

Collapse 451

Chapter 451 Abstract Artist_1

The terrifying female ghost loomed behind the Fortune-teller.

The Fortune-teller glanced at the ghost, then turned her head nervously to stare at the referee in front of her, wondering when this man with a whistle in his mouth would finally disappear.

Mingyue had already run off quickly, and by this point, the Fortune-teller could no longer see her figure.

Dangerous times are always excruciatingly long.

Her eyes were glued to the referee in front of her. She wasn't sure when it would be safe for her to continue running. Gu Mian's syrup only held off the ghost for half a minute, and she could even hear an invisible clock ticking away inside her, constantly reminding her that time was passing.

Luckily, the referee didn't linger for too long. A few seconds after Mingyue's figure disappeared, the Fortune-teller saw the man in the black T-shirt in front of her begin to turn transparent. Then, she realized she could move forward again.

Without any hesitation, the Fortune-teller sprinted forward.

At this moment, Fatty and Chu Changge, who were not being pursued by the ghost, had already met up.

The two were in a taxi, heading towards the staff dormitory where Gu Mian and Fatty lived.

Fatty, sitting in the back seat, stared quizzically at Chu Changge beside him. "Brother Chu, why are we going to our staff dormitory? Shouldn't we go meet up with the Doctor and the others now?"

"Even if we go now, it wouldn't matter much to Gu Mian," Chu Changge said, glancing at the driver ahead. "However, there might be some clues in your staff dormitory..." He trailed off, considering whether directly mentioning the ghost would make him sound like a lunatic.

Despite believing that going back to the dorm wouldn't make much difference, Fatty obediently followed Chu Changge to the dormitory building.

"Did you bring the Key?" Chu Changge asked as he stepped into the dark stairwell.

Fatty, following behind him, nodded. "I did, but there should be someone in the dorm right now, right?"

"Actually, I have a theory," Chu Changge said as he ascended the stairs. "The ghost in this instance is always moving, trying to escape the instance's control. So, it won't kill easily when players aren't in the instance. This is because it's uncertain if it has successfully hidden its identity by possessing a corpse. If it has indeed hidden its identity, killing someone might expose it, and all its previous efforts would be wasted."

Fatty had already reached the door and was taking out his Key. "So the ghost doesn't kill when not in an instance period; it just wanders around wearing a corpse. Then, when it finds out the instance has teleported players near it again, it knows it failed to hide successfully last time, so it starts killing to find the next body it can control?"

Fatty inserted the Key into the lock, turned it, and opened the door.

The door opened a crack; the room was pitch black and unlit.

It seems like the person inside is asleep...

Just as Fatty was about to say something, he suddenly caught a faint, putrid smell.

The smell streamed out from the crack in the door, like the stench of a decaying animal.

Fatty held his breath. Is it a rotting corpse?

Beside him, Chu Changge seemed unaffected by the smell. With his usual composure, he pushed the door open, fumbled for the switch on the wall, and with a CLICK, turned on the dormitory's overhead light.

The four beds in the room were empty. Only a pale arm protruded from under one bed, as if the murderer had forgotten to stuff this hand under the bed. The strange smell seemed to originate from here.

Fatty gulped and, after mentally preparing himself, squatted down beside Chu Changge. He took a moment before lifting the bedsheet. The stench assaulted his nostrils. Fatty squinted and looked underneath, seeing a man lying there. Although he was good-looking, he was now just a handsome corpse.

"It's Liu Jie!" Fatty instantly recognized the man. "The Doctor's colleague, the one who traded on his looks, was still alive this morning! Why does he stink so badly?"

At that, he suddenly understood. So Liu Jie died a long time ago, and the ghost has been using his body?

Chu Changge nodded. "Previously, customers at the café mentioned that Gu Mian and his colleagues wouldn't easily give their contact information to customers. However, two of Gu Mian's business cards were found at the deceased Wang Xin's residence. That can only mean someone took Gu Mian's business cards and intentionally placed them in the dead person's hands." The most probable suspect would be his roommate.

"Having used Liu Jie's identity to survive for so long, it should have left some clues," Chu Changge said, standing up and looking towards Liu Jie's bed. "Perhaps what it knew was recorded in some form, though the possibility isn't high."

Fatty understood. "So, we came here to find clues this time."

He acted quickly. Without waiting for Chu Changge's instructions, he began to search the corpse in front of him. "Important things are naturally carried on one's person... but he doesn't seem to have anything on him."

Saying this, Fatty stood up and began to search the bed in front of him. "If I were hiding something, I'd put it under the mattress or in the pillow. I used to hide my allowance there back in the day, though my dad eventually found out and gave me a good beating..."

Meanwhile, Chu Changge had already stood before a locked cabinet. "This should be Liu Jie's cabinet."

Having found nothing, Fatty turned his head and saw a small, bright yellow lock on the cabinet—the kind you could buy at a convenience store for five yuan.

Fatty was no stranger to picking locks. He immediately set to work on the five-yuan padlock. It wasn't long before the small lock opened with a CLICK.

The two of them pulled open the cabinet.

There wasn't much inside, just a few symbolic stacks of clothes.

Chu Changge reached beneath these clothes and, at the very bottom of the stack, found an A4 sheet of paper.

"What's this?" Fatty looked curiously at what Chu Changge had pulled out. He certainly recognized A4 paper.

However, this sheet of paper was covered with writing done with a black gel pen.

A closer look revealed they weren't words, but drawings.

The entire sheet was filled with strange little symbols—each a circle, with a simple shape like a stick figure's body drawn beneath it. The paper was packed densely with these stick figures.

"Are these stick figures?" Fatty immediately recognized the symbols filling the entire paper. "Was this ghost just idling its time away drawing stick figures and then neurotically hiding them in its locker?"

Although the lines were extremely crude, Fatty felt his scalp tingle as he looked at these densely packed stick figures.

What does this have to do with the instance?

At this point, Chu Changge looked at Fatty. "This thing can't be taken out of the instance. Where's your camera? Photograph it."

He was referring to Fatty's special item, the [Strange Camera], which could photograph invisible ghosts and could only be used once a day.

Of course, it could also be used for selfies or landscape photos. Fatty took out his camera and turned it on.

The first photo in the album was Gu Mian's handsome face, with a ghost face—the assassin's face—peeking out from the window behind him. However, not long ago, it had been neatly placed on Gu Mian's bedside table, never to be seen again.

Fatty raised his camera towards the paper in Chu Changge's hand and CLICKED. Of course, no ghost was captured; everything in the photo looked normal.

He looked at the camera screen. Truly an abstract master painter...

The Fortune-teller, sprinting through the darkness, had already spotted the shopping mall ahead. She was instantly overjoyed and pushed herself to run even faster.

The Fortune-teller, now moving at double speed, had caught up with Mingyue. The two were now running almost side-by-side. Although the ghost behind them had been delayed for half a minute, it had still caught up and was now less than three meters away.

The Fortune-teller was still about a hundred meters from the shopping mall entrance; there was no way she could make it before the ghost caught her.

Mingyue's stamina was nearly depleted. She was still forcing herself to run, but she didn't know when it would end and felt a growing despair.

The Fortune-teller's goal was clear—the shopping mall ahead—so her strides were much more forceful.

Mingyue, panting heavily, looked at the person beside her, somewhat surprised by her abundant energy. "If we keep on like this, the ghost will definitely catch us. Why don't we split up? It's better for one of us to die than for both of us to perish."

