

**Chapter 681: “Clothes”**

It was quite weird for Zhang Heng to see his other-self.

His second-self was still wrapped in something like a cicada pupa, with fluid surrounding it as if still growing in a mother’s womb. Other than that, Zhang Heng also noticed a fist-thick fibrous tube inserted into the creature’s brain. This might explain the perfectly-shaped fourth ventricle they saw on the CT image.

The other end of the fibrous tube was connected to a smaller pupa. The thing inside it was trying to break through the pupa’s thin film and crawl into the tube.

At this point, Zhang Heng has basically figured out how they replaced humans.

They did not get into their target’s head. Instead, they had found a way to clone a human body. This body was like a garment. Once that thing got into the brain, they could start to talk and act like a human. It was no wonder why they had been so inefficient and had not attacked him for so long.

Once that thing arrived at the fourth ventricle through the fibrous tube, they would start to plan an attack on him. And it seemed that daylight might come faster than expected. Zhang Heng walked around the ancient plant and counted the cicada pupae on the trunk. Among them, there were more small pupae, their numbers reaching to the hundreds. In comparison, there was far fewer cicada pupa—only thirteen of them—which was a bad number.

Including the time when Judas betrayed Jesus, Jesus happened to have thirteen disciples as well. Given the huge disparity between the number of small and large cicada pupae, it meant that those creatures needed to compete with each other to get out and walk on this earth. This was somewhat similar to the human reproduction system.

Zhang Heng had just spent a short time here, and his shoulders were already covered with ashes. In such a turbid environment, even breathing had become a little difficult. Fortunately, he brought a mask with him in advance, though he knew that it was not ideal staying here for too long. So, Zhang Heng decided to speed up.

Although he knew nothing about this mysterious living organism in front of him, its relationship with the fourth ventricle’s parasite was now clear.

The weird-looking tree was the one that gave birth to those parasites and cloned those human bodies.

The tree could also be compared to the Zerg’s Broodmother in StarCraft. In other words, as long as Zhang Heng destroyed this place, he could at least stop the tree from producing more of those things, even if he could not kill every single one of them.

Zhang Heng drew his knife to test the plant’s defense mechanism, but before he could even get close to the tree, the vines entwined on the branches started to move again. And this time, every single vine was on the move. They were like giant pythons that had awakened from a deep slumber.

Immediately, Zhang Heng stopped moving forward. When the sarcomas on the vines exploded together, there would be no dodging them, no matter how agile he was. And as long as he stepped away, the vines would immediately slow down and return to their squirming state.

Zhang Heng also noticed that those cicada pupae hanging on the branches were far away from those vines. It was to prevent them from being damaged during battles.

Did that mean the vines could attack indiscriminately?

He frowned. It would prove challenging to get close to the tree, especially its heart. Fortunately, he had anticipated all kinds of scenarios that might take place tonight, and he was well-prepared. Zhang Heng then squatted down, opened the backpack behind him, and took out a gasoline bottle.

The backpack had limited capacity, and Lego bricks had taken up most of the space. Although little was left for the gasoline, it should be enough to light up the whole tree. Zhang Heng unscrewed the bottle and sprinkled as much gasoline as he could on the plant's center. At the same time, he slowly retreated to the door. The vines were not engaged in a combat state at that time.

After that, Zhang Heng struck a match as he decided to bid this alien tree goodbye before him.

The lit match fell on the gasoline accurately, and it started to burn the tree. In the blink of an eye, the entire tree was engulfed in flames.

Coupled with the atmosphere, the burning alien was a strangely beautiful sight. When the flames started to attack the tree, the vines tried to protect it, but there was no target for them to attack.

However, the flame in front of him only lasted for less than two seconds. With the next "breath," the tree was no longer spitting out ashes. Instead, it started to spit bright red sap. The moment the flames came into contact with the sticky liquid, they instantly extinguished.

The fire was quickly brought under control. After the third exhalation, the flames had disappeared entirely, and the previously blackened areas began to fall off, in their place, replaced by new bark. It began to look just as it did before.

The entire fire extinguishing and repair process only took less than half a minute. After that, everything returned to normal.

At the other end of the hall, Zhang Heng realized that he was in huge trouble this time. In front of him, the alien tree did not seem to have much offensive ability. It had to rely on the vines to protect it. He was, however, in awe at the creature's self-healing ability and crisis response capabilities.

In gaming terms, the alien should belong to the kind of boss with high health points where it allocated all its attributes to survival points. This was in line with its evolutionary theory. Other than those ugly vines, it still had the small cicada pupae to protect it. Focussing solely on defense, there was no longer any need for it to develop any offensive abilities.

Judging from the damage on the alien tree, Zhang Heng figured that not even a rocket launcher could blow up its outer trunk, let alone the Paris Arrow in his backpack. Even if he managed to find its weakness, there was nothing he could do as long as the outer defense was intact. At this point, he might just need an intercontinental ballistic missile-level weapon to deal with it.

Zhang Heng had no intention to stay here any longer. His throat had already started to itch, and his vision became increasingly fuzzy as well. After Zhang Heng attempted to burn it down, the putrid smell became even more intense. And Zhang Heng also realized that this smell had a slight paralyzing effect. He might be fine for now. However, if he continued to stay here, his movement would become slower, and it would affect his brain as well.

It seemed like there was nothing he could do to destroy the tree tonight. Zhang Heng took his mobile phone out of his pocket, took a few photos, recorded the place, and walked out of the hall through the door.

## **Chapter 682: Essay**

This should be the most unforgettable night in Bai Qing's life, second only to that nightmare that happened in her house not long ago.

When only white noise could be heard from the earpiece, Bai Qing began to go into full panic mode. Although she repeatedly told herself to be calm, she still couldn't stop those dreadful thoughts from pouring into her mind.

What happened at Workshop No. 3?

Had Zhang Heng encountered any danger?

Had someone spotted him? Had those creatures captured him? Would they kill him?

Bai Qing wanted to rush into the glass factory, but her wise mind told her that it would be best for her to stay in the car and wait for Zhang Heng's instructions. Even she herself did not know how she could survive the past six minutes.

Every second was torturous. When the white noise disappeared, the connection between the two was reestablished. A familiar voice then came from the other end, much to Bai Qing's relief.

"I'm out of the glass factory," Zhang Heng said, "The signal was lost when I went underground just now."

"It's okay. Did you find anything there?" Bai Qing asked curiously after she calmed down.

"I figured out how those beings replaced the people around us and planted them into human society. That includes how they reproduce and live," Zhang Heng paused. "And I don't think those missing people are dead."

Bai Qing was overjoyed when he heard this. "Are you saying that my mother is very likely to be alive?"

"Yes," Zhang Heng said, "They can't inherit the memory of their target, which means a living target or at least a temporarily alive one would be more useful to them. They can extract more information by doing this, including the victim's interpersonal relationships and living habits. But your mother's situation is quite special. The being that took your mother's form chose to kill herself to send your father to prison. Since there are no more requirements for your mother, I have no idea what they will do to her. I'm not ruling out the possibility that they might keep her as a research subject."

"Then, do you know where my mother is now?" Bai Qing asked.

"I'm going to look for her," Zhang Heng said. "If someone from the factory gets detained, there should be signs of it."

