

Chapter 2

The Sudden Change of Dragon and Tiger

Lake Huang is an ancient name derived from the Spring and Autumn Period⁷.

At this moment everyone could see 13 flagpoles with 13 impressive banners.

Mei Simang pointed at a yellow silk banner and explained to Yu Peiyu: “Yellow represents prominence and only the leading martial arts school is allowed to use it. At the moment that is Shaolin.

Taoism often refers to the colour purple, that's why the banner of Wudang is purple. “The Eight Stances of Heavenly Dragon” of Kunlun are known far and wide. For that reason there are several flying dragons embroidered on their banner. It looks very impressive, don't you think?”

Yu peiyu looked at a banner made out of several small pieces of different coloured cloths and asked: “Is this the banner of the Beggars Association?”

Mei Simang laughed: “We ARE poor beggars and we use the the materials that other people throw away and made a banner out of it. We are very thrifty.”

Yu peiyu asked: “May I ask where master Hong Lian is at the moment? I would like to pay my respects.”

Mei Simang said: “Beneath every flag-pole there is a large tent, our leader is resting right over there in that tent.” Mei pointed at a tent farther up ahead.

As they walked towards the tent, many people looked very respectfully at Mei and Yu and greeted them very humbly.

Yu Peiyu thought: “The Beggars Association has been able to remain the most important Wulin association for more than 100 years. Even the disciples have amazing abilities and prestige, their leader must be even more impressive. But when did I meet such an important and prominent man.”

The more he pondered over it the more confused he got and as they approached the tent he saw 20 to 30 young men and women partrolling. Judging by their

⁷ 707 - 480 B.C

appearances and all of them looked seemed to have good martial arts. But everyone of them wore different types of robes, they must be the top-notch disciples of the 13 Great Schools.

Before Mei Simang could say something a Taoist priest in a purple robe approached him and humbly said: “Old master Mei, you have arrived. This is... ?”

Mei Simang laughed: “Hahaha! Taoist brother, this young master Yu and is an honorable guest.”

Yu Peiyu already took out his invitation and held it up. The Taoist priest backed 3 paces and said: “This was, please.”

Yu Peiyu looked back and now fully realized the safety precautions taken by the 13 Great Schools. He considered himself very lucky, because a large number of Wulin people were not allowed to enter and could only walk about outside the agreed perimeter.

Mei Simang approached the tent and respectfully said: “Master, young master Yu is here.”

The voice said: “Please let him in! He must be very anxious now.”

Indeed Yu Peiyu wanted to know who this mysterious leader was and really couldn't wait anymore. Mei and him walked in and entered a very luxurious tent, he couldn't clearly see the face of the leader and knelt down and said humbly: “Yu Peiyu pays his respects to master Hong Lian.”

Master Hong Lian turned around and smiled: “Brother Yu, don't you recognize anymore?”

Yu Peiyu saw a pair of bright, shining eyes and stuttered: “You... you... are you the leader of the Beggars Association?”

Master Hong Lian is the young beggar, Hong Lianer he met earlier.

Yu Peiyu was still too surprised to speak, Hong Lianhua laughed: “Not all leaders of Wulin schools are old, for example the leader of Diancang isn't even 30 yet. The leader of the Baihua⁸ Association is also only 20 odd years old.”

Yu Peiyu said: “No wonder why master Hong Lian kept helping me.”

Hong Lianhua said: “There was no particular reason, and I like you. Wulin is a strange place, some people want to kill you for strange motives and some want to help for mysterious reasons.”

Yu Peiyu agreed and sighed: “True!”

⁸ 100 flowers

Hong Lianhua now stopped smiling and seriously asked him: "Judging from your expression, the gathering seems very important to you."

Yu Peiyu tragically said: "A matter of life and death."

Hong Lianhua continued: "It would be unfair if a bunch of idlers were allowed to enter, when people like you who really have important matters are not allowed to participate."

Yu Peiyu respectfully said: Master Hong Lian, thank you for helping me."

Hong Lianhua smiled: "Also you are soon to be the next leader of the Xiantian Wuji School, when that happens we cannot even invite you over even if we gave you 100 invitations."

Yu Peiyu stuttered: "How did you know?"

At this point they heard a loud "Boing" and they heard a strong, clear voice saying: "The gathering is about to start. Would the 13 leaders please take their seats."

Hong Lianhua held Yu Peiyu's hand and smiled: "All the previous leaders of the Beggars Association were not only notorious busybodies, but also had to have the ability to know practically everything. As to how I know that much about you know, you will soon find out."

A huge platform was constructed for this occasion and many Wulin dignitaries were present.

There was a big cauldron on the platform and it emitted a white smoke. On each side of the cauldron there was a row of armchairs. 13 in total, and already nine people were seated now.

An old monk with a white long beard wearing a yellow kasya stood in front of the cauldron. Although he was quite small and skinny he looked very majestic. Obviously this old monk was the abbot of the Shaolin Monastery, reverend Tianyun.

Under the platform there were several rows of armchairs, and several famous Wulin dignitaries were sitting there. However no one sat at the first row, which was a strange thing.

Hong Lianhua smiled to Yu: "I have to go up there and perform now, just find a seat having a yellow invitation automatically means that you have a seat. Don't be shy."

Hong Lianhua and 6 beggars walked up the platform.

A deep, strong voiced announced: "The leader of the Beggars Association, master Hong Lien!"

The announcer was a very tall and big man, Hong Lianhua was much smaller compared to him. But the eyes of all the attending heroes were shifted from the announcer to Hong Lianhua.

Yu Peiyu smiled when he saw this he felt proud to have a friend like Hong Lianhua.

A clear, lovely said to him: "Seeing that your friend is so impressive, you must feel proud too, don't you?"

