

Chapter 13

Ulterior Motives

Silver Blossom looked at the four men for some time and sighed: "All of you are real heroes I don't know how to choose. The only thing I can come up with is..."

All four of them asked: "What is it?"

Silver Blossom said: "I am only a weak female I just hope my husband can protect me. So like many other women I just hope my husband has superior martial arts."

At this point Greywolf's face changed and wanted to speak. Before he could do so, Silver Blossom continued: "However if the four of you would fight amongst each other I will be sad too. I don't want you to fight or get injured over me."

Greywolf's face returned to normal. Zhao Gang asked: "I don't understand. How will you be able to see which one of us is stronger?"

Silver Blossom said: "If all of you would display your best skill I will be able to see who of you has the best martial arts. And in this way you won't have to fight over me."

Zhao Gang laughed: "A good idea! A good idea!"

Jin Yanzi softly asked Mei Simang: "What is she planning?"

Mei Simang said: "Your sister is hoping the four of them will kill themselves in a fight."

Jin Yanzi said: "If so why doesn't she come up with a plan that will make them fight amongst themselves?"

Mei Simang said: "She is a clever girl. That Greywolf is a bit suspicious already and if she insisted the four of them should fight he will surely see through her trickery."

Jin Yanzi frowned: "But they're not going to fight now."

Mei Simang smiled: "Your sister has seen through that although they are sworn brothers, but they do not respect or acknowledge each other. Each one of them feels that his martial arts is superior to the other, so in the end they will bound to fight each other till the death. But this way they won't suspect your sister has anything to do with it."

Jin Yanzi sighed and remained silent.

On the other hand Zhao Gang walked up to a pile of bricks and generated his energy to his right palm and smashed a brick into pieces.

Silver Blossom smiled: "Mr. Zhao has very good martial arts, I never thought anyone's palm could be that strong and powerful."

Zhao Gang laughed: "I'm certain that few people have this ability in Wulin."

Silver Blossom nodded in agreement, but glanced at Qin Biao.

Qin Biao sneered: "This type of martial arts is very suitable to chop wood. In a real battle such skills are useless."

Zhao Gang angrily shouted: "In other words you think you're better than I."

Qin Biao didn't answer but just coldly laughed, he walked to another pile of bricks and sat on it.

Zhao Gang scoffed: "What are you training here? The Buttocks Skill?"

Qin Biao coldly said: "Your brains don't work but I do hope your eyes are alright."

Suddenly Zhao Gang saw that Qin Biao was slowly descending, the bricks were drilled into the ground. Qin Biao used his internal strenght to drill the bricks into the floor."

Silver Blossom laughed and applauded: "Excellent skill! Mr. Qin's martial arts are truly amazing, don't you agree?"

The White Snake Lord nodded and said: "I haven't seen brother Qin only for a few months. It is hard to believe that you mastered such level in such a short time."

Qin Biao laughed: "If I didn't have such martial arts, how could lead you bunch of... ahhhhhhh"

His laughter stopped and he turned pale, somehow Greywolf sneaked up on him and stabbed a dagger into his back.

Qin Biao said angrily: "Old Wolf... you're..you're too vicious... !"

Greywolf coldly said: "I just want to tell you that although old Zhao's martial arts are only good for chopping wood. But your skills are useless too. Do you really expect your enemies will let you sit on them?"

He turned to Silver Blossom and said: "In my opinion the only good martial arts is the one that kills."

Qin Biao wanted to grab Greywolf's neck, but Greywolf quickly leapt away and pulled out the dagger. Blood gushed out of Qin Biao's wound and he fell to the ground.

Zhao Gang angrily said: "Old Qin may be a stupid moron but we're still brothers. How could you?"

Greywolf coldly said: "With him dead you're the leading brother."

Zhao Gang grunted and stayed quiet.

The White Snake Lord said: "Old Wolf is right, the only good martial arts is the type that is lethal. But my killing skills aren't as good as old Wolf."

He had already positioned himself behind Zhao Gang's back for some time now and after he finished his sentence he launched an attack at Zhao Gang.

Zhao Gang may look dumb but he isn't as stupid as he looks. When he knew that the White Snake Lord attacked him he didn't back away in fact he counter-attacked.

