

Collapse 561

Chapter 561 Last Night's Dream of Falling Flowers in the Quiet Pond_1

"What?" Cang Yue, who was closely inspecting the bus, turned her head towards the direction of the voice.

She saw Keke eyeing a certain spot on the ground, and Xia Jianren, about two meters to her right, was staring at the same spot.

Between them... where a person had just been standing.

Cang Yue stared in shock at the empty patch of ground. "Where's Wang Chuan?"

"He was just here!" Xia Jianren exclaimed, gesticulating wildly. "Then he disappeared in the blink of an eye!"

The streetlights illuminated the nearby ground. Cang Yue stared intently at the place where Wang Chuan had just been standing, but not a single trace remained.

She took a deep breath. "It's a ghost..."

Indeed, the instance wouldn't let them get through the next thirty-six hours easily. Even being near Gu Mian wasn't safe. The ghost had already made its move. They had to find a way to survive, and quickly! It seemed the most efficient method now was what Gu Mian had suggested: driving the bus, taking Zhao Shuang to revisit those places—only that could stimulate her to remember what happened on October 1st. Why had they argued? Why had Zhao Shuang been left at the base halfway up the mountain? Why had the bus plunged from the mountain? Only if Zhao Shuang remembered quickly could they find a way out!

"Let's head towards Fenshan Mountain now!" Cang Yue said, her heart still pounding with fear as she looked away. Wang Chuan had vanished this time; who would be next?

As she spoke, she turned to Xia Jianren and Keke. "You two okay?"

Keke nodded. "I'll go to Fenshan Mountain with you."

After witnessing Wang Chuan's sudden disappearance, Xia Jianren certainly didn't dare to remain idle. He nodded firmly. "I'm going too."

For Gu Mian, who had already been planning a day trip to Fenshan Mountain, taking a few more people wasn't a problem.

Zhao Shuang had no objections and agreed to go to Fenshan Mountain with the others.

They didn't dare call another car; now, this dilapidated Spirit Car seemed safer than any vehicle they could randomly hail in the middle of the night.

Gu Mian returned to the driver's seat. When the other four boarded the Spirit Car, they discovered it was bloodstained inside.

"After all, it tumbled and rolled down the mountain. The people inside definitely got tossed around a few times," Gu Mian explained.

Cang Yue found a relatively clean spot to sit, only to see that most of the seats were stained with blood. Bloody handprints also marked the ceiling and floor, looking as if someone had struggled desperately inside the vehicle. The other three sat next to Cang Yue, none of them daring to stray too far.

Luckily, it was five in the morning, and not a single car was on the road. Otherwise, any other driver would have been startled by the sight of this nearly scrapped Spirit Car.

The Spirit Car's windows were all shattered. Gu Mian wasn't driving slowly, and a cold wind gushed in through the broken panes. Cang Yue leaned against the window frame, looking out at the quiet city. Lights still glowed in a few houses. The wind whistled past roadside billboards, making them RUSTLE. Leaves on the trees in the green belts swayed. A blast of cold air struck her face, reminding her of winter mornings spent cycling to work. For a moment, she felt she was back in those days.

But before she had time to savor it, Keke's voice pulled her from her reverie.

"Look at these handprints."

What is it? Cang Yue wondered, looking at Keke, who was tilting her head back to study the bloody handprints on the ceiling with a flashlight. Keke was shining her flashlight on a certain spot on the ceiling. Following the beam, they saw a series of somewhat connected handprints.

"Look at this series of handprints," Keke said, gesturing with her flashlight. "Judging by the size, they look like they were left by the same person."

The beam of her flashlight traced the bloody handprints, which disappeared near the edge of the right-side window. The group looked closely at the window's edge and found clear marks where a blood-soaked hand had clawed at the frame above it. They gathered, looking up at the upper edge of the window.

Xia Jianren said over the wind, "So, after the Spirit Car rolled down the mountain, someone crawled out from here, right?"

The thought that just a few days ago this vehicle had contained over thirty corpses made him shudder.

"Yes," Cang Yue nodded. "The news said that when this vehicle was found, it was overturned—upside down, with the roof on the ground and the chassis facing up. These bloody handprints must have been left by someone still alive who crawled out of a window."

Who could have crawled out...?

Keke stared at the bloody handprints on the window's edge. "The police must have found this too. That's why they mobilized manpower to search the entire mountain for survivors."

Including the driver, there were eight missing people. None of them had been found, dead or alive. Not long ago, they had seen the driver. The driver had become a ghost, so he was confirmed dead, but his body had still not been found.

"Could it be that among those eight people, the others, besides the driver, are still alive?" Xia Jianren smoothed his tousled hair.

Keke nodded. "Someone must be alive. But there's one thing I've always found strange..."

"Logically, when this vehicle rolled down from the mountain, even if the people inside didn't die, they would be seriously injured. Even if someone alive tried to crawl out, they wouldn't have been able to crawl far. The police should have been able to find those missing people near the vehicle.

"But they've been searching for so many days, and still, no trace of them, dead or alive. Could someone have hidden them?"

If anyone in this instance was most likely to have hidden those people, it would undoubtedly be Zhao Shuang, who was right beside them. But the police had, of course, considered this. They had thoroughly investigated Zhao Shuang and found her completely clean; there was absolutely no way she could have been at the scene.

Cang Yue looked at those around her. "Do any of you remember who the eight missing persons are?"

Zhao Shuang remembered this clearly.

She said, "The driver was Zhao Jianming, and the others were seven of our colleagues: Qian Xinguo, Xue Guang, Hu Shufeng, Jiang Mei, Gan Da, Qiu Hongyu, and Lu Xian."

"One of them must have left these bloody handprints," Keke said, looking at the handprints that vanished at the window's edge.

However, where these eight missing people had gone remained an unsolved mystery. They might be useful in finding a way out of the instance. Perhaps when Zhao Shuang regained her memory, they would find clues about these missing people.

"Speaking of which..." Cang Yue said, looking at Gu Mian in the driver's seat. "When you stopped this Spirit Car, did you happen to see how many people... or ghosts... were on it?"

It seemed she had grown accustomed to Gu Mian's habit of flagging down Spirit Cars.

Gu Mian didn't have the habit of counting passengers before boarding. So Cang Yue's hope of deducing whether the missing people were still alive based on the number of occupants in the Spirit Car came to nothing.

Fenshan Mountain drew nearer, and the sky began to lighten. Cang Yue pulled out her instance-issued phone and glanced at it. The top right corner showed a dangerously low battery icon next to the current time: already past six in the morning. Traffic would start picking up soon.

「Meanwhile, Wang Chuan was astonished to find he hadn't died.」

When he opened his eyes, he saw a slightly yellowed ceiling above him, from which an old-fashioned chandelier, untouched by a duster for who knew how many years, hung. A glance to the side revealed a moderately-sized window. Outside the window, the sky was a greyish hue, and a few pairs of sparrows streaked across it, CHIRPING noisily.

Chapter 562 Treating Kidney Deficiency without Sugar_1

This place... it felt familiar.

Wang Chuan struggled to get up and realized he was lying on a wooden floor, with a single bed behind him.

This was a bedroom, with an open door directly in sight. Faint light from the window outside allowed him to see the room's layout.

There was a wooden bed covered with a light-yellow striped sheet, and a light-pink comforter was folded at the head of the bed.

Next to the bed was a plastic woven basket filled with men's clothes.

By the bedroom door, there was a desk with a desktop computer on it, and some women's magazines stood beside it.

The setup was somehow familiar to Wang Chuan, but he couldn't remember where he had seen this room before.

"What is this place?"

He looked around but found no sign of the ghost.

The sky outside was beginning to whiten; daylight was imminent.

After ensuring there was no danger nearby, Wang Chuan quickly went to the desk and flipped through the magazines, but found nothing exceptional—just ordinary reading materials.

He then squatted beside the plastic woven basket and searched through the clothes, hoping to find some clues.

To his surprise, he found something.

A hard, card-like object seemed to be in the pocket of a pair of trousers. He pulled it out and saw that it was an ID card; the name "Sun Zihao" was boldly written in the name field.

Only then did Wang Chuan understand why the place felt so familiar.

"Is this the employee dormitory? Sun Zihao's dormitory?" Holding the ID card, he stood up and looked out the bedroom doorway in amazement. The structure of the room was indeed identical to the employee dormitory he lived in.

Why didn't the ghost kill me? Why did it bring me here?

Puzzled, he quickly walked out of the bedroom. To the left of the exit was the bathroom. The bathroom door was open, revealing a mirror facing it. Wang Chuan's reflection was visible in it, but he had no time to look at himself; his attention was drawn to the array of bottles and jars below the mirror.

Although he was a man, he recognized most of the items.

Toner, face cream, eye cream, foundation, hair removal cream, blush, mascara...

Toner and such were understandable, but would a grown man like Sun Zihao use things like mascara and hair removal cream?

The more Wang Chuan thought about it, the more something felt off. He went back into the bedroom and looked at the pink bedding on the bed—that also wasn't a color Sun Zihao would likely use.

Frowning, a thought struck him. He rushed to the wardrobe, pulled it open, and found it full of women's clothes, mostly dresses and stockings.

Wang Chuan didn't immediately jump to the conclusion that Sun Zihao had a cross-dressing fetish.

His first reaction was that this was actually a woman's place, and Sun Zihao's clothes were here because he would spend the night here.

This wasn't Zhao Shuang's room.

In other words, Sun Zihao, Zhao Shuang's boyfriend, was spending nights in another woman's room, and this woman was their colleague.

Wang Chuan closed the wardrobe and walked toward the living room.

In the living room, a gray sofa and a glass coffee table were arranged in an orderly manner. It was here in the living room that he finally found a clue to the room's owner.

A few family photos were stuck on the wall above the sofa. Wang Chuan leaned in to take a closer look and saw a young woman with a middle-aged couple in the photos.

The young woman looked familiar.

"Jiang Mei?" Wang Chuan dredged the face up from his memory.

Jiang Mei, a colleague of Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao, was in the finance department.

She was also one of the eight missing people.

Now, it seemed she was also Sun Zihao's secret lover.

