

48 Hours a Day

Chapter 4: A Small Test

“Hey, did you girls hear? A media senior girl lied to a freshman about an internship opportunity but when she arrived at the place, she found out that she had been tricked into drinking with other men. They even took naked pictures of her. Yesterday night, that senior’s dormmate suddenly disappeared. Her roommate said that she saw her go to bed. But she vanished just like that.”

“I heard that too! All the girls in Block Two are freaking out. They searched the entire campus but didn’t find her. Then the police called the school and asked the head of the university to go to the station. Apparently, someone sent all her dirt to the authorities. Among them were two pictures that had close shots on her. But, it seemed like the person in the picture did not realize that there was a camera in front of her. This is just weird.”

“Speaking of weird, isn’t the Wumart twelve o’clock legend even scarier?”

“What twelve o’clock legend?”

“How can you not know about that? It has been spreading around the campus like a wildfire! Every Monday, exactly at midnight, a bottle of Nescafe coffee would go missing at that Wumart near the library, and every time, there would be exactly 4.50 yuan in the cash register. The two cashiers who work there are scared to death! When they looked at the surveillance videos, the coffee just vanished in split seconds. There was no one in the videos.”

“Wow! Just hearing the story gives me the chills.”

A group of girls chatted as they passed by Zhang Heng who was fussing with a newly acquired Sony compact camera.

For a month now, since he found out that he had extra twenty-four hours, he had been experimenting and got the hang of this newfound ability.

That media senior incident was just something he came across. He was just merely trying his hand.

If he prepared well, he could incite World War III¹ if he wanted to.

Of course, doing that would not benefit him in any way.

Other than that, he could also walk down the street with a fire axe and hack away at all the ATMs. He could become a Top 100 millionaire overnight! He could also just steal one yuan from every person's wallet, and earn twenty million while inflicting the smallest impact.

But for the time being, he had no need in this regard.

To a sophomore, thirty-thousand yuan allowance was more than enough. He would not know where to spend the extra money.

His family did not need financial support from him—forget about his parents that were focusing on their research in another country; his grandfather was the first batch of university students during the reintroduction of gaokao¹ in 77. After graduation, he became a senior engineer of a water conservatory project. Now that he was retired, he had a pension and a retirement home with a courtyard where he planted his own crops and play chess. He was currently very contented with his life.

As a matter of fact, now that he was familiar with his abilities, Zhang Heng did not need to break the law to earn money.

Take his recent participation in the photography club, for example. Next month, a major photography competition with the theme 'city impression' was taking place. The senior in charge managed to find pretty good sponsorships, so the first place winner would be getting five thousand yuan and a Canon EF 17-40mm f/4L wide-angle zoom lens, and the

second and third place winner would be getting three thousand yuan each along with some prizes.

Having joined the club late, Zhang Heng had only been to two classes and one seminar. He was still heavily reliant on the internet to learn. His progress was currently only at composition and exposure. During Zhang Heng's private twenty-four hours, everyone would be standing still for him to take pictures of them. To an ordinary photographer, it was a golden opportunity. Without any editing, the pictures of all those frozen moments were enough to touch someone's heart.

Since his skills were still insubstantial—he was still perplexed by color warmth and depth of field. But through his lens, the city had a certain unusual charm about it.

Zhang Heng had picked out two of the more satisfactory photos from the shots he took last night and signed up for the competition.

He was not necessarily eyeing the prizes, but to that he could to gauge his own progress.

Ever since he found out about the extra time he had, instead of slowing down, Zhang Heng became even busier.

In the beginning, it was mainly because he was testing and experimenting. For example, would the objects that he touched break away from complete stillness? Would it resume its stillness after he had stopped being in contact with the object? How much area did this stop-in-time cover? Was it limited only to this city? He bought a plane ticket to fly to a place one thousand miles away on a Saturday...

Through these experiments, he was able to find the answers to most of these questions. For now, he had no way of verifying the more difficult ones.

After that, he had to figure out what to do with the extra twenty-four hours.

First was sleep, which was necessary. He used to sleep at midnight.

Early on, his curiosity would bring him all over the city for the entire day. But once he got used to it, he could not do it anymore.

In the twenty-four hours when everyone was motionless, and the time on his wrist continued to move, his physical needs were still present and he still experienced hunger, thirst, discomfort, and exhaustion from a full day of activity.

“Hmm, does this mean that I would age faster than normal?” Zhang Heng stared at his own reflection in the mirror. Unfortunately, this was a question he would not be able to answer in the short term.

After all the time he spent eating and sleeping, he had about fourteen hours left. His remaining period of time was enough for him to do plenty of things like reading. Perhaps it was his theologian parents’ influence that caused him to be interested in all kinds of bizarre knowledge. Previously, because of time limitations, he could only read a book a week. Now, he had made a new arrangement and was dedicating six hours every Monday and Wednesday to reading.

The bright and spacious library had become exclusively his. He did not need to book a place in advance or sit next to a strange person—he could even visit the library in his pajamas and flip flops.

An interesting book, paired with a cup of cold coffee was enough to pass some meaningful time.

Other than that, Zhang Heng even picked up the rock-climbing hobby he had abandoned and added a new one, photography to his list of hobbies. He continued to attend classes as usual, and then practice and consolidate what he had learned in his own time.

He had continued to practice in the shooting range and his coach was constantly surprised by his incredible progress every week. He was even encouraged to seriously consider the possibility of expanding in this area.

Of course, Zhang Heng’s favorite activity was his nightly city roams. Every day, he would spend at least two hours walking around town.

The big city at midnight held many secrets.

Zhang Heng took advantage of the frozen time and his camera, quietly observing every corner of the city, as if he was watching a stop-motion film. Most of the time he was just a silent observer, but on occasion, he would take action to change some of the circumstances that he did not like very much.

These changes had nothing to do with good or evil. He had no interest in playing God or the devil. He was simply enjoying the time that belonged only to him.