Unfortunately he was a bit too fat, and couldn't avoid the sword stance to his body. The short sword stabbed through his shoulder but he had already grabbed the neck of the White Snake Lord.

He asked with a mean laugh: "Do you think you can escape?"

The White Snake Lord begged: "Second brother Zhao, please spare me!"

Zhao Gang said: "In my heart I have forgiven you, but my hands are not listening to my heart."

With one movement he snapped the neck of the White Snake Lord. Greywolf, who was also a bit shocked to see Zhao Gang killing the White Snake Lord, said: "Impressive, old Zhao!"

Zhao Gang pulled out the short sword and looked at Greywolf: "And then there were only two."

Silver Blossom who arranged the entire scenario was hiding and watching from a corner.

Greywolf walked up to the table and sat down, he said: "Old Zhao, sit down first. Let us talk this over." He poured two cups of tea.

Zhao Gang replied: "Alright! I'm interested what you have to say."

Greywolf said: "Some things in life you can share with others. For instance I would share a bottle of good wine with you anytime. And I believe you would do the same thing, right?"

Zhao Gang said: "So what if I would? Get one with your shit!"

Silver Blossom frowned, she knew where Greywolf was getting at.

Greywolf said: "It is not uncommon to see two women marrying to one man, why won't we share one wife?"

Zhao Gang shouted: "I can share a lot of things, but nobody touches my woman!"

Greywolf coldly said: "The two of us have a lot of enemies, you can kill me. But if so you will have to face your enemies alone. Furthermore if the two of us started fighting no one would know the outcome."

Zhao Gang was silent for some time, he was thinking over Greywolf's words.

After pondering for some time he laughed: "Right, half a wife is better than having no wife. By the looks of it I may not handle this little tart alone."

He raised the cup of tea and said: "My good brother, I will listen you to your suggestion."

Silverblossom walked up and smiled: "It is a very good idea! Drink this cup of tea and you will even like the idea more and more."

Zhao Gang looked at the cup and thought for a minute and put it down. He is not the brightest man in Wulin but he has roamed the realm long enough to have gained some experience. He didn't learn any good habits but he mastered plenty of nasty habits to survive.

He looked at Greywolf and said: "Have you done something with this tea?"

Greywolf yelled: "Don't be a fool! We're brothers for many years don't let outsiders drive a wedge between us."

Silver Blossom said: "Why won't you drink the tea?"

She casually put her finger in the cup for an instant and put it in front of Greywolf.

She said: "I say there is poison in this tea and if you don't want to drink it. I understand."

Zhao Gang yelled: "Drink the tea! If you don't I will snap your neck!"

Greywolf loudly said: "There wasn't any poison in the tea, but after you put your finger in it. There is poison now."

Silver Blossom said: "You're accusing me?"

Greywolf said: "Yes you, you little crumpet!"

He leapt up and wanted to hit Silver Blossom, she quickly hid behind Zhao Gang.

Zhao Gang angrily said: "You're the one who put poison in the tea! Do you think I'm a dumb pig!"

Greywolf aimed his two fists at Zhao Gang's chest, Zhao Gang didn't avoid those blows. Greywolf's fists struck him on the chest but Greywolf felt like he was hitting a bag of sand. He quickly wanted to draw his sabre but it was too late. Zhao Gang struck hard on the chest too and he fell down, to finish him off Zhao Gang raised his fist and struck him on the head. Killing him instantly.

Silver Blossom was clapping her hands. Zhao Gang spat on Greywolf's body.

Silver Blossom said: "Mr. Zhao's body is truly amazing! But are you alright? Are you in pain?"

Zhao Gang patted himself on the chest and said: "Those dirty paws of him won't harm me."

Silver Blossom said: "But your shoulder is still bleeding."

She used her finger to gently touch the wound on his shoulder and asked: "Does it hurt?"

Zhao Gang laughed: "Not at all!"

He wanted to embrace her, but she quickly ran away and smiled: "Catch me if you can? If you can catch me I will give you a surprise."

She was as swift as a fox, Zhao Gang couldn't catch her and said: "Little darling! Let me give you a kiss!"

Silver Blossom stopped running and sighed: "You really are a dumb pig."

Zhao Gang said: "What are you saying?"

Silver Blossom said: "I just put poison on your wound enough to kill ten pigs. But if you didn't run around to catch me you could have lived another two hours."

