

Collapse 341

Chapter 341 The King of Autumn Mountain Cars_1

As Gu Mian's hand hovered, Liu Ying, still in the green belt, spoke again. With a somewhat shy gesture, she raised a hand to cover her mouth and began in a voice barely a whisper, "I don't have any money to pay you. My illness... it seems quite serious, and I've even developed blisters. This probably won't help me. It would just be a waste..."

She's remarkably conscientious, worrying about money and waste even now.

She must be covering her mouth because she's afraid of infecting others.

Fatty couldn't help but shake his head. He wondered how this girl would react if she'd heard Chu Changge's earlier remarks.

Just then, Chu Changge suddenly asked, "Why did you come out?"

Someone this gravely ill, with no money for medicine... is she planning to drag her sick body into an instance? But those instances aren't just simple game data; a player's real-life condition is carried into the instance as well. If someone enters an instance needing to pee, they'll frantically look for a restroom once inside. Liu Ying's illness, of course, would also be carried in. With her physical state, she obviously can't play the game properly. Entering an instance would just mean losing equipment.

Liu Ying seemed to have regained some strength, though her voice was still very soft. "I came out to buy medicine for others. The only supermarket nearby is in a densely populated residential area where many people have recently frozen to death."

She's not buying for herself, but for others? Probably just because she has no money. Gu Mian recalled the map Chu Changge had drawn. Indeed, the only nearby supermarket was in a heavily infected zone. Since they weren't short on resources, Gu Mian hadn't planned on going there. In fact, Chu Changge had passed by that supermarket while familiarizing himself with the terrain and had brought back a considerable amount of medical supplies. The reagent Gu Mian held in his hand was part of the supplies Chu Changge had procured.

Liu Ying continued softly, "The flu has been spreading badly lately. My neighbors wanted to buy some preventative medicine, so they gave me their game coins."

So, this errand had fallen to Liu Ying. Since she had already contracted the infectious disease, she had no reservations about entering or leaving heavily infected areas.

Gu Mian, however, was quite curious. Why would her neighbors trust someone so gravely ill and in desperate need of medicine herself? Aren't they afraid Liu Ying will take their money, buy medicine for herself, and run off? Perhaps it's because she has such a good reputation... At least, judging by her current behavior, she really is a genuinely good person.

Just then, Liu Ying tried to push herself up from the ground. "You should all stay away from me," she said. "I caught this disease too; it's contagious."

Having regained a little strength, she wanted to continue towards the supermarket. "My neighbors are waiting for me. I'll be going now. Thank you all..."

Although Gu Mian and the others hadn't really done anything—in fact, they'd rather violently tossed her into the green belt—she still thanked them.

Fatty's face turned red with shame. He remembered Gu Mian driving the car back and forth, testing her several times to see if she was a scammer trying to extort them. Gu Mian's original words had been: "Pretend you're going to run her over. If she jumps up and runs, she's definitely a scammer."

Liu Ying managed to get up from the ground. After thanking Gu Mian and the others again, she took a few steps towards the supermarket. But her recovery was short-lived. After only a few seconds, THUD! She collapsed again.

Fatty, who was inwardly exclaiming, This girl is so incredibly kind!, heard a sound and followed it with his gaze. THUD! Liu Ying, who had just struggled to her feet, had crashed to the ground again. She was completely unconscious this time.

Gu Mian, holding the syringe, sighed softly. Looks like she can't avoid getting a shot from me today.

「When Liu Ying woke up again, it was already night.」

The first thing she saw was the pitch-black sky, especially dark tonight, devoid of any trace of the moon or stars. But then, to her surprise, she saw familiar faces.

The white car was still parked nearby. Its window was open, and Fatty was slumped over the sill, asleep, yet his posture was surprisingly composed. As if sensing her movement, Fatty, who had been sleeping so soundly, suddenly opened his eyes.

Just as Liu Ying was about to speak, she saw Fatty's excited expression. He turned and shouted to someone nearby, "Doctor, she's awake!"

A few seconds later, another familiar face appeared at the window. Liu Ying recognized him as the Doctor who had wanted to give her an injection earlier.

Did they stay because they saw me faint and were worried? Wanting to thank them, Liu Ying struggled to sit up.

But as she tried to push herself up from the ground, she realized the itching sensation around her waist was gone. Because of the viral infection, her skin had developed a series of reactions, including many terrifying blisters. They were incredibly itchy, yet she didn't dare scratch them, making her utterly miserable. But now, that feeling had completely vanished.

A little surprised, Liu Ying lifted her clothes. She found that the terrifying blisters had receded significantly, and some areas had even scabbed over. Her headache and fever had also eased; she no longer felt as light-headed as before. It felt as if her illness was about to be completely cured.

Liu Ying wasn't foolish. She knew, of course, that such a severe illness couldn't be cured by just sleeping it off. It was very likely this Doctor had given her an injection while she was unconscious.

She immediately looked up.

She saw that the seemingly aloof young man from before had also leaned in. Three heads were now crowded together in the car window, creating a surprisingly harmonious sight.

Chapter 342 The World's Morals are Deteriorating, People's Hearts are not Ancient_1

Seeing the three surprisingly harmonious heads, Liu Ying scrambled to her feet.

The headlights of the Spirit Car were still on, allowing Liu Ying to see the scene clearly.

She paused for a moment, lowering her head to feel her waist. The blisters there had almost completely healed, and her mind felt much clearer too.

Then, she excitedly raised her head to look at the three heads inside the car.

She seemed so overwhelmed with gratitude that she couldn't utter a word. Gu Mian and the others could only see her mouth moving slightly, as if she wanted to say something but was too emotional to form the words.

After a few more seconds, Gu Mian finally heard Liu Ying's voice.

"Thank you..." she said. "Thank you all..."

Her voice trembled with emotion, but it retained its usual gentle quality.

Listening to her, Gu Mian felt that the newly awakened girl might pass out at any moment from being winded.

Immediately after, he saw Liu Ying take a few steps toward them, her hands fumbling over her clothes as if searching for something.

It was clear she was trying to find something valuable to give Gu Mian. Unfortunately, she was utterly poor.

Gu Mian watched for several seconds, but Liu Ying didn't produce anything. He quickly waved his hand, "Never mind, don't bother. I don't want anything, really."

Liu Ying clearly recognized her own poverty.

She lowered her hands, her expression troubled. "Medicine that could heal me so quickly must be expensive," she said, her eyes filled with unease. "You must have bought it to protect yourselves from getting sick, yet you gave it to me. I'm so sorry..."

One had to marvel at the vividness of human imagination.

Seemingly influenced by Liu Ying, Fatty silently took a step back, retreating behind Gu Mian with a contemplative expression.

Noticing Fatty's odd behavior, Gu Mian turned to him, perplexed. "What's wrong?"

Fatty gulped and whispered to Gu Mian, "Speaking of which, don't these situations usually end with her pledging herself to repay the kindness?"

Gu Mian was speechless. "..."

To prevent the situation from escalating to that point, Gu Mian reached into the corner and pulled Xiao Hong to the window.

Liu Ying, still frowning in thought, was startled to see another head suddenly appear in the car window.

She stared intently, then flinched slightly as her gaze met the newcomer's eyes.

Gu Mian and the others had long grown accustomed to Xiao Hong's appearance. She was truly ugly, and horrifying at first glance. However, seeing her face day after day had diluted the initial shock by a good measure.

But for someone seeing that visage for the first time in the dead of night, it was enough to scare their soul right out of them.

Gu Mian had hoped Xiao Hong's appearance would startle Liu Ying—if not scare her off completely, then at least make her hesitant to speak to them further.

