

Horrors 31

Chapter 31: Who Is He?

“Eight?”

“Stop kidding!”

Lao Zhao’s words made everyone’s heart skip a beat. The light in the Murder by Midnight scenario was exceptionally weak. The group looked at each other, their bodies frozen.

“Where’s the eighth person?”

“Stop panicking!” Brother Feng ordered as he pulled out his phone. As he was about to turn it on, the sound of chains from the other end of the corridor suddenly turned rapid.

“Someone is coming!”

As Brother Feng unlocked his phone, a bloodied monster turned the corner. The timing was perfect as if the monster already knew where they were.

“What is that?”

Underneath the blood-soaked doctor’s coat were chains that dragged themselves across the floor. The monster’s head was lowered, and the hammer in ‘his’ hand was dripping with blood. Everyone started to worry, and only Brother Feng managed to keep his cool. Ignoring Chen Ge’s earlier warning, he turned on the flashlight inside the Haunted House.

A ray of light shot through the long corridor, shining on the monster. The light attracted the monster’s attention who turned ‘his’ head and glared at them through the curtain of long hair.

At that moment, the group of medical students had their hairs stand on end. The monster had a face that was sewn together with the features of several males. The stitches on the mask observable even through the distance!

The monster seemed to be ultra-sensitive to light because when the light hit ‘him’, ‘he’ went berserk and started to charge down the corridor, waving the hammer crazily in the air!

The chains knocked into the walls as the heavy footsteps echoed across the thin corridor. As the madman approached, it was unknown who was the first to move, but it created a domino effect, and the group of students scattered to run for their lives.

Some hid inside the nearest room, others rushed down the stairs to hide on the second floor, while some shot down directly to the first floor.

Everyone was spooked by the sudden appearance of the monster, and the approaching footsteps and clinking chains deeply unsettled them. Fight or flight was a natural human response to threats, and when the brain sensed this was a fight that they could not win, they naturally chose to escape and run.

Xiao Hui was the one closest to the stairs. When the monster rushed at them, she was a bit at a loss, and the man beside her suddenly turned and ran down the stairs. Her brain frizzled by fear, she did not think twice and ran after the man. At the time, her instinct was merely to run away from the monster.

The phone was left in a forsaken corner. The calmness of the group of students was completely shattered, and screams tore through the corridor. The group dispersed like a flock of spooked chickens.

When Xiao Hui followed the man before her to the first floor, the screaming from the third floor had not ceased. Then came a halting tempo to the sound of the chains, which sounded like the monster was coming down the stairs!

Xiao Hui increased her pace and did not dare turn back. She kept close to the man in front of her, afraid that she might be left stranded. The creepy music and endless screams caused fear to breed within Xiao Hui's heart. The bigger the fear, the greater the need for company.

She chased after the shadow before her like her life depended on it. The shadow had become a rock for her to rely on inside the darkened Haunted House.

No matter what happens, at least we'll be able to look after each other. Xiao Hui did not dare imagine what would happen if she was abandoned all alone inside the Haunted House. To prevent that from happening, she picked up pace again and reached out to grab the shirt of the person in front of her.

The sound of chains drew closer. Xiao Hui was led by the person to the first floor, where he ran into one of the rooms to hide.

A dead-end? Xiao Hui paused at the door while she saw the man jumped into the only furniture in the room, a cupboard to hide. At this juncture, Xiao Hui only had two options left: run on her own or hide inside the cupboard alongside the man.

The sound of the chains dragging on the floor came closer, and she decided on the latter option. Once the cupboard door was closed, it seemed like she had entered a different world, one that was filled with darkness and silence. The only thing that made her feel safe was at least she had a companion with her.

The make-up on her face had already been ruined. Holding her breath, Xiao Hui leaned toward the crack to try to take a look outside.

She saw the chains glint in the dark. The doctor stopped at the door. 'He' used the hammer to knock on the door before walking into the room.

Xiao Hui's heart was racing at an impossible pace. She bit on her finger and shrank deeper into the cupboard, her heart praying softly, *Please don't come any closer, please don't come any closer.*

Her prayers were answered because the doctor only took a look around before 'he' left. Xiao Hui sighed in relief and lightly shook the arm of the person beside her. "The monster doesn't seem to have spotted us. We'll wait for a little longer, and then we'll go meet up with the rest."

Only Xiao Hui's voice could be heard echoing inside the cramped cupboard. She waited for a response, but there was no answer. She frowned, feeling something was wrong as she turned to look at the man.

The man hiding inside the cupboard with her had an average frame, neither thin nor fat.

Definitely not Monkey or Lao Zhao: Brother Feng is taller than this, and He San is smaller. Xiao Hui called out cautiously, "Lao Song?"

There was still no answer. Xiao Hui's heart cracked with tension. *Wait a minute, Lao Zhao did say there was an eighth member among us...*

Xiao Hui's blood started to chill, and her breath caught in her throat. Xiao Hui slowly pulled out the phone in her pocket. She turned her phone to the side, its cold light flashing. In the sealed compartment, a deathly white and completely unfamiliar face was staring right back at her.

The phone slipped from her fingers, and after two seconds of absolute silence, an ear-splitting scream escaped from within the cupboard!

Xiao Hui scooted back in an attempt to escape, but the cupboard was only so big. In her desperation, the back of her head knocked against the cupboard wall, and perhaps from the pain or perhaps due to the shock, this fashionable girl collapsed to the floor of the cupboard with her head lolling to the side, appearing as if she was about to die in a few minutes.

"Didn't I already warn you guys not to use your phones inside my Haunted House?" Chen Ge pushed the cupboard door open, picked up the phone from inside the cupboard, and shoved it inside Xiao Hui's pocket. Then he used his own to contact Xu Wan. "Xiao Wan, temporarily make them stay away from the first floor."

After giving the order, he carried Xiao Hui into the bathroom. He opened the trap door in the bathtub and carried Xiao Hui out of the scenario using the worker's passageway.

We're definitely lacking in physical help.

After placing a piece of warm towel on Xiao Hui's forehead, Chen Ge returned to the scenario.

One down, six to go. Chen Ge closed the passageway and called Xu Wan on her phone. "Xiao Wan, where are you now?"

"There's someone hiding on the second floor in the first room on the left from the staircase. I'll go to force him out, and you'll be able to ambush him with a 'surprise' from the right exit."

"Xiao Wan, you've been corrupted."

"Boss, you have no right to say that; this is all thanks to you."

Chapter 32: Dolls, Dolls, Dolls

Monkey was stranded alone on the second floor, his eyes and ears staying alert to his surroundings. He had himself cooped up in the corner where he could get a good view of the staircase, so no matter which direction the murderer came from, he would be able to escape as fast as possible.

The lights in the scenario seemed to have gotten dimmer, and the eerie music toyed with his heart. Monkey pinched himself to focus and took a deep breath. As a medical student, he knew pain and oxygen were the best elements to make one calm down rapidly.

Monkey went through what happened earlier in his mind. *The timing of the monster's appearance is just too weird. He rushed at us right after Lao Zhao pointed out there was an eighth character hidden among us; that is too much of a coincidence.*

Everyone lost their cool when Lao Zhao made that stupid discovery. If Brother Feng was allowed to use his phone and looked through us carefully, the eighth person would have been readily exposed. That was our first mistake. After the monster rushed at us, if we stood our ground and didn't rush off like a bunch of headless chicken, we would have been fine. That was our second mistake.

