

# GUARDIENNE

## 守娘

\* 2020 Golden Comics Awards Best New Talent

*In the Taiwan of the early 1900s, the happiness of a married woman depended on providing a son. Doing so became an obsession, involving various rituals. Nownow combines traditions and history to provide a visually ravishing look at the lives of women in Qing dynasty Taiwan.*

Taiwan during the Qing dynasty was deeply patriarchal. Women were disregarded from birth, their only purpose was to make a good marriage. But once married, the pressure was on to provide sons. This gave rise to various folk practices which were claimed to ensure male offspring. Chieh watches as her sister-in-law, obsessed with giving birth to a son, gives in to these superstitions. And she herself is under pressure to marry – can she ever break free?

Walking by the river one day, she comes across the body of a woman. A priestess is summoned to ensure her spirit passes peacefully and does not haunt the town. The woman, with her mysterious ways, does seem able to communicate with the spirit world and Chieh, seeing a glimmer of hope, enrolls as her apprentice. But soon after, small handprints start appearing on her legs as she sleeps, while more women go missing or are found dead. What will Chieh do, and will she find the life she wants?

A look at an independent young woman during the Qing dynasty, *Guardienne* is critical of the society of the time. Mixing folk tales and religion, it portrays the struggle of the women of the era living in a provincial city, and the beauty and tragedy of their lives.

Nownow 小猫猫

A graduate of National Taiwan University of the Arts, Nownow excels in portrayals of traditional clothing and her work has been serialized



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in the Create Comic Collection. *Guardienne* has won the Best New Talent at the Golden Comics Awards.



Pretty, very  
pretty.



MOTHER SAYS  
SMALL FEET  
MAKE UP FOR  
AN UGLY FACE

SHE'LL EASILY MARRY  
INTO A GOOD FAMILY  
WITH THOSE FEET.



Tiny! I've  
been match-  
making for  
years, but  
never seen  
smaller!



Oh,  
and are  
her feet  
small?



"YOU BE CAREFUL, AND  
DO WHAT YOUR HUSBAND  
TELLS YOU."

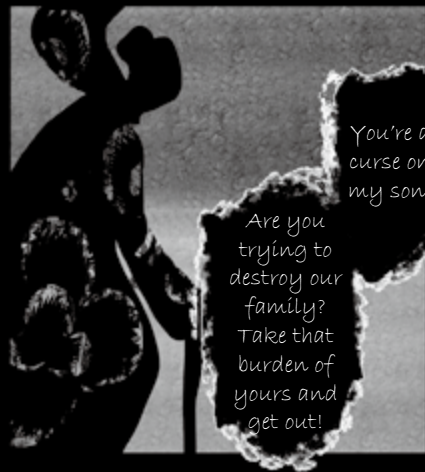


"BEAR A SON AND  
SECURE YOUR  
PLACE"



I've  
found a  
way to  
help her.

Don't  
worry,  
mother.



You're a  
curse on  
my son!

Are you  
trying to  
destroy our  
family?  
Take that  
burden of  
yours and  
get out!



THEY'RE  
CHASING  
US!



QUICK!

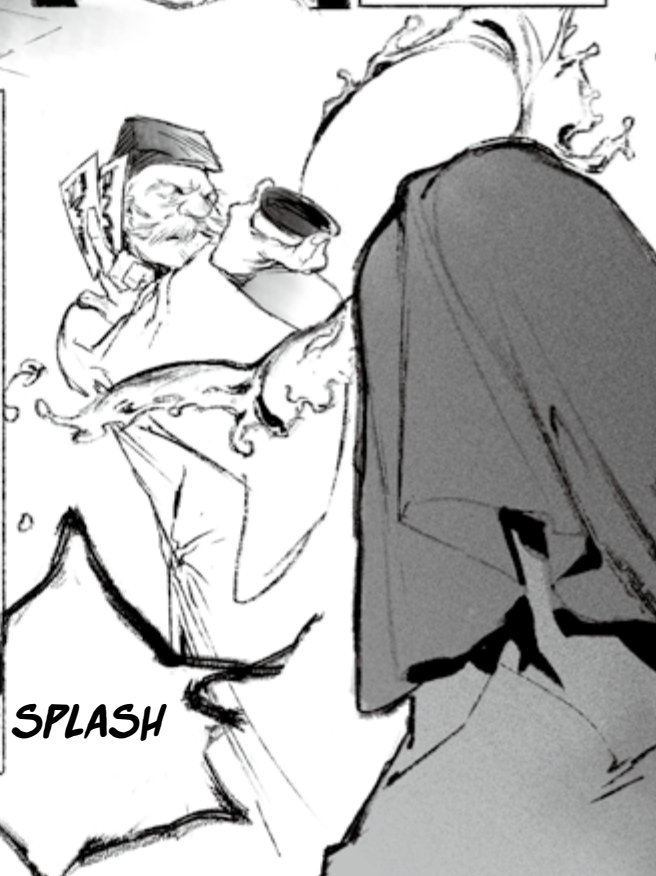


RUN!





