



Cannibalville



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Аннотация

В престижной школе Людоедбурга, где людоедство давно стало частью государственной идеологии, пятиклассница Аня замечает странное исчезновение одноклассницы Синьей Ма. Учителя уверяют, что девочка уехала на выставку хищных растений, но брошенный у школы велосипед заставляет Аню начать собственное расследование.

Перед вами сатирическая повесть с элементами детского детектива, антиутопии и абсурдного гротеска. За приключенческим сюжетом скрывается история о пропаганде, социальном неравенстве, школьной дисциплине, ксенофобии и взрослении в мире, где официальная правда постоянно расходится с реальностью.

Уровень B2.

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Ксения Пронина

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Chapter 1

Hi! My name is Anya. I'm in fifth grade at the most prestigious school in all of Cannibalville. The city earned its name fair and square, since most of the adults are cannibals—though there are ordinary people too. But at our school, everyone—the teachers, the principal, even the building manager—is wall-to-wall cannibal.

But more on that later. Because I want to tell you the important thing.

My classmate Xinyu Ma didn't come to school today. And I have an actual reason to worry. Our teacher says Xinyu Ma went with her parents to another city for the annual carnivorous plants exhibition. But that exhibition is usually in June. And right now it's April: the time when everyone is preparing for tests, especially the people who might fail exams and get held back a year.

And one more thing—you'd better sit down if you're standing! The last time I saw Xinyu Ma, she'd been kept after school for extra tutoring. That was yesterday. But today the bicycle she rides is still abandoned by the entrance, with the red ribbon on the

bell. Which means Xinyu Ma never left school and may still be somewhere in the building!

On her last two dental hygiene quizzes, she got an “F.” And aside from cramming and a good walloping from her parents, nothing else was in store for her. Mrs. Ma looks kind on the outside, but when she’s angry, she’ll chew you up and spit you out. And that’s not even mentioning Mr. Ma, whose icy stare gives me indigestion.

And here’s the strange part: when Xinyu Ma got her second failing grade, she didn’t even get upset. She just closed her notebook and, looking toward the teachers’ lounge door, said:

“Sometimes it pays to look weaker than you are.”

At the time I figured it was some kind of diplomatic wisdom from her household, since her father is a diplomat, and diplomats do a lot of talking.

As for me, on the contrary, it’s better not to open my mouth at all, so I don’t ruin my grades with unnecessary questions. But there’s nothing terrible about taking just one tiny peek around the school to see whether Xinyu Ma’s bloodstained backpack, bearing signs of a struggle, is lying around somewhere, right?

Point “A” would be the teachers’ lounge—that’s where underperforming students have extra lessons after school. At any other time, and without a special reason, students aren’t allowed in there. But if you know how to get the key, you can sneak into the office before recess.

All you have to do is complain about a stomachache and ask

to go to the bathroom. My classroom is on the first floor, and the teachers' lounge is on the second. First I'll go straight down the hall to the hall monitor, who at that hour is usually chatting with the cafeteria lady in the dining room. I'll take the keys unnoticed and go upstairs. I'll have a couple of minutes to find evidence and get back the same way.

We were in Natural Nutrition class. Our notebooks lay open on the desks: all the students were carefully taking dictation while Onzagai Mandyy-oolovna paced back and forth, bellowing as if she wanted to be heard on another continent:

"Thus, cannibalism is demographically conditioned and critically important not only in the northern latitudes... Third desk, if you do not stop whispering, you will go straight to the principal! Now let us examine the diet of gatherer-cannibals of the First Period. How did the original simplicity of digestion lead to the complex organization of cannibal-cooking systems, and why will any genetic modification of humans—so widely promoted by residents of the southern latitudes—inevitably result in the collapse of the entire food chain... Open your textbooks to page ninety-seven."

The whole class rustled pages at once.

"Third desk, how many times must I repeat myself? Where is your textbook?" The teacher came right up to the offenders.

"Forgot it at home, Onzagai Mandyy-oolovna."

"Next time I'll make sure you forget your head at home! How do you expect to survive without knowledge of the core subject,

given the extremely fragile state of the peace treaty between the countries of the South and the North at present? That applies to the rest of you as well.”

A pause hung in the air. That was when I was about to raise my hand, but suddenly the classroom door opened, and the vice principal came in.

“Children, stand! Sit down! Due to the arrival of the regional commission, a shortened school day has been declared. All teachers are invited to a meeting, and students may return home.” She clapped her hands three times to cut off the sudden commotion and roar. “Silence! Loitering in the halls is prohibited! Do not crowd or scream in the cloakroom as if you’re already being butchered!” Her voice kept getting louder and louder. “The honor of the school is at stake! Monitors leave first; everyone else lines up in pairs behind them. If anyone catches my eye, I’ll personally skin them alive! Understood?”

My plan had failed, but retreat was impossible. If Xinyu Ma was in the school, every minute counted. So I decided to hide and wait until everyone left. The quietest place is the girls’ room—you know what I mean.

