

Collapse 231

Chapter 231: Gu Mian's School Days_1

Zi Liang scratched his head. "Didn't the game ask you to choose your attire before entering the instance for the first time? I remember there were outfits like 'school swimsuit,' 'mosaic,' and such..."

He seemed quite fond of the school swimsuit and mosaic outfits, but ultimately lacked the courage to choose them.

"Of course, I chose my own clothes, but I didn't expect the handcuffs would also be brought into the game. Every time I manage to get them off within an instance, my clothes reset the next time I enter, and the handcuffs are back. It's just like how if your hand or arm gets cut off in one instance, you're perfectly fine in the next... Trying to remove them in the real world doesn't work either. Sigh. So, every time I enter an instance, I have this thing with me..."

"But don't misunderstand!" The student-like figure in front of him quickly waved his hands. "I wasn't handcuffed because I was doing... *that* kind of thing..."

Arrested by a vice squad and he still claims he wasn't doing *that* kind of thing? Then what *was* he doing?

"To be honest," Zi Liang lowered his voice, "I'm a Supernatural Author. However, I often lack inspiration, so I have to go out and gather material."

Gu Mian raised an eyebrow. "That's hardly an excuse for whatever you were up to."

"No, no," Zi Liang shook his head vigorously. "I heard that three types of people have the most contact with diverse individuals and events, making it easiest to get stories from them: doctors, lawyers, and... well, them... So, I just wanted to find some stories."

Gu Mian said with dawning understanding, "So, even though you were caught by the vice squad, you're innocent, right?"

Zi Liang nodded in fervent agreement.

"Alright, enough messing around," Gu Mian said, putting the chainsaw back into his guitar bag. He then glanced at the mirror above the sink. "Let's head back to class first."

In the mirror, Gu Mian still looked like himself, only a few years younger, as if he were back in his high school days.

This is probably the instance's Disguise ability; otherwise, it wouldn't make sense for an intern doctor to pass as a high school sophomore.

At this moment, the two small figures on the game screen changed again; they had started a new conversation.

[Gu Gu: Class is about to start! Let's go back to the classroom. If we stay here any longer, we'll die!]

[Liang'er: Yeah! I need to get out of here!]

Gu Mian frowned. "Die?"

What kind of nonsense is this?

Immediately after, Gu Mian noticed that the small figure named [Liang'er] had started moving on its own, but the Zi Liang in front of him hadn't budged.

Zi Liang was clearly surprised too. He quickly pulled his phone from his uniform pocket and saw that his registered character was already speeding out of the restroom.

"AH—" Zi Liang exclaimed. "We'll die if we stay here? No, wait... this little character can move on its own?"

He started walking while looking at his phone. "Doctor, I need to go first. You saw what the game said; our characters will die if we stay here any longer. Doctor, you should hurry too."

They both knew the name of this instance: "The Vanishing Game."

This "Vanishing Game" clearly referred to the game they had downloaded on their phones. If the registered characters died, the people who registered them would likely die as well.

Gu Mian nodded to him. "You go first. By the way, do you know what grade and class you're in?"

Knowing his class would make it easier to find him later.

Zi Liang paused for a moment, seemingly trying to recall, then said, "I didn't check, but I remember our classroom is at the far right end of this hallway."

Gu Mian nodded. "Okay, you go on ahead."

Zi Liang hesitated, then asked, "Aren't you leaving?"

Staying here, the game character could die!

Gu Mian shook his head. "I'll wait a bit longer."

Alright then... This Doctor seems unfathomably mysterious, even pulling a chainsaw from a guitar bag. Zi Liang didn't press further and instead chased after his game character, running out.

Watching Zi Liang run off, Gu Mian looked down and started fiddling with his phone again. Although the game was primarily in a top-down view, the angle could be tilted slightly.

He tilted the screen with his finger, wanting to observe his own little character from all directions.

But just then, his little character changed again.

[Gu Gu: It's too dangerous! I must get out of here!]

After this message, Gu Mian's character surprisingly started running on its own as well. The surrounding scenery moved along with the character. Once the little character ran out, the game screen switched to the hallway.

Gu Mian looked down at his phone; his little character was running towards the classrooms.

What's so dangerous? Gu Mian found it strange.

He looked up at the restroom again; not even the shadow of a ghost was in sight.

And just then, Gu Mian saw another small figure appear on his phone screen.

This new little figure emerged from one edge of the screen and slowly walked towards the restroom's location.

It wore the same student uniform, had short hair, was a male character, and the name above its head was [Wang Panzi].

He knew who it was just by the name.

Gu Mian stepped out of the restroom. Sure enough, as soon as he exited, he saw Fatty peering around in the hallway. Fatty looked much younger, like a high school student—though still as fat as ever.

Fatty spotted Gu Mian at once and jogged over excitedly.

Gu Mian saw that Fatty's corresponding little character in the game was also running over.

"Doctor, you look so young now!" Fatty said, panting heavily. Then, seeming to realize he was stating the obvious, he quickly changed the subject. "I was on the second floor just now and heard someone sprinting wildly in the hallway up here. So, I came up to check it out. Didn't expect you to actually be here."

The one sprinting just now must have been Zi Liang. But if Fatty was on the second floor, does that mean this is the third floor?

Gu Mian asked, "Have you seen any other players?"

Fatty shook his head. "Nah. When I first got here, I saw this phone on a desk. A little character prompted me to pick a name, so I just chose one randomly... By the way, Doctor, this game is the 'Vanishing Game' the instance mentioned, right?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Although it doesn't seem scary at all right now, I have a feeling it will eventually turn into a horror game."

He noticed that his own registered little character had returned to his side and was now conversing with [Wang Panzi].

[Gu Gu: What are you doing here?]

[Wang Panzi: I'm here looking for someone.]

[Gu Gu: Have you found them now?]

[Wang Panzi: I have.]

The dialogue between these two characters is completely different from his conversation with Fatty.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. Could it be that this instance requires analyzing something from the dialogue between these little characters? The missing upperclassmen? The terrifying restroom? Who is Fatty's little character looking for? The more he thought about it, the weirder it got.

Just then, Fatty suddenly said to Gu Mian, "Doctor, I heard other students talking about this game earlier. They said... it seems like all the students who downloaded this game before have disappeared..."

Chapter 232 Title_1

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "All the students who had downloaded this game before have gone missing..."

He remembered that when he first entered this instance, his deskmate with the bitter-gourd face seemed to have mentioned this matter. But Gu Mian had been in a hurry and left the classroom without much discussion.

It seemed Fatty had come to him after learning about the game's history.

I'd better not ask my deskmate with that perpetually miserable face about it again, Gu Mian thought.

He touched his chin and looked at Fatty in front of him. "Tell me about it."

Suddenly, a bell rang above their heads. The sudden loud noise shattered the quiet of the hallway and was rather frightening.

Luckily, both Gu Mian and Fatty had encountered numerous Mysterious Dungeons by now, so they weren't too shaken up.

That must be the class bell, so the previous one was the warning bell, Gu Mian realized.

He noticed a line of text appearing at the bottom of the game screen as soon as the bell rang.

[The class bell has rung. Teachers and students should already be prepared in their classrooms.]

This is high school. I remember my high school teachers never arrived in the classroom bang on time, Gu Mian recalled. Usually, the teacher from the previous class would drag on for five minutes, and the one for the next class would arrive five minutes early.

During Gu Mian's high school years, those teachers often made life miserable for students suffering from upset stomachs.

Regardless, the teachers at this school were clearly very strict about timing. By this point, the sound of lectures could already be heard from the adjacent classrooms.

Only Gu Mian and Fatty remained in the hallway.

Just as Fatty was about to answer Gu Mian's question, he saw the two small figures on the phone screen start conversing again.

[Wang Panzi: Today is Saturday, and we have the afternoon off. Where are you planning to go?]

[Gu Gu: Probably going to sleep in the dorm.]

Fatty looked at the two small figures on the screen with some confusion. "Don't the characters in the game go home during their vacation?"

Gu Mian continued to read.

