

Collapse 441

Chapter 441 Extremely Terrifying_1

Fatty widened his eyes, asking incredulously, "Just like that?"

Gu Mian twitched his fingers and looked at Fatty. "What are you thinking?"

Chu Changge stepped forward to pick up something from the ground, intending to throw it in the garbage. As he passed by the bedroom door, he seemed to notice something and looked inside.

There lay a dead body on the floor.

Traces of dust had been swept out from under the bed, and the computer screen on the desk was still on. Chu Changge saw information about the Ziyang City serial murders displayed on the screen.

Gu Mian looked towards the door, noticing two strangers behind Fatty—a man and a woman. It seemed Chu Changge and his group had found the two remaining players. Now all nine players had gathered.

The two strangers were looking at Xiao Qiao with some surprise, evidently recognizing her.

The man stepped forward, allowing Gu Mian to see his game nickname—"A Green Prairie Overhead."

Suppressing the urge to ask if he had a girlfriend (an urge sparked by the rather unfortunate implications of the name), Gu Mian turned to look at Chu Changge, who was walking into the bedroom.

"Did she come by herself?" Chu Changge was now crouching next to the body.

Gu Mian nodded, "Yes."

Sunlight shone through the window, illuminating the suspended dust in the room. Chu Changge crouched by the body, looking at it carefully.

The two unfamiliar players also spotted the corpse in the bedroom. Before they could express their fear, they noticed the bespectacled man, who didn't seem easy to get along with, crouching next to the corpse, examining the horrifying body calmly, motionless.

Caoyuan gulped. "Although we've been through many instances, we really can't remain so calm at the first sight of a corpse..."

The female player moved forward, allowing Gu Mian to see her game nickname—"The Moonlight Before Bed."

He decided to address her as "Mingyue."

At this time, the Fortune-teller also stepped forward. She looked at the body, then turned to Gu Mian, who was still sitting on the sofa. "Could you explain the origin of this body for us?"

"It walked in by itself," Gu Mian explained. "It's a very polite corpse. It even tried knocking first."

Hearing this, the two new players had strange expressions on their faces. They turned to look at the man in doctor's attire sitting on the sofa.

His nickname was an unusual color, the same green as the Fortune-teller's. The Fortune-teller had explained that this was the distinct color of their class nicknames.

Furthermore, this doctor seemed to have an uncanny sense of humor, the kind who would tell jokes regardless of the situation.

Caoyuan's gaze swept over Gu Mian, then over Xiao Qiao, and finally landed on the body. "So you let her in because she was knocking?"

"Of course not," Xiao Qiao turned her head, eager to prove her innocence. "She pushed the door open herself. When it happened, Mr. Doctor and I were both under the bed."

"Under the bed?"

The expressions of the others also turned strange. Just then, Mingyue, folding her arms, said with a knowing look, "Hiding under the bed? You should know that hiding under the bed doesn't do any good if a ghost has its eye on you... What's with that expression?"

Her last sentence was directed at Xiao Tuwan beside her, whose face was growing increasingly strange.

Xiao Tuwan's expression had become impossible to ignore. She furrowed her eyebrows tightly, finally speaking up, "They did hide under the bed, but not the way you think!"

Not that kind of hiding? Mingyue's expression also turned strange.

Just then, the Fortune-teller interjected, "Excuse me... what happened after the body came in?"

As she said this, she suddenly recalled a scene from the "Sweet Lover" show she had seen.

The room was full of bound, struggling ghosts. Teacher Sweet was trembling before the gleaming chainsaw, and the doctor was standing in the room, his face as relaxed as if he had just come from the restroom.

"After it came in?" Xiao Tuwan repeated with an eerie tone, before continuing, "After she came in, someone suddenly pounced on her from under the bed, and then she ended up as you see her now."

Hearing this, the Fortune-teller silently looked at the corpse on the floor. Now it was a genuine dead body.

Mingyue and Caoyuan were both slightly stunned. Then Mingyue, arms still folded, immediately spoke up, "This corpse was controlled by a ghost. This means that a corpse controlled by a ghost can't harm us, right? Could this be the key to our escape?"

Caoyuan looked at Mingyue strangely. They didn't know each other; they had met at Liu Ruyan's coffee shop. His initial impression of her was of someone who smiled a lot and was quite talkative. Although a bit noisy, everything seemed normal. But after coming here, Mingyue seemed to have changed. Her tone had suddenly become somewhat aggressive, and she seemed to be constantly trying to get a word in.

Even Liu Ruyan sensed this aggressive attitude. She smiled, walking forward. It was then that Gu Mian noticed she was carrying a packaged drink.

"Your papaya juice." Liu Ruyan placed it on the table before Xiao Qiao.

Gu Mian's eyebrow twitched. "You still remember this?"

By this point, Xiao Qiao had already inserted a straw and taken a sip. Noticing Gu Mian's gaze, she turned to him. "Do you want some?"

Gu Mian quietly turned his head. "No."

Caoyuan chuckled, trying to ease the strange atmosphere. "It seems the ghosts in this instance can really control corpses. But they can't harm us... Doctor, you're quite something. How did you think of this? You weren't scared at all, daring to pounce right on it."

Watching the naive man beside her, the Fortune-teller gave a dry laugh but said nothing.

Whether or not they could cause harm was still uncertain. She felt there was a ninety-nine percent chance that they could harm poor players like them.

Gu Mian didn't clarify. Instead, he stated seriously, "Actually, I was terrified. But have you ever heard that extreme fear can turn into anger? When a person experiences immense terror, they subconsciously want to eliminate its source."

Really? Caoyuan and Mingyue were somewhat skeptical. They had also experienced a fair share of terrifying instances, often being cornered by ghosts, but they had never considered the idea of suddenly attacking and beating a ghost to death.

Fatty, long accustomed to Gu Mian talking utter nonsense, silently nodded, pretending to agree.

His name often appeared with Gu Mian's on the compensation announcements, so Chu Changge had ordered him to pretend he'd just met Gu Mian in instances with many players.

By this time, Chu Changge had stood up from beside the corpse. He walked out of the bedroom and looked at Gu Mian. "We learned some other information after you left."

Chapter 442 Scaring_1

"Apart from the serial murders in the city next door, there were also quite a few similar serial murder cases. However, the serial murder cases we've found were all horrific events carried out by extremely cruel murderers. They were widely publicized because the victims died in such ghastly conditions."

"Of course, what I've said is of little use. The instance doesn't want us to delve into the ghost's origin or past events. This instance only wants us to survive here; hence, most useful information and background details are hidden."

At this point, Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "However, luckily, there's a Fortune-teller in this instance."

He said this while looking at the black-robed girl.

Gu Mian also turned his gaze to the Fortune-teller. This woman, clad in a black robe, would probably be tied to a stake and burned if she were to travel back to medieval Europe.

The Fortune-teller chuckled, embarrassed. "You all know fortunetelling isn't omnipotent. Just like how I can't divine the math paper for this year's college entrance exam..."

Gu Mian recalled the college entrance exam activity. "Then I suppose there won't be any math questions in this year's college entrance exam," he said.

The Fortune-teller cleared her throat and continued, "I can't divine specific events, but I can divine whether something has happened or not. Of course, the failure rate isn't low. If a divination fails, it doesn't give a wrong answer; rather, it completely fails to reveal what you want to know..."

"Since the Pendulum is a special item obtained from the instance, my failure rate with Pendulum Divination is currently the lowest," she said, taking out her Pendulum. "When I divine something, if it swings clockwise, the answer is affirmative. Counter-clockwise means negative. If the divination fails, it won't swing at all."

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses again.

"I had her divine whether the serial killer in Ziyang City was a ghost. The Pendulum swung clockwise.

"Whether the ghost had committed serial killings multiple times. Clockwise again.