The Fortune-teller didn't even turn her head. "That's not what you said when you held me back earlier."

She said this as she continued to sprint forward.

But Mingyue reached out and forcefully grabbed the Fortune-teller's clothes. "Wait for me."

Chapter 452 Gu Mian Who Doesn't Care About Life_1

"Are they here yet?" Gu Mian murmured. He was currently in a warehouse on the second floor of the department store, peering out of a window that overlooked the alleyway.

The pitch-black alley was deserted, with no sign of anyone. It was nearly midnight. Chu Changge and his group had left at 9:30, over two hours ago now.

Nearby, Xiao Qiao was dutifully crouched by the window, intently watching the street below. "Nothing yet."

Liu Ruyan, on the other hand, was languidly leaning against the shelves behind them.

Gu Mian recalled that she always had this listless demeanor. He had never seen Liu Ruyan actually panic and shriek while being chased by a ghost; he rather looked forward to witnessing such a scene one day.

Meanwhile, Mingyue was frantically trying to grip the Fortune-teller in front of her.

Feeling a sudden, immense pull from behind, the Fortune-teller yanked her clothing forward without looking back. This caused Mingyue, who had been clinging to her, to stumble, her hands naturally losing their grip.

Mingyue, caught off guard, tumbled to the ground.

Before she could even get up, refusing to give up, she stretched out her hand again, trying to grab the Fortune-teller's ankle, but she missed. The Fortune-teller was already several meters away.

Mingyue looked up in astonishment at the Fortune-teller's retreating figure, watching her dash off without a single backward glance.

The crawling sounds were now right behind her head.

"I see them!" Xiao Qiao's voice came from beside him.

Following Xiao Qiao's gaze, Gu Mian saw a figure sprinting wildly in their direction—undoubtedly the fleeing Fortune-teller. Behind her, a humanoid shape crawled like a spider.

The crawling entity moved quickly, and the Fortune-teller was still dozens of meters from the department store's back door. Gu Mian estimated that the ghost would undoubtedly catch her within that distance.

Oddly, there appeared to be another person behind the creature. This figure, staggering towards them, looked somewhat familiar upon closer inspection.

It was Mingyue, staggering behind the ghost and the Fortune-teller. She couldn't understand why the ghost had ignored her, rushing straight for the Fortune-teller without even pausing.

Normally, after such a close brush with death, one would immediately turn and flee.

But Mingyue quickly realized the ghost wasn't interested in her; it was only interested in the Fortune-teller up ahead.

So she stealthily trailed the pair—the person and the ghost—keeping her distance, stumbling occasionally, curious to see how things would unfold.

The Fortune-teller was slower than the ghost. Just as the frantically crawling humanoid figure was about to pounce, the Fortune-teller suddenly found a burst of energy from nowhere. She shot forward, diving headfirst through a back door of the department store in front of her.

Mingyue watched cautiously from behind. After the Fortune-teller entered the doorway, her figure vanished from sight. The ghost lingered at the entrance for a few seconds, as if hesitating about something, before it too entered.

Seeing this, Mingyue emerged from the darkness. "She was bound to be caught by the ghost sooner or later, so why run so desperately?" she muttered.

As she made her way towards the door where the person and ghost had disappeared, she continued to herself, "Judging by the Fortune-teller's running speed, she won't die immediately. But she'll likely be killed by that ghost in this department store. In that case, I'll follow them and hide in this department store too. The ghost probably wouldn't expect someone to hide in a place where it has just killed."

Gu Mian was now standing at the second-floor elevator entrance. Despite the lights being off, the elevator still had power; it was currently stopped in front of him.

Xiao Qiao had already gone to the first floor to hide, ready to lock the main entrance.

While Gu Mian stood at the second-floor elevator entrance, Mingyue had already passed through the warehouse. She opened a small door that led into the supermarket on the first floor. Inside, she could hear urgent footsteps echoing—clearly the Fortune-teller fleeing for her life.

She stealthily moved forward a few steps, searching for a hiding spot.

The Fortune-teller had reached the first-floor elevator and was anxiously jabbing the call button, repeatedly glancing back at the ghost rapidly crawling towards her.

Hiding behind a distant clothes rack, Mingyue watched everything unfold. Taking the elevator while being chased by a ghost has to be the most foolish move! The time it takes for the elevator to arrive will be more than enough for the ghost to catch her. I wonder what she's so desperately struggling for.

The elevator was still on the second floor, seemingly slow to respond. It lingered there for several seconds before finally beginning its unhurried descent.

The red fluorescent numbers flickered in the darkness, looking quite eerie.

The Fortune-teller clenched her fists, looking as if she wanted to rip the elevator doors open then and there.

It didn't take long for an elevator to travel from the second floor to the first—merely a few seconds.

But those few seconds could be fatal.

Mingyue saw the crawling figure drawing closer and closer to the Fortune-teller by the elevator. But the Fortune-teller just stood there rigidly before the elevator doors, completely motionless.

Sure enough, while the elevator was still descending, the ghost lunged before the Fortune-teller. It was barely a meter away, and Mingyue saw the ghostly figure pause before the Fortune-teller, extending a withered hand towards her.

And just then, Mingyue saw the Fortune-teller, her back pressed tightly against the elevator doors, open her mouth and scream, "If you don't get down here now, I'm dead!"

What?

As Mingyue watched in confusion, the elevator behind the Fortune-teller suddenly announced its arrival with a DING.

Then the doors opened.

The elevator car was brightly lit, allowing a clear view of its interior.

Inside stood a man in a white coat, holding a guitar case. He was looking straight ahead, a gentle smile on his face.

"That Doctor?" Mingyue exclaimed in surprise. "He's alive? The ghost didn't kill them?"

But why is he here? And that's not the expression someone should have when facing a ghost!

Just as Mingyue was wondering why this Doctor hadn't been killed by the ghost, she witnessed an even more astonishing scene.

The ghost, which had been reaching for the Fortune-teller in front of the elevator, suddenly froze. Then, it whipped around and fled.

And the Doctor in the elevator, incredibly, rushed out to chase it!

Wait a minute! What on earth is going on?!

Chapter 453 The Mantis stalks the Cicada, with Xiao Qiao Following Behind_1

At this moment, the Fortune-teller had already stepped one foot inside the elevator, but it didn't immediately ascend.

She watched with wide eyes as the ghost's expression changed dramatically before it turned and bolted. She hadn't expected the ghost's escape to so closely resemble her own.

The ghost in front dashed back towards its original direction at a breakneck pace, with Gu Mian closely following behind.

In no time, the human and the ghost disappeared among the crowded shelves.

"Oh my god..." She clutched her chest, standing before the elevator. The light from within gave her a much-needed sense of security.

Just then, she noticed a familiar silhouette appearing ahead.

It was Mingyue.

Gu Mian had long since run off chasing the ghost. Meanwhile, Mingyue stepped out from the shadows. She was standing by a clothes rack, looking at the Fortune-teller, and even took a few steps in her direction.

The Fortune-teller heard Mingyue ask, "What just happened? What was that all about? Did the ghost run away? Who is that Doctor?"

The Fortune-teller looked at Mingyue, who was standing ahead in the darkness. Mingyue's face showed a mix of shock and disbelief, her expression like someone dreaming.

The Fortune-teller didn't have a favorable opinion of Mingyue. She didn't intend to answer Mingyue's questions and simply ignored her.