## Chapter 1





SIS,

CAN I TAKE  
THIS OFF  
NOW?

CHIEH!



OF  
COURSE,  
MASTER!

IT'S UP TO  
HER NOW,  
SO KEEP  
A CLOSE  
WATCH!



A BIG-  
FOOTED  
GIRL LIKE  
YOU...

WHAT IF  
WE CAN'T  
GET YOU  
MARRIED?

OH, NOT  
THIS  
AGAIN...

IT'LL  
WORK  
OUT.



ALL THE  
TROUBLE  
HE TOOK  
OVER THE  
CEREMONY!

YOU  
PEST!

BUT IT'S  
ALL WET, IT'S  
HORRIBLE.



AUNT!  
AUNT,  
PLEASE  
WAIT...

OH, THIS  
WILL  
NOT  
DO...

SIS?



SHIH-LIU

YOU BRAT!  
WHAT  
ARE YOU  
DOING?

AUNT...

BE  
GOOD...

THAT'S GOOD..  
DON'T CRY...



AND  
YOU,  
YU-LAN,

IF YOU CAN'T  
MANAGE THE  
SERVANTS,  
HOW CAN YOU  
MANAGE A  
HOUSEHOLD?

I'M  
SORRY..



SHE JUST  
STARTED  
CRYING..

YOU CAN'T  
EVEN LOOK  
AFTER A  
BABY!

YOU'RE  
USELESS!

WHAT ARE  
YOU GOING  
TO DO IF  
YOU RUIN THE  
RITUAL?

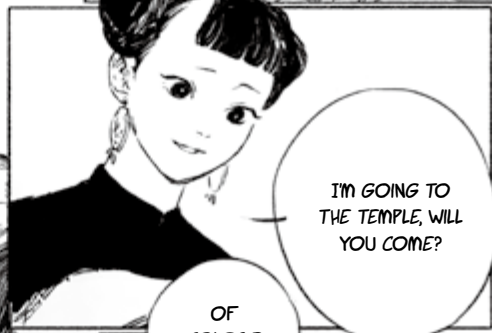
IT'S  
ALL MY  
FAULT..

IT'S FOR  
YOUR OWN  
GOOD..

WORRY  
ABOUT THE  
CHILD, NOT  
ATTRACTING  
MEN!

AND WHY  
ARE YOU  
WEARING  
THOSE  
CLOTHES?





FOUR YEARS AGO,





IN THE HOPE OF HELPING  
OUR AILING FATHER,

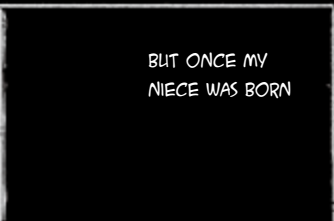
MY BROTHER MARRIED

TO A GIRL INTRODUCED BY OUR RELATIVES.





SIS SEEMED TO CHANGE.  
SHE BECAME OBSESSED WITH  
THESE RITUALS.



BUT ONCE MY  
NIECE WAS BORN



BEFORE  
THEY DIED,  
MY PARENTS  
NAGGED  
ME ABOUT  
GETTING  
MARRIED.

BUT IF I DO

NO...

MY ENTIRE LIFE  
DEPENDS ON  
WHAT COMES  
OUT OF MY  
BELLY?

NO...

WILL I BE THE SAME AS SIS?

GUANYIN,  
KEEP MY  
FAMILY  
SAFE...

I DON'T  
WANT TO  
LIVE LIKE  
THAT.



