

48 Hours 671

Chapter 671: Examination

The corpse was with the authorities now.

An autopsy would usually be carried out on those who went through an unnatural death to gain a deeper insight into the fatal wounds.

For this case, the cause of death was undeniable. Hence, the forensic doctors did not need to perform an autopsy on Bai Qing's mother. Even after the examination was completed, family members were not allowed to retrieve the corpse immediately. It would be placed at the funeral home temporarily.

Since Bai Qing's mother's death fell under criminal investigation, even her family members could not see her anytime they wanted. And Zhang Heng did not want other people to be around when he examined the corpse. So Bai Qing and Zhang Heng waited until the funeral home closed in the evening before they headed over there.

Zhang Heng then said to Bai Qing, "Wait for me outside the funeral home."

The latter bit her lip when he heard Zhang Heng's instruction. "I want to go with you because I want to see her again."

"I don't think it's wise to traumatize yourself again. Let alone the fact that we have to sneak in this time," Zhang Heng said.

"I have changed into my sport shoes," Bai Qing said.

Zhang Heng turned around, only to see how determined Bai Qing looked.

"I have to see it with my own eyes to believe what you just told me," the girl added.

Zhang Heng thought for a bit before agreeing. "Okay. Follow me closely."

The two had already checked out the place once during the day. Due to the nature of this business, thieves would usually not target funeral homes, and security here was average. Although some CCTV was being installed in the funeral house, they were mainly located in the columbarium. That was because some family members liked to place items that were once belonged to the deceased in that particular room, including necklaces, rings, and bracelets.

Besides that, the funeral home also hired some security guards to look after the place at night.

Zhang Heng climbed over the lower wall and landed at the back of the green zone. Then he reached out and caught Bai Qing, who just jumped off the wall. The two passed through a small flower bed, and the funeral home's main building was right in front of them. The hall facing the flower bed was a high-end memorial hall, and behind it was the mourning hall. The door to the memorial hall, however, was now locked.

Zhang Heng and Bai Qing went to the side corridor, pried a window from there, and slipped into the memorial hall. From there, they could walk to the cremation room, where only a broken CCTV greeted them along the way.

At midnight, the funeral home was extremely quiet.

The funeral home's busiest time started at 7 a.m. The two high-end halls, six mid-range halls, and two ordinary halls would hold memorial services continuously throughout the day. Some said that whether the deceased was rich or poor, they all looked the same after they died.

Actually, this statement was not entirely correct.

On average, hundreds of people usually attended a high-end memorial service, and the high-end memorial hall would not fit all of them. Whether the people who came for the memorial service were close to the deceased or not, they would still come to pay their respects with flowers. Some funeral services would be held at the ordinary halls where it was attended by only a few of the closest relatives.

Other than that, from renting the mourning hall to the funeral vehicle, the shroud, and the cemetery slot all came with different price tags. Other than that, their customers were also given options to pick the type of funeral service. It implied that not even the dead could escape the hierarchy so deeply rooted in our society.

This made people believe that we had to expect that we would never be treated fairly when we were born into this world. And this applied to the dead as well.

Zhang Heng and Bai Qing walked through the corridor as quietly as possible.

When they heard the sound of footsteps coming from a distance, the two stopped and temporarily hid in the dressing room on the side, a spot where the morticians worked. Usually, they would clean and do some makeup for the corpse before they were sent for cremation. Bereaved family members would want their loved ones to look as beautiful as possible before sending them away on their final journey.

There was no one inside now; only a few iron racks were placed in it. Zhang Heng and Bai Qing hid behind a rack against the wall, waiting for the sound of footsteps from the outside to approach them. Zhang Heng could feel Bai Qing's breathing becoming more rapid. She probably thought of something that caused her mood to become a little unstable, and she began to tremble again.

Hearing that the footsteps were getting closer and closer to them, Zhang Heng hesitated and had to stretch out a hand to pat her back.

Zhang Heng could see that Bai Qing was trying her best to stop herself from crying. She buried her face into Zhang Heng's embrace, and her shoulders heaved slightly. Zhang Heng gently stroked Bai Qing's back to calm her down.

The light from the flashlight shone through the window into the dressing room. Fortunately, the security guard had no intention to enter the room. The people who chose to work as security guards here were usually quite bold. However, they would not deliberately look for things that they were not supposed to do. After they checked out the place briefly, they would quickly take their leave to inspect another place.

When the footsteps moved to the end of the corridor, Bai Qing's body finally stopped shaking.

After that, Zhang Heng felt that his chest was wet. When he lowered his head to look at it, he saw snot and tears on his shirt. Bai Qing raised her head and quickly apologized to Zhang Heng in a low voice. She then promptly wiped them away.

Zhang Heng handed her a tissue and said to her, "It's okay. Let's carry on."

Bai Qing nodded and followed Zhang Heng to leave the dressing room.

She sniffled and said, "I'm sorry, I thought about how my mother's body would be pushed into the room, and she's lying there all alone... It makes me really sad."

"That might not be the case," Zhang Heng comforted.

The two then walked through the cremation room, passed the empty forensic room next to it, walked through another corridor, and finally reached the morgue. It was a place where the funeral home temporarily stored the corpses and was probably the largest area on the grounds. All the freezers were neatly arranged in the morgue.

Zhang Heng looked at Bai Qing beside him and asked, "Are you sure you want to watch what happens next? You have been very brave so far, but if you want, you can just stay outside and let me do the work."

"We are here now. Let's get over it." Although Bai Qing's face had turned pale, she still insisted on staying with Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng then opened his backpack and took out two pairs of rubber gloves. He put on one of them and handed the other to Bai Qing.

During the afternoon, Zhang Heng had already found out where Bai Qing's mother was located. It was easy for them to find her since there was a number written on each freezer. Once Zhang Heng opened the freezer, he could feel the chill hitting on him.

Although the security guards had just patrolled this area and would not return until the next shift, Zhang Heng wasted no time, pulling out the body bag and placing it on the flatbed trolley beside him.

After that, Zhang Heng proceeded to open the body bag. Although Bai Qing tried her best to control her emotions, she still could not help but cry when she saw her mother's body.

Zhang Heng did not pay too much attention to the body's surface because he knew that the forensic doctor had done a thorough examination on her before. So he did not waste his time checking the apparent wound. The police would generally not send the body for an X-ray and CT scan for such obvious injuries.

Zhang Heng then took out the Lego bricks in his backpack and assembled a small CT scanner as fast as possible.

After that, he inserted the Infinite Building Block into the Lego CT scanner. While Bai Qing was looking at him in surprise, a fully functional Lego CT scanner was presented in front of her.

Zhang Heng and the forensic doctor focussed on completely different aspects. He did not care about the fatal injuries on the corpse. What he was interested in was its internal structure. In short, what he

wanted to know was whether the corpse and a real human had any differences. From there, he wished to figure out how those aliens took into human forms at will.

Chapter 672: Closer

Other than checking out the place during the day, Zhang Heng spent the better part of the day attempting to assemble the CT scanner. Thank goodness his efforts were not in vain. It took him about 20 minutes to get to the morgue, but he managed to assemble the CT scanner that he wanted.

And scanning the body was not that complicated as well. Even a layman like Zhang Heng could learn to operate it from manuals he downloaded from the internet.

What he received next, however, was the raw image from the CT scanner. He would need someone professional to process and analyze the image. Zhang Heng then pushed the CT scanner aside and waited quietly for the Infinite Building Block effect to expire. As for Bai Qing, she was staring at her mother. The lady's eyes were closed, and she looked like she was asleep. The horror on her face was gone too. She looked like she was in peace.

