

## 48 Hours 641

### Chapter 641 Life of a High School Student

The hour and minute hand on his watch met, pointing to zero together.

Zhang Heng received a system reminder in his sleep and learned that his quest time had been extended from 20 days to 140 days. Since it was set in the modern-day, the prolonged game time had undoubtedly more pros than cons. In other words, there was now more time to explore this dungeon. He could hone his skills, and at the same time, there was no need for taking additional risks.

However, was this quest as peaceful as it portrayed?

The alarm woke Zhang Heng up early the next morning

Having left high school life for quite a while, he would need some time to get used to the grind again-waking up early every morning, then gobbling down breakfast as fast as possible before the mad rush to school. Returning to high school all of a sudden made him a little uncomfortable, not to mention that yesterday's homework was uncompleted.

After coming back from the river last night, he wanted to complete his homework, but the moment he looked at them, he found that he had forgotten a lot of things. So he gave up on doing it completely.

After breakfast, Zhang Heng grabbed his schoolbag, said hello to his grandfather, and left for school.

Although he knew who the person under the bridge's pier from last night was, he didn't immediately confront the person. The first reason was that the person would not run away from this place for now, and the second was that everything seemed normal in this dungeon so far. Nonetheless, Zhang Heng made sure that his guard stayed up all the time.

On the bright side, at least he had not done anything beyond his status as a student yet.

After waited for a while, Zhang Heng finally got on the bus. There were many students and office workers who went on the same bus. One of the girls with pigtails took advantage of the time to memorize some texts. When the bus became too crowded, the driver shouted, "Stand back a little! Stand back a little!"

Zhang Heng had no choice but to move half a step toward the pigtailed girl. The two were almost sticking together. She then raised her head and looked at Zhang Heng. Immediately, he showed an apologetic smile to her. The girl with pigtails quickly lowered her head to the point it almost got buried in the textbook.

Zhang Heng had been taking this route for some time now, and this wasn't his first time encountering her. Judging from the textbook she was holding, she should be a year older than him. In reality, however, Zhang Heng had never spoken to her, nor did he know her name until she completed her college entrance examination.

The purpose of this quest was not for Zhang Heng to relive the memories of high school. Seeing that the girl was well into her textbook, he didn't intend to disturb her. So, the two stood close together until they arrived at the school. Zhang Heng was encumbered by the crowd and had to squeeze his way to get

off the bus. He tidied up his slightly messy clothes and looked at the familiar yet unfamiliar school gate. The current time was 7:15, only five minutes left before the day's classes began.

Knowing he could be late, Zhang Heng picked up the pace like the other students around him. He found his class by memory, and not long after he put down his schoolbag, the bell rang. Zhang Heng had traversed many quests, and he had also done all sorts of odd jobs. However, the busiest job was none other than a high school student.

This was the kind of life where you opened your eyes every day, and the day was fully arranged. However, the magical part was that although everyone was super busy every day, they still managed to squeeze out some time to engage in relationships. It was as if everyone had 48 hours a day.

Zhang Heng felt a little dizzy after a day of class, not to mention his summoning to the office by many teachers since he failed to hand in his homework. Fortunately, he had not caused too much trouble, making a good impression of himself in front of his teachers. Zhang Heng told the teachers that he was not feeling too well, the most effective excuse to avoid reprimand. However, this was just a temporary solution.

Fortunately, Zhang Heng had someone that he knew sitting beside him. Her name is Bai Qing, a friend who happened to be the class study committee member.

"Are you okay? Did Teacher Song scold you?" asked Bai Qing with concern as she looked at Zhang Heng, who had just returned from the office. She was the one who had notified Zhang Heng to go to the office earlier.

"I told them I had a fever last night."

"You were sick last night?" Bai Qing was a little surprised. "No."

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"Then, you'd better complete your homework next time. If you just get good grades, the teachers will stop coming after you. And you won't be so lucky next time," Bai Qing reminded. Apparently, she hadn't forgotten her duties as a member of the study committee.

And Bai Qing could not figure out why Zhang Heng gave her a different feeling today. Unlike before, Zhang Heng was obviously absent-minded in class. He paid not the slightest attention to the lessons, whether it be math or English. He did not even bother to open the textbooks on his table. Although Zhang Heng would occasionally let his mind wander, this was Bai Qing's first time seeing him being so disconnected for the whole day. She also noticed that he would write something down in the textbook with a pen from time to time, only to cross it out a moment later.

Zhang Heng acknowledged Bai Qing. The girl thought that he would heed her advice, constantly feeling that he was different from the other boys in the class. He had a kind of maturity that did not match his age, as if he knew what needed to be done all the time. After a while, she heard Zhang Heng asking her a shocking question.

"Can I copy your homework?"

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Upon his request, Bai Qing was speechless. "The teacher is no fool. He can tell that you've copied someone," she replied.

"It makes sense. I shall borrow another person's homework to copy from it."

It was troublesome enough to come to school every day without knowing what was going on. Zhang Heng was in no mood to do homework school like before. Although he had an extra 24 hours every day, he had no intention to abuse himself.

"Copying from multiple copies of homework... is not the solution, either," Bai Qing frowned. "You will suffer in the exams. You can't lie to yourself when it comes to learning." As she spoke, she handed her homework and examination papers to Zhang Heng.

Ordinarily, Bai Qing could sit at her seat for a long time to finish up her homework. During the break, Zhang Heng had never once seen her leave except for toilet visits and fetching water. By the end of the school day, her homework would have been almost done.

"Thank you," Zhang Heng nodded and took the workbook. "I will treat you to a cup of milk tea later."

"Coco?"

"Whatever you want."

"I want a double portion of boba pearls. How about English and Biology homework? I haven't completed them yet," Bai Qing offered.

"I can complete English by myself. As for biology, can you come to school early tomorrow morning?"

"Yes," Bai Qing nodded. Seeing Zhang Heng grabbing his bag, she hesitated and let out a "Hmm..."

"Why? Is there anything else?"

"I will help you... for a week at most. After that, you will have to do your own homework."

Looking at Bai Qing's serious expressions, Zhang Heng did not defend himself. He simply nodded and said, "I will see if I can find another way then."

## **Chapter 642 Contact**

After school was finally over, Zhang Heng returned home with his schoolbag.

Instead of going home, as usual, he decided to pay the college hostel a visit. Although the student's face was covered last night, Zhang Heng could recognize him from his clothes. His Adidas sweatpants and the T-shirt printed with the word "Underground" had exposed his identity. He was wearing the same set of attire when Zhang Heng saw him in the convenience store.

Zhang Heng knew that last night, the college student had to be targeting him because he told no one about his plan to go to the river to investigate the drownings. He had driven his grandfather's car to the river, not to mention the relatively remote surroundings of the route he picked. While on the way to the river, only an occasional car would pass him by.

Let alone sneak under the bridge pier when he was standing by the riverbank, Zhang Heng clung to the fact that the college student had arrived there than him last night. When the student saw Zhang Heng parking his car beside the river, he quickly hid underneath the pier. Hence, there were now questions to be answered. Why was the college student on the river last night? What was the relationship between him and the three drowned children?

Why was the college student so scared when he saw Zhang Heng? He even risked his life to jump into the water. Probably, he was the only one that had answers to these questions. Zhang Heng knocked on the door of the student's house, but there was no response. His parents were still at work at this hour, an indicator that he should be home alone now.

If memory served him right, Zhang Heng remembered that the student would practically stay at home all day ever since he was discharged from the mental hospital. Other than buying cigarettes, he wouldn't go anywhere else. Since he just swam in the river last night, there was no reason for him to wander around today.

So Zhang Heng continued to knock on the door.

After a while, Zhang Heng heard a feeble voice. "My parents are not at home. Please come back later."

"I'm here to find you," Zhang Heng did not beat around the bush, "I knew it was you last night. We have to talk."

