

Collapse 371

Chapter 371 Life_1

"Who?"

Yue Nu quickly looked behind her.

Behind her was a long, assembled table and scattered stools. Further ahead, a classroom door stood half-open. Wind gusted in from the corridor, making the wooden door sway slightly.

Directly opposite the open door was a window, but no one was outside.

The weather was good today. Through the window, one could see the azure sky dotted with large, fluffy white clouds. The entire sky exuded warmth, a cozy appeal that almost made Yue Nu forget it was already late September in the instance.

Yue Nu gazed at the blue sky and white clouds for a while before hesitantly turning back to continue pushing the phone into the radiator.

This time, she didn't dare to be slow. She quickly pushed the phone into the crevice, double-checked that no one could spot it, then turned and hurried away.

She had a strange feeling, as if her every move was being watched.

Perhaps it's just an illusion... Yue Nu felt a shiver down her spine and quickened her pace.

She soon returned to the dormitory building.

From afar, Yue Nu saw 007 and Guo Jimei standing by the dormitory building. Since almost all students had already returned to their dormitories, the two of them were particularly conspicuous.

She's back... Before Yue Nu could get close, she saw 007 looking her way. 007's expression seemed a bit odd, and Guo Jimei also had an indescribably strange air about her.

Yue Nu also felt something was amiss.

Only 007 and Guo Jimei are downstairs now. Where has everyone else gone?

With this thought, she quickly jogged over.

Seeing Yue Nu approach, 007 was the first to ask, "Did you get Pan Yue's diary?"

Yue Nu shook her head. "No, I couldn't find it..."

"What a coincidence," 007 tilted his head up slightly. "We couldn't find the paper Guo Jimei used for voting either. We've searched their entire dorm room."

Couldn't find it? Yue Nu glanced at Guo Jimei beside him.

Guo Jimei's face was somewhat pale. She quickly explained, "I left it on my bed this morning and didn't touch it. I don't know why it's gone..."

Yue Nu frowned at Guo Jimei, then turned back to 007. "Setting that aside for now, where are the others?"

007 shook his head. "I don't know. When we came downstairs, the five people who were here had all vanished."

"All vanished?" Yue Nu was rather surprised.

Just then, she remembered the feeling of being watched while hiding the phone. A sense of terror welled up inside her. She looked at 007 again. "By the way, have you two been together this whole time?"

"Yes, why?" 007 seemed puzzled.

Yue Nu shook her head slightly. "It's nothing..."

So, the person spying on me then was someone other than 007 and Guo Jimei. That included Gu Mian, Chu Changge, Keke, Li Yibai, Yuan Qinghua, and the persistently absent Pan Yue and Zhang Pingfan.

And the extra vote for Li Wentao in the first round was cast by someone not in the building last night, quite possibly a ghost. This list included Yuan Qinghua, Guo Jimei, and Zhang Pingfan.

There were two subtle overlaps between these lists of names.

One was Zhang Pingfan, who had been missing for days yet was still alive.

The other was Yuan Qinghua, Zhang Pingfan's class president from the same class.

These two... They're highly suspicious, Yue Nu thought.

Meanwhile, Guo Jimei was still muttering her defense, "Maybe someone cleaned up and took the paper. Otherwise, it's impossible that we couldn't find it after searching the entire dorm room."

Yue Nu looked up. Guo Jimei, standing before her, was also highly suspicious, but this suspiciousness seemed almost too blatant.

Although doubtful, Yue Nu still ranked Guo Jimei's level of suspicion below that of Zhang Pingfan and Yuan Qinghua.

At this point, 007 frowned and asked, "What should we do? Go look for them?"

Yue Nu nodded slightly. "Yes, we search. The school isn't that big. Everyone's on their lunch break now, so there won't be many people outside the dormitories. It should be easy to find people." She paused. "Also, let's split up and then meet in that classroom. We're more scattered than ever right now. Ghosts can't kill during the day, so it won't be too dangerous even if we're alone. Remember, whether we find them or not, we all meet back in that classroom when the bell rings for the end of the second afternoon class."

007 nodded solemnly.

「Meanwhile」

Gu Mian was trailing Zhang Pingfan from a distance.

Indeed, while they were waiting for 007 and the others, they had caught sight of Zhang Pingfan. Gu Mian's group naturally wouldn't recognize him; it was Li Yibai and Yuan Qinghua who identified him instantly.

Since Zhang Pingfan wasn't far, an excited Li Yibai immediately led them to charge towards him.

Unexpectedly, Zhang Pingfan turned and fled, as if burdened by a guilty conscience. Gu Mian and the others, of course, weren't about to let him escape.

However, reality seldom lives up to expectations. Zhang Pingfan was in excellent physical condition and ran incredibly fast.

Gu Mian, sprinting at the forefront with his guitar, managed to keep up. But when he glanced back, there wasn't a single person in sight.

The more delicately built members of their group had been left behind.

Zhang Pingfan sprinted for a long time before finally stopping in a corner of the sports field, panting heavily. He kept looking around, as if afraid someone might catch up.

Gu Mian initially wanted to rush forward and grab Zhang Pingfan. But before he could enact this malicious plan, a familiar face appeared in his line of sight, heading straight for Zhang Pingfan.

It was Xu Xingcheng, Gu Mian's deskmate, who was exceptionally interested in the game they were playing but wasn't one of the twelve participants.

Gu Mian halted his move to apprehend Zhang Pingfan, hiding in the shadows to observe them silently.

Xu Xingcheng and Zhang Pingfan seemed to have a prearranged meeting. The moment they saw each other, they converged.

Xu Xingcheng looked furious. As soon as they met, he began speaking angrily, gesticulating wildly.

Gu Mian was too far away to hear.

Zhang Pingfan remained silent, merely keeping his head bowed and nodding occasionally, looking extremely guilty.

Xu Xingcheng seemed to feel that words weren't enough and even reached out to grab Zhang Pingfan.

At this, Zhang Pingfan finally resisted. He suddenly wrenched his hand free from Xu Xingcheng's grasp, sprinted towards the railing at the edge of the sports field, vaulted over it, and fled the school grounds, vanishing without a trace.

Gu Mian, hidden in the shadows, stroked his chin. Is this Zhang Pingfan... really the ghost?

「At this moment」

Keke was wandering alone near the cafeteria.

The earlier chase after Zhang Pingfan had scattered the five of them, and Keke was now searching for the others alone.

Just then, she suddenly saw 007 approaching from a distance.

Keke stopped and turned, intending to go over.

Just then, however, she spotted Chu Changge approaching from the direction of the sports field.

Chu Changge was also walking directly towards 007. At the same time, 007 noticed Chu Changge heading his way. The two rapidly approached each other.

Keke hesitated for a moment. Instead of approaching them, she quickly slipped behind a few trees in the landscaped area.

She saw Chu Changge and 007 meet not far from her; Keke could even hear their voices.

First came 007's indistinct voice, as if about to ask something, "You..."

Then Chu Changge's voice, slightly clearer, "Help me with something."

"What?" 007 sounded a little confused.

"Let's talk as we walk."

Immediately, the sound of their footsteps followed. Keke listened carefully; they seemed to be moving further away.

Listening to the fading footsteps, Keke slowly peeked out, looking in the direction they had gone.

But as she watched their retreating figures, her scalp suddenly prickled intensely.

Chu Changge's head had swiveled a hundred and eighty degrees, and he was staring at her with an eerie posture!

Keke froze, unable to move.

An unknown amount of time passed before she saw Chu Changge turn his head forward again, continuing to walk as if he hadn't seen a thing.

Chapter 372 The Villain's Gathering_1

Even though Gu Mian was separated from the others, his mind was still alert.

The others must have chosen a place to regroup... Probably the classroom we used for the game. Gu Mian thought, as he began heading towards the classroom.

