

Collapse 711

Chapter 711

Both of them were in a dilemma. To test their guess, they first had to find a ghost. They wanted to confirm if this was truly a path to survival, yet they didn't want to encounter a ghost.

"Let's take it step by step," Wenqin Tan Jiu said. "Let's not actively seek out the ghost. If our guess is wrong, actively seeking it out would be a fatal mistake." As he said this, his expression became hesitant. "Actually, I'm starting to doubt..."

Doubt what? Jin Ye Bai wondered, looking at Wenqin Tan Jiu.

"Whether the ghost really crawled out of the photo," Wenqin Tan Jiu recalled. "On the bus, the ghost was definitely getting closer to us, looking like it was about to crawl out of the photo. But we didn't actually see it emerge. Could it have just been trying to scare us?"

"If we'd actually seen the ghost crawl out of the photo, it would have been too late for us," Jin Ye Bai said, imagining the scene. "We'd have been face-to-face with the ghost, with basically no chance of survival."

"That makes sense," Wenqin Tan Jiu acknowledged, "but I have a bad feeling. What if our guess was wrong? What if the ghost **can't** crawl out of the photo?"

He had only seen the ghost **almost** crawl out. For everyone's safety, Wenqin Tan Jiu had thrown the photo out of the bus. At that time, he hadn't dared to gamble; losing the bet meant losing his life. Throwing away the photo was the safest option.

"Let's not overthink it for now," Jin Ye Bai said. "In any case, we should try our best to stay away from the mountain where we took the group photo and the place where the photo was discarded. I think the ghost will either crawl out of the photo and start searching for us from where it was thrown, or it will begin its hunt from the mountain where we took the photo. Either way, the farther we are from those two spots, the better."

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded, thinking as he quickened his pace.

Bicycles were always parked in clusters on the bustling streets. Among them, there were invariably one or two unlocked ones. After walking for several hours, they finally found two unlocked bicycles. They skillfully appropriated them and rode off.

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at the sun, now leaning westward. "Do you want to rest tonight?"

Jin Ye Bai considered for a moment. "Let's not rest. We can manage through the first night. The most important thing now is to get away from here. Let's travel through the night."

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded.

「Meanwhile, Ningmeng Busuan and Yu Ji had also traveled a considerable distance.」

The road they chose was quite remote, with almost no signs of civilization, only large tracts of land planted with trees and crops. A wide road stretched into the distance, with occasional large trucks speeding past them.

"It's getting dark," Ningmeng Busuan said, looking at the yellowing sky. "It's very dangerous at night. Our vision is impaired by the darkness, making it hard to notice the ghost's approach. But the ghost can easily detect us moving in the dark. It's best if we find a hidden place to hide for tonight. What do you think?"

Yu Ji nodded. "I'll listen to you."

So, before the sun completely set, they began searching for a secluded hiding spot. Ningmeng Busuan didn't consider staying in a hotel. Firstly, they had no money. Secondly, ghosts often targeted people in such places. Staying in a hotel made it easy for a ghost to find them. The wilderness offered better concealment.

They found a cornfield before sunset and hid inside it. Ningmeng Busuan also placed some small loudspeakers at different places inside the cornfield. These were special items she had obtained from a previous instance. There were five of them in total, controlled by a remote control. Pressing the switch on the remote would make all five small loudspeakers emit a loud noise simultaneously. This sound

couldn't deter a ghost and had no other effect except for being painfully loud to the ears. It was a rather useless special item that could even expose their position. But Ningmeng Busuan put it to good use.

"If the ghost finds us, press the remote control switch and we split up," she explained to Yu Ji. "This cornfield is so tall that once we run, we'll vanish. The ghost will have a hard time finding us; it will only be able to judge our location by sound. The sound from these loudspeakers will mask our footsteps, making it hard for the ghost to determine our escape direction."

Yu Ji nodded.

Ningmeng Busuan looked at the afterglow on the horizon. "Once it's completely dark, we must remain silent. If we need to communicate, we can use paper and pen." As she spoke, she took out a notebook and a pen. She had bought them from a supermarket outside; they were items that could be brought into an instance. The other end of the pen had a small lightbulb that emitted a faint light, enough to illuminate the words on the notebook. Ningmeng Busuan had taped this small light to the pen to make it easier to read in the dark. The lightbulb only illuminated an area of four to five centimeters, so it wouldn't be detected by a ghost.

Yu Ji nodded and stopped speaking.

Nightfall came quickly. The sky turned completely dark. The moon was quite large that night, brightly illuminating the cornfield.

Ningmeng Busuan gently brushed away the leaves that kept sweeping against her face, vigilantly observing her surroundings. There were many small flying insects, which were extremely annoying. Every now and then, a few would fly into their eyes, and they silently swatted them away.

Besides these insects, some strange animals were also making noises in the cornfield. Rustling sounds from their surroundings occasionally made them tense.

I wonder if there are snakes in here, Ningmeng Busuan thought. It would be awful to die from a snakebite instead of being killed by the ghost.

She had chosen this relatively secluded path for a reason. In such a quiet environment, she could immediately detect any disturbance and react. A bustling place, on the other hand, might conceal danger, and by the time it was discovered, it would be too late.

Ningmeng Busuan wrote on the notebook and handed it to Yu Ji: "We'll take turns resting. You sleep first."

Yu Ji nodded slightly and closed her eyes.

Falling asleep under these circumstances was extremely difficult. But they had to force themselves to sleep. Without any rest, they wouldn't have the energy to escape.

Thank goodness I don't snore, Yu Ji thought. That might attract the ghost.

Seeing Yu Ji close her eyes, Ningmeng Busuan resumed observing their surroundings. She had brought an electronic timer specifically for keeping track of time in this survival instance. So far, they had spent seven hours and twenty-four minutes in the instance. Only a tenth of the instance's duration had passed. They still had to endure over sixty more hours here before they could leave.

With everyone having gone their separate ways, Ningmeng Busuan had no idea about the others' situation.

Has anyone died yet? she wondered. If others have died, I should feel relieved, she thought. Grateful that they bought me time, grateful that the ghost didn't choose the same path as me.

But in the face of death, she couldn't feel any happiness. The deaths of others were advantageous to her, yet she still hoped everyone could survive.

As she mused, the discarded group photo came to her mind again. Ningmeng Busuan used the quiet moment to think rapidly.

Chapter 712 The World has Suffered for a Long Time_1

This instance had to do with a photo.

The ghost will crawl out of the photo and kill people, and the only way to survive is to destroy the photo before the ghost crawls out, Ningmeng Busuan pondered. This was their speculation. After all, no one had witnessed a ghost emerge from a photo. They had simply conjectured this conclusion based on the ghost's actions. Indeed, this was the most plausible guess so far. Ningmeng Busuan couldn't think of any other possibilities for now, so she proceeded with her deductions based on this conjecture.

Is destroying the photo the only way to survive? Could there be other hidden survival methods? There must be a connection between the ghost and the photo; if a ghost can emerge from a photo, can it return to the photo? Thinking about this, she suddenly remembered that Polaroid camera. If a ghost appears, could taking another photo of it with the Polaroid send it back into the photo?

Ningmeng Busuan remembered that there were still four pieces of photo paper left in that Polaroid. Perhaps that's the escape route the instance left for them. But it seemed Jin Ye Bai took the Polaroid. We've been on our respective paths for several hours now, and it would be hard to find Jin Ye Bai if we were to return for him now.

Thinking about this, Ningmeng Busuan frowned.

If we don't have a Polaroid, maybe we could try other cameras? But a standard camera doesn't produce a photo immediately after shooting. We'd have to find a photo studio to develop it, and the ghost won't give us that time. Besides, where would we find a camera now?

Ningmeng Busuan felt a bit of a headache.

There were probably many rats in the cornfield at night; she could hear something rustling around, then the sound would disappear. These noises kept her highly alert, fearing the ghost's arrival.

Fortunately, what she worried about never happened. The two of them had spent five hours there safely. After standing guard for five hours, Ningmeng Busuan started to feel drowsy. She poked Yu Ji, who was beside her, wanting to switch so she could rest.

Yu Ji was a light sleeper and woke up instantly. First, she swatted away the flying insects in front of her, then sat up and looked around. It was pitch dark all around; she could only see the nearby cornstalks. Aside from the sounds of small animals and the wind, there were no other particular disturbances. After observing her surroundings for a moment, she finally looked at Ningmeng Busuan beside her.

Ningmeng Busuan lowered her head and wrote in her notebook, "I'm a bit tired. Can you keep watch for a while longer?"

Yu Ji looked at the words in the notebook and nodded.

Only then did Ningmeng Busuan close her eyes. In this place, we can detect any noise immediately and prepare promptly. Moreover, this place is very hidden. It would be difficult for the ghost to find us, so staying hidden here for all three days is actually a good choice.

Just as she was about to drift off to sleep while pondering, a sudden, distinct rustling sound erupted.

Ningmeng Busuan sat up instantly. Yu Ji beside her also widened her eyes, not daring to make a sound. This sound was clearly not made by a small animal. It sounded more like someone had entered the cornfield and was moving rapidly within it.