[Gu Gu: Where are you planning to go?]

[Wang Panzi: How about we go to the science building in the afternoon? I heard there's something good over there.]

At this point, the two small figures in the game weren't busy with class anymore but were instead going to look for some "good stuff."

Strange. It seems players have no control over the game's progress at all, Gu Mian mused. This 'vanishing game' feels like it's turning into a treasure hunt.

Fatty seemed to want to ask something but answered Gu Mian's question first. "I asked my deskmate... Speaking of which, my deskmate is quite a beauty..."

Fatty coughed twice before continuing, "She told me that in the past, some senior students, both male and female, also secretly brought phones to school. But that was many years ago. Her older sister studied at this school before her, so my deskmate is quite clear about what happened back then."

Fatty furrowed his brows as he said this. "This high school was built a long time ago. Back then, students used phones with keypads. There were more advanced touchscreen phones, but even those usually had keypads too. Students generally couldn't afford those kinds of touchscreen phones with keypads..."

Fatty paused here. "The phones they had back then were similar to our Nokias. By the way, you've seen a Nokia, right?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Yeah, I used it to crack walnuts when I was a kid."

Fatty: "..."

After a brief pause, he continued, "It probably started about ten years ago. There weren't many students who secretly brought phones, only about seventeen or eighteen in the entire school. This game appeared around that time."

It appeared that long ago? Gu Mian pondered.

Fatty continued, "No one really knows who first discovered this game, but it quickly became popular in the school. Later on, almost all of those dozen or so students had this game on their phones."

"Ten years ago, this game was considered quite advanced, and it was rumored that you could find treasure in it. So, everyone would wander around the school during their free time, trying to find the game's treasure boxes or something similar."

"But then, the first disappearance happened... I'm not really sure about the specifics. I only know that after the first person went missing, the other senior students who played this game also disappeared one after another."

"Of those dozen or so people, the last one to disappear was named Liu Qing. She was my deskmate's older sister's roommate..."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. His deskmate's older sister's roommate?

Fatty continued, "In the few days before her disappearance, Liu Qing started acting very strangely. She often rambled about someone secretly following her, wouldn't sleep at night, and would secretly stare at her roommates..."

"My deskmate said that once, in the middle of the night, Liu Qing grabbed her sister's arm tightly. Liu Qing seemed to be raving, saying something like, 'If we don't follow them, we'll die!' After that, she grabbed her phone and rushed out of the dormitory. No one has seen her since."

As he listened, Gu Mian glanced at the two small figures on the phone screen. Could the 'them' Liu Qing mentioned be these little figures? he wondered.

"It's weird, though," Fatty said. "The dormitory building's main doors are always locked, and the windows are secured so that even a child couldn't squeeze through the openings. She shouldn't have been able to get out of the dormitory building."

"But the police searched the entire dormitory building, inside and out, and found no trace of Liu Qing. Everyone suspected there was a problem with the game. The principal and the dean also seemed to have heard something about this game. Although they verbally dismissed it, saying things like, 'Don't believe in such superstitions,' they implemented even stricter controls on mobile phones afterwards."

"Back then, the school administration apparently specially borrowed a mobile phone detector from somewhere else—that's what it's called, right? The machine they use during exams to check if we've secretly brought phones."

Gu Mian nodded. "Call it whatever you like."

Fatty continued, "...They set up several of these machines at the dormitory entrances to check for phones. That year, not a single student's phone made it through."

"About four or five years later, the principal had changed, and several groups of teachers had also left. People grew lax about the phone ban, and that's when the game reappeared... Doctor, you can probably guess what happened next. Some bold students who didn't believe in superstitions deliberately downloaded this game. But later, all these defiant students encountered something terrible and disappeared entirely. Not a single one was left..."

Gu Mian brushed some dust off his school uniform. It's truly remarkable this school has managed to stay open until now, he thought.

"Later, the school banned cellphones strictly again," Fatty said. "Then, after another four or five years, enforcement became lax once more... and then we came along. It seems we're also fated to disappear."

Hearing this, Gu Mian couldn't help but laugh.

Fatty pursed his lips. "Doctor, please stop laughing. You're really creeping me out."

Gu Mian stopped laughing. "Speaking of which... did you know that the character you created can move by itself in the game?"

Fatty's eyes widened slightly. "I didn't know!"

Gu Mian nodded. "Now you do."

Chapter 233 Who is Behind You_1

"Wait, wait..."

Fatty rubbed his belly, which gave a lurch in fright. "The little figures in the game can move on their own. Does that mean the warning Liu Qing gave before he disappeared—'you will die if you don't follow them'—refers to the little figures in the game?"

Gu Mian nodded.

Fatty seemed somewhat agitated, sweat beading on his face. "So, the little figures can move on their own, and we'll die if we don't follow them. What if they jump off a building?"

If they followed and jumped, they would die; if they didn't follow, they would also die.

Gu Mian coughed. "I guess the little figures in this game haven't learned the highly intelligent skill of jumping off buildings yet."

Is that even considered intelligent?

Fatty glanced out the corridor window. The sun overhead radiated scorching heat; even through the glass, the fierce sunlight could be felt.

He wiped a fresh bead of sweat from his brow. "Jumping off a building? Just point your head down, grab the window frame, and drop. Simple as that."

So simple, even an idiot could do it.

Gu Mian opened his mouth to respond, but at that moment, he noticed a faint sound from the classroom door to his front right. He immediately hid his phone in his pants pocket.

The door to the front right opened, and a teacher wearing glasses peeked out, looking at the two in the corridor with puzzled eyes.

The teacher wasn't young; it was clear he had worked at this high school for many years. Deep wrinkles lined his face, and his hair, streaked with white at the temples, had clearly been dyed black, giving it an oily look.

The teacher, whose hair had an oily sheen, raised his eyebrows and put on a stern expression. "Which class are you two from? What are you doing out here instead of being in class? Whispering in the corridor is disturbing our lesson!"

Fatty had evidently been scolded by teachers many times during his school days. Gu Mian watched him expertly nod and bow, an apologetic look on his face as Fatty said, "Sorry, Teacher, we'll head back to class right away!"

Though Fatty was actually in his thirties, he played the part of a high school student quite convincingly.

With that, Fatty quickly pulled Gu Mian along. The stern male teacher watched them for a long while before withdrawing his head back into the classroom.

By then, Gu Mian had reached his own classroom door. "We have the afternoon off today, so this should be the last class of the morning. I'll go back to my classroom first and see if I can get any useful information. You should also go back to class."

As he spoke, Gu Mian took out his phone to check it.

He had tried to close the game screen earlier, but it wouldn't close. It seemed that once opened, the game couldn't be shut down, and it also blocked their ability to send messages with their phones.

The two little figures on his screen had also arrived at their current location.

[Gu Gu: I'm going back to class now. Don't forget to find me this afternoon.]

[Wang Panzi: Okay, I'm going back to class too.]

With that said, the two little figures parted ways. [Gu Gu] directly pushed open the classroom door and went in.

[Wang Panzi] continued walking down the corridor.

Gu Mian looked at Fatty in front of him. "You go back to class with your character first. I'll come to your classroom after this class ends. By the way, which classroom are you in?"

Gu Mian only knew Fatty's classroom was on the second floor, but not which one.

Fatty also took out his phone to look. "I'm in the classroom in the middle of the second floor. I'll wait for you at the door after class... I'll get going then!"

"Go on," Gu Mian nodded.

Fatty hastily followed his little figure away. If he didn't move with it, he would likely disappear, and Fatty didn't want to be the first blood in this instance.

Listening to the THUD, THUD, THUD of Fatty's footsteps as he ran down the stairs, Gu Mian pushed open the door of his own classroom.

In the torrid summer, even the air was hot. Every breath felt like inhaling steam. The corridor was sweltering, and staying there for long made one feel as if they were being roasted over a fire. Fortunately, it was cooler in the classroom.

Presumably, to ensure students could study well, the school had installed central air conditioning to deliver cool air to every classroom during the scorching summer.