Zhao Gang roared and collapsed on the ground. Silver Blossom sighed: "Why won't anyone listen to my good advice?"

She opened the door and the henchmen of the Four Beasts were still outside waiting. These men were trained not to move without permission from their leaders, although they heard strange noises from the room they didn't dare to check.

Silver Blossom smiled: "Here are four bodies, would you mind carrying them outside?"

Those henchmen all hurried to the door and saw their leaders were dead and are stunned.

Silver Blossom smiled: "I can understand what you are going through. Your leaders died under strange circumstances if you want to avenge them I don't mind."

The men were too shocked and thought why she is still smiling like that. Her clothes are not torn, they were too terrified to even think of avenging their leaders. They knew the deaths of their leaders were related to this strange but beautiful woman. They quickly ran to their horses and fled.

Silver Blossom sighed: "The robbers nowadays are such losers."

Jin Yanzi and Mei Simang were both absolutely stunned about what just happened.

Mei Simang said with an enforced smile: "Your sister is really formidable. In my opinion she is as lethal as Madame Hai Tang, I knew we didn't have to intervene."

Jin Yanzi was still too surprised to talk. Mei Simang said: "Miss Jin, it is safe now you can go down now. I have to report back to master Hong Lian."

Jin Yanzi asked: "Won't you come in for a minute?"

Mei Simang smiled: "Although I am old, I am still a man. Furthermore I rather not meet your sister..."

With that he was off.

Jin Yanzi sighed; Silver Blossom heard someone and said: "I didn't expect to have anymore visitors. But feel free to come in."

Jin Yanzi came down and Silver Blossom was shocked to see her. Before she could say anything Jin Yanzi slapped her twice on her face, very hard.

She stuttered: "Sis, you... you..."

Jin Yanzi was still angry and thought those two slaps were not hard enough, she scoffed: "I'm not fit to be your sister. Human life means nothing to you, who know I may be next on your list."

Silver Blossom touched her face and started to cry.

Jin Yanzi angrily reproached: "Spare me your tears! You should be happy that you have such lethal skills."

Silver Blossom sobbed: "I didn't want to do this, but they gave me no choice. If I didn't trick them they would have..."

She knelt down and sobbed: "You can hit me, scold me but don't treat me like a stranger. If you don't want me as your sister anymore I will die in front of you to proof my intentions."

Jin Yanzi, who was not so angry anymore after scolding and slapping her, said: "But still you shouldn't have to be this ruthless."

Silver Blossom continued: "I know I shouldn't. But... but when I was young I was bullied and abused lots and lots of times... I was afraid... that's why... I... I... was that ruthless."

She continued: "If sis came back earlier I didn't have to use these disgusting lowly tricks."

Jin Yanzi sighed: "You're right. I am also to blame I was outside the entire time."

She helped Silver Blossom up and consoled and started to weep too. Silver Blossom on the other hand almost exploded with laughter. She thought that Jin Yanzi must be one of the most gullible women on this world.

The world of martial arts is a dangerous place but also a very fair place. If you have the skills you can become very famous. And if you become famous your life will brighten up like a comet soaring through the sky. But a comet comes and passes very quickly just a lifetime.

Within 300 years the realm of martial arts has produced numerous heroes. Some were able of them were able to keep up their fame and some couldn't. There are some of them whose children or grandchildren managed to preserve the fame of the heroic ancestor.

Besides Shaolin, Wudang, E Mei and other schools with a glorious history there are some famous Wulin families who share the shame fame and glamour as those prestigious Wulin Schools.

The fame and glory of these families were established by their ancestors. That glory and fame came with a lot tears, sweat and BLOOD. But in exchange for their efforts they received the respect of their Wulin peers.

Futhermore the skills of these families are not to be underestimated.

Some examples of these families should be the famous Zhang family in Beijing, their ancestor the physician Zhang Jianzhai was an excellent physician and martial artist. His descendants are still practicing medicine.

Or the *Thunderbolt Clan* that became famous because of their expertise in gunpowder and making secretive weaponry using gunpowder.

The Nangong family in the southern provinces are well-known for their marvelous palm techniques.

And the disciples of the *Celestial Water Hall* are known for their impressive swimming abilities. Who can forget the Peng Family in HenanProvince? Their *Five Tigers and Door Slashing Sabre* is a recognized powerful sabre style.

