

Stranger 341

Chapter 341: Five Phases Ritual

“Paper doll?” One of the coffin hauliers, Peng Shan growled and attacked the paper doll with his saber. But the second the blade made contact with it, Peng Shan abruptly froze in his tracks, and his face contorted as if he was struggling with something.

Willow branches began growing out of his skin and sprouting green leaves that swayed gently in the night. They looked beautiful.

Their growth was fueled by Peng Shan’s vitality, however. He was sucked dry before anyone could do anything. His skin shriveled, and his flesh withered. All that was the lush willow still swaying in the wind.

“PENG SHAN! YOU BASTARD!” Peng Hu roared. Blinded by fury, he too charged toward the paper doll and swung his saber.

Thang!

There was a soft clash of metal and a flash of crimson, and Peng Hu’s saber was sent flying. His weapon arm shook uncontrollably as he staggered backward.

“Calm down.” Ye Qing glanced at Peng Hu. “You can’t defeat this paper doll.”

“Do you know what it is, Joyless?” Chu Nianjiu stared at the paper doll severely.

“I’m not sure.” Ye Qing shook his head. “All I can tell you is that it’s not a Stranger.”

“I think it’s the Five Phases Ritual,” Qi Xuanyun blurted suddenly. “Yes, I’m certain this is the Five Phases Ritual.”

“Do you know what this is, Xuanyun?” Everyone looked at the young Taoist immediately.

Instead of replying, Qi Xuanyun waved his sleeve and sent the kowtowing body flying with a gust of force. As if on cue, the muddy water pouring out of Peng Chuan’s body ceased immediately after the body was swept away.

Before they could let out a sigh of relief, the paper doll slowly turned its head and looked at them. Its simple, ink drawn eyes were calm, and the corners of its lips were curled up slightly into an eerie smile.

Everyone including Ye Qing broke out in cold sweat when they saw this.

Qi Xuanyun wasn’t, however. The next moment, he produced a small cup containing some sort of black liquid and threw it over the paper doll.

It was so foul-smelling that everyone—even the coffin hauliers who were used to foul smells—backed a few steps away from the coffin. The paper doll sizzled and gave off puffs of green smoke like it was burned before dissolving into dust.

“Phew! Thank goodness. We’re safe for now.” Qi Xuanyun let out an audible sigh of relief after he confirmed that the paper doll was gone.

“Do you recognize this, Xuanyun?” Ye Qing asked curiously. The anomalous power imbued within the paper doll was such that even he felt incredibly threatened. That was why it surprised him to see the young Taoist taking it out almost effortlessly.

Qi Xuanyun answered, “Yes. It’s the Five Phases Ritual.”

“You mentioned that before. Is that the paper doll’s name?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

Qi Xuanyun shook his head. “No, the Five Phases Ritual is a kind of curse. The paper doll is just a medium for the ritual.”

“A curse?” Lin Yuhuai sounded surprised.

“Yes, a curse.”

Qi Xuanyun began his explanation, “The Five Phases Ritual was originally named the Five Punishments Ritual. The punishments themselves are tied to the Five Phases. Someone who is cursed by the ritual would die by Metal, entombed in Wood, burned by Fire, drowned in Water, or buried in Earth.”

Ye Qing nodded in realization. No wonder Peng Hu’s head and the other corpse hauliers had died the way they did.

“It’s very easy to execute the Five Punishments Ritual. All they need is a paper doll to carry the curse and a corpse. So long as the corpse kept kowtowing to the paper doll, the Five Punishments Ritual would be activated. Anyone who shares blood ties with the corpse and made contact with them would die by the ritual, and as long as the paper doll or the body isn’t destroyed, the ritual could theoretically continue for eternity just like the Five Phases. Hence the name.”

Qi Xuanyun took a moment to gather himself before continuing, “It’s quite simple to dismantle the Five Punishments Ritual. One simply needs to damage the paper doll or the body. But of course, there are risks. For one, the paper doll is the medium carrying the curse. Anyone who touches it even indirectly would be cursed by it.”

“That is why one must first stop the body from kowtowing to the paper doll. This would greatly weaken the curse on the paper doll. After that, one simply needs to destroy the paper doll with things of extreme filth such as piss and shit[1].

“Wait a second... Are you telling me that that liquid you threw just now is piss or shit? Or both?” Ye Qing’s eyes bulged in shock and disbelief.

Have I been doing this wrong the whole time? I should’ve just used piss and shit to smite dem evils?

“What are you talking about, Brother Ye? This is a potent item my master created using virgin boy piss, horse piss, cow piss, pig piss and a dozen other livestock and

Strangers. It can even contaminate a Strange Artifact. It's one of my most prized possessions," Qi Xuanyin declared proudly.

"Ha... haha..." It was so, so much worse than he had imagined. "Your master must have a lot of free time in his hands, doesn't he?"

"Huh? How did you know?" Qi Xuanyun sounded surprised.

Isn't it obvious? Who else but someone who has too much time in their hands would come up with something like this?

Ye Qing chuckled awkwardly and rubbed his nose. "It's just a guess, considering how... creative your master is."

"Since this is a curse, someone must be behind this," Lin Yuhuai spoke up suddenly and looked at Peng Hu's group. "They're planning to kill you all."

"They want to kill us?" Peng Hu looked puzzled. "But why?"

"Someone is definitely targeting you all," Ye Qing echoed in agreement. "Xuanyun said that the Five Punishments Ritual only cursed the blood descendants of the afflicted corpse. Since the corpse is your clan elder, and he's related to you by blood, you must be the target of the ritual."

"Again, why? We haven't offended anyone throughout our journey," Peng Hu asked with a deep frown.

Chu Nianjiu answered, "It doesn't necessarily have to be them, does it? The caster could've been targeting the Peng Clan or the clan elder only. Peng Hu and his brothers were just unfortunate enough to be dragged into this mess."

"I doubt it," Ye Qing rejected the theory. "If the caster of the curse really was targeting the Peng Clan, they wouldn't have allowed Peng Hu's group to find the corpse. They would've snuck the corpse into the Peng Clan before they execute the Five Punishments Ritual. That would've dealt far more damage to the Peng Clan, don't you think?"

"Of course, I'm not denying the possibility that someone wants to taunt the Peng Clan with your deaths. It would be a lot less trouble as well."

"I agree with Brother Ye." Qi Xuanyun joined in. "Back when I was experiencing the *jianghu* with master, I once encountered a great tragedy. A man had snuck into the graveyard of a powerful century-old clan and used one of the bodies to enact the Five Punishments Ritual for revenge. As a result, all five hundred and sixty one members of that family had died a horrible death, and the one hundred year old clan was wiped out just like that."

“If whoever enacted the ritual really was going after the Peng Clan, they wouldn’t have done it this way. Just think about it. Peng Hu and the others would’ve died long before they made it back home.”

Peng Hu frowned deeply. “But our clan elder is a compassionate and easy-going man. He spent most of his time inside the Peng residence as well. I just can’t imagine him committing something so atrocious that someone would curse him and his family to a terrible death.”

“It’s hard to say...” Ye Qing smacked his lips. Peng Hu might be telling the truth, but kindness and compassion weren’t qualities you would normally find in a warrior of *jianghu*.

And assuming that Peng Hu was wrong about his clan elder, it would be perfectly normal for someone to kill the clan elder over past grievances.

“Something still doesn’t quite make sense about this.” Lin Yuhuai voiced his question, “You were saying that the caster was only targeting the clan elder, right? That the Peng Clan itself isn’t their target? The clan elder is literally dead, so we can assume that they have gotten their vengeance. In that case, why are they targeting the Peng brothers?”

“You’re... right.” Ye Qing rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

“Oh right. Where did you find your clan elder’s body, Brother Peng? Did you notice anything strange at the time?” Qi Xuanyun asked suddenly.

Peng Hu didn’t understand why Qi Xuanyun was asking this, but he answered honestly, “We discovered his body at the peak of a lone mountain. He was in a kneeling position with his eyelids removed, his ears blocked by mud, his nose flattened by a file, his mouth sewn together by threads, and his legs crossed behind his back. He was barefooted, and his feet were covered in wounds. His head was touching the ground as if he was kowtowing to someone.”

“Do you remember which direction he was facing?” The young Taoist asked in a hurry.

“I think it was the west. What’s the matter, young Reverend?” Peng Hu looked confused.

Qi Xuanyun clapped his hands triumphantly. “I got it! That has to be it!”

“What did you figure out? Tell us!” Chu Nianjiu urged.

The young Taoist scratched his head and explained, “According to the ‘Cloud Profound Dragon Riding Sutra’, the Buddha once traveled to the south of Fengdu and saw a city where everyone’s eyelids were removed, their ears were stuffed with soil, their noses were flattened, their mouths were sewn, and their arms were crossed behind their backs. They were all climbing a mountain barefooted. The Buddha considered it a strange sight.”

“A deity explained that these people were vile creatures atoning for the sins they have committed for ten lifetimes. So vile and long were their list of crimes that their eyelids were cut out so they cannot sleep, their ears were stuffed with mud so they cannot hear, the noses were flattened so they cannot smell, their mouths were sewn so they cannot feed, and their arms crossed behind their backs so they cannot use them. Everyday, they must climb a tall mountain barefooted, face toward the west, and touch their heads against the ground to atone for ten lifetimes of sins. Hence, this scene became known as the Punishment of Ten Commandments.”

Ye Qing coughed. “Can you like er, be more direct, Xuanyun? What does this have to do with our current situation? Don’t you see that everyone’s confused?”

Lin Yuhuai: “...”

Chu Nianjiu: “...”

Excuse me? Who are you calling confused? Just admit that you’re the one who don’t understand what he’s saying!

“O-Oh, got it.” Qi Xuanyun scratched his head and simplified things, “To put it simply, this method of punishment is only meant for people who have committed grave sins. Your clan elder had probably done something that the caster of the curse considered so heinous that it could only be atoned for with the Punishment of Ten Commandments.”

“As for you guys, you weren’t the caster’s target until you moved the body and interrupted the punishment.”

Qi Xuanyun looked at Peng Hu and said, “Did you know how the Five Punishments Ritual got its name, and why the body kowtows to the paper doll when the curse is activated? It looks like someone is kowtowing for forgiveness, doesn’t it?”

“That is why the Five Punishments Ritual also carries the meaning of punishment and apology. Since you moved the corpse without permission, the caster cursed you with the Five Punishments Ritual to punish you.”

“Are you sure about this, young Reverend?” Peng Hu looked utterly shocked.

“I think so!” Qi Xuanyun hesitated all of a sudden. “It’s just a guess.”

“Xuanyun’s words make a lot of sense. At the very least, it is the most reasonable and sound theory we have at the moment, don’t you agree?” Ye Qing looked at Peng Hu.

“Do you know who killed my clan elder, young Reverend? And who’s the one who cursed us with the Five Punishments Ritual?” Peng Hu’s eyes turned steely.

“I’m sorry, but I do not know. The Five Punishments Ritual is powerful, mysterious, and rarely seen in the *jianghu*.”

Qi Xuanyun shook his head when he recalled something. "Oh right, I also heard master saying that there is a mysterious faction in the *wulin* called Heaven's Judgment. They love enacting cruel punishments upon others, and they believe that they are enacting the heavens' will. I believe that the Five Punishments Ritual is one of their exclusive arts."

"Heaven's Judgment?" Everyone exchanged glances with each other. No one here had heard of it.

Peng Hu grunted, "Hmph! It doesn't matter who they are. Anyone who kills a member of the Peng Clan must pay the price in blood!"

Chapter 342: Lotus Goat

Would the caster find out that the ritual has been destroyed, Xuanyun? Ye Qing suddenly asked a crucial question.

They would, Qi Xuanyun replied without hesitation.

How strong is your clan elder, Brother Peng? Ye Qing looked at Peng Hu next.

Hes a Spirit Master. Whats the matter? Peng Hu didnt understand why Ye Qing was asking this.

Ye Qing rubbed his chin thoughtfully. So, your enemy is strong enough to kill a Spirit Master. Thats a problem. If I were you, I would be thinking how Im going to keep myself alive, not take revenge.

Youre saying they would show up to silence us all. Peng Hus eyes narrowed.

Thats definitely a possibility. Ye Qing shrugged. Qi Xuanyun was certain that the caster would find out that the Five Punishments Ritual was destroyed. Naturally, it made sense that the caster would show up to finish the job.

Of course, there was always the possibility that they wouldnt, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Joyless worries are well-founded. Chu Nianjiu nodded. For now, lets leave this place. Brother Peng Chuan needs his rest too.

One thing, Brother Peng. You should leave your clan elders body behind. The Five Punishments Ritual might not be the only thing the caster has done to it. Ye Qing stopped Peng Hu as he moved to retrieve the corpse.

Peng Hu rejected the suggestion without hesitation, No coffin haulier worth their salt would ever abandon a body to save their own lives, much less the body of a clan elder.

