

Foxs' Wuxia

Wuxia Fan Translation

YTTLJ Chapter 40



Chapter 40 – Didn't Know This Zhang Fellow was The Mr. Zhang
Translated by Foxs



Zhou Zhiruo drew out her sword and pointed it toward Zhang Wuji's chest. "I am going to take your life today," she shouted sternly, "Yin Li's ghost is entangling me anyway. I will eventually get killed. I'd rather die together with you." While saying that, she raised her sword high, ready to stab it down into Zhang Wuji's chest.

Zhang Wuji woke up at daybreak the next morning, and immediately jumped up a tall tree to scout the enemy movement. The enemy camp was bustling with activity; it seemed that they were going to launch an attack.

“Min Mei!” Zhang Wuji called.

“Mmm ... what is it?” Zhao Min replied.

Zhang Wuji hesitated before saying, “Nothing, I just love to call your name.” Actually, he wanted to consult Zhao Min on how to repel the Yuan army, knowing full well that she was very resourceful; certainly she had some brilliant ideas. But then he thought, “She was a princess of the imperial court; she betrayed her father and brother to follow me. I think it is just too much to ask her to help me killing her fellow Mongolians.” Hence, he stopped himself when the words were just on the tip of his tongue.

Zhao Min noticed the change in his countenance; she knew what he was going to say. She sighed and said, “Wuji Gege, you are able to empathize with my painful predicament; I don’t have to say anything.”

Zhang Wuji went back to his room with a troubled mind of not knowing what to do. Absentmindedly he took the two bundles of book Zhao Min brought last night. He read several pages of the Nine Yin Manual; he also took a glance on the Wumu Legacy. Again, after reading several pages, he came across a title ‘bing kun niu tou shan’ five small characters [troops trapped on the Ox-head Hill]. His heart was moved. He read on and found that in this section, Yue Fei recounted his experience when his outnumbered troops were surrounded by the Jin army; how he escaped from the entrapment, how he deployed special force soldiers, how he launched a converging attack and seized an overwhelming victory, all kinds of plan explained in great details.

Zhang Wuji slapped the table, “The Heaven helps me!” he exclaimed. Slapping the book down, he started to think. The situation of this Shaoshi Peak was entirely different to the Niutou Hill where Yue Fei was trapped in the past; however, if he used the same tactics, there was no reason why he could not win by a surprise move.

His admiration grew as he pondered deeper; he thought that Yue Wumu was a Heaven-sent genius. Faced with such danger, an ordinary man would not think of such strategy. He also thought that troop’s deployment was just like martial arts; if there wasn’t any expert giving guidance, no matter how smart or how dull, one would not think of such plan.

Dipping his finger into the tea cup, he drew the Temple map on the table. Even though he was aware of the dangerous situation they were in, who can say that they would not be lucky and prevail against the enemy? Their side was few, the enemy was many; they

would not be able to score victory by marching out in a neat formation and engage the enemy in an open battle.

Once his mind was set, he went to the Da Xiong Bao Dian [Precious Hall of Great Heroes] and asked Abbot Kong Wen to summon the heroes. In a short moment everybody had arrived.

Zhang Wuji stood up and said, “Presently, Tatar cavalry has gathered at the base of the mountain. Presumably, they will carry out a large scale attack soon. Although we have scored a small victory yesterday and have dampened their spirit, we will be hard pressed to withstand them if the Tatars pay no regards to their own lives and throng up the mountain. Zaixia [lit. under, the humble one] has no talent; it was by the heroes’ graciousness that I am elected to hold this temporary position as the commander in chief. Today we are united against a common enemy. I am asking everybody to obey my command.”

The multitude of heroes replied in one voice, “Please issue the order, we will follow, no one will dare to disobey.”

“Very well!” Zhang Wuji said, “Wu Qishi [Flag Leader Wu], receive my order!”

Rui Jin’s Flag Leader, Wu Jingcao stepped forward, bowed and said, “Subordinate is ready to receive the order.” While he was thinking in his heart, “Jiaozhu issues his first order to me. It is truly a great honor. No matter what kind of danger I will have to face, I will risk my life in doing it.”

Zhang Wuji said, “I assign you to lead your Flag brethren to uphold the martial law. Whichever hero or warrior does not obey my order, the Rui Jin Flag’s lances and hatchets will be thrown into his body. This law applies both to seniors and elders of our own Cult, and other Wulin masters and seniors. No exception.”

“Accept the order!” with a loud voice Wu Jingcao complied. He took a small white flag from his bosom and held it tight with both hands.

Both in terms of name and martial art skill, Wu Jingcao was not considered a first class Jianghu warrior, so previously, nobody regarded him too highly. But since the Five-Element Flags demonstrated their invincible might the other day, the multitude of heroes all knew that wherever this small white flag in his hand landed, it will immediately followed by the 500 feathered arrows, 500 javelins, and 500 short hatchets. Even if your skill is as high as the heavens, you will become mincemeat instantly. Therefore, seeing him unfold the white flag, everybody’s hearts shivered.

The reason behind this order was because when Zhang Wuji browsed through the Wumu Legacy, the first chapter started with, 'The way to the successful training of troops starts with strict discipline.' He knew these Jianghu warriors were proud people; each one was used to do what one thought right. Although individually they possessed strong martial art skills, fighting together, they were no different than a motley crowd. Without someone giving order to organize and restrain, forcing them to follow orders, there was no way they could resist the Mongolian elite troops. Therefore, his first order was to assign the Rui Jin Flag as the law enforcers.

Pointing his finger to the tall wall in front of the hall, Zhang Wuji said, "Gentlemen, Heroes, whoever excels in 'qing gong' and able to jump over that wall, please show your skill."

Among the crowd of heroes, there were not a few whose face appeared dissatisfied; they thought, "What is this immaterial talk about telling us to show off our jumping ability?" Some senior masters felt that he was showing contempt toward others; they were not pleased at all.

Zhang Songxi stepped out from among the crowd and said, "I can." And then he leaped over the wall and lightly landed on the other side of the wall. Wudang Pai's 'ti yun zong' [cloud stairs] 'qing gong' enjoyed quite a reputation throughout the world. For someone with Zhang Songxi's ability, leaping this wall was as easy as blowing off dust. However, he was not showing off at all, it was only an honest demonstration because he was following order. Thereupon Yu Lianzhou, Yin Liting, Yang Xiao, Fan Yao, Wei Yixiao, Yin Yewang and the other experts followed suit one by one.

Like butterflies flying over flowers the heroes jumped over the wall one after another. Some were showing off their 'qing gong' by performing all kinds of flowery styles midair. After more than four hundred people had leaped, it looked like nobody else would try.

This wall was indeed not low; without a good 'qing gong' it was not easy to leap over it. The multitude of heroes did not train the same martial art skill. Oftentimes they trained themselves well in fists and kicks or weaponry, so their 'qing gong' was ordinary. There were quite a number of Jianghu characters who made their names this way; naturally, they were not willing to show off their shortcomings.

Noticing that among these four hundred people there were about eighty to ninety Shaolin monks, Zhang Wuji thought, "Shaolin Pai truly lives up to its reputation as the number one school in Wulin. Just in 'qing gong' alone, they have many more masters

than any other schools.” Thereupon he issued his next order, “Yu Er Bo, Zhang Si Bo, Yin Liu Shu, the three Uncles are to lead these heroes excel in ‘qing gong’ to bluff the enemy. You are to pretend to be escapees from the Temple, make the enemy troops to pursue you, and when you get to the back of the mountain ...” And he detailed the next steps.

Wudang Pai’s Yu, Zhang and Yin, three heroes accepted the orders. Zhang Wuji made further assignments: who would set up ambush, who would cut the enemy’s rear flank, who would engage them frontally, who would make flank attack, and so on; all in detailed arrangement.

Yang Xiao and the others noticed how he planned this ingenious tactic and deployed troop’s formation to engage the enemy; everything was so clear and orderly as if it was all premeditated. They were all utterly impressed; nobody knew that he had used the military tactic legacy of Yue Wumu. Only, he modified it slightly because of different terrain and different troops.

Finished assigning tasks, Zhang Wuji finally said, “I am asking Kong Wen Fangzhang and Kong Zhi Shen Seng to lead gentlemen and ladies of the Emei Pai to take care of the injured and the dead.” Since Zhou Zhiruo was not present, Emei Pai had no one to give leadership. Zhang Wuji was aware Emei Pai had deep resentment against him, so he felt it was inappropriate for him to give them direction. For this reason he asked Kong Wen and Kong Zhi, two divine monks; both men of good moral standing and reputation to act as their leaders. Presumably, Emei Pai people would not refuse to be under their leaderships. Sure enough, hearing his order, male and female disciples of Emei Pai silently accepted it; no one open his or her mouth in dissent.

In a loud and clear voice Zhang Wuji said, “Today, the warriors of the Central Plains are united to fight the Tatar invasion. Masters in charge of bells and drums of the Shaolin Pai, please beat the drums and ring the bells.” The multitude of heroes responded with an earth-shattering cheers; they unsheathed their weapons in high spirit.

The Lie Huo Flag had transported the firewood amassed in the Temple out from its storehouses and piled it up in front of the Temple. They lighted it up and very soon flames and thick smoke rose up to the sky. The Hou Tu Flag had spread silt on top of various halls in the Temple, where the Lie Huo Flag then stacked firewood on it. This way, when they lighted the firewood, the fire would not spread to the building below. Yet from a distant, the several hundred buildings in the Temple complex appeared to be burning.

From the base of the mountain, the Yuan army heard the bells and drums first, which sounded like emergency alarm; then they saw the raging fire up the mountain. “Not good!” they said to each other, “The ‘man zi’ [insulting term for south Chinese/southern barbarian] set the Temple on fire; they must be running away.”

Leading more than 150 warriors excelled in ‘qing gong’, Yu Lianzhou rushed down the mountain from the left side of Shaoshi Peak. Before they even reached the waist of the mountain, Yuan troops had already made loud ruckus and lined up in formation to pursue. The crowd of warriors scattered in all directions, making it hard for the Yuan army to shoot them with arrows.

Zhang Songxi led the second group. Yin Liting led the third group. Each of them carried a large bundle on his back. The bundles contained either wooden planks or bundles of clothes. In the eyes of the Yuan troops, it appeared that they were abandoning the Temple, escaping with difficulty carrying valuables; but the bundles were actually shields against the Mongolians’ arrows.

Because of the heavy smoke, the Yuan troops could not see clearly how many people were escaping. Thereupon they divided their forces into two groups; ten thousand soldiers pursued the escapees immediately, while the other ten thousand stayed in their original defensive position.

“Yang Zuo Shi,” Zhang Wuji turned toward Yang Xiao, “The Tatar General is quite knowledgeable of military tactic; he did not order the entire army to pursue. This might give us trouble.”

“Yes,” Yang Xiao replied, “They do give us reason to be concerned.”

They heard bugles sound from the bottom of the mountain. Two thousand strong Yuan cavalry divided itself into two groups and advanced to the top of the mountain from left and right. The mountain roads were rugged, but Mongolian ponies were able to gallop fast, as if they were flying. With their long spears and iron armors, the troops’ appearance was very impressive.

When the vanguard of the Yuan cavalry arrived at the pavilion halfway up the mountain, Zhang Wuji gave his signal. From either side of the road, Lie Huo Flag people closing in, crouching among the tall grass. As the two-thousand strong cavalry advanced about another hundred ‘zhang’s, Xin Ran let out a whistle; his troops immediately sprayed oil toward the enemy, followed by balls of fire, burning both horses and their

riders. The horses neighed in fear and pain; most of them rolled down the mountain, creating a great chaos.

The Yuan troops discipline was very strict. As the front group was being defeated, the rear group did not budge. Under the command of their general, three thousand soldiers got down from their horses and marched forward to attack. Again the Lie Huo Flag shot their fire, burning several hundred troops. But with extreme force of will, the remaining troops were still marching on.

Tang Yang, the Flag Leader of the Hong Shui Flag waved a black flag; poisonous water spurted out. Next, the Hou Tu Flag also shot poisonous sand, throwing the Yuan army into total disorder. Several hundred troops managed to advance toward the mountain peak. These soldiers were completely wiped out by the Rui Jin Flag and Ju Mu Flag.

From the bottom of the mountain suddenly came the sound of beating drums. Five thousand troops marched forward with large shields lined up in front of their bodies, creating a slowly advancing wall. This way, the fire, poisonous water and poisonous sand lost their effectiveness. Even gigantic logs rolled down by the Ju Mu Flag only managed to create a few gaps, which were quickly closed again.

Seeing this desperate situation, Abbot Kong Wen said, “Zhang Jiaozhu, please have everybody retreat quickly. We must preserve the vitality of the Wulin world of the Central Plains. Although we are defeated today, we will stage a comeback in the future.”

In the midst of this anxiety, suddenly they heard rousing sound of metal drums from the foot of the mountain, followed by a rocket shot up to the sky. Battle cries rose up from all directions.

Yang Xiao was delighted. “Jiaozhu,” he said, “Our reinforcement arrives!”

From the top of the mountain looking down, they could not see the situation at the foot of the mountain; but they saw the dust rose and they heard the shouts of the people and the neigh of the horses. Obviously, the incoming troops were numerous.

