

Collapse 661

Chapter 661 The Plump Knight Isn't Afraid of Difficulties_1

Left with no option, the group decided to proceed to their next destination in the middle of the night.

"Next, we're heading to the suspect Yuan Haotian's house. I remember it's Apartment 1302, Unit 2, Building 13, Dayang Garden. It's about five kilometers from here. Are we excited?" Gu Mian, holding a map, stood under a faint street lamp with his arms spread wide, looking just like a tour guide.

Actually, they didn't need to go. The surveillance clearly showed that Yuan Haotian was the murderer. They could go directly to court for trial now.

Keke didn't understand why Gu Mian would make this redundant move. She guessed Gu Mian was perhaps worried about Chu Changge, or maybe he felt there were still suspicious points about the case. She didn't question Gu Mian's decision and just followed quietly.

When Gu Mian and his group left Li Shu's house, it was already past midnight, and there were few cars on the street. Even if there were, they had no money left. The money for their previous taxi rides had all been squeezed out of Coach Che. He was now completely cleaned out, unable to shake a single coin loose even from his underwear. So, the group had to walk to Dayang Garden in the dead of night.

Bai Lu clung to the group tightly; she was utterly terrified after that episode. Since she started playing this global game, she had rarely confronted ghosts directly. In previous instances, encountering a ghost basically meant death. Just now, when she saw Cao Deren and Zhang Shengli blocking the bedroom door, she really thought she was done for. Fortunately, there was some powerful individual among her teammates who had managed to drive the two ghosts away using an NPC.

But what about next time? She didn't think her teammates would be able to drive away the ghosts every time. They should hurry up with the verdict so they could leave this instance. Thinking of this, Bai Lu subtly inched closer to Coach Che.

Feeling slightly safer, Bai Lu finally spoke under the dim light, "We're so unlucky! We ran into a ghost less than half a day in. This is the fastest I've ever encountered one."

Hearing the word "unlucky," Gu Mian reached out and adjusted the hem of his clothes slightly.

Bai Lu then got to what was bothering her: "After Cao Deren and Zhang Shengli turned into ghosts, they'll kill indiscriminately, right? We're clearly here helping with their case, yet they want to kill us..."

Gu Mian classified the ghosts he had encountered into two categories. The first kind were those who retained their consciousness. Some of these would only seek revenge on their enemies and wouldn't harm others. Some even had a conscience and would help living people in danger, like those few driver ghosts in the taxi. Others killed based on their mood—if they were in a bad mood, they'd kill a few; if their mood was good, nothing would happen. The other kind were ruthless ghosts, commonly known as Evil Ghosts. They killed anyone they saw, regardless of who they were, having completely lost their minds.

But Cao Deren and Zhang Shengli didn't seem like the second type of ghost. They hadn't torn Coach Che apart when he tried to push them. Or could it be that NPCs in the instance have a special privilege of not being attacked by ghosts?

While pondering, Gu Mian continued to walk on the dimly lit road. Several moths fluttered their wings around the street lamp. The leaves of the cedar trees in the green belt swayed gently in the wind, casting flickering shadows of trees and fluttering moths on the ground.

"And that pumpkin accessory shop..." Bai Lu continued from behind, "Maybe we could find some clues there as well."

Gu Mian glanced at the map in his hand. The Pumpkin Accessory Shop was near Dayang Garden, so they could conveniently stop by after leaving Yuan Haotian's house.

"Actually, we don't need to go... The surveillance footage clearly shows that Yuan Haotian killed the two victims. We could just make the judgment now," Bai Lu said hesitantly, unsure of herself. She felt this would make the instance too simple, and she was afraid it might be a trap set by the instance. But the video was clear, unless the instance had created a fake surveillance video to confuse them.

Keke also thought of this and spoke softly, "I remember that the surveillance camera at the entrance to Li Shu's home looked very new, as if it had been installed not long ago." She had mentioned this to Gu Mian in the corridor before. Also, the position of the camera was very strange, aimed directly at the door. She had never seen anyone install a camera in such a position.

"Just to be safe, let's go to Yuan Haotian's house first," Gu Mian waved his hand at the others. He didn't have the keys to Yuan Haotian's house, so they would have to break in.

At this point, Gu Mian noticed Chu Changge had sent a message in Xiao Qiao's group chat.

[Chu Changge]: Gu Mian, could you ask Coach Che how many groups of players entered this instance in the previous few runs?

Upon seeing Chu Changge's message, Gu Mian glanced at Bai Lu, then pulled Coach Che, who was beside her, over.

Bai Lu wanted to follow, but Keke grabbed her and said, "Sis, I'm so scared. Can you stay with me, please?"

Why are you clinging to me instead of your precious doctor! Bai Lu fumed internally.

When Gu Mian pulled him, Coach Che immediately clutched his chest protectively, afraid that Gu Mian would tear his clothes off in a search for money.

Gu Mian looked at Coach Che, who was clutching his chest, and asked, "I'm asking you: the last time players entered this instance, how many were there, and how many groups were they split into?"

Seeing Gu Mian was only asking an irrelevant question, Coach Che relaxed, replying, "Eight people, two groups."

"And the time before that?"

"Twenty-four people, six groups."

"What about the time before that?"

After some reflection, Coach Che replied, "Four people, one group."

"Okay, you're dismissed." After getting his answer, Gu Mian tossed Coach Che aside.

Then, he started typing in the chat box.

[Gu Mian (Chin looks so good)]: The cases of our three groups are not related.

Wait a second? Gu Mian stared at the suffix after his nickname. What is this? Who added it?

This was Xiao Qiao's group. Besides the members themselves, only the group owner could change nicknames. The answer was obvious.

Gu Mian silently stared at the suffix after his nickname. Xiao Qiao really has a deep obsession with chins.

A few seconds later, he saw Chu Changge's reply.

[Chu Changge]: Okay.

Then, Fatty, who was spectating, also chimed in.

[Fatty Knight unafraid of challenges]: Doctor, Brother Chu, what are you two talking about? You're being so cryptic, I don't understand a thing!

Gu Mian looked at the eight characters of "Fatty Knight unafraid of challenges," deep in thought. He definitely changed that himself.

Meanwhile, Chu Changge on the other end had closed the group chat. He looked at another group of judges led by Wang Youcai in front of him and said, "Our groups' cases have no relation to each other."

Yes, the two groups had happened to meet at the school. Several victims from Wang Youcai's group were high school students at this school, and his group was there to investigate information about these victims. The suspect in Chu Changge's group used to attend this school, so Chu Changge was there to investigate the suspect's past.

After the two groups bumped into each other, Wang Youcai, recalling his previous encounter with Gu Mian's group, voiced a doubt, "I also bumped into another group at a hospital earlier. Could it be that our groups' cases are connected in some way?"

This led to the conversation between Chu Changge and Gu Mian in the group chat.

As for why Chu Changge didn't have Gu Mian directly ask Coach Che if the cases were connected, it was primarily because Coach Che might not know the answer. Secondly, if asked directly, Coach Che might lie. Only by asking a seemingly irrelevant question could they get an unguarded answer from Coach Che.

Chu Changge planned to analyze this question based on the number of players and groups in previous instances. If the instance was designed for the cases of multiple player groups to be connected, then the number of players entering each time would likely be between eight and sixteen, forming two to four groups. It would be extremely difficult to set up more than four cases that seemed unrelated on the surface but were intricately linked. Besides, players could easily spot the connections. However, if there was an instance with only one group of players, it would mean the premise—that the instance was designed for the cases of multiple player groups to be connected—was false.

Chu Changge originally intended to analyze this himself, but Gu Mian had directly seen through his intentions and provided the answer.

Wang Youcai looked at Chu Changge curiously, "So sure of that? Who told you?"

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses without answering.

Seeing that the other party remained silent, Wang Youcai decided not to press further.

He glanced at the moon in the sky, "It's getting late. We'll look for clues around the school first. Where are you guys headed?"

Chapter 662 Feeling Lost after Looking Around_1

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "We're heading to the office to look for the files on our case suspect."

"I see..." Wang Youcai nodded. "We're going to the victims' classrooms to see if we can find any clues."

Notably, neither of their groups had entered the school openly through the main gate. This high school enforced strict access control; only teachers and day students with passes could enter. These few, all looking like adults from outside the school, had no choice but to sneak over the fence in the dead of night.

That was how Chu Changge had gotten in as well.

Yan Shuang Fei was stunned to see the usually stern, bespectacled Chu Changge hoist his leg to climb the school fence. Chu Changge, clearly not adept at such activities, twisted his ankle and stumbled slightly upon landing but promptly pushed up his glasses as if nothing had occurred.

"We don't have keys to the classrooms, so we plan to climb in through the hallway windows," Wang Youcai said, glancing at the ankle Chu Changge had just twisted. "The office probably doesn't have windows you can climb through, does it?"

Chu Changge took a step back. "You don't need to concern yourself with that."

With that, he turned and left.

Yan Shuang Fei and Li Yuan hurriedly bid farewell to Wang Youcai and his teammate, Screw-head, then rushed to catch up with their own team.

The school was vast, and the academic buildings looked identical, making it easy for newcomers to get lost. Moreover, night had fallen, and darkness enveloped the entire school, obscuring anything in the distance.

But Chu Changge had an excellent sense of direction. He took hardly any wrong turns, leading his three teammates directly to the foot of the building they were looking for.

Watching Chu Changge's back, Yan Shuang Fei couldn't help but mutter to Li Yuan, "I get the feeling our Judge doesn't like us much, does he? He hasn't looked back once to see if we've gotten lost."

Li Yuan felt the same. Their Judge seemed indifferent to them, as if they were dispensable.

Chu Chu, who had quickly become acquainted with the two, overheard their grumbling and chimed in, "Our Judge is the most aloof, isn't he? Judge Wang Youcai, whom we met earlier, seemed very responsible and considerate of his teammates."

"And what about the Judge from Bai Lu's team we met? He looked like he was no pushover. Did you see his nickname? It was green! Do you think he paid real money for that?"

At that moment, Chu Changge, walking ahead, suddenly glanced back at them. The trio immediately fell silent.

「Meanwhile」

Wang Youcai and his three teammates arrived at their destination: the academic building where the victims had attended classes.