As Gu Mian pushed the door open, a gust of cool, air-conditioned air hit his face.

Intense sunlight filtered through the windows, bathing half the lectern in light. The teacher, in the shadow of the other half, was speaking languidly. Seeing Gu Mian suddenly enter, he didn't ask much, just glanced at him and continued with what he was doing.

Gu Mian, his guitar slung over his back, quickly walked to the second-to-last row by the window and sat down, then pulled out his phone.

The student at the desk in front of him, seeing him return, seemed to want to say something, but with the teacher still lecturing, the student didn't turn around.

Perhaps because it was an art class, there were very few students, barely twenty, each sitting alone at a desk. The creature known as a "deskmate" didn't exist in this classroom.

Because his desk was by the window, it was already scorching hot from the sun. The glare from the window made it hard to see his phone screen clearly. Gu Mian tried to adjust the brightness but couldn't access any page other than the game.

The curtains were paper-thin and didn't help much when drawn, but Gu Mian could at least faintly make out the screen.

He saw that [Gu Gu] had returned to this spot in the game classroom.

The entire game classroom still showed only his character, strikingly empty.

So strange, Gu Mian muttered. My character was so insistent on coming back to class, yet he's the only one here in the game classroom...

He also noticed that his little figure was currently standing in this position.

There was a chair, but it didn't sit. Gu Mian tapped on the chair in front of the little figure, but nothing happened.

I wonder if the game developers were too lazy to give the little figures the ability to sit.

Just then, the little figure's head suddenly turned to look out the window, and a dialogue box appeared above its head.

[Gu Gu: Why did Chu Changge go out?]

[Gu Gu: He's hunting for treasure!]

Chu Changge? Gu Mian frowned and lifted the curtain a little to look outside.

On the unobstructed ground below, a slender figure was walking, holding a phone and seemingly looking at something on it.

Despite the younger appearance, Gu Mian immediately recognized him as the Chu Changge from his high school days.

Treasure hunting right at the start of the instance?

But Chu Changge didn't walk out of Gu Mian's line of sight; instead, he stopped in a particular spot.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "What is he doing?"

At that moment, Chu Changge was staring at his own phone screen. On it, he saw a treasure box right in front of his own little figure.

The sun was baking his scalp, but he paid it no mind. He only needed to take one more step forward, and his game character would reach the treasure box.

But what is this treasure box for? And what will happen if I open it? He had no idea.

But he didn't hesitate for long. He pushed up his glasses and quickly took a large step forward. His game character also took a step, arriving at the treasure box's location.

The screen changed.

[You found a treasure box. Do you want to open it?]

[Yes] [No]

Chu Changge extended his finger and selected [Yes].

A line of text appeared on the screen.

[Congratulations, you obtained the 'Bloodstained School Badge'.]

At this point, Chu Changge saw a dialogue box appear above his little figure's head.

[Chu Changge: Ah, this is a good item. It might undergo some change when the game is cleared.]

[Chu Changge: It feels like something upstairs is watching me.]

Chu Changge looked up.

He saw a pale, sinisterly grinning face pressed tightly against a window on the third floor of the teaching building, staring fixedly at him. And behind that face, also looking in Chu Changge's direction, was Gu Mian.

Chapter 234 A Game That Damages Public Morality_1

The class passed by very quickly.

When Gu Mian's class ended, he ran into Chu Changge, who was waiting at the classroom door.

As he approached the classroom door, a wave of heat washed over him. Chu Changge had clearly been waiting for a long time, evidenced by the slight sheen of sweat on his forehead.

By this time, the other students had already left one by one. They had all gone to lunch, and perhaps because they had the afternoon off, they all looked remarkably relaxed.

Chu Changge blocked Gu Mian's path, glanced at the empty classroom behind him, and then said, "You saw me just now, didn't you?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Yes, I saw you, and you saw me too, right?"

Chu Changge admitted, "Yes."

He hesitated, then looked towards the classroom behind Gu Mian. "Aside from me, did you see anything else just now?"

Hearing this, Gu Mian also looked back. "There was only you downstairs."

"I'm not talking about downstairs."

Gu Mian furrowed his brow. "You mean inside this classroom?"

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "Right in front of your seat."

Speaking of the seat in front of him... The student with the bitter-melon face, who sat there, had already vanished, probably in a hurry to get food.

Was the ghost in this instance invisible?

If it was invisible, the "Strange Camera" in Fatty's hands could capture the true appearance of these ghosts. Although the images it captured didn't look as good as selfies, Gu Mian figured the ghosts wouldn't mind.

As Gu Mian pondered this, he averted his gaze. "If the ghost is invisible, staring at the spot won't make it appear. Let's go find Fatty and get the camera first."

As he said this, he started walking towards the stairs.

Chu Changge followed closely. "Have you two met?"

"Yeah," Gu Mian nodded. "He's in the classroom in the middle of the floor below."

The teaching building's hallway wasn't long. The two of them quickly descended the stairs and arrived at the classroom in the middle of the hallway.

Gu Mian glanced at the nameplate on the classroom door—[Year Two, Division One, Class Shiba].

"It should be here."

Since high school students didn't have long lunch breaks, they usually returned to their classrooms early in the afternoon, so the doors were typically left unlocked.

Although it was a rest period that afternoon, some diligent students might have returned for self-study, so the door was unlocked.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "But it's a bit odd."

Technically, even if Fatty hadn't managed to come upstairs to find him, he should be waiting at the classroom door by now.

Could he have decided to wait in the classroom because it was too hot in the hallway?

While pondering this, Gu Mian pushed the door.

With a CREAK, the door swung open. The students had already left, so the central air conditioning had been shut off. The last wisp of cool air from the classroom rushed out, meeting the hot air in the hallway and instantly evaporating. Two seconds later, the final trace of coolness in the room had vanished completely.

Gu Mian stood by the door, scanning the empty classroom. "No one's here."

Never mind a two-hundred-pound Fatty, even a slim and frail girl would have nowhere to hide in this classroom.

This was the centermost classroom in the hallway, but Fatty wasn't inside.

Perhaps he's in an adjacent one?

Gu Mian moved quickly, searching the two adjacent classrooms, but there was still no sign of Fatty.

How strange.

Although he didn't find Fatty, Gu Mian did discover something else.

The hallway had fallen silent again when the sound of a classroom door opening at the far end broke the stillness. Then, someone snuck out.

Given Fatty's distinctive physique, Gu Mian recognized at once that this slimmer, more youthful-looking person wasn't Fatty, but another familiar face.

Gu Mian remembered this face, but he couldn't quite recall the name.

He remembered this face belonged to a player who had participated in the same instance with him before. Although the person looked much younger now, Gu Mian, who had a good memory, still recognized him, even if he'd forgotten the nickname.

Gu Mian also recalled that the name of that instance was something like the "Spirit Car Test Center." He wondered if that instance had been repaired yet.

The person who slipped out of the classroom obviously recognized Gu Mian as well. He froze, seemingly wanting to approach.

But then, he seemed to see something terrifying. Staring at the space behind Gu Mian, he abruptly retreated several steps, his mouth slightly agape in terror.

Before Gu Mian could react, the man spun around, stumbled towards the nearby stairs, and fled headlong without looking back.

What happened?

Gu Mian also looked behind himself, puzzled.

Chu Changge was standing not far behind him, his face expressionless.

By now, Chu Changge seemed to have adapted to the scorching heat. Even though he was fully exposed to the sun, his forehead was no longer beaded with sweat, and he looked quite refreshed.

Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge behind him. "Was there something behind me just now?"

What could have frightened the man so much?

Chu Changge paused for a moment. "No."

He then added, "Perhaps he saw something out the window."

Though, the direction he was looking in earlier was nowhere near a window.

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian moved a step into the shadows of the hallway. "Do you remember that guy? He was with us in the Spirit Car instance."

Chu Changge nodded. "I remember him. His nickname is Hao Laoshi."

That was it. It was a rather unique name. As soon as Chu Changge said it, Gu Mian recalled it.

But why had Hao Laoshi run away, frightened and flustered like that just now?

