

Chapter 1

Scores of Heists

Scolding heat. The sun rays was like heat carrying knives, beating down relentlessly upon the yellow dirt road. Even the knife scar on Chang Man Tian's face was roasted to a shade of red.

To be precise, it was three scars, that and about 7 or 8 internal injuries had earned him his fame and position that he enjoyed on this day. Whenever the weather turns moist or rainy, his internal wounds would starts throbbing again, causing his joints ache, he would be reminded of the hard fought battles of his youth and feel an incredible amount of graditude!

To have survived this long was not easy, to be able to be the Vice Master Escort earning 500 taels of silver every month was even harder, for that was truly earned with blood and sweat. Lately, he rarely ever escort any job himself. The Head Escort of “Enforcing Peace Escort Service” was a disciple of the same master as he. Between the two of them, the old men spent the last several years enjoying the tranquil and peaceful life, practicing a little martial arts in the morning, drinking some wine in the evening. Just merely the sight of their “Golden Spear Iron Sword Flag” was enough to keep most of the people in the Southeast away from the packages that “Enforcing Peace” had been entrusted with.

But this particular package was just too important, the trustee insisted that the two martial brothers escort the entire delievery process. But since the Head Master was under the weather yet again, Chang Man Tian had little choice but to pick up that pair of huge iron sword of his that weighed more than 13 kilograms each and personally ride out once again.

“Make way... Enforcing Peace... Keep clear....” The Henchman Old Man Zhao was out in front shouting the passage of the escort. He had been at this for 20 years now, even though he was no longer a young lad, he still had a booming voice, especially since he had just drank several jugs worth of Fire Sabres during lunch break that perked him up even more than usual.

Chang Man Tian fished out a green piece of handkerchief and wiped the sweat off of his forehead. Time has no mercy, he suddenly realized that he is really getting

old, after this escort mission, it is probably time to hang up the swords and go into retirement. The sun is really scorching down at the moment, if there is a place to catch a shade ahead, then it probably would not hurt to rest a bit before continuing farther.

Chang Man Tian gave the reins a tug and galloped to the front. He was just about to give the instructions to Old Man Zhao when he suddenly noticed that there was a person, busy sewing, sitting smack in the middle of the road. A huge, bearded man.

Having made his way through the pugilistic world for some 30 years now, Chang Man Tian had yet see a man embroidering, much less someone doing so under such a scorching sun while sitting in the middle of the road.

“Could he be insane?” For he really did look like a lunatic, the surface of the road was hot enough to fry an egg on, and yet he was wearing a reddish purple cotton overcoat.

The strange thing was that, while all these men who were wearing a single layer of shirt was covered in sweat, there was nary a single bead of sweat to be seen on this man's face.

Chang Man Tian frowned, brought his hand up to signal to the rest of the group to stop, and shot a look in Old Man Zhao's direction.

Old Man Zhao had been a veteran of the martial world as well, he had been Chang Man Tian's henchman ever since Chang Man Tian's first escort job.

Naturally, he understood exactly what his long time master wanted. So he lightly coughed a bit to clear his throat and walked up to the man.

That bearded man was concentrating on sewing his flower, just like a newly in love girl sitting in her bedroom sewing up her own wedding dress, totally oblivious to the fact that a dozen or so carriages had been stopped because of him.

The flower he was embroidering on the cloth was peony, a black peony, his embroidery was incredibly more delicate than anything that a girl would make.

“My friend, your embroidery skill are quite remarkable, but pity this isn't a place for sewing.” Old Man Zhao suddenly said loudly. His voice was booming to begin with, and now he was purposefully trying to give this man a scare. But unexpectedly not only did this man not look up, he did not even blink one bit.

“Is he not only insane but deaf as well?” Old Man Zhao walked up even more and patted him on the shoulder.

“Friend, could you let us go by? You see....” He suddenly stopped and his expression suddenly changed. When he had reached over to pat the man on his shoulders, the needle in the bearded man's hand just happened to lift up a bit and pricked him lightly on the back of his hand. What's a little needle prick to a man who barely flinches when slashed by a sabre?

Old Man Zhao did not mind at first, but when he wanted to bring his arm back to his side, he discovered that he could not! That half of his body seemed to have went numb! What kind of evilness was on the tip of that needle?

Old Man Zhao took three steps back and carefully inspected his hand. There was no swelling of any kind, but it just did not respond to his commands anymore. He was surprised and furious at the same time.

Gracefully, Chang Man Tian floated down off his horse and quickly made his way to the bearded man.

“Quite a beautiful peony that you have sawn there my friend.” He said, cupping his fist together. The bearded man still did not look up, but suddenly laughed.

“I can sew other things as well.”

“Really? What?”

“Blind men.”

“Blind men aren't easy to sew.” Chang Man Tian snickered.

“On the contrary, blind men are the easiest, two pricks and you get one.”

“Oh really? How so?”

“Like this.” He suddenly reached out and pricked Old Man Zhao's face twice.

