

Collapse 431

Chapter 431 You are the Younger Brother_1

Gu Mian stiffened slightly.

Under the scrutiny of three humans and one ghost, he paused for a moment, irritably unbuttoned the top button of his collar, then turned to look.

A man with gray hair and brown eyes appeared in Gu Mian's line of sight. His fair face was somewhat gaunt, and he wore a gentle smile as he watched him.

This face was very familiar to Gu Mian. Not long ago, it had been the face of a Non-Player Character (NPC) in the game—the Holy Daughter's elder brother.

But now... This was the 'minor issue' the goddess had mentioned?

The goddess's brother was abandoned, and a player known as Honest Person conveniently took over.

That's a really minor issue, huh?

Gu Mian smoothed the wrinkles on his jacket and stared at the man before him, "What did you call me just now?"

The confined space in the Spirit Car didn't allow anyone to stand, so the gray-haired man was kneeling before Gu Mian. He leaned slightly closer to Gu Mian, and Gu Mian heard the man, who had been smiling all this time, repeat his earlier word—

"Little sister."

Gu Mian exploded.

The global game had been ongoing for months, but this was the first time he had experienced such a strange sensation.

It was one thing for the goddess to entrust her kin to him, but what was this about her relative latching onto him and calling him 'little sister'? Gu Mian took a deep breath. I wouldn't mind if you call 007 or Xiao Hong 'little sister'; heck, you can even call Chu Changge or Fatty 'little sister', but why me? I mean, the gender field on my profile is still a question mark!

007, curled up in her blanket, shrank further into it when she saw Gu Mian looking as if he might drag her into this familial claim.

She turned her head to see Chu Changge retract his gaze and look down at himself. Also looking down at her was the woman in a red dress who had previously been pressing her face against the rear car window.

Only then did 007 glimpse the woman's true face, and she couldn't help but exclaim inwardly... Truly terrifying!

Chu Changge's steady voice said, "This is Xiao Hong."

Under two pairs of scrutinizing eyes, 007 nodded emphatically, "Well, she looks... very unruly."

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was pinching the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger, feeling rather helpless. Perhaps because he had played the game as the Holy Daughter, the man before him had identified him as such.

The brown-eyed man continued to watch him, his gaze filled with tenderness, as if Gu Mian were genuinely related to him by blood.

After rubbing his temples for a while longer, Gu Mian finally looked up at the man. "Listen, I'm not your little sister, but I did use your sister's character to play the game. You can't mistake a thief for your sister."

Fatty, by the door, mumbled to himself, picking out a phrase that invited wild speculation, "'Used your sister to play the game?'"

But Gu Mian's words were like playing a lute to a cow; they elicited no change in the man's expression. He maintained his smile and continued to look at Gu Mian with a tender gaze, "Little sister."

Gu Mian: "..."

"I need some peace."

As he spoke, he grabbed his guitar case from the side and climbed out of the Spirit Car. Then, under Fatty's watchful gaze, he walked briskly away.

Inside the car, 007 watched Gu Mian's retreating figure. "Where is he going?"

Fatty made an irresponsible guess, "Perhaps he's going to find a restroom to confirm his gender?"

"Speaking of which, it's rare for the Doctor to be pushed this far by a ghost, huh? Right, you're a ghost, aren't you?" Fatty rambled on, looking at the gray-haired, brown-eyed brother still sitting in the same spot. The Human CD Gu Mian had placed inside the car meant the brother couldn't stray too far from it.

The brother was still gazing at Gu Mian's retreating figure. His expression made Fatty want to recite a poem— "The thread in the hands of a fond-hearted mother, Makes clothes for the body of her wayward boy; Carefully she sews and thoroughly she mends, Dreading the delays that will keep him late from home..."

Wait, what am I even thinking? Fatty shook his head vigorously, redirecting his gaze to the brother, who had now turned to look at him.

Startled, Fatty took a step back. "I'm not your little sister, you know."

The brother simply smiled and shook his head, saying nothing.

"It's a ghost," Chu Changge's voice interjected. He adjusted his glasses. "The elder brother from the diary 007 read. He died a long time ago."

007 glanced at the drool at the corner of Xiao Hong's mouth and nodded slightly. "Although I don't know how he got out... Gu Mian did tell us this morning about the three memories he saw. This elder brother must hit pretty hard."

He was terrifying when he was alive; he's probably even more frightening as a ghost.

Fatty felt somewhat reassured. Gu Mian's life would be secure, and he wouldn't have to worry about assassinations by other players in the real world.

If there were another large-scale event, who would ever guess that a seemingly frail doctor could unleash two ghosts? These are the kind of ghosts that would make anyone scream in terror! It's like a blatant, large-scale cheat.

Although, these two ghosts are quite abnormal...

As Fatty pondered, he glanced at the brother, who was still smiling to himself, and then at Xiao Hong, whom 007 was making reluctantly wipe her drool.

This is horrifying.

Moreover, the brother can be brought into instances, right? After all, he's a ghost attached to a special item.

Does this mean...

An image had already formed in Fatty's mind.

If the Doctor encounters another ghost in an instance, perhaps the brother, with his motherly smile, will suddenly appear and kill the ghost before Gu Mian even has a chance to draw his saw.

The thought sent a shiver down Fatty's spine.

Terrifying!

At this moment, 007 let go of Xiao Hong and looked in the direction Gu Mian had gone. "Aren't we going to look for Gu Mian?"

Chu Changge shook his head slightly. He reached over and picked up the Human CD Gu Mian had left on the car seat, its reflective back mirroring his face. "He won't go far. Don't worry."

Fatty, holding his pot, said, "Then I'll continue cooking..."

Gu Mian had deliberately stopped in a sparsely populated area, mostly surrounded by unfinished buildings. Before the game started, mostly only construction workers and vehicles would pass by here. After the game began, even fewer people came. Although the recent virus outbreak had driven many people from cities to less populated areas, this particular place remained quite deserted.

Right then, Fatty was frying some ham slices in his pot.

007 had taken them from her special items. It was worth noting that supermarket food normally couldn't be placed in one's inventory, but she had acquired a special item capable of storing food—a mini-fridge.

Fatty muttered to himself as he took out a few eggs, "This thing is really useful. We don't have to go to the supermarket for fresh ingredients every time we cook. On our way to take 007 back, we can stock up on a lot of food... Let's make beef and fried eggs today."

Fatty scraped the crispy fried egg onto a disposable plate, then took out a beef steak, seasoned it, and began to fry it.

Beside him, a pot of porridge was bubbling.

When Gu Mian returned, he saw Fatty had already spread a perfectly square tablecloth on the ground—pink with white polka dots.

It felt very ceremonious.

Fatty was carefully placing a pot of steaming porridge in the center of the tablecloth, then setting out four bowls, and finally serving four plates of aromatic beef and fried eggs.

As for why Gu Mian could smell the aroma from so far away, it was because he saw 007 sticking her head out of the car door, sniffing the air repeatedly.

"Doctor, you're back!" Fatty, sitting opposite, was the first to spot Gu Mian.

Gu Mian nodded slightly and walked towards them.

As expected, the brother had also gotten out of the car and was standing to one side, waiting for him.

Gu Mian looked at the somewhat thin man before him and sighed.

He returned to the Spirit Car, took the CD from the car seat, turned, and placed it in the hands of the man behind him. "If you like it, you can carry this thing around."

He was the Goddess's brother, after all. Although the Human CD was indeed a life-saving tool, Gu Mian rarely needed it. Besides, using the CD once in the real world would destroy it, and the Goddess's brother would disappear along with it.

Although the Goddess hadn't exactly asked him to look after her brother, the man himself was so insistent on being his relative that Gu Mian didn't have the heart to just erase him from existence.

The brother took the CD, looking somewhat confused, but that didn't stop him from calling out to Gu Mian again, "Little sister."

"Can you only say 'little sister'?" Gu Mian felt a headache coming on. "Fine, whatever makes you happy."

Just like Xiao Hong couldn't speak, the brother could only say 'little sister' when he opened his mouth.

It was like a kitten meowing.

Later, they could try taking the Mind Amplifier off Xiao Hong's neck and putting it on the brother to see if he had anything else to say.

He irritably sat down on the tablecloth Fatty had laid out. Just then, 007 also climbed down from the car. She looked up at Xiao Hong, whose face was still pressed against the rear window, "Isn't she eating?"

007 didn't know Xiao Hong's identity.

Fatty, unsure how to persuade a ghost to eat fried eggs, hesitated for a moment before saying, "She's not hungry."

"Is that so?" 007 nodded without further questions.

Fatty felt a little sheepish. They still had many meals to eat before they got 007 home; Xiao Hong couldn't possibly skip all of them.

But directly telling 007 that Xiao Hong was a ghost seemed a bit...

Gu Mian picked up a fried egg and took a bite, then another, until he had stuffed the entire egg into his mouth.

But soon, something new caught Gu Mian's attention.

The four players sitting on the tablecloth simultaneously received a game announcement.

Fatty opened his game panel with a puzzled expression. "That's not right. Didn't the announcement for the last instance collapse come out a while ago?"

Gu Mian also opened his panel, but he saw it wasn't an instance collapse announcement this time, but a preview for a new event.

Following the extremely long instance collapse announcement after the Lantern Festival riddle event, this was the first game event since then.

[The world's second major event, 'Dragon Boat Race,' is about to descend on Earth]

[Event Venue: Please refer to the event ticket. Henceforth, to maintain fairness between game event regions, tickets will possess a teleportation function. Players holding tickets can be teleported to the event venue during the event time]

[Event Time: June 7th, 2019, from 7:00 to 24:00]

[Event Description: Teams of five players will compete against multiple other teams in a Dragon Boat Race.

Rankings will be determined by the time taken to reach the finish line, and prizes will be distributed according to rank.

Terrifying Evil Ghosts will be present in the competition waters. Interference between players will not be considered a foul.

Please participate with caution. Death during the event is permanent]

[Participation Conditions: The event area will be sealed off during the event. Only players holding tickets obtained from the advanced ticket booth may enter]

Chapter 432 The High Mountain Flower Gu Bong Bong_1

"These two events are both Chinese holidays, though..."

"And if I'm not mistaken, June 7th should be the day of the college entrance exam, which seems to coincide with the Dragon Boat Festival this year," Fatty remarked as he looked at the panel. However, before he could dwell on it too long, he suddenly noticed another event announcement below.

Two event announcements? Could it be two events happening together?

By this time, Gu Mian had already clicked on the next announcement.

[The third global event 'College Entrance Exam' is about to descend on Earth]

[Event location: See event ticket. To maintain fairness between game event regions, tickets will have teleportation capabilities. Players holding tickets can be transported to the event location during the event time]

[Event time: June 8th, 2019, 7:00 to June 9th, 24:00]

[Content: All participating players will enter the examination room for a large-scale test;

Players who reach the final admission score will receive event rewards]

[Event participation conditions: The event area will be sealed off during the event. Only players who rank in the top 20 percent in the 'Dragon Boat Racing' event can get tickets to the 'College Entrance Exam' event.]