However, Liu Ying seemed to have remarkable composure. She only trembled slightly before quickly calming down. She showed no signs of terror or disgust, instead looking at Gu Mian with a bewildered expression, seemingly wondering why he had suddenly pulled a woman over.

Gu Mian was again speechless. "..."

Not only was she not scared off, she even has that 'how can I help?' look on her face, Gu Mian thought. There's no other way... Since she won't run, I'll have to be the one to leave...

And so, under Liu Ying's uncomprehending gaze, Gu Mian quickly slid into the driver's seat and slammed on the accelerator.

The still-confused Liu Ying watched as the white car before her suddenly roared to life. Its wheels spun rapidly against the ground, and the entire vehicle began to move. Within seconds, it had sped away from the scene.

It was just like a hit-and-run.

"Hey, wait!" Realizing something was amiss, Liu Ying ran several steps in the direction the car had gone, only to get a mouthful of dust kicked up from the ground.

After she stopped to catch her breath and looked ahead again, even the dust had settled. The car had vanished from sight, as if it had never been there.

If not for the scabs forming over the blisters on her waist, Liu Ying would have almost believed she had dreamt the whole thing.

"They're such good people..." Liu Ying murmured to herself, gazing in the direction the car had vanished, though she couldn't understand why good people would flee.

"If I ever get the chance to meet them again, I must repay their kindness." As she said this, she suddenly remembered something else. "Oh, right! I still need to buy medicine! It's so late; the neighbors must be waiting for me!"

With that thought, Liu Ying quickly got her bearings and hurried off in the direction of the supermarket.

Fate is indeed a wondrously strange thing.

Just a few days later, early one morning, Gu Mian and his companions once again encountered this woman—the one who, if the plot developed typically, might offer herself to them. It happened to be a bright and sunny noon.

Gu Mian and his companions had already left the previous town. For the past few days, Chu Changge had been scouting the surroundings to draw a map, selecting a relatively safe route for the Spirit Car to pass through. While exploring, Chu Changge was also searching for the high-level ticket booth they needed to find.

Effort always yields rewards. Chu Changge did indeed find a high-level ticket booth. However, just as Gu Mian and the others followed Chu Changge to this booth, they unexpectedly ran into Liu Ying, who had arrived at the same time.

Perhaps because it was a high-level ticket booth, many players were coming and going. A quick scan revealed that a large portion of them had already contracted the virus.

The sounds of coughing and sneezing were incessant.

Some wealthier players had bought barrier masks from the supermarket, but not many people were wearing them.

Amidst the chorus of coughs, Liu Ying spotted Fatty—his large build made him an easy target, after all.

She quickly ran over and, in public, grabbed the corner of Gu Mian's sleeve—because his white lab coat was the easiest piece of clothing to grab among the three of them.

Gu Mian didn't even have time to run. He could only endure the peculiar stares of the crowd as a girl clung to his sleeve.

Liu Ying looked relieved. "I was afraid I wouldn't see you all again..."

Gu Mian, almost in tears, lamented, "How on earth did we run into you again, even after traveling so far?"

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Liu Ying paused slightly, then hurriedly whispered an explanation, "No, my home isn't in that city... I just happened to stay there for a few months."

Just happened? Gu Mian was a bit confused.

By now, the onlookers had basically lost interest. Life was short, and they didn't care too much about other people's business. Even though the current situation was a bit strange, it was only worth a few more glances. Only if the sky were falling would people truly give it their full attention and gawk.

Seeing that those around them were no longer paying attention, Liu Ying continued in a low voice, "I'm a flight attendant..."

"A flight attendant?" Fatty sighed. "No wonder you speak so gently. It must be a habit."

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "Do all flight attendants speak gently?"

Due to his peculiar constitution, Gu Mian had never dared to take a flight, fearing the plane might suddenly perform a 360-degree spin mid-air and then spiral into the ground. Consequently, he had hardly ever seen a flight attendant.

Fatty nodded sympathetically. "The ones I've met were all very gentle."

Gu Mian nodded slightly; the Liu Ying before him indeed spoke gently.

At this moment, Liu Ying continued, "Because when the game started, we were on a flight... At that time, we were pulled into the nearest ticket kiosk, so we came directly from the plane to the ground. It was roughly near the place where we met before..."

Fatty choked on his saliva. "Yeah, the start of this global game was quite sudden. There must have been people on planes, some being arrested by the vice squad, and others in the middle of making babies... But was your captain pulled into a ticket kiosk too? Wouldn't the plane crash without anyone piloting it?"

As Fatty spoke, he began to reminisce. He didn't seem to recall any news about a plane crash.

Liu Ying shook her head and explained, "Planes have autopilot, so they usually don't just crash. But I don't know if the plane landed safely in the end... And probably because we were in the sky, we all got scattered. So far, I haven't run into any passengers or colleagues from the flight."

"COUGH, COUGH," Gu Mian glanced around, then looked at Liu Ying before him. "Did you stop us just so we could listen to your story?"

Hearing this, Liu Ying quickly shook her head. "No, no, it's because you saved me not too long ago, and I couldn't find anything to repay you with."

So, she stopped us now because she found something to repay us with? Gu Mian's mind was filled with questions.

Seeming to sense Gu Mian's thoughts, Liu Ying lowered her head in embarrassment, then took something out. "I know that medicine was very valuable, and this small thing doesn't really compensate for it. I initially wanted to save up a bit more before giving it to you, but I was afraid you'd turn around and run off again..."

It seemed their previous escape had traumatized this girl.

While thinking this, Gu Mian took the item from her hand.

Unexpectedly, as soon as he took it, Liu Ying turned and bolted as if she had handed him a time bomb, making Fatty flinch.

Gu Mian could now see the item in his hand clearly. It was a rather cute-looking eraser, definitely not a time bomb.

Liu Ying had already run some distance and was looking back at them anxiously. It seemed she had run off because she was afraid Gu Mian would try to return it to her.

[Kitty Head Eraser]

[Description: A cute, cat-head-shaped eraser. Due to copyright concerns, the designer specifically avoided all features of the Hello Kitty cat.]

[Function: Can erase all dirt. If you're too lazy to wash your clothes, this eraser is your number one choice.]

But wouldn't rubbing an entire outfit with an eraser be more tiring than actually washing it?

Fatty was now craning his neck to look at the Kitty Head Eraser. "Speaking of Hello Kitty, Doctor, did you know there was a Hello Kitty murder case before?"

Gu Mian shot him a sidelong glance. "If you don't have anything sensible to say, then don't say anything."

Fatty immediately shut his mouth.

Not far away, Liu Ying saw that Gu Mian seemed to have accepted the item. She let out a sigh of relief, took a few steps back, and then disappeared from their sight.

Fatty watched Liu Ying's retreating figure, and an unsettling thought suddenly popped into his head. "Speaking of which, Doctor, I was a park ranger for a while."

Gu Mian pinched the bridge of his nose, a headache forming. Why has this guy Fatty worked all sorts of jobs? Is he even human?

"I think this girl is a bit like a fox I found once..."

Gu Mian asked, "You mean in terms of looks?"

That would be horrifying.

"No, no, no," Fatty quickly explained. "When I was a ranger, I found an injured little fox. I treated it, and after it recovered, I released it back into the woods. Who would've thought, the fox was probably grateful, because after that, it started bringing live mice to my place every day! Fucking live ones! It was practically trying to stuff them in my mouth."

Fatty paused, then added, "I feel like this girl is showing a similar tendency... like she might come back at any moment..."

Gu Mian analyzed this carefully, then said under Fatty's watchful gaze, "I don't think she'll be catching mice."

Fatty: "..."

Liu Ying had already left; there was no telling when she might suddenly pop up again.

Gu Mian, however, had become interested in the item Liu Ying had left.