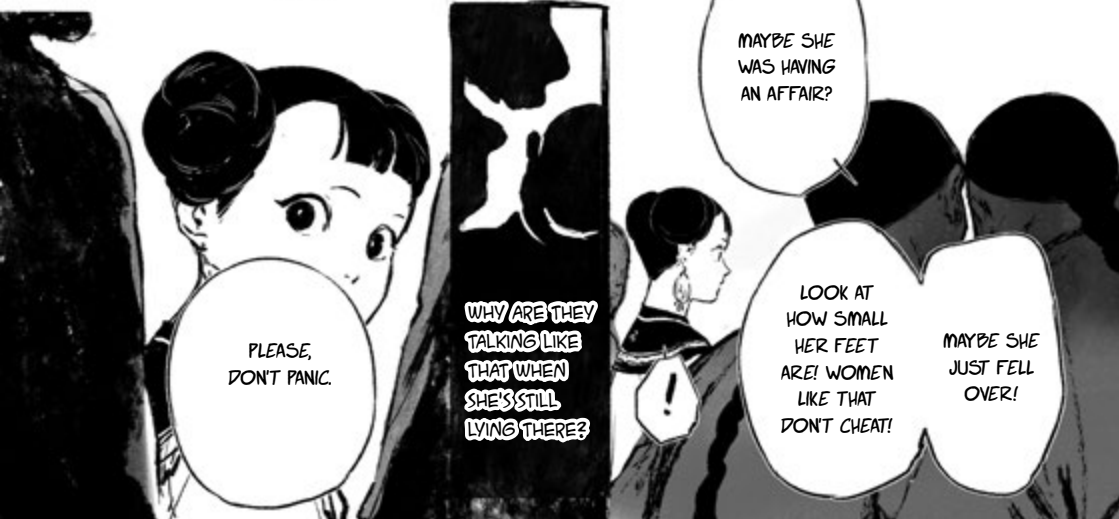


WHAT'S  
HAPPENED?

?

SUCH A  
YOUNG  
WOMAN...  
WHAT A  
PITY.

WHAT ON  
EARTH  
HAPPENED?



MAYBE SHE  
WAS HAVING  
AN AFFAIR?

PLEASE,  
DON'T PANIC.

WHY ARE THEY  
TALKING LIKE  
THAT WHEN  
SHE'S STILL  
LYING THERE?

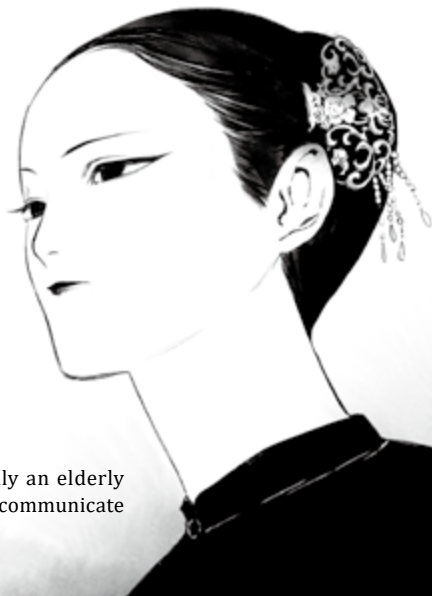
LOOK AT  
HOW SMALL  
HER FEET  
ARE! WOMEN  
LIKE THAT  
DON'T CHEAT!

MAYBE SHE  
JUST FELL  
OVER!





Magistrate: The magistrate was the local administrator for the Qing, responsible for public buildings, maintaining order, keeping population records and solving crimes.



Priestess: Usually an elderly woman, able to communicate with the spirits.

WE CANNOT HAVE  
GHOSTS CAUSING  
TROUBLE.








I'VE NEVER SEEN A RITUAL LIKE THIS.

IT'S LIKE A DANCE.

AND HER  
SINGING, SO  
DEEP BUT  
CLEAR, IT FEELS  
CALMING.

IT'S AS IF SHE REALLY CAN  
TALK TO THE SPIRITS.



MAYBE SHE'S THE ANSWER...



I DID THIS  
TO HELP  
CALM THE  
LOCALS.

YOU  
NEED  
NOT  
WORRY.

IF THERE  
HAS BEEN ANY  
CRIME, I SHALL  
HANDLE IT.

DO TAKE  
CARE.



MOVE  
ON,  
MOVE  
ON!

THERE'S  
NOTHING  
TO SEE!



MAGISTRATE,  
YOU ASKED  
ME TO  
RELEASE  
HER SPIRIT,

HAVE YOU  
FOUND  
ANYTHING  
SUSPICIOUS?

YOU  
FEAR SHE  
MIGHT  
BECOME A  
GHOST?

IF SIS BELIEVES  
IN ALL THAT...

THEN MAYBE IF I CAN GET THE  
PRIESTESS TO SPEAK TO HER...

WAIT,  
PLEASE!

CAN I HELP  
YOU?

I'M SURE I  
CHANGE HER  
MIND!

AND I'M  
VERY HARD-  
WORKING...

LET  
GO.

WHAT?  
WHAT  
ARE YOU  
TALKING  
ABOUT?

PLEASE,

YOU'RE SO  
POWERFUL,  
YOU COULD  
EASILY  
TEACH ME,

I HOPE  
YOU CAN  
HELP ME...

I MEAN...  
ACCEPT  
ME AS AN  
APPRENTICE!



BUT MY FEET AREN'T BOUND, SO I'LL NEVER FIND A GOOD HUSBAND.

THEY'LL BE SOME BAD-TEMPERED OAF

OR AN OLD MAN WHO WANTS A CONCUBINE.