It was now two in the afternoon, and everyone's lunch break had passed.

Gu Mian blended into the crowd, following the main group towards the teaching building.

When Gu Mian returned to that classroom, he saw Chu Changge, 007, Li Yibai, and Guo Jimei already seated inside.

Gu Mian first glanced at 007, his eyes asking if he had found Guo Jimei's voting slip.

007 understood Gu Mian's meaning and gently shook his head. "I didn't find it. When I went downstairs again, I'd lost sight of all of you. I heard from Meiren Chu that you saw Zhang Pingfan and went after him. By the way, Yue Nu said she went looking for Pan Yue's diary, but she didn't find anything when she returned."

The mysterious disappearance of Guo Jimei's voting slip made her identity even more elusive.

Hearing this, Gu Mian turned to Guo Jimei. "So, Guo Jimei, you came back with Lin Qi?"

Guo Jimei immediately shook her head. "When you all disappeared, Yue Nu, Lin Qi, and I decided to split up to find you. But I was scared to be alone. Luckily, I bumped into Li Yibai. We stayed together, and then I got a bit tired, so Li Yibai and I returned to the classroom first."

Li Yibai, who was sitting next to 007, nodded at Guo Jimei's words, confirming her account.

So, the first ones to return to this classroom were Guo Jimei and Li Yibai.

007 picked up where Guo Jimei left off. "While I was out looking for people, I ran into Meiren Chu. He said some of you might have already returned to the classroom, so we came back together."

Just as 007 was speaking, Gu Mian suddenly heard footsteps outside the door.

He looked out and saw Keke already standing at the entrance.

She quickly scanned the people in the room before walking in. "You've all returned, huh? I figured you'd come back here, so I thought I'd check."

As soon as Keke finished speaking, 007 immediately asked, "Did you run into anyone else outside?"

Keke paused slightly, then shook her head. "No..."

Gu Mian looked away from Keke.

So now, only Yue Nu and Yuan Qinghua were still outside alone.

They didn't waste time.

Chu Changge immediately broke the brief silence. "So, did any of you manage to catch Zhang Pingfan?"

007 and Guo Jimei had come from the dormitory, so naturally, they hadn't participated in the chase.

The only ones in the room who had chased Zhang Pingfan were Gu Mian, Chu Changge, Keke, and Li Yibai.

And Chu Changge's tone clearly suggested he hadn't caught him.

Li Yibai spoke first. "That kid, I don't know what's gotten into him. He runs as soon as he spots anyone, and damn, he's fast. I couldn't catch him."

Keke also shook her head slightly. "I was left far behind. I didn't see anything at all."

Hearing that, Li Yibai turned to Gu Mian. "I saw you running at the front. Did you catch him?"

Gu Mian spread his hands slightly. "If I'd caught him, I would've brought him back by now."

He paused before continuing, "I was right behind him the whole time, so I saw him jump the fence by the playground and leave the school."

Gu Mian didn't reveal that Zhang Pingfan had met Xu Xingcheng.

A daring idea was swirling in his mind.

Just then, two more sets of footsteps sounded from the corridor.

Several of them turned to look at the door and saw the absent Yue Nu and Yuan Qinghua arriving together.

Yue Nu seemed surprised to find so many people in the classroom. With a puzzled expression, she said, "I thought we'd have to search longer to gather everyone. I didn't expect you all to be so clever."

Yuan Qinghua, beside her, added, "After we were separated, I searched outside for a while. Then I met Yue Nu, and we came back together."

Finally, everyone who could be found had gathered.

Yue Nu quickly walked over, pulled out a chair, and sat down. "I heard from Yuan Qinghua on the way here that you saw Zhang Pingfan. He ran, so you chased him and got separated."

This saved them the trouble of explaining everything to Yue Nu.

Gu Mian nodded. "That's right. When Zhang Pingfan appeared, there were still some students outside. We lost each other in the chaos of the chase... Of course, we didn't catch Zhang Pingfan in the end. He climbed the fence and left the school."

At this, Yue Nu's expression became strange. "His running off the moment he saw us is rather baffling. If he didn't have a guilty conscience, he wouldn't be that scared, right?"

Li Yibai suddenly interjected, "Speaking of a guilty conscience... there's only one thing that fits that description right now, isn't there? Wang Pan..."

Wang Pan's body had been found in the building last night; he had died a gruesome death.

No one yet knew who was behind it.

At that moment, a cold wind blew in from the window.

Keke seemed to feel cold. She walked a couple of steps to the bedside and closed the window.

"Li Wentao received an extra vote last night. It could have been cast by Zhang Pingfan..." Li Yibai continued.

"Indeed," Yue Nu nodded. "Did any of you notice anything unusual about Zhang Pingfan before he disappeared?"

Li Yibai shook his head. "Pan Yue and Zhang Pingfan were close. If she were here, we could ask her. But now, who knows where she's gone."

Pan Yue had been traumatized last night and had fled in a frenzy.

But it was also possible she had used this opportunity to act alone.

Yue Nu continued, "So, if we don't have a definite target to vote for tonight, we can vote for Zhang Pingfan. But..."

But what? Gu Mian looked towards Yue Nu.

"But I have an idea that might help us find at least one ghost tonight."

As soon as Yue Nu said this, almost everyone turned to look at her.

Seeing that everyone's gaze had turned to her, Yue Nu continued, "We know there's a rule in this game: civilians can't kill other players, while a ghost can kill any player during the killing phase."

Chapter 373 Yue Nu's Paper Square_1

007 frowned slightly.

Gu Mian also looked thoughtful as he turned his gaze towards Yue Nu.

He remembered when Chu Changge had first received the game rules from 007, she had brought up the very point Yue Nu was now making.

Civilians cannot kill, but a ghost can kill anyone.

Civilians could use this rule to identify the ghost.

And now, it seemed Yue Nu intended to start using this rule.

She spoke up, "Setting aside Zhang Pingfan and Pan Yue, who aren't here, there are eight of us present. We eight can use the rule 'Civilians cannot kill other players; ghosts can kill any player' to find the ghost hiding among us."

Keke, who sat by the window deep in thought, glanced over, seemingly anticipating Yue Nu's idea. "Are you saying... we should use this rule to actively attack other players?"

Li Yibai looked at Yue Nu, somewhat shocked.

Yue Nu continued, "Exactly. The rules state civilians cannot kill other players. So, if you're a civilian, you can't kill anyone. Even if you try to stab another player with a knife, you won't succeed. Conversely, any player who **can** stab and kill another after eight in the evening is definitely a ghost..."

Yuan Qinghua, who was closest to Yue Nu, widened her eyes slightly. "Are you suggesting that, once the time comes, we should... stab one another?"

Yue Nu paused briefly before resuming, "Well... essentially, that's the idea. If a civilian poses a life-threatening risk to another player, the game will definitely intervene."

So, those who could not stab another to death were civilians, and those who could were ghosts.

Upon hearing Yue Nu's words, Li Yibai shot up from his seat. "No! Absolutely not! This is preposterous! If the game prevents civilians from killing, then who knows how it does it? By directly eliminating any civilian who tries to kill?"

Before last night, none of those present had taken the term "eliminated" very seriously.

But after witnessing Li Wentao being voted out and eliminated, none of them could ignore the word any longer.

To be eliminated meant death.

Li Yibai could still vividly recall the grotesque, twisted form of Li Wentao's body just before his death, and the tears streaming from his eyes.

At this point, Gu Mian also spoke up, "I remember in games I've played before, people who broke the rules would be directly eliminated, right? So, I guess the game prevents civilians from killing by directly eliminating any civilian who is about to kill someone."

007 also turned to Yue Nu. "Yes, this method shouldn't be attempted lightly."

