

Collapse 108

Chapter 108: I Understand_1

Gu Mian pushed the door open and peered in; the room was vacant.

Fatty popped his head out from behind Gu Mian, his expression wary. "So, Doctor, do you think something went in... or did something come out?"

Gu Mian closed the door again. "Only a ghost would know."

They didn't linger, heading straight for the study. Mingliang and Xiao Zhang, the young couple, had a room right next to it.

As Fatty passed by, he glanced at their door.

It was half open, offering a view of a cheap baby crib inside, apparently containing some toys.

The sounds of the couple chatting drifted from their room. They probably felt keeping their door closed was risky. After all, in some horror films, once certain doors were shut, they never opened again.

Leaving the door half open would make it easier for them to escape in case of danger.

Mingliang, seemingly noticing the footsteps outside, walked over to the door for a look.

Gu Mian had no intention of stopping for a chat. He bypassed their room and headed straight to a nearby door—this was the study Zhao Lei had mentioned.

The door to this room was closed but not locked, allowing them to easily step inside.

Gu Mian reached for the doorknob and pushed the door open a crack.

The study was pitch black as the lights were off. Pushing the door open further revealed only the faint outlines of some bookshelves.

Fatty took out his flashlight. "I'll use my flashlight to find the light switch in here..."

Meanwhile, Brother Mobile was in the first-floor main hall, staring intently at the backward-ticking clock.

He clenched a piece of paper he had found in his room. Nearly all the content on it was obscured by something like black ink, leaving only a distorted character 'Wang'.

This backward-ticking clock and the paper in my hand must be important clues, he thought. But first, I need to figure out what's written on this paper...

Brother Mobile stared at the clock, deep in thought.

Perhaps there's a connection between this paper and the clock?

The face of this backward-ticking clock was quite vintage. It had no numbers, only twelve black marks around its perimeter, which still allowed one to tell the time.

The second hand was currently ticking. Aside from the hands moving backward, the clock seemed quite normal.

Because the hands moved backward, the time displayed was incorrect.

Although it was already night, it clearly wasn't midnight, yet the clock showed two-thirty.

Brother Mobile stared at the clock, which was as tall as he was. Does a backward-ticking clock mean that time in this instance is flowing in reverse?

So, will I get younger and younger, and my lifespan increase?

That was Brother Mobile's initial thought.

But he quickly dismissed the idea. This wasn't the time to think about such things.

Lost in thought, Brother Mobile glanced around nervously. He wanted to dismantle the clock and take a look inside.

By now, Chu Changge had already returned to his room, his door firmly shut.

Zhao Lei had also closed his door. What he was doing inside was unknown.

This is the perfect chance to dismantle the clock, Brother Mobile thought.

Thinking this, he boldly reached out. But, as if it were deliberately aimed at him, the moment he extended his hand, a sound suddenly came from Zhao Lei's room.

Brother Mobile snatched his hand back as if shocked, looking stiffly towards Zhao Lei's door.

Zhao Lei's door was now open, offering a glimpse of the spartan interior. From this angle, Brother Mobile could see the corner of a battered table with a pen holder on it. The holder contained two pens, one of which looked somewhat familiar...

Next to the pen holder, there seemed to be some CDs or similar items.

Zhao Lei was standing in his doorway, looking at him with some confusion. "What are you doing?"

Brother Mobile awkwardly fumbled with his hands. "I just wanted to see this clock, to see why it's going backward."

He noticed Zhao Lei's suspicion level towards him had risen to 20.

I could cry but have no tears, Brother Mobile thought. A few more times like this, and I can forget about the side quest reward. The 'Financial Management Handbook' clearly has something to do with money, and money is what players in this game lack most.

Fortunately, Zhao Lei didn't seem to want to pursue the matter. Instead, he went along with what Brother Mobile said. "It is strange. The clock was like this when I got back. I don't know if it's because the clock is going backward, but I still feel something's very wrong here."

