

Horrors 821

Chapter 821: Data Filing Room

Things were getting worse. Zhou Tu started to get targeted as well, and the first wound appeared on his finger.

“Mr. Bai, what should we do now?”

Chen Ge had no better idea. All he could do was grit his teeth and push through. Even if everyone was shredded by the monsters and lost their mobility, he had to drag everyone out. The stench rushed into their nostrils, attempting to knock them out. When Chen Ge carried Wang Yicheng to the corner of the first floor’s staircase, a jolt of pain came from his chest. Chen Ge shuddered and almost tripped. He lowered his head to look and found a nail stuck in his chest.

“The curse from Room 413?” He noticed something instantly and turned to look at his shadow. The normal shadow was currently twisting, like the person hiding inside was in incredible pain.

“Even he’s under attack?” All the members were at their limits. They were seriously wounded. “The exit is just before us. Don’t give up!”

Chen Ge’s determination was strong; he had gotten used to pain. Pulling out the nail, Chen Ge tried his best to run forward. Even if it was just one more step, it would mean that he was one step closer to hope.

Zhou Tu collapsed on the stairs while carrying Zhu Long. His right hand was covered in wounds, and it looked like it was about to break. “My painting hand...”

It was difficult for Chen Ge to carry one person, much less four. “Hang in there! We’re almost on the first floor!”

Their legs appeared to be shackled with lead. Every step was very heavy. The stench on the first floor was heavier than on the second floor. More monsters were waiting for them there. Other than Chen Ge, everyone was in despair. But suddenly, the stench in the air dissipated like someone had led part of the monsters away.

“This is our chance!” Chen Ge dragged Zhou Tu, carried Wang Yicheng, and made a mad dash. When he reached the first floor, he saw a black shadow standing at the other end of the corridor. The person looked very similar to Chang Gu. His left eye was shining with a red glow, and blood was dripping from his body under his clothes. He appeared to be holding something.

“Chang Gu?” Chen Ge blurted out the man’s name, but the other person did not reply. He turned to leave, and the stench in the corridor became lighter.

“Was he the one who led the monsters away?”

In Chen Ge’s memory, Chang Gu was cowardly and weak, very different from the shadow that he had seen.

“He only entered the door several seconds earlier than I did. What happened to him?”

The shadow led more than half of the monsters away. Chen Ge quickly led the members away from the education block.

“Mr. Bai, what are those monsters? Why can we only see them with our heads inverted? And why did they only attack Wang Yicheng and Zhang Ju but not you?” Zhou Tu collapsed to the ground. He felt like the stench had seeped into his body.

“The monsters are probably what the school uses to punish students. There’s a possibility that they were the students who once broke the school’s rules.” Chen Ge also did not expect the monsters to not fear Red Specters. They had lost their rationality. They were crazed and mad.

“The school owner wanted to create a paradise behind the door. The memory of your past goes against that wish, so naturally, you are prime targets.” Chen Ge inspected Wang Yicheng and Zhang Ju’s bodies. The black threads had already crawled into their wounds. The wounds were faintly giving off that familiar stench. “You have to be careful. I’m afraid that the monsters are trying to assimilate you.”

Standing outside the education block, Chen Ge used his Yin Yang Vision to look around, but he did not see the black shadow that had saved them. “If he was really Chang Gu, why didn’t he come find me? Or is it not yet time to meet? Or has he been targeted as well?”

Chen Ge and Chang Gu did not have much communication. He needed to guess Chang Gu’s emotions, and then he could make the most correct decision.

“It’s good that there’s someone who can help me tip the balance.” Chen Ge supported Wang Yicheng. “Come, let’s go to the office. The data filing room should be there.”

...

The western campus’ office block was close to the wall. Standing on the roof of the building, one could see the entire view of the two campuses.

“The monsters I’ve encountered in this school can be separated into a few brief categories: the normal Specters and lingering spirits, the normal Red Specters, the administrators of western campus whose bodies were scorched and wore all white, and the monsters who were walking upside down. Other than them, the most dangerous creatures are the teachers and dormitory administrators at this school. We’re going to the office block, and there’s a good chance we’ll meet them, so we have to be careful.”

With great risk came great reward. This was not the first time that Chen Ge had done something like that, but this was not common for the other club members.

“Mr. Bai, but aren’t you one of the teachers as well?”

“Don’t you think I’m dangerous?” Chen Ge replied without turning his head around and was the first to step into the office block. He had been to the western campus’ office building before, but to his surprise, the interior designs of the office blocks of each campus were so different.

The office block on the western campus was clean and organized, but once he stepped into the eastern campus’ office building, he felt pressured. The floor needed cleaning; muddy footprints were

everywhere. The previously-white walls were scratched and had turned a faded yellow. Stains of mildew were everywhere.

“The teachers on the eastern campus work in this kind of environment?” Zhou Tu could not believe it.

“In this school, the teacher’s job is not to educate but to manage. They spend most of their time with the students. The office building is just a symbolic place.” Chen Ge pushed one of the doors. The door was not locked and opened easily. The amenities inside the building were old, and they looked dated.

“I’ve been to this place before. I know where the filing room is,” Zhang Ju said coldly. Ever since he found his memory, he had become reticent.

“When have you come here?” Zhou Tu was afraid of the current Zhang Ju, and when he spoke, he naturally lowered his voice.

“Before I was lied to by Chang Wenyu, I once sneaked here to find out more about this school.” Zhang Ju walked ahead. “Stick close to me. This place makes me uncomfortable. Something dangerous might be hiding here.”

Perhaps the monster inside the building had sensed Zhang Ju or some other reason, but they did not run into any danger and successfully reached the third floor.

“This is the data filing room. We should leave immediately once we find what we need. We shouldn’t stay too long; I feel like there’s something else in this building.” Zhang Ju opened the door. Several aged wooden shelves and four rows of wooden bookshelves sat inside.

Chapter 822: Big Fire!

The smell of mildew permeated the data filing room. Chen Ge was the first to enter the room with his hand over his mouth. The wooden shelves looked antique. Placed next to the rusted shelves, they looked quite out of place. “These metallic and wooden shelves seem to have come from different schools.”

Chen Ge took a random document from the wooden shelf. The document was so poorly preserved that once Chen Ge touched it, it started to crumble.

“Bug infestation, water damage, the school doesn’t seem to value these documents at all.” Chen Ge carefully opened the document file. The content inside confused him. “A donation appreciation list? Why does this look so familiar?”

Chen Ge looked through it again, and an image suddenly flashed across his mind. He looked at the file that was filled with holes. “I saw this exact list in the headmaster’s office in Mu Yang High School!”

He studied the list closer and rummaged through his memory. After comparing the donor’s names, he was more certain of his discovery.

“It’s the exact same! It’s the same as one I saw in Mu Yang High School!”

Back when he returned to Mu Yang High School to find the headmaster, he had scanned the two-star scenario but could not find the old headmaster.

“The world behind the door is created from the memory of the door-pusher, but this school is rather unique. It seems to have been created from the amalgamation of the memory of everyone who is trapped behind the door.” Chen Ge touched his chin. “Other than the old headmaster, the other students of Mu Yang High School are all currently in my Haunted House. The fact that this list has shown up here, does it mean that the old headmaster is in this school?”

Chen Ge’s eyes widened. He looked at the bookshelves, and the longer he looked, the more familiar it felt.