Seeing this, Wang Chuan suddenly understood something about the chat logs on Xia Jianren's phone from when they first entered the instance.

Zhao Shuang had questioned Xia Jianren about whether he already knew about "that matter." "That matter" must be Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei's affair.

He remembered Zhao Shuang recently recalling some things, saying they had argued in the car.

Presumably, the argument was also about this.

Wang Chuan furrowed his brows, an idea forming in his mind: Could it be that Zhao Shuang, after finding out about Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei, tampered with the car, then deliberately started an argument midway and got off, ensuring her own survival while leaving them to die? But there were more than thirty other colleagues in the car at that time who had nothing to do with this. If that's true, then Zhao Shuang is too terrifying.

The chirping of birds outside the window pulled Wang Chuan back from his thoughts. He touched the mobile phone he had kept in his pocket. It was almost seven o'clock now.

He had possessed the phone since they entered the instance and had always kept it with him. Of course, Wang Chuan had set it to silent mode long ago, afraid it would ring at the wrong time.

The contact information for the other players was in his phone book. He thought for a moment, then dialed a number.

Cang Yue couldn't believe it when she received Wang Chuan's call.

They all knew Wang Chuan had vanished into thin air and was most likely dead or in grave danger, so she never expected to receive a call from him.

The bus had just stopped midway up Fenshan Mountain, and they were preparing to get off.

Xia Jianren also saw the caller ID on Cang Yue's phone screen. Clutching his fan, he backed away slightly and said, "Don't tell me Wang Chuan was killed by the ghost, and the ghost is calling us with his phone?"

The same thought crossed Cang Yue's mind.

She mulled it over for a good while before deciding to answer the call. However, when she answered, she held the phone slightly away from her ear, afraid of hearing some strange sound from the other end.

Unexpectedly, Wang Chuan's voice actually came from the receiver.

"Cang Yue?"

"Wang Chuan? You're not dead?" Cang Yue exclaimed in surprise.

"Is anyone else there listening to your call?"

Hearing this, Cang Yue realized something. Glancing at the people around her, she stepped back a few paces. "No one can hear what you're saying."

Only then did Wang Chuan continue, "Listen, I'm in Jiang Mei's dorm right now."

Jiang Mei? Cang Yue remembered that name was on the list of missing people.

"I found out about Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei..."

Cang Yue listened quietly to Wang Chuan's account. Then, she glanced at Zhao Shuang, who was staring blankly at the base not far away, apparently not paying any attention to her.

She whispered into the microphone, "So, is it highly likely that the bus crash has something to do with her?"

"Yes," Wang Chuan's voice came through the receiver. "You guys must be with her now. Be careful. If things are really as I suspect, then that person is truly malicious."

To make the entire company die with them just to get revenge on Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei... that was indeed malicious. But if that's really the case, then finding a way out would be much simpler. The resentment of those ghosts comes from Zhao Shuang. As long as Zhao Shuang dies, they can live.

Cang Yue clutched her pocket.

"By the way, where are you guys?" Wang Chuan's voice continued from the receiver.

Cang Yue looked toward the base in the distance. "Fenshan Mountain, where the police found Zhao Shuang. Gu Mian drove us up here, hoping to stimulate Zhao Shuang's memory. Are you coming over?"

Wang Chuan on the other end was silent for a few seconds. "I don't know why the ghost brought me to the employee dormitory but didn't kill me. I want to search for more clues here. If I find anything else, I'll call you. If I can't reach you by phone, I'll send you a text message."

"Okay," Cang Yue nodded. "Then you be careful."

With that, they ended the call.

At this moment, Xia Jianren, holding his small fan, sidled up. "Was that Wang Chuan?"

"Yes," Cang Yue nodded. "He's still alive."

The ghost actually didn't kill him. Cang Yue found this very strange too.

Xia Jianren tossed the fan, which was printed with an advertisement and which he had brought from the bus, back through the bus window. "What did he say?"

Cang Yue turned to look at Zhao Shuang in the distance. "He told us to be careful of Zhao Shuang."

But even the most malicious person fears a knife. As long as it was confirmed that Zhao Shuang had caused the deaths of those thirty-odd people, then a single stab would be enough to end this instance safely. Cang Yue guessed the ghost had taken Wang Chuan to Sun Zihao's dorm to let him learn the truth.

The base halfway up the mountain was simply a row of small earthen huts, with a few tables and chairs arranged inside. No one was usually here; only people tired from climbing would rest here for a bit.

Zhao Shuang had already gone into this row of small earthen huts. It seemed she was also very eager to recall the events of that day.

But the others watched her try hard to remember for a long time, yet in the end, she still recalled nothing.

"I have absolutely no memory of this place," Zhao Shuang said, clutching her aching head as the others exchanged looks.

Zhao Shuang had gotten off the bus here. She hadn't gone any further up, so the places higher up probably wouldn't stimulate her memory.

"Why don't we go a bit further up?" Xia Jianren suggested. "Maybe we'll find something at the crash site. Besides, aren't there still a few people missing? We might find clues about them too."

With no other option, everyone agreed.

It was already fully daylight, and more hikers began appearing on the mountain. To avoid causing a commotion, Gu Mian had parked the bus in a secluded place and hidden it.

If they wanted to continue upwards from here, they would have to walk.

Fortunately, a main concrete road had been built on this mountain, so climbing wasn't too tiring.

「Meanwhile」

Wang Chuan had long finished searching Jiang Mei's home. Now he stood once more at the entrance to Zhao Shuang's room. Their escape the previous night had been hasty, and they hadn't had time to shut the door, so it was still open, conveniently allowing him to enter and investigate.

He cautiously pushed the door open and searched the room meticulously, looking for any clues related to Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei.

But a thorough search yielded nothing.

He did, however, find a fan with an advertisement for "Treating Kidney Deficiency" printed on it. Staring at the pile of useless items before him, he sank into deep thought.

"It's been twelve hours already," Xia Jianren said, looking up at the brightening sky.

One-third of the mission time had passed; another twenty-four hours of suffering remained. If they could find a way out, their next twenty-four hours wouldn't be such an ordeal.

Mountain climbing was physically demanding. Before they even reached the bus crash site, the group was exhausted and out of breath, unable to walk any further. Fortunately, there was a pavilion ahead, so they stopped, planning to rest there for a while.

They had originally planned to discuss their next steps while resting, but unexpectedly, a man with graying hair was already sitting in the pavilion, so they could only keep quiet and rest silently.

Chapter 563 The Simple Gugu Spirit_1

The group of them caught the attention of a man with salt-and-pepper hair in the pavilion.

He watched Gu Mian's group for a good while. Just as Xia Jianren was about to lose his patience and ask what he was staring at, the man sitting on the stone stool finally spoke. "You folks are here to hike the mountain too, huh? A few days ago, a group of young people about your age also came here to hike."

An idea crossed Xia Jianren's mind. "Were there about thirty-odd of them, arriving in a large vehicle?"

"Yes, that's right," the man nodded. "They stopped here when they passed by, and a dozen or so got out to stretch their legs. They all looked quite happy. But I heard later their vehicle overturned, and more than thirty people died. Several are still missing."

Xia Jianren swallowed hard. He didn't dare say he was a colleague of those thirty-odd people.

"These past few days, I've seen police cars driving back and forth constantly. I guess they're looking for the missing ones. Doesn't look like they've made much progress, though."

"Wait a minute," Xia Jianren interjected. "Are you on this mountain every day?"

The man chuckled, lifted his backside a bit, revealing a stack of flyers underneath him for 'Treatments for Infertility and Premature Ejaculation.'

"Many people hike here daily, so I've been handing out flyers at this pavilion these past few days."

Cang Yue also turned to the man. After a moment of thought, she asked, "Sir, you've been here for several days. Do you know why that vehicle fell down the mountain?"

The man shook his head. "I've heard many stories these past few days. Some say the driver wasn't paying attention and it rolled over; others claim it swerved to avoid an oncoming car and went down. But who knows if any of that is true? Anyway, the police are calling it an accident."

While speaking, he pointed ahead. "It's about a ten-minute walk further ahead to where the vehicle crashed. It's cordoned off with police tape; you'll see it as soon as you get there."

Cang Yue nodded without uttering another word.

After a few minutes of rest, they had recovered. During this time, Gu Mian found a roadside vendor and bought five bottles of soda.

Accepting the soda from Gu Mian, Cang Yue stood up. "Let's keep moving."

Xia Jianren rose while opening his bottle. In the real world, he didn't have extra Game Coins to buy such things. Most instances took place in desolate wilderness or confined spaces, and there were rarely any normal world-setting instances with chances to shop. He hadn't had soda in a long time.

They set off up the mountain trail again, drinks in hand.

Gu Mian, holding his soda, said, "The vendor just told me that when the bus passed him on October 1st, someone got off and bought thirty-seven bottles of drinks."

Cang Yue nodded. "Zhao Shuang got off the bus. That left thirty-seven people on board."

It seemed like it was one bottle per person.

The group quickly arrived at the crash site. It was cordoned off with yellow police tape and was indeed very conspicuous. From time to time, a few passersby would walk past, all keeping a wide berth from the tape, as if afraid they too might accidentally fall.

They stood at the edge of the road and peered down.

Beside the road was a steep slope, dropping about twenty meters to a slightly gentler incline below.

The steep slope was covered in weeds. These weeds had recently been crushed, lying askew, and some patches of soil had even broken away, exposing fresh earth underneath. Gu Mian knew these were the tracks left when the bus tumbled down the mountain.

Even standing at the edge of the slope and looking down was enough to make one's legs tremble.

On the gentler incline at the bottom, there was a shallow pit, which looked like the impact mark from the bus. However, the bus itself was gone now; Gu Mian had hidden it somewhere concealed.

Fortunately, the police weren't on duty at the moment. Otherwise, if they discovered the bus missing from the accident scene, they would surely launch a massive search. It would be bad if that search led them to Gu Mian and the others.

Keke turned and asked the others, "Should we go down?"

There were still a few people missing. Perhaps they could find some clues down there.

Cang Yue took a deep breath. "Since we're already here, let's find a slightly gentler spot and go down to take a look."

