

Chapter 37

The Yama Book Of Debts

The woman in black said: “When Mr. Dongguo finds out that you are in possession of the plaque of repay, he will be bound to look for you.”

Yu Peiyu said: “But Mr. Dongguo has said that he will help out whoever is in possession of that plaque, before I can personally hand the plaque back everyone can steal it from me.”

The woman in black said: “But who is capable of stealing that plaque from you?”

Yu Peiyu smiled wryly: “I am not being modest here, but there are a lot of martial arts experts in the realm.”

The woman in black said: “You're right. With your present skills there are to my knowledge about 13 people who can defeat you. Possibly even more but most of these experts are in retreat and when they hear the news they will probably come out and try to steal that plaque from you. Even by all means necessary.”

She did not give Yu Peiyu time to ask and added with a smile: “But you have the Yama Debt Book of Lady Zhu, why should you be afraid of them.”

Yu Peiyu said with surprise: “Yama Debt Book?”

The woman in black said: “You have the plaque of gratitude, how can you not have the book of debts.”

Yu Peiyu seemed to understand and said: “Madame, are you referring to that black notebook?”

The woman in black said: “Indeed.” She paused for a short moment before adding: “Everyone is bound to make mistakes in life, even sages are not perfect. In this short lifetime one is sure to err occasionally, especially famous people. We see their glory and their high status and the ever so mighty grandeur of them, are we aware how many people were sacrificed to gain that glory and wonderful status.”

Yu Peiyu sighed deeply too, because he too knew the road to fame was not easy and when one reaches that point the road is probably full of corpses.

The woman in black said: “For instance, Hong Shengqi was able to become the leader of the Fengwei³³ Association, because he framed his elder martial arts brother and poisoned his teacher. This secret leaked out eventually, but before this secret was uncovered everyone believed that Hong Shengqi was an awesome true hero.”

Yu Peiyu still did not speak and sighed softly.

The woman in black continued: “Hong Shengqi was just unlucky that his secret was exposed. Many similar events happen all the time in the realm but we are just unaware of it.”

Yu Peiyu said: “If one does not want someone to know about something, one should not have done it in the first place. Crimes like that will be solved in the end, no matter what.”

The woman in black said: “True! Every secret is bound to be solved one time. However the person who accumulated most secrets is Zhu Mei of the Palace of Enchantment.”

Yu Peiyu looked surprised.

The woman in black explained: “Lady Zhu kept every men spellbounded with her beauty and she had numerous lovers. And men are most vulnerable when they are lying on a bed with a beautiful woman next to him.”

She said it rather indirectly but one could easily imagine what situation would arise. It is the truth that most men cannot really keep any secrets hidden when there is a beautiful woman lying next to him gazing at him with pretty eyes.

The woman in black said: “Lady Zhu suddenly was overwhelmed with secrets, she carefully wrote every secret down in a black notebook. Secrets of her lovers, admirers or mysteries those people overheard, found out and told her about it to gain her love and grace. She was a very intelligent woman and knew that every secret was invaluable, so she carefully protected her notebook because she knew that these secrets would be useful some day.”

Yu Peiyu sighed: “In the end she did not use those secrets.”

The woman in black said: “That is because she became stupid suddenly.”

Yu Peiyu said: “Stupid?”

The woman in black said: “Yes, stupid.”

³³ Phoenix tale

She continued: "There are two types of stupid people in this world, the first one type are old men who fall in love with young girls. Some of those old men are very intelligent men and had seen the world. But because of a mere young girl with pretty face, they do the most foolish, stupid things and lose everything they worked so hard to gain in life. They are very sad but nobody feels sad for them, in the end they were themselves to blame for their pitiful state."

Yu Peiyu smiled wryly, he too knew some of these tragic tales. Sometimes it was downright a farse.

The woman in black said: "The second types are women who fall head over heels in love. Normally smart women will become ignorant and dumb when they fall for a man completely. The man they love is a rogue, a thief, but in their eyes he is the most honest, likeable man on the world. Even if he told her that the sun rises in the west or that snow is black, she will believe it."

Yu Peiyu thought of Zhong Jing now and sighed deeply.

The woman in black sighed: "However Zhu Mei became even more stupid than these two types of people, she fell madly in love with a despicable, horrible little bastard who was so young that he could have been her son."

Yu Peiyu sighed too: "Lady Zhu sacrificed a lot for this awful man, she of course did not want to use any incriminating secrets to blackmail her father-in-law."

The woman in black said: "Indeed with your intelligence, you could put this notebook to good use and nobody will try to harm you."

Yu Peiyu said: "But... "

The woman in black interrupted him: "I know what you are thinking. Everything in life has two sides, it really depends on the user. You should understand that."

Yu Peiyu lowered his head and said: "Yes, I do."

The woman in black smiled now: "This is all I have to say, go now. When you have completed your task we will meet again. Till that time I sincerely wish good luck with your mission."

When Yu Peiyu's back disappeared into the horizon, she was still standing there and as the sun was setting her facial expression changed. Her face suddenly changed awfully mysterious and eerie, she seems to have two identities in the day she is human. However in the night she turns into a [shade]. Another ghost krept towards her, it was the ghost of Ji Kuqing.

His clothes were still drenched with blood but his face was cleaned up now, his eyes were glittering wtih laughter and laughed loudly: "You have a lot to say today."

The woman in black said casually: "To rid our troubles, I don't mind talking a bit more."

Ji Kuqing said: "Won't killing him be easier?"

The woman in black shook her head: "You do not understand."

Ji Kuqing sighed: "I just don't understand why you want me to play dead earlier and left him alive... "

The woman in black said: "Only this way he will reveal his secrets to me."