Chu Nianjiu joined in on the persuasion. Brother Peng, now isnt the time to cling stubbornly to your beliefs. Assuming what Joyless and Xuanyun said is true, we would die as soon as the enemy catches up to us. Youve already lost so many brothers, you dont want Peng Chuan and your remaining brothers to die a meaningless death, do you?

Peng Hu frowned deeply but didnt say anything.

Brother Peng, we understand that you have certain rules you must abide by, but rules are dead, and you are alive. The living has to be more important than what is dead, dont you agree? Lin Yuhuai also chimed in. Plus, were not telling you to leave your clan elders body in the wilderness. Were telling you to do what you need to do to secure the body first and message the Peng Clan for

reinforcement later. Surely this is a better way than throwing away your lives for nothing? Surely that cannot be the wish of the Peng Clan?

Peng Hu was visibly struggling to arrive at a decision. On one hand, breaking the rules would mean breaking the taboo and ruining the reputation his clan had upheld for over a hundred years. On the other hand, his brother's lives were in danger. He truly didn't know which was the better choice.

Brother Peng, remember that we're only making guesses. We have no idea if the caster would actually come after us. Ye Qing advised after choosing his words carefully, We're not far away from Auspicious Phoenix Market. You can afford to secure the clan elder's body, leave it here, and spy on it from the village. If a few days later, you discover that the body is undisturbed, it probably means that the caster hasn't caught up to you. You'd be free to carry it back to the Peng Clan.

But if something did happen to the body, this would be your opportunity to find out the truth. You'd be able to find out exactly who is the murderer of your clan elder. Assuming help shows up in time, you could even take revenge for your elder and resolve the problem once and for all. This way, you can kill two birds with one stone.

Obviously, this solution isn't risk free. Assuming the caster shows up, I won't deny that there is a chance they would spot you spying on them in secret. But it's still better than sticking to your current course of action and dying meaninglessly, isn't it? What do you think, Brother Peng?

That's a wonderful plan! I knew you're the most devious of the four of us. Chu Nianjiu clapped a hand on Ye Qing's shoulder.

I'll pretend that you're complimenting me. Ye Qing rubbed his nose.

Very well. We'll do as you say. This time, Peng Hu agreed to the suggestion without hesitation. Doing as Ye Qing said would allow them to identify their clan elder's murderer and still carry the body back to its rightful place. He could not see any reason to turn this down.

As for danger, they were ready to die for their cause. Why would they be afraid of danger?

Thank you very much for your guidance, Brother Ye. Peng Hu saluted Ye Qing.

You're welcome, but let's make haste, shall we? The sooner we're away from this place, the better! Ye Qing warned. He was certain that the caster hadn't caught up to them yet, but he hadn't sensed any pursuers with his demonic thoughts, but that could change given enough time.

Peng Hu wasn't stupid. He too knew the dangers they were courting by lingering too long. So, he immediately produced a new coffin from his Nature's Shell, put the body back inside, and began searching for a good location to secure the body.

They were fishing. Of course they should choose a good fishing spot.

As for Peng Shan[1], they put him to rest the coffin haulier way: cremating him and allowing his ash to return to the world.

All coffin hauliers possessed unusual birth dates and secret arts that were unique to their profession. As a result, their corpse and soul were attractive to certain Strangers and evils. Besides that, coffin hauliers generally preferred to live on nature's gift and return the favor after they're dead. That was why they were normally cremated and scattered across the world.

The group trekked toward Auspicious Phoenix Market after dealing with Peng Shangs body. Finally, they found a good place to secure the clan elders body not far away from the village: a tall cliff.

They werent the only ones who had the same idea. Some of the recesses and gaps below the cliffside were hanging with coffins.

Lin Yuhuai explained as he watched the coffins, Those are hanging coffins[2]. Some places prefer to deposit their loved ones deceased bodies on a cliff or suspend it in the air. Its because they believe that their souls would go to the heavens this way.

Ye Qing nodded approvingly after observing the location. This is a good place. The fact that so many people decided to leave their coffins here meant that this location is safe from most Strangers. Since it is close to Auspicious Phoenix Market, you can pretend to be a villager or a traveler and spy on this place without drawing attention.

You are absolutely right. Peng Hu was clearly satisfied with this location as well. Very well. We shall leave our clan elders body here.

Meeeeeeh

Meeeeeeh

Suddenly, the group heard a goats cry from atop the cliff. When they looked up, they saw a black goat that wasnt there before.

The goats fur was as black and shiny as ink. It had a pair of multi-pronged horns like a deers, and sitting on its forehead was a black lotus. A palm-sized girl sitting crosslegged at the center of the lotus. Right now, the girl was watching them curiously from above.

A Stranger?! Chu Nianjiu raised an eyebrow.

Ye Qing rubbed his nose embarrassedly. He just said there were no Stranger, and a Stranger immediately came out to slap his face. How embarrassing!

But Peng Hu let out a sigh of relief. Calm down, everyone. Thats a Lotus Goat. Its harmless to humans.

A Lotus Goat was a Soulstealer-class Stranger. Shaped like a goat, it had pitch black fur and a lotus with a child inside the pistil. As it enjoyed feeding on corpse qi[3], it could often be found in a graveyard and other places where the dead were plentiful. If it ran into a funeral procession or an abandoned body, it would personally carry the coffin or the body to the graveyard. If it encountered grave robbers, Strangers or people who were planning to steal or damage a body for whatever reason, then they would swallow the offenders whole.

This is great! If the caster shows up, it would have to go through the Lotus Goat first before it could get to the body. It would give us an easier time to identify them, Ye Qing immediately pounced on the opportunity to cover up his failure.

Indeed, not to mention that the Lotus Goat would protect the body from danger. There is a problem though. How are we going to retrieve the body afterward? Lin Yuhuai voiced his worry.

Peng Hu wasn't worried though. He assured them, That, you don't have to worry about. The Peng Clan knows a secret art that'll allow us to retrieve the body without being attacked by the Lotus Goat.

Oh, I've heard that before. Apparently, all coffinmakers, corpse shepherds, corpse carriers and more know a kind of secret art that allows them to summon a Lotus Goat to their aid if necessary. The Lotus Goat wouldn't protect them, but it would guard the bodies with its life.

Chu Nianjiu explained, There are many benefits to having a Lotus Goat guard a body. For one, it is a powerful Soulstealer-class Stranger who could fend off most Strangers and warriors. Two, it could feed on corpse qi and prevent the bodies from transforming into zombies. After the danger is over, we would retrieve the bodies from the Lotus Goat using our secret art.

Haha, Brother Chu's explanation is right on the mark. Peng Hu smiled. That is why this is the best place to place the clan elders' body.

Peng Lin?

Peng Hu glanced at Peng Lin, and Peng Lin immediately produced a bone whistle from his sleeve. He then blew it strongly.

Screeeeeeeeeeeech!

The whistle sounded more like the screeching noise of fingernails digging into a piece of wood, or glass rubbing against metal than an actual whistle. The shrill, piercing noise immediately inflicted Ye Qings group with deep nausea.

Meh! Meh!

On the other hand, the Lotus Goat started bleating the moment it heard the whistle. Soft and elegant, it was completely different from the horrible whistling.

A few bleats later, the Lotus Goat began walking down the cliff with elegant footsteps. The cliff was tall, steep, and impossible for a human to navigate normally, but the Lotus Goat made it look like it was treading on flat ground.

Meh

After the Lotus Goat landed on the ground, it bleated once at Peng Lin before the girl inside the lotus flower rubbed her nose with great anticipation. Then, she opened her mouth and breathed deeply. A stream of mist-like corpse qi immediately rose from the coffin and entered her mouth.

The lotus girl's cheeks were fully puffed like that of a cute cat as she swallowed the corpse qi inside her mouth bit by bit. She looked so happy and intoxicated it was like she was drinking sweet honey, not corpse qi.

When she was finally done, the lotus girl let out a big yawn, smiled sweetly, and closed her eyes.

Meh The Lotus Goat bleated and tapped the ground with its hoof three times. There was a small explosion of dust, and the coffin was thrown into the air and onto its back. Then, the Lotus Goat climbed up the cliffside with just as much ease and grace as before.

It is done. Let's go. Peng Hu let out a sigh of relief after the matter was settled.

What is that bone whistle Peng Lin just used? On the way to Auspicious Phoenix Market, Ye Qing voiced his curiosity. Its pretty interesting.

Er Peng Hu hesitated.

Chu Nianjiu interrupted, Its better if you dont know.

What do you mean? Is it a taboo to speak about it? Ye Qing looked puzzled.

No, but Brother Chu is right. Are you sure you want to hear about this? Peng Hu asked.

If youre trying to pique my curiosity, then you sure as hell succeeded, brother.

Peng Hu noted Ye Qings expression and sighed. The whistle is called the Human Bone Whistle. Among corpse hauliers, we have a saying called, The living hear the living, and the dead hear the dead. The Human Bone Whistle is a whistle forged from the skull of a dead human. It can be used to interact with some ghosts and Strangers.

The skull needed to make the whistle is also quite unusual. It is the skull of a baby who is born on a yin year, month and day. The baby cannot be older than nine years old either, and the younger the better.

This is because people who are born on a yin year, month and day are also born with a greater reservoir of yin qi, so much so that they can see the unseeable. This applies to babies as well as their heart and soul is pure. This is why the Human Bone Whistle possesses the power to communicate with certain ghosts and Strangers. In a sense, its a Strange Artifact.

Chapter 343: Yin Market

Ye Qing let out an audible gasp when he heard this. He didnt really mind people making Strange Artifacts out of a persons skull, but to blow[1] it as well? That was going a little too far, wasnt it?

Peng Hu wasnt done talking, however. He continued, A babys skull is soft because it isnt fully formed yet. Therefore, one baby can only make one Human Bone Whistle at most.

Of course, the Peng Clan doesnt murder babies to create our Human Bone Whistles. We only use babies who have already passed away for one reason or another. But there are some heretics out there who use living babies to make the Human Bone Whistle. In fact, they removed the skull and carved out the whistle while the baby was fully conscious.

They used a secret art to keep the baby from dying so they would continuously accumulate resentment until they transformed into a Grudge Baby. Once the whistle was complete, they would seal the Grudge Baby into the Human Bone Whistle.

It is said that a Human Bone Whistle that was created this way is very powerful. It could summon and control thousands and thousands of ghosts and even Strangers.

Despicable human scum! Qi Xuanyun was so angry he actually cursed despite his upbringing.

Thats why a Stranger isnt the most terrifying thing in the world. The human heart is. Chu Nianjiu gave the young Taoist a consoling pat on the shoulder and sipped his wine.

Time passed quickly as the group continued to make idle chats with each other. They soon arrived at Auspicious Phoenix Market.

Damn! This Auspicious Phoenix Market is positively flourishing! Ye Qing exclaimed in admiration as soon as he stepped through the entrance. The streets were jam-packed with people, and the rows and rows of houses were lined up orderly like fish scales. He thought that Auspicious Phoenix Market was just a small, remote village, but in reality it was just as busy as some of the counties he visited.

Strange. Auspicious Phoenix Market is a prosperous village, but I don't remember it being this busy. It literally doesn't have enough houses to fit this many people. Peng Hu was a little confused as well.

He passed through Auspicious Phoenix Market during one of his runs before, so he knew that Auspicious Phoenix Market was more prosperous than most villages. However, he had never seen the streets as packed as it was today. Literally, you couldn't walk down the road without bumping shoulders with someone.

Now that you mentioned it, they don't look like locals. Ye Qing watched his surroundings for a bit before adding, Also, don't you think that the shops are a little strange. Why are there so many shops and stalls selling burial clothes and paper offerings?

Even if people died in this village everyday, the supply should still far exceed the demand

At least five out of ten of the stores on both sides of the main street were selling burial clothes. There were burial clothes designed for male, female, old and young. Even stranger was the fact that each and every shop was jam-packed with customers.

Three out of the five shops that weren't selling burial clothes were selling funeral supplies such as paper dolls, paper offerings and coffins. From time to time, a customer would walk out of the store carrying a Golden Boy and a Jade Maiden with happy faces. Those who bought a set of burial clothes looked even happier.

Is it okay to look this happy when you've lost a family member? Chu Nianjiu couldn't help but stare at the people with a strange expression.

Ye Qing replied with black humor, Maybe it's because they lost their wife? Lose a partner to get rich and earn a promotion. It's one of the three happiest things one could experience in life.

Perhaps, but they can't all have lost their wife, can they? Chu Nianjiu complained. What about that woman over there? Don't tell me she lost a wife too.

Ahem maybe they lost a husband? The proverb should still apply even if the genders are reversed. And who says a woman can't marry another woman? Ye Qing retorted.

Hehe, makes sense! Chu Nianjiu let out a lecherous chuckle.

Cut it out, you two. We have a kid with us. Lin Yuhuai interrupted their conversation and glanced at Qi Xuanyun. The good news was that the young Taoist didn't seem to get the joke at all. Anyway, keep your eyes open for an inn. Peng Chuan needs his rest as soon as possible.