Yu Peiyu turned around and saw a pair of cold, clear eyes but somehow also he saw a bit of passion in these eyes. Jin Yanzi was talking to him. Coincidentally, he sat next to her he smiled back but didn't say a word.

The young master of the divine sabre was not pleased and looked quite annoyed now.

He said to Jin Yanzi: "Yan-Er, shall we sit somewhere else?"

Jin Yanzi coldly asked: "Why should I sit somewhere else?"

The young master answered: "Somehow the air around here seems not so fresh anymore."

Jin Yanzi said: "If you find it smelly here you can go and find a new seat. I'm staying right here."

Yu Peiyu already stood up and wanted to find a new place to sit. However Jin Yanzi's delicate, soft hand held his wrist, the young master was furious now.

He angrily said: "Fine, fine! I will go away."

Although he said that he remained seated and didn't leave Jin Yanzi out of sight.

Yu was quite amused by this situation and secretly laughed.

Although Yu Peiyu didn't fully understand what love meant at this point in his life but he knew it was sweet and bitter. After gazing into the eyes of Jin Yanzi he remembered Lin Daiyu. He remembered her eyes, expression, her strong personality and beauty. And asked why she tricked him.

The announcer loudly introduced someone else now: "The leader of the Baihua⁹ Association, Madame Hai Tangjun!"¹⁰

12 young maidens carried a sedan-chair decorated with fragrant flowers. Everyone was enchanted by the scent of those flowers. On top of the sedan-chair was

⁹ 100 flowers

¹⁰ Hai Tang is a kind of Chinese cherry blossom

a beautiful, enchanting woman wearing a tempting silk gown and lots of garlands. She got off the sedan-chair and one of the maidens held her hand, everyone was captivated by her fragrance and allure.

Jin Yanzi softly sighed to Yu Peiyu: "This Madame Hai Tang is indeed a true beauty."

Yu Peiyu didn't answer he was looking into the crowd looking for someone.

12 of the 13 leaders of the Great Schools have arrived.

Yu Peiyu was hoping to see someone, could he be wrong. Wouldn't "they" make an appearance here?

The attending heroes were all wondering: "The leader of the Hainan School hasn't arrived yet. Why is that?"

Could it be that master Yu is detained, because he lives in the outer south of China?"

The heroes kept talking about the leader of the Hainan School, Yu Xuan, why he is late.

Suddenly everyone was quiet and looked at a man, Yu Peiyu watched that man too. It was a rather fat man wearing a green robe and staggered like a drunk. In his waist was an old sword and judging by his expression he was a drunk. He didn't seem to care that everyone was staring at him.

The announcer frowned and loudly introduced: "The leader of the Hainan School, master Yu Xuan!"

This is the impressive "The Flying Fish and the Swift Sword" Yu Xuan. It is said that he is unbeaten throughout the 18 isles of the South Sea.

He walked up the platform and laughed: "Sorry, I'm late. Please forgive me."

The abbot of Shaolin gave him a Buddhist greeting by putting his palms together.

A Taoist priest wearing a black robe coldly smiled: "Brother Yu, you're not too late. You could have drunk a few more cups before joining us."

Yu Xuan blinked his eyes and laughingly said: "Well, some people see the fun of liquor and some don't. I cannot help it if the KongTong School prohibits drinking. I have nothing else to say to the likes of you."

The black-robed Taoist priest got up and sternly said: "The gathering does NOT welcome drunkards like you."

Yu Xuan didn't pay any attention to him and sat down.

The abbot of Shaolin smiled and said: "Taoist brother Jueqing, please don't be upset..."

Jueqing Zi angrily said: "This man is late because he was getting himself drunk. Because of his drinking he could have delayed the prospects and future of all heroes of the realm. He should be punished accordingly otherwise how can we establish discipline."

Abbot Tianyun turned to the leader of Wudang reverend Chuchen, reverend Chuchen got up and said: "Master Yu..."

Before he could finish, Hong Lianhua laughed: "Do all of you think that master Yu is late because he went drinking?"

Reverend Chuchen smiled: "I think the information master Hong Lian gathered will enlighten us."

Hong Lianhua loudly said: "Master Yu was able to lure "The 7 Hornets of the White Forest" to a remote place and killed them all. With this act he re-assured the safety of all the women of the gathering. I, Hong Lianhua would like to thank him."

All the heroes were shocked to hear that the infamous rapists "The 7 Hornets of the White Forest" were able to sneak into the city. Luckily Yu Xuan killed them otherwise who knows which poor woman or girl will fall victim.

Shaolin was the organizer of this time's gathering if anything happened they would be held responsible. Although abbot Tianyun has extraordinary cultivation he was still surprised.

Yu Xuan smiled in a carefree manner: "Master Hong Lian is really knowledgeable. Even small matters like this do not escape your attention."

Abbot Tianyun earnestly said: "Benefactor Yu, how can you say that this is a small matter? You have done a great deed by this action alone you're fit to be the new chancellor of Wulin."

If anyone else said these words it probably would be plain polite words of formality. But these words were said by the abbot of Shaolin and carry a very strong weight. With this sentence alone Yu Xuan could very well be the next chancellor of Wulin for the next 7 years.

Yu Xuan respectfully said: "If I hadn't disposed of those rogues, I'm sure master Hong Lian would have."

Hong Lianhua hurriedly said: "Beggars cannot become leaders of the martial arts realm, we will become the laughing-stock of the entire world. Abbot Tianyun is

highly respected in Wulin and I feel that we should ask reverend Tianyun to lead us one more time.”

Abbot Tianyun sighed: “I am too old now to lead the realm of martial arts. Even without this incident I have no intentions of becoming chancellor again.”

It seems that Shaolin had no ambitions to lead again, but who dares to follow the footsteps of Shaolin.

But abbot Tianyun has expressed to retreat freely, at this point the other leaders stood up.