“Could these things have been moved from Mu Yang High School? Has a part of that two-star scenario been moved here?”

“Looks like it is destined for me to meet the old headmaster.”

He replaced the document, and his expression was hard to read. “Before unlocking the School of the Afterlife, there are nine missions to complete. Could there be a special relation between these nine missions and the School of the Afterlife?”

“Mr. Bai, what have you found?”

“I did find something, but the implication’s still unclear.” Chen Ge pulled out another ruined document. It was covered in mildew. “An investigation report of the school perimeter?”

Instead of calling this place a data filing room, it was more like a storage room for a variety of documents. Any documents and information could be found there, including accounting books, graduation forms, the canteen tender list, and so on.

“Mr. Bai!” Zhu Long found a few scrunched up newspapers in the corner. He showed one of them to Chen Ge. “Look at the article in the middle with the zoomed in picture.”

“A fire of unknown origin ravaged the education block. Many students were trapped inside the toilet. The brave firemen rushed into the fire to save them.” This article was placed in the middle of the paper.

“Based on the arrangement and content, it doesn’t sound like the writer is that old.” Chen Ge accepted the copy that was stained. A major part of the paper was unreadable. “This looks like the school’s school bulletin.”

Mu Yang High School was a private charity school; they should not have had the excess budget to have a school newspaper. Chen Ge flipped through the copy and noticed a familiar name—Western Jiujiang Private Academy. The location’s name appeared many times, and many articles were about the Western Jiujiang Private Academy.

“Wait, isn’t Zhang Ya from Western Jiujiang Private Academy?”

Chen Ge’s first date had been with the Red Specter at that abandoned school. It was also at that school that he had walked into Zhang Ya’s heart.

“There was a fire at Western Jiujiang Private Academy’s education block?” Thinking back, he did remember seeing many burned bannisters in the school. “This is strange. Not only Western Jiujiang Private Academy, including Mu Yang High School, the schools that I’ve been to have been ravaged by fire before.”

He looked through the paper that Zhu Long had given him again. At the time, the firemen had saved six people from the top floor's toilet. The paper hailed the firemen as heroes, but he saw an article in the corner that reminded the students about some fire safety knowledge. It mentioned briefly that a student had lost their life in the fire.

"The fire might have spread from the toilet, but why would it start there? It was already after the time for the students' night study when the fire started. In other words, it was already past normal school time. So, what were those students doing in the top floor toilet?"

Concluding the various articles, Chen Ge quickly zeroed in on the problem. "The fire burned the fourth floor, and the only students were found in the fourth-floor toilet. The firemen saved six students, but there was one who died in the fire. This means that there were seven students in total!"

It was hard to tell what had caused the fire. This was not recorded in any of the files. The child who had died in the fire seemed to have become a taboo topic as well.

"Something like this happened at Western Jiujiang Private Academy before? How come I didn't feel anything 'special' when I visited it?" Chen Ge was confused. "If the toilet's door was pushed open by the child who died in the fire, then he should be door pusher at Western Jiujiang Private Academy, but the reason the school could qualify as a three-star scenario was because of Zhang Ya!"

Now that Western Jiujiang Private Academy had become part of the Haunted House, Chen Ge could confirm that Zhang Ya was the scariest presence at that school.

"There should be a door in all three-star scenarios, but even though Western Jiujiang private Academy is a three-star scenario, there's no door." Chen Ge turned to his shadow and called the name silently in his heart. He repeated it, but there was no reply. "The black phone categorizes Western Jiujiang Private Academy as a three-star scenario because of Zhang Ya, and based on my knowledge, Zhang Ya hasn't pushed open any doors. Plus, when I went to Western Jiujiang Private Academy, I didn't encounter a door..."

Chen Ge slowly lowered his hands that held the paper, and a red dress appeared in his mind.

"Zhang Ya, the door that has disappeared, the door-pusher..." Those three terms formed a line in Chen Ge's mind, and he a possibility suddenly came to him.

His eyes widened as Chen Ge sucked in a cold breath. "Is it possible that the door pusher from Western Jiujiang Private Academy has been consumed by Zhang Ya?"

That would explain why Zhang Ya was so different and so ridiculously strong.

"What happens to the door after the door-pusher has been consumed?" Chen Ge thought about various possibilities. "Due to her spirit, Zhang Ya didn't become the door pusher. After the door lost the pusher, it should have gone out of control like the door at Li Wan City, but that didn't happen. The door only shows up at the bedside of these despairing kids... Wait a minute! Could it be searching for a new door-pusher?"

Chapter 823: Search for Children with Despair

Chen Ge was shocked by his own thought. An ownerless door going on an endless search for a despairing child, and after several years, it transformed itself into a four-star scenario. That sounded impossible, so Chen Ge warned himself from getting ahead of himself.

“There are thirteen easels in the art room, so there should be thirteen painters. They know about the school’s secret. They might be the thirteen door-pusher candidates that the door has found for itself.”

A person’s energy would have a hard time supporting an entire four-star scenario, unless that person had surpassed the limitation of a Red Specter, or it was the cooperation between many Red Specters. No one knew how this would end. After all, Chen Ge had not encountered so many Red Specters in one place before.

“Thirteen, this sure is an unlucky number.” Chen Ge glanced at Zhou Tu. He had been looking for the art club and had dreamed about the scene inside the room with the oil paintings. He should be one of the thirteen painters.

“The door should have its requirements. Zhang Ju obviously doesn’t fulfil those requirements, but Zhou Tu does.” Chen Ge had not expected much from the art room initially, but now after giving it some analysis, he changed his mind. “Zhou Tu’s memory will be key.”

Of the club members, Zhou Tu was the most unique, and Chen Ge was going to face two possible developments. After Zhou Tu’s memory awakened, he might tell Chen Ge everything, or he might become Chen Ge’s enemy.

“This is a big fish. Perhaps I should pay him more attention.” Chen Ge narrowed his eyes at Zhou Tu until the latter shivered from his gaze.

“Mr. Bai, I’m going to go there to take a look.” Zhou Tu found an excuse and scurried deeper into the room.

“Why are you running away? I’m the one who should be scared.” Chen Ge continued searching the room. He believed that the filing room had more surprises for him. Very soon, Chen Ge found more articles about fires inside the room. Flames seemed to have a special significance in the school. They represented destruction but also rebirth.

“There was a fire at Mu Yang High School. There were burn marks on the stairs, and the school used to house a crematorium. Now I’ve discovered that there was also a fire at Western Jiujiang Private Academy. Are these mere coincidences, or is there a deeper meaning behind it?”

Other than the articles about the fire, Chen Ge also found a few rather well-preserved student files. Two of them were quite unique. One of them had Lin Sisi’s name, and there were many comments given about him by the teachers and other students.

Other classmates refused to be his friend, and the teachers ignored him for the most part. The child had lost his mother, and his father was a murderer. He had been adopted when he was young, but for some reason, he always ran away from home and created a lot of trouble. From his perspective, the only person who sincerely wanted to help him was an intern at the children’s home. The young man who had just graduated from university sponsored Lin Sisi through primary school even though he had not settled down himself. He even attended Lin Sisi’s parent-teacher conferences.

Based on the teacher's observation, only in the intern's presence would Lin Sisi's 'hyperactivity' improve. The document did not have any actual information or even a picture of Lin Sisi, but there was a handwritten signature—Gu Youjia. The document was moldy and been eaten by bugs. Only the spot with the guardian's signature was clean and untouched.