These are all exemplary families but the most respected of these families should be the Tang Clan in Sichuan province. Their usage and development of poisonous secretive weaponry are unmatched in the realm.

The TangMansion looks very impressive, the descendants of the Tang Clan have preserved the family house very good. Even ordered to build extra wings for their ever growing number of disciples and relatives.

The Tang disciples are not only good martial artists but also very good entrepreneurs. Earning profits to help establish and preserving the fame of the Tang Clan has been a family tradition.

When Silver Blossom entered the property of the Tang Clan she saw that the Tangs have managed to turn their mansion into a small city. They had shops, restaurants, blacksmiths, etc. She was very much impressed and surprised to see this.

After a long time she softly asked Jin Yanzi: "This is the TangMansion?"

Jin Yanzi smiled: "You wouldn't believe it, would you?"

Although they were being watched by the people here but none came by to question them. Silver Blossom said: "This is strange. It is said that the TangMansion is as heavily guarded as the Shaolin Monastery, or the PurpleHeavenPalace on MountWudang. But it seems that is highly exaggerated."

Jin Yanzi smiled: "If you weren't travelling with me you wouldn't even have made it to the front door. It is because the people here know me and as you're travelling with me they didn't come to question us."

Silver Blossom asked: "The Keeper of the mansion..."

Jin Yanzi said: "Old Mr. Tang lives way in the back with his sons and daughters. Don't think you can reach the inner quarters easily. You have pass through numerous guards to even get to the doors of the main wing."

Silver Blossom said softly to herself: "It is not strange that he is so cowardly. He has been well protected his entire life."

Jin Yanzi frowned: "How do you know that old Mr. Tang is cowardly"

Silver Blossom knew she said too much and smiled: "It is just a rumour I heard some time ago."

Jin Yanzi wanted to inform a bit more about this rumour when suddenly a few young women came to greet them.

A woman in a white dress smiled to Jin Yanzi and said: "Third lass, it's about time you came and paid us a visit."

After the introduction this young woman was the daughter of Tang Wushuang, Tang Qi, and also the semi-leader of the Tang Clan. Tang Wushuang has more or less retired from Wulin and left most of the duties to this daughter.

Silver Blossom softly asked Jin Yanzi afterwards: "This second sister Tang is smart, capable and quite pretty. I wonder why she isn't married yet."

Jin Yanzi sighed: "She has been engaged three times but before the actual wedding all her three fiancées died. Some people were saying she brings bad luck and so. These rumours reached her ears too and she vowed in front her ancestral graves that she will never get married."

Tang Qi praised Silver Blossom and congratulated Jin Yanzi for finding such a good sister.

Next to Tang Qi was another young woman she was the eldest daughter-in-law of Tang Wushuang, Li Peiling.

Her husband Tang Yu was one of the more talented second generation Tang disciples.

The third girl was the youngest daughter of Tang Wushuang, Tang Lin. She looked very elegant and refined, but she looked troubled and sad at the moment.

Li Peiling and Tang Qi prepared a banquet for Jin Yanzi and Silver Blossom.

Tang Qi said: "Our father is resting you don't have pay your respects to him yet. Let us go to the room of my eldest brother and drink to our contend."

Li Peiling smiled: "My heaven. You really are something aren't you? You even know that your brother and I have saved up two bottles of precious wine."

Tang Qi laughed: "Let us drink those bottles with our esteemed guests, when eldest brother comes home he will finish those bottles alone."

Silver Blossom tried her best to get along with these three women which was working. Her goal was to find Tang Yue, the second son of Tang Wushuang and lover of Golden Blossom.

Silver Blossom took out a few beautiful objects from her treasure and gave it to the three women as presents.

Later on all of them were drinking and laughing. Suddenly Tang Qi asked: "Well third lass, how old are you?"

Jin Yanzi joked: "Why do you ask? Do you want to arrange a meeting for me with someone you know? If you were a man I would marry you."

Tang Qi drank a cup empty and said: "I know you're about 20 odd years old. You should look for a good husband?"

Jin Yanzi blushed and said: "You should worry about yourself."

Tang Qi said: "I'm not getting married in my life, when you have reached my age you will learn that being single is quite lonely."

After saying this she drank another cup of wine.

