

How to stay alive after you die

Chapter 1 Death

“Am I blind?” was the first thought crossing Lu Yao’s mind when his vision suddenly turned black and white. He quickly discarded that thought. If he was blind, it wouldn’t just be the loss of color in his vision. He would have bumped into something or fallen off the stairs by now.

Another observation kicked in. He was sitting on the floor. *Why am I sitting on the floor?* Lu Yao pushed himself up. The floor felt... nothing. His palm did not register any temperature from the touch on the floor. Another weird fact to consider for later.

Finally, he stood up. He started remembering things as his body moved. *I am on my way to buy dinner. I am in the building of my friend Matthew’s apartment. I am here because he injured his left leg. He injured his left leg in a recent Spirit Guardian operation.* Lu Yao felt that he was almost back to normal from the color loss shock when he saw what was behind him.

It was another person who looked just like him.

No, that was me. His brain drew the conclusion after three seconds.

But if I am there, who am I here? Lu Yao lifted his hand in front of himself. He could see the ceiling light through his right hand. That was the last piece of the puzzle his brain needed.

I have died?!

This sudden realization hit Lu Yao so hard that he collapsed to the floor again. After what felt like an eternity, he crawled to his motionless body and touched its cheek. But his fingers went right through the skin. He didn’t feel a thing.

How did I die? Lu Yao’s brain finally put itself back together and figured out the important question to ask. *I didn’t feel anything before I became... became this. In fact, I was feeling great before going out to buy dinner, just a bit hungry. Did someone attack and kill me?*

He looked down to examine his body again. But there was no cut, no bullet wounds, no bleeding whatsoever on his body. His body was a little pale, but otherwise he looked just like a normal person who was sleeping.

I cannot stay like this. Lu Yao decided. Staring at the body, no matter how hard he did, would not change anything. *My friend! He should be able to help me, or at least find a Spirit Guardian to help me.* Although Matthew was only an aide to a junior Spirit Guardian, he would not leave Lu Yao alone. What was more important was that Matthew could see spirits himself, saving Lu Yao the trouble of figuring out ways to communicate with a living person.

This newfound hope revitalized Lu Yao’s spiritual body. He jumped up and headed back to Matthew’s apartment. He took only three steps before hearing a grinding sound. A black slab as

wide as the hallway and taller than him appeared in front of him and started pushing towards him. Lu Yao almost clashed with the slabs before stopping himself. He turned around but found a similar black slab advancing at him from behind.

I don't know what they are, but they can't be good. Lu Yao touched the left wall, pushed it, then tried the same thing on the right wall. They were solid. He didn't have the time to contemplate why his hands couldn't touch his body but were stopped by the walls. The black slabs were still closing in. He very much did not like the idea of becoming the middle part of a giant sandwich.

Breathing deeply, Lu Yao reached out to push the black slab in front of him. For the first time, his hands felt something. A burning feeling that gave him the illusion that his hands were melting. He pulled back the hands and cried out in pain. The pain was different from a physical wound. It was hurting his mind and his soul. Lu Yao looked at his hands but did not see any visible burn marks. There was also no heat radiated from the black slabs, but the burn was real.

I will not become the human patty. Not today! Lu Yao grinded his teeth and pushed at the slab again. The burn resumed and intensified. Lu Yao screamed but did not pull back. The black slab kept moving. He kept pushing while feeling every second of the pain. Lu Yao remembered a time when he pulled a part of his left toe nail out without any anesthetics. That pain felt like a gentle twitch compared to what he was going through at the moment.

Finally, the slab stopped. Lu Yao bit his lower lips and threw himself on the slab. Now all his upper body felt the burn. One step, two, then three, he pushed the slab toward the right wall. With a final shout and a loud pop, he completely turned the slab to the side.

Lu Yao nearly collapsed to the floor again but caught himself. *No, I can't stay here. Somebody is after my spirit.* He looked back and saw that the slab behind him has stopped moving too. That gave him some relief. He bent over and panted, totally ignoring the fact that spirits didn't have the need nor the ability to breath.

Where can I go? I cannot go back to Matthew's place if somebody or something is after my soul. He is still recovering from his injury and cannot even walk properly, let alone fend for both him and I. I need to find the Spirit Guardian patrol responsible for this area and ask them for help.

Having decided that, Lu Yao walk towards the stair well. Matthew's apartment was on the sixth floor. He could take the elevator down but rather not spend time to figure out if and how a spirit could use the elevator. *What if there is someone in or outside the elevator? That would be a perfect way to start an urban legend about a haunted elevator. Better to take the stairs.*

He was on the fourth floor when he heard a sound that was not his own the first time after becoming a spirit.

