

48 Hours 721

Chapter 721: Another Traveller

The male staff and the old man never expected that Zhang Heng hadn't brought any money. The one-dollar room wasn't expensive by any standard, but seeing as to how filthy and depressing the environment was, no one would be willing to stay here even if they reduced the price by another 50%. Since the bus was not in service, Zhang Heng had no choice but to live here. Logically, he had no reason to save that one dollar.

After a moment's silence, the old man said, "Forget it, I'll help him pay for the room. Since the celebration is just around the order, we can't just disregard others and have fun on our own. It is rare to have a guest here. We should be generous hosts." Since the old man had led Zhang Heng here, he would not give up on his plan for that mere one dollar.

"Since you are willing to pay for him, of course, I'm fine with it," the male staff said. As he helped with the checking-in procedures, Zhang Heng signed his name on the traveler's book.

In the meantime, the old man had left quietly, as if his sole objective was to lead Zhang Heng to this hostel.

Zhang Heng was about to follow another staff to go upstairs, but right then, another person walked in from outside. He looked anxious, annoyed, and a little flustered. He wanted to say something but swallowed back the words. "Give me a room," he simply requested.

"One dollar." Expressionless, the male staff repeated the price.

Zhang Heng knew that this was the other guest of the Gilman Hostel. The male staff mentioned it earlier. It was actually quite obvious, not only because he looked normal but because he did not have the dark aura surrounding him.

Since the two were outsiders, maybe they could talk to each other about this place.

Before he could say anything, however, Zhang Heng saw a wary look on the person's face.

Having been a hunter before, Zhang Heng knew all too well what this look meant.

This was the look of prey attempting to flee. At a time like this, they wouldn't place their trust in anyone or anything.

"Room 428," the male staff said to the new guest.

After that, the two new guests of Gilman Hostel followed another staff to the top floor. The staff opened the door for Zhang Heng, and he was greeted with a single room facing the street. Dark and shabby, the room had two windows and some cheap furniture lying around. Judging by its condition, it seemed no one had lived in it for a long time. Not to mention that the mattress on the steel bed frame was hardly soft.

Zhang Heng did not have high hopes for the food after checking out the room. Since it was almost time for dinner, he asked the staff, "Where can I look for food here?"

“We don’t provide meals,” the staff snapped coldly. But perhaps he remembered he was still an employee of the establishment, that he added, “There is a restaurant in town, right next to the hostel.”

“Thanks,” Zhang Heng said. He did not tip the staff, and neither did the staff care as well. So he turned and left.

Zhang Heng and the other man were the only guests staying on this top floor.

The latter’s room 428 was opposite Zhang Heng’s room. He closed the door vigilantly the moment he entered, making it clear that he wanted to see no one.

Zhang Heng wasn’t in a hurry to disturb his temporary neighbor either. So, he decided to give his room a better look.

The faucet was broken. Before he entered the room, the staff had told him about it.

In other words, this magical hostel provided neither food nor tap water. This could explain why there were no other guests besides the two.

The closet’s body was cracked. As Zhang Heng opened it, it creaked loudly, revealing a thin layer of dust that had accumulated on the shelves. And the dirty quilt was damp as well. If not for the roof to shelter him from the rain and sun, sleeping here wasn’t any different than sleeping on the streets. Lamentably, his lodging woes did not end there. Zhang Heng noticed no latch on the door, which meant that the room could still be opened with a key from the outside even if the door was locked. Judging by the traces on the door, it seemed the latch had been removed recently.

This was getting more and more interesting.

The good news was, at least the old-fashioned electric lamp was still functioning. Although the lightbulb was moldy, causing it to emit a rather dim orange glow, it provided a source of light for the night.

Something awful was bound to take place tonight. If the power was cut off, the light bulb would no longer be useful for Zhang Heng.

After that, Zhang Heng approached the window, pulled up the curtain, and looked at the street below him.

The street seemed more lively now, and mixed among the crowd were some religious group members. They were all giving their best to prepare for the evening celebration, where everyone had put on gold jewelry. Zhang Heng, however, did not see them preparing any food.

Without food and drink, a celebration would be pointless.

Naturally, many who attended a function mostly didn’t care about its purpose, simply wanting to fill their stomachs and have a good time. A celebration without food and drink was like a cake without cream.

But the group downstairs didn’t seem to think so. They were still excited about the celebration. Zhang Heng looked away from the crowd and saw the wave breaker in the distance. There was also a black line on the sea.

When he first came here, he saw the black line on the sea as well. It made him feel like something was waiting out there to be summoned by him.

The two small black dots squatting on the wave breaker should be fishermen. They put down their fishing rods and jumped off the wave breaker.

Jumping from such a tall place into the sea was extremely dangerous. Not to mention the reefs below it. If a big wave came when they jumped off, it might just sweep them away. Others who stood on the wave breaker, however, weren't surprised by their actions. Seemingly used to such things, they continued on with their own business.

Everything in this coastal hamlet was weird.

The church bells tolled, indicating that the time was now 7 in the evening. The sun had set entirely, leaving behind only a little afterglow.

Zhang Heng put down the curtains in his hands. He was actually not very hungry. Even if he didn't get to eat dinner, he was okay with it. However, considering what would happen at night, some preparations needed to be made in advance. The most important thing to do right now was to get his hands on some weapons.

Zhang Heng walked out of his room and knocked on the door opposite him.

"Who are you?" A vigilant voice came from inside.

"Like you, I'm an outsider. Would you like to go out for dinner?"

After a brief moment of silence, probably considering the proposal, the person in the room opened the door.

Chapter 722: I Will Just Watch You Eat

Although the man who lived opposite Zhang Heng agreed to eat together, he was still very cautious and kept a certain distance from him. Zhang Heng did not force his friendship, though. At least the two had exchanged names and made a simple self-introduction, which was considered a significant improvement.

His name was Fabericotte, and he was only seventeen years old. According to him, he was traveling around New England to explore its natural scenery, historical sites, and a deeper understanding of his family genealogy. Initially, he planned to take the train directly from Newburyport to Arkham, but the conductor in Newburyport had provided him with a more economical travel plan. He was supposed to get on the bus and transit here, not expecting the night bus to Arkham would be canceled. So he could only stay here tonight.

As they chatted, Zhang Heng also learned that Fabericotte had arrived much earlier than him. He had departed Newburyport at 10 in the morning, meaning he had spent at least half a day here. He should have collected a lot of information about this place by now. Maybe that could explain his heightened wariness and apprehension.

Something must have had probably traumatized him, seeing as to how he immediately closed his mouth and stopped talking the moment Zhang Heng inquired about the matter. The two had just met, though, and Zhang Heng realized that perhaps sufficient trust hadn't yet been established between them.

Although the town was drowning in gloominess and oddities, Zhang Heng did not feel too much repression or fear. On the contrary, Fabericotte beside him seemed exponentially disgusted and disturbed by this small town. In his own words, he did not want to stay here a second longer, wishing that he had a pair of wings to fly away as far as he could from this place.

After a while, the two walked out of the hostel.

Although the nearby buildings still looked dirty, these were in better condition than the town's dilapidated structures. There were grocery stores, pharmacies, wholesale fish markets, refineries, and restaurants. A river even ran in the middle of all these buildings. Perhaps it was time for the residents to get off from their work, or perhaps they were preparing for the celebration that most of the shops were closed. Fortunately for the two weary travelers, the restaurant was still open.

