces a young man to marry her daughter and they don’t want anyone else but them, right or wrong?”

Qiu Qianchi said coldly, “Wrong!”

Ma Guangzuo opened his mouth and laughed out loud. Suddenly a ‘bo’ sound was heard as a date stone flew towards the center of his eyes; the stone came like lightning and there was no way to avoid it. Ma Guangzuo lifted his head in shock; a ‘pai’ sound was heard as three of his front teeth were knocked loose. Ma Guangzuo was furious and roared while he threw himself forward. Another two ‘bo’ sounds were heard as the ‘Linking Jump’ pressure point on his right groin and the ‘Yang Pass’ pressure point on his left leg were struck. Both his legs went limp and he fell down onto the floor, unable to get up.

Those three date stones were extremely quick. Yang Guo knew that Qiu Qianchi would make her move when Ma Guangzuo was laughing and drew his sword to go to save him; but it was too late. He picked him up and unsealed his pressure points. Ma Guangzuo admitted defeat; this bald old woman didn’t move her legs or arms and was able to defeat him just by opening her mouth. He had great respect for her; he spat out the teeth and said with a mouthful of blood, “Old woman, you’re more powerful than me; the one named Ma does not dare to offend you again.”

Qiu Qianchi ignored him and stared at Yang Guo. She said, “You’ve decided to not marry my daughter, true?”

Gongsun Lu’E couldn’t bear to suffer such embarrassment in front of everyone and took a dagger from her waist. She pointed it at her chest and said loudly, “Mother, if you ask again, then I’ll kill myself right in front of your very eyes.”

Qiu Qianchi opened her mouth and a stone shot out, hitting the handle of the dagger. There was great power behind that stone; the dagger flew and planted itself inches into a wooden pillar, the handle quivering in the candlelight.

Everyone gasped.

Yang Guo knew that his time would be wasted if he remained here for much longer so he flicked his blade with his finger and said clearly with the resonation of the blade, “The lonely rabbit, going east watching west. The clothes are not of new; the person is not like that of before.” He motioned his sword in a flurry and turned around with Xiao Longnu’s hand held in his.

When Lu’E heard the last two sentences, ‘the clothes are not of new, the person not like that of before’, her hurt became even greater; she took off the ragged gown that Yang Guo had given her. She went to him and offered it back to him, saying, “Brother Yang, it’s better to have old clothes.”

Yang Guo said, “Thank you.” He stretched out his hand to take it. He and Xiao Longnu knew that Lu’E was deliberately standing in front of them so her mother wouldn’t be able to attack them with the date stones. Xiao Longnu had a faint smile on her face and nodded her head, showing her thanks.

Lu’E moved her lips to the side, telling them to leave quickly.

Qiu Qianchi mumbled ‘the clothes are not of new, the person is not like that of before’ a few times before she suddenly raised her voice and said, “Yang Guo, you don’t want my daughter; but don’t tell me that you don’t want your life as well?”

Yang Guo gave a bitter laugh and backed another step out of the hall.

Xiao Longnu’s heart trembled and said, “Wait.” She asked clearly, “Senior Qiu Lao, have you got an antidote for the Passion Flower poison?”

Lu’E had been thinking about this all along. Yang Guo gave the only Passionless Pill that her father had to Xiao Longnu while his poison had yet to be cleared. The only hope that he had was her mother, who might have a way to cure this poison. But she knew that her mother would use this to blackmail Yang Guo, to force him into marrying her; this is why she hadn’t mentioned this before. But in this urgent situation she could no longer care about her embarrassment and turned herself around, saying, “Mother, if it weren’t for brother Yang, you would still be trapped down in that cave. Brother Yang has not done anything to offend you. We need to pay back this kindness; please cure his poison.”

Qiu Qianchi chuckled, “Repay kindness with kindness? Repay vengeance with vengeance? How can the world’s vengeance and kindness be distinguished like that? Was that thanks I got from Gongsun Zhi?”

Lu’E said loudly, “I hate men whose hearts are not loyal, men who like the new and forget those of old. If the one named Yang Guo wanted to leave his lover of old and marry me, I’d rather die than marry him.”

Those words rang in Qiu Qianchi’s ears, but after a thought, she immediately knew what her daughter was trying to do. Her daughter loved him dearly and if he agreed to marry her, she would leap for joy. Because the situation was pressing, her daughter was just hoping that she would save him first before doing anything else.

Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi and the others looked at each other in amusement as they watched this second show of a forced marriage. Fawang now knew that Yang Guo had been poisoned and he was feeling pleased. He hoped that Yang Guo would stick to his choice, by refusing to marry Lu’E to save his life; but he was worried about the craftiness of Yang Guo who might lie about the marriage to get the antidote and then refuse. Then he thought that even if Yang Guo tried something, he’s there to see through him and alert Qiu Qianchi to his tricks.

Qiu Qianchi’s eyes swept across all the guests slowly and then said, “Yang Guo, amongst the people here there are those who wish that you live and those who wish that you die. Think about whether you want to live or die.”

Yang Guo placed his arm around Xiao Longnu’s waist and said with a clear voice, “If either of us can’t marry the other, then we’d rather die together.”

Xiao Longnu smiled sweetly and said, “Yes!” The two of them were as one; their love for each other was so deep that life and death was no longer anything important.

Qiu Qianchi did not understand Xiao Longnu and said, “If I don’t save him then he will die, do you understand this? Do you know that he can only live for another thirty six days?”

Xiao Longnu said, “If you do agree to save him and let us be together for a few more years then of course we’ll be extremely touched. If you refuse, we’ve still got thirty six days together, that’s fine as well! In any case, if he dies, I won’t carry on living.” Her beautiful face showed no signs of concern as she said this.

Qiu Qianchi looked at her and then looked at Yang Guo; she saw the two staring at each other, their love for each other so passionate, their devotion to each other so intense. This was something that she had never experienced nor even thought about before. So such devoted lovers actually existed in this world. When she saw how dedicated they were, she couldn't help but muse over her and Gongsun Zhi and the way they ended up. She gave a long sigh and tears rolled down her cheeks.

Lu'E went to her and threw herself into her arms; she cried, "Mother, just cure him please; then we'll go and find uncle; he misses you, doesn't he?"

Qiu Qianchi's tears stirred her compassion, but then she immediately thought about the words in the letter from her brother Qiu Qianren; "Ever since first brother died at the hands of Guo Jing and Huang Rong on Iron Palm Peak..."

She herself was crippled and her brother had become a monk, saying something like 'I dropped my knife of slaughter and followed the ways of Buddha'; does this mean that her brother's death can never be avenged? Yang Guo's martial arts weren't weak; though he refuses to marry her daughter she could order him to help her avenge her brother.