They looked up. The three large red characters for "Diligent Learning Building" were affixed to the building's exterior, likely chosen by the school to be conspicuous. However, the vivid red font appeared somewhat eerie in the night, like fresh blood seeping from the building.

Twist off your head stared at the ominous red characters, his heart heavy with hesitation. "This is an instance where death is real," he muttered. "Are we seriously going into this deserted academic building in the dead of night?"

Wang Youcai said solemnly, "I'm afraid we wouldn't even be able to get in during the day." He was right. The four of them clearly looked like adults from outside the school. If they tried to enter during the day, they'd likely be discovered by teachers and promptly kicked out. Each building only housed a few classes, and most teachers knew one another, so posing as one was impossible.

Besides, they needed to search the victims' desks in the classrooms. During the day, classrooms were usually occupied. High school PE classes were usually only once a week and often canceled anyway, so they couldn't hope to sneak in while students were supposedly in PE.

Grass Aguirre also found the empty academic building rather creepy. "You know, most old ghost stories are set in schools. Things like a woman washing her face in the girls' restroom, the thirteen steps, moving statues... all classic school ghost stories."

Twist off your head hunched his shoulders, trying to reassure himself. "But there haven't been many new school ghost stories these days, have there?"

Grass Vivi glanced at him. "That's because writing about haunted schools nowadays can easily get your book banned."

"Haha, that does seem to be the case," Screw-head said, scratching his head. "I remember a while back, to avoid getting books banned, authors couldn't even mention 'ghosts.' They all became 'specters'... There are quite a few ghosts in this global game. It'd be great if they could ban this game too."

After some idle chatter, the group felt a little braver and stepped into the academic building together.

"The deceased victims were students from Senior Year Class 5," Wang Youcai said as he started up the stairs. "Class 5 is on the top floor. Keep quiet on the stairs to avoid any accidents."

They huddled together, tiptoeing up the steps. Though they were extremely careful, in the dead silence of the night, any sound was infinitely amplified. The stairwell echoed with their four sets of footsteps and soft breaths.

Screw-head, at the rear of the group, kept glancing back into the darkness, terrified that something might be following them. The middle-aged Wang Youcai, leading the way, was equally uneasy. Every time they reached a staircase landing, he felt an Evil Ghost might be lurking above, waiting for them.

They finally reached the fourth floor without incident, though not without some anxiety. No strange ghosts had jumped out at them. Senior Year Class 5 was directly opposite the staircase landing; they spotted their target classroom as soon as they arrived.

An old classroom door blocked their way. A large, sturdy lock was securely fastened, making it difficult to break open by force.

Wang Youcai looked down the corridor. He could see to the end of the dark corridor at a glance. This floor housed five classrooms, Class 1 through Class 5. Class 5 was at their end, while Class 1 was at the far end.

The restroom was next to the staircase landing, its door wide open. From the corridor, they could see a large mirror inside. As players, they were sensitive to mirrors; Wang Youcai quickly averted his gaze, not daring to look longer.

The classroom door was locked. Fortunately, there was a window set high in the classroom's corridor wall. Though high, it was climbable. They looked up at the rectangular window. It was somewhat small but definitely large enough for a person to squeeze through. Behind it lay the pitch-black classroom. The corridor still had some faint light, but the classroom seemed utterly devoid of it. The students had probably drawn the curtains before leaving their evening self-study session, preventing any outside light from entering.

"Do we... all have to go in?" Screw-head asked, looking at the dark window and hesitating. The door was locked from the outside. They would have to use the window to get in and out. If there was danger inside, their only escape route would be to slowly climb back out the window, a difficult proposition.

"Two of us can go, or even just one," Wang Youcai said, having also considered this. "The fewer people inside, the less chance of blocking the window during an escape if there's danger." After a moment's thought, he asked, "I'm going in. Anyone else?"

Grass Vivi said with a grave expression, "You're the Judge. If something happens to you in there, our entire team is finished. So, I'll go. I'm slimmer; it'll be easier for me to get through the window."

Wang Youcai frowned, considered for a few seconds, then nodded hesitantly. "Alright, be careful then."

Just then, Screw-head, standing beside them, also raised his hand. "I'll go too. Two people searching will be faster."

"Okay," Wang Youcai said, looking at the two of them. He then took out two bundles of rope. "Tie these around your waists. We'll hold the other end out here. If you encounter danger, we'll pull the ropes. It should make escaping through the window a bit smoother."

Vivi and Screw-head took the ropes and secured them around their waists.

Since there was nothing in the corridor to use as a foothold, Vivi climbed onto Wang Youcai's shoulders to reach the window. Nearby, Ye Qianqian watched with trepidation, repeatedly calling out, "Be careful!"

After Ye Weiwei jumped into the classroom, Screw-head also climbed onto Wang Youcai's shoulders and squeezed through the narrow window.

Just as the two of them landed inside the classroom, the locked classroom door suddenly made a loud BANG.

The pair, having just found their footing, immediately ducked into a corner, not daring to move.

Outside, Wang Youcai and Ye Qianqian were also startled by the sound. They quickly scanned their surroundings and relaxed slightly when they saw nothing unusual.

"That was just the wind, right?" Ye Qianqian whispered.

No sooner had she spoken than the door of Class 2, not far away, rattled as a gust of wind blew through.

Only after confirming there was no danger inside did the pair in the room stand up and begin to feel their way around the dark classroom.

"So... should we turn on the lights?" Screw-head asked, looking at the dark classroom, a sense of unease creeping over him.

Ye Weiwei pondered for half a second. "Better not."

They had to be extremely cautious in the instance; who knew if turning on the light would attract something?

She touched the rope around her waist and moved towards the lectern at the front of the classroom, where the class seating chart should be posted.

Chapter 663 Yellow Book_1

"Li Yi"

"Shu Jianmin"

"Qi Haixuan"

These were the names of the three victims who had died on the scene. And "Zheng Dejun," "Li Guoxin," "Deng Xiaofang," and "Zhao Linan" were the four students who had luckily escaped.

Ye Weiwei held a dimly glowing glow stick, swiftly scanning the seating chart on the podium for these names. Certain dark moments in a horror instance weren't suitable for flashlights. The intense light might attract other things, so she had bought several glow sticks at the supermarket for small-scale illumination.

Screw-head, on the other hand, didn't immediately start searching the desks. He quietly picked up a few chairs and stacked them on the desk near the window, forming a staircase-like structure. This would make climbing out the window later much more convenient. He stood on the desk and passed a stool to

Wang Youcai and Ye Qianqian outside. It wasn't to offer them a place to sit and rest, but to allow them to stand on the stools and observe the situation inside the classroom.

Ye Qianqian stood on the stool, her head just above the window. She had a clear view of the classroom's interior. She carefully observed every corner of the room. When the two people inside were searching for evidence, they might inadvertently overlook their surroundings. If a ghost suddenly appeared from a concealed corner, they would likely fail to notice it immediately. It was Ye Qianqian's duty to observe the entire classroom and issue a warning if danger approached.

Wang Youcai stood beside Ye Qianqian, attentively watching the corridor and the restroom behind him. Danger could come from anywhere within the instance. Although the classroom seemed very dangerous, they couldn't relax their guard in the corridor either.

Ye Weiwei quickly found the names of these seven individuals. Their seats were almost all together. This wasn't surprising, as these students were from the same dormitory. That night, their dormitory group had gone out for dinner together and unexpectedly encountered the drunk suspect, Liu Ben. Three of them were fatally stabbed on the spot.

When assigning dormitories, the class teacher had likely considered academic performance. A seating chart on the podium showed that these students were all poor performers, seated in the last few rows at the back.

Without any delay, Ye Weiwei strode towards the back rows. When Screw-head saw Ye Weiwei heading to the back of the classroom, he also followed her to the last couple of rows. The textbooks on the back desks were very clean. Thankfully, the students had written their names in them. Ye Weiwei easily found the desks of the seven individuals by the names in their books.

She first approached the desk of the deceased Li Yi and began her search carefully. Screw-head thoroughly inspected a nearby desk, which belonged to Zhao Linan, one of the survivors.

Searching for clues in the dark was quite straining on the eyes, and Screw-head didn't dare turn on his flashlight. He had no choice but to ask Ye Weiwei for a glow stick. Each of them in the classroom held a glow stick, a stark mismatch with the eerie surroundings.

With the glow stick in her hand, Ye Weiwei carefully searched Li Yi's desktop but could find hardly any clues. Perhaps to obstruct the teacher's view from the podium, he had piled all his books on his desk, forming a high stack. Not wanting to miss any clues, Ye Weiwei searched methodically through each book. Yet, after going through more than half of them, she hadn't found even a bookmark. Most of the books were empty, without a single highlighted line.

Is this the world of a slacker? she wondered, putting down the book. Before the global game began, Ye Weiwei had been a top student, her books filled with annotations, notes practically spilling off the pages. Li Yi's textbooks now showed her just how different people could be.

Screw-head, beside her, was in a similar predicament. He worked faster and had already gone through all the books on the desk but found no clues. Holding a glow stick in one hand, he rubbed his eyes with the other, then squatted down to inspect the dark desk compartment. The desk compartment was stuffed with balled-up tissues. These probably just contain snot, no clues here, Screw-head thought, looking at the mess.

Fortunately, besides the tissues, there was something else in the compartment. Suppressing his disgust, he pulled out a notebook from beneath the tissues. It was a homework book. With his index finger and thumb, Screw-head pinched a corner of the cover and flipped it open. Surprisingly, this homework book was filled with writing, not at all like a slacker's. Screw-head glanced at the name on the cover again, puzzled. Yes, it's definitely Zhao Linan's homework book, he confirmed.

Meanwhile, Ye Weiwei had also found a homework book. The one in her hand was also full, a stark contrast to the empty textbooks. She leaned towards Screw-head, glanced at the homework book in his hand, and concluded, "Copied. They're identical."

Alright.

Screw-head put down the notebook and moved to a desk on Ye Weiwei's other side to continue searching. Ye Weiwei then started checking the compartment of Li Yi's desk. She half-knelt before the desk, frowning at the storybooks, comics, and pornographic magazines filling the desk compartment.