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Zhang Heng waited another fifty minutes in Workshop No. 3 until his cat turned back into Lego bricks. As expected, the vines were not interested in things like plastics and metals, and they immediately let go of it.

He picked the bricks from the ground, put them into his school bag, and with one last glance at the underground entrance, he returned to Workshop No. 3, backpack on his back.

Escaping that hellhole felt so good, especially now that he had gotten away from that putrid stench. Since the security camera outside the workshop had been readjusted to its original position, Zhang Heng could not leave the same way he came in. Now, the window was the only way out. Entering the factory via the windows was challenging, but opening it from the inside was easy. Once he was out, a string could then be used to close the window.

Half an hour had passed by the time Zhang Heng returned to the van.

Bai Qing had been waiting anxiously for his return. Zhang Heng opened the car door, sat in the driver's seat, and drank a few sips of water. "I have good news and bad news."

Before Bai Qing could ask further, Zhang Heng continued, "The good news is, I've found evidence that someone had been imprisoned in a room on the first floor. The bad news is that there's no one there anymore. I'm afraid I might have spooked them with my previous investigation. Perhaps they were afraid that I would find out about Workshop No. 3 and moved the prisoners to another site."

"Where are they now?" Bai Qing asked. Her mother's whereabouts remained her biggest concern.

"I don't know the answer to that yet. They moved them carefully and quickly this time. Some of them didn't even get to pack their things, But don't you worry, I will find them. Before that, we'll have to deal with that underground thing first. Otherwise, more people would only keep disappearing. And even if we manage to rescue all of them, there is no guarantee that they won't be replaced again."

Bai Qing had received the photos and videos from Zhang Heng earlier.

Due to the tiny ashes floating in the air, they looked somewhat blurry, but it did not stop Bai Qing from seeing the alien tree and the cicada pupae on the branches.

If she had not seen it with her own eyes, she wouldn't have ever believed that such a curious being would call this would home. It was a plant but seemed to possess some animal characteristics as well, especially the trunk's beating heart. The sound it emitted was enough to send a chill down anyone's spine.

"Now that we have the evidence, how about handing it to the police so that they can kill the... alien?"

"I'm afraid that's unrealistic," Zhang Heng said. "What are we going to tell the police? Are we going to tell them that a monster is living in a glass factory?"

"Aren't the videos and photos enough to make them send someone?"

“A few vague photos and a video can’t explain anything,” Zhang Heng shook his head. “No one will believe us, and we don’t even know if the aliens had replaced the police, so it’s too great a risk to expose these to them. They might just be prepared to deal with us. By the time the real police get to Workshop No. 3, they will find nothing there. And how do you plan to explain the fire at the cardboard factory?”

Bai Qing seemed a little discouraged the moment she heard that.

“Well, what should we do? You’ve said that ordinary physical attacks have no effect. Are we supposed to steal an ICBM to kill it?”

“There should be other ways,” replied Zhang Heng. “With the alien tree’s defensive abilities and survivability, why were they so afraid of the three children? They were willing to go through all that trouble to kill them. They treated adults like your father and the college student like fools. No one will believe what we tell them.”

“Do you think the three children had something that could deal with them?”

“Yes, but it’s late now. Let’s rest first,” said Zhang Heng. After he drove Bai Qing back to the hotel, he did not return home immediately. Instead, he pulled out his mobile phone and looked at it. Other than the pictures of the underground creature, another two new photos were stored in his gallery.

It was an essay written by Lin Sisi.

She turned out to be one of the three drowned children. Zhang Heng had gone to her school earlier and learned about the existence of this weekly diary from her class teacher. And this was his first time reading the full version of the essay. Apparently, the aliens in the glass factory were studying her essay as well.

### **Chapter 683: Planetary Observation Team**

The first sentence of Lin Sisi’s essay went like this—‘Does our there our universe have aliens? It is a topic our planetary observation team has been studying.’

‘With constantly developing science and technology, we receive new and updated news every day. Like the vast universe, the planetary observation members know that our human civilization is still in its infancy. If other intelligent beings do exist outside the solar system, how do they view us? Are their intentions toward us good or malicious?’

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Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows. For a child of Lin Sisi’s age, this weekly diary’s writing style and contents were surprising. Zhang Heng remembered how she looked like in the photo. Thin and having some sparse bangs on his forehead, she was hardly noticed by the crowd.

Thus, only a few people knew about the knowledge this ordinary little girl possessed. Zhang Heng spent five minutes reading the entire weekly diary, only to find its contents completely different from what he had thought.

Earlier, he had talked to Lin Sisi’s class teacher, Li Yan, discovering about the existence of this entry. Maybe the other party was too nervous at the time, and there was some ambiguity in her writing.

In fact, Lin Sisi mentioned two types of aliens in her entry. According to the different attitudes that they had toward humans, she divided the aliens into two categories. One species was willing to help humans, and the other group was malicious and aggressive toward them.

According to Lin Sisi, these aliens had come to earth as early as the Cretaceous period. Equipped with strong disguise and learning ability, their species were supposed to be on the top of the food chain. Unfortunately, as they were living here on earth, the third extinction event happened. It wiped out almost all animals and plants on the earth, including dinosaurs, killed in the colossal catastrophe. Even the alien species did not manage to survive the extinction event.

But they did not die right away. The mother served as the core of reproduction escaped the extinction event through a long period of hibernation. Since it did not know when the extinction event would end and whether the environment was suitable for survival after everything was settled down, it slept for an exceptionally long time this time and was only awakened recently.

When it woke up, it found something better than a dinosaur.

And that was the human beings who stood at the top of the food chain.

"This will be the greatest disaster faced by human history. But unfortunately, human beings did not realize that they are being hunted. The prelude of this battle was about to begin," Lin Sisi wrote at the end, "The adults are all busy with their affairs and waste their time on things that do no matter much to them. Fortunately, the planetary observation team members have found a way to prevent this disaster. We will fight for the fate of humankind."

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Zhang Heng put down his mobile phone. In the eyes of ordinary people, Lin Sisi's weekly journal might look like a child's fantasy. Especially at the end, where she mentioned that she would fight for the fate of humanity. Usually, only boys would write something like this, and it was hard to believe that a timid girl like Lin Sisi would have such a passionate side.

It was a pity that she and her planetary observation team did not manage to prevent this catastrophe.

A few years later, when everyone recalled this summer, they would only remember that three little brats refused to listen to their parents, came to the river to play at night, and eventually drowned. The other parents would use this unfortunate event to educate their children about the consequences of not listening to them.

Zhang Heng wondered if the three of them would make the same choice if they were given another chance.

Unfortunately, they had departed this world.

Most of the contents in this weekly journal were about the evil aliens who came to this world during the Cretaceous Period. Most of the contents matched the things that Zhang Heng saw in Workshop No. 3. Now, Zhang Heng had gained a better understanding of those things. Unfortunately, Lin Sisi did not write about the methods to stop those aliens in her weekly journal.

However, Zhang Heng did manage to find some useful clues between the lines.

He had been investigating those things for some time now, and he had to admit that those aliens were indeed very cautious. Even though he risked his life to venture into Workshop No. 3, he did not find anything useful to help him deal with them. Besides, the oldest member of the three planetary observation team's members was only fourteen years old. It was unlikely that they could find so much information on their own. Especially the fact that they knew that those aliens had been living on the planet earth since the Cretaceous Period. Not even the best archaeologist could completely restore what happened tens of millions of years ago.

