

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

YTTLJ Chapter 16



Chapter 16 – If All Failed, Consult the Nine Yang

Translated by Foxs



He saw a large skin ulcer on the big white ape's belly, with a faint trace of pus and blood. The ulcer was no more than an inch in diameter, but the hard area around it was more than ten times larger. When he looked closer, he saw a more or less a rectangular bump on the abdomen. All four sides of the bump were sewn, apparently it was a human handiwork.

Zhang Wuji continued crawling through the passageway for several more 'zhang'. The light was growing brighter, until suddenly he was dazzled by the bright sunlight. He had to close his eyes to calm down for a while before opening his eyes again. To his sur-

prise, in front of him was a jade-green valley with clusters of bright flower bushes; the flowers were red, the trees green, complementing each other to deliver this dazzling scenery. He shouted in glee and crawled out of the cave.

The mouth of the cave was actually about a 'zhang' above the ground [reminder: 1 zhang is approximately 10ft or 3m]. He lightly jumped down and landed on a layer of soft fine grass. His nose smelled the clear and quiet fragrance of flowers; his ears heard the chirping birds from the mountain pass, and he saw fresh fruits hanging from tree branches. Who would have thought that beyond the dark cave lay such a paradise like this?

Forgetting all his wounds and pain, he let his feet loose and ran forward. After about two 'li' [1 li is approximately 0.5km], another peak blocked the way. Looking at all directions, he noticed that this jade-green valley was surrounded by tall peaks; apparently there have never been any human in this place. The tip of the peaks on the four sides all were hidden behind the cloud, the cliff was very steep, it seemed like nobody would be able to climb it.

Zhang Wuji was delighted. He saw seven, eight mountain goats were grazing on the meadow, and the goats were not scared of him. On the trees there were dozens of monkeys playing around by leaping from branch to branch, apparently because tigers, leopards or other predators were heavier, they were not able to climb over the perilous peaks. He thought, "Laotianye [the Heaven] indeed treats me not so bad, he prepares for me this kind of fairyland as my burial place."

Strolling back to the mouth of the cave, he heard Zhu Changling shouting from the other end, "Xiao Xiongdi, come out! Aren't you afraid of dying of suffocation in this cave?"

"It's so fun in here!" Zhang Wuji replied with a laugh. He picked a fruit from a dwarf tree whose name he did not know. He held it in his hand and smelled its sweet fragrance. Taking a bite, he found out that the fruit was delicious beyond comparison. Peach would not this be crisp, apple would not be this fragrant, while pear would not be this creamy. He took one of the fruits and tossed it to the cave, while calling out, "Take this! Something delicious is coming your way!"

As the fruit went through the cave, it bumped several times on the rock wall so that by the time it reached Zhu Changling, it was already smashed and mushy. But when he took a bite and chewed it, his appetite was roused that he was hungrier than ever. "Xiao Xiongdi," he called out, "Give me some more."

“You are a man of wicked conscience,” Zhang Wuji called back, “You deserve to die of starvation. If you want more, then come and get it yourself.”

“My body is too big,” Zhu Changling replied, “I can’t go through the cave.”

Zhang Wuji laughed, “If you cut yourself in halves, won’t you be able to come here?” he said.

Zhu Changling realized his plot had failed and been exposed; Zhang Wuji wanted him to die of starvation to avenge his hatred. In the meantime, the pain on his chest was worsening; he opened his mouth to shout curses, “Thief little rascal, can the fruits in this cave feed you for the rest of your life? I will die of starvation outside, but no more than three days you will also die of starvation.” Zhang Wuji ignored him, he took seven, eight more fruits and had his fill.

About half a day later, a sudden wisp of thick smoke puffed out of the mouth of the cave. Zhang Wuji was startled, but then he realized that Zhu Changling must have ignited pine branches outside the cave, supposing that he would force Zhang Wuji to come out by smoking him. He did not know that there was another world at the other end of the cave, so that it would be useless even if he burned a thousand or ten thousand piculs [1 picul = 100 catties, approximately 50 kg] of pine wood. But just for the fun of it, he pretended to cough loudly.

“Xiao Xiongdi,” Zhu Changling called out, “Come out! I promise not to harm you in any way.”

“Aahhhhh ...” Zhang Wuji cried out as if he was fainting, and then he left the cave.

Walking to the west for about two ‘li’, he saw a large waterfall falling heavily down from a cliff, which he thought must be from the melted snow. Under the sunlight the falling water looked like a giant jade dragon in all its magnificence. The water flowed into a clear dark-green pool, but the pool did not overflow, so there must be another way through which the water drained from the pool.

After enjoying the scenery for half a day, he looked down and saw his hands and feet were filthy with moss and mud, plus countless cuts and bruises from the thorns and coarse grass; thereupon he went to the edge of the pool, took out his shoes and socks, and washed his feet in the pool water.

After washing for a while, suddenly ‘splash!’ a big white fish jumped from the water, it was about a foot long. Zhang Wuji quickly reached out to grab. He was able to touch the fish, but it slipped and fell back into the water. Zhang Wuji leaned over the pool edge to look down into the water. He saw about a dozen big white fish swimming back and forth in the dark green water. Catching fish was a skill he had learned since his childhood on the Bing Huo Island, thereupon he broke two stiff branches and sharpened one end. He then waited patiently by the edge of the pool. As soon as another fish jumped out of the water, he thrust the spear with all his strength and it pierced the fish body. He cheered, and then with the sharpened branch he cut the fish and cleaned its intestines. Gathering some dried wood, he took out his fire blade, flint and fire cloth to build a fire and roast the fish. Shortly the aroma floated everywhere. As soon as the fish was cooked, he enjoyed the smooth and tender, delicious roast fish. He could not remember ever eating this kind of tasty fish before. In just a short moment the big fish was cleaned to its bone.

The next day he caught another big white fish and roasted it. He thought, “Since I am not going to die soon, I’d better leave the fire on, otherwise the fire cloth will be used up quickly and then it will be troublesome.” Thereupon he gathered the ashes and put the partly burned firewood inside to keep it burning. All household appliances on the Bing Huo Island were homemade, so living alone in the wilderness like this was not foreign to him. He made a pot from clay, and spread some straw as his bed.

Busily working until the evening, he remembered that Zhu Changling must be very hungry, thereupon he picked a big fresh fruit and tossed it through the cave. He was afraid if he gave Zhu Changling some fish, his strength might increase and perhaps he would be able to break through the hole and give him trouble; therefore, he never gave him any roasted fish.

By the fourth day, Zhang Wuji was busy building a clay furnace when he heard some miserable cry of a monkey. It sounded so urgent that he rushed toward the noise. He saw that a little monkey was lying on the ground next to a cliff. One of the monkey’s feet was crushed under a rock that it could not move. It seemed like the monkey lost its footing and fell from the steep cliff.

He lifted the rock and pulled the monkey up, but the monkey’s right leg was broken. It cried out in pain. Zhang Wuji picked two straight branches as splint to connect the monkey’s broken bone. Next he looked for some herbal medicine, which he chewed mushy and applied it to the wound. Although it was difficult to seek effective herbal medicine in this valley and the medicine he applied did not have any miraculous effect, the broken bones were healing well because of his bone-mending skill.

Unexpectedly, the little monkey was grateful and wanted to repay the kindness. The second day the monkey returned, bringing lots of fresh fruits for him. Ten days later, the broken leg was completely healed. Since Zhang Wuji did not have anything to do, he spent his days playing with the monkey. If not for the cold poison occasionally flaring up, his life in that secluded valley could be called carefree and happy. Sometimes he saw wild goats grazing by. He had a thought of catching one and roasting it over the fire, but seeing the goats were so tame, he did not have the heart to kill them. Fortunately he had enough fruits on the trees and fish in the pool, so he never lacked food.

A few days later, he succeeded in catching several snow birds, which enhanced his appetite greatly. In this way he already passed more than one month. One early morning, while he had not completely awakened, he suddenly felt a large hairy hand gently stroking him on the face. He was greatly startled and jumped up, only to see a large white ape squatting by his side, holding the little monkey, with which he used to play every day, in its arm. The little monkey was squeaking and chattering incessantly with its finger pointed toward the big ape's belly.

Zhang Wuji smelled a whiff of nasty odor, like rotten meat; he saw a faint trace of pus and blood on the white ape's belly, which looked like a large skin ulcer. He smiled and said, "Alright, alright! Turned out you are bringing a sick person to see the great doctor!"

The large white ape extended its left hand, with a 'pan tao' [from the dictionary: the peaches of immortality kept by Xi Wangmu] about the size of a fist, which it respectfully presented to Zhang Wuji. Seeing this bright red and plump 'pan tao', Zhang Wuji mused, "Mama told me a legend about the immortal goddess Wangmu of Kunlun Mountain, who held a 'pan tao' feast every year on her birthday, inviting other immortals. Xi Wangmu might not exist; but the fact that Kunlun Mountain indeed produces large 'pan tao' is certainly undeniable." With a laugh he said, "I normally do not take payment; even without 'xian tao' [immortal peach], I will still treat your sore."

He reached out to gently feel the white ape's belly and could not help but feel shocked. The white ape's malignant ulcer was no more than an inch in diameter, but the hard area around it was more than ten times larger. He had never read about this kind of malignant boil in the medical manual. Supposing this hard area was full with pus and was rotten, then this boil might be incurable. He pressed his finger on the white ape's wrist to feel its pulse, but did not find anything to cause him any concern. Next he opened up the long hair covering the ape's abdomen to look at the ulcer again. He was more shocked, because there was more or less a rectangular bump on the abdomen. All

four sides of the bump were sewn. Apparently it was a human handiwork, because no matter how intelligent apes and monkeys are, they had never learned how to use needle and thread.

Looking at the boil more carefully, he deduced that the bump was the culprit, it pressed on a blood vessel and stopped the blood from flowing that the flesh around it was gangrenous and became a long lasting boil. If he wished to treat the ulcer, he must remove whatever object sewn inside the ape's abdomen. Speaking about performing operation to treat injury, he had mastered the skill taught by Hu Qingniu, and thus it should be an easy and simple procedure. However, he did not have any knife or scissors with him, also no medication whatsoever. This might pose some problems.

After contemplating for a while, he picked a rock and threw it with all his might against another rock that it smashed into pieces. He chose one piece with a sharp edge and corner, with which he slowly cut the thread sewn on the white ape's belly. The white ape was very old and was intelligent, it knew Zhang Wuji was trying to treat its injury; therefore, although it felt severe pain on its abdomen, with a strong willpower it endured the pain and did not make even a single move.

After cutting the right and upper side of the stitches, Zhang Wuji made a slanting cut to the skin on the corner, which was healed a long time ago; he saw an oilcloth package hidden in the ape's belly. He felt even more strange; but he did not have time to open the package. He set it aside and busily sewed the abdomen skin back. Since he had no needle and thread, he used the fishbone as the needle, piercing the skin one hole at a time, and then used tree bark as the thread, tying the small holes together. With great difficulty he finished mending the cut, and then he applied some herbal medicine on the wound. He was busy for more than half a day before everything was in order. Although the white ape was strong, by this time it lay on the ground, motionless.

Zhang Wuji washed of the bloodstain from his hands and the oilcloth, then he opened the package. Inside were four thin books of scriptures. Because the oil cloth was watertight, although the books were hidden inside the ape's abdomen for a long time, the pages were still intact without any sign of damage.

