

Lantern District Nocturne

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Chapter 1: Prayer Smoke in the Night Market

Rei opened in a market where the lanterns did not merely illuminate commerce. They judged it. Stalls selling honest remedies burned amber. Stalls hiding curses flared blue-white at the wick. The city treated this as folklore because admitting the lanterns were right would have made too many respected people difficult to seat at dinner.

The protagonist, a debt collector for a shrine nobody officially recognized, moved through the district reading heat, incense drift, and the way vendors flinched at certain temple bells. Every exchange felt transactional in two currencies at once: cash and absolution.

By the end of the chapter a severed promise had been found folded into a prayer slip, and the district's prettiest alley had become a murder scene.

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Chapter 2: An Elegant Little Desecration

Wednesday tightened the macabre and removed any temptation to romanticize it. The ghost in the lantern district was not tragic because it suffered. It was tragic because it had learned etiquette after death and still chose vengeance.

She made the shrine records delightful in the wrong way, full of immaculate handwriting and bureaucratic cruelty. Every missing donor looked like a clerical error until the protagonist realized the temple had been balancing its books with souls.

The deadpan tone sharpened the horror instead of flattening it. A market that can invoice the afterlife is funny right up until you receive the bill.

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