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Its intention is to frighten and disturb.

It may contain subject matter that is distressing to some.

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She Had Enough

A Halloween L5R Fan Fiction

By Robert Denton III



Bayushi Shizuko and I did not get along. I don't deny that. She was not my "rival" as Instructor Barunori likes to say, whenever new students ask about her calligraphy hanging on the wall. She and I were not competing for our class' top position, nor were we "squabbling" over "some boy's" affections. Perhaps you overheard Naoki repeat a rumor that, while our disagreements were heated, Shizuko and I ultimately respected one-another. He is mistaken. Then and now, I consider her to be my enemy. But I didn't ask for the misfortune that befell her. I would never wish that fate on anyone..

I first met Shizuko on the day we were accepted into the School of the Split Grass. Back then, it was one of the most acclaimed bodyguard schools in Scorpion lands. I remember how she approached the dōjō in her swinging sleeves, laughing carelessly, mindless flunkies hanging on her every word. As a scion of the Bayushi family, her attendance was arranged before her birth. Already she carried a grandparent's name, although it was still years before our coming-of-age ceremony. Even *that* had been handed to her.

She didn't know what it was like to have to claw your way into the bottom ranks of a prestigious class. To endure the heckling, your teacher's doubts, and the sharp corrective snap of a *shinai* against your bare back. There are only two things that a Yogo inherits: a curse, and distrust. Anything I have, I had to fight for. I disliked her from the moment my eyes beheld her.

It started with Shizuko bumping into me at inopportune times – while sweeping the floors, bowing, moving through the hall to the bath – always sending me sprawling. She apologized, but in such a way that I could never be certain of her sincerity. Too subtle to call out. I never said anything about it. I didn't want to appear weak or dependent on the instructors. I certainly didn't want to seem like I couldn't take care of myself. One does not attend the School of the Split Grass expecting things to be easy.

Then one day, as we sparred in groups, Shizuko began loudly announcing my actions.

"She advances!"

"Left-upward swing!"

"Awaiting her opponent!"

"All out attack! And she trips!"

There is one weakness over which I have stumbled my entire life. I cannot stand to be the center of attention. A few pair of eyes, I have no issue with. But to be crushed beneath the gaze of an entire room, all those staring faces, chills me to the bone. My limbs become like sticks, and my spine locks into a rigid pole, and my stomach churns as though I've swallowed an angry beehive. Heat rises to my face. I sputter. I stumble. My entire focus is required to budge even an inch. I used to have nightmares where I was an actress alone on a stage, an audience of hundreds studying my every move. I longed for my coming-of-age ceremony, when I would finally earn a mask I could hide behind.

I lost to each of my peers that day, my practice sword knocked out of my weakened grasp, over and over. Each time Shizuko would begin calling out my movements, my joints would solidify, and my opponents would best me. By the end of the day, I was the lowest-ranked student in the class. My face burned beneath her amused laughter. She'd figured out my weakness. She would embarrass me, again and again, from that day forward. Every chance she got, she would lay me at the center of attention. And I hated myself a little more each time for my weakness. Every day was a new humiliation. Always accompanied by her voice.

She was never reprimanded. It is because her own sister, Bayushi Haneko, was an senior instructor. Instructor Haneko always looked the other way where Shizuko was concerned. They all seemed to feel that bullies were an important part of a dōjō, that their presence toughened up the students. Shizuko was a favorite. She could do whatever she pleased.

One morning, I found my uniform dripping with mud, but still folded neatly at the foot of my bedroll. I knew Shizuko had done this, but I could not prove it. I finally realized she existed to torment me, that she got some sick pleasure each humiliation. Perhaps it was because I was a Yogo in a Bayushi school. Perhaps it was the difference of family's status. But for whatever reason, she wanted me to dread going to class. She wanted me to quit. I refused to give her the satisfaction. I had worked too hard. I wasn't going anywhere.

I decided that, before the year ended, I would avenge myself against Bayushi Shizuko. Not just a prank, not just reveling in misfortune, but proper, satisfying, *true* revenge. She had to suffer publicly, powerlessly, *expensively*. And she had to know that it was me who had done it.