Two people were already inside the restaurant, a man and a woman. Among them, the man had a thin face, hunched back, and his eyes looked very dull. Zhang Heng stared at him for a while and found that he had not blinked for a long time. If one encountered him as an SCP-173, there was nothing the person could do but cry in the corner.

On the other side, the flat-nosed woman, wearing a rustic dress, was bending over and wiping the table. Although she was about to experience a wardrobe malfunction, no man would look at her when they saw her face.

Zhang Heng also noticed that Fabericotte, beside him, had become uneasy again. Although neither of them had apparent deformities, they both looked somewhat similar to the old man that Zhang Heng met earlier. According to the old man's previous statement, their faces would start to deform as they grew older.

If Fabericotte had a choice, he would never want to walk into this restaurant. Eventually, though, hunger overcame his fear. He tried not to look at the two other people in the restaurant and focused on the menu at the counter. After discovering they mainly served canned food and ham, he was not disappointed but relieved.

He did not trust the people in this town very much. Hence, he was quite skeptical about the food they served. A portion of canned food with biscuits and a bowl of vegetable soup were more than enough.

After that, he made way for Zhang Heng and asked, "What are you eating?"

The latter replied, "I have no money with me, and I am not very hungry. I will just watch you eat."

"..."

Fabericotte stood there for a moment and blinked. "Forget it, let me buy you your meal," he relented.

Zhang Heng then said to the dull-eyed man, "I'll have one more of what he ordered."

After Farbericotte paid for the food, the woman with a flat nose headed into the kitchen.

Zhang Heng and Fabericotte found a place away from the counter and sat down.

Fabericotte could not help but ask, "You knocked on my door and asked me out for a meal, yet you don't have any money?"

Zhang Heng nodded at Fabericotte. After that, he started to check out the restaurant. Decorations had been hung for the celebration later.

Fabericotte frowned, growling in a melancholic tone, "...Do you take me for a fool?"

"I told you that I'm not hungry. You should have just eaten without me," Zhang Heng turned to him, continuing, "You are the one who insisted on buying me a meal."

"I... I was just being polite."

"It's still not too late to tell the chef to cancel my order."

"This is too embarrassing... Wait, did you just say that because you know I won't do it?"

"If you feel embarrassed, I can do it myself," said Zhang Heng while standing up.

"Are you bluffing?"

Zhang Heng did not answer him. He just smiled, turned, and walked towards the kitchen.

When he was about to walk to the door, Fabericotte spoke again, "Okay, you can stop there. The meal doesn't cost much anyway."

Despite Fabericotte's persuasion, Zhang Heng kept on walking.

At this time, Fabericotte felt terrible. After all, he was taught since childhood to help those who were in difficulty. As long as it was within his capability, he should not say no to the person who needed his help. Just like what he said, this meal did not cost much anyway. Even for a young man who traveled with very little cash on him, the least he could do was to buy Zhang Heng the meal. So he got up from his seat and rushed into the kitchen.

The dull-eyed man sat there and watched the two of them walking into the kitchen. He did not stop them or talk to them.

The kitchen's cleanliness was not nearly as unsanitary as Farbericotte imagined. Although the fishy smell still lingered in the air and the walls were covered with mold, at least there were no rats and cockroaches. When he walked into the kitchen, Zhang Heng was talking to the woman with a flat nose.

Immediately, Farbericotte stretched out two of his fingers and shouted, "Two! We are getting two sets!"

At that moment, he noticed that Zhang Heng, who was standing at the side, took the two chef knives that were hanging on the wall. He then hid them in his clothes and made a silent gesture to Fabericotte.

Fabericotte was shocked by it. And he immediately realized that Zhang Heng did not go into the kitchen to cancel his meal. He had gone in to steal the knives for self-protection. This was not the kind of behavior one should be endorsing. Fabericotte hesitated for a while before deciding not to tell anyone

about it. His heart was thumping in his chest, however. After that, he followed Zhang Heng out of the kitchen.

Chapter 723: Don't Worry

Fabricotte waited for the flat-nose woman to leave after bringing the food before speaking to Zhang Heng in a hushed tone.

"What are you doing?"

"I took two chef's knives, didn't you see it?" Zhang Heng slowly gnawed on the canned food that had just been served.

"I know you stole the knives. The question is, why are you stealing them?" Fabricotte looked nervous, covertly giving the dull-eyed man and flat-nose woman a glance. He then said to Zhang Heng, "Hey, I think... You better put the knife back before they find out about it. I don't want to cause any trouble here. I just want to spend the night peacefully and leave this place as soon as possible."

"Is that so?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think you can spend the night peacefully here?"

Fabricotte immediately became alert again, "What do you know about this place?"

"What do you know?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

"..."

"I have an idea. Let's exchange what we know."

"I don't know anything," Fabricotte said immediately. He then added, "I'm just a traveler who's passing by."

"It's up to you then. Anyway, I don't think you should blame me for not warning you. Something bad will happen here tonight. You'd better be prepared."

"What should I prepare?"

"Do you know how to use a knife?"

"No. I don't want to sneak into the kitchen and steal a knife like you."

"It's okay. We'll look for another weapon."

"Hmm?"

Zhang Heng had already finished his canned food. However, he didn't intend to continue elaborating on his plan. He then asked Fabricotte, "How long do you need to finish your food?"

Fabricotte looked at the vegetable soup and canned food that he had barely touched. After Zhang Heng asked the question, he gritted his teeth, gobbled up his meal as fast as possible, then grabbed the biscuit and said, "Let's go."

He didn't want to stay there any longer because the ugly-looking man and woman gave him an uneasy feeling. The other reason was that Zhang Heng had just stolen two chef's knives from them, and he was afraid that they would find out about it.

So the two left the restaurant and returned to the street.

Fabricotte took in two deep breaths. Unfortunately, the lingering stench of fish in the air didn't make him feel any better. And after taking a few steps, he suddenly asked Zhang Heng suspiciously, "Do you feel that we are constantly being watched?"

"Yes. Someone is watching us right now. Or should I say the townsfolk have been keeping an eye on us?" Zhang Heng replied casually.

Fabricotte turned his head around, but he saw no one following them. While they were eating earlier, they realized that there were fewer people on the street. Earlier, many were still busy preparing for the celebration, but they seemed to have disappeared in the blink of an eye.

In those stuffy, airtight buildings, however, behind the doors and curtains, Fabricotte clearly sensed that something lay there, watching them from afar. At that time, the sun had finally set, and the last light of the afterglow had completely disappeared. The incandescent lamps lining the road were lit up.

But the lamps were feeble and could only illuminate a small area on the street. Under the glow of the dim lights, the entire town looked gave off an even more peculiar and mysterious vibe.

"I think we'd better head back to the hostel," Fabricotte suggested. "When I was in Newburyport, I heard that it's not safe at night for outsiders here. People usually go missing at night, not to mention the strange noises all around the town when darkness arrives. They explicitly advised me not to go out after dark."

"Don't worry. They won't be doing anything to us anytime soon," Zhang Heng said. He then took the lead and walked toward the grocery store. Fabricotte could only trail him helplessly, and at the same time, unleash a barrage of nonstop complaining.

