

The fish was dead before Yoshito Tanaka even reached his dirty home halfway up a valley hillside. It was partially his own fault, going to a koi auction in the middle of winter and thinking it would survive the day-long trek home in a stone flask. Not that there was much hope for the poor thing he traded half a bowl of rice for; with a crooked spine and undesirable bleeding colours. The small vendor was probably going to cull it right as he hobbled along, optimistic about the chance of an already half dead fish becoming the next in his more appropriately labelled koi lake.

Alas he ended up in this too familiar scenario, kneeling in damp soil with a shovel, trying not to relish in the smell of dirt as he buried a corpse wrapped in a leaf. A proper funeral, for a fish. He even offered up a prayer before retreating to his modest one room shack, removing his sandals out of courtesy rather than an attempt to keep it clean. Two steps left for someone with full leg function took him to the kitchen, and another 3 forward to his sleeping area. The single room building he crafted himself what seemed like a lifetime ago, out of anything growing next to the rice field he purchased more out of desperation than a sound business plan.

Whenever Yoshito had called it a rice field his wife would hide a snicker behind her hand. She told him when they brought the farm cheap that nothing would ever grow so high up the mountainside and was as usual right. Disease wiped out plants long before anything else could reach them. Almost as if knowing the opportunity would present itself, his wife happened upon a man sitting in front of a large pot of vividly coloured fish.

"Look how beautiful they are," she whispered in fascination. Yoshito knew they wouldn't be leaving without one, quietly asking for the seller's opinion. Not the blonde foreigner who strode over and decided to explain the most obscure detail of the fish's qualities.

"...well, what I mean to say is that all these fish are clearly improperly bred. The bleeding colours and asymmetrical patterns are completely inappropriate for the sub-species," the gentleman ranted with an aura of absolute charisma, ignoring the stall owner almost pleading with him to leave. The smile on his wife's face turned to feigned interest in what he was saying.

"So which would you classify as the most affected?" She struggled to word in English, but since he couldn't understand a word she said and the foreigner's eyes lit up, she must have done a good job. He slipped into his native language and pointed at half a dozen fish, which were suddenly given to Tanaka in a recycled milk canister. His wife paid and the gentleman was dragged away by a girl in pig pigtails.

"So where do you propose we keep these?"

She pretended to think for a moment. "Perhaps your so called rice patty will do. I think I want a pond. Don't I deserve one?"

"Of course you do," he said with a faint smile, picking up the canister and carting it all the way back up the mountain. It was the last time she ever found the strength to walk with him. The doctor insisted she would recover in the fresh air away from town life, instead she was physically unable to return. When he

prepared to leave in the morning once a month she would hobble over on the cane he made and beg for another ugly fish. Sometimes it meant going without a new pair of shoes he desperately, but each month she released another fish. People detoured to see the water lilies in bloom or creatures that grew far beyond normal size. Tour sized groups that came for the spirit clan across the river would spend more trying to count just how many things swam in the pond, to the cult's disgust but the Tanaka's escalating pride. She almost seemed to feel better listening to his stories of obtaining the suddenly desired carp.

In summer she soaked her feet in the pond when the sun started to sink, and counted the ripples of fish breaking the reflection of the sky. Tanaka watched her, catching glimpses of a finned silhouette in the water, giving the illusion of giant black creature swimming through the sky. When she came inside she would shiver against him, insisting she was too hot.

"My cousin used to tell me that starts were the wings of people that died." Her voice shook with exhaustion, skin clammy as she tried to pull the blanket closer for security rather than warmth. Rubbing his legs that were only just starting to ache, Yoshito stayed close to her listening contently.

"Each time you did something wrong, a feather would fall from your wings. Once there was a man who lived a life of darkness and drugs and murder, and when he died his wings were so small all the other spirits laughed at him. 'You'll never reach heaven like that.' He didn't listen, and one day he jumped off a cliff and tried to fly to heaven with wings so small no one could see them." She panted through a seemingly permanent fever, smiling as he opened the door to get cold air in. "Do you want to know what happens?"

"He fell," Yoshito replied quietly. Every night she forgot she'd already explained her faith the night before.

