

Chapter

5

A NOVEL BY JIN YONG

---

Crooked Bow, Shooting Condors

# Legend of the Condor Heroes

TRANSLATED BY

Moinllieon at wuxiapediā dot com

(Minglei Huang)

Strunf at wuxiapediā dot com

Re-edited by Duguqiubai 

---

---



Temujin smiled, aimed his bow and shot an arrow of iron that, like the lightning, slicing through the body of a black eagle. The crowd applauded. The Khan then gave his bow to Ogedai. "It's your turn!"

---

## Crooked Bow, Shooting Condors

**A** row of people came down the mountain. After walking for a while, they suddenly heard the roars of wild beasts in front of them. Han BaoJu leapt on his yellow horse, and went to see what was happening. After galloping for a while, the yellow horse suddenly stopped and no amount of urging would make it move.

Knowing in his heart that there was something strange ahead, he stood in the stirrups and looked into the distance; he could see a group of people with some leopards clawing at the earth. Knowing the yellow horse's fear of leopards, he jumped off and took hold of his 'Golden Dragon Whip'. Moving forward, he saw that the two leopards had uncovered a body. Continuing forward a few more steps, he saw that the body was that of 'Copper Corpse' Chen XuanFeng. The area from his collar bone to his lower abdomen was a blood covered mess, as though the skin had been sliced off.

Surprised, he thought, "He was killed by the boy last night with a dagger thrust through his navel, so why is his corpse here? Since he is already dead, why would anyone do this to his corpse? Who did it and what is the meaning behind it? Do the 'Twin Killers of the Dark Winds' have another enemy in the desert with hatred that strong?"

Not long after, Zhu Cong and the others arrived. No one could understand the reason behind the mutilation. They looked at Chen XuanFeng's corpse, whose face still showed a fierce expression, which caused a quick shiver of fear in everyone. Thinking back to last night's terrifying fight on the barren hills, they knew, that if not for Guo Jing's lucky hit with his dagger, the outcome might have been very different. Just thinking about it brought a chill to their hearts.

By this time, the two leopards were chewing on the corpse. To one side, there was a little boy on a horse loudly urging the leopard handlers to drag the leopards away.

Turning his head, he saw Guo Jing, and shouted to him “Ha! So you are hiding here. You didn’t have the guts to help Tolui fight, what a useless friend!” It was Senggum’s son Dukhsh.

“You all fought Tolui again? Where is he?” worried, Guo Jing asked.

“I’m taking the leopards to eat him up. You’d better surrender now, or else I will include you too,” Dukhsh replied smugly. He had seen the ‘Six Freaks of the South’ at one side, if not for them, Dukhsh would have already sent the leopards to attack Guo Jing.

Guo Jing persisted, “Where is Tolui?”

Ignoring him, Dukhsh shouted loudly, “The leopards will eat Tolui now!”, as he led the leopard handlers away. One leopard handler advised him, “Little master, that boy is Temujin Khan’s son.” Dukhsh immediately hit the leopard handler with a slash of his riding whip, shouting, “What is there to be afraid of? How dare he raise his hand to hit me today? Move aside!” The leopard handler, not daring to disobey his order, followed Dukhsh. The other leopard handler was afraid that this might cause some irreversible problems; he turned and ran, shouting, “I’m going to inform Temujin Khan.” He was gone before Dukhsh could stop him. Dukhsh said bitterly, “Fine, by the time Uncle Temujin comes, it’ll be too late! Then we’ll see what kind of solution he comes up with.” He whipped his horse, forcing the group to move faster.

Although Guo Jing was terribly afraid of leopards, he was more worried about his sworn brother’s safety. He said to Han XiaoYing, “Master, Dukhsh is going to get the leopards to eat my sworn brother. I need to inform him so he can escape.”

“If you hurry there, may be the leopards might eat you too? Aren’t you afraid?” Han XiaoYing asked.

He replied, “I’m afraid.”

“Are you still going?”

After hesitating for a split-second, Guo Jing affirmed, “I’m still going!” before running away rapidly.

Because Zhu Cong’s wound was still painful, he was quietly lying forward on his horse’s neck. Noting Guo Jing’s chivalrous heart, he mused, “This child may not be very smart, but he is, nevertheless, a person worthy of our generation.”

Han XiaoYing replied, “Fourth Brother’s perception is right! Let’s go save them.”

Quan JinFa cautioned the rest, “This little lord keeps leopards at home; he must be the son of an important general. We’d better be careful not to create trouble, since three of us are injured.”

Han BaoJu used his lightness kung fu to catch, pick up, and place Guo Jing on his shoulders. Although Han BaoJu is small with short legs, he can still move very quickly. For Guo Jing, sitting on his fat and sturdy shoulders was like riding on a good war horse, fast and steady. Han BaoJu rushed to ‘Wind Chaser’s’ side, and with a great leap, he took Guo Jing with him onto the horse’s back. Within moments, they caught up with Dukhsh and the leopard handlers. After a short gallop, they saw ten or more kids surrounding Tolui. It was Dukhsh’s gang following his orders. They were not trying to attack him, just trying to keep Tolui from leaving.

Having been taught three skillful moves by Zhu Cong, Tolui had practiced the moves that night until he was familiar with them all. Come morning, he was not able to find Guo Jing or to get his Third Brother Ogedai to help him. Tolui bravely went to fight Dukhsh by himself. Dukhsh had brought along ten or so reinforcements. Seeing him alone rather surprised him. When Tolui requested that they only fight one on one and not attack him as a group, Dukhsh agreed immediately. He thought that there’s no way Tolui could beat him. But once they started fighting, Tolui kept using the three moves that Zhu Cong taught him, and incredibly, he managed to best Dukhsh. Although the three moves that Zhu Cong taught him were simple, they were actually the essence of the ‘Vacant Fist’ technique. Furthermore, since these three moves had no complicated changes, Tolui, being very smart, picked it up immediately. So when he used them, the other Mongolian kids were no match for him. The Mongolians place great importance on keeping promises. Since they had agreed to battle one on one only and even though they were upset, they could not do anything about it. Tolui made Dukhsh fall twice, and even hit him on the nose. Dukhsh was furious, so he ran off to get his father’s hunting leopards.

After single handedly winning against so many kids, Tolui was very proud of himself. That was why he stood quietly in the center of the surrounding kids, not even thinking about running away. Unknown to him, big trouble was coming.

From the distance, Tolui heard Guo Jing’s faint shouts, “Tolui, Tolui, run away now. Dukhsh is bringing his leopards to eat you up!”

Tolui was shocked and tried to rush out of the circle. But the kids surrounding him kept blocking him; there was no way for him to escape. Soon the ‘Six

Freaks of the South', together with Dukhsh, arrived one after the other. Following them, the leopard handlers led the leopards there. Though the 'Six Freaks of the South' could have prevented the oncoming danger by catching Dukhsh, they did not want to create more trouble. They also wanted to see how Tolui and Guo Jing faced the danger, so they did not offer any help.

Suddenly, they heard sound of numerous horses coming like the wind. Someone shouted at the top of their lungs, "Don't let the leopards go, don't let go of the leopards!" Muqali, Boroqul and the rest of the 'Four Aces' had arrived. When they heard the leopard handler's report, they didn't have enough time to inform Temujin, and hurriedly rushed to the scene. Temujin, Ong Khan, Jamuka, Senggum and the others were at the Mongolian camp chatting with Wanyan HongLie and his brother. Hearing the leopard handler's report, they were shocked and ran out of the ger and leapt on their horses.

"Quickly inform them that I order Dukhsh not to do this. It is important that Temujin Khan's son is not injured," Ong Khan ordered. His men rode their most spirited horses to where the trouble was.

Because Wanyan HongXi was not able to see the leopards fighting against men yesterday, he was still feeling bored. Hearing this, he felt excitement rise and stood up exclaiming, "Let's all go take a look!"

Wanyan HongLie speculated, "If Senggum's leopards really kill Temujin's son, then their families will no longer be friendly. After that happens, they may start fighting. Who knows, maybe both sides will suffer terrible losses and be severely weakened. That will definitely be good fortune for my Jin country!"

The Wanyan brothers, Ong Khan, Senggum, Jamuka and the others arrived at the scene, only to see that the two hunting leopards' chains had already been unfastened. The leopards crouched on the ground with low growling noises coming from their throats. In front of the leopards stood two kids, Tolui and his younger sworn brother Guo Jing. Temujin and his 'Four Aces' raised their bows and pointed them at the leopards; they were ready for action. Although Temujin saw his youngest son in a dangerous situation, he also knew that those two hunting leopards were very precious to Senggum. Senggum had caught the leopards when they were young; he reared and trained them until they grew strong and ferocious. Since that could not be achieved easily and took much time, Temujin felt that if the leopards did not attack, he wouldn't harm them.

Seeing the crowd arriving and relying on his grandfather's and father's adoration for him, Dukhsh felt even more courageous. He kept urging the leopards to attack.

Ong Khan then shouted, "Stop this now!"

The sounds hooves were heard as someone riding a red horse arrived. On the horse was a middle-aged woman, clad in leopard fur, and in her arms, a little girl. It was Temujin's wife, Tolui's mother.

She had been chatting in the camp with Senggum's wife. When she heard the news, she immediately rushed out with her daughter Hua Zheng. Seeing the danger, she was both shocked and worried. She shouted "Quickly, shoot the arrow!" With all her being focused on her son, she absentmindedly placed her daughter on the ground, forgetting about her safety.

As a little girl of four years, how was Hua Zheng supposed to know of the leopard's ferocious nature? She happily bounded over to her brother's side. Spotting the leopards with their pretty colored fur, she was reminded of her Second Brother Ogedai's hunting dogs. She stretched her hand out, wanting to pat the leopard's head. The crowd was startled, and yelled at her to stop; but it was already too late. The two leopards, already nervous and agitated, growled at the same time, and leapt forward fiercely. Alarmed, the crowd called out in distress.