The leader of the Huashan School, the graceful Taoist priestess Xu Shuzhen said with her clear voice: “Wudang has been the orthodox Taoist school for many years. If abbot Tianyun really stays adamant in his decision. I will certainly support Wudang.”

Reverend Chuchen smiled and sat down.

The leader of the Kongtong school scoffed: “Of course Wudang will receive support from Huashan. Unfortunately I do NOT have a sister who is the leader of the Huashan School.”

Xu Shuzhen and reverend Chuchen are brother and sister, coincidentally both became leaders of the 2 prominent martial arts schools. Which is an exemplary tale, however now it became an excuse for Jueqing Zi to make fun of them both.

Xu Shuzhen raised her pretty eyebrows, reverend Chuchen smiled: “In that case I nominate reverend Jueqing.”

Xie Tianbi loudly said: “If someone else would lead Wulin we, Diancang will have no objections. However, we do have some objections to Kongtong and reverend Jueqing.”

Although the Diancang School was located in Yunnan province, but disciples of Diancang were very much respected and the words of the leader of Diancang carried a lot weight in Wulin.

Jueqing Zi's face changed and said: “It seems that in order to pick a new chancellor there must be a fight.”

Xie Tianbi held his sword and said: “In that case I would like to encounter the world famous “Merciless Swordsmanship.”

At this point an old man with a long beard stood up and said: “I, Ouyang Long on behalf of the 36 united heroes of the waters, nominate master Xie of the Diancang School. As for reverend Jueqing's “Merciless Swordsman...”

Before he could finish a bald old man with a rather fair, red young face laughed and said: "Dianchang School lies in the outer regions of China, if master Xie becomes the chancellor he will have no control over lord Ouyang. In that case lord Ouyang is free to do whatever he likes."

Ouyang Long angrily said: "What do you mean with those words! It can be that everyone else fears the secretive weaponry of the Tang Clan of Sichuan province. But I AM NOT AFRAID OF YOU!"

The bald old man smiled: "So you want to try it, don't you?"

He waved his hand and Ouyang Long quickly leapt backwards.

The bald old man stroked his beard and laughed: "Lord Ouyang is very courageous indeed."

Abbot Tianyun saw that the entire matter was getting out of hand and frowned his eyebrows and said: "Would everyone settle down! It was not my intention to create chaos."

Despite all the noise everyone could hear the voice of abbot Tianyun clearly and everybody settled down.

Now, a large muscular man jumped up the platform. He was as tall and impressive as the announcer he lifted the heavy cauldron with ease.

All the heroes applauded when seeing this. Even Yu Peiyu exclaimed: "This man is truly awesome!"

Jin Yanzi immediately spoke: "He is one of the leading figures of the Wulin of the northern regions of China. Everyone calls him "The Invincible Iron Overlord." His arms are very strong and can easily lift heavy objects. But he is not too intelligent."

Yu Peiyu still didn't talk to her and watched the Iron Overlord carrying the cauldron walking about on the platform.

He put the cauldron down and shouted: "Whoever can lift this cauldron and can easily walk 3 steps on the platform I will support him becoming the new chancellor of Wulin!"

All the present dignitaries on the platform were all martial arts experts but this ability was something they could not do.

As result nobody said a word.

The Iron Overlord was feeling very pleased and was looking arrogantly.

Madame Hai Tang walked up to the Iron Overlord and smiled sweetly: "I never thought I would have the chance to see the Iron Tyrant Strength. I really admire your strength."

The Iron Overlord was mesmerized by her charm and beauty and cleared his throat and smiled dryly: "You're too kind, Madame."

She stared at him and said very tenderly: "That awesome power you displayed, is it really generated through these 2 arms?"

The fragrance of her was really quite strong, even if you stood metres from her you would still be captivated by her sweet scent. And now she just stood a few centimetres away from the Iron Overlord he was already practically under her spell and had difficulty standing still.

Madame Hai Tang innocently asked: "Can I touch your arms?"

The Iron Overlord blushed and stuttered: "Ma... Madame... I... uhh... I"

The delicate soft hands of Madame Hai Tang were already touching, stroking the arm of the Overlord. He was completely lost what to do and just stood there blushing.

Hong Lianhua called out: "Brother Tie, pay attention!"

But it was too late, he felt an iron grip and couldn't move anymore. Madame Hai Tang smilingly held up the Iron Overlord with ease.

A muscular big man was being held up in the air by a graceful young woman. This is was a scene that no one will ever forget.

Nobody knew whether to clap their hands or laugh.

Madame Hai Tang now sighed sweetly: "Whoever can lift this true "HERO" I will support him in becoming the next chancellor of Wulin."

After saying this she put the Iron Overlord down and smiled tenderly and walked back to her seat.

The Iron Overlord could move again but was too confused to do anything and just stared at her in a silly way.

Yu Xuan approached Madame Hai Tang and laughed: "Madame, could I borrow a garland from you?"

Madame Hai Tang blinked her eyes and said: "If master Yu was a bit slimmer I will be very happy to give you one of... "

Before she could finish her sentence she saw that on top Yu Xuan's tip of the sword was one of her garlands. Nobody could see clearly when, how Yu Xuan drew his sword and how he managed to remove a garland from Madame Hai Tang.

She quickly paced back 3 steps and looked quite pale now.

Hong Lianhua laughed: "Madame, since you gave away one of your garlands to master Yu. Why don't you wear one of my red lotuses."

During his laughter he advanced forward very quickly and before everyone knew it a red lotus was stuck between the hair of Madame Hai Tang.

The display of Hong Lianhua's unique art of levitation was truly amazing even the leader of Kunlun renowned for his "Eight Stances of Heavenly Dragon" was impressed and felt he couldn't do this either.