The pages were filled with curvy and squiggly characters, which Zhang Wuji did not recognize. Browsing up all four books, he found that these strange characters were used in all the books, but in between the lines he saw tiny Chinese characters, as small as a fly's head. After calming himself down, he started from the first line, and found that the content of the book was actually some secret instructions on cultivating and applying 'chi' and energy. He slowly read from top to bottom; suddenly his heart

skipped a beat, for he read three lines with which he was very familiar. It was the ‘Wudang Jiu Yang Gong’ [Wudang’s Nine Yang Energy] he learned from Tai Shifu [grand master, referring to Zhang Sanfeng] and his Yu Erbo [second (older) uncle Yu, referring to Yu Lianzhou], only the subsequent part was different.

Casually browsing through, after several pages he read another sentence of the ‘Wudang Jiu Yang Gong’, but all in all the theory differed greatly from the one taught by Tai Shifu and Yu Erbo. His heart was beating wild as he closed the book and pondered deeply, “What manual is this? Why does it contain sentences of the ‘Wudang Jiu Yang Gong’? But why is it different from the one taught at our Wudang school? Furthermore, it seems like this manual is ten times more complete than ours?”

Thinking to this point, he remembered the story told by Tai Shifu when he was taking him to Shaolin Temple: Tai Shifu’s master was called Reverend Jueyuan, he mastered the ‘Jiu Yang Zhen Jing’ [nine ‘yang’ (positive, sun, male, etc.) real/true scripture, in this series it is commonly translated as ‘Nine Yang Manual’], which he recited from memory just before he passed away. Tai Shifu, Heroine Guo Xiang, and Reverend Wuse of Shaolin Pai, three people, each remember parts of it. As a result, Wudang, Emei and Shaolin, three Sects, enjoyed tremendous advancement in martial arts, and were regarded as equals in the past dozens of years, their names shook the Wulin world.

“Could it be that this is the stolen Nine Yang Manual?” he mused, “That’s right, Tai Shifu said that the Nine Yang Manual was written inside the ‘Lengjia Jing’ [Lankavatara Sutra]. These squiggly and curvy characters must be the Lankavatara Sutra in Sankrit. But why is it inside the ape’s belly?”

This four-volume book was indeed the Nine Yang Manual; as for why it was hidden inside the ape’s abdomen, no one in this generation knew. More than ninety years ago, Xiao Xiangzi and Yin Kexi stole the manual from the Shaolin Temple library, for which crime they were pursued by Reverend Jueyuan to the summit of Huashan [Mount Hua in Shaanxi] without any chance of escaping. It so happened that they had this dark grey ape with them, so they had an idea: they cut open the dark grey ape’s belly, and hid the manual inside. Later on, Jueyuan, Zhang Sanfeng, Yang Guo, and the others searched Xiao Xiangzi and Yin Kexi’s bodies thoroughly, but failed to find the manual, so that they let the two, along the dark grey ape, go down the mountain. [Author’s note: please read ‘Divine Eagle Gallant Knights’] And thus the Nine Yang Manual’s whereabouts became the great mystery of the Wulin World for approximately a hundred years.

Later, Xiao Xiangzi and Yin Kexi took their dark grey ape and went to the far away Western Region. The two of them were suspicious of each other; each of them feared

that when the other one had mastered the martial art of the Manual, he would kill him. Thereupon they kept their eyes on each other and neither dared to take the manual out from the ape's belly. Finally they arrived at the Jing Shen Peak of Kunlun Mountains; Yin and Xiao two people were plotting against each other. They fought until both of them sustained injuries. Thereafter this supreme manual of internal energy cultivation stayed hidden inside the dark grey ape's abdomen.

Actually, Xiao Xiangzi's martial art skill was slightly better than Yin Kexi's, but because he was hit by Reverend Jueyuan's fist on Mount Hua, his internal strength was shaken and he suffered serious injury; hence when he fought Yin Kexi later, he was killed instead of scoring a victory.

At the point of his death, Yin Kexi met 'Kunlun San Sheng' [Three Sages of Kunlun], He Zudao. Pricked by his own conscience, Yin Kexi asked He Zudao to go to Shaolin Temple and tell Reverend Jueyuan that the books were inside this ape's belly. However, by that time he was already delirious that his speech was incoherent; he said 'jing zai hou zhong' [scriptures inside the monkey], He Zudao heard it as 'jing zai you zhong' [scriptures inside the oil]. He Zudao did keep his promise; he went to the distant Central Plains and conveyed the message 'jing zai you zhong' to Reverend Jueyuan. Jueyuan failed to comprehend the meaning of the message. Rather than talking about it, he stirred up a big disturbance instead. As a result, the Wulin world enjoyed the addition of Wudang and Emei, two Sects.

As for the dark grey ape, it was fortunate to have Kunlun Mountain's immortal peach as its diet; with the spiritual influence of the heavens and the earth, after more than ninety years it was still capable of jumping around as if flying. The dark grey and shiny long hair covering its entire body gradually turned snow-white that it turned into a white ape. It was just that the manual hidden inside its belly had caused a digestive system problem that from time to time it suffered stomach ache. Finally the malignant skin ulcer was developed on its belly, which lasted until today, when Zhang Wuji took the books out. Speaking of this white ape, it had entrusted its great misfortune to a trusted friend. This whole story was so complicated that even if there were someone with intelligence a hundred times better than Zhang Wuji in the world, he would definitely not able to deduce it.

Zhang Wuji was lost in thought for half a day. Realizing he would not be able to solve this riddle, he did not take the trouble to think about it further. He took the big 'pan tao' presented by the white ape and took a bite, enjoying the fresh sweetness of the juice slowly flowing into his throat. It was indisputably better than the nameless fruits he found in the valley.

Finished eating the 'pan tao', Zhang Wuji thought, "Tai Shifu once said that if I can practice the 'Jiu Yang Shen Gong' [nine 'yang' divine strength/power] of Shaolin, Wudang and Emei, three Sects, then I can drive the cold poison away from my body. These three Sects' Jiu Yang Gong all came from the Nine Yang Manual. If this book is indeed the Nine Yang Manual and I practice according to it, then the end result will far exceed the result if I practice the three Sects' divine power separately. Since I have nothing to do in this valley, I'd better practice according to this book. Supposing my guess is wrong; that this book is actually useless, so much so that it is harmful to me, the worst that can happen to me is death anyway."

Without anything to weigh his heart down, he put the other three volumes of the manual on a dry place. He spread some straw over the books, and put three big rocks on top, for fear that the monkeys, being mischievous, would fight over the books and perhaps would tear the books apart into pieces. With the first volume in his hand, he started by reading it several times to commit its contents to his memory. Afterwards he would try to understand it and only then he would start practicing the first sentence. His thought was, 'Even if I succeeded in cultivating the divine strength from the book, and managed to repel the cold poison, I would still be imprisoned in this valley with steep peaks all around, could not get out forever. My days in this valley are long, if I can succeed today, good; if I must wait 'til tomorrow, it's also good. It doesn't make any difference. If I fail, I would have something to do to pass my boring days anyway.'

Strangely, with this win-or-lose-always-happy attitude, he made a surprisingly rapid progress. In only four short months, he succeeded to comprehend in detail the skill described in the first volume of the book, which he immediately trained accordingly.

Finished training the first volume, he did a quick calculation, and found that the date predicted by Hu Qingniu on which the cold poison would take his life had already come and gone. His body felt light and healthy, the 'zhen qi' [real 'chi'] flowed freely in his entire body, without any symptom of an illness. Previously, the cold poison would flare-up often; now, the interval between occasional attacks was more than a month. When the attack came, it was very light.

Not too long afterwards, he read a sentence in the second volume: 'Exhale according to the Nine Yang, hold in the mouth first, this book is called the Jiu Yang Zhen Jing'.

[Translator's note: I am not sure about this part; any help will be appreciated.] Now he was convinced that this book was really the treasured texts which had always been in Tai Shifu's mind all these years. He was delighted and trained even more diligently. In addition, the white ape was grateful for his kindness in treating its illness that he had an endless supply of large 'pan tao', which was good to invigorate his body and lift his spirit.

When he was halfway through the second volume, the cold poison inside his body had been driven out completely. Every day, other than cultivating his energy, he played with the apes and monkeys. When he picked the fruits, he would always give half to Zhu Changling. Thus he lived without worry or concerns, free and easy. However, to Zhu Changling, who was still on that little piece of platform, a day dragged past like a year. When winter came, his world was covered in ice and snow; the cold wind penetrated his bones. The hardships he suffered were beyond description.

Zhang Wuji had acquired immunity to heat and cold after finishing the second volume. It was just that the further along he was, the more complicated and subtle the lesson got; his progress was not as rapid as before. He needed a whole year to finish the third volume; the final volume took him more than three years until he achieved a satisfactory result. He had been living in that quiet, secluded snowy valley for more than five years by now; he had grown from a boy to a tall and well-built young man.

For the last year or two, whenever he felt like it, he would occasionally play with the apes and the monkeys by climbing up the rock wall and looking out into the distance. Based on his current skill, it would not be too difficult for him to climb over the peak and get out of the valley. However, each time he remembered that the world was full with treacherous and deceitful people, he could not help but shudder. He thought: why should he go outside to bring trouble to himself, just like a fish throwing itself into the net? Wouldn't it be better to live in this beautiful valley until he grew old and die?

One afternoon he browsed the four-volume book from head to tail all the way through. When he flipped the very last page, his heart was joyful but he felt a slight emptiness at the same time. He dug a hole, about three feet deep, on the mountain wall to the left of the cave. He wrapped the four-volume Nine Yang Manual, as well as Hu Qingniu's Medical Manual and Wang Nan'gu's Poison Manual, inside the oil cloth he took out from the white ape's belly, and buried the bundle in the hole. He then filled the hole with dirt, thinking, "I got the Manual from the white ape's belly; that was truly destiny, an enormous opportunity. I wonder if in a hundred or a thousand years it would be somebody else's destiny to come hither and find these three Manuals?" Picking up a sharp stone, he carved six large characters on the mountain wall, 'Zhang Wuji's Manuals Burial Place'.

When he was in training, he had something occupying his mind every day, so that he did not feel the slightest degree of loneliness. That day, after successfully completing his training, he felt hollowness in his heart. Moreover, with the newly acquired 'shen gong' [divine strength], his courage soared high. He mused, "If this time Zhu Bobo came to

harass me again, I would not be afraid of him. There is no harm in going out and talk to him.” Thereupon he bent down to crawl into the cave again.

When he entered the valley, he was a small fifteen-year old boy; going out, he was a grown up twenty-year old adult, who could not go through the narrow passage of the cave. Taking a deep breath, he utilized the ‘suo gu gong’ [shrinking bones skill], making the bones in his entire body crowded together, reducing the space between bone and bone. Gently and easily he slipped through the cave.

Zhu Changling was sleeping soundly, leaning against the rock wall, dreaming he was sitting in one of his family’s banquets, with maids and servants running around him, and friends and relatives fawn up to him; it was a happy and ego-boosting occasion for him. Suddenly someone tapped his shoulder; he woke up with a start, and saw the shadow of a big and tall man in front of him.

Zhu Changling leaped up, he was still half asleep. “You ... you ...” he called out.

Zhang Wuji smiled and said, “Zhu Bobo, it’s me, Zhang Wuji.”

Zhu Changling was startled and delighted, but angry and hateful as well. He stared at Zhang Wuji for a long time before saying, “You grew this tall. Hmm, why didn’t you come out to talk to me? No matter how I asked you, you have never paid me any attention.”

Zhang Wuji smiled and said, “I was afraid you would hurt me.”

Zhu Changling’s right hand suddenly reached out, using the ‘qin na’ [grab and capture, grappling] technique he grabbed Zhang Wuji’s shoulder, while sternly said, “So you are not afraid now?” But he felt the palm of his hand boiling hot; he could not stop his arm from shaking and his hand slipped, while there was a dull pain at the pit of his stomach. In his shock he took three steps backwards and stared at Zhang Wuji with a blank expression on his face.