Gu Mian stared at the game panel. "The Dragon Boat Racing event is on June 7th, and the College Entrance Exam starts on the 8th. Only players who rank in the top 20 percent in the Dragon Boat Racing event can participate in the College Entrance Exam... Sounds just like the real College Entrance Exam."

"Will the players be able to handle two large-scale events at once?" Fatty scratched his head. "They'll be moving from one event to the next immediately. I guess the players will suffer greatly in the Dragon Boat Racing event."

Chu Changge, sitting to the side, pushed his glasses up with his index finger. "The two events are seamlessly connected. Players who get a 'College Entrance Exam' ticket in the 'Dragon Boat Racing' event can participate in the next event if they are not injured. If they are injured..." At this point, Chu Changge paused, focusing his gaze on Gu Mian. "Then it will be time for the Doctor class to shine. Of course, injured players could also sell their tickets to other players at a high price, and I guess that's another reason for the existence of tickets."

Of course, injured players would depend on healers who could quickly replenish their health. With Gu Mian being the only Doctor in the world, they didn't have a choice.

As for whether Gu Mian would be harmed by players... Just look at drooling Xiao Hong and grinning Brother behind him, and you'd know it's not that easy.

"So, Doctor, are we going?" Fatty asked, looking at Gu Mian with a bowl in his hands.

Gu Mian straightened his collar. "Of course we're going. We might discover something." As he spoke, he tapped on the tablecloth. "Chu Changge said before that participating in events could be beneficial, didn't he? But today is only April 5th. There are still two months before the event starts. Let's return 007 home first."

If there aren't any unexpected events, 007's hometown of Yingchuan should be reachable in seven days, and it wouldn't delay anything.

007, who was mentioned, sat up straight with bread in her hands. "I appreciate your help."

However, now that there were four living people in the Spirit Car, it wasn't quite convenient for them to sleep together at night.

During their journey, Gu Mian found a hotel that had been locked up for quite some time. The owner might have died or might be hiding at home. The sun was halfway down the mountain, and the afterglow of the sunset shone on this empty building, adding a touch of warmth to this cold early April.

Fatty was currently trying to pick the lock. "It's a good thing I've done all kinds of jobs in my travels over the years..."

Gu Mian couldn't remember all the things Fatty had done. He could have just sawed the door open, but Fatty felt it would be impolite to damage someone else's lock when freeloading in their rooms. Fatty, meanwhile, was sticking his butt out, hunched over the door lock as he tinkered with it.

A gust of wind blew by, making Gu Mian's white coat flap loudly. Fatty's butt also shivered a little; he seemed a bit cold.

Just then, Gu Mian felt something placed over his shoulders. He looked to the side and saw a coat. Then, a pair of hands proceeded to help him button it up—the buttons were a little tight. Following the hands, Gu Mian looked up to see his Brother, who was earnestly fastening the buttons.

This coat... Gu Mian pondered for two seconds, then turned to look behind him.

007, who had been relieved of her coat, was standing in the cold wind, clutching the collar of her sweater and shivering as she looked at him.

This is really... Feeling a bit troubled, Gu Mian unbuttoned the coat, walked over to 007, and helped her put it back on.

007 looked up at him. "If you... if you feel cold, you can wear it."

Gu Mian shook his head helplessly. "I'm not cold."

By this time, Fatty had finally picked the lock, so 007 no longer had to arduously guard her coat.

"Alright, we can go in!" Fatty excitedly pushed the door open. "I wonder if there are any blankets or something inside." As he spoke, he stepped inside.

Gu Mian also took a few steps forward and entered the hotel. The hotel featured a tranquil style and had six floors. It was surrounded by greenery, and one would have to walk quite a way to see the road.

"Hmm," Fatty, who had jumped behind the front desk, began rummaging about. "I'll look for some room keys. Doctor, which floor should we stay on?"

"Staying on the first floor doesn't seem safe," Gu Mian said, turning to look at the out-of-order elevator. "Let's stay on the third or fourth floor."

In the end, they chose a large room on the third floor. The room was exceptionally tidy. A huge window was embedded in the wall opposite the entrance. To the left of the entrance was the washroom, and to the right was the kitchen. A soft, light-coffee-colored carpet covered the floor. Further inside were four single beds, spaced evenly apart, enough for the four of them.

Fatty pulled the curtains and excitedly inserted the key card into the slot by the door. "Let's choose our beds! It's been so long since we last slept on a real bed."

Gu Mian was indifferent. He randomly picked a bed, sat down, removed his coat, and started reading *Second World*, the book he had gotten from the Central Library.

He had skimmed through the book before but hadn't found anything. Tonight, he could thoroughly delve into its contents.

Just then, Fatty approached with a large basket. "Doctor, I saw a laundry room outside. Do you guys have any clothes to wash?"

Gu Mian and the others didn't have the habit of hoarding clothes. They always bought new ones and discarded the old ones immediately, as they had neither the time nor the energy to do laundry.

Gu Mian was wearing a thin, white shirt at the time. He tugged at the collar of his shirt. "If I give you this shirt, I'll have nothing to wear."

"I came prepared," Fatty said, magically producing a black turtleneck sweater. "A black sweater, handsome and warm! Look at this stylishly loose turtleneck; wear this, and you'll be the epitome of cool, aloof elegance..."

"Alright," Gu Mian interrupted, reaching for the sweater. "I'll go change in the next room."

With two girls in the room, it really wouldn't be right to undress in front of them. Yes, Xiao Hong had also entered the room. 007 was currently secretly stuffing pieces of bread into Xiao Hong's mouth.

When Gu Mian returned after changing, Fatty was stuffing Chu Changge's coat into the laundry basket. Seeing Gu Mian, Fatty's eyes lit up. "I must say, I have excellent taste."

Gu Mian ignored Fatty's bright-eyed self-praise, returned to the bed, leaned against the headboard, and resumed reading *Second World*, his legs bent.

The book had a book band claiming it was Wang Yushu's debut work. However, the book itself was chaotic. It started as a supernatural novel set about ten years in the past, then transitioned into science fiction, then into tomb raiding, and finally, it even included fantasy elements.

The protagonists were also inconsistent, seeming forcibly inserted into the plot. The initial protagonist died before the story was even halfway through, after which the protagonists kept changing, one after another...

Gu Mian spent several hours flipping through the book. Because he was short on time, he only skimmed it.

It seemed like seven or eight protagonists died throughout the book. It was as if an author would come up with an idea, write half of it, get bored, kill off the protagonist, and then start on a new idea.

Yuan Qinghua was a character in an instance, but she had existed in the real world thirteen years ago. Wang Yushu was Yuan Qinghua's classmate and the author of **Second World**. When Gu Mian and his friends obtained the book, they were all drawn into a special instance that would lead to certain death—as if something didn't want them to have the book.

"What on earth is this?" Gu Mian slammed the book shut.

Just then, Chu Changge's voice suddenly came from above his head. "Have you noticed? The beginning of this book is quite different from the rest."

Gu Mian turned to look. Chu Changge was standing beside his bed; Gu Mian had no idea how long he'd been there. His Brother was also sitting by Gu Mian's legs, watching him.

Gu Mian asked, puzzled, "You haven't been standing there for several hours, have you?"

Chu Changge didn't answer, instead sitting down. "The beginning of this book feels very similar to the real world, and the protagonist seems awkwardly inserted, as if a character was forced into a book meant to introduce a worldview. But the later parts are different; they read like a story passionately written by a novice."

That's right. Gu Mian nodded. In fact, the book band also said that the writing quality at the beginning was the highest, and the rest was just a jumble of stories.

"It's as if a decent beginning was copied, and the rest was just made up," Gu Mian said, rubbing the book's pages. "Are you suggesting that the rest of Wang Yushu's book is useless to us?"

"Perhaps we should find out where he copied the beginning from," Chu Changge said.

Gu Mian yawned. He spent another two hours rereading the beginning of the book, noting down the locations mentioned. Yan Chuan, Hou Ming, Xile Town. The first part of the story wasn't long, and these were the only three locations Gu Mian found.

"Do these three places exist in the real world?" Gu Mian rubbed his chin, lost in thought.

"They do," came Chu Changge's resolute voice.

They exist? Gu Mian turned towards him.

Chu Changge's face was backlit, making his expression difficult to see in the dim light.

Gu Mian suddenly remembered that Chu Changge had an excellent memory for maps. After the hide-and-seek instance, when Gu Mian had asked him about locations related to "Seven," Chu Changge had been able to list several without hesitation.

"But I need to check some information," he said, standing up and looking down at Gu Mian. "You guys go to sleep first."

"You're going out?" Gu Mian asked as Chu Changge walked towards the door.

Chu Changge paused. "I'm going to find a more detailed map. There's a supermarket nearby that should sell them."

In that case... Gu Mian turned to Xiao Hong, who was still stuffed with bread. "Xiao Hong, you go with him."

It's not safe for one person to go out this late at night.

Xiao Hong, looking as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders, quickly agreed and left with Chu Changge.

Gu Mian lay on the bed and closed his eyes. "I haven't read a book in so long. I'm a bit tired. I'm going to sleep now."

When Fatty returned after hanging the clothes, he saw Gu Mian asleep, curled up under the blanket, with the brown-eyed Brother sitting beside him.

But then, as if sensing something, the grey-haired man looked out the window. Before Fatty could react, he suddenly stood up and left the room.

Chapter 433 007 Looking for Mom_1

The next morning, when Gu Mian opened his eyes, the first thing that met his gaze was a corpse.

A grotesquely shaped, distorted-faced corpse.

It was placed at the foot of his bed.

Neatly arranged at the foot of his bed.

Gu Mian was speechless.

He subconsciously felt for the chainsaw beside him and only turned his head to look around after confirming the chainsaw was still there.

To the left of the corpse was a strange-looking Fatty, holding a camera. He was standing over the corpse on the ground as if transfixed by some spell.

Across from Fatty was 007, who looked equally odd, clutching her clothes and shivering visibly.

Meanwhile, Chu Changge was sitting on the couch opposite them, holding the book "Second World." A thick atlas lay open next to him. Apart from these two books, several miscellaneous items were scattered on the table. He didn't appear to pay any attention to the corpse on the floor.

Xiao Hong was sitting on 007's bed, hugging a large plastic bag filled with snacks. Gu Mian noticed red cans of lychee soda taking up a good portion of the space; Chu Changge had likely bought them when he went to the supermarket the previous night.

At this moment, she was unconcerned about anything else. She reached into the shopping bag, took out a can of lychee soda, pulled the tab, and slipped in a straw.

Gu Mian tugged at his uncomfortable collar, his voice a bit hoarse. "What's up with this corpse?"

It didn't quite look human, and it seemed somewhat familiar.