Although Temujin had already aimed his arrow, Hua Zheng's sudden appearance was something that no one had expected. In the blink of an eye, the leopards were in the air. Hua Zheng was blocking Temujin's aim at the strategic spot on the leopard's head where they have to be hit to ensure an instant kill. A shot by Temujin now would only injure the leopard, and that would aggravate it further. The 'Four Aces' threw down their bows and drew their knives. As they moved forward, they saw Guo Jing roll forward to pick up Hua Zheng; at the same time one leopard's front claws was on Guo Jing's shoulder. The 'Four Aces' raised their knives, only to hear several faint sounds. When the noises passed, the two leopards suddenly fell growling and rolling from side to side. After a short time they were motionless.

Boroquul went forward to find out what had happened. He saw blood running from the leopards' foreheads. It was obvious that a kung fu master had used a hidden weapon to hit the leopards' brains. He turned around and saw six calm, composed Han people standing to one side watching the on-going scene. He knew that the hidden weapons had been thrown by them. Temujin's wife hurriedly picked up the now bawling Hua Zheng from Guo Jing's arms and pulled Tolui to her bosom as she tried to comfort Hua Zheng.

Senggum asked angrily, "Who killed the leopards?"

The crowd remained silent and no one answered. Ke Zhen'E had heard the leopards' growls, and fearing that the leopards would harm Guo Jing, had thrown four projectiles with poisonous tips. Since that action only took a wave

of the hand, and since everyone had their eyes focused on the leopards, there was no one who actually saw who fired them.

Temujin smiled and said, “Brother Senggum, I’ll repay you with four good leopards when we get back, and I’ll add eight pairs of black eagles.”

Senggum was seething with anger when he heard that, but he remained silent. By now, Ong Khan was angrily scolding Dukhsh. Humiliated at receiving this treatment in front of the crowd, he tried to deflect the blame from himself. In a fit of temper he lay down on the ground and began rolling and hitting, crying and shouting. Ong Khan loudly commanded him to stop, but he did not care.

Because Temujin was still grateful for what Ong Khan had done for him in the past, he felt that it would be a pity to break up the two families’ friendship over such a small matter. He smiled and bent over to pick up Dukhsh. Dukhsh was still crying and yelling and tried his best to struggle, but could not. Still smiling, Temujin tried to salvage the situation, “Step-father, the kids were only playing, there’s no need to get worked up. I think he is a good boy and I’m thinking of betrothing my daughter to him. What do you think?”

Ong Khan saw that Hua Zheng had eyes like glistening dew, and skin like a baby lamb, fair and cute, and felt happy in his heart. Laughingly, he said, “What could be wrong with that? Let’s have an even closer relationship; I’ll betroth my eldest granddaughter to your son Jochi.”

Temujin agreed, “Thanks Step-father!” He turned around and said to Senggum, “Brother Senggum, we are now in-laws!”

Senggum had always felt that he was of a higher status than Temujin. He was already jealous of Temujin, yet looked down on him. Although he was not happy about becoming in-laws with Temujin, he could not go against his father’s wishes. He could only smile weakly.

At this point, Wanyan HongLie noticed the ‘Six Freaks of the South’, and he was shocked. “What are they doing here? I’m sure they are chasing me. I wonder if the temperamental Taoist priest with the surname Qiu is around here as well?” he asked himself. Since he currently had the protection of numerous soldiers, he was not afraid of them. But if he gave the command to capture them, he was afraid that it might cause trouble. The ‘Six Freaks’ were listening to Temujin’s and the others’ conversations and had not even noticed him. He turned and moved behind the crowd of soldiers, while at the same time thinking of ways to handle the matter. As for Ong Khan and Temujin’s families’ engagement, he did not think much of it.

Temujin knew that it was the ‘Six Freaks of the South’ that saved his daughter’s life, and he waited for Ong Khan and the others to leave, before commanding Boroqul to reward them richly with furs and gold. He then reached his hand out to stroke the top of Guo Jing’s head and repeatedly praised him for his courage and valor. Temujin said that risking his own life to save another, is something that not all adults will do, much less a small child. When he asked Guo Jing why was he so brave, Guo Jing just stood there dumbly since he could not find an answer. After pondering for some time, he said, “Leopards will eat people.”

Hearing that, Temujin laughed loudly. Tolui then told why he started fighting with Dukhsh. When Temujin heard how Dukhsh kept mentioning embarrassing events from his past, anger boiled deep in his heart. He said nothing about it, only saying, “In the future, don’t bother with him.” Temujin then turned to Quan JinFa and asked, “How much gold do you want to stay in my camp to teach my son kung fu?”

Quan JinFa thought, “We were thinking of finding a place to teach Guo Jing kung fu. If we can teach him here, there would no better place.” He replied, “The Great Khan’s willingness to accept the six of us is something we could not have asked for. You can pay us whatever you decide is suitable, we wouldn’t dare to discuss or argue about the amount.” Temujin was pleased and he told Boroqul to look after them; after that, he left to see off the Wanyan brothers.

The ‘Six Freaks of the South’ rode slowly behind the others while they discussed the matter.

Han BaoJu said, “The skin on the chest of Chen XuanFeng’s corpse was removed by someone; it must have been an enemy of his.”

Quan JinFa replied, “The ‘Twin Killers of the Dark Winds’ are cruel and ruthless; having many enemies isn’t something to be surprised at. But I don’t understand why his enemy didn’t simply chop up his body, or slash him all over. Why only slice off a large piece of skin from his chest?”

“I have been thinking of that all this time, but I still cannot figure out the reasoning behind it,” Ke Zhen’E replied. “The most pressing task at hand is to find out where ‘Iron Corpse’ is.”

“Precisely! If that person is not killed, she will bring much danger to us in the future. I’m afraid that she will not die from the poison,” Zhu Cong agreed.

With tears in her eyes, Han XiaoYing spoke up, “Fifth Brother’s dead, how could we not avenge him?”

So Han BaoJu, Han XiaoYing and Quan JinFa, rode their fast horses to try to find 'Iron Corpse'. But after numerous days of searching, they were not able to find a trace of her. Han BaoJu considered, "The woman's eyes were hit by elder brother's poison projectiles. The poison must have worked on her by now; she probably died in some mountain valley." The rest of them agreed. Ke Zhen'E knew in his heart that the 'Twin Killers of the Dark Winds' were very smart and devious. Unless he could touch her corpse with his own hands, it would always remain a heavy weight on his heart. He did not want to bother his younger brothers and sister with his worries and did not tell them of his concerns.

From then on, the 'Six Freaks of the South' remained on the steppe, teaching Guo Jing and Tolui kung fu. Temujin knew that kung fu is for protecting oneself in close contact with an opponent. He wanted Tolui and Guo Jing to learn these techniques briefly, and to spend most of their time learning riding, shooting with their bows and arrows, and learning other important skills of the battlefield. The 'Six Freaks of the South' were not familiar with these Mongol skills so Guo Jing and Tolui learned these from Jebe and Boroqul.

In the evenings, the 'Six Freaks of the South' taught Guo Jing alone, teaching him fists, sword, hidden weapons, and lightness kung fu. Although Guo Jing was slow by nature, he knew that he had to avenge his father in the future using martial arts, so he did not complain and worked as hard as he could.

Zhu Cong, Quan JinFa and Han XiaoYing's kung fu was a bit too hard for him to comprehend. With Han BaoJu and Nan XiRen's basic kung fu, he just followed their directions exactly and slowly but steadily learned it. This basic martial arts strengthened bodies but was not designed to overcome an enemy and win a fight.

Han BaoJu often said, "Training you is like training a camel. Strong is strong, but can a camel be victorious over a leopard?"

Whenever he heard that, Guo Jing only showed a silly smile. When the 'Six Freaks' taught Guo Jing, they only supervised his learning, instead of explaining it to him. Of the ten moves they tried to teach him, he couldn't learn a single one; they could not help feeling discouraged. Whenever they talked about it, they would only sigh and shake their heads. Although they knew that their chances of being victorious over Qiu Chuji's disciple were almost non-existent, an agreement had been made so they couldn't give up. As a business man, Quan JinFa's talents lay in the field of intricate calculations. He often said, "For Qiu Chuji to find the Yang family widow, I figure he has about an eighty percent chance of success. That improves our chances by twenty percent. Whether the Yang family widow gave birth to a boy or girl, who knows? The chance that she gave birth to a boy is only half, with that, we potentially gain

another forty percent. If it's a son, maybe he won't survive to adulthood, we then gain another ten percent. Even if he manages to grow up, maybe he'll be as stupid as Jing'er. Therefore, I'd say that we still have an eighty percent chance of winning."

The other Five Freaks thought that what he said wasn't wrong, however, saying that the Yang family's son's aptitude for learning martial arts might be the same as Guo Jing's, they had to know that Quan JinFa was trying to console them. Luckily, Guo Jing had a good heart and he is exceedingly obedient, so the 'Six Freaks' really liked his character a lot.

On the prairies of Outer Mongolia, the coming of green summer grass and the brilliant white of winter snows, ten years quickly went by. Guo Jing had become a sturdy youth of sixteen. There were only two years left until the martial arts competition, so the 'Six Freaks' stepped up their supervision. They ordered him to stop practicing riding and shooting temporarily, and from dusk to dawn, concentrate on practicing fists and the sword. During these ten years, Temujin had many battles and had swallowed up numerous other tribes into his own. He commanded his subordinates strictly, and all his soldiers were courageous and excelled in fighting. He was both courageous and resourceful and knew when to attack using force or attack using strategy. In all of Mongolia, no one could be compared to him. As the livestock bred and numbers grew, the population also increased, so that the differences between Temujin and Ong Khan's tribes became smaller.

The violent winds gradually stopped and the heavy snows began to decrease, but the outer prairies of Mongolia still remained bitterly cold. A certain day arrived; it was the Pure Brightness Festival. The 'Six Freaks of the South' arose early and Guo Jing with them; they took cows and sheep as sacrificial items to Zhang A'Sheng's grave and swept it. Since the Mongolians are nomads, they move around more or less continuously. They have no fixed place to stay. At this point in time, the Mongolian camp was quite far away from Zhang A'Sheng's grave. Even riding fast horses, it took them more than half of a day to get there. The seven of them climbed the barren hill and swept away the piled up snow from the grave. They then lit candles, burned incense, and knelt in front of the grave praying.