"Whether there were players among the earlier victims. The Pendulum didn't move... We can basically confirm that the ghost is systematically killing players who enter this instance by committing serial murders."

At this point in his explanation, Caoyuan interjected, frowning with a strange look on his face, "Hold on, doesn't the instance clear its data and restart after each batch of players? The data for players killed previously should have been erased."

Mingyue, next to him, also wore a peculiar expression.

The Fortune-teller looked somewhat uneasy. "I'm sorry, Mr. Caoyuan, but according to my divinations, the instance mechanics don't seem to work the way you think."

After witnessing Gu Mian's exploits in the Sweet Lovers instance, the Fortune-teller's worldview had crumbled. She began to doubt the instance itself and, as a result, performed several divinations concerning the instance's creators.

Using her profession obtained from the instance to divine the instance's mechanics is like a character created by an author trying to kill the author—basically impossible.

But the Fortune-teller succeeded. Despite countless failures, she finally managed to glimpse the instance's secrets.

Of course, regarding the instance, her divination only succeeded that one time. Using the Pendulum for Q&A, she discovered that the instance's timeline was continuously advancing. It was unbelievable, but she had to accept it.

Caoyuan's brow remained furrowed; he still seemed to disbelieve what he'd heard. Mingyue, perhaps influenced by him, also frowned slightly.

The Fortune-teller looked up. "My abilities are limited; I can't keep divining. I don't know why Meiren Chu's questions earlier consumed so much energy..."

The implication was clear: she lacked the energy to continue, and they could do as they pleased.

Chu Changge looked at her. "I have one more thing about the serial murder case I want to confirm. It should be possible without divination, but it might take some time."

At this, Mingyue suddenly interrupted, "Isn't our mission just to survive? Is it really necessary to understand everything from the past so clearly? How does figuring all this out help us survive?"

Without hesitation, Chu Changge answered honestly, "It doesn't."

"If it doesn't help, why research it? We should be figuring out how to survive... You're all acting like you've transmigrated to ancient times, found yourselves framed and in bed with a man, but instead of trying to escape, you're busy researching what year it is and who the emperor is..."

Gu Mian silently glanced at Mingyue. It seems this female player's mind has been poisoned by some rather vicious novels.

Fatty, however, sank into deep thought. "What's so incriminating about me lying in bed with a man?"

Chu Changge completely ignored him and looked at the Fortune-teller. "You really can't continue?"

The Fortune-teller also paid no mind to Mingyue's vivid analogy, her brow furrowed in thought. "My energy is insufficient... but there is one more divination method I can use. It barely draws on my energy... but it's quite dangerous."

Mingyue spoke up, somewhat resentfully, "Are you guys even listening to me?"

The method she referred to was invoking the Spirit Pen. Gu Mian had never considered such things a form of divination, but the Fortune-teller firmly insisted it was.

A white sheet of paper lay on the table, with a black gel pen on top. Beside it was a white candle, which Fatty had specifically run downstairs to the small shop to buy.

The Fortune-teller sat at one side of the table. "Many people have tried invoking the Spirit Pen, but most attempts weren't truly successful. After I became a Fortune-teller, my success rate increased significantly. However, failure is still possible. And by failure, I don't mean we won't summon anything... but that we might summon... miscellaneous things."

Fatty leaned over. "Is that why you roped the Doctor into doing this with you?"

At this moment, Gu Mian was seated opposite the Fortune-teller, his fingers idly poking the black gel pen on the table.

"If you're relying on the Doctor, you probably won't summon anything at all. How about someone else takes over?" Fatty suggested sincerely.

"I'll try first," Gu Mian said, turning his head to Fatty. "If I fail, you're up."

Fatty instinctively recoiled a step. "I wish you success."

Caoyuan and Mingyue watched from a distance, thinking the other players were acting strangely—suddenly deciding to play with a Spirit Pen, claiming they wanted to uncover the secrets of the serial murder case.

"Are they nuts?" Mingyue murmured, staring at them from afar.

Caoyuan, beside her, nodded in agreement.

Xiao Tuwan checked the time. It was already 2:50 PM. Nearly a third of the forty-eight hours had passed, yet no one had died.

As she spoke, she looked at Chu Changge beside her. "You've already decided what to ask, right?"

Chu Changge nodded silently.

And just as Caoyuan and Mingyue watched coldly from a distance, with Xiao Qiao crouching nearby and staring curiously, Gu Mian suddenly felt the room grow frigid, the air around him turning iciest of all.

It was as if a refrigerator had abruptly opened its door beside him. Then, something cold seemed to pierce into their clasped hands. Gu Mian tightened his grip slightly; it felt like an icy hand.

Simultaneously, the candle flame suddenly extinguished. He felt the Fortune-teller's hand, opposite him, tremble slightly. "It's here."

"Ask quickly," the Fortune-teller urged, turning to Chu Changge.

Chu Changge stared at the white paper and slowly began, "In the Ziyang City serial murders, the number of people killed by the ghost."

Isn't it eight? Mingyue looked at Chu Changge, puzzled. Ziyang City was just next door. Whether they searched online or asked others, the reported death toll was eight. Why was he asking this now?

At that moment, Gu Mian felt the intruding icy hand begin to move. It guided the pen, which started to trace a number on the white paper—

"9"

Seeing this number, the others collectively held their breath. Nine deaths?

Chapter 443 Fatty's Underwear_1

"But the serial killings next door resulted in eight deaths..." Mingyue couldn't help blurting out.

The Fortune-teller didn't have time to ponder the death toll. She quickly asked, "Are we done?"

Chu Changge nodded.

"Alright, then we'll end it now," the Fortune-teller said, staring at the pen in her hand. "Please leave."

If it were a kind-hearted Spirit Pen, it should have left by then.

However, Gu Mian waited for a long time, but the nearby candle didn't re-ignite. Simultaneously, he felt the invisible hand holding his grow colder, as if he were clutching a block of ice, so cold his blood felt like it was about to freeze.

It didn't want to leave.

Beads of sweat appeared on the Fortune-teller's forehead. She repeated firmly, "Please leave."

The Spirit Pen still didn't react. At the same time, everyone felt the temperature in the room plummet, making them shiver involuntarily.

"What's happening!" Caoyuan's eyes widened as he stared at Gu Mian and Chu Changge.

A bead of sweat trickled down the Fortune-teller's forehead. "I told you accidents could happen... After all, summoning the Spirit Pen is inherently a very dangerous thing..."

The room was terrifyingly quiet. The temperature continued to drop, as if something was about to appear.

Swallowing hard, Caoyuan took a step back and quietly reached for the doorknob, only to be shocked to find the door wouldn't open.

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't push the door open.

None of them could leave.

"The door won't open!" Realizing this, he finally raised his voice and shouted to the others.

Mingyue immediately looked over, ran towards the door, not believing it, and forcefully twisted the handle. Of course, it didn't open either.

"What do we do?" Mingyue quickly turned to look at the others.

No one seemed to be paying attention to the door. The Fortune-teller was still staring intently at the pen in her hand, and the man with glasses was also staring at it.

The Doctor (Gu Mian) even had the presence of mind to reach out his other hand to touch the guitar case beside him.

And the others actually looked as if they were just watching the excitement.

Watching this scene, Mingyue's heart began to pound. These people...

Just as the temperature in the room had dropped to an exceptionally terrifying degree, Chu Changge suddenly said, "He's coming out."

Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge in confusion, only to see a pale hand already extending from his pocket.

Outside the dilapidated building, a tall, thin old man with graying hair, carrying a small stool on his back, was strolling leisurely. Suddenly, a hand shot out from a corner, violently dragged him into the darkness. Half a minute later, a corpse, dead in a horrific manner, lay in the middle of the road.

Five minutes later, an older woman pushing her bicycle came by and was startled by the corpse on the ground. Trembling, she immediately took out her old-fashioned phone and pressed three keys.