"There's nothing to see here. Everyone has gone home after work."

Zhang Heng ignored him and looked through the glass door to ensure that there really was no one inside the restaurant. He then pulled out the chef's knife from under his clothes and smashed the glass with the knife's handle, before reaching in and pulling it.

"You! You! You!!!"

Fabricotte's eyes widened. He thought that Zhang Heng would have put a stop to his crimes after stealing the knives. The last thing he expected was for him to loot the grocery store.

He could barely pretend that he knew nothing about Zhang Heng's previous misdoings. Looting the grocery store had gone way beyond his principles. He did not want to be an accomplice to a crime. When Zhang Heng opened the door and signaled him to go in, the young man quickly took a few steps back.

"You are crazy!"

"I don't think so," Zhang Heng shook his head, "I know exactly what I'm doing now. You are the one that looks weird here. Ever since I met you, you've constantly been looking over your shoulder, as if you've witnessed something terrible but refuse to believe what you saw."

"If you heard what I heard, you would've acted like me too." Fabericotte immediately realized that he had spilled the beans. This statement was tantamount to acknowledging that he did hear something. He then hastily attempted an escape. "That's it—time to go our separate ways. Whether you want to steal a knife or rob the grocery store, it's all your business. I want to have nothing to do with you."

Turning around, he quickly walked away. After a few steps, though, he stopped. "If you are caught by the townsfolk, you have to tell them that it has nothing to do with me!"

Zhang Heng blinked a few times. "The people in the town have been watching us in secret, but no one has come out to confront us until now. Do you think they'll care that we have committed a crime?"

Fabericotte was startled when he heard Zhang Heng's reply. "I don't know. That's just your speculation. I really don't want to get into any trouble."

"If you want that to come true, you'll have to first make sure that you are not in any trouble."

"I don't know what you are talking about. I'm heading back. I suggest you don't stay outside for too long." Fabericotte did not want to argue with Zhang Heng anymore. With that, he ended the conversation and headed straight back to the hostel.

Zhang Heng watched him walk through the hostel's door. He stood under the streetlamp for another half a minute before turning around to walk into the grocery store.

Not only was he looking for weapons for Fabericotte, but also potential weapons that he could use to protect himself. The two chef's knives from the restaurant weren't nearly enough to handle the threats he was about to face.

Zhang Heng found flashlights, candles, ropes, fishing lines, and whiskey in the grocery store. Among all these, his biggest surprise was that he found a rifle, two revolvers, and several bullets. He then took a large backpack and stuffed everything that he found useful in the grocery store.

Chapter 724: Midnight Is Coming

Zhang Heng returned from the grocery store with a bag full of useful items. He walked through the lobby of the Gilman Hostel, backpack on his back. Although the rifle clearly protruded out of it, the surly-looking male staff didn't say a word, pretending he hadn't noticed it at all.

After that, Zhang Heng stepped on the broken stairs to get to his room located on the top floor. Every step he made creaked loudly, as though the old wood under his feet was protesting the sudden increase in burden.

The lights in the corridor were no better than the ones on the street. Although turned on, the distance the light could reach was sorely limited. The long shadows it cast on the walls made the whole place look even eerier.

Zhang Heng could clearly hear Fabericotte's footsteps thumping around in his room. And he could tell from his pace how upset the young traveler was now. After a while, he sat down and took a book out of

his luggage. Zhang Heng could hear the sound of flipping papers. Faberlicotte was trying to calm himself down by reading a book.

Wasting no time in the corridor, Zhang Heng reached out and opened his room's door.

Instead of resting upon returning to his room, he began to organize the things he brought back from the grocery store. He attempted to make a few Molotov cocktails using methods the Finnish guerrillas had taught him during the Soviet-Finnish war. However, there wasn't enough alcohol in commercial whisky to be ignited. Hence Zhang Heng distilled some high-purity whiskey and added tinder as a fuse.

Once that was done, he loaded all three guns with bullets and tied the claws to the front of the rope. With the makeshift grappling hook, he would be able to use it to climb the wall. After that, Zhang Heng picked up the fishing lines strung them all over his room. Under the dim light, these threads were so thin that they were barely visible.

Only Zhang Heng knew where he had laid those lines.

With limited sharpness and toughness, Zhang Heng never expected fishing lines to kill his enemies. These, however, served as an effective method to block uninvited guests that might barge into his room. Since the enemies wouldn't expect the trap, whatever they were about to do would be immediately put to a halt.

Zhang Heng paid particular attention to the positions of several doors and windows. After planning an escape route for himself, he blocked all the other places with the fishing lines.

Upon making sure that the room was secure, he put up a chair against the doorknob and finally laid himself on the bed. After a few tosses and turns, however, he was still denied sleep. First, he couldn't tell if he was in a dream or reality, and second, he really didn't feel very sleepy. So, with his mind unable to come to rest, Zhang Heng took out the Shadow-set items and gave them a once over.

After coming to this place, he could clearly feel that the power the Shadow-set items contained had recovered to a certain extent. However, they felt different when he used them. Pulling out his favorite Shadow Moment, he and started to think about the crow in his mind.

Unfortunately, he saw no crow in the dark. He then tried the Shadow Foot, but it yielded no result too. Just when Zhang Heng wanted to use the Shadow Key again, he heard something.

The floorboards under the stairs and corridors started creaking. Someone was coming upstairs, and it was no new guest nor employee. Whoever it was, though, the person had deliberately attempted to tread as lightly as possible.

In other words, the person did not want his presence to be known.

Earlier, Zhang Heng spent a long time distilling the whiskey and arranging the traps. It was past midnight, and most people should be asleep by now. Suddenly, the only source of light in the room cut-off, as if proving his speculations right. The room instantly plunged into complete darkness. Of course, it wasn't because the lightbulb had exhausted its lifespan. Someone had cut off the power on purpose.

Zhang Heng knew that the show was about to begin.

The townsfolk kept mentioning a celebration in the evening, but the streets were still empty until now, and nobody was outside their houses. The residents had been so busy preparing for the celebration for such a long time, but instead of proceeding with it when the time came, they had all gone home to sleep.

But Zhang Heng was not in a hurry. He lay silently on the bed, waiting to see what the person in the corridor would do to him.

Unexpectedly, the person headed to Fabericotte's room first. He stood in front of the door for a while as though listening to the movements inside the room. After that, Zhang Heng heard the sound of a key being inserted into a keyhole.

Fabericotte was not ready to face a circumstance like this. His increasing bouts of anxiety had forced him to do something about his safety. Although he disagreed with Zhang Heng's plan to arm himself, he appeared to have made some preparations after returning to his room. To Zhang Heng's surprise, the intruder failed to unlock Fabericotte's room with the key. So, he went to the next room.

The rooms of Gilman Hostel were fascinating. Zhang Heng's room, a single room, for instance, had a front door and two side doors. Fabericotte's room should have a similar layout.

The intruder wanted to find another way to enter Fabericotte's room after discovering that he could not open his room's door. In the end, after spending a long time trying to unlock both of the side doors, his attempts were all but fruitless, and he still failed to find a way to enter Room 428.