Ji Kuqing asked: "Did he tell you?"

The woman in black said: "Yes, he admitted he was the son of Yu Fanghe, just like I thought that old dog was responsible for changing his face."

Ji Kuqing said: "Now you know, why leave him around?"

The woman in black shook her head and said: "You don't know, but soon everything will be clear to you... "

Ji Kuqing said: "I just hope you are right."

The woman in black said: "When was I ever wrong?"

She backed away from him and asked: "Where did all that blood come from anyway?"

Ji Kuqing laughed: "Even you think this is blood? It seems that my abilities are becoming better and better."

The woman in black smiled: "I was always impressed by your abilities."

Ji Kuqing asked: "How about your pupil?"

The woman in black said: "Hai Dongqing?"

Ji Kuqing said: "Yes."

The woman in black said: "He is taking Iron Blossom and Zhu Lei'Er back to my place."

Ji Kuqing asked: "Does he know about our plans?"

The woman in black said: "To succeed, the fewer people know about our plans the better."

Ji Kuqing asked: "How about Yang Zijiang?"

The woman black said: "In order to succeed, we must have a few scapegoats ready."

It was a chilly Autumn day, he traveled with extreme caution every day now. He thought that every day could be his last one, he was relieved when he managed to make through the day. He noticed that he looked very dirty and he wished he could change his robe and take a warm bath. But he did not have much money on him, when you're running from death one tends to forget the value of money quite easily.

Near dusk Yu Peiyu reached a small town, he used his remaining copper coins to buy four paper flints and two bowls of noodles. After that he had not a coin on him anymore.

Still he was very excited. Reading secrets of dignitaries of Wulin was most intriguing, being curious of other people's mysteries is also a rather nasty character trait of all humans.

Yu Peiyu left the town and found a remote place to shelter himself from the wind, he made a small fire and held the notebook near the fire. The characters slowly appeared.

Yu Peiyu was shocked to read the names on the notebook, everyone in the book were famous martial arts experts Yu Peiyu had heard of. Some were even more even more shocking: the lord of Nocturne City Dongfang Daming, Heavenly King Li, Granny Hu, master Nu, the Flying Hunchback Yi Kun, the celestial dragon swordsman...

Besides the names of the ten great martial arts masters, also some of the 13 leaders of the orthodox schools were on the list. But three other names were most shocking to Yu Peiyu, namely Ji Kuqing, Feng San and his father Yu Fanghe. He could not believe his eyes, his father was righteous and fair throughout his entire life it was impossible that he did something wrong in his life.

He did not want to look and did not want to believe it.

He also did not read about Feng San, Feng San was his brother and his good friend. Even if he did something wrong he did not want to read about it.

However he did not pass on Ji Kuqing, under the name Ji Kuqing were the characters [incest between brother and sister].

Yu Peiyu felt disgusted when he read that, he could not believe that such revolting things could actually be committed.

But he believed it was true, because he remembered the son of Ji Kuqing, Ji Zanghua. He was obviously a product of the sick revolting relationship between Ji

Kuqing and his sister. But it was strange that Ji Lingfeng and Ji Lingyan looked normal, they did not inherit the bad genes from their sick, midget father Ji Zanghua.

Could it be that they were not the daughters of Ji Zanghua?

Yu Peiyu thought back when he was in that secret passage beneath Murder Manor, he found a piece of jade left behind by the lover of Madame Ji.

That piece of jade was a family heirloom of the Yu family, so her lover was someone of the Yu family without any doubt.

Could this be that secret of Yu Fanghe?

Yu Peiyu did not want to think about it, but he wanted to get to the bottom of this. So he flipped the page to Yu Fanghe. His hand was trembling and his heart was beating faster and faster.

Under the name of Yu Fanghe stood: [disowned his own brother and banned him from the family, his brother looks like a gentleman but is in fact a despicable murderous rogue].

Next to his father's name stood: [The elusive cloud a rogue of the north and brother of Yu Fanghe. Banned from his family when he was young because of his awful ways. The elder brother is a sage, but the younger brother is thug. Marvelous, marvelous].

Yu Peiyu broke out in a cold sweat when he read this. He remembered that he had a second uncle when he was very young, Yu Peiyu's mother was still alive that time whenever he asked about his second uncle his mother would look unhappy and stern. She would tell him that his second uncle was already dead and told him never to ask about his second uncle again.

Now he knows his second uncle is not dead, so the secret lover of Madame Ji could be his uncle. And the sister Ji Lingfeng and Ji Lingyan would likely be the daughters of that uncle of his. That perhaps also explained why Ji Lingfeng would often help him out and wanted him to join forces with her. In the end blood is really thicker than water.

Yu Peiyu was contemplating and was trying to digest the information he just read, after some time he heard a carriage coming his way.

In the dark Yu Peiyu could not see what was in the carriage but he could smell a very strong scent of herbs.

The man pushing the carriage was wearing a big dark outer robe, which is worn to protect oneself from rain.

In Sichuan province, there were many mountains and hills making transportation via carriage quite difficult. One could also find a lot herbs in the mountain range, and people from Sichuan are known herb collectors.

Nothing strange about this in the eyes of all and sundry, but Yu Peiyu was immediately suspicious.

From afar he could tell that the carriage was transporting something heavy, but herbs are not that heavy. It does not rain often in Sichuan and it was raining now, but this man was still wearing a rain robe to protect himself. He was pushing an extremely heavy carriage with a lot of ease, by this alone this man must know martial arts. It was now night time but this man was still traveling at this hour, meaning he was making haste to go somewhere.

Yu Peiyu was not really interested in the affairs of others now, although he found a bit strange but he did not want to poke his nose into this matter.