So they must have received some kind of help. Coupled with Lin Sisi's classification of those aliens, Zhang Heng realized that there were likely to be two types of life forms that could be considered as aliens in this quest. Other than the aliens trying to exterminate every human being, there was another type of aliens trying to help humans. However, that might not be their pure motive. Zhang Heng figured that they might have had grievances with the former.

After all, this was just a game. Zhang Heng did not care about their purpose. As long as they had a way to help him destroy the weird creature at Workshop No. 3, he would not mind working with them.

Now, he was back dealing with his original problem.

How would he find out more about the clues that the planetary observation team left for him?

Zhang Heng knew that he was going to lose sleep again for a few days. He was used to having 48 hours of active time in the real world, but when he came into the dungeon that adopted the 24-hour system, he started to feel that 24 hours were not enough for him. He had to continue to go to the school to ensure that the aliens would not suspect that he was onto something.

With no teammates to rely on, Zhang Heng could only entrust Bai Qing to investigate the planetary observation team. He sacrificed his sleep and went to the hotel where she was at early in the morning. After the two of them exchanged the secret code, Bai Qing opened the door and let Zhang Heng enter her room.

"...you are saying that there is another group of aliens here?" Bai Qing asked in surprise after hearing what Zhang Heng told her.

"The other group of aliens may not be on Earth," Zhang Heng said. After analyzing the current situation, he knew that those aliens were still searching for something after making the three children look like they were drowned in the river.

"We should be looking for the same thing as well. I don't know what that thing is, but it is obviously related to the three children. We have to think about where to start."

"Planetarium. You said that the three of them would often leave the neighborhood together. And they called themselves the Planetary Observation Team. I think they went to the planetarium," Bai Qing said suddenly.

Zhang Heng frowned, "I did consider this possibility, but the distance between the planetarium and their residence is too far away. It is almost ten kilometers. After considering their age, it was impossible for them to do that."

“No, no, no. I’m talking about the old planetarium. My grandmother’s house is around there as well. I lived there for a while when I was a child. So I knew there was an old planetarium there. The place became a spot for teenagers to gather after the new planetarium is opened. It’s been many years since I’ve been to the old planetarium,” Bai Qing added, “The old planetarium is very close to where they lived. It’s a ten-minutes walking distance.”

#### **Chapter 684: Director Gao**

Zhang Heng and Bai Qing met up for a short while, parting ways after discussing the next plan of action. Zhang Heng grabbed the homework that Bai Qing had completed for him and headed to the school. As for Bai Qing, she went to the old planetarium to investigate what the three children actually did before leaving this world.

The two communicated via mobile phone, where Zhang Heng would instruct Bai Qing from time to time to take some photos of the scene, how to find the right person to inquire about the incident, and where she should pay attention to.

If Zhang Heng had a choice, he sure hoped to exchange roles with Bai Qing.

Unfortunately, the aliens were actually more cautious of him. Since his clone from the giant cicada pupae beneath Workshop No. 3 was about to hatch, they would be keeping an eye on him more frequently now.

The moment Zhang Heng stepped into the school, he could feel someone watching him. Of course, he was more than capable of getting rid of whoever that was, but it would only serve to alert the enemies.

This was not the right time to engage in the final battle with them. The enemies surely were not limited to the hundreds of workers in the glass factory. Until now, Zhang Heng still did not know how many enemies were in the entire city. Allowing them enough time to gather at the same spot would be unwise, and taking advantage of their alertness to find a way to deal with the alien tree beneath Workshop No. 3 seemed like a better option.

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Bai Qing acted swiftly. After a dash of simple makeup and quick change of clothes, she parted ways with Zhang Heng. Instead of riding a taxi, she chose to get on a bus. Instantly she got mixed-in with the morning crowd, and even had to change buses twice before finally arriving at the old planetarium. The place had now transformed into a children’s palace, and they were promoting all kinds of talent classes.

There were dancing, violin, and table tennis classes on offer, though Bai Qing saw nothing related to astronomy.

Thus, she went directly to the guard at the entrance and immediately showed him Lin Sisi’s photo on her phone. “Uncle, I’d like to ask. Have you seen this child? She should be with two boys all the time.”

The guard took the phone, put on his reading glasses, and when he saw who it was, he smiled. “Oh, her! I remember she would come here with two other boys every week. Sometimes, they would come here three or four times a week. They were very polite. Whenever they see me, they would greet me. By the way, I haven’t seen them for almost a week. Are you a friend?”



“Well, I’m her distant relative,” Bai Qing said, and asked again, “Do you know what they did here?”

The guard shook his head, “I have no idea.” After a pause, he added, “Director Gao should know more about them. They are always here to look for Director Gao.”

After asking the whereabouts of Director Gao’s office, Bai Qing thanked the guard. She then sent a message to Zhang Heng while walking upstairs.

Suddenly, she ran into a man holding a box on the third floor while running. Bai Qing’s mobile phone flew out of her hands, prompting her to scream. The man reacted quickly, putting down the box and attempted to catch the mobile phone. However, it was too late. Bai Qing’s phone flew off of the edge of the stairs and fell to the first floor.

When Bai Qing went to pick up her mobile, she found the screen completely shattered. She tried turning it on, lucky, but she could no longer type on it.

“Hey, are you okay?” the man asked while walking down the stairs.

The guard greeted the man, and Bai Qing knew that the man was a Children’s Palace teacher. The subjects he taught were drawing Chinese painting and calligraphy.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t see you while I was holding the box. Is your phone’s screen broken?”

“Is there any place to fix it nearby?” the male teacher asked the guard.

“There is one phone repair shop 200 meters east of here. They’re not very ethical with prices, though. A parent once went there to repair a mobile phone. The technician took only two minutes to fix it, but the parent was asked to pay 50 yuan.”

Clearly, the male teacher wasn’t happy with the price. “Let me see what I can do for you. This is an Apple mobile phone. I will drive you to an Apple official aftersales service store.”

Upon hearing the proposal, Bai Qing shook her head. “No. I am at fault as well. I was running, and I ignored my surroundings.”

She had just received some information about Lin Sisi, proving that she was on the right path. Besides, she managed to send out the last message to Zhang Heng as well. Although she could no longer use her phone, she thought it was more important to talk to Director Gao first since she was now at Children’s Palace. In the end, since it had done what she was supposed to do, she decided not to fix her mobile phone.

Bai Qing made it clear that she did not want to hold the male teacher accountable. Still, he felt sorry for her and gave her 300 yuan to repair her mobile phone. Since she was in a hurry, she accepted the money and headed to Director Gao’s office on the fourth floor.

Upon the knock on the door, the voice of a middle-aged woman could be heard from inside. “Please come in.”

When Bai Qing heard the words, she pushed the door open. Director Gao raised her head. She carried a solemn look on her but spoke in a rather polite tone. “What’s the matter? The talent class registration is on the second floor.”

"I'm not here to sign up for talent classes," Bai Qing said. "Actually, I have something to ask you."

Director Gao raised her eyebrows. Instead of asking Bai Qing to leave, she pointed at the chair in front of her desk. "Please sit."

"Thank you." Bai Qing breathed a sigh of relief, sat in front of Director Gao, and thought about what she should say next.

