

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

SDYXZ Chapter 40



Chapter 40 – Sword Meet of Mount Hua

Translated by Foxs



Genghis Khan fetched his iron bow and aimed the arrow toward the female eagle. The eagle was able to skew itself and sweep its wing to strike the arrow. The male eagle was angry; it let out a long cry and dived to strike Genghis Khan's head.

Ouyang Feng coldly said, "Arrive early compete early, arrive late compete late. Old Beggar, tell me, our contest today, is it just to decide victory or defeat, or is it for our lives?"

“To achieve victory sometimes means risking our lives,” Hong Qigong said, “When we start, you don’t need to be lenient.”

“Good!” Ouyang Feng said. His left hand was behind his back, but suddenly he moved it forward, showing a snake staff. Tapping the staff’s end to a rock he asked, “Here, or do you need a more open space?”

Hong Qigong has not opened his mouth when Huang Rong interrupted, “Mount Hua is not a good place to compete, we’d better go to find a boat.”

Hong Qigong was puzzled, “What?”

“To give Mr. Ouyang another good opportunity to reply kindness with evil, to make a sneak attack from behind again,” Huang Rong explained.

Hong Qigong burst out in laughter, “Fall into a trap once, learn to be smart once; don’t expect the Old Beggar to show mercy anymore.”

Listening to Huang Rong’s insult Ouyang Feng’s face did not show any emotion. He bent his knees a little bit, moved his staff to his right hand, and launched the Toad Stance with his left hand.

Huang Rong gave the dog-beating stick in her hand to Hong Qigong, “Shifu, use the Dog Beating Stick Technique and the Nine Yin Manual’s martial arts. We don’t talk about honor and honesty with an old traitor like him.”

Hong Qigong thought, “It really is not easy to win relying on my own martial arts alone; if I spend too much energy fighting the Old Poison, I won’t be able to fight the Old Heretic Huang later on.” So he nodded his head and took the dog-beating stick. Immediately his left hand launched ‘da cao jing she’ [beating the grass scaring the snake], while his right hand launched ‘bo cao xun she’ [brushing the grass aside looking for snakes]; attacking from both sides.

Ouyang Feng had fought him several times yet he had never seen Hong Qigong use the Dog Beating Stick Technique. Even in a critical situation when they were fighting on the burning boat Hong Qigong did not use this technique. Ouyang Feng had seen Huang Rong use this technique before and he did not dare to look down on the technique; now that the stick was in Hong Qigong’s hand it moved fast, carrying gusts of wind, truly not something to be trifled with. The snake staff in his hand shook; parried the left and evaded the right, he struck toward the middle.

He had lost his snake staff twice; the one currently in his hand was a new one. The staff had the same scary head carved on it, but the two venomous snakes wrapped around it were new; even though their poison was as lethal as the previous ones, but they haven't been used too long; thus their effectiveness was inferior to the previous ones.

In the past Hong Qigong had been bitten by this kind of venomous snake, he had also suffered under Ouyang Feng's vicious palms to the point of almost losing his life; which took him nearly two years to recover and get his martial art skill back. That was his greatest defeat and greatest danger he had to face his entire life; how could he not avenge this enmity? Thus he moved his stick with all his might, attacking furiously.

The first time those two fought was over the Nine Yin Manual during the Sword Meet of Mount Hua. The second time was on the Peach Blossom Island, fighting over Guo Jing and Ouyang Ke's marriage proposal; this fight was to decide victory and defeat only, not a life-and-death situation. The third time was on the small boat in the middle of the sea; where life and death were separated only by a thin line, but Hong Qigong still held his uprightness. This fight was the fourth time they battled each other fiercely; each one threw everything they had, no more mercy. They both knew that the opponent had trained hard and improved their martial art skill throughout all these years; their martial arts were very fierce, so if they were careless and yield even for half a stance, it would be difficult not to lose their own lives.

Two people turning around and hitting each other for about two hundred moves when suddenly the moon disappeared, the darkness came blanketing everything. It was the darkest hour of the night before dawn. Both were afraid the opponent would launch a sneak attack, so they were focusing their attention on defense and did not care much on offense. Guo Jing and Huang Rong were anxious about their master's safety; each moved forward several steps, ready to help if Hong Qigong's life were threatened.

While watching intently on the fierce battle in front of his eyes, Guo Jing had a disquieting thought, "These two people are the top skilled martial artists, but one is heroically upholding justice, while the other one is deceitfully wicked. Obviously martial art in itself does not differentiate good from evil; it all comes back to the person using it. If used to do good deeds, then the higher the skill the better, but if it used to do evil deeds, then the higher the skill the more wicked the martial art becomes."

The darkness made the battle difficult to watch, but the weapons made loud clashing sound and strong gusts of wind; Guo Jing's heart was beating faster. "Shifu has wasted two years worth of training because of his injury. Originally they were in par with each other; this time the outcome will be decided by a step forward or backward; I am afraid

Ouyang Feng will gain a half-step advantage because of that. If I knew this would happen I wouldn't have shown mercy to him three times," he silently mused.

Guo Jing remembered Qiu Chuji once explained the 'xin yi' [trust and honor], that big trust and big honor should be differentiated from small trust and small honor. If a person's entire being lacking trust and honor, it was the same as if that person did not have any trust and honor at all. Thinking about this, he felt his blood rushing through his system, he thought, "Although Shifu and Ouyang Feng clearly said that the battle will be a one-to-one combat, but what if Ouyang Feng harmed Shifu? What if from this time on, he would run amuck in the world? I don't know how many good people will be hurt in his hands. I wasn't clear about truth and righteousness before, hence I committed not a few foolishnesses." Because of this thought he lifted up his palms, ready to move forward to help his master.

But suddenly he heard Huang Rong called out, "Ouyang Feng, you and my Jing Gege had made an agreement which resulted in you being spared from death three times; who would have thought that you still relying on your strength bullying me? You proved yourself untrustworthy, much like a nameless pawn of the Wulin; yet you are still dreaming of becoming the number one martial artist of the world?"

Ouyang Feng had committed countless ruthless acts in his life, but he was a proud man, he would call 'one' as 'one', and 'two' as 'two'; never backed off on his own words. If it was not because of his desire to learn the Nine Yin Manual he wouldn't break his promise to Guo Jing. This time he was fighting a fierce battle with Hong Qigong and suddenly Huang Rong brought it up; his ears turned red and his mind was muddled; he lost his concentration and the dog beating stick almost hit him.

"You are known as the Western Poison," Huang Rong continued, "So all kinds of evil are not stranger to you; but to have a junior sparing your life three times? You have lost your face. Where is your honor? How could you swallow your own words toward a junior? You have become the laughingstock of all the valiant people of the Jianghu till their mouths crooked. Ouyang Feng! Oh, Ouyang Feng! There is one title you deserve to have: you are the number one shameless man of the world!"

Ouyang Feng was angry, but he realized it was Huang Rong's clever trick to break his concentration; to make him feel ashamed. And as long as his internal strength was affected he would fall under Hong Qigong's hands, hence he turned a deaf ear toward Huang Rong. Who would have thought that Huang Rong kept accusing him with more and more evil and wicked deeds; sounded like every crime ever committed in the martial art world was his doing. If it was just ruthless deeds, Ouyang Feng did not care, but

Huang Rong's tongue was getting more and more vicious. She mentioned all kinds of lowly and cowardice acts that even a bandit in the Jianghu would not do. Furthermore she said Ouyang Feng kissed Lingzhi Shangren's rear end; that he respectfully called Sha Tongtian his 'beloved uncle'; that he regarded Peng Lianhu as his 'honorable father' and begging for the secret ingredient of the poison Peng was using; that he repeatedly asked Wanyan Honglie for the captain of the guards position, so that he could live at the Zhao palace and be their night watch. She went as far as how Guo Jing in the west had spared his life three times, how Guo Jing rescued him from the sand, but Huang Rong add some spices to her story, made Ouyang Feng appear completely helpless and the rescue ten times more dramatic.

At first Ouyang Feng was still able to control his emotion, but as the story progressed to extreme nonsense he could not restrain from refuting Huang Rong several times. It was exactly what Huang Rong wanted: to engage him in useless debate and deliberately losing his fighting concentration. Thus Ouyang Feng had to fight in two fronts: with his hands and feet he fiercely battled Hong Qigong, with his mouth he argued with Huang Rong. Unfortunately for him, Huang Rong's mouth was a lot sharper than Hong Qigong's hands and feet.

After fighting for half a day Ouyang Feng began to feel the pressure, he thought, "It would be difficult to win if I don't use the martial art from the Nine Yin Manual." Although he had not mastered Huang Rong's explanation on reversing the blood flow through vital energy passages, he had been able to train for half a year; due to his own intelligent and profound martial art, he managed to somewhat improve his internal strength. Therefore, his snake staff suddenly made strange movements.

Hong Qigong was startled; he had to increase his attention. Huang Rong called out, "Yuan si ying er, ba ba xi luo zhao, xue liu wen bing." Ouyang Feng was startled, "What is the meaning of that?" he asked himself. How would he know that Huang Rong was letting her tongue loose and talk whatever came into her mind? That it did not carry any meaning at all? Huang Rong repeatedly talked gibberish, changing the tone of her voice; sometimes sounded like she was scolding him, other time encouraging, but suddenly turned to a sigh; then the sigh turned into cheers. Some sentences sounded like they were questions; or urgently asking for advice. Ouyang Feng had determined to ignore her, but in the end his curiosity won, "What are you talking about?"

Huang Rong answered him using Sanskrit sentences she learned. Ouyang Feng was confused; he tried hard to remember the altered manual Guo Jing wrote for him. Suddenly a flood of chaotic sounds, images, strategic moves and martial arts theories came streaming into his mind. He felt dizzy and suffer a momentary memory loss.

Hong Qigong saw an opening in Ouyang Feng's staff movement, "Got you!" he cried, and swung his stick toward the top of Ouyang Feng's head.

This hit did not carry tremendous strength; Ouyang Feng was already confused, but after his head was hit he became more confused. He was in a daze; screamed and dragging along his snake staff he ran away.

"Where are you running to?" Guo Jing called out. He jumped to catch up. Ouyang Feng leaped high, made three somersaults in the air; then rolling and crawling, climbing a hill nearby, he disappeared without a trace.

Hong Qigong, Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other, perplexed; then they smiled out of surprise. Hong Qigong sighed, "Rong'er, your part in my victory over the Old Poison today is actually big. But with us, master and disciple, against one opponent, it was a rather shallow victory."

Huang Rong smiled, "Shifu, it was you who taught me this skill."

Hong Qigong laughed, "It was your natural ability," he said, "Only a crafty old fellow as your father can have a crafty daughter like you."

Suddenly someone called out from behind the mountain, "Good! You talk about other people behind their backs. Old Beggar, aren't you ashamed?"

"Father!" Huang Rong called and leaped to him.

It was dawn, the morning light shone on a man wearing a green robe, walking leisurely. It was none other than the Master of the Peach Blossom Island, Huang Yaoshi.