Initially, Zhang Heng thought that the intruder would give up entering room 428 for now and try his room instead. To his surprise, the sound in the hallway disappeared, and the person appeared to have retreated downstairs.

After that, Zhang Heng heard footsteps in Room 428. Fabericotte was not asleep either. At this point, he should be terrified. He did not allow himself to be immersed in fear for too long, though. He knew that this was a rare opportunity. Since the other party was determined to harm him somehow, they would definitely not give up so quickly. Staying in the room any longer would prove unwise. This was the time to take advantage of the situation and attempt escape.

Fabericotte did not dare to open the door and run down the stairs. The intruder would be able to capture him if he did so. So the other thing that crossed his mind was to escape through the windows. Unlike Zhang Heng's unit, there was a dilapidated impluvium outside the windows, and there were some short and abandoned masonry buildings surrounding it. Then, to the west was a swamp.

The window was too high from the ground. Fabericotte thought about jumping to the masonry building's roof beneath his room, but after a visual inspection, he figured a successful jump from this distance wouldn't be possible. It would work if he entered the room two rooms away from him. So, he first tried the door on the south but found something was stuck behind it. In the end, he could only try to open the door on the north side.

Suddenly, the creepy footsteps sound came from the stairs again. Goosebumps sprouted all over Fabericotte's skin. Soon after that, the person began banging violently on his door. It seemed the intruder had given on concealing his presence.

As Fabericotte trembled in fear, a strange look appeared across Zhang Heng's face. Because no one had come to him until now. It looked like they had forgotten about him.

Chapter 725: The Beginning of the Celebration

In the corridor outside the room, Fabericotte was experiencing the most bizarre and terrifying thing in his life, while Zhang Heng, on the other side, remained undisturbed.

The footsteps outside the room became louder, accompanied by a conversation. Zhang Heng had mastered many foreign languages, but he still could not understand what they were talking about. He realized that their language was made up of only a few syllables, and they repeated those syllables constantly.

After a while, more and more movement could be heard outside his door. It seemed like they were hitting the door with a heavy object. And some of them wanted to surround Fabericotte from the side door. Zhang Heng could only imagine the fear he experienced at that moment.

This was especially the case when he heard the door to his room getting hit by a heavy object. When he wanted to leave from the side door, he heard someone trying to insert their keys into the keyhole. It was then that he knew his enemies had surrounded him.

Soon, he fell into despair, but the sheer will to survive had coerced him to tackle one of the side doors. Fortunately, this one was unlocked, and he managed to open it without much effort, right before the enemy opened the front door with the key.

Seconds later, Fabericotte heard someone barging into the room. If he were still there, there was an 80% chance that he would have been captured. Even so, he didn't have much time to linger around. As he poked his head out of the window, he saw the roof ridge under the moonlight. The slope, however, seemed a bit steep.

Fabericotte knew he had no other choice but to jump out.

He mustered enough courage and prepared himself for the dangerous feat. When he was halfway out, however, he saw something that sent a chill down his spine.

Black shadows had suddenly appeared from the abandoned masonry buildings below. Fabericotte finally knew why there were so few people in town.

If the two people he saw in the restaurant were hideous, then the creatures below him could be classified as monsters. They had gray-green skin and white bellies. There was not a single strand of hair on their skin. Fish-like scales had replaced these. And the thing that terrified him the most was their heads. They possessed massive, never-closing eyes, protruding eye sockets, and both sides of the neck bulged with gills.

They flopped and jumped around under the moonlight, waving their web-covered hands and feet as though dancing to an absurd tune.

Fabericotte almost fell out of the window after witnessing the horrifying scene in front of him. Fortunately, someone caught him from behind before he let go, and he was dragged back into the room.

Not only was Fabericotte unhappy, but the level of fear in his heart had also risen to the top.

He turned his head and saw that the person that dragged him back into the room was the hostel's male staff. He stared at the escapee with cold, ruthless eyes.

But at the next moment, Fabericotte heard the sound of the door opening in the distance.

The familiar boom of a Winchester rifle somewhat neutralized the horrifying atmosphere for Fabericotte. Screams could be heard outside the room when the rifle was fired, but the commotion soon died down.

Fabericotte's heart sank. Just when he thought that the guy at the door must be under the townsfolk's control, the door opened.

Zhang Heng hit the head of the staff, charging at him with the butt of the rifle, managing to silence the latter completely. After that, he walked toward Fabericotte.

When he saw Zhang Heng approaching, Fabericotte subconsciously backed off until his back came against the wall.

"We are greatly outnumbered. Even if I stay here, I can't save you," Zhang Heng warned.

Fabericotte snapped back to reality, swiftly getting up to his feet. "You...Where did your gun come from?" he asked, pleasantly surprised.

"I borrowed it from the grocery store," replied Zhang Heng. "Can we leave this place through the window?"

"No, there are monsters outside." Now, Fabericotte began to regret that he didn't loot the grocery store with Zhang Heng earlier. "How about the street?" he asked, moving himself a little further from the window.

"What do you think?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

Although the small town's residents did not knock on his door, Zhang Heng did not continue lying on the bed, allowing them to take Fabericotte away. Other than the fact that the two of them were the only outsiders in this town, Farbericotte was also the only one who could tell him what had really happened here.

And Zhang Heng wasn't that naive to think that they would never come looking for him. After all, the old man that he met earlier did everything possible to make him stay at the Gilman Hostel. He even paid for Zhang Heng's accommodation fees. There was no way that they would allow him to be the bystander here.

"What should we do, then?" Farbericotte was lost.

For starters, they could no longer stay here. Although Zhang Heng had a rifle in his hand, they were only a two-man team. A two-man team that was about to go against an entire town. Other than the deformed residents, the monsters that usually stayed hidden in their houses during the day were also out roaming the streets now.

"Go south," Zhang Heng said. Before they walked out of the hostel, they quickly checked the street. There were not many people, and the building nearby could help them cover their tracks.

While talking, Zhang Heng had already returned to the corridor, followed closely by Fabericotte. The two walked all the way to the end of the corridor. At the same time, they heard footsteps coming up the stairs again. It meant that another group was coming up to deal with them.

Zhang Heng handed the jerry-rigged wall-climbing hook to Farbericotte, "Do you know how to use this?"

"I think so," said the latter nervously as he took the grappler.

"Go to the roof of the opposite building. I will meet you there later." Zhang Heng raised his rifle and aimed at the stairs. The moment the first person appeared, he decisively pulled the trigger. The bullet accurately hit the target's head.

With a sickening crack, blood splattered all over the wall.

Zhang Heng masterfully reloaded his rifle, swiftly hitting the second person in the chest. Instead of backing up, he kept walking and shooting until he was only three steps away from the stairs. He looked down and found out that the barrage of gunshots and the mounting corpses could not stop them from charging at him. More dark shadows were rushing upstairs. The rickety stairs could only fit so many people, so some of them jumped up on the handrail and climbed toward the top floor.

A half-fish half-frog creature jumped over the corpse and rushed towards Zhang Heng. Despite frayed nerves, he remained calm, not giving in to fear and panic. Right before the monster pounced at him, Zhang Heng lit a Molotov cocktail and tossed it at the monster.

Chapter 726: Swamp

Accompanied by a shrill shriek, the flames instantly engulfed the monster. Its burning body had stopped the people at the back from advancing. Zhang Heng took advantage of the rare opportunity, putting the rifle back into his backpack, and running toward the other side of the corridor.