Fatty finally moved. He looked up at Gu Mian. "Well, here's the thing. The Holy Daughter's brother went out last night... He just got back this morning... and dragged back this... trophy, I guess."

As he spoke, he raised the camera in his hand. "I thought it looked familiar, so I flipped through the photos I took of you before, Doctor."

Fatty took a few steps, walking around the corpse on the ground to Gu Mian. "Doctor, look. Doesn't this thing on the ground look a lot like the assassin I photographed trying to kill you before?"

Gu Mian looked at the screen. It did indeed look very similar.

Previously, he had drawn a strange Wanted Order, and a ghost had been pursuing him ever since. However, this ghost probably realized it needed to bide its time and build its strength, so it hadn't appeared again after their initial encounter.

Who would have thought it would die while biding its time.

So tragic...

Gu Mian looked around again. "Where is he?"

Fatty pointed to the side. "In the bathroom... washing his hands, I suppose?"

Very conscientious, he even had to wash his hands after killing a ghost.

By this time, Xiao Hong had already finished one can of soda. She was now pulling the tab on a second can and inserting a straw.

As Gu Mian passed her, he smoothly snatched the lychee soda from her hand, took a few sips through the straw, and remarked, "Tastes good."

Xiao Hong sat with her mouth slightly open, maintaining her previous posture, a bewildered look on her face.

Gu Mian walked over to the corpse and looked down at it. Its expression was incredibly contorted. Its mouth was so wide open Gu Mian suspected two eggs could be stuffed inside. It made one wonder what terrifying ordeal it had experienced when it was still alive and mobile.

"To actually scare a ghost to this extent..." Fatty muttered, subconsciously thinking of Gu Mian.

At this moment, 007 looked up at Gu Mian. "When it was... dragged back, it dropped some special items along the way..."

"Mm," Gu Mian nodded. He remembered the assassin's description mentioned it carried many special items, and killing it would allow one to claim them.

007 continued, "But most of them probably dropped outside. We only found these few."

As she spoke, she pointed in Chu Changge's direction.

Gu Mian turned to look; so those items on the coffee table were the special items they had found.

Three in total.

[Rose Teacup]

[Description: A transparent crystal cup, devoid of artistic value. Selling it to a second-hand gift recycler might fetch a small sum.]

[Function: The teacup will always be filled with rose tea at the perfect temperature. It is an essential item for crossing deserts.]

A lifestyle-type special item?

This would indeed be very convenient for some players.

Chu Changge stopped flipping through the book in his hands, reached for the teacup filled with rose tea and a few floating petals, and took a sip.

It seemed quite tasty.

The other two items were of no use.

[Wand Five]

[Description: A card from a tarot deck, depicting five small figures and five wands. Basically useless unless a complete set is assembled.]

[Function: A tarot card with extremely high accuracy. A dream item for the Fortune-teller class.]

The other was also a tarot card, depicting a man holding a sword—the King of Swords.

The description and function were similar to the Wand Five.

Gu Mian knew about tarot cards. A full set was needed for them to be useful, and a set consisted of dozens of cards. Having only two of them, like these, was useless.

Gu Mian picked up the two cards from the coffee table. "These two cards are class-specific items. I'm not a Fortune-teller. Is anyone here proficient in fortune-telling?"

As he spoke, he looked at the people around him. Chu Changge and 007 shook their heads. Only Fatty eagerly raised his hand. "I've told fortunes under an overpass before!"

Gu Mian remarked, "...You really have done everything, haven't you?"

He took a few more sips of lychee soda. "Alright, enough nonsense. Let's get going."

He still needed to get 007 home soon.

It's worth mentioning that to prevent his brother from running around at night, Gu Mian had put the CD back into his lab coat pocket. Fortunately, since the night the assassin was dealt with, his brother hadn't shown any inclination to go out gallivanting at midnight.

The journey was quite smooth. Gu Mian brought 007 back to her hometown without many detours.

Throughout the journey, Xiao Hong clutched her lychee soda tightly, completely preventing anyone from snatching another can. Gu Mian couldn't understand why a ghost could drink soda.

It was already April 13th when 007 arrived home. During the journey, Gu Mian and his group passed by an advanced ticket booth. Amidst the ticket seller's ashen-faced expression, they obtained event tickets, and 007 also managed to snag one.

The city of Yingchuan looked relatively normal. Someone had cleared the cars from the roads, and Gu Mian saw bicycles weaving through the narrow paths that had been cleared out.

At this moment, 007 had already gotten out of the car and was looking up to bid them farewell. "This is far enough. You don't need to continue playing '007 Searches for Her Parents' with me. Driving further in makes it too easy to be targeted."

Gu Mian looked down at her. "Do you not need us to escort you in?"

007 shook her head. "This is my home. I can find my way back with my eyes closed."

As she said this, Gu Mian suddenly saw Xiao Hong approach from the side. She reluctantly stuffed two cans of lychee soda into 007's hands, then quickly scrambled back to the rear of the vehicle.

007 was slightly stunned, then smiled. "You all should take care as well."

"Oh, right," she suddenly leaned closer to Gu Mian, quickly pressed something into his hand, and whispered, "Consider this my payment for the ride."

With that, she waved goodbye and turned to leave. Gu Mian looked down at the item in his hand.

It was the [Prophecy Book].

A special item Guo Jimei had used in the 'Close Your Eyes' instance. By filling in a name, one could learn all the identities that person had possessed from birth until the present.

This was probably the reward 007 had received in that instance.

Looking at the item in his hand, Gu Mian again remembered the identity he had seen for Chu Changge before Chu Changge died in that instance.

Just then, Chu Changge, sitting in the back, suddenly spoke. "I've researched the three locations: Yan Chuan, Hou Ming, and Xile Town. From here, Yan Chuan is the closest, followed by Xile Town, and Hou Ming is the farthest. Our event location is at the Liannu River. I've planned a route..."

As he spoke, he took out a small notebook with his left hand and a pen with his right. It was pink, and the cap was adorned with a cute rabbit in a pink dress. Chu Changge put the cap on the end of the pen

and began writing in the notebook, the cute rabbit head bobbing with his movements, a sight rather inconsistent with his temperament.

Undoubtedly, this was Fatty's aesthetic taste.

"The event starts on June 7th. Although the event tickets can teleport us directly there, it's best to familiarize ourselves with the environment first. This is like familiarizing yourself with the test site before a driving exam; understanding the environment can be a great help to us."

"So, I've planned a route. From here, we'll first go to Yan Chuan, then Hou Ming, then Xile Town, and finally the Liannu River. Xile Town and the Liannu River are almost next to each other. This route is the shortest one I've calculated, and the density of cities along the way isn't high."

"However, it might take some time. It's best not to enter any instances in the meantime. But we can enter a few more after we reach the Liannu River. What do you all think?"

As he finished, Chu Changge looked up and adjusted his glasses.

Gu Mian nodded. "No problem. If we want to understand the connection between instances and the real world, exploring these three locations is our only option."

Perhaps because Xiao Hong and his brother, two ghosts, were providing suppression, they encountered no trouble along the way; even special instances didn't pop up.

Gu Mian passed through Yan Chuan and Hou Ming smoothly but didn't find a single shred of a clue. He could only pin his hopes on the final stop, Xile Town.

However, his brother's surveillance only intensified. He not only stared at Gu Mian during the day but also at night.

He was practically staring Gu Mian bald.

More than once, Gu Mian woke up in the middle of the night to see a pale face hovering above his head. Even Fatty, sleeping beside him, got caught in the crossfire several times. The Spirit Car often echoed with Fatty's wails.

As for Chu Changge, even if he saw a pale face hovering above him, he wouldn't make a sound. At most, he would just turn over and continue sleeping.

Gu Mian, at his wit's end, eventually resorted to forcibly pressing his brother back into the CD every night before sleeping.

However, Fatty still often saw the brother appear in the middle of the night to gently tuck Gu Mian's blanket, much like a mother covering her child in the dead of night.

The peculiar team of three people and two ghosts finally arrived successfully at Xile Town on May 21st. This was their last hope.

This should have been a good day for giving flowers. However, at this point, people couldn't even afford flowers for their ancestors' graves, let alone worry about whether their significant others would be angry if they didn't receive any.

Fortunately, Gu Mian and the other two were single, so they never had to consider such problems.

Fatty, however, had somehow procured a wilted flower and spent the whole day trying to give it to Gu Mian.

At this point, Gu Mian stopped the car, as he saw two familiar figures ahead.

Gu Mian looked through the windshield. "An acquaintance? Looks like there's something to this place."

Chapter 434 Gugu May Be Late, But Never Absent_1

Xile Town was neither too big nor too small. A drive of less than twenty minutes from here could take you to Liannu River, which attracted some players who thought it wouldn't hurt to check out the place first.

Today was May 21st, with a little more than a dozen days left before the event on June 7th. Most of those who could make it were already here.

The infectious disease from a few months ago was no longer rife, and there was still some activity in this unremarkable town, reminiscent of the lively atmosphere from before the game started.

Even in the outskirts of the town, a few people could be seen now and then.

007 was right, driving a Spirit Car is too conspicuous, Gu Mian thought, deciding to park it somewhere outside Xile Town where there weren't many people.

However, just as he stopped the Spirit Car, he spotted two familiar faces in the distance.

These two already had unusual appearances, and standing together made them even more noticeable.

It was Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan.

One was a washed-up female star. Regardless of how popular she was before the game started, she was now indeed past her prime. Gu Mian did see a crowd not far from them, occasionally casting glances their way, obviously recognizing Xiao Qiao. The other was his landlady, who had spent years trying to tamper with Gu Mian's natural gas valve. Despite repeated failures, she persisted until Gu Mian finally changed his door.

The appearance of these two, who should have had no connection, at the same place—and even at the last location mentioned in 'Second World'—made Gu Mian suspect an unspeakable bond between them.

At this point, Gu Mian had already stopped the car and opened the door to head their way.

Fatty hastily stuck the wilting rose in his hand into a water-filled pop can and quickly got out of the car to follow Gu Mian.

The street, which should have been deserted, was now bustling with people because of them. At this moment, the two women were standing in front of a very heavy-looking vending machine. Of course, they weren't there to buy drinks. Everything inside the vending machine had been ransacked. The glass was smashed, the door was pried open, and even the large springs that pushed out drinks were almost straightened and exposed through the broken glass.

Liu Ruyan was leaning against the vending machine with her arms crossed, tilting her head slightly as she spoke to Xiao Qiao with a smile.

Xiao Qiao's expressions were the same as those she'd shown on screen—she widened her eyes slightly to express surprise, fear, joy, and confusion.

Fortunately, she was pretty. If Xiao Hong were to perform the "slightly widened eyes" routine on TV every day, probably half the nation's audience would develop heart conditions.

At this moment, Xiao Qiao had her eyes slightly widened again.

Gu Mian couldn't decipher her current emotion either.