Both of them held their breath, not daring to move or make a sound.

Was it the ghost? Did the ghost come looking for us?

For a moment, they couldn't be sure.

Ningmeng Busuan gently shook her head at Yu Ji, signaling her not to move.

Yu Ji pursed her lips, afraid of making even the slightest sound.

The rustling sound was exceptionally clear in the night. They heard it getting closer and closer...

In a little over ten seconds, the rustling sound reached their vicinity, then brushed past them and receded into the distance. Before the two could feel relieved, the sound returned. After this happened several times, the rustling finally stopped, very close to them.

At this point, they were almost certain: it was the ghost, and it was looking for them.

Ningmeng Busuan clutched the remote control in her hand, staring intently in the direction the sound had come from. If they were found, she would immediately press the horn switch and run.

But just then, the sound suddenly stopped.

The two of them held their breath, remaining motionless for several minutes, but the sound did not resume.

The moonlight shone on the dense cornstalks, making the place look somewhat eerie. Cold sweat already covered Ningmeng Busuan's forehead, but she couldn't spare a moment to wipe it.

Yu Ji turned her head towards her, her expression questioning, as if asking whether the source of the sound had left.

Ningmeng Busuan slightly shook her head.

Don't move, don't make a sound! That thing made noise when it came; it would surely make noise when it left. But the sound stopped nearby. 'It' hasn't left. It just temporarily lost track of us and stopped, waiting for us to give ourselves away. Luckily, this cornfield is vast, and the ghost doesn't know our exact hiding spot. Even if the ghost finds us, we can immediately run in separate directions. I've even scattered horns around to disrupt the ghost's hearing, making it unable to determine our escape route. There's hope... We have hope to survive this together.

As Ningmeng Busuan encouraged herself, she looked at Yu Ji beside her.

She saw Yu Ji trying to press her body as low as possible to hide.

Seeing this, Ningmeng Busuan also copied Yu Ji, slightly bending her waist. But halfway down, she felt something was wrong. She watched Yu Ji continuously press her body lower. Wait, I don't remember Yu Ji being this flexible.

The person before her sat on the ground with her legs spread apart. Her upper body was continuously pressing towards the ground, her head almost buried in the earth.

Watching this, an unsettling feeling surged in Ningmeng Busuan's heart.

She opened her mouth but dared not make a sound. She wanted to reach out and touch 'Yu Ji,' but the bizarre sight made her recoil.

Ningmeng Busuan's trembling arms supported her on the ground, ready to flee at any moment.

Just then, a sudden CRACK came from 'Yu Ji's' body, like the sound of a bone breaking.

With that sound, 'Yu Ji's' upper body completely flattened against the ground.

Her spine has snapped!

Ningmeng Busuan leapt up abruptly, wanting to flee.

At that moment, 'Yu Ji,' who had kept her head buried in the ground, suddenly tilted her head up. Her movements were grotesque. Her upper body remained pressed tightly to the ground, yet her head was tilted upwards.

Ningmeng Busuan saw 'Yu Ji's' mouth agape, but no sound came out; her mud-streaked face was covered in tears.

She watched as 'Yu Ji's' head tilted back further and further, almost becoming perpendicular to the ground. She saw 'Yu Ji's' eyes widening, filled with terror.

Then, another familiar CRACK.

The back of 'Yu Ji's' head pressed completely against her spine.

She was dead.

All of this happened almost instantaneously.

Ningmeng Busuan no longer dared to stay put. She desperately ran backward, pressing the button on the remote in her hand.

Shrill horn blasts echoed from all directions.

She didn't dare look back, nor did she dare run in a straight line. She made several turns within the cornfield, nearly losing her bearings. It took her a long time to run out of this cornfield. Then, without looking back, she darted into the nearby woods.

After running in the woods for several minutes and confirming the ghost hadn't followed, she finally dared to stop.

Ningmeng Busuan leaned against a tree, gasping for breath. She felt wetness on her face. Reaching up to touch it, she realized they were tears she had shed unconsciously.

"How... how could this happen..." she thought of the scene of Yu Ji's death, mumbling to herself repeatedly. "Why is the ghost invisible... We can't see the ghost at all..."

Doesn't this mean that even if the ghost is right in front of us, we wouldn't know? Can only that Polaroid camera capture the invisible ghost?

「Meanwhile」

Gu Mian had found the discarded group photo.

The sanitation workers in this area were very diligent. When Gu Mian and the others arrived at the spot where the photo had been discarded, the ground had already been cleaned spotless, without a single piece of trash left. Ultimately, it was Xu Xingcheng who fished the group photo out of a trash can. He had rummaged through many trash cans, only finding it late at night.

At this moment, Gu Mian was holding one corner of the group photo, shining a flashlight on it. The photo looked mostly the same as before, only the ghost inside it had disappeared.

"Did it crawl out from here?" The photo had a strange odor from being thrown in the trash can, and Gu Mian was quite disgusted by it. Gu Mian had already shooed Xu Xingcheng, the one who had rummaged through the trash cans, to the side, forbidding him to come close.

Xu Xingcheng felt very wronged by this.

Chu Changge took the photo, seemingly oblivious to the odor emanating from it. "The idea of the ghost crawling out of the photo is just an assumption. From start to finish, none of us have actually seen a ghost crawl out."

Wenqin Tan Jiu had also discarded the photo as a precaution.

Chapter 713 Pretend to be at Third Watch _1

Chu Changge looked at the group photo in his hands. "Actually, I have a question. Can ghosts really come out of photos? Were all those behaviors we saw from the ghost done deliberately for us?"

Gu Mian also looked at the picture that no longer harbored a ghost. "Are you suggesting it's creating an illusion? An illusion that it could climb out of the picture to mislead them into burning the photos?"

But Wenqin Tan Jiu had acted too quickly, throwing that specific photo out of the car. Many of the other photos were indeed burned.

"This is just speculation." Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "There's no evidence to prove it."

"If the ghost is indeed misleading players into burning the photos, then a path to survival might be hidden in them." Gu Mian thoughtfully reached for his guitar case. He still had a few photos in there. When everyone else was burning photos in the car, Gu Mian hadn't taken out the ones from his case.

At that time, Wenqin Tan Jiu's theory was that "ghosts could crawl out of photos."

Could such a good thing actually happen? Gu Mian had thought. So, he had kept those photos with him in eager anticipation.

He unzipped his guitar case and took out the treasured photos. There were three in total. All three had been taken on the bus, shot by someone inside looking through the window at the passing scenery. Because they were taken from a moving vehicle, the photos were somewhat blurry.

The first was of a flowerbed in a green belt along the roadside. The photographer probably thought the patch of red flowers was beautiful and snapped it on a whim. Besides the flowerbed, the frame also contained a portion of the road and part of the sidewalk. A road sign stood next to the flowerbed, but the photo was too blurry; Gu Mian could only vaguely make out two characters.

"This seems to say something like Hua... Street," Gu Mian said, squinting at the picture.

Chu Changge leaned in for a look. After a few seconds, he said, "Huayin Street."

You can even recognize that? Gu Mian gazed at the blurry characters in the center.

"We passed this sign when we took the bus back to the company. It seems we take the same route there and back," Chu Changge said. "I remember the location in the photo isn't too far from here." He pointed forward as he spoke. "It's just two intersections ahead."

He even remembers the specific location so clearly. Gu Mian mused. I could practically stick him beside the steering wheel as a human GPS.

He then looked at the next photo. The main subject of this photo was the sky, with a cloud shaped like droppings in the center. The sight made Gu Mian want to take a few more pictures himself. The

photographer hadn't aimed completely upwards, so a part of the ground was also captured. Below the sky was an intersection. The bus had probably been waiting at a red light, so this photo was somewhat clearer.

"This intersection looks familiar." Gu Mian held the photo, comparing it with the one visible in the distance ahead. "It seems to be the one right up there."

"That's right." Chu Changge also looked at the intersection ahead. "It's the one just ten minutes from the company."

Gu Mian remembered the bus waiting for a red light there on their way back.

"Let's check it out later," Gu Mian said, then turned his attention to the third photo.

This photo was of a place much farther away. He recalled a reservoir along their route; this picture had been taken there. It was quite far from their current location, over a twenty-minute drive. This one had also been taken while the bus was moving, making the image even blurrier than the first. Fortunately, the reservoir in the photo was distinctive enough for Gu Mian to recognize it at a glance.

He stared at the blurry photo in his hands for a long while.

Chu Changge asked, "What are you looking at?"

Gu Mian looked up at him. "Something's not right with this photo."

Wenqin Tan Jiu and the others didn't know that Gu Mian had already returned to where the photos were discarded and had even retrieved the group photo.

The two of them, Wenqin Tan Jiu and Jin Ye Bai, had been pedaling furiously for several hours, and their strength was waning.

"Maybe we should take a little break," Jin Ye Bai said, looking at a streetlight by the road. "My legs are getting weak. I can't pedal anymore."