"What on earth happened just now!" Caoyuan, his back pressed tightly against the door, said, swallowing, as he looked at the few people by the table.

The temperature in the room had returned to normal, all thanks to the hand that had emerged from the pocket of Meiren Chu.

That's right, they had all personally seen a pale hand suddenly emerge from Meiren Chu's pocket and swiftly grasp the pen.

In that instant, the surrounding icy aura vanished without a trace, and so did the pale hand.

Chu Changge looked expressionlessly at the people by the door. "It's nothing."

Looking at Chu Changge's face, Caoyuan shivered. He quickly turned and twisted the doorknob. "You people are too weird. I'm leaving this damned place..."

This time, the door surprisingly opened when he twisted it. Caoyuan didn't hesitate and quickly fled from that man who seemed very much like a ghost.

Mingyue clearly didn't want to stay with them any longer either. She glanced at Gu Mian's group, then quickly followed Caoyuan out.

Xiao Tuwan also went with them.

Instantly, only Gu Mian's group of six remained in the room.

The Fortune-teller also looked at Chu Changge quite warily. "What was that that came out of your pocket just now?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses and repeated, "It's nothing."

"It was a ghost, wasn't it?" Liu Ruyan suddenly interjected. "A ghost from who knows which instance, to actually be carried around as a special item."

What? The Fortune-teller's mouth fell slightly agape. "That's possible?"

While the Fortune-teller was expressing her surprise, Chu Changge suddenly stood up and walked into the bedroom, frowning slightly.

Gu Mian put down the saw he had acquired and followed him in. Chu Changge was standing by the window, looking outside. At this moment, Gu Mian also heard a sound, which seemed to be coming from downstairs.

There were no security bars on the window, so the view outside was very clear.

A crowd of elderly and middle-aged people were gathered together, forming a circle. In the center of the circle, someone seemed to be lying there.

Gu Mian, who had excellent eyesight, saw that the person in the center of the circle appeared to be dead. The person's face was contorted in terror, limbs twisted; it was not a pretty corpse.

Some of the surrounding elderly and middle-aged people also slightly covered their eyes with their hands, as if unable to look directly at the horrifying corpse.

At this point, the others had also come to the window, looking at the corpse below.

"Was this a ghost's doing?" Gu Mian frowned, staring at the corpse in the center of the crowd.
"Someone must have called the police by now."

The police would surely arrive soon, and they still had a body in their room.

"We should leave here quickly," Gu Mian said, turning to walk out of the bedroom. "Otherwise, I might soon experience something I've never experienced before."

Fatty scratched his nose. "I don't want to go to the clink either... but where do we go?"

The Fortune-teller suddenly chimed in, "When we asked the Spirit Pen earlier, didn't it say that nine people died in the serial murder case in the neighboring city? But both official reports and rumors say the death toll is eight. What are your thoughts on this?"

Gu Mian returned to the sofa and picked up the guitar case. "Based on my years of experience with horror movies, the ninth person killed in the previous serial killings might have been possessed by a ghost after death, and is now hiding among us."

Players also died in the previous serial killings; a ghost could easily be wearing a player's skin.

At this, Fatty suddenly raised his hand. "Of course, it can't be one of us five. The five of us were matched together for this instance! We know each other inside out."

The Fortune-teller wore a bitter expression. "Then doesn't that just leave me?"

"Of course, the three who left just now are also suspects." Saying this, Gu Mian suddenly took a step forward and patted the Fortune-teller's shoulder. "Although you don't look like a ghost, I still have to ask you a question to test you."

The Fortune-teller craned her neck, listening intently. "What question?"

Gu Mian leaned in and spoke softly, "The last time we cleared an instance together, what color was Fatty's underwear?"

The Fortune-teller stood rooted to the spot, stunned.

The last time we cleared an instance together...Wasn't that the Sweetheart Lovers instance? the Fortune-teller recalled with a dawning realization. There wasn't any Fatty in that instance!

Chapter 444

"Alright, you passed." Not wanting to harass the Fortune-teller too much, Gu Mian patted her shoulder and dropped his questions about the color of her underwear.

The Fortune-teller seemed taken aback for a couple of seconds before realizing Gu Mian had been messing with her.

She chose not to be angry; instead, she looked at Wang Xin's body on the floor and asked, "The police will be here soon. What's your plan?"

"Since our mission is to survive two days, we should try to escape," Gu Mian glanced at the door. "If we see a ghost, we turn tail and run. Same goes for the cops. Back in the day, I used to be a champion at the 1,000-meter sprint."

Fatty sidled up, whispering, "But Doc, back when you saw ghosts before, you didn't exactly react this way..."

"Enough talk, let's get a move on, or we may find ourselves in the back of a cop car," Gu Mian quickly walked a few steps, opened the door, and said, "We'll hide out in some secluded place first."

With a trace of resignation on her face, the Fortune-teller followed. "According to my experience with past instances, going to more isolated places usually means dying faster, but this time is different... I'll run with you guys."

She had considered leaving with the other three, but on second thought, it seemed safer to stick with this seemingly perverse doctor.

By now, Gu Mian had already started down the stairs.

The others soon streamed out of the room too. While descending the stairs, Chu Changge took out several property flyers from his pocket. "I've examined the map of this city closely..."

Fatty interjected, somewhat surprised, "When did you manage to grab those flyers?"

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. He continued down the stairs, examining the papers in his hand as if he didn't need to watch his step. "This city isn't a tourist destination," he explained, "so it's hard to find maps with details on building distribution or population density. That's why I grabbed several property flyers from different residential communities."

Gu Mian knew that property flyers always contained maps, mostly boasting about their prime location, proximity to schools or supermarkets, and so on.

While talking, Chu Changge placed the topmost flyer at the bottom of the stack and started reviewing the next one. "If we don't deal with Wang Xin's body, the ghost's influence will likely lead the police to discover it here. We could then become suspects, so I suggest we head somewhere remote."

Truth be told, their current location was already somewhat secluded, but the police would be arriving soon.

"By studying the mini-maps on these property flyers, I've got a general idea of population density in certain areas," Chu Changge continued. "I suggest we first go to Tongying Street in the west of the city. It's mostly auto-manufacturing plants there. Normally, aside from the businesses, there's hardly anyone around. If we head there now, it won't be long before those businesses close for the day and everyone leaves, making it the most deserted place at night."

By this time, the group had reached the ground floor. The elderly people were still gathered around the horrifying corpse. A battered minivan was parked not far away.

Gu Mian strode past the group of seniors, quietly asking Chu Changge, "How far is Tongying Street from here?"

"About a one-and-a-half-hour drive."

"Who has a car?"

Liu Ruyan's voice came from behind them. "I do, but we just walked past it."

Fatty coughed. "We came here in Liu Ruyan's car."

Gu Mian stopped and looked behind him. The area wasn't very crowded, so parking spaces were quite plentiful.

Within his field of vision, only a dilapidated minivan was parked there. Liu Ruyan raised her hand, a set of car keys dangling from her index finger. "That old wreck over there."

Upon exiting the building, Caoyuan, Mingyue, and Xiao Tuwan naturally caught sight of the gruesome corpse.

A chill ran down all three of their spines, and they hurried past the body without dawdling.

At this point, they had reached a slightly more crowded street. Xiao Tuwan looked visibly worried. "Although I know it's usually pointless to stick together in a horror instance, there's a sense of security with a larger group. I feel like it's dangerous for just the three of us."

While observing their surroundings, Caoyuan remarked, "But you still chose to come with us, didn't you? Did you think it was more dangerous to stick with them?"

The saying "strength in numbers" definitely didn't apply to this damned horror instance. All three of them were acutely aware of this.

At this point, Mingyue spoke up, "Did you guys see the hand extending from that man's pocket? Wasn't that a ghost's hand? It looked like some kind of special item."

Hearing this, the other two fell silent for a moment.