Old Man Zhao let out a blood curdling scream and fell to the ground. Covering his face with his eyes, he was writhing on the ground in pain as blood squirted out from in between his fingers, blood from his eyes! Chang Man Tian's face dropped as he immediately grabbed his sword.

But the big beard was still casually sitting there, seemingly minding his own business.

“See? Two pricks, one blind man.”

“That were some fast moves my friend.” Chang Man Tian let out a little laugh and coldly observed.

“Sewing blind men is what I'm best at, 72 pricks and I can give you 36 blind men.” The big beard matter of factly answered.

For this job, Chang Man Tian had taken with him, including himself, exactly 36 men. Those who were with him were all first rate masters themselves and have all rode forth and joined alongside him.

“What are you doing here? Seeking revenge or robbing the package?” Even though he was shocked, Chang Man Tian was still managed to stay calm.

“I'm here to sew.”

“What exactly are you planning to sew?”

“First I'm going to sew myself 36 blind men, then I'm going to sew eight hundred thousand taels worth of caravans to go home with me.”

Chang Man Tian let out a long and drawn out laugh.

“Funny, this sword of mine can sew something as well.”

“What?”

“Dead men!” His laughter stopped, his sword was unsheathed.

This huge iron sword might not be some incredibly heavy weapon, but it was still the very sword that the legendary “Mister Iron Sword” had used in times past.

On this sword, Chang Man Tian had put in at least forty years of hard work, how else could he have lived until now?

The accompanying men all that revealed their weapons as well, an Eagle Wing Sabre, a Wise Son Lance, and a Gate of Hell Sword.

When fighting bandits, these men in the escort business did not conform to any pugilistic world rules, and did not worry about fighting one on one.

“Liang Qing Zi, let's go! Go for his eyes!” Chang Man Tian let out a shout.

If you want to turn others into blind men, then others will obviously want to turn you into one as well! This is the law of their world. “A tooth for a tooth, an eye for an eye!” But the big beard was still embroidering as a sword of more than 13 kilograms howled towards him.

The Wise Son Lance pulled a “Poisonous Dragon Drinking” and attacked the man's waist. Enforcing Peace's escort runners had all been trained by the master brothers in one shape or another. Therefore, when they fight, they always complement each other perfectly.

“Finished!” The big beard suddenly laughed.

He had finished his peony and the needle came flicking up sideways. In the sudden cold flash that surrounded him, Chang Man Tian suddenly realized that the flash was in front of his eyes.

Nobody can describe this kind of speed, and almost nobody could dodge it. Chang Man Tian howled, the sword suddenly flew off of his hand, but his body had collapsed onto the ground.

“Dong!” The iron sword was nailed almost half a meter into the trunk of a huge tree on the side of the road. By now the big beard had just finished sewing his fourth blind man.

Seventy two pricks, thirty six blind men. Such speed, such savageness! A sheet of cloth fell onto Chang Man Tian's face. On it was embroidered a big red peony.



When Jiang Zhong Wei walked, it always jingled, as if he was a bell himself. Of course, he was not a bell. Jiang Zhong Wei was the Head Warden of the Southern Peace Royal Palace, a very dignified, and very powerful person.

Inside the Royal Palace there was, naturally, a great number of top secret places. And on the door leading to these places, there were, naturally, locks. And they were all under his supervision. Anybody with 30 or so chains of keys on him would jingle when they walk.

He was truly a trustworthy man, not only was he calm and collected, and loyal to the bone, he also trained his body in the “Thirteen Guardians Brute Training”, so even though he was not quite to the point where he was impenetrable to sabres and spears, it was nevertheless very difficult to hurt him. However, it was not difficult for him to hurt others.

His Iron Sand Palm had reached about 90% of its highest level and could readily split boulders or turn smaller rocks into sand. Whenever the Prince entrusted him with another key, there was a sense of relief about him, knowing that the key was safe. At this moment he was just on his way to retrieve a stud of diamonds and a pair of flat jade with a hole in the center, which are traditionally used for ceremonial purposes in China, from the Royal Treasury Vault.

Today was the birthday of the Prince's favorite concubine and the Prince had already promised her those things as birthday gifts.

Like most men in the world, the Prince was always very generous towards the women he loves.

The long hall way had a suppressed peace about it, because this was so close to the Royal Treasury Vault, trespassing, by anyone, for any reason, will result in immediate death!

After entering the restrict area, every 7 or 8 steps or so was a man who Jiang Zhong Wei had hand picked himself, standing guard like stones statues.

These men had all been passed a harsh and rigid training procedure, not a fly landing on their face or a person stumping on their foot would make them move one bit. Not only was Jiang Zhong Wei hold enormous and popular influence over them, his orders were also clear and absolute. If anybody slacked off in his duty and let so much as a dog into the restricted area, what awaits them was also death! Even he has to say the password of the day before entering the area.

Today's password was: "Sun and Moon both shine brightly." Because today was a very good day according to the almanacs.