Monkey sighed slightly. *Yes, the monster rushing at us was scary, but it should not have been enough to make us all run off like that. It all started when that first person ran. His action ruined our thoughts, so if I'm not mistaken, that first runner was the eighth person. Earlier, I heard Xiao Hui's scream; she was the second to run and was closest to the mystery man, so this supports my hypothesis.*

Monkey laughed self-deprecatingly. Then again, guessing it right and not being scared were too different things. After all, being stranded all alone in this creepy Haunted House did still cause chills to rise up his spine. *The monster and the eighth person were working together, using psychological pressure to instill fear in us. If I'm not mistaken, their plan has always been to split us apart and then take us down one by one. Does the proprietor need to rely on such wicked psychological techniques just to scare someone?*

Monkey was a brilliant student, but he was as big a coward as He San. In school, he did not dare enter the morgue unless accompanied. *I need to relay this information to Brother Feng and the others as soon as possible.*

He took out his phone to call Brother Feng, and when he saw the stuff that was reflected in the shining surface of his phone, he trembled all over. *Why is this ragdoll sitting on the stairs? Didn't I leave it on the third floor earlier?*

Monkey did not dare utilize the flashlight function, lest he attracted the unwanted attention of the monster. He turned his phone display toward the wall, and he saw a tattered ragdoll was lying against it.

Did someone accidentally kick it downstairs in the earlier commotion? This was the only valid explanation Monkey could come up with. The ragdoll was filled with paper pieces and not mechanical parts, so it could not have been remote-controlled. *It's quite scary lying there like that.*

Other than its slightly worn state, there was not anything particularly scary about the doll, but as Monkey stared at it, he had this suspicious feeling that it was alive. Monkey could not understand it either, but for some reason, he saw a young girl looking pleadingly at him when he looked at the doll.

I must be hallucinating. Either way, I have to leave this Haunted House as soon as possible if I want to keep my sanity. Monkey called Brother Feng, and a ringing sound came from the third floor.

He's still up on the third floor? Or did he lose his phone like Lao Zhao did? The ringing sound of the phone weirdly enough made the Haunted House feel creepier. Monkey did not hang up but shoved his phone into his pocket and slowly climbed up the stairs to the third floor. Hiding on the staircase, he looked down the corridor, and as he expected, Brother Feng's phone was left ringing on the floor.

Both Brother Feng and Lao Zhao have left their phones; I'll have to try someone else. Standing alone at the third-floor staircase, watching the doors on either side of the corridor swing open and shut due to the draft, Monkey was feeling weak in his knees.

He scrolled down his contact list rapidly to look for other people's contact number when his phone vibrated and rang.

*F*ck! What now! It was a call from one of the group members. Shi Ling? Why did she call me? Or is she also stranded alone like I am?*

Like most young men, Monkey puffed his chest up with courage when he was interacting with a member of the opposite sex. "Shi Ling, did you get lost from everyone else? Where are you now? I'll come get you."

"I'm trapped inside a room on the third floor; I didn't catch the room number, but please come and get me. This Haunted House is all sorts of wrong!" Shi Ling was normally a quiet and reserved girl. To be able to make her talk in such a drastic and hurried tone, something traumatic must have happened to her. She sounded like she was on the brink of tears.

"Slow down, how did you get trapped? None of the rooms have locks," Monkey explained as he walked down the corridor, trying to locate the room Shi Ling was in through the sound of her voice.

"I also don't know. After I ran in to hide, I was unable to open it anymore! And this room is different from others; there are two dolls sitting right in the middle of the room, side by side!"

"Sitting?" The mention of dolls made Monkey's hair rise. If he did not see another doll in his life ever again, he would be satisfied.

"Please come and get me!" Shi Ling's voice turned shrill. From the sound of it, her sanity was fraying.

"I'll be there in a moment! Just get as far away from the dolls as you can for now and listen to what He San said earlier, do not touch anything in the room, I suspect those dolls..." Monkey halted mid-sentence because he suddenly realized that there was a ragdoll blocking his path, lying on the floor about half a meter away from his feet.

Resisting the urge to scream and toss the phone at the doll, Monkey took cautious steps toward it.

Long hair with an expression of guilt and self-reparation, different from the doll on the staircase. This one looks much mature in age. After he thought that, Monkey's eyes widened. *What on Earth... how did I manage to read so many emotions from a mere doll? Is this fear talking? Or are the dolls too authentic? For some reason, I feel like they're like human beings with real emotions.*

In any case, now is not the time to think about that. As long as the doll before me is not the one I saw on the stairs, then everything is fine. At least this proves that the dolls don't know how to move on their own. Things aren't as bad as I imagine. Focus, the most crucial mission now is to rescue Shi Ling.

Monkey shook his head violently, trying to steady his mind. He cheered himself on. *I'm merely scaring myself. If the doll from the staircase was indeed following me, she would not have appeared in front of me, right? She should be behind me. This is merely a trick by the boss; there's no need to be afraid.*

To convince himself, Monkey turned to look behind him. *See, there's nothing...*

Monkey's eyes zeroed in on a spot about one meter behind him, and the rest of his sentence was forcefully cut off. There it was, a ragdoll lying quietly on the floor.

Chapter 33: Correct Usage of the Missing Person Notice

If not for the fact he could barely control his limbs anymore, Monkey would probably have smacked himself on his lips. He swore to never curse himself inside a Haunted House anymore.

Separated from his group, stranded with no help, standing in the middle of a darkened corridor, chased by a crazed murderer that could appear at any moment, and haunted by dolls that would be there wherever he turned to look... this kind of hellish Haunted House experience made Monkey's breathing unsteady. "Why did it appear here? When did it follow me? How can it move?"

His brain was swamped with endless questions, his composure was brutally shattered, and his hands that held the phone were shaking violently.

"Monkey, where are you? Please come save me! I feel like the dolls in the room are looking at me! I swear to God, they are!" A maddened voice screamed through the phone; Shi Ling's situation was not looking so good either.

"Sister, I'll save you, but who is going to save me?" Monkey instinctively took a step back from the source of danger. He felt like something was tugging at his ankle, he turned to look at the doll that was originally a distance away from him was lying beside his shoe.

The black hair felt weirdly authentic, and the burned face was turned upwards. The facial features were completely ruined, but it gave a peculiar feeling. *It's smiling!*

Monkey could not explain why this thought would appear in his mind, and honestly, he did not to understand why; the things that he had experienced in the past ten minutes were about to break his sanity.

He bit on his lips and nudged his feet, trying to leave. Perhaps it was fear or perhaps he had been standing for far too long, but the muscles on his calves shrank, and a shot of pain tore through his heart. *F*ck! Cramps!*

Monkey toppled to the ground. He had given up on his dignity. Clutching his legs, he screamed, "Is someone there? I quit! I quit! Help me, please!"

Chen Ge and Xu Wan were stuck on the first floor at the time, hauling Lao Song, who was scared dumb, out of the scenario through the workers' passageway when they heard the blood-curdling scream from the third floor. Safety was their first priority, so neither of them dared dawdle and ran up to the third floor.

After they entered the corridor, Chen Ge saw Monkey rolling on the floor. He had Xiao Wan retreat, and he walked over to the young man with his flashlight on. "Are you alright?"

"I quit! I quit forever, please let me go."

One could say that Monkey was a changed man. Chen Ge did not promise anything but squatted down to press on Monkey's knees. "Exert force and try to straighten your knees."

As he helped Monkey ease his pain, Chen Ge glanced around the area; he was confused. *Neither Xiao Wan nor myself were even close to this place, so why did this fella get so scared?*

Other than the two ragdolls on the floor, there was nothing out of place. Thus, Chen Ge asked, "Brother, what spooked you so?"

"Do you even need to ask?" Monkey's eyes were red, and like a scorned woman, he grumbled, "These two ragdolls were chasing after me; you were controlling them, weren't you? You sick bastard!"

"These two ragdolls were chasing after you?" Chen Ge paused. He did not tell Monkey the truth lest he scarred the young man's mind forever. "In any case, let me get you out first."

"Wait, there's another person trapped on this floor. She's gone almost mad, please save her as well." Monkey took out his phone to contact Shi Ling. When Monkey was not paying attention, Chen Ge picked up both of the dolls and held them in his palm. The dolls were small and could not be called exquisite; they were more like hand-made dolls produced in children's arts and crafts classes.