Madame Hai Tang looked very pale now and she put both of her hands in her sleeves and smiled: "Two grown men picking on a helpless woman. Aren't you afraid people will talk?"

Although she smiled ever so charming, all the heroes had heard of the three killing specialties of Baihua Association; flower, fog and rain.

At this point she must have prepared her hands in her sleeves and was about to strike.

Hong Lianhua and Yu Xuan were still smiling but they were very cautious now. They also have heard of the three killing specialties of Baihua Association, The Soul-dissolving Flower, The Bone Gnawing Rain and the Heavenly Fragrant Fog.

To their knowledge no one was able to avoid any of these specialties without injuries.

But the fast sword of Yu Xuan was also not to be trifled with.

At this very exciting moment a figure stood in between Yu Xuan and Madame Hai Tang. It was abbot Tianyun who quickly intervened all the experts present didn't see when and how he stood in between them.

Abbot Tianyun said: "There are numerous variations in martial arts, everyone has their advantages and disadvantages. If all of you would engage in meaningless battles not only will it be difficult to find a victor but everyone will become the laughing-stock of the world."

Everyone kept quiet, reverend Chuchen asked: "Abbot Tianyun, what do you suggest?"

Abbot Tianyun answered: "When it comes to martial arts everyone has his or her strong points. And when it comes to prestige being all leaders of prominent martial arts schools it is also very difficult to make a difference in that too. What I suggest is..."

A laughing man said loudly: "Well, why don't all of you give the leading position to my Xiantian Wuji School!"

10 odd men walked slowly towards the platform. Everyone including the dignitaries on the platform were all impressed.

Yu Peiyu was shaking and said to himself softly: "Here they are, here they are..."

These 10 odd men formed to rows and all of them wore green brocades and had long beards. They were at least 50 odd years old.

These 10 odd men were famous top martial arts experts in the realm. Although a lot of people haven't met them but they have all heard of their names.

The Flowered Chestnut Sword Lin Shoujuan, the Dragonking of Taihu, Silver Spear Shen, Ximen Feng of Mount Mao, the hero of Jiangnan Wang Yuluo, etc.

In spite of the fact that they weren't leaders of any martial arts schools their fame was not inferior to the 13 leaders of the Great Schools.

Abbot Tianyun quickly advanced to greet them: "Welcome everyone! It is indeed an honor to have you here to attend the ceremony. Please take a seat at the first row."

Lin Shoujuan smiled: "We're not here to attend the ceremony."

Wang Yuluo said: "Isn't the Xiantian Wuji School worthy enough anymore to take place on the platform?"

Abbot Tianyun was a bit confused but kept his smile and asked: "Since when did all of you entered the Xiantian Wuji School?"

Lin Shoujuan said: "We haven't invited anyone over that day, please forgive us."

Abbot Tianyun said: "Benefactors,... your leader, master Yu is he..."

A voice from behind said: "How are you doing, reverend Tianyun? We haven't seen each other for many years."

Abbot Tianyun turned around and saw an elderly, sophisticated man in a long brocade standing on the platform, it was the leader of the Xiantian Wuji School Yu Fanghe.

Nobody saw him walk up the platform.

Abbot Tianyun said: "Brother Yu, I am glad to see you again. I never thought you would enter the realm of martial arts again. But with your arrival I can feel assured now."

In other words abbot Tianyun is supporting Yu Fanghe and the Xiantian Wuji School.

Jueqing Zi and others were not too eager to give in but seeing that Yu Fanghe has managed to enlist a group of top martial arts masters they have no choice but to give in.

Reverend Chuchen said: "If brother Yu would become the new chancellor of Wulin all the Wudang disciples will be very pleased."

Jueqing Zi said: "The entire Kongtong School admires master Yu's reputation and will gladly see master Yu becoming the new chancellor of Wulin."

Ouyang Long loudly said: "My teacher often spoke of master Yu when he was alive. It is a great honor to meet you in person, all the friends of the waters will be very happy to see master Yu lead us."

Madame Hai Tang also said: "Master Yu is famous for his benevolence and righteousness and cannot be compared to mean men who bully innocent women. The Baihua Association fully supports master Yu."

Everyone clapped their hands and approved.

It seems that Yu Fanghe is becoming the next leader for sure. Hong Lianhua is shocked to see this situation and is looking into the crowd hoping to spot Yu Peiyu.

Yu Fanghe smiled: "I'm an old man with no special abilities and am not fit to lead all the heroes in the realm. However ..."

Yu Peiyu couldn't control himself anymore and rushed up the platform and called out: "THIS MAN IS NOT MY FATHER! HE IS AN IMPOSTER!"

Lin Shoujuan chided: "Peiyu! Have you gone mad!"

The Dragonking of Taihu and Ximen Feng tried to block Yu but were pushed aside by Yu Peiyu.

Yu Peiyu stood in front of "Yu Fanghe" and shouted: "Who are you? Why do you pretend to be my father?"

During his shout he raised his palm and pushed out towards "Yu Fanghe."

Suddenly he felt a soft, gentle power pushing back and pushed him a few metres back.

Now, Ximen, Shen, and Lin quickly held Yu Peiyu tightly.

Abbot Tianyun frowned and said: "This young benefactor is truly too rash."

Reverend Chuchen also said: "Whose disciple is he?"

Yu Peiyu had tears in his eyes and said: "My name is Yu Peiyu."

Abbot Tianyun asked Yu Fanghe: "This young man is your son?"

Yu Fanghe looked up and laughed bitterly: "This boy... he... he..." and sighed.

Now, reverend Chuchen chided Yu Peiyu too: "How can you behave this rudely in front of seniors."

Yu Peiyu couldn't move at all and cried out: "He is not my father! My father is dead! I was there when he died..."

Abbot Tianyun and reverend Chuchen looked at each other and looked confused.