WE'LL BARELY KNOW EACH OTHER, AND THEY'LL BULLY ME UNTIL I HAVE A SON.



I'M SERIOUS!

MY FAMILY WANT TO MARRY ME OFF, BUT I WON'T LET THEM.

THEY DON'T LISTEN TO ME, BUT YOU...

.....

THERE'S NOTHING ODD IN A GIRL BEING MARRIED.



ISN'T THAT ODD?

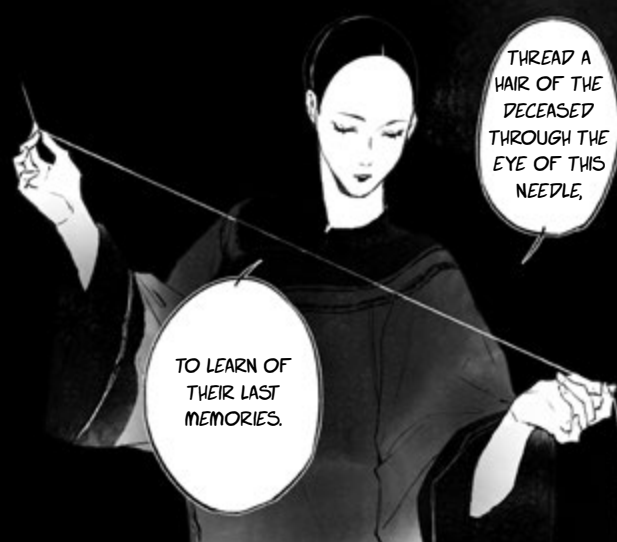


WELL, MAYBE I COULD GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNITY.

REALLY?



HERE IS A NEEDLE.



THREAD A HAIR OF THE DECEASED THROUGH THE EYE OF THIS NEEDLE,

TO LEARN OF THEIR LAST MEMORIES.



HER HAIR...

GET ME ONE  
OF HER HAIRS,  
AND I'LL THINK  
ABOUT IT.

YOU SAW  
THAT DEAD  
WOMAN  
JUST NOW?  
USE HER  
HAIR AS A  
TEST.



LOOK, THEY  
HAVEN'T TAKEN  
HER FAR. GO AND  
CATCH THEM.

JUST ONE  
STRAND  
SIMPLE,  
ISN'T IT?

YES.



AND IT'S JUST ONE HAIR,



AND MY LIFE WOULD BE MY OWN...



HOW LONG  
DO I HAVE TO  
CHOOSE?

IF SIS HEARS  
THE GOSSIP,  
MAYBE NOT  
LONG...





SIRS!  
WAIT!



CAN'T YOU  
SEE WE'RE  
BUSY? OUT  
OF THE WAY!

WHAT?



I'D JUST  
LIKE TO  
TAKE ONE  
HAIR

OW!



BUT

I WOULD  
LIKE TO  
ASK A  
FAVOR!









IF YOU'RE  
GOING TO  
COME BACK  
EMPTY-  
HANDER

...JUST  
GO  
HOME,



PEOPLE  
STRUGGLE  
WHEN THEY  
DROWN, THEY  
WOULDN'T  
HAVE CLEAN  
NAILS LIKE  
HERS.

MY BROTHER  
IS AN AIDE  
TO THE  
MAGISTRATE,  
AND  
SOMETIMES  
I READ HIS  
PAPERS.



!!



DID HER  
SPIRIT  
TELL YOU  
ANYTHING?

THAT  
WOMAN  
DIDN'T  
DROWN.


SOME-  
THING'S  
NOT RIGHT!





?

DON'T YOU  
THINK YOU  
SHOULD ASK?  
AND I COULD  
HELP! I CAN  
READ AND  
WRITE...




WRITE A PLAINT  
ON BEHALF  
OF THE DEAD  
AND BURN IT  
TO INFORM  
THE GREAT  
TUNGYUEH OF  
THIS INJUSTICE.

IF YOU'RE  
SO KEEN TO  
HELP, VISIT  
TUNGYUEH  
TEMPLE,



OH, YOU  
CAN WRITE?  
THAT MAKES  
THINGS  
EASIER.



BUT... YOU  
MUST BE SURE  
THAT GREAT  
TUNGYUEH  
WILL WISH TO  
INTERVENE,





WISH TO  
INTERVENE  
IN EVERY  
INJUSTICE.

OR NOT ONLY  
WILL YOU FAIL,  
IT WILL ALL END  
BADLY FOR  
YOU TOO.

FOR AFTER  
ALL, NOT EVEN  
THE GODS  
OF THE  
UNDERWORLD



IF THERE HAS BEEN  
NO INJUSTICE

THERE IS NO NEED FOR  
EITHER HAIR OR PLAINT.