These two managed to scare an adult until his leg cramped up? Chen Ge used his finger to poke one of the dolls' faces. For some reason, he managed to feel a sense of reluctance from the doll at having her cheek poked but being powerless to stop it. *Interesting...*

Following Shi Ling's scream for help, Chen Ge and Monkey managed to locate the room she was trapped in and opened the door from the outside.

"Don't be scared, we'll get you out now."

The girl paid Chen Ge no heed. She was quivering at the corner of the room, her lips quivering as she stammered senselessly, "The dolls are looking at me! No matter where I hide, their eyes keep following me!"

"More dolls?" Chen Ge looked toward the center of the room where two slightly larger dolls lay side by side.

"They were sitting up earlier, I swear!" Shi Ling's teary eyes were filled with fear.

"I know, they're all... parts of the Haunted House's tricks." Chen Ge tried consoling the girl before walking to the dolls. One of them had a sewn beard while the other was wearing an apron over her normal clothes.

Based on these details, these two should be the father and mother. He placed the dolls he had picked up earlier on the floor, and the four did look like a family.

This matches the number of victims at Ping An Apartments arson perfectly, and this Murder by Midnight scenario is inspired by Ping An Apartments, so could these four dolls actually represent the actual victims?

As that thought entered Chen Ge's mind, he felt the black phone in his pocket vibrate. He pulled it out to take a look; there was new message.

“Specters’ Favored. Congratulations for triggering the sole Hidden Mission inside the Murder by Midnight scenario! The spirits still have some unfinished business in the mortal world. Help them fulfil their wish, and they would become helpful allies.”

Sole Hidden Mission? The scenario unlocked by the black phone comes with Hidden Missions? This was a huge discovery for Chen Ge. The unfinished business of the spirits from Ping An Apartments had to do with Wang Qi. Detaining him so that he would be punished by the law should resolve that business already, no?

Chen Ge held Shi Ling and Monkey as he led them downstairs, but his mind was contemplating the Hidden Mission. After they exited the workers’ passageway, Chen Ge did not return to the scenario immediately but rushed to the Props Room alone. He picked out Wang Qi’s missing person notice from the bottom of the box.

This thing could be useful to the victims. With an idea in his mind, Chen Ge returned to the room on the third floor where Shi Ling had been trapped in earlier.

As he crossed the threshold, Chen Ge spotted something weird.

The three dolls that represented the parents and elder sister were lying flatly on the floor, but the smallest doll was lying with her face down near the door like she was in the middle of escaping. Chen Ge picked the doll up, and upon closer inspection, he had this curious sensation that the doll was playing dead, afraid of being discovered. For some reason, instead of feeling scared, he found it quite cute and charming. *The victims’ spirits are probably inside these dolls.*

Closing the door behind him, Chen Ge sat down at the middle of the room.

“In that case, perhaps we can have a little talk.”

Chapter 34: Goodwill

Chen Ge sat alone in the dark room, talking to himself, while the four dolls sat before him. The scene was weird to say the least. Thankfully, there was no one else there to observe.

“I don’t know how or why you’ve appeared inside my Haunted House, and I’m not sure how to refer to any of you, but there’s one thing I can guarantee—I mean none of you any harm.”

Chen Ge’s voice echoed in the room. Looking at the four dolls before him, a contradictory feeling rose in his heart. On one hand he wished there was a response to confirm his suspicion, but on the other, he was afraid that the dolls would suddenly move to do something dangerous.

Several seconds later, Chen Ge felt like he was overthinking and decided to switch his way of thinking. “The Murder by Midnight scenario is based off of the arson four years ago at Fu An Apartments, and the four of you should be the victims of that case.”

Probably hitting a sore spot, Chen Ge could feel the temperature in the room dropping. The door was suddenly locked behind him, and the furniture around him rattled slightly.

“But the case has been solved! The madman who ruined your lives and hurt you has been captured and is awaiting the law’s judgement!” Chen Ge was slightly unhinged by this sudden development. He pulled out his phone to find the morning news on the internet. “Look, see, it’s on the news, and the person who caught him is me!”

Chen Ge knew the four dolls’ unfinished business had plenty to do with Wang Qi, so he wanted to use the video as proof that he was the one who had captured him to placate the dolls, but it was not working as well as he planned.

The atmosphere in the room turned increasingly chilly. Chen Ge was panicking, but he had no better idea; the inability to communicate between the two parties was his biggest hurdle. The lack of results unsettled Chen Ge, but he did not plan to give up so easily. This Haunted House was everything he had. If he allowed the dolls free reign of the place, there would be too many unknown elements; if some huge accidents happened in the future, he would lose everything.

“Calm down! I’m here to help!” The dolls were not paying Chen Ge any attention. No matter how loud he screamed, it was pointless.

“I guess this is my final option.” Chen Ge pulled out Wang Qi’s missing person notice from his pocket. The yellowed piece of paper was dirtied with some blood stains, but beyond that, there was nothing particularly special about it. However, weirdly enough, when Chen Ge pulled out the notice, the noisiness in the room settled, and the atmosphere was not as intense as before. It was as if the hands that were strangling his neck were slowly relaxing.

“All you wanted was this?” The effect of the notice was better than Chen Ge expected. He placed the paper in the middle of the four dolls, and when the dolls’ bodies touched the yellowed paper, the missing person notice started to struggle like it was fluttering in a raging wind.

The scene that happened before his eyes were definitely inexplicable. The room did not have any draft, but the notice and the four dolls were swaying like crazy. Chen Ge studied this closely. Several minutes later, a human face seemed to appear on the missing person notice; it looked suspiciously like Wang Qi. Before Chen Ge could take a closer look, the notice was torn apart. The pieces snuck into all four of the dolls’ bodies, and the room returned to its usual quietness.

“That’s all?”

The black phone in his pocket vibrated. Chen Ge took it out to find a new message.

“You’ve completed the Hidden Mission inside the Murder by Midnight scenario! Increase the affection of specters by one. Obtained the goodwill of the victims’ lingering spirits from Ping An Apartment. They will help you clean up all the trash every day to keep the Murder by Midnight scenario at its peak.”

Looking at the message on the phone, Chen Ge stood where he was for a long time before he said to no one in particular, “And that completes the sole Hidden Mission?”

His mind tried to collate all the information he had gathered so far. *Finishing a Trial Mission with a completion rate higher than ninety percent will reward me a Hidden Item, and the Hidden Item will be the key to completing the scenario’s Hidden Mission! In other words, if I want to have complete mastery*

of the unlocked scenarios of the Haunted House in the future, I'll need to finish the respective Trial Mission with a more than ninety percent completion rate.

Thinking back, if he had just survived the night at Ping An Apartment without being a busybody, he would have completed the Trial Mission as well, but he wouldn't have gotten the Hidden Item.

This thing is evil. This kind of set-up is just asking the player to walk into as many traps as he can. Chen Ge searched through the black phone, attempting to figure out more information. The first thing he clicked was the 'My Team of Ghosts and Ghouls' tab, and to his disappointment, it was still empty.

The mission notice states that I've gained the goodwill of the victims' lingering spirit from Ping An Apartment, but there's no update to the window. Is it because they haven't agreed to help me completely or can lingering spirits not be counted as ghosts nor ghouls, so they don't show up on the list?

Chen Ge had no clue. He clicked into the 'My Item Storage' and realized Wang Qi's Missing Person Notice was still there, but the Malice Points attached to it were now zero.

What are these Malice Points? And why did the lingering spirits tear it up to feed on it?

The door to the hidden world was slowly opening. Chen Ge had no clue whether this information was useful or not, but he committed it all to memory. He rubbed the sweat on his forehead and stood up from the floor. *Even though I couldn't communicate with the lingering spirits, they'll help up clean up the scenario. Conclusively speaking, it's still more advantages than disadvantages.*

Maintaining the scenario was a troublesome and tiring thing, and the appearance of the lingering spirits saved Chen Ge plenty of time, money, and effort. Looking at the four dolls on the floor, the last vestige of fear in Chen Ge's heart slowly disappeared. *Hiring the ghosts to help out at my Haunted House isn't such a ridiculous idea after all.*

He walked to the door and turned around with concern. The dolls that represented the parents and the sister were sitting where they were, but the smallest doll was collapsed on the floor, leaning on her side. She was acting secretively, like she was preparing to sneak out again.