After 45 minutes had passed, Zhang Heng looked at the time on the phone, dismantled the Lego CT scanner, and put the bricks back into his backpack. He then said to Bai Qing, "We are leaving now."

"Let me take another look, just one look." Bai Qing said.

Zhang Heng did not rush her after hearing her request. He just stood at the side quietly.

Half a minute later, Bai Qing zipped up the body bag and pushed her mother back into the freezer. She suppressed her grief and asked, "What shall we do next?"

Zhang Heng looked at Bai Qing's slightly red and swollen eyes and shook her head. "There is nothing else for us to do for the time being. Go back and rest first. I will send the image to a friend that works in the hospital. When the results come out, I will contact you again."

"But I can't sleep now." Bai Qing said.

"You have to try to sleep because this is likely going to be a long battle." Zhang Heng said, "In my experience, whether you are looking for your mother or saving your father, you need sufficient physical strength to support you till the end of this battle."

"Will you stay with me then?" Bai Qing bit her lip.

Initially, Zhang Heng wanted to go home to prepare for the follow-up investigation. Still, considering that he had not slept for almost the entire whole night, it was difficult for him to say no after looking at Bai Qing's current mental state.

"Yes, I will stay," Zhang Heng finally said. "Let's go back to the hotel."

Since the funeral home was at the city's outskirts, it was almost dawn when they returned to the express hotel. Zhang Heng bundled up all the information that he collected and composed them into an email. Due to the fact that he was worried about those aliens had fully penetrated human society, he had to go to the hospital to verify that his friend was still his friend. To be safe, he also called his

parents, who lived far away in Europe, asking them to find someone they knew to help analyze the CT image.

He then drew the curtains, and the room became dark again.

“Sweet dreams,” Zhang Heng said to Bai Qing, who was on the bed.

Seating himself on the chair under the window sill, he leaned his head against the wall with his feet propped on the other chair.

About a quarter of an hour later. He heard Bai Qing asking from the other end of the room. “Are you still there?”

“Yes,” Zhang Heng replied in the dark.

“Can you... come closer?” Bai Qing asked softly.

“Sure.”

After Zhang Heng finished speaking, he moved the chair to the side of the bed. Before he sat down, he heard Bai Qing spoke in a hoarse voice.

“...A little closer.”

So Zhang Heng laid down on the other side of the bed and then asked, “Is it better now?”

Bai Qing did not answer him. She just stretched out her hand, touched Zhang Heng’s face, and asked with a hoarse and crying voice. “Why, why did this happen to me...”

Her palms were ice cold, and her voice was filled with sadness, like a lost puppy under the heavy rain, not knowing where to go.

“Sorry for getting you involved in this,” Zhang Heng apologized.

In the real world, Bai Qing did not need to experience the separation of life and death from her loved ones. She was still happily attending classes at the university, and after all, this was just one of the events in this dungeon. Usually, such an event was linked to the assigned quest.

Zhang Heng held Bai Qing’s hand and said softly, “Don’t worry, it will be better when you open your eyes again.”

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The next time Bai Qing opened her eyes, Zhang Heng was gone. Soon, she heard the sound of water.

When she was still sleeping, Zhang Heng took a cold shower and analyzed the information he collected. After he got dressed and walked out of the bathroom, he found out that Bai Qing had woken up. And his face was blushing.

Nothing happened between the two, even though they slept together. Although they were lying on the same bed, they were fully clothed. Having no other thoughts, Bai Qing just wanted to find someone she trusted to stay with her. Likewise, Zhang Heng had no other intentions towards her as well.

He uncapped a bottle of mineral water and tossed another to Bai Qing.

“The results of the CT scan is here.”

To Zhang Heng’s surprise, it turned out that his unreliable parents were more effective than his friend that worked at the hospital. They sent the result back to him in two hours. An hour and a half later, his friend that worked at the hospital sent Zhang Heng his results.

The two sets proved similar. The image’s three-dimensional reconstruction showed that the corpse’s bones and blood vessels were almost indistinguishable from that of an ordinary human body. Only its brain managed to attract the analysts’ attention.

“What does it mean by an abnormal fourth ventricle?” Bai Qing walked to the computer.

“The fourth ventricle is an anatomical structure located between the midbrain, pons, and cerebellum. The fourth ventricle’s content was mainly cerebrospinal fluid connected to the third ventricle, the subarachnoid space, and the central canal of the spinal cord. The fourth ventricle of an ordinary person has a quadrangular pyramid shape. But the fourth ventricle on the CT image is twice the size of an ordinary person, and it has a very neat hemisphere,” Zhang Heng said.

“Hmm?”

“Let’s put it this way, the analysts who saw the CT image believed that such a neat hemispherical shape could not be formed naturally. It is more like an industrial product. In other words, it was manufactured artificially. In addition, the CT image also shows that the top of the skull has traces of cutting, and it was healed after that. The radius coincides with the fourth ventricle.”

“What does this mean?”

“This means that there are many possibilities, and it is not possible for us to draw any conclusions yet.” Zhang Heng said, “But one thing is certain. The brains of the people who have been replaced are different from those of ordinary people. Look here.”

Zhang Heng pointed at the fourth ventricle on the CT image. There was an irregular-shaped shadow at the bottom of it.

“What’s that? Is it a tumor?” Bai Qing squinted, trying to figure out what that was.

For some reason, the shadow creeped her out.

“I don’t think so.” Zhang Heng said, “It looks like some kind of organism. We are one step closer to the truth.”

Chapter 673: Meeting

After having slept for only four hours, Bai Qing finally met her defense lawyer in the afternoon.

When the suspect of a major criminal case had been arrested, even their family members could not visit them. They could only communicate with them through the lawyers. Bai Qing, however, couldn’t fathom why the gentle and polite lawyer in front of her made her feel uncomfortable.

“I have worked in this field for ten years and have defended many suspects,” said the representative. “Don’t worry. There is no better lawyer in this city than me in dealing with a criminal case. Since Mr. Bai chose me, I will definitely do my best.”

Unable to wait any longer, Bai Qing’s grandfather asked, “How is my son holding up?”

“He just met his in-laws, and it did not end well. There were scratches on his arms. Typically, when a murder happens between a married couple, the pain is doubled. It’s an extremely traumatizing experience for both families.”

“Mr. Bai did not admit to killing his wife, insisting that he was merely trying to stop her from committing suicide. Judging by the evidence collected from the scene, it isn’t easy to stand up for his statement. However, he did explain the reason he installed the pinhole cameras. Having suspected that his wife was cheating on him, he also revealed that he had hired a private investigator to investigate his wife before the incident. I am going to get in touch with that private investigator to gain a better understanding...”

...

As Bai Qing’s classmate, Zhang Heng wasn’t allowed to participate in this meeting with the lawyer. Besides not being interested, after discovering the shadow in the fourth ventricle, Zhang Heng believed that he had probably found the alien race mentioned in the main quest. And that the other party was probably still alive as well.

Since the alien race was willing to send Bai Qing’s father to jail by sacrificing one of their own, Zhang Heng did not rule out the possibility that they might possess a very potent reproduction ability. However, a case like this did not happen as often as he thought it to be. Otherwise, they would have started a large-scale replacement operation. If the creature was still alive and the low temperatures in the freezer could not kill it, its companions would definitely find a way to retrieve it.

This would be a rare opportunity for Zhang Heng to meet them.

After knowing what happened to the college student and seeing that the perfectly-shaped fourth ventricle resembled a manufactured object, Zhang Heng became more convinced that those creatures should have a base camp. Unfortunately, he was forced to put his investigation on hold after discovering that the surveillance cameras at the underground parking lot were broken.