[Kitty Head Eraser]

Its function is to erase all dirt... Gu Mian would absolutely not use this eraser to wash clothes, but aside from that, it didn't seem to have any other purpose. In the current world setting, this thing was practically useless, its utility comparable to the [One Roll of Tissue] Gu Mian had gotten from his first lottery draw. But Gu Mian remembered Chu Changge had an item that might be usable with this eraser.

As he thought this, Gu Mian looked towards Chu Changge's chest. Pinned to his coat was a [Bloody School Badge (Incomplete)].

Anyone wearing this item would have their game nickname changed to 'Meiren Chu,' and Chu Changge has been going by this nickname for a long time now. It's called 'incomplete' because the photo part of the badge is still covered by bloodstains. The bloodstains have to be removed for it to display all its functions. I didn't know what all the functions of this badge were before, but today it seems I'll have a chance to test it out...

"Using this eraser, we should be able to clean Chu Changge's badge," he said aloud.

Fatty was astonished by Gu Mian's idea. "Use a special item on another special item?"

This is truly mind-boggling.

While Fatty was still trying to wrap his head around it, Gu Mian, holding the eraser, said seriously, "Since this badge can change a player's nickname, I suspect that after cleaning the bloodstains off the photo area, Chu Changge's appearance will also change."

He would change to look like the person in the obscured photo.

Fatty was alarmed. "It'd be one thing if the photo showed a handsome guy, but what if it's someone with three eyes and four noses?"

"That's why we need to find a more secluded spot," Gu Mian said. "We can't do this performance in front of everyone."

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The three of them soon found a secluded corner.

Gu Mian wasn't afraid of Chu Changge transforming into a monster with four eyes and two mouths; rather, he was afraid of him transforming into a woman.

After all, the name on the school badge was 'Meiren Chu,' which hardly sounded like a name for a boy.

The obscured photo was likely a woman's. If Chu Changge suddenly transformed into a woman after the stain was wiped off, the situation would become incredibly awkward.

Fortunately, even if he did turn into a woman, removing the school badge would change him back. That's why Gu Mian dared to proceed.

Not far from the ticket booth, they found a hidden corner and prepared themselves.

Gu Mian, holding the 'Kitten-Head Eraser,' said to Chu Changge, "I think you should brace yourself."

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "I'm prepared."

Even Fatty, next to them, held his breath, silently nodding in agreement.

Gu Mian didn't waste any time. The corner they were in was dimly lit, but it was still possible to see.

He reached out, grabbed the school badge still pinned to Chu Changge's coat, and began to scrub it vigorously with the eraser in his hand.

This eraser indeed worked wonders.

The bloodstain, which previously wouldn't come off no matter how hard they scrubbed, actually began to fade.

The obscured section also slowly began to appear.

Fatty, standing beside them, had craned his entire head over, apparently wanting to see what Chu Changge would look like.

The bloodstains gradually vanished, and the concealed content slowly emerged.

Both Gu Mian and Fatty furrowed their brows.

They saw that the covered part didn't seem to be a photo at all, but rather something reflective.

Gu Mian continued to scrub vigorously.

Soon, what lay underneath was completely revealed.

"It's definitely not a photo..." Gu Mian took a small step back, staring at the school badge still hanging on Chu Changge's chest.

Fatty, however, took another step forward, getting closer to Chu Changge, almost pressing his face to the school badge. "I say, Doctor... look, this seems to be a small mirror, right?"

"Yes," Gu Mian nodded slightly. "It is indeed a mirror."

Where the headshot should have been on the school badge, there was now a small, square mirror.

Fatty leaned closer to look at the mirror on the school badge. The tiny mirror could only reflect his eye. Seeing an eye appear in the small square in front of him, Fatty felt a bit creeped out.

He instinctively took a couple of steps back.

But after retreating a few steps, Fatty sensed something was amiss.

Their surroundings were dim, but not so dark as to play tricks on one's eyes.

Yet, Fatty was certain the person before him had changed.

He was currently looking down slightly, so he could only see the lower half of the person before him. Those overstuffed, bulging trousers, and those tattered shoes that had clearly suffered a lot... how could they not look familiar!

Damn it, isn't this my own outfit?!

Fatty's neck stiffened. In the dim corner, he slowly raised his head. His gaze met a face identical to his own.

It was staring intently at him. Fatty staggered, so frightened he nearly had a heart attack.

"Don't panic," Gu Mian said, steadying Fatty. "It's Chu Changge."

Hearing this, Fatty finally composed himself. He twisted his neck to look towards Chu Changge again. "My god, so this is what the school badge does?"

Chu Changge, now looking like Fatty, suddenly spoke, "This school badge allows the wearer to change their appearance to that of the person reflected in the mirror. It can only be used once a day, and each use lasts for thirty minutes."

"So, it transforms the wearer to look like whoever is reflected in the mirror?" Gu Mian stroked his chin. "This thing seems a bit tricky to use, doesn't it?"

"It can be covered with something," Chu Changge said, reaching out to cover the school badge on his chest with his hand. "When you want to change your appearance, remove the covering and reflect the person you wish to become."

Fatty, still shaken, looked at the person in front of him who looked just like him. "Can it turn you into a ghost too?"

Chu Changge paused slightly. "We can try it in the next instance."

That would be terrifying.

You'd never know if the one chasing you in an instance was a ghost or your teammate.

Fatty asked cautiously, "You'd better not change randomly. What if the Doctor accidentally chops off your head?"

However, the item had to be worn to be effective. So, even if Chu Changge turned into a ghost, he would still be wearing the school badge. Gu Mian would see the badge and naturally wouldn't chop his head off.

But Gu Mian couldn't help feeling that Fatty's statement was a bit off. "I say, I haven't chopped off that many heads, have I?"

Fatty just chuckled, not responding.

It had to be said that Chu Changge's and Fatty's temperaments were worlds apart; even if they looked the same, it would be impossible to mistake them.

Even when transformed to be as large as Fatty, Chu Changge still carried an "I'm the coolest dude far and wide" air, remaining expressionless and disinclined to say much.

Fatty, on the other hand, circled Chu Changge, observing him for quite a while and constantly exclaiming things like, "So this is how handsome I am!"

The transformation could be reversed by removing the school badge. However, Chu Changge had to keep wearing it to conceal his real name.

So Gu Mian and the others waited in the dim corner for thirty minutes, for Chu Changge to revert to his own appearance, before heading into the advanced ticket booth.

Actually, it wouldn't have been impossible for Chu Changge to enter the instance in Fatty's form. However, for one, two big fatties would be too conspicuous; for another, if two fatties entered an instance and one disappeared midway, it would also scare the other players.

So, they waited there for the time to pass.

Thirty minutes passed quickly. Chu Changge had already changed back to his original appearance, and Fatty could no longer observe his own 'handsome' face up close.

"Let's enter the instance," Gu Mian said, taking a few steps towards the ticket booth. "We can test out the functionality of your badge, Chu Changge. Oh, and let me know in advance if you decide to turn into a ghost."

Chu Changge paused slightly behind him, then nodded.

The instances from the advanced ticket booth were supposed to be quite high-level. This was evident from the ticket seller inside the booth.

Upon seeing Gu Mian, this ticket seller in the advanced ticket booth didn't have an overly dramatic reaction; his expression merely stiffened slightly, looking as if he was mentally prepared.

The players queuing behind Gu Mian's group noticed the ticket seller's subtle expression and couldn't help but find it a bit strange.

However, this slight oddity was quickly overlooked by people. Players came and went in the ticket booth area; some were holding tickets, preparing to enter an instance, while others had just emerged from an instance, their faces full of terror.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian and the others had already started matchmaking for the instance.

[Matching instance...]