Wenqin Tan Jiu was also exhausted. He nodded in agreement, got off his bike, and plopped down on the ground by the road. Jin Ye Bai, still holding his Polaroid camera, sat beside him. After cycling for so long, his bottom ached a little. Rubbing it, he looked behind them. "Has Hao Laoshi not caught up yet?"

Hao Laoshi had also stolen a bicycle, but his stamina couldn't compare to the two younger men, and he had fallen far behind. The two sat there for almost two minutes before Hao Laoshi finally arrived on his bicycle, panting heavily. Seeing Wenqin Tan Jiu and Jin Ye Bai resting by the roadside, Hao Laoshi immediately jumped off his bike and half-lay on the steps, gasping for breath.

"It's almost dawn." Jin Ye Bai withdrew his gaze and looked up at the sky. Perhaps it was psychological, but the arrival of daylight always brought some measure of comfort.

"We've run far enough; the ghost shouldn't be able to catch up with us anytime soon." Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at the three bicycles by the roadside and tried to lighten the tense atmosphere. "If the ghost wants to catch us, it'll probably have to chase us on a bicycle too."

Jin Ye Bai imagined the scene and chuckled. Even Hao Laoshi, still gasping for breath beside them, was amused.

"Even if the ghost catches up to us, we still have the Polaroid camera. What if taking a photo of the ghost is our way out?" Wenqin Tan Jiu continued. "If we verify this is a path to survival, we'll go back to find the others, gather everyone, and we'll all survive together."

Jin Ye Bai looked at the moon, gradually fading in the sky. "Yeah. I hope everyone can survive."

Hao Laoshi, who always prepared for the worst, hesitated before asking, "But what if taking a photo of the ghost isn't the way out?"

The other two fell silent.

Half a minute later, Wenqin Tan Jiu spoke again. "Then we run. If it really comes down to it, we still have special items we can use to escape."

Players couldn't harm ghosts, but some possessed special items that could delay them. For example, Keke's special item, 'Money Can Make Ghosts Grind', and Xiao Qiao's 'Ghost Census Form'. Both of these special items could delay a ghost for a few seconds, or even tens of seconds. The former's delay depended on how much money you had, while the latter's depended on the length of the ghost's name. As for Gu Mian's 'Wildlife Protection Law', which was basically a cheat when he used it, that went without saying.

However, these special items were extremely rare and difficult to obtain in ordinary instances. Wenqin Tan Jiu had been lucky enough to get one of these life-saving special items in a lottery draw, but it was single-use; once used, it was gone. He wouldn't use it unless he was forced into a dead end.

The other two weren't as fortunate. Jin Ye Bai had a load of miscellaneous items, but nothing particularly useful. Hao Laoshi was in an even worse situation. He didn't even have miscellaneous items; he had sold all his special items for Game Coins to support his family. The supermarket had a dedicated recycling area for special items, with a sign prominently displayed: "Fair prices, honesty to all." That was where Hao Laoshi had sold his things.

For a moment, both their expressions turned grim, and they lowered their heads in silence.

Chapter 714 Immersive Gugu Spirit_1

"Alright, enough talk." Wenqin Tan Jiu patted his trousers and stood up. They had been resting here for over ten minutes; it was time to leave.

"Let's keep riding," he said, righting the bike that had fallen by the roadside. The streetlamp stretched his shadow long. "Don't let the ghost catch up."

Jin Ye Bai and Hao Laoshi also got up, righting their own bikes.

The three of them remounted their bikes and continued into the dark night.

The road was deserted, the wide street occupied only by the three of them. There were no storefronts along the road either, just green belts on either side.

Jin Ye Bai spoke as he pedaled, "We've been riding for so long, we must have covered more than ten miles, huh?"

He had no clear concept of distance; this estimate was just a guess.

"That's too low," Wenqin Tan Jiu pondered. "It must be several dozen miles."

Hearing this, Jin Ye Bai felt slightly relieved. They had already ridden quite far; it would take the ghost some time to catch them. The thought filled him with a surge of energy, making him wish he could pedal a few dozen more miles.

"We've passed several crossroads and picked random directions. I wonder if the ghost might take a wrong turn trying to find us," Jin Ye Bai hypothesized.

Hao Laoshi, however, kept his attention divided, scanning their surroundings, afraid a ghost might leap out from the green belt at the roadside. He didn't see any ghosts jump out from the green belt, but he did notice more and more storefronts appearing on both sides of the road. The more they advanced, the more shops they saw on the roadside.

They seemed to be entering a busier part of the city. Most of these were snack shops, but they were all closed. It wasn't the time for snack shops to be open, after all.

As he was looking around, he heard Jin Ye Bai's voice call out from ahead, "There's another crossroads in front! Which way are we turning this time?"

Upon hearing this, Hao Laoshi also turned his head to look at the crossroads up ahead.

But at a single glance, he froze.

Something's not right... This crossroads... why does it feel so familiar?

Wenqin Tan Jiu also realized something was off. He slammed on his brakes, the tires screeching harshly against the ground.

Jin Ye Bai hadn't registered the gravity of the situation yet. He stopped beside Wenqin Tan Jiu and asked, "What's wrong?"

"No... Run! Turn back, now!" Wenqin Tan Jiu bit out the words, sharply turning his bike and pedaling away from the crossroads.

Cold sweat trickled down his cheeks.

As Wenqin Tan Jiu rushed away, he mumbled despairingly, "How is this...? How can this be? Why...why are we back here again..."

That crossroads was where the nine of them had separated! They had actually returned to that very spot! How is this possible...

Wenqin Tan Jiu ignored the sweat on his face. He pedaled forcefully, attempting to distance himself from that eerie crossroads.

Hao Laoshi was already pedaling furiously ahead; the instant he realized something was wrong, he was ready to flee.

Jin Ye Bai, stunned for a few seconds, finally reacted and quickly pedaled to catch up.

"What the hell is going on?!" Jin Ye Bai roared from behind. "Why are we back in this damned place?!"

"It's a ghost wall," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, his voice trembling. "The ghost has found us."

"Shit!" Jin Ye Bai cursed, pedaling even harder.

"Watch your surroundings!" Wenqin Tan Jiu's eyes darted around. "Don't get off your bikes! If you see any suspicious figures, turn and run immediately!"

He spoke while pedaling furiously, trying to escape.

At that moment, he noticed another crossroads ahead. He looked closely and realized it was the same crossroads they had just seen.

Jin Ye Bai also saw the crossroads ahead. "We're back again... How can this be... We definitely rode in the opposite direction..."

As he spoke, he looked back to see if the crossroads they had just left behind was still there. But all he saw was an opaque mist that obscured everything.

Suddenly, the three of them heard a hair-raising sound. Heavy footsteps reached their ears.

They anxiously glanced all around but couldn't see who or what was making the noise.

"Where is that noise coming from?" Jin Ye Bai clenched the handlebars so tightly that the front of the bike trembled. "I can't tell."

Hao Laoshi's face turned as white as a sheet. "Neither can I."

What should they do? What now? No matter which way they turned, the same crossroads appeared before them, and now, there were also those eerie footsteps.

Wenqin Tan Jiu gritted his teeth and said to the other two, "Follow me."

As soon as he finished speaking, he charged towards the crossroads up ahead. Jin Ye Bai and Hao Laoshi were startled, but then bravely followed. There was no other choice; this was the only path available. They could only charge into the crossroads and see if they could find another way out.

But no matter which path the three chose, the same crossroads would always appear before them.

This place was like an inescapable maze. What can we do? Wenqin Tan Jiu felt a wave of despair; it seemed they had reached a dead end.

Those terrifying footsteps echoed continuously in their ears, drawing nearer and nearer. But they couldn't even see where the ghost was.

At this point, Wenqin Tan Jiu suddenly turned to look at the Polaroid camera hanging from Jin Ye Bai's neck. "Quick, try taking pictures with it!"

If we can capture the ghost in a photo, maybe we can seal it back in the photo.

"I've thought about it too!" Jin Ye Bai gripped the handlebar tightly with one hand while the other held up his Polaroid camera. "But I can't take pictures while riding! And I don't dare stop."

Wenqin Tan Jiu urged anxiously, "You can do it! Just try..."

As he urged Jin Ye Bai on, he suddenly felt a tightness around his waist. He looked down only to find nothing there. Then, he felt a chill on his back, as if something had pressed against it.

Wenqin Tan Jiu's scalp tingled, and his limbs turned icy. His bicycle had a rear seat. He knew something was sitting on his rear seat. And it was something invisible.

An invisible ghost...

He hadn't considered before that this ghost could be invisible.

Shortly after, he felt the pressure on his waist intensify, nearly suffocating him. Wenqin Tan Jiu lost control of his bicycle and crashed by the roadside.

The sudden incident startled the other two.

Wenqin Tan Jiu gasped, his mouth wide open. The immense pressure on his waist made his eyes bulge, and he felt as if the contents of his stomach were about to be squeezed out. Nausea welled up, and he wanted to vomit.

The ghost wants to snap me in half! No... I don't want to die... That's right, I can still use that!