"Help! Anyone?" The sound was muffled but clear. It sounded like a girl. Lu Yao stopped at the edge of the steps.

“Help! Please help!” He heard the sound again. *Is there another person that also died suddenly?* Lu Yao slowly walked towards the source of the sound, which was unit 406 towards the end of the hallway. After encountering the giant BBQ slabs, he did not want to fight another trap.

“Help!” The sound echoed in the hallway for the third time and followed by sobbing sound.

“Hello?” Lu Yao said tentatively, “Anyone out there?”

“What? Yes, Yes! I am here!” The sound was from inside unit 406, and it was a girl’s sound, a young girl. “I... I don’t know what happened.”

Lu Yao wanted to try a subtle way to ask the girl questions but gave up after five seconds. It was too strange a situation for anyone to handle anyway, better got straight to the point.

“Are you dead?” Lu Yao tried to keep a calm voice.

“I... I think I am...” The sound replied, then the sobbing sound started again.

“I know it is hard to believe... But I... I am dead too.” Lu Yao scratched his head. “That maybe why only I can hear you...”

“Really?” The sobbing sound stopped. “Can you... can you help? I am trapped inside some black things. They are tall and hot. I cannot get out.”

The black slabs again. Lu Yao put one finger on the apartment door. He felt it. But no burn feeling. He wrapped his right hand around the doorknob and twisted. It didn’t turn. He tried again. Same result.

“Hold on. I cannot open the door. Let me think of another way to get into your apartment.” Lu Yao said. He pushed both his hands against the door and tried to recall the feeling when his hands came through his body without touching it. *I am a spirit. I don’t belong to this world. I can go through anything I want.*

He concentrated on this thought, hard. Slowly, he felt a knot lessened in his chest. With that, his hands started to sync into the door, then his wrists and forearms.

“I see your hands. You can go through a door? Wow.” The young girl’s sound was now more exciting then fearful or sad. *Kids are so good at lighting up their moods.* Lu Yao smiled slightly and kept pushing into the door.

“What is that sound?” The girl asked suddenly.

“What sound?” Lu Yao felt hair stood on the back of his neck.

Three low growl answered the question. Lu Yao almost jumped but found his arms stuck in the door. More growls echoed in the hallway. This time the sound came closer. Lu Yao forced himself to calm down and focus on the previous feeling again. His hands came free at last.

Three black heads emerged from behind unit 407. The heads looked like dogs but each head had three bloody red eyes. The creature sniffed the air and let out another growl before fully entered the hallway. All three heads connected to the same body. The nine eyes looked around before locking on Lu Yao, who felt a sharp pain throbbing behind his forehead.

"What is going on outside?" The girl asked, her voice slightly trembling.

"Stay where you are, and don't make a sound." Lu Yao swallowed. He took a step back. The three-headed dog took a step forward. Another step back, another step forward. Lu Yao swirled around and broke into a run. His instinct screamed inside him. *Get away from this freak, as far away as possible!*

He practically jumped down the four floors of steps and sprinted out of the apartment building and into the fall night.

Lu Yao did not know how long or how far he had run. He did not feel exhausted either. Finally, he saw the shape of a large building but there was no light in or around it. He risked looking back but saw no three-headed dog following him. So, he slowed down to walking speed and approached the building. Now that he was closer, he recognized the building as an abandoned warehouse on the north outskirts of the city. It was at least twenty minutes' drive from Matthew's apartment building. His legs suddenly felt very heavy as if he was walking in knee deep mud.

Maybe I can hide in that warehouse and plan my next move. Lu Yao used the same trick on the fence surrounding the warehouse so he could get through it. The door of the warehouse was open but there was no light coming from inside. Lu Yao went into the warehouse and sat on a crate. Now that he had a moment of peace. The recent events flooded back and he had a hard time making sense of them. So many questions. *Was I really dead? How did I die? What were those slabs that trapped me? Who was that girl? What was the three-headed dog? What did it want from me?*

He shook his head, trying to shake off the sunken feeling. *What if I am really dead? Would I get a chance to say goodbye to my friends and family after I find the Spirit Guardian? Will they let me? I still have so many things to do. I am too young to die!*

Whatever happen next, I need to find the Spirit Guardian. If anyone can help me, they are. Lu Yao finally gathered enough strength to jump off the crate and headed out of the warehouse. Even without any light, he could still make out rows of shelves in the warehouse and the scattered cigarette butts and empty beer cans on the floor. That was the one thing more convenient as a spirit than a human.

He was almost at the fence when the familiar growl returned to him. Lu Yao froze.