As soon as his voice fell, he heard some weird clattering coming from inside, seeming as if things were knocked around. With a hint of panic, the student's voice came through the door. "I don't know what you are talking about. Hold on. I will open the door for you."

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows and rested his ear on the door.

After listening for a while, he turned around, walked down the stairs, and left the building. After that, he walked to the west, looked up, and saw the window of a college student's house on the second floor was opened. A man carrying a Sailor Moon schoolbag had his back facing him.

The college student was holding the window sill and was almost completely out of the window completely. One of his legs was on the air conditioner's compressor, and the other was trying to move it off the window sill.

It seemed the student wasn't one that fancied exercise. It took him quite some time to complete the action. Zhang Heng watched him struggle for a while and started to wonder if his leg had cramped up. For his safety, Zhang Heng had to speak out loud, "You can move your leg to the left first."

The student was startled when he heard the voice from behind him, almost falling off the second floor.

Giving up on the idea of getting out from the second floor, he attempted to crawl back into the house. Due to how anxious he had become, the leg that was stepping on the compressor did not exert enough strength, and it caused him to step on the empty space.

Fortunately, someone helped him to get back into the house at this critical moment. It was from Zhang Heng. When the college student started screaming, Zhang Heng quickly returned to the home to give him a hand.

The college student was trembling. Fearing for his life, he repeated the same phrase again and again, "I don't know anything! I don't know anything!"

Zhang Heng quickly closed the window after he pulled him back into the house. Fortunately, it happened so fast that no one from the community had spotted them.

Afterward, Zhang Heng took out the newspaper page about the drownings and threw it in front of the college student.

"Tell me, what do you have to do with this."

The moment the college student saw the headline of the news, he knelt on the ground and cried, "Let me go. I know I'm at fault. I don't know what the hell is wrong with me. Maybe I've been cooped out in the house for too long. I just wanted to get some fresh air! I've been cooped up inside the house for too long."

Zhang Heng frowned. Although the guy was dressed like a crazy person, it seemed his mind was still sound. And he still knew how to do things logically. When he heard that Zhang Heng was here to look for him, he immediately turned to the window, and he even lied before he tried to escape. If Zhang Heng had not heard his footsteps moving to another room, he might have been deceived by him. "What actually happened to them?" Zhang Heng asked.

However, no matter what he said, the college student only knew how to beg for mercy. And he even took off his pants while he was talking, and his squatting posture gave off the impression that he wanted to perform some hardcore stuff.

Just when Zhang Heng wanted to say something, he heard the sound of the key being inserted into the keyhole.

For unknown reasons, the college student's parents came home early today. Zhang Heng knew that he could not stay any longer, so he had to escape through the window. However, before leaving, Zhang Heng caught a glimpse of the college student's face, and he was a little surprised.

Instead of showing any sign of relief, the fear in the student's eyes had amplified, just like when he ran away from Zhang Heng at the pier last night. All his pores were closed tight. This time, there was nowhere for him to run to.

It was a pity that Zhang Heng could not talk to him anymore because the door was slowly opening. Zhang Heng took advantage of the last minute to jump out of the window, stepping on the air-conditioner's compressor. With backpack on his back, Zhang Heng and looked back at the window.

He saw a woman there, the mother of the college student. Like all the kind neighbors in the neighborhood, she smiled sweetly at Zhang Heng before closing the window and drawing the curtains.

Zhang Heng could no longer see what was going on in that room.

After Zhang Heng returned home, he threw his schoolbag into the bedroom. At that time, his grandpa also happened to walk out of the yard, holding a container that had some vegetables that had just been pulled out of the ground. He also carried some soil.

Zhang Heng took out a bottle of yogurt from the refrigerator and asked, "Do you know anything about the college student?" "Which college student?"

"The one who's mentally ill." "Oh, him. It's a pity." Grandpa said, "He had so much potential. He majored in mechanical engineering at Harbin Institute of Technology. He was supposed to become an engineer. It's a shame that he lost his mind."

"How did he become crazy?"

"I heard that he had a relationship problem. His first girlfriend broke up with him and married someone else. At his young age, he couldn't get over it. Hence he lost his mind gradually. During his most severe episode, he grabbed a kitchen knife from his house and shouted that he would kill anyone who approached him. His parents had no choice but to send him to a mental hospital for treatment. After he was released, he could finally control his emotions, but he was a broken man," Grandpa shook his head.

### **Chapter 643 Night Visit**

Zhang Heng inquired about the college student from his grandfather.

On the surface, there was nothing out of the ordinary. From the reason that drove him into madness to being sent to a mental hospital, it appeared the decision had been all but his parents' last resort. Despite that, Zhang Heng couldn't see how his parents were harming him.

Zhang Heng also remembered his grandfather telling him about the college student who lost his mind. He was at school the afternoon at the time of the incident, and it was talk of the entire neighborhood for a week. The student's parents seemed deeply saddened by this incident, so Zhang Heng's grandpa visited them, hoping to offer some comfort.

If that was the case, Zhang Heng could not explain the student's terrified expression when he heard the door opening. After Zhang Heng completed the Deductive Reasoning quest, his observation skill had significantly improved, and saw that the student's fear was genuine, the sort of fear that emerged from the depths of the soul.

It meant the student was indeed afraid of the person behind the door, just like how he turned and ran after seeing Zhang Heng from under the bridge pier. He must have thought that he'd come across someone like his parents.

The whole incident only seemed to get more interesting. Zhang Heng was now sure that gradually, he was getting more involved in the main quest of this dungeon.

Undoubtedly, the college student was the key to it.

Hence, Zhang Heng planned to pay him a visit again later tonight.

"You should leave the yogurt at room temperature for a while. I don't want you to catch a cold," said grandpa while walking into the kitchen with the drain basket he used to wash vegetables.

After a long wait, the hour hand finally pointed at twelve.

There was almost no difference between this world and the real one. If the time did not stop, it would be almost impossible to tell which world he was in.

As he did the previous night, Zhang Heng sneaked out of the living room carrying a backpack on his back.

After considering the possibility that a battle might occur, he brought along his Pestilence Bone Bow and Paris Arrow. Instead of going through the main entrance, Zhang Heng climbed from the west wall to the second floor and tapped lightly on the college student's room window.

Zhang Heng had already found out earlier on that this was the student's bedroom. The latter had probably left the house from this very room last night. Nonetheless, similar to what happened during the day, there was no one there to answer him.

Zhang Heng knew that the student did not believe him. Right now, the unwell man seemed to be in a state of extreme paranoia, unable to trust anyone but himself. It might why he chose to stay at home all the time.

Zhang Heng was well prepared for a situation like this. Since the student was unwilling to open the window, Zhang Heng decided to pry it open. First, he threw his backpack into the room, making sure he wasn't being ambushed.

Even if the student had a knife and was waiting to stab him, Zhang Heng was not worried. The man seemed frail, and it would be difficult for him to harm anyone even if he stood face to face with them. To be cautious, however, Zhang Heng did not jump into the room immediately after his backpack landed. He first took a quick glance around the room, and to his surprise, nobody was there.

The room was in an awful mess. The quilt on the bed was undone, and unwashed plates and bowls were stacked on the computer desk. It was exactly the kind of room where its owner spent most of his time there. Even more of a shame were many poorly maintained action figures and comics scattered all over the floor. Other than that, Zhang Heng caught sight of a slipper and the door that was slightly opened.

Given the degree of fear the student had toward his parents, Zhang Heng couldn't have imagined that he'd leave the door slightly ajar, something that would only serve to increase his psychological trauma.

Zhang Heng quickly realized that the student might not have left the room under his own will.

Instantly, he became vigilant, grabbing the Pestilence Bone Bow on his back as he strung the Paris Arrow onto it. When he passed the computer desk, he grabbed a Lego Gundam on the computer table and shoved it into his backpack.

