

## Global Collapse

*Chapter 9: Chapter 9: I am a Good Person\_1*

"Ah——"

A scream echoed through the entire dormitory building.

Gu Mian, who was conducting a search on the second floor, stopped in his tracks. He recognized the scream as Xun Li's voice. "History always repeats itself."

There wasn't much of interest on the second floor, but Gu Mian noticed a familiar object in the hallway—a panda's head. Of course, it wasn't a real panda head; otherwise, Gu Mian could sue the school for beheading a national treasure. It was an accessory stuck on the hair clip of Zixin Bingling, the high school girl. Gu Mian had previously noted how flimsy this hairclip was, with a panda head that seemed ready to fall off at any moment. Now, his prediction was proven accurate.

"So, the two female players weren't content to sit idle and have joined the investigation?" Gu Mian stroked his chin. But this didn't seem like their style. They had always adopted a passive attitude, never intending to take the game seriously, as if waiting for others to do the hard work so they could reap the benefits.

"Oh well, let them do as they please." Gu Mian dusted off his lab coat, planning to move his investigation to the third floor after finishing the second.

At this moment, Zixin Bingling was cowering behind a dormitory door on the third floor. Moonlight seeped in from a small window in the eight-person room, illuminating the entire space and casting a ghastly pallor on her face.

"Aunt Zhao is dead..." she muttered, her body shivering.

The two of them had been discussing how to avoid being discovered as living people when they heard someone outside calling their names. It was Chu Changge's voice. Letting their guard down, Aunt Zhao opened the door immediately. But in that instant, Zixin Bingling saw a student in uniform drop from above, clutch Aunt Zhao's head, and twist it violently. Terrified, she couldn't make a sound. She scrambled up to the second floor, but feeling it was too close to the first, she continued to the third. The sharp crack of bone snapping still echoed in her ears.

"I should be safe here..." she sighed deeply, curling herself into a tighter ball. *No one can find me.*

But just then, an eerie creak of a door opening echoed in the otherwise silent corridor, seemingly from the direction of the staircase. It was neither too close nor too far. A few seconds later, footsteps sounded in the corridor, followed by another door creaking open, this time a little closer. The girl huddled by the door shivered violently.

CREAK—

*Closer!*

CREAK—

*Even closer!*

CREAK—

One eerie sound after another, drawing nearer and nearer. She didn't dare move, hiding behind the door, trembling, her eyes squeezed shut, too afraid to look. The footsteps reached her door and stopped. There was a pause, as if something were peeking in through the long, narrow glass pane on the door. The girl desperately lowered her head, her panic reaching its peak. *I have to escape! I have to escape!* She almost screamed it aloud.

After a long silence, it started moving again. The thudding footsteps moved towards the door directly opposite her dormitory and pushed it open. In the same instant, the girl abruptly stood up, yanked her door open, and darted out. The moment she opened the door, she saw a charred figure standing in the room across the hall.

"Ah——" Screaming, she ran towards the stairs on the east side of the corridor.

At that moment, Gu Mian was on the west side staircase, preparing to head to the third floor. The sudden scream made his hands tremble slightly. He looked up towards the third floor, where the sound had originated. "Is everyone trying to hit the high notes tonight?"

Zixin Bingling ran frantically up to the fourth floor, which was the top floor; there were no more stairs leading upward. She gritted her teeth and, in her panic, darted into a random dormitory, pressing herself tightly against the back of the door. For a long time, the footsteps didn't follow.

She breathed a small sigh of relief and began to examine the dormitory. It was an eight-person room, but only one bed had bedding. A chair sat askew before a desk. Further in, toward the back of the room, was a balcony, where, by the moonlight, she could see something. She quietly and carefully moved towards the balcony, trying hard not to make a sound. It took her a full minute to finally reach it. With her back to the dormitory door, she picked up an object from the floor.

It was a yellowed piece of paper, covered in densely scrawled red words. In the dim moonlight, she could barely make out the characters.

"They are going to kill me!"

"They want to put a talisman on me, confine me in a dark box, beside a disgusting rat hole, staring and laughing at me every day, tormenting me, making me stay here forever!"

"No matter where I hide, whether it's in the classroom or the dorm, they can find me!"

"They're here! They're here!"

"There's no sound, but I know—"

"They're right behind me!"

*Behind... behind me?* Zixin Bingling shuddered.

Just then, a strange door-opening noise came from behind her.

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Chu Changge and Fatty were holding their breath, hidden on the balcony of a fourth-floor dormitory. They had watched a female player run into the room next door. Not long after, they heard a shrill 'creak' from that direction, followed by silence.

"Don't make a sound," Chu Changge signaled with his eyes.

Fatty nodded, sweating profusely. Even though it was a cold night, he was drenched in sweat, his clothes a damp mess.

After a long while, there was no more noise from outside. With Chu Changge's permission, Fatty cautiously peeked out the door, only to immediately recoil in horror.

A charred, twisted humanoid figure was pressed tightly against the long glass pane of the door. Its eyes, mostly white, spun wildly, while its tiny, dark pupils stared fixedly at him.

"Mom!" Fatty yelled, jumping up.

Chu Changge quickly stood up too. This was the only room on the fourth floor that could be locked from the inside, so the two of them had bolted the door. The doorknob was being violently twisted from the outside. The twisted figure convulsed, as if eager to shatter the glass and crawl in.

"What should we do?!" Fatty looked in terror at Chu Changge. The door wouldn't hold for long, probably less than a minute.

Chu Changge quickly scanned the dormitory. The bedding on the beds was still present, though damp and moldy. In the darkness, he quickly pulled off the bed sheets from several beds. "Tie these together. We're jumping."

Fatty looked at him incredulously. "Are you crazy? We'll die!"

"Getting killed by the ghost is certain death. Jumping isn't. Pick one," Chu Changge said, tying a tight knot.

By now, the glass in the door window looked as if it had been smashed. A charred claw reached in, fumbling for the doorknob.

Seeing this, Fatty, petrified, took a large step back. "Let's jump! If we die, we die!"

But they quickly discovered the window wouldn't open more than a tiny crack. It was likely designed to prevent students from jumping; even pushing with all their might, they could only create a ten-centimeter gap. Fatty couldn't possibly fit, and neither could Chu Changge. At most, he could stick his head out.

The thing outside grew more agitated, thrashing against the door panel like a fish on dry land, its eyes emitting an eerie glow.

"What do we do now?!" Fatty collapsed onto the floor, trembling. He scooted backward as far as he could, as if the ghost outside wouldn't see him if he did.

Just then, the convulsing head of the ghost outside slammed violently into the glass, apparently not of its own volition. It hit so hard that brain matter splattered out. A trail of brain matter slid down the glass. The ghost, having lost all strength, slumped down with it, its head lolling.

As it slid down, the two of them saw Gu Mian standing outside, holding a chair.