

Collapse 491

Chapter 491 I Have Your Childhood Photos_1

Gu Mian was unable to control the rules of the university entrance examination event. He was quite worried that these two ghosts would be confiscated as contraband once they climbed in.

Fortunately, his roar intimidated Xiao Hong. She scrambled up, dusted off her red skirt, and wore an expression of extreme shame—or so he assumed.

It didn't take Gu Mian long to come down from the dormitory building. He was now standing before the two ghosts, facing them across the fence. This place was secluded; only certain rooms in Dormitory Buildings 1 and 4 had a view of this spot.

Gu Mian reached his left hand through the fence, grabbed Xiao Hong's sleeve, and pulled her close. "Didn't I tell you not to come in?" he scolded. "You looked so happy climbing the fence just now, even encouraging someone else to join you."

As he spoke, he tried to grab her brother too. But her brother was some distance from the fence, and Gu Mian couldn't reach him through it.

Just then, her brother thoughtfully leaned his head closer. Gu Mian grabbed his curly hair and began to scold him harshly.

After sternly scolding them both, Gu Mian released them. "Alright, you two should go now. Stay away from this school; we'll be out soon."

It was already 9:20, with more than two hours left before the exam ended. The school was shrouded in darkness, with only a few scattered streetlights casting a faint, eerie glow. The light from behind Gu Mian illuminated the faces of the two ghosts outside the fence, making them appear ghastly pale—a truly horrifying scene.

Her brother was one thing, but Xiao Hong's face, under that lighting, looked like it could belong to the main character of a horror film. And this face, fit for a horror movie protagonist, showed no sign of leaving. Xiao Hong stood stock-still outside the fence, looking as if she would climb back in given another chance; her brother beside her was no different.

Gu Mian sighed, looking at the two pale ghost faces before him. He stood under the dim, eerie light, patted his pocket, and muttered to himself, I remember putting it here...

As he spoke, he pulled out a key and placed it in Xiao Hong's hand. "From the school's main gate, go straight. After two intersections, turn left. There's an apartment building called the Passing Inn. I used to live there. You two go on ahead."

When Fatty learned this event was in Lianhua City, he had specifically dug out this key from Gu Mian's pile of miscellaneous belongings. It had been unused for half a year, and now it certainly came in handy.

Seeing that the two ghosts before him still hadn't reacted, Gu Mian pondered for a moment. "There are photos of me as a child in there. When I get back, I'll put them away."

At that, her brother snatched the key from Xiao Hong's hand and bolted. Xiao Hong also scampered after him.

After double-checking that they had left, Gu Mian slung his guitar case onto his back and headed towards Academic Building 6.

Unexpectedly, he hadn't gone far before he encountered a lone player. It was a familiar face; Gu Mian had seen this person a few times. His nickname was Hao Laoshi.

The first time he saw this man was in Coach Che's driver's license instance. Gu Mian remembered he had died quite horribly. The second time was in the 'University Urban Legends: The Vanishing Game' instance. Gu Mian had been with Chu Changge at the time. Hao Laoshi had taken one look at them and bolted as if he'd seen a ghost, much like Mingyue when she'd gotten off the school bus.

It was worth noting that this player knew Gu Mian's real name; Gu Mian hadn't yet acquired the Doctor profession when he cleared the driver's license instance.

This lone man's first reaction upon seeing Gu Mian was to turn and flee. But after a few steps, he looked back, sized Gu Mian up, and then stopped, as if sighing in relief.

His reaction is a bit strange, Gu Mian thought.

Before Gu Mian could ask anything, Hao Laoshi, standing about five meters away, craned his neck and asked, "You're not dead yet?"

He said it as if Gu Mian still being alive was some extraordinary event.

If this had been before, and someone had spoken to Gu Mian like that, he would have already started cursing their entire family. But now, it seemed Hao Laoshi had more to say. Gu Mian remained silent, waiting for him to continue.

Getting no reply, Hao Laoshi swallowed hard and continued, "I know you're Gu Mian. But I'm naturally timid and don't want to cause extra trouble. I don't care about any bounty or whatnot..."

He hesitated, seemingly debating whether to say what came next. After a few seconds, he made his choice. "But there's one thing I have to warn you about: that Chu Changge is a bad sort!"

I had a feeling Hao Laoshi would say something like this, Gu Mian thought. He'd always suspected Chu Changge had done something to this poor man.

Hao Laoshi continued, "In that driver's license instance, the ghost was originally chasing me and that other guy. But just as the ghost was about to catch up, he, without any change in expression, backhanded me towards it! Threw me right at it!"

So that's what happened... Gu Mian's eyebrow twitched. It turns out Hao Laoshi was scared off by Chu Changge in that 'University Urban Legends' instance.

Hao Laoshi seemed extremely worked up about this incident, repeating the last few words twice through gritted teeth, emphasizing them heavily.

"And I saw his completely unperturbed expression, as if he thought he was just tossing some object aside! That's not just a matter of bad character; it's monstrous!" Gu Mian listened to the man's furious denunciation.

Hao Laoshi added, "I originally figured someone so rotten would have stabbed you in the back for the reward long ago. I'm surprised you're still alive... Anyway, Chu Changge is not a good person. You need to be careful."

Chapter 492 I Have Your Childhood Photos_2

As soon as Hao Laoshi finished speaking, he vanished in a puff of smoke, as if terrified Chu Changge would materialize beside Gu Mian at any second.

Gu Mian silently watched Hao Laoshi's retreating figure. I've always felt Chu Changge's mentality was a bit off, he thought. His values seem different from other people's.

This issue became even more pronounced after the global game began. Gu Mian discovered that Chu Changge seemed to have a shallow understanding of 'people.' To him, 'people' were like objects that could be casually discarded.

And sure enough, some people had been casually discarded by him.

It wasn't just Chu Changge with this issue. After a few encounters, Gu Mian realized Xiao Qiao had a similar problem, though hers was even more severe.

For instance, Chu Changge at least regarded people as valuable objects, only discarding them when he had no other choice.

Xiao Qiao, however, was different. She apparently saw everything as equal. What she might discard depended purely on luck. If she went completely mad, she might even discard herself.

Comparing the two, Chu Changge is somewhat more humane than Xiao Qiao, Gu Mian mused.

As Gu Mian walked along the base of the dormitory building, silently pondering who was more rational, he suddenly spotted a life-sized doll by the pavilion in the landscaped area.

A doll of that size looked particularly eerie in the darkness, almost like a person lying on the ground.

Gu Mian hadn't found the dead fish, nor were there any new questions.

Out of boredom, he took two steps into the landscaped area and squatted beside the pavilion to observe the doll.

The doll was smeared with bloodstains—a considerable amount, and the color looked fresh, suggesting a player might have been brutally killed by it recently.

In the darkness, the doll's realistic eyes were motionless, as if staring at him, extremely eerie.

Gu Mian squatted on the damp grass, staring at the eerie doll for a moment before remarking, "It's really ugly."

Then, the doll seemed to twitch.

Gu Mian paid it no mind. Just as he was wondering where to go next, he suddenly heard a voice from nearby, "Doctor!"

That drawn-out call was unmistakably Fatty's; Gu Mian had been hailed like that countless times.

He looked up to see Fatty running towards him, holding a neatly folded test paper.

Gu Mian had already posted his question's location in the cheating group chat. It seemed Fatty had found him using that information.

"Doctor!" Fatty ran over, his call drawn out, then stopped at the edge of the landscaped area, panting heavily.

"I heard you, I heard you," Gu Mian stood up. "I'm not deaf."

Fatty looked like he wanted to step closer, but he froze when he saw the terrifying doll by Gu Mian's feet. His face fell. "Doctor, are you in the middle of a question?"

According to Chu Changge, if Fatty were to interfere with Gu Mian's question now, he'd be as good as dead.

"No," Gu Mian said, stepping out. "I saw this ugly doll by the roadside and came over for a closer look."

Fatty couldn't quite follow Gu Mian's logic, but he was used to it. He ignored Gu Mian's explanation and got straight to the point. "Doctor, I came looking for you because I found this thing. It's a special item, but it doesn't seem to have any real use. It was in a pretty obvious spot, but for some reason, no other players found it..."

As he spoke, he took a folded piece of paper from his pocket and spread it open in front of Gu Mian. "I had a fill-in-the-blank question that required me to return a book to the library, and that's where I found this."

Gu Mian took it. The sheet of paper, about octavo size, had only a few lines of text. It looked like a page torn from a book. A story ended on this very page, with only the few lines at the top starting mid-sentence.

[...death, the secrets beneath Songcheng College were thus concealed. Every night, resentful voices could be heard emanating from here, seeming to curse everyone who heard them.]

[Years later, this place was deserted. The entire college lay under a thick layer of dust. Only when the weather was clear would the gate at the 'bottom of the cup' glint dazzlingly in the sunlight.]

[That secret would never be known again.]

[Actually, every place has its stories; it's just that people often don't discover them.]

In addition, there was a page number "13" in the lower right corner. This was page 13 of the book.

Gu Mian instinctively thought of the Second World. Could this be a page from the Second World?

Was this book torn out page by page?

Gu Mian said to Fatty, "A little while ago, I met three ghosts. They were students from Songcheng College. So, we can say that the place we're in right now is Songcheng College... I have a theory: the Songcheng College in this book is structurally based on Lianhua University. That's why the event is being held at Lianhua University."

And although the general layout is similar, the stalls in the cafeteria are completely different from before.

I'm afraid the Songcheng College in this book imperceptibly replaced Lianhua University when the event began.

As he spoke, he flipped the paper in his hand to see the back. Indeed, in the bottom left corner was the page number "14."

Page 14 had no text; it was a full-page illustration—a massive door.

A keyhole was visible in the middle of the door. This must be the door to the underground area, Gu Mian thought.

Gu Mian looked at the illustration, then reached into his pocket and took out the Key he'd kept there since the Dragon Boat Race event. Back then, Gu Mian hadn't known what this Key was for. Now, he did.

He held the Key up to the drawing of the door, sizing it up. "I think it'll fit. We can get underground."

The reward from the Dragon Boat Race event was this Key. Does that mean only they can open this door? Could this be considered a special reward from the Dragon Boat Race event?