Unexpectedly, Mingyue took a few more steps forward, adopting an inquisitive tone. "On second thought, you running in this direction seems premeditated. You must have discussed it with that Doctor, so you must know what's so special about him."

A person whom ghosts won't chase... That's what every player dreams of!

No, wait. Not only is this Doctor not pursued by ghosts, but ghosts actually turn and flee the moment they see him!

"Does he have some special item?" Mingyue asked, now standing right in front of the Fortune-teller.

Despite knowing it was highly unlikely any special item could be that powerful, Mingyue still asked out of wishful thinking.

Out of sight, out of mind, the Fortune-teller thought. She considered entering the elevator to leave this floor, but taking an elevator in a horror instance wasn't advisable.

She stood by the elevator door and said impatiently, "I haven't even settled the score with you for what happened earlier, and you dare to stand here asking me all these questions?"

Mingyue snorted. "What score? Isn't it perfectly normal to only look out for yourself in an instance? Besides, aren't you fine now? Or are you going to play the saint in an instance, worrying about whether others live before ensuring your own safety?"

The Fortune-teller frowned. "But when you grabbed me earlier, wasn't that an act that harmed me without benefiting you? If you couldn't run yourself, dragging me wouldn't have helped you escape either."

Mingyue replied nonchalantly, "That was my instinct. When I'm out of strength, of course I'll grab onto someone nearby who has strength. If I don't grab on, I die for sure. If I do, there's at least a chance I'll survive, right?"

The Fortune-teller stared at the person in front of her. "What kind of person are you?"

Mingyue stared back at her. "Success and failure in this world are never determined by one's character."

"Alright," Mingyue continued. "Professional players' nicknames are all hidden. I presume that Doctor's nickname is hidden too. But it looks like you know his original nickname."

Of course, I know his nickname is Gu Mian, the Fortune-teller thought. I know that the moment I say the name 'Gu Mian,' this person in front of me will immediately come up with a bellyful of malicious schemes.

The Fortune-teller remained silent. She took a step back, fully entering the elevator and intending to leave, but Mingyue blocked the door. "It's Gu Mian, right?"

Inside the elevator, the Fortune-teller abruptly looked up at Mingyue.

Under the illumination of the elevator light, Mingyue's face looked somewhat pale. Her mouth opened and closed as she spoke, "I always read the game announcements. There's a Fatty in this instance. His nickname sounds familiar; it often appears with Gu Mian's name on the same announcements... Oh, and Xiao Qiao, the celebrity. I remember seeing her name on a compensation list in an announcement once. She must have gotten to know Gu Mian back then.

"I noticed Xiao Qiao and that Doctor seem quite familiar with each other, as if they've known each other for a long time. It seems she knew Gu Mian wasn't ordinary, so she stuck with you guys this time. After all, someone like her, who knows nothing, wouldn't survive long in an instance on her own."

Knows nothing?

The Fortune-teller sensed the ill-intent in Mingyue's tone and frowned. "You don't like her?"

"No," Mingyue replied matter-of-factly. "Actually, I quite dislike her. And I see her every time I turn on the TV."

"Is that so..." The Fortune-teller suddenly laughed. "That's right. Xiao Qiao has been with us the whole time; she's in this mall right now. I've long disliked her too. Why don't I take you to her, and you can beat her up? That woman, just as you said, knows nothing. She just drags us down all day. When she gets scared, she just whimpers and cries. She definitely wouldn't dare to fight back."

I personally saw Xiao Qiao toss a three-meter-tall steel shelf aside with her bare hands. If I take Mingyue to fight Xiao Qiao now, someone will definitely be whimpering and crying.

Mingyue looked a little strange. "It hasn't reached the point of beating her up. I just find her an eyesore, always showing up on TV."

As she said this, she suddenly looked in the direction Gu Mian had disappeared. "Of course, the one who interests me most right now is Gu Mian. Did you know he's worth tens of thousands now? But to get the bounty, I need to find out where he is in the real world. Do you know?"

"I don't know," the Fortune-teller replied coldly.

"Forget it." Mingyue stepped back from the elevator door. "I'll find clues myself. Asking you is useless."

Then she turned around and left.

The Fortune-teller watched Mingyue head in the direction Gu Mian had gone. Looking at Mingyue's retreating figure, the Fortune-teller took out the knife she always kept in her inventory. She considered giving Mingyue a righteous stab in the back but hesitated for a long time. She was still hesitating when Mingyue's figure disappeared from view, unable to decide whether to act.

"I guess I still can't do it..." The Fortune-teller stared at the knife in her hand and sighed with emotion. "How can there be someone as kind as me in this world? She set me up like that, yet I still can't bring myself to do it."

And just as she was sighing at the fruit knife in her hand, she suddenly noticed another figure emerge from the darkness ahead.

It was Xiao Qiao, who supposedly "knows nothing"!

The Fortune-teller saw Xiao Qiao step out from the shadows nearby. Who knows how long Xiao Qiao has been hiding there? That position was perfect for overhearing their entire conversation. How much did she hear?!

Xiao Qiao's dark eyes were fixed intently on Mingyue's retreating back for a good while, and she made no sound at all.

In that instant, the Fortune-teller suddenly felt as if she were looking at a wolf stalking through the night, its gaze fixed solely on its prey, making no sound to give itself away.

A few seconds later, the Fortune-teller saw Xiao Qiao lift her foot and walk in the direction Mingyue had gone. Soon, her figure also vanished.

"Wait, what was that feeling just now?" The Fortune-teller took a few deep breaths, facing the darkness ahead. "Although she's a bit strong, she always seems so naive... But that feeling she gave me just now..."

Her professional intuition told the Fortune-teller something was about to happen. She stared in the direction the two had left, paused for a few seconds, then gritted her teeth and followed them.

This ghost can't pass through walls. This was the conclusion Gu Mian had reached based on his experience chasing it.

By now, the female ghost that could spider-walk had been cornered by Gu Mian for a long time. The human and the ghost were locked in a staring contest, creating a rather strange scene.

If an old man with a heart condition happened to pass by at this moment, seeing this scene would definitely make him yelp and pass out.

Chapter 454 The Pleasure of Breaking Updates_1

When Mingyue quietly passed by, she saw this harmonious scene between a person and a ghost.

She didn't dare get too close, so she could only hide behind a billboard and secretly observe Gu Mian. The dragon boat competition is about to start. I assume he'll participate in that event, probably around Liannu River. Even if Gu Mian doesn't participate in the dragon boat race, he should participate in the final exam event... I'll observe for a while.

"Spill it," he said, looking at the ghost trapped in the corner. "What do you know?"

The mall was still very dark. Gu Mian could only see the ghost cowering in the corner by the light of his flashlight. The flashlight cast an eerie glow on the ghost. Its two eyes were round, shining with a strange light in the darkness.

It's a well-known fact that once a ghost speaks, any air of mystery it previously cultivated vanishes completely. Its aura is also likely to shift from eerie and mysterious to comical. Perhaps understanding this, the ghost had been silent since the start of the chase with the Fortune-teller. But now, facing a life-or-death situation, it had to bow its head.

It was a long time before Gu Mian heard its voice coming from the corner. Its tone and voice were quite normal, no different from an ordinary person—if one were to ignore its slightly eerie appearance.

"As the saying goes, 'Divine secrets must not be revealed.' If I say too much, I could die on the spot."

Hearing this bizarre, almost mocking remark, Gu Mian finally understood why ghosts usually keep quiet. At least after this ghost in front of him had spoken, its imposing presence completely vanished. Though it hadn't possessed much of an imposing presence even before speaking.