Caoyuan frowned. "All this time, in these horror instances, all I've ever been able to do is run. Even if I had a special item, it was never one that could attack ghosts. All I can do is run, run, run... That's why I was scared when I saw that hand. The Spirit Pen is obviously a ghost too, but when that ghostly hand just lightly gripped it, the Spirit Pen seemed to vanish. I don't understand how such a special item can exist."

That didn't make any sense.

Mingyue and Xiao Tuwan also frowned; this was clearly the first time they had encountered such a peculiar situation.

"Maybe it involves some sort of sacrifice. There shouldn't be any special item that can attack ghosts without a price," Xiao Tuwan speculated. "That group of people are no pushovers. Two of them have professions, and one even has that terrifying ghost hand..."

"But the actress didn't seem very useful," Mingyue added abruptly.

Caoyuan gave Mingyue a strange look.

Xiao Tuwan paused, mumbling to herself, "But she seemed pretty nonchalant about the horror instance..."

At this, she shuddered, recalling the scene she'd witnessed from her hiding place in the cupboard. When Xiao Qiao had seen Wang Xin's body, there was no fear on her face; instead, she looked... happy?

Years of watching TV dramas had taught her that it was very difficult to discern any emotion from an actress like Xiao Qiao. This could only mean that Xiao Qiao had been absolutely thrilled at that moment.

Mingyue didn't seem to hear Xiao Tuwan's muttering. She was busy discussing their next move with Caoyuan. "Where should we go next? We should head to a crowded place, right?"

"Exactly," Caoyuan nodded. "We're better off finding a crowded shopping mall to hide out in. Ghosts typically don't kill in crowded places. When it gets dark and other places are empty, we'll go to a bar; they're usually crowded at night."

Finding a crowded mall wasn't difficult, as this was a fairly populated city. Even on weekdays, the mall was bustling with people.

The trio sat on leather stools in the mall, back to back, vigilantly scanning their surroundings.

Since they had been sitting there for so long, the sales staff at nearby counters couldn't help but shoot curious glances in their direction.

Xiao Tuwan checked the time. "It's three-thirty now. The three of us are still safe. The ghost doesn't seem very active in this instance. I wonder how the others are doing."

Caoyuan said knowingly, "They have more people. If anyone's going to die, it'll definitely be someone from their side first."

Chapter 445 What do you want a bicycle for_1

As she watched people stream through the mall, Xiao Tuwan felt uneasy. It was not yet four o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun still hung in the sky, but she knew that no matter how hot its rays were, it wouldn't make any difference to their situation.

Mingyue was currently sitting next to Xiao Tuwan, vigilantly observing their surroundings while occasionally checking her phone.

Before the global game began, Xiao Tuwan had been a genuine online game addict—the kind of girl who could stay home all day glued to her phone. However, after the game started and the internet collapsed, she sometimes subconsciously reached for her phone to open a game, only to be disappointed when the network was unavailable.

Later, even the electricity was cut off. When night fell, they could only rely on precious electricity cards for light, and she couldn't bear to charge her once-beloved phone.

When was the last time I saw a lit phone screen anyway? Xiao Tuwan pondered quietly. She unconsciously glanced at Mingyue's phone screen and saw that Mingyue was searching for information about the serial murders in neighboring Ziyang City.

People were coming and going. Occasionally, a child passed by, holding a helium balloon.

After browsing the web for a while, Mingyue lowered her voice and began to speak softly to the other two, "I don't know about the person the ghost killed before. But looking at the descriptions of that serial murder case next door, the murderer killed eight people in two days. The times of death for these eight people, however, were all different. Only three people died together because they huddled together; the others all died a few hours apart."

Caoyuan picked up the thread, "So, you're saying the ghost can't teleport? If it wants to kill two people who aren't in the same place, it has to kill one first and then go find the second?"

Mingyue nodded slightly. "It seems that way. I think we have a better chance of survival if we scatter and run in different directions."

Xiao Tuwan looked at her two companions. "So, the three of us huddling together is quite dangerous. If the ghost comes to kill, it could wipe us out in one swoop."

Mingyue suddenly laughed and shook her head. "Let me ask you, if you were the ghost and wanted to kill the nine players entering the instance, but your actions were limited—you couldn't teleport or clone yourself—and now the nine players have split into two groups, one with three people and the other with six, which one would you kill first?"

"Of course, I'd kill the group of six first... because they might suddenly split up at any time. You'd have to kill them before they disperse," Xiao Tuwan lifted her head to look at Mingyue as she spoke. "So you're saying the ghost will kill them first, and we are temporarily safe?"

"Of course," Mingyue put away her phone. "The more players gather together in this instance, the worse it is for them. I think the ghost has already set its sights on that group."

"But those six people don't seem easy to deal with. When I solve problems, I always finish the easy ones first before tackling the difficult ones," Xiao Tuwan expressed her worries.

"You said yourself that you skip tough problems. In the ghost's eyes, all players are simple problems. Do you think the ghost can be stumped by the players? Impossible. So, we are safe until they are all dead."

「On the wide road, a worn-out minivan was racing.」

Liu Ruyan's minivan was already quite old, and it was a real squeeze to fit six people in it, especially since one of them, Fatty, needed room for two. At half-past four, the sun hung in the western sky, and Gu Mian and his group were almost at their destination.

The driver wasn't Gu Mian, but Liu Ruyan. At this moment, Gu Mian was sitting in the front passenger seat, while Chu Changge, Fatty, and the rest were all in the second and third-row seats.

Gu Mian heard Chu Changge's voice from the back, "I looked into Ziyang City's serial murder case earlier. Except for the three victims who died at the same time because they were together, the others all died after certain intervals."

Fatty quickly caught on to Chu Changge's point, "Which means the ghost can't teleport or clone itself? So, it would be more advantageous for us to split and run?"

"Exactly," Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "Theoretically, the farther the nine players are from each other, the fewer people the ghost can kill within two days. So, the ghost should actually prefer players to gather together..."

"But let's put that aside for now. I believe that in front of absolute force, all theories can be invalidated. So right now, we are not the ones in danger."

On hearing this, Fatty hugged his guitar bag tightly.

"So, if we're safe until all six of them are dead, what happens when they are all dead?" From the bustling mall, Xiao Tuwan looked at Mingyue next to her.

"I can't calculate when they will die, but since the six of them are together, they would likely be swiftly destroyed if the ghost sets its sights on them. I don't believe they can survive tonight. However, we should plan ahead," as Mingyue spoke, she glanced over at Caoyuan. "Now that we know scattering is advantageous, I suggest that before the mall closes, each of us find a car and head in different directions. The farther, the better."

"But I can't drive," Xiao Tuwan looked somewhat anxious. "Could I get a taxi?" Even if she hailed a taxi, the driver would probably not agree to the requirement of "drive straight and don't stop."

Mingyue shook her head. "We can't guarantee the driver's safety. You saw Spirit Pen's answer as well. In the Ziyang serial murder case, nine people died, but only eight bodies were found. The ghost could have used one of the corpses as a disguise. When escaping, it's safer to be alone. You can find a bicycle."

"Okay... then how will you two find cars?" Xiao Tuwan asked.

Mingyue gave a slight smile. "I have a car. It's parked in the underground garage of my apartment complex."

Caoyuan also felt his pocket. "I have one too. I've still got the car keys on me."

Caoyuan and Mingyue lived in the same residential complex, very close to each other. They parked in the same garage. The car key had a small metal tag attached, engraved with the parking space number and license plate number. Xiao Tuwan, who initially wanted to hitch a ride with someone, had been rejected. Now she stood on the sidewalk, staring blankly at a row of shared bicycles.

She had agreed with the other two to head west because the road seemed relatively flat there.

Mingyue and Caoyuan had already arrived in the underground garage. The garage was rather gloomy. If not for the necessity to escape, they would never have come to such a creepy place.