[...]

[...]

[No suitable instance detected. Rematching. Please wait...]

Gu Mian: "..."

He felt as if he were watching a group of brothel girls unenthusiastically refusing customers.

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The young women politely declined back and forth for a while before finally selecting one to 'receive the guest.'

[Successfully matched to instance 'Close Your Eyes (High-Spec Version)']

[Matching teammates for you now, please wait...]

"Close Your Eyes?" Gu Mian stroked his chin in the darkness. This was a murder game before the global game started, right? Similar to Werewolf. There are two factions: werewolves and civilians. Werewolves kill at night, and civilians vote others out during the day. Whichever side is wiped out first loses... But why does the name of this instance seem so familiar?

Suddenly, Fatty chimed in from the side, "I remember that instance, Doctor. Do you recall the shutdown list of extra-long instances after the New Year's Day event?"

The shutdown list of extra-long instances...

Now that Fatty mentioned it, Gu Mian suddenly recalled. You mean... there was a low-spec version of 'Close Your Eyes' on that shutdown list?

At this point, Chu Changge also spoke up, "That's right."

Fatty ducked his head. Could these two instances be related?

It looked like the younger brother had been taken down, and now the elder brother was out for revenge.

At this moment, a few lines of text appeared in front of Gu Mian.

[Instance Size: 6 Players]

[Synopsis: 'Close Your Eyes' is a game that swept through countless high schools. Six players will take on the roles of students who previously played this game. After these six individuals played the game, a series of bizarre incidents began to follow.]

[Main Objective: Ensure the 'Ghost' is eliminated.]

Seeing the main objective, Fatty couldn't help but feel a surge of emotion. Gu Mian might not excel at other things, but when it comes to getting the 'Ghost' eliminated...

Gu Mian didn't share Fatty's sentiment. He looked at the instance details. This instance is certainly bold, daring to set a haunted location in a school. Aren't they afraid of attracting the attention of the 'great light of socialist harmony'?

The moment Gu Mian finished speaking, light flooded in from all directions.

Every time he entered an instance, Gu Mian had to experience the environment transitioning from dark to light; he was already used to it.

Fatty still wasn't quite used to it. When the light surged in, he instinctively shielded his eyes, as if the brightness stung them.

Just as their eyes were filled with sunlight, a very familiar sentence reached their ears. Even Fatty, who hadn't been in a classroom for many years, was momentarily stunned when he heard it.

"Your P.E. teacher couldn't make it today, so I'm taking over."

A very familiar excuse.

Gu Mian instinctively looked towards the source of the voice.

He found himself in a brightly lit classroom with a row of large windows to his left. Outside, the sun was setting in the west. Its orange afterglow filtered through the clear panes, dyeing the students' pristine white uniforms a pale gold; even their hair seemed to shimmer with a warm light.

Gu Mian was seated in the second-to-last row, giving him an unobstructed view of everyone in front.

At the front, a female teacher stood on the podium. She looked quite young.

Her hair cascaded neatly down her back. Her light-mocha sweater fell to her knees, topped with a brown plaid vest, giving her a very girlish appearance.

Probably a recently graduated teacher.

After she announced the bad news that their P.E. class was being commandeered, the students at the front showed no reaction; it seemed they were already accustomed to such things.

Only Fatty, seated diagonally in front and to the right of Gu Mian, turned his head back, wiggling his eyebrows and making faces at him.

The sunset's afterglow, filtering through the window, landed on his face, making Fatty's already unremarkable features look somewhat contorted.

This rather contorted expression, naturally, also caught the teacher's eye, unpleasantly.

"Wang Pan!" Hearing the name, Gu Mian instantly knew who the teacher on the podium was addressing. "What are you wiggling your eyebrows and making faces for?"

Fatty's game nickname was 'Fat Kid Surnamed Wang'. Such a name wasn't suitable for an immersive instance, so the instance had conveniently changed it for them.

As for how to find out one's name in the instance...

Lost in thought, Gu Mian lowered his head to the Chinese textbook under his arm. He silently flipped open the cover. On the flyleaf, the large characters "Year 2, Class 5, Gu Mian" practically blinded him.

Gu Mian silently tore off this page with his name on it, crumpled it into a ball, and stuffed it into his pocket.

This instance is really going out of its way to enforce a real-name system on him!

Speaking of which, I wonder if Chu Changge can still use the name 'Meiren Chu'? As Gu Mian pondered this, he glanced around.

Just as he glanced to his side, a smiling face suddenly entered his line of sight.

"Holy shit!" Gu Mian almost swore out loud.

The teacher on the podium was still lecturing Fatty and hadn't noticed Gu Mian's unusual reaction.

At that moment, Gu Mian's eyes widened slightly as he stared at the person sitting beside him—his deskmate. That face...

"What's wrong?" His deskmate, who had been smiling with crinkled eyes, seemed to notice Gu Mian's odd behavior and was now looking at him curiously.

Gu Mian calmed down and shook his head, "Nothing."

There were no distorted facial features or terrifying blood on this face.

On the contrary, it was an exceptionally clean and ordinary face, yet it looked somewhat familiar.

Gu Mian had seen this face once before, in a previous instance, but it hadn't belonged to a player.

Gu Mian recalled seeing this face in an instance called 'High School Tales: The Spirited Away Game.' That too was a school-themed instance, and this person had been the first 'classmate' Gu Mian encountered upon entering. Back then, this same smiling face had explained the instance's particulars to him. To sum him up in one sentence: he was a somewhat useful NPC.

That Spirited Away Game instance had collapsed, unsurprisingly. But he never expected to see this person in a different instance.

Gu Mian now strongly suspected that this person beside him, whose player information was hidden, was actually a player and not an NPC.

How could an NPC appear in two different instances?

By now, the teacher had finished her "ideological guidance" with Fatty and returned to the lectern to resume her lecture.

Fatty no longer dared to turn around and make faces.

Gu Mian saw his deskmate, apparently satisfied Gu Mian was fine, lazily rest his head on the desk. Gu Mian then nonchalantly flipped open the textbook his deskmate had placed near the edge of the desk.

The flyleaf bore a few words: "Year 2, Class 5, Xu Xingcheng."

His name is Xu Xingcheng?

"Speaking of which..." Just then, his deskmate suddenly turned back. Gu Mian, with lightning-fast reflexes, snapped the book shut.

"What is it?" Gu Mian asked, feigning innocence.

Xu Xingcheng didn't seem to notice anything amiss. He lowered his voice, a curious expression on his face. "I heard that during our field trip a few days ago, you played a game with some others, right?"

He must be talking about the game 'Close Your Eyes.' Gu Mian remained silent, which Xu Xingcheng took as tacit agreement.

Seeing this, Xu Xingcheng continued, "Do you remember who the werewolf was?"

Chapter 346 Gu Mian and the Werewolf are not Allowed In_1

The content of the instance is about six students who had played the game 'Close Your Eyes' and subsequently encountered frequent supernatural events.

The role Gu Mian played was one of these 'six students'.

But if he were asked right now to identify the player who was the werewolf in the game, he wouldn't be able to tell.

After all, Gu Mian had just been thrown into this instance by the game. He wouldn't be able to remember the name of the werewolf, let alone the names of the other students who had played the game with him.

Since he couldn't recall the names, Gu Mian could only play dumb.

Gu Mian coughed gently, hesitated for a moment, then said two words: "I forgot."

This excuse was undoubtedly the most used by humans.

Hearing Gu Mian say he forgot, Xu Xingcheng didn't respond but simply laid his head back down on the desk, seemingly lost in thought.

Gu Mian stealthily glanced at his deskmate again.

No matter how hard he looked, he couldn't bring up Xu Xingcheng's player information. Looks like he's just a simple NPC, Gu Mian mused.