For months I endured her heckles and pranks with smiles and shrugs. I grew accustomed to the paralyzation that came with two-dozen gazes. I started to anticipate it. Each time furthered my resolve to make her pay. But I never let her see my anger. I swallowed it bided my time.

Then one day after practice, I found a folded note among my things. It was a letter of admiration. Clumsy poetry alluding to my "skill." Wishing we could spar in the dōjō alone. Somewhat erotic imagery. The game of letters was never my forté, but I was eventually able to decipher some of the clumsier metaphors, and more importantly, discern where the paper came from. It was a boy from the upper class named Takashi.

This was a stroke of good fortune, because Takashi was a boy that Shizuko liked. I'd discovered that in the weeks prior by listening to rumors. My mind formed a vague plan: make Shizuko think that Takashi liked her back, then "take" Takashi for myself, right in front of her. Nothing scandalous – just a peck on the cheek would be enough. I wasn't particularly interested in Takashi, but he wasn't bad looking, and any resulting rumors would reflect more poorly on her than they would on me. She would be the fool for once. *She* would be the one humiliated before all the others.

It was the upper class' responsibility to maintain the dōjō's *shinza*. If you do not know what that is, our *shinza* was a knee-high shelf for displaying the school's artifacts. You can think of a *shinza* as a dōjō's "shrine," so-to-speak. Our *shinza* displayed the two-sword *daishō* of the school's founder, as well as personal effects belonging to some of our greatest students, such as the mask of Bayushi Kirūske, who died in the

4th century intercepting a poison dart meant for the Emperor's son. As it happened, Takashi was one of the seniors tending to the artifacts the day I received his letter. I caught his frequent glances as I swept the dōjō floor.

"You missed a spot."

Of course instructor Haneko was there to pester me. She was nearly as bad as her younger sister; while Shizuko took delight in making me the focus of attention, Haneko was always testing me in one way or another. She seemed to take a special interest in me, always correcting my stance, interrupting my *kata* to show me this or that nuance. Even when my form was flawless, she always found some imperfection, any chance to clip my wings.

Worse, she always paired me with the weakest students, as if I had to be coddled. I may have been the only Yogo in a Bayushi school, but had I not proven myself, clawing my way through opponents in my initial exam? Was the same not expected of me as of my peers? Thanks to her, I never had the chance to catch my sensei's eye. The condescension of the Bayushi knew no limits! But as she was my senior, this was an outrage I had no choice but to bear.

Before I could use my sweeping as an excuse to approach Takashi, instructor Barunori pulled me aside.

Shosuro Barunori was one of the instructors I liked. We sparred whenever I craved a challenge, and he never held back. I thought that when I had my coming-of-age ceremony, and I finally earned my mask, I would fashion it after his as a token of respect: molded silk that covered the bottom half of his face, padded and shaped into a demon's toothy grin.

When we were apart from the others, he spoke. "You seem to be paying a lot of attention to Takashi-san today." His voice was playful, joking.

Normally I would not have replied, but as I said, I liked Barunori. I told him that I just wanted to talk to him a bit. I said nothing of my greater plans. He didn't need to know of my feud with Shizuko, or he'd tell her sister — or worse, our sensei.

He paused uncomfortably, then said, "Just be careful. You are here to hone yourself into a weapon for your master. Do not become distracted by... *other things*." Concerned eyes shone above a demon's grin. "Some say that anger is temporary madness. So is infatuation, Jun-*chan*. Remember this."

I should have been insulted, I think. He was crossing a line into personal territory. But instead his words thrilled me. If he believed that Takashi and I could become romantically entangled, then certainly Shizuko would.

In retrospect, I should have heeded his advice. I should have paid attention.

When the moment was right, I approached Takashi in the hall outside the dōjō. I pretended not to see Shizuko and her flunkies, addressing him as though we were familiar. Naturally he responded in kind, hiding some surprise. I flattered him and let him lead the conversation — boys are so easy that way — all the while relishing the sight of Shizuko glowering behind him. She couldn't believe he was paying attention to me instead of her. I could taste her jealousy.

And that would have been a good enough start, had the conversation not turned to what the upper class students had done the previous night.