Wang Yuluo sighed: "The poor child has gone insane."

Xie Tianbi nodded and said: "This young man is indeed strange, this morning he accused me of killing his father. But that is impossible I only arrived a few days ago. Fortunately, master Yu has arrived now. This is truly a most unfortunate tragedy..."

Even if there were some people who believed a bit of Yu Peiyu's claim but after hearing this they shook their hands and sighed.

Who will they believe, the words of a group of respected martial arts experts or a rash young man?

This is not even a fair question.

Yu Peiyu saw that everyone was looking at him with compassion and sadness. Nobody believes his story. He was crying now, because who can help him. Will his grievance never be settled?

Lin Shoujuan saw that no one believes Yu Peiyu and he fiercely spoke: "This child has no respects for his father and other seniors. His intentions are wicked and his crimes are unforgivable. Nobody in Wulin can plead for him anymore, I see no other choice but to place righteousness above family loyalty and kill him myself."

Even Yu Peiyu's own future father-in-law cannot tolerate him anymore, so nobody else can speak on behalf of him.

He drew his sword and aimed for Yu Peiyu.

Somone shouted: "Stop right now!"

Lin Shoujuan's hand couldn't move anymore and he saw that Hong Lianhua grabbed his wrist.

He was surprised and asked: "Master Hong Lian, why do you help this unfilial child?"

Hong Lianhua ignored him and tapped Yu Peiyu on the shoulder and laughed: "This joke of yours is a bit too exaggerated but it was very convincing."

Again everyone was stunned, Lin Shoujuan stammered: "Joke... ? What joke?"

Hong Lianhua said: "Every time these Wulin gatherings are too serious and lack entertainment. This time I thought of an idea to bring a bit of fun."

Abbot Tianyun, reverend Chuchen and others were all too surprised to talk now.

Hong Lianhua unsealed Yu's acupoints by patting on his back and smiled: "The joke is over now, you can tell the truth."

Yu Peiyu lowered his head and said: "Yes... yes.."

He lifted his head and knelt in front of Yu Fanghe, kowtowed and said: "Please forgive me, father! I was too rude."

Yu Fanghe was looking very pale and said: "You... you... (*cough)... this is too much... "

Hong Lianhua said to Yu Peiyu: "Your father has forgiven you, you can get up now."

Everyone now understood and started to smile and thought it was quite a funny joke.

Only Yu Fanghe, Wang Yuluo and others were fuming.

Xie Tianbi laughingly said: "Brother Hong Lian, I should have guessed you were behind this joke."

Hong Lianhua smiled: "Of course, otherwise who would put an idea in his head to accuse you of being the murderer of his father."

Xian Tianbi laughed loudly.

Yu Fanghe coughed: "This son... he is... (*sigh)."

Besides sighing and coughing what else can he do.

Hong Lianhua helped Yu getting up: "I am the one who put you up to this, I'm sorry that you have to kneel."

Lin Shoujuan sternly said: "Just a minute! The gathering at Lake Huang is a serious matter. How can we allow such nonsense go unpunished. What he did cannot be forgiven because he just knelt down and kowtowed to his father."

Hong Lianhua asked calmly: "What do you suggest Mr. Lin?"

Lin Shoujuan said: "Just for being rude to his seniors is enough to nullify his martial arts and ban him from his school and family."

Hong Lianhua smiled: "Mr. Lin, since when have you become the new chancellor of Wulin?"

Lin Shoujuan was stunned and stuttered: "No, I... "

Hong Lianhua asked again: "Are you the father of brother Peiyu?"

Lin answered: "No, I am not."

Hong Lianhua put up a serious face and said: "In that case, WHO ARE YOU to give orders around on the platform of the gathering at Lake Huang?"

His eyes were very sharp and Lin Shoujuan avoided eye contact with him.

Hong Lianhua looked around and said: "This was my idea! If any of you found this was a bad plan, fine! Punish me or strike me if you please!"

The Beggars Association had existed for more than 800 years now, had thousands of disciples. Hong Lianhua may be young but no one in Wulin would dare to question his martial arts, intelligence, fame. Who would dare to punish him or even to lay a hand on him.

Jueqing Zi was unconcerned about this matter, Madame Hai Tang being a smart woman remained silent.

Yu Xuan smiled: "In my opinion brother Hong Lian just played a harmless joke. Nothing to fuss about we should even thank him and invite him for wine for providing such entertainment."

Hong Lianhua smiled happily and turned to abbot Tianyun: "What do you think, reverend?"

Abbot Tianyun frowned and turned to Yu Fanghe: "Brother Yu should deal with this incident."

Yu Fanghe remained silent for awhile, somebody with a sharp voice called out from the crowd: "Even a tiger won't eat his own cubs!"

It seems that Yu Fanghe's face changed and smiled wryly: "So be it, since master Hong Lian has pleaded on his behalf I will let the matter rest."

Everyone was happy that the incident was solved and cheered.

Hong Lianhua quickly whispered to Mei Simang: "Find out who that person was that shouted."

Mei Simang quietly left the platform and Hong Lianhua thanked Yu Fanghe.

Yu Peiyu looked at Hong Lianhua his eyes were filled with gratitude. He bowed four times to Hong and left the platform. Lin Shoujuan, Ximen Feng and others were looking at Yu Peiyu but couldn't do a thing. All the attending heroes were looking at Yu Peiyu too and smiled.

The young master of the divine sabre softly cursed in his own local dialect, but it was loud enough for Jin Yanzi to hear it.

She coldly said: "He is the son of the new chancellor of Wulin. When it comes to martial arts and prestige he is far and far above you. I advise you not to antagonize him."

The young master of the divine sabre was furious and gritted his teeth.

Yu Peiyu didn't turn around to look at other people. He just wanted to get away from everyone. He was absolutely lost, he didn't know what to do.