Han XiaoYing secretly prayed, "Fifth Brother, for the past ten years we've given all of our energy and our hearts to teaching this child. His gift for learning isn't good and he can't learn our martial arts properly. I hope that Fifth Brother's spirit in the heavens will watch over him now and at the JiaXing martial arts competition in two years time. Do not let this child spoil the prestige and name of the 'Seven Freaks of the South'!"

The 'Six Freaks' were born and lived their lives in the south, with its warm hills and waters. During the time they stayed in the Mongolian desert with its cold winds, they had become weaker and frailer and their faces looked lean and somber. The hair at their temples had started turning white. Although Han XiaoYing's charisma and attractiveness had not lessened, she was no longer the pink-cheeked young girl of yesteryear.

Zhu Cong surveyed the graveside piles of skulls. After ten years of enduring winds and snow, the skulls had not started to decay. In his heart, there was a feeling that he could not express. Throughout these years, he had searched all over the surrounding country for hundreds of li with Quan JinFa. They searched in every mountain valley and in every cave, trying to find Mei ChaoFeng. Had she died from poisoning, there should be a skeleton left behind. If she did not die, it would be very hard for a blind woman to live in seclusion for a long time and not leave a trail of some kind. Nonetheless, she had vanished into thin air like a spirit. On this lonely hill in the wilderness, in this grave and the piles of white bones, lay the only marks that the 'Twin Killers of the Dark Winds' had left behind in the desert. The seven stayed in front of the grave to have a memorial meal and drink; then returned to their dwellings. After a short rest, the 'Six Freaks' took Guo Jing to the hillside to practice his martial arts.

One day his Fourth Master, 'Wood Chopper of the Southern Mountains' Nan XiRen and he practiced using the 'Open Hills Palms' technique (Kai Shan Zhang Fa). Nan XiRen intended that he use as much martial arts as he could. They sparred for around seventy or eighty moves continuously before Nan XiRen suddenly pushed his left palm outwards and flipped his body in the move "The Hawk Hunting Rabbits" (Cang Ying Bu Tu), aiming the palm at Guo Jing's back. Guo Jing bent over to avoid his move; then moving his leg in a circular motion with the move "Autumn Winds Sweeping the Fallen Leaves" (Qiu Feng Sao Luo Ye), he swept his leg towards his teacher's lower body. Nan XiRen countered using "Iron Bull Tilling the Land" (Tie Niu Tian Di), attacking with his palms. Guo Jing had just started to withdraw his leg to change his stance, when Nan XiRen suddenly shouted "Remember this move!" His left hand swiftly moved out and tried to hit Guo Jing's chest from the front. Guo Jing's right palm hurriedly moved to block, because this palm is considered rather fast. Then Nan XiRen's left palm flew out, and with a slap, both palms connected. Although Nan XiRen only used about thirty percent of his power, Guo Jing could not help falling over. Both his hands hit the ground, but he immediately jumped up, with a look of shame showing on his face.

Nan XiRen was just about to instruct him about the essence of this move, when suddenly, from a grove of trees, came two bursts of laughter. Then a youthful girl came out, clapping her hands and smiling. She shouted, "Guo Jing, are you beaten by your teacher again?"

Guo Jing's face turned red as he said, "I'm practicing now, don't bother me!"

The young girl laughed, "I like seeing you getting beaten up!"

The girl was Temujin's young daughter Hua Zheng. She, Tului and Guo Jing were around the same age, and they'd played together since they were small. Because her parents doted on her, it is not surprising that she was a bit arrogant and willful. Since birth, Guo Jing's character was straight forward and simple; whenever she threw a tantrum without reason, they always clashed. However, after arguing, they would soon make up. Hua Zheng knew that she was wrong and would sooth his feelings with soft words. Hua Zheng's mother still remembered how Guo Jing risked his life at the leopard's mouth to save her daughter. She was especially fond of him and often gave gifts of clothing and livestock to his mother and him.

Guo Jing said, "I'm practicing with my Master, go away!"

Hua Zheng laughed and said, "This is practicing? I'd call it getting beaten up!"

While they were talking, several Mongolian soldiers arrived. One Ten Soldier Leader got off his horse, and bowed to Hua Zheng, saying, "Hua Zheng, Great Khan is calling for you." Mongolians are simple by nature, and do not have the courteous customs of the Han people. Although Hua Zheng is the Khan's daughter, everyone still called her by her name. Hua Zheng said, "What for?" The Ten Soldier Leader replied, "Ong Khan's messengers have arrived."

Hua Zheng wrinkled her brow and said angrily "I'm not going."

The Ten Soldier Leader continued, "If you don't go, the Khan will be angry."

When she was very young, Hua Zheng had been betrothed to Ong Khan's grandson Dukhsh by her father. But over the years, she had developed a close relationship with Guo Jing, although it really couldn't be said that there are feelings between them. Yet, whenever she thought about having to part from Guo Jing to marry that infamously arrogant Dukhsh, she couldn't help but feel sad. She pursed her small mouth and kept silent as she thought. In the end, she did not dare disobey her father's command, and followed the Ten Soldier Leader back to the camp.

Ong Khan and Senggum decided that Senggum's son has grown up and wanted to pick a date for the marriage. Therefore they sent people with gifts and Temujin wanted her to meet the messengers.

That night while Guo Jing was sleeping, he suddenly heard the soft sound of someone clapping three times outside the ger. He sat and heard someone speaking the Han language, “Guo Jing, come out.”

Guo Jing was curious but didn't know the voice. He lifted up a corner of the flap of the door cover and peered outside. In the moonlight he saw a person standing near a large tree.

Guo Jing went out of the ger and moved forward to see that the person was dressed in a large sleeved long robe and hair combed into a bun; this person looked like neither a man nor a woman. The face was hidden by the shadows of the tree and couldn't be seen clearly. The person was actually a Taoist priest, but Guo Jing had never seen a Taoist priest before and asked, “Who are you? Why are you looking for me?”

The person said, “You are Guo Jing?”

“Yes,” Guo Jing replied.

The person demanded, “Where's your dagger that can cut iron as though it were mud? Take it out and show me!” He suddenly moved and leapt close by to him; then he sent out a palm aimed right for his chest. Guo Jing knew that the person attacked without reason and his attack was vicious; he was greatly surprised and moved sideways immediately to evade the palm. He shouted, “What was that for?”

The person said with a smile, “Just testing your abilities.” Then with his left arm, he sent out a fist with strength that was fierce and swift.

Guo Jing, feeling anger rising, slanted his body to avoid the move. Then he raised his right hand and fiercely grabbed the enemy's wrist while his left hand moved to take his opponent's elbow. This move was the “Strong Soldier Breaks the Wrist” (Zhuang Shi Duan Wan) from ‘Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones’ technique (Fen Jing Cuo Gu Shou). You need only catch hold of the enemy's wrist, then the elbow, push forward a little, then a twist, and with a “kacha” sound, the right wrist bone will be twisted out of place. The ‘Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones’ technique was passed on to him by his Second Master Zhu Cong. Although Zhu Cong's language and everyday behavior tends to be comical, his mind is actually very sharp. Ke Zhen'E and he had secretly held several discussions about Mei ChaoFeng. Although both of her eyes were injured by poisoned projectiles, her martial arts are unusual and strange; perhaps she was able to resist the poison. If she did not die, she will definitely seek revenge. The longer the time before she shows herself, the more thorough her plans will be and the more vicious and evil her methods. In the past ten years, even though no trace of Mei ChaoFeng had been

discovered, the ‘Six Freaks’ were never complacent; in fact, they were even more cautious than ever. Whenever Zhu Cong looked at the fingernail scars left on the back of his hand, he couldn’t help but feel fearful. When he thought about her strong martial arts, he knew it would be very difficult to harm her. To resist the ‘Nine Yin White Bone Claw’, why not use the ‘Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones’ technique? This kung fu set focuses on dislocating or breaking the opponent’s bones, using ultra fast methods, to attack the other party’s limbs, skull and neck bones.

In the past, back home in Central Plains, Zhu Cong regretted he had never asked for advice from any Masters that were experts in this style of martial arts. None of his brothers and sister knew it either.

After thinking for some time, he remembered that all the martial arts in the world were created by people. Since there is no one here to teach this technique to me, will it be hard for me to create my own version? His nickname, ‘Magical Hands Scholar’ (Miao Shou Shu Sheng), referred to his very fast hands. Furthermore, he was very familiar with attacking accupoints and knows their positions well. Using his unique talents, he re-created the ‘Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones’ method without too much difficulty. After numerous years of practice, the essence of this technique was deeply ingrained in him. Although his method may differ from Shaolin kung fu, it was still powerful. He analyzed and worked on it with Quan JinFa, and then passed on his techniques to Guo Jing.

Guo Jing was battling a strong opponent, so when he started attacking, the first move he used was the ‘Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones’ move.

Although not an expert, he practiced this martial art a lot, and the way he used the moves was close to perfect. That person’s wrist and elbow was suddenly held by Guo Jing, and in surprise, he sent out his left palm swiftly, aiming for Guo Jing’s face. Guo Jing wanted to twist the enemy’s wrist bones out of place, but the enemy’s palm suddenly came. With both hands holding onto his enemy, he had no way to defend. All he could do was let go and leap backwards. He felt the force of the palm sweeping past his face with an uncomfortable burning sensation.

When he turned around, he saw his enemy was actually a handsome youth of around seventeen or eighteen years, with a refined face and long lashes. He heard him say in a low voice, “Your martial art is not bad. You did not waste the ‘Six Freaks of the South’s’ ten years of teaching.”

Guo Jing was only using one palm to protect himself, so he was very cautious and asked, “Who are you? Why are you looking for me?”

The youth shouted, "Let's spar again." Before he stopped speaking, he'd already raised his palms from his side.

Guo Jing stayed calm and did not move; he waited until he could feel the movement of the air caused by the enemy's palm nearing his chest. He moved his body slightly and his left hand grasped the enemy's arm. He raised his right hand and pinched the enemy's cheek. He had only to hold onto the enemy's face, swiftly pull outwards, and the jaw joint will dislocate.