"Do you know Lin Sisi and her friends?"

Director Gao immediately put down the pen in her hand. Instead of answering, she returned the question, "Who are you?"

"I'm a... relative of hers." Bai Qing bit the bullet, repeating the lie she told the guard.

Director Gao was noncommittal. She took a sip of tea and said. "Before I took up this management job, I worked in the education sector for more than 20 years. And I have dealt with children of all ages. I can tell when they are lying."

Bai Qing's cheeks flushed.

"She was among the three children who drowned in the river, right?" Director Gao did not dwell on the fact that Bai Qing was lying to her. Instead, she sighed. "I had a bad feeling when I saw the news. Although they didn't reveal the names and pictures of the deceased children, they did mention their age and the school they attended. After the news broke out, the three children have stopped coming here. Who are you? Her teacher? A reporter? No. You look too young to work those jobs. You should still be a student."

"I'm a high-school student," Bai Qing answered in a low voice. Facing the director was like facing her schoolteacher. After the director knew that she was lying, she could no longer use the lie that she had made up in her mind.

### **Chapter 685: Why Is It Important?**

The atmosphere in the office was a little awkward.

Bai Qing regretted telling the director that she was a high-school student. The development of this matter had completely derailed her expectations. In this case, she would not know how to explain her intention next. And she did not know if director Gao would chase her out of her office.

In the end, it was director Gao on the other side of the desk who spoke first. "Do you know how Lin Sisi and I met?"

"Hmm?"

"A children's astronomy contest was held in the city some time ago. Only elementary school students were eligible for participation. Most schools chose their grade fives and sixes to participate, and among them, Lin Sisi was the youngest. Yes, she was the only third-grade participant at that time. Although I've no idea what your relationship with her is, I assure you that you have seen her photo before. She was so tiny that she never stood out in a crowd. That said, she was brilliant. I was one of the judges of that contest. I could see that most children spent a great time memorizing facts before they came to

compete. Lin Sisi, however, was different. She was truly passionate about astronomy. I could see it in her eyes.”

“Did she get first place in the competition?”

“No, she came in second. She answered a wrong question during the final answering session, but it turned out that she was right afterward. The new research findings were announced shortly after the competition, and the system did not manage to update the answer in time. Although she didn’t get first, she impressed me the most. So I gave her my personal number and told her that she could come to Children’s Palace to look for me whenever she was available.”

“So, you’ve known her a long time? Did she tell you anything before the tragedy?” Bai Qing asked quickly.

Director Gao looked at Bai Qing, answering only after a moment’s silence. “It’s a pity. I went on a long business trip some time ago. I wasn’t here for about a month. In other words, she had not contacted me for about a month before the tragedy.”

“But the guard said that they were here at Children’s Palace last week?” implored Bai Qing.

“Is that right? I did give them a key. I allowed them access to a storeroom currently not in use. They do come here from time to time.”

“Can you take a look at the activity room?” Bai Qing asked without thinking, then realized that she had probably gone overboard with the requests.

Unexpectedly, director Gao agreed. “Sure. Anyway, I have nothing to do today.” She took out a bunch of keys from the drawer, and they headed to B1. The surroundings were pitch black at that time, and they were the only two walking in the corridor. Suddenly, Bai Qing felt a little nervous when she saw director Gao walking in front of her.

Zhang Heng warned that the aliens had been among society for some time now, and there was no way of knowing if an alien had replaced director Gao. Before she came down here, Bai Qing was so happy that she hit the jackpot. Now, she began to wonder why director Gao agreed to bring her to check out the storeroom.

However, she had to admit that she didn’t play her role well while talking to director Gao earlier. If she were in the director’s place, she would have kicked the imposter out of the office. To her surprise, director Gao stopped pursuing her real identity and even agreed to her request.

The excitement soon passed, and Bai Qing finally calmed down. She felt that something wasn’t right, though, unable to stop goosebumps from sprouting all over her skin as she looked at the director’s back. The latter did not speak. She walked to the wall and pressed the switch to turn on the corridor’s light before looking at Bai Qing again, “Why aren’t you walking? Didn’t you request to check out the activity room?”

“Yes, I’m sorry,” Bai Qing quickly apologized. Biting the bullet, she followed director Gao.

It was too late to turn back now. Terrified, all she could do was follow director Gao.

Fortunately, there was no ambush waiting for her. The place turned out to be an ordinary storeroom.

"We mainly stock the sundries here, as well as things left by the previous planetarium. Of course, we moved the high-value items to the newly built one. The rest of the things here were what they do not need, including some old models and popular science materials," director Gao explained.

Bai Qing's attention shifted temporarily to the storeroom that she was in. The first thing she saw was a small table and a few stools. On the table were the models of the nine planets (Pluto had been delisted in 2006, and there were only eight planets now. This was an old model). Also, there were a Galileo telescope and a sandbox with a crater model in it.

Bai Qing was overwhelmed. Although a student with excellent academic performance, she was not an astronomy enthusiast. Her strengths were exam-oriented, and she did not know where to start when she all those things in front of her. According to the previous agreement with Zhang Heng, she could snap a photo of the items here and send the pictures to him.

But her mobile phone was broken at this moment. Left with no other option, she could only continue to ask director Gao the questions that she had in mind.

"Is there anything special here?"

"Special? What do you mean?" director Gao asked rhetorically.

"I'm talking about things that other planetariums don't usually own." Bai Qing said.

"What do you think this is? A treasure-hunting game?" Director Gao shook her head. "The planetarium can be categorized as popular science, built to help young people to understand more about astronomy. There is nothing unique here. Besides, this is the old planetarium. The valuables have been moved to the new planetarium."

"Uhm. Can you please think a little harder? This matter is very important to me," Bai Qing asked anxiously.

"Why is it important?" asked director Gao calmly. "How am I supposed to help if you don't tell me your intention?"

"Trust me. I don't want you to get into unnecessary trouble." Bai Qing smiled bitterly, "If you know what happened to Lin Sisi and my family, you would never want to get involved."

"No. You refuse to tell me about it because deep down, you assume that I wouldn't believe you," said director Gao. "You know, you weren't the first to ask me about the planetary observation team."

"Has anyone else looked for you and asked you about this matter?" Bai Qing was shocked when he heard her reply, "Who are they?"

"It doesn't matter. You don't know him anyway," director Gao looked into Bai Qing's eyes, "When you try to make others believe you, have you ever thought about trying to trust that person first?"

"I'm sorry. This whole thing is insane."

"The truth is sometimes crazier than a lie. As a former scientific researcher, no one knows this better than me."

## Chapter 686: You Are Here

"You are saying that extraterrestrial life-forms came to the earth tens of millions of years ago and almost ruled the world?" Director Gao was surprised upon hearing Bai Qing's confession.

"Yes."

With gritted teeth, Bai Qing had finally blurted out everything to director Gao.

Director Gao frowned. "You do know what you've just said sounded like a novel or movie plot, right? It's absurd. It's fine if Lin Sisi and her friends believe in such a thing, but how old are you this year? I guess you are around 16, right? You'll be an adult soon. Why would you believe such things?"

Bai Qing's heart sank.

"You said that that thing replaced your mother and put your father in jail by framing him for her murder. I remember reading about it in the newspapers. That explains why such a thought would appear in your mind, you poor child. You wished your father was innocent. Understandably, a daughter would want her father to stay out of jail," director Gao said, "But you are pinning your hopes on aliens. You are even telling me that these aliens will annihilate us all. Strictly speaking, you have violated the law.