But suddenly Yu Peiyu heard the galloping of a horse, a horse came his way and it was mighty fast. When the horse was about ten metres away from the carriage the rider leapt off the horse and made a somersault in mid-air and landed gracefully in front of the carriage.

The horse also stopped on its own, Yu Peiyu praised in his heart: An excellent rider and a wonderful steed.

The other man seemed to be oblivious to the rider and continued to push his carriage.

Yu Peiyu was sitting on the slope and when he heard the carriage he had already put out his fire, and in the dark both men could not see Yu Peiyu. Furthermore Yu Peiyu now positioned himself between some bushes to observe the two men.

The rider also did not notice when the carriage almost hid him, he stood there steady as a mountain.

Yu Peiyu saw that the rider was short and fat, he carried a long sword on his back making him look rather ridiculous.

But there was something about him, he had a rather powerful grandeur that made people look at him in awe. Although Yu Peiyu could not see his face clearly he had already guessed who this rider was. When the carriage bumped into him, the man also stopped pushing the carriage.

The rider laughed loudly: "Lord Ouyang, since when have you started to sell herbal medicine?"

The man pushing the carriage was the leader of the 72 branches of water heroes of the Changjiang River, Yu Peiyu thought he looked familiar but could not see his face clearly because he had covered his face.

Ouyang Long smiled: "Master Yu, you have sharp eyes. My respects." He removed his big straw hat and continued: "I thought that Master Yu was staying nicely at Hainan Isle, what brings you in these parts? Don't tell me that you have retired from being the leader of the Hainan School and have become a herb collector too?"

Yu Peiyu was sure of it now, this fat, short man was Yu Xuan, The Flying Fish and the Swift Sword. The leader of the Hainan School, Yu Peiyu saw him once during the gathering at Lake Huang. But it was coincidence that these two men met each other here in the remote skirts of Sichuan province.

What were they doing here and what were they up to?

Yu Xuan said: "Lord Ouyang, do you have an idea why I am here?"

Ouyang Long said: "Please enlighten me."

Yu Xuan smiled: "Lord Ouyang, I am here because of the same reason why you are in Sichuan."

Ouyang Long stayed quiet for awhile before taking out something from his robe, he asked: "Did Master Yu receive this too?"

He was holding an ordinary invitation card, there was nothing special to it, but it was strange that he was trembling when holding this invitation.

When Yu Xuan saw the invitatin he stopped laughing too and sighed: "This year I am the unfortunate fool."

Ouyang Long laughed sadly: "This year, it is the 70th birthday of eighth squire Fu. He has sent you an invitation even though you live far, far away. That means that brother Yu's fame and reputation is well-known throughout China, why would you say that you are an unfortunate fool?"

Yu Peiyu thought Yu Xuan's remark was strange too, if you are invited to attend to feast far, far away from you that usually meant your prestige and reputation were very high. And the person who invited you had a very high regards of you, furthermore with Hainan School and Yu Xuan's status a gift would not be too much to be asked.

Yu Xuan laughed dryly: “Lord Ouyang is right, I should be happy that I am invited by eighth squire Fu, however after searching for two months I still could not find a suitable present for him.”

Yu Peiyu felt this was very strange, I mean presents are not that important it is about the intention. Anything can be seen as a present, a piece of antique, tael of gold, silver, jewelry and even pastry, silk etc.

How come the leader of the Hainan School is unable to find a present for this eighth squire Fu? Nobody would believe him.

Ouyang Long sneered: “Master Yu is both rich and powerful, everyone knows that in Wulin. If you would say that you are incapable of finding a present nobody would believe you.”

Yu Xuan stayed quiet for awhile before asking: “Have you heard of a man called Deng Xuan?”

Ouyang Long said: “Of course even though I am not a well-informed man in Wulin, I still know that Lord Deng is the lord of the Purple Sand Isle, and one of the best friends of master Yu.”

Yu Xuan asked: “Do you think he is dead for about a year?”

Ouyang Long was surprised and exclaimed with surprise: “What kind of illness did lord Deng contract?”

Yu Xuan said: “He was always very healthy and never even coughed, he did not die because of any illness.”

Ouyang Long asked: “If he wasn't bedridden? Was he ki... killed by someone?”

Yu Xuan said: “Yes, he was killed.”

Ouyang Long said: “Lord Deng's pair of sun and moon wheels were said to be imparted by late master Dongfang Daming of Nocturne City, for the last couple of decades lord Deng was said never to have met a match. Who is capable of killing him?”

Yu Xuan said: “Eighth squire Fu.”

Ouyang Long's face changed and did not speak anymore.

Yu Xuan said: “Last year Deng Xuan received an invitation to attend the birthday feast of eighth squire Fu, Deng Xuan searched for two days and finally found a piece of beautiful coral about one metre high. He was very pleased about it and thought his present would be the most eye-catching one, at least eighth squire fu would be happy.”

Ouyang Long nodded and said: "Hmmm."

Yu Xuan continued: "When Deng Xuan presented his present to eighth squire Fu, he did say a word to Deng Yuan and lead him to chamber. When he opened that room Deng Yuan saw corals at least two to three metres tall."

Yu Xuan sighed: "When Deng Xuan saw this fear struck him into his chest, eighth squire Fu did not invite him to attend the feast and asked him to leave. He personally accompanied Deng Xuan out of his estate."

Ouyang Long asked: "What happened?"

Yu Xuan sighed again: "Deng Xuan hurried back home on his steed and when he reached home he coughed up blood and fainted. He himself did not know how he got injured, he only remembered that eighth squire Fu made a farewell gesture to him and he felt his chest was a bit warm."

Ouyang Long asked: "How... how many days till he got home?"