"But I can't quite say what's wrong." Zhao Lei looked quite troubled.

He stepped out of his room and walked towards the coffee table, apparently intending to pour himself a glass of water.

But as he passed the sofa, perhaps because he was distracted, he inadvertently knocked his knee against its corner.

He immediately bent over in pain, about to clutch his knee, but as he did so, something seemed to strike him. "Wait... this sofa wasn't here originally, was it...?"

Brother Mobile swallowed, watching Zhao Lei from the side.

Zhao Lei straightened up again and looked around, his expression even more bewildered. "No, that's right... I remember it was always placed like this. But why do I keep feeling like its position is wrong...?"

Zhao Lei's sofa was also very shabby, a grayish-brown. To put it vividly and crudely, it was shit-brown.

It was old and worn. A slightly longer section was placed in the middle, facing the main door.

It looked like there should have been two single sofas flanking it, but one of them was probably unusable, so there was only a small sofa on one side.

Zhao Lei had knocked his knee on this small sofa.

At this, Brother Mobile finally spoke. "Are you hurt? Do you need some ointment?"

He was trying his best to act like a normal person, hoping his suspicion level wouldn't rise any further.

"No." Zhao Lei shook his head, looking dazed. "I think I'll just go back to my room."

Saying this, he started walking back to his room.

Zhao Lei wasn't short, but for some reason, he always looked like he hadn't rested well, and he seemed to float when he walked.

"Wait, hold on..." Just as Zhao Lei reached his door and was about to close it, Brother Mobile suddenly walked up and spoke.

"What is it?" Zhao Lei asked, a puzzled expression on his face.

Standing at the doorway, Brother Mobile glanced inside Zhao Lei's room. "Um... could I borrow a pen?"

"A pen?" Zhao Lei instinctively glanced at the pen holder on his desk.

There were two pens in the holder. One was a very old-fashioned pencil, the kind that needed to be sharpened with a knife, entirely black without any patterns. The other was a rather thick correction pen, but its wrapper had been peeled off, making it look somewhat plain.

Zhao Lei had often seen such things when he was in elementary school. It had once been all the rage because it could erase fountain pen ink.

I wonder if this correction pen can remove the black stuff on the paper in my hand? Brother Mobile thought.

Although Zhao Lei didn't know what Brother Mobile wanted the correction pen for, he still lent it to him.

As soon as Brother Mobile got the pen, he immediately returned to his room. He took out the stained paper, uncapped the pen, and started dabbing at the smudges.

Thankfully, the cliché of the pen running out of fluid didn't occur.

He was thrilled to discover that the black ink marks on the paper could indeed be removed by the correction pen. Having found this out, Brother Mobile began to apply the pen downwards from the character 'Wang'.

When he uncovered the second character, a strange expression appeared on his face.

The characters on the paper looked as if they were written by an elementary school student with poor handwriting, crooked and squiggly like earthworms.

Is this... a character?

Brother Mobile frowned at the second revealed character.

He clearly couldn't recognize what it was.

But Brother Mobile didn't give up. He lifted the pen and continued to apply it downwards.

As more and more characters were revealed, the puzzled look on his face lessened, replaced by an expression of astonishment.

Fine beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. Seemingly anxious to find the answer, he took the pen again, wanting to quickly apply it further down.

But just as he finished the next line and was about to examine it closely, the light overhead suddenly went out.

To be precise, all the lights in the entire building went out, plunging every room into darkness.

A woman's scream came from upstairs, but he paid it no mind. Instead, he urgently took out his flashlight and shone it on the paper in his hand, as if afraid the words on it would disappear in the next second.

The flashlight beam illuminated the somewhat crumpled paper in front of him. He stared at the contents with a shocked expression. "I get it!"

However, just as he shouted these words, he suddenly caught sight of something white beside him out of the corner of his eye.

Brother Mobile stiffly turned his head to look, only to see a deathly pale face that had, at some unknown point, appeared right in front of him.