"You cannot tell anyone," Takashi said in a low tone, "but we played *the game* last night."

Game? What game?

It was Shizuko who pressed him. How transparently she wanted his affections!

"It's a tradition," Takashi explained. "A class plays it every year. It's a test of courage from the lands of the Crab Clan. They use it to prove they're worthy to face the nightmares beyond the Kaiu Wall. It is called the 'candle-and-mirror' game."

Of course you have heard of the candle-and-mirror game. Versions are played throughout the Empire. You may know it as "A Gathering of One Hundred Weird Tales," a popular pastime in winter courts. But for your sake, I will explain the particular version Takashi proposed to us, the version he said Crab samurai played to test their courage.

The game is played in a long hallway or narrow room, which is divided by a folding screen. On one side, a circle is made from candles – one candle for each participant. The candles provide the only light. On the other side of the screen hangs a mirror, hung so as to reflect a kneeling participant's face. During the game, participants sit just outside the candles, so that their shadows are cast behind them. Then one participant leaves the circle, taking their candle behind the screen. While staring into the mirror, they tell the most frightening ghost story they can conjure. It must be told as though it happened to them, although the tradition is to tell a classic folk tale, so it is rarely authentic. When the story is finished, the teller extinguishes their candle, then walks back to take their place at the circle. Thus the game continues with a new teller, each candle extinguishing, the light gradually fading, until the end of the game, when all is cloaked in darkness. The object is to make it to the end; anyone who leaves prematurely is a coward. Moreover, after all the candles are extinguished, the first to leave the room will have their sword fail them, and the last to leave will suffer a tragedy. So it is said, anyway.

I recognized this game from my home province, but the additions of the folding screen and mirror, and the consequences of fleeing the circle, I hadn't previously heard. Some of those gathered looked uneasy at the thought of such a game. Others seemed thrilled.

"Too bad Shizuko doesn't know any good stories," I said.

Eyes turned to me, and I fought the sensation of my limbs turning to stone.

Shizuko scoffed. "My grandfather was famous for collecting strange stories. I know five for each one you might come up with."

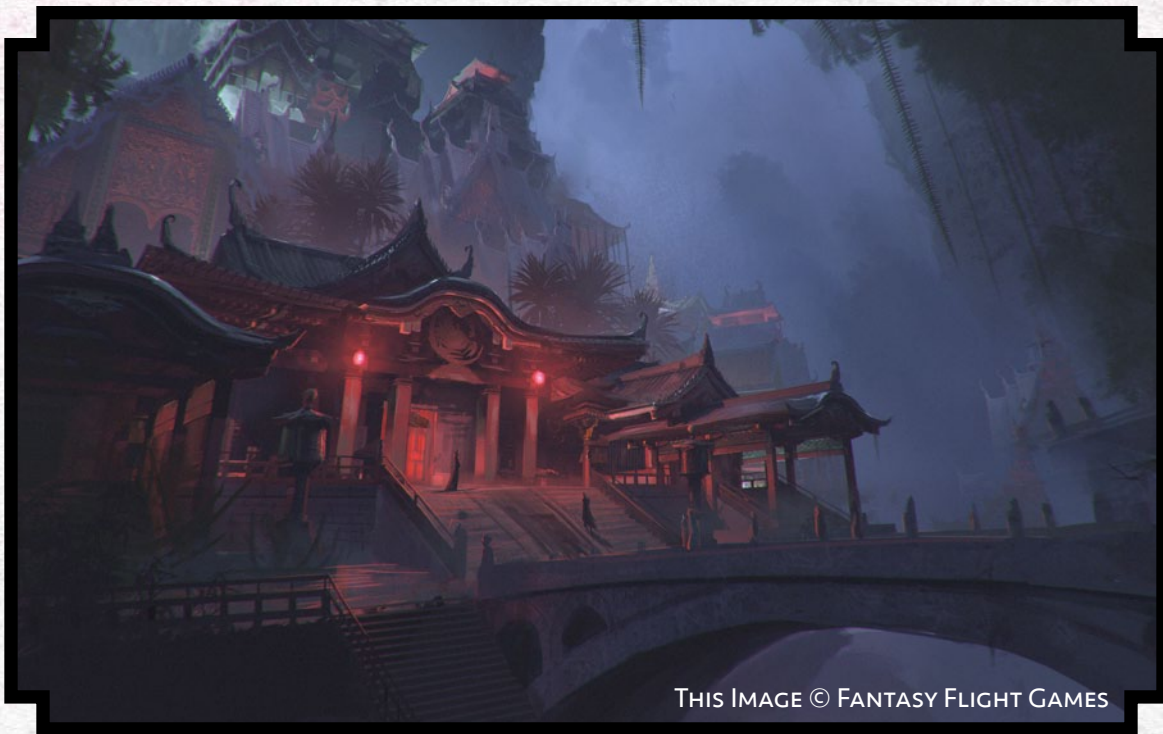
I forced a smile despite my pounding heart, even as my legs became wooden sticks. I placed a hand on the boy's arm. "Takashi," I said, "what if we played this game tonight? Would you be so willing to show us how?" Then I looked at Shizuko from the corner of my eyes, a devilish expression I'd practiced for just this moment. "Oh, but Shizuko's exam is tomorrow. She needs her beauty sleep. What a shame that she couldn't join us."

