

Chapter 30

Long, Long Night

Fog fills the night, few leaves remain on the trees, lotus pond filled with dried leaves, the grass by the path all brown. In the past the flowers were red, and the trees green, the smell of plum filled the pavilion, but none still remain. At the end of the little bridge is a little house, the Cold Fragrance Hut*.

*Note: I did not use this translation in previous references to this place, and instead just said something like 'house' or 'room' or some other generic term. This is the house Li Xun Huan and Lin Xian Er lived in (remember when Li Xun Huan visited Lin Xian Er there?). But I will use this term from now on. As you can probably see by now, editing and thinking-up-perfect-translations tend to take a back seat to speed. I don't like it, but it's necessary if I don't want to drag out this translation process for years. If I still feel up to it, I'll make a thorough revision after I finish the whole translation. But for right now, you'll have to bear with me.

Here lived the top hero in the martial world, and the most beautiful woman in the world; back then, the plum flowers blossomed, its smell alluring.

But now, cobwebs filled the corners, dust gathered on the windows, nothing remained, even the old plum trees had dried up.

Deep in the darkness of the night, a shadow appeared.

His hair disorganized, his clothing messed up, look like a street bum, but his expression still graceful, his eyes bright as the stars.

He walked over the bridge, saw the old plum tree, and sighed. The plum trees used to be his friends, but has since withered as he had.

Then like a sparrow he shot up!

The window on the top floor of the little building is closed.

But there are many slashes on the window. From these slits one can see that lonely person, facing towards the candle, sewing.

Her face pale, even her beautiful eyes cannot retain its magnetism of the past.

She has no expression, looks very cold, as if she had forgotten all happiness, and all sadness.

She simply sits there, sewing, withering away.

Tears in clothing can be mended, but the tears in one's heart cannot...

At the other side of the room is a boy around thirteen or fourteen.

He looks very smart, a pair of eyes that makes him look even smarter, but his face is pale, so pale one almost forget that he's a kid.

He's practicing writing.

Although he's young, he has already learned to withstand loneliness.

That withered man stood outside, watching them.

Tears flowed down his eyes.

After who know how long, that child stopped writing, raised his head, and began to stare at the candle flame.

That housewife also stopped sewing, looking at her son, her face filled with unlimited tenderness, and softly asked, "Xiao Yun, what are you thinking about?"

The kid bit his lips, said, "I was just thinking about when dad is coming back."

The housewife's hand shook, the needle stabbed her finger. But she seemingly felt no pain, for all the pain resides in her heart. That kid said, "Mom. Why did dad suddenly leave? It's been two years, and still no word of him."

The housewife remained silent for a long time, and then softly sighed. "I didn't even know why he left."

That kid suddenly showed a strange expression of hatred, said, "But I know why he left."

The housewife said softly, "You're still a kid. What do you know?"

That kid said, "Of course I know. Dad left because he's afraid that Li Xun Huan will come back for revenge. If he so much as hear Li Xun Huan's name, his expression would change."

The housewife wanted to say something, but only let out a sigh instead.

She realizes that this kid knows a lot of things, perhaps too much.

That kid continued, "But Li Xun Huan never came, why hasn't he come to see mom?"

The housewife's whole body shook. She said loudly, "Why would he come to see me?"

The kid smiled. "I know he and mom have always been great friends, right?"

The housewife's face became pure white. She frowned. "The sun is about to rise. Shouldn't you go to sleep now?"

The kid blinked his eyes, said, "I won't sleep. I want to accompany mom, because for the past two years, mom had not slept well at all."

The housewife closed her eyes, tears poured down.

That kid stood up and started to smile. "But I do need to go sleep now. Tomorrow is mom's birthday, I need to get up early..."

He walked over to the housewife and gave her a kiss on the forehead, then said, "Mom should also go to sleep. I'll see you tomorrow."