There were people everywhere and everyone was pushing each other about. Yu was pushing too, suddenly he felt something prick him in the side. So as result he pushed people aside, with his tremendous strength and his strong internal energy those people all fell on the ground. Some of them called out and cursed, but Yu didn't care anymore. He just wanted to rest.

Finally, he reached a remote desolate place and sat down on a rock.

He felt something dripping from his back, he used his hand to wipe it away. Thinking it was sweat, but when he looked at his hand he saw it wasn't sweat but blood. He now realized that someone tried to kill him in the crowd earlier. Fortunately he pushed out and wanted to get away, otherwise...

He broke out in a cold sweat.

He was so extremely tired and disillusioned about everything.

He pondered about lots of things, about Hong Lianhua's friendship.

About the killer of his father, but now he had to acknowledge an imposter as his father. He was angry and sad.

Thinking back he is surprised how he managed to put a smile on his face. He couldn't hold back his tears anymore, his father was dead, his home was gone, all his relatives and friends have deserted him.

The only thing that kept him going and will keep him going is he wants to find out what is going on here. He cannot give up and will not give up, so he will stay alive no matter what. He got up and started walking.

He heard three people sneaking up on him, Yu Peiyu turned around and saw three shadows quickly hide behind a rock. Yu Peiyu pretended that he didn't notice the three men and walked even slower now. All of a sudden three sabres attacked him from behind. Fast and vicious.

Yu Peiyu stopped and bent forward and used his right leg to kick backwards and heard a scream. One of the attackers was sent flying, the other 2 saw that their attack failed and wanted to run.

Yu Peiyu turned around and used his fist to hit one of the man on the back, the man ran a few steps but suddenly he bent forward and fell to the ground.

The remaining man knew he couldn't escape anymore and turned around to fight. He raised his sabre and wanted to hack Yu, Yu seized his wrist the man wanted to use his fist to strike down Yu. But Yu easily used his other hand to grab the fist.

This man was not a weakling but somehow his martial arts didn't mean a thing anymore around Yu Peiyu.

Yu put force into his both hands and squeezed, the man broke out in a sweat and cried out.

Yu Peiyu sternly asked: "Who sent you? Tell me, and I will let you live."

The man laughed: "You will never know"

The laughing stopped and the man's face turned green.

Yu Peiyu quickly took his pulse but it was too late. In a few moments the man's face changed colour a few times and all the flesh in his face dissolved. Yu Peiyu saw that this poison was similar to the poison that killed Hei Gezi when all the problems started.

He knew that this man was sent by that evil mastermind.

He went over to check on the other 2 attackers and saw that both of them were dead. He sighed and realized he used too much strength just then.

He lifted his head and stared into the air and sighed, he felt an itch in his hands and started to scratch them.

But the itch seemed to get worse, before long he knew there was something amiss.

He looked at his hands and saw that his fingers were swollen and his palms were black.

The itch and the starting numbness began to spread to his arms too.

He tried to pick the sabre on the ground but his hands didn't listen anymore. With great difficulty he could pick a sabre and wanted to chop off one of his hands.

Suddenly an object flew by and sent the sabre flying.

Two tall figures in long robes came out the bushes, both wore a black cloth covering their face except for their sinister looking eyes.

One was a skinny, tall man, the other was quite muscular.

The skinny man laughed evilly: "Scratch, go ahead! Scratch it will make you feel better."

Yu Peiyu couldn't resist and scratched his hands but in an instant he stopped. He yelled to those 2 men: "In the end I couldn't

escape your vile treachery. Just kill me now!

The skinny man said: "Now, you realize you cannot escape. Weren't you feeling high and mighty just a few moments ago by defeating those three."

The muscular man scoffed: "Those three were sent to die, otherwise why would we sent three useless, expendable fools to deal with you."

The skinny man continued: "We knew that you would investigate their bodies after you've dealt with them. We have sprinkled poisonous powder on their clothes. When you touched them you were poisoned, and with every scratch the poison will travel faster."

The muscular man laughed: "Now both of your hands are too swollen up to fight. Can you still be that arrogant and hit us?"

These two men are putting up a two-man comic show to antagonize Yu Peiyu.

Their plan was devious and ingenious, no matter how careful you are it was practically impossible to escape them.

Yu Peiyu was furious and called out: "Just for your own selfish gain you can even sent your own people to death. What kind of monsters are you!"

The skinny man scoffed: "These 3 men were willing to die for the master and his cause. They died a glorious death. Even their families will feel honored."

The muscular man said: "But when you die no one will even miss you. They won't even know that you're dead. They will just think that you're touring the world."

Yu Peiyu was feeling very cold now and smiled bitterly: "I never would have dreamt that there was such a vicious person in this world... "

The poison began to take effect and Yu Peiyu fell down.

The skinny man laughed: "That is the way in the realm of martial arts, I hack at you with my sabre, you stab me with your sword. It is just a matter of who will die first."

The muscular man said: "Amusing, very amusing."

Both of them picked up a sabre and walked to Yu Peiyu.

Yu Peiyu sighed: "I'm about to die, can you at least tell me who this mastermind is."

The skinny man said: "I'm afraid you're destined to become a muddle-headed ghost."

The muscular man continued: "It's not that we do not want to tell you, but the truth is we don't know who the master is either."

Suddenly the muscular man leapt up and called out: "Snake... a snake!"

And he fell to the ground. The skinny man saw a snake biting him and saw 2 snakes coming for him and quickly avoided the snakes. He said to the muscular man: "I will take care of your family. You can die in peace." He used his sabre to hack the muscular man in the face and left.

The muscular man covered in his own blood said with his dying breath: "I feel honored that I can die for the master and his cause."

Yu Peiyu watched this in amazement but before long he felt dizzy and fainted.