She then said, "There were actually quite a lot of Passionless Pills; but apart from three pills, the rest were ruined by me when I soaked them in frosty arsenic water. Out of the three pills, that bastard Gongsun Zhi took one, another he took from me when I was drunk and that was the pill that you gave to that girl. There is only one pill remaining in this world. This pill has been with me for over twenty years. If one doesn't prepare a Passionless Pill for themselves while living in the Passionless Valley, then they are not in complete control of the fate of their lives. Right now, I haven't got long to live and my daughter might not stay here for much longer..." She then took out the last remaining Passionless Pill on this earth slowly and broke it in two with her nail. She took half a pill and placed it in her palm before saying, "I can give you the pill. You don't want to marry my daughter, fine but you have to promise to do one thing for me."

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu looked at each other, both surprised with her sudden kindness. The two weren't worried about life and death; but since there's a way for them to live, of course they'd be happy to take this chance. Both said at the same time, "We'll do our best to fulfill Senior's request."

Qiu Qianchi said slowly, "I want you to get me the heads of two people."

When Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu heard this, they both thought that she wanted them to kill Gongsun Zhi. Yang Guo had no good feelings towards Gongsun Zhi and now that he's lost an eye and his "Closure of the Pressure Point" has been destroyed, it won't be hard to kill him even though he still has his other martial arts remaining. But he was Gongsun Lu'E's father; the girl loves Yang Guo deeply, but killing her father might cause great distress for her and he couldn't help but hesitate.

Xiao Longnu thought that although Gongsun Zhi was evil, he was still the one who saved her life. From Qiu Qianchi's expression, if she didn't kill him Qiu Qianchi would never agree to give the pill to Yang Guo.

Qiu Qianchi saw that they had troubled expressions on their faces and said coldly, "I don't know what ties these two people have with you but I must kill them." She then flung half of the pill lightly upwards in her hand.

From her tone, it didn't appear that she was talking about Gongsun Zhi so Yang Guo asked, "With whom does Senior Qiu Lao have a feud? Whose head do you want me to take?"

Qiu Qianchi said, "Didn't you hear that scoundrel when he was reading out that letter? The names of the people who killed my brother are Guo Jing and Huang Rong."

Yang Guo was delighted and called out, "That's great. Those two people killed my father; even if Senior Qiu Lao didn't ask I'd still kill them."

Qiu Qianchi's heart trembled and said, "Is this true?"

Yang Guo pointed to Jinlun Fawang and said, "This Reverend has crossed paths with those two people. I told him about this matter before."

Qiu Qianchi looked at Fawang and he nodded his head and said, "But at that time, brother Yang helped Guo Jing and Huang Rong to oppose me."

Xiao Longnu and Lu'E were both furious with Fawang for trying to stir up trouble time after time; they both stared at him with anger.

Jinlun Fawang ignored them and smiled, "Brother Yang, did such a thing happen?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes. Once I've avenged my father I'll need to exchange a few stances with Reverend Jin."

Jinlun Fawang folded his arms and said, “Good, good!”

Qiu Qianchi held up her left hand and said to Yang Guo, “I don’t care if this is true or false, just take this pill.”

Yang Guo went forwards to accept it when he saw that it was just half a pill and immediately understood, he laughed, “I need to get their heads in exchange for the other half?”

Qiu Qianchi nodded and said, “You really are clever; you didn’t need anyone to tell you.”

Yang Guo thought, “It’s better to take half a pill than take nothing.” He took the half pill and swallowed it.

Qiu Qianchi said, “There was only one Passionless Pill left in the whole wide world. You’ve just taken half of it. The other half will be kept in an extremely secretive place. If you bring the heads of Guo Jing and Huang Rong in eighteen days time then I’ll give you the other half. Even if you hold me at knifepoint and threaten me or throw me down that cave again I will never give it to you. The word of Qiu Qianchi’s is as solid as rock, I’ve never taken back what I’ve said. To all the guests, please leave on your own accord. Master Yang, Miss Long, we’ll meet again in eighteen days time.” She then closed her eyes and ignored everyone.

Xiao Longnu asked, “Why have you set a deadline of eighteen days?”

Qiu Qianchi said with her eyes closed, “The Passion Flower poison in his body originally would have reacted in thirty six days time. Now that he’s taken half a passionless pill, the poison has all come together and is now concentrated in one place; the poison will now react twice as quickly. The poison will be cleared if he takes the other half of the antidote eighteen days from now, otherwise... otherwise... ha-ha!” After she said this, she waved out her hand, ordering everyone to go quickly.

Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu both knew that this person does not listen to reason and so the two bid farewell to Lu’E and quickly left the Narcissus Manor. Yang Guo couldn’t be bothered to find a boat to get out of the valley and instead, he and Xiao Longnu utilized their lightness kung fu and left the valley by going over the mountains.

Yang Guo had stayed in this valley for only three days; but within these three days, he had experienced many near deaths. Now that he’s left this place of danger with his

lover, it was like he was in a different world.

It was now dawn. The two of them stood on top of a mountain ridge shoulder to shoulder and looked down at the valley. As the morning light sparkled on the luxuriant emerald forest, their eyes were filled with the green color. They felt filled with boundless joy; their hearts floating and swaying around as if they were at one with the clouds.

Yang Guo held Xiao Longnu's hand and the two walked up to a locust tree. He said, "Gu Gu..."

Xiao Longnu leaned on him and smiled, "I don't think you need to call me Gu Gu again."

Yang Guo had stopped viewing her as his Master long ago; the reason he called her 'Gu Gu' was because he was used to it. When he heard this, his heart was filled with a sweet feeling and he stared into her black eyes. He said, "What should I call you?"

Xiao Longnu said, "Call me whatever you want; it's up to you."

Yang Guo thought for a little while and said, "The happiest time of my life was when we were in the tomb together. At that time, I called you Gu Gu. Just let me call you Gu Gu until I die."

Xiao Longnu laughed, "I used to spank you in those days; were they happy days?"

Yang Guo stretched out his arms and embraced her. Yang Guo's soul was completely enchanted as he smelled the fragrance of Xiao Longnu's scent mixed up with the scents of the surrounding flowers and trees. He seemingly lost himself and said softly, "Let's just live like this happily for the next eighteen days; we don't need to go and kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong. Living happily and peacefully for eighteen days is better than rushing about and fighting for our lives."

Xiao Longnu smiled and said, "We'll do whatever you say. Before, I wanted you to listen to me; but from now on, I'll listen to you." She has always had an icy cold disposition; but now she was filled with love. She felt warm all over and felt that the greatest thing in life was to listen to Yang Guo with all her heart and soul.

Yang Guo looked at her startled; and said slowly, "Why are there tears in your eyes?"