Wenqin Tan Jiu struggled to pull something out and hurled it into the distance. The observant Hao Laoshi saw it was a bowl of white rice.

After throwing the white rice, Wenqin Tan Jiu felt the pressure around his waist suddenly disappear. Ignoring the pain, he immediately scrambled up and ran towards Jin Ye Bai.

"Quick! Take a picture of where the rice landed! The ghost is invisible, and it's eating. Once the rice is gone, it'll come after us again!" He grabbed Jin Ye Bai, who had just stopped his bicycle, and pointed towards the white rice. "Take the picture quickly! Capture the ghost in it!"

"Okay, okay..." Jin Ye Bai said, his hands shaking as he fumbled with the Polaroid camera. "Turn on, turn on, quick!"

Hao Laoshi had stopped his bike a short distance away. He watched as the rice in the bowl rapidly diminished, vanishing in seconds. Only then did the Polaroid camera in Jin Ye Bai's hands finally power on.

"Hurry up!" Wenqin Tan Jiu exclaimed, instinctively backing away as he watched the rice disappear.

This Polaroid camera didn't have a screen on the back, so Jin Ye Bai had to peer through the tiny viewfinder to aim. Just as Jin Ye Bai was looking through the viewfinder to locate the spot with the rice, Wenqin Tan Jiu saw the bowl was already empty.

Then, the empty bowl was slammed down. He heard something pounce towards them.

It's over...

At that moment, a blinding white light flashed before their eyes. Jin Ye Bai had pressed the shutter!

Jin Ye Bai, holding the Polaroid camera, collapsed to the ground afterward. He was terrified. It had taken immense courage for him to stand there and take the picture, knowing the ghost was lunging towards them.

Wenqin Tan Jiu was still holding his breath; for a moment, no one spoke.

One second, two seconds... Even after ten seconds, there was no sound or movement. The ghost hadn't attacked again.

"Did we... succeed?" Jin Ye Bai turned to look at the other two.

"So, taking a picture of the ghost really is the way to survive." Wenqin Tan Jiu finally relaxed, the fear subsiding. He clutched his stomach and bent over, trying to ease the pain. "Let's find the others and tell them about this way out."

Jin Ye Bai, who was sitting on the ground, nodded.

By then, the photo had slid out from the Polaroid camera. He took it, placed it on the ground, and looked at the image. Because the picture was taken at night, the background was almost pitch black. But the figure standing in the middle was very clear. It was bowing its head, as if looking at something.

This is the ghost.

Jin Ye Bai looked at the ghost in the picture and still felt a lingering fear. "Should we burn it?"

If we don't burn it, it might crawl out of the picture again.

Wenqin Tan Jiu straightened up. "No... I have another theory now. If a photo can seal a ghost, could it be the ghost's prison? Were we wrong to burn the photos before?"

"You mean the ghost couldn't crawl out of the photo originally, but because we burned the photos, it was able to manifest?" Jin Ye Bai pushed himself up from the ground, edging away from the photo.

"But the photos we burned weren't the group photo with the ghost in it," Jin Ye Bai mused. "We burned other photos."

Wenqin Tan Jiu was also puzzled. He glanced at the ghost's photo on the ground. "Let's get out of here first. It's still dangerous."

He went to retrieve his fallen bicycle.

Hao Laoshi, patting his chest, asked, "Should we go find the others?"

"Yes," Wenqin Tan Jiu agreed, swinging onto his bike. "We need to tell them the Polaroid camera is the way to survive."

"Right, don't forget to bring the Polaroid camera..." he said, turning back to look at Jin Ye Bai.

But just as he was turning his head, he heard something thud to the ground.

By the time he fully turned around, he saw Jin Ye Bai on the ground, back to him, struggling violently. It was as if something had grabbed his head and was forcefully twisting it backward. He thrashed about but couldn't make a sound.

Two seconds later, with a sickening CRACK, all struggling ceased. Jin Ye Bai's head had been twisted a full 180 degrees, his face now staring silently in the same direction as his back in the dark night.

Why... Wenqin Tan Jiu stared in disbelief at the scene before him. Why can the ghost still kill?!

"Run!" Hao Laoshi's voice rang out.

Only then did Wenqin Tan Jiu snap back to reality, pedaling his bicycle away as fast as he could.

Chapter 715 Thank you GT loves wife guild leader_1

They had already photographed the ghost, so why did Jin Ye Bai still die? Wenqin Tan Jiu couldn't figure it out. Could their earlier deductions have been wrong? Did they have to discard their previous conclusions and begin anew? A deep sense of despair filled him. But now he couldn't afford to be melancholy. The ghost was right behind them! All Wenqin Tan Jiu could do was frantically pedal the bike, trying to get as far away as possible from the place where Jin Ye Bai had died.

The ghost barriers had disappeared. The two of them pedaled furiously, not stopping until they had rushed through several intersections.

Hao Laoshi was so exhausted he was practically frothing at the mouth. He stopped by the roadside, leaning on a tree and coughing violently. He continued to look warily around him as he coughed, even pricking his ears to listen to the surrounding sounds. Only after confirming there were no anomalies did he relax.

Wenqin Tan Jiu wasn't in good shape either. The pain in his waist hadn't lessened, and the effort of pedaling the bike pulled on his waist muscles, making him grimace in pain. Eventually, he couldn't help but swear out loud, "Damn it, how the hell did this happen!"

The ghost was invisible. The photographs couldn't hold the ghost. All their previous assumptions were invalid.

Thinking of Jin Ye Bai's expression as he died, Wenqin Tan Jiu shivered. He really wanted to grieve for his friend, but the current situation didn't permit that. He had to focus on escaping, on finding a way to survive. Otherwise, he would end up like Jin Ye Bai, dead inside this horrifying instance.

"What do we do now..." Hao Laoshi coughed a few times. "Should we keep fleeing?"

"Forget it," said Wenqin Tan Jiu, tightening his grip on the handlebars. "No matter how far we run, the ghost barriers will just bring us back. There's no point in futile efforts."

He touched his arm, which was covered in goosebumps. "Let's go find the others and see if we can come up with a viable plan."

He didn't sound very confident as he spoke. Wenqin Tan Jiu had witnessed the horror of this ghost. He wasn't sure how many people the ghost had killed before it got to Jin Ye Bai.

"There might be other players who have died." He took a deep breath. "I don't know how many are still alive."

Seven? Five? Three? Or were they the only two left?

A terrifying sense of isolation spread through the night, causing Wenqin Tan Jiu to shudder. He didn't dare to contemplate further.

"Let's get going," he said. "Since the ghost has brought us back here, I think the others might have experienced the same thing... If we look around, we might find other surviving players nearby."

Wenqin Tan Jiu thought of the unreliable trio of doctors, of Ningmeng Busuan and Yu Ji, and of the lone wolf player, Su Lian. He wondered how many of them were still alive.

What he didn't know was that Gu Mian and his group had not fled at all; they had even gone back to rummage through the garbage can where they had discarded the photographs.

Ningmeng Busuan had also returned here. She hadn't encountered a ghost barrier; she had returned of her own volition.

Ningmeng Busuan limped alone down the empty street. There wasn't a soul around at this time of night, save for her, hobbling along.

"Only the Polaroid camera can capture the invisible ghost. I must find Jin Ye Bai... I need to tell everyone that the ghost is invisible so they can be careful," she muttered to herself as she looked around, trying to find a place that sold phones.

She wanted to test if her phone's camera could capture the ghost. It's the middle of the night, and the shops are empty. I could just use a brick to break the glass and steal one, she mused.

She wasn't worried about being apprehended by the police but was slightly worried that she might not be able to break the glass of the phone store. That made Ningmeng Busuan think of the big guitar the doctor carried on his back. If she used that guitar to smash the glass, she would surely be able to break in easily, right?

After walking a considerable distance, she realized she needn't have worried. Because she hadn't come across a single phone store. Just her luck...

She was too tired to go on. Ningmeng Busuan had no choice but to stop and rest on the steps by the roadside.

She looked at the intersection not far in front of her. That was where the nine players had parted ways. She had chosen the road on the right. Wenqin Tan Jiu and his group had taken the more lively route on the left. The group of three doctors and Su Lian had both chosen to go straight ahead.

"I should go and find Wenqin Tan Jiu's group first; if I follow that road, I might run into them." Ningmeng Busuan knew in her heart it would be difficult to find anyone, but she had to try.

As she thought this, she pushed herself up on her legs, intending to continue onward. But then she suddenly heard the sound of footsteps behind her.

Ningmeng Busuan's spine chilled, and she immediately started running forward without looking back. Oddly enough, the footsteps didn't follow.

After running a distance, she plucked up her courage to look back, only to see that it wasn't a ghost standing behind her, but Su Lian, notebook in hand. Su Lian just stood there silently, watching her.

"You... why are you here?" Ningmeng Busuan was somewhat shocked. She didn't expect to run into another player here.

Her shock quickly turned into caution. She stepped back a few paces, somewhat doubting whether the person in front of her was really Su Lian. She knew the ghost had been invisible when it killed Yu Ji, but who knows if the ghost might have other forms?