Soon, Xiao Qiao made a move. She crouched down, in front of the group of people stealthily watching them, and reached into the less-than-three-centimeter gap between the vending machine and the ground.

"Did something fall in?" It seemed someone wanted to come over and help.

Just as Gu Mian was wondering, he saw the washed-up actress, still crouching, forcefully lift with her arms.

She lifted the vending machine...

The bottom of the machine lifted, forming an acute angle of about thirty degrees with the ground. Gu Mian then watched as she released one hand to feel around on the ground; the scene was quite terrifying.

Gu Mian could even hear the sharp intake of breath from the onlookers. The onlookers who had stepped forward stiffly retracted their feet.

Fatty, standing nearby, also gasped, "That thing must be heavier than me!"

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses, "Approximately 300 kilograms."

Fatty peacefully closed his eyes.

Xiao Qiao seemed to have found what she was looking for. With a BANG, she abruptly released her grip, and the hefty vending machine crashed back onto the ground. Gu Mian felt the earth tremble. She'd be great at hauling bricks.

As he was about to reach them, he saw Xiao Qiao extend her hand, dirty from fumbling on the ground, towards Liu Ruyan. A coin lay in her palm, looking like a Game Coin from an arcade. "Is this it?"

"Yes," Liu Ruyan took the coin. "Was it heavy?"

"Nope."

Liu Ruyan laughed helplessly and took out a handkerchief to clean Xiao Qiao's hand.

Gu Mian had now led his group over to the two women. After feeling the earth shake, Fatty silently moved behind Gu Mian. Chu Changge stood to one side without comment. Luckily, his brother knew to restrain himself and wouldn't fuss over Gu Mian like a doting sibling in public, allowing Gu Mian to save some face.

Xiao Hong also got out of the car; she was, as usual, holding a can of lychee soda, sipping it as if lost in reminiscence.

At this moment, Xiao Qiao noticed a white sleeve in her peripheral vision. Looking up along the sleeve, she saw Gu Mian's strikingly handsome face.

Gu Mian was looking down at the two of them against the light, "What are you guys doing here?"

Xiao Qiao didn't react; she kept staring at his face.

Liu Ruyan, however, seemed perfectly at ease with Gu Mian, as if she knew he would show up here. Her gaze swept over Xiao Hong and his brother. "I'd like to say we just happened to be passing by, and you definitely wouldn't believe it, but I'll say it anyway: we were just passing by."

Gu Mian: "..."

Xiao Qiao was still staring at his face, her eyes slightly widened.

Fatty, standing beside them, leaned over and asked her, "Is he handsome?"

"Yes."

Gu Mian: "..."

Suddenly, Chu Changge's voice came from the side, "I called them here."

Gu Mian turned to look at him. Chu Changge's face was expressionless, and his glasses reflected the light, a white sheen obscuring his eyes.

"Ah, is it for the dragon boat event?" Fatty seemed to recall something. "I remember, Brother Chu, you seemed to get along pretty well with Landlady Liu, and you also seemed to mysteriously know Xiao Qiao well during the Fairy Tale City instance."

Gu Mian hardly had time to concern himself with their relationships during the Fairy Tale City instance, as he was in contact with 007 most of the time. By the time he encountered Chu Changge and the others, the instance was almost over.

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses, "We needed to meet up for some matters. Plus, it might be risky to try forming teams on the spot during the dragon boat event."

Gu Mian thought this landlady, who had repeatedly tried to sneak into his house, was far more dangerous.

At this point, Xiao Hong had finished the drink in her hand and was turning to head back to the Spirit Car.

Fatty quickly took out his car keys to follow, "Wait, let me open the door. Don't break the car window."

Gu Mian glanced at the three people in front of him, who were strangely silent, then at Fatty who was chasing after Xiao Hong, and said quietly, "I'm going to get my bag from the car."

His brother followed him closely into the car.

Fatty was at the back of the Spirit Car, looking for straws in a shopping bag.

Gu Mian swiftly moved into the driver's seat. He looked at Chu Changge and the other two, who seemed to be discussing something.

He remembered Chu Changge's status that he had seen in the Close Your Eyes instance. There were a few strange identities listed. He pondered for two seconds, then took out the Prophecy Book 007 had given him before leaving.

By writing a person's name, one could learn all the identities they had ever possessed.

Gu Mian casually picked up a pink rabbit pen and glanced at Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan. There was some ambiguity regarding Xiao Qiao's name, and Gu Mian was afraid that if he wrote her name, the paper might show something bizarre like 'Zhou Yu's wife'. Although special items had specific targets, so such an outcome was unlikely.

Just to be on the safe side, Gu Mian filled in Liu Ruyan's name.

Name: Liu Ruyan

Identities: Student, Murderer, Prisoner, Fugitive, Player, Champion, Guardian, Landlord

The three blatant 'criminal' statuses practically blinded Gu Mian.

Indeed, he had unfortunately rented a house from a murderous landlord before meeting Liu Ruyan. However, he hadn't expected his current landlady to also be a murderer.

How had she avoided capture and was still parading around so openly?

What the hell is going on? Gu Mian massaged his temples, a headache forming.

Chu Changge and Liu Ruyan did indeed share the 'Guardian' identity. Gu Mian reckoned this was why they had so much in common.

Xiao Qiao was probably one too.

Looking at Liu Ruyan's identities, Gu Mian couldn't help but ponder her odd attitude towards him. If this 'Guardian' role corresponds to protecting me, then that's just ghostly weird. I've never seen a guardian who insists on fiddling with the gas valve of the person they're supposed to protect.

He couldn't help but wonder if Chu Changge had also fiddled with his gas valve.

What kind of bizarre relationship did these three have?

Just then, Fatty's mournful voice came from the back of the Spirit Car, "Who plucked my flower?"

Gu Mian turned around to see Fatty's flower, which had been in the pop can, had been plucked, leaving only a bare green stem quivering in the can.

His brother stood to the side, smiling gently.

"Forget it, I'll buy you another one later," Gu Mian said, picking up the guitar case beside his seat and pulling Fatty, who was still cradling the stem. "Let's go. Is Xiao Hong coming down?"

As he spoke, he looked at Xiao Hong.

She was curled up in the very back, silently chewing her straw, seemingly lost in memories.

Gu Mian didn't press Xiao Hong further and, pulling Fatty, got out of the car and walked back to Chu Changge.

The three of them seemed to have quickly finished their discussion. Seeing Gu Mian approach, they all stopped talking with noticeable coordination, and the air instantly fell into an eerie silence.

Gu Mian put a hand in his pocket, "Don't you have anything to say to me?"

The three of them shook their heads in unison, "No."

Such perfect coordination.

Gu Mian was still thinking about how to expose their identities when Chu Changge adjusted his glasses, "After these two events, they will leave. But there are still twenty days until the event, so we can enter an instance first."

"The instance has been chosen," Xiao Qiao suddenly pulled something like a ticket from her pocket; it looked like it had been prepared long ago. Gu Mian recognized it; it was an Instance Exchange Ticket. By filling in the instance name and player names, they could enter that instance via a ticket booth.

Unexpectedly, Xiao Qiao had one too.

And the names were already filled in. Gu Mian frowned as he looked; the instance name was 'Death Face'.

That's a rather terrifying name.

Why enter this instance?

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses, "I chose it. I screened all the terms from the early part of the book 'Second World' that could possibly be instance names. Only this one could be filled into the instance name field of an Instance Exchange Ticket."

It seemed Chu Changge had already discussed this with Xiao Qiao, probably through the Friend System. Perhaps while they were asleep, Chu Changge was still secretly chatting.

Gu Mian rubbed his temples with his index finger, quickly accepting the situation. "Alright. I don't want to be stared at anymore. Let's go find a ticket booth."

There was still a crowd of people around, staring at them.

Fortunately, they didn't have to walk far before finding a ticket booth and entered the instance under the despairing gaze of the ticket seller.

...

At 12:15 AM, the room was pitch black.

Wang Xin, nestled in her quilt, yawned. The phone in her hand cast a dim glow in the darkness.

She scrolled through some messages, put down her phone, and got ready for bed.

But just then, she saw a figure standing in front of her dark door.

Chapter 435 It seems like I am late again_1

[Successfully matched to the instance 'The Deathly Visage']

[Matching your teammates, please wait...]

[Number of Participants: 9]

[Main Task: Survive for 48 hours]

This instance didn't provide any narrative content, only direct tasks.

As Gu Mian was looking at the panel and contemplating the tasks, an odd sensation suddenly came over him. The panel in front of him gradually blurred until it completely disappeared into the darkness.

He felt a discomfort, the kind one experiences when fed a bottle of sleeping pills but desperately tries to keep their eyes open to see the world.

Gu Mian moved his body in the darkness but found himself seemingly lying on a bed. His brain raced, but his body felt somewhat out of his control, as if experiencing sleep paralysis.

He strained again, finally regaining control of his body.

Gu Mian took a deep breath and abruptly sat up from the bed.

He must have entered the instance.

But where on earth was he?

It was pitch black around him, with the softness of a bed beneath. Gu Mian sat on the bed for several seconds, gradually adapting to the darkness.

A window was apparently by his side, but two curtains covered it, leaving only a gap in the middle, no wider than a palm, through which a faint light projected.

Gu Mian reached out to pull the curtains apart. Just then, he suddenly sensed something watching him from the darkness—a gaze seemingly filled with malice.

He immediately turned to look but saw only pitch-black darkness.

Meanwhile, his hands hadn't been idle; he had swiftly pulled open the curtains before him. Outside the glass window was a city still aglow with lights. Colorful neon signs on tall buildings intertwined and flickered. Streetlights cast dazzling beams, and occasionally, cars sped along the empty roads. It looked like a perfectly normal world.

The light from outside illuminated the room.

Gu Mian immediately used the light to look in the direction from which he had sensed the gaze. He saw a door there, slightly ajar, but the light from the window couldn't penetrate the darkness beyond the gap.

Gu Mian quickly surveyed the room's interior.

It resembled a dormitory, likely for staff. A large table stood in the middle of the room. On it, an alarm clock was running; Gu Mian used the faint light to check the time: twelve-twenty.

There were four beds in the approximately thirty-square-meter room, and on each, someone was snoring heavily.

Following the loudest snore, Gu Mian saw Fatty sleeping soundly—and drooling—on the bed next to him.

It seemed all players who entered this instance had been forced to "sleep."

Thankfully, their clothes were still on; they hadn't been undressed.

He couldn't determine if the people in the other two beds were players.

Looking at Fatty drooling on the adjacent bed, Gu Mian sighed. He leaned over slightly and patted Fatty's fleshy cheek, making the fat on his face jiggle. "Wake up."

Just then, Gu Mian felt a movement in the pocket of his white lab coat. He looked down to see a slender hand suddenly extending from it, like Sadako climbing out of a television screen.