Huang Rong threw herself into her father's bosom; father and daughter hugged each other. Huang Yaoshi could see the childish expression had gone from his daughter's face; she had grown into a beautiful young woman. She looked much like his late wife, that his heart was both happy and sad at the same time.

"Old Heretic Huang," Hong Qigong said, "Didn't I tell you on the Peach Blossom Island that your virgin daughter is so smart? She is so crafty; others won't bully her that easily, so there is nothing for you to worry. Now tell me, was the Old Beggar wrong?"

Huang Yaoshi smiled faintly, holding his daughter's hand he went near and said, "Congratulations! You made the Old Poison ran away. His defeat means you and I have

one less problem to face.”

“You and I are the current experts of the world,” Hong Qigong said, “As soon as I saw your daughter the worms in my tummy started to dance around, my mouth watered. Let us just compete and get it over with; you become the number one is fine with me, I become the number one is also good. I only want to eat Rong’er’s cooked meals.”

“Not so fast,” Huang Rong laughed, “Only if you lose I will cook something for you to eat.”

“Bah!” Hong Qigong spat, “You are shameless. You are extorting me, aren’t you?”

“Old Beggar,” Huang Yaoshi said, “You have wasted two full years to recover from your injuries. I am afraid you are not my match. Rong’er, no matter who wins and who loses, you will cook some food for your Shifu to eat.”

“Right!” Hong Qigong exclaimed, “Now THAT is a speech befitting a great master of a martial art school! How can the Master of the Peach Blossom Island have the same petty thought as a little girl? We don’t have to wait until noon to start our competition. Come!” He swung his bamboo stick and moved forward to begin.

Huang Yaoshi shook his head, “You have just fought the Old Poison for quite a while. Although your energy is not completely depleted, you are tired nonetheless. How can Old Huang gain a slight advantage over you? We will wait till noon to compete, you need to restore your strength.”

Even though Hong Qigong knew what he said was right, but he was too impatient to wait, so he insisted on starting right away. Huang Yaoshi simply sat on a big rock, totally ignoring him.

Seeing these two could not reach any agreement Huang Rong said, “Father, Shifu, I have an idea: the two of you can compete immediately without Father taking any advantage over Shifu.”

“Good! What is it?” Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi asked.

“The two of you have been friends for many-many years, no matter who wins or loses; your friendship will be damaged. But today is the Sword Meet of Mount Hua, so no matter what, victory and defeat must be decided, does it not?”

Hong and Huang two people's interests were piqued. They were aware that she was right; and if she indeed had an excellent idea, then they would kill three birds with one stone: one, they could compete immediately; two, Huang Yaoshi would not take any advantage over Hong Qigong; three, their friendship would not be damaged. So they enthusiastically asked, "Tell us your great idea."

"My idea is this," Huang Rong explained, "First, Father compete with Jing Gege. We will see how many stances Father will need to defeat him. Then Shifu will also compete with Jing Gege. If Father uses 99 moves to score victory but Shifu needs 100 moves, then Father wins. But if Shifu only need 98 moves, then Shifu wins."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Hong Qigong exclaimed.

Huang Rong continued, "Jing Gege will compete with Father first; both are still fresh. Then when he competes with Shifu, both parties have each fought one time. Don't you say it is a fair deal?"

Huang Yaoshi nodded his head, "This is a good idea. Jing'er, come! Are you going to use weapon or not?"

"I am not going to," Guo Jing said. He was about to step forward when Huang Rong said again, "Hold on a second. There is one more thing I want to say: What if you two seniors cannot defeat Jing Gege in 300 moves?"

Hong Qigong burst out in laughter, "Old Heretic Huang, originally I envy you of having a smart daughter, who is always looking after her Father's well-being. Ay! Who would have thought that a girl is always a girl; born to leave home. Actually she wanted this dumb kid to hold the title 'Number One Martial Artist in the World!'"

Huang Yaoshi might be eccentric, but he loved his daughter with all his heart. He secretly thought, "Let me help her achieve her wish." So he said, "What Rong'er had said is true. If we two old men cannot defeat Jing'er in 300 moves, would we have any face to become the Number One?" But suddenly he had another thought, "I intended to hold back and let him to fight me for 300 stances, but what if the Old Beggar does not hold back and score victory in less than 300 moves? Then I won't be holding back for Jing'er's sake, but for the Old Beggar's." He hesitated on what to do.

Hong Qigong shoved Guo Jing forward, "Go, fight! What are you waiting for?" he said.

Guo Jing staggered and stepped forward to face Huang Yaoshi. “All right,” Huang Yaoshi thought, “Let me try his skill first, then I’ll decide what to do later.” Raising his left palm he hacked diagonally toward Guo Jing’s neck. “First move!” he called out.

While Huang Yaoshi was not sure what to do, Guo Jing also had some doubt of his own, “There is no way I can win the world’s number one title; but shall I let Daozhu [Island Master] win, or shall I let Shifu win?” He was still thinking when Huang Yaoshi had made his move. Guo Jing lifted up his right hand to parry. His body shook and he almost fell down. “Stupid!” he scolded himself, “Why would I worry about whom I should let to win? Even if I fight with all my might I may not be able to keep up for 300 stances.”

In the mean time Huang Yaoshi had launched the second move, so he was forced to focus his attention. He made a decision right then and there, to compete with those two people with all his might. Who is swift and who is slow, let them use their skill to defeat him. He would not be one sided.

Several stances later Huang Yaoshi was astonished. “How did this dumb kid reach this level? If I held back, not only I might not be able to defeat him in 300 stances, I might even lose in his hands.” In a battle between martial art experts one cannot let back even half a step. Because initially Huang Yaoshi was only using 70% of his strength, he fell under Guo Jing’s control. He started to feel alarmed, and busily launched the ‘luo ying shen jian zhang’ [falling flower divine sword palm technique], his body floating around at full strength. But Guo Jing now was not the same as Guo Jing then. Huang Yaoshi had used dozens different palm techniques, yet it was still difficult for him to gain an upper hand.

After about one hundred moves Huang Yaoshi suddenly launched a trick move. Guo Jing did not expect him to make such move; he was almost kicked down by Huang Yaoshi’s left leg. Frantically Guo Jing retreated two steps and steadied himself. Because of this Huang Yaoshi managed to even up the battle situation.

Huang Yaoshi took that opportunity to take a deep breath. “Amazing!” he secretly praised.

Huang Yaoshi worked very hard to gain an upper hand, but unexpectedly Guo Jing’s position was very firm. Guo Jing had decided all along to put up a very tight defense line; he knew it was impossible for him to win, so he only hoped he would not lose.

Listening to his daughter on the side counting, “Two-hundred and three, two-hundred and four,” Huang Yaoshi became impatient. “Old Beggar may use a heavy hand; if he

defeats Jing'er in 100 moves, where would I put my face at?" he silently thought. He changed his attacks: now his palms floating around like a shadow; his hands were very swift.

Guo Jing started to feel the pressure; his chest tightened, like it was pressed under a huge mountain. He started to get disoriented, but he bravely stood his ground.

Huang Yaoshi's hands moved faster and faster, his offensive power increased. In the meantime Huang Rong's mouth was also counting faster and faster.

Guo Jing started to feel his lips and tongue dry up, his movements became sluggish; getting more and more difficult. The only thing kept him going was his strong will. In this critical moment suddenly he heard Huang Rong call out, "Three hundred!"

Huang Yaoshi's countenance changed, he leaped back.

Guo Jing, on the other hand, still felt dizzy. His body did not stop spinning; he turned around more than a dozen times. He knew he was going to fall, hence he focused his energy to his left leg with 'qian jin zhui' [thousand-catty plummet], trying to anchor his body down. But Huang Yaoshi power was incredible; even after he pulled back his hands, the force did not vanish away. Guo Jing lost his balance and fell down; but he used his right hand to push himself back up again. Immediately he launched dozens of stances from the '18-Dragon Subduing Palms' and thus cleared his mind up. He stayed silent for a moment, then turned his head toward Huang Yaoshi and said, "Huang Daozhu, several moves more and I will fall down to the ground."

Seeing Guo Jing was unexpectedly able to withstand his more than ten years worth of 'qi men wu zhuan' [wonderful gate five revolutions] cultivation, Huang Yaoshi was not angry; on the contrary, he was happy. "Old Beggar," he said, "I am useless, the title Number One in the World is yours." He cupped his fists and turned around to leave.

"Not too fast! Not too fast!" Hong Qigong said, "I won't necessarily win. Could you lend your iron flute to Jing'er, please?"

Huang Yaoshi's jade flute was already broken, so he wielded an iron flute on his waist instead. He pulled the flute and gave it to Guo Jing.

Hong Qigong turned to Guo Jing and said, "You use a weapon. I will fight you barehanded."

Guo Jing was dumbstruck, “This ...”

Hong Qigong said, “Your bare hand techniques came from me. If you use your hands and feet, how can we call it competition? Come!” His left hand’s fingers forming a hook, showing off his grabbing skill, trying to snatch the iron flute in Guo Jing’s hand. Guo Jing did not understand his intention; he let the flute go without any resistance.

“Dumb kid!” Hong Qigong scolded, “We are competing martial arts skill!” With his left hand he gave the flute back to Guo Jing, while with his right hand he tried to snatch it one more time. This time Guo Jing moved his flute to evade the attack. Huang Rong started counting, “First move!”

In the battle between experts, using weapon or being barehanded did not make too much difference. Hong Qigong used his ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’ attacking ferociously; the gust of wind could be felt a ‘zhang’ [10 feet/3 meters] away. Even with the iron flute in his hand, how could Guo Jing get close to him? Moreover, Guo Jing was not used to use weapon until in the western region he was forced to battle Ouyang Feng on the stone cliff. It was then that he started improving his sword technique. Even then he did not put too much emphasis on the offense; his swordsmanship was 80% for defense, and only 20% for offense.

The weapon techniques he learned from the Six Freaks of Jiangnan were inadequate to battle an expert; it was after he learned the Nine Yin Manual that his weapon technique improved greatly. Actually it was inside that stone building in the west he started learning many defensive techniques in using a sword to defend against Ouyang Feng’s snake staff. This time he was using an iron flute as a sword to ward off Hong Qigong’s fierce palm attacks; and he was able to defend himself quite well.

Hong Qigong could see his strong defense line and was delighted, he thought, “This kid made a tremendous advancement; I did not teach him in vain. But it won’t look good for the Old Heretic Huang if I defeat him in under 200 moves. I’d better wait until after 200 moves then I am going to increase my power.” And so Hong Qigong kept using his ‘18-Dragon Subduing Palms’, from the first variation to the ninth; with gusts of wind so strong surrounded Guo Jing completely.