They were too far apart to check each other's player panels, so Ningmeng Busuan cautiously opened her mouth to verify. "How many players are listed on the game's bounty board?"

If Gu Mian happened to be passing by, he would certainly be rendered speechless by her way of verification.

It seemed Su Lian was also rendered somewhat speechless. She was quiet for two seconds before answering, "One."

Even though the answer was right, Ningmeng Busuan was still unsure. "How much is the current worth of this player?"

"One hundred thousand." Su Lian's eyebrows twitched as if afraid that the other would continue to ask questions piecemeal. She added, "Gu Shiwan, who has seen his value increase multiple times and has been brutally dealt with in instances like The Haunted High School, The Driving Exam for Spirit Cars, and Crazy Guessing Words..."

The situation was somewhat bizarre. In the middle of a horror instance, the two female players were engaged in a friendly game of question and answer, with Su Lian even volunteering additional information.

Only after hearing the chain of responses from Su Lian did Ningmeng Busuan relax.

"Why are you here? Did you leave only to return?" Ningmeng Busuan moved forward a few steps and checked Su Lian's player panel.

"No, I've been around here the whole time," Su Lian answered succinctly.

"You didn't leave?" Ningmeng Busuan was slightly startled. "Aren't you going to run?"

Su Lian didn't answer her question, only turned to look at her. "Your friend, you've separated?"

Hearing this, Ningmeng Busuan's expression dimmed. "She's dead... You're right. We did run, but we couldn't escape the ghost."

Thinking of Yu Ji's death, Ningmeng Busuan wrinkled her brows at Su Lian. "Actually, the reason I came back was to tell you, the ghost is invisible. Only the Polaroid camera can capture its image."

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Hearing this, Su Lian looked ahead. "I remember Jin Ye Bai took the Polaroid camera. They took the road ahead."

"Correct." Ningmeng Busuan nodded. "After careful consideration, finding the path to survival is the best approach. Even if we split up and run, we'll still be chased down and killed by the ghost."

"Didn't you say earlier that we've already missed the path to survival?" Su Lian looked at her.

Ningmeng Busuan frowned. "That was just our guess. All the evidence at the beginning suggested that the ghost would crawl out of the photo. Therefore, destroying the group photo seemed to be the most logical path to survival. But during the time we were split up, I kept thinking, can the ghost really climb out of the photo? Is its behavior in the photo just a trick to get us to destroy it?" As she spoke, her frown deepened. "Thinking about it now, perhaps destroying the group photo is actually a path to death."

Thankfully, Wenqin Tan Jiu acted quickly and threw that photo away, she thought. However, we also destroyed other photos. Those didn't contain the ghost, so destroying them shouldn't have too negative an impact. Of course, that's also just my guess. Right now, we don't have any evidence, so it's impossible to determine the true path to survival or death.

"Do you have any ideas about the path to survival?" Su Lian asked.

Ningmeng Busuan hesitated before nodding. "The ghost is invisible, but it shows its form in a photo. It initially existed inside the photo. I'm wondering if we encounter the ghost and use a Polaroid camera to take its picture, can we lock it back into the photo?"

If she had taken a few more steps to the intersection ahead, she would have abandoned this thought.

That's because Jin Ye Bai, who had just tried this very idea, had already become a corpse. He was lying on another road connected to the intersection, visible with just a turn of the head.

Ningmeng Busuan didn't know Jin Ye Bai's body was nearby. She frowned in concern. "But the Polaroid is with Wenqin Tan Jiu and the others. It will be difficult to find them."

As she spoke, she sighed. Then she raised her head to look around. "I want to try if other cameras can capture the ghost in a photo, but I didn't find any mobile phone or camera stores along the way, nor did I encounter any pedestrians."

It was indeed hard to come by pedestrians in the middle of the night.

There were a few passing vehicles, but Ningmeng Busuan couldn't possibly jump onto them to snatch someone's phone.

Su Lian pondered for a few seconds. "As for a camera, other players might be carrying one, right? There are many types of special items, so perhaps some players own camera-type special items."

"Wenqin Tan Jiu and Jin Ye Bai didn't have such special items, and it's uncertain if the others do either." Ningmeng Busuan glanced at the intersection ahead. "Besides, it will be hard to find them. We don't know how far they've gone..."

To be honest, bumping into Su Lian here was beyond my expectations, she thought.

"Let's go ahead and see." Ningmeng Busuan took a step forward. "I see more stores on the streets that way. Maybe we can find a mobile phone shop or something."

"Are you coming with me?" She looked back at Su Lian.

This lone wolf player seems to dislike socializing with others, Ningmeng Busuan felt. If I hadn't looked back earlier, Su Lian might have just let me run off alone.

Su Lian was silent for a few seconds, then followed.

Seeing her follow, Ningmeng Busuan turned and continued walking forward.

"I hope taking a photo of the ghost is the path to survival," she said while walking. "If this isn't it, then I have no other ideas."

Su Lian didn't speak, simply following silently behind her.

However, Ningmeng Busuan's hope was soon dashed.

By this time, the two of them had reached the intersection where they had previously split and saw a figure lying prone on another road.

"What's that?" Ningmeng Busuan cautiously stepped back a few paces.

The street was pitch black before dawn, and they could only see a person-like figure lying on the road.

"It seems to be a corpse." Su Lian took a few steps forward, adjusting her slightly slipping glasses back onto the bridge of her nose. "The clothes look familiar."

Ningmeng Busuan stared at the blurred silhouette and muttered absently, "It does look familiar... Wait a minute, is that Jin Ye Bai!"

"It seems so." Su Lian took a few more steps forward.

Jin Ye Bai... is he dead? Ningmeng Busuan stared blankly at the body. I already witnessed Yu Ji die before my very eyes, and now I'm seeing Jin Ye Bai's corpse. Doesn't this mean that only Wenqin Tan Jiu and I

are left in our group of four? The four of us entered the instance together. Now two are dead, and one is missing, their fate unknown. I've experienced this so many times, but I still can't get used to it.

A wave of ineffable loneliness and despair washed over her. I suddenly envy Su Lian for being alone; she doesn't have to watch her friends die one by one.

At this moment, Su Lian started to step towards Jin Ye Bai to get a closer look.

But Ningmeng Busuan grabbed her. "Don't go over there! The ghost might still be nearby..."

Su Lian looked at something next to Jin Ye Bai's body and pointed. "The Polaroid is over there."

Ningmeng Busuan immediately turned to look.

She saw something indeed hanging around Jin Ye Bai's neck; it looked like the Polaroid camera.

"There seems to be a bowl over there too." Su Lian had good vision and immediately spotted a bowl lying upside down in a nearby corner.

Ningmeng Busuan also looked at the bowl. "I know. That's Wenqin Tan Jiu's special item. There's rice in the bowl, which can attract the ghost to eat."

"So, when Jin Ye Bai died, Wenqin Tan Jiu was nearby. But his body isn't around here; he managed to escape." Su Lian looked at the Polaroid next to Jin Ye Bai's body. "At that time, he and Jin Ye Bai were together. After the ghost killed Jin Ye Bai, it should have immediately pursued Wenqin Tan Jiu as he was closest. There's no reason for it to have stayed in place."

"The ghost probably isn't here anymore." Su Lian looked at Ningmeng Busuan. "I'm going over to take a look. You can stay here if you don't want to."

In the end, Ningmeng Busuan followed.

The two of them approached Jin Ye Bai's body.

As they drew closer, they discovered that the state of Jin Ye Bai's death was horrific.

His neck was twisted a full 180 degrees, his eyes wide open and staring straight ahead, his eyeballs looking as if they were about to fall out.

Heart pounding, Ningmeng Busuan reached for the Polaroid hanging around his neck and carefully removed the strap.

She didn't hang the Polaroid around her own neck but lowered her head to check the number of film sheets remaining.

"Three shots left?" she murmured in confusion. "They took a picture?"

There were four shots before, she recalled.

At this point, Su Lian had already found the photograph Jin Ye Bai had taken. She stood in front of it, looking down. "It's here."

Ningmeng Busuan walked over and looked down as well.

The photograph was pitch black and extremely blurry.

Su Lian examined it carefully and pointed to a white object in the middle of the photograph. "This photo was taken here. This white spot must be the bowl."

Ningmeng Busuan compared the white spot in the photograph with the bowl on the roadside and saw that they indeed matched.

Su Lian glanced at the now empty bowl by the roadside. "It seems Wenqin Tan Jiu and his group had the same idea as you."

Ningmeng Busuan stared blankly at the empty bowl.

"They also thought that taking a picture of the ghost might be the path to survival. So, when they encountered the ghost, Wenqin Tan Jiu threw out this bowl of rice to buy Jin Ye Bai time to take a picture, allowing him to successfully photograph the ghost." Su Lian looked at the small white dot in the photo. "But after Jin Ye Bai took the photo, he died instantly. This proves that taking a photo cannot restrain the ghost."

