

THE MIRROR LEGACY

Chapter 6: Jade

As Li Tongya and Li Xiangping made their way through the reeds, parting the layers gently, the grayish-blue mirror in their hands emitted a warm, pulsating white light.

Li Xiangping looked in the indicated direction and whispered, "This way leads to Moongaze Lake. It's about half an hour's walk from Guli Road."

Li Tongya shook his head and said, "We can't use Guli Road. Let's cut through the reeds."

Li Xiangping murmured his agreement and followed his brother.

Lu Jiangxian sensed the pulling force growing stronger. As they ventured deeper into the reeds, the light in front of him brightened, revealing an image of a serene, crystal-clear lake, where a flock of white gulls stood one-legged along the edge, resting.

The mirror in Li Xiangping's hand grew increasingly hot, filling him with apprehension. Looking up at Li Tongya, he saw his second brother's expression was stern and silent. Only concern filled his eyes.

Is immortality really within the reach of us mortals...? Li Xiangping pondered, seemingly oblivious to the burning sensation in his hand.

"Hang in there, mirror. We're almost there," he muttered, clutching the grayish-blue treasure.

Soon, they emerged from the dense reeds to find Moongaze Lake shimmering before them, with a startled flock of gulls taking flight.

Lu Jiangxian's gaze was fixed on a rocky sandbar in the middle of the lake. Among those moss-covered stones, a piece of jade was wedged firmly in a crevice, glowing with a white light.

As the mirror emitted a beam of brilliant white moonlight, Li Tongya and Li Xiangping could faintly discern the glowing white jade that lay wedged between the rocks before them.

Exchanging looks of amazement and excitement, Li Xiangping eagerly began to remove his clothes, preparing to enter the water.

"Wait!" Li Tongya cautioned, pulling him back.

"I'll get it. You stay here with the mirror. If the moon reaches that position in the sky and I'm not back..."

He pointed upward, indicating the moon's trajectory before continuing, "Then, hide the mirror in the reeds and head toward the Guli Road. Don't go back home right away," Li Tongya instructed, looking earnestly at his brother.

"Wait until sunrise, then return to see how things stand."

"Got it..." Li Xiangping's voice broke, betraying a hint of sadness. He wiped his eyes and gazed at his second brother.

With a reassuring laugh, Li Tongya stripped off his clothes, revealing his lean and muscular arms. He then turned and swam toward the lake, leaving Li Xiangping concealed in the reeds, watching him intently.

Years ago, he swam in Moongaze Lake numerous times during visits with his father and brothers. Drawing on this familiarity, he effortlessly made his way to the center of the lake.

Li Tongya thoroughly examined the rocky crevices on the island. After spending what felt like the time needed for an incense stick to burn, he let out a sigh.

“Nothing,” he muttered with a frown. As he checked once more, he inadvertently pulled out five or six small river crabs.

Then, his fingers brushed against something smooth and cool. With a gentle tug, he extracted a jade piece about two fingers thick.

This cylindrical shaped jade had characters engraved on it, which Li Tongya strained to read under the moonlight.

“Supreme... Qi... Meridian Nourishment...”

He could recognize only a few words. Though he had learned to read at a young age from the scholar in the village, the intricate patterns on the stone made it difficult to decipher. *RĀNŌbĒš*

Glancing back at the shore, he clutched the jade and swam back.

“Third Brother!” he called out softly as he neared the reeds.

Li Xiangping emerged, and Li Tongya reached out to show him the jade. But as soon as he opened his hand, the jade transformed into a beam of white light and whooshed into the mirror.

The brothers watched in shock at the white light above the mirror and moonlight swirled together, before merging into the glass.

Inside the mirror, Lu Jiangxian felt as if struck by lightning. Knowledge flooded his mind so rapidly that he cried out in pain and lost consciousness.

After the jade’s absorption, the white light in the mirror gradually faded.

As the golden-red sun cast its first rays, they illuminated Li Tongya’s bare torso, revealing golden lines that glowed.

He turned to face his younger brother and suggested, “Let’s head home first.”

Li Mutian sat at the red lacquered wooden table, attentively listening as his two sons recounted the events.

He nodded approvingly at Li Tongya and said, “Well done.”

He and Li Changhu had spent a restless night, fraught with worry. Now, seeing his two sons return safely, his anxiety finally eased.

“Our home is spacious, with the backyard against the mountain and two melon fields in front. I’ve been thinking of expanding, building two more houses there and a courtyard with a secure front gate to prevent prying eyes,” Li Mutian shared thoughtfully.

He had contemplated this for some time, anticipating the day his growing children would need their own space.

The Li Family was well-respected in the village, thanks to Li Mutian’s savings and the land he had bought after leaving the army—over ten mu. This, combined with an additional five mu inherited from his father, brought their total landholdings to approximately twenty mu.

The fertile land of Lijing Village, along with the valuable reeds and mudflats, sustained them well.

In a prosperous year, the yield from their twenty mu of land could comfortably sustain more than ten people. Such productivity had the potential to elevate the Li family from mere farmers to the status of landowners[1].

Despite their wealth, Li Mutian insisted his children engage in both academics and farming, preparing them for independent lives.

“We need to keep the family together. When it comes to finding spouses, they should be connected to the Li Family,” he mused, reflecting on the opulence of the city’s elite families, where multiple generations lived under one roof, engaged in scholarship or military service. In contrast, poorer families often split up, each member fending for themselves.

“I’ve made my decision,” Li Mutian declared with conviction, turning to his sons.

“Call your eldest brother from the fields. We’ll level the foundation and rent them out. The tenants can manage the fields from now on. Your youngest brother doesn’t need to gather mulberry leaves this afternoon. From now on, he’ll spend his days studying with Master Han.”

“All right,” Li Xiangping replied energetically, despite a sleepless night, and hurried outside.

Li Tongya, after a moment’s contemplation, addressed his father, “Are you thinking of adopting the ways of the clan? Establishing ancestral halls, opening a clan residence, focusing on education and military training?”

“The Li Family has been saving for two hundred years. It’s time,” Li Mutian affirmed with a smile, waving his hand dismissively.

“As for pursuing academics and martial arts, traveling the Guli Road is filled with danger, and venturing in and out of Mount Dali is a life-threatening journey. There’s no need to go all the way to Yue State to study or train in martial arts. We only want to build a legacy for our family business and to ensure our survival.”

“I agree, who knows we may find something more interesting than academics and martial arts,” Li Tongya responded softly.

“Don’t say such nonsense.” Li Mutian laughed heartily, patting Li Tongya on the shoulder before strolling out with his hands clasped behind his back.