

Horrors 8

Chapter 8: Black Friday

“Xiao San, this is a perfect opportunity for you to brush up on your traditional Chinese architecture knowledge. This is an almost perfect reconstruction of a traditional Siheyuan ¹. There are three layers of entrance: Dao Zuo Wu ², the Main House, the Ear Houses ³, Chao Shou Corridor ⁴, Chui Hua Men ⁵, East and West Houses, the Back House, Ru Yi Door ⁶, and so on. I’m impressed by the attention to detail; it really does feel like you’ve travelled back in time.” Gao Ru Xue walked through the set pieces, stopping occasionally to study the details.

“Senior, we’re inside a Haunted House, not on a study trip, do you mind?” Their footsteps echoed through the empty courtyard in which paper money was fluttering. It was as if He San was in a different dimension compared to Gao Ru Xue. He turned back every few seconds, afraid that something might jump out at him from the dark corners. “We’d better find the exit as soon as possible; this place makes me jumpy.”

“Since we’re already here, of course, we have to savor the experience. Remember, we’re customers, don’t let the Haunted House toy with you.”

“But don’t you remember the boss warned that we have to find the exit in less than fifteen minutes? Based on the evil look of that guy, I’m sure he has something scary planned if we are unable to escape in fifteen minutes!” He San tried to urge Gao Ru Xue, but the latter was not at all affected.

“There are only so many tactics that a Haunted House can employ. At worst, they’ll have the workers dress up as ghosts to chase us around. Xiao San, you deal with dead bodies every day, don’t tell me that you’ve suddenly decided to be afraid of ghosts?” As Gao Ru Xue wandered down the Hugging Corridor, she pushed open the door to the Left Ear House.

The set piece of Minghun was typical of an old Beijing Siheyuan. The Main House was the living building for the elderlies and the head of the house; the East and West Houses were for the sons and daughters, while the Ear Houses were for the servants and maids.

As the door was pushed open, the tables and chairs in the room tumbled over. The pillows on the bed were shredded, causing cotton fluff to float up into the air. A white hanging cloth swayed right in the middle of room.

“Senior, I’ll guard the door, be careful inside...” Before He San could finish, he was dragged into the room by Gao Ru Xue. His body froze, and his face blanched watching the white cloth sway in the windless room.

“Interesting, the cloth is at least 1.5 meters off the ground; this height is not enough to cause strangulation from hanging. The tumbled chairs and tables, as well as the signs of struggle on the floor... the Haunted House is trying to create the illusion that this was a forced suicide. But the Ear Houses were meant for the maids. This means that the specter refused to spare even those who are unrelated to her death. She’s hell-bent on torturing those in this house to their death.” Behind Gao Ru Xue’s clear analysis, there was a hint of excitement. “The design of this Haunted House is quite impressive; there might still be other hidden secrets that we haven’t discovered yet.”

She walked around the room and yanked off the faded bed cover. Lying underneath it was a paper doll.

“A paper doll lying in a living person’s bed?” Gao Ru Xue tossed the doll to the side and bent down to flip the mattress over. There was nothing underneath.

“The greater the anticipation, the greater the disappointment... looks like I’ve overestimated this Haunted House. Let’s go, the exit is not in this room.” She shrugged before walking out. He San, who had been left alone in the living room, had his teeth chattering. Perhaps it was the angle, but he swore he saw the paper doll, which was lying on the floor, wink at him.

“The statues of bronze chicks started to bleed, and the paper dolls burned for the dead were found blinking... Senior, wait for me!”

As the door to the Ear House closed, the white cloth in the room stopped swaying.

“Can you be a little quieter, why are you screaming left and right? Stop acting like such a little girl, man up!” Gao Ru Xue rolled her eyes at He San as she waited for him to catch up.

“I’m not scared, but this place seriously makes me feel uncomfortable, and the longer we stay here, the stronger that feeling becomes. Don’t you feel like something is amplifying our deepest fear?”

He San’s words hit the nail on the head. Gao Ru Xue thought about it, and she also realized that something was off. The most important quality of a forensic doctor was the ability to stay calm no matter the situation, but when she was scolding He San earlier, her composure was shattered; this hadn’t happened to her before.

“Could it be that I too am feeling afraid? But why should I be afraid? Everything here is obviously fake!” A crack started to form on Gao Ru Xue’s internal defense. Neither of them could figure out the source of their fear. With the combined effect of suspicion and psychological terror, the seed of fear had started to grow in their hearts.

“Say, do you think there is really something or someone inhabiting this place? After all, the boss did say this place is built on top of a mass grave and is a remodeled abandoned hospital...”

“Shush! Our university’s morgue is even scarier than this! You’re a forensic doctor; how is it that you’re so easily scared?” Even though Gao Ru Xue said that she was not afraid, it was noticeable that the speed of her speech had increased. She looked around her. The old house, the mourning hall, dead trees, the paper money, they were all set pieces; they weren’t scary. “So, what is it that I’m afraid of?”

The two were so distracted by their environment that they did not notice the background music that was on repeat. This banned song called Black Friday had slowly but surely snuck its way into their hearts, evoking their sense of fear.

“Xiao San, how long have we been in here already?”

“I have no idea, but I have a feeling we won’t be able to escape in fifteen minutes!”

“Don’t fret, give me some time to think about this,” Gao Ru Xue said as she wandered down the corridor. “This Haunted House is not that scary; it’s because the boss has been giving us negative psychological suggestions. Ever since we entered the Haunted House, he has been stressing points like, mass grave, live burial, ghosts, and stuff. That is a classic method to weaken our hearts. However, the

most cunning part of this man is, even though he has set up a time limit, he did not say what will happen if we fail. This creates a natural pressure on ourselves, causing our minds to fill in the blank with the scariest speculation.”

“Then, what do you think we should do now? This Haunted House feels a bit different from others.” He San was an honest boy; he would do what his senior ask him to do.

“You’re not wrong there; a normal Haunted House hires actors to dress up as ghosts or uses plenty of set-ups to paint gory scenes to scare us, but this Haunted House doesn’t do that. He has prepared the set beforehand and allows us to wander about it freely. Without guidance and a set plot, there’s no telling what will happen.”

“I understand what you mean; the scariest is the unknown.” He San nodded.

“That explanation is as good as any.” Gao Ru Xue frowned imperceptibly. “Come on, let’s move on to the next room.”

The Ear House was attached to the Main House. After pushing open the wooden door, it revealed a room filled with mourning outfits and a painted coffin sitting right in the middle of the room.

The red coffin had a big “喜” character, cut out from white paper pasted in the middle of it. Standing in two neat rows beside it were plenty of paper mannequins.

Each of them had a name written on their back, and they all wore thin make-up on their faces. Their eyes seemed to glow as the door was pushed open, and they appeared to be quietly staring at the two figures standing at the door.