To prevent the Holy Daughter's brother from wandering around while he was away, Gu Mian had brought the CD into the instance in his pocket.

The hand was currently trying to crawl out. Gu Mian unthinkingly pressed it back in.

After Gu Mian pressed it back, the brother in the CD finally quieted down and stopped moving.

At this point, Fatty was dazedly rubbing his face. Of course, the first thing he touched was a handful of his own drool. He slurped a couple of times, then opened his drowsy eyes and looked at Gu Mian. "Ah... Doctor, weren't we...?"

"Quiet," Gu Mian whispered, cutting him off. "There are others in the room."

Fatty shook his head, got out of bed, and surveyed the room. He noticed the people sleeping in the other two beds and looked somewhat disappointed when he didn't see Chu Changge.

He opened his mouth and asked Gu Mian in a low voice, "Are these two players?"

Gu Mian had already gotten out of bed and approached the two. He was unable to access their player information; it seemed these two weren't players.

Gu Mian shook his head at Fatty.

Fatty nodded in bewilderment and looked around again. He observed their surroundings: they seemed to be on the third or fourth floor of a building adjacent to a road, with a line of shops below.

The clock on the table now showed twelve-thirty. Fatty quietly got out of bed and came over to Gu Mian. "There was no instance introduction this time. It said there are nine players, but we don't know who the other four are. We also don't know where Brother Chu has gone."

As he spoke, Fatty glanced at the two people sleeping on the other beds. "So, what should we do now?"

Gu Mian tiptoed around the room and noticed something that looked like a schedule posted on the slightly ajar door. He walked over to take a closer look and saw it was a "Duty Roster."

It wasn't a cleaning rotation but a work schedule.

But the times seemed a bit strange...

[Monday] 8:00-12:00 Yang Ziwen; 12:00-4:00 Liu Jie; 4:00-20:00 Gu Mian.

[Tuesday] Yang Ziwen all day.

[Wednesday] 8:00-14:00 Yang Ziwen; 14:00-20:00 Liu Jie.

[Thursday] Liu Jie all day.

[Friday] 8:00-14:00 Gu Mian; 14:00-20:00 Liu Jie.

[Saturday] 8:00-14:00 Yang Ziwen; 14:00-20:00 Gu Mian.

[Sunday] Gu Mian all day.

As expected, the instance had maliciously used his real name again.

Chapter 436 It seems like I am late again_2

However, Gu Mian wasn't concerned about those things. What caught his attention was the strange shift schedule. It seemed this was his job in the instance. It must be something like a restaurant waiter, but looking at these time slots, it seems only one person is ever needed. That feels a bit sketchy.

And for some reason, Fatty's name wasn't on it.

Moreover, Gu Mian couldn't be sure if 'Liu Jie' and 'Yang Ziwen' referred to the two people currently sound asleep or if they were the names of other players. However, since they shared a dormitory, they must know each other.

He couldn't just wake them up now and ask, "What's your name?"

Gu Mian had softly opened the door. The layout resembled his old school dormitory. Outside was a long corridor, but one glance revealed it was a place for adults. The hallway was cluttered with cardboard boxes and wooden planks, and someone had piled several bags of garbage by their door. Opening the door seemed to have disturbed a rat foraging in the darkness; a rustling sound scurried along the corner of the wall.

He remembered that when he'd opened his eyes, the clock showed 00:20. They could leave the instance in just forty-eight hours.

Time was incredibly tight—for the ghosts.

"Doctor, what should we do?" Fatty whispered from behind Gu Mian. He still hadn't figured out what this instance required them to do. However, since they could leave in just forty-eight hours, it implied danger could strike at any moment during this brief period.

Gu Mian stared thoughtfully down the corridor. He had sensed a malevolent gaze moments ago, but it vanished instantly. Perhaps the ghost had already targeted them.

Thinking this, Gu Mian turned to Fatty. "Are you sleepy?"

Fatty, taken aback, answered honestly, "Yes."

He'd been jolted awake from a deep sleep and was now utterly exhausted.

"Then get some sleep first. I'll keep watch," Gu Mian said, walking towards his own bed.

Fatty, somewhat bewildered, followed him and whispered, "But there are only forty-eight hours! With nine people in the instance, that averages out to the ghost killing someone a little over every five hours. We might not be safe tonight..."

No, others might not be safe tonight, but being next to the Doctor, I should be quite safe.

With this comforting thought, Fatty sat back on his bed. "So, Doctor, aren't we going to look for Brother Chu and the others?"

As he spoke, he lay down, tugging at the corner of Gu Mian's shirt as if that would make him feel safer.

Gu Mian shook his head. "They could be anywhere. Searching blindly probably won't help us find them. It's better to check out the workplace tomorrow and see."

Gu Mian had checked the schedule beside the duty roster; today was Friday. According to the Friday schedule, Gu Mian was on duty from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and Liu Jie from 2:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

Although Gu Mian didn't know who Liu Jie was or where their workplace was, he figured he could ask the other two when they woke up tomorrow. He'd have to be discreet about it, though.

Fatty snuggled deeper into his blanket, one hand still clutching Gu Mian's shirt. "Aren't you sleepy, Doctor?"

"Not at all."

"Alright, I'm going to sleep then..."

Soon, the sound of Fatty's snores once again filled the room.

Meanwhile, Magical Girl Little Rabbit Ball was huddled under her blanket, too scared to move. She'd been matched into this instance alone from the ticket booth earlier today. It was an instance completely at odds with her nickname and temperament. Not only did its name exude a bizarre aura, but the first thing she saw upon opening her eyes was a dead body!

Her room door was ajar, directly facing the doorway of another room. That door was also open, and the faint light of a mobile phone screen spilled out from within. A phone lay face-up on the floor beside the bed, its screen emitting an eerie glow.

On that bed, a woman lay on her side. Her neck was bent at an unnatural angle, her face turned towards the door. Her mouth was agape, and her eyes bulged as if about to pop from their sockets. This grotesque face was staring right at her.

Just as Xiao Tuwan cowered under her blanket, frantically wondering how to escape, she suddenly heard footsteps in the living room. Her body went rigid; she didn't dare make another sound or movement.

There were only a few sounds from outside before silence fell again. She waited, huddled in her blanket, until long after the sounds had ceased, then cautiously peeked out through a tiny opening.

She saw a deathly pale face staring at her from beside the bed.

When Fatty woke up, the first thing he asked was if anything had happened last night.

"Nothing happened," was Gu Mian's reply.

And indeed, nothing had. The other occupants of the room were now awake. They seemed to know each other well and were on the balcony, washing up and chatting. Truth be told, these two were quite presentable; they would definitely turn heads on the street.

At that moment, Gu Mian said softly, "I've found out about our job."

"Our job?" Fatty paused. "Am I included too?"

His name hadn't been on the duty roster.

Gu Mian nodded slightly. "Indeed, waiters. To be precise, waiters in a coffee shop. However..."

However, what? Fatty leaned closer to Gu Mian, curious.

Gu Mian paused for a good while before finally saying, "However, it requires... using your looks."

Fatty's face puckered, and he nervously clutched at his clothes.

"It's not what you're thinking." Gu Mian explained, "Ever heard of a maid café? Just replace the maids with men. That's our job."

Fatty blushed slightly. "So, does that mean we have to wear uniforms?"

Gu Mian glanced at Fatty. "You don't."

"Why not?" Fatty asked, puzzled.

"Because you'll be cleaning."

"..."

The staff dormitory was very close to their workplace, so Gu Mian quickly led Fatty to the venue. It was a coffee shop of modest size. Because such themed establishments weren't common, it attracted many customers despite its unassuming appearance.

The moment Gu Mian stepped inside, he saw Liu Ruyan behind the counter. It was a familiar scene. For an instant, Gu Mian felt as though he'd been transported back to the time before the game started, back when he used to go home.

"What a coincidence," Liu Ruyan said with a smile from behind the counter. "I'm the proprietress."

She showed no intention of discussing player strategies, instead pointing directly towards a back room. "The work clothes are in there. Go get changed."

Seeing her unsettling smile, Gu Mian felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle.

I just hope it's not some bizarre uniform... Gu Mian thought as he walked into the back room, with Fatty trailing behind him.

Gu Mian then saw the work attire laid out on a cabinet. A white shirt and a tailcoat—indeed, an outfit perfect for leveraging one's attractiveness.

Fatty had already covered his eyes. "Doctor, you go ahead and change. I won't look!"

Naturally, Gu Mian wasn't about to let Fatty stay in the changing room with his eyes covered, so he unceremoniously kicked him out.

Fatty had no choice but to sit outside, craning his neck expectantly.

Gu Mian changed quickly and came out. He was fastening the last button on his cuff as he looked up at Fatty. "Well? How do I look?"

Fatty clapped a hand over his nose. "Amazing!"

Chapter 437 Persecution of Gu Mian_1

The official start time for work was eight o'clock.

They had arrived too early; it was just past seven-thirty.

The small shop was empty. Its wallpaper featured a dark gray theme, and a row of single seats, probably intended for people on their own, lined the huge floor-to-ceiling window. Fatty was currently seated in one of them.

Other tables were surrounded by dark gray leather sofas that looked quite heavy.

All in all, it looked like a high-class establishment.

Adding my face to the mix makes the whole shop look even classier, Gu Mian thought.

He tugged at his uncomfortable tie and turned to look at Liu Ruyan. Due to unavoidable circumstances, he had to go through an instance again with this landlady who had cost him a bicycle.

Although their relationship wasn't the best, he still had to ask the necessary questions.

Gu Mian casually sat at the table closest to the counter. "So, out of the nine players, we already have three here."

As he spoke, he rapped his index finger on the table. "Liu Ruyan, have you seen any of the other players?"

She sat at the wooden counter, resting her chin on her hand, and shook her head. "I live alone in a nearby residential complex. I entered the instance at twenty past midnight. I had to turn my house and my phone upside down before I found this place."

"Phone?" Fatty suddenly realized. "Doctor, does that mean we don't have phones?"

"I suppose not," Gu Mian said, massaging his aching forehead.

Fatty hadn't used a phone in an instance for a long time, so he had subconsciously overlooked it.

Gu Mian had specifically looked for one but couldn't find it. To avoid being late, he had to rush over.

Of course, he wasn't trying to play the role of a diligent and humble employee. Perhaps I'll meet other players here, Gu Mian had thought. It seemed he was right, though unfortunately, he'd run into the one person he least wanted to see.

Liu Ruyan was flipping through a piece of paper on the counter when she chuckled. "By the way, since you lack experience in this area, I should remind you: when a customer comes in, you're to say, 'Miss, welcome home.'"

Gu Mian barely suppressed his laughter.

He was afraid he'd burst out laughing and spray the customers.

Fatty, seated in one of the solo chairs, asked thoughtfully, "Do I need to say that too?"

Liu Ruyan glanced at Fatty. "I don't think you'll get that opportunity."