Agreed. Come with me. Peng Hu beckoned the group to follow him. He visited Auspicious Phoenix Market before, so he was more familiar with the terrain than the rest of them. It wasn't long before they arrived at an inn.

Unfortunately, the inn was completely full, so they had to search for another inn. To their surprise, the next few inns they visited were completely full as well. Even the wood sheds were completely packed.

What is going on here? Peng Hu's brows were knitted together in a frown. This makes no sense!

That's not all. This whole village is brimming with oddities. Ye Qing rubbed his nose and narrowed his eyes thoughtfully.

Why guess when we can just ask a helpful pedestrian? Chu Nianjiu suddenly said with a smirk. The next moment, a ridiculously loud scream burst out beside him, Ahhhhhhhh! Its gonna break! Its gonna break! Mercy!

Peng Hu turned around and saw Chu Nianjiu grabbing a young man's wrist. The guy was bent like a prawn and crying out in abject pain.

Is it? Then why did you try to steal my stuff in the first place? Chu Nianjiu said with a grin. Clearly, the young man had tried to steal the Spirit Purifiers stuff but failed to realize that he was no easy mark. Worse, Chu Nianjiu was an expert torturer.

Giant beads of sweat poured down his forehead. He would be rolling on the floor if Chu Nianjiu wasn't holding him tight.

Chu Nianjiu looked down on the youngster. I can let you go, but you'll have to answer some of our questions.

Anything, boss! I'll even answer a hundred questions if I must! The young man replied in a hurry.

When Chu Nianjiu let go, the young man immediately snatched his wrist away and rubbed the sore spots.

Don't be a chicken. I didn't even break your wrist, Chu Nianjiu said nonchalantly. What is your name?

The young man replied meekly, Mank Ee. My name is Mank Ee [2].

Monkey? A fitting name. Why are so many people gathered in Auspicious Phoenix Market today, Monkey? Chu Nianjiu asked.

Boss! My name is Mank Ee, not monkey! Mank Ee tried to defend his dignity.

I like Monkey. You don't like Monkey? Chu Nianjiu side-eyed him.

Whatever you say, boss! Mank Ee wisely changed his mind.

Answer my question, Chu Nianjiu pressed.

Mank Ee shot him a surprised look. I thought you were here for the Yin Market?

The Yin Market? Whats that? The group exchanged glances with each other. No one knew what the young man was talking about.

Come on! The Yin Market of Auspicious Village Market has to be one of the most famous happenings in the realm! How could you know nothing about it?

Mank Ee scoffed in disdain, but when he noticed the unfriendly look in everyones eyes, he abruptly recalled his position and answered the question in a hurry, The Yin Market is a grand event our village holds once per year. Do you know why our village is named Market instead of the standard Village? Thats because of the Yin Market. It is said that Auspicious Phoenix Market is located at the intersection point between the yin world and the yang world, and every fifteenth of May[3], the two worlds will merge, and our village will overlap with Fengdu.

Fengdu? Are you referring to the Yin Market of Fengdu? Qi Xuanyun exclaimed with surprise.

Youve heard of it, Reverend? Mank Ee looked at him.

Qi Xuanyun answered, Fengdu is the city of ghosts located on top of Luo Mountain. According to volume fifteen of the Declarations of the Perfected[4], chapter one of Revealing the Profoundly Faint, Fengdu and Luo Mountain is located to the north of the Nether. It is the land of ghosts and the roots of blackness and death.

Luo Mountain is thirteen hundred kilometers tall and fifteen thousand kilometers long in circumference. There are six caverns within Luo Mountainthirteen hundred kilometers tall and five thousand kilometers long in circumferenceand they are known as the Six Abodes of Ghost Gods[5] ruled by the Six Ghost Gods.

The first cavern is called the Tyrant Extinction Abode of Absolute Yin, the second cavern is called the Grand Fiend Abode of Forgiveness, the third cavern is called the Bright Star Abode of Resistance, the fourth cavern is called the Illuminating Abode of Sin, the fifth cavern is called the Sect Spirit Abode of Seven Wrongs, and the last cavern is called the Daring Charge Abode of The Cojoined[6]. Everyone who dies will enter the six abodes.

Finally, the ruler of the Fengdu is the Great Emperor of Fengdu.

Youre incredibly knowledgeable, Reverend, Mank Ee praised. He had no idea what the young Taoist was prattling about, but you couldnt go wrong with compliments.

Ye Qing, Lin Yuhuai, Chu Nianjiu and the coffin hauliers had heard of Fengdu as a matter of course. Humans had their own world, and so did ghosts. The living governed the yang world, and the Fengdu governed the yin world. Fengdu was where a person went after they died; the afterlife. It was the equivalent of the Hell or the Netherworld Ye Qing knew in his previous life.

According to the Pacification Bureaus records, Fengdu had most likely began as the abode or the realm of a godlike champion. It was created for the express purpose of receiving ghosts. The people were superstitious, ignorant, and afraid of death, so they began worshiping Fengdu and all that it entailed. Over time, it became a true Hell or Netherworld and developed its own unique system and operations.

In simpler terms, Fengdu was an imperial court or organization that specifically took care of ghosts. One could even view them as a sect of sorts.

But thats impossible! Qi Xuanyun denied his own words. Several centuries ago, when the great You Dynasty was overturned, and everyone was fighting for dominance, Fengdu too opened its unholy gates and attempted to invade the yang world. As a result, Chu, Yan, Wei and Qi united everyone in the world to launch a counter invasion. It ended with the death of the Great Emperor of Fengdu and the Six Ghost Gods. Even if Fengdu itself isnt completely destroyed, it has ceased to exist as a faction for a very, very long time. Did another godlike champion somehow rebuild Fengdu without anyone knowing?

The group exchanged glances with each other before shrugging. This level of knowledge was way above their pay grade.

Mank Ee shot Qi Xuanyun a displeased look. What nonsense are you spouting, Reverend? The Fengdu is eternal!

In response, Ye Qing slapped him on the back of his head and said, Tell us more about the Yin Market of Fengdu.

Yes, yes, Mank Ee replied in a hurry. To put it simply, the Yin Market of Fengdu is a market in the underworld. Every fifteenth of May, the two worlds will merge, and we, the living, will gain access to the Yin Market for one night and trade with its denizens. As you know, the yin world holds a lot of items that are quite priceless in the yang world. Even if youre not there to trade, who doesnt want to experience a completely different world?

However, the Yin Market is only accessible for a single night, and only once per year. That is why travelers from all across the world would enter our village during this time of the year.

In fact, we used to be called Auspicious Phoenix Village. The people were poor, and the farm yields were just enough to survive. But after the Yin Market appeared, our situation kept getting better and better. Over time, we decided to change our villages name to Auspicious Village Market.

One question. The yin world isnt meant for the living. Wont the ghosts of Fengdu tear you to pieces for technically invading their realm? Chu Nianjiu asked.

Of course not! Violence is prohibited in the Yin Market, Mank Ee explained. There are countless yin guards patrolling the market to enforce peace and order. Anyone who tries anything would be captured and thrown into prison immediately.

Chapter 344: Blue Duckweed Flower

What are those burial clothes for? Is it something you need to enter the Yin Market? Peng Hu pointed a thumb at a stall selling all kinds of burial clothes.

Mank Ee rubbed his sore spot and answered, The Yin Market is located in Fengdu; the yin world. Naturally, a living person cannot enter it directly. Trying to force ones way in is like mixing water and fire. The weaker element would be overwhelmed, or in this case, ejected from the Yin Market.

Burial clothes are the clothes of the dead. You only wear it only after you die. Therefore, wearing a set of burial clothes could effectively isolate a living persons yang qi and allow safe entry into the Yin Market.

As for the paper offerings, theyre functionally useless. The only reason people are buying them is to make themselves look better. For example, if you carry two paper dolls with you when you enter the Yin Market, they would transform into the Golden Boy and Jade Maiden and act as your servants. If

you carry a paper horse carriage with you, then it'll turn into a real horse carriage that you can ride in the Yin Market.

That's all though. The items are purely cosmetic, and they won't help you in any way. Mank Ee snorted. But of course, we still sell them because there are always stupid people who can't resist showing off and looking good.

In fact, I noticed that the poorer someone is, the more they care about their appearances. They might be so poor they couldn't even afford a pair of pants in the yang world, but in the yin market, they'll make themselves look better than even the actual officials who live in Fengdu. Silk clothes, tall hats, a whole parade of slaves and so on. Seriously, who are they showing off to?

You look like you're speaking from experience. Ye Qing raised an eyebrow.

I am! Mank Ee declared proudly, To tell you the truth, I entered the Yin Market three times! I know it better than I know my own house!

Very good. I expect you to join us in the Yin Market tomorrow! Ye Qing clapped Mank Ee on the shoulder.

What? Why? No way! Mank Ee immediately rejected the suggestion. It costs a lot of lifespan every time you enter the Yin Market. There's no way I'm entering that place!

He was a living person after all. The yin world was full of yin qi, and being in this environment even for a short time was very bad for the body and shortened one's lifespan.

From the moment you fell into our hands, you've lost the right to refuse our requests! Chu Nianjiu sneered.

Hmph! So what? Mank Ee puffed up his chest and actually moved closer to Chu Nianjiu. If I enter the Yin Market, I'll lose my lifespan. If I don't, the worst I'll get is a beating. Even an idiot can tell which option is better!

Feel like beating me up? Then get on with it already!

His experience told him that the worst he was going to receive was a beating. In fact, a thief who didn't get beat up at least two or three times per day didn't deserve to call themselves a thief. That was why he wasn't afraid.

Things didn't go the way Mank Ee anticipated, however. As soon as he finished his sentence, Ye Qing raised his hand and slapped him on the back of his head.

Slap! Slap! Slap!

Before Ye Qing could hit him a fourth time, Mank Ee clutched the back of his head and ducked. While staring at the young man in disbelief, he asked, You actually hit me?

Aren't you the one who asked for it? Ye Qing said innocently, Honestly, I've never heard such an insane request in my life. I just can't help but do as you say.

Come, brothers. Lets beat the shit out of him. No need to go too far, of course. A pair of broken arms and legs should be good enough. And oh, and remind me to hand him over to the administrative division after were done. Nianjiu, youre an official yourself. Please inform the magistrate to lock him up for eight to ten years. Its just harmless theft after all. Its no big crime.

The most important part was Ye Qing calling Chu Nianjiu an official, however. There was no way to know if Ye Qing was lying to him, but if he wasnt, then Chu Nianjiu absolutely possessed the power to punish him as he pleased!

Sure! Chu Nianjiu grinned and cracked his knuckles. That was the final straw that broke Mank Ees backbone and dropped him to his knees.

What was I saying just now? Sorry, my heads a little dizzy because I drank some yellow wine. Please dont take what I said earlier seriously. Mank Ee shook his head a few times. What were you saying earlier? Oh right, you want to enter the Yin Market. No problem, good men! Im very familiar with that place. Im more than willing to guide you if you would accept my service!

You shouldnt drink on the job, brother! Youre likelier to make mistakes that you cant take back! Ye Qing smiled. Dont worry, we wont make you work for free. Well pay you five silvers after your duty is done.

By the way, it looks like you just arrived at our humble village. You havent found a place to stay, have you? Mank Ee asked.

Nope. Ye Qing shook his head. If you find us a place to stay, then this silver is yours.

Ye Qing tossed a silver ingot into Mank Ees hands. The thief hurriedly caught it and broke into a wide grin. Dont worry, my lords! Just leave this to me! Its true that every inn in our village is probably full right now, but I have my ways! I take you to a place where you can eat well and sleep well right away! This way, please!

Mank Ee sauntered forward and took the lead. Behind him, Ye Qing and Chu Nianjiu exchanged knowing smiles with each other.

Mank Ee was a local criminal. If they kept beating him with the stick, then it was only a matter of time before he grew resentful and tried to screw them over. On the other hand, a suitable amount of beating plus a carrot would make him as obedient as a donkey. That was why they had put on that little show earlier.

As expected, Mank Ee didnt disappoint them. He quickly led them to a farmers house.

This is my sister-in-laws house, my lords. I guarantee that youll be comfortable here. Just speak to my sister-in-law if you need anything. Ill be leaving to prepare the things you need to enter the Yin Market.

Mank Ee instructed his sister-in-law to prepare them a warm meal as soon as they entered the house. He himself went away to buy them the items they needed to enter the Yin Market.

Ye Qing wasn't worried that Mank Ee would run. For one, he was a thief, not a warrior. He most likely didn't have the balls to pull a great escape. Second, he was greedy as hell. There was no way he would run until he had gotten the five silvers he was promised.

Mank Ee didn't go to the market after leaving his sister-in-law's house. Instead, he strode through a number of winding alleys until he finally arrived at a shabby-looking grocery store.

Old Hu, you there? Mank Ee rapped the counter table with his knuckles while yelling.

Mank Ee? What brings you here today? A lazy voice came from behind the counter. It was an old man with a head of white hair and a hunched back. He had to be in his fifties at least.

Mank Ee smiled and answered directly, We got business to do!