Fatty blinked a few times. "So, this paper means we can unlock another storyline in the event, one about the secrets beneath this school, right? Since we have the Key, it would be a shame not to go... But Doctor, you don't seem to know where the door is."

At this moment, Gu Mian glanced at his test paper. A new multiple-choice question had appeared:

[Do you wish to go underground?]

[A. Yes][B. No]

At the same time, Fatty discovered the same choice had appeared on his test paper.

"Since it's the same question, it wouldn't count as cheating if we answer it together, would it...?" Fatty wondered aloud.

Gu Mian glanced at the time again. It was 9:40 PM.

"There's still time, and I know where the door is," Gu Mian said, starting to walk along the path.

Fatty quickly followed. "Doctor, I'm coming too!"

Just as the two turned to leave, the doll lying in the damp grass suddenly swiveled its head, looking at their retreating backs.

Gu Mian suddenly turned back. The doll in the grass looked exactly as it had before; nothing had changed.

Fatty sensed something was off. "What's wrong, Doctor?"

"Nothing," Gu Mian said, stroking his chin. "I just find the ghosts in this event a bit strange."

The ghosts in this event showed no fear. Take Liu Xuan, the ghost he'd encountered earlier; it was still baring its teeth crazily even as it was dying. If given the chance, it would have counterattacked immediately.

Commendable courage, but so different from the ghosts I've seen before, Gu Mian thought. Other ghosts would at least show some fear, but the ghosts in this event were so frenzied they'd fight to the death to drag someone down with them.

Fatty trotted eagerly after Gu Mian. "Speaking of which, Doctor, you were in the female dormitory for a long time, weren't you? Didn't you run into any proctors?"

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "No proctors entered the female dormitory. Probably because the proctors are all male."

Ah! Fatty suddenly gazed at Gu Mian with admiration, clearly envious that Gu Mian could enter the female dormitory.

But Fatty quickly got back to the point. "But Doctor, do you actually know where the door mentioned in the book is?"

"It said it's under the 'cup.' Remember when we entered the school, there was that trophy statue as tall as a three-story building, right? I think the Stone Tablet under that 'cup' looks a lot like this door," Gu Mian said, looking down at the paper in his hand.

Fatty also looked with Gu Mian, and just then, he suddenly had an eerie feeling, as if something was staring at his back.

He whirled around and saw that the doll, which had been lying in the grass, was now just three meters behind them, its eerie face turned towards them.

It had followed them!

Chapter 493 A group fight against Gu Bongbong_1

"Let's go," Fatty said nonchalantly, brushing off his hands after he saw Gu Mian pick up the doll from the ground, find a nearby trashcan, and stick it headfirst inside.

Fatty shivered.

It is worth mentioning that when Gu Mian was performing his "evil deed," two players happened to pass by. These two players had already been so scared by Chu Changge that they saw danger everywhere. Upon seeing a psycho here "hanging the willows upside down," they turned tail and fled.

There were not many players left in the school now.

Gu Mian was sure that at least half of the players who participated in this event had died here, because the Dragon Boat event and the college entrance exam event were seamlessly linked. In the Dragon Boat event, it was mandatory for everyone to be in teams of five.

Therefore, those who teamed up in the Dragon Boat event also participated in the college entrance exam event together. This grouping led a large number of people to participate in other players' exam questions.

The organizer truly couldn't bear to see people happy, using two seamlessly linked events to trap and kill players.

Who could have thought that the team formed in the previous event would become a death knell for the next?

Some of the survivors had taken Chu Changge's words to heart, returned to the exam room to hand in their papers, and were preparing to leave. These players had mostly participated in other players' questions and had personally witnessed their teammates being killed by unsolvable ghosts.

Some didn't plan on leaving, including those who hadn't participated in other players' questions and those who were skeptical.

Others returned to the exam room, intending to observe the situation for the time being. In the minds of the test-takers, the exam room was the safest place in the entire event.

At this time, in Teaching Building No. 7, the one closest to the school statue, some players were observing from an exam room. Few players were wandering outside the buildings now. In Test room 7608, two players were craning their necks, looking out.

"Xingchen, do you think the man in the broadcast just now was telling the truth? Did we really overhear him by accident?" At this moment, a player whose nickname was 'Chen Jiyu's Marvelous Adventure' asked the person next to him, whose nickname was 'Star Sinks on the Other Shore'.

They had also teamed up for questions but were hesitant to leave so easily.

Xingchen gazed at the sparsely populated road outside. "I also think that the ghosts in this event are a bit strange. But we struggled to get into this college entrance exam event in the first place. Only the top twenty percent in the Dragon Boat event ranking were eligible to participate. We barely made it into the top twenty percent by the skin of our teeth. The rewards from the Dragon Boat event alone were very generous, providing enough Game Coins to cover our expenses for a month... The rewards for this college entrance exam event must be even more generous. Do you really want to leave halfway?"

The invigilator was still in the classroom. They occasionally glanced back at the monster on the platform, wary that it might suddenly appear behind them.

Xingchen stared at the street outside, silent for a moment before speaking. "It's only nine-fifty now; there are still more than two hours before the event ends... There's no rush. Let's observe a bit more. Look, two players are coming from over there; they seem to be a group. Let's see what happens to them first."

Following Xingchen's gaze, Chen Jiyu indeed saw two players approaching from the direction of the girls' dormitory.

One of them was wearing a white medical coat and carrying a guitar bag on his back that seemed incongruous with his appearance.

The other was Fatty, carrying a lantern that emitted a blue light. It is worth noting that the lantern had a very wide illumination range, lighting up an area tens of meters around them.

"They haven't attracted any Patrollers with such a conspicuous lantern?" Xingchen frowned at the two people slowly approaching from below.

These two seemed to be targeting the school's statue, walking slowly towards it.

Unlike other players, these two seemed not to be nervous at all, especially the one who looked like a Doctor.

Xingchen had good eyesight; he could even see the excitement on the Doctor's face.

For some reason, upon seeing the excited expression on the Doctor's face, he subconsciously shuddered.

Just then, he suddenly noticed something about ten meters behind the two. Xingchen focused for a moment and realized it appeared to be a person lying on the ground.

"Did a player die there?" Chen Jiyu apparently saw it too.

But Chen Jiyu suddenly noticed the figure seemed to be moving. It covered a large distance in an instant, drawing closer and closer to the two people ahead.

"That thing...is following them?" Xingchen said, his face pale. "Are these two being targeted by a ghost because they solved a problem together?"

As it drew nearer, the two on the upper floor got a clear view: it was a human-sized, eerie doll covered in large bloodstains.

The two people ahead seemed oblivious, stopping nonchalantly before the statue.

"Should we alert them?" Chen Jiyu looked at the two people standing before the statue, preparing to call out.

Just as he opened his mouth, he saw the doll's head snap around to stare directly at them.

Cold sweat instantly drenched Chen Jiyu. He held his breath and retreated a few steps.

Xingchen finally realized the seriousness of the situation. "I think we'd better turn in our papers and leave. Have you noticed that we've been here for almost half an hour, but no other test-takers have come back to turn in their papers? I'm afraid they..."

He paused, seemingly reluctant to voice his guess. "This event is indeed terrifying. Let's leave the two players alone and let them fend for themselves."

But these two players were also likely doomed.

"Alright..." Chen Jiyu immediately agreed. As he turned, he noticed something new outside the window.

"Huh?" Chen Jiyu waved at Xingchen. "Don't leave yet, the Patrollers are coming!"

Patrollers?

Xingchen immediately shifted his gaze toward the window. Sure enough, Patrollers had appeared downstairs, seemingly out of nowhere, dressed in biohazard suits. There were at least forty to fifty of them!

These Patrollers were headed towards the two people under the statue, but those two seemed oblivious to their presence.

Seeing the group of Patrollers getting closer and closer, Chen Jiyu couldn't hold back anymore. He took two large steps back from the window, then mustered all his strength to yell out, "Run!"

At this moment, Gu Mian was scrutinizing the Stone Tablet under the statue, searching for a keyhole. However, before he could find anything, he heard a roar from above telling them to run.

You could tell from the voice that the person shouting "Run!" had gathered all their courage to do so, as the roar was laced with several trembles.

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian's first instinct was not to wonder why they should run, but to look up in the direction the sound came from.

He saw a flushed face behind one of the sixth-floor windows of Teaching Building No. 7. It was obvious that this test-taker had shouted.

The loud roar also caught the attention of the other test-takers in the examination rooms. Gu Mian saw test-takers from that teaching building all curiously crowding by the windows.

However, Fatty's focus was clearly different from Gu Mian's.

While Gu Mian was counting the number of onlookers, Fatty's anxious voice drilled into his ears. Gu Mian heard him essentially repeat the earlier trembling roar, even his tone was identical.

"Run..."

Following Fatty's gaze, Gu Mian saw a dense swarm of Patrollers that had appeared behind them at some point, now moving towards them at a terrifying speed.

Meanwhile, the test-takers in the building were calling out to their companions: "Quick, come look! Those two unlucky fools ran into Patrollers!"

The crowd of onlookers grew. This excitement was their only bit of warmth in this cold, unforgiving event.

"Doc, I know your punches hurt..." Fatty looked at the dozens of Patrollers behind them, his voice still trembling, "but can you save this poor Fatty from so many Patrollers?"

"To be honest, while my punches do hurt," Gu Mian said, hastily taking the guitar bag off his back and opening it to reveal a gruesome chainsaw inside, "even if they were human, one against fifty is a death wish."

Fatty made a pertinent suggestion: "Then maybe we should run."

The test-takers in the building were curious to see how these two players would escape, but unexpectedly, neither of them ran.

One of them even took off the guitar bag from his back.

"What's he doing? Planning an impromptu performance for the Patrollers?"

"What if it's a special item? Like, he strums the guitar and all the ghosts in the area fall unconscious... Of course, I know no such ridiculously overpowered special item exists. I'm just kidding. Look, the Patrollers are almost on them..."

But soon they discovered that a guitar bag doesn't always contain a guitar; it might also hold a chainsaw.

Gu Mian pulled the gleaming saw from the bag. "Although I can't win one against fifty, running over fifty with a car might be possible. Where's my car!"

"Here!" Fatty quickly replied.

By now, the foremost Patroller had reached them, moving with a bizarre posture.