Gu Mian looked at the humanoid figure cowering in the corner. "If you don't tell me right now, you will die."

He noticed the ghost seemed to have shrunk back slightly and opened its mouth.

Gu Mian remembered that in the hide-and-seek instance, the instance had collapsed just as the ghost was about to reveal important clues. The same had happened in the Sweet Lover instance. As a result, he still had no idea what Teacher Sweet had said in the end. He wasn't sure if the current instance would risk collapsing after this ghost uttered a few words. However, since Mr. Green had said that the ghosts in this instance had broken free of control... perhaps it could reveal more?

Just ten seconds earlier, Mingyue had spotted Gu Mian ahead with his flashlight. She saw him almost pressed up against a ghost. The ghost was curled up in a small corner, showing no intention of attacking.

He really is different from other players... Mingyue took two more steps forward. She was still far from Gu Mian and could only see his mouth moving, as if he were asking something.

Questioning a ghost in an instance? What's there to ask a ghost? Mingyue kept moving forward. She was still too far away to hear the conversation between the person and the ghost.

After Gu Mian's question, the ghost fell silent for about a second, then seemed about to speak.

Mingyue quickly took two more steps forward, trying to get closer to hear their conversation.

Gu Mian is a unique person with many secrets. Maybe he's discussing them with the ghost right now? Even if their conversation isn't useful to me, there are quite a few people in this world interested in Gu Mian. I could sell the information regardless.

Mingyue pondered this as she strode forward. She was still quite far from Gu Mian's position, but if she got just a little closer, she might be able to faintly hear their voices.

Just as Mingyue, staying hidden, eagerly took another step forward, she saw the ghost huddled in the corner open its mouth. A faint voice reached her ears—

"I have... seen you before."

What?

The ghost in the instance had seen a player from the real world before?

That's preposterous.

Mingyue swallowed and continued to move forward quietly. She heard Gu Mian's voice ask, "You've seen me? Where?"

Yes, where did it see him? Mingyue stared intently at the spot where the light emanated, straining her ears.

The ghost's mouth moved slightly, its voice somewhat strained. "It... was at..."

Hurry up and say where! Mingyue held her breath, her gaze fixed on the ghost's opening mouth. In the next moment, she would learn some of Gu Mian's secrets.

But at that very moment, she suddenly heard another sound from behind her—the sound of breathing, very close to the back of her neck.

Before she could react, a sharp pain shot through her abdomen. She instinctively reached down to clutch it, only to feel warm liquid on her hand.

Mingyue looked down.

A clothes hanger had pierced through her stomach from behind. Yes, a clothes hanger.

She had never imagined such an object could be used as a weapon to penetrate a human body.

Blood coated the clothes hanger, making it indistinct in the darkness. The pain numbed her auditory nerves, and for an instant, all surrounding sounds ceased.

Clutching her pierced abdomen, she struggled to look back. A hateful face met her eyes.

It was the person she detested, Xiao Qiao.

The female celebrity who was supposed to be completely useless.

Mingyue saw Xiao Qiao, who should have been utterly inept, standing quietly behind her. Her eyes shone faintly, devoid of pity, fear, or excitement—just like her on-screen persona.

Immediately after, Mingyue felt another sharp pain in her abdomen.

Xiao Qiao casually pulled the clothes hanger from Mingyue's abdomen, hung it nearby, then covered Mingyue's mouth, grabbed her head, and began to drag her backward.

Mingyue didn't die instantly. Her gaze remained fixed on Xiao Qiao's face as she was dragged.

No expression.

Killing someone and disposing of the body as calmly as if slaughtering a chicken. No, even slaughtering a chicken wouldn't be done with such indifference.

Why? Why? Why?

Until her vision blurred, Mingyue kept asking these questions in her heart. A terrible horror filled her body. In those few minutes, Mingyue's fear of Xiao Qiao surpassed even her fear of ghosts.

This wasn't the female celebrity she recognized.

Mingyue's consciousness began to fade as Xiao Qiao dragged her away.

Before long, their figures vanished completely into the darkness.

"A crematorium?" Gu Mian was very surprised. This ghost must have truly broken free from some of the instance's control. To think the instance hasn't collapsed even after I've questioned it this much.

But the answer the ghost gave also puzzled him greatly. Gu Mian straightened up. "You saw me at a crematorium?"

Chapter 455 The Real Crematorium_1

When Chu Changge and Fatty stepped into the dark mall, the first thing they saw was a corpse, its eyes wide open, refusing to close in death.

Fatty stared at the corpse on the floor, its eyes starkly open. "It's Mingyue..."

Fatty wasn't surprised by Mingyue's death. He always felt that she was a bit sly but couldn't articulate exactly why.

Chu Changge shone his flashlight on the corpse's wound. "The wound doesn't seem to be caused by a sharp weapon. She must have bled to death after being stabbed and lived for quite a while. And it appears she was dragged here from somewhere else."

What a pitiful death, Fatty thought, looking at the trail of blood. "This couldn't have been done by a ghost, right?"

Would a ghost have the leisure to murder someone and then drag them to the doorway? Of course not.

Fatty followed the blood trail and saw a figure in the darkness. It was Xiao Qiao.

She was slowly walking towards them, emerging from the darkness, illuminated by the flashlight in Chu Changge's hand.

"Xiao Qiao?" Fatty looked up at her. "This body..."

Just as Fatty hesitated, the person in front of him began to speak, as if reciting something she had heard: "Moral character doesn't determine success or failure in this world. Sounds reasonable."

"Huh?" Fatty was somewhat confused; he didn't really understand what Xiao Qiao was talking about.

Chu Changge moved on with his flashlight, saying, "She's probably started rambling because she heard some nonsense again. Ignore her."

Seeing Chu Changge walk away, Fatty hurriedly followed.

「At this point, Gu Mian was still with the ghost in the corner.」

This gave Gu Mian a strange feeling. His former roommate had once had a cat, and perhaps due to Gu Mian's own unlucky constitution, their dorm was frequently visited by rodents.

Gu Mian often saw the cat cornering a trembling mouse, teasing it with a paw.

It felt oddly similar to the current situation.

Gu Mian considered himself a proper person who never teased others.

While pondering this, he looked back at the ghost. "When? When exactly did you see me there?"

People who meet in crematoriums generally don't develop any kind of 'love at first sight' relationship. After all, it's mostly encounters between the living and the dead there, and most living people don't harbor particular feelings for corpses. Yet, the ghost claimed to have seen Gu Mian in such a place. Despite his many trials and tribulations growing up, Gu Mian had never once set foot in a crematorium.

"One day a year ago." The ghost in the corner tilted its head slightly, as if recalling something.

A year ago, this global game hadn't started yet, and Gu Mian spent most of his time in the hospital. He certainly couldn't have entered a crematorium in any instance. So, what exactly had it seen? A version of himself that existed in an instance?

Gu Mian saw a strange light in its eyes. This was a ghost with a surprisingly wide range of facial expressions. For a moment, Gu Mian detected doubt, inquiry, and fear on its face.

It was hard to imagine these three emotions appearing on a ghost.

Before Gu Mian could speak again, the voice continued from the corner, "I died on that day. After seeing you, I died."

"Later, I became a ghost, but thankfully, one with self-awareness. I was trapped, killing intruders day after day. Then I began to realize this world might not be as real as I thought.

"It seems we're in a game. Outside our world, there's another, much vaster world, and they call us NPCs.