Yue Nu's brow tightened for a moment, then relaxed. "I suspected you might not agree with my idea, but that's alright... Just remember that only civilians cannot kill other players. If anyone sees someone kill another person, then that person is definitely a ghost."

She paused a moment before continuing, "So, I suggest we all stick together tonight. If we all stay together, the ghost won't dare to show itself and kill."

Keke frowned. "We were all together last night, but then the ghost split us up. Even if we want to stay together, there's no guarantee we'll succeed."

Yue Nu nodded slightly. "Although I wasn't with you last night, Lin Qi told me everything that happened. The ghost will separate people after 8 PM."

007 and Yue Nu were classmates, so they had more opportunities to interact. Thus, 007 had recounted most of what happened the previous night to Yue Nu.

Yue Nu said, lowering her voice, "If we do get separated, I hope everyone, no matter where you end up, will try to return to this classroom and regroup. Ideally, we should all be gathered here by the time of the second vote at 3 AM tonight."

"But that's impossible!" Li Yibai exclaimed anxiously. "Just like yesterday, we were all transported a great distance from the school and couldn't even go downstairs. There's no way we could have made it back to this classroom under those circumstances."

If it wanted to, the ghost had a thousand ways to prevent them from regrouping.

Yue Nu spoke to soothe the agitated Li Yibai. "I know. That's why I'm just asking you to try your best to return here before the vote at 3 AM. If you can't make it back, then you'll just have to vote as you see fit. I won't be able to help."

007 seemed to detect a hidden meaning in Yue Nu's words. She hesitated for a moment before asking, "Are you implying that if we manage to gather here before 3 AM, you'll provide some clues for the vote?"

Yue Nu nodded. "After we were scattered at noon today, I discovered that this game has usable items."

Usable items? Gu Mian frowned.

He knew that instance players could use special items, but he hadn't noticed any available items in this game, and the rules didn't mention them either. Was Yue Nu bluffing, or did such things truly exist? Everyone had dispersed at noon today. Yue Nu was the last to return to the classroom, giving her plenty of free time. Perhaps she found the "item" she mentioned during that period.

Li Yibai immediately asked, "You found an item? What is it?"

Yue Nu shook her head slightly. "I can't disclose it right now. But with this item, I will certainly be able to identify one of the three ghosts tonight..."

As she said this, Gu Mian suddenly interrupted, "Since you've said all that, the ghost's target tonight will definitely be you. There's a high probability you'll die tonight, so you won't even get to use the item in your hand. You don't actually believe there isn't a ghost among the eight of us here, do you? Why would you say something like this now?"

Yue Nu was momentarily taken aback. She didn't know the identities of the others, but she was certain of her own: she was a civilian. This instance was a bit unique; it was the only one she'd experienced where the mission wouldn't necessarily fail even if a player died. Because even if she died, as long as the remaining living civilians managed to vote out all the ghosts, the instance mission would be considered complete. If the surviving civilians were clever enough, she could win the instance even as a corpse. Yue Nu could tell there were a few enigmatic individuals among the instance players this time, but she couldn't determine if they were human or ghost. Therefore, she hadn't planned on just coasting to victory as a corpse. Even though she had said such things in front of everyone, she didn't intend to be eliminated tonight. At the very least, she had to survive until the next round.

Yue Nu thought to herself for a moment, then said aloud, "Of course, I don't want to die. So, today, I'll randomly give this thing I'm holding to one of you here."

As she spoke, she took out seven nearly identical small paper squares from her pocket. No one could tell if anything was wrapped inside them. "The 'item' I mentioned is among these," she continued. "I will distribute them randomly among you now. This way, even I won't know whose hands the 'item' will ultimately fall into."

Chapter 374 The name is very precious, Gu Bong Bong_1

When Yue Nu mentioned the random distribution, the atmosphere became tense.

Guo Jimei spoke first, "How can this be? If this item were to fall into the hands of a ghost, wouldn't they be able to use it to identify one of their own?"

Li Yibai looked at Guo Jimei. "You can shut up now. Lin Qi didn't find the voting slip in your dormitory. The seventh vote for Li Wentao was most likely cast by you. You probably followed us last night, voted, then threw the slip away and pretended nothing happened. As it stands, you're the prime suspect for being the ghost. So, quit blabbering."

Hearing this, Guo Jimei's face reddened. "I already said I didn't vote last night, and I have no idea why the slip is missing! The voting slip disappearing is actually disadvantageous for me, because its presence would prove I didn't vote!"

"Maybe, maybe she..." Guo Jimei shifted her gaze towards Yuan Qinghua as she spoke.

At this time, Yuan Qinghua also turned her head. Their eyes met.

Seeing what was happening, Gu Mian slightly furrowed his brows.

Realizing Yuan Qinghua was looking at her, Guo Jimei seemed scared. She twisted her neck and continued, "And my opposition to Yue Nu randomly distributing this 'prop' is also for everyone's good. Compared to giving it to someone whose identity—whether they're a civilian or a ghost—is unknown, I think it's better if it stays in Yue Nu's hands."

At that moment, Gu Mian abruptly spoke up, "Yue Nu did the right thing. We all know that this 'prop' is in her possession. If she continues to hold it, she might get killed tonight before she can even use it. But if she randomly gives it to someone now, the ghost won't know who holds the item that can reveal identities and will hesitate when selecting a victim tonight..."

Gu Mian didn't voice the rest of his thoughts.

The ghost wants to kill the person holding this 'prop,' yet it doesn't know who actually has it. Therefore, it will definitely try to test others, and in doing so, the ghost is very likely to expose itself. Making the prop's distribution public could lead to a double gain tonight: a ghost might expose itself through its actions, and another's identity might be revealed by the prop. The benefits of this far outweigh those of keeping the prop hidden.

However, the risk would also increase.

Of course, there was another possibility... After all, Yue Nu was alone for a while just now. Who knows if she really has this so-called 'prop'?

Gu Mian stroked his chin. That 'prop' might just be something Yue Nu fabricated. She could be using this to observe if anyone acts suspiciously, or perhaps to execute some plan.

As for what plan...

Guo Jimei stopped talking, perhaps conceding that what Gu Mian said made sense.

Yue Nu stacked the seven small paper squares she held and pinched them between her thumb and forefinger. She looked at the other seven people in the room. Among them, who could the ghost be...?

The most conspicuous was the green-clad doctor with a guitar on his back, named Gu Mian—a rather expensive-sounding name.

She didn't understand why he was so particularly fond of his guitar; he didn't even put it into his inventory, just carried it on his back like that, apparently not finding it tiring at all.

At that moment, he was stroking his chin, seemingly lost in thought.

Just then, Yue Nu saw Gu Mian raise his head and look towards her. She hurriedly averted her gaze to look at the others.

Meiren Chu was sitting in the seat behind Gu Mian. She didn't quite understand why a grown man would have such a strange name.

His face was expressionless. Due to the angle of the light, Meiren Chu's glasses reflected it, making it hard for her to see his eyes clearly.

Sitting opposite them was Yuan Qinghua, the class monitor of Second Year, Class 9—the same class as Zhang Pingfan, who was still missing but confirmed to be alive.

Due to the equipment room incident, the relationship between Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei had become very distant. This distance was largely one-sided, coming from Guo Jimei; Yuan Qinghua, on the other hand, seemed to still want to reconcile with Guo Jimei, who had been scared out of her wits.

Currently, Guo Jimei stood in the corner farthest from Yuan Qinghua. 007 was beside her, apparently deep in thought, and Li Yibai had been by 007's side the entire time. It was clear he and Lin Qi were very close, though the Lin Qi of now was not the same person she once was.

Keke, who seemed clean and harmless, leaned against a window not far from Yue Nu.