Oh? How fat's the prey? Old Hu asked.

Very. They offered me five silvers like it's nothing. What do you think? Mank Ee chuckled.

Oh! That is quite fat. Old Hu grinned. Where are they staying?

My sister-in-law's house.

Old Hu cocked his head to one side. That's a daring move. Aren't you afraid that your sister-in-law might get caught up in this?

Mank Ee replied in a cool voice, It won't happen. My sister-in-law is just an ordinary person. They would never suspect her.

I need to warn you though. As far as I can tell, everyone in the group is a warrior. You better give it your all!

Old Hu cracked a yellow-toothed grin at him. Have I ever failed?

That's true. Mank Ee laughed. I look forward to the good news.

Before Mank Ee left, he added, By the way, we're splitting the spoils fifty-fifty as usual. You better not hide anything!

Hehe. Do I look like that type of person? Old Hu chuckled.

You absolutely do. Mank Ee sneered. You think I don't know that you kept a silver ingot to yourself the last time we worked together?

Slander! You were right there with me. How could I have hidden a silver from under your nose? Old Hu protested his innocence. Slander me again, and I'm not taking this job!

Fine, fine, I was wrong. Mank Ee sighed. You know, can't you come up with a new tactic to threaten me? It's always the same threat!

Why fix something that isn't broken? Old Hu chuckled.

Screw it. I don't have time to argue with you. Mank Ee waved him goodbye and said, I'll give you the stuff at night.

Sure. I can use the cat nap myself. Old Hu waved Mank Ee off before sitting down on his rocking chair and humming a small tune. He fell asleep soon after.

It was night. The moon was bright, and the stars were scarce. Auspicious Phoenix Market slowly regained its tranquility after a whole day of hustle and bustle. Ye Qings group had also returned to their rooms after exploring Auspicious Phoenix Market for a bit.

The first thing Ye Qing did after returning to his room was to take out Nanke. Before he could say anything, White Lord and Black Lord turned their heads toward Ye Qing and complained like a resentful housewife, Finally remember your cute little snakes, master?

Anyway, whats your request this time? Ye Qing asked directly. Should I sing another song for you?

No!

Dont!

Both snakes blurted at the same time. Most peoples singing deserved at least a coin or two. But Ye Qings singing was the opposite. It robbed his audience of their lifespan!

What? Do you hate my singing that much? Ye Qing cocked his head smilingly.

O-Of course not! White Lord racked its brain for a suitable answer. Your singing is too good for this mortal coil, so good that we couldnt forget about it even if we tried. Last nights singing alone is enough to last us for thirty to fifty years, so really, theres no need.

Yeah, yeah! Also, its almost midnight. You dont want to disturb your neighbors, do you? And what about the plants and livestock? They need their beauty sleep too! Black Lord hurriedly echoed in agreement, its tone was as sincere as it could be.

In that case fine! Ye Qing shrugged. He was just joking. The first time was just a freebie. He knew that Black Lord and White Lord wouldnt make an easy request this time. So? Whats your request?

White Lord flicked its tongue and answered, We want a Blue Duckweed Flower.

Chapter 345: Five Imps of Wealth

“Duckweed Flower? What’s that?” Ye Qing’s brows knitted into a frown. He had never heard of such a plant.

“Hiss...” White Lord flicked its tongue and answered, “A Blue Duckweed Flower is a rootless, stemless plant that floats wherever the river takes it. Its blossom has seven petals, and each petal reflects one color of the rainbow. That is why it’s also nicknamed the Rainbow Duckweed.”

“Where can I find it?” Ye Qing asked.

White Lord replied slowly, “That, is up to you...”

“... My lord.” Black Lord finished its sentence.

“We wish you good luck in your search.”

“Goodbye.”

That was all they said before they shrank back to the bronze door and turned into inanimate objects once more.

“I still have more questions to ask...”

Ye Qing was miffed, but he had no choice but to put Nanke away.

“Time to consult the Annon Sutra!”

If he was anyone else, then this might have been a troublesome matter. But for him, it was simply a matter of how many mouthfuls of blood. He had literally gotten used to it at this point.

Ye Qing asked after pulling out the Annon Sutra. “Where can I find a Duckweed Flower?”

A few mouthfuls of blood later, the Annon Sutra slowly gave its answer:

“The Yin Market”

Ye Qing was surprised to see this. He had just decided to enter the Yin Market today, and the two snakes asked for an item he could obtain at the Yin Market?

Was it a coincidence? If not, how did White Lord and Black Lord find out that he was going to enter the Yin Market?

Ye Qing was a bit worried, but the solution was right in front of him. He asked the Annon Sutra again, “Tell me about Nanke. What functions does it possess?”

He spat a mouthful of blood on the vellum as usual, but this time, he noticed that his blood wasn’t absorbed. Instead, it slid off its smooth surface and dripped on the floor.

“The Annon Sutra isn’t willing to answer the question?” Ye Qing muttered while narrowing his eyes. He knew from experience that the Annon Sutra would not absorb his blood if it wasn’t willing to answer a certain question. It showed how extraordinary and mysterious Nanke was.

“Oh well. I already made up my mind to use Nanke. Might as well see it through until the end.”

Ye Qing was able to accept his predicament fairly quickly. He carried plenty of dangerous and unusual items on him already. What was one more?

Besides, he already knew from Lin Yuhuai that Nanke was as mysterious as it was inauspicious. The Annon Sutra’s reaction—or rather lack thereof—was just additional evidence.

Chu Nianjiu was right in this case. As long as he kept growing stronger at a fast pace, then no misfortune could catch up to him. Not even Nanke.

Next, Ye Qing checked out the four golden dragon-serpent runes on the Annon Sutra. He felt much better the second he laid his eyes on them.

When Ye Qing brushed a finger across one of the runes, he immediately felt a pure stream of spiritual power flooding into his headspace. His demonic lotus bobbed up and down like it was floating on a lake or a sea. At the same time, the second petal began unfurling at a slow pace.

Not long after he obtained his first ever golden rune, he found out that it could restore his spiritual power. The gray rune filled him with vigor, the silver rune strengthened his true qi, and the golden rune improved his spiritual power.

Each rune targeted the three fundamental elements that constituted a human—qi, essence and spirit. To be weak in any one of these elements was to be an incomplete human. The body was the root of one's essence, the qi was the source of one's strength, and the spirit was the pathway to one's destiny. Only by cultivating all of them could one truly transcend mortality.

In more practical terms, the three runes guaranteed that he would be able to enter the Spirit Master Realm without any difficulties whatsoever.

The first ever golden rune he obtained was when he killed tens of thousands of Vengeful Souls at Sky Gate Abyss. Knowing how precious a golden rune was, he didn't use it for cultivation. Instead, he kept it as a trump card he might use to save his life at a critical moment. The other three came from killing the Soulstealer-class Strangers in the Demon's Tomb.

From what he could tell, there were only two ways to gain a golden dragon-serpent rune: One, accumulate enough silver runes for them to merge into a golden run. That required killing a ton of ordinary Strangers. Two, he needed to kill Strangers who were Soulstealer-class or above.

Moreover, not every Soulstealer-class Stranger could yield a golden rune. That was a privilege belonging to the extraordinarily strong and special only.

That was why he was reluctant to use them—until now. They were going to enter the Yin Market tomorrow, and it was impossible to say what kind of danger they might encounter there. He needed to increase his strength now so he could deal with the unknown dangers better.

A golden dragon-serpent rune was precious, but it was also useless if he didn't convert it into his own strength.

Ye Qing closed his eyes tightly and assumed a more serious meditative position; his palms, soles and his skull all facing toward the sky. Then, he channeled the “Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra” and began absorbing and refining the spiritual power in his headspace.

.....

“I'm here, Old Hu.”

The moon was tall, round and bright in the sky tonight. Mank Ee was cloaked in its radiance and starlight as he stepped into Old Hu's grocery store.

“Follow me.”

Old Hu seemed to be a night owl. He looked lazy and sleepy in the morning, but now, he looked more spirited than ever. His eyes were glowing a faint green as well.

Old Hu led Mank Ee into a small secret room underneath the back hall. At the center of the room was an altar table, and five bowls of rice were placed on the table besides the usual candles and offerings.

Hanging on the wall above the table was a painting with five imps. Their stature was thin and short, but their head was unnaturally big. They were carrying a massive ingot of silver each and grinning widely.

Old Hu looked at Mank Ee. "Have you brought the stuff?"

"Yep. It's right here." Mank Ee handed a folded handkerchief to Old Hu while staring at the strange painting with obvious greed in his eyes.

There was a single strand of hair in the handkerchief. When Old Hu saw this, he asked with a frown, "Is this all?"

Mank Ee complained, "Come now, that guy is a warrior and extremely cautious. It took me a lot of effort just to obtain this one strand of hair."

"It would be better if you could obtain his flesh, blood, fingernails or birth date." Old Hu sighed. "But a strand of hair works too, I guess."

Old Hu walked up to the altar table and placed the hair on the third bowl. After placing the bowls in the east, south, west, north and center position, he walked around like he was drawing the Northern Dipper with his feet while chanting,

"The sky is big, the earth is vast. Where might the Five Imps be?

I ask Taigong to bring me the Imps of five directions.

The imps of wealth from the east,

The imps of wealth from the west,

The imps of wealth from the south,

The imps of wealth from the north,

And the imps of wealth from the center."

"Imps are imps, magic overwhelming and power encompassing the five directions.

Masters of wealth and fortune, bring me wealth from the east, west, south, north and center.

Bring me riches every day, every month, every year.

Bring me riches from five directions and five ways.

Let them come, but never away."

"Imp of wealth from the east, fulfill thy command or face thy retribution!"

Old Hu abruptly opened his eyes, bowed deeply to the bowl toward the east, and stomped his feet.

"Imp of wealth from the west, fulfill thy command or face thy retribution!"

"Imp of wealth from the north, fulfill thy command or face thy retribution!"

"Imp of wealth from the south, fulfill thy command or face thy retribution!"

The altar table shook all of a sudden, and the rice in all five bowls jumped into the air and buried the hair.

“Did it work?” Mank Ee asked nervously. This wasn’t the first time he witnessed this, but he was still a little nervous.

Old Hu let out a sigh of relief and grinned. “Phew... it worked. The Five Imps of Wealth have agreed to our request.”

Foo... foo...

A yin wind blew out of nowhere inside the secret room, causing Old Hu and Mank Ee’s hair to stand on end. They could also hear some strange giggles amidst the wind. Thankfully, it was gone just a second later, and everything seemed to return to normal.

The five imps in the painting were nowhere to be seen, however.

“Your ‘Five Imps of Wealth Summoning’ never fails to impress me, Old Hu.” Mank Ee clicked his tongue with envy.

Old Hu explained, “This is one of the Seventy Two Earthly Fiends’ techniques. It could steal a person’s wealth without opening doors, alarming people, or breaking cases. Of course it’s powerful.”

Old Hu was going to say more, but he suddenly let out a bloodcurdling scream and spat out a mouthful of fresh blood.

“Ahhhhh! Pwack!”

Mank Ee asked nervously, “What’s wrong, Old Hu?”

“My imps! My imps!”

Old Hu wasn’t looking at Mank Ee, however. He was looking at the painting on the wall. The massive silver ingots in the painting began disappearing bit by bit like they were being erased by someone, and so did Old Hu’s qi, essence and spirit. His skin began sagging and aging, his black hair began turning white, and his complexion turned deathly white.

“My painting! My precious painting! Who’s the bastard who did this?!” Old Hu glared at the perfectly blank canvas with unbridled fury and swore at the top of his lungs.

He had obtained the painting of a Five Imps of Wealth by accident. It had taken him countless days and nights of praying and offering to finally awaken a sliver of sentience. That was how he was able to command them to commit thievery.

He never imagined that he would lose it all until now.

“I have other business to attend to, Old Hu! I’ll see you another day!” Mank Ee realized he was in deep shit and immediately ran toward the exit.

“Give me back my painting, you bastard!”

Old Hu screeched like a banshee and gave chase. However, he had only taken a few steps when the painting abruptly floated into the air and grew bigger and bigger. Then, it fell right on top of Old Hu's head.

A moment later, the painting flew back to the wall and returned to its original size.

Strangely, Old Hu was nowhere to be seen. Even stranger was the fact that a person had appeared inside the painting.

The person was none other than Old Hu.

"Old Hu? Old Hu? Are you alright?"

A moment later, someone called for the old man from outside the secret room. Inside the painting, Old Hu began turning bit by bit until his back was facing outward. It was as if he didn't want anyone to see his face.

"Are you alright, Old Hu?"

When the person received no reply, he peeked his head through the entrance and looked around. He was none other than Mank Ee.

"Huh? Where is he?" Mank Ee scratched his head when he realized that Old Hu was nowhere to be seen. "Strange."

"Oh well. It wasn't my fault."

Right before Mank Ee would leave the place, he suddenly saw the painting on the wall.

"There's a new person inside the painting! Are the Five Imps fine after all?! They just took their time to come back?"