Then, the test-takers on the upper floors saw the Doctor raise the gleaming thing in his hand, and a head suddenly fell to the ground.

The test-takers watched the head roll several times, fell silent for a moment, and then a commotion began.

"Am I seeing things? Whose head was that? A Patroller's?"

"I was wrong! This thing is way more badass than a guitar that can hypnotize the whole field! How did I not know there was a special item that could make a ghost's head fall off?"

"Look, a car suddenly appeared next to them!"

When Liu Ruyan arrived near the statue, she saw Gu Mian's Spirit Car drifting recklessly around the school grounds.

Numerous victims lay under its wheels—they were the Patrollers, who had a habit of appearing like phantoms.

However, these Patrollers were now on their last legs.

It is worth mentioning that not far away on the road lay a human-sized doll, looking quite eerie. However, because Gu Mian wasn't paying much attention to the road while driving, the doll was being repeatedly run over.

Chapter 494 | Travel Around The World in a Hearse with a Doctor_1

"Doctor, don't you feel like we just ran over something?"

The sound of the tires rubbing against the ground echoed in the night, piercing and shrill.

Fatty, who hadn't buckled his seatbelt, was being thrown around inside the drifting Spirit Car. Every now and then, he would feel a THUD underneath his buttocks, as if someone was being run over beneath them.

"Fasten your seatbelt," Gu Mian instructed through the rearview mirror at Fatty, who was being tossed around the back. "Don't wreck my car."

"Alright, alright..." Fatty quickly clung to the seat in front of him, finally managing to sit securely and fasten his seatbelt.

The candidates nearby were witnessing the "Spirit Car drift" for the first time in their lives.

In a sense, this was indeed a legitimate Spirit Car drift.

This unexpected farce ended in a brutal scenario. Gu Mian emerged victorious in this war of one against fifty, with dozens of uniformed proctors smooshed under his vehicle.

The scattered students inside the dark classroom gulped. They watched the proctors, who had previously terrified them, transformed into pitiable pancake-like figures stuck to the ground under the wheels of a car; they never knew it was possible to kill a ghost in such a way.

They even began to suspect that some accident had occurred during the event; they started to believe Gu Mian was not a player but an Evil Ghost disguised within this activity.

"Technically, beating up an invigilator is against the rules, right? It should be!" Fatty clung tightly to the seatbelt that secured him to the car seat, his knuckles turning white. "Although this isn't explicitly written in the rules, it's definitely illegal!"

"None of that matters," Gu Mian said, pressing the brake and reaching back to hand the key to Fatty. "On the first day of the game, it told me that I couldn't beat up NPCs... Quit your yapping and get out of the car to look for a keyhole on that stone slab."

Fatty moaned internally but did as he was told. He opened the car door and ran towards the statue behind them. As he ran, he mumbled to himself, "I don't think I can submit my paper today..."

The current time was 22:01, and they had to hand in their papers within two hours.

But if he and Gu Mian truly unlocked this grand door depicted in the *Second World* fragmentary pages, things probably wouldn't be as simple.

Despite groaning inwardly, Fatty groped carefully at the base of the statue and soon found a keyhole where the statue met the plinth.

"Found it!" Fatty shouted back to Gu Mian.

As soon as he turned his head, he saw more white figures appearing. It seemed Gu Mian's violent acts had severely disrupted the exam order, attracting more proctors.

"Dammit," Fatty swore, a rare curse for him. "I have a very bad feeling about this!"

With things like this, it means either Gu Mian or this event has to be destroyed. And since I've never seen Gu Mian die, it's gotta be the event that's toast!

He kept cursing as he quickly jammed the key in his hand into the keyhole. He immediately heard a CRACK from the Stone Tablet beneath him; it split open, and the statue on top moved aside with it.

The Stone Tablet set into the ground split open from the middle like automatic doors. Fatty, still sitting on one of the separating halves, raised his lamp and peered down in astonishment.

Beneath this enormous doorway was a wide staircase leading down into the darkness. It extended so far that even his lamp, with its twenty-meter radius of illumination, couldn't reach the bottom.

Staring at the deep, dark chasm, Fatty couldn't shake the feeling that entering it was like walking straight into the gates of hell.

The candidates watching were also stunned. They hadn't expected such a turn of events: first, the Doctor, who resembled a chainsaw-wielding maniac, mowed down dozens of proctors with his car. Then, more proctors appeared. After that, Fatty, who was accompanying the maniac, used a key to open a "gate" that didn't look like one at all.

Next, they saw the Doctor drive his car straight towards the now-open gateway. Fatty, who was nearby, scrambled aboard just as the vehicle vanished into the darkness.

The proctors behind them didn't follow. They seemed to be afraid of something and kept their distance from the entrance.

Before long, silence returned below—an unnerving silence.

The players stared silently at the ominous, dark entrance that had appeared in the middle of the school grounds. A heavy atmosphere began to spread among them. They all felt that ever since this gaping doorway had opened, the darkness within the school had grown even more terrifying.

"To be honest, I deeply regret participating in this event right now," Xingchen muttered, staring out the window.

They had remained in the classroom for quite some time, but no other candidates had returned.

Xingchen's hand twitched involuntarily. "I'm afraid what that person on the radio said is true. Anyone who gets involved in another's exam questions is doomed to die. The only people left alive in this exam hall now... are just us."

The terrifying difficulty of this instance is far beyond our imagination. Leaving this place as quickly as possible is definitely the best choice!

Thinking this, Xingchen clutched the exam paper in his hand and turned to walk towards the teacher's desk. However, he sensed something was wrong after taking only a few steps.

Xingchen's scalp prickled. He rigidly turned his neck to look around.

"Chen Jiyu... where is Chen Jiyu?"

He was alone in the empty exam hall. Chen Jiyu, who had been right beside him moments ago, had vanished as if he had never existed.

Xingchen stared at the empty classroom and gulped. No one! There's no one here! No one but me!

Just then, he suddenly felt something icy cold grab his ankle. He looked down and saw a withered, skeletal hand.

After a bloodcurdling scream, the last person in this exam hall also disappeared.

And so, Test room 7608 was completely wiped out.

「Meanwhile, 007 had already left the school grounds.」

After the proctor at the girls' dormitory entrance departed, she had immediately run back to the exam hall, submitted her paper, and quickly left.

007 hadn't lingered at the girls' dormitory to find Gu Mian and thank him. She knew that in this terrifying event, doing so was a complete waste of time, not even worth farting over.

Two seconds after she stepped out of the school gate, she heard the sound of drifting coming from the school behind her.

When she turned to look, her view was blocked by a giant statue. However, after a few minutes, 007 saw the massive statue move. Its base slowly split open to either side, revealing a hidden cavern. A Spirit Car then sped into it.

Just as 007 was staring, somewhat dumbfounded, a voice came from nearby, "Hey, are you out after finishing the exam?"

Hearing the voice, she instinctively glanced over and saw a few players waiting by the school gate. They must be waiting for teammates still inside, 007 guessed.

"Mm," 007 nodded silently, then looked up at them. "And you are?"

"We're the ones who got tickets but were too injured to participate, or just didn't want to join this event. We had nowhere else to stay, so we're waiting here for our teammates... Oh, by the way, I just saw that thing split open. Was that part of your exam too?"

Upon hearing this, the corner of 007's mouth twitched. After a few seconds, she replied, "Probably... I guess so."

"This event isn't too hard, is it? It's just answering questions, right? Not many people should die," the man in front of her pressed.

Players who hadn't participated had no idea how arduous this event truly was, nor did they know if they would ever see their teammates again.

The number of people who will make it out of this event alive will probably be in the double digits, at best, 007 thought.

She fell silent and said no more.

When Chu Changge arrived near the statue, he saw that its bluish-gray marble base had split neatly down the middle, revealing a pitch-black doorway.

There were no proctors around the dark entrance, only a few daring players craning their necks to look at a staircase that seemed to lead deep underground.

"They've gone in. Are you going in too? If you do, perhaps you could turn the tide," Liu Ruyan, who had appeared behind Chu Changge at some unknown point, said in a voice tinged with an eagerness for trouble to unfold.

Chu Changge stared at the split base for a long time, then finally turned and walked away. "Forget it."

Xiao Qiao popped out from some obscure corner, joining Liu Ruyan to watch Chu Changge's retreating figure. After a moment, this usually emotionless celebrity sighed, "How tragic."

"Oh, right," Liu Ruyan suddenly said to Xiao Qiao, who was beside her. "That Xie Bi'an, isn't he..."

Just as she was halfway through her sentence, a RUSTLING sound suddenly came from a nearby corner. They both turned to look and caught a fleeting glimpse of the hem of a garment.

Liu Ruyan felt that piece of fabric looked somewhat familiar.

Then she heard Xiao Qiao say, "In this world, success and failure are not always determined by one's character."

Those words... where have I heard them before? Liu Ruyan wondered.

"Driving a Spirit Car around recklessly underground like this is a first for me in this lifetime. I wonder if anyone else will ever have such an experience. Doctor, ever since I teamed up with you, I've had enough experiences to write a whole book! I've decided, if I'm still alive when this global game ends, I'll publish a book. The title will be 'Driving a Spirit Car Through the Underworld.' This place really is a lot like the underworld..." Fatty's voice echoed continuously inside the car.

The Spirit Car was moving very fast, especially for driving on stairs, jostling the two of them continuously. The seatbelts were almost useless; Fatty had to grip the seatback tightly to avoid being thrown to the rear of the car. He was currently clinging to the seatback, shouting nonsensically.

By now, they had been speeding down the dark staircase for several minutes but still couldn't see the end.

"Doctor, can we slow down a bit?" Fatty whined. His butt was sore. My dinner from last night is about to be bounced out of me! If I'd known, I wouldn't have eaten so well!

Gu Mian, however, was remarkably composed, as if he wasn't affected by the violent jolting at all. "It's downhill, and I don't think we're going very fast."

The deeper they descended, the colder it grew. While it was normal for underground areas to be chilly, Fatty, from his experience in numerous instances, knew this wasn't an ordinary cold. It felt more like

countless strands of malevolent resentment intertwined, clinging to any living being they encountered, a chill so pervasive it seemed to fill the very marrow of his bones.