Bai Qing opened her mouth, attempting to further explain herself.

"I..."

"You have just lost your mother, and you are about to lose your father. That's why you've been so desperate to believe the absurd fantasy that your mind created. It is simply because of everything bad that's been happening to you. Maybe the real bad guys made up these stories to deceive you. Their intentions must've been ill since the beginning and are perhaps taking advantage of your deepest desires to gain your trust."

"No, I have photos and videos to prove my claims, but I can't show them to you now," Bai Qing valiantly defended Zhang Heng.

"Really? Did he show these videos and photos to anyone else besides you?"

"..."

Bai Qing was left speechless.

"And why didn't you call the police?" the director went on. "I guess he must have told you that the police couldn't be trusted too and that from now on, you can only trust each other. But you didn't enter the factory with him that night. You have no idea what went on, right? With current technology, it's really easy to fabricate photos and videos," analyzed director Gao calmly. "He could've just walked into the factory, then walked out without really doing anything inside. When he came out, he could have shown you materials he prepared in advance."

"How about the CT image? There is indeed a shadow in the fourth ventricle. I saw it too..." Bai Qing said, but her voice became smaller and smaller.

"You've realized, haven't you?" said director Gao. "He's been pumping you with second-hand information since the very beginning. Since photos and videos can be fabricated, he could've done the same to the CT image, right? Ask yourself if aliens invading our world sound really true, or there's a better chance that he's really just trying to deceive you?"

Bai Qing was all but dumbfounded.

"It seems you've already gotten your answer," director Gao sighed. "This must be a very difficult period for you. I understand how you feel. When I learned that Lin Sisi and her two friends passed away, I did wish it wasn't true. This is human nature. When we encounter insurmountable difficulties, we refuse to accept them. We simply bury our heads in the sand, like an ostrich."

"I am not an ostrich. I just hope that whatever happened to me that night was only a bad dream. I just want my mom and dad to be home."

Bai Qing started to cry.

"I know, the truth always hurts." Director Gao patted Bai Qing's shoulder and comforted her.

"Sorry." Bai Qing wiped away the tears from her face. "Thank you for telling me all these things. I have interrupted your work. I'm so... so stupid. I should've thought of that."

"It's okay. This is growth that everyone has to endure," director Gao paused. "You know, when I was a child, I too encountered something that saddened me. However, that incident actually prompted me to become an astronomer later. Although I have left the education sector for a few years now, I quickly realize how insignificant I am whenever I look up at the stars in the sky. Sooner or later, you'll feel your troubles getting smaller and smaller. You can come to look for me whenever you want. I can teach you some astronomy."

"You are really kind," Bai Qing replied gratefully.

"Looking at you reminds me of my daughter. You both look different, but your temperaments are very similar," replied director Gao while waiting for Bai Qing to walk out of the storeroom before turning off the lights and closing the door. "Unfortunately, she's settled down in another country."

"I'm nowhere like your daughter."

"You have no idea the troubles she caused me when she was a child," director Gao denoted. "She the main reason I got myself into the education sector. At that time, I desperately wanted to figure out what really went on in her little head."

...

Director Gao then walked Bai Qing to the exit, watched her walk out of the Children's Palace's gate, smiled, and waved at her before returning upstairs. And Bai Qing smiled in return. Turning around, she walked to the street right beside her. At first, she maintained her usual pace, but after a while, she began walking faster and faster, her body trembling uncontrollably at the same time. In the end, she dashed toward the mobile phone repair shop two hundred meters away. And she asked a man that was playing with his mobile phone in the shop, "How much does it cost to replace a mobile phone's screen?"

"It depends on the model. I need to see if it's the internal or external screen that needs replacing." The latter put down his mobile phone. It was rare that customers visited his shop as soon as he opened in the morning, and as he talked to Bai Qing, he observed her. Although she was a student, she seemed to have come from a rather wealthy family. Quickly, he assumed that she must know little about mobile phones, which meant deceiving and manipulating her would be a breeze.

Bai Qing handed the broken cell phone to the shop owner.

"Damn. This is a 6-plus."

The boss took the phone and looked at it. "This is worse than I thought. The entire screen is broken. Did you throw the phone downstairs? Now the entire screen has to be replaced, and it will cost you eight hundred yuan." Worrying that Bai Qing might think that he was overcharging, he added, "This is the official price. You can check it online if you're not confident."

But to his surprise, Bai Qing did not even attempt to bargain with him. She just nodded and said, "Replace it. Do you have a phone that I can use here? Can I use it to make a call?"

"I don't have a landline. You can use my mobile."

Bai Qing snatched the phone from him, startling the unsuspecting owner. He might have just encountered someone worse than him. Would such a good-looking girl rob him? Fortunately for him, she did not run away. She was simply looking for a corner to use it.

Before she could make the call, however, she heard a voice calling from behind. "Oh, you are here!"

### **Chapter 687: Suspicion**

Bai Qing subconsciously hid the phone behind her and saw the male teacher she had run into earlier.

The latter smiled. "Great. I was thinking about whether you would come here," he said. "I thought about it again, and I believe that it's only right to pay you more. Your phone has been severely damaged, and I'm afraid the three hundred yuan I gave you just wouldn't cover it." Looking at the shop owner beside him, he took out his wallet from his pocket. "How much does it cost to fix?"

"Eight hundred yuan," the boss replied with a candid undertone.

To which, the teacher frowned. "That much?!"

"That is the official price of a screen replacement," the owner stated with confidence.

"Would that be the original and official screen?"

"Of course it is." The shop owner quickly pointed to the Apple-authorized repair point signboard.

The male teacher snorted, "Are you really using that pointless signboard to scam us? Every single mobile repair shop has that signboard hanging outside their shops. Whenever I look at the Gaode Map, I see these fake 'Apple-authorized' repair shops everywhere. I can't even find the official stores anymore."

The shop owner merely sneered.

"The screen that you are about to sell to his lady is definitely not an original product," the teacher went on. "Four hundred yuan. Take it, or we leave."

"Brother, you pushing me to the edge here. I only run a small business, and I don't make as much profit as you think. At that price, I can't make anything at all..."

It was impossible that the shop wouldn't make a profit, but slashing prices from eight hundred yuan to four hundred was too large a gap. Undoubtedly, the owner wasn't too happy and blamed the teacher for being too nosy. Disgruntled, he grumbled, "Fine! I'll take the deal. Pay me the four hundred yuan later."

After dealing with the overcharge, the teacher looked at Bai Qing again and found she showed no gratitude on her face. Instead, it displayed one that was of nervousness.

"I haven't seen you before. Is this your first time here?" asked the teacher, attempting to break the awkward atmosphere. "There should be classes in school today."

"I... took leave." Bai Qing took two steps back until she backed into a glass cabinet.

"Really?" The teacher blinked repeatedly. "What is your relationship with director Gao?"

"How did you know I met director Gao?" Bai Qing asked, caution evident in her tone.

"Don't be so nervous. I'm just trying to make conversation with you," the teacher shrugged. "Uncle Zheng, the security guard, told me about you."

"Does this matter have anything to do with you?"