Fatty: "..."

"The remaining players might also come here." Gu Mian calmed himself and pinched his chin with his index finger and thumb.

But in what capacity they might arrive was uncertain.

They could be customers...

At this thought, Gu Mian furrowed his brows. A female player, sure, but would Chu Changge come to a place like this?

It seemed Fatty had read Gu Mian's mind. He waved a finger in front of his face. "Maybe Brother Chu is working as a waiter at the Shake S Milk Tea Shop next door. For example, when a girl goes for milk tea, Brother Chu might push up his glasses and say, 'You can't have any more; you're already too fat.'"

As Fatty described the scene, a bizarre image formed in Gu Mian's mind.

Gu Mian quickly shook his head to dispel the image of a stoic Chu Changge telling people they were "fat."

He asked Liu Ruyan uncertainly, "There aren't any other coffee shops around here, right?"

Liu Ruyan seemed to ponder for a moment. "Not to my knowledge."

Hearing this, Fatty looked disappointed. "I thought Miss Xiao Qiao would be in a maid café, and when she saw us, she'd say something like, 'Master, welcome home'..."

"Keep those dangerous thoughts to yourself," Gu Mian glanced at Fatty.

"This city is very large; I'm afraid it'll be very difficult to find the people you're looking for. So, just stay here," Liu Ruyan said, glancing at the time. It was almost eight o'clock. "Since the three of us managed to gather here, it's possible the others might come too. Plus, we might get some useful information from the customers."

"Oh, right, do you want to check my phone?" As she spoke, she took out a phone and handed it to Gu Mian. "Most of the information I found was on this phone."

Gu Mian reached out and took Liu Ruyan's phone.

It probably didn't have a screen lock password to make it easier for players to check.

Gu Mian first checked the message inbox. It contained no useful information, mostly just balance warnings and spam advertisements for a fish-raising game.

He closed the messaging app and checked the contacts.

The contact list spanned several pages of phone numbers, mostly customers, including Gu Mian, Fatty, Liu Jie, and Yang Ziwen.

Gu Mian closed the contacts list and tapped on the green social media app on the screen.

Nowadays, most communication happened through convenient social media apps. Sure enough, when he opened it, he saw many messages.

Most of these messages were business-related.

Gu Mian habitually scrolled to the very bottom and started reading upwards.

Turns out, Liu Ruyan was indeed a cunning businesswoman, buying low-quality ingredients, even though the prices at this shop weren't low at all.

What was more outrageous was a recent message about perfume; Gu Mian had never imagined he'd have to wear perfume while working in this shop.

[Liu Jie: Boss, we're running out of perfume in the back!]

At that moment, Liu Ruyan, from her seat, took out a newly purchased pink bottle of perfume from a drawer. "I bought this on the way. Do you want to use some?"

Gu Mian retreated a few steps, avoiding the fragrant onslaught.

"Alright, it's almost time," Liu Ruyan said, glancing at the wall clock. "I'm going to the back room."

Fatty asked in confusion, "Aren't you staying out here?"

Liu Ruyan gave a slight smile. "The young ladies wouldn't want the handsome face they adore to come with a proprietress."

"Indeed," Fatty nodded solemnly and looked at Gu Mian. "I think they also wouldn't want to see a man even more handsome than you. It would make them feel insecure."

As he spoke, Fatty walked over and patted Gu Mian's shoulder. "Anyway, our proprietress is one of us. So, I'm going to skip out for a bit and see if I can find the others outside. I'm a bit worried Brother Chu won't be able to find us."

And so, Gu Mian watched as this "man more handsome than himself" walked out the door.

The not-so-large coffee shop was now empty save for Gu Mian. He promptly stood up from his seat. It wouldn't do for customers to see a server slumping in his chair.

He just stood there, straight and still.

In his twenty-odd years, Gu Mian had never worked as a server, mainly because he was afraid customers might suddenly drop dead from poisoning while eating.

Fortunately, not many people came to hang out on a Friday morning. Gu Mian stood there until nearly ten o'clock before the first, blissfully unaware, patrons arrived.

It was a girl with a slightly round face who looked like she was still in school. She wore her hair in two pigtails, and the little cherries on her hair ties swayed with her movements. She seemed rather shy.

Next to her was a girl of about the same age with her hair down, smiling at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian immediately went to the door and dutifully delivered his line, "Miss... welcome home."

The two girls sat down near the door, and Gu Mian then heard the girl with loose hair say to her friend, "See? I told you the one on duty this morning is the best looking..."

While they were ordering, Gu Mian heard the door behind him being pushed open again.

He dutifully turned around. "Miss, welc—"

But he swallowed the rest of his words.

The glass door behind him had been pushed open, and someone walked in. Sunlight streamed through the glass, illuminating the newcomer's face.

Chu Changge looked at Gu Mian, emotionlessly adjusting his glasses. "Why did you stop?"

"..."

How did you find this place? Gu Mian really wanted to ask.

But with two girls sitting at a nearby table, Gu Mian had to swallow his words. He led Chu Changge to the most secluded corner before asking in a low voice, "How did you find this place?"

Chu Changge studied the menu intently. "I'm a student. My classmates Wang Xin, Qiao Chu, and Xiao Wan didn't come to the first class today. I heard the three of them are renting a place together... Caramel macchiato, extra sugar."

Gu Mian paused for a moment. "Okay, got it. Continue."

"I found their place and went in."

"I have all three of their numbers in my phone. I called before I went and confirmed that Xiao Wan is a player, nicknamed Magical Girl Little Rabbit Ball. Qiao Chu, well, no need to explain her."

Gu Mian knew that Xiao Qiao's real name was Qiao Chu.

"They told me their situation over the phone. Wang Xin died last night. To avoid unnecessary trouble, Xiao Qiao hid the body under the bed. The two of them are currently investigating places Wang Xin visited a few days ago, so it would have taken too much time for them to come back and open the door for me."

"I used the special item 'No.1 Car Warehouse Access Card' to get into their apartment. You gave me that card."

Gu Mian, lacking an item inventory, couldn't hold many special items, so he had given most of them to Chu Changge and Fatty.

He remembered the item Chu Changge mentioned; it was obtained in the Bizarre Runaway Train instance. It was a one-time use access card that could open any door requiring a card swipe.

Since Chu Changge went in, then knowing his personality...

Gu Mian suddenly lowered his voice and looked intently at Chu Changge. "Did you strip the body?"

Chu Changge's finger, resting on the menu, curled slightly. After a few seconds, he looked up at Gu Mian. "The body is gone."

"Then I searched Wang Xin's room."

Gu Mian knew that Chu Changge's "search" must have been a truly thorough one; he might have even pried up the floorboards.

"I found this in the pocket of one of her outfits."

As he spoke, Chu Changge took out a business card and pushed it towards Gu Mian. "Of course, there were other business cards in her room, but this one was the most direct."

Because in the middle of this business card, "Gu Mian" was written in large characters.

Gu Mian looked down at it. Besides his name in the center, the card also had his phone number and his place of work: Weaver's Coffee Shop.

Chu Changge put down the menu and propped his chin on his interlaced hands. "So, I came looking."

Chapter 438 Vulgar Title_1

When Fatty returned to the coffee shop, gasping for breath, he saw Chu Changge, wearing his glasses and sitting on a somber gray sofa, lifting a cup of caramel macchiato.

The scene was somewhat odd.

A few seats away were two girls, with Gu Mian currently being cornered into a chat.

Fatty straightened his collar, puffed his chest, and feigned being a legitimate customer as he strode in. Passing by Gu Mian, he heard a girl asking Gu Mian for his contact information in a sly tone.

"Gu Mian... can you give me your contact number?"

"The waiters here won't give you their phone numbers. If you ask for their contact information, they'll definitely say they didn't bring their phones."

By then, Fatty had taken a seat across from Chu Changge. The leather gray sofa was so soft that he sank deep into it, not wanting to get up.

"I was still looking for you outside. I didn't expect you to show up on your own," Fatty reached for an unused spoon beside Chu Changge and boldly scooped some foam from Chu Changge's cup. "Seriously, Brother Chu, how did you find this place... Ptooeey, so sweet!"

Chu Changge lifted his cup, glanced at the business card on the table, and said softly, "Someone died last night. This was found in her clothes."

Just then, someone else walked in. Gu Mian was bowing slightly, diligently putting on the charm.

"Did you see? Police cars came to our school today." The three newly arrived girls were discussing this.

"I saw them, but I don't know what happened... Oh, speaking of police cars, I just remembered something. Do you know about the serial killer case in the neighboring city six months ago? They say he killed eight people. The strange part is, several bodies were never claimed, and the murderer still hasn't been caught."

"I heard about that too. They said it wasn't that the unclaimed bodies were unrecognized. The weird thing is, those people had perfectly normal identities, yet no relatives could be found to claim them, as if they'd sprung from stones. I think that rumor must be fake."

Information from the instance? Listening to this conversation, Gu Mian pondered for a moment, then handed them the menu with a smile. The three girls quickly shifted their conversation from the supernatural to gossip; the rest of their chat was useless.

Chu Changge picked up his spoon, thought for a moment, then put it back down. "It seems that not only can we wait for other players here, but we can also gather some useful information."

Just then, the glass door was pushed open again.

Gu Mian turned to look, only to see a girl in a black robe walk in, her head lowered. She wore a black hood, half her face obscured by shadow, and held something in her hand that resembled a pendant. Gu Mian recognized it as a Pendulum, a tool used for divination. The deep blue Pendulum was swinging relentlessly clockwise. If Gu Mian couldn't open her player panel, he would have thought she was cosplaying a medieval witch.

The hooded figure stopped at the door and then slowly raised her head. As she did, Gu Mian got a clear look at her face—it was very familiar. It was the same female player he had encountered in the Sweet Lovers instance who claimed to be a "Fortune-teller"! Sure enough, her nickname consisted of the green characters for "Fortune-teller". It seemed that having a profession granted a green nickname.

At this moment, the ostensibly mysterious Fortune-teller had raised her head and was looking at Gu Mian. The instant she saw him, the air of mystery she had barely managed to maintain shattered. Gu Mian saw shock and surprise flash across her face; her expression looked as if she were mourning her deceased Crystal Ball. It seemed this Fortune-teller hadn't divined she would meet an acquaintance here.

"How did you..." Upon seeing Gu Mian's face, the Fortune-teller instinctively thought of Teacher Sweet, the most miserable NPC she had ever met, who had been threatened by a player holding a chainsaw to her neck.

Gu Mian quickly covered her mouth, silencing her next words. "Welcome home, miss."

The Fortune-teller was dumbfounded as Gu Mian forcibly pushed her into a seat by the door, giving her no chance to resist. She turned her stiff neck to look at this "Chainsaw Doctor," only to find he had changed his clothes. With the smile on his face, he looked quite gentle, as if he would never raise his

voice to anyone. If the Fortune-teller hadn't personally witnessed how terrifying Gu Mian could be when he went berserk, she too would have been fooled by his deceptive appearance.

