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The Quiet Floor

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The fifth floor. A beacon of silence for the struggling, studying student of UCF. The stream of littered desks provide a humble home for anyone, regardless of time or intention. At least during finals week.

It was during this particular finals week that a particularly overburdened pre-med student constructed her nest at a solitary desk near the corner of the floor.

Her laptop was open and charging, fan whirring lightly from hours of overuse. Gel pens lay scattered across two creased and yellowing notebooks, both reaching their very last pages. Her eyes, long since bloodshot and sullen, had grown dark circles from weeks of overuse. Her hand cramped, the tendons of her fingers falling behind the consistent requests to continue writing. This pre-med’s most recent standardized tormentor took the form of an organic chemistry final—one which loomed over tomorrow’s already busy schedule. The clock was ticking, and it mocked her.

She reached for a worn thermos that had long since run empty and stale. In a moment of annoyance and realization, she thrust the cup quickly towards the desk’s wooden surface, only to discover that her cup hadn’t made a sound.

Suddenly, the buzzing of her laptop fan had vanished, the subtle echo of students breathing shortly following suit. The hum of the air conditioning. The tapping of keyboards. The scribbling of pencils. All gone.

The student’s tired body stilled. She felt the hairs on her arm prick to attention, the sweat on the back of her neck chilling in an icy terror. What is happening to me? the question echoing violently through her mind amidst the agonizing silence. She didn’t want to move, the permeating nothingness taunting her. She sat in terror of her wristwatch, feeling as though a minute would never pass. The clock wasn’t ticking, and it mocked her.

Slowly, she managed to move a finger to her pulse and she slid it around her wrist in search of what should be its never-ending beating. She felt her heart stutter when she couldn’t find it immediately, and ironically, her pulse quickened.

In a final moment of desperation and morbid curiosity, she coughed with an intense fervor that shot a stinging pain throughout her diaphragm; dirty looks followed soon after in an instance of both embarrassment and relief.

Her arms quaked as she began to unceremoniously shove her belongings into her backpack. With a start, she rose from her chair and shuffled against the carpeted floor. The exit called to her viciously as she weaved through the desks and stacks, her blood pounding in harmony with short and uneven breaths.

The sound of her footsteps never reached living ears.