The group picked a spot where no one was around and climbed down a small path. They soon reached the bus's landing site. There were scattered bloodstains on the ground, likely from the people inside the bus.

The area around this spot was covered in messy wild grass. Further out was a dense forest where the grass grew almost waist-high.

There were no signs of anyone having passed through, making it difficult to determine which direction the missing people had gone based on this large pit alone.

Keke turned to the others. "Alright, let's search the surrounding area first and see if we can find any clues." As she spoke, she glanced at Gu Mian. "Let's spread out a bit; it'll be more efficient that way."

After Keke finished speaking, Cang Yue then looked towards Xia Jianren. He just nodded, not moving, apparently wanting to stick with Gu Mian.

Just then, Keke suddenly said, "Zhao Shuang, let's go check over there."

Saying this, she took the arm of a slightly bewildered Zhao Shuang and led her off in one direction.

Only when Keke had led Zhao Shuang some distance away did Cang Yue look away.

Xia Jianren asked, puzzled, "Didn't you say we should split up to find clues? Why aren't you two moving?"

"Obviously, she just wanted to get Zhao Shuang out of the way," Gu Mian said matter-of-factly. "But you didn't get it."

"Get Zhao Shuang out of the way?" Xia Jianren asked, still puzzled. "Is there something she's not supposed to hear?"

Cang Yue shook her head. "No, it's to use a special item."

As she spoke, she casually produced a doll about twenty centimeters long—not from her pocket, of course, but from her item bar.

[Simple Eyewitness]

[Description: One-time use item. As the name suggests, this is an eyewitness. This special item is highly anthropomorphic and possesses all human flaws, such as a hazy memory, missing key details, fragmented recollections, etc.]

[Function: Can be asked about what it saw and heard when the accident occurred.]

Gu Mian looked at the doll in Cang Yue's hand. "Looking at these flaws, this thing doesn't seem very reliable."

Cang Yue placed the doll on the ground at their feet. "It's better than nothing."

Two seconds after being placed on the ground, the doll, whose head had been lolling to one side, suddenly straightened its neck. Its head snapped up, and its eyes began to glow, startling Xia Jianren who was standing nearby.

Gu Mian noticed a small screen on the doll's stomach displaying a countdown.

"180," "179"...

It would probably become useless when the countdown reached zero.

At this point, Cang Yue had already asked, "How many people were still alive after the bus crashed?"

But because this thing 'possessed all human flaws,' it couldn't give an exact number.

"It was already dark then, so I couldn't see clearly. I only saw some people crawling out after the bus crashed. I'd say about seven or eight of them crawled out."

It had only seen a few crawl out, but it didn't know how many were alive.

Cang Yue continued, "Then, among those who crawled out, was Jiang Mei there?"

"Who is Jiang Mei?"

Cang Yue closed her eyes in exasperation. She'd forgotten this thing was just an unrelated eyewitness; it had no connection to these people and wouldn't know her colleagues at all.

Chapter 564 Unexpected, Right? This is a Saved Draft_1

So, Cang Yue could only ask some straightforward questions: "After the survivors crawled out, which direction did they go?"

One of the doll's arms suddenly lifted, pointing in one direction.

Gu Mian followed its arm and saw it was pointing in the exact direction Keke and Zhao Shuang had taken.

Cang Yue looked away. Just as she was about to ask another question, she suddenly saw the doll's second arm rise, pointing in a different direction.

"This... What's going on?" Xia Jianren stared in bewilderment at the directions the two arms indicated. "Those few people, they split up and went in two different directions?"

"Actually, I've found it strange from the very beginning," Cang Yue said, frowning at the doll before her. "Theoretically, anyone who survived must have been severely injured. A normal person would have stayed put and waited for rescue."

The doll said the accident happened at night. Even at night, people would occasionally pass by this area. Staying put and calling for help would have been the most logical choice.

Yet, these people dragged their injured bodies away from the site, even splitting up to leave in two different directions.

As she pondered this, Cang Yue continued her questioning: "Why did they leave this place?"

"It was too dark. I couldn't see clearly. I only saw them leaving in a hurry in two different directions."

"Were their injuries severe?"

"It was too dark. I couldn't see clearly. I only saw that some were stumbling as they walked, while others could still run."

Cang Yue saw the countdown on the doll's stomach had reached ten seconds and quickly asked, "Did they say anything when they left?"

"Run."

After uttering those two words, the doll's head lolled to one side, and the light in its eyes faded.

It stopped moving.

Xia Jianren and Cang Yue exchanged a look, not quite understanding the meaning of those two words.

"Run?"

Listening to this, it sounded as if they had caused the bus to overturn and then fled in a panic after causing the accident.

"How strange," Xia Jianren frowned. "I originally thought Zhao Shuang might have secretly sabotaged the bus, causing it to overturn. I didn't expect that among the survivors, there was also someone with a guilty conscience."

Just as Xia Jianren was feeling perplexed, footsteps approached from one of the directions the doll had pointed.

Keke and Zhao Shuang were returning.

Cang Yue swiftly retrieved the doll and then looked up in the direction of the approaching footsteps.

Zhao Shuang was somewhat surprised to see Gu Mian and the other two still there. "You've been here all this time? Didn't you say you were going to look around for clues?"

Cang Yue smiled at her. "We've already looked. We didn't find anything special. But what about you? Did you find anything?"

Keke shook her head. It seemed they hadn't found anything either.

The doll had pointed in the direction Keke and Zhao Shuang had just explored. If its testimony was correct, they should have found something there. Their coming back empty-handed might mean they hadn't gone far enough.

Cang Yue thought for a moment, then stood up. "Alright, let's search again carefully and see if we discover anything."

Saying this, she started walking in the direction Keke and Zhao Shuang had just come from. Time was pressing. The police could arrive at any moment and discover the bus was missing. If the investigation led to them, it would be bad.

Keke looked from Cang Yue to Gu Mian, apparently curious about what Gu Mian's group had been discussing earlier.

Cang Yue saw through Keke's curiosity. She took Zhao Shuang's hand and walked ahead, making sure Zhao Shuang couldn't hear the conversation behind them.

She took Zhao Shuang's hand and said, "You've been this way before, so you're more familiar with it. Warn me if there are any pits so I don't step into one."

Xia Jianren also followed them. Keke watched the three of them walk away, then quietly asked Gu Mian, "What were you all talking about just now?"

Gu Mian looked down at her. "Earlier, Cang Yue took out a special item called 'Unreliable Witness.' It can provide an unreliable testimony about the bus crash."

He quietly described to Keke the unreliable testimony the doll had given. Keke frowned as she listened.

She repeated the last two words the doll had uttered, "Run?"

It sounded as if they had committed some offense and were in a hurry to escape.

Frowning, she said, "Besides sounding like they're fleeing after committing a crime, it also sounds like..."

But before she could finish, she was interrupted by a voice from above.

"What are you two doing!"

Gu Mian looked up. The man who had been distributing flyers earlier had somehow gotten to the top of the slope and was peering down at the two of them.

The shout also attracted the attention of Cang Yue's group, who had already walked some distance. They looked up, but the dense trees obscured their view of what was above.

The man above also hadn't seen Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang, who had already entered the dense woods. He craned his head and shouted down, "What are you two doing down there? Don't go causing trouble! We haven't even found those missing people yet, don't tell me you two are going to get lost as well."

Gu Mian figured the man probably thought they were just curious onlookers.

Cang Yue looked up and called out an explanation, "We just came down to take a look, we didn't mean any harm!"

"Well, be careful then!" the man cautioned. "It's getting late, and the police will be here in a few minutes. If they see you down there, they'll definitely haul you up."

At this moment, Cang Yue, Xia Jianren, and Zhao Shuang were looking back at Gu Mian and Keke.

Hearing the flyer man's words, Keke gave Cang Yue a meaningful look, signaling for them to leave first.

Otherwise, when the police arrived in a few minutes, they would all be caught together.

Having received the signal, Cang Yue turned back and quietly left with Zhao Shuang.

"Huh?" Just then, the flyer man noticed something was amiss. "I got so caught up talking to you. I remember that bus was here last night. How come it's gone today?"

I drove it away.

Of course, Gu Mian didn't say this aloud. He began to climb up, lest the police arrive and arrest him as a suspect.

Keke, however, was quite good at spinning tales. "It was probably towed away as evidence. This wilderness isn't suitable for investigation and evidence collection anyway."

The two of them quickly climbed up.

The flyer man looked at the two who had climbed up. "Didn't five of you come together? Where are the other three?"

As he spoke, he looked around but saw no sign of the other three.

Keke quickly replied, "Those three went ahead towards the mountaintop. We stayed behind to check this area."

"Oh." The man nodded, fanning himself with the flyers in his hand.

Gu Mian took Keke's hand and said to the man, "Then we'll go catch up to the other three."

After saying this, he even politely bid the man farewell.

He was afraid that when the police arrived and found the bus missing, they would arrest all suspects present at the scene.

Keke jogged alongside Gu Mian for a few hundred meters. Only when the man was out of sight did she gasp for breath and ask, "Sister Cang Yue and the others went down. What should we do now?"

"Don't worry." Gu Mian stood by the main road, looking down the slope. He had climbed up earlier because he was afraid the man would tell the police that people had entered the woods. It wouldn't be good if the police then searched for and found their group.

He looked at the weed-choked forest below and said, "I remember one of the directions the doll pointed was this way. If we go down from here and head back, we might find something on the way."

If they were lucky, they might also meet up with Cang Yue's group.

Keke took out her phone. "Should I call them first to let them know?"

Gu Mian nodded while scanning for a suitable place to descend. "Up to you."

Just as Keke was about to dial Cang Yue's number, she saw Cang Yue was already calling her. She immediately pressed the answer key.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Keke? Where are you?" Cang Yue was currently on the phone with Keke, standing in front of a ditch that was neither too deep nor too shallow.

The trees around this ditch were relatively sparse, but the weeds were still plentiful. Stepping on them made her whole leg feel itchy.

Keke's voice came from the phone: "We're on the concrete road up top and are about to go down from a different spot. Where are you now?"