When Yue Nu saw where Keke was standing, she frowned. Keke was blocking the spot where she had put her phone.

Seeming to notice Yue Nu looking at her, Keke turned. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Yue Nu quickly said, "It's nothing. Let's distribute this random 'prop' now."

She raised her hand as she spoke. "Since my original intention is to prevent the ghost from knowing who has the 'prop,' please don't open it right away or tell anyone else what you received."

Seeing that everyone agreed, Yue Nu slowly rose to her feet.

First, she approached Keke, who was closest to her.

After receiving the item, Keke immediately clenched it tightly in her hand.

Next was Yuan Qinghua, then Gu Mian, and then Meiren Chu.

Finally, it was the three in the corner: 007, Li Yibai, and Guo Jimei.

Yue Nu nervously observed everyone.

She saw that no one opened theirs, except for the green-clothed doctor, whose expression was somewhat audacious. He casually held the small paper square between two fingers, looking completely indifferent.

It was as if he didn't care at all what he was holding.

Yue Nu even suspected that if it weren't for saving face, this doctor might casually toss the light little square into a nearby trash can.

"Alright," Yue Nu said, taking a step back. "The items have all been distributed. Everyone must wait until you are alone or absolutely sure no one else can see before you look."

Time flew quickly.

The light outside the window had turned a pale yellow. The sun could set at any moment, classes were about to end, and the daily marathon scramble for dinner was about to begin again.

After Yue Nu finished distributing the items, the classroom lapsed into silence for a moment.

Everyone seemed to be contemplating how to discreetly check the item in their hand.

But this rare silence was soon broken—a cheerful bell rang out.

This was probably the most refreshing sound of the day.

At the signal of the bell, hundreds of students rushed out, the sound of their shoes scraping against the cement floors echoing throughout the entire school, clearly audible even in Gu Mian's classroom.

They didn't have to participate in this scramble for dinner, but an even more terrifying contest awaited them after eight o'clock tonight.

Amidst the background cacophony of hundreds of students' shoes scraping the ground, Yuan Qinghua hesitantly asked, "So, what should we do next?"

At this moment, Li Yibai, who was beside 007, suddenly spoke up, "I say... aren't you all hungry? I've been holding it in for a long time now, but it seems like... none of you look very hungry?"

Chapter 375 Shit in the Sugar_1

Chu Changge and the others were instance players whose bodies had been strengthened. Even if their Attribute Points hadn't been directly applied to physical enhancement, after so many instances, they wouldn't solely be thinking about food.

Although Gu Mian hadn't undergone strengthening, he had always been indifferent about eating. He never felt hungry when he ate less, nor bloated when he ate more.

But the NPCs in this instance couldn't say the same.

Especially Li Yibai; he hadn't eaten dinner the previous night, had toiled outside all night, and still hadn't eaten anything.

Gu Mian even suspected he hadn't had a chance to drink water during that time.

On the other hand, Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei, both NPCs in the instance, had eaten breakfast, so they didn't feel as hungry as Li Yibai.

The sound of footsteps running towards food outside the window seemed to make Li Yibai even hungrier.

He clutched his stomach with his hands, looking very uncomfortable.

Yue Nu was the first to speak. "I had breakfast at home this morning, so I'm not hungry yet. But you guys who didn't sleep last night must be starving, right?"

Of course, she wouldn't say something like, We're instance players, our bodies are incredibly fit, we don't need to eat, even though it was the truth.

On the surface, they had to maintain appearances, lest they appear too special and be voted out by the NPCs as ghosts.

She continued, "Why don't we head to the cafeteria first? The ghost will likely make a move tonight. I'm afraid we won't have the strength to act if we don't eat."

At the thought of what might happen after eight o'clock that night, everyone present grew somber.

But Yuan Qinghua, sitting opposite Gu Mian, didn't seem so grave. Perhaps because she hadn't been there the previous night, she couldn't yet comprehend that level of fear.

However, Li Yibai seemed too hungry to muster any strength to move.

After a brief discussion, they decided to send a few people to buy food and bring it back, while the others would remain in the classroom.

Gu Mian, being one of those who had been up all night, also feigned exhaustion, sitting in place and waiting for the others to return with food.

It was mealtime.

Yue Nu, Yuan Qinghua, and 007 went to buy the food. Guo Jimei, seemingly distrustful of Yuan Qinghua handling the food, went along as well.

The others, including Gu Mian, remained in the classroom.

It was five-thirty in the evening.

There were still two and a half hours until eight o'clock.

Gu Mian noticed Li Yibai squatting alone in a corner of the room, apparently fiddling with something in his hands.

He didn't need to guess; he knew it was the item Yue Nu had distributed to them earlier.

Gu Mian had already opened the small paper cube to inspect it. There was nothing inside; it was just a blank piece of paper folded into a small square, without even a single punctuation mark.

Chu Changge, next to him, seemed to have never unwrapped the item from the start; at least Gu Mian hadn't seen him do it.

Keke, standing by the window with her back to them, had also been tinkering with something alone for a while; it was unknown if she had discovered anything.

In short, when she turned around, Gu Mian didn't notice any particular expression on her face.

Li Yibai, after staying in the corner for a good while, seemed to be done. He put the item into his pocket, then turned and walked towards the table, his face showing no particular excitement.

Gu Mian couldn't analyze whether either of these two had found something significant.

Seeing that both of them had finished, Gu Mian finally had an opportunity to speak. "With Guo Jimei and Yuan Qinghua gone, there's something I want to say..."

"What is it?" Li Yibai, who had just sat down on a bench not far away, turned his head in surprise upon hearing this.

Keke also shifted her gaze to Gu Mian. "Are you going to talk about something related to those two? While they're not here?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Yes, it's related to them. Don't you find those two exceedingly strange? Since this morning, they've caused such a commotion. Guo Jimei insists she saw a ghost in broad daylight, but we all know ghosts pose no threat to us during the day. Yet Guo Jimei is adamant she saw Yuan Qinghua transform into a ghost."

Li Yibai also voiced his confusion. "Exactly. If she's telling the truth, then why would that ghost pop out in broad daylight? Just to give people a scare?"

"I guess it might be to confirm identities," Gu Mian suddenly said.

"Confirm identities?" Li Yibai repeated, puzzled.

"Precisely," Gu Mian affirmed with a nod. "The three ghosts don't know each other's identities. To avoid accidentally killing their own, they'll definitely try their best to probe everyone else's identity."

Li Yibai still didn't understand. "If the ghost needs to investigate others' identities, why would it jump out in broad daylight to scare people?"

"Think about it," Gu Mian continued. "In this game, if you were a ghost, forced to kill cautiously because you don't know the other two ghosts' identities, what would your reaction be if you discovered another ghost in broad daylight?"

"I'd be... happy..." Li Yibai said, struggling with the words. "Unless that ghost appeared before me in a particularly nasty form..."

He paused again, as if pondering something. "No, even if the ghost appeared in a very nasty form, I wouldn't scream like Guo Jimei did all the way from one end of the corridor to the other... At most, I'd yelp once, and then, realizing the situation, quickly shut up..."

At this point, Li Yibai seemed to have a realization. "Are you saying the ghost appeared during the day because it wanted to determine our identities by observing our reactions to it?"

"Exactly," Gu Mian confirmed.

And the ghosts in this game were very selective about their targets. If it chose to scare Chu Changge, regardless of whether Chu Changge was human or ghost, he would maintain his "unflappable even if Mount Tai collapsed before him" poker face.

If it scared me... Gu Mian mused. Perhaps I'd be treated to an unexpected, beautiful guitar performance?

Just then, Keke's voice came from the side. "If that's the case, doesn't that mean Yuan Qinghua is a ghost?"

"Not necessarily," Chu Changge interjected. "First, what we've been discussing is merely a hypothesis, based on the assumption that 'Guo Jimei is telling the truth.' In reality, what she said might not be true at all."