I DON'T  
HAVE THE  
TIME FOR  
THIS.

YOU'RE  
GIVING  
ME A  
HEADACHE.

DON'T  
GO!



YOU KNEW  
FROM THE  
START  
SHE WAS  
MURDERED,  
DIDN'T YOU?



WHAT  
DID  
YOU  
SAY?!

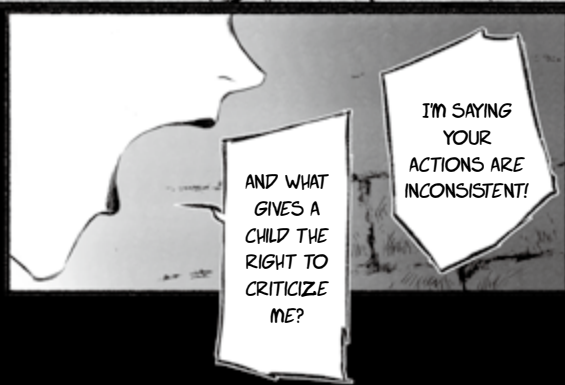
TO  
SCARE  
ME AND  
THE  
OTHERS  
AWAY?

OR  
WAS  
THAT  
WHOLE  
RITUAL  
A SHAM,

IF THE  
WOMAN HAS  
A GRIEVANCE,  
WHY CAN'T  
SOMEONE DO  
SOMETHING?



VERY WELL,  
VERY WELL,  
THAT'S  
ENOUGH.



AND WHAT  
GIVES A  
CHILD THE  
RIGHT TO  
CRITICIZE  
ME?

I'M SAYING  
YOUR  
ACTIONS ARE  
INCONSISTENT!





YOUNG  
GIRL,

YOU ARE  
CERTAINLY  
QUICK-  
WITTER



THEY SEEM TO KNOW  
EACH OTHER WELL....

WHAT NEED  
DO YOU HAVE  
TO PUT ON  
SUCH AN ACT,  
PRIESTESS?



WHAT IS YOUR  
NAME, GIRL?



MY  
FAMILY  
IS DU...



Who is this?

AND IF YOU  
ARE SO  
POWERFUL,

MY  
APOLOGIES,  
I DID NOT  
MEAN TO  
STARTLE YOU.



UNTIL NEXT  
TIME. KEEP  
WELL. UNTIL  
NEXT TIME.  
KEEP WELL.

OKAY!

BUT CAN I  
TRUST THEM?

HE DIDN'T SEEM  
LIKE A BAD MAN...



OH!



REALLY!

EXCELLENT,  
THANK YOU,  
SIR!

MISS  
DU,

OUR  
PRIESTESS  
WAS MERELY  
TESTING YOU.  
IF YOU WANT  
TO SEE HER  
AGAIN,

SIMPLY  
VISIT  
YUNGHUA  
TEMPLE.



WHAT'S THE  
RUSH? I JUST  
GOT HERE.

I... I'M  
SORRY FOR THE  
WAIT.

REALLY, MISS...





I'VE  
ALREADY  
SAID,

I DON'T  
WANT YOUR  
PARENTS  
COMING  
HERE WITH  
ALL THEIR  
SPIRITUAL  
NONSENSE.

PERHAPS  
WE COULD  
DO THIS  
FOR YOUR  
BROTHER AND  
HIS WIFE?

NO!  
I DON'T  
WANT TO  
HEAR ANY  
MORE ABOUT  
HAIR!

THEIR  
WISHES  
WILL COME  
TRUE!

TWO PEOPLE'S  
HAIRS ROUND  
A CHOPSTICK,  
THEN USE IT  
TO STIR THE  
VINEGAR URS  
AT CHUNGCHING  
TEMPLE,

MISS, I'VE  
HEARD  
THAT IF  
YOU WRAP  
STRANDS  
OF



*The Annals of Taiwanese Customs* records that praying at Chungching Temple then stirring the vinegar jars will make wishes come true.



DON'T  
THINK LIKE  
THAT.

I NEED TO  
WORK, YOU  
SHOULD  
REST.



HUSBAND!

IT'S ALL  
FOR OUR  
FAMILY.



FOR  
NOT  
GIVING  
YOU A  
SON...

IT'S  
MY  
FAULT



AND WHERE  
HAVE YOU  
BEEN CAUSING  
TROUBLE  
TODAY?



BROTHER  
...



YOU'RE  
NOT A  
CHILD ANY  
MORE,

WHY DOES  
EVERYONE  
WANT TO  
GET ME  
MARRIED?

I...  
JUST WENT  
TO THE  
TEMPLE?



THE  
NEIGHBORS  
HAVE ALREADY  
BEEN TO  
SEE ME

AND I'D LIKE TO  
SEE YOU HAPPILY  
MARRIED TOO.