There, Fabericotte had hooked the window edge with the claw hook. He was climbing down the wall slowly with both his hands grabbing the ropes tightly. When he raised his head, he saw Zhang Heng climbing out the window.

That man was so agile that he managed to climb to Fabericotte without using any ropes.

Zhang Heng looked at the group of monsters below him who were still calling out to their companions with those strange syllables. He then said to a still hesitating Fabericotte, "You'd better hurry up because I will not wait for you if the situation goes downhill."

Wearing his backpack in front of him, Zhang Heng bent his calf slightly, exerted maximum force, and leaped to the roof opposite him. With the backpack acting as a buffer, it helped him to significantly reduce the impact of the fall.

Unavoidably, some of the items inside were damaged. When Zhang Heng checked the two Molotov cocktails inside of the backpack, he found it to be broken, though he had made very sure it was well protected.

After hearing what Zhang Heng said, Fabericotte did not dare to wait any longer. He did not have the explosive energy and excellent balance that Zhang Heng possessed. Fortunately, he could fully utilize the rope. He held on tight, and like Zhang Heng, kicked the wall hard. After three kicks, he felt that he now

had enough strength to leap over to the roof opposite of him. So, with a final, decisive swing, he released the rope in his hand.

In the end, Fabericotte successfully landed on the roof, but he was not as fortunate as Zhang Heng.

He landed back-first, and his landing point happened to be a weak spot. The building had been left unmaintained for so many years, after all, and as a result, he fell right through.

Seeing that Fabericotte was about to fall through the roof of the abandoned house, Zhang Heng quickly grabbed his hand and pulled him up.

“Thank you!” Fabericotte exclaimed in shock, his breaths heavy and his eyes bulging.

“Keep up.”

The black shadows that initially gathered in front of the Gilman Hostel rushed to the side upon hearing their companions’ hail. Simultaneously, the people in the hostel seemed to have crossed the line of fire Zhang Heng created. Poking their heads out the window, they frantically looked for the two escaped men. Some of the more impatient ones even attempted to jump to the roof to pursue them.

Two monsters managed to jump on the roof. Unfortunately, one fell into the hole that Fabericotte created, and the other lost his balance when he landed, swiftly kicked off the roof by Zhang Heng.

“Here.” Zhang Heng took a quick glance around and decided to move towards the swamp.

Other than the fact that there were fewer people there, it had a more complicated terrain. To get there, they had to pass through a small area of buildings first.

“More and more seem to be coming after us!” Fabericotte yelled in panic as he ran. He also saw a figure with a golden crown in the crowd. That one had emerged from the church.

Immediately, an indescribable sensation of intense discomfort emerged in Fabericotte’s heart. He looked away as fast as he could and followed Zhang Heng to the next roof, unable to help himself from spotting those hideous beings whenever he ran. Unfortunately, they could not stay on the roof all the time. With the increasing gap between buildings, they couldn’t keep making more leaps.

Fabericotte then saw Zhang Heng changing direction and jumping off the roof. It happened that five half-human half-fish monsters were blocking them. The moment he saw them, his heart started thumping violently.

After that, he saw Zhang Heng fell on one of the monsters, stabbing its head with the chef’s knife in his hand. It was a clean kill. The four other monsters began giving chase as Zhang Heng pulled out the rifle from his backpack. Immediately, he drew two revolvers from his waist.

Having a greatly enhanced shooting and drawing speed thanks to the Western dungeon he was in, it now took him less than a second to draw the gun and pull the trigger. And like their companion, the four monsters soon ended up dead.

If it were not for the enemies nearby, Fabericotte would have screamed his lungs out.

When he first saw the hostel's monsters, he had a strong premonition that he was no match for them. He just wanted to turn around and escape, and he had never thought that there would be someone mighty enough to go against these creatures. For Zhang Heng, on the other hand, he seemed to have exerted little strength although he had just killed five monsters.

"Come down." Zhang Heng put away the revolvers, walked to the first monster that he killed, pulled out the chef's knife, and wiped the blood on the monster's body.

"What next?" Fabericotte asked as he climbed down the roof.

Unbeknownst to him, his apprehension and distrust of Zhang Heng had now switched to seeking his opinion no matter what he did. Fabericotte himself did not realize that he had now become dependent on Zhang Heng. As long as it wasn't something insane, he would follow and do whatever he suggested.

It was a shame that there was no time to ask him about the town now. Hence, the two continued running towards the swamp.

Admittedly, Zhang Heng's chosen route was very strategic. They did not encounter any large group of monsters along the way, where the scattered ones were quickly killed off by Zhang Heng as soon as they were in his sights. On the other hand, Fabericotte ran as fast as his legs could keep up.

Due to his passion for travel and adventure, he was a rather fit man than his peers. However, he realized that he failed to outrun those half-fish and frog monsters.

Fabericotte could feel that more and more enemies were chasing after him. They were speaking in a language that did not belong to any race on this earth, and the fishy smell was getting more pungent as well. As the slapping and splotting of their webbed feet got louder and louder, it reminded him that the enemies were getting closer.

But the good news was that they were about to leave this area and arrive at the swamp.

Zhang Heng then lit his last homemade Molotov cocktail in his hand, managing to delay the enemies' pursuit once again. The weeds and shrubs of the swamp provided a good cover.

After Fabericotte ran into the swamp, he saw Zhang Heng in a crouching position, attempting to hide behind the tall grass. He quickly did the same too. Before they could run far, however, they heard the strange sound again, accompanied by crunching and rustling from stepping on the weeds. This also meant that those monsters hadn't yet given up on searching for them. In fact, they had followed them into the swamp.

The worst part was that the two parties were getting closer a lot faster than when they were in the city.

Chapter 727: Necklace

"Go in this direction. Don't look back. Hide if you manage to find a perfect spot." Zhang Heng said to Fabericotte.

"What about you?" asked Fabericotte.

"I will draw them away, and I will come back for you later."

Zhang Heng hadn't been suddenly possessed by Bethune, where his soul would get upgraded, and he wasn't about to sacrifice himself to keep Fabericotte alive either. He had only done that because he underestimated the monsters' tracking abilities in the swamp. If the two continued running together, sooner or later, the enemies would be able to capture them.

Also, if Zhang Heng ditched Fabericotte aside, there was a good chance he would be able to get out of this predicament alone. Getting out of trouble wasn't his purpose tonight, though. He wanted to investigate what was happening to him, which also meant that he first needed to understand what was really going on with this town. If it were not his last resort, he would have tried his best to protect Fabericotte.

Zhang Heng then handed Fabericotte a revolver. "Use this gun to defend yourself. If the circumstance is not dire, try your best not to fire. Otherwise, I may not be able to save you in time.

Fabricotte was no a fool, and he immediately understood what Zhang Heng meant.

Although the revolver could protect him to a certain extent, the loud gunshot would almost certainly reveal his position. If a large number of monsters did surround him, Zhang Heng definitely wouldn't be risking his life to get him out of that.

That being said, the revolver still gave Fabericotte a sense of security.

When fear went beyond human understanding, at least the technological advancements of civilization could bring him some comfort, especially under the knowledge that he would surely die without a gun if those monsters surrounded him. With that piece of crude technology, he could at least fight for his life.