"So, I tried my hardest to escape. Strangely, I actually managed it. I wandered from city to city, attempting to break free from this world's control—until I met you."

As the ghost spoke, Gu Mian noticed an overwhelming fear in its voice.

It was looking at him as if he were a massive monster.

Gu Mian suddenly realized the ghost's fear of him didn't seem to stem from the title "Instance Destructor." Instead, it appeared rooted in the terror he had instilled in it on the day of its death.

Why so scared? Gu Mian furrowed his brows. Even if what it saw in the crematorium was "Gu Mian's" corpse, it shouldn't show such terror upon seeing the living Gu Mian. Besides, it died immediately after seeing "Gu Mian" back then.

At this thought, Gu Mian frowned. "What exactly did you see?"

"Do you know why this instance is named 'Image of Death'?" The ghost suddenly shrank back, its answer seemingly unrelated to his question.

'Image of Death' refers to one's appearance at the moment of death, but that doesn't seem to have anything to do with this instance.

"Before I broke free from control, this instance was indeed related to 'Image of Death.' In this instance, the bodies of dead players would remain in the exact state they were in at the moment of death.

"You know I can take on the appearance of others and hide among players and human NPCs. Back then, the objective of this instance was to 'find the ghost,' and the 'Image of Death' was the key to solving it."

Gu Mian immediately understood.

Previously, the objective of this instance was to 'find the ghost.' Since players remained in their state at the moment of death, the reflection in a dead player's eyes wouldn't change! The last reflection in a dead player's eyes would be the ghost's appearance. By looking into a corpse's eyes, one could find the ghost hidden among players and NPCs!

But what use is this information now? Gu Mian thought, then looked down at the ghost in the corner. "Could it be that your current state is also... from the moment of death?"

He frowned, his words trailing off as a realization struck him.

If this ghost's body is indeed fixed at its state from the moment of death... then the reflection in its eyes must be the last thing it saw before dying! The very last scene it witnessed in the crematorium!

Gu Mian leaned slightly closer to its face. What could it have seen in that crematorium to cause its immediate death, and to make it show such terror when facing him now? What on earth had it seen?

Gu Mian aimed his flashlight into its dark eyes. Just then, he felt a subtle vibration from the ground—a precursor to the instance collapsing.

Ignoring it, Gu Mian continued to stare intently into the ghost's eyes.

Chapter 456 Relatives at the Crematorium_1

At this moment, Fatty and Chu Changge were still on their way to Gu Mian when they bumped into the Fortune-teller midway.

She seemed to be hesitating, as if she had discovered something. However, before either of them could ask her anything, a strong tremor ran through the ground, signaling the collapse of the instance.

"This strange trembling..." Fatty commented, feeling the ground shake beneath his feet. "I'm afraid this instance is about to collapse, Brother Chu?"

Who knows what the Doctor had done this time.

The Fortune-teller stopped her hesitant explanation and looked thoughtfully behind them. "Did Gu Mian cause more trouble?"

The ground shook violently. Gu Mian leaned against the wall, staring into the ghost's eyes. The violent shaking of the ground seemed to be trying to prevent him from seeing something.

Then, the message warning of the imminent collapse of the instance appeared.

[Warning! The 'Image of Death' instance will be closing prematurely. All players inside will be immediately expelled...]

Gu Mian wasn't in the mood to deal with the game interface; he was focused on the ghost's eyes.

However, the instance was collapsing rapidly.

A loud cracking sound was heard, as if something had torn apart the entire instance. Gu Mian felt a beam of light pierce the darkness from above. It gradually spread across the instance before quickly illuminating his body.

He was about to be thrown out of the instance.

Just at this moment, Gu Mian also caught a glimpse of a vague image in the ghost's eyes.

Was that... a dump?

It seemed like there were heaps of garbage in its eyes. Gu Mian spotted colorful fragments piled together, forming a small mound.

What was that? A mosaic in the crematorium?

Before Gu Mian could think further, the bright light engulfed him completely. Then, the sounds of footsteps, conversations, and soft throat-clearing reached his ears as he looked around.

He was back.

As expected, the instance had thrown him back into the real world at the critical moment.

Also thrown out were Chu Changge, Fatty, Xiao Qiao, and Liu Ruyan.

Now, all of them were staring at Gu Mian. The scene was quite bizarre.

"Doctor," Fatty spoke softly, "did you do something to the ghost again...?"

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "I didn't do anything this time."

This time, the instance had decided to self-destruct. It seemed it didn't want him to see the image the ghost had seen before its death.

What's the big deal if I see it? It's not like I'll get pregnant. Gu Mian mused.

"Let's get out of here," Chu Changge said, taking a step forward. "We can talk somewhere with fewer people."

The ticket booth was indeed not a suitable place to talk. Besides, a ticket seller in a nearby booth was eyeing them, looking ready to pounce.

He's probably considering whether to go to the supermarket and buy a "No Gu Mian or dogs allowed" sign. Gu Mian suspected.

They quickly arrived at the Spirit Car. The place where Gu Mian had parked was quite secluded, so even if Xiao Hong pressed her face against the window, it wouldn't scare anyone.

It was somewhat cramped in the Spirit Car with five people and a ghost. The big brother in the CD also extended a hand, wanting to squeeze into the crowded space.

Gu Mian, sitting in the driver's seat, looked at Chu Changge. "The instance self-destructed this time because it contained something it didn't want me to see."

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "Did you see it?"

Gu Mian recalled the image he saw in the ghost's eyes before leaving the instance. "...I saw it."

To be precise, I did see it, though not perfectly. What he saw was different from what the ghost saw. After all, he was looking at reflections in its eyes, making it difficult to see the image clearly.

Gu Mian briefly described the ghost's characteristics, then mentioned what he saw in its eyes. "I saw... a mosaic?"

Those colorful fragments must be a mosaic.

What on earth did that ghost see that was so unsuitable for children it got censored into a mosaic?

"But it might not necessarily be a mosaic," Gu Mian continued. "I didn't see clearly what was in its eyes; I just saw a mess of colors."

"Ah... what kind of threat would seeing that pose to the instance? Why would the Doctor be kicked out of the instance for seeing it?" Fatty asked, confused. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he

took out his camera. "By the way, Doctor, Brother Chu and I found a piece of paper in the ghost's room. I took a photo."

Gu Mian looked down at the screen.

The drawing wasn't very well done, but one could still make out what it was.

Stick figures were densely drawn on the paper. These tiny human figures appeared to be packed closely together.

"This," Gu Mian said, staring at the crude stick figures on the screen and frowning slightly. "Was it drawn by the ghost?"

"Most likely," Chu Changge stated. "It was found in a locked cabinet, hidden at the very bottom beneath some clothes."

In that case...

Gu Mian fixed his gaze on the screen. "Then I might know what I saw in the ghost's eyes."

It must be people.

A dense crowd of people wearing different colored clothes.

To be precise, they must be corpses. Piled up together, in numbers so vast they could fill an entire crematorium.

That would make sense. The ghost saw corpses in the crematorium, so many that they filled its entire field of vision.

But what kind of crematorium would accumulate so many bodies? The crematorium the ghost saw a year ago definitely wasn't in the real world. The instances existed before the game even started, and within that world, there was a crematorium filled with corpses. Where did those corpses come from? Were they related to the arrival of the instances on Earth...?

Moreover, the ghost claimed to have seen *him* in the crematorium. Gu Mian frowned.