Xiao Longnu took his hand and stroked her cheek gently with the back of his hand. She said tenderly, “I... I don’t know.” After a while, she said, “It must be because I love you too much.”

Yang Guo said, “I know what you are sad about.”

Xiao Longnu lifted her head and suddenly tears burst from her eyes as she threw herself into his arms. She cried, “Guo’er, you... you... we’ve only got eighteen days; how is that enough?”

Yang Guo patted her shoulder lightly and said softly, “No, it’s not enough.”

Xiao Longnu said, “I want you to treat me like this forever; I want a hundred years, a thousand years, ten thousand years.”

Yang Guo lifted her head and kissed her on her pale red lips. He said resolutely, “Fine, we’ll go kill Guo Jing and Huang Rong.” When he tasted her tears on his tongue, the love in his heart was stirred and his whole body felt like as if it wanted to explode.

Suddenly, a voice laughed out loudly from some high place to the left of them and said, “You don’t have to be that intimate.”

Yang Guo turned his head around and saw Jinlun Fawang, Yin Kexi, Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and Ma Guangzuo standing shoulder to shoulder about a hundred feet away. The person who said this was Jinlun Fawang. When the two left the valley hurriedly together, Fawang and the others followed. The two of them were oblivious to everything around them; they didn’t see or hear anything but each other. When the two stood below the locust tree acting lovingly towards each other, they did not notice that Fawang and the others were watching them from faraway.

Yang Guo recalled the many times that Fawang tried to stir trouble for him in the valley which almost cost him his life on many occasions. If he could turn back time he would chose to kill Fawang. He had the chance when Fawang was recuperating on the mountain top instead of helping him. He’s meant to be a great Master of this generation; yet he repays kindness with ingratitude.

Xiao Longnu saw the fiery anger in Yang Guo’s eyes and said, “Ignore them, those people will never experience a second of the happiness that we have.”

Ma Guangzuo called out, “Brother Yang, Miss Long, let’s leave. There’s nothing around here in these wild mountains; no wine, no meat, it’s boring around here.”

Yang Guo just wanted to spend some quiet time with Xiao Longnu but these people had to come and disturbed them. However, he knew that Ma Guangzuo meant well and so he said clearly, “Brother Ma, you go first, I’ll be there in a second.”

Ma Guangzuo said, “Fine, just hurry up when you’ve finished.”

Jinlun Fawang laughed, “Who needs you to worry about them? They just want to spend eighteen days here on this wild mountainside.”

Everyone had heard Qiu Qianchi talk about how Yang Guo’s poison would react in eighteen days. When Ma Guangzuo heard this he couldn’t stop himself from getting angry and grabbed hold of Fawang’s sleeve, cursing him, “Bald scoundrel, you really are evil! We came here together with brother Yang; you should have helped him but you didn’t. Instead you tried to stir things up; what are you trying to do?”

Fawang gave a wry smile and chuckled, “Are you going to let go?”

Ma Guangzuo said angrily, “I’m not letting go; what are you going to do about it?”

Fawang threw his right fist towards his face.

Ma Guangzuo said, “Fine, you want to fight?” He raised his massive hand to grab Fawang’s fist but this fist of Fawang’s was a decoy; his left hand suddenly came out and pushed him on the back. He used soft and hard force at the same time, causing the great body of Ma Guangzuo to fly away and down the mountainside. Luckily for Ma Guangzuo, the mountainside was covered in long green grass and he was thick skinned so he wasn’t seriously injured. However, his forehead was covered in green bruises. He roared and climbed back up.

When Yang Guo saw the two starting to fight, he knew that Ma Guangzuo would suffer at Fawang’s hands so he went forward to help him. But it was too late; he had moved just three steps and Ma Guangzuo had already been sent tumbling downwards.

Though Ma Guangzuo wasn’t the sharpest tool in the box; but he knew how to protect his life. He saw that he would not be able to beat that monk face to face and he cried and hollered, “Oh no, oh no, that bald bastard’s broken my arm.”

Xiaoxiang Zi and Nimoxing did not like the fact that Jinlun Fawang had been proclaimed the First Protector of Mongolia by Khubilai; they were now even angrier with him when they saw how brutish he was; the two glanced at each other.

Xiaoxiang Zi said, “Reverend’s martial arts are indeed excellent, you are worthy of the title of the First Protector of Mongolia.”

Fawang said, “You’re too kind.” Fawang knew that the two wanted to make their move on him right now while Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu were also edging forward to make their move. As to what Yin Kexi was thinking, Fawang wasn’t too sure. He knew his martial arts were strong; but if the five great fighters join together and attack him all at once, not only will he not be able to fight them off; but his life will also be threatened. While his mouth replied dutifully, in his mind he was thinking of a way to escape.

While Ma Guangzuo was calling and hollering, he was making his way slowly towards Fawang. Suddenly, he threw out a fist and struck the back of Fawang’s head. With Fawang’s abilities, this sneaky attack of Ma Guangzuo’s would never have succeeded; but at this moment in time, he was just concentrating on Yang Guo, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others. The idiot he had ignored actually managed to strike him on the back of his head. This attack was hammer like; hammering him into a starry daze. In his anger, Fawang sent his elbow backwards striking Ma Guangzuo squarely in the chest. Ma Guangzuo called out and his body fell forward right onto the shoulders of Fawang. Fawang’s legs bent a little and he dashed straight down the mountainside.

Yang Guo was the first one to chase after Fawang as everyone shouted. Though Fawang had a great three hundred ‘jin’ (150kg/330lbs) body on his shoulders, he still moved like the wind. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Nimoxing and the others all had first-rate lightness kung fu; but since Fawang made the first move, they were not able to catch up with him for the first hundred feet. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu increased their speed and gradually got closer to him.

Fawang suddenly stopped and he turned his head around. He laughed, “Fine, are you all going to come up on me at once or will it be one on one?” He held Ma Guangzuo and placed his head next to a large rock on the mountainside. He was about to smash Ma Guangzuo into the rock.

Yang Guo went around him to first block his way before saying, “If you kill him, then of course we’ll all attack you at once.”

Fawang laughed and threw Ma Guangzuo to the ground before saying, “Do you think I’d trouble myself with this kind of idiot?” He then sent his arms into his gown and out came a white light in his left hand and a yellow light in his left; he had taken out his silver and bronze wheels. He clashed the wheels together and the sounds resonated throughout the valley. He said arrogantly, “Who’s first?”

Yin Kexi laughed, “I’m just a merchant, so I’ll just watch from the side and see everyone test each other’s skills.”

Fawang thought, “That’s one less strong foe for me to face.”