Caoyuan hunched his shoulders, comparing the metal tag on the key to find his car. Soon, he recognized the familiar license plate number. At that moment, he suddenly heard urgent footsteps from behind him—footsteps that didn't belong to either him or Mingyue. They were the footsteps of a third person! But the noise was getting farther and farther away.

He quickly turned around to look. He only saw Mingyue standing behind him, looking in a certain direction. Caoyuan immediately followed her gaze, but the densely packed cars obstructed his view.

"What's going on?" he asked, his voice tinged with fear. "I heard that noise right behind us just now."

Mingyue retracted her gaze. "There was someone crouching in the gap between nearby cars. They stood up and ran as soon as they saw us."

Without wasting any time, Caoyuan quickly got into his car. "This place is pretty creepy. I don't dare stay longer. You continue your search; I'll leave first."

With the sound of the car's ignition, Mingyue suddenly asked, "Which way are you going? I'll go a different way."

Caoyuan quickly responded, "Xiao Tuwan is heading west, so I'll head east. You shouldn't go east then."

"Alright." Mingyue nodded slowly, watching the car in front of her drive farther and farther away.

Soon, she also got into a car and slowly drove out of the underground garage. It was just after five in the evening, and the sun was starting to set. The three of them scattered, racing off in different directions.

Xiao Tuwan rode a shared bike alone, heading west on the main road. The farther west she went, the fewer people she saw. Outside the city center, the surrounding ring was all suburbs.

The sun had gradually set. Seeing the sunset ahead, she felt a little nervous.

Riding a bicycle alone at night in a horror instance is genuinely frightening.

She pedaled furiously, trying to get as far away as possible before the sun set completely and night fell.

Joyful moments are always fleeting, and so is the time to escape.

Before she could get far, the last rays of the sun dipped below the mountains. She watched the sky darken and the surrounding light fade.

The streetlights above flickered on, illuminating the road ahead.

Xiao Tuwan looked ahead. There was hardly anyone left on this road. If she kept going, it would likely become a highway or something similar, and there appeared to be no buildings around.

For a moment, she considered finding a hotel for the night, but quickly dismissed the idea.

Just keep moving forward. The farther I run, the less likely the ghost will catch me. With this thought, she resignedly pedaled her bicycle again.

After pedaling for what felt like an age, the sky had completely darkened. The moon was only faintly visible. Xiao Tuwan rode alone on the wide road, a knot of fear in her stomach.

The ghost will kill the other six people first, and those six must not be all dead yet. The ghost can't possibly come after us now, she muttered, trying to console herself.

Just then, bright car headlights suddenly illuminated her from behind.

Several cars had already passed her, so Xiao Tuwan didn't turn her head and kept pedaling forward.

Unexpectedly, the car approaching from behind pulled up beside her and honked.

Xiao Tuwan turned her head in surprise and saw a familiar face through the car window. "Mingyue?"

"It's me," Mingyue said from the driver's seat. "Caoyuan went east. I originally planned to go south, but there was road construction, so after a few detours, I ended up here. You'd better hurry; the ghost will definitely kill those at the very back first."

"Mm..." Just as Xiao Tuwan nodded, she saw Mingyue start to close her window, apparently about to leave. She immediately cried out, "Wait!"

Mingyue, her window half-closed, turned to look at Xiao Tuwan outside. "What is it?"

Xiao Tuwan hesitated for a moment before asking, "Could you give me a ride for a bit? I'm too slow on this bike. I'll get out after a short distance and walk."

Mingyue was silent for a moment as if considering it. A few seconds later, she nodded.

Xiao Tuwan immediately put her shared bike into the trunk of Mingyue's car, then got into the back seat.

Gu Mian and the others had already reached Tongying Street. At 7:30 in the evening, the street was indeed deserted. The six of them sat in a row on the curb beside the road, an old van parked nearby. The dim streetlight shone down from above. Despite the eerie atmosphere, not a single ghost was in sight, creating a strangely harmonious scene.

Brother took advantage of Chu Changge's momentary distraction to dart out and crouch by Gu Mian's side, almost scaring the nearby Fortune-teller into abandoning the van and running away.

"Th-th-this... is this the hand from earlier?" the Fortune-teller stammered, his voice filled with bewilderment.

Gu Mian nodded honestly. "It's a ghost, but it has one flaw: it loves to randomly claim kinship, calling everyone 'sister'. If it calls me 'sister' later, don't be scared."

Just then, Fatty asked Chu Changge, "Brother Chu, are we just going to wait here for the two days to pass?"

It was now 7:30 in the evening. Nineteen hours of the forty-eight had already passed, and so far, they were still quite safe.

"No," Chu Changge shook his head, "we're going back tomorrow, back to where we started."

"Back?" Fatty craned his neck, puzzled.

Gu Mian turned to Chu Changge. "When I was on the road, I was thinking back through the contents of *The Second World* again. I don't remember ever seeing the words 'Visage of Death,' but you all said that's where you found the name of this instance."

He paused for a few seconds before continuing, "Actually, you didn't find the name in the book, did you?"

The Fortune-teller listened to Gu Mian, a look of dawning comprehension on his face. "What are you talking about?"

But nobody answered his question.

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses under the streetlight. "You're right. I didn't get the name of this instance from the book."

Fatty began, confused, "Then you..." but Chu Changge cut him off before he could finish. "The reason we entered this instance before the event started is because the ghost in this instance seems to have changed, just like in the Fairy Tale City instance."

Before Fatty could fully process how Chu Changge knew all this, his eyes widened as he blurted out, "In this instance, if you die, do you really die?"

Chu Changge shook his head slightly. "No. It's just that the ghost, which was originally an NPC, has gained self-awareness. You all know there are two types of NPCs in instances. One type, like Mr. Green and Coach Che, are fully aware they're NPCs in a game. The others are completely unaware they're in an instance world, and this latter type is usually hard to control."

"The ghost in this instance originally belonged to the latter category. However, it discovered the truth of the world, realized it was in a game, and has begun to resist."

"Such a ghost is a highly unstable factor, but the instance itself can't eliminate this ghost, so it could only ask for your help."

While speaking, Chu Changge looked at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "So, how did you know all this?"

Xiao Qiao, who was sitting next to Gu Mian, quietly raised her hand. "Actually, I told him."

The Fortune-teller was struggling to understand, as if listening to gibberish.

Gu Mian continued his question, "And how did you know?"

Xiao Qiao replied, "Mr. Green told me."

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian felt a slight headache. "How do you all know each other?"

Chu Changge spoke up again, "The ghost in this instance has discovered some secrets, which is why I chose this instance. As long as we capture it alive, we can question it about the world's secrets."

Is this something a human would say? The Fortune-teller was frozen to the spot.

"Of course, once you've questioned it for secrets, whether you kill it or cut it up is up to you," Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses. "The ghost in this instance is extremely cunning. After realizing it was in a game, it began a series of serial murders. Often, after killing multiple people, it chooses the most suitable corpse to wear..."

"Wear?" Fatty suddenly interjected.

"Yes," Chu Changge said, "to use as a cover for itself, attempting to evade the instance's notice. Due to the ghost's particular nature, it can wear one corpse for several months."

"The ghost has been committing crimes as it moves from place to place. Since the instances can accurately teleport us to the ghost's location, it means that even though the ghost is constantly hiding, it hasn't escaped the instance's surveillance," Gu Mian interjected.

"Mm," Chu Changge nodded, "but there's a small problem."

Gu Mian remembered... The goddess in the last instance had said something similar when she was giving her brother away...

Chapter 447 Strange Appraisal Method_1

Chu Changge suddenly fell silent at this point.

In those few seconds of silence, Gu Mian realized the seriousness of the situation.

Then Chu Changge spoke, "The ghost in this instance has come into contact with some degree of truth, and it seems to know you."

Gu Mian raised his head slightly, looking at the dark night sky. "It knows me?"