This move was given a humorous name by Zhu Cong; he called it "Jokes Will Undo the Jaws" (Xiao Yu Jie Yi), meaning laughing until the chin drops. This time around, the youth was more alert, and used his right hand to defend while attacking horizontally with his left. Guo Jing still used the 'Disconnect the Muscles and Separating the Bones' technique to defend. Within a short time, they had exchanged more than ten stances. The youthful Taoist's movements were light and graceful; his palms swift and powerful. Before the palm hits, his body had moved, and it was hard to tell where the palms came from.

This was the very first time that Guo Jing fought an enemy using martial arts, and it was against one with high kung fu skills. After battling for awhile, he felt despair. The youth's left foot flew out, and with a pat, hit Guo Jing's right hip. Luckily, the enemy did not use all his strength and Guo Jing's basic martial art was very strong. His body only shook a little, and immediately both palms were flying again, protecting all the weak spots on his body, as he tried his best to defend and attack. The youthful Taoist kept pressing him hard, and Guo Jing knew that he could not cope for much longer. Suddenly he heard a voice from behind him shouting, "Attack his lower body!" It was his Third Master Han BaoJu's voice, and he felt joy in his heart. He angled his body to the right then turned around. He saw that all of his six masters had been standing behind him for a long time. With all of his concentration focused on battling the enemy, he did not notice that they were there.

His spirits rose greatly and he followed his Third Master's advice, fiercely attacking the Taoist's lower body. The Taoist's body was lightly built, and his lower body, as his Third Master was pointing out, was definitely not very strong. Since spectators could usually see the flaws from the sidelines, the 'Six Freaks of the South' had seen his from the beginning. After being attacked by Guo Jing for a time, the youth couldn't help but fall back. Guo Jing felt that victory was near. Seeing his enemy stumble, he attacked with a series of 'Mandarin Duck' kicks (Yuan Yang), with both feet flying. But his enemy was only trying to trick Guo Jing with this ruse; both Han BaoJu and Han XiaoYing called out together, "Watch out!"

Because Guo Jing lacked experience, he didn't even know what to watch out for, when his right foot kicked out, it was instantly grabbed by the enemy.

The youthful Taoist took advantage of the way he kicked and sent his palm out to hit him. Guo Jing couldn't resist it, and with a somersault, he fell onto the ground. He landed on his back and it hurt terribly. With the move "Carp Flipping Upright" (Li Yu Da Ting), he immediately sprang up to attack again, but saw his six masters surrounding the youthful Taoist. The Taoist neither resisted nor tried to attack; he raised his hands together in the traditional greeting manner, and said in a clear voice, "Disciple Yin ZhiPing is following the instructions of my honored master 'Chang Chun Zi' Qiu Chuji, who asks if the masters are well." While saying that, he respectfully kowtowed.

Hearing that this person was sent by Qiu Chuji, the 'Six Freaks of the South' were curious but feared that it might be part of some scheme. They did not raise their arms to help him up. Yin ZhiPing stood up and took out a letter. With both hands, he presented it to Zhu Cong.

Ke Zhen'E heard patrolling Mongolian soldiers coming nearer so he said, "Let's talk inside."

Yin ZhiPing followed the 'Six Freaks' into their ger. Quan JinFa lit a candle made of sheep's fat. It was the ger that the five male Freaks lived in; Han XiaoYing lived in another ger with other unmarried Mongolian women. Yin ZhiPing saw that the furnishings in the ger were simple and rough and thought that the 'Six Freaks' everyday life must be quite tough. He bowed again and said, "Every elder here must have suffered greatly from being here for all these years, my teacher is grateful to you beyond words. He specially commanded this disciple to come and thank each of you."

Ke Zhen'E let out a 'hmp', thinking, "If that truly is the reason you are here, then why did you fight Jing'er till he fell over? Were you trying to make us feel inferior before the competition?"

Zhu Cong had by now opened the envelope and taken out the letter. In his clear and resonant voice, he read out:

*"QuanZhen disciple, Qiu Chuji respectfully greets the 'Six Heroes of the South'. Master Ke, Master Zhu, Master Han, Master Nan, Master Quan and Heroine Han. The years have passed quickly since we parted in the south. The 'Seven Valiant Heroes' are people of their words and your righteousness and your integrity is awe-inspiring. Your benevolence and chivalry matches the ancients of old."*

After hearing this, the wrinkled face of Ke Zhen'E looked somewhat pleased.

Zhu Cong continued:

*“Hearing that Master Zhang died in Mongolia was very saddening. I am still very shaken by Master Zhang’s death. Due to your good fortune and my good luck, I was able to find the son of the late Mr. Yang nine years ago...”*

“Ah...” the other Five Freaks said simultaneously. They knew that Qiu Chuji was very capable and the disciples of the QuanZhen Sect are spread throughout the country. It was to be expected that he would find Yang TieXin’s offspring. He must always have kept in mind the scheduled meeting for the competition in JiaXing. Finding the mother, whose whereabouts were unknown, was like searching for a needle in a haystack. Whether the child was a girl or boy, was up to the heavens. Had it been a girl, there would be a limit to the power of her martial arts. Hearing that the child had been found, gave them a momentarily shock. The six had never told Guo Jing’s mother or him about this matter. Zhu Cong slid his eyes towards Guo Jing; seeing no change in his expression he read on,

*“After two years, when the flowers are blooming and the grass is long in JiangNan, I will meet and drink with all of you masters at the Pavilion of the Drunken Immortal. Life passes like the dew, and these eighteen years are like a dream. Will the brave heroes of the world laugh at my foolishness?”*

When Zhu Cong read to this point, he stopped.

Han BaoJu asked, “What is below?”

“The letter ends there. It is definitely his handwriting,” Zhu Cong replied. That day in the inn, Zhu Cong had stolen a piece of poetry from Qiu Chuji’s pocket and recognized his handwriting.

Ke Zhen’E asked in a somber voice, “The Yang family’s child is a male? His name is Yang Kang?”

Yin ZhiPing replied, “Yes.”

Ke Zhen’E continued, “So he is your junior brother?”

“He is my senior brother. Although this disciple is older than him by a year, Senior Brother Yang started learning from the QuanZhen two years earlier,” Yin ZhiPing replied.

The ‘Six Freaks of the South’ had seen his kung fu, and Guo Jing was definitely not his match. If the junior brother is already so good, his senior brother must be even more powerful. At this point, they felt their hearts sinking. It seemed Qiu Chuji knew of their actions in detail; he even knew of Zhang A’Sheng’s death. They all felt that they were on the losing end already.

Ke Zhen'E said coldly, "When you sparred with him earlier, was it to test his abilities?"

Yin ZhiPing heard the hostile tone in his voice and felt anxious. He hurriedly said, "Disciple would not dare."

Ke Zhen'E said, "Go back and tell your teacher that, although the 'Six Freaks of the South' may not be as good as he, they will definitely not miss the appointment at the Pavilion of the Drunken Immortal. Tell your teacher not to worry. There will be no replying letter!"

After hearing these sentences, Yin ZhiPing did not know whether to reply or not, and felt very awkward. He'd followed his teacher's instructions to come up to the north and pass on the letter, and Qiu ChuJi had indeed told him to find a way to test Guo Jing's character and martial art. The elder 'Chang Chun Zi' actually cared about his friend's son and his intentions were good. But Yin ZhiPing, as a youth, was naturally more adventurous; upon reaching the Mongolian plains, he did not hurry to see the 'Six Freaks', but instead sparred with Guo Jing in the middle of the night. Seeing the unfriendly expressions the 'Six Freaks' were wearing, he felt afraid and did not dare to delay leaving. He bowed to everyone, saying, "The disciple will go now."

Ke Zhen'E suddenly said, with a sharp tone in his voice, "You should turn a somersault too!" Swiftly sweeping his left arm out, he caught hold of Yin ZhiPing's collar. Yin ZhiPing felt fear and used both his hands, trying to push Ke Zhen'E's arms away. He wasn't aware that if he had not attempted to get away, he would only have been made to fall with a somersault. By resisting, he only made Ke Zhen'E angrier. He bent his left arm, he lifted up Yin ZhiPing's body and with a "hey" sound, threw the little Taoist heavily onto the ger's floor.

After landing, Yin ZhiPing's back hurt badly as though it was cracked; but after awhile, he slowly struggled up and limped away.

Han BaoJu said, "The little Taoist has no manners. It's a good thing that big brother taught him a lesson."

Ke Zhen'E was thinking, and after quite a long while, took a deep breath. The Five Freaks felt the same way and everyone was depressed.

Nan XiRen suddenly said, "No matter what, we still have to fight, even if it cannot be won!"

Han XiaoYing said, “Fourth Brother is right. After we seven became sworn siblings, we traveled over the world together. We went through many dangers and the ‘Seven Freaks of the South’ never retreated.”

Ke Zhen’E nodded and said to Guo Jing, “Go back to sleep. We will work even harder starting from tomorrow.”

Thereafter, the ‘Six Freaks of the South’ were even stricter in their training. However, in studies or martial arts, as in music or mahjong, when someone tries for quick success, he risks getting precisely the opposite result and progress stops. The ‘Six Freaks’ hoped for so much from their disciple that they put immense pressure on him. To make things even more difficult, Guo Jing didn’t have a quick intelligent mind; on the contrary, he was slower than most young people his age. The more they wanted from him, the more he panicked and lost concentration. Since the nocturnal visit of Yin ZhiPing, he hadn’t made much progress for three months; he even seemed to have regressed somewhat. It was precisely what the popular belief says: ‘The one that hurries too much doesn’t arrive safely’, and ‘The one that swallows too much gets a stomach ache’.

The ‘Six Freaks’ were remarkable masters in their respective arts, acquired at the cost of constant effort over a long period. Wasn’t it an illusion to wish for Guo Jing to acquire a mastery of all those arts in just a few years? An extremely gifted person would have a lot of trouble to accomplish such a prodigious feat; how could someone hope for the same thing from a young and not very gifted boy? The ‘Six Freaks’ were conscious of the problem, and considering the character of Guo Jing, he could have practiced the techniques of Han BaoJu or Nan XiRen alone and, after twenty or thirty years of fierce effort, maybe have half of their respective skills. If Zhang A’Sheng had not died prematurely, his teaching would have been the most compatible with Guo Jing’s abilities. The ‘Six Freaks’ wanted to beat Qiu Chuji so much that, even knowing it would be better to teach one skill rather than teach all, they could not restrain themselves and tried teaching everything they knew to this dumb disciple. During the last sixteen years, Zhu Cong had not stopped thinking about the fight in the Pavilion of the Drunken Immortal and in the Buddhist FaHua Monastery. He reviewed with precision every movement and every stroke made by Qiu Chuji. Though he had a great memory and replayed them in his mind, he didn’t succeed in finding any flaws. Sometimes, he even thought that only ‘Copper Corpse’ and ‘Iron Corpse’ would be able to beat the Taoist.