Even on that stern and serious face of Jiang Zhong Wei, a hint of happiness could be discerned. For he was an invited guest at the Prince's consort's birthday bash as well. After finishing this task, he would immediately change outfits and join the celebration. Therefore his steps were a little faster than normal as well.

Eight personal guards dressed in silk and armed with a sabre at their side followed him. Silk robed guards were the best among the guards within the guard units, and on top of that, these eight men were hand picked from among over 100 of the silk robed guards. Jiang Zhong Wei had always been a prudent man.

The heavy doors leading to the Royal Treasury Vault were heavily locked, there were three separate layers of doors, each more than half a meter thick, and the locks on them were all custom made by the best locksmiths.

Jiang Zhong Wei finally opened the last door as a gust of cold and moist air hit him in the face.

This place was just most treasure vaults in this world, cold, moist, dark, and sinister. Just like a tomb.

The only difference was that tombs had at least dead people in them, this place did not even have a dead ant in it.

Everytime Jiang Zhong Wei entered here, he was always struck with a strange thought: if a man could have all of the treasures inside of this vault, but only under the condition that he lived in here, what good would it be? Even if you give him all of the riches in the world, he would not want to stay in this place for just one day.

This thought struck him again this time as well, when he pushed the door open and walked in, his only wish was to walk out as soon as possible. He could never have imagined that once he entered this time, he would never come out again!

Unbelievably, inside of this cold, moist, dark, and sinister vault, there was a person. A live person.

This person's face was covered with his beard, wore a reddish purple cotton overcoat, and was, amazingly, sitting on one of the treasure chests sewing.

Jiang Zhong Wei could not even have imagined something like this in his dreams, he could barely believe his very own eyes.

But in front of him was really a person, sitting there sewing, a real, live, man.

“Could he be a ghost?” Other than ghosts, what else could get in here?

Jiang Zhong Wei suddenly felt his spine shiver and shuddered despite of himself. The bearded man was concentrating on embroidering, just like girls do as they sit in their bedrooms thinking about their crush. He was sewing peony, black peony on a red piece of satin.

“How did you get in here?” Jiang Zhong Wei collected himself and demanded.

“I walked in here.” The big beard did not even look up as he answered matter of factly.

“Do you know what kind of place this is?”

“It's a place for sewing!”

“So you came here just to embroider?” Jiang Zhong Wei let out a cold laugh.

“Because I can only sew what I want to sew here!” The big beard nodded.

“And what's that?”

“A blinded Jiang Zhong Wei!”

Jiang Zhong Wei reared back and let out a maddening laugh. Only when he is furious and ready to kill does he laugh madly like this. With the laughter still echoing, his body lunged forward. His palms whistled through the air like tigers as he pulled out his boulder-smashing Iron Sand Palm. He suddenly felt the center of his palm temporarily go numb, as if he had just been stunned by a bee, but all the power

behind his palm had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. At this moment, a flash of cold light arrived in front of his eyes.

“Thirteen Guardians Brute Training” might be the most powerful skill in the world in hardening one's body, but it does not cover one's eyes.

The guards outside suddenly heard a blood curdling yell and tried to scramble in, but the iron door had already been closed from the inside. By the time they pried open the door, an unconscious Jiang Zhong Wei laid on the ground, a blood red piece of satin covered his face. On the satin was embroidered a black peony!



The incense had already been lit in meditation room. Hua Man Lou had already finished bathing and was quietly sitting there, waiting.

If you want to get a taste of some of Father Bitter Gourd's cooking, not only do you have to wash yourself, but you have to be patient. Father Bitter Gourd was not a person who cooks often, not only did the guest have to be the right kind, but he also had to be in a good mood. The guests today were exceptionally right, other than Hua Man Lou, there was Ancient Pine Hermit and that man who claimed to be the number one in chess, number two in poetry and wine, and number three in sword skill: Wooden Taoist.

Obviously, these people were not just any regular guests, therefore Father Bitter Gourd was especially happy today. In the vast and boundless sunset, the crisp and clear sounds of the late bell could be heard, finally signaling the coming of the night. By the time Hua Man Lou walked outside, Ancient Pine Hermit and Wooden Taoist were already waiting for him in the yard. The night breeze blew through the bamboo forest, the scorching day was already on the other side of the sunset.

“To have two of my seniors waiting for me, I don't know how I can forgive myself.” Hua Man Lou smiled and greeted them.

The Wooden Taoist laughed. This never conforming, always different elder of the Wu Dang Sect had actually also changed his usual, patched thousand times over, Taoist robe for a clean and sparkling blue shirt.

Precisely because he did not want to be held to other people's standards and expectations, he willingly gave up the position of the Head Master of Wu Dang. But in order to taste some of Father Bitter Gourd's personal cooking, he was willing to suffer a little.

Everybody knew about Father Bitter Gourd's strange temperament.

“Looks like this old Taoist is right after all.” Ancient Pine Hermit inexplicably let out a sigh.

“What did Father say?” Hua Man Lou inquired.