Shizuko's smile faded. Before Takashi could reply, she stormed right into my face. "Yogo Jun talks big for someone who winces during practice. Did you know that, Takashi? Did you know that she has yet to spar me? And she thinks she'll last in a game of bravery?"

"I'll outlast you," I murmured.

Shizuko spun to the others. "Tonight," she said. "Bring a candle, if you're not afraid."

And that is how I set the trap.



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By evening, the entire class whispered of our little bet, inviting themselves to the game. Shizuko selected the narrow storage room above the dōjō, which was little more than an attic. She would supply the mirror – how fitting for such a vain creature. As for the folding screen, there was already one up there, and although it had holes in the canvas, Takashi assured that it would suit our purposes. All day I heard my classmates ask each other the same hushed question: “Are you be going to the candle-and-mirror game tonight?”

We were careful not to say anything in front of the instructors. After all, we had curfews. Being caught outside the dormitory after dark was a punishable infraction. It was not just that we were holding a game of courage with unforeseen consequences, it was that we would be sneaking out to do so. This made it all the more thrilling. Would we get away with it? Would anyone last until the end?

Although curfew was the hour of the dog, there was no sleep in the dormitory on this night. Hushed whispers and the rustling of the restless permeated the room. Some quietly recited the tales they intended to tell. My heart raced all the while. I stared through the shutters at the waning moon and counted down the minutes. Soon. Very soon.

Just after the hour of the boar, the dormitory door slid aside. I watched Takashi lean over the threshold and make the sound of a cricket.

One by one we filed out, creeping down the hall and into the night. My bare feet crunched on cold grass as we crossed the practice yard. Only the stars saw us. Takashi held the dōjō's doors open as we tip-toed up to the storage room. The ceiling was low, and I had to stoop forward to avoid bumping my forehead.

Only then did we light our candles. With each tiny flame, the room grew brighter. No one had bothered to restore the room after the previous night's game, odds and ends shoved into the corners and against the wall, the folding screen already set up. Shizuko brushed past me and set up the mirror.

I couldn't stop shaking. This was actually working! And Shizuko seemed none the wiser. The determination to best me, to tell a story that would frighten the shadow right out from under me, was plain on her stony face. No, she didn't suspect anything.

We took our seats outside the circle, our shadows like outstretched fingers against the walls. It was as if we sat in the palm of a gossamer creature. I openly rushed to sit beside Takashi. My classmates' snickers confirmed the desired effect; everyone would think I had a crush on him. Which meant Shizuko would notice as well. She wouldn't be thinking clearly. With amazement I realized there was no hint of my usual malady; I was in complete control.

She lowered to his other side. I caught her glare, eyes shining in her candle flame. And that is when I saw it. Jealousy. Delicious and hot. Oh, how I wanted to spring the trap then, to swat her like a lovesick fly. But I resisted. It wasn't time. Not yet.