"He fell right into the ocean. He used his wings to fight the water's currents all the way to land, but he couldn't walk onto the beach. His legs had turned into a tail, and the air hurt to breathe. So he was doomed to live in the ocean's unforgiving tides, always swimming in the reflection of the heaven he could never reach." She seemed to settle, watching the sky through the archway.

"Bury me near the pond so that I can always see heaven. I did so many awful things in my life my wings would never take me past the moon." She laughed.

"Don't say such morbid things."

"Promise." She stared at him almost coldly. A demand too dark and serious for Yoshito to process.

"I promise, now sleep." He blew out a candle, retreating to his own spread away from the chill of the open door. She smiled, sleeping without wheezing for the first night in their entire lives' together. Not being woken was almost uncomfortable for Tanaka, who woke late the next morning and wondered how she knew. How was her gut intuition always so right, and how long after he fell asleep did she die? He

found himself time and time again staring into the pond wondering if it bothered her the last thing he said wasn't more sentimental, as though by telling her to sleep he'd ordered her to never wake up.

The smell of freshly turned dirt always reminded him of her gaunt face, eyes closed as he delicately placed her in a dry area of the pond. Her family watched him without offering to help. Cold glares bore into his turned back. He offered them tea, and they offered their opinion. It was his fault for taking her away from them. That he'd somehow doomed her soul by not burying her in their family land. Her cousin even made a rare appearance, with a snide remark about how she could have been powerful if they'd never met.

He used a cane to help himself out of the soft ground, feeling much older than he was. Apparently his body was struggling to forgive him for climbing the trailless hill so many times over the years and while it made sense he couldn't bring himself to trust the word of a doctor. The foot of his robes was heavy with mud, the stink of it following him back into the house. It haunted his senses as though foreboding the arrival of the regal woman in his doorway. Her permanent scowl never failed to make him feel ashamed of how he looked no matter how he presented himself; after his wife passed almost 15 years ago he stopped trying.

"That time of month already, Ami?" He wanted to cringe at his own voice, dry throat making the joke creak more than his house. Her scowl somehow deepened, revealing frown lines he'd almost forgotten existed under the first layer of age.

"As it's always been, Fey is the only acceptable title for me." She held her head high, despite being quite a deal shorter than the most recently erected statue of her. To avoid her gaze Tanaka thought it was the perfect opportunity to broom his mostly dirt floor. Her eyes seemed more dead than the fish, not quick enough to hide a chuckle. The legendary Ami Fey shot him another look almost as venomous as her tongue. She never needed to resort to her wit when her reputation was enough to send most into timidity, but Yoshito had been victim to it more than most. The most powerful spirit medium ever born, they whispered. Called on by the emperor directly, murmurs seemed to echo everywhere she travelled. Despite unwillingly being associated with the cult-like Fey clan for the best and worst years of his life, Tanaka found himself utterly unable to think of any occasion she'd actually demonstrated rumoured abilities.

"I've been lighting lanterns each night," he said, focusing on a particularly dense area of mud. Ami made a short sound of acknowledgement that he interpreted as condescending.

"It most likely would not be enough." The priestess went about lighting her own candles that she claimed were blessed next to a large grave he carved out himself, another thing the family objected to. It sat overlooking her garden in a low area that sometimes flooded in the wet season, letting fish swim around the stone base. He liked to believe it was what she wanted.

"She is suffering because of you. She will never be able to reach the afterlife because of your crude burial," Ami taunted, putting down a ridiculous staff and starting to pray. 15 years and each evening she

arrived to 'pray for forgiveness' she would drudge up the past to drag him through his every mistake. His grip tightened on the broom, moving closer to the Fey style memorial. Almost an hour's worship she stood, shooting him a look as she brushed off her robes.

"Keep the lanterns going. All the negative spirits you have here consume the light she needs to escape this world." She turned rigid, noticing a fish that seemed to watch her from the water. One of the first from the exchange with the foreigner. Tanaka hated admitting that the witch did strike a certain resemblance to her. Minus the self-imposed fear of water, which begged the question why her temples were always near running water. He could see it across the river, in all reality quite close to their escape. The journey was so long due to having to find a safe area to cross.