In the morning, Han XiaoYing taught Guo Jing two movements of the ‘Sword of the Yue Maiden’. To execute the first, “The Branch Hits the White Gorilla”, it was necessary to leap, make two turns with the sword before straightening it to attack. Guo Jing had worked hard on the stability of his lower body, but

lacked the agility for the jumps. He could hardly make a half a turn in air before landing heavily. After seven or eight attempts, he didn't succeed in making it any better. Han XiaoYing began to get angry and had to force herself to stay calm. She continued her explanations, indicating to him how to land on tiptoe, how to make his jumps, etc. But when he jumped sufficiently high, he forgot to do the turns, and his landings remained clumsy.

Han XiaoYing thought that, after suffering the rigors of the Mongolian steppe for more than ten years, and Fifth Brother losing his life here, the end result was so disappointing! She felt a pain in her heart and began sobbing. Throwing her sword to the ground, she left with her hands covering her face.

Guo Jing ran after her, but didn't catch her. He stood there, stupidly immobile, with his heart broken. He knew that he owed everything to his Masters and had hoped to succeed in the martial arts to prove to them his recognition of their teaching. Though he made every effort, he still couldn't succeed and he didn't know what to do any longer. He was lost in thought when he suddenly heard Hua Zheng's voice calling him, "Guo Jing, come quickly! Come quickly!"

He turned around and saw her on her horse with an anxious and excited expression. "What's happened?" Guo Jing asked.

"Quickly, come and see," Hua Zheng answered. "There's a fight with two big eagles."

"I'm training now."

"You trained so badly that your Master scolded you, am I right?"

Guo Jing nodded his head miserably.

"It is indeed a terrifying fight, come let's see it..."

Guo Jing was very tempted, but he remembered the disappointment he caused the Seventh Master, and shook his head sadly. "I won't go."

"I came especially to tell you," an excited Hua Zheng said. "If you don't come, don't expect to find me later!"

"Then quickly go alone. If you tell me later how it went, it will be almost the same thing..."

Hua Zheng jumped down from her horse and with a stubborn look on her face she walked up to him. "If you won't go, I won't go either. I wonder if it's the black eagles that are going to win, or the white ones..."

“Is it the pair of big white eagles, that live on cliff?”

“Yes! Even though the black eagles outnumber them, the white ones are still very dangerous; they’ve already killed three or four blacks with their beaks...”

On the top of the cliff, a couple of white eagles nested. White feathers were very rare amongst eagles, and these eagles were not only completely white but also of exceptional size. The Ancients used to say that they had never seen their equal, and considered those eagles ‘Divine’ birds. Some women even avowed them in a cult.

Listening to her, Guo Jing couldn’t hold back any longer. He took Hua Zheng’s hand and the two jumped onto the back of her horse and rushed to the cliff. When they got there, they saw the white eagles fighting against seventeen or eighteen black ones, attacking them with their beaks and their talons, making feathers fly. The white eagles were bigger and stronger. A single stroke of their powerful beak on the head was enough to kill an enemy, who then fell to the ground. The others flew away; but came back soon after to surround the pair again.

The spectacle had attracted many spectators; more than six hundred men and women, from many tribes, were gathered and commenting on the fight. Even Temujin, accompanied by Ogedai and Tolui, had come and watched the fight with interest.

Guo Jing, Tolui and Hua Zheng often played at the bottom of the cliff, and saw the white eagles nearly every day flying to their nest or leaving it when going to hunt. Sometimes, the children threw them some cuts of sheep meat; the eagles then dove and snatched them with precision while in the air. By doing this, they created close ties between them and the eagles. Because the white eagles were fewer in number, the children encouraged them with great vigor. “Go, white eagles! Attack! Watch out, enemy on the left! Quickly! Well done!”

Two more black eagles fell, but the white eagles were also wounded and their white feathers were covered with blood. Suddenly, a particularly big black eagle uttered several screams and flew away, followed by about ten of its companions. They disappeared into the clouds. Four other black eagles remained fighting. Thinking they had seen the victory of the white eagles, the spectators uttered shouts of joy. Shortly after, three other black eagles also flew away to the east, pursued by one of the white eagles. Soon, they were out of sight. The remaining black eagle tried to escape the single white eagle and was about to succumb, when suddenly, strident screeches came from clouds and about ten of the black eagles that had previously flown away appeared out of the clouds and attacked the lone white eagle.

“Excellent strategy!” exclaimed Temujin, admiringly.

The isolated white eagle was not able to, in spite of its bravery, resist the constant assault of its adversaries and fell onto the cliff, overwhelmed by black eagles. The children were very worried, and Hua Zheng exploded in sobs. “Quickly, dad!” she said while crying. “Kill the black eagles!”

But Temujin was thinking about the ruse used by the winners. “The black eagles won,” he said to Ogedai and Tolui, “Thanks to a very clever strategy. Don’t forget it!”

His two sons acknowledged this.

After having finished the white eagle, the black eagles flew towards a cavity in the cliff. One could see the heads of two white eaglets that would likely succumb to the attack of the aggressors.

“Guo Jing, can you see?” Hua Zheng cried. “The eagles have eaglets! How come we’ve never noticed them? Ah, father, shoot quickly and kill those black eagles!”

Temujin smiled, aimed his bow and shot an arrow of iron that, like the lightning, slicing through the body of a black eagle. The crowd applauded. The Khan then gave his bow to Ogedai. “It’s your turn!”

Ogedai pulled back the bow and also knocked his target down, as did Tolui. The black eagles started to panic. Other officers and soldiers also started to help the white eaglets, but the remaining black eagles had gained height, and it became very difficult to reach them.

“A reward for those that will make a hit!” shouted Temujin.

Jebe, a skilled archer, wanted Guo Jing, his pupil, to have his moment of glory, and handed him his own war bow. “Knee on the ground,” he recommended in a low voice, “Aim for the neck.”

Guo Jing complied, putting his right knee on the ground. His left hand firmly held the powerful bow, and he drew the bow with his right hand. After ten years of training with the ‘Six Freaks of South’, even though he had not assimilated their sophisticated martial arts, nevertheless he had acquired strength in his arms and outstanding precision when aiming a bow. Seeing two eagles flying one above the other to the left, he turned, aimed for the neck and released his projectile.

It was precisely, as the popular expression described it: “The bow bent as the full moon, the arrow flashing like a meteor”. The first eagle didn’t have the time to escape before the arrow pierced its neck, continuing its way and planting itself in the flank of the second bird! Only one arrow for two eagles, which fell like stones! The crowd noisily applauded and the other eagles didn’t stay any longer and rushed to disperse themselves.

“Offer the two eagles to my father,” whispered Hua Zheng in the ear of Guo Jing.

He obeyed. He collected the two eagles, ran to Temujin, and kneeling, he offered the two eagles to him respectfully.

Temujin appreciated, above all, skilled fighters. He was delighted to see Guo Jing suddenly bringing two eagles down with a single shot; especially since these eagles from the north were dangerous birds. The span of their wings passed one meter, their feathers were as hard as iron, and they were so strong that they could seize and carry away in the air ponies or large sheep! Even tigers and leopards were afraid of them! To kill two eagles with a single arrow constituted a remarkable exploit. “Brave boy,” Temujin said while accepting the offering. “You manage the bow quite well!”

“It is master Jebe who taught me.”

“The master is Jebe,” said Temujin while laughing, “The disciple is also jebe”.

“Father,” Tolui said, wanting to help his sworn brother, “You promised a reward to the one that could bring an eagle down. My anda killed two of them with one shot. What reward will you grant him?”

“Whatever he wants,” answered Temujin still smiling. “Guo Jing, what do you want?”

“Is it true?” insisted Tolui, delighted. “Whatever he wants?”

“Do I have the habit of lying...even to children?” responded Temujin

During all these years, Guo Jing had lived under the Khan’s protection. Everyone in the tribe liked him for his simplicity and his kindness, and no one rejected him even though he was a Han. Seeing the Khan in such a good mood all had turned towards the young man, hoping that he would get a good reward.

“The Khan is so good to me,” said Guo Jing, “And my mother has everything that she needs, you don’t need to trouble yourself giving me a reward...”

“That is a good example of filial piety,” Temujin said. “You always think about your mother first...But for yourself, what do you wish? Speak without fear.”

Guo Jing thought an instant, and then knelt before Temujin. “I don’t want anything for me, but I have a wish for someone else.”

“What is it?” asked Temujin.

“Dukhsh, the son of Senggum, is cruel and mean. If Hua Zheng marries him, she will be very unhappy. I implore the Khan to not give her in marriage to that dishonorable man.” said Guo Jing.

Temujin was disconcerted at first, but then exploded in laughter. “These are indeed the wishes of a child! How could this be possible? I am going to give you a very precious object.” From his belt he removed a dagger which he handed to Guo Jing. All the officers displayed their admiration and appreciation noisily; it was Temujin’s favored weapon with which he had killed innumerable enemies. If he had not made a solemn promise, he would never have parted with it. “Take my golden dagger,” Temujin said, “And kill some enemies for me.”

“I will,” Guo Jing answered. Guo Jing thanked him and took the dagger. He had often seen it on the Khan’s belt, but it was the first time that he examined it closely. The girdle was of pure gold, and the end of the handle was decorated with the grinning head of a tiger also in gold.

Hua Zheng, exploding in sobs, bounded onto her horse and left at full speed. Temujin had a hard heart, but he could not stop sighing while thinking of his daughter’s pain. He then took the eagles to the camp, followed by his officers and soldiers.