Chen Ge sighed, looking at this, and he realized not all ghosts in the world were evil and cruel. For example, this smallest doll was like a kitten that was curious about the world, easily intrigued but a coward at her core.

"Little girl, stop running about. Be careful or you'll get stepped on."

Chen Ge left after that. After helping the lingering spirits from Ping An Apartments with their wish, he had a deeper understanding of the black phone. *The unlockable scenarios on the phone probably aren't just to help me scare people. Each scenario has its own story and plot with its own reason and development. In a way, unlocking the scenarios is helping these homeless souls find a place to call home.*

After turning off the flashlight, Chen Ge walked down the darkened corridor alone. After he was far enough gone, ensuring no human or ghost could hear him anymore, his lips curved involuntarily upwards to reveal a foxlike grin. "These are natural experts at scaring people, and they don't need salary, won't complain about tiredness, or act out of emotions; they are the perfect employees!"

With a bright future awaiting him, Chen Ge felt reenergized and was ready to scare the shit out of his hapless victims.

“It has dragged on for too long already; it’s time to end this. There are three people left inside the Haunted House, let me think... Who shall be my first victim?”

Chapter 35: Shattered Mirror

“Why is it suddenly so quiet?” He San turned to look at Lao Zhao. “Shall we go take a look?”

“If our enemies don’t move, we don’t move. We’ll go out when we hear screams and start the investigation in the opposite direction; this way we’ll avoid the scary traps,” Lao Zhao said shamelessly.

“Isn’t that selling out our classmates?”

“No, that is appreciating their noble sacrifice. We’ll be using the time they give us to find the exit and achieve victory.” Lao Zhao was as round as a ball. He stood behind He San, but the young man’s small figure could barely cover up half of Lao Zhao’s body.

“Then, how long should we hide in here? What if we’re the only two left in the Haunted House?” He San turned to look at his senior behind him. For some reason, he felt his senior was merely using him as a human shield.

“We’ve checked all the rooms on the second floor and most of the rooms on the third floor, so the exit has to be on the first floor. In other words, we’re inches away from victory.” Lao Zhao patted He San encouragingly on his shoulder. “Chin up, don’t give up now when we’re at the gate of victory.”

“Even at a time like this, you’re still calm enough to feed me such crap?” He San pouted. He had many grievances to voice, but he did not know how to. He was supposed to only lead his seniors to New Century Park, so why was he there inside the Haunted House?

“Don’t be so pessimistic.” Lao Zhao counted on his fingers. “We heard Monkey and Xiao Hui’s screams earlier, so both of them have probably been led out of this place already. Minus the eighth person, we still have five students from our school inside this Haunted House. The probability of the murderer hunting us is two in five, which is smaller than three in five, so don’t worry. We’ll only need to wait.”

“Alright, we’ll do it your way.” Squatting at the door, He San leaned to peer out the crack. He felt like there was an additional something in the darkened corridor. He rubbed his eyes and took a closer look in the same direction. There was a worn ragdoll lying on the floor.

What’s wrong with my eyes? Was there a doll on the floor to begin with? But that’s impossible. During the ten minutes I’ve hiding here, I’ve kept my eyes on the corridor outside. He San slapped himself lightly on the cheeks before turning to look out of the crack again. The doll was still there, but it had moved closer to the door.

It can move on its own? Am I imagining things from nervousness? He San shook his head before peering out the crack again.

This time, the doll had disappeared.

This is weird...

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At the first floor's workers' passageway, Chen Ge put on the Doctor Skull-cracker's garb after he had Xu Wan leave to take care of the few students outside. He was going to catch the rest personally.

Wearing the blood-soaked doctor's coat, curling the iron chains that were carved with human faces on his body, gripping the hammer, and putting on the human skin mask, be it from height or presence, Chen Ge's Doctor Skull-cracker was more intimidating than Xiao Wan's.

These youths want to fight an extended battle with me? The chains clinked viciously with his every step. It might have sounded eerie, but the greatest weakness was that it would give his location away. Chen Ge roamed the scenario for about five minutes but could not find anyone.

"Boss, I can't spot them on the cameras. They should be hiding inside the many rooms; you'll need to check them one by one." Xu Wan's voice came into his ear. "Speaking of which, I suggest we install surveillance camera in every corner of the Haunted House. Now, with only cameras on the intersecting corridors, there are too many blind spots."

"We'll think about that when we have the money." Chen Ge used his mallet to push the door of each room open. When he reached a corner on the second floor, he spotted a doll leaning against one of the doors.

"Little girl, why are you here, leaning against this room door for no reason?" Chen Ge scratched his chin with the mallet, and the truth soon dawned on him. "I know, you're telling me there's someone hiding inside this room, right?"

Pretending like he did not notice anything, Chen Ge walked away from the door. When he was about ten meters away, Chen Ge picked up the chains that dragged along the floor and leaned against wall to silently move toward the door.

Utilizing the blind spot, he half-squatted and peered in through the crack of the door.

...

Inside the room, He San and Lao Zhao were squeezed behind the door with their palms over their mouths.

"The sound of chains has disappeared; the murderer should have wandered off already." Lao Zhao's face was pale beyond belief, but he made sure his tone sounded calm to maintain his dignity as the senior. "Actually, I'm not one bit scared. Based on my analysis, since the murderer just came up from the first floor, he won't be returning to it anytime soon; this is our chance!"

He used plenty of energy to push himself off the floor. "Now is the perfect time for us to go to the first floor. We'll be able to avoid the killer and achieve victory. Xiao San, you take a look out the door. If the murderer has wandered off already, we'll move out instantly."

He San felt like Lao Zhao was making some sense. He did not argue and leaned against the door to look out the crack. He felt something like warm breath blowing on his face. What He San saw this time was

different from before. There was no darkened corridor or creepy doll but bloodshot eyes staring back at him from the other side of the crack!

“What the f*ck!”

He San felt like his soul almost left his body. He collapsed to the floor dramatically and shuffled away from the door. This spooked Lao Zhao as well. “What? What did you see?”

The answer that Lao Zhao got was the door knob being twisted open. The old door was slowly pushed open, and a bloodied shadow radiating evil and resentment hovered at the door. Seeing this, Lao Zhao kept retreating even though his back was already firmly pressed to the wall.

“You shouldn’t lean so hard against the wall, what if there’s someone inside it?” Chen Ge silently poked his hand into the pocket and pressed the prop option that was available on the black phone.

Lao Zhao was so scared that his fatty body was shaking all over. Before he understood what Chen Ge meant by that sentence, something suddenly poked into his back. He turned to look back over his shoulder instinctively, and the wallpaper behind him had opened on both sides to reveal an expressionless woman who was embedded inside the wall!

His brain went blank, and something akin to his breath left Lao Zhao’s body. He fell to the floor butt-first, and his eyes rolled back in his head.

“Your experience is now officially over, let me get you out.” As Chen Ge said so, there was suddenly the sound of a mirror shattering coming from the third floor, which was closely followed by Brother Feng’s scream.

“Sh*t!” Chen Ge called for Xiao Wan to come get He San and Lao Zhao while he raced upstairs. Following the voice, Chen Ge found Brother Feng inside one of the rooms, waving a wooden chair before him like he was in the middle of fighting some unknown force.

He pulled down his mask and waited until Brother Feng tired himself out and slid to the floor before he walked into the room.

“What happened?” Chen Ge gingerly pulled the wooden chair away from Brother Feng and tossed it to the side. Brother Feng was in a highly unstable state. His eyes were filled with such fear that Chen Ge worried the young man was going into shock. “Did you come across some weird things?”