Ami followed his line of sight to the temple, almost pleased by the spark of envy. "The new Hazakura building is quite impressive. She would have enjoyed it."

"I'm sure," he had enough, turning to hobble back inside. It was his house. Ami Fey had no right to follow him inside, running a finger over the arch borders and turn up her nose when it was covered in black dust. He limped back quickly, almost missing the pounding thuds of his chest and the stabs in his knees. "Leave, Ami."

The cobra arched back and struck. His cane slipped out of his grasp. "She always liked the finer things. Sometimes I wonder if she left because she was embarrassed by you."

He reached for the broom just for support. His legs started to buckle and he dug it into the ground directly in front of himself to stop from falling in front of his self-righteous enemy. It wasn't until she had already reacted that he realised the hard bristles of the driftwood tool hit her hard in the chest, with enough force to make her lose balance. She took a step into the polished stone cemetery in thick sandals that offered no grip. She fell before he could offer assistance even if he'd tried, somehow twisting mid-fall and landing in the aquatic garden. For less than a second Yoshito found himself struggling back a laugh.

She seemed to bob under the surface, the bow of her kimono constantly disturbing the water. Red began seeping into the pond. His heart slowed from the initial spike of adrenaline, nauseating panic leaving him paralysed. The rock, the stupid pointed stone he'd used to cover the dead animal from mere minutes ago was dyed a similar colour. Fish swarmed around the Fey like they did when his wife used to them, almost jumping out of the water to get closer to the excitement. Blood spread a cloud that contrasted with their white hides.

The woman didn't make any attempt to get up; completely still.

His body couldn't handle the step into the pool. He paced, and tried, but the step hurt too much. She still wasn't moving. It was like poking a drowned toad with his cane, trying to turn her body.

Wide, shocked, greying eyes. The last glare she would ever give him before her body rolled itself back over. The fish were still in a frenzy, trying to pull at her clothes. Whenever he disturbed the water they would retreat for seconds before going straight back to the same spot. Thoughts were starting to put themselves back together in his head, like instincts whispering in his ear.

*What are we going to do with the body?*

The furthest corner of the pond. Almost reclaimed by the forest, thick with debris and dry rice husk. He poked and prodded the small woman's body over the water like a leaf, all the way around the perimeter to where a branch he couldn't remove stuck half exposed. A dull satisfaction chased the paranoia out of his body when he realised there was enough thickets to cover the purple of her ceremonial outfit. They treated him like a dirty secret, he rationalised, almost no one would know she was coming here. If they asked he could say she already left.

Her stupid bow had come loose almost like fate. He could walk the short trail to the Inner Temple of the Fey clan, which sat almost abandoned with the river having taken out Dusky Bridge. Throw the bow into the rapids.

*They'll assume she fell.*

He slept almost peacefully, with a faint smile on his face the entire night.

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"They say they found the body almost 2 weeks later, when all the flesh had started to melt off her bones," Maya giggled as she spoke, adjusting the torch under her face. Pearl squealed and pulled the blanket up to her face while Phoenix Wright, still wondering what god must have hated him enough to cancel the last train out of Kurain, found himself less than impressed.

"Yoshito Tanaka, the murderer, was immediately found guilty and executed. The house traded hands almost a dozen times before the year ended; everyone with the same complaint. Weeping in their heads as they tried to sleep. A deformed figure standing in the window, pointing with an accusing glare. A woman standing in the middle of the pond on nights when the moon is blocked by clouds." The spirit medium inched closer to them, grin distorted by the single light source in their small guest room.

"A voice, dry and old, shouting at them-"

"KEEP THE LANTERNS LIT!" Maya tripped over her own blanket and dropped the torch, sending the room into darkness. Pearl's scream quickly turned into babbling, in turn causing Phoenix to scream as Maya grabbed his foot trying to find her way off the floor in the dark. The lights all turned on, Sister Bikini laughing in the doorway. It took almost 5 minutes for all three to calm down.

"So the mediums light the lantern then, to appease the spirit of Mr Tanaka," Phoenix said, remembering the flicker he never failed to notice outside the train window where he knew the cabin still sat 100 years empty. Bikini's face turned white; Maya sitting up with a sheen of confusion.

“What lantern?”