"No, just like I said, I'm just trying to chat with you." A touch of helplessness flashed across the teacher's face. "You don't seem to have a good temper."

"That's because I don't like chatting with strangers," retorted Bai Qing almost instantaneously.

"Okay," the teacher nodded. "Initially, I wanted to wait until your mobile phone got fixed, then escort you home."

"Thank you, but I have a pair of legs, and I can go home myself," Bai Qing replied, her tone plain and straightforward.

At that time, even the shop owner had noticed the argument. He popped out his head to check on them, yet still couldn't figure out how the two were connected.

Taking a step backward, the teacher raised his hand, signaling Bai Qing to calm down. "Okay. Fine. I won't ask you any more questions."

"Then why are you still here?"

"How rude! How did your parents educate you? You didn't even thank me for your repair bills. How could you say something like that to me?! Suit yourself. I will leave now." The teacher turned around and walked out of the shop.



Bai Qing let out a sigh of relief the moment she saw he was gone. In desperation, she urged the shop owner to fix her mobile phone as soon as possible. She had wanted to call Zhang Heng earlier, but the teacher unexpectedly interrupted her. The second class should have already started by now, so Bai Qing had to wait again.

Another twenty minutes passed, and the shop owner failed to fix her mobile phone within the promised time.

Bai Qing, meanwhile, was only becoming more and more anxious. After she discovered director Gao might have actually been replaced by an alien, she now felt suspicious about everyone. With Children's Palace only 200 meters away, Bai Qing was unsure if her acting managed to fool Director Gao.

She thought she did quite well in the storeroom, though she dared not admit it flawless. In retrospect, it was too much of a coincidence that her phone broke the moment she arrived at Children's Palace. It prevented her from contacting Zhang Heng, and at the same time, the repair shop owner who was taking unusually long to fix her phone had become increasingly suspicious of her.

Bai Qing had been urging the owner non-stop to hurry up with the repairs.

The shop owner was sweating profusely. Perhaps it was the constant pestering. Her phone should have been fixed some time ago, but it kept getting delayed. Bai Qing could not remember how many times she urged him to speed-up. When she looked back, she spotted a suspicious Mini parked opposite the street.

She could not see the driver's face but a hunch told her he had looks of the teacher who had just left.

When Bai Qing asked the owner the same question again, the man became a little annoyed. "What's the hurry? Anyway, I'll fix it for you before the afternoon. Perhaps you might want to pay the nearby mall a visit in the meantime."

Upon his reply, Bai Qing was finally determined to do something. She snatched her mobile phone from the owner and dashed out of the shop.

The boss was left in shock for half a second. After a while, he reacted and shouted from behind, "Hey, where are you going? It hasn't been fixed yet! Aren't you going to pay me?"

By then, Bai Qing was already long gone. As she hurried out of the shop, she glanced at the Mini. The person inside the car was staring back at her as well. The two of them looked at each other for a short while, and almost instantly, Bai Qing started running. It was then that she heard the sound of the engine.

Bai Qing was already in a state of extreme panic, unsure if the engine's sound was from the Mini. With no hesitation, she dashed into the adjacent neighborhood, trying to get rid of her pursuer. After running into two different junctions, she started to lose her sense of direction. At which time, she spotted an exit. When she ran towards it, however, she was befuddled to find herself back at the planetarium's front entrance.

Director Gao happened to be standing in front of the door, talking to the guard, and she looked like she was heading out. Bai Qing quickly turned and walked away, but the Mini turned into the path at the end of the road she was walking on.

The fear in Bai Qing's heart rose to its climax.

Right at the critical moment, an arm pulled her close to the newspaper stand. Bai Qing almost screamed until she saw the person who pulled her. "Aren't you supposed to be in school? Why are you here?"

"I sent you a WeChat message, but you didn't reply. I was worried something might've happened to you."

"Don't worry. I have come up with a perfect excuse for myself to leave the school."

After that, he fixed up Bai Qing's messy hair, and gently, he said, "It's okay. I'm here now."

However, when Zhang Heng touched Bai Qing's forehead, she unconsciously stepped back.

### **Chapter 688: No Way To Run**

"Sorry. I'm really nervous," murmured Bai Qing.

"It's okay. Just be careful. They are obviously one step ahead of us." Zhang Heng sounded a little annoyed. "These things are everywhere, as annoying as cockroaches."

"What should we do now?" asked Bai Qing.

"We have to figure out another way. Children's Palace is a dead end," Zhang Heng said. "And it seems they have an eye out on you as well. It is impossible to return to any hotels you've stayed at. Let's find a safe place first."

"We have to look for a place that we both haven't been to," he added.

"Where?" Bai Qing asked.

"I know an internet cafe owner. I can get him to give us a private room on the second floor."

"How would you know if the aliens hadn't replaced him?"

"Don't worry. I've personally checked him out earlier," Zhang Heng said. "The place is actually similar to a hotel. There is food and drink, and we can stay until we come up with a plan for our next move."

"Okay." Bai Qing took a deep breath. However, she did not move forward. "I know this isn't the right time, but can I ask you a question?"

"Of course. You can ask me anything. I will answer you truthfully as long as I know the answer." Zhang Heng nodded.

"I want to know..." Bai Qing looked into Zhang Heng's eyes, "Do you like me?"

Zhang Heng was stunned when he heard the question. "Uh, I didn't expect you..."

"Sorry, I'm so stupid, forget I asked." Bai Qing's head fell, seemingly heavy with embarrassment.

"No, I meant, I didn't expect you to be so brave. I should have been the one to ask you."

"What is your answer?"

"Yes, of course. I like you too," Zhang Heng answered affectionately.

Bai Qing covered her mouth when she heard the answer. Tears began to well up in her eyes.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. I'm just... overjoyed," Bai Qing croaked between her tears. "You are the only one that stayed by my side after the unspeakable tragedy that happened to our household."

"Ah, don't sweat it. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do." Zhang Heng stretched out his hand again to touch Bai Qing. This time, she did not step away but instead allowed him to wipe away the tears from her cheeks.

Before he could even retract his hands, new, warm tears fell and wet his index finger. It was then that Zhang Heng became suspicious.

However, at the next moment, he saw that Bai Qing walked half a step towards him, plunged directly into his embrace, and sobbed, "This is the first time I confessed to a boy. You don't know how scared I was. I thought you'd reject me."

Zhang Heng pat Bai Qing's back with a comforting but reassuring touch. "Hey, don't cry. It's something you should be happy about." He then stuck his head out of the newsstand. "That car is gone. Let's get out of here."

"Okay." Bai Qing looked up. She had finally stopped crying. "I will follow you wherever you go," she said with determination and resolute.

"Well, they have taken control of this place. Let's go a little further by cab."

Like all young lovers, the pair walked 300 meters hand in hand. Initially, Zhang Heng wanted to get a cab there, but Bai Qing insisted on going another 200 meters further.

After a while, Bai Qing's face suddenly flushed, "Um, I...I want to go to the bathroom."

Zhang Heng raised his head and looked around, "There seem to be no public toilets nearby. Let's go to the Internet café first. It is very close. It will only take us ten minutes to get there if we get a cab. Can you hold on a little longer?"

"I'm at my limits," Bai Qing whispered.

Zhang Heng frowned. Patiently, he replied, "There is a ramen restaurant in front of us. Let's go there."