Zhang Wuji loudly called out, “The reinforcement has arrived; everybody, charge!” From the top of the mountain, the multitude of heroes charged downward with weapons in their hands.

Zhang Wuji cried out again, “Gentlemen Heroes, kill officers first before killing the soldiers.”

The crowd of heroes echoed his cry, “Kill officers first before killing the soldiers!”

The Mongolian armed force was organized into teams. Every ten soldiers formed a ten-man unit. Every ten-man units formed a hundred-man unit. Likewise, they formed thousand-man unit and subsequently ten-thousand-man unit, following a layered chain of command. When they go to battle, it was just like the mind giving order to the arm, the arm giving order to the hand, the hand giving order to the fingers. If the two forces were battling against each other arrayed in formation, Zhang Wuji's order to kill the officers first would be difficult to follow; but at this moment the Yuan army was scattered on the hillside. Although the Yuan army could be considered elite troops, the martial art skill of their officers, after all, was inferior to the heroes and warriors of the Central Plains. Soon several ‘qian fu zhang’ [leader of a thousand-man unit] and ‘bai fu zhang’ [leader of a hundred-man unit] were killed. The Mongolian troops were thrown into confusion.

Charging down the mountain, Zhang Wuji and the others saw fluttering flags at the base of the mountain. The one on the south carried a ‘Xu’ character, while the one on the north had a ‘Chang’ character. So they know that Xu Da and Chang Yuchun had arrived.

Xu and Chang, two men were originally stationed around the Huai Si River. This time they were just moving their troops to Henan when Budai Heshang [cloth sack monk] Shuo Bude arrived with the call for help. As soon as they learned about their Cult Leader was besieged by the enemy at the Shaoshi Peak, they deployed their troops night and day. By that time, around the Henan and Hubei, the Ming Cult army had fought the Yuan army for several years; with both sides occupying overlapping regions. Since they were not too far away and left as soon as they received the news, they managed to arrive in less than two days.

Xu Da and Chang Yuchun had been in command over the Ming Cult army for a long time; moreover, their troops were large, so they were able to drive the Yuan army to the west in no time.

The other force of ten-thousand Yuan soldiers was pursuing the heroes who pretended to escape from the Temple toward the western valley. Yu Lianzhou, Zhang Songxi and Yin Liting led several hundred warriors with outstanding ‘qing gong’ fighting and retreating into the valley. The Yuan army's ‘wan fu zhang’ [leader of ten-thousand-man unit] saw that the three sides of the valley were all steep cliffs; the valley looked dangerous. However, seeing the number of the enemy was small, he thought that even if

the enemy prepared an ambush there, they should be able to deal with it. Thereupon he signaled with his hand to order his troops to pursue closely into the valley.

As Yu Lianzhou and the others arrived at the bottom of the cliff, they climbed on several dozens long ropes, which were prepared in advance. As the 'wan fu zhang' realized they had fallen into the enemy's trap, he quickly ordered his men to withdraw. To his shock, however, at the mouth of the valley they were driven back by volleys of fire, poisonous sand, arrows, and poisonous water; while the Ju Mu Flag dropped logs in abundance to seal up the entrance of the valley.

Meanwhile, the second defeated army was also driven to the valley. As they saw there was no way out, they ran all over the mountain and valley, scattered to all direction. Zhang Wuji and Xu Da arrived in close succession. "What a pity!" they cried; if they had planned it properly in advance, the second ten thousand strong troops would also be driven into the valley and destroyed completely.

Zhang Wuji did not anticipate the Yuan army would divide themselves into two groups, he also did not expect the reinforcement would arrive amazingly quickly. After all, commanding troops in the battlefield was not the same as being a Cult Leader. Although the Wumu Legacy contained marvelous military strategy, in the end, it was not easy to reconcile between the theory and practice. If Xu Da and Chang Yuchun did not arrive on time, the Shaolin Temple would inadvertently meet its doom. The first ten-thousand strong Yuan army, which was trapped inside the valley, would also be eventually rescued by their allies.

Xu Da immediately ordered his troops to move dirt and rocks to seal the mouth of the valley. He also sent his archers to climb up the cliff. Occupying the higher position their arrows shot down like rain into the Yuan army below. The Yuan troops were surrounded by the valley walls, they were powerless to retaliate and could only hide underneath the mountain rocks.

Not too long afterwards, Chang Yuchun's troops arrived. He was extremely delighted to see Zhang Wuji after a long period of separation.

"Remove the dirt and the rocks," Chang Yuchun yelled, "We are going in to wipe out the Tatars."

Xu Da laughed and said, "There are no food and no water in the valley. Give them seven, eight days; the Tatars will die of thirst and starvation. Why must we, brothers, painstakingly fight with them?"

Chang Yuchun also laughed, “I always prefer to kill them with my own hands.”

Although Chang Yuchun was older than Xu Da, he usually submitted to Xu Da’s intelligence; also, he noticed that Zhang Wuji did not contradict Xu Da, so he did not press on.

Xu and Chang, two men were battlefield-trained; their orders were appropriate and to the point. Zhang Wuji realized his battle experience was inferior to these two, therefore, he asked Xu and Chang to be in charge in pursuing and killing the runaway Yuan soldiers.

That evening, joyous noise shook the Shaoshi Peak, as the Ming Cult rebel army [orig. ‘yi jun’ – righteous army, or militia] and the heroes from all schools and sects celebrate their victory. After several days in a row always eating vegetarian dishes in the Shaolin Temple, they grew tired of the food. Tonight, wine and meat were overflowing; everybody could eat to their heart’s content.

During the banquet, Zhang Wuji asked Chang Yuchun about his health; he wanted to know if Chang Yuchun diligently took the medicine he prescribed to nurse Chang Yuchun’s health. Chang Yuchun laughed aloud and said, “Jiaozhu, don’t worry. Lao Chang [the Ol’ Chang] is as healthy as an ox, on one meal I can eat three catties of meat and six big bowls of rice. During the battle, lack of sleep for three days and three nights will not harm me a bit.” His implication was that he did not need any medication. However, Zhang Wuji remembered what Hu Qingniu had told him; therefore, he earnestly implored him to take the medicine for his health. Chang Yuchun only gave him a non-committal answer, because in his heart he greatly disapproved Zhang Wuji’s advice.

Xu Da poured a cup full of wine to toast Zhang Wuji. “Congratulations, Jiaozhu,” he said, “Please accept this toast!” Zhang Wuji received the cup and drank the wine.

Xu Da said, “Subordinate has always admired Jiaozhu’s courage and wisdom in dealing with others, admired your peerless martial art skill. To my surprise, your military tactic is also marvelous. This is the great fortune of our Cult to the benefit of common people everywhere.”

Zhang Wuji laughed out loud and said, “Xu Dage, no need to flatter me. Our great victory today was first, due to the amazingly speedy arrival of Xu Dage and Chang Dage; and second, due to the Yue Wumu’s Legacy. Xiao Di [little brother] truly cannot take even a half part of credit.”

“What is the Yue Wumu’s Legacy?” Xu Da wondered, “I beg for Jiaozhu’s explanation.”

Zhang Wuji took a bundle of yellowish thin paper from his bosom. It was the Wumu Legacy, which was concealed inside the Tulong Saber. He turned the page to the ‘Troops Trapped on the Ox-head Mountain’ section and handed it over to Xu Da.

Xu Da received the book with both hands and read attentively for a moment. He could not help but be stunned and impressed and the same time. “Wumu’s ability in managing the troops was truly divine, truly unachievable by the later generation,” he sighed, “If Yue Wumu was still alive today, leading the warriors of the Central Plains, we would not worry about driving the Tatars back to the northern desert.”

While saying that, he respectfully returned the book But Zhang Wuji did not want to receive it. He said, “‘The most revered in the Wulin world, treasured Saber slaughtering the dragon; ruling everything under the heavens, no one dares to disobey.’ The real meaning of these sixteen characters, only today did I finally understand. The so-called ‘the most revered in the Wulin world’ is not the Saber itself, but it is the Legacy concealed inside the Saber. When this military strategy is used to face the enemy, fighting a battle will result in victory, attacking will result in subduing the enemy. Ultimately, ‘ruling everything under the heavens, no one dared to disobey.’ Otherwise, how can one rule everything under the heavens with just a single treasured saber? Xu Dage, I am passing this military strategy book to you. I hope you will use the notes Yue Wumu left behind to take our country [orig. ‘he shan’ – river and mountain] back and set up a new emperor [orig. ‘huang long – yellow dragon].”

Xu Da was taken aback. “What kind of virtue or ability does Subordinate have?” he hastily said, “How can I be worthy to accept such a generous gift from Jiaozhu?”

“Xu Dage,” Zhang Wuji replied, “Please do not decline. I am giving this book on military strategy to you on behalf of the common people.”

Xu Da held the book with trembling hands. Zhang Wuji continued, “There were two more lines in the saying circulating within the Wulin world: ‘Yitian [relying on Heaven] does not appear, who can match its sharpness?’ Presently, the Yitian Sword is broken into two; but someday someone will mend it. Hidden inside the Sword was a very fierce secret martial art manual. I also know the meaning of these last two lines. The Military Manual is to be used to drive the Tatars away. Somebody will seize the power. If it happens that the new ruler is abusing his newfound power, that he is simply replacing one tyrant with another, so that the common people are oppressed with great suffering, then there will come a day when a hero, wielding the Yitian Sword, will sever the

head of that tyrant. Although by commanding millions of warriors the tyrant is able to overturn the world, he might not necessarily be able to withstand one strike of the Yitian Sword. Xu Dage, I want you to remember what I said today.”

Xu Da's back was streaming with cold sweats; he did not dare to decline anymore. “Subordinate will cautiously observe Jiaozhu's instructions today,” he said. With full respect he placed the Wumu Legacy on the table, knelt down and kowtowed to it four times before respectfully thanking Zhang Wuji again for bestowing the book to him.

Hereafter, Xu Da did indeed command his troops with a divine skill; consecutively defeated the Yuan army, until finally he held the commander-in-chief position in the expedition to the north, driving away the Mongolians beyond the Great Wall. His prestige shook the northern desert, establishing meritorious achievement of his generation. Henceforth the Ming Cult was admired by the heroes of the Central Plains. Everywhere Zhang Wuji issued his order, nobody dared to disobey. For the last several hundred years the Ming Cult was held in contempt by the common people; they were considered demonic and heretical. After this heaven-turning-and-earth-shaking huge change, the Ming Cult became the leader of the heroes and warriors of the Central Plains, became the driving force behind the resurgence's great mission. Later on, Zhu Yuanzhang turned double-minded and repeatedly schemed to ascend the throne. Even so, the Ming Cult people were the ones helping him to take back the country [here, the word is 'jiang shan' – river and mountain]; therefore, he could not help but choose the character 'Ming' [bright] as his dynasty name. From the first year of Ming Dynasty's Emperor Hongwu [reign name of Zhu Yuanzhang] to the seventeenth year of Emperor Chongzhen [the last emperor of Ming Dynasty], 277 years of ruling the land under the heavens [i.e.China], it was because of the Ming Cult.

[Translator's note: Jin Yong original text says the first year of Hongwu was 'wu shen', the forty-fifth year of the 60-year cycle. History of China (J.A.G. Roberts) says Zhu Yuanzhang declared his new dynasty in January of the year 1368. The last year of Chongzhen was 'jia shen' – the twenty-first year of the 60-year cycle, or 1644. Roberts did say that Chongzhen committed suicide in 1644; however, $1368 + 277 = 1645$. The same book also says that Chongzhen reigned from 1628 to 1645 (seventeen years). One possible explanation I can think of is that according to Chinese calendar, January of 1368 was still considered the previous year.]

That evening, the multitude of heroes ate and drank until dawn; it was not until they were drunk did they go to their rooms to rest. Toward the afternoon, one by one they took their leave from Kong Wen and Kong Zhi. Zhang Wuji saw that the Emei disciples were like sheep without a shepherd, his heart was sorrowful. He also saw Song

Qingshu was still lying on the stretcher; it was unclear whether he was still alive or had already died. Thereupon he went near them and said to Jing Hui, “Let me examine Song Dage’s injury.”

Jing Hui coldly said, “The cat weeps for the dead mouse. You don’t need to shed crocodile tears.”

Zhou Dian happened to be nearby; he could not restrain himself from cursing, “For the sake of old friendship with your Zhang Men [Sect Leader], our Jiaozhu is willing to treat this surnamed Song’s injury. Actually, everybody has the right to kill this kind of renegade and betrayer-of-father disciple. What is a wicked nun like you prattling about?”

Jing Hui was about to retort; but then she saw Zhou Dian’s rogue looking ugly countenance, she was afraid he might be persistently unreasonable. If a fight broke, she would unavoidably be at a disadvantage; therefore, suppressing her anger she laughed coldly and said, “From generation to generation, our Emei Pai’s Zhang Men has always be ‘clear-as-ice-and-clean-as-jade’ virgin. If Zhou Zhang Men did not maintain her moral integrity and chastity, how can she be our school’s Zhang Men? Humph, if this kind of traitor Song Qingshu stayed with our Sect, he might smear Zhou Zhang Men’s reputation. Li Shizhi [martial nephew], Long Shizhi, please return this fellow to Wudang Pai!”