Cang Yue looked at the ditch in front of her. "I can't tell you the exact location. It's in the direction you and Zhao Shuang took earlier. Just keep going straight. There's a large ditch here, and we're in front of it."

"Gu Mian and I plan to go down from the other direction the doll pointed and walk back. We might meet up with you."

Cang Yue nodded, holding her phone. "Alright. You two be careful. We'll walk slower and wait for you."

After arranging things, the two ended the call. Gu Mian had also found a suitable path to go down.

On the other side, Cang Yue, having hung up the phone, stared at the ditch before her.

This ditch lay before them, stretching out of sight in both directions. The water inside had long since dried up, and its bottom was overgrown with weeds. Thorny plants like brambles grew around the ditch, very prickly.

She crouched down, looking at this ditch, which was about two meters deep.

If the direction given by the doll was correct, then those survivors must have also encountered this ditch. Did they cross it, or did they follow the ditch to one side?

Just as Cang Yue was wondering about this, Zhao Shuang, who was beside her, suddenly stood up and looked along the ditch. "Can we go that way?"

Chapter 565 Who are you? Why is this book updated?_1

"What's wrong?" Cang Yue straightened and looked at Zhao Shuang, who was staring into the distance.

Zhao Shuang had gotten out of the car at the mountainside base. Cang Yue hadn't expected her to remember anything in this unfamiliar place, but things weren't turning out as Cang Yue had anticipated.

"I feel... like there's something over there..." Zhao Shuang said, puzzled, her eyebrows knitted in concentration.

Psychic perception? Cang Yue wondered.

Some players with a certain level of Spiritual Value indeed possessed an eerily accurate sixth sense, but sadly, Attribute Points were rarely generated in instances...

Cang Yue interrupted her train of thought about Attribute Points and looked up at Zhao Shuang, who was still staring into the distance.

At this moment, Xia Jianren leaned over and said, "Isn't it always like this in horror movies and novels? If the main character senses something unusual in a certain place, there must be something there."

It wasn't surprising that Zhao Shuang suddenly had this feeling; it could be a clue from the instance.

Cang Yue, her fingers around the fruit knife in her pocket, said, "Well, let's go check that area."

If Zhao Shuang's premonition is accurate, there should be important clues there, Cang Yue thought. They might even find some of the missing people. If any of them are still alive, the truth could finally surface. Once the truth is clear, the way out will be right in front of them.

The two were somewhat excited.

But Cang Yue found it strange. The police searched here for days without finding anything. Could we find it so easily?

Meanwhile, Gu Mian and Keke had successfully climbed down from the main road and entered the dense, weed-filled forest. Amidst the greenery, they got their bearings and headed toward where the bus had crashed.

As Keke walked, she said, "I never thought Wang Chuan, taken by a ghost, would survive."

"From your tone, it sounds like you were hoping he would die."

"Not exactly," Keke replied, pushing aside the branches blocking their path. Many branches grew low here, forcing them to clear a way forward and slowing their progress considerably.

Gu Mian knew Keke had little interest in the fates of others; she only cared about the lives of those she was close to.

"It's just strange," Keke continued. "The ghost took Wang Chuan but didn't kill him. Instead, it sent him back to the staff dormitory to find all those clues about Zhao Shuang. It's as if they intentionally wanted us to find out about Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei. What good does that do them?"

Pausing, Keke added, "And the ghost didn't kill Wang Chuan. Could it be because they *can't* kill people? Or perhaps they can't kill *us*?"

Thinking back, ever since we entered this instance, it seems these ghosts have just been full of sound and fury, she reflected.

Whether it was the knocking, the footsteps, or the incidents at the company, none of it had caused them any real harm—only psychological distress.

Gu Mian stepped onto the tangled grass. "An instance is unlikely to pose no threat to players. In other words, if these ghosts aren't a threat, then something else in this instance must be capable of endangering players' lives."

It's like that taxi instance, Gu Mian recalled. The ghost posed no threat to players, but the driver, who wasn't a ghost, was incredibly deadly when he started killing.

Keke nodded thoughtfully. Something feels off, she thought, but I can't quite place it.

They continued onward but found nothing until Wang Chuan called.

By now, Wang Chuan had also reached Fenshan Mountain, out of breath. He hadn't found any clues beyond the connection between Sun Zihao and Jiang Mei.

Hearing the others were also at Fenshan Mountain, he had hurried over. He didn't dare take a taxi again, so he'd found a shared bike by the road and ridden it all the way up the mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, he called Cang Yue, but her phone was likely on silent, as she didn't answer. So, he called Keke instead.

Keke told him that Cang Yue's group had separated from them (her and Gu Mian) at the bus crash site, and that he should go to the accident site first.

Wang Chuan rode his bicycle all the way up, passing several parked police cars.

When he arrived at the accident site, he saw a group of policemen in a heated discussion, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers.

Listening in, he learned that the police had arrived earlier that day to find the bus missing. They were now asking around if any other precinct had towed it.

Wang Chuan knew Gu Mian had driven the bus away. Feeling a pang of guilt, he skirted the crowd, intending to find a secluded path down into the woods.

Just as he was about to ride on, his peripheral vision caught an older man by the roadside fanning himself with an advertising flyer. He stopped dead in his tracks.

Cang Yue and Xia Jianren had followed Zhao Shuang for quite a distance, covering about two kilometers along the ditch.

Upon reaching a spot where the weeds were somewhat sparser, Zhao Shuang suddenly halted.

"There should be something nearby. I remember this place from a dream I had last night... it felt like there was a cave..." Zhao Shuang said, looking around.

She scanned the area, then abruptly crouched and slid into the earthen ditch below. The other two looked down and saw Zhao Shuang reaching to clear a patch of thick weeds. After about thirty seconds, she actually uncovered a cave entrance.

The cave entrance was about one and a half meters high and just wide enough for one person to pass through, offering barely enough room to turn around inside.

The two observers were left speechless at the sight.

So, the missing people came in here? they both wondered.

Cang Yue and Xia Jianren exchanged peculiar glances.

No wonder the police couldn't find the missing people, Cang Yue mused. This place is so far from the incident site and so well hidden. Survivors wouldn't normally retreat to such a concealed spot, so it's unlikely anyone would have thoroughly searched through these weeds.

"You dreamt this?" Cang Yue asked Zhao Shuang, her expression skeptical.

Zhao Shuang's expression was also unsettled. "A few days ago, I had a nightmare that I think was set here. I dreamt they hid in here, terrified."

Her voice grew firmer as she spoke, "They're definitely in here!"

Cang Yue frowned, reaching for her phone to contact Gu Mian. "Let's wait for Gu Mian and Keke before going in..."

Unexpectedly, Zhao Shuang, standing before the cave, had no intention of listening. Clutching her head as if a memory had struck her, she suddenly bolted into the entrance.

This startled Xia Jianren. "Wait!"

But Zhao Shuang didn't stop; her silhouette vanished into the darkness.

"What do we do now?" Xia Jianren stared, dumbfounded, at the pitch-black opening.

Cang Yue also frowned deeply. This cave might be a crucial point in the instance, she thought. Zhao Shuang running off isn't the main concern. Who knows what's in there? The real fear is that her recklessness will trigger a dead end and doom us all.

She quickly produced a rope, its end connected to a safety harness. Swiftly buckling the harness around her waist, she handed the other end to Xia Jianren. "This is a special item. Just hold this end and don't move. If I run into trouble, it can pull me out instantly."

The device resembled a retractable tape measure, with the release mechanism on the harness Cang Yue wore. One press, and it would pull her back from this end to the other.

Without wasting another word, Cang Yue swiftly disappeared into the darkness.

Xia Jianren remained at the entrance, nervously staring into the dark little cave.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian and Keke had detoured to avoid the bus crash site. The police were already there, and it would be hard to explain if they were seen emerging from the nearby woods.

Keke navigated through the dense forest. "If we continue this way, we should meet Cang Yue's group soon, provided they haven't gone too far."

Gu Mian nodded, then suddenly remembered something. "By the way, what were you going to tell me back at the bus crash site?"

"What?" Keke was taken aback.

"It was about what the doll said, 'Run quickly!' You mentioned that besides a hit-and-run, there's another situation where people say that. The guy handing out flyers interrupted you before you could finish."

"Ah," Keke remembered. "You probably figured it out. Besides a hit-and-run, people also shout 'Run quickly!' when they're fleeing danger."

Indeed, Gu Mian had often heard players yell those two words in dangerous instances.

Most people instinctively yell "Run quickly!" when chased by a ghost.

"In that case," Gu Mian stroked his chin, "those survivors might have been fleeing something, dragging their severely injured bodies in a desperate escape. And splitting up... isn't that what we often do when ghosts are chasing us?"

Keke's expression changed, a realization dawning on her.

Then she noticed a light glowing from Gu Mian's pocket.

"You're getting a call," she reminded him.

Gu Mian pulled out his phone and saw it was a call from Wang Chuan.

As he answered, Wang Chuan's anxious voice came through, "Did you just say Zhao Shuang went with Cang Yue and Xia Jianren?"

Chapter 566 An Interesting 'GuGu' is One in a Million_1

Keke, her face grave, leaned in beside Gu Mian, listening to Wang Chuan's voice on the phone.

When she heard him ask about Zhao Shuang's whereabouts, an 'I knew it' expression crossed Keke's face.

At that moment, Wang Chuan was anxiously holding an advertisement flyer, his eyes fixed on the words "Specializing in Infertility Treatments." He said to Gu Mian on the other end of the phone, "Here's the thing. I saw a fan with an advertisement printed on it in Zhao Shuang's dormitory, and I came across the same flyer distributor today..."

Gu Mian and the others had also run into this person, but none of them had paid attention to his small ads about infertility treatments.

Wang Chuan's voice came through the phone. "He said he's always been distributing flyers not far from the accident site. On October first, when those colleagues passed by him, a few got off the bus to get some air. He said he took the opportunity to hand them a whole stack of ads. The advertisement he gave out that day was printed on fans..."

The man hadn't mentioned taking the opportunity to hand out flyers.

But Gu Mian recalled that there were indeed a few fans with ads printed on them in the vehicle; Xia Jianren had even used one to fan himself.