Suddenly, the corner of a notebook caught her eye. Ye Weiwei reached out, grabbed the corner of the notebook, and pulled it out from between the pornographic magazines. This was also a homework book. She looked at the name on its cover: "Liu Baoma."

An unfamiliar name, she thought.

Just then, Screw-head, searching a desk behind her, suddenly spoke up, "Hey, Ye Weiwei, isn't something odd? High school dorms usually have eight people, right? Theirs only has seven. Were there always just seven, or..."

But before he could finish, Ye Weiwei heard Ye Qianqian gasp from near the window. Almost instantly, Ye Weiwei dropped the homework book and sprinted towards the window. Then, Ye Qianqian's voice erupted in the dark classroom, "Run! Run quickly!"

Ye Weiwei was explosive and close to the window. With Wang Youcai in the hallway also pulling hard on the rope, she scrambled onto the stool-ladder and through the window just as Ye Qianqian finished shouting.

Screw-head, his words cut off, froze for a split second before realizing the danger and bolting towards the window. But he was a beat too slow. He found that no matter how he lifted his feet, he couldn't get any closer to the window, as if something were pulling him back. He clung to his glow stick and looked back stiffly. He saw a bloodless hand shoot out from a desk compartment, grabbing the hem of his shirt.

He opened his mouth to scream, but before any sound escaped, the hand yanked violently. He was dragged entirely into the desk compartment, and the classroom fell silent once more.

Ye Qianqian clapped her hands tightly over her mouth, staring at the now-empty classroom.

Ye Weiwei leaned against the wall, gasping for breath, cold sweat trickling down her forehead. She didn't look into the classroom but saw the snapped rope in Wang Youcai's hands. It was the rope that had been tied around Screw-head's waist, now broken. When Wang Youcai retrieved the rope, he found the broken end stained with blood.

He stared at the rope in his hands for two silent seconds, then said, "Let's go. Quickly."

While Wang Youcai's group had lost a member, Gu Mian and the others arrived at Dayang Garden, Yuan Haotian's residence.

Looking at the gray residential buildings in the complex, Gu Mian frowned slightly.

Bai Lu wiped sweat from her forehead. "This is awful. Tonight, we first went to the victim's house and encountered a ghost. Now we have to go to the suspect's house. Yuan Haotian's home won't have a ghost too, will it?"

"Very possible," Gu Mian said, looking at her. "Didn't Li Shu say Yuan Haotian's entire family died? We might get a warm welcome from them the moment we open the door."

Bai Lu wiped her sweat again. "That's the last thing we need..."

Without further delay, Gu Mian stepped into the complex. The guard in the security booth had presumably gone home to sleep, as the booth was empty. Lights were still on in a few apartments; perhaps angry parents were dealing with children who hadn't finished their homework.

Gu Mian quickly found Building Number 13. They stood at the entrance of the second unit. Fortunately, the entrance door to this unit was broken, sparing it from being forced open by Gu Mian.

Bai Lu really didn't want to take the elevator; in previous horror instances, she always avoided them. Even if their destination was the twentieth floor, she would have preferred to walk. But her teammates in this instance didn't seem to share her aversion to elevators. They didn't seem afraid of encountering ghosts in the elevator; it was as if they feared something else entirely.

"I just hope this elevator doesn't plummet before it reaches the thirteenth floor," Bai Lu heard their 'judge' say.

Chapter 664 Feeling Lost in the Vehicle after Looking Around_1

No ghosts appeared in the elevator, nor did any other incidents occur. It just swayed a few times as they rode it, as if it were long overdue for maintenance.

Gu Mian and his group safely reached the thirteenth floor.

As Bai Lu stepped out of the elevator, she lightly stamped her foot, triggering the sound-activated lights in the hallway.

Gu Mian scanned his surroundings under the dim orange glow.

Yuan Haotian's apartment was in a building with two units per floor. The other unit on this floor appeared unsold, its door plastered with small advertisements.

Gu Mian looked out through a corridor window and saw several unfinished, abandoned buildings.

These buildings looked like they had been deserted for a long time, judging by the overgrown weeds on the ground beneath them.

"The developer skipped town, didn't they?" Keke also came to the window, looking at the unfinished buildings in the distance. "My family used to live in a complex like this. The developer bailed halfway through construction, leaving no property management and no security. Residents had to do everything themselves."

No wonder the guardhouse was empty and even the access control system was broken.

Behind them, Bai Lu stood before Yuan Haotian's door, hesitating.

"We had keys for Li Shu's place, so we could get in, but what about Yuan Haotian's?" She looked rather helpless as she studied the sturdy apartment door.

Before coming here, she had imagined Yuan Haotian's door, damaged from a fire, would be so decrepit that a simple hammer blow could break the lock.

But that wasn't the case.

Yuan Haotian seemed to have a strong awareness of burglars; his door was far more robust than most.

Bai Lu glanced at the advertisements on the other door. "Should we call a locksmith...?"

She was halfway through her sentence when she heard the sound of a zipper from behind her.

Bai Lu abruptly fell silent.

She suddenly remembered something: the NPC known as Coach Che had only sprung up from the bed to help them drive off two ghosts after the sound of a zipper.

And after those two ghosts were driven off, this doctor-like Judge had zipped up his guitar case.

As she recalled these recent events, her imagination began to run wild.

Could the guitar in the Doctor's bag be a special item? Would any NPC who saw it feel compelled to help him? Does this game really have such ridiculously powerful special items? An item like that would be Epic level!

Lost in thought, Bai Lu turned around, eager to witness the glory of such an Epic level special item.

When she turned, she indeed saw the brilliant radiance she had imagined—a huge chainsaw gleamed under the sound-activated light, the guitar case tossed carelessly aside.

Coach Che, clad in his suit, seemed stunned by the Epic level special item. He recoiled against the wall, clutching his chest, his face contorted in pain.

A chainsaw... in the guitar case?

Before Bai Lu could recover from her shock, she saw Gu Mian, in his white lab coat, advancing on the seemingly indestructible door with the chainsaw.

Then, with a RRRIP—

The sturdy door Yuan Haotian had so carefully installed split open.

Bai Lu: "..."

"Alright," Gu Mian said, kicking the cracked door fully open. "We can go in."

Bai Lu silently took a step back, a serene expression on her face.

Keke and Xie Bi'an, unfazed, followed Gu Mian into the room. Coach Che, who had been leaning against the wall, his heart still pounding, also staggered in after them.

CLICK.

Gu Mian casually flipped the light switch by the door.

The overhead lightbulb flickered, casting a dim glow.

Only then could they clearly see the room's interior.

It was a... very shabbily kept room.

The apartment had clearly suffered a fire. Parts of the walls showed signs of demolition and reconstruction, but the work was unfinished.

The whole place had a rather war-torn, dilapidated look.

The dilapidated room contained little furniture; there wasn't even a sofa.

A few mismatched chairs were scattered around the living room. Near the balcony stood a small, knee-high round table. Beside it was a small, old-looking thermos.

On the table rested a chipped bowl, and next to it, a pair of chopsticks of different lengths.

Gu Mian stepped closer to examine the bowl's contents.

"Instant noodles?" Keke also approached the table. "No, doesn't look like it..."

"Plain noodles soaked in boiling water," Gu Mian said, staring at the bowl's contents.

They were the kind of plain noodles sold in bulk containers, likely what Yuan Haotian ate because he didn't have a pot to cook with.

Xie Bi'an also came forward, his gaze fixed on the bowl and chopsticks on the table, his thoughts unreadable.

"How miserable," Bai Lu remarked, surveying the surroundings. "Living in a place like this, eating plain noodles soaked in boiling water."

Gu Mian then turned his gaze towards the bedroom.

The bedroom door was long gone, leaving only an empty doorframe as a stark reminder that a door had once been there.

A bed—no, a mattress lay on the bedroom floor. This appeared to be where Yuan Haotian usually slept.

The quilt on it, however, was neatly folded.

Gu Mian took a couple of steps to the mattress and reached under the quilt.

Sure enough, his hand touched something.

He pulled out what was hidden under the quilt: a photograph—a family portrait.

The photo was well-preserved, without a single crease.

It showed Yuan Haotian's family of four.

The photograph had been taken at an amusement park, with a gigantic Ferris Wheel in the background.

The Yuan Haotian in the picture looked much as he did now, making a V-sign at the camera. His sister, around seventeen or eighteen years old, stood quietly beside him, looking at the camera with a hint of shyness.

Behind them stood their parents, smiling gently.

Everything looked so wonderful.

Except for the butterfly hairpin in his sister's hair.

"This is..." Bai Lu's pupils constricted as she looked at the photo. She then took out the pink hairpin she had been carrying in her pocket.

She placed the hairpin next to the photo and compared them carefully.

They were identical.

Only, the hairpin in the photo didn't look as new as the one in her hand.

"What's going on?" Bai Lu frowned. "Cao Deren had a hairpin identical to Yuan Haotian's sister's, but this isn't her sister's hairpin—it's just exactly the same."

Did Yuan Haotian kill because of this hairpin? Was he triggered on Wei Mountain when he found Cao Deren had a hairpin identical to his deceased sister's? No, that doesn't add up. This hairpin was bought just a few days before the incident; the timing doesn't match their trip to Wei Mountain.

Bai Lu frowned deeply. She felt she was onto something but couldn't quite grasp the elusive thread of connection in her mind.

"There's an even bigger coincidence," Gu Mian, who had been standing to one side, suddenly said.

Bai Lu then saw him take another photograph from his lab coat pocket.

She looked down and recognized it as the one from Li Shu's computer desk.

"What about this photo?" Bai Lu asked, puzzled.

"Look at the background."

Hearing this, Bai Lu carefully examined the gray building in the background of Li Shu's photo. The more she looked, the more familiar its facade seemed.

Then, a realization struck her, and her breath hitched. "Isn't this... the building we're in right now?"

Chapter 665 The Word of Pei Gong's Left Sima, Cao Wushang_1

Looking at the cheerful Li Shu in the photo, Bai Lu felt a chill.

The dim light overhead shone on the photo, making the familiar smile seem somewhat sinister.

Gu Mian pointed with a finger to the bottom right corner. "Look at the date it was taken."

Bai Lu looked where Gu Mian was pointing.