"Gu Youjia, Jiujiang Children's Home. If I can leave this place alive, I should go pay the place a visit." Chen Ge seemed to be talking to himself, but at the same time, his words appeared to be meant for other ears as well. Then he turned to the other selected document. This document's date was earlier than every other file. There was no name, and there was no content; there was only one line written on it.

"Just one more minute, one more hour. It will get better. They won't bully me forever. One day, I will grow up." The handwriting was uneven and tilted. They did not appear to be written by an adult, more like the handwriting of an injured child.

"Patience and refusal to fight back will only make the bullying worse. It is the same no matter what. Those who gain joy from inflicting pain on others will not practice empathy and self-reflection." Chen Ge used Lin Sisi's phone to take a picture before putting the files back.

"The earliest file should have been left behind by the real door pusher. After he pushed open the door, perhaps his personality underwent a drastic change, and he shot down to the other end of the spectrum. If he was the person whom Zhang Ya had consumed, after he perished, the door that he opened might have continued to operate based on his lingering spirit. "If I wish to increase my survivability behind the door, I should try to follow his ideology."

Bullying never happened to Chen Ge. The closest he had come to being bullied probably happened when he was still in primary school. The teacher had told the students to bring their old toys to school so that they could donate them to the local children's home.

After everyone had made their donation, Chen Ge had been the only one left who had stood there wordlessly holding his bag. The naughtier kids in class had started to grab at his bag, and in that process, they had accidentally yanked down the zipper. A bloody intestine and a whole bag of decapitated fingers had burst forth like a foundation. The realistic fingers had rolled on the ground like hot dogs. The plastic bloody intestine had bounced several times on the table. It had definitely given the teacher and his classmates a day to remember.

When the vice headmaster came to the class, he had asked the teacher about Chen Ge's family background. That afternoon, Chen Ge's parents had been called to the school and then been led to the police station for some questions. In a way, Chen Ge should have been the only kid who got bullied in class but ended up with his parents interrogated by the police. Looking on the bright side, from then on, no one dared bully Chen Ge.

"One shan't ever bow down to bullying." Chen Ge had another meaning in that statement. At this school, some of the victims had restarted the cycle. The School of the Afterlife kept expanding. The door that was not completely dyed red would approach all despairing children and incorporate them into the world behind the door. It would repeat their nightmare behind the door and use their souls as bricks to create a giant tomb that could capture real life.

They looked through the data filing room for a long time until the familiar stench returned. Chen Ge quickly led the members away from the room.

“Sir, our luck is not bad. The stench only came to find us after we’d looked through so many things,” Zhu Long whispered.

“It’s not luck. Someone distracted the monsters for us.” Chen Ge was not sure whether Chang Gu was helping him or not. However, he knew that something was happening in the school, and those things were probably related to the Chang siblings.

“Let’s go. We’re heading to the lab building next.” Chen Ge turned to Zhou Tu. “Have you come to a decision?”

Chapter 824: Red Specter Club

Memory is a hard thing to describe. It is like snow that will not melt, light that is disappearing. The memories that you wish to catch, you cannot; the memories that you wish to forget, you cannot.

Zhou Tu had been troubled by that dream for a long time. He knew that he was different from others, but there was real no evidence. In the end, he had gotten lost in deep self-doubt. That was, until the day he met Chen Ge.

The man was the first to give Zhou Tu confirmation. His dream was all real. What he had experienced was not fake but a part of the memory seared in his brain that could not be deleted. Zhou Tu found the answer that he was looking for, but at the same time, he sunk into a dangerous whirlpool. He did not know whether following Chen Ge would lead to more tragedy or salvation.

Chen Ge stood before Zhou Tu and asked once more, “Have you made up your mind?”

“I...”

“If you have not, you can take a look at him.” Zhang Ju and Wang Yicheng suddenly walked over. They held Zhou Tu from either side. “Zhu Long, come over here.”

Zhu Long, who walked at the back, was in an unstable state. His gaze was strange like it was burning. It appeared that he was about to lose it.

“What have you two done to him?” Chen Ge looked at Zhu Long’s left hand. The hand that held the pink phone was bursting with veins.

“We found a half-destroyed article in the data filing room. A courier who worked at the university went missing in the school. After several days of investigation, a body that was no longer recognizable as a human’s was found inside the autopsy room’s storage.” Zhang Ju handed the severely damaged article to Chen Ge. “The body was him—Zhu Long.”

The fake memory had been shattered. When Zhu Long saw that article, he had remembered many things. He had studied very hard; his only dream was to get into the university of his dreams, but reality was always so cruel. The girl that he liked was a hardworking student. She got into the best medical

university while his studies were a mess, and he could not even scrounge up enough money for a retest. His family was poor. His only family member fell seriously ill, and their health was fast deteriorating.

Bad fortune would not let him go, but it did not defeat this young man. He learned how to take care of the ill and supported the whole family on his shoulders. When he went searching for work, people complained about how he looked sleepy, so he went to cut away his messy long hair. People thought his tattoo might scare the customers, so he used a small knife to shear away the thin layer of skin. He was not defeated; he finally found a stable job—a courier.

He was hardworking and friendly with determination in his eyes and a smile on his face. He tried his best to survive and depended on hard work to receive respect and stability. After surviving a hard summer break, he had gotten used to the job. He worked late every day, and the only source of his joy was in delivering to Jiujiang Medical University. There would be anticipation in his heart whenever he entered the school compound. He knew that the girl was at this school. Even if he caught a glimpse of her from faraway, he would be satisfied, and that joy could last him for a day. The school was not that big, but it was not that small either; it was hard to tell when he would be able to cross paths with her.

He imagined the event when they would meet in his mind many times, but when the girl really showed up, he realized that none of his preparation was enough. He was so nervous that he could not speak, like a child who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

After that day, they exchanged contact information. The girl was surprisingly active. She liked to be in control, and Zhu Long mistook that as affection. His obedience traded for a mental torment. The girl liked to torture Zhu Long; her favorite habit was reminding Zhu Long that he was not worth anything. The confidence that he had built was shattered just like that. Zhu Long became a puppet in the girl's hand, but the scariest thing was that Zhu Long did not realize that.

The boy who did not have a cunning bone in his body was no match for the girl who was an expert in criminology and autopsies. He was like a defeathered chicken laid bare on the girl's dining table, a feast to be had. Eventually, the torture evolved from a mental phase to a physical phase. As death approached, Zhu Long finally understood everything, but it was too late. Blood leaked out from his wounds. Zhu Long gripped the pink phone and stared at the article that Chen Ge was holding. His memory had finally returned.

"Do you know which part of the human flesh is pink?" Blood vessels sewed up his skin like a needle and thread. Zhu Long took deliberate steps toward Chen Ge. "Just as a flesh wound is about to heal, that is when it's the pinkest. She had a preference for pink."

Zhu Long's body started to distort. Sewing marks appeared on his body. It was hard to imagine what he had gone through before his death.

"Yet another Half Red Specter." Chen Ge's eyes were curiously calm. When Zhu Long was two steps away from him, he raised both of his arms to hug Zhu Long. "I wish you to understand one thing. No matter the time or the reason, any action that harms others shouldn't be allowed, even if it is in the name of love."