“I said that you would surely know that we were here, even if we hold absolutely still, you would still know!” The Wooden Taoist laughed.

“But I can't figure out exactly how you knew that we were here.” Ancient Pine Hermit sighed again.

“Me neither.” The Wooden Taoist conceded. “But I have a good point about me that you can't match.”

“And what's that?”

“When I run into something that I can't figure out, I stop thinking about them!” The Wooden Taoist joked.

“That's why I have always maintained that if you give up drinking, you would surely live until you are 300 years old!” Ancient Pine Hermit jokingly observed.

“Why would I possibly want to live to 300 if I can't drink?”

The bamboo curtains of the meditation room had been drawn. But from there permeated the indescribably delicious smell of food, delicious enough to lead any human to the table in hopes of food.

“Father Bitter Gourd's vegetable cooking is truly peerless in this world.” Ancient Pine Hermit sighed.

“He had always maintained that his cooking was enough to even tempt the Bodhisattva!” Wooden Taoist laughingly claimed.

“Well, the food had already been placed on the table, what are we waiting for?” Ancient Pine Hermit commented.

Drawing aside the bamboo curtain sheet, they walked in, and were all shocked. Not only had the food been already placed on the table, there was already a man there, eating to his heart's desire.

This uninvited guest did not wait for them, nor he did not bath either. In reality, not only was his body covered in mud and dirt, his body emanated a stinking odor of

sweat. But not only had Father Bitter Gourd not chased him away, incredibly, he was sitting at his side, constantly putting food into his bowl, as if he was afraid that this guest might not eat enough.

“This monk is playing favorites.” Wooden Taoist sighed.

“We are the ones he invited, yet he lets someone else eat first.” Ancient Pine Hermit grimly agreed.

“And then he demanded that we wash up, but then this guy looked as if he had just come rolling out from a mud puddle.” Wooden Taoist continued.

Father Bitter Gourd laughed at their comments: “True, this monk is playing favorites, but only to this one person, so there's no point for you guys to get mad.”

“Why do you favor him anyways?” The Wooden Taoist demanded.

“Because I have no idea what to do whenever I run into him.”

“I don't blame you,” the Wooden Taoist laughed as well. “Last time, this guy stole two jugs of Virgin's Blush that I had sat for more than 50 years. And all I could do was stare angrily at him!”

“Even the Bodhisattva run out of ideas when this guy shows up.” Hua Man Lou ruefully smiled.

Who else could this man be but Lu Xiao Feng.

A plate of ham and another plate of tofu had already been cleaned off when Lu Xiao Feng finally stopped and shot a smile towards the three guests.

“Go right ahead and curse me if you want, I'll just keep on eating. You guys have a good time cursing, I just happen to be having a great time eating.”

“Others might fall for your tricks, but not I.” Wooden Taoist burst out laughing and sat down. Instantly three pieces of ducks had disappeared into his belly as well.

Hua Man Lou sat down along side Lu Xiao Feng, and immediately frowned.

“You usually don't smell bad at all, how come you smell like a dog that just crawled out of an outhouse today?”

“Because I haven't taken a bath in 10 days.”

“How many days?” Hua Man Lou was shocked at the answer.

“Ten days.”

“Why haven't you taken a bath in 10 days?” Hua Man Lou frowned disapprovingly.

“I have been busy.”

“Busy doing what?”

“Busy holding up my end of a gamble.”

“Who did you lose a bet with?”

“Other than that devil Si Kong Zhai Xing, who else could it be?” Lu Xiao Feng sighed.

“How did you lose to him?”

“Remember how I humiliated him last time we competed doing back flips?” Lu Xiao Feng laughed. “Well, this time he came up to me and wanted a rematch. How could I turn that down?”

“Of course you accepted!”

“But it turns out that this little bastard had been doing nothing but practicing back flips these days. In two hours he did six hundred and eighty back flips! What am I suppose to do after that?”

“So what did you lose to him?”

“We agreed that if I won, he would have to, from now on, get on his knees, kowtow to me, and yell at the top of his lungs: 'Uncle!' if he ever sees me again. And that if I lose, then I would dig out one earthworm for every back flip he did in the next 10 days.”

Hua Man Lou laughed.

“No wonder you look like an earthworm yourself now.”

“Did you really dig out 680 worms for him?” The Wooden Taoist could not control himself anymore either and asked in between fits of laughter.

“The first several days wasn't that bad, found alot of worms.” Lu Xiao Feng sighed and put up a brave smile. “But later on, finding a worm got harder than a slacker finding his wife.”

“What does the King of Thieves need all those worms for?” The Ancient Pine Hermit had to ask.

“He doesn't!” Lu Xiao Feng bitterly replied. “He just wanted to see me dig worms.”

“Who could have imagined that Lu Xiao Feng would have today!” Wooden Taoist was having a good laugh over this. “Makes you feel good all over!”

“Do you want a bet with me as well?” Lu Xiao Feng proposed, after his eyes twirled about for a bit inside of their sockets.