Gu Mian glanced down the hallway. It was empty now, with only him and Chu Changge standing there alone.

"Let's find the others first," Gu Mian said, taking out his phone and looking at it. "Fatty came to me this morning and gave me a crucial clue. We're short on time, so I'll keep it brief. The gist is that others have downloaded this game before, but they all mysteriously disappeared. One of the missing upperclassmen left us some valuable information—our registered characters sometimes move on their own. If we don't follow them, we die."

Fatty had learned about this in the morning. If he wasn't here now, it was probably because his little avatar had moved, and he'd had no choice but to follow it.

Just then, Gu Mian noticed another little avatar enter the scene on his screen. It came from the stairs Hao Laoshi had just used.

This little avatar had long hair and was clearly female.

The game developers, likely fearing that short skirts would be censored for being too risqué, had given the female avatars trousers instead.

Above the little avatar's head were three words: 'Willow not supporting wind'.

Liu Ruyan?

Immediately after, Gu Mian heard the THUMP THUMP of rapid footsteps ascending the stairs ahead, as if a player was hastily chasing their little avatar. He had never seen the usually laid-back Liu Ruyan rush upstairs so frantically before.

As it turned out, the person making the sounds wasn't Liu Ruyan, but another female player.

Chapter 235 A Game That Corrupts Morals and Manners_1

The female player's name was Willow not supporting wind. Gu Mian saw her character run over on the screen and stop in front of [Gu Gu] and [Chu Changge].

[Willow not supporting wind: "Ah, so you guys are here. I just saw Wang Panzi and Zi Liang heading towards the lab. Do you guys know what they are up to?"]

[Gu Gu: "Huh? Didn't they go to eat?"]

[Chu Changge: "Why don't we go take a look?"]

Options appeared on the screen:

[Would you like to go to the lab?]

I can actually choose? Gu Mian had thought the character would run straight to the lab.

This should be the equivalent of accepting a mission in an online game.

The difference was that in online games, players appeared in Novice Village. Then, some village chief would ask them to find a missing kitten or puppy, or to kill a few wild boars, or something similar.

If this game only asked people to kill a few wild boars, that would be great.

Unfortunately, it seemed there were no wild boars for them to kill right now.

Gu Mian glanced at Chu Changge next to him. Chu Changge paused for a moment, then selected the [Yes] option.

But his character didn't move and instead continued to speak.

[Chu Changge: "Are you two going to take a look too?"]

Willow not supporting wind, who hadn't even had a chance to exchange a word with the people she had just met, was faced with this choice. She hesitated for a moment, then also selected [Yes].

Immediately after, the two characters on the screen twisted their heads at the same bizarre angle, looking at the character Gu Mian had created. Two dialogue boxes appeared above their heads simultaneously.

[Chu Changge: "Gu Gu, are you going to take a look too?"]

[Willow not supporting wind: "Gu Gu, are you going to take a look too?"]

See what my ass!

Gu Mian glanced at the other two characters on his screen, then decisively chose [No].

Chu Changge looked up at him.

The characters of those who chose [Yes] didn't move at that point. Gu Mian remembered that these game characters usually acted according to the player's movements and only moved on their own in special circumstances. Therefore, the two players who chose [Yes] also had to walk to the lab themselves.

Sunlight poured through the glass onto the hallway, making one's hair feel hot.

Willow not supporting wind touched her hair, then showed an awkward smile to the two people in front of her. "Hello..."

The three of them finally exchanged their first words.

Willow not supporting wind specifically noticed Gu Mian's nickname and seemed somewhat curious about the green "Doctor" title above his head.

But when she saw Chu Changge's name, she had a surprised look on her face. "Chu Changge?"

Her reaction was like a fangirl finally seeing her idol in person. She was a little excited and a little agitated.

She asked, "Are you the one frequently mentioned in the announcements?"

Because of Gu Mian, Chu Changge's name was often posted on the notification board when an instance collapsed. Although Gu Mian was the one causing all the trouble, he conveniently hid his username and brushed it off. So, Chu Changge and Fatty were always the ones recognized and, consequently, the ones who faced trouble.

Willow not supporting wind continued, as if speaking to herself, "You should know Gu Sanwan, right?"

See! Gu Mian thought. This is the charm of money.

Not long ago, the bounty on Gu Mian had been raised to 30,000 Game Coins. People started nicknaming him Gu Sanwan. Hardly anyone called him by his original name anymore, making him out to be like Voldemort.

Gu Sanwan pursed his 30,000-Game-Coin-worth lips. "Alright, let's head to the lab."

Gu Mian successfully diverted Willow not supporting wind's attention from "Gu Sanwan" to the lab. She looked curiously at Gu Mian. "Didn't you decide not to go earlier?"

She was quite curious about this Doctor with the green title.

Gu Mian glanced at the screen. "I did choose not to go, but the character is controlled by us. I just wanted to see what would happen if I chose not to go but went anyway."

Would I run into a ghost or something?

By now, Gu Mian was already heading towards the staircase. "Zi Liang and the others should have left quite a while ago. Let's hurry too."

To avoid any awkwardness with Fatty, Gu Mian specifically mentioned Zi Liang's name.

Just as the three of them started moving, their characters on the screen also began to move.

[Gu Gu: "Let's go down together. We'll part ways once we reach the ground floor."]

[Chu Changge: "Okay."]

Such smart little characters, huh.

By now, Gu Mian was already on the stairs. At that moment, he suddenly saw something lying in the middle of the stairs on the screen.

A line of text appeared at the bottom of the screen: [The stairs ahead seem like they're about to collapse. It's best not to walk on them.]

Gu Mian turned to look at Willow not supporting wind. She had just come up these stairs. She should know what the situation is, right?

Willow not supporting wind nodded. "This thing was already here when I came up, so I jumped over it. I originally wanted to take another staircase, but I'm not familiar with this place. The character moved too fast, and I was afraid of losing it."

What would happen if I stepped on it? Gu Mian wondered. But he didn't plan to put this thought into action. What if it really collapsed when I stepped on it? With my luck, if the stairs collapsed, I would definitely land headfirst.

So, Gu Mian seriously and solemnly planned to leap over this section of steps.

At that moment, Chu Changge suddenly stopped him. "Let's take another staircase."

That works too, Gu Mian thought. The other staircase isn't far anyway.

Gu Mian and the others quickly reached the other staircase. To their astonishment, an object also lay in the middle of this one, though it wasn't an obstacle.

It was a treasure box.

The huge treasure box blocked the entire staircase, seemingly preventing them from going down unless they opened it.

That's when Chu Changge suddenly said, "I've seen two already."

Two? Gu Mian looked at him.

Chu Changge nodded. "There was one in my classroom. When class ended, a dialogue box appeared above the character I created, saying something like, 'It seems like there's something outside the window.' I went straight downstairs and found another treasure box, which you saw from upstairs."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "What did you get from the treasure box?"

Chu Changge tapped the character on his screen. "It's all school-related stuff, but there are only icons and names; no other pages can be opened."

Gu Mian saw that after Chu Changge clicked on the character, an "Inventory" page appeared on the screen.

Two items were lying in the inventory.

One looked like a school badge or something similar; the other was a school uniform.

Chu Changge clicked on the school uniform, and its name appeared on the screen: [The First Person to Eat's School Uniform].

At the same time, Gu Mian noticed a dialogue box appear above the character Chu Changge had created.

[Chu Changge: "It might change after the game has been cleared."]

The other item was the [Blood-stained school badge].

When he clicked on this item, [Chu Changge] said the same thing.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "Isn't this subtly implying that these are special items that could be brought out of this game?"

Chapter 236 Sweet Watermelon Knife Covered with Cream_1

Gu Mian stared at Chu Changge's mobile screen for a while, then turned his head to look at his own screen.

The big treasure box was still lying horizontally in front of him, clearly meant to be opened.

Gu Mian had noted the time while searching the classroom earlier. It was now past ten after twelve, and Fatty and Zi Liang had left quite some time ago. Musing on this, Gu Mian glanced at Willow not supporting wind beside him. "Do you want to open this invincible treasure box?"