Chapter 36: Danger

Several seconds later, after Brother Feng caught his breath, he raised his finger and pointed toward the toilet weakly. “Mirror...”

The word, which could not have been more common, caused Chen Ge’s expression to shift. After placing Brother Feng on the bed, he walked into the toilet. The mirror on the wall had been shattered, and the glass pieces littered the floor.

Earlier, after He San's fainting incident, Chen Ge had used black cloth to cover up all the mirrors in the Haunted House. There had been no accident since then, and with the unlocking of a new scenario, he should have been more alert, but he had not been. He was partly responsible for this accident.

For any entertainment establishment, once it was labelled with the rumor of being a safety hazard, business would definitely be difficult, and Chen Ge was acutely aware of that scary fact. He picked up one of the pieces of the floor, and looking at his reflection inside it, he promised, "I need to deal with this thing as soon as possible!"

Like human beings, ghosts also had the separation of good and evil. The monster in the mirror was definitely evil; Chen Ge was sure of that. It was naturally aggressive and was probably hiding some horrible secret. He San's fainting spell and Brother Feng's incident raised the alarm within Chen Ge, making him feel pressured.

Covering the mirrors with black cloth was not a permanent solution. The thing inside the mirror was fast becoming a blockage for the Haunted House's expansion. Other than the broken mirror, there was nothing else out of place inside the toilet. Chen Ge took a cursory look of the room before leaving.

With the hammer in his grip, he sat down beside Brother Feng. "Do you mind telling what happened earlier?"

After a few minutes of rest, Brother Feng's breathing finally stabilized; however, his face was still startlingly pale. "I don't think I'll be to explain it."

"No worries, just tell me whatever you remember." Chen Ge studied Brother Feng quietly. This young man was different from He San, who fainted directly; his mental tolerance was obviously higher than He San's, an observation supported by the fact that at least he showed resistance.

Brother Feng tried to sit up in bed, the fear still circling in his eyes. "At the time, I was chased by one of your workers, so I ran into this room to hide. Initially, everything was fine, but later, I started to hear someone calling my name."

"Someone was calling your actual name?"

"It's not that; it's more like I felt like I was being summoned." Brother Feng scratched his head. "The source of the sound was inside this room, and it took me a long time before I was able to find the source."

At this point, the fear in his eyes deepened. "The voice came from the mirror inside the toilet. It was saying something, but I couldn't really understand it. All I know is it had something to do with me."

"And then?" Chen Ge memorized every word that came out of Brother Feng's lips; this would be valuable information when he dealt with the mirror monster.

"And then I stood in front of the mirror, trying to understand what was really happening. I tried to remove the mirror from the wall, but when my hands touched it, the voice beside my ears suddenly picked up. My consciousness started to waver, and for some reason, the reflection of myself in the mirror started to shift." Brother Feng's eyes kept glancing at the toilet, afraid that some monster might jump out of it at any moment. "I stood in front of the mirror, but the reflection in the mirror wasn't me."

Normally, I would be afraid, but what happened next still sends shivers down my spine when I think of it.”

“What happened?”

Brother Feng said seriously, “At the time, I didn’t feel any fear or apprehension. It was like everything couldn’t have been more normal. I started to lean toward the mirror, and when my face was close to the surface, I could see the face of the other me also leaning close. The face that stared at me was mine, but for some reason, it felt very unfamiliar. If you want me to point out why, I can’t really tell you, but it’s just a feeling that the face that stared back at me wasn’t mine. Out of the corner of my eyes, I could see my hands rising even though my brain didn’t register such a command. My hands pressed against the surface of the mirror like I was trying to crawl into it or... that’s not right, it felt more like I was trapped inside the mirror, and I was trying to crawl out of it.”

During the Nightmare Mission, Chen Ge had gone through the same thing. Looking through the recording on his video, his body was indeed slowly leaning against the mirror. “Then, how did you remove yourself from this situation?”

“It’s also thanks to the mirror.” This answer surprised Chen Ge. “At the time, it really felt like my body was no longer under my control until I saw a ragdoll lying behind me through the reflection inside the mirror.”

“A ragdoll?”

“Yes, similar to the dolls I saw lying around the other rooms. It’s the size of an open palm and had a sewn beard on its face.” Brother Feng used his hands to measure out the size for Chen Ge. “The sudden appearance of the doll caused my brain to scream with alarm, and fear spread through my body like wildfire. There was only one thought on my mind then—escape. However, the body refused to listen to my command; the mind and the body started fighting.”

Brother Feng described it in a placid tone, but Chen Ge could imagine how dangerous it was.

“After that, I heard He San’s scream coming up from the second floor. That seemed to do the trick and break the spell.” The fear in Brother Feng’s eyes had dissipated slightly. “I was so scared that my first instinct was to grab the nearest wooden chair to swing at the mirror. Your Haunted House is so scary and atmospheric that I completely forgot I was inside a park attraction.”

At this point, Brother Feng suddenly remembered something and smiled apologetically at Chen Ge. “Everything I told you is the truth; there’s no exaggeration or anything. I will pay the replacement fee for the mirror in full.”

“That won’t be necessary; I’m just glad that you’re safe.” Chen Ge stood up, and his eyes wandered about the room. “By the way, where is the doll that you saw now?”

Brother Feng hesitated before answering. “I seem to remember kicking it under the bed. That’s also part of your props, right? I’m sorry.”

Chen Ge squatted down and pulled out the doll with a dusty footprint on it out from under the bed. He patted the dust off its body and said, “You should thank this doll; it was he who saved you.”

“The doll saved me? If you say so... Thank you, so can I go now?” Brother Feng inched subconsciously backward, and his face paled considerably. He could feel the odd presence surrounding this Haunted House’s proprietor, but since Chen Ge did come to save him, he forced out a polite thank you.

“If I told you that everything that you experienced earlier wasn’t part of the Haunted House’s props or special effects and was all real, would you believe me?”

Wearing the blood-soaked outfit, cradling the tattered doll, Chen Ge tilted his head to the side as he posed this question to the young man.

The poor Brother Feng, who was about 190 centimeters tall, was curled up like a little girl at the corner of the bed and answered with a tone laced with helplessness, “I don’t know, you tell me, should I believe it or not?”

Chapter 37: Expansion

Brother Feng curled up even more. Looking at Chen Ge, who stood in the middle of the room, he could envision the man killing people and cutting up body parts just to add to the authenticity of his Haunted House. He started to fear for his life.

“Look at you, all serious. I’m just kidding.” Chen Ge was quite disappointed. He asked that question because he spotted something unique in Brother Feng. With a little push from the doll, Brother Feng managed to break free from the mirror monster’s control and even fought back. His constitution was stronger than most and could have been a valuable ally.

This was what Chen Ge admired about the young man. If possible, Chen Ge wished to befriend him and asked for his help to deal with supernatural events like the spirit inside the mirror. That was Chen Ge’s intention, alas Brother Feng was far too distraught to catch the hidden meaning.

Looks like I can only depend on myself, Chen Ge thought to himself as he locked the door to the Murder by Midnight scenario. When he helped Brother Feng go down the stairs, the black phone in his pocket vibrated. Chen Ge jumped from shock. He quickly pulled out the phone afraid that it might be some bad news.

“Number of Monthly Visitors surpassed 100. Reputation is now 60 percent positive. Congratulations for fulfilling the rules for expansion!

“Warning: Each expansion of the Haunted House will award you with a mysterious reward (After three expansions, the Haunted House will upgrade to a Maze of Terror)!”

I can expand so soon? Expansion was a good thing, but temporarily, that was not part of Chen Ge’s plan. The most crucial thing was still removing the stuff inside the mirror.

After exiting the Haunted House, the sun shone gloriously on the steps. The students from Jiujiang Medical University were collectively collapsed in front of the Haunted House. They were either holding their heads in their palms or hugging their legs. Some had tears staining their make-up while others looked aimlessly up at the sky. The occasional twitching on their faces was the only sign that they were still alive for some.