“You ... you ...” he asked, “What martial art is this?”

After completing the Nine Yang Manual training, it was the first time that Zhang Wuji had ever tried it out; he was pleasantly surprised at its formidable power. Zhu Changling was a first rate martial art master, yet he was still shaken by his ‘shen gong’ without he him needing to lift even one finger. Seeing Zhu Changling’s miserable condi-

tion and his amazement, Zhang Wuji was very proud of himself. “So you think this martial art skill is useful?” he said with a laugh.

Zhu Changling’s mind was still shaken. “What ... what martial art skill was that?” he asked again.

“It’s Jiu Yang Shen Gong,” Zhang Wuji replied.

Zhu Changling was stunned. “How did you train it?” he asked. Zhang Wuji did not hide anything. He told Zhu Changling how he treated a white ape’s illness, how he found the manual inside the ape’s belly, and how he practiced according to manual.

Listening to this story, Zhu Changling was jealous and resentful at the same time. He thought, “I had to suffer hardship beyond description for five years, alone on this peak, yet this kid actually trained an incomparably mysterious ‘shen gong’.” He did not remember that it was because his own heart’s desire to harm others that they ended up this way; he also did not remember that Zhang Wuji had supplied him with fruits these past five years, every day without fail, so that he could live until today. He only remembered that this kid was too lucky while he was too unlucky, and he felt it was so unfair. Anger rose in his heart, with a forced laughter he said, “Where is that Nine Yang Manual? Can you show it to me?”

Zhang Wuji thought, “There is no harm in letting you take a look. I don’t think you will remember much in just a short time.” Thereupon he said, “I buried it inside the cave, I’ll bring it out tomorrow for you to see.”

“You have grown this big,” Zhu Changling said, “How can you go through the cave?”

“The cave is actually not too narrow,” Zhang Wuji said, “If you make an effort to shrink your body and push, you can come through.”

“Do you think that I can squeeze through?” Zhu Changling asked.

Zhang Wuji nodded and said, “We can try together tomorrow. The place inside the cave is spacious, nothing compared to staying on this tiny platform.” He was thinking of using his power to press his shoulder, chest, buttocks, and the bones all around his body, and help him to go through the cave.

“Xiao Xiongdi,” Zhu Changling laughed, “You are indeed a good man, a gentleman who does not recall old grievances. I have done you wrong, I wish for your forgiveness.” While saying that, he bowed deeply with cupped fists.

Zhang Wuji hastily returned the propriety, saying, “Zhu Bobo does not need to be overly courteous. We’ll think of a way to get out of this place tomorrow.”

Zhu Changling was overjoyed. “Did you say we are going to leave this place?” he asked.

Zhang Wuji said, “If apes and monkeys can come in and out, we certainly can.”

“If that’s the case, why didn’t you leave?” Zhu Changling asked.

Showing a faint smile, Zhang Wuji said, “I didn’t want to go out for fear that people would bully me, but now I am not afraid anymore. I also want to see my Tai Shifu, along with all Shibo and Shishu [martial older and younger uncles, respectively].”

Zhu Changling laughed out loud, clapped his hands and said, “Very good, very good!” He took two steps backward, suddenly his shadow swayed, ‘Aiyo!’ he shouted, and fell over the cliff to the empty air below.

That his extreme joy suddenly turned into an unforeseen accident, had taken Zhang Wuji by surprise. He hurriedly leaned over the cliff and called out, “Zhu Bobo, are you all right?” He only heard two groans uttered in a low voice from underneath. Zhang Wuji was delighted; he thought, “Fortunately he did not fall all the way down, but I am afraid he is injured.” Judging by the sound of the groans, Zhu Changling was only several ‘zhang’ away from him. When he looked closely, he saw by coincidence a pine tree grew just beneath the cliff. Zhu Changling’s body lay horizontally on the tree trunk, unmoving. Seeing this situation, Zhang Wuji was thinking of leaping down and carrying Zhu Changling back over the cliff. With his skill right now, it should not be too difficult. Thereupon he took a deep breath and aiming for the tree trunk, which looked like an extended arm out the canyon wall, he jumped down lightly.

When his toes were still half a foot away from the tree trunk, suddenly the tree trunk dropped. He was hanging midair and did not have any place to set his foot on; although he had mastered the ‘shen gong’, he was only a human and not a bird; how could he fly back up to the cliff? It was as if a lightning suddenly illuminated his dark mind as he understood: “Turns out Zhu Changling is still employing a dirty trick to harm me. He had broken the branch and held it in his hand, waiting for me to set my foot on it, he let the tree branch drop down.” But his understanding had come too late; his body fell straight down ...

Zhu Changling had lived on that tiny platform with circumference of less than several dozen ‘zhang’ for more than five years. He knew every grass every tree, every grain of

sand and every rock on that platform by heart. He pretended to be falling over the cliff and feigned injury, knowing full well that Zhang Wuji would jump down to help. As expected, his treacherous plan prevailed; Zhang Wuji fell down the tens of thousands 'zhang' deep canyon.

Zhu Changling laughed out loud, thinking, "This kid will fall into pulp today, finally I can vent my five years worth of resentment!" With the help of a long cane by the pine tree, he leaped over the cliff back to the platform. He mused, "Last time I could not go through that cave, perhaps I was impatient and exerted too much strength that my rib was broken. This kid's stature is a lot bigger and taller than mine. If he could go through, I don't see any reason why I cannot. After I find the Nine Yang Manual, I'll find a way home from the other side. Someday when I have acquired the 'shen gong', I will be unequalled under the heavens, won't it be wonderful? Ha ha ha ha ...!" The more he thought about it, the happier he was; he went into the cave at once.

Before long, he had crawled to the place where five years ago he broke a rib. His only thought was: 'that kid is bigger than me, if he can go through, I certainly can too'. He did not think erroneously, however, he forgot one tiny little detail: Zhang Wuji had mastered the shrinking bone technique from the Jiu Yang Shen Gong.

Calming himself down, he squeezed into the narrow passage, inch by inch forward, and sure enough, he managed to advance about a 'zhang' further than five years ago. But from this point forward, no matter how he exerted his strength, it was simply impossible to advance even half an inch more. He realized that if he used brute force, he would only repeat the disaster he suffered five years ago; he would certainly break some more rib bones. Thereupon he calmed himself down and exhaled all air from his lungs. Sure enough, his body shrunk two more inches that he managed to squeeze three more feet forward. However, without any air in his lungs, soon he was suffocating; his heart beat felt like the beating of a drum, several times he felt he was going to faint. Knowing his condition was far from good, he had no choice but retreat before he could make another plan. He did not think, however, that when he moved forward, his feet propelled his body by kicking against the uneven surface of the mountain wall, but to go back, there was nothing he could use as a stepping stone. As he moved forward, his arms were in front of his head to reduce size of his shoulder. At this moment, his hands were tied by the rocks all around his head; he could not stretch the arms further, he could not use the least bit of strength in his hands.

He started to panic; thinking, "That kid is bigger than me; he could go through, I can certainly go through, why am I stuck in here? This really does not make any sense!" But there are so many things in this world that do not make sense. This man, who pos-

sessed excellent literary and martial art skills, whose intelligence and resourcefulness could be considered first rank among the masters, hereafter stuck inside the narrow passageway of a remote mountain cave; unable to neither advance nor retreat.

Fallen under Zhu Changling's treacherous plan, Zhang Wuji fell straight down from the cliff, while continuously scolding himself, "Zhang Wuji, oh, Zhang Wuji, you are such a useless kid. You knew Zhu Changling's matchless craftiness, yet you still fell under his evil trick. You deserve to die, deserve to die!"

Although he scolded himself as deserving death, he was actually struggling furiously to stay alive. The 'chi' inside his body flowed, sending his strength upward, trying to slow down his fall, so that his body would not be smashed to powder and his bones broken to pieces. But he was in midair, swaying against emptiness, his body was beyond his control. Even when he exerted his whole power until not an ounce of strength left, he still felt the wind passing his ears had not diminished at all.

A short moment later, he felt the sting of the bright light reflected from the white snow below in his eyes. He knew he was at the critical moment between life and death, but he saw about a 'zhang' away there was a big pile of snow. He did not have time to distinguish whether that pile was really snow or a white rock; immediately he made three somersaults in the air, trying to land on that pile of snow. His body curved diagonally, his left foot pointed toward that pile of snow. 'Splosh!' his body sank into the pile of snow.

His more than five years training of Jiu Yang Shen Gong showed its formidable power; as he made contact with the pile of snow, his body reacted naturally and he bounced upwards. But the momentum from the ten thousand 'zhang' fall was simply too great. He felt a severe pain on his legs as the bones were broken.

Although his injury was severe, his mind was still clear; he saw firewood flying in the air, because the pile of snow was actually a farmer's pile of firewood and straw. "What a close call!" he groaned inwardly, "If under the snow was not a pile of firewood but a block of boulder, I, Zhang Wuji, would have lost my life." Sending his strength to his arms, he slowly crawled out of the pile of firewood, and rolled toward the snowy ground. Inspecting his own legs' injury, he took a deep breath and set his broken bones, while thinking, "I must lie down without moving for at least one month before I can walk again. That shouldn't be any problem because I can use my hands in place of my feet; but I cannot stay here and die of starvation." He thought further, "This pile of firewood must belong to a farmer family; there must be some people nearby."

He was about to call for help when suddenly he had a second thought, “There are too many evil people in this world. It’s all right for me to lie alone on this snowy ground, recovering from my injury; but if I call and an evil person comes, I will be in big trouble.” Thereupon he quietly lied down on the snowy ground, waiting for his broken bones to heal slowly.

And so he lied down like that for three days. His stomach rumbled from hunger, but he knew that especially at the beginning of the healing process, he must not move at all; he would be crippled for the rest of his life if the healing bones were not set straight. Consequently, he steeled himself not to make the slightest move. Whenever he felt unbearable hunger, he would grab a handful of snow just to appease his hunger. In these three days he kept thinking, “From now on, I will have to be extra careful in every step I take. I must not fall under evil people’s tricks. Otherwise I may not be as lucky as today and in the end may not avoid great calamity.”

Toward the evening of the fourth day, he was lying down quietly while cultivating his internal energy. He felt his mind was clear and his body relaxed. Although the injury on his legs was heavy, it did not appear to hinder his training that he made some progress. Suddenly the quietness of the night was broken by the noise of barking dogs in the distant, which gradually came closer. Apparently, this pack of vicious dogs was pursuing some kind of wild animal. Zhang Wuji was startled. “Could the dogs be Zhu Jiuzhen Jijie’s? Hmm, those vicious dogs have been killed by Zhu Bobo. But it’s been a few years; she could have raised another pack of dogs.”

Focusing his eyes, he looked toward the distant snowy ground, and saw that a man was running fast, pursued by three large howling dogs. The man was obviously dead-tired; he staggered along for several steps and then tumbled down to the ground, but because he was afraid of the sharp teeth and claws of the dogs, he struggled hard to stand up and desperately ran.

Zhang Wuji remembered his own sufferings he received from dogs attack a few years ago; he could not refrain the blood in his chest from boiling. He had the desire to render his help, unfortunately his legs were broken and he could not walk.

Suddenly he heard the miserable cry of that man as he fell down and two vicious dogs climbed over his body and bit fiercely. “Vicious dogs, over here!” Zhang Wuji indignantly shouted.