"Second, even if Guo Jimei is telling the truth, do you remember Li Wentao from last night? Keke, last night you and Pan Yue also saw Li Wentao, who was suspected of being a ghost, but it turned out he wasn't; the ghost was someone else."

Keke fell silent for a moment before asking, "Are you saying ghosts... can disguise themselves? Disguise themselves as other people to interfere with us?"

"Precisely," Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses. "Even if Guo Jimei is telling the truth, what she saw might have been a ghost disguised as Yuan Qinghua."

Gu Mian glanced at Chu Changge. "Speaking of which, I don't recall ghosts having disguise abilities in the games of this type I've played."

Li Yibai flinched slightly. "The games like this I played before didn't involve real deaths either. Anything could happen now. We should be careful..."

Gu Mian retracted his gaze. "Returning to the topic," he said, "I'm bringing them up because I suspect one of them is a ghost."

Keke turned to Gu Mian. "What?"

"As I said earlier," Gu Mian explained, "if Guo Jimei isn't lying, it means a ghost was trying to determine others' identities by scaring them. When Guo Jimei saw the ghost, all six of us were together; there was no opportunity for one of us to be the culprit."

"If we exclude Guo Jimei, then the ghost that did the scaring must be among Yuan Qinghua, Zhang Pingfan, and Pan Yue."

"And if Guo Jimei was lying, then she is very likely one of the three ghosts. You all know that in these games, ghosts will do their utmost to make their identity seem like that of a civilian. How do they do that? Guo Jimei provided an example. A poor girl frightened by a ghost—if it weren't for her inability to produce evidence that she didn't vote last night, anyone would think she was a pitiful civilian."

Li Yibai looked partly enlightened, partly confused. "Based on what you said before, I thought Yuan Qinghua was the ghost. But now, it seems more like Guo Jimei..."

Gu Mian continued, "The main reason that makes me certain the ghost is one of Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei is the voting slip in Yuan Qinghua's hand..."

Just then, they heard footsteps approaching from the corridor.

Chapter 376 Poison in Feces_1

"We're back." 007's voice came from the hallway.

Their voices reached the room before they did.

Gu Mian and the others had no choice but to pause their conversation.

Although Li Yibai seemed eager to ask Yuan Qinghua what exactly was wrong with the ballot, he held his tongue as Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei had already reached the corridor.

The first to step into the classroom was 007. Holding her plastic bag, she looked at the huddled group of Gu Mian and the others and asked with a hint of perplexity, "What are you guys discussing?"

Li Yibai opened his mouth as if he wanted to share his recent observations with his childhood friend, only to close it again, "Nothing much."

By this time, Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei had reached the doorway. A considerable distance separated the two of them, and Yue Nu was also there.

Guo Jimei pulled Yue Nu close to her side, distancing her from Yuan Qinghua.

The four girls entered, each carrying two plastic bags. Gu Mian glanced into the bags; they were filled with food that didn't look particularly appetizing.

Yue Nu moved quickly. Upon entering, she first glanced at the clock hanging above the blackboard at the back of the classroom.

Even though the classroom was unused, there was still a clock hanging on the wall.

It was already ten past six.

She put her bag on the desk in front of Gu Mian, "In less than two hours, the second night will begin. We might get separated. While eating, let's continue the discussion..."

As she said this, she seemed to recall something and pulled out a few thumb-sized flashlights from her pocket, "Oh yes, we are likely to end up in pitch-black places tonight, so we bought a few flashlights from the campus supermarket. They didn't have any big ones, but these should do."

Yue Nu distributed the small flashlights to the others while speaking, then picked up a pair of disposable chopsticks and shoveled a few token mouthfuls of food into her mouth, "At the moment, there are still ten of us alive, three of whom are ghosts, and seven are ordinary people..."

So, among the eight people present, at least one was a ghost; if they were unlucky, all three could be in this room, intently watching her.

"Now, the item for revealing the ghost's identity has been randomly assigned to one of you seven—of course, it might still be in my hands..."

Gu Mian listened quietly to Yue Nu's speech.

He had a feeling that Yue Nu was intentionally courting disaster. Claiming to have found the item that reveals identities was one thing, but announcing it to everyone, as if afraid the ghosts wouldn't come after her, was another. Even though she supposedly randomized who received the item later, she now suddenly brings up the possibility that it's still in her possession. It was as if she had meticulously planned what she believed to be an unparalleled scheme, only to be unable to resist smugly blurting it out. He couldn't tell if it was an unintentional display of genuine feeling or a deliberately feigned air of foolishness...

As expected, Yue Nu's words drew everyone's attention.

Even Li Yibai, who had been busily eating, looked up at her.

Yue Nu paid no mind to the others' gazes and continued, "Tonight, the ghosts will certainly kill again. If we vote incorrectly in this round, we will fall into a very disadvantageous situation."

If the ghosts accurately killed an ordinary person tonight and another one was wrongfully voted out, only eight people would remain alive. Among them would be three ghosts, and with nearly half the group being ghosts, the situation would indeed be unfavorable for the ordinary people.

"So we must make use of tonight to find at least one ghost—at the very least, one. We might get separated again tonight, so if anyone finds a ghost, I hope you can try to notify the others as surreptitiously as possible. We cannot afford to vote out the wrong person again tonight."

Yue Nu frowned, "If I find the ghost, I will notify you. I will try my best to let you know who the ghost is..."

Gu Mian rubbed his chin.

As for how she would let them know, Yue Nu didn't explain.

Her voice continued, "If you're at a loss during tonight's voting process and haven't found any clues, vote for Zhang Pingfan. At least for now, he is the most suspicious..."

No one raised objections.

Time passed quickly.

The bell for evening self-study had rung several times, and the plastic bag in front of Li Yibai was empty. Darkness had now completely enveloped the school. There was no moon tonight, only the faint, dim glow of the streetlights.

The school was incredibly silent during evening self-study, except for the few minutes during breaks.

Gu Mian and the others hadn't requested leave when they skipped class, and it was uncertain whether a teacher was currently searching for the mysteriously missing students.

They had turned on the lights in this classroom long ago. Being on the top floor, no one questioned why an unused classroom had its lights on.

It was now seven fifty in the evening.

All of them sat huddled together, so close they were almost holding hands.

Li Yibai, now full, huddled closely to 007 and nervously asked, "If we get separated tonight, is there a chance we end up in last night's building again?"

It was possible. Maybe they'd even see Fatty again.

007 responded, "Anything is possible. We need to be prepared."

Guo Jimei still didn't trust Yuan Qinghua. She sat with Keke, as far away from Yuan Qinghua as possible. Whenever she looked at Yuan Qinghua, her expression was that of someone facing a formidable enemy.

It was all but certain that Guo Jimei would only vote for Yuan Qinghua. Most likely, she would cast her vote for Yuan Qinghua as soon as the voting began.

For once, Chu Changge refrained from voicing his opinion and just sat there in silence, prompting Gu Mian to glance at him a few times.

As eight o'clock drew near, an absolute silence fell over the classroom.

Only the ticking of the clock punctuated the silence.

All eyes were locked on the clock hanging above the blackboard, their gaze jumping with each movement of the second hand. Even their heartbeats seemed to gradually synchronize with the rhythm of the second hand.

And just as the second hand leaped towards the '12', indicating the approach of eight o'clock, Gu Mian felt the blackboard under the clock suddenly expand, instantly dominating his field of vision.

It took several seconds for him to realize that it wasn't the blackboard enlarging, but the surroundings growing darker.

No matter where he looked, all he could see was pitch-black darkness.

Without a doubt, as eight o'clock arrived, they were once again transported by the ghosts to some godforsaken place.