Looking at the boy before him, Chen Ge's heart wrenched with pain. He patted Zhu Long's shoulders. "I have no idea what's on your mind now, but I can give you a promise. If we manage to leave this school, I will help you go and meet that girl again."

The blood threads that sewed through Zhu Long's body stopped. Zhu Long stared right at Chen Ge before slowly lowering his head. "You have a promise."

Holding the pink phone, Zhu Long silently retreated to behind Chen Ge.

Zhu Long and Zhang Ju's shirts were still turning red. Even though they were not yet Red Specters, they could be considered powerful Half Red Specters. With Wang Yicheng as well, Chen Ge would not be afraid if he ran into a normal Red Specter.

"It's time to head to the lab." Chen Ge did not ask for Zhou Tu's opinion this time. He had gotten the answer from the child's gaze. After seeing what had happened to Zhu Long, his fingers dug into his flesh. He should also have an unfulfilled wish, but he had forgotten what it was. Walking through the brush, Chen Ge led the members to the lab building. This was his second visit there that night.

"The Red Specter should still be in the guardroom. If we run into him, it's the perfect chance to return the uniform to him." Chen Ge had more confidence this time. He led his students and stopped outside the building.

"This building is the lair of those upside-down monsters. The art club, which is our destination, is on the fourth floor. After we visit the place, whether Zhou Tu's memory is awakened or not, we have to leave immediately." Chen Ge walked to the one of the windows of the first-floor room. "Now, come with me."

The students looked at each other, and then they saw Chen Ge climb easily up to the second floor.

"I told you he's a physical education teacher." Zhang Ju, Zhu Long, and Wang Yicheng had awakened their memory. Scaling walls was nothing for Specters, but Zhou Tu showed difficulty on his face.

Chapter 825: I See Myself

"Quick, it's very dangerous inside the building. This is the safest route." Chen Ge had the most experience. He avoided all possible rooms that might pose a danger and swiftly climbed up to the third floor. Stepping on the outside box of the air conditioner, Chen Ge half-squatted on the outside of the building, waiting for the rest to catch up. "The secret will be revealed soon. The key for the lock is on its way. When Zhou Tu enters the art room, everything will be answered."

Zhou Tu used to be an obedient child. He lived within the rules set out by his teachers and parents, and he never stepped one foot out of the boundary. He was well protected from danger and thus was spared the 'bad scenes' that were privy only to the bad kids. When they reached the third floor, Zhou Tu's arms were already shaking. He did not dare look down, and his face was pale. "Sir, are we there yet?"

"It's on the fourth floor." His hands holding the edge of the windowsill, Chen Ge climbed to the outside of the art room and glanced in through the gap in the curtain. The art room had returned to normal, but the colors on the oil paintings appeared to have become more vibrant like the paintings had just been

done, and the paint was still wet. The windowsill was too small for even one person to fit. Chen Ge was worried that Zhou Tu might lose control once he caught sight of the oil paintings, so after ensuring the safety, he signaled for Zhou Tu to climb into the room next to the art room.

“Go in first. Don’t worry, I’ll be behind you.” The fourth floor was very high. The night wind buffeted against their bodies. Zhou Tu forced a nod and climbed, following the direction given by Chen Ge. After Zhou Tu got into the room, Chen Ge waved for the others to follow.

“One, two, three, four?” Other than Zhou Tu, four shadows had slipped into the fourth floor.

“There’s an extra one?” Chen Ge was the last to enter the room. He looked around with a frown. The room was not big, and the only people there were his club members. “When you guys came in, did you sense anything weird?”

“There’s nothing obviously out of place, but once I saw the building, there was this discomfort, and now that we’re in the building, that feeling only grew,” Zhang Ju said, and the scars on his face started to crawl like snakes. He seemed to be very anxious. Zhang Ju’s shirt was almost red. He was one step away from being a Red Specter. To make him feel uncomfortable just being in the building’s vicinity meant that there were probably more than one Red Specter inside the building. This place was more dangerous than Chen Ge had thought. Combined with the extra shadow that he had seen, he reminded himself to be more careful.

“After we go to the art room, whether Zhou Tu awakens his memory or not, we have to leave this place,” Chen Ge told them. After everyone agreed, they left the room. The corridor of the fourth floor had not changed much since the previous time Chen Ge visited it. It was eerie and dark like it had not been used in years.

“Zhou Tu, the art club that you’re looking for is on the fourth floor, and the scene from your dream is just next door.” Chen Ge smelled the stench in the air once he exited the room. He knew very well that the upside-down monsters were patrolling the area. So far, they had not attracted their attention, but the longer they stayed, the bigger their chance of being exposed. This time, Chang Gu might not show up to save them again, so he had to move fast.

“Stop looking around and head over there. Haven’t you been yearning to join the art club? Open that door, and the memory from your dream will be awakened!” Chen Ge had already wasted a lot of time there. The longer he stayed, the more unsafe he felt. Chang Gu’s appearance had given him hope of clearing the scenario another way.

“It’s right here?” Zhou Tu walked out of the room and stopped before the door. He grabbed the door handle but did not have the courage to push it open.

“Why are you hesitating? The answer that you’re looking for is behind the door! No matter the result, as long as you wish to recover your memory, don’t hesitate! Open it!” Chen Ge had lost his patience. The extra shadow seemed to have disappeared. The stench around them thickened, and the anxiety that he felt grew. Zhou Tu was the last member to have his memory recovered. He had witnessed what had happened to the rest, he knew the imminent pain, so he was under a great amount of pressure. To live in a fake but safe world or to regain his painful but true memory—anyone would struggle to choose.

Zhou Tu was caught in a difficult conundrum. He gritted his teeth, and his chest rose. His knuckles turned white before finally pushing the door open!

BANG!

Because he shoved so hard, the door knocked into the wall, creating a loud crack. The member of the club huddled to the door and gazed into the room.

“This looks like a normal art room.”

“They might look gory, but there is no scent of blood. Those red colors should be paint.”

“Were these paintings done by students? Why would they paint something like this?”

The other members mumbled among themselves. They were curious about the art room. Only Chen Ge and Zhou Tu were quiet. Chen Ge had been there once, so he could keep calm. However, Zhou Tu looked like he had lost the ability to speak due to shock.

“Don’t just stand there. We’ll get spotted.” Chen Ge waved for everyone to get into the room. He walked in last.

“Mr. Bai...” Hearing Chen Ge’s voice, Zhou Tu seemed to snap out of his trance. He pointed at the art room with a face filled with disbelief. “This... is right from my dream.”

“I know. Now you understand how surprised I was when I heard your description, and that’s why I promised to bring you here.” Chen Ge had a warm smile on his face like he was a big brother who could forgive anything. “Go in and take a look. Search for your past. Think about why you’re here. No matter the choice you make, I hope you remember this—we are not enemies.”

Zhou Tu might be a Red Specter, so Chen Ge had to be prepared to ensure that he would not be surprised by a sudden betrayal. Entering the art room, everything was red. The walls were red; the tiles were red; the paintings were red; even the stain on the wall was red. This was a red world. It was like a living hell, but at the same time, colored with an indescribable sense of artistry.

Zhou Tu looked at the thirteen easels in the room dumbly. His eyes moved over the easels one by one before falling on the fourth easel.

“I’ve been to this room before, I’ve taken these steps.” Slowly walking to the fourth easel, when Zhou Tu looked at the painting that sat on the easel, he froze.