When the dogs heard the call, they charged toward Zhang Wuji. Smelling that Zhang Wuji was not someone they knew, the dogs surrounded him while barking madly, be-

fore they finally pounced on him to bite him. Zhang Wuji stretched out his finger and flicked each dog on its nose. The three vicious dogs rolled down and died at once. Seeing that with only a gentle flick of his finger he killed the three dogs, Zhang Wuji could not help feeling startled by the formidable power of his Jiu Yang Shen Gong.

He heard that the sound of that man's groan was very weak. "Dage [big brother]," he asked, "Did the dogs bite you really bad?"

"I ... I ... can't hold on ... I ... I ..." that man said.

Zhang Wuji said, "My legs are broken, I can't walk. Can you come over here? Let me take a look at your wounds."

"Yes ... yes ..." the man replied. Huffing and puffing he struggled to crawl over. After crawling for a while, he stopped a moment, then crawled again toward Zhang Wuji, but when he was about a 'zhang' away from him, he suddenly cried out, 'Ah!' and then fell flat on the ground, he could not move any more. The two of them were quite some distance away from each other; one could not go over, the other could not come closer.

"Dage," Zhang Wuji asked, "Where exactly is your wound?"

The man replied, "I ... chest, belly ... the vicious dogs tore my stomach and pulled out my intestines."

Zhang Wuji was shocked. He knew that since that man's intestines had already out, he would not live. "Why did those vicious dogs chase you?" he asked.

The man replied, "I ... went out tonight to chase the wild boars away, so ... so they will not damage my crop. I saw Zhu Jia Da Xiaojie [eldest miss of Zhu family] and ... and a young master talking underneath a tree. I should have not come close ... I ... aiyo!" With a loud cry he died.

Although he did not finish, Zhang Wuji understood most of what he was about to say. It seemed like Zhu Jiuzhen and Wei Bi were having a rendezvous in the middle of the night, and met this peasant by accident, so Zhu Jiuzhen released her dogs to kill him. Zhang Wuji's anger arose, but suddenly he heard the sound of hoof beats, followed by several whistles. Apparently Zhu Jiuzhen was calling her dogs.

The hoof beats came closer, two riders coming over, fast. The riders were one man and one woman. The woman suddenly called out, "Ah! How come General Ping Xi and the

others are all dead?” The voice belonged to none other than Zhu Jiuzhen. She still called her vicious dogs as generals, no different than before.

The man riding with her was indeed Wei Bi. He dismounted and said in astonishment, “Two people are dead in here!”

Zhang Wuji quietly decided on his course of action, “If they come to harm me, I have no choice but to act without leniency.”

Zhu Jiuzhen looked at the peasant’s corpse with the intestines spilled out; it was a terrifying sight. Zhang Wuji’s clothes were tattered to the extreme, his hair was disheveled, his face was covered with unkempt moustache and beard, he was lying down on the ground motionless, so she thought he must be dead, bitten by the dogs early on. She was eager to talk about feelings and love with Wei Bi, and thus she did not want to stay much longer.

“Biaoge, let’s go!” she said, “These two must be fighting with all they had and killed my three generals before their own deaths.” Pulling her reins, she galloped to the west.

Wei Bi felt there was something unusual in the death of these three dogs, but seeing Zhu Jiuzhen riding away, he felt it was inappropriate for him to stay and investigate carefully. Thereupon he mounted his horse and galloped away behind her.

Zhang Wuji could still hear Zhu Jiuzhen’s tender laughter coming from afar, he felt anger rise in his heart. Just a little over five years ago he adored her as a goddess. She only needed to lift her little finger, even if she wanted him to climb the mountain of blades or go down the boiling oil, he would do so without the least bit of hesitation. But seeing her again tonight, for some unknown reason, her charms on him had unexpectedly completely vanished.

Zhang Wuji thought that it was because of his mastery of the Nine Yin Manual, or perhaps because he had discovered her treacherous scheme toward him. He did not realize that most young men would experience this kind of blind infatuation stage of the first love, in which he would neglect sleep and food for the sake of a young girl that he would live and die for that particular girl. However, this kind of passionate infatuation comes quickly, also vanishes as quickly, someday his mind would clear up and he would laugh at his own former days’ wallowing.

In the meantime, his stomach was growling with hunger. He was thinking of tearing off a dog leg and eating it, but he was afraid that Zhu Jiuzhen and Wei Bi would return and

find out that he had not died yet, and he had eaten her general. In which case he would have committed a grave offense against her; he was not Wei Bi's match while his legs were broken.

Early in the morning the next day, he saw a bald eagle eyeing the dead people and dead dogs on the ground. The eagle wheeled several times in the air before finally diving down to feed. This eagle really deserved to die, because instead of going down on the dead man or the dead dogs, it flew straight toward Zhang Wuji's face. Zhang Wuji reached up and caught the eagle's neck. With a light pinch he killed the bird.

"It is truly a heaven-sent breakfast," he muttered happily. He plucked the feather, tore the eagle's leg, and took a big bite. Although it was raw, he ate it with gusto because he had been hungry for three days.

Before he finished the first eagle, the second eagle came down. And thus Zhang Wuji appeased his hunger with eagle meat, while lying down on the snowy ground waiting patiently for his broken bones to heal completely.

A few more days passed. Surprisingly, he did not see any humans wandering around in the wilderness. There were three dead dogs and one dead man by his side; fortunately it was the depth of the winter, the weather was bitter cold, so that the corpses did not decay. He was accustomed to spending his days alone, so he did not suffer from loneliness.

One afternoon, after circulating his internal energy for one round, he saw two bald eagles flying high in the sky. The eagles circled around for a long time without daring to fly down. One eagle suddenly swooped down, fast, but when it was about three feet away from Zhang Wuji, it suddenly turned around and soared high to the sky. The movement was extremely swift and amazing. All of a sudden Zhang Wuji had an inspiration, "This movement can be used in martial art; attack when the enemy expects it the least, and when the attack fails, swiftly retreat far away."

In the past, although Jueyuan Dashi's entire body was filled with the divine energy, when he received attack from Xiao Xiangzi and He Zudao, his hands and feet moved randomly without any ability to resist. Zhang Sanfeng had to ask Yang Guo to teach him four stances first before he was able to fight Yin Kexi.

Zhang Wuji had learned martial arts ever since his childhood, so he had a far superior foundation compared to Jueyuan and Zhang Sanfeng. However, Xie Xun only taught him the theory of martial art, without the actual practical stance or style. Right now

Zhang Wuji understood the painstaking effort of his foster father. Yifu's mastery of martial art was broad and profound; supposing he imparted his knowledge by step by step instructions, perhaps even twenty years would not be enough to teach Zhang Wuji everything he knew. Knowing that their time together was limited, he insisted that Zhang Wuji firmly remember all the key theories of the martial arts, so that he could comprehend it on his own later on.

The only martial art ZhangWuji really learned was the thirty-two stance Wudang Long Fist, which his father taught him on the wooden raft. He realized that from now on, other than continue cultivating the Jiu Yang Shen Gong until he reached perfection, he should try to integrate his excellent internal energy with the martial art theory Xie Xun passed on to him. Thereupon every time he saw a flower blown by the wind or fell down to the earth, strange tree shape reaching out to the sky, as well as the movements of birds and beasts, the changing of the wind and cloud, he would often think about martial art movements.

This moment, he was hoping that the bald eagles would circle back and display their various movements. While he was deep in thought, suddenly he heard footsteps on the snowy ground from a distance. The steps were light and intermittent; the newcomer appeared to be a woman. Zhang Wuji turned his head and saw a woman carrying a bamboo basket, approaching him in quick steps.

When she saw bodies of people and dogs lying around on the snow, she exclaimed, "Ah!" and halted her steps in fright. Zhang Wuji focused his eyes and saw that she was a young girl, about seventeen, eighteen years of age. Her dress was simple; apparently she was a poor peasant girl. Her countenance was rather dark, she seemed to suffer some kind of skin disease, with bumps and indentations all over her face. In short, she was very ugly; only her eyes were bright, her posture was also slender and elegant. She took a step closer and was slightly startled to see that Zhang Wuji was staring at her. "You ... you are not dead yet?" she asked.

"Maybe not," Zhang Wuji replied. Both the question and the answer did not make any sense; once both of them realized what they were saying, they could not help but laugh.

"Since you are not dead, why are you lying down here without moving?" she asked with a laugh, "You frightened me."

"I fell from the mountain and broke my legs," Zhang Wuji replied, "I have no choice but to lie down in here."

“Was that man your companion?” the girl asked, “Why are there three dead dogs over here?”

“These three dogs were very vicious,” Zhang Wuji said, “They bit this Dage to his death, but they also turned into dead dogs.”

The girl said, “What can you do, lying in here? Are you hungry?”

“Naturally I am starving,” Zhang Wuji said, “But I cannot move. I have to submit to the will of Heaven.”

The girl smiled slightly. She took two wheat cakes from her basket and handed the cakes over to him.

“Thank you very much, Miss,” Zhang Wuji said, but as he received the cakes, he did not immediately eat it.

“Are you afraid my cakes are poisonous?” the girl asked, “Why don’t you eat it?”

In the last five years, other than occasional exchange through the cave with Zhu Changling, Zhang Wuji had never tasted anything else; furthermore, he had never spoken even half a word with another human being. This time he met this girl, although her appearance was ugly, her manner of speaking was actually quite charming; his heart was delighted. He said, “Because Miss gave me these cakes, I can’t bear to eat it.”

His words carried a somewhat teasing tone. He was always honest and frank; he had never smooth talked anybody, but in front of this girl, he felt comfortable and almost without thinking had blurted those words.

When she heard it, the girl’s countenance darkened. “Humph,” she snorted.

Zhang Wuji immediately regretted his words; busily he took a big bite of the cake. But because he was in a hurry, the cake choked his throat, and he coughed it out.

The girl’s anger turned into delight, “Thanks the Heaven and thanks the Earth,” she said, “May you be choked to death! This ugly freak is not a good person, no wonder Laotianye [God, lit. old master of the sky] punished you. How come nobody else broke his dog-legs, and only you fell down and broke your bones?”

Zhang Wuji thought, “For five years I never cut my hair or shave my face, of course I look like an ugly freak. But you are not necessarily more beautiful than I am. We are the same [‘ban jin ba liang’ – half a pound eight ounces]. The eldest brother does not speak ill about the second brother.” But of course he kept this thought to himself. With all seriousness he said, “I have been lying down in here for nine days. To see Miss passing through is such a blessing indeed. Now that Miss gave me these cakes, I thank you very much.”

The girl pursed her lips, laughed and said, “I asked you: How come nobody else broke his dog-legs and only you fell down and broke your bones? If you do not answer, I am going to take the cakes back.”

Listening to her peal of laughter and seeing the twinkle in her eyes, showing her mischievousness, Zhang Wuji’s heart was shaken. “How come her eyes look very much like Mama?” he mused, “When Mama swindled the old monk of Shaolin Temple just before she died, her eyes also shone like this.” Thinking to this point, he could not stop tears from welling up in his eyes, and very soon the tears flowed down this face.

“Pei,” the girl spat and said, “I won’t take your cakes away. You don’t need to cry. I didn’t know you are such a useless fool.”

“It’s not that I am crying over your cake,” Zhang Wuji said, “It’s just that I am remembering a sad memory.”

That girl had turned away and walked for two steps, but as she heard him, she turned her head and said, “What sad memory? A foolish-looking fellow like you also have a sad memory?”

Zhang Wuji sighed deeply and said, “I remember my Mama, my passed away Mama.”

The girl guffawed and said, “Your Mama always gave you cake, didn’t she?”

“Mama always gave me cakes to eat,” Zhang Wuji said, “But I remember her because your smile looks like my Mama.”