Mank Ee grew incredibly excited. There was also a flash of greed in his eyes. He stepped forward and plucked the painting from the wall.

"You've made plenty of money in the past few decades, Old Hu. Excess greed is bad, so I'm doing you a favor here, hehe..."

Chapter 346: Yin Token

"You're quite early today, Joyless."

As soon as the first light broke, Ye Qing got out of his bed and began practicing his fist arts. He had gone through his stances and techniques three times when Chu Nianjiu lazily stepped out of the door.

"Not really," Ye Qing withdrew his fists and replied.

"Oh right, I thought I heard something last night. Is everything fine?" Chu Nianjiu asked.

"Yeah. It's just a bunch of useless imps," Ye Qing replied uncaringly.

Last night, he was in the middle of training when suddenly, five imps passed through the wall and appeared inside his room. He had taken them out in a single strike.

“Imps? Why would they come here? This place is full of yang qi and the energy of the living.” Chu Nianjiu was confused.

“How would I know?” Ye Qing shrugged. “Oh right, where is Brother Peng? Has he not returned yet?”

“No—wait, here he comes.” Chu Nianjiu was just about to shake his head when Peng Hu stepped through the gates.

“Did you find anything, Brother Peng?”

“No. I haven’t seen anyone the whole night.” Peng Hu shook his head a little tiredly.

Last night, after they had settled in, he and Peng Lin had agreed to watch the cliff for the person who cursed their clan elder twenty-four-seven. Peng Lin would keep watch during the day, and he during the night.

“Are you sure you and Peng Lin don’t want to enter the Yin Market?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

Peng Hu shook his head. “Yes. Both of us are needed to take care of Peng Chuan and watch over the cliff. Perhaps next time.”

“Very well.”

Peng Hu added, “The Yin Market is a dangerous place. Be careful.”

“Thank you for your concern, Brother Peng. We will.” Chu Nianjiu and Ye Qing saluted him. “You must be quite tired after staying up the whole night. Please, go catch some rest.”

“Yeah. I’ll see you later.” Peng Hu returned the salute and went back to his room.

“Do you think that the caster will show up, Joyless?” Chu Nianjiu whispered to Ye Qing after Peng Hu had gone into his room.

“I can’t say,” Ye Qing shook his head and said in a serious tone, “but I hope not.”

“Me too.” Chu Nianjiu nodded.

The reason was simple. It was because they most likely wouldn’t be able to defeat whoever the caster was.

“Say, why is Mank Ee still not back yet? He said he would familiarize us with the process today, didn’t he?” Chu Nianjiu changed the subject.

“There’s no hurry. We still have plenty of time.” Ye Qing shrugged.

Entering the Yin Market wasn't as simple as putting on a set of burial clothes and going to the right at night. There was a series of things they had to prepare.

Lin Yuhuai and Qi Xuanyun appeared not long after that. It was after they had eaten breakfast that Mank Ee finally showed up.

The thief didn't look good, however. He had dark circles under his eyes, and he looked distracted.

"You look poorly rested. Were you out doing something bad last night?" Ye Qing joked.

"N-No! I didn't do anything! I was inside my room the whole night!" Mank Ee subconsciously blurted when he heard this.

"Hmm?" Ye Qing wasn't expecting this. He was just making fun of the thief, but his reaction turned out to be bigger than expected.

Mank Ee himself realized that he had overreacted. His first impulse upon hearing the joke was that Ye Qing had found out about his ploy, but if that was true, then Ye Qing would've kicked his ass already.

"S-Sorry. I don't know why, but I had nightmares the whole night. That's why I'm a little sleepy right now." Mank Ee hurriedly changed the subject.

This time, he was telling the truth. He was out like a light as soon as he returned home from Old Hu's grocery store, but in his dreams, he felt like someone was watching him from beside his bed. It felt so real, so terrifying that he awoke with a start, but there was no one around him. When he fell asleep again, the sensation would return as if it never left.

One time, when he was half-awake and delirious, he even saw a face staring at him from up close. They were so close that their noses were practically touching each other. When he realized what he was looking at, he was so frightened that he nearly fell off his bed. There was no one around him, however. No one except himself. This strange phenomenon would continue until morning broke.

"Nightmare? Why don't you tell us about it? We can use the entertainment." Chu Nianjiu chuckled.

Mank Ee waved it off. "Hahaha, it's nothing. Are you ready, my lords? If you are, then I'll familiarize you with the process of entering the Yin Market immediately."

"Let's go then," Ye Qing said while shooting Mank Ee a glance. Something didn't feel right with the thief, but he saw no reason to pry.

And so Mank Ee led the group of four out of the house and toward a temple. The temple was named the Judge Temple.

But unlike a normal temple, this one was built underground. It was a yin temple.

According to the ancients, a man was on top, and a woman at the bottom. Yang was on top, and yin was at the bottom. A temple that was built on the surface was meant for the living, whereas a temple built underground was meant for the dead. That was why a surface temple was called a yang temple, and an underground temple was called a yin temple.

Normally, the living only prayed inside a yang temple, and the dead only prayed inside a yin temple. They weren't meant to be mixed. A living person who prayed inside a yin temple could easily attract filth and dangers, whereas a ghost who prayed inside a yang temple was courting death. A particularly strong blast of yang qi could easily annihilate their soul.

Barring exceptional circumstances, the imperial court generally forbade the construction of yin temples. But not only was there one in Auspicious Phoenix Market, it was pretty big too. More importantly, Mank Ee was leading into the yin temple.

As they walked down the stairs and into the main hall, they saw a martial judge and a civil judge on the altar. But unlike the ones people normally worshiped in the yang temple, these ones looked darker and gloomier.

They're not your normal statues!

Ye Qing's pupils contracted into pins. He could sense a thick amount of yin qi circulating around the statues. It was almost as if they were possessed by ghosts. That said, the yin qi did not feel malicious, so it didn't feel like the aura of a malicious Stranger.

Mank Ee led them to the statue and turned toward them. "I'll now tell you the steps we need to go through. First, you need to kowtow three times in front of the Yin Gods. We call it 'inviting the Yin Gods'."

"Your head must touch the ground, and your heart must be pure when you kowtow to the Yin Gods. Not only that, the louder your kowtows, the better they would regard you."

"Interesting," Ye Qing commented with a smile.

Mank Ee performed a demonstration for them, and he wasn't kidding when he said the kowtows needed to be loud. If the floor was made of wood, he would've shattered it with how hard he was slamming his head against the floor.

As soon as Mank Ee kowtowed three times, Ye Qing clearly sensed a pair of cold, dark presences possessing the two statues and examining the people inside the temple.

Next, Mank Ee rose to his feet and walked up to a three-legged brazier. "The second step is to write your birth date and name on a wooden tablet and throw it inside this bronze brazier. It's called the Yin Entry Register."

Emerald green flames abruptly appeared out of nowhere and enveloped the wooden tablet as soon as Mank Ee tossed it into the brazier. Not only that, the flame felt colder than an icy lake in winter. The wooden tablet was quickly burned into ash.

After the flame was gone, Mank Ee stuck his hand into the pile of ash. To their surprise, he fished out a mysterious, exquisite, seemingly brand new token that didn't look like it was made of metal or wood.

Mank Ee showed them the token and said, "This is the Yin Token. It proves that the Yin Gods have registered our names and given us permission to enter the Yin Market, and only those with the Yin Token are allowed to roam the Yin Market freely."

“You *must* keep your Yin Token safe while you’re still inside the Yin Market. Otherwise, the yin guards will steal your soul and imprison you in the Eighteen Hells on the spot.”

“Let me take a look.” Ye Qing took Man Ee’s Yin Token and examined it closely. It was cold to touch and forged from some sort of unknown material. One side of the token was engraved with Mank Ee’s name, and the other with the word “Feng”.

He clearly remembered that the wooden token Mank Ee gave them was made of ordinary willow. How strange!

“This material seems impressive. I bet it’ll last for a long time. Surely you’ve kept some spares since this isn’t the first time you enter the Yin Market?” Ye Qing asked, hoping to exploit a loophole.

Mank Ee shook his head. “You are joking, my lord. The Yin Token will only last until the end of the Yin Market. It would automatically crumble into ash once the Yin Market is closed.”

“I see.” Ye Qing smiled and returned the token to Mank Ee. Then, he looked at his companions and asked, “So, who’s going first?”

“This looks interesting. I’ll go first,” Chu Nianjiu declared with bright eyes before walking up to the statues. Then, he kowtowed three times loudly like Mank Ee.

But as soon as he finished, the two statues shuddered and made three banging noises. It almost sounded like they were returning the kowtows.

“Heh...” Ye Qing smirked. Thanks to his demonic thought, he “saw” something bright yellow flowing out of Chu Nianjiu’s body and taking the form of a dragon. The dragon then let out a mighty roar.

Two silhouettes also appeared out of the two statues. The reason they returned Chu Nianjiu’s salute was because they were afraid.

If he wasn’t mistaken, the bright yellow energy that came out of Chu Nianjiu’s body was the Will Of The Dragon. The Pacification Sentinels were the Son of Heaven’s personal bodyguards, and Chu Nianjiu was a Peacemaker in the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau. As an official of Chu, of course he was protected by the Will of the Empire and the Will of the Dragon.

The two silhouettes who attached themselves to the civil and martial judge were most likely yin guards of Fengdu. Since Chu Nianjiu was an official of the yang world, of course they couldn’t receive his kowtows without returning it.

“What happened?” Chu Nianjiu looked confused.

Ye Qing chuckled. “It’s nothing. Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Chu Nianjiu rose to his feet and threw the wood tablet into the bronze brazier. A while later, the wood tablet burned into ash, and Chu Nianjiu fished out a Yin Token from within.

Lin Yuhuai stepped forward after Chu Nianjiu got his Yin Token. But unlike Chu Nianjiu, his head didn't touch the ground. Still, the martial and civil judge returned the salute.

"My lord, your head needs to hit the ground for it to work!" Mank Ee said in a hurry.

"It's fine."

Lin Yuhuai must have figured out something because he didn't hesitate to toss his wooden tablet into the bronze brazier. A short while later, he walked away with his own Yin Token.

"Huh...?" Mank Ee's mouth was wide open. Since when were the Yin Gods so generous? The last time someone tried something like this, they failed to get a Yin Token and fell gravely sick. They were this close from dying and joining the Fengdu, so what was so different about this?

Qi Xuanyun stepped forward next, but he didn't fall to his knees. Instead, he bowed his head deeply and said, "The heavens' blessing be with you. This one has been a part of Taoism since young, and I was taught to kneel only to the Taozu. Forgive me for not paying you the respects you deserve."

Then, he walked up to the bronze brazier and tossed the wooden tablet inside.

"Young Reverend! You won't get the Yin Token like this!" Mank Ee couldn't help but cry out. Lin Yuhuai at least saw through the formalities even though his kowtow wasn't sincere, but this was completely against the norm!

Before he could say anything else, he saw Qi Xuanyun pulling out a Yin Token from the bronze brazier. His eyes immediately widened like saucers, and his jaw hit the floor with a loud clang that only he could hear.

Chapter 347: This Is A Setup, I Say!

What are you doing, Joyless? Its your turn! Chu Nianjiu urged when he saw Ye Qing blanking out for no reason.

Right. Coming.

Eh, screw it. It'd be nice if I dont have to bend my knees, but its not like I care about such things.

And so Ye Qing walked up to the statue and knelt on the floor. He was going to emulate Lin Yuhuai and kowtow ceremonially so to speak, but he had just lowered his head when the sound of something breaking entered his ears. He looked up just in time to see the two statues shattering into smithereens[1].

What the?

Everyone was shocked, of course. They couldnt stop glancing back and forth between Ye Qing and the ruined statues.

Why are you looking at me? Its not my fault! Ye Qing rubbed his nose and protested weakly. They could have broken down after years of disrepair, right?

Tell me you actually believe that. Chu Nianjiu rolled his eyes.

I do! I believe it even if none of you do! Ye Qing declared seriously. His sense told him that the two yin guards possessing the statues were gone as well.

What do I do now? Do I still kowtow to the statues even though they're gone? Ye Qing asked.

In the end, it was Chu Nianjiu who spoke up. Ahem since the statues are gone, you can probably skip the kowtowing part. Toss the wooden tablet into the brazier and check if it'll work. If not, then let's get the hell out of here before someone else shows up.

You're right. Ye Qing hurriedly got to his feet and did as he was told. The second the wooden tablet entered the bronze brazier, a pillar of glassy fire at least ten meters tall shot into the air and turned the tablet into ash in an instant. Before Ye Qing could make sense of this, an emerald green token flew into his hands.

Crack crack crack!

Suddenly, spider webs started appearing across the bronze braziers surface. Then, it shattered into a million pieces like porcelain. Strangely, the pieces burned into ash before they could hit the ground.

There was a moment of stunned silence. Then, Ye Qing gulped audibly and protested, It really wasn't me!

How the fuck did something that's made of metal shatter like glass and burn like paper anyway?