This was where Hong Qigong made a mistake. Guo Jing’s weapon skill had not reached perfection yet; if he kept pressing Guo Jing with a heavy hand, Guo Jing would not be able to withstand, but he wanted to wait until after the 200th move. Initially Guo Jing’s strength was already profound; after completed the ‘yi jin duan gu pian’ [changing muscle forging bone chapter], his internal strength increased by leaps and bounds. On

the other hand, Hong Qigong had advanced in age, plus he had suffered a heavy injury under Ouyang Feng's snake staff. It was true that he had completely recovered, but his stamina could not compete with Guo Jing's in an endurance race. To make matter worse for him, the '18-Dragon Subduing Palms' required a lot of energy; so after 9 rounds (or 162 stances) even if his attacks were still strong and fierce, but his stamina was gradually decreasing.

After about 200 moves not only the iron flute in Guo Jing's right hand increased in offensive power, but he was actually getting better in coordinating the right sword technique with his left hand palm technique. Hong Qigong was secretly groaning; realizing that he would not win relying on his brute force, he had to use strategy to defeat this dumb kid, so immediately he changed the way he fought. He opened his hands wide.

Guo Jing was startled, "Shifu has not taught me this stance yet," he thought. If it was a fight against an enemy, he would attack toward the chest since it was wide open, but the opponent he faced was his own benevolent master, how could he use a killer strike?

While he hesitated, Hong Qigong smiled and said, "You are tricked!" His left foot swiftly moved upward to knock the iron flute in Guo Jing's hand down, while his right palm slanting downward, attacking Guo Jing's shoulder. He only used 80% of his strength on this attack since he did not have any intention to hurt Guo Jing. He only wanted to knock Guo Jing down, and thus achieved victory.

Who would have thought that these past several years Guo Jing had endured wind and frost; his body became resilient. This heavy blow made him stagger and caused him to suffer a severe pain, but he did not fall down.

Hong Qigong was surprised Guo Jing was able to withstand his palm, he busily said, "Quickly spit three times and breathe in, breathe out; see if you suffer an internal injury."

Guo Jing followed his advice, and his chest was not constricted, anymore so he said, "Disciple has lost."

"No," Hong Qigong said, "We have to keep fighting. If you admit defeat, the Old Heretic Huang won't accept it. Come!" Immediately he sent his palm to attack.

Guo Jing did not have any weapon in his hand anymore, while the incoming attack was fierce, so he used Zhou Botong's Vacant Fist to parry the attack.

The Vacant Fist technique was the softest fist technique in the world; it was created by Zhou Botong based on the Taoist principles found in the 'Dao De Jing' [moral/virtue scripture – Taoist's holy scripture]. The 'Dao De Jing' said, 'A strong army can be decimated; a strong tree can be broken. Strength will fail; suppleness will prevail.' Also, "The most flexible substance under the sky is water, but it is not easy to withstand its strong attack. Suppleness' victory is powerful; softness' victory is strong. No one in the world is unaware, no one can stand.'

On the other hand, '18-Dragon Subduing Palms' technique was the strongest/hardest martial art. There was a saying, 'Softness can overcome hardness.' However, if it was Hong Qigong's level of 'hardness,' then it would not be easy for Zhou Botong's 'softness' to overcome. Fortunately, Guo Jing had mastered the mutual hands combat technique, so with his right hand he launch the soft Vacant Fist, while with his left he employed the Dragon Subduing Palm; hard and soft worked together, yin and yang complemented each other. No matter how fierce Hong Qigong's attack was, he could not penetrate Guo Jing's defense.

On the side Huang Rong kept counting; it was almost 300 stances, and Guo Jing did not show any sign that he would be defeated soon. One move after another ... Hong Qigong heard her calling out the number two hundred and ninety-nine; he became edgy, wanted to win the contest; so for the last move he launched the 'Proud Dragon Repents' full-strength, with earth-shattering power to back it up. But once it was launched, he began to feel regret; afraid that Guo Jing would not be able to withstand and suffer a heavy injury, so he shouted, "Watch out!"

Guo Jing understood his warning, but the gust of wind had already reached his face; he knew it was very strong. He also knew that his Vacant Fist wouldn't be able to parry this attack; so in this critical moment his right hand made a circle and with a loud shout launched the very same 'Proud Dragon Repents'.

Two palms collided with a deafening sound; both men felt their bodies shook violently. Huang Yaoshi and Huang Rong both cried out in shock, simultaneously they jumped toward the men, only to see both men stood still with their palms stuck together like they were glued to each other.

Guo Jing had a mind to yield, but knew very well that his master's overbearing power was still pushing his palm. If he let go and his master did not take his strength away, he might end up getting seriously injured. Hence he was forced to wait for his master to take the pressure away then he would admit defeat.

Seeing Guo Jing was able to block this palm, which he sent with his lifetime cultivation of energy, Hong Qigong could not help but feel pleasantly surprised. He regretted his proud thinking of wanting to be the number one; now he wanted his disciple to win this contest and build up a name for himself. Therefore, gradually he decreased his power to nothing.

Right when these two men were still in a stalemate position, where nobody wins or loses, suddenly someone was heard shouting three times from behind the cliff; then someone leaped and made three somersaults in the air before landing on the ground close to them; it was the Western Poison Ouyang Feng. Hong Qigong and Guo Jing simultaneously retracted their palms and leaped backward.

Ouyang Feng's clothes were tattered, his face full of blood, he shouted, "I have mastered the Nine Yin Manual! My martial art is number one in the world!" Lifting up his snake staff he swept away all four people.

Hong Qigong picked up his dog-beating stick and parried the snake staff. After a while all four people were astonished. Ouyang Feng's stances had always been unusual, but this time they were weirder than ever: he would suddenly claw his own face or kick his own buttock; while launching an attack he would suddenly change direction midway in an unpredictable way. Hong Qigong was extremely amazed; he put a strong defense with his dog-beating technique and did not dare to act carelessly.

While fighting ferociously, 'Slap! Slap! Slap!' suddenly Ouyang Feng slapped his own face red, then he shouted loudly; put down his hands and crawled around like an animal.

Hong Qigong was surprised, but also amused, he thought, "My stick technique is the best at beating dogs, you act like a dog, aren't you just coming straight for the trap?" Lifting up his bamboo stick he aimed for Ouyang Feng's waist. Unexpectedly Ouyang Feng rolled his body around and pinched the stick to the ground; then he rolled alongside the stick upward. Hong Qigong was so startled that his grab loosened and the bamboo stick fell down. Ouyang Feng suddenly leaped up and kicked both feet toward Hong Qigong's head. Hong Qigong was taken by surprise and forced to step back in anxiety.

By this time Huang Rong had already bent down and picked the iron flute up, giving it to her father. Huang Yaoshi used that flute as a sword piercing toward Ouyang Feng. "Emperor Duan! I am not afraid of your 'Solitary Yang Finger'!" Ouyang Feng called out; he jumped and threw himself up.

Seeing his behavior like that, Huang Yaoshi knew that his mind was confused; but to Huang Yaoshi's amazement his attack was fiercer than before. Even though he was smart, Huang Yaoshi did not have any idea what had happened. He did not know that Ouyang Feng had diligently trained himself according to the altered manual Guo Jing wrote for him; and then Huang Rong led him along the wrong path by giving him random interpretation. Driven by his desire to win the competition he followed her instruction blindly and trained hard. Only his martial art was profound, so even though following the wrong path with lots of mistakes, he somehow managed to achieve some improvement and gave Hong and Huang, two men of great learning and integrity, a hard time.

Dozens of stances later Huang Yaoshi was forced to admit defeat. Guo Jing stepped forward to face the enemy. Ouyang Feng suddenly stopped and wept, "My son, you died a tragic death!" Throwing his snake staff aside he opened up his arms wide to hug Guo Jing.

Guo Jing knew he was remembering his nephew, Ouyang Ke. Ouyang Feng's voice sounded so miserable that Guo Jing felt sorry for him; but he was also scared, so he held out his hand to shove Ouyang Feng's arms away. But Ouyang Feng turned his left wrist over and grabbed Guo Jing's arm, while his right arm tightly hugged Guo Jing's body. Guo Jing frantically struggled to free himself but Ouyang Feng was too strong for him; he could not get away from Ouyang Feng's embrace.

Hong Qigong and Huang Yaoshi, father and daughter, were shocked; they moved together to rescue Guo Jing. Hong Qigong stretched out his finger to attack the 'feng wei' [phoenix tail] acupoint on Ouyang Feng's shoulder, to force him loosen up his grip. Unexpectedly by that time Ouyang Feng's energy passages had been reversed, his acupoints were entirely dislodged, that although Hong Qigong's finger was right on target seemed like he did not even aware of the attack.

Huang Rong picked up a rock and smashed the top of Ouyang Feng's head. Ouyang Feng casually swung his right fist upward; Huang Rong was not able to hold the rock, it flew toward the valley below. But because of this interference Guo Jing was free from Ouyang Feng's right arm; he struggled hard and leaped backward. After calming down a moment he saw Ouyang Feng and Huang Yaoshi were engaged in a fierce battle.

Huang Yaoshi had inserted his flute back to his waist and fought barehanded. This time Ouyang Feng's movement was really bizarre, weird beyond imagination. Sometimes he stood upright, some other time he would lean to the side with body as straight as a stick, yet some other time his body was horizontally off the ground, supported with one

hand while the other hand launched strange attacks. Huang Yaoshi had to put all his concentration to face this kind of opponent, since Ouyang Feng's movement was totally unpredictable.

Hong Qigong, Guo Jing and Huang Rong three people were watching intently with their hearts beating fast. Seeing her father's precarious condition, Huang Rong called out, "Shifu, toward this lunatic we don't have to follow Wulin's rules, let us fight together!"

Hong Qigong shook his head, "If it were some other day, we can cooperate to capture him, but today is the Sword Meet of Mount Hua; the men of valor under the heaven must fight one on one. If we relied on numbers we will be disgraced by the heroes of Jianghu." But he also could see that Ouyang Feng's mental condition was so severe; his mouth foaming, spitting his saliva everywhere. Huang Yaoshi had a difficult time avoiding this attack and was forced to step back.

A moment later Ouyang Feng stooped down, seemingly in pain; his back was completely undefended. Huang Yaoshi was delighted, he thought, "His madness is spreading after all." With the 'Divine Flicking Finger' he attacked the 'ying xiang' [welcoming fragrance] acupoint on the side of Ouyang Feng's nose. This finger attack was executed swiftly but unexpectedly as soon as it touched his face, Ouyang Feng slightly turned his head and bit Huang Yaoshi's index finger.

Huang Yaoshi was so startled and quickly hit the 'tai yang' [sun] acupoint with his left hand; forcing the mouth to loosen up. Ouyang Feng thrust his right hand up while his mouth bit even harder.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong simultaneously attacked from both sides. Ouyang Feng was forced to loosen up his bit on Huang Yaoshi's finger, but his ten fingers forming two claws tried to grab Huang Rong's face. Under the bright sunlight his face looked so nauseatingly fierce and full of blood. Huang Rong was so scared that she ran away screaming.

Guo Jing hurriedly came to her rescue; Ouyang Feng was forced to parry this palm attack toward his back, giving Huang Rong an opportunity to escape.