“Zhou Tu?” No matter how hard they nudged him, he did not reply. There was a rush of red coming from the bottom of his eyes. His soul seemed to have been sucked into the painting.

“I can see it. The me inside the painting crying out to me.”

Chapter 826: Finally Here, the Fourteenth

“The you inside the painting?” Chen Ge leaned over to look. He had seen all thirteen paintings in the room, and he believed that he had some impression of the fourth painting. “You painted this?”

Zhou Tu did not answer. His soul appeared to have been sucked into the painting as he stared at it. The fourth painting was about this art room.

The upper half of the painting showed thirteen painters sitting at their chairs while the lower half of the painting was blood red. All thirteen painters died on their chairs in different ways. It was strange because the painters in the upper part of the painting were painting their own deaths. Those painters knew about their endings, but they did not choose to escape from it but recorded everything as it was.

When Chen Ge first came to the art room, he had stopped beside this painting for a long time. He was surprised that it was Zhou Tu who had painted this. As he looked closer, he noticed that the painter who sat in the fourth chair bore some similarities to Zhou Tu.

All the other paintings are expressing an inverted world; only this painting is themed with the painters themselves.

Chen Ge did not disturb Zhou Tu. His eyes wandered between the painting and Zhou Tu.

What has Zhou Tu experienced? Why would his painting be so different?

There were thirteen painters, and Zhou Tu was the fourth. He was not the oldest nor the youngest, but he had the most unique perspective. Unlike the others when their memory awakened, Zhou Tu merely stood next to the easel. There was no change to his body, but the atmosphere in the art room was slowly changing. It was hard to describe, like the people in the paintings had all opened their eyes, looking at the people outside the paintings.

“How come it suddenly feel so cold?” Wang Yicheng shrank his neck and hid behind Zhang Ju. He looked around with a trace of fear in his eyes.

“Zhou Tu?” Zhang Ju had a bad feeling as well. He patted Zhou Tu on his shoulder lightly. His lashes blinked. Zhou Tu’s body seemed to have frozen. His eyes scanned the room, and there was no blood on his face.

“Am I dead?” The hoarse voice echoed from the throat. At the same time, the fourth painter in the painting suddenly moved. The painter dropped the paintbrush that he was holding, and his hands gripped his neck. His legs kicked out underneath him like an invisible noose had been wrung around his neck. His eyes bulged out from their sockets. He struggled with all his might, but his body slowly slid down the chair. Blood rushed to his brain, and his expression was one of despair. He was slowly becoming the Zhou Tu inside the painting.

The scariest thing was, in the lower half of the painting, the Zhou Tu who was in the blood world started to have a smile blossom on his face.

“Zhou Tu, your neck!” Wang Yicheng pointed at Zhou Tu’s neck and shouted. The Zhou Tu who stood outside the painting started to transform into the Zhou Tu inside the painting. A purple line appeared around his neck. As time progressed, the purple color intensified. His neck turned at an abnormal angle as the sound of dripping echoed in their ears. Following the sound, Chen Ge realized that the Zhou Tu who was trapped inside the blood red world of the painting had come alive. His bloodied body was crawling inside the painting. His face was stuck close to the surface, his lips tore open, and blood slid

down his face. The bulging eyes looked straight at the Zhou Tu who was outside the painting. He seemed ready to crawl out from the painting to pull Zhou Tu into it!

“Mr. Bai, do we need to move Zhou Tu away?” The sound of dripping increased; it was coming from all sides of the art room!

Turning to look, the club members realized that every character in the different paintings had come to life. They were crawling on the surface of the painting like they were in the progress of coming out!

Last time, when I was here with the shadow, this didn't happen. Is this because they've sensed Zhou Tu?

Reality showed the uniqueness of Zhou Tu again. Chen Ge signaled for the other members to stick close to Zhou Tu. Once things worsened, they would forcibly drag Zhou Tu away. The blood on the painting turned redder, bursting with a blood mist. The scent of blood started to fill the air.

“Things are not looking good!” Zhang Ju and Zhu Long stood around Zhou Tu. They realized that the blood mist in the room had started to gather toward Zhou Tu like a giant man-eating flower that was opening its petals. “These things want to enter Zhou Tu's body!”

The blood fog avoided everyone else and stuck to Zhou Tu.

“Mr. Bai, we can't wait any longer! We need to hurry and leave!” To prevent Zhou Tu from being consumed by the blood mist, out of concern, Zhu Long reached out to grip Zhou Tu's arm. He wished to pull Zhou Tu out from the fog, but once he pulled, the blood fog coagulated into a physical rope and circled itself around Zhou Tu's neck, hanging the young man in the middle of the room.

“Zhou Tu!” The rope lassoed around Zhou Tu's neck. Zhou Tu swung in the room like a pendulum. He looked just like himself in the painting.

He had already seen his own death and had recorded the picture of his death perfectly.

“I have painted my own death. I can see myself getting hanged to death. I can see the breath leaving my body...”

The atmosphere in the room darkened, and more blood stains leaked out from the paintings. As Zhou Tu swung in the middle of the room, the characters inside the paintings appeared to be caught in a maddening party.

“Hanging is different from any other death. Unlike using knife piercing through the heart, after a short period of numbness, the body will feel like it's being burned as pain spreads through the body. This is a very gentle way to die. As strength seeps away and oxygen decreases, the despair increases. You will be able to experience every second of your death.”

A male voice echoed in the room. It seemed to have originated from one of the paintings, but it also felt like it came from the edges of the walls and floor. Chen Ge could not ascertain where it came from, but he knew that the person who spoke then was similar to the one who had intervened at the education block's top floor toilet.

“There is no need to fear death. I know you will return. No matter how many times you try to run, you'll always be one of us.” The voice seemed to be speaking to Zhou Tu. It was impossible to tell where it

came from. If one listened closely, one might even suspect that the voice had come from Zhou Tu's own mouth.

"Do not resist. You have completed your mission. Take your seat quietly and wait for the last painter to arrive."

The blood mist surrounded Zhou Tu, and the young man became scary. His body was shrinking at an impossible speed. Just as everyone had their attention on Zhou Tu, a fourteenth easel appeared in the room.

The mist rolled around the fourteenth easel, and a faded red color was left on the paper that was as smooth as human skin. From a far, it looked like the fluttering of a red dress.

Chapter 827: The Remover

Not just Zhou Tu, the other thirteen easels in the middle of the room had also started to change. The blood expanded on the paintings, and the originally inverted paintings started to morph. The side that was normal was overwhelmed by blood, and screams escaped from inside the paintings.

"Mr. Bai, what is happening?"

All the paintings in the room could be split into upper and lower halves. The upper half reflected real life while the lower half was covered in red. When the blood red color started to spread, the characters originally belonging to the lower part of the paintings started to crawl to the other side, following the blood. They used various methods, utilizing the tools in the paintings to kill the normal versions of themselves.

The inverted world was being destroyed. The strange thing was that more blood vessels leaked out from the characters who were killed inside the paintings, and they all rushed toward the thirteenth easel. The picture on the painting started to sharpen. Everyone's blood started to combine together to create a red dress.

BANG!