After the crowd dispersed, Guo Jing drew the dagger and felt the coldness of the blade. He had the impression he could see traces of blood on it. It was a short massive weapon, and it impressed him because it had killed many people! He moved it about for a moment and then put it back in its sheath, which he attached to his belt. Then he drew his sword and started practicing the ‘Sword of the Yue Maiden’ again. In spite of all his efforts, he didn’t succeed in executing the movements of “Branch Hits the White Gorilla” correctly. He either didn’t jump sufficiently high or he didn’t have the time to make the turns. The more frustrated he got, the less he controlled his breathing; the result was catastrophic and he was sweating heavily. Suddenly, he heard a galloping horse; it was Hua Zheng coming back.

She stopped not far from him, got off the horse and lay down on the grass with her chin on her hand, to watch Guo Jing train. Seeing that he seemed to be suffering a lot, she shouted to him, “Stop, rest for a while.”

“Don’t disturb me,” Guo Jing retorted, “I don’t have the time to chat with you.”

Hua Zheng didn’t say anything else, but observed him while smiling. Then, she took a handkerchief from her pocket, made two knots in it, and threw it to him. “Wipe off the sweat with it!”

Guo Jing grumbled, but didn’t look up to catch it, and continued to train.

After a little while, she asked, “You asked dad to not marry me to Dukhsh. Why?”

“Dukhsh is very mean. He once released leopards so that they could devour your brother Tolui. If you marry him, maybe he will beat you...”

“If he beats me, you will come to defend me!”

“But,” thought Guo Jing, speechless, “How would that be possible?”

“If I don’t marry him, who will marry me?” Hua Zheng said with a tender look.

“I don’t know,” Guo Jing said, shaking his head.

“Pah!” Hua Zheng said, while the face that had blushed earlier became suddenly furious. “You never know anything!”

Some moments later, she softened her attitude. Then they heard the eaglets, on the summit of the cliff, calling. Loud screeches sounded in the sky; it was the second white eagle coming back after having been drawn afar by the black eagles. From the heights, it saw its beloved companion dead on the cliff; then it flew like a white cloud in concentric circles.

Guo Jing stopped and raised his head. The white eagle didn’t stop whirling, still uttering screeches of pain.

“Watch,” Hua Zheng said, “The eagle is unhappy!”

“Yes,” Guo Jing agreed, “It must be very sad.”

The eagle uttered a long call and suddenly flew off up towards the highest clouds.

“Why does it go up so high?” Hua Zheng wondered.

Suddenly the eagle came down again like an arrow and dove onto the cliff, where it smashed itself. Horrified, Guo Jing and Hua Zheng uttered a scream of surprise, and didn’t know what to say.

Suddenly, they heard a loud voice behind them saying, “Admirable...admirable.”

They turned around and saw a white-haired Taoist and with a red-face. His clothing was strange and to his hair were attached three high adornments. He wore the immaculate dress of a Taoist, which was a surprising sight on this windy and dusty plain. Since he had spoken in Han tongue, Hua Zheng didn’t understand him and lost interest.

“The two eaglets lost their father and mother,” she said, looking up at the top of the cliff, “How will they survive now?”

The extremely steep cliff reached up into the sky, and it looked nearly impossible to climb. Obviously, the two eaglets, which had not yet learned to fly, were going to die of hunger in their nest.

“Unless,” said Guo Jing, “Someone has wings and flies there, it is the only way to save them...” He collected his sword and started to practice. In spite of all his efforts, he still didn’t manage to execute the movements; just as he began to despair, he heard a voice behind him say coldly, “If you keep doing it that way, you will still be dragging your sword a hundred years from now, and you won’t progress as much as a hair!”

Guo Jing turned around; it was the Taoist with the three adornments.

“What did you say?” he asked.

The man smiled, didn’t answer, and suddenly advanced. Guo Jing felt like his arm was paralyzed and, without knowing how, saw his sword, that he had held firmly, in the hand of the Taoist! Zhu Cong had already taught him the technique “To Seize a Blade with the Bare Hand”; even though he hadn’t mastered it entirely, he had assimilated the principles of it. However, this time, he didn’t have the slightest idea as to how the Taoist did it. Frightened, he moved back three steps. He stood in front of Hua Zheng to protect her and drew Temujin’s knife.

“Watch closely!” the Taoist shouted.

He jumped as if it was nothing special, made six or seven turns with the sword, before softly landing again on his feet. Guo Jing was awestruck.

The man threw the sword on the ground and said while laughing, “The white eagle was quite admirable, it is necessary to save its offspring!”

He sprang toward the cliff and began climbing at full speed using his feet and hands, as agile as a monkey and as light as a bird. The slope rose very steeply and was, in part, as straight as a wall. But the slightest bump was sufficient for him to climb up higher. Even when the rock appeared smooth as a mirror, he climbed like a lizard.

Guo Jing and Hua Zheng were very anxious; if he slipped, the fall would definitely kill him. The silhouette became smaller and smaller and gave the impression he was about to enter the clouds. The girl closed her eyes, afraid of seeing what could happen:

“Where is he now?” she asked.

“He’s nearly at the summit,” Guo Jing answered. “There, he made it!”

Opening her eyes, she saw the Taoist fly off as if he was going to fall and let out a scream of fright. In fact, when he reached the summit, the large sleeves of his robe floated in the violent wind that blew there. One had the impression, seen from below, that he was a huge bird.

The man slipped his hand into the nest, caught the two eaglets and put them against his chest. Then, back to the slope he went, where he let himself slip, grabbing a hand on a bump here or giving a kick from time to time, to slow his fall, and reached the ground very quickly.

Guo Jing and Hua Zheng ran towards him. He took the eaglets and said to the girl, in Mongolian, “Will you take good care of them?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” she answered quickly. Hua Zheng, surprised and delighted, stretched out her hands.

“Be careful of their beaks,” warned the Taoist, “They are small, but their bite is dangerous...”

Hua Zheng undid her belt and attached it to the legs of the fledglings. Then she held them against herself, delighted, “I am going to look for meat to feed them.”

“Wait,” the Taoist said. “If you want the eaglets, you must promise me one thing.”

“What?” asked Hua Zheng.

“You must not tell anyone that I climbed the cliff to catch the birds.”

“Okay,” Hua Zheng said joyfully. “That’s easy. I won’t tell anyone.”

“While they are growing,” warned the Taoist while smiling, “These two white eagles will become aggressive. Be very careful while feeding them!”

Happy, she told Guo Jing, “Each of us will have one, and it will be me who keeps them in the meantime, okay?”

Guo Jing nodded his head. Hua Zheng got on her horse and happily rode off.

The young man stayed immobile, as if hypnotized, reviewing in his head the ease of the movements of the Taoist executing “The Branch Hits the White Gorilla”. The man grabbed the sword and kindly offered it to him and turned on his heels. Seeing that he was leaving, Guo Jing said, in panic:

“You...please... Don’t leave...”

“Why not?” asked the Taoist.

Guo Jing scratched his head, not knowing what to say. Suddenly, he kowtowed, knocking the ground with his forehead, without stopping.

“Why do you prostrate yourself before me?” the Taoist asked.

There was a deep ache in Guo Jing’s heart. Seeing the kind face of the Taoist, he felt as if he had met a relative with whom he was able to confide. Suddenly, two big tears rolled down his cheeks and he said while choking back sobs. “Me...me...I am very dumb, I can’t manage to learn martial arts, and I am a disappointment to my Six Masters, to whom I owe everything...”

“What are you going to do?” the Taoist asked.

“I give all of myself, day and night, and still I don’t manage to do it properly... I really can’t manage to learn it...”

“Do you want me to show you a way?” he asked.

“Yes, please!” replied Guo Jing, kowtowing again.

The Taoist smiled, “It seems to me that you are full of sincerity. Very well, let’s meet each other again in three days; we will meet on the fifteenth day of the month. When the moon is full, I will wait for you at the summit of the cliff. But you must not tell anyone!” Then he left.

“But I won’t be able to climb up there,” Guo Jing protested in a rush.

The Taoist didn’t answer and it appeared, as he departed, that his feet didn’t touch the ground at all, and he was already far away.

“He made that promise on purpose to embarrass me; he doesn’t want to teach me.” Then he said himself, “I am not yet without a master and my Six Masters have caused themselves much pain trying to teach me; it’s me that is stupid, what choices do I have ? This Senior is probably very strong, but I won’t be able to learn any of what he knows from him anyway; why should I even try?” He contemplated the top of the cliff, and then he tried to not think more about it. He took his sword, and repeated the moves again and again of “The Branch Hits the White Gorilla”, until sunset, when hunger urged him to go back home.

Three days passed in the blink of an eye. That afternoon, Han BaoJu taught him the ‘Whip of the Golden Dragon’. This kind of flexible weapon required particularly close attention; if one didn’t master all the refinements of it, not only would you not reach the enemy, but you risked getting injured by it yourself. Guo Jing, of course, made a false move, and “slash”, the whip turned against him, striking him on the head causing a big bump. Han BaoJu, who had a legendary harsh character, immediately gave him a slap. Guo Jing didn’t dare to shy away and continued to practice. Seeing him putting in a lot of effort, Han BaoJu regretted having lost his temper. Even though his pupil made mistakes several more times, the master didn’t scold him again. He showed him five more movements, encouraged him, and recommended that he train by himself. Then he left on his horse.

To practice the ‘Whip of the Golden Dragon’ wasn’t an easy task. After having executed the set of the sequences about ten times, Guo Jing’s forehead, arms, and thighs were covered with blue welts. Tired and aching all over, he fell asleep on the grass. When he woke up, the moon had appeared from behind the mountains. He felt burning pains on his whole body and notably on the cheek, where Han BaoJu had slapped him.

Contemplating the top of the cliff, he had suddenly a burst of self-esteem, “If the Taoist can climb up there, why not me?” he thought. Clenching his teeth, he ran to the cliff and began to climb it, clinging onto the plants that grew there, slowly going up. At the end of six or seven zhangs <sup>iii</sup>, the cliff became completely smooth without any vegetation or bumps to grasp. How could he advance further in these conditions? He gritted his teeth, tried two times, but his

foot always slipped, and he almost fell. Understanding that any new attempt would be in vain, he wanted to go back down again. When he glanced behind him, he was terrified! He had forced himself to follow this path of ascent, and now found his feet were unable to use the same support points on the way down. If he jumped, he would certainly smash himself below!