Yu Xuan said: "Seven days, he coughed up buckets of black blood and he died that very same night."

Ouyang Long stayed silent and looked very earnest, he softly said: "Very formidable Hundred Paces Divine Fist! Harming one without knowledge and dying of injuries after seven days... Eighth squire Fu has really awesome martial arts."

Yu Xuan sighed: "Almost everyone in the realm knows that the invincible fists of eighth squire Fu are lethal, and if he doesn't like your present you might get a hit on the chest."

Ouyang Long looked at his cargo on the carriage.

Yu Xuan said: "With Deng Xuan serving as an example I do not dare to present my gift like that. When I received the invitation I immediately started to look for a present, but even now I could not find a present suitable enough to present to eighth squire Fu. Now there are only two days left before the birthday of eighth squire Fu, what should I do lord Ouyang?"

Yu Peiyu now understood what was going on, he was quite bemused by this. People using their birthdays as excuse to receive presents was not uncommon, but the way this eighth squire Fu was using his martial arts to force people giving him present was unheard of.

Yu Peiyu also knew that the Hundred Paces Divine Fist was a Shaolin special technique, could this eighth squire Fu be a secular disciple of Shaolin?

Ouyang Long and Yu Xuan were both famous and strong martial artists in the realm, seeing that both of them feared this eighth squire Fu that meant that he was not to be trifled with.

However Yu Peiyu could not think of who this man was.

Ouyang Long stayed quiet for some time before saying: "I fully understand master Yu's predicament. However I too am most worried and fear for my own life, I really do not have the ability to help you."

Yu Xuan looked at the cargo on the carriage and said coldly: "So lord Ouyang has found a suitable present for eighth squire Fu?"

Ouyang Long said with a troubled smile: "I found a simple object which I tend to present to eighth squire Fu. I too hope it is sufficient."

Yu Xuan laughed loudly: "Lord Ouyang must be joking."

He suddenly stopped laughing and said: "Let us be honest! If your present is not suitable how would you even dare considering presenting it. Furthermore I think this object is most adequate too."

Ouyang Long's face changed and asked: "You know what it is?"

Yu Xuan said casually: "Well, I think I have a vague idea."

Ouyang Long said sternly: "So you were spying on me the entire time!"

Yu Xuan said: "Lord Ouyang, on your way here you met with no trouble at all not even a small thief. Do you honestly believe because you have disguised yourself perfectly?"

He laughed arrogantly: "Let us not even mention thieves even laymen can see that you are not transporting herbs. Heavy herbs like this do not exist."

Ouyang Long sneered: "Even if there were small thieves who would consider attacking me, I am still quite capable of dealing with those."

Yu Xuan said: "I helped lord Ouyang chase away numerous of unwelcomed thugs, even if you're not grateful you should at least show a bit of consideration for my hard work."

He laughed: "I think lord Ouyang won't object if I want some repayment for my efforts."

Ouyang Long was stunned and knew what Yu Xuan wanted from him. He asked earnestly: "Master Yu wants this carriage."

Yu Xuan sighed: "I wish there was another option, but unfortunately there isn't."

Ouyang Long said: "Allright, I will give it to you."

He pushed the carriage forward and wanted to use it to bump into Yu Xuan.

Yu Xuan anticipated that and leapt up and in mid-air he drew his sword and stabbed towards Ouyang Long with incredible speed.

Yu Xuan is proclaimed to be the best swordsman of the Southern Sea regions, all his moves were conducted with lightning speed. Ouyang Long put his hand on his shoulder and ripped open his rain robe and used it to curl it up and blocked that stance. This rain robe of his was made from the silk spun by golden silkworms, swords and sabre cannot punch a hole through it. It was his weapon in combat, it was not handy in assaults but excellent when used to defend oneself. The sword stabbed a few times on the robe causing sparks.

Ouyang Long twirled the robe again and swept it towards Yu Xuan and right behind the robe he flung ten odd metallic objects towards Yu Xuan's chest.

One of Ouyang Long's lethal stances, Golden Robe Followed By The Iron Swallow. Ever since Ouyang Long started to roam the realm few have been able to avoid this attack of his.

However suddenly Yu Xuan's body was not in front of him anymore and the sword of Yu Xuan's also made a twirl and before he could turn around the sword pierced through his back.

This was a famous technique from the Hainan School called The Flying Fish Move, Yu Xuan has mastered this technique to perfection.

Ouyang Long was a famous martial artist on the waters, perhaps he should have stayed there. As the saying goes if the dragon leaves the sea, he might perish on the land.

Yu Peiyu was also surprised that Ouyang Long could not even handle three stances of Yu Xuan. He was wondering whether he should interfere but when he was still doubting Ouyang Long was already killed.

Yu Xuan pulled out his sword and said softly: "Lord Ouyang, I really did not want to kill you. But if I don't kill you I will surely meet death. You should not blame me, you should blame eighth squire Fu."

He started to push the carriage himself.

Suddenly a voice said: "You should really learn to share... I take carriage you can have the corpse."

When the first word was uttered the person was about 40 metres away but when the final word was said, the speaker was standing in front of Yu Xuan.

While he advanced forward Yu Peiyu and Yu Xuan heard a soft bell sound. Yu Peiyu could not see this man clearly, but Yu Xuan backed away and it looked like he shrunk when he saw this man.

This man moved like a spirit and was very tall, but he had a lump on his back. When Yu Peiyu saw the fear Yu Xuan showed towards this man and the sound of the bells and the posture, he remembered something.

When the bells of the hunchback are sounded, you will perish right away.

Could this man be one of the ten great martial arts masters along with Yinghua Shi-Tai, divine dragon swordsman, granny Hu, master Nu, etc. the flying hunchback of the north Yi Kun?