While Gu Mian was looking at Xu Xingcheng, he suddenly felt a gaze sticking tightly to his back.

He turned his head slightly to look backward.

Gu Mian's seat was in the second-to-last row. There was only one more row of desks behind him.

When he turned around, he saw Chu Changge sitting directly behind him, quietly looking up. Surprisingly, Chu Changge was seated right behind him.

Gu Mian subconsciously looked down at the book in front of him. The cover was flipped open, and the three characters "Meiren Chu" on the title page were very conspicuous.

Soft golden sunlight cast upon Chu Changge's face. Under the effect of the instance, their faces had traveled back in time, returning to their sophomore year of high school.

Therefore, Chu Changge's face looked a bit childish, and Gu Mian almost didn't recognize him. Fatty's fleshy face, however, was easily recognizable at any age.

Right under the teacher's nose, Gu Mian didn't interact much with Chu Changge.

Time went by very quickly. This should be the last class of the afternoon, Gu Mian thought. As dismissal time approached, an eager anticipation filled the classroom.

Most of the sun had already set, with only an arc remaining above the horizon, causing the light in the classroom to dim. In the fading sunlight, everyone's previously relaxed bodies tensed up, as if preparing for something.

From my experience, they're most likely preparing for dinner, Gu Mian surmised.

The cafeteria in high school seldom satisfied the students. Not to mention the taste of the food, even getting the food itself was a problem.

Gu Mian had experienced the cafeteria at his own school where, at peak times, the lines stretched from the serving windows almost to the cafeteria entrance. Students who arrived late often only got the food that nobody else wanted.

This school seems to be no different, he thought.

The teacher on the podium, however, was understanding. He picked up his books and left the classroom two minutes before class was supposed to end.

Now, the restless atmosphere grew even stronger. Still, everyone remained seated, craning their necks and waiting for the bell to ring.

Gu Mian, on the other hand, wasn't interested in what the cafeteria food in this instance would be like.

He grabbed a pen from the pen holder, opened his exercise book to a blank page, and began doodling.

The instance is called 'Close Your Eyes.' There are six players in total. Chu Changge, Fatty, and I make up three of them, so there are three other players in this instance... Gu Mian thought, looking at his deskmate.

He really wanted to list his deskmate as a 'suspected player,' but no matter how he tried, he couldn't bring up his player panel, so he had to give up on the idea.

However, even if this Xu Xingcheng is an NPC, he must be an extraordinary one, Gu Mian mused.

The atmosphere around him clashed with that of everyone else. While the others were eagerly awaiting the bell, he was slumped somewhat dejectedly on his desk, counting on his fingers, his back to Gu Mian. He seemed to be troubled by something.

Suddenly, Gu Mian noticed a hand stretching out from under Xu Xingcheng's desk.

But just then, the long-awaited dismissal bell suddenly rang. The classroom instantly erupted into chaos, filled with the jarring sounds of chairs scraping.

Immediately after, the hand disappeared.

Xu Xingcheng seemed to sense something and looked down, but there was nothing there. Gu Mian saw his face turn a little pale.

Chu Changge, who had been sitting behind him, was now standing up. He walked briskly to the back door of the classroom and then glanced back at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian understood instantly, quickly left his seat, and headed for the back door.

Fatty also trotted over.

There were still a few students left in the classroom. Gu Mian confirmed that besides their trio, there were no other players.

The three of them left the classroom and found a less crowded stairwell landing.

After confirming no one else was around, Fatty began to complain, "What the hell is this instance? It gives no direction at all! The mission is to get the ghost eliminated, but we can't even figure out who all six people who played 'Close Your Eyes' are. Who knows where the other three players are?"

The sun had completely set, and the lights in the corridor were turned on.

The light on this stairwell landing seemed to be broken, so it wasn't on.

Fortunately, there was a window nearby, and the light filtering in from outside was enough for them to see by.

Chu Changge spoke softly, "I suspect that it wasn't just us six players who participated in 'Close Your Eyes'; there were more people involved. And while we were playing, a real ghost infiltrated the game. That's why those who played subsequently encountered supernatural events—because the ghost is killing people."

Gu Mian nodded. "But I don't think the ghost kills indiscriminately. It likely has a specific killing mechanism, for example, only targeting those who played as villagers."

After Gu Mian finished speaking, the other two were silent for a few seconds.

Then, Fatty pursed his lips, looking somewhat troubled as he spoke, "But, do you guys know what your identities were when you played the game?"

Chapter 347 Close Your Eyes When It's Dark_1

Knowing jack all!

But this seemed a bit impractical. At the moment, the only option was to find those who had previously participated in the game of 'Close Your Eyes' and ask if they remembered everyone's roles.

Gu Mian gazed out the window. It was now ten minutes past the end-of-class bell.

Even then, students were still trickling toward the cafeteria. Among the crowd, a few students who had hurriedly finished their meals were already returning to their classrooms.

Gu Mian glanced out the window and spoke, "This instance is named 'Close Your Eyes.' I don't think it's just because the characters we're playing have been in that game. Before class ended, I saw a hand appear out of thin air, reaching for the person next to me. I think this game is starting to affect reality."

Chu Changge's voice also came from the side, "That's correct. The characters we're playing did indeed participate in that game, but I highly suspect the 'Close Your Eyes' game never actually ended. It was most likely interrupted halfway by some accident, preventing it from finishing... And now, the 'Close Your Eyes' game is still ongoing, just in a different way."

Fatty paused slightly, then asked in a low voice, "Brother Chu, are you suggesting... a real-life version of 'Close Your Eyes'?"

Gu Mian nodded at Fatty. "Indeed. The players are no longer confined to a table or a room. This game has engulfed an entire region, with players moving through the city, engaging in a more advanced form of combat."

Fatty shuddered slightly.

Games like 'Close Your Eyes' and 'Mafia' had been popular for a while. There were many immersive experience stores and mobile apps for these types of games.

Fatty, following the trend, had played a few rounds, both on mobile and in person at experience stores.

However, regardless of the format, the scope of play was very limited.

Physical experience stores usually only provided one room with a long table. Larger ones might offer a few more rooms at most.

As for the mobile version, the play area was confined to a small screen.

But now, this game had spread throughout the entire city!

Players moved between day and night, hiding in towering buildings, waiting for the chance to engage in a truly sickening, bloody game.

"Let's figure out the game rules first," Gu Mian said, noting the increasing number of students coming from the cafeteria. "If this really is a real-life version of 'Close Your Eyes,' as we suspect, not knowing the rules will put us at a serious disadvantage."

Fatty nodded gravely.

At that moment, Gu Mian began to think about his deskmate, Xu Xingcheng.

Xu Xingcheng seemed very concerned about who the werewolf was in the 'Close Your Eyes' game. Gu Mian had also coincidentally seen a malicious hand emerge from under Xu Xingcheng's desk, as if it were coming for him.

If that was the case, Xu Xingcheng might have participated in the game. However, his words and actions suggested he hadn't.

How strange...

Students were already coming up the stairs.

Gu Mian and the others' classroom was on the third floor—a middling location, not too high and not too low.

Students coming up from below lethargically glanced at Gu Mian and the others on the landing. Then, they turned and continued up the stairs toward the fourth floor, seemingly unfazed by people loitering there.

Fatty, feeling a pang of guilt, instinctively looked at Gu Mian when he saw people approaching. He found Gu Mian seemingly lost in thought.

"Doctor?" Fatty asked, somewhat confused. "What are you thinking about?"

