

M. Slaying 22

Chapter 22: A Nighttime Encounter by the Lake

Li Jue told Chu Liang a story.

The protagonist of the story was Situ Yan. She had been an ordinary girl with average looks, but she had a wealthy family and lived comfortably. She had everything she needed to live a blissful life.

Unfortunately, a massive fire broke out in Situ Yan's home two years ago. She managed to survive, but the fire had burned half of her face and left it disfigured with unsightly scars.

Situ Yan had been just another student in the South Mountain Academy's 37th Class. However, things changed after the incident.

Situ Yan's classmates were frightened of her scarred face. She covered her face with a veil and even styled her hair with a thick fringe on the left side of her face to conceal her scars, but it was impossible to hide them completely.

Several rambunctious and mischievous classmates bullied her regularly, wanting to pressure her into leaving South Mountain Academy.

Zhang Cong would shout "Freak!" at her every day... Wu Shao'an would frequently throw balls of paper at her... Chen Da would often set some straw alight and use it to frighten her, despite being well aware that she had become extremely afraid of fire after the incident... Yan Xiaohu would demand five taels of silver from her every month...

Situ Yan thought about giving up. She didn't want to attend the academy anymore. However, Li Jue encouraged her to persist.

That's right. Among all the students in Situ Yan's class who either bullied her or didn't dare to look at her at all, Li Jue was the only one who was genuinely kind to her. Li Jue, who was typically taciturn and reserved, and Situ Yan, who had gradually become socially withdrawn after the incident, seemed to share mutual understanding as if they were kindred spirits.

Li Jue would keep encouraging Situ Yan to be brave and continue attending the academy. He would also help her with any lessons she missed and stand up for her when the bullies targeted her... He persisted with all of that even though it often resulted in the bullies targeting him too.

Before the fire, Li Jue and Situ Yan had been casual friends, but after her disfigurement, they became close friends. Li Jue thought that by being a good friend to her, he could gradually help Situ Yan pull herself together.

However, something he'd never expected occurred one day. They were reading by the lakeside, and Li Jue dozed off... He woke up to find that Situ Yan had tied him up!

Situ Yan bound Li Jue's hands together and pulled out a knife. There was a frightening glint in her eyes.

She told Li Jue that she had fallen for him... and that once she ruined his face and made him a monster too, they could be together forever.

Li Jue tried to dissuade her, but she seemed to be in a state of hysteria and completely ignored his words. All she wanted to do was make him just like her—a freak, a monster...

After struggling frantically, Li Jue managed to break free just before Situ Yan's knife got too close. He pushed Situ Yan away and called her a lunatic. Then he turned and fled, too afraid to look at her ever again.

The next day, Li Jue heard that Situ Yan had drowned herself in the lake.

Li Jue was perplexed. He didn't know whether what he'd done was right or wrong... or why treating her sincerely had led her to reciprocate in such a way. Nor did he know if calling her a lunatic had been the last straw that broke her.

Seven days later, the bodies of Wu Shao'an and Zhang Cong were also found in the lake.

Everyone at the academy was speculating whether it was the work of Situ Yan's vengeful spirit returning to get revenge.

Li Jue thought the same way.

It has to be her! She must have returned to deliver retribution to all the people who had bullied her.

However, Li Jue didn't know... if he was a target of her revenge.

He was very afraid.

...

Chu Liang walked out of the room with mixed emotions. The story he'd just heard was indeed a grim tale. Nevertheless, he had his duties as a cultivator.

Lin Bei was waiting for him outside.

Upon seeing Chu Liang emerge from the room, Lin Bei asked, "What did he say?"

"Ever since Zhang Cong and Wu Shao'an died, Chen Da hasn't been to the academy. He's been hiding at home all this time... Yan Xiaohu, on the other hand, has been going about his business as usual, but he shouldn't be able to leave home for the next two days..."

"If Situ Yan has indeed become a vengeful spirit, then that means she will probably appear at the lake by the hill behind the academy..."

"I'll go check that area. You should stay here and watch over Li Jue."

After briefly explaining to Lin Bei what he had found out from his conversation with Li Jue, Chu Liang prepared to head over to the hill behind the academy to investigate.

"All right, I'll take care of things here," Lin Bei said. "Be careful when you deal with the vengeful spirit."

"Don't worry. Situ Yan didn't cultivate at all while she was alive. So, even if she has become a vengeful spirit, she won't be too difficult to handle," Chu Liang replied.

His flying sword glowed with a dazzling radiance. Chu Liang chose to use a simpler but slightly slower wind-assisted form for his flying sword this time.