To put his Infinite Building Block into use, other Lego bricks had to be built around it. However, a box of Lego was too way too expensive for a high school student, and there was no way he could afford it. Hence, all he could do was borrow the bricks from the college student first.

Zhang Heng then pushed the door lightly, and with a creak, the door started to open. He found another slipper under the sofa as he walked into the living room.

At this point, he could basically deduce what happened earlier-something or someone must have dragged the college student out of his room. The guy must have struggled a lot, explaining the scattered books and figurines. Amid his futile attempts to free himself, he had inadvertently kicked off one of his slippers in his room and left the other in the living room.

Zhang Heng even found a lock of hair by the sofa. It appeared that whatever that had dragged him out of his room must have been very strong. A sinking feeling started welling from within Zhang Heng's heart.

Perhaps he shouldn't have left him alone during the day. Zhang Heng thought that the student would be fine since he only left for a few hours. Now it seemed the decision had robbed the student of his last chance to survive.

Stuffing the lock of hair into his pocket, Zhang Heng looked around the living room as quickly as he could. Suddenly, he heard a noise coming from the kitchen behind him, prompting him to turn around. It was then that he saw a shadow on the frosted glass of the kitchen door. The silhouette stood there, staring at him with the coldest of stares.

Even at this moment, Zhang Heng managed to remain calm. He did not back up when he saw the silhouette. Instead, he kicked the door open.

Just as he was ready to fight, he discovered it had been a false alarm.

The silhouette turned out to be a mop. The moonlight casting a shadow on the glass door, coupled with a wild cat, had probably caused the sound. Zhang Heng, however, did not let his guard down. He had a strange feeling that the whole thing was only getting weirder.

When he kicked the door, the loud noise should have woken up the other people in the house. But until now, there was no movement in the master bedroom.

Zhang Heng did not hesitate. Since he was here, he might as well check out the master bedroom. If he did not figure out what happened to the college student, it would be difficult to know more about the aliens he needed to deal with in the main quest.

So Zhang Heng covered his face with a facemask before entering the master bedroom. Then he held his bow and arrow and walked towards the master bedroom.

If someone called the police now, not only would the authorities accuse him of trespassing, but they would charge him for attempted murder as well. When Zhang Heng walked into the master bedroom, however, he realized that his worries were unnecessary. The room was empty as well.

The college student was not the only one that went missing, but also his parents.

It was hard to imagine any family would go out together at this hour when most people were already asleep. Maybe they had an emergency that required them to leave the house. After a while, Zhang Heng's eyes were attracted by the bed.

There was nothing strange about this bed, save for it being a little too tidy. Especially the bed sheet-it wasn't wrinkled. Someone must have spent a reasonable amount of time to tidy up the bed. When Zhang Heng compared the master bedroom with what he saw in the living room and the college student's room, it did not make sense that the master bedroom was so tidy and clean.

This showed that the owner was not at all anxious when he tidied up the room, as if he was about to go on vacation.

## **Chapter 644 Thought It Through**



Zhang Heng was woken up by the alarm clock beside his bed.

The bad news was that he needed to be in school today to relive his high school life. There was a silver lining though. Today was Friday, and the weekend break was finally on the horizon if he were to hang in school for another day.

Zhang Heng yawned. He was a little sleep-deprived, having spent quite a long time at the college student's house last night. He wanted to try his luck and wait for the student or his parents to come home, but astonishingly, after waiting until five in the morning, none of them returned to the house.

To avoid being discovered by his grandfather, Zhang Heng had to sneak back to his house when the sky began to light up. Initially, he wanted to lie down for a while, but he remembered that he still needed to copy biology homework from someone else. So, he forced himself out of bed and gave his face a splash of cold water to feel better.

Seeing that he was running late, Zhang Heng gulped down two mouthfuls of soy milk, took a fried dough stick, and hurried out while carrying his schoolbag.

"Eat slowly, and... don't stay up late to read novels next time," Grandpa advised while flipping through his newspaper. "Anyway, the author stopped updating the novel," Zhang Heng replied to grandpa while changing shoes.

Although he had left home today a little earlier, the bus did not arrive on time, meaning he wouldn't arrive at school earlier than he did yesterday. On the contrary, Bai Qing, the one willing to lend Zhang Heng her homework, had been more attentive, arriving almost twenty minutes earlier than him. When she saw him walking into the classroom, she raised her eyebrows.

"Sorry for getting up late. I forgot to buy you a cup of milk tea. I will make it up in the afternoon." With one hand, Zhang Heng put down his school bag and pulled out the chair with the other.

"It doesn't matter. You won't be going anywhere soon anyway." Bai Qing handed over the biology workbook to Zhang Heng. "You should complete your homework first. I will take it back after the morning reading session."

"Thank you," he replied. At that moment, he realized how important it really was to have a good tablemate.

"I will help you keep an eye out for Teacher Han."

Although a kind soul by nature, she was a member of the study committee, and hence, hadn't done such a thing before. Instead of looking at the teacher, she couldn't help but catch a glimpse of him from time to time. As a result, it had now caught the attention of the teacher. Fortunately, Zhang Heng had high efficacy for copying, and by the end of the morning reading session, he managed to complete his homework.

So the second day of his high school life, Zhang Heng finally turned in his homework on time.

"What did you do last night?" Bai Qing said while doing her math homework during the break.

"Hmm?"

"We have only gone through two classes. And I lost count of how many times you yawned. You are affecting me," complained a frowning Bai Qing while moving the bangs covering her forehead aside.

"I was at my friend's house for a while." "For a while?" Bai Qing erased an auxiliary line with an eraser, her frown only getting deeper.

"Well, until dawn."

"Huh," Bai Qing snorted, adding the other two auxiliary lines, and wrote down the answer. After a while, she poked Zhang Heng's arm with a pen. "Is it a girl or a boy?"

"A brother, seven or eight years older than me."

"Pfft! You expect me to believe that?" Bai Qing rolled her eyes.

"The truth usually sounds unbelievable," replied Zhang Heng.

His mind appeared to be absent that morning, not only because he lacked sleep, but he was still trying to figure out what took place last night. Initially, Zhang Heng thought that the student was the one with the problems. Now, it seemed like his parents were the ones who had bigger issues.

Had they grown suspicious of him because of what happened yesterday afternoon?

Zhang Heng was confident with his skills, extremely certain that he had acted fast enough. When the student's mother entered the room, she couldn't have seen him jump out the window. However, the possibility that the college student told his parents about it couldn't be ruled out.

Other than that, it seemed that it was no coincidence that the student's mother left work yesterday. She probably wasn't there for him, but there was an 80% chance that the mother found out that he left home the night before. After all, the student was forced to jump into the river, and his clothes and socks must have been soaking wet. It wasn't easy trying to sneak into the house without anyone finding out.

What happened last night might have had something to do with this incident. For now, Zhang Heng was unsure how the college student and the three drowning children were connected. Right now, what he worried about the most was the safety of the college student.

After school was over, Bai Qing halted Zhang Heng, who was in a big hurry to leave the classroom.

"Eh, what do you want to do with your homework? Do you still want to copy it? I can't finish the weekend's homework in a day." "Can I have your address? I can come on Sunday," replied Zhang Heng as he stopped to think for a while. "Well, on Sunday I'm going to watch a movie and go shopping with a friend. We're just going over to Wanda Plaza. Can we meet there?"

"Sounds good to me."

"We'll continue this on WeChat then." Bai Qing, too, stuffed the books on the table into her backpack. "Are you in a rush to meet your girlfriend?" she muttered.

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Having learned his lesson, Zhang Heng took a taxi home this time. It also meant he had spent his weeks' worth of pocket money, the price he had to pay if he wanted to talk to the college student again before his parents got off work. Before he could do that, he had to be sure that the student was even alive in the first place.