Xiaoxiang Zi thought that he should let someone else go first and allow them to wear Fawang down a bit before he stepped in and finished him off. So he said, “Brother Ni, your martial arts are better than mine, please go ahead!”

When Nimoxing heard his words, he knew what Xiaoxiang Zi was planning; but then he thought about how good his martial arts were. He was matchless in India and had never met a match in his life; even if he can’t beat Fawang he wouldn’t lose to him. He went over to one side and casually grabbed hold of a large rock. He shouted, “Fine, I’ll test out your two circular things.” He picked up the large rock and smashed it towards Fawang’s chest. This rock was at least three hundred ‘jin’ and everyone was startled when they saw him using this to fight.

Jinlun Fawang did not know that this dwarf would possess such strength and actually use a large rock to attack him. He didn’t dare to meet it head on and dodged to the side and swept his bronze wheel across the back of Nimoxing. Nimoxing used the large rock to block the attack. The wheel and rock collided with each other and sparks flew everywhere with the sound of the collision echoing throughout the valley.

Fawang’s left arm felt slightly numb and he thought, “This dark dwarf’s martial arts are extremely strange, I cannot be careless. But even if he was stronger, how long can he last holding up such a large stone?” So he moved his wheels, circling it around Nimoxing’s body.

Yang Guo helped Ma Guangzuo up and then stood next to Xiao Longnu. Both were surprised with Nimoxing’s great strength and his strange martial arts.

The two of them battled for a while before suddenly Nimoxing shouted, “A Po Xing!” He lifted the large rock and shot it forward towards Fawang.

This throw was one of the greatest skills of Indian monks; it was called “Elephant Shooting of Shijia”. In the scriptures it recorded; ‘When Shijiamouni (Buddha) was still a prince, he left the city one day and found an elephant blocking his path. He lifted the elephant by the legs and shot it up into the sky. The elephant came back down three days later and when it landed it made a deep ditch, now called the Shooting Elephant Ditch. This was of course just a story that describes the unimaginable wonders of Buddhism. The later Indian martial artists developed a powerful external martial art, that allowed the user to shoot large objects and was subsequently named after this story. Nimoxing called upon the divine strength of this technique and shot the boulder towards Fawang. The large rock traveled extremely fast towards Fawang, creating a ferocious wind as it went forward.

Though Fawang was greatly skilled, he still didn’t dare to receive such a large heavy object head on and moved out of the way. Nimoxing suddenly flew up and struck the large stone with his palms, sending the stone back towards Fawang once again. This second attack was much stronger than the first because it was the combined force of the second propulsion from his palms with the remaining force from the first attack.

Fawang was better at martial arts than Nimoxing; but because he had never seen this “Elephant Shooting of Shijia” he was actually forced on the back foot. When he saw the rock coming towards him again, he could only move out of the way once again. Nimoxing pressed his advantage and the force of the rock become more and more ferocious as he repeatedly increased the force behind it.

Fawang thought, “If this continues I’m going to lose to this dark dwarf; I need to think of something else. Luckily he’s up by himself; when I kill him that zombie face would not dare to come up against me. Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu have been poisoned and won’t be able to use their “Pure Heart of Jade Maiden Swordplay” smoothly.”

Suddenly, the thunderous sounds of horses were heard from nearby. Flags fluttered in the air as a group of men on horseback rushed towards them. Fawang and Nimoxing were in the middle of a heated battle and had no time to look. Yang Guo and the others saw it was a division of Mongolian soldiers on horseback armed with bows and sabers. About a hundred feet from Yang Guo and the others, the leader of the division held up his hand to order his men to stop. The soldiers all reigned in their horses.

Below the flag, a person watched the battle from his horse for a while before riding up towards them and called out, “Stop, stop!” This person wore a yellow gown and carried an iron bow; it was the Mongolian Prince Khubilai.

When Nimoxing heard his voice, he struck the rock with his palms and sent it rolling down the mountainside. Vast amounts of dust and dirt were thrown up as the boulder rolled down the slope.

Khubilai leapt off the horse and held Fawang with his left hand and Nimoxing with his right. He laughed, "So you two are exchanging a few stances here; it really was a great spectacle." He knew that the two were having a real battle but he said this to keep the face of both sides. Fawang gave a wry laugh and said, "Brother Ni's martial arts has its good points; a rare sight, a rare sight."

Nimoxing's eyes glared at him and said, "I thought the First Protector of Mongolia would be someone extraordinary, but you're just... bah!"

Fawang was furious and thought, "Do you really think I can't beat you?" He was just about to say something when Khubilai laughed, "This place has everything, but where's the wine? Men, bring wine! We'll drink three bowls here!"

Mongolians have always lived in the wild and made the world their home. Eating and drinking outside was no different than eating in a hall to them. One of the guards brought some wine and food to them and laid a rug on the ground.

Khubilai looked at Xiao Longnu and was shocked, "There's actually a girl with such beauty here on this earth." He saw Yang Guo and her holding hands, standing next to each other intimately; he asked Yang Guo, "Who's this girl?"

Yang Guo said, "This is Miss Long; she is my Master and she is also my wife."

After the life and death experiences in the Passionless Valley; the world's customs and traditions meant absolutely nothing to him. He deliberately wanted everyone in the world to know that 'I, Yang Guo, have married my Master'.

Mongolians weren't as strict as the Han when it came to adhering to custom and tradition. When Khubilai heard this he wasn't surprised, but instead, he had great respect for Xiao Longnu when he heard that she was the one who taught Yang Guo martial arts. He laughed, "You two are indeed a match made in heaven, excellent, excellent. Everyone, let's congratulate these two." He raised his bowl of wine and drank it all in one go.

Fawang gave a wry laugh before he too raised his bowl and drank it all in one go. The others followed and Ma Guangzuo drank three bowls in one go.

Xiao Longnu did not hate or like Mongolians; but when she heard Khubilai praising her and Yang Guo as a great match, she was wild with joy. She drank half a bowl of wine and her face became even more beautiful. She thought, “All the Han say that I and Guo’er can’t marry each other; while this Mongolian Prince kept on saying excellent, excellent. It looks like Mongolians are more knowledgeable than the Han.”

Khubilai laughed, “I missed everyone here while you were gone for these past three days. However, matters at Xiangyang were getting urgent and so I was unable to continue hosting our esteemed guests. I’d left requests for you at the camp to meet up with the army at Xiangyang to aid us. Things will go a lot smoother now that we’ve met here.”

Fawang asked, “Your Highness, how has our army been doing in our attacks on Xiangyang?”

Khubilai frowned and said, “Lu Wenhuan, the General who’s guarding Xiangyang, is just a mediocre General; the person I’m worried about is Guo Jing.”

Yang Guo’s heart trembled and asked, “Is Guo Jing really at Xiangyang?”