The pale-looking Zhou Tu was slammed against the ground by the blood vessels. His body was damaged like a sponge that had been overstretched. The blood mist that enveloped him thickened, and they slowly flowed toward the fourteenth easel. The girl's dress fluttered in the sea of blood. Screaming faces were printed on the dress, and her feet stepped on screaming souls; it was like a flower blooming in the depths of despair. Compared to everything around her, she appeared so unique and different. Standing inside the cage made of negative emotions and curses, the dress was the world's brightest red.

"This painting..."

As the blood gathered, the fourteenth painting became clearer. On the mirror shards that littered the ground, she stood barefooted in the abandoned school. The blood red dress stuck to her skin. Her snow-white neck was arced back like a bloody swan. The painting only had the girl's back. Even with everything from the previous thirteen paintings, they only managed to carve out her back. Standing

before the paintings, Chen Ge could not help himself from moving to the fourteenth painting. He was certain in his heart that the girl inside the painting was none other than Zhang Ya!

“Everyone is here. Those I’ve saved, those that have saved me. Those I’ve killed and those that have killed me. Everyone is finally here.” The man’s voice echoed again. When the first sentence was uttered, it was a male voice, but as it continued, the voice started to become more unisex.

“Who are you? How do you know what she looks like?” Chen Ge stood next to the fourteenth painting. “Where is she?”

Zhang Ya was hibernating in his shadow. Chen Ge was worried that the enemy might make use of this opportunity to harm her. After all, the school might belong to a Greater Red Specter. There was no reply. The voice slowly disappeared amid the dripping sound. All the paintings in the art room were filled with blood. Rationality and artistry were destroyed by brute force, and only a bloody stain remained.

Why is Zhang Ya the fourteenth painting? Has all of this been planned?

Inside the four-star scenario, Chen Ge felt so miniscule. Even with so many club members by his side, he felt unsafe; he had merely been able to keep his anxiety in check.

Before things ended for real, Chen Ge would not expose his real thoughts. But this time, it was different. When he saw Zhang Ya appear in the painting, his heart had jumped into his throat.

Zhang Ya is related to the School of the Afterlife! This time, Zhang Ya is not my trump card but one of the chess pieces!

Fourteen paintings represented fourteen people. One of them had Lin Sisi’s signature, and one of them recorded Zhou Tu’s death. Chen Ge had already met the owner of the school and possibly brushed shoulders with him in the school.

They were competitors and also partners. To achieve the final goal, there was no bottom line that they would not cross.

The goals in School of the Afterlife are escaping and finding a scapegoat. The person who will end up bearing all the negative emotions behind the door will probably be chosen from one of the fourteen painters.

Chen Ge had no idea what was going to happen next. Everyone in the school was looking for a scapegoat, so he suspected that was the owner’s plan as well. After all, the door’s pusher had already been consumed by Zhang Ya. So, theoretically speaking, the owner of this school was himself a scapegoat.

This four-star scenario is huge, and it’s nowhere near ending. To support a door like this, one would be under enormous negative emotions.

The art room was located at the very end of the corridor. The change here had started to affect the rest of the building. Blood red paint leaked into the walls, and blood vessels crept along them like a type of extremely resilient plant that sucked on dead bodies as nutrients. The people in the paintings were bleeding. They beat on the surface of the paintings repeatedly with scary expressions, but they were unable to escape from the paintings.

“Quick... you have to leave!” Zhou Tu, who was now as thin as stick, woke up from his unconsciousness. His raised his twig-like arm and grabbed Zhang Ju beside him. “He’s coming. The painter is coming.”

“The painter?” Zhang Ju was sure that this was the first time that he had heard the term in that setting, but for some reason, when he heard the term, his body naturally started to shake.

Just the mention of a word caused a Half Red Specter to shiver, which was unimaginable for Chen Ge.

“We need to leave this place first.’ Chen Ge signaled for Zhang Ju and Zhu Long to carry Zhou Tu. He was the first to rush to the door and pull it open. A stench and chill rushed into the room, causing Chen Ge to take several steps back. He looked a closer look and saw a man in a red uniform leaning against the door outside. His body was tilted, and he leaned against the door like he was eavesdropping.

“A Red Specter...” When Chen Ge first came to the lab building, he had run into this Specter, but he had been lucky last time to have escaped.

“Are you one of the staff here as well? This place is not safe. If you wish to talk this out with us, we can go to another place first.” Chen Ge tried to communicate with the man, but before he even finished, a scent of blood drifted from behind him.

“Be careful!” Zhang Ju and Zhu Long stood either side of Chen Ge, and they were each stepping on top of a ghostly face.

Lowering his head to look, Chen Ge noticed that the Red Specter outside the door seemed to have the hobby of collecting human faces. On the floor where he was standing, many human faces were squeezed around him.

Ding Dong Ding Dong...

The sound of metal clanking came out from the Specter’s waist. His red uniform was blown open by the wind to reveal the various autopsy tools that were hidden underneath.

Chapter 828: Number One

The bloody faces looked like balloons whose air had leaked out. The wrinkly faces stuck to the ground. If not for Zhang Ju and Zhu Long, those things would have crawled onto Chen Ge already.

“Looks like our friend is not in the mood to talk.” Blood was spreading within the art room. Chen Ge stood behind Zhu Long and Zhang Ju, studying the Red Specter before them with his Yin Yang Vision. Blood splattered everywhere as the red uniform waved around. Various torture tools hung from the skin. With each step, broken faces fell from inside his uniform. There were levels to Red Specters, and unfortunately for Chen Ge, they had run into the extremely dangerous type.

However, there was something that drew Chen Ge’s attention. When facing against this Red Specter, Zhu Long and Zhang Ju showed no fear. They were different from Xu Yin, who was maddened to the core. Zhu Long and Zhang Ju were extremely rational, and their expressions were calm. It was as if there was a voice in their heads telling them that there was no need to be afraid.

When the Red Specter saw Zhu Long and Zhang Ju, he did not launch an attack directly. He slowly lifted his head, and his face was covered behind a curtain of wet hair. Chen Ge could make out a face covered in black veins through the gap. It was pale and crazed. He seemed to be smiling.

Drip drop.

A middle-aged man's face slid down the man's sleeve and dropped between him and Chen Ge.

"Save me, this demon likes to peel people's faces off. Save..."

Pa!

Before the man could finish, a blood red boot landed heavily on the face. His words were forcibly interrupted, and his face shattered into pieces. The room was very quiet. Because it was so quiet, the sound of blood dripping became very clear. The blood on the boot deepened. Originally, the color had faded, but now, it felt like the boot had been red from the very beginning.

"Move out of the way. We are not his target." The weak Zhou Tu lifted his head to glance at the Red Specter; there was no uncertainty in his eyes. "This monster stayed here for this day. He wishes to be the first to see inside the art room because he is the custodian and also a participant."

"Participant?"

"He's the creator of the sixth painting, the monster that connected the two inverted worlds!"

While Zhou Tu said that, he kept his eyes on the Red Specter. His memory had awakened. Even though he was still weak, there was an extra presence about him. The Red Specter at the door did not get mad from being called a monster. If anything, he seemed to like that. The sound of footsteps echoed inside the art room. The Red Specter walked past Chen Ge, leaving a trail of blood behind as he headed to the middle of the room. He finally stopped beside the sixth painting and looked at the painting that had already morphed into something unrecognizable.

Chen Ge could remember part of the sixth painting. There was someone carrying a big mirror, but he tripped, and the mirror was shattered. The ground was littered with glass shards, and each shard reflected a blood red human face.