"Great." Bai Qing nodded.

When the two arrived, Bai Qing let go of Zhang Heng's hand. "I will go in myself."

"Okay." Zhang Heng then stood in front of the window and watched Bai Qing enter the restaurant. Bai Qing said something to the waiter before going to the bathroom. The waiter then pointed her in the right direction. She waved to her newly minted lover standing outside the window.

Bai Qing entered the cubicle, instantly locked the door, and tears inexplicably formed her eyes again. Despair had hit her hard this time. If the aliens replaced Zhang Heng, there would be no way for her to run.

She thought about calling the police, but would the police believe what she said?

Director Gao intended to break off the relationship between her and Zhang Heng, but her deduction was undoubtedly reasonable. Bai Qing's only source of information so far was Zhang Heng, not to mention that no conclusive evidence had been presented to her yet. Compared to accepting such a bizarre story, everyone would be more willing to believe that her trauma had caused her to come up with such a beautiful lie to numb herself.

And sooner or later, she would be replaced by the aliens anyway. Or she might even follow in the footsteps of the planetary observation team.

Bai Qing turned on the faucet and let the sound of the water conceal her sobbing.

That being said, she allowed herself to cry for only half a minute before quickly washing away the tears. After that, she started to look for a way to get out of this place.

However, a familiar voice came suddenly from outside the toilet door, "How are you? Feeling better?"

"I'm coming out soon. Hang on a little bit." Bai Qing did not expect Zhang Heng to come in so quickly. She had crept to the bathroom's window as she talked, only to realize that they were equipped with one of those anti-theft nets. Leaving the place via the window was out of the question. Again, Bai Qing started to feel impending anxiety plaque her guts.

On the other side, Zhang Heng was getting suspicious of her. So he placed his ear against the bathroom door to eavesdrop on Bai Qing.

After a while, he heard the water disappearing and the sound of footsteps approaching the door.

Zhang Heng then took a half step back and returned to his original position.

When Bai Qing opened the door, she barely managed to squeeze a smile on her face. Failing to escape, she had to pretend that nothing had happened before she walked out.

"What's the matter? Feeling unwell?" Zhang Heng looked at Bai Qing's reddened eyes.

"No. I just thought of my mother again."

"It's okay. Everything will be fine." Zhang Heng held Bai Qing's hand as he spoke. He felt that her hands were colder than before but figured she must have just run them under the cold water.

"Let's go."

In the eyes of the waiter at the ramen shop, the two looked like a young couple in love. Couples in the honeymoon stage usually stuck with each other all the time. Life's pressures seemed to be all but forgotten, and they freely enjoyed the lovey-dovey period.

None of them could see the fear buried deep in Bai Qing's eyes.

Bai Qing did not want to go to the internet cafe that Zhang Heng mentioned, but she did not know where else to run to.

**Chapter 689: Bayberry and Ashtray**

When subjected to tremendous pressure, one human would react differently from the other.

Some would wail, kneel, or beg for mercy, some put up the final fight to save themselves, whereas some would remain calm, looking for the opportune moment to escape their captor. Bai Qing felt like helpless prey caught in a spiderweb. She realized that she needed to escape immediately from this fake Zhang Heng. Once the victim ensnared by the web struggled, however, its body would inevitably touch the silk strings, the slightest of which would alarm the hunter at the other end.

And the most critical problem was that she did not know who else she could trust.

The waiter at the ramen restaurant? Or the driver in the cab?

Whose side were they on? Were they capable of saving her?

Bai Qing glanced at Zhang Heng.

The latter replied with a smile. After exiting the ramen restaurant, the two continued sticking to each other like young lovers that had just fallen in love. This time around, Zhang Heng did not let Bai Qing leave his sight.

“Don’t worry. We’ll get to our safe spot soon.”

“Okay.”

Bai Qing responded reluctantly. She could feel that the hunter was on the move and was slowly making its approach. It made her feel even more uneasy. She had no idea how long her disguise could last.

The taxi driver complained about the heavy traffic and the rising property prices. Even though they were in the same car, Bai Qing didn’t hear a single word he said. Her mind was somewhere else, knowing that she should be more intimate with Zhang Heng to lower his guard. But she could no longer force herself to do such a thing again. She was on the verge of breaking down. Just a brief look of him would invoke great terror.

So, Bai Qing tilted her head slightly and looked out the car window.

Watching the endless traffic and pedestrians flashing by calmed her down a little.

Since there were a couple of traffic lights along the way, the cab arrived at the destination later than expected.

The driver pulled up by the roadside, and Bai Qing noticed that Zhang Heng did not pay the cab driver with his e-wallet. Instead, he handed over a twenty-yuan note. “Keep the change.”

He then opened the door and was first to get off.

Bai Qing got out after him, and the first thing she saw was the internet cafe Zhang Heng had mentioned earlier.

It was an old building, with a damaged signboard hanging outside saying Ronghua Internet Café. On the concrete steps at the entrance sat a group of suspicious-looking teenagers. They should be about Bai Qing’s age, but they weren’t in school at this hour. The boys in the group were smoking away, and their eyes lit up the moment they spotted Bai Qing.

One of them raised his head. "Are you looking to have some fun? Let me be your guide."

But as soon as he said that, a figure blocked his view and warned him.

"She's my girlfriend."

Zhang Heng held Bai Qing's hand. When the boy saw Zhang Heng stepping in, he threw the cigarette in his hand. He was about to mount a confrontation when a voice called out from the cafe.

"Don't cause trouble, Xiao Fei! Otherwise, you and your friend can't play for free in my café."

Upon the owner's warning against starting a fight, the young man named Xiao Fei backed down.

Zhang Heng then brought Bai Qing in. Having only thirty computers, the space on the ground floor wasn't that large. Since it was still morning, only seven or eight patrons occupied the computers.

The owner of the place, Zhang Heng's friend, was an oversized man weighing more than two hundred pounds. He was sat in front of the cash register at most times, working part-time as a cashier. When he saw Zhang Heng and Bai Qing walking in, he nodded at them. "The private room is ready for the two of you, VIP 3."

"Thank you." Zhang Heng nodded and was about to go upstairs when Bai Qing suddenly said, "When I came in just now, I saw someone selling bayberry at the roadside. Can I buy some?"

Zhang Heng and the owner looked at each other, to which the latter suggested, "I have watermelons and bananas here."

"It's okay. I'll just buy it," Zhang Heng said. Since they had now arrived at the internet café, Zhang Heng figured that Bai Qing could no longer escape him. He started to lower his guard as a result. "You go to the room first. I will come in a while."

"Hmm," answered Bai Qing.

"Just treat this place like your own home. You can relax here," the obese owner added.

Zhang Heng behaved like a total gentleman, making sure Bai Qing had safely ascended to the second floor before leaving.

As she stood in the corridor on the second floor and saw that there was no one around, Bai Qing quickly checked out her surroundings. And yet again, she found no way of escape. After noticing the security camera on the other side of the corridor, she wanted to linger there no further. With her head lowered, she walked into the room reserved for VIP 3.

As compared to the dirty corridor, the private room was fully furnished. There were two computers and a small bed for the overnights, though some questionable stains could be seen on the bedsheet.

Bai Qing then looked around, pick up the glass ashtray on the computer desk, and held it firmly in her hand. After that, she stood by the door and leaned on the wall, waiting for Zhang Heng to come into the room.