Yu Xuan smiled apologetically: "I have heard of old master Yi's fame for many years, it is most fortunate that I can finally meet you."

Yi Kun ignored him and had his eyes on the carriage, Yu Xuan deliberately stood in front of the carriage hoping to block Yi Kun from seeing it.

Suddenly Yi Kun moved forward and passed Yu Xuan he removed the packages of herbs and was holding a metal box in his hand.

Yu Xuan's eyes were fuming with anger but he did not dare to advance forward to reclaim the box.

Yi Kun opened the box and took a look, he laughed: "Excellent, marvelous!"

Yu Xuan smiled apologetically: "Not good, not excellent. These are mere silly stone statues, even I cannot see anything special about them. Why would old master Yi like such rubbish?"

Yi Kun laughed: "In that case you won't mind me keeping them."

Yu Xuan now could not even smile apologetically, he stuttered: "These... these are really not worth anything... if... if old master Yi really likes them... I... I will instruct the best sculptor of Beijing to make another set... no better than this set for you... completely made from... from jade."

Yi Kun said: "No need, I like these."

Yu Xuan wiped away his sweat and said: "But... but... "

Yi Kun looked at him and said sternly: "I hardly want anything in life, now that I do how dare you spoil my mood! Are you only afraid of old Fu's Hundred Paces Divine Fist, so you're not afraid of my Wind Chasing Palms?"

Yu Xuan was sweating like a pig now, he was looking at the sword in his hand, he was wondering whether he should attack or not.

Yi Kun smiled coldly: "I heard that your swordsmanship is said to be very swift. There must be a reason why you are the leader of the Hainan School, you must know a few monkey tricks... Come, show me what tricks you have learnt."

Yu Xuan gritted his teeth and said: "In that case forgive me for being rude."

He stabbed out with everything he had, during this point he could not hold back. In an instant his sword almost reached the throat of Yi Kun, Yi Kun seemed to be oblivious to the sword and did not pay any attention to it.

Yu Xuan was pleased and thought this old fool is too confident, in a flash Yi Kun raised his hand and used his index- and middle finger to hold the blade of the sword.

Yu Xuan was shocked and wanted to twirl the sword as to slice off the fingers of Yi Kun, however the sword could not move an inch. He used his full power hoping to pull out his sword again, but in vain. He could hear the laughter of Yi Kun, he used a bit more force and Yu Xuan was pushed back and Yi Kun was holding the sword now. He used a bit more energy and the sword broke into two. The sword was made from fine metal, it was amazing that he could break without much force.

Yi Kun laughed: "Old Fu's birthday is in two days, but it is my birthday tomorrow. I just learnt the same method as old Fu, forcing people to give me presents. If you refuse I will kill you, it is your choice."

Yu Xuan looked awfully pale and could not speak anymore.

Another voice suddenly laughed: "It is your birthday tomorrow, but today is my birthday. So shouldn't you give that present to me?"

A young man gracefully walked down from the slope, his robe was torn and dirty. But he did not look ordinary at all, it was Yu Peiyu.

Yi Kun was shocked that he did notice that another person had arrived, furthermore it has been decades since someone had the nerves to retort him, he looked at the speaker and angrily said: "Give it to you? Who are you?"

Yu Peiyu smiled: "My name is Yu Peiyu, people call me the world's number one graceful swordsman."

Before he was finished Yi Kun laughed loudly: "The world's number one graceful swordsman?... hahahahaha I have met many arrogant people in my life, but you are the most arrogant one I have ever seen."

Yu Xuan was surprised too and thought it was funny but he could not laugh now.

Yu Peiyu walked over to Yi Kun and now he noticed he was very tall, even with a hunchback he was taller than Yu Peiyu half a head. He was not really a Taoist priest, nonetheless he wore a Taoist robe. He was at least 60 years old and had a long beard. His laughter was loud and clear, everyone's ears felt a bit numb, not only had this man swift techniques his internal power was also incredible. No wonder that the famous leader of the Hainan School was unable to withstand a single stance from him.

However it seems that Yu Peiyu was not really impressed by him, he smiled gently: "I am just like you, when I do not receive my present I will get extremely angry too."

Yi Kun stopped laughing and carefully observed this young man like he was some strange creature. After some time he started to laugh again: "Angry? I would like to see you angry!"

Yu Peiyu said: "Very well."

With the tip of his foot he kicked up half the sword of Yu Xuan and caught with his hand and immediately launched an attack on Yi Kun.

Yu Xuan was most surprised that this young man was so bold as to attack one of the ten great martial arts masters, Yi Kun. That sword stance of his was gentle and elusive, without any force at all and also very slow.

As a matter of fact that stance is worthless and Yu Xuan was convinced that Yi Kun could blast that sword from his hand with one blow.

However when Yi Kun saw that attack he paced back with three steps and shouted strangely: "Good! I never expected that a young lad like you has some abilities!"

Yu Xuan was stunned, how could an attack like that be called [good]?

His attacks were not fast, but they followed each other fluently without openings. After ten odd of these attacks Yi Kun still did not counter-attack yet.

Yu Xuan was a famous swordsman too but after looking for some time he did not see the power of these slow techniques. He did not even see what stances he used.

Yi Kun kept praising Yu Peiyu: "Good lad! People like you could be called swordsmen with some difficulty, you are ten times better than those so-called worthless idiots who do not understand the essence of the sword. Yet they are called swordsmen and are leaders of orthodox schools, your nickname as the world's number one swordsman is not entirely too arrogant."

Although Yi Kun did not use a name but it was evident his sarcasm was directed towards Yu Xuan.