The girl angrily said, “You devil! So you said I am that old? That I am as old as your mother?” While saying that, she picked a piece of firewood and hit Zhang Wuji, twice.

If Zhang Wuji wanted to seize the firewood in her hand, it would be very easy, but he thought, “She does not know my Ma was young and pretty. She only knows that I look

like an ugly freak; no wonder she is angry.” So after she struck him twice, he said, “When she died, my Ma was very pretty.”

With a serious face she said, “You make fun of me because I am ugly, you don’t want to live. I’ll pull your leg!” She bent down, acting as if she was going to pull Zhang Wuji’s leg.

Zhang Wuji was shocked; his broken legs were just beginning to heal. If she did indeed pull it, then all previous accomplishment would come to nothing. Hastily he grabbed a handful of snow. As soon as that girl’s hand touched his leg, he would strike the acupoint in between her eyebrows to knock her unconscious on the spot.

Luckily that girl was only scaring him; looking at the great change of his face, she said, “Look at your frightened face! Who told you to make fun of me?”

Zhang Wuji said, “If I intentionally make fun of Miss, after my both legs are healed, let me fall again and break my legs three times that in the end I become a cripple.”

The girl giggled and said, “Alright, so be it!” She sat on the ground next to him and said, “So your Ma was a pretty woman. How could you compare me with her? Do you think I am pretty?”

Zhang Wuji was speechless for a moment, then he said, “I don’t know why, but for some reason I feel that you are somewhat similar to my Ma. Although you are not as pretty as my Ma, but I like looking at you.”

The girl bent her middle finger and gently tapped his forehead twice with her knuckle. She said with a laugh, “Good boy, then call me Mama!” But as soon as these words came out of her mouth, she immediately realized its inappropriateness; thereupon she closed her mouth and turned her head the other way, yet she still could not stifle her laughter.

Looking at her expression, Zhang Wuji vaguely remembered when his Mama chatted with his Papa on the Bing Huo Island, her expression was very much like this. All of a sudden he felt that this ugly girl was simply elegant and charming; her manner was sweet, and that she was not ugly at all. He could not help but staring at her with a dreamy look on his face.

The girl turned her head around and saw the way he looked at her; she laughed and said, “Why do you like looking at me? Tell me.”

Zhang Wuji stared blankly at her for half a day. He shook his head and said, “I don’t know. I only feel that when I look at you, my heart feels safe and comfortable. I feel that you will treat me with nothing but goodness. You will not bully me, harm me!”

“Ha ha ...” the girl laughed, “You are dead wrong! In all my life, I like nothing better than harming others.” Suddenly she raised the firewood in her hand and struck Zhang Wuji’s broken legs twice, and then jumped up and walked away.

These two strikes happened to fall right on Zhang Wuji’s broken bones. He was caught off guard and cried loudly in pain, “Aiyo!” But the girl only giggled and turned her head around to make a face at him.

Zhang Wuji kept his gaze on her as she gradually disappeared in the distance. The pain on his broken legs was unbearable. He mused, “Turns out all women love to harm others. The beautiful ones love to hurt people, the ugly ones also like to inflict pain on me.”

That night in his sleep he dreamed about that young girl, also about his mother. Several times the images in his mind blurred between that girl and his mother. He was unsure if the face in his dream was beautiful or ugly, he only knew that the eyes were clear and bright, and both were mischievous and charming at the same time as those eyes were gazing at him. His dream brought him to his childhood past, when his mother often teased him by deliberately stretching out her leg to trip him. And then when he stumbled and cried in pain, mother would hug him and kiss him, while did not stop saying, “Good child, don’t cry, Mama loves you dearly!”

He woke up with a start; suddenly a thought flashed in his mind, a thought which he had never suspected before, “Why did Mama like to see others suffer? Yifu’s eyes were blinded by her, Yu Sanbo [third (older) uncle] was crippled by her underlings, the entire family of Lin’An prefecture’s Long Men [Dragon Gate] Escort Agency was also perished under her hands. In the end, was Mama a good person, or was she an evil person?”

After gazing the continuously twinkling stars high in the sky for a long, long time, he sighed and said to himself, “Doesn’t matter if she was a good or evil person, she was my mother.” In his heart he thought, “If Mama was still alive, I would love her with all my heart.” Again his mind wandered toward that peasant girl. He was baffled as why without any reason she hit his broken legs. “I did not offend her at all, why did she want me to cry out in pain before she was happy? Could it be that she really loves hurting others?” He wished she would come again, but he was also afraid she would hurt him with different method.

As his hand gently stroked the half eaten cake by his side, he remembered that peasant girl's expression when she said, 'So your Ma was a pretty woman. How could you compare me with her? Do you think I am pretty?' He could not stop himself from saying out loud, "You are pretty; I really love seeing you."

Indulging himself in this kind of fancy thought, he lay down for two more days, but that peasant girl did not come. Zhang Wuji started to think that she would never come again, who would have thought that toward the afternoon of the third day, the peasant girl appeared from behind the hillside, walking toward him with the bamboo basket in her hand.

"Ugly freak," she said with a laugh, "You have not died yet?"

Zhang Wuji also laughed. "Most of me have died of starvation, a little part of me is still alive," he said.

The peasant girl giggled and sat by his side. Suddenly she extended her foot and kicked his broken leg, asking, "Is this part dead or still alive?"

"Aiyo!" Zhang Wuji cried out, "Don't you have any conscience?"

"What conscience?" the girl replied, "What did you do to me that I should be good to you?"

Zhang Wuji was taken aback. He said, "Three days ago you hit me really bad, but I don't hate you. In fact, I have been thinking about you often these past two days."

The girl's face reddened, she was angry, but forced herself to bear it. "Who wants to be thought by you, an ugly freak?" she said, "Most likely you did not think good things about me. In your belly, you must be cursing me as ugly and evil girl."

"You are not ugly at all," Zhang Wuji said, "But why must you hurt others first before you can be happy?"

With a chuckle the girl said, "If others do not suffer pain, how can I be happy?" She could see the disagreement in Zhang Wuji's expression, but she also noticed the half-eaten cake in his hand, which after three days he had not finished eating. She said, "You keep that cake until now? Won't it taste awful?"

Zhang Wuji said, “This cake was given by Miss, I hate to part with it.” Three days ago, he said those words half-jokingly, but today he was very sincere.

The girl knew he was not talking empty words, her face blushed slightly. “I have fresh cake,” she said, while taking many more food from the basket. Other than cakes, there were a roast chicken and a roast mutton leg.

Zhang Wuji was very happy. He had been eating raw eagle meat these days; it was dripping with blood, smelly, and tough. The roast chicken was delicious; it was still hot that it burned his hand somewhat, but in his mouth it was delicious beyond measure.

The girl watched his appetite while she chuckled and sat down, hugging her knees. “Ugly freak,” she said, “You are eating happily, it’s fun watching you eat. Apparently you are different; I don’t have to hurt you for me to be happy.”

“Others are happy, you are happy. Now that is the real happiness,” Zhang Wuji said.

“Humph!” the girl sneered and said, “Let me tell you first: right now I am happy, so I won’t hurt you. There will come a day when I am not happy. I can’t say for sure; perhaps I will torture you until you are neither dead nor alive. At that time you must not blame me.”

Zhang Wuji shook his head, “Bad people have been torturing me since I was little until I am a grown up. The more I was tortured, the stronger I became.”

With a cold laugh the girl said, “Don’t be so sure of yourself. We’ll see.”

Zhang Wuji said, “In that case, as soon as my legs are healed, I am going to go far away from you. Even if you want to torture me, hurt me, you won’t be able to find me.”

The girl said, “Then I am going to cut your legs first, so you won’t be able to leave me for the rest of your life.”

Hearing her icy-cold voice, Zhang Wuji could not help but shiver. He believed that she was capable of doing whatever she said. Those words were certainly not an empty threat.

The girl stared at him for half a day. She sighed and then her expression changed suddenly, “Do you think you deserve it? Ugly freak! Do you think you deserve me cutting your dog legs?” She leaped up, grabbed the half-eaten roast chicken from Zhang Wuji’s

hand, the mutton leg, and the cakes, and tossed them all far away. Lastly, she also spat on Zhang Wuji's face.

In shock Zhang Wuji looked at her. He felt that she was not actually angry with him, nor did she hold him in contempt; yet her face revealed her deep misery. Apparently she bore an unspeakable burden in her heart. He wanted to comfort her, but in that instant he was not able to find any appropriate words to say.

Seeing the expression on his face, the peasant girl suddenly shouted, "Ugly freak, what are you thinking?"

"Miss," Zhang Wuji said, "Why aren't you happy? Would you tell me?"

Listening to his gentle words, the girl could not throw a tantrum anymore. She dropped herself next to him, holding her head in his hands, and sobbed uncontrollably.

Looking at her shaking shoulders and her waist as delicate as a bee, Zhang Wuji felt sorry for her. "Miss," he said in low voice, "Who bullied you? Wait 'till my legs are healed, I am going to vent your anger for you."

The girl was sobbing continuously. After a while she said, "Nobody bullies me. It's just that I have been unfortunate ever since the day I was born. I always think of one person, and cannot forget him."

Zhang Wuji nodded and said, "He is a young man, isn't he? Was he cruel to you?"

"That's right," the girl replied, "He is very handsome, but also very arrogant. I wanted him to come with me and be with me forever, but he did not want to. That was all right, but why did he have to scold me, hit me, and even bite me bloody?"

Zhang Wuji angrily said, "This man is so rude and irrational. Miss, from now on, forget him."

The girl burst into tears and said, "But ... but I can't forget him. He ran far away; I have been looking for him everywhere without ever finding him."

Zhang Wuji thought, "This love affair between a man and a woman is indeed difficult to resolve. Although this miss' appearance is somewhat lacking, but it is obvious that her love is genuine. Her temperament is rather strange, that is because of the grief in her heart, because of her deep disappointment. It's hard to imagine that that man's

heart is this callous toward her!” In soft voice he said, “Miss, don’t be sad. There are plenty of good men in this world, why do you have to worry about this man, who do not have any conscience?”

The girl heaved a deep sigh. Her eyes gazed toward a distant place, as if she was in a trance. Zhang Wuji knew that she would not be able to forget this boyfriend, the desire of her heart. He said, “That man scolded you, hit you; but the misery I suffered was actually ten times worse than Miss’.”

“What is it?” the girl asked, “Have you been cheated by a beautiful girl?”

Zhang Wuji replied, “At first, she did not intentionally cheat on me; I was stupid, seeing her beauty, I was captivated by her. Actually, how could I deserve her? In my heart, I have never had any vain desire. But she and her father have arranged in secret a treacherous plan to inflict an unspeakable harm on me.” While saying that, he pulled his sleeve to show the countless scars on his arm. “These teeth marks were from the bites of her vicious dogs,” he said.

Seeing that many scars, the girl flew into a rage. “Was it that girl Zhu Jiuzhen who harmed you?” she asked.

“How do you know?” Zhang Wuji wondered.

“Everybody within the surrounding area of several hundred ‘li’ knows that that lowly girl loves to raise vicious dogs,” the girl replied.

Zhang Wuji nodded. “Yes, it was Miss Zhu,” he said indifferently, “But these scars have been healed a long time, I no longer feel the pain. I am fortunate to be alive, I don’t need to hate her anymore.”

The girl stared at him for half a day, but she could not see any trace of anger, he looked at ease; she felt this was rather strange. “What’s your name?” she asked, “Why are you here?”