"Ignore him, we'll leave now." Zhou Tu was being supported by Wang Yicheng as they headed toward the door. Chen Ge also did not want to mess with the monster at that moment, so he followed the other members out of the building. "Are we still going through the window?"

Wang Yicheng pulled open the door of the classroom next door. The mannequin that was covered under the white cloth started to change. Blood stains silently appeared under the cloth.

"Most of the painting ingredients and props inside this building were made by that monster." Zhou Tu still looked weak. He did not look better even after they had left the art room. "Including the red paint and those foul-smelling painting canvases."

Zhou Tu did not need to go into details, and everyone already knew what had gone into making of these materials.

“So many people died at this abandoned school?” Chen Ge was confused. “I saw several storage rooms on the fourth floor, and they are filled with painting materials.”

“I know many things but not everything.” Zhou Tu treated Chen Ge strangely. Compared to before, it was not better or worse, but there was a trace of caution in his tone. Suddenly, a loud crash came from the art room. The group turned to look. The red monster’s back was split open, and his back expanded. His spine expanded outward, and tools meant for cruelty dangled from each bone. He stood facing away from the door. He appeared to be using those tools to edit the painting.

“Stay away from him.” Zhou Tu had Wang Yicheng open the window. The glass window was opened, and Zhou Tu and Wang Yicheng left first. Chen Ge followed close behind, but he paused when he stood beside the window. There was someone standing in the shadow at the north western corner of the building. He was wearing a pair of black leather shoes, and his face was pale while his gaze was dim. He was hugging a little girl’s pajamas and a dog collar.

Mr. Bai?

With his Yin Yang Vision, Chen Ge caught sight of Mr. Bai easily. He also saw the blood stains on the pajamas.

Has something happened to his daughter?

Mr. Bai, who hid in the shadow, spotted Chen Ge as well. He had been lying in wait for a long time. He had not made his move probably because he did not expect Chen Ge to be in the company of so many people.

This is the real Mr. Bai. I stole his identification and his identity. I don’t think that will make a good impression on the members if I’m found out.

Chen Ge felt like Zhang Ju and the rest should have already guessed by now that he was not a member of staff there, but no one had torn down this lie. At least on the surface, everyone tried to maintain this disguise.

I’ll have to find a reason to get rid of him first. Destroying evidence should be something familiar to many around me.

There was another Specter hiding in Chen Ge’s shadow. He was the one who had set the curse on Chen Ge, but now he had become one of Chen Ge’s chess pieces. With the decision made, the way Chen Ge looked at Mr. Bai softened. He moved faster and only took one minute to get to the bottom of the building.

Where is he?

When he landed, Chen Ge looked toward the corner again, but Mr. Bai was already gone.

“What are you doing?” Zhou Tu’s voice dwindled like he was going to disappear at any moment. “I don’t have much time left. I have something to tell all of you. This is not only related to whether I can find myself but also related to all of your survival.”

“Do tell, we’re listening.” Zhang Ju and Zhu Long stood adjacent to Chen Ge. They were huddled together.

“The thirteen paintings in the art room represent thirteen people. Each of them are like the Red Specter we just encountered, incredibly scary.” Zhou Tu gasped for air. After Wang Yicheng carried him into the brush and away from the lab, he continued. “The order has nothing to do with their strength. It’s completely randomized, but there is an exception.”

“An exception?”

“Number One is an exception. I have no memory of Number One; I only know that he likes painting and is a painter.”

Chapter 829: You Have Her Presence

“Number One is unique. He is different from everyone else; he was the first student at this school.” Zhou Tu’s eyes scanned the other members. “In other words, he is a big reason the school is what it is now.”

“When you mentioned the painter, I felt a natural sense of fear. Just the word caused fear to grip my heart.” Zhang Ju’s body was almost dyed red. His face was like melted wax, looking very scary.

“That is a normal response because before you became a monster, you would have met him. You are one of his creations.” Zhou Tu revealed another secret. “Everything that you’ve experienced after you entered the door was personally arranged by the painter, but there was a little accident in your case.”

“How do you know about these things? Didn’t you say earlier that you do not know anything about the painter?”

“Because I am like you. To be more precise, other than the painter himself, everyone is his creation!” Zhou Tu’s words belied his deep-seated fear. “You, me, Lin Sisi, Wang Yicheng, and everyone at this school, we are all the painter’s creations. Ever since we entered the door, we started our lives inside the painter’s script.”

“If it is as you say, then what is the explanation behind the accident that happened to Zhang Ju?” Chen Ge did not fully believe in Zhou Tu yet. This was not because he suspected that Zhou Tu was lying to him, but there were certain things that Zhou Tu would not know about either like Zhang Ya’s existence. The door pusher in Western Jiujiang Private Academy was Zhang Ya, so no matter the case with other people, of the fourteen paintings, at least one would not be the painter’s creation.

“The painter was too careless. He didn’t expect someone to betray him.” Zhou Tu sucked in a deep breath and turned his neck around with difficulty to look at Zhang Ju. “You should have heard of the name Chang Wenyu.”

“Of course, she betrayed her promise and stole my left eye and made me her scapegoat.” Zhang Ju had a bad impression of Chang Wenyu.

“Who she betrayed wasn’t you but the painter.” Zhou Tu’s voice hastened like he was using his last breath to defend Chang Wenyu. “Chang Wenyu was the second person to enter this school and the only person who has successfully escaped this place!”

“What are you trying to say?”

“She used actual action to tell us one thing. Other than following the painter’s script, there are other choices for us to pick. We need to obey not the painter but the real owner of this school.” Veins popped around Zhou Tu’s neck. His physical condition was getting worse.

Since the beginning, Chen Ge had been curious about the school’s owner. After all, they might be a Greater Red Specter. “Can you tell me who the real owner of this school is?”

Zhou Tu looked at Chen Ge deeply and uttered, “We are.”

“We?”

“Yes, all the despair of the bullied is forged into the school’s foundations. After a lost and young soul enters the door, they are combined into a monster that keeps growing.” Zhou Tu pointed at himself and the people around him. “We are inside this monster’s body; we are part of this monster. This place has our memory, but it is also our home and our body.”

Chen Ge understood what Zhou Tu was trying to express. The owner of the School of the Afterlife was not one person but a kind of spirit. After the door-pusher died, there was no new door-pusher who came to support the negative emotions behind the door. The door kept searching for despair and led these despairing souls behind the door. Chen Ge suddenly understood why the black phone would name this place the School of the Afterlife.

The school was a normal scenario, but under the influence of despair and negative emotion, the scenario itself gained some kind of consciousness, and thus, a door that could move on its own was born. Other doors were pushed open by people in despair and were frozen inside a part of the blood world, but this door would voluntarily show up next to victims in despair. It offered an escape to those people and provided a home for wandering souls, but at the same time, it deprived them of their lives.

“No, something’s wrong,” Chen Ge suddenly said. “If there is no way to leave this school, how did Chang Wenyu manage to do so? The children who enter the school should be given some kind of choice, and each choice made corresponds to a type of ending!”

“Even though I have no idea why you would suddenly bring that up, you’re right.” Zhou Tu followed Chen Ge’s lead. “The school has its own consciousness, and everyone who enters the school will be given a choice. Different choices lead to different outcomes. Some choose to go back to real life after experiencing despair; some embrace the despair and become part of the school; some choose to give up, forget everything, and close their eyes. There are many choices. At least, that’s what Chang Wenyu told me.”