Khubilai said, “This Guo Jing is my Senior. He was my father’s sworn brother and was my grandfather Genghis Khan’s most beloved General. This person was both brave and wise; he commanded an army at Xiyu and used an extraordinary plan to succeed in his task. My father once said to me, ‘The Song courts are led by an incompetent Emperor and scheming ministers; they have timid Generals and a weak army. Although they have great numbers they will not be able to defend against our skilled army. But if you come across Guo Jing, you must be careful. Father’s foresight was indeed right; our army has attacked Xiangyang many times but all attempts have been unsuccessful. The reason behind all this is Guo Jing.’”

Yang Guo stood up and said, “That Guo Jing is the person who killed my father; I would like to request the order to assassinate him.”

Khubilai said with pleasure, “I have gathered all you heroes together for this exact task. But from what I hear, Guo Jing is the best martial artist of all the Han and he’s got many able people under his command. I have ordered many warriors to go and assassinate him but all have failed. They were either captured or killed; none of them returned. Brother Yang might be brave but it would be difficult for you to achieve this on your own. I want to send everyone here to go into Xiangyang and to work together to kill him. Once this person is killed, Xiangyang will fall.”

Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi and the others all stood up; they crossed their arms and said, “We will use every ounce of our strength to follow your Highness’ order.”

Khubilai was delighted and said, “It doesn’t matter who kills Guo Jing, and those who go along to help will also be greatly rewarded. However, the Khan will be informed of the name of the person who killed Guo Jing, be given the title of Viscount and be called The Greatest Warrior of Mongolia.”

Xiaoxiang Zi, Nimoxing and the others did not care about the Viscount position; but if they got the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia, they’ll be famous throughout the world, and achieve their life’s dream. The influence of the Mongolian army has spread far and wide; they have countless li of territories in the western regions and have taken two thirds of the land of China. It would take a fast horse a year to travel from the centre of their empire to its boundaries. If they had the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia, all of the world’s heroes, bar none, will be in awe of them. Everyone’s spirits were motivated and even Fawang reacted to this news; there was a glint in his eyes when he heard it.

Yang Guo gave a bitter laugh and shook his head. Xiao Longnu looked at him lovingly but she was thinking, “Who cares about the title of Viscount, or the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia? I just hope that you can stay alive and well.”

Everyone drank a few more bowls of wine and then stood up. A Mongolian soldier led some horses to them. Yang Guo, Xiao Longnu, Fawang and the others leapt onto the horses and followed Khubilai, riding southwards towards Xiangyang.

It was a scene of destruction along the way; nine out of ten buildings were empty and the ground was covered with corpses. Whenever the Mongolian soldiers see Han, they would kill them with unrestrained violence. Yang Guo was furious when he saw this and wanted to stop them. But he hesitated because of Khubilai, and thought, “The Mongolians are so violent and cruel and treat my Han people worse than animals; after I’ve killed Guo Jing and Huang Rong, I’m going to kill a few of the vilest Mongolian soldiers to vent my anger.”

A few days later, they arrived outside of Xiangyang. The two sides had now been fighting for around a month and the ground was covered with the remnants of battle; broken spears lay strewn everywhere; blood and bodies covered the ground.

When the Generals and commanders of the army outside Xiangyang learned of the Fourth Prince Khubilai’s arrival, they went to greet him thirty li outside of Xiangyang.

The sounds of the horses' hoofs and the clanging of the soldiers' armour reflected the grandeur of the army. When the Generals and commanders saw Khubilai's banner, they all leapt off their horses and knelt down by the roadside.

Khubilai rode up near them and reigned in his horse. He took a look around and didn't say anything for a long while. He then gave a 'humph' grunt and said, "Xiangyang city has been under attack for so long yet you still have not captured it; isn't that a disgrace to the mighty Mongolian army?"

All the Generals and commanders replied at the same time, "We deserve to die; please punish us your Highness."

Khubilai whipped his horse and galloped forward. All the Generals and commanders kept themselves down on the ground for a long time, not daring to get up.

Yang Guo saw that Khubilai was very peaceful and easy going towards him, Fawang and the others; but when he was disciplining his army he was very strict. He thought, "The Mongolian army is so strong and so disciplined; how can the Song defend against them?" He frowned as he thought about this.

Early next morning, the Mongolians attacked Xiangyang once again. Arrows and stones were sent towards the city like rain and hail. The soldiers at the front of the attack placed ladders around the city of Xiangyang and climbed up. The city was guarded tightly; groups of eight soldiers held a wooden ram in their arms and were knocking the ladders off the city walls. After a prolonged attack, a hundred or so Mongolian soldiers eventually managed to get themselves on top of the city walls. The Mongolian army hollered and another hundred or so soldiers climbed up towards the walls for support. The watchman's rattle rang urgently and a group of archers appeared, shooting arrows down on the advance, forcing them back. Another group of Song soldiers appeared with torches in their hands and they burned the ladders, sending the Mongolians on the ladders plummeting down to the ground.

Shouts and calls could be heard from the city as a group of men appeared on the walls with long spears and sharp sabers, attacking the Mongolians who had climbed up onto the city walls. This group of men did not wear the uniform of the Song army; some wore short black garments, while some wore long green gowns. When they attacked, they didn't attack in a group; their movements were swift and showed that they possessed martial arts. The Mongolians who had managed to get themselves on top of the city walls were all great warriors of the Mongolian army and had never met their match before. But when they came across this group of Han, they were all killed. Some

died on the city walls while others fell to their deaths. There was an especially commanding Han in the Song army. This person wore a grey gown and was fighting empty handed; he scanned the walls and when he saw Han soldiers in distress, he would immediately dash over and help them. Wherever his palms went, Mongolian soldiers fell; it was like a tiger in amongst a herd of sheep.

Khubilai was commanding this battle himself and when he saw how brave and heroic this Han was, he was stunned and didn't say anything. After a while he sighed and said, "Out of all the warriors in the world, who can compare with this man?"

Yang Guo was standing beside Khubilai and asked, "Highness, do you know who that is?"

Khubilai was startled and said, "Could it be that he's Guo Jing?"

Yang Guo said, "Yes!"

By this time, most of the hundreds of Mongolians soldiers who had climbed up the city walls had been killed. Only three brave Sergeants of the Jagen (100 man squad) still survived and they were fighting on in a corner with their spears and shields. A Noyan (rank in Mongolian army, leader of a division of 10,000) below blew their horn and another group of soldiers attacked the city walls, intending to bring the three remaining Jagen Sergeants back to safety.