Dead... Ningmeng Busuan closed her eyes slightly. Why did this happen? Does taking a photo of the ghost not seal it away? Isn't this supposed to be the path to survival?

"Let's leave here first." Su Lian tugged at the still-stunned Ningmeng Busuan beside her. "This spot is too exposed. Let's find a more hidden place to examine this Polaroid and the photo."

Ningmeng Busuan came to her senses. "Should we take this photo with us?"

"Yes. I have an idea: the path to survival must be related to these photos." Su Lian nodded, reached down to pick up the photo from the ground, and put it into her pocket.

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The two quickly left the place, groping in the dark until they found a spot where a truck was parked.

The truck was about three meters high and parked near a supermarket. They hid behind it, studying the Polaroid camera and the photo.

Ningmeng Busuan didn't wear the Polaroid camera around her neck but put it in her jacket pocket.

Her jacket pocket was large enough to accommodate the Polaroid camera perfectly.

"Is it really okay to keep this photo with us?" Ningmeng Busuan felt the Polaroid in her pocket and looked up at the photo in Su Lian's hand, feeling uneasy.

She was slightly worried that the ghost might find them through the photo.

"This photo is very important," Su Lian said, staring at the blurry bowl in the middle of the photo. "Jin Ye Bai died after taking this photo. He must have captured the ghost that was eating at the time."

"They must have thought that taking photos of the ghost was their way to survive," she continued, "but instead of being sealed in the photo as they had hoped, the ghost immediately killed Jin Ye Bai."

"The photo does not restrain the ghost. So, I presume its only function is to make the ghost visible." Su Lian suddenly handed the photo to Ningmeng Busuan.

Taken by surprise, Ningmeng Busuan held the photo, feeling slightly dazed.

"They're just tools to make ghosts visible?" she asked, pondering the ghost's actions in the group photo. "So, even if we destroy the photo, it won't affect the ghost, right?"

Ningmeng Busuan had previously speculated that the ghosts might have appeared in this world because they had burned the photos. Perhaps they had released the ghosts by burning the cage that confined them.

But Su Lian told her that wasn't the case.

"I think these photos are irrelevant to the ghosts. They are neither a seal that confines them nor a weapon that kills them. They are merely photos that can make the ghosts visible." Su Lian's tone suddenly grew urgent.

Ningmeng Busuan frowned in thought. Just as she was about to ask more questions, she was suddenly pushed by the person in front of her.

Stumbling backward, she looked in confusion at Su Lian, who had just shoved her.

Then, she saw the person in front of her open her mouth and say, "Run."

As soon as the words fell, Ningmeng Busuan heard a very faint crawling sound.

It was coming from underneath the truck!

She widened her eyes to look at the source of the sound.

In the dark gap under the truck, an emaciated hand had somehow reached out and was now clenching Su Lian's ankle.

Ningmeng Busuan's mouth fell open. She reached out to pull Su Lian, trying to yank her away from the hand.

Before she could grab her, the emaciated hand abruptly pulled the spectacled female player completely under the truck.

The world once again fell silent.

Ningmeng Busuan froze for a moment, then, clutching the photo, she turned and ran desperately.

Another one dead... Another one gone...

Overwhelmed by immense fear, she sprinted, tears threatening to stream from her eyes as she ran.

Three... three had died right in front of her eyes already.

She didn't dare to imagine how many other players had died in places she couldn't see.

All she could do was run, run for all she was worth, trying to escape the ghost's line of sight.

The sky was already beginning to lighten in the east; the sun would rise soon.

A few pedestrians appeared on the road, mostly early morning vendors.

They all stared strangely as Ningmeng Busuan sprinted into the distance.

Wenqin Tan Jiu and Hao Laoshi were hiding inside a two-meter-high dinosaur model at the entrance of a children's park.

The dinosaur model was hollow. It had a broken door on its side, through which the two had easily slipped. The space inside, however, was rather cramped.

"The ghost will never think to look for us here, right?" Hao Laoshi nervously peered outside through a crack in the dinosaur model.

"Not necessarily," Wenqin Tan Jiu replied, unconvinced. "Sometimes these ghosts seem to have GPS; no matter how well we hide, they can find us."

"But ghosts also often pass right by us when they're searching," Hao Laoshi murmured. "I've often seen them go past me while I'm hiding."

"That's just your good luck." Wenqin Tan Jiu also peered out through the dinosaur's crevice.

"We can't keep hiding like this forever," Wenqin Tan Jiu sighed. "We need to find a way out, and soon."

"Let's rest for a bit," Hao Laoshi said, leaning against the inner wall of the dinosaur. "We've been cycling all night. My legs feel like jelly; I doubt I could outrun a ghost if we ran into one now."

Wenqin Tan Jiu wasn't faring much better.

He had been attacked by a ghost, and his waist still throbbed with a dull ache.

The area where the ghost had grabbed him was now a terrifying, dark bruise.

"Let's wait till dawn," he said, looking out through the crack at the gradually brightening sky. "Once it's completely light, we'll go find the others."

Splitting up had already proven ineffective; their only hope now lay in strength in numbers.

While resting inside the dinosaur model, Wenqin Tan Jiu began to think rapidly.

The ghost is invisible, only revealing its form in photos, Wenqin Tan Jiu mused. But taking a photo doesn't restrain it. Does it really appear by climbing out of the photos?

Just as he was pondering this, the sound of hurried footsteps suddenly approached from the distance.

Hao Laoshi, who had been leaning against the inner wall of the dinosaur, straightened up abruptly. He silently turned his head towards the crack, looking in the direction of the sound.

Wenqin Tan Jiu also stopped thinking. He looked out anxiously, afraid the sound was made by a ghost.

After a few seconds, a familiar figure appeared in their line of sight.

It was Ningmeng Busuan!

They saw her running rapidly towards them, then dash past their hiding spot and continue onward.

The two inside the dinosaur exchanged a look, speechless for a moment.

Ningmeng Busuan was clearly being pursued by a ghost.

They didn't dare to act recklessly.

The two hid silently inside the dinosaur model for several more minutes. Only when they were certain no other sounds followed did they dare to speak.

"She must have run into a ghost," Hao Laoshi said, looking hesitantly in the direction Ningmeng Busuan had fled.

Wenqin Tan Jiu also frowned. "Yu Ji wasn't with her. She might be dead already..."

"Should we go out and follow her?" Hao Laoshi asked, steadying himself against the inner wall of the dinosaur. "She can't have gotten far."

Wenqin Tan Jiu checked again to make sure there were no other sounds, then nodded. "Alright. Let's go."

Ningmeng Busuan ran nonstop for several minutes, only stopping when she could no longer see the truck behind her.

She stopped in front of a clothing store with a 'Shop for Lease' sign, leaning against the glass door and gasping for breath.

But before she could catch her breath, footsteps sounded from behind her.

Ningmeng Busuan snapped her head back and saw Wenqin Tan Jiu and Hao Laoshi running towards her.

On seeing the two of them, Ningmeng Busuan was nearly overcome with joy and relief.

It was so good to see other living people!

"You... why did you come back?" she asked, her relief mixing with curiosity.

When she had found Jin Ye Bai's body and the empty bowl nearby, she knew they must have returned.

"A ghost wall," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, his expression grim. "We didn't intend to come back, but the ghost forced us. What about you? Did a ghost wall bring you back too?"

Ningmeng Busuan didn't know about ghost walls. She shook her head in confusion. "No, I didn't encounter anything like that... I came back on my own. Yu Ji was killed right in front of my eyes, and that's how I realized the ghosts are invisible."

"I thought only the Polaroid camera could reveal the ghost's form, and that the way out must be related to it. That's why I came back to find you all."

Wenqin Tan Jiu's expression darkened. "No, the Polaroid is useless. We've already tried it."

"I know..." Ningmeng Busuan said. She took the Polaroid camera from her jacket pocket. "I've seen Jin Ye Bai's body."

Chapter 718 A Gentleman Named Gu BengBeng_1

"I also encountered Su Lian." Ningmeng Busuan looked down at the photo in her hand. "She just died as well..."

"So many people have died already." Hao Laoshi shivered.

"I wonder how the other three players are doing now," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, thinking of Gu Mian and the others. "We suffered heavy casualties, and I doubt they're faring any better. I wonder how many of them remain."

Hearing this, Hao Laoshi blinked and opened his mouth, but said nothing. The other two didn't notice his discomfort.

Ningmeng Busuan presented the photo in her hand to Wenqin Tan Jiu, asking, "This photo was taken by Jin Ye Bai right before he died, right?"

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at the photo in her hand, his eyes widening. "You brought this photo too?"

"Yes. Su Lian told me that these photos might be the key to surviving this instance." Ningmeng Busuan frowned; Su Lian had been killed by a ghost before she could finish speaking, leaving Ningmeng Busuan in the dark about Su Lian's theory on the way out.

"But we've already tried photographing the ghost, and it didn't seem to affect it at all," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, looking at the dark image in the photo.

When they first took this photo, there was a ghost in it. But now, the photo only showed a blurry bowl against a dark background. Ningmeng Busuan was also puzzled. If the photos can't confine the ghost, why would they be the way out?