He smiled as he walked out the door, but once outside, his smiled disappeared, replaced by a venomous expression. "Li Xun Huan, everyone else is afraid of you, but I'm not. One of these days, you're going to die in my hands."

The housewife's eyes followed the kid out the door, filled with sorrow, filled with tenderness. This really is a smart son.

She only has this one son.

This son is her life, even if he did something that made her sad or angry, she would still love him wholeheartedly.

The love of a mother to her kid is always limitless, always unconditional.

She sat down again, made the light even brighter.

Every night when it's almost dawn, she would feel especially gloomy.

A sound of light coughing came from outside the window.

Her expression changed again.

Her whole person seemingly became a piece of wood, unable to move, simply looking out the window. Her eyes carried a hint of joy, but also a hint of sorrow...

After who know how long, she slowly got up, walked over to the window, and with a hand still shaking, opened the window slowly. She asked loudly, "Who's there?"

Not even a hint of a shadow below.

The housewife looked around, then said, "I know you're here. Since you're here, why don't come see me?"

No sound, no response.

That housewife took a deep breath, then said, "I don't blame you for not wanting to see me. We really wronged you..."

Her voice became softer and softer, then basically stood there aimlessly for a long time, before closing the window.

The ground has been fully covered by darkness.

The moments before dawn is always the darkest.

But darkness always eventually passes, as a hint of light appeared from the east. A shadow appeared from the back of a tree.

He had been standing still for a long time, his hair, clothing, all seemingly soaked with tears.

His eyes never did leave the window. He looks so old, withered, fragile...

He is the same person as the one who appeared here last night, the same one who was perpetually drunk at Hunchback Sun's shop!

He did not speak, but his heart kept reaching out.

Shi Yin, Shi Yin, you never did anything wrong, it's me who wronged you...

Although I couldn't see your face, but for the past two years, I was by your side the whole time, protecting you. Do you realize that?

The sky is getting brighter.

This person's hand held his mouth, trying to suppress a cough.

Then, he walked in front of the door.

The door wasn't locked, so he pushed it open.

Once opened, the stench of alcohol filled his nose. The room is dirty and disorganized, a man sleeping on the table, holding a wine bottle.

Another drunkard.

He smiled, and knocked the door.

The drunkard finally awoke, raised his head, and revealed a face full of freckles.

No one would ever believe that he's Lin Xian Er's dad.

Still not sober, he looked around and said, “Why would anyone come by this early in the morning? Run into a ghost or something?”

Only after he finished saying this did he see the middle-aged man. “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

The middle-aged man smiled. “We met two years ago. Don’t you remember me?”

The freckled man looked at him, then said in surprise, “You’re Li...”

Before he can get on his knees, the middle-aged man lifted him back up. “It’s a good thing you still recognize me. Come, let’s sit down and chat a bit.”

The freckled man smiled. “How could I not recognize you, master*. I promise it won’t happen again. But, master you’ve gotten older the past two years.”

*Note: The ‘master’ here doesn’t necessarily mean that Li Xun Huan is his master. It’s a generic term any servant would use to refer to his master’s friends, who would be above his own social level.

The middle-aged man felt a bit of gratitude, said, “You also got older. Everyone’s getting older. So how have you been the past two years?”

The freckled man said, “In front of others, I might boast a little bit, but in front of master you...”

He sighed. “To be honest, I have no idea how I lived through the past two years. Today I sell some paintings. Tomorrow I sell some furniture...”

The middle-aged man raised his eyebrows. “Is it so bad that there’s no more money here?”

The freckled man lowered his head.

The middle-aged man said, “Are you telling me that when Fourth Master Long left, he didn’t leave any money to sustain the household?”

The freckled man shook his head, his eyes red.

The middle-aged man’s face looked even paler, began to cough continuously.

The freckled man said, “The Lady originally had some jewelry, but her heart’s too kind. She gave the money to the servants, so they can find some business to do outside... She’d rather burden herself than the servants.”