Zhang Wuji mused, “All the way from the Central Earth, people keep asking me about Yifu’s whereabouts. They threatened, swindled, committing all manners of crimes that I had to suffer countless sufferings. From now on, Zhang Wuji is dead, nobody in this world knows Jin Mao Shi Wang Xie Xun’s whereabouts. Supposing I meet with someone ten times more cunning than Zhu Changling, I won’t have to worry about falling into

his trap and unintentionally cause trouble to my Yifu.” Thereupon he said, “I am called Ahniu [lit. cow/bull].”

The girl slightly smiled. “What’s your surname?” she asked.

Zhang Wuji thought again, “I can’t say Zhang, Yin, or Xie; those are all not good. ‘Zhang’ and ‘Yin’ combined sounds like ‘Zeng’.” Thereupon he said, “I ... My surname is Zeng. What is Miss’ surname?”

The girl’s body shook, she said, “I don’t have any surname.” After pausing for a moment, she slowly said, “My birth father did not want me; he would kill me if he sees me. How can I take Father’s surname? My Mama was killed by me, I also cannot use her surname. I was born ugly. You can call me Miss Chou [lit. Ugly].”

Zhang Wuji was stunned. “You ... you killed your Mama?” he asked, “How can that be?”

The girl sighed and said, “It’s a long story. Mama was my father’s first wife. She had never given birth to any son or daughter; hence Father took Er Niang [Second Mother]. Er Niang gave birth to my two (older) brothers. Father doted on her very much. Later on Mama gave birth to me, her only daughter. Relying of Father’s love, Er Niang had always bullied Mama. My two older brothers were also very bad; they helped their mother in bullying my Ma. My Ma could only cry in secret. Tell me, what should I do?”

“Your father should have been more neutral” Zhang Wuji replied.

The girl said, “Because Father constantly shielded Er Niang, I was unbearably angry. I took a blade and killed my Er Niang.”

“Ah!” Zhang Wuji exclaimed in shock. He always thought that people kill people in the Wulin world was nothing strange, but that this peasant girl unexpectedly could kill someone with a blade was beyond his expectation.

The girl continued, “Seeing I was in deep trouble, Mama told me to run away at once. But my two brothers pursued me to take me back. Because Mama was helpless to stop them, she slit her own throat to save me. Tell me, didn’t Mama lose her life in my hands? When my father saw me, is it possible for him not to kill me?” When she said all these, her intonation was light, without the slightest degree of excitement.

Zhang Wuji, however, listened to her story with his heart thumping madly; he thought, “I am unfortunate that my parents are dead, but Father and Mother loved each other

and they loved me very much. Compared to this Miss' bitter experience, I am actually ten thousand times luckier than she." Thinking to this point, his sympathy for the girl grew. With a tender voice he said, "Have you left home for a long time? Have you been always alone out here?"

The girl nodded slightly. Zhang Wuji asked again, "Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know," the girl replied, "The world is very big, it doesn't matter if I go to the east or to the west. I will be all right as long as I don't bump into my father or brothers."

Zhang Wuji's heart burst with compassion because he felt they shared the same fate. He said, "Wait 'till my legs are healed, I will accompany you to look for that ... that Dage [big brother]. We'll ask him what he thinks about you."

"What if he scolds me or bites me again?" the girl asked.

"Humph," Zhang Wuji boldly said, "If he dares to harm a single strand of your hair, I will not rest until I deal with him."

The girl said, "What if he simply ignores me, will not speak even one word to me?"

Zhang Wuji was dumbfounded. He thought that he could not force a man to love a woman he did not have any affection to even if he possessed stronger martial art skills. After being silent for half a day, he said, "I will try my best."

Suddenly the girl bent over in laughter, as if she had just heard the funniest joke ever. "What's so funny?" Zhang Wuji asked.

"Ugly freak," the girl said, "Who do you think you are? Will others listen to you? Besides, I have been looking for him everywhere and did not even see any sign of him. I don't even know if he is dead or alive. You will do your best? What kind of ability do you have? Ha ha ha ha ...!"

Zhang Wuji was about to open his mouth, but because of her laughter, he blushed and closed his mouth immediately.

The girl saw him opening and closing his mouth, she stopped laughing and asked, "You are going to say something?"

“You laughed at me, I won’t tell you,” Zhang Wuji said.

“Humph,” the girl coldly said, “A laugh is a laugh. At worst I will laugh at you again. You won’t die because of my laughter, will you?”

In a loud voice Zhang Wuji said, “I have nothing but good intentions toward you, you should not laugh at me!”

The girl said, “I am asking you: what is it that you were going to say?”

Zhang Wuji said, “You are all alone, without friends or family. I am of the same fate. My father and mother have died; I have neither brothers nor sisters. I was going to say that if that wicked man still pays no attention to you, there is no harm in us traveling together as companions. I can accompany you and talk to you to relieve boredom. But since you said I am not fit, I might as well not say it.”

The girl said angrily, “You certainly are not fit! That wicked man is a hundred times more handsome than you; he is a hundred times smarter than you. It is really bad luck that I hang around with you in here, engaging in idle conversation.” While saying that, she madly kicked the mutton leg and the roast chicken lying on the snowy ground, and then she ran away while covering her face.

Being on the receiving end of such unreasonable fit of temper, Zhang Wuji did not get angry. He thought, “This Miss is truly pitiful. It’s not surprising, considering she has been through many sufferings.”

Suddenly the girl rushed back and fiercely said, “Ugly freak, you must be upset with me. You must be thinking that my own face is so ugly yet I am looking down on you. Am I right?”

“No, it’s not that,” Zhang Wuji shook his head, “Your face is not very good-looking, but as soon as I see you, I feel we can get along well. If you have not turned uglier and looked the same as before ...”

The girl suddenly cried out in alarm. “You ... did you say I do not look the same as I was before?”

Zhang Wuji said, “Compared to the last time we met, your face today looks somewhat more swollen, your skin also darkened somewhat. That is unnatural.”

The girl was startled. “I ... I did not dare to look into the mirror these past few days,” she said, “Did you say I am getting uglier?”

Zhang Wuji gently said, “For a person, the most important thing is good character. Who cares if one is beautiful or ugly? Mama told me that the more beautiful the women, the worse their conscience and the more they are capable of deceit. She told me to carefully guard against such women.”

The girl was not interested in listening to whatever his Mama said. She pressed on, “I am asking you: when you saw me the last time, I was not this ugly, yes or no?”

Zhang Wuji knew that if he answered ‘yes’, then she would be unbearably heart-broken, therefore, he only stared at her with a blank expression on his face, his heart full of compassion.

Seeing his expression, the girl knew what his answer would be. She covered her face and cried. “Ugly freak, I hate you! I hate you!” she screamed and ran away madly. This time she did not turn back.

Zhang Wuji lay down for two more days. During the night, a wild wolf crawled near him, attracted by the smell. Zhang Wuji struck the wolf dead with his fist. Instead of feeding on Zhang Wuji, the wolf became his dinner instead.

Several days later, his broken legs had healed for the most part. In ten more days at most he would be able to walk again. He thought that henceforth the peasant girl would not come again. He regretted that he did not even ask her name. “How can her face turn uglier?” he mused, “This is indeed a mystery.” After pondering this matter for half a day without finding any answer, he gave up and tried to get some sleep.

Around midnight, in his sleep, he heard the footsteps of several people walking on the snow. He woke up immediately and sat up, turning his head toward the direction of the noise. That night the new moon looked like an eyebrow. Under the soft moonlight, he saw that seven people walked in. The silhouette of the one in the front appeared graceful, apparently it belonged to that peasant girl. When these seven people were near enough, he could see that it was indeed the girl with the ugly face. The other six people were walking in a fan formation behind her, as if they were guarding against her running away.

Zhang Wuji was greatly astonished. “Has she been captured by her father and brothers?” he wondered in his heart.

Before he finished this thought, the girl and the six people behind her had come near. As soon as Zhang Wuji looked, he was even more shocked. Turned out these six people were his old acquaintances; they were Wu Qingying, Wu Lie and Wei Bi on his left, and He Taichong and Ban Shuxian, husband and wife, on his right. The one on the extreme right was a middle-age woman. Her face looked somewhat familiar. Turned out she was Ding Minjun of the Emei Pai. “How did she know all these people?” he mused, “Could it be that she is one of the Wulin people who knows my real identity so she is taking all this people to capture me and force me to reveal Yifu’s whereabouts?”

Thinking to this point, the suspicion in his heart was gone and anger rose in its place. “I have no enmity no grudges, but you come here to bring harm to me!” he mused. He thought further, “Presently I cannot move my legs. There is not a single weakness among these six people; the peasant girl’s martial art may not be weak either. I’d better submit to them and agree to take them to look for my Yifu. When my legs are healed, I will deal with them one by one.”

If it were five years ago, he would rather lose his life than submitting to the enemy. No matter how the enemy tortured or intimidated him, he would simply clench his teeth refusing to say anything. But now, first of all he was older, his mind was more open; second, after mastering the Nine Yang Manual, his confidence grew, he was able to deal with dangerous situations calmly. In the presence of powerful enemies, he did not feel the least amount of fear. The only unexpected thing was that the peasant girl would betray him. In his resentment, he could not help but be grieved. He lied back down and used his arms as a pillow, no longer paying attention to these seven people.

The peasant girl stopped in front of him. She quietly looked at him for a long, long time before slowly turning around and walking away. Zhang Wuji could hear her sigh. The sound was extremely soft, but it was full of grief. He sneered in his heart, “I don’t know what malicious intention you have in your heart, but since you already planned it, why fake compassion on me?”

He saw that Wei Bi was swinging the sword in his hand back and forth and he said with a cold laugh, “You said you want to see someone before you die. I thought it must some young man whose appearance was as handsome as Pan An; turns out it as an ugly freak. Ha ha ... funny! Very funny! The two of you are really a pair made in Heaven.”

The peasant girl did not get angry. “That’s right,” she drily said, “I want to see him again before I die. I want to ask him clearly about one thing. After I know his answer, I will die with closed eyes.”

Zhang Wuji was greatly astonished, he did not understand what these two people were talking about. The peasant girl said, “I have something I’d like to ask you. You must answer me honestly.”

Zhang Wuji said, “Anything about me, I can answer truthfully; but if it is about another person, it may not be easy to tell you.” He was guessing the peasant girl would ask him about Xie Xun’s whereabouts. He had decided to yield to their wish for now, therefore, he stated his condition first so that later on he would have some leeway in the negotiation.

“Why would I want to know other people’s business?” the peasant girl said, “I am asking you: that day you said that both of us are all alone, without friends or family; therefore, you are willing to be my companion. Did you say that with a sincere heart?”

What Zhang Wuji heard was beyond his expectation. He sat up at once, and saw that her eyes showed the grief she bore in her heart. “I did. I was sincere,” he said.

“You really do not mind my ugly appearance, and willing to stay together for a lifetime?” the peasant girl asked.

Zhang Wuji was taken aback. He had never expected this ‘staying together for a lifetime’ in his heart, but he could not bear to see her forlorn look, as if she was about to cry; thereupon he said, “Ugly or not, pretty or not, I don’t care at all. If you want me to accompany you, to talk and laugh together with you, as long as you don’t mind me, of course I will be happy to do so. But if you are thinking of deceiving me ...”

“Then are you willing to marry me, to take me as your wife?” the peasant girl asked in a trembling voice.

Zhang Wuji’s body shook, and he was speechless for half a day. “I ... I have never thought ... to take a wife ...” he mumbled.

He Taichong and the others, six people broke out in laughter. Wei Bi laughed and said, “Even an ugly bum don’t want you. If we don’t kill you, what good is it for you to continue living? You’d better hit your head against the rock and die.”