As she pondered, she looked in the direction she had just run from. That's when she noticed a security camera mounted on the entrance of a nearby shop. Ningmeng Busuan froze, staring at the camera.

"What's wrong?" Wenqin Tan Jiu asked, noticing her sudden stillness.

Ningmeng Busuan came to her senses, her face pale. "I think our initial assumptions might have been led astray by the instance," she said. "When we saw the photos and the ghost in them, we focused on using the photos to confine the ghost."

"But the way out isn't necessarily about confining the ghost. From the beginning, we focused on the relationship between the photos and the ghost, ignoring what the photos could do for us."

"You mean..." Wenqin Tan Jiu began, seeming to grasp something.

Ningmeng Busuan lowered her gaze to the photo in her hand. "Su Lian reminded me," she said. "The purpose of these photos might only be to make the ghost visible. And we've all seen it—the ghost can

move within the photo. So the photos don't capture a specific moment of the ghost, but rather its continuous, long-duration movements."

"I think the photos are like these surveillance cameras, live-broadcasting the ghost's every move." Ningmeng Busuan looked up. "The ghost doesn't emerge from the photos; it's always there. The photos just make it visible."

"At the beginning, we saw a ghost in the group photo. But in reality, the ghost wasn't *in* the photograph; it was at the location where we took the photo. So at that time, the ghost could only snarl and snap within the photo. It couldn't actually harm us because it was far away."

"The ghost's actions in the photos led us to believe the photos had some sort of control over it, but in reality, they didn't."

Ningmeng Busuan raised the photo in her hand as she explained, "When Jin Ye Bai took this photo, the ghost was right in front of him. That's why he was killed immediately."

"I think the way out of this instance is to use these photos to avoid the ghost. We can identify the ghost's location from the photos and then avoid it."

Wenqin Tan Jiu felt a chill run down his spine as he listened. If Ningmeng Busuan's theory about the way out was correct, they had already ruined their only lifeline.

They had already burned all the other photos. The only ones left were the discarded group photo, the one in Ningmeng Busuan's hand, and three unused sheets of film in the Polaroid camera.

Ningmeng Busuan took a deep breath. "If we had been more cautious on the bus and hadn't immediately destroyed the other photos," she said, "we might have discovered the way out then."

But it was too late now.

The sun was slowly rising, but Wenqin Tan Jiu felt terribly cold, devoid of any warmth.

After some time, he finally managed to find his voice. "Your guess makes sense..." he said. "But if this truly is our way out, I doubt we'll be able to make it out of this instance alive."

They had already burned their lifeline.

As they hesitated, Hao Laoshi suddenly saw a hand reach out from behind and land on Wenqin Tan Jiu's shoulder.

Wenqin Tan Jiu jumped, startled by the sudden touch.

Before he could react, a familiar voice sounded from behind him, "So this is where you've been hiding. I've been looking all over for you."

They all turned to see Xu Xingcheng's beaming face.

Seeing Xu Xingcheng, Hao Laoshi's spirits lifted momentarily. But when he looked around and couldn't spot Gu Mian, his face fell again.

Wenqin Tan Jiu and Ningmeng Busuan's first reaction was also to look for Xu Xingcheng's two teammates. It wasn't that they particularly wanted to see Gu Mian and Chu Changge, but rather they wanted to know if the two were still alive.

Not seeing Gu Mian or Chu Changge, Wenqin Tan Jiu asked with a serious expression, "Where are your teammates?"

They were probably killed by the ghost, just like Jin Ye Bai and the others, right?

However, Xu Xingcheng didn't seem bothered. His jovial expression didn't at all match that of someone who had lost teammates.

Wenqin Tan Jiu was puzzled.

"Them?" Xu Xingcheng said, recalling Gu Mian's recent actions. "They forced me to rummage through a lot of trash cans, then mercilessly abandoned me and told me to find you."

"They're fine?" Wenqin Tan Jiu asked.

"Rummaging through trash cans?" Ningmeng Busuan interjected.

Their points of focus were completely different.

Wenqin Tan Jiu hadn't expected them all to be unscathed up to this point. Could it be that the more peculiar a person was, the stronger they became?

Ningmeng Busuan, on the other hand, wanted to know why they had to rummage through trash cans.

"What were you rummaging through trash cans for?" she asked.

"To find photos," Xu Xingcheng replied, pulling out a crumpled photo—the group photo.

Wenqin Tan Jiu suddenly had a thought. "Searching for photos?" he asked. "It seems your guess is the same as Ningmeng Busuan's—that the photos could be our way out."

In fact, Gu Mian hadn't searched for the photos with the way out in mind. He just wanted to see if the ghost was still in the photo, and if so, to try and pry it out.

Ningmeng Busuan looked at the photo in Xu Xingcheng's hand, somewhat excited. "I believe these photos serve as surveillance screens, allowing us to view the ghost's real-time location," she said. "Is that what you think as well?"

Xu Xingcheng hummed nonchalantly in agreement. "That's right," he said. "When you were all burning the photos, our dear Doctor, out of caution, secretly kept three. Not long after we split up, he noticed something unusual about them."

In truth, Gu Mian hadn't been particularly cautious; he just wanted to see if he could pry a ghost out of those photos.

Xu Xingcheng was trying his best to portray Gu Mian as a normal person.

"He noticed that a ghost appeared in one of the photos and was moving within it. We therefore speculated that these photos were like surveillance feeds, allowing us to observe the ghost's every action as long as it was within the frame."

"To verify this theory, our Doctor took an enormous risk by returning here and ordered me to search countless trash cans to finally find this group photo."

To make Gu Mian sound like a normal person, these words contained quite a few of Xu Xingcheng's own embellishments.

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As Xu Xingcheng spoke, he pulled out three photos—the very ones Gu Mian had been sitting on. "He gave me both the group photo and these three pictures. He told me to find you and show you the way to survive."

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked dazed. "So, it was really like that... But we only have five photos left now. I'm afraid this path to survival won't work anymore."

"It's better than nothing," Xu Xingcheng said. "Don't we still have the Polaroid camera? We can use that to take more photos. Try to cover as large an area as possible with each shot; it'll at least be somewhat useful."

Ningmeng Busuan was examining the photos in Xu Xingcheng's hand. She noticed that of the three, one showed a roadside, another an intersection, and the last was of the reservoir they had passed while on the bus.

However, there was something strange about the reservoir photo. She pointed to the road beside the reservoir. "Why is there a tear here?"

Xu Xingcheng glanced at the photo. "It wasn't stored properly and got accidentally scratched."

Polaroid photos are thicker than regular ones, making them difficult to damage. Ningmeng Busuan was skeptical of his explanation.

Of course, Xu Xingcheng couldn't admit Gu Mian had damaged it. Gu Mian had seen the ghost wandering on that photo and had pulled out a knife to test his idea—what if the ghost could be scraped off? The attempt proved his theory wrong; they couldn't harm the ghost through a photograph.

Having lost interest, Gu Mian then gave all three photos to Xu Xingcheng, telling him to find the others and inform them of this way to survive.

At this, Wenqin Tan Jiu suddenly asked, "He gave all three photos to us? Then where is he now? Doesn't he need photos to hide from the ghost?"

Xu Xingcheng had anticipated this question and promptly recited the lie he had prepared. "He said he's a doctor, and his duty is to save people. He's gone to find the ghost and delay it, to buy everyone time. He said he'd have no regrets, even if it meant sacrificing himself."

It sounded like a grand speech. Both Wenqin Tan Jiu and Ningmeng Busuan listened, stunned. They hadn't realized the Doctor was such a selfless person when they were on the bus.

Nearby, Hao Laoshi, who knew the truth, cringed internally. He felt a bit embarrassed listening to all that.

"Why don't we go find him so he can use the photos to hide from the ghost with us?" Ningmeng Busuan suggested hesitantly. "Even if we players risk our lives to delay the ghost, we won't slow it down much."

Hao Laoshi immediately shook his head. "We don't even know where he is. It would be very difficult to find him."

Wenqin Tan Jiu also chimed in, "Right. Now that we know a way to survive, the priority is to get to the locations in the photos and use them to evade the ghost."

Hao Laoshi then suggested, "The locations in these five photos are quite far apart. I think we should use the Polaroid to photograph the gaps between them."

"Exactly," Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded. "It would be perfect if we could photograph a closed-loop path. That way, we could lead the ghost in circles."

Unfortunately, they had destroyed too many photos earlier, so they couldn't create a complete loop with only three sheets of film remaining.

Ningmeng Busuan looked at the Polaroid in her hand. "Actually, photographing a long, straight path could also work. But this path must be long and ideally include several intersections."

She continued, "After we take the photos, we'll position ourselves at the midpoint of this path. If we see the ghost appear at one end, we immediately run to the other. Then, using the intersections in the middle, we can loop back to the end where the ghost first appeared. By then, the ghost should have moved on a fair bit, making it safe for us to return there."