When he said this, his voice croaked somewhat.

The middle-aged man remained silent for a long time, then asked, “But you didn’t leave. You really are a faithful person.”

The freckled man smiled. "I just didn't have any place to go to."

The middle-aged man said, "You don't have to explain. I know that while some people have a bad temper, their heart is good, but few people understand them."

The freckled man's face turned red, forced a smile. "This wine isn't really good, but if master doesn't mind, why don't you have some?"

Only when he tried to pour the wine did he find that the bottle is empty.

The middle-aged man smiled. "I don't really want to drink any wine, just some tea... Don't you find it odd, that I would want to drink tea? I haven't done this for so many years."

The freckled man also smiled. "This is easy to do. I'll just go boil some water to prepare your tea."

The middle-aged man said, "No matter who you see, don't tell them I'm here."

The freckled man said, "Don't worry, master. I'll keep your secret."

He cheerfully walked out, even forgetting to lock the door.

The middle-aged man frowned, talking to himself. "Shi Yin, Shi Yin, you've been through so much pain because of me. I must protect you. I won't let anyone hurt you!"

The sun shined through the window, it's very bright already.

The tealeaves aren't good at all.

But as long as the tea is thick, people can drink it. This is just like women, as long as they're young, one won't find them disgusting.

The middle-aged man slowly drank the tea, then suddenly laughed. "I used to have a very smart friend, who said something very witty."

The freckled man laughed with him. "Master, you're very witty too."

The middle-aged man said, "He* told me, 'There are no wine that can't make you drunk, and there are no ugly young women.' He also said, 'It's because of these two things that I kept on living.'"

His eyes filled with laughter. "Actually, the good wines are the ones that has been sitting for a long time, the good women are the older ones because they have more flavor."

The freckled man didn't comprehend everything, so he didn't respond, instead pouring more tea. "What's the reason for master to come back?"

The middle-aged man sat there for a long time before responding, "Someone said, there's a treasure here..."

The freckled man laughed. "Treasure? I wish there really is a treasure here."

He suddenly stopped laughing, his eyes stared at the middle-aged man, asking, "If there are any treasures, I'm sure master would know, right?"

The middle-aged man sighed. "Although you and I don't believe this rumor, apparently a lot of people do."

The freckled man asked, "Who's spreading this rumor? Why?"

The middle-aged man said, "He did it for two reasons. One is to get some greedy people to come and fight each other, so he would get something out of that."

The freckled man said, "Any other reasons?"

The middle-aged man said, "It's been a while since I've appeared. Many people wish to know my whereabouts. Whoever did this obviously want me to appear."

The freckled man said, "What's wrong with that? They'll get to see just how amazing you are."

The middle-aged man said, "But this time, there are some people even I can't handle."

The freckled man was amazed. "You mean there are people in this world even you're afraid of?"

Before he got the answer, a loud knock came from outside, a voice screaming, "Is this where Fourth Master Long lives? We are here to pay a visit."

The freckled man said, "Strange. We haven't had any visitors for the past two years. I wonder who they are?"

After about an hour, the freckled man came back chuckling. "Today is the Lady's birthday, even I forgot, yet these people remembered, and brought gifts too."

The middle-aged man thought for a while, and then asked, "Who are these people?"

The freckled man said, "Five people came. A very stylish old man, a handsome youngster, a one-eyed man, plus a very ugly green-faced man."

The middle-aged man said, "And the fifth person is a one-legged man, right?"

The freckled man nodded. "That's right... How do you know? Do you know who they are?"

The middle-aged man lightly coughed, his eyes sharper than knife.

But the freckled man didn't seem to notice, and continued to smile. "Although these people look strange, their gifts are certainly amazing. We've never had presents like these even when Fourth Master Long was here."

"Really?"

"One of the gift is a coin made of pure gold, at least 6 pounds. I've never seen anyone this extravagant before."