"Was this place packed with corpses before? Why is there so much resentment?! Seriously, any place connected to that *Second World* damn thing is never good," Fatty muttered, using one trembling hand to hug himself.

The further down they went, the colder it became, like being submerged in a frozen winter lake. Soon, he was even finding it hard to breathe.

We're approaching something incredibly terrifying, Fatty thought. We're almost there.

But Gu Mian in the driver's seat seemed to feel nothing amiss. He continued driving with his usual calm expression, not even shivering.

"Doctor... aren't you c-cold...?" Fatty stammered, his teeth chattering.

"Cold?" Gu Mian paused, as if genuinely considering it. "Oh, the temperature does seem to have dropped a little."

Hearing this, Fatty hugged himself with a serene sense of resignation.

Chapter 495 World Tour of Collapse_1

Although eager to reach the end as soon

as possible, Gu Mian slowed down, considering Fatty's ass was taking a beating.

The Spirit Car's high beams illuminated the front, and the staircase underfoot extended into the darkness. However, it wasn't long before the two of them smelled a strange odor.

The smell was like the stench produced by feces that had been carefully fermented for three years.

This stench penetrated the Spirit Car, filling Fatty's nostrils. He felt as if he were lying on a toilet half-filled with feces, his nose right above the pungent excrement.

He felt like he was about to throw up some excrement himself.

Fatty now regretted it, deeply regretted hitching a ride when Gu Mian drove into this place.

Gu Mian carefully sniffed the smell in the dark. "The further down we go, the stronger the smell gets. We must be getting close to our destination."

He had a feeling that this underground area was hiding a tremendous secret, possibly related to the core of the game, but they were unlikely to approach the core without any obstacles.

Just then, Gu Mian suddenly noticed a vibration in the staircase below.

The tremor was so strong that even Fatty could feel it. He covered his mouth and widened his eyes to look out the window but could only see a short distance in front of the Spirit Car.

At that moment, Fatty noticed a change up ahead. Instead of stairs leading down, there were... cages?

Dense cages almost filled their vision. These cages resembled those for large dogs. Most were rusted and covered in thick dust. They were packed together haphazardly but left a path in the middle for them to continue forward, as if this path led somewhere important.

By now, Gu Mian was driving the Spirit Car along this path.

Fatty finally understood where that awful smell was coming from.

The car's headlights illuminated the surroundings. Inside these rusty, moldy cages were, without exception, rotting corpses. They had been dead for who knew how long, their final poses twisted in struggle, as if they had desperately wanted to escape.

Fatty followed the beam of light, noticing signs hanging on the outside of these cages. Despite the dense layer of dust covering these signs, if one looked carefully, they could make something out.

The signs displayed different long strings of digits.

Are these serial numbers? Fatty pondered, his hand covering his mouth.

Gu Mian continued to race down this path at full speed.

They felt the vibration again, this time strong enough to shake some dust off the dog cages.

"This place is going to collapse," Gu Mian said, glancing at the messy cages around them. His words sent a chill down Fatty's spine.

But they were almost there—Gu Mian had this sense. Just a bit further and they would discover the secret hidden underground.

The vibrations around them were now far more noticeable, even causing the Spirit Car to sway slightly.

Fatty finally held back his nausea and shouted, "Doctor, if we get crushed here, can you dig a hole up to the surface?"

"I'm not a mole," Gu Mian said, gripping the steering wheel. "But perhaps that mole item you first acquired could do it."

"Ah," Fatty looked at the shaking cages outside. "Dying in a Spirit Car, buried underground... it even saves Brother Chu the trouble of digging a grave. I'll tell him in a dream to burn us some more paper money. It's pretty cold underground; we don't want to be unable to buy new clothes and freeze, Doctor..."

He looked like he was about to burst into tears.

Gu Mian pressed the accelerator to the floor. "Could you please shut your mouth? We're almost there."

Fatty, who was feigning wiping away tears, lifted his head to look ahead. He saw that the cages nearby were gradually thinning, and the dog cages beside them could now be counted on one hand.

They could now see a massive cage, different from the rest, about a hundred meters ahead. It stood in the middle of the road, as if it had been waiting for someone.

The strangest thing was that there were no corpses in this cage.

Most of it was rusted over. At the bottom of the cage, almost obscured by dust, lay a file bag.

This is it! Gu Mian floored the gas pedal and charged ahead.

The tremors around them intensified so much that even the surface of the ground was clearly shaking.

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Mingyue was standing at the entrance of her exam room.

Not long ago, she had seen Gu Mian driving into the underground. Then, she saw Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan and overheard their conversation, but she was discovered almost immediately.

Panic-stricken, Mingyue hurried back to her own examination room. In her mind, the examination room was the safest place, since the invigilators wouldn't enter.

She had heard Chu Changge's words too. Fortunately, although she had worked on problems with others, she had worked on her own questions, so only Li Xueqi died.

Having learned this, Mingyue had originally wanted to stay a little longer in this activity. She didn't expect to run into Xiao Qiao.

As she walked into the examination room, she thought, I'd better hand in my paper and leave. I really don't want to run into them again...

Inside her examination room were two players who had just finished their papers and were about to leave.

Mingyue swiftly walked up to the lectern, placed her paper on it, and pressed it down with the teaching pointer. Then she turned and began to walk out. But at that moment, they all felt the ground shaking.

"What's going on? Is there an earthquake?" A nearby player widened their eyes and looked up to see the chandelier shaking more and more violently.

Mingyue, too, was shocked as she watched the chandelier swaying above her. Immediately, she thought of Gu Mian rushing underground. Could it be him...

Luckily, the violent shaking lasted only a few seconds before stopping. The three people in the examination room breathed a collective sigh of relief.

"I think the shaking just now had to do with the car we saw rushing underground."

"Wasn't the one who rushed in an NPC? Maybe it's an NPC with a special mission..."

Mingyue heard the two players behind her murmuring as they walked outside.

At that moment, she remembered when she was killed in the 'Death Hall' instance. She had been eavesdropping on Gu Mian's conversation with the ghost but was killed by Xiao Qiao, who suddenly appeared behind her at a critical moment.

Xiao Qiao killed her because she didn't want her to hear Gu Mian's secret... Although she had no chance of revenge, Gu Mian's identity...

Thinking of this, she suddenly turned around with a vengeful thought. "It wasn't an NPC. That person is a player."

"A player? How is that possible?"

"He is indeed a player. I've entered the same instance with him. Even though his nickname was obscured, I still recognized his true identity. You would never guess who he is." Mingyue saw the strange expressions on the faces of the two people in front of her. She smiled, leaned in closer, and whispered, "He is..."

SHLICK—That was the sound of a sharp object piercing flesh.

Mingyue opened her mouth wide and looked down. A long, blood-stained wooden plank had skewered through her throat and was then quickly pulled out.

The puzzled expressions on the faces of the two people in front of Mingyue turned into horror as they stiffly turned their heads to look behind her, seeing a familiar face.

It was a beautiful face that often appeared on TV screens.

The ground suddenly started shaking again; the entire building began to sway massively. Twenty seconds, thirty seconds, a whole minute passed, and the shaking hadn't stopped, as if it were determined to collapse the entire school.

The two players stared rigidly at the falling Mingyue, who was desperately trying to cover her bleeding throat. The person standing before them wiped the teaching pointer on her clothes. Her face, devoid of expression and now spattered with blood, was utterly terrifying.

"The world never judges success or failure based on character." —They saw this face look down at the corpse on the ground.

CRACK.

The ground started to crack. The shaking became more and more intense, and the nearby school building was swaying as if it were about to collapse at any moment.

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"He still hasn't come out." Liu Ruyan stood not far from the statue, looking at the hole leading to the underground.

Chu Changge was ten meters behind her.

RUMBLE.

A sudden collapse of the ground nearby frightened a fleeing examinee. He stared at the collapsing ground that vanished into a bottomless abyss. "What the hell is below this! Why is it hollow!"

As soon as the ground began to shake, the examinees desperately ran towards the school gate. All the surviving examinees rushed out from the buildings, but only a few were left.

The ground kept collapsing. Some areas merely caved in significantly, while others fell directly underground, disappearing from sight.

Just a few minutes later, almost half of the school grounds had collapsed.

The statue at the entrance also collapsed, toppling onto the dark entrance and smashing a small section of the ground.

Another minute passed. The collapse of the ground had reached the entrance, and the surrounding ground sank completely. Dust flew everywhere, nearly obscuring the surroundings.

"He's probably not going to make it," Liu Ruyan looked at the completely collapsed entrance. "In that case..."

But at that moment, the roar of a car suddenly drowned out her voice.

Following that, she saw two bright lights shooting from the flying dust. Soon after, the roaring sound grew closer and closer. Three seconds later, the front of a dilapidated car came into her view. Through the shattered windshield, she could see the Doctor sitting in the driver's seat.

"Where did all this dust come from!" Gu Mian coughed heavily as he steered; the Spirit Car was still moving at full speed. They had used the vehicle to forcefully break through the obstacles at the entrance to get out.

Fatty sneezed in the back seat while holding the file bag. "Indeed, expensive things are good. The quality of this Spirit Car, worth 998, is truly excellent. It seems like next time we die, we'll have to ask Brother Chu to dig graves for us..."

"Hey, Doctor!" Gu Mian heard Fatty's voice from the back seat. "Look! Brother Chu and that... uh... someone are just up ahead!"

Gu Mian immediately looked.

The ground had almost completely collapsed by now, but these two people stood still, like wooden pegs, seemingly waiting for death.

Gu Mian quickly turned the steering wheel. "The ground is about to collapse! There's no time to stop! Open the door and pull them in!"

Fatty quickly opened the back door.

When Chu Changge was pulled in, his head hit the car roof, bounced off, and then struck the car seat.

Fatty, having used too much force, looked guiltily at Chu Changge, who was slowly getting up. "Ah, my apologies..."

Chu Changge adjusted his broken glasses. "It's okay."

Chapter 496 Tears Flowing, Gu Bongbong Collapses_1

June 8th, 23:40.

Outside Lianhua University gates.

The thick night shrouded the city. The school, the darkest point in the night, barely revealed the collapsed victorious trophy statue and the shattered remains of its base through the school gate. Further in, only dust could be seen.