No doubt, Zhang Heng was worried about him; it was also true that killing someone in modern society would be almost impossible without word getting around.

Unless the student's parents were criminal masterminds, they wouldn't have taken the route of murder. Amid worrying for the student's safety, Zhang Heng unexpectedly met somebody who looked like the student walking into the convenience store. "Please pull over," Zhang Heng told the taxi driver.

He quickly scanned the QR code to pay the fare and got out of the cab. Even before entering the store, Zhang Heng could confirm that the person inside was indeed the college student. However, he looked better than usual. He had shaved, changed a shirt, and was no longer wearing slippers. Now he looked like a top-tier college graduate. Standing in front of the cashier, he was talking to her. While they were talking, she lowered her head shyly and smiled. Zhang Heng then pushed open the glass door of the convenience store, and the doorbell rang.

A look of disappointment flashed across the cashier lady's face, but she still did not forget to greet her customer. "Welcome."

"Your name is Zhang... Zhang Heng, right?" The college student turned around, and he no longer panicked when he saw Zhang Heng. Instead, he seemed polite. While smiling, he stretched out his hand, "I remember you. You are Uncle Cheng's grandson, right?"

"Hmm." Zhang Heng shook hand with him.

His temperature and skin looked fine. Yesterday was the first time Zhang Heng approached the college student, and the man in front of him did look exactly like who he saw. In other words, he was indeed the college student that he encountered at the bridge pier.

Zhang Heng pointed at his head, "You feel better?"

"Yeah, I finally thought it through. I was so stupid. Love is not everything," the college student smiled bitterly. "When I was in college, I could solve all kinds of problems, even winning the grand prize for our national physics competition. I didn't expect that this simplest of problems would bother me for so long."

### **Chapter 645 Unknowns and Suspicion**

Zhang Heng looked at the college student in front of him. The latter was akin to the proverbial inspirational protagonist from a soap opera who had overcome many difficulties, defeated mental illness, and finally regained a new life. All the gloominess that surrounded him seemed to have gone.

He stood there, talking about how he overcame all the difficulties that he faced in his life, even mentioning how bad he felt for allowing his parents and friends to be worried sick of him. His emotions,

actions, or expressions were flawless, and judging by the lady cashier's response; it appeared that the prodigal son had now returned.

Mental illness could be categorized as a disease itself. Only a minute fraction of people could heal themselves, and it usually took a very long time.

The college student had been staying at home for so long, rarely leaving his bedroom. Zhang Heng, who had just met him yesterday afternoon and the night before, knew his condition showed no signs of improving. He still remembered that the student even took off his pants in front of him to play dumb. And with the sound of the key being inserted into the keyhole, the look of horror on the student's face wasn't something he could make up.

In a span of less than a day, however, the student made a miraculous recovery. After a night's disappearance, he abruptly reappeared, and he threw himself right into the public's embrace again. No matter how one looked at it, something was not right. But before Zhang Heng confronted him, he pointed at the side of the student's head, "Where did your hair go?" "Oh, I accidentally tripped and fell on the coffee table earlier. The doctor had to shave a bit of my hair before he stitched up the wound," the student explained, moving aside the hair that covered the wound. Zhang Heng saw the stitches.

"Oh, does it hurt?" The lady cashier girl said with concern. "I also heard that someone broke into your house. Was your injury from a fight with the thief?"

"No, the thief had already left when we woke up," replied the college student with a shake of the head. "I fell while tidying the house later on."

Zhang Heng knew that the college student was lying because he noticed that the hair had clearly been ripped-off violently. His hair, alongside some blood stains and scalp tissue, had been kept in a Ziploc bag inside Zhang Heng's bag. And his family was not even at home last night.

One thing left Zhang Heng wondering, though – how did the student change overnight from a person cowering in fear and begging for mercy into a man so good at making up stories. Even Zhang Heng, who had completed the Deductive Reasoning quest, saw no weaknesses in him.

The college student had almost become a completely different person.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng thought of something. He took an ice-cream from the freezer on the side and handed it to the lady cashier. At the same time, he said to the college student, "I don't have enough change in my e-wallet. Can you pay for me first?"

"No problem," the student chirped cheerily. "We are all neighbors in this small area. And I have caused you guys some trouble before," he added while taking out his wallet.

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows and said nothing. Now, he was convinced that not only was the man in front of him telling the truth. The student had to be a completely different person since he didn't couldn't recall how Zhang Heng paid the one yuan when he bought a pack of cigarettes two days ago. When Zhang Heng asked him a favor, the student would have surely mentioned the incident.

Was this a precursor to what he had to deal with throughout the duration of the quest?

A creature that could morph into another person and replace the person.

And others hardly noticed. Judging by the lady cashier's reaction, she obviously was oblivious to the fact that this was a different person she was talking to.

Hence, some things began to make some sense now. The college student must have been so afraid of his parents because they weren't actually his parents. All his troubles had nothing to do with the so-called emotional entanglement. That had to be the real cause of his mental illness.

No one was willing to believe him. After all, if he had not seen it with his own eyes, Zhang Heng himself would be having difficulties believing that something so bizarre could happen.

It was unimaginable how the student could live with his fake parents after getting discharged from the mental hospital. Under the intense psychological pressure he had been subjected to, it was a miracle he didn't go insane.

Now, it seemed that whatever little luck he had would end here.

Just last night, what happened to his parents finally happened to him. Despite the truth being out, Zhang Heng did not immediately act on it.

He was faced with the same predicament the college student once struggled with. All of the above had been Zhang Heng's speculation so far. He couldn't prove that the college student was not the original one. There was simply no difference between the two, and Zhang Heng had no idea what sort of alien enemy he faced and what methods they used to replace the student. Was it some cloning technology, or were they parasitic, mind-controlling creatures?

If he were to attack the student now, there were consequences he needed to consider. Although this quest had a shorter duration than his previous ones, he still had to be here for 140 days. This place wasn't like the vast West of the 19th-century United States. He could not just go into hiding after killing someone.

Zhang Heng was also oblivious to the number of enemies he faced. Other than the college student and his family, who else were under the control of these aliens? It appeared that the best course of action was for him to stay low for the time being. He needed to collect more evidence to carry on with the investigation.

Of course, having to stay vigilant at all times was a given. Judging from the college student's reaction, he did not seem to know what happened before. Desperate to live to the next day, Zhang Heng was unclear if the original student told his fake parents about him.

In a worst-case scenario, his identity had been exposed. Many preparations had to be done in advance in the face of the most unfavorable outcome. Zhang Heng took his ice-cream from the lady cashier, thanked the college student, and left the convenience store with his schoolbag on his back.

Although Zhang Heng did not look back, he was sure that the fake college student was watching him from behind.

It was a bad feeling. And more importantly, after discovering that the student had been silently replaced, Zhang Heng suddenly realized that perhaps he could only rely on himself in this quest because he did not know who else he could trust.

It had been a long time since he encountered a situation as such. As of now, he did not know who his enemies were, where they came from, and how many of them he was up against.

Going against them wasn't the scary part. The unknowns and suspicions were the most threatening factors Zhang Heng had to endure in this quest.

When Zhang Heng opened the door and looked at grandpa practicing calligraphy on the table, he suddenly felt that the old man looked a little strange.

## **Chapter 646 Surveillance**

Including the time he spent in the previous quest, Zhang Heng realized that he had been away from home for a long time.

It had been so long that he had forgotten the finer details of the old man when he used to live with him. His grandfather at that time undoubtedly looked younger—the world had developed rapidly over the years, and science and technology had advanced at a pace faster than anyone could imagine. None of those factors affected grandpa, though. In defiance to the test of time, he still kept many of his old habits.

Grandpa had always been a relatively old-school man. Time had not changed him one bit.