The photo was taken on June 1st of this year, a few days before the incident.

She looked at the date in the bottom right corner, her face full of confusion. "When Li Shu took this photo, hadn't Yuan Haotian's family already died?"

"That's right," Gu Mian nodded.

Upon seeing that Cao Deren and his sister had the same hairpin, Bai Lu had doubted if Li Shu and the others were involved in the arson at Yuan Haotian's home. But that hairpin was new and not the same one Yuan Haotian's sister had worn.

Although Li Shu had taken photos downstairs from Yuan Haotian's apartment building, those were also taken *after* the fire.

These coincidences couldn't prove that Li Shu and the other two were connected to the arson case.

"Such a coincidence?" Bai Lu glanced again at Li Shu's smile in the photo. That smile made her shudder, and she quickly averted her gaze, not daring to look any longer.

Gu Mian didn't have much of a reaction. "Li Shu told us that after returning from Wei Mountain, Yuan Haotian kept trying to create chance encounters with them. But that's not what I see."

Bai Lu looked up at Gu Mian.

"From my perspective, it was Li Shu and his two companions who were creating these 'coincidences.'

"Cao Deren bought a hairpin similar to Yuan Haotian's sister's, and Li Shu took pictures outside Yuan Haotian's burned-down house. These are all coincidences.

"There may be more coincidences we haven't discovered. I guess Yuan Haotian must have discovered some of these coincidences when he went to Wei Mountain, which is why he started stalking them so frantically."

"So many coincidences do seem intentional. But why would Li Shu and the others do this?" Bai Lu thought hard. "Are they psychopaths? Did they decide to torment him like this after learning his whole family had died?"

"You're overlooking one thing," Gu Mian said, looking down at Bai Lu. "If they could manufacture so many coincidences to drive Yuan Haotian mad, they must know Yuan Haotian very well."

"You mean..." Bai Lu was startled. "Li Shu and the others knew Yuan Haotian a long time ago? Before that party? Even before the fire at Yuan Haotian's house? Could it be that he's been deceiving us from the very beginning?"

"That's right. You've fallen into his verbal trap."

「Meanwhile, Wang Youcai's team, which had just lost a member, had already run out of the teaching building. They were gasping for air, sitting in a small pavilion next to the building.」

Ye Qianqian's face was alternately flushing and turning pale. Even in the deep darkness of the night, it was clear she looked dreadful. She was the only one who had seen Screw-head being dragged by a ghost into the void beneath the desk.

Wang Youcai sat beside her on a stone bench, head bowed, saying nothing.

Ye Weiwei also looked pale. She had just narrowly escaped a ghost's clutches and was still deeply unnerved by the close call.

"Just now..." Ye Qianqian gasped for several breaths before turning to Ye Weiwei. "That was so dangerous. While you were talking, that ghost hand suddenly reached out from under the desk."

Remembering this, Ye Qianqian shivered violently again.

Having witnessed a teammate being dragged under the desk, she now had a phobia of dark holes.

"The roommate," Ye Weiwei suddenly sat upright and looked at the two beside her. "Before the ghost took him, Screw-head mentioned the roommates of the seven victims."

"There are other people in their dorm?" Ye Qianqian was slightly taken aback. "That's right. High school dorms usually house eight people."

"But they never mentioned anyone else," Wang Youcai, at their side, also frowned.

Ye Weiwei suddenly remembered the other workbook she had found inside Li Yi's desk. "Before the ghost appeared, I found a workbook belonging to a student named 'Liu Baoma' inside Li Yi's desk. Could this be the eighth person in their dorm?"

Liu Baoma? Wang Youcai pondered. An unfamiliar name.

"Could he be unsociable?" Ye Qianqian wondered. "Sis, do you remember when we were in high school? There was that weird girl in the dorm next door. She'd shake her clothes until two or three in the morning, keeping everyone else in her dorm awake. She wouldn't listen to anyone and just did her own thing."

Ye Weiwei nodded. "It's hard to forget."

The outlandish things that girl next door did were too numerous to count.

Not only did she stand naked in the middle of the dormitory shaking her clothes at midnight, but sometimes she also brought her desk back from the classroom to wash it in the dormitory all night.

Once, this girl borrowed Ye Weiwei's newly bought shampoo, and when she returned it, only a little was left at the bottom.

Later, Ye Weiwei had the dubious honor of witnessing how she washed her hair—she would douse her head in shampoo, rub it vigorously for half an hour, until the foam was so thick you could barely see her head.

Because of this neurotic behavior, this girl was not liked by her roommates.

When the girls in the neighboring dorm took a group photo, they didn't include her.

"It could also be that their dormitory really only had seven people," Ye Qianqian mused. "Why don't we go back to the hospital and ask those surviving students again?"

Ye Weiwei looked up at the school, shrouded in darkness.

After what had just happened, she didn't want to stay here any longer. "I wonder if it's a coincidence, but the ghost appeared when we mentioned the eighth person. It seems like it doesn't want us to investigate further. But if this eighth person really holds important clues, we have to find him."

Wang Youcai also nodded. "There's security at the student dorms; we won't be able to get in anyway. Let's go back to the hospital and ask the few survivors."

With that, he stood up. "Let's get out of here first."

But just as Wang Youcai stood up, they suddenly heard a rustling noise coming from the nearby bushes.

"Who's there?!"

Ye Weiwei immediately grabbed Ye Qianqian and started running in the opposite direction.

After running for about ten seconds, she realized Wang Youcai wasn't following.

At that moment, Ye Qianqian, still held by Ye Weiwei, suddenly said, "Sis, I think it might be a person..."

A person?

Only then did Ye Weiwei slowly stop and look back.

She saw a person standing by the pavilion where they had just rested, looking at them as if they were insane.

Wang Youcai was keeping his distance from the figure that had appeared so suddenly. Ye Weiwei saw his lips moving, as if asking something.

The student who had crawled out of the bushes looked at Wang Youcai with a strange expression. "You guys... you're not teachers, are you? I've never seen you before."

"Are you human?" Wang Youcai sized up the teenager in the student uniform before him.

"Nonsense," the student said with a peculiar expression. "If I weren't human, would I be a dog? You people are really weird, out here in the middle of the night asking if I'm human."

Wang Youcai warily eyed the student-like figure. "You're pretty strange yourself, crawling out of the bushes in the middle of the night. It's almost four in the morning, isn't it? What's a student like you doing out here instead of in your dorm?"

"Obviously, I climbed the wall to go to the internet cafe and play games," the teenager said, not bothering to hide it once he realized they weren't teachers. "When I ran out of money, I came back to get some sleep."

"Sleeping in the bushes?"

"The dormitory door was locked. I was originally planning to crash here in this pavilion, but I didn't expect to run into you. Who are you people, anyway? Thieves?"

"Of course not," Wang Youcai denied.

Then he paused, his gaze fixing on the school badge pinned to the boy's chest. "You're from Senior Three, Class Five?"

The young man yawned lazily. "Yeah, what about it?"

They had unexpectedly run into a student from Senior Three, Class Five.

This was too coincidental.

Wang Youcai wasn't sure if this was a genuine coincidence or something deliberately arranged by the instance, but with a clue right in front of him, he couldn't possibly let it go.

"Do you know that people in your class have died?"

"Of course. Three people in one dorm were stabbed to death, and the rest ran away."

Wang Youcai took a deep breath. "Then do you know who the killer is?"

Of course, Wang Youcai knew the killer was a recently divorced, middle-aged man named Liu Ben. He just wanted to confirm if this student knew.

"I know. It was Liu Baoma's father, of course. What a coincidence! Oh, you don't know Liu Baoma. He was another guy from their dorm; he committed suicide three months ago. Speaking of which, that dorm of theirs is really cursed. One committed suicide, and now three more were stabbed to death by the suicide's dad..."

Listening to the young man, a chill ran down Wang Youcai's back.

It all connected.

Liu Baoma was Liu Ben's son. Liu Baoma had committed suicide, and three months later, Liu Ben had killed three of his son's roommates.

Liu Ben hadn't killed randomly.

However, the students in the hospital hadn't told them this. They hadn't mentioned that the murderer was the father of their deceased roommate.

Ye Weiwei had already returned to the pavilion. She frowned and asked, "This person you said committed suicide, did he get along well with his other roommates?"

"I wouldn't know about that; I'm not in their dormitory," the teenager pondered for a few seconds. "But Liu Baoma was a top student. Maybe he didn't get along well with the others. He always had a smile on his face, though, so even if he was bullied, he might not have said anything. I heard that after Liu Baoma committed suicide, his mother couldn't handle the shock and divorced his father not long after..."

Hearing this, Ye Weiwei had already formed some theories.

She turned to look at Wang Youcai but found him staring blankly, his expression somewhat off.

"What's wrong?" Ye Weiwei asked.

Wang Youcai finally snapped out of it. "...Nothing."

At that moment, Ye Qianqian, standing to the side, was staring at a dark patch of greenery. The knee-high plants were so dense they blocked her view of what lay beyond. Her sharp ears caught a faint scraping sound from behind the greenery, but the noise was so slight she wondered if it was an auditory hallucination brought on by her tension.

The swaying branches and leaves occasionally revealed small gaps, allowing glimpses into the area behind them. Ye Qianqian stared intently at these openings, wary of anything that might suddenly appear.

Seeing Wang Youcai regain his composure, Ye Weiwei lowered her voice. "I think Liu Ben's motive for murder must be related to his son's death. You know about school bullying, right?"

Wang Youcai was stunned for a few seconds before nodding. "I know."

"Perhaps Liu Baoma experienced something like that. His death might be closely related to his roommates, which is why Liu Ben would go on a killing spree against them."

"Is this the truth we're looking for?" Wang Youcai seemed somewhat tired, leaning on a nearby pavilion pillar for support.

Ye Weiwei said, "This is just my guess. To verify it, we'll probably need to find more clues. But I think I'm very close to the truth."

"So, what's the solution then?" Wang Youcai seemed somewhat dazed. "Acquit Liu Ben? But he definitely killed people."

"I think that's it. This instance wants us to make the right choice. We need to find out the truth and then make a judgment. The truth is that the deceased were not innocent..."

Just as Ye Weiwei was speaking, she felt a tug on her sleeve.