Only about a dozen of so stances later Guo Jing's shoulder and leg were hit one after another. "Jing'er, back off! Let me try," Hong Qigong shouted, rushed ahead barehanded. Two people were engaged in a fierce battle for the second time in one day, this time more ferocious than the last.

Hong Qigong had been paying close attention when Ouyang Feng battled Huang Yaoshi and Guo Jing. He found out that even though Ouyang Feng's movements were strange, he could see a pattern on them; they were actually based on the 'Toad Stance' launched backward, like upward movement became downward, left became right. Although his comprehension was incomplete, but Hong Qigong thought that with 70, 80% certainty he had a general idea on how to battle him. He proceeded with utmost caution, and was able to launch a counterattack for roughly every three attacks he received.

Huang Rong took out her handkerchief and wrapped her father's wound. Huang Yaoshi turned his attention to the ongoing battle and after watching a moment he started to shout one after another, "Qi Xiong, kick him upside down." "Strike his 'ju que' [gigantic capital]!" "Hack his 'tian zhu' [pillar of heaven] with the back of your hand."

As a spectator Huang Yaoshi could see clearly; Hong Qigong followed his instructions and a short while later was able to gain a slight advantage over his opponent. But actually these two people were ashamed of what they were doing, they thought, "This time the Eastern Heretic and the Northern Beggar two people join forces to battle the Western Poison, one person." Seeing his defeat is imminent, suddenly Ouyang Feng opened up his mouth and spat his saliva toward Hong Qigong's face.

Hong Qigong quickly leaned sideways to evade, but unexpectedly Ouyang Feng had already anticipated his move. Ouyang Feng's palm flew and slapped the side of Hong Qigong's head; while simultaneously spat saliva toward his face. Hong Qigong was in an awkward position; he did not have any chance to evade. If he let the spittle hit his eyeball he knew he would suffer an injury, or at least very hurt; and if the opponent used that opportunity to attack it would be very difficult for him to parry. He did not have any choice but extending his right hand and took the spittle with his palm, while his left hand counterattacked.

Several stances later Ouyang Feng again spat his saliva; looked like he was using his spittle as secret projectile to confuse enemy's defense. Hong Qigong felt icky and angry at the same time. He still had the spittle on his right palm; he was not able to shake it loose or wipe it on his clothes since he had to focus his entire concentration to fight the enemy. With a sudden movement he stretched his right palm and shouted, "Got you!" He smeared his right palm on Ouyang Feng's face. Looked like he was casually smearing the spittle on Ouyang Feng's face, but in actuality his palm carried a murderous intention.

Even though Ouyang Feng's mind was confused his senses were as keen as before. Seeing Hong Qigong's palm was about to wipe his face he leaned sideways slightly,

evading the attack. Hong Qigong flipped his palm and moved vertically up. Ouyang Feng turned his head slightly and opened his mouth to bite. It was exactly the same bite that defeated Huang Yaoshi's unique skill. It looked ridiculous, but since his movement was so quick that even somebody who had reached martial art perfection like Huang Yaoshi was not able to evade.

Huang Yaoshi, Huang Rong and Guo Jing could see clearly Hong Qigong's palm went straight into Ouyang Feng's mouth; and within an inch from the target suddenly the mouth opened showing two rows of white teeth gleaming under the bright sunlight; ready to bite Hong Qigong's finger. They could not refrain from shouting in alarm, "Watch out!"

What these three people, along with Ouyang Feng, forgot was that Hong Qigong was widely known as the 'jiu zhi shen gai' [Nine-fingered Divine Beggar]. One time because of his gluttonous character he was late in saving the life of a Jianghu's man of valor. In his regret and anger toward himself he chopped off his right index finger.

Ouyang Feng's bite was swift and accurate, if it were other people he would certainly succeed in biting other's finger; but because Hong Qigong did not have an index finger 'clack!' his teeth were biting air.

Actually Ouyang Feng, and everybody else for that matter, knew that Hong Qigong only had nine fingers; but in a ferocious battle situation like this, who would have time to remember little detail like that? The battle between experts, where both contenders' martial arts have been refined through fire, more often than not the end result would be decided by slight oversight like this. When Ouyang Feng bit an empty space, how could Hong Qigong let this opportunity pass? With the 'xiao kou ya ya' [the laughter of a mute] immediately his middle finger struck the 'di cang' [earthen storehouse] acupoint on the side of Ouyang Feng's mouth.

Seeing Hong Qigong's attack went well, the three spectators were ready to applaud, but their mouths were just saying the word 'good' when suddenly Hong Qigong somersaulted several times backward; while Ouyang Feng staggered backward like a drunk before finally came to a stop and let out a big laugh.

Turned out the energy passages in his body were reversed, so that when Hong Qigong hit his major acupoint of 'zu yang ming wei jing' [lit. positive foot, bright stomach passage] he only experienced a slight numbness, then immediately back to normal. Taking that opportunity his palm hit Hong Qigong's shoulder. Lucky for him, because his finger was stretched out, he did not get hit too severely. Hong Qigong further neutralized

the hit by somersaulting backward while launching the 'jian long zai tian' [seeing dragon on the field], which made Ouyang Feng stagger back.

Hong Qigong avoided serious injury by moving fast, yet his body was sore, temporarily unable to move. Hong Qigong was the grand master of his respective martial art school; even if he did not want to admit defeat to a confused man, yet he had to admit that the opponent's martial art was admirable. He cupped his fists and said, "Ouyang Xiong, the Old Beggar admits defeat, you are the Number One Martial Artist in the World!"

Ouyang Feng looked up to the sky and let out a long laugh, his arms waving chaotically in the air. He turned toward Huang Yaoshi and asked, "Emperor Duan, do you or do you not admit defeat?"

Huang Yaoshi was not happy, he thought, "The Number One Martial Artist in The World title fell to a lunatic; won't the Old Beggar and I become the laughingstock of the heroes of the world?" But he realized that even if he'd fight again, it would be difficult for him to score victory anyway, so he did not have any choice but nod his agreement.

Ouyang Feng turned to Guo Jing and said, "Son, your father's martial art is matchless, unrivalled in the world, aren't you happy?"

Ouyang Ke was officially his nephew, but actually he was his son; they were known as uncle and nephew but actually they were father and son. In his confused mind he saw Guo Jing as Ouyang Ke, and thus revealing the secret he had kept for decades.

Guo Jing thought no one present was able to defeat him, so he was worthy of the title Number One Martial Artist in the World; "We can't defeat you!" he said.

Ouyang Feng giggled foolishly, he turned toward Huang Rong and said, "Good daughter-in-law, aren't you happy?"

Huang Rong saw her father, her master and Guo Jing were defeated one after another; she had been thinking of a way to cope with this lunatic early on, but could not think of anything good. Now Ouyang Feng was asking her, she saw he was dancing joyfully with a strange facial expression. Under the bright sunlight his shadow was also dancing back and forth in confusion; suddenly an idea came into her mind, "Who said you are number one in the world?" she asked, "There is one person you can't defeat for sure."

Ouyang Feng was very angry, he beat his chest and roared, "Who? Who? Let him come here and fight me!"

“This man’s martial art is so high, you are not his match,” Huang Rong said.

“Who? Who? Let him come here and fight me!” Ouyang Feng said.

“He is called Ouyang Feng,” Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng scratched his head, musing, “Ouyang Feng?”

Huang Rong continued, “Right! Your martial art may be high, but you won’t stand against Ouyang Feng.”

Ouyang Feng’s mind was totally confused; he knew the name ‘Ouyang Feng’ to have a very close relationship with himself, but who could that be? “Who am I?” he asked nobody in particular.

“You are you,” Huang Rong sneered, “You don’t know who you are, why do you ask me?”

Ouyang Feng’s heart turned cold, he leaned his head sideways, trying to think hard; but his brain did not want to cooperate, he could not figure out who he was, he could not understand anything.

He was an intelligent man; oftentimes when he was alone he liked to ponder the old-age philosophical questions like, “Who am I? What am I during my lifetime? What will I become after I die?” Ouyang Feng was a smart person, his comprehension ability was outstanding; these questions sometimes came flashing in his mind. That particular day he had defeated three great martial artists but his energy passages were reversed; he would be happy but suddenly turn angry. Listening to Huang Rong he looked around in confusion and muttered, “I, who am I? Where am I? What happened to me?”

“Ouyang Feng wanted to fight you, he wanted to snatch the Nine Yin Manual away from you!” Huang Rong said.

“Where is he?” Ouyang Feng asked

Huang Rong pointed toward his own shadow and said, “Look! He is behind you!”

Ouyang Feng quickly turned around and saw his own shadow. He was shocked. “This ... this ... he ... he ...”

“He is going to beat you!” Huang Rong said.

Ouyang Feng squatted and hacked the shadow. The shadow also squatted and hacked him.

Ouyang Feng was scared, he hacked and he chopped left and right, but the shadow also moving incessantly. Ouyang Feng felt his opponent was so fierce, he turned around to evade. Facing the sunlight he did not see his shadow anymore “Where did you run?” he shouted, and ran toward the left.

Their left side was actually a barren rock wall. The sun was behind him, casting a shadow on the wall. It looked like the enemy was standing straight in front of him. Ouyang Feng sent out his right palm, striking the wall with all his might. He felt a shot of pain straight to his bone. “Very fierce!” he shouted. Immediately he sent a left kick toward the wall, and the shadow also sent him a kick. His foot hit the wall, hard. The pain was unbearable. Ouyang Feng did not dare to fight again; he turned around and ran away.

This time he was running toward the sun, the enemy disappeared. Several ‘zhang’s later he turned around to look, and to his surprise the enemy was right behind him. He was frightened and shouted loudly, “You can be the world’s number one, I admit defeat.” But the shadow was motionless.

Ouyang Feng turned around and ran again, but as soon as he turned his head he saw the shadow was closely following him. He could not run, he could not fight, his heart was stricken with terror; screaming and cursing he ran toward the valley below. A moment later his voice could still be heard from the other side of the hill, “Don’t chase me, don’t chase me!”

Seeing a great grand master of martial art of their generation ended up this way Huang Yaoshi and Hong Qigong looked at each other and heaved a deep sigh. By that time Ouyang Feng’s cry was intermittent, it sounded like he was already several ‘li’s away. The mountains and valleys echoed his cry, which sounded like a wolf’s howl or a ghost’s cry. The four of them were standing under the bright sunlight, yet they felt coldness creep into their hearts.

Hong Qigong sighed, “This man won’t live much longer.”

All of a sudden Guo Jing mumbled, “I? Who am I?”

Huang Rong knew him to be honest and upright, she was afraid he might think over this matter too much and as a result being possessed by an evil spirit; quickly she said, “You are Guo Jing, Jing Gege. Quickly think about yourself, don’t think too much about other matters.”

Guo Jing shivered in cold, startled, and came to his senses, “Right! Shifu, Huang Daozhu, let us go down the mountain.”

“Dumb kid!” Hong Qigong scolded him, “You are still calling him Huang Daozhu? I’m going to give you several slaps on your face.”