ABOUT  
YOU  
RUNNING  
ABOUT ALL  
DAY.

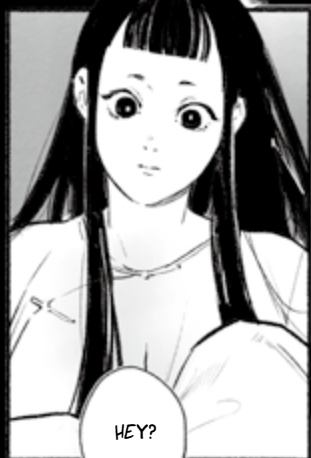
THEY  
THINK YOU  
NEED A  
HUSBAND  
TO KEEP  
YOU IN  
LINE.

JUST DON'T  
TURN OUT  
LIKE YOUR  
SISTER-IN-  
LAW...









HEY?



MY FEET ARE  
SORE FROM ALL  
THAT WALKING.

I HOPE THE  
PRIESTESS TAKES  
ME ON...

AT LEAST  
LITTLE  
LYCHEE'S  
ASLEEP



WHAT ARE THESE MARKS?

HANDPRINTS!?

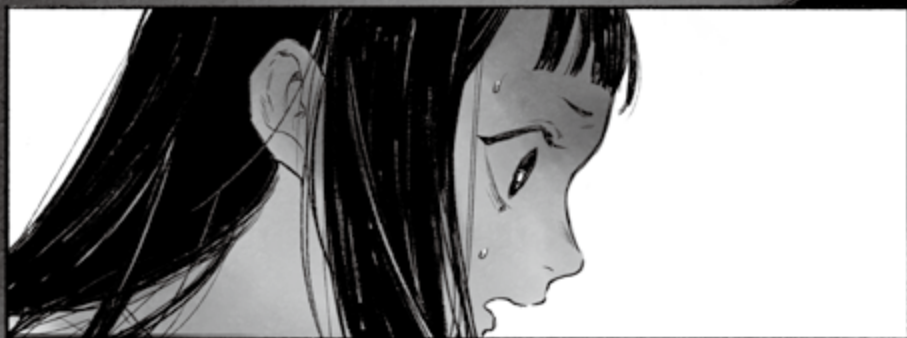


THEY'RE  
LIKE  
LITTLE...



COULD IT BE...





HAVE I....

... BROUGHT  
SOMETHING  
BACK?





## **Taiwanese folklore in *Guardianne* / CCC Editors**

### **Women are yin, men are yang Women a curse, men a blessing**

Both Chieh's sister-in-law and the lowly servant Shih-liu think folk methods can guarantee a son. And traditional marriage customs, from the dowry to the speaking of auspicious words, show the expectations placed on the bride to provide sons. Ceremonies were carried out to try to ensure a boy. In one, women who had given birth to a girl ate pig's intestines in the hope of replacing their womb with a new one.

Unwanted girls might be lucky and, like Lychee, be accepted by their parents. Others would never grow up. Miscellaneous Records of Anping County records: "In the villages of Tainan, daughters are often drowned by the aggrieved parents-in-law of the mother." This was because a daughter was a burden for an ordinary family: the dowry required to marry her off would be cripplingly expensive. Meanwhile, female infanticide meant many men could not find wives. And the refusal to allow servant girls to marry and the practice of adopting young girls to raise to be wives also arises.

Local gentry would sometimes act, raising public and government money for a foundling hospital, where unwanted daughters could be left. These were found in many locations in Taiwan.

### **Folk methods to ensure sons**

#### **On marriage:**

For many sons: Include a potted Canna lily in your dowry (the name of which sounds similar to that for the male reproductive organs and the phrase "many births"), and also pomegranates (for many male offspring) and osmanthus (for wealth).

## **On conception:**

Followers of Lady Linshui believe she controls the Hundred Flowers Bridge, the flowering shrubs of which represent the female womb. The flowers on the shrubs represent the children: white for a boy, red for a girl. Before the ceremony, offerings are prepared, including the Canna lily. During the ceremony a Daoist priest symbolically crosses the Hundred Flowers Bridge and removes a white flower, which the supplicant takes home, along with the Canna lily. The ceremony is believed to change a female fetus to a male.

**\* Symbols:** It is said that swallowing certain magic symbols in the third month of pregnancy can change the sex of a fetus.

**\* Incantations:** In the third month of pregnancy the mother-to-be must bathe, dress well and, in the dead of night, walk three times around a well. Then, looking at her reflection in the water and never looking back, she must say:

*Women are yin, men are yang  
Women a curse, men a blessing*

The well must then be sealed for three days.