He was quite aware that his name was well-known, but he hadn't expected that even the ghost in the instance would have heard of the name "Gu Mian."

"Just as a ghost wouldn't proactively step into a known trap, this instance is quite safe for you. But that very safety makes things difficult.

"The ghost won't actively seek you out, so you won't have a chance to confront it directly, and naturally, you won't be able to ask questions..."

Gu Mian noticed that when Chu Changge said "ask questions," Fatty, standing beside him, had a slightly unnatural expression.

Immediately after, he heard Fatty's voice. "Ask questions? Not torture?"

Ignoring Fatty's words, Chu Changge continued, "So, our departure today was just for show. We need to return secretly, without being discovered."

The Fortune-teller, standing nearby and staring at the gravel on the road, listened to Chu Changge's words and sank into deep thought. "This isn't like how I used to clear instances," she mused. "Weren't we always desperately trying to escape? Why do we now have to put on a show to lure the ghost? Am I the ghost, or a Ghost Messenger?"

Chu Changge's voice continued, "The ghost won't chase us, so it will definitely kill the other three first. We'll sneak back while it's busy killing them."

After he finished speaking, he stood up and walked towards Liu Ruyan's beat-up van.

The Fortune-teller looked up at him blankly. "Are you serious?"

He was, of course, serious. Before long, a speeding beat-up van appeared on the deserted road.

Xiao Tuwan sat idly in the back seat while Mingyue drove.

She had been in the car for nearly an hour. It was now 8:30 PM, and in that hour, they had traveled a significant distance. Xiao Tuwan didn't want to get out too early; cycling alone in the dark wasn't safe.

Fortunately, Mingyue didn't seem to be in a hurry to make her leave, so Xiao Tuwan lingered in the back seat, occasionally chatting with Mingyue as she drove.

"Mingyue, we're pretty far from where we started, aren't we?"

Mingyue, eyes fixed on the road ahead, answered, "Mm-hmm."

"The ghost can't teleport, but if it comes after us, it'll be incredibly fast. Even in a car, we'd still be caught, right?" Xiao Tuwan glanced at the passing streetlights, a flicker of anxiety in her heart.

"Of course," Mingyue replied.

"It seems the more people split up, the harder it is for the ghost to manage... I wish we'd told the other six to scatter too. That way, the ghost would take longer." As she spoke, Xiao Tuwan suddenly pulled a cell phone from her pocket. "Oh, I have my phone, and Xiao Qiao's number is in it. Should I call and tell them to split up?"

In the pitch-black night, only the sound of the car moving forward broke the silence. Mingyue didn't speak.

Xiao Tuwan looked towards the driver's seat, slightly confused. "What's wrong, Mingyue? Don't you want them to also..."

However, her words abruptly stopped midway.

Her eyes flew wide as she stared at the driver's seat. It was empty, yet the car continued its eerie forward motion.

Dim streetlight filtered through the windshield. Xiao Tuwan shook her head hard, her eyes straining to see the driver's seat in the faint light, but it remained stubbornly empty.

Fear began to creep in. She quickly glanced around, trying to get out of the moving car, only to find the doors were somehow locked.

The car continued on, driverless. Xiao Tuwan straightened up slightly, intending to pull the handbrake.

But just then, she glanced at the interior rearview mirror. Reflected in it, sitting right beside her, was a female ghost in a red dress, her hair hanging loose.

"Mingyue? What in the world...?" On the open road, Caoyuan stared through his windshield at a car that had suddenly shot out from another lane.

The two cars collided squarely, head-on. Thankfully, it wasn't a major accident.

Just as Caoyuan was feeling bewildered, he recognized the driver of the other car.

It was now 9:30 PM. Caoyuan couldn't understand why Mingyue had suddenly appeared here.

He rolled down his window. "Didn't I tell you not to head in my direction? Why did you still come this way?"

Mingyue, wearing an odd expression, got out of her car and walked towards him. "I don't know. I was driving south and ended up here. Isn't this south?"

"Of course this isn't south," Caoyuan said. "This is east. Can't you even tell directions?"

Saying this, he paused and turned the key in the ignition. "I'm not going to waste time arguing. You head a different way. I'm leaving."

But then he realized the car wouldn't move.

He wasn't sure if the collision was the cause. Meanwhile, Mingyue was approaching from the other car, drawing closer and closer.

Watching Mingyue approach, a thin film of sweat coated Caoyuan's forehead. He sensed something was deeply unsettling. They had clearly agreed to split up, yet here was Mingyue.

He couldn't be sure if the person in front of him was a ghost in disguise.

There was one way to immediately determine if this Mingyue was human or ghost, but he needed her to get a little closer...

Tense, Caoyuan kept turning the key, but the car wouldn't start.

Just then, he heard a knock on his window. He turned to look. Mingyue's face was right there. "Your car broke down? Come ride with me."

Caoyuan's eyes widened slightly. There was one way to immediately tell the difference between a player and a ghost.

That was by attempting to open the other's game panel.

A bead of sweat rolled down Caoyuan's forehead. He was terrified to realize he couldn't open the game panel of the person before him! This wasn't a player!

Chapter 448 Alien in the Pigsty_1

"I wonder how the other three are doing now," Fatty muttered to himself.

By nine-thirty in the evening, Gu Mian and the others had already returned to the city center. They were now hiding in a dressing room in a mall that was about to close, avoiding other people. Fatty was so

large he was shoved to the very edge, his face pressed against the door and nearly squashed out of shape.

Fatty listened carefully to the footsteps outside, recognizing the sounds of mall employees leaving for the day. Gu Mian and the others hid in the dressing room of an abandoned store, considering the cleaning lady might check the restrooms for anyone left behind before the mall closed.

Not daring to breathe heavily, Fatty squeezed out a whisper, "Brother Chu, why are we hiding here?"

Chu Changge, squeezed into another corner, his feet barely touching the ground, explained, "There's nobody here after the mall closes, which greatly reduces the risk of us getting caught by the police. It makes our task easier. We need the ghost to find us. As everyone knows, secluded and dark places are ideal for ghosts to appear."

"Be found by the ghost?" Fatty's eyes widened in the cramped dressing room. "You mean, after everyone leaves, the six of us will split up to lure it out?"

Squeezed at the edge, Chu Changge remained composed. "The ghost in this instance is somewhat out of control, but it seems to have a particular interest in players' bodies. Mr. Green said it wouldn't miss any chance to kill players, possibly intending to use a player's body to escape this instance."

Xiao Qiao, who had a chainsaw hanging around her neck, nodded in agreement. Gu Mian was wracking his brains trying to get the bag off her neck.

Fatty was still pressed against the dressing room's partition door. "But even if we split up in this mall, the Doctor is still close by, right? If the ghost knows we're back, will it definitely come?"

Chu Changge shook his head, a difficult maneuver in the cramped dressing room. "That's why we can't let the ghost know Gu Mian is here. We need to send out bait to lure it. Besides, this time we have two professional players. While the Doctor can't be touched, there's still the Fortune-teller. The ghost might think possessing a professional player's body could offer some advantage."

The Fortune-teller, in the cramped fitting room, struggled to turn her head toward Chu Changge. "What did you say?"

"I said the Fortune-teller is an excellent lure," Chu Changge repeated, unfazed.

Gu Mian watched them. If Liu Ruyan hadn't been standing between them, the Fortune-teller would likely have her hands around Chu Changge's neck by now.

Chu Changge ignored the Fortune-teller's twitching fingers. He managed to free a hand from the crush of bodies to adjust his glasses. "Let me outline my plan. It's nine-thirty now, and the mall entrance is still busy. If we operate outside and someone spots a ghost, they'll definitely call the police..."

The Fortune-teller interjected, "Would anyone really call the police to report seeing a ghost?"