"Nothing much," Gu Mian replied, snapping out of his thoughts. He observed more and more people returning to the academic building and continued, "Anyway, first, let's find the other three players besides us and see if they have any clues. Second, it's highly probable that it's not just the six of us participating in this 'Close Your Eyes' game. There might be instance natives involved too. They could be more reliable for understanding the game rules, but we must be cautious with them."

Just then, a few more people passed by. Gu Mian paused until they were gone before continuing, "I suspect the real ghost has infiltrated the werewolves. If we try to contact the instance natives who played 'Close Your Eyes,' we might inadvertently encounter the actual ghost..."

"Also," Gu Mian glanced out the window, "it's getting dark."

The sun had completely set, and darkness was gradually engulfing the entire school. The students who had initially rushed to the cafeteria were now returning to the academic building.

Only a thin layer of the sunset's afterglow remained. The streetlights on both sides had already switched on, re-illuminating the darkening campus.

Gu Mian retracted his gaze. "The game is called 'Close Your Eyes.' Chu Changge and I have played this type of game before the global game started, so we know the general rules. What about you?"

Gu Mian was asking Fatty.

Fatty nodded quickly. "I've played it before too. I remember in this game, as soon as it gets dark, the werewolves can kill people..."

This was an absolutely real game.

In the real night, werewolves could use any means to kill villagers.

"So, nighttime is the most dangerous time for civilian players," Chu Changge said quietly. "We need to be careful."

Fatty felt a bit apprehensive. "What if we all stick together at night? Generally, a werewolf can only kill one person per night. If the three of us are together and one of us gets killed, the other two will definitely know the killer's identity. So, if we stick together, the werewolf wouldn't dare to make a move easily, right?"

Fatty looked very seriously at Gu Mian and Chu Changge. But then he suddenly realized that the expressions on their faces were a bit off.

They were both virtually expressionless. The dim light filtering in from the window made their faces flicker between light and shadow. Looking at them, Fatty shivered.

What's wrong with these two...

Fatty felt a bit scared and took a step back.

And just as he hesitated, an expressionless Chu Changge suddenly opened his mouth, his voice like a ghost's, "And how can you be sure that neither of us is a werewolf?"

Chapter 348 Old Friend_1

Fatty froze. Before him, Chu Changge stood with an expressionless face, lips opening and closing as he uttered chilling words: "Don't trust anyone."

Gu Mian was deeply considering Xu Xingcheng's situation when he heard Chu Changge beside him begin his lecture.

Looking at Fatty, who was already trembling from Chu Changge's icy tone, Gu Mian put an arm around him reassuringly. "Don't worry. Based on our relationship, even if I were a ghost..."

"Even if you were a ghost, you wouldn't have the heart to kill me, right?" Fatty swallowed nervously.

Gu Mian paused for a moment, then corrected himself, "Even if I were a ghost, I wouldn't let you die too painfully."

Fatty was speechless.

After three seconds of contemplation, Fatty finally spoke again. "Our main mission is to eliminate the ghost, which means we're civilians, right? Besides, the person playing the ghost in this instance should have been replaced by a real ghost. Logically, the instance wouldn't allow players to be replaced by ghosts, so player identities can't be ghosts."

The paths on campus were growing more crowded. Under the dim lights, people quickened their pace, flocking towards the academic building.

The sky had completely darkened, taking on a peculiar hue—a deep cyan mixed with an unblendable black that slowly painted the entire sky.

Chu Changge shook his head slightly. "That's not necessarily the case. In games like 'Close Your Eyes,' there are usually multiple ghosts. It's possible that among these multiple ghosts, only one person playing a ghost was replaced by a real ghost."

"Also, the instance can definitely change the mission content. Gu Mian experienced this firsthand when he first entered an instance. Just as he was about to complete his task, the instance changed the mission content, forcing him to stay. Therefore, it's possible that in this current instance, the mission will be altered after players have entered."

"Because the tasks for ghosts and civilians are undoubtedly different. When teaming up to enter an instance, players unfamiliar with this game or its rules are highly likely to discuss mission completion strategies with others right at the start. This could easily lead to them revealing their identities. To prevent this, I suspect the mission will only change after the game rules are known... This is the most plausible scenario I can envision."

Gu Mian continued to stroke his chin, pondering. Since this is a real-life version of 'Close Your Eyes,' why doesn't the instance announce the game rules at the beginning? Why make players discover them within the instance? Is it purely to increase the difficulty?

By this time, the stairs were already crowded with students returning from dinner, ready for evening self-study.

Of course, Gu Mian had no intention of sticking around for some troublesome evening self-study session.

I need to find the other three players first and see if they have any clues.

He quickly returned to the classroom and picked up his guitar case, which was propped against his desk. His guitar had also been transported into this instance. A high school student carrying a large guitar is quite incongruous...

His deskmate, Xu Xingcheng, looked up at him. "Are you planning to cut class?"

Without hesitation, Gu Mian responded with a simple "Mmm."

An 'I wish I could cut class too' expression flashed briefly on Xu Xingcheng's face before quickly fading. He said, "Then be careful. And also..."

Seeing Xu Xingcheng hesitate as if wanting to say more, Gu Mian pressed, "What's the matter?"

Xu Xingcheng looked up slightly at Gu Mian. "Have you seen Zhang Pingfan recently?"

Who is Zhang Pingfan? Gu Mian had no idea, but of course, he couldn't admit his ignorance outright. He shook his head. "No, I haven't."

Though, judging by the name, he sounds pretty ordinary.

"Oh," Xu Xingcheng slumped back onto the desk. "Then it's nothing."

Gu Mian frowned slightly. This deskmate is really suspicious.

By now, Chu Changge was already standing by the back door. Fatty cowered behind him, peeking out fearfully like a thief.

Seeing this, Gu Mian slung his guitar over his shoulder and quickly walked to the back door. Teachers were usually on duty during evening self-study, and it would be difficult to slip away once they arrived.

Based on his years of experience, teachers were most active at the very beginning of self-study. He planned to avoid this period by hiding for a while in the green belt beneath the academic building.

Once things settled down, he planned to sneak back into the academic building and check each classroom for anyone who could access player information.

At this point, students had mostly returned to their classrooms and settled in their seats, preparing for the night's self-study.

Consequently, the hallways and stairwells were nearly empty. Gu Mian's group of three made their way to the first floor unimpeded. Just as the three of them stepped out of the academic building's main entrance, they ran head-on into someone.

Even from five meters away, Gu Mian immediately recognized this person as a player.

Really delivered right to my doorstep...

As for why he could recognize her as a player from five meters away... well, it was because he had teamed up with her before!

And his impression of this player was exceedingly profound; the moment he saw her face, he recalled the image of a flayed arm.

007 also hadn't expected to run into three familiar faces.

After the Fairy Tale City instance, 007 had developed strong suspicions about this global game. She suspected it wasn't merely data but a massive conspiracy.

Of course, what pained her most was that the Fairy Tale City instance offered no completion rewards at the end—something utterly unheard of, which had cost her a significant amount of money.

So much so that seeing these three again instantly reminded 007 of that instance which, despite being cleared, yielded no reward.

After the Fairy Tale City instance, she had developed some psychological scars, terrified that she might inexplicably die in an instance one day.

Although terrified, she still had to enter instances. Entering instances could mean death, but in the current environment, not entering them meant she wouldn't survive for long.

Thus, 007 had been treading through instances with trepidation, never expecting to be so unlucky as to encounter this death trio again.

Although she felt that meeting these three boded ill, communication among teammates within an instance was still necessary. Steeling herself, 007 clutched the item in her hand and moved towards them.

Chapter 349 Party when the night falls_1

"What's that?" Upon seeing 007, the first thing Gu Mian noticed was the object in her hand and her arm, which actually had skin on it. Come to think of it, this was the first time Gu Mian had ever seen 007's bare arm...