Jin Yanzi felt a bit sad for her but said: "Are we opening up today?"

Tang Qi sighed: "Do you really think I wanted to be an old spinster? But who wants to take me as his wife?"

She poured another cup and drank.

Li Peiling smiled: "But honestly, third lass are you in love with someone? Perhaps the young master of the divine sabre?"

Jin Yanzi loudly said: "Don't mention him!"

Li Peiling asked: "You must like someone else, right?"

Jin Yanzi blushed and smiled: "No, I am not."

Tang Qi smiled too: "I know you are. Tell us who is it! Be honest now!" She stood up and wanted to tickle Jin Yanzi.

Jin Yanzi hid behind Tang Lin and smiled: "Fourth sister isn't that young anymore, why won't you ask her whether she is in love with someone."

Tang Lin stood up and said: "I didn't interfere with your matters. You should stay out of mine."

She stood up and left.

Jin Yanzi was surprised and asked: "Why is she angry?"

Tang Qi said: "I don't know either. She is been acting strange lately."

Li Peiling said: "Girls at their age are always a bit quick-tempered. I will go and see her."

Silver Blossom smiled: "Sister Li, I will go."

Li Peiling nodded and said: "Alright, she does seem to like you. But hurry back I still have a few dishes you have to taste."

Silver Blossom followed Tang Lin and saw her standing under a tree looking very sad.

Silver Blossom sighed: "Life can sometimes be very sad, won't you agree?"

Tang Lin who was feeling lonely and sad, she looked at Silver Blossom and said sadly: "How do you know what loneliness is? You get to travel around the realm, you meet people get to see things."

Silver Blossom sighed: "You're still young. Some people can smile and talk the entire day but in their hearts they pine away for love. Everyone deals with loneliness in a different way."

Tang Lin thought over those words and nodded and said softly: "You're right. But how do you know if the person you're thinking of is also thinking of you?"

Silver Blossom said: "I don't know, in fact no one knows. That is the difficult and painful part about life and love."

Tang Lin nodded and agreed.

Silver Blossom said: "A very long time ago I fell in love with a young man called, Zou Yulang. I only met him once but I kept thinking of him, but I'm afraid he doesn't even remember my name."

This is absolutely rubbish, but in order to find out where Tang Yue is she trying to trick this lovesick young girl.

Tang Lin suddenly asked: "Have you been to many places?"

Silver Blossom nodded. Tang Lin continued: "Have you met and seen a lot of people in your journeys?"

Silver Blossom smiled wryly: "Too many to mention."

Tang Lin lowered her head and was hesitating whether she should ask this question. After some time she raised her head and looked at Silver Blossom and asked: "Do you know a young man called... Yu Peiyu?"

Yu Peiyu again Yu Peiyu, Silver Blossom's heart skipped a beat. But she remained calm and asked: "When did you meet this Yu Peiyu? You never leave the TangMansion."

Tang Lin softly said: "A few days he came by."

Silver Blossom was surprised and said: "He came by."

Tang Lin bit her lip and said: "He came by to pay a visit to my father, that day my sister and sister-in-law weren't home. Only I was at home after talking to my father for some time, my father had to leave. My father instructed me to him company, so I chatted with him..."

She was blushing but her eyes glittered, Silver Blossom listened carefully.

Tang Lin continued: "Normally I don't like talking to strangers but in front of him I felt very at ease. His every word and movement were very considerate and gentle. His voice was filled with understanding and compassion. He was heavily injured at that time but he tried his best to hide it, he didn't want me to know that he was wounded. He was afraid that I would be worried about him, he always thinks of the other people first."

Her voice was sounded soft and like she was describing a dream.

Silver Blossom asked: "What happened afterwards?"

Tang Lin said: "Afterwards my father came back so I had to take my leave, I... I ..thought I would see him the following day. But... but... he left during the night and father didn't tell me where he had gone to. He told my father that he was very grateful that I took the time to accompany him. I... I... am afraid I will never see him again..."

She started crying.

Silver Blossom said: "You just met him once, does he really mean that much to you?"

Tang Lin said: "But you only met Zou Yulang once too."

Silver Blossom remembered her lie and said: "If you could never see him anymore."

Tang Lin said: "If that's the case there is nothing I can do, but... but I think I will never be happy again."

Silver Blossom looked at her and said: "But if someone could let you see him again."

