

EXT. MOUNTAIN COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Wooden huts lie in clusters on a grassy ledge under a CLOUDY NIGHT SKY. The land slopes down to reveal RICE FIELDS swaying gently in the wind.

SFX: THWACKING NOISES. Coming from the lowest RICE FIELD.

CUT TO:

VILLAGERS gathering around the edges of the field, LAMPS and STICKS in their hands. They poke at the BUSHES around the field angrily.

VILLAGER 1

Another one!

Flickering lamplight falls onto a cluster of bushes and catches three RED FOXES. The villagers take in their muddy paws, jaws lined with yellow seeds, green stalks on the ground.

VILLAGER 1

Catch them!

The villagers surge forward. Several sticks miss two of the foxes. They slip away under the underbrush.

A stick lands squarely on the THIRD FOX, who cries out in pain.

Two villagers hold it down as it struggles.

VILLAGER 2

(in between beatings)

How dare you steal our crops!

VILLAGER 3

Don't you ever come back!

The WIND howls. The villagers step away slowly from the unmoving body of the third fox.

It's dead.

As they turn to leave, VILLAGER 1 motions for the group to stop.

VILLAGER 1

We're missing one person.

They turn...

...to see a GIANT RED FOX with THREE TAILS. Jaws dripping with saliva and blood. Yellow eyes reflecting the lamplight.

On the ground by its paws is the LAST VILLAGER.

Unmoving.

VILLAGER 1  
(panicked)  
DEMON!

The FOX DEMON snarls and leaps over the last villager's body.

VILLAGER 1  
Run!

The villagers scramble for the hill. Undeterred, the Fox Demon leaps forward and lifts a YOUNG BOY -- barely 10 years old-- into its jaws.

YOUNG BOY  
Dad!

YOUNG BOY'S FATHER  
Let go of my son!

The wind rises, stirring the CLOUDS above as the YOUNG BOY'S FATHER rushes forward, brandishing his stick at the fox. It easily swipes at him, knocking him backwards onto the ground.

The villagers back away, shaking in fear as the Fox Demon tightens its jaws.

YOUNG BOY  
(sobbing)  
Please...

Behind the Fox Demon, the clouds part to reveal a FULL MOON. The light shines on the edges of its fur, turning it from red to silver. The Fox Demon's eyes narrow. The boy's father lies dazed on the ground. The demon leaps forward--

--only to collide with a SHADOWED FIGURE, who rips the YOUNG BOY from its jaws.

The Fox Demon lands backwards and snarls.

The SHADOWED FIGURE-- masked and donned in black-- sets the boy on the ground. Gently, next to his father. The villagers

stare in awe as the figure turns back toward the Fox Demon.

The Shadowed Figure draws a LONG SILVER BLADE as they dash forward.

The Fox Demon hisses. Leaps forward again, tails flaring behind it.

In a blink, the Shadowed Figure SHIFTS in the air and reappears behind the fox. Silver blade FLASHING in the moonlight.

The Fox Demon CRASHES as it lands. Stumbles once, twice, before falling to the ground. BLOOD spilling over the brush.

The Shadowed Figure turns back to the villagers.

And BOWS once.

They bow back, startled.

The YOUNG BOY'S FATHER steps forward. He slips a SMALL PACKAGE out of his pocket, and hands it to the Shadowed Figure with two hands, bowing deeply.

YOUNG BOY'S FATHER

Thank you, night warrior. I owe you my son's life.

The NIGHT WARRIOR stands silently.

YOUNG BOY'S FATHER (CON'T)

Please, accept this payment as thanks.

The Night Warrior takes the package. Bows again to the young boy and his father.

A SHADOW passes over the field as clouds move over the MOON, hiding it from sight.

When the Young Boy's Father lifts his head, the Night Warrior is gone.

INT. VILLAGE BEDROOM - NIGHT

The NIGHT WARRIOR slips in through the open window. Unclasps the sword from their side. Removes their robes, armor, and mask, and places it into a LARGE CHEST under the BED...

...to reveal YUE MING-- a young girl of 15. From around her neck, Yue Ming pulls out a small silver key.

SFX: QUIET KNOCKING from the HALLWAY. Then, silence.

Yue Ming creeps up on her BEDROOM DOOR, fingers tightening around her sword hilt.

On the count of one...

Two...

Three...

She flings it open--

--to reveal a HALF-ASLEEP BOY (7 Y/O), slumped against the doorway. Holding a small lamp.

HALF-ASLEEP BOY  
(yawning)  
Jiejie...

Yue Ming relaxes. She hides the sword behind her back.

YUE MING  
Ling Xiao. Why are you up so late?

LING XIAO  
(mumbling)  
Can't sleep.

He rubs his eyes.

LING XIAO  
Baba was sweating in his sleep again.  
Can we go get some water?

YUE MING  
When it's lighter outside. Come on,  
let's go back to sleep, okay? I'll  
bring Baba a towel in a second and  
tuck you in.  
(pauses)  
Just head back to your room first.

LING XIAO  
Okay.

He wanders down the hallway, tugging the lamp behind him. Yue Ming watches him turn the corner.

Then she quickly shuts her door. Places her sword into the chest, grabs her key, and LOCKS it tightly.

By moonlight, she lights a lamp of her own. Takes a small TOWEL from her bedside, along with the package with the payment. Steps into the HALLWAY, closing the door behind her.