What are you waiting for? Let's get out of here! Chu Nianjiu grabbed Qi Xuanyuan's wrist and broke into a run.

Whoosh whoosh!

Just a few breaths after the group of five left, a gust of yin wind blew within the yin temple. An imposing voice resounded throughout the cavern, Who is the bastard who destroyed my statues and even Fengdus Life Death Brazier? Who?!

We do not know, An eerie voice answered.

Useless. The imposing voice uttered, Who are the ones who summoned the Yin Gods and asked for a Yin Token earlier? What is their name and birth date?

We do not know. Judge Cui is the only one who has that information! The eerie voice answered again.

Hmph! Truly useless! The imposing voice sounded greatly displeased. I shall visit Judge Cui right away. I must find the killers and strip them of their lifespan to appease my fury!

Whoosh whoosh!

The yin wind howled, and the temple returned to normal. It was as if nothing had ever happened.

What do we do, what do we do?

After they returned home, Mank Ee couldn't stop walking circles around the courtyard like an old bull turning the millstone. I can't believe we offended the Yin Gods! We're so dead!

Ye Qing felt dizzy just looking at him. Slow down, you fool! We're the ones who're cursed, not you! I don't know what you're worried about.

What a good brother you are!

You can tell that to the yin guards and Yin Gods when they find you. Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine looking like he couldn't wait to enjoy the show when it happened.

Let them come! I'm literally innocent! Ye Qing declared.

It was at this moment Qi Xuanyun spoke up. It should be fine. It's a mighty coincidence, but it really didn't look like Brother Ye had anything to do with it.

See?! The truth shall prevail! Ye Qing put an arm on the young Taoist's shoulders gratefully.

So, are you still planning to enter the Yin Market, Joyless? Lin Yuhuai asked.

Of course I am! I still need to find the Duckweed Flower! Ye Qing replied. He had told them about Nankes request.

It will be fine, Ye Qing assured him.

Maybe for you, but not for me! I was there too, you bastard!

Mank Ee stuttered, B-But

Enough. If you're so afraid, you don't have to come with us. Just tell us how to enter the Yin Market and what to look out for when we're inside. Don't worry, we'll still pay you your due.

Really?! Thank you, my lords! You're all good people! Mank Ee immediately regained his energy when he heard this.

So, what do we do next?

Mank Ee answered, Now that you have your Yin Tokens, its time to get your coffins.

Mank Ee explained, Humans sleep in houses, and ghosts sleep in coffins. That is why you must lie down in a coffin to enter the Yin Market. When the sun has set, lie down in the coffins and close the lid. Stay inside until you hear a cocks crow. Only then can you see the Yin Market.

Remember that violence is prohibited inside the Yin Market. You may say whatever you want, but you must never use your fist. Also, do not provoke the yin guards or officials. The consequences are severe to say the least.

You dont need to do anything to leave the Yin Market. When daylight comes, youll automatically return to the yang world.

The sun was just beginning to set, but Auspicious Phoenix Market darkened so fast it was like a giant was pulling a blanket across the sky. The yin wind howled in every street and alley, and the bright lights and bustling noises slowly died down like a mirage. Eventually, there was only dead silence, and the entire village was enveloped in oppressive darkness.

Cockadoodle!

Suddenly, a strong, loud cockcrow resounded throughout the village. Like the drumbeats of the heavens or a sword that cut through the darkness, the darkness in the sky gradually faded to reveal a bright moon in the sky. Something wasnt right, however. The moon was dark green in color instead of white.

After the darkness had faded, noises and people began appearing in the streets once more. The dead silent village had returned to life.

At a certain courtyard, four coffins were lined up in a row. They combined with the greenish moonlight to paint a dark, eerie picture.

Creak

Suddenly, one of the coffins gave off a creaking noise. Then, the coffin lid was pushed away, and a person sat up from the coffin.

Yawn The person raised both hands and stretched. Its surprisingly comfortable.

He was none other than Ye Qing.

Wakey wakey, people! Ye Qing called out to his companions. A second later, Lin Yuhuai, Chu Nianjiu and Qi Xuanyun pushed away their coffin lids and sat up as well.

I fell asleep just now. What about you guys? Chu Nianjiu asked.

Everyone nodded. Were the same.

Thats strange. Chu Nianjiu frowned.

He had been fully awake when he lay down in the coffin. He was planning to observe how the two worlds merge and how the Yin Market manifested itself in Auspicious Phoenix Market.

The next thing he knew, he had awakened to a cocks crow. He never even knew when he had fallen asleep.

Are we inside the Yin Market yet, Brother Ye? Qi Xuanyun asked.

I think so. Ye Qing pointed at their surroundings. Look.

Their surroundings looked dilapidated and lifeless. The walls were tattered, the house behind them looked like it hadn't been maintained for ages, and the big, lush willow tree in the courtyard had withered completely. Besides that, the entire residence smelled of death and decay.

This was Mank Ee's sister-in-law's house. It was clean, lively, and well-maintained. But now, it looked dilapidated and rundown. Moreover, Peng Chuan, Peng Lin, Mank Ee and more were nowhere to be found. This could only mean one thing: They had entered the Yin Market.

Ye Qing guessed, Ghosts do not live in a house that exists in the yang world even if it is reflected in the yin world. That's probably why it looks like this.

Anyway, let's go.

Ye Qing jumped out of the coffin and put on a mask he kept in his shirt. The mask was a paper mask in the yang, but here in the yin world, it was real. The reason they brought a mask was to keep their identity hidden, of course.

Ye Qing took the lead, and his companions followed closely behind him. A lot of people were walking out of the residences on both sides of the street. Clearly, they were people who came to visit the Yin Market as well. But unlike them, they looked like the emperor himself attending a parade. Some people wore expensive clothes. Some were riding unbelievably handsome horses that few in the real world could rival, and some were attended to by many slaves and beautiful women.

The contrast was such that they looked like beggars.

Heavens, I'm starting to regret not getting myself some excellent service. Chu Nianjiu clicked his tongue.

Were here to visit the Yin Market, not entertain the residents of Fengdu like monkeys. Ye Qing snuffed out that desire as easily as he would snuff out a candle.

They didn't go far before they ran into a traffic jam of sorts. They were closing in on an imposing city, its walls so tall that one literally couldn't see the top even if they bent their necks the whole way. A checkpoint had been set up at the entrance, and two yin guards wearing black robes were inspecting the visitors' Yin Tokens.

You dare show us a fake token? The audacity!

The group was waiting for their turn to enter the checkpoint when suddenly, they heard a loud, harsh rebuke.

Chapter 348: Qi Eater

Boom!

There was a loud boom as two men wearing masks and burial clothes leaped into the air, fleeing from the gates. They were both middle-stage Astral Refiners and pretty strong. But as soon as they

leaped into the air, the yin guards threw out a chain each from their sleeve. It moved as quick as lightning and caught the two Astral Refiners with ease.

This wasn't a scary sight. What was scary was the yin guards pulling out what looked like two semi-transparent silhouettes from the Astral Refiners' bodies. It was their souls. Their bodies sailed forward for a bit before dropping to the floor because of momentum, but their souls were still tightly bound by the chains.

When the two souls saw this, they immediately struggled and begged for mercy with all their might. It was futile though. The yin guards pulled them over and declared, 'The punishment for forging a Yin Token and attempting to infiltrate Fengdu is a hundred years in the Hell of Mountain of Knives!'

After sweeping their black, lightless pupils across the crowd, the two yin guards slowly opened their mouths until their cheeks literally split into two. There was no tongue or goozle[1] in their throats, however. Instead, they were treated to the horrifying sights taking place in various hells such as the Hell of the Cauldrons of Oil, the Hell of the Mountain of Knives, the Hell of Mills and so on. Each and every hell showed countless souls suffering inhuman punishment and screaming on top of their lungs. It was terrifying to look at to say the least.

The two yin guards threw the still struggling souls into their mouths and slowly closed them. But even after their faces had returned to normal, the crowd could still vaguely hear the two souls screaming in pain and torture. The two yin guards declared coldly, 'This is Fengdu. Respect our laws, or suffer the consequences!'

Chu Nianjiu chuckled after the show was over. Ah, if it's not the age-old tactic our bureau has used countless times to intimidate our enemies!

So what if it's old? Don't fix what isn't broken, Ye Qing commented as he observed the crowd. If the atmosphere was light and relaxed just now, now it was tense and silent.

No one in Ye Qing's group took the example to heart. The yin guards might be very powerful, not to mention that this was their turf where they could unleash their full potential, but it didn't matter to them, because they were men with a genuine Yin Token.

Of course, that wasn't to say they hadn't taken anything away from the experience. For starters, their desire to let their impulse run free was way smaller than before. Why suffer in hell when you can live in comfort?

As expected, the group passed through the checkpoint smoothly and without trouble. Something happened when it was Ye Qing's turn though. When the yin guards saw his Yin Token, a flicker of astonishment appeared in both their eyes. They even saluted him and returned his token to him respectfully.

Ye Qing was confused by their change in attitude, but he didn't dare to ask them about it.

What was that about, Joyless? Chu Nianjiu asked Ye Qing after they were inside the city.

I don't know. Maybe my Yin Token is special? Ye Qing answered while feeling the Yin Token in his pockets. Technically speaking, his Yin Token was a tad different from his companions. Their tokens were black in color and somewhat coarse in appearance, while his looked like it was made from glass or jade. At the very least, it looked better than the normal tokens.

Who are you really, Joyless? You blasted a Yin Gods statues and their brazier, and you still got a better token than us? How is that fair? Chu Nianjiu joked.

Who knows? Maybe Im just handsome. Ye Qing shrugged. He couldnt give an answer because he himself had no idea why he was getting special treatment. If he had to guess, it probably had something to do with the Annon Sutra, but that was a secret he would be taking to his grave.

Meanwhile, Qi Xuanyun was examining his surroundings curiously and excitedly, So this is the Yin Market. How lively! It doesnt feel too different from a normal market.

Ye Qing and Chu Nianjiu stopped their conversation and looked. The place was full of people, shops and stalls lined both sides of the street, all kinds of goods were on display, and the sheer number of colorful lanterns and banners on display rivaled that of the Lantern Festival in the yang world, if not more.

Of course, the atmosphere was a little strange. The items and the people selling them were much stranger than the average human as well. For starters, the lanterns hanging on the flag poles, eaves and more were pale white in color. The candle flame was an eerie green as well.

The stalls were selling bones, writhing yin souls, bloody organs, dark green eyeballs and more.

The people or more accurately, the ghosts selling the items looked far more varied than a human ever was. Some had blue faces and long fangs, some had an animals head despite their humanoid body, some had their guts spilled all over the floor, and some were straight up a ball of nothingness.

Even the humans roaming the market were wearing jarringly colorful burial clothes that you would never catch them wearing in their own world.

It was strange, but it definitely fit a humans impression of the yin world.

At the beginning, everyone was a little tense worried that they might offend one of the ghosts and be eaten like the poor fucks from earlier. However, they soon realized that these horrifying-looking ghosts werent too different from the human merchants in their own world. They boasted their products to stupid levels just like a human merchant would, they haggled over every coin like a human merchant would, and they even lied and pulled all sorts of trickery to scam their customers like a human merchant would. It was all so familiar, and it was that familiarity that allowed them to relax again.

Whats that?

How much is this?

Brother Ye, look! Look!

Qi Xuanyuns eyes shone brightly as he ran all over the place admiring the strange products that were on sale like a kid. Ye Qing, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai too felt like their horizons were broadening by the minute.

A Stranger called Two Halves it was because his head was two halves of two different heads joined into one[2] was calling for his customers to buy the other halves of his head.

A saliva ghost was spitting black water into a wooden basin and drinking from it after it was full. He was literally selling its own saliva.

A faceless ghost with long hair and an hourglass figure was selling clothes and ornaments woven from her own hair.

A ghost scholar with no head was singing from his bare neck and selling his ghastly artworks and poetry.

A ghost bride wearing a bridal dress and a phoenix coronet was selling her own husbands soul.

There were also bones that were wreathed in ghostfire, a stone that sang in a sweet, feminine voice whenever it felt the wind, a ghost willow branch that could be used to repel stray ghosts, Water of Forgettance that could make one forget their memories on sale.

Unfortunately, Ye Qing hadn't found a Duckweed Flower amidst the stalls. He was a little disappointed.

Scions, warriors, big brothers, passerby, ladies and gentlemen, wanna check out a bottle that can turn breath into gold? Come, come! You don't want to miss this!

Suddenly, a loud cry drew everyone's attention. Ye Qing too got curious and went over to check out the situation. It wasn't long before he saw a thin, long-faced ghost with pointed lips holding a bottle that was literally bigger than him.

A bottle that turns breath into gold? You're not kidding, are you? Someone asked.

The ghost chuckled. Not at all! My bottle is a natural magical item that can turn any breath into gold! All you need to do is to blow into it, and it will spit out a block of gold in return!

This can't be real, can it? Someone looked dubious.

Of course it's real! Would you like to give it a try, scion? Even if it's fake, it'll only cost you a single breath anyway. It's a win-win for you no matter how you look at it, don't you think? The ghost urged.

