

Chapter 4 — They Were Not Killed

The door stands open at the end of the corridor.

It wasn't there before.

No hinges visible.

No frame.

Just—

an absence shaped like an entrance.

Ace moves first.

This time slower.

Not hesitation.

Adjustment.

Mai doesn't stop her.

Not now.

"Document everything," she says quietly.

Ace steps through.

The hallway ends—

and becomes something else.

A party room.

Decorated.

Clean.

Not abandoned.

Color returns.

Faded banners now bright. Balloons full. Tables upright.

Everything—

intact.

Too intact.

Ace stops.

“This is wrong.”

Mai steps in behind her.

Her eyes move rapidly.

Angles. Distances.

Consistency.

“It’s not decay reversal,” she says.

She reaches out—

touches the table.

No dust.

No age.

“It’s selection.”

Shammy enters last.

The air shifts sharply—

like the room resists her more than before.

“This version expects witnesses,” she says.

Music starts again.

Clear now.

A stage at the far end of the room.

Curtains open.

Freddy.

Bonnie.

Chica.

And Foxy—

just visible from behind a partially open curtain to the side.

All facing forward.

All still.

The room is full.

Children sit at the tables.

Laughing.

Talking.

Moving.

But—

no sound reaches the Triad.

Silent motion.

Ace's jaw tightens.

"They're not real."

Mai shakes her head slightly.

"Not entirely correct."

She watches a child lift a slice of pizza.

The movement is smooth.

Too smooth.

“Scripted behavior,” she says.

Shammy steps forward.

The air around her distorts faintly—

like heat over asphalt.

The children don’t react.

“They’re not aware of us,” she says.

A pause.

“But something else is.”

A man stands near the stage.

Purple shirt.

Watching.

Not the animatronics.

The children.

And slowly—

very slowly—

his head turns.

Toward the Triad.

Ace shifts immediately.

Hand on blade.

Mai doesn't move.

"Don't engage," she says.

The man smiles.

Not wide.

Not exaggerated.

Just—

acknowledging.

The music falters.

One note drops out.

Then returns.

But slightly off.

Shammy inhales.

“Pressure spike,” she says quietly.

The room tightens.

The children’s movements begin to desync.

Tiny errors.

A hand pauses too long.

A head turns too far.

Ace’s voice is low.

“This is breaking.”

Mai watches the stage.

“No,” she says.

“It’s correcting.”

Freddy’s head tilts.

Not toward the audience.

Toward the man.

The man steps back.

Into shadow.

Gone.

The music stops.

Complete silence.

The children freeze.

Mid-motion.

Every single one.

Mai speaks.

Carefully.

“They weren’t killed here.”

The room flickers.

Hard.

The children blur—
then stabilize again.

But fewer.

Two tables empty now.

Ace’s eyes narrow.

“We’re removing them.”

Mai shakes her head.

“No.”

A beat.

“We’re removing the wrong version of them.”

Shammy steps forward.

The air resists violently now—

like pushing into water.

“This place is holding a shape,” she says.

“It doesn’t care what happened.”

A pause.

“It cares that the show continues.”

Ace looks at the stage.

Then at the empty tables.

Then back at Mai.

“So we stop it.”

Mai’s answer is immediate.

“No.”

Silence.

“If we stop the show,” Mai says, “we collapse the structure.”

Ace doesn’t blink.

“That’s the objective.”

Shammy shakes her head.

“No,” she says softly.

“That’s what it wants.”

The lights flicker.

Not failing—

synchronizing.

The animatronics move.

All three.

Perfectly in unison.

Not toward the audience.

Toward—

the empty tables.

Ace draws one blade.

The hum cuts through the silence—
sharp, real, grounding.

The room reacts.

Not fear.

Recognition.

Mai steps in front of her.

“Don’t,” she says.

Ace’s voice is flat.

“They’re targeting.”

Mai shakes her head.

“No.”

A beat.

“They’re filling roles.”

Freddy reaches one of the empty chairs.

Slowly.

Gently.

He pulls it out.

Waits.

The room holds its breath.

And then—

something begins to take shape.

Not visible.

But present.

Shammy whispers:

“Something is trying to sit down.”

The pressure spikes.

Hard.

The room snaps.

Half the children vanish.

The stage flickers—

and resets.

Now—

only three empty tables remain.

Mai’s voice drops.

“We’re not fixing this.”

A pause.

“We’re rewriting it.”

Ace looks at the stage.

At Freddy.

At the empty chairs.

“Then we do it right.”

From somewhere behind the curtain—

a voice.

Soft.

Childlike.

“You’re late.”

No one moves.

Because this time—

the voice is speaking directly to them.

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