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THE BROKEN MIRROR

By DANIEL ACABA

A shrill scream of co-mingled pain and pleasure breaks the placid country night, piercing the silence that looms over the darkened temple. Running his hand over his baldhead, the young man walks for the doors to the temple. Feeling the darkened, sturdy wooden door, he sighs heavily before shoving it open. Making his way over some debris, he slowly heads for the back of the main area of the temple. A soft hissing sound is heard from behind him but he barely reacts to it, making his way straight for the doors ahead of him and shoving them wide open, stopping suddenly to look over the sight before him. All around the room are mortal men and women in the throes of pain, pleasure and ecstasy as they writhe and groan under bakemono of both sexes. Sitting on a large chair made of stone and decorated with bits of bone and jade, is a man, slight of stature but with a force of will that can be felt from across the expansive room. *Master Whangbo . . . I hope he doesn't react too harshly to my failings . . .*

The slight man looks up at the young Devil Tiger's entry. "Shen Jin, what brings you back here so soon after leaving?" The man asks. The annoyed tone of his voice brings a slight shudder to Shen as he bows to the elder. "Most wise and honored elder, I have come to deliver news of the mission you sent us on." Spoken nervously. The elderly man sighs heavily and waves a hand idly then. "Speak then, boy. And make it quick. I have more important matters to attend to than sitting here listening to you all night." Nodding at his words, Shen rises to his feet and looks at the man. "You sent us out to meet with members of the Green Court to obtain the package you asked for. However when we arrived at the small village, there was naught there. It was a ghost town, devoid of any mortals much less Wan Kuei. We proceeded to investigate as per Saimdang's orders . . . the Bone Flower leader of our wu. As we split up, I was made aware of the fact I was being watched and I proceeded to assume the Demon's form, just in case of a Green Court ambush . . . " Shen trails off, clearly bothered by what he is thinking. "What is it boy? What happened? Do not waste my time with this drivel unless it is important." Taken aback at the outburst from the elder, Shen nods and licks his lips before continuing.

"I heard a scream from one of my wu mates . . . one of the women. Not sure which one though because almost as soon as that happened I noticed something my senses hadn't caught before. There were scents in the air that made my P'o go wild; the scent of Yomi was in that place. Realizing something bad was going on here, I ran to the scream but was stopped by demons that suddenly blocked my path. They looked like vulture men or something. Distorted beings . . . Regardless, I managed to fight them off, but the sight of them had my P'o in a whirl. Memories of time in Yomi and tortures that were suffered came rushing back . . . " Taking a breath he continues. "By the time I found them,

only my leader Saimdang was left. She demanded I leave her to hold them off and report back to you. So I fought my way out of the city and returned here." It is at this point that Shen moves his hand that was clutched to his ribs, revealing a gaping wound that would have disemboweled any mortal that had taken the wound. For the Devil Tiger however, it is merely something to be overcome.

"I see. Sister Bone Flower was wise to send you back here. This is troubling news." The elder says softly, rubbing his white stubble on his chin. "Did you see or notice anything else? Was there anything that stood out?" Shen thinks for a moment before shaking his head negatively. "No elder, I did not. Everything was rather cut and dry there. The horde of creatures going through my combat wu like a hot knife through butter was all that really stands out to me . . . " It's clear that the thought of having lost his wu is troubling him greatly. "Shen. Go home to your wife. Rest. You have dealt with much trouble this night. I think you for bringing me this message and I will take this information to those who will put it to best use." Nodding, Shen bows again, but is interrupted by Whangbo speaking again. "However. If I should find out that you were a coward there and deserted your wu to die, you would be lucky to get off by only greeting the Eye of Heaven." Shen tenses a bit at the threat, knowing full well that the elder's words ring true. Bowing once again, Shen makes a hasty retreat from the temple, knocking over a bakemono in his rush. The frightened creature skitters away from the Devil Tiger, not wishing to upset its superiors.

Whangbo sits in his chair for a long while, thinking over Shen Jin's words before slowly rising from his chair. His bones crack and twist as the old man moves for the first time in decades. The gathered creatures around him stop their fornication and look to him, curious what has brought this man from his chair. Making his way down the steps, he moves toward a room in the corner, throwing the door wide as he enters. Inside, two snake-like bakemono are lying on the floor next to a dresser where a jade bowl rests. "Move." Said sharply in Korean as the creatures both slither out of the way rapidly. Walking over to the bowl, he concentrates on his inner Yang before pricking his finger on a sharp edge of the bowl, letting drops of his Yang-charged blood mingle with the water in the bowl. Letting the blood flow cease, he leans over the bowl and watches the water for a moment before he begins to speak in low tones. "Emerald River of Fire, appear before me. We must talk."

The mixture of Chi and water shimmers and flows, turning into an image of a savage, but beautiful female face. "Whangbo. I hope this is important. I will not be pleased if it is not . . . " The man licks his lips before speaking. "It has been found. The Broken Mirror has been found and it is not more than two hours

travel away from here. They took over a small village and have stripped it of human life and killed at least seven Wan Kuei. Only one has survived the attack, one of my dharma." He explains. The woman's face gets interested suddenly at the mention of the Broken Mirror. "Really now? Have you? And what do you think of the area? How populated is it?" She asks looking away as she says something softly in Korean, presumably to one of her aides. "It is in a now deserted area due to them taking the humans. They're likely food and hosts for bakemono now." Whangbo adds. The woman nods to that.

"And if we were to bring out the weapons, how much danger would there be to other humans?" He thinks for a moment and reaches for a piece of paper. Looking over it closely, he analyzes the writing on it before speaking. "If we make a thorough assault on the area as our elders have dictated, we will likely destroy four small villages and destroy part of a larger city." Said easily as if he were discussing the weather. "I see. Send a messenger with all the relevant information and let us gather our troops to be mobilized. We will set up a perimeter before we devastate the area with missiles. Once we have flattened the demons we will send in our forces to finish it off and seal the Broken Mirror." He

nods to her words and grins. "As you wish. I look forward to this momentous event. The Thousand Embers Righteousness Society will no longer have to hide away from the masses. We will seize our destiny and annihilate all that oppose us." He grins and the woman laughs a girlish laugh.

The sound of rapid movement suddenly distracts him. Whirling around Whangbo looks at the bakemono. "Why were you listening in on my conversation?" The two serpent creatures look over to him. "It was not us, master. It was Shen Jin. He was just here." Whangbo's eyes widen at that. "He heard . . . Get him!" With a hiss, the bakemono slithers out of the room calling for others to come with them. Walking out to watch the small horde of bakemono race out the temple, Whangbo makes a fist. *He can ruin everything. He must not be allowed to live to pass on what he has seen and heard.*

Breathing heavily, Whangbo runs as hard as he can. The cries and screeches of the bakemono behind him, he moves as fast as his demon powers and Yang Prana will allow him to move. He has to warn someone . . . has to find help. *I can't let them do this. I cannot . . . those innocents . . .*