

Collapse 105

Chapter 105: Only Safe at Night [Seeking the First Subscription] _1

At this point, Brother Mobile had already gone up to the second floor. He stood somewhat hesitantly outside the door. "Can I come in?"

Gu Mian and the others actually hadn't closed the door, but Brother Mobile still symbolically asked. Since he'd asked, they didn't feel right responding with, "No, you can't."

Only then did Brother Mobile step inside.

As soon as he entered, he seemed rather eager to speak, "I think there's something odd about my room..."

No one responded, listening quietly.

Brother Mobile furrowed his brow. "It's like a child's room—there's a pile of marbles and children's playing cards under the bed. I also found this piece of paper with something written on it. Have a look."

As he spoke, he held out the object in his hand to them.

Gu Mian looked up. Brother Mobile was indeed holding a thin piece of paper on which something appeared to have been written. However, the paper had been altered; thick black ink covered the original handwriting. All they could make out was the first character, which resembled the Chinese character for 'King'.

Gu Mian thought this character for 'King' seemed rather off.

Meanwhile, the couple, seemingly having agreed on something, walked over.

Mingliang first glanced cautiously toward the stairs, then spoke, "Did you know? There's a baby crib in our room. We're just a couple; we hadn't planned on taking things that far..."

Ignoring Mingliang's inappropriate digressions, Gu Mian pondered. Zhao Lei is indeed the most important NPC in this instance. The rooms in this building basically cover Zhao Lei's entire life, from infancy to adulthood. The couple's room corresponds to infancy. Brother Mobile's room, childhood. Fatty's room, adolescence. Chu Changge's room, his college years. And my own room, he thought, likely corresponds to the time right after college. Then which time period did Zhao Lei's room represent?

Though Mingliang was spouting nonsense, he understood the situation. He was just about to say something more when Zhao Lei's voice suddenly came from the entrance, "Ah, you're all here."

Everyone turned to look at the door.

Zhao Lei looked at them, somewhat puzzled, "It's almost evening. I was about to ask you about dinner, but I found no one in their rooms. I didn't expect you all to be gathered here..."

The sky outside the window had already darkened; night was not far off.

If this weren't a Mysterious Dungeon, Gu Mian mused, I'd really be impressed by Zhao Lei's selfless spirit. Not only has he sheltered six people trapped on the mountain, but he's even providing food and lodging—a true living saint.

But things are different in a Mysterious Dungeon; it's not even certain if he's truly human.

Mother always taught us not to accept food from strangers, Gu Mian thought. Even though I never really had a mother, I understand that principle.

"No need," Brother Mobile quickly waved his hand. "We're not hungry..."

Though this sounded suspicious, it was better than eating food cooked by who-knows-what—possibly not even by human hands.

Seeing this, Zhao Lei didn't insist. "Alright... Oh, by the way, for some reason, I can't make any calls. I can't reach the outside world."

Chu Changge's brow twitched. "You can't contact the outside? Was it like this the past few days?"

Zhao Lei, standing outside the door, hesitated and shook his head. "When I came up here a few days ago, I only tried to call my father but couldn't reach him. Maybe the signal had already started malfunctioning then..."

Chu Changge pressed on, "After you came up the mountain, did you only call your father? You didn't call anyone else?"

Zhao Lei nodded slightly. "I haven't called anyone else. That's why I now suspect the signal might have been faulty for a few days already."

Logically, a snowstorm severe enough to block the mountain shouldn't also cut off the signal completely. And from Zhao Lei's description, it seems the signal here had issues even before the heavy snow began to fall; he just hadn't noticed.

Brother Mobile spoke up, "Then, did you call your father before you came up the mountain?"

What he really wanted to ask was, "Why did you come to the mountain to find your father?" However, their current cover was that of hikers trapped on the mountain, not detectives searching for a missing person, so it wasn't appropriate to be too direct.

Despite his tact, the question was still somewhat out of line. Zhao Lei opened his mouth slightly, evidently puzzled why Brother Mobile would suddenly ask such a thing. As soon as the words left his mouth, Brother Mobile regretted it, seeing Zhao Lei's suspicion level towards him rise to 10.

However, Zhao Lei was good-natured. After a moment's hesitation, he said, "I believe I did... because of some special circumstances."

Brother Mobile opened his mouth as if to press further, but seeing the suspicion level at 10, he closed it again.

Just as the conversation was about to stall, Gu Mian suddenly interjected. He was adept at spinning tales and could concoct stories on the spot.

"The six of us were stranded on the mountain, and you kindly took us in. We have nothing to repay your kindness with. Perhaps you could tell us more about your father? Maybe we've seen him down in the valley."

Zhao Lei nodded. "Yes, if you've seen him at the foot of the mountain, at least it would prove my dad's still alive."

Still alive? Fatty's expression became quite animated. Who talks about their own father like that?

"My father was a short man with a bad temper; he was always cursing. When I was a kid, I often got beaten by him."

"He wasn't very capable, but my grandfather left a substantial inheritance. This house was also left by my grandfather."

Zhao Lei's expression grew distant as he spoke, as if lost in memories.

"My father was short, bad-tempered, and not very capable. All he did was drink all day. Back then, he couldn't even find a wife..."

Fatty arched an eyebrow. He'd truly never heard anyone disparage their own father so openly.

"Luckily, my grandfather was resourceful. While he was still hale and hearty, he managed to find my mother for my father. I heard her family was extremely poor at the time; she was almost bought."

"My mother was beautiful, and my father treated her very well. However, she seemed to look down on my father. Not long after my grandfather passed away, she abandoned us and ran off with another man."

"I was only two or three at the time; I don't remember it clearly."

"But I know my father disliked me ever since then because of her. He would always find fault with everything I did and curse at me, constantly saying I'd grow up to be an ungrateful wretch, just like my mother."

"Later, he probably found me too troublesome and sent me to a boarding school. My grades were actually quite good, but I was often looked down upon by my peers because I was the worst off in terms of food and clothing. I'd wear the same set of clothes for an entire season. In the summer, after sweating all day, I'd take off my clothes, wash them, and wear them again the next morning once they were dry."

"My grades were good, so the teachers liked me. But the other students didn't. They often talked badly about me behind my back, calling me a bookworm who knew nothing but studying. I knew all of this."