Yu Xuan was furious but did not dare to retort but could not leave it at that so he scoffed softly. He thought that Yi Kun could not see his scoffing, but Yi Kun could see everything and hear everything around him even in a fight ten times fiercer than this.

He suddenly floated towards him and said: “Why are you laughing? Do you think your swordsmanship is better than this young man?”

Yu Xuan could not restrain himself anymore and said: “I really cannot see the power of his swordsmanship.”

Yi Kun sneered: “If you can understand the excellence of his stances, his swordsmanship wouldn't be that good, right? For example like the great historical musician Bo Ya³⁴, his unmatched play of the zither can only be admired by other true musicians. Simple riff-raff would not understand the beauty of it.”

Yu Xuan was furious when he heard that, he even forgot that Yu Peiyu helped him out here. He aimed his fists towards Yu Peiyu's chest and struck out with two fist techniques.

Yu Peiyu did not foresee that this man was as stubborn as a mule and saw that his fists were very fierce, he casually twirled his sword to block those two fists.

That twirl looked very gentle and casual, but like Wang Xizhi³⁵ or Huaisu³⁶ even a simple stroke with the brush has reached the level of excellence and perfection.

Yu Xuan felt that his half sword became a circle of sword energy, impenetrable he himself was about to throw himself in that circle of sword energy. He had no choice but to break off his attack and retreat. He changed several movements and was finally able to escape from that sword energy, however a flash of energy did slightly pass him although he was not injured but his robe was torn.

Yi Kun laughed: “Now do you understand the excellence of his techniques?”

³⁴ Bo Ya: A wonderful musician who lived in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) has been proclaimed to play the zither perfectly. Even attracting animals...

³⁵ Wang Xizhi: famous calligrapher, 303 A.D. - 361 A.D. His calligraphy is said be unmatched everyone even now still admires his characters.

³⁶ Huaisu: A Buddhist monk who lived in the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) renowned for his excellent calligraphy.

Yu Xuan looked very pale suddenly he turned red from embarrassment and bowed to Yu Peiyu, he said: "Your swordsmanship is far superior to mine, my respects."

Yi Kun said: "Well, you're not entirely worthless. You know when to acknowledge your faults when you are confronted with it."

Yu Xuan said: "I have heard of a young man with the same name as the late son of chancellor Yu Fanghe, in a short period of three months he has done several great deeds."

Yu Peiyu smiled: "News travels fast in Wulin."

Yu Xuan said: "It is said that young master Yu has good martial arts and is very gentle, humble. Furthermore he is very cautious..."

Yi Kun laughed: "Well, in my opinion everyone could be called gentle, humble but not this youngster here."

Yu Peiyu said: "Hmm?"

Yi Kun smiled: "Someone who calls himself [the world's number one graceful swordsman] cannot be called gentle and humble, can he?"

Yu Peiyu said: "You are very right."

Yi Kun said: "Your swordsmanship is very good, but you're still no match for me."

Yu Peiyu said: "Yes, I won't lose in the initial 300 stances but I cannot win either."

Yi Kun said: "If you can't win, that means you will lose. After the initial 300 stances you will lose. Besides you seem to want to battle me, how can such a person be called cautious."

Yu Peiyu laughed a bit: "Everyone changes, the I you see before you is not the same Yu Peiyu of yesterday."

Yi Kun asked: "Now, why do want to change?"

Yu Peiyu stayed quiet for some time before saying: "I want to become very famous now."

Yi Kun said: "People are afraid to become famous and pigs are afraid to become fat, haven't you heard of this saying before? If you're famous a lot of people will be looking for you, that way you won't live very long. There is nothing good about being famous."

Yu Peiyu smiled: "I want people to look for me."

Yi Kun shook his head and said: "Listen to my advice, go home and peacefully spend your life in recluse. I like you, young lad. I won't harm you today."

Yu Peiyu said: "If you give me that box, I will leave at once."

Yi Kun stared at him and asked: "Do you know what is in it?"

Yu Peiyu said: "I do not know."

Yi Kun asked: "Why do you want it?"

Yu Peiyu answered: "For no reason."

Yi Kun was stunned and asked with surprise: "If there is no reason, why do you want it?"

Yu Peiyu said: "Since all of you want it that much, why can't I have it."

Yi Kun looked a bit angry and said slowly: "So you deliberately want to look for trouble here."

The two of them were fighting again.

Yu Xuan thought that Yu Peiyu was mad, he hoped both would perish at each other's hand in this fight that way he could reclaim the box again.

He decided to observe the fight and hope to gain the advantage in the end. However after some time Yu Peiyu's sword energy became weaker but the stances of Yi Kun became fiercer and fiercer.

Yi Kun still had the iron box under his arm-pit and it seemed that he did not fight Yu Peiyu with full potential.

Yu Xuan wondered why Yu Peiyu deliberately sought death.

It was obvious now that within moments Yi Kun could defeat Yu Peiyu, but suddenly Yu Peiyu moved forward and whispered something to Yi Kun. Yu Xuan could not hear what Yu Peiyu whispered, but Yi Kun turned pale and made a somersault backwards.

He was now standing seven metres away from Yu Peiyu and stared at him with fear, he was also trembling.

Why was Yi Kun so afraid now?

Yu Xuan was flabbergasted too.

After a long time Yi Kun stuttered: "You... you... who... who... are you? How... how do you... you know this?"

Yu Peiyu just calmly looked at him and did not reply.

Yi Kun was sweating heavily now.

Again after a long time, Yi Kun sighed deeply: “29 years... 29 years. In another 17 days it will be exactly 29 years. I never thought that people would still know about this after 29 years... who would have guessed?”

Yu Peiyu said: “Have you forgotten about that?”