Chapter 377 Of Course, Choose to Forgive Her_1

Gu Mian skillfully pulled a wrist-thick flashlight from the guitar bag on his back.

In this cold world where all players had an inventory, only this ornate guitar bag could offer Gu Mian a sliver of warmth.

He first switched on the flashlight to observe his surroundings. Logically, even though it was eight o'clock at night, it shouldn't be so dark that he couldn't see his hand in front of his face. Unless we've been sent to some windowless place, like a sealed warehouse?

The flashlight beam now illuminated the area, and Gu Mian scanned his surroundings.

This really is a godforsaken place—at least in my opinion.

"So... this is a sealed warehouse, right?" Gu Mian muttered, flashlight in hand, as he spun in a circle.

It was an empty room. There were no windows on any of the four walls, so no light penetrated from outside. Naturally, there was no concern about birds flying in to defecate. Forget birds and droppings; even the other players were nowhere to be found. Gu Mian strongly suspected he wasn't in the same place as the others.

The room was square, about fifty to sixty square meters, roughly the size of their classroom. Perhaps because it was seldom visited, Gu Mian stirred up a large cloud of dust just by turning around.

He looked down at the floor. A thick layer of dust had accumulated, reflecting a whitish glow in the flashlight beam. If anyone had walked across it, they would have left clear footprints.

There was nothing in the room besides the walls—no, there was also a door that looked like it hadn't been maintained in years. The door, almost entirely coated in dust, was ajar. Gu Mian shone his flashlight on it, vaguely making out a pale yellow color, similar to their classroom door.

The air here smelled stale, filled with a musty odor. Gu Mian felt his nose was probably protesting.

"Can't just stay here," Gu Mian muttered to himself, taking a step. "First, I need to figure out what the hell this place is... Maybe if I walk around, I'll run into a ghost or something?"

Just then, Gu Mian suddenly sensed something overhead, staring intently at him.

What was that?

He looked up.

He only caught the outline of a face before it vanished. Within two seconds, the contour had disappeared completely, as if it had never been there.

"Is someone spying on me?" Gu Mian glanced back at the doorway. "Right, it's perfectly normal for someone as handsome and suave as me to be spied on."

Muttering to himself, he walked towards the door, casually flicking the light switch on the wall. As expected, the overhead light didn't react.

Gu Mian continued towards the doorway. As he passed through the ajar door, he was careful not to disturb the dust covering the old frame.

Stepping outside, he finally saw the scene beyond.

It was a straight corridor.

Strangely, this corridor also had no windows, so Gu Mian couldn't determine his general surroundings. If it weren't for the rather modern-looking, though dilapidated, door behind him, Gu Mian might have thought he'd been transported into some ancestor's tomb.

He tried walking a few more steps along the corridor. There were rooms on both sides, somewhat like a hotel hallway. Some of these room doors were ajar; others were closed.

Gu Mian had no intention of pushing open the closed doors to see what treasures lay within. He headed straight in one direction because he saw what appeared to be a door at the limit of his flashlight beam.

A door standing at the end of the corridor.

Perhaps passing through that door would lead to something—clues about the others' identities, or maybe even a direct encounter with a ghost.

Gu Mian moved quickly and soon reached this corridor door. It too was almost completely covered in dust; even the keyhole was clogged with it. Never mind that Gu Mian didn't have a key; even if he did, he might not be able to open the door before him. The 'treasures' accumulated in the keyhole would surely obstruct any key.

It was a locked door, and Gu Mian had no key...

But such a trivial matter couldn't stop him.

"Although I don't have a key..." Gu Mian muttered, reaching for the guitar bag behind him, "we have other ways to open locks. Don't firefighters often do this when rescuing people?"

He quickly clenched the flashlight in his teeth, lowered his guitar bag, and unzipped it. Under the flashlight's beam, the guitar inside gleamed.

"This probably doesn't count as damaging the instance, does it?" Gu Mian mumbled quietly as he raised the weapon in his hand and flipped the switch on the chainsaw.

Instantly, a sound like a revving motorcycle engine filled the entire hallway.

As he held the weapon, carefully cutting into the weak door, a voice suddenly rang out from the other side of the door, reaching Gu Mian's ears—

"It's a chainsaw! There's a ghost! Run!"

It was Li Yibai's voice. He sounded like he was shouting to someone, and his voice grew fainter as he ran off. He sounded terrified, as if he'd encountered a ghost.

Hearing Li Yibai's voice, Gu Mian, with the flashlight still clenched in his mouth, silently paused his actions. Does my chainsaw look like a ghost?

It seemed if he continued sawing the door, he might cause Li Yibai irreversible psychological damage. Plus, his own identity would be questioned—normal people didn't carry chainsaws in guitar bags.

Just as he was contemplating whether to proceed, he suddenly noticed a sputtering sound from above. It sounded as if an old, aging electrical wire had finally given out, emitting sputtering, decaying sounds.

He took the flashlight from his mouth and shone it upwards.

On the ceiling, which was far from pristine, something else had appeared...

It was a trail of bloody footprints. The trail stretched along the ceiling, leading into the depths of the corridor.

Gu Mian followed the footprints backward with his eyes.

But just as he tilted his head up, the overhead lights suddenly blazed on, illuminating the entire corridor as brightly as if it were daytime.

Gu Mian was momentarily blinded and instinctively lowered his head. As he did so, he caught sight of a figure out of the corner of his eye, apparently standing at the far end of the corridor.

He was about to take a closer look when the overhead lights extinguished again. The surroundings plunged into darkness, and the figure along with them.

His eyes, assaulted by the harsh glare from moments before, found the dim beam of his flashlight almost useless.

But as Gu Mian was still adjusting to the darkness, the lights in the entire corridor suddenly blazed on again.

This time, Gu Mian saw it.

There was indeed a humanoid figure at the end of the corridor. Its face was indistinct, but one thing was clear...

It seemed to be getting closer.

Chapter 378 This is a surprise_1

The overhead light didn't last long. As Gu Mian had surmised, it dimmed once more.

The corridor fell instantly silent.

Perhaps because he was in the midst of it, Gu Mian felt that the darkness lasted a bit long this time.

He even tried taking a step forward.

As soon as his foot landed, the electric lights came back on, and the previously pitch-dark corridor became Mingliang.

In the regained light, he saw the human-shaped figure he had expected to be at the other end of the hallway—stiff and motionless.

It stood like a human mannequin in the dark right after a supermarket's lights went out.

And it was closer now!

Almost to the midpoint of this corridor!

If this kept up, he suspected that it would only take three or four more cycles of the lights fading and brightening before it reached him.

Each time the lights dimmed, it would advance a considerable distance, filled with malice.

When the lights came on again, one would see that the thing was much closer.

Theoretically, a normal person would have panicked and run by this point, though there was no escape now.

But Gu Mian was not a normal person.

He picked up his electric saw, hiding it behind his back. Just a game of Red Light, Green Light, huh? I can play, too.

As he thought this, he switched off his now-useless flashlight, took a large step toward the figure in the darkness, then stopped abruptly, remaining motionless.

This would be a surprise.

The lights came on as expected.

Gu Mian remained rigid, looking ahead.

The clothes-rack figure was indeed closer to him. It had crossed the midpoint of the corridor and was now only about a classroom's length away from Gu Mian.

But this thing clearly hadn't expected Gu Mian to pull such an inhuman stunt.

The lights stayed on noticeably longer this time.

Gu Mian speculated that the figure might be briefly reevaluating its life choices.

Given their current distance, only two more rounds of the lights going out and on would bring them face to face.

The lights stayed on a little longer this time, but eventually, they went out again.

The instant the lights went out, Gu Mian again seized the opportunity to take several large steps forward, raising his saw.

Thus, when the lights came on again, the hallway gleamed with the dazzling reflection from his electric saw.