Guo Jing roared and stepped forward. One of the Jagen Sergeants thrust his spear forward towards him. Guo Jing grabbed the spear and pushed forward. He then kicked out at the shield of another Jagen Sergeant with his left leg. Though these two Jagen Sergeants had great valor, how could they resist the divine strength from such a push and kick? They somersaulted down from the wall and fell to their deaths.

The third Jagen Sergeant was fairly old and had grey hair. He knew that today was the day when he would meet his maker. He swung his long saber wildly like a mad tiger. Guo Jing stretched out his left hand and grabbed the wrist of the hand that was holding the saber. He was about to chop down with his right hand when he suddenly stopped in alarm. The Jagen Sergeant recognized Guo Jing and called out, "Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort), it's you!" Note: He was betrothed to Genghis Khan's daughter Hua Zhen during his time in Mongolia.

He was actually one of the soldiers that accompanied Guo Jing when he was sent to conquer the western regions. When Huang Rong made the plan to take Samarkand, he

was amongst the first warriors who made the attack on the city.

Guo Jing recalled past memories and said, “You are E’er Dou?”

The Jagen Sergeant cried when he saw that Guo Jing remembered his name and he called out, “Yes, yes it’s me.”

Guo Jing said, “Fine, I’m going to spare your life today because of what happened in the past. If I capture you again, there will be no mercy.” He turned to one of his aides and said, “Get a rope and send him back down!” Two soldiers tied a rope around E’er Dou’s waist and lowered him.

E’er Dou was a famous warrior in the Mongolian army; when the Mongolian soldiers saw him being lowered down on a rope by the Song army, they were surprised. They didn’t know what had happened and retreated a few hundred feet. The Song soldiers at the top of the city stopped firing their arrows and the two sides ceased the battle for the time being.

When E’er Dou got down, he turned to Guo Jing and bowed to him on the ground. He said clearly, “Since Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort) is here, this servant will not dare fight again.”

Guo Jing stood at the top of the wall with a commanding aura around him and shouted out, “The commander of the Mongols, listen: Years ago the Mongols and Han worked together to get rid of the Jin; why are you Mongols now invading our land and killing our citizens? We have ten times more people than you Mongols have. If you don’t quickly retreat then we’ll gather our armies and kill the hundreds of thousands of soldiers that you have. We’ll not even leave them with a body that can be buried.” He spoke in Mongolian with great vigor. Though the wall was high and there was a large distance between the two armies, the Mongolian soldiers could hear every single word clearly and they couldn’t stop themselves from looking at each other pale faced.

A Noyan led E’er Dou to Khubilai and told him what had happened. E’er Dou then told Khubilai about how he followed Guo Jing on the expedition to the west and described how the Jin Dao Fu Ma (Golden Blade Consort) used his troops like a god. How he subdued and defeated the enemy, explaining all this with great enthusiasm.

Khubilai’s face turned heavy and shouted, “Execute him!”

E’er Dou called out, “Please, I’ve done nothing!”

The Noyan said, “Please your Highness, this E’er Dou has achieved many great deeds for our army...”

Khubilai waved his hand and four guards came. They took E’er Dou away and executed him, bringing his head back to Khubilai. All the Generals trembled with fear.

Khubilai said to the Noyan, “Apart from the money owed to E’er Dou’s family for his services to the army, give his wife ten ‘jin’ (5kg/11lbs) of gold, thirty slaves and three hundred livestock.”

The Noyan was puzzled but replied, “Yes, yes.”

Khubilai said, “I’ve killed him yet I’m also rewarding his family; you do not understand this, do you?”

All the Generals bowed to him and said, “Please enlighten us your Highness.”

Khubilai said clearly, “That Jagen Sergeant bowed down to Guo Jing and talked about how powerful Guo Jing is; shouldn’t he die for disturbing the morale of the soldiers? But he was brave and led the attacks; he fought with his life up until he reached the final man, shouldn’t he be rewarded?” All of the Generals bowed to him.

But after this event, the Mongolian army’s morale was low. Khubilai knew that if he continued to battle on today, he would just suffer more losses. He was exasperated when he saw the hundreds of corpses of his experienced spirited soldiers lying across the battlefield. He then looked at the fortified wall of Xiangyang; it was guarded tightly and there was no way to break through. He couldn’t stop himself from releasing a sigh. He immediately gave the order to retreat back forty li.

Two of his guards looked at each other and both said, “This servant would like to share the burdens of your Highness and will go to dampen the morale of the Song.” They leapt onto a horse and galloped towards the city. The two mounted their bows and shot the arrows towards Guo Jing.

The two were skilled riders and their archery skills were accurate; their horse galloped like the wind and the arrows were shot out like lightning. By the time warning cries were heard from both the top and bottom of the city walls, the arrows had reached Guo Jing’s chest and stomach. It appeared that Guo Jing had no way to avoid the arrows; but he gathered his hands towards himself and grabbed the arrows. He then raised his hands and shot the arrows back. Before the two guards had turned their horses

around, the arrows had arrived and shot through their chests. The two fell onto the ground. The Song army at the top of the city wall cheered thunderously.

Khubilai was not pleased and ordered his men north. The army had traveled for a few li when Yang Guo said, “There is no need to be troubled your Highness; I will now go to the city to take Guo Jing’s life.”

Khubilai shook his head and said, “That Guo Jing is both valiant and wise; he indeed does live up to his reputation. This matter is more troublesome than I thought it would be now that I’ve seen him with my own eyes.”

Yang Guo said, “I lived with Guo Jing for many years and I have helped him before; he will have no suspicions about me. There’s a saying; a spear out in the open is easy to dodge, but an arrow in the dark is hard to avoid.”

Khubilai said, “When you were standing next to me watching the battle, you were afraid that he would recognize you from the top of the city’s walls?”

Yang Guo said, “I was wary of this so when you were attacking the city, Miss Long and I wore hats to cover our faces and fur garments to hide our bodies; he would not be able to recognize us.”

Khubilai said, “Well then, I hope you succeed. I will keep my word about the rewards.”

Yang Guo casually thanked him and he was about to turn around to Xiao Longnu to leave with her when he saw Jinlun Fawang, Xiaoxiang Zi, Yin Kexi and the others with strange expressions. His mind lit up, “These people are afraid that I’ll get the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia if I succeed in killing Guo Jing; they’ll definitely try to stop me.” He turned to Khubilai and said, “Your Highness, I have something to tell you. The reason I am going to assassinate Guo Jing is because I want to avenge my father’s death and because I need his head in exchange for an antidote to save my life. If I succeed in helping your Highness, I cannot accept the title of the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia.”

Khubilai asked, “Why?”

Yang Guo said, “My martial arts can’t compare with these people; how can I be the Greatest Warrior of Mongolia? I can only make my move if your Highness promises me this.”