“A bet over what?”

“Drinking.”

“I'm not going to fall for that.” The Wooden Taoist told him with a smile.

“You are admitting defeat already?” Lu Xiao Feng shot him a sideways look.

“I admitted defeat a long time ago. When it comes to drinking I'm no match for you, when it comes to sword skills I'm no match for Xi Men Chui Xue and Yie Gu Xing. If you really want to get in a bet with me, then do it over chess!”

“You think I'm going to fall for that?” Lu Xiao Feng laughed.

“Other people know that I'm Number one in the world in chess, but they don't know that there is something else that nobody can match me in!” the Wooden Taoist proudly declared.

“What's that?”

“Eating, would you be willing to have an eating contest with me?”

“I want to, but I'm not a rice barrel!”¹ Lu Xiao Feng sighed.

“Who would have thought that the world famous Lu Xiao Feng would admit defeat. This is truly a rare occasion.” The Wooden Taoist sighed as well.

“In truth, recently he is no longer the most sensational guy in the martial world!” Father Bitter Gourd suddenly proclaimed.

“Who else could it be?” Lu Xiao Feng asked.

“Who do you think?”

“Xi Men Chui Xue?”

“Rumors say that he has been keeping that young Lady Sun of the Four Beauties of E'Mei recently and have not shown his face in the martial world for quite a while now!” Hua Man Lou answered for Father Bitter Gourd. Lu Xiao Feng smiled at that.

“Who would have thought that he would have a day like today as well? I thought for sure he was going to turn into a monk eventually.”

“We don't want monks like that in Buddhism!” Father Bitter Gourd replied.

“Well if it's not Xi Men Chui Xue, could it be Yie Gu Xing?” Lu Xiao Feng took another crack at it.

¹ The term “rice barrel”, or “fan tong”, is a general put down in Chinese.

“Not him either!”

“Yie Gu Xing has been very sick recently!” The Wooden Taoist revealed.

“He could get sick too?” Lu Xiao Feng was quite taken aback by the news. “What did he come down with?”

“The same illness as me. Laziness.” Wooden Taoist smiled. “Once you catch it, no matter who you are, you'll never cause a sensation again!”

“Could it possibly be the Boss and the Boss's Wife?” Lu Xiao Feng asked after thinking it over for a bit.

“The Boss is even lazier!” Hua Man Lou laughed and eliminated that choice.

“The Honest Monk isn't big on causing a stiff, Abbot... no, can't be him....” Lu Xiao Feng thought out loud.

“Could it be that female tiger over there at Mount Qi Xia?” He asked, after much deep thought.

“No, all no. Not only do you not know this guy, I guarantee you haven't even heard of him before!” Father Bitter Gourd replied.

“What kind of a person is he?”

“A man that knows how to embroider!” Father Bitter Gourd answered. Lu Xiao Feng was taken aback momentarily before he laughed.

“Actually there are quite a few men who knows how to embroider. Of the several tailors that I know of, a couple of them knows how to embroider!”

“But not only does he know how to sew flowers, he can sew blind men!” Father Bitter Gourd responded. Lu Xiao Feng was taken aback yet again.

“Sew blind men?”

“Seems like he had sewed at least 70 or 80 blind men in the last several days!”

“How does he sew blind men?”

“With a sewing needle, two pricks and you get one!”

Lu Xiao Feng finally understood what he was saying.

“What kind of people are these blind men that he has sewn?”

“There's at least 4 or 5 men that you know of in that group!”

“Who?”

“Chang Man Tian, Hua Yi Fan, Jiang Zhong Wei....”

“The Jiang Zhong Wei of the Southeast Royal Palace?” He did not even finish before Lu Xiao Feng's expression changed drastically.

“Is there another Jiang Zhong Wei?”

“But ever since he entered the Royal Palace, he hasn't meddled in the affairs of the martial world, why would anybody go after him?” Lu Xiao Feng frowned.

“Nobody went after him, but somebody did go after those 18 bushels of diamond studs in the Royal Palace!” Father Bitter Gourd answered.

“This person didn't just blind Jiang Zhong Wei but made off with 18 bushels of diamond studs from the Royal Palace?”

“On top of that, he also took with him 70 or so priceless pieces of art work and calligraphy that Hua Yu Gan has collected, 800 thousand taels of silver entrusted to escort to Enforcing Peace Escort Service, a coveted shipmen that Enforcing East insured, and some 90,000 taels of golden leaflets from Golden Sand River!” Father Bitter Gourd sighed to catch his breath and continued. “Within a space of about a month, this man has committed 60 some huge heists, and all by himself. Causing quite a stir wouldn't you say?”

“How come I didn't hear anything about any of this?” Lu Xiao Feng asked, still a bit startled by the news.

“You have been busy in the Northwest lately, these crimes happened in the Southeast. The news only got here in the last couple of days, only you were busy digging for worms!” Father Bitter Gourd.

