

Collapse 51

Chapter 51: Abolished_1

Gu Mian remembered the landlady speaking of this woman; she had opened the door for him and Qing Huan when they came to investigate yesterday.

However, half of her face had been hidden behind the door then, so the two of them hadn't noticed anything unusual about it.

The woman with the disfigured face was right across from them, just a few steps away.

Gu Mian knocked on the door. He didn't have to wait long before the sound of footsteps came from inside, followed by the door creaking open.

A face emerged from behind the door, staring at them.

Upon seeing this face, Yuwen Hao drew a sharp breath. It was a face truly beyond description.

Half of it was relatively normal, but the other half was incredibly grotesque.

The burnt half of her face sagged. Its skin resembled that of someone in their eighties or nineties—coarse, slack, and perpetually filthy-looking.

The face was incredibly incongruous. One eye and the corner of her mouth on that side drooped, and her facial features were entirely asymmetrical.

The woman seemed to have anticipated their visit after hearing the commotion from the landlady's side. Without asking any questions, she just stepped back, holding the door, and said, "Come in."

Gu Mian walked straight in.

The other three followed suit.

The house was compact. Upon entering, they found themselves in a somewhat gloomy living room. In one corner stood a shrine with an idol Gu Mian couldn't name. It had a rather ominous appearance.

Next to the shrine was a row of old sofas, where Gu Mian sat down.

The woman made no attempt to offer them any hospitality, instead getting straight to the point, "You're here about Zhong Min, aren't you?"

This must have been the name of the woman who was burned to death.

The landlady had never dared to mention her name, yet this disfigured woman spoke it directly without hesitation.

Given her straightforwardness, Gu Mian was also direct. He nodded. "My friends have been troubled by some unclean things. Our investigation eventually led us to this woman. I heard from the landlady that you were nearby when she died."

The woman nodded blankly. "I was nearby. But I advise you not to get involved with her. She... is extremely vengeful. If she sets her sights on you, it's a death sentence no matter what."

"Did you know Zhong Min well when she was alive?" Gu Mian asked.

The woman was silent for a moment, then answered, "No... I didn't know her."

Yuwen Hao looked uneasy. "Then why do you seem to know so much about her?"

The woman lowered her head slightly and fell silent.

"Well, since you don't want to talk about that, let's change the subject," Gu Mian said. "I learned from the landlady that on the night of the fire, you weren't very close to its source. You should have been able to escape when you realized there was a fire, but you didn't."

The expressions of Yuwen Hao and the other two became a little strange as they looked at the woman with the half-burnt face.

"At that time... I was asleep."

"And when did you wake up?" Gu Mian probed.

"...I heard Zhong Min screaming. She had locked herself in a small storage room inside, right next to mine... She was screaming for help from in there, and by then, the fire had already reached my area..."

He then asked, "She couldn't get out on her own?"

"She had locked the door from the inside but didn't have the Key."

"Then did you have a Key?" Gu Mian pressed.

"..."

Yuwen Hao frowned, looked at Gu Mian, and whispered, "Do you suspect this woman had something to do with the fire?"

Gu Mian shook his head slightly.

The others also found the woman very peculiar. She was ostensibly a victim of the fire back then, yet everything about her exuded an unsettling eeriness.

Looking at the woman, Gu Mian said, "Since you were on night duty at the warehouse, you must have carried the warehouse Key with you. I imagine that when you woke up, instead of running out immediately, you tried to save someone, right?"

The others were all slightly taken aback by his words.

Judging by the current situation, her rescue attempt had clearly failed.

"I'm guessing that after you woke up and heard the cries for help, you used your Key to open the door, intending to escape with Zhong Min. But something went wrong in the process, leading to Zhong Min's death in the inferno, and you were burned as well."

"And based on your description of Zhong Min just now, she definitely did something to you, either when she was alive or after she died."

"She probably resented you for not being able to save her and, after becoming an Evil Ghost, continued to torment you."

So, the curses the landlady heard Zhong Min screaming back then were likely not aimed at others, but at this woman who had abandoned her and fled.

Qing Huan looked puzzled. "Then how has she managed to stay alive all this time?"

This must also be the key to this instance.

After Gu Mian finished speaking, the woman fell silent. A long moment passed before she lifted her face, a strange, almost relieved smile spreading across it.

"You guessed correctly. I did try to save her back then. But what Zhong Min did was far more despicable than you can imagine."

"We didn't even know each other back then. When the fire spread, I was jolted awake. I heard her shouting for help from behind her door, so I took out my Key, opened it, and we tried to escape together."

"Everything was going smoothly. We covered our noses and hurried through the large warehouse, trying to get outside. But then a burning shelf collapsed, trapping her underneath."

"I tried to pull her out so we could run together, but the shelf was too heavy; I couldn't free her."

"The fire had grown very intense by then. She grabbed my hand, desperately pleading with me not to leave her, to save her. But if I stayed any longer, I would have died with her."

"I had no choice. I told her I would go out and get help. But who would have thought she'd grab my leg with all her might, making it impossible for me to move!"

"She said she didn't trust me. If I couldn't save her, then we should both die there together."

"Just then, several burning bolts of cloth from a shelf came crashing down towards me. She was holding onto me so tightly I couldn't dodge, and they hit me..."

She touched her face as she spoke.

"At that moment, my hair and clothes were on fire. My face was in agonizing pain, unbearable pain. I threw all caution to the wind, lifted my foot, and kicked her hard, several times, until she finally let go. Only then did I run outside."