Tang Lin grabbed her hand and said: "If that person could help me I will... I will... do anything to repay that person. I've never been so passionate about anything in my life, but now I'm pining away."

Silver Blossom sighed: "Young love, young love."

Tang Lin trembled and said with a shaky voice: "You can help me?"

Silver Blossom didn't answer her question and said: "I always wanted to see something, could you help me?"

Tang Lin said quickly: "What is it?"

Silver Blossom said: "I've always wanted to see the famous Tang secretive weaponry fabrication. It is been said that it is one of the most mysterious places in the realm. It sounds like a lot of fun."

Tang Lin said: "That place isn't much fun."

Silver Blossom sighed: "Well, since you can't help me I will have to get back inside and eat my dumplings."

Tang Lin stopped her and said: "If I can help you, you..."

Silver Blossom smiled: "I will help you too."

Tang Lin thought for a moment and said: "Alright! I will take you there but I cannot guarantee we will be able to succeed. You have to promise me not to touch anything in there."

Silver Blossom happily said: "Just a look will be fine I won't touch a thing."

Tang Lin said: "Let us go now."

Silver Blossom said: "Let us go inside and eat our dumplings. We don't want them to get suspicious. During midnight we will meet each other here again."

Tang Lin nodded and had tears in her eyes and thought: Yu Peiyu, Yu Peiyu I'm doing this because of you. Will you ever know that?

During midnight both of them met again, Tang Lin led the way.

After walking for a short while Tang Lin told Silver Blossom to hide in the bushes first. Silver Blossom saw a cave being guarded by a few Tang disciples. Silver Blossom had heard that the secretive weapons of the Tang Clan were fabricated with special mineral water found in one of the caves at their land. But whether this story is true no one knows for sure.

Silver Blossom asked: "Why don't we go in now."

Tang Lin said: "My fourth martial arts brother Tang Shoufang is guarding the cave now. He is very strict he won't let anyone pass."

Silver Blossom coldly said: "Let us go back now."

Tang Lin quickly added: "But in a moment his watch will be over and either my eldest or my seventh martial arts brothers will take over. They are much easier to persuade."

Silver Blossom smiled.

After some time Tang Lin asked: "Do you know young master Yu too?"

Silver Blossom indifferently nodded.

Tang Lin bit her lip and said: "How did you meet each other?"

Silver Blossom smiled: "Don't worry we're just normal friends. My heart belongs to someone else."

Tang Lin blushed but felt secured now in her heart.

Silver Blossom said: "I heard that he was injured in his face recently. Is that true?"

Tang Lin sighed: "That's true. There is still a scar on his face. He told me that the most vicious and mean woman in the world did that."

Silver Blossom was fuming but smiled: "It must be a mean woman or else she wouldn't have injured him."

Tang Lin smiled sweetly: "If that woman thinks that with that she has ruined his looks, she is wrong."

Silver Blossom asked: "How come?"

Tang Lin said: "That scar on his face brings out his manliness. Before he had a scar on his face I think he might have looked a bit too feminine. He now has more charisma in my opinion."

Silver Blossom was furious but said: "The apple of your eye always appears beautiful to you."

Suddenly another group of Tang disciples came, it was time to switch guards.

The man in front of the new group was a short and fat man.

Tang Lin's face cleared up and said: "We're in luck, my seventh martial arts brother, Tang Shouqing is guarding the cave now."

Silver Blossom asked: "That little fat man is your seventh martial arts brother?"

Tang Lin said: "My seventh brother is a very friendly man, his martial arts has reached a very high level. His nickname is the Thousand Armed Arhat. Next to my brother and my eldest martial arts brother he is the most famous expert of our Tang Clan."

Silver Blossom smiled: "If you didn't tell me, I thought he looked like a proprietor of a restaurant."

Tang Lin smiled too: "When he isn't on duty he is a proprietor of a restaurant. He is also responsible for receiving guests and when trespassers do come here they have to deal with my seventh brother first."

Tang Shouqing stopped in front of the entrance and took out a metal tablet and showed it to the guards.

In awhile a tall muscular man with a short beard walked out. He looked quite impressive.

Tang Shouqing smiled: "Fourth brother, sorry to have kept you waiting."

Tang Shoufang looked around and said: "Why are there only 29 men here?"