Chen Ge felt a sense of déjà vu. However, the devastation this time was much greater than before. In just a mere forty minutes, the group of spirited youths had experienced such a drastic change; it was near miraculous.

The surrounding visitors were mumbling and pointing among themselves, but Chen Ge did not think too much of it. After all, if it wasn't exciting, how could it be called a House of Horrors?

He dropped Brother Feng to the ground, completing the collection; the whole 'happy family' was finally together again.

"Xiao Chen! Come here." The gathering crowd once again attracted Uncle Xu's attention. The middle-aged man had on an expression that said 'what am I going to do with you' when he saw Chen Ge. "Explain yourself, what is it this time? You already scared someone until he fainted last time, and this time you toppled seven in one go! Are you that insistent on getting our park on the headlines?"

Chen Ge's eyes darted around, and he coughed drily. "They came to experience the Haunted House, and what I did was present to them the best service, so how is this my fault? Furthermore, I can promise I had zero physical contact with them, which you can check on the security footage. Everything is all within the required rules of operating a Haunted House."

"Stop acting dumb. If that's the case, how do you explain the bump on the back of her head?" Uncle Xu surreptitiously pointed at the back of Xiao Hui's head, afraid that he might accidentally scare the poor girl, and he kept his voice to a whisper.

"Uncle Xu, I swear, I'm completely innocent on that count. I was running ahead, and she pulled on my shirt as she ran behind me. I crawled into the cupboard to hide, and she wanted to follow me. All I did was lie there quietly; it was she who turned on the flashlight to shine on me. It almost blinded my eyes, but before I could say anything, she knocked herself on the wall of the cupboard. See, I'm also a victim here." Chen Ge described the 'truth' with only a slight variation.

"In other words, you're the one who has suffered?"

"Isn't that obvious?"

"Stop treating this like such a joke. Be more careful and attentive in future, and make sure this doesn't happen again," Uncle Xu advised him with a sigh. "What if you cause an accident? Or your client happens to be someone unreasonable? It'll greatly influence your Haunted House's future."

"I know, I know. Is there any more kind advice?" Chen Ge didn't directly retort, but he grumbled internally, *If there is really someone unreasonable, I'll just give them the love letter. We'll see who's more unreasonable then.*

Uncle Xu stared at Chen Ge and knew perfectly well that his words would not be heeded. He sighed to himself and continued several seconds later. "Xiao Chen, I know it's not required for you to listen to me, but certain things have to be said now that your parents are no longer here."

"I'm listening."

"This morning, Xu Wan said you were on television, claiming that the key witness who helped solve the arson case four years ago is you." Uncle Xu did not look one bit happy.

“Yes.”

“Why would you go to a haunted house late at night? Do you know how dangerous that is? Those are murderers!” Uncle Xu did not leave Chen Ge any openings to counter. “If you’re in need of money, there are many other methods rather than going for this reward money. I can help you cover the utility bills you owe the park management for now. You’re still young, be careful not to stray from the righteous path.”

“Don’t worry, Uncle Xu, I know what I’m doing.”

“I hope so. In that case, if there’s nothing else, I’ll be leaving. Quickly get those people off the floor. It reflects badly on the park letting them lie like that on the floor.” As Uncle Xu turned to leave, Chen Ge stopped him. “What’s wrong?”

“Uncle Xu, I really do have a favor to ask,” Chen Ge said shyly. “Can you please lend me 5,000 RMB? I plan to install cameras in every corner of the Haunted House. I’ll pay you back when the reward money arrives.”

After He San and Brother Feng’s ‘accidents’, Chen Ge was indeed worried. There were too many blind spots inside the Haunted House.

“You still want to invest in the Haunted House?” Uncle Xu stopped moving. “Xiao Chen, I can lend you the money, but I’ll be honest with you, this park of ours is on its last legs; investing here is no different from throwing money into the sea.”

He led Chen Ge to a shaded area before explaining, “This park has been around for eleven years already; its main attractions are all outdated. Nowadays, people want virtual reality, fashion, and creativity; we’re none of those things. To put it simply, we’re at the edge of being filtered out. Other than the Haunted House, the number of visitors for every single attraction in the park is on a steady decline.”

“I know that.” Chen Ge had already planned to work on his Haunted House, and increasing security was a definite first step.

“What do you know?” Uncle Xu turned off the walkie-talkie. “Eastern Jiujiang’s Virtual Reality Futuristic Carnival is close to its completion date. It will be one of the few fourth-gen amusement parks we have in this country. When it’s open, it’ll naturally become the go-to attraction of the city. Tell me, how are we going to compete with that? Now, every member of the park from the highest management to the lowest cleaners are slowing down as they figure out a way out for themselves. You’re the only one left dumb enough to keep charging ahead.”

Chapter 38: Underground Parking Lot

Uncle Xu was sincerely looking out for Chen Ge, so he did not hide anything; he laid out everything on the table. “Now, do you still want to invest in the Haunted House?”

“I’m still willing to give it a try. After all, that new park isn’t completed yet, so we still have a chance.” Chen Ge’s secret weapon was the black phone, but of course, he could not tell anyone that.

“You’re such a bright kid normally, so why are you so stubborn when it comes to crucial matters? Do you not see the eroding flow of time? I’ve worked here for ten years already, so I also wish for this place to stay, but we have to surrender to reality.”

Uncle Xu pointed at the few attractions that were already foreclosed around them. “Do you know why they are all closed? Not because they did not pass the safety inspection as the rumors say, but because once they’re turned on, they start to burn money. Having one or two visitors is not enough to break even. Imagine, when New Century Park was open, the place was crowded, our parking lot was not enough to support the crowd, so we had to rent the parking space from the nearby shops. The situation only got better after the new underground parking lot was built. But in the last three years, even during the height of holiday fever, the underground parking lot has never been needed. In fact, the number of visitors has been constantly dropping, and we’ve reached a new low this year.”

“Uncle Xu, wait a minute, you said the underground parking lot hasn’t been needed since three years ago, meaning the parking lot hasn’t been used since then? Does this mean it’s currently abandoned?” Chen Ge had a glow in his eyes that made Uncle Xu uncomfortable.

“Yes, when New Century Park was first open, there were cars and people everywhere. You would need to line up for at least two hours for any attraction. That was the time of our prime; alas, we’re now slowly being forgotten by the city.” Thinking about the past, Uncle Xu could not help but sigh. “However, that’s nothing to be sad about; after all, we were lucky enough to once enjoy a time of glory, right?”

“Uncle Xu, if one wished to rent the park’s underground parking lot, how much would it cost?”

“Huh?” Uncle Xu was confused by Chen Ge’s sudden question. “Why would you ask that?”

A plan was forming in Chen Ge’s mind. Now, he had found the ideal space to expand his Haunted House. “I want to reuse the parking lot. According to what you said, it’s currently in a half-abandoned state, so why not let me use it?”

“Have you lost your mind? Why do you want to rent that place? To rear bats?” Uncle Xu really feared that this young man had lost his mind.

Since the park management would eventually catch on to what he was doing, Chen Ge did not consider lying about it. “I want to expand the Haunted House. With my current financial situation, the underground parking lot is perfect. The rent won’t be that high, and the underground environment is a perfect match for a Haunted House.”

“Kid, what’s wrong with you today? A three-story Haunted House is not enough for you to worry about? Do you know how large the underground parking lot is? Even if the management is willing to rent it to you, when you finish setting up the place, the park will already be closed.” Uncle Xu shrugged. “Don’t be stupid, you had better focus on your work.”

“Uncle Xu, I’m serious.”

“Do you think I’m joking with you?” After switching the walkie-talkie back on, Uncle Xu wandered back to the crowd. When he was several steps away, he turned back to tell Chen Ge, “I’ll give you the 5,000 tomorrow morning, but make sure you keep your feet firmly on solid ground, stop imagining the impossible.”