Clearly, it was a creepy, broken box in a supernatural game, but Gu Mian's tone made it sound like a treasure box that could contain the Green Dragon Crescent Blade.

The temperature on the stairs was very high, yet Willow not supporting wind felt chilly standing next to the Doctor; it was almost more effective than standing under an air conditioner.

She wiped the cold sweat from her forehead and shook her head. "No, no. Whenever I play games and open equipment, I never get anything good. I'm unlucky..."

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian opened his mouth but eventually suppressed the desire to tell her about his tragic life.

He didn't say much, took a step down, and moved his character closer to the treasure box.

As expected, an option appeared on the screen.

[You have found a treasure box. Do you want to open it?]

[Yes][No]

Of course, Gu Mian chose [Yes].

Immediately after, the lid of the treasure box in the game suddenly flipped open with a BANG, as if a corpse inside had suddenly pushed open its coffin lid.

Although the way the treasure box opened was identical to a coffin lid being pushed open, there was no corpse inside that might jump out and reanimate.

[Gu Gu: Ah, it's a good thing. It might change when the game is cleared.]

[Gu Gu: It seems there is also jam on it?]

[Received item - 'Watermelon Knife Covered in Cream', placed in the backpack.]

A watermelon knife covered in cream, and jam too?

One could easily guess the item's description would be something like: "A watermelon knife covered in cream, with something red mixed in. It seems someone used this watermelon knife instead of a cake knife."

Unfortunately, when this item appeared, there was only an icon and the item name below it; the description couldn't be accessed.

Gu Mian closed his backpack. At this point, the box blocking the way in the game had disappeared, so he quickly descended the stairs to the building's entrance.

With the teaching building no longer obstructing them, the nearly boiling heat finally swallowed the three of them whole. Just standing for a few seconds made them sweat profusely, making one wish to immediately find a cool place to crawl into.

"Do you know which way the laboratory building is?" Gu Mian asked the two beside him.

A few beads of sweat trickled down Willow not supporting wind's forehead. She shook her head; apparently, she didn't know.

But Chu Changge nodded. "I noticed the surroundings when I came downstairs. A building over there looks somewhat like the laboratory building."

Gu Mian looked in the direction Chu Changge indicated. He saw a slightly shorter building faintly visible there, which didn't resemble a teaching building, nor a dormitory, dining hall, or the like.

Since it wasn't very far, they decided to head over and take a look first.

Gu Mian started walking in that direction. Chu Changge kept his eyes on the game screen, seeing that both [Chu Changge] and [Willow not supporting wind] were moving towards the laboratory building in the game; only [Gu Gu] remained in place.

[Gu Gu: They've all left. Well then, I'll go to the cafeteria to eat. Still, I'm a bit uneasy... Never mind, I'll follow them and see.]

Gu Mian saw that the character he had created was following them; it hadn't given up on going to the laboratory building despite its previous choice.

However, the [Gu Gu] character always maintained a certain distance from the two characters ahead, as if it couldn't catch up...

「Meanwhile, Fatty and Zi Liang had already slipped into the somewhat spooky laboratory building.」

"What the hell!" Fatty muttered, staring at his screen. "This thing can automatically recognize other players and even meet up with characters created by other players!"

Zi Liang tried to hide the two large iron bracelets he still wore on his wrists. "Actually, I didn't want to meet up with you here either..."

Fatty glanced at the bracelets on Zi Liang's hands. "Stop hiding them; I saw. Say, kid, are you some kind of outlaw? Why do you have handcuffs on?"

Zi Liang stammered, a little flustered, "I'm no outlaw."

Fatty continued to mutter to himself, "Don't tell me you were cuffed by the anti-vice squad?"

Zi Liang's face began to flush slightly. "For scholarly matters, how can you call it lewd? Besides, I wasn't..."

Before he could finish, Fatty interrupted him, "Wait, don't make a sound."

Zi Liang looked somewhat frightened. "What's wrong?"

Fatty was frowning, staring at his game screen. Both of them had followed their in-game characters, which had suddenly started moving on their own, to this location.

Their characters had run to the middle of the first-floor corridor before stopping, and Fatty and Zi Liang had followed them there.

The lighting in the laboratory building wasn't good. Since no students were in class, not a single light was on. The two now stood in a dim, very long first-floor corridor, lined with laboratories on both sides.

The poor light made it difficult for them to see the end of the corridor. They could only vaguely perceive something there, though it also seemed like nothing was there at all.

The two in-game characters who had run into the laboratory building now began to converse in the dim environment.

[Wang Panzi: Did you hear? Two upperclassmen disappeared right here before. I heard from an older female student from a previous year that someone saw them come in here in the middle of the night, and the next day, news of their disappearance broke.]

[Liang'er: Then we must be careful.]

[Wang Panzi: I heard there might be some clues about the upperclassmen in this laboratory building. Why don't we look for them?]

[Liang'er: Okay.]

The dialogue ended there.

Then, a line of text appeared at the bottom of the screen:

[Side quest triggered: 'The Mysteriously Missing Upperclassmen'. Please explore this map.]

Fatty stared at the screen. "Can I run out of this damn laboratory building right now?"

"I'm afraid not," Zi Liang said, rubbing his handcuffs as he looked at the main door not far behind them. "That door... it closed on its own. Not only did it close, but it also locked!"

Fatty immediately turned to look at the main door.

A somewhat rusty chain had, at some point, been tightly wound around the main door, binding it shut. The atmosphere here was already very eerie; now that the door was closed and locked, it became even more unsettling.

But then, Zi Liang noticed something even more terrifying.

"Hey—" he suddenly grabbed Fatty, who was about to go and check the door. "Don't you think something's off?"

Fatty froze.

Something off?

This whole place seems off.

But then, he understood what Zi Liang meant...

It really is... far too off...

The door... was locked from the inside.

Chapter 237 Taking Territory by Force_1

There was clearly no one behind them.

Yet the huge iron chain had appeared out of nowhere and then locked the gate from the inside.

Reason told Fatty that what was happening now was certainly not due to the iron chain becoming sentient.

"I mean..." Fatty stopped walking and turned to Zi Liang. "There was no one behind us just now, right?"

Zi Liang pursed his lips, hesitated, then shook his head. "There were no humans... but as for ghosts, perhaps."

Fatty: "..."

Forget it; it was better to keep quiet than talk to this sort of person.

In the dim light, Zi Liang lifted his head and looked toward the gate. "But when I came in, I saw a staircase by the entrance. Could something have come down from there and locked the gate?"

Inspired by this, Fatty suggested a bold plan. "Should we go look by the staircase?"

Frequent experiences in Mysterious Dungeons had considerably emboldened Fatty, and he had adopted Gu Mian's ultimate strategy: when it's time to court death, then court death.

Although he would still panic and run chaotically when faced with a ghost, he was willing to court a little death when no manifestations were in sight.

However, other players clearly did not comprehend the essence of this strategy.

"You're courting death!" Zi Liang clutched his handcuffs, staring at Fatty. "Although this might be helpful material for my writing... it's still really scary..."

Material for writing? Fatty looked at Zi Liang in surprise. "Are you an author?"

Zi Liang nodded a little, then added in a whisper, "A Supernatural Author."

Fatty pondered. "Speaking of authors and gathering material, I'm reminded of someone..."

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

At this very moment, Zi Liang **saw** these three strange 'THUMP' characters. That's right, **saw** them... These three 'THUMP' characters originated from the mobile screen.

A few lines of text appeared at the bottom of the screen.

[THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.]

[A strange noise suddenly came from the staircase beside the locked gate, as if something was coming downstairs.]

[Liang'er: Did you hear that sound?]

[Wang Panzi: Run!]

Although the two little figures communicated this way, neither of them moved, seemingly waiting for the player's control.

"Damn it!" Fatty's recently mustered courage to court death instantly deflated a bit. "What's happening?"

He hadn't heard the strange thumping sound with his own ears, but the captions at the bottom of the screen kept updating.

[THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.]