The two Emei disciples carrying Song Qingshu complied. Lifting up the stretcher, they brought it to Yu Lianzhou and set it down in front of him before promptly returning to their group. Everybody was stunned.

“Wh ... what?” Yu Lianzhou asked, “He is not your Zhang Men’s husband?”

“Humph,” Jing Hui hatefully said, “How could our Zhang Men even look at a man like that? She was unbearably angry to that kid Zhang Wuji for breaking faith and running away from their wedding; humiliating our Sect in front of the heroes from all over the world. It was then that she deceived this kid to come and pretend to be her husband. Who would have thought ... humph, humph, if we had only known, why should our Zhang Men endure this notoriety? Presently, she ... she ...”

Zhang Wuji had been listening from the side with a dull expression on his face; he could not restrain himself from stepping forward and asking, “You said Mrs. Song ... she ... she is not really Mrs. Song?”

Jing Hui turned her head and hatefully said, “I am not talking to you.”

Right this moment, Song Qingshu, who was still lying on the stretcher, stirred and moaned, “Is ... is Zhang Wuji killed?”

“On your dream!” Jing Hui sneered, “Death is at your door, you are still thinking about pretty face.”

Seeing Jing Hui was emotional and her speech was incoherent, in low voice Yin Liting asked another female disciple of Emei, Bei Jinyi, “Bei Shimei [martial (younger) sister], what had actually happened?”

Bei Jinyi was a good friend of Ji Xiaofu. As Yin Liting asked her, she hesitated for a long time before saying, “Jing Hui Shijie [martial (older) sister], Yin Liu Xia is not an outsider. Let Xiao Mei [little sister – referring to self] explain to him, alright?”

“What outsider or not outsider?” Jing Hui replied, “He is not an outsider, we must explain it to him. He is an outsider, we must explain it to him even more. Our Zhou Zhang Men is clean and pure; she has nothing to do with this crafty villain surnamed Song. All of you have seen the ‘shou gong sha’ [lit. gecko/house lizard sand, ‘chastity mark’?] on Zhang Men’s arm with your own eyes. We must make this fact known to the Wulin people all over the world, so that our Emei Pai’s hundred years of uprightness will not be blemished ...”

Yin Liting thought, “This Jing Hui Shitai’s mind is jumbled; her speech is somewhat confusing.” Thereupon he said to Bei Jinyi, “Bei Shimei, since that is the case, could you elaborate more? How did my Song Shizhi get involved with your precious Pai? What relationship did he have with your precious Pai’s Zhang Men? Someday Xiao Xiong [lit. little/humble elder brother] must report to our Shifu. This matter concerns both of our Sects; I think it will be better not to damage the friendship between the two parties.”

Bei Jinyi sighed and said, “Speaking about both behavior and martial art skill, this Song Shao Xia [young hero] could actually be considered a rare talent within the Wulin world. Only because of one silly youthful lust, he has fallen into such sin. Apparently our Zhang Men promised him that as soon as Zhang Wuji is killed to wash away the humiliation she experienced in her wedding day, she would marry him. Thereupon he agreed to join our Sect and asked our Zhang Men for advice in the marvelous martial art. During the Heroes Assembly the day before yesterday, Zhang Men suddenly declared herself as ‘Mrs. Song’; by saying that she was the wife of this Song Shao Xia. At that time, all our Sect’s disciples were utterly astonished. That same day our Zhang Men’s prestige shook the crowd of heroes by subduing all Sects ...”

Zhou Dian interrupted, “It was because our Jiaozhu was yielding to her intentionally; what a loud horn you are blowing!”

Bei Jinyi ignored him, she continued, “Although our Sect’s disciples were very happy, when evening came, we still asked her where the ‘Mrs. Song’, three characters [Song Fu Ren] came from. Zhang Men exposed her right arm and sternly said, ‘Everybody, come and see!’ All of us saw with our own eyes the scarlet ‘shou gong sha’ on her arm, so we know that she has kept her chastity. Zhang Men said, ‘It was expedient that I call myself Mrs Song for the time being. I need to make that kid Zhang Wuji angry, to disturb his mind so that I may seize victory over him. This kid’s martial art is simply too remarkable, I definitely cannot defeat him. For the sake of our Sect’s reputation, why should I care about my own?’ She said that with determination and in loud voice as if she wanted everybody to hear it clearly. She also said, ‘The disciples of this Sect, male or female, unless they are ‘chu jia xiu dao’ [those who leave home (to become Buddhist monks or nuns), and those who practice Daoism], are never forbidden from getting married. However, since our founder Guo Zu Shi’s [lit. ancestor master], all highest and deepest martial art skills are imparted only to virgins who keep themselves pure. Each time a female disciple bows down to enter our school, Shifu will always plant ‘shou gong sha’ on our arms. Every year, on Guo Zu Shi birthday, Xian Shi [departed master] would perform inspection. That year Ji Shijie ... it was ...” Speaking to this point, she stammered and then stopped altogether.

Yin Liting and the others understood clearly, however, that Bei Jinyi was going to say that when Ji Xiaofu was violated by Yang Xiao, her ‘shou gong sha’ disappeared and that was how her disgrace was discovered by Miejue Shitai. Yin Liting and Yang Buhui were happily married, yet as he remembered Ji Xiaofu this time, he could not help from feeling deep sorrow in his heart. Involuntarily he cast a sidelong glance toward Yang Xiao and saw that Yang Xiao’s eyes were brimming with tears as he turned his head away.

“Yin Liu Xia,” Bei Jinyi said, “Our Zhang Men deliberately wanted to anger the Ming Cult’s Zhang Wuji by taking advantage of this Song Shao Xia’s endless infatuation toward our Zhang Men, in the end, it gave birth to many problems. I wish for Song Shao Xia’s recovery, also for Yin Liu Xia to talk to Zhang Zhenren and Song Da Xia, so as to avoid further hostility between your precious Sect and ours.”

Yin Liting nodded. “So that’s how it is. My Shizhi was disobedient and he defied his superior, his death will not be regretted. He truly did bring shame to our humble Sect. I only wish he would die cleanly sooner.” Yin Liting was softhearted by nature, but re-

calling Song Qingshu's grave offense by murdering Mo Shenggu, he was really repulsed by him.

While they were still talking, suddenly from a distant came a shrill scream; it sounded like Zhou Zhiruo's voice, full of shock and fear, as if she had met some extremely dangerous misfortune. Everybody was horrified; especially since it was in the middle of the day, the sun was shining brightly, with people everywhere all around them. Yet this scream was so hair rising, as if the person screaming suddenly saw an evil spirit appear before her very eyes. Almost like on cue, everybody turned their heads to the direction of the noise.

Zhang Wuji, Jing Hui, Bei Jinyi and the others rushed forward. Zhang Wuji was afraid Zhou Zhiruo might meet a powerful enemy, so he ran full speed ahead. After several jumps, he had already entered the forest. He saw a dark green shadow running wildly towards him, it was none other than Zhou Zhiruo.

Quickly Zhang Wuji met her and asked, "Zhiruo, what is it?"

Zhou Zhiruo cried out with a face full of terror, "Ghost, ghost! There's a ghost chasing me!" She threw herself to Zhang Wuji's chest, while trembling uncontrollably.

Seeing her so frightened as if her soul was leaving her, Zhang Wuji patted her shoulder gently. "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid; there is no ghost," he said consolingly, "What did you see?" He noticed that her clothes were tattered from running through the thick briar and her face was full of bloodstains. Half of the sleeve on her left arm was torn, exposing a snow-white, lotus-root colored arm. Sure enough, there was a red dot, as red as a coral or a red jade, the 'shou gong sha'.

Zhang Wuji was proficient in medicine. He knew that once this 'shou gong sha' was implanted under the skin, it would stay forever, unless the woman marries or loses her chastity. When listening to Jing Hui and Bei Jinyi previously, he was still half-believing and half-doubting. Now as he saw it with his own eyes, not even half a suspicion remained in his heart.

In that moment, myriads of thoughts filled his mind. "So her marriage with Song Qingshu was a fake. Why did she deceive me? Why did she deliberately want to anger me? Was it truly because of that 'Number One Martial Artist of the Present Age' title? Was it because she wanted to test my heart, whether I still have feelings toward her?" Just as quick, he remembered, "Zhang Wuji, oh, Zhang Wuji, Miss Zhou is the enemy who murdered your Biaomei. Whether she is a virgin or already married to someone

else, what do you have to do with it?” Yet seeing how terrified Zhou Zhiruo was, he did not have a heart to push her away.

Zhou Zhiruo buried her face in Zhang Wuji's chest. She was aware of Zhang Wuji's broad and muscular body and smelled his masculine breath; gradually her fear subsided. “Wuji Gege,” she said, “Is it you?”

“It is I,” Zhang Wuji replied, “What did you see? Why were you terrified like that?”

Zhou Zhiruo was suddenly enveloped by fear again. ‘Wah!’ she broke into crying again; she sobbed uncontrollably on Zhang Wuji's shoulder with hot tears streaming down her cheeks.

By this time, Yang Xiao, Wei Yixiao, Jing Hui, Yin Liting and the others arrived one after another. Seeing this scene, they signaled each other with their eyes and withdrew quietly. Ming Cult, Wudang Pai and Emei Pai people were all still hoping in their hearts that Zhou Zhiruo will be reconciled with Zhang Wuji and they will become husband and wife. Admittedly, it was difficult for all these people to forget Zhao Min's offense in the past. In addition, Zhao Min was a Mongolian woman; if Zhang Wuji took her as his wife, they were afraid it would hinder their great mission.

After crying for a while, Zhou Zhiruo suddenly said, “Wuji Gege, is there somebody chasing me?”

“No,” Zhang Wuji replied, “Who is chasing you? Is it the Xuanming Elders?”

“No! Not them!” Zhou Zhiruo said, “Have you looked clearly? Are you sure nobody ... no, it was not a human ... Are you sure nothing, whatever it is, pursuing me?”

Zhang Wuji smiled and said, “The sun is shining brightly, I can see everything clearly.” His voice turned gentle; “Zhiruo,” he said, “You have spent too much energy these past few days; you must be really tired. Perhaps you hallucinated and thought you saw something.”

“Can't be! Can't possibly be!” Zhou Zhiruo insisted, “I saw it three times; three consecutive times.” Her voice trembled; obviously she was terrified.

“What is it that you saw three consecutive times?” Zhang Wuji asked.

With one hand on his shoulder, Zhou Zhiruo tried to stand up on her trembling feet. And then, mustering all her courage and strength she turned around to look back. Just an instant she quickly turned her eyes toward Zhang Wuji again and seeing his gentle and soft expression, full of concern, her heart ached; suddenly she felt weary and dropped down on the ground.

“Wuji Gege,” she said, “I ... I have deceived you. I was the one who took Yitian Sword and Tulong Saber, I was the one who killed ... killed Yin ... Miss Yin ... I was the one who sealed Xie Da Xia’s acupoint. I ... I did not marry Song Qingshu. In my heart I always have only ... only you alone.”

Zhang Wuji sighed. “Actually, I have already known everything. But ... but why did you do it?”

Crying, Zhou Zhiruo said, “You don’t know what my Shifu told me on the Wan An Temple Pagoda. She told me the secret of the Yitian Sword and the Tulong Saber. She wanted me to obtain the treasured Sword and Saber at all costs, to brighten the name of Emei Pai. She made me swear a heavy oath to pretend that I like you, but she would not allow me to fall in love with you ...”

Zhang Wuji gently stroked her arm, remembering how he had witnessed Miejue Shitai struck Ji Xiaofu dead with her palm, how in the great desert Miejue Shitai swore to destroy the Ming Cult, how he saw her massacre the Cult disciples under the Rui Jin Flag with Yitian Sword in her hand. Afterwards, soaring down from the Wan An Temple Pagoda, she preferred death to being helped by him. It all showed how deep her hatred toward the Ming Cult was. Since Zhou Zhiruo was appointed her successor and had received her last words, all kinds of malicious and cruel acts she did must be because of her Shifu’s instructions.

By his nature, Zhang Wuji had always been very easy to forgive other people’s offense. He had never held any grudge against anybody. Moreover, he remembered her kindness when they were little on the boat floating along the Hanshui River, how she helped him eat and took a good care of him. Also, during the fierce battle on the Brightness Peak, when he was fighting He Taichong, husband and wife, and the two tall and short elders of Huashan Pai, perhaps he would have been dead right then and there if she did not give him directions from the side. On top of that, he remembered that although she was malicious, cruel and crafty, all her actions were caused by her deep feelings toward him.

This moment, as her delicate and frail body was leaning against his bosom, Zhang Wuji could not help from having a tender feeling toward her. “Zhiruo,” he called in a soft

voice, “What did you actually see, which made you that scared?”

Suddenly Zhou Zhiruo jumped up and said, “I am not going to say. It must be one of those restless spirit came back to entangle me. I have done too much evil. I deserve this revenge. I have explained to you everything, I ... I won't live long ...” Covering her face, she scurried down the mountain.

Zhang Wuji felt as if his mind was enveloped in fog. “What restless ghost entangled her? Was it the Beggar Clan's people seeking revenge on her and dressed up as a ghost to frighten her?” Slowly he turned around and walked back to the Temple.