Khubilai heard him say this with great sincerity and thought that this really was what he wanted. He then looked at the expressions of the others and then knew what he meant by this. He said, “Since you’ve decided this, I can’t change your mind. I will not force you.”

When Fawang and the others heard this, they indeed did show signs of relief.

Yang Guo turned his horse around and headed for Xiangyang with Xiao Longnu. They took off the disguises along the way and dressed themselves back into Han clothing. It was beginning to get dark by the time they reached the walls of the city; when they got there, a closed gate greeted them. Soldiers with torches were patrolling the city walls.

Yang Guo called out, “My name is Yang Guo, and I’ve come to see Guo Jing, Master Guo.”

The General who was guarding the city walls heard his calls and saw that he was accompanied by a girl. He immediately went to tell Guo Jing the news.

After a while, two youngsters arrived at the top of the city wall and looked down at them. One of them called out, “So it’s brother Yang. There are only two of you?”

When Yang Guo saw the Wu brothers he thought, “When Guo Jing killed my father, I wonder whether or not the Wu brother’s father was there to help him?” He said, “Big brother Wu, second brother Wu, is Uncle Guo in the city?”

Wu Xiuwen said, “Come in.”

The soldiers opened the gate and lowered the drawbridge to allow Yang Guo and Xiao Longnu through.

The Wu brothers led the two to a large house. Guo Jing’s face was filled with joy and he dashed out of the house to meet Yang Guo. He greeted Xiao Longnu and then held Yang Guo’s hand and smiled, “Guo’er, you’ve come here just in time. The Mongols are attacking us intensely and you can help me now that you’re here; the citizens of the city are very fortunate.”

Xiao Longnu was Yang Guo’s Master and Guo Jing treated her as an equal, politely inviting her into the house while he treated Yang Guo with great care.

Guo Jing held Yang Guo’s left hand. When Yang Guo thought about the act that his father’s murderer was doing now, pretending to be caring and loving towards him, he

really wanted to draw out his sword and kill him right there and then. But he was worried about how good Guo Jing's martial arts were so he didn't dare to make a rash move. He forced himself to smile and said, "I wish Uncle Guo great health." He was filled with anger and did not kneel down to him. Guo Jing was a broad-minded person and did not take little details like this to heart.

When they arrived in the hall, Yang Guo wanted to go and see Huang Rong. Guo Jing laughed, "Your Auntie Guo is about to give birth and hasn't been feeling well in the last couple of days; you can see her in a few days time."

Yang Guo was delighted and thought, "Huang Rong is extremely wise and clever; I was afraid that she would be able to see through my plan. But she's ill at the moment; it looks like even heaven wants me to succeed."

As they were talking, a soldier came in and reported, "General Lu requests Master Guo's presence at a feast to celebrate our victory against the Mongols today."

Guo Jing said, "Go and tell the General, thank you for the invitation. However, I have a guest and cannot attend."

The soldier looked at Yang Guo and saw that he was just a young man with nothing special about him; he didn't know why Guo Jing would treat him with so much respect that he would actually reject the General's invitation to the celebratory feast because of him. His mind was full of questions as he went back to report this to Lu Wenhuan.

Guo Jing prepared a family meal in the inner hall in honour of Yang Guo's and Xiao Longnu's arrival. Zhu Ziliu, Liu Youjiao, the Wu brothers and Guo Fu were in attendance. Zhu Ziliu kept on thanking Yang Guo, saying that only he could have gotten the antidote from Huo Dou to cure his poison. Yang Guo just gave a lifeless smile and said a few modest words.

Guo Fu saw that Yang Guo had an aloof expression on his face. She called out, "Brother Yang."

Guo Jing scolded, "Fu'er, if it weren't for brother Yang risking his life to save you from the hands of Jinlun Fawang, not only would you have been in trouble but also your mother; why aren't you thanking him?"

Guo Fu stood up and said, "Thank you brother Yang for saving me."

Yang Guo said, “We’re not strangers, why is there a need to say thanks?”

Guo Fu didn’t say anything and sat down. During the meal, Guo Fu frowned and it seemed that there was something on her mind. The Wu brothers were seemingly avoiding her glances. But Liu Youjiao and Zhu Ziliu were extremely happy and were chatting about the victory against the Mongols.

By the time dinner finished, it was around eleven o’clock. Guo Jing told his daughter to take Xiao Longnu inside to rest and he himself took Yang Guo to his room to sleep in the same bed. When Xiao Longnu was about to go inside, she glanced at Yang Guo, telling him to be careful. Her face was filled with love and concern. Yang Guo was afraid that his intentions would be revealed and so turned his head away, not daring to look at her directly.

Guo Jing led Yang Guo to his room and praised Yang Guo for saving Huang Rong, Guo Fu and the Wu brothers from Jinlun Fawang at the restaurant and the stone formations. He then asked about what had happened to him afterwards.

Yang Guo was afraid that he might let something out if he talked too much; and so he kept the events of how he met Cheng Ying, Lu Wushuang, Sha Gu and Huang Yaoshi from him. He just said, “After I was injured, I recuperated in a wild valley. Afterwards, I met my Master again and we decided to come here to help Uncle Guo.”

Guo Jing got himself readied for bed and said, “Guo’er, there is a strong enemy pressing against the boundaries of our land; the Song Empire is in great danger. Xiangyang is a barrier for our Song land; if this city falls then the thousands and millions of citizens that we have will become the slaves of the Mongols. I have seen the brutality of the Mongols when they kill with my own eyes; it causes one’s blood to boil.”

When Yang Guo heard this, he remembered the tragic and terrifying scenes of the actions of the Mongols he encountered during his travels. He couldn’t stop his teeth from clenching in anger and his chest filled with fury.

Guo Jing continued, “Why do we learn martial arts? Lending a helping hand and getting people out of danger is of course something that we must do; but this is just one of the minor parts of being a hero. The people of Jianghu call me ‘Hero Guo’ because they respect me for serving my country and my people and guarding Xiangyang without care for my life. But my abilities are limited, I cannot get my people out of this trouble; I really am not worthy of the title ‘Hero’. You are ten times more intelligent than me; your future achievements will definitely exceed mine. I just hope that you remember

these words, 'a hero's imperative is to serve your country, to serve your people'. You will be a famous true hero of the people if you remember this."

These sincere words moved Yang Guo. He saw that Guo Jing had a stern face on him and although Guo Jing was his father's murderer, Yang Guo couldn't help but feel respect for him. He replied, "Uncle Guo, after you've gone, I will definitely remember the words that you have said tonight."