[The sound is getting closer! 'It' seems to have already reached the first-floor landing!]

Zi Liang could almost feel an unseen, unheard thing closing in. Fear spread through his entire body, making his scalp tingle.

"What are you waiting for? Run!" At this moment, Fatty suddenly grabbed the dumbfounded Zi Liang and bolted in the opposite direction.

The moment Fatty took off running, he thought he saw two options appear on the screen.

[At this moment, you decide...]

[Run Away] [Charge and Bite]

Say what you would, but the two options together rhymed pretty well.

Although neither of them had used a finger to select an option, their bodies had already made a choice. They had clearly chosen the first option, [Run Away], so the selection disappeared as soon as it was presented.

At the same time, Zi Liang saw the fleeting options on the screen and gaped. "Why would you charge up and bite it?"

Fatty retorted while fleeing, "So you're saying you'd actually charge forward if not for the biting part? But speaking of which, if the Doctor were here, you'd probably see what exactly gets bitten if one chose the second option."

"Doctor!" Zi Liang was stunned. "The green one, who sawed off my handcuffs?"

Fatty was surprised. "Since you mentioned 'green' and 'saw,' that must be him. Have you two met before?..."

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

The words had barely left his mouth when Fatty heard an indescribable sound from behind him.

A real sound, coming from behind them.

On this very floor.

Right behind them.

The sound only lasted an instant before vanishing, making Fatty momentarily think he was having auditory hallucinations.

But seeing the sudden pallor on Zi Liang's face next to him, Fatty knew that what he'd heard wasn't a hallucination.

Fatty quickened his pace. "You heard it?"

Zi Liang nodded palely.

So the ghosts in this game didn't just exist in the game... they existed in reality too!

The surroundings were very dim, making Fatty suspect a ghost might suddenly pop out of a laboratory at any moment. However, it wasn't the time for such thoughts; they needed to hurry and escape.

The screen kept updating with new information. Fatty, while fleeing, could only spare quick glances and had no time to examine it closely.

[Wang Panzi: It's come down!]

[Liang'er: Run!]

Just then, Zi Liang, who was being pulled along by Fatty, suddenly noticed something at the far edge of his screen.

Long hours of working in front of the computer and a lack of physical exercise had made Zi Liang weak, placing him at a disadvantage from the start of the game. He had finally managed to remove the handcuffs in a certain instance and clear it, obtaining some resources. But then, in the next instance, the handcuffs caused his death, and he lost most of his resources.

So now, he couldn't run as fast as Fatty and could only be dragged along.

Therefore, in the game, Liang'er was behind Wang Panzi. Zi Liang's phone screen view was also slightly behind Fatty's, as the game's field of vision was centered on the character model.

"Brother Fatty!" Zi Liang panted, calling out.

Fatty sprinted forward without looking back. "What's up?"

This laboratory building was huge, so it didn't just have one door; they could escape through another exit. Even if the other doors were locked, there were surely other staircases. Escaping to another floor to shake off their pursuer was also a good option.

Zi Liang, panting heavily, said, "I think I saw the thing chasing us!"

Hearing Zi Liang on the verge of gasping his last breath, Fatty wished he could just sling him over his shoulder and run.

While pulling Zi Liang along in a sprint, Fatty quickly scanned for another exit or staircase. "What did you see?"

"It looks like... hair?" Zi Liang frowned, looking at the thing constantly jumping at the edge of his screen. "It looks like a lock of hair is hopping along behind us?"

Hearing this, Fatty's entire back went numb. "You idiot! That's a ghost hopping on its head!"

Hearing Zi Liang's words, Fatty sped up even more, dashing past one laboratory after another.

And just then, Zi Liang finally saw something besides hair—half a face.

At the very edge of the screen, half a face could be faintly seen, continuously hopping along the floor. Although he could only see half of it, Zi Liang's imagination had always been vivid, especially when it came to ghosts.

He had already pictured a female ghost, covered in blood, landing on her head with each hop. The image itself made him shudder.

If I charge at that thing, I have to bite it?

Just then, Fatty suddenly saw a light ahead. It seemed to be sunlight from outside a door. Not far ahead of them was a stairwell.

Looking closer, there was another main door not far beyond the stairwell.

Zi Liang suddenly spoke, "Brother Fatty, that thing behind us is moving faster than we are!"

If a ghost can't outrun a human, can it still call itself a ghost?

Fatty patted his chest. "Don't worry, we'll definitely reach the door before it catches us."

Just then, Zi Liang unexpectedly asked, "What if the door ahead is locked too?"

If the door ahead was also locked, then rushing over would be like running into a dead end...

So, they first needed to see if there was a chain on the door.

Unfortunately, neither Fatty nor Zi Liang had very good eyesight. They would have to rush past that stairwell to see clearly if the door was locked.

But if they rushed past that stairwell, they really would be in a dead end.

Turning back then might mean coming face-to-face with a female ghost smashing its head on the ground with each movement...

Just imagining that scene was delightful.

Chapter 238 Green Face_1

Things suddenly became somewhat difficult.

If they weren't careful, both of them could end up dying here.

"Logically speaking, we should opt for a safer choice," Fatty began, panting heavily from the exhaustion of the run. "But first, I need to see if things are as we imagine."

Zi Liang raised his head in confusion. "What?"

Inside the game, a ghost woman was chasing the characters representing them—Fatty and Zi Liang. In reality, a strange THUD THUD sound had appeared.

Yet, neither of them had so much as glimpsed a ghost, and the strange sound had only lasted a few seconds before it disappeared.

But it was obvious that there was something wrong with this experimental building. If there was no ghost behind them and this noise was merely a trick to lure them to the second floor, they would be at a significant disadvantage.

Fatty felt like he finally had a brilliant idea.

At this moment, Zi Liang looked at Fatty. "Hey Fatty, the entrance to the stairs is right ahead. Should we go straight up, or should we head towards the main entrance?"

Due to the excessive exertion, beads of sweat had formed on Zi Liang's forehead. Suddenly, Fatty pulled out an object. Zi Liang noticed it was a camera.

Holding the [Strange Camera], Fatty turned around, eager to try it. "This thing can capture invisible ghosts in photos. One shot will tell us if there's a ghost behind us."

As he spoke, he quickly turned around and slammed down on the shutter, aiming at the corridor behind them.

Zi Liang only saw a sudden, intense flash. He felt like his eyes were about to go blind.

Even so, through his nearly blinded eyes, he saw Fatty's expression change drastically.

Since Fatty had paused for a moment, Zi Liang had by then run ahead of him. From this angle, he could only see his profile.

In the dimly lit corridor, Fatty's face shifted from red to pale, and then seemed to be turning green.

Zi Liang, however, never got to see Fatty's green face. Before it could fully turn green, he was violently yanked and dragged by Fatty like a dead pig towards the nearby staircase.

"Run!" Zi Liang heard Fatty utter the same words as their game characters.

What on earth did he see...

「Meanwhile, Hao Laoshi had run to the school cafeteria in terror.」

It wasn't because he was hungry; he simply ran towards any crowd he saw. Lunchtime had just ended, and students were gradually dispersing.

Standing at the cafeteria entrance, watching students come and go, Hao Laoshi began to feel a little more at ease.

While glancing at the passing students, he decided to stand in a bright, open space. He then sneakily checked his phone.

He saw his in-game character, [Honest Person], following him without any sign of acting independently. Only then did he breathe a sigh of relief.

Just as class ended and he was preparing to leave the classroom, he noticed his registered character had unexpectedly stopped following him and was even muttering to itself.

"'Going out will mean death'—he clearly remembered this dialogue box popping up above [Honest Person]'s head."

Combined with what his classmates had told him about this horror game and the stories of numerous seniors disappearing because of it, Hao Laoshi became even more hesitant to act rashly.

He stayed in the classroom. About ten minutes later, he found his character was responsive to his commands again.

He cautiously tried to go out into the corridor, but as soon as he stepped out, he encountered something terrifying...

While reminiscing with lingering fear and staring at his phone screen, he suddenly noticed an additional female character in the game. She was not far from him, apparently having just come out of the cafeteria.