After some time he gradually woke up, the itching was gone but he felt pain and still couldn't move. He was still feeling very woozy in a haze he saw an old man with a white, silver long beard standing in front of him. When he took a closer look he was happy and surprised and said softly: "Mei Sim..."

The old man was Mei Simang of the Beggars Association, he turned to Yu Peiyu and said softly: "Don't move! My little friends are sucking the poison out of your body."

Yu saw 4 little snakes attached to his body.

Mei Simang was looking at the snakes like a proud parent was admiring his children. He asked with a smile: "Aren't they cute?" After being almost killed by 2 ruthless men and one devious plot, these snakes seem indeed very cute.

Yu Peiyu managed to smile a bit, this was the first time in a long, long time he felt a bit relaxed.

He was thinking that perhaps Mei Simang might know the identity of the attackers. Because judging from the martial arts of the 2 men they must be famous

martial artists. And Mei Simang being a knowledgeable Wulin senior might recognize them.

Mei Simang saw the pensive face of Yu and knew what he was thinking and sighed: "It could be that I know this man but unfortunately the other man deliberately mutilated his face, so that we cannot trace the identity of this man. Such viciousness is seldom seen."

Yu Peiyu closed his eyes and sighed this lead has also ended.

Mei Simang continued: "I carefully examined, searched the clothers of these men but couldn't find a clue that would reveal their identities. They're not only cunning but also very cautious."

He looked at the hand of Yu Peiyu and nodded. He whistled softly and the snakes let go and crawled back to him. Mei Simang softly said: "Good job! You can rest now."

The snakes seemed to understand him and crawled back into a sack.

Mei Simang said: "Luckily the poison didn't enter your body via a wound otherwise there might be some problems. Now you just need a good rest."

Yu Peiyu wanted to say thanks but knew that a mere [thanks] would not repay the kindness of Mei Simang and would probably insult him too. Also Mei Simang seemed very happy to help.

Mei Simang continued: "I don't know if the gathering has finished, if the gathering is over master Hong Lian wishes to speak to you."

Yu Peiyu said: "I won't go."

Mei Simang asked: "Why?" Yu Peiyu said: "I don't want to drag the Beggars Association into my family problems."

Mei Simang smiled lightly and said: "Master Hong Lian is not the sort of man who is afraid for a bit of trouble."

Yu Peiyu sighed and followed Mei Simang.

Mei Simang said: "I think I heard cheers earlier, I suppose the ceremony is over and the new chancellor of Wulin is installed. With this the peace in Wulin is secured."

Yu Peiyu asked bitterly: "Is it really secured?"

Mei Simang sighed: "I hope it will be."

The feast to celebrate the new leader of Wulin Yu Fanghe has started.

Before long they reached the tent of Hong Lianhua. There was no one near the tent, a voice inside asked: "Who is there?" The voice was deep and powerful, Yu Peiyu was startled and then he heard Hong Lianhua asking: "Has father Mei returned? Did you bring back our lost little sheep?"

Both of them entered, Yu Peiyu saw an elderly majestic looking Taoist priest sitting next to Hong Lianhua. The old Taoist priest sat very straight and examined Yu Peiyu with his pair of shining eyes.

Yu Peiyu lowered his head, the grandeur of that old Taoist priest was incredible.

Hong Lianhua laughed: "You're finally here. Do you recognize this reverend?"

Yu Peiyu said: "The leader of the Kunlun School?"

Hong Lianhua clapped his hands and praised: "Very good! Reverend Tiangang didn't say a word when you entered and yet you were able to recognize him."

Hong Lianhua turned to Mei Simang and asked: "What kind of poison did those men use? And who were they?"

Mei Simang lowered his head and replied: "The identities of those men are unknown and I don't recognize the poison however... "

While he was relating what happened, reverend Tiangang got up and advanced to Yu Peiyu with lightning speed and used his index finger to seal 12 major acupoints of Yu's arms and put a pill in Yu's mouth. He said to Yu Peiyu: "Don't move for the next hour."

Without saying anything else Yu swallowed the pill and reverend Tiangang returned to his seat with the same speed.

Yu Peiyu was also very surprised now and remained silent. Mei Simang lowered his head even deeper and said: "I... I thought.."

Hong Lianhua sighed: "You thought you had removed the poison from brother Peiyu's body?"

Mei Simang said: "I saw that... "

Hong Lianhua explained: "If it wasn't for reverend Tiangang's Diamond Finger and Gold Dissolving Pill the arms of brother Peiyu were lost."

Yu Peiyu was shocked and Mei Simang looked ashamed.

Hong Lianhua asked: "Earlier I asked to see who that person was that shouted something to Yu Fanghe. Did you find something about that person?"

Mei Simang replied: "I asked several people, but no one paid any attention that that person. They only knew that he wore a black robe."

Hong Lianhua frowned and said: "A black robe..."

Of all the attending Wulin people at the gathering almost half the people present wore something black.

Hong Lianhua turned to reverend Tiangang and asked: "What do you think, reverend?"

Reverend Tiangang answered: "A unknown poison, unknown assassins, a devious plot with no flaws."

Hong Lianhua asked: "Could that mysterious black-robed man belong to the Xiantian Wuji School?"

Reverend Tiangang replied: "Even if he isn't a disciple he must have links to the school."

Hong Lianhua sighed: "If you say that Yu Fanghe, Wang Yuluo, Lin Shoujuan and other prominent Wulin heroes were behind this evil plot. Nobody will believe it. Their chivalrous and benevolent deeds over these 20 years are not fake. But if we say that they do not have anything to do with this conspiracy, that doesn't make sense either."

Yu Peiyu said: "Their fame is real, but these men are imposters."