"The key thing is the fan I found in Zhao Shuang's dorm," Wang Chuan said, continuously flipping the flyer in his hand. "That fan was given to our colleagues by this man on October first. He's always been distributing flyers near the incident site. Zhao Shuang got off at the base halfway up the mountain. So, on October first, she shouldn't have been able to get anything this man was handing out!"

Logically, by the time the bus reached the flyer distribution spot, Zhao Shuang should have already alighted.

Yet something she supposedly couldn't have obtained appeared in her dorm room.

This meant Zhao Shuang had lied to them. That day, she hadn't gotten off halfway; she had followed the bus all the way up the mountain.

Everything that happened after that... Zhao Shuang was there for all of it...

"She lied to us?" Keke squinted.

Gu Mian, holding the phone, shook his head. "No. When she was found, she was at the base halfway up the mountain. I don't think she consciously lied to us."

He paused for two seconds before continuing, "She has amnesia.

"She's forgotten what happened on October first, forgotten the cause of the conflict. She was found at the base halfway up the mountain and just assumed she'd gotten off midway. She believes... she's still alive."

This would explain everything: why the group of survivors didn't wait at the scene but instead fled—it was because they saw something terrifying.

They saw Zhao Shuang die on the spot and turn into a ghost. Then they fled in panic, even splitting up.

The reason the ghosts haven't killed anyone yet is that the danger in this instance doesn't lie with them; it lies with Zhao Shuang.

Gu Mian said, holding the phone, "Zhao Shuang doesn't remember what happened that day. If she recalls that she's dead, it will likely trigger a total annihilation scenario."

She was most likely responsible for the bus crash too.

This woman was such a handful when she was alive; one can only imagine how much more malevolent and resentful she'd be after death.

Wang Chuan clutched the phone, cold sweat beading on his forehead. So my initial idea with Cang Yue was completely wrong! Helping Zhao Shuang regain her memory will only trigger the annihilation scenario!

"I... I'll call them again! Tell them absolutely not to investigate any further!" Wang Chuan said, hanging up and quickly dialing Cang Yue's number from his contacts.

But there was no answer; he had no idea what she was doing.

Meanwhile, Keke, beside Gu Mian, was also trying to call Xia Jianren.

But she couldn't get through either.

At that moment, Xia Jianren was nervously clutching one end of a rope, his eyes fixed intently on the dark cave entrance before him. He paid no mind to his silenced phone.

The same was true for Cang Yue, who had entered the cave.

The cave entrance was initially narrow and dark, forcing Cang Yue to bend over to proceed. However, the further she went, the more spacious it became. Eventually, she could even stand upright, and it was wide enough for two people to walk side-by-side.

The damp earthen walls exuded a musty, unpleasant odor.

Cang Yue still hadn't seen any sign of Zhao Shuang. She walked on for some distance before vaguely spotting a figure standing ahead with its back to her.

Approaching cautiously, she confirmed it was indeed Zhao Shuang.

In front of Zhao Shuang was a solid wall; it seemed this was the end of the cave.

Strangely, at the foot of this wall, a square piece of blue-and-white striped cloth, about three square meters in size, lay spread out. It bulged unevenly, as if covering something underneath.

Judging by the shape, I can guess what it is, Cang Yue thought. People. Corpses.

Taking a few more steps forward, she could smell a putrid stench assaulting her nostrils.

It seems the missing people are dead too, Cang Yue mused. I just don't know why this cloth is covering them.

Just then, she saw Zhao Shuang reach out, seemingly intending to lift the cloth.

Instinctively feeling something was wrong, Cang Yue immediately moved to stop Zhao Shuang's hand. "Don't touch it."

I'm afraid it might trigger some taboo.

Zhao Shuang turned to look at Cang Yue, who was holding back her hand. In the dim, shifting light, Zhao Shuang's face looked somewhat unsettling.

Gazing at the unsettling face before her, a peculiar sensation welled up in Cang Yue's heart.

"Alright," Zhao Shuang said, withdrawing her hand.

Cang Yue stared at her. "It's not very safe in here. How about we go out and wait for the others to arrive before coming back in?"

Zhao Shuang nodded and repeated the same word as before, "Okay."

With that, she turned and started walking back the way they had come.

Seeing Zhao Shuang head back, Cang Yue finally breathed a sigh of relief. She glanced at the peculiar blue-and-white striped cloth behind her, planning to come back and investigate it with Gu Mian and Keke later.

But suddenly, a hand reached out from behind Cang Yue and abruptly yanked away the cloth.

Cang Yue looked back in surprise. It was Zhao Shuang, who had only pretended to leave and had now returned. Perhaps Zhao Shuang never actually intended to agree to my suggestion at all.

As the cloth was pulled away, what lay beneath was revealed.

Underneath, as expected, were corpses, lying haphazardly.

But Cang Yue hadn't expected to find *that* among them...

She had tried to stop Zhao Shuang from lifting the cloth only because she feared accidentally triggering some taboo. She never imagined there would be such an unexpected corpse underneath.

A female corpse, its features grotesquely twisted, lay sprawled on top of the other bodies.

Her limbs were bizarrely contorted, even elongated, spread out over the corpses beneath as if to prevent them from escaping.

And that face...

...was precisely Zhao Shuang's!

So, she was dead all along!

"AH."

Beside Cang Yue, Zhao Shuang suddenly twisted her head a full ninety degrees, an eerie face now directly confronting Cang Yue. "Ah, now I remember. I've been dead all along."

Cang Yue stumbled back several large steps, desperately pressing a button on her belt.

But to her dismay, after several seconds, she hadn't moved an inch. Zhao Shuang's mouth split into a grotesque grin. Cang Yue saw her raise a twisted hand, which was now clutching the rope that led out of the cave entrance.

"Gotcha," Zhao Shuang rasped.

「Outside the cave」

Xia Jianren was waiting, his anxiety mounting. There had been no sound or movement from the two who had gone inside, making him so antsy he felt like blisters were about to erupt on his lips.

Just then, he felt the rope in his hand twitch, followed by the sound of something being rapidly dragged out from the cave entrance before him.

His eyes widened as he stared at the vibrating rope. Did they run into danger? Otherwise, they wouldn't use this rope to come out.

He took two steps back, anxiously waiting for Cang Yue to emerge so he could ask what was inside.

This special item was fast. In no time, Xia Jianren felt the object on the other end reach the cave mouth. Two seconds later, he vaguely saw something being dragged out.

Then, the object was pulled by the rope right to his side.

Xia Jianren focused his gaze, only to see that the other end of the rope was no longer attached to Cang Yue, but to a severed lower torso.

He yelped, dropping the rope, and collapsed to the ground, trembling violently as he stared at the bloody mess at his feet.

Blood was still gushing from it, leaving a crimson trail all the way.

He recognized the clothing on the severed torso.

White sneakers, jeans, and the safety harness still tightly buckled around the waist—but the upper body was gone.

That's Cang Yue's outfit! She's dead!

He no longer cared about Zhao Shuang, who was still in the cave. Scrambling to his feet, he turned and fled, trembling, back the way he had come.

As he bolted, he heard rustling sounds from the cave behind him.

He dared to glance back once and saw a deathly pale face emerge from the darkness, grinning at him.

It's Zhao Shuang! She's a ghost!

Xia Jianren couldn't care less why Zhao Shuang had become a ghost; he just ran for his life, desperately hoping to run into Gu Mian.

But in his panic, he couldn't find the way back. After running for a while, he realized he was lost.

Fortunately, the ghost didn't seem to be chasing him.

His heart still pounding with fear, he cowered in a corner, staring at the bloodstains on his hand—splattered there when Cang Yue's lower half had been pulled out.

Just as he took a few deep breaths, preparing to run again, he noticed his phone screen lighting up in his pocket. It looked like someone was calling him.

That's right, my phone! I need to call Gu Mian and tell him to come quickly!

With this thought, he fumbled for his phone. The lit screen showed an incoming call.

It was a call from Cang Yue.

Chapter 567 You Haven't Watched for Ten Years_1

Xia Jianren's hand shook, and he immediately hung up the phone call from Cang Yue.

He'd seen Cang Yue torn in half with his own eyes; there was no way he was answering that call.

But the caller kept insisting. The phone screen lit up repeatedly, like a relentless, ominous curse. Panicked, Xia Jianren repeatedly pressed the end call button. Unexpectedly, after a few tries, the phone screen went black—it had powered off.

His phone's battery had already been low, and the recent calls had drained the last of its power. Xia Jianren stared dumbfounded at the dark screen.

He repeatedly pressed the power button, but the phone wouldn't light up again.

"Fuck!" Xia Jianren cursed, gripping his phone tightly, though he didn't dare to shout.

His breathing was heavy as he moved forward cautiously, desperate to find the path he'd taken earlier.

Meanwhile, Wang Chuan, who was on a mountain road, finally got through to Cang Yue's phone.

"Hello?" Cang Yue's voice came from the phone.

Hearing Cang Yue finally answer, Wang Chuan breathed a sigh of relief and immediately asked, "Gu Mian told me you left with Zhao Shuang?"

"Yes, we're looking for our missing colleagues. We found a cave here. The other two went in, and I'm keeping watch outside."

Wang Chuan said anxiously, "Get them out of there first! Tell them to stop looking! Zhao Shuang might be the ghost!"

"Zhao Shuang is the ghost?"

"Yes! If she remembers she's dead, we're all doomed! Don't stimulate her memories any further!"

The other end fell silent for a few seconds before a voice replied, "Alright, I'll go get them out. By the way, do Gu Mian and the others know about this?"

"Gu Mian was the one who told me."

"Okay. Where are you? I'll meet up with you after I get them out."

While on the phone, Wang Chuan glanced down the mountain road where a group of police officers were gathered, discussing where the bus had gone.

"I'm right next to the accident site. You'll see me when you come up."

"Okay."

Just as Wang Chuan was about to end the call, he suddenly remembered something. He asked uncertainly, "By the way, Cang Yue?"

"What is it?"

"Do you remember how much longer we have before we can leave this instance?"

He was asking about the time limit for this instance.

The other end fell silent. For a long time, no one spoke.

