

Collapse 42

Chapter 42: Everyone Seems Very Busy_1

The landlord was a middle-aged man in his forties or fifties. He seemed very hearty, and his mouth never stopped moving.

"I felt wronged, really. My place here was spotless. Yet, two years ago, two young lads moved in, and this place hasn't been peaceful since.

"They told me they were originally a group of three, but one of them didn't work nearby, so he split off. These two lads rented a two-person room here.

"One was called Li Dongqiang, and the other was Wang Erwa.

"They were fine at first, but not even a month later, I saw their friend show up, all panicked and deathly pale!

"The friend hurriedly took both young men away, apparently to his place for a few days.

"They were back after a few days, laughing and joking as if nothing had happened.

"But then, another two months passed, and I noticed they started acting strangely. They looked utterly miserable. When I asked, it turned out their panicky friend had died somewhere out there...

"His death was said to be quite suspicious," the landlord continued, shaking his head. "After that, those two lads started acting strangely too.

"I don't know what got into them, but from that point on, they became paranoid, always saying someone was spying on them.

"My perfectly good house, oh, they trashed it! They nailed wooden boards over the windows, sealing them completely! Not a single crack left!

"The transom window above the door was also sealed tight with newspaper. Even the peephole was stuffed with toilet paper. Just... not a single gap left, you get me?"

Gu Mian nodded.

"But even that wasn't enough. That Wang Erwa kept feeling like he was being watched from all sides, no matter where he went. He even consulted a psychic.

"That psychic was also unreliable. She got him a tall Paper Man and told him to carry it on his back, claiming it would ward off disaster!

"So Wang Erwa stopped going out completely. He'd stay home all day carrying that deathly pale Paper Man on his back. It was terrifying.

"And Li Dongqiang was even more extreme than Wang Erwa. He felt like someone was watching him, so he'd desperately squeeze into the smallest spaces he could find, just like a cat, you know?"

Gu Mian nodded again.

"At first, he'd hide in the wardrobe. But the wardrobe was too big, so he started hiding under the table. But even under the table felt too spacious for him.

"Later, he actually managed to stuff himself into a small cabinet on a desk! You know those small cabinets, right? Goodness! Even a child would have trouble getting in there, but this grown man, over 1.7 meters tall, somehow squeezed himself inside.

"I have no idea how he managed to get himself in there. He was curled up so tightly, a layer of his skin was rubbed off!

"But he still thought that small cabinet was too big! He even tried to crawl into the sewer drain! Wasn't that just asking for death?

"We desperately tried to pull him back. He looked furious and moved out of my place right after, to another apartment not far away.

"Li Dongqiang moved out, but Wang Erwa remained. I kept a close eye on him, afraid he might suddenly do something drastic.

"But even keeping an eye on him didn't save him. Not long after that Li Dongqiang fellow moved out, Wang Erwa died. Died in his bed.

"When we found his body, he had used a rope to tie himself tightly to that Paper Man, as if the Paper Man had grown onto his back."

Sigh...

The landlord sighed as he finished this part.

Qing Huan's face was extremely grim.

He wasn't stupid; he could figure out who was following him even with his eyes closed—Wang Erwa. That tall, twisted white figure behind him had to be Wang Erwa's Paper Man. He feared that the moment the Paper Man made full contact with his back would be the moment of his death. The thought sent a shiver down Qing Huan's spine.

Gu Mian then asked, "What about Li Dongqiang? Do you know which apartment he moved to?"

The landlord thought for a moment. "I think it was Hejia Apartment, not far to the east. I heard he died later too... It's truly bizarre..."

The two exchanged glances. That was where Lin Yue'er lived.

It was 3:05. They still had time.

Immediately, they rushed to the nearby Hejia Apartment where Lin Yue'er lived.

It seemed Yuwen Hao and his group hadn't investigated this place yet. The landlord here looked a bit curious when Gu Mian and Qing Huan arrived.

"Hello," Gu Mian began, addressing this landlord, "We're friends of Lin Yue'er. It seems she's encountered something... unclear here recently, and we'd like to ask you a few things."

This landlord was a young woman, seemingly unmarried. The property here was likely inherited.

She was very cooperative and nodded. "What can I help you with?"

"It was about two years ago. Do you remember a tenant named Li Dongqiang from back then?"

Upon hearing the name, the young woman had a strong reaction, nodding vigorously. "Remember him? Of course, I remember! My father hadn't officially handed over the properties to me back then, but I remember that man crystal clear!

"I thought he was a bit off from the moment he arrived. He looked so tense, like a fugitive on the run.

"But his ID checked out, so we couldn't really refuse him. We let him pay and move in.

"He paid six months' rent all at once. I found it quite strange at the time; tenants here usually pay month by month, but he paid for half a year upfront.

"I was puzzled at first, but later I understood why he paid for half a year in one go.

"He was nuts! He was afraid we'd kick him out when his lease was up!

"The man hardly ever left his room. If he absolutely had to go out, he'd wrap himself up completely, his head constantly darting around, terrified of being spotted by something.

"And that wasn't the worst of it. What was more alarming was his peculiar habit: he loved to squeeze into small places. Once he got in, he'd stay there all day.

"In the apartment we rented him, the desk cabinets, shoe cabinets, kitchen cupboards—he was about to break them all by squeezing into them!

"You know, this line of work isn't easy. If one apartment has issues, it brings down the reputation of the whole building.

"He was so bizarre and unsettling. My father was scared too, so he wanted him to move out.

"We even offered him his money back, compensation for breaking the lease, but he flat-out refused to move. He insisted on staying. My father went over to his place every other day, trying to persuade him to leave.

"Until one day...

"My father went to look for him again, but he was nowhere to be found in the apartment.

"Initially, we thought he'd just gone out. But we didn't see him for several days straight. It was summer then, so the smells get strong, you know? After a few days of him being missing, his room started to stink.

"My father suspected he might have died in the room, so he searched every conceivable place, but found nothing.

"After a few more days, the room reeked. The stench was overwhelming. We had no choice but to call the police.

"Later, the police discovered him under the bed...

"The gap under the bed is less than ten centimeters. I still don't know how on earth he managed to get under there.

"The room was sealed, and no one else was in there besides him. But when they found him, he was curled up in the tightest spot, way in the back, as if... as if he were hiding from something."