The middle-aged man raised his eyebrows, asked, "Did the Lady accept the gifts?"

The freckled man said, "She didn't want to originally, but those people just sat in the living room and won't leave, saying they want to see the Lady, that they're friends of Fourth Master Long. The Lady doesn't know what to do, so she sent the young master to greet them."

He smiled. "Master, while the young master is still young, he certainly knows how to talk to people, sometimes even better than adults. All of those guests complimented on his intelligence."

The middle-aged man stared at his tea. "I wonder if there will be more people coming, more people who would dare to come."

ZhuGe Gang, Gao Xing Kong, Yan Shuang Fei, Tang Du, and ShangGuan Fei all sat in that large living room, talking to a kid in a red robe.

Although these are some of the best fighters in the martial world, they did not seem to look down on the kid at all.

Only ShangGuan Fei sat there quietly, not speaking a word, as if nothing in this world can make him speak.

ZhuGe Gang said with a smile, "Young master really is amazing. Your potential is limitless. In the future when you become a famous hero, I hope you'll remember us old folks."

That kid also spoke with a smile, "If I can only be half as successful as elders, I'd be satisfied. But I'll certainly need elders' guidance in the future."

ZhuGe Gang clapped his hands. "Young master really knows how to talk. No wonder Fourth Master Long..."

He suddenly stopped talking, and looked out onto the yard outside.

That freckled man came in again, with a person behind him, wearing black robe, black pants, black shoes, and carries a long, black sword on his back.

He is a big and muscular person, almost twice as big as the freckled man. His face carried an expression of death, his eyes striking, his beard flowing with the wind.

He looks arrogant, but also graceful, stern, but also unruly.

Anyone who sees him will know that he is not a regular person.

The five people looked at each other, as if trying to figure out his identity.

That red kid got up from his chair, walked up to him and bowed. "Nice of you to visit. My name is Long Xiao3 Yu..."

The black-robed man looked at him. "So you are Long Xiao4 Yun's son?"

Long Xiao3 Yun said, "Yes. I take it that elder is a friend of father. Could I have your name?"

The black-robed man said, "Even if I tell you, you won't recognize it."

He walked into the room.

ZhuGe Gang got up and bowed. "I am..."

He just said two words before the black-robed man cut him off. "I know who you are, and you don't need to try and figure out my identity."

ZhuGe Gang said, "But..."

The black-robed man cut him off again. He said in an icy tone, "I came for a different reason from you. I just came to watch."

ZhuGe Gang smiled. "I'm very glad, if that's the case. When we're finished with our business here, we will certainly thank you."

The black-robed man said, "I don't interfere with you. You don't interfere with me. Let's just mind our own business. No need to thank me."

He found a chair, sat down, closed his eyes, and rested.

The five people looked at each other.

Gao Xing Kong smiled. "I heard the backyard is very famous. I wonder if the young master can show us around."

Long Xiao3 Yun sighed. "Unfortunately, the backyard has withered..."

Gao Xing kong said, “Oh, that doesn’t matter. We just want to take a look.”

Long Xiao3 Yun said, “If that’s the case, then follow me.”

A line of people walked through the yard.

First one is Long Xiao3 Yun, the last one is the black-robed man, his eyes half-open half-closed, his hands in his sleeves, as if trying to conserve energy.

Long Xiao3 Yun pointed at a forest of withered plum trees, said, “That’s the Cold Fragrance Hut over there.”

Yan Shuang Fei’s eyes brightened. “I heard Little Li Tan Hua used to reside there.”

Long Xiao3 Yun lowered his head. “That’s right.”

Yan Shuang Fei held his spearheads, let out a cold laugh. “He has flying dagger, I have flying spear, if I could duel with him one of these days, it would be quite fun.”

The black-robed man said from afar, “If you really can duel with him, then that would truly be a miracle.”

Yan Shuang Fei turned around quickly, staring angrily at him.