“If what you’re saying is true, then the school is not a bad place, at least not for these despairing children.”

“The school itself is not wrong; the one who’s wrong is the painter. He has changed the rules and cut off the way out, forcing everyone to stay here.” Zhou Tu’s voice was getting louder, but his body was getting weaker.

“Why would he do that?” Zhang Ju could not understand.

“I have no idea what he’s planning. I only know that there was someone who tried to challenge the painter. Chang Wenyu was successful while the others and I failed.” The weak Zhou Tu leaned on Zhang

Ju. "Whenever there's a problem in the art room, the painter will show up. He will be here soon. If you do not wish to have your memory erased and turn back into a mindless puppet, you have to figure out a way to leave."

"Do we still have time?" Zhang Ju was pessimistic. "We are facing the painter. The few of us do not even stand a chance against him."

"It'll be fine." Zhou Tu's pale face showed a smile. His twig-like finger pointed at Chen Ge. "Chang Wenyu has returned. I can sense her presence on you."

"On me?" Chen Ge was shocked. "Are you sure it's Chang Wenyu? Not another person?"

"I am sure." Zhou Tu did not catch the other meaning that Chen Ge was trying to hint at. He nodded affirmatively.

"But I haven't met Chang Wenyu. How could I have her presence?" Chen Ge shook his hands.

"Perhaps you have something of hers on you or are related to her. Maybe you two are lovers."

"Stop right there." Chen Ge gritted his teeth. "It sounds like you're trying to set me up."

Zhou Tu did not think it was that big of a deal to sense Chang Wenyu on Chen Ge. He kept persuading Chen Ge. "We've all forgotten part of our memory. Perhaps among that missing memory is the secret. There's no need to worry. My hunches have always been accurate."

Chapter 830: Chen Ge's Choice

"I'm not worried about your hunch but something else." Chen Ge could not explain the exact situation to the students; he could only think about it on his own.

Why would Chang Wenyu's presence linger around me? Is it because I've spent an extended period of time with her brother or because Chang Gu has left something of Chang Wenyu's with me?

"There's no need to panic. You'll eventually recover your memory; I have faith in you." Zhou Tu did not quite understand Chen Ge's circumstances. "Don't waste your energy in inconsequential places. What I'm going to tell you next is very important."

"Every student that enters the school will be given a choice. Each choice leads to different results. The standard of judgement is not with the painter but is based on the school's own consciousness. The monster that has collected everyone's despairing school is the real owner of this school; the painter is at most his spokesperson."

"What we need to do is get the school's approval and follow through one of the choices to the very end before embracing the corresponding outcome with open arms." Zhou Tu thought about it. "The painter's choice is probably to escape from reality and create a home for all the lost souls behind the door; Chang Wenyu's choice should be to find a way to escape from the school to return to the real world. We should follow the path left behind by Chang Wenyu, but the prerequisite is that we have to get the school's approval."

“How do you suggest we go about doing that?”

“Do not think of this school as a detached scenario. Think of it as a person, a person who was bullied and filled with despair.” When Zhou Tu said that, he lowered his voice to the minimum. He had a strange expression. With each word, his face darkened like saying that in the school would get him cursed. “To get the school’s approval, you have to elicit its resonance. The painter, for example, creates a home to console the loneliness inside the school’s consciousness and allow it a place to stay, or like Chang Wenyu, we can choose to escape.”

“I understand what you mean, but from how I see it, be it to escape or to build a fake home, neither will solve the problem.” Chen Ge had his own idea. “My decision might not be correct, but if I am bullied, I will use the most direct method to fight back.”

“What do you plan to do? Chang Wenyu and the painter have already provided us with two shortcuts. We only need to follow one of them.” Zhou Tu frowned slightly. He saw the fire burning in Chen Ge’s eyes, and that kind of fire was very rare in this eerie school.

“No one is willing to be bullied. As long as there’s a chance to fight back, they will grab it.” Chen Ge stood at the edge of the brush and looked at the large school compound. “The basic rule of this world is still survival of the fittest. The weak like to follow the strong or stick close to the strong, and the easiest way for the strong to showcase their strength is to control the weak and express their dominance over the weak. This is so juvenile and yet so realistic. Since we are now inside this school, we should follow its rules.”

“The rules?”

“It’s the bullied victims’ souls that make the consciousness of the school, so to get their approval, there is another way to go.” Chen Ge took a big step out of the brush. “That is to reinstate one’s spot in the cycle and bully back those who dare bully us.”

Chen Ge had a real leap in his thoughts. The members were surprised by his statement. “Are you sure you want to do that? Not only might that fail to get the school’s approval, it might cause them to be reminded of their weak past selves and turn hostile toward us.”

“Human beings are strange creatures. Only when pain is inflicted on them would they understand how painful certain things can be. My choice might not be the best choice, but it is my favorite choice.” He waited for a long time, but there was no reply, so Chen Ge turned around to look at his members. “Why are you all looking at me like that?”

“What you said is different from how you usually act,” Zhang Ju said. “I mean, that does not sound like what a teacher should say.”

“Then it only shows that you do not know me well enough.” Chen Ge placed his hand on Zhang Ju’s shoulder with a smile. “Most people have a demon and an angle in their heart. Whenever they wish to do something, there will be a heated discussion between the two parties, and that will cause hesitation, but it is different for me.”

“You wish to say there is only a demon left in your heart?” Zhang Ju’s ugly pupils stared at Chen Ge. He tried to find the answer from Chen Ge’s expression.

"It's the exact opposite. The demon in my heart has been locked behind the door; the only remaining one is the angel that is always with me. She will always support me. No matter what kind of decision I've made, she will stand behind me."

"In that case... your angel must have her hands covered in blood, wearing a bloody red dress." Zhou Tu chuckled. He seemed to have misunderstood something.

"I'm too lazy to explain the details. You only need to know that I have my own way of doing things. And I have no regrets." Chen Ge stood in the middle of the group. "It's time to depart. We're heading to the second floor of the library next. There should be another answer to be found hidden in the mirror left behind by Chang Wenyu."

"That's right. Your instincts are very sharp. We can't stay here too long." Zhou Tu leaned on Zhang Ju's back. "The world on the other side of the mirror is the real world behind the door. This place is manufactured by the painter, a home that he created for the homeless children. Of course, you can also see it as a cage."

Zhou Tu's body was weakening; he was fading.

"We'll continue this conversation after we find the mirror. Let's go." Chen Ge felt like Zhou Tu's soul should have been destroyed already. The one leaning against Zhang Ju was just a lingering spirit. When he uttered everything that was captured in his memory, that would be the time he disappeared. There would no longer be Zhou Tu in this world; he would disappear without a trace. Zhou Tu was trapped in the war between Chang Wenyu and the painter, and his body and soul were one of their battlefields. From the ending, it seemed like the painter had won. He had destroyed Zhou Tu, but Chang Wenyu had not lost. After all, she had managed to reveal so many secrets about the painter through Zhou Tu.

There is not one character at this school who is simple, but that is a good thing because the muddier the water, the greater the chance of me being successful.

Chen Ge led the members to the library, and they moved through the brush carefully. They noticed that the doors of the buildings on both sides were all open, like 'people' had been going through them.