How is there an extra character!

Hao Laoshi was so scared he immediately looked up from his phone towards the cafeteria. He saw a girl standing at the entrance, seemingly contemplating where to go next.

Sharp-eyed Hao Laoshi also noticed something above the female character's head, like a nickname—[Little Dumpling].

Surely, a ghost wouldn't allow such a cute thing on its head.

Is she a player? Hao Laoshi took a few steps forward. In this game, can we see the characters of other players?

Player information was only visible within three meters. Hao Laoshi had no choice but to take a few more steps forward until he was within range. He found that he could indeed open the girl's player information.

Little Peach Dumpling had noticed someone stealthily approaching her and was a bit panicked.

This person, though dressed like a student, acted and looked like a suspicious middle-aged man. Fortunately, she hadn't turned and fled. Instead, after Hao Laoshi moved closer, she tried clicking on the player panel.

Two wary players, cautiously probing, finally met.

Upon seeing Little Peach Dumpling, Hao Laoshi sighed in relief, as if he had found a long-lost relative. Finally, I've met a normal person...

Hao Laoshi was also the first person Little Peach Dumpling had encountered in this instance, so the two of them naturally had a lot to talk about.

Students were coming out of the cafeteria nearby, so the area was still quite populated. Moreover, the sun overhead seemed potent enough to make ghosts disintegrate, so they weren't overly afraid.

Little Peach Dumpling asked, puzzled, "Have you met other players before? Why didn't you stick together?" She had been moving alone precisely because she hadn't found anyone else.

Little Peach Dumpling had originally wanted to try her luck in the cafeteria to see if she could find other players. She hadn't expected to actually find one—a suspicious-looking young man who seemed more like an uncle.

You couldn't blame Hao Laoshi for looking like an uncle. He actually was from an older generation, complete with a beer belly. It was just that the instance had altered his age to fit the student image. After all, a man in his forties attending sophomore year of high school would be too bizarre.

Hearing the phrase "other players," Hao Laoshi visibly shivered.

He quickly waved his hands, somewhat agitated. "Don't even mention it! I'm just so unlucky. The people I run into always seem to be full of bad intentions..."

Hao Laoshi's gestures were a bit exaggerated at this point, attracting curious glances from students seeking refuge from the sun in the shade of the trees.

While others sought to escape the sun on this hot summer day, these two were standing in a spot baked by the harsh sunlight, without a shred of shade. They were undoubtedly conspicuous.

Hao Laoshi toned down his movements, but continued, "Listen, there's a maniac, a complete nutcase, in this instance!"

He paused, catching his breath, then added, "Oh, right, and there's also one who..."

But just then, Hao Laoshi suddenly heard a female voice from behind him, "A maniac? What kind of maniac?"

He paused, then whipped his head around.

He saw a long-haired girl standing behind him, a smile on her face. Hao Laoshi realized he could open her player panel—[Liu Ruyan].

He subconsciously glanced down at his phone screen and saw that a third character, representing Liu Ruyan, had indeed appeared. Hao Laoshi felt a bit strange.

He found Liu Ruyan in front of him rather odd. He felt that she was like him; he knew that even though he had become younger and was wearing a school uniform, there was a strong sense of incongruity. No matter how one looked at it, his disposition was that of a sleazy middle-aged uncle. Liu Ruyan was the same. She was a beautiful girl in a school uniform, but she didn't give off the impression of a student. Nor did she seem like a delinquent from the outside world who had merely slipped into a school uniform.

Hao Laoshi was taken aback by the sudden sound and fell silent.

Despite receiving no response, Liu Ruyan continued to speak.

"Speaking of psychopaths, I once knew an arsonist... Not that he was particularly fond of setting fires, but I witnessed him burn down an entire building. A family of four all perished, all because of some baseless speculation." Liu Ruyan paused here. "But this speculation was a suspicion unsupported by any facts."

As Liu Ruyan spoke, Hao Laoshi quickly scanned recent news reports in his mind, searching for any stories related to arson, but he couldn't find any.

Seemingly guessing Hao Laoshi's thoughts, Liu Ruyan smiled faintly. "Let me see... I was only fourteen back then. It's been eight years since that incident."

Liu Ruyan added, reminiscing, "Besides, not many people knew about it. In the end, it was treated as an accidental fire."

The sun scorched the ground, and an intense, irritable heat enveloped the three of them.

Yet Hao Laoshi felt a chill run down his spine. "You... you didn't see that person commit arson with your own eyes? Didn't you report it to the police?"

She saw the arsonist burn four people to death with her own eyes and knew the case was ultimately treated as an accident, yet she didn't report it or expose the criminal. Years later, she even brought up this malicious event that killed four people as casually as remarking on the nice weather, as if it were a joke. At this thought, Hao Laoshi couldn't help but step back, his calves trembling slightly. What kind of teammates had he been matched with this time...?

Liu Ruyan squinted her eyes and smiled faintly, seemingly intending to drop the subject. "By the way, I came in with two acquaintances. Have you..."

However, before she could finish, she was interrupted by Hao Laoshi.

The middle-aged man, disguised as a student, stared intently at Liu Ruyan. "You didn't report it? Was it because you were scared... or did you not care about those four lives? You were only fourteen then, right?"

A fourteen-year-old witnesses an arsonist kill people and then just turns around and acts as if nothing happened? Hao Laoshi had already decided. If her answer was the latter, he would turn and run, taking Little Peach Dumpling with him. He had no intention of teaming up with a suspected psychopath.

Liu Ruyan glanced at the wristwatch on her hand. She had taken it from someone else's wrist, so it was a bit too large for her.

Then, she looked up and said, "Let me finish my question first. I came in with two acquaintances. One was a Doctor carrying a guitar, and the other wore glasses..."

This time, too, she wasn't able to finish speaking.

As if he had heard something utterly terrifying, Hao Laoshi turned and bolted, even forgetting Little Peach Dumpling beside him.

Little Peach Dumpling clearly didn't want to stay with Liu Ruyan either. Without hesitation, she immediately followed Hao Laoshi and fled.

Now, Liu Ruyan was the only one left standing in the wide, open area, making it seem very spacious.

She watched their receding figures without expression, then glanced at her wristwatch again.

It was now around twelve-fifty, close to one o'clock.

Hao Laoshi ran for a considerable time, only stopping to gasp for air when he was almost too exhausted to continue. He plopped down on the steps of a flower bed, panting and looking behind him.

Indeed, there was no sign of Liu Ruyan behind him. Only then did Hao Laoshi feel slightly relieved.

However, Little Peach Dumpling had been left far behind. Despite this, she was still struggling to run towards him.

The weather was extremely hot; just a short run would leave one drenched in sweat. It made you want to strip off your clothes and jump into the pond next to the school woods.

However, doing so would probably startle countless young couples emerging from the woods.

Little Peach Dumpling didn't want to be such a spoilsport. Once she stopped, she also squatted down beside Hao Laoshi, gasping for breath, too tired to even lift her head.

But as she panted, she suddenly realized something was wrong.

Hao Laoshi beside her had stopped earlier. But even though he had rested for a moment, he was still gasping for breath, unable to catch it. And his panting was becoming increasingly labored, as if he were having an asthma attack.

Little Peach Dumpling lifted her sun-baked head and looked doubtfully at Hao Laoshi beside her.

One glance and she was startled. Under the fierce sunlight, Hao Laoshi's face had turned a bluish-purple.

She had never seen sunlight turn anyone this color; this complexion clearly wasn't from the sun!

Hao Laoshi kept clawing at his neck with his hands, as if trying to tear something away, as if someone were strangling him.

But there was no one near him, not even a tree branch!

Little Peach Dumpling, somewhat flustered, moved closer. She also reached out to touch Hao Laoshi's neck, but her hand grasped only air.

There was nothing there, as if he were being choked by thin air.

Anxious, Little Peach Dumpling beside him frantically pulled out one item after another—special items she had obtained in the instance.