Yi Kun said sadly: “I wish I could forget about it, but I can never forget what happened.”

Yu Peiyu said: “Since you cannot forget about it, how can others?”

Yi Kun said: “But... but... how... not many people know about that incident.”

Yu Peiyu said: “If you do not wish people to find out about that, you should not have done that in the first place... I know about it.”

Yi Kun asked with a shaky voice: “Are... are... you related to that incident?”

Yu Peiyu said casually: “Everyone with a conscience and a heart is related to that incident.”

Yi Kun looked up into the sky and said softly: “I know I have to pay for that mistake sooner or later... it has come back to haunt me now, after 29 years...”

He suddenly turned to Yu Peiyu and said fiercely: “I don't care who you are, but I just want you to know that Yi Kun is not a person who is afraid to pay for his mistakes.”

Yu Peiyu said: “I do not want you to pay for that mistake, I just want you to repent for that incident.”

Yi Kun laughed loudly: “If I did not repent for that mistake, I could have killed you now. So nobody might find out about that incident.”

He put the iron box down on the ground, he sighed deeply before saying sadly: “One mistake you will live to regret if for a thousand years, looking back a hundred years are not enough... a hundred years are not enough...”

He suddenly raised his palm and struck himself on the skull.

Yu Peiyu softly recited the final words of Yi Kun and suddenly he felt very sad and earnest.

A mistake made in an instant and it keeps haunting one for the rest of one's life. It is not fair and even wicked. If Yi Kun did not feel remorse he would not have committed suicide. Since he did feel remorse why can't we forgive him?

Yu Peiyu was saddened and said softly: "I was wrong... I am wrong..."

Yu Xuan was complete dumbfounded by what happened, he now asked Yu Peiyu: "What did he do 29 years ago?"

Yu Peiyu looked at him and said sternly: "Shouldn't you be wondering what you have done?"

Yu Xuan said: "Me?"

Yu Peiyu said: "Just for a few stone figures you killed Ouyang Long."

Yu Xuan said: "If I don't kill him I will die. So I have no choice but to kill him, if he killed me I have no regrets either. The survival of the strongest that is the universal rule of the realm of martial arts, we as people of Wulin face death numerous times and from the very beginning you should know that you might get killed some day."

Yu Peiyu sighed: "Maybe you are right, we as people of the martial arts realm should not place so much emphasis on life. But if that is the case why are... are you afraid of eighth squire Fu?"

Yu Xuan's face turned red now, he said: "I am not afraid of death, but I am afraid of ghosts."

Yu Peiyu asked: "Is he a ghost?"

Yu Xuan sighed: "In my opinion he is even worse than a ghost."

He added sadly: "His family name is Fu, everyone says secretly he is [the rich bastard], but nobody of course dares to say that in his face. Once the golden sabre, Chen Xiong of Luoyang blurted out this nickname, when he stepped out of the main hall of the Fu estate he started to vomit blood..."

Yu Peiyu suddenly asked: "Does he have a wife, name eighth Madame Fu?"

Yu Xuan said: "Yes, it is said that eighth Madame Fu is an exemplary wife, gentle and caring. She is also a faithful Buddhist and hates to see killing, that is why eighth squire Fu kills people outside his residence."

Yu Peiyu looked pensive for a moment, suddenly he said softly: "Now, I... I remember now."

Yu Xuan asked: "What do you remember?"

Yu Peiyu smiled but did not answer his question, he said: "He is a very funny man, I would like to meet him."

Yu Xuan said: "My word! Funny?!? You say he is funny, my heaven! When you see him you won't find him funny anymore."

He now looked at the box and said sternly with a pale face: "There is only one present here, if you want to go..."

Yu Peiyu said: "You deliver your present, I do as I please."

Yu Xuan said: "But without a present how... how do you want to enter?"

Yu Peiyu said with a smile: "I don't need to bring a present, I will pretend to be your servant. It is not strange that a prestigious leader of a great orthodox schools is travelling with a servant."

The Elegant Assembly Estate, that was the home of eighth squire Fu. Many thrifty, greedy rich people like to consider themselves as elegant, refined. This Elegant Assembly Estate is not different from other manors from rich people, however how much space does one need after one is gone.

But the most strangest thing when you enter this estate is seeing servants, a lot servants in green robes. All seem to know martial arts but all of them walk like women.

A short and a tall servant approached Yu Xuan and Yu Peiyu, the short servant looked very white but had a few pimples on his face, he kept giving Yu Peiyu meaningful looks. It seems he was trying to flirt with Yu Peiyu, Yu Peiyu had received a lot of those meaningful looks but this was the first time a man gave him one.

He felt disgusted the way these two servants were staring at him, he wanted to poke out their eyes.

The tall servant put his hand on his waist and said in a feminine way to Yu Xuan: "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

If it was not for the moustache you would almost think he was a woman.

Yu Xuan coughed dryly: "I am Yu Xuan from Hainan, I came here to congratulate eighth squire Fu."

The tall servant used his hand to cover his mouth and laughed: "You're the great leader of the Hainan School, master Yu. Where is your present?"

Yu Xuan said: "The present has been prepared, would you mind announcing me?"

The tall servant looked at Yu Peiyu and said: "Who is this and what is he doing here?" His awful feminine voice really got on one's nerves, one would love to smack his teeth out of his mouth.

But the ever so hot-headed Yu Xuan respectfully said: "He is Yu Er, he is a servant of mine. Please take good care of him while he is here."

The tall servant giggled: "Yu Er... He looks very handsome, does he have wife?"

The short servant suddenly took Yu Peiyu by the hand and giggled too: "Master Yu can join our lordship's feast, brother Yu Er can drink with us."