At the same time, Gu Mian saw that he was now very close to the figure—so close he could jab its backside with just a few more steps.

Indeed, the clothes-rack figure had crept a few more steps forward in the dark. However, it seemed to have sensed something amiss early on. The moment the electric saw flashed brilliantly, it had already spun around, presenting Gu Mian with only its backside, looking as if it had realized something was wrong.

Gu Mian opened his mouth to say something.

But before he could utter a word, all the lights in the corridor went out.

Gu Mian deliberately waited a while.

The lights did not return this time.

After more than ten seconds in the darkness, Gu Mian finally pulled out his flashlight and aimed it forward.

He could finally see the scene before him clearly again.

The clothes-rack figure that should have been face to face with him had vanished without a trace, gone who knows where.

Gu Mian walked a short distance in the direction the figure had disappeared. He then saw another door at the end of the corridor, similar to the one he had cut through earlier.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "It disappeared over here..." he mused. "It seems this section of the corridor is a central point, with doors at both ends leading elsewhere."

Behind the door he had sawed at earlier, there were at least two people; Li Yibai was behind that door.

There should also be a considerable amount of space behind that door, as Gu Mian had heard footsteps from behind it running a long way before disappearing.

Gu Mian quickly approached the new door, pondering. There should be a lot of space behind this door too. The ghost vanished here... Did it go behind this door?

With that thought, Gu Mian abandoned the door he had sawed at earlier. Raising his saw, he turned his attention to the door in front of him. I absolutely have to find it today.

This door, too, proved to be flimsy. Within minutes, Gu Mian had cut a large opening in the lock, and the door creaked open reluctantly.

There was nobody coincidentally passing by behind this door.

So, even though Gu Mian's saw made a tremendous noise, no one from behind the door shouted "Run!" or anything similar.

Now that he had pushed the door open, Gu Mian could see the scene behind it.

It was a very spacious platform, though he couldn't figure out its purpose.

Gu Mian scanned the area with his flashlight.

The platform split into two paths, one to the left and one to the right, each leading to a different place.

Gu Mian quickly crossed the platform to the fork in the path and shone his flashlight to the left.

To the left was a pitch-black, narrow staircase that looked rather short.

To the right was a much broader corridor, quite similar to the one he had just come from.

Just as Gu Mian turned his gaze to the right corridor, he suddenly noticed what looked like a figure's back in the distance.

The flashlight beam didn't reach that far, but Gu Mian saw a hurried figure flash through the darkness and then disappear.

Gu Mian frowned at the distant, disappearing figure. That's... Xu Xingcheng?

Gu Mian's eyesight was excellent. Years of assassination missions had honed his vision to the point where he could, as the saying goes, "blow an enemy's head off from eight hundred miles away."

So, even though it was very dark, he could still clearly make out the fleeting figure.

How could he be here? Theoretically, he isn't one of the twelve people participating in this game... At that moment, Gu Mian recalled the exchange he had witnessed between Zhang Pingfan and Xu Xingcheng earlier that day.

Perhaps Xu Xingcheng has some connection to the game they're all involved in.

Just as Gu Mian was about to follow, he suddenly heard a rustling sound from behind.

Behind him was the narrow staircase; it was pitch-black inside, and he couldn't see a thing.

He immediately spun around.

But the narrow staircase, as if it had sensed him, fell silent the moment he turned.

Gu Mian looked at the dark staircase before him, considered for two seconds, then abandoned the idea of following Xu Xingcheng and headed into the darkened staircase instead.

Chapter 379 Mysterious Gu Mian_1

Something sinister and secretive was definitely going on.

Xu Xingcheng moved so quickly Gu Mian only caught a glance from afar before he vanished.

Gu Mian immediately shifted his attention, turning his gaze to the pitch-black corridor.

The entrance was so close, yet he had no idea where it might lead...

As he thought, he took a step forward and walked in.

The faint flashlight beam illuminated the narrow hallway, casting a bizarrely long shadow of Gu Mian. Coupled with the guitar on his back, the shadow dancing on the ground looked just like a grotesque figure out of a movie.

If any unsuspecting passerby were to see this, they would most likely be scared witless.

This black hallway was even narrower and shorter than he'd anticipated.

However, after a few steps, Gu Mian spotted the staircase ahead. Strangely, there were only stairs leading down and none leading up.

"Such a damp place, and with no windows, it must be underground," Gu Mian muttered, furrowing his brow as he looked at the staircase not too far ahead.

This place must be something like a basement.

Logically, there should be a staircase leading up to the surface, but instead, there was one leading further down. What the hell...?

Gu Mian paused for a moment before stepping forward to investigate.

But just as he took that first step, he felt something snag his pant leg.

Whatever held him had little strength, though, and he easily broke free from its grip with a single step.

Having taken the step, Gu Mian shone his flashlight down. "What? Is there wire here on the floor to snag clothes?"

But when he clearly saw the thing by his feet, Gu Mian realized it wasn't wire that had snagged him. It was a pale hand.

This was a common scene in horror films. When people were alone, studying, or reading, a lonesome ghost would often reach out from the shadows, trying to grab hold with its pale claws. And it was happening to him now.

Gu Mian stared silently at the pale hand.

It reached out from a dark corner nearby. Since Gu Mian had been focused on what lay ahead, he hadn't noticed a small corner situated in the darkness beside him.

The hand, not having caught its prey, was still desperately fumbling about beneath him, seemingly trying to grab something.

Gu Mian speculated that its target was his pant leg.

He dimmed the flashlight beam, tucked it inside his jacket, and carefully sidestepped the persistently groping hand, stealthily heading toward the corner from which the hand extended.

Reaching the corner, he hugged the wall and halted, not daring to venture in yet, merely peeking inside with half his face.

Behind the corner, a woman was squatting. Gu Mian only saw her by looking down.

She crouched there motionless, her head bowed low, only her slender arms swayed slightly as they groped about.

Gu Mian stared intently at the top of her head.

Before long, the woman on the floor seemed to sense the malice directed at her scalp.

Gu Mian saw her slowly raising her head.

"AHH!" As Li Yibai was darting about frantically in a corridor flanked by doors on both sides, he heard a distant, piercing scream.

Even though the scream seemed to come from behind several walls, he recognized it as Guo Jimei's voice.

Right then, Keke was trailing right behind Li Yibai.

The two had just witnessed a gleaming chainsaw piercing through a door, their faces marked with panic.

Hearing Guo Jimei's voice, Li Yibai immediately halted.

Keke also recognized the voice. "That was Guo Jimei, right? It seemed to come from the direction we just came from..." As she spoke, she stopped, her face showing worry. "Should we go take a look?"

"Don't!" Li Yibai immediately objected. "Didn't you hear what Gu Mian said? There's a ghost between Guo Jimei and Yuan Qinghua. Besides, Guo Jimei is suspicious anyway. She said she didn't vote, but the ballots disappeared without a trace—not even a shred of paper was found... She could very well be the ghost, trying to lure people over, right?"

"Even if she isn't the ghost, a scream like that usually means she's encountered one. If she really has encountered a ghost, you going there won't be of any help."

Keke nodded. "You're right... What should we do next?"

The two of them were fortunate to have been teleported together. Moving as a pair felt much safer.

Li Yibai held up his small flashlight. "I need to see if Lin Qi's around here, and also look for an exit. Let's not head towards Guo Jimei; let's go the other way."

Although there were doors on both sides, Li Yibai didn't dare interact with any of them, fearing there might be a ghost or something similar behind them.

They only moved within the corridor, at most listening at the doorways for any sounds from inside the rooms.

Keke nodded in agreement.

The two moved forward again.

Li Yibai scanned their surroundings with his flashlight. For some reason, he felt a strange sense of familiarity with this place.