Why not? Okay. The young man stepped forward and blew into the bottle once. Two breaths later, it spat out a block of gold as promised.

It's real?! The young man picked up the gold, weighed it in his hand, and even bit it with his teeth. He exclaimed in shock, It really is gold!

Of course it is! The ghost grinned widely. You can have that, scion. It's yours.

Is there anyone else who would like to give it a go? I'm just doing this for fun. I promise I won't take a single coin for you, but you are free to take the gold my bottle spits out.

Me! Let me!

No, let me!

Stop pushing me! I came here first!

Fuck you! I'm the one who came first!

Practically everyone who saw the performance went bonkers when they saw that the bottle could actually turn a person's breath into actual gold. No one wanted to miss the opportunity.

Do you want to give it a try, Joyless? Chu Nianjiu looked tempted.

Haha. If you think that your life is worth a block of gold, then sure, Ye Qing replied nonchalantly.

Wait, what? What do you mean? Chu Nianjiu frowned.

Ye Qings lips curled into a smile. Did you notice? The air these poor fools are breathing into the bottle isn't normal. Specifically, its a breath of pure yang.

A single breath of pure yang is worth a full year of qi, essence and spirit. Anyone who breathes into the bottle is going to get terribly ill when they return.

Is that so? Chu Nianjiu suddenly felt far less tempted to give the bottle a go. But a bout of illness is nothing to a warrior, is it? Why did you imply that breathing into that bottle would cost someones lives?

Because it literally would kill them, Ye Qing sneered.

If Im not mistaken, that ghost is what they call a Qi Eater[3], Lin Yuhuai said. According to Hundred Ghosts Record of Fengdu, there exists a ghost who is as thin and small as a child and carries a silver bottle with it all the time. During a full moon after midnight, it would slip into a persons room and feed on their yang qi while they are asleep. Hence, it is called the Qi Eater.

Every time a Qi Eater feeds on a persons yang qi, the silver bottle would spit out a block of gold that the Qi Eater would place next to the persons head. If the person accepted the gold, the Qi Eater would take it as permission to feed on their qi until they die. Thats what Joyless meant.

These people shouldve known better. There is no such thing as free lunch in this world. If you take the Qi Eaters gold, then you will die.

Heavens above! Chu Nianjiu didnt think that it would be so serious. His lips curled into a cold sneer as he asked, What an audacious, vile Stranger!

This is the Yin Market, you know. What did you expect? Ye Qing wore a smirk that didnt reach the eye. See that ghost whos selling mirrors? Hes called a Mirror Spirit or Mirror Ghost. If you buy his mirror, then you better be careful when you look into the mirror at night. He might just crawl out and consume your soul.

See that ghost scholar giving away his artwork for free? If youre stupid enough to buy his paintings, theres a non-zero chance that the person returning to the yang world wont be you anymore.

Humans think that ghosts are scary, and ghosts think that humans are cruel and vicious. They are both right. The last thing you want to do in the Yin Market is to lose sight of the bigger picture.

Should we get involved? Chu Nianjius eyes glinted dangerously.

What do you think? Ye Qing sighed. They were the Pacification Bureau after all. They couldnt possibly watch someone throw their lives away and do nothing about it.

Chapter 349: The Wolf Cries Wolf

“Stop! That’s the Qi Eater! You’re killing yourself!”

Qi Xuanyun was so horrified and angry that he barely waited for Ye Qing to finish before rushing forward to stop the crowd, but...

“What Qi Eater? Get out of my way, Taoist!”

“Yeah, get lost!”

“Out, out! I’ll kick your ass if you stay here any longer!”

“You guys...” Qi Xuanyun froze in place when the people he was trying to save turned on him instead. He didn’t know what he should do to convince the people that he meant well.

“Just because I’m a ghost doesn’t mean I’m a bad person!” The Qi Eater hurriedly fanned the flames. “Don’t listen to his bullshit, people! It’s clear this young Taoist just wants to claim the gold for himself! Chase him away!”

Qi Xuanyun had never encountered something like this. He truly wanted to save these people from the bottom of his heart, but not only did they not listen, they were turning on him.

Slowly, a sheen of purple colored over his eyes. His aura turned cold and murderous.

“He’s still too young and immature!” Ye Qing shook his head at this. “I’ll do it!”

He could tell that Qi Xuanyun wanted to smite these fools with a Palm Thunder. He had no qualms with that, but he was definitely going to draw the yin guards’ attention if he did that. He had to step up before the worst case scenario happened.

Ye Qing stepped forward and said loudly, “Yeah, shut up, you Taoist! Don’t get in our way, you greedy, selfish prick! Get out get out get out!”

The moment Qi Xuanyun heard Ye Qing’s voice, most of his anger disappeared like it was never there. His shock was another story though. Slack-jawed, he stared at Ye Qing and tried to understand what the Spirit Purifier was doing.

“What’s Joyless doing?” Even Chu Nianjiu was a little confused by this opening. “Did he betray us?”

Ye Qing’s companions weren’t the only ones who were confused by this. He had stolen the aggressive crowd and the delighted Qi Eater’s wind from their sails as well.

Ye Qing paid them no attention though. He Jojo-walked his way to Qi Xuanyun and shoved him away mercilessly. “The fuck ya looking at? Look at me again, and I’ll beat you up!”

He then turned toward the Qi Eater and declared imperiously, “I want to use your bottle.”

“Hey! I came—”

The guy who was supposed to go first complained, but Ye Qing tilted his head and glared at him. “Excuse me? What were you saying again?”

A powerful aura full of the promise of violence washed over the man. His words immediately died in his throat.

This guy is stronger than me. Abort, abort!

Ye Qing waited a moment just in case some other idiot wanted to challenge him. When no one spoke, he beckoned the Qi Eater with a hand and said, “What are you waiting for? Give me the bottle already.”

“Of course, my lord!”

Although the burial clothes Ye Qing was wearing had covered up his yang qi, the Qi Eater could still sense it because it was his nature. Not only was it one of the most refined yang qi it had ever felt, Ye Qing was a virgin too. Yang qi that had never been vented was exceptionally nutritious for a Qi Eater.

From the ghost’s perspective, Ye Qing was the definition of a big fish. Of course it was excited by this unexpected boon.

“Alright! Watch me.”

The corners of Ye Qing’s lips curled into a devilish smirk as he stared at the massive bottle. All of a sudden, the Qi Eater felt a bad premonition. Before it could figure out where its source, Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath and blew into the bottle.

This time, every hair on the Qi Eater’s body stood on end. Although Ye Qing wasn’t targeting it, it was one hundred percent certain that the puff of yang qi was more than potent enough to kill it.

Before the Qi Eater could recover from its shock, an ominous series of cracks entered its ears. It looked just in time to see its bottle exploding into smithereens with a bang.

“Ahhhh! My bottle!”

The Qi Eater let out a horrified scream as its body turned transparent, and its qi weakened drastically all of a sudden. The surrounding crowd was stupefied as well. Most of them had seen this magic trick before, but the Qi Eater’s bottle was huge and hardly ordinary.

“Ahhhh! My gold!” Right after the Qi Eater was done screaming, Ye Qing screamed in the exact same tone.

Before the Qi Eater could say anything, Ye Qing shouted furiously, “Didn’t you say that I would get a block of gold if I blow into your bottle, ghost? Well? Where is it? Where is my fucking gold!?”

“Give me back my gold, you swindler!”

The Qi Eater: “...”

“Everyone: “...”

The wolf was crying wolf.

“You... it was you who blew up *my* bottle! You’re the one who should compensate me!” The Qi Eater was so angry it nearly transcended on the spot. Its savage, contorted expression made one wonder if it was actually possible to anger a ghost so much to death.

“And why the fuck should I compensate you anything?” Ye Qing harrumphed imperiously and put his hands on his waist. “How could I have known that your shitty bottle is less sturdy than a bloody balloon? No, it’s clear that you were trying to scam me!” There’s no way a bottle that big could explode in a single puff, could it?”

“Also, you promised me that I could get a big ass block of gold as long as I blow into the bottle. So? Where is my gold? Where is my gold, you scammer?”

“You better give me my gold, you bastard! Otherwise, I’ll take you to the bloody court, you hear me?”

“You... You...” The Qi Eater had never encountered something like this. Such was its fury that his yin qi was simmering like a kettle of boiling water. Even the surrounding crowd was speechless. It was bad enough that he literally blew up the Qi Eater’s bottle, now he was demanding that it compensate him for his “loss” as well. Just how shameless could you be?

“What are you guys doing? We don’t tolerate problems in the Yin Market!”

It was at this moment a yin guard carrying a mourning staff and a long chain wrapped around his waist stepped over with a cold look. The crowd instinctively gave way when his cold, eerie yin qi brushed against their skin.

The Qi Eater lit up when it heard the yin guard’s voice. It immediately ran up to him and wailed at the top of its lungs, “You must help me, my lord! You must!”

“Fuck off.” The yin guard kicked away the Qi Eater who clung to his leg before asking, “What the hell happened? Speak!”

The Qi Eater explained in a hurry, “It’s like this. This guy purposely blew up my bottle, the one thing I rely on to make a living. How can I possibly live without it? You must help me, my lord!”

“Hmph! You’re using your shitty bottle to scam people again?” The yin guard scoffed and glanced at the crowd.

Someone exclaimed in shock, “What? Was the Taoist actually telling the truth?”

The yin guard hadn’t tried to keep his voice low or something when he insulted the Qi Eater, so everyone heard his words loud and clear.

“Wait, I remember now! The Qi Eater! He’s the Qi Eater! The gold we’re carrying is real, but it’s also permission for the Qi Eater to suck our yang qi dry!” Someone cried.

“Seriously?”

“I was wondering if it’s possible for anyone to be this altruistic. It was aiming to kill us this whole time?”

“How dare you trick us!”

The crowd’s ire was immediately targeted at the Qi Eater.

The ghost wasn’t afraid, however. It said sarcastically, “Trick you? How could you say that? It’s true that I laid out the lure, but you’re the one who fell for it. I never tried to coerce you into accepting the gold. You’re the ones who’re too greedy to see the obvious, hehehe...”

“Bastard!” One guy allowed his fury to overcome his good senses and attacked the Qi Eater with his sword.

“You dare!”

He was fast, but the yin guard was faster. The second the guy unsheathed his weapon, the yin guard appeared in front of him and smacked him with his mourning staff.

The man immediately froze in place, eyes glassy and unfocused. At the same time, a semi-transparent silhouette left his body. The yin guard had smacked his soul out of his body in one strike.

After that, the yin guard eyed the surrounding crowd and said frigidly, “This is the Yin Market and the Fengdu. We don’t give second warnings.”

“Besides, the Yin Market is a place of fair trade. You got what you paid for, did you not? It’s not anyone’s fault you’re too dumb to recognize that the price of the good is your life.”

The victims’ faces were ugly, but they didn’t dare to mouth a retort. For one, the yin guard was incredibly strong. Two, this was the ghost’s home turf. And three, what he said made sense. They were the ones who were too stupid to recognize the Qi Eater’s trick.

The yin guard hmped one more time before turning his icy gaze on the Qi Eater. Of course he knew that the Qi Eater had inflamed the crowd on purpose.

“Er..” The Qi Eater shivered when it felt the gaze. It immediately put on a crying face again and wailed, “I have always been an honest and law-abiding ghost, my lord! You gotta defend me, my lord!”

“Hmph.”

Although the yin guard found the Qi Eater’s actions despicable, it was also true that it wasn’t illegal. This was how the Yin Market functioned. Just like the yang fault, you only had yourself to blame if you were tricked. Sure, the price of getting tricked in the Yin Market could very well be one’s life, but so what? A human’s death would only benefit Fengdu.

No, they weren’t stupid enough to encourage such behavior. That was one way to promote the destruction of Fengdu. But the higher-ups certainly saw no reason to forbid it either.

The yin guard looked at Ye Qing next and ordered, “You look like a malicious human. Show me your Yin Token.”

And finally, the yin guard was a ghost and a member of Fengdu. He might be a neutral party in this case, but he was biased in favor of his kind as a matter of course.

You can tell I’m a “malicious” person even though I’m wearing a mask? Why don’t you flap your wings and ascend to the heavens then?

Knowing better than to antagonize someone who was already biased against him, Ye Qing obediently bided his time while producing his Yin Token. “Over here, my lord.”

At first, the yin guard regarded Ye Qing just like any other human. But when he saw the Yin Token Ye Qing handed him, his eyes flickered with a hint of astonishment, gravity, and envy. He immediately shoved his bias and arrogance to the back of his mind and asked respectfully, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"All I ask you to see justice through, my lord. This clearly isn't my fault," Ye Qing said while mulling over the flickers of emotions he sensed from the yin guard. It would seem that his Yin Token really was an extraordinary item.

Now was not the time to be distracted, however. Ye Qing gathered his mind and continued, "He said that anyone can blow into his bottle and receive a block of gold, so I did. But not only did the bottle shatter, I didn't even receive my share of gold. Now, he's demanding compensation for me? How is that fair?"