The footsteps behind him were getting closer and closer. Zhang Heng and Fabericotte quickly went through the action plan and went on their separate ways. Fabericotte kept moving forward, while Zhang Heng chose another direction to advance. And he deliberately made more noise by touching the weeds around him as he moved.

Almost immediately, the monsters who were searching for them noticed the rustling. Like a torch burning brightly in the dark, he was attracting the nearby moths to pounce at him.

Of course, there was good news. After ditching "cumbersome," Zhang Heng had become a lot more agile.

He quickened his pace and ran toward the paddy field in front of him, where two residential houses were located.

It would be idiotic to block those monsters with a thin door and wall made of soil. Since he was on high ground, it was perfect for him to carry out a blockade.

Although Zhang Heng's ultimate goal was to run away, he did not want to just run. It was never his style to stay silent after getting forced into a corner. If he did not teach them a lesson, they would never stop coming after him.

As Zhang Heng ran, he reached into his backpack, taking out a box of bullets and reloading his rifle. He was less than 200 yards from the two small houses at that time, where its broken windows that had been stuffed with clothes could be clearly seen. The front doors were open, and there was a pile of

garbage in the courtyard. The mess of broken oyster shells scattered all over the floor indicated that this place must have been uninhabited for a long time.

He was about to approach one of the houses after crossing a small bog. Suddenly, something unexpected happened. A shadowy figure emerged from the grass on his left-hand side. It seemed the person had been waiting for some time to ambush Zhang Heng. Considering how close the two were to each other, the monster's huge protruding eyeballs almost touched Zhang Heng's cheeks. Zhang Heng, on the other hand, had no time to mount an ambush.

The putrid fishy smell on his enemy had made it possible for Zhang Heng to identify him.

Although Zhang Heng had been pushed to the ground, he still managed to aim at his opponent's neck with his rifle. As he started examining the creature, he realized that its physiology completely differed from that of an ordinary person. It breathed via the gills on both sides of its neck. The rifle hadn't affected it too much, simply making it feel a little uncomfortable. With its feet, the creature kicked the rifle away.

Zhang Heng also noticed that a piece of gold jewelry engraved with a strange pattern had fallen from the enemy's neck to the ground amid the struggle. Before Zhang Heng could take a closer look at the necklace, he saw other figures rushing out of the abandoned house. They looked like the nearby farmers but weren't yet fully transformed into the monsters he met earlier. At most, they looked like the man and woman that worked in the restaurant.

If they managed to get to him, Zhang Heng would need more time to get rid of them. So he decisively pulled the trigger while wrestling the enemy in front of him. He managed to aim at the farmer's leg when he grabbed his rifle, the bullet firing out of its chamber embedded itself into the target's thigh. Although not fatal, it was more than enough to stop him from getting into his way.

After firing the shot, Zhang Heng dropped the rifle, drew the chef's knife from his backpack, and inserted it into the eye socket of the monster when it turned its head. The latter grinned and exerted the last of its strength to squeeze out few vague syllables from his throat.

"Save it. I don't understand what you are talking about..."

Zhang Heng picked up the rifle. After hesitating for a while, he picked up the necklace as well and put it in his pocket.

Initially, he thought that the necklace was made out of gold, but after closer inspection, he found that it had a strange luster with a lighter color. It seemed someone had cast it with an alloy of unknown metals.

This was not the time to analyze this necklace. Zhang Heng looked at it briefly, stepped over the wailing farmers, and came up to the two abandoned houses. It was crucial that he confirmed nobody was hiding inside them, so he gave them a quick once over. Sure that he was alone, he climbed onto the roof of one of the houses.

What greeted him was a spectacular and mysterious scene.

He witnessed countless half-man half-fish, and frog-like monsters leaping around in the swamp, like dolphins jumping out of the water. However, these look far more horrific than the graceful creatures.

Seeing dolphins in a boat at sea would always make people happy, but these hideous creatures moving in the swamp would freak most ordinary people to the point they peed their pants.

Instead of wasting time gawking at the multitude of monsters below him, Zhang Heng hurriedly looked for the ones wearing golden crowns and robes. He had noticed these people with weird appearances when he was running away, and it seemed that they were the same ones near the church when he first arrived in the town. They played a commanding role among the monsters, hence making them of higher status.

Naturally, Zhang Heng needed to kill these ones first.

But little time was left. The first wave of monsters would soon reach his location.

Zhang Heng raised his rifle, and with help from the moonlight, he took aim at one of them.

A deafening bang pierced the air. A figure wearing a golden crown trembled, fell to the ground, and could not stand up again.

This time, Zhang Heng was unbothered to admire his kill, swiftly changing his muzzle's direction and fired at his second target.

The shot missed, however. It was all due to the distance and that this target had become vigilant enough to dodge the gunshot after witnessing his two companions getting killed.

The Filter Lens, or rather, the lack thereof, was responsible for these misses. If only he had the device with him, he would've taken out the enemy with a single shot even if it came prepared. As of now, Zhang Heng knew that he had run out of time to reload his rifle. The gold-crowned figure glared at him for a while. Zhang Heng then killed the two monsters that charged at him and jumped down from the roof.

Chapter 728: Meetup

Zhang Heng's two shots impacted them somewhat. At least it slowed their advance. They were clearly not used to losing their commanders, and although they were still charging at Zhang Heng, they could not help but slow down.

This was a logical thing for them to do. Although monsters, these were no brainless zombies. They witnessed the way Zhang Heng had massacred their companions. With the bodies of the sacrifices lying beside them, hearing the farmers wailing on the ground, they would naturally worry about their safety.

As for the monsters led by the third sacrifice, Zhang Heng was not too bothered because they were still far away. After firing at his target, he put the rifle back into his backpack and left the two farmhouses.

Zhang Heng did not rendezvous with Fabericotte immediately. Instead, he went around the area to make sure that he had gotten rid of all the monsters behind him before heading off.

After such a long time, Zhang Heng had no idea where Fabericotte went. He didn't even know if Fabericotte had been apprehended. There was nothing he could do if he were that useless. After all, he had done everything he could to help him survive.

Zhang Heng headed in the direction that Fabericotte went in. At the same time, he noticed that the monsters behind him hadn't yet given up. He was quite a distance from them, though, not to mention that it was a large swamp as well.

They couldn't be locating Zhang Heng in a short time. Considering how he had led the enemies in other directions, he had plenty of time to move around if he was careful. In other words, he finally had the time to listen to Fabericotte's experiences. For him to do that, he had first to locate Fabericotte.

Zhang Heng also took this opportunity to check the necklace that he picked up earlier. Busy fighting-off monsters, there was simply no chance to take a closer look before this. He discovered that the materials used to make the necklace were a bit strange. He deduced that it was of the same material as the golden crowns of the sacrifices, save for the crown's more refined and intricate workmanship.

In contrast, the necklace had been made to simpler standards. Although there were markings on it, they were mainly some very abstract symbols. Among them, Zhang Heng could only identify the water symbol, something that might represent life. Other than that, there was an ocean and some fishes. He could feel that it was cold to the touch.

It would have been an excellent summer accessory, except that just like its owner, this necklace also exuded an indescribable evil and mysterious aura, like a rattlesnake hiding under a slate.