"Of course," Fatty said with conviction. "I used to be in and out of the station a lot. The police officers there told me they often get bizarre reports, things like, 'An alien landed in the pigsty east of my house and is now walking around,' or 'A female ghost just crawled out from under Old Wang's bed next door'—that sort of thing."

The Fortune-teller looked utterly bewildered. "What in the world?!"

Before the conversation could stray further, Chu Changge interjected, "That's why we need to send out bait to lure the ghost. We can only make our move when there's no one else around."

Fatty sounded skeptical. "Setting aside other issues, the mall doors should be locked by now, right? Plus, it's still pretty crowded outside, even at night. If we just saw through the mall's security door, we'd likely all be eating prison food tonight."

"I checked this mall's fire safety map when I came in," Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses.

"Deliveries go straight to the loading dock, and there's a door there that leads directly into the mall. That entrance is also quite secluded, so we can operate freely."

By now, the noises from outside had completely faded. It seemed everyone had left. Not long after the sounds died down, the light above their heads suddenly went out, plunging the entire dressing room into darkness.

Chu Changge took out a flashlight he had prepared. "Looks like they've all gone. We can go find the loading dock now."

Fatty, who had been squeezed for quite a while, immediately turned the doorknob to the fitting room and burst out of the cramped space. Gu Mian followed him out. Xiao Qiao, chainsaw still hanging around her neck, followed close behind. Gu Mian could finally reach out and take the guitar bag off her neck. Chu Changge and the Fortune-teller emerged last.

Using their flashlights, it didn't take them long to find the first-floor loading dock. As they located it, Chu Changge continued to explain his plan: "We don't know the ghost's exact whereabouts, but it's likely near our lodgings. Hanging around the coffee shop might give us a lead."

The Fortune-teller pointed at herself. "Are you talking to me?"

"Yes," Chu Changge nodded.

A miserable expression crossed the Fortune-teller's face. "I have such rotten luck! I never should have entered an instance at a time like this... Being chased by ghosts was one thing, but actively luring one? I've never heard of such a thing, let alone seen it!"

Gu Mian, flashlight in hand, was already inside the loading dock. It was filled with numerous shelves. He swept the beam around. "So, I just hide here and grab the ghost when it shows up?"

"No," Chu Changge shook his head. "This spot is too close to the exit; the ghost could easily get away. If anyone saw a doctor wielding a chainsaw and chasing someone down the street, it would cause a massive commotion."

As he spoke, Chu Changge had already reached the large doors of the loading dock. With Gu Mian's help, they quickly opened the heavy doors. As expected, they opened onto a deserted alley with not a soul in sight.

Standing in the doorway, Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "It's too risky for the Fortune-teller to go out alone. I'll accompany her, along with Fatty."

Fatty, who had been daydreaming, jolted when his name was called. "Huh? Me?"

"Yes." Chu Changge nodded, then looked at Xiao Qiao. "Give Gu Mian your phone so we can stay in contact."

Xiao Qiao grunted in acknowledgment and pulled a pink phone from her pocket.

Chu Changge stood at the entrance. "We'll do our best to lead the ghost this way, though there's no guarantee of success. If we don't return tonight, it means we perished somewhere along the way..."

"Don't say such terrifying things!" The Fortune-teller rubbed her arm, goosebumps rising on her skin.

Chapter 449 Wishing Everyone a Happy New Year_1

Mingyue was hiding in a remote small inn, half her face visible as she peeked out the window at the familiar faces passing by on the street below.

Earlier, when she and Caoyuan were in the underground parking garage, she had abruptly seen another face identical to hers in the gap between nearby cars, staring intently at her.

Without a second thought, she had turned and sprinted away. After running quite a distance and looking back, she saw that other version of her face conversing with Caoyuan.

"It's a ghost..." Mingyue's gaze remained on Chu Changge and the others on the street below. "The one who transformed into me is a ghost."

Mingyue's mind raced. If I run now, she thought, the ghost most likely won't chase me. It'll use my face to deceive Caoyuan directly. But if I shout a warning and we split up, the ghost will chase one of us randomly, and it might come after me.

Understanding this, Mingyue chose to abandon Caoyuan and flee immediately. However, she was shrewd enough not to run out of the underground garage. Instead, she hid in a corner beyond the ghost's sight.

Sure enough, once Caoyuan had left, the ghost immediately got into a car and drove in the direction Mingyue had fled. Clearly, the ghost's primary target was her. However, this also indicated that the ghost couldn't pinpoint a player's exact location.

Only after confirming the ghost had left did Mingyue quickly exit the underground garage. After leaving the garage, she checked into a remote inn. Since their escape plan was likely already known to the ghost, Mingyue decided to stay there to mislead it.

Upon entering the inn, she had been puzzled. The ghost had found her so quickly. Logically, the other six people shouldn't have died so quickly.

It wasn't until just after eleven o'clock at night that she saw three familiar figures passing by on the street below her window. She was on the third floor, which gave her a clear view of the ground.

It was Fatty, Meiren Chu, and a player with the Fortune-teller class.

Watching Fatty below, sneaking around suspiciously like a thief, Mingyue frowned. "They didn't die? Did the ghost come directly for us?"

This makes no sense.

How could the ghost ignore six people grouped together and come directly for them? Besides, by then, she and Caoyuan had already separated from Xiao Tuwan, making them a much smaller target.

Staring at the three below, Mingyue frowned. "Although it's illogical, the very existence of ghosts is nonsensical. Perhaps the ghost in this instance is just unorthodox and kills whomever it pleases."

At that moment, only three people were below.

The Fortune-teller glanced at the time again. "Almost twenty-three hours of instance time have passed. Caoyuan must be dead by now. The ghost must know Xiao Tuwan's whereabouts; she's likely in grave

danger... Twenty-three hours... Nearly half the instance time has gone by. The death toll has to be more than two."

That means the other three might also be dead, the Fortune-teller concluded.

The Fortune-teller initially considered going down to meet the three survivors. However, she then thought that the three of them together would be too conspicuous a target; they might have already attracted the ghost's attention.

"Forget it..." She shifted a step aside. "I'll wait and see."

At this moment, Fatty was hunched over, cowering, as he whispered to Chu Changge, "Brother Chu, we definitely can't be obvious and shout, 'I'm here, come and get me!' We need to act scared to attract the ghost's attention."

Chu Changge nodded in agreement.

"So, Brother Chu, you have to act scared too!" Fatty urged anxiously. "Look how convincingly the Fortune-teller beside us is acting!"

The Fortune-teller beside them touched her still-trembling arm. "I'm not pretending..."

Chu Changge expressionlessly shook his hand.

"Forget it." Seeing this, Fatty decided not to say more and continued walking down the deserted street.

Their movements followed a rather predictable pattern: first, they would stroll through a bustling area, then duck into deserted alleys. This made it easier for the ghost to find them and also easier for it to make a move. However, if not acted out convincingly, such behavior could easily look deliberate. Therefore, they all pretended to be searching for other people, while occasionally taking breaks.

Just then, Fatty noticed Chu Changge tilt his head up slightly. He followed Chu Changge's gaze upward. On either side stood two dilapidated buildings, with a few utility poles nearby. Between the buildings, the night sky was pitch-black. The weather was poor that night; neither the moon nor the stars were visible.

As Fatty tilted his head back to look at the sliver of pitch-black sky above, he suddenly heard Chu Changge's voice from the side, "Are you tired?"

"Huh?" He craned his neck back to look at Chu Changge.

Chu Changge continued, "If you're tired, let's rest here for a while."

The Fortune-teller also found it odd. I've gotten a pretty good sense of Chu Changge's temperament on this journey, she thought. Caring if others are tired really isn't his style.

Despite her puzzlement, she didn't show it. Instead, she took a few steps and sat on the roadside steps. "I wonder how Xiao Tuwan and the other two are doing."