So they wouldn’t catch me, I wrote “out of order” on the stall door and locked myself in from the inside. The janitor peered in and muttered, “The pipes are eating the budget again,” then left without suspecting a thing. So far, I was lucky.

Coming out of hiding, I slipped into the cafeteria, where voices were coming from, and crouched behind a poster that

said, “Cannibalism Is Your Goal.” There I saw several suspicious people in white coveralls. They were carrying metal crates, bundles of wire, and long instruments that looked either like probes or very thin skewers. Round golden seals gleamed on the crate lids. My palms started to sweat.

“Why didn’t you leave with the others?” A hand touched my shoulder from behind.

I turned around—the principal.

“There aren’t any classes anyway. No need to wander around.”

“I just went to the bathroom.”

Another minute and it would almost have been true. Now danger threatened not only Xinyu Ma, but me too. After all, for violating a direct order from the vice principal, they could make you serve kitchen duty in the staff kitchen until the end of the school year. And can you even imagine cannibal cauldrons? Exactly. So I quickly left school and ran home.

There are three of us at home: Dad, Mom, and me. Dad works from morning till night. He’s a cobbler at a factory. A cobbler with no shoes. And if you think that’s funny, don’t: part of his leg from the knee down has been bitten off, and a prosthetic doesn’t need shoes. Dad is a veteran of the Resistance against the South, like many people his age. The factory even has a workshop making custom shoes for different injuries, and we have a special hand-control car. Mom sews leather clothes at home, and that’s all you need to know.

“Why are you back so early?” she asked when I came home

from school. “I’m going to the grocery store.”

Mom took a big shopping bag. Officially my parents don’t have cannibal status, so they buy leftovers from cannibal production through a reseller.

“They let us go,” I said, then fell silent. But before Mom left, I added, “Is it true that Xinyu Ma went to the carnivorous plants exhibition with her parents? Isn’t that in June?”

“You know how it is before elections—nothing happens when it’s supposed to. They want to put on a holiday and splash some blood in everyone’s eyes so voters will be happy with the new candidate. If your father had been given the Cannibal Order, we could go to exhibitions too, like your beloved Xinyu Ma. Better not fill your head with nonsense. Do your homework. If you finish the year properly, you’ll be able to become a cannibal’s apprentice.”

Chapter 2

My homework on the defense of traditional cannibal values was not coming together. After all, I still hadn't found out why Xinyu Ma had abandoned her bicycle at school. And what were the people in white coveralls doing?

A real detective must reconstruct the whole picture: every movement and every contact of the victim. Since classmates and teachers might be mixed up in the case, I'd better turn to independent experts.

Meet Hannah and Boar. I'll admit—not a lot to work with. But I can't be picky. I don't have many friends outside school, and the closest of them are closest literally: my neighbors on the landing.

Hannah is my age, and Boar is her younger brother. They're homeschooled, which means that, in the school's opinion, they are growing up as savages. In my opinion, both of them are suuuper smart, and all because they don't have to waste precious time on stupid PE.

So, dossier number one. You do want to get to know my team better, don't you? Then I'll continue: dossier number one. Tall, thin, braids, dark hair. Distinguishing feature: an incredibly clean and tidy girl, like all homeschoolers. Hobbies: playing musical bones, hair weaving, amateur dentistry. Question: how many braids did you count on Hannah in your imagination?

Dossier number two: little, skinny, blondish. Distinguishing

feature: he's hard not to notice—he's a total remora fish. Hobbies: radio electronics, conspiracy theories, and driving Hannah to the boiling point. They call him Boar not because of his looks, but because of his character. Question: does Boar wear glasses if I didn't mention them?

"Nooo, I don't want to hear any of this," Hannah said after listening to my story. "Final assessment is right around the corner. I need to study. Besides, the new hamster's teeth won't extract themselves."

Boar, who had been importantly soldering parts of some receiver, suddenly rebelled.

"Hands off Fluffball! I've almost developed the most accurate missing-pet search system ever, and Fluffball has to go missing for the sake of saving thousands—no, hundreds—of pets who vanish without a trace in this city."

"Then let him vanish after I remove a couple incisors!"

"Like last time? I need a live ham-ster! And as for you, little Anya, I'd bet my tooth—just not to her"—he pointed at his sister—"that the girl was eaten by the teachers for bad grades, or maybe by her own parents. Or worse: she was kidnapped and is being held hostage by vile Southerners to prevent the signing of the thirteenth peace treaty between South and North! In any case, if her trail ends at school, it means someone on the inside is involved. And he's cleverly destroying evidence. Look!"

Boar pulled a magazine off the shelf. It was full of ads of various kinds, from dating-column gems like "attractive cannibal

seeks full-figured woman for romantic relationship” to cartilage-extension services. A small finger jabbed at an image of people in work uniforms. The caption read: “Professional cleaning and turnkey disposal of remains.”

“No,” I said. “Those were different suits. White, thick. And crates with golden seals.”

Hannah stopped worrying her braid.

“Golden? Those are used for official documents,” she said. “References, clearances, sanitary permits. So no one can forge them.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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