The hand of the short servant was greasy and wet, like someone put slime on the hand of Yu Peiyu and he could not wipe it away.

Yu Peiyu could almost throw up now.

Fortunately someone called from the main hall: "Our lordship says master Yu can enter, please come in with the present."

Yu Xuan said hurriedly: "Yes... yes... right away."

He started walking inside after two paces he said: "Yu Er, why are you standing there? Follow me inside!"

Yu Peiyu felt relieved and was grateful that Yu Xuan helped him to escape from those two admirers.

The short servant seemed not too willing to let go of Yu Peiyu and said: "Don't forget to look for me afterwards, I'm called Little Clever."

Yu Peiyu thought this little creep is called [Little Clever]???!!??

Yu Peiyu wanted to kick him away from himself, he felt disgusted also quite amused by this. He said something back like I will see later on or so and quickly followed Yu Xuan in.

There were already eight, nine other guests sitting here, all of them looked quite impressive. They must be leaders of prominent martial arts experts, but they were looking worried now.

Sitting at the head were eighth squire Fu and his wife eighth Madame Fu. The infamous eighth squire Fu was a strange looking old man. His eyes were just ordinary eyes, his nose was at the right place, in fact he looked very normal but somehow he made people feel uncomfortable when they saw him.

The wife of his looked like an elderly rich lady, but she wore a lot of make-up too much in fact. But it was only natural, women who have reached a certain age love to cover the liver spots and wrinkles with make-up.

Yu Xuan who did not want to look like a coward in front of the other guest tried to keep his grandeur, however unsuccessful before he knew it himself he bowed and said: "This humble person is Yu Xuan of Hainan, I wish you a pleasant birthday and may you live another thousand years lordship."

Eight squire Fu smiled a bit: "Yes, thank you for coming today even living so far away."

Like the servants his voice sounded feminine too, making everyone uncomfortable again.

He opened the box and took it the marble figurines, he looked very happy now and admired those figures with beady eyes. He kept saying [nice, good, great craftsmanship].

He patted Yu Xuan on the shoulder and laughed: "Great! Thank you for this wonderful present, please take a seat here at the honorary seat. The efforts you have gone through to bring me this present, thank you very much."

Yu Xuan was thrilled in his heart the other nine martial arts experts looked a bit upset. But that was the rule here eighth swuire Fu only lets the guest with best present sit at the honorary seat, it does not matter whether whether you are older or more famous but the present are most important.

Every guest was either the leader of the a prominent martial arts school, association or armed guard agency, so all the presents were invaluable.

One person presented 18 pearls as big as lychees the sizes of each pearl was identical to each other. The pearls would give light in dark places.

One presented a jade cup with nine dragons carved on it, during humid air the cup would emit clouds and fogs and when the weather turned better the clouds and fog would disappear. When plain water is poured in it, it will have the flavour of a fine wine.

Some of these treasure were so rare that the Imperial Palace might not have them, all the leaders were initially not to happy to give away their prized treasures but keeping their lives was even more important. Furthermore they wanted to show off their riches in front of the other martial arts experts, nobody understood why those stone figures got eighth squire Fu's attention.

By this time everyone felt hungry and wondered when the dinner was going to be served, they did not even had a cup of tea ever since they arrived.

Eighth squire Fu seems to have intention of letting his guest eat now, he looked like he had fallen asleep.

Fortunately eighth Madame Fu was aware of the hunger of their guests, she called the servants and said: "It is not time to eat yet, but all of our esteemed guests have come from afar they must be hungry. Go to the kitchen and let them eat some pasty first."

Everyone was pleased when they heard that, suddenly they thought that eighth Madame Fu looked quite pretty and young for her age.

After awhile servants came out with big plates and when they put the plates in front of the guest, everyone was disappointed. The so-called pasty were buns with some salted vegetables in it, just plain big buns.

However everyone was hungry and the buns looked quite tasty when you are feeling hungry.

Eighth Madame Fu smiled with difficulty: "I am sorry, but please bear with us. I do not know when my husband will wake up but please help yourself to these buns."

Most of these guests hardly even touched buns normally why should they even they can have feasts, but since dinner is postponed indefinitely some helped themselves to those buns.

Yu Peiyu was both angry and amused when he saw this, but he worried about eighth Madame Fu's laughter. He was worried her make-up might drop off when she was laughing, fortunately she put layers and layers on it.

The salted vegetables made everyone extremely thirsty and those ate the buns started to drink water cup after cup. But because of water the dough rose in their stomachs and in an instant those who ate were full and stuffed.

Those who did not eat thought: I will eat later one when the good food is served, those idiots have stuffed themselves.

After a moment eighth squire Fu woke up and called repeatedly: "Quickly serve the food and drinks! We cannot keep the guests hungry."

Some of the guests thought: Those who ate those buns are idiots, the banquet is being served now.

When the servants came out the brought big plates of delicious dishes fit for kings and emperors, the wine was also of a good vintage. In an instant the aroma of the food and wine filled the main hall, those who ate the buns regretted stuffing themselves.

Eighth squire Fu suddenly said: "Wine is bad for our health, when Di Yi created wine the Yellow Emperor said that wine could very well be the cause of the

destruction of empires. Wine is truly poisonous I cannot let my esteemed guests drink from poison. Impossible... impossible.”

He waved his hand and added: “Put the wine back and give my esteemed guests water flavoured with sugar, but don't put too much sugar because sugar is bad for the teeth.”

Those who enjoyed wine were disappointed and angry that this old goat is this thrifty.

Eighth squire Fu poured himself a cup of wine and said softly: “I am old... I have lived long enough, even if I die of this poison called wine I will not mind. Here let us drink! Thank you my good friends for coming to my birthday.”