007 hadn't expected Gu Mian to show no joy at encountering an old acquaintance, and she couldn't help but feel a surge of exasperation. But seeing that the two people beside Gu Mian also showed no signs of a "joyful reunion in a strange land" kind of emotion, 007 suppressed her rising temper and slowly raised the object in her hand.

As she lifted it, 007 felt a little dazed. Had human relationships really grown this cold? No reaction at all to seeing a former teammate?

It was already completely dark. Who knew if the streetlights on either side of the road were just shoddy fakes; the light flickered faintly, enough to give one a headache.

At this moment, Gu Mian was intently observing the object in 007's hand.

It was a piece of paper.

Noticing the curiosity of the three, 007 quickly spoke, "Isn't this instance called 'Close Your Eyes'? When I entered, I found myself in a classroom, and this was on my desk... These are the rules for 'Close Your Eyes'. I originally wanted to wait at the cafeteria entrance to see if I could meet other players, but I didn't expect to not find anyone..."

She hadn't found anyone. Instead, on her way back to the classroom, she'd run into three acquaintances who looked like they could stir up trouble.

Gu Mian had already taken the paper from 007 and begun to read it carefully. It was a piece of paper, like a small flyer but slightly larger, with a red and black color scheme, printed with cheap-looking

bloodstains. The first line of text was in a large, bleeding font effect, which looked incredibly tacky. The smaller black text below, however, looked much more normal.

['Close Your Eyes' Game Rules]

[1. There are twelve players in total, including 3 'ghosts' and 9 'civilians'. Every player is aware of only their own identity. If all members of one side are eliminated, the other side wins.]

[2. After nightfall, the 'ghosts' begin their actions. Between 20:00 and 03:00 the next morning, 'ghosts' may select one player to kill. Once a player is killed, all 'ghosts' must cease further killing that night. If any 'ghost' kills again (i.e., a second victim is claimed by the 'ghosts' that night), that 'ghost' will die along with the player they killed.]

[3. At 03:00 each day, all players will participate in a public vote for their suspected 'ghost'. The player with the most votes is eliminated. After the vote, the system will announce the current number of remaining players for that round.]

[4. In the game, 'civilians' cannot kill other players; 'ghosts' can kill any player.]

Gu Mian fell into thought. Three ghosts...

Fatty, beside him, muttered, "Isn't this fourth rule specially prepared for the Doctor? Right, they're probably afraid civilians might turn around and saw off the head of a ghost chasing them."

Gu Mian continued reading. Below the rules were twelve signatures:

Gu Mian, Meiren Chu, Wang Pan, Lin Qi, Yue Nu, Xu Keke, Pan Yue, Zhang Pingfan, Guo Jimei, Li Wentao, Yuan Qinghua, Li Yibai.

Zhang Pingfan? Gu Mian noted the name. Just a short while ago, Xu Xingcheng had asked him if he had seen Zhang Pingfan.

Under the dim streetlight, 007 began, "It seems the instance wants us to participate in a real-life version of 'Close Your Eyes'. And it's not just us six players participating, but also the original inhabitants of this instance."

007 used to refer to the instance's native inhabitants collectively as NPCs. However, after her experience in the Fairy Tale City instance, she found she couldn't quite bring herself to call them that anymore, so she'd switched to a different term.

Seeing the people before her still scrutinizing the list, 007 spoke again, "My class is Senior Two, Class Thirteen, and there's another player from my class."

As she spoke, she pointed to the list in Gu Mian's hand, her slender index finger landing on the name 'Yue Nu'.

No wonder this name is so peculiar; she's a player, Gu Mian thought.

"That's her. Besides her, Li Wentao and Pan Yue on the list are also in my class, but they are original inhabitants of this instance," 007 said, seeming to recall something. "Li Wentao and Pan Yue know quite a bit about 'Close Your Eyes'; they started playing it last week in the evenings..."

The instance natives definitely knew more than they did. After all, for these six players, entering this instance was like losing their memories.

007, standing before them, continued, "This is the sign-up sheet. The people who signed it were all planning to play this game, and indeed, these twelve were the ones who ended up participating. However, the game had just started and everyone had just received their roles when the power went out, so the game had to be stopped."

Just as Chu Changge suspected, Gu Mian mused, rubbing his chin.

'Close Your Eyes'—the board game—had to be stopped for some reason, leading to this game escalating into a real-life version.

At this moment, Chu Changge, who was beside them, spoke up, "First, players only know their own identity. This means the three 'ghosts' don't know who the other 'ghosts' are. Since a 'ghost' can kill any player, there's a possibility of 'ghosts' killing other 'ghosts'. Therefore, 'ghosts' will likely be hesitant to act."

"Second, according to rule two, after one player is killed that night, any 'ghost' who kills again will die along with the player they killed. But rule three states that the player count is only tallied after the public vote. This means that before the 03:00 AM vote, the game won't reveal who died that night. Since the 'ghosts' don't know each other's identities, they also won't know if another 'ghost' has already secured a kill before them. This makes it extremely risky for a 'ghost' to kill."

"Lastly, 'civilians' cannot kill other players, but 'ghosts' can kill anyone. An observant 'civilian' could potentially use this to identify a 'ghost'."

"In summary, these rules are quite disadvantageous for those playing as 'ghosts'."

Chu Changge's string of deductions left 007 almost breathless. She found herself in a slight daze, mulling over his words several times, and finally realized—damn, he was absolutely right!

Gu Mian, however, was accustomed to this. He looked at the list before him and asked 007, "Speaking of which..."

Lost in thought, 007 snapped back to reality and looked at Gu Mian. "What is it?"

Gu Mian held up the paper. "Which one is your name? This one?"

He pointed to the name "Lin Qi". Among the twelve names, this was the only one that could correspond to 007's nickname.

007 nodded. "Your names... Gu Mian, that's you, right?"

The name Gu Mian was practically household knowledge; he was nicknamed Gu Sanwan. In this harsh environment, killing Gu Sanwan would earn a hefty sum of Game Coins—enough to make someone who loved money too excited to sleep for three days and nights.

Gu Mian touched his guitar case, suddenly recalling that in this instance, he couldn't just kill someone to silence them.

At this moment, Chu Changge suddenly spoke, "Actually, a game like 'Close Your Eyes' has a certain principle."

A principle? 007 hadn't intended to dwell on Gu Mian's name. Even if he really was Gu Sanwan, she couldn't bring herself to stab the Doctor who had saved her life. Who knew, if he encountered danger in the future, she might even have to risk her own life to save him.

Therefore, 007 was easily drawn in by Chu Changge's words. "What principle?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "The survivor principle. The simplest way to clear this kind of game is for only one survivor to remain. That survivor's faction will definitely be the winning side."

Fatty, beside them, grimaced. "Brother Chu, you make it sound so easy! There are twelve people. One killed at night, one voted out during the day—wouldn't that take at least six days for everyone to be eliminated? And the rules don't allow players to kill each other..."

"No," Chu Changge shook his head. "For example, if it were me, it would only take one day."

007 frowned slightly, listening intently. "How would you win?"

Chu Changge looked at her. His lips parted, and he uttered words that sent a chill down her spine, "Contract killing. Hire someone to kill all of you. I could win right now."

Chapter 350 Close Your Eyes When It's Dark, Open Your Eyes When It's Dusk_1

In an instant, 007 felt like she had fallen into an ice den, vaguely feeling that a murderer could strike her down at any moment.

At this moment, Gu Mian's words pulled 007 back up, "Of course, that's not realistic. I've been with him the whole time after entering the instance. He had no time to hire a murderer."

007 laughed sarcastically, increasingly feeling that the three people in front of her were unreliable.