Caught in a desperate situation, the words of his Fourth Master came to mind, "In this world, there's nothing impossible to the men of good will." Since death stared at him from all sides, rather than remain in an untenable position, it was better to continue. He drew his dagger and dug two small holes, in which he slowly placed one foot and steadied himself, and then the other. He rose thus a few more inches. Then he continued to dig in the wall, making more hand and footholds, rising laboriously a few zhangs. Because of the difficulty of the task, his head started to spin and his limbs burned with exhaustion.

He stopped to clear his mind, holding closely to the wall, controlling his breathing. Then he wondered how many holes it would take before arriving at the summit. As strong as his dagger was, it would probably be able to dig ten more holes, and then it would break. Since he had made it this far, he could no longer go back. After a brief rest, he got ready to dig again; then he heard a burst of laughter coming from the summit of the cliff.

Not daring to lean backward to look, he remained, nose against the smooth wall of the cliff, wondering who this laugh came from. Then he saw a thick rope slip down and stop next to him. He heard the voice of the Taoist saying, "Tie the rope around your waist, I will pull you up."

Delighted, Guo Jing sheathed his dagger. Holding tightly with his left hand, he took the rope with his right hand and wrapped it around his waist two times and made two knots.

"Did you tie it firmly?" the Taoist shouted.

"It's done," Guo Jing said.

The Taoist seemed to not have heard. "Did you tie it?" He asked again.

"It's done," Guo Jing repeated, without any response.

Some instants later, the Taoist laughed again and said. "Ah, I forgot...your breathing is not yet sufficiently powerful, your voice cannot carry as far as mine. If you tied it well, pull three times on the rope!"

Guo Jing obeyed and pulled three times. Suddenly, the rope grew taught; his body flew up toward the summit of the cliff. He knew that the Taoist was going

to pull it, but not with such speed. In the blink of an eye, he landed again on his feet, right in front of the old man.

He knelt and got ready to kowtow, but the Taoist held his arm. “Three days ago, you kowtowed more than a hundred times, it is more than enough! You are a child with good character!”

On the summit of the cliff was flat ground covered with snow. The Taoist showed him two big round rocks that looked vaguely like stools, “Sit there.”

“I will remain standing to serve you, Master,” Guo Jing said.

“You don’t belong to my school,” the Taoist said, still smiling. “I am not your Master, and you are not my disciple. You may sit.”

Guo Jing, perplexed, obeyed and sat down.

“Your six masters,” the old man continued, “Are well known in the martial arts realm. I don’t know them personally, but I’ve always felt a lot of admiration for them. It would be more than enough for you to acquire the techniques of one of them to make yourself a name in the JiangHu. It is not due to a lack of effort on your part, yet, during the past ten years, you haven’t progressed that much. Do you know why?”

“It is because I am too dumb. My Masters have tried very hard to teach me the best they could, but it didn’t help.”

“It’s not really because of you,” the Taoist said. “It’s, as the popular saying goes, ‘If those that teach don’t know how to teach, then those that try to learn won’t learn anything’!”

“Shif...uh, I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“If we look only to the core martial arts, the level to which you’ve arrived is not negligible. At the time of your first real fight since the beginning of your training, when you were beaten by the Taoist youth, you questioned yourself and thought it was impossible for you to beat him. On this point, however, you are completely mistaken!”

“How does he know of this matter?” Guo Jing wondered.

“This Taoist youth made you do a somersault, but he did it with a trick. Comparing basic techniques, it’s not at all certain that he surpasses you. Besides, your six masters are probably as strong as I am, that’s why I cannot teach you martial arts.”

“He’s right,” Guo Jing thought. “My Six Masters are very strong, it’s me that’s too dumb.”

“Your seven masters made a bet,” continued the Taoist. “If I teach you some martial arts, your masters will be sad when they learn of it. They are brave, and place a lot of importance on loyalty and honor. They would refuse to accept any sort of unfair advantage in a bet.”

“What bet?” Guo Jing wondered.

“So you don’t know about it then? Well, if your masters didn’t tell you anything about it yet, it’s because you don’t have to know about it at the present time. During the next two years, they will certainly explain it to you in detail. Let’s look at it this way: you are full of sincerity, and it seems that our meeting was written in destiny. I am going to teach you some methods of breathing, of sitting down, of walking and sleeping.”

The astonishment Guo Jing felt knew no boundaries. “To ‘breathe, to sit down, to walk, to sleep’,” he thought to himself, “I know how to do that already, why would I have to learn it again?” He thought of a lot of questions, but didn’t say anything.

“Clear the snow from this big rock,” the Taoist ordered, “You will be able to sleep there.”

Guo Jing thought it strange, but obeyed. He swept off the layer of snow and lay down on the rock.

“Not like that,” the Taoist said. “If it was just sleeping like that, I wouldn’t need to teach it to you. Here are four formulae, remember them well: ‘When the thought fades, the feelings will be forgotten’; ‘When the body empties, the breath will circulate’; ‘When the heart dies, the mind will live’; ‘When the sun rises, the darkness will vanish’.”

Guo Jing repeated the formulae several times to learn them by heart, but he didn’t understand the meaning of them.

“Before sleeping,” the Taoist continued, “It’s necessary to clear the mind, letting no thoughts or preoccupations remain there. Then, it is necessary to compose the body, while lying on your side, and to breathe in a continuous way through the nose, so that the soul doesn’t wander inside and the mind doesn’t go outside.”

And so he taught Guo Jing breathing and the mastery of the breath, the technique of meditating and of eliminating worries.

Guo Jing did what the Taoist explained to him. In the beginning, his thoughts stayed chaotic and difficult to control. But after applying the breathing method, exhaling and inhaling deeply, after a certain time, he slowly felt his heart calm down, and a slow breath brought slowly into his 'dan tian' (the area between the groin and the navel) brought a warm feeling. An icy wind blew on the summit of the cliff, but he didn't feel any need to resist it. He remained immobile, stretched out on his side, for close to an hour, before feeling some "ants" in his limbs. The Taoist, who was sitting cross legged in front of him, practicing meditation, opened his eyes, "Now," said the Taoist, "You can fall asleep."

Guo Jing obeyed and fell asleep. When he woke up, the rays of the sun had begun to radiate from the east. The Taoist let him down the cliff attached to the rope, telling him to come back this evening. He reminded him not to speak of it with anyone.

Guo Jing returned that evening and the Taoist brought him up with the same rope. During his practice with the Six Masters, he often did not go back home at night, but his mother didn't worry about him.

And so he went in the evening and left at dawn, practicing meditation and the mastery of breathing all night on the summit of the cliff. It was strange; the Taoist hadn't taught him any movements at all, not even the smallest sequence, and yet, in his daily practices, he became lighter and faster. Six months later, the movements that he hadn't managed to do before, now were executed perfectly. The sequences that he had never completed some months ago were executed with speed and precision. The 'Six Freaks of South' believed that, with age and the regular practice, he was finally open to learning martial arts. They no longer felt the frustration they had at the beginning of his training.

Every evening, when he arrived at the cliff, the Taoist climbed with him, showing him how to use his breathing and his strength. They went up together until he was incapable of continuing, then the Taoist rushed to the summit and raised him with the rope. With the passing of the months, the young man climbed more and more quickly, and higher and higher. The steps once so difficult were cleared with only one jump! Only some particularly difficult places still required the help of the rope.

Another year passed, and only a few months remained before the competition. The 'Six Freaks of the South' spoke of this event as though it was going to change the world of martial arts and attract the attention of all the brave heroes in the country. Observing Guo Jing's lightning progress, the 'Six Freaks' felt sure to win, and the idea of returning to their home in JiangNan filled them with joy. However, they still hadn't explained to Guo Jing the reasons for this competition.

One morning, Nan XiRen said to Guo Jing, “Jing’er, in these last few months, you’ve mastered the weapons. It may be that you still lack enough practice fighting with bare hands. Today, we are going to work the palms more.

Guo Jing nodded his head.

They arrived at the place where they usually trained. Nan XiRen got ready to begin the lesson when they suddenly saw clouds of dust rising not far away, accompanied by screams and neighs. A herd of horses approached at a fast gallop and the beasts were agitated; the Mongol who herded them had problems retaining control of them with his whip.

Just when they’d barely settled down, one could suddenly see, coming from the west, a small red horse, with the hair the color of fire. It was speeding along in the herd, harassing it with hoofs and bites, before disappearing northward at the speed of the wind. Then, the red tornado came back in the blink of an eye, provoking a considerable tumult in the herd again. Furious, the herders tried to capture this spoilsport, but the horse was so fast that it was impossible to catch it. In an instant, the horse had moved off and stood several zhangs away, neighing proudly, as if he was very happy with the shambles he’d caused. The Mongols didn’t know whether to laugh or be angry. When the small horse charged in for the third time, several guards sent arrows in its direction, but he was so astute and fast that he departed before the projectiles reached it. An expert in martial arts couldn’t have done it any better!

The ‘Six Freaks’, along with Guo Jing, were fascinated. Even Han BaoJu, who loved horses above all else, had never seen such a magnificent and fast animal. His own horse, ‘Wind Chaser’, had rare speed, unequaled even in Mongolia. However, the small red horse surpassed them all. Han BaoJu asked the herders where this marvel came from.

“This wild horse,” answered a herder, “Comes from some mountains. We first saw it a few days ago, and found it so beautiful that we wanted to capture it, but did not succeed. Our attempt put it in a mean mood and, for these past few days, it keeps coming to bother us.”

“It is not a horse,” said a very serious old horse herder.

“What is it then?” Han BaoJu wondered.

“It is a transformed celestial dragon, we shouldn’t bother him!”

“A dragon transformed into a horse!” another horse herder mocked. “What nonsense!”

“What do you know of it? I’ve kept horses for several years, but I never saw an animal as fabulous as this one, ever!” He had not finished speaking when the small red horse sped again into the herd.