With twenty minutes left before the end of the exams, players outside the school held their breath as they watched.

The players waiting for their teammates watched with wide eyes as the ground inside the school collapsed. Dust and heavy darkness obscured their vision, rendering it impossible to see what was happening inside.

The three-meter-high automatic door barred their steps. The gate of Lianhua University had been modified for the event; only players who had handed in their papers could get out from the inside. Once the exam began, latecomers could not enter.

"What's happening in there... there's no sign of anyone else..." Someone sucked in a cool breath while looking into the school.

Just then, they suddenly saw two bright lights bursting out from the darkness, followed by the roar of an engine. Immediately, they saw a rickety car emerging from the darkness, heading straight for the school gate!

Some quick-thinking players pulled others to the side. "Get out of the way!"

The startled players scattered like a tide.

Within two seconds, the car that appeared from the darkness had violently collided with the automatic gate. The first crash didn't break it open. They heard a tense voice from inside the car: "Doctor, it's not working! I guess it won't open for us because we didn't hand in our papers!"

Didn't hand in their papers? they wondered. Wouldn't leaving without handing in their paper be a violation? Would the invigilator let them out?

Before they could react, another voice came to their ears: "Stop whining and hold on."

The stunned people watched as the car reversed slightly, then rammed forward aggressively again, as if to say, 'I don't want to hand in my paper, but you **must** open this gate for me!'

Players hiding to the side swallowed hard as they watched this car repeatedly ram the school gate.

"Have they gone mad? There are ghosts in there! What if they let them out by ramming the door open?"

"I guess there must have been an accident inside. Look, the ground inside the school has collapsed. They'd probably be done for if they stayed in there any longer."

As players outside conversed, Gu Mian drove the Spirit Car, violently ramming the gate several times until the automatic gate was finally broken in two. He slammed the accelerator, carrying a nauseous Fatty, a young man with broken glasses, and a landlord who enjoyed twisting gas canisters, and sped out of the school.

The Spirit Car sped straight out of the school gate for a good distance before making a sharp turn and barely managing to stop.

As soon as the car stopped, Fatty, in the backseat, unfastened his seat belt, rushed out of the car door, and crouched in a corner, retching. Gu Mian thought he should take Fatty drifting more often to get him used to it.

Chu Changge habitually pushed his glasses; the broken lens cut his hand.

"One, two, three, four... four..." Gu Mian also got out of the car and leaned against the car door, counting. "I feel like we're missing someone..."

Xiao Qiao was missing.

Liu Ruyan looked towards the school gate through the open car door. "She said she had something to do and left first, telling us not to worry about her."

Oh, really? Gu Mian thought. Although Gu Mian felt that this unemployed actress couldn't have any serious business to attend to, he didn't inquire further. What if, like 007, she went to find her mom... No, wait, Xiao Qiao is an orphan.

Speaking of 007, Gu Mian suddenly remembered their agreement from not long ago. He was supposed to lend her the "Dimension-Breaking Phone" to make a call. He remembered telling 007 to wait for him at the school gate. Where is she?

Gu Mian thought and looked around. The first thing he saw was the group of players in the direction of the school gate, watching him silently. Even though it was pitch black outside, Gu Mian could still see the strange and frightened expressions on their faces, as if they had seen a ghost in broad daylight. The Spirit Car's earlier crash must have given them quite a mental shock.

And 007 was running towards him from that direction. She panted as she stopped in front of Gu Mian. "Those at the school gate are players waiting for their teammates... Can I ask... do you think they'll still be able to wait for anyone...?"

She was subtly asking about the casualty situation inside the event.

Gu Mian looked towards the school gate. He saw the people outside glance at him a few times before turning their expectant gazes back towards the school interior, as if desperately hoping someone else would emerge. But after quite a while, only a few more people stumbled out. They immediately collapsed to the ground, and one even started sobbing.

Just then, Fatty, who was retching in the corner, abruptly straightened up and turned around. "Tough luck for them!"

"Enough with the tough luck," Gu Mian swiftly walked over and patted his shoulder. "Give me the phone."

But in the end, 007 didn't manage to talk to her parents. When used outside an instance, the "Dimension-Breaking Phone" would call the person with the strongest affinity to the user. However, the call was answered by a strange player, not her parents. Though regrettable, it was beyond her control.

After returning the phone to Gu Mian, 007 thanked him and left, embarking on her journey to find her parents once again.

Gu Mian decided to stay in Lianhua City. At this stage, with no specific goals, it didn't matter where he stayed. Since he originally lived in this city, staying here was more convenient.

At this point, the four of them had embarked on their journey home.

Before leaving, he looked back at the school gate. The players were still staring intently at it, but no one else came out.

Ninety percent of the players died in this event, and some of the remaining ten percent ran out without handing in their papers. Theoretically, one couldn't leave the school without handing in their paper, but this wasn't a big issue, as Gu Mian had broken the gate when he drove out.

The Spirit Car was driving on a road without street lights.

Gu Mian didn't own a house. The landlord of the Passing Inn, where he was staying, was Liu Ruyan.

Speaking of Liu Ruyan, she was quite an oddball for giving the inn such a name. It scared people off; no one dared to stay, fearing they would literally "pass on" if they checked in.

Experience has shown that staying at the Passing Inn is indeed not peaceful. Some bold individuals had tried it for a while, but they were all frightened by odd happenings. Sometimes the power would

suddenly go out during a nighttime shower; other times, pipes would inexplicably burst, flooding a room. Frightened guests quickly demanded refunds and left.

But they did not know this was all because of Gu Mian's misfortune, which even affected nearby guests. In a nutshell, if you live with Gu Mian, don't expect to be safe and sound.

Chu Changge, who had known Gu Mian since the orphanage, suffered greatly from this. Fortunately, he had an easy-going temperament and wasn't too bothered by these tribulations.

At midnight, Gu Mian's dilapidated Spirit Car was parked beneath the Passing Inn. He opened the car door, got out, and stared in the darkness at his battered Spirit Car.

Should I consider getting a new car? he mumbled to himself as he surveyed the shattered windshield.

At this moment, the economical Fatty jumped out of the car. "No way, Doctor! A 998-yuan car isn't cheap, you know! We can try to negotiate with the manufacturer to get it repaired."

Gu Mian touched his chin. I don't recall any warranty mentioned when I bought the car...

"But they didn't say there's no warranty either," Fatty retorted.

A pretty sound argument, indeed convincing.

Just then, Fatty noticed that a new notice had been updated on the game panel. It was updated at 23:50 yesterday, but he had only just seen it.

At this point, Gu Mian had already stepped into the Passing Inn. He needed to see what kind of mess his brother and Xiao Hong had made of his room. Chu Changge also headed inside.

And Fatty was still standing in front of the Spirit Car, examining the notice.

[Notice (June 8, 23:50)]

[According to official game detection, severe vibrations occurred at the 'College Entrance Exam' event location. This event has been closed prematurely. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience caused to players.]

[All players who survived this event will receive compensation. Please check your mailbox.]

"All surviving players..." Fatty muttered. I guess there are less than a hundred.

The apartment building had seven floors. Gu Mian lived on the sixth floor in a two-bedroom, one-living-room unit. He used to have a roommate, but they were scared off. Too lazy to find a new place, Gu Mian had stayed on his own.

Now, he was standing in front of the security door of his room. He had replaced the door himself and had a spare key. He reached into his pocket, pulled out the spare key, inserted it into the keyhole, and gave it a twist.

CLICK. The door opened.

The room was pitch-black, and he couldn't see anything inside. There was no electricity because the power card hadn't been inserted. And the power card was now with Fatty.

Gu Mian left the door open and walked a few steps inside. The room was silent, as if no one was there. He looked around the dark room, puzzled. "Where are those two ghosts?" There's no sound at all. Could they have gotten lost and gone to someone else's place?

"Xiao Hong?" Gu Mian called out again, but there was no response.

"Coming, coming!" Just as Gu Mian was perplexed, Fatty's voice came from the stairwell. He'd stayed here briefly before, so he knew where Gu Mian lived.

Fatty came running up the stairs. He jogged to the door with the power card, inserted it into the slot, and casually flicked the light switch.

The light on the ceiling lit up instantly.

Gu Mian blinked several times before his eyes adjusted to the sudden light. After blinking a few more times, he looked up into the room again.

The two ghosts were there. But...

Xiao Hong was sneakily standing on the couch, trying hard not to make a sound as she ripped a photo from the wall. It was a photo of a young Gu Mian, hit on the head by a basketball that had suddenly flown out of nowhere, wailing his eyes out.

He silently followed Xiao Hong's hand and looked around. The walls were plastered with photos from his childhood: pictures of him bawling, moments where joy turned to sorrow, and, most numerous, snapshots of unexpected incidents. Back then, the director of their orphanage loved to take candid shots with his camera. Many photos were even scattered on the floor, and an empty photo album lay tossed aside. This was clearly their handiwork.

Xiao Hong, clearly afraid of being found out, hadn't dared to make a sound earlier, hoping to sneakily tear down a few more. Unfortunately, her scheme was exposed.

After silently looking at the photos all over the room, Gu Mian finally uttered with a twitching eyebrow, "Take all of these down!"

By the time they finished cleaning up all the photos, it was past one in the morning. Fatty had sorted them all and put them back into the thick album, grouping together those taken around the same time, almost recreating the original stories behind them. He now gazed at the album in his hands with a fond expression.

Fatty was currently looking at a series of photos of Gu Mian eating lunch.

In the first photo, Gu Mian sat quietly at the table, eating his bowl of rice. The dish that day was seaweed egg drop soup. Everything was peaceful at that moment; time seemed to pass serenely.

In the second photo, a girl in a skirt appeared in the frame, holding a bowl of soup. Seeing this, Fatty could already guess what was about to happen.

Looking at the next one, it was just as he expected.

In the third photo, the skirt's owner had accidentally tripped and fallen, splashing the soup all over Gu Mian's head. Gu Mian, however, continued to eat calmly, as if completely accustomed to such things.

The photos after that were from a different series.

Fatty looked at the photos, his face red from suppressing his laughter. "Doctor, who on earth splashed soup on your head like that? That's outrageous!"

Just then, Chu Changge's quiet voice drifted over from beside him: "That was me."

Chapter 497 Love, Hatred, and Revenge of Two Generations_1

"Come to think of it, I still haven't seen what's inside this thing." Gu Mian extended his hand towards Fatty's backside and pulled out a battered, torn document bag from underneath him.

Gu Mian ran his fingers over the deep brown document bag.

Truth be told, apart from its shape, one could hardly tell this was a document bag anymore.

Probably because it had been stored in a damp underground place for years, the writing on its surface had completely blurred. Fortunately, the opening was still firmly sealed, ensuring that whatever was inside remained intact.

It felt thick to the touch.

"I almost got buried underground to get this," Gu Mian said as he started to unseal the bag. "If this turns out to be full of useless scrap paper, I swear I'll go to the supermarket, buy some bombs, and blow up the school."

Holding the thick photo album, Fatty looked over. "But Doctor, I don't think supermarkets sell bombs..."

By this time, Gu Mian had already opened the document bag and reached inside to feel the contents.

Fatty, sitting on the couch opposite him, watched as Gu Mian first pulled out a palm-sized piece of paper.

The paper was facing away from him, so Fatty could only see its blank back.

Next, he saw Gu Mian looking at the front of the paper for a good while. His expression shifted from calm to peculiar, and finally to something Fatty couldn't quite describe.

It was as if he had seen something incredible.

Looks like the school is safe after all.

But what on earth is it...?

Fatty curiously leaned over, trying to see what Gu Mian was holding. But before he could get a glimpse, Gu Mian slapped the item onto the table with a SMACK.

Now Fatty could see it clearly.

It was a photograph... and the person in it looked somewhat familiar...

"So why is a childhood photo of you hidden beneath Songcheng College?" Gu Mian asked Chu Changge, maintaining a smile.

He didn't need to infiltrate an underground chamber just to see a childhood photo of Chu Changge; he could have easily found plenty in the orphanage albums. To Fatty, Gu Mian's current expression looked uncannily like the 'smiling' emoji on QQ.

"Ha... ha..." Fatty laughed awkwardly. "Maybe Xiao Hong sneaked it in when we weren't looking? Right, Xiao Hong?"

As he spoke, he glanced towards the corner.

Xiao Hong, who was standing in the corner as punishment, shook her head like a rattle drum.

Then he saw Gu Mian pull out another photo from the document bag. Gu Mian stared at it for a long time, his expression shifting from peculiar to one of utter disgust, as if he had eaten shit.

Could it be a childhood photo of me? Just as Fatty was trying to sneak a peek, Gu Mian handed him the photo. "And one of your dad."

Hearing this, Fatty felt as if he'd been struck by lightning. He reluctantly extended a trembling hand to take the photo from Gu Mian.

He looked down and saw a familiar face on the faded photo, smiling brightly at the camera.

The person in the photo was still very young then. He appeared more cheerful and less mature than Fatty remembered him, looking both handsome and somewhat frivolous.

But that wasn't the most important part.

Fatty's hand trembled so much as he held the photo, it was like a sieve. After about three minutes, he stiffly lifted his head. "How did you know...?"

"Your dad was my homeroom teacher," Gu Mian stated casually. "Otherwise, why do you think I'd dare bring a strange fatty home after meeting him just once?"

At this, Gu Mian looked at Fatty with an almost surprised expression. "Did you really think you hid it that well?"

Fatty's mouth twitched. "Yes, I thought I hid it damn well..."

Wang Shenxing had been Gu Mian's math teacher and homeroom teacher when Gu Mian was sixteen. Coincidentally, that year, his class went on a spring outing, and Gu Mian joined them.

It had been many years since Gu Mian had participated in such an activity. Previously, whenever the students went on excursions, he would watch from the window as they filed out of the school in a long line. The procession was so long it took more than half an hour for everyone to depart. Gu Mian would just watch until they were all gone.

Afterwards, he would sit alone in the classroom, waiting for them to return. He waited from early morning until noon, then from noon until it was completely dark outside. Only when the classroom lights flickered on did he finally see students trickling back.

The returning students were all limping; they had reportedly walked more than a hundred li. They came back in tears, vowing never to participate in such an ordeal again.

Yet, when the next excursion came around, they all set off in high spirits, once again leaving Gu Mian alone in the empty school.

When Gu Mian turned sixteen, he had a new homeroom teacher surnamed Wang.

"It'll be fine." He remembered his math teacher saying this to him. He also recalled the inner leap of joy and excitement he'd felt.

Due to Gu Mian's unique circumstances, previous teachers had been reluctant to let him join group activities, and Gu Mian himself never pushed for it.

But this new teacher was different. He was always very good to Gu Mian, so much so that Gu Mian felt he was like the father figure he'd always longed for.

But the teacher had his own child. Gu Mian often saw a photo of a cute, chubby little boy on his desk. The teacher would smile and tell Gu Mian it was his son, Wang Xianzhi.

And just as the teacher had said, Gu Mian didn't get into trouble that time. Someone else did.

When he was sixteen, Gu Mian carried his dying math teacher for five kilometers along a mountain path in the middle of the night, but in the end, it was too late.

By the time they reached the hospital, he wasn't breathing anymore. He was completely gone.

"Your dad was really good to me when he was alive," Gu Mian recalled, propping his chin on his hand. "If it weren't for me, he might have... What are you doing?"

Fatty's eyes were red and brimming with tears. He was clutching the hem of Gu Mian's white coat, wiping his runny nose on it.

Gu Mian patted his shoulder. "Stop crying, Wang Xizhi."

"It's Wang Xianzhi!"

He didn't expect this sloppy-looking Fatty to have such an artistic name. With a name like that, he could be the male lead in a romance novel.

Gu Mian pushed Fatty's head away with a look of disgust. "I'm surprised you don't look anything like your father."

Fatty wiped his nose on Gu Mian's coat again. "Actually, he wasn't my biological father. He adopted me from an orphanage when I was five..."

As he spoke, he looked at the photo in his hand. "Ever since I was little, I felt he was different. When I was very young, he told me the passwords to all his bankbooks, as if he expected to die at any moment... Later, he said there was something important he needed to tell me, but he'd wait until I was a bit older..."

"But years went by, I grew up, I was about to graduate, and he still hadn't told me that important thing. It was as if he'd decided not to tell me after all..."

"But I kept waiting. And I kept waiting, and then he died."

With that, another large glob of snot landed on Gu Mian's coat.

Gu Mian: "..."

"Later, when I was sorting through Dad's belongings, I found out he'd been secretly observing someone for the past few years... I always felt that this was the important thing he wanted to tell me but never did..."

"That person was me?" Gu Mian leaned in.

"It was you," Fatty sniffled. "But back then, I didn't know you were his student. I searched like a fool for three years before I finally found you. That was three years ago. The first time I found you, it was at a bank. I was going to go right up and talk to you, but before I could even get close, two robbers with guns rushed in from outside. I was so scared I ran off immediately... The second time I saw you was at an internet cafe. But before I could approach you, the kid on the computer next to yours got an electric shock and had a seizure. That scared me off again... After that, I didn't dare try to get close to you."

Gu Mian could pretty much guess the rest. This stalker had been secretly watching him for another three years. If Fatty's car hadn't malfunctioned on New Year's Day this year, he might still be tailing and spying on him even now.

Hmm, he might have ended up dead long ago too. After all, spying during an 'event' could be fatal.

Chu Change sat silently opposite him. Gu Mian reached into the thick document bag again.

This time, he pulled out another photo. This one was of himself...

Gu Mian stared silently at the photo in his hand. It was a picture of him as an adult; judging by his appearance, it looked like it was taken around his current age.

But the person in the photo—his style of dress, his posture—was nothing like him. Gu Mian was also quite sure he had never taken such a photo.

At this, Fatty also leaned over to look at the photo in Gu Mian's hand.

The photo showed Gu Mian's face, but the person in it looked gloomy and listless, as if nothing held any interest for him.

Fatty craned his neck. "Doctor, is this photo of you? It doesn't really look like you."

"No," Gu Mian denied flatly. "I've never taken this picture."

Besides, that underground place had clearly been sealed for many years. So the photo must have been put there many years ago. Back then, Gu Mian was only a teenager, and wouldn't have looked like the person in this photo.

Fatty then recalled the earlier 'Gu Mian's twin brother' theory. But that theory didn't work now; the person in the photo was already in his twenties many years ago, a different age from Gu Mian.

He frowned at the photo. "Maybe it's a relative? Your older brother? Or maybe it's a photo of your father when he was young..."

But it was highly unlikely for two people to look identical.

The photo was severely faded, making it difficult to determine when it was taken.

The background behind the person was pitch black, offering no clues to date it.

There were only these three photos in the document bag. The rest consisted of about a dozen consecutive pages torn from some book.

However, that wasn't the most pressing issue right now.

Gu Mian rubbed his temples, a headache starting. "I have no idea why my photo would be in that damn place."

As he spoke, he removed his own photo, his gaze fixed on the two remaining on the table. "Do you two know why these photos were under the 'event' site? Don't tell me you don't."

Fatty looked like he was about to cry. "Doctor, I really don't know!"

Chapter 498 Gu Mian Online_1

"I can explain why this photo is here," Chu Changge said, adjusting his broken glasses.

Fatty turned his gaze upon hearing this. "Brother Chu, you sound like a scummy boyfriend caught red-handed by his girlfriend's parents," he teased.

Fatty even imagined Chu Changge pushing up his glasses and saying, "I can explain why we're here. She's just my sister."

Gu Mian figured Chu Changge would probably try to fob them off with a lie. Although it wasn't very nice to say, telling blatant lies with a straight face was indeed his usual style.

Unexpectedly, this time Chu Changge spoke the truth.

At least, it sounded like the truth. Gu Mian felt Chu Changge wouldn't make up a lie this bizarre.

"I've been in a laboratory for as long as I can remember. Initially, I was housed alone in a transparent, person-high container. Many other children were also housed in similar containers. The room was filled with these densely packed transparent containers, each holding one person. Many adults surrounded us; they were silent and always taking notes, though I didn't know what they were recording.

"At first, my neighbor was an embryo, the size of a fingernail. His container was filled with an unknown liquid, and during my free time, I would watch that fingernail-sized thing floating inside.

"Later, he gradually grew into a baby. That's when I realized I was born the same way.

"You know, children don't understand anything if no one teaches them. We didn't know what parents were, or what lay outside the room. No one taught us to speak, so we couldn't. Then, gradually, some children started dying.

"Everyone was silent. I often woke up to see a child in a container lying completely still, who would then be removed by the adults. Back then, we didn't understand what death was.

"Like an invisible plague, children in the containers would die inexplicably. Some would suddenly contract strange illnesses and be taken away. Once, I heard a few adults talking about 'genetic defects.' That was the first time I heard others speak. Although I had no idea what it meant at the time, I remembered it."

Just then, Gu Mian saw Xiao Hong sneakily peeking out from the corner.

Chu Changge paused for a moment then continued, "I can't quite recall how many people died in the end... When most of the children in that room's containers had died, the adults noticed me because I was smart. Even if I only heard a conversation once, and even if I didn't understand its meaning, I could mimic it perfectly, repeating it verbatim. The children in the other containers still couldn't speak; they could only make occasional whimpering sounds, and no one knew what they were trying to express.

"They took me out of the container and taught me to read and write. They discovered I learned incredibly fast, whether it was studying or anything else; I could remember almost anything completely

after seeing it just once. I still remember the look in their eyes back then. I didn't understand its meaning at the time, but now I do..."

Chu Changge seemed to reminisce at this point, pausing for two seconds before continuing, "I was what they had been anticipating all along.

"Only then did I realize that outside the white room was just another white room. I spent many years in those rooms. Strangely, my growth rate was very slow during my childhood.

"I once thought this was because I also had a genetic defect, but I later learned they had designed us that way. They designed us to grow slowly in childhood to ensure enough time for testing and knowledge acquisition... As for any side effects, those are still unknown.

"For those few years, I lived continuously in white rooms. The first time I saw the sky was at the entrance of an orphanage."

As Chu Changge said this, Gu Mian remembered the first time he had seen Chu Changge.

The weather was beautiful that day. The dean was standing at the orphanage entrance, holding the hand of an expressionless child in a frilly, colorful dress, telling them a new friend had arrived.

Gu Mian remembered that the child in the dress hadn't looked at them, but had kept staring at the sky.

That damned, garish dress had fooled Gu Mian for years!

"By the way, Brother Chu..." Fatty cautiously leaned in. Although Chu Changge showed no signs of sadness, Fatty decided to choose his words carefully. "Why were you released? Did those adults have some objective?"

Chu Changge reached out and picked up the photo of the gloomy Gu Mian from the table. "For this person. Back then, they gave me a stack of photos of this person, from childhood to adulthood. They said this person must not die."

Ignoring the outlandish elements in Chu Changge's story, Gu Mian looked at the photo in Chu Changge's hand and said, "Don't you think you might have found the wrong person...?"

Although this person looked exactly like him, a closer look revealed they were clearly not the same.

Besides, Chu Changge had seen adult photos of this person back then, so it definitely couldn't have been Gu Mian.

Chu Changge actually nodded. "I did consider that. But aside from you, I couldn't find anyone else who looked exactly like the person in the photos, so I just..."

He paused for a moment before saying, "decided to give up on finding the perfect match and settled."

What a way to "settle"! Gu Mian felt his young heart had suffered a tremendous blow.

"Settle for what?" Fatty immediately raised his hand to declare, "In my heart, the Doctor is always the best, not someone to be 'settled' for!"

After making his declaration, Fatty asked curiously again, "Brother Chu, is what you said really true?"

Chu Changge nodded.

Fatty asked again, "Then did those people tell you why this person couldn't die? And isn't it a bit much to send a child out to save the day? They should have sent an adult, or at least a few more people. What's the deal with sending a kid?"

Chu Changge suddenly said something bizarre, "Because they can't get out."

Can't get out? Fatty was somewhat puzzled.

Then Chu Changge's voice continued in his ear, "They don't belong to this world. They... are in an instance."

...

That night, Gu Mian's mind was full of transparent containers as he slept. At times, these transparent containers transformed into terrifying-looking instances, all clamoring to rule the Earth.

These images were so grotesque that, in the middle of the night, he suddenly felt something crawl into his bed.

Using the moonlight from the window, Gu Mian lifted his blanket and saw a face that could scare someone to tears.

It was Xiao Hong.

"Still as ugly as ever, no matter when I look at you..."

Gu Mian muttered, hugging the ugly head and going back to sleep.

When Gu Mian woke up the next morning, he found Xiao Hong had been hung from the ceiling light by someone.

Chapter 499 Paper Man is Singing_1

This inn was Liu Ruyan's property. Gu Mian had always thought Liu Ruyan's taste was rather inexplicable. The glorious chandelier hanging above, boasting a style reminiscent of the Republic era, had been there before Gu Mian moved in. He had once feared it might fall and hit him. Thankfully, this splendid chandelier had hung firmly from the ceiling for many years and seemed to have no intention of landing on his head.

He had once imagined what it would be like if someone hung from the chandelier. Unfortunately, that thought became reality today. Gu Mian silently looked up at Xiao Hong, who was hanging from it.

She was wide-eyed, her gaze locked on his. Gu Mian remained silent for two seconds. "Could you tell me how you managed to get up there?"

Xiao Hong, her innocent eyes wide, predictably said nothing.

Well, he might as well pretend she climbed up there herself.

Gu Mian shifted his gaze towards the bedroom door. Chu Changge was sitting on the sofa outside, leafing through some pages. Gu Mian realized Chu Changge was often reading whenever he woke up. The "book" Chu Changge was currently engrossed in consisted of about a dozen pages they had found in a file folder last night. Might as well call it a book...

"Where's Fatty?" Gu Mian looked around but couldn't see him.

"He went to the supermarket," Chu Changge said, looking up from his reading. "Said he wanted to buy some food and took the Spirit Car with him."

Speaking of which, Gu Mian had bought his Spirit Car from this very supermarket in Lianhua City. He hadn't expected that after half a year of traveling, it would return here, to be foisted upon the same salesperson.

「Meanwhile, Fatty had already found that familiar salesperson.」

To this day, Fatty still remembered the joy on the salesperson's face when he had managed to sell his first Spirit Car. Of course, that expression was a stark contrast to the one he wore now.

"Um..." Fatty said, looking at the salesperson's gloomy face. He flinched slightly and pointed to the dilapidated Spirit Car he had just brought out. "This is broken. It was bought here. You remember, right?"

Oddly enough, Fatty thought, the salesperson's expression is somewhat similar to the Doctor's "smile" from yesterday.

The salesperson forced a smile. "Of course, I remember. Thanks to you, that's the only Spirit Car I've managed to sell in the past six months. It's certainly memorable."

Because Gu Mian had wrecked the driver's license instance, sales of Spirit Cars had been dismal.

"Ah, is that so?" Fatty laughed awkwardly. "Well, look, we're bringing you business today... I mean, this Spirit Car is under warranty, right?"

"Look, we're your only customer, after all. You were the one who sold us the Spirit Car... It should be under warranty, right?"

The salesperson turned to look at the Spirit Car. Its hood was almost rusted through, both headlights were gone, and the windshield was shattered, with only fragments remaining. It looked completely irreparable. "You're aware I sold you the car, right? So why repay my kindness with such malice?"

Not only had they repaid kindness with malice, but they had also wrecked the event that had descended upon Lianhua City.

The salesperson turned his back on Fatty and walked a few steps away. "It can't be fixed. You should leave."

"Well... The Doctor said if it couldn't be repaired here, he knows an instance that can fix cars, so we wouldn't have to trouble you..."

Hearing this, the salesperson, who still had his back to Fatty, suddenly spun around, his voice now enthusiastic. "No problem! We now offer a trade-in service. You can trade in your old Spirit Car for a new one, free of charge!"

Fatty returned with a brand-new Spirit Car.

"That's a new car, isn't it?" Gu Mian asked, looking down from his bedroom window. He could see Fatty parking the Spirit Car below.

"Yeah," Fatty replied, nodding happily. "The salesperson was really understanding. He said something like, 'It's not like anyone's buying them anyway,' so he let us trade our old one for a new one."

Really now?

Gu Mian stroked his chin. The salesperson in my hometown is really good to me, he thought. To show my gratitude, I should visit the supermarket more often.

While Gu Mian was mulling this over, Fatty returned, carrying a bag full of items.

Fatty placed the full shopping bag on the table in front of Chu Changge and started unpacking. "Summer's coming soon. This is a new shirt for the Doctor, these are new glasses for Brother Chu... I really don't get why you wear glasses with no lenses. And here's lychee soda for Xiao Hong..."

As for Brother, he only ever shouted, "Sister!"

When asked what he wanted, he would just repeat that. So, Fatty automatically ignored his requests.

As he was taking things out, he said, "We haven't entered any instances for a long time, so our Game Coin supply is running a bit low. It's a good thing you busted that event, Doctor..."

Fatty's words seemed problematic, but on reflection, they made a strange kind of sense.

Fatty reached for another bag. "Today's lunch is mutton soup. Since you got up so late, Doctor, you'll have to go straight to lunch. I'm heading to the kitchen."

With that, he walked into the kitchen carrying a scallion, a bunch of cilantro, and a piece of mutton.

Meanwhile, Chu Changge put on his new glasses and continued reading the pages in his hand.

In just that short while, Gu Mian saw him flip through the dozen or so pages several times.

Gu Mian had read these pages last night. The gist was that to prevent a terrifying apocalypse, the world's elite had secretly built such laboratories to create "Adapted Humans."

These dozen pages chronicled the beginning and end of the underground laboratory at Songcheng College.

There wasn't much to say about the beginning—just a group of people creating a batch of children. The end detailed how the laboratory finally achieved success. To prevent the secret from leaking, most of those privy to it, along with the children created, were secretly killed and left underground.

It was worth noting that the pages mentioned countless such laboratories around the world, but only this one had succeeded.

As for what "Adapted Humans" truly were, or what the "apocalypse" entailed, these pages offered no explanation.

At this point, Chu Changge adjusted his new glasses. "I come from there, so I can confirm that these pages were taken from the actual Second World. But there's one problem..."

What problem? Gu Mian wondered.

"Did you notice? The page numbers on these dozen or so sheets are consecutive, from 1 to 14. But looking at the beginning of the first page, it's clear there was content before it. So, this 'page 1' definitely isn't the actual first page of the book from the Second World."

"I have a theory," Chu Changge said. "As we've seen, the Second World has fractured into countless remnants. These remnants have become independent entities. The instances we've experienced are the content of these remnants. Only by collecting all these remnants can we piece together the complete Second World."

Gu Mian was startled. "Why does this setup feel so damn familiar?"

He remembered a cartoon from his childhood about someone who shattered a glass ball and then had to collect all the pieces.

Back then, all the children at the orphanage would huddle together to watch cartoons. If Gu Mian had seen it, Chu Changge had likely seen it too.

"The story isn't going to unfold like that cartoon, is it?" Gu Mian asked, looking quietly at the dozen pages in Chu Changge's hand. "It's not like I was the one who tore up the book..."

If I were the one tearing it, I'd have shredded it to pulp, not neatly page by page, Gu Mian thought.

"It doesn't necessarily have to be like that," Chu Changge replied. "Gu Mian, if you want to understand why you're so special, you just need to find the key page. It's like wanting to know the ending of a novel; you just skip to the end.

"However, I suspect the answer you're looking for might not be in the Second World. We've speculated before that these instances don't all come from one world. Besides the Second World, we don't know how many other worlds exist. The answer you seek could be hidden in one of them."

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian said, looking at Chu Changge, "you don't have any colleagues, do you? From your original world, I mean."

Chu Changge shook his head, his expression unchanging. "No."

He seems quite certain, Gu Mian noted.

Liu Ruyan and Chu Changge were similar in nature; Gu Mian remembered they shared a common designation or title.

If that's the case, then Liu Ruyan must be from another world, Gu Mian mused. He'd been entertaining the idea of tying her up and giving her a good thrashing for a while now. And now I finally have a legitimate reason.

"However..." Gu Mian didn't act on his thought immediately. Instead, he looked at Chu Changge. "You might not know the details, but I still want to ask."

Chu Changge looked up, watching Gu Mian attentively.

"The Second World is considered a Low-Dimensional World, right? Initially, you probably didn't realize you were in one."

"Correct."

"Then... how did you all eventually find out?"

After Gu Mian asked, an unsettling silence filled the living room for several seconds before Chu Changge finally spoke. "An error."

An error?

"Because of an error," Chu Changge began. "At some point, someone suddenly realized that an event from the past, as they remembered it, completely contradicted current records. People's memories contained an error. If it had been something few people knew, it wouldn't have caused much chaos. But this error was too significant; it concerned something everyone knew."

"Take The Internationale, the song everyone could sing. There was a problem with it. People remembered one of its lines as, 'We will eventually meet the sun.' But one day, someone noticed the lyric had become, 'We will eventually meet the sunrise.'"

"People started searching, only to find that in books, online records, and even on recordings, the lyric was universally 'We will eventually meet the sunrise,' completely contradicting their collective memory."

"It was as if you'd used the wrong word in an essay, then silently erased it and wrote in the new one, and all existing data then reflected 'sunrise.'"

"It was then that some realized... we were living in a Low-Dimensional World."

Chu Changge stated calmly, "Of course, this matter wouldn't become public knowledge. In an age of advanced networks, controlling public opinion isn't difficult. Besides, compared to work and daily life, it wasn't a major concern for most. No one would get worked up over a single song lyric. So, the general public assumed they had misremembered, rather than considering that the data itself had been altered."

Chapter 500 Wang Xianzhi, a Kind Father and Filial Son_1

After hearing Chu Changge's words, Gu Mian began to ponder if his memory had errors.

But before he could reach a conclusion, a rich aroma wafted from the kitchen, completely captivating his attention.

At that moment, Fatty emerged from the kitchen wearing newly bought oven mitts and carrying a large, steaming white porcelain bowl. The tantalizing scent of meat emanated from it.

Fatty quickly placed the soup bowl on the living room table. Gu Mian looked at the white porcelain bowl. Emerald-colored coriander and pale green scallions floated on the surface of the meat soup, from which steam continuously rose. Fatty turned back to fetch three small bowls, placing them on the table. "Help yourselves to the soup," he said. "Add as much vinegar and pepper as you like..."

He then returned to the kitchen, murmuring, "Just eating meat isn't good. I also made some vegetarian dishes: hot and sour lettuce, sweet and sour peanuts, and stir-fried rice cakes. Oh, right, I bought some strawberries, made them into jam, and put it in the fridge to set. It should be ready by tonight."

It's great to have a cook, Gu Mian mused. At home, I'll never have to cycle through different flavors of instant noodles again.

Fatty then came out with several small spoons, handing them to Gu Mian and Chu Changge. Xiao Hong stared covetously at them, looking like a starving child from a poor family. Fatty, unable to bear the sight, handed her a small spoon as well.

Then Xiao Hong happily snatched Gu Mian's bowl.

Gu Mian: "..."

Then Xiao Hong was hung up on the chandelier again.

Now Gu Mian understood how she got up there. His brother had simply lifted her, tossed her toward the ceiling, and there she hung.

"Ahem," Gu Mian glanced at Xiao Hong swinging back and forth from the chandelier. "Alright, let's eat..."

"By the way, where were we before Fatty came out?" Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge.

Chu Changge put down his spoon. "We were talking about memory discrepancies. And incidentally, your expression just now made you look like you wanted to tie Liu Ruyan up and beat her."

Yes, they had been talking about tying Liu Ruyan up and giving her a beating.

Fatty's eyes widened. "Ah, why would you want to beat Miss Liu?"

Speaking of which, they hadn't seen Liu Ruyan since returning to the inn yesterday. Gu Mian and Liu Ruyan used to see each other daily. Every day when he returned from class, he would find Liu Ruyan sitting behind the wooden counter on the first floor. It was worth mentioning that the counter faced the main entrance, so many male passers-by would often fix their gaze on it, unable to look away.

Before moving here, Gu Mian had rented a room in another inn.

But coincidentally, the landlord of that inn was a maniac. He was a man in his early fifties who seemed decent, but no one would have guessed he had started committing murders about twenty years prior. Back then, surveillance cameras weren't common, so he had gotten away with serially killing three people.

As times changed, the landlord gradually stopped, knowing it would be difficult to continue his crimes in an era of ubiquitous surveillance cameras.

However, for some reason, he took a liking to Gu Mian.

Upon seeing Gu Mian, his heart, quiet for many years, began to stir again.

He meticulously planned the route and timing, prepared his tools, and even identified a spot to dump the body. Then, during the day, he snuck into Gu Mian's room and hid under the bed. He lay in wait, intending to murder his victim in his sleep.

Coincidentally, Gu Mian happened to stuff a corpse under his bed after returning that day.

The landlord, who hadn't murdered anyone in over twenty years, was full of murderous excitement, planning to kill a young man in his sleep, but instead encountered a skinless corpse.

Gu Mian still remembered the scene that night.

Just as he shoved the disassemblable human muscle model he had finally managed to buy under his bed, he heard a horrified scream from beneath it.

He lifted the bedsheet, bent down to look, and saw the terrified landlord holding a boning knife.

Later, this landlord was taken away by police officers.

During the recorded interrogation, the police asked him, "Why did you put such a terrifying human model under the bed? Weren't you scared?"

"Putting it under the bed is better than opening my eyes in the middle of the night to see a skinless thing standing somewhere. So, under the bed is the safest place."

The police had nothing to say to Gu Mian's answer.

Having learned his lesson, Gu Mian was very cautious when choosing his next landlord.

Eventually, he settled on Liu Ruyan.

Compared to a landlord who hides under the bed with a boning knife at night, someone who could merely twist off a gas canister seemed a lot cuter.

Thinking of this, Gu Mian turned to Chu Changge, "Do you remember that landlord I encountered when I was renting before? He was sentenced to a suspended death sentence. He should have been executed before this game started, right?"

"Yes," Chu Changge nodded. "By the way, there's something I wanted to ask you."

What is it?

"What happened to that human muscle model you asked me to buy? You didn't bring it when you moved here."

Gu Mian scooped a spoonful of soup. "What do you think I used to subdue a landlord armed with a boning knife?"

Gu Mian had smashed it to pieces.

Of course, the landlord's head had almost been smashed to a pulp too.

"Although I don't fully understand what you're talking about!" Fatty suddenly and frankly interjected, "But Doctor, when I went to the supermarket today, I heard other players say Lianhua University is still in ruins. It seems like, Doctor, you collapsed a real-world location too!"

Gu Mian felt quite apologetic for having caused the collapse of the cafeteria where he often ate.

He felt his actions were rather like the saying: "Smashing the pot after finishing the meal."

"We can go see Lianhua University if we get a chance," Chu Changge scooped his soup, his expression unchanging, as if it weren't his own school that had collapsed. "We might discover some clues in the ruins. But it's best not to go out much recently, as many players have gathered in Lianhua City due to the event. Although most of them are likely dead now, the remaining ones still pose a threat to us."

"Mhm." Fatty nodded thoughtfully. When he went out today, he was disguised and wore the 'Wang Longxiang' school badge. Although he didn't think the name suited his sophisticated image, it was still better than going out under the moniker 'Fat Kid Surnamed Wang'.

Fatty picked up a piece of lettuce. "When I went to the supermarket this time, I noticed there were indeed more players. I suppose those who came for the event will need to find a place to stay, right?"

When the game held its first event, some inns still dared to open, but their numbers dwindled until none remained.

Perhaps the great plague had killed many landlords, and the few who survived were likely struggling too much to continue their businesses.

However, when Gu Mian's group arrived at a new place, they usually just broke into an inn.

"Since we usually stay at inns, then the other players..." Fatty paused for a moment before continuing, "I remember this place isn't far from Lianhua University, right?"

"Yes," Gu Mian answered knowingly. "Aside from Couple Street near the school gate, this is the closest inn to Lianhua University."

Couple Street wasn't suitable for long stays, only for a night or a few. Its rooms were generally small and windowless. The slightly better ones often had bizarre themes; staying in them for too long could drive someone mad.

At this moment, Gu Mian heard footsteps from downstairs.

He put his bowl down and silently walked to the window to look outside. As expected, he saw a group of men and women approaching the building.

"There's an inn here!"