Thus, Zhang Heng resisted the impulse to return to the funeral home immediately to dissect the corpse’s head and see what it was made of. He decided to wait for the aliens to come to their ally’s rescue.

But before he did that, he headed home first.

When Bai Qing was giving her statement to the authorities, Zhang Heng returned the car to its original place. He also left a note to his grandpa stating that something had happened to his classmate, and he had gone to help her.

It would be a little unusual if he wouldn’t return home for the next two days, so Zhang Heng took the opportunity and headed home first. At this time, the news had also begun reporting on the homicide at Bai Qing’s house. Most quarters assumed that her father was indeed the killer, and although the names of the people involved were omitted, the location of the incident was explicitly reported. The people close with Bai Qing had begun asking her questions.

Grandpa asked while listening to the news and practicing calligraphy, "What happened to your classmate?"

Zhang Heng did not answer the question.

"Boy and girl?"

"Girl. She sits right beside me," replied Zhang Heng, making an excuse for the actions he would be taking. "Her mood is not too stable, and I might be staying with her for a while."

"Poor child. She should be traumatized by what happened to her. Do you have enough money?" asked Grandpa. "Go to the bedroom and get me my wallet on my desk."

Although Zhang Heng wasn't short of money, he still went to the master bedroom to fetch grandpa his wallet to prevent suspicions.

Grandpa counted and took a thousand yuan out of it. "Here you go. If it is not enough, come and get more from me."

"Thank you, Grandpa." Zhang Heng stretched out his hands to take the money, but Grandpa did not immediately let go of the cash. He solemnly added, "She is at her most vulnerable state. Everything that she says or does right now isn't an indicator of her real intention. Don't take advantage of her at this difficult time."

"Of course."

"Very well. Please take good care of her."

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Zhang Heng changed his clothes at home and sent a message to Bai Qing, asking her about her situation. He learned that the lawyer's meeting was over, and she was currently being escorted home by the police home to pick up her school bag and some daily necessities. Later, she would meet with her grandparents and two uncles to discuss where she would live next. That meant she was not available for the time being.

So Zhang Heng started the preparations for his next move alone. He carried a black plastic bag with him, walked for a distance to make sure that no one was following him, and then he went to a public toilet to change his clothes. He used the method taught by Irene Adler and Holmes to make put on simple makeup to deter anyone from recognizing him.

After that, he took out his cell phone, going on Baidu to look for detectives that provided service for investigating extramarital affairs. Sure enough, he found the phone number left by a group of men who claimed to be private investigators. Zhang Heng contacted three of them and found out that two of them were scammers. As for the last one, Zhang Heng believed that he was the real deal through a simple conversation.

However, he might not be as professional as Zhang Heng thought he would be. The profession of private investigator had always been a grey area in this country. The authority did not give credit to this profession, nor did they ban people from practicing it. Extramarital affairs investigation was always high on demand, which was how this profession survived until now.

Since no formal qualifications and legal supervision was required, the private detective industry was often filled with scammers. As for the private detective that Zhang Heng contacted, he could not work a normal job. That was how he ended up becoming a private detective.

The two agreed to meet in a cafe.

“So, you want to buy a tracker and a pinhole camera?”

“Yes, the smaller, the better. I want to know where my wife has been.” Zhang Heng previously revealed his identity on the phone as a banker and wanted to know if his wife was unfaithful.

“You have found the right man. I can follow your wife around the clock. If I see her on a date with another man, I can take pictures of it and send them to you.” The private investigator tried really hard to sell his service. After all, the money from selling equipment was not as lucrative as being hired by someone. His operating expenses could be reimbursed as well.

“No, I have to check it myself. You can give me what I want.” Zhang Heng took two thousand yuan from his wallet, put it on the table, and said plainly, “If you have it, this money is yours. If you don’t, I will find someone else.”

Devices such as miniature trackers and pinhole cameras were forbidden to be sold on the market. And Zhang Heng needed them urgently. So he could only seek help from these private detectives. Even if they did not sell it, they would know where to get them.

As expected, Zhang Heng successfully got what he wanted half an hour later.

Chapter 674: Secret Code

Zhang Heng waited until late that night before heading to the funeral home again to set up the pinhole camera.

Later, he contacted the modified car club to borrow a van from them. Worried that the aliens might have replaced some of its members, Zhang Heng changed the van’s appearance by adding a tailgate and sealing the rear compartment. He then headed to the hotel to pick Bai Qing up.

Zhang Heng still had to verify Bai Qing’s identity by using the previous method. The latter looked a little tired, albeit not as sad as before. It was probably because she had caught a glimpse of the CT scan that Zhang Heng had shown her. Filled with hope once again, her fighting spirit was rekindled.

“What shall we do next?”

“Wait.”

“Hmm?”

“We now know the whereabouts of one of the creatures. I’ll need it to lead me to their nest. I have been investigating the college student’s identity for quite some time, and those creatures now have their eye on me. I’m not worried about them at night. Once I run out of my house, I am confident enough that I can get rid of them. School starts tomorrow, though, and if I’m not in school, they will definitely pay extra attention to me. They may not head to the funeral home quickly enough to retrieve their ally. So, I’ll need your help.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I need you to stay near the funeral home. I have installed cameras in the morgue, parking lot, and front entrance. The camera in the morgue faces the freezer where the corpse is stored,” said Zhang Heng as he took a tracker out of his bag. “You’ll need to pay attention and see if anyone moves your mother’s body. Once you find the target, you can stick this underneath their car.”

Considering that the college student’s family had changed their car halfway through their journey, Zhang Heng hesitated and took out another miniature tracker, this time, the size of a coin. “If possible, place this on one of them, and be careful not to trigger their suspicion.”

“Okay.” Bai Qing agreed and reached out to take the tracker.

“Aren’t you going to ask me how to use it?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows, “Or, have you figured out a way?”

“I have no idea how to use it, but I will think of a way. Didn’t you say that they won’t be acting so quickly?”

“Yes, that’s my theory, at least. It’s unnecessary for them to take risks. When everyone’s attention is no longer on the corpse, it will be their time to act.”

“Then, I will find a way,” said Bai Qing. “Trust me. I am not some goody-two-shoes who knows nothing about this world.”

“Hmm,” Zhang Heng nodded.

“Anything else?”

“I have prepared seven power banks, food, and some water for you. You might have to live in this car for some time. You can check in with your grandpa and relatives from time to time so that they won’t be worried. You can’t, however, tell them where you are, or what you’re doing, and that includes your friends... From now on, you can trust no one except for me. And we need to agree on a secret sign. It is too much trouble to have me cut your finger every time.”

“Those aliens that you have been talking about... won’t they read our memories when they latch on us?” Bai Qing asked.

“To that, I have no answer yet. But based on previous experience, they don’t seem to know what the recent happenings of their hosts.” Zhang Heng pondered for a moment. “I will ask you a question when I want to verify your identity—Do you like me?”

Bai Qing blushed upon hearing the question, “And how should I answer?”

“Sorry, I’m from another world,” Zhang Heng replied. “When you ask me that question, this will be my answer. I’m no longer me if you give you another answer.”

Bai Qing took a deep breath. “Okay.”

“Finally, I need to put some makeup on you. Although they wouldn’t recognize you, you will be safer if you change your appearance.”

An hour later, Zhang Heng had put a wig on Bai Qing and given her some simple makeup with the bag of cosmetics he had just bought. As he put the makeup on, he taught her a few touching up techniques. "You only need to keep an eye out for them during the day. At night, you can rest. I'll be taking over the shift then. Remember, once you find something out, call my cell immediately, and I will meet you as quickly as I can."