But that wasn't him. Gu Mian knew for certain that a year ago, he hadn't been anywhere near a crematorium.

"Doctor, what's wrong?" Fatty's voice asked.

Gu Mian looked up and shared his thoughts with them.

After listening to Gu Mian, Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "So, you're saying the ghost saw you in a crematorium before the game started, and it's very likely it died because of you? This means there might be another 'Gu Mian' inside the instance?"

Gu Mian shrugged. "Who knows? But if there's another person in the instance who looks exactly like me, then the NPCs in the instance should know something, right?"

Gu Mian thought back to the various NPCs he had encountered.

Mr. Green might know something... And Coach Che, who was always wandering through the instances? Gu Mian remembered Coach Che had once mentioned the term "crematorium" to him.

But if there really was another "Gu Mian" in the instance, why hide it?

Was it afraid he'd cozy up to this other 'him' and claim they were twins?

Chapter 457 Gu Mian's Chuni Soul_1

"Speaking of that 'Deathly Visage' instance..." Fatty suddenly looked at Gu Mian curiously, "Doctor, was Mingyue murdered by a ghost?"

Fatty remembered that the ghost had completely targeted the Fortune-teller.

Gu Mian thought for a short while, "When I encountered it, it was constantly chasing the Fortune-teller. As far as I remember, didn't Mingyue fall behind the ghost and the Fortune-teller?"

It was impossible for the ghost to turn around and kill her.

"Oh," Fatty recalled, "but when Brother Chu and I returned to the mall, we saw Mingyue's corpse. Wasn't she killed by the ghost?"

While saying this, Fatty subconsciously looked towards Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan, who were nearby, "Do you know how Mingyue died?"

Xiao Qiao resolutely shook her head, "I don't know."

Liu Ruyan gave the same answer.

Fatty found it strange, "This is really bizarre..."

Chu Changge, at the side, adjusted his glasses, "Never mind this for now. We have two events before us: the Dragon Boat Festival on June seventh, and the college entrance exam on the eighth. Only players who rank in the top twenty percent during the Dragon Boat Festival event will be qualified to enter the college entrance exam event. We should think about these two events first.

"The Dragon Boat Festival event will take place on the Liannu River. We're almost at the river now. The event begins at seven in the morning on the seventh and continues until midnight. Five players need to form a team to compete with other players. There are Evil Ghosts in the waters, and players can interfere with each other.

"I need to emphasize here again: death during the event is real death."

The details and rules of the college entrance exam event had not been announced yet.

Gu Mian guessed they probably wouldn't know the exam rules until they entered the exam site.

"Let's make a plan for the dragon boat race for now," Chu Changge adjusted his glasses and looked at Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan, "You two don't mind teaming up with us, do you?"

Xiao Qiao quite sincerely shook her head, "I don't mind."

Liu Ruyan also had no objections.

Chu Changge glanced at Liu Ruyan before continuing, "The rules of the dragon boat event do not provide a start or end point, so it's quite probable that these will only be marked once the event starts. And the length of this event's duration..."

Gu Mian noticed it as well.

The dragon boat event would start at seven in the morning and last until midnight.

A full seventeen hours.

Although the game had been running for nearly half a year and many players had strengthened their physiques, it was impossible to row a dragon boat for more than ten hours straight.

Gu Mian rubbed his chin, "This could mean some players might take over ten hours to reach the finish line."

They didn't know how long the race route was either.

Fatty spoke softly, "I think it's highly likely that players will capsize within an hour of starting the race..."

But he still remembered Chu Changge's words: the game organizers seemed to harbor goodwill towards Gu Mian. He quietly said, "However, we shouldn't capsize within an hour, right?"

"That depends on the difficulty of the event," Chu Changge softly replied. "I mentioned earlier that there are two hosts in the game constraining each other. So even if the event organizers want to go easy on us, they can't be too lenient; someone will obstruct them... I think the ghosts in this dragon boat event will be difficult to deal with, and we'll be at a significant disadvantage on the boat. If it capsizes, we'll immediately become prey for the Evil Ghosts."

"Ah," Fatty grimaced, "this event is quite dangerous."

Hearing this, Gu Mian looked thoughtfully at Xiao Hong, who was sipping lychee soda at the back of the car, "Can you swim?"

Xiao Hong: "..."

Practice is the sole criterion for testing truth.

Gu Mian picked a clear and sunny day and, in a park, tossed Xiao Hong into the water with a PLOP.

Xiao Hong, dressed in red, struggled violently in the water. After flailing for a few minutes, she stopped and slowly sank. GLUG, GLUG. A few bubbles rose from the water's surface, as if the ghost that had sunk had really died.

Gu Mian stared at the bubbles, considering whether to go in and save her, when he saw an ugly head float up from the water, silently looking at him.

The human and the ghost simply stared at each other.

Fatty twitched an eyebrow at Xiao Hong, "You're good at playing dead."

The breeze here was a bit strong, causing ripples to form on the water's surface.

Gu Mian stared at Xiao Hong in the water for a while, then casually pushed the brother, who had been standing obediently nearby, into the water.

And so, two ghosts were floating on the water.

"It seems neither of you is afraid of water," Gu Mian squatted down to look at the two heads poking out from the water and asked gently, "When we're rowing in a few days, would you mind pushing from underneath?"

The rules stipulated that five players form a team, but they didn't say you couldn't bring other things.

"You're cheating, Doctor," Fatty said, though his expression was quite joyful, "but I like it."

No one could have imagined a team of players having two ghosts pushing their boat from underneath with all their might. The mere thought of such a scene was quite terrifying.

The brother soaking in the water smiled, but he only kept calling for his sister. Gu Mian took that as his agreement.

As for Xiao Hong, who was nearby... Gu Mian saw her looking at him gloomily. Then she turned away, presenting him with the pitch-black back of her head. For some reason, that back of her head looked a bit wronged.

At this moment, Chu Changge spoke up, "Ignoring the event itself, this event will attract players from all over. Gu Mian, you need to be careful about your identity."

Although he had the protection of the "Doctor" nickname, quite a few players in the game knew he was Gu Mian.

This was because Gu Mian had participated in the previous few instances using his real name.

Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan had also joined this "tossing Xiao Hong" activity, but neither was interested in Xiao Hong at all. Not far away, Xiao Qiao was plucking willow twigs and fiddling with them in her hands.

Liu Ruyan sat on a nearby bench, uninterested in who they threw into the water.

Fatty glanced at the willow tree suffering from Xiao Qiao's plucking, "By the way, Doctor, aren't you curious about what the ghost said in the previous instance?"

It said that there was another Gu Mian in the instance.

Normal people might be shocked to hear this, or perhaps indulge in some wild fantasies.

However, Gu Mian had accepted this very calmly and didn't seem to care much.

Chapter 458 Gu Mian in the World_1

"Anything is possible, you know," Gu Mian said knowingly, "I've already experienced countless serendipities. What do you think is more likely: eighteen flower pots, which you've never seen before, continuously falling on your head, or your mysteriously disappeared parents leaving you a twin brother?"

Fatty pursed his lips. "I think...the latter is probably more likely."

But it might not be a twin brother, right?

Fatty's mind raced. "After all, Doctor, you don't know who your parents really are. Plus, that person who looks exactly like you clearly exists in an instance world, which is a bit strange... But then again, does that person exist only in the Death Scene instance world?"

Gu Mian watched the two ghosts in the water, who were now almost water ghosts. He stared at the two heads in the water and said, "Actually, I have a guess, but I'm not entirely sure about it."