"I know." Chen Ge followed behind Uncle Xu. Looking at the crowd that had gathered in front of his Haunted House, he pouted. "In any case, I don't feel like the number of visitors has decreased. After all, my Haunted House has always enjoyed a zero visitor rate before this."

After squeezing through the crowd, Chen Ge stood beside the group of students and said, "Rested enough already? If you don't get up soon, these people are going to think I did some immoral things to all of you."

"Give me a few more minutes, your Haunted House needs some time to digest."

"What are you looking at, I'm not afraid. I merely sprained my ankle when I was in there, so that's why I can't get up now."

"Everyone looks like a killer to me now, what am I to do?"

"Stop being so stubborn, we lost to his Haunted House this time," Monkey said as he climbed down the steps. He waved the five stars review he just submitted on the Haunted House on his phone before Chen Ge and stood before the man saying, "But don't think that's the end of this. We're not going to surrender so easily."

"Meaning you all plan to come back tomorrow?"

"If not for the fact we have exams tomorrow, do you think would really be afraid of the challenge?" Monkey sounded rather brave... if only his pale lips could stop quivering and his legs could stop shaking.

"Either way, my doors are always open for business should any of you want to come again." Chen Ge was close to treating the students from Jiujiang Medical University as his lucky charm.

"I will not be coming back again. You'll have to drag my dead body here if you want me to come back here." He San looked gloomily at Chen Ge. It looked like the young man was truly scarred by the bloodshot eye in the crack of the door.

"Junior, be careful what you wish for." Xiao Hui stood up with help from He San. She glared at Chen Ge. "You're the first man who has made me cry to the point that my make-up is all ruined; I'll definitely remember you."

Noticing the bump on the back of Xiao Hui's head, he did not have the heart to fight back, so he merely smiled. The group of medical students headed toward the entrance of the park, holding each other for support. When Chen Ge thought they had left, Brother Feng came running back to him alone. With a complicated expression, he told Chen Ge, "I've been thinking about your question. I am still unable to believe that they're real, if anything, it's probably explainable using theories related to psychological trauma and stimulus."

Chen Ge knew what he was referring to. "Perhaps, by the way, I haven't gotten your full name."

"It's He Feng, I'm older than most of them and will be starting my residency in a few days."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, hopefully we'll meet again soon."

After they exchanged phone numbers, Chen Ge returned to the Haunted House. He closed the gates and placed a sign saying 'Temporarily Closed for Maintenance' on it.

“Boss, there’re still many visitors waiting outside. Why are we closing?”

“There’s a little problem, so we’ll call it a day. Do you mind explaining it to the customers?” Chen Ge took off the Doctor Skull-cracker outfit and went back to the Props room to cut up some black clothes before he headed back up the Murder by Midnight scenario.

He started covering all the mirrors, but there were too many rooms, and he soon ran out of cloth. *This scenario is too big. Before the cameras are ready, I cannot risk the visitors’ lives by having them up here; it’s too dangerous.*

After locking up the door to the Murder by Midnight scenario, Chen Ge returned downstairs. The visitors outside the Haunted House had mostly left. Only one or two visitors still remained.

“Xiao Wan, you can remove your make-up. It’s time to go home.”

After saying goodbye to Xiao Wan, Chen Ge returned to the staff breakroom. He hadn’t had a real rest since the day before, so he fell asleep the moment his head hit the pillow.

Chapter 39: The Sound from the Third Floor

With the arrival of night, silence fell over the Haunted House like a blanket.

Suddenly, a weird sound like someone was sawing something shattered the peaceful quiet. In the staff breakroom, Chen Ge’s eyes slowly peeled open. He glanced at the phone—it was 1:10 am.

He turned to bury his head under the pillow, but the weird sound kept drilling itself into his ears.

Am I dreaming? Who is making all that noise?

Every single prop in the Haunted House was hand-made or upgraded by Chen Ge, so he knew that no prop in the building would make a sawing sound. After only six hours of sleep, Chen Ge was still feeling a bit blurry. He pinched the inside of his leg hard to wake himself up before putting on his clothes and grabbing an iron hammer out of the nearby toolbox.

He switched on the flashlight and pushed the door of the breakroom open. The Haunted House at midnight was many times scarier than it was during daytime. Chen Ge leaned against the door, not in a hurry to go out.

Can’t be a burglar, would any sane person choose to rob a Haunted House near midnight? Can’t be the rats either, the sound of their chewing wouldn’t be so loud and clear. After vetoing these two normal possibilities, Chen Ge’s mind wandered toward the not-so-normal possibility. Could it be that the monster has escaped from the mirror?

Due to a lack of cloth, not all the mirrors on the third floor’s Murder by Midnight scenario were covered up. He stared down the darkened hallway and retreated back into the breakroom. He only dared wander out after grabbing the doll his parents left behind for him. The sound came from above, so Chen Ge followed the sound up the stairs before stopping at the door to the Murder by Midnight scenario.

As I expected, it's coming from here, but now it's unclear whether the source is the lingering spirits from Ping An Apartments or the mirror monster. Chen Ge hesitated at the door. Honestly, he too was not that willing to enter a scary scenario so late at night.

However, allowing himself to be tortured by the sawing sound was not a valid solution either. Chen Ge gripped the hammer in his hand and said in his heart, *I have The Specters' Favored title and have received the goodwill from the residents of Ping An Apartment's lingering spirits. Therefore, even if it is the thing from inside the mirror, it won't be able to do me much harm.*

He was reminded of what happened to He San. It was Xiao Wan's sudden appearance that ruined the thing's plan, so in a way, the monster probably was not as powerful as he made it out to be.

I have to go in. After all, I'll need to deal with it eventually. The more I know about it, the greater the confidence I'll have in dealing with it. Chen Ge calmed himself down. He told himself, he was not afraid of the monster itself but rather the unknown it represented.

After pushing open the door, a faded smell of mold drifted into Chen Ge's nose; this place was getting closer to the actual environment of Ping An Apartments by the hour. The room doors on both sides of the corridor were half-closed. Chen Ge held the phone in one hand while the other grabbed hold of the hammer.

The sound of sawing intensified, a sign that Chen Ge was getting close to the truth. He walked through the entire third floor before stopping at the door that he was sure the sawing sound was coming from. The room door was closed, and as Chen Ge placed his palm over the doorknob, the icy feeling of steel jolted him awake. His muscles tensed as he shoved the door open.

"Who's in here?" Chen Ge yelled as he dashed into the room with the iron hammer raised high. He saw a well-built dark shadow half-squatting inside the toilet. It looked suspiciously like He Feng!

The black shadow did not expect the interruption; it dropped what it was holding and jumped inside the mirror and disappeared.

"Stop right there!" Chen Ge screamed as he waved the hammer. It only made contact with air. The toilet was now empty like everything that he had just seen was an illusion.

That shadow can't be He Feng! Why would it have a similar build to He Feng? Standing before the mirror, Chen Ge looked at his reflection, and he felt weirdly uncomfortable. This monster is mimicking He Feng? But why would it do that?

The appearance of the black shadow brought many questions, but it also answered two for Chen Ge. One, the mirror monster had now gained the ability to leave the mirror; two, it could morph into the person who once looked inside the mirror.

This thing is more dangerous than I thought.

The sawing sound that echoed through the building had finally stopped. Chen Ge squatted down to examine what the black shadow had dropped earlier. Four ragdolls and several sharp mirror pieces were littered on the rough-hewn cement floor.

Chen Ge held the dolls in his palms. The dolls that represented the mother and two sisters were fine, other than the normal dust and mud that covered their bodies. However, the doll that represented the father had its neck almost sawn off, and there were cuts all over its body.

Why is the father doll the only one that's injured?

However, Chen Ge soon realized why. The father doll helped He Feng escape from the monster's clutches, so this was an act of vengeance.

It seems like the four lingering spirits aren't strong enough to stop the monster inside the mirror, so they could only allow themselves to be bullied by it.