He saw Zhou Zhiruo go toward the Emei Pai crowd. Bei Jinyi took a coat and wrapped it around her shoulder. Zhou Zhiruo said something in low voice and the Emei Pai disciples bowed together.

By this time, most of the multitude of heroes had left the mountain, Kong Wen and Kong Zhi, two monks were busy sending them off. Yang Xiao, Fan Yao and the others congregated around Zhang Wuji. “We'd better take our leave too,” Zhang Wuji said.

He saw Zhou Zhiruo walk toward Kong Wen and speak in a low voice. Kong Wen's countenance changed; he looked startled. Then Kong Wen shook his head. Whatever it was, it looked like Kong Wen had just refused her request. Zhou Zhiruo talked some more, and then suddenly she knelt down in front of him. Clasp her palms together, she mumbled something that looked like she was praying. Kong Wen looked somber, his mouth muttered praises to Buddha.

“Jiaozhu,” Zhou Dian said, “You must quickly stop her, don't let her do it.”

“Don't let her do what?” Zhang Wuji asked.

Zhou Dian replied, “Miss Zhou is going to leave home [orig. chu jia] to become a monk. She ... she is going to enter the gate of emptiness. It will be bad for you.”

Yang Xiao snickered and said, “Even if Miss Zhou is going to leave home, she will become a nun, not a monk. Why would she take a Shaolin Pai monk to be her master?”

Zhou Dian slapped his forehead loudly. “Right, right!” he said, “I was muddleheaded. But what is Miss Zhou asking Kong Wen Dashi to do? One is Shaolin Pai Zhang Men, the other is Emei Pai Zhang Men, they are equal, nobody needs to kneel down in front of the other.”

They saw Zhou Zhiruo standing up; her face showed she was somewhat comforted. Zhang Wuji sighed and said, “We don’t need to meddle into someone else’s business.” Turning his head, he said, “Min Mei, let us leave.” Who would have thought that as he turned his head, he did not see Zhao Min.

For the last several days, Zhao Min had never left his side; she always shadowed Zhang Wuji. Zhang Wuji was slightly stunned. “Where is Miss Zhao?” he asked, while in his heart he silently cursed, “Bad! I am sure Min Mei saw me when Zhiruo leaned against my chest. Could it be that she thinks I cannot forget my old flame and considers me as hopeless?” Hastily he ordered everybody to look for her.

Xin Ran, the Flag Leader of Lie Huo Flag said, “Reporting to Jiaozhu: subordinate saw Miss Zhao walking down the mountain!”

Zhang Wuji was grieved. “Min Mei has abandoned everything to follow me,” he mused, “She has gone through I don’t know how many adversities. How can I give up on her?” Thereupon, he turned to Yang Xiao and said, “Yang Xiong, I am asking you to take care of our business here. I am going to leave first.”

He bid his farewell to Kong Wen and Kong Zhi, also to Yu Lianzhou, Zhang Songxi, Yin Liting and the others. Last of all, he said to Zhou Zhiruo, “Zhiruo, take a good care of yourself. We’ll meet again some day soon.” Zhou Zhiruo hung her head low; she did not reply, only nodded slightly. Beads of silver tears fell down from her face to the dusty ground.

Unleashing his ‘qing gong’, Zhang Wuji dashed down the mountain. For the next several ‘li’s, the mountain path was full with the heroes returning home from Shaolin Temple. He was not willing to greet the heroes one by one, so he simply flew past them from the side, yet along the way he did not see any trace of Zhao Min at all. In one breath he had pursued for more than thirty ‘li’s. The sky was turning dark, the people walking along the road was thinning. Suddenly he remembered, “Min Mei is best in planning and scheming. If she has a mind to avoid me, then most likely she will avoid the main road. Otherwise, with my speed, I should have caught up with her long ago. Could it be that she is still hiding around the Shaoshi Peak, waiting for me to leave before she comes out and walk away?”

Burning with anxiety and he forgetting his own hunger and thirst, he ran back around the hills and valleys. Oftentimes he leaped up a tall tree, a hill peak or steep slope, looking to all directions. The empty mountain was quiet, the only noise came from the crows flying home for the night. Circling around toward the back of the Shaoshi Peak,

he still did not see Zhao Min. “Whatever happens,” he mused, “I will always be faithful to you. Even if I have to go to the end of the earth or the corner of the ocean, I will find you.”

Once he made this decision, his mind calmed down. Looking toward the northeast he saw two large locust trees grew side by side, towering high from a crevasse on the side of the mountain. Leaping up the tree, he found a large branch extended horizontally and lied down on this branch. After toiling for the whole day and facing many unforeseen incidents, he fell asleep not too long after he lied down.

Toward the middle of the night, in his sleep he suddenly heard gentle footsteps from several dozens ‘zhang’s away, which made him wake up with a start. By this time, the round bright moon had already slanting toward the western sky. Under the moonlight, he saw on the hillside, there was a shadow floating speedily to the south. That person’s figure was slender with a slim waist; obviously, the shadow belonged to a woman.

In his great delight, he nearly called ‘Min Mei’; but he immediately realized something was not right. The woman’s figure was taller than Zhao Min, her ‘qing gong’ was entirely different from Zhao Min’s, although her speed was inferior to Zhou Zhiruo’s, her steps were lighter and livelier. His curiosity was piqued. “This woman wanders alone in the deep of the night, I wonder what is it she is doing?” he mused.

At first he thought that he did not have any business to meddle with whatever this woman was doing, but then he thought, “Who knows? Perhaps I will find Min Mei’s whereabouts from this woman. If she has nothing to do with Min Mei, then I will slip out quietly, no harm done. I must not let any clue off easily.” Thereupon he got up from the tree branch and quietly slipped down.

Afraid that the woman might detect his presence, he did not dare to get too close. Besides, by stalking a young girl – a total stranger for that matter – in the middle of the night, it might be difficult for him to avoid frivolous suspicions from others.

He noticed that the woman was wearing black clothes, and she indeed was heading toward the Shaolin Temple. “Although she has nothing to do with Min Mei, she must be doing some clandestine activity related to the Wulin world,” he thought, “If her intention is not beneficial to Shaolin, I must interfere.” He halted his steps to listen, and did not hear any other people nearby, so he knew that this woman did not have anybody supporting her.

Walking for about the time needed to eat a bowl of rice, that woman had never turned her head around. Zhang Wuji had a vague feeling that this woman looked somewhat familiar, as if he had seen her somewhere before. “Is she Miss Wu Qingying? Or one of the Emei Pai female disciples?”

Several ‘li’s later, Shaolin Temple was already in sight. The woman turned toward the side of the hill, approaching the Temple from the side. Suddenly she slowed down her steps and moved surreptitiously among the trees and the mountain rocks. It was obvious that she was afraid someone might see her.

Suddenly he heard clear ringing noise coming from the main hall of the Shaolin Temple, followed by the sound of chanting of several hundred Buddhist monks. Zhang Wuji was greatly puzzled, “Shaolin monks are still chanting sutra deep into the night, and there are hundreds of them. Is there an important ceremony going on?” he mused.

The woman in front of him proceeded even more stealthily. Several dozens ‘zhang’s more, she would have reached the side of the main hall. Suddenly there were light footsteps. The woman quickly ducked among the thick patch of grass. Four Shaolin monks with sabers and Buddhist staffs were patrolling around the Temple. The woman waited for the four monks to pass before standing up, and leaped toward the shutter by the main hall. Her leap was as light as flying cotton wool; her ‘qing gong’ was truly top-notch among the Wulin characters. Zhang Wuji noticed that she did not carry any weapon, plus she was alone; hence he believed it was unlikely that she came to Shaolin Temple to create trouble. He wanted to know who the woman was, whether she was a friend or a foe; therefore, crouching behind her, he crept toward the northwest corner of the main hall.

He realized that he was in a very awkward situation. Someone of his position snooping around the Temple in the middle of the night, if he was detected by a Shaolin monk, although the other party might feign ignorance, he will not be able to avoid losing a great deal of face. And thus he was twice more careful; each step he took and each movement was as nimble as a cat stalking a mouse.

By this time, the chanting inside the hall was getting louder. Peeking from a crack on the window, he saw hundreds of monks arranged in neat rows, all sitting on round meditation mats, all wearing yellow Buddhist robes, draped in scarlet and gold kasayas. Some of them were holding ceremonial articles in their hands; the rest of them clasped their palms together with heads hung low, loudly chanting the sutras. It sounded like they were offering prayers to send departing souls crossing into the netherworld. Zhang Wuji understood immediately. “In the Great Hero Assembly this time, there were

not a few people lost their lives. During the Yuan army attack up the mountain, even more people from both sides perished. Therefore, the Temple monks are holding this ceremony tonight so that the dead will be reborn happily.”

He saw that Reverend Kong Wen was standing in front of the sacrificial table. There was a young woman standing on his right. As soon as Zhang Wuji saw her, he was slightly stunned, since that young woman was none other than Zhou Zhiruo. Although he could only see her from the side, he could tell that her expression definitely showed grieve and distress; her pretty eyebrows were deeply wrinkled, as if she was harboring a deep sorrow.

“That must be it,” Zhang Wuji thought, “The reason Zhiruo knelt down in front of Kong Wen Dashi this afternoon must be to ask him to hold this Buddhist ceremony. I suppose she is repenting from her conduct and deeds. The innocents who lose their lives under her claw and her sword are simply too many.”

Focusing his eyes, he tried to read the memorial tablets arranged on the sacrificial table. To his great surprise, one of the tablets read ‘nu xia Yin Li zhi ling wei’, seven characters [the memorial tablet of Heroine Yin Li]. Zhang Wuji felt a stab of pain in his heart, remembering how during her short and miserable life his cousin had always passionately devoted to him; he could not help from shedding some tears.

Amidst the ringing of chime stones and the tapping of wooden fish, Zhou Zhiruo gracefully knelt down and bowed to the ground, while her lips were moving in quiet prayer. ZhangWuji raised up his ‘shen gong’ [divine strength] trying to listen to what she said. This was what he heard, “Miss Yin ... your spirit in Heaven ... rest in peace ... do not come to harass me ...”

Zhang Wuji tightened his grip on the wall while disquieting thoughts filled his mind. “Biaomei lost her life under her sword, no doubt it was a cruel fate; but the torment inside Zhiruo’s heart, the pain she is suffering, might not necessarily be lighter than Biaomei’s. Suddenly from the ocean of thoughts in his mind a song surged up, the song he heard on the Brightness Peak, sung by the Ming Cult people, “What joy is in life, what pain in death? I pity the mankind, with their many sufferings! I pity the mankind, with their many sufferings!”

Zhou Zhiruo stood up slowly with her body slightly facing the east. Suddenly her countenance greatly changed, while she called out, “You ... you ... you have come again!” Her voice was shrill, suppressing all other noises in the main hall.

Zhang Wuji followed the direction of her eyes and saw the paper pasted on the window was somehow torn, and the hole revealed a young woman's face. The face was full of scars. Zhang Wuji was so shocked that he shivered and could not stop from crying out. Although that young woman's face was full of scars and the bumps of the former days were gone, he was very sure the face belonged to his dead cousin, Yin Li!

He wanted to rush forward and call her, but his legs did not obey their master's bidding; it was as if his feet were planted on the ground.

As the face appeared suddenly on the window, there was a loud crash in the main hall as Zhou Zhiruo fainted and fell to the floor. Zhang Wuji no longer cared whatever Shaolin Pai might think of him; he called out loudly, "Zhu'er, Zhu'er! [spider kid] is that you?" But no one answered him.

After calming himself down, he flew to the back of the hall to pursue, but all he saw was the moon hanging low on the horizon, casting its cold shadow on the trees; the young woman in black was nowhere to be seen. Normally he did not believe in deities and demons, but faced with these kinds of images and scenes, he could not restrain cold sweats from wetting his body and hairs from rising on the back of his neck. Bracing himself, he said to himself, "It is she, it is she! No wonder her back looked so familiar, turns out it is Zhu'er. Did her ghost know that the eminent Shaolin monks are offering prayers to help her crossover to the netherworld, so she came here to receive the prayers? Could it be that because she died an unjust death her spirit did not find peace?"

As the Shaolin monks heard some noise, several people came over to investigate. As they saw Zhang Wuji, they could not help but be startled. A senior monk stepped forward, saluted him and said, "We did not know Zhang Jiaozhu came to visit this late at night, otherwise we would have welcomed you properly. Please accept our apology."

"I do not dare," Zhang Wuji replied, cupping his fists to return the propriety. Stepping aside, he entered the main hall.

He saw Zhou Zhiruo's eyes were shut tight; her face was without any sign of blood. Apparently, she had not regained her consciousness. Walking toward her, he put forth his strength to massage her and knead [orig. 'tui na' – a form of Chinese manual therapy] her back for some time. Zhou Zhiruo slowly awakened.

As she saw Zhang Wuji and realized she was in his embrace, Zhou Zhiruo hugged him and called out, "Ghost, there is a ghost!"

Zhang Wuji said, “This is indeed strange, but you don’t need to be afraid. There are so many eminent monks in here. I am sure they will be able to solve this mystery.”