She turned to see Ye Qianqian beside her, anxiously pulling at her sleeve.

"Sister, I have a bad feeling about this place. Can we leave first and talk later?" Beads of sweat appeared on Ye Qianqian's forehead.

Ye Weiwei looked at Wang Youcai. "We should go."

The group said goodbye to the teenager and then quickly left.

However, before they had gone far, they heard footsteps behind them, followed by a familiar voice. Listening to the voice, it was precisely the judge surnamed Chu whom they had encountered not long ago: "Xu Xingcheng?"

Chapter 666 Oh, Isn't this Chu Changge? Missing for several copies, what happened? _1

That Meiren Chu, a judge, knows an NPC in the instance? Wang Youcai turned to look. Could it be that this student encountered Meiren Chu's group before they met him?

Xu Xingcheng also looked up in the direction of the sound. He saw a man standing in the darkness not far away. It was Chu Changge. The judge was currently staring at him with a steady gaze.

Xu Xingcheng raised his eyebrows but said nothing.

Wang Youcai looked at the two standing opposite each other not far away and asked Chu Changge, "Do you recognize him?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "The name is on the school emblem."

Oh, right. Wang Youcai remembered that the student's school emblem did indeed say "Xu Xingcheng."

"I thought you knew him..." He didn't say the letters "NPC" out loud. After all, it was quite awkward to call someone an NPC in front of an unsuspecting student.

Meanwhile, Ye Weiwei was the first to notice something strange about Chu Changge. "Where are your teammates?"

At that moment, Chu Changge was standing alone in the darkness; his three teammates were nowhere to be seen.

"We decided to split up to be more efficient." The lenses of Chu Changge's glasses glinted a few times in the darkness.

Ye Weiwei frowned and said, "It's best not to split up in this situation. Just now, even when we were all together..."

She stopped mid-sentence. There was a local student from the instance nearby, so she couldn't directly mention seeing a ghost.

"Since there's nothing else, we'll leave first," Wang Youcai said. "You guys be careful too. This place... is very dangerous."

With that, he led the other two away.

Watching the three figures disappear, the previously silent Xu Xingcheng finally laughed. "Well, well, if it isn't Chu Changge. Haven't seen you in a few instances. Gotten this pathetic, have we?"

Chu Changge silently watched Xu Xingcheng, who wasn't far away.

Including this time, this NPC has appeared three times in total. The first time was in the High School Urban Legends: Spirited Away instance, and the second time was in the Close Your Eyes instance. It's worth mentioning that this NPC died in the Close Your Eyes instance, but now he appears perfectly fine in this current instance, and each time as a student. In the previous two instances, this person seemed normal. But this time, he seems to have awakened some incredible attribute; his entire tone and demeanor have changed. Moreover, judging by his words, he clearly remembers what happened in the previous instances. What's going on? Has Xu Xingcheng upgraded from a cannon fodder NPC to a high-level NPC with memories of past instances? Chu Changge had never heard of such a thing.

"Who are you?" Chu Changge frowned, looking at him.

Xu Xingcheng didn't seem to be an ordinary NPC. Although he had appeared in three instances, he was different from Coach Che, the wandering odd-jobber. In the first two instances, he was just a minor character, not even realizing he was an NPC. But now, it was as if he'd become enlightened, much smarter.

"Came to spy on Gu Mian," Xu Xingcheng plopped down on a stone bench in the pavilion, resting his cheek on his hand. "If I'm unlucky enough to get caught, I'll negotiate my compensation for emotional distress with him. Oh, and also the payment for the statue."

Upon hearing this, Chu Changge instantly confirmed the other's identity. "Slaughter."

A few seconds later, he narrowed his eyes slightly. "An avatar?"

"Of course, it's an avatar, a stupid one," Xu Xingcheng said, standing up and twirling around. "After all, my true self isn't in this world, so the avatars projected here tend to be a bit... defective. When I first arrived, I had complete amnesia. It wasn't until I died and resurrected that I remembered the important stuff."

At this, Xu Xingcheng seemed to recall something. "Gu Mian might not like this avatar of mine. But no matter, I don't have a gender anyway. Next time, I'll send out a beautiful woman to seduce him. Surely he wouldn't bring himself to chop me up then, right?"

Chu Changge, not wanting to listen to his nonsense, directly changed the subject. "Was what you told Wang Youcai and the others just now true?"

"Of course, it's true. Even though I'm the avatar of a big shot, I'm still diligently playing my role as an NPC... Speaking of which, it's thanks to my brooch, otherwise, it really would have been hard to find Gu Mian. But... does he have another anchor on him? I sensed it."

Chu Changge recalled the grey-haired man who only ever cried out for his sister. "It's an anchor of the Doctrine Goddess."

"Ah, so it's that Holy Daughter," Xu Xingcheng mused, sitting on the stone bench. "Is Gu Mian working on another case?"

Chu Changge nodded.

"Anyway, he doesn't need my hints, so I won't go wander over to his side. Don't want him pulling out that precious chainsaw of his to hack me to bits. You don't need my hints either, right?" Xu Xingcheng tilted his head, looking at Chu Changge.

Chu Changge let out a rare, cold laugh. "HEH."

Gu Mian, on the other side, was unaware that Chu Changge was currently beaming with a happy smile. He was crouched opposite the pumpkin ornament shop, explaining Li Shu's rhetorical traps to Bai Lu.

"He's been deceiving us from the very beginning and cleverly used another lie to divert our attention."

Bai Lu recalled Li Shu's words in the hospital room. "You mean... his unnatural expression when he mentioned the video was deliberately put on for us to see?"

"Exactly," Gu Mian nodded. "That way, we'd focus all our attention on the video, filled with high hopes that it would prove he was the murderer. Wasn't that what you were thinking at the time?"

Bai Lu pursed her lips and nodded awkwardly. "Yes, I was indeed thinking that at the time."

Seeing Li Shu evasively trying to prevent them from watching the video, Bai Lu's first thought was that it contained highly incriminating evidence against him, possibly directly proving he was the murderer.

"But after watching the video, our expectations would be dashed. We'd realize we had misunderstood him; we'd discover he had merely abandoned his friend and fled. Compared to murder, this is just a small mistake. Then, we might feel a slight sense of guilt for misunderstanding Li Shu, and simultaneously drop our suspicions about him. You'd think he was lying only to cover up a small mistake, thereby overlooking other potential lies in Li Shu's words. That's misdirection."

Bai Lu looked at Gu Mian. "Yes, after discovering Li Shu had merely abandoned his friend and run off, I didn't suspect his words contained any other lies at all... But how did you know for sure he was lying?"

"Li Shu's home surveillance camera, installed opposite his front door," Gu Mian began. "You should know that besides surveillance, cameras serve another purpose."

What? Bai Lu looked at Gu Mian.

"Deterrence," Gu Mian said, raising a finger. "Most burglars planning a break-in will stop if they see a camera at the front door. It warns them: 'I'm watching you. Don't try anything.' Li Shu's camera was installed directly opposite his front door, almost as if it was set up specifically to film the scene inside the house on the day of the incident. This indicates Li Shu and the others already knew Yuan Haotian might do something, so they deliberately used a camera to warn Yuan Haotian not to act rashly. Also, did you notice? In the video, when Li Shu's neighbors rushed into his house to subdue Yuan Haotian, Yuan Haotian didn't accidentally injure anyone. Even though he had a knife, he was easily overpowered by neighbors armed with various cleaning tools. I don't think someone truly frenzied would act like that. He most likely discovered some evidence related to the arson, or perhaps even got a confession directly from Li Shu and the others, which is why he stormed into their house and did what he did."

"You mean Li Shu and the other two are not only the arsonists but also went to flaunt their 'victory' in Yuan Haotian's face after the fire?" Bai Lu felt a surge of anger rising from the soles of her feet.

"Correct," Gu Mian nodded. "They were careful and left no evidence. But after the incident, they would buy things identical to what Yuan Haotian owned to provoke him. If investigated, they'd say, 'These aren't Yuan Haotian's things; I just bought them new. It's just a coincidence.' By the way, do you remember that friend Li Shu mentioned?"

Bai Lu nodded. "Chen Yao?"

"Yes. According to Li Shu, his first two meetings with Yuan Haotian were both because of Chen Yao. The first time, Chen Yao invited them to a party. The second time, Chen Yao asked if they wanted to buy travel packages. But if my theory is correct, it wasn't Chen Yao who initiated these; it was Li Shu and his group. The first time, Li Shu heard Yuan Haotian would be at Chen Yao's party, so he took the initiative to go. The second time, Li Shu and his group heard Yuan Haotian's company had travel packages available, so they proactively went to buy them. As long as we find this Chen Yao, we can verify if our theory is correct."

Bai Lu felt the anger blaze all the way to the top of her head. "If your theory is correct, then Li Shu and those two are psychopaths? What kind of grudge did Yuan Haotian have with them for them to target him like this?"

Gu Mian laced his fingers together and rested his chin on them. "There's no logic to be found in the world of psychopaths. They often do whatever comes to mind, whether there's a grudge involved or not."

"When did you first realize something was off with Li Shu?" Xie Bi'an suddenly asked from the side.

Gu Mian turned his head and glanced at him. "I noticed it back in the hospital."

That early? Bai Lu's expression was strange.

"That book, 'The Vanishing Murderer'," Gu Mian said.

"Just because he was reading that kind of book, you suspected he was a psychopath?" Bai Lu felt that was a bit of a stretch.

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "It was when he was reading that book right in front of us, and then brazenly pushed it towards us, that I got a certain feeling. A very familiar one."

What kind of feeling? Bai Lu looked at Gu Mian.

"A kind of 'I'm the murderer, so what can you do about it?' feeling. I once encountered a psychopath in a taxi instance who also had that 'I'm the murderer, but you can't do a damn thing to me' look all over his face."

Of course, it was also because Gu Mian had been abducted by numerous psychopaths throughout his childhood and adolescence, so his radar for detecting them was exceptionally sensitive.

Listening to Gu Mian's explanation, Bai Lu felt the anger inside her flare up. She wished she could rush back to the courtroom right then, snatch Gu Mian's gavel, and declare the defendant innocent.