## **On birth:**

### **Womb-changing**

If a girl is born, her family has ten days to carry out the following ceremony to avoid a reoccurrence:

1. Stuff a pig stomach with glutinous rice, add the four sacred ingredients and place in a new teapot.
2. Bind six copper coins with a red thread, tie a longan to each end, then bind to the mouth of the teapot.
3. This should be carried, by the woman's family, to her new home, and placed in the center of her bed. They should then leave quietly after praying to Bed Mother, the female goddess of the bedchamber.
4. The woman should eat the pig intestines, then place the teapot under her bed.
5. Before giving birth again, the teapot should be removed and used to toast the birth. Many believe this process will replace the woman's womb with one which will give sons.







I WAS  
THE GO-  
BETWEEN  
FOR THE  
MARRIAGE,

AND I  
HADN'T  
SEEN HER  
SINCE.

SHE  
MARRIED  
INTO SOME  
FAR-OFF  
FAMILY  
YEARS AGO,

SUCH A  
SHAME IT  
CAME TO  
THIS...

AND SAW THE  
WOMAN, BUT  
NOTHING  
ELSE.

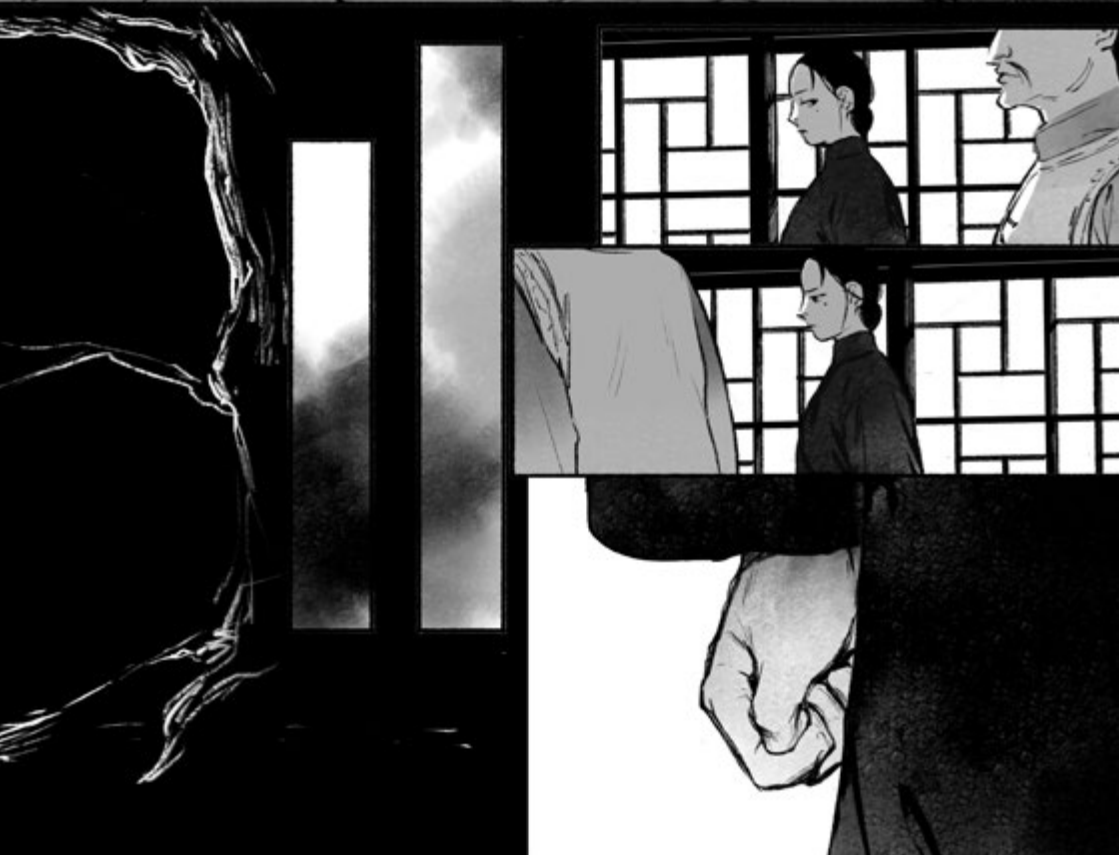
SIR, I WAS  
ON MY WAY  
TO WORK  
EARLY THAT  
MORNING

SHE WAS  
NAMED TSAI  
SHUN, AGED  
19. DID YOU  
KNOW HER?



YES,

SHE  
WAS MY  
OLDER-  
SISTER.

