

Horrors 21

Chapter 21: Party of More Than One?

The small room had a leak in the ceiling, and the windows were barred, causing damp to seep into the walls and a festering smell from the heavy mold to fill the room. It was uncomfortable. Chen Ge walked into the room to take a closer look at the wooden planks that barred the windows. They looked surprisingly unworn, suggesting they were a recent addition.

This is just a common guest room. The ruined furniture had been removed, and the room was barren; there was basically nothing in sight. Then again, years have passed. Even if there was evidence, it wouldn't have been preserved for so long.

Chen Ge exited the room and continued down the darkened corridor. Most of the rooms were empty. The corridor was choked full of trash and abandoned paraphernalia, making it difficult for him to navigate.

A person's trash can often reflect their lifestyle and attitude; perhaps this litter will provide the clues that I need.

After setting a new goal, Chen Ge trudged through the rubbish in spite of the disgusting smell. About one hour later, he did come up with some interesting findings.

Why are there toy dolls? There are no children among the people I have seen, so who do these belong to? Chen Ge spent another hour sifting through the trash, and he ended up with four ragdolls. Submerged underneath the sea of trash, the four ragdolls would not have captured Chen Ge's attention if not for the fact he was a toy design major.

The four dolls had probably been left there for quite some time already, because they were covered with dirty stains, and mold had infested certain parts. The toys were so fragile that if Chen Ge was not careful, he could easily pull out clumps of dirty wool.

Chen Ge studied them closely and realized even though the dolls were all of different types, they came from the same manufacturer.

Could it be that the toys were left behind by the ex-tenants of Ping An Apartments? However, Chen Ge very soon vetoed this possibility. *The low possibility of a family with children moving into a run-down apartment like this aside, even if there was one, it was unlikely for one family to own four dolls at the same time; after all, they came from the same manufacturer. Furthermore, based on the design and stylings, these were manufactured several years ago.*

The toy market updated constantly. Before he took over the Haunted House, Chen Ge had worked at a toy company, so he did know a thing or two about the toy market.

If these weren't left behind by the new tenants, then it's possible they belonged to the original tenants of Fu An Apartments, Chen Ge speculated. *The original owner of the apartment had two daughters, so if I'm not mistaken, these should belong to them.*

However, if that was true, another question needed answering. *This place was almost completely ruined by the fire, so how did these four dolls survive?*

Is it a coincidence or... did someone purposely keep them at a place that would be safe from the fire? Chen Ge felt like he was on the right track. The only person who could that... is the killer themselves! But why would the killer risk their life to protect these four dolls? Are these items of importance to them?

The zipper on the back of the doll was all rusted, so Chen Ge tore open the fabric directly. Among the cotton, he discovered a card. It fit perfectly inside his palm. It was a love letter. The action was so cheesy that Chen Ge cringed on the person's behalf. *Sticking love letter inside a doll? Goodness, that sure is cheesy!*

If this was the murderer, then he was definitely a shy and reserved man. He did not have the courage to confess in person, so he gifted the girl the doll, hoping that she would discover the secret that was hidden within.

Compelled by curiosity, Chen Ge tore open another two dolls. Each of them contained a card, and the content was almost similar to the first one.

However, when he tore open the last doll, a chill ran down his spine.

Instead of a love letter, the cotton was filled with shredded pieces of paper, and if placed together, they all read—GO TO HELL!

Confession of love for some reason turned into curses. What happened in between, Chen Ge had no way of telling.

These should all have been left behind by the killer, so they are crucial evidence. He picked out several paper pieces and shoved them in his pocket. As he was about to walk deeper into the house, the voice-activated light at the staircase suddenly came on!

*Sh*t! Someone's coming!* Desperate to escape, Chen Ge turned off the flashlight on his phone, grabbed the dolls, and ran into the guest room that was closest to him. Holding his breath, Chen Ge hid behind the door and looked out at what was happening through the crack between the door and its frame.

The sound of footsteps became clearer, and the conversation between a male and a female floated up the stairs.

"We have to move that thing out soon; we can't delay anymore."

"The new tenant has been up to the third floor already. Thankfully, he turned back at the staircase or else he would have spotted me."

"I know, there have been more and more new people coming here recently; we have to deal with that thing as soon as we can."

"Agreed."

"Inform everyone, and tell them to be prepared. We'll dig it out tonight and bury it up the hills."

The person was carrying an old-fashioned oil lamp, and with the light's help, Chen Ge managed to see that the two people talking were the landlord and the woman from the first floor.

Why would they come up to the third floor in the middle of the night?

Chen Ge pushed himself against the wall to ensure they would not see him.

Not long after that, the tattoo guy and the fat man whom he had seen earlier all came up the stairs. They were all wrapped up in black clothes and carried equipment like wires, a gunny sack, and cleavers.

What are they up to?

The small group stood in the corridor, and it felt like they were in the middle of an argument.

The fat man, who was walking at the back, had his head drooped while he groused, "Do we really have to do this? If we dig it out, our fingerprints will easily get left behind; things will be incredibly hard to explain then."

"And you think it's easy to explain now?" The landlord glared at the fat man. "Stop complaining and start moving."

"I think we should call the cops." The fat man stood where he was.

The tattoo guy walked over to grip the man's collar, hissing into his face, "Have you lost your mind? Do you want to die so badly? If we involve the police, we'll be their prime suspects! During the investigation, your hit-and-run and our illegal occupation of the old man's property will all be exposed!"

"Honey, calm down." The woman walked over to place her hand on the tattoo guy's arm. "We're all in the same boat, so instead of turning on each other, we'd better get moving."

"None of us have a clean record, and it was not easy for us to finally find ourselves a comfortable lair. If any of you dare get any other ideas, you'd better watch out." The landlord tossed the iron hammer in his hands to the fat man. "You go and take the first crack."

"Me?" Sweat covered the fat man's forehead immediately. His face blanched as he dragged the mallet across the floor.

As he continued to observe, the more Chen Ge felt something was wrong. *What are they planning to dig up?*

The fat man walked to the deepest part of the staircase. He moved the trash to the side and, under the other tenants' careful scrutiny, parted the curtain that was originally hidden behind the mountain of trash.

It was a fortified cement wall, and embedded inside the wall was a female body that was facing away from the group.