But before the gavel in her imagination could fall, she saw the judge, who had been resting his chin on his hand, suddenly reach out and grab the cloaked man beside him.

"Here it comes again," she heard Gu Mian say.

Then, Bai Lu felt a horrifying chill creep up from behind her. She mechanically turned her head and came face-to-face with half of a dead man's face.

Chapter 667 Damn you, Carven! _1

There's a ghost behind me too! Why did you only grab Bai Wuchang? The ghost face behind me is practically glued to my ear, its hand is choking my neck, I can barely breathe, and you *still* only grabbed Bai Wuchang!

As if hearing the wails in Bai Lu's heart, Gu Mian released Xie Bi'an and stood up.

He didn't pull out his chainsaw this time.

Trembling, Bai Lu watched as the doctor before her lifted his foot, then kicked the terrifying ghost face on her shoulder.

Then she heard something thud to the ground as it was kicked away.

"Damn!" Feeling the chill on her back vanish, Bai Lu cursed, then scrambled to her feet and fled.

Gu Mian dealt with the ghost clinging to Xie Bi'an in the same fashion, kicking it away.

For the first time, Bai Lu saw what looked like a shocked expression on a ghost's face.

In her mind, ghosts in an instance were supposed to chase players with gaping, bloody maws, or wander around, swiping everywhere with their withered claws.

This was the first time Bai Lu had ever seen such a bewildered, then shocked, expression on a ghost.

The expression of the suit-clad NPC beside her was also intriguing.

He quietly stared at the two ghosts on the ground, his expression clearly conveying the thought: "Good advice is wasted on a doomed ghost."

Fortunately, these two ghosts knew to flee when the situation turned against them. Ghosts are inherently fast, a trait primarily for chasing players, and this speed now served them well for escaping.

The two ghosts fled faster than startled dogs and vanished in an instant.

Bai Lu watched the two ghosts frantically escape, then her gaze fell upon Gu Mian's shoes, which Fatty had polished to a shine. "Are your shoes... a special item? They don't quite look like it..."

Gu Mian: "..."

Just as Bai Lu was intently staring at Gu Mian's shoes, a middle-aged woman's voice called out from across the street, not far away.

"You folks..." The middle-aged woman stood before the pumpkin-themed accessory shop, a key still in her hand. "Are you here to buy something?"

She was obviously the owner or an employee of the accessory shop.

Keke quickly walked over and showed the woman the pink butterfly bow in her hand, asking, "We want to buy a hairpin exactly like this one. Do you have any in your shop?"

The woman glanced at the butterfly bow in Keke's hand, then inserted the key into the lock. "This one... I remember it. I got a batch last year, but not many people liked them, so sales weren't great. The very last one was sold on the last day of last month."

The date she mentioned was May 31st—the same date on Cao Deren's receipt.

Hearing the woman's words, Gu Mian felt relieved and walked over.

He really didn't have any extra money for hairpins. What if the shop still had some in stock and they couldn't pay? How embarrassing would that be?

Keke continued to ask, "Was the last one bought by a man?"

The woman pushed the shop door open and gave Keke a strange look. "How did you know?"

Keke began to spin a tale, "That man is my roommate's boyfriend. He bought it as a birthday gift for her. She really loves this kind of pink butterfly hair accessory, so I wanted to buy a few more..."

"Oh, I see!" The woman's face lit up with sudden understanding. "No wonder that man came in and asked specifically for a pink butterfly hairpin, one with pearls and diamonds. So it was because his girlfriend likes them!"

Bai Lu, who had already reached the shop entrance, looked a bit pale. "So Cao Deren did buy a hairpin matching Yuan Haotian's sister's. It wasn't a coincidence. Your guess was correct."

Gu Mian stared at the butterfly bow in Keke's hand. "Next, let's go to Chen Yao's company. We need to ask whether the first two meetings between Li Shu and Yuan Haotian were coincidental or deliberate. Actually, we don't necessarily have to go. You all can decide."

Keke frowned. "Regardless, we have to return to the courthouse. I've checked the map; Chen Yao's company is on our way. We can just stop by and ask."

Bai Lu nodded solemnly. "Since it's on the way, let's go. But I've noticed something... Ghosts always seem to appear when we find clues. The first time, it was when we found the surveillance video. The second time was when you told me about Li Shu's lies. I have a feeling the ghosts don't want us to find any clues about the truth. They want us to make the wrong judgment and fail the mission."

Although their judge had practically guessed the truth already.

"Exactly," Gu Mian agreed. "Under normal circumstances, when we question Chen Yao, there's a high probability ghosts will appear again."

Bai Lu recalled Gu Mian's kicks from earlier. "I don't think they'll dare to come again..."

Having witnessed her team's judge in action, she'd come to the realization: We can do whatever we want!

Even though she didn't know why this player was so special, it didn't stop her from freeloading and taking it easy.

"Heh-heh."

Bai Lu heard a few dry chuckles from Coach Che, the suit-clad NPC beside her. Turning her head to look at him, she saw he had already rolled his eyes and turned his head away.

"Let's not delay," Keke said, putting away the pink bow in her hand. "We should leave this instance as soon as possible."

Bai Lu also nodded. "After we question Chen Yao, let's go back for the verdict. Since the truth has been uncovered, we should declare Yuan Haotian innocent. Then we can leave the instance."

"Let's go find Chen Yao now," Keke added enthusiastically.

The 'green tea' and the 'normal player' had finally found some common ground.

The two of them, hitting it off, immediately set off towards Chen Yao's company.

Watching the two female players depart, Gu Mian remarked, "Hmm, actually, I have another idea."

Hearing this, Bai Lu stopped and looked back. "What is it?"

"An idea about the way out. Now that the truth has surfaced, you think declaring Yuan Haotian innocent is the correct path, right? But that might not be the case."

「Meanwhile, Wang Youcai, Ye Weiwei, and Ye Qianqian had returned from the school and arrived back at Dianxin Hospital.」

The three of them were currently resting on the steps outside the hospital's main entrance.

With no NPC to exploit for transport, they had walked the entire way.

They hadn't slept all night and had lost a teammate in the classroom around midnight. Now, all three were somewhat dazed.

Ye Qianqian looked up at the hospital building, hesitating. "Do we really need to go ask those students about Liu Baoma?"

Ye Weiwei understood her hesitation. "Since those students didn't tell us anything initially, it's unlikely they'll tell the truth even if we ask now."

Wang Youcai was also pondering this. "Based on my experience, most instances have a twist. Initially, didn't we all assume Liu Ben was a killer who got what he deserved? Following the principle of reversal, he probably has some hidden hardship, so it's very likely the school bullying is real... Of course, this is just a guess based on my experience."

Wang Youcai's conjecture was somewhat crude, but his reasoning wasn't without merit.

Instances often had twists; Ye Weiwei knew this well.

"The judge doesn't need to rely on evidence for a verdict, and we don't absolutely have to hear the truth from those students. We can return to the courthouse to deliver a verdict at any time," Wang Youcai said, frowning. "Either way, there are only two choices: guilty or innocent. Right now, it seems declaring Liu Ben innocent is the way out, doesn't it?"

Ye Weiwei agreed with Wang Youcai. "I think so too, but for some reason, I have this persistent feeling of unease."

Wang Youcai dusted off his pants and stood up. "To be safe, let's go ask those students again, though we probably won't get much out of them."

The two female players nodded and stood up.

When the three of them reached the students' floor, they noticed a furtive-looking woman lingering outside their hospital room door.

Wang Youcai looked at the furtive woman and called out, "What are you doing?"

Wang Youcai's sudden voice startled the woman. She spun around, her eyes wide with fear.

"N-no... nothing," she stammered, nervously waving her left hand.

Ye Weiwei noticed the woman's right hand was tucked inside her coat, as if she were hiding something.

She subtly signaled Ye Qianqian to step back a few paces before asking the woman in a low voice, "I presume you're Liu Baoma's mother?"

Her identity revealed, the woman froze for a moment, then asked, "How... how did you know?"

Ye Weiwei noted her gesture of keeping her hand tucked in her coat—a common posture when concealing a weapon.

Without answering the woman's question, she continued in a low voice, "Was your son's suicide connected to the individuals in that room?"

The woman's eyes widened, and she watched them warily.

"Don't misunderstand," Ye Weiwei began. "We're from the court, investigating this case. You're aware that your ex-husband is at the courthouse awaiting the verdict, aren't you?"

After Liu Baoma's suicide, his parents, Liu Ben and his wife, had divorced. This was mentioned in the case file, and the student named Xu Xingcheng had also confirmed it.

The woman finally spoke. "Are you really from the court?"

"If you don't believe us, you can accompany us to the courthouse. We've seen your ex-husband there. He was wearing a brown top and glasses, and he has a lot of white hair at his temples." Ye Weiwei did her best to describe the defendant's appearance in court.

"I believe you! I believe you!" the woman exclaimed, her voice thick with emotion. She withdrew her hand from her coat and stepped forward. "If you're judges, please, can you help me...?"

Ye Weiwei glanced at the nearby hospital room. "If you don't mind, let's go downstairs to talk. That way, the people inside won't overhear us."

The woman wiped at the tears welling in her eyes and nodded quickly.

The three of them quickly made their way to the hospital lobby.

The woman sat on a chair in the lobby and, with her head bowed, began to tell them about her son.

Chapter 668 A Difficult Chapter_1

"My son, Liu Baoma, was born in the spring.

"At that time, Liu Ben and I didn't know much about taking care of a child, and we were poor. Right after he was born, I found some manual work to do at home so I could look after him while working.

"Although I said I took care of him, I was often too busy with my work to give him much time. So, most of the time, I would place him on his small bed, where he would stay for more than half the day. He never cried or fussed, just lay on the bed quietly, watching me.

"He was different from other children. He seldom cried or fussed, was very undemanding, and never woke us up crying in the middle of the night..."

The woman began by speaking of Liu Baoma from the time of his birth.

Though her words were irrelevant to Wang Pingfan and the others, none of them had the heart to interrupt the woman, so immersed was she in her past.

"Later, he grew a bit older and started to talk. I remember it was summer. Our house was very old and couldn't keep out the summer heat. In July and August, it was often hotter inside than outside, and we only had one small electric fan.