Zhou Zhiruo had always been a dignified and staid woman. This time she was scared out of her wits, and right now she was embracing him in public; hearing him say these words, her face blushed and she busily pried herself away from him. She stood up, but could not stop herself from shivering. Quickly she grabbed his hand and even if she had to die, she would not dare to let him go.

Zhang Wuji exchanged some propriety with Kong Wen; he mentioned that someone was spying on them outside the window just now. Neither Kong Wen nor any of the monks had seen it, but the fact remained that it was a new torn on the paper, and the hole was still there.

“Wuji Ge ... Zhang Jiaozhu,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “That was what I saw earlier.” Zhang Wuji nodded.

“You ... you ...” Zhou Zhiruo’s voice was trembling, “Who did you say she was?”
“She is Miss Yin, my Biaomei Yin Li,” Zhang Wuji replied. Zhou Zhiruo cried out in fear and fainted again.

This time Zhang Wuji pulled her hand that she did not fall to the floor. She was unconscious for a moment but quickly recovered. Zhang Wuji said, “I did see Biaomei, but ... she is a human, not a ghost!”

“She is not a ghost?” Zhou Zhiruo was still trembling.

Zhang Wuji said, “I followed her all the way to Shaolin Temple. She walked like a human, not like a ghost.” He had said that to comfort Zhou Zhiruo, but deep in his heart, he was unsure.

“So you saw her walking like a human and not like a ghost?” Zhou Zhiruo asked.

Zhang Wuji then recounted how he saw that black-dressed young woman and followed her all the way to Shaolin Temple; also how he saw her hiding outside the long window and spying inside the main hall. Every action and every movement was of a young woman who was adept in martial arts, not at all peculiar in any way.

“Fangzhang,” he asked Kong Wen, “I [orig. ‘zaixia’ – the humble one] have one thing I am not sure I understand, I beg Fangzhang’s advice. When someone dies, will he really

become a ghost?”

Kong Wen pondered about it deeply for half a day before answering, “The matter of the netherworld is difficult to assert.”

Zhang Wuji said, “That being the case, why did Fangzhang hold a ceremony to cross the departing soul to the netherworld?”

“Shanzai, zhanzai!” Kong Wen said, “The departing soul need not be helped to cross over. In the matter of live and death, virtue has its reward, evil has its retribution. The way of Buddha seeks to help living people achieving peace; the ones need help to cross over are the living ones.”

Zhang Wuji understood immediately. Cupping his fists he said, “Many thanks for the direction. I have stirred up trouble and caused disturbance this late at night. I only wish for Fangzhang’s forgiveness.”

Kong Wen smiled and said, “Jiaozhu is our humble Sect’s great benefactor. You have saved us several times, enabling Shaolin Pai to avoid disaster; why be overly courteous?”

Immediately Zhang Wuji took his leave from the crowd of monks. To Zhou Zhiruo he said, “Let us leave!”

Zhou Zhiruo seemed reluctant, she was afraid to leave the security of the Buddhist hall. Zhang Wuji did not feel comfortable to urge her strongly; he simply cupped his fists again and said, “In that case, we will say goodbye here.” Finished speaking, he turned around toward the hall gate.

Watching his back, suddenly Zhou Zhiruo called out, “Wuji Gege, will you see me again? I ... let me go with you.” She jumped to catch up with him, and then side-by-side they walked out the Temple gate.

After they were far away from the Shaolin Temple, Zhou Zhiruo leaned on Zhang Wuji’s side and held on to his hand. Zhang Wuji knew she was still afraid. With her soft and smooth palm in his hand, and catching a whiff of fragrance coming from her body, it was not possible for his heart to remain unmoved.

The two of them walked silently for quite some time. Zhou Zhiruo slowly heaved a deep sigh and said, “Wuji Gege, when you and I met for the first time at Hanshui River that

day, I was saved by Zhang Zhenren. If only I knew that I would suffer so much pain in the later days, my death in Hanshui River that day would be a lot cleaner.”

Zhang Wuji did not answer; in his heart he remembered the song the Ming Cult people, and without realizing it, he was humming softly, “What joy is in life, what pain in death? I pity the mankind, with their many sufferings!”

Listening to the lyrics of this song, Zhou Zhiruo’s hand, which held his slightly trembled. In a low voice she said, “Zhang Zhenren brought me to Emei Pai. He had my well-being in his mind. But if he, Senior, took me under his wings on the Wudang Mountain, letting me be a disciple of Wudang, everything today would be entirely different. Ay, it is not that En Shi [benevolent master] was not good to me, but ... but she forced me to make that evil oath, wanted me to abhor the Ming Cult, wanted me to hate you and harm you, while in my heart ... in all honesty ...”

Zhang Wuji was rather touched to hear the sincerity in her voice; he understood she indeed have many difficulties, all sorts of vicious matters, mostly because she honored Mijue Shitai’s last words. Seeing that she was also very scared, his compassion to her grew one layer deeper.

The night breeze blew gently on the mountain road, transmitting faint fragrance of wild flowers around them. It was early summer, the night was clear. With a beautiful girl pouring out her heart so close to him, Zhang Wuji could not stop his heart from beating faster. Moreover, when he helped her driving out the poison on that little island, they were flesh-and-skin close. She had shown him kindness in the past, and she was engaged to him once. All of these had made his heart confused and he was at a loss.

“Wuji Gege,” Zhou Zhiruo continued, “In Haozhou that day, when you were just about to get married to me, why did as soon as Miss Zhao bid you, you immediately come with her? Do you really love her with all your heart?”

“I was just about to tell you what happened that day,” Zhang Wuji replied, “Why don’t we stop and sit for a while?” He pointed to a big rock by the side of the road.

“No,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “At this moment, my heart is in turmoil, I won’t be able to listen to you. Let us walk quietly for a moment longer before talking about that.”

Zhang Wuji nodded. He followed her wander around, seemingly aimlessly. Zhou Zhiruo led him through a small path and walked for four, five ‘li’s before she finally said, “All

right, you can tell me.” She walked toward a large mountain rock in front of a clump of bushes. The two of them sat side by side.

Thereupon Zhang Wuji told her how Zhao Min had in her hand a bunch of Xie Xun’s golden hair, which leave him no choice but to walk away, and everything else that happened afterwards. Zhou Zhiruo listened from start to finish, and then for half a day she did not say anything.

“Zhiruo, do you blame me?” Zhang Wuji asked.

Choking, Zhou Zhiruo said, “I have done so many wrong things, I can only blame myself, why would I blame you?”

Zhang Wuji gently stroked her shoulder and said in a tender voice, “In this world, mistakes arise out of circumstances. Things are difficult to anticipate. You must not be excessively heartbroken.”

“Wuji Gege,” Zhou Zhiruo raised her head to look at him, “I have something I want to ask you, I want you to answer me sincerely, you must not have the slightest degree of concealment.”

“All right,” Zhang Wuji said, “I will not conceal anything from you.”

Zhou Zhiruo said, “I know on this world there are four women who love you with all their hearts. One has gone away to Persia, Xiao Zhao. One is Miss Zhao, the other is ... she ...” She was going to say ‘Miss Yin’, but she did not have the courage to utter that name out of her mouth. After pausing for a moment, she continued, “If all four of us all alive and well, and right now we are by your side, which one of us do you really love?”

Zhang Wuji felt a burst of confusion rising in his heart. “This ... mm ... this ...” he stuttered.

Even since that day, when he was on the boat floating aimlessly on the ocean with Zhou Zhiruo, Zhao Min, Yin Li and Xiao Zhao, certainly more than once he had thought about this matter. “Each of these four women loves me very much, what should I do? No matter which one I marry, I will deeply hurt the other three’s hearts. But in the end, in the deepest part of my heart, which one do I really love?”

Since it had always been difficult for him to decide, he told himself to just evade the question altogether. Sometimes he thought, “The Tatars are not driven out yet, our

country [orig. 'he shan' – river and mountain] is not being recovered yet, the barbarians [orig. 'xiong nu' – a general term for nomadic people] are not destroyed yet; how can I build a family? In the end, what reason do I have for having sons and daughters?"

Another times he thought, "I am the Jiaozhu of the Ming Cult. Anything I say, goes. I am responsible for the prosperity and decline of not only our Cult, but the Wulin world as well. I am confident that in all my life, I had done nothing to be ashamed of. Yet, if I let myself indulged in female charms, not only I will invite the ridicule of the heroes of the world, I will also spoil our Cult's reputation."

Yet another time he thought, "Just before she died, my Mama earnestly exhorted me that beautiful women are most capable of deceiving people, warned me to be extremely careful all of my life. How can I not heed Mama's last words to me?"

Actually, arguing every way he liked, in the end he was no more than deceiving himself. Deciding which young woman he loved most would not necessarily hinder the great undertaking of recovering his country. It would not in any way affect Ming Cult's reputation. He only thought that this one was very nice, that one was also good, and thus he did not dare to think about them too much. His martial art skill might be strong, but his natural disposition was actually indecisive; all things considered, he preferred to let nature take its own course. When forced to make decision, he would rather sacrifice his own desire than disagree with other people's wishes. Take the Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi, for example. He trained it because of Xiao Zhao's encouragement. By right, he had held the authority to become the Cult Leader of the Ming Cult; yet he needed Yin Tianzheng, Yin Yewang and the others to push him before he agreed to them. His engagement with Zhou Zhiruo was because he was honoring Xie Xun's request. He did not bow to the Heaven and the Earth with Zhou Zhiruo because Zhao Min compelled him. That day, if Jin Hua Popo and Yin Li did not use force, but persuaded him nicely to come with them to the Lingshe Island, he would most likely go with them.

Every once in a while, though, he could not help but think, "If I can spend the rest of my life with these four women, living together harmoniously, won't I have a happy and carefree life?" After all, it was the end of the Yuan Dynasty; whether it was a scholar, a merchant, a Jianghu warrior or an outlaw, it was not uncommon for a man to have three wives and four concubines. On the contrary it was extremely rare for a man to have only one wife. It was just that the Ming Cult originated from Persia, where the followers were encouraged to live a frugal and hard-working life, so that taking a concubine in addition to a single wife was unusual.

Zhang Wuji was a mild-natured man. He had this idea that no matter which girl he married, it was to his greatest good fortune. Supposing he took more than one wife, he felt he would be unfair to the other. Consequently, as this thought kept flashing in and out of his head, he always tried to suppress it. Whenever he remembered it, he would immediately rebuke himself, “One must always be content with whatever one has; yet I always indulge in this kind of thought. Won’t that mean I am a despicable man? Shame on me!”

Later on, Xiao Zhao went to Persia, Yin Li died, and supposedly, Zhao Min was the one who murdered her. Logically speaking, the only option left for him was to marry Zhou Zhiruo. However, through some unexpected mishaps, some bizarre twists and turns, the truth was gradually being revealed. Zhou Zhiruo and Zhao Min switched places as the good and the evil. He felt so fortunate for not marrying Zhou Zhiruo and thus cast his blunder in stone. In addition, the fact that Zhao Min broke her relationship with her father and brother was publicly known; therefore, he should not have any difficulty in making up his mind, should he? Against all his thoughts and expectations, Zhao Min suddenly disappeared without telling him anything; and right now Zhou Zhiruo was forcing him into a corner with her question.

Seeing him hesitate without answering, Zhou Zhiruo said, “My question is hypothetical, of course. Xiao Zhao has become the Persian Ming Cult’s virgin Cult Leader, I have ... have killed Miss Yin. Out of these four women, Miss Zhao is your only choice. I just want to know, supposing that all four of us are alive and well, we are all by your side, then what would you do?”

“Zhiruo,” Zhang Wuji finally said, “This matter has been burdening my heart for too long. Obviously, it was very difficult for me to make up my mind, until today ... I know now who my true love is.”

“Who is it?” Zhou Zhiruo asked, “Is it ... is it Miss Zhao?”

“That’s right,” Zhang Wuji replied, “Today, when I looked for her and could not find her, I wish I was dead. If I henceforth cannot see her again, I do not wish to live longer. When Xiao Zhao left me, I was extremely heart-broken. When my Biaomei died, I was even more grieved. You ... you came back like this, I was not only pained, but feeling deep regret as well. But, Zhiruo, I won’t lie to you, if for the rest of my life I cannot see Miss Zhao anymore, I’d rather die. This is my deepest feeling, which I have never made known to anybody else.” At first, all four women: Yin Li, Zhou Zhiruo, Xiao Zhao and Zhao Min were equal in Zhang Wuji’s eyes. But as Zhao Min walked away from him to-

day, he suddenly realized Zhao Min's true place in his heart; she was not on the same position as the other three women.

As Zhou Zhiruo heard him say so, she quietly said, "That day at Dadu, I saw you go to that small wine shop to meet her, I knew exactly where your heart really was. It was just wishful thinking in my heart; if you and I get married perhaps ... perhaps I can pull you back to love me. In all honesty ... really ... I know that is of course impossible."

Zhang Wuji said apologetically, "Zhiruo, toward you, I have always had respect. Toward Yin Jia Biaomei [younger female cousin of Yin family], my heart will always be grateful. Toward Xiao Zhao, I have always had a soft spot in my heart for her. But toward Miss Zhao, actually ... actually I have an engraved-in-my-heart-carved-in-my-bones kind of love."