When the elderly man heard the door opening, he called out without looking up. "You're home earlier than usual."

"The rice is in the pot," he continued. "We'll be having curry chicken tonight; scoop as much as you can eat."

"Okay," Zhang Heng responded. He then changed his shoes without putting down his schoolbag and went straight into the kitchen to get himself a bowl of rice with curry gravy on top of it. After that, he went to his room with his food.

Grandpa did not say much about when he saw Zhang Heng bringing his food back to his room. However, he reminded, "Make sure a single grain of rice doesn't fall to the ground."

After Zhang Heng closed his room door, the first thing he did was disassemble the Lego Gundam that he acquired recently. Once it was done, he reassembled them into a brick kitten. And when he inserted the Infinite Building Block, the Lego kitten instantly bounced to life. It started licking its paw after it was put on the ground, and it wanted to squeeze itself into the box used to store Zhang Heng's test papers.

Zhang Heng ignored the feline. He placed a paper towel on the floor, then put a potato and some rice on it. The kitten didn't seem too very interested in curry, sneezing after it gave the gravy a sniff. In the end, it did finish eating the small spoonful of potatoes and rice. Zhang Heng then released it and watched it scurry around the house. After waiting for a while, he saw that the cat had no adverse reactions to the food.

Zhang Heng felt that he had become overly sensitive.

If his grandpa in this quest had been replaced by something else, Zhang Heng figured that it would barge into his room while he was sleeping—just like what they did to the college student. Going through all that trouble to poison his food didn't seem necessary.

After eating up the remaining curry chicken rice, he took the plate to the kitchen and washed it clean.

“Qin Zhen wants to meet me. I’ll be going out for a bit later,” he told grandpa. “Don’t come back too late.”

“Okay. Don’t wait up for me. Just sleep at your usual time. I have the key.”

After that, he returned to his bedroom, waiting a while before turning back the kitten into a pile of Lego building blocks and stuffing them into his schoolbag. This time, Zhang Heng had swiftly prepared the things he needed to bring with him. Other than the usual game items, he brought a USB flash drive as well.

For the next part of his investigation, Zhang Heng started by checking the CCTV footage. Last night, the college student’s entire family disappeared into thin air. It was impossible to leave the residence without leaving any traces when dozens of security cameras had been installed in the corridors. Judging from how badly the student had been struggling at that time, it was clear that he did not want to be taken away. Bringing a person out of the neighborhood against his will without being seen or heard would be almost impossible.

The most likely scenario was that the college student had been stuffed into the car’s trunk. After that, his fake parents left the neighborhood with the car. There were also CCTV cameras installed at the neighborhood’s entrance and exit, and if that were the case, their movements should have been captured.

To investigate the footage, Zhang Heng knocked on the door of the monitoring room.

“Coming!” a voice responded. The person inside put down his bowl, slipped on his flops, and walked over. After a while, the person opened the door and poked his head out. “What’s the matter?”

“I lost my phone, and I want to check the CCTV footage.”

A young man, the control room guard, was not much older than Zhang Heng and had just started working here less than half a year ago when he heard Zhang Heng’s request, a deep frown formed across his brow. “I can’t allow you to do that. You’ll have to come with a police officer if you want to check the CCTV footage. It’s a rule that the residents of our neighborhood are not allowed to watch the security recordings.”

“The police won’t care that I’ve lose my mobile phone. At most, I can only file a report. You show me the footage. If I don’t see it, I won’t bother to make a report, eh?” replied Zhang Heng

The zealous young man in charge of the control room shook his head. “No, no, rules are rules. If I let you in, I will be fired tomorrow.” The guard then closed the door.

But the next moment, a hand blocked the door that was about to close.

“I will make you a deal,” Zhang Heng went on.

“It’s not about money,” the young man harrumphed confidently with an awe-inspiring sense of justice. “The leader has asked me to supervise this area because I am a man of principle.” “I’m not planning to bribe you either. The deal is—you let me check the CCTV footage, and I won’t expose your dirty little secret.” The incident in question would happen two months later. The young guard had secretly

recorded a couple of surveillance clips when he was on duty in the control room. Instead of copying them into his flash drive, he decided to record the footage with his mobile phone mainly surveillance clips of attractive female residents living in the neighborhood. Since it was now summer, many women wore loose-fitting clothes. And the angle the CCTV cameras pointed at endeared him with the best view of them.

It was not until later that he got drunk and showed-off the recorded videos to others. Once the matter got exposed, the property agency fired him immediately. The incident had created an uproar in the community at that time, and Zhang Heng still vaguely remembered bits and pieces of it.

In fact, the real estate agency also shared part of the responsibility. They did, in fact, hire two people to work in the control room, but the other person happened to be a relative of the agency's higher-ups. The latter was paid every month, but he would never show up at work. This had opened up opportunities for the young man to make those mistakes.

Before he got fired, he recorded those surveillance clips for his personal pleasure, not expecting anybody to find out about his dirty little secret. The young guard's expression had changed drastically. "You, what did you just say?"

"You really think no one will know about the horrible things you've done?" Zhang Heng saw the young man put his hand into his pocket, attempting to destroy the evidence, and instantly grabbed his arm. "What are you trying to do?! I warn you, don't use violence on me," the young guard warned sternly. Seeing that Zhang Heng was all but a student, he tried to break free, but little did he expect his opponent had such great strength. He simply couldn't break free no matter how hard he tried.

"You can continue to shout... shout louder. I want to see which one of us would end up worse in the end," Zhang Heng replied in a calm tone.

The young man was in a dilemma. Not too long after that, he gave up resisting, nervously looking around his surroundings instead. When he saw that nobody had been paying attention to them, he said, "Come in first."

Zhang Heng knew that he had gotten the deal. He then followed the young man into the control room.

"Let me lay some ground rules. You can only have 20... no, 15 minutes top to look at the CCTV footage. And you can't make a copy."

Although the young guard had succumbed to Zhang Heng, he insisted on mounting a little resistance, all in the name of stroking his ego.

"Let me take a look at the CCTV footage first." Zhang Heng was not bothered by the young man. He was threatening the young man with his dirty little secret. In other words, he could just ignore the rules that were set by him.

### **Chapter 647 Suspicion**

"When did you lose your phone?" "Last night," Zhang Heng answered. "Uhh... which building do you live in?"

Zhang Heng gave the number of the college student accommodations to the guard.



“Unit 2, Block 5?” The guard sounded surprised. “Why? What is it?”

“Ah, err... no... nothing.” The guard was about to say something, but in the end, he clamped his mouth shut.

Zhang Heng reckoned that this man must have filmed someone from the building in secret, and although it had left an impression on him, he was afraid to talk about it.

Pretending as if he had not heard the overtone, Zhang Heng watched quietly as the guard picked out yesterday night’s recording. The young man then suddenly hesitated. “Actually, this recording is useless.”

“Now why would you say that?”

“You’ve probably heard about the student who just got discharged from the mental institution, right? Early this morning, they reported that a thief had entered their house, prompting the police to come and check the recording. “Did they find anything?”

“No. The police suspected that the thief circumvented the camera’s blind spots and climbed upstairs from there. Fortunately, nothing was taken, so the police didn’t investigate any further.”

Zhang Heng raised his brows but made no comment. He sped up the video and watched until the end. Save for a couple of folks still entering and exiting the building before midnight, most were already asleep, except for one guy. At around one, he stumbled into the building, drunk. No one else came out of the building until morning.

“Where’s the recording of the entrance?” Zhang Heng asked. “You want to see that too? Whoever found your mobile phone probably kept it in their pocket how could you possibly tell by watching the recording?”