As she spoke, she shot Chu Changge a questioning look, trying to convey her confusion: Why stop so suddenly? Did you discover something?

Unfortunately, Chu Changge couldn't read her mind. He merely sat down beside them without a word.

"What else could have happened to them?" Fatty also plopped down. "Nearly half the instance time is gone. I reckon their bodies are cold by now."

Mingyue, still by the window surreptitiously observing the people below, was startled when the man wearing glasses suddenly looked up. Have I been discovered? she thought.

Unexpectedly, he quickly lowered his head. Then the three of them sat down on the roadside steps, apparently resting.

The trio sat on the steps on Mingyue's side of the street. She saw the three of them with their backs to her, apparently discussing something.

How could they suddenly stop right below me? This is too much of a coincidence. Mingyue pressed herself against the window, observing their backs. Because the three were sitting so close to the inn where she was hiding, she had to lean right against the glass to see them below.

What are they discussing, stopping here all of a sudden?

Just then, she saw the man wearing glasses suddenly turn his head and say something to the other two. His companions immediately froze, their mouths ceasing all movement.

They sat there, motionless.

Then, Mingyue watched as the two immobile people suddenly twisted their necks in unison, slowly turning their heads around, their eyes gazing fixedly upward.

Mingyue's scalp prickled. Are they looking at me?

Did they spot me a while ago? But why that expression?

And just then, Mingyue suddenly noticed something odd about the glass in front of her. Light from behind her cast her reflection onto the transparent glass.

But at some unknown point, someone else had appeared behind her.

CRASH—

It was the sound of shattering glass. Fatty saw Mingyue on the third floor suddenly charge at the window and jump out!

Chapter 450 Getting Fatter and Fatter_1

First came the sound of shattering glass, followed immediately by a heavy thud.

Fatty saw Mingyue crash through the glass and leap from the third-floor window, landing on the ground below. He barely had time to exclaim, "Holy shit!" before a sound from above caught his attention.

He saw the female ghost that had been standing behind Mingyue now halfway out the window, her blood-red eyes fixated on them as she crawled menacingly down the wall like a spider.

Mingyue, who had jumped from the third floor, was already up and scrambling to her feet, running for her life.

"Run!" Chu Changge suddenly yelled. After that single, urgent word, he turned and bolted.

Hearing him, Fatty immediately sprinted in a different direction.

The Fortune-teller ran toward the mall where Gu Mian was.

The three had already agreed to scatter if they needed to flee; running together would be far too obvious.

Chu Changge and Fatty took off in two separate directions, while the Fortune-teller, serving as the most enticing bait, ran towards Gu Mian's location.

However, a small problem arose.

The Fortune-teller was sprinting, her teeth gritted, with another frantic runner right in front of her—Mingyue, who had escaped earlier.

Mingyue was also heading in Gu Mian's direction. Fleeing through the dark alley, she kept glancing back. The Fortune-teller was right behind her, and right behind the Fortune-teller, the grotesque, spider-like ghost was in hot pursuit! It's coming after *me*! Mingyue realized with terror.

The Fortune-teller ran hard, but she was already panting, her strength waning.

As a Fortune-teller, she usually predicted an instance's progression from the rear, where her teammates would do their utmost to protect her, rarely letting her face danger. She never expected that entering this instance would mean being thrown out as bait, forced into a chase with a ghost spanning several kilometers.

The chilling aura from behind was already pressing close. Without looking back, the Fortune-teller knew the ghost was about to catch her!

At that moment, she quickly pulled out [a tube of Failed Experimental Potion] and gulped it down.

It was Gu Mian's special item, meant for escape. After consumption, it would double her speed for ten minutes.

After drinking the potion, she picked up her pace again. Her speed had indeed increased significantly, and she was almost catching up to Mingyue ahead.

"Faster! Faster!" The Fortune-teller urged herself on, sprinting forward.

Ten minutes was enough time to reach the mall, but even with doubled speed, she was still slower than the ghost. Whether she would survive to see Gu Mian depended entirely on luck.

Mingyue heard footsteps rapidly approaching from behind. She turned in surprise to see the Fortune-teller suddenly accelerating, almost on her heels and about to overtake her.

Seeing this, Mingyue sped up, not wanting to be passed. "Get away from me! The ghost will chase where there are more people!"

Gasping for breath, the Fortune-teller retorted, "You get away from me! Go in another direction."

She was heading for the mall. Her plan was to run straight down this alley, take a right at the fork a thousand meters ahead, and after running for a few more minutes, she would reach the mall's back door.

By now, the Fortune-teller had overtaken Mingyue, who had been ahead, and was desperately heading for the right path at the upcoming fork.

Seeing the Fortune-teller pass her, Mingyue's eyes widened as she looked back.

The ghost, relentless, was still closing in. Mingyue saw it was now less than three meters behind her.

The Fortune-teller who was behind me is now ahead! There's no one behind me anymore!

Mingyue watched the Fortune-teller's receding figure as she entered the fork in the road.

Mingyue's mind raced. I'm behind! If we split up now, the ghost will definitely chase the one lagging—me!

With this thought, she dashed unhesitatingly after the Fortune-teller, and both entered the right fork together.

The ghost was drawing nearer, and Mingyue felt the hairs on the back of her neck prickle—her body's instinctual warning of danger.

Hearing the footsteps following her, the Fortune-teller glanced back and saw Mingyue still trailing her. "Why are you still following me?"

Just as she spoke, she suddenly saw Mingyue raise her right hand.

The alley was dim, and the Fortune-teller couldn't clearly see what Mingyue held in her hand, but she heard Mingyue shout, "Unfair Referee!"

What's that? The Fortune-teller froze.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw something suddenly appear in front of her.

She widened her eyes. About a meter in front of her, a red ribbon had suddenly appeared, stretched horizontally about 1.2 meters above the ground. It looked exactly like the finish line tape in a long-distance race.

Beyond the red ribbon, a man had suddenly materialized. He wore a black t-shirt and shorts, a whistle clenched in his teeth, his eyes fixed on a timer in his hand.

Just then, the Fortune-teller made a bizarre discovery: she couldn't run forward anymore.

It wasn't a lack of stamina. It felt as if she were on a treadmill; no matter how desperately she pumped her legs, she only ran in place.

A special item! The Fortune-teller understood in an instant.

Mingyue had used a special item on her to get ahead.

She looked back to see Mingyue accelerate, dash past the red ribbon, and continue running, leaving the Fortune-teller with only a view of her retreating back.

Meanwhile, the ghost was closing in on the immobilized Fortune-teller.

The Fortune-teller, usually quite good-tempered, was on the verge of cursing out loud. She watched the ghost draw nearer; it would reach her in seconds.

Fortunately, those few seconds were enough for the Fortune-teller to flick her wrist and throw something—[Penguin Brand Cough Syrup (Single Use)].

Throwing this item would stop a pursuer for half a minute.

This was also from Gu Mian, part of her payment for acting as bait. Of course, the payment also included the two tarot cards she had just received.

Gu Mian had gone to considerable lengths to ensure the bait would survive long enough to reach the mall.

Sure enough, after she threw the syrup, the pursuing ghost froze. It had almost pressed itself to the Fortune-teller's face, its crimson eyes staring intently at her in the gloom.

Still unable to move, the Fortune-teller saw Mingyue, now nearly a hundred meters away, look back. "I didn't expect you to have such a potent life-saving item," Mingyue called out. "I underestimated you."

Special items capable of stopping a ghost were exceedingly rare; Mingyue had hardly ever seen one. Her own "Unfair Referee" could only hinder a player for twenty seconds.

The Fortune-teller also knew this item was invaluable.

Although Gu Mian had looked quite nonchalant when he'd pried the item from Fatty's inventory, the Fortune-teller, watching nearby, had been wide-eyed with astonishment.

She hadn't wanted to use it here, but Mingyue had tricked her. To save her life, she'd had no choice but to use it.