The equestrian arts of Han BaoJu, nicknamed the ‘Horse God’, were remarkable. Even the Mongols, who constantly lived in the saddle, recognized his superiority. Seeing that the small horse had come back, and knowing well which way he was going to leave, he stood in a strategic position and awaited the passage of the animal. When it approached, he suddenly jumped, a very calculated jump, so that he should have managed to straddle the beast. He had tamed so many stubborn horses in his life that he had the conviction that once on its back, he wouldn’t fall. However, in a split second, the small red horse accelerated, making Han BaoJu miss his mark. Furious, he ran after him, but how could he have caught up with such a fast animal?

Suddenly, someone jumped and seized the mane of the horse with his left hand. Surprised, the horse galloped even faster. Still clutching the horse’s mane, the man let himself be pulled along with his body off the ground.

The spectators noisily applauded.

Astonished and delighted, the ‘Six Freaks’ saw that it was Guo Jing that was being cheered!

“But where,” Zhu Cong asked, “Did he learn a lightness technique that sophisticated?”

“Our Jing’er has made immense progresses lately,” Han XiaoYing said. “Could it be his dead father that guides him from the heavens? Or would it be Fifth Brother?...”

How could they have known that, for the past two training years, the Taoist of the three adornments had taught him every evening, on the cliff summit, the art and mastery of breathing? Even though he didn’t teach him any fighting skills, he had initiated him into the superior art of Nei Gong.<sup>iv</sup>

Every evening, when he climbed and descended the cliff, Guo Jing practiced, without the knowledge of his teachers, a very subtle lightness technique called the ‘Flight of the Golden Eagle’. Having a naturally simple and confident mind, he was completely unconscious of what he had learned from the Taoist. His progress in the mastery of his internal energy and in this technique of the ‘Flight of the Golden Eagle’ only appeared when he practiced lightness techniques with Zhu Cong, Quan JinFa or Han XiaoYing. He didn’t realize it, and the ‘Six Freaks’ were pleasantly surprised at his improved performance, without suspecting the truth.

Observing the Nei Gong of their disciple and his suppleness that didn't corresponded at all to what they had taught him, they looked on in astonishment, suspecting that the young man had another master.

Guo Jing suddenly executed a somersault in the air and dropped astride the horse. The horse reared, kicked with its hind legs and bounded to all sides as if possessed! But the boy clamped down with his thighs and didn't allow himself to be tossed off.

Han BaoJu shouted some instructions to him and told him some tricks to master the horse, which ran with renewed vigor for more than an hour, apparently untiring.

His audience was in awe: the old horse herder knelt and whispered some prayers, imploring the sky not to punish the man for having offended the 'Dragon Horse', before shouting to Guo Jing to let him go. But he didn't hear a thing, and stayed glued to the horse as if he was attached by a rope, reacting to all of its movements smoothly.

"Come down off that horse," Han XiaoYing shouted. "Let your Third Master replace you..."

"Absolutely not!" protested Han BaoJu. "Changing the trainer now would risk all of the work he has done up to now!"

He knew very well that such a stallion had to have a strong character. If someone managed to tame it, it would respect its master and would stay forever faithful to him. But if more than one tried to overcome it, it would rather die than submit!

Guo Jing also had an obstinate character. When he began to get tired, he slipped his arms around the neck of the horse and began to tighten them, making use of his internal energy. The animal bounded, jumped, and shook itself in all directions, without getting rid of this pressure that was suffocating it. It then knew that it had met its master, and stopped.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Han BaoJu, delighted. "That's it! You have succeeded!"

Fearing that the horse would run away again, Guo Jing didn't dare dismount.

"You can come down," Han BaoJu reassured him. "Now it will follow you all of your life. Even if you wanted to get rid of it you wouldn't be able to..."

The young man jumped to the ground. The horse licked his hand, showing affection that made everyone there laugh. A guard approached it a little too

closely and the animal gave him a kick that made him somersault. Guo Jing led it to the water, to wash it and calm it down.

Since this session of horse breaking had tired him a lot, the 'Six Freaks' released him from practice for now; but doubts still troubled them.

After the lunch, Guo Jing came into the ger of his masters. "Jing'er," Quan JinFa said, "I would like to see your practice of the 'Crunching Mountains Palm' strokes."

"Here, in the ger?"

"Yes. One can meet enemies in any place; it's necessary to train to fight even in closed spaces." He feinted with the left, and delivered a stroke with his right fist.

Guo Jing, respecting the rule of courtesy due to elders, defended three movements before responding. Quan JinFa then attacked with violence. Suddenly his fists hit the young man's chest, with a movement named "Penetrating Deeply in the Lair of the Tiger". It was no longer a practice stroke, but a deadly, violent and heavy one, used to kill! Panicked, Guo Jing wanted to move back, but he already had his back against the wall of the ger. Trying to protect himself when confronted with danger is a natural reaction especially since he had a rather slow mind. Without even thinking about it, he turned his left arm, and blocked the attack of Quan JinFa by repulsing his arms. The fists had already touched his chest, when Quan JinFa realized with surprise, that it was as soft as cotton, without any resistance. Then he was repulsed with strength, and his arms were afflicted by a jolting pain; he moved back three steps before recovering his balance.

Guo Jing was speechless and knelt before saying, "I probably did something that I shouldn't have," he exclaimed, "I accept the punishment of the Sixth Master!" Afraid and surprised, he wondered what crime he could have committed that was worthy of his master's anger, to the point of wanting to kill him!

Ke Zhen'E and the others got up, all with stern expressions. "You train with someone besides us," Zhu Cong said. "Why did you hide it from us? If Sixth Master hadn't tested you like that, you would have continued to lie to us, am I wrong?"

"There is only Master Jebe," Guo Jing said, "Who teaches me the bow and the spear!"

"Do you dare lie to us again?" an angry Zhu Cong said, with a severe look.

“I would not dare to lie to my Masters ever!” Guo Jing said with his eyes full of tears.

“Then where did you learn this mastery of Nei Gong?” Zhu Cong insisted. “Now that you have the support of a powerful master, you no longer have any respect for us!”

“Nei Gong?” Guo Jing wondered. “But I don’t have a Nei Gong!”

“Pfui!” Zhu Cong spat, still doubtful. He moved his index finger toward a location situated two inches below the sternum, named ‘Tail of Turtledove’. A stroke to this essential point on the body induces immediate unconsciousness. Guo Jing didn’t dare to avoid or to defend against it and remained immobile. However, he had practiced for almost two years with the Taoist of the three adornments and, even though he didn’t know it himself, his body was filled with internal energy. On contact with Zhu Cong’s finger, his flesh naturally retracted and then expanded itself, repulsing the finger. The stroke still hit the point effectively, but caused only a certain amount of pain, without succeeding in affecting that point on the meridian. Zhu Cong had not used all of his strength, but Guo Jing’s internal energy had succeeded in neutralizing him. When he realized it he was astonished and angry. “And that’s not Nei Gong?” he shouted.

“Could the Taoist master have taught me Nei Gong?” wondered Guo Jing finally understanding. He said, “During these past two years, someone came, every evening, to teach me how to breathe, to sit and meditate and to sleep. I found it funny, but I followed his instructions. But he didn’t teach me any techniques, but he did tell me to not talk of it with anyone. Since I thought that there wasn’t anything wrong with it and that it didn’t affect my practicing, I didn’t speak of it to any of you. I recognize my mistake; I won’t go to him anymore.” He kowtowed.

The ‘Six Freaks’ looked at each other and thought, “The young man seems sincere, and he doesn’t seem to be lying.”

“Don’t you know what the Nei Gong is?” Han XiaoYing asked.

“I really don’t know what the Nei Gong is!” Guo Jing said. “He told me to sit and meditate and to breathe slowly, without thinking about anything while concentrating only on the way the breath circulates inside the body. In the beginning I couldn’t manage to do it, but lately I’ve had the impression that, inside me, there was something like a hot small mouse running through all of my body; it was very funny.”

The 'Six Freaks' were surprised and delighted at the same time, to see that this simple-minded kid had succeeded in reaching such a level. This was not very easy, especially for him.

In fact, Guo Jing did have a simple mind. Compared to so-called intelligent people, he didn't have a head cluttered full of difficult and meandering thoughts to bother him. His type of mind encouraged progress in the acquirement of Nei Gong. Thus, in barely two years, he had succeeded in reaching this level.

"Who taught it to you?" Zhu Cong asked.

"He doesn't want me to say his name," answered Guo Jing. "He said that the kung fu of my Master is not lower than his, and that's why he cannot teach me martial arts and cannot be my Master. He made me swear to not ever describe his appearance to anyone."

The 'Six Freaks' were more and more astonished. In the beginning, they thought to themselves that Guo Jing had by luck met an expert, and were delighted for him. But this individual appeared so mysterious that they were now suspicious. With a gesture, Zhu Cong asked Guo Jing to leave.

"I won't dare go and amuse myself with him anymore," the young man said.

"You can go," reassured Zhu Cong. "We are not angry with you, but you don't need to tell him that we know."

Guo Jing acquiesced and, seeing that his masters weren't annoyed anymore, happily left. Outside of the ger, he saw Hua Zheng with the two white eagles, which had grown a lot. Standing next to her, they were nearly as tall as her.

"Come quickly," Hua Zheng said, "I've been waiting for you a long time."

One of the eagles fluttered over and came to perch on Guo Jing's shoulder.

"A while ago," he said, "I tamed a small red horse that runs with incredible speed! I don't know if it will let you mount it..."

"If it doesn't let me," said Hua Zheng, "I'll slaughter it!"

"No you won't!"

The two young people, hand in hand, ran on the plain to have fun with their horses and eagles.

---

<sup>i</sup> Qing Ming Festival. A day for paying respects to the dead. The Chinese pay their respects at their ancestor's / family's graves, and may clean up the grave and pull out the weeds etc.

<sup>ii</sup> In Mongolian, jebe means 'skilled archer'.

<sup>iii</sup> 1 zhang = 3.3 meters / approx. 11ft

<sup>iv</sup> Nei Gong could be regarded as a form of internal martial arts involving controlled breathing, meditation and the awareness of what's happening inside one's own body and to some extent controlling it. It can be used as an aid in the recovery of one's health from illness or injury and improves the skills of external types of martial arts.