How would Guo Jing know that Yang Guo was planning to assassinate him tonight? He stretched out his hand and stroked his hair and said, "Yes, bend your body to the task until your dying day. If our country perishes then your Uncle Guo's life will go along with it. I have heard that Khubilai is skilled in warfare; he retreated today but he will come back to attack again soon. There's definitely going to be a great battle in the upcoming days. It's going to be a spectacular battle. It's getting late, let's go to sleep."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes." He undressed himself for bed and hid the dagger from the Passionless Valley on him. He thought, "I'll wait until you're deep in your sleep and then stab you; even if your martial arts were a hundred times better, how could you avoid this attack?"

Guo Jing had fought in a great battle today and he immediately fell asleep. How could Yang Guo sleep with the thoughts that he had? He lay on the bed and listened to the breathing of Guo Jing. Every inhalation and exhalation was spaced out with an extremely long gap; he admired how profound Guo Jing's internal energy was.

Some time passed. It was silent everywhere with the exception of the noises from the guards. He sat up quietly and felt out the dagger from underneath his clothes. He thought, "I'll kill him first and then go kill Huang Rong. She's a pregnant woman, what can she do? Once I've killed them, I'll immediately go back to the Passionless Valley with Gu Gu to get the other half of the antidote. Once I've got the antidote, I will go back to the tomb with Gu Gu and enjoy the pleasures of life; who cares about whether this empire is Song or Mongol?"

He felt extremely pleased with himself as he thought about this; but suddenly he heard the crying of a baby from one of the neighboring residences. He then heard the mother of the baby comforting it; the baby gradually stopped crying and fell asleep.

Yang Guo's heart trembled and remembered the time when he saw a Mongolian soldier holding up his spear in midair with a baby hanging off the end of it; the baby had not died and was crying miserably. He thought, "It would be easy for me to kill Guo Jing

now; but once he dies, it will be difficult to protect Xiangyang. This city has thousands and thousands of babies; won't they all be killed by the Mongolian soldiers for fun? My avenging of my father will lead to countless deaths, is this right?"

But then he thought, "If I don't kill him, how can I get the antidote from Qiu Qianchi? If I die, Gu Gu will not live on." Nothing in the world could compare to his love for Xiao Longnu and he made up his mind, "Fine, fine, who cares about the lives of Xiangyang; who cares about the Empire of the Song? When I was suffering, who cared about me apart from Gu Gu? The people of the world don't love me; why should I love the people of the world?" He raised the dagger and gathered all his strength into his right hand. He aimed for Guo Jing's chest.

The candlelight in the room had gone out long ago but Yang Guo had the ability to see things in the dark. When he was about to thrust the dagger, he glanced over at Guo Jing's face. There was a peaceful expression on his face and he was in a deep sleep; all the love that Guo Jing shown him when he was younger suddenly surfaced in his heart. How he treated him lovingly on the Peach Blossom Island; how he took him all the way to Mount Zhongnan to learn martial arts; how he betrothed his only daughter to him. He couldn't stop himself from thinking, "Uncle Guo is a straight and honest man; he is an extremely sincere and kind person; he cannot be the person who killed my father. Could it be that Sha Gu was confused and was talking rubbish? If this knife goes forward and kills an innocent man, I won't be able to redeem this with ten thousand deaths. I'll wait; I need to make sure."

He put away his dagger slowly and thought about all the things that had happened since he'd met the Guo couple; pondering over every single memory. He remembered how Huang Rong always felt uneasy with him around; there were many times when she and Guo Jing were talking about something but would immediately change the subject once she saw him. There was no question about it; the couple was keeping something from him. He continued thinking, "When Auntie Guo took me as a disciple, how come she only taught me to read and write and didn't teach me martial arts? Could it be that the reason why Uncle Guo treats me so well is because he's trying to make himself feel better about killing my father? But if he really did kill my father then how come he is not wary of me at all? He lets me sleep with him and gives me the chance to kill him with one stab of a knife. He was troubled as his thoughts went to and fro like the tides.

Though Guo Jing was sleeping, he noticed that Yang Guo's breathing was quickening and he opened his eyes. He asked, "Guo'er, what is it?"

Yang Guo trembled a little and said, "It's nothing."

Guo Jing laughed, "If you're not used to sleeping with someone, then I'll go and sleep on the table."

Yang Guo said quickly, "No, it's nothing important."

Guo Jing said, "Fine, just go to sleep. We martial artists need to make sure our states of mind are well rested."

Yang Guo replied, "Yes."

Another while passed. Yang Guo could not hold it in any longer and asked, "Uncle Guo, that year when you took me to Mount Zhongnan, I asked you a question at the Cow Head Monastery at the foot of Mount Zhongnan."

Guo Jing said, "What was it?"

Yang Guo said, "When I asked the question you became furious and smashed down on a stone obelisk; that was why you got all the trouble from the Quanzhen Taoists; do you remember what I asked?"

Guo Jing thought for a while and said, "Yes, I remember, that day you asked me how your father died."

Yang Guo stared at him and said, "No, I asked you who killed my father."

Guo Jing said, "How do you know that someone killed your father?"

Yang Guo choked, "Could it be that my father died just like that?"

Guo Jing stayed silent for a while before giving out a sigh and said, "It was no one's fault but his that he died like that."

Yang Guo sat up; he was extremely emotional and said, "You're lying! How can someone cause their own death? Even if my father killed himself, someone must have forced him to do it."

Guo Jing felt sad and tears rolled down from his eyes. He said slowly, "Guo'er, your grandfather and my father were very close; your father and I were sworn brothers. If

your father was killed by someone don't you think I would have avenged his death?"

Yang Guo shook all over and he wanted to say, "You're the one who killed him, how can you avenge him?" But he knew that if he said this, Guo Jing would be wary of him and if that happened, it would be difficult to assassinate him. He nodded his head and stayed silent.

Guo Jing said, "Your father's death is a long complicated story, it cannot be explained in one sentence. When you asked me all those years ago, you were still young; you wouldn't have understood all the causes behind it. That is why I didn't tell you then. You can distinguish between right and wrong now that you've grown up. Once we've made the Mongols retreat, I'll tell you all about it from the beginning." He then laid his head back on his pillow and went to sleep.

Yang Guo had always known him to be completely honest; if he said something it was truthful and he never lied. But when he heard his words he wasn't convinced and was semi suspicious of him. He cursed himself, "Yang Guo, Yang Guo, you have always done things with an indomitable will; whatever you dared to do you did, why are you acting so timid today? Could it be that you're afraid of how good his martial arts are? If I keep on changing my mind tonight and lose this opportunity, Huang Rong might find out about my motives in the near future. When that happens, I'm afraid that even Gu Gu will be killed without a corpse that can be buried as well."

When he thought about Xiao Longnu, his spirits stirred again and he stretched out his hand to check the dagger. The dagger tip was hot after being pressed against his body.