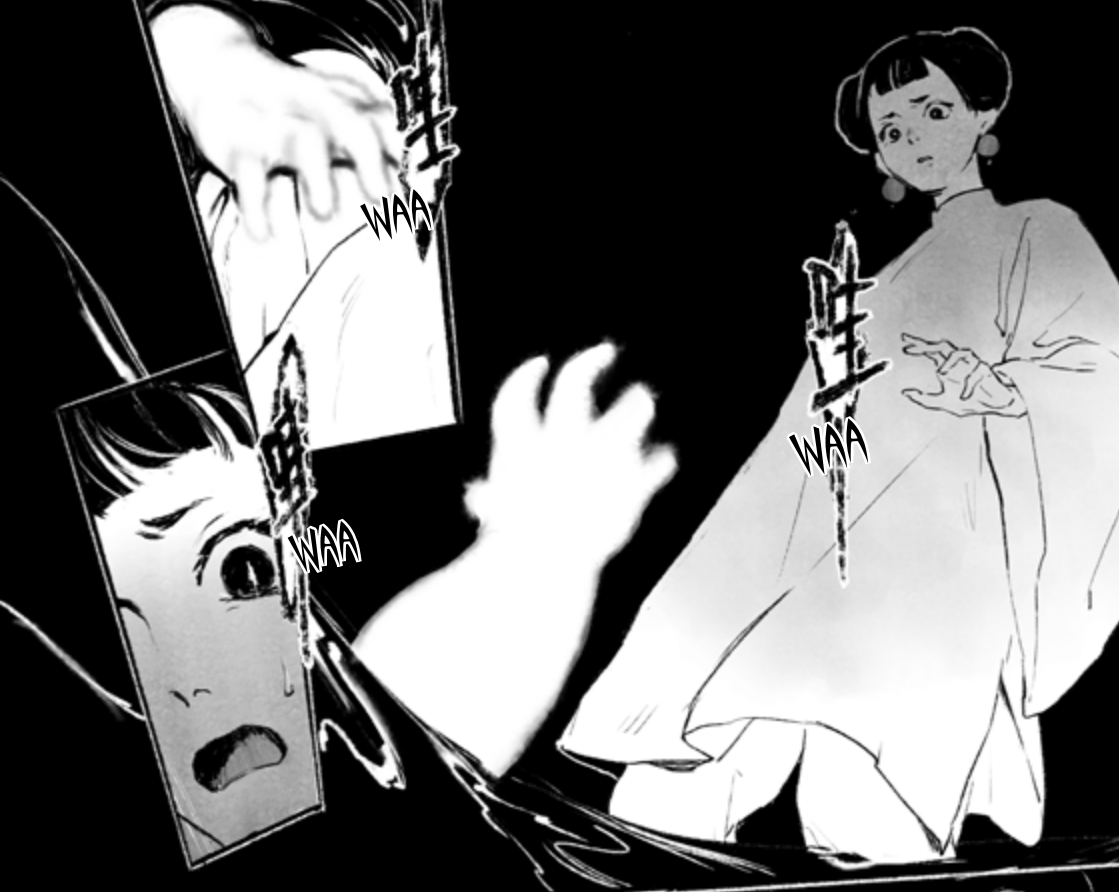


WHERE IS THIS...?



THAT RIVER?









WHERE'S THAT  
STRANGE SMELL  
COMING FROM?



AND THOSE MARKS  
ARE STILL THERE.





IS THERE A  
TEAPOT UNDER  
THE BED?

WHY



WAA

I THINK  
IT'S FROM  
SIS'S  
ROOM.



WHY?

THAT  
TEAPOT'S  
IMPORTANT  
TO HER.

DON'T  
TOUCH  
IT.



SHIH-LIU?

SH!

QUICK,  
COME  
OUT!



YOU EAT IT, THEN  
PUT THE POT  
UNDER THE BED  
THEN YOU GET  
A NEW WOMB  
AND HAVE A BOY  
NEXT TIME.



IT'S PART  
OF THE  
WOMB-  
CHANGING  
CEREMONY.

?

IF YOU DON'T  
HAVE A SON,  
YOUR FAMILY  
BRINGS YOU  
PIG STOMACH IN  
A TEAPOT,



LOOK,

MY WOMB IS  
USELESS.

SHE'S LOST  
SO MANY  
PREGNANCIES,  
AND THEN IN  
THE END ONLY  
HAD A GIRL.

YOUR  
BROTHER  
MUST BE  
DISAPPOINTED,  
EVEN IF HE  
DOESN'T SAY  
SO.



HOW CAN  
SHE SAY  
THESE  
THINGS?

WHAT'S THE  
USE OF  
RAISING A  
GIRL?

WHAT  
IS SHE  
TALKING  
ABOUT?

I'M GOING  
TO TRY  
PIG  
STOMACH



TO GET A  
BETTER  
WOMB..



!!

MISS?



IT'S  
FOLLOWING  
ME!

SOMEONE  
HELP ME!

WHAT  
SHOULD I  
DO?