Guo Jing was startled; he saw Huang Rong was blushing, looked like she was smiling, yet she was not. He knew what to do; bashfully he called, “Father-in-law!” his face was red.

Huang Yaoshi laughed a big laugh; he pulled his daughter’s hand with one hand, then pulled Guo Jing’s hand with the other, said to Hong Qigong, “Qi Xiong, martial art study is inexhaustible. Today we’ve seen the Old Poison’s martial art, which made others frightened and ashamed at the same time. Ever since Chongyang Zhenren died, there is no more the Number One Martial Artist in the World.”

“Rong’er’s culinary skill is number one in the world, this I can guarantee,” Hong Qigong said.

Huang Rong pursed up her lips and laughed, “No need to praise me, let us go down the mountain; I am going to prepare some good food for you to enjoy.”

Hong Qigong, Huang Yaoshi, Guo Jing and Huang Rong four people went down Mount Hua. Huang Rong demonstrated her superb culinary skill by handpicked the ingredients and cooked some out-of-this-world quality dishes. Hong Qigong ate to his heart’s content.

That very evening four people slept in an inn; Huang Yaoshi father and daughter shared a room, while Guo Jing and Hong Qigong shared another. Early the next morning Guo Jing awoke only to find the other bed empty; Hong Qigong was nowhere to be seen. On the table top he saw three letters written with grease: ‘I am gone’; it was unclear whether the letters were written with a chicken leg’s bone or a pork hoof.

Guo Jing quickly went to the other room to alert Huang Yaoshi father and daughter. Huang Yaoshi simply sighed and said, “Qi Xiong leads a busy life, he is like a divine

dragon; we can see its head but not its tail.” He turned his gaze to Jing and Rong couple and said, “Jing’er, your parents have passed away, the closest relative to you would be your Da Shifu Ke Zhen’e. Why don’t you come along with us to the Peach Blossom Island and ask your Da Shifu to act in your parents’ behalf to preside at your wedding with Rong’er?”

Guo Jing was both grieved and joyful, he could not say anything but nodded his head repeatedly. Huang Rong pursed her lips and smiled; she wanted to scold him ‘Dumb’ but looking at her father she refrained from saying so.

Three people traveled together crossing mountains and rivers, heading southeast. In less than a day, they arrived in between the two parts of Zhejiang; the Peach Blossom Island was not too far ahead. Suddenly they heard an eagle’s cry high up in the air; two white eagles were seen flying from the north. Guo Jing was delighted, he whistled and the pair of eagle dived down and perched on his shoulders.

When he left Mongolia Guo Jing was such in a hurry that he did not take his eagles along; but now that they met his joy was unspeakable. He held out his hands to stroke the eagles’ back and then he saw a piece of leather rolled into a small cylinder tied on the male eagle’s foot. Quickly he used his dagger to take the leather and found a letter carved on it. It was written in Mongolian characters and read, ‘We are going south to attack Xiangyang, Knowing my lord’s loyalty to his country I braved death to inform you. I have caused my lord’s mother tragic death, am so ashamed I don’t have the face to see you. I want to say goodbye, am going to the west to live with my eldest brother; won’t come back to my homeland forever. I wish my lord’s good fortune, long life and happiness.’

The letter did not bear any signature, but as soon as he saw it Guo Jing recognized Princess Huazheng’s handwriting. He translated the letter for Huang Yaoshi father and daughter, and asked, “Father-in-law, what do you think?”

Huang Yaoshi answered, “This place is close to Lin’an, but if we inform the royal government they won’t necessarily believe us; even if they did, it will take a long time for them to react. This is an urgent matter; your little red horse is swift. Leave for Xiangyang today. If the garrison commander is willing to cooperate, help him defend the city. If not, kill him and lead the troops and the people to fight the Mongolians. Rong’er and I will wait for you on the Peach Blossom Island.”

Guo Jing asserted his agreement, but Huang Rong’s countenance changed. There was nobody who knows her heart better than her father, so Huang Yaoshi smiled and said,

“Very well, Rong’er, you can go too. Come home as soon as you are done; if the government wants to reward you, don’t take it.”

Huang Rong was ecstatic, “That’s for sure,” she said.

The young couple took their leave from their father, riding the little red horse heading west. Guo Jing was afraid they would be late; if the Mongolians had already attacked the city, he knew the massacre would be unimaginable; therefore, they continued their journey almost nonstop.

One night they stopped by an inn to spend the night. They were already nearing the two southern roads which linked towards Jiangxi. Guo Jing’s mind was occupied with Huazheng’s letter; he recalled their childhood together, how he, Huazheng and Toulei played together in the desert. And then his mind wandered to things that happened since until today. His heart was depressed. Huang Rong saw he was staring blankly, lost in thought; she sat by the lamp sewing her clothes.

“Rong’er,” suddenly Guo Jing broke the silence, “She said she had caused my mother’s tragic death that she is ashamed to see me ever again; what did she mean by that?”

“Her father had forced your mother to her death; naturally she felt sorry for that,” Huang Rong reasoned.

“Mmm,” Guo Jing mumbled. Lowering his head he tried to recall the scene surrounding his mother’s death. Suddenly he leaped up and slap the table, “I know! So that’s how it is!” Huang Rong was startled that the needle punctured the tip of her finger and a drop of blood came out. She smiled and asked, “What is it? You made a fuss about nothing; what did you know?”

Guo Jing said, “When my mother and I opened the Khan’s secret order and decided to go back south there was nobody around, yet Khan immediately found out and captured us, mother and son. In the end my mother committed suicide and died. Who reported on us? I have been thinking hard about it. Turned out ... turned out it was she.”

Huang Rong shook her head, “Princess Huazheng loved you very much; it is impossible for her to betray you.”

“She did not mean to,” Guo Jing explained, “She was outside, accidentally heard everything my mother and I said. She told her father so that Khan would prohibit us from go-

ing back home; who would have thought that it ended up in a great tragedy?” Saying thus he sighed and sighed again.

“Because she did that unwittingly, you must go to the west to find her,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing disagreed, “I love her as my sister. She is now with her brother in the west; she has all the honor and riches she deserves; why would I go and seek her?”

Huang Rong smiled, secretly she was very happy.

Another day they arrived at the southern Jiangxi town of Shangrao; the horse trotted along the mountain road where the grass was tall. It was a desolate place. Ahead of them was a dark forest thick with trees. High above them the pair of eagles let out a loud angry cry, and then they dived down and in a blink of an eye disappeared into the forest. Jing and Rong knew something was not right, quickly they urged their horse to run ahead.

Winding through the forest path they saw their eagles were spiraling down above a man who was trying to fight them frantically. They came closer and found out that the man was Peng Zhanglao [Elder Peng] from the Beggar Clan.

Peng Zhanglao was brandishing a steel saber trying to protect himself. The saber moved swiftly; although the eagles were brave it would be difficult for them to score victory. The female eagle made a sudden attack from behind and managed to snatch Elder Peng’s head covering, showing a patch of baldness on his head. Peng Zhanglao’s saber swept up, cutting down some of its feathers.

As soon as Huang Rong saw the baldness on Elder Peng’s head she remembered something, “That day the eagle’s breast was injured by a short arrow; turned out it was this evil beggar who did it. Afterwards the pair of eagle fought the criminal again by the ‘qing long tan’ [Green Dragon Shore] where they managed to snatch a piece of scalp; so it was this evil beggar.”

“Surnamed Peng!” Huang Rong loudly called out, “Look who is here.”

Peng Zhanglao lifted up his eye to see two people, he was scared out of his wits; he turned around and ran away. The male eagle dived down and struck the top of his head. Peng Zhanglao swung his saber to protect his head. The female eagle swooped from the side and pecked his left eye. Peng Zhanglao screamed, throwing his saber

away he ran without looking where he was going and entered thick thorn bushes nearby. Peng Zhanglao valued his life more than a few stabbing pain from the thorns, so he went even deeper into the bush. The pair of eagles still did not want to let him go, they circled above the thorn bushes.

“He has lost one eye, just let him go,” Guo Jing called his pair of eagles. Suddenly he heard a baby’s noise among the thick patch of grass nearby. “Ah!” Guo Jing cried. Quickly he dismounted his horse and parted the grass only to see a baby sat on the ground. Next to that baby he saw a pair of a woman’s feet. He parted the grass further and saw a woman wearing dark green clothing was fainted on the ground. It was none other than Mu Nianci.

Huang Rong was pleasantly surprised, “Mu Jiejie [Elder sister]!” she cried; then she stoop down to help her up. Guo Jing carried the baby in his arms. The baby’s bright eyes were staring at him intently, they did not show any sign of fear at all.

Huang Rong massaged several acupoints on Mu Nianci’s upper body; then she also pinched the acupoint next to her nose. Mu Nianci slowly regained her consciousness; she opened her eyes and saw these couple. She thought she was dreaming, “You ... you are Guo Dage [eldest brother Guo] ... Huang Jia Meizi [younger sister from the Huang family] ...”

“Sister Mu, why are you here? Are you injured?” Guo Jing asked.

Mu Nianci struggled to stand up, but she fell down again; turned out her hands and feet were bound by pieces of ropes. Huang Rong quickly took her dagger out and cut the ropes. Mu Nianci quickly took the baby from Guo Jing’s arms. After calming down herself for half a day bashfully she started to recount what had happened to her.

Turned out Mu Nianci lost her chastity to Yang Kang at the Iron Palm Peak, and she was pregnant. She had hoped to return to her hometown at Lin’an, but when she reached Zhangrao she was too weak to continue; so she found an empty hut in the forest and took a rest. Not too long afterwards she gave birth to a baby boy. Since she had no desire to see other people, she stayed in the forest, hunting and picking up wild fruits to survive. Luckily the baby boy was so smart, so she was comforted amidst her suffering and loneliness. That particular day she took the baby out to gather some fire woods, unfortunately they met with Peng Zhanglao. Seeing her beauty Peng Zhanglao wanted to rape her. Mu Nianci’s martial art was not weak, but Peng Zhanglao was one of the four Elders of the Beggar Clan; he was the peer of Lu Youjiao Zhanglao; second only to the Bangzhu [Clan Leader], Hong Qigong. Naturally Mu Nianci was not his match. She was

subdued easily and her hands and feet bound. In her anger and desperation she passed out. If Jing and Rong, two people did not arrive at this exact moment, and with their sharp eyes their pair of eagles spotted their common enemy, Mu Nianci would suffer a terrible fate, molested and disgraced by this evil man.

That evening Jing and Rong spent the night at Mu Nianci's hut. When Huang Rong told her that Yang Kang had died at the Temple of the Iron Spear in Jiaying, Mu Nianci's tears came down like rain. Huang Rong understood the depth of her love to him, so Huang Rong did not dare to tell her the details surrounding his death; she only said that Yang Kang was poisoned by Ouyang Feng. "I did not lie, didn't he die because of Ouyang Feng's snake venom?" she said in her heart.

Guo Jing saw the boy was handsome, he recalled how he became sworn brothers with Yang Kang, could not refrain from heaving a deep sigh.