I cannot recall most of the game. There were some original stories, but mostly classics, such as the story of the Corpse-Eating Ghost, or the Farmer who Slept With Skeletons, or the tale of the tattered paper wall and the samurai who woke to find eyes staring at him from each hole. I was preoccupied with leaning gently against Takashi's arm, inching my hand oh-so closely to his own. I knew Shizuko would be watching. I knew it would drive her crazy. One at a time, each student stepped behind the screen, their shadow dancing on the wall as they told their tale. And one at a time, the candles went out.

Just as our fingers barely touched, Shizuko rose, her face bright red. "It is my turn." She stormed behind the folding screen.

To my regret, I cannot recall her story exactly. But I do remember what it was about: a Yogo shugenja and how he caused the death of the woman he loved.

Even a child can recite the Yogo curse: we are each destined to betray our true love. Even fools never speak this aloud. To even allude to my family's curse is grounds to draw blades. For the sake of all who will one day bear the Yogo name, we can never allow ourselves to be demeaned. Not without retribution.

In that moment, I hated her with all of my being. I prayed to the Fortune of Pestilence that she would die slow and gasping. I hoped she would die in front of someone she loved. I would have swallowed each lit candle if it would have burned her guts with mine.

That is why I leaned into Takashi, laying my hand on his knee. That is why my heart beat so fast as I laid my chin on his shoulder and felt his breath on my neck.

At that moment, she blew out her candle and stepped out from behind the folding screen.

She froze. Her eyes popped open. Her jaw dropped. And she stood there, stupidly, with her mouth wide in a soundless gasp. Her candle slipped from her limp fingers.

I smiled at her. *That's right, I thought. See how foolish you are. Die of embarrassment.*

I expected her to break. To shout. To tear us away from one-another, shattering her image as the ice princess of the dōjō. At the very least, I expected her to cry.

But she didn't do any of those things. She just hung there, very still, mouth opened wide.

I didn't understand. Why wasn't she doing anything? I pulled away from Takashi, and the others saw and realized what we'd been doing. A cascade of giggles rushed through the room, but Shizuko did not react. Her face seemed paler, and her lips trembled, like she was trying to say something. Like she was gasping for breath.

And in the flickering light, I thought I saw movement behind her. Another shadow, separate from hers. Long and thin, towering over us. But then the light danced again, and there was nothing there.

And then a bang from downstairs. The door! Instructor Haneko's harsh bark, ordering us back to the dormitory.

We bolted like startled birds. I think my heart stopped. We avalanched down the stairs, some slipping and falling down. I caught her furious eyes as I darted past. But she let me go. The last I saw of Takashi was Haneko seizing him mid-stride, slamming him into the wall. It looked like she broke his arm. I heard her scream, "You're done!"

We scampered to our beds with our tails tucked, game unfinished, dreading what might happen the next day. We'd broken curfew and trespassed after hours. We had to be reprimanded. And surely Haneko would come down hardest on me. My thoughts were consumed by Takashi's horrified face, and how I would be next.

None of us realized that Shizuko did not come down.

Shizuko's bedroll was still empty when the morning rays invaded the dormitory. As I prepared for the day, I slowly realized Shizuko's absence. Where had she been all night? Tattling to her sister? I felt increasingly as though something heavy were about to crush me.

The instructors waited for us when we entered the dōjō. Sensei Ryugakatsu sat quietly on the dais, his head tilted down, as if in deep thought. We exchanged looks; our master was not expected to be here today. The others stood to his sides, masks obscuring their faces. All but Instructor Haneko, whose hands were balled into tight fists, eyes shining like a barely-contained inferno. I felt their accusing heat on my face as I took my seat.

I knew then that I was finished. The entire ordeal would be pinned on me. Shizuko's elder sister would call me before the entire class, and withering and stiff in their collective gaze, I would be stripped of all honors and cast from the dōjō. Humiliated, ruined, I would return to my home an embarrassment. Shizuko would have the final laugh after all. Already my stomach churned, the tendons in my arms and legs tightening like frozen ropes in anticipation. I wanted to run away. I wanted to die.

Just get it over with, I thought. Just finish me already!

After an eternity, our master raised his head. His voice barely reached the furthest students.

"Unfortunately, last night, a game was played in the storage room above this dōjō. I am told that it was the candle-and-mirror game."