The guard was reluctant, but Zhang Heng had something to use against him now. When he saw Zhang Heng looking at him, he scrambled to locate the gate’s surveillance footage. Zhang Heng spent another ten minutes watching the fast-forwarded surveillance video. The camera at the main entrance wouldn’t have caught wall climbers like Zhang Heng, but whenever a vehicle entered or exited the building, it would be well in the frame.

The college student’s red Honda Fit, nonetheless, did not show up on the recording.

Could three people just vanish into thin air within a span of a night?

Zhang Heng considered all the facts before proceeding to ask the guard, “Did anyone else come to the control room before the police came to see you?” “Erm... probably not,” the young man shook his head.

Zhang Heng could sense the hesitation in the man’s tone. “What do you mean by probably not?” he pressed on, hoping to invoke a more conclusive reply.

“Ah, now that you mention it... before the officers came, I received a phone call from the manager. He told me to bring something to him. I left the room for around ten minutes, and before I left, I made sure to lock the doors. Wait... What does that have anything to do with your missing phone? Are you here to find out about the college or your phone?”

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It then dawned on Zhang Heng that he had been one step behind all along. Chances were, the footage would have probably tampered with, all it would take was a set of passable tampering skills and it would have been impossible to notice any nuances with the naked eye. Since the college student's family had declared nothing stolen, it was likely the police wouldn't attempt to verify the footage's authenticity.

Zhang Heng was well aware that the call he made to the police that morning might have come off a little sloppy. Instead of forcing his family to show their true form, the way the whole thing turned out now made the student look like he was crying wolf. Zhang Heng did not know what happened to the family at that time, and he certainly did not expect a surveillance-footage-tempering-expert to be among them. It was worth noting that there wasn't much time to do anything before the police arrived at the place to check the video.

Being able to alter the footage in such a short amount of time could only mean that the culprit had to be very skilled at the job.

Even though Zhang Heng's Hacker skills were at Lv. 2, he had never tried tampering with security footage and knew that he wouldn't have been able to do it. However, this trip was not completely a waste of time. For now, at least, Zhang Heng knew that the manager that the young guard spoke to should be connected to the student's entire family getting swapped without anyone's knowledge.

Zhang Heng asked the guard for his manager's name, then copied the two tampered footages into a flash drive. Before he left, he warned the guard, "Don't tell anyone that I came here to the control room."

"Don't worry. I happen not to like my job anyway. If anyone finds out about you, the job is mine to lose," said the guard. Then, with an awkward smile, he added, "...and err, you've seen how cooperative I have been. That thing about the videos..."

"I won't tell anyone about it either. But you better not do it again. Also, remember one thing-keep your mouth shut when you drink," Zhang Heng said sternly, giving the young guard a final warning.

Even though things did not pan out as planned, Zhang Heng did not feel discouraged. He knew that delving into this was not going to be easy, and through the college student's incident, he could also tell that 'they' had been walking among humans for quite some time and were all too familiar with the rules and regulations of the human world. In fact, they were even more proficient at taking advantage of them than humans-like how they committed the college student into a mental institution.

Zhang Heng could imagine just how devastated the student must have become-his family had been palmed off, and not a single soul believed him. Everyone thought that his mental illness had worsened, and naturally, nobody would ever believe anything he said anymore. Worse of all, from tomorrow, he would have to live under the same roof with creatures who came from god-knows-where for the rest of his life.

Being forced into such a situation, even a normal person would develop severe depression over time.

But Zhang Heng realized somethingwhatever methods these creatures had employed to replace a grown, living person, it was definitely not easy for them. Otherwise, they would have never go through

all that trouble to send the student to the mental institute, then wait until now to destroy this threat once and for all.

What more, the news about the three children appeared that the 'accidental drowning' might have been related to these things. The question here was-why did they kill the children? If it was simply to avoid their cover getting blown, there was no logical reason that such drastic measures had to be taken. If they had the means to send a college student who was essentially an adult to a mental hospital, they would certainly have the means to control the three children.

From the way they behaved, it was obvious that they were extremely meticulous. After replacing a human with one of theirs, they would work hard to integrate themselves into society, avoiding attracting attention to the best of their abilities.

Henceforth, the riverbank drownings had gone on to become the latest hot topic, something that obviously did not correspond to the behavioral patterns of these creatures. On top of that, if the college student was so afraid of them, why did he take such a huge risk, running from the safety of his home to the dark, hazardous riverbank?

What was he really doing there the night Zhang Heng met him?

#### **Chapter 648 Smile**

Zhang Heng realized that he might have to go to the river again. His previous investigation was interrupted by the college student, not to mention how Zhang Heng found nothing valuable at the scene as well. Perhaps then, a second visit might yield some gains. At the same time, he had no intention to stop looking for the student. Until now, Zhang Heng had no idea if the college student was alive or dead. If he were still alive, he could not just sit there and do nothing. Zhang Heng wanted to know the truth, or save him if he could.

Although the creatures had modified the surveillance clips, there were still surveillance cameras everywhere. In this modern society, the government had installed surveillance cameras almost everywhere in the city. After coming out from the garage, the street outside was filled with shop lots, and many of them had their own surveillance camera. There were also vehicles parked by the roadside overnight. Their dashcams might have captured something important.

Going through the footage one by one, however, would take a lot of effort. And Zhang Heng couldn't threaten the shop owners like he threatened the young guard. Hence, he could only look for the brand of the cameras in their shops, pretend to be the manufacturer, and contact them for a free quality inspection.

Upon thinking about that, Zhang Heng started to miss Fan Meinan. Although he had Lv.2 makeup skills, it turned out that Fan Meinan was still better at it. She was Loki's agent anyway. With a professional liar like her on his team, it would life a lot easier.

That said, Fan Meinan should be fighting in her own proxy-war quest right now, so Zhang Heng could only leave the thought behind.

Considering the current situation, it was necessary to learn from those things, and caution needed to be taken with every step.

Zhang Heng did not head home immediately after watching the surveillance clips; instead, heading to Qin Zhen's house first. Both friends since childhood, Zhang Heng's grandfather and Qin Zhen's parents were well acquainted with each other. To ensure that no one would suspect him, Zhang Heng decided to put on a full show, going to Qin Zhen's house to play video games for an hour.

The two were playing NBA 2K16 in Qin Zhen's room. One controlled the Warriors, while the other the Cavaliers. "I have something else to do on Sunday. I don't think I can come and find you," said Zhang Heng as he scored a three-pointer with Curry.

"Huh? What do you plan to do this time? Please don't tell me you need to buy soy sauce same excuse twice, aren't you?" Qin Zhen asked after he used Owen to shoot a three-pointer.

"No, but I have an appointment with a classmate." This time, Zhang Heng tried to shoot with Thompson but failed.

"Boy or girl?" inquired Qin Zhen as he controlled another Thompson to catch the rebounding basketball from the backboard.

"Why does gender matter so much?"

"Otherwise, what should I pay attention to? Should I ask which supermarket you'll visit or what brand of soy sauce you consume?" Qin Zhen asked. "As a friend, of course, I have to pay attention to your personal life... and you'd better be dating a girl. Otherwise, it would be weird when you start missing our appointments for another man."

"...I'm just going to borrow her workbook and copy her answers." Leveraging a distracted Qin Zhen, Zhang Heng stole the ball from him and pulled the Warrior's signature move defensive counterattack.

"So your date is really a girl?" Qin Zhen seemed uninterested in playing the game. He continued to serve slowly from the backcourt.

"Yes, she is my tablemate."

"Yes. It's always better to go after someone close to you. Where are you two planning to meet? KTV, movie theater, or milk tea shop?"

"Wanda Shopping Mall." "Oh, awesome! You are getting better at this. Attacking and defending simultaneously," Qin Zhen praised Zhang Heng and gave him a thumbs up.

