

Collapse 21

Chapter 21: Chirp_1

By this time, Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao had already reached the second floor.

In a circular structure like this, with an open-air center, they should have been able to see the lower floor from the railings of the upper level.

However, where the railings on the second floor should have been, there was now a solid wall. Thus, Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao found themselves in a ring-shaped hallway. It was utterly dark here, indicating a power outage throughout the entire building.

Turned-off chandeliers hung overhead. Large LED boards were set at intervals into the ceiling. One board was still lit, displaying the time: 20:23. The quiz would begin in an hour and a half.

As far as they could see, the rooms were strikingly similar. However, they had morphed from the funeral halls on the first floor into patient rooms on this level, closely resembling the hospital Gu Mian knew.

But this place was somewhat different from a typical hospital.

In a standard hospital, patient rooms lined both sides of the corridor. Here, however, one side was a wall while the other held patient rooms.

This level seemed to correspond with the ambulance outside.

Following that logic, the lower level should then correspond to the hearse.

And by the same token, the third floor might be a prison, corresponding to a prison van.

Luckily, the patient rooms had windows. So, although the power was out here too, it was considerably brighter than the first floor.

Gu Mian attentively observed the second floor.

The doors of the patient rooms had glass windows, enabling them to see inside without entering.

Because the hallway was circular, they could only see a portion of the patient rooms at a glance; most of the area remained out of sight.

"I guess there must be a nurse's station on this floor. Let's find it," Gu Mian said, looking down at Xiao Qiao beside him.

Just like on the first floor, the clues about this level's ghost were likely hidden in one of the patient rooms. Searching room by room would be too inefficient; it would be quicker to check names directly at the nurse's station.

Xiao Qiao rarely had strong opinions of her own. Whatever Gu Mian said, she would simply nod and follow.

She was quiet, a genuinely refreshing contrast to the other players whose screams were as loud as automated alarm systems.

Gu Mian swept his flashlight across the dark hallway.

Hospitals always possessed a creepy atmosphere. Gu Mian had previously worked overtime late at night in hospitals. Even when all the overhead lights were on, the hallways exuded an ominous aura.

What made it even more unsettling was that Gu Mian was an intern in the neurology department. Most of the patients on such a floor had problems with their brains or nervous systems.

Patients with conditions like cerebral infarctions or partial paralysis, for instance, had difficulty walking. Doctors would advise these patients to move around frequently.

These patients were very obedient and would often come out to walk in the hallways if they couldn't sleep in the middle of the night. Consequently, Gu Mian often saw shadowy figures in the midnight hallways, walking with an unnatural, zombie-like gait that most people would find unbearable.

Thankfully, this floor currently seemed devoid of patients, nor were there any figures walking with strange gaits.

However, the building was vast, probably about the size of two athletic fields combined. The pair walked for two minutes without seeing any sign of a nurse's station.

Instead, strange rustling noises kept coming from behind, as if something was following them.

Each time, Gu Mian turned around promptly, but there was absolutely nothing behind them.

But the sounds from behind kept getting closer, until they were almost directly upon them.

Xiao Qiao had clearly heard the noise too. She proposed a bold idea: "Why don't I walk backward and see what's behind us?"

As she spoke and began to turn, Gu Mian quickly pulled her back. "No need."

She seemed somewhat puzzled but didn't press further, simply continuing to follow Gu Mian forward.

They had taken only a few more steps when the sound from behind drew even closer, this time almost pressing against their backs.

Gu Mian even sensed something slowly approaching the back of his head.

He was about to do something when an alarm bell suddenly went off in his head.

It felt as if something malicious had suddenly fixed its gaze on him. He knew the source of this predatory stare wasn't the thing behind them; he had experienced this kind of malevolent scrutiny countless times over the past twenty years. Every time this sensation occurred, some accident was sure to follow! Therefore, over these years, Gu Mian had honed a unique skill: the moment this feeling arose, he would instantly leap to the location farthest from any threat.

For instance, during a class outing on a bus, as the vehicle was slowly turning at an intersection, he suddenly had this feeling. Gu Mian immediately jumped off the bus and, following a pre-planned escape route, sprinted away at full speed. When he looked back, the bus had been hit by a truck.

By a strange coincidence, the truck that struck the bus was laden with steel rebar. One improperly secured bar had shot out from the front of the truck, directly piercing a window of the bus—the exact spot where he had been sitting.

His classmates had all suffered some injuries, though none too severe. The most seriously injured was actually Gu Mian, who had broken his arm jumping out of the bus window.

After the bus incident, Gu Mian seldom participated in group activities. Even when he did, he would deliberately keep his distance from crowds.

He understood that his peculiar luck could also bring misfortune to others.

But now, inside this instance, he couldn't deliberately keep his distance from others. He could only try his best to pull along anyone nearby.

And now, he grabbed Xiao Qiao's hand, yanking her violently forward.

Xiao Qiao, caught completely off guard, was yanked down and then inadvertently dragged a short distance by Gu Mian. A crisp snapping sound emitted from her wrist.

But immediately after, a much louder crash drowned out the crisp sound from her wrist.

A massive object had suddenly smashed down onto the spot where they had just been standing. It seemed to have landed on something, as the impact sound was muffled, not sharp.

It was the LED board from overhead. It had fallen right where Gu Mian's head had been. Fortunately, he had lunged away quickly; if that thing had hit his head, it would have undoubtedly split open.

Gu Mian shone his flashlight towards where the LED board had fallen. The board seemed to have struck something by chance; there was a dark shadow beneath it.

Just as he was about to take a closer look, the dark shadow emitted a "WOOF" and then vanished entirely.

The shadow was gone. Xiao Qiao was still on the ground, face-planted.

Several seconds passed before she tried to get up, using her hands and feet. But the hand Gu Mian had pulled seemed to have lost all strength, dangling limply and unnaturally from her wrist.

Gu Mian, bracing himself for a torrent of abuse, squatted down, intending to help her up.

However, she seemed unable to stand and just plopped down on the floor, lifting her bruised and swollen face to look at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian knelt before her, awkwardly meeting her gaze, and asked a rather idiotic question, "Does it hurt?"

She finally showed a reaction. Tears welled up, swirling desperately in her eyes, and her face contorted with an utterly indescribable expression. "It hurts!"

Though she clearly looked on the verge of tears, her portrayal of it was somehow comical.

Gu Mian silently prayed that her legion of crazed fans would never find out what he had just done to her.