“This news had just got to here, and yet you know all about it!” Lu Xiao Feng observed.

“Mmm!”

“Since when did you become so well connected to all that's happening in the world?” Lu Xiao Feng wondered.

“Don't forget, I have always had a most well connected younger martial brother.” Father Bitter Gourd sighed.

“Jin Jiu Ling?”

“Luckily, I only have one martial brother like him!” Father Bitter Gourd let out an exasperated smile.

“Now I understand.” Lu Xiao Feng let out a long, drawn out sigh.

“What do you understand?”

“Jin Jiu Ling was good friends with Jiang Zhong Wei, and not to mention he was once the Number One Bounty Hunter in the world. Even though he had washed his hands of the business, but he has to get in on this matter.”

Father Bitter Gourd conceded Lu Xiao Feng's point. Once someone has worked one day for the government, it was hard to get out.

“To this day, I still don't understand why he decided to go into that line of work back then!” Father Bitter Gourd sighed.

“What? You want him to be a monk instead?” Wooden Taoist interrupted.

“A monk would at least not have as much trouble and worry!” Father Bitter Gourd replied.

“But monks don't have wives either!” Wooden Taoist jabbed. Father Bitter Gourd did not reply anymore. Everybody in the martial world knew that the biggest flaw that Jin Jiu Ling has was that he fancied himself to be suave and charming. It had even been rumored that the reason he entered public service was because of a woman.

“Jin Jiu Ling has been publically acknowledged as the best in the 300 year history of the Six Doors. Any and all cases, be it large or small, would be solved the moment he gets his hands on it.” Lu Xiao Feng stated.

“That's why I have always thought that his biggest problem is that he was too capable, too smart.” Father Bitter Gourd sighed some more.

“But even the smartest man would eventually come across something that he can't solve.” Lu Xiao Feng hypothesized, and Father Bitter Gourd agreed.

“Maybe this case is that very one that he could not solve, so he wants a helper.” Again, Father Bitter Gourd agreed to that notion.

“And since you only have one martial brother like him, you would naturally help him find a helper!” Lu Xiao Feng sighed and ruefully laughed. “The unlucky thing is, I just happen to be the perfect helper, whenever someone run into something they can't solve, they come to me, therefore....”

“Therefore....?” Father Bitter Gourd asked.

“Therefore when you invited me here to eat this meal, you probably did not do it out of the kindness of your heart.”

“Don't forget that it was you who barged in here, I didn't actually invite you.”

“Maybe I just happen to be unlucky to begin with.” Lu Xiao Feng laughed at his own misery. “Why else would I just barge in here like that?”

“You seem to be getting quite unlucky recently!” The Wooden Taoist laughed.

“But this time I'm not having it, I don't care if he sews flowers or patches up pants, none of my business. I don't care how big this thing get, I want no part of it!”

“He didn't want you get in on this anyways, what are you making a big fuss about anyways?” Father Bitter Gourd plainly told him.

“He didn't?” Lu Xiao Feng was startled.

“I truly did not!” A man replied, smiling.

Of course, he was none other than Jin Jiu Ling.

As quite a number of people in the martial world know, there was two things about Jin Jiu Ling that very few people could match. His cloths, and his eyes. Jin Jiu Ling's eyes were not especially big, nor were they exceptionally bright, but as long as he laid an eye on something, he would never forget it.

The cloths that Jin Jiu Ling wore were always made of the finest of fabrics, in the latest of styles, and done with the most delicate of care. Even that fold out fan that he carried in his hand was a priceless object, when push comes to shove, it could even be used as a weapon. Jin Jiu Ling's skill at finding and hitting pressure points were first rate. In reality, everything about him was first rate.

If the wine was not first class, he would never drink it, if the woman was not first rate, he would not even look at her, if the carriage was not first class, he would never get in it. But he was not a first rate rich man, luckily for him, he had many money earning abilities. He was an expert in appraising old paintings and calligraphy as well as having an uncanny ability to judge thoroughbreds. Those two abilities alone were enough to assure him a first rate life for the rest of his days.

Besides, he was still a very handsome and attractive man, and did not look to be that old. This made it possible for him to spend very little money on what should be his biggest drain of cash. The beauties' smiles that other people might have to spend one thousand taels of gold to get usually came to him without him having to spent a penny.

That was why he had always lived quite comfortably, and also had preserved himself very well, looking not a bit like the martial arts master that had criminals shivering at the mere mention of his name but instead like a poetry writing, horse riding playboy.

“Have you found anything worthwhile lately?” Ancient Pine Hermit immediately asked upon seeing him walk in.

The Ancient Pine Hermit's biggest hobby was collecting classic art work and calligraphy. His collection was definitely not any worse than that of Hua Yu Gan's.

“All the good stuff that already been taken to Mount Huang by my dear hermit, what's left for me to find?” Jin Jiu Ling smiled.

“Not even one painting?”

Jin Jiu Ling paused for a moment before smiling again.

“I have on me a recently created flower piece!”