"You... you're in this instance too..." The Fortune-teller timidly raised her head to look at Gu Mian.

He leaned down slightly, a gentle smile on his face, as if listening to her needs. "What can I get for you?"

Staring blankly at Gu Mian's face, the Fortune-teller instinctively responded, "Ca...cappuccino..."

"Alright." Gu Mian retrieved the menu.

Meanwhile, they heard another sound from the door.

Gu Mian turned to look and saw familiar faces again. It was Xiao Qiao, bringing along an unfamiliar female player. It seemed Chu Changge had given them this location.

Once they entered, they saw Gu Mian in his tailcoat. Xiao Qiao quickly pulled her companion to sit across from the Fortune-teller.

Xiao Tuwan sat down, her gaze sweeping over Gu Mian, then over the Fortune-teller. "Both your nicknames are green, huh? Professional nicknames, right? I heard players' nicknames turn this color once they get a profession."

"What can I get for you?" Gu Mian asked with a professional smile.

Xiao Qiao immediately answered, "Papaya juice."

Gu Mian frowned. Miss Xiao Qiao's mind must have been addled by something.

Xiao Tuwan wasn't interested in such things. She looked at Gu Mian. "I'll have the same."

That's not on the menu. I'll just have to improvise when the time comes. After all, these aren't real customers. Thinking this, Gu Mian walked towards the back, where Liu Ruyan was preparing drinks.

Meanwhile, the three female players had started to converse.

The Fortune-teller spoke first, looking at Xiao Qiao. "Are you Qiao Chu? The actress."

Xiao Qiao nodded earnestly. "My name is Qiao Chu."

A look of realization dawned on the Fortune-teller's face. "I never thought I'd meet a celebrity playing this game..." Though, celebrities weren't so revered anymore. With that thought, she continued, "Did you two get matched into this instance together?"

Hearing this, Xiao Tuwan's brow twitched. "No... not exactly..."

The pale face she had seen when she lifted the blanket last night belonged to the female celebrity beside her. Thankfully, Qiao Chu wasn't gruesome-looking; otherwise, she might have had a heart attack on the spot. She recalled how she had once jumped on the bandwagon, calling Qiao Chu a "pretty face," but after witnessing Qiao Chu single-handedly drag that horrifying corpse under the bed last night, her opinion had shifted slightly. At least she's a brave pretty face.

By the time Xiao Qiao finished explaining to the Fortune-teller the events of last night and their fruitless search for clues during the day, the Fortune-teller was pinching the bridge of her nose, looking somewhat pained.

"As you've seen, my in-game profession is Fortune-teller, so I didn't need to search for many clues to find this place. I used a Pendulum." As she spoke, she glanced at the deep blue Pendulum resting on the table.

Xiao Tuwan's eyes lit up. "Then you should be able to divine how to survive in this instance, right?"

The Fortune-teller shook her head. "No, my ability isn't that strong. A fortune-teller isn't a prophet. I can usually only divine events that have already occurred. If you ask me next week's lottery numbers, I definitely can't answer. But if, say, your mother was murdered and you didn't know who the killer was, perhaps I could divine the culprit for you."

Hearing this, Xiao Tuwan's expression turned a little strange; she felt the second analogy wasn't quite right. She leaned back slightly. "Let's talk more about this instance..."

As she said this, her voice suddenly trailed off.

The Fortune-teller looked at her, puzzled. "What's wrong?"

Xiao Tuwan stared intently at the glass door behind the Fortune-teller. "I think I just saw... Wang Xin walk by?"

Chapter 439 The Gentleman Gu Beng Beng_1

"Wang Xin? The one who died last night?" The Fortune-teller immediately turned her head to look outside the door, but saw nothing.

She turned back with some concern and saw that Xiao Tuwan in front of her looked a bit anxious. Xiao Tuwan quickly stood up, pushed open the door, and looked in a certain direction. "That's right, it's her!"

At this time, there wasn't any trace of Wang Xin on the street. Only a few customers in the shop looked at them with curious eyes.

Chu Changge and Fatty, who were in the farthest corner, had noticed them long ago. Chu Changge was observing them with narrowed eyes.

Fatty's hearing wasn't very good. Plus, the three women were speaking in low voices, so he only heard Xiao Tuwan's last sentence.

He curiously looked at Chu Changge across from him. "Who is Wang Xin?"

"Wang Xin is the one who died last night. I went to check this morning, and her corpse has disappeared," Chu Changge replied softly to Fatty.

Fatty touched his arm, which was covered in goosebumps. "So, what they just saw was a walking corpse?"

Chu Changge picked up the second cup Gu Mian had refilled for him. "Probably a ghost's doing."

But what would be the point of a ghost moving a corpse around here?

With this thought in mind, Chu Changge's gaze shifted back to Gu Mian's business card on the table.

The Fortune-teller didn't know what the dead Wang Xin looked like and could only judge the current situation based on the expressions of the two women next to her.

She saw Xiao Tuwan staring in one direction with a baffled expression, indicating she hadn't seen what she wanted to see.

On the other hand, Xiao Qiao, unusually, didn't break character. She reacted just as she did on television—with no reaction at all.

While the Fortune-teller was looking at Xiao Qiao, she suddenly saw Xiao Qiao raise her hand and point to a table in the shop. "There are two players over there too. Why don't we go and talk to them?"

There are two more players in this shop?

The Fortune-teller frowned and looked in the direction Xiao Qiao was pointing. The table was in a rather remote location. She hadn't noticed the two men sitting there when she first came in because Gu Mian had ushered her directly to a seat near the entrance.

One of the men was a Fatty of about two hundred pounds, who was currently smiling at them rather foolishly.

Across from Fatty was a man with his back to them. He was mostly blocked by the sofa, so the Fortune-teller could only see a small part of his face, which looked a little pale.

"They've been here the whole time. Did they not realize we three are also players?" the Fortune-teller quietly mumbled to herself as she looked at the two men in the corner.

"Of course they did. We've known each other for a long time," Xiao Qiao said, lifting her head slightly.

Hearing this, the Fortune-teller's expression turned a bit odd. So, those two over there knew they were players? Then why didn't they show any intention of acknowledging them?

As she wondered, she started to walk over.

But at that moment, the slightly pale man suddenly stood up. She saw he was wearing a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, which gave him a scholarly look.

He adjusted the frame on the bridge of his nose, shot them a brief glance, and then walked towards the back of the shop.

"Chu... Brother Chu, where are you going?" Fatty asked, looking somewhat surprised at Chu Changge, who had abruptly stood up.

As Chu Changge passed him, he leaned down slightly. "To find Gu Mian and tell him to run."

What? Fatty felt his head spinning. He looked at the three girls not far away and began to wonder, Is one of them not who she seems?

Upon seeing Chu Changge's actions, the Fortune-teller paused. She looked at Xiao Qiao somewhat awkwardly. "That man seems a bit difficult to get along with..."

Xiao Qiao tilted her head slightly. "Not at all."

By now, Chu Changge had already reached the backstage area.

Backstage, there was not only a dressing room but also a kitchen where Liu Ruyan was busily rushing between multiple beverage machines.

When Chu Changge arrived in the kitchen, he saw Gu Mian leaning against the refrigerator, drinking a cup of papaya juice. A light blue straw was bent into a cute heart shape in its middle.

"What brings you here? Want some papaya juice?" Gu Mian asked, noticing Chu Changge enter the backstage area.

Chu Changge glanced at the orange drink in Gu Mian's hand. "No. You better run. The police might be coming for you."

Gu Mian coughed a few times. "The police are coming for me?"

This was the first time he had encountered such a refreshingly unconventional situation in a horror instance. Presumably, not many players had been wanted by the police in a horror instance before.

"What happened?" Gu Mian put the papaya juice, from which he had only taken a few sips, to the side. The straw in the cup wobbled a few times before settling.

"I found your business card in Wang Xin's room when she died," Chu Changge said, glancing at the drink beside him.

"In fact, Xiao Qiao also found your card last night while hiding the body. It was clutched tightly in Wang Xin's hand, as if intentionally placed there. But considering your... unique identity, Xiao Qiao hid the card and didn't tell the other player."

At this, Gu Mian touched his chin. So, not only did Xiao Qiao hide the body last night, but she also snatched my business card from the deceased's hand. How ruthless.

"And today, when the guests arrived, they said you guys don't usually leave contact information easily. Yet, two of your business cards were found in the deceased Wang Xin's room alone. Setting that aside for a moment, if you found a corpse clutching someone's business card, what would you think?"

Gu Mian looked down slightly. "I'd take them in for questioning first."

One business card was clutched in Wang Xin's hand, and another was in her clothes pocket. If the one in her hand was found and taken, the one in the pocket of her clothes in the wardrobe could still serve as an important clue.

Of course, Gu Mian knew he hadn't killed Wang Xin. He tilted his chin slightly. "The ghost wants to send me to the police station first?"

"Considering your past actions, sending you to jail first would indeed save a lot of trouble. At least you couldn't bring your chainsaw in," Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses.

Gu Mian couldn't help but laugh. Ghosts these days are really cunning. It seems they truly don't want to die.

"I guess after the murder, it stuffed my business cards in and wanted to call the police. But it probably didn't expect Xiao Qiao to take one card, and for you to find the other, more hidden one."

Chu Changge ignored the word "find." He lowered his eyes. "Wang Xin just walked past the shop entrance."

"Walked past? The corpse?" Gu Mian paused.

"Most likely," Chu Changge nodded. "I told you her body was already missing when I went to check. I guess her corpse will soon appear on the street... You have to understand, a death investigation is much more serious than a missing person case. And there will likely be more evidence on her body detrimental to you. Xiao Qiao, who lived with her, will also be a suspect."

Gu Mian hadn't expected a horror instance to turn into a legal drama. He unbuttoned his coat. "Then I'll run first. Should we arrange a meeting place?"

As he said this, Gu Mian suddenly took the Human CD from his pocket and handed it to Chu Changge. "Take this, just in case. If I do get caught, everything on me will definitely be confiscated. If that happens, this would be left behind when we leave the instance."

Chu Changge reached out, took the Human CD, and then pulled out a set of keys with an address already stuck on them. "My place. It's very remote, surrounded by old houses with hardly anyone around. And I have no connection to Wang Xin. You can take Xiao Qiao and the others there to lay low for now."

The instance only lasts forty-eight hours. As long as they aren't caught during this time, they'll be fine.

Gu Mian took off his coat and took the keys. "You didn't leave fingerprints at Wang Xin's house, did you?"

"Collecting fingerprints takes time. And when I went to Wang Xin's house..." Chu Changge paused. "I wore gloves."

He even specifically wore gloves?

Gu Mian didn't inquire further. He quickly went to the changing room next door, put on a white lab coat, grabbed his guitar case, and slipped away.