"We adults could manage; being a bit hot wasn't a big deal. But the child was covered in prickly heat. I'd often see him scratching his arms and thighs until they were covered in red bumps. He wouldn't cry. When anyone came near, he'd just reach out his arms to be held.

"Liu Ben and I didn't do well in school. I started working after middle school. His father, a vocational school graduate, didn't work any well-paying jobs. After Baoma was born, our savings amounted to only 20 yuan.

"We couldn't offer him the best. When he was young, he rarely ate well, mostly drinking rice water. It wasn't long before he was eating the same food as us adults.

"Later, he started school. After paying for the textbooks, we had no money left for new clothes for him. We could only ask for hand-me-downs from relatives' children... The clothes didn't fit well, but he never complained to us.

"He was not like me or his father. He did very well in school from elementary school onwards, always among the top students in his class. However, he seemed to have no friends.

"I remember every time I went to pick him up, other children would come out in boisterous groups, but he was always last, walking alone.

"Once, I saw one of his classmates pointing at him, saying he was a scavenger and that his clothes were ragged, all hand-me-downs..."

As she said this, the woman lowered her head and whimpered softly.

Ye Qianqian couldn't bear it and gently patted her shoulder.

Then the woman, choking back sobs, began to recount more of the past.

"That boy was very sensible. He never told us about these things. Every time I asked about his relationships with his classmates, he would just smile and tell me they were all very good to him.

"It was always like that. He always smiled at us, keeping everything bottled up inside. Until his third year of high school...

"For a while, I noticed he seemed dazed and listless, and he always had some new bruises or scrapes. He didn't laugh much when he saw us anymore. When I asked if anything had happened, he'd just shake his head and say no, that he'd accidentally bumped into something.

"We thought it was nothing serious, so we didn't pay much attention. We never expected that just a few months later, that boy would be gone..."

The woman's tears could no longer be held back, streaming down her face along with her snot.

Passersby would glance over, their faces showing pity. Such weeping was not uncommon in a hospital. Liu Baoma had committed suicide, as Ye Weiwei and the others knew.

"I felt as if the sky had fallen. How could a perfectly fine boy just leave like that? He didn't leave anything behind, not a single word for us..."

"Later, I remembered his unusual behavior before he left and wondered if something had happened to him at school. So I went to the school to find his teacher, but his homeroom teacher was evasive and wouldn't say anything clearly.

"I tried to ask his roommates, but those students avoided me; I couldn't find them at all. That's when I started to suspect something. I thought the boy's death might be related to the school.

"I told Liu Ben about this. He had some connections and knew a teacher at that school.

"One night, very late, he went with that teacher to the school, saying they were going to look into something. He didn't come back all night.

"When he returned the next day, he was carrying a case of liquor. He sat in the living room drinking all day. When he got drunk, he would clutch his cell phone and cry. When I asked him what he had done the previous day, he wouldn't say...

"You know what happened next. We couldn't bear the blow and got divorced. Liu Ben probably discovered something at the school. Not long after, he went to settle scores with the boy's roommates... just as you saw."

Liu Ben had murdered Liu Baoma's three roommates on the street. The other four had run fast and escaped.

However, Wang Youcai and the others still didn't know what Liu Ben had seen at the school. That was likely the most crucial piece of evidence in this case.

Ye Weiwei was pondering the woman's words. "The cell phone Liu Ben was clutching when he was drunk," she asked, "where is it now?" The key evidence must be on Liu Ben's cell phone, she thought.

"It might... it might have been taken to the court..." the woman said, uncertainly.

Ye Weiwei looked at Wang Youcai. "When criminals are detained," she said, "their personal belongings are usually confiscated and stored somewhere."

As she was speaking, Ye Qianqian, who was sitting beside her, suddenly jumped up and pulled her.

Caught off guard, Ye Weiwei was pulled from her chair and fell to the ground.

"What happened?" the woman sobbed, looking at them.

Ye Weiwei also looked up at Ye Qianqian with a questioning expression.

But Ye Qianqian, her face pale, whispered, "A hand... there was a hand behind you just now."

Ye Weiwei immediately turned to look, only to see that the spot where she had been sitting was empty. There was nothing there.

The ghost had appeared again. A strange sense of panic rose in the hearts of the three.

"Let's go back to the courthouse, now!" Wang Youcai said, standing up nervously.

Ye Weiwei also got up immediately. After bidding the woman farewell, she grabbed Ye Qianqian's hand and followed.

The trio fled the hospital as if on wings. Only when they reached the street did their terror lessen somewhat.

"Let's go to the courthouse and find Liu Ben's phone," Ye Weiwei said, suppressing her unease. "I think the most crucial evidence is in there."

Wang Youcai nodded. "Then we need to move quickly, so we can reach a verdict sooner."

They quickly agreed and headed towards the courthouse.

After walking for about a kilometer, Wang Youcai heard Ye Weiwei speak from behind him, "When that woman was talking just now, your expression was off. And not just then; last night, when that student Xu Xingcheng was telling us things, your expression was off too."

Ye Weiwei paused after saying this. "Did you also experience school bullying?"

But judging by his age, that didn't seem likely.

Wang Youcai's pace slowed slightly. "I... I also once had a son..."

Ye Weiwei was stunned and didn't press further.

Wang Youcai didn't elaborate, but the two female players had already guessed his story.

As they walked on in silence, they suddenly saw a few familiar figures ahead. It was the group with the colorful nicknames.

Chen Yao, who had just been intercepted by Gu Mian and the others as he reached the company building, was currently answering their questions. "You're asking about that dinner party... Yes, Li Shu was indeed the one who approached me first. He asked who would be there and then asked if he could bring a few friends. I felt it would be awkward to refuse him, so I agreed. Besides, many others were bringing friends too."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. So, it was just as they'd suspected. Li Shu had deceived them. The first encounter between Li Shu and Yuan Haotian wasn't accidental; Li Shu had planned it.

"Do you remember that trip? The one where we climbed Wei Mountain?" Keke pressed. "Were you the one who told Li Shu about your company's trip?"

Chen Yao looked somewhat surprised. "No, he heard from somewhere that our company was having an event and specifically asked me to get three spots for him."

Bai Lu clenched her fists. That was also different from what Li Shu had said. As expected, the second encounter was also planned.

"During that trip, Yuan Haotian even had a dispute with one of Li Shu's friends. It seemed Yuan Haotian noticed a very familiar item on Li Shu's friend and wanted to take a closer look, but the friend refused..." Chen Yao continued, as if talking to himself.

The familiar item was probably the "coincidence" Li Shu and the others had meticulously prepared. Just like that pink bow hair clip.

"Now it seems your guess was one hundred percent correct. Li Shu and the others are indeed perverts!" Bai Lu exclaimed, feeling as if her hair was about to be ignited by her rage.

Just then, she heard footsteps approaching.

Bai Lu turned her head and saw Wang Youcai's group walking towards them.

"You all... did you find something?" Ye Qianqian asked curiously, seeing Bai Lu's furious expression.

"We did discover some things," Bai Lu said, her lips pursed. "It turns out the victim in our case, who always presented as meek and vulnerable, is actually a pervert."

Hearing this, Ye Qianqian's expression also became animated. "What a coincidence! It's quite similar in our case... the victim has another side to them."

Could it be? Bai Lu's eyes widened slightly.

Gu Mian turned his head, noticing their group was smaller. "Is someone missing from your group?" he asked.

Wang Youcai nodded grimly. "He died..."

"Killed by the ghost while searching for clues, wasn't he?" Gu Mian asked, looking at Wang Youcai.

"How did you know?" Wang Youcai asked, somewhat surprised.

Gu Mian raised his head slightly. "Because we've discovered the ghost's killing pattern in this instance. Whenever players get close to the truth of a case, the ghost appears to stop them."

Chapter 669 Damn, My Dream is to Earn Ten Thousand a Day! _1

At these words, Wang Youcai and the others froze.

Then Ye Weiwei began, "That's right. The ghosts are hindering us."

She explained, looking at her teammates, "The first time a ghost appeared, Screw-head mentioned the 'eighth person' in the victim's dormitory. The ghost appeared a second time after we met Liu Baoma's mother."

Every time they uncovered a clue, the ghosts would interfere.

"'Ever since I realized this, I've been thinking about what the so-called 'correct judgment' in this task might be.' Gu Mian looked at the three people in the other group. 'When you seek the truth, the ghosts will kill you. What does that imply? The ghosts don't want their cases reopened; they want the culprits dead.'"

At this, Ye Weiwei suddenly felt a chill run down her spine. A strange suspicion arose in her heart, and she desperately hoped it was wrong.

"'And our offender,' Gu Mian paused, 'is very gentle and kind, at least the offender in our group is. Even when armed with a machete, he didn't harm any of the neighbors who came to capture him. He must have resigned himself to death before committing the crime.'"

""However, the victims aren't so gentle. They couldn't wait to strike us merely for searching for clues. Just imagine what would happen if you delivered a verdict that goes against their wishes.""

Gu Mian had asked Coach Che previously.

If the offender is found guilty, he will be executed on the spot. If acquitted, he will be released on the spot.

""I questioned my guiding NPC. If the judge finds the criminal guilty, the criminal will die on the spot. You don't need to worry about him immediately becoming an Evil Ghost to seek revenge on you. He hesitated and was uncertain before, but ultimately, he made his choice, prepared to die without regrets. Such a person, regardless of your judgment, will not blame you.""

At this, Wang Youcai also realized something. He suddenly understood what the 'correct judgment' of the mission meant.

There is no absolute 'right' or 'wrong' in any of their cases. The defendants on trial certainly committed murder, but they had their reasons. The victims weren't entirely innocent either; one could say they brought their deaths upon themselves.

It was a story where right and wrong couldn't be definitively distinguished.

However, for their own survival, they had to make the "correct" choice.

""So you're saying, ' Ye Qianqian took a shaky step forward, 'the way to survive this instance is to find the convict guilty?""

""Exactly,' Gu Mian nodded."

Ye Qianqian looked quite displeased.