“Well? Come on, let's see it!” Ancient Pine Hermit asked. But Jin Jiu Ling was already in the middle of bringing it out. It was a blood red piece of satin, on it was sewn a black peony.

“What is this?” Ancient Pine Hermit asked after being momentarily surprised by it.

“Recently, there has been quite a demand for embroidery.” Jin Jiu Ling smiled.

“Could this be the personal work of Divine Needle, Madame Xue?” Ancient Pine Hermit asked.

“No, a man sewed this.”

“That particular sewing man?” Ancient Pine Hermit's expression noticeably changed at the revelation.

Jin Jiu Ling nodded.

“This was the very one that he sewed inside the Royal Treasury Vault.”

“Was he really sitting there sewing?” Lu Xiao Feng asked.

Jin Jiu Ling nodded again.

“When Jiang Zhong Wei opened the door, he was sitting there sewing this very flower!”

“The Royal Treasury Vault must be guarded inside out by a forest of men, how did he get in?” Lu Xiao Feng frowned.

“Nobody knows how he got in, nobody even knows where to start.” Jin Jiu Ling smiled rather tiredly.

“And he did not leave any clues whatsoever?”

“None.”

“What kind of a person was he?”

“He was the kind of person that had a huge beard and still wore a huge cotton overcoat even on a scorching hot day.”

“And?”

“And he's a man, and he knows how to embroider, and he's very good at that!”

“That's all you know?”

“That's all I know, and that's the same thing that everybody knows, nobody knows any more than I.”

“What type of kungfu did he use?”

“Don't know!”

“Even Jiang Zhong Wei couldn't tell?”

“Even a veteran of the pugilistic world like Chang Man Tian couldn't tell, what hope does Jiang Zhong Wei have?” Jin Jiu Ling sighed.

“Jiang Zhong Wei's Iron Palms is probably the best in the Southeast.”

“But he still did not even have a chance to make a move!” Jin Jiu Ling sighed again.

“How could someone this powerful just suddenly pop out of thin air....?” Lu Xiao Feng frowned.

“You said that you weren't going to get into this matter, why are you asking all these questions?” Master Bitter Gourd coldly inquired.

“What's the harm in asking?”

“Of course there isn't any harm.” Jin Jiu Ling put up another tired smile. “It's just that everything I know, you know now as well.”

Lu Xiao Feng stared at him for a while.

“Why did you tell me everything?” He suddenly asked.

“Because you asked.”

“No other reason?”

“No.”

“And you were not purposely waiting here for me?”

“How could I have known that you would come here?” Jin Jiu Ling could not help but put up another tired smile.

“And you did not have any intentions of finding me?”

“No.”

“Good, now I can relax and drink wine.” Lu Xiao Feng smiled and proclaimed. Even though his mouth was saying “good”, his smile was very awkward, very unnatural, and it seemed like he did not want to drink anymore wine.

But now it was Jin Jiu Ling's turn to suddenly smile.

“But now that you are here, I do have something to ask you!” He declared. Lu Xiao Feng's eyes immediately lit up.

“I knew it, I knew you must have something to ask of me!” He laughed and said.

“To crack this case and find this Embroidery Bandit, there's probably only one person in the entire world that is capable of that.” Jin Jiu Ling said. Lu Xiao Feng's eyes shone even brighter, who else but him could solve this mystery?

“Who is this person that you speak of?” But he purposefully asked nevertheless, wanting to hear Jin Jiu Ling say it.

“Si Kong Zhai Xing!”

“Who did you say?” Lu Xiao Feng asked after being rendered momentarily speechless.

“Si Kong Zhai Xing.” Jin Jiu Ling repeated. Lu Xiao Feng looked away, seemingly ignoring him totally.

But Jin Jiu Ling somehow, did not seem to notice and continued.

“Si Kong Zhai Xing is known as the King of Thieves, and he is truly a genius that comes along once every century. If there was anybody in the world that could figure out how the Embroidery Bandit got into the Royal Treasury Vault, then that person is Si Kong Zhai Xing.”

Lu Xiao Feng had already begun to drink, seemingly too disinterested to even listen anymore.

But Jin Jiu Ling just kept on going.

“If we want to crack this case, then we must find Si Kong Zhai Xing. But unfortunately, he's the type of person whose whereabouts and movements are always a mystery, so....”

“So you want to ask me where you can find him?” Lu Xiao Feng could not contain himself anymore.

“Correct.”

Lu Xiao Feng suddenly, and quite forcibly, put the cup in his hand down onto the table.

“So all that time that you wasted telling me all that garbage, was just for finding him?”

“Who else could I go to besides him?” Jin Jiu Ling sighed.

Lu Xiao Feng suddenly jumped up and pointed at his own nose.

“Me!” He was practically shouting. “Why can't you ask me?”

Jin Jiu Ling laughed, laughed and shook his head.

“You won't do!”

“What do you mean I won't do?” Lu Xiao Feng seemed to jump even higher.