Fatty looked at Gu Mian curiously. "What's your guess?"

Gu Mian stared into the water. "I think perhaps the instances we've entered are all in the same world?"

What? Fatty widened his eyes slightly.

Gu Mian continued, "I think those instances might all be in the same world, just scattered in different locations. If we investigate carefully, we might find information about another instance within one."

"For example, the Death Scene instance is one of the rare ones where we can use the internet. So I used Chu Changge's computer to search for Songwen Academy, and I actually found it."

Found it? Fatty's eyes widened slightly. He still remembered that Songwen Academy was the school where they played the game in the Close Your Eyes instance.

Who would have thought that one could find the location of another instance within an instance?

Fatty spoke cautiously, "Could it be a coincidence that the names are the same?"

Of course, Gu Mian had considered that possibility. "You know that when you search for a school's name on the computer, pictures appear in the search results. I've seen the pictures of Songwen Academy from the search results; it's exactly the same as the school where we played the game."

"Ah—" Fatty let out an almost inaudible sound. "That's really strange. We can find buildings from instances in the real world, and now we can also find the location of another instance within an instance. Ignoring the first point, just considering the latter suggests your guess is correct, Doctor. The instances we've entered are all within the same world. I wonder if other players have discovered this..."

"But there are also strange things," Gu Mian continued. "I've found that the worldviews of many instances clash. For example, the Death Scene instance we just passed through—its worldview is similar to the one we had before the game started: a society under the rule of law in a technological era."

"The Slaughter Game instance couldn't possibly exist under the worldview of the Death Scene instance. Furthermore, the Mr. Green word-guessing instance we experienced together, and the Sweet Lovers

instance I entered solo, are both themed around variety shows. These don't fit with the worldview of the Death Scene instance, nor are they compatible with the Slaughter Game instance's worldview. And the Angel Redemption instance is primarily game-based, which also seems incompatible with the worldviews of the previous three I mentioned."

Just as Fatty was listening with wide eyes, Chu Changge, beside him, pushed up his glasses. "Indeed. Even though we could find the location from the Close Your Eyes instance within the Death Scene instance, the worldviews of all the instances we've experienced so far can't be unified. So, Gu Mian, you must have another theory."

Gu Mian nodded and said, "I speculate that the instances we enter come from several different worlds. Right now, we can at least deduce four different worldviews."

"I don't really care how many worlds there are. I'm just curious. This global game was initiated under the pretext of human evolution. However, so far, I haven't seen any obvious signs of evolution in humans. This might be related to the time frame, as only half a year has passed. But setting that aside for now... I'm rather curious about where these worlds originated."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "If this were just a simple game, the organizers wouldn't need to divide the instances into different worlds before letting players enter. They could have simply created each instance as an unrelated minigame, like those on the minigame websites we played as kids."

"But the game went to great lengths to first categorize different worlds and then let players enter the instances. For this, I think there's only one explanation... these worlds already existed. For some unknown reason, they became instances within the game."

Fatty nodded, seeming to understand for a change. "Listening to you, Doctor, it sounds a bit like parallel worlds. Could they be several parallel worlds of Earth?"

But how did parallel worlds become a game?

Gu Mian pondered, "If they are parallel worlds, then those worlds are on the same level as ours. Our world wouldn't have the ability to turn them into a game."

Fatty frowned. "Then could they be... Low-Dimensional Worlds?"

But the instances did enhance the players' physical fitness. Can a Low-Dimensional World do that?

Seemingly sensing Fatty's thoughts, Chu Changge suddenly spoke. "Don't underestimate Low-Dimensional Worlds. Sometimes, the lower the dimension of a world, the more terrifying it can be."

Huh? Fatty looked confused.

"If it's a Low-Dimensional World..." Gu Mian suddenly pulled a book from his lab coat. It was *Second World*.

Fatty stared at the book in Gu Mian's hand. "How did you hide that in your clothes?"

Ignoring Fatty, Gu Mian looked at the book in his hand. "I guess this book is a world."

Chapter 459 She died later_1

Fatty stared at the book that Gu Mian had just pulled from his pocket. "Doctor, do you mean that some of the instances we've experienced are in this book?"

But he had also read *Second World* once and discovered no traces of the instances.

"Speaking of which..." Fatty didn't question Gu Mian's words. He fixed his eyes on the book in Gu Mian's hands. "What would happen if we write 'World Explosion' in this book right now?"

The instance world wouldn't really explode, would it?

Seeing Fatty's thoughts, Gu Mian spoke, "It wouldn't actually explode. There are many copies of *Second World* out there. What we're seeing is just one of them. I think there should be an original version, and that original is the real world."

By now, Gu Mian had flipped through several pages. Fatty, with his sharp eyes, saw a line written with a black gel pen on one page—"World Explosion."

Clearly, it was written by Gu Mian.

So, he was certain that writing anything in the book would not cause the instance world to explode.

"Then..." Fatty chose his words carefully. "What would happen if we find the original *Second World* and write 'World Explosion' on it?"

Gu Mian suddenly realized how much ill will Fatty harbored towards the world.

"I remember Chu Changge mentioned," Gu Mian coughed, "the book written by Wang Yushu is split into several parts. Only a small part at the beginning resembles the real world. I think Wang Yushu must have seen the real 'Second World' book and copied the settings from that book in the initial part. That's why we have this *Second World* I'm holding now. So, the original *Second World* does exist in reality."

"The world in the book," Fatty contemplated. "Then, Doctor, since one of the worlds might be a world from a book, and that book exists in the real world, do other instances also exist in the real world in similar forms, like books?"

As he said this, Fatty saw the "brother" in the water. "For instance, some worlds might exist as CDs, some as games..."

"That's possible," Gu Mian said, looking at the book in his hand. "If we could obtain them, it would be like holding those instances within the worlds in our own hands. We could do whatever we want."

"Do whatever we want..." Fatty's face turned slightly red. "That sounds great. Though, I think you've always pretty much done as you please, Doctor."

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "If you truly managed to obtain the items to which these worlds are bound, what would you do?"

Gu Mian always had a feeling that the instances were hostile towards him. If he could get hold of the instance worlds...

"Burn them and end this game... Of course, that's impossible," Gu Mian slipped his hands into his pockets. "What if my twin brother is really inside one of them?"

As he spoke, he took a few steps to one side, going to chase Xiao Hong, who had started frolicking joyfully in the water.

Watching Gu Mian's back as he went to chase Xiao Hong, Fatty said, "Doctor, that idea of yours isn't right. Usually, when the main character in a novel finds out there's someone who looks exactly like them, shouldn't they first consider it their dark side and think about how to eliminate him?"

"Forget it," Chu Changge said quietly to Fatty. "I remember when Gu Mian was in the orphanage, he always hoped to meet his parents. He wished they would come for him one day."

Fatty was taken aback. To this day, Gu Mian still referred to himself as an orphan. His wish had clearly not come true.

"As he got older, he stopped mentioning it. But I think if he had relatives when he was a child, he would have been very happy, whether they were parents or siblings." Chu Changge glanced at the "brother" still lounging in the water. "Of course, I'm not referring to *that* kind of sibling."

Fatty wasn't clear about Gu Mian's childhood experiences. He asked, puzzled, "No friends? Didn't Doctor have any friends when he was a child?"

Chu Changge walked a few steps to a nearby lounge chair and sat down. "He used to have some. But as you know, with Gu Mian's luck... anyone who played with him would end up injured, or some other accident would occur. Gradually, he had no friends left.