But none of these items could help her solve the problem: "What do you do when someone is being choked by a ghost?"

She could only watch as Hao Laoshi in front of her struggled continuously, his face changing from bluish-purple to an ever-darkening shade, eventually becoming almost the color of pig's liver. With one last violent struggle, he gasped his last breath and then moved no more.

The person, now a corpse, lay limply on the ground, his face still that horrifying, pig-liver red.

Silence descended once more. Little Peach Dumpling's body remained stiff for a few seconds. Hao Laoshi's death was clearly caused by a ghost.

And after Hao Laoshi's death, the ghost seemed to have no further plans.

Little Peach Dumpling looked at the corpse on the ground, feeling a bit nauseated.

But her nausea didn't last long; instead, she quickly scanned her surroundings.

This was a hidden corner next to the teaching building. Most students had gone to the cafeteria or back to their dorms, and no teachers came here. There weren't many people around.

Seeing no one around, she finally breathed a sigh of relief. If I'm discovered next to a dead body, I won't be able to clear my name even if I jump into the Yellow River... I wonder if there are any CCTV cameras around here.

At this thought, Little Peach Dumpling quickly scanned her surroundings again but found no sign of cameras.

Whether there are cameras here or not, the most important thing is to leave quickly. Who knows what trouble might brew if I stay any longer.

As she thought this, Little Peach Dumpling quickened her pace, wanting to leave. But just as she lifted her foot, something else occurred to her. She quickly ducked to the side and took out the phone she had been keeping in her pocket.

The content on the screen had actually updated while they were fleeing just now!

Little Peach Dumpling hastily tried to read the updates, but as she read on, her teeth began to chatter uncontrollably.

She shivered violently. "How could... this be..."

Then, as if she suddenly thought of something, she abruptly looked up. But just then, a pale hand slowly extended, entering Little Peach Dumpling's line of sight.

Chapter 240 Gu Gu's Death_1

"What did you see just now?"

At this moment, Zi Liang was clutching his chest nervously.

The two of them had taken refuge in a decrepit restroom of a deserted third-floor laboratory.

Although they hadn't contributed much so far in the instance, they had finally learned that the laboratory restrooms were different from those in the classrooms.

Every lab in the school had its own small restroom, presumably for the teachers' use.

This restroom wasn't much different from an ordinary one at home, with a single toilet in the middle.

It was a squat toilet, though.

Additionally, under the wooden door, there was a vent with horizontal wooden slats, like a window blind. Looking from Fatty's perspective, due to the slant of the slats, one could only see the nearby floor.

The lab was obviously in disrepair from years of neglect. Upon his arrival, Fatty had noticed a layer of yellowish-brown gunk in the washbasin near the entrance. Each lab bench's water tank also contained unidentified solids of peculiar colors—the kind that made one lose their appetite completely.

Since the laboratory was so dilapidated, its restroom certainly wouldn't be any better.

Who knew what kind of fierce battles had taken place here? The mop handle in the corner was almost broken, and an unidentifiable yellow semi-solid substance was splattered on the wall.

The sight was extremely nauseating.

After taking the photo, Fatty had led Zi Liang straight to the third floor, where they hid in this restroom.

During this time, Zi Liang kept staring at his phone screen. When they reached the third floor and his phone displayed, 'The sound from behind has disappeared,' the two of them found a laboratory to hide in temporarily.

Feeling the laboratory wasn't safe enough, Fatty then led Zi Liang into the restroom.

Fatty handed the camera to Zi Liang. "Take a look for yourself. This camera of mine can capture ghosts we can't see, though it can only be used once a day..."

Taking the camera, Zi Liang dimmed the brightness and examined the image on the screen.

The corridor where the photo had been taken was extremely dark, making it almost impossible to see anything even slightly further away.

Thankfully, Fatty's phone had a flash, illuminating the distance when the photo was taken. Although the edges of the photo were still somewhat dim, the thing in the center was captured very clearly.

Ignoring the dark edges of the picture, Zi Liang focused on the middle.

There was an inverted figure.

It couldn't exactly be called inverted.

Nor could it truly be considered human.

If he had to describe it, 'a female ghost ramming her head into the ground' would be more fitting.

Although the description sounded almost comical, Fatty and Zi Liang, being in the midst of it, didn't find the situation the least bit funny.

It was simply terrifying.

The female ghost, her neck seemingly snapped, propped her crooked head on the ground. Her two hands, limp and powerless, dragged behind her on the floor as if broken.

Her upper body, however, was bolt upright, as straight as a javelin. She just stood there in the middle of the corridor. Zi Liang could even imagine this thing hopping forward, jump by jump.

He shivered. "This indeed provides me excellent material for supernatural stories... but who would be reading my novels right now anyway?"

Especially supernatural novels.

That would conflict with this paranormal game.

Fatty tugged at his hair. "With this paranormal game causing a global headache, who'd be bored enough to read supernatural novels?"

He paused before adding, "Oh, right. Even before this game started, I wouldn't have read supernatural novels even if I were bored stiff. And I certainly won't now."

Zi Liang's head drooped slightly.

Just then, he suddenly heard a strange sound.

It came from not far off; to be specific, it seemed to be echoing from the corridor on their floor.

THUD. THUD. THUD.

It was that same faint, almost imperceptible thudding sound.

Upon hearing this sound, Zi Liang instinctively looked at his phone.

On the screen, the two small figures labeled 'Liang'er' and 'Wang Panzi' were cowering in the restroom, trembling.

"Liang'er": She's coming!

"Wang Panzi": We're all going to die.

Fatty also looked at the screen then. He spat. "Who was so eager to come here in the first place?"

It was as if that one spit could land on the two little figures on the screen.

The text at the bottom of the screen was also constantly updating.

A strange sound is coming from the corridor. The sound seems to be getting closer.

And this time, the sound seemed to make no attempt at concealment, continuously approaching the duo's location.

Fatty cursed under his breath. "Did the sound stop earlier because she went to search the second floor?"

Zi Liang shook his head, his face pale. "I don't know, but we better keep quiet now."

The restroom wasn't too small. Fatty used the mop handle to barely prop the restroom door shut, then squeezed into a corner with Zi Liang, out of sight from the vent.

"Can they really not see us from the vent? I think the two of us take up too much space." Zi Liang expressed his concern about Fatty's bulk.

Fatty sucked in his stomach hard. "They can't see!"

Seeing him so certain, Zi Liang had no choice but to shut up and shrink his neck down.

The thudding sound outside persisted. Occasionally, the sound of a door being pushed open echoed from the corridor. An unknown number of minutes passed before Zi Liang heard that sound drawing nearer and nearer.

Despite the situation, he didn't forget to keep an eye on his phone.

"Wang Panzi": Is that the senior student who went missing years ago? She won't let us go.

"Liang'er": We must not leave this place!

"Wang Panzi": This lab seems like it hasn't been used for years. She probably won't come in, right?

"Liang'er": Keep quiet!

He hadn't expected the game characters to be so smart, to even know that you shouldn't talk while hiding.

And just then, Zi Liang heard the sound from the corridor arrive right outside their laboratory.

Time always seemed to pass exceptionally slowly in moments of danger.

The THUDDING sound outside rang out a few more times. Though it was only a few thuds, Zi Liang felt they stretched on for an eternity.

It was like waiting for the teacher on duty to do room checks late at night—both tense and exciting.

Zi Liang furrowed his brows in confusion. Wait... why would I be excited?

Just then, the sound outside the door suddenly stopped. It seemed to have vanished for a long time, yet perhaps not too long, before the CREAK of a door being pushed open rang out.

A dilapidated door would make exactly that sound when pushed open.

The door to their laboratory had been pushed open!

After the sound of the door opening, it seemed to be quiet outside again for a few seconds.

Then, a dull, terrifying sound began to echo within the laboratory.

THUD. THUD...

Hold on! Zi Liang suddenly thought of a problem. He jerked his head up to look at Fatty, his mouth open, but he didn't dare make a sound. The ghost is inverted... If she's looking upwards from outside, through the vent in the door, wouldn't she be able to see right inside?