"Hmm."

"You can find a hotel nearby to rest first. Come and change shifts with me in the morning," Zhang Heng added.

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Nothing happened all night. At six in the morning, Bai Qing knocked on the door of the van. Zhang Heng opened the door and saw Bai Qing holding two plastic bags in her hand. "I couldn't find anywhere to buy breakfast. I had to walk about a kilometer before I found a small stall selling buns and soy milk. Here, I bought you some..."

"Thanks." Zhang Heng took one of the bags and asked after a pause. "Do you like me?"

"Sorry, I come from another world," Bai Qing replied, "Am I right?"

"That's right." Zhang Heng reached out and pulled Bai Qing closer to the van.

"Sounds like a line from some science fiction movie."

After that, the two of them did not speak anymore. After eating breakfast in silence, Zhang Heng headed to school with his schoolbag on his back, leaving Bai Qing alone in the vehicle. She was looking at her cellphone.

This week, Zhang Heng was reprimanded by his teacher, mostly in no thanks to no longer being able to copy Bai Qing's homework. In the morning, Bai Qing's grandfather came to school and helped her to take a week off.

So some students who had a good relationship with Bai Qing began to think of the news that was reported not long ago. Chi Jia also ran to ask Zhang Heng if he knew what happened to Bai Qing. Zhang Heng told her that he had been sending messages to Bai Qing but received no reply.

A look of worry flashed across Chi Jia's face, "How could this happen?! Find her as soon as possible. Otherwise, I'm scared she might lose it. The authorities have sealed-off her house. Do you know if she has other relatives?"

"I don't know." Zhang Heng shook his head.

"Then let's go to the class teacher after school," Chi Jia suggested. "Our teacher would definitely be able to contact her relatives. We'll be able to locate her then."

"Sorry, I have other things to do after school," Zhang Heng said.

Chi Jia became a little annoyed when she heard Zhang Heng's reply, "How could you be like this? You were chasing her before the tragedy, and now that something awful has happened to her, I can't believe you're staying away!"

Furious, she yelled at Zhang Heng. It quickly attracted the attention of the other students who were around. Someone laughed and said, "What's wrong with Chi Jia? Did you just confess to Zhang Heng and he rejected you?"

"It's impossible that I'll like this type of person! This is ridiculous." Chi Jia shoved the boy who teased her.

Seeing that Chi Jia was getting really angry, the latter scratched his head, "What's wrong with her?? She was fine just now."

"All the boys should go to hell! You guys disgust me!!" Chi Jia showed Zhang Heng and the other boys her middle finger.

Chapter 675: Tracking

For the next three days, Zhang Heng and Bai Qing took turns monitoring the funeral home. During that period, he slipped into the morgue again, taking another CT scan and confirming that the creature in the fourth ventricle was still there.

It seemed they were not in a rush to retrieve the body. It had Zhang Heng wondering if the creature might be dead. After all, the CT scan showed that it had not changed its position.

He had now also become a frequent visitor to the teacher's office. Usually, grandpa would not stick his nose into his business. Still, this time, the elderly man had no choice but to remind his grandson upon arriving home yesterday afternoon. So Bai Qing got Zhang Heng to hand her his homework, where early the next morning, at the shift change, she brought along some breakfast and the completed work.

To prevent the teacher from recognizing the different handwriting, Bai Qing tried her best to imitate his. Finally, the teacher did not summon Zhang Heng to the office today. The teacher even complimented him.

When Zhang Heng handed in his homework on time, the teacher did not compliment him. After not handing in any assignments for three whole days, the teacher was surprised to see him passing it up this time.

Back to the surveillance site, there hadn't been any movement for some time. Zhang Heng began to wonder if perhaps, there might be something wrong with his plan.

He had tried his best to avoid every conceivable risk, but if those creatures had replaced most humans living in society, there would be at least twenty of them watching him in the classroom right now. In other words, it would be pointless to keep treading carefully. Fortunately, the possibility of something like that happening was minute. If that were true, then the creatures wouldn't have spared a second and attacked him right here, right now.

Besides, Zhang Heng hadn't given up on the drowning case yet. Earlier, he learned from the security guard that the three children often left the community together. He wanted to know where they usually headed to.

Hiding his mobile phone under the desk, Zhang Heng looked at the map, when he suddenly received a message.

It was from Bai Qing, and had only three words in it.

[They are here]

Zhang Heng could sense Bai Qing's tension and anxiety on the other side of the phone, and he quickly replied.

[Install the tracker and wait for me.]

He turned around to look at the clock hanging at the back. The physics class he was in was only halfway through, and there were still 20 minutes to go. He couldn't wait that long. The only way out was to lie to the physics teacher standing in front of the class right now.

At the time when nobody was paying attention to him, Zhang Heng dug the root of his tongue with a pencil, and within seconds, he vomited all over the floor. Blue veins popped up on his neck, and he looked terribly ill.

When the teacher saw this, he hurriedly stepped down from the podium and came over. "What's wrong with you?" he asked with the utmost concern.

"I don't know. My stomach is upset after I drank a bottle of expired yogurt this morning," replied Zhang Heng, his voice quivering and his brow lined with cold sweat.

"Ah, could it acute enteritis." The physics teacher said with a solemn expression, "You have to go to the hospital immediately. Hold up, let me see which teacher is available now."

"No need, Teacher Zheng, I will go to the hospital on my own."

"How could I let you go alone in your current state?" Teacher Zheng shook his head.

"I know a friend who works in the hospital. He will take care of me once I arrive. I'm just a little weak, but I still have the strength to take a taxi," Zhang Heng said. "Can you please inform my class teacher, sir? I will hand in the request-to-leave form later."

"Okay. You'd better go to the hospital now," replied teacher Zheng.

Zhang Heng returned to his seat, grabbed his schoolbag, and left the classroom.

As for the vomit on the floor, his classmates would clean up for him. This could be considered a perk for the sick.

Upon leaving the school grounds, Zhang Heng first called a friend at the hospital and asked her to issue him a sick leave slip.

The latter did not feel good when he heard Zhang Heng's request. "Are you going to do something bad again? Don't keep involving me in your business, and you haven't told me where the last CT film came from."

"First, help me to come up with a cover story. Later, my class teacher will call my grandfather. You tell him that I am with you and I'm doing fine. I will head back once I feel better. As for the CT image, I will tell you everything once it's all over," Zhang Heng replied.

"Okay, don't do it again next time," the person at the other end of the phone sighed. He then paused and added, "After I looked at the image you sent me, it looks a bit like a parasite. Later, I tried and read some articles about it, but nothing helped me understand it better. And the shape of the fourth ventricle, it's so strange."

"Tell no one about this," Zhang Heng exhorted.

After creating the perfect cover for himself, he could finally turn his attention to Bai Qing again. Immediately, he sent a message to her.

[How is everything?]

This time, Bai Qing did not reply immediately.

Although the situation was urgent, Zhang Heng made a detour to a nearby shopping mall to ditch anyone that might be following him. He changed to a new set of clothes, took a taxi, and rushed to the funeral home.

Bai Qing finally replied when he was in the car.

[It's done.]

Afterward, Zhang Heng received a notification on his phone that the target car was on the move. He could tell from the tracker that the car was heading toward the east of the city, consistent with his previous investigation results. At that time, he had tried to track down the college student, and the last place he stopped turned out to be the east of the city.

Another signal then appeared on Zhang Heng's cellphone. Sent by another micro tracker, this one was moving in the same direction as the car.