After Zhang Heng confirmed that he could no longer decipher any information from it, he stuffed it into his backpack and continued to look for Fabericotte.

The dilapidated church's spire stood tall in the darkness from far. And on the other side, long shadows loomed over the wave breaker. It seemed some people were standing on top of it. At first, Zhang Heng thought they were looking for him and Fabericotte, but after close inspection, he realized how wrong his initial speculations were.

Their backs were facing Zhang Heng, and they were looking in the direction of the sea. Or, to be more precise, they were staring at the black reef. Zhang Heng could not figure out what they were waiting for. Simultaneously, the stench of rotten fish got stronger and stronger, more so when the sea breeze blew at him. At first, Zhang Heng mistakenly thought that another wave of enemies was approaching him only to realize that it was the breeze that was actually responsible for carrying the disgusting smell to him.

Zhang Heng had a hunch about what would happen to the black reef. And this might even have something to do with him. The most urgent thing, however, was finding Fabericotte. He needed to figure out what was really happening in the town before deciding his next move.

Crouching down, Zhang Heng tried to hide behind the weeds while paying attention to any movement from all sides. He spent about an hour trying to identify the types of footprints left on the soil with his pocket flashlight. He had deliberately chosen to walk on some muddy road when heading to dinner with Fabericotte, and on those paths, he spotted Fabericotte's shoeprints.

In the end, Zhang Heng managed to locate him. He was hiding beside an abandoned railroad track. At first, Zhang Heng thought he was dead when he saw him since he was completely motionless, looking very much like a corpse.

As Zhang Heng approached him, he found Fabericotte's breathing to be very stable. He was simply unconscious.

Zhang Heng shook the young man and woke Fabericotte from his nightmare.

The latter almost screamed when he opened his eyes. Fortunately, Zhang Heng was quick enough to cover his mouth with his hand.

Fabericotte was surprised and delighted the moment he saw who was in front of him. "You are finally back!" he gushed.

"Well, why are you sleeping here?" Zhang Heng asked. "You even deviated from the route we agreed."

"After we are separated, I ran in the direction that we agreed. Unfortunately, I ran into a group of monsters. To avoid them, I had to change the route slightly. Initially, I wanted to head back in the right direction after a while. It was then that I saw another group of monsters. I saw no alternative, so I had to hide in the railway tunnel temporarily. What I didn't expect was that they would jump over my head one by one."

As if reliving the horrific scene, Fabericotte's voice quivered. "God! They were so close to me, so close that I could see the scales on them. The extreme fear that I was experiencing made me pass out. I never thought I would see you again. If one of them looked down at that time, I would have been done for good."

"So, it seems great luck is on your side." Zhang Heng sat down next to Fabericotte. "Now, can you tell me about the town?"

"Of course. I'm so sorry. Please forgive my apprehension. The thing that has happened here is too absurd, and..." At that point, Fabericotte hesitated again. "Do you know that there are only two buses here? Did you have any contact with the outside world? I came here by the morning bus, but I didn't see you at the time. I don't know where you came from. The people at Newburyport said that no outsider would come to this place."

"I'm from Arkham," Zhang Heng lied calmly, "...I was ordered to investigate what happened here."

"Ah, are you a detective? No wonder you are so good at what you do." Fabericotte came to a sudden realization. And soon, a look of regret flashed across his face.

"That means the government has realized that something is wrong with this place. There are a lot of legendary tales here. I didn't expect them to be true. I should have told you everything I know, Mr. Agent."

Chapter 729: Fabericotte's Story

Fabericotte calmed down a little after that. Although his common sense and logic were destroyed after seeing those monsters from such a close distance, he did not allow his mind to fall into confusion.

He was able to describe to Zhang Heng what he saw and heard that day.

According to him, he initially wanted to transit to Arkham from here by riding the bus at 8 p.m. Usually, no one would pick this route, hence the cheap fare. For a poor traveler like him, he chose that route without much hesitation. Besides that, he was curious about this place as well.

In Newburyport, he had heard many tales about this place, such as the disgusting and hideous people who lived in this town, the gloomy, oppressed, and sneaky atmosphere, and the periodical disappearance of people. It seemed like a rather attractive prospect at that time.

That was especially the case when Fabricotte saw the golden crown in the museum. He became deeply fascinated by the evil aura beyond human imagination and its mysterious origin.

“Is the golden crown made of this material?” Zhang Heng took out the necklace he found in his bag.

“Yes! That’s it!” Farbericotte immediately yelped when he saw the necklace. However, before he could get a good look at it, he shuddered, trying to look away. It seemed the necklace stored some evil magical power. Despite that, Fabricotte could not help but be fascinated by it.

Fortunately, Zhang Heng did not take it out for too long. He just waved it in front of him and put it away again.

Fabricotte breathed a sigh of relief, “Anyway, I took the bus at ten o’clock the next morning and arrived here. Although I’ve had done a lot of research and mentally prepared myself before coming here, I must admit the strange and dead atmosphere is beyond my imagination. I mean, can you believe it? Before 1846, this town was filled with people. It was said that a great plague swept by, destroying this town, wiping out more than half its inhabitants in a short time. Perhaps this unknown disease is the cause of their strange appearance.”

Fabricotte paused for a while.

“Anyway, I had already gotten on the bus and landed here. Even if I wanted to leave, I had to take the evening bus. So I decided to spend some time walking around. I wanted to satisfy my curiosity too. I wanted to hear more tales about this place... But as you can see, the people here are not very friendly to outsiders. No one wants to talk to me. In fact, it is not that I don’t want to communicate with them. Their strange looks simply make me very uncomfortable. Then, found an employee in the grocery store. He is not a local. Not too long ago, his headquarters transferred him here.

“He told me a few things that I should be mindful of, such as not going out in the middle of the night and staying away from the church. Another mysterious order had replaced the Freemasons here, and their priests worked on some peculiar rituals. On another note, the townsfolk love water very much. They have swimming competitions from time to time. Trust me. You don’t want to know how they swim. By the way, there are four famous families in this town—the Marsh family, running the refinery, the Witt family, the Gilman family, and the Elliott family. However, the people here rarely see them around town.

“When the staff in the grocery store knew that I was curious about the tales here, he recommended an old man called Zadok Allen to me. He is a poor old drunk who lives alone and is over ninety years old. Normally, he would keep his mouth closed tight, and he is mentally unstable. But as soon as he gets drunk, he would start spilling everything kept in his mind. It is said that he created most of the fables around here.”

“Did you manage to find him?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Yes, but it was not an easy task. I had to avoid as many people as possible. In fact, the staff told me that it would be best that nobody knew that I had met Zadok Allen. I used a bottle of wine to lure him to some ruins. That was where I acquired a precious opportunity to talk to him one-on-one.”

Farbericotte suddenly displayed a look of horror and annoyance, “but I now wished I never heard those horrible stories from him.”

“What kind of stories?”

“Everything traced back to a small island in the South Pacific. At that time, a series of unfortunate events took place one after another. A ship of fishermen was killed by pirates during the War in 1812. Three of the Gilman’s ships went missing, leaving only the Marsh’s vessels still sailing. However, they didn’t manage to fish for a long. There was a man called Obed, one of the captains of the fleet. He had come to know about a small island where the indigenous wore gold-like jewelry and fishes that were so abundant their boats would creak from the haul.