“There's absolutely no way that you could do this.” Jin Jiu Ling was actually still shaking his head.

“Why can't I?”

“Because this case is truly too dangerous,” Jin Jiu Ling matter of factly answered. “Besides, you already said that you wanted no part of this!”

“Who said that I wanted no part of this? I'm going to get into this just to show you that I can.” By now, Lu Xiao Feng was way beyond screaming.

“I'm still willing to bet that you won't solve this case!”

“Alright!” Lu Xiao Feng slammed his hand onto the table. “Whatever you want to bet, I'm in!”

He had not even finished his sentence before he noticed that other people were laughing. In fact, everyone was laughing. It was the kind of laugh that you get when you suddenly see someone step onto a pile of dog droppings. Lu Xiao Feng suddenly realized that he had just step onto a pile of dog droppings, a huge, stinking pile that he could not pull out of no matter how much he wanted to.

“Inviting him is not as good as baiting him, so true that saying is.” The Wooden Taoist sighed after having a good laugh.

The dinner was over. Ancient Pine Hermit was someone who took very good care of himself, he gets up early, and goes to sleep early as well. The Wooden Taoist had that illness, laziness; and Father Bitter Gourd had a night session to attend to. There were only three people left in the guest room.

Lu Xiao Feng stared at the black peony on the red satin.

“When was the first time this man appeared?” He suddenly asked.

“The third of June, the first person to run into him was Chang Man Tian.” Jin Jiu Ling replied.

“And the last time?”

“The last that I know of was 13 days ago, whether or not there was any new heists these last several days, I know not!”

“Thirteen days ago I was busy doing back flips with Si Kong Zhai Xing, obviously it wasn't him.”

“I didn't suspected him to begin with!”

“And you didn't want to ask him to help either” Lu Xiao Feng coldly rebuked.

Jin Jiu Ling laughed.

“All I know is that you had just finished digging out over 600 worms for him, so you weren't exactly feeling gracious towards him!”

“So you purposefully baited me?”

“How else could I get you involved in this?” Jin Jiu Ling laughed and replied.

“Looks like I really shouldn't try and make friends with people in your line of work!” Lu Xiao Feng sighed.

“Well no matter what, since we are all now knee deep in this, it's best to figure out a way to get out of this.”

“First, we have to figure out what kind of person this is.” Lu Xiao Feng said after some deep thought.

“Agreed.”

“From what I can tell, not only does this person do things fast and clean, his martial arts are also first rate, there's no way he's some new guy who just came onto the world.”

“That's what I think as well, he must be a very famous person in disguise. But I can't figure out who it could be.”

“He purposefully put on a big beard and a big cotton overcoat, and sat in the middle of the road sewing; all in order to distract poeple's attention so that nobody would notice some other things about him!”

“Looks like you should be in my line of work.” Jin Jiu Ling joked. “Even an old fox like me, who has spent ten years or so in Six Door could not analyze the situation any better than you.”

Lu Xiao Feng purposefully put up a stiff face.

“You already dragged me into this, you can't stop kissing my ass now!”

“One kiss, two kiss, nothing beats ass kissing! It's never wrong to kiss ass a couple more times than necessary!” Jin Jiu Ling loudly laughed.

“No matter how good a disguise is, there will always be some flaw somewhere,” Hua Man Lou suddenly spoke up. “Maybe Chang Man Tian and them didn't notice, maybe they noticed, but didn't think it was important.”

“Very possible!” Jin Jiu Ling agreed.

“Therefore, if we ask them again, in detail; maybe we can find some new clues!” Hua Man Lou concluded.

“We?” Lu Xiao Feng frowned.

“We!”

“Does 'we' include you?” Lu Xiao Feng wondered.

“Don't forget, I'm blind.” Hua Man Lou smiled. “How can I not get involved in other blind men's matters?”

Lu Xiao Feng and Jin Jiu Ling shot a look at one another, both of them feeling a bit guilty. They had been going back and forth with “blind-this” and “blind-that” just a bit earlier, totally forgetting that there was a blind man sitting right beside them. It seemed as if nobody has ever really treated Hua Man Lou like a blind man!

Lu Xiao Feng lightly coughed a couple of times.

“Ok, let's split up so we can do this faster. The two of you go find Chang Man Tian and Jiang Zhong Wei!”

“And you?” Jin Jiu Ling wondered.

“I'm going to take this and find someone!” Lu Xiao Feng put the piece of red satin into his shirt.

“Find who?”

“A female tiger!”

“Which one?”

“The prettiest one. Of course.” Lu Xiao Feng smiled. Jin Jiu Ling smiled as well.

“Don't forget, the prettiest one is also the meanest one. Careful not to get bit!”

“Oh he'll be careful, you can be sure of that!” Hua Man Lou matter of factly reassured him.

“How come?”

“Because he's already been bitten quite a few times!” Hua Man Lou smiled.

There were four female tigers in the martial world. Seemed like all four had taken a couple of bites out of Lu Xiao Feng one time or another.