It appeared that not only had Bai Qing completed the task, but she even did something extra.

[Wait for me to come over.] replied Zhang Heng.

The school and the funeral home were quite a distance apart, and it wasn't until forty minutes later that Zhang Heng arrived at the van. At the same time, he could see that the car he was tracking was not far from the underground parking lot he had gone to. Meanwhile, Bai Qing was very anxious, sending him several WeChat messages, constantly asking his whereabouts.

[I have arrived.]

Upon receiving the message, Bai Qing opened the door and poked her head out. The two then exchange their secret codes. Zhang Heng then took the driver's seat, and Bai Qing moved aside. "I don't know how

they did it," she lamented while putting on her seatbelt. "There was something wrong with the freezer unit, so they pretended to be technicians and took the body with them."

"Did you see how they took away the body?"

"No," Bai Qing shook her head. "They blocked the camera with their backs, but I recorded a short clip," she said, sending the video that she had just edited to Zhang Heng.

The clip showed a fat man and a thin man. Apart from one having a leg problem, they looked no different from ordinary people.

"How did you put the tracker on them?" Zhang Heng asked.

"I played to the advantage of being a woman."

"Hmm?"

"What are you thinking? I meant it's normal that a woman asks a man for some assistance. Usually, it's difficult for a man to refuse a lady," Bai Qing explained. "I asked them to help me to carry two wreaths, and then I gave them a can of fruit candy. The tracker is located on the bottom layer of the candy can."

Chapter 676: Dilemma

Zhang Heng drove the van in pursuit of the tracker's signal.

Bai Qing was holding onto the car handle and finally asked a question that she wanted to ask for a long time, "When did you get your driver's license?"

"Oh, I don't have one," said Zhang Heng. "But it's okay, as long as I don't get caught by the police," he added after a pause.

"..."

Zhang Heng shortened the 40-minute journey to only about 20 minutes. He was, however, slowed down by a few traffic officers standing at several intersections along the way. About fifteen minutes ago, the tracker had stopped moving. Worried that Zhang Heng might track them down again, they should have headed to a different parking lot to swap cars.

After a while, the tracker hidden in the candy box started to move again and about ten minutes later, it stopped.

When she realized that the tracker had stopped moving, Bai Qing became really nervous. "Have we been found out?!"

Zhang Heng looked at the map and found that the tracker had stopped beeping at a small factory. Originally a state-owned cannery, the land was sold to a small-time businessman after it went bust, and the owner turned it into a glass factory. Since then, it had been operating for more than ten years. Business was neither good nor bad, but since the continual increase in labor costs, production lines once reliant on manual labor were slowly being replaced by machinery. It was simply getting increasingly difficult for a small factory like this to survive in this era.

Zhang Heng parked the van at the next street, a relatively deserted spot of the city.

Now, they were only less than two hundred meters from the tracker's last location.

Zhang Heng thought about it for a moment. "Stay here and wait for me."

"Hmm?"

He didn't explain much, merely pulling down the rear compartment's partition and snuck out of the car.

Bai Qing was still in the front passenger seat, doing nothing as instructed by Zhang Heng. After waiting quietly for some time, she discovered that the phone's tracker had started moving again. Feeling like she should let Zhang Heng know, she hurriedly opened the partition.

It turned out that Zhang Heng was undressing. He had taken off everything from his body except for his underwear. Bai Qing's face flushed, and she quickly looked away, not even getting to tell him what she wanted.

Zhang Heng didn't seem bothered by it as he put on a set of new clothes.

Now he was transformed into a young countryside man who had come to the city searching for a job.

"You can look at me again," Zhang Heng said to Bai Qing while stuffing the makeup tools and changed clothes into another bag.

Since the time Zhang Heng did Bai Qing's makeup, she knew that his skills were somewhat extraordinary. She was, however, still a little surprised when she turned to look at him. He had changed so much that he had completely transformed into another person. Not only were his clothes different, but his appearance and temperament had also undergone an earth-shattering change.

This was the effect of an Lv2 makeup skill. Zhang Heng's current technique and Holmes's were almost the same. The art of makeup was the sort of skill that constantly improved over time, and more modern tools were also available right now. In other words, Zhang Heng could make his makeup even more realistic.

"Even if I act, I'll have to wait until night. In the day, I will explore the factory first," Zhang Heng said.

"Okay."

Bai Qing nodded as she watched Zhang Heng get out of the van. Initially, she thought he would be gone for a long time, not expecting him to return after only a quarter of an hour.

"How did it go?"

Bai Qing could not wait but ask. Anxious and unhinged, this had everything to do with her mother's whereabouts and whether her father's innocence could be proven. In the beginning, she doubted what Zhang Heng told her, but after witnessing the subsequent events, she had become more and more convinced that there were indeed things in this world that science and technology could never explain.

"This looks like the right place. I pretended to be an applicant, but I was stopped at the door. The security guard told me that the factory isn't hiring even after telling him that all I needed was food and a place to stay and that I was willing to give up two months' wages. Normally, the factory would use me for two months before firing me, but the guard didn't even report it to the person in charge. And then I

asked the workers in several factories next door. They talked to each other quite often, but they had never seen anyone coming out from that factory.”

Zhang Heng paused for a moment.

“I couldn’t see the factory’s parking lot from where I stood, but judge from some old photos I found on the internet, the lot’s gate originally faced the factory’s gates. Now, the place is sealed off, and the gate is opened on the other side. This doesn’t make sense at all. The workers would have to walk a lot further to get to work. Besides, there is an unusual number of security cameras around the factory as well.”

“Can we sneak in at night?”

“It could be quite difficult,” Zhang Heng said. “On the way back, I ran into a man delivering something, and he said that even he could not get into the factory. He would be instructed to leave the parcel at the gate every time.”

“This factory is so strange. Wouldn’t the workers present their doubt?”

Zhang Heng did not answer her. Since this factory might very well be the aliens’ nest, it was very likely that they had replaced all its workers with themselves. According to nearby workers, one hundred people were working in this factory. This was not a small number.

Even if they did not possess any abilities, the crowd alone was enough to defeat Zhang Heng.

And the problem now was that there was not much time left for the two to prepare to face those aliens. The tracker in the sugar box helped them find this place. However, it was also a time bomb. Sooner or later, the alien would surely find out about them and realized that they were near them.

The current situation was unfavorable for both of them.

Zhang Heng could feel that the difficulty of this quest was greater than an ordinary one. Although it was rare for a quest to be set in the modern world, the unknown nature of the opponent and perilous environment made Zhang Heng feel as if he was playing chess blindfolded. He could only watch his steps carefully since he did not know how his actions would eventually impact the whole event.

And in terms of the degree of understanding of those things for human society, modern civilization rules had greatly slowed Zhang Heng’s progress. He felt more freedom in the old western world, and if he did not count the extra 24 hours he had, he was close to approaching this quest’s deadline. And he still had not killed a single alien. He also had no idea what was going on with other agents. Maybe it would be better for him to join a team instead of doing it solo.

Chapter 677: Visiting the Glass Factory at Night

After discovering an abnormality in the fourth ventricle and realizing that the deadline of the quest was approaching, an ordinary player would consider doing something reckless to complete a quest. He would first kill whoever could identify him and then figure out a way to get rid of the shadow in the fourth ventricle. Since the quest was ending soon, the player should have exhausted every possibility of completing the quest.

Considering how Zhang Heng still had more than 120 days to complete the quest, he would not do anything reckless.

He looked at the location of the micro-tracker on the phone again. Although it moved a little, the tracker was still in the factory. Now, it was stuck. Someone must have placed it at a stationary spot.