Wang Chuan's hands began to tremble. He was starting to realize something.

Suddenly, a bizarre CACKLE echoed from the silent receiver. It sounded like a child's strangled, sinister laugh, or a cat's shriek in the dead of night.

A chill ran down Wang Chuan's spine, and he dropped his phone in shock.

He quickly reacted, snatching up the phone and ending the call.

Staring at the darkened phone screen, he broke out in a cold sweat. Cang Yue... is she already dead? Did Zhao Shuang remember?!

This was clearly not the time to stand around pondering such things.

He had already told 'Zhao Shuang' his location over the phone; the ghost would definitely come looking for him!

Wang Chuan didn't expect to escape harm by running towards a crowd; he'd already witnessed the ghost's teleportation ability.

With these thoughts, he got on his bicycle and headed towards the mountaintop. Gu Mian had said he took a small path further ahead down into the forest. Wang Chuan planned to retrace the route Gu Mian and Keke had taken to catch up with them.

He steered his bike with one hand while calling Gu Mian with the other.

Gu Mian and Keke were crossing the accident site, heading in the direction Cang Yue's group had gone, when Gu Mian's phone screen suddenly lit up. It was a call from Wang Chuan.

"What was the last major event the players participated in?" Gu Mian was caught off guard by the question as soon as he answered the phone.

He paused for a moment before replying, "The college entrance exam?"

Hearing those words, the person on the other end audibly sighed in relief and then began to speak rapidly.

"Cang Yue called me just now. Before hanging up, I was careful enough to ask her a question about the instance mission, but she couldn't answer. Then she cackled strangely... I'm guessing Cang Yue is already dead..."

Keke was beside Gu Mian when he answered the phone, so she heard Wang Chuan's words clearly.

Hearing this, Keke pondered for a moment. If that's the case, Zhao Shuang must have regained her memory... The viable paths to survival in this instance are gone.

If they wanted to survive, they could only rely on hiding and luck.

We just don't know if Xia Jianren is dead yet. Keke had tried calling Xia Jianren earlier, only to find his phone was off.

Wang Chuan continued, "Where are you guys now? I want to find you."

Gu Mian's strength, demonstrated after entering the instance, was indeed very reassuring.

However, Keke knew the instance wouldn't let them stay by Gu Mian's side indefinitely. In the next second, they might be teleported elsewhere, out of the safe zone.

They needed to prepare early.

Beside her, Gu Mian had already given their location. Hearing that Gu Mian was heading towards Zhao Shuang, Wang Chuan sounded a bit apprehensive.

Keke, who was beside Gu Mian, spoke into the phone, "Actually, you don't need to come find us. Just hide well. You know the ghost can teleport us."

Wang Chuan sounded quite helpless. "That's true, but I still feel a bit safer near Gu Mian. Anyway, I'm heading your way. Try to go a bit slower and wait for me, okay?"

Keke silently glanced at the phone by Gu Mian's ear, not quite understanding why their initially astute teammate had become like this.

After giving Gu Mian these instructions, Wang Chuan hung up. He then veered onto a gentle path leading down into the forest below, and his figure quickly disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile, Xia Jianren was still wandering around aimlessly, like a headless fly.

He moved stealthily, terrified that any sound he made might attract Zhao Shuang.

The image of Cang Yue's severed torso was still vivid in his mind. That was his first true encounter with death.

He didn't want to die, especially not in such a gruesome way.

After wandering in the dense forest for what felt like an eternity, Xia Jianren suddenly heard a rustling sound up ahead. He quickly ducked to the side and carefully parted the branches, peering through the gap.

Ahead, he saw a familiar back.

"Wang Chuan? What are you doing here?" Xia Jianren called out, a wave of pleasant surprise washing over him.

Encountering someone familiar in a place like this was indeed a great comfort.

The person turned around, looking at Xia Jianren with apparent surprise. "Xia Jianren? I came down to look for you all."

Hearing this, Xia Jianren hurried out, panting. "That sound earlier scared me to death! Thank goodness it's you... By the way, you don't know, that Zhao Shuang, she... she..."

Wang Chuan interrupted him, "I know. She's the ghost."

Xia Jianren asked in surprise, "How do you know?"

"Gu Mian told me. Later, Zhao Shuang used Cang Yue's phone and Cang Yue's voice to call me, but I saw through her trick," he said, glancing behind Xia Jianren. "Cang Yue is dead?"

Xia Jianren gritted his teeth and nodded. "Dead."

Even now, the memory of Cang Yue's death made him tremble with fear.

"Let's not stand around talking here. Do you know the way back to the bus? Let's head that way. We might run into Gu Mian," Xia Jianren urged, nudging Wang Chuan forward.

"Alright," Wang Chuan nodded. "This way."

As he spoke, he started walking in one direction, and Xia Jianren quickly followed.

"That Zhao Shuang is terrifying," he said, describing what happened as he walked behind Wang Chuan. "We found a cave, and the two of them went in. Cang Yue was worried, so she tied a rope around her waist, with the other end in my hand. But when I pulled her out, only her upper body was left..."

"Then I ran. When I looked back while running, I saw Zhao Shuang's face in the cave, smiling at me! It scared me to death!"

Xia Jianren followed closely behind Wang Chuan, speaking with lingering fear and occasionally patting his chest.

He continued, "When we find Gu Mian, let's just stick to him and not leave his side. I don't believe the ghost can still move us if we're stuck to him."

"Alright," the person in front agreed.

At this point, Xia Jianren sensed something was wrong.

The surrounding scenery looked very familiar, as if he had passed by here not long ago.

But this definitely wasn't the way back; it seemed more like the path leading to that cave.

The dead leaves and withered grass crunched underfoot. Xia Jianren stared at the back of the person in front of him, an increasingly unsettling feeling creeping into his heart. He felt a chill, and his steps gradually slowed to a halt.

He tried to open the player panel of the person in front of him, but it wouldn't open.

Just then, the 'Wang Chuan' in front of him also stopped.

"Why did you stop?" Wang Chuan's voice came, though he still hadn't turned around. It was as if he were talking to Xia Jianren with his back.

Xia Jianren stared at the eerie back, took two steps backward, and opened his mouth, but no words came out.

Getting no reply, 'Wang Chuan' turned his head and asked again, "Why did you stop?"

Xia Jianren shuddered, nearly falling to the ground.

The person in front had only turned their head; their body remained facing away from him. From that bizarrely turned head, two eyes stared intently at Xia Jianren.

Chapter 568 Welcome to the City of Night... Sorry, Wrong Set_1

At this moment, Gu Mian and Keke were walking through the dense forest.

Although it was already October, tiny bugs always flew about in places with lush vegetation. Occasionally, these tiny insects would land on their faces or collars. However, now was not the time to be bothered by this.

"Zhao Shuang definitely turned into a ghost after recovering her memory," Keke said, looking down as she proceeded. "I guess some important clues that could stimulate her memory are located where Cang Yue and the others have gone."

The two of them were now heading in that direction.

Gu Mian, who was walking ahead, nodded slightly. "Zhao Shuang might have seen her own body."

Nothing could stimulate one's memory more than seeing one's own corpse.

Keke also nodded, agreeing with this idea.

"The malice of this instance towards players is indeed immense," her voice came from behind Gu Mian. "From the very beginning, it misled us into thinking that killing Zhao Shuang was the way to survive. But if Cang Yue had actually stabbed her then, Zhao Shuang would have immediately realized she couldn't die from being stabbed."

"And then later, helping her recover her memory—that was also a path to death. It seems we've been on the wrong path ever since we entered this instance," Keke said gravely.

This was a highly deceptive instance, designed to trap all players in one fell swoop.

Keke continued, "I'm even more suspicious of the true purpose of this global game now..."

She guessed many players must be harboring doubts by now.

This global game, under the banner of human evolution, has done nothing practical to achieve it. From last winter's cold snap and plague, to activities with real death, the pitifully scarce resources given after clearing instances, and now the deactivation of the instance death protection mechanism.

"I, for one, think it's a human extermination plan," Keke said, looking up at the back of Gu Mian's head.

She knew Gu Mian was special in this game.

And special people were always burdened with important tasks or involved in colossal conspiracies.

"Indeed," Gu Mian, who was walking ahead, responded. "I believe that in a little while—a few months, perhaps half a year, or a year—this game will show its true colors, and someone will discover the truth."

Only the CRUNCHING sounds of shoes on grass could be heard in the quiet, dense forest. No one responded to him.

Amidst the monotonous sound of footsteps, Gu Mian stopped, and the only sound in the woods vanished.

He turned to look back. Behind him was nothing but empty space, branches swaying gently in the wind, and trampled weeds struggling to straighten.

Keke was gone.

「DRIP. DRIP. DRIP.」

Before her was complete darkness, and the sound of dripping water reached her ears.

Keke's eyes widened.

It took her a moment to adjust.

Just a moment ago, her surroundings were bright, and Gu Mian's back was less than two meters in front of her.

In an instant, her vision went black. The smell of damp must filled her nostrils, the sound of dripping water echoed in her ears, and a chilling cold enveloped her. Keke shivered.

Where am I?

She calmed herself, took out her flashlight, wrapped the glowing end with several layers of her clothing, and then carefully pressed the switch.

The light, muffled by the cloth, was much dimmer and could only illuminate a distance of half a meter.

Clutching her modified flashlight, she probed her surroundings. She saw damp earthen walls on both sides and overhead.

She seemed to be in a cave. The spot where Keke stood wasn't too narrow; she could stand upright, and the cave was about a meter wide.

Holding the flashlight, she took a few steps forward and then backward.

Behind her, the passage grew narrower and lower. Ahead, the passage became wider, and the ceiling gradually rose.

After a few more steps, she was sure.

I'm the only one here. Gu Mian isn't with me.

Keke understood. This is the ghost's doing. The ghost has found me.

She stood still, considering for a few seconds, then began to walk slowly forward. The further she went, the more open the cave became, and the dripping sound also came from that direction.

As Keke moved quietly through the darkness, she suddenly caught sight of a pair of shoes in the gloom ahead, illuminated by her flashlight. They were facing her.