Chen Ge had no idea about the situation of the other world, so he could only come up with the explanation from all his previous observations. *The victims have no attack methods other than scaring people. The mirror monster is at least one level higher than the lingering spirits of the victims, but it runs whenever it is around humans. This means that the monster's physical combat ability is rather weak as well; its main method of attack is psychological, manipulating people's internal weakness to create an illusion and then take control of them.*

Combining He San and He Feng's experience as well as what happened earlier, Chen Ge came up with this hypothesis. The mirror monster was troublesome, but if Chen Ge could face it in person, then most of its power would be void. Therefore, if Chen Ge manage to lure the monster out of the protection of the mirror, everything would be easy.

I need to figure out a plan. If possible I wish to take care of it tonight so that I'll be able to use this scenario tomorrow.

Chen Ge was cool and collected. The monster inside the mirror was acting more and more wantonly, so if he did not deal with it soon, he would not be able to operate the Haunted House peacefully.

Chen Ge hugged the four dolls in his arms as he left the Murder by Midnight scenario. He locked the door behind him before going to the Props Room. As he sewed the cuts back up, he tried to come up with a plan.

The creature is highly aggressive and seems to have a curious interest in live humans. So the simplest way of luring it out of the mirror is to use a live human as bait. Chen Ge was a master seamstress because he patched up most of the injuries in just a few minutes.

But the real question is, after I've lured it out, how do I kill it? Rumors say that ghosts are all afraid of salt and garlic, but must I risk my life to try out such hearsay?

Chen Ge thought about it before deciding to log into the supernatural forums to ask the experts.

Chapter 40: New Nightmare Mission

After logging in, Chen Ge noticed his username had changed into a purple color. Clicking on his account profile, he realized it was because the thirty-minute video that he had posted the other day had been shared, viewed, recommended, and commented at least several thousand times already. With a cursory glance, Chen Ge found nothing useful; most of them were there simply due to curiosity.

Who knows, perhaps this might work, maybe there are experts hiding on the internet? Chen Ge started writing a new thread to provide more information about the mirror monster and used the special power afforded Purple Accounts to open a bounty thread.

“After playing the game on the video, I realized I’m now being haunted by the creature inside the mirror! Asking for help on how to remove this threat!”

The replies came pouring in mere seconds later.

” OP ¹, you’re still alive?”

“A black dog’s blood is the best solution, or rear a cock, legend says all the bad stuff are afraid of cocks.”

“OP, listen to me and call this number. Tell them you need help, you can thank me later.”

“Ghosts are nothing but memories that were left behind in the physical world. Killing it will only earn you bad karma. Kindness goes a long way.”

“OP, have you tried reasoning with it? Education is the best solution!”

“If there’s something strange in your neighborhood, who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!

“If there’s something weird and it don’t look good, who you gonna call? Ghostbusters!”

“Mix yellow bean, white rice, and Indian ink together. Soak them in salt water for fifteen minutes. Spread them on the ground to watch them grow into powerful bean warriors.”

“I once saw a video that described the story of a man who was also haunted by a female ghost. To deal with her, he bought a gun, and when the female ghost returned that night, the man shot himself and later dragged the ghost into the bedroom to...”

“OP, serious though, listen to me, this method will definitely work! Go find an iron sword, preferably one that has tasted blood before. Ghosts are nothing but special magnetic energy, and such a sword will be able to harm them!”

Chen Ge scrolled through the comments, and only the iron sword seemed somewhat plausible; the others were merely trolling or impossible to accomplish. He also knew about the traditional legends regarding the exorcism power of a black dog’s blood and cocks, but where was he going to find such things in the middle of the night?

After leaving the forum, Chen Ge tossed his phone to the side, spacing out as he sat in his chair. Combating the mirror monster meant putting his life on the line; he definitely could not rely on these half-baked online suggestions.

After a roundabout detour, Chen Ge pulled out the black phone again. He knew he had to rely on the black phone because it was the only thing that was trustworthy. However, the black phone operated on the Law of Equivalent Exchange; to gain something, something of equal value had to be lost.

After several days of trial and error, Chen Ge had gained some understanding regarding the hidden laws of the black phone, such as its mission reward structure. Easy and Normal Missions rewarded items that

would supplement the operation of the Haunted House; only Nightmare Missions would provide rewards that were directly beneficial to Chen Ge, like special powers.

In other words, to deal with the creature inside the mirror, completing Easy and Normal Missions were pointless; he needed the reward from the Nightmare Mission. However, Chen Ge was hesitant because he knew how dangerous Nightmare Mission; he could easily attract another dangerous specter on top of the mirror monster.

What should I do? Take the stakes or wait a little while longer?

It was then the Chen Ge realized it was already a new day, meaning the Daily Missions had been refreshed.

Easy Mission: If you want to provide the visitors a scary experience, then first you have to pay notice to the rhythm and tempo of their experience in the Haunted House. Setting off the scare too early might cause the visitors to lose their interest, so it is suggested that you install some sound detectors or surveillance cameras in the Haunted House to keep track of your visitors' progress.

Normal Mission: You've achieved the criteria to enable the first expansion of the Haunted House. Search for a suitable location soon! Due to the current space limitation, you are unable to perform any Trial Missions to unlock scenarios!

Nightmare Mission: There are weird sounds coming from the bathroom every midnight. If you want to know why, follow my directions.

Daily Missions will refresh every day at midnight. User can only apply for one mission each day, and the reward corresponds to the difficulty of the mission.

(Beware! The more difficult the mission, the more dangerous it'll be, so please choose carefully!)

Chen Ge read the mission descriptions. Since he temporarily could not complete the Normal Mission, he skipped it. Thus, he was left with the choice of the Easy Mission or Nightmare Mission.

When Uncle Xu gets me the money tomorrow morning, it should take less than a day to purchase all the necessary surveillance, but it'll take more than that to install it all. According to the description, the Nightmare Mission is related to the bathroom... it sounds creepy.

Chen Ge was caught between a rock and a hard place. He was not confident that he could finish the Easy Mission, and even if he did, the reward would not be that great. However, the Nightmare Mission was too dangerous; after all, it all started inside the bathroom.

He sat mired in his thoughts inside the Props Room. Before he came to a decision, the sound of sawing came again, this time, more distracting than before. Chen Ge tilted his head back and was sure that the source was again the third floor.

I've already carried out all four of the dolls, what else is it cutting? Chen Ge found the creature increasingly irksome. After putting the sewn dolls back into his pocket, he rushed up the stairs to the third floor holding his trusty hammer. When he arrived at the entrance to the Murder by Midnight scenario, he was shocked by what he saw.

There were mirror pieces lying around the entrance, and there were scratch marks on the wooden door.

The creature has been clawing at the door! What is it up to?

Chen Ge's back was covered with cold sweat. He could imagine a monster holding the mirror pieces while running around the building when he was asleep. He would never allow such a dangerous existence to live under the same roof as him!

Normally a nice guy, Chen Ge had sour expression at that moment. He locked the door to the Murder by Midnight scenario behind him and walked down the corridor, gripping the hammer. He stalked into every room to shatter every mirror he could find on the third floor. The sound of glass shattering echoed through the night. Chen Ge felt more like himself when he reached the end of the third-floor corridor.

During the first Nightmare Mission, the creature was held back by the doll who sat before the mirror. When it was attacking He San, it had to retreat when Xiao Wan strode into the room. However, after assaulting He Feng, it gained the ability to leave the mirror! It's growing, and it's growing fast!

Chen Ge knew he could not wait anymore. His Haunted House was finally on its way back, and he could not allow it to be ruined by an unknown creature.

After leaving the scenario and locking the door once more, Chen Ge switched on the black phone to accept the Nightmare Mission with a do or die determination. *Hopefully the reward for this mission will be powerful enough.*

"Are you sure you wish to accept the Nightmare Mission? After acceptance, unknown circumstances might occur."

"Yes."

The screen glowed, and the actual Nightmare Mission description started to surface.