So he made up his mind and said, "We know too little about those things. We must not waste a rare opportunity. I will enter the factory tonight and see if I can find any useful information, and perhaps, the people they replaced. While I'm at that, I will also bring back the tracker to us."

"Didn't you say security there is very tight? Aren't there cameras everywhere?"

"We have to take some risks now. Otherwise, it'll be a long time before we find anything useful. The risk is worth it," Zhang Heng said. "If we keep doing this step by step, they'll get to mislead us all the time."

"Then what should I do?" Bai Qing asked positively.

"Help me with homework I need to hand in tomorrow."

"..."

"Actually, I will need your help with something. I need someone to work with me from the outside and distract them when necessary. You might, however, be putting yourself in danger, and you'll have to break the law," Zhang Heng added.

"No problem!"

Bai Qing did not hesitate to say yes. "I will finish the homework for you," she paused and said.

"Thanks." Zhang Heng wiped off the makeup from his face. "I'm going to the hospital first, get the sick leave slip, then go back to my house to prepare for tonight. We will meet here at 1 a.m."

"Okay."

...

Since they were not going to kill anyone, Zhang Heng left out the Pestilence Bone Bow. His Paris Arrow, however, was with him all the time in his backpack. Since he had the Infinite Building Block, a bow could be assembled during an emergency.

Zhang Heng had also prepared many completed Lego models, including a silenced pistol that was missing a brick. Of course, if possible, he wished he'd never need to use a gun tonight.

The quest set in a modern background allowed Zhang Heng to utilize his Infinite Building Block fully. This Grade-B game item might not be as powerful as the Dreamland of Death, but it had been instrumental in dealing with all kinds of emergencies and circumstances. It was comparable to a Swiss army knife, where it allowed its user to deal with complex and constantly evolving environments.

At 1 in the morning, the two met again in the van.

Zhang Heng had changed into the clothes of a glass factory worker, and if he was noticed, he could pretend to an employee. It would, however, only work if he was at a distance from the person. Once he entered the factory, his Bluetooth headset had to be on all the time to allow him to communicate with Bai Qing.

Upon explaining to Bai Qing what she should do later, Zhang Heng opened the door and walked towards the factory, backpack on his back. He found an empty spot, opened the backpack, and took out a mini drone he just bought, flying it toward the factory once he got the controls set up.

He first flew it to a safe position, carefully inspecting the factory's surroundings and ensuring that no security cameras were pointing to the sky. He then landed the drone. The glass factory had both night and morning shifts since machines operated 24 hours a day. Other than the huge demand, the silicate within the machines would solidify immediately after it cooled. Having molten glass shards amid the inner workings of a machine would prove hard to remove, and hiring a technician would cost the factory a lot of money.

For that reason, many people worked in the factory at night. After observing for a while, Zhang Heng saw nobody had left the factory except for those moving materials around. Not one person deviated from their respective tasks, looking as if their movements were synchronized. Nobody talked to each other like they were a group of strangers.

Even though they were working hard, the scene was terrifying to watch.

Emphasizing strict discipline, modern society had turned workers into machines. Nonetheless, no matter how hard they tried, no human in this world could work like one.

Upon witnessing the scene, he was certain that the aliens must have replaced the factory workers.

He also discovered that one of the four workshops was not in use, seeing how no workers approached it.

However, the interesting part was a few security guards were guarding it. Not only was the workshop under the shadow of a few security cameras, but guards from the factory would patrol the area every hour. Zhang Heng realized that the three workshops that operated nonstop were probably a cover for whatever they were doing there.

The workshop looked like a monster with a gaping mouth in the dark, waiting to devour all that entered it.

Although Zhang Heng knew right away that it wasn't a place he was supposed to approach, it was too late to give up on the plan now.

He quickly flew the drone, checking the locations of all the security cameras in the factory. He was also interested in seeing how many security guards were actually there, analyzing their patterns and movements. Half an hour later, the drone ran out of battery, and he had to fly it back to the van.

Bai Qing would be there to grab it, and Zhang Heng could finally be on the move.

Since the front entrance faced the security room, it would be impossible to enter the heavily guarded workshop from there. Not to mention the overkill of cameras that did an excellent job monitoring the place. Fortunately, it was not without its blind spots.

It wouldn't be possible to know all these if one wasn't good at the art of surveillance.

Zhang Heng walked ten steps along the wall from the southeast direction, and once he reached the stop, he climbed over the wall and fell behind a cypress tree. Hiding behind the large trunk, he managed to escape the view of the cameras.

Usually, there would be no residential buildings built near the glass factory, thanks to the cacophony it usually produced. Most glass factory workers would have their ears buzzing all day long. It came as welcome news for Zhang Heng, however. Now, he could talk slightly louder to Bai Qing.

After landing in the workshop, Zhang Heng informed Bai Qing, "I'm here."

"Be careful." Bai Qing's voice seemed a little nervous.

Zhang Heng did not act immediately. Instead, he squatted behind the tree and waited for about four seconds before he made a move. Then a forklift drove out of the workshop next to him with the glass on it. Zhang Heng calculated the time in his mind. Around ten seconds later, the forklift had moved halfway, he quickly lowered down his body, moved towards the plant area, and crawled forward.

Chapter 678: Drama Actor

As the forklift disappeared around the corner, Zhang Heng had already crawled about a third of the distance. That meant he was out of the security camera's range of sight. He then dashed to where the advanced worker display board was before the second forklift came out.

That display board, too, had helped him block the vision of another camera on his left, and instead of going forward, Zhang Heng took advantage of this rare opportunity and crossed the road. Finally, he had arrived at workshop No.1. He began to climb up the roof via the pipe attached to the wall; all in a timely affair, just as the second forklift emerged from the opposite corner.

Zhang Heng patted the dirt off his body. The loud workshop had helped him mask the clanging pipes as he scaled the wall and the walking on the roof.

There were so many CCTV cameras in the glass factory that even if there were blind spots, it did not mean that he could come up with a safe path to avoid detection. Getting to workshop No. 3 involved getting through the gates of workshop No.1, but if Zhang Heng stayed on the ground, someone would notice him sooner or later. Fortunately, he found that they did not pay much attention to airborne security.

This was actually quite normal, where this was a glass factory after all and not a military fortress. No matter how tight security was, there was only so much they could do to fortify themselves. Undoubtedly, the authorities would be a little more than suspicious if they started installing anti-aircraft defense systems around the factory, not to mention how inconsistent it would be with their low-profile style.

After dealing with the surveillance system, Zhang Heng was soon greeted with another new problem.

Workshop No.3 was the core of the entire glass factory.

Regardless of which security team patrolled the place each hour, the windows of workshop No.1 windows had been replaced with tempered glass and were shut tight. Zhang Heng tried to pry it open, but it was a failed attempt. He could, however, see what was inside the room— a pile of waste.

It did not make sense that creatures would mount such tight security just to watch over a pile of garbage. This wasn't some kind of dark humor. What they were guarding, however, remained a mystery until Zhang Heng entered the workshop. He had, in fact, found a way to cut through the glass, but since

workers would instantly discover the next morning that workshop No.1 had been broken into, the best way to get in was via the front entrance.

There was a security system at the front entrance that needed to be dealt with, though, and he needed to find a way to open the electric rolling shutter-gate. He knew how to deal with the surveillance system, but the gate would be a big problem.

Fortunately, there was an office building not far from Workshop No. 3, and the electronic map showed that the mini tracker was there as well. So Zhang Heng changed his plan and decided to go to the office building to retrieve them.