Hong Lianhua smiled bitterly: "I carefully examined their faces and movements. They are not wearing a mask or a disguise. Also if they were no one can be that accurate in acting the manners of someone else. Furthermore if they were disguised and wearing masks how could they fool abbot Tianyun and reverend Chuchen and others who are befriended with them for many years."

Yu Peiyu lowered his head, forgetting about the other people like Lin Shoujuan, Wang Yuluo, etc.

But just his father, the man that impersonates his father is so lifelike. If Yu Peiyu didn't see his real father die he would surely believe that this Yu Fanghe is his father. But who can this be?

Mei Simang said: "Could it be that these people were hypnotized and are under the control of someone else? I could remember that many years ago something similar happened in Wulin."

Hong Lianhua said: "No, hypnotized men behave differently, very artificial. But these men behave very naturally and don't seem to be hypnotized."

Reverend Tiangang sighed deeply: "A very cunning plan with no flaws."

Hong Lianhua said: "If we say that these men were imposters they seem to real. But if they are not imposters their actions are very questionable. Whether they are following orders from someone else or following their own secret dark agenda, at this moment they have successfully become the leaders of Wulin. This is something which brings a lot of concern and besides the four of us everyone believes their intentions are pure and good."

He added with a wry smile: "This must be the most deadly and masterful plan of the entire history of Wulin."

Reverend Tiangang put up an even more serious face than usual and said: "Young master Yu is our only chance in foiling their plans."

Hong Lianhua sighed: "Because of this his life is in peril. If anything happens to him..."

Mei Simang asked: "But this Yu Fanghe has acknowledged that young master Yu is his son, how can he kill him anymore?"

Hong Lianhua said: "Although he cannot kill young master Yu openly, he could have him assassinated and look like if it was an accident. And accidents do happen and no one has to take any responsibility for an accident."

Mei Simang said: "That explains why nobody tried to ambush young master Yu earlier, when I was trying to cure him. They were afraid there might be witnesses."

Hong Lianhua said: "It will be very difficult for him to leave this place on his own. We have to..."

Reverend Tiangang interrupted Hong Lianhua: "Do you know what the worst thing is that could happen right now?"

Hong Lianhua frowned and asked: "Reverend, have you thought of something?"

Reverend Tiangang said: "If this would happen, young master Yu would surely die."

Suddenly someone outside called out very loudly: "Is reverend Tiangang here? Chancellor Yu would like to speak to you."

Reverend Tiangang's face changed and said: "I will be back in awhile." He got up and walked outside.

Hong Lianhua looked even more worried now and said: "Reverend Tiangang must have thought of something important. What could he have thought of?"

Mei Simang softly said: "What a frightening plot! At this point things are dangerous already, could it get any worse? Young master Yu is really in a lot of trouble..."

Yu Peiyu smiled tragically: "I know that I am pushed into the corner of death, even if I won't die I will probably go mad. But anyhow I'm grateful to the people who believe and helped me till the day I die."

Hong Lianhua shook his head and didn't know what to say.

Yu Peiyu said: "I don't know how to thank you, master Hong Lian. Everyone thinks I'm a madman but why do you believe me?"

Hong Lianhua said: "There is a reason..."

He took out a beautifully embroidered pouch out of his robe and opened it. Inside was an old piece of paper. He handed the paper to Yu and said: "Read it and you'll understand."

It was quite strange that this piece of old paper would be kept in such a beautifully embroidered pouch.

On the piece of paper were only a few character namely: Believe in Yu Peiyu and help Yu Peiyu.

It seemed those characters were scribbled down in a hurry. Yu Peiyu showed Mei Simang the short letter.

Yu Peiyu asked: "Who wrote this letter?"

Hong Lianhua said with a strange sad look on his face: "Your fiancée."

Yu Peiyu was too surprised to see the sad strange look on Hong Lianhua's face and exclaimed: "Lin Daiyu? Do you know her?"

Hong Lianhua nodded: "3 days ago I met her near Shangqiu, she was with her father, Lin Shoujuan and Wang Yuluo. I have known her for a long time but that day she seemed not to recognize me anymore."

Yu Peiyu asked: "You have known each other for a long time?"

Hong Lianhua smiled a bit: "You don't leave your home a lot, do you? That's why you don't have many names in Wulin. Lin Daiyu has been roaming Wulin since the age of 13 and every year she quietly leaves her home and has done some rather chivalrous deeds in all these years. And has become quite famous."

Yu Peiyu remembered her strong personality, her good swordsmanship and sighed: "She is very different from me, she is much stronger."

Hong Lianhua said: “She used to be a very open and straightforward girl but that day she seemed different and I began to suspect something was wrong. Anyway I ordered the disciples of Shangqiu to talk to the innkeeper of the inn she was staying at. A disciple disguised himself as one of the waiters and she saw through the disguise and handed that disciple this pouch with the letter.”

Mei Simang exclaimed: “No wonder that day Old Song Si hurriedly came to see you, master. He seemed to have urgent news.”

Yu Peiyu was silent for awhile and said softly: “She is used to roaming Wulin, she wasn't at home when something happened at her house.”

Hong Lianhua's face changed and asked: “Something happened at her house too, so this Lin Shoujuan is also...”

Yu Peiyu nodded: “This Lin Shoujuan is also an imposter, but that day... (sigh*)”

He remembered when Lin Daiyu told him what happened and said: “I thought she was also in cahoots with that evil mastermind. She knew then that this was a horrible big conspiracy and she played along with those imposters to avoid suspicion. After all this time now I realize she and I are walking the same path. She is 10 times more intelligent than I.”

Hong Lianhua agreed: “Of all the men and women I met, she is the most intelligent one I have ever seen.”

Yu Peiyu said: “But that Lin Shoujuan is an imposter why doesn't he kill her? Judging from the situation she must be detained by them. I'm afraid...”