Tang Shouqing said: "Little Hu's wife is in labour so I gave Little Hu permission to go back to his wife."

Tang Shoufang looked very serious and said: "Having children is not an important matter, practically every day someone is having a baby here in Tang manor. When my wife was giving birth to my son I did not neglect my duties and was still on watch."

Tang Shouqing apologized: "My mistake, I will not... "

Tang Shoufang grunted: "Nevermind. Next month he will have to be on duty three extra times. But you're still short of one man."

Tang Shouqing smiled: "Fourth brother nothing has happened here for the last 13 years. What does one extra or one man less matter?"

Tang Shoufang sternly said: "Seventh brother, you cannot say that. Even if nothing has happened to this place for a thousand years we still have to be vigilant. The reason that nothing has happened is that we have been guarding this place very well for the last 10 odd years."

Tang Shouqing lowered his head and said: "I understand."

Tang Shoufang looked at the 30 men in his own group, he pointed at one man and said: "You! Yesterday during dinner you drank a bit of wine during your watch. I will punish you now for that, you will take over for Little Hu tonight."

That man replied respectfully: "Yes."

Tang Shoufang waved his hand and he and his men left, Tang Shouqing and the other 29 men took their places.

After the men had taken their positions Tang Shoufang turned to Tang Shouqing and said: "Come by tomorrow at my place for dinner. Your sister-in-law has bought two pheasants, she knows that you like to eat pheasants too."

Tang Shouqing said: "I will bring the wine."

Tang Shoufang waved his hand and his men followed him, suddenly he turned around and said: "Don't bring too much wine."

Tang Shouqing smiled: "Alright."

Silver Blossom was impressed and a bit scared by the security measures taken by the Tang Clan. Any reckless idiot who would try to steal their secret will surely be killed before reaching this place.

Tang Lin waited till Tang Shoufang was out of sight and said: "Let us try our luck."

She took Silver Blossom by her hand and they walked out, some men called out: "Who goes there?"

Tang Lin responded: "It is me, Tang Lin."

The men respectfully said: "It is the fourth Miss."

Tang Lin said: "I have something important to ask my seventh martial arts brother."

She continued to walk to the entrance but the men blocked her way. One of them said: "Please forgive us, but without permission from the old master no one is allowed to enter the cave."

Tang Lin said: "At least let my seventh brother come out and see me."

The man thought for a minute and said: "I will notify Mr. Tang Shouqing."

Immediately Tang Shouqing came out to greet Tang Lin and smiled: "Well, fourth sister what can I do for you? And I see that you've brought an esteemed guest as well."

Silver Blossom smiled and looked at him.

Tang Lin smiled: “How do you know she is an esteemed guest?”

Tang Shouqing said: “Yesterday I heard that someone drank up the two precious bottles of wine brother Tang Yu had saved. I wanted to drink a cup too but I wasn’t invited.”

Tang Lin smiled: “No wonder sister Qi¹⁹ always praises seventh brother for being informative.”

Tang Shouqing smiled: “I will take that as a compliment, now what can I do for you?”

Tang Lin said: “I brought a guest with me, so what are you going to do to welcome her.”

Tang Shouqing smiled wryly: “There is nothing here that is of any interest. She can always drop by me restaurant for a few bowls of the finest shark fin soup.”

Tang Lin pouted: “What is special about shark fin soup.”

She pulled Tang Shouqing’s sleeve and said: “She just wants to have a look, last time when sister Qi brought a guest you allowed her to take the guest for a tour. If you allowed her so you should also allow me to do the same thing. Or else you’re not welcome at my place when I am having a feast.”

Tang Shouqing sighed: “When I heard that you were here I already guessed your motives. Why didn’t you come by when fourth brother was on duty?”

Silver Blossom giggled and said: “I know we couldn’t fool him, let’s ask sister Qi.”

She was talking to Tang Lin but it was loud enough for Tang Shouqing to hear it too.

Tang Shouqing sighed: “You know that I’m afraid of the second Miss, but I’m also afraid of the fourth Miss. She is quite a petty girl.”

He moved aside and said: “Be quick with your tour and don’t wander off.”

The three of them walked to the entrance of the cave, Silver Blossom saw a big heavy metal door. Tang Shouqing pressed a switch and the iron doors opened. Silver Blossom knew that no one can force their way inside unless you know how to operate the switch.