But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't recall when he'd been here before. Li Yibai instinctively thought Keke might know the place and asked, "Doesn't this place seem a bit familiar to you?"

No one answered.

Li Yibai slowly came to a stop.

In the darkness, what had been two sets of footsteps had, at some unknown point, dwindled to only his.

He froze for a moment, then turned to look behind him.

Behind him, it was completely empty. He stood alone in the vacant corridor. Some of the doors nearby were cracked open, as if something was spying on him from the darkness within.

Gazing at the emptiness behind him, Li Yibai swallowed hard and cautiously called out, "Keke? Xu Keke?"

The only response was the echo in the corridor.

He took a few steps forward, attempting to locate Keke, but to no avail.

The dark corridor seemed to consume everything, even sound. It was so silent he couldn't even hear his own breathing.

Li Yibai called out a few more times, still receiving no response.

At this moment, he felt the place was incredibly eerie, as if at any second something could float towards him from the end of the corridor, or emerge from the partially opened doors.

Chapter 380 Underground Turmoil_1

The narrow corridor was suffocating.

Li Yibai lingered in the pitch-black corridor for a while. Eventually, unable to bear the terrifying darkness any longer, he bolted towards the far end.

Not long after his frantic escape from the terrifying corridor, one of the doors was suddenly pushed open a crack.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was standing in the narrow stairwell, looking down at Guo Jimei, who was sitting on the floor, terrified. "It was clearly you trying to be spooky here, so why do you look like *I'm* the one who scared *you*?"

The hand that had reached out from the corner belonged to Guo Jimei.

Just as Gu Mian was staring at the top of her head, Guo Jimei, who was squatting on the ground, seemed to sense something and looked up. Her eyes met Gu Mian's pale face, illuminated by the faint flashlight beam.

A bloodcurdling scream then pierced the area.

Startled, Guo Jimei sat on the ground, staring up at Gu Mian with wide eyes. "Are you a ghost? You don't make any sound when you walk."

Gu Mian pulled the flashlight from his pocket. "If I were a ghost, you probably wouldn't be sitting here all safe and sound... Besides, shouldn't I be asking you that?"

He brightened the flashlight, shining the intense beam on Guo Jimei's face. She raised a hand to shield her eyes. "Don't shine it at me."

Gu Mian ignored her. "Of course, I need to get a good look at you. I need to see what kind of thing reaches out a pale hand from a dark little corner to grab someone's trouser cuff. If it's a ghost, shouldn't I turn tail and run?"

Knowing she was in the wrong, Guo Jimei didn't argue. After a moment of silence, she explained, "I was hiding here just now. I saw you pass by and wanted to call out to you."

Gu Mian thought for a moment, recalling the pale hand from earlier. "That's a rather unique way to get someone's attention."

"No..." Guo Jimei explained, "It's because... before you arrived, I saw something, and that's why I hid here."

Guo Jimei really sees a lot of things, Gu Mian mused, stroking his chin. During the day, she saw Yuan Qinghua turn into a ghost. Tonight, it seemed she'd seen something strange again, and even reached out with a pale hand to grab someone's trouser cuff.

Seeing Gu Mian's silence, Guo Jimei continued, "As soon as it struck eight o'clock tonight, everything went black before my eyes. In an instant, I was in this place. I've been here from the very beginning..."

"Because it was so dark, I didn't dare move around. I didn't even dare to make my flashlight too bright."

"I originally wanted to survey the surroundings to see which way would be better to go, but before I could get a clear understanding, I heard someone approaching."

As she spoke, Guo Jimei frowned. Gu Mian's flashlight beam illuminated her face, allowing him to see her expression clearly in the darkness.

Guo Jimei looked grave, as if trying to recall something. "When I heard the sound, I was terrified, so I just hid here. It was too dark; I couldn't see my surroundings, and I didn't dare turn on a light. I only heard someone walking towards me."

Gu Mian listened quietly to Guo Jimei's words.

"I heard that person getting closer and closer, and finally, they walked straight through this corridor! I didn't dare make a sound... You know why I didn't dare, right?"

Encountering a teammate in a horror instance is like meeting an old friend in a foreign land. If things go well, the two might even greet each other with tears of joy.

But teammates in this instance aren't necessarily **real** teammates.

Gu Mian looked at Guo Jimei. "You said that in this place, with the lights off, you can't see anything. Yet that person was able to walk straight through this dark area. Only a ghost could do that, right?"

Guo Jimei nodded hurriedly. "Exactly! If you hadn't passed by with your flashlight on, I definitely wouldn't have dared to make a sound either."

That's what Guo Jimei thought.

But someone with a flashlight isn't necessarily trustworthy, Gu Mian mused. Ghost impersonators also exist among instance players, but these instance players don't possess any night-vision abilities. So, someone carrying a flashlight isn't necessarily human.

Gu Mian fiddled with the flashlight in his hand, then asked, "It was so dark; you surely don't know who that person passing by was, right?"

Guo Jimei nodded hesitantly. "I don't know... It was too dark; I couldn't see. I only heard that person pass by and then they never came back. That ghost went in the direction you were heading earlier. I was afraid it was still nearby, so I didn't dare make a sound. That's why I wanted to reach out and grab you."

Guo Jimei's earlier scream was definitely piercing enough. If the ghost had been nearby, it would have heard it long ago. There was no need for the two of them to be secretive now.

Gu Mian shone his flashlight in the direction he had been heading.

The flashlight beam cut through the darkness, revealing a somewhat indistinct walkway.

"That person went that way..." Gu Mian murmured to himself.

Could the person Guo Jimei saw be the coat stand I saw in the flickering corridor not long ago?

Of course, that "coat stand" could very well be the Guo Jimei in front of me.

Not everyone can play the wolf in sheep's clothing, but most people can play the sheep.

Guo Jimei hesitated before speaking. "I think... that person looked like Yuan Qinghua."

Here we go again.

Ever since the incident in the equipment room this morning, Guo Jimei had insisted it was Yuan Qinghua and hadn't budged an inch all day.

Gu Mian suggested a bad idea. "Since you didn't get a clear look, why don't we go over there and see?"

Guo Jimei's eyes widened in the flashlight beam. "But the ghost might still be there!"

Gu Mian said, "A ghost can only kill one person a night. As long as the two of us stay together, it won't dare to appear."

Hearing this, Guo Jimei nodded hesitantly but then said warily, "How do I know you're not a ghost? In a creepy place like this, you weren't even scared when a hand suddenly grabbed you, and you even came over to check on me..."

As Guo Jimei spoke, she backed away a few steps, her eyes filled with suspicion.

Gu Mian spread his hands. "I think the person squatting in a corner in this creepy place, reaching out a hand to grab someone's trouser cuff, is more suspicious."

Guo Jimei fell silent.

Ultimately, the two of them still went in the direction Guo Jimei said the person had gone.

This narrow stairwell was shorter than Gu Mian had expected, and they quickly reached its end.

"An elevator?" Gu Mian frowned, raising his flashlight to illuminate what was in front of him.

That's right, it was an elevator. And it appeared to be one that had been abandoned long ago.

The buttons and display panel beside the elevator were dark; Gu Mian pressed them several times, but there was no response.

The elevator doors were shrouded in a thick layer of dust, so thick that the seam between them was barely visible.

However, despite the thick dust on the doors, Gu Mian's sharp eyes noticed that there seemed to have originally been something on the upper part of the doors.

He raised his hand and wiped away some of the dust on the doors, revealing what was underneath.

It was a square sticker, about two fingers wide, with several large words written on it: "Elevator 4, Basement 1."

This sticker on the elevator door really resembled a classroom door sign.

Meanwhile, Guo Jimei, standing beside him, froze when she saw it. "This is... our school's basement?"