She quickly switched off the flashlight, but the other person had already seen her.

"Keke?" Wang Chuan's voice came from the darkness.

Wang Chuan? Is that him?

Before Keke could speak, a light flared as Wang Chuan switched on his flashlight.

She saw Wang Chuan's face appear before her.

Keke instinctively tried to check his player panel first. She breathed a sigh of relief when she found it could be opened.

Across from her, Wang Chuan's eyes kept darting towards the top of her head; he was clearly trying to open Keke's player panel as well.

Fortunately, both of their player panels could be opened normally.

After confirming each other's identities, they both sighed in relief simultaneously.

"What are you doing here?" Keke frowned.

Wang Chuan looked equally troubled. "I don't know either. I was in the forest looking for you all when everything suddenly went dark. I thought I'd gone blind until I turned on my flashlight and realized I was in here."

It seems Wang Chuan was also brought here by the ghost, Keke thought, glancing around warily. "How long have you been in here?"

"About ten minutes, I think..."

For the past ten minutes, Wang Chuan had been carefully making his way along the wall. He had tried to call Gu Mian, but his phone had no signal, likely because they were in a cave.

"How did you get in?" Wang Chuan asked Keke.

Keke replied, "Same as you. I was suddenly brought in."

Wang Chuan swept his flashlight beam around. "I guess the ghost did this."

Keke nodded. "She's found us."

An eerie silence instantly fell upon the cave, broken only by the continuous sound of dripping water in the distance.

Wang Chuan paused for a moment. "Gu Mian... he's not here?"

Keke looked in the direction of the dripping sound. "I don't think the ghost would be that reckless."

If Gu Mian were brought in, this cave might just collapse.

Seeing only darkness around him, Wang Chuan's heart was shrouded in gloom. He understood that the ghost had already found them, and anything he did next would probably be a futile struggle.

A strong desire to live spurred him into action again. "Let's try to find an exit first."

He quickened his pace as he spoke, moving forward. I don't want to die here, he thought.

Keke followed behind Wang Chuan. "By the way, Xia Jianren's phone is off. Have you run into him?"

Wang Chuan shook his head as he continued forward. "I haven't run into anyone. I was trying to rendezvous with you all, but before I could find you, I was brought to this place. Judging by your tone, you haven't seen him either, have you?"

His voice was hurried and soft, as if afraid something else might hear him.

Keke nodded. "He left with Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang. Cang Yue is already dead, so I guess his chances are slim as well."

Wang Chuan sighed but had no time to mourn his teammate.

He could barely fend for himself right now.

The dripping sound ahead grew clearer, as if they were very close to its source.

Wang Chuan hoped the source of the sound was the tunnel's exit. Getting out would be much safer than staying in this pitch-black tunnel.

As he thought this, he quickened his pace. But just then, he suddenly noticed his flashlight begin to flicker, dimming and brightening as if it were about to run out of power.

"What's going on?" he wondered, staring at the flickering flashlight in astonishment. He always checked the flashlight's battery before entering an instance; it should never run out midway.

He quickly realized it wasn't just his flashlight; Keke's, behind him, had also started to flicker.

Immediately after, they heard a loud RUSTLING sound from behind them, as if something was crawling there.

They understood at once.

It's the ghost!

Run!

Without a word, both of them turned and bolted forward. Their flashlights flickered a few more times and then went out completely.

Absolute darkness enveloped them.

They could only feel their way along the wall as they sprinted forward.

Unable to see, their sense of hearing became even more acute.

They could only hear the RUSTLING sound from behind them growing faster and closer!

The ground was uneven, causing them to stumble occasionally, but each time they quickly regained their balance and continued running.

Keke's stamina was inherently worse than Wang Chuan's, and she had been walking behind him earlier, so the distance between them naturally grew.

She could only hear Wang Chuan's footsteps receding into the distance ahead, while the crawling sound behind her grew closer and closer, until it was almost right at her ears.

But just then, she suddenly heard the sound of someone falling up ahead, followed by a startled cry from Wang Chuan.

It seemed he had tripped over something and fallen.

Keke, who was behind, had no time to slow down. She rushed forward, and then her foot hit something soft and raised. She lost her balance and pitched forward.

Her forehead slammed hard against the ground, making her head buzz.

Her flashlight also slipped from her grasp and ROLLED away, CLATTERING.

Keke quickly regained her senses. She turned and sat up, intending to keep running, when she suddenly felt something drip onto her face. After a moment of confusion, she heard an incredibly clear dripping sound, seemingly coming from directly above her head.

Just then, the flashlight that had rolled to one side suddenly lit up again.

The white light illuminated the darkness. Keke looked up in the direction the sound had come from.

She saw...

Cang Yue's face was suspended above her, eyes wide, staring down at her.

Chapter 569 Money Can Drive the Devil Away_1

She was cut in half.

The upper half of her body, less than a meter long, was covered in fresh blood. Her hair was soaked with blood, and her face was filled with terror; her eyes were wide open, her mouth agape, as if she had been screaming frantically before her death.

This less-than-a-meter-long torso was strung by a rope from the ceiling, fresh blood continuously dripping from her severed waist, falling onto Keke's face.

Cang Yue... was completely dead.

Keke wiped her face and struggled to sit up, but her hand landed on something chillingly cold.

She looked down and saw her hand pressing on a nearly broken neck.

Looking down from the neck, she saw a cold body wearing familiar clothing.

Looking up, she saw a face twisted by sheer terror.

It was Xia Jianren.

He was dead.

His body lay sprawled across their path, having tripped them.

The flashlight illuminated the area. Wang Chuan was staring dumbstruck at Cang Yue's upper half hanging above, momentarily unable to react.

Keke didn't hesitate. She scrambled to her feet, picked up the flashlight, and continued running forward.

The beam of the flashlight startled Wang Chuan back to his senses. He averted his gaze and stumbled to his feet, intending to run, but Xia Jianren's arm tripped him, nearly causing him to fall again.

At that moment, he noticed a sinister face emerging from the darkness behind him, staring at him with a mocking smile.

It was Zhao Shuang's face; she had caught up.

Seeing this, Wang Chuan immediately turned and fled, not daring to look back.

He ran desperately in the dark tunnel. But no matter how hard he tried, the crawling sound behind him never faded; instead, it grew closer...

Wang Chuan ran until his chest felt like it would explode. The potholes on the ground tripped him repeatedly, nearly making him fall.

The eighth time he stumbled into a pothole, he suddenly felt a burning pain in his ankle.

He looked down and saw a pale, veiny hand gripping his ankle.

Wang Chuan opened his mouth, wanting to yell.

But before he could make a sound, he was yanked backward and disappeared into the darkness.

Keke, running desperately ahead, no longer heard footsteps or crawling sounds behind her. She knew Wang Chuan had likely met a terrible end.

But she didn't have time to mourn her teammate; she had to ensure her own survival first.

As she continued to run, the tunnel grew wider and taller, but Keke intuitively felt this wasn't the way out of the cave.

Indeed. After running for some more, she finally saw the end of the grim tunnel.

A wall blocked her path. Sweeping her flashlight across it, she saw bodies stacked haphazardly at its base. The topmost one was eerily Zhao Shuang's corpse.

Presumably, Zhao Shuang had seen this and remembered that she was already dead.

Her gaze lingered on Zhao Shuang's corpse for a long moment before she slowly turned around.

Behind her was a dark tunnel.

And Zhao Shuang, who should have been dead, was standing there, her lips stretched into a wide, unsettling grin.

There was no way to run; she was trapped.

By now, three of the five players who had entered the instance were dead.

Only she and Gu Mian were left.

And now, the ghost stood before her, its hand reaching out...

But just then, Keke suddenly pulled a rather large item from her inventory: a grinding plate, one meter in diameter and waist-high.

Simultaneously, her three-digit Game Coin balance plummeted, hitting '0' within seconds.

This made things worse for the already impoverished Keke.

[Money Can Make Ghosts Grind]

[Introduction: Money is omnipotent, even for ghosts. Perhaps you can escape while the ghost is turning the mill.]

[Function: Each use will deduct all Game Coins owned by the user. After using this item, all nearby spirits will diligently turn the mill. The duration they turn the mill is directly proportional to the amount of Game Coins paid by the user.]

[Tip: If enough money is paid, this item can temporarily evolve into 'Money Can Make Ghosts Push the Mill'.]

This was a special item she had obtained during the college entrance exam event.

The instant the grinding plate appeared and her Game Coins hit zero, Zhao Shuang's hand, which had been reaching for Keke, suddenly changed direction. It began to push the nearby stone mill, turning it in circles.

The scene was quite comical.

But Keke was in no mood to appreciate the comical scene. She took a deep breath and dashed past Zhao Shuang, who was busy turning the mill, heading back into the dark tunnel.

If the exit isn't this way, it must be in the other direction!

Keke hadn't had many Game Coins to begin with, so she knew this special item wouldn't delay Zhao Shuang for long. Gripping the flashlight, she ran as fast as she could.

Sure enough, after only about twenty seconds, a chilling RUSTLING sound resumed behind her.

This time, the crawling sound was more frantic, as if Keke had infuriated it.

By now, Keke had run over two hundred meters. She passed the corpses of Cang Yue and Xia Jianren, and also saw the deceased Wang Chuan.

She didn't stop, running frantically onward as the tunnel grew increasingly narrow and the ceiling lower.

She had no choice but to run hunched over with her head down, which significantly reduced her speed.

To make matters worse, the tunnel continued to shrink. Keke had to bend very low, her arms constantly scraping against the walls, making it almost impossible to run.

And the tunnel showed a trend of shrinking even further.

Keke was starting to break down. How can this be! Is there really no exit?!

The crawling sound behind her grew closer, sounding as if it was right at her back.

Just when Keke began to think she might have been wrong, that perhaps this tunnel had no exit at either end, a sliver of light pierced the darkness ahead.

She looked over excitedly; it was light shining in from outside! Seeing this light, Keke mustered all her strength and ran with renewed speed through the narrow cave, the crawling sound behind her now almost at her ears.

The light grew stronger. Keke could see clearly now; it was indeed an exit.