Hearing the laughter of the six people and Wei Bi’s mocking, Zhang Wuji was convinced that this peasant girl was not in cahoots with these people, and that Wei Bi and the others meant to kill her. The realization that the peasant girl really did not come to harm him, Zhang Wuji’s heart grew warm. He saw her hanging her head, with tears

dripping down her face, obviously her sorrow was unbearable, only he did not know whether she was sad because she was going to die soon, or because she was ugly, or was it because Wei Bi's mocking was like a blade cutting deep into her heart?

Zhang Wuji's heart was greatly moved, recalling that after his own parents' death, he himself was wandering about in desperate plight, and was the victim of countless others' bullying. This peasant girl was also alone and weak, she was a few years younger than him; she was also more unfortunate than he. Now that she came to him and asked that question, how could he let her broken-hearted to the point of shedding some tears, and suffer disgrace from others? Much less her question showed her sincere devotion to him. "In all my life, other than my parents, Yifu, Tai Shifu and all martial uncles, who else would show such loving care to me? If I treat her well, and she also treats me well, we are bound by a common destiny, what harm can that bring?"

He saw that her body trembled, she was about to go away. Immediately he reached out to grab her right hand. In a loud voice he said, "Miss, with all my heart I sincerely desire to marry you. I only hope you will not regard me unworthy."

As the girl heard this, her eyes immediately lit up, with a low voice she said, "Ahnium Gege, you are not lying to me, are you?"

"Of course not," Zhang Wuji said, "From now on, I will cherish you with all my might, I will look after you. No matter how many people come to make things difficult for you, no matter how many fierce people come to bully you, I don't care if I'll have to lose my life, I will protect you. I want you to be happy, I want you to forget your past sufferings."

The peasant girl sat down on the ground, leaned against his body, and grabbed his other hand. "I am really happy that you are willing to treat me like that" she said with a tender voice. Closing her eyes, she said, "Please say those words again, let me hear it and remember each word in my heart. Tell me, how are you going to treat me?"

Zhang Wuji was also grateful to see her so happy. Holding her soft and silky smooth hands he said, "I want you to live in safety and joy, I want to make you forget all sorts of past suffering, I don't care how many people come to bully you, to give you trouble, I will protect you without any regard of my own life."

With a tender and sweet smile the peasant girl leaned on his chest and said with a gentle voice, "I asked you to come with me, but you not only refused, you hit me, scolded me, and bit me ... Now you told me those things, I am really happy."

As soon as Zhang Wuji heard her words, his heart turned cold. Turned out this peasant girl was talking with her eyes closed, she was imagining that he was the boyfriend of the past.

The peasant girl felt his body tremble; she opened her eyes and looked at him. Her expression changed suddenly; she looked disappointed and angry, but there was also a hint of regret and tender feelings. Calming herself down, she said, “Ahniu Gege, you are willing to take me as your wife; you did not turn your back to me even though I am an ugly woman. I am very grateful. But several years ago I have given my heart to someone else. At that time he already had not paid me any attention. If he saw me now, he would not even cast me a glance. He is such a heartless and short-lived little rascal ...”

She was cursing that man as ‘heartless and short-lived little rascal’, yet her voice was full of longing and tender sentiments.

Wu Qingying coldly said, “He has agreed to marry you, and you two have spoken words of love to each other. Can we start now?”

The peasant girl slowly stood up and said to Zhang Wuji, “Ahniu Gege, I am going to die soon. But even if I live, I cannot marry you. I want you to know that I am very happy to hear what you have just told me. Please do not be angry with me. If you have some free time in the future, please remember me.” Her voice was extremely tender and sweet.

Zhang Wuji’s heart ached. He heard Ban Shuxian’s hoarse voice say, “We have kept our words by letting you see this man. Now you must keep your words by telling us who the killer was.”

“Alright!” the peasant girl said, “I know for sure that the killer had once hidden in his house.” While saying that she pointed her finger to Wu Lie.

Wu Lie’s countenance changed slightly. “Humph!” he shouted, “Nonsense!”

Wei Bi angrily said, “Tell us the truth quickly. You killed my Biaomei, who ordered you to do so?”

This time Zhang Wuji’s shock was indeed not small. With a trembling voice he said, “Killed Zhu ... Miss Zhu Jiuzhen?”

Wei Bi turned his stare toward him; he asked fiercely, “You know Miss Zhu Jiuzhen?”

“The name of Two Beauties of the Snowy Range shook the heavens, who hasn’t heard?” Zhang Wuji replied.

A faint smile appeared on the corner of Wu Qingying’s mouth. “Hey!” she loudly called the peasant girl, “Are you or are you not going to tell us who sent you?”

The peasant girl said, “I was sent to kill Zhu Jiuzhen by Kunlun Pai’s He Taichong, husband and wife, and Emei Pai’s Miejue Shitai.”

Wu Lie roared, “You attempt to sow dissension among us is in vain, what good is it for you?” With a loud shout his palm struck toward the peasant girl. This shout carried an impressive power, the palm also created a strong gust of wind causing the snowflakes rise on the ground that snow fluttered in the air.

The peasant girl moved sideways to evade, her movement was fantastic. Zhang Wuji’s mind was chaotic, “She ... she is indeed a Wulin character. She killed Xhu Jiuzhen, that must be because of me. I told her that I was deceived by Miss Zhu, and was bitten by the vicious dogs she raised. But I have never asked her to kill anybody. I only know that because she is ugly and has been through a misfortune in her family, her temperament turned strange. Who would have thought that she really is capable of killing people without a strong reason?”

Wei Bi and Wu Qingying, each with a sword in their hands, attacked from left and right. The peasant girl dodged to the east and escaped to the west trying to evade Wu Lie’s palm force. Suddenly her slender waist twisted, she turned toward Wu Qingying’s side and slapped her on the face, while her left hand reached out and snatched the sword in her hand. Wu Lie and Wei Bi cursed and came together to her rescue. The sword in the peasant girl’s hand shook and she called out, “Got you!” as she inflicted a short cut on Wu Qingying’s face.

Wu Qingying cried out in fear and leaped backwards. Her injury was actually very light, but she cherished her appearance very much, so when she felt a slight pain on her face, she was frightened out of her wits.

Wu Lie swept his left palm, pressing down on the peasant girl. The peasant girl leaned sideways to dodge. ‘Clang!’ the sword in her hand crashed with Wei Bi’s sword. Right this moment Wu Li’s right index finger trembled and sealed the ‘fu tu’ [subduing rabbit] and ‘feng shi’ [windy city(?) – I am sure Jin Yong was not talking about Chicago?], two acupoints on the outer side of her left leg. The peasant girl uttered a soft groan as her leg gave up and she fell onto Zhang Wuji’s body. She felt her body was comfortably

warm, but she could not exert an ounce of strength or the least bit of 'chi', even trying to lift a finger felt like hoisting a thousand-catty load for her.

Wu Qingying raised her sword and hatefully said, "Ugly girl, I won't let you die a quick and painless death. I am going to cut your arms and legs first and I'll leave you here to feed the wolves." She swung her sword down to chop the peasant girl's right arm.

"Hold it!" Wu Lie said, while reaching out to grab his daughter's wrist and pushing her sword away. To the peasant girl he said, "Tell us who sent you and I'll let you die a quick death. Otherwise, humph, humph! I'll say you won't enjoy rolling around on the snow without your limbs."

With a smile the peasant girl said, "Since you insist, I cannot hide the truth anymore. Miss Zhu Jiuzhen wanted to marry a man. Another pretty woman also wanted to marry this man. This other pretty Miss then gave me five hundred taels of silver, telling me to kill Zhu Jiuzhen. Actually, I should have kept this matter in the strictest confidence ..."

Before she finished talking, Wu Qingying's pretty face had turned pale from anger; with a flick of her wrist the sword went straight toward the peasant girls' chest.

The peasant girl was good at observing people and evaluating their situations [orig. 'inspect appearance distinguish/recognize look'. Elif, can you think of a better translation?]; early on she had guessed the awkward situation among the three people, Wu Qingying, Wei Bi and Zhu Jiuzhen, correctly. Deliberately enraging Wu Qingying, her intention was precisely that she would stab her to death quickly. She saw a blue ray flashed and the sword had already arrived at her chest. Suddenly, something flew noiselessly and struck the sword. 'Whoosh!' the sword was knocked out and flew more than a dozen 'zhang' away before it fell on the ground.

In the darkness, nobody saw clearly how Wu Qingying's sword left her hand and flew away, but this kind of force, even if she intentionally wanted to throw it away, she might not have the ability to do so. It was obvious that the peasant girl had a powerful helper.

In their shock, the six people took several steps backward. They looked around, but there were only open spaces in all directions; there were no hills, trees or thick bushes in which someone might be hiding. As far as their eyes could see, not even half a shadow of other people was to be seen. The six of them looked at each other in alarm and uncertainty.

"Qing'er," in low voice Wu Lie said, "What happened?"

“Seemed like a very fierce secret projectile,” Wu Qingying replied, “It knocked my sword out of my hand.”

Wu Lie again looked around, but did not see any other people. “Humph,” he said, “Perhaps this slave girl played a trick on you.” But in his heart he felt strange, “She was definitely hit by my Yi Yang Zi [Solitary Yang Finger], how could she still have the strength to shake Qing'er's sword away? This girl's martial art is truly demonic.” He strode forward and struck the peasant girl's left shoulder with his palm. He was using his entire strength with the intention to crush her shoulder bone, so that she would lose her martial art skill and thus give his daughter the opportunity to do to her as she wished.

It seemed that the peasant girl's shoulder bone would be crushed soon, when suddenly she raised her left arm and met his palm with hers. ‘Crash!’ Wu Lie felt a burning sensation in his chest; the opponent's palm felt like a raging storm, a torrential flood which was impossible to resist. “Ahh!” he cried out loudly as his body flew backwards, and ‘Bang!’ it hit the ground, hard. Fortunately his martial art skills were superb that as soon as his back touched the ground, he leaped back up. But blood was bubbling up in his chest and abdomen, his vision blackened and his head spun, so that he had just straightened up his body and regulated his breathing when his body swayed and in the end he tumbled down on the ground again.

Wei Bi and Wu Qingying were greatly shocked. They rushed to prop him up, but suddenly He Taichong said, “Let him lie down for a while longer!”

Wu Qingying turned her head and angrily said, “What did you say?” In her heart she thought, “Father has just fallen under the enemy's attack yet you take delight in his misfortune and ridicule him?”

He Taichong said, “His ‘chi’ and blood bubbled up, he needs to calm down quietly.”

Wei Bi understood immediately. “Yes!” he said, and gently laid his Shifu back to the ground.

He Taichong and Ban Shuxian looked at each other in great surprise. They had fought the peasant girl before, and although her stances and techniques were exquisite and her skill was above average, her internal energy was mediocre. When she exchanged palms with Wu Lie, it was obvious that the internal strength that jolted Wu Lie was extraordinarily strong. This had puzzled them to no end.

In her heart, the peasant girl was even more shocked. When her acupoints were sealed by Wu Lie, she fell into Zhang Wuji's bosom, completely unable to move. Very soon Wu Qingying's sword would have stabbed her, but suddenly something flew and shook the sword, while a stream of charcoal hot energy flowed through her leg, burst into her 'fu tu' and 'feng shi' acupoints and flushed the sealed acupoints open. Her body shook; lowering her head, she saw Zhang Wuji's hands were gripping both of her ankles, the stream of hot energy rushing into her body continuously via the 'xuan zhong' [hanging bell] acupoint.

