

Collapse 48

Chapter 48: Everyone, stop tearing the tickets!_1

The old folks always relished a few pots of wine and a plate of peanuts when they told stories.

The old man initially didn't want to talk much with them, but Gu Mian coaxed him out with just a few words.

Now, they were all seated in a small, local eatery. The old man sat happily at the table, not even glancing at the main entrance anymore.

He picked up a peanut, tossed it into his mouth, and chewed with gusto. Listening nearby, Yuwen Hao and the others couldn't help but swallow.

"Speaking of Zhou Guanglei and Zhao Wen, they both died two years ago, but their deaths were more than two months apart," the old man began.

"Let's start with Zhao Wen. Before he died, Zhao Wen had already quit his job here. At the time, those of us at the factory thought he'd gone off to make his fortune somewhere. We never expected to hear he was dead less than three months later."

"Well, life and death are common occurrences. So, although the factory workers were surprised to hear about it, they didn't dwell on it for too long."

"It wasn't until two months later, when Zhou Guanglei, who was good friends with Zhao Wen, also died, that people started suspecting their deaths weren't normal. No one knew how Zhao Wen died, but Zhou Guanglei's death was incredibly bizarre."

"Before he died, he kept saying someone was knocking on his door and even suspected it was us. Later, he started doing nothing but making phone calls in the middle of the night. This old man even received one of his calls..."

"Later on, I heard he died in his own house, strangled in his bed by a telephone cord. Tell me, isn't that strange? How could a grown man be strangled in his own bed by a telephone cord?"

"We all knew his death was out of the ordinary, but people didn't dare discuss it much. Everyone felt that the deaths of Zhao Wen and Zhou Guanglei were peculiar, yet no connection between them could be found."

"But they don't know how Zhao Wen died. This old man, however, does! My nephew works at the police station, you see."

"I heard from my nephew that when they questioned Zhao Wen's family, they also said Zhao Wen kept hearing knocking sounds before he died."

Gu Mian and the others already knew this information but didn't interrupt the old man, letting him continue.

The old man picked at another side dish, took a sip of wine, and then went on, "As for the source of that knocking, others might not know, but I do. My nephew, he's in the police force, hehe."

Hearing this, Yuwen Hao and Qing Huan exchanged a glance. So, this is the origin of the Knocking Ghost.

"Speaking of this knocking sound," the old man continued, "it all goes back to a fire in our factory about seven or eight years ago. A man burned to death in that fire. TSK, TSK. I was right here back then; I saw the man with my own eyes, burned black, being carried out."

Yuwen Hao and the others had heard someone mention this yesterday when they were investigating Zhou Guanglei. This factory had seen three deaths: one from the fire, and the other two were Zhao Wen and Zhou Guanglei.

"Seven or eight years ago, around '95, our factory had just been built. It was brand new, and getting a job here was a sought-after opportunity. Many young lads were scrambling to get in."

"The one who burned to death back then was a young fellow named Yu Hai. I heard he came from a village not far from here, hoping to make something of himself in the small county town. Little did he expect to lose his life right after arriving."

"The fire broke out at night. At that time, we were a new factory, and our leadership was also new to managing. They were quite petty, terrified that someone might sneak in at night and dismantle the factory doors or something."

"So, our leaders arranged for a few people to be on night duty. I was also at the factory that night; I was the gatekeeper."

"That young man, Yu Hai, was on duty in the office. The office had a small adjoining bedroom with a bed. There were even people keeping watch in the workshop."

"When the fire started, I was dozing off. It must have been around two in the morning. I was woken up by the person on duty in the workshop."

"By the time I woke up, the fire was already raging! I rushed over frantically, only to see the entire row of offices completely engulfed in flames! It was a terrifying sight..."

The old man clicked his tongue and shook his head as he spoke, seemingly still awestruck by the ferocity of the fire back then.

"That was in '95. In our small county town, telephones hadn't even become widespread, let alone mobile phones. Only the leadership had one of those brick-like mobile phones, as long as a newborn baby."

"We couldn't call the police, we didn't know where the fire department was, and the police station was too far. Our only option was to run and find the leaders, so they could use their big mobile phone to call for help."

"But it was too late. The person who went to find the leadership told me to watch over the burning row of offices. After he left, I heard a sound from inside..."

"It was Yu Hai's voice... Sigh... he must have been trapped in the small bedroom in the office."

"I could hear him yelling from inside, screaming in terror! He was banging on the door, POUND, POUND, POUND! It seemed like the bedroom door wouldn't open, and he was inside, desperately crying out."

"I wanted to rush in and save him too, but the fire was just too intense. It had completely swallowed the entire row of offices. You couldn't even see where the doors were. Going in would have been a death sentence."

"All I could do was stand outside and listen to Yu Hai inside, endlessly hammering on the door, hammering and hammering. But no matter what, it wouldn't open. Eventually, his voice grew fainter, but he was still in there, desperately knocking..."

"By the time the fire trucks arrived, there were no more sounds from inside. The fire department put in a tremendous effort to finally extinguish the blaze. When they found him, he was already burned as black as charcoal..."

"Over these past seven or eight years, workers have come and gone at the factory, wave after wave. Most of them don't know the details of the fire back then; they only know someone burned to death."

"But I remember it vividly. I still remember Yu Hai desperately banging on that door that night, trying to get out. So, when I heard about what happened to Zhao Wen and Zhou Guanglei, the first person I thought of was Yu Hai."

Reaching this point in his story, the old man put down his chopsticks and let out a long sigh, the food in his mouth suddenly hard to swallow.

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. So, this Yu Hai is the Knocking Ghost that's been following me. However, Yu Hai's death was peculiar; perhaps he too was killed by another ghost.

He looked at the old man. "What did the police say about it later?"

"My nephew said the fire was very strange. It didn't seem like an accident, nor did it look like arson. It was as if a massive fire had just appeared out of thin air..."

"Did Yu Hai experience any supernatural incidents before his death?"

Now that the ghosts corresponding to each of the five of them have appeared, it seems the source of the curse isn't far off. Perhaps the ghost that killed Yu Hai is the true origin of this curse. Gu Mian thought.

"How would I know about that?" the old man replied. "He was a bachelor. I heard his parents died when he was young, and he grew up relying on the charity of many families. He was a big, simple fellow, didn't talk much. But from what I saw, it didn't seem like he'd encountered anything supernatural before; otherwise, he would have been scared out of his wits long ago."

"Were there any other strange incidents at this factory before that?" Gu Mian asked.

"When Yu Hai died, this factory was still brand new, only recently built. How could there have been any supernatural occurrences in such a short time? If you're looking for something, you'd have to go back to before the factory was even constructed. I heard this land used to be the site of a textile workshop."