

Collapse 41

Chapter 41: I am title_1

"Of course not, I never knocked on his door.

"When I told him I hadn't, he just went quiet. He kept his mouth shut and wouldn't say a word, no matter how much I asked.

"I saw things weren't right, so I discussed with his brother-in-law about taking him to the hospital. But he absolutely refused, yelling that he wasn't sick.

"My husband and I paid close attention. There were absolutely no knocking sounds at night, no noise at all, but he insisted someone was knocking on his door, someone was out to get him..."

Zhao Meixiang let out a long sigh, looking somewhat tired.

Gu Mian continued, "What happened afterward? I heard Zhao Wen was eventually found in a hotel."

Zhao Meixiang nodded tiredly. "After my younger brother returned, his personality completely changed. First, he locked himself in his room, only coming out for meals and to use the bathroom.

"But then..." She shivered. "But then, he started coming out frequently..."

Qing Huan asked curiously, "Isn't that a good thing?"

"No," Zhao Meixiang shook her head. "He only came out in the dead of night.

"One night... my husband and I were asleep, but I suddenly had to use the bathroom. Just as I was about to get out of bed, I... I saw...

"The door had been pushed open a crack, I don't know when. He was squatting right outside, his whole face pressed against the gap, his eyes staring unblinkingly at me.

"I was so scared I screamed. My husband was startled awake, and he immediately saw the person squatting outside the door too.

"I was terrified. I asked my brother what he was doing. He just said 'nothing,' then stood up and left...

"But after that, I realized he was always watching us...

"When I was in the living room, he would pull the door open a crack and just watch me...

"When I was in the kitchen, he would squat behind the kitchen door, his head down, staring at me through the gap at the bottom...

"Even when I came home from outside and was opening the front door, he would be pressed against the peephole, watching me intently...

"There was even one time he hid in the wardrobe beside our bed. In the middle of the night, I heard a sound. I opened my eyes and saw the wardrobe door was open a crack. His head was extended out, right above mine, staring fixedly at me..."

Zhao Meixiang shivered violently. "Finally, my husband couldn't take it anymore. He yelled, wanting to drive him away, but my brother claimed it was *us* trying to harm *him*.

"He rushed out right after saying that... We couldn't catch him. Later... later the police found him in a hotel...

"They said he was already decomposing when they found him... in the hotel wardrobe.

"The room attendant couldn't find him and wanted to clean the room to rent it out again. When she opened the wardrobe, he just fell out, his eyes still wide open, staring..."

At this point in her narration, Zhao Meixiang couldn't hold back anymore and began to sob softly.

Qing Huan shuddered. Encountering that Knocking Ghost... they all end up having a mental breakdown and becoming like this, don't they?

Gu Mian frowned slightly.

Seeing this, Qing Huan asked, "What's wrong, Dr. Gu?"

Gu Mian looked at Zhao Meixiang. "You mentioned earlier that your brother, Zhao Wen, in his later stages, developed a tendency to peep?"

"The later symptoms..." Qing Huan swallowed. He truly is a doctor, asking about supernatural events as if diagnosing an illness.

Zhao Meixiang nodded. "Yes, I don't know why, but he suddenly became like that..."

Gu Mian said with understanding, "I suspect your brother Zhao Wen developed symptoms of persecutory delusion in his later stages. He suspected that you and your husband were the ones knocking on the door, so he was constantly watching you."

Zhao Meixiang looked bewildered. "Is... that so...?"

"Oh, right," Gu Mian then asked, "Before these incidents, did Zhao Wen experience anything else strange? For example, exploring a haunted house or being frightened by something?"

Zhao Meixiang shook her head. "No, he was a very sensible young man. He usually just worked at the factory. At most, he would go out with friends for a bit of fun, but never too far."

"Then where did he work?"

"Nearby, the Mingliang Plastic Factory. It's still in operation; you can see it just a short walk from here."

Having finished asking his questions, Gu Mian didn't linger. He stood up and shouldered his chainsaw. "Thank you for your cooperation. We'll do our best to find out the real cause of Zhao Wen's death."

Then he left with Qing Huan.

As they left the building, Qing Huan was still a bit bewildered. "Dr. Gu, we came to investigate the Knocking Ghost, but it feels like we don't have any clues at all."

Currently, all they knew was that the Knocking Ghost had killed a man named Zhao Wen, but they had no clues about the Knocking Ghost itself.

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "Although Zhao Wen has no direct connection to me, he has a very significant one with someone else."

Qing Huan looked puzzled. "Who?"

"Think about it. What were Zhao Wen's later symptoms?"

"Persecutory delusions, peeping... wait, peeping? Could he be the one who was following Yuwen Hao?!"

Gu Mian nodded. "Most likely, he was the Peeping ghost trailing Yuwen Hao. After Zhao Wen died from the curse, he himself became an Evil Ghost, a part of the curse."

Qing Huan felt a chill run down her spine. "That's terrifying! If every cursed person becomes part of the curse after death, how many ghosts would there be!"

"I suspect if we trace it back to the origin, the deaths of all these ghosts can be linked to a single source. For instance, Zhao Wen was killed by the Knocking Ghost. The Knocking Ghost, in turn, could have been killed by a ghost from a higher tier. If we trace it upwards like this, the entity at the very top would be the source of the curse we're seeking."

Gu Mian continued, "The source might be one of these five ghosts, or it could be something else entirely. In any case, we first need to deduce the relationships of who killed whom among these five ghosts."

Ultimately, who killed whom? And who, in turn, killed another?

Qing Huan had a moment of realization. "So, the connection we've established is... the Peeping ghost was killed by the Knocking Ghost. If we're to trace the origin, we need to go up another level—meaning, find out who killed the Knocking Ghost?"

Gu Mian nodded. "So, let's first figure out the relationships between those five ghosts. Let's go to your place and find out the cause of the Back Ghost's death."

Qing Huan nodded, leading Gu Mian towards her residence.

It was past noon now, and both of them were a little hungry, so they bought some buns to eat on the way.

"It's almost two o'clock," Gu Mian said, glancing at his phone. "We need to gather at four, so we should hurry."

Qing Huan nodded and quickened her pace.

Just after two o'clock, they arrived at Qing Huan's place. It was another old apartment building; one couldn't help but wonder why there were so many dilapidated buildings in this area.

The landlord looked somewhat surprised to see Qing Huan, but then, as if understanding something, invited them to sit down. "Are you also finding something off about the house?"