"Everyone here is a witness, my lord. You can ask them if you don't believe me."

The yin guard frowned and looked at the Qi Eater. "Is he telling the truth?"

"Of course not! You know that my bottle is my innate magic! How can anyone blow it up like a balloon? He obviously did something to my bottle I couldn't see. You can't fall for his sophistry, my lord!" The Qi Eater complained.

"And what do you have to say to that?" The yin guard looked at Ye Qing again.

"What do you even want me to say? It *claims* that I did something to his bottle, but it didn't have any evidence to support it. But I have scores of witnesses who can prove that all I did was blow into the bottle. Surely someone would notice something if I really tried to pull a trick under their noses?"

Ye Qing sneered. "Also, this bastard got it all wrong. I'm the one who's demanding compensation here, not it."

"What do you mean?" The yin guard raised an eyebrow.

Ye Qing explained, "First, all I did was blow into the bottle, and the damn thing suddenly shattered on its own. It said it itself that the bottle is its innate magic. How could I possibly blow it up with my breath alone? It's obvious that the bastard's trying to scam me."

"Second, it promised that anyone who blew into the bottle would be rewarded with a block of gold. I did, but it didn't give me the gold it promised. Don't you agree that it owes me a block of gold, my lord?"

"You want the gold?" The yin guard narrowed his eyes. *I bet you want to be the King of Hell too, don't you?*

"Of course I do! You're the one who said that this is a place of fair trade, isn't it? I already paid it my breath, but where is my gold?" Ye Qing shrugged. "Also, this gold is very important to me. It's the key to world peace, you know?"

“The key... to world peace?” The yin guard’s tone turned incredulously. *Is he crazy, or am I crazy?*

“Yep! Everyone needs money to build a family, don’t they?” Ye Qing scratched his head embarrassedly.

“And how does that relate to world peace?”

The yin guard wasn’t the only one who was completely thrown off by Ye Qing’s insane logic. They were all wondering where the hell Ye Qing was going with this.

Chapter 350: Can One Yin Token Cause A Massacre?

“Haha, I can see your confusion. It’s like this!” Ye Qing let out a chuckle before he began his explanation,

“If I don’t have the gold, then I won’t be able to marry the love of my life.

If I can’t marry the love of my life, then I won’t have children.

If I don’t have children, then no one will take care of me when I’m old.

If no one takes care of me when I’m old, then I will be beset by hunger and cold.

If I’m hungry and cold, then I would commit crimes to fulfill my needs.

If I commit crimes, then public unrest will happen.

If public unrest happens, then the people will suffer.

If the people suffer, then they will rebel.

And if they rebel, then the world will plunge into chaos.”

“Do you understand how important this gold is to me now? How it will affect world peace if I don’t have it?”

We... don’t understand, you madman! Everyone rolled their eyes when they heard this. *Who the fuck do you think you are? If your logic works the way you say it is, then the world would’ve been annihilated by bachelors a long time ago!*

The yin guard took a moment to bleach the memory out of his mind. When he was ready, he said coldly, “Are you done? If you are, then it’s my turn now.”

“You broke the Qi Eater’s bottle, but the Qi Eater was the one who tried to scam you in the first place. Since you’re both in the wrong, you should both make a compromise and forget about this matter.”

He didn’t want to get involved in this matter. Ultimately, The Qi Eater was the one who was in the wrong here, and although he was a ghost himself, he didn’t want to be seen as too biased. Most importantly, the Qi Eater had no proof that Ye Qing had done something to its bottle to break it. So, asking both parties to back down was the best way he knew to resolve this matter.

Of course, he had his own selfish reasons for wanting this matter to go away as quickly as possible.

“Forget this?” The Qi Eater blurted.

“You want me to just forget my gold?” Ye Qing also cried.

“What, you don’t like my decision? How about I throw you both in prison and investigate this matter slowly?” The yin guard looked displeased.

“Oh, fine. Since you’ve given your verdict, I shall be the bigger man here and forgive him,” Ye Qing declared with a magnanimous wave.

This was a better outcome than Ye Qing had imagined when he kicked up a fuss. He was fully prepared to be kicked out of the Yin Market. But now, he had killed the Qi Eater’s conspiracy dead, broke its bottle, saved the victims from certain death—without the bottle, the gold would lose its ability, and the Qi Eater wouldn’t be able to suck their yang qi dry whenever it felt like it—and he didn’t even have to pay any price for it. It was perfect.

“Good.” The yin guard nodded and looked at the Qi Eater next. “What do you say?”

“I...” The Qi Eater was extremely displeased with this outcome as a matter of course, but one look at the yin guard’s face was enough to end any protest it might have. He had no doubt that the yin guard would throw him into the Eighteen Hells if he so much as said the word, “No.”

“Fine.” In the end, the Qi Eater caved into the pressure. He could only glare impotently at Ye Qing.

The verdict seemed fair to both parties, but in reality the Qi Eater was the only one who suffered an actual loss. He didn’t understand why this was happening either. Usually, the yin guards were biased towards their fellow ghosts even if the humans were the ones who were in the right. But today, the yin guard had done a one-eighty and favored the human instead.

Don’t you love us anymore, my lord?

Heh. You should be thankful this isn’t the yang world. Otherwise, you would be a rune already! Ye Qing didn’t hesitate to return an icy glare. Glare at me some more, and I might make you into a rune anyway!

“What are you waiting for? Get lost already! Scam another person, and I will throw you into the Hell of Tongue Ripping!” The yin guard rebuked the Qi Eater.

The Qi Eater shot the yin guard a resentful look. *You really have changed, my lord! You don’t love us anymore!*

It transformed into a gust of yin wind and disappeared after that.

“Thank you for your fair words, my lord.” Ye Qing thanked the yin guard after the Qi Eater left.

“You’re welcome. It is our duty.” The yin guard returned the salute and hesitated for a moment. He then began, “Your Yin Token...”

“What about it?” *I was hoping you would ask!* Ye Qing got ready to receive an explanation regarding how special it was, but instead, he received an unexpected question.

“Would you like to sell it to me?” The yin guard asked.

“You can sell the Yin Token?” Ye Qing was completely caught off guard by this.

“Normally, no. But I possess the authority to buy it from you,” the yin guard replied.

Ye Qing was puzzled. “But why would you need my Yin Token?”

Something flashed behind the yin guard’s eyes as he explained, “I’m a collector of Yin Tokens, and yours is a rare item. That is why I would like to add it to my collection. I’ll pay you a reasonable price, of course. How does one hundred yin gold sound?”

Before Ye Qing could give a response, a deafening, booming voice pierced his ears. “I’ll pay you five hundred yin gold for your Yin Token, human. Would you sell it to me?”

The shout was so loud that even Ye Qing felt like his eardrums were vibrating a little, much less those who were weaker than him. Some of the warriors clutched their heads and screamed the second they heard it.

The yin guard was about to blow his top when he saw who it was. He then asked in a wary voice, “What are you doing, Loud?”

“What do you mean what I’m doing? I’m trying to buy his Yin Token just like you? Is that a crime?” Loud side-eyed the yin guard before turning his attention back to Ye Qing. “Are you selling, human?”

Even the speaker’s normal voice was so loud that it deafened the ears and inflicted a horrible headache upon everyone who was in the vicinity. As for the ghosts, the weakest ones straight up exploded into a puff of yin qi, and those who were lucky enough to survive the noise barrage hurriedly ran away. It was chaos.

One might imagine that the speaker was a tall, imposing ghost. They could even be a giant for all they knew. But in reality, the speaker was no bigger than a human child. A human boy to be exact.

The yin guard knew it would be folly to underestimate him because of his size, however. In fact, the ghost boy was as strong as he was famous.

It seemed obvious, but Loud was very loud. Originally a human child who was killed by lightning, Loud’s voice was as loud as thunder and possessed the ability to tear most ghosts asunder. It was why he was considered a powerhouse even in the yin world.

Ye Qing had read about Loud before, but this was the first time he saw him with his own eyes. His name definitely fit his volume.

“I can offer you one cycle of yin lifespan, young man. Will you sell it to me?”

Once again, a voice interrupted Ye Qing’s train of thought. This time, it belonged to a hunch-backed old lady carrying an oil lamp that glowed a dark green color. The old lady didn’t have a face, however. More accurately, her face was plastered at the back of her skull.

“Granny Lampflower...” Ye Qing’s heart skipped a beat. He immediately recalled the Stranger’s description.

Granny Lampflower was an evil spirit born from the light of a lamp. Shaped like an old lady, her face was on the back of her skull, not the front. She carried an oil lamp that never goes out, and she prefers to manifest herself after midnight when everyone has extinguished their lights. If she encountered someone on the streets, she would offer to guide them home. Once there, she would kill and devour the insides of everyone who lived inside that house.

Most ghosts were malicious by nature, but Granny Lampflower was vile even compared to them.

What’s with this Yin Token? Why is it attractive to these monsters?

“One cycle of yin lifespan. Are you trading or not?” The face behind Granny Lampflower’s skull asked again.

Ye Qing didn’t answer. Granny Lampflower was talking about a person’s lifespan after they died. Yang lifespan was the amount of time someone could live in the yang world, and it was predetermined unless you were a warrior. But yin lifespan was different. It referred to the amount of good fortune, virtues and achievements they had accrued, and the longer their yin lifespan, the better the service, status, and respect they would receive after they joined the afterlife. It was why people with long yin lifespans were normally made into official deities after they died.

Generally speaking, yin lifespan was accumulated by being virtuous, performing good deeds, and making worthwhile achievements when someone was still alive. The better one’s virtue and achievements, the longer their yin lifespan to become. Evil, horrible people normally possessed a short yin lifespan, so the second they joined the afterlife, they would be thrown into the Eighteen Hells to atone for their sins.

This was what Granny Lampflower was referring to. It was very attractive to dying people and the ghosts of Fengdu.

Ye Qing wasn’t very tempted though. He wasn’t even in his twenties yet. Why would he worry about his life in the afterlife when he still had so much time in the world of the living?

“Hahaha... are you stupid, Lampflower? He’s young and full of life! Why the heck would he want your yin lifespan?” Loud taunted.

“Human, I’ll pay you a thousand yin gold. Give me the Yin Token.” Loud looked at Ye Qing next and threatened, “I’m doing this for your own good. Countless ghosts have set their sights on your Yin Token, and there is no way you’ll be able to keep it. It’s not worth losing your life over a shitty token, is it?”

Ye Qing frowned. As Loud said, he could feel a lot of ghosts watching him from the shadows. There was one problem though. *Can someone tell me what the fuck this token is used for? How can I sell something when I don’t even know what it’s used for, much less its value?*

“Loud, Lampflower, can you give me face and leave this token to me?” The yin guard asked with a deep frown.

“And why would we do that?” Loud scoffed in disdain. “You look like you wield a lot of authority, but you’re really just a dog. Why would we lower ourselves to your level?”

“You dare!” The yin guard lost his cool after receiving a terrible insult in front of so many people. Roaring, his clothes popped like a balloon as he transformed into a blue-faced ghost with huge, long fangs and yin fire spitting out of his mouth. Now over three meters tall, the yin guard raised his millstone-sized foot and stepped on Loud. The ghost boy looked like an ant compared to the foot.

Ye Qing immediately darted a few steps away from the yin guard for fear of getting hit by the attack. Loud had no such qualms, however. His childish face was overflowing with arrogance as he declared, “Out of my way!”

Rumble!

The thunderous shout blew the yin guard’s foot away and annihilated the foolish ghosts who stood too close to the battlefield to watch the show. The records hadn’t exaggerated when they said that Loud’s shout possessed the power to tear a hundred ghosts asunder.

Seeing that the attack had failed, the yin guard roared and swung his Soulstealing Chain—now as thick as a baby’s arm—at Loud. A hideous, several inches scar erupted from the road, and Loud took some serious damage as well.

“HAH!” Furious, Loud opened his mouth and shouted even louder. It sent the yin guard flying all the way to a stone pillar on the far end of the street.

As the yin guard stifled a groan, his expression suddenly turned ugly when he realized something. A few breaths later, he shrank back to his original size and declared, “Stop! We’ve been had!”

“Hmm?” Loud noticed that something was wrong and stopped in his tracks as well.

The yin guard was hot-tempered, but he wasn’t a powder keg that might explode at the slightest spark either, much less someone who would break his own rules and fight Loud in the middle of the Yin Market.

The reason he did was because his anger had spiraled out of control. Specifically, someone had done something to fan his flames of anger into an inferno.

“It’s Angry Ghost.”

Angry Ghost was a ghost of someone who died while full of anger. Possessed by the anger they felt prior to their deaths, the Angry Ghost loved nothing more than to observe an argument. If someone were to argue in the Angry Ghost’s presence, it would fan their fury until they started fighting.

Their strange behavior earlier was most likely caused by the Angry Ghost.

“Shit! Lampflower and that human are gone!” Loud suddenly exclaimed in realization.