By now, the city gates had already been locked for the night. However, this was actually more convenient for cultivators. If they flew during the daytime, they would have to worry about potentially alarming normal people, so flying at night was a simpler affair.

By the time Chu Liang arrived at the hill behind the academy, the night was dark, and there was not a soul in sight. Amidst the howling wind, the shadows of the trees stretched across the land. Yet, it also seemed as though many people were hiding and rustling about in the darkness. It was a perfect night for a haunting.

Chu Liang hid in the thicket and concealed the flow of his qi, fearing he might alert the enemy. He waited there silently until midnight.

However, he didn't have to wait until then because he soon heard something whoosh by.

Is there someone here?

Chu Liang extended his divine sense. Then he noticed a shadowy figure nearby.

That looks like the back of a woman. She arrived quite early.

Chu Liang carefully withdrew his qi and leaped forward with his sword in hand. Yet, when he arrived at the spot where the woman had just passed, he found no trace of her.

Huh? Even if it's a ghost, it wouldn't suddenly disappear...

There were no traces of an aura of death in the surrounding area either. Chu Liang was puzzled by the situation.

Then just as he landed on the ground, he heard a burst of air above him.

Whoosh—

A streak of emerald green light descended from the sky. It seemed to be swordlight, yet it also seemed to be a beam of augmented qi!

"Who are you?" Chu Liang questioned as he raised his sword to block the attack.

His sword collided with his opponent's weapon with a clang, bringing about a surge of wind that crushed the fallen leaves within a range of several zhang!

This was when he finally got a good look at his opponent's weapon. It was not a longsword but a jade ruler. There was no doubt that, in comparison to his flying sword, the jade ruler was a superior weapon. He knew this because his sword was trembling under the force of the jade ruler even though his cultivation level was on par with his opponent's.

Chu Liang's opponent stopped after that one strike. They leaped backward, somersaulting in midair before landing one zhang away.

However, Chu Liang did not chase after them, as their foundational qi gave off an aura of virtuosity. They were clearly not a supernatural being.

His opponent turned out to be a tall woman in black form-fitting clothes, accentuating her lithe figure and the size of her breasts. Her fair and delicate skin glowed under the moonlight.

"Ms. Song?"

"Chu Liang?"

The two people uttered in surprise.

So, the one who had attacked Chu Liang was Song Qingyi, the female teacher whom he had met during the day.

However... Song Qingyi's breasts hadn't seemed that large during the daytime, yet they had grown dramatically in size within just half a night... It was extremely odd.

After looking at each other for a moment, they both asked simultaneously, "Are you a cultivator too?"

They paused.

Then they once again asked each other simultaneously, "What are you doing here?"

Song Qingyi blushed.

She then put on a stern expression and chided, "Don't imitate me!"

Chu Liang just offered a small smile and raised his hand, politely gesturing that she should go ahead and speak first.

"I knew something was off about you when I met you earlier. Where are you from?" Song Qingyi asked.

"I am a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect. I've come to the South Mountain Academy to... Well, actually, I accepted a request to provide protection for one of the academy's students," Chu Liang answered truthfully. "What about you, Ms. Song?"

"I'm from the Noblemen's Hall in Jiangnan..." Song Qingyi replied. "A strange incident occurred in the South Mountain Academy. Naturally, it should be handled by us since we're followers of Confucianism. However, we were concerned about inadvertently alerting the culprit, so I entered the academy in the guise of a teacher."

I see.

No wonder the young age.

Chu Liang said, "Indeed. This matter shouldn't involve the disciples of Mount Shu Sect, but I'm just trying to do my best to fulfill a task that was entrusted to me. In the process, I acquired some information, so I came to investigate the lake by the hill behind the academy. Ms. Song, since you're here, I assume you must also be aware of the matter involving Situ Yan."

Song Qingyi nodded and said, "Yes, I've been keeping watch over this place for the past two nights, but I haven't seen any sign of activity... That is, until today when I saw a figure lurking around. That's why I attacked you. I hope you'll excuse me for that..."

"No worries," Chu Liang replied, shaking his head slightly. "In that case, since we have a common goal of wanting to resolve this strange case, shall we share with each other the information we've gathered?"

He suspected that Song Qingyu, recently employed at the academy, might have access to confidential information that Li Jue, a student, wasn't aware of.

Song Qingyi agreed to Chu Liang's suggestion and nodded gently.

"What do you want to know?" she asked.

"I want to know..." Chu Liang stared at Song Qingyi's bust curiously and gestured at its curvy shape with his hands. "Ms. Song, were you wearing a chest binder earlier in the day...? Why do you look... so different now that it's nighttime?"