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Zhang Heng was speechless. He glanced at the time on the wall clock and realized he had stayed here for almost an hour. After finishing the last half of the game, he returned the controller to Qin Zhen. "You win. It's time for me to go home now." "Hold on. Aren't we supposed to play seven rounds? The conditions are for one of us to win at least four rounds. We've just played two," Qin Zhen grumbled. "Isn't it Friday today? There will be no class tomorrow. Why are you rushing to go back?"

"I am not like you. I still have a lot of things to do." Zhang Heng got up and said.

"I can help you," Qin Zhen also put down the controller, opened a bag of sausages, and tossed two sausages to Zhang Heng. "I will help you to court your tablemate if you play longer with me."

Zhang Heng hesitated as he took the sausages. He was not thinking about wooing Bai Qing, but he considered asking Qin Zhen to help him with the main quest. Since he could not rely on Fan Meinan, he had to start looking for someone else to help him with the dungeon.

After all, collecting surveillance clips and watching all of them would require a lot of time. If there were another pair of eyes, the task would be more efficient, saving more time at the end of the day.

Zhang Heng thought for a while and suddenly asked, "On Christmas in the fifth grade of elementary school, you asked me to send a greeting card to a girl that you liked. What is her name again?"

"Sun Jia." A strange look appeared on Qin Zhen's face, "Why mention it?"

"It's nothing. It would help if you practiced your calligraphy when you have the time. If you reencounter a similar thing, you might slightly increase your rate of success," Zhang Heng said.

In the end, Zhang Heng gave up asking him for help. The fake college student he met in the afternoon didn't recall the one yuan he owed, and through that, Zhang Heng knew that those creatures could not inherit the memories of its host. However, Zhang Heng did not know when they infiltrated human society and how long had they stayed in it.

As for now, Zhang Heng had no way to figure out the answer. Even if Qin Zhen could name the girl he once liked, nobody could tell if this Qin Zhen was the real one. Hence, to be safe, it was better that he acted alone.

Soon, Zhang Heng exited Qin Zhen's house and was about to go home. When he walked to the second floor, however, he found the voice-activated light to be broken. After stomping his foot twice and receiving no response, he ignored it and walked down a few more steps. Suddenly, he saw a figure standing quietly in the dark downstairs.

Zhang Heng stopped and stared at the figure without saying anything. The shadow was also looking at him, its intentions unknown. After a while, the dark shadow grinned, "What a coincidence." "Yes." Zhang Heng said, "What are you doing here?"

Even though the person's face was hidden in the darkness, Zhang Heng could still recognize the shadow's height and size.

It was the fake college student.

He then raised the stainless steel basin in his hand and said, "I'm helping my mother deliver some jelly she made to Aunt Wang. How about you?"

"I'm here to visit a friend," Zhang Heng

for a while." "Hmm. The lights here are broken." "It was fine when I came here just now."

"Maybe it's just bad luck."

"Your luck is indeed bad," said Zhang Heng.

When he heard those words, the college student suddenly put on a smile. The smile slowly spread from the corner of his mouth, like a ripple—the muscles of his face seemed to be pulled back by an unnatural force. It was obviously a laughing expression. However, the laugh made no sound like a puppet with a

### **Chapter 649 Jelly**

Zhang Heng simply stood quietly, waiting for the college student to finish smiling. “What’s so funny?” he asked.

“Oh sorry, I thought of something when I just stood here.” “What is it?”

“Did you know that the jelly is made of pigskin?”

“Hmm.”

“You see it right? How did anybody not see it before? Humans consider this intelligent species as food, consuming their flesh, skin, and even their bones. It is as if they exist solely to be eaten. No one seems to think of this as a cruel act. Everyone I’ve met thinks that this is the way the world works.” The college student curiously poked the jelly in the pot with his finger. “Interesting. So, such is the civilization I’ll be facing.”

“Trust me. I’ve seen our civilization commit deeds that are way worse,” Zhang Heng said. “Eating jelly is definitely not among the top ten.’ “If that’s the case, does that mean that a species of higher intelligence can decide the fate of a lower one without asking for its consent? In other words, if a species is on a higher level than a human, they must be allowed to eat humans too.”

“I do not think so.”

“Why? Humans have been doing the same thing to pigs.”

“Because I don’t want to be a piece of jelly?” replied Zhang Heng with a raise of an eyebrow. “Hahaha!”

The college student laughed again when he heard Zhang Heng’s reply. This time Zhang Heng could finally hear his laughter. It sounded a bit screechy, like chalk scratching a blackboard. After he was done laughing, he said to Zhang Heng, “You are the most interesting person that I ever met.”

“It sounds like you haven’t met a lot of people.”

The college student nodded and pointed at his head, “I had a problem here before. I have been staying at home for a very long time.”

“You don’t look too good right now. Don’t you need a few more courses of medicine to recover completely?”

“I will take my medicine when I go back later. But first, I’ll have to deliver this skin jelly to Aunt Wang.”

After the college students finished speaking, they started to move again.

The distance between the two gradually got closer and closer. When Zhang Heng realized that he was two steps away from the college student, he tilted his body slightly.

“Thank you,” the college student gave a sincere thanks.

“You’re welcome.”

“I’m not that bright, but I like to deal with bright people. I hope you can always be this smart.”

“If you are not that smart, it’s better that you give a little less of your false suggestions to anyone in the future,” replied Zhang Heng in kind.

After that, the two spoke no further, with one heading upstairs and the other in the other direction.

Zhang Heng walked out of the gate and looked back at the building behind him.

He knew that what happened tonight was not a coincidence. Although the student used the excuse of delivering jelly to Aunt Wang, Zhang Heng knew that the creature was actually waiting for him.

Maybe it was because the real student could bear it no more and told had the creature everything about himself. Or perhaps the conversation with Zhang Heng at the convenience store had raised its suspicions.

Noticing how the creature had deliberately looked for Zhang Heng at night, the creature must have attempted to use the same method he used on the real student. Knowing that Zhang Heng could not expose them, he deliberately created a terrifying atmosphere, hoping to drive fear into Zhang Heng’s heart and driving him mad. However, they obviously underestimated Zhang Heng’s mental state. Let alone the fact that Zhang Heng was saner than the ordinary person, his mental state was robust and had been greatly fortified, considering the unfathomable things he witnessed during the numerous quests he had participated in. That level of intimidation was no better than opening a can of herring. When he saw the college student standing in the dark, Zhang Heng’s breathing didn’t change, slow and calm as before. Moreover, this encounter verified his previous inferences. Although he hadn’t figured out the nuances of these creatures, the one thing that could confirm, was that they couldn’t take someone’s form whenever they desired to. In other words, even if those things started to grow suspicious of him, as long as they were not prepared to take his form; he would be safe for the time being.

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However, the state of relative security would not last forever. The next step would depend if those things were prepared to take on Zhang Heng’s form, or if he managed to uncover any useful clues.

Zhang Heng did not stay there any longer. He quickly returned home, waited for his grandfather to fall asleep, took his car key, and drove back to the river where the three children were drowned.

However, after a night of searching, nothing was found.

This time, Zhang Heng focused his search on the bridge pier where the college student hid that night. He rolled pebbles away and dug the ground and despite all that, all he found was beer bottles, plastic bags, leather shoes, and other garbage.

After another futile effort, Zhang Heng headed home, taking a two-hour nap before going out again to check on the surveillance cameras of the nearby shops. This time he finally found something useful.

A few shops’ cameras actually captured the red Honda Fit of the student’s family at midnight. However, these cameras installed outside the shops were angled toward the entrances they guarded. To know where the student family went that night, Zhang Heng had to combine all the clips.

He spent a good half of the day rummaging through surveillance clips from two different streets to confirm where the Honda Fit was heading to. Then, Bai Qing sent him a text, saying that she and her friend had arrived at Wanda Shopping Mall, and she wanted to know Zhang Heng's whereabouts.