Amidst her tears Mu Nianci said, "Guo Dage, would you give this child a name, please?"

Guo Jing thought for a moment, then said, "His father and I were sworn brothers; it's a pity he did not finish well. I regretted the fact that I was not able to fulfill my responsibility to steer him from his wrong way of life. I hope when he grows up this child will cross over/change ('guo') the mistakes and correct ('gai') them; he will uphold justice and righteousness with all his might. I am giving him the name Yang Guo, alias Gaizhi; is it all right with you?"

Mu Nianci thanked him and said, "I hope it would be like just what Guo Dage said."

Early the next morning Guo Jing and Huang Rong presented Mu Nianci not a few silver 'liang's to help them, mother and son, to pass the days. Guo Jing urged her to return to Lin'an; but Mu Nianci shook her head. A moment later she softly said, "We, mother and son, are going to the Temple of the Iron Spear in Jiaying so he can see his father's grave."

Three people bid farewell to each other and Guo Jing and Huang Rong left with heavy hearts.

Two people headed west and arrived at the Hunan-Hubei border, then they turned north and in less than a day they arrived at Xiangyang. They saw the people were calm, the city was prosperous, there was no sign of any military activity; they knew the great Mongolian army had not arrived, they were relieved.

Xiangyang was an important city located on the northern border of the Southern Song Dynasty. It was under the authority of a garrison commander in charge of the troop to defend the border. Guo Jing thought the situation is critical, so without trying to find any inn they went directly to the Commander Lu Wende's official residence.

This commander was in charge of the whole garrison, he was a high-ranking officer. Even though Guo Jing was a marshal in the Mongolian army, but in the Southern Song Dynasty he was a nobody. How could he seek audience with a high-ranking officer just like that?

Huang Rong knew that money solved everything, so she gave a 'liang' of gold to the receptionist. Immediately the receptionist treated them nicely; he looked happy, but still could not guarantee audience that very same day. He said that the earliest opportunity would be half a month away; even then he could not guarantee the commander would be willing to receive Guo Jing.

Guo Jing's temper flared, "This is an urgent military situation, how can I wait?" he shouted.

Huang Rong quickly cast a meaningful glance toward him, pulled him to the said and whispered, "We'll comeback tonight."

They found a temporary lodging, waited until the second hour that night and using their lightness kungfu they went to the commander's mansion. Commander Lu Wende was having a private party, he hired some professional female entertainer and was having fun with his concubines. Guo and Huang two people jumped down from the roof. Guo Jing cupped his fists, "Xiao Ren [little/lowly people] has an urgent military matter to report," he said.

Lu Wende was startled, "Assassin!" he shouted; shoving the female entertainers away he went hiding underneath the table.

Guo Jing stepped forward in big strides and said, "Commander, please calm down. Xiao Ren does not have any ill intention toward you." He pulled the commander back to his seat.

Lu Wende's face was pale, he kept trembling. Then he saw dozen or so soldiers with their swords and spears ready to rescue him. Huang Rong immediately took out her dagger and pointed it toward Lu Wende's chest. The soldiers yelling and shouting

loudly, but nobody dared to go forward. “Tell them to shut up, we have something to say to you,” Huang Rong said.

Lu Wende was still trembling all over, he signaled the soldiers to be quiet. Guo Jing silently sighed seeing the man who held authority over the troop with a heavy responsibility to guard against the enemy was such a useless fool. He reported that the Mongolian army was going to attack Xiangyang and asked the commander to deploy troops immediately and arranged the necessary defense.

In his heart Lu Wende did not believe him at all, but his mouth repeatedly said yes. Huang Rong saw he kept trembling, “Did you hear what he said?” she asked.

“I did ... I heard,” Lu Wende answered.

“What did you hear?” Huang Rong pressed.

“That ... that the Jin army are planning a sneak attack, must arrange defense, must arrange defense,” Lu Wende mumbled.

Huang Rong was angry, “It’s the Mongolian army, not the Jins!” she said.

Lu Wende was scared out of his wits, “Mongolian army? That’s impossible, that’s impossible. The Mongolians have signed an agreement with our minister to fight the Jins together; they won’t breach that agreement.”

Huang Rong was really angry, “I said the Mongolian army! It is the Mongolian army!”

Lu Wende repeatedly nodded his head, “If Miss says it is the Mongolian army, then it is Mongolian army.”

“The whole country and the people’s lives are in the hand of ‘Da Ren’ [lit. big person – common term for government official]. Xiangyang is the Southern Song’s first defense, Da Ren must really care about it,” Guo Jing said.

“Right, right,” Lu Wende said, “What ‘lao xiong’ [‘old chap’] said was absolutely right.”

Jing and Rong two people sighed. They leaped over the wall and went out, amidst the chaotic shouting, “Catch the assassins! Catch the assassins!”

Two people waited for two more days, but did not see any increased activity on the city wall at all. “This Commander is to be cursed!” Guo Jing said, “Father-in-law was right, I’d better kill him and think about something later.”

“The enemy will arrive within the next few days,” Huang Rong said, “Killing this dog government official is not enough. The city will certainly be chaotic, the troops will not have anybody to lead them; it will be difficult to fight the enemy.”

Guo Jing creased his brows, “Then, what do we do?”

Huang Rong hesitated, “The ‘zuo zhuan’ [lit. left biography] has a story called ‘xian gao kao shi’ [Xian Gao presenting a gift to an army]. We might be able to follow this example.”

Guo Jing was delighted, “Rong’er, reading books truly brings endless wonders. What story was that? Quickly narrate it for me. Can we do it?”

Huang Rong said, “We can do it, but it all depends on your body.”

Guo Jing was puzzled, “What?”

Huang Rong did not answer, but she softly laughed.

A moment later she continued, “Very well, I’ll narrate the story for you to hear. During the ‘chun qiu’ period [spring and autumn, ca. 770-476 BC] in the Zheng country there was a merchant whose name was Xian Gao. While doing business out of town he came across the Qin army who was going to attack the Zheng country. That time the Zhengs were not prepared, therefore, if the Qins attacked they would surely perish. Even though Xian Gao was a businessman he was also a patriot. He cooked up a plan. He dispatched a courier traveling at night to alert his country, while he himself prepared twelve oxen and requested an audience with the enemy’s general. He said he represented the Zheng government to present a gift for the Qin army. The Qin’s army general thought that the Zheng had already prepared to battle; he did not dare to proceed and pulled the army back to their own country.”

Guo Jing was delighted, “That was a wonderful story; but what does it have to do with my body?” he asked.

Huang Rong laughed, “Didn’t he use twelve oxen? Your zodiac is the ox, isn’t it?”

Guo Jing threw his hands in desperation, “Good! You used a story to indirectly curse me.” He stretched his fingers to tickle Huang Rong. Huang Rong laughed and ran away.

After having a good laugh, Huang Rong said, “Tonight we’ll plunder the Commander’s residence for gold and precious jewels. Tomorrow I will disguise myself as a male government officer and welcome the great army of Mongolia. We’ll see whether we can deceive them to withdraw their troops.”

Guo Jing applauded.

That very evening two people plundered the Commander’s mansion. They found Lu Wende had amassed riches as high as a mountain. They took away a large amount of gold and jewels plus a set of government official’s costume; while the people inside the mansion slumbered.

Huang Rong dressed herself in the costume and she was transformed into a handsome high-ranking officer. Taking the gold and jewelry she rode the little red horse headed north.

Guo Jing was waiting for the news from Huang Rong outside the north gate about mid-day on the second day when he saw the little red horse came galloping fast; dust flying behind. Huang Rong pulled the rein; her face was ashen. With a trembling voice she said, “The Mongolian army is more than a hundred thousand strong; how can we fight them?”

Guo Jing was shocked! “That many?” he muttered.

“Looked like Genghis Khan has determined to crush the Southern Song in one swoop,” Huang Rong said, “I presented the gift to the commander of their vanguard regiment. He did not know that we are already aware of their real intention; he said they were going to attack the Jins and not the Songs. When I told him point blankly he was startled and immediately held their movement and sent words to their general.”

“It certainly is best if they decided to withdraw, but I am afraid ... I am afraid ...,” Guo Jing said.

Huang Rong raised her beautiful eyebrows. “Judging from their preparation, they won’t withdraw that easily.”

“Can you think of another wonderful idea?” Guo Jing asked.

Huang Rong shook her head. “I have racked my brain for a whole day and a whole night. Brother Jing, if we fight one on one, there are probably only two or three people in the world that can defeat you; even if the enemy is ten or a hundred men strong, we won’t be deterred by them; but the enemy is thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands strong; what can we do?”

Guo Jing heaved a deep sigh. “Our Great Song people are actually dozens times more than the Mongolians. If all the millions people are all of one mind; why would we fear the Mongolian army? It’s a pity our government officials are cowards and fools; that the people have to suffer.”

“The Mongolians are not here yet; even if they were, we can always kill some of them. If the situation becomes really critical we can still depend on the little red horse to escape. The anxiety of this world is enough to burden us down,” Huang Rong said.

Guo Jing’s expression changed, “Rong’er, please don’t say such a thing. Both of us have already learned the art of war from the book ‘Wu Mu’ [General Yue Fei] left behind; how can we forget Yue Wu Mu’s teachings, ‘jin zhong bao guo’ [with utmost loyalty serving the country]? Even though the two of us won’t make significant contribution, but we must dedicate our lives to defend the country with all of our might. Even if we have to lay down our lives here, we won’t let our parents’ and masters’ upbringing in vain.”

Huang Rong sighed, “I knew early on that it would be difficult to avoid a day like this. All right! You live I live, you die I will also die!”

Once these two made a decision, their hearts were peaceful. They returned to their lodging immediately, drinking and chatting. They knew the enemy was threatening the border; they knew they might part forever, so they felt closer than in the previous days.

They were drinking until about the second hour that evening, when suddenly a commotion outside the city wall was heard. It was so loud and sounded really bad. “They are here!” Huang Rong called out.

Two people jumped and rushed to the top of the city wall to see outside the city thousands of refugees had arrived; young and old, endless streams of people rushing to the city. Who would have expected that the captain of the guards had ordered the soldiers to shut the gate tightly; not allowing the refugees to enter the city? Not too long afterwards Lu Wende sent reinforcement with bows and arrows. They started shooting toward the refugees, forcing them to withdraw from the city wall.

“The Mongolian soldiers come and kill us!” the refugees loudly shout. But the captain did not open the gate. The refugees under the city wall cried and screamed, their voices shook the sky.

Jing and Rong two people stood atop the city wall; they looked as far as their eyes could see, and saw in the distant a column of torches flickering in the wind coming near. The vanguard regiment of the Mongolian army had arrived.

Guo Jing had served under the Genghis Khan for quite a while. He knew that the Mongolian's tactic to break city walls was forcing refugees to flee into the city and attack as soon as the city gate was open. Guo Jing saw tens of thousands of refugees gathered around the city gate; as soon as the army arrived, they would kill everybody, outside and inside the Xiangyang's city wall.