This turn of events happened so quickly that before she had time to think about it, Wu Lie's palm had already come down. Without thinking she raised her hand up, thinking that broken hand would be better than crushed shoulder bones. Who would have thought that as soon as two palms collided, Wu Lie was jolted more than a 'zhang' backwards by her own palm? She was startled and thought in her heart, "Could this ugly freak bum actually be a martial art master with immeasurably deep skill?"

He Taichong was wary; he did not dare to contend in palm strength with her. Unsheathing his sword, he said, "I want to receive instructions in sword technique from Miss."

The peasant girl laughed. "I don't have any sword!" she said. "Not a problem," Wei Bi said, "I'll lend you mine!" Raising his sword, he aimed the tip of the sword toward the girl's chest and exerting himself, he threw the sword away.

The peasant girl reached out and caught the sword in her hand. She laughed and said, "Your martial art skill is lacking too much, your thrust did not kill me!"

Being a leader of a Sect, He Taichong did not want to take advantage of a younger generation. "You may start," he said, "I will yield to you for three stances before I will attack!"

The peasant girl thrust her sword toward He Taichong's groin. He Taichong snorted in anger. "A junior is being impolite!" he said in low voice, while lifting his sword to block. But there was a 'Crack!' sound as both swords broke at the same time.

He Taichong's face changed greatly; his shadow swayed and he withdrew half a 'zhang' backwards.

"What a pity! What a pity!" the girl exclaimed inwardly. Turned out Zhang Wuji transmitted his Jiu Yang Shen Gong to her body, but she did not know how to unleash the

formidable power of Shen Gong's, which resulted in both swords being broken. If she was able to utilize the power to attack the enemy, only the enemy's sword would be broken, while the sword in her hand would stay intact.

Ban Shuzian was greatly astonished. "What happened?" she asked in a low voice.

He Taichong's arm was still numb and aching. "Demonical!" he said with a bitter smile.

Ban Shuxian drew her sword out. With a cold face she said, "I want to receive instructions."

The peasant girl spread out her hands, her meaning was clear: she did not have any sword. Ban Shuxian pointed towards Wu Qingying's sword, which was fallen on the ground about a dozen of 'zhang' away. "Take that sword!" she ordered.

The peasant girl did not dare to be away from Zhang Wuji's hands; she had no choice but lift the broken sword in her hand, she laughed and said, "This broken sword is all right!"

Ban Shuxian was angry. She mused, "This dead girl is too arrogant to despise me like this." She was not like He Taichong who maintained his position in every aspect as an older generation of high skill level; her sword circled around and pierced the peasant girl's neck. The peasant girl raised her broken sword to block, but Ban Shuxian's sword technique was light and agile to the extreme; the sword quickly cut down on the peasant girl's left shoulder. She quickly flipped her sword to fend off. Ban Shuxian again changed her sword to stab the right side of her body. Ban Shuxian successively attacked eight times like a whirlwind, but all along she did not dare to meet the peasant girl's broken sword. She only displayed the exquisiteness of her swordsmanship without giving the opponent any opportunity to use her internal energy.

The peasant girl blocked to the left and parried to the right; soon she repeatedly fell into dangerous situations. Her swordsmanship was far inferior to Ban Shuxian to begin with, now that she only had a broken sword in her hand and did not dare to move her feet, she could only defend without any possibility of attacking.

Several stances later, the tip of Ban Shuxian's sword flashed and made a slash on the peasant girl's left arm. In Kunlun Pai's sword technique, once one gained the upper hand, one would not allow the enemy even half a chance to take a breather, and pressed on with follow-up stances to advance.

“Ah!” the peasant girl cried out as her shoulder was hit by the sword. “Hey!” she called out, “Aren’t you going to help me? Are you going to just watch me being killed?”

Ban Shuxian took two steps back; holding the sword horizontally across her chest, she looked all around, but did not see anybody. Immediately her sword vibrated and the tip created cold plum flowers as she attacked the peasant girl again. The peasant girl frantically brandished her broken sword. After blocking three sword moves, the opponent’s sword was getting amazingly fast, but her defense was also amazingly swift. It was a situation where the eyes must be clear and the hands must be quick, there was simply no leeway for miscalculations.

“Dead girl, your hand is quick!” Ban Shuxian praised.

The peasant girl did not want to be beaten; she cursed back, “Dead Granny, your hand is not slow either.”

But Ban Shuxian’s swordsmanship was from a major school with dozens of years of training. Her mouth was speaking while her hand did not slow down ever so slightly. On the other hand, the peasant girl was no more than seventeen, eighteen years of age; even if she was trained under a great master, how could she copy Ban Shuxian’s calm and composed manner even in a fierce battle? As soon as she opened her mouth, her attention was slightly distracted and she felt pain on her wrist immediately as the broken sword in her hand flew away.

“Ah!” the peasant girl cried out in fear as the tip of Ban Shuxian’s sword threatened the lower part of her side.

Ding Minjun had been watching from the side without doing anything. Now that she saw a small opening, because it was too late to draw her sword, she launched the stance ‘tui chuang wang yue’ [push out the window to look at the moon], in which both of her palms struck toward the peasant girl’s back. Right this moment, Wu Qingying also leaped in, her leg flew to kick the peasant girl’s right waist.

The peasant girl was so frightened that she felt her heart was about to jump out of her throat. Suddenly she felt her whole body was boiling as if she had fallen into a raging furnace. Without thinking she stretched out her finger to flick Ban Shuxian’s sword. At the same moment her back was struck by the palms and her waist was kicked.

“Aiyo! Aiyo!” two miserable screams were heard. Ding Minjun and Wu Qingying were thrown backward, while the sword in Ban Shuxian’s hand was reduced to a half-sec-

tion broken sword.

Turned out when Zhang Wuji saw the desperate situation, he sent out his entire ‘zhen qi’ [real ‘chi’] to the peasant girl’s body in great speed. By this time, his cultivation of the Jiu Yang Shen Gong had reached about thirty, forty percent of perfection; his power was indeed not small. As a result, Ban Shuxian’s sword, both of Ding Minjun’s wrist bones, and Wu Qingying’s right toes, were all broken.

He Taichong, Wu Lie, and Wei Bi were stupefied; they were momentarily at a loss. Ban Shuxian tossed the broken sword on the ground. “Let’s go!” she bitterly said, “Haven’t we disgraced ourselves enough?” while her eyes shot a fierce glare toward her husband. Her belly was full of resentment, which she wanted to vent on him.

“Yes!” He Taichong replied. Two people rushed away side by side. In a short moment they had already gone.

Kunlun Pai’s ‘qing gong’ [lightness skill] was excellent; certainly it ranked among the top within the Wulin world. As far as how Ban Shuxian would vent her anger toward He Taichong as soon as they reached home, whether by punishing him by making him kneel in front of her sword, or by subjecting him to another strange Kunlun Pai sword stance, it was not for the outsiders to know.

With one hand supporting his Shifu and the other supporting his martial sister, Wei Bi walked slowly away. The three of them were afraid the peasant girl would pursue and attack them; yet they were unable to run away as fast as He Taichong, husband and wife did. Each step they took was laden with anxiety.

The bones on both of Ding Minjun’s wrists were broken, but her feet were not injured. Gritting her teeth and bearing the pain, she walked away alone.

Pleased with herself, the peasant girl laughed heartily. “Ugly freak! You ...” she said, but before she could finish, she passed out suddenly.

Turned out as soon as Zhang Wuji saw the six people took off their separate ways, he released her ankles. Immediately the Jiu Yang Zhen Qi [the true/real ‘chi’ from Nine Yang] filling her body dispersed that it was as if her body was drained and her limbs and her entire bones were without any strength.

Zhang Wuji was startled, but immediately realized what had happened. Both his thumbs lightly pressed the ‘si zhu kong’ [empty bamboo silk] acupoint on the ends of

her eyebrows and transmit a little bit of 'Shen Gong'.

The girl slowly regained her consciousness. When she opened her eyes, she realized she was lying on Zhang Wuji's bosom while he was looking at her with a smile on his face; for some reason she felt very bashful. She leaped up immediately, and stared at him with a face that seemed like smiling yet she was not smiling. Suddenly she reached out toward his left ear and twisted it with all her strength.

"Ugly freak," she scolded him, "You deceived me! You possess such a fierce martial art skill, why didn't you tell me?"

"Aiyo!" Zhang Wuji cried out in pain, "What are you doing?"

The peasant girl laughed and said, "Who told you to deceive me?"

"When did I deceive you?" Zhang Wuji replied, "You did not tell me you know martial arts, I did not tell you I know martial arts either."

"All right," the peasant girl said, "I'll forgive you this time, considering you have helped me big time just now, your merit compensates for your crime, I am not going to press charges. How's your leg? Can you walk?"

"Still cannot," Zhang Wuji replied.

The peasant girl sighed and said, "Finally good intentions are being repaid well. If I did not remember you and wanted to see you one more time, you would not help me." After pausing for a moment, she continued, "If I knew your martial art skill level is much stronger than mine, I would not have to kill that witch girl Zhu Jiuzhen."

Zhang Wuji's face darkened. "I did not ask you to kill her," he said.

"Aiyo, aiyo! Turns out you still have this beautiful lady in your heart," the peasant girl said, "My bad, I killed your sweetheart."

"Miss Zhu was not my sweetheart," Zhang Wuji replied, "Even if she were more beautiful, she had nothing to do with me."

"Well! That's strange," the peasant girl exclaimed in amazement, "She had harmed you this bad, yet you don't like it when I killed her to vent your anger?"

Zhang Wuji indifferently said, “There are too many people who have harmed me. If I want to kill each and every one of them to vent my anger, I would have gone on an endless killing spree. Besides, there were some people who deliberately harmed me, but actually I feel sorry for them. Take Miss Zhu for example, she had always been scared and edgy every day, she was afraid her Biaoage [older male cousin] would not get along well with her, she was always anxious that he would take Miss Wu as his wife. This kind of person, do you think she would be happy?”

The peasant girl got angry. “Are you mocking me?” she said.

Zhang Wuji was taken aback, he did not expect that talking about Zhu Jiuzhen would offend the girl in front of him right now. “No, no,” he busily said, “I was talking about how everybody has his or her own misfortunes. If others were unfair to you and you killed them, that is really not good.”

The peasant girl laughed. “If you learned martial art not to kill people, then why did you learn it?” she asked.

Zhang Wuji hesitantly said, “After we mastered the martial art skill, when bad people mistreat us, we can resist them.”

“My utmost admiration!” the peasant girl mocked, “Turns out you are such an upright gentleman, a very good man!”

Zhang Wuji looked at her with a blank expression on his face. He always felt that somehow this girl’s demeanor seemed familiar, he felt somehow this girl was related to him.

The peasant girl closed her mouth and asked, “What are you looking at?”

Zhang Wuji replied, “My Mama often laughed at my Papa who was indiscriminately good toward others, saying that he was a soft-hearted scholar. When she said that, her tone and her manner was exactly the same as yours just now.”

The peasant girl blushed. “Pei!” she spat, “You are mocking me again. You said I look like your Mama, then you yourself look like your Papa!” Although she was angry, her eyes were actually laughing.

Zhang Wuji hurriedly said, “The Heaven above, if I had the intention of mocking you, let me be condemned by the Heaven and the Earth.”

“Talk is cheap,” the peasant girl said, “Even if you did mock me, there is nothing serious about it. Why do you have to swear an oath?”

They had just talked to this point when suddenly there was a clear whistle coming from the northeast. The whistle was bright and long, obviously it was coming from a woman. The whistle was responded by someone nearby; apparently it was Ding Minjun who had not gone too far. Ding Minjun immediately stopped.

The peasant girl’s countenance changed slightly; she said in a low voice, “Someone from Emei Pai is coming.”



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