He was lucky enough to locate the tracker fairly quickly. It had been taken into the security area on the first floor, and the remote control to open the gate was most likely there as well. There was a man on duty over there, though.

He looked like he was in his twenties and looked ordinary, but it was what he was doing that was terrifying.

The man was practicing all kinds of expressions in front of a mirror—like a drama actor on stage; he reenacted the look of joy, pain, sadness, excitement, and even orgasms. Zhang Heng wasn't here to watch a drama tonight. If he did not want to be discovered, the first thing was to draw the guard away from the duty room—the feat would only cost him two or three minutes.

After that, Zhang Heng gently retreated to the other side of the corridor and recalled the factory's layout. The next thing he had to do would be perilous—having to calculate the time precisely. He needed to know how long the security guard would spend walking around and the pair of patrols to arrive from their previous spot.

Zhang Heng was cautious, repeatedly playing the plan in his mind to make sure that it was feasible. He squatted down when he was done, took out the Lego bricks from the bag, and assembled them into a kitten. Before inserting the Infinite Building Block, he promptly contacted Bai Qing.

"Remember what I told you before? I need your help now."

"OK." After receiving the instruction, Bai Qing took a deep breath before using a mask to cover her face. She then carried the package that Zhang Heng gave her and walked to the designated place. With trembling hands, she poured the barrel of gasoline on the cardboard factory's outer wall before spraying on a 'Give us our salary! Do the right thing!' with some a red spray can.

The cardboard factory's security guard seemed to have noticed Bai Qing. He then walked out with a flashlight. "Who are you, and what do you want?!"

Bai Qing did not reply, pulling out a matchbox from her pocket instead. Being her first time committing a crime, her nervousness was understandable—she failed to light up the match even after striking it twice. The security guard was horrified when he caught a whiff of the gasoline, running to Bai Qing instantly.

She bravely struck a second match and threw it at the wall, this time successful, lighting it up in a burst of raging flames.

The moment the terrified guard saw that, he wasn't bothered to go after Bai Qing, shouting, "Fire! Help!!!" instead.

Guilt flashed across Bai Qing's sullen face—the glass factory was, of course, the target, but to avoid raising suspicion, they were forced to target the cardboard factory next door.

The fire burned ferociously, but since there wasn't anything nearby to stoke the flames, it shouldn't cause any damage if they did put it out in time. The current economy wasn't easy on small businesses—wages getting dedicated had become the norm, and the more extreme workers causing trouble wasn't something unheard of.

Upon lighting the fire, Bai Qing ran into the darkness.

At the same time, the fire had also attracted the attention of the glass factory's workers.

Zhang Heng was very close to Workshop No.3. If whatever was inside it were valuable to them, they would ensure at all costs that the fire wouldn't reach their factory.

It turned out that Zhang Heng was right about that.

When the guard on duty in the security department heard about the fire, he immediately stuck his head out of the window. Seeing that the fire was only a wall away, he walked out of the office without hesitation and headed for a closer look.

And as soon as he left, Zhang Heng slipped in.

Four remote controls were hanging on the wall. Zhang Heng picked the one with a number 3 sticker, slipped it in his pocket, then quickly opened the drawer and turned the candy box upside down. Thankfully, only less than half of the candy had been eaten. The tracker at the bottom, however, could already be seen.

Zhang Heng took it out, put the sugar box back in place, glanced across the desk, and saw a printed booklet. Looking at it out of curiosity, he found out the booklet was filled with the young security guard's expressions. Meanwhile, the original owner of the face was nowhere to be found.

Chapter 679: Workshop No.3

In the monitoring room, the security guard who was in charge of keeping an eye on the surveillance feed suddenly noticed that the picture on one screen was shaking. After that, the video flipped 90 degrees, and it was now facing the wall.

Immediately, the security guard noticed that something had gone wrong. He instantly sensed something amiss, seeing how camera 24 was one of the two cameras facing the entrance of workshop No.3.

It was the most important place in the entire glass factory.

However, before he could react, something happened to the other camera. Like camera 24, CCTV camera 25 seemed to be experiencing the same problem as well. The feed was shaking, and the security guard could see that something furry appeared to be touching it.

Was that a cat?

The guard hurriedly went through the common knowledge that he had recently learned about the human world. After a while, he remembered that a cat too was a creature of earth. Unlike pigs and chickens raised in batches for food, cats were mostly reared as pets. It was especially true in the cities, where more and more single young men and women were starting to adopt cats, hoping the animals could keep them company.

The cat was the kind of animal that was independent and arrogant.

As long as they had enough food and water to meet their basic needs, they would practically ignore humans and mind their own business. The security guards had a hard time understanding why humans kept cats as their companions. If it was purely for companionship, why not get a dog instead? Was it because they are not required to bring their cats for a walk?

After discovering that the cat was why the CCTV cameras were malfunctioning, he was not as vigilant anymore.

To further fortify his deduction, the cat placed its paw on the camera's lens, causing camera 25 to move.

Although it was no a big deal, the guard knew that he still had to deal with it as soon as possible.

The cameras purchased by the factory were of a relatively old model and lacked the function which allowed the guard to adjust its angle through the console. Since he was in the monitoring room, he had to ask his colleagues who were patrolling outside to deal with this problem.

While waiting for the CCTV camera to be fixed, Workshop No.3's electric rolling shutter gate was slowly opening.

Zhang Heng then put the cat that had done an excellent job distracting the enemies into his backpack. He did not immediately enter the workshop, knowing that he still had some time before the security team arrived. Before that, he needed to return the remote control to the security office.

Fortunately, the office wasn't too far away from where he was. He pushed the close button outside the security office, instantly hanging the remote back on the wall before turning around and rushing toward Workshop No.3.

The shutters landed faster than expected, but Zhang Heng managed to get into Workshop No.3 in the nick of time.

Just as the bottom of the rolling shutter was less than 30 centimeters away from the ground, Zhang Heng managed to squeeze himself into Workshop No.3. Fortunately, everything worked according to plan. As the shutters rolled shut behind him, Zhang Heng knew he had completed the most perilous part of this quest.

Ten seconds later, the guards in charge of the patrol had also appeared on the other side of the rolling shutter.

All they saw was a rolling shutter that was shut and nothing wrong with the security cameras as well—all they needed to do was to readjust the cameras back to their original position. At the same time, the people who had gone to investigate the fire had also come back. After confirming that the cardboard factory's fire would not affect them, they returned to their respective posts.

Zhang Heng placed his ear on the rolling shutter, paid attention to their footsteps, and waited a while before walking towards the workshop.

The inner part of the workshop was similar to what he saw from the window earlier.

The room was mainly filled with waste materials, including rejected glass plates, raw materials left for an unknown period, and two old machines by the previous owner.

Instead of using a flashlight, Zhang Heng put on the Filter Lens to look at his surroundings—he saw no threats. He then spoke to Bai Qing, “I’m here now. How about you?”

Since the two had been in communication from the start, Zhang Heng could hear the security guard from the cardboard factory yelling, attempting to get help to put out the fire. After that, Bai Qing started to run, and Zhang Heng could hear her heavy breathing. The strange thing was, she had been running for quite some time and hadn’t stopped until now.

Zhang Heng could not help but start worrying. Although the little fire caused no major incident, arson was still considered a vicious crime. If nabbed, she might just be sent to jail, although just a minor.

“Ah, I don’t know.” Bai Qing’s answer surprised Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng asked patiently after her reply, “Are you still running away from people chasing you?”

“Chasing... People chasing me?” Bai Qing gasped for breath, “I don’t know if there are people after me.”

“... ”

“Have you not looked back after running for so long?”