No one spoke. Denials would be useless. We'd left plenty of evidence behind.

Sensei shook his head. "Perhaps some of you heard some of the senior students talking about this game. That it is a tradition of sorts, and that each year, students play it to test their courage. I had hoped that this class would be the one to break this tradition. The seniors have already been reprimanded."

I felt the collective shift as we all wriggled in the net of guilt Sensei cast over us. We all should have known nothing happened beneath these roofs without Master Ryugakatsu knowing, that no scheme was new to him.

"I imagine," he continued, "that you heard this game is popular in the lands of the Crab Clan. That the candle-and-mirror game is how aspiring students of the Hida and Hiruma families prove their bravery to one-another." His next words were slow and deliberate. "This is a lie. Since the 5th century, this game is banned in Crab provinces. Just last year, the Hida family executed three samurai for playing this game. That is because it is not a game at all. It is a ritual that gives form to vengeful spirits, and if finished, sets them free to act as they please."

The only warmth I felt then was the fire in Instructor Haneko's eyes. Our collective horror was matched only by the stunned silence prevailing over the room.

Sensei Ryugakatsu raised a wrinkled hand. "As I have said, the guilty parties have already been reprimanded. I may yet show leniency to this class. If you truly wish to prove your courage before your classmates, then you will speak up now. Whose idea was it to play the game?"

Even if I had wished to speak – if I had the heart to withstand two dozen gazes locked on my shaking body – I couldn't say anything. Not with my thudding heart lodged in my throat, or the crushing vice of my own blood surging in my ears.

I closed my eyes, held my breath, and waited for my name.

But no one said anything. There was only silence.

Until Haneko screamed. "Cowards! Which of you bastards killed my sister?!"

The collective gasp was like the draft that swept across the dōjō, as cold and empty as Shizuko's bedroll. Any chance of confession died in its wake. A person had died. No one would say anything now.

Haneko spun to our master, anguished tears streaming down. "Punish them!" she barked. "They all did it! She was your prize student! *Where is the loyalty of the Scorpion?!*"

Sensei Ryugakatsu rose from his seat and left.

Haneko stormed to the dōjō's *shinza*, to the stand that held the *daishō* of the school's founder, and smashed it with her blade. The ancient weapons clattered to the floor, the short sword sliding free from its sheath. It stopped mere feet from where I sat, pointing directly at me. A long bladed finger of glinting steel and my own guilty face.

As they dragged Haneko away, instructor Barunori's voice boomed. "You will clean this dōjō from top to bottom! And when you are finished, you will clean it again!"

As the sounds of scrubbing and brushing overcame our stunned silence, I meekly retrieved the founder's short sword, trying not to notice how the brittle wrap of the handle had come partially undone. Instructor Barunori knelt over its sister, the fallen katana. Our eyes met only briefly. In silence, we gathered the weapons and returned them to their sheaths, then tried to restore the *shinza* to some degree of dignity. My mind returned again and again to Shizuko's gasping face the evening before. The desperation in her eyes.

"She admired you, you know." He spoke softly, as if to comfort me. "I do not know if you ever found it, but she confessed her feelings to you in a letter. She borrowed some fine paper from Takashi-san, then sought advice from Haneko on what to write. But she couldn't give it to you in person. Her pride would not allow it. So she left it for you to find, trusting you'd discover it was from her."

Shizuko's wide mouth in the dark. Her round eyes locked with mine. As we played our little game, she died in front of all of us, trying desperately to scream.

"She spoke often of how she had to exceed you, how she couldn't let you best her. She wanted to prove she was your equal. That's what good rivals do. They push one-another to greater mastery. That is what you were to her. In a way, her best friend."

His words seemed sincere. But beneath eyes glossy with tears, the molded-silk grimace of his demon mask silently laughed.

What became of Haneko, I cannot say. I saw her one last time after her expulsion. Her shaved head looked so pale, pale as her bare shoulder poking out from a massive tear in her right kimono sleeve, where our dōjō's heraldry had been torn away. I eventually heard that she joined a bandit gang somewhere south of the Spine of the World, but that may have just been a rumor.