"Engraved-in-my-heart-carved-in-my-bones kind of love, engraved-in-my-heart-carved-in-my-bones kind of love," Zhou Zhiruo muttered. After pausing a moment, she said in low voice, "Wuji Gege ... my love to you is also engraved-in-my-heart-carved-in-my-bones kind of love. Don't you ... don't you know it?"

Zhang Wuji was extremely touched; grabbing her hand, he said in a tender voice, "Zhiruo, I know. What I do not know is how am I going to repay you for your great love in my lifetime. I ... I really have wronged you."

"You have not wronged me; you have always treated me very well, do you think I do not know it?" Zhou Zhiruo said. "Let me ask you this: Supposing Miss Zhao this time left you and not came back, you would not see her again forever; supposing she was killed by a wicked man, supposing she had a change of heart toward you, then you ... what would you do?"

Zhang Wuji's heart had been grieving for too long. As he heard her say those words, he could not bear it anymore. His dam broke and with a choking voice he said, "I ... I don't know! Whatever happens; to the heavens above or to the earth below, I must find her."

Zhou Zhiruo sighed and said, "She won't have a change of heart toward you. If you really want to find her; nothing could be easier."

Zhang Wuji was both surprised and delighted. "Where is she?" he stood up and said, "Zhiruo, tell me, quick!"

Zhou Zhiruo's pair of beautiful eyes stared at Zhang Wuji intently; seeing his face was wild with joy, she said softly, "You have never shown this kind of emotion toward me. If you want to find Miss Zhao, you must agree to do something for me. Otherwise, you can forget of finding her, ever."

"What do you want me to do?" Zhang Wuji asked.

"I have not thought about it yet," Zhou Zhiruo said, "Later, when I think of it, I will let you know. I can promise you that this matter will not violate the way of chivalry; it will not hinder the great undertaking of recovering our country, and will not damage your name as well as the Ming Cult's reputation. Only, it won't necessarily be easy to do."

Zhang Wuji's expression went blank. He thought, "Min Mei has also asked me to do three things for her; she has also said that it won't violate the way of chivalry and so on, but so far, I have done only two things for her, and those two things were really not easy to manage. Why does Zhiruo have to copy her?"

"Whether you want to do it or not, it is entirely up to you," Zhou Zhiruo said, "But a real man is as good as his word. If you agree, you simply cannot shrink back at the last moment."

Zhang Wuji hesitantly said, "You said that this matter will not violate the way of chivalry; it will not hinder the great undertaking of recovering our country, and will not damage my name as well as the Ming Cult's reputation?"

"That's right!" Zhou Zhiruo replied.

"Very well," Zhang Wuji said, "If it indeed will not violate the way of chivalry and will not damage the great undertaking of recovering our country, then I give you my promise now."

"Let's strike our palms to seal the deal," Zhou Zhiruo said. Extending her arm, she was ready to strike his palm.

Zhang Wuji understood that as soon as he struck her palm, he would place himself under extremely heavy shackles. Outwardly, this Miss Zhou was gentle, soft, and polite; but her mind was shrewd, her actions cruel. She was not the least bit inferior to Zhao Min. Therefore, as he raised his palm, he did not immediately strike her palm.

Zhou Zhiruo smiled and said, "As soon as you give me your word, I am going to tell you, and you will meet your beloved very soon."

Zhang Wuji's chest boiled up. He no longer had any regard for anything else and struck Zhou Zhiruo's palm three times.

Zhou Zhiruo laughed and said, "Look who's here." She reached down to pull and open up the bushes behind her. There it was, behind the clump of leaves sat a young woman whose face appeared smiling yet she was not exactly smiling, and who was she if not Zhao Min?

Surprised and delighted, Zhang Wuji loudly called out, "Min Mei!"

"Ah!" suddenly, from several 'zhang's behind him, he heard a female voice exclaimed, as if that woman could not restrain from being shocked when she saw Zhao Min appeared in the flesh. The voice was actually very soft, but Zhang Wuji was able to hear her clearly.

Zhang Wuji was staring blankly for a moment, loss in countless thoughts going through his mind. Slowly he reached out to pull Zhao Min up. When their palms met, he felt Zhao Min's palm was rather stiff. Immediately he realized that when she left without telling anybody during the day, and then he looked for her everywhere without finding her, she was actually captured by Zhou Zhiruo. Her acupoint was sealed and she was hidden in here. Zhou Zhiruo then intentionally led him and said all those words in this place so that Zhao Min could hear him. If he could not bear to see Zhou Zhiruo sad and spoke thoughtless flattery to her, if his words were full of feeling to her, even acting passionately toward her, then he would fall into her scheme. If that happened, Zhao Min would have left without any question. As he thought about this, he could not help but groan secretly, "Shame on me!" while his back was wet with cold sweats.

Checking Zhao Min's pulse, he found out that her 'chi' and blood were flowing normally, so she did not sustain any injury. Under the moonlight he saw her forehead and the corner of her eyes bore a happy expression; she looked so cute and flirtatious. He believed she heard everything he had just talked with Zhou Zhiruo. Although her body could not move and her mouth could not say anything, her ears could hear very well how he revealed the contents of his heart, that unexpectedly he loved her with engraved-in-his-heart-carved-in-his-bones kind of love. Zhao Min could hear the earnestness in his voice and she was ecstatic beyond her own control.

Zhou Zhiruo bent her waist and whispered something in Zhang Wuji's ear. Zhang Wuji also replied in low voice. Suddenly Zhou Zhiruo shouted angrily, "Zhang Wuji, you really have no regard of me! Look carefully, after Miss Zhao is poisoned, do you think she can live?"

Zhang Wuji was shocked. “She ... she is poisoned?” he asked, “Did you poison her?” Stooping down to examine Zhao Min, he had just opened Zhao Min’s left eye when he felt his back go numb as the acupoint on his back was sealed.

“Aiyo!” Zhang Wuji cried out. His body swayed.

Zhou Zhiruo’s movements were as swift as the wind. With her delicate fingers full of strength, she quickly sealed five major acupoints on his left shoulder, the side of his lower back, and the center of his back. Zhang Wuji fell backwards. He saw a dark green flash as Zhou Zhiruo drew out her sword and pointed it toward his chest.

“You cannot run, you cannot hide,” she shouted sternly, “I am going to take your life today. Yin Li’s ghost is entangling me anyway. I will eventually get killed. I’d rather die together with you.” While saying that, she raised her sword high, ready to stab it down into Zhang Wuji’s chest.

Suddenly a female voice shouted from behind her, “Hold on! Zhou Zhiruo, Yin Li has not died yet!”

Turning her head around, Zhou Zhiruo saw a woman dressed in black dash from among the thick underbrush, with fingers extended to pierce her. Zhou Zhiruo leaned sideways to evade. The woman turned around. The moon shone its light on the side of her pretty face, albeit full of faint scars.

Zhang Wuji saw her clearly; she was none other than his cousin Yin Li, only the bumps on her face had faded. Although her face was crisscrossed with scars, the scars could not cover her beauty. She vaguely looked like the delicate and pretty young girl standing by Jin Hua Popo he met in the Butterfly Valley many years ago.

Zhou Zhiruo withdrew two steps backward, her left palm in front of her chest, the sword in her right hand was still pointing toward Zhang Wuji’s chest. “You move one step forward, my sword will kill him first,” she barked.

Yin Li did not dare to move, she anxiously said, “You ... have you not done enough wickedness already?”

“Are you a ghost or a human?” Zhou Zhiruo asked.

“Naturally I am a human,” Yin Li replied.

“Zhu’er!” suddenly Zhang Wuji cried out, sprang up and embraced Yin Li. “Zhu’er ...” he called out again, “You ... I miss you so much that it hurts!”

Yin Li shrieked as she was taken by surprise; she was unable to move because Zhang Wuji’s arms were wound around her.

Zhou Zhiruo giggled and said, “If we did not do this, you won’t want to come out.” Turning around, she unsealed Zhao Min’s acupoints and massaged her veins and muscles.

Zhao Min had been under Zhou Zhiruo’s control for most of the day and was left alone after being thrown in here; she was seething with anger. Luckily, afterward she heard Zhang Wuji pouring out his heart, which turned her anger into joy. However, Yin Li’s sudden appearance had increased the countless loads she already bore in her mind. The old hatred had just gone away, new anxiety arose.

Yin Li angrily said, “What are you flattering and sweet talking to me for? Both Miss Zhao and Miss Zhou are here, watch your manners.”

“Humph,” Zhao Min sneered, “So he only needs to watch his manners when Miss Zhou and I are here?”

Zhang Wuji said, “I was overjoyed beyond words when I saw you arise from the dead. Biaomei, you ... how are you?”

Yin Li pulled his hand and held his face toward the moon. After staring at him for half a day, suddenly she reached out to grab his left ear and twisted it forcefully.

“Aiyo!” Zhang Wuji cried out in pain, “Why did you do that?”

“You are one ugly freak deserving to be cut in thousand pieces!” Yin Li said, “You ... you buried me alive under the ground, you made me suffer countless pain.” While saying that, she punched his chest three times, ‘Bang! Bang! Bang!’

Zhang Wuji did not dare to protect himself with the Jiu Yang Shen Gong. He endured her three punches with a smile, saying, “Zhu’er, I really thought you were ... you were dead. I cried myself to exhaustion several times. You are not dead. That is wonderful. Laotianye [lit. ‘old master of the sky’ – Heaven, God] truly has eyes.”

“Laotianye has eyes alright, but you, this ugly freak, do not have eyes,” Yin Li angrily retorted, “You did not even know whether someone died or was still alive. I just can’t believe it. You hated my swollen ugly face; you simply buried me without waiting for my breathing to stop. You don’t have any conscience. You are a heartless and short-lived little rascal!”

As she constantly spitting up curses, her expression, voice and attitude were just like the Yin Li he knew. Zhang Wuji chuckled. Scratching his head, he said, “Your scolding is right on target. You are totally right. I was such a muddle-head; I saw your face was full of blood and you were not breathing, your heart was not beating. I thought you were beyond help ...”

Yin Li leaped forward to twist his right ear. Zhang Wuji chuckled and moved aside to evade. He bowed and cupped his fists. “Good Zhu’er, please forgive me!”

“I won’t forgive you!” Yin Li said, “That day I woke up somehow, and felt cold all around me. Turned out I was surrounded by stones. If you wanted to bury me alive, why did you put twigs and stones on me? Why didn’t you pile up dirt on me so that I could not breathe and died for real?”

“Thank the Heaven and thank the Earth that I only piled up twigs and stones on your body,” Zhang Wuji said. He could not restrain from casting a sidelong glance toward Zhou Zhiruo.

Yin Li was angry. “This woman is completely wicked; I forbid you to look at her,” she said.

“Why?” Zhang Wuji asked.

“She is the murderer who killed me,” Yin Li replied, “Why do you still care about her?”

“But you are not dead,” Zhao Min interrupted, “How can she be your murderer?”

“I have died once,” Yin Li said, “That makes her the murderer!”

“Good Zhu’er,” Zhang Wuji tried to persuade her, “You have escaped danger and returned to live. We are all very happy. Why don’t you sit nicely over here and tell us how did you cheat death and escaped alive?”

Yin Li said, “What do you mean ‘we’? Let me ask you this: when you said ‘we’, who is ‘we’?”

Zhang Wuji said with a laugh, “There are only four people in here. Naturally ‘we’ refers to Miss Zhou, Miss Zhao and me.”

“Humph!” with a cold laugh Yin Li said, “I am not dead. Granted that you might be somewhat happy, but what about Miss Zhou and Miss Zhao? Are they also happy?”

“Miss Yin,” Zhou Zhiruo said, “I was so evil in those days; I have harmed you. But later, not only I deeply regretted my actions but also I have never had peace in my sleep. Otherwise, when I suddenly saw you in the woods, I would not be frightened like this. Now that I see you alive and well, my burden has been lifted off. The Heaven above is my witness that my joy is unbounded.”

Yin Li leaned her head sideways and thought for a moment. She nodded and said, “That makes sense. Actually, I was going to settle the score with you, but since you have apologized, I’ll let it go.”

Zhou Zhiruo kneeled down and sobbed, “I ... I truly have committed the gravest offense toward you.”

Yin Li had always been hot-tempered; but seeing Zhou Zhiruo sincerely admit her guilt, her heart melted. She quickly helped her up and said, “Zhou Jiejie, let bygone be bygone, let us forget it. After all, I am not dead.” Holding Zhou Zhiruo’s hand, she took her to sit on her side.

Brushing her stray hair aside, Yin Li said, “You crisscrossed my face with the swords, it was also not entirely without any benefit. My face was originally bumpy, after the sword cut, the poisonous blood was drained away, the bumps slowly subsided.”

Zhou Zhiruo was overwhelmed with regret; she did not know what to say.

Zhang Wuji said, “Afterwards, Yifu, Zhiruo and I lived on that island for a long time. Zhu’er, after you came out of the grave, why didn’t you see us?”

