

Chapter 26

Stranger in the Little Shop

Autumn, the leaves are falling.

At the end of the street is a big mansion, like the autumn leaves, almost time to fall.

At the front is a big door, seemingly haven't been opened for over a year now, the bronze filled with rust.

It's been a while since any sound came from the inside, other than an occasional cricket or bird.

However, it hasn't always been this way. Seven Jin Shi and three Tan Hua had lived here, including one who's also a hero in the martial world.

But two years ago, this mansion changed owners, and many amazing events happened here, many top-level fighters died here.

After that, this mansion became very quiet.

People started to wonder about this place, some feel there's an evil presence inside.

Now, you can no longer hear laughter inside. No more lanterns brightening the mansion in the evenings. Only a single candlelight in little building in the back.

It seems that a person's here waiting for someone, but who is she waiting for?

No matter how dirty, how dark a place, some people would live there.

Perhaps it's because they can't go anywhere else, or that they're sick of life, preferring to hide in the dark, waiting for others to forget them.

On the street here is a little shop, selling food and wine in the front, an Inn with a few rooms in the back. The owner, Hunchback Sun, is a handicapped person.

He knows that this street isn't very good for business, but won't move his shop.

He prefers to simply live a solitary life here, not hearing others' laughter or joy, because he knows that no money can buy peace.

Of course he's lonely.

About a year ago, a strange customer came into this little shop. Actually, he wasn't wearing anything special, or looked very special.

Although he's fairly tall, and looked pretty dashing, but he also looked quite frail, as if he's always sick, and he kept coughing.

He really looks like an ordinary man.

But Hunchback Sun immediately knew that he was special.

He did not laugh at Sun for his hunchback, nor cared, especially not tried to show sympathy.

He wasn't picky about the wine, nor did he judge it, he just doesn't talk much period.

The strange part is, after he entered the little shop, he never walked out.

The first time he came in, he chose a seat by the corner, asked for some dried tofu, some beef, two pieces of bread, and seven jugs of wine.

When he finished all his wine, he asked Hunchback Sun to get more, then slept in the last room of the Inn, until he woke up the next dusk.

By the time he came out, his seven jugs of wine would be all gone.

It's been over a year now, every night the same corner, the same dishes, some dried tofu, beef, two pieces of bread and seven jugs of wine.

He would cough and drink at the same time. When he's done, he would carry seven more back to his room, not showing up again until the next night.

Hunchback Sun is also an alcoholic, but he's still in awe of this person. He has never seen anyone drink fourteen jugs before getting drunk before.

He would sometimes want to ask for this person's, but then decide against it, because he knows that he won't get a response.

Hunchback Sun is not a chatty person.

So this went on for months, until those few days when it was quite cold, and rained continuously for a few days. Hunchback Sun went into the back to check on things, found out the back room's window was open, the strange customer lying on the floor, his face terribly red, like it's filled with blood.

Hunchback Sun picked him up, went to get some medicine, cooked it, and took care of him for three days, until he got out of bed, and then asked for more wine.

At that time, Hunchback Sun realized that this guy had a death wish, so he tried to help him, saying, “No one can keep living drinking like this.”

But this person simply smiled, asking him, “How do you know drinking would make me live a shorter life?”

Hunchback Sun could not respond.

From that day on, they became friends.

When there are no other customers, they would drink together, talking about useless things. Hunchback Sun realized that this person is quite knowledgeable.

He only refrained from one subject, his past and name.

One time Hunchback Sun asked him, “Since we’re now friends, what should I call you?”

He thought for a while, then answered, “I’m a drunkard, why don’t you call me that?”

Therefore, Hunchback Sun realized that this person must’ve had a terrible past, so he couldn’t even bear to bring up his name, preferring to live his life in wine.

Other than wine, this person had one other hobby.

It’s woodcarving.

He would always use his little knife to carve pieces of woods, but Hunchback Sun never knows what he’s carving, because he never finishes any of the carvings.

This really is a strange customer, to the point where it’s scary.

Yet Hunchback Sun hoped that he’d never leave.

This morning, it was especially cold, so Hunchback Sun had to wear his heavy coat before opening shop.

He then saw two people on horsebacks coming his way.

There aren’t many people who ride horses in the area, so Hunchback Sun took notice.

These two people both wear long, yellow robes, the person in the front has big eyes, the person in the back with a pointy nose, both with short hair, in their 30s.

These two people don't look out of the ordinary, but their yellow robes made them stick out, they didn't notice Hunchback Sun, simply examining the surroundings.

He knows that he's definitely not on the minds of these two.

Only to see them ride past his shop and out of sight, but soon afterwards, both came back.

Surprisingly, they actually dismounted in front of the shop.

Although Hunchback Sun has a strange temper, he's still a businessman, immediately asked, "Do you need anything?"

The big-eyed man said, "We don't need anything, just want to ask you something."

Hunchback Sun went back to his chores, because he's never a big fan of talking.

The pointed-nose man laughed, then said, "How about if buy some answers from you? A tael of silver per answer."

Hunchback Sun immediately brightened his eyes, nodded and said, "Sure."

As he said those words, he raised a finger.

The big-eyed man laughed, "This also counts as an answer?"

Hunchback Sun said, "Yes."

He raised another finger.

The pointed-nose man asked, "How long have you lived here?"

Hunchback Sun answered, "Twenty to thirty years."

The pointed-nose man asked, "Who lives in this mansion across from you?"

"The Li family."

The pointed-nose man asked, "Who was the owner after that?"

"His surname is Long, called Long Xiao Yun."

The pointed-nose man asked, "Have you seen him?"

"No."

The pointed-nose man asked, "Where is he now?"

"He left."

The pointed-nose man asked, "When?"

"About a year ago."

The pointed-nose man asked, "He's never been back since?"

"No."

The pointed-nose man asked, "If you've never seen him, how could you know so much?"

"His chef often buy wine from me."

The pointed-nose man thought for a while, then asked, "Has any stranger drop by to ask you questions recently?"

"No. If there is... then I'd probably be rich today."

The big-eyed man smiled, "Here's your reward."

He tossed some silver over, then without another word, they rode their horses and left.

Hunchback Sun looked at his silver, then said to himself, "I can't believe sometimes it's this easy to make money."

He turned around, suddenly found that drunkard is behind him, looking at where those two men disappeared into.

Hunchback Sun smiled, "You're awake awfully early today."

That drunkard also smiled. "Last night I drank really fast, so I was already sober by morning."

He lowered his head, coughed, then asked, "What day is today?"

Hunchback Sun said, "September 14."

That drunkard's normally white face became a bit red, looked off into the distance, remained quiet for a while, then asked, "Then tomorrow will be September 15th, right?"

The drunkard seemed to want to say something else, but started to cough continuously.

Hunchback Sun sighed, shook his head. "If everyone drank as much as you, then all the wine sellers would be rich by now."

At dusk, candlelight appeared in the little building in the back.

The drunkard still simply drank at his old place.