The magistrates came and went. Shizuko's death was never explained. Eventually, Barunori hung some of her calligraphy on the dōjō wall. We all moved on. Only now did I recognize her writing – I'd never seen her poetry before, never thought to compare it to the letter, which I'd long since burned.

I had nightmares after that. I would awaken to the sound of my own screaming. It got bad enough that I was permitted to sleep in the dōjō until I could control myself. I still have this dream now and again, and it is always the same. In the dream, I once more sit outside a circle of candles. I can feel Takashi's breath like fire on my neck. I look past him at Shizuko, just within the candlelight. That gaping mouth we thought was opened in surprise, trying to scream.

But unlike then, I can see her murderer clearly. The light dances through the figure just behind her, its long hair whipping crazily as though caught in a storm. It wears a pale dōjō uniform with pleated *hakama* fading away below the knee. And as Shizuko claws uselessly at the fingers crushing her throat, I recognize that specter's hateful face. Because it's my face grinning beyond the candle's flames. I watch myself squeeze her neck until it snaps, and as blood leaks between the specter's fingers, I look down at my own bloody hands.

That is the moment I awaken, and after a long time panting in the dark, rational thought reminds me that such a thing is impossible. A person cannot be in two places at once. It is only a trick of the realm of dreams. It is only a meaningless nightmare. Probably.

Yet in the dream's own foggy logic, it makes a sort of sense. I have the vague notion that the ghost is my own soul, twisted by resentment and anger, freed from my body's cage and given form by the game – the ritual – we didn't know we were playing. For if a spirit can haunt a person after the body has died, then why couldn't it also do so while the body was still alive? Perhaps I could endure the endless barrage of embarrassment that Shizuko levied at my person, the only way that her immature, uncertain heart knew to express her secret admiration. But my spirit – my *living* ghost – finally had enough.

Sometimes, especially upon waking in that familiar cold sweat, I see it hovering above my bed. Until I blink, and the shape becomes just another rafter, just another trick of the dim light. After all these years, I am still not sure if my nightmare is just an illusion conjured by the realm of dreams, or if it is truly a memory of that night. Not a nightmare, but a recollection. I don't know anymore. I don't want to know.

It's been many years since then. Now I am an instructor at the School of the Split Grass. I no longer freeze when the students watch me demonstrate our techniques, although I cannot say that I ever grew to like being the focus of attention. Perhaps that is my little atonement for what happened. Sensei Ryugakatsu is long gone – replaced by a new sensei from the city. It is a different dōjō now, but still the most accomplished bodyguard school in Scorpion lands. It just has a more... *diverse* group of students. Opening the dōjō to those outside the clan was not without controversy, but I've personally learned a great deal from them. Especially when they don't know I'm listening.

And some things haven't changed at all. About this time every year, when the yellowed leaves just begin to wither, the students whisper of a game they can play to test their courage. A forbidden game they must play in secret. A game of candles and mirrors. I've decided that I won't say anything about this to the new sensei. I have come to feel that some lessons are better learned without guidance. Some scars last longer when they're earned in the dark.

But each year, when the students attempt the candle-and-mirror game, I make sure that I am not there. I go into town, to a quiet tea house that I like, and order a large kettle of their strongest tea. After they close, I walk the streets and midnight fields. I may even take a swim in the cold autumn lake. Whatever it takes to stave off sleep until the sun finally rises. I know better than to return until the game is done. Perhaps I worry over nothing. But I don't know what would happen if I were nearby as the game unfolded. I don't trust my *Self*.

So instead, I take the evening to remember my enemy. For that is what she was. As I have said, I hated Shizuko. And I am not sorry that she's dead. I don't care how she felt about me or if she was well-meaning; she tormented me relentlessly and it only ended when she was gone. But that doesn't mean I don't feel sorry for what happened. The way she died still chills me to the bone. I never want to die before an audience. The way Shizuko hung there before us like an actress on a stage, how she desperately tried to call for help, and we just stared as the final threads of her life were severed; that is something that will be forever burned into my mind. All those gawking faces must have been the last thing she saw. I may have hated her, but I never wanted her to die that way. I wouldn't wish it upon anyone.



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