"If we deliver a verdict that goes against the victims' wishes, we will face severe retaliation. We might die in this instance before the court even adjourns. But if we sentence the convict to death, harmless as he may be to us, he won't harm us. He is prepared to die. So... we have to send a poor soul, who harbors no ill will towards us, to his death to evade the ghosts' revenge. Because he holds no ill will towards us, because he won't turn into a ghost to harm us even if he dies, we need him to die..."

As she reached this point, she took a deep breath. "Isn't this... just bullying the weak and fearing the strong?"

If they went against the ghosts' wishes, they would face retaliation. But if they sentenced the convict to death, he would just willingly accept it. He wouldn't harm the players. Therefore, he had to die.

Ye Weiwei suddenly felt nauseous. This instance was truly disgusting.

"This is an instance about choice,' Gu Mian spoke. 'Life or humanity—the instance forces us to choose between the two.'"

Ye Qianqian clenched her fists tightly.

Wang Youcai also looked grim.

"The path to survival is clear. If you want to leave this instance, you can return to the court now and deliver your verdict.' Gu Mian looked at the three people before him, their faces pale. 'If you don't deliver a verdict now and instead continue to search for clues, the ghosts will likely reappear. You should think it through carefully.'"

The three stood there for a long moment.

Finally, Wang Youcai seemed to have made up his mind. He thanked Gu Mian, then turned to the two female players behind him and said, "We're going back to the courthouse."

Then they quickly left.

Watching them leave, Bai Lu said, "They must be returning to the courthouse to pass judgment, right?"

Gu Mian also looked in the direction they had left. "I don't know."

"Then... what's our choice?' Asking this, Bai Lu suddenly felt a bit foolish."

The way to survive had already appeared; of course, they should take it. This was just an instance. Even if the people in this instance had suffered grave injustices, the players shouldn't have to pay with their lives just to satisfy a momentary desire for righteousness.

However, perhaps it was the judge's earlier actions that gave her a sliver of confidence, because a sense of anticipation began to well up inside her. She found herself hoping they could make a different choice in this instance, even though the path to survival was already clear.

"Let's go to the hospital to see Li Shu again,' Gu Mian said, not giving her a direct answer. 'There are still some unclear parts about this case.'"

Bai Lu didn't know what to say, so she just nodded.

They quickly arrived at Li Shu's hospital room.

The person on the hospital bed wasn't surprised by the arrival of Gu Mian and the others.

He offered them a smile, which seemed particularly glaring in the sunlight.

Li Shu was still reading, but by now, he had switched to a different book.

Seeing Gu Mian and the others enter, Li Shu casually flipped the book he was reading facedown onto his lap. Bai Lu caught sight of the title on the cover— *Born Psychopath*.

What audacity! Bai Lu's fingers turned white from clenching her fists so tightly.

"Your Honor, have you come to me because you've found something new?' Li Shu asked with a cheerful smile, still maintaining his composed and polite demeanor, as if he hadn't done anything wrong."

Gu Mian sat on the bed opposite him, silent. He extended his hand towards Li Shu, then opened his palm in front of him.

Li Shu lowered his gaze and saw a pink bow lying on Gu Mian's outstretched, slender hand.

As if he had expected this all along, not the slightest hint of panic showed on his face. Instead, he smiled at Gu Mian. "Isn't this Cao Deren's? I remember he ran around to many stores to buy this."

"You also ran quite a distance to take photos beneath Yuan Haotian's apartment building, didn't you?' Gu Mian also chuckled, his smile looking even warmer than Li Shu's."

Li Shu remained silent, merely reaching out to adjust the book lying facedown on his lap.

"Stop pretending,' Gu Mian said, placing the bow on the black cover of the book on Li Shu's lap. 'We all know. You like playing with fire."

"Oh—" Li Shu's expression suddenly shifted, and he let out a long, drawn-out, peculiar sound."

"So, you all know.' He suddenly tilted his head, his eyes fixed on Gu Mian, his gaze somewhat horrifying. 'Then you must also know that my two poor, dead roommates have been following you all this time."

Bai Lu's scalp tightened.

This person... he knew his roommates had turned into ghosts, knew those two had been following them all along. That's why he was so brazenly unafraid.

"'Why bother investigating so thoroughly?' Li Shu tilted his head again, the calm aura about him completely gone, replaced by a chilling madness and distortion. 'Wouldn't it be better to make a judgment in blissful ignorance? That way, you wouldn't feel any psychological pressure.'"

"'That's right, we were the ones who set the fire at Yuan Haotian's house. Want to know why we did it? Fine, I'll tell you. At first, we just noticed his sister—an innocent, naive little girl, completely unguarded. So adorable, like an Angel. When we threw some newborn puppies into a stinking ditch, she jumped out from God knows where, accusing us of being cruel, despicable, and heartless. Oh, she really had some nerve, managing to annoy me the very first time we met. Naturally, I had to teach her a lesson, teach her not to go around spreading her misplaced saintly compassion when she has nothing better to do. Little girls like that usually aren't very wary. We only had to follow her for a week to find out everything about her. She had parents who loved her and a brother who doted on her. I really wanted to see if this naive little girl could still maintain her compassionate, saintly demeanor if all those people died. I wanted to know if she'd still have the energy to care about some puppy in a ditch after all her relatives were dead. Everything went smoothly. A residential complex with no surveillance cameras, a developer who had skipped town, old apartment doors... we skillfully set another fire in the middle of the night. Though, there was a small mishap. That poor little girl was actually at home; it was her lucky brother who was out at the time. We were quite disappointed that we couldn't see the little girl's grief-stricken face after losing her family. But it doesn't matter. After all, she still has a brother left.'"

As Li Shu said this, the smile returned to his face. Unlike before, the smile on his face now was utterly eerie, like a puppet with a sinister, leering grin.

Chapter 670 Damn, I Almost Stood Someone Up_1

"Since she's already dead, then let's torment her brother.

"Let him discover that the fire that killed his loved ones was no accident. Let him realize that the killer is right next to him. Let him drown in shock and outrage.

"We not only bought this butterfly hairpin, but we also purchased ornaments identical to those in their house. We wore clothes identical to his father's and even directly hinted to him that we were the culprits.

"But what can he do?"

Li Shu adopted a sorrowful expression at the right moment, as if he were genuinely immersed in the situation.

Bai Lu stared at his face, her tightly clenched hands trembling uncontrollably.

"All the items were newly bought. We have evidence that they weren't stolen from his house before the fire.

"It was all just a coincidence. We left no leverage for him at all.

"Then, he started relentlessly tracking us, like he was possessed. We knew he was going mad, and the more he did, the more excited we became.

"He hated us fiercely but was powerless against us. How delightful!

"Watching someone in a helpless rage is the most satisfying, isn't it?"

Li Shu revealed a contented expression, "Pleasure aside, safety is still important. I intentionally installed a surveillance camera directly opposite the front door to scare him, to tell him not to act recklessly.

"But who would have thought he'd have the guts to break into my house under the camera's watchful eye, killing my two poor roommates."

Saying this, he raised his hand to wipe the corners of his eyes, seemingly shedding tears for his dead roommates.

Yet, he immediately put on a cheerful expression and said, "But thanks to him killing my two poor roommates, I had another chance to witness that helpless rage of his."

As he spoke, he looked up at Gu Mian, his eyes glinting with malice, "The truth is just as I said: we started the fire, we killed people, we provoked Yuan Haotian, and we deserve to die.

"Yuan Haotian is just a pitiful, innocent man who lost his mind seeking revenge. But what can you do? Do you dare declare him innocent?"

He grinned, the smile on his face impossible to conceal, "My two dead roommates are watching you all. If you make a judgment that displeases them, I can't guarantee what they'll do.

"Yes, we are thoroughly evil and deserve to die. Yuan Haotian is an innocent victim, pure and unblemished.

"But do you dare to deliver a just verdict?

"Do you dare to trade your own lives for Yuan Haotian's innocence?!"

As he said this, his expression became increasingly distorted, bearing no resemblance to his formerly handsome, youthful appearance. He gaped his mouth and let out a fiendish laugh.

"HAHAHAHAHA—"

After laughing, he tilted his chin up and said smugly, "You don't dare."

"If you want justice, you die! If you want to live, you do as we say!"

Just as he was boasting proudly, chin held high, Gu Mian suddenly leaned in and grabbed his collar.

Li Shu then saw the judge's face drawing closer and closer, until it filled his entire vision.

He saw an unreadable, eerie smile appear on that face, followed by a demonic voice whispering in his ear, "I want it all."

"This is the storage room," Ye Weiwei said, looking at a large vermilion door in front of her. An aluminum plaque nailed above the door read 'Storage Room'. "The prisoners' belongings should all be stored in here... Should we... go inside?"

Wang Youcai and the others had returned to the courthouse.

They stood at the entrance to the storage room, hesitating.

They were unwilling to follow the path the instance had laid out, but they seemed to have no other choice.

"Let's... just go in and take a look," Ye Qianqian said, suddenly stepping forward. "We'll decide what to do after we see what's inside."

Although they already had an inkling of the decision in their hearts, they still procrastinated, unwilling to act on it so soon.

Wang Youcai nodded and pushed open the door before him.

Behind the door was a large space.

Like a school library, shelves were arranged inside the room. But instead of books, they were filled with all sorts of items: keys, cell phones, lipsticks, and the like.

Each pile of items had a name tag next to it, indicating that this was indeed a temporary storage area for prisoners' belongings.

Ye Qianqian walked to the nearest shelf and lowered her head to look at the name beside one pile of items—"Zhao Huanhuan."

She looked up at the other shelves and saw they were crammed full of belongings.

"Are there so many prisoners in the courthouse?" she asked, looking at the shelves in confusion. "But didn't we check the other courtrooms when we first entered the instance? They were all empty."

Ye Weiwei also shook her head in puzzlement. "Prisoners must stay in the courtroom from the moment they're captured until their verdict is delivered... Never mind that for now. Let's find Liu Ben's cell phone. There are so many shelves here; it won't be easy to find his name."

Ye Qianqian hesitated, then nodded and began to search the shelves in front of her.

Ye Weiwei and Wang Youcai also began searching the nearby shelves.

"Sister," Ye Qianqian said to Ye Weiwei, who was searching an adjacent shelf, "after we find the phone, we'll have to make a judgment, right?"

Ye Weiwei responded with a quiet HMM.