In this critical moment Guo Jing made up his mind. He stood on top of the city wall, he raised his arm and loudly shouted, “If the Mongolian army breaks Xiangyang's wall, nobody will live. Men of valor, quickly follow me to kill the enemy!”

The captain of the guards at the north gate was one of Lu Wende's trusted aides; hearing Guo Jing's shout he was angry, “A traitor trying to trouble people's mind; arrest him!”

Guo Jing leaped down from the top of the city wall; stretching his right arm he grabbed the captain's chest, lifted his body up and mounted his horse.

There were many patriots among the soldiers and people of the Central Plains. They saw how the refugees were crying bitterly outside the city wall; they were indignant. This time Guo Jing grabbed the captain they could not help but feel pleasantly surprised; obviously nobody went forward to rescue the captain.

Guo Jing barked his order, “Quick, tell the soldiers to open the gate!”

The captain was a coward; he had no alternative but to comply. The north gate was opened, and the refugees came flooding in.

Guo Jing handed out the captain to Huang Rong while he himself took a spear and went out of the city gate on the horse back. “Wait!” Huang Rong called. She took the captain's helmet and armor and put them on Guo Jing. “Use a fake imperial decree; command the troop to go out of the city,” she whispered in Guo Jing's ear. With the back of her hand Huang Rong struck the captain's acupoint and threw him by the city gate.

Guo Jing thought it was a great idea, so he shouted loud and clear, “Hear the imperial decree: Due to his incapability, the Garrison Commander Lu Wende is removed from his duty. The army is to follow me going out of the city and fight the enemy.” His speech was supported by profound internal strength; so that although the city was in chaos but his voice was clearly heard above the clamoring people. For a brief moment everybody was quiet. In this panic-stricken situation who could differentiate whether the decree was real or not? Almost everybody in the army, from top to bottom, did not hold Lu Wende in high regard; they knew he was a coward, afraid of death. This time a powerful enemy was threatening their border. In this time of panic suddenly hearing that the corrupt official is being removed from his office and somebody stepping up to lead them to face the enemy, they were cheering with one voice.

Guo Jing lead about six, seven thousands of infantry and cavalry troops going out of the city. They were not observing military discipline, the troop was scattered in disorder; how could they be compared to the refined Mongolian army?

Guo Jing recalled Yue Fei’s book had this principle, ‘in a critical situation, use unconventional tactic’, he ordered over three thousands soldiers and their sergeants to hide on the eastern hillside; as they heard the canon once, they were to shout at the top of their lungs, raising and waving flags, but did not go out to fight the enemy. Then he ordered another three thousands soldiers and their sergeants to hide on the western hillside; as they heard the canon twice, they were to do the same.

Both companies could see Guo Jing’s confidence, giving up orders with ease and competence; they accepted the command and went to their respective positions.

It was already dawn when the entire refugees had entered the city. They heard the drums and the battle cry, the sound of iron horseshoes treading on the ground. They also saw the dust rising from the earth; the vanguard regiment of Mongolian army had arrived at the city wall.

Huang Rong had also donned battle armor; mounting on a horse she took a spear and rode next to Guo Jing to face death. Guo Jing gave his order loud and clear, “Open wide all four city gates! Everybody in the city hide inside the houses. Whoever dares to come out will be beheaded immediately!”

Actually he did not need to issue this order; early on everybody in the city had disappeared into the houses, while the brave soldiers had positioned themselves on the east and western hillsides. Lu Wende hid underneath a table, busily read his prayers with a trembling voice.

Hundreds of Mongolian cavalry galloped like the wind spreading out along the city wall; they saw Xiangyang's city gate was wide open and a pair of young people, a man and a woman, on horsebacks with spears in their hands. Their horses stood in front of the hanging bridge across the moat.

The vanguard regiment's 'qian fu zhang' [leader of a thousand unit] felt strange; he did not dare to proceed without authorization. Quickly he dispatched a messenger to the 'wan fu zhang' [leader of a ten thousand unit]. The 'wan fu zhang' was a veteran; listening to this strange report he rode his horse to the city wall. When he saw Guo Jing he was shocked. He had joined the expedition to the west, time and again he had seen Guo Jing's strange and wonderful tactics in battle. Guo Jing's troops were invincible. His paratroopers flying down and breaking Samarkhand defense was a legend, making Guo Jing the object of full admiration of the whole Mongolian army; as a matter of fact, his accomplishments were still the talk of the troops. This time he saw Guo Jing was standing in front of the city, while the city looked empty and deserted; how could he dare to attack? Immediately he dismounted his horse, raised his hands in salute and called out, "Jin dao fu ma [golden blade consort], your subordinate pays his respect."

Guo Jing returned his salute, but did not say anything. That 'wan fu zhang' withdrew and flew to report to his commander-in-chief. About an hour or so later a group of riders bearing a large military banner came near; a young looking general came forward to the bridge. It was the Fourth Prince Tuolei. He shouted, "Guo Jing Anda [Mongolian term for sworn brother], how are you?"

Guo Jing moved his horse forward and said, "Tuolei Anda, so it is you?"

Whenever these two sworn brothers met in the past, they would always hugged each other in delight, but this time both of them held their horses' reins when they were still about five 'zhang's [about 50 feet or 15 meters] apart as if they had a prior agreement.

"Anda, you are leading your troop to attack my Great Song, are you not?" Guo Jing asked.

"I bear my 'fu huang's [Emperor Father] decree, I don't have liberty. I ask for your forgiveness," Tuolei replied.

Guo Jing swept his gaze across the field; he saw flags fluttering like clouds, the blades gleaming white like snow; he did not know for sure how many soldiers were there. "Once this cavalry attacks, I, Guo Jing, will give up my life," he thought. With a clear voice he said, "Very well! Then go ahead and take my life!"

Tuolei was taken aback, he mused, “This man commands an army like a deity, truly I am not his match; much less he and I are as close as flesh and blood brothers. How could I injure this sworn brother’s relationship?” He hesitated and did not know what to do.

Huang Rong turned her head and signaled with her right hand. Immediately the soldiers in the city shot a canon. As soon as they heard the canon, the soldiers on the eastern hillside raised their voices and waved their flags. Tuolei’s face changed. The canon was shot again, and the soldiers on the western hillside were also shouting loudly. Tuolei thought, “Not good! I fell into his ambush.”

Tulei had served under Genghis Khan fighting to the east and attacking to the west; he had been in countless battles. What major battle he had not seen? How could this little ambush by several thousands soldiers scare him? It was because during the expedition to the west Guo Jing had demonstrated wonderful and strange warfare. Tuolei was already scared of Guo Jing. Now he saw the situation was unusual, he was afraid he might fall into Guo Jing’s trap. He gave an order for his troops to withdraw about thirty ‘li’s and pitched a camp there.

Seeing the Mongolian army retreat, Guo Jing and Huang Rong looked at each other and smiled. “Jing Gege, congratulations on your empty city tactic.”

Guo Jing smiled, but his face still showed anxiety, he said, “Tuolei is smart and brave. He retreated today, but he will be back tomorrow. How would we fight him?”

Huang Rong hesitated for half a day before opened her mouth, “I have an idea, but I am afraid you love your sworn brother too much and will not be willing to do it.”

Guo Jing’s heart turned cold, “You want me to assassinate him?” he asked.

“He is the youngest and most beloved son of the Great Khan,” Huang Rong replied, “Unlike other senior generals, he holds incomparable honors. If the Fourth Prince dies, the troops will retreat immediately.”

Guo Jing lowered his head without saying anything; they turned back and entered the city. Seeing the enemy retreat, the troops marched back to the city, still in disorderly manner. Lu Wende heard how Guo Jing made the enemy retreat simply by talking; he was overjoyed and immediately paid two people a visit at their lodgings, inviting them back to his mansion for a drink.

Guo Jing wanted to discuss city defense with him, but as soon as Lu Wende heard that the Mongolian army would be back the next day his knees weakened and he was speechless for half a day. When he finally opened his mouth what he said was, “Prepare a sedan chair, I am going home. Prepare a sedan chair, I am going home.” He determined to abandon the city and head south that very same night.

Guo Jing was very depressed, he could not eat. The sky gradually darkened. He heard people crying all over the city. He was afraid that by this time the next day there wouldn't be a single living Great Song people in Xiangyang. He had seen not a few times where the Mongolian troops were on a killing spree, washing the city wall they subdued with the blood of the people. He could never take the massacre of the people of Samarkhand out of his mind. “Crack!” he slapped the table with his palm and shouted, “Rong'er, the people of old sacrificed their own family for the country; today how can I concern myself with sworn brotherhood?”

Huang Rong sighed, “This is actually a very difficult matter.”

As soon as his mind was made up, Guo Jing changed into night clothing. Together with Huang Rong they rode the little red horse toward the Mongolian camp. They stopped at a hill nearby to leave the red horse then walked the rest of the way, looking for Tuolei's tent.

They caught two night watch guards, sealed their acupoints, and donned their uniforms. Guo Jing grew up among the Mongolian warriors; he spoke their language, and was familiar with Mongolian army regulations; so without too much effort they found the big tent where Tuolei slept.

It was a pitch black night; two people crouched down behind the big tent, peeking inside through the tent seams. They saw Tuolei was pacing back and forth, his face gloomy. Tuolei was muttering, “Guo Jing, Anda! Anda, Guo Jing.”

Guo Jing was startled; he thought his presence had been detected. He almost opened his mouth to answer when Huang Rong, who had anticipated early on what would happen, immediately covered his mouth with her hand. Guo Jing silently cursed his own stupidity, he felt partly funny, partly mad at himself.

Huang Rong whispered in his ear, “Do it now, a real man takes the bull by the horns; wavering is useless.”

Right at that moment they heard a distant sound of horse hoof galloping fast; the sound was getting closer as the rider came toward the big tent. Guo Jing knew it was an urgent military dispatch, so he bent back down and whispered in Huang Rong's ear, "I want to listen to the military situation, it won't be too late to kill him later."

They saw the messenger dressed in yellow dismount his horse and enter the tent. He bowed to Tuolei, "Fourth Prince, a message from the Great Khan," he said.

"What did the Great Khan say?" Tuolei asked. The messenger bent his knees and started to sing. The Mongolian culture had not been developed too long; although they had written words, Genghis Khan was not literate; he could neither read nor write. The decree would be issued orally; and to avoid mistakes in the transmission, oftentimes the decree was made into a song which the messenger memorized and recited over and over along the way before finally delivering it to the recipient.

The messenger only sang three lines when Toulei and Guo Jing were both shocked; Tuolei even shed some tears. It turned out that after the expedition to the west Genghis Khan got sick; for the last few days he got worse, sometimes he lost consciousness. He summoned Tuolei to go back home as soon as he could. At the end of his message he said that he missed Guo Jing very much; and if Tuolei in the south knew his whereabouts, to invite him back north and bade farewell with the Great Khan. Khan had pardoned every single offense he had committed.

Listening to this part Guo Jing used his dagger to rip open the tent. He jumped in and called out, "Tuolei Anda, I am coming with you."