“I was not willing to see you,” Yin Li angrily said, “You and Miss Zhou kept whispering sweet nothings to one another; how can I not be angry listening to those crap? Humph! ‘Hereafter my love to you will be doubled or tripled! We are husband and wife, two people one body; how can I mistreat you?’” In the last several sentences, she was mim-

icking Zhang Wuji's manner of speech. And then, she continued with Zhou Zhiruo's voice, "What if I wrong you or offend you, will you hit me, scold me, kill me? Since I was little, I had never had a father and a mother to instruct me. It would be difficult not to mess up sometimes'. She coughed once and changed her voice to a throaty male voice, "Zhiruo, you are my beloved wife. Even if you make any mistake, I won't blame you or scold you." Pointing her finger toward the moon on the western horizon, she said, "The moon in the sky is our witness."

Turned out when Zhang Wuji and Zhou Zhiruo were pouring their hearts to each other that night, Yin Li had heard everything. As she now repeated their words one by one, Zhou Zhiruo's entire face reddened, while Zhang Wuji looked bashful and restless. He stole a glance toward Zhao Min and saw that her face was deathly pale; thus he reached out to hold her hand. To his surprise, Zhao Min turned her palm around and pricked his arm with her two long fingernails. Zhang Wuji winced from the pain, but did not dare to make any noise; he did not even dare to move.

Yin Li reached into her bosom and took out a wooden strip. She shoved it in front of Zhang Wuji's face. "Look clearly. What is this?" she asked.

Zhang Wuji looked closer and saw a line of characters engraved on the wooden strip; it read 'The Tomb of my Beloved Wife, Zhu'Er Yin Li. Zhang Wuji Sincerely Stated'. It was exactly the grave marker he erected in front of Yin Li's grave.

Yin Li bitterly said, "As I crawled out of the grave, I saw this wooden strip, and I was confused. What is this? Where is that heartless and short-lived little rascal Zhang Wuji? I thought about it a hundred times without figuring out what happened, until later on I eavesdropped the two of you calling 'Wuji Gege this' and 'Wuji Gege' that. It suddenly dawned on me that Zhang Wuji is Zeng Aniu, and Zheng Aniu is Zhang Wuji. You, the heartless scoundrel, you have deceived me really bad!" She raised the wooden strip and smashed it with all her might onto Zhang Wuji's head. 'Bang!' the wooden strip broke, wooden shards flew out in all directions.

Zhao Min was angry. "Why do you keep hitting people?" she said.

Yin Li laughed aloud and said, "I love to hit him, what does it have to do with you? Your heart hurts, doesn't it?"

Zhao Min blushed and said, "He is yielding to you. You do not know good from bad."

Yin Li laughed. “Why did you say I do not know good from bad?” she asked, “Don’t you worry, I will not fight with you over this freak. I have given my heart to only one person, one who bit the back of my hand in the Butterfly Valley, Zhang Wuji. About this freak, I don’t care if he is called Zeng Aniu or Zhang Wuji, I don’t like him the least bit.”

Turning toward Zhang Wuji, she said in a gentle voice, “Aniu Gege, you have always treated me very well, I am very grateful to you. But since a long time ago, I have given my heart to that heartless, ferocious little Zhang Wuji. You are not him, no, you are not him ...”

Zhang Wuji was confounded. “I am definitely Zhang Wuji,” he said, “Why ... what ...”

Yin Li looked at him with a tender expression for a long, long time. Her eyes changed irregularly. Finally, she shook her head and said, “Aniu Gege, you don’t understand. In the western region desert, you and I have gone through live and death situation together. On that small island, you were extremely good to me. You are a good man. But I have already told you, I have given my heart to that Zhang Wuji for a long time. I am going to find him. Tell me, do you think if I find him, he would still beat me, scold me or bite me?”

Without waiting for Zhang Wuji to answer, she turned around and slowly walked away.

Suddenly Zhang Wuji understood. Turned out the one she truly loved was the Zhang Wuji who lived in her memory, the Zhang Wuji she met in the Butterfly Valley, the one who beat her and bite her, the obstinate Zhang Wuji who refused to follow her; not the real Zhang Wuji, the grown up Zhang Wuji who was extremely tolerant and always treated people with kindness. One third part of his heart was wounded, one third of it was reluctant to let her go, yet the other third part was relieved. He followed her with his gaze until her shadow disappeared into the darkness. He knew that for the rest of her life, Yin Li would always remember the very strong teenage boy of the Butterfly Valley, and that she would always want to find him. He realized that she would never find the one she was looking for, but then again, he could say that she had already found him, because that boy had always lived in her heart. Isn’t it true that oftentimes, the real person, the actual matter, is not as good as the one inside one’s memory?

Zhou Zhiruo sighed and said, “It’s all my fault. I harmed her so bad that she turns crazy.”

Yet Zhang Wuji thought, “She might be a little confused, and that was because of me. But compared to a clear-minded person, she is not necessarily less happy.”

Zhao Min, however, had another matter in her mind. Yin Li had gone, but what about Zhou Zhiruo? Yin Li had not died, Xie Xun had been found, safe and well, the martial art manual concealed inside the Yitian Sword, as well as the military strategy manual inside the Tulong Saber, along with the Saber itself, had been recovered and returned to Zhang Wuji. In short, it appeared that Zhou Zhiruo's offenses and mistakes had not turned to the worst. While it was true that Song Qingshu had killed Mo Shenggu because of her, but it was Song Qingshu's own crime; Zhou Zhiruo actually did not have any foreknowledge of the matter, also, she certainly did not instigate the incident. Zhang Wuji had had an engagement with her before, and he was not the kind of man who would abandon trust and uprightness.

Zhou Zhiruo stood up. "Let's go!" she said.

"Where?" Zhao Min asked.

Zhou Zhiruo replied, "When I was at the Shaolin Temple just now, I saw monk Peng Yingyu came in a hurry to look for him," she gestured toward Zhang Wuji. "Apparently, there is some important matter within the Ming Cult."

Zhang Wuji's heart turned cold. "I must not neglect important Cult business for the sake of my feelings toward women," he mused, and then hastily said, "Let us quickly find out what happened."

They set off at once, and after walking quickly for a short while, they arrived at the Ming Cult's encampments. Yang Xiao, Fan Yao, Peng Yingyu, and the others were just about to dispatch their subordinates to look for their Cult Leader. Everybody expressed their delight and relief to see him come back, but when they saw Zhou and Zhao, two women returning with him, their faces all showed surprised looks.

Zhang Wuji noticed that everybody looked dejected, immediately he knew something was amiss. "Peng Dashi," he asked, "Were you looking for me?"

Before Peng Yingyu even answered, Zhou Zhiruo dragged Zhao Min away by the hand while saying, "Let us go and sit over there."

Zhao Min understood Zhou Zhiruo was trying to avoid any suspicion; she was not willing to listen to the Ming Cult discussing their internal affairs. Thereupon Zhao Min accompanied her going out the room. Yang Xiao, Fan Yao and the others were even more amazed. They all thought, "In Jiaozhu's wedding day in Haozhou that day, these two young ladies fought ferociously one against the other; but now they look as close as sis-

ters. I wonder how Jiaozhu reconciled them. He is indeed able to achieve the impossible. The 'Qian Kun Da Nuo Yi' skill truly deserves other people's admiration."

Peng Yingyu waited until Zhou and Zhao, two women left before saying, "Reporting to Jiaozhu: We suffered a major defeat in Haozhou; Han Shantong, Han Xiong has fallen."

"Aiyo!" Zhang Wuji cried. He was deeply grieved.

Peng Yingyu continued, "Presently, the military affair around the Huai Si River is under Zhu Yuanzhang Xiongdi's control. As soon as Xu Da and Chang Yuchun, two brothers learned about the news, they deployed their troops to render their assistance. Han Lin'er Xiongdi is also coming with them. The situation is urgent; we did not wait for Jiaozhu's order."

"That's how it should be done," Zhang Wuji replied.

While they were in the middle of discussing military situation, Yin Yewang rushed in and said, "Reporting to Jiaozhu: The Beggar Clan is sending their people to inform us that Chen Youliang, that traitor's whereabouts has been discovered."

"Where is he?" Zhang Wuji asked.

Yin Yewang said, "Unexpectedly, that traitor mingles in the midst of our Cult as a subordinate of Xu Shouhui Xiongdi. I heard he has won Xu Shouhui Xiongdi's favor and trust."

Zhang Wuji pondered for a moment and said, "If that's the case, it is inappropriate for us to act rashly. Jiujia [maternal uncle], I must bother you to send someone to warn Xu Xiong: this traitor Chen Youliang is extremely treacherous and crafty. By letting him staying by his side, Xu Xiong is just waiting for a great disaster to happen; he must by all means not let Chen Youliang stay close to him."

Yin Yewang complied, but then he continued, "It would be better to eliminate him completely with a blade. Please assign me to handle him!"

Zhang Wuji was still contemplating the proposal when a Ming Cult disciple came in to deliver an urgent letter from Xu Shouhui.

Yang Xiao knitted his brows and exclaimed, "Terrible! It's terrible! He has beaten us by taking the initiative."

Zhang Wuji unsealed the letter and read. Turned out it was a long report Xu Shouhui submitted to his superior. In it he explained how Chen Youliang admitted his offense to the Cult Leader, how he understood that he had committed a serious crime, how he deeply regretted his sins and wanted to repent. Right now he sincerely wanted to join the Ming Cult and was determined to completely turn from his wicked ways. He was asking the Cult Leader to give him an opportunity to tread the new way.

Zhang Wuji handed the letter over to Yang Xiao, Yin Yewang and the others so that they could read it themselves. Yin Yewang said, “Xu Xiongdi has fallen under this man’s spell; he will certainly suffer misfortune in the future.”

Yang Xiao sighed and said, “This traitor Chen Youliang is extremely wicked, but if we kill him at this moment, the public is bound to find out. It would appear that we are only settling a long-standing grudge without giving any consideration to other people’s qualities. We will inevitably turn the hearts of the world’s heroes cold.”

“What Yang Zuo Shi said is correct,” Zhang Wuji said, “Peng Dashi, you are a good friend of Xu Xiong. Why don’t you advise him to be careful and rise up his guard against Chen Youliang? He must not let the authority over the troops to fall into his hand.” Peng Yingyu gave him his consent.

Unfortunately, Xu Shouhui dismissed Peng Yingyu’s advice. Chen Youliang had won his full confidence and in the end he lost his life under Chen Youliang’s hands. Afterwards, Chen Youliang seized control of Ming Cult’s western rebel army. He declared himself ‘Han Wang’ [King of Han], and fought for control over the land under the heavens [i.e. China] against the eastern Ming Cult rebel army. They fought great battles as far as Lake Poyang, until finally his troops were defeated and he lost his life in battle. During the dozens of year’s fierce civil war, the heroes and warriors of the Ming Cult suffered very heavy casualties.

That very evening, Zhang Wuji had a discussion with Yang Xiao, Peng Yingyu and the others. They agreed to dispatch Ming Cult disciples to various army units to coordinate their movements. By the time they finished their meeting, it was already very late at night.

Early next morning, Zhao Min said, “Zhou Jiejie left last night. She said she did not wait to take her leave from you.”

Zhang Wuji was depressed for half a day. Then he remembered that the number of days he had been separated from Zhang Sanfeng was simply too great and he missed

him. Therefore, taking Zhao Min and Song Qingshu along, he decided to come to Mount Wudang with Yu Lianzhou and the others.

The distance between Shaoshi Peak and Mount Wudang was not too far; in just a few days they have reached the mountain. Zhang Wuji accompanied Yu Lianzhou, Zhang Songxi and Yin Liting as they entered the inside hall to pay their respects to Zhang Sanfeng, also to see Song Yuanqiao and Yu Daiyan.

When Song Yuanqiao learned that his son was outside, his face paled; with a sword in his hand, he stormed outside. Zhang Wuji and the others were in quandary; they felt they must persuade him, yet they realized it was not their place to interfere. Left with no other choice, they went to the main hall in his wake. Zhang Sanfeng also followed them out.

“Where is that disobedient, rebelling animal?” Song Yuanqiao roared. His glance caught Song Qingshu, who was still lying down on the stretcher. Song Qingshu’s head was covered in plain wrap cloth, even his eyes were covered. The sword in Song Yuanqiao’s hand was aimed straight at Song Qingshu’s body, but Song Yuanqiao’s hand went weak and the sword did not continue piercing down. In that instant, he remembered the love between a father and his son, the loyalty among disciples of the same school; all sorts of feeling welled up in his heart. Turning the sword around, he stabbed it into his own lower abdomen.

Zhang Wuji hastily reached out to snatch the sword away, while urging, “Da Shibo [first martial (older) uncle], you must not do this. Let us leave it to Tai Shifu [grandmaster] to handle this matter properly.”

Zhang Sanfeng sighed and said, “That our Wudang School has produced this kind of unfilial disciple, Yuanqiao, it is not the misfortune of you, one man, alone. It is better for us all not to have this kind of unfilial son!” His right hand waved and ‘Bang!’ it landed on Song Qingshu’s chest. Song Qingshu’s internal organs shattered and he stopped breathing instantly.

Song Yuanqiao kneeled down and sobbed, “Shifu, disciple was negligent in teaching disciple, resulting in Qi Di’s [seventh (younger) brother] life lost in that animal’s hands. How can disciple be worthy of you, Senior, and Qi Di?”