As he passed Xiao Qiao, he grabbed her and forcefully dragged her away, leaving a room full of customers with bewildered expressions.

Fatty shifted as if to chase after them but was held back by Chu Changge, who was now holding a tray.

"Brother Chu, why are you holding the tray?" Fatty asked curiously. "Where did the Doctor go?"

"None of your business," Chu Changge said, no longer looking at Fatty. He turned his attention to Xiao Tuwan. "You'd better leave with them too."

Xiao Tuwan was somewhat confused but quickly got up and followed them.

Now, only the somewhat restless Fortune-teller remained at the table across from him. She instinctively felt a little afraid of the man known as "Meiren Chu."

She fidgeted in her seat. "What are they..."

Chu Changge tapped the tray in front of him. "The police might arrest all three of them."

How can that be!

The Fortune-teller furrowed her brows, her expression strange as she tried to argue, "Well... to be honest, I've been in quite a few instances, but players being hunted by the police..."

That's unheard of.

But if this happened to Gu Mian, it might actually be possible. The Fortune-teller couldn't help but think of Teacher Sweet again.

Thinking of this, she suddenly asked the two men in front of her, "Do you know... that doctor in green? I was actually matched with him in an instance before, but the outcome wasn't very satisfactory..."

'Not very satisfactory' was an understatement; it was downright dangerous.

The Fortune-teller was trying her best to be tactful.

Chu Changge looked at the woman in front of him and paused. "We know him."

Fatty added from the side, "They've known each other since they were kids! Back when Brother Chu used to wear skirts!"

Wearing skirts? The Fortune-teller's face contorted again. What kind of strange fetish is this?

Chu Changge's expression didn't change. He tapped the tray in front of him again. "These are the drinks you ordered."

The Fortune-teller looked at the three cups of papaya juice before her and fell into deep thought. "I remember ordering a cappuccino..."

"Oh."

"..."

Fatty reached out, grabbed the cup of papaya juice with the blue straw, and began drinking it with relish.

The Fortune-teller sniffed, then reached out and took the cup of papaya juice with the pink straw. But just then, she saw a pale hand suddenly emerge from under the table—it didn't belong to any of the three of them!

It's a ghost!

The Fortune-teller scrambled to her feet in panic, wanting to escape. But then she saw the man across the table with the gold-rimmed glasses calmly press the hand down, forcing it back under the table.

By this time, Gu Mian had already taken Xiao Qiao into Chu Changge's house.

It was indeed a secluded place. Most of the residents in the surrounding area had already moved out. The neglected hallway was plastered with small advertisements.

Chu Changge's house, however, was relatively clean.

Just as Gu Mian was surveying the living room, Xiao Qiao suddenly dashed out from an adjacent bedroom, holding a box.

"Look," she said, shaking the box next to her face. "Condoms. Three of them have been opened."

Gu Mian pinched the bridge of his nose. Don't shake that thing next to your face!

Chapter 440 He Pressed Me Down_1

When Xiao Tuwan arrived, she happened to see Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao squatting on the ground, examining a condom.

The two were squatting, engrossed, a small box on the ground before them. Xiao Qiao was currently poking at an opened package on the ground, remarking seriously, "Two packets were taken, and one was opened. This one doesn't look like it was opened long ago. The packaging was cut with scissors, but the contents inside were damaged."

Gu Mian was also staring at the ground. "Now I know where his gloves came from..."

Xiao Tuwan pursed her lips as she looked at them, taking a slight step back. Why do I feel like the teammates in this instance are so strange?

In the past, the most unreliable teammates had, at worst, just dragged her down or displayed questionable intelligence.

But these two... Xiao Tuwan's face twitched; she was momentarily at a loss for words.

By then, Gu Mian had already stood up and was no longer looking at the items on the ground.

He circled the room a few times. In Chu Changge's room, there was a desktop computer, and opposite it, a wardrobe holding few clothes. Gu Mian tried turning on the computer and found it didn't require a password.

There was a folder on the desktop, newly created today by Chu Changge after he arrived in this instance;

Gu Mian opened it and saw it was filled with screenshots of various supernatural incidents. It seemed Chu Changge had been working on this last night.

Xiao Qiao glanced at the wall clock in the living room. "It's almost noon. They should be coming soon, right?"

Hearing this, Xiao Tuwan asked curiously, "Are we hiding here because they're afraid we'll be caught by the police? And they're not coming together because they're worried about drawing too much attention?"

If Fatty were with them, they'd certainly be a conspicuous target.

"There might be other reasons," Gu Mian said, glancing at the box on the ground again. "We can't show our faces right now; only they can move about freely."

Upon hearing this, Xiao Tuwan abruptly sat down on the living room sofa. "I've been in so many instances, but this is the first time I've been chased by the police... If we get caught, we won't have anywhere to run when the ghost comes, will we?"

"You're right," Gu Mian said, looking at her. "So, whatever you do, don't get caught."

As he spoke, he walked into the bedroom and sat in front of the computer.

A guest today mentioned a serial murder case in the neighboring city. The killer was never found, and among the eight victims, several bodies remained unclaimed.

"Perhaps they were players from the previous group in this instance," Gu Mian mused, opening the browser. His fingers tapped on the keyboard. "Let's search for the serial murder case in the neighboring city... What was its name again? Right, Ziyang City."

Muttering to himself, Gu Mian typed "Ziyang City Serial Murder Case" into the search bar.

Xiao Qiao also came over then, perching on the side of the bed. Resting her chin in her hand, she watched the screen. The old bed frame, seemingly in disrepair, let out a loud CREAK the moment she sat on it.

Xiao Tuwan was pacing in the living room, sometimes looking under the sofa, sometimes behind the bathroom door, always worried a ghost would crawl out.

As she paced, she suddenly heard a knock on the door.

Could it be the people from the coffee shop?

Chu Changge's dilapidated front door lacked a peephole, so she couldn't see outside. Xiao Tuwan approached the door and asked in a hushed voice, "Who is it?"

She was quite afraid that if she opened the door, the police would be standing there.

But the person outside didn't answer. The knocking persisted. Besides the knocking, an eerie silence seemed to have fallen over the entire building.

At that moment, Xiao Tuwan felt her blood run cold. Something was very wrong.

"Who is it?"

She asked again, and still, no one answered.

The abrupt knocking continued for several more seconds before stopping. She froze for a moment, then quickly hurried to the room where Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao had been. But when she reached the doorway, she found the room empty. There was no one there.

Where did they go?! She was stunned.

The computer screen was still lit; Xiao Tuwan could vaguely make out the words "Serial Murder" on it. But the two people who had been in the room were gone!

Then, the knocking suddenly resumed, each terrifying THUD hammering at her heart.

It's the ghost!

She stared at the door, the source of the incessant knocking, terror etched across her face.

Hide! I have to hide!

Xiao Tuwan frantically scanned the living room, but there was nowhere to hide.

Her gaze immediately shot to the bedroom, fixing on the large wardrobe opposite the computer. Without hesitation, she dashed into the room and scrambled inside.

The wardrobe, likely belonging to a boy, contained very few clothes. It was mostly empty and smelled of wood shavings.

Xiao Tuwan curled up inside. The wardrobe door wouldn't close completely, leaving a half-centimeter gap. By angling herself just right in her cramped position, she could see the bedroom doorway.

If anything comes in, I'll see it immediately!

The knocking outside grew louder and more insistent. Just as her heart was pounding in sync with the thuds, the noise abruptly stopped.

Then, she heard a CREAK from outside—

It's inside.

THUD... THUD... THUD...

Footsteps. Slow, heavy footsteps.

Shivering, Xiao Tuwan peered through the gap and saw a figure slowly pass the bedroom doorway.

It's Wang Xin!

Wang Xin... who died last night...

It still looked the same as last night: mouth agape, eyes bulging.

Just then, the figure abruptly turned toward the bedroom doorway. Its head snapped grotesquely toward the entrance, its terrifyingly wide eyes fixing rigidly on the crack in the wardrobe door.

I've been spotted!

Xiao Tuwan shivered violently. Her mouth fell slightly open as she tried to shrink back, but there was nowhere to retreat.

It's coming closer...

It's right in front of the wardrobe...

Xiao Tuwan, rigid with fear, tilted her head up, looking through the half-centimeter gap. That horrifying face was pressed against the crack, staring in at her.

This is it, she thought, so terrified she squeezed her eyes shut.

But just then, an unusual sound suddenly reached her ears.

"HEY! YOU FOUL BEAST WHO SULLIES THE INNOCENT!" — Is that the voice of the doctor in green?

Xiao Tuwan immediately opened her eyes and peered out again.

Gu Mian was struggling to crawl out from under the bed but got stuck for a moment. He saw Xiao Qiao next to him also trying to crawl out, her head right beside his hand.

"Let me borrow your head," Gu Mian muttered guiltily, pressing down on Xiao Qiao's nearby head for leverage to pull himself out. He then quickly lunged at Wang Xin.

Xiao Qiao, whose head had just been pushed down, emerged from under the bed with her face caked in dust. She looked utterly bewildered when she lifted her head.

From inside the wardrobe, Xiao Tuwan trembled as she watched the celebrity's head get shoved into the dusty floor. When Xiao Qiao lifted her head, her expression was one of complete bafflement.

And that doctor, ever so unreliable, had lunged directly at Wang Xin. The man and the corpse crashed heavily against the wardrobe, the loud THUD making Xiao Tuwan shudder violently.

Is he trying to take it down with him?!

Sure enough, a moment later, a figure collapsed. As it hit the floor, Xiao Tuwan shuddered again, only to see that it wasn't the doctor who had fallen, but the horrifying form of Wang Xin!

Did it turn back into just a corpse? Xiao Tuwan wondered. The doctor squatted beside Wang Xin, yanking her half-upright by her long hair. "All that time waiting under the bed... what a waste."

Watching the scene unfold, Xiao Tuwan's mind reeled, stuck on three questions: Who am I? Where am I? And what in the world are *they* doing?

Gu Mian, still squatting, glanced to the side. Xiao Qiao was still mostly under the bed, her face grimy with dust, but her eyes sparkled as she looked at him.

"COUGH. COUGH." Gu Mian fanned away the dust he'd stirred up from under the bed, then reached out, pulled Xiao Qiao out, and said guiltily, "Come on, let's get your face cleaned up."

When Fatty and the others returned to Chu Changge's house, the first thing they saw was the peculiar expression on Xiao Tuwan's face as she opened the door.

Then they noticed the torn-open condom on the floor.

Looking further inside, they saw Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao on the sofa. Gu Mian was gently wiping Xiao Qiao's face with a towel. "Does it hurt?" he asked.

Xiao Qiao nodded honestly. "Yes."

Fatty clutched his jacket tighter, his voice laced with trepidation. "What... what did you two... do?"

Xiao Qiao looked at the newcomers at the door and stated, once again with complete honesty, "He pressed down on me."