"But when we're taking those detours, we won't be in an area covered by a photo," she added. "If the ghost doesn't move in a straight line and instead turns into an intersection, we'll be in great danger."

"Can't we just keep an eye on the photos?" Hao Laoshi asked. "The moment we see the ghost turn into an intersection, we immediately return to the straight, monitored path. Would that work?"

"That takes time," Ningmeng Busuan said, her worry evident. "From the moment we spot the ghost entering an intersection until we get back to the monitored area, there'll be a period where we can't track its movements. We could run right into it."

"Photographing a long, straight path has another drawback," she continued. "The ghost might enter the monitored area from the nearest intersection, catching us completely off guard."

"But we have no other choice right now," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, looking at the road ahead. "The Polaroid only has three sheets of film left, plus the three photos Xu Xingcheng brought. We can only photograph a straight path."

Ningmeng Busuan also accepted this reality. She looked at the photos in Xu Xingcheng's hand. "Among these three photos, only the one of the intersection covers a reasonably large area. The other two only show one side of the road. If the ghost is hiding on the other side, we won't see it at all."

"So only the intersection photo is useful?" Wenqin Tan Jiu asked.

"Yes," Ningmeng Busuan nodded. "If I remember correctly, that intersection is quite close to us now. Let's hurry."

The group immediately set off towards the intersection shown in the photo. Within minutes, they arrived.

Standing at the intersection, Ningmeng Busuan glanced around, quickly chose a road with the fewest obstructions, and pressed the shutter button.

The Polaroid's range was decent; from their position, they could just make out the traffic light at the next intersection, though it was blurry in the distance. After taking the picture, Ningmeng Busuan quickly examined it. She only sighed in relief after confirming there was no ghost on that road in the photo.

The others also began to relax. They finally had a safe zone! And a fairly large one at that!

Hao Laoshi, overjoyed, immediately ran onto this safe road, gesticulating excitedly. "This road is also quite long! If the ghost comes from one end, we'll have plenty of room to escape from the middle!"

"This length still isn't enough," Ningmeng Busuan said, shaking her head. "If the ghost appears at one end of this road, it will spot us in the middle immediately. We need to photograph a longer stretch for surveillance."

As she spoke, she started walking forward. When she reached the next intersection, she backed up a few steps. Before taking the picture, Ningmeng Busuan carefully angled the camera, trying to capture as much of the road on both sides of the intersection as possible.

After the flash, everyone nervously looked at the photo. The road ahead in the picture also looked clear, with nothing unusual on it.

Looking at the photo, Ningmeng Busuan's lips curved into a slight smile. "Just one more shot, and the surveillance distance will be long enough."

But just as she lifted her foot to continue forward, Xu Xingcheng, who was beside her, suddenly grabbed her arm. "Wait, look at this."

Ningmeng Busuan turned to look and saw Xu Xingcheng staring intently at the photo of the first intersection they had photographed. "What's wrong?" Her heart skipped a beat.

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"This part is a bit blurry," Xu Xingcheng said, pointing to the right edge of the photo. "I remember it wasn't like this before."

Ningmeng Busuan immediately looked at the photo. Indeed, a small area on the right edge was blurry. She hadn't looked closely at this photo before, so she didn't know what this part originally looked like.

Hao Laoshi suddenly spoke. "I remember when we saw the ghost in the group photo, its body was blurry. This couldn't be part of the ghost's body, could it?!"

Upon hearing his words, Wenqin Tan Jiu and Ningmeng Busuan grew somewhat anxious. It was just as they'd feared.

Right after Hao Laoshi spoke, the blurry area in the photo suddenly twitched. The blurry mass moved forward a short distance, its entire form appearing in the photo. It was the ghost!

Ningmeng Busuan's scalp tingled. The ghost was at the crossroads just behind them, only a street away!

"It hasn't fully reached the crossroads! It hasn't spotted us yet!" Hao Laoshi suddenly yelled, dashing towards the path on the right. "Run, before it notices us!"

The others immediately sprang into action, running down the path to the right. If they fled straight ahead, the ghost would surely see their retreating backs when it reached the crossroads. They had to turn.

"Let's hide on this road first," Ningmeng Busuan said. She ran down the path to the right but didn't go far before stopping. She stared intently at the photo showing the ghost. "If the ghost just passes by the crossroads and doesn't turn into the street where we took the photo, we'll return to the surveillance area immediately after it's gone."

"What if the ghost turns in here?" Hao Laoshi asked.

"...Then we can only run," Ningmeng Busuan lowered her voice. "The ghost came too quickly; we didn't have time to take the last picture."

Hao Laoshi looked at the ghost in the photo, a chill running down his spine. When he'd heard Xu Xingcheng say Gu Mian was going to "stall the ghost," he had been overjoyed. This instance is finally going to end! he'd thought. But I didn't expect to encounter the ghost before Gu Mian!

Xu Xingcheng also hadn't expected the ghost to find them directly. If only I'd known, I would have brought Gu Mian over, she thought. Poor Gu Mian, meanwhile, was still racking his brain, searching for any trace of the ghost.

"If the ghost turns into the street where we took the photo, we run immediately. We'll circle around from here to the crossroads in this picture," Ningmeng Busuan said, her gaze fixed on the photo in her hand. "We need to get back to the surveillance area as quickly as possible."

The others all nodded.

By now, the ghost had reached the crossroads. They saw it stop in the middle, seemingly considering which path to take.

Please, don't come this way! Hao Laoshi silently prayed.

But his prayers went unanswered.

After pausing for a few seconds, the ghost chose the street where they had taken the photo.

Seeing this, their hearts sank. However, they had no time to stand frozen in fear. Ningmeng Busuan immediately turned and fled down the path to the right, and the others quickly followed.

As they ran, they kept an eye on the ghost's movements through the photos. By then, the ghost had already appeared in the next picture, advancing rapidly.

"Faster!" Ningmeng Busuan urged, quickening her pace. "It's moving very fast! It'll reach the crossroads behind us in no time. We need to get out of its line of sight before then!"

Since the beginning of this instance, they had been constantly on the run, with almost no rest. By now, they were all reaching their limits. But even though they were exhausted to the bone, they didn't dare slow down, terrified the ghost would spot them.

While they were running for their lives, Gu Mian was also hard at work. He was holding Xiao Qiao's Big Data Search, struggling to compare the arrows on it.

Gu Mian had typed "ghost" into the search box, but the device's search range was enormous. It didn't just flag the ghost from their current instance; it also marked ghosts from other instances. These markers were all identical arrows, so Gu Mian could only determine which one represented the ghost in their instance by observing their movement speed.

"Theoretically, the closer a ghost is to us, the more its arrow will move," Chu Changge said, also looking at the Big Data Search.

The ghost in this instance was definitely the closest one to them, but with so many arrows on the screen, it was difficult to tell them apart immediately.

"Has it been stationary all this time?" Gu Mian muttered, staring at the screen until his eyes blurred. "I don't see any arrows moving significantly."

Just half a second after he said this, an arrow showing significant movement suddenly appeared.

Gu Mian watched as the arrow swiftly changed position, moving from the bottom-left of the screen to the top-right almost instantly.

"That fast?" he murmured, watching the rapidly moving arrow. "This is most likely the ghost from our instance. Judging by its speed, it's not far from us."

As he spoke, he glanced in the arrow's direction: northwest.

Having found the direction, Gu Mian quickly planned a route.

"Go straight down this road, turn left, then straight again... we should be able to find it then," he muttered to himself. "But it's too fast; we probably can't catch it on foot."

Just as Gu Mian was muttering to himself, Chu Changge righted a bicycle he found by the roadside.

He pushed up his glasses. "It's unlocked. No idea who left it here."

"Whoever left this bike here is a real saint," Gu Mian said, instantly stuffing the Big Data Search back into his pocket. He swung his leg over the bicycle and looked back at Chu Changge. "What about you?"

I'm actually quite worried the ghost might double back, Gu Mian thought. What if it suddenly returns and gets Chu Changge?

Just then, Chu Changge righted another bicycle from the roadside. "This one's unlocked too. No idea who'd abandon two of them here."

"Truly a great person!" Gu Mian exclaimed sincerely. "Alright, let's go!"

Meanwhile, Ningmeng Busuan and the others were marveling at the ghost's astonishing speed.

In less than half a minute, the ghost had crossed an entire street, arriving directly at the crossroads behind them.

Fortunately, they had reacted quickly when they first spotted the ghost. By the time it reached the crossroads behind them, they had already covered a considerable distance and found an electrical box.

They were now huddled behind the electrical box, concealing themselves. At this distance, the ghost probably couldn't see them anyway, but to be safe, it was better to hide.

Ningmeng Busuan crouched behind the electrical box, her head down, staring intently at the photo in her hands. She saw that the ghost had stopped at the crossroads again, seemingly undecided.

Please, don't come this way! she prayed silently.

The road they were on was outside the surveillance area. If the ghost came down this road, everything that happened next would be unknown. They wouldn't be able to see the ghost's position or know how far away it was. The ghost could kill them at any moment!

The others also watched the photo tensely, praying silently in their hearts.