After a while, Bai Qing spoke again, “Ah, I’m sorry. I’m too nervous. I was so afraid of getting caught. I haven’t done anything this bad before.”

“It’s okay,” comforted Zhang Heng. “You’ll get used to it after you do it a few more times.”

“Huh?” Bai Qing was dumbfounded when she heard Zhang Heng’s reply.

“It’s just a joke to make you relax a little. Make sure no one’s behind you before you go back to the car.”

“Did you find anything over there?”

Bai Qing had come up to a wall and was leaning on it, resting.

“Well... I will know soon.”

Zhang Heng walked around Workshop No.3 as he talked to Bai Qing, and soon, his attention landed on the two old machines. From the outside, one looked like a can washing machine. It was pitch black all around, but with the Filter Lens’s help, Zhang Heng could see the trailing traces on the ground.

This can washer weighed more than one hundred kilograms. Under normal circumstances, it would take two people to drag it, but with Zhang Heng’s current strength, he could do it alone. Pushing the machine aside, he saw an entrance to a cellar-like place.

A disgusting stench wafted out from it.

Having no idea what was in the cellar, Zhang Heng hesitated to enter. Worried that the strange smell might have a negative effect on the human body, he decided to let the cat enter first.

Zhang Heng tied it up with a rope and placed it in front of the entrance as bait. Obviously dissatisfied with the plan, the feline struggled and yowled periodically. It seemed like it did not like the smell as well. Fortunately, no one would patrol around Workshop No. 3 at this hour.

After waiting for a while, Zhang Heng saw no movement coming from the cellar. Albeit looking a little sluggish, the cat was healthy for the most part. Zhang Heng decided to stop waiting. He retrieved the cat and put it back in his backpack, and began to walk down the steps.

As he went further down, the disgusting smell became stronger and stronger.

And Zhang Heng noticed strange ferns growing on the surrounding walls. He had learned about plants from Bell before and had come across many plant illustrations as well. However, he had never seen this type of fern before. Looking somewhat prehistoric, they looked like the kind of fern that came from the Cretaceous period.

Chapter 680: Door

Zhang Heng moved his face a little closer to the ferns, but the strange smell around him did not become stronger. It seemed these weren't the ones emitting the putrid stench. The presence of these plants, however, made the air more humid. Coupled with the smell, it made for an even more uncomfortable experience.

Zhang Heng scraped off the ferns with a knife, put them in a sealed bag, and continued further down.

About ten steps later, a door appeared in front of him.

If those ferns could make anyone feel uncomfortable, then whatever that grew on the door could only be described as downright ugly. It looked like some kind of vine, and there were many small sarcomas on each of its nodes. Zhang Heng saw something that looked like a sucker on an octopus's tentacles at the bottom of the vine, firmly entangled with each other on the door.

Upon closer inspection, he saw the vines moving slowly.

This was Zhang Heng's first time seeing such a mysterious organism.

He now felt like he was an Alice who fell into the rabbit hole. Instead of walking into a dreamland, Zhang Heng was about to enter an abyss of infinite terror. Just by standing in front of the door, he could feel the terrifying atmosphere slowly devouring his mind. It was hard to imagine what he would see behind the door.

If Zhang Heng were ordinary, he would have definitely turned around and leave immediately. Now, he was simply a little uncomfortable, thanks to the putrid smell. Usually calmer than most, and when coupled with the turbulent emotions experienced in this quest, he had almost forgotten the taste of fear.

He walked toward the door, his cat coming in handy again.

Though the feline struggled and resisted, Zhang Heng grabbed its neck and brought it near the moving vines. As the cat approached, the vines began to squirm faster, looking like they were preparing to devour their prey. At the same time, the cat's instincts allowed it to sense the imminent danger. It now struggled with greater intensity.

Its attempts were futile, however, since Zhang Heng was pinching its neck really hard, escaping an impossible feat to achieve.

When the vines' squirming had reached a critical speed, Zhang Heng could hear a muffled explosion. The sarcomas on the branches started to explode simultaneously, where countless small twigs sprouted and unfolded out, like a mosquito's feet. The twigs then started to pierce their way into the cat's body, and with the Filter Lens, Zhang Heng could see blood flowing into the vines along those tentacles.

The cat's body was trembling, and Zhang Heng could see the animal drowning in fear.

Zhang Heng had retracted his hand right before the sarcoma exploded, but the vines held on to the cat. Once their tentacles had fully penetrated its body, the cat finally calmed and stopped struggling.

At the same time, the vines at the door handle seemed to loosen a little. Although unintentional, those vines had technically come from the other side of the door. Hence, the door wasn't sealed completely. While the vines slowly devoured the cat, Zhang Heng cut out some of them with a knife.

There was just enough space for him to squeeze himself into the room.

Although the cat allowed him to witness the horror of those vines, he still decided to go in and take a look. He had observed how the vines hunted down their prey and knew that the process took some time. Thus, Zhang Heng had enough time to step away when the sarcoma exploded. While they were in hunting mode, they would increase speed. This could serve as a sign for Zhang Heng to avoid their attack.

Other than that, Zhang Heng also confirmed one more thing about those vines when he pried the door open. It looked like the plants didn't respond to inanimate matter, and as a result, he was brave enough to enter the room through the door.

Even if this were hell, now that he was on the other side, he had to check out the place come what may.

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Bai Qing has been listening in to everything going on on Zhang Heng's side,

Zhang Heng had not spoken to Bai Qing for some time now since their last conversation ended. However, the girl could hear the miserable shrieking of the cat through the Bluetooth earpiece. It was like chalk scratching the board, and it made her panic.

Although she was not there to witness the prehistoric ferns and the ugly vines with Zhang Heng, the fear she was experiencing was no less than the cat. Someone once said that the source of fear came from something that humans failed to comprehend.

The sound on the other side made the atmosphere even more tense and terrifying. Bai Qing could not help but ask Zhang Heng about the situation over there and what he saw. However, she was afraid that

she might distract him and put him in danger. So she decided to keep quiet until she heard a babbling sound.

This time, she could not hold it anymore, asking hastily, "How is it? What do you see?"

Zhang Heng did not answer.

The latter seemed to have disappeared. The noise was getting louder and louder, and it caused Bai Qing's hands and feet to become ice-cold.

Zhang Heng also noticed the problem with the earpiece.

Earlier, he could hear Bai Qing's breathing, but now, only the strange noise was audible.

Zhang Heng figured that it might have something to do with the magnetic field here.

Since he had come into this place, he had no intention to leave immediately. And the most important thing was his attraction to the sight in front of him.

Zhang Heng finally knew where the vines came from.

In the center of the hall, in front of him, was a strange plant. It looked like a banyan tree, only shorter, and had more luscious branches and leaves. The vines on the tree had almost covered the entire room, making the place seem like a botanical garden of horrors.

No one knew how long this thing had lived. It seemed to be even older than those ferns outside.

At the same time, Zhang Heng noticed that this fossil-like plant could breathe like an animal. Something was beating in its tree cavity, much like a heart. Besides, an ash-like material was ejecting from the tree canopy.

The strange smell that Zhang Heng smelled earlier came from these tiny specs of ashes flying in the air, some of which had fallen on his shoulders and hair tips.

However, this part was not the most terrifying.

Zhang Heng saw many capsules that looked like cicada pupa hanging from the trunk. They all came in different sizes. The smaller ones had dark shadows moving within it, and judging by its shape, it looked like the shadow he saw on the CT film. And the thing that wrapped in the big cicada pupa had a human form.

Suddenly, within the wriggling pupae, Zhang Heng saw his face.