Tang Lin and Silver Blossom entered the cave. It was deep cave and looked quite ancient and spooky.

¹⁹ Tang Qi

Silver Blossom said: "He didn't have to warn us, in such a place nobody would wander off."

Tang Lin pouted: "If it wasn't for you I wouldn't enter this eerie place."

Although she said that she felt in her heart very proud that the Tang Clan had preserved this practically sacred place.

Tang Lin led the way, the underground water source was channeled to several apparatuses. Some muscular men looking blacksmiths were operating these apparatuses.

The entire place was organized like an underground factory, you had blacksmiths striking the iron till the required models.

It looked very impressive and majestic, Silver Blossom was very much impressed and began to realize why the Tang Clan had been famous and respected for about 300 years.

Tang Lin asked after an hour or so: "Seen enough?"

Silver Blossom said: "Are you joking? This place is magnificent I haven't seen enough yet."

Tang Lin said: "Everyone who came here for the first time has the same expression like you. No one would have guessed that forging our tiny secretive weapons would require such an enterprise."

Tang Lin thought for a moment and took out a metallic object from her girdle and showed it to Silver Blossom. It resembled a flower.

Tang Lin asked: "Do you recognize this?"

Silver Blossom looked at it carefully and said: "I don't have a clue."

Tang Lin said: "This is one of our most feared secretive weapons, the spiked bludgeon. Our spiked bludgeons differ from the spiked bludgeons from other people because our bludgeons are fabricated in a special way."

Silver Blossom deliberately said: "I don't see anything special."

Tang Lin explained: "The spiked bludgeons of other people are made according to fixed stencil plates. They pour the melted metal into those stencils."

Silver Blossom asked: "How do you make them?"

Tang Lin answered: "Our bludgeons are made from 13 very thin metallic plates, plate for plate are put together till this form. Whenever our bludgeon hits someone the plates will fold open and clutch into the flesh. And when that person wants to pull out the bludgeon he will also pull out a part of his own flesh."

Silver Blossom exclaimed: "How very lethal! And the pain!"

Tang Lin said: "The pain isn't the main concern. Even if the person pulled out the bludgeon they are beyond rescue."

Silver Blossom asked: "Why do you say that?"

Tang Lin explained: "Every plate has been dipped with a different type of poison, when the 13 kinds of poison make contact with the blood then it is too late."

Silver Blossom got goosebumps when she heard this and said: "That explains why everyone fears the Tang Clan secretive weapons."

Tang Lin added: "There are seven most lethal secretive weapons in our family, the spiked bludgeon is a rather simple weapon compared to those seven. There are some of our weapons which are constructed from 70 to 80 thin metallic plates. For example the construction of the quiver to hold *The Ninth Heaven And Tenth Netherworld Celestial Needles* is one of the best kept secrets in Wulin."

Silver Blossom added: "That's why you have different people working on different parts of your secretive weapons. You don't want the workmen to learn the secret of making the Tang secretive weapons."

Tang Lin said: "Exactly, although we only have really loyal and trustworthy people working here but still our ancestors thought of a way to make sure that the workmen will never learn the secret. For example these two men are responsible for modelling those metallic plates. They will never know how the metallic plates become a spiked bludgeon."

She pointed at two blacksmiths striking iron.

Silver Blossom praised: "No wonder the Tang Clan has become and stayed the number one experts in secretive weaponry."

Tang Lin said: "This way these men can go home after their shifts and live their lives. We're not afraid that people will threaten them to reveal our secret. Because they don't know it."

Silver Blossom pointed to a stone house and said: "Who is in there?"

Tang Lin said: "The people in there are responsible for putting the plates together."

Silver Blossom asked: "Won't they reveal your secret?"

Tang Lin said: "The workmen in there are usually old men who have retired and do not have any family anymore. Also they requested for this job themselves and will never leave this place."

Silver Blossom sighed: “That’s why they are so diligent. They have given up their lives for the fabrication of secretive weapons.”

At this point Tang Shouqing came and walked up to them.

Tang Lin suddenly said: “Will the two of you wait for me a minute, I am going to see someone. I’ll be right back.”

Tang Shouqing frowned and said: “Fourth sister, don’t forget... ”

Before he could finish Tang Lin was already out of sight.