“Hence, Captain Obed led his people to find the small island. At first, he just tried to trade the gold-like pieces of jewelry with the natives. Not too long after that, Obed found the source of those gold from the tribal chief. The tribal chief told him that the people on the island would hold ceremonies from time to time. These creatures would ask the tribe to give up their young people as a sacrifice, and in return, they would give them gold and fishes.”

“After that, those things attempted to persuade the island’s natives to reproduce with them. When they gave birth, their offspring look exactly like humans, but as they mature, they would take on the likeness of those creatures. Eventually, they would live underwater forever.”

“Are you referring to those half-human, half-fish, and frog creatures?” Zhang Heng frowned.

“Yes, those creatures were the ones who did business with that tribe. But not all their children grew up that way. Besides that, different people had different mutation times. Some were born like this, and some could maintain their human appearance until they were 70 or 80. Some even looked human until the day they died.”

“Hmm.”

“In short, Captain Obed figured out what happened on the island and brought back the gift the tribal chief gave him, a gadget made of lead or something and a set of corresponding rituals. According to the chief, if they managed to find a place with fishes, all they had to do was throw the gadget into the water. In conjunction with the ritual, they would be able to find those creatures living underwater.

“Captain Obed did not use it at first. He just put it aside and continued to trade with the tribal people on the island to acquire their gold. Not long after that, he opened a refinery in the town to secretly process the gold and made a lot of money. On the 8th of March, when Obed took the people to the island, he discovered that the tribe had disappeared. Folks from other islands had wiped them out, and mysterious amulets were scattered everywhere on the island. For Captain Obed, that could only mean terrible news.”

Chapter 730: The Truth Revealed

“The refinery’s business took a sudden turn for the worse, and even the economy of the town began to deteriorate. Captain Obed thought of the lead object that he received from the tribal people. So he told the people in the town that he could bring in gold and fish again. At first, there were objections, especially one of the sailors who had gone to the island with him. However, those who objected to the idea were soon forced to step away. At that time, Captain Alder started to restore his refinery business.

“But in 1846, things got out of hand. Too many people had gone missing in the town, and many inhabitants had seen the half-human half-fish monsters crawling out of the water. That had caused some working in the city committee to go against him. They made contact and gathered a large number of people to force him to surrender. In the end, Obed and the twenty-three people who followed him were put in prison. Unfortunately, something terrible happened before their trial got to proceed. One night, countless creatures crawled out from the water to the shore. There were gunshots and screams in the square, churches, and fields. It continued until dawn. By that time, half of the town’s people had disappeared.

“Obed and the twenty-three people came out of the prison. Leading the remaining half of the town’s inhabitants, he declared that a plague had struck the settlement and was responsible for many deaths. The plague, however, was simply an excuse to cover up for their mistakes. And since then, they began to lose control before finally falling into the abyss of sin. Everything rotted away and died, especially when the first batch of children grew up, and they began showing a difference. More and more inhabitants started to mutate. Monsters crawl in the dark attics and basements. You could tell that the normal-looking people were getting lesser and lesser. I guess this is what we’ve come to.”

Farbericotet’s voice has been to tremble. “I’ve been trying to comfort myself ever since I first heard these tales. I kept telling myself that these were the drunk talk of an old man. After he spoke, he suddenly grabbed my shoulder. He told me that it’s coming. It’s too late! It’s too late! It’s too late! He shouted. Then, I saw him run to the distant wave breaker and jumped off of it.”

“Did anyone see him talking to you?” Zhang Heng asked.

“I don’t know. I was in too much of a panic. I should have saved him. A normal person would have saved him or at least checked if he was alive. I mean, after all, he committed suicide because of me. Initially, I thought he had a mental problem. After he jumped down from the wave breaker, I just stood there and felt something strangling me. When I realized that I couldn’t save him anymore, I turned around and ran back to the square. I wanted to take the bus at 8.p.m. to get to Arkham, but the driver suddenly told me that some celebration would be held in the evening and the bus service would stop for one day. After that, I met you at the Gilman Hostel.”

“Then, do you have any idea what this thing that Allen mentioned was?”

“No, I have completely no clue. I have told you everything I know so far,” Fabricotte said. “If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes tonight, I would have never believed that such terrifying creatures exist. I swear that the excitement that I experienced here beats my entire life’s experience of encountering strange happenings. If we are lucky enough to leave this place safely, I will never come back again.”

He looked at Zhang Heng with hopeful eyes. “We can leave this place in one piece, right?”

Zhang Heng did not answer him right away. He turned to look in the direction of the wave breaker. The dark shadows were still standing there, motionless.

After that, Zhang Heng turned around and said to Fabericotte. "You didn't tell me the truth."

"What do you mean?" Fabericotte was stunned. "I wouldn't dare hide anything from you now. Otherwise, I'll be risking my life."

Zhang Heng did not answer. Instead, he said, "I'm just curious of why you guys would put so much effort into making up the whole thing. Is it just for me to see?"

Fabericotte's face remained stunned.

"You didn't come here by bus," Zhang Heng said. "In fact, the bus never left here. I checked its wheels and the dirt on it. Judging from its condition, I'd say it hasn't been driven for more than ten hours. And the grocery store's story has a big loophole as well. Considering the dust on the counter, I don't think it has been opened for the past week. However, you told me that you talked to the employee there in the afternoon. Oh, and those abandoned houses."

"Is there anything wrong with those?" Fabericotte asked.

"Some of them have collapsed because of disrepair, but as for the others, especially the ones by the sea, they had been destroyed by bombs. Their damage differs from the dilapidated houses. Somewhere in the town, I also saw traces of tank tracks."

"How did you find out so much after just staying for a while?" Fabericotte asked in surprise.

"My observational ability is a lot better than you think," Zhang Heng replied. "So what day is today? When I first came here, the first person who talked to me told me that it is July 15, 1927. The newspaper the staff at Gilman Hostel's front desk was reading had been published years ago. And the magazine on the table also shows me the date, July 15. You guys have been using this method to tell me that today is July 15. Why? What is so special about this day?"

"No matter what date it is today, everything that you have experienced so far is real. Does it remind you of something?" Fabericotte asked rhetorically.

"Save the puzzle for someone else," Zhang Heng said. "The young man in your story, did he escape here in the end?"

"Did he escape?" the young foreigner asked himself.

"Oh, I think he managed to escape. Otherwise, there would have been no military intervention. The tank marks on the ground and the old blown-up houses were what happened later."

Fabericotte finally stopped pretending and took off the surprised expression on his face. "Your reasoning and keen observation are impressive. But you were wrong about one thing."

"Please advise." Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

"I am the young man, and that young man is indeed me. Or, to be more precise. That was the old me."

“Interesting, as you said before, people don’t usually come back after experiencing those horrible things.”

“It’s true, but do you remember my introduction when we first met? I said that I came here to admire the natural scenery, look for historical sites, and study my family pedigree.”

“You have family members here? Were you born here? Were you sent away after you were born into this world? Is that why you don’t know much about this place?”

“To be more precise, she is my great-grandmother. And she is a member of the Marsh family, Captain Obed Marsh.”