Every second felt painfully long.

On top of that, Bai Qing did not know how to escape the internet cafe even if she managed to stun Zhang Heng. The fat owner must have been replaced by the aliens as well. Perhaps, asking the gang of teenagers outside for help was a good idea. She simply didn't do what she could do to convince them.

Time dragged by, showing none the slightest mercy for frayed nerves.

Finally, she heard footsteps outside the room. With every closing footstep, Bai Qing's heart thumped harder.

This would all be over soon. She closed her eyes, raised the ashtray in her hand, and prepared to strike.

The person outside the door knocked twice.

Hearing no response coming from the room after a while, the person stretched out a hand and opened the door.

At the same time, Bai Qing, waiting at the side, gritted her teeth before swinging the ashtray with all her might. The person, however, managed to stop her strike.

After that, the man walked into the room and closed the door smoothly.

The difference in strength between the two was simply too great. No matter how much Bai Qing struggled, she could not free herself from Zhang Heng. She wanted to open her mouth and yell, only to be covered shut by Zhang Heng's hand.

"It's me."

Bai Qing opened her eyes and looked at the face that made terrified her, and her body started to tremble even more.

"Ask me that question."

When he saw Bai Qing nodding at him, Zhang Heng started to loosen his grip little by little.

"Do you... do you like me?" Bai Qing asked while trembling like a leaf.

"Sorry, I come from another world," Zhang Heng replied, letting go of the terrified girl.

However, Bai Qing was probably still scared to death. Although she didn't try to strike him with the ashtray again, she still had a hard time believing him.

Zhang Heng then pointed at the unused pocket on Bai Qing's shirt, and the latter reached in and took out a miniature tracker the size of a coin.

### **Chapter 690: Snapshot**

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have let you act alone," Zhang Heng apologized. "I keep feeling that they have their eye on me all the time, which means they'd be attacking me first. Besides, we still have some time left. To my surprise, I didn't expect them to so quickly come up with a plan to attack us at the same time."

"Did they attempt to replace you too?" Bai Qing was still a little frightened, "...in school?"

"Yes. The alien at Workshop No. 3 last night should have hatched by now. Theoretically, it would need some time to learn about our society before replacing me. However, it seems they've run of patience. Early this morning, they attempted to attack and replace me with the fake Zhang Heng."

"They called me to the disciplinary office, but the discipline teacher was not there. The room was filled with those aliens. Fortunately, they had only slightly better combat power compared to a normal person. And they didn't even come up with any special attacks to subdue me." Although Zhang Heng made it sound like it was no big deal, Bai Qing could imagine just how dangerous the situation was.

"I see now," she replied, "Director Gao from Children's Palace told me that you have been lying to me from the beginning. If I hadn't seen you using Lego bricks to build a CT scanner, I might have believed her. I think she knew I was pretending, so she found someone to follow me. After that... the thing appeared, pretending to be you and saved me. At first, I really thought it was you, but he failed to recite our secret code."

Bai Qing started crying again. "I was too scared at the time and could only act like it was the real you. I was looking for opportunities along the way to run from him, but each time, only dead ends greeted me. And it seems like they are everywhere now. It brought me all the way here. It made me believe that the aliens had captured you."

"It's okay. We are safe for now," Zhang Heng said. "Just in case, I put a tracker in your pocket secretly before we parted this morning. After dealing with the school problem, I called you, and I found your mobile phone turned off. When I looked at the screen, I saw that you had deviated from Children's Palace, which is why I came over as quickly as I could."

"I tricked that thing into buying me bayberry. He might be coming back soon." As some thoughts crossed Bai Qing's mind, she started panicking again. "And the fat boss downstairs! I think he is one of them as well! How did you come up? Once that thing steps into the cafe, they will know you are here..."

"Relax, relax, I have a clear picture of the current situation," Zhang Heng calmed Bai Qing. "Rest assured, that thing won't come back to life again. It's lying in my trunk now."

Bai Qing finally breathed a breath of relief. It was time to loosen up a little. After a while, Bai Qing reorganized what she wanted to say to Zhang Heng. "We have failed. Those things have total control over Children's Palace. Other than director Gao, there is a male teacher, probably one of them as well. If the three children really left something there, it is probably in their hands already."

"Yeah." Zhang Heng was in a relatively calm mood. After discovering that there was a problem with Bai Qing's position, he figured that Children's Palace must have fallen into the hands of those things. However, he didn't think that they had obtained whatever they wanted. If so, they wouldn't have been so rash.

Attacking Zhang Heng at school in broad daylight was taking a monumental risk, not to mention that Zhang Heng's copy was only a semi-finished product. If he could not fool Bai Qing, there was a good chance he'd be exposed once he encountered grandpa.

"The aliens are not in Children's Palace." Zhang Heng thought for a bit. "Otherwise, they would have found it by now. Maybe we have complicated the whole thing from the beginning. If there weren't some



item that could deal with alien tree beneath the Workshop No. 3, the three children would have never risked their lives to hide it.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s been a question I have been thinking about. If the item exists and is so important to them, why would they kill those three children before they locate the item? They could have imprisoned the children and tortured them to find out the item’s whereabouts. Even with professional training, continuously withstanding high-intensity torture would be difficult, to say the least. Not to mention they are only children.”

“I am confused. Are you trying to say that the item doesn’t exist at all?” Bai Qing asked.

“No. Judging from their actions and reactions, I’m pretty sure that that item exists. However, it cannot be destroyed nor retrieved. So the aliens had to use every means necessary to prevent its existence from coming into light.”

“What sort of object can’t be destroyed and retrieved?” Bai Qing asked, her eyes landing on the computer on the side. Then she thought of something and exclaimed, “The internet? Do you think that those three kids posted the method to kill that alien tree online?”

“This is the most reasonable explanation, isn’t it?” Zhang Heng said, “If you want to spread any news, the internet is the best place to do so. Once you post something online, someone’s bound to read it and record it down somewhere. Even if they delete the original post, there is still no way to stop what has happened. So, they can only kill the source and nip the bud’s spreading to avoid it from getting known. They misled me from the beginning and made me think they were looking for something tangible. The college student was deceived as well. Whether it was the river or Children’s Palace, there were no useful clues buried there. On the contrary, the people that visited these two places would be automatically included in their elimination list.”

“But now that the original post has been deleted, how can we know who has seen the content, and how do we get in touch with them?”

“Leave it to me.” Zhang Heng turned on one of the computers. “As long as the information was once posted on the internet, there will be digital footprints. Do you know Baidu Snapshots? In layman’s terms, Baidu will keep on unleashing Baiduspider while obtaining data. Baiduspider is an automated program that accesses and collects various data on the internet. They would then build a database index. When Baiduspider reaches a new website through a link, it will download and store the website’s homepage and corresponding pages. Whenever a user searches for the term through the Baidu search engine, Baidu will extract the cached data from the database server. And this is Baidu Snapshot.”

“With this function, we can quickly locate keywords and view the old web pages. If we are lucky, we may be able to see deleted and unauthorized posts.”

After Zhang Heng finished speaking, he saw that Bai Qing’s mouth was wide open. And she was dumbfounded. It took a long time for Bai Qing to come back to her senses. She then exclaimed, “Since when you become so good at utilizing technology??”