Zhang Sanfeng reached down to help him up, saying, “You do have some part in this transgression. Lianzhou will take over the Zhang Men disciple position from you start-

ing today. You may devote your attention to study and refine the Taiji Fist technique. The day-to-day affair of Zhang Men, you do not need to manage anymore.”

Song Yuanqiao bowed to thank him and receive the order. Yu Lianzhou tried to decline, but Zhang Sanfeng firmly refused to dismiss him, thereupon he had to accept the order.

Witnessing how Zhang Sanfeng executed Song Qingshu, removed Song Yuanqiao from his position, and thus managing his school with a firm hand, there was not anyone present who did not shiver with astonishment.

Zhang Sanfeng asked about the Great Assembly of Heroes and the rebel army's fight against the Yuan, he was very warm toward Zhang Wuji. Zhao Min kneeled and kowtowed in front of Zhang Sanfeng, asking forgiveness of her previous rudeness and offenses. Zhang Sanfeng laughed and said that he had never kept it in his heart. While it was true that Yu Daiyan's lifelong disability, Zhang Cuishan's lost of life, were related to her subordinate, Ah Da, Ah Er, and the others, Zhao Min had not even been born yet at that time, so when all is said and done, he could not put the blame on her.

When Zhang Sanfeng heard that she willingly forsook her father and brother to follow Zhang Wuji, he said, “Very good! Very good! A woman like you is hard to come by!”

After several days of good visit with Zhang Sanfeng and the others at the Wudang Mountain, Zhang Wuji proceeded toward Haozhou accompanied by Zhao Min. Along the way he repeatedly heard reports of their Cult's victories. He also heard that the rebel army had swarmed various places; Zhang Shicheng at Gusu and Fang Guozhen at Taizhou, for instance. Although they were not affiliated with the Ming Cult, they were friendly forces who fought the Yuan together. Zhang Wuji's heart was overjoyed; he continued riding with Zhao Min toward the east, envisioning that the days until country's [orig. 'he shan'] recovery were close. He only hoped that henceforth peace and security would reign over the world, the common people would enjoy a good and prosperous life. If that happened, then the hovering between live and dead, the under-going of many sufferings in the past several years would not be in vain.

Zhang Wuji was not willing to create too much disturbance, hence, along the way he avoided meeting the Ming Cult rebel army's officers and generals. He simply observed them in secret and was pleased to find the rebel army's troops were following strict discipline; they did not harass the common people and everywhere he heard praises to Marshal Zhu Yuanzhang and Senior General Xu Da.

One day he arrived at the outskirts of Haozhou. Zhu Yuanzhang had heard about his arrival and sent Tang He and Deng Yu, two generals to lead troops waiting to welcome

him and take him to the guesthouse. Tang He reported, “Marshal Zhu, along with Senior General Xu Da and General Chang are in the middle of urgent military intelligence meeting. They cannot contain their delight as they learned about Jiaozhu’s arrival; only they are being bound by military affairs and are not able to welcome Jiaozhu personally. For this disrespectful offense, they are asking Jiaozhu’s forgiveness.”

Zhang Wuji laughed and said, “We are all brothers, why bother with all these empty talks about welcoming and sending off? Military intelligence matter is more important.”

That evening, a large banquet was prepared in the guesthouse. Tang He and Deng Yu, two generals acted as hosts. After three rounds of wine, Zhu Yuanzhang, accompanied by his senior generals, hurriedly rushed in and bowed to the ground in front of the banquet table. Zhang Wuji hastily helped him up. Zhu Yuanzhang personally poured some wine and respectfully presented three cups of wine to Zhang Wuji. Zhang Wuji took the cups and dried them up in one gulp. Zhu Yuanzhang also presented some wine to honor Zhao Min, and Zhao Min drank it.

During the banquet, they talked about the military situation in various fronts. When talking about their achievements in besieging towns and seizing territories, Zhu Yuanzhang looked rather proud of himself. Zhang Wuji heaped him with praises.

While they were still taking, suddenly the Senior General Liao Yongzhong entered the reception hall in big strides. After paying his respects to their Cult Leader, he whispered in Zhu Yuanzhang’s ear, “He is captured!”
“Very good!” Zhu Yuanzhang replied.

Suddenly, from outside the door someone was shouting loudly, “Injustice! Injustice!”

Zhang Wuji recognized the voice crying ‘injustice’ was Han Lin’er’s. “Is that Han Xiongdi?” he was astonished, “What happened?”

Zhu Yuanzhang said, “Reporting to Jiaozhu: This traitor Han Lin’er is conspiring with the Tatars, he is scheming to topple our Cult by responding from the inside to their attack from outside.”

Zhang Wuji was even more shocked, “Han Xiongdi is a very loyal and upright person, how can this happen? Take him in quickly, let me ask him personally ...” His words

were not finished when he suddenly felt dizzy; the sky became fuzzy and the earth blackened as he lost consciousness.

When he came around, he felt his limbs were bound with rough and heavy ropes. Looking around him, all he could see was darkness. His shock was not exactly 'mild'. Fortunately, he felt a soft body leaning against his chest. Turned out Zhao Min and he were bound together, only Zhao Min had not regained consciousness yet.

Upon thinking it over, Zhang Wuji realized that Zhu Yuanzhang was behind all this. Most likely he expected the Ming Cult to be successful in the future; then logically and rightfully, Zhang Wuji should become the new emperor. Therefore, he put an extremely strong drug in Zhang Wuji's wine with the intention of killing him secretly later.

Zhang Wuji circulated his 'chi' around once, and did not find anything unusual in his chest and abdomen; his strength was still intact. He sneered inwardly and thought, "So they think they can bind me with this rope? I don't think it's that easy. Right now Min Mei has not awakened yet; there's no hurry in leaving. As soon as it is dawn, I am going to expose his traitorous scheme in front of our Cult's people." Thereupon he rested quietly to regain his strength.

About two hours later, he suddenly heard some people enter the room next door. As he listened to them talking, he recognized the voices of Zhu Yuanzhang, Xu Da and Chang Yuchun, three people.

He heard that Zhu Yuanzhang was saying, "This man betrays our Cult, surrenders to the Yuan Dynasty. The evidence is conclusive; there is no doubt about it. It pained me just to think about it. Brothers, what do you think we must do?" Without waiting for Xu Da and Chang Yuchun to answer, he continued, "This man's ears and eyes are numerous; he has trusted comrades everywhere in the army. We'd better not to mention his name."

Xu Da was heard replying, "Zhu Dage [big brother Zhu], to succeed in an important matter, we must not concern ourselves with trivial matters; we must cut the grass and pull the roots, do not leave any potential problem in the future."

"But this little thief has always been our superior," Zhu Yuanzhang said, "We must not forget kindness and violate justice. This is our basic principle."

Chang Yuchun said, "If Dage is afraid that by killing him the army would revolt, there is no harm in us making our move quietly, so that Dage's reputation will not be

implicated.”

Zhu Yuanzhang was quiet for a moment before saying, “Since Xu and Chang, two brothers have already said so, we will deal with him as such, then. Only, this little thief has sown quite some kindness to the people of our Cult, also, two brothers were usually on good terms with him; we must keep this matter from leaking out. Ay, the thought of killing him today is truly unbearable for me.”

Xu and Chang both said, “We cannot give friends and personal relations more consideration than the great undertaking of recovering the nation.” As the three men finished talking, they went out the room.

Zhang Wuji sucked a mouthful of cold air. Immediately he exerted his ‘shen gong’ [divine power/strength] to break the rope binding his body. Carrying Zhao Min in his arms, he quietly climbed over the wall and went out.

Leaning against the wall, he could not stop all sorts of feelings from bubbling up in his heart. “That traitor Zhu Yuanzhang forgets kindness and violates justice, I am fine with it. But Xu Dage and Chang Dage have special friendship with me, yet for the sake of riches and honor they are unexpectedly able to betray me. The three of them bear heavy responsibility within the rebel army. If I strike them dead with my palm, I am afraid the army’s unity would disintegrate. I, Zhang Wuji, have never coveted name or position. Xu Dage, Chang Dage, you are looking down on me too much.” After thinking deeply for half a day, he quietly took Zhao Min to leave the area.

When he was safe outside the city, he wrote a letter, appointing Yang Xiao as the new Cult Leader, but he did not write even a single character about what had happened in Haozhou.

It never occurred to Zhang Wuji that when Xu Da and Chang Yuchun talked about ‘the little thief’, they were actually referring to Han Lin’er. They did not even know that Zhang Wuji was in Haozhou. Everything was secretly arranged by Zhu Yuanzhang. He wanted to make Zhang Wuji downhearted so that Zhang Wuji would retire voluntarily. First, Zhu Yuanzhang was dreadful of Zhang Wuji’s divine bravery. Second, Zhang Wuji was their Cult’s Jiaozhu who was highly esteemed by everybody in their Cult. Let’s say he wanted to kill him; not only Zhu Yuanzhang did not have the courage to do so, even if he did succeed in killing him, but if there was the slightest chance of his plot being exposed, the consequences would be too detrimental for him.

Zhu Yuanzhang understood very well that Zhang Wuji placed the important matter of recovering the country above all else, moreover, he loved Xu Da and Chang Yuchun like brothers. As soon as Zhang Wuji heard their discussion, he would quietly go away.

As expected, everything happened according to Zhu Yuanzhang's anticipation. Although Zhang Wuji's martial art skill was unequalled in the present age, in term of scheming and resourcefulness, he was too far below Zhu Yuanzhang. In the end, he had fallen into the treacherous scheme of the most ambitious and ruthless character of their generation.

Although Zhang Wuji had never wanted to be an emperor, he would feel saddened for the rest of his life whenever Xu Da and Chang Yuchun, which he thought were without kindness and loyalty, came into his mind.

As for the accusation that Han Lin'er was colluding with the Tatars and betraying his country, it was actually Zhu Yuanzhang who planted false evidence against him. It was because after Han Shantong's death, the army appointed Han Lin'er as their commander; consequently, Zhu, Xu, Chang, and the other generals became his subordinates.

Zhu Yuanzhang forged a letter from Han Lin'er to the enemy as if it was Han Lin'er's own hadwriting; with a large sum of money, he also bribed Han Lin'er's trusted aide to leak the secret to Xu Da and Chang Yuchun. Xu and Chang, two men, believed without any reservation. As a result, they insisted on Han Lin'er's elimination. Zhu Yuanzhang pretended to uphold righteousness and benevolence by refusing to allow the execution. It was not until Xu Da and Chang Yuchun urged him repeatedly that he reluctantly agreed.

He held Zhang Wuji and Zhao Min in the adjacent room, knowing that with his martial art skill, for Zhang Wuji to break the rope binding his body was as easy as lifting his finger. He was only afraid that as soon as Zhang Wuji was free, he would find him to exact revenge. Therefore, as soon as he finished talking with Xu and Chang, two men, he immediately went into hiding.

Soon after Zhang Wuji left, he ordered Liao Yongzhong to throw Han Lin'er into the river and let him sank into the bottom. This way, he killed two birds with one stone. His plan was truly flawless.

Later, Yang Xiao became the Cult Leader of the Ming Cult; but by this time Zhu Yuanzhang had grown wings, the troops under his command numbered in millions.

Yang Xiao was aging and less ambitious than before, he lost any desire to fight over the throne with him.

After Zhu Yuanzhang ascended the throne, he opposed the Ming Cut by issuing an order to strictly prohibit its movement and massacred the brethrens who had once rendered great merit to him. Chang Yuchun died early because of sickness. Xu Da eventually was not able to escape disaster.

When Zhang Wuji finished writing the letter to Yang Xiao, Zhao Min saw he did not immediately put down the writing brush in his hand; he had quite an unhappy expression on his face. Zhao Min interrupted his thoughts by saying, “Wuji Gege, once you agreed to do three things for me. The first thing was to let me look at the Tulong Saber; the second thing was not to marry Zhou Jiejie back at Haozhou, so the first two matters are already accomplished. I still have the third request to you, you must not fail to keep your own word.”

Zhang Wuji was startled. “You ... you ...” he stammered, “What kind of strange demonic witchcraft do you want me to do this time ...?”

Zhao Min smiled sweetly and said, “My eyebrows are too thin. I want you to thicken it with your brush. This matter certainly does not violate the Wulin’s way of chivalry, does it?”

Zhang Wuji raised his brush up; he laughed and said, “From now on I am going to draw your eyebrows every day.”

Suddenly from outside the window came a soft giggle and someone said, “Wuji Gege, you also promised to do something for me.” It was Zhou Zhiruo’s voice.

Zhang Wuji was so engrossed in writing the letter that he did not know when she arrived outside the window. The shutters slowly opened and Zhou Zhiruo’s beautiful face appeared. Under the candlelight, she looked smiling, yet she was not exactly smiling.

Zhang Wuji was startled again. “You ... what do you want me to do?” he asked.

Zhou Zhiruo smiled and said, “I haven’t thought about it now, but when you and Zhao Jia Meizi [little sister of Zhao family] are ready to bow to the Heaven and the Earth to get married, I am sure I will think of something by then.”

Zhang Wuji turned to look at Zhao Min, and then he turned again to look at Zhou Zhiruo. In that instant, a myriad of thoughts raced around in his mind. He was unsure if he should be happy or if he should be worried. His hand trembled and the brush fell on the table ...

THE END



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