"Later, a married couple adopted him. They had visited the orphanage many times before and treated Gu Mian very well. You could see Gu Mian was very happy then. But later, that couple also died, right on the second day after the adoption procedures were completed. Gu Mian hadn't even had a chance to take a look at his new home yet.

"After that, almost no one spoke to him. With no other choice, he could only entertain himself. You also thought this person was quite cheerful when you first met him, right?" Chu Changge looked out over the shimmering lake, where the sunlight cast a golden hue, making the water sparkle like scales.

Fatty also looked at the lake and quieted down. "Back then, were you the only one who played with him?"

Chu Changge paused. "No, there was one more person..."

"Who... else?" Fatty turned to look at him. Chu Changge's pause made him feel that things were perhaps heading in a sad direction.

"A girl named Lin Xiaowei, but she also died in her second year of middle school. I remember when he was very young—probably in first or second grade—by then, no one was willing to talk to Gu Mian anymore. But you know how kids are; they always like to play with others. At that time, Gu Mian would always try to find others, following behind them, wanting to talk to them, but no one paid him any attention.

"That period lasted for about a year. Later, Gu Mian understood. Starting from the third grade, he started to be alone, coming and going by himself. Lin Xiaowei, in order to cheer him up, would often stick to him and play rock-paper-scissors... I've told you this before, haven't I?"

Chu Changge turned his head to look at Fatty.

"Ah, you did," Fatty remembered. "I remember you said a girl often pestered Doctor to play rock-paper-scissors with him. Whoever lost would get a kiss. Eventually, Doctor's face even swelled up from all the kisses..."

However, the ending wasn't very good.

Fatty still clearly remembered the last words Chu Changge had uttered in the wind when he told the story—"Later, she died."

Chapter 460 Global Manhunt_1

"It was a car accident," Chu Changge said, looking at the lake shimmering in the sunlight. "Gu Mian should have told you. Twenty-eight cars in a pile-up, and the three of us were in a taxi right in the middle."

"Our cab braked just in time and didn't hit the car in front. However, the car behind slammed into our rear, pushing us forward. Gu Mian was sitting between us. When our taxi was about to crash into the car ahead, Lin Xiaowei opened the door and pushed Gu Mian out."

"Then, at the very last second, she pushed me out. The moment I got out, our taxi rammed into the rear of the car in front. The massive impact from behind nearly crushed our cab into a metal pancake. My leg was still stuck inside. Luckily, it was only broken; I didn't need an amputation."

"Ah..." Fatty uttered, looking at Chu Changge. "What happened then?"

Chu Changge continued, "The accident happened just two blocks from the hospital. Gu Mian was knocked unconscious when he was pushed out. I saw a passerby pick him up and run toward the hospital."

"...What about you?" Fatty wanted to ask about Lin Xiaowei, but he swallowed his words.

"Me? I was stuck there, watching the cars pile into each other. It all happened in an instant. By the time I could react, all twenty-eight cars were already tangled together in a line."

Fatty was still thinking about Chu Changge's trapped leg. "Didn't it hurt then?"

"It hurt, but there was nothing to be done. No one could pull my leg out of the crushed cab. I figured I'd just have to wait for the police or firefighters to rescue me..."

"But I didn't expect Gu Mian to return so soon, to find us. I don't know where he'd found two sticks, but he came stumbling back with them. People who wanted to take him to the hospital were right behind him, but he just kept running towards us without a backward glance, trying to save us."

The outcome was already clear: Chu Changge was alive; Lin Xiaowei was gone.

Fatty looked at Chu Changge sitting beside him. He clung to a sliver of hope and asked, "What about the girl?"

"Dead," Gu Mian's voice said suddenly from behind him.

A chill ran down Fatty's spine as he turned to look.

He saw Gu Mian, who had appeared beside him at some point, holding a dripping Xiao Hong. "She died on the spot," Gu Mian said. "There wasn't even a chance to save her."

Fatty swallowed hard, looking at Gu Mian. Although Gu Mian's expression wasn't one of extreme sorrow, Fatty kept his mouth shut.

"You don't need to look so guilty," Gu Mian said, placing Xiao Hong aside and turning to Fatty. "That car accident was about ten years ago. Even if it's brought up now, I'm not going to burst into tears and bang my head on the ground."

Fatty felt a wave of dizziness. "Yes, ten years is a long time. No matter how intense the grief was back then, ten years is enough to dilute it."

"But back then, I suspected Chu Changge was severely traumatized," Gu Mian said, "because I saw he was actually quite cheerful at the time."

Although ten years had passed, Gu Mian still remembered the scene he had returned to.

Chu Changge's leg was trapped in the car, bleeding. But instead of crying like other children, he wore a genuine smile.

From then on, Gu Mian began to suspect Chu Changge had developed some kind of psychological illness due to the accident.

Despite his own grief, Gu Mian took his surviving friend to see a psychologist. However, the diagnosis was that Chu Changge was psychologically quite healthy, with no illness.

The psychologist's diagnosis once made Gu Mian suspect that what he'd seen at the accident was an illusion.

A smile rarely appeared on Chu Changge's face.

Aside from that car accident, Gu Mian couldn't recall another time Chu Changge had ever smiled.

"Let's not talk about this," Fatty said, quickly changing the subject with a keen sense of the mood. "We discovered before that the instance world and the real world have subtle overlaps, right? I think even people who've died might appear there. Didn't Yuan Qinghua die in the real world and then show up in an instance world? Maybe we can meet people we've always wanted to see in the instance worlds."

Fatty grew wistful as he spoke. "Actually, I have people I want to see too..."

"No," Gu Mian suddenly interjected as Fatty was daydreaming. "If someone I know truly appears in an instance, I still won't accept it."

Fatty was stunned. "Why?"

"Because they're not the same," Gu Mian stated plainly. "No matter if their appearance and memories are identical, the people in an instance are not the same as the people from the real world."

"But... but Doctor, aren't you curious about your own twin brother?" Fatty found this strange. He could accept someone identical to himself appearing in an instance, but not other people?

"Gu Mian has always been quite indulgent with himself," Chu Changge's voice reached Fatty's ears.

Fatty: "..."

"Alright, cut the crap," Gu Mian said, pressing down on Xiao Hong's restless head to keep water from splashing on him. "It's June 1st. The dragon boat race is in a week. Are your plans even ready, or are you just going to keep rambling about irrelevant nonsense?"

"What we were discussing was important too!" Fatty mumbled guiltily. "Important business about the instance world!"

Not far away, Xiao Qiao was still yanking branches off a willow tree, nearly stripping it bare.

If any media friends happened to pass by and snap a photo, tomorrow's headline might read: "Popular Superstar Qiao Suffers Suspected Mental Breakdown Over Love, Savagely Rips Apart Willow Tree by Lake, Hurls Abuse at Passersby."

Too bad the tabloids have probably gone bankrupt by now.

And all our media friends are probably unemployed too.

Gu Mian paid little attention to the nearly bare willow tree. He mused aloud, "Since this is a game-wide event, many players will participate. What worries me is that quite a few people know who I am... I checked the leaderboard a few days ago; I'm currently ranked around fifty thousand."

In reality, not that many people knew Gu Mian's identity. The concern was some idiot recognizing him and bellowing to other players, "That green-clad Doctor is Gu Mian!"

At that point, Gu Mian would face being hunted by every player in the game.