Sending her a reply that would get there as soon as possible, Zhang Heng hurried to the bus station and took a bus to Wanda Mall.

He saw Bai Qing upon arriving on the first floor of the mall. She was in a grey T-shirt with a pair of denim shorts and a pair of white sneakers, lugging around a canvas bag on her back. She was standing in front of a KFC restaurant, staring at the mall entrance.

She seemed to be looking all over the place, but since it was a Sunday and the mall was packed, she failed to spot Zhang Heng.

It was not until Zhang Heng quickly walked to her side that Bai Qing reacted with her eyes open wide. "Hey! When did you arrive?!"

"I just got here. How about you?"

"It's been a while."

"Where is your... friend?"

Zhang Heng remembered Bai Qing saying that she'd come to the mall to watch a movie with her friend. However, she was alone now.

"Don't talk about it. We just went to collect the movie tickets, and I told her that I have to pass you the workbook. I had no idea where she went. Then, she sent me a text to meet up when the movie starts," complained Bai Qing.

"When does your movie start?"

"There is still an hour and a half left. We were supposed to go shopping first."

"Have you eaten? If you haven't eaten, I'll get you a burger..."

Zhang Heng pointed at the KFC beside him. But before he could say anything more, he suddenly remembered that he had spent every dime of the week's pocket money.

### ***Chapter 650 Don't Forget To Bring It On Monday***

Zhang Heng had spent most of his pocket money on batteries and Florida Water. Before he started to work on the quest, he went online and bought a batch of books. The two then strolled into KFC. "Check out what you want to eat first. I'll make a call."

"Hmm." Bai Qing looked slightly uncomfortable. It was her first time going to KFC with a boy alone, and it felt strange to her.

Zhang Heng went to a corner and called Qin Zhen. Unfortunately, Qin Zhen was a bigger spender than him. The pocket money he had saved for two months had been spent on buying a pair of sneakers. It was the weekend now, and he had not gotten his pocket money yet.



After that, Zhang Heng contacted his grandfather. Much to his relief and surprise, grandpa wired him the pocket money in advance without asking any questions. Zhang Heng was relieved. When he returned to Bai Qing, he found that she had already paid for his meal.

“I ordered you a child’s meal that comes with a toy.”

“Huh?”

“Just kidding. I ordered a meal for two, but I only want the burger and drink. You can have the rest,” Bai Qing chirped. “Ah. I’ll return the money to you...”

“No need,” Bai Qing shook his head and said, “You bought me milk tea before.”

“The price of milk tea is nothing when compared to a KFC meal. Besides, I’ve always copied your homework, and it’s just not right getting me something like this,” Zhang Heng said, taking a quick glance at the menu to look for the price of the meal that Bai Qing just paid.

“You don’t have to pay me back.” Bai Qing waved her hands at Zhang Heng again and again, “You helped me before. I was blocked by girls outside the school last semester. You were the one who helped me out of that sticky situation.”

“Wow. You still remember that incident?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

That incident was completely unwarranted. She did not know the sports committee student from the next class, but the latter seemed to like her a lot. The boy was close to some bad apples, the kind of students that dropped out of school, worked an illegal job, but when someone asks them to do something horrible, they couldn’t stomach doing so. People like them would usually hang out in a group and wander around aimlessly.

Among these was a young lady who was the girlfriend of a member of the sports committee. When she noticed that her man had his eye for another girl, she gathered her friends and ganged up on Bai Qing.

Bai Qing was dumbstruck when they ganged up on her. Fortunately, Zhang Heng left school late that day, and the moment he saw her getting surrounded, he walked over and pulled her away. When girls saw that a boy had come to her aid, they did not dare do anything other than provoke her with words that weren’t too kind to the ear. The mob then watched the two leave the school. A month later, Bai Qing’s parents had decided that they’d fetch her to school and pick her up every day.

Some time had passed since it happened, and if Bai Qing hadn’t mentioned it, Zhang Heng wouldn’t have remembered at all. Bai Qing did not want to dwell on the issue of who should pay the bill. So, she passed the receipt to Zhang Heng

“Please get the meal. I will look for a place.”

“Sounds good.”

During the weekend, the number of people visiting KFC rivaled that of the mall, and one had to be lucky enough to find a seat. Fortunately, when Zhang Heng got the set meal, Bai Qing had found a two-person seat in the corner as well. She waved at him.

Zhang Heng walked over with the tray and looked at the drink and the burger in front of him. "You choose first..." they both blurted in unison.

"Then I shall pick first because I'm very thirsty." Bai Qing decided on a cup of lemon oolong tea and a chicken burger, then pushed the tray to Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng had spent a long time investigating the case that he was working on. Without saying a word, he devoured his burger in a few bites and gulped down half a glass of cola in one breath.

"Do you want more food? I can go and order more."

Bai Qing took her time to enjoy up her burger. By the time Zhang Heng finished his meal, she had only gone through less than a third.

"There are still some fries and drumsticks. It should be enough for me," replied Zhang Heng as he yawned.

"Am I really that boring?"

"Ah, no. It's not about you. I just didn't get enough rest in the past two days," Zhang Heng explained.

"Hmm... You went looking for that older brother again?"

"No, this time I was busy with something else," Zhang Heng said.

"You are always so mysterious," Bai Qing commented.

Zhang Heng changed the subject. "What about you? What are you up to?"

"Me? I'm just doing my usual stuff, studying and revising whatever I learned in class. It's only today that I have the time to come to the mall," said Bai Qing as she bit the straw.

She still felt kind of nervous when she talked to Zhang Heng and had no idea where to look. The truth was, she had known Zhgn Heng for some time now, not to mention that they were tablemates as well. The truth was she had known Zhang Heng for some time now. Logically, she should have felt comfortable talking to Zhang Heng.

Could it have been the mall's air conditioning? Bai Qing unconsciously rubbed her arm.

The two soon embarked on a great chatting session. They talked about volunteering at the college entrance examination. Bai Qing was gradually relaxed over time, even telling Zhang Heng about her family.

"Lately, I feel my dad's been getting weirder."

"Oh, why say that?"

"He used to socialize with his clients and come back late every night. My mother quarreled with him all the time because of this. He recently started to come home early, and I caught him looking at family photos we took a long time ago. This is the weirdest part: He's always taught us never to look back on the past. I haven't seen him taking the initiative to look at the family photos." Zhang Heng's expression

instantly changed when he heard about Bai Qing's father. "Did he do other strange things?" Bai Qing waved her hand. "No, my dad is a very serious man. He doesn't usually smile. Sometimes I don't even dare to talk to him. He doesn't do anything stranger than that, I guess?" After a pause, she continued. "Is he in a midlife crisis? Is that why he looked through the photos?"

Zhang Heng did not know if he had become a little sensitive, thanks to what happened to the college student. He had started getting suspicious of everyone that acted differently, thinking that they had to be one of those creatures. Certainly, flipping through an old photo album proved nothing for now. Human beings were not machines, and regardless of how mundane the person was, they couldn't possibly do the exact same thing every day. Out of cautiousness, however, Zhang Heng said to Bai Qing, "If your dad does anything unusual in the future, you can tell me about it."

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"What's the point?" Bai Qing raised her eyebrows, "Can you control my dad?"

"I can't control your dad, but it's always good to have someone to talk to," Zhang Heng said. To conceal his true intentions, he then added, "Of course, you can talk to me about other things."

Bai Qing obviously misunderstood the meaning of the statement. Her face flushed, and she lowered her head to stare at her shoes. After a while, she glanced at her watch. "Oh crap. The movie will start in 5 minutes! How did we talk for so long?"

"Go catch your movie first," said Zhang Heng.

Bai Qing hurriedly took out her homework from her canvas bag and passed them to Zhang Heng before leaving. She thought for a while before finally saying, "Don't forget to bring them back to me on Monday."