Tuolei was startled, but seeing it was Guo Jing his delight was unspeakable. Finally they both hugged each other.

The messenger recognized Guo Jing, he stepped forward and knelt in front of Guo Jing and said, "Jin dao fu ma, the Great Khan requested you come to the Golden Tent to see him."

Hearing the messenger still called him 'jin dao fu ma' Guo Jing was anxious for fear that Huang Rong would make a big deal out of it. Immediately he jumped out through the rip on the tent and pull Huang Rong's hand, "Rong'er, you and I will go together and return together."

Huang Rong lowered her head but did not say anything.

“Don’t you believe me?” Guo Jing nervously asked.

Huang Rong smiled sweetly, “If you are still thinking of becoming ‘fu ma’ or ‘fu niu’ [fu ma – consort, ma – horse, niu – cow], I’ll kill you with this dagger.”

That very evening Tuolei issued an order to withdraw the army; they would be leaving at daybreak.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong went back to get the red horse and their pair of eagles, ready to leave with the army heading north the next morning.

Tuolei was afraid he would not be able to see his father, so he delegated his command to his second in command, while he himself sped up north with Guo Jing and Huang Rong.

In less than a month they had arrived at Genghis Khan’s golden tent. From the distant Tuolei saw in front of the golden tent nine big banners were still fluttering in the wind. He knew the Khan was still well; he shouted in joy and urged the horse to run faster.

Guo Jing held his rein. He recalled Khan’s generosity in raising him up; yet the same Khan had caused the tragic death of his mother. He loved and hated Khan at the same time. He lowered his head and did not say anything.

Suddenly he heard the bugle being sounded, two rows of Khan’s personal guards lined up in front of the Golden Tent. Genghis Khan, wearing a black eagle’s feather coat, walked out in big strides supported by Tuolei’s shoulder. His footsteps were as majestic as in days past, but he was trembling slightly.

Guo Jing rushed forward and knelt down. Genghis Khan’s eyes were brimming with tears, with a trembling voice he said, “Get up, get up! I am thinking of you every day.”

Guo Jing stood up. He saw the Great Khan’s face was full of wrinkles; his cheeks were deep, it looked like his days in this world were numbered. Suddenly he felt he did not hate Khan that much anymore.

Genghis Khan placed his other hand on Guo Jing’s left shoulder. He looked at Tuolei, then at Guo Jing, and heaved a deep sigh. He lifted up his eyes to the distant desert and stood silent, lost in thought. Guo Jing and Tuolei did not know what he was thinking, they did not dare to make any noise.

After a long time Genghis Khan sighed, “A long time ago Anda Jamuqa and I became sworn brothers; who would have thought that there came a day when I had no choice but to kill him. I have become the Great Khan; he died under my own hands. A few more days and what difference will we have? Won’t I be the same with him, return to the yellow dirt? Who succeeds and who fails, in the end what difference does it make?” Tapping both men’s shoulders he continued, “You two have to live in harmony from the beginning to the end; don’t ever think of killing each other. Anda Jamuqa had died, the matter between us is finished; but every time I remembered our brotherhood, many, many nights I could not close my eyes to sleep.”

Tuolei and Guo Jing remembered how they almost killed each other outside the Xiangyang’s city gate, they were secretly ashamed.

After standing up for a while Genghis Khan felt tired. He was about to return to his tent when suddenly a small group of riders approached fast. The one in the front wore a white robe with a golden belt on his waist. As soon as Genghis Khan saw his enemy, his spirit rose.

The men held their reins quite a distance away, dismounted their horses and anxiously stepped forward. They kneeled on the ground from a far, did not dare to approach at all. Respectfully the leader said, “The Jin emissary seeks an audience with the Great Khan.”

“The Jin is not willing to surrender, what does it want by sending someone to see me?” Genghis Khan angrily asked.

That emissary bowed to the ground and said, “Our lowly country realized that we have been too bold; offending the divine power of the Great Khan; a crime deserving death. We are offering one thousand pearls to appease the Great Khan’s anger; we are asking the Great Khan to pardon our sins. These thousand pearls are our country’s heritage treasure; we earnestly hope the Great Khan would accept this humble gift.” The emissary took a big bundle from his back, produced a jade tray, and again from his sack poured innumerable pearls onto the tray. He knelt on the ground and lifted the tray high above his head with both hands.

Genghis Khan slightly squinted and looked at the pearls; those were big pearls, about the size of a fingertip each, surrounding a giant pearl in the middle of the tray. Just one pearl would worth a fortune, let alone a thousand of them. Except for the giant pearl in the middle, the rest of them were roughly of the same size. The pearls were gleaming

brilliantly under the sun light; there was a layer of rainbow-like light above the jade tray.

On a normal day Genghis Khan would love this kind of gift; but that particular day he only raised his eyebrows and to his personal guard said, “Take it.” The personal guard took the jade tray.

Seeing the Great Khan accepted the gift, the emissary’s joy was unbounded. He said, “The Great Khan has accepted our humble gift; our lowly nation, from the ruler to the people, are very grateful.”

Genghis Khan was indignant, “Who said I accept your gift? I am going to dispatch my army to attack the Jin dogs left and right. Seize him!” His personal guards immediately surrounded the emissary and his men.

“Even if there are a thousand more pearls, it is still difficult for me to live longer!” Genghis Khan sighed. He took the jade tray from his guard and threw everything high in the air; the pearls scattered everywhere. Everybody was startled.

Many of these pearls were later picked up by the Mongolian soldiers and people; but many more were still hidden among the tall grass that hundreds of years later lucky herdsmen would find them.

Genghis Khan was indifferent, he returned to his tent.

That evening just before dusk he told Guo Jing to accompany him for a stroll along the prairie. Two people on horseback had ridden for about a dozen of li’s when they heard the cry of eagles high above their heads. They looked up and saw Guo Jing’s pair of eagles circling in the air. Genghis Khan fetched his iron bow and aimed the arrow toward the female eagle.

“Great Khan, don’t shoot!” Guo Jing cried out in alarm.

Although Genghis Khan was feeble, his hand was still quick; by the time Guo Jing cried, the arrow had already left the bow. Guo Jing secretly groaned, he was fully aware that Genghis Khan had an outstanding physical strength. Once the arrow left his bow his beloved eagle would be killed for sure. Who would have thought that the eagle was able to skew itself and sweep its wing to strike the arrow. The male eagle was angry, it let out a long cry and dived to strike Genghis Khan’s head.

“Eagle, you want to die?” Guo Jing barked and raised his whip to hit the male eagle. The male eagle saw its master was angry flew back to the sky, letting out a loud cry a pair of eagles soared to the sky.

Genghis Khan was dejected, he threw his bow and arrow to the ground and sadly said, “For dozens of years this is the first time I could not shoot an eagle down; I guess my time is drawing really near.”

Gou Jing wanted to console him but actually he did not know anything good to say. Suddenly Genghis Khan kicked his legs and his horse sped to the north. Guo Jing was afraid he would be lost, so he urged his horse to follow. The little red horse ran like the wind and in a blink of an eye they caught up with the Great Khan.

Genghis Khan held his rein; looking at all direction he suddenly said, “Jing’er, I built this great country; no other dynasty, past or future, can match its splendor. It will take one full year to travel from the center of my kingdom to the outermost part of it, east, west, south and north. Tell me, among the heroes of the world, who achieved more than I do?”

Guo Jing hesitated a moment before answering, “Great Khan’s accomplishment is exceptional, no one can match it since time immemorial. However, for Great Khan one person to achieve this level of awe-inspiring power, I don’t know how many bones have been piled up, how many orphans and widows out there, and how many tears have been shed?”

Genghis Khan’s eyebrows were raised. He lifted his horsewhip high, ready to strike Guo Jing’s head; but seeing Guo Jing imposingly looking at him without any trace of fear in his eyes, his whip stopped midair. He roared, “What did you say?”

Guo Jing said in his heart, “After today the days for me to say goodbye to the Great Khan are numbered; even if I provoke him to anger I have to make him understand what’s in my heart.” Therefore, fearlessly he said, “Great Khan, you raised me up and taught me, yet you also caused my mother’s tragic death. This is personal grudge and gratitude; let us not talk about it. I only want to ask you: when somebody died and buried, how much land would he occupy?”

Genghis Khan was startled, but he answered anyway, “About this big,” he made a circle with his whip.

Guo Jing said, “That’s right. Then you killed so many people, shed so much blood, and invaded so many countries; in the end, what’s the use of all that?”

Genghis Khan was silent.

Guo Jing continued, “The true measure of a real hero, the one admired by the future generation, is how much he did for the benefit of his people; who always seek the good of the common people. In my opinion, someone who killed many people is not necessarily a hero.” [Translator’s note: the word ‘hero’ here is ‘ying xiong’.]

“Are you saying that in all my life I did not do a single good deed?” Genghis Khan asked.

“Good deeds, certainly there are many, but you attacked the south and conquered the west, piling dead bodies like a mountain. Whether that act could be considered right or wrong, might be very difficult to say,” Guo Jing answered. His natural disposition was simple and straightforward, he said what was in his heart.

All of his life Genghis Khan was a conceited man, nobody dared to tell him anything. This time he was scolded by a youngster, worse yet, he found it difficult to refute what Guo Jing had said. He looked back to his past, also looked around him on the horseback. He felt something is suddenly taken away from him. Half a day later, ‘wah!’ he spurted fresh blood to the ground.

Guo Jing was scared, he realized his tongue had been too sharp; busily he held out his hand to support the Khan and said, “Great Khan, let’s go back and rest. I have been too bold and affronted you, I beg for your forgiveness.”

Genghis Khan gave a slight wry smile, his face was pale like a yellow wax, he sighed, “Among the people around me, there is none who is as bold as you are, dare to tell me what you really think in your heart.” Immediately his eyebrows were raised, put an arrogant face and proudly said, “I have wandered back and fro over the earth, crushing countless countries, yet in your opinion I can’t be counted as a hero? Hey! It truly is childish talk!” He raised his whip and struck his horse’s back, speeding back to his tent.

That very evening Genghis Khan collapsed inside his Golden Tent. Just before he died he mumbled, “Hero ... hero ...” Apparently he had been pondering in his heart what Guo Jing had said earlier.

Guo Jing and Huang Rong paid their final respect to the Great Khan; and after bidding Tuolei farewell, they headed south that very same day.

Along the way two people saw the white bones that were scattered among the tall grass of the prairie; they could not refrain from lamenting incessantly; both were thinking that the two of them loved each other, they would live harmoniously, they did not have any regrets; yet the common people's misery was deep; they did not know the day peace and prosperity would reign on earth. It was as written:

*After the soldiers and fire become ashes,
Only then the poor village sprouting families.
No one's to know when the war is over,
Until they are buried in the cold sand under the waning moon.*

(The end of the entire book. The narration of Guo Jing, Huang Rong, and the others' accomplishment is continued in the 'Divine Eagle, Gallant Knights'.)

THE END



Blog at WordPress.com.