With them here, can this game really proceed smoothly to the end? 007 couldn't help but doubt.

The school bell had already rung. In the meantime, a few teachers passed by them, all with strange expressions, as if wondering why these students weren't going to class.

However, even within the instance, everyone upheld the fine human virtue of "if it doesn't concern me, I'll stay out of it."

Seeing students who were not from their class, the teachers hastily walked by.

By this time, Gu Mian and the others had moved to a secluded pavilion in the nearby landscaped woods. There were no lights in the woods, and 007 was a bit scared. But seeing there were three other people beside her, she boldly inquired, "What are you doing hiding here?"

In the darkness, Gu Mian spoke, "We plan to wait until the patrol is almost over, then search for other players one classroom at a time."

Upon hearing this, 007 suddenly wondered, "Didn't you meet Yue Nu in the school building?"

Gu Mian remembered that both 007 and Yue Nu were players assigned to Year Two, Class Twenty-Three. But why would they have run into Yue Nu?

Seemingly seeing through Gu Mian's thoughts, 007 then added, "After the last class in the afternoon, she and I went our separate ways to find other players. I searched near the cafeteria entrance, and she searched the deserted school building. You just came out of the school building; she should have run into you by now. How could she not have?"

Gu Mian shook his head. Sorry, but they really hadn't seen her.

007 was thrown into confusion.

Fatty suddenly spoke from the side, "Brother Chu analyzed that there might be someone among us six players who is the 'ghost.' Could it be that Yue Nu mysteriously disappeared to kill people alone?"

007's face hardened. "You mean there could be a 'ghost' among us?"

Chu Changge grunted in affirmation. "I suspect that there is a 'ghost' among the six players. But to protect their identity, everyone's task panel is the same at the beginning. After the 'ghost' figures out the game rules, the task panel will change to 'kill all civilians.' This means the task for one of the four of us might have already changed."

Fatty suddenly felt a chill run down his spine. "Well... my task hasn't changed... Ours should all be the same, right..."

It wasn't possible to bring up the task panel to prove one's innocence right now. Due to game protection, the task panel in this type of instance couldn't be seen by others.

Gu Mian chuckled. "My task has changed to killing all civilians."

Fatty joined in, revealing an awkward yet polite smile.

Chu Changge raised his arm to reveal a digital watch. "But it's only 7:00 PM now. The ghost still has an hour before they can start killing."

The ghost could only kill between 8:00 PM and 3:00 AM the next morning.

Fatty diverted his attention to Chu Changge's wrist. "Where did you get that watch?"

"Stole it from Xu Xingcheng."

"..."

Speaking of Xu Xingcheng, Gu Mian also recalled Zhang Pingfan, whom Xu Xingcheng had asked him about.

Gu Mian, while thinking, turned to 007. "Do you know Zhang Pingfan, one of the twelve people who joined the game?"

Just after Gu Mian spoke, 007 suddenly showed a strange expression.

She looked at Gu Mian with an enigmatic gaze, lowered her voice, and said, "I was just about to tell you all about that. Come with me..."

With that, 007 quickly exited the small pavilion. Gu Mian followed.

This Zhang Pingfan must be something special, judging by 007's and Xu Xingcheng's reactions.

Chu Changge and Fatty also followed.

Not many people were out and about on campus at night. 007 didn't lead them far. Instead, she brought them to a signpost standing under a streetlight. Under the light of the streetlight, Gu Mian could see the notice posted on the signpost.

****ANNOUNCEMENT****

Zhang Pingfan from Year Two, Class Nine, was reported missing on September 24th. Students who have seen Zhang Pingfan are urged to report to a teacher immediately.

Missing? One of the twelve players is missing?

Gu Mian furrowed his brows.

007 began, "I heard from Li Wentao and Pan Yue that Zhang Pingfan regularly skipped classes. He'd climb over the school wall and often disappear. His parents were used to it, so they didn't pay much mind. But this time, he's been missing for a rather long time. He usually returned after skipping only one or two classes."

Chu Changge's voice came from behind Gu Mian, "Today is September 25th. Zhang Pingfan has been missing for a day."

"Hmm," 007 nodded slightly. "Normally, I wouldn't care if this Zhang Pingfan disappeared for a few days. But isn't the timing a bit too coincidental now? We just played that game last week, and this week he's missing. Could he have already been killed by the ghost?"

Fatty interjected, "That's not necessarily true. We suspect a real ghost might have infiltrated this game. Zhang Pingfan might have died before we played the game last week and then participated in the game with the identity of a real ghost."

007 had also said the game was interrupted only after everyone's roles were confirmed. By that time, the ghost role had already been assigned.

The mysteriously missing Zhang Pingfan, the enigmatically elusive Yue Nu...

Among these twelve people... who was the ghost?

Gu Mian stared at the list in his hand.

Just then, he heard a rustling sound from behind.

It sounded like feet gently scraping against the ground. Chu Changge and the others heard it too.

They quickly turned to see a frightened-looking female student standing behind them in the dim light.

Gu Mian couldn't quite describe his feelings at that moment.

He didn't understand why he kept running into acquaintances in this instance. Was it because instances became more difficult the further one progressed, resulting in fewer suitable teammates? However, this girl in front of him didn't seem like a good match for him...

Upon seeing the unfamiliar girl, 007 instinctively tried to open the girl's player panel and was surprised when she actually succeeded.

The girl's game nickname was "Keke."

Before 007 could react, Keke, who was standing not far away, showed a somewhat pleased expression. "So, it's you!"

So, it's them? 007 instinctively took a step back, only then realizing Keke wasn't talking to her, but to the three men beside her.

Gu Mian remembered Keke as a player from the hide-and-seek instance. Speaking of the hide-and-seek instance, Gu Mian recalled Ji Bie Li, who had been mysteriously killed. The identity of Ji Bie Li's murderer remained an unsolved mystery to this day.

Seemingly aware that it wasn't the time for pleasantries, Keke, after her brief moment of happiness, got straight to the point. "I'm a student in Year Two, Class Nine. Four others from my class also played 'Close Your Eyes' with me. I managed to get the names of the others who played the game from them... Since I only knew their names and not what they looked like, I was afraid of exposing myself. So, I thought of checking the Wall of Fame downstairs for their photos. I didn't expect to run into you all as soon as I came down."

The Wall of Fame, true to its name, displayed photos of model students.

Displaying photos of model students in a glass display case, with their names and classes listed below, was a mark of honor.

It hadn't occurred to Gu Mian that Keke would think of identifying people this way.

Gu Mian's eyebrow twitched. He didn't dwell on the Wall of Fame, instead focusing on "Year Two, Class Nine."

"You're in the same class as Zhang Pingfan?" Gu Mian asked. The mysteriously missing Zhang Pingfan was indeed from Year Two, Class Nine.

Keke paused for a moment before replying, "Yes. The others in our class who participated in this game are Zhang Pingfan, Li Yibai, Yuan Qinghua, and Guo Jimei."

Year Two, Class Five: Gu Mian, Chu Changge, Fatty.

Year Two, Class Nine: Keke, Zhang Pingfan, Li Yibai, Guo Jimei, Yuan Qinghua.

Year Two, Class Twenty-Three: 007, Yue Nu, Li Wentao, Pan Yue.

All twelve individuals were accounted for.

These people were distributed among three classes. Could there be some pattern related to their identities?

As they silently mulled this over, Keke, standing in the dim light, suddenly whispered, "I've played this type of game before. Isn't the ghost usually played by one of the players? So, among us... there should be a ghost, right?"

Though her voice was innocent and harmless, her words sent a shiver down their spines.

Is there really a ghost... among us?

Chu Changge silently raised his wristwatch. "It's 7:40 now."

In twenty minutes, the real game would begin.