Taking a deep breath, she lunged forward and burst out. Finally, light enveloped her.

The damp, musty smell of the tunnel was gone, replaced by the fresh scent of trees.

Just as she took a deep breath of fresh air, she suddenly felt her shoulder go sore and numb.

She turned her head and saw a twisted hand resting on her shoulder.

Following the hand with her gaze, she saw Zhao Shuang, her mouth split wide in a grotesque smile. "Caught you," Zhao Shuang said.

Keke looked back at her, motionless.

Just as Zhao Shuang slowly moved her hand, intending to grab Keke's neck, she suddenly felt a sharp tug on her scalp.

She mechanically turned her head.

Her hair was gripped by a hand and was being lifted.

Then, Gu Mian's face loomed closer, growing larger in her vision. She saw his lips move, and heard him say, "Caught you."

Meanwhile, Fatty, waiting boredly in Gu Mian's room, noticed the announcement had been updated.

[Announcement (June 25, 19:02)]

[The main character of the instance 'Amnesia' has died in the line of duty. This instance will no longer operate. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause to our players.]

[Compensated Players: Gu Mian, Keke]

Chapter 570 Intermittent Playing Dead in My Hand_1

"Brother Chu!" Fatty exclaimed. "The announcement is out!"

His voice attracted the attention of Xiao Hong, who was hugging a green dog plush toy by the window. Hearing this, Xiao Hong pressed her gloomy face against the glass, her gaze continuously sweeping the dimly lit street outside.

Chu Changge saw it too. He stared at the words "Killed in the line of duty" on the announcement for a while before shifting his gaze down to the compensation list.

There were only two names: Gu Mian and Keke.

Fatty hesitated before asking, "Does this mean... only the Doctor and Miss Keke survived the Amnesia instance?"

When Gu Mian and Keke returned to the real world, they found that it was already dark.

The salesperson behind the glass counter lazily raised his head to glance at the two of them, then quickly lowered his head again, as if afraid of attracting Gu Mian's attention.

The ticket booth was empty. It was the first day the death protection mechanism was disabled, and not many people were rushing into an instance.

Keke moved her foot. She had sprained it in the instance before, and it had throbbed with pain every time she moved it. Now, however, she felt nothing. All injuries sustained in an instance were repaired upon returning to the real world.

Only death was irreversible. In fact, she had almost died. The moment she ran out of the cave, Zhao Shuang had grabbed her.

But Zhao Shuang apparently hadn't expected Gu Mian to be at the cave entrance as well.

Keke recalled the last scene she saw before being teleported out of the instance—

Gu Mian grabbed Zhao Shuang by the hair, lifting the female ghost—whose face was contorted and expression terrifying—like a rabbit. He even uttered a line that ghosts often had on their lips.

Then he did what psychopaths in horror movies often do.

He held up the Saw and cut the woman in half at the waist.

Just like Cang Yue had been cut in half.

At that moment, Keke was not only overjoyed at her narrow escape from death but also terrified.

She feared Gu Mian at that moment, terrified by the coldness, horror, and madness that had erupted from him.

As Keke thought about this, she looked up at the person beside her.

Gu Mian was as kind and friendly as usual. He was looking down at her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Keke immediately shook her head. "It's late now, let's head back."

The two of them left the ticket booth under the friendly gaze of the ticket seller.

The weather at the end of June wasn't too hot. As they stepped out the door, a breeze carrying the scent of leaves wafted over them. The long-unattended grass by the roadside had grown to their ankles and swayed in the wind.

The sun had completely set beyond the horizon; only its afterglow still lingered on the land, stretching their shadows out long.

The road was deserted. The two of them wandered slowly down the street, one in front and one behind.

Keke followed behind Gu Mian, looking up at his back.

"Gu Mian." Gu Mian, walking ahead, suddenly heard Keke call him from behind.

"What's wrong?" He turned around.

Keke looked at Gu Mian and suddenly asked a strange question: "Have you ever liked someone? Or loved someone—like parents, siblings, or a romantic partner?"

This touched upon a blind spot in Gu Mian's knowledge.

He pondered for a moment and realized he had none of the things Keke mentioned.

Gu Mian answered truthfully, "I don't think so. Why?"

"Nothing," Keke pulled her jacket tighter around herself and continued walking into the breeze. "Just curious."

In the final moments of the Amnesia instance, Gu Mian's expression and the look in his eyes had resembled those of someone utterly devoid of humanity, giving her an immense sense of being threatened.

She couldn't help but wonder if the man before her possessed any human emotions at all.

But that was only for that moment.

After the instance collapsed and she saw Gu Mian again, he was back to his usual self, speaking gently and making her feel safe.

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian, who was walking in front, also began to ask, "I just saw the announcement. It seems the others all died, didn't they?"

They hadn't completed the "survive for thirty-six hours" task in this instance.

It was because Gu Mian had inadvertently cut Zhao Shuang in two, causing the instance to stop running and kicking out all remaining players.

The compensation list only had their two names; the fate of the others was self-evident.

Keke nodded. "Yes. I was suddenly pulled into that tunnel and saw Cang Yue's and Xia Jianren's corpses one after the other... They both died horribly."

"They were closest to Zhao Shuang when she regained her memory, so naturally, they bore the brunt of it."

Keke continued, "After I got in, I found Wang Chuan had also been dragged in by the ghost. The two of us tried to escape together, but we initially chose the wrong direction. We ran towards the wider end, not expecting it to be a dead end.

"At the very end was a wall. Beneath it lay a decomposing body—it was Zhao Shuang. When I ran there and looked back, I saw her standing behind me. Wang Chuan was nowhere to be seen; I knew he was dead."

Gu Mian asked, "How did you escape?"

Being cornered by a ghost against a wall... it looked like a dead end.

Keke replied, "Actually, during the college entrance exam event, I obtained a special item called 'Money Can Make Ghosts Grind.'"

Gu Mian stroked his chin. That's a very logical special item.

"When you use that item, your Game Coins are instantly depleted. This money compels nearby spiritual entities to involuntarily grind. The duration they grind is proportional to the Game Coins you spend."

Gu Mian pondered.

That's a great item.

If I save up enough Game Coins in the future and use this special item, I might be able to make a ghost grind for the entire duration of an instance.

Seeming to recognize Gu Mian's thoughts, Keke glanced at him. "You probably don't need something like this."

This special item was extremely rare, one that could hold back ghosts.

Of course, the cost was high.

Having your Game Coins wiped out meant it would be even harder to survive in the real world. Moreover, a few hundred Game Coins could only stall a ghost for a mere tens of seconds.

Ordinary players would need to clear several instances to save up a few hundred Game Coins.

Unless it was absolutely necessary, Keke would never use this item.

She continued, "At that time, I was cornered and had no choice but to use it. That bought me just enough time to turn around, run, and escape the tunnel... I saw Wang Chuan's corpse on the way."

Truthfully, she'd had almost no hope of surviving back then.

She knew that even if she ran out of the tunnel, into the sunlight, into the woods, she still couldn't outrun the ghost.

But her survival instinct drove her to run desperately, leading her to Gu Mian.

Keke, her thoughts still on this, looked at Gu Mian. "Had you just arrived at the cave entrance then?"

"Indeed," Gu Mian said, walking forward. "After you disappeared, I headed in the direction Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang had left. I followed a ditch for quite a while and then spotted a conspicuous cave—and half a body."

It was Cang Yue's lower half. Xia Jianren had hastily discarded that half of her at the cave entrance.

"Actually, when you ran out, I was at the cave entrance, pondering a problem..."

"What problem?" Keke looked at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian patted his guitar case. "This case is a bit big. I saw the cave entrance was quite narrow and was wondering what position to use to get it inside. I was still thinking about it when you rushed out."

And, of course, Zhao Shuang, whom Keke had led out with her.

Now Gu Mian no longer had to consider how to get the guitar case in; he could just resolve the instance with a single cut.

Keke fell silent. The contrast was a bit much—while she had been desperately fleeing for her life, Gu Mian had been pondering how to get his guitar case into the cave. A strange expression came over her face.

Keke composed herself. "Regarding the Amnesia instance, based on the clues we found, I'm guessing Zhao Shuang had long since discovered her boyfriend was involved with Jiang Mei. She probably also found out that many people knew about it behind her back."

"The chat history we saw on Xia Jianren's phone at the beginning was probably about this."

"Then, filled with resentment, she argued with others on the bus. I guess in her extreme anger, she might have grabbed the steering wheel," Keke continued. "As a result, the bus plunged off the mountain, and more than half the people on board, including Zhao Shuang, died instantly."

"But Zhao Shuang's resentment was far from settled. She transformed into an Evil Ghost and hunted down the other survivors. Finally, she hid her own corpse along with the survivors, then returned to the mountainside and lost her memories."

The instance had laid a massive trap, waiting for players to step into it.

"I also don't think those dozens of people who died long ago were benevolent towards us. The ghost led Wang Chuan to Jiang Mei's room, allowing him to discover the crucial clue that could awaken Zhao Shuang's memories. I suspect that group of long-dead people, besides holding resentment towards Zhao Shuang, also wanted to kill us. However, they were probably restricted by something and couldn't harm players," Keke mused.

Gu Mian knew this was a restriction Earth placed on instances.

The day ghosts in instances could kill indiscriminately, without any restrictions, would surely be the day Earth had lost its battle against the Low-Dimensional World.

As they discussed this, they arrived downstairs from the hotel.

Because Fatty constantly protested that the inn's name was unlucky, Liu Ruyan had taken down the wooden "Passing Inn" sign.

Later, Fatty chopped up the sign, saying he was saving it for firewood in the winter.

The first to see Gu Mian was Xiao Hong, who was pressed against the glass.

Gu Mian was still walking forward when he heard a BUMP from above.

Looking up, he saw Xiao Hong knock the window open with her head and crawl out of the room, hair disheveled. She climbed vertically down the building's outer wall but slipped when she reached the second floor, crashing directly onto the ground.

She landed face-first. Xiao Hong paid it no mind. She quickly pulled her face from the ground, rushed excitedly to